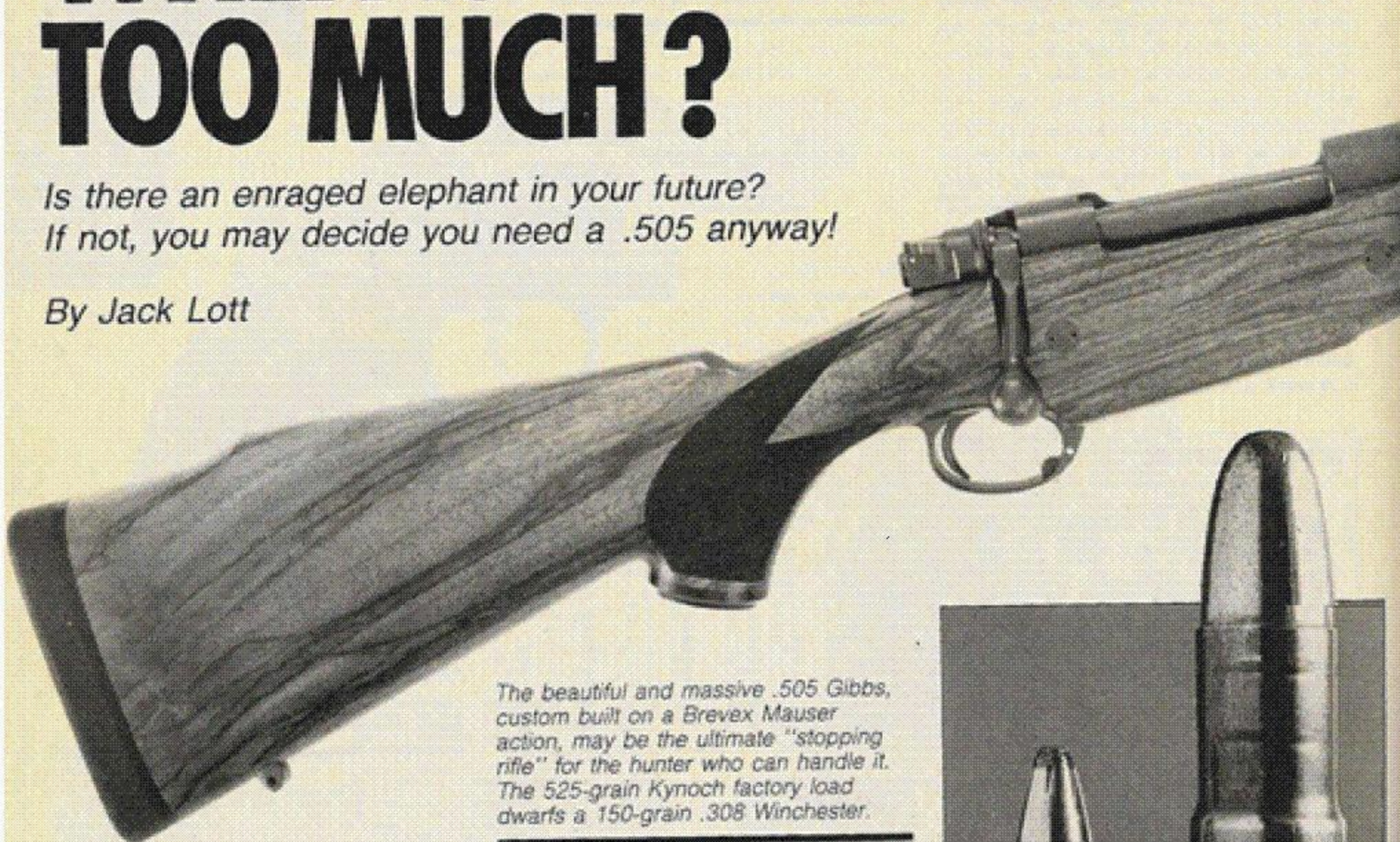


THE .505... WHEN IS 'ENOUGH GUN' TOO MUCH?

