

The Los Angeles Silhouette Club

The Levergun Catalyst

By: Glen E. Fryxell

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In chemistry, a catalyst is defined as something that facilitates or accelerates a process that would proceed slowly, if at all, in its absence. Catalysts play a very important role in creating the quality of life that we enjoy today -- whether we're talking about producing life-saving pharmaceuticals, high-tech composites for lightweight fly-rods, skis and bicycle frames, or more durable rubber compounds for longer-lasting safer tires for your work truck. Catalysts make important contributions to our everyday lives. What does all this have to do with leverguns? Well.

A number of years ago Bob bought a Rossi .357 Magnum levergun. He wanted to learn more about it's care and feeding, so he did some searching online. One of the resources he found was sixgunner.com (hosted at that time by Jim Taylor), as well as the related sixguns.com (hosted by John Taffin). Bob asked his questions and got some good answers, and was generally pleased with sort of people he found frequenting these sites. He hung around and adopted the nickname "fatboy" as that was his nickname among his cycling buddies (Bob is an avid bicyclist). He was one of several "regulars" at these sites who hailed from the Pacific Northwest.



A certain element of camaraderie started to gel among the PNW regulars and it was decided that we needed to get together to shoot, talk guns, tell tall tales and maybe have a barbeque. The first of these gatherings was organized by Caz, down in Albany, Oregon. As I pulled up to the gate on that cool, foggy Saturday morning I found Bob was the first person there, eagerly waiting at the gate to be let in to the range -- his enthusiasm was contagious, and soon the whole crew was laughing and shooting and telling tall tales and eating Caz's delicioso carne azada. We had about 15 people show up for that gathering and a grand time was had by all. These gatherings have since become tradition, held every summer, the weekend after the 4th of July weekend. The company and the food are excellent.

Over the years, we have become good friends, and we have had Bob and his delightful wife Audrey as guests in our home. We have hunted together, we have plinked together, we have made a few trades, and we have cooked together (Bob is a *good* cook). Bob had taken a fair amount of game over the

intervening years, but he still hadn't blooded that little Rossi .357 -- the levergun that had taken him online and led him to a new circle of friends. It was time, and Bob decided that bustin' a big feral hog would be just the way to do it.

The trip was planned for late February. There would be three of us hunting on this trip -- Bob, Steve and myself. Steve had joined the PNW Sixgunner gatherings over the last few years and is fascinated by classic old rifles, powered by classic old cartridges (i.e. he has good taste!). He has recently taken up the timeless art of bullet casting and this trip would mark the first time that he would be hunting with bullets he made himself. It promised to be a memorable trip!

The three of us met up at the hunter's cabin on the Clover Creek Ranch in central Oregon. The weather had been rainy and cool, so the area around the cabin was quite muddy. We got a fire crackling in the fireplace, and the cabin warmed right up as we off-loaded our gear into the mud-room. We had appetizers around the wood-burning stove and then had a dinner of grilled German sausage, sauerkraut, coarse-ground mustard and salad. After dinner, we had a show-n-tell of guns, knives, and all the other stuff that hunters tend to go ga-ga over, then settled in for some serious story-telling and world-class pontificating. A most enjoyable evening!

The next morning started early with Steve cooking breakfast of home-raised ham and bacon, eggs, juice and coffee. We were out of the cabin and hunting before sun-up. We started off by working our way down a finger-ridge where Bob and I had found some bedded hogs on our last trip to this ranch. Sure enough, there were a couple of nice black-n-white boars nestled in their beds in these juniper woods. We decided to pass them up since we weren't sure if they were the size we were looking for, and besides it was the first hour of the first day and we didn't want the hunt to end so soon. We moved on. We hunted the bottoms, we hunted the highlands, we saw Asiatic water buffalo, we saw fallow deer, we saw bison, and we saw myriad colors, sizes and varieties of goats and sheep (including one old Ibex ram that had real character). We saw lots of critters, but we did not see the size of hogs that Bob and Steve were looking for, so it was back down to camp for lunch and Bob's home-made bean soup.



After lunch, Bob decided he wanted to go back and take a closer look at the black-n-white boars we had seen that morning, so we headed back to the top of that finger-ridge. We worked our way through the junipers, and eventually Bob worked his way back out into the open, where he found a group of hogs, of many different sizes and colors, including one big ol' black-n-white boar that weighed 650-700 lbs. He got himself into position and from close range used the little Rossi levergun to plant a 180 grain WFN cast bullet into that boar's brain,

entering just behind his left eye. The boar went down quickly. This was a well-muscled boar, with a nice set of tusks. Bob had been given orders by his wife to shoot a pig that was "big enough to have some bacon". He was successful in achieving his directive!

We had an early breakfast the next morning and got started hunting right away. Steve and I went out to find him a good sized hog to take home. Steve was hunting with an 1880s vintage Phoenix rifle, single-shot .45-70. The Phoenix is similar to the Remington Rolling Block (very similar frame), except that instead of having the breech-block roll backwards to open the action, on the Phoenix it flips over the right side of the action. Steve's rifle is in nice shape, and has a very good bore. He was hunting with the Gould hollow point (Lyman/Ideal 457122), loaded to about 1500 fps. The Ideal 457122 was designed by John Barlow back about 1890 for A. C. Gould, who was the editor of "Shooting and Fishing" magazine (Barlow actually designed 3 different HP bullets and Gould chose the middle one, which weighed 330 grains, and it has been known as the "Gould bullet" ever since). In recent years, a number of sources have criticized the Gould bullet as being too destructive and expanding too rapidly to be useful as a big game bullet. I disagree. It must be kept in mind that the Gould bullet was designed as a black powder express bullet, and was intended for velocities on the order of 1300-1500 fps. The fact that it *can* be driven over 2000 fps from a modern levergun (e.g. the Marlin 1895) doesn't make it structurally well-suited for such velocities. The Gould bullet is a fine bullet for hunting big game, but it does its best work at moderate velocities, where it is a killer of the first order. Driving it faster is counter-productive. Steve was using it properly, at moderate velocity.

