Typical use of the .375 is for African animals such as this eland, the world's largest antelope, weighing over 1,000 lbs.

THE WONDERFUL .375 MAGNUM

BY CARLOS WOLFE

With it you can bring sudden death to anything from a deer to an elephant—with less recoil and a much better trajectory than you might believe possible. Here's what it's like to shoot

The world's most useful cartridge is no ultramodern superduper fresh from the ballistic designer's drawing board, written up by swooning gun editors and ballyhooed with four-color ads. Instead it is as cartridges go an old-timer born almost half a century ago in a cultured low-pressure shop in London's West End.

The cartridge is the famous .375 Magnum. It was introduced in 1912 by the reknowned British rifle and gun-making firm of Holland & Holland, 98 New Bond Street. The outfit is right in the midst of the classiest retail shopping district in London and in the world . . . a street where the well-heeled can buy plover's eggs, handmade shoes, hand-tailored suits and jackets of the world's finest woolens, antique silver and china, luggage hand-sewn and of Indian water-buffalo hide. The shop is not far from the plush Dorchester Hotel, the custom-tailoring street called Savile Row, Peal the bootmaker or Herbert Johnson, the hatter.

The whole West End caters to the carriage trade and so does Holland & Holland. The firm was founded in 1835 and since then has made rifles and shotguns for British royalty, continental nobility, Indian maharajas, Middle Eastern potentates, American millionaires—as well as for the run-of-the-mine sportsmen who simply love fine weapons and are willing to pay for them. Holland & Holland make fine side-by-side and over-and-under shotguns, but the firm has always been most famous for its rifles. The name stamped on a rifle barrel increases its value anywhere from 50 to 100 percent.

But this ancient and slightly musty outfit has always been a bold pioneer in the development of rifle cartridges. Its latest is the terrific .244 Magnum, a cartridge that drives a little 100-grain bullet at 3,500 feet per second. Other Holland & Holland creations are the .275 Holland & Holland Magnum, a slightly oversize 7mm. on a short, belted magnum case and so good that the latest and similar American wildcats are just beginning to catch up with it; the little .240 Apex, a cartridge with a small belted case and about the ballistics of the [*Continued on page* 123]

The Wonderful .375 Magnum

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American .257 Roberts. Incidentally this ancient British firm was a generation ahead of American designers in bringing out a .240. Holland likewise fathered the cartridge which we know as the .300 Holland & Holland Magnum, but which they call the Super .30. The great .465 Nitro Express (or .500-465), one of the most popular of all elephant cartridges, is also a Holland invention.

But the firm's masterpiece is the .375 Magnum, the world's most useful and versatile big-game cartridge. It is the one cartridge which will do for deer or for African antelope in the brush and yet is perfectly usable on the wild sheep and goats of the world, from the Alberta bighorn and the Alaskan Dall to the ibex and argali of Asia.

As hundreds of .375 owners will testify, a good .375 with good ammunition will group like a varmint rifle. It is by no means rare to find .375s that will shoot 1½ or even 1-inch groups. The .375 is likewise one of those odd calibers that for some reason will put about any bullet weight so close to the same point of impact that under hunting conditions and at ranges up to 200 yards the man shooting one cannot tell *what* bullet he is using. Even a temperamental double rifle, when chambered for the .375 and shot with iron sights, will lay all the bullets from 225 to 300 grains and at muzzle velocities varying from 2,400 to 2,800 into a 4-inch group at 100 yards. With one of my own .375s I can keep five shots with the 270-grain bullet at around 2,740 and five with the 300-grain bullet at around 2,550 in a group of 2 inches or slightly over at 100 yards.

The .375 is the world's best cartridge for soft-skinned dangerous game. With anything like a well-placed shot it is a one-shot killer on African lion and likewise on tiger. In India it has pretty well nosed out that old favorite of the tiger hunters of the early Nineteenth Century, the .450-.400. It is likewise a deadly killer of that huge predatory animal, the giant Alaskan brown bear, and most of the professional brown-bear guides in Alaska are armed with it.

