

The German M98 (top) is much like the Swedish M94. Note striker tab on the M94.



Peter Paul Mauser and his rifles

Inspired by a door latch? This German genius changed the face of American hunting rifles!

By Wayne van Zwoell
B&C Professional Member
Photos courtesy of Author

Many moons ago, on a cold hill above Spoon Creek in eastern Oregon, a mule deer buck stepped from behind rimrock. The gyrating crosswire passed his shoulder just as the .270 fired. Other game has since fallen to my Mauser rifles. I wish I'd not sold that one, a 98 stocked by Iver Henriksen in beautiful French walnut. It didn't last long in its new home. The shooter mistakenly chambered a .308 cartridge. The shorter case slid obligingly home, but the 30-caliber bullet resisted mightily its forced passage down the .277 bore. The extractor blew off, with a shard of bolt face. Escaping gas split that gorgeous French into three pieces. But the lugs held, limiting shooter damage to a peppering of powder and metal particles.

Breech pressure there must have far exceeded that of the friskiest proof loads—testimony to the Mauser's legendary strength.

Another Henriksen-stocked Mauser in .270 felled my first bighorn. Yet another 98, this one in .300 H&H with the magazine opened for the longer case, killed the first bull elk I had ever seen afield. It appeared out of dusk's gloom, ghost-silent from black lodgepoles. Against that elk, I couldn't see the tiny dot in my Lyman Alaskan. Frantic, I found it in bleached grass at the animal's feet. Fixing my eye upon it, I lifted the rifle onto the bull and pressed the trigger.

An equally fetching Mauser in .257 Roberts tumbled a blacktail buck caught between Willamette Valley alder patches But enough about my rifles. I was foolish to part with those I sold—all when surplus battle rifles came cheap. Commercial and even custom-smithed Mausers were affordable then...

A family passion

While the Mauser moniker has appeared on myriad firearms and been used to describe (and sell) others, most shooters associate the name with the Model of 1898. This, however, was not the first Mauser rifle. In fact, it arrived when Peter Paul Mauser was 50 years old.

Paul came naturally to gun design. His father was a gunmaker; so too were his six older brothers! Like John Browning, young Mauser began to “think” mechanisms onto paper and fashion parts that functioned as he imagined. He understood the value of fine machining, but his rifles boasted an economy of design that made them both reliable and, at the time, easy to manufacture in quantity. You’d be selling Mauser short if you credited him only with a bolt that worked like a door latch.

Almost anybody could have done that. Some probably did it before Paul Mauser. Notably, one of his first experimental rifles derived from the turn-bolt action of

the Dreyse needle-gun, German’s primary shoulder arm in the Franco-Prussian War. That work drew no contracts from the Wuerttemberg, Prussian or Austrian War Ministries. But it caught the eye of Samuel Norris, an American in Europe as an agent for E. Remington & Sons. Norris urged Paul and older brother Wilhelm to convert the French Chassepot needle-gun to a metallic-cartridge rifle—and evidently offered financial help. In 1867 the Mausers moved to Liege, Belgium to tool up. But when the French government showed no interest, Norris skipped out of the project. (Oddly, Norris filed to patent Mauser’s rifle in the U.S! On June 2, 1868, this became the first patented design to bear the Mauser name.) Paul and Wilhelm returned to set up shop

Wayne used a Mauser to take this elephant on a control hunt, with one Woodleigh solid in a Norma .375 load. Range: 16 yards in dense cover.

TOP RIGHT: Mauser’s long, broad extractor shows here, with the semi-rimmed bolt face and split left lug.

BOTTOM RIGHT: CZ’s 550 Magnum action borrows much from Mauser. But the left lug isn’t split; instead, the ejector operates through a slot below it.

in Oberndorf, Paul’s birthplace 29 years earlier. They soon moved to bigger quarters.

Wilhelm’s business acumen complemented Paul’s mechanical genius in their fledgling firearms enterprise. Still, they struggled until the Royal Prussian Military Shooting School tested a Mauser rifle Samuel Norris had furnished. It so impressed ordinance people, they asked the Mausers for improvements. They complied. The resulting single-shot rifle chambered an 11mm (43-caliber) black-powder cartridge with a 385-grain



