



Why Lever-Action Reliability Still Matters in Remote Terrain

There's a conversation happening in the hunting and shooting world right now, one that's been going on for decades, honestly, about what makes a rifle truly reliable. Not reliable on a bench. Not reliable at a 100-yard range with a cleaning kit 10 feet away. Reliable when you're three days into a backcountry elk hunt, the temperature has dropped 40 degrees overnight, and the nearest gunsmith is on the other side of a mountain range.

That's a different conversation. And in that conversation, the lever action still wins.

Here's why.

Simple Machines Don't Fail in Complex Ways

Every action type has a failure mode. The more parts a system has, the more ways it can go wrong, and the

harder it becomes to diagnose and fix the problem without tools, spare parts, or a workbench.

The gas-operated semi-automatic is a remarkable piece of engineering. But it is, by definition, dependent on consistent gas pressure, clean gas ports, a properly functioning piston or bolt carrier, a buffer spring calibrated to the cartridge, and a feeding system that plays nicely with the ammunition you happen to have on hand. Any one of those variables can introduce a malfunction. Some of those malfunctions are clearable in the field in seconds. Some are not.

A lever action has none of those variables. The shooter provides the cycling force intentionally, completely, every single time. There's no gas system to foul. No buffer spring to replace. No bolt carrier to crack. The mechanical sequence is direct, visible, and auditable by feel.

When a lever action fails to cycle, the shooter knows immediately, knows why, and can address it without guesswork. That's not a small thing when you're hunting in the Wyoming backcountry or the rainforests of Southeast Alaska.

The Case Against "Just Clean It More"

We've all heard this one. Gas gun advocates sometimes respond to field-reliability concerns with the suggestion that proper maintenance solves everything. And they're not wrong, exactly; regular cleaning absolutely helps.

But backcountry hunting is fundamentally about controlled uncertainty. You can't always control the weather. You can't always control the conditions your rifle gets dragged through: creek crossings, blown snow, red mud, pine sap. You *can* control what action type you carry.

Lever guns are remarkably tolerant of the kind of abuse that backcountry hunting dishes out. Dirt, debris, and moisture have fewer critical pathways to interfere with; the toggle-link or rotary bolt design cycles without depending on propellant gas to do the work. Get mud in the action? Work the lever a few times. It clears. That's a different story from a fouled gas port at 2,000 feet of elevation with a bull elk in the next drainage.

We're not saying lever guns are indestructible or infallible. We're saying they fail in ways that are simpler, more predictable, and more

field-addressable. In remote terrain, that distinction matters enormously.

Built Not to Break: The Real Field Advantage

When hunters evaluate rifles, they look at caliber, weight, accuracy, optics compatibility, and ergonomics. Almost nobody asks the question that matters most in remote terrain: “How likely is this rifle to need attention at all when I’m three days from a road?”

For a lever action, the answer is rarely, if ever.

The design of BHA's [Model 89](#) and [Model 90](#) lever guns is so fundamentally robust that field repair almost never comes up. A lever gun doesn't ask much of you in the field because it was built to keep going without being asked.

This matters in grizzly country. It matters in the Alaska Range. It matters in the canyon country of the Southwest, where a horse can take a tumble with your rifle in the scabbard, and you need to know, right now, on the spot, whether that gun is still functional. The answer with a lever gun is almost always yes. Not because you can fix it on the spot, but because there's rarely anything to fix due to its durable design. That's a

fundamentally different reliability proposition than a platform whose function depends on a gas system staying clean and a buffer spring staying calibrated under hard field conditions.

The Model 89 Take Down: Field Reliability Gets Packable

If the standard Model 89 represents the leverage-action ideal for backcountry hunting, the [Model 89 Take Down Carbine](#) pushes it further.



Designed with inspiration from John Moses Browning's 1905 patent, adapted and modernized to handle the immense chamber pressures of the .500 S&W Magnum, the Take Down separates into two compact sections without tools and without losing zero. It's the ultimate guide gun concept: serious big-bore stopping power in a package that fits in a pack, stows in a

float plane, or rides behind a saddle without sticking out like a flag.

The spline interface used on the BHA Take Down isn't an aesthetic choice; it's an engineering one. Founder Greg Buchel specifically chose the spline-based take-down design over interrupted thread systems because it offers greater bearing surface area, which means greater strength and consistency under the pressures the .500 S&W Magnum generates. That's the kind of thinking that produces a backcountry rifle you can trust.

A rifle you can take apart fast, stow compactly, reassemble in the dark, and count on to function after rough handling is not a novelty. It's the correct tool for remote hunting.

What "Proven" Actually Means

Hunters use the word "proven" loosely. Everything from century-old cartridges to last year's new platform gets called proven when people mean "I like it."

The lever action has earned the word. The core mechanism has been refined over 150 years in the hands of hunters, frontiersmen, and working cowboys who could not afford for their rifle to go down. Every design quirk

that created a failure mode has had a century and a half to get engineered out. What remains is the distilled product of generations of field feedback, a mechanical action that has been optimized for reliability by people who depended on it to stay alive.

[Big Horn Armory's](#) contribution to that legacy is building that action around the most powerful cartridges available in the format, in a rifle worthy of the terrain you're hunting. The Model 89 and Model 90 aren't antiques. They're what happens when you take 150 years of field-proven mechanical logic and apply it to a .500 S&W Magnum or .460 S&W Magnum.

That's not nostalgia. That's engineering.

The Bottom Line for Backcountry Hunters

If your hunts happen close to a truck, a cabin, and a cleaning kit, you have a lot of good options. Run what you love.

But if your hunts happen far from all of those things, in grizzly country, in canyon country, in the high wilderness where something going wrong with your rifle is a serious problem, then mechanical simplicity, proven durability, and the confidence that your rifle won't ask for attention when

you need it most, are the specs that matter.

The BHA Model 89, Model 90, and Model 89 Take Down are built for exactly those conditions. Big-bore power, lever-action simplicity, and Wyoming-built durability. No gas system to foul. No buffer spring to replace. No mystery failures in the dark.

Just the lever. Just the round. Just the country.

Ready to carry something you can count on?

Explore the full BHA lever-action lineup at bighornarmory.com/rifles — or call us at 307-586-3700. We're gun guys who hunt the same kind of country you do, and we built these rifles because we needed them ourselves.



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