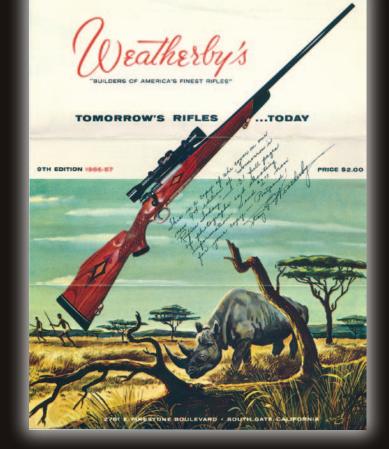


Tomorrow's Rifles OCLAY

Roy Weatherby's slogan was also a promise to hunters. He took it seriously.



Tomorrow's Rifles ... Today This 1956-1957 cover of the
Weatherby guide shows a classic
Weatherby stock on a Mauser
action. Roy would shortly
introduce his own
Mark V action.



By Wayne van Zwoll B&C Professional Member Photos courtesy of Author The elk, badly hit, galloped off. We followed. Hoof-prints took us a couple of hundred yards. We found a small-font comma of blood on one blade of grass. Then, by blind luck, we came upon the bull. He'd bedded, but rose as our eyes met. Kneeling, I caught him in the scope as he crested a ridge. The .300 Weatherby bounced; the animal was gone. But the reticle had looked just right. We found him dead just over the hump.

Weatherby rifles aren't magic, but they can seem so, killing more suddenly than you expect. Last fall I sent many bullets after a mountain goat to anchor it. No, my shooting hadn't been that shiny, and goats are notoriously tough. Then there was the long yardage, the storm, the goat's insistence on keeping his derriere between his vitals and my .30-06.... Days later, crawling to my partner with a hat to shade his eye, I grabbed a handful of cartridges in my other hand. Surely he'd need them. But when his Weatherby Magnum recoiled, the goat dropped dead. Instantly.

A century ago, the .30-06 was all the cartridge any hunter could want. It hit half again as hard as a .30-30 up close, twice as hard out yonder. The '06's pointed bullets lost speed reluctantly. Speed not only put more power on tap, it ensured flatter flight.

The slug barrel on this pumpaction Weatherby PA-08 delivered near-rifle-like accuracy for Wayne. The company also markets "tactical" shotguns.



As bolt-action rifles overtook lever

guns at market and optical sights earned their stripes, hunters shot farther. Wildcatters fashioned hot-rod cartridges from the .30-06, then the .300 Holland & Holland (Super .30), first loaded stateside in 1925. Though the Depression-battered arms factories, experimenters carried on. Among their protégés was a young man selling insurance in Los Angeles.

The man and his company

Roy Weatherby was born in 1910 to a Kansas sharecropper and spent his childhood helping the family wrest a living from the ground. He earned a BB gun peddling garden seed on foot to neighbors. Though in that day college was just a dream for farm boys, Roy was determined to make it come true. Working for Southwestern Bell, he took night classes at the University of Wichita. In 1937 he and wife Camille headed for California. The Golden State was growing fast, its ranks swelled by refugees from the Dust Bowl, and by legions of the unemployed from farther east, migrating toward hope on Route 66. Roy started an insurance business and prospered. He bought a lathe and a drill press from Sears, then began building custom rifles in his basement shop. They chambered Weatherby's own wildcat rounds. The .220 Rocket, an improved .220 Swift, appeared in 1943 and is widely acknowledged as the first of Roy's high-octane line. It did not see commercial production.

Other projects fared better, and would later earn for Roy the title, "high priest of high velocity." The .270 Weatherby Magnum, a shortened, blown-out .300 H&H, was the same length as Winchester's popular .270, but held a lot more powder. The .257 and 7mm Weatherby Magnums followed in a year, on the same hull. Radiused shoulder junctures on these and the .300 Weatherby Magnum (introduced 1945) distinguished Roy's frisky rounds. The .300 was a "full-length" magnum, essentially as long as its parent. Minimal body taper gave it much greater capacity than the Super .30.

