

The much-maligned 10,75x68 Mauser

ALL IT NEEDS IS A SECOND CHANCE...

I doubt if there has ever been a cartridge so successfully consigned to the dustbin of ballistic history as a result of damning with faint praise as

the 10,75x68 Mauser. This cartridge has been vilified by so many old-time hunters that today it is almost unwanted, an orphan that nobody wants

to adopt or care for.

The history and origin of the 10,75x68 is somewhat murky. *Cartridges of the World* claims it was introduced sometime

during the 1920s, but Mauser sporting rifles were available for the 10,75x68 as early as 1908, and it was by all accounts already well established by

the time World War I broke out in 1914. Original ballistics were a 347-grain bullet listed at 2 198fps for 3 700ft/lbs of muzzle energy. Bullet diameter is .423", the same as that of the .404 Jeffery.

A pretty good indication of the 10,75x68's popularity is the fact that ammunition for it was loaded in Germany and England by Kynoch. Mauser chambered a great many M98-actioned sporters for the 10,75, as did just about every other gunmaking concern in Germany prior to World War II.

In Continental Europe, Fabrique Nationale, Dumoulin, Mahillion and Francotte produced good numbers of 10,75x68s as well. I have even seen a Springfield '03-actioned 10,75 fashioned by an unknown German gunsmith in the 1920s on what was no doubt a post-WW I battlefield pick-up action. In the late 1990s, a friend had the opportunity to examine the contents of a number of Mozambican government armouries and he found literally dozens of 10,75x68s there, all of them

confiscated from citizens in 1975 after Mozambican independence. This was a clear indication that it was a favourite calibre amongst the old-time Portuguese big-game hunters.

NOT SO POPULAR

If all this sounds eerily like the description of a commercial triumph for the 10,75x68, let me introduce a further complication... by the name of John Howard Taylor or "Pondoro" Taylor. The son of a Dublin physician and an ivory hunter by trade, Taylor was also the author of a number of books on African hunting. He operated mainly in Portuguese East Africa, today's Mozambique. According to his writings he was exposed to a wide variety of cartridges and rifles, experimented with them on elephant, buffalo and other dangerous game animals and wrote down his experiences and conclusions. Taylor by and large had only good things to say about most of the cartridges he hunted with, but if there was one cartridge for which he reserved »



MAIN PHOTO: A vintage FN Mauser rifle in 10,75x68 shown with a selection of equally vintage ammunition by Czech, British and German manufacturers. The scope is an old steel-tubed Weaver K4.

GENUINE MAUSER BIG GAME RIFLES

By virtue of the outstanding strength of the Genuine Mauser Action, it has been adapted or closely followed by almost every army in the world. This same virtue puts the Genuine Mauser Action rifle in a class by itself for the heaviest kinds of loads under the strain of which other actions would be ruined, to say nothing of the possible serious injury or even death to shooter in such a case. It may be said that all big game hunting is carried on either with this style rifle or the double barreled rifles such as described elsewhere in this catalog, but the great

majority of big game hunters use the Mauser Action because it allows a great number of shots, very seldom gets out of order, is easily repaired, and costs but a fraction of the price of the double rifle. It is interesting to note that almost without exception, all fine English magazine rifles for big game turned out by world famous makers employ only the Original Mauser Action, an undisputed attest to its supremacy. We take especial pleasure in offering the following big game rifles and are prepared to build any special rifle using the genuine Mauser action.

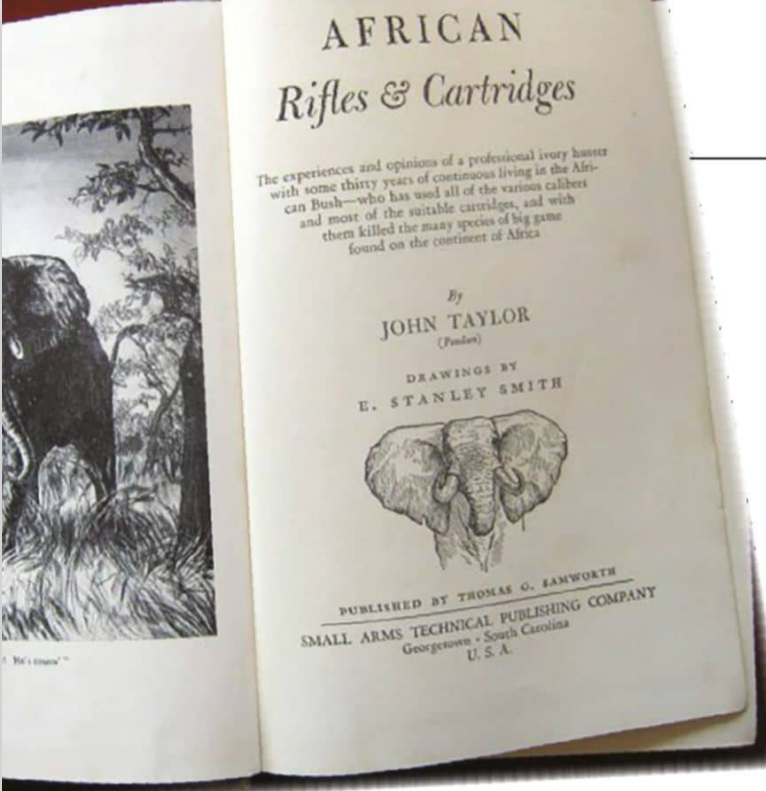


NOS. 627 AND 628
(TYPE A)

