

Impala Bullets: Practical or Preposterous?



L-r: 30gr .22 Hornet; 65gr .243; 110gr 7mm; 90gr .308; 130gr .308; 200gr .375; 220gr .375 and 270gr .375. The bullet second from right is the special order semi-wadcutter Kobus du Plessis made for me.

Appalled by the amount of meat damage a 350gr softnose bullet from a friend's .45-70 caused to an impala, Kobus du Plessis, formerly attached to SAPS Forensic Science Laboratory, set out to develop an effective non-expanding bullet that caused little bruising on game. His solid brass 'Impala' bullets are light-for-calibre, sharp-nosed and have sharp cutting shoulders. Unique to this bullet is the long conical nose and the shape of the grooves on the shank that reduce the bearing surface.

Round nose solids usually leave smaller than calibre-size wound channels, but the

Impala's are calibre-size. Impalas can be launched at high velocity and this (together with the nose and shoulder shapes) claims Kobus, has a shockwave inducing effect on tissue that often produces larger than calibre-size channels. More on this later. Penetration is, like that of most solids, impressive.

Lightweight, high velocity bullets generate high energy but it is not the 'shock effect' of high energy that kills; it is the destruction of vital organ tissue. In the Impala's case I'd say that its solid construction (which prevents deformation), the high striking velocity and the shape of the

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nose promote deep penetration. While the sharp cutting shoulder ensures a lethal wound channel. A big bonus is that Impala bullets bruise less meat than expanding ones when body shots are taken.

Kobus' initial objective was to cater for big-bore owners who seldom use their rifles for general purpose hunting because most have rainbow-like trajectories and deliver a hefty punch at the butt end. Being much lighter and faster than the bullets traditionally loaded in big bores, Impalas not only produce light recoil, thus promoting better shooting, but their flatter trajectories allow for medium to long-range shots. The 'standard' Impalas for the .375H&H weigh 200gr and can be launched at close to 3000fps from 24 inch barrels. A 200 grainer launched by 67gr S335 leaves the 21 inch barrel of my rifle at 2710fps, duplicates the trajectory of the 180gr bullet from a .30-06 and is very pleasant to shoot.

The success of the big-bore bullets created a demand for Impalas in smaller calibres and Kobus now produces bullets from .172



Left: Loaded ammunition sporting Impalas. L-r: .22 Hornet; .243; .30-06 and 2 x .375s. Above right: Frikkie du Plooy (left) and Kobus du Plessis with a blesbuck killed by a 200gr .375 Impala bullet. Right: Impalas cause little bruising to carcasses – ideal for meat hunters.

to .510" and exports substantial numbers to Europe. The design is such that Kobus feels only one weight per calibre is feasible. There are exceptions though .22 bullets come in three different weights and, for some big-bore calibres, round nose bullets which are heavier than the HVs, are available. The .375 RN bullets weigh 270gr and the .458s 475gr. Locally the 130gr .308 and 200gr .375 bullets are the most popular.

About eight years ago I tested Impalas for accuracy and penetration on the shooting range but never used them on game. Martel Jacobs of the Eastern Cape has used Impala bullets to shoot close to 200 animals with his .375H&H and has taken many others with his .30-06 and .300H&H. Dr Willie Barnard of Ellisras uses his .458 with 300gr Impalas very successfully on bushveld game. Martel and Willie swear by these bullets and their reports prompted me to try these solids for myself.

In April I culled three blesbuck at Indawo, the property of Frikkie du Plooy near Ermelo. Although Impalas are available in component form for reloading, I used Kobus' factory ammunition which is available in most popular calibres –.223, .243, 7x57,.270,.308,.30-06,.303,.375H&H, etc.

Right: This 130gr .308 bullet was recovered from a springbuck's back leg after travelling lengthwise through the body. The only damage Impala solids suffer is slight bending of the conical nose if heavy resistance is encountered.

Far right: Loaded with 130gr Impalas the .303 was deadly on a blesbuck ewe.

For the blesbuck cull at Indawo I also used two of Kobus' rifles, a .303 and .375H&H.

