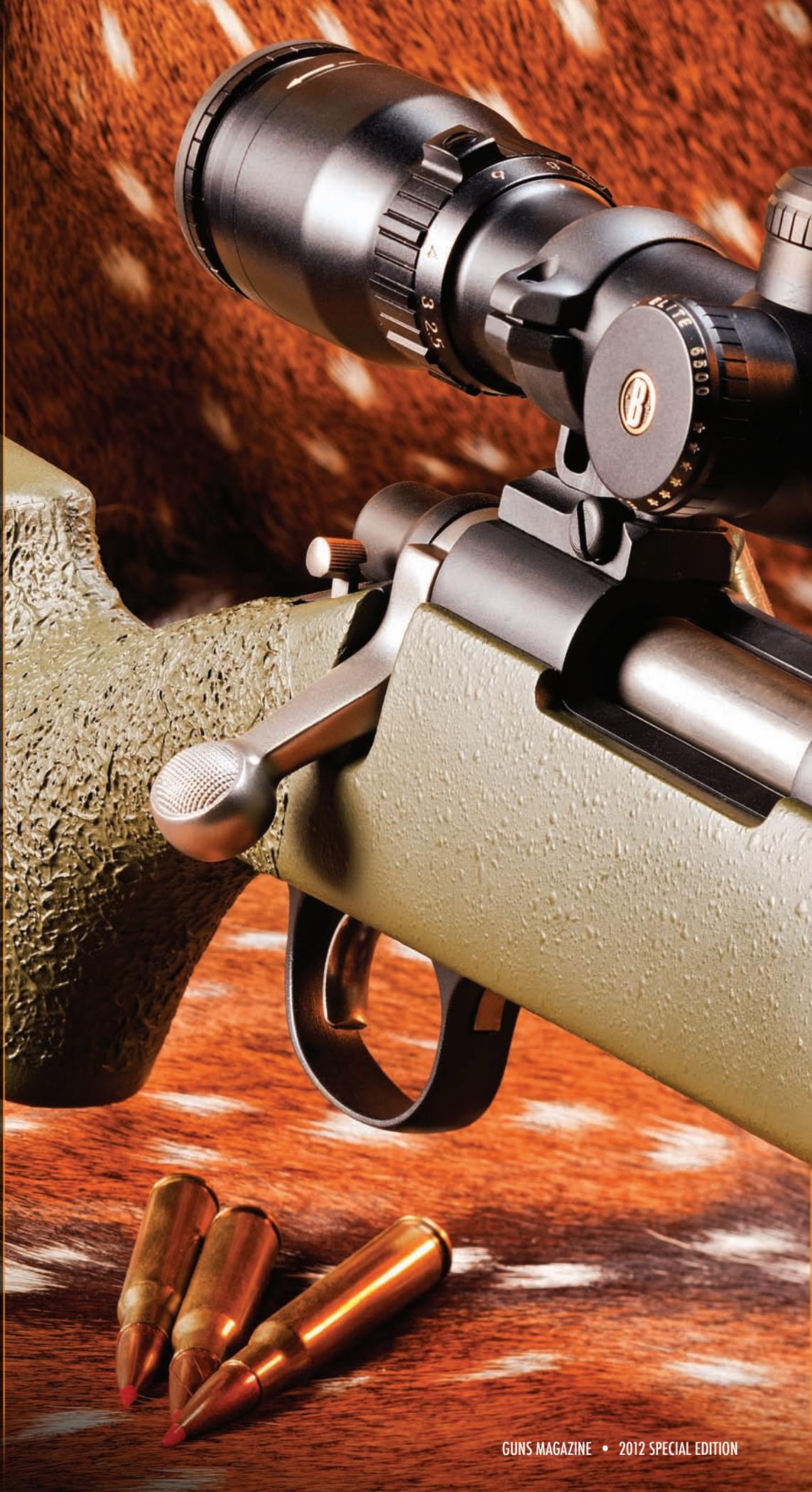


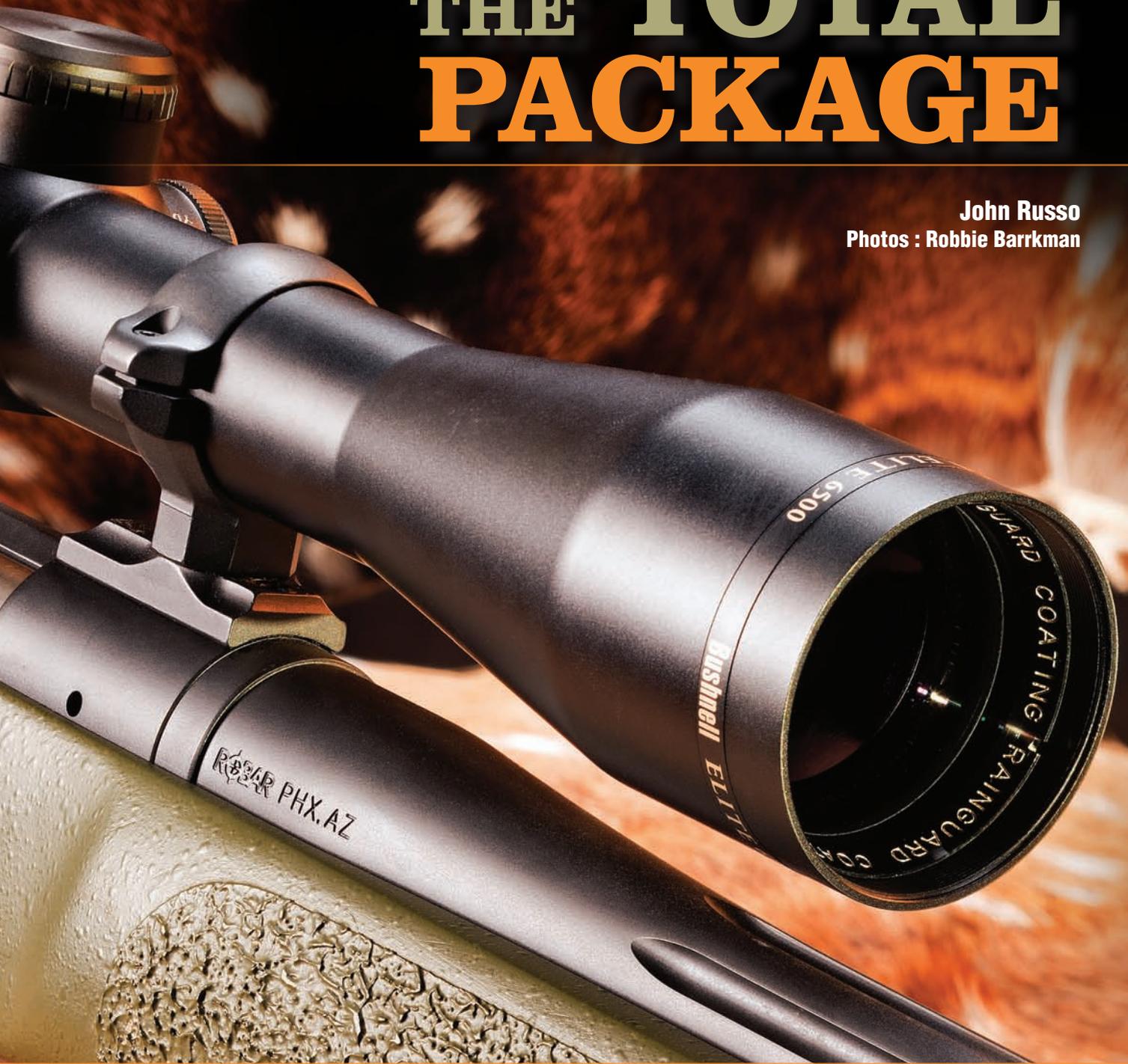
ROBAR PRECISION HUNTER 6.5 CREEDMOOR



THE TOTAL PACKAGE

John Russo

Photos : Robbie Barrkman



The 6.5 Creedmoor cartridge continues to gain popularity in the shooting community. Just as much as target shooters, hunters are now flocking to this great round. Many of them, like me, are finding it their new favorite for deer-sized game and larger varmint hunting. I discovered it about two years ago and still can't get enough of it.

After several successful deer and hog hunts with it in 2009, I was sold. This is largely due to Hornady's Superformance ammo and new GMX bullet technology, which make smaller calibers shoot bigger. Since there weren't many companies making factory hunting rifles chambered for it, I decided to go the custom route and have one built.

Robbie Barrkman founded Robar several decades ago and has created a company known for their incredible metal coatings and custom firearm enhancements. From NP3 and Roguard metal finishes to polymer-frame reshaping, their work is legendary in the gun industry. In fact, the only Glocks I carry have all had Robar grip reductions and texturing. For decades Robar has also been known for making custom sniper rifles. As a rookie sniper in the '90s, I watched in envy as my veteran mentor and partner repeatedly shot one-hole groups with his Robar SR90 .308. What some may not know is Robar makes some of the best hunting rifles out there, and for a much better price than most other custom rifle companies. Since I wanted a hunting rifle that not only shot great but could handle the harsh elements, I guess you could say choosing Robar was a no brainer!

