

The 9mm MAUSER

By Charlie Haley

The 9mm Mauser is one of a number of cartridges based upon the old German infantry round, the 8 x 57mm Mauser adopted in 1888. A popular sporting cartridge in itself, the 8mm Mauser spawned a number of others as cartridge designers busily necked it up and down to accept different calibre bullets. Most of these fell by the wayside, or at best achieved a moderate popularity. One version which did achieve popularity was the 9 x 57mm sporting round. For those of you who may be confused, 9mm refers to the calibre and the 57mm designation is indicative of the length of the cartridge case. This turned out to be an exceptionally well balanced and effective sporting round, and became one of the more widely used medium bores in Africa during the pre World War II era.

It is one of those splendid calibres which just plain *worked*, without being possessed of spectacular velocities, nor bone-jarring recoil for that matter. None of the old time hunter/writers of that era waxed particularly lyrical in its praise, but simply took it for granted that it would do its job effectively and with the minimum of fuss and bother. Fairly typical were the comments made about it by John Taylor in "African Rifles and Cartridges", where he does not have much to say about it bar "...I had a very nice little 9mm Mauser one time. I seldom used it other than for the pot, which it had no difficulty in keeping filled". It is not, and never was a heavy, dangerous game calibre, and those who tried to use it as such were asking for a sticky end, but nonetheless round-nosed solid ammunition was readily available for it. Many individuals used such bullets in their 9mm Mausers quite successfully on the big stuff with nary a hitch nor hiccup, but nonetheless such practices are not to be recommended! For any game animals up to but not including the thick-skinned, heavy animals the 9mm Mauser was wonderfully effective, proving yet again the effectiveness of larger calibre bullets of good sectional density at moderate speed.

The ballistics of the 9mm Mauser are somewhat confusing, as there were a number of bullet weights available and two distinctly different load levels. Bullet weights available ranged from 205 grains up to 281 grains, but the



R - Old medium Bores. 8mm Mauser - the parent cartridge. 9mm Mauser, 9mm Mannlicher. The modern equivalents - .376 Steyr, .338 Winchester & .375 H & H.



The two 9mm's: Mannlicher m1910 left and a model A Mauser M98 right

standard Kynoch loading (and the one which established this cartridge's reputation) was a 245 grain round-nosed bullet (available as a solid or a soft-nose) at 2150 feet per second. Other factory ammunition was loaded somewhat hotter, particularly the German DWM sporting ammunition which offered a 247 grain bullet at an alleged 2310 feet per second. Under Zimbabwe's National Parks regulations the 9mm Mauser fits quite happily in the calibres suited for Class 'C' animals (general big game), which includes Kudu, Zebra, Sable, Waterbuck and the like.

As noted, popularity was very high in Africa as this calibre, as well as being effective, was available in the well-made and reasonably priced (and absolutely delightful) Mauser sporting rifles of the era. Popularity even spread across the Atlantic to America, where

Winchester chambered the model 54 bolt-actioned rifle for it and most of the major ammunition companies loaded 9mm Mauser ammunition. Sadly, the 9mm Mauser did not really catch on in the States. The American gun buying public have always been highly suspicious of any calibre with the dreaded millimetre designation attached to it, and I would not be surprised if the Americans were going through one of their periodic high velocity and long range phases at about this time. If they were, the moderate speeds of the 9mm Mauser would doubtless fail to excite them in any way. Whatever the reason, it failed to prosper. A few (a very few) Model 70 Winchesters were made for the 9mm Mauser in 1937, using left-over Model 54 barrels and probably as a special order item only. It then sadly expired as far as the Americans were concerned. Incidentally, if you show a Winchester model 70 in 9mm Mauser calibre (in good, original condition of course) to a *serious* pre '64 Model 70 collector, best make sure that he's sitting down first he may hurt himself when he falls over. When he picks himself back up again, prepare to have ever-increasing quantities of money offered to you for it (or to be seized by the throat until you agree to give it to him)! The 9mm Mauser is one of the rarest of all the pre-'64 Winchester variants.

What of modern-day use? Unfortunately, the years have not been kind to the 9mm Mauser. After World War II, the Mauser factory was in ruins and the last thing on anyone's mind was sporting rifles and calibres. As Europe settled down, various calibres were resurrected for continued sporting use, but the 9mm was not among them. Factories continued to make ammunition for the many rifles still in use, but no new rifles were made and it was only a matter of time before the 9mm Mauser slipped into obscurity. Newer, faster and generally more gee-whiz calibres were being brought out to tempt the buyer, and whereas some old classic calibres have been re-introduced in the States, it seems no-one is about to repeat the unhappy pre-war American experience with the 9mm. They tried it once, it didn't work out so they're not going to try it again! Craig Boddington, in his excellent book "Safari Rifles",

sums the current position up most aptly when he states, concerning the various 9mm's, 'Of them, the 9 x 57 Mauser enjoyed a degree of popularity, even in America. Although the bore diameter has potential, the European cartridges had generally low velocity...No 9mm rifle cartridges are currently listed by RWS. Rather than spend more time on them, let's turn to some metrics that still have real importance in African hunting".

