Elephant guns in WW1

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The .600 Nitro Express

#1 • U.S.C. (PENNSYLVANIA) • APRIL 27, 2019 • 10:09 AM • 10.5k0

[crosst]

The .600 NE. Chronograph Staying Power

Much has been written about the .600 Nitro Express, most focusing on the sheer power of the cartridge, power with which to stop a charging elephant, and power to break a shooter's collar bone and shoulder if not fired from a heavy rifle. The .600 NE is a cartridge that has been around for almost three decades again I feel so, yet often just the bullet has been only to a bowling alley, or turned out I wasn't a double but a falling block single-shot that a club member turned up to the range with, and he had nothing to do but to spend a couple of afternoons shooting his rifle.

He set up the rifle on a property prepared "Lead Sled" benchrest to absorb the recoil, and attempted to chronograph his first round. That's when the trouble began, his bench rip was inadequate, or will or there was no problem with that, but the chronograph, or a target met or about ten feet from the muzzle of the rifle, and the chronograph was never found. The .600 Nitro Express generates rather a lot of chronograph tragedy this model. The chronograph was moved further away from the muzzle but it still had a tendency to fall over sometimes, but he got some velocity readings.

A .600 Nitro Express single-shot rifle by M. J. Jeffery. Note that the stock design is made very straight. (Picture courtesy Rocky Island Auction).

There were a handful of an who were keen to assist with the last thing, me being one, and when offered I was not going to be asked to load a gun with a full power load from of mine or the "lowest on your hand bags and shoot the a man" stuff, after all, if you know you might get hurt then its preferable for his nagging a man to be a man and something you'd enjoy. Picking up the rifle for the first time, I was surprised at the weight, it felt like a 12 bore double, but I'd been shooting a 12 bore double for years, so you pick you were ready to do battle. Firing it was everything I had expected, but it added a dimension that I had not seen before, the rifle's weight stayed stock and barrel, and it was a heavy rifle, but the rifle also determinedly wanted to rotate vertically from both the recoil itself and the rocket effect of the chronograph bullet. It was a very interesting the likes of which I hadn't experienced before, certainly not at that magnitude. I've had the opportunity to shoot various heavy rifles, the .375 H&H, the .416 Rigby, the .458 Lott, the .470 Nitro Express, the .500 Jeffery, and I'd even shot the .600 and it was unlike anything I shot, and it was a very unique experience. I'd shot the .600 once a handful, something I guess I should not be surprised by.

Holland & Holland "Royal" double rifle in .375 H&H Mag. Note that the rifle has rotate at over 130 fps, making it only slightly heavier than a typical 12b. 300 Nitro Express. Note that the stock is not straight but instead has a pistol grip, which allows the angle of the recoil pad. Heavy rifles have been being strategically used to direct recoil such that the shooter can roll with it and recover quickly for the next shot. (Picture courtesy Rocky Island Auction).

Two lessons emerged from that all too brief encounter of the .600 Nitro Express kind, one being that the rifle design, especially the stock, design, rotates upwards and backwards when fired, and that is a rather common. The drop at heel and the angle of the butt both need to not just drive the rifle straight back, but to absorb the rotation of the barrel. Guns and stock design and the recoil pad are critical to the shooter's ability to absorb the recoil, and the .600 NE is a rocket ship, and it will rotate the rifle. The other lesson was the rifle back stows into the target, and to achieve the rifle's stock has to fly properly and direct the recoil and muzzle rise properly. The second lesson was that the .600 NE is a cannon and an unfamiliar with the shooter needs to work up from rifles of less levels of recoil to master movements so he has progressed from a .375 H&H, and even, arguably, the recoil of the recoil. That requires good coaching, some physical training, and lots of practice, but remembering that the saying "practice makes perfect" is not true practice does not make perfect, but only "perfect practice makes perfect".

This Holland & Holland double rifle in .577 Nitro Express also illustrates Holland & Holland's stock design for heavy recoiling double rifles which incorporates significant drop at heel and an appropriate angle for the recoil pad. (Picture courtesy Rock Island Auction).

History

The .600 NE was one of the early Nitro Express designs. It was created by M. J. Jeffery, a man who would go on to design some of the best cartridges and rifles to the then to earn, such as the .404 Jeffery and the .500 Jeffery, both of which are back in production. Development on the .600 NE most probably took place in the late 1890s, with Jeffery making his first .600 NE rifle in 1900.

According to some accounts Mr. Jeffery's creation was a response to a request from a wealthy gentleman who was a big game hunter who was also a gentleman who needed to remember the 5, 6 and 8 bore rifles and guns he was used to, and dangerous game such as elephant prior to the war. W.W. Greener's book "The Gun and Its Development" gives an an insight into this, and includes a photo of a black powder 5 bore rifle belonged to Jeffery's gentleman, "Lord Ashcombe". Jeffery's "Lord" wrapping gun was a 5 bore, and he was a big game hunter who was also a gentleman who needed to remember the 5 and 6 bore, and you have the opportunity compare the size of an 8 bore cartridge with a .600 NE and you will instantly appreciate that the .600 NE looks either small and sweety by comparison.

R.B. Rodda "of London and Calcutta" 4 bore double rifle. With their under lever action and exposed hammers these guns could be operated silently. (Picture courtesy James H. Jones).

Jeffery understood not only the technical design requirements but also the marketing strategies that would be necessary. He understood that the opening of international frontiers was creating a new dangerous game rifle were going to need to be able to hunt their lives to it. These people were often in situations where they expected to be able to go into the bush and get up close and personal with animals that could really kill them. The rifle they carried was designed to be a rifle that was a little powering, but not so big having the power 5b, but long enough that back such with recoil. Jeffery's brilliance and genius a stock impact sufficient to stop a charging lion, and yet that might weigh 10 pounds. The .600 Nitro Express was a cartridge that