

Big Game Rifles

Heym's 88B double and Martini Magnum bolt-action



by PHILLIP HAYES

When hunting dangerous game, a reliable rifle, and the ability to use it effectively under pressure, is of the utmost importance. Selecting a suitable large calibre bolt-action or double rifle requires much thought, but getting the best quality that you can afford will go a long way towards making your task easier and perhaps save your life or that of others.

Several gunmakers offer high-quality production rifles that are far better than a run-of-the-mill factory rifle, and other than having a custom rifle built to fit you, a rifle in this class is a very good option. Heym is one such company, founded 150 years ago in Suhl, Germany. It is famous for the attention to detail that goes into its production models, and most of its rifles rival those of custom gunmakers.

The Heym Express Magnum has been around since 1986. The Express' action is larger than the magnum Mauser. The magnum Mauser '98 actions have a bolt diameter of .700", the Heym .785".

In 2010, Heym had German-born, Canadian custom rifle-builder

Ralf Martini redesign the stock and profile of the rifle, and the Martini Express came into being. Heym says the design of its Martini Express is reminiscent of best-grade English sporting rifles made "between the wars", and is a modern version of a classic design made with all the advantages of 21st century steel and CNC precision. One aim was to produce a rifle that is 100% reliable. The action and magazine boxes, produced by Heym, are cartridge-specific to ensure reliability.

The 24" barrels are of Krupp steel, hammer-forged in-house and the magnum action is a Mauser design (double square bridge) with controlled-feed, non-rotating claw extractor. The safety is a three-position side-swing type and the trigger a single stage, set at 3.5lbs with no creep or over-travel.

Available in .375H&H Mag, .416 Rigby, .404 Jeffery, .458 Lott and .450 Rigby, the magazine holds four cartridges and has an Oberndorf-style drop-magazine; it's of one-piece construction with a straddle floor plate and trigger bow release. The stock is of select European walnut and upgrades are available. Depending on the calibre, rifle weight varies between 9.0lbs and 10.5lbs.

I had the opportunity to use the Martini Express in .375H&H on the range and it was immediately apparent that the rifle's elegant classic lines and lively handling belie its size. Although it did not fit me perfectly, it came up naturally to my shoulder and, surprisingly, the open sights were spot on when mounting the rifle.

It is well-balanced, with its centre of gravity positioned midway between the hands. During the shoot, I swung the rifle as if taking shots at moving targets, and it handled very well. The bolt-action is very smooth, making reloading effortless and the straight bolt handle with its pear-shaped knob afforded a good grip when rapidly chambering rounds. The stock's design is perfect for absorbing recoil and it literally felt as if I was shooting my lightweight .308 Mauser. The fore-end is slimmer than those found on most factory rifles and extremely comfortable to hold. The wrap-around chequering, which is practical and not too fine, ensured a secure hold with the trigger hand. The express sights are simple, yet made target acquisition and alignment an effortless and natural process.

HAVING USED LARGER calibre rifles most of my working life, I found the action of the Heym Martini its greatest asset – it is simply sublime, and cycling the bolt becomes instinctive and effortless. Incidentally, Heym has omitted the third locking lug of the original Mauser, as it was rendered unnecessary by the superior quality of today's steel and the Heym's bigger locking lugs (the Mauser's third lug made no actual surface contact anyway, it was there solely as a backup in the unlikely event of the front lugs failing). The Heym's large, non-rotating extractor claw and controlled feeding instil the confidence that is needed in a



The 88B action is an Anson & Deeley boxlock with a triple lock – a double underbite with a Greener cross-bolt.



The raised cocking indicators left and right on the tang provide a clear visual indication that the rifle is cocked and ready to be fired.



The Express rear sight is zeroed at 50m and makes target acquisition quick and easy.



Above and right: Examples of actions that Heym builds. The actions come in five different sizes, depending on the calibre.

rifle intended for dangerous game. This is one of the best actions I have had the pleasure of using. In a larger calibre, I can easily see myself using it daily as a working rifle.

