

Get Close and Use a Good Bullet!

By Brian Gallup

I recently tested the Peregrine Monolithic's Bushmaster bullet in .577NE, and Cutting Edge Bullet's Raptor in .50-110 Winchester on four Cape buffalo. I've got some good news, but first a little background on the bullets.

Both of these bullets were designed on opposite sides of the world at about the same time, by two hunters with no connection to each other. They each set out on their own to make a better bullet, not just by improving an existing design, but by designing an all-new bullet for a higher level of terminal performance.

The Peregrine Bushmaster Bullet

In South Africa, a well-known professional hunter and marksman, Adriaan Rall, drew from his experience and designed the first Peregrine Bushmaster bullet. In 2009 he took his creation to a defence industry manufacturer in Pretoria, Specialty Design Engineering (SME), for some short production runs. Rall's patented bullet worked so well for professional hunters that Peregrine Bullets Inc. was formed and now produces over 400 different bullets.

Rall's innovative design includes a machined brass tapered insert in the nose of the monolithic bullet that, upon impact, initiates controlled expansion. The wide flat meplat of .350 inch on a .585 caliber bullet is considered ideal for dangerous game.

The Cutting Edge Raptor Bullet

While Adriaan Rall was perfecting his excellent Peregrine Bushmaster bullet in South Africa, Michael McCourry, a seasoned dangerous game hunter from South Carolina, USA was developing his own dangerous-game bullet. It would be aptly called the Raptor. Michael said in his southern way, "I started the project when a hippo tried to bite me."

Working closely with Cutting Edge Bullets and North Fork Bullets, the result was a monolithic solid bullet and a unique fragmenting bullet. Both bullets feature a 13 degree straight ogive and a wide flat meplat that is 67% of bullet diameter. Both the Solid and Raptor have the same point of impact at 50 meters for each pairing bullet.

The Raptor is a monolithic bullet designed to change configuration after two inches of penetration. The top portion of the bullet consistently blows off into six blades that move away from the main wound channel in a star pattern, causing massive tissue damage.

For each Raptor bullet there is a pointed polymer tip that you can snap into the hexagon hollow point to enhance external ballistics and also enable the Raptor to penetrate a bit further before the blades blow off and go into action.

I have used the Cutting Edge Solid several times on cape buffalo before with excellent deep/straight penetration through meat and bone, so I didn't need to test it on this hunt.

The Hunt

Alliwyn Oberholzer at Peregrine Bullets told me that at least 2,000 fps muzzle velocity was recommended for good expansion on the Bushmaster bullet. However, my old .577 NE single shot didn't like that much pressure and I didn't like that much recoil, so I loaded the 700-grain Peregrine Bushmaster to just 1,700 fps and hoped for the best.

I asked my PH, Pieter Kriel of Mkulu Safaris if I could get each shot on all four buffalo to be a similar close range, broadside, shoulder hit, for comparing bullet terminal performance. He chuckled and suggested we try a hide at the water hole to start with. This style of cape buffalo hunting was new for me and it turned out to be a lot more fun than I imagined. We watched different birds and animals come and go, but when a herd of thirsty buffalo came pounding in it was spectacular. There was a big Acacia tree near their favourite drinking spot and we paced it off at 40 meters. This was perfect. There was lots of room in the hide for Pieter Kriel, Johan the back-up

PH, Samuel the tracker, my wife Sandy with the video camera, and me with my single-shot, break open .577 NE.

Around 9 a.m. a mixed herd of about 35 buffalo came clattering in at a high trot. They stayed for nearly half an hour and it was pretty exciting. We wanted an old bull but didn't see one. About two hours later a small group of about 15 bulls, cows and yearlings came shuffling in. They all jammed up around their favourite drinking spot. My scope was turned down to 3x and I had the crosshairs on an old white faced bull standing near our acacia tree. I couldn't see the bottom half of his shoulder as a yearling was standing in front of him. Pieter was watching the same bull. "Yes!" he hissed, "that's the one. When you get a clear shot, take him."

I just couldn't wait. I squeezed the shot off with my crosshairs a few inches over the yearling's back at what looked to me like a medium-high shoulder shot.

With the recoil and muzzle blast from my .577 NE I couldn't see where my bullet went. All I saw was the herd scattering and my old bull just standing there exactly the same as he was before I fired. I had never seen a buffalo react like that and I started to panic. I must have missed! I opened my single shot and grabbed another cartridge without looking down. Pieter was silent and I took it as a bad sign. The bull stood motionless. Then I saw his head drop just a bit. Johan was the first to speak. He sounded like a man who had just witnessed an accident.

"Brian..." he started slowly, "I...I think you got him." As soon as he spoke the bull lowered his head and crashed to the ground without taking a step.

The 700-grain Peregrine Bushmaster bullet had shattered the bull's left shoulder and torn straight through the lungs leaving a wide wound channel. The .585 diameter bullet had expanded to nearly .724 of an inch. This was an outstanding terminal performance considering that the bullet was going 300 fps slower than recommended. We were all very impressed and I didn't need to test another Peregrine bullet. The Bushmaster was good to go on buffalo !

I was keen to see how the 410-grain .500 caliber Raptor from Cutting Edge Bullets would perform. I was a little bit sceptical about it's high tech design.

The next morning, bright and early, we were all back in the hide. I had switched my 27 inch .577 NE barrel out for a 22 inch .500-110 Winchester barrel. My 410-grain Raptors were loaded at 1,950 fps muzzle velocity. They were sure easier to shoot than the 700 grain .577NE loads. I considered the .500-110 to be my "little" gun.

It was cold in the blind that morning and I didn't bring a jacket. But when the first herd of buffalo arrived I seemed to warm up just fine.

Pieter picked out a good bull near the tree again. He was standing broadside and I had a clear shot. I hit him square in the middle of the shoulder, not down near the heart. He shuddered for an instant, took several steps and went down. It wasn't that much different from the .577 NE kill. I turned and looked at Pieter who seemed a little surprised too.

"Wow," I said.

"Lekker!" he answered.

"Anticlimactic," chuckled Johan.

At the skinning house we found massive internal tissue damage. The main shank of the .500 caliber Raptor went deep into the shoulder, missing the heart by about seven inches, but one of the rotating blades severed a large artery close to the heart. The six blades also tore up a lot of lung tissue. Johan and the skinners said they had never seen damage like that from a single round.

I had two more buffalo to take so I used the same Raptor bullet on both of them just to make sure the first one wasn't a fluke. I hit one more bull broadside in the centre of the shoulder with the 410-grain .500 caliber Raptor, and he staggered and went down as uneventfully as the first one hit with the Raptor.

The last bull was standing behind our acacia tree with only the front half of his shoulder showing. I slipped the Raptor bullet an inch or two past the big tree and it hit the bull a bit forward in the shoulder. He bolted and went about eight steps before going down. Samuel, the tracker, grinned and said he liked tracking buffalo for me.

The tissue damage from the 410-grain Raptor on both of these buffalo was very extensive.

Pieter and Johan, who had collectively seen hundreds of Cape buffalo kills, were very impressed with the Peregrine Bushmaster and the Cutting Edge Raptor bullets. I would not hesitate to recommend these excellent bullets.