*Is there an enraged elephant in your future?
If not, you may decide you need a .505 anyway!*

By Jack Lott



The beautiful and massive .505 Gibbs, custom built on a Brevex Mauser action, may be the ultimate "stopping rifle" for the hunter who can handle it. The 525-grain Kynoch factory load dwarfs a 150-grain .308 Winchester.

It's amazing how tenacious of life the heavy English nitro-express cartridges are in this era of declining populations of elephant, rhino and buffalo. Consider George Gibbs' 1911 creation, the .505 Gibbs, that largest of rimless rounds for magazine rifles. This remarkably modern-looking cartridge was supposed to have become obsolete in the late sixties when Kynoch closed down its metallic cartridge operations. But it refused to die, and somehow collectors, big game hunters, and a growing "cult" of big bore shooters, who enjoy shooting ground squirrels, deer and blocks of ice with such heavies, snap up any available rifles and ammo. I know one collector who buys every .505 in good condition that turns up, but I doubt if he fires them. Now the .505 has been given a new lease on life since BELL is producing the brass. Even I have joined the .505-owning fraternity with a stainless steel barrel and a Remington 1917 action, a Brevex magazine box and a Bastogne walnut

stock being cobbled together to create a working rifle. Do I need a .505? Probably not, but when offered the components I couldn't turn down the opportunity—such is the appeal of this Gargantua of sporting rifles.

The .505 is unusual in that its designation actually represents the bullet and/or groove diameter instead of the more common designation of English calibers relating to the bore or land diameter. This is also sometimes confusing since the standard .500 caliber bullet and groove diameter is .510 inch. The most powerful of the original British pre-war rimless calibers wasn't the .505, but the now-defunct .500 Jeffery, also known as the 12.7x70mm Schüler, a rebated (reduced diameter) rim round with an extremely short neck. Its ballistics were listed as a 535-grain bullet at 2,400 fps for an energy of 6,800 ft-lbs. Gibbs' .505 used a 525-grain bullet at 2,300 fps and 6,180 ft-lbs energy, propelled by 90 grains of cordite. Now that's not a differ-

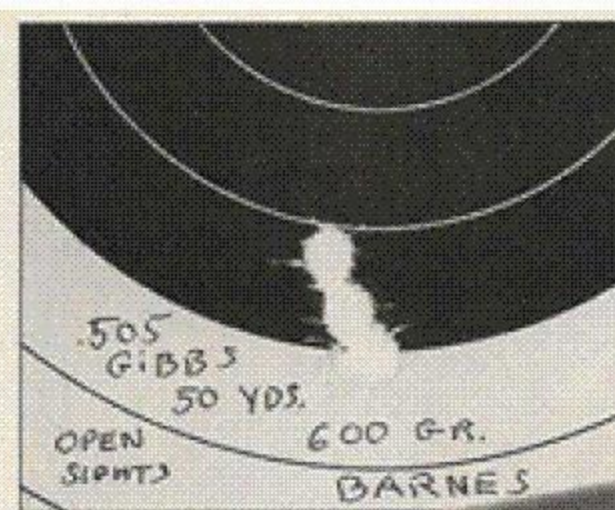
ence any normal elephant could distinguish, but the Jeffery/Schüler case, which was only made in Germany, is of inferior design and lesser capacity than the Gibbs. The Jeffery/Schüler's rebated rim can cause the bolt face to slip over the undersized rim and jam the round by digging a groove down the case, and the short neck is inadequate for secure retention of a 535-grain bullet. The .505's case, however, has a long

neck and a normal rim, plus plenty of extra powder capacity to drive heavier-than-original bullets at higher-than-original velocities. This is what attracts heavy-caliber handloaders to the .505.

Before World War I, a fair number of .505 Gibbs made on magnum Mauser actions were imported into the U.S. from Gibbs' Bristol, England factory. In the twenties, James V. Howe, a co-founder of New York's great custom gun firm of Griffin & Howe, made a limited number of fine .505s on original Mauser magnum actions. When Howe left Griffin & Howe to supervise the fine riflemaking of Hoffman Arms, he continued producing .505s under that name.

