

AR-24s: The **PISTOLS** Of **ARMALITE?**

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CARRY KAHR

Meet The
New P380

We Shoot:

- > **Browning** BLR .358
Takedown
- > **FNH** SLP Mark I Tactical
12-Gauge
- > **Uberti** Lightning
.45 Colt Pump

> **Crimson Trace**
Leading Edge In Lasers

> **.257 Weatherby**
Resurgence Of A Cult Classic

BLR .358 TAKEDOWN

About 25 years ago I was hunting hogs in California's coastal range with outdoor writer Bob Robb. We'd jumped two nice boars out of a gully, and as they ran up the opposite side—about 75 yards out—Bob dumped the top one with a BLR in .358 Winchester. About

two beats later, I got the second one with my bolt-action .30-06. As I turned around to Bob, I noticed he'd been lined up on mine as well (for some time, as it turned out).

"Jeez, you're slow today," he laughed. "I could have shot the second one out from under you!"

Looking back, I remember being impressed with two things: how fast Bob had shucked the lever and gotten his crosshairs on the second hog and how decisively his 200-grain Silvertip had hammered the first one. At the time, I thought about what a perfect boar rig that .358 BLR was and resolved to get my hands on one someday.

Well, it took a quarter-century, but I finally did get one of the latest variants of Browning's sleek, modernized levergun,

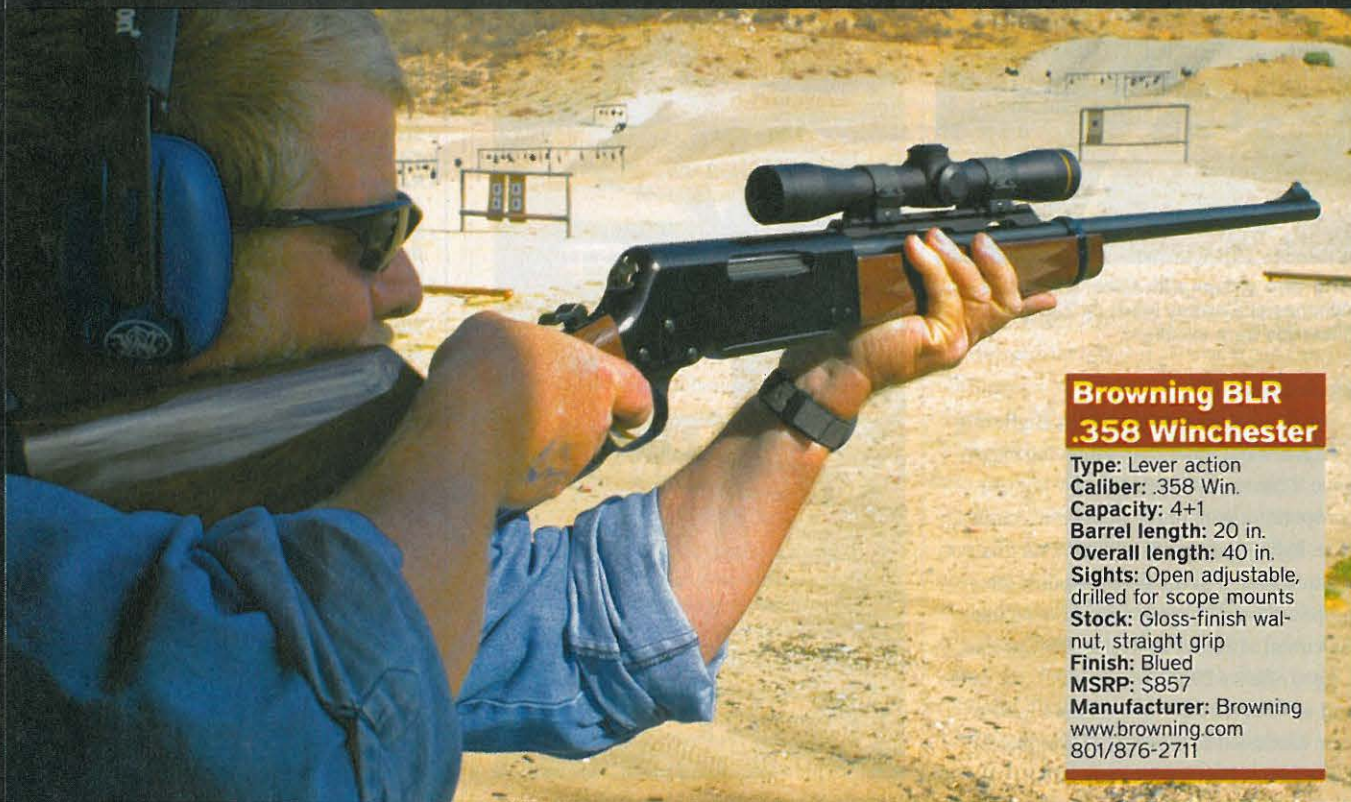
specifically a straight-gripped takedown model with a Leupold 2½x Scout Scope on a barrel-mounted rail mount. Today you can get one in short- and long-action calibers from .22-250 up to .450 Marlin—with most of Winchester's short-mag chamberings thrown in for good measure. But I wanted a .358. And that's not simply a matter of nostalgia for an under-appreciated cartridge.

