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I'm a believer!

Avid handloader **Chris Redlich** applauds Federal factory ammo

When was the last time you tried to buy primers only to be told: "Sorry, there's a back order of more than 10 million large rifle primers!" I'm not kidding and have heard the same statement at numerous gun shops, both here in Queensland and in New Zealand from where we'd just returned. Whatever the reason, whether politics or climate change - the big two blamed for most things these days - they're just plain hard to find. For a keen handloader this is beyond frustrating, forcing me from time to time

to resort to factory-loaded ammunition. Furthermore, during my time reviewing countless rifles, I've been supplied with many types of factory ammo which distributors prefer me to use. Some have been good and some not so, though one off-the-shelf brand which provided me with reliable performance is Federal.

They've been making quality ammo and components, including brass and primers, in the US for 100 years. That's a long time and if you'd been churning out rubbish the American public would've tossed the business on the proverbial scrapheap long ago. Now while I prefer handloads for hunting, my history with Federal was borne out of desperation when I flirted with a couple of packs of .223 Rem ammo more than 20 years ago. My wife Sue-Ann and her M77 Ruger using 55-grain soft point bullets made light work of foxes in the paddocks of our St. George property.

Fast-forward to 2016 and I was in New Zealand for my first Alpine hunt. Using a .270 Win to shoot a chamois and .300 WSM to take my first tahr, I was more than happy with the guide's choice of Federal's Power-Shok and Fusion ammunition. Had I'd missed those shots I probably wouldn't be writing about it, yet in both instances the factory loads performed beautifully in their



Chris's daughter Rachel smashes clays using Federal 12-gauge Target loads.



Federal 180-grain Power-Shok loads proved accurate for sighting-in Chris's new .300 WSM hunting rifle.

respective rifles under awful conditions.

On top of that, not to disappoint the guide I accepted his challenge to eliminate two vermin high on the Kiwis' hit-list! These unwanted Aussie imports thrive well in the NZ hills but wreak havoc on their native flora, so I felt obliged to help out. Thanks to a couple of 165-grain Fusion bullets from the suppressed .300 WSM, I surprisingly yet comfortably neck-shot both across a steep gully at roughly 260 metres, sitting down and using my knees as a rest.

The following year I bought a new deer rifle in .300 WSM based on that experience with my outfitter's rifle. I must admit I didn't hold high hopes for the 'Big 30s' ability to group well straight out the box, yet my first three shots from the superlight using 180-grain Power-Shok loads printed an impressive sub-MOA group. Results on the range restored my faith in factory loads and, many shots later, those results have remained the same.

Impressing once again, Federal factory ammo was used recently to take a huge South Island red stag. Prior to that hunt we visited the outfitter's range for a practice. Originally he insisted the rifle was good to go and wouldn't need testing, though I insisted we check-sight first. I don't believe for one moment I was being 'precious' and felt that taking the word of someone I'd just met, let alone never used their rifle, went against good judgement. I was happy to confirm the Kiwi-made Glacier in 7mm Rem Mag with Swarovski Z5 scope were sighted true and not one of my shots went amiss.

What's more, we tested adjustments of the BT (ballistic turret) on that Z5 and I hit the gong plates easily at ranges out to 400 yards (about 370m) using 150-grain Power-Shoks. I didn't anticipate shooting a stag at that distance but, should the need arise, I had confidence to take a long shot with my loan rifle and Federal factory loads.

As it happened my chance came later that same afternoon after an intense stalk to take an impressive 15-point trophy.

I cautiously narrowed the gap to 140m which was more than close enough for the 7mm Rem Mag's capability. As the deer's shoulder filled the sight picture and with reticle trained for a heart shot, I unleashed a single round to secure my first New Zealand red stag. He leapt up on impact then fell into a hollow mere metres away, reinforcing the 150-grain Power-Shok soft-point's ability to humanely despatch game of broad stature.

'Double the weight, half the velocity and with twice the kick' would best describe my next experience using Federal's Premium loads. I was lucky to review one of the first Ruger-made Marlin SBL in .45/70 Govt and, as with all my rifle reviews, it was rigorously field tested out bush. That cartridge isn't known for being shy but for a heavy hitter, the rifle and supplied 300-grain Hammer Down hollow-points produced outstanding accuracy during the sighting-in process. To be honest I was never expecting such superb performance, though nonetheless the proof on paper gave me absolute confidence for my next hunt with that new lever gun.

As most hunters know, game animals don't take bookings to reserve their spot in the firing line but, with a little luck, some outings fare better than others. The 'Marlin and Me' embarked on the first of a few hunts together, a dream run starting with my first wild dog taken in a couple of years. 'A 300-grain pill for wild dogs?' I can assure you that despite its size and recoil, I wasn't going to let a calf-killer pause to ask if it preferred a smaller bullet! My point is that at no stage did I feel uncomfortable taking a well-aimed shot off-hand and, not surprisingly at 80m, the large bullet stopped that dog in its tracks.

Luckily the rifle remained slung on my back for the next 24 hours as another wild dog and a large wild boar fell to a single round each, thanks to my brother's sharp-shooting. That Marlin lever-action and Federal ammunition were a winning combination, proving Australian distributor



A large wild boar shot cleanly with the Marlin SBL .45/70Govt. and 300-grain Hammer Down.



Sue-Ann used Federal 55-grain ammo successfully on foxes.

Nioa know their products and what works. For a farmer growing crops and the grazier trying protect cattle, the practical field test was proof-positive of accuracy and a superb outcome for vermin control.

I won't pretend I'm a shotgun expert but can say Federal cater to various chamberings including 12-20 gauge for competition disciplines and 12, 16, 20, 28 and 410 gauge for hunting. I can speak with some experience on Federal's Top Gun target loads I used to support a recent clay thrower review. I don't know how well a target load is supposed to smash clays but, with every hit, my family consistently destroyed more than I did and no-one complained of excessive recoil from the 12-gauge over-and-under.

As mentioned earlier I'm an avid reloader but have to give credit where it's due. With exposure to Federal ammunition spanning two decades, all centrefire loads I've used have reinforced a positive opinion they're a factory ammo alternative certainly worth considering. For more on their range of ammunition visit the Nioa website. ●