Holland & Holland would be the last people in the world to say it was an elephant cartridge, yet thousands of elephants have been shot with it—and killed very dead. With the 300-grain "solid" bullet it has enough power to turn an elephant with a head shot, enough penetration to get into the brain with a frontal brain shot, and likewise enough penetration for a deadly heart or lung shot. Because of its combination of bullet weight, velocity and accuracy, it is the one most useful cartridge for an African safari and is perfectly usable on anything from the tiny Tompson gazelle to Cape buffalo and elephant. It has unnecessary power for a Tommy, of course, and a bit more for elephant might come in handy in the case of a charge, but the man with a .375 in his hands has no need to back away.

The .375 Magnum was introduced in 1912, and it is the father or grandfather of all the large belted magnums that have come along since. That includes the .300 Magnum, which Holland & Holland brought out later (and which even now is sometimes called the .375-.300 by Britishers because it is the .375 case necked to .300), the Weatherby line of cartridges, the new .264, .338, and .458 Winchesters, the even newer .358 Norma Magnum designed in Sweden, and a multitude of American wildcats. It has had more influence on subsequent cartridge design than any other cartridge with the exception of the first smokeless-powder bottleneck creations, and it has begotten as many offspring as the .30-06.

Because Holland & Holland designed the cartridge to be good on anything from wild sheep to Cape buffalo and rhino, the cartridge was loaded with bullets of three different weights—a 235-grain open point at 2,800, a 270-grain semispitzer soft point at 2,650, and a 300-grain soft-point round nose at 2,500. Bullets of this weight are also available in solid form with mild-steel jackets and at the same velocity.

As loaded in Britain, the .375 was stuffed full of Cordite, a double-base (nitro glycerine and nitro cellulose) powder that comes in long cords. It is a very hot powder and hard on barrels, but it has the virtue of delivering good velocity with relatively mild pressure. The Americans with their excellent nitro cellulose powders put more steam behind those bullets. The 270-grain bullet as loaded by Winchester-Western leaves the muzzle at 2,740 and the 300-grain at 2,550. This means that the 270-grain bullet has almost exactly the same trajectory over 300 yards (practical big-game hunting range) as the famous 180-grain bullet in that great American game cartridge, the .30-06. Midrange trajectory of the .30-06 load is 7 inches as against only 7.1 for the .375. Even with the 300-grain bullet at 2,550, the midrange trajectory is only 8.3, and it is entirely practical to sight a .375 in with the 300-grain bullet at 200 yards. The 235-grain bullet is no longer loaded in the United States, but bullets of that weight are made by at least one custom bullet maker in this country, and it is possible to load it to about 2,950 feet per second. In that case the .375 becomes a sort of an ultrapowerful .270 Winchester.

For all practical purposes, however, the 270-grain bullet shoots flat enough for about any open-country hunting one would be apt to run into, from eland on the open plains of Africa to *Ovis poli* on the Pamir plateau of Central Asia. When a man would be apt to run into anything, as he is in Africa, where he may go out to knock off a topi for meat and wind up in a hassle with a buffalo or a lion, the best policy is to keep Old Betsy filled with 270-grain stuff. The 235-grain bullets are designed for quick expansion on lighter animals and may break up too quickly on massive or dangerous animals.

The first World War stopped the .375 Magnum in its tracks, but when the fighting was over and men went back to shooting animals instead of each other, the cartridge began to make its great reputation as an all-around caliber. Prior to that time, the nearest thing to a cartridge to use on everything all over the world was the .450-.400, a long-rimmed and bottlenecked British job used in doubles and falling-block single shots. It propelled a 400-grain bullet at 2,150. It was considered pretty fair elephant medicine, good for buffalo, rhino and gaur (the big Indian wild cow), and poison on the large antelope and the soft-skinned dangerous game like lion and tiger. The muzzle energy of this cartridge is 4,010.

The .375 doesn't have the bullet weight (something dear to the conservative British heart), but it surpasses the .450-.400 in power and flatness of trajectory. As loaded in the United States, the 270-grain bullet has a muzzle energy of 4,500 foot pounds and the 300-grain bullet 4,330. That's crowding up into the elephant class. In addition, the .375, as we have seen, has as flat a trajectory as the .30-06 with the widely used 180-grain bullet, whereas the .450-400 has a trajectory about like that of the .30-30. The hunter taking a poke at a topi 300 to 350 yards away across the veld or at an Asiatic wild sheep across a canyon would be handicapped with a .450-400, but right in the money with a .375 and its flat .30-06 trajectory.

