

The outfit reviewed is a Kimber Classic Model 8400 in .325 WSM with a Vixen LVF 1.5-6x42 scope which has an illuminated red dot reticle.

The Kimber Classic 8400 is the walnut stocked and blued short action model designed for the Winchester range of short magnum cartridges. I bought this rifle in 2008, three years after the .325 was introduced, as my all round deer rifle, as I believe the cartridge offers impressive versatility for deer hunting in Australia, being flat shooting enough with the lighter projectiles for fringe hunting whilst having more than enough short range clout for bush stalking with the heavier projectiles.

By Garry Stoll

the
Kimber
Classic .325 WSM

The .325 WSM was the last of the short magnum cartridges introduced by Winchester in its short magnum range. From its release it seems to be been a somewhat controversial cartridge, being the only one in the range not in a traditional American calibre, with the others being .270, 7mm and 308. Given the previous lacklustre history of the only other factory 8mm calibre round developed in America, the 8mm Remington Magnum, the choice by Winchester to bring out their WSM case in 8mm rather than a .338 caused a great deal of discussion and wringing of hands amongst gun writers across the world and no doubt sold many a magazine.

But to me such wailing misses the point. Whether the .325 should really have been improved by being an extra .015 inches larger is a rather pointless argument given that it is effective enough to propel .323 diameter projectiles from 180gns to 250gns from between 3,000 and 2,500 fps.

Long time 8mm fan and noted American hunting and gun writer, Craig Boddington, in an article in Peterson's Rifle Shooter described the .325 WSM as being 'about versatility; upper end versatility. If you do not hunt anything larger than elk, this cartridge probably isn't for you. But if you are looking for a cartridge that is powerful enough for very large game, yet still flat-shooting enough for deer sized game in open country, the .325 has much to offer. As a bonus, it won't kick you into next week.' For elk read sambar.

Finn Aagaard, the renowned African and later American hunter and gun writer, was also an 8mm fan. His first serious big game rifle in Africa was an old Mauser in 8x60 which he used for a number of years until the barrel became worn out and unusable. He once wrote that "the 8x60 drove 196gn soft nose and solid bullets to an alleged 2,580 fps and proved utterly reliable on everything I tried it on, given reasonably adequate bullet placement." Everything included a wide range of African antelope including eland and also one buffalo.

So during this article I will be looking at the merits of .325 WSM in its own right as a hunting cartridge for Australian deer hunting conditions. My old copy of *Barnes's Cartridges of the World* lists no fewer than nineteen 8mm hunting cartridges with all but two, being the previously mentioned ill-fated 8mm Remington and the American based wildcat, the 8mm/06. Being European and given that most are early 1900 developments enforces the fact that the 8mm calibre has had a long and distinguished career.

The European 8mm cartridge that comes closest to the .325 WSM, the 8x68S was developed in 1938 and is described by Barnes as being 'in the same class as the .338 Winchester Magnum. It is one of the best European cartridges for all-round use in North America.' Barnes accompanying load ballistic chart indicates similar performance between the .325WSM and the 8x68S. However the greater case capacity of the 8x68S would I believe result in the 8x68S being faster than the 325WSM, although performance would be for all practical purposes be identical.

The diameter of 8mm converts to .323 which is exactly half way between the .308 and .338, and has I believe the worthwhile features of both. For example I can comfortably achieve 3,000 fps with either the 180gn Nosler Ballistic Tip or Barnes Triple Shock for long range work and at the other end, a comfortable 2,500 fps with the long

250gn Woodleigh for bush stalking, all with a mix of common medium burning powders such as ADI 2209, Winchester 760 or Reloder 17.

Its ability to shoot flat as well as being able to be loaded to suitable shorter range bush hunting is a flexibility that does not necessarily make it any better than a .338 or a 30 cal, but certainly makes it eminently suitable for a range of sambar hunting scenarios.