Reloading the magazine is a pleasure with the ample space the magnum action provides, and this is definitely a plus when a speedy reload is needed. The double square-bridge action is slotted for scope mounting, and EAW quick release mounts will do a good job for such occasions. The side-safety is also very desirable on a dangerous game rifle.

Shooting with open sights was done at 25m – my eyesight is simply not good enough anymore to use open sights at longer distances. However, this gave me a good indication of its accuracy as I frequently use my own .375 at this distance, and I well know its capabilities at longer distances.

Shooting from the standing position, and with careful aiming, the Martini produced groups with shots virtually touching each other. I also found it easy to put three fast shots into the vitals of a scaled-down buffalo target. The muzzle velocity with PMP 300gr softs averaged 2 495fps and that of 286gr PMP solids 2 503fps. I also tried two different reloads and the rifle fed every cartridge flawlessly.

Overall, this is an excellent rifle that works perfectly. Everything about it has been well thought out for hunters going after dangerous game. In fact the Heym's performance so impressed me that I grudgingly had to admit I prefer it to my own .375H&H – a rifle that was custom built for me to use on dangerous game and with which I have had a love affair since the first day.

The Martini's price is a rather stiff



The double square bridge magnum Mauser action of the Express rifle.

R140 000, much more than a custom working rifle will cost, but Heym succeeded in getting everything right with this magnum sized bolt-action. I want one in .404 Jeffery.

I ALSO USED this opportunity to test Heym's 88B double rifle in .470NE. This is the workhorse version of Heym's doubles, a no-frills rifle on a boxlock design with ejectors.

Heym has produced the 88B for over 35 years, and until the recent arrival of the 89B it served as the maker's flagship double rifle for dangerous game. Heym claims that there are more professional hunters carrying its double rifles in Africa today than any other brand. It is available in different frame sizes and each 88B Safari – the more upmarket model – is individually crafted by hand, with a host of options for making the rifle uniquely yours.

Stocks, right- or left-handed, can be made to measure to ensure a perfect fit. The receivers are scaled in five calibre-specific sizes designed from the ground up for double rifle cartridges. Each calibre receives its own barrel profile to ensure proper balance, weight distribution and the "balance-point between the hands" feeling that is synonymous with a well-designed double rifle.

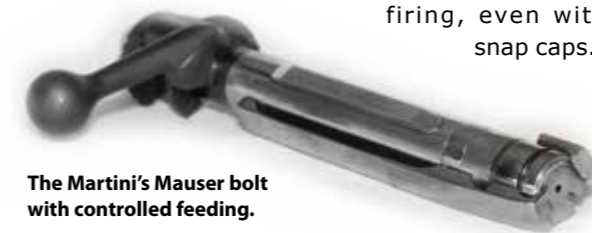
The action is an Anson & Deeley boxlock with a triple lock – Purdey double under-bite with a Greener cross bolt. It's available in .300 Win

Mag, .375H&H Belted Mag, .375H&H Flanged Mag, .416 Rigby, .416/500NE, .450/400NE 3", .450NE 3.25", .470NE, .500NE, .577NE and 20ga.

For the uninitiated, the first question regarding a true large-bore double is whether the recoil is manageable. I found the 88B's .470 comfortable, shot after shot – more of a push than a kick. In fact, I tested the .375 and .470 on the same day and did not have a tender shoulder afterwards. The stock design and neat, dark-coloured recoil pad did an excellent job of taming the .470's recoil.

The safety is non-automatic, a great help when confronting dangerous game, as there is no need to disengage the safety after reloading – you simply close the rifle and fire. The sights are well designed and the front bead easy to pick up against dark backgrounds.

The triggers are heavy – according to the brochure, 1.7kg to 1.8kg for the front and 1.9kg to 2.0kg for the rear. To me, it felt much heavier, but dry firing the rifle (using fired cases as snap caps) soon got me used to the heavy pull. A lot of practice in this regard is advised. Nicholas Yale imports snap caps for big bore doubles, so there is no excuse for not practising frequently, but keep in mind that Heym advises against excessive dry firing, even with snap caps.