Not only did Holland & Holland make the .375 on the big, belted rimless case to headspace on the forward edge of the belt instead of on the shoulder, as is the case with most rimless cartridges, but they also brought out a rimmed form. In British catalogs this cartridge is called the .375 Flanged Magnum Nitro Express. What we Americans simply know as the .375 Magnum is listed in the catalog of the British loading trust (Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd.) as the .375 Belted Rimless Nitro Express. Because double rifles are not as strong as good bolt actions, and because the rather fragile ejectors of the doubles do not have the extracting power of the bolt with its powerful cam and its leverage, pressures are kept down with the rimmed .375 ammunition. With the 300-grain bullet only 56 grains of Cordite is loaded as compared to 58 in the belted case. Velocity is likewise lower—2,425 with the 300-grain bullet, 2,600 with the 270-grain, and 2,450 with the 235-grain. Still no firecracker!

Holland & Holland would rather build a double rifle for the rimmed cartridge, but if you twist their arms and wave in their faces a sufficiency of pounds sterling,

dollars, lira, francs, rupees, toman or pesos, they will now make a double for the belted case. Furthermore, they'll "regulate" it for the hot American ammunition, pressures of which run about 52,000 pounds per square inch, as compared to about 45,000 for the rimmed case. By all laws of logic, a double for such a hot rimless cartridge is a bum idea. Ejectors are tough to make for a rimless case, and since they do not have much yanking power they should theoretically give extraction trouble. But I have shot double rifles for the American .375 Magnum cartridges and have yet to see a failure in ejection.

The first Holland & Holland .375 rifles for the belted magnum cartridge were built on the long-magnum Mauser action made especially for the British riflemakers to use in rifles for heavy game. British gunmakers are mostly fairly small outfits who have never been willing to put out the money for tooling to make their own actions. They either imported actions from the Mauser Werke in Germany, or remodeled in some cases British Lee-Enfields or Austrian Mannlicher-Schoenauers. All of them imported Mauser actions, both standard and magnum.

At first the .375 was a "proprietary" cartridge. That is an odd British custom by which the riflemaker designs a cartridge and then makes a deal with Imperial Chemical Industries to sell the loaded ammunition to no one but the gunmaker. He then sells it to dealers and customers and tacks on his profit, thereby making an easy shilling. The .416 Rigby is still a proprietary cartridge, and the only way the ammunition is obtainable is through Rigby.

But along in the 1920's Holland released the .375 along with the .465. Anyone could make rifles for the .375 and Imperial Chemical could sell ammunition to all comers. At once the other British gunmakers in London and Birmingham got into the act. The Mauser Werke also put out .375's, and custom riflemakers like Griffin & Howe, Hoffman, and Neidner built them in the United States.

But the prices asked for .375's were pretty rich for the blood of most riflemen. A magnum Mauser action never cost less in the United States than $100. By the time a barrel and sights were put on and a handmade stock of European walnut whittled out, a .375 cost an American a minimum of 300 uninflated dollars.

Then in 1937 Winchester brought out the Model 70 bolt-action rifle, and among the cartridges for which it was chambered were the .300 and the .375 Holland & Holland Magnums. For the modest sum of about $65 any American who wanted a .375 could have one. Inflation being what it is, a Model 70 in .375 now sells for about twice that, but it is still a great bargain as a rifle.

American custom gunmakers have built hundreds of .375's. Many are simply restocked and tuned-up Winchesters, but many have been built on Model 1917 Enfield actions, on Brevex Magnum Mauser actions made in France, and even on opened-up standard Mauser actions. Rifles for the .375 are also regularly made

in Belgium, Finland and Austria, and the British have turned out many since the war on opened-up Belgian Mauser actions and on remodeled U. S. Model 1917 actions. But the best rifle for the money, or for that matter the best .375 for any money, remains the Winchester Model 70. Even in British Africa one sees more Model 70's in that caliber than anything else.