Winchester has currently available 3 different factory loaded cartridges for the .325. An 180gn Ballistic Tip at 3,060 fps, a 200gn Accubond at 2,950 and a 220gn Power Point at 2850 fps. From the 24" barrel of my Kimber, the 200gn achieves near the factory specifications at 2920 fps, but the 220gn will only reach 2720. These factory loads led Nick Harvey to write that the .325 WSM 'is a nice easy-going, user friendly cartridge for a big bore' that, with the Winchester 200gn Accubond load, 'actually has a slightly

flatter trajectory than Winchester's 140gn Accubond load for the .270 Winchester'.

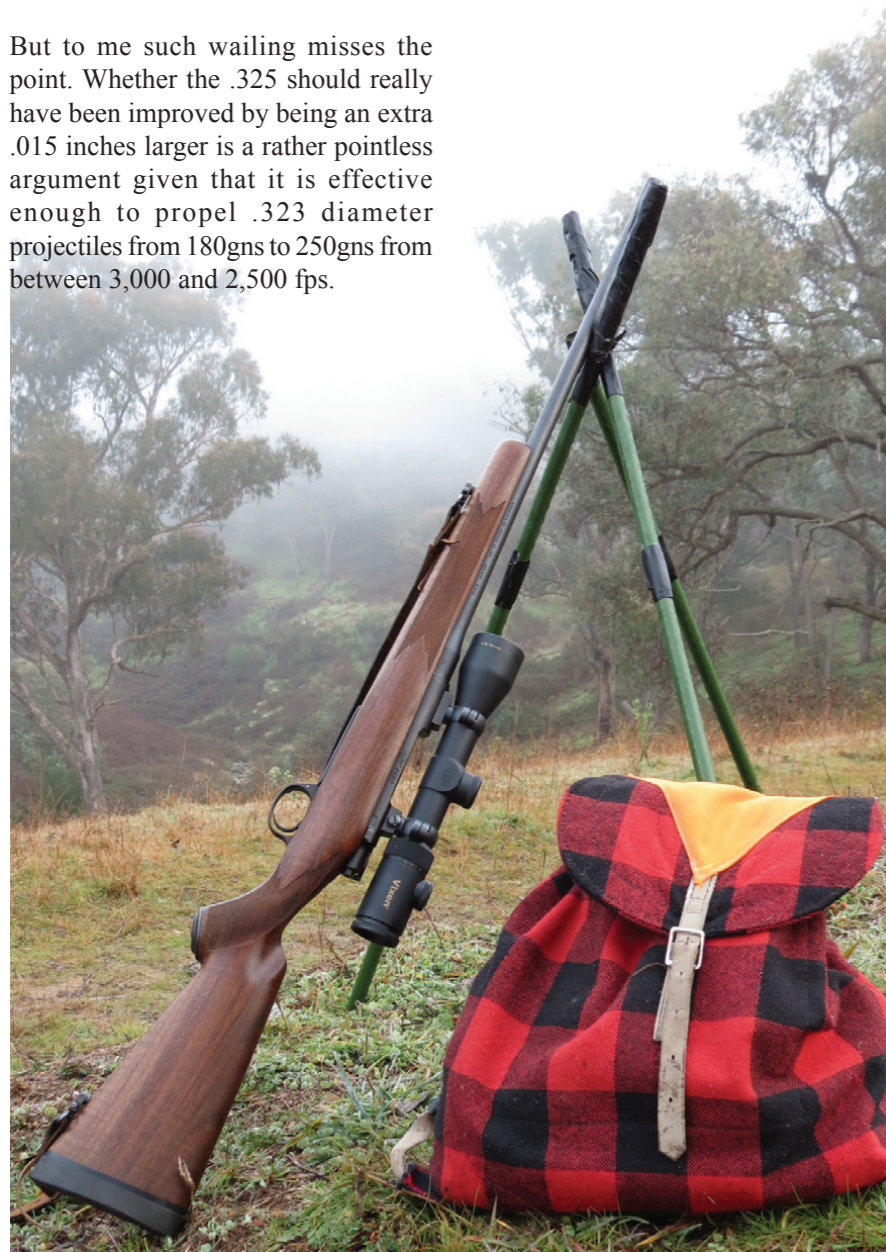
A fourth load featuring a 220gn bonded core projectile called the Power Max has also been announced by Winchester, but my efforts to locate a box have proven fruitless. Should this load ever arrive in Australia it could well prove to be the ideal factory sambar load in the .325 given the success of the bonded core Woodleigh projectile of similar weight in my reloads.

