



The Role of Heavy-Caliber Rifles in Hog and Predator Control

What penetration, anchoring power, and hard field use actually demand of a hog and predator rifle — and how the biggest bores answer the call.

A feral boar does not offer the soft, forgiving target a whitetail does. Across his shoulders he grows a shield: a slab of calcified cartilage and old scar tissue that thickens with every year and every fight, sometimes better than an inch through the middle. Behind it lies dense, heavy bone. A marginal bullet flattens against that armor or stalls somewhere inside it, and the hog that should have folded

instead runs into thick brush, in the dark, and now thoroughly educated. Predator and hog control is not a contest of energy on a ballistics chart. It is the plain problem of driving a heavy, well-built bullet through obstruction and out the far side. That is a job for a big-bore caliber.

The Animal Is Built to Defeat Your Bullet

Sectional density and construction matter more here than velocity or a flat line of flight. A light, fast bullet is designed to expand quickly and dump its energy near the surface, exactly the wrong behavior when there is an inch of gristle and a shoulder joint standing between the muzzle and the boiler room. A heavy .50-caliber projectile does the opposite. It carries its mass deep, resists deflection off angled bone, and keeps a wide wound channel from entrance to exit. Factory loads in this class run from roughly 350 grains up past 600; handloaders push hard-cast and monolithic solids heavier still. Frontal diameter starts at half an inch before the bullet ever begins to open.

The result is penetration with margin to spare. In [independent testing](#), reviewers found the .500-caliber Big Horn Armory rounds punch through automotive sheet metal as readily as soft tissue, a useful proxy for what heavy bone and shield plate do to lesser cartridges. Against a quartering hog or a bear that turns at the shot, that reserve is the difference between a recovered animal and a long night with a flashlight.

[Duke Atkins](#), a retired Houston police lieutenant who put a [Model 89 in .500 S&W Magnum](#) through more than a hundred hours in a Texas deer stand, saw exactly that reserve at work. His 350-

grain load struck slightly behind the foreleg, drove through bone in a channel nearly two inches wide, opened a fist-sized hole through the chest wall, and exited in front of the off shoulder. The hog never took a step.



“Hog went down hard in his tracks.”

— Duke Atkins, retired Lieutenant,
Houston P.D. — Model 89, .500 S&W
Magnum

One Hog Is a Shot. A Sounder Is a Math Problem.

In high-density country, hogs do not travel alone. A sounder may run from a

dozen animals to forty, and when the first shot breaks, they are gone in seconds, a boiling mass of pigs headed for cover in every direction. The manager's real objective is not one clean kill. It is the greatest number of animals accounted for before the ground empties.

That is where anchoring power earns its keep. A hog that drops where it stands does not broadcast alarm to the rest of the sounder the way a wounded, squealing runner does. Put animals down decisively, and you buy the seconds needed for a second, a third, a fourth. Two tools answer this problem from different directions. A fast, slick lever action rewards the deliberate shooter who works the gun between aimed shots and never gives up an ounce of terminal authority. A big-bore semi-auto answers the sounder that is already moving, where honest follow-up speed keeps a second and third animal on the ground. Field reviewers hunting hogs and bear with these platforms came back saying the same thing: fast follow-ups turn a scattering herd into a recovered one.

Most of This Happens After Dark

Where hogs are pressured, they turn nocturnal, and serious control work moves to thermal and night optics. The dark rewrites the shot. Depth perception flattens. Reading an animal's angle, the single most important judgment in

placing a big-bore bullet, gets harder precisely when the shield-and-bone problem is least forgiving. Your margin for a perfect broadside shrinks to nothing.

This is the strongest argument for carrying more cartridge than a textbook broadside would require. A round with penetration in reserve forgives the slightly steep quartering angle you misread at one in the morning, because it drives through anyway. A cartridge that only performs on the ideal shot is the wrong companion in the dark. Threaded muzzles, optics-ready receivers, and the ability to run a suppressor or brake round out a rifle meant to work when the sun is down.

