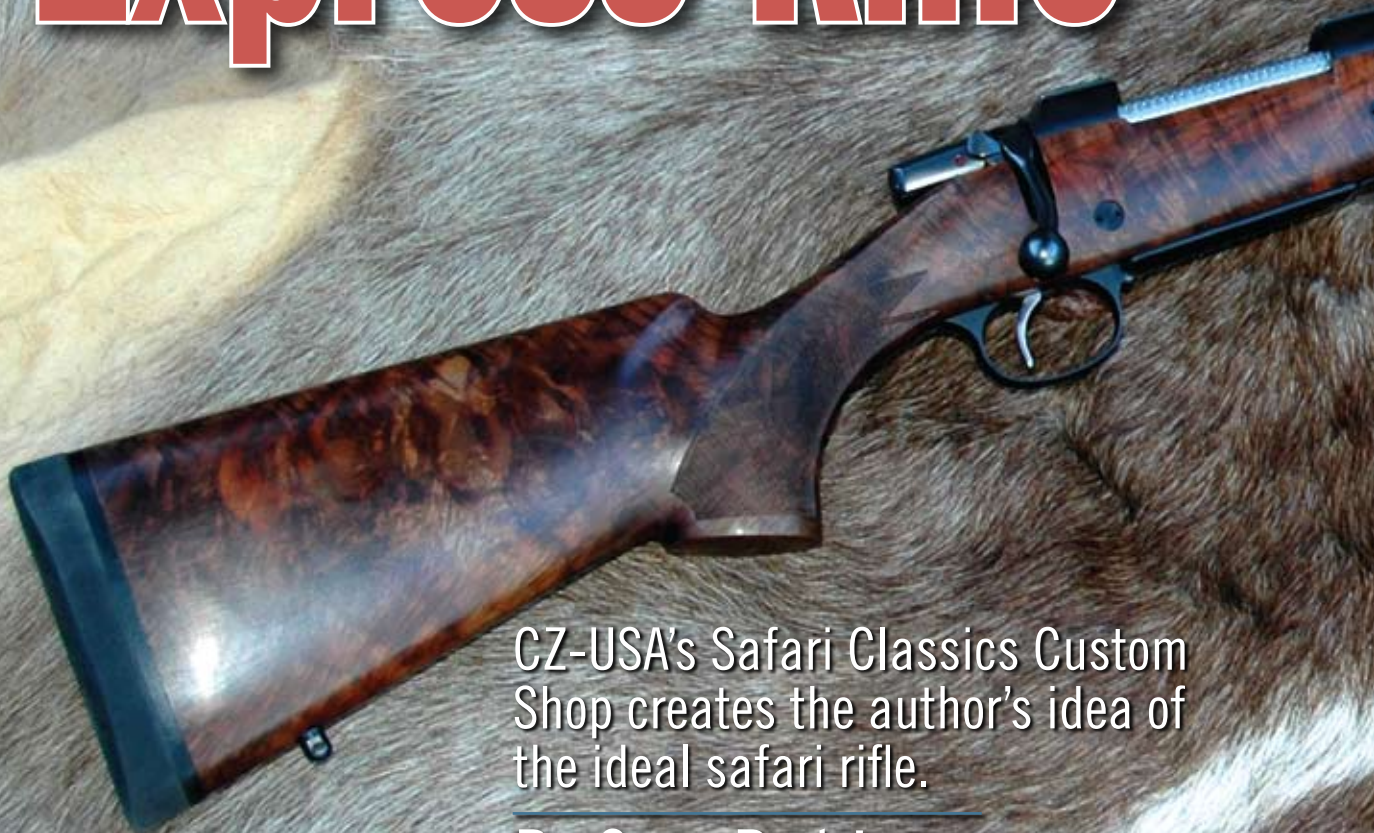


# Safari Classics Express Rifle



CZ-USA's Safari Classics Custom Shop creates the author's idea of the ideal safari rifle.

By Greg Rodriguez

CZ's 550 line is known the world over as one of the best values in the centerfire market. Its bigbore rifles, in particular, are praised for their accuracy and reliability. Countless head of dangerous game have fallen to the controlled-round feed, Mauser-based rifles, which has only added to their reputation.

However, safari hunting is an expensive endeavor. And, as nice as the 550 line is, many of those who can afford to hunt the Dark Continent on a regular basis want something a little fancier than the affordable American Safari Magnum that has become so popular in recent years.

Those high-end clients are why

CZ-USA opened its custom shop, Safari Classics, a few years ago. Safari hunters no longer have to choose between a custom gun costing well into five figures or an inexpensive, utility-grade gun. Thanks to Safari Classics, you can have a rifle with knock-your-socks-off beauty that is reliable enough to trust your life to without breaking the bank.



