

WHEN THE .38 SPECIAL WAS KING

SHOOTING TIMES

MARCH 2023

VIRIDIAN
GDO 25

BLUE-COLLAR BEAUTY
**BROWNING'S
X-BOLT SPEED SR**

THE GREAT
.300 WIN. MAG.
TURNS 60

A SIGHT FOR
OLD EYES

QUICKSHOTS

- ▶ **UBERTI**
1873 Cattleman II
Dual Cylinder
- ▶ **MTM**
Divided Ammo Crate

AMERICA'S RIFLE

POF'S TAKE ON
**THE LEVER
ACTION**

SHOOTINGTIMES.COM \$6.99 USA // \$7.99 CAN





SHOOTING TIMES FEATURES
CONTENTS

MARCH 2023 VOLUME 64, ISSUE 2

24

America's Rifle

POF's 9mm Luger Tombstone lever-action carbine isn't some run-of-the-mill lever gun.

By Joel J. Hutchcroft

32

A Sight for Old Eyes

Sometimes, purism must take a back seat to practicality, and putting a red-dot sight on a lever gun is one such instance.

By Payton Miller

36

When the .38 Special Was King

The .38 Special once was the king of competition and personal protection. Here's the lowdown.

By Layne Simpson

42

Browning's Blue-Collar Beauty

Browning's new X-Bolt Speed SR bolt action may be the most feature-packed production rifle available for blue-collar dollars.

By Joseph von Benedikt

50

60 Years of Success

It's hard to believe, but the great .300 Winchester Magnum cartridge has been around for just 60 years.

By Steve Gash

56

Quick Shot

Uberti 1873 Cattleman II Brass Dual Cylinder 9mm/.357 Magnum

This convertible single-action revolver has sleek lines, great fit and finish, and extreme versatility.

By Joel J. Hutchcroft

58

Quick Shot

MTM Divided Ammo Crate

The stackable Divided Ammo Crate provides a large interior that is divided into four compartments by removable partitions.

By Joel J. Hutchcroft



AMERICA'S RIFLE

POF'S 9MM LUGER TOMBSTONE LEVER-ACTION CARBINE
ISN'T SOME RUN-OF-THE-MILL LEVER GUN.

BY JOEL J. HUTCHCROFT

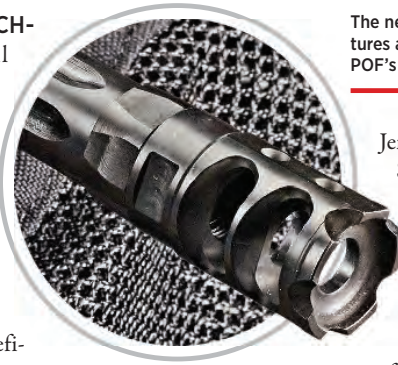
AMERICA'S RIFLE

TWENTY-ROUND DETACH-able magazine. Magpul buttstock. M-LOK handguard. Picatinny top rail. Sixteen-and-a-half-inch barrel. Two-port muzzle brake. Do those features make you think lever-action carbine? I didn't think so. Well, POF's new Tombstone lever action has them...and more. The carbine's name sounds like a throwback to the Old West, but it is definitely not your grandpappy's lever gun.

I've said it before. I'm not much of a lever action fan, even though the first rifle I ever fired was a .44-40 Winchester Model 1873. Instead, I grew up shooting a pump-action .22 Short Winchester Model 1890 and a Savage Model 24 .22 LR/20 gauge combination gun. Of course, I've owned several traditional lever actions over the years, including Winchesters and Marlins, a Henry, and a Mossberg, to name just a few, but I've always preferred other types of rifle actions. That said, I have to admit that I have an unexplainable fondness for POF's take on the lever gun. I felt it the moment I took it out of the box, and that feeling has grown after handling and shooting the new carbine. The Tombstone is built with a lot of attention to quality. It functions smoothly and reliably. It's lightweight. And it's accurate.

