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# A PERFECTLY DELIGHTFUL CARTRIDGE

## 7x57 mm Mauser

Long replaced as America's favorite 7 mm cartridge by the 7 mm Rem. Mag., the 7x57 mm Mauser has proven itself in war and in gamefields around the world. For more than a century, the likes of W.D.M. "Karamojo" Bell, Harry Selby, Emiliano Zapata and Francisco "Pancho" Villa have appreciated the performance of the 7x57 mm. As far as the author is concerned, you can add him to the list, too.

BY JIM WILSON

It's surprising how many of our most useful and reliable cartridges started life in the military. Some that quickly come to mind are the .45 Colt, .45 ACP, .308 Win., .223 Rem., and the glorious .30-'06 Sprg. And right in among those, I also have to add another great performer, the 7x57 mm Mauser. The 7x57 mm, although less popular in this country, is an excellent performer featuring good accuracy and moderate recoil.

The cartridge was originally designed by Mauser of Germany in 1892. It is also often referred to as the 7 mm Mauser cartridge, and in the U.K. it is commonly called the .275 Rigby. By whatever name one wants to use, the cartridge originally featured a 175-gr. bullet of modern design over enough smokeless powder to drive it to slightly more than 2300 f.p.s. In the last years of the 19th century, the accuracy and the power of this new Mauser cartridge were widely acknowledged.

The Spanish adopted the Mauser Model 1893 rifle, chambered for the 7x57 mm, for its military. And it was this combination they used against U.S. troops in Cuba during the Spanish-American War. American troops were so impressed with this rifle/cartridge combination

that Theodore Roosevelt challenged U.S. military rifle designers to use it as a basis for a new U.S. fighting rifle. Legend has it the Springfield rifle and the .30-'06 Sprg. cartridge were direct results of our study of the 7x57 mm cartridge and the '93 Mauser. So influential were the rifle and cartridge that the U.S. government was forced to pay royalties to Mauser for quite some time. In retrospect, it looks like that was a pretty good trade-off.

Even closer to home, the 7x57 mm cartridge played a huge role in the Mexican Revolution (1911-1920). Mexican federal troops, taking the lead from their Spanish allies, were armed with Mauser rifles chambered for the battle-proven 7x57 mm.

When Francisco Madero gathered the Mexican rebels to his banner, along with Emiliano Zapata, from the state of Morelos, and Francisco Villa, from the state of Chihuahua, the arms available to them were obsolete. Some rebels arrived with Winchester and Marlin lever-actions chambered for blackpowder pistol cartridges. Others showed up with equally antiquated single-shots, like the Remington Rolling Block and the old Sharps buffalo guns. A few had just sixguns, and a number were armed only with machetes.



Cal. 7 mm [7x57] (.276)

*The 7x57 mm Mauser was a success in sporting and military rifles, and it was adopted by the Spanish and Mexican governments. It also proved quite popular with both sides during the Mexican Revolution (I.).*

## 7X57 MM MAUSER



The rebels' idea was to get into a fight with federal soldiers as quickly as possible and then liberate the Mauser 7x57 mm rifles. As soon as the federal troops could be overcome, the first order of business was to collect all of the rifles and distribute them among those who were fighting for Mexican freedom. Gen. Villa once attacked a train filled with federal soldiers. After the battle, he handed out the liberated Mauser rifles and ammunition to his own troops then ordered the uniforms to be stripped from the dead enemies. He sent the empty uniforms back to the federal lines with this message: "Here are the husks [reusable covers for tamales], send me some more tamales!" And you can bet he hoped that the replacements were carrying more Mauser rifles.

As with other good military cartridges, the 7x57 mm was soon adopted by sportsmen. Rigby, the British firearms company, bought Mauser actions and used them as the basis for hunting rifles that were used the world over. As a marketing ploy, Rigby began to call the new cartridge the .275 Rigby. One of its best customers was a fellow that went by the name of W.D.M. "Karamojo" Bell.

Walter Dalrymple Maitland Bell was a Scotsman who arrived in Africa in the closing days of the 19th century. After several false starts, young Bell set out to make his fortune by hunting elephant and selling the ivory. The only problem was he found he was a bit recoil shy and just didn't cotton to the big-bore rifles that are generally associated with collecting ivory.

The interesting thing about Bell is that, in his lifetime, he collected right at 2,000 elephants. More than 1,000 of these were killed with a Rigby sporting rifle chambered for the 7x57 mm/.275 Rigby cartridge. Bell had no use at all for soft-point ammunition and did all of his ivory collecting using the 173-gr. full-metal-jacket military round.



Cal. 7 mm [7x57] (.276)



Cal. 7 mm S [7x57] (.276 inch.)