Incidentally, the .303 (a full stock rifle with a 19-inch barrel) was built at Frikkie's gun shop, J&J Wapens some years ago. Its owner did not want to go through the hassles of the relicensing process and handed it in at Kobus' gunshop. Both rifles were accurate with the Impala bullets, especially the .303, and after a short session at the shooting range to familiarise myself with the trigger pulls, we were off. Kobus had zeroed the rifles at 300m and was familiar with their trajectories, so he ranged the blesbuck and told me where to aim. It worked well and a ram soon fell to a shoulder shot from the .375 at just over 200m. Next I shot a female with the .303, loaded with 130gr bullets. At 280m I aimed for the junction of the neck and shoulder as the animal stood facing us at an angle. The 130gr bullet dropped her in her tracks. Although it hit a little higher than my point of aim, it



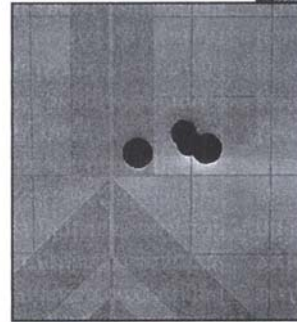
clipped the top of both lungs and the spine before exiting behind the far shoulder. The third blesbuck, taken again with the .375 at 180m, was a near miss. I used a makeshift rest on the hunting car and as I pulled the trigger, my elbow slipped off the support.

Convinced that the bullet had passed over the animal's back, I was surprised when Kobus and Frikkie told me it had gone down in its tracks. The bullet had struck behind the shoulder but very high, smashing the spine and killing the ram instantly.





Left: The exit wound on the blebuck I shot with my .375H&H in the Northern Cape. Centre: The Impala bullet destroyed the blebuck's heart. Right: Kobus' rifles are accurate with Impalas. I fired this 'combined group' (2 x .303 and 2 x .375 shots) from 100m.



Above: The extensive damage caused to the blebuck's lungs by a I 30gr .303 bullet.

the bullet passed through the lower neck without hitting any vitals. After hitting the bull three more times on the run I finally killed him with a head shot.

Back at the skinning shed I was delighted by the limited amount of bruising the Impalas had caused. Any high velocity bullet will cause a certain amount of bruising but solids damage less meat than expanding ones when striking at similar velocities. Interestingly, the bullets that killed the first and second animals caused extensive damage to their lungs - similar to what you'd expect from expanding ones.

After my experience at Indawo, I decided to use Impalas on a Northern Cape hunt, so Kobus supplied loads in .243,30-06 and .375H&H, loaded with 65, 130 and 200gr bullets respectively. My .243 was not very happy with the Impalas but the other rifles grouped very well with them. The .375 bullets leave my rifle's short barrel at 2750fps while the .30-06 launches the 130 grainers at 3050fps. A week before leaving for the Northern Cape my youngest son used the .30-06 with Impalas to neck shoot a young impala ram from about 50m. The bullet zipped through, killing the animal on the spot. At Wintershoek Safaris near Kimberley I shot four springbuck rams with the .30-06 - at 72, 150, 63 and 175m respectively. The first one, taken at 72, was facing me at a slight angle and the bullet hit at the junction of the neck and shoulder. It broke the spine, destroyed the 'plumbing' at the top of the heart, passed through the liver and rumen and stopped inside the left back leg (see picture). This one was the only bullet I recovered. There was a bit of bruising and bloodshot meat at the entrance hole but with the bullet passing lengthwise through the body cavity, meat damage was minimal. The hole in the back leg showed no peripheral bruising at all. The animals shot

at 68 and 150m also faced me and they too were shot at the junction of the neck and shoulder. The bullets exited behind the far shoulders. On one animal the bullet clipped the spine and the exit wound was quite large. However, on both these animals the bruising was less than expected.

The fourth animal received a broadside shot through the vital triangle right on the shoulder. None of the big shoulder bones and, miraculously, no rib bones were hit but the animal, which was unaware of my presence, simply dropped in its tracks. The bullet punched a calibre-size hole through the lungs and bruised virtually no meat at all. Of the nine animals that I had killed, this one had the least amount of bruising.