Roy eventually eased out of the insurance business and began hiring people to help him build and promote his rifles and fast-stepping cartridges. He borrowed from friends to keep the enterprise solvent. In 1946 he sold half interest to his friend and attorney Bill Wittman, for \$10,000 in venture capital. About this time Camille inherited \$21,000 from the sale of her family's Kansas farm. Roy promptly used that money to buy back the stake he'd sold. Then, in December, an auto accident put Roy on crutches. As if to

offset that event, a Weatherby rifle appeared on the cover of *The American Rifleman* the same month.

Roy was back in action by early spring, courting celebrities and industry giants to give his rifles exposure. "The day Gary Cooper walked into my shop, I knew things were looking up," he later recalled. Roy got Sheldon Coleman as a customer. He hobnobbed with Elmer Keith and Jack O'Connor, Jimmy Doolittle, Joe Foss and Robert Stack. He was photographed showing a rifle to John Wayne. Roy Rogers would use a Weatherby rifle to shoot an Alaskan brown bear. But Roy needed the favor of the hard-core shooter, too—and he went after it. Gun guru Phil Sharpe gave Weatherby prominent mention in the 1948 revised edition of "Complete Guide To Handloading." Weatherby print ads spoke to rifle enthusiasts.

Roy opened his first retail store in 1945, on Long Beach Boulevard. Five years later he moved to a better facility. That shop, on Firestone Boulevard in Southgate, remained Weatherby's home base for more than four decades. Roy put down roots, established his name, and branded his business there. Southgate handed Weatherby its corporate image. Glossy, full-color catalogs showing Weatherby rifles also pictured Roy in his office, nattily dressed, hosting war heroes, tycoons and film stars in front of an enormous mural of the African plain. The mural survives; so too Roy's conference table from that office.

During the 1940s, Roy pursued commercial ammo suppliers. He was stocking loaded Weatherby cartridges by 1948. Norma, of Sweden, has provided ammunition for the company since the early 1950s.

In May, 1949, Weatherby's (later, Weatherby Inc.) was formed. It offered stock to investors, who quickly provided Roy with an additional \$70,000 to fuel his plans for growth. Herb

Weatherby rifles in the hands of celebrities brought the rifles to prominence. Roy Rogers shot this brown bear with an early Weatherby on a Mauser action. Klein, a wealthy oil man who'd bought his first Weatherby rifle in 1946, ponied up \$10,000. He and Phil Sharpe became vice presidents in the new company.

Dean Rumbaugh, who at this writing has worked for Weatherby for an astonishing 50 years, told me: "Herb was crucial to Roy's survival early on. But those two men didn't always see eye to eye." Both strong-willed, hard-driving entrepreneurs, they had a falling out over comptroller Bill Hansen, hired to tend company books by Klein's business manager, Ralph Maddox. Employee complaints led to Hansen's dismissal in 1957, by Klein. Hansen's replacement didn't work out either. Another comptroller steadied the ship for a time. "Then Herb got Roy to hire John Coapman as sales manager," said Dean. "Coapman was a Coca Cola employee who'd also guided Herb on a hunt. Evidently he wanted Weatherby to provide him an office in Europe and give him three months leave for his hunting business." Roy's friend Elgin Gates, who was hunting all over the world and knew the outfitting industry, agreed that hiring Coapland was a bad idea. But Herb insisted. Coapland joined the firm in August, 1961 and was fired in November.

"When Roy reported the firing to Herb on his return from a hunting trip, Klein took it well," Dean remembered. "The two then agreed Klein would take a more active role in the company." But while they shared



vision and energy, their ideas concerning day-to-day operations differed. When Herb's nephew, attorney Lloyd Klein, came on as Roy's legal assistant, sparks flew again. By this time, Klein owned half interest. Roy proposed a buyout. Herb insisted on payment of \$125,000 over what he had invested.