Parts Is NOT Parts!

When building a rifle, the finished product will only be as good as the sum of its parts. If you use inferior stuff or cut corners along the way, it will show in the end. Therefore, I had to start with a solid action. Since this was to be a hunting rifle, I didn't want anything too heavy or bulky. I decided to go with the venerable Remington 700 standard action. This is my favorite all-around action for hunting rifles. It's the most popular and has the most accessories and parts available for it. It's also a tried-and-true design that, simply put, works great. For the 6.5 Creedmoor, the easiest thing was to get a .308 action and bolt since the 6.5 is basically a necked-down .308.

The barrel wasn't as easy a decision for me to make. There are some great barrel makers out there and I like many of them. Ultimately, I chose to use one of Dan Lilja's barrels from Lilja Precision Rifle Barrels, Inc. Dan has been making barrels for a long time and his stuff is second to none. Lilja barrels are not drop in, they require a good gunsmith to install and finish them. Robar is no stranger to Lilja barrels, having used them for many years. A very important thing to remember: once you have



settled on a gunsmith to build your rifle, ask their opinion on every aspect of it. You may only have a couple of custom guns built in your lifetime, while they are doing it every day. If you are unsure of an aspect of your project, go with what your gunsmith recommends.

Robar recommends McMillan stocks for their rifles. This was an easy choice for me since I have used McMillan stocks on guns ranging from sniper to hunting rifles and always found them to be excellent. They also have a large selection, so if you don't find what you're looking for, you probably don't need it! I chose to go with the Sako varmint-style stock for a couple of reasons. Typically, for my western hunting guns I like a lighter, thinner stock for easier carrying when hiking the hills of the west. However, the 6.5 Creedmoor is such a great long-



range cartridge, I wanted a stock that would complement this. The varmint style gave me a slightly wider fore-end and a higher cheekpiece.

The Robar Magic

So now we have all these great components, how do you put them together to make a great rifle? Most shooters have no idea how much work goes into building a custom precision rifle. I spoke to Gunsmith Marty Enloe at Robar and he filled me in on what went into building this custom rifle. Marty has been working for Robar for many years and has learned well from Master Jedi Barrkman!

Marty said they start with the stock by filling in any existing checkering or imperfections. It's then sanded smooth and taped and prepped for texturing. The texturing is applied to the chosen areas, in this case that was the grip and fore-end. This is the same texturing Robar uses on its Glock pistol modifications. It gets one more final sanding to knock off any sharp areas and now it is ready for bedding the action.

Next, they blue print and accurize the action. We started with a Remington 700 standard action with a .308 bolt face. Marty said they do several things to square the action to

the centerline of the receiver, such as recutting the threads and the lugs. They lap the bolt lugs, which provide the bolt with greater contact to the receiver; this gives that smooth-as-silk feeling when cycling the action. The front of the receiver is then refaced so it is square to the action. An oversized Badger Ordnance recoil lug is added to provide greater purchase in the stock and tighter, more consistent bedding. This lug is surface ground to ensure even thickness so it is perfectly square to the action and barrel.

Barrels made for custom rifles have excess length in the chamber and muzzle end so they can be precisely



finished. Robar starts by cutting the chamber length and then threading the barrel. Then the headspace is set and the final length is cut. We cut this barrel to 26" to maximize the 6.5 Creedmoor's capabilities, while keeping it reasonable for hunting. The recessed target crown is cut, which is a great benefit to hunters by protecting the crown when you take a spill on a rough hillside and jam your muzzle into a rock. Only after the barrel is spin polished to remove all imperfections is it installed in the action. A final quality check on the headspace is done and then the action is bedded to the stock.

During this process, a trigger job is done. You can opt for any one of the good aftermarket triggers or stick with the factory one. Personally, I have always liked the factory Remington trigger. In the hands of a good gunsmith like Marty Enloe, it can be adjusted perfectly for hunting conditions. This one was set at a crisp 3 pounds with all travel taken out and the safety adjusted to ensure positive engagement.

