

COYOTE THUMPER

THE SAVAGE PREDATOR .243.

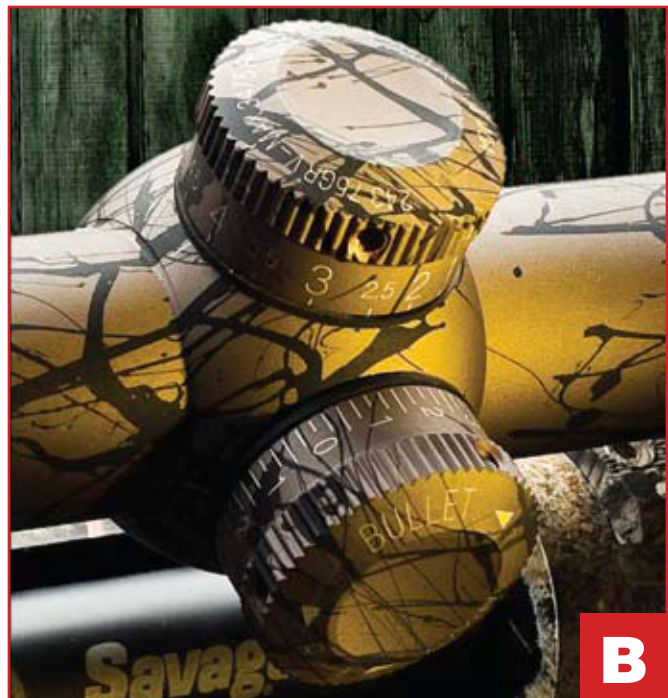
John Barsness
Photos: Joseph R. Novelozo

This story has been told in print before, but some stories are too good to use only once. Several years ago a well-known custom riflescope flew to Wyoming to spend a few days shooting prairie dogs with a friend who lived there. Of course the riflescope brought one of his custom \$5,000 rifles chambered in .223 Remington, along with 1,000 handloads.

The friend picked up the riflescope at the local airport, then drove to a local shooting range to make sure flying across the continent hadn't knocked the Swarovski scope off zero. After setting his rifle on the sandbags, the riflescope loaded the chamber, then aimed carefully. Instead of a bang there was an almost inaudible crack. The fancy custom trigger on the custom .223 had broken.

Of course there wasn't a replacement trigger within hundreds of miles, so they drove to the nearest gun store, a tiny place in a small town. The gun store had several Savage bolt-actions for sale, including one chambered in .223 Remington. The riflescope purchased the .223, along with some scope-

A The Mossy Oak camo covers the entire rifle and breaks up the outline very well ending in a black hard rubber buttpad. **B** Leupold's Custom Shop did a good job camoing the scope to help blend it in with the rifle. The turrets feature finger-adjustable, 1/4-MOA clicks with resettable pointer dials. **C** The tang safety is of the 3-position variety. All the way forward with the red dot exposed is the "fire" position, back halfway allows the bolt to be opened with the safety on and all the way back is on safe with the bolt locked closed. **D** The rifle has a flush-fitting detachable 4-shot magazine and the release is deeply recessed into the stock to prevent it from being accidentally dropped. The knife (far left) is a Grayman Knives Suenami 5.