To fill the void left by the departure of his Texas friend and associate, Roy approached Udo van Meeteren, who owned the German firm, J.P. Sauer Company. But he found Sauer had just been acquired by Dynamit-Nobel, so he had to negotiate too with Manfred Holzach, a managing director. In October, 1962, J.P. Sauer and Dynamit-Nobel committed to a deal that gave each a quarter-interest in Weatherby, Inc. But they remained partners for just four years before selling their stakes in Weatherby to Roy's pal and NASCO Industries owner Leo Roethe. He paid \$500,000, about \$187,000 less than they'd paid for it!

During the company's early years, Roy was always exploring fresh ways to market his wares. He bought a new 1950 Ford van and embellished it with images of his rifles. To develop an active, mobile sales force, he took the lead in that Ford, tirelessly working the dealer circuit. A Chrysler coupe, complete with zebra seat covers, came next. His Buick wagon featured a walnut vault, pull-out draw-

High velocity and flat trajectory are the hallmarks of Weatherby cartridges. But sportsmen find Roy's magnums useful in cover too. Weatherby offers left-hand rifles like the Mark V shown here.

ers heavy with scoped rifles for display.

Besides his eye-catching Weatherby fleet, Roy indulged a personal passion for automobiles. He collected Lincolns and Packards, owned a 1930 Franklin, a Clipper, a Patrician. The pump shotgun that later appeared in Weatherby's line as the Patrician probably owes its name to the car.

At the retail counter, on dealer visits and soliciting celebrity endorsements, Roy knew the value of face-to-face talk. An engaging personality earned him a lot of business. For years after rising postage made it a significant expense, Roy mailed Christmas cards to *everyone* who bought a Weatherby rifle! He cared about his customers and wanted them to know it!

Oddly enough, Roy spent relatively little time afield. He enjoyed hunting, but even as sportsmen initiated their new Weatherbys on safari, Roy hunted in Africa only twice—in 1948 and 1952. Those who knew him insist his purpose on both trips was to generate publicity for his rifles. In 1958, when

RIGHT: Dean Rumbaugh has worked at Weatherby for 50 years. Here he holds an early Weatherby rifle on a Shultz & Larsen action, used for the .378 Weatherby Magnum. Note the signature grip cap.

Not all winners!

Researching this article, I came across a note from W.G. Martin, Jr., who worked as a ballistician for Weatherby in 1960. It describes experimental work with a .284 Weatherby Magnum, a necked-down .300, fired in a Mark V rifle with 26-inch barrel. The cartridge drove 139-grain Hornady bullets at 3,580 fps, 154-grain Hornadys at 3,361. Martin listed charges of 78 and 76 grains 4350 powder (probably IMR) respectively. Charges of 75 and 74 grains pushed 160- and 175-grain Noslers at 3,382 and 3,138 fps. All pressures registered as high to maximum. Five-shot groups averaged 1½ inches uniformly across bullet weights.

Velocities beat those for the 7mm Weatherby Magnum by an average of

just under 150 fps, the lighter bullets showing the greatest boost. Weatherby did not load this round. Roy may have considered it "beyond overbore," with more powder than could be usefully consumed,

given the bullet diameter. Years later, the 7mm STW and the 7mm Remington Ultra Mag would test demand for a super 7.

RIGHT: A super salesman, Roy built a successful retail business, first on Long Beach Blvd., then at the famous Firestone Blvd. store in Southgate.



Fair Chase Spring 2013



Pistols too?

