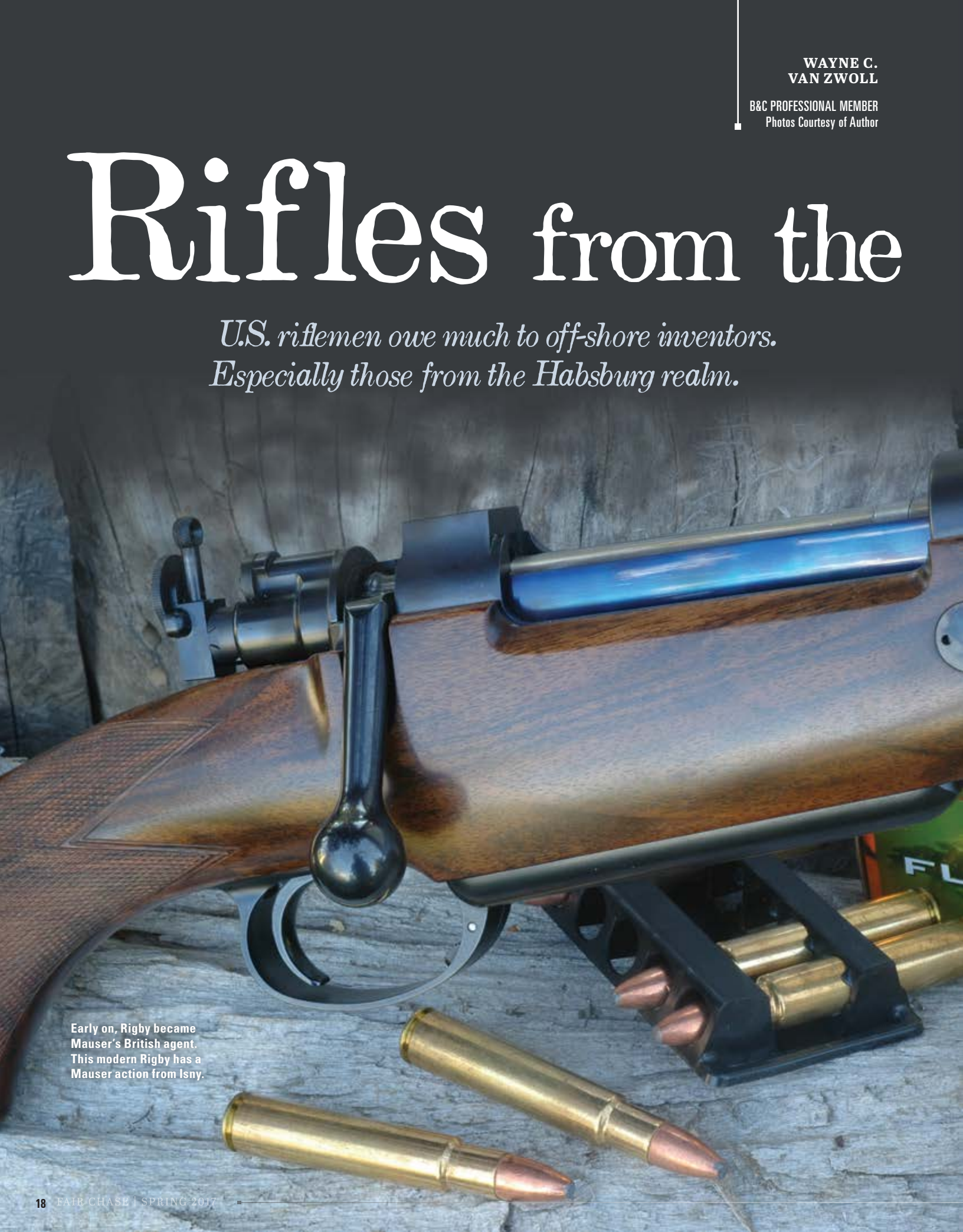
WAYNE C.
VAN ZWOLL

B&C PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Photos Courtesy of Author

Rifles from the

U.S. riflemen owe much to off-shore inventors. Especially those from the Habsburg realm.



