

Marlin's NEW 1895SBL!

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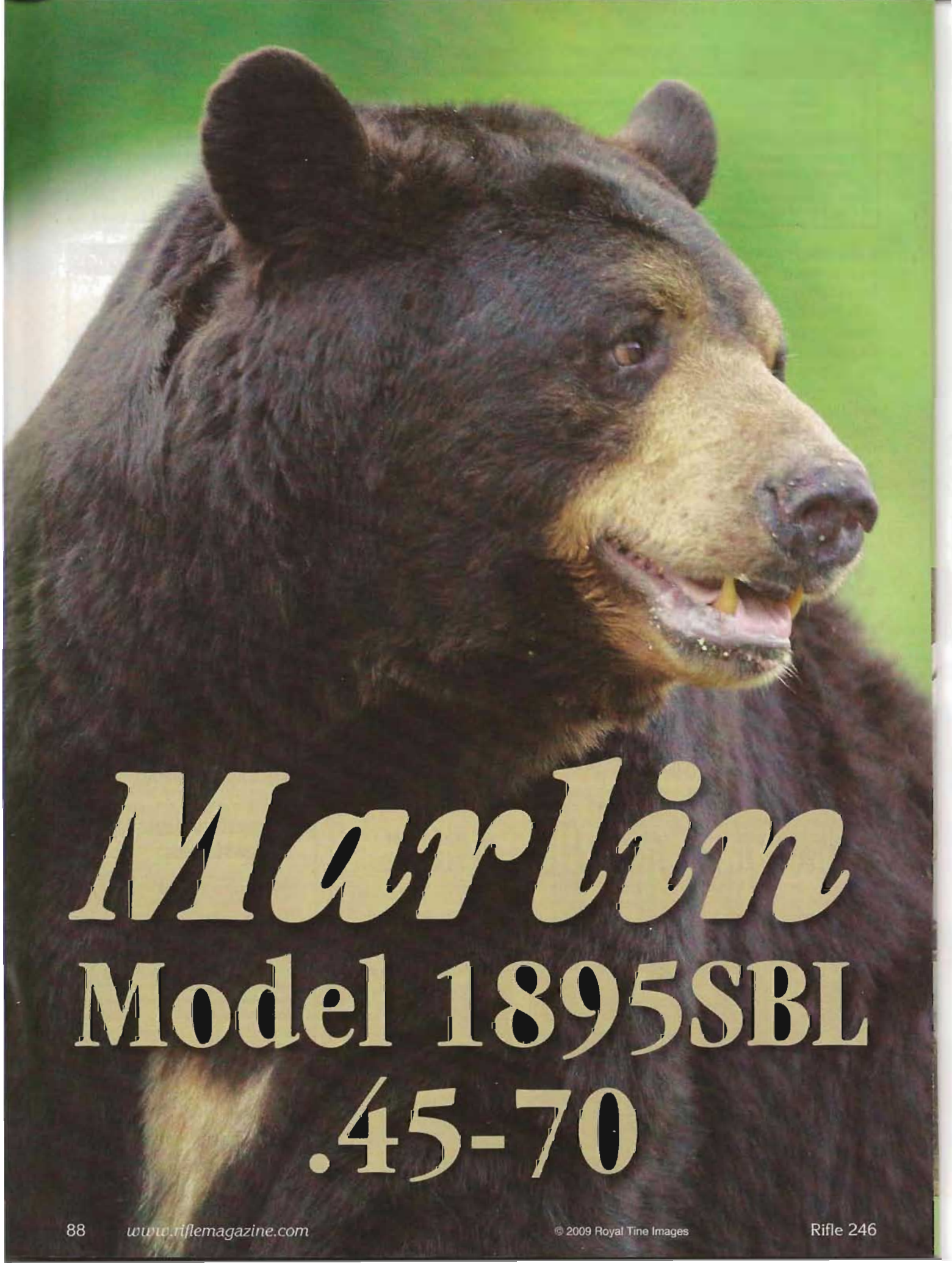


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**FACTORY LOADS FOR
WWII RIFLES!**



Marlin
Model 1895SBL
.45-70

Brian Pearce

In 1998 Marlin began offering the Model 1895G Guide Gun .45-70. It featured an 18½-inch ported barrel, Ballard cut rifling, four-shot magazine, straight grip, loop lever and American walnut stock. The company forwarded one of the first rifles manufactured, which proved accurate with a number of loads (both factory and handloads) with 100-yard groups measuring around one inch.

