

Is it the ultimate elk cartridge? – Backfire



Last year, I purchased a Browning X-Bolt Pro in .28 Nosler. I wanted it to be my “hunt the world” gun that I could use for hunting everything from wild hog and deer up to elk, wildebeest, waterbuck, and other large-bodied game. A year later, I couldn’t be happier with my purchase.

The .28 Nosler cartridge is one of the best cartridges for hunting elk as long as controlled-expansion bullets are used. The .28 Nosler shoots flat and powerfully, but it is expensive to shoot, burns barrels quickly, and has significant recoil.

Benefits of the .28 Nosler
Drawbacks to the .28 Nosler
Extremely flat shooting
Factory loads are expensive
Very resistant to wind drift
Less variety in factory loads on the market
Maintains high energy at long ranges
High recoil
Inherently accurate
Short barrel life

In this article, I’ll cover the pros and cons I’ve found with shooting the .28 Nosler on my recent big game hunting adventures.

Can a .28 Nosler Effectively Take Large-Bodied Game Like Elk?

No discussion of a cartridge’s ability to take large game would be complete without discussing foot pounds of energy. This is, perhaps, one of the worst ways to measure a cartridge’s suitability for hunting because it doesn’t take into account shot placement or bullet design; however, it at least provides some barometer of the cartridge’s power.

The conventional (and mostly misguided) wisdom is that an elk cartridge should have 1,500 foot pounds of energy at the distance from which you shoot. Measured in foot pounds of energy, the .28 Nosler is a powerhouse. Not only does it pack a whopping 3,188 foot pounds of energy at 100 yards, it maintains a measurement of over 1,500 foot pounds out to 747 yards. By this measurement, the .28 Nosler is one of the best elk cartridges for long range shooting.

The .28 Nosler is an ideal elk hunting cartridge for today’s longer-range, flat-trajectory shooting style. While there are some drawbacks to this cartridge for elk hunting, in general it’s one of the best rounds on the market.

28 Nosler Average Ballistics

Distance	Energy (Ft lbs)	Velocity (Fps)	Bullet Drop (Inches)
100 Yards	3,457	2,983	5.1200
200 Yards	2,841	2,841	7.9300
300 Yards	2,704	2,704	10.7046
400 Yards	2,570	2,570	13.5005
500 Yards	2,441	2,441	16.3152
600 Yards	2,315	2,315	19.1529
700 Yards	2,193	2,193	22.0100
800 Yards	1,850	1,850	24.8850
900 Yards	1,642	1,642	27.7731
1,000 Yards	1,593	1,593	30.6731

The data in this table is averaged from several different loads to provide a benchmark for comparing cartridges.

Video of Elk Being Shot with .28 Nosler

Nosler even advertises the .28 Nosler primarily as an elk cartridge. On much of their marketing material for the cartridge, they call it “The New Herd Bull.”

I took two black wildebeest with my rifle chambered in .28 Nosler. One of the shots put the wildebeest flat on the ground immediately. In the other case, it bucked around for about 5 seconds before expiring. That’s excellent performance for a tough animal. In both cases, the 163 grain ELD-X bullet did not exit the animal’s body and used all that energy inside the vitals.

The two old wildebeest bulls weighed about 315 pounds each, and a mature bull elk weighs approximately 650 pounds. However, simply not passing through the body is not necessarily a bad thing, and depends highly on the bullet construction. The ELD-X is not a deep penetrating bullet, but instead is designed for reliable expansion even at longer distances and slower speeds. Consequently, it is not surprising that the bullet did not pass through.

This point, however, brings up a problem with the .28 Nosler if you plan to shoot factory loads rather than reloading yourself. In local stores, you are unlikely to find

anything other than Hornady's Precision Hunter 162-grain ELD-X, or a Nosler's 175-grain Trophy Hunter load with an Accubond bullet. Those are the two loads I keep seeing in my local Sportsman's Warehouse and Cabela's. There are several more options if you purchase online or order your loads from a local store, but you should be aware that those who don't reload and purchase from local shops will likely not have many options.

If you plan to order your ammunition online, the best elk hunting cartridge I've seen is probably the Nosler 160-grain Trophy Grade ammunition with a good old Partition bullet. The partition has proven itself over the years to penetrate deep. Although there are more advanced and fancy bullet designs created more recently, most factory loads for the 28 Nosler focus on long range expansion, and I'd prefer to have a Partition's deep penetration for elk.