It was Tom Siatos' superb .505 Hoffman magnum Mauser that introduced me to the great cartridge. This rifle weighed 10½ pounds and it had a comb with too much drop for such a cannon, so when I fired it, I received the most vicious jolt any rifle has given me, including several .577 nitro-expresses and a couple of 8-bores! Tom—like myself, not sensitive to recoil—could hardly stand the kick, which was as bad as that of a mean Missouri mule high on Geritol! Nothing wrong with that Hoffman that a straight comb, another pound of weight and a wider and deeper butt mounted with Pachmayr's best recoil pad couldn't cure. Subsequently, I survived more than a dozen years without the "pleasure" of

The rear express sight of the .505 Gibbs has a recessed folding leaf regulated for 300 yards. The fixed "V" is set for a more realistic 200 yard range.

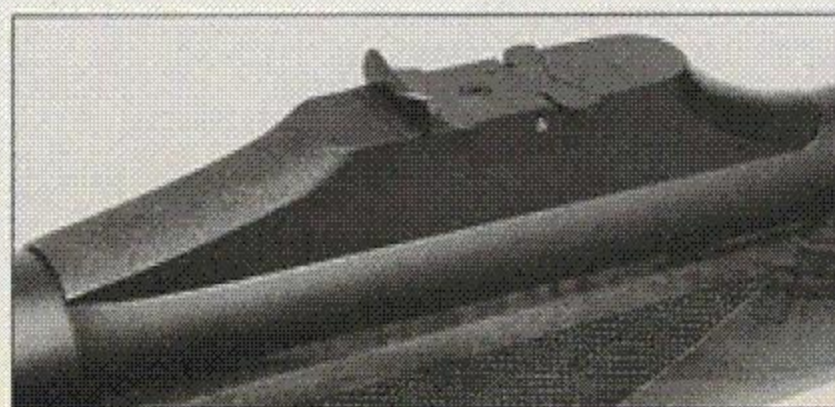


The .505 Gibbs, custom built by Ryan Breeding, proved itself capable of excellent accuracy, particularly with 600-gr. Barnes.

firing a .505. But my abstinence was to end after Gil Van Horn, that master riflesmith of the high desert, wrote me about a remarkable .505 his protégé, Ryan Breeding, manager of the Rifle Shop, Dept. GA, 38458 N. Sierra Highway, Palmdale, CA 93550, was finishing up. It used a Brevex magnum Mauser action, and was stocked by Breeding in California English walnut—the hardest, toughest wood available for a heavy-recoiling express. Gil kept me informed on the rifle's progress, since I was interested in test-firing it. I suggested that he and Breeding finish all load development and chronographing before I stepped in. Finally, Gil wrote me that the rifle was finished except for hand-engraving the maker's name, address and caliber designation.

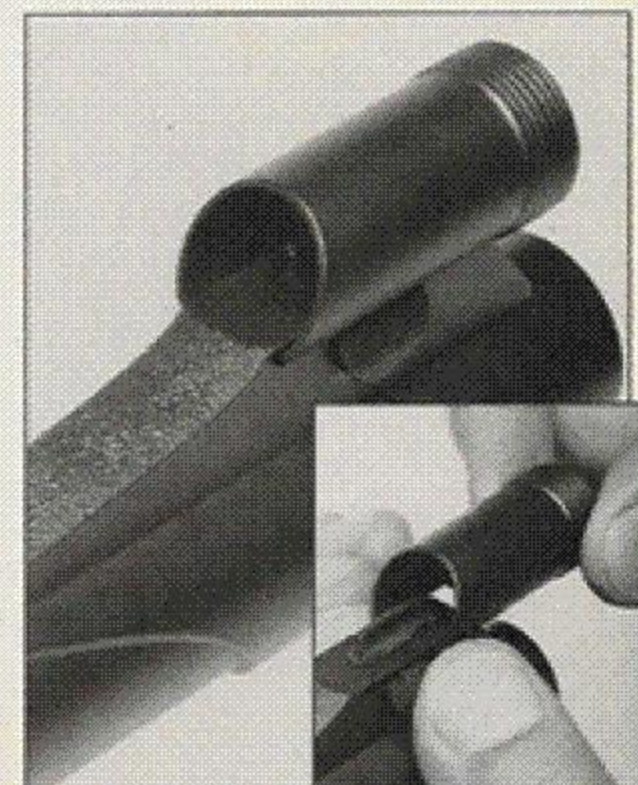
I agreed to meet Van Horn, Ryan Breeding, his father John and a rifleman friend, Jack Trott, at the Angeles Shooting Ranges in Little Tujunga Canyon in the Sunland area. The time of the rendezvous was 12:00 "High Noon," a not inappropriate designation for a "schutzenfest" conducted with these .50 caliber bruisers!