This great game cartridge is distributed all over the world wherever big game is hunted or wherever people outfit for big-game hunts. It can be purchased in any fairly large American city and even some surprisingly small ones, in London and in Nairobi, in Bombay and in Ft. Lamy, in Saigon and in Anchorage. Because of the giant Alaska brown bear, there are probably more .375-users per capita in Alaska than in any other place in the world.

In Africa the .375 is the queen of the lion cartridges and the one cartridge just about all safari outfitters recommend that their clients bring. In India it has supplanted the .450-.400 as the No. 1 tiger cartridge, just as in Alaska it has taken the place of the old Winchester .405 for brown bear.

Once when I was on safari in French Equatorial Africa, I ran across two tough-looking French civil servants off for a month's safari in a British Land Rover with two black boys perched on the load. They had but two rifles, both Winchester Model 70 .375's. In India I visited the trophy and gun room of a maharaja. The talk was about tigers and tiger rifles and presently my host volunteered to show me his favorite tiger rifle. It was a Holland .375. In Alaska my brown-bear guide carried with him a rifle powerful enough to protect his clients from wounded bears in the brush. It was a .375. He didn't need to use it because I was also armed with a .375.

When the first .375's became available to the American shooting public at a moderate price, they had some takers, but the average American looked upon the big rifles with awed and jittery respect. The mild .30-30 was his notion of an entirely adequate deer rifle, and he regarded the .30-06 as a "big" rifle. He pondered the big .375 cartridge, made a mental note that here was a real hell bender, and concluded that if he ever fired the monster he might get broken bones and bent and damaged bridgework.

If he did fire it, he was tense and expecting to be killed. Since half of all recoil is mental anyway, he generally was clobbered. Then he told his cronies how that crazy Joe Jones had bought a .375, had taken it out to the rifle-club range, and how he had fired it. He described his fractures, contusions, and concussion. Gun writers solemnly advised readers not to attempt to mount scopes on .375's. No glass sight, no matter how well made, they said, could stand up against the ferocious recoil of this terror and sooner or later it would shake to pieces.

It is true that the .375 has considerable recoil. It comes back with a blow of between 35 and 40 foot pounds, depending on bullet weight, velocity and rifle

weight. In comparison to .30-06 with the 180-grain bullet boots the shooter at a rate of about 18 or 19 foot pounds. But as big bores go, the .375 is not so bad. A real elephant cartridge such as the .458 Winchester, the .465, the .470, the .577 or the .600 will belt the shooter with a blow of anywhere from 60 to 100 foot pounds.

A .375 built light has an unpleasant kick, and the recoil can be punishing if the rifle is held away from the shoulder when it is fired. I wouldn't recommend that anyone shoot a .375 much from the prone position, as he cannot then roll with the recoil. Nevertheless, as American .375 owners soon found out, people actually could shoot 20 rounds or so through a .375 and survive without too much suffering. An experienced rifleman using a .375 with a rubber recoil pad and a straight stock and holding the butt firmly to his shoulder won't be bothered when he shoots in the offhand, sitting, or kneeling positions. In fact many riflemen come to love the boot and bellow of this formidable old Betsy. When they touch a shot off they feel as though they have accomplished something.

American riflemen also discovered that the recoil was not heavy enough to bother good scopes and mounts and that it was no more difficult to keep a .375 sighted in than it was a rifle for any other cartridge. Some very light .375's have been put out by custom makers; but because of the recoil, one of the big rifles should weigh with scope and sling a *minimum* of about 9 pounds. A rifle to be lugged around by a gun bearer is more comforting to shoot if it weighs about 10.

