How Important is Accuracy?
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Everyone likes their rifles to be accurate and if it is then we are happy. However I submit that sometimes accuracy is overrated as compared to other factors. Accuracy is the ability to hit what you are aiming at if you do your part. That can be hitting a gallon can at 50 yards or a woodchuck at 500 yards. A 30-30 foe example typically shoots a 3” group at 100 yards but for eastern woods hunting that is fine. You would not take it on an antelope hunt in a western state however. Antelope are typically shot at 300 yards plus and the lever action 30-30 isn’t up to the task. If your gun can hit the required target at the desired ranges then it is accurate enough for the task at hand. In hunting accuracy isn’t everything as important as it might be. There are other important factors such as bullet performance. A good well designed bullet is much more desirable for hunting then a gilt edge target bullet. Many target bullets while super accurate perform poorly on game. Some hollow points fold over when they hit an animal making them act like a solid which is frequently a bad idea. The Nosler Partitions had a reputation of not being as accurate as some of the other brands but they got the job done. I had the same experience but accuracy wasn’t that bad. Since then accuracy has improved over the years. No matter what type of hunting you engage in practice is all important. You should be familiar with the characteristics of you hunting gun at any range that you expect to use it. That includes the knowledge of your bullets trajectory. Also keep in mind that each rifle will prefer a different brand of bullet so it’s up to you to experiment until you find the right combo.

If you are hunting in the brush or woods for game such as a moose or grizzly bear your shots probably won’t be over 50 yards maybe a hundred at the most. With those animals you need a hard hitting rifle with a quality bullet for best results. A 45-70 with a well constructed bullet weighing 400 grains that group 3” at 100 yards is all you need for accuracy purposes. With that type of hunting you will probably be standing or at best have a haphazard rest so gilt edge accuracy isn’t necessary. You might even be shooting at a moving target. You need a combo that will place a sturdy bullet into the boiler room, breaking bones along the way if necessary. You want to do your hunting before you shoot not after. Some of the new lead free bullets made by Barnes and Hornady might be an option worth exploring. They have a good reputation for performance and are definitely accurate enough for any task that they may have to perform. I have shot both with great results in various calibers.
Checking your groups is important

If you are hunting deer at a couple hundred yards or so then you would need a different type of rifle. Something that shoots flatter and can shoot a 3 shot group at 100 yards of an inch or so. If it is more accurate fine but don’t get hung up on that. You need a good hunting bullet with good flight characteristics rather then a super accurate target bullet. The bullet has to perform on the animal to obtain a clean kill. It has to have the ability to get into the boiler room and do some significant damage in order to insure a clean kill. A bullet that blows up on the hide without penetrating is useless. As with all hunting the first shot is the most important and it’s our moral obligation to humanely dispatch any animal that we shoot. If you mess that up there is a good chance that the hunt will go south quickly. If you hit it badly or miss it the animal isn’t going to stick around for you to target practice on it. So when you shoot your groups be sure to carefully observe where the first shot from a cold barrel goes. Keeping the barrel oil free helps keep the first shot closer to the rest of the group as oil can throw off the first shot by quite a bit.

Over the years shotgun slugs have greatly improved in performance. The old pumpkin ball was good out to 50 yards or so before accuracy deteriorated too much. Slugs such as the Brenneke and Actives extended that range out to about 100 yards in good guns. They were all smooth bores but with an open or modified choke and a scope 3 to 5” groups were possible at 100 yards. Then came rifled barrels and modern projectiles which changed everything. One outstanding example is the Lightfield brand of slugs www.lightfieldslugs.com. Not only are they exceptionally accurate in a rifled barrel but the various loads hit to the same point of impact. The importance of that is a shooter that is more recoil shy can shoot a lighter load while the heavier load can also be utilized without changing the scope setting. I am not aware of any other slug that can do that though there are other accurate slugs out there. I have shot the Remington slug with good accuracy results also. With the increased velocity and accuracy of modern slugs ranges of 175 yards and more are possible given hunter skill.

Shooting varmints at long range does require serious accuracy. Most of the time you will be using a small caliber high velocity rifle capable of shooting bullets up to 4000 feet per second or so. A groundhog at 400 yards is a very small target. A rifle the shoots 5 shots into a half inch or less at 100 yards is needed. Groundhogs are relatively small but need to be hit well with an explosive bullet in order to anchor them reliably. Improperly hit woodchucks will escape into their holes to die. That’s a shame because the meat is very tasty, properly prepared. As with all animals they deserve a quick and painless death.

As hunters we are obligated to kill as humanely as possible any animal we shoot. Animals that get away usually die a painful and futile death since no one gets to eat the meat or gather the trophy. Harvesting everything that you shoot is also a good conservation measure. Taking your time and placing all of your shots is of paramount importance in the scheme of things.

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