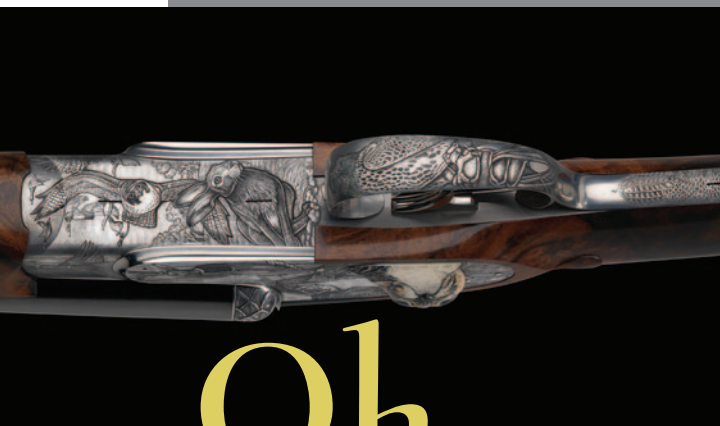


Falcons and Jaguars and Dinosaurs, Glamour Guns



Oh My!

The Sporting Firearms of Peter Hofer

BY MICHAEL G. SABBETH

I vividly remember my first visit with Peter Hofer, about 15 years ago. We were seated outdoors at a lovely beerhaus in Ferlach, Austria, overlooking the picture-postcard-perfect Rosental Valley at the base of the Karawanken mountain range. Graciously, Peter ordered a drink for me. Eyes sparkling with an impish glint, he said: “You drink this, and you will be so happy, you will buy one of my guns!” I took a gulp of the repellent fermented apple drink and replied, “Peter, my new dear friend, happiness is not the variable that prevents me from buying one of your guns!” A few hours later, at his studio, I handled a four-barrel Vierling, boasting engravings of a Rubens painting on its sideplates and costing 1.3 million Euros. Lack of happiness was not the factor that thwarted a sale.

Ferlach is the southernmost town in Austria, about ten miles south of the Carinthian capital, Klagenfurt. Ferlach has been Austria’s arms center since the 1550’s, much like Gardone Val Trompia has been Italy’s arms center since approximately the same time. In 1979, at age 21, Peter gained his Master Qualification diploma

for Gunsmith and Stockcraft from the prestigious Ferlach Gunsmiths’ College. Entrepreneurially inclined, he started his own business in 1986. His meteoric ascension to worldwide prominence was fueled by imaginative and complex mechanical solutions wedded to perfect wood and metal finishes.

With the earnestness of explaining scripture, Peter extolled the art of gun making. “It is not an industry,” he said. “The guns are all hand made. My computer and my CAD are in my head. Designing is from my heart.” I trust I am not breaching any confidences by disclosing that Peter admitted to me that the unceasing creative process is wearing and “hurts my brain.”

Peter’s website illustrates his capabilities to construct actions based on all classic designs, including the Blitz, Anson & Deeley, Merkel, Holland & Holland designs and combining them with Greener, Kersten, Purdey or his own proprietary bolting systems. Peter constructs sporting arms with near limitless combinations of calibers, barrel configurations and locks/bolting systems.

The Falcon Shotgun

This article presents three abbreviated descriptions of recent Peter Hofer masterpieces: the Falcon shotgun, the Dinosaur double rifle and the Jaguar double rifle. In 2010, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) honored the falconry tradition as a “living human heritage.” In that same year, UNESCO also honored the 500-year-old gunmaking craft of Ferlach, Austria for its high cultural value for “preserving fragile knowledge and skills inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants.” Ferlach’s gunmaking craft was added to the UNESCO List of “Intangible Cultural Heritages.”

Peter’s fertile mind saw a coalescence of the honorary recognitions of the falconry and gunmaking traditions. Fascinated by falconry for decades, Peter had become a student of the four-thousand-year discipline. Capable of diving at a speed up to 170 miles per hour, the “silent hunter” can grasp its prey in the air or on the ground. Falcon hunting was long-range — five to 10 miles; well beyond that of any firearm. Peter’s attendance at many falconry hunts in Middle Eastern countries inspired him to craft this bespoke Falcon shotgun.