Since many of the game animals for which the .375 was designed are apt to be dangerous and likewise since many of them are hunted in brush and forest, it has always struck me that it is wise to have the scope for the .375 put on with a quick-detachable mount. Among the best is the side mount made by the New York gunsmithing firm, Griffin & Howe, Inc., 114 E. 13 St., New York 3, N. Y. The base portion is attached to the left side of the receiver with screws and pins. The detachable portion with the scope can be slipped on and off in a matter of seconds. With the scope off the top of the receiver it is left clear so that iron sights can be used. Some like an open iron rear sight in connection with a large gold front bead. Others depend on a receiver sight like the famous Lyman 48. Then when they remove the scope, they insert the slide of the receiver sight and are ready for action. Because of the lower line of sight and because the shooter can look around his sights, the iron sight is generally conceded to be somewhat faster for close-range shooting than a scope. There might be some argument about this, but that is the general opinion of experienced hunters of dangerous game. Another reason the removable scope is a good idea is that a .375 is often used in regions of much rain. The Alaskan brown-bear country, for example, has one of the most miserable climates on this earth. The hunter may go out for a 21-day shoot and find that he must hunt every day in pouring rain or not at all. In parts of Southeast Asia, it is likewise necessary to hunt in the rain or stay in camp.

As much as I love the .375 I must admit that in the United States the big-game hunter can get along very nicely without one. The big magnum will kill deer very neatly, of course, but no better than many smaller calibers. With elk one is beginning to get into .375 territory. This is not to say that lighter cartridges like the .30-06, .280, .308 and .270 aren't adequate for elk. They are—with well-placed shots. Even the .375, or for that matter a cannon like the .465, is not adequate with poorly placed shots.

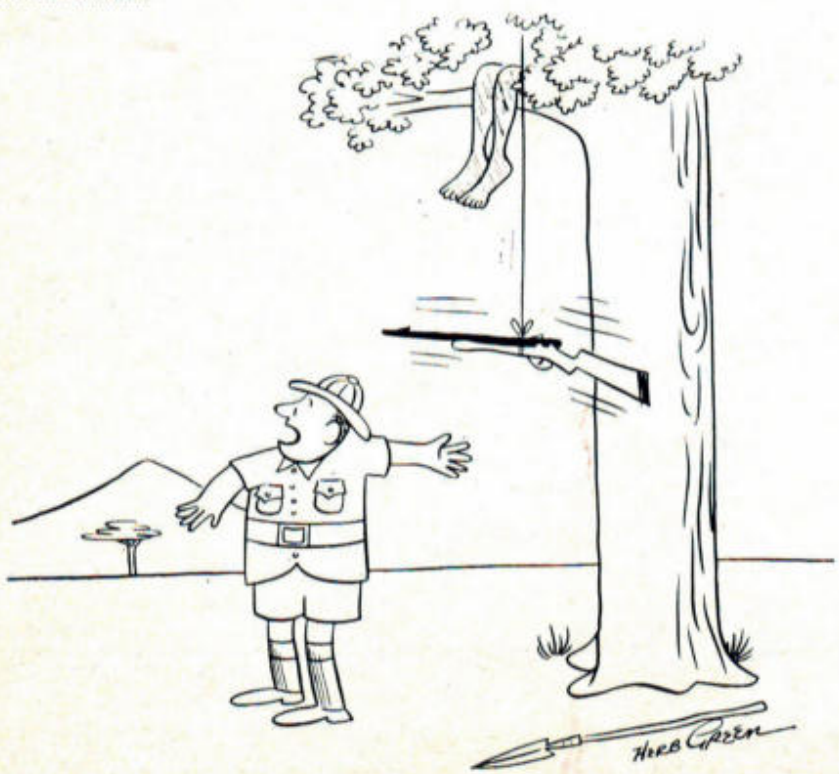
Nevertheless the .375 is a more sudden and spectacular elk killer than the .30-06. It is not uncommon to see .30-06 bullets break up on the shoulder bones of an elk, but either the 270 or the 300-grain .375 bullets will plow through both shoulders of an elk and pile him up. A bull elk shot through the lungs with a .30-06 will often run from 100 to 200 yards, but not when hit with a .375. Almost always the bull will go down within a few feet. If necessity forces a .30-06 man to plow a bullet into the south end of a northbound bull elk, he may find that the bullet fails to penetrate up into the vitals and he has a chase on his hands. A hit in the same place with the .375 will almost always penetrate deeply and break the elk down.

