

# Big Game Beast

► TEXT & PHOTOS BY PHIL MASSARO

## THE HEYM EXPRESS BOLT-ACTION RIFLE

The Heym Express in .404 Jeffery is expertly crafted and totally reliable.

**V**ERY RARELY HAVE I PICKED UP a rifle and become immediately smitten, but this is an honest tale of love at first sight.

I was headed on safari to hunt elephant in the Dete Valley, Matabeleland North, Zimbabwe, near the east side of the Hwange Park – the very same ground where Frederick Courteney Selous hunted ivory in the 1870s – and was privileged enough to be offered a Heym rifle for the trip.

While Heym is best known for its fantastic double rifles – the Model 88 is a staple among professional hunters – their bolt guns are equally impressive. As this safari would include plains game as well, the good folks at Heym and I figured a .404 Jeffery would make a good choice of caliber. It would be plenty of gun for the elephant, yet still be able to hit distant targets should the longer shot present itself.

From the instant I removed the rifle from the Pelican case at Cossackie Gun & Bow, I felt it balance perfectly, and how it rose to my shoulder almost effortlessly. The express sights were “right there”, meaning that the bold gold bead settled into the wide, shallow “V” without adjusting to the stock’s cheekpiece at all. The feel of the slim forend was reminiscent of a fine English double-barreled shotgun, and the length of pull fit as if it were made for me. This wasn’t lust; this was head-over-heels love.

As an added bonus, it came with a Swarovski Z6i 1-6x24 in detachable Talley rings. This particular scope has the circle-dot reticle, and was illuminated to boot; perfect for hog hunting or for Cape buffalo in the shadows. The scope took adjustment very well, and despite the fact that I removed it and re-installed it numerous times, and that it was in the care of ever-abusive baggage handlers, it never lost zero.



The Heym's great big bolt, which cycles like a dream.

## FROM THE BENCH

The rifle's accuracy potential was clear from its first trip to the bench. I had two boxes of Nosler Safari ammo, featuring their monometal solid at 2,350 fps, which put three shots into a 3/4-inch group at the 100-yard target. Not too shabby for a cartridge that has been drastically overlooked for the last 50 years. The .404 Jeffery, with its .423-inch diameter bullet, was once the standard issue caliber for most of southern Africa's game rangers, but the initial loading – a 400-grain bullet at 2,150 fps – seemed anemic in comparison to the .375 H&H and the .416 Rigby.

However, modern loads like Nosler, Norma and Hornady bump the velocities up to 2,300-2,350 fps, depending on the brand. This puts the old cartridge nearly on par with

the .416s in the velocity and energy departments. Component brass is also available from those three companies, and it's good stuff.

For my trek, I was set on using the Woodleigh Hydrostatically Stabilized Solid, a monometal affair with a small cup at the front to create a shockwave for tissue destruction, yet still give the fantastic penetration of the non-expanding bullets. I cooked up a handload using Norma cases with an 80-grain charge of Alliant's fabulous Reloder 15, sparked by a Federal Gold Medal Match GM215M primer, and the Heym Express put those Woodleighs into a one-inch group at 2,280 fps. Hornady's great DGS 400-grain bullet liked the same powder charge, giving more than acceptable accuracy.

Recoil was more than manageable, with the Heym producing the classic "push" of the big bores, rather than the quick, stinging slap associated with the larger, bottle-necked magnums. The red NECG recoil pad takes much of the beating; it grips your shoulder well and is pliable enough to allow you to place your shot accurately without fear of excessive recoil.

I also cooked up a load for lighter game, as a bushpig hunt was on the initial menu (the bushpigs never came to the party), using Cutting Edge Bullets' neat 325-grain Safari Raptor. The all-copper bullets cruised along at 2,550 fps when set atop an 85-grain charge of Reloder 15, using the same Norma cases. The hollowpoint Raptor has proven to be a very accurate bullet, and in the .404 Jeffery

that tradition continues.

Want a bit more "oomph" from your .404? Norma loads the wonderful 450-grain Woodleigh softpoints and solids at a muzzle velocity of 2,150 fps, and these shot very well, printing groups less than one inch. This takes the .423-inch bore to a new level, offering performance approaching the .450 Nitro Express.

