

# The Long And Short Of Shooting

Gerry Blair

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I have hankered to do an article on shooters for the longest time. My sixty or seventy years as a hunter have caused me to develop strong opinions about “good” shooters and “less good” shooters. Trouble is, about every hunter who has stroked a trigger is exactly the same. You want the truth? I have seen mature men, mature women and even a few sorta mature kids dern near wrestle Dogpatch Style (biting, scratching, cussing, screaming, gouging) when some ignoramus demeans their favored caliber. Even so, knowing the risks, I will tactfully endeavor to explain why my shooters are as good as a bowl of hot apple cobbler (with vanilla ice cream) and your shooters are as good as a tub full of fresh coyote KaKa.

Before you make a run for the mail box with the letter bomb, I ask indulgence. The final word on shooters, the way I see it, stays with the person who pulls the trigger. Each of us, to my way of thinking, has the opportunity to evaluate target and terrain and decide intelligently. Knowing that the title of this publication is **The VARMINT HUNTER Magazine®**, knowing the main thrust of **TVHM** readership is directed toward prairie dogs, groundhogs, marmots, predators, and the interesting et cetera, I will limit my opinions to some of such.

Those of you who are older’n dirt might recall seeing my name on articles detailing techniques that might be helpful when a hunter screams to coyote, bobcat, gray and red fox, mountain lion, and bear. Some faithful readers may have seen my name on books covering the same subjects. Those screamers, much of the time, are hoping to do serious harm to the customer, maybe even hoping to help the respondent as he or she (myself being an equal opportunity killer) travels to the Pearly Gates.

About any gun, under precise



***A 22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire hollow-point can cause gray fox to die with dignity and do so with enthusiasm. (Mike Blair photo)***

conditions, will cause a critter to become dead. I have done the dirty deed using every caliber from 22 Long Rifle hollow-points up to and including an ought six. I have owned and used centerfires made by Browning, Colt, H&K, H&R, Ithaca, Remington, Ruger, Sako, Smith & Wesson, and Winchester. I have owned and used shotguns made by most of the above. Probably more. And every dern one has killed critters. Can you tolerate a confession? I once offed a coyote by beating such about the head with the bad end of an unloaded three-inch twelve. I am not making this up. Hell, ask Chuck Spearman.

Some predator callers scream for the pure pleasure involved in outwitting and scragging a crafty critter. Others extend their pleasure (and their bank account) when they skin, handle, and market the fur from the recently deceased. If you are a pure pleasure person you can do the dirty deed using about any centerfire. I have seen some, such as George Oakey of Arizona and

Possum Al Prather of Kentucky, who almost always shoot a 243 caliber. Fur damage? Hell yes. George doesn’t mind the money from the pelt but hates skinning. Much and maybe most of the time he cons me into doing the skinning. And the sewing. Al does it differently. Al donates the bloody carcasses to a needy neighbor. Needy neighbor does the skinning, the de-flea-ing, the washing, the sewing, and the selling, most likely cussing Al and 243s the whole time.

Fur buyers, almost always, pay high dollar for pelts that pretty much retain all essential parts. Folks like Gerry Blair attempt to deliver. Almost all of my fur guns shoot fast and far and shoot accurate. My favored whacker, a Sako Forester in 22-250, will shoot MOA on a bad hair day and might shoot half that on a really good day. Much of the time the 52-grain spitzer point leaves the barrel bore at about 3,750 fps, delivers a 224 entry hole through the ribs, explodes within the chest cavity, and does not exit. Bottom line? No blood. No damage.



**Top of the food chain predators will want to check their hole cards when callers carry a rifle in 22-250.**

No sewing and no whining.

The choice of sights can generate about as much hostility as the choice of rifle. My Sako is topped with a Bushnell 1.5-3.5x variable. Why the low end magnification? Some of my shot opportunities are close calls. Maybe ten or so feet close. I like the field of view offered by a wide angle lens, such permitting these tired old eyes to get on target quickly. Lets me pull the trigger before the chosen leaves for Chicago or some other foreign land. I further like the light gathering ability of the wide angles. Can you say crepuscular customers? To me, a stout scope that causes a coyote to look as big as a bull buffalo (bison) can cause a miss. Overconfidence. The coyote I want to kill is not that big booger within the objective lens of the telescope sight. The coyote I want to shoot and skin is that little sumbitch that looks to be no bigger than a pissant that delivers the bad eye from two or three hundred yards. Yep, I know that some folks shoot dogs, hogs, and other pests at a mind-boggling distance. Too far to see with the naked eye. I say to such, good on you. A 24-power telescope sight makes perfect sense.