In the BLR platform, it's got more than enough range to take it out of the traditional tube-magazine brush-rifle class, although with its 20-inch barrel and quick-pointing characteristics it does just fine in short-range, heavy-cover situations.

Now, if you're the traditional type, you can mount a scope on the receiver of the BLR, but I opted for the Scout mount, al-

though in the interests of full disclosure, I'll confess to a long-standing uneasiness over the whole forward-mounted-scope concept. My experience with Scout-type rifles has been minimal, but the thought of being able to grab a gun around the receiver and carry it seemed like a pretty good thing, particularly since there are no sling swivels on the straight-grip takedown model (they're on the pistol-grip versions). After I mounted the Leupold on the rifle, I immediately appreciated the fact that it put the balance point farther forward than I was used to, right over my support hand.

Takedown is accomplished by swinging down the takedown lever and pulling the barrel out of the receiver. There is no interrupted-thread setup, just six big locking lugs. Flip down the lever; pull out the barrel. Put the barrel in; flip the lever up (the takedown lever on mine was pretty stiff at first, but it gradually got easier). I tried shooting groups, taking off the barrel,



Browning BLR .358 Winchester

Type: Lever action
Caliber: .358 Win.
Capacity: 4+1
Barrel length: 20 in.
Overall length: 40 in.
Sights: Open adjustable, drilled for scope mounts
Stock: Gloss-finish walnut, straight grip
Finish: Blued
MSRP: \$857
Manufacturer: Browning
www.browning.com
 801/876-2711



The strength of the BLR's modern action permits the use of higher-intensity loads than traditional tube-magazine lever guns.



Winchester's 200-grain Silvertip loading (right) is a good one, but 250- (left) and 225-grain (center) loadings can increase the utility of the .358.

putting it back on and shooting another to see if I could discern any shift in point of impact. What I saw was minimal, maybe an inch higher and an inch off windage-wise. If I transported a taken-down BLR to a hunt (either by plane or pickup truck), I'd probably check it before hunting. But I'd do that with a solid-receiver bolt action anyway. And I saw no shift in the BLR's zero that would have any effect on big game out to 150 yards or so.

The dearth of factory ammo for the .358 is not insurmountable. The 200-grain Winchester Super-X Silvertip load is still a good one, averaging just under 2,400 fps from the BLR's 20-inch barrel. Two custom loading outfits, Quality Cartridge (www.qual-cart.com) and the Bore House (512/556-0308) offer a wide range of "throw weight" options. These range through 180-, 200-, 225- and 250-grain loads.

I fired a series of 100-yard groups and was very pleased to find two stellar performers. Both Quality's 250-grain Grand Slam loads and Winchester's 200-grain Silvertips produced several one-inch groups. In offhand shooting at gongs, I was very im-



The takedown lever allows instant disassembly, a real plus for situations where storage space is limited.



pressed with the rifle and the whole Scout scope concept in general. It's faster than any aperture-sight setup I've ever used, and the low magnification and big field of view are enough to downplay the shakes. It's funny, but sometimes the *illusion* of being steady is almost as good as the reality.

I quickly found that you can't baby the BLR when it comes to working the lever. Slam it or you'll be shaking empties out of the ejection port and/or popping out the magazine to increase the number of exit points for the brass. The trigger pull was six pounds—not optimal, but reasonably clean with a little takeup. I was expecting to be battered a bit with the heavier loads, but the BLR straight-grip stock configuration and generous recoil pad did a very good job of civilizing things.

Even if the BLR were not the only available lever-action platform for the .358 (the Savage 99 is long gone), it would still be my choice. You give up some velocity with the short barrel, but not enough to detract from the cartridge's utility.

If the blued version I used is a bit too pretty for your tastes, there's a matte stainless variant. The BLR in .358—in whatever configuration—has been around for long enough to rate status as a classic. It's just as cool as I remember.—Payton Miller G&A



Inherent accuracy: Both Winchester's 200-grain Silvertip (left) and Quality Cartridge's 250-grain Grand Slam offerings delivered excellent 100-yard results.

ACCURACY RESULTS

Load	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Average Velocity (fps)	SD	Average Group (in.)
Winchester Silvertip	200	2,393	18.5	1.1
Quality FN	180	2,614	13.3	2.5
Quality Barnes TSX	225	1,980	24.2	1.7
Quality Grand Slam	250	2,080	10	1.2

Velocity recorded 10 feet from the muzzle. Groups were the average of three three-shot groups at 100 yards from a sandbag rest.