

# The .300 – Weatherby's Magnum Opus

by Pierre van der Walt

*Weatherby's greatest success undoubtedly is the .300 Weatherby Magnum. Despite me not being a great fan of belted cartridges, nor really believing in any of the touted advantages of double radius shoulders, there is no denying that the .300 Weatherby Magnum works.*

I grew up in an isolated world of plodding large bores. Cartridges like the .416 Rigby, the 10,75x68mm Mauser, the 9,5x56mm Mannlicher-Schönauer and .375 Holland & Holland were to be found everywhere in the house. There was something for 'small stuff' like zebra and the odd marauding baboon. It was an 1893 Lee-Metford .303. In those days you listened to Mozambique's LM-Radio when around Hoedspruit. Pretoria, even in the sixties, was not only across the Drakensberg, but across the plains on the other side of those mountains and a place rarely heard of in Hoedspruit.

Fortunately I only spent school holidays there. I was exposed to a touch of civilization during school terms where I attended school at a place called Arnot. For the record, in those days it was bigger than Hoedspruit. Apart from the school, which about 40 of us attended, it had a railway station, a co-op, a post office and an Indian store where fuel could be bought. Unlike Hoedspruit, it did not have a watering hole for the men.

We were very fortunate in that despite our ballistic ignorance, all the old plodders

in the house gave sterling service. Great was my surprise later on in life when I began hearing about how ineffective they were and that you could not kill a dung beetle with some of them.

Everybody knew that I was the gun nut of the area. One day, as I entered Moosa's store, he beckoned me into his stacked little office in the back of the shop. From a pile of papers about a mile high he pulled a fairly thick book and gave it to me. The cover said it was from a company called Weatherby. In retrospect, it must have been something like a Weatherby Guide, and it opened a whole new world for me.

Never before had I seen rifles with Monte Carlo combs and racy forends with racy tips. Never before had a rifle had so many inlays that I could confuse it with a chess board. My tastes were simple and the glossy angular look of Weatherby rifles did not appeal to me. All sorts of magical things were claimed about the high velocity of Weatherby cartridges and this confused me. Up to that point in time my little boy mind had never even considered velocity as an issue. When I asked my father about the velocity from our rifles he did not know

either. He was a farmer, not a ballistician. He did however in no uncertain terms inform me that one does not fix what works, and since his guns worked, he did not consider the Weatherby claims anything but advertising.

I will always remember his words terminating the discussion: "If you cannot hunt well enough to get sufficiently close to your prey to be able to shoot it with any cartridge, you belong in the kitchen, not the bush."

So my prejudices against Weatherby cartridges were born and so they remained until about 13 years later when I opened my mind and commenced re-evaluating everything I thought I knew about cartridges on a systematic basis. Even then everybody I talked to informed me that Weatherby cartridges were a bunch of gimmicks. When I then asked them how many Weatherby chambered rifles they had fired, nobody answered in the affirmative. I was not the only prejudiced one.

It is only when one starts comparing Weatherby cartridges with the likes of the .244 Holland & Holland that you realise that Roy Weatherby was no fool. The fact that he did not introduce the .30-378 during his lifetime because of the propellants available at the time also shows that Roy Weatherby pushed the velocity parameters of his times, but never exceeded sensible balances.

The advent of modern super velocity cartridges make many of the once hot Weatherby chamberings look rather sedate, but one thing has not changed: Weatherby cartridges were designed to be unproblematic to load and use. That is not true of many of the modern screamers.

Weatherby's greatest success undoubtedly is the .300 Weatherby Magnum. Despite me not being a great fan of belted cartridges, nor really believing in any of the touted advantages of double radius shoulders, there is no denying that the .300 Weatherby Magnum works. It delivers around 3,150 – 3,200fps from a 26" barrel. That is right on par with the .300 Dakota. and the .300



*A typical, slightly weathered, old-style .300 Weatherby Magnum cartridge box. These boxes are fast becoming collector's pieces.*

Remington Ultra Mag. Even the massive former wildcat, the .30-378 Weatherby Magnum recently introduced as a commercial cartridge, hardly outshines it at around 3,250fps from a 26" barrel.