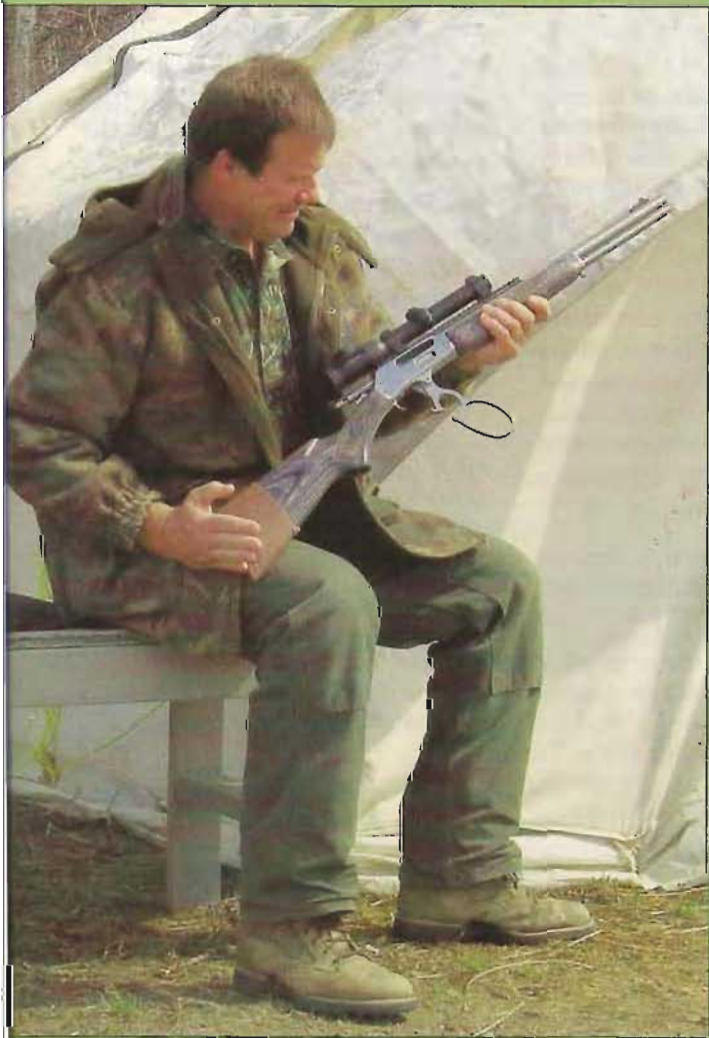


The large lever loop provides more room for the fingers and will likely fit most shooters.

The Next Generation

Considering that the .45-70 has the power potential to cleanly take any animal on earth, even being used against large and dangerous game, combined with the handy and reliable Marlin Guide Gun, it was clear the company had created a winner. In wandering around Canada and Alaska among the great bears, it is obvious the above rifle has caught on with guides and outfitters who make their living with a rifle in hand. For a number of years, there was such great demand that it was nearly impossible to find one for sale on dealers' shelves, which was largely the result of common deer and elk hunters who also desired such a rifle.

Marlin has recently introduced another Guide Gun known as the Model 1895SBL, which should be on dealers' shelves by the time you read these words. For the purposes of this article, I was sent a preproduction or prototype version. It is crafted from stainless steel (with a couple of minor parts being nickel plated) and features the same 18½-inch barrel as the original Guide Gun, which is port free. And like its predecessor, it features the excellent Ballard-style rifling that has proven accurate with jacketed or cast bullets. The magazine tube is full-length and holds six cartridges. The stock is checkered laminated wood (green in color) and features a pistol grip. In conjunction with the curved grip, there is a large lever loop that does not appear to be a copy of any existing after-market designs and



Brian examines a Marlin Model 1895SBL .45-70 while hunting bear in northern Alberta.

Marlin

Model 1895SBL

is manufactured by Marlin. (More on that in a moment.)

Also standard is an XS Sight Lever Rail that is mounted on top of the drilled and tapped receiver and barrel (via the rear sight dovetail) and houses an XS aperture rear sight. The rail is just over 11 inches in length and will readily receive a variety of scope rings and accessories. In addition to housing a Ghost-Ring sight and being suitable for mounting a conventional rifle scope (with standard eye relief), it will accommodate Scout-style scopes, red dot-style sights and Weaver

The Marlin Model 1895SBL .45-70 is an excellent choice for hunting big game such as black bear.

and Picatinny rings. The front sight consists of the XS post, which combined with the XS aperture Ghost-Ring rear is one of the best all-around sights for general field use ever devised. The white center line or stripe is easily seen in low light or in dark timber, yet the black surrounding edges (or sides) offer an excellent sight picture in strong light or when trying to squeeze the utmost accuracy on paper targets. The front sight can also be seen quickly when time is of the essence and a quick shot must be made. XS sights are constructed of hardened machine steel, making them unusually durable, and the rear sight is fully adjustable for windage and elevation.

