

Browning bolt-action rifle chambered for the .458 Winchester Magnum.



## WHY MAGAZINE BIG-BORE RIFLES ARE BEST

### PART II

From long experience, this writer has made up his mind.

By JACQUES P. LOTT

THE choices of large-bore magazine rifles available today are sufficiently varied to meet any requirements. The Model 70 .458 Winchester has been improved from the post-'64 model to a very effective rifle with a shorter barrel 22" long. I do not object to 24" or 25" for the heavy rifle since it is steadying for offhand work and not the brush catcher claimed. The shorter barrel will not result in any significant loss of velocity, however. The Browning no longer carries a bolt guide, and, if the bolt is worked rapidly and moves too far to the side, will cramp and bind. A tighter fit of bolt to receiver would reduce this tendency. The new F.N. Mausers have apparently the same basic action since they also are made by F.N. in Belgium.

A new or used factory rifle such as the Winchester should do nicely in .458 unless one desires to spend a good bit more for a custom job ranging from the posh creations of Griffin & Howe or Holland & Holland to the work of individual gunsmiths or even a home-made job by the skilled amateur. The tremendously powerful .460 Weatherby is available for left or right handers who want to achieve the ultimate velocity from a .458 bullet and do not mind a heavier rifle and more expensive ammo. I find its 2700 f.p.s. velocity well beyond that required for optimum performance on dangerous game, which

I would place at around 2300 f.p.s. The .416 Rigby is always a fine choice for those who find the big .40's enough gun. Whenever used magnum actions or the discontinued Brevex magnum actions can be obtained, Rigby will oblige by building a .416.

The plentiful '14 and '17 Enfields are available for those who don't insist on pure Mauser. The late M. Polonsky, who manufactured the Brevex, made his fine action to accept the .505 Gibbs, and his action is larger in bulk than the Mauser magnum. Such actions will come high to those who can find them since neither one is currently manufactured. Mauser actions have a lot of virtues desirable in a large-bore. The big extractor takes a healthy bite on the case rim, making for dependable extraction. The bolt can be disassembled for cleaning or replacement of parts in seconds without tools by turning that slow but wonderfully positive 180° military-type safety to the vertical position and unscrewing the bolt sleeve.

Mauser paradoxically came into the big game rifle business only after the British had made the Mauser action famous in their sporting rifles, especially Rigby and Jeffery. The Germans had concentrated on the export of Mausers for military use, while the British developed and made famous the 7 mm. Rigby (.276), the .416 Rigby, the .350 Rigby, the .404 Jeffery and others.

Realizing the lucrative market, the Mauser Werke in Oberndorf launched an extensive line of sporters in tropical calibers, making their type "A," according to English specifications. Their own contribution to large-bore magazine calibers was the 10.75 x 68 mm., using a 347-gr. bullet at some 2200 f.p.s. as an all-around choice. The 10.75 had great appeal owing to its light weight and five-shot magazine, which with one in the chamber provided six shots. It was found wanting in penetration but was quite effective on lion and tiger and would turn elephant or rhino. This lack of penetration was more due to thin jackets than lack of sectional density, although this is minimal, of course.

The current British loadings of the .404 have been upped to compete with the D.W.M. 404 loading of 2330 f.p.s. almost equalling the .416. Current Kynoch brass has Boxer priming. The .404 has for years been the favorite game ranger caliber for African game departments. Users of the .416 can obtain Boxer-primed brass by purchasing .378 Weatherby cases, turning off the belts and loading with magnum primers and Barnes bullets. Barnes has sold out



Some big-bore cartridges for which magazine rifles are chambered are (l. to r.) the .458 Winchester Magnum, .404 Nitro-Express, 10.75x68 mm., .460 Weatherby Magnum, and the .505 Gibbs.

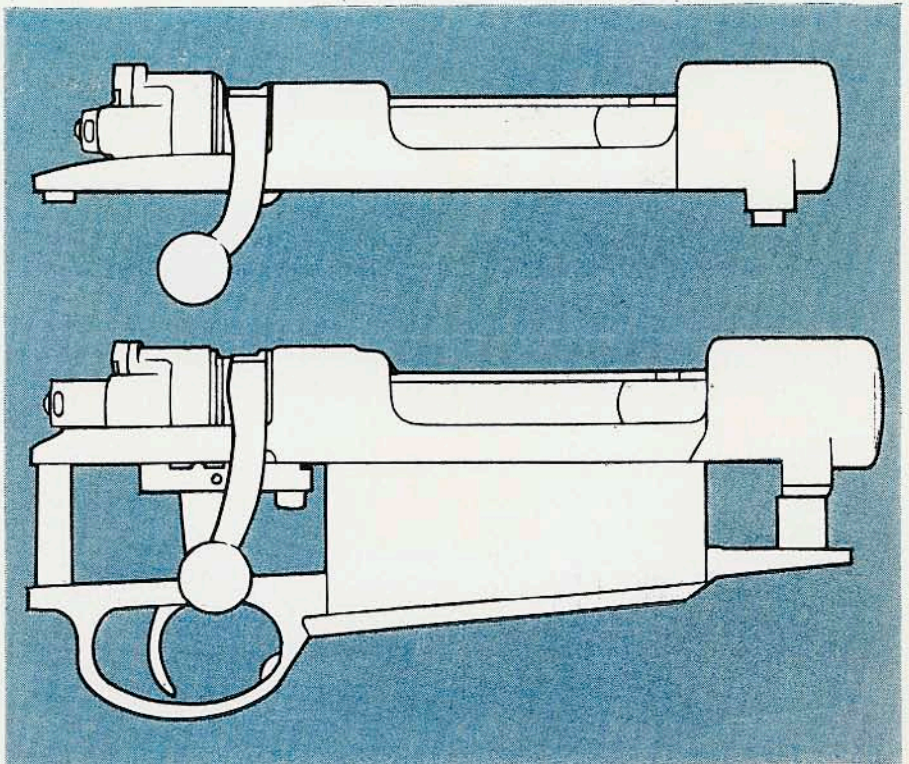
to Colorado Custom Bullets, Route 1, Box 507-B, Montrose, Colo. 81401. They have a very complete list of bullets right up to the .577 and the .600.