Models 627 and 628. These represent the heaviest big game rifles built by the Mauser Factory. They are built on the famous Mauser Magnum Actions, which are recognized the world over as by far the strongest action ever made, and one which assures positive safety and reliability even under excessive breech pressures. These rifles are especially made for use against the heaviest and most dangerous game, particularly however for tough skinned game such as elephant and rhinoceros.

Model 627, Cal. 10.75 x 68—Price.....\$125.00 Model 628, Cal. .404 Jeffery—Price.....\$250.00
May also be had on special order in the following calibers:—
Model 628A, Cal. 250 Ross—Price.....\$250.00 Model 628B, Cal. .318 W. R. Express—Price.....\$250.00

INSERT ABOVE: An excerpt from an old Stoeger catalogue from before World War II, showing an advertisement for Type-A Mauser commercial sporting rifles in various chamberings, including 10,75x68. Stoeger was the Mauser agent in the United States at the time.



In his book, *African Rifles and Cartridges*, published in 1948, Taylor went to great pains to explain just how much he disliked the 10,75x68.

» a special place out in the cold, it was the 10,75x68.

In his book, *African Rifles and Cartridges*, published in 1948, Taylor writes in detail just how terrible the 10,75x68 is. He mentions shooting a buffalo in the head with the bullet failing to penetrate through the boss into the brain cavity, and then goes on to explain how the 10,75 lacks the necessary penetration to kill elephant with frontal brain shots. Taylor even condemns the 10,75 for soft-skinned game such as lion or eland, but the *pièce de résistance* is his description of the broken magazine spring he suffered with his “cheap German-made rifle” and how he cautions his readers to stick to better rifles, preferably British-made ones!

Well, I don’t dispute the fact that Mauser magazine springs can break (it happened to a friend’s .500 Jeffery that was made – ironically – on an action that was once a Type-B Mauser in 10,75x68) but it is certainly not a common occurrence. Unlike what Taylor

may have believed, the British and German hunting rifles of the time were all made on exactly the same action: M98 Mauser actions manufactured in Germany with identical magazine springs!

I have mulled over Taylor’s vitriol regarding the 10,75x68 many times and I have concluded that the basis of his criticism regarding the cartridge rests on three legs. The first one is a basic aversion of anything not British. Taylor was an Anglophile when it came to choice of guns and ammunition and he stated so on many occasions. The second leg is a basic misunderstanding of ballistics and, specifically, sectional density. Thirdly, Taylor didn’t consider the fact or knew that, at the time, all ammunition were not created equal.

Many of the vintage 10,75x68 Mausers I have seen, have been original Type-A Oberndorf Mauser sporting rifles. These rifles were very well made and have a reputation for good functioning and smooth feed-

ing. They were all made on the same commercial M98 actions that makers such as Rigby used for their own rifles. Granted, many 10,75s were made on ex-military Mauser actions, but again, the same goes for hundreds of British rifles! “Cheap German Mausers”? Methinks not.

Regarding ballistics, the most oft-repeated criticism against the 10,75x68 is the 347-grain bullet’s supposed poor sectional density. With a sectional density factor of .277 it is perhaps not the best penetrator, but the 525-grain bullet from the mighty .505 Gibbs scrapes by with an SD of .294, not to mention the 270-grain .375 bullet, one of Taylor’s favourites, with a measly SD of only .274, even worse than the 10,75’s 347-grain bullet! Sectional density (or rather the perceived lack thereof) consequently does not support Taylor’s criticism of the 10,75x68.

BAD AMMUNITION

I’ve mentioned that ammunition for the 10,75x68 was loaded in Germany and Britain. The German ammunition of the time was renowned for being sub-standard, and their expanding bullets especially had a nasty reputation for over-expansion and even disintegrating when encountering resistance. The non-expanding “solid” bullets of the time were not much better either and tended to rivet and break up. To add to the problems, batches of ammunition could be encountered loaded with bullets that were so brittle as to be unsuitable, whilst others were so hard that they hardly expanded and gave indifferent performance.

