



**Johan van Wyk**

# HEYM MARTINI EXPRESS

## *A Masterpiece from Germany*

*In spite of the availability of a plethora of bolt-action rifles chambered for dangerous-game cartridges from scores of manufacturers, every once in a while a rifle comes along that really causes a stir for all the right reasons. The Heym Martini Express bolt-action is just such a rifle. Redesigned a few years ago with the help of ace German-born Canadian custom rifle builder, Ralf Martini, it is available in some of the more popular big-bore cartridges today.*

I first saw a Martini Express in the flesh in January 2015 at the Safari Club International (SCI) Convention in Las Vegas. The SCI Convention is a good place to look at lots and lots of very fine rifles. Literally hundreds of quality guns and rifles are on display at the booths of the many dealers and custom gunmakers that exhibit at this show. Prior to leaving for Las Vegas, I saw pictures on the Internet of the new Heym bolt-action rifle and my immediate impression was that someone managed to get things just right with the design thereof. On the second day of the show at the Heym booth, I was handed a Martini Express chambered in .375 H&H Magnum by Thomas Wolkmann, owner and CEO of Heym. I was delighted to discover that my first impressions of the new Heym had been spot on – it was a lovely rifle indeed!

I recently had a chance to lay my hands on not one but two Heym Martini Expresses; one in .375 H&H and the other in .416 Rigby. Needless to say, both functioned like the well-designed and well-made mechanical contraptions that they are. But before we take an in-depth look at them, it is perhaps prudent to take a quick step back in time. As a company, Heym is no stranger to firearms and with a heritage dating back to 1865, they have manufactured just about every kind of rifle and shotgun and have a well-

earned reputation for quality at competitive prices. In addition to the Martini Express, they also manufacture the SR21 and SR30 lines in various calibres. The SR21 is a three-lug bolt-action with a detachable box magazine meant primarily for the European market. The SR30 is a straight-pull design that is rapidly gaining popularity amongst the long-range shooting crowd in Europe for its superb accuracy.

Heym's first dedicated big-bore bolt-action rifle was the Heym Express, made around an outsize bolt-action that could handle the largest of cartridges, including rimmed cartridges such as the .577 and .600 NEs (with the help of a sloped magazine box). The Express was an interesting design that featured a Mauser-type claw extractor but made use of a small plunger-like ejector that projected through the bolt face instead of the more accepted Mauser-type, fixed-blade ejector. Although a fine and reliable rifle in its own right, the Express never sold all that well. Besides not being exactly the most elegant rifle to



**The Heym Martini Express features integral scope bases that will readily accept Talley or EAW rings. Also note the Model 70-style, three-position safety catch and neat Oberndorf-style bolt handle.**



The sights on the Martini Express consist of a neat soldered-on island rear base and ramp at the front. It is a functional and strong arrangement. Also note the barrel band front sling swivel.

be had, many considered the fact that it was available in almost every large-bore cartridge under the sun, along with a range of custom options that boggled the mind, as being partly responsible for its downfall. The result was a complete redesign of the Express, both inside and out, and the man called upon in 2009 to consult on the project was Ralf Martini.

The list of what had to be done to turn the Heym Express into the Heym Martini Express is long, to say the least. Suffice to say, however, that the result that was introduced to the public in 2011, was a complete and utter transformation – the workman-like, reliable ugly duckling was turned into a lovely, well-balanced and superbly functional dangerous-game hunting rifle.

The metalwork was designed not only to be attractive but perfectly functional as well. In the fashion of quality British bolt-action rifles of yesteryear, there is plenty of steel around the chamber but the profile of the barrel tapers rapidly towards the muzzle. The rear sight (one standing V-leaf regulated for 50 metres with a stippled rear surface to reduce glare, together with a folding leaf with U-notch for 100 metres) dovetails into a neat island soldered to the barrel. Likewise the front sight, which is a decent-sized brass bead fitted into a barrel band-mounted front-sight base. The front-sight barrel band and the barrel-mounted sling swivel are both soldered in place as well, so there is literally nothing that can fall off, get lost or be damaged when the going gets tough.

The Magnum-length action follows the classic M98

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**A neat H&H-style cheek piece neatly rounds off the elegant stock. Notice the well-figured Turkish walnut stock with good grain flow through the grip and magazine cutout.**

formula and again features a fixed-blade ejector coupled with the reliable Mauser claw extractor. The bolt shaft is of greater diameter than that of the original M98 design and allows the use of big cartridges with plenty of steel left for support around the case head. Although the action lacks an M98-style third locking lug, the use of the best modern steels negates the need for the safety lug and the two opposing locking lugs offer plenty of strength for the task at hand. The magazine followers on both of the test rifles were polished to a mirror surface as an aid to feeding, and indeed both fed cartridges from the magazine as if on greased rails. The finish of the action was done exception-

ally well and it cycled, fed and ejected just like one would expect of a fine rifle.

