

America's Specialized Rimfire

FROM PLINKING TO SMALL GAME, IT'S HARD
TO BEAT THIS BOLT-ACTION FAVORITE.

By ERIC R. POOLE | Photography by SEAN UTLEY





CZ 455 AMERICAN



It doesn't matter where I have lived; I've grown a certain contempt for a number of small animals. I know many friends and family who hunt prairie dogs, groundhogs, fox and coyote for sport. Conversely, I've usually been subject to situations where small-game shooting came out of a need.

When I lived in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountain range of California's high desert, coyotes dined on our chickens and rabbits. For a rifle-toting kid, I compared the defense of livestock to protection of family. When we moved to the Appalachian Mountains, foraging raccoons and opossums became the primary targets in efforts to defend farm feed. My dad's orders were to shoot groundhogs on sight. Their deeply dug holes and trenches were known to break the legs of cattle.

I've most recently settled among endless cornfields in central Illinois. Yet again, I find that my family is working against the greed of varmints and predators. I've spotted coyotes roaming night and day on my Cuddeback trail cameras while scouting for Illinois' large bucks. Raccoons and the occasional opossum grow fat from the fields and find healthy security during the winter months as tenants in the barns that store feed for our cows.

I'm thinking that the best solution for these problems might just be the precise application of a 17-grain, .17-caliber bullet from CZ's newest 455 chambered in .17 HMR. A box of

50 rounds typically costs about \$12, and the results are well worth the insurance it provides.

HUNTING FOR A SMALLBORE

Like many people these days, I do a lot of research before making a significant purchase. I had known about CZ's solid reputation in the hunting circles for years, but I never paid much attention to their rimfire rifles. When someone first told me about their CZ .22 rimfire, I thought back to the military training rifles that CZ pioneered as a cost-effective way to maintain marksmanship. I went to the Internet and searched forums to see what he was talking about.

My friend's field companion was a CZ 452 American. The "American" part of that model name represents the influence of features over rifles commonly imported from Europe. European gunmakers often don't understand the average American consumer and try to impart Euro "refinements." The bolt-action CZ 452 American features a stock with a straight comb and barrel without open sights. Having an affinity for appeasing diversity, CZ-USA sold the CZ 452 in either right- or

The 455 is a descendant of the proven 452, but redesigned for more efficient manufacture.

I HAD KNOWN ABOUT CZ'S SOLID REPUTATION IN THE HUNTING CIRCLES FOR YEARS, BUT I NEVER PAID MUCH ATTENTION TO THEIR RIMFIRE RIFLES.



Styled after a classic deer rifle, the 455 can be used to practice for hunting season.

SPECIFICATIONS

MODEL: CZ 455 American
CALIBER: .17 HMR
BARREL: 20.5 in., 1:16-in. twist
WEIGHT: 6.8 lb.
OA LENGTH: 39.3 in.
LENGTH OF PULL: 13.7 in.
STOCK: Walnut
TRIGGER: Adjustable, 3 to 5 lb.
SIGHTS: None
MAGAZINE CAPACITY: Five rounds
MSRP: \$463 to \$507

left-hand configurations and in four calibers—.17 HMR, .17 Mach 2, .22 LR and .22 WMR.

My research ended on the CZ-USA website. While looking up the details of the CZ 452 American, I scrolled down to the bottom of the page and read a note written in a section called "Share Your CZ Experience!" The familiar image of a dead groundhog caught my eye, and I saw the enthusiasm Christian Dugas had for the .17 HMR. "This is the last groundhog of the '09 season," he said. "It was shot just

north of Quebec city, Quebec, Canada, in mid-August. I shot it at 75 yards with a 452 American in .17 HMR. It's topped with a Bushnell Trophy 6-18x40mm. It's a real hog blaster. Can't wait til next spring."

"Can't wait til next spring," he says? Well, neither can I! I contacted CZ-USA in Kansas City, Kansas, to order one and am told that the CZ 455 American will be replacing the CZ 452 for 2010. Sensing my urgency, CZ-USA offered me the first chance to evaluate a CZ 455 American in .17 HMR.

A NEW GUN

New for 2010 is the CZ 455 American. It's going to be replacing the respected CZ 452 and is built on standardized dimensions across all rimfire models. These dimensions carry closer manufacturing tolerances, and, as the name suggests, the new 455 features a more American appearance.

If the CZ 452 is such a great performer, why is there a need for the CZ 455? I posed that question directly to hear CZ's answer.

