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Pigs for the Plate

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What's the Best Hog Caliber?

It drives me nuts when someone does something once, and is suddenly a self-proclaimed expert. For example, they make a head shot with a .22 and then promote it as an adequate hog caliber. Come back in about 50 hogs and let's talk. Just because something miraculously works once doesn't make it the perfect caliber.

I've shot hogs with a .223, 5.56, 25-06, .300 Blackout, .30-06, Henrys .45-70, UMAREX .50 cal. airgun, UMAREX Air Sabre .and even the lowly Ruger 10/22. But just because all of the above has worked in certain situations it doesn't mean all of them are the best options.

I've shot quite a few hogs with a 5.56 and they work great for headshots but after the first shot and when hogs are scrambling every which way and things get chaotic, you'll want a larger caliber or you're going to just wound a bunch of hogs.

A lot of calibers will kill a hog, especially in the 75-125 pounder class. But when you start getting into the larger porkers I'd recommend day in, day out you probably ought to go to a .30 caliber. You'll have more stay down if you do.

Another question if you're a serious hog hunter is what action should you use. On this one, any action is effective and will kill a hog but hog hunting is not like deer hunting. If you shoot a big buck with a rolling block or a black powder rifle that's cool.

But when hog hunting, you're wanting to shoot as many hogs as you can as fast as you can. This is the reason so many hunters use an AR, aka modern sporting rifle.

For instance, Ron Spomer and I were hunting with Reno, a friend of Charles Allen in East Texas, on Charles ranch. We were using Reno's rifle chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor with a Pulsar Thermal scope and mounted on a tri-pod.

We were spotting/stalking hogs at night. We spotted a nice sounder. Ron was first up. He said he'd shoot first and then I could jump over and take the second shot. I deferred and told him by the time I'd



PHOTOS BY TOM CLAYCOMB III

The author shot this hog with his bolt action deer rifle while on a hunt south of Abilene Texas near Winters. A bolt action is an excellent choice when looking to encounter single animals with the intent on taking just one or two shots.

located them I'd be lucky to get one fast shot so to go ahead and try to get two or three shots before they scattered and I'd shoot the next sounder of hogs.

We got into position and Ron shot. And shot again. And again. And again. He got 11 shots. I've never gotten that many shots at one sounder of hogs in my life! Unbelievable. So that's why I say the AR platform is the perfect action for hog hunting. With a high capacity magazine you can get shots as fast as you can pull

the trigger.

Decades ago, AR's were clunky and not very accurate. Now? With some good Hornady ammo I can get close to 1 MOA or less groups with a couple of my AR's that are not even high-priced tricked out firearms.

You may say wait a minute, I'm super-efficient with my lever action .45-70 and some hunters are. Or the other day a buddy in North Texas called me. He'd been out coyote hunting. Three coyotes

came in at once at one of his set-ups. He dropped all three with a bolt action rifle. So some people are super proficient with that type of action.

But what about that once every blue moon opportunity like Ron had when he got 11 shots? Obviously, the AR is the top choice. After the fourth, fifth or sixth shot with the lever action or bolt rifle Ron would have been sitting there with an empty gun watching a field full of hogs running around. Due to having a high capacity magazine he was able to shoot 11 times.

Moving on. Another big factor is what ammo you use which will also ultimately determine your success rate. Decades ago, on my first moose hunt I decided to go with Winchester ammo. They had four ratings of ammo. The first one was a fast expanding bullet for hunting thin skinned coyotes. The next one was a little slower expanding for deer so it would penetrate the hide and break through a rib before expanding.

The third level of ammunition could penetrate through a thick hide and break through larger ribs or shoulder bones before expanding. I say all of this to point out what bullet construction you chose is important. If you're shooting smaller hogs probably anything will work but when you get up to the 200+ pound boar you need to use some well constructed bullets.

I'd suggest you can't just have a narrow view and inquire what is the best caliber for hog hunting. You need to consider the best caliber, action and bullets when buying for your next hog rifle. While any rifle might work.... Not all rifles are the perfect choice.

