

A CLASSIC PREDATOR RIFLE: REMINGTON'S .223 MODEL 760 SLIDE ACTION

By Gerald Peterson

This unusual slide action repeater, which first originated in the 1960s, has since proven itself as a highly adaptable predator rifle for both the southern prairies and the northern forests of Saskatchewan.

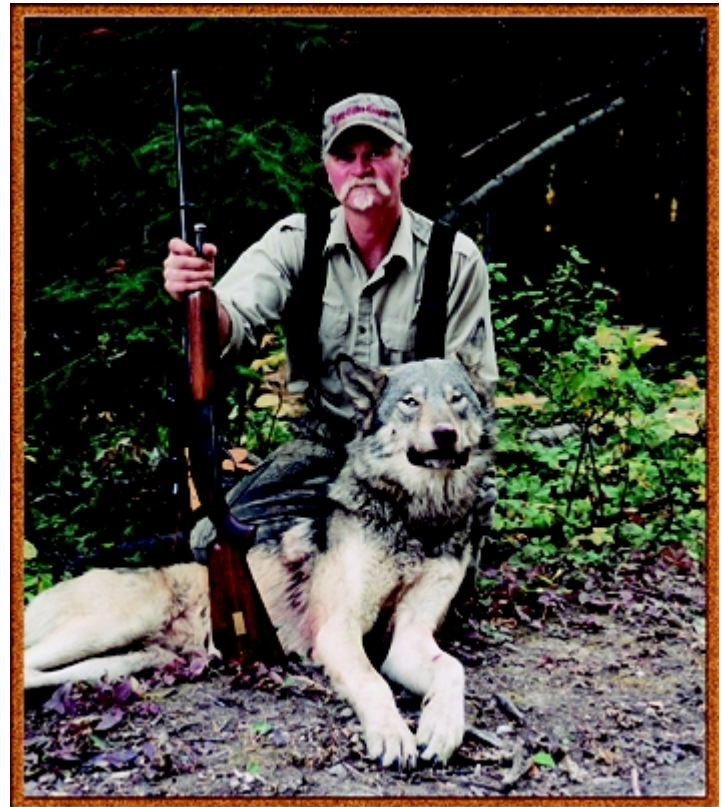
One day this past fall, close to midmorning, Murray Mackintosh, a fellow guide, and I were proceeding to dress out an elk in the field, not too far from the main hunting lodge on the ranch where I guide elk and whitetail deer hunters each fall. We had a bull hanging from the loader of the CAT, and we were up to our armpits in elk blood as we worked at removing the animal's innards. I happened to look up from the carcass and was about to say, "What the hell! There's someone's dog." But the words didn't clear my mouth.

"Wolf!" I exclaimed and, throwing my knife to the ground, I rushed to my pickup. I had moved it into the field to haul the head and antlers back to the lodge for caping.

Still dripping with blood, I swung open the door, grabbed my .223 Remington pump from the cab of the truck, whipped off the scope cover, and tossed it in the slough grass. Running back to Murray, I slapped the magazine into my rifle and chambered a round. Drawn by the smell of elk blood, the wolf had left the safety of the forest and was circling us at less than 25 yards away. When I ran for my gun, the wolf broke for the cover of the forest, loping across the open fields.

Now standing beside Murray, I threw the rifle to my shoulder and, at that same instant, Murray let out a sharp whistle. The wolf stopped and swung around broadside to glare back at us. The crosshairs in my Redfield Widefield scope settled for an instant behind the wolf's shoulder. I quickly pressed the trigger and he dropped at the shot. I ejected the empty and chambered another round, fully expecting to see it get up and run. The wolf kicked a couple of times, flipped its tail in the air, then lay still. About this time I exhaled and started breathing once again, after running on pure adrenaline since I had first seen the animal. We paced off a distance of 80 yards to the wolf, a beautifully gray-furred, large male, that would weigh close to 100 pounds.