Peter Paul Mauser and his rifles

Catching up to the M98

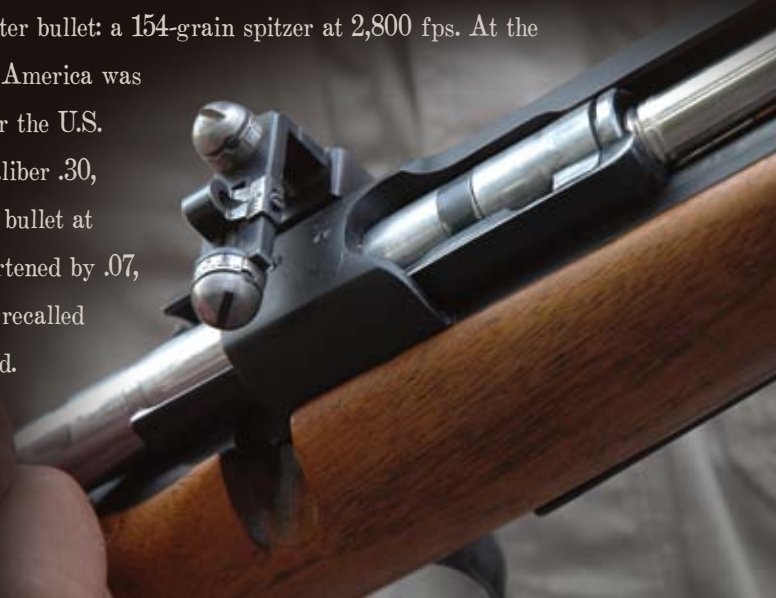
The M98 Mauser heavily influenced the design of the 1903 Springfield (and of course Winchester's M70 sporting rifle). Loads for the 8x57 cartridge also beat a path for the .30-06. Two years after its prototype appeared in 1901, the Model 1903 Springfield was in production. A 220-grain bullet at 2,300 fps made the .30-03 a ballistic match to the 8x57, with a 236-grain bullet at 2,125. But a year later, Germany switched to a sleeker, lighter bullet: a 154-grain spitzer at 2,800 fps. At the



ABOVE: Winchester's M70 debuted in 1937, with definite Mauser roots. Here: a 1950s Super Grade.

RIGHT: Mauser's extractor was snapped up by Winchester, for controlled feed on its M70.

time, such speed was remarkable. America was obliged to catch up. In short order the U.S. introduced the Ball Cartridge, Caliber .30, Model 1906. It drove a 150-grain bullet at 2,700 fps. The case was soon shortened by .07, to .494. Issued .30-03 rifles were recalled and rechambered to the new round.



bullet clocking about 1,400 fps. Early in 1872 the Mauser Model 1871 became Prussia's infantry rifle. But the rewards for this coup were disappointingly modest. The Prussian army would pay the Mausers only 15 percent of what they'd been led to expect for design rights! Also, the new rifles were to be built in government arsenals, not at the Mauser shop! The brothers managed to snare a contract for 3,000 sights for the Model 1871. Bavaria's order for 100,000 sights justified construction of a Mauser factory in Oberndorf. Soon the Wuerttemberg War Ministry awarded Paul and Wilhelm a contract for 100,000 rifles. They partnered with the Wuerttemberg Vereinsbank of Stuttgart to buy the sprawling Wuerttemberg Royal Armory (which had begun life as an Augustinian cloister). On February 5, 1874, it became Mauser Bros. and Co. The firm delivered the last Model 1871s in 1878, ahead of schedule. The Mausers then filled an order of 26,000 rifles for China. Paul also invented a revolver and a single-shot pistol, but neither sold well. After Wilhelm died young in 1882, Mauser sold stock. Ludwig Loewe & Co. of Berlin bought controlling shares.

By this time it was clear arms contracts of the future would go to makers of repeating rifles. Paul modified the Model 1871 to include a nine-shot tube magazine in the forend. The 71/84 proved a reliable service arm, but it was crude compared to later Mausers, and the 11mm bullet had a steep arc. As late as 1967, when American troops were toting M-16s, you could still buy Mauser 71/84 rifles—for about \$15.

Rifles to bottle smokeless

In 1889 Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre (FN) emerged in Liege to produce Mauser rifles for the Belgian government. FN owed its genesis to the Mauser Model 1889, Paul's first successful arm for smokeless powder. This rifle boasted features that established Mauser as the dominant gun designer on the continent. The one-piece bolt, bored from the rear, had twin locking lugs up front. The magazine was designed for loading by charger or stripper clip. Still, the 1889 (Belgian), 1890 (Turkish) and 1891 (Argentine) Mausers—nearly identical, and all chambered for the 7.65x53 Mauser cartridge—had flaws. The narrow extractor, with its small spring, could fail; double loading and a subsequent jam could result. The trigger could be pulled with the bolt out of battery. The external magazine made for awkward carry.

In the Model 1892 Mauser, Paul introduced the long, non-rotating extractor now widely hailed as the most reliable claw ever. Attached to the bolt body with a collar, this extractor required the rising case head to slide into the claw from underneath, for a positive grip even before the cartridge aligned with the barrel. The 1892 bolt cleared the breech even if, in the press of battle, a rifleman short-cycled. The broad, stout claw also engaged a big section of case head, forcing even reluctant hulls from hot, dirty chambers.