## RELIABLE CRAFTSMANSHIP

To help deliver those well-placed shots, the Heym trigger is nice and crisp, breaking at right around four pounds with virtually no creep and very little overtravel. I like a bit of weight to a trigger on a safari gun. You don't want a hair-trigger to go off at the wrong time when dangerous game is involved; the results could literally be deadly. I took a nice impala ram in South Africa with the .404 at just over 175 yards and put that bullet exactly where I wanted, with great confidence, partly due to that fine trigger.

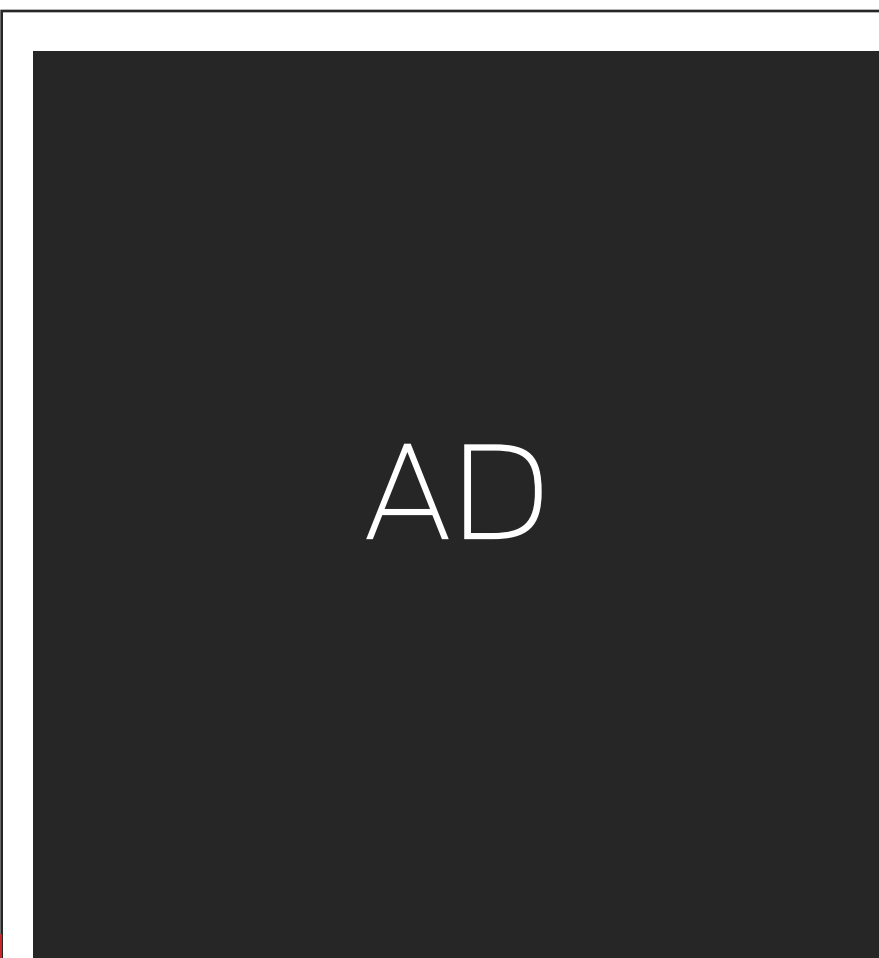
The word "reliable" is an adjective that must always describe your choice of dangerous game rifle. You'll want to work out any potential problems long before actually hunting dangerous game, and that includes verifying all your ammo will feed from the magazine every time.