A staunch supporter of heavy bullets in the .22 centerfires, I was using Remington's excellent 55-grain pointed soft-point,



The author displays the wolf described in the beginning of the story. Drawn by the smell of elk blood, this wolf had left the safety of the forest and had circled the author and a fellow guide at less than 25 yards.

a bullet weight I have used for years on coyotes and fox, loaded to a velocity of just over 3,100 fps with a charge of H335 powder. The 55-grain Remington completely penetrated the animal's chest. Upon closer examination while skinning the wolf, I was quite impressed with the destruction this little bullet had done to the chest cavity. Both lungs and the whole front end was a mass of bloodshot meat. The bullet had expanded violently, yet held together and exited in one piece. At 80 yards the wolf's chest had absorbed much of the muzzle energy this bullet would have started out with, 1,175 foot-pounds of kinetic energy.

THE EARLY YEARS

I had been carrying the .223 every day in my pickup. Driving the backcountry roads around the ranch each fall allows me plenty of opportunities for shots at coyotes and fox. The rifle I was using that morning was an old and familiar friend. My father had purchased this rifle new, back in 1967. Pa had a passion for his Remington pumps (both shotguns and rifles), pass shooting ducks, and hunting fox and coyotes throughout the winter.

Right after the war, snow planes were popular for getting around in the cold, snowy, windswept Saskatchewan prairies. Eventually, these early wind-propelled snow machines were replaced with more modern track-driven snowmobiles. During the 1950s and '60s, my father and uncle, as well as our neighbour who lived close to our farm, spent most of their spare time in the winter (between feeding cows and cleaning the barn) hunting coyotes from these early snow machines.

The prairies always have been infested with these critters, since the first team and plow turned the sod. Fur prices weren't great during those years, but back in the mid-1960s, my father and the others figured that enough money could be made to cover the cost of a new coyote gun. Come the first of the year, three brand new Remington Model 760 Gamemasters were ordered from our local gun shop and, during the next 30 winters, gun and dad were practically inseparable.

The Model 760 Gamemaster slide action rifle became available to the public in 1952; it was designed to replace the Model 141 that was discontinued after the war. A number of parts for this new pump gun were made interchangeable with Remington's semiauto and pump action shotguns, as well as their model 740 semi-



Fast handling, accurate, and capable of a quick follow-up shot are features that make the Model 760 Remington an outstanding rifle for predators.

auto rifle. Among its new features was a button-rifled barrel, designed by Mike Walker, longtime Remington employee and the designer of the .222 Remington cartridge way back in 1950.

Remington first introduced the Model 760 Gamemaster in the .223 Remington cartridge back in 1964. This was the second cartridge Remington had chambered for a small case head in their Model 760 pump. The first was the .222 Remington, which was introduced in 1958, but lasted for only three years before being dropped from production, in 1960. The .223 Remington remained in production slightly longer, lasting five years before being discontinued in 1968. The new rifles arrived on the dealer's shelves with impressed checkering on both the forearm and the pistol grip. This was the ADL grade that was introduced in 1964, replacing the earlier 1954 ADL grade that had featured real cut checkering. The rifles came with a detachable box magazine holding five cartridges, and with a trigger pull of 3 pounds.

My father was a farmer by profession and, for almost 60 years, a custom stockmaker by trade. It didn't take long

for these three rifles to be restocked to fit their new owners. With custom-fitted stocks, any predators spotted within a reasonable distance were in serious trouble. These riflemen grew up during the beginning of the last century. They were trained in the old school and were very proficient offhand game shots. The tack-driving accuracy of the .223 Remington pump-action only enhanced their skill.