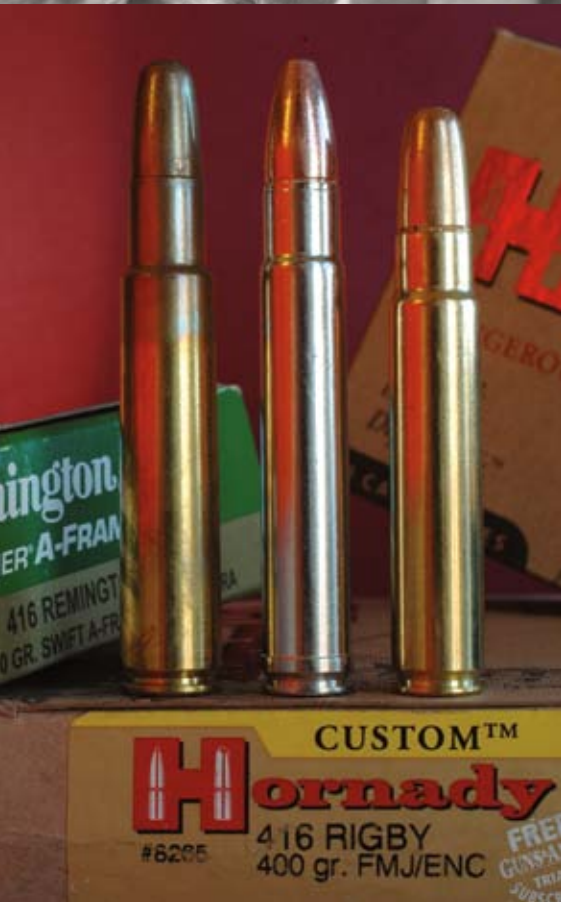
The Model 1892 featured a fixed magazine, though like its detachable predecessors the box held a single vertical stack

and protruded from the rifle's belly. The bolt stop no longer secured the clip. A sear pin fitted up with a notch in the bolt to prevent firing if the bolt wasn't locked. A bolt guide rib in the left locking lug race mated with a slot in the lug to prevent binding.

As notable as these improvements in the 1892 was the rifle's new cartridge: the 7x57 Mauser. It remains popular 120 years later—a standout in the first flurry of rimless rounds for smokeless powder.

Mauser's Model 1892 Spanish rifle (and the 92/93 Spanish Navy arm in 7.65x53Mauser) enjoyed barely a year in the sun before Paul simplified the safety and changed the magazine to a flush, fixed box with a staggered column. The resulting 1893 Spanish Mauser became a tremendous success. It was soon adopted by armed forces worldwide, and would become the prototype of the Model 1898. Mauser's 1893 flat-bottomed receiver was machined from a steel forging, with an integral recoil lug and a trimmed bridge. The integral bolt handle of most Model 1893 and 1895 rifles was straight; horizontal with the action closed. Bent bolt handles appeared on carbines. An angled cut at the left rear of the bridge had a camming surface for the square bolt handle base, to help with primary extraction. The safety, a stout wing, pivoted on the top of the bolt sleeve. At "right horizontal," the safety locked bolt and striker. At "vertical" it held the cocking piece off the sear but allowed bolt manipulation. "Left horizontal" was the fire position. The trigger, on a sear pin, had two humps for a two-stage let-off.

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TOP: Wayne aims a .416 Rigby on CZ's magnum action - stout, reliable like its Mauser forebear.

INSET: A century ago, Rigby acted as Mauser's agent in England. The Magnum Mauser action owes much to the .416 Rigby (left). It also suits Remington's .416. The .416 Ruger is '06-length.

Paul Mauser designed his staggered magazine box as a unit integral with the trigger bow, held to the action by a pair of stout screws on either end of the bottom metal. A spring-loaded plunger secured the floorplate. Depressing it with a pointed bullet allowed the floorplate to slide back and down for removal.

There are variations beyond the scope of this article—from a hinged floorplate (Spanish 93) and a magazine cutoff (Turkish 93) to a sloped follower heel (Brazilian 94) and a right-side safety lug (Chilean 95) to the more common thumb notch on the left-hand receiver wall to speed clip stripping.

In 1894 Sweden ordered 12,185 Mauser carbines from Germany. Later, they would be produced by Carl Gustaf's Stads Gevarsfaktori, a government arsenal in Eskiltuna, Sweden. These differed from the standard 1893/1895 rifles in that they chambered the 6.5x55 Swedish round, with a head slightly larger than that of the 7x57. A checked projection on the cocking piece permitted a soldier to ease the striker forward without firing the rifle; an additional notch in the cocking piece allowed the safety to swing to the right with the striker down, pulling the striker back from the bolt face. The Model 1896 Swedish Mauser was similar, but with a straight, rather than a turned-down bolt handle. It featured a deeper thumb cut. An anti-bind slot inside the bridge, matched a rib on the bolt body. The 1896 boasted three vents in the bolt to divert gas from a ruptured case. In 1938 Sweden adopted a carbine version of the 96, the M38 Swedish

Short Rifle. Three years later came the M41 Sniper Rifle, a scoped Model 1896 selected for accuracy. The Swedes reportedly proofed these actions to 66,000 psi—pressures as stiff as from modern magnums.