In handling the new stainless steel Guide Gun, it balances well

and quickly comes to the shoulder, naturally right on target. (The stock was short for my 6-foot, 4-inch stature, so a Pachmayr slip-on recoil pad was used only for the purpose of increasing the length of pull.) The new Marlin has an overall length of around 36½ inches and tips the scales at 7 pounds.

The large lever loop – at least when compared to the standard Marlin lever loop – offers some distinct differences. First, there is considerably more room, probably around ½ inch, between the second finger and the front of the loop. There have been a number of shooters report that the standard Marlin lever loop bumps the second finger hard during recoil when shooting heavy .45-70 loads, or the rearmost portion of the

Left, shown next to the original Marlin Model 1895G Guide Gun, the Model 1895SBL is constructed largely of stainless steel with a laminated stock, XS Lever Rail, aperture sights and large lever loop. Below, the barrel length of the 1895SBL is 18½ inches.



loop can bump the little finger. This additional "room" will likely alleviate both possible issues.

Marlin recently introduced the Model 1895SBL.

While I almost never fire a rifle with gloves on, leverguns have been carried in the pistol grip area with gloves during cold weather, and the large lever loop gives the necessary room for this application. This lever loop design allows a bit more of a running start at working the lever with speed. And last, it allows the hand to be placed where it is most natural, and as a result the trigger finger can be positioned on the trigger where the shooter desires, which may be the single greatest benefit of this design.

From the Bench and in the Field

Using factory fresh Remington .45-70 ammunition containing a 405-grain softpoint bullet at 1,330 fps, 75-yard groups hovered around 1½ inches using the XS aperture sights. The rifle was sighted at 50 yards and the sight removed, which can be reinstalled while holding its zero.

I was offered the opportunity to try one of the new Swarovski Z6i 1-6x24 EE (with CD-I reticle) scopes, which was installed on the Marlin Model 1895SBL using Warne Maxima Quick Detachable



The Swarovski Z6i 1-6x24 EE scope was used on the new Marlin Guide Gun. Its illuminated reticle is adjustable for a variety of light conditions.

30mm rings. The Lever Rail permitted the rings to be installed nearly seven inches apart. This is an excellent combination for the Marlin, as the scope can be detached in just a few seconds and reinstalled while retaining its zero, or detached and the XS sight installed, which likewise retains zero.

For those not familiar with the above Swarovski scope, it is a relatively new product and boasts of many significant features. First, it offers a true 6x optical zoom, clearly adding to its versatility with 1x being ideal for close-in timber hunting, dangerous game or other such work, while 6x serves well for longer shots. The matte finish is low glare and has proven unusually tough and durable. In the Swar-



ovski tradition, clarity, resolution and brightness are simply remarkable with practically no distortion at the outer edges of the field of view. The eye relief is generous at 4.72 inches, leaving plenty of room to prevent the scope from bumping the shooter, even when heavy .45-70 +P loads are used that can offer significant recoil. The click adjustments move the point of impact .54 inch at 100 yards.

The Swarovski Z6-series scopes are available with an illuminated reticle (Z6i), a system that is ad-

The Marlin Model 1895SBL features an XS front sight and a Ghost-Ring aperture rear sight. The XS Ghost-Ring aperture combined with the XS Post is an excellent combination for a variety of shooting applications and light conditions.



Marlin Model 1895SBL

vanced and designed by hunters for hunters. It is really very simple, taking more words to describe than it ought, but in short it has a "daytime" and "twilight" setting with the brightness of the

The new Marlin was checked for accuracy with a variety of factory loads.

illuminated reticle being easily adjusted for an individual's eye or hunting conditions. This is an excellent setup, as some illuminated scopes provide overwhelming brightness for early morning or late evening hunting. And there is a memory function that retains the setting that the scope was on when the illumination was turned off. To help conserve battery power, there is an automatic shutoff (3 hours during the daylight and 5 hours at night) when there has been no activity with the illumination. In



By removing one screw, the Marlin Model 1895SBL can be field stripped for easy cleaning, which also allows the barrel to be cleaned from the breech end.

spite of the electronics and a 30mm tube, the Z6i tips the scales at a reasonable 15.9 ounces.

The new Marlin was checked for accuracy with a variety of factory loads from the bench with the Swarovski Z6i scope attached and with the aid of sandbag rests. At 100 yards several loads produced near MOA accuracy with four-shot groups (referenced in the accompanying table). Remington's 300-grain jacketed hol-

lowpoint (JHP) loads managed to produce one group that was 1.2 inches center to center with three of the holes touching, while the Federal 300-grain JHP loads effectively duplicated that group size. In preparing to use the rifle on a northern Alberta bear hunt, the traditional Remington 405-grain softpoint load was tried, which grouped just under 1½ inches at 100 yards. Next, the rifle was carefully sighted at 50 yards with the above proven Remington load. Should the rifle take a bad fall during the hunt and the glass sight get damaged, the XS aperture sight could quickly be installed and the hunt continued.