In 1981 Elgin Gates, who'd been shooting special handguns at long range, urged Roy to build a pistol on a rifle action developed for the .224 Weatherby. (A decade in the making, the .224 didn't appear until 1963, when Weatherby had an action to match the diminutive round.) The pistol reached production stage in Japan, where Weatherby rifles were built during the '80s. It shot tiny groups. Everything was just fine, Dean Rumbaugh recalled, "until they declared they couldn't in good conscience ship a rifle whose barrel was going to be lopped to produce a pistol!" Elgin took the first 25 handguns - "even serial number 5," added Dean. "The number Roy had traditionally held back for my collection!"

Weatherby even designed a doubleaction revolver. It was never produced. The prototype closely resembled Smith & Wesson models of the period.

The .300 Weatherby Magnum,
Roy's most famous round, dates to
1945. Most hunters prefer lighter,
sleeker bullets than this 220-grain
round-nose. Norma loads
Weatherby-brand ammunition.

the Mark V action debuted as Weatherby's own, Roy made sure it found its way to the world's great game fields. Meantime, he produced films to show the Mark V in action, and the muscle of his magnum cartridges. An unapologetic salesman with unerring instincts and a flare for the dramatic, he taped for television a shot he fired at a tree branch thick as a stevedore's thigh. The branch collapsed to the .300's blow like a tree felled by a power saw. Hunters were proving the .300 on game the world over; though to my knowledge none limbed trees quite as cleanly as Roy did in his vintage film!

In 1963, when Dean Rumbaugh moved to the shipping department, "Lawrence Warehouse was buying and storing Weatherby rifles. It was essentially a clever loan. Roy got up-front money to operate. Then, to fill orders, he bought rifles back from Lawrence!" Roy sold barrels and loading equipment, as well as rifles and ammo, from his retail outlets. He and Fred Huntington of RCBS were friends. In 1964 Weatherby added 10,000 square feet to its Firestone Boulevard facility for production and warehousing. Two years later it leased a nearby skating rink and converted it. In 1971 Roy bought the rink.

But Los Angeles, the City of Angels, was changing. Vandalism and violent crime had cast long shadows on places once viewed as heaven itself by immigrants. And while Roy still held the corporate reins, his techsavvy young son Ed was already deep into the mechanics of running a rifle company. Ed left during the mid-1970s to spend three years in Applegate, Oregon. He returned to steer the firm into another era. Roy and Camille had two daughters as well. The youngest, Connie, married Paul Shepherd, an attorney who has served as the company's legal counsel.

Herb Klein, ever a close family friend, died in 1974. Roy Weatherby lived another 14 years, most of them actively engaged with his company.

When Ed moved up the coast to a rural homesite, and Brad Ruddell, new vice president of sales and marketing, endured a commute from even farther north, all hands figured relocation was imminent. Weatherby set up shop in rural, picturesque Atascadero in late 1994 and early 1995. Twelve years later it sought a new home, this time in Paso Robles, an equally enchanting place on the central California coast.

But Ed has been careful not to change the company's reputation. While Roy knew how to build rifles that shooters wanted—and how to make them want what he had to sell—he was as admired for his integrity in business. He tried to give customers more than they paid for. Ed and his crew hew to the same standards.

The rifles and cartridges

Roy Weatherby built his first rifles on the most available turn-bolt actions of his day—mainly the 1898 Mauser, 1903 Springfield and 1917 Enfield. He also used Model 70 Winchesters and other actions supplied by customers. The first commercial Weatherbys were re-stocked, re-barreled FN Mausers. Roy began importing those actions in 1949. He started contouring and deep-hole-drilling his own barrels, then fitting the metal to walnut stocks he fashioned by hand. He installed Jaeger triggers, and bought safeties and scope mounts from friend Maynard Buehler. In 1954 Weatherby announced its Imperial scope, with adjustments atop the tube. One was a focusing knob; the other incorporated windage and elevation dials. That scope was made by Hertel and Reuse. A year later Weatherby contracted with Timken for its barrel steel. 'T' was stamped on the right-hand side of these barrels. Roy liked Douglas barrels as replacements in custom work. He rebarreled completed rifles to keep warehouse inventory modest and overhead low.