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As with the Jaguar rifle, the Falcon shotgun advances a message: Peter's testament to falconry's unique cultural tradition and Peter's advocacy for falconry's conservation. As opposed to the Jaguar and the falcon, Peter concedes he can no longer preserve the dinosaurs!

Technical Data

The Falcon is a side-by-side 12-gauge shotgun based on a Special Peter Hofer sidelock action, with catch bar

and double underlug lock. The shotgun has ejectors and double triggers, with an articulated front trigger. The 30-inch chopper lump barrels are made of the highest quality Böhler steel and are choked half and full. The bespoke 15 3/8-inch stock is constructed of specially selected Turkish burr walnut that, according to Peter's brochure, is approximately 580 years old. The stock blanks used by Peter are unsurpassed anywhere in the world of crafting sporting firearms. When finished with dozens of layers of oil, the wood glows as if illuminated by an inner lamp. The Falcon exhibits the finest expression of bulino engraving, featuring the most delicate shading

on the spectrum from light gray to rich black. Hundreds of hours were required to execute this spectacular aesthetic achievement. As I studied the sketches for the engraving, I could hear in my mind the beating of the falcon's wings and see its acceleration to its target.

The Jaguar Rifle

The Jaguar double rifle is a bespoke firearm that required six years to build. The project was orchestrated closely with the client, who understood and expounded the meaning inherent in its creation. The Jaguar rifle is a side-by-side double rifle in 500 Nitro Express three-

inch caliber. The rifle is built on the massive and extraordinarily strong Peter Hofer special action which features a double underlug and a third bite. The sidelocks are pin-less. The double triggers feature a floating front trigger and a two-stage rear trigger. The safety is non-automatic. Chopper lump 24-inch barrels are constructed of Böhler steel with an integral rear fixed V sight and folding leaves regulated to 50 and 80 yards. The rifle is paired with a Swarovski Z6i 1-6x24 scope, reticle 4AI, zeroed at 110 yards, and secured by a Peter Hofer quick detachable swivel mount.

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to influence making corrective behavior that will sustain them. Peter views the Jaguar rifle as a defining work of his art, in essence, his legacy. These goals are ambitious, but Peter has earned his place in the constellation of the world's finest gunmakers by transforming ambition into reality.

The Dinosaur Rifle

"The mechanics are the heart of the gun," Peter says, and, if he is correct, then he is the master heart surgeon. The Dinosaur 4-bore double barrel rifle is among the



few firearms Peter created that are not bespoke. More than half a decade was required to envision the rifle and bring it to realization. I mention only a few of the manufacturing challenges that were, metaphorically, as immense as this world's largest double rifle.

The 4-bore caliber was developed centuries ago for black powder shotguns. A 4-bore nitro powder rifle cartridge had never been developed. Peter's cartridge and corresponding rifle traversed new territory with every component and variable. The 4-bore bullet diameter is 25.4 mm (one inch) and weighs 2,000 grains (130 grams). Since components were not existent, Peter had to develop the bullets and make the cartridge cases. Ponder that the powder, powder charge, ignition and burning rate had never been tested or graphed and that

a bullet of that size and weight requires an ignition similar to a rocket, yet would have to be bearable — somewhat — for a human to endure. The Hofer-created cartridges fire a 2,000 grain bullet at 2,625 feet per second, yielding the jaw-dropping muzzle energy of 30,670 foot pounds.

During a telephone discussion about the rifle, Claudia translated some of the nuances of the technical design aspects of the internal ballistics of the barrel and cartridge. Gas pressure, rifling depth and twist rate all had to be constructed and accurately measured. Claudia sent me a descriptive brochure that identified and clarified the design requirements. For example, adding to the Herculean challenges just stated, Peter

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The Jaguar rifle engraving is embellished with solid gold inlays of white, yellow, red gold and platinum and multiple hues of enamel. The scene on the bottom of the action portraying the luminous jaguar attacking the unfortunate mammal, exhibits the multiple shades of black and gray found in the most masterful execution of the bulino engraving style. The rifle immortalizes the resplendent Jaguar in the glory of its colorful and breathtaking habitat. The engraving, the precious metals, and the enamel show a cascade of wildlife, including a crocodile, an anaconda, a capybara, an ocelot, a blue-and-yellow macaw, a toucan and tree frogs.