Early on, Rigby became Mauser's British agent. This modern Rigby has a Mauser action from Isny.

Old Country

Keening wind sucked away the strike; swirling snow erased the image after recoil. Mechanically I cycled the bolt, again pressing cheek to comb. The elk reappeared, a miniature gray shadow nearly 300 yards distant. Another muted shot. The bull was no longer obscured; he was gone. I scrambled to my feet and wiped the snow-plastered rifle, still snugged to my arm.

Pushing into the blow to find tracks before they filled, I cradled my .30-06, ready. But the elk lay dead, my Core-Lokts having minced its lungs.

A rifle is as a rifle does—or as you imagine it doing. Extract history and the attendant romance of heroes gone and times irretrievable, and choosing a rifle becomes merely tool selection. Even the ordinary bolt action I used that day has a fascinating story—not all of it stateside.

The most significant bolt-action rifles evolved in Europe during the period that gave America's frontier its saddle guns. Like John Moses Browning, who designed Winchester's 1886, 1892 and 1894, Peter Paul Mauser saw his star rise during the 1880s. His brother Wilhelm, who'd worked with him, died young in 1882, a few short years after the Mausers earned a contract from the Wuerttemberg War Ministry for 100,000 Model 1871 single-shot 11mm black-powder rifles to arm Prussian infantry.

Fabrique Nationale d'Armes de Guerre (FN) was then established in Liege to build Mauser rifles for Belgium's government. Mauser's 1889 rifle, for smokeless loads, followed. The 1895 action became, with improvements, the 1898. Adopted by the German army April 5 of that year, Mauser's '98 military rifles would become the most widely used in history.

You'll find no action that feeds more reliably than an original 1898, largely because Paul Mauser

This elk fell to two Core-Lokts from Wayne's .30-06 at 280 yards. American-built rifle or European?

fashioned each box for a specific cartridge. A host of measurements contribute to that smooth, dead-sure feed. The taper of the box relative to case shape and shoulder location, follower height and slope—every variable matters. The follower spring must squirm to center the stack as cartridges strip from either side.

After World War II, the Mauser firm was renamed "Werke" (works), replacing "Waffenfabrik" (arms factory). Courting sportsmen, Mauser engaged U.S. agent A.F. Stoeger, Inc., of New York, to sell in the U.S. By the late 1930s, the line comprised 20 rifle configurations in four action lengths. Surplus infantry rifles sold cheap, but commercial Mausers came dear. In 1939 a Winchester M70 cost $61.25, a Mauser sporter $110 to $250. Custom Mausers were coveted by discriminating riflemen.

One of them, evidently, was Lee Sherman Chadwick. Two weeks travel by rail and road in the summer of 1936 put this Cleveland industrialist in central British Columbia, where he headed for sheep country with outfitter Roy Hargreaves, guides Curley Cochrane and Frank Golata, and 13 pack horses. Chadwick's heavy Mauser in .404 Jeffery was an unlikely sheep rifle. But that mattered not at all during the first days, as they saw little game. Then three rams appeared, far away. The subsequent approach, on the 28th of August, probably went awry, as Chadwick fired from great distance. A low hit wounded the biggest ram. As the story goes, Hargreaves chased and finished the animal—which has since been widely acknowledged as the finest trophy ever taken in North America—known as the Chadwick Ram.

On the continent, Mauser rifles waxed the competition. In 1900 John Rigby & Co. of London became Mauser's agent. Rigby surely saw profit in Mauser's 1898 action, with its cock-on-opening bolt, short lock time, third lug and twin gas vents. The 1911 debut of Rigby's .416 cartridge in Mauser rifles gave hunters a repeater with Nitro Express muscle. Rigby was loath to sell actions to other shops. But that monopoly ended in 1912, and British gunmakers descended on them. W.J. Jeffery used the 98 in its .333s and .404s. Westley Richards barreled Mausers to its .318 and .425. Holland & Holland found the actions readily fed its belted .300 and .375. Magnum Mausers swallowed rounds as big as the .505 Gibbs.