Next, an old blebuck ram fell to my .375 - a 200gr bullet through the heart from 143m did the trick. At the shot he took off and ran in a semi-circle, covering 33 paces, as he stopped to look back his hind legs suddenly wobbled and he dropped dead. The autopsy revealed extensive damage to the heart. The exit wound on the brisket was slightly oval, indicating that the bullet might have tumbled or perhaps yawed during exit. Was the striking velocity, the shape of the bullet, the possible tumbling, or all of the above responsible for the extensive damage to the heart? Whatever it was, the bullet killed effectively and that's what's important. Meat damage was again acceptable.

Finally I shot a gemsbuck. Shooting from a standing position off sticks at 230m, I pulled the shot badly. Instead of hitting the animal on the point of the shoulder,

By the time we got to the skinning shed it was dark and, disgusted with my poor shooting, I was not in the mood to do a proper autopsy. The next morning I saw that two of the three body hits had exited. The third one (actually the first follow-up shot) hit low on the flank and did not exit. Unfortunately the skinners did not find the bullet. Only one bullet caused a fair amount of bruising. This one ploughed through three rib bones on its way forward and I assume fragments of bone were responsible for the damage.

Eight one-shot kills and one poorly shot gemsbuck are not comprehensive evidence, but the Impalas performed very well and I was impressed. There are those who dislike using solids on any but large, dangerous game animals and then only in big-bores. Two PHs told me that they do not like the Impala design/concept, claiming that such bullets are not for the average hunter.

One PH, who regularly hunts buffalo, said that he never uses solids in his .375H&H - his favourite is the Barnes-X. I have to admit that the margin of error is smaller with solids but I am now convinced that Impalas perform better than RN solids and, on the game I shot, they were as effective as expanding bullets. Martel's last eland was shot with his .375H&H at 245m and the animal died almost in its tracks.

Martel did point out that you cannot rely on pieces of jacket or core shrapnel to work for you when using Impala bullets (or other

solids) because they do not expand and thus have less potential to kill or slow down animals with marginal hits. Kobus du Plessis was also quick to point that out. "My bullets, like every other bullet on the market, have no magic – they will wound or miss if the hunter doesn't aim right or shoot straight. However, you can go for body shots and not worry about losing a lot of expensive meat."

I will try Impalas in my .243 and 7x57 and will report back in due course. Anyway, what I like about the Impalas is that they allow me to get more use out of my .375H&H. (I have already mounted a 3-9x scope.) At times I shoot different size animals in different terrains on a single hunt and therefore take along at least two rifles. As I often camp in the veld it can be a schlep to arrange safe storage for the second rifle. As my .375 is accurate and pleasant to shoot with the 200gr Impalas, I will now make use of its extra versatility.

I visited Kobus at his Centurion gun shop to see how these Impala bullets are made. Kobus and his son also own and run the firearms training facility, Lyttelton Firearm Centre, as well as their Centurion Indoor Shooting Range. Impalas are cut on a CNC machine that, depending on the calibre, can produce about 1 500 bullets in 24 hours. When Kobus mentioned that he does accept requests for brass solids of other designs, I asked him to make a 220gr flatnose semi-wadcutter for my .375H&H. Within 30 minutes the first prototypes were in my hands. They are very accurate in my Mauser and I look forward to using them at around 2200fps in bushveld terrain.

When hunting with Impalas (or any other solid) always make sure that your target animal is well clear of the others because these bullets will zip right through an animal with enough power to kill or wound whatever is in its path. On four of the animals I shot, I could actually hear the bullet whining away in the distance.



Temba Mphofu, left, and the gun shop manager Eben Motsi in Kobus' Centurion shop.

Being cut one-by-one on a CNC machine and made from solid brass, Impala bullets are not exactly cheap but – direct from the manufacturer – they cost less than many imported bullets. The 200gr .375 bullets for instance, sell at R640 for 100 (in packets of 50) Kobus does not charge any extra for postage.

After having used Impala bullets on game I am happy to recommend them, they certainly were very effective in my case. Use common sense, shoot straight and these unusual bullets will serve you well. Contact Kobus du Plessis on 082-442-0219 or visit the website <<http://www.impalabullets.com>>.