

The Magnum for Brawny Game

A PROVEN DESIGN IN AN AFFORDABLE PACKAGE.

By WAYNE VAN ZWOLL | Photography by SEAN UTLEY





CZ 550 AMERICAN SAFARI MAGNUM



For hunters who'd rather spend their money on plane tickets to Zambia than high-end safari rifles, CZ-USA offers its American Safari Magnum. Built on the CZ 550 action and chambered to .375, .416 Rigby, .458 Winchester and .458 Lott, it lists for half as much as the company's Safari Classic.

While I've used CZ 550s in .30-'06 and 9.3x62mm, I'd not handled one in an "African" chambering, so I called Jason Morton at CZ-USA for an American Safari Magnum in .375 H&H.

Nobody can call CZ's 550 willowy. Best described as a modified Mauser, its action has a brawny profile and substantial heft. The double-square-bridge receiver has no top holes; you fasten a scope with mounts that clamp 19mm dovetails front and rear.

The big, flat footprint of the action makes for plenty of bedding area. "We add epoxy to ensure full contact at recoil-lug faces on our most powerful rifles," Jason says. Magnum 550s feature a second recoil lug under the barrel that mates with a steel stock insert to best distribute thrust, and they incorporate double crossbolts—fore and aft of the magazine well.

The 550's bolt is of traditional two-lug design, with a no-nonsense Mauser extractor. The bolt face is partially enclosed, allowing for controlled feed. A fixed extractor emerges from a slot just below the left locking lug as the bolt reaches the end of its throw. A Winchester 70-style bolt stop bears against the left lug.

The two-position thumb safety locks the striker. A red dot appears

on the sleek bolt shroud when the safety is forward. The trigger is CZ's own: a single-set mechanism you can pull as you would any trigger or push ahead to engage it for a lighter pull. The trigger is adjustable. Mine came from the box at a manageable 2¾ pounds, by my Timney scale. Set, it broke at just one pound.

Bottom metal, all steel, includes a one-piece guard bow and magazine housing and a hinged floorplate secured by a Model 70-type button in front of the guard.

Most CZ 550s are stocked in plain American walnut, but laminated wood is an option, as is fancy walnut. Composite stocks are also available: Kevlar-reinforced fiberglass with an internal aluminum bedding chassis.

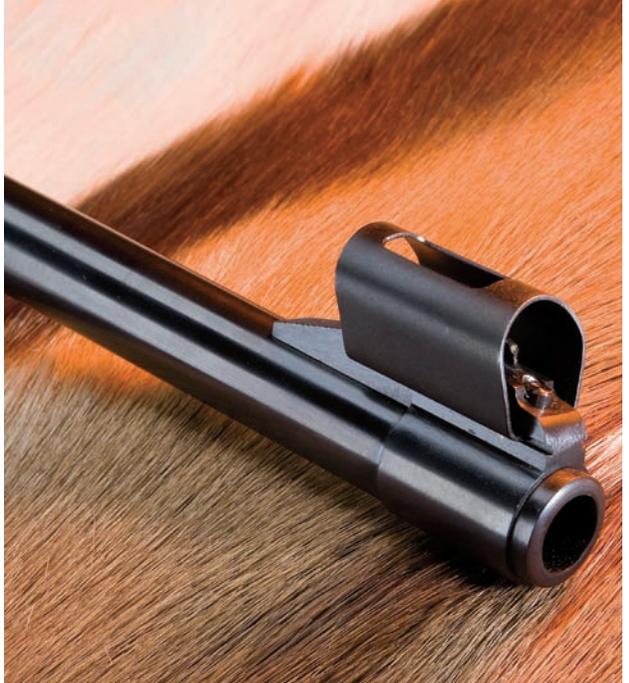
The 25-inch barrel, of medium contour, hangs easily on target and swings readily. A barrelband front sight complements a trio of rear leaves, two folding. Their shallow V notches all have white center lines for

The rifle in this photo is a European model, with more drop to the comb and a Schnabel fore-end.

CARTRIDGES SLIDE DUTIFULLY FROM BOX TO CHAMBER, WITH NARY A HICCUP.



Three open sights (two hinged) feature white center lines under broad V's for quick aim.



A barrelband front sight complements the trio of rear leaf sights.



The American Safari Magnum is an accurate and affordable bigbore rifle, one that's also quite comfortable to shoot at a shade under 10 pounds.