Less powerful chamberings caught the eye of celebrated hunters like W.D.M. "Karamojo" Bell, who reportedly owned six Rigby Mausers in .275 (7x57) and one in .22 Savage Hi-Power. In India, tiger hunter Jim Corbett favored a .275. It was quicker in hand than a heavy double in the jungle, and, when he trailed the Chowgarh tigress, it surely saved his life. After stooping to pick up two rare bird eggs, Corbett entered a sandy wash, turned and "looked straight into the tigress's face" eight feet away. He wrote that the eggs in his left hand may have prevented sudden reaction—and a certain charge. Slowly Corbett eased the Mauser across his chest with his right hand. "My arm was now at full stretch and the weight ... was beginning to tell." Fighting the urge to hurry, he completed the arc, firing when the muzzle came to bear. The 7mm bullet shattered the man-eater's spine and heart. By firm count this tigress had killed 64 people.

The commercial Mark X Mauser evolved from the 98

Arguably, every modern turn-bolt rifle has Mauser's door-latch lockup. This buck fell to a Howa.

Paul Mauser's 1898 action was instantly adopted by many armies switching to smokeless powder.

Namibia's German roots favor Mauser rifles. Iron sights on this 9.3x62 gave Wayne a fine gemsbok.

You'll find no action that feeds more reliably than an original 1898, largely because Paul Mauser fashioned each box for a specific cartridge.

B&C World's Records

B&C's scoring system depends upon carefully taken measurements of the horns, antlers, etc., to arrive at a numerical final score that provides instant ranking for all trophies of a category. Unlike all other systems, B&C's system places heavy emphasis on symmetry, penalizing those portions of the measured material that are non-symmetrical. This results in even, well-matched trophies scoring better and placing higher in the rankings than equally developed but mismatched trophies, a result that most people readily accept. Non-typical categories were established for those antlered trophies with unusual amounts of abnormal point material to give them recognition as they would be unduly penalized in the typical categories.

The Boone and Crockett Club's Records Committee, which is the governing body of the Club's records-keeping activities, created the Special Judges Panel with the express purpose of verifying and announcing potential new World's Records as they are submitted during any triennial Awards Program.

The Boone and Crockett Club Records Program recognizes 38 different categories of North American big game. In order for a trophy to be declared a World's Record it must be brought before an Awards Judges' Panel at the end of an Awards Entry Period or a Special Judges Panel. Only these Judges' Panel can certify a World's Record and finalize its score.

The Famous Chadwick Ram

The longtime World's Record Stone's sheep considered by many to be the best trophy ever taken in North America—is a star attraction of the National Collection of Heads and Horns (NCHH). The ram was donated to the collection right after the hunt.

Learn more about the history of the NCHH in the four part series printed in *Fair Chase* in the Summer 2015 through Spring 2016 issues.

The World's Record Stone's sheep is considered by many big game enthusiasts to be North America's greatest trophy. L.S. Chadwick took this unbelievable specimen while on expedition along the Muskwa River drainage in British Columbia on August 28, 1936.

At a final score of 196-6/8, in 75 years of hunting and records keeping no other Stone's sheep ram has come close. The #2 all-time B&C ram was taken in 1962 and scores 190, which is also the only other ram on record to score over 190.

Why is it that one animal, that now lives only in pictures and on a mounted form, is so celebrated? Perhaps it is that the days of the month-long expedition hunts on horseback, deep into the "never hunted" are long gone. It could be that this particular trophy stands as a testament to these once untouched and unspoiled wildernesses? Maybe it's because this one trophy represents our long fascination with the biggest and the best.

Chadwick's heavy Mauser in .404 Jeffery was on display in the National Collection of Heads and Horns, in Cody, Wyoming.

Right horn: 50-1/8
Left horn: 51-5/8.
No other mountain sheep on record of any species has recorded both horns over 50-inches.

action. It appeared in Whitworth big-bores and other affordable rifles. Exquisite 98s machined from scratch by the likes of Granite Mountain Arms followed. Meanwhile Rigby stayed true to Mauser as its action of choice—an unlikely union that survived world war. It continued with Rigby's revival and the move of Mauser manufacturing to Isny, Germany.

