

CARTRIDGE REVIEW

CRAIG
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PROFESSIONAL MEMBER
Photos Courtesy of Author

7x57 MAUSER



TOP: Ruger has done recent runs of their Number One single shot in 7x57. I had to try all kinds of different loads to get this one to shoot. It isn't a tack driver, but it's accurate enough for the hunting I do with this cartridge. **ABOVE:** Eleanor O'Connor took this elephant in Zambia, in 1969. Sheep, moose, bears, elk, African plains game, and even a tiger fell to her 7x57.

Okay, okay—with similar ballistics, the 7mm-08 Remington is probably a better cartridge than the 7x57 Mauser. As a relatively new cartridge it is only chambered in modern rifles, so it's loaded to higher pressures and velocities. Out of concern for its use in the 1893 and 1895 Mausers, current American 7x57 factory loads are quite mild. Also, the 7mm-08 fits into a short (.308 Winchester-length) bolt action, while the 7x57, with six millimeters more case length is too long. So please forgive me, I prefer the 7x57!



LEFT TO RIGHT: 7mm-08 Remington, 7x57 Mauser, .280 Remington. Of our "non-magnum" 7mm cartridges, only the 7mm-08 is really popular today; but with handloads, the 7x57 is capable of higher velocity, though is not nearly as fast as the .280 Remington.

My preference is not just for nostalgia. The 7x57—also known as 7mm Mauser and .275 Rigby—is a classic cartridge with an unusually rich history. This is partly because it was one of the early smokeless powder military cartridges developed and introduced by Peter Paul Mauser in 1892, and first adopted by Spain in 1893; and also partly because it went on to do historic things, both dastardly and heroic.

Eventually adopted as a military cartridge by ten nations, it was the 7x57 that our founder, Colonel Theodore Roosevelt faced at San Juan Hill. The 750 Spanish defenders were greatly outnumbered, but they poured down a withering fire, inflicting a staggering 1,400 casualties on the Americans before the hill was taken. More than a century would pass before Roosevelt received a well-deserved posthumous Medal of Honor for his actions on San Juan Hill. Immediately after the event a board of enquiry was convened to determine why the casualties were so lopsided. The answer was that the 7x57 Mauser was superior to the rifles carried by our troops—in some cases the .30-40 Krag,

but many Americans were still armed with black powder Springfields.

A short while later the British faced the 7x57 in the Second Boer War. And although they also eventually won, they took a terrible shellacking from the sharpshooting Boers and their Mausers. In South Africa, to this day, the 7x57 is commonly referred to as the “Boer Mauser.” The British respected the cartridge, and in 1899 John Rigby renamed it .275 Rigby for the British trade. Under that guise it became a favorite among some of Britain’s most famous hunters. Walter Dalrymple Maitland “Karamoja” Bell was a big fan. Although commonly stated, he did not take all of his 1,013 elephants with the 7x57—but it was one of his favorites. Between 1910 and 1923 Bell purchased six .275s from Rigby! Another Rigby .275 was a favorite companion of Jim Corbett, of man-eating tiger fame. He used a heavier rifle for most of his tigers, but his .275 accounted for several tigers, some infamous leopards, and all manner of other game.

Over here the 7x57 hasn’t fared quite as well. It

has never died away, sort of coming and going, never exactly popular but also not quite forgotten. Jack O’Connor himself used it both before and after the 1925 introduction of the .270, but it was the darling of his wife Eleanor, who used very few other rifles during her own long hunting career. Sheep, moose, bears, elk, African plains game, and even a tiger fell to her 7x57.

I’ll never hunt a tiger and, with all due respect to Karamoja, I’m not about to tackle an elephant with a 7x57. But I’ve used the cartridge on all the continents, including mountain game, red stag, and African plains game up to kudu and zebra. It’s effective far beyond its modest paper ballistics, certainly fully capable of handling game up to elk with no hesitation, mild recoil, and little fuss. Over here it has primarily been my favorite whitetail cartridge, which is certainly not damning with faint praise.

The 7x57 made its bones with a heavy-for-caliber 173-grain round-nose at 2,300 feet per second, flashy in 1892 but not so impressive by today’s standards. The funny thing is that in 1913 the Spanish adopted a new 139-grain spitzer load rated at 2,789 feet per second (in their long-barreled Mausers). Despite our modern propellants today’s 7x57 loads barely come close. Standard today is a 140-grain bullet at a very mild 2,660 feet per second, while the smaller-cased 7mm-08 is loaded to 2,840 feet per second with the same bullet weight. Go figure. Hornady’s Superformance line offers a 139-grain bullet at 2,760 feet per second, which is getting there.

However, the message is pretty clear: The 7x57 today is a handloader’s cartridge. It has greater case capacity than the 7mm-08, so in modern actions it can easily be loaded equal-to or even exceed its

brave young rival. Depending on which loading manual you use it’s no problem to get a 140-grain bullet up to 2,850 feet per second, and some manuals go to 2,900. Since I use it mostly for deer hunting that’s the bullet weight I prefer, but because of its greater case capacity and the ability to seat bullets farther out (because it requires a longer action) it widens the gap with heavier bullets.

I used to load the 7x57 up to the gills, and it was impressive. I don’t do that anymore. I don’t think of it as a long-range cartridge, so I use it in mixed country where longer shots are unlikely, and it does wonderful work with a 139 or 140-grain bullet loafing along somewhere in the 2,700s. It’s still impressive. I’m sure I’ve never lost an animal hit with the 7x57, and I don’t recall any long tracking jobs. I will admit, grudgingly, that I have never owned a 7x57 that was a real tack-driver. The 7mm-08 is probably a more accurate cartridge—but since I don’t think of it as a long-range cartridge it’s plenty accurate enough for the hunting I wish to do with it.

Today the 7mm-08 is much more popular, offered in a greater variety of loads, and chambered by virtually all manufacturers. New American factory rifles in the 7x57 are now very rare. Ruger has done runs of their Number One single shot in 7x57, and in 2013 Winchester did a limited edition Model 70 Featherweight, but regrettably, it’s no longer a rifle you can run down to the corner gun shop and purchase. I suppose time marches on and some great old cartridges have to be left behind. Heck, I got both my daughters 7mm-08s because of ammo and rifle availability. Me—I’ve never owned a 7mm-08 and I don’t intend to. I’ll stick with the grand old 7x57. ■

The 7x57 has become my go-to whitetail rifle. This was the first buck I took on my place in Kansas, dropped at 125 yards with the Todd Ramirez 7x57.

