

The awesome

The days of the professional or highly active amateur hunter are so filled with all sorts of rifles that they often become rather blasé about them. Before long they simply consider a rifle a tool like any tool they use on a daily basis. Fortunately every once in a while a rifle of such distinction makes it into camp that everybody sits up and take notice. In 1989 the German firm Friedrich Wilhelm Heym GmbH & Co introduced such a rifle. The Heym Express.

The company was established by Friedrich Wilhelm Heym in Suhl in 1865. Suhl is situated in the mountainous former East German province of Thuringe and used to be the heart of the German rifle making industry until the end of the Second World War. Adolph Heym - the founder's son - succeeded his father in 1912 and managed it until 1920 when his son August took over from him. Under August's control Heym acquired its excellent international reputation.

The end of the Second World War brought a crisis. Suhl ended up in communist hands and the Heyms wisely decided to move to West Germany where they had to start afresh. Because rifle manufacturing was prohibited by the Allies, August and his son Rolf were forced to manufacture airguns, clocks and computing rulers to survive. The situation changed in 1952. The Heyms immediately took the plunge and established a new rifle manufacturing works in Muennerstadt.

Rolf assumed control of the company in 1963 and developed new products to capture new markets. He realized that Heym had to enter the market of the average man and decided to introduce a bolt action rifle. Heym's first modern bolt action rifle, the SR-10, saw first light as a result of this new approach. The SR-10 was marketed during the 1960s as the Mauser M-3000. The latter became fairly popular in the United States of America, but never achieved much local success.

Rolf unexpectedly passed away in 1972 and this forced his wife, Elisabeth Heym-Dschulnigg, to assume the company's reigns. The agreement between Heym and Mauser finally came to an end and this opened the doors for development of the Heym SR-20. Since the introduction of this rifle, Heym has gone from strength to strength and today it is considered one of the leading international hunting rifle manufacturers. It was, in fact, the only production rifle



manufacturer chosen by Safari Club International to build a rifle for its commemorative Big Five series – Heym built the Number 3.

The Heym plant has a relatively low production rate and a large percentage of hand finishing is done on their products. This policy contributes to high quality, but unfortunately to high prices. The degree of craftsmanship is evident by the fact that Safari Club International had appointed this firm to manufacture a never-to-be-repeated limited edition of 50 over-and-under doubles. These rifles fetched in the region of US\$16 500-00 during 1978. Presently they fetch substantially more.

A better compliment no manufacturer can hope for.

Based on its low volume philosophy and the rise in interest in large and super bore cartridges, the company then decided to introduce an express rifle capable of handling the massive cartridge sought after by African dangerous game hunters. Thus, the Heym Express was born.

The Heym Express action is not merely a massive action that offers controlled feeding, claw extraction and ejection at the rear of the bolt's stroke, like so many other designs. It contains numerous original features indicative of a lot of lateral thinking.

As befits a dangerous game rifle intended for powerful cartridges, the rifle weighs about 9.9 lbs (4,48 kg) to contain recoil. Despite its relative heaviness, it handles well. This is the result of a well-designed modern classic stock with a high comb and heel. The only criticism I can level against the stock is the sudden taper in the forend just before the magazine well.

One cannot discuss the Heym Express



Heym Express rifle



By Pierre van der Walt

without detailing its innovative features. Despite it having been designed for magnum length cartridges, including the .600 Nitro Express, its outside dimensions approximate normal Mauser measurements. The action is only 10mm (0.393") longer than the normal Mauser M-98 and it is therefore slightly shorter than the magnum Mauser action, yet it can readily accommodate brutes like the .500 A-Square and the .460 Weatherby Magnum. This compactness is another reason why the rifle handles well.

In another unusual approach, the underside of the receiver ring is not rounded near the front like the Mauser at all. The Express has these flat metal sidewalls stretching right from the front of the receiver bottom right back to the tang. In addition to the beefy, yet elegant, sides, the receiver wall between the ring and bridge is not interrupted by any notches or cuts. It therefore beds very solidly.

All the above features undoubtedly make Heym's Express action the sturdiest and most rigid dangerous game hunting rifle action on the market today. It is exactly what the staunchest traditionalist can order on a wish list - and more. The Heym Express receiver is without question potentially very accurate and will endure the buffeting of the large bores better than most. Although accuracy is something that varies with cartridges, reloading and shooting techniques, many hunters want to read whether a rifle is potentially accurate. You will not find a potentially more accurate dangerous game rifle and minute of an angle groups are the norm with proper ammunition.

As if the design of the receiver proper is not sturdy enough, Heym machines the magazine box from steel. The receiver fits onto the tremendously strong magazine assembly to form a unit, which further supports the receiver and adds even more rigidity. The layout is such that it is impossible to bend the receiver by uneven tightening of the main screws. The whole system reminds one of the rail-type rifles benchrest shooters use. It is very stable and extremely durable. I have never seen a sturdier magazine box on any rifle. The Express magazine will withstand the most severe battering that the most powerful cartridge can dish out for centuries and more. It is very important in a dangerous game rifle chambered for extremely powerful rifles. Cartridges like the .500 A-Square and .505 Gibbs buffet a magazine box to smithereens within a box of cartridges fired.