A more contemporary Mauser arrived four years ago after a series of disappointing sequels to the 98. Slim and conservatively profiled, the M12 evolved with hunters in mind. It has a straight-comb stock (walnut or synthetic) and a smooth, six-lug action. The damascened bolt runs full-diameter to its recessed, dual-ejector head, machined away for three pairs of lugs that lock to the barrel. Bolt lift: 60 degrees. The bolt handle is vintage Mauser: simple, elegant, and straight. Mauser adopted the M70-style three-position safety. The trigger adjusts to a crisp 2 pounds. A brushed steel floorplate caps a flush polymer magazine, which can be loaded in the rifle. The M12 comes in a dozen chamberings, to .338 Winchester.

An M12 in .270 accompanied me into Austria's alps, where fog and snow hid the chamois until a gap in the sky appeared one morning. We scrambled through the murk to take advantage of this window. Prone from 200 yards, I steadied the Leupold's crosswire. The chamois collapsed at the report, instantly dead. Besides its slick action and fine accuracy, this Mauser had exceptional walnut, and I sorely wished to give it a new home. "Nein," grinned the man from Mauser. Or was that "Mine"?

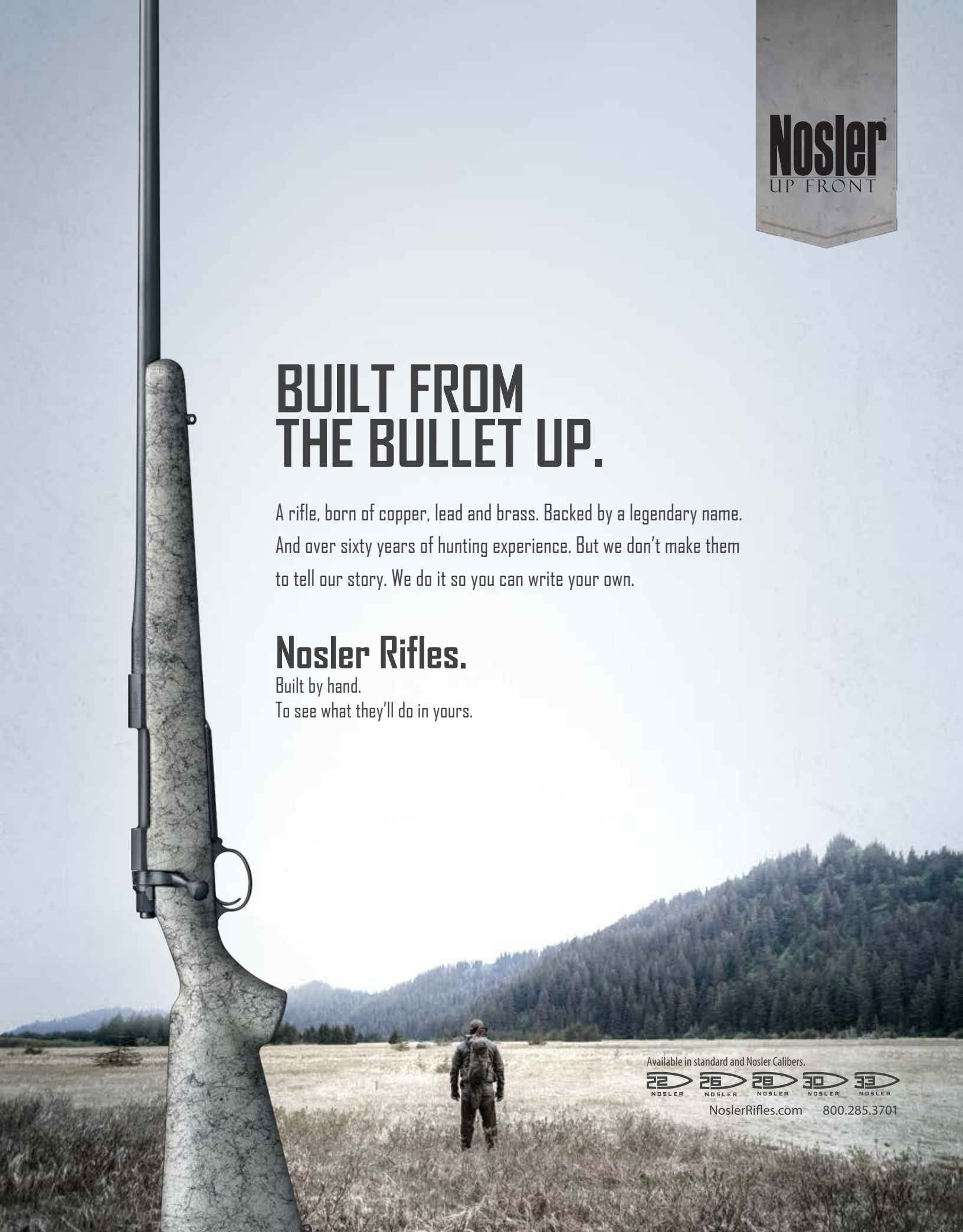
There's no faster bolt rifle than Blaser's R93 (here) and R8. An expanding collet locks bolt to barrel.

