

Tuscola County Advertiser

OUTDOORS

Wildcat Mania



TOM
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The term 'wildcat' has several definitions from wild felines and quick-tempered people, to exploratory oil wells and spontaneous labor strikes. In the firearms world, it relates to experimental cartridges, usually formed from parent cartridges already on the market and well known to the shooting public. Some wildcat cartridges perform so well and gain such a strong following that major ammunition manufacturers eventually legitimize them for commercial sales. Some examples of such wildcats being brought about on a commercial level are the .25-06 (with the .30-06 Springfield parent), .257 Roberts (with the 7x57 Mauser parent), and the 7mm-08 (with the .308 Winchester parent) just to name a very few.

I have long wanted to play around with a wildcat cartridge and actually use it in the hunting field, so I recently quit thinking about it and jumped in. I've always found reloading ammunition to be a relaxing pastime, and dealing with a wildcat cartridge is purely a reloading option.

A downside to using a wildcat in today's world of air travel, if the ammunition

gets sidetracked by the time you reach your destination, your firearm is literally rendered useless. But all of that aside, I'm willing to take my chances. That is because the gun I've selected for using the wildcat meets my specific needs for a wide variety of hunting applications.

I wanted a very compact and lightweight piece that could be transported easily in a saddle scabbard, or on a pack, and to also be ultimately maneuverable in heavy cover or tree-stands. I wanted the wildcat cartridge to be versatile enough to tackle everything from coyotes to moose. The gun is a T/C Contender Carbine, a versatile firearm I've used for many years (in the form of a scoped .223 and vent-ribbed .410 shotgun barrels — thanks to its interchangeable barrel system) which I truly appreciate. The cartridge I selected is the .309 JDJ, a creation of J. D. Jones of SSK Industries.

I met J. D. Jones many years ago through Larry Kelly of Mag-Na-Port International. Larry (a world famous handgun hunter) has used various cartridges designed by J. D. Jones (an extremely knowledgeable ballisticsian and hunter) in Contender pistols (in this

case such are called "hand-canon") for a wide variety of game including Alaskan brown bears and African elephants and lions. One of Larry's favorite wildcat cartridges is the .375 JDJ. The JDJ cartridges also do a fine job in T/C Contender Carbines, and even offer slightly better ballistics due to a longer barrel length. The .444 Marlin round is the parent cartridge for the .375 JDJ, .358 JDJ, and the .309 JDJ.

The .309 JDJ actually uses .308 diameter bullets and offers some impressive ballistics, and being .308, there is a wide selection of choices per bullet weights and types for a variety of tasks.

The "bull" barrel I purchased for my T/C Contender Carbine is a custom Shilen that was cut to size (20 inches) and chambered by SSK. I then had Ken Kelly of Mag-Na-Port port the barrel for recoil reduction, and install a scope base and rings and a proper forearm to mate the barrel. The barrel arrived with the appropriate reloading dies, as well as reloading data and instructions.

While I enjoy reloading, I thought I'd take a shortcut in

sizing the straight .444 Marlin brass cases into the bottlenecked .309 JDJ, and I contacted Peter Cardona of Quality Cartridge in Hollywood, Maryland (Telephone # 301-373-3719). You name it and Peter can make it for you, not only wildcats, but old and obsolete cartridges as well. He can simply make just the specified brass for you, or load you up the whole cartridge. I purchased 100 sized .309 JDJ brass cases, and when I need more, Peter assures me he can head-stamp the next batch with ".309 JDJ" (the parent cartridge is still head-stamped on the present cases).

Now that I have the properly sized brass, I'm presently in the process of obtaining all the correct reloading components, such as 210 Federal primers, 165 grain Hornady Spire Point bullets, and IMR 4350 powder. My first loads will have to be slightly reduced to fire from the brass. When I reload the fire formed brass to full potential, only then will I have the very potent .309 JDJ.

While this may sound like a lot of fuss to go through it is one of the key facets of

wildcat mania. You either love it or hate it. Avid wildcatters obviously love it. Because of my investment thus far, I plan on loving it, regardless.

I originally called Ken Kelly last fall to see about having a .30-30 T/C Contender Carbine barrel re-chambered to .30-30 Ackley Improved. This is actually a simple wildcat round to deal with because you take regular commercially loaded .30-30 cartridges and fire form them in the re-chambered gun, and reload them to the Ackley Improved version. In a pinch, you can use regular .30-30 shells for hunting. Somewhere during my talk with Ken, I ended up with the .309 JDJ being ordered instead. Ken has a great familiarity with this round (and the other JDJ rounds as well) in a T/C Carbine, and he has even dropped a bull elk in its tracks at 275 yards with it. He knew from experience what might work best for me and I listened.

I also originally wanted to go with peep sights, which would be fine on the .30-30 Ackley Improved, but for .309 JDJ, Ken suggested a scope to obtain this wildcat's full potential. I chose a 1X-4X variable Leupold scope. Leupold scopes have a very dependable reputation, and a police sniper friend of mine swears by them. I wanted the low power setting for close up

and heavy cover situations, and I found out a long time ago, if I can't hit something at range with a 4X scope under normal hunting conditions, it's too far away for me to shoot at. I either stalk in closer (which I dearly enjoy to do anyway) or I pass.

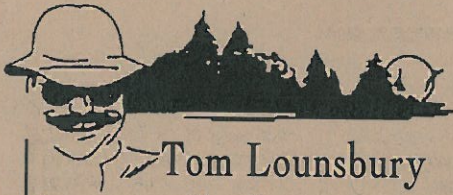
Thus far I have yet to shoot my new .309 JDJ round. A bout of wildcat mania takes time and patience, and I'm making sure I do it right, and savoring the moment and anticipation as well. I've done my research, and I have great confidence it will perform admirably as expected, in the firearm I selected.

Actually, Thompson/Center Arms (T/C) has a long history of offering their own wildcat chambered barrels for the Contender series, and now the newer Encore series as well. (To get an idea of this, order T/C's Fox Ridge Outfitters catalog by calling 1-800-243-4570. Barrels also in regular calibers not listed for the Contender or Encore series can be found in the catalog as well. An example would be the .375 H&H magnum for the Encore rifle.)

Wildcat cartridges are not everyone's cup of tea, but it is a pastime that interests some avid shooters. Personally, I'm about to find out how I fit in. Of course, that's another story.

Moose capturing starts

It's time to plan your tree planting



Tom Lounsbury
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4/17/03

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Hi Peter -

I've been meaning to send this to you sooner but kept procrastinating. This article appeared in a couple other newspapers & will be on the "American Shooting Magazine" per the internet soon. A version of it may also appear in "Woods -N- Water News" magazine as well.

I'll send other articles in this regard when they occur. I have plans to use the 309 JDJ in Alaska, Africa, Canada, & out West.

Thanks for the quality work.

Best Regards,

Tom