After the bedding is complete, the gun is taken to the range for the first test fire. If it shoots well, the caliber and designation is engraved into the barrel then the metal is sent

for finishing. This gun shot well the first time out, so the bolt, safety and several other internal parts were then NP3 PLUS coated while the rest of the metal was done in matte Roguard. For those not familiar with NP3, it's Robar's proprietary electroless nickel coating combined with Teflon. This coating surface hardens the metal while providing a finish that is impervious to the elements and never needs lubrication. NP3 PLUS takes this to the next level with even greater corrosion protection. Roguard is a molybdenum-disulfide-based polymer baked-on finish that provides incredible weather and wear protection, while also providing lubricating properties. The polymer stock is finished with Polymax and can be done in any color desired.

Scope

The optic I chose for this project was Bushnell's new Elite 6500 2.5-16X42mm riflescope. This is a beauty! It features Bushnell's Rain-Guard lens coating, fully multi-coated optics, side focus, has a 30mm tube and is dry-nitrogen filled for true fog-proof construction. It even comes with a 3" sunshade, which really helps on those long shots in bright sunlight. This scope's broad power range is

ideal for hunting with a long-range caliber like the 6.5. I sent this scope to Robar where they mounted it and sighted it in.

When the gun was finished and delivered to me, its beauty immediately struck me. This was a piece of art! I picked it up and noticed how perfectly balanced it felt, not an easy task for a 26" medium-weight barrel. The texturing on the grip areas made the rifle stick to my hands and the weight was just right. The trend lately has been to make hunting rifles as light as possible. While I like an ultra-light rifle for certain things, the benefit of the 6.5 Creedmoor is long-range accuracy. To maximize this, you're going to have to allow a little weight, but an 8-pound rifle isn't that difficult to carry around all day. Especially when you know you can hit what you aim at, even *way out there!*

Robar included a 100-yard test target with the rifle, which had a 4-shot group measuring 5/8" center to center. This is awesome for any rifle, but what was really impressive was three of the shots measured .159" center to center! I took it to the range and found I got similar results, routinely shooting 1/2" to 3/4" groups with both 120- and 140-gr. Hornady GMX and A-MAX ammunition at 100 yards.



What was really nice were the 1.25" groups I shot at 200 yards! I firmly believe a hunting rifle needs to be as accurate as possible. So many variables come into play in the field that can affect your accuracy, you need to start with a tack driver to try to ensure clean kills. Flat shooting and low recoil makes the 6.5 Creedmoor an outstanding hunting round. With a 200-yard zero, it only drops 6" at 300, 18" at 400 and 36" at 500 yards!

Time To Hunt

I couldn't wait to get this gun into the field for some hunting. Luckily I didn't have to wait long for mule deer season. I found the 26" barrel wasn't a problem lugging over the mountains through brush country and the gun carried easily on my shoulder. When I shouldered it to look at deer, the Bushnell scope was crystal clear and the gun pointed naturally, characteristics that would come into play on subsequent hunts. I had two buck tags so my plan was to shoot the first legal buck I found for meat and then look for a trophy.

My first buck was a large-bodied, small-racked forky running with a herd of does. I shot him from a kneeling position on the run at 212 yards. The trigger on the Robar rifle broke

crisp and clean and the 120-gr. Hornady GMX bullet flying at 3,100 fps dropped the buck in his tracks.

As I hunted for buck number two, we began to get some nasty weather. It rained heavy on us for a few days and I hunted in it constantly. Bad weather makes for great mule deer hunting and it also helped with the rifle test. The rifle was wet for several days straight. I deliberately didn't dry it off at night, wanting to see how the finish held up. I knew the NP3 Plus wouldn't be affected by the rain, but wondered about the matte Roguard. Not only did it hold up, it looked as good as new after several days soaking in the rain. At the end of the season, I pulled the action out of the stock and couldn't find a trace of rust or corrosion anywhere. We were doing another rifle test on a popular manufacturer's .30-06 on this same hunt and found it began rusting in the rain, by the end of the first day!

I found my second buck on a day when it was still raining, which was a great test for the Bushnell RainGuard. This stuff really works. I spotted this buck in the thick brush when I saw his antler tips moving. I was able to clearly find him and track him in the rain. I then made a 221-

yard shot on him through an opening in the brush as he ran broadside to me up a hill. If you haven't tried the Hornady GMX bullet, you are missing out. This little bullet really performs big and puts animals down quickly! This buck literally stopped in his tracks and toppled over.

Robar has done it again. Most manufacturers or gunsmiths can build a rifle and chamber it for a given cartridge. It's quite another thing to build a rifle around a cartridge. I have always been a big fan of Robar and think their stuff is top notch and the 6.5 Creedmoor is my new favorite medium-sized-game round. Now that I have combined the two into a hunting package, I have found even greater respect and admiration for each! 🦌

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