

**FIVE  
MINUTES  
WITH...**

**Tom O'Keefe,**  
President of  
Winchester Ammunition

## An American Legend Focuses on the Future

Under new stewardship, Winchester Ammo continues to lead the industry **By Slaton L. White**

**L**ate last year, Tom O'Keefe became president of Winchester Ammunition. *SHOT Daily* sat down with him recently to see how the change in the executive suite has affected this industry icon. The short take-away is this: On O'Keefe's watch, don't expect this manufacturer to rest on its laurels.

**SHOT Daily:** Winchester has played a leading role in American ammunition manufacturing for a long time. Why do you think the company has been able to maintain its position?

**Tom O'Keefe:** Winchester has maintained a leading role among ammunition manufacturers for more than 145 years because of its emphasis on tradition, excellence, and innovation. Since 1866, the Winchester brand has contributed to many of history's most memorable events. From the taming of the American West to the battlefields of World War II, Winchester was there. Our customers know they can count on Winchester ammunition products, shot after shot.

In addition, we are continuously improving our processes because we want to meet our customers' expectations 100 percent of the time. Whether it's ammunition for law enforcement agencies, the military, hunters, or sport shooters, our employees significantly contribute to the excellence found in Winchester products.

Finally, Winchester continues its leadership in strategic new products. Just last year, we launched Blind Side steel waterfowl ammunition, one of the most revolutionary shotshell products in our company's history. Our PDX1 Defender ammunition products for personal defense are also extremely innovative and are available in the shotshell, rimfire, centerfire rifle, and centerfire handgun categories, making it the most comprehensive lineup in the industry. We continue to be aggressive when it comes to launching new products.

**SD:** What does Winchester need to do in the future to maintain its position?

**TO:** Maintaining our status as an industry leader means building upon our legendary brand, continuous focus on our customers, launching strategic and innovative new products, and making quality products at an affordable price. Generations upon generations have come to rely on "The American Legend" for quality products, and we're extremely fortunate to be a part of their experiences in the field, on the range, and beyond.

**SD:** What are the big challenges you see on the horizon?

**TO:** It is difficult to cite future challenges, whether specific to our industry or the general economy. However, it is extremely important that Winchester, as well as other manufacturers, continue to encourage youth and other members of the general public to experience the outdoors and shooting sports. For decades, Winchester has been deeply committed to this goal through its support of many industry organizations and events.

**SD:** Winchester is currently relocating a portion of its manufacturing operations. What is the status of the transition and how does this impact the organization?

**TO:** Winchester Ammunition did relocate its rimfire operations to Oxford, Mississippi, in 2005. Last year, the decision was made to move centerfire rifle and centerfire handgun manufacturing to Oxford. The new 500,000-square-foot facility is now complete. The relocation and installation of our equipment is very well planned and will be executed accordingly, as we are extremely mindful of our customers' product needs. Winchester is proud to be investing in its business with this decision. Our employees in the East Alton, Illinois, and Oxford locations are dedicated to building upon our more than 145-year history as a brand. This transition is a positive one. It is a commitment to the continuation of manufacturing quality products and it positions Winchester well into the future.

**SD:** There was a time when cartridges were like country singers. Once established, they stay around a long time. These days, the industry seems to be developing new cartridges at an incredibly rapid rate. Will these new cartridges have the legs of such famous products as the .270?

**TO:** Winchester is certainly dedicated to launching innovative new products, but the products need to be sustainable—meaning, we make products available that will truly benefit our customers over the long term. As technologies become more advanced and we become more sophisticated in our manufacturing capabilities, it's fair to anticipate current-day 1 new products having sustainable lifespans. Winchester has long been thought of as the leader in caliber and cartridge develop-



ment; our lineup of products is living proof, and we're not slowing down.

**SD:** Lead seems to have become a big international issue. Do you see any fallout in the domestic market?

**TO:** We at Winchester recognize that some of our customers, because of specific regulations or legislation, must shoot lead-free ammunition in their respective area. It's important to us at Winchester that we offer products to this customer base so they can continue to have meaningful experiences, whether hunting in the field or shooting on the range.

**SD:** Retailers and consumers alike complain about the high cost of ammo. Is there anything that Winchester can do to alleviate the situation?

**TO:** Winchester offers a wide lineup of products that include various technologies and components and are offered at differing price points. Our organization is committed to identifying innovative processes that afford cost savings in both the short and long term. Many levers can impact our business—fluctuating commodity prices is just one example. It's extremely important that we offer products at affordable prices so that hunters and shooters (from the novice to the expert) can continue spending time afield and on the range. We are continuously investing in new equipment and processes to improve production efficiency, keep prices in check, and offset increasing labor and material costs.

**SD:** You've put a great deal of time and effort into the design of your packaging. What's the thought process behind this?

**TO:** Shopping for ammunition can be a challenge, given the many available bullet/load types. That's why Winchester Ammunition has spent a considerable amount of time and resources redesigning the packaging for our entire line of ammunition products. Without question, our new packaging maintains the integrity of the legendary Winchester brand as well as the horse and rider logo, but we've added clarity to the design and added new features to make choosing ammunition much simpler. Calibers and load specs information are listed on the front, end, and back panels; usage icons (e.g., whitetail, elk, bear) are identified on the end panels; and ballistics information and cartridge anatomy are available on the back panel. This helps customers understand the intended use for each load, as well as the features and benefits of each product. ■

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