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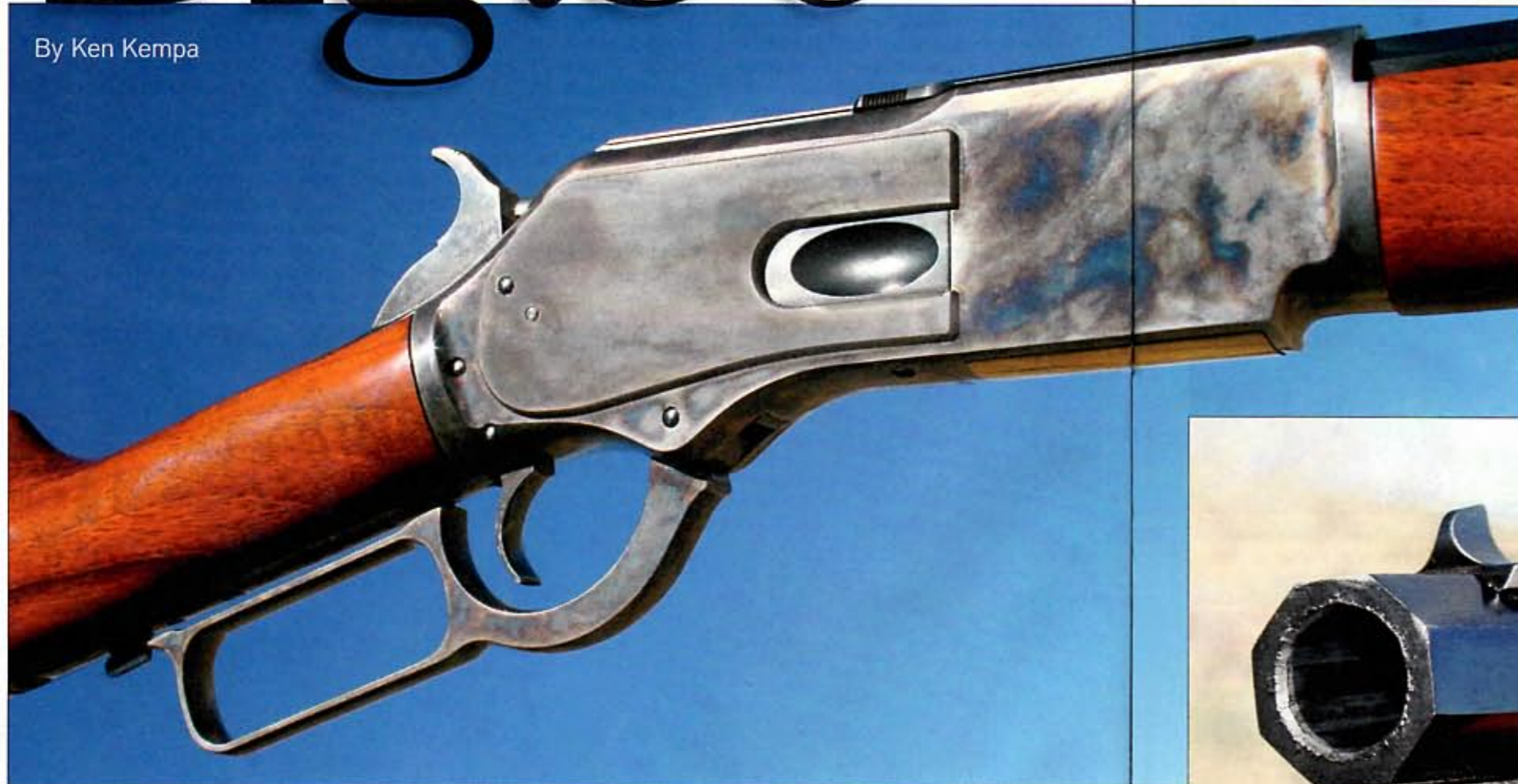
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# UBERTI'S 'Big .50'

By Ken Kempa



Real leverage: If you're going to shoot a Winchester Model 1876 repro, why not go all the way with a .50-95?

I am a modern shooter and hunter, hooked on scopes, stainless actions and barrels, and synthetic stocks. Having used black-powder muzzle-loaders on and off over the past 35 years, I would rather be shooting smokeless cartridges. Nowadays, though, it's hard to ignore Cowboy Action and the reproduction rifles that competitors are using.

However, Uberti is offering a modern repro of an early lever gun that really caught my attention.

When I got to handle the company's Model 1876 rifle, I was immediately attracted by the color case-hardening and the long octagon barrel. Then I worked the lever. It was the smoothest I'd ever cycled. Again and again I worked it.

What is that sliding part on the top for? What do you call that brass block that goes up and down behind the barrel? How many cartridges does the full-length magazine tube hold? What is the twisty-thing behind the rear of the lever? Questions, questions, questions... I had to find out for myself.