The rapid-fire series of Mauser actions in the 1890s brought improvements that culminated in the Model 1898, adopted by the German Army on April 5 of that year. It cocked on opening and, for safety, featured generous gas ports and a third lug that slipped into a slot in the bridge. The M98 would become the most acclaimed military arm to that point in history. Exported to many countries, it was built in many more. France, Great Britain, Russia and the U.S. designed their own battle rifles; but none surpassed this Mauser in accuracy or function. The original Gewehr 98, a 9-pound rifle with 29-inch barrel and five-shot magazine, saw its first action in the Boxer Rebellion in 1898. The Karabine 98a, a short cavalry rifle, was built from 1899 to 1908. During WWI, 18,421 Gewehr 98s were converted for use with 2x and 3x scopes.

Paul Mauser died in May, 1914, just before his rifle muddied and bloodied itself in the trenches.

Cartridges and receivers

The first cartridge chambered in the 1898 Mauser was the 8mm smokeless round introduced with the 1888 Commission rifle—which had little of Mauser's influence. Known as the 7.9x57 or 7.9x57I (the common use of J for I is incorrect), this round fired a 227-grain .318 bullet at

around 2,100 fps. Germany lost little time developing a more potent cartridge for the stronger M98. The 8x57, with 154-grain pointed .323 bullet at 2,870 fps, appeared in 1905. Breech pressure of nearly 50,000 psi topped that of the 7.9x57I by 10 percent. Officially, the 8x57 was designated 7.9x57IS and 8x57IS. It would see German infantry through WWII. The Lange Visier rear sight with a shallow V notch, could be adjusted for point-on aim to 2,000 yards with the 8x57IS load.

During WWI the walnut stocks of Mauser service rifles acceded to less costly and more available beech. Leather slings were replaced with canvas.

The Treaty of Versailles had nothing to say about accoutrements; but it did prohibit use and even possession of military ammunition by Germans. The 8x60S (with .323 bullet) was a logical sequel to the outlawed 8x57IS. A simple rechambering made 1898 infantry rifles into legal, lethal hunting arms. Later an 8x60 round came along, for early M98s bored for the original 7.9x57 (.318) cartridge.

Early 1898 carbines like the 98a, had receiver rings 1.300 inch in diameter. The later Czech 33/40 also had this “small-ring” receiver. Most 1898 military rifles and post-WWII sporters have a larger 1.410-inch ring.

Custom rifles for powerful rounds, especially those with belted heads, are best built on large-ring actions. Steels and heat-treating of 98 Mauser actions have evolved, though the mechanism’s vaunted strength is due mainly to its design, not to metallurgy. Throughout its military life the M98 was made of tough, low-carbon steel carburized, or case-hardened, for a hard finish. The earliest actions were softer, in general. During the final, frantic years of WWII, receivers showed wider variations in hardness. Soft steel in lug abutments can result in bolt setback. Choosing a military Mauser as the basis of a custom sporter, shooters have long been advised to pick a large-ring action made between 1920 and 1943. Some source names are also favored—the Mauser stamp certainly, but also DWM, FN and Brno (VZ-24).

While the bolt face of M98s chambered to the 8x57 will accept without alteration the .30-06 and derivatives, the 3.32-inch Mauser magazine is cramped for the '06 and .270 (and short-belted magnums), commonly loaded to 3.30 to 3.34. Removing a bit of metal from the front of the magazine box and the ramp will usually ensure function. A box spacer and short follower is a good idea for .308-length rounds.

Some aficionados wax poetic over “short” Mauser actions—mainly the Mexican

1898. At 8.50 inches instead of the standard 8.75 inches overall, these receivers weigh 43 ounces, compared to the 45 of ordinary large-ring actions (Mexican Mausers also came in small-ring form). In my youth, riflemen spoke of bantam-weight mountain rifles crafted by the best stockmakers and metalsmiths on short actions; but wand-like handling came from the ministrations of these wizards, not from receiver dimensions.

In 1935 the Gewehr 98 (GEW.98 or M98) was replaced by the Karabiner 98 (KAR.98 or K98). The rifle’s mechanism remained essentially unchanged.

A Mauser for rimmed cartridges (originally the 8x52R Siamese) appeared in Siam, now Thailand, during the scramble for infantry rifles of Mauser design. By the 1960s the Thai army was equipped with more modern arms, and Siamese Mausers were surplused cheap. American shooters barreled them to .45-70 and .444 Marlin. They’ll also cycle the .303 British, 7.62x54R, .30-40 Krag and .348 Winchester.