The safety catch is a Model 70-style, three-position safety catch mounted on the bolt shroud. It is reliable, does not interfere with a low-mounted scope and is easy to operate: Push forward to fire; the centre position disengages the firing pin to allow for easy and safe unloading, and the rifle is on safe with the catch to the rear. Scope mounting is via two neat, slotted dovetails on top of the receiver and bridge – the famed “double square-bridge” system often mentioned in connection with fine rifles. As I did not have scope mounts on hand I was unable to mount a scope on either the .375 or the .416. However, mounts are available from EAW in Germany as well as Talley in the USA. Mounting a scope on your Heym Martini Express should not be a headache.

The bolt handle is a straight, Oberndorf-type handle with pear-shaped knob contoured to clear a scope. It is elegant and complements the rifle well. The bolt stop differs from the Mauser recipe. To remove the bolt is easy: When looking at the action from above, pull the latch located on the left side of the breech away from the rifle and simply pull the bolt clear from the action. Again, it is elegant, strong and functional.

The Martini Express is available in a number of popular cartridges, including the .375 H&H Magnum, .416 Rigby, .404 Jeffery and .458 Lott (the .450 Rigby Rimless is available as well on special order and at a slight premium). Rifles chambered for all the available cartridges feature 24" hammer-forged barrels made in-house by Heym and dedicated magazine boxes that allow smooth feeding. Magazine capacity across the board is four cartridges and the lip of the extractor claw is bevelled to allow the extractor to slip over the rim of a cartridge if needed. Magazine floor plates are made from steel and can be released via a small button mounted in the front of the trigger bow. The metalwork on both test rifles had a matte black finish that was attractive and functional and, I'm told, is quite durable as well.

Any rifle is only as good as its stock, and the Martini Express certainly does not disappoint in this respect. The styling of the stock diligently follows elegant British lines. The fore-end is neatly trimmed down with just enough surface and length to allow for a good grip on a hard-

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**A neat steel grip cap is standard fit on the Martini Express.**

recoiling rifle. It is elegantly finished with wrap-around chequering and rounded off with an ebony tip.

The pistol grip of the stock also has wrap-around chequering; it is nicely shaped and opens enough to ensure quick handling and a secure grip. Even someone with smallish hands should have no trouble in shouldering and handling the rifle with no trouble whatsoever. The two test rifles fitted me very well and allowed for easy alignment of the open sights and rapid shooting. Although the stock has some drop at the comb to allow the shooter to use the open sights, it is still high enough to enable the use of a scope. A good compromise was reached in this respect, in my opinion. An elegantly shaped, H&H-style cheek piece and a solid red rubber recoil pad neatly round off the Turkish walnut stock.

Both test rifles had nicely figured walnut, with the walnut on the .375 being especially attractive to my eyes. Both blanks were well suited to hard-recoiling rifles in that the grain flow through the pistol grip and magazine cutout was nice and straight. A steel cross-bolt through the recoil lug is standard fit for strength and added protection against recoil. A nicely blued steel grip cap adds an elegant final touch.

Both rifles shot extremely well. As mentioned above, I was unable to mount a scope on either and really check their accuracy potential but I did make use of the open sights on both to check accuracy at 50 metres. Recoil was surprisingly modest with both, thanks to the rifles' excellent stock design and good balance. The ammunition used was Hornady DGS and DGX, which also happens to be the ammunition used at the factory for regulation purposes. It therefore came as no surprise that both the .375 and .416 shot perfectly to point of aim at 50 metres. Due to its relatively low cost (compared to the ammunition offered by some other ammunition manufacturers), Hornady big-bore ammunition is rapidly becoming the regulation ammunition of choice for many of today's big-bore rifle makers. I certainly have no complaints with regard to the ammunition used in both test rifles.

After all is said and done, there is no doubt in my mind that the Martini Express is an awesome rifle. There is very little that I would want different and a lot about it that I think is just about perfect. It ticks all the boxes insofar as both form and function are concerned and is a top-quality product that would appeal to the serious rifleman and dedicated professional alike.

Price-wise, though, the Martini Express is most certainly not an entry-level product. It is more or less in the same price bracket as a number of its European and British competitors and as a result it competes for the same market. With a current retail price (very much exchange rate-dependent) in South Africa of somewhere around the R140 000 mark, the Martini Express is more expensive than some of the entry-level double rifles on the market, which automatically raises the question whether to stick with the Heym Martini Express or something similar (such as a top-notch custom rifle), or go with the double.