Gerry Blair is not a one-gun hunter. I learned long ago to match my gun to the country being hunted. A lot of my screaming is within brush and woodlands that does not allow the time needed to aim and shoot a rifle

accurately. I hunt that kind of country using a shotgun loaded with a couple of ounces of copper-coated BBs. My main predator shotgun is a big ugly mother (B.U.M.) I call MooseDick. When The Moose talks, the critters listen. If they are within about sixty yards they die.

Even though M.D. receives much of the ink, I hunt with a Remington Model 1100 three-inch twelve a part of the time. The 12 (MouseDick) is considerably lighter on its feet and is a fast swinger. All such offers an asset within really tight country. Those two big bangers, teamed with the Sako 22-250, are the guns I most often use.

Howza about what the old wives say about big banger recoil you ask? Saying the ten gauge kills at one end and cripples at the other? Hell, I answer. Old wives would not know a big banger if one sprouted between the roses and the marigolds or if they saw such within an erotic dream. My big bangers do not cripple my shoulder. I cannot testify how such would cohabit with your shoulder. My own self, being biggish, being a weirdo who owns a high pain tolerance, may make me immune.

How do I decide which gun to use? At one time I asked intuition to decide. Trouble was, intuition was a poor chooser. An experience hunting the junipers north and west of Williams illustrates.

I was with Mike Mell, my starter

wife's second cousin, a hard hunter and a guide to other hard hunters. Mike brought his friend Gary north for a day of critter hunting excitement. We three were screaming the transition woodlands and had set up on a juniper-decorated hillside that offered a view into a drainage. A mud dam caused a mini-lake to form. Stock tank. The bottom of the drainage below the dam was brush choked. Knowing Arizona critters always appreciate a gulp of wet, cow flop flavored brown water (who in Arizona does not?), knowing those same critters are attracted to edibles that are also attracted to the water, we set up with high hopes.

Himself being the designated screamer, Cousin Mike took the middle. Little Gary was fifty yards to his left and my own self was fifty yards to his right. We loitered for a few minutes, allowing the juniper woodlands time to quiet down. And then Mike made music.

The whiskers and the eyeball announced maybe five minutes into the screaming. My right eyeball (the good one) saw such secreted within the brush that littered the far bank. The next time Mike paused in his screaming I honored with my own delicious screams.

The bobcat moved into the open and paused for a look about. I blew soft low volume screams again and the bobcat disappeared into the brush-choked drainage below the dam. A minute or two later the bob reappeared, on our side of the water, and cat-like, paused for another reconnoiter, himself being maybe seventy yards out. I lip squeaked and the cat advanced a couple of steps. About then, Gary, who was perhaps a hundred yards away from the bobcat, caused his twelve to go bang. The bobcat immediately froze and I panicked. I shouldered the three-inch twelve, doing so at a truly amazing rate of speed, and slapped the trigger.

The bobcat did an Olympic class half gainer, did a roll, and staggered into the mystery of the brushy drainage. Mike and I immediately began a hot pursuit but learned a sad truth. A big bobcat carrying a couple of ounces of copper coated BBs can outrun a pair of hunters carrying a couple of twelve

gauge bangers. Sad? Hell, yes. As truly mentioned, the bobcat was toting a couple of ounces of copper plated B's. Tom also toted a fur coat that was worth maybe three hundred dollars. Later, we learned Gary had fired at a back door coyote and had the carcass to prove it.

I learned a couple of lessons from that mess-up. Number one lesson? When there are multiple shooters on a stand at least one should carry a rifle. Lesson two? Gerry Blair should not have fired at an out-of-range target. It would have been better, I think, to immediately scream and those screams might have, probably would have, caused the cat to come sure kill close. What a wonderful tool is hindsight.

The bobcat boondoggle and other such caused me to structure a new strategy for solo screaming. Currently I am a two-gun man. I carry both a shotgun and a rifle. The shotgun is held at the ready while the rifle rests within easy access. Close customers are greeted with a fast load of BBs. Bashfuls and paranoids that hang up out of shotgun range almost always allow time for the gunner to trade the shot shooter for the centerfire rifle.