The M98 on mountain and veldt

As war clouds gathered over Europe, Lee Sherman Chadwick went hunting. In his early 60s, the Cleveland industrialist set out in the summer of 1936 for central British

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Columbia. Two weeks' travel by rail and road put him on the trail with outfitter Roy Hargreaves. Accompanied by guides Curley Cochrane and Frank Golata and 13 pack horses, the men made their way into sheep country. The hard land showed them little at first, and when three Stone's rams appeared in the distance

vanguard of a series of heavy-game cartridges using smokeless powder. Rigby must have seen the possibilities in Mauser's 1898 action, with its cock-on-opening bolt, short lock time, third lug and twin gas vents. In fact, Rigby may well have influenced Mauser's decision to build a magnum-length action. In 1911, the introduction of Rigby's .416 in Mauser rifles put repeaters on equal footing with most popular doubles. Its 410-grain bullets registered 5,100 foot-pounds of muzzle energy—on par with that of the .470 and .475 No. 2 N.E. John "Pondoro" Taylor was a great advocate of the .416. Rigby knew it had a good thing going and initially refused to sell Magnum Mauser actions to its competition.



on consecutive days, the hunters took the hint. Legend has it the object was camp meat. Chadwick's Mauser rifle, in .404 Jeffery, was an unlikely sheep rifle, not only heavy but overly powerful. Mauser .404s had been issued to African game rangers in charge of culling thick-skinned game!

Evidently the rams got the drop on the hunters, as Chadwick fired from some distance. The bullet struck low, wounding the biggest ram. As the story goes, Hargreaves chased and finished the animal. That ram, shot on the 28th of August, is still hailed as the finest trophy ever from North American game fields.

Early in the 20th century, the Mauser sporter pulled the rug out from some fine rifles—particularly single-shots like the Farquharson. Mausers were cheaper to make, held a stack of cartridges in reserve and (unlike the weaker, rear-locking British SMLE) could be barreled to very powerful cartridges. But Mauser actions were not immediately available to all in the British gun trade. In 1900 Mauser blessed John Rigby & Co. of London as its agent. Rigby had prospered with its 1898 introduction of the .450 3/4-inch Nitro Express. While this rimmed round was for double rifles, it appeared in the

When Rigby's monopoly on Mausers ended in 1912, other British gunmakers scrambled to build rifles on them. Westley Richards barreled Mausers to its .318 and .425 rounds. W.J. Jeffery used the M98 in its .333 and .404 rifles. Holland & Holland found it ideally suited to the belted .300 and .375. The .505 Gibbs fit in Magnum Mauser actions.

Not all commercial Mausers bound for Africa were chambered for big-bore cartridges. W.D.M. "Karamojo" Bell reportedly owned six Rigby Mausers in .275 (essentially, 7x57) and one in .22 Savage High-Power—as well as a .416. In India, the great tiger hunter Jim Corbett carried a Mauser in .275. It proved more manageable than a heavy double in tight quarters—and at least once saved his life.

On the trail of the man-eating Chowgarh tigress, Corbett stopped to pick up a couple of rare bird eggs. Soon thereafter he came into a sandy wash. Stepping clear of a giant rock protruding from the steep bank, Corbett turned and "looked straight into the tigress's face." Her head was eight feet away.

Australia: A hunter aims a Mauser of classic profile. The M98 is popular Down Under.

MIDDLE: The current Mauser flagship, Model 03, has interchangeable barrels and bolt heads.

TOP: An Australian hunter used a Mauser in .30-06, with Woodleigh bullet, on this buffalo.

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In his left hand, Corbett still held the eggs. He wrote that they may have prevented a sudden reaction to the sighting, which would almost certainly have triggered a charge. In slow motion, Corbett eased the slender Mauser across his chest and raised it with his right hand. "My arm was now at full stretch and the weight of the rifle was beginning to tell. Only a little further now for the muzzle to go, and the tigress ... had not once taken her eyes off mine ...

"To me, looking into the tigress's eyes and unable therefore to follow the movement of the barrel, it appeared that my arm was paralyzed, and that the swing would never be completed..." As soon as the muzzle covered the beast, Corbett fired. The 7mm bullet caught the great cat's spine and ripped her heart. She had killed, by firm count, at least 64 people.

Stateside, Jack O'Connor liked the Mauser. His first rifle from custom gunmaker Al Biesen was on a Mauser action—a .30-06, Al told me. Despite an affinity for Winchester Model 70 Featherweights, O'Connor never lost his fondness for 98 Mausers. Of the Springfield, he wrote: "Various departures were made from the Mauser design, and in every instance the designers laid an egg."