I have used the factory load featuring the 200gn Accubond bullet, which has a bonded core with a plastic tip, on enough fallow deer with complete penetration from any range or angle with emphatic knock down, to believe it would also be equally successful on the bigger red deer or sambar.

My early reloading attempts were based around the 200gn Woodleigh PP. A mild load of 65gns of 2209 gave

about 2800fps with great accuracy and terminal performance on fallow, goats and pigs. I also used this combination during a couple of culling exercises on several large and heavy feral animals and whilst they still worked well, I recovered a number of projectiles that had opened up to such a large degree that I felt may have limited their penetration. I have since moved up to the 220gn Woodleigh which has provided a much more satisfactory combination of expansion and penetration.

Another favourite has proven to be the Woodleigh 250gn round nose. Gregor Woods in his book, *African Rifles*, argues strongly that the best combination for stalking in Africa's bushveld conditions, which involves stalking brushy terrain for animals that are roughly in the 400-700 pounds weight class at ranges from 10 metres to 150 metres, is a bullet of about .338 in calibre weighing 250gns at about 2400 fps.



Taken at nearly 300m in open farm country with a 220gn Woodleigh PP, this beautiful fallow doe was taken for venison.

He states that in his experience this combination gives adequate trajectory combined with wonderful penetration and dependable bullet performance as a result of the moderate velocity and sectional density of this weight projectile. His description of bushveld hunting could also be an identical description of bush stalking for sambar.

Wood's opinion is based on the long success in Africa of the .318 Westley Richards. Developed in 1910 the .318 WR (a 250gn .330 diameter bullet at 2,400 fps), became the most widely used British medium bore in Africa. Its success, Woods believed was based on an 'ideal combination of bullet diameter, weight and velocity' which gave reliable penetration and bullet performance, and for the 'hunters of non-dangerous game who did not want the extra recoil and rifle weight of a 9.3x62 or a .375 H&H, the .318 was far and away the best killer.'

Whilst the Woodleigh 250gn 8mm projectile is slightly under the bullet diameter favoured by Woods, it matches all the other criteria and as it exceeds the section density of the .338 calibre, .346 against .313, penetration should even be greater. However this projectile weight in the .325 seems to be dismissed in nearly all magazine articles about the .325 that I have read as being either too long or heavy, but it has worked for me out of the Kimber.

Loads for the 250gn projectile were hard to come by until Geoff MacDonald from Woodleigh was kind enough to respond to an email and suggested I try 60gn of 2209. This load gave 2570 fps but pressures were slightly warm in the Kimber and I dropped back to 58gns for 2460 fps and I am yet to recover any from game. Typically there is a dull thud and an animal lying on its back with four legs pointing to the sky.

During the time that I have owned this rifle I have tested and used the Winchester 200gn Accubond as well as a range of reloads featuring projectiles

such as the 180gn Nosler Ballistic Tip, 180 & 200gn Barnes Triple Shocks, 195gn Hornadys, 220gn Swift A Frames and Woodleigh's in 200 and 220gn Protected Points and 250gn Round Noses. I have never found either a lack of variety or availability of suitable projectiles in 8mm. Unfortunately no matter what I do, the factory Winchester 220gn Power Point loads and the Kimber do not like each other, and the best they will do is about 3 MOA. This sometimes happens and rifles will like what they like.