Knowing that Gerry Blair would not and should not speak for the whole dern world, opinions from shooters who live and hunt within varying ZIP codes follow. Even though opinions might vary as to caliber and sights, most, I am thinking, will agree in principle with what I have written. They will if they know what is good for them. Even though I am a geezer who is on the fast track to the happy hunting ground in the sky, I can still do Dogpatch style with the best of them. Maybe.

Rich Higgins is a hardcore hunter who hangs and hunts within the Arizona low country. Rich mostly hunts the deserts (Sonoran and Mohave) but at times travels to God's Country (northern Arizona) to enjoy a bit of fun with some strange stuff. Rich Higgins, and his grown son Tyler, might be the best darn coyote callers in Arizona. And when you say that, you might as well say the whole dern world. Who says so? Hell, I say so. As do judges who have awarded a roomful of trophies. Are

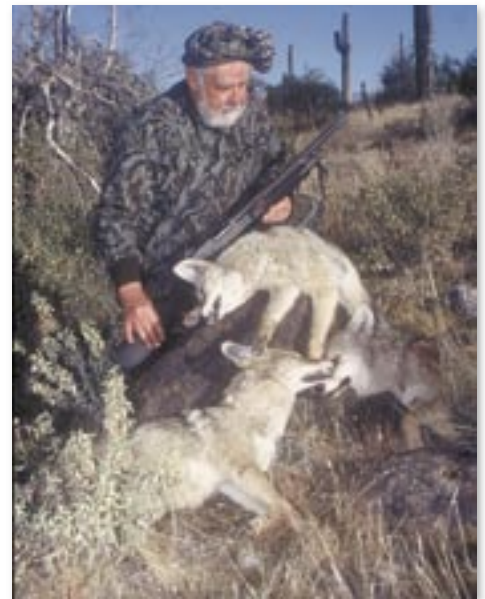
you ready for this? A few years back Rich became sorta bored calling and killing coyote. He continued to scream, continued to call coyote, but ceased to kill. Instead, he would punch a .224" diameter hole through the right ear of the customer. Cruel? I think not. If I was a coyote, I would rather have a .224" hole in my ear than have one through my gizzard. The way I see it, Rich Higgins might be one of the few remaining compassionate killers.

How do I know so about the "holey ear caper?" Rich confessed. And I am almost certain Rich would not lie. Not about something like that.

What sort of whacker does this super hunter use? Gary Madison hangs his hat and his heart within a ranch house located within the sagebrush country of southeastern Oregon. "Harney County, Oregon," Gary says ruefully, "mainly grows coyote and sagebrush." Gary hunts the sage flats and hills using a custom built FoxPro digital caller that owns surprising volume. "My Brute," Gary boasts, "can scream through a forty mile an hour wind and grab the ears of long distance coyote and the ears of an occasional bobcat." Eastern Oregon 'bobs are welcomed. Such being the pallid subspecies and such wearing a coat that can cause the fur buyer to give up a thousand dollar bill. "A half a handful of bobcat," Gary observes, "can buy enough four dollar a gallon gas to last a winter's worth of hunting."

Gary is mainly a two-gun hunter. When calling solo Gary carries a 223 Tikka (a part of the Sako family) bolt-action, such shooting a V-Max plastic point Hornady out the bad end of the barrel at a chronographed 3,300 fps. The AccuTrigger is set at a hairy 2.5 pounds. Gary's gun is topped with a high dollar Burris 3-12x fitted with a Ballistic Plex crosshair. Sagebrush shots, Gary says, can be longish. Particularly so when about every customer carries a Ph.D. Gary's Tikka has reached out to touch four hundred-yard paranoids. As is the case with many and maybe most serious shooters, Gary shoots from sticks, his made and marketed by Stoney Point.

Gary's close-in gun (deadly out to about fifty yards) is a three-shot Benelli



**The 22-250 cartridge is one of the author's favorites for coyote calling. (Gerry Blair photo)**

twelve shooting three-inch loads of four buck.

Peter Hauer hunts a long way from the sagebrush country of eastern Oregon. Pete screams within Maryland, a place that offers few coyote opportunities but offers a plethora of red fox, gray fox, and raccoon. As might be expected, Pete's choice of shooters is influenced by target and terrain. Targets are almost always small-bodied, and terrain is most often a series of meadows and fields bordered by hardwood forests.

