Recommended Hunting Bullets

By Chuck Hawks

Having written several articles about hunting bullets in the past, perhaps this could be considered the most basic in a series on the subject. In this case, I am simply going to list proven bullets that are available in factory loads and to reloaders. These bullets are established game getters.

Naturally, any bullet must be in a caliber and weight appropriate to the game hunted. Take, for example, the popular Remington Core-Lokt bullet, which is available in numerous calibers and bullet weights for a wide variety of game animals. A 100 grain .243 Core-Lokt would be an appropriate choice for hunting whitetail deer, but not for hunting Roosevelt elk. For elk, the 180 grain .30 caliber Core-Lokt would be a much more appropriate choice. Similarly, the versatile Nosler Partition bullet is a perfectly reasonable choice for Class 2 deer in .257 Roberts, for Class 3 elk in 7mm Magnum and for Class 4 bison in .416 Rigby.

Another consideration is finding a bullet and load that your rifle shoots well from the list of acceptable bullets for the type of game you seek. This requires testing the likely candidates at the rifle range from a bench rest at a distance of 100 yards or longer. Use sandbags or a commercial rifle rest like a Lead Sled to eliminate as much shooter error as possible and the results should tell you what bullet your rifle prefers. Once you determine the preferred bullet and load for your rifle, stick with it. After your rifle/scope is zeroed, other bullets, even of the same weight, are unlikely to shoot to the same point of impact.

There are many bullets offered to hunters that are not listed below. If a bullet is not listed here, follow the manufacturer's recommendations

Bullets for Varmints (Class 1)

Varmints are small pests and include such species as gophers, rats, groundhogs, rock chucks, ground squirrels, jack rabbits and other rodents that devour crops and even gardens. They are best hunted with frangible bullets that are not prone to ricochet and are safe for use in semi-populated areas, where varmints are often hunted. Frangible bullets also provide the quickest kills on small animals. The Sierra BlitzKing and Hornady V-Max are popular examples of such bullets. The same bullets recommended for varmints are also recommended for the small predators, especially coyotes, which prey on them.

- Barnes: Varmin-A-Tor, Varmint Grenade

- Federal: Soft Point
- Hornady: V-Max, SPSX, HP, SP, SX and SP
- Norma: Soft Point
- Nosler: Ballistic Tip-Varmint, BT Lead Free, Varmageddon
- Remington: AccuTip-V and Hollow Point
- Sierra: BlitzKing and Varminter
- Speer: TNT, Varmint Hollow Point and Varmint Soft Point
- Winchester: Ballistic Silvertip-Varmint, Hollow Point and Pointed Soft Point

Bullets for Medium Game (Class 2)

Class 2 game includes such species as deer, antelope, goats, sheep, cougar, caribou, feral hogs, black bear and other thin-skinned game ranging from about 50-300 pounds live weight. Frangible varmint bullets should never be used on Class 2 game. In most cases, a conventional soft point bullet is the best medicine and will out perform more expensive premium bullets. Bullets that expand rapidly and destroy a lot of heart/lung tissue usually deliver the quickest kills on deer size game, particularly at longer ranges.

Penetration must be sufficient for the bullet to get into the vitals, of course, but from there on a wide wound cavity is the ticket. A bullet that spews fragments in the middle of the chest and stops under the skin on the far side has delivered what I consider ideal performance for achieving the quickest kills of medium size animals. The Winchester Power Point, Sierra Pro-Hunter and Speer Hot-Cor are classic soft point bullets. Plastic tipped, lead core bullets, such as the Nosler Ballistic Tip, Remington AccuTip, Swift Scirocco and Hornady SST have also proven very effective on Class 2 game.

- Barnes: Tipped TSX
- Federal: Soft Point, Fusion
- Hornady: SST, FTX, ELD-X and InterLock
- Norma: Spitzer Soft Point and Oryx
- Nosler: Ballistic Tip, Partition
- Remington: AccuTip and Core-Lokt
- RWS: Soft Point
- Sako: SP
- Sellier & Bellot: Soft Point
- Sierra: Pro-Hunter and GameKing
- Speer: Hot-Cor
- Swift: Scirocco

- Winchester: Deer Season XP, Soft Point, Ballistic Silvertip, Power Point and Power Max Bonded

All-around Bullets for Class 2 and Class 3 game

Combination hunts, such as for mule deer, black bear and Rocky Mountain elk or general African plains game, place multiple demands on bullets. "Hard" bullets intended for Class 3 game may not achieve quick kills on Class 2 animals and "soft" bullets intended for medium size game are iffy on raking shots at Class 3 animals. (Raking shots are best avoided in any case!) These bullets that follow expand rapidly enough to be reliable on Class 2 game and yet typically retain a substantial percentage of core for deep penetration after expansion. Some of them may appear on both the Class 2 and Class 3 lists. The Nosler Partition, Hornady InterLock and Remington Core-Lokt are classic examples of proven, all-around bullets.