American-Made

As longtime readers know, POF is well known for building high-quality AR-type rifles, and many are probably familiar with how the AR is often referred to as "America's rifle." Some readers may remember that the lever action was born in America around 1849, with the first ones being made by Walter Hunt and Lewis



The new Tombstone lever-action carbine features a 16.5-inch fluted barrel that comes with POF's two-port muzzle brake.

Jennings. Those rifles were followed by the Smith & Wesson Volcanic, the Whitney-Kennedy, the Spencer, the original Henry, the Winchester Model 1866 and Model 1873, the Marlin Model 1881, and others. Because the lever action was created in America and since the new Tombstone combines elements of the AR, you can certainly think of it as literally being America's rifle. And it's made in the U.S.A., too. Continuing our brief history lesson, by the 1950s the lever action had become the darling of American hunters. Why? Well, the lever action is lightweight and handy, just right for the woods. The lever action is fast shooting, too. Some informal tests have proved that the lever action slings lead as quickly as the pump action, and darn near as fast as a semiautomatic. Most lever actions also have plenty of firepower by virtue of their multiple-round tubular magazines. And just about every lever action is capable of hunting-grade accuracy. Some are able to produce astonishing accuracy. For example, Joseph von Benedikt reported on Winchester's new StaBALL Match propellant for the 2023 edition of the *Hodgdon Annual Manual* (which the *Shooting Times* team puts together for Hodgdon), and one of the cartridges he handloaded for that article was the .45-70 Gov't. His handloads with the new powder produced a three-shot group average of 0.78 inch at 100 yards from his customized Marlin lever-action rifle without any personalized load tweaking. One individual three-shot group measured just 0.45 inch!

Now let's take a good look at the new POF Tombstone.



The carbine has a Picatinny top rail with 11 slots, which makes installing an optic quick and easy, and an integrated XS Ghost Ring rear sight.



The front sight is also by XS Sights, and it features a vertical white stripe. The handguard has 2.0-inch-long rail sections at the 12 o'clock and six o'clock positions.



The trigger is POF's proprietary single-stage trigger, and it has a flat-face profile. The lever loop and trigger guard are large enough to accommodate gloved hands.

The Tombstone Up Close

First, the new Tombstone is chambered for 9mm Luger. Its fluted barrel is 16.5 inches long, made of 4150 steel, and free-floated. The muzzle is threaded 1/2x28, and the carbine comes with POF's double-port muzzle brake.

The handguard is POF's 10.5-inch Modular Receiver Rail, and it has M-LOK slots

TOMBSTONE	
MANUFACTURER	POF-USA pof-usa.com
TYPE	Lever-action repeater
CALIBER	9mm Luger
MAGAZINE CAPACITY	20 rounds
BARREL	16.5 in.
OVERALL LENGTH	36 in.
WEIGHT, EMPTY	5.75 lbs.
STOCK	Polymer Magpul SGA
LENGTH OF PULL	13.75 in.
FINISH	Black anodized
SIGHTS	XS Ghost Ring rear and front
TRIGGER	3.9-lb. pull (as tested)
SAFETY	Crossbolt hammerblock, halfcock hammer notch
MSRP	\$1,962

AMERICA'S RIFLE



The Tombstone's fixed buttstock is the popular ambidextrous Magpul SGA model, and it has a recoil-reducing 1-inch-thick butt pad, integral right-side and left-side 1.25-inch sling loops, and a modified pistol grip. The length of pull measures 13.75 inches.

at three, six, and nine o'clock positions. It also has 2.0-inch-long Picatinny rails up front at the six and 12 o'clock positions.

Speaking of Picatinny rails, the billet 7075 aluminum receiver has a Picatinny top rail with 11 slots. It also has integrated XS Ghost Ring sights. The rear sight is an aperture type, and the front sight has a vertical white stripe.

For my shooting session, I installed a Viridian GDO 25 electronic-dot optic and a Viridian 4 Lux CQ Forelight with built-in tactical light. (For more about those accessories, see the accompanying sidebar.) I mention them here because the high mount on the Viridian GDO 25 allowed me to use the carbine's XS Ghost Ring sights with the optic mounted on the top rail, and I found the sights to be quick to acquire and easy to see.