Part of what made Roy's rifles special was their chamberings. His first belted magnum cartridges—.257, .270, 7mm and .300—all launched bullets at over 3,300 fps. Not long before, the .270 Winchester and .300 H&H had awed sportsmen with midweight bullets at 3,000 fps. More common in deer and elk camps, the .30-06 and .300 Savage were much slower. "With a Weatherby, you could hold dead-on to 300 yards," recalled one hunter. "Those screamers added a football field to accepted range limits of the day." I recall a dark afternoon in Idaho and a buck behind a thicket. Prone, with a .257 Weatherby slinged up and steady on my pack, I waited. At last the deer moved, its ribs now visible. Shading into the wind, I crushed the trigger. The 110-grain AccuBond at 3,400 fps covered the 330 yards in a blink and struck the animal like a bolt from Zeus. I had held only a hand's-width high.

Roy thought big bullets should travel fast too. A 180-grain Nosler from the .300 Weatherby exits at 3,250 fps. It carries a ton of punch to 400 yards—as much as you'll get from an '06 at 200!

The .270 Magnum, its 2.54-inch case trimmed to fit standard-length actions, is one of my favorite cartridges. I used one not long

ago to tag a Montana elk. Though seldom so credited, the .270 Magnum provided a template for belted magnums with other headstamps. Winchester's .458, announced in 1956, was the first. The .264 and .338 Winchester Magnums and later 7mm Remington Magnum, with Norma's .308 and .358, shared all but the Weatherby's radiused shoulder. The .300 Winchester followed, with a slightly longer hull but shorter neck.

In 1957 Roy and his engineer Fred Jennie developed the Weatherby Mark V rifle action—at 36 ounces, a heavy mechanism. Its forged receiver had an integral recoil lug. The full-diameter bolt locked with nine interrupted-thread lugs and enclosed the case head. When the action was tested on a completed .300 Weatherby Magnum rifle, the lab crew kept increasing charges of IMR 4350 powder, from 84 to 86 to 88 grains... all the way to a caseful of 92, which was leveled off and compressed by seating the 180-grain bullet. The rifle shrugged off this overload. Then, surely with trepidation, the lads in the white coats jammed a 180-grain bullet in the rifle's throat and chambered a cartridge behind it! After firing, the bolt needed a tap from a mallet, but incredibly, the case was intact and the extractor pulled it free! As standard .300 loads generate 60,000 psi, the double-bullet caper pushed pressures off the chart! After 17 such proof firings, that Mark V action was still in "excellent working condition, with no damage whatsoever....

In a 1958 letter to Lucian Cary of *True* magazine, Roy announced the 10th edition of *Tomorrow's Rifles Today*, with photos of the new Mark V. "I think this is the finest, strongest, smoothest action ever produced," wrote Roy. "I do want to clarify this point, that this action was my idea and my design. With the help of Fred Jennie, who is a very fine engineer ... we have completed

the world's finest rifle." (WW II veteran Fred Jennie applied his talents to other firearms, including an autoloading .22 that, in the mid-60s, became Weatherby's first rimfire. When Roy died, Fred retired. He passed away in 2007.)

The Mark V was big enough to replace the Danish Shultz & Larsen action, which Roy had used for his .378 Magnum cartridge, then four years old. At 2.91 inches, the .378 case was not only .06 longer than the .300 H&H Magnum's; it was also .07 larger in diameter (.603 compared to .532 at the belt). In designing this herculean cartridge, Roy may have envisioned a belted .416 Rigby. Indeed, the subsequent .460 and .416 Weatherby Magnums, introduced in 1958 and 1989. incorporate the .378's hull. Before the Mark V, only the Shultz & Larsen and costly Magnum Mausers (among readily available actions) could swallow the .378. Weatherby rifles chambered for such enormous rounds sported dense, heavy mesquite instead of the colorful, figured but more open-grained Claro walnut that graced less violent Weatherbys.

