



Amber Bridges Bags First Whitetail

By Steven Bridges

Standing at the Mills County General Store gun counter in downtown Goldthwaite one day last summer, Rodney Spies handed me a Savage .22 Hornet rifle. The second I held the little rifle in my hands, I began to see a wonderful vision of my hunting future.

As I first held the rifle, Rodney began explaining to me how perfect the rifle's sensitive AccuTrigger and small caliber would be for my kids to shoot. He also began to explain how the rifle would be handy for me to carry in my ranch truck. But Rodney and his conversation quickly faded away while a vision began to form of me and my little nine-year-old daughter Amber deer hunting.

My vision became clearer as I was transported into the fall of the year atop a two-person ladder stand next to a deer food plot at our family ranch. Amber was looking up from her smoking .22 Hornet rifle with a big smile on her pretty little face. I looked past Amber to see a big doe lying on its side in the oat patch right where Amber had shot it. My heart began to fill with pride and satisfaction that only a father can have for his only daughter.

Quicker than it takes to write this, I was transported back to the General Store. Rodney was looking at me from the other side of the gun counter with a quizzical expression plastered on his face. "Are you okay?" he asked.

I was better than okay. I was sold!

Rodney is a good salesman, but this rifle was mine the second I touched it. Of course I bought the rifle, a nice scope and several boxes of .22 Hornet ammunition. But I had bought more than a mere rifle and some accessories. I had just purchased a once-in-a-lifetime soon-to-be-had daughter/daddy memory of a lifetime. I even smiled as I shelled out the cash.

I had a few months to talk myself down from my otherworldly vision at the gun counter. Each week that passed caused the vision to fade a little farther from my mind. Did I really get that emotional right there at the General Store? Was I going a little batty? That vision couldn't have been that real, could it?

Our first trip to the ranch with Amber and the little rifle confirmed my every suspicion. We pulled up the ranch lake where I had already set up my shooting table. I told Amber to sit down at the table while I went to the truck. Amber assumed I was going to pull out our usual .22 rifle for some turtle shooting. But her eyes got wide when she saw the .22 Hornet for the first time.

I told her this was to be her rifle. She squealed and gave me a big hug, after the "Thank you Daddies!"

First, I showed her how the safety functions. Then, I set about showing her how to work the bolt action and how the magazine fits into the rifle.

Next, we then set about dry firing the rifle. I am a big believer

in dry firing, especially for kids. It seems to reduce noise anticipation and the resulting flinching that is so common among shooters. Rodney was right about the AccuTrigger system. It is crisp and clean with right at a 2-1/2 pound pull. She was able to hold the rifle on target and pull the trigger without moving the end of the rifle. This is a must for accuracy.

Only after Amber got comfortable holding, aiming, and pulling the trigger did I pull out a box of the little .22 Hornet shells. I let her open the box of shells. As soon as she saw the diminutive little rounds, she smiled and said, "The bullets are just my size."

I helped her load the magazine with shells and fit the magazine into the rifle. She proceeded to place four rounds right in the center of the white steel plate 50 yards downrange. Her first group with the rifle was well inside the two inch orange paint bulls-eye I painted in the center of the target. She moved on to the 100 yard target with similar results. It was like the rifle was custom made for her.

Due to the heavy barrel, there was virtually no recoil. Of course, Amber was wearing hearing protection, but the report from the rifle was not a whole lot more than a .22 long rifle. The low recoil and report made the rifle a joy for Amber to shoot. She calmly reloaded each time her magazine ran out, never pausing to rest. She banged away at the 100 yard target literally wearing the orange paint off the bulls-eye. I called it quits after the box of 50 shells ran out.

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