*The Express Rifle is an elegant, trim piece that will appeal to anyone who admires fine firearms.*

The first offerings from CZ's custom shop were based on the Magnum 550 action. Like the original, those custom offerings offered controlled round feed, a robust claw extractor, express sights, and a generous magazine box that accommodates three rounds of .416 Rigby ammunition, or five rounds in .375 H&H and .458 Win. Mag. But the

new Magnum Express rifles added an upgraded stock with trimmer lines, dual crossbolts, and a barrel band sling swivel.

The new Magnum Express line generated a great deal of interest from savvy hunters. I first saw them at the SCI show in Reno where I was impressed by the workmanship of CZ's custom shop. In fact, I was so

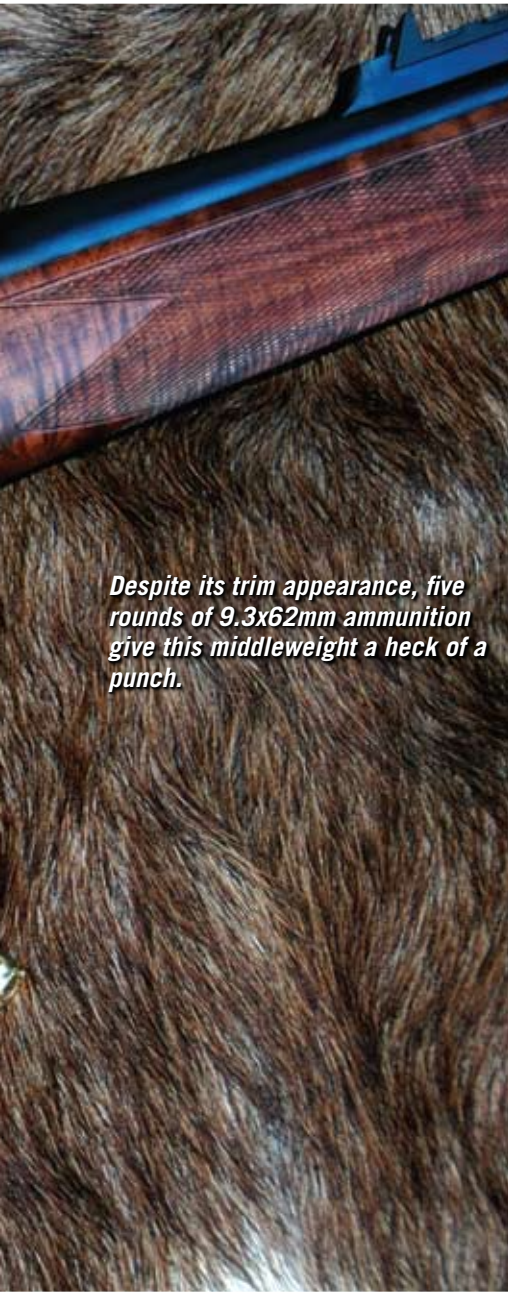
impressed that I called CZ's Jason Morton to discuss my ideas for a new custom rifle project.

I wanted a trimmer, lighter rifle than the Magnum Express but with similar looks and similar performance. I figured I could achieve my goals by chambering it for the 9.3x62mm cartridge, which is very similar in performance to the .375

## Safari Classic **Express Rifle**



*The bolt has that famous Mauser claw extractor. The jewelling also looks great.*



*Despite its trim appearance, five rounds of 9.3x62mm ammunition give this middleweight a heck of a punch.*



***Safari Classics' James Parker trimmed down the stock bit-by-bit until the author deemed it perfect.***

H&H but with a bit less recoil. Another advantage of this fine old cartridge is that it fits into a standard .30-06-length action. That standard-length action helped meet my goal of a lighter, trimmer package that is still, where legal, perfectly capable of smoking lions and sending even the surliest of buffalos to the hereafter.

Jason liked my idea for a lighter version of the Magnum Express rifle right away. He asked me for my

wish list, which I happily gave him and then promptly forgot about until Jason called and invited me to Safari Classics' shop in Missouri to see my rifle come to fruition.

I christened it, simply, the Express Rifle. It is similar in appearance to the classic Mauser-actioned rifles that were so popular in colonial Africa. Though the classic .318 Westley Richards is long dead as a commercial cartridge, the rifles that were typically chambered for it were elegant hunting tools with lean, sexy lines and fast handling qualities. For a brief period, I owned a beautiful little Westley Richards so chambered, and it inspired the look and feel I envisioned for my new rifle.