Choice of one of the big .40's, a .458 Win. or wildcat or .460 Weatherby on up to the .475 A & M or the .500 Buhmiller on the same case depends on whether one is willing to depend entirely on handloads and also on the type of game and country to be hunted. For general use the .40 and up to .423 (.404) calibers will perform admirably, but fall short of the .458's for close work in thicker cover, though they, too, will perform adequately. There is no denying that the larger the frontal area of a bullet combined with great sectional density and strong steel jackets, the greater its "knockdown" of elephant, buffalo and rhino. This is particularly true on elephant for shots that miss the brain closely. From the .458 on up to the .577 in doubles this shot will tend to floor the elephant and knock him out long enough for a second or third shot to be fired.

It all depends on how much insurance against a charge is wanted. If no charge occurs, then anything from a .375 on up will suffice. This is one of the unpredictable in modern African hunting. Many wounded animals are walking about some areas due to poachers.

Those contemplating the building of a large-bore bolt-action rifle should avoid gimmicks and see that the stock is made of dense wood with no fancy grain in the grip area. It must be shaped for firm holding, recoil and fast handling with sufficient butt area and firm neoprene pad to absorb kick. French walnut, hard American walnut, and some mesquite blanks make into fine large-bore stocks. I avoid Monte Carlo type stocks on such rifles and prefer very straight combs and longer, more gradual pistol grips. Such stocks keep the cheek from slipping away and yet do not hurt it, allowing the eye to remain as aligned as possible with the sights regardless of where the cheek supports the stock.

I find that 13½-14" pulls are perfect for rapid working of the bolt from the shoulder, which one should master to be effective with the bolt-action rifle for dangerous game. The forearm should be full enough to permit a firm



Standard length FN Mauser bolt and receiver assembly (top) compared with a BreveX Magnum Mauser action. BreveX action is ½" longer and has a larger recoil lug, but is of conventional Mauser design.

grip and short enough to clear the barrel band or stud holding the sling. If the pistol grip is too short and arched down excessively, the hand will be too close to the bolt knob and the bolt sleeve when firing, and therefore one should not sweep the bolt backwards unduly, either. The bolt knob should be well clear of the hand and protruding enough to let the shooter grab it unflinching.

Button floor plate releases inside the trigger guard are fine if the catch has enough engagement and the spring is strong enough to overcome the tendency of recoil to open it. The latter can be usually remedied by drilling out the spring hole and installing a stiffer spring of larger diameter. It is not the index finger recoiling forward that releases these catches.

I had warned Wally Johnson's client about this tendency of F.N.-type magazine cover catches to release in .458's before Wally was horned. A doctor friend in Kenya had his floor plate do

the same trick, also while shooting at a wounded buffalo. Pinning the floor plates shut, a heavier coil spring, or perhaps more overlap in the catch will usually cure it. I understand that current Brownings have the release catch pinned or fastened to render it inoperative.

### Choosing sights

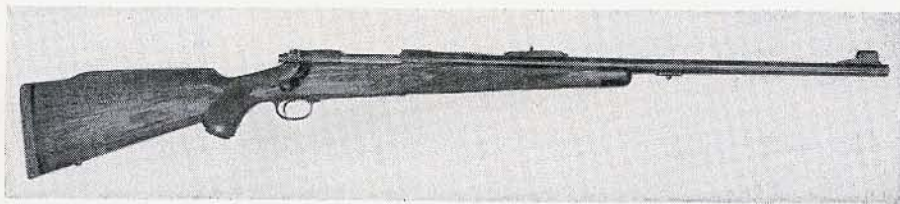
Rather than have an integral recoil lug turned on the barrel, I prefer to make up a barrel band containing the extra lug on the bottom and an express sight base on top with a dovetail to accommodate a tool steel blank vertical rear standard, sloping slightly forward on its rear face. I file this in at the range to a front sight which is often a "sourdough" type sight of my own manufacture, with silver solder bead. When filed in, I engrave a vertical line on the rear face of the rear sight and fill with low temperature silver solder which leaves a permanent vertical line

as with the English express sights. Very little sight radius is required for accuracy, and for quick resolution of the rear sight the placement should be not less than 24" from the butt and more if required. Some will want to use a Parker Hale "Sportarget" cocking piece sight. I do not find these sights at all inaccurate and they are the least liable of all peeps to be damaged. A receiver sight such as the Lyman 48 will suffice, but it is susceptible to blows capable of stripping the screws or breaking them.

