

# CLASSIC RIFLES: The W



### By John Marshall

This brainchild of master firearms designer John Browning has probably served up more venison in the United States than any other rifle. It's been carried throughout the country and it's rare to find a gun enthusiast who hasn't handled or owned one. Over seven million have been made, and it's become a bona fide legend. It's the Model 94 Winchester, and its most prolific chambering has resulted in the .30-30 Winchester cartridge being available in any sporting goods store in the nation. Although the word "classic" has been overworked extensively, this one is the real deal. Handy, lightweight and sufficiently powerful, it serves equally well as a deer rifle or as a home-defense weapon. It's been seen in the movies, rifle scabbards, pickup racks and over home fireplaces for well over a century. Its popularity has endured like no other rifle before or since.

The gun was patented by Browning in August 1894 in response to the need for a handy lever-action repeater that could withstand the higher pressure of the new smokeless powders. The then-popular lever-action Model 1892 Winchester served well for pistol cartridges and gave increased power and range for them, but it could not take the high-power smokeless rounds. A stronger rifle of about the same size was needed and John Browning, as ever, was up to the task. Not only did the new rifle utilize a much stronger action, but improved metallurgy played a role as well. The first Winchester Models 1894 were listed in the November 1894 catalog. Although the rifle was designed for smokeless powder, the first chamberings were for a couple of black powder cartridges, the .32-40 and the .38-55. After some metallurgical issues were sorted out, it was soon mated with the first American-made smokeless sporting cartridge, the .30 WCF (Winchester Center Fire). Because the .30-caliber cartridge contained about 30 grains of powder, the new rimmed round was soon dubbed the ".30-30." It rapidly

became the most popular caliber in this rifle. With much higher velocity and flatter trajectory, the .30-30 produced almost as much muzzle energy as the vaunted .45-70 service cartridge.

For those used to reloading cartridges with black powder, the almost identical .32 Winchester Special was offered. The .30-30, with its 1-in-12" rifling twist, fouled barrels badly when loaded with black powder. The 1-in-16" twist of the .32 Special helped to increase the number of rounds that could be fired before barrel scrubbing was needed. The flat-shooting .25-35 cartridge was also introduced. It produced less recoil and was especially popular with women and children.

Although the 20-inch carbine barrels became the most common, longer rifle barrels were offered in various configurations such as octagonal, round, and half and half octagonal/round. Magazine tubes varied in length from full to 3/4 and half as long as the barrel. Most full-length rifles had a crescent-shaped buttplate, while the carbines generally had a more gently curved configuration. In New England, the "eastern carbine" style with its shotgun-style buttplate, 20-inch barrel and shorter magazine tube became popular. Winchester also offered shorter barrels of 14 or 15 inches, and guns with these were known as the Trapper carbines. In later years these would be resurrected with 16-1/4" barrels to meet modern federal requirements. Winchester bent over backwards to supply customers with what they wanted, and any combination of features could be had on special order, including fancy wood, engraving and stock checkering.

During WWI, Winchester sold 1,800 Model 94 carbines to the U.S. armed forces. These carried "U.S." and ordnance "flaming bomb" stamps. Most were used for stateside guard duty, but at least one is reported to have made it overseas for use in the war. These number among the rarest U.S. martial arms today. A few were made for the home front war effort in 1942, as well. A Model 94 spinoff was the Model 55, made from 1924 to 1932. It had a 24-inch round barrel, a shorter magazine, a curved pistol grip and lever, and a shotgun-style buttplate. This later morphed into the Model 64, and it could

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