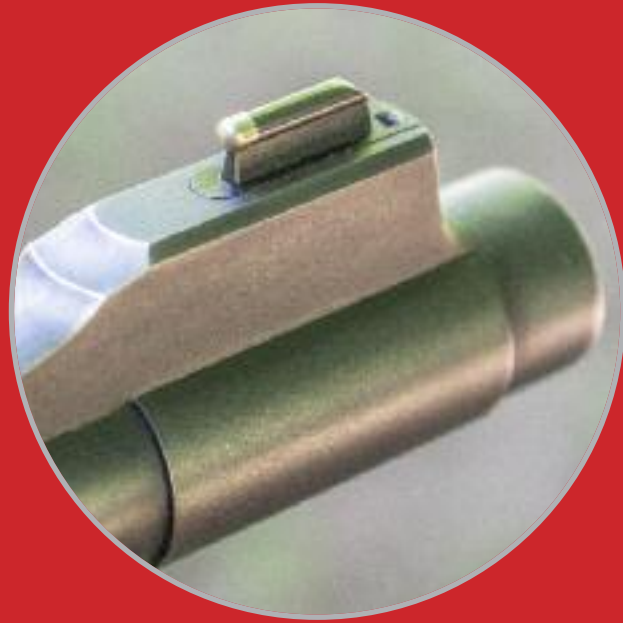
The geometry of the proprietary Heym action is unique to each cartridge, as well as the magazine and follower. The cartridges click into the magazine, and even with the Woodleigh bullet's flat meplat – which historically doesn't feed well from a box magazine – the cartridges fed like they were greased. There were no rattles in the magazine (a sound that can be a dead giveaway when game is close) and the hinged floorplate held things in their proper place throughout the trip. The Heym Express holds four .404 Jeffery cartridges in the magazine, with a fifth up-the-pipe if you so choose, yet the well designed geometry allows the action to fit perfectly in my right hand while carrying it.

The safety is along the lines of the Winchester Model 70 safety: a three-position wing style safety located at the rear of the action on the right hand side. Forward is fire, the middle position allows the safe operation of the bolt for loading/unloading, and the rearward po-



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The big gold bead on the front sight is very useful on close up shots, yet fine enough for accurate shooting.



The integral rear sight has a wide "V" for 50-yard shots, and a finer groove for the 100-yard sight.



The integral scope mounts, designed for Talley rings.

sition blocks both the sear and the bolt operation. I like this style safety on my bolt action rifles, firstly because I've used it for decades and muscle memory counts when you're in the thick of it, and secondly because you can verify the safety position with your thumb without taking your eyes off your target.

## IN COUNTRY

In Zimbabwe, the Express exhibited all of its finer points. When hunting elephant, I like to remove my rifle's sling and scope so a rifle that doesn't balance well will show itself immediately. The Heym rifle balanced perfectly, with a balance point just forward of the floorplate. This made the miles we put on our boots much easier as the rifle would carry very well in one hand.

The stock design also gave great confidence. The way the rifle came to my shoulder allowed me to use the positioning of the cheekpiece on my face for quick sight alignment, and this was wonderful in the thickets of Zimbabwe where an encounter with lion, buffalo, elephant or hippo is not out of the question.

I had booked the hunt through deMouplied & Son Outdoor Adventures and my good friend Dave deMouplied came along with me to film the affair. When we saw the bull we were after, PH Tim Schultz and his head tracker M'butha both gave us a nod of encouragement, and Dave said, very quietly, "Make sure this shot goes true." I did my best to keep my heart rate down and prevent the shakes from the tension and excitement, but with every step we took closer to the bull, my heart beat a little bit louder in my ears.

When M'butha spread the shooting sticks 16 yards away from the six-ton bull, the forend of the Heym Express slid into the groove, the safety was gently pushed forward and I quickly settled that gold bead on the point of the pachyderm's shoulder. To Dave's elation, the shot did go true, and two more went true behind it. I don't remember cycling the action, but when I watched the playback of the video, the straight bolt cycled almost effortlessly and I was able to operate the firearm without ever taking my eyes off the elephant. It's worth the price for a rifle that produces that level of confidence in a

situation that tense. You risk your life when hunting dangerous game, and you need to rely on every piece of gear. Heym's Express rifle can be relied upon to see that you get home safe.

## WHY HEYM?

So why would a hunter opt for this much more expensive German gun as opposed to something more run-of-the-mill? Well, it starts with the proprietary action. Having a proper sized action makes the balance of the rifle stay between the shooter's hands, where it belongs. This allows for a slimmer barrel contour and a lighter stock, while keeping the weight proper for a rifle of this caliber. The 24-inch Krupp barrel is a good piece of steel. This particular rifle shoots groups that you'd expect from a good .308 Winchester or .30-06 Springfield.