Post-war commerce

After armistice in 1945, the Mauser enterprise was renamed to reflect a new direction. "Werke" (works) replaced "Waffenfabrik" (arms factory), and Mauser's business shifted toward the sporting trade. The U.S. agent, A.F. Stoeger, Inc. of New York, assigned numbers to the various Mauser actions. By the end of the Depression there were 20 configurations in four lengths: magnum, standard, intermediate and short. The short, or "kurz" version featured a small receiver ring and only three chamberings: the 6.5x50, 8x51 and .250 Savage. Magnum and kurz actions were built specifically for the hunting market. Though Mauser did not adopt Stoeger numbers, 1 through 20, collectors still use these designations.

Surplus military Mausers sold at ridiculously low prices following World War II, but commercial sporting rifles never came cheap. In 1939 a Model 70 Winchester retailed for \$61.25, while Mauser listed its sporters at \$110 to \$250. Square-bridge or

magnum actions cost more. Left-hand versions commanded a \$200 premium.

Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre in Liege, Belgium, founded by Ludwig Loewe ex-

pressly to manufacture Mauser rifles, once exported commercial 98 actions to the U.S. through Stoeger. In 1941 you could buy an FN action (cataloged as the Stoeger Peerless) for \$18! But war interrupted the supply of these actions. In 1947 they appeared again, this time via the importing conduit of Firearms International in Washington, D.C. Almost identical to its predecessor, the new FN featured a lower bolt handle, and, in 1948 a double-set trigger option. The bridge was trimmed and the clip slot eliminated. The next year FN was selling complete rifles. One receiver served for standard long- and short-action chamberings, with a magazine filler for the short rounds. An FN Magnum action appeared in 1953 for the .300 and .375 H&H. It was really the standard receiver with opened bolt face, altered feed ramp and extended box. A single-shot BR or benchrest action arrived in 1955. A couple of years later, the repeating action became the FN Deluxe. A new action, the Model 300, incorporated improvements like an adjustable trigger and right-side sliding thumb safety. The 300 later became the FN Supreme. By 1964, the Deluxe was moth balled. The Musketeer replaced it, only in completed rifle form. During these transitions, FN made an oft-overlooked internal change. In addition to milling the right-hand side of the receiver collar for the extractor claw, the company milled a cut in the collar's left side. The cut has no function in service but does make machining the left lug race easier. By all logic, it weakens the receiver ring, albeit there's no evidence the removed material has led to receiver failure.

The FN gave riflemen an economical route to Mauser 1898 features. While many tinkers built sporting rifles on liberated military hardware, or bought surplus M98s at garage-sale prices, alterations needed to make an infantry rifle into a fetching sporter cost plenty. A new barrel, a swept bolt handle, an adjustable trigger and M70-style safety, a hinged floorplate, a hand-shaped and -checkered French walnut stock add up. Trimming the receiver and drilling it for scope mounts hike the bill. New York's Griffin & Howe has delivered such services to the well-heeled. For years, amateur gunsmiths made do with issue barrels (perhaps rechambered to 8mm/06) and triggers. They cut down

military stocks. FN and other post-war Mauser actions for the sporting trade promised less work and superior results. A fledgling industry in replacement gun-stocks provided semi-inletted walnut to home workshops. Herter's walnut went into my first attempt at stocking a rifle. The inletted blank cost \$7.50.

The Yugoslavian Mark X Mauser, and the Spanish Santa Barbara served impoverished Mauser enthusiasts like me. A Mark X barreled to the then-new .264 Winchester Magnum was an early prize. I dug deep for a fancy stick of Claro walnut—but inletted it without proper attention to recoil lug contact. After cinching the finished stock to the metal, I affixed a K4 Weaver and hied off to a nearby farm. There my first shot split the Claro through the grip as neatly as if I'd cleaved it with a maul.

Following that dark day, I patiently set to work on another blank. On a frigid November day the re-stocked .264 clobbered the first branch-antlered whitetail buck I'd ever seen through a sight. I've since assembled a couple of Mark X rifles in .308 and .358 Norma. Ed Sweet, of Intermountain Arms in Idaho, barreled another in .338 Winchester. I owned a Whitworth in .375 but foolishly sold it. An FN .30-06 got a makeover when the late, talented, Maurice Ottmar barreled it to .458 and installed a Lyman 35 receiver sight. This is a very fast-pointing rifle, as lithe as you'd wish for angry beasts bearing down fast in tight places. The sights are shotgun-quick. The trigger could serve on a target rifle. The barrel will never wear out either, because at just 8 pounds, this .458 has all the civility of a jackhammer.

Trumping the FN?

