

The New Heym “Express” by Martini

It all starts innocently enough.

In 2009, Thomas Wolkmann, the owner of Heym, was once again at the SCI show in Reno, to join Chris Sells from Double Gun imports/Heym USA at his booth. A fine group of Heym double rifles is displayed for American hunters of African dangerous game.

By Art Froese



A proud Ralf Martini holds the prototype for the new rifle.

“Why don’t our bolt action Express rifles sell very well in America, when our double rifles do?” wondered Thomas.

“The stock design and the whole look of the rifle does not please or attract American hunters,” Chris said. He remembered that in the 1980s, with different owners and a different factory, Heym had the advice of Tom Turpin, an American outdoor writer and aficionado of fine rifles. Tom had taken his experience and his Rigby rifle to Germany for a week to meet with the engineers and designers, but found resistance to change for the rifle redesign to be successful.

“I almost delivered a litter of Gila monsters when I saw the first production rifle,” Tom wrote in a recent article.

So Chris and his team looked at Express rifles and the stocks exhibited at the previous year’s SCI and American Custom Gunmakers Guild show, starting with the work of Ralf Martini, an expat German from Cranbrook, British Columbia, Canada.

They asked Ralf if he could manufacture 50 to 100 stocks per year for Heym. He declined – his passion was in the design and assembly of the entire rifle and he had no desire to work in mass production, but offered to design a stock for Heym craftsmen to build.

Little did the three men know that they had embarked on a journey that would take two years and with a review of every component of the requirements for a fine magnum “Express” rifle, and credit

goes to Ralf Martini for quietly and thoroughly explaining function and design to achieve “a design that is alive.”

Together with Chris’s knowledge of hunters’ requirements, Thomas and his Heym team worked to develop a whole new concept in the factory-built “Express” rifle.

In the spring of 2009, Heym sent their then Heym Express Lite rifle to Ralf for his review. The conference included Bernd Helbig – Heym shop master/gunmaker; Alois Schlembach – Heym designer and engineer, and Manfred Eisenbrand, General Manager at Heym. The initial discussion focused on the stock, with Ralf suggesting modifications and changes based on his experience and keen designer’s eye.

Ralf had worked with Martin Hagn in Cranbrook who had considerable experience as a master gun maker and was for years affiliated with Hartman and Weiss in Germany, one of the finest gun making firms in the world. During those years Ralf studied the design and manufacturing of classic British-styled rifles and stocks.

Further discussion moved to barrel contours, weight and balance, with Ralf indicating that the barrels were too small and light for the size of the action and cartridges being considered.

Finally Bernd Helbig turned to Ralf: “Why don’t you completely redesign the rifle in caliber .375H H&H, exactly like you want. Our team will review the results produced by your design.”

While the final decision rested with

Rifles in Africa



The firing pin is screwed into the front of the cocking piece which results in a stiff one-piece performance without the slop and play in a standard Mauser action. It is easy to remove the bolt from the bolt body for cleaning, which can be a must on the Alaskan coast or in the African rains.



The stock design allows the shooter to immediately acquire the sights which is essential for dangerous game.

Heym and Chris Sells, the Martini design would remove all skepticism and caution, and create a “WOW” response.

Ralf started in 2010, carefully reassessing each design component, working on a prototype in between his custom gun orders. In late 2010 he shipped the prototype to Chris in Dallas for comment. The rifle had Ralf’s new stock, bolt handle, barrel contour, open sights and barrel band. Ralf also machined the square bridges of the receiver to accept Talley rings.

Chris got his permission to display the proposed new express rifle at the Dallas Safari Club and SCI, and Ralf displayed it at the American Custom Gunmakers Guild.

The rest is history:

“Finally, a gun manufacturer is producing a classic British-styled ‘Express’ rifle,” said the hunters, who wanted to place orders for the new rifle. Although it was a prototype and production likely a year away, Chris accepted orders from the most persistent hunters. Heym wanted to go into production immediately, and a market demand resulted in an action plan at Heym headquarters. Heym then decided to exhibit the prototype at the IWA [International Waffen Ausstellung], and hunters from Europe and Russia



The overall balance form and weight makes the rifle feel good in your hands. The contours of the barrel vary between calibers to achieve the desired weight.



The action has massive recoil lugs. The bottom of the action and the magazine are machined for the cartridge dimensions for each caliber to achieve perfect and reliable feeding. The magazine accepts four rounds for each caliber without using a drop box. As a result the rifle feels better.

placed immediate orders.