I am fortunate as the favoured 220gn Woodleigh load shoots exactly 25mm higher than the 250gn Woodleigh out of the Kimber at 100m. This allows me to use the 220gn as my all round load, as it

is sighted in to be 50mm high at 100m, which means it will shoot reasonably flat to 300m. I can still use the heavier projectile for bush stalking at ranges up to 150m. I am not always this lucky with my other rifles.

Reloder 17 also deserves a quick mention. Specifically developed in 2008 for short magnum capacities and although rated as having the same burn speed as IMR 4350, it has in the Kimber achieved higher velocities than either ADI 2209 or even Win 760, the powder reportedly favoured by the short magnums.

The Kimber Classic 8400 is built around a short control feed action which was designed specifically for the Winchester short magnum range



of cartridges. It features a 600mm long reasonably light match grade barrel, timber classic stock which comes from the factory bedded including two aluminium action pillars and an oil finished stock featuring chequering of 20 lines to the inch. The stock also has a 25mm decelerator recoil pad which is certainly needed as the .325 does produce some significant recoil, as bare the rifle only weighs a bit over 3kg. With the Vixen scope and 4 cartridges on board this rises to only 3.8kgs (8½lbs). A nice weight to carry up and down in sambar country but somewhat brutal off the bench.

Suggested loads for the .325 include: (see table at right)

CAUTION: MAXIMUM LOADS LISTED START 10% BELOW AND WORK UP IN YOUR RIFLE.

Projectile	Powder	Velocity (fps)	Source
200gn Woodleigh PP	67gn 2209	2930	Nick Harvey Sporting Shooter November 2006
220gn Woodleigh PP	62gn 2209	2665	Nick Harvey Sporting Shooter November 2006
200 Barnes X	66gn Reloder 19	2825	Nick Harvey Sporting Shooter April 2006
200 Barnes X	64gn Win 760	2891	Nick Harvey Sporting Shooter June 2012
220gn Sierra BT	64gn 2209	2730	Nick Harvey Sporting Shooter April 2006
220gn Sierra BT	63gn Win 760	2768	Nick Harvey Sporting Shooter November 2006
180gn Nosler Ballistic tip	65gn 2209	2942	Breil Jackson Guns & Game Jan - March 2009
200gn Nosler Accubond	65gn Win 760	2832	Breil Jackson Guns & Game Jan - March 2009
200gn Barnes Triple Shock	65gn Reloder 17	3000	Author
220gn Woodleigh PP	63gn Reloder 17	2760	Author
250gn Woodleigh RN	58gn 2209	2460	Author



Testing of these projectiles by firing through deer skin into wet newspaper at 100 metres had the following results:

Projectile	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Penetration	Retained Weight	Retained Weight %	Expanded Diameter
200gn Win Accubond factory load	2920	360 mm	146 gn	73	18 mm
200gn Win Power Point factory load	2720	375 mm	154 gn	70	19.5 mm
200gn Barnes Triple Shock	3000	460 mm	198 gn	99	17 mm
220gn Swift A Frame	2710	550 mm	207 gn	94	15.5 mm
220gn Woodleigh Protected Point	2760	410 mm	177gn	80	24 mm
250gn Woodleigh Roundnose	2460	450 mm	213 gn	85	27 mm

The action has been designed to incorporate many features of the famed M'98 Mauser. It has the Mauser style non rotating claw extractor, controlled feed, fixed ejector blade which unlike the Mauser does not split the left bolt lug, but fits into a slot cut under the bolt lug at about 4 o'clock and a three position safety catch. It needs to be said that although this safety is very positive it is by no means ergonomic and cannot be released quickly or silently as the rifle is shouldered.

Feeding and extraction have been positive and flawless. The action is held into place with the traditional two bedding screws, a one piece trigger guard and floor plate assembly with the release for the floor plate in the trigger guard and a match grade

trigger. The only piece of plastic I can find on the all steel Kimber action is the cartridge lifter.