Sauer shares Mauser's factory site. This handsome new Sauer 404 rifle has interchangeable barrels.

At Isny, Mauser shares its footprint with Sauer and Blaser. The factories are separate, but a short walk apart. Michael Luke and Thomas Ortmaier control the L&O Group that owns these brands, plus SIG Sauer in northern Germany. Bernhard Knobel, CEO of Isny operations, runs Blaser. Thorsten Mann heads Mauser, Matthias Klotz the Sauer works.

Blaser's straight-pull R93 and its successor, the R8, rank among Europe's most innovative rifles. Introduced in 1993 and 2008, they feature a radial-head bolt with an expanding collet that locks into the barrel. The bolt telescopes, keeping action length two inches shorter than that of ordinary turn-bolt rifles—none of which match a Blaser's speed. A flick of your hand cycles the action. But you sacrifice nothing in strength or accuracy. The R8 has endured pressures of 120,000 psi. It has given me half-minute groups.

A thumb-switch cocks the R8. "You can safely carry it and the R93 with a loaded chamber," says Bernard Knobel. Plasma nitriding makes for a hard surface on the interchangeable barrels. Scope rings engage barrel notches so precisely, you can remove the scope and replace it without losing zero. The R8s adjustable trigger is of target quality, tucked in a compact, detachable magazine group easily top-loaded in the rifle. R83s and R8s have downed game for me in Europe and Africa. No hiccups.


Nosler
UP FRONT
BUILT FROM
THE BULLET UP.
A rifle, born of copper, lead and brass. Backed by a legendary name.
And over sixty years of hunting experience. But we don't make them
to tell our story. We do it so you can write your own.
Nosler Rifles.
Built by hand.
To see what they'll do in yours.
Available in standard and Nosler Calibers.
22 NOSLER
26 NOSLER
28 NOSLER
30 NOSLER
33 NOSLER
NoslerRifles.com 800.285.3701

Blaser's superb R8 (here a .338 Lapua) has a telescoping, straight-pull bolt that shrinks overall length.

Available in various grades, the CZ 550 Magnum swallows the biggest dangerous-game cartridges.

Sauer's 101 is of more traditional bent. My pick of eight versions: the walnut-stocked Forest, an agile carbine with iron sights at scope height on a 20-inch barrel. Like its laminate twin, the Scandic, it's quick to cheek, with a nose for the target. My current 101, in 9.3x62, punches sub-minute groups.

An upgrade, the new Sauer 404, has a six-lug bolt that locks into the barrel, and a cocking switch. The trigger adjusts .3 inch for reach and down to 1.2 pounds in weight. Sauer Universal Mounts hold zero when removed. Interchangeable barrels come in 13 chamberings, to .375. The bolt head is easy to change too. Last fall I snared one of five sub-models of the 404 for a red stag hunt, then zeroed its Leica scope on the steeps of western Scotland. Despite stormy conditions, I rang steel plates to 1,000 yards. The synthetic stock shrugged off afternoon sleet, while the alloy receiver kept the rifle lively in hand as we trod sodden heather. When my stalker spied an aged stag in a hollow far away, we splashed across an icy stream and climbed fast to beat dusk. An angry North Atlantic hurled horizontal rain as I bellied over the last rise. At 90 steps the great stag folded to a Hornady ELD-X bullet.