The rakish high comb, flared grip and angular, reverse-slant forend tip of Mark V stocks dating to the 1950s came to define the "Weatherby profile"—though the company's custom shop would later offer alternative contours. By the late 1970s, Weatherby had established a relationship with Calico, a California walnut supplier that remains the primary source for Mark V (and now Vanguard) wood.

The first Mark V receivers were manufactured by Pacific Foundry

During the late 1950s, hunters proved the Weatherby Mark V in tough, remote places like this British Columbia goat country.



Smoothbores!

Since the '60s, Weatherby has contracted with various makers to build shotguns to its specs. The first Regency over/under came from Antonio Zoli of Spain. Nikko, in Japan, built the Olympian. In the late '70s Weatherby branded over/ unders and side-by-sides from Japan's SKB. Subsequent hinged-breech models from Fausti of Italy maintained Weatherby's reputation for high-quality shotguns. So too the PA-08 and SA-08 pump and autoloader. The firm acceded to market demand with tactical-style repeaters like the PA-459 Threat Response shotgun. Mike Schwiebert, now Weatherby's marketing chief, admits these guns have little in common with the classy hunting rifles Roy Weatherby built by hand in his Los Angeles basement. Ditto the new "Weatherby X," line of rifles and shotguns with graphics, names and dimensions for young shooters.



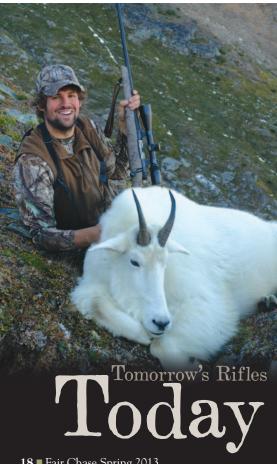
INSET: Roy Weatherby and Fred Jennie designed the Mark V with interrupted-thread breeching and a full-diameter bolt. The bolt lift is a shallow 54 degrees.





TOP: This cutaway shows the Mark V's interrupted-thread lockup, its full-diameter bolt, glass bedding in the recoil lug abutment. The magazine box is for the full-length .300 and .340 Magnums.

BELOW: A left-hand Mark V in .270 Weatherby took this mountain goat with one shot. In the 1940s and '50s, Roy hawked the speed and smashing impact of his magnums-templates for the competition!



International (in California) from sand castings. Some of these didn't pass muster, so Roy tapped J.P. Sauer, where receivers were forged. German Weatherbys date to 1959. Incidentally, you won't find Mark Vs with single-digit serial numbers. PFI rifles were numbered from 15,000 into the 16,000s; Sauer-built actions start at 20,000.

In 1977 Weatherby shifted Mark V production from Germany to Japan, a costsaving measure. The Mark V came stateside again in 1996, when Saco Defense contracted to build the nine-lug magnum version in Saco, Maine. This 150-year-old complex had been upgraded during World War II to produce M2 50-caliber and M60 30-caliber machine guns. An "ISO9001" firm, top-rated for holding tolerances, Saco had hammerforging machines to produce the barrels Weatherby wanted. Calico supplied walnut blanks to Lone Tree Manufacturing in South Dakota, which shaped Mark V stocks.

Assembly of Weatherby's new six-lug Ultra Lightweight rifles (for the likes of the .30-06 and small-bore Weatherby Magnums) went to Acrometal, in Brainerd, Minnesota. More modest than the Saco facility, Acrometal's plant impressed me as very clean, with the latest in CNC machines and electronic quality-control instruments. John Krieger provided button-rifled Criterion barrels. Bell & Carlson got the synthetic stock contract. Adjustable triggers yielded consistent sear engagement of .012 to .015. Barrels for the Super VamintMaster rifles were cryogenically treated and hand-lapped. By 2001, Acrometal's performance convinced Ed Weatherby and company to bring all Mark V manufacture to Brainerd. By this time the Beuhler scope mounts on Weatherby rifles had been replaced by those from the Carolina shop of Dave Talley, now operated by Gary Turner.