The first production rifles went to the US customers in 2012.

THE RIFLE Calibers

Heym produced the rifle in four calibers: .375 H&H, .404 Jeffery, .416 Rigby and .458 Lott – all proven African cartridges with the Lott being the largest. At 2400 fps muzzle velocity with a 500-grain bullet, one doesn’t need any more in a bolt action rifle. The .375 H&H is the versatile caliber which can be used for all African game and large North American game.

The Stock

Ralf knew the toughest challenge in the overall rifle was to have a true large magnum Mauser action and appropriate barrel dimensions to achieve elegant lines in the stock and the rifle. He perfected his stock design concepts, and his refinements allow immediate visual acquisition of



The rear sight is so seamlessly integrated into the barrel contour that it appears to be part of the barrel.



The integral scope bases for Talley rings are low and include a front stop on both bases for additional security and safety. The fit of the metal to the wood is extraordinary. The fit requires care when removing the barreled action from the stock.

open sights without excessive drop at the comb. There is no need for cast-off as the dimensions of the cheek piece allow the shooters to acquire the line of sight easily. This works for a great variety of hunter sizes and facial and neck characteristics. It’s hard to describe, but it works. The result is an elegant feel and look that belies the size of the caliber and rifle weight.

The Bolt & Action

A Heym design with true magnum Mauser features. It has a bolt diameter of .780”, larger than a magnum Mauser (.700) and can easily handle all the large African calibers. Chris Sells had Heym change the bolt shroud to a more traditional Mauser look, including a three-position side safety. Because Heym uses an EDM wire to cut the raceways of the action, they are perfectly square and parallel to the bore.

The bottom of the action and magazine box is machined for each specific cartridge dimension to achieve smooth and reliable feeding of the cartridge. These details create a true custom action tailored to each cartridge to achieve perfect smooth and reliable feeding function.

Heym uses Ralf's bolt handle as it is a straight down Oberndorf style. The ejector blade is underneath the bolt face on the left-hand side and ejects the brass sideways. The firing pin is screwed into the front of the cocking piece and then secured with a set screw. This results in a stiff one-piece performance without the slop and play like in a standard Mauser firing pin and cocking piece assembly. Disassembly of the bolt is absolutely easy. You press the bolt shroud locking pin, turn the shroud and release. There is no pressure in this release as the firing pin, shroud and firing spring is a one-piece assembly. The shroud locks to the bolt body with a single cam, similar to a Sako. When hunting in adverse weather conditions, it is often necessary to clean and dry the action, including the firing pin spring and bolt body.

This design makes the process simple and safe compared with other actions.

The top of the action has a square bridge with recessed scope ring bases machined in for Tally scope rings. The front and rear dovetail bases have recoil shoulders machined in the front of each to act as ring stops. The rings cannot move forward from recoil. Tally rings are used as they are strong and offer a simple, quick-release mechanism – essential when hunting dangerous game. If a scope is damaged in action, requiring the open sights to be used, the changeover can be done in a few seconds. The tolerances between the bolt and the action are much tighter than on a standard Mauser and provide incredibly smooth and easy cycling for a magnum action.

The Magazine

Three facts set this design apart. First, the magazine allows four cartridges down in every caliber plus one in the chamber – again essential when hunting dangerous game. Your PH will often ask you to put an extra round into a downed animal. It's easier to sew up an extra bullet hole than deal with a dangerous animal at close range. Normally, four large cartridges would mean a drop box magazine design that increases the depth of the magazine



A three-shot 100 yard group with 400-grain Swift A-Frames from the author's new Heym .416 Rigby Express rifle.

“Finally, a gun manufacturer is producing a classic British-styled ‘Express’ rifle...”

box as cartridge size increases, resulting in it protruding from the stock ahead of the trigger guard. The genius of the Heym solution is that the width of the magazine changes with cartridge size, thus keeping the bottom metal flush with the stock. The outside width of the stock doesn't change as the interior allows for the width of the four different calibers. The magazine box is made specifically for each cartridge and ensures reliability in cartridge feeding. (Once, my PH's father when hunting elephant with only his tracker, discovered that his second round in his new rifle would not feed into the chamber. He was fortunate his first shot downed the animal.)

