

# *Custom Rifles from* **The Workshop**

## **CREATING THE FINEST IN CUSTOM RIFLES**

***JUDSON STEWART BAILEY, CUSTOM GUNMAKER***

Federally licensed class 07 manufacturer specializing in super accurate hunting rifles  
with stocks that are designed to fit the individual.

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### ***THE CUSTOM DANGEROUS GAME RIFLE***

BY JUDSON BAILEY

I wiped down the .416 Rigby I had just test fired and placed it carefully into the gun safe in my shop. The rifle was built for a man in Texas and though it did not fit me I was very pleased with how it shot and handled. Weighing in at 10-1/2 lbs., and thanks to my muzzle brake, it recoiled about like a 12-gauge shotgun with standard 2-3/4" loads and had virtually no muzzle jump. Next I called Dave Walker, a friend and customer, who is quite fond of the .416 Rigby cartridge and who has also been to Africa several times. I asked him if he would care to shoot the rifle and critique it. Dave agreed (I had gotten the OK from the customer prior to calling Dave). I wanted Dave to try the rifle for several reasons. First, he has been to Africa and successfully hunted dangerous game. Second, though Dave is taller than my customer, his length of pull is close to the same. I was also sure Dave would have an opinion on the stock design and porting of the barrel that I used to reduce the recoil on the gun. After spending some time on my range, Dave told me that he was extremely impressed with the rifle and was amazed at how soft shooting and fast handling it was.

Soon after the conversation turned to dangerous game rifles, wildcat cartridges and hunting in Africa. Though I have never been to Africa, listening to Dave speak of his adventures made me feel as though I had been there with him. Talk of cape buffalo, professional hunters and the Dark Continent made it seem like I was sitting by a campfire watching its sparks dance into the African night sky after a great day of hunting.

As with hunting in Africa, a custom rifle consists of lifelong memories and fulfillment of one's dreams. A custom rifle is so much more than a functional firearm. It represents hours of thought, weeks of planning and the anxious anticipation of a piece of artwork created especially for you. In working together, a bond usually grows between the riflescope and the client. The experience starts when you walk in the door of your favorite riflescope's shop. Welcome to a custom gun shop. Before the woodchips start to fly many issues must be discussed, considered and decided.

Since I love the looks, concept, and the whole idea behind big game rifles, especially dangerous game rifles, I would like to share some of my ideas and successes with you. Let's pretend that you have decided that you would like a custom dangerous game rifle. In order to produce the best rifle for you, my customer, you must know what you want, and you must be able to convey the image of your finished showpiece to me. What do you believe a dangerous game rifle should be, and what is involved in building one? Without the knowledge of the elements that compose the whole, it will be almost impossible to make the decisions necessary to designing your dream rifle. Your response will be composed of many parts, but we will review some of the most important basics to help answer the question.

Rifles of this sort have to be fast handling, meaning that when brought to the shoulder the sights must line up with where the shooter is looking. You should not have to hunt for a sight picture on a charging cape buffalo. After all, he already has you in his sights, that is what the points on his horns are all about and they instantly line up where he is looking. This rifle also has to deliver 2-1/2 tons of muzzle energy or more, be light enough to be carried all day in 110-degree heat, allow the shooter to recover from a shot fast enough for a follow-up (this means little or no muzzle jump among other things) and, in addition, function absolutely flawlessly. I think Dave Walker summed it up very nicely when he said, "You have to think of a dangerous game rifle as a Sumo wrestler on a gymnast's balance beam and being good enough to win the Olympics in both fields." In addition, this rifle has to be mild enough in recoil so that the owner will enjoy shooting and practicing with it. Familiarity and repetition builds both speed and confidence in oneself and one's rifle. Ideally, all this will be wrapped in an aesthetically pleasing package that you are proud to own.

Where does the process begin and just what is involved? The first thing I need to know from you is what cartridge the rifle is to be chambered for. Most other aspects of the rifle's design, such as action length and type,