"CZ's modern manufacturing techniques are allowing us to build better guns and keep tighter tolerances," says Jason Morton of CZ-USA's marketing/media relations. "The new design makes things function a little easier and creates a smoother-working action. One of the main features that the new CZ 455 American offers is a smallbore rifle that can be easily interchanged between calibers. Switching out the barrel on the CZ 455 is easy, and, besides the barrel, all you need is an appropriate magazine."

The American influence translates into a stock that has a straight comb and a barrel that's without open sights. Stocks are still laser checked, and the weight without a scope



The workmanship on the 455 is on par with high-end centerfire rifles and speaks to the Czech penchant for precision.

This 452 American in .17 HMR is topped with a Bushnell Trophy 6-18x40mm scope. With a couple of slight modifications, including a new striker spring from J&P Custom and a trigger shoe from Rimfire Technologies, it's been perfect for Christian Dugas in dispatching varmints. The groundhog shown here was taken at a distance of 80 yards using Winchester Game Point ammunition.



remains at less than seven pounds. I'm told by CZ-USA that this can vary slightly based on grain and natural differences in walnut. The CZ 455 utilizes a pair of action screws that distribute strength, and a 20½-inch barrel extends the effective range of most rimfire cartridges. The trigger is adjustable for consistent draws between three and five pounds. The trigger is identical to that used on the CZ 452. Like its predecessor, the stock is a good selection of walnut, but the new CZ 455's switch-barrel design gives Americans what they love most—freedom of choice.

The biggest contributing factor to CZ's well-earned reputation as a

dependably accurate rifle company is rooted in CZ barrels. The CZ 455 barrel is still cold hammer forged, gauged, stress relieved and lapped by the hands of experienced artisans in the Czech Republic. The receiver touches the shoulder of barrels in different calibers in the same way and without deviation. This is partly credited to the modern machine capabilities brought to CZ's manufacturing capabilities. A barrel (caliber) change is quick and accomplished by removing two screws.

Besides the barrel, the other component necessary for a caliber change is the magazine. The magazine for the

CZ 455 is a little longer for the .17 HMR, but the .22's are the same as the ones used in the CZ 452. They are of polymer construction and hold five rounds. A single-shot adapter is available along with five- and 10-round spares on CZ-USA's online store for less than \$30 each. The single-shot will cost you less than \$20.

OPTIC COMBINATION

CZ's new smallbore arrived quickly to my FFL, but I had to find a scope. I turned to Leupold and found a new



Changing calibers between .17 HMR, .22 LR and .22 WMR is extremely simple. Removing the stock from the action assembly, the barrel comes off by backing out two threaded barrel retaining screws (detail above right). The rifle's accuracy is unaffected by a barrel change, and you only need to have a cartridge-specific magazine to complete the CZ 455's transformation.

VX-I Rimfire 2-7x28mm with a non-glaring matte finish. A rimfire scope with a variable power between two and seven takes well into consideration the practical ranges at which I'd likely encounter fast-acting predators and varmints. Coyotes love to keep their distance along a treeline across a field, but a scope capable of low power provides the quickest target acquisition for closer ranges.

SO IF YOU LIKE THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE, THERE'S NO REASON NOT TO LIKE THE NEW CZ 455 AMERICAN.



The safety, located on the cocking piece, is optic-friendly. CZ uses integrated bases on their rimfire and centerfire bolt actions.

At the bench in my shop, I realized that I had forgotten about the rings. All CZ 455 dovetails are 11mm, the same used on other CZ rimfires. The good news is that the CZ 455 will accept the more readily available CZ 452 rings. You can go onto CZ-USA's site and directly order a set of steel rings for \$55. Mine arrived in just three days.

The rings mounted on top of the receiver that's fitted with a 3/8-inch-wide dovetail groove. I used a Wheel-

er Engineering scope-mounting kit to lap the rings and secure the scope. A magnetic borescope got me within inches of a target's center without damaging the muzzle's 11-degree crown. On the range, I was just three audible clicks from shooting point of aim/point of impact.

FIELD ACCURACY

When handling the CZ 455 American, it's obvious that this 6.8-pound rifle was designed for use in the field. For those already familiar with the CZ 452 and who want to upgrade to the CZ 455, you'll find all the similar function characteristics (like the bolt throw). Never knowing when something like a fox or coyote will appear, it's quick to throw into the shoulder. Utilizing the rifle's studs at the fore-end allowed me to attach a bipod without making it cumbersome. Now I have a stable platform while monitoring fields for groundhogs.

