



Hollywood's Love Affair with Lever- Action Rifles

There are firearms that appear in movies...and then there are firearms that become movies.

Few designs have etched themselves into the visual language of American cinema like the lever-action. Part mechanical poetry, part cultural shorthand, the lever gun has long been Hollywood's fastest way to say: frontier grit, righteous resolve, and action that doesn't pause to reload. And while the screen often favors style over strict historical accuracy, the

influence is real—generations of shooters, hunters, collectors, and gun folks first fell in love with the lever gun under theater lights.

Here's a tour through iconic scenes—especially the moments when bigger-bore lever-actions (or the on-screen idea of them) stole the show—and how those moments helped shape firearm culture.

1) *Stagecoach* (1939): The “Loop Lever” Is Born on Screen

If you’ve ever pictured a cowboy snapping a lever gun like it’s an extension of his arm, you’re living in the wake of *Stagecoach*.

John Wayne’s Ringo Kid famously carried a Winchester Model 1892 carbine with a large-loop lever, a look that became a lasting trademark for Wayne across multiple films.

Here’s the kicker: the oversized loop lever wasn’t some widespread Old West standard. It’s widely credited to Hollywood—specifically the *Stagecoach* era—where the loop became a cinematic tool for dramatic manipulation and memorable handling.

Cultural impact:

The loop lever became a style signal—“this is the hero,” “this is a gunfighter,” “this is motion.” It helped cement the lever-action as the visual icon of the Western, even when the exact model and configuration weren’t period-perfect.

2) *The Rifleman* (TV, 1958–1963): Lever Guns Go Superhuman

Long before “speed runs” and slow-motion reload montages, *The Rifleman* turned the lever gun into a near-mythic object.

Chuck Connors’ Lucas McCain carried a modified Winchester Model 1892, popularly associated with rapid cycling and a distinct, instantly recognizable handling style.

Cultural impact:

This is where a lot of modern lever-gun romance comes from: the idea that a lever-action is both practical and heroic, fast yet traditional. It’s also a prime example of Hollywood turning the lever gun into a character of its own—not just a prop.

3) *Winchester ’73* (1950): The Rifle as a Plot Device—and a Status Symbol

Some films feature a firearm. *Winchester ’73* is about one.

The movie follows the turbulent journey of a prized Winchester 1873 repeating rifle, passed from hand to hand as obsession, identity, and violence orbit the same object.

Cultural impact:

This kind of storytelling did something powerful: it elevated the lever gun from “tool” to treasured possession; a legacy object. That notion still drives collecting and high-end lever-gun appreciation today: fine wood, fine metal, fine history, and a rifle you don’t just own; you keep.

4) *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991): Lever-Action Cool Goes Modern

Westerns don’t have a monopoly on lever-action swagger.

Arnold’s T-800 made the Winchester Model 1887 lever-action shotgun an action-movie legend—particularly the one-handed cycling flourish that burned itself into pop culture memory.

Cultural impact:

This was a major pivot: lever-actions weren’t only “Old West.” They could be industrial, brutal, futuristic—a mechanical throwback that looked even cooler against modern vehicles and urban backdrops.

5) Big-Bore Lever Guns on Screen: When “Traditional” Meets “Serious Punch”

If classic Westerns made lever guns iconic, more recent films have helped

popularize the idea of the lever gun as a hard-hitting modern choice, especially in big-bore form.

A standout example is *Wind River* (2017), where the lead character carries a Marlin 1895SBL in .45-70 Government; a cartridge and platform combo that screams “real world, real consequences,” not cartoon physics.

And in *Jurassic World* (2015), Chris Pratt’s character is also associated with a Marlin 1895SBL in .45-70, giving the lever gun a blockbuster moment outside the Western genre entirely.

Cultural impact:

This is where the lever gun’s identity gets re-forged for a new era:

- Compact handling in rough country
- Fast follow-up shots without abandoning tradition
- And a clear nod that lever-action doesn’t have to mean mild

What Hollywood Really Sold: A Feeling

Across all these eras, Hollywood consistently sold three things about lever-actions:

1. **Motion** – levers look alive on camera
2. **Character** – the rifle tells you who the hero is
3. **Authority** – big-bore lever guns imply stakes without exposition

This is why lever-actions remain so culturally sticky. They're mechanical, readable, and emotionally coded.

Bringing It Back: Big Horn Armory and the Big-Bore Lever Renaissance

Hollywood made lever guns iconic. Modern shooters are rediscovering them for very practical reasons. But [Big Horn Armory](#) occupies a distinct category within that lineage.

Rather than recreating yesterday's carbines, Big Horn Armory builds lever-actions engineered around some of the most powerful revolver cartridges in production, bringing true big-bore performance into a traditional repeating rifle format.



Model 89 – .500 S&W Magnum

The Big Horn Armory [Model 89](#) is purpose-built around the .500 S&W Magnum cartridge. That alone sets it apart. This isn't a nostalgic chambering; it's a modern powerhouse adapted into a classic lever platform.

Key characteristics that define the Model 89:

- American-made, precision-machined components
- Solid stainless steel construction
- Substantial locking strength engineered for high-pressure performance
- Premium walnut furniture
- Controlled, repeatable lever cycling

In practical terms, the Model 89 bridges two worlds:

- The heritage ergonomics and fast follow-up capability of a lever gun

- The sheer energy delivery associated with modern magnum handgun cartridges
- Multi-cartridge compatibility within the .45 caliber revolver family

It's compact compared to many large-caliber bolt rifles, yet delivers authority suitable for serious hunting applications where heavy-for-caliber projectiles are preferred. That balance—traditional manual operation paired with modern ballistic performance—is precisely what keeps the lever-action relevant.



Model 90 – .460 S&W Magnum

Where the Model 89 emphasizes bullet weight and frontal area, the Big Horn Armory [Model 90](#) in .460 S&W Magnum brings velocity into the equation.

The .460 S&W platform is known for:

- High velocities within the revolver cartridge category
- Flat trajectory relative to other big-bore handgun calibers

By building a lever-action around this cartridge, Big Horn Armory created a rifle that expands the functional envelope of the platform. The Model 90 maintains:

- Stainless steel durability
- Tight machining tolerances
- Robust extraction and feeding geometry
- Configurable options for optics integration

The result is a lever-action that doesn't simply echo history; it extends it.

The Throughline

Hollywood put lever-actions on a pedestal.

Modern cinema reminded audiences they still have teeth.

Big Horn Armory demonstrates that the platform can evolve without losing its soul.

The lever-action was never just about nostalgia. It was about mechanical

confidence: visible, deliberate, and decisive. When chambered in cartridges like .500 S&W and .460 S&W, that confidence scales upward in a very real way.

For collectors, these rifles represent legacy craftsmanship.

For hunters, they represent serious capability in a compact form.

For enthusiasts who grew up watching lever guns dominate the silver screen, they represent something familiar, now built for modern expectations.

From the earliest Westerns to today's big-bore renaissance, the lever-action has never truly left center stage. It simply keeps finding new ways to command it.



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