The .375 is not a necessity for moose either, even for the gigantic moose of Alaska and northern Canada, but as is the case with the elk, the .375 will knock more moose down in their tracks, penetrate more deeply with raking shots, and in the case of a wounded animal the entrance hole left by the big bullet will assure a better blood trail.

Nor is the .375 a must for grizzly, as a good shot can kill any grizzly that ever walked with a .30-06, a .270 or even a .300 Savage. But the .375 will kill a grizzly quicker, will break both shoulders more reliably, and in the case of a charge has more knock-down power.

Even more important in the case of dangerous game is that the big .375 gives a boost to the spirits of the nervous hunter. With the magnum in his hands the bear hunter knows he has a surplus of power and is less apt to get nervous by pondering the dismal fact that if things go wrong he has a good chance to get chewed on.

The same thing is true of the giant Alaska brown bear, a creature that can weigh 50 percent more than the largest grizzly. He is a tough and short-tempered animal. He has been known to charge unprovoked, and the man who follows a wounded and angry brownie into the Alaskan bush should carry a rifle with the power to penetrate, to break heavy bones, and to knock a bear back on his haunches with about any solid hit. And in these things the .375 shines. I'll admit that the big browns (and lots of them) have been killed with .30-06's, with .270's, and even now and then with .30-30's. But in what a brown-bear rifle needs, the big .375 has it all over these lesser cartridges. When brown-bear guides see that a dude is armed with a .375 and find out that he knows how to use it, they breathe a sigh of relief. Chasing up wounded brownies in the brush and forest is an extremely



Quick Mambo! My elephant gun!

hazardous occupation not calculated to fill anyone's soul with joy.

The hunter of the Indian tiger cannot very well get along with anything less than a .375, as the more suddenly he kills the tiger the better. Tigers are often driven to the gun by a line of native beaters and sometimes the tiger will wait until the last moment before he comes by the machan where the hunter sits. The beaters may be but a few yards away, and a tiger that is mortally wounded but not knocked flat may yet have time to kill a beater before he dies. A chap I know made a heart shot on a tiger with a .318 (a British cartridge with about the power of the .30-06). The tiger whirled and charged into the line of beaters, mauled one so badly that his leg had to be amputated. India being India, this hunter was able to clear himself by settling 1,000 rupees (about $200) on the maimed victim, but he'll have nightmares about that experience the rest of his life.

A wounded tiger is about the world's most dangerous animal. Following up one that has been insufficiently shot and having to take a charge is a fearful and hair-raising experience, one which the tiger hunter should do his best to avoid, not only by placing his first shot right but by using a powerful rifle.

It is in Africa, though, where the .375 shines. The big antelope like the eland, the roan, the sable and the kudu are tough and hard to kill and when insufficiently hit will give the hunter a long and disagreeable chase. To be sure of a leopard, the hunter should use a bullet that will rake from stem to stern and knock that treacherous cat flat. Under ideal conditions the lion is an easy animal to kill, but conditions are not always ideal. Often the nervous hunter jerks the trigger and the shot goes wrong or he must take a running shot or forego one of the world's great trophies. Then the extra power of the .375 comes in very handy indeed.

I don't believe any African hunter of wide experience would call the .375 an ideal rifle for elephant or buffalo, but it will do in an emergency and in the hands of a cool shot. In Kenya, for example, the game department requires that a heavier rifle be used on elephant, buffalo, or rhino—at least a .40 caliber. Nevertheless if I were to plan to hunt the length and breadth of Africa and take but one rifle, it would be a .375.

For the thick-skinned stuff, it is a marginal caliber, just as the .30-06 is marginal for Alaska brown bear. Under good conditions where the hunter can take his time and place his shot, it is adequate. In the case of stopping a charge, more bullet weight and energy is indicated.

But Holland & Holland way back in 1912 didn't design the .375 for the ponderous thick-skinned creatures. It is primarily a rifle for thin-skinned game, dangerous and nondangerous. And for that stuff it has no rival. It is a big *high-velocity* rifle, a super .30-06, an ultra .270. With its heavy bullets, its flat trajectory, its high velocity, its enormous power, it is in a class by itself. In all the world there is nothing quite like it.

—Carlos Wolfe