B



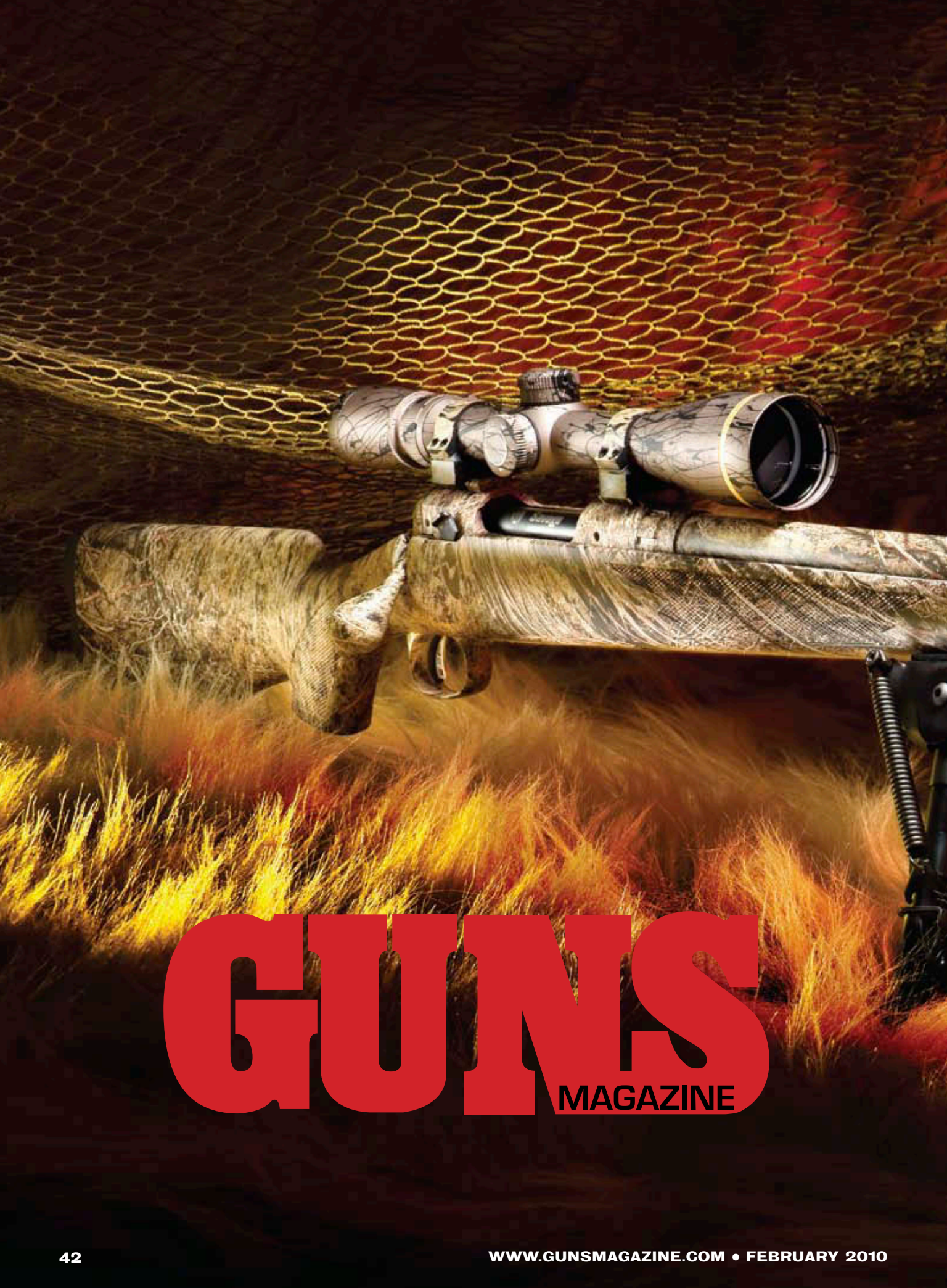
C



A



D



GUNS

MAGAZINE

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THE SAVAGE PREDATOR.243.



CURING BARREL FOULING



A kit of Ultra Bore Coat comes complete with bore degreaser, directions, and enough UBC to do several rifle barrels.

Ultra Bore Coat consists of microscopic ceramic particles in a quick-drying liquid glue. It was originally developed for military use in artillery barrels but also works quite well in sporting arms. It's applied to a perfectly clean, degreased bore with a bore-mop. You just swab the stuff in and wait an hour or so for the glue to dry, then shoot the rifle at least five times quickly. The heat and pressure of the firing presses the ceramic particles into any tiny imperfections in the bore, smoothing the surface so much that metal fouling is greatly reduced or even eliminated.

I first tested UBC three years ago in a brand-new stainless E.R. Shaw barrel in .223 Remington fitted to a Remington 788 rifle. Before installing the UBC I shot 50 rounds of factory 50-grain ammunition through the new barrel. At the beginning 5-shot groups ran around .6" at 100 yards; by the end they'd grown to over 1.5". The bore was then cleaned with Montana Extreme's .50 BMG, among the strongest solvents available, and it required a lot of .50 BMG and bore-brushing to come clean. The barrel was *fouled*.

After installing and fire-curing the UBC, I shot another 50 rounds of the same factory load through the barrel. The last 20 shots were fired into one group measuring 1.01", with 17 of the shots in .75". The bore was then cleaned with standard Montana Extreme. The cleaning consisted of pushing three consecutive solvent-soaked patches through the bore. This removed all the powder fouling—and there was no visible copper-blue on any of the patches.

UBC doesn't work quite that spectacularly in every barrel, but with the exception of a couple of .204 barrels it has cut copper-fouling at least 90 percent in the bores I've tried it in so far, a total of around eight rifles ranging up to .338 in diameter, including the chrome-lined barrel of a Bushmaster AR-15. The problem with the .204's was apparently caused by getting enough UBC inside the bore without essentially pushing it out at the same time. The firm selling UBC is working on solving the problem with a very small bore-mop.