In other words, what Roy Weatherby created in 1944, holds its own against every other commercial cartridge introduced in the 57 years since. That is a remarkable feat.

Another fantastic feature of this cartridge is its versatility. It is an excellent bush cartridge with 250-grain bullets at around 2,650fps and an equally magnificent long-range cartridge with 165 and 180-grain bullets. Interestingly enough, neither the .300 Remington Ultra Mag, nor the .30-378 Weatherby Magnum can claim any measurable advantage over it with heavy bullets of comparable barrel lengths. Both these cartridges consume more propellant and dish out more recoil than the .300 Weatherby Magnum. Conversely, in wildcat configuration, the barrel life of the newcomers has proved shorter than the .300 Weatherby's.

One may be led to believe that the larger capacity .300's are flatter shooting than the .300 Weatherby. It is true that they do, but it should be viewed in perspective. Using the velocity averages from three manuals for 26" barrels, the trajectory comparisons for 180-grain bullets are very informative.

In the worst case scenario, the .300 Weatherby Magnum only shoots 1.7" less flat than its sibling over a range of 450 yards! We all mostly shoot over less than half that distance. Fact is, that at whatever range you use the .300 Weatherby Magnum, chances are that the bullet will impact within an inch from the flattest shooting cartridges on the market. Human error exceeds that over the ranges we are talking of here and it can work in your favour as much as it can work against you.

I know of two instances of fleeing lion given Texas heart shots by the late Daan Olwage with 180-grain factory loads using



Some well-known and some lesser-known rifle styles listed in the current Weatherby catalogue.

Nosler Partition bullets. We have all seen how a lion can prance and flop around when shot. In both these instances the killing effects were dramatic. Both times the lion simply dropped stone dead as if hit by lightning. Not a movement followed their dropping. I do believe that the bullet entry being so close to the base of the spine had something to do with the rapidity of incapacitation, but it also represents an altogether impressive display of cartridge and bullet performance.

shortcomings and it consistently vies for the top spot, whichever way you look at it. It is easy to reload for and it performs very well with a surprisingly wide range of readily obtainable propellants, no matter in which corner of the world you may find yourself. That is a luxury one does not have if you opt for a larger capacity .300 cartridge.

Although this Weatherby line of rifles will always be typified by the flashy Californian style of the original Mark V Deluxe and ornate Crown Custom, Weatherby Inc have also introduced a wide range of increasingly more sedate stock styles since Ed Weatherby took control of the company. The Euromark and Safari Grades are basically Deluxe rifles with a matte finish. The Sporter and Euro-sport are typical Mark V Deluxe rifles without grip caps, white line spacers and forend tips, while the Classic Custom is as classic as one can hope for.

The Weatherby line also contains numerous synthetic stocked versions, fluted and bull barrels and the only contoured graphite barrel on the market today.

Combined with any of these rifle options, the .300 Weatherby Magnum is not only Roy Weatherby's magnum opus, but a formidable combination. It is the best selling cartridge in the Weatherby cartridge line-up and for good reason. It simply is a great cartridge and, together with its Holland & Holland and Winchester peers, a truly classic .300 magnum.



A nice lechwe, a distinctive rifle, and a great moment for Ed Weatherby. Courtesy: Weatherby.

The deeper one delves into the .300 Weatherby Magnum's characteristics, the more one realises that this cartridge is exceptionally well conceived. It may not be the be-all and end-all in any particular field, but it does not have any glaring

CARTRIDGE	VELOCITY	250 ZERO	450 DROP	300 ZERO	450 DROP	350 ZERO	450 DROP
.300 Wby Mag	3120	0.0"	-21.1"	0.0"	-16.4"	0.0"	-11.4"
.300 Ultra Mag	3250	0.0"	-19.3"	0.0"	-14.9"	0.0"	-10.2"
.30 - 378 Wby	3275	0.0"	-19.0"	0.0"	-14.7"	0.0"	-10.0"