Quality control prior to World War II was certainly not what it is today, and ammunition manufacturers often had to wait for months before re-

ceiving feedback from hunters via slow surface mail, by which time a new batch of ammunition was already out in the field. The ammunition of yesteryear was therefore a very big variable factor.

Taylor never mentioned what type of ammunition he used in the 10,75x68 or even what type of bullets, so I’m just wondering whether a bad batch of ammunition wasn’t responsible for Pondoro’s opinion of the 10,75x68.

To be fair, Finn Aagaard also had a bad experience with the 10,75x68 on a buffalo and condemned the cartridge as well. He wrote: “It was not uncommonly used by African resident hunters, some of whom even liked it. I cannot imagine why, as it was about the most unsatisfactory large-game cartridge ever produced, noticeably lacking in penetration”.

Aagaard was a very experienced African hunter with a keen knowledge of what it took to hunt the big stuff. However, he also wrote the following: “The bullet was no doubt a little on the light side for its calibre, but I suspect that a thin and flimsy jacket was its main failing”. And there you have it, the 10,75x68’s biggest failing summed up in one sentence – bad ammunition!

STANDARD ACTION

The maximum OAL of the 10,75x68 cartridge is 81mm, or just a millimetre shorter than that of the German military cartridge of the day; the 8x57JS. This, and the 347-grain bullet’s weight, was probably intentional in order to enable the 10,75x68 cartridge to fit into the magazine box of a standard-length M98 Mauser action. Mauser themselves chambered rifles for both the 10,75x68 and .404 Jeffery but used standard-length actions for the 10,75x68 and

THE MUCH-MALIGNED 10,75X68 MAUSER



The 10,75x68’s 347-grain bullet (left) has a sectional density of .277, compared to a sectional density of .321 for the .404 Jeffery’s 400-grain bullet (centre). The 270-grain .375 bullet (right) has a good reputation for performance on game but it’s sectional density is even lower than that of the 10,75x68’s bullet at .274!



A 10,75x68 cartridge (left) is shown here next to a .404 Jeffery (centre) as well as a 9,3x62 (right) for comparison.

M98 Magnum actions for the .404 Jeffery.

Although cartridges such as the .404 Jeffery and .375 H&H can be made on opened-up standard-length M98 actions, the process often involves removing steel from behind the locking-lug recess and therefore potentially weakening the action in this vital area. History has shown that it is a safe practise if done correctly and the action is opened up to the rear by lengthening the bolt throw and grinding away the bolt-stop, but Mauser clearly didn’t want to take any chances and the 10,75x68 was therefore designed to function through the standard action, which was also much cheaper and freely available.

HANDLOADING

Although the 10,75x68 still retains a small following, it is by and large a handloading proposition today. The German ammunition manufacturer RWS used to load batches of 10,75x68 ammunition from time to time but I’m not sure if this is still the case as the demand is small.

All is not lost for the 10,75 though. Woodleigh in Australia as well as Claw here in SA make suitable bullets, and the Woodleighs especially, are of stouter construction than anything produced in the old days. Cases for the 10,75x68 are available from Bertram in Australia. Reloading dies seems to be the biggest potential headache, especially after the closing down of the RCBS Custom Shop, but Simplex in Australia and CH4D in the US will produce reloading dies in 10,75x68, albeit not for the man in a hurry.

The 10,75x68’s base diameter of 0.4949” is unique and forming cases from any other calibre is a time-consuming process involving lots of ma-

chining. Pierre van der Walt has already covered this aspect thoroughly in his book *African Dangerous Game Cartridges* and there is therefore no point in rehashing everything here.

With modern propellants and bullets the 10,75x68 can be loaded to its full potential. Medium-fast burning propellants such as S341, IMR-3031 and Norma 202 should work well and launching modern 347-grain bullets at muzzle velocities in excess of 2 200fps is a reality. Many even load 400-grain .423” bullets in the 10,75x68 – at 2 100fps that duplicates the .404 Jeffery’s original loading, one of the legendary African combinations. When loaded to its full potential, there is no reason why the 10,75x68 won’t do exactly what its designers intended it to do all those years ago, and this from a package that usually doesn’t weigh more than 8lbs and is made on a standard-length action.

From a wildcatter’s perspective the 10,75x68’s case has a lot to offer, and its scarcity is probably to blame for the fact that some bright spark has yet to take the 10,75x68’s case, neck it down to 8 mm or .308” with a short, sharp shoulder, and announce the birth of the next miracle cartridge! Let’s give it some time. There is nothing new in the world of firearms, so it might just be a matter of time before someone takes a second look at the odd-looking Mauser cartridge case.

If I owned a 10,75x68, especially a nice old Mauser, I would leave it just as is. I would go to the trouble of finding a supply of cases and a set of dies and set about constructing a few handloads. Taylor’s comments may have nearly scuttled the 10,75x68 but all it needs to shine again is patience, modern reloading components, and a second chance. ☺