The other great thing about UBC is that it's good for the life of the barrel—as long as you don't try to clean the bore with a wire brush.

ULTRA COATINGS INC.
425 S. KANSAS AVE., OLATHE, KS 66061
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mount bases. After transferring the Swarovski to the Savage, he and his friend went back to the range and found the Savage shot just as well as the \$5,000 custom rifle. The riflemith made his friend swear an oath of silence, but the friend didn't take it very seriously, laughing frequently every time he told the story.

To those of us familiar with Savage bolt-action rifles this story isn't surprising. Recently Savage introduced a heavy-barreled, camouflaged version of the Model 10 and sent one chambered in .243 Winchester along for testing. Meanwhile, Leupold's Custom Shop camouflaged a new 3.5-10x40 VX-3, and equipped it with one of their Custom Bullet Drop Elevation Dials with adjustment markings to match the trajectory of a 75-grain 6mm Hornady V-Max at 3,475 fps. The rifle came with Weaver bases, painted in the same Mossy Oak Brush Pattern camouflage as the rifle.

The rifle is advertised at 7.25 pounds, and after mounting the scope in Leupold PRW steel rings the entire rig weighed 8 pounds, 6 ounces. This is a fine weight for a coyote rifle, light enough to carry all day and aim quickly. With the heavy 22" barrel it balanced quite well, settling down yet not feeling sluggish. The stock is dual pillar-bedded, and unlike some factory synthetic stocks is quite stiff, even through the fore-end. As with all Savage bolt-actions the barrel is free-floated, one of the not-so-secret "secrets" of Savage accuracy.

Free Floated

My personal test for effective free-floating—aside from shooting—is to grab the fore-end tip and barrel with my right hand and attempt to crush the fore-end against the barrel. If this can be done easily, then the barrel isn't really free-floated, because the barrel can tap the fore-end during firing, causing fliers. The Predator passed the test easily.

The rifle's 3-shot, 100-yard test target made with Federal Premium factory loads featuring the 70-grain Nosler Ballistic Tip measured .3", center to center. This seemed promising (if not surprising) so I put together some handloads with three different plastic-tipped varmint bullets—75-grain Hornady V-Maxes, 70-grain Ballistic Tips and 70-grain Sierra BlitzKings—and three powders proven accurate in .243 varmint loads before.

After a few shots to get on paper at 100 yards the rifle started off grouping well. The first 5-shot group with 75-grain V-Maxes went into .85", but then things went downhill. The second 5-shot group measured over 2", and a third group was almost as big. Instead of using up valuable test ammo I decided something was wrong and shot some other rifles instead before heading home.

Back in the shop the Hawkeye bore-scope revealed a lot of copper-fouling and a fairly rough bore. This happens sometimes with factory barrels, and up until a couple of years ago I would have tried to break-in the barrel with a combination





of JB Compound and a lot of shooting. These days, however, there's an easier solution. Instead I installed Ultra Bore Coat (see sidebar), a matter of about an hour's time, then went back to the range and fired five "curing" shots.

After cleaning the bore with Montana Extreme solvent, the rifle settled right down and shot very well for a number of consecutive groups with all three bullets. The most accurate powder proved to be Hodgdon Varget, also not much of a surprise. Discounting one flier with the Hornady V-Max's (due to operator error) the size of 5-shot groups with all three bullets hovered between .5" and .7", with none different enough to be statistically significant. This is also what I've come to expect with most of today's plastic-tipped varmint bullets.

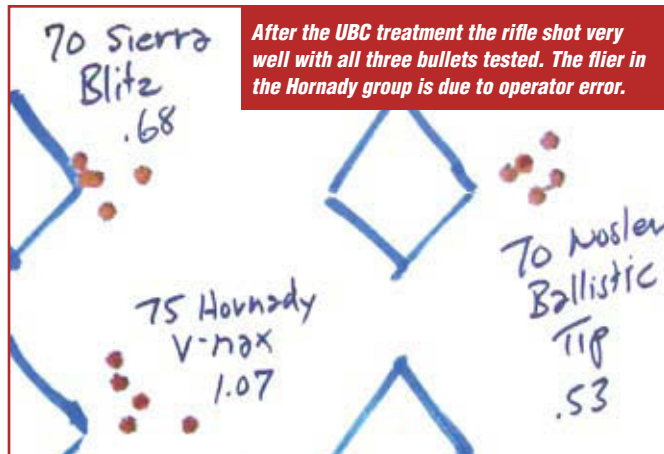
Since the muzzle velocity of all three bullets was in the mid-3,400s, I also suspected the Leupold's elevation dial would work closely enough with any of them. This was confirmed by the highly scientific (and fun) method

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The Accu-Trigger, one of Savage's greatest achievements, broke very cleanly at a little over a pound.