Extraction and feeding problems during a dangerous-game hunt are not an option. The classic Mauser extractor eliminates concerns about reliability during follow-up shots.



quick aim. “We offer 15 heights and sizes of front sights,” Jason points out, “so your rifle is pretty much guaranteed to shoot where you look, no matter the load.”

The rifle arrived as I was about to leave town, so I suggested to pal Rich McClure that he check zeros. He promptly boxed up a few dozen handloads and found that the rifle printed tight groups at 50 yards—appropriate iron-sight range.

The fixed (100-yard) leaf put 300-grain bullets six inches low, 270-grain bullets 3½ inches low. The 300s, a handload using RL-15, struck an inch high with the 300-yard leaf, and 270s

CZ rifles feature an adjustable single-set trigger. The author’s sample broke at 2.75 pounds normally, one pound when set.

with RL-15 shot to point of aim. All groups—several under an inch—landed just a tad right of center.

Because each shooter sees irons his own way, I mounted a 3-9X Leupold Vari-X II in Talley rings to check accuracy at distance.

In fact, the CZ’s substantial weight made bench shooting comfortable and may have contributed to the rifle’s fine accuracy. The beefy stock and broad buttpad help mitigate recoil, and the straight comb babies my cheek at the shot, then puts my eye quickly in the sights for a follow-up.

My handloads, 300-grain Herter softnose bullets accelerated to 2,420 fps in front of a charge of H4831, printed inside 1¼ inches. In fact, the CZ shot the smallest groups and the most consistently of four .375s I had on the range that day.

THE CZ'S SUBSTANTIAL WEIGHT MADE BENCH SHOOTING COMFORTABLE AND MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE RIFLE'S FINE ACCURACY.



(Above) A stout recoil pad is a good friend when launching African-size projectiles. Strong grain through the beefy wrist ensures stock durability. The sharp-eyed reader will notice this image is of the European-styled stock, with more pronounced drop.

(Right) After more than a century in the field, the only big change to the Mauser bolt assembly has been to make the safety compatible with optic sights.





The magazine assembly and floorplate are steel.

SPECIFICATIONS

TYPE: Two-lug turnbolt, centerfire
CALIBER: .375 H&H Magnum (tested), .416 Rigby, .458 Winchester, .458 Lott
MAGAZINE: Five-round internal box with hinged floorplate
BARREL: 25 in., 1:12 twist
OVERALL LENGTH: 46.5 in.
WEIGHT: 9 lb., 15 oz.
TRIGGER: Adjustable single set
SIGHTS: Triple-leaf V-notch rear (two folding), metal bead front on hooded barrelband ramp
MSRP: \$1,179

By no means svelte, the 550 American Safari Magnum is a solid rifle with a reliable extractor and sights sturdy enough for any safari. The heft assists with offhand aim when you're out of breath from keeping up with your PH. A single fixed leaf filed

for an 80-yard zero would suit me, ensuring point-blank hits from the muzzle to just over 100 yards with big bullets. An open-sighted .375 need not reach farther.

The bolt cycles more smoothly than a Mauser's, and you'll feel the same subtle bumps. Cartridges slide dutifully from box to chamber, with

nary a hiccup save, occasionally, with the last round on the lift.

Sure, I could ask for 22-LPI checkering instead of 18, but the American Safari Magnum is an affordable .375 retailing for \$1,179. It is a hunter's stopping rifle—rugged, reliable, accurate and with the fetching lines that appear in rifles costing many times as much. Like the other 550s in an extensive line of big-game rifles, this CZ feels at home in the hand. 🍷



Groups of 1.25 inches came easily with scope attached. The iron-sight groups were nothing to sneeze at either.

ACCURACY RESULTS

Bullet	Muzzle Weight (gr.)	Avg. Velocity (fps)	Group (in.)
Hornady SP-RP*	270	2,610	2.4**
Federal Vital-Shok SP	270	2,700	1.7
Herter*	300	2,415	1.2
Speer*	300	2,440	1.8**
Hornady Heavy Mag InterBond	300	2,705	1.6

Accuracy figures are the average of three-shot groups at 100 yards unless otherwise noted. Herter handload chronographed with an Oehler 35 with screens set 15 feet from the muzzle. All other velocity figures are published data. Abbreviations: SP, softpoint; SP-RP, spire-point recoil-proof

*Handload

**Iron-sight group at 50 yards, expressed in MOA