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JOURNAL



June 2026 / \$5.99



0 74470 81224 1 06 >

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## King of the Rimfires — The Mighty .22

Recently I ran out to the high desert country to test three new TriStar guns. I had the APOC PRO 9mm which is a thinner profiled concealed carry pistol, the UPLAND HUNTER THUMBHOLE 20 ga. over/under that needed to be sighted for an upcoming turkey hunting and their KR-22 which needed to be sighted in for my Spring ground squirrel and pigeon hunts.

It was fun just getting out by myself sighting in a number of guns. I shot the shotgun and got it sighted in, then the pistol and then I got to the .22.

After shooting the, 22 I started reminiscing how for a big majority of us the .22 was our first real gun. I still have my old Remington Apache Black Chrome Nylon 66 I bought with my paper route earnings. I think it cost me a whopping \$54.00. That was over 60 years ago so forgive me if my memory is off a few pennies. That started my love affair with the .22.



PHOTOS BY TOM CLAYCOMB III

Boyd's offers numerous colors of stocks. The author's daughters love these pink and red tricked out 10/22's.

Since my first 22, I've probably owned 15 other .22's. The .22 has to be the most popular caliber ever invented. Look at all of the small caliber rifles that have tried to kick the .22 off its throne. The .22 Hornet, .22 WMR and most recently

the .17 HMR. Then should we count in the .17 Hornet, .218 BEE, 204 Ruger and 222 Remington?

When the .17 HMR came out back in what, 2002? It was supposed to knock the .22 into oblivion. Yes, it was popular but the .22 was like the Weeble that no matter how hard it gets hit, it doesn't stay down.

What makes the little ol' .22 so resilient? I think there's a few factors that maintains its popularity, but we're going to have to begin back to the early 1930's, almost 100 years ago.

This would have been in the depression. My dad could shoot a rabbit and sell it for a whopping 10 cents, which was enough to buy a box of shorts. That kept him, in ammo. I remember the story of how he went out one day with only one bullet left and got a rabbit. He sold it, bought a box of ammo and was back in the saddle.

Back in that day they offered

shorts, longs and long rifle ammo which made the .22 versatile and cheap to shoot. That was space age technology or maybe just good marketing back in those days. I bet I've never bought more than one or two boxes of shorts in my life but back then it was an inexpensive option.

There are a number of modern-day reasons the .22 is still alive and even making a resurgence. My first guess would be the Ruger 10/22. It has to be the most trick-outtable gun in the world. I have models I've tricked out which shoot unbelievable groups, like pushing 1/4-inch groups.

Boyd's makes some super cool laminated stocks. Timney makes some slick triggers, and Ruger makes a decent after-market trigger as well. Then there are numerous bull barrels to dress them up. I obtain good accuracy with the factory barrel so I don't put on bull barrels anymore.

Another big boost is all of the offerings from Henry USA. I have a Henry .22 Magnum and on the first outing to sight it in, within minutes my wife declared she loved her new Henry's .22 Mag. What? That's the shortest amount of time I've ever owned a gun!

At SHOT Henry's Dan Clayton-Luce told me they were introducing 60 new SKU's this year, of which a big majority were .22's. He claimed they now offer hands down, the most accurate lever action in history.

Due to the popularity of Henry's, not only has the lever action hit new levels but the .22 has also resurged.

Another factor is the low price point for .22 ammo. I use to buy 500 round bricks for \$10.00. That allowed for a lot of inexpensive, low key, fun plinking. Even now ammo is a lot cheaper to shoot than the larger caliber rifles.

I'm big on recommending you shoot your regular hunting rifle a lot so you're familiar with it. There is also a lot of value in shooting a .22 regularly for numerous reasons. I may get 400-450 shots at ground squirrels on a good day. That helps me get fast at obtaining target acquisition, being able to



Timney Triggers are the best after market triggers the author has tested. However on this model the magazine release can be in the way when hunting. It's easy to bump and accidentally release the magazine.

take moving shots and learning to take shots quickly in various positions. Due to regularly shooting a large volume of .22 ammo I'm always tuned up.

Another reason the .22 has seen a resurgence in popularity is the availability of quality good ammo. Here's why I say that. About 25 years ago I bought my first Ruger 10/22. I'd get 1 1/2-inch groups shooting 10 rounds. I just figured that .22's were inherently inaccurate. Maybe I was oblivious but to my knowledge there was not super accurate .22 ammo on the market. Then a few years later I met Aguila and Eley which both produce the most accurate .22 ammo I've found.