The Van Horn-Breeding delegation kept the "High Noon" appointment, all aquiver with anticipation. Breeding's .505 emerged from its case in an awe-inspiring display of first-class gunsmithing—its intimidating look of vast power, plus something else—the warm glow of a stockmaking masterpiece and metalwork to match. I hoisted the more than 12 pounds of rifle, and like all such beautifully proportioned stocks, it handled de-



ceptively like a much lighter gun. All details and components had been scaled up to be proportional to the .505's huge case and to feed and fire it as easily as a custom '03 Springfield feeds and fires a .30-06 round. The specially designed and constructed magazine box had to be extra deep to accommodate five such enormous rounds, and the guard bow was placed high enough to provide a normal grip size where the belly of the magazine suddenly makes a rapid reduction in size where the guard begins. Breeding had to make a special long trigger to extend through this depth and positioned it at the rear of the shapely guard. The California English stock reflected Van Horn's influence—a good idea for a .505 so as to minimize kick. The grain structure was perfect for strength and its beauty left nothing to be desired. I snapped the rifle up to try the open "V" express sights. Alignment was instantaneous—the front bead automatically nestling down in the fixed shallow "V" of the rear. There was a folding 300-yard leaf, but Breeding said that it was unnecessary and that the fixed "V" was for up to 200 yards. These sights were mounted on a massive stainless steel

continued on page 99



Front sight is built on a stainless steel barrelband ramp with a spring-loaded catch to retain the front hood.

base with the folding sight recessed into the sub-base. The front sight was on a custom barrelband ramp of stainless with a simple, but effective, spring-loaded catch that kept the front sight protector in place during firing or transport. To release the hood one only has to grasp the buttons on either side of the ramp and press down. The hood then slips off.

Breeding's inletting merits the "wood poured around the metal" praise phrase. I know of no better way to describe the close fit of wood to metal, so tediously achieved by lamp-blackening the metal to reveal any high spots which are then carefully scraped down until none remain. The stock employed Gil Van Horn's clever recoil reinforcing device—a heavy steel yoke which is fitted to go over the receiver recoil lug. To this yoke is welded a heavy section of threaded stock, all of which is trapped in epoxy bedding. This extends the shearing surfaces containing the recoil and avoids the need for a second recoil lug attached to the barrel. A lateral hole through the yoke is for the forward stock recoil bolt which, along with a similar bolt through the web between the trigger and the magazine mortices, makes the stock almost indestructible.

I have worked many Mauser and other bolt actions and smoothed up not a few myself, but Breeding's .505 Brevex is the smoothest magnum action I've ever tried. You can be sure it did not come that way, but rather is the result of hours of painstaking effort in lapping and polishing all the right places, including cocking cams, extractor bearing surfaces, extractor yoke and its groove, bolt sleeve threads, etc., plus bolt body and

"I have worked many Mauser and other bolt actions and smoothed up not a few myself, but Breeding's .505 Brevex is the smoothest magnum action I've ever tried."

raceways. Most gunsmiths find such work too tedious and few purchasers seem to complain, even on top-quality custom rifles, according to my experience. One reason for this may be that today few riflemen learn to work the bolt at the shoulder as it should be for rapid fire. That's when you'll miss this smoothing-up of the bolt and its bearing surfaces in the receiver.