With the double's romantic appeal, many would no doubt go that route – a perfectly understandable decision from a romantic point of view. For my money, though, I

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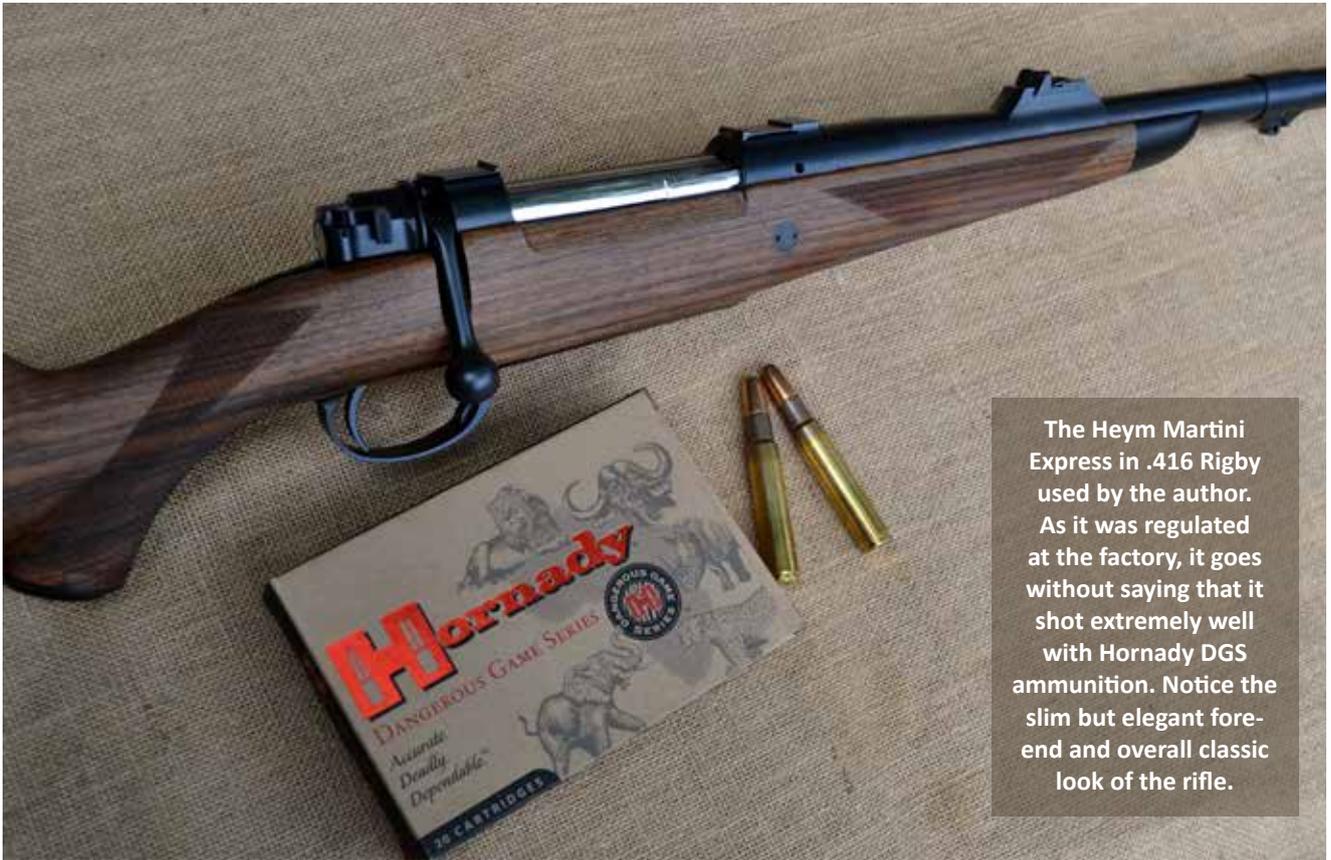
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The Heym Martini Express in .416 Rigby used by the author. As it was regulated at the factory, it goes without saying that it shot extremely well with Hornady DGS ammunition. Notice the slim but elegant fore-end and overall classic look of the rifle.

would rather have a top-notch bolt-action rifle chambered for a proper dangerous-game cartridge than a double rifle with questionable manufacturing behind it. Double rifles do not lend themselves to manufacturing shortcuts and I have heard of a number of double rifles in the lower price bracket that were not properly regulated, had ribs that came loose, needed rejoining in short order or suffered similar potentially fatal defects – not the type of thing that anybody needs in a rifle meant for dangerous game! Please note that I am by no means implying that all modestly priced double rifles are prone to failure. The point I am trying to make is that it is sometimes better

to invest hard-earned money into a perfectly functioning bolt-action rifle instead of spending the same amount on a double rifle with slightly dodgy provenance. But to each his own, I suppose.

When all is said and done, I am convinced that the Heym Martini Express is an exceptionally fine product. It is a well-designed, superbly made and thoroughly reliable dangerous-game rifle that should provide years of trouble-free service if looked after. In addition, it is backed by a comprehensive ten-year guarantee from the manufacturer as well as full after-sales service from Heym's local agent, Safari Outdoor. If you happen to be in the market for a

top-notch bolt-action rifle for your next dangerous-game hunt, be sure to take a good look at the Heym Martini Express. It may just be exactly what you are looking for.

*The author would like to thank Safari Outdoor for their generous support in supplying the Hornady DGS and DGX ammunition used for testing the rifles reviewed for this article. Heym rifles are available in South Africa from Safari Outdoor, Heym's only approved agent in Africa. A full range of custom options as well as after-sales service is available. For more information, please contact your nearest branch of Safari Outdoor.*

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