I think the reason the .28 Nosler factory loads are so focused on long range expansion is that it is an extremely capable long range cartridge. Having said that, I'd like to see more manufacturers focusing on deeper penetrating bullets in their .28 Nosler factory loads because the cartridge already shoots so fast that I am less concerned with expansion at a distance than I am about penetration—at least for elk.

If there were a factory load of .28 Nosler Cartridges with a 168-grain Barnes LRX, I'd order a whole pallet right away. Okay, maybe not a pallet, but a lot.

Does the .28 Nosler Have too Much Recoil for a Lightweight Elk Gun?

Hunting elk is hard work. It usually includes hiking steep country for days with a pack on your back. Nearly every elk hunter will care somewhat about the weight of their rifle after a long day of hiking.

The Browning X-Bolt Pro I purchased in .28 Nosler weighs a mere 6 pounds, 10 ounces un-scoped. I put a Vortex Viper PST Gen II 5-25x scope on my rifle, so the finished setup weighed 31.2 ounces. So my final hunting setup only weighs 8 pounds, 8 ounces. That's a very nice lightweight setup, without going to the extremes.

Chambered in .28 Nosler, this 8 pound, 8 ounce setup kicks quite hard. Although I've been shooting all my life, I have to mentally check my shoulder mount before I pull the trigger. With a muzzle brake (included with the X-bolt Pro, the gun is quite tolerable. If you like your hearing, on the other hand, shooting without a brake will kick hard. For me, it's quite tolerable for shooting up to 30 shots in a practice session and certainly a shot or two for hunting. In my situation, I think the tradeoffs of recoil are far outweighed by the positive aspects of the cartridge.

However, you should be aware that the recoil on a .28 Nosler is not right for all shooters. In fact, the first time my friend, who is a seasoned shooter himself, shot my 28 Nosler, he got scoped! He wasn't quite prepared for the recoil when the rifle was mounted on his shoulder over a puffy coat.

I wouldn't want to use my lightweight rifle in .28 Nosler for a range gun when I want to shoot 50-100 shots for a practice session. However, strong-bodied hunters who will only shoot 20 shots in a practice session and a few shots for hunting will likely have no trouble at all.

For me, I haven't developed any flinching issues and I'd prefer to have a gun that I know will shoot incredibly flat with little wind drift at long distances for those cross-canyon elk shots. I don't personally shoot extreme ranges when hunting by any means, but when I can consistently hit 600 yards in practice, I know 300 won't give me any trouble when hunting.

I'm not not the kind of shooter that whips out a 50BMG or .338 Lapua for a casual day on the range. I wouldn't say I'm especially recoil sensitive, but I don't have an iron shoulder either. If I can shoot the .28 Nosler without any issues, the vast majority of adult male shooters won't have any issues either.



Jim Harmer is a host of the Backfire Youtube channel. He has managed multiple gun ranges, and has hunted around the world. He is a well-known entrepreneur, having started many successful online brands, and lives in St George, Utah.

338 Lapua Magnum Load Data

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 - Varmageddon®
 - RMEF Licensed Products
 - Bulk Ammo Sale
 - Cartridge
 - 10mm Auto
 - 17 Remington Fireball
 - 17 Remington

- 204 Ruger
- 22 Hornet
- 22 Nosler
- 221 Remington Fireball
- 222 Remington
- 222 Remington Magnum
- 22-250 Remington
- 223 Remington
- 243 Winchester
- 25-06 Remington
- 257 Roberts +P
- 257 Weatherby Magnum
- 26 Nosler
- 260 Remington
- 264 Winchester Magnum
- 27 Nosler
- 270 Weatherby Magnum
- 270 Winchester
- 270 Winchester Short Magnum
- 28 Nosler
- 280 Ackley Improved
- 280 Remington
- 30 Nosler
- 300 AAC Blackout
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- 300 Remington SA Ultra Magnum
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- 300 Winchester Magnum
- 300 Winchester Short Magnum
- 30-06 Springfield
- 30-30 Winchester
- 30-378 Weatherby Magnum
- 308 Norma Magnum
- 308 Winchester
- 325 Winchester Short Magnum
- 33 Nosler
- 338 Lapua Magnum
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- 340 Weatherby Magnum
- 35 Whelen
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 - 9.3x62
 - 9.3x74 R
 - 9mm Luger
 - Activity
 - Dangerous Game
 - Deer Sized Game
 - Elk/Moose Sized Game
 - Tactical/Defense
 - Target/Match
 - Varmint
-
- Bullets
 - Product Line
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 - 20
 - 22
 - 25
 - 30
 - 35
 - 38
 - 41
 - 44
 - 50
 - 270
 - 338
 - 375
 - 416
 - 458
 - 470
 - 10mm
 - 45 (.451")
 - 6.5mm
 - 6.8mm
 - 6mm
 - 7.62 (.310")
 - 7mm
 - 8mm
 - 9.3mm
 - 9mm
 - Activity
 - Dangerous Game
 - Deer Sized Game
 - Elk/Moose Sized Game
 - Tactical/Defense
 - Target/Match
 - Varmint
-
- Brass
 - Rifle Brass
 - Nosler Premium Brass
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-