The Tombstone's trigger is POF's proprietary single-stage trigger, and the company rates its pull at 3.5 pounds. Ten measurements with my trusty RCBS trigger pull scale averaged 3 pounds, 14.6 ounces (3.9 pounds). The trigger has a hybrid flat-face profile.

The lever has an oversized loop that easily allows the use of gloves. I found that especially useful because the temperature was a very cool 30 degrees Fahrenheit on the

day I did the shooting for this report. Operation was smooth and crisp.

The buttstock is the popular SGA model by Magpul. It is an ambidextrous, fixed buttstock with a recoil-reducing 1-inch-thick butt pad, integral right-side and left-side 1.25-inch sling loops, and a modified pistol grip. It's polymer, and the length of pull measures 13.75 inches, which is just right for me as it allows me to work the lever without dropping the carbine from my shoulder.

The Tombstone comes with one 20-round injection-molded magazine, and it's the same one that POF's semiautomatic Phoenix pistol uses. The AR-style magazine release is ambidextrous.

(Ten-round magazines are available for shooters living in states where the capacity is limited.) I found the magazine to be quite easy to load to full capacity, unlike many of the high-capacity pistol magazines I've loaded, which are difficult to load to say the least.

is factory-rated with a muzzle velocity of 1,100 fps from a 4.0-inch handgun barrel, providing a muzzle energy of 309 ft-lbs. Out of the Tombstone's 16.5-inch barrel, the velocity averaged 1,142 fps for 10 rounds. The extreme spread was 28 fps, and the standard deviation was 11 fps. Those results were obtained

Range Results

And speaking of firing the Tombstone, as you can see from the accompanying shooting results chart, I fired nine 9mm Luger factory loads with bullet weights ranging from 115 to 147 grains, with 124-grain and 135-grain weights included. Overall average accuracy for three, five-shot strings with each load was 0.78 inch at 25 yards and 1.38 inches at 50 yards.

The best average accuracy at 50 yards (1.03 inches) came with Hornady's 9mm Handgun Hunter ammunition. I think this factory ammo is interesting. It's loaded with specially engineered copper-alloy MonoFlex handgun bullets and premium cases, primers, and propellants. Designed to provide deep penetration and 95 percent weight retention, the MonoFlex bullets have a proprietary elastomer material inserted into the bullets' hollowpoints. Upon impact, the elastomer tip compresses and causes the bullet to expand quickly.

The 9mm Handgun Hunter loading carries a 115-grain MonoFlex bullet and



This 1.0-inch, five-shot group at 50 yards demonstrates the very good accuracy Joel achieved with the Tombstone lever action. The ammo was Hornady's 9mm 115-grain MonoFlex +P Handgun Hunter load.

POF TOMBSTONE ACCURACY & VELOCITY

AMMUNITION	VEL. (FPS)	E.S. (FPS)	S.D. (FPS)	25-YD. ACC. (IN.)	50-YD. ACC. (IN.)
9mm Luger, 16.5-in. Barrel					
American Eagle Syntech 115-gr. TSJ	1145	39	17	0.73	1.36
Hornady Handgun Hunter 115-gr. MonoFlex +P	1142	28	11	0.65	1.03
Winchester Active Duty 115-gr. FN FMJ	1406	72	28	0.98	1.50
Federal Syntech Range 124-gr. TSJ	1242	23	9	1.00	1.72
Nosler Match Grade 124-gr. JHP	1231	30	11	0.85	1.39
Hornady Critical Duty 135-gr. FlexLock	1235	17	6	0.66	1.30
SIG SAUER 147-gr. FMJ	1107	28	11	0.75	1.47
Winchester Defender 147-gr. JHP	1047	14	6	0.69	1.33
Wilson Combat 147-gr. RN*	1031	22	8	0.71	1.34
*Optimized for compact handguns					
NOTES: Accuracy is the average of three, five-shot groups fired from a sandbag benchrest. Velocity is the average of 10 rounds measured 12 feet from the gun's muzzle.					

