

# What's the best caliber for young or recoil-sensitive hunters?

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Special Correspondent

Prior to every deer hunting season, one question is always asked. What is the best caliber for a new or young hunter, for a woman or an older hunter who no longer wants to be subject to a noisy and heavy-recoiling rifle?

Many parents have purchased for their youngsters the .223 Remington or the .22-250. Is that the best choice, though? In most states, the .22 caliber center-fire cartridge is illegal for big-game hunting, but not in Texas.

I checked the ballistics of these calibers on the Remington Web site to determine velocity and energy figures at 100 yards, the most common distance for shooting at a deer.

It is commonly accepted that the minimum energy for taking a deer is 1,000 foot pounds. The .223 with a 55-grain falls just short at 921 pounds. The .22-250 fares a little better at 1,201 pounds.

I had several bad experiences using the .223 with factory 55-grain soft-point bullets. Hunting with a Ruger Mini-14 rifle I shot two deer. One was a doe that I wounded but never recovered. Another was a spike buck shot in the lungs that I tried to trail but did not find until



Two rifles available in 7.62x39 are the Norinco SKS semi-auto (top photo) made in China and the Remington Spartan single-shot rifle (bottom) made by Baikal in Russia.

late the next day. Of course, the meat was tainted.

From those experiences and others, I never used the caliber again. I have not used the .22-250, but others have reported good results.

If I decided to use a .22 caliber today, I would use one of the controlled expansion bullets available as loaded ammo or for reloading. I have heard good reports from hunters using the 60-grain Nosler partition bullet, and they said they downed deer with no problems. Other premium .22 bullets are available from other companies.

Another caliber young or recoil-sensitive hunters should consider is the Russian 7.62x39. This was the official Soviet and Chinese military

and AK-47 rifles. These weapons proved to be a superior battle rifle than the previous Russian bolt-action 7.62x54 rifle.

The cartridge normally uses a 123-grain full metal jacket bullet. Soft-point bullet hunting cartridges are now available, however, from Winchester, Remington and other companies. The bullet weight is twice the .22-caliber bullets, and the bullet diameter is over 30 percent more.

Comparing ballistics to the .223, the 7.62x39 123-grain bullet at 100 yards shows a velocity of 2,062 feet per second and 1,180 foot pounds of energy. This compares very favorably with the 30-30, one of the most popular calibers for deer, with a 150-grain bullet -- which has a 100-yard velocity of 1,973 feet per second and 1,296 foot pounds of energy.

Several years ago, when they first became available I purchased a surplus Chinese SKS semi-auto rifle in 7.62x39. I paid the high price of \$89.95 for it! Being interested in and collecting military rifles, my son immediately claimed the gun. Over the years he has shot several deer without losing or wounding any animals. He uses Winchester 123-grain pointed soft-point bullets.

Today, other rifles are available in 7.62x39. The most popular is the



PHOTOS BY MAT TAYLOR

A .223 cartridge alongside a 7.62x39. Although the .223 has a higher velocity, the 7.62 shoots a bullet with twice the weight and greater diameter.

caliber for many years.

It was developed during World War II, and was chambered in SKS

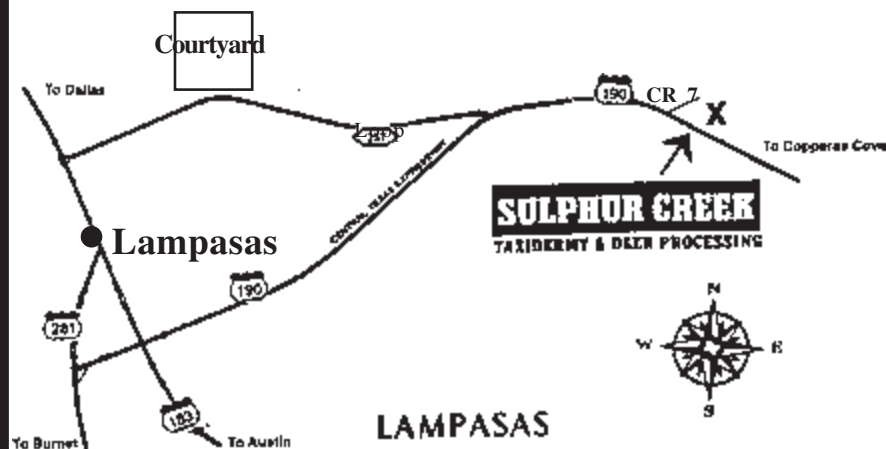
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