The Express Rifle is based on CZ's popular 550 American barreled action. Of course, the classic Mauser action has controlled round feed, a claw extractor, single-set trigger, and five-round magazine. And its barrel is the same hammer forged, 23.6-inch tube with a 1-in-

9.5 rate-of-twist as the standard model. CZ's two-position safety and integral scope mounting bases are also standard.

But the Express Rifle action, like all Safari Classics' offerings, is honed and polished to give the custom shop offering a smoother, more refined feel than the standard rifle. Mine has an optional jeweled bolt.

In keeping with my desire for a traditional, Express Rifle look, I specified a barrel band front sight and barrel band sling swivel. Though I would prefer to see a single-leaf rear sight, the three-leaf rear provided is well done and perfectly regulated at 100 yards with the rifle's favorite Norma load. I doubt I'll ever get around to zeroing the other two leaves.

The barreled action is glass bedded into the stock for greater strength and accuracy. Twin cross bolts provide even greater rigidity. A hidden bolt provides insurance against stock breakage in the wrist, which is the weakest part of every

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*Head gunsmith Harlan Satrang jewelling the author's bolt.*

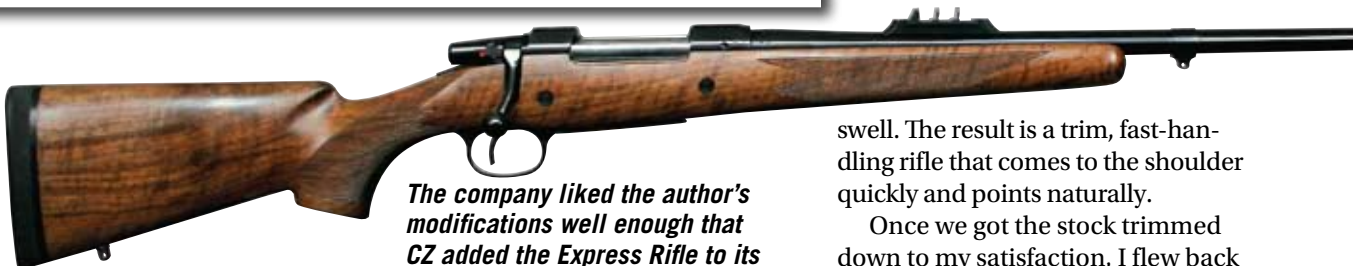


*The three-leaf rear sight was perfectly regulated with the rifle's favorite Norma load*

wood stock.

My Express Rifle's stock started out as a very nice, dark piece of American black walnut with quite a bit of figure. It's not quite exhibition grade, but it's got as much figure as we could get away with and still maintain the trim stock's structural integrity.

While the latest CZ stock design was the starting point for my rifle's stock, Safari Classics' stock maker trimmed it down, one pass at a time, from the butt to the fore-end tip, until it felt right to me. He also left a slight, almost imperceptible palm



*The company liked the author's modifications well enough that CZ added the Express Rifle to its standard custom shop line.*

swell. The result is a trim, fast-handling rifle that comes to the shoulder quickly and points naturally.

Once we got the stock trimmed down to my satisfaction, I flew back home and waited for them to do



*Gunsmith Mike Ballinger doing some work on another Safari Classics rifle*

the finish work. While the metal work underwent a meticulous rust bluing, Safari Classics' stock maker hand-checked the wrist and fore-end in a simple, attractive pattern. The checkering was sharp and crisp. With that done, many hand-applied coats of stock oil over the next several weeks really brought out the figure and color of the stock and brought my project to completion.

I was blown away by my new rifle. Though all gun writers think we know a thing or two about guns and often offer our suggestions to various manufacturers—whether they ask for them or not—few companies act on them.

So I was a bit surprised and very flattered when Jason Morton said CZ was going to add the Express Rifle to its 2009 Safari Classics line.

Though the MSRP has yet to be set, CZ plans to offer the new rifle in 11 calibers: .270 Win., .30-06, .300 H&H, .300 Win. Mag., .300 Ultra



*Even in the rough, the author could tell his stock was something special.*

Mag., .338 Win. Mag., 9.3x62, .375 Ruger, .416 Taylor, .416 Ruger, and .425 Westley Richards. All are ideal for the more compact Express Rifle package, though the 9.3x62 and .375 Ruger are my top picks.

If you're in the market for a custom rifle with that classic,

Express rifle look and feel, but at a price that won't break the bank, consider one of the offerings from CZ's custom shop. With incredible quality, almost unlimited options, and a speedy turnaround time, CZ's Express and Magnum Express rifles are darn tough to beat. **CZ**