The calibre is, of course, as effective as it ever was, but it just doesn't feature anymore. This is a pity. Modern powders and cases should make it easy to boost velocities and power levels significantly. Loading up to the aforementioned DWM specifications with a more aerodynamic spitzer or spire-point projectile would flatten trajectories, too. However, consider that with a 100 yd. zero, the original bullet will drop about 9 inches at 200 yards, which is better than most would think (and is as far away as most of us should ever consider shooting). At DWM speeds with a spire-point bullet, we're now looking at a six inch drop at the same range, so one can see that the 9mm is more than adequate at all practical ranges. You can get out of your head the notion that it's only good for bowling-alley distances. It's a funny thing, but all those I have spoken to who have ever used the 9mm Mauser for hunting (and some who still do) are all highly enthusiastic and voluble as to its effectiveness. All are agreed that it is splendid for hunting, none have a bad word to say about it and to a man they bemoan the difficulties they experience in obtaining ammunition (although it has to be said that one particularly enthusiastic user's experiences as to the singularly devastating effects of his rifle were largely due to the fact that his bullets were travelling virtually sideways upon striking his game, due to a severely eroded bore)!

You aren't going to buy any currently manufactured rifles in 9mm Mauser, and neither are you going to stroll into your average neighborhood gun shop and be able to buy any ammunition. Nonetheless, there are a number of perfectly good rifles still floating about, and what's a fellow to do if one wishes to shoot a cherished old heirloom in this calibre? Never fear, all is not lost. Reloading dies are available, and readily obtainable 8x57 Mauser brass is easily expanded or fire-formed into

9mm. The correct bullet diameter is .356", whereas American bullets are .358". However, American bullets can be swaged down (or put on a centreless grinder) and thus made to work. Before doing this, I would slug the bore of my particular rifle to find out the exact groove measurement, as a lot of these older rifles can vary considerably in their bore dimensions. You may well find that .358" bullets can be used as is. You may equally find that further reduction is necessary, however! Another option is Stewart's Bullets in South Africa, who will custom-make bullets of whatever size you need. I would stick to round-nosed bullets in the 250 grain range at the original 2150 feet per second, particularly if using open sights. If your rifle is 'scope or peep sighted, feel free to experiment with pointy bullets at higher velocity. Just go carefully, and don't over-strain a fine old rifle (or yourself, for that matter). It isn't a magnum, so don't try and turn it into one! I have seen some of the old Kynoch 9mm Mauser ammunition in this part of the world. Beware. It is now extremely old, and primers may well not go off. Furthermore, the primers are more than likely corrosive. I would use it as a source of components only. This, of course, does not apply to the *new* Kynoch ammunition, which is first class in every way. However, the new Kynoch catalogue makes no mention of 9mm Mauser ammunition.

I have before me a fairly typical and utterly delightful Mauser rifle in 9mm calibre. It is an A-grade, meaning that it is of a style designed to appeal most to the British tastes and market (and is my favourite Mauser sporter style). It has a 24" barrel, with shallow 'v' rearsight and bead foresight mounted on a chequered ramp, a style I find far easier to use than the normal old European deep-V and barleycorn arrangement. Additional folding leaves upon the rearsight block go up to 500 metres. The forward sling swivel is mounted upon a barrel band in front of the fore-end, a style sure to delight the hearts of purists. The action is, of course, the marvellous Model 98, and is of commercial Obendorf Mauser manufacture with the top of the forward receiver ring finely chequered so as to avoid glare (and look darned good to boot). The magazine box is equipped with a side-swinging release lever, a style I am highly enamoured with which combines rigid locking, ease of release and fine appearance. The stock is of

classic design, of course, with a modest cheekpiece and extensive hand-cut chequering. The fore-end has an ebony tip (minus white-line spacer, I'm glad to say) and the buttplate is black Bakelite with the Mauser logo moulded in. The comb of the stock is supremely comfortable for use with the iron sights, and the entire rifle as a whole certainly comes out as more than the mere sum of its parts. The balance is impeccable. It begs to be handled, to be put up in the shoulder and aimed with, and then having wormed its way into the heart, one cannot but yearn to shoot with it. From there, the progression is entirely natural; what *would* it be like to hunt with? I'll bet it carries nicely in the field, just the ticket for typical bushveldt hunting conditions. That big, long bullet wouldn't half be effective on game...before you know it, you're arranging a 'classic' hunt with some friends old rifles only, no 'scopes allowed, that sort of thing.

I very much doubt we'll ever be seeing the 9mm Mauser back again as a viable, commercial entity. However, I hope this encourages those of you who may have one of these fine old rifles to use it again. Make the effort to assemble some ammunition. Shoot with it. Hunt with it. Disregard the temptation to have it re-barreled to some other more easily obtainable calibre, especially if the bore is still decent. Ignore the seductive siren songs of the new, blistering, high speed magnum cartridges with long range performance figures you don't need and will never use. I note with dismay that the American market is once again obsessed with magnumitis II if you thought the currently extant group of magnums were powerful, wait and see what the latest crop has to offer! (we won't mention heavy recoil, ear-splitting muzzle blast, poor barrel life, bullet failure and meat loss...mustn't be spiteful, must we...). Ignore the current fads, and give the old timer a chance again. The 9mm Mauser hasn't 'gone off' or anything over the years, and is of course as good as it ever was. Just because up-to-the-minute hunters are using new wonder-magnums, it doesn't mean the game is now somehow tougher or is going around in bullet-proof vests. The 9mm Mauser is quite capable of getting the job done, and doing so with such a classic will, I like to think, give an added measure of satisfaction. 