When you work the bolt, it feels different from any other bolt gun I've used in that there are no rattles or sloppy play in the action. It cycles like a dream. The Heym bolt diameter is 0.780 inches, larger than the Mauser 98 (0.700 inches) or the Brevex magnum action (0.750 inches), so the Express

can handle virtually any cartridge you'd use in a shoulder-fired rifle.

Heym will make the stock to your chosen length of pull. The LOP of the rifle I used measured 14.5 inches, which fits me perfectly when wearing just a safari shirt. Good stock fit translates into less perceived recoil, and less recoil is always a good thing.

Heym also offers several options for the top of their receivers. Single square bridge, double square bridge or – like my rifle had – scope bases milled directly into the receiver to work with 19mm Talley rings. Milled scope bases equal one less moving part, and one less thing that can work loose. Mr. Murphy and his annoying law will definitely show up in the bigger caliber rifles, so less is definitely more.

The rear iron sights are milled onto the barrel, featuring the traditional wide "V" for the 50-yard sight and a flip up 100-yard sight with a small U-shape for a finer hold. The front sight sits atop a barrel band and features a 3/32-inch gold bead that works very well in all sorts of lighting.

Heym puts some classy appointments on as well, little things like a nice barrel band sling swivel and a rear sling swivel that looks like the letter "O" on the end of the screw. They use a straight bolt handle instead of angling it, so the knob sits about opposite the front of the generously sized trigger guard. The front of the trigger guard also holds the release for the hinged floorplate.

The wood-to-metal fit on the Express is impeccable, and the checkering is nice as well. The slim, English-style forend has an

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The author with his Zimbabwe bull elephant.

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**CONTACT:**

**Alliant Powder**  
AlliantPowder.com  
(800) 379-1732

**Cutting Edge Bullets**  
CuttingEdgeBullets.com  
(814) 345-6690

**Federal Premium**  
FederalPremium.com  
(800) 379-1732

**Heym Rifles**  
HeymUSA.com  
(214) 606-2566

**Hornady**  
Hornady.com  
(800) 338-3220

**Norma USA**  
Norma-USA.com

**Nosler Bullets**  
Nosler.com  
(800) 285-3701

**Swarovski Optik**  
SwarovskiOptik.com  
(800) 426-3089

**Talley Manufacturing**  
TalleyManufacturing.com  
(803) 854-5700

**Woodleigh Bullets**  
WoodleighBullets.com.au  
+61 3 5457 2226

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## SPECIFICATIONS

- Model:** Heym Express by Martini
- Action:** Bolt action
- Caliber:** .404 Jeffery
- Stock:** Walnut
- Finish:** Matte black barrel & action
- Barrel:** 24-in. carbon steel
- Sights:** Express iron sights (50 and 100-yard)
- Magazine Capacity:** Four rounds, fixed magazine with hinged floorplate
- Overall Length:** 45.75 inches
- Weight (empty):** 10.0 lbs.

**MSRP: \$9,800**



### HEYM EXPRESS BOLT-ACTION RIFLE

Load Name	Avg. Muzzle Velocity (FPS)	Avg. 3-shot 100 yd. Group (inches)	Best 100 yd. Group (inches)
Nosler Custom Safari 400-grain brass solid	2,380 fps	0.80	0.70
Woodleigh Hydrostatically Stabilized Solid 400-grain (Handload)	2,280 fps	1.05	0.80
Hornady DGS 400-grain (Handload)	2,270fps	1.25	0.90
Cutting Edge Bullets 325-grain Safari Raptor (Handload)	2,550fps	1.00	0.85
Norma African PH 450-grain Woodleigh Weldcore	2,140fps	0.85	0.75

Velocities measured with Oehler Model 35P chronograph, 5 yards from muzzle.

ebony tip for a bit of contrast and a well-pronounced cheekpiece that feels very comfortable, even from the bench. The pretty walnut stock is cross-pinned to prevent it from cracking due to recoil. The rifle settles down nicely on shooting sticks and from the offhand position, with the added weight of the Swarovski scope. Without a scope, the rifle points like an extension of your arms. It's literally the most graceful rifle I've ever used.

If you've dreamed of owning a premium safari gun, give the Heym Express a long hard look. For the price of a low-end double, you can enjoy a fine bolt-gun that can hunt the whole. **GW**

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