- Barnes: TSX, Tipped TSX, LRX, Original
- Federal: Trophy Bonded Tip
- Hornady: FTX, InterLock, Monoflex and InterBond
- Norma: Kalahari and Oryx
- Nosler: AccuBond, AccuBond LR and Partition
- Remington: Core-Lokt and Core-Lokt Ultra Bonded
- RWS: DK
- Sierra: Pro-Hunter and GameKing
- Speer: Hot-Cor, Grand Slam
- Swift: Scirocco
- Winchester: AccuBond CT, Power Core, PowerMax Bonded and Power Point

Bullets for Large Game (Class 3)

Class 3 game includes such species as wild boar, red stag, elk, moose, kudu, eland, oryx and other large game weighing in excess of 300 pounds live weight. The bullets listed in the Class 2 category can be deadly if driven directly into the heart/lung area of game like red stag and elk, but may not remain intact if they hit heavy bones. Greater penetration is generally preferred for large animals and premium bullets, often constructed with lead cores bonded to gilding metal jackets or partitioned cores, are quite popular. The Nosler Partition is the original American premium bullet and it remains a favorite of experienced hunters around the world.

- Barnes: TSX, TSX Tipped, LRX, Original
- Federal: Trophy Bonded Tip and Trophy Bonded Bear Claw
- Hornady: Interlock, Monoflex, SP-RP InterLock, InterBond and GMX
- Norma: Oryx
- Nosler: AccuBond, AccuBond LR, E-Tip and Partition

- Remington: Core-Lokt and Core-Lokt Ultra Bonded
- RWS: DK
- Sierra: GameKing
- Speer: Grand Slam
- Swift: A-Frame
- Winchester: AccuBond CT and Power Core
- Woodleigh: Weldcore

Bullets for Dangerous Predators (Class 4)

Many of the bullets listed for Class 3 game would also be good choices for hunting large, potentially dangerous predators, such as leopard, jaguar, lion, grizzly bear, brown bear and polar bear. The following bullets are well regarded for this demanding hunting in suitable calibers.

The polar and Alaskan brown bears are the world's largest predators. Medium bore rifles (.338-.375 caliber) and heavy bullets of high sectional density are preferred. The Swift A-Frame, Nosler Partition, Hornady SP-RP InterLock and Remington Core-Lokt Ultra Bonded are all considered good choices.

- Barnes: TSX
- Federal: Trophy Bonded Bear Claw
- Hornady: SP-RP InterLock and DGX
- Norma: Oryx
- Nosler: AccuBond and Partition
- Remington: Core-Lokt Ultra Bonded
- Swift: A-Frame
- Winchester: AccuBond CT
- Woodleigh: Weldcore

Bullets for Thick-skinned, Dangerous Game (Class 4)

Class 4 animals are heavy, thick-skinned game and the 9.3mm or .375 calibers are considered the practical minimum, while the over .40 caliber big bores really come into their own. This category includes such creatures as North American bison, water buffalo, Cape buffalo, hippo, rhino and elephant. Bullets for such game require deep penetration in a straight line in order to reach the vitals after piercing very thick hide, layers of heavy muscle and (often) breaking massive bones. Expansion must be subordinated to penetration in such bullets.

Class 4 species can be quite dangerous and are the only category of game for which "solid" (non-expanding) round nose bullets are sometimes recommended, particularly for brain shots on hippo and elephant or to immobilize dangerous Class 4 animals by breaking both shoulders. Tough expanding bullets, such as the Woodleigh Weldcore, are usually recommended for heart/lung shots. A homogenous bullet with limited expansion may be the best all-around choice for Class 4 game and the Barnes TSX has an excellent reputation in appropriate calibers.

- Barnes: TSX and Banded Solid
- Federal: Trophy Bonded Bear Claw and Trophy Bonded Sledgehammer Solid
- Hornady: Interlock SP-RP, DGX and DGS
- Norma: Solid
- Nosler: Partition and Solid
- Swift: A-Frame Heavy Rifle and Break-Away Solids
- Woodleigh: Weldcore and FMJ