

# Heym .404 Jeffery

## A Journeyman's Rifle

By John Mattera

*The first night in a safari camp can be humbling. Testosterone runs high among a gathering of Type A personalities.*



*The action is a controlled-round feed with the classic Mauser straight bolt handle design, but added are modern improvements such as the proven Winchester Model 70 three-position safety and a one-piece hinged floor plate that locks solidly into the receiver bottom.*

African night sounds resonate from beyond the edge of sight, the fire is at full roar, and the slow familiarity between clients and professionals begins. The number one goal of the hunter is not the collection of trophies. Nor is it creating lasting memories to take into our old age – that’s just something we tell our wives and non-hunting friends.

In fact, the first goal of any hunter is acceptance as one of the faithful among the like-minded. I could end this story right here, right now – the secret is that simple. We aspire to be judged and be found competent. The greatest compliment a PH could bestow upon you is to acknowledge,

“He’ll go into the bush with you when needed.” It doesn’t get any better than that.

As the night progresses, the conversation switches to rifles. Your PH already knows what you’re shooting, but there are other men with ears canted and opinions pursed upon their lips, ready for any opportunity. When the question falls to you, you simply respond with an abbreviated name that suggests familiarity and a few innocuous numbers.

“Heym .404 Jeff,” you say in an easy manner.

The group first grows silent, then murmurs as nods of approval rise and fall. Someone finds voice, and the word “nice” rolls from his lips. Dialogue no longer

matters, when you’re judged and accepted as a hunter.

At first light, as you slip your backpack and rifle case into the hunting vehicle, a feeling of confidence washes over you. As you unzip and slide out your Heym Express rifle, you know you have arrived: *You have brought a journeyman’s rifle for the hunt.*

The overall appearance of the Heym Express is that of a fine English big-caliber sporting rifle from hunting days gone by, with all the features that captivate our desires in the safari styling of yesteryear, popular with PHs and learned sportsmen throughout the golden age of safari. This rifle just screams style.



*The overall appearance of the Heym Express .404 Jeffery is of a fine English big-caliber sporting rifle from hunting days gone by. "This rifle just screams style!"*

The first thing I really like about the Heym Express rifle is that all of the actions are built caliber-specific, and prototyped on the tried and proven German Mauser Model 98 action, a blueprint that has stood the test of time for 100-plus years. Renowned German-born gunmaker Ralf Martini is the design architect behind the new Heym Express rifle. A member of the American Custom Gunmaker's Guild, Ralf's concept is the quintessential statement of style and function. Each rifle is handcrafted, and every part is made and finished in-house at their Gleichamberg factory in Thuringia, Germany, which allows the company to maintain quality control over every procedure, while combining old-world skills with high-tech modern methods and a more contemporary flair.

The Heym Express is built on a true magnum action, enabling the rifle to be crafted in those African calibers we love so much, while keeping the weight between the hunter's hands, as it should be for a well-balanced rifle.

Taking full advantage of modern CNC machining techniques, Heym builds each action around the specific caliber it will fire. Starting with a solid billet of steel, the bore and raceway locking lugs are precisely cut. All progressive machining is then performed around the perfectly straight bore: squaring

up the design, ensuring the foundation of great accuracy. The same holds true for the magazine box construction; it, too, is caliber-specific, utilizing the correct geometry for the round it will hold, reducing the chance for mishap, and increasing reliability. Gone is that annoying extra space around the cartridges as they stack up below the bolt, that we have grown accustomed to. Limiting this wasted space reduces the chance for problems, thus eliminating dangerous situations on a dangerous-game rifle.

The action is a controlled-round feed with the classic Mauser straight bolt handle design, but added are modern improvements such as the proven Winchester Model 70 three-position safety and a one-piece hinged floor plate that locks solidly into the receiver bottom.

The barrel is cold, hammer-forged Krupp steel, cut from bar stock, molded and formed around a hardened mandrel, then precision drilled and rifling cut to further ensure accuracy. Each action is then fitted with a finished 24-inch barrel.

*"The thought in my mind was of the advertisement I'd recently read for the Express rifle: German Quality – English Styling."*

Painstaking tolerances are adhered to on each and every rifle. Hand-fitted means individual construction. There are no parts that are interchangeable.

The stock is hand-oiled English walnut with spectacular figure; the grain of the stunning wood is exceptional. The stock is well cast to help absorb the jarring effect of dangerous-game calibers during recoil, along with a tapered forearm with an ebony tip and an open grip, to eliminate hand bite. A beaded cheek piece and 5/8-inch solid Old English natural rubber red recoil pad give it a classic look, while also aiding in the mitigation of recoil. The stock sports a cross bolt through the barreled action to aid structural strength, with a steel grip cap for aesthetic appeal. Other safari features include a banded front-sight ramp with an island express rear sight that has one folding and one fixed leaf. The front-sling swivel eye is also banded, and the rear-sling eye is recessed into the stock.

1/3V

2

## Rifles in Africa

Length of pull is 14½, a bit long for my short arms, but not overly so. The weight of the rifle with scope, fully loaded, came in at 11 pounds 11 ounces, heavy enough to handle big calibers, but not too heavy to carry through the field.

The .404 Jeffrey cartridge is a medium-large game collector, and has been so for over a century. Above all other 40-caliber rifles of the day, it was the caliber used by more African game wardens, as well as the favored turn-bolt cartridge of the rank-and-file dangerous-game hunters. The .404 was the people's choice for animal control, if a caliber could be called such. The expensive double was just that, suited for the landed gentry and their like.