Duke's hog came exactly this way. Where he hunts, the pigs go nocturnal once deer season opens, so his shot came after dark, from a fixed stand, in the rising light of a full moon, a lone hog working a line of shell corn below him around 7:20 p.m. He lit the shooting lane with a flashlight wedged between two sandbags, settled a red dot on the shoulder, and made it a one-shot night. That is the whole problem in miniature: poor light, a single opportunity, and no room for a bullet that quits early.

“This rifle handles very well and feels really solid in the hands.”

— Duke Atkins, on the Model 89 after 100+ hours in the stand

The Rifle Has to Survive the Work, Too

Population control is high-volume, hard-use hunting. Rifles ride in UTV racks, take the mud and the humidity, get banged against gates and dragged through greenbrier, and burn through round counts a once-a-year deer hunter never sees. The gun is a tool, and tools that quit are worthless.

Big Horn Armory builds for exactly that. Actions are high-strength 17-4PH stainless; barrels are 416 stainless; and a special nitriding process hardens critical surfaces to Rockwell C82; harder, as the company points out, than most machine tooling. Reviewers have noted those black nitride surfaces shrug off scraping branches and knocking around in a side-by-side without much of a mark. One tester, cataloging the strong, heavy, carefully fitted components, summed the guns up as built for rough use with an evident respect for tradition.

What It All Adds Up To

Put the criteria together: deep penetration through shield and bone, decisive anchoring in a scattering sounder, performance that forgives the imperfect angle in the dark, and a build that survives for generations, and they point squarely at the big .50-class rifles

[Big Horn Armory](#) has spent its existence perfecting.

The Model 89 in .500 S&W Magnum is the natural first answer, and the backbone of the line. Built on a scaled and hardened 1886-pattern lever action, it puts seven rounds of heavy .50-caliber authority in a compact, fast-handling package, and in Carbine and Trapper trim, it slips through brush as easily as any pig does. For the hunter who wants deliberate, aimed shots delivered with total confidence in penetration, it is hard to improve on. It is, quite simply, the workhorse. It is also the rifle Duke trusts for close-range follow-up on wounded hogs in heavy brush — the fast, decisive work a big-bore lever gun was built for.

“Do not have any doubts 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.”

— Duke Atkins, retired Lieutenant, Houston P.D. and founder, FBI NA226 Hog Slayer Society

The [Model 90](#) shares that same proven action while opening the door to .460 S&W Magnum, .454 Casull, and .45 Colt, a useful range for those who want to tune recoil and trajectory to their ground without giving up the big-bore terminal punch the work demands. Hunters have already put that flexibility to work: one customer took a hog cleanly with a Model

90A in .454 Casull, proof that the lighter-kicking chamberings surrender nothing that matters on pigs.



“A fun weekend with [the] Model 90A in 454 Casull – 24 hogs in total in [two] days, Magtech 240gr JSP worked great, and the BHA ran like a dream. Such a great rifle.”

— Graham P., Customer Testimonial

And when the job is a moving sounder rather than a single animal, the [AR500 Next Gen in .500 Auto Max](#) earns its place alongside the levers, not in front of them. The .500 Auto Max is essentially the rimless twin of the Model 89's cartridge, so it brings the same half-inch-hole authority to a semi-automatic platform built for honest follow-up speed. Where the Model 89 is the precise, deliberate instrument, the AR500 is the answer to the herd that's already running. It is not a hypothetical role: on a

Texas night hunt, [outdoor writer A.W.R. Hawkins](#) dropped a mature hog with a single .500 Auto Max round from the AR500, running a thermal optic in full dark.



This hog was harvested using a BHA 500 Auto Max with an ATN THOR4 thermal scope during a Lone Star Hunts wild hog hunt.

Different tools, same Cody-built DNA, and the same commitment to putting the biggest bore in the field to work.

Hog and predator control asks a rifle to do the hard thing repeatedly, in poor light, against an animal engineered to shrug off anything less. It asks for penetration, for anchoring power, for durability, and for the confidence to take

the shot that presents itself rather than
the one you wished for. It asks, in a word,
for enough gun. At Big Horn Armory,

enough gun is the only kind we build. Go
big or go home.



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