#### CARTRIDGE/RIFLE COMBO

For my testing I requested a .50-95 version, the largest caliber offered. It is a bottle-necked rimmed case, about 1.89 inches long, with a water capacity of 85 grains. It's a black-powder cartridge, and many sources I checked with indicated that loads up to 29,000 psi would be a

reasonable upper limit. The rifle has a 28-inch heavy octagon barrel, which measures three-quarters of an inch across the flats.

The rifle—which has an overall length of 49 inches—weighs a substantial 10½ pounds. A round loaded with the Barnes 450-grain Original weighs around 740 grains, so 11 cartridges in the full-length magazine tube will add another 1¼ pounds to the overall package.

The action and lever are beautifully color case-hardened. Right behind the barrel is a brass carrier block, which transports cartridges up to load into the chamber, also serving to carry and eject fired cases. The breechblock—which actually looks like a thick automotive engine valve—drives a cartridge into the chamber. As the lever is fully closed, the brass carrier drops back down into the lowered position, picking up the next cartridge from the magazine tube.

The lever has a fully closed safety, which requires that it be raised up against the bottom of the receiver for firing. At the bottom rear of the lever is a rotating lever hook, which prevents the lever from being worked to load the rifle.

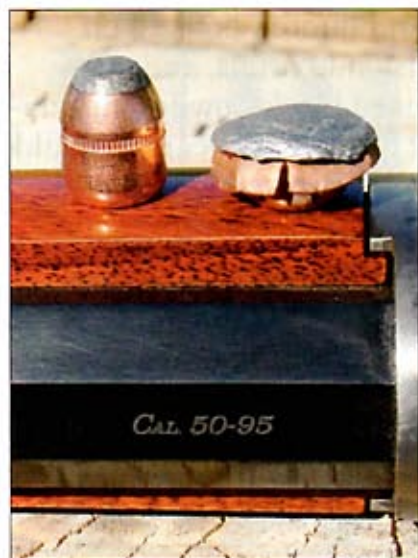
At the very top of the receiver is a sliding dustcover, to keep the insides clean when it's not in use or when you're in the field. It moves back and stays to the rear when the lever is first cycled. When done firing, the shooter can simply push it forward to the closed position.

As if 12 total cartridges were not enough (11 plus one in the chamber), a sliding cover in the curved buttstock can hold an additional three. Fifteen cartridges, loaded with Barnes 450-grain flatpoint bullets, results in a total payload of 6,750 grains. That is about equal to 40 rounds of .30-30. Not many rifles today are capable of even coming close to that amount of firepower.

The rifle has basic, traditional open adjustable sights. The trigger pull is extremely smooth, with little overtravel, breaking between five and six pounds. Place the rifle in anyone's hand and they cannot work the action just once; everyone I handed the rifle worked the lever again and again. Uberti craftsmen are







**Awesome expansion, not to mention great weight retention: The Barnes 300-grain Original at almost 2,100 fps expanded to around .80 caliber and retained 290 grains.**

to be commended for producing such a silky-smooth action. After putting hundreds of rounds through the rifle—even when shooting as fast as I could work the lever, aim and shoot—I experienced no malfunctions.

**COMPONENTS, COMPONENTS** Brass is available from Ten-X Ammunition ([www.tenxammo.com](http://www.tenxammo.com)) or from Bertram Brass out of Australia (around \$3 U.S. per case). Due to very limited production, ammo from Ten-X is also correspondingly priced at \$99 per box of 20. I find cost to be the only drawback to the .50-95, but once you have the cases, reloading really costs no more than loading a .45-70. RCBS provided the FL die set for my tests, and I used the company's VLD chamfering tool on the case necks.

Having had prior success in .50-caliber jacketed bullets from Barnes in a .50 Alaskan on paper and in the field, I obtained 300- and 450-grain .510 Original flatpoints from the company. The powders tested included Accurate 5744 and 2015; Hodgdon H4895; IMR 4227, 4198 and 3031; and Vihtavuori N133.

Federal 215 Large Rifle Magnum primers were used to ensure good ignition in the large-caliber, low-pressure round. Using QuickLOAD, I elected to have beginning loads assembled at a minimum of 20,000 psi, stopping at 26,000 for the suggested maximums.

The listed 350-grain lead bullet load from Ten-X is unique in that the bullet does not have any traditional lubricant in the single grease groove. Instead, a wet, silver-colored coating from the aerospace



**Big gun, big game:** Suitable quarry for a .50-95 Model 1876 lever action would include species up to the American bison in size.

industry is applied, which is then baked on. The company calls it the Slick Silver process. No leading ever appeared when shooting 60 rounds of Ten-X's ammo. The actual bullet weight came out to 339 grains, as the grease grooves contained no conventional lubricant. I obtained three-shot groups at 50 yards that averaged 2/4 inches, using the standard open sights.

