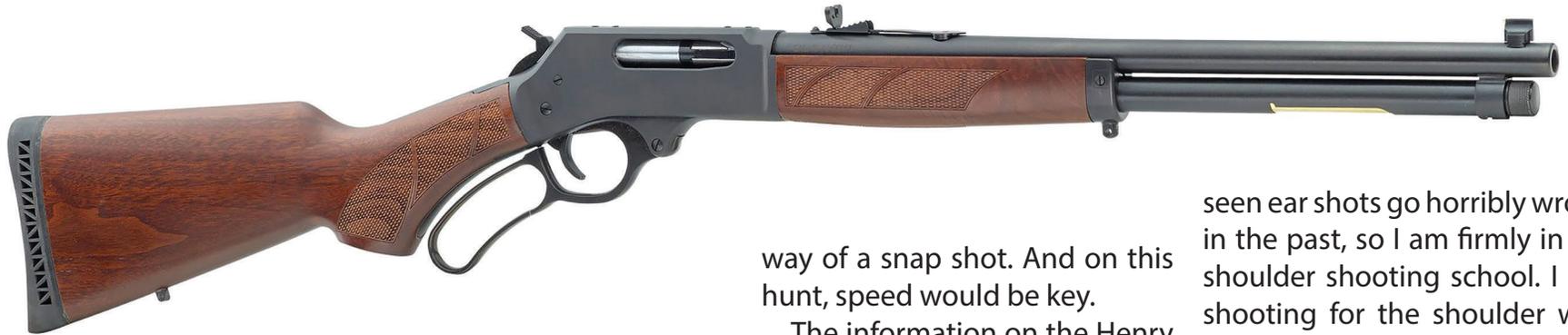




Henry .45-70 Rifle: Proof in the Pudding



By Steven Bridges Goldthwaite Eagle

Central Texas was in a drought this past summer. The ground had been rock hard and the grass and leaves made tons of noise, making still hunting impossible. I was itching to get out and still hunt in the brush for hogs with my new Henry .45-70 lever action rifle. But the hard ground showed no tracks and each step in the brush sounded like Rice Krispies ... Snap, Crackle, and Pop!

Finally one weekday night, we got a little much needed rain. It was only about a 1/4 inch of moisture. It was not enough to really break the drought, but just enough to show hog tracks in the dirt. Plus, the rain would quiet the leaves and grass, making for a quiet still hunt. So, I called into work with a bad case of flu... Swine Flu to be exact.

My plan was simple. I knew where hogs were crossing through a small water gap on our fence line at the ranch. I'd go to that spot and follow the tracks slowly into the brush until I found where the hogs were bedded.

Once I found the hogs, I'd be within twenty yards of them. I knew this because there was no place in that thick brush where I could see more than twenty yards. In this situation, a scope with any magnification would make my shot slower. At that range and in that thick of cover, fast would trump accuracy.

The fully adjustable semi-buckhorn rear sight of my Henry .45-70 would fill the bill perfectly. I imagined raising my rifle, finding the shoulder and squeezing the trigger. The reliable lever action would allow for a quick follow up shot if my aim was less than perfect.

The rifle comes from the factory tapped for adding a scope rail, but none would be needed here. I made a mental note to order the scope rail base and match it with quick release scope mount and a low magnification scope for stand hunting porkers. That way, I could quickly change the rifle from a close range brush gun to a 100+ yard stand rifle.

I also chose not to put a sling on my seven pound Henry rifle. A sling tends to catch on brush and make extra noise and movement. Plus, a sling can get in the

way of a snap shot. And on this hunt, speed would be key.

The information on the Henry rifle says that it holds four rounds of ammo. But I was able to load five rounds into the tubular magazine without any problem. I'm not sure if this is a best practice, but I didn't want to be a shell short if I was charged by a big boar in the thick brush.

One good thing about the .45-70 is that most major manufacturers produce rounds for the caliber. The army popularized the .45-70 round in the 1870s when they made it standard issue for US Troops. Since then, the .45-70 has found a solid following in big and dangerous game hunters. The round has been in continuous production since the 1870s.

Knocking down a charging boar hog in close cover is quite an issue. Big hogs are famously tough. It takes a lot of power to drop a big porker in his tracks. Hogs have thick, dense bones protecting their vitals. The two schools of thought on dropping a hog are to aim for the ear and make a brain shot, or aim for the shoulder area and hope to break one or both shoulders.

Ear shooting is fine from a stand with an accurate rifle and a good rest. But even so, I have

seen ear shots go horribly wrong in the past, so I am firmly in the shoulder shooting school. I feel shooting for the shoulder with plenty of lead gives me the most room for error. So, I chose Winchester 300 grain partition gold solid point ammo for this hunt. This round is known for its deep penetration and delayed expansion for big game with thick bones.

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The morning dawned clear and crisp after the rain. I got to the gap in the fence right around daylight. It was no problem seeing the hog sign at the crossing. A two foot wide swath of muddy tracks led into the brush. One set of tracks in particular got my blood pumping. The pig that laid down these tracks had hooves nearly as long as my hand. "This must be the lead boar of the group," I thought. "I hope I get him in my sights this morning."

I had no idea how far the hogs had gone into the brush to bed down. That is part of the excitement of this style of still hunting. My rule when still hunting is that I never take more than a step or two at a time without pausing and taking a good look around. I use the mantra from the Navy SEALS... "Slow is smooth and smooth is fast".

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