Pete's favored rifle is a Browning Micro Hunter chambered for the 22 Hornet. Such, he says, is easily carried as he hunts the midnight, toting his FoxPro digital caller, lights, shooting sticks, and all else. The Hornet is deadly accurate when using box stock Hornady Varmint Express 35-grain V-Max loads. The relatively short barrel and stock work well, even when connected to Pete Hauer's tallish persona. A Harris tall swivel bipod is at times attached. At other times the bipod is replaced by a set of Stoney Point sticks.

Pete changes guns as target and terrain requires. Night hunts within tight country can cause Pete to shoulder a gas-operated Beretta Xtrema shooting either BBs or #4 buckshot. The gas-operated ejection minimizes recoil, even with the 3.5" twelve.



**The muscular 22-250 loves to reach out to touch long distance coyotes. (Gerry Blair photo)**

Mike Messina hunts coyote and other such within southern California with his friend and hunting buddy Tim Lewis. As is the case with other screamers who enjoy deep pockets (or own a sky high credit rating) Mike has filled a couple of gun cabinets with varmint guns and varmint gun wannabes. Mike sometimes shoots one of his 204 bolt-action guns and does so savagely. His favored 204 is a Savage Model 16FSS fitted with a composite stock, such weighing an admirable six pounds when fitted with a variable US Optics 1.5-6x28 telescope sight.

The great state of Kentucky is mainly noted for bourbon whiskey, fast horses, and fast females. Maybe fast colonels. Certainly not known as a top notch coyote producer. Even so, Al Prather (Possum Al, Song Dog, and other aliases) of Nicholasville, hunts Kentucky coyote successfully. Al has killed more than six hundred of such, killing more than one hundred fifty of that number with a Browning A-Bolt 243 fitted with BOSS. BOSS? Simply stated, Ballistic Optimizing Shooting System is a Browning innovation that subdues barrel whip. Such is claimed to cause an MOA gun to improve radically. Does it work? Al Prather says yes. Al shot 80-grain Sierra Blitz Varminters through the BOSS and achieved three-shot groups that measured as little as one-fourth inch.

Al tops his A-Bolt with a Bushnell 6-18x optic coming out of the box with 1/8 minute clicks, saying such was designed for competition airgun shooting but works well with his BOSS. The scope is sighted to hit dead on at 330 yards, hitting 2 1/2" high at one hundred yards and 3 1/4" high at midrange.

Fur damage can be considerable, Al acknowledges, but has diminished somewhat since he changed to the Sierra 70-grain BlitzKing. Al does not skin his kills, donating the carcasses to a needy neighbor.

Randy Watson hard hunts within Midland County, Texas, doing so to pleasure and instruct paying people. Even though Randy seldom shoots called customers, experience causes him to own firm opinions about the good, the bad,



**A centerfire rifle and a three-inch 12 gauge can be bad news to about any kind of customer. (Mike Blair photo)**

and the ugly of varmint guns.

Randy Watson called and killed critters when he was 12 years old, using the only gun that was available to him, such being a 22 rimfire with open sights. Doing so, Randy says, made him a better hunter. Knowing the limitations of the gun, Randy called the customers close and shot for the brain. Randy currently favors the 223 caliber bolt-action. His main gun is a Custom 700 Remington built by a friend. The rig has a one-inch Douglas match grade barrel that is 24 inches long, and a Timney trigger set at a hairy 1.75 pounds. A second Remington 700 BDL, off the shelf except for a drop-in trigger, is a backup. That gun, Randy claims, continues to shoot in the same hole to this day.

Randy Watson has been and is a 223 advocate. The availability of surplus military ammo caused the 223 to be inexpensive to shoot during his early days. Trouble was, the full metal jacket ammo available caused coyote to disappear within the mystery of the Texas night carrying a 224 diameter hole. Randy switched to soft-nose bullets and the escape rate diminished. "Those soft-points killed, created a small hole as they entered and a middling hole as they exited. I was trying to make money selling pelts and endeavored to cause the hole size to diminish. Eventually I loaded 55-grain Ballistic Tip bullets at reduced speed. Yep, you heard me right. Those Ballistic Tips leaving the bore at about 3,300 fps killed quickly, are accurate, shoot flat, and do a minimal amount of fur damage. I have killed coyote out to 400 yards more than once."

I am hopeful you have found the above to be informative. Maybe even a little bit humorous. I hope shining a dim light into the dark corners of critter killing will provoke an enlightenment that will diminish the incidences of Dogpatch wrestling. Even though I continue to find fun as I watch others do the Dogpatch, honesty causes me to say that enjoyment decreases when I become a participant rather than a spectator.