A quality scope of low power, mounted strongly on a good side mount like the Griffin & Howe or their top mount on a quarter rib will take the recoil and allow quick detachability. The side mount is screwed and pinned for maximum strength and allows full use of the open sights when removed. The G & H top mount is also suitable and rugged, but few mounts provide both the strength required by such heavy recoiling rifles and a clear re-

Griffin & Howe lever, replacing the soft Jaeger lever that had a tendency to bend, preventing removal of scope. The eye relief is very long. I have also had success with the Lyman All-American in 2½X. Heavy recoil will jar many otherwise fine scopes loose, and I cannot emphasize too strongly the need to range-test the scope for internal weaknesses before a hunt. No scope of over 2½X should be used and only those of better quality. After careful trial positioning of scope in rings, some masking tape may be applied on tube adjacent to ring and an index mark drawn in ink. After the scope and rings are degreased with acetone or solvent and Loctite or epoxy applied, the line on tape can be aligned with split in rings. Omitting cementing of rings and mount or receiver sight screws will surely result in loosening with recoil. Four to five inches of eye relief is about right if one doesn't like a cookie cutter in the eye via 75 ft.-lbs. of recoil.

By scoping the .458, I have another



The Winchester Model 70 African in .458, shown at top here in its pre-1968 version, is one magazine big-bore rifle American shooters can obtain easily. Weatherby's Mark V, shown below in .300 Weatherby, is available from U.S. gun stores in .460 Weatherby, which moves a 500-gr. .458 bullet at several hundred f.p.s. faster than the standard .458. The .460 rifle is identical to the .300 shown, save for a much heavier barrel.



ceiver for open sights. One chap took his .458 to Kenya after removing the open sights. He screwed the popular mount on with standard screws provided, and the .458 actually sheared off the screws when fired early in the safari, and he had no open sights to rely on. Heavy rifles should always carry open sights and be precisely sighted with them. I like a bit of level flat on top of my open "V" express sight for an elevation reference plane that cuts down on the overshooting that is so common when open sights are used in poor light.

I use an old G.I. Lyman Alaskan on my Jaeger-Enfield .458 with a modified Jaeger mount to which I added a

general purpose rifle capable of taking game out to 200 yards. It is also handy for night shooting or cats on bait in the early morning or evening. This combination of precision plus the large bore must be experienced to be fully appreciated. When tracking time is limited in the late afternoon, I use the .458 for everything and obtain quicker kills than with the .375 with equal placement.

Reliable feeding must be incorporated into the bolt rifle or it is worse than dangerous. Sometimes the feed ramp must be ground out a bit in the middle or on one side or the other with a hand grinder. If a round pops out of the magazine rails a bit late, it will

probably angle up too steeply towards the chamber and run into the receiver wall. The rails can be opened up a bit forward so the head of the case is out of the magazine and on the follower by the time the bolt is halfway home. Magazine boxes must sometimes be milled out to accommodate the fatter cases. A magazine should be lengthened as much to the rear as possible before removing metal at the front. This is all work for the professional or advanced amateur. *All owners should repeatedly attempt to create jams* by removing cocking piece and firing pin, and working rounds through the action briskly. Any tendency to jam from rounds fed from one side or the other should be noted and the feed ramp or rails fixed.

The cocking cams of the bolt should be well polished and unnecessary tension of the extractor spring on Mauser-type actions should be lightened to allow smoother operation of the bolt. This can be done by springing the extractor between the fingers to remove some of the extra bow which is not needed. I want the bolt handle to snap down by spring action when lifted almost to cocking height. The extractor should snap over the rim of a cartridge case when a single round is slipped in the chamber in emergencies. This may require some very skilled and careful hand grinding and polishing in beveling the forward face of the extractor hook.

#### Adjustable triggers avoided

Bulky adjustable triggers, full of hair springs and set screws and requiring extra inletting, should be avoided. The Model 70 trigger is quite foolproof, and a properly altered military trigger or the plain two-stage trigger will work fine. I dislike aluminum on any such rifle because of its tendency to brighten and its softness compared to steel. Nor do I need its lightness.

With a rifle of the quality and calibers I describe, reasonably skilled in its operation and with the right bullets for the job, the hunter is ready for anything that walks the earth and will have two or more rounds left when the double would be empty. American gunsmiths have brought the heavy magazine rifle to a level not previously imagined in a field deemed the exclusive hunting preserve of the double. The basic forms and calibers were pioneered by the British, but we have brought the work they began to a peak that means more power and more shots from a lighter rifle, delivered more accurately and at greatly lessened investment of time and money. ■