A truly outstanding feature of the Express magazine is the set of rails it contains in the rear of the magazine box. The extractor groove of the cartridge case is slipped over these rails when the rifle is loaded and they then hold the cartridge as if held in position by the bolt. No amount of recoil can cause the cartridges to slip forward and damage the tips. This is actually an old Mauser idea

that originated in its Sporting Rifle Department during 1940, but which had only rarely been used before. The Express magazine also contains a spring-loaded buffer plate in the front magazine wall to prevent bullet damage and movement under recoil. The whole design is conducive to fast and reliable feeding and there is no magazine in the world to rival it at this point in time. Depending on cartridge base diameter, the Express handles between three and five of the most powerful rimless cartridges presently available.

An outstanding feature of the Heym Express is that the bolt stop latch deviated from the traditional Mauser and Winchester systems. The bolt stop latch looks like a light switch standing vertically. The top of the latch is serrated and one simply depresses this latch to release the bolt. It therefore enables one to grasp the rifle with the left hand, whilst simultaneously operating the latch with one's thumb. It is the most ergonomic system available.



The bolt of the Heym Express sports typical Mauser twin opposed front locking lugs. The left locking lug is not slotted Mauser-style to permit passage of an ejector, nor does the Express make use of the Winchester style under-the-lug ejector. Heym opted for a very novel approach. A plunger style ejector pin has been recessed into the bolt face. This would have seriously detracted from the design had it not been for the fact that it does not operate on the plunger principle of non controlled feed designs. It is merely a kind of reverse plunger which lies inside the bolt, but when the bolt is pulled to the rear of its cycle, a pre-'64 Winchester M-70 style static ejector blade pops into a slot in the bottom of the bolt shaft and punches the ejector forward, ejecting the case in a manner quite reminiscent of the Winchester under-the-lug system.

The main difference between the Heym and Winchester systems is that the ejector slot does not stretch into the bolt face, but stops behind the extractor's bolt head groove. The advantage of the Heym system is that the bolt face is solid and does not offer the passage into the raceway to escaping gasses which both the



Mausers and Winchester systems do. It is a better system from this point of view. The ejector pin is sturdy and, since ejection is manual and at the rear of the bolt stroke, the Express offers the advantages of the Mauser system without the shortcomings of the modified modern Mauser designs. Its cartridges will stay in line until ejected and short stroking and double feeding is inhibited. As reliable a system as any with gas flow advantages.

Its Timney trigger is adjustable for creep, overtravel and weight of pull. The screw at the rear of the housing can be adjusted clockwise to reduce creep. Overtravel is limited by turning the top screw in front of the housing clockwise. Counter clockwise adjustment of the bottom screw situated at the front of the trigger housing reduces weight of pull.

The Express safety catch is of the bolt sleeve mounted side-swing style. It engages the firing pin assembly directly and therefore is a very reliable system. All three positions are clearly marked on the very elegant bolt sleeve and no hunter should experience any problems with the system. It rates amongst the best on hunting rifles. The catch is equally elegant yet large enough to be easily manipulated and as said - comfortable to use.

The rear sights are situated on a very elegant EAW-style saddle with hollow ramp contours. It is a three blade system of which two leaves fold down into the sight base completely in typical English style. These two leaves are calibrated for 100 and 200m (110 and 220

yards) respectively. The other leaf is a fixed standing leaf calibrated for 50m (55 yards).

A standing leaf is a necessity on a dangerous game rifle. The leaf leans slightly forward to gather all possible light and its face is serrated to reduce glare. From the centre of the notch a silver line drops downward to draw the attention of the eye. The standing leaf has a wide V-notch, for fast use, but the other two leaves have flat tops with U-notches. They are also serrated to reduce glare. The whole system can be moved laterally for windage by driving it crosswise. It is a very good system, both from a practical and aesthetical point of view.

The front sight sits atop an equally graceful ramp with a concave ramp contour - one of the most beautiful that can be had today. The bead-shaped front sight looks somewhat like a minute T-wrench and is very original and novel. The stem threads into a hole atop the ramp. Elevation is altered by the depth it is screwed in and locked. A white insert caters for poor light conditions. Both sides of the 'handle' are slanted to catch light from above and the flat bead face eliminates off-centre gleaming. On a dangerous game rifle I cannot think of a better front sight. It simply is marvellous!

The Heym Express is available in .404 Jeffery, .416 Rigby, .450 Ackley Magnum, .460 Weatherby Magnum, .500 Nitro Express and .500 A-Square. At about US\$ 6 500 apiece these rifles are not cheap, but for that one gets a highly practical custom rifle on a rare and collectible action. You can, of course, have it chambered for the .600 Nitro, but that option will set you back almost US\$ 12 000 for one of the rarest combinations in the world!

I own and use a rifle built upon a double square bridge magnum Mauser M-98 action. I love it dearly, for its style elegance and rarity. Owning it also places me in that category of people who are entitled to sing its praises and damn its shortcomings, which are few and far between. Peter Paul Mauser did a tremendous job when he designed it, but Heym can be as proud of its Franz Würger design. Personally, I would be hard pressed to favour any other magnum rifle over the Heym.