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 - Rifles
 - Model 48® Rifles
 - Model 21 Rifles
 - Handguns
 - Model 48® Handguns
 - Parts & Accessories
 - Uppers
 - Scope Ring Bases
 - Scope Rings
 - Magazines
 - Replacement Stocks
 - Rifle Accessories
-
- Suppressors
 - Suppressor Line
 - Nosler Suppressors
-
- Gear
 - Apparel
 - Hats
 - T-Shirts
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 - Reloading Supplies
 - Reloading Dies
 - Seating Plugs
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 - Accessories
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- Explore
 - Company
 - About Nosler
 - History
 - Forum
 - Blog
 - Nosler Cartridges
 - 22 Nosler Rifle Cartridge
 - 26 Nosler Rifle Cartridge
 - 27 Nosler Rifle Cartridge
 - 28 Nosler Rifle Cartridge
 - 30 Nosler Rifle Cartridge
 - 33 Nosler Rifle Cartridge
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 - Sponsored Shooters
 - Project 48
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- Load Data
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-
- Sign In
- Create an Account
-
- Home
- 338 Lapua Magnum Load Data

- 180 Grain
- 200 - 210 Grain
- 225 Grain
- 250 Grain
- 265 Grain
- 300 Grain

- PRIVACY
- USE
- ORDER PROCESSING
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33 Nosler Rifle Cartridges

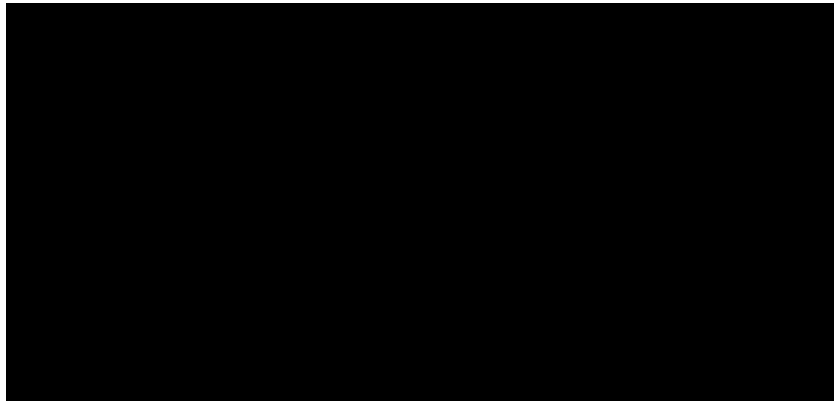
33 NOSLER RIFLE CARTRIDGE

The Nosler family of cartridges was born in 2014 with the introduction of the 26 Nosler, followed by the 28 Nosler in 2015, 30 Nosler in 2016 and now we're ready to introduce the patriarch of the family – the 33 Nosler. The 33 shares the same parent case (404 Jeffery) as the rest of the family but fires .338 caliber bullets for the toughest of big game.

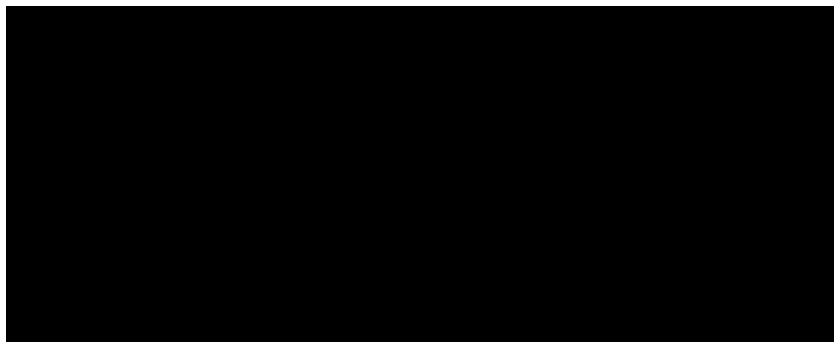
The 33 Nosler is capable of propelling a 225gr AccuBond at 3025 fps and the brand new 265gr AccuBond Long Range at 2775 fps. That's 275 fps faster than the 338 Win Mag using the same length action and 25 fps faster than the 338 Lapua at the muzzle while burning 18% less powder. The 33 Nosler is SAAMI approved and will be supported with ammunition and components from Nosler beginning Q1 of 2017.