I have shot a boat load of hogs using traditional scopes but Night Vision and thermal imaging scopes have taken over and now dominate the hog hunting world, — and for good reason. They allow us to hog hunt 24/7. This is super important in Texas because



The author hunts with a variety of hunting methods. This Hill Country hog was dropped with an Air Saber at about 45 yards.

when the summer heat hits, hogs don't even start feeding until maybe 2:00 a.m. Without night vision or thermal imaging optics you're left out of the game.

Sure, you'll catch a few out feeding until shortly after the sun comes out and the heat kicks up but basically you're getting in on the tail end of the hunt. A few



A .50 caliber air rifle is another fun and productive technique if taking just one hog is the plan.



Regardless of the hunting discipline the author field dresses the hogs he kills.

When the plan is to reduce the numbers of hogs the author says he will reach for a modern sporting rifle or AR plus carry high capacity magazines that afford multiple follow up shots.

years ago Bill Olson and I were with Jr. Walker hog hunting north of Abilene. The first night we hunted until after midnight and had not seen hide nor hair of a hog. A day or two later we were able to get into them right at daylight for a few hours. It had turned super-hot and Jr. had figured out they weren't even coming out to feed until 2:00 am.

So it is a given, to be an effective hog hunter you're going to have some NV or thermal imaging scopes. It seems many of the good hog hunters I hunt with use Pulsar. A year ago Kevin Reese at Pulsar, sent me some Pulsar gear to test on a coyote hunt on my cousins ranch in Oklahoma.

Most hunters are all in on night hunting with NV and thermal imaging and somewhat educated on their basic use. However, the hog hunting accessory I think is vastly underutilized-is a Thermal monocular.

You may think, I have a Thermal scope. Why would I want a thermal monocular?

I'm big time into glassing. I've taught GLASSING FOR BIG GAME seminars all over the country. Been on Pro-staff with Leica, Riton Optics, sponsored for years by Leupold, done a lot with Vortex, did some with Burris and tested optics for many other companies.

Even a novice glasser knows a scope doesn't cut it for glassing. You've got to



The author processes a wild hog, will wrap and freeze the meat for the trip home.

use a good set of binoculars or a spotting scope. So why would you not think along the same lines of thought when night hunting and realizing you can't really glass well with a NV or Thermal scope? You know you can't use a scope to glass during the day.

I recently became acquainted at SHOT Show with James Donaldson, VP at Mileseey Optics. He showed me his lineup. One item that impressed was his TNV60 PRO Thermal Monocular. I soon started field testing this tool.

The older I get, the more I glass. Just like when day hunting, it is just as important at night to have a handheld optic. They're faster to throw up to glass. Also, if you're hunting out of a blind it seems like you're always banging your rifle against the blind window if you're using your rifle scope to glass which will spook your game.

If you're on the ground sitting or walking you're not swinging a rifle around pointing it at everyone in the dark like when you're trying to use your thermal scope to glass. I can't tell you how much handier, efficient and safer it is to use a monocular for glassing.

Also, as you're riding down a trail with a buddy you can be glassing and eliminating unproductive ground void of animals being hunted.

Like with all optics, you get what you pay for. A few years ago I was using an inexpensive NV monocular. After 45 minutes it seemed to blur my vision. You want good optics that can be used comfortably for hours. I think if you use a thermal monocular once, you'll going to fall in love with them and see you can't live without one.

In college I worked summers for a big rancher in North Texas. In the Spring we'd go crappie fishing on Lake Texoma in the early mornings for a couple of hours before we started out ranch work. He always said that fishing was like checking cattle. He had to drive around the pasture to find where the cattle were feeding/calving. He said it might take him a day or two until he got into the crappie:

That was 50 years ago. The modern term that fishermen use is "eliminating unproductive waters." It is no different in hunting. Use a monocular to eliminate unproductive hunting ground so you can focus on where the hogs are at. **T&J**

North American & Exotic Game Taxidermy Specialist