Early attempts to bring other 98s stateside failed. In the 1960s, wildcatter P.O. Ackley contracted to have a copy built in Japan, but the enterprise soon folded. A similar fate befell the Korean-built Royal Arms action. The common obstacle: Mauser's M98 is an expensive action to make! Stout and fault-free in function, it requires many boring, milling and broaching operations in manufacture. Some have been easy to jettison—the clip guide, thumb cut and top-swing safety aren't useful on hunting rifles. FN Supreme actions have a simpler shroud with a safety that blocks the trigger only. Ditto the Santa Barbara (Spanish) and Zastava (Yugoslav) Mausers. These, and the fine Czech Brno, were either dropped or fell victim to import restrictions in the U.S. (Zastava because of sanctions on Serbia).

Among the most coveted of short-run Mausers is the French Brevox, a magnum action that gave shooters a worthy alternative



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to the scarce and costly Oberndorf Magnum Mauser. Now you'll have to secure a second mortgage for a Brex! In 2002 George Sandman and partners formed Empire Rifles to build true-blue M98 commercial actions and affordable big-bore custom rifles. By all accounts the few in circulation are excellent firearms, but the company didn't survive its first decade.

In my youth, one rifle that made men swoon was Browning's High Power, built on FN Mauser and small Sako actions. The FN, with short and long (desirable) extractors, handled cartridges from .243 to .375 H&H. The Browning receiver featured a trim bolt stop, which lay almost flush and pivoted with the ejector. The trigger, similar to the Winchester 70's in its simplicity and adjustment, sported a sliding thumb safety. The bolt knob on Browning rifles was round, not flat inside like the FN's. Less appealing: etched, gold-washed alloy floorplates. Illustrated seductively in two-page spreads in Browning catalogs, Safari Grade and fancier Medallion and Olympian High Power rifles were stocked in lovely walnut and hand-checked. FN built these rifles from 1960 to 1974. A liability surfaced years later. "Salt-curing" the wood left residual salts, which drew moisture and produced rust where the metal contacted the walnut.

Global Trading, an Italian firm that

came along in 1995, imported a 98 action under the Legacy Sports International name. E.R. Shaw barreled two for me, in .264 Winchester and .270 Weatherby. At 3.2 pounds of investment-cast steel, these are heavy actions, 8.66 inches long with an extended receiver ring for barrel support. A square-shouldered bridge and front ring mimic double-square-bridge Mausers (there's only one real bridge on any bolt rifle!). Flats are drilled and dovetail-machined for scope mounts. The 3.11-inch port has ample clearance for magnum cartridges. An Oberndorf-style guard latch secures a hinged floorplate. An M70-type safety complements a fully adjustable trigger. Alas, this rifle has faded.

Reimer Johannsen, of Neumunster, Germany, has produced classic commercial 1898 actions with a full suite of refinements. Four action sizes accept chamberings from .223 to .500 Jeffery and .505 Gibbs. Options include cocking-piece rear sights and drop-box magazines. Stocks and barrels on cataloged rifles are svelte and conservative. In the U.S. (Phoenix), Granite Mountain Arms builds actions faithful to the Oberndorf 98. Milled from 8620 steel billets, bolts and receivers (four sizes, right- and left-hand) are case hardened and hand-lapped. Action lengths to 9.695 inches and diameters to .750 accommodate the biggest hunting rounds.

A straddle floorplate is standard; so too an extended tang, an adjustable trigger.


Mauser resurrected its own commercial M98 actions (or, if you like, flew its banner over the M98 again) in 1999, under the shingle Mauser Jagdwaffen GmbH (Mauser Hunting Arms, Ltd.). But the firm's main effort now is production and sale of Model 03 rifles, which differ significantly from M98s. Mauser Jagdwaffen GmbH, in Isny im Allgäu, is a subsidiary of SIG Sauer.

Any discussion of Mauser rifles must end with a helpless shrug. No one can tell in a few pages the tale of the most important military rifle ever—and the mechanism still dominating the hunting field. Books have been written on the M98 Mauser alone. The hefty 33rd edition of Fjestad's Blue Book of Gun Values has 20 fine-print pages of terse notes on Mauser pricing. The door-latch design of Paul Mauser's 1871 rifle preceded George Custer's last battle, the birth of W.D.M. Bell, the debut of John Browning's falling-block action. A star in the most productive era in firearms history, it emerged a prototype for the strongest, most dependable, most accurate repeaters.

