

Ethics of Long-Range Shooting

There are many factors to consider when deciding to take a shot at a big-game animal at an extended range. While many Performance Shooter readers are no doubt excellent shots and have well-tuned rifles, these two factors are not the only ones that come into play in the field.

Few production rifles chambered for cartridges powerful enough for big game and shooting factory ammunition loaded with controlled-expansion bullets are able to achieve the minute-of-angle accuracy needed to make 400-yard shots. Assuming that the size of the heart/lung area of the average deer-sized game animal is 8 inches in diameter, this gives us an 8-inch target ring when the animal is standing broadside. Angled animals present an even smaller vital target. Even with a superb rifle/load combination that can achieve a 4-inch group at 400 yards under perfect conditions from a bench rest, making such a shot under field conditions is difficult.

Add the variables of wind, mirage, poor light conditions at dawn and dusk when game animals are most active, the difficulty of finding a rest from which to shoot, accurate range estimation, trees, brush, and other obstructions, and other factors, and you have the makings of a difficult shot.

Ethics are a personal thing. The ethical hunter does everything in his power to make a quick, clean, one-shot kill. For us, that means trying to get as close as possible, taking a steady rest, and waiting for an unobstructed shot.