My starting loads, using the 300-grain Barnes Original flatpoint bullet, all produced groups that averaged between 1/4 and 1/2 inches at the same distance. A great hunting load with that bullet uses IMR 4198 for 2,057 fps.

Bullet expansion in water was an impressive three-quarters of an inch, with a retained weight of 290 grains. (My .50 Alaskan performed excellently in Africa, using the heavier 450-grain Barnes but

at around 300 fps faster than top loads in the .50-95.)

I did not get expansion with the heavier bullet in my tests, but that was to be expected at less than 1,600 fps. I still would not hesitate to hunt boar, black bear or elk with the heavier bullet, knowing it most certainly would go in very deep and probably exit.

The most accurate load was the 450-grain Barnes Original, which shot into one inch. Full-power loads with that bullet were also accurate, producing 1/4- to 1/2-inch three-shot groups at 50 yards using the open sights.

Due to the weight of the rifle, recoil wasn't an issue at all. I would rate the top loads as being comparable to slug loads in a 12 gauge; all other lesser loads wouldn't give most shooters anything to worry about.





The turning lever lock secures the lever from inadvertently opening (top). The sliding dustcover (above) stays to the rear, once the lever is first cycled. The shooter can return it to the closed position after the shot.



Left to right: .50-95 Barnes Original flatpoint, .50-95 Ten-X factory load, .45-70 Government (for comparison).



The round bolt feeds the round through the brass carrier, then into the chamber.

## LOADS FOR THE .50-95

Bullet	Powder Type	Charge (gr.)	Velocity (fps)	Energy (ft.lbs.)	Average 3-shot group (in.)*
350-gr Ten-X Factory Lead FP (actual weight 339 grains)	flattened ball	27.2	1,477	1,642	2.25
300-gr. Barnes Original FP (starting loads @ 20,000 psi)	A 5744	40.0	1,652	1,818	1.25 to 1.5
300-gr. Barnes Original FP	N133	55.3	1,657	1,829	1.25 to 1.5
300-gr. Barnes Original FP	H4895	60.7	1,744	2,026	1.25 to 1.5
300-gr. Barnes Original FP	IMR 4198	47.2	1,815	2,193	1.25 to 1.5
300-gr. Barnes Original FP (maximum loads @ 26,000 psi)	N133	60.3	1,819	2,203	1.125
300-gr. Barnes Original FP	IMR 4198	52.7	2,057	2,818	.75
300-gr. Barnes Original FP	A 2015	62.8	2,126	3,009	1.75
450-gr. Barnes Original FP (starting loads @ 20,000 psi)	H4895	46.4	1,336	1,782	1.75
450-gr. Barnes Original FP	IMR 4227	32.1	1,363	1,856	1.125
450-gr. Barnes Original FP	IMR 4198	35.8	1,370	1,874	1.125
450-gr. Barnes Original FP	IMR 3031	45.3	1,456	2,117	1.5
450-gr. Barnes Original FP (maximum loads @ 26,000 psi)	N133	46.7	1,402	1,964	1.0
450-gr. Barnes Original FP	H4895	50.5	1,473	2,166	1.125
450-gr. Barnes Original FP	IMR 4198	40.2	1,546	2,387	1.25
450-gr. Barnes Original FP	IMR 3031	48.8	1,582	2,500	1.375

Data only for Uberti Model 1876. Pressures are calculated using QuickLOAD, with a maximum of 20k or 26k psi. Oehler 35P chrono used to record velocities. All Barnes loads crimped in cannellure, 2.195 OAL. All loads use Federal 215 LRM primers and Ten-X brass. \*Groups fired at 50 yards.

## THE UPSHOT OF IT ALL

The Uberti Model 1876 is of extremely high quality in fit and finish. It is a pleasure to shoot, look at and handle. While you can also get it in .40 or .45 calibers, I found working with a .50 again to be a real pleasure. Most any shooter can easily handle my starting or maximum loads, with the most accurate top loads being excellent for deer, pigs, elk or black bear out to perhaps 100 yards or more.

Once you get past the relatively high cost for ammo or brass, it can be reloaded for about the same cost as a .45-70. Personally, if I just wanted to experience shooting a finely crafted rifle such as this Uberti, I would choose whichever caliber I fancied.

What really would entice me would be a carbine version with a 22- or 24-inch barrel. I would have the top rear of the barrel drilled and tapped to accept a Marlin 1895 scope base, install an extended-eye-relief scope, develop and test loads to my heart's content, then remove the modern sighting system for good. I could then plink with my most accurate target loads for fun and hunt with my best-performing top-end ones. And other hunters would *really* take notice when I uncased the rifle in camp.

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