*The British renamed the 7x57 mm the .275 Rigby, and it was made famous by W.D.M. "Karamojo" Bell as an elephant cartridge—a practice not recommended. The 7x57 mm is at its best in a stalking rifle, such as this vintage Mauser 98 Sporter (l.).*



The key to Bell's success was precise bullet placement and the development of the brain shot. Early in his career, Bell went so far as to saw an elephant's skull in half so he could determine the exact location and size of the brain. And he must have learned his lesson well because, on those 1,011 elephant, he averaged 1.5 shots per kill. In other words, some 500 of those elephant were taken out with one shot each! Bell is also quoted as saying the 7x57 mm's 173-gr. solid is the only bullet that he ever had fully penetrate an elephant skull from side to side. He believed this was because of the fine sectional density of the 7 mm bullet.

Before leaving this discussion of old-time African adventures, I want to point out that I really don't think the 7x57 mm should be anyone's choice for such big game. That W.D.M. Bell used a 7x57 mm so successfully doesn't say as much about the cartridge as it does about Bell's marksmanship and hunting skills. Should I ever encounter a pachyderm that requires killing I would hope to have a much larger rifle as well as Bell's coolness and resolve in the face of such potential danger.

The 7x57 mm is at its best when used to collect deer-size game. It can also be effective on elk, black bear and moose—if the proper ammunition is chosen and the shots are made at reasonable ranges. A survey of American ammunition companies seems to bear this out. Remington and Winchester each offer only one 7x57 mm loading. Remington's is the 140-gr. Core-Lokt pointed soft point at about 2660 f.p.s. Winchester duplicates that published velocity using its 145-gr. Super-X Power-Point bullet.

Federal offers three loadings for the 7x57 mm cartridge. In 140-gr. bullets, it uses the Speer Hot-Cor soft point and the Nosler Partition, both at 2660 f.p.s. Federal's third 7x57 mm load uses a 175-gr. round-nose soft point that it suggests will run at about 2390 f.p.s. Hornady also lists two hunting loads for the cartridge, all using a 139-gr. bullet. For a standard loading, it offers a 139-gr. soft point at approximately 2680 f.p.s. And, in its Light Magnum loading, it lists a 139-gr. SST bullet at 2830 f.p.s. Of the numerous 7x57 mm factory rounds that I've fired through my Ruger No. 1A, the Hornady Light Magnum, 139-gr. SST load has given the best performance and accuracy to date.

For handloaders, there is a wealth of loading information available for the 7x57 mm Mauser. Bullet choices range anywhere from 110 grs. to 190 grs. Naturally, the smart handloader will choose the bullet



weight and construction based upon the game that he or she intends to take. In my opinion, it is hard to beat bullets by Hornady, Speer, Nosler and Barnes.

In addition, the handloader can safely improve on factory velocities shooting a well-built, modern rifle. Keeping pressures at the 50,000 c.u.p.-level, good loads can be built that will run at the 2800-2900 f.p.s. range. As a general rule, the medium-burning-rate propellants give the best results. Some of the best are H414, H380, H4350, IMR 4064, IMR 4320, IMR 4350 and W760. As with any handloading, it is always wise to consult a reputable reloading manual and not try to turn the 7x57 mm into some sort of magnum rifle round. The 7x57 mm is a game-killing cartridge without having to be "magnumized."

Seven American loadings for the 7x57 mm, and a plethora of suitable bullets and powders for the handloader, indicate that the 7x57 mm—while more than 100 years old—is not to be counted out just yet. It is unfortunate American riflemakers don't seem to agree. Checking the various manufacturers, one finds only two that still chamber rifles in 7x57 mm: Thompson/Center with its Encore, and Ruger with its No. 1, specifically the No. 1A and the No. 1RSI. All are single-shots.

*Although many 7x57 mm loads have been offered through the years (top), when it comes to factory loads today, Federal offers three, Hornady catalogs two, and Remington and Winchester offer one each. For handloaders, bullets range from 110 to 190 grs.*



## 7X57 MM MAUSER



*Ruger, with its No. 1A single-shot, is one of the only large American makers currently offering a factory 7x57 mm. The author used the No. 1 in Texas while hunting Aoudad.*

My own 7x57 mm rifle is a current-production Ruger No. 1A, with a Leupold 1-4X scope. Using Hornady's 139-gr. Light Magnum ammunition with the SST bullet, this rifle will group three shots into 1" at 100 yds. off sandbags. In addition, its light weight makes it a pleasure to carry on long, arduous hunts. I discovered this, to my delight, on an aoudad hunt in the Chinati Mountains of Southwest Texas in 2008. You might say it is an American copy of the European stalking rifle. And the 7x57 mm cartridge is the perfect choice for this task.

Those who want a bolt-action chambered in 7x57 mm will find that Winchester, Remington and Ruger, to mention three, have all chambered the cartridge in the recent past. Good-quality rifles can be found pretty easily on the used gun market. And, in addition, custom riflemakers will gladly chamber a rifle in this useful caliber. The 7x57 mm cartridge seems to be a favorite of those who have decided to have a custom hunting rifle built.

Working on its second 100 years, the 7x57 mm cartridge is far from dead. The main reason is that it has simply proven itself, over and over again, to be a dependable, accurate, game-killing cartridge. Recoil is mild and performance is right up there in the .270-class of cartridges. From Alaska, to Arizona, to Africa, the 7x57 mm continues to deliver the goods in the hunting field. 🦋

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