After the UBC treatment the rifle shot very well with all three bullets tested. The flier in the Hornady group is due to operator error.



of cranking the dial to various ranges out to 400 yards and busting some fist-sized rocks.

Savage advertises the Accu-Trigger on the Predator as adjustable from 1-1/2 to 6 pounds, and the data on the .243 test target claimed this particular trigger broke at 28 ounces, a little over 1-1/2 pounds. Perhaps it did, especially when new, but my own Timney trigger gauge indicated it varied about half an ounce either way from an average of 20 ounces. It was a pleasure to use. I have run into a few shooters who claim they can't get used to the tab, but I have grown quite fond of them since buying my first Accu-Trigger equipped Savage (a .22-250) about five years ago.

Leupold has made some noticeable advances in the VX-3 over the VX-III line. The optics have definitely been upgraded. They were good before, but they are better now. This scope was tested on my standard brightness/sharpness chart at 25 yards after dark, the chart illuminated by a 100-watt bulb off to one side of my rest. The light is blocked from shining on the scope itself, so stray light doesn't interfere with the view, and the scoped rifle is placed on a rest so it's absolutely steady. The chart is a series of alternating black and white lines, starting 1" wide at the top of the chart and growing narrower down to the bottom, ending up 1/8" wide. I always set variables on 6X, ensuring the test is of optical quality, not exit pupil size.

The practical quality of any scope's optics is a matter of both brightness and sharpness, and this test measures both. The scope is rated by how far down the chart the black and white lines can be differentiated; at some point only gray can be seen (just as a zebra appears gray in the distance). The VX-3 rated in the same class as some very expensive competition. In

addition, eye relief is just about constant. It only varied .4" from 3.5X to 10X, right in the same range as two other VX-3s I've tested.

The adjustments have been upgraded too, with dual erector springs. Each and every time the scope was adjusted, the bullet holes went exactly where they were supposed to, and during the long-range rock shooting the elevation went where it was supposed to go. The nicest thing is that all this has been accomplished without raising the price much. A combination of this Savage and Leupold would be hard to beat for the serious predator hunter.

GUNS

HODGDON POWDER COMPANY
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(913) 362-9455, WWW.HODGDON.COM

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(800) 338-3220, WWW.HORNADY.COM

NOSLER, INC.
P.O. BOX 671, BEND, OREGON 97709
(800) 285-3701, WWW.NOSLER.COM

SIERRA BULLETS
1400 WEST HENRY STREET, SEDALIA, MO 65301
(660) 827-6300, WWW.SIERRABULLETS.COM



MODEL 10 PREDATOR HUNTER

MAKER: SAVAGE ARMS, INC.
100 SPRINGDALE ROAD, WESTFIELD, MA 01085
(413) 568-7001, WWW.SAVAGEARMS.COM

ACTION:	Bolt action
CAPACITY:	4+1
CALIBER:	.243 Win (tested), .204, .223, .22-250
BARREL:	22" heavy chrome-moly
OVERALL LENGTH:	43"
WEIGHT:	7 pounds, 4 ounces
SIGHTS:	None, Weaver bases provided
FINISH:	Mossy Oak Brush Pattern
STOCK:	Synthetic, dual pillar-bedded
RETAIL:	\$806

3.5-10X40MM VX-3

MAKER: LEUPOLD & STEVENS
1440 NORTHWEST, GREENBRIAR PARKWAY
BEAVERTON, OR, 97006
(503) 646-9171, WWW.LEUPOLD.COM

MAGNIFICATION:	3.5X-10X
LENGTH OVERALL:	12.5"
TUBE DIAMETER:	1"
OBJECTIVE LENS:	40mm
EYE RELIEF:	3.7" (3.5X), 3.4" (10X)
WEIGHT:	13 ounces
INTERNAL ADJUSTMENT:	1/4 MOA
RETICLE:	Duplex
PRICE:	\$624.99 (standard finish), \$119.99 (custom finish)

Leupold Gold Ring 10x42 Binos would be good choice for this walkabout .243 Savage Predator and a Harris folding Bipod is also a very useful piece of gear. The knife is Grayman Suenami 5.