



↑ Don puts a few 55 grain Oryx rounds through his Weatherby Vanguard .223 under field conditions.

↪ The quality of factory ammunition has improved dramatically over the past two decades, and Don believes that the accuracy and knock-down performance of these Norma rounds places them among the very best.

CHOOSING FACTORY AMMO –

DON MACDONALD HUNTS WITH THE LATEST IN THE NORMA RANGE...

Although I like to tinker with reloading, sometimes it's nice to buy a good quality factory load and simply go hunting. With this in mind I contacted Paul Clark at the NZ Ammunition Co to get some advice for my .223 and .308 rifles. 'Probably the best available is in the new Norma Oryx range,' he said. 'I'll send some down for you to try.' That was fine with me – Norma has always had an excellent reputation for consistency and accuracy in a wide range of calibres and firearm types. Spent Norma cases are also the brass to store away, they offer an excellent base for reloading.

For the non-reloader, there's a huge range of factory ammunition to choose from and it can

be frustrating deciding where to start. Before rushing out and buying the first or cheapest

packet of ammunition you come across, it pays to do a little research. As most readers know, one brand of factory ammunition may be very different from another. This variation can be as wide as the brands or types of firearms the ammunition will be used in, eg; American or European, semi-auto or bolt action. Some ammo will shoot really well in one rifle and be absolute rubbish in another. Hopefully this article

will provide a few tips that allow you a more informed choice, and make your purchase go a little more smoothly.

The internet is an excellent place to start matching a brand of ammo with a particular rifle. Other shooters will have gone down the track you're on before you, and most are happy to share their info. The good sales people at your local gunshop will also have valuable knowledge about firearms and ammunition. If they don't know the manufacturer's recommended type, they will probably know what brands and loads customers come back for. Also look around the rifle manufacturers' web sites, many will state the name and projectile weight used in

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a rifle's testing process. Weatherby is a good example – their .308 test targets came with Federal 150 grain listed in the data section. For years 150 grain Power Shok was the only brand that went down my .308's barrel and it accounted for a huge number of animals backed by tight groups on paper.



If you do have to start from scratch, buying six different packets of ammunition is going to be expensive starting at around \$30 and climbing way up to maybe \$175 per packet for the larger or rarer calibres. Although this maybe a worthwhile initial investment, I recommend starting with the bullet weight you would like to shoot and buying only

a couple of packets at a time. This way if you get the accuracy standard your happy with right away you'll save a fortune. If you know somebody who is using your calibre, ask if they can spare you say three rounds of each type to test. I have always thought sporting goods stores should offer mixed boxes of ammunition as a customer service, it

⬆️ *Don's 10 year-old son Ben lines up the .223. (RIGHT) Ben later shot a one-hole group with this rifle and ammo combo.*

would make matching a rifle to good factory ammunition a lot easier.

Before beginning your testing don't forget to give your rifle's bore a quick clean and let it cool down a little between groups. Don't get too bogged down



“DON'T GET TOO BOGGED DOWN ON WHERE THE LOADS FALL ON PAPER, YOU CAN ADJUST THAT LATER – IT'S THE SIZE AND CONSISTENCY OF THE GROUPS THAT COUNT.”

your shots. The main objective is to put three good, well-placed shots together to establish the potential of each brand. Once you find a brand with the accuracy you're happy with, you can zero your rifle and scope, then stick with it. Keep in mind (if you are using a new rifle), that there could be a "running in" period of up to 100 rounds, after which groups may even tighten up further.

Further down the track, there are always newer brands appearing, or updates of your existing ammunition, and it's a quick and simple process to put a group together to see how they go. This is what I planned with the newer Norma Oryx range.

Although handloading is king in terms of precision accuracy, giving you loads tailored for a particular rifle, some of the new brands of factory ammunition shoot extremely well and in some cases almost match the results from reloading. This makes hunting and shooting preparation less time consuming

on where the loads fall on paper, you can adjust that later – it's the size and consistency of the groups that count. It pays to use a bigger than normal target to allow for this and mark each group so you don't lose track of

⬆️ *With the rifles sighted in, it was time to chase the local fallow population.*



NORMA ORYX PROJECTILE PERFORMANCE:

NORMA.CC



⬆️ *Oryx projectile expansion breakdown.*

“THE ENTRANCE HOLE WAS SMALL AND THE EXPANDED PROJECTILE DIDN'T QUITE EXIT BUT THE INTERNALS WERE A MESS.”

and immediately cost effective – you don't have to hold a selection of various powders, projectiles, primers and other loading components.

Good factory ammo also benefits the handloader because it offers a simple option for follow-up shots. I run my magazine with three factory loads underneath two handloads. My handloads cover my first

and second (hopefully) well-placed shots and the factories are there in case it all turns to custard and I need some quick lead in the air. They also come in handy when a non-target species turns up like hares, wallabies and the odd goat and don't want to use those precious handloads.

The results with the Norma Oryx were better than I could have imagined. I shot a series of three shot groups using three different types of .223 ammunition, including the Oryx. The initial groups were all acceptable for hunting but the Oryx immediately stood out from the rest. I decided to let my 10 year-old son, Ben, put a group down as I know he is shooting better than the old fella now. Once again he didn't disappoint and produced one of the best three shot groups to date



with our .223. This is the ammunition he will be using for hunting from now on!

With such impressive results for the .223 I immediately went home and grabbed the .308 and the 165 grain Oryx and headed back to the range. Lo and behold, the point of impact was the same as my handloads and not far off their accuracy either. Enough was enough, so I took our other little guy, Max, and headed for the hills to see if we could get onto a deer.

With cyclone Gita out of the way, I envisioned deer would be out and about early, enjoying the sun's first day back.

📍 *Don and his younger son Max went looking for a fallow deer to harvest. They located the fallow spiker at 200 yards.*

Two hours glassing showed this was not the case and we wandered back towards the truck. Then Max caught a movement and asked “What's that?” Sure enough a quick check with the binos revealed three fallow deer. We moved in for a 200 yard shot but had to wait for the deer to move down the hill a bit, as a miss would put a bullet hole through the windscreen! With Max covering his ears I sent the Oryx 165 grain shot away at a quartering spiker with spectacular results. The shot entered just behind the rib cage, driving into the powerhouse. The entrance hole was small and the expanded projectile didn't quite exit but the internals were a mess. After dressing the animal and carrying it a gruelling 50 metres, it

📍 *A quartering shot with the 165 grain .308 Oryx put the fallow buck down. The bullet expanded perfectly and did not exit.*

was time to head home – it was school the next day for Max.

This article proves that it is possible to get some really great performance out of today's factory ammunition. In this case I was lucky enough to be sent an exceptional product to start with. The Norma Oryx suited my rifles and my hunting style perfectly. I was very happy with the performance of the ammunition in the field and intend stocking up on a few boxes based on this. I will keep an eye out for updated or new ammunition types in the future, but these results will be hard to match.

Don