"Hitler's plans for eastern Europe were clear long before they spanned the Channel," said Milan Kubelen. He had then just retired after 30 years at CZ, the great Czechoslovakian armsmaker. In 1936 the Czech government moved its arms factory to Uhersky Brod, as far as practical from Berlin. The small city is shadowed by arable hills. In wooded uplands bent men in dark overcoats hunt mushrooms. Silent fog spins the clock back to the Cold War, where unobtrusive people passed intelligence in unobtrusive places.

Forebears of CZ rifles hailed from an earlier time. Before World War I, Zbrojovka Brno produced arms on government contract in the central-Czechoslovakian town of Brno. In 1921 the factory became Ceska Zbrojovka, or "Czech Armsmaker." CZ soon established another plant at Strakonice, where it produced pistols. By the time Hitler blitzed Poland, the Uhersky Brod operation had become a subsidiary. Neville Chamberlain's capitulation in Munich gave the Nazis Sudetenland. At war's end, Germany relinquished its conquests. Czechoslovakia was, briefly, self-governing. But in 1948 Communists took control. Seven years later the Uhersky Brod operation split from Strakonice. Firearms manufacture in Brno was throttled in 1964; but the Brno name lived on in ZKK, ZKM and 527 rifles—all produced at Uhersky Brod.

During the '60s this factory grew substantially. It's still big. Visiting again in 2014, I found Milan Kubelen keen to show me changes. CZ was clearly still his passion. Nearly a mile long, the complex has many buildings pre-dating the war. Their peaked roofs "look residential through a bombsight." Like most firearms factories in Europe and the U.S., CZ still uses tooling from that era. But banks of modern CNC machines, and an investment casting operation, show the company also embraces the new. In 1991, two years after revolution led by Vaclav Havel jettisoned Communist rule, Czech industries were privatized. In '93 the nation became two. The Czech and Slovak republics remain autonomous.

Zbrojovka Brno endured these political upheavals, but internal troubles soon followed. A line of shotguns and single-shot rifles helped it recover from a 2004 bankruptcy. The Uhersky Brod plant grew and thrived. It now employs 1,750 people and exports to 80 countries. CZ-USA, established in California in 1997, moved to Kansas City, Kansas, the following year. Alice Poluchova heads CZ's U.S. operation. The firm's acquisition of Dan Wesson Firearms brought a line of 1911 pistols to join the M75 autoloader. CZ has since engaged factories in Turkey (Huglu and Akkar) to produce shotguns.

CZ catalogs a wide range of rifles, from the 805 Bren A2 selective-fire infantry arm (5.56x45 and 7.62x39) to the 750 Sniper (7.62x51) and 550 High Energy Tactical (.338 Lapua) bolt gun—plus rimfire and centerfire sporters. CZ's 527 is one of few bolt-actions designed for the .222 and .223. The 550 big game rifle is a refined Mauser. Its forged receiver has an integral recoil lug, the staggered-stack

magazine a hinged floorplate. The twin-lug bolt features a 98 extractor for controlled feed and a strong tug. The 550 is barreled for a host of cartridges, 6.5x55 to .505 Gibbs. Once, as I fired a .505 at the range, a bystander requested "just one shot." I handed him a cartridge, suggested he fire offhand. At the blast, the 10-pound rifle lifted free to twirl like a baton over his head. The stunned shooter landed ignominiously on his fanny. Soft lawn caught the rifle before I could. "Another?" I asked. The man declined.

CZ big-bores are quite comfortable in recoil. But you're still smart to grip firmly any rifle hurling 3 tons of muzzle energy!