The trigger is something special. As it arrived from the factory it was about 4lbs but it is fully and easily adjustable. As a measure of how simple I was able to adjust it down to 2½ lbs. It breaks clean and crisp without any discernible movement, creep or backlash. Furthermore the Kimber action lock time is reputedly 2.0 milliseconds, which proved too fast for me to test. This feature combined with the crisp release enhances the accuracy of this rifle.

One feature of the action that also needs mentioning is the magazine and bolt lengths. In a direct comparison with the Winchester 70 WSM action, which is often lauded as the best purpose built WSM action; the magazine lengths of my Winchester 7mm WSM and the Kimber both measure exactly 77mm in length, yet the bolt of the Kimber only measures 165mm against 173mm for the Winchester.

This simple comparison adds weight to Kimber's claim that they built the 8400 series action from the ground up to suit the WSM cartridges by utilising minimum dimensions. The action is also shorter than the smallest and rarest original sporting Mauser action, the Kurtz, which is 206.4 mm long against the Kimber which is 200mm long. The Kimber magazine holds 3 cartridges and will permit cartridges to have a maximum overall length of 76mm.

The scope that I chose for the Kimber is a 1.5-6x42 Vixen that is imported by Errol & Lynne Mason. The Vixen range of scopes are fairly new in Australia although they have been manufacturing optics in Japan since 1949. It has several features that make them worthy of consideration; fully multi coated lenses to allow the highest possible light transmission on all internal and external surfaces, a rugged aircraft grade aluminium one piece tube, nitrogen filled for total fog proofing, O-rings for waterproofing, long eye relief off between 85-100 mm and an illuminated reticle.

When I originally set up the Kimber I had on it a well-known European 1.5-6x42. However being a traditional European scope, the reticle was in the first focal plane and when set on 1.5 power the reticle was extremely fine which bugged me enough to look around for a replacement. When I looked at the Vixen range I could not see any difference in clarity or brightness between the two scopes so the choice was an easy one. Plus the reticle is both illuminated with 11 settings and is in the more popular second focal plane. I find that the first setting is all I have ever needed to set the illuminated reticle to a fine red dot, which I have found to be perfect for all hunting situations. Because it is small, the red dot is also perfect for zeroing.

The Vixen is very compact being only 275mm long. This creates the only down side with the Vixen 1.5-6x42, as there is only 127mm between the objective and ocular lenses for mounting, which is extremely short and it is therefore better suited to shorter actions rather than long action rifles, which would require special mounts. I believe it would be worth persevering with on a long action as its clarity, precise adjustment and illuminated reticle make it an excellent hunting scope. On the Kimber there is only about 0.5mm clearance for scope mounting but this works due to the Vixen's long eye relief.

Some may question my choice of a scope with a maximum magnification of only 6, given it would be easy to form the opinion when reading many of today's deer hunting magazines that it is fashionable to use higher power scopes. However I am old enough to have lived through the fox skin boom of the late seventies. As a poor kid, coins were scarce so for years we used a plain old 6x Tasco on Dad's .222 to shoot hundreds upon hundreds of foxes without ever knowing that our scope did not have enough magnification. I have always found that smaller more compact scopes do not detract from a rifles overall balance or handling