I was a competitive riflshooter for an NCAA rifle team the last time I printed 50-meter groups this small. I shouldn't have been surprised, but I didn't find the factory function target with a .6-inch five-shot group



Magazine capacity is five rounds. The .17 HMR has been a commercial success since its introduction and is a favorite among varmint hunters.

tucked inside the new CZ 455's box until after I returned from the range. CZ-USA calls it a "function target" to ensure that groups are pointing straight with the optic rail and that everything works. It's not really to brag about accuracy, so they say.

Most .17 HMR enthusiasts know that CCI produces Federal Premium V-Shok, Hornady V-Max and Remington AccuTip varmint loads in Idaho. But each specification is a little different for each brand, so they don't all shoot equally out of any rifle that happens to be chambered for .17 HMR. In fact, I spent two range days printing groups with friends and family to best understand the capabilities of the CZ 455 American. The only two loads I could readily get my hands on were the Hornady V-Max and CCI TNT.

Hornady's V-Max bullet exits the barrel slightly faster than the CCI load at 2,550 fps, but slows to about the same at 1,900 fps when passing 100 yards. The CCI load features a 17-grain Speer TNT jacketed hollowpoint that jets out the barrel at 2,535 fps. Historically, Hornady gets the credit for being primarily responsible for developing

CZ 452-453 (1995-PRESENT)

During the 1970s and '80s, an expanded CZ plant at Uhersky Brod produced rifles with the Brno label. Surviving political and economic trials, that factory now ships CZ guns worldwide, including 15 box-fed rimfires with machined receivers and hammer-forged rifling (rare in .22s, which are mostly buttoned). Adjustable (452) and single-set (453) triggers are standard. Chambered also in .22 WMR and .17 HMR, 452 and 453 bolt-action rifles have synthetic, beech or walnut stocks. The accuracy of these sporters rivals that of many match guns.

ACCURACY RESULTS

| | Muzzle Velocity | Avg. (50 yds.) | Best (50 yds.) |
|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| CCI TNT 17-gr. JHP | 2,535 fps | 1.21 ins. | .96 in. |
| Hornady V-Max | 2,550 fps | .54 in. | .46 in. |

the .17 HMR, and this credit may have led to the improved accuracy observed on the range. My best five-shot group at 50 yards measured just .46 inch, and my average over five groups measured .535 inch. These are incredible numbers for a bullet of this weight traveling at this speed. Unfortunately, I couldn't repeat that level of accuracy with the CCI TNT load.

At 100 yards, my average group size printed an inch using Hornady and nearly two inches with CCI. This distance reveals a consideration that

must be factored in when applying either of these to small game. A gusty five- to 10-mph crosswind blew open my groups at 100 yards from 2½ inches to as much as six inches. The lesson is to make a shot only when you have a lull or no-value wind. I've experienced similar results with .22 LR and .22 WMR rifles at the same distances. Light bullets just don't like wind.

AN AMERICAN COMPANY

This is a country developed by

international flavor. CZ-USA is an American company, and the CZ 455 American is a faithful symbol of it. CZ-USA recognizes that choice and variety are part of what makes the American consumer unique. With no increase in price over the CZ 452, you get every advantage offered in the new rifle. In CZ-USA's own testing, the results showed no accuracy degradation in changing between calibers. So if you like the freedom to choose, there's no reason not to like the new CZ 455 American. 🇺🇸



Triple River
gunsmithing



The modern medium cartridges can surely kill dangerous game, but there is a vast difference between shooting an undisturbed animal, compared to a charging one or a wounded beast. In this case stopping power is the most important criteria.

Triple River Gunsmithing has been building Safari Classic Rifles for CZ-USA since 2004 in 338 Lapua, 404 Jeffery, .450 Rigby, .500 Jeffery, .505 Gibbs and other safari calibers.

Triple River Gunsmithing uses CZ 550 Safari Mauser style actions, rugged, heavy duty, capable of accommodating a wide variety of safari calibers suitable for dangerous game. The Safari Classic rifles feature a single set trigger set up to your specifications, glossy, satin, matt or rust blue finish on metal parts, Fancy Grade American walnut stock with dual crossbolts and a straight comb glass bedded to the individual action and a barrel band. Upgrades include bolt jewellery, action job, extractor jewellery, installation of a muzzle break and more.

Triple River Gunsmithing are custom gun makers and professional gunsmiths
for over 20 years located in the heart of Ozarks in Warsaw, MO

619 Commercial St. Warsaw, MO 65355 • phone: 660.438.2004 • website: www.tripleriver.net • email: info@tripleriver.net