The 550 appears in trimmer form, for popular North American cartridges and European favorites. I once took a 550 in 9.3x62 on a British Columbia hunt for moose and mountain goat. True to Teutonic tastes, its trigger was of single-set design (push it ahead to get super-light let-off). After a day's glassing, we spied a moose antler and approached through thick willows. The bull rose at 40 yards—then dropped instantly to my Norma-loaded softpoint. Later, I crept toward a mountain goat on an impossible ledge and fired as he quartered away at 200 yards. Goat-like, the billy refused to yield, so the CZ followed up. That hunt not only sold me on the 550, but on the 9.3x62 cartridge. I still use both.

A couple of years ago, CZ replaced the 550 in standard chamberings with a push-feed 557 rifle. It boasts the high quality of its forebear, with 19mm dovetails for CZ scope rings machined into the receiver, itself milled from a solid billet. A two-detent safety lets the bolt cycle "on safe." The trigger (not single-set) adjusts for take-up, weight, over-travel. A hinged floorplate secures the four-shot internal box. Cold-hammer-forged like the 550s, the 20½-inch barrel is lapped too. My first 557 had a pre-production beech stock with conservative lines and a slight grip swell that fit my hand perfectly. Center-weighted balance put the reticle on target naturally. The only amenity lacking: iron sights. As if in response, CZ announced a Carbine version. I bought that one too. Predatory in profile, it leaps to my cheek, sights instantly lined up. Fitting a Zeiss Terra 3-9x42 in steel CZ rings to check accuracy, I made first adjustments at 35 yards, then moved my target to 100. Hornady 150-grain SSTs edged other loads with a .75 knot; but 155-grain A-Max's in Black Hills ammo nipped 1-inch triangles.

That 557 Carbine remains one of my favorite current-production big game rifles. In a country and a company that have endured much, workmanship remains a point of pride. The solid, gunny, pre-war feel of CZ rifles also brings to mind Uhersky Brod's wooded hills, where bent men still seek mushrooms.

No bolt rifle runs itself. But the slick Mannlicher-Schoenauer action, the first of which appeared in 1900, comes close. The "butter knife" bolt handle of the famous 1903 in 6.5x54 slipped through its split bridge so fluidly that flipping the muzzle down would zip the drawn bolt forward *and turn it into battery!* It whisked cartridges from a spool magazine. The full-stocked carbine was seductively trim, its curves as artfully fetching as those of a supermodel in evening dress.

The series of M-S rifles succeeding the 1903 ended 50 years ago. None were built by Mannlicher or Schoenauer,

Rotary magazines in Mannlicher-Schoenauers have given way to detachable boxes in modern Steyrs.

Rifles from the Old Country

Mauser's non-rotating, controlled-feed extractor is still exceedingly popular on dangerous game rifles.

who were designers, not industry tycoons. They applied their genius at the Steyr factory, in the Austrian city of that name. Established in the 13th century at the confluence of the Steyr and Enns Rivers, the town prospered with its small arms trade—and, later, with bicycles and motor vehicles.

Leopold Werndl founded the Steyr firm in 1821 for the sole purpose of making gun parts. He died of cholera in 1855, leaving the business to his son Josef. The company began building rifles in the 1860s, after Josef returned from a stint working at Remington and Colt in the U.S. Then, as legend has it, an idea with real promise came to Josef in church. That rifle action, aptly named "tabernacle breech," appealed to the Austrian Army. Military contracts followed. Soon the Werndls had 10,000 workers on their payroll!

Josef proved a talented engineer and manager—and a visionary. In 1883 he brought hydro power to the city, making it the first in Europe with electric lights.

