



The Lieutenant, the Lever Gun, and 100 Hours in a Deer Stand

A retired Houston police lieutenant made us a promise: bring a Model 89 to Texas, and it would earn its keep against the toughest customer he knew — three million feral hogs. Here's what happened when he held up his end.

It started with a boast. In May of 2025, Duke Atkins — a 34-year veteran of the Houston Police Department, retired Lieutenant, and graduate of the FBI National Academy's Session 226 — stopped by our shop in Cody, Wyoming, on vacation. We walked him through the

operation, showed him rifles ready to ship, and let him run his hands over some of the finest walnut we had on the rack.

Duke looked at a [Model 89](#) and said what a lot of people say when they pick one up for the first time: I bet this thing would

kill a hog. Only Duke wasn't like most people. He runs the FBI NA226 Hog Slayer Society, a hunting reunion-turned-institution now in its 19th year, that draws roughly 25 law enforcement veterans from as far as Oregon, Wisconsin, Kansas, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and New York to a property outside Houston every March. It began in 2008 with five friends and a week of hog hunting. It's since grown into a full training-conference-sized event, complete with a steak luncheon that feeds upward of 80 guests. If anyone was going to test a claim like that fairly, it was him.

So, we called it. In November, we shipped Duke a [Model 89 Black Thunder chambered in .500 S&W Magnum](#), loaded with 350-grain Hornady XTP ammunition, and asked for one thing in return: hunt with it and send us the photos.

Three Million Reasons It Wouldn't Be Easy

Texas is home to an estimated three million-plus feral hogs, responsible for enormous agricultural losses statewide. On paper, that sounds like target-rich hunting. In practice, hogs are smart, and they adapt fast. By late October, once deer season opens and pressure builds, Duke's local hogs go almost entirely nocturnal, up and moving only after dark, and not always cooperative even then. Duke's promise to [Big Horn Armory](#) would have to be kept largely in the dark,

from a fixed stand, in thick East Texas woods.

He mounted a Skinner peep sight and dropped a Burris FastFire red dot on the rail, a combination chosen specifically to hold up in dim, late-afternoon light under heavy tree cover.

"This rifle handles very well and feels really solid in the hands," Duke said. His [Model 89](#) went on to spend more than 100 hours in the stand with him before it got its chance.

The Shot

It came during this year's Hog Slayer event, on a night with a full moon rising. Duke stayed late — later than usual — watching daylight fade to dark and then, as the moon climbed, brighten again just enough to make out movement. Around 7:20 p.m., a lone hog worked a line of shell corn he'd put down, drifted into the tree line, and came back. Ten minutes later, it was below his stand in the rising moonlight.

He wedged a flashlight between two sandbags to light the shooting lane, got the rifle up, hit the light, and settled the FastFire's red dot on the hog's shoulder.

"Hog went down hard in his tracks," Duke told us.



The 350-grain XTP had struck slightly behind the right foreleg, breaking bone through a nearly two-inch channel before opening a fist-sized hole through the chest wall. It exited in front of the off shoulder. One shot, one hog, dropped where it stood.

A few nights later, Duke's FBI NA classmate Steve B., of Pennsylvania, borrowed the same rifle from a neighboring stand and connected on a hog of his own, a tougher recovery in heavy brush, but a good hog all the same.

The Verdict

“Do not have any doubts,” Duke told us afterward, “that a [Big Horn Armory Model 89 in .500 S&W Magnum](#) will indeed harvest any hog you want to put in front of it.” He added that he'd trust it for close-range follow-up work on wounded hogs in heavy brush, exactly the kind of fast, decisive scenario where a big-bore lever gun is built to perform.

We built the [Model 89](#) around the .500 S&W Magnum for hunters who need that kind of certainty; in the dark, in the brush, in the one shot that has to count. Duke's word is as good a proof point as we've had.

Duke has one more request on file: a Cape buffalo, loose in East Texas. We're still working on that part.

Ready to see what a Model 89 can do for you?

Explore the [Model 89 lineup](#) and contact us at [bighornarmory.com](#). Go Big or Go Home.

About Duke Atkins

Duke Atkins is a retired Lieutenant with the Houston Police Department (34 years of service) and a graduate of the FBI National Academy Session 226. He founded and runs the FBI NA226 Hog Slayer Society, an annual hunting reunion for law enforcement veterans now in its 19th year.



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