The third positive aspect of the magazine design is that it fits securely into a recessed slot at the front and back of the bottom of the action. The fit is snug and ensures from receiver and magazine box that inletting of the wood in the stock must be absolutely precise as well. The action is slightly glass-bedded in the stock with the chamber portion of the barrel lying firmly bedded in the stock. This results in a secure and rigid action and a free-floating barrel. The recoil lugs on the front and rear of the bottom of the action are twice as high as on a standard Mauser. The cross bolt

through the stock behind the front recoil lug is filed to sit directly against the recoil lug. This design will handle the heaviest recoil. My first PH in Africa is on his third wooden stock on his rifle caused by recoil damage due to poor recoil lug and stock design. A broken stock can ruin a great adventure and expensive hunt.

The Barrel

The barrel is made by Heym and is hammer forged from the finest quality steel. Heym claims these barrels will last twice as long and do not require a break-in period to remove tool marks, compared with button and cut-rifled barrels. The barrel contours on the Express rifles is different for each of the .375, the two .400s and, the .458 to ensure the required weight and balance for each caliber is maintained. The sights and barrel bands are customized to the three different caliber groupings. This attention to

detail is virtually unheard of in any other factory rifle.

The Trigger

This is a proven design. It is set at 3½ pounds at the factory and the lock screws are sealed. There is no further adjustment after that. The trigger breaks without creep, and as smoothly as any I've ever used.

Open Sights and Barrel Bands

The front and rear open sights and the front sling swivel use a barrel band that is soldered to the barrel. The rear sight is machined to be flush with the chamber contour of the barrel making it look like an integral rear sight base. The sights are not going to move or come off in heated action. A PH friend shot a wounded buffalo at five yards, only to see the front sights on the rifle fall off. Had he not killed the buffalo, he might not be here to tell the story. He threw the rifle in the back of the truck and never used it again.

Finishes

The barreled action is matte-blued to last and make sure the sun doesn't betray the hunter's presence. This is the right finish



The three people behind the design and construction of the new Heym Safari: Chris Sells, Ralf Martini, and Thomas Wolkman with Heym marketing associate Jacqui Van Veuren, at the 2014 SCI Convention.

Guild members

Advert

for a hunting rifle. I've seen high-gloss bluing reflect like a mirror two miles away on a bighorn sheep hunt. The Stock

The stock has a satin-looking oil finish. The weather and field conditions these "Express" rifles will see will result in character marks.

Weight

The .416 Rigby rifle, without scopes weighs in at 9¾ pounds. With scope and rings it weighs in at 11 pounds. I know that this is a comfortable weight to shoot for this caliber as I've put probably 300 rounds through my old .416. You won't have to spend time on aftermarket recoil reducers with these rifles.

Price

These rifles currently retail for \$9800 US and can be ordered with a custom length of pull at that price. The only factory upgrade available is the wood and engraving features with nitrate-hardened action parts. The price for these rifles is a bargain. Heym has my money and I have their rifle.

The Difference

If I were a PH or an African hunter that wanted a magnum express bolt action rifle, this is the choice for me. Why?

The open sights that are needed are not going to fall off. I can shoot the rifle comfortably because it's balanced and has the right weight. The action cycles

perfectly smooth and is totally reliable with controlled round feed and claw extractor that ensures I can feed a round, even while falling down. The dangerous critters won't see me because the rifle does not reflect the sun. The magazine holds four rounds down which gives me one more round if I ever need it. The scope won't fall off and the stock won't break because of recoil.

And you know what – the look and lines satisfy my inner sensibilities. I like this rifle. And, oh yes, it shoots straight as it must. My .416 Rigby shoots groups under 1" at 100 yards with 400-grain Swift A-Frame bullets. Repetitive feedback from customers claim outstanding accuracy.

This Heym team has found all the differences that make a difference and have included them all with skill and uncompromised design and construction in the new "Heym by Martini" Express Rifle.

It would be great to see the Martini and Heym team continue their collaboration for the next caliber grouping in the 7 mm, .300 and .338 grouping, preferably with a longer action to allow loading bullets to the bottom of the case neck and to the barrel rifling. Ralf was already involved in redesigning the rear stock of the magnificent Heym Jumbo Double rifle in .577N.E. based on Mark Sullivan's extensive experience and Chris Sells's keen eye.

I find myself dreaming that I am younger and living the hunting life, supported and enriched by a fine and beautiful rifle. ♡