The Model 760's front locking, rotating bolt head, and multiple locking lugs can safely handle our modern high pressure cartridges. This and the stiff 22-inch free-floating barrel measuring 0.650-inch at the muzzle make for a very accurate rifle. To get a better idea of the accuracy that is possible with this rifle, during the early 1960s the U.S. Army Marksmanship Training Unit at Fort Benning, Georgia, used custom Model 760s equipped with 28-inch heavy barrels chambered for the .222 Remington in their International Running Deer matches. In 1961, a U.S. shooter won the double shot aggregate at the World Championships in Oslo, Norway, while another took second place in the single shot World Championships in Cairo, Egypt. Also, shortly after this, a



Unfortunately in production for only five short years, the accuracy of Remington's Model 760 in .223 would equal any good bolt action sporter.

U.S. shooter won the single shot World Championships at Fort Benning, again with a Model 760 Remington slide-action rifle.

BULLETS AND LOADS

I inherited Dad's .223 pump when he passed away back in '96. Since then, I carry the old coyote gun more often than any other varmint rifle I own. I am careful not to overdo any load development with this rifle for fear of burning out the barrel. There must be somewhere between 6,000 to as many as 8,000 rounds that have gone down the bore over the past 34 years. The last thing I want is to burn out the throat and see the old heirloom left hanging on the wall. I must admit, though, it is hard to leave the gun at home when I'm heading to the range, for I still like to watch through the scope as it repeatedly prints small cloverleaf groups.

I always have been impressed with the accuracy potential of Remington's .223 pump; it definitely would put the run on any bolt-action sporting rifle in the same caliber. It is not uncommon to get three-shot groups at 100 yards as small as $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch, when using a load the rifle likes. This accuracy will last for 20 to 25

rounds; then it is time to give the barrel a thorough scrubbing with a high-quality copper removing solvent. I have had excellent results with Shooter's Choice Copper Remover and, in the summer, I use Sweet's 7.62 solvent, where I can clean the rifle in a well-ventilated area, or outdoors, to avoid inhaling the toxic ammonia fumes.

A number of powders have shown fine results throughout the years. Both accuracy and velocity have been good with most powders and outstanding with some of the modern ball powders available to today's handloaders. For the sake of brevity, I will touch only on those which have shown the most favourable results.

Hodgdon's H335 has proven to be an excellent performer regarding both accuracy and velocity. We switched to this powder back in the mid-1980s. Although the velocities we are now seeing are not quite as high as we were getting with the earlier powder lots, a 55-grain bullet over 26 grains of H335 will safely exceed 3,100 fps with no pressure signs showing. This load will print $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch three-shot groups and just over 1-inch five-shot groups at 100 yards. Earlier lots of this

powder allowed us to increase the charge to a maximum of 27 grains, again with no pressure signs showing. I got $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch to $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch three-shot groups and a velocity of 3,250 fps from the Model 760's 22-inch barrel and 3,380 fps from my brother Al's 24-inch Remington Model 788 barrel. Plenty fast and accurate for both coyote and fox, at any range where they might be encountered.

An old standby over the years has been IMR 4895. This was the main powder that my father and his hunting partners used in their .223s throughout the 1960s and '70s. They tried other powders at times but always returned to this old favourite. IMR 4895 has been a very forgiving powder in the .223 Remington cartridge. During the 1960s, reloading was considered by many as a means of procuring cheap ammunition compared with the cost of factory loads. Many handloaders were never interested in precision loading from an accuracy standpoint. One of dad's coyote hunting partners would simply dip a re-sized and primed case into a pan filled with IMR 4895, scrape the excess powder from off the top of the case neck, and seat a bullet.

My curiosity got the best of me one day so I tried this old-fashioned method of measuring powder into a case. I found while using Remington, Federal, and some old Herter's brass that 27.5 to 28 grains of IMR 4895 powder completely filled the case. *Speer Reloading Manual Number Seven*, dated 1966, lists 27.5 grains of IMR 4895 with a 55-grain bullet as a maximum load in the .223. While this was safe during the 1960s, modern powder lots have slightly different burning rates, so this is not a safe practice or a load to recommend. Be that as it may, loads with 26 to 26.5 grains of IMR 4895 consistently have shown the best accuracy in this rifle with most bullets from 50 to

55 grains in weight.