The Jaguar rifle, Peter struggled to convey, possessed a nature that went beyond beauty and mechanical excellence. Searching for precise words, he spoke rapidly in German to Claudia, his able office manager, asking, in essence, "Tell me what I am trying to say!" With assertive confidence, Claudia interjected, "With this rifle, Peter is trying to explain his philosophy about the value of hunting." I came to understand that the Jaguar rifle was intended to be Peter's metaphorical representation of two forces: the sustainable conservation of a rare animal and the legitimacy of hunting, generally, for advancing wildlife conservation. Now I understood the rifle's significance to Peter.

The message, or ethos, of this extraordinary Jaguar double rifle embodies Peter's desire to raise awareness of the circumstances that threaten the jaguar's survival and



G&A

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capacity is needed to produce a miniscule gain in velocity over the .264 and RPM.

Still, these two cartridges are capable enough that for hunting we can use a 300-yard zero. Given that, coupled with, say, Nosler's 142-grain AccuBond Long Range bullet with a BC of .625 exiting at 3,300 fps, we're looking at a Point Of Impact of -6 1/2 inches at 400 yards, and -18 1/2 inches at 500, where it's arriving at 2,075 fps with 2,100 foot-pounds of energy!

With such a colossal gain in velocity over the 6.5 Creedmoor and .260 Rem., would



Weatherby now has two players in the 6.5 game, one a magnum, the other a super magnum.

these two overachievers do better in 1,000-yard competition? On paper one would certainly think so, but in the real world, probably not. But would they make better hunting cartridges? Absolutely!

What about barrel life? With full-power loads, you'd be lucky to get 750 rounds. But in a hunting rifle, who cares? I bet if used solely for hunting, not two percent of hunters using these rounds would ever shoot out a barrel.

What about accuracy? Can these two compete with the 6.5 Creed or 6.5 PRC? Not likely in handloads or factory ammunition. But you don't need a 1/4-minute rifle for hunting. A 1 1/2 MOA rifle will get you into that 10-inch vital zone on deer-size game out to 500 yards if that's what you're looking for.

Recoil? Again, not a big factor in a hunting rifle. Besides, even the big Weatherby and Nosler don't punch more than a 7mm Rem. Mag, and most hunters can handle that with but a modicum of practice.

So, there you have it. As hunting cartridges in hunting rifles, even the smallest members of the .26 caliber family can match the 6.5 Creedmoor in velocity, some by a tad, some by a lot and some by a helluva lot.

If 1,000-yard competition is your goal, go with the Creed. If hunting is your thing, and you're a handloader, any of the others are a better choice. 🐾

Glamour Guns

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had to manufacture a device to test gas pressure. Moreover, the Ferlach government proof house required every rifle to pass a ballistic projectile test with a 50% higher overload. Not only had such a powerful rifle never been tested at the proof house, but also no proof house could provide clamping blocks for this size of gas pressure test barrel.

Studying the Dinosaur double rifle, I am immediately impressed by the elegant lustrous stock and cheekpiece crafted from half-millennia-old Turkish walnut. Shouldering the rifle, its thirty-pound weight communicates that leisurely carrying it across the great plains would not be appealing. The luxurious engraving features an encyclopedic array of dinosaurs — the Koreaceratops, Tyrannosaurus and Triceratops, among others. Gold inlays in several colors are embedded throughout the rifle's action and top rib. The skin pattern of a boa constrictor is engraved on the breech end of the barrel. This breathtaking double rifle represents a dinosaur-sized achievement by every measure and standard. I am told the rifle will be displayed at the 2022 SCI Convention.

My words and Peter's photos cannot adequately illuminate the majesty of Peter Hofer firearms. His work is sui generis; unsurpassed and unparalleled. Peter Hofer is not owned by a corporate conglomerate. He is insulated from a demand to maximize profit. Peter's product line exemplifies quality, prestige, and uniqueness. A study of his craftsmanship shows Peter Hofer never compromises. 🐾

For More Information

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