Chances are your big game rifle owes its genesis to the German inventor whose single-shot black-powder rifle lobbed an 11mm bullet at 1,440 fps. ■

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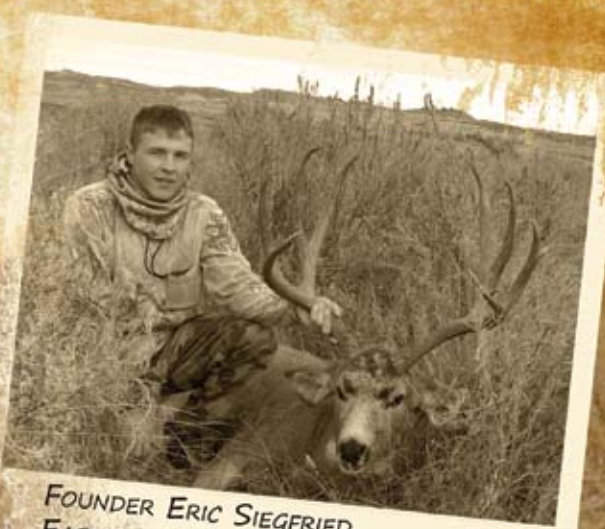
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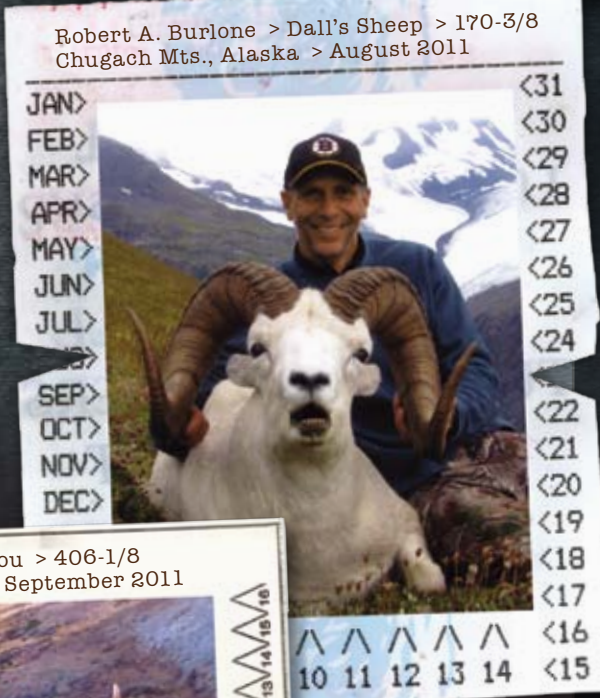
The Boone and Crockett Club has a tradition of honoring trophies and the fair chase hunts that produce them, including photographs from the field. In keeping with this tradition, the Club, and our friends at Swarovski, thought it would be a good idea to take this one step further and celebrate some of the best examples of field photography, and share them with you in each issue of *Fair Chase*.

One average, the Club accepts 1,500 new B&C trophies annually. For the fourth year, our editors will be sifting through hundreds of field photos looking for exemplary trophy field photography. The most outstanding examples will be featured in the Spring 2013 issue with the top three being awarded prizes provided by Swarovski Optik.

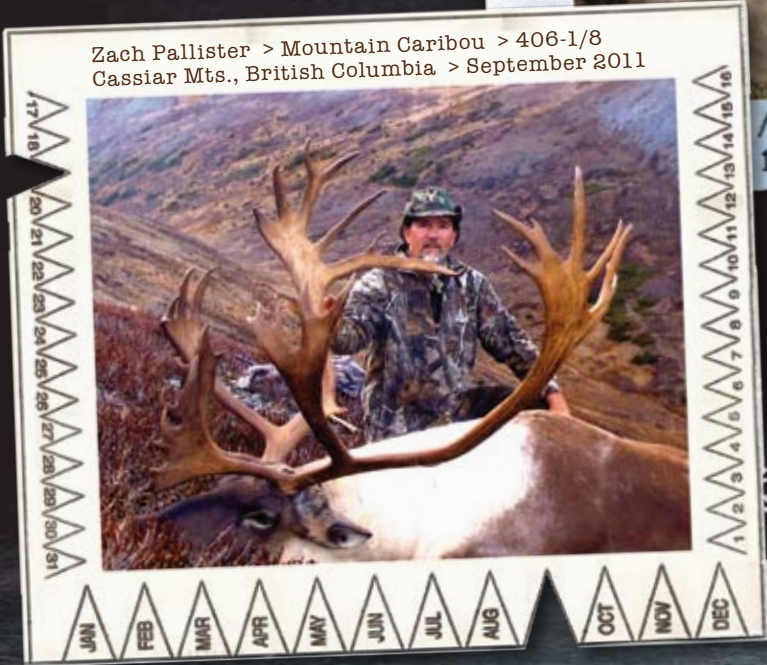
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Eric H. Boley > Cougar > 14-10/16
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Robert A. Burlone > Dall's Sheep > 170-3/8
Chugach Mts., Alaska > August 2011



Zach Pallister > Mountain Caribou > 406-1/8
Cassiar Mts., British Columbia > September 2011

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THIRD PRIZE Z3 3-9x36

NOTE: All field photographs from accepted trophies in 2012 are eligible

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ANNOUNCED IN THE NEXT
ISSUE OF FAIR CHASE**