Another powder that has worked well in the Remington pump has been W 748. More than a few pounds of this powder have been burned in our .223 caliber coyote rifles over the years. We especially like the way W 748 meters through the powder measure and, with such small cases, any powder which doesn't bridge in the measure or case mouth can be worth its weight in gold. Best accuracy came from a load of 26 to 27 grains with 55-grain bullets.

Throughout the years, we consistently have used 55-grain bullets in this rifle. Heavier bullets seem to hold a slight edge in accuracy over the lighter bullets. One that has seen the most use by far has been a flat-based, open-point design, using Corbin jackets, and home-swaged on a set of dies made in the 1960s for my father by Ted Smith, a manufacturer of bullet swaging equipment from North Bend, Oregon. Besides the Corbin jackets, at least a few thousand bullets have been made from empty .22 rimfire cases. Although these bullets are not as accurate as the Corbin jacketed variety, they are very destructive on gophers and jackrabbits. Because of their light construction and their explosive effect, we would often load these in the spring when we were more concerned with bullet ricochets than in the winter, when the ground has a snow cover. Other advantages of the 55-grain bullet over the lightweights are its ability to better buck the prairie winds, and the extra energy and penetration we get on larger predators.

A BIRTHDAY HUNT

Toward the end of last October, I managed to get a day off from my guiding duties. This also was my father's birthday, so I decided to honour the occasion by taking his old .223 pump gun coyote hunting. I was planning on calling along a major river system north of my home in White Fox, Saskatchewan. The river winds its way through the farmland along the edge of the settlement and the northern provincial forest. With its rugged, heavily forested terrain, this consistently has proven to be a prime coyote and wolf producing area.

I was on my second stand of the day, and I had set up overlooking a large horseshoe bend in the river where an old beaver dam on one side and a stunted birch and willow flat on the other side offered visibility out to 300 yards. Within minutes of calling, I had a coyote loping along the river bottom, homing in on the dying jackrabbit sounds coming from the speaker which I had hidden behind a jack pine 30 feet to my left. The coyote's full attention was focused on the sound and it never saw me as I cranked the scope's magnification down to its lowest setting of two power and slowly raised the rifle to my

shoulder.

As the coyote cleared the top of the ridge, in what could best be described as ideal shotgun range, it was simply a matter of placing the cross hairs below its ear and pressing the trigger. The animal toppled over and rolled back down the slope. I was in a good area and I had just started calling when the coyote came in. The sunshine felt warm on my face and I was feeling rather smug after so quickly outwitting this coyote, so I decided to stay put and continue to call for the next 30 minutes.

It didn't take quite that long. Almost 25 minutes later, following the shoreline upstream from my position, was another coyote making its way toward the call. This one was more cautious, stopping occasionally to look things over before moving closer. I waited patiently as the coyote slowly worked its way into position for a clear shot. Then it stopped one last time to look over the hillside before turning its back to me and climbing onto the beaver dam. The range was a bit over 100 yards and the coyote never knew what hit him, dropping at the shot to lay stretched out on the banks of the dam. Two coyotes in less than half an hour! Dad's old predator rifle had come through once again.

Of course, I'm not at all superstitious, nor do I believe in ghosts, but I like to think there is a bit of each of us in our favorite guns, be they rifles or shotguns. I also like to think my father was there right along with me, on the ridge that sunny October afternoon, with his .223 Remington pump, celebrating his birthday by shooting coyotes.

It is highly unlikely in this day and age, but if Remington were to ever reintroduce their pump action rifle in the .223, or possibly chamber it for the .22-250 cartridge, I believe they would most certainly capture the lion's share of the predator callers' market. One of the main requirements of this sport, besides an accurate rifle, is a rifle capable of producing a fast second, or possibly third, follow-up shot at a quickly departing target. This is a feature that Remington's classic .223 caliber Model 760 Gamemaster slide-action rifle truly fulfills. 