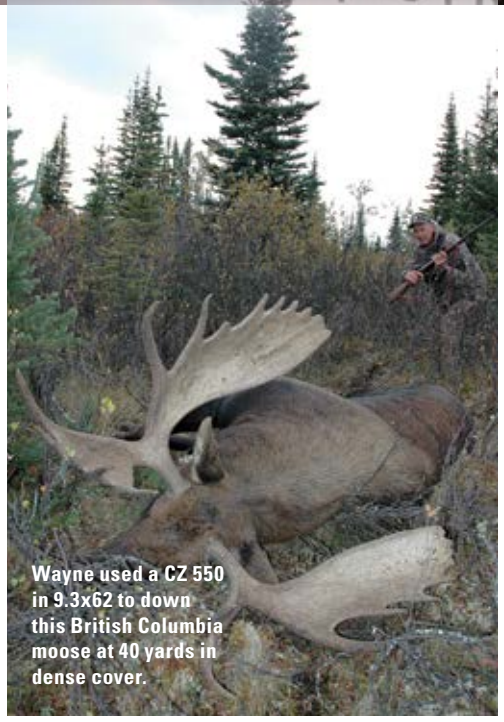
Early Steyr rifles fired black-powder cartridges converted to smokeless. Improvements resulted in new rifles at roughly two-year intervals until 1910. Steyr built rifles for other nations on their patterns too, including the Norwegian Krag and '98 Mauser. In 1918 Josef died of pneumonia, contracted as he battled one of the town's periodic floods. He was only 58.

After the Great War, Steyr added cartridges to its rifle stable. Steyr-Daimler-Puch resulted from a 1934 merger. It dissolved in 1996, leaving firearms production alone under the Steyr name. Current Steyr rifles differ from the classic M-S line. The new, stronger, twin-lug action, with its Mauser-style bridge, is stout enough to withstand the test-firing of a factory load *behind a bullet lodged at midpoint in the bore!* Accuracy? A Classic Steyr in .270 WSM printed .8-inch groups for me. Another in .338 RCM sent three shots into half an inch. On a hunt in Austria, my 9.3x62 Steyr tumbled three boars in quick succession.

Steyr's newest flagship, the SM 12, borrows from its forebear, the SBS. I carried one of these up an Austrian mountain, where I spied a chamois about to hop off its rock into oblivion 300 yards off. The Kahles optic quartered the tiny animal's chest. When the .270 barked, the chamois pitched from its perch, tumbled down the slope and lay still.

The SM 12's hammer-forged barrel has a post-M-S barbershop twist near the breech. Two pairs of opposing lugs bracket a recessed bolt face. The tang-mounted cocking switch lets you carry an SM 12 loaded. Other firms have adopted this device. But their springs won't yield as easily to weak or cold-stiff thumbs. At 2 pounds, the SM 12's trigger helps you shoot well. But a nudge forward sets it for a 12-ounce pull. Both breaks are icicle-crisp. The SM 12 comes in 10 chamberings. Cartridges feed from a staggered-stack detachable box, polymer or stamped steel. I like the polymer; it's lightweight and quiet.

Now, "made in America" still matters to many hunters. Surely, there's nothing wrong with rifles built stateside—and they outsell imported bolt-actions by huge margins. Indeed, near the bottom of the price scale, European rifles can't compete at all. But several European firms now bring us well-appointed rifles with conservative lines. They've jettisoned the sloping combs and hooked grips and fish-scale grip panels that give U.S. hunters the vapors.


Wayne used a CZ 550 in 9.3x62 to down this British Columbia moose at 40 yards in dense cover.

One thing to mind when considering rifles from central Europe: scope mounts. Some proprietary rings cost as much as a lawnmower. Also, studs and/or swivels may not mate to your favorite sling. On the upside, iron sights remain a standard feature in Europe. I enjoy using irons; to my eye they make even scoped rifles look complete. I've found too that many European triggers yield lighter, cleaner pulls than those on comparable U.S.-produced sporters.

Europe's firearms wizards have had a big impact on American rifles—from the Krag-Jorgensen to, arguably, every turn-bolt sporter since. A century ago Mauser's non-rotating extractor and staggered magazine were signature features of the 1903 Springfield—though Jack O'Connor once wrote of that classic: "Various departures were made from the Mauser design, and in every instance the designers laid an egg." Jack's first rifle from gunmaker Al Biesen—a .30-06, with a Sukalle barrel—was on a 98 Mauser action. Fond of M70 Winchesters, O'Connor never lost his affinity for Mausers.

Rifles fashioned in central Europe 130 years ago have long prowled North American game fields. Mannlicher-Schoenauer carbines and Czech-built rifles sharing camps with U.S.-made sporters reflecting Old World design. Truly, painted with wet snow, the .30-06 nosing into the storm toward that band of elk last November could have come from anywhere. ■