Upon arriving in bear camp, the rifle was fired to make certain it had retained its zero, which it had. That evening a bear was observed that could have easily been taken with the Marlin 1895SBL .45-70, but it was a six-day hunt, and since it was not especially large, was passed up. The weather then turned wet and cold, and the bruins seemed to brush up. Then I slipped and did a first-class job of breaking three ribs, which is something I don't recommend! After lying down in my tent and feeling one rib overlying another like crossed fin-

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The .45-70 is popular with handloaders and can be improved substantially when handloaded in a modern rifle such as the Marlin Model 1895SBL. Brian fired a variety of factory ammunition and handloads through the Model 1895SBL and found the overall performance with both cast and jacketed loads to be excellent.

gers, I was able to push it back into place.

However, the hunt continued, and eventually a beautiful black bear came into a bait site the guides had set up. His fur was

thick and long, and it was estimated that he would easily exceed 7 feet. He was just 14 yards away (and explains why the 50-yard sight-in distance of the Marlin rifle), so I studied him while

waiting for a shot. When he finally turned at an appropriate angle for the bullet to positively reach his vitals, the illuminated reticle of the Swarovski scope was placed accordingly, which showed up perfectly against the black hair. Since I always shoot with both eyes open, and at just 14 yards, I could see the bullet as

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Marlin Model 1895SBL



This 75-yard group was fired using Remington .45-70, 405-grain factory ammunition with issued XS sights.

it impacted exactly where desired. He instantly whirled and disappeared into the thick brush and in just a moment could be heard hitting a creek with an impact that sounded like a truck. He stopped on the other side and let out bellows and moans that are typical of a mortally wounded bear and which soon faded out.

Darkness was quickly closing in, and the guide and I couldn't find him so decided to come back in the morning and pick up the trail.

Marlin Model 1895SBL .45-70 Performance

load (grains)	advertised velocity (fps)	actual velocity (fps)	smallest 100-yard group (inches)
300 Federal JHP	1,880	1,855	1.20
300 Remington JHP	1,810	1,801	1.20
300 Winchester JHP	1,880	1,785	2.00
350 JFN Buffalo Bore	2,100	2,010	1.35
405 Cor-Bon FP	1,650	1,698	1.45
405 Remington softpoint	1,330	1,303	1.45
430 Buffalo Bore cast GC	1,925	1,889	-
460 Cor-Bon cast	1,650	1,621	2.35

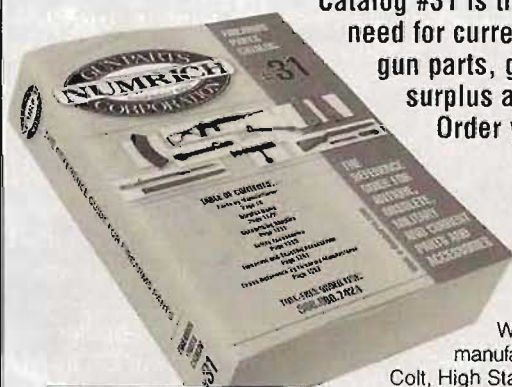
Notes: The Marlin Model 1895SBL has a barrel length of 18½ inches. Temperature during the testing was 52 degrees Fahrenheit.

Unfortunately, there was some rain overnight, and the bear had headed into a swampy area that was thick with brush. We were never able to recover him, so the guide decided to abandon the search, which bothered me greatly. I replayed the shot a thousand times in my mind, but the shot and bullet placement were correct, and I am convinced he didn't go far before expiring. Certainly the old Remington 405-grain softpoint did the job, as I have used it on elk, deer, black bear and a number of African game and have confidence in its reliability. It is a great load. At any rate, with two bear tags in

my pocket, I continued to hunt, but there were no other opportunities to take another bear with the new Marlin Guide Gun, at least for now.

From a gun writer's standpoint, I very much appreciate Marlin lever-action rifles. They are simple in design, work reliably and have always been crafted of forged parts; the folks at Marlin have never taken shortcuts that have jeopardized quality, reliability and reputation. The rifles have proven time after time that they are accurate, often producing MOA groups or very close to that, right out of the box. On a recent trip to the Marlin factory, it was observed that company employees and engineers are committed to producing arms efficiently while always maintaining quality. With a pedigree like that, there is no doubt the new Model 1895SBL Guide Gun will be in great demand.

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