Though Roy Weatherby got his start building custom rifles, the firm's custom shop went dark briefly as all efforts focused on the assembly line. Custom rifles returned to Weatherby in 1998. Including "banquet rifles" for conservation groups like the Wild Turkey Federation and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, they now account for about 10 percent of Weatherby revenues.

During the first 40 years of Mark V production, Weatherby introduced several more cartridges for its flagship rifle. The .340, a necked-up .300, came in 1962. Six years later Weatherby announced its .240, a belted round but on .30-06-size brass, not the Holland case. The .30-378 arrived much later (1998), in response to a request from Alabama's Redstone Arsenal for a round that would push a bullet at over 6,000 fps! In tests,

a lightweight bullet reached 5,000 fps. Hunting bullets clock between 3,300 and 3,500 fps. Though the .30-378 reacts violently when you squeeze the trigger, shooters have flocked to it. In fact, 15 years after its debut, it's still a top-selling magnum in the Mark V.

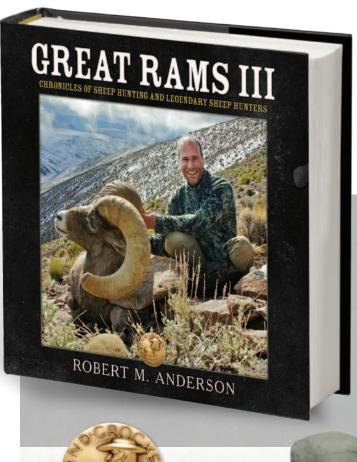
A .338-378 was bound to follow. When the .340 arrived in 1962, wildcatters had already necked the .378 to .33. I'd borrowed a rifle so bored to smash rocks at long range, but never had a chance to hunt with it. Decades later, I snared a Mark V in .338-378. Ken Oehler's chronograph clocked Normaloaded 250-grain Noslers at 3,005 fps from the 26-inch barrel. They drilled sub-minute groups at 300 yards—and brought 2,500 ft-lbs to 500 yards. To reduce the ear-rending blast from my rifle's factory-installed brake, I removed it. But recoil then whacked me so hard, I screwed it right back on!

Not long ago an arguably more practical round returned to Weatherby's line. The .375 Weatherby Magnum dates to 1945. It's essentially the .300 Weatherby necked up. Put another way, it's a blown-out .375 H&H that kicks bullets 250 fps faster.

The recent trend to long-range shooting has fueled interest in cartridges of moon-rocket size and performance. It has also prompted Weatherby to offer TRR (Threat Response Rifle) versions of its Mark V, with sniper-style stocks and long, heavy barrels. Chambered to .300, .30-378 and .338-378 Weatherby, they also come in .300 Winchester and .338 Lapua.

In the late 1980s Weatherby introduced its Vanguard rifle, on Howa actions. The Vanguard Series 2, announced in 2012, brought a better trigger, three-position safety, walnut or Griptonite synthetic stock and sub-minute accuracy guarantee. A detachable box magazine option can be ordered as a kit to retrofit earlier Vanguards.

This past year, Weatherby's flagship rifle came home to California. "The Mark V now begins life in our own Paso Robles plant," Ed Weatherby told me. "And in 2013 it joins the Vanguard Series 2 in our Range Certified program." Rifles so marked are guaranteed to put three shots inside an inch at 100 yards, with factory ammunition. Roy would approve. The snazzy rifle and high-velocity cartridges that came to define Weatherby—the man, the company, the culture—belong where he started living his dream. While the slogans have changed, and advertising is less flambovant than when Herb Klein first bought company stock, and you won't see Weatherby trucks with gun logos on Los Angeles byways, the tag "Tomorrow's Rifles Today" still makes sense to hunters the world over.



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