I worked a full magazine of .505s

continued on page 100

TRY A .505

continued from page 99

through the magazine with effortless precision. Breeding had debugged the feeding to perfection with both the 600

"I noted that the magazine follower was of a black plastic which turned out to be du Pont's Delrin, a self-lubricating Teflon-like plastic."

and 700-grain loads and obtained a near liquid-smooth cycling effect. Totally reliable feeding is not a cosmetic feature, especially with a dangerous game rifle, but rather a matter literally of life or death. With the staggered Mauser magazine this involves almost endless working of dummy rounds through the magazine and grinding here, polishing there, until no jams occur.

I noted that the magazine follower was of a black plastic which turned out to be du Pont's Delrin, a self-lubricating Teflon-like plastic. This was Van Horn's idea to prevent the battering caused when the last round on a conventional steel magazine follower is chambered and the rifle fired. The empty steel follower, with its substantial inertia, hammers the feed ramp and the front wall of the magazine, causing damage to these and peening the follower. The light Delrin follower eliminates that problem. All metalwork is coated with the amazing "Gun Kote," an ideal finish for stainless steel which is "gun metal" blue-gray in color and which is also bonded tenaciously to the steel surfaces and is scratch-resistant. I will have Breeding apply this fine finish to my .505 when it is completed.

After everyone else had fired the .505 it was my turn to "put my head on the block"! I hoisted the great rifle and dry-fire tested the trigger so that I wouldn't have any surprise let-offs with 600 or 700 grains of bullet and all that recoil. I chose the 25-yard target to ensure that all my shots were on the paper. The .505 literally steadied itself in my hands as I cheeked the stock and found the front bead nestled down firmly in the "V" rear. I placed the bead directly central with the bull and pressed the trigger. I wasn't kicked backwards, but rather shoved back as if a linebacker wanted to move me out of his path without hurting me. I was moved backwards and could feel the power, but no brute force. A quick inventory of my body parts found them all to be in place, and thus reassured, I decided it would be macho to fire off the

contents of the magazine. I had left my spotting scope at home, but at 25 or 50 yards a .50 caliber hole doesn't need magnification, and I was quite satisfied to note that all my shots were in the black. If it had been a buffalo or an elephant, only the first shot would have been required.

I asked Ryan Breeding to provide me with his loading data for both 600 and 700-grain bullets, along with instrumental velocities. His best load with the 600-grain Barnes soft nose was 152 grains of IMR (du Pont) 4831 for an instrumental velocity of an incredible 2,578 fps! This load is accurate and extracts freely. The 700-grain soft-nose Barnes took 132 grains of the same powder and produces 2,260 fps. This amounts to some 7,500 ft-lbs of energy for the 600-grain bullet and 8,400 ft-lbs for the 700-grain slug—things not to think about when firing a .505! Such thoughts create psychological hazards which cause flinching and otherwise disturb many shooters more than the recoil.

Accuracy was amazing with the 600-grain bullet—three shots all touching in one group and two touching with the third one inch out, all at 50 yards from a bench as fired by Breeding. This is good enough for ground squirrels, but don't try it from the prone position!

Such heavy magazine stopping rifles as these are as fine as the most skilled craftsmen can produce. They are more powerful than the nearest double rifle calibers, provide more shots per loading and are less expensive than doubles. But they aren't cheap. I can't quote prices, but can only say that relative to

"A quick inventory of my body parts found them all in place, and thus reassured I decided it would be macho to fire off the contents of the magazine."

the hours, days and weeks required to produce them with uncompromising quality, they are bargains, considering any fair hourly wage. If you are looking for an ultimate "stopper" in magazine persuasion, a .505 will answer any questions you may ask of such calibers. Is the .505 too much gun? I'll reply by reference to Ernest Hemingway's .505-toting guide, the late Philip Percival, who used it for decades, firing hundreds of rounds. Percival never suffered from shoulder problems as a result, but what fellow professionals called his "shocking great .505" did cause Percival's deafness! Enough gun? Yes! But for some—a bit too much!