A magazine-fed rifle up to the task of hunting and stopping dangerous game was needed, and in 1905 the .404 Jeff was born. Ballistically equivalent to the proven .450/.400 caliber cartridge, the .404 pushes a .423 projectile through a .424 diameter bore at that magic velocity of 2150 feet per second. Where the name "404" comes from is anybody's guess, most likely because it followed the .303. But the number 404 and the bore size have nothing in common, least of all a name.

Performance of the .404 is similar to other mid-40 African dangerous-game cartridges with less felt recoil. Delivering a 400- or 450-grain projectile at a desired and known velocity is a time-proven concept in the 100-plus-year-old formula for success.



*For over a century, the .404 Jeffrey cartridge has been used in Africa by game wardens and rank-and-file dangerous-game hunters to kill medium-large and soft-skinned animals.*

The .404 Jeffrey was well received in its day and well used on the Dark Continent in the heyday of African safari, popular in no small part due to its combination stopping power, reliability and manageable recoil compared with the other medium 40s.

Range, Day One, with the new Heym Express rifle was, in a word, uneventful.

Shipped from Chris Sells, the CEO of Heym USA, the rifle arrived in a double-locked dark-green Pelican case. Opening the lid, it was obvious the rifle was assembled and ready for work.

It sported a Swarovski ZI-6 1-6 dangerous-game scope with a lighted reticle on Talley mounts; just about the way I would have done myself.

This was a dangerous-game rifle, set up, and ready to go hunting.

Hefting the Heym Express to your shoulder, you could not help be impressed by how it feels; its lines and workmanship are unsurpassed. The rifle screams *Old English design!*

Then I rolled the bolt in my hand! So many metaphors jump to mind, so many bold literary descriptions, but heavy-handed words or phrases would just cheapen the experience. So, in one word: *smooth!*

The thought in my mind was of the advertisement I'd recently read for the Express rifle: *German Quality – English Styling.*

I've often been perplexed with these two European cultures. One developed style and the other function. I've often thought that if the British Jaguar XKE were built in Germany, it would have been the greatest sports car of all times.

Heym has taken the same concept and brought the best of these two worlds together to create a classic in the making: English style and applied German engineering!

1/4 page  
4



*Their first African field test of the new Heym Express rifle was with a problem hippo in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa. After coaxing him out of the water, the hunter placed a .450-grain Norma Woodleigh full-metal-jacket solid between his eyes at 40 yards, “ending the problem with no fuss or fanfare.”*

The only thing I did was run a dry patch through the bore before I slipped in three Norma .404 PH rounds. I leveled off with a target at 50 yards and printed a very respectable group. Next, I ran the target out to 100 with similar results.

All range days should be this easy! The only thing left to do was to put about 50 or so rounds through the Heym over the next week, to get a feel for the big gun and see if there were any hiccups. But all was wonderful in our little corner of the world, so the next stop was Africa!

The first African test-a-field of the new Heym Express rifle was a “problem” hippo in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa, formerly known as the Transvaal, a large region just to the south of Limpopo province. A few days of fruitless stalking moved us no closer to the extremely shy hippo. After a meeting of the minds, we decided to try to provoke some aggressive behavior from the big fellow in the hopes of coaxing him out to the shallows for a better shot.

Being a hippo, his patience could be measured with a thimble, so out he came.

Swimming from deep water in an ungainly push of his big body, he sought solid ground.



*John Mattera (L) with his hunting buddy Al Gargano (R) who aimed the Heym Express bolt-action .404 Jeffery rifle on a small rosette on the leopard’s shoulder. The .450-grain Norma PH Woodleigh Weldcore Soft Nose sent the big tom to the ground for good.*

As he gained firmer real estate, his massive body rose from the water table, and out he came for us. Building up the momentum for what was certain to be a charge, the Heym went to work, and at 40 yards placed a .450-grain Norma Woodleigh full-metal-jacket solid between his eyes, square into the brain-housing group, ending the problem with no fuss or fanfare.

Next stop was deep in the Limpopo province where my hunting buddy, Alexius Gargano, used the Heym Express rifle to drop a leopard in his tracks. The second of our hunts also required a bunch of work on our part, as anyone who has hunted leopard can attest – it’s not easy.

The hunt started with looking for signs of a big tom and setting baits. Then, day after day, we checked or changed dead carcasses and dragged gut piles to mark their scent. Finally, our diligence paid off and we spotted the track of a big male cat on freshly gnawed impala hind. We refreshed the bait from the endless supply of butchered game that rode on the back of our truck, glad to get rid of it! Then we built a blind within good view of the bait tree, covered our tracks, and left.

The first morning after the track was found, Al and PH André Nel slipped into the blind, and in no time were greeted with the magnificent sight of a great male leopard in the tree surveying his last meal.

André took two seconds to judge the cat and uttered the affirmative.

“Shoot as soon as he turns broadside.”

Al aimed the Heym Express bolt gun in on a small rosette on the leopard’s shoulder with the Swarovski dangerous-game scope cranked down to 1x. The big rifle barked with authority as soon as the leopard turned, and the .450-grain Norma PH, Woodleigh Weldcore Soft Nose sent the big tom to the ground for good.

Everyone loves quick and decisive ends to dangerous-game encounters, and the Heym Express rifle was delivering rapid, effective resolutions without much drama. Over the next 10 days, the Express rifle and I chewed some African dust, collected a few more trophies, and worked as back-up rifle on a couple of other dangerous game encounters. A very comforting tool to have in my hands, just in case.

The Heym performed wonderfully without a glitch, working through whatever problem faced us like the seasoned veteran it was.

My African adventure ended, as always, with me wanting more – more great hunting, more time with friends afield, and a new petition – more shooting opportunities for the big Heym Express rifle.

The good news is, we’re coming back in November... to hunt buff.

*John Mattera is a regular contributor to “African Hunting Gazette.”* 🍷