Yes, I've killed 1,250-pound steers

and a 350 pound hog with a .22 but as a whole, when hunting with a .22 we're hunting small game with a small kill zone. So, I think the availability of more accurate ammo, has also played a role in the popularity of the .22.

I almost titled this article THE LOWLY .22 but after getting started on the article it seemed more appropriate to title it KING OF THE RIMFIRES — THE MIGHTY .22.

I'm told the .22 was invented in 1887 by J. Stevens. What other caliber has lasted that long and is still on top of the heap?

You may say the .30-06 or the .45-70 and yes, I love both but sadly they are not



Why have a Plain Jane .22? The top tricked out rifle is the most accurate .22 the author owns. It has a custom made Leupold scope that is painted to match the Boyd's stock, a bull barrel from Brownells and a Timney trigger.



The author put a Vortex Crossfire II 6-18x44 scope on this .22. He says, "If you get a top quality scope you'll never regret it."



"The .17 HMR tried to do a hostile take over but it just couldn't quite unseat the ever popular .22," says TC3.

the top choice of their class of hunting now. I still love the .30-06 and have shot moose, bear, deer, antelope on down to prairie dogs with one. And, I love my Henry .45-70 and have shot bear and fallow deer with it.

One thing you will want to do

to enhance your shooting pleasure/proficiency with your .22 is to get a decent scope. I just mounted a Vortex Crossfire 4-12x44 scope on my new TriStar K-22. It has an Adjustable Objective so you can dial in on close shots which is a big deal since when hunting with a .22 a lot

of times we'll be shooting small animals that are within close range. Buy a good scope and cuss less!

Now let's go into why shooting/hunting with a .22 is so relaxing. Let's start with the hunting aspect.

When I'm elk hunting I wake up two or three hours before daylight, gobble down a breakfast and then hike up into the high country. I hunt hard all day and drag back into camp beat, cook up a hot dinner and crawl into bed. By day three I'm so sore I can barely move. Not to mention the temps are getting down close to zero out west so I'm not sleeping that great. I love elk hunting, but it's tough duty. Especially if you backpack in.

Let's compare an elk hunt to my normal .22 hunts. I wake up to a big breakfast and two to four cups of coffee. Check my email. Maybe start another Pulitzer Prize winning article and then head out to ground squirrel hunt and arrive about 9:00.

Me and a buddy will walk across the high desert find a good spot, set down on a pad, throw up our shooting sticks and then start shooting. You don't have to be super quiet. You can be eating snacks and even carry a thermos of coffee if so desired. The temp will be between 60-85 so you may even be able to get a suntan. Then about an hour and a half before sundown they go underground, so you can get home and finish dinner before dark.

Or what about my pigeon hunts? I'll



The most accurate .22 ammo the author has found is made by Aquila and Eley.

usually arrive at a feedlot about an hour after daylight. Take a box of donuts for the feedlot manager, catch-up for 30 minutes and then go hide in a barn and shoot pigeons off the silo.

After an hour or so of shooting I'll go hit a few more hot spots in the feedlot. Repeat. Repeat. Then clean my birds and be home by 2:00.

Both hunts are low-key, high shooting hunts, Now go back and read how intense an elk hunt is! Plus with the introduction of the Canadian wolf into the lower 48, you might not even see an elk in a week of hard hunting, much less get a shot.

So, my .22 hunts are low-key, fun and involves a lot of shooting. How can you not love em'? Plus, they are a great way to introduce kids into hunting since it's not intense, they can be successful, the .22 doesn't kick and won't hurt their ears.

What if you want to just go plinking? What's better than a .22? Again, no loud report. No recoil and there are a million tin cans begging to be perforated!

Kids love the Birchwood Casey Shoot NC targets that produce a splash of color when they're hit, Or if you really want to get your kids into shooting, what about spinner targets or water bottles filled with water? The sky is the limit.

Due to all of the above, it's no wonder our blood pressure drops and we get that far away nostalgic look when we pull our .22 out of the closet and head outdoors. It's the same feeling Huckleberry Finn and Jim had when they went down to the river and threw out a line and rested the cane pole between their toes and dozed off while waiting on a bite.

LONG LIVE THE LITTLE OL' .22!!!

T&J



The author loves his new KR-22 TriStar .22. He says, "It is cool looking and fun to shoot, plus I think it is going to be a good seller."

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