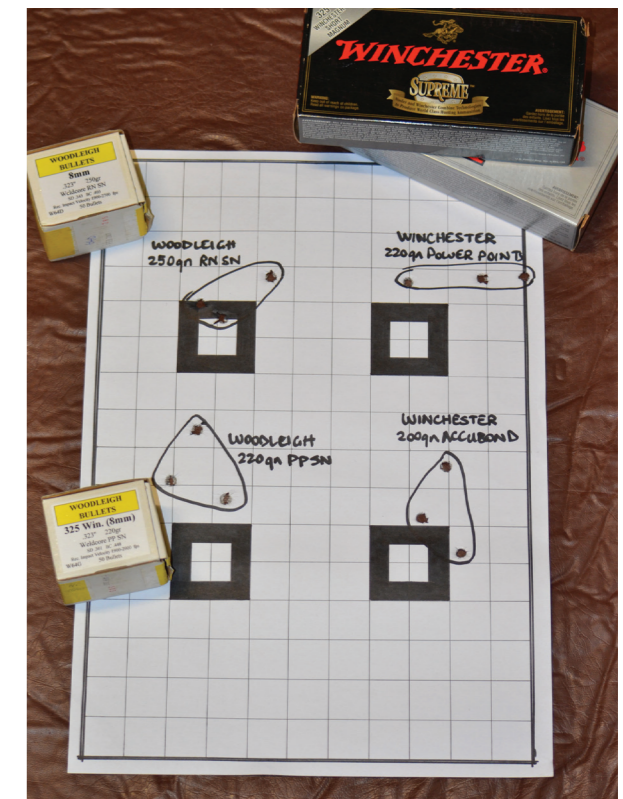
and given the optical brightness and clarity of the Vixen 1.5-6, it also does not give anything away to bigger scopes.

Should you ever search online for a European scope manufacturers description of their 1.5-6x42 scopes, you may well find descriptions such as 'our most versatile scope. Excellent for close-range hunting on large game, while its 6x upper limit allows precise bullet placement at all but the longest distances. A large objective lens provides outstanding low-light performance, and a large field of view makes it highly efficient for driven game, stalking, and high seat hunting.'

I chose the timber stocked Classic over the Kevlar Montana for purely old fashioned reasons. Whilst I own a Kimber Montana .308 for pig shooting from a quad bike as it is indestructible, I do prefer my rifles to have timber stocks. I figure that when the hills in sambar country become too steep, it will be nice to relive the memories of hunts long past in worn bluing and honourable scars on the stock.

Among the hunters I know, four have sold their previous rifles and moved to .325s, mostly Browning X Bolts. The Boys at Elks in Albury also tell me that the .325 remains a constant seller, so it may be that its attributes are starting to become more recognised.

In his book, Safari Rifles II, Craig Boddington, wrote about the .325, 'I believe it may prove the most useful of all the new short magnums. Again, the 8mm hits harder than a .30-calibre but, especially in the .325 WSM form, offers considerably less recoil than the fast .33s.'



Above: A feature of this Kimber 8400 in .325 is that it will shoot Woodleigh 220gn PP, seen bottom left of target, almost exactly 25mm higher than Woodleigh 250gn RN projectiles at top left. It likes Winchester 200gn Accubond factory loads at bottom right but can't live with Winchester factory 220gn PowerPoint loads at top right.

The selection of a hunting rifle is a personal thing, influenced by experience, peers, budgets and opportunity. No two hunters will share the same opinions, which makes it difficult to write about your own rifle and give definite recommendations. However since owning my Kimber in .325 WSM and its Vixen 1.5-6x42 scope, I do firmly believe that this combination is as close I as have been able to come over a long period to being the ideal combination for the sambar.

Given its light weight, ability to shoot flat or close, reliable Mauser style action, manageable recoil and compact and bright scope, and I would recommend it without hesitation.

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- L to R:
1. factory loaded Winchester 200gn Accubond with recovered projectile;
 2. factory loaded Winchester 220gn Power Point with recovered projectile;
 3. loaded .325WSM with 220gn Swift A frame;
 4. 220gn Swift A frame projectile and recovered projectile;
 5. hand loaded .325 WSM with 200gn Barnes TSX;
 6. 200gn Barnes TSX projectile and recovered projectile;
 7. hand loaded .325 WSM with 220gn Woodleigh PP;
 8. 220gn Woodleigh PP projectile and recovered projectile;
 9. hand loaded .325 WSM with 250gn Woodleigh RN,
 10. 250gn Woodleigh RN projectile and recovered projectile.



- L to R: A range of wonderful sambar cartridges
1. 30-06;
 2. 300 WSM;
 3. 300 Win Mag;
 4. 325 WSM;
 5. 338 RCM;
 6. 338 Win Mag;
 7. 35 Whelen Imp;
 8. 9.3x62.

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