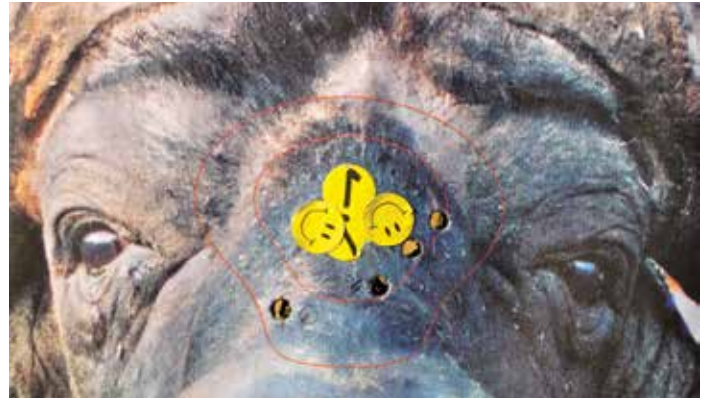
The Martini's Mauser bolt with controlled feeding.



The three-position safety. From the top: Safety off and bolt unlocked; safety on and bolt unlocked; and lastly safety on and bolt locked.



Wood-to-metal finish on the bolt-action is of high quality.



The .470 double landed a left and a right exactly where aimed at 25m. The double is regulated with Hornady's Dangerous Game ammunition.

PMP factory ammunition fired at 25m from the .375H&H proved it to be an accurate bolt-action, ideal for dangerous game work.

The double triggers, however, created some problems for me. As the stock was slightly too short for my large frame, when firing the front trigger first, the recoil would shift my hand forward, forcing me to change my hold to engage the rear trigger for the second shot. This considerably slowed down my follow-up shot, and also brought my middle finger in contact with the trigger-guard during recoil. For my larger than average hands, a coarser wrap-around chequering on the grip and possibly a palm swell would sort that out – as, of course, would a longer stock.

Accordingly, to place the second shot exactly where I wanted it, I tried using the back trigger first, and it worked. Incidentally, the front trigger is articulated to avoid painful contact with the forefinger when firing the rear trigger.

Other practical features are the raised cocking indicators left and right on the tang, providing visual indicators, or you can use the thumb of your shooting hand to feel the indicators without lowering your eyes.

The 88B double, like the Safari, is handmade, but options are limited to barrel length

and stock dimensions. The receiver remains 'in the white' with no engraving. A European walnut stock is standard, though upgrades are available, and a good stock oil will enhance the appearance.

Heym regulates these rifles with Hornady's Dangerous Game ammunition, which is imported by Inyathi Sporting Supplies and available from a number of dealers. A box of 20 cartridges in .470NE costs around R2 400. Hornady and other manufacturers market bullets and cases for those willing to work up a load.

Hornady 500gr DG bullets chronographed at 2 182fps (right barrel) and 2 205fps (left). This felt to me like

enough 'bench-resting' of a .470, so I stood to engage the buffalo target at 25m. Carefully aimed shots landed a left and a right close together.

I then picked up the pace, placing most of the shots in the vitals, though it was clear that, as a bolt-action-man, I'd need a lot of practice to make a successful transition to a double. However, I found adapting to the Heym easy. It functions like a familiar side-by-side shotgun, and if you can acquire an old double-trigger shotgun with a safety that duplicates this one, it will make for cheap practice and will ingrain muscle memory.

To me, the Heym double and bolt-action came as a surprise: plain, no-frills rifles, easy to use with low recoil and outstanding accuracy, and quality that would put most custom rifles to shame. The 88B model with ejectors is priced around R200 000. It's a lot of money, but for those who regularly work in dangerous game country it is well worth considering. Heym rifles are available from Safari & Outdoor, telephone 086-122-2269. For more information, or if you want to test one on a hunt, visit www.heymanfanatics.co.za. 



Mynhard Herholdt, the driving force behind www.heymanfanatics.co.za with the .470NE 88B double on the range. The rifle proved to be a mild-mannered beast.