AMERICA'S RIFLE

with a Competition Electronics ProChrono Digital chronograph positioned 12 feet from the gun's muzzle. The resulting energy was 333 ft-lbs, and that's plenty for small game and varmints. (Other chamberings in Hornady's Handgun Hunter line include .40 S&W, 10mm Auto, .357 Magnum, .44 Magnum, .454 Casull, and .460 S&W Magnum.)

Second and third places in the accuracy department went to the Hornady Critical Duty 135-grain FlexLock loading and the Winchester Defender 147-grain JHP loading respectively. The Critical Duty load averaged 0.66 inch at 25 yards and 1.30 inches at 50 yards. The Defender load averaged 0.69 inch at 25 yards and 1.33 inches at 50 yards.

Oddly, occasionally while shooting from the bench, I had a failure to feed with both Winchester loadings, but all other rounds fed smoothly. Also, the Tombstone sort of dribbled the empty cases out the side of the action, and sometimes I had to pluck them out manually. However, during my offhand shooting of the carbine, all rounds fed and ejected perfectly. I surmise I wasn't working the lever with enough gusto when shooting from the bench.

I want to mention one other factory load. Just to see what it would do in the Tombstone carbine, I fired Wilson Combat's 147-grain RN loading that is optimized for compact handguns. Wilson rates the velocity at 890 fps from a 4.0-inch barrel. Out of the carbine's 16.5-inch barrel, the load averaged 1,031 fps, for a gain of 141 fps over its factory rating.

And that leads me to this general observation: From the 16.5-inch carbine barrel, the velocity increase as compared to the same ammunition being fired in a Springfield Armory Hellcat Pro OSP pistol with a 3.7-inch barrel that I've been working with recently ranged from about 30 fps to about 120 fps depending on the load.

POF says its take on the lever action is "radical." I suppose that's true, but the new Tombstone also has the qualities that has made the lever action so popular for close to 175 years. It's lightweight (5.75 pounds) and handy. It can fire a lot of ammo quickly. And it is accurate. I think the Tombstone would make a great home-defense carbine and an excellent truck gun. As I said earlier, there's something about the Tombstone that I really like but can't explain. I suggest you get your hands on one and see for yourself. If you get the same good vibes from it, and you can put them into words, drop me a line. My wife says I'm never at a loss for words, so I'd like to know how to explain it to her. **ST**



The carbine comes with one 20-round magazine. It's the same injection-molded magazine as used by POF's Phoenix semiautomatic pistol. The Tombstone's AR-style magazine release is ambidextrous.

VIRIDIAN ACCESSORIES

WITH UNLIMITED EYE RELIEF AND A 25mm objective lens, Viridian's parallax-free GDO 25 electronic-dot optic is compatible with pistols, rifles, and shotguns. The 1X sight comes with a 2-MOA green dot with eight visible and two night-vision brightness settings, and it is powered by a single CR2032 battery, which provides over 30,000 hours of battery life on the middle setting. The GDO 25 has INSTANT-ON technology and a five-minute auto-off.

The housing is high-grade aluminum alloy, and the unit weighs 6.7 ounces. High and low mounts are included. Backed by a seven-year warranty, the GDO 25's MSRP is \$289.



Viridian's new GDO 25 green-dot optic was the perfect companion to the new POF Tombstone lever action. Installation was quick and easy.

The new 4 Lux CQ Grip Light is an ergonomic foregrip and high-intensity 400-lumen, 850 candela LED tactical light in a single unit. It attaches to M-LOK slots and features pressure-pad grip activation. The specially designed LED and floodlight lens provide a close-quarters beam for combat situations. Power is provided by two 3-volt CR2 batteries, and runtime is 90 minutes. It is made of high-strength polymer and machined aluminum, weighs 1.76 ounces, and is impact and water resistant. It's designed and made in Minnesota, U.S.A., and it comes with a seven-year warranty. The MSRP is \$199.

viridianweapontech.com