New 33 Nosler Rivals .338 Lapua Magnum in Smaller Package « Daily Bulletin

October 28th, 2016

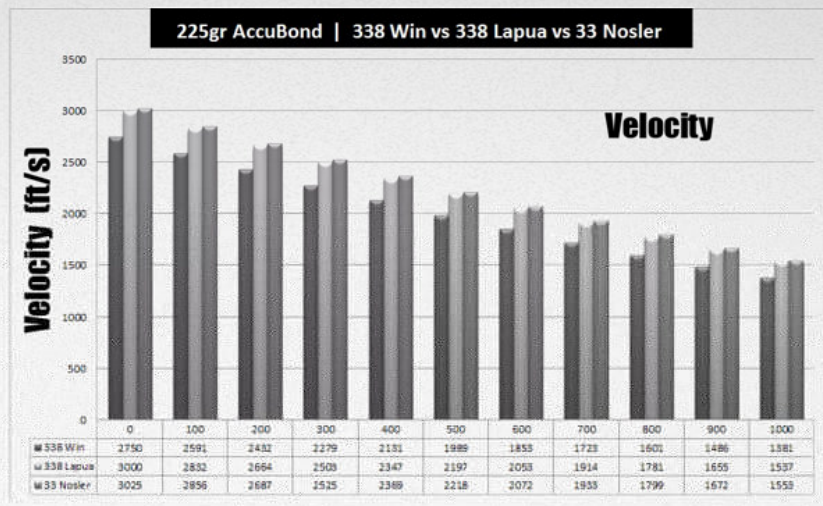


Nosler has just introduced a new SAAMI-spec .338-caliber cartridge, the 33 Nosler, which is based on the 404 Jeffrey parent case. This efficient new cartridge rivals the velocity and energy of the proven .338 Lapua Magnum while using significantly less powder. AND, the Nosler 33 fits in a standard, long action receiver. Accordingly the 33 Nosler should be popular with extreme long range (ELR) shooters and big game hunters. The 33 Nosler fires .338-caliber bullets which are tough on big game and typically boast high Ballistic Coefficients and sectional densities. For long-range target work, Nosler will offer 33 Nosler match ammo with a high-BC 300gr bullet.

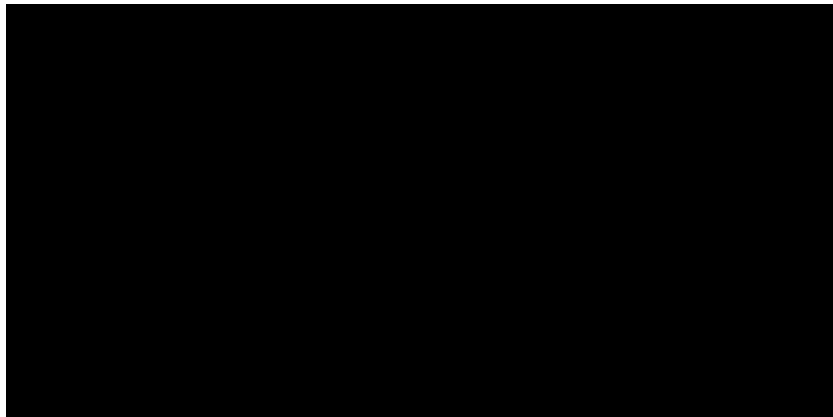


Notably, the 33 Nosler will fit in a standard-length Long Action. That's a big deal because it means you can now achieve .338 LM performance in a rifle that is lighter and less costly to build. Nosler lists a 3.340" COAL for the 33 Nosler. Compare that to 3.681" for the .338 LM. Nosler will offer loaded ammunition as well as 33 Nosler brass.

Velocity Comparison



The above chart was created by Nosler. It shows the 33 Nosler can push a 225gr AccuBond at 3025 fps and the 265gr AccuBond at 2775 fps. That's 275 fps faster (with 20% more energy) than the .338 Winchester Magnum using the same length action. According to the chart, the 33 Nosler is also 25 fps faster than the .338 Lapua Magnum at the muzzle while burning 18% less powder. However, the numbers quoted by Nosler for the .338 LM are conservative.



The 33 Nosler® is SAAMI-standardized for consistent industry-wide brass and chamber dimensions. Nosler will be supporting this new cartridge with Nosler Brass, factory ammunition, and Nosler factory rifles. Expect 33 Nosler products to be available in early 2017.

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