

# Old Reliable

## DEADLY ACCURATE AND POWERFUL .30-06

Story by Dale Valade for the Blue Mountain Eagle

**F**or every rifleman and hunter, there exists a certain weapon of somewhat enchanting, if not mystical, properties. This is the one they would grab if the house was on fire and let the rest go to perdition. The one they value above all the rest and view as the favorite. Sometimes it has a nickname or has somehow been a source of good luck, if you will. Just like each of us, each one has a very unique and interesting story.

For some, it was their very first smoke pole, and whenever they clutch it in their hands, they're instantly transported in their mind's eye to a vivid, if not immortal, childhood memory of days gone by. This was likely a .22 rimfire of some sort with basic open sights good enough to score hits on a tin can out to 75 or 80 yards if the wind stood still. Perhaps it was on a hot summer afternoon spent trading maternal insults and shooting ground squirrels. Merely holding this amulet awakens sleeping memories to become immortal dreams to be relived again and again.

Maybe this memory took place on a cold autumn morning. Perhaps it wasn't a .22 but their first "big" gun. At last they were going to become a man. Mother bundled them up and handed off a brown bag of sandwiches to Dad with a kiss on the cheek as they headed out to a favorite duck pond or deer haunt. As they yawned and staggered toward the truck, the excitement was already building inside. Hopefully they could keep a steady nerve and shoot straight, just the way Dad and Grandpa taught them to.

Perhaps, for some, "the one" belonged to Grandpa and has been handed down to them. Maybe it has been in the family for several generations and was carried on the trail by pioneer ancestors and was used to hunt buffalo and elk and to defend the homestead against any would-be malefactors. Like other heirlooms, its very existence is revered and honored. It will be kept, used and passed on again for as long as it lasts.

For others, perhaps "the one" got away at some point. As they got older, priorities changed, and in a desperate moment "the one" was sold and the money went to pay rent or buy groceries. Maybe they saw something shiny, which somehow diminished their "Old Reliable" just enough to feel all right about sending her down the road. Regrets? Oh, they regret it all right and usually quite deeply.

For me, it's not my first .22 nor my first deer rifle that I consider "the one to rule them all." Fifteen years ago, I blew a half month's wages at Nydam's Ace Hardware right here in John Day to buy it. Darren showed me three rifles that day, and this is the one that followed me home. With it I have taken a myriad of coyotes, a badger, various other varmints, more than several deer and elk. I've even used it to put down beef cattle and as backup on a bear hunt.

At one point, I nearly sold it. I was broke, and it was well worth what I was asking. I thought to myself that I would replace it with a newer, flashier magnum caliber rifle once I was able. I remember well the day I told Dad that I had put it up for sale. My father, in his usual loving way, told me that I should

duly extract my cranium from my posterior to make room for his foot if I was to be foolish enough to sell that rifle.

"Everything you've pointed that rifle at has hit the dirt. Son, some men spend their whole lives looking for what you already have, and you're going to get rid of it?"

The old man didn't live as long as he has by being a fool. I immediately took it off the market, telling all interested parties they were out of luck. That's only one of the many good lessons I've been party to in my time.

Nope, for me, that gun "Old Reliable" still resides in my gun cabinet. Every year I take her hunting for whatever big game tags I'm lucky enough to draw. I have always had a Leupold scope mounted in steel rings for sights. It's pretty plain Jane as far as looks go: a standard factory stock full of dents, dings, scratches and gouges from the miles we've shared. It was fitted with a



Pachmayr Decelerator recoil pad by John Petersen of Idaho Falls a few years back because the factory pad began to split. She's on her second barrel, a 24-inch Douglas just a little larger in diameter than her first, installed by Randy Wills of Bend. Randy also tuned the Winchester factory trigger to a perfect 3-pound pull. The old military-style leather sling belonged to my grandfather and has been a great aid to making shots in the field where no other rest was available.

When I look at that rifle and take it hunting or shooting, it's a tome of the miles we've shared, the freezers we have filled and the great memories with family and friends, some of whom are no longer walking this earth. She's no speed demon as far as velocities go and lacks a lot of the pizzazz that folks nowadays consider necessary for big game hunting. In a world of polymers and carbons, she's walnut and steel. Maybe you could even say she is fleshy, weighing 9 pounds loaded. This, for me, is a plus rather than a minus. I have always been able to shoot straighter from all the various field positions with a heftier long gun. It's the rifle for which I will no doubt be remembered when I'm long gone and hopefully will be cared for and passed on just the same.

Oh, I almost forgot, you all will want "the rest of the story." For those of you who care about the

numbers and specs, the legend stamped on the side of the barrel reads ".30-06." It may not be all you ever want, but for myself and thousands of other sportsmen across the globe, it's all the rifle we need. Its ubiquity of ammunition and components, deadly accuracy and awesome power are the main reasons for me that it is "The Rifle." Whether I am hunting badgers or bears or anything in between, I feel perfectly confident in the power and performance of this caliber and rifle.

For those out there just getting into the shooting and hunting sports, I implore you to take a second look at the rifle that you choose to make yours. While a big, heavy magnum or a light speed freak may be en vogue, the classics last forever. They outlast and usually outperform all candidates that appear to supplant. While numbers can be made to reflect any opinion, actual performance is always what counts. Whatever you choose, take care of her, and she will last. Maybe someday your grandchildren will hold your rifle in their hands and reminisce fondly of the memories they've had and will yet create while hunting with Grandpa's rifle.

Your rifle, the one, the only one worthy to be called "Old Reliable."

*Dale Valade is a local country gent with a deep love for handloading, hunting and shooting.*