Having passed up some hogs the day before, Steve was eager to find a good pig on the second morning and see how well his carefully hand-cast bullets would do their job. As we worked our way down towards a small pond below where Bob had shot his pig the day before, we heard some deep grunting coming from the creek channel above the pond. I took Steve's pack and waited back, out of the way while he stalked this deep-voiced hog. Several minutes later, I heard the report of Steve's .45-70, immediately followed by a loud squeal. As I worked my way down the hillside, there was some loud thrashing coming from a thicket off to my left. As I moved in to help out, I see a large black-n-white boar, hit hard, struggling to move through the thick stuff on three legs. The next thing I see is Steve moving in from the opposite side, peering into the brush trying to see where his boar is so he can finish him off. Oops! My mistake! I am directly in Steve's line of fire and he doesn't know I'm here. I should have been calling out to Steve my whole way down the hill so he could keep track of where I was, but I hadn't done that. "Steve! Don't shoot! I'm directly behind your pig. He's right in front of me, hit hard, but still on his feet. Do you want me to shoot?"

"Thanks for calling out Glen. I didn't know you were back there. Yes, shoot him. I can't see him from here" came Steve's response. The boar hobbled around to my left (so I wouldn't be shooting towards Steve), so I drew my .44 Special



and shot him twice through the lungs, and he went down hard. Steve came up through the thicket and put a finisher in, just behind his ear. This was a BIG pig! It was estimated that he weighed a little over 700 lbs (hanging weight of the meat went over 350 lbs).

Steve's first shot had entered low in the boar's left shoulder, breaking the leg and passing low through the chest cavity, just cutting the heart and damaging

the first couple of inches of both lungs before it exited through the far-side ribcage. The Gould bullet had expanded nicely, and punched right through, leaving a large exit hole in its wake. My .44 Special was loaded with the Lyman 429251 hollow point (BHN = 8), loaded over 17.0 grains for 2400 for 1235 fps. One of my lung shots exited. We found the other under the hide on the far-side, expanded to approximately .60 caliber and weighing 194 grains (original weight was 241 grains). Steve's boar also sported a nice pair of tusks.



On this particular tip, I wasn't looking for a hog. I had been inspired by my good friend Rob Applegate when he shot his buffalo a couple of years ago. It was time for me to shoot a buffalo. The first group of 14-15 buffalo that we tried to stalk were very spooky and took off for the horizon when I peaked over the hill to see if there were any young "meat bulls" in the herd. They had been hunted before and were not going to have anything to do with any human

that was trying to sneak up on them. Oh well, keep hunting. Later that afternoon we happened across another group of 14-15 buffalo, this time bedded down in some thick juniper woods. I made a stalk that got me within about 30-35 yards of the herd when we reached a stand-off -- they were all tightly bunched together, looking at me, and there I stood with my Freedom Arms 454 Casull, looking at them. There were several meat bulls of the appropriate size/age in this group, but with them all bunched together, I couldn't shoot for fear of shooting through one and hitting a second animal. Finally, the lead cow (who was HUGE!) slowly sauntered off into the thick stuff off to the left, and the herd slowly started to follow. Eventually, I got an unobstructed shot opportunity at a young meat bull. The Freedom Arms revolver came up and the front sight blade

settled on the young bull's shoulder. The 454 roared and the young bull reared up on his hind legs, like a stallion. All of this played out for me in slow motion, with my attention focused on the clearly visible bullet hole, low in his left shoulder. He came down on three legs and charged forward to re-join the departing herd. Then a strange thing happened, the herd gathered around him and neighboring animals leaned in to hold him up. I have read of elephants "shouldering" a wounded comrade up to aid in their escape, but I have never heard of this happening with buffalo.

Anyway, after about 10 seconds, as though someone had flipped a switch, the herd turned as a unit and walked away from the wounded bull, as though to say, "Sorry, we can't help you.". As the solitary bull stood there with his head sagging, I snuck into position and from about 25 yards away put a second shot through his lungs. He raced forward for about 20 feet and then went down for good.

The 454 was loaded with the Lyman 454629 GC-FP (water-quenched WW alloy, BHN of about 18), loaded over 30.0 grains of H110 for about 1650 fps. The first shot had entered low in the left shoulder, breaking the leg, cutting the heart and damaging both lungs before exiting the far-side ribcage. The second shot had center-punched both lungs and exited. Study of both wound channels revealed that neither bullet had expanded appreciably. This bull was 3 to 3 1/2 years old, weighed about 800 lbs, and was in beautiful shape.

All in all, this was a muddy couple of days, and we covered a lot of ground in order to find the animals we were looking for, but when it was all said and done, it was a great hunt with good friends. And Bob's little Rossi was the catalyst that started it all!

- Glen E. Fryxell

Warning: All technical data mentioned, especially handloading and bullet casting, reflect the limited experience of individuals using specific tools, products, equipment and components under specific conditions and circumstances not necessarily reported in the article or on this web site and over which The Los Angeles Silhouette Club (LASC), this web site or the author has no control. The above has no control over the condition of your firearms or your methods, components, tools, techniques or circumstances and disclaims all and any responsibility for any person using any data mentioned. **Always consult recognized reloading manuals.**

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