

By Tracy Short



# CZ'S 550



## SAFARI CLASSIC 375 H&H

**Employing over 2000 people**, this Czechoslovakian gun maker is one of the biggest in the world. They make a huge range of sporting and military weapons and are well known for their superb Mauser style sporting actions.

**N**Z Agents Kilwell sent me the big .375 for Testfire and my first impressions were "What a great looking rifle for the money." This is not your normal Euro looking CZ but a rifle that has obviously been built for the U.S market. There is a huge amount of rifle for the money when you look at the express sights and set trigger and quality fibreglass stock, which was wearing a 1" Decelerator recoil pad as standard. The big Mauser style square bridge action, plus all the other features, presents an extremely capable dangerous game rifle at a price that no one else could come close to.

### The Action

The heart of the CZ 550 is pretty much a modified Mauser style action which features controlled round feeding using the full length Mauser claw extractor. The beauty of controlled feeding is that as soon as the bolt engages the round the extractor grabs the rim and holds it to ensure feeding into the chamber under any conditions. Using a rifle that has genuine controlled round feeding is very sensible for a dangerous game rifle because there is always a possibility that a jamb up at the wrong moment could be unhealthy or even fatal.

The CZ550 has been a little more refined than the 98 in styling and features. The mounting system is CZ's own integral dovetail design with a large recoil lug to prevent the rings sliding in the dovetail. I am not a fan of integral dovetails and prefer actions that accommodate Weaver style rings and an integral Weaver base however the CZ rings and dovetail is well done. There is a lack of options available in rings for these rifles, however this one was supplied with very



*Open sights, a good option for dangerous game and an essential back-up in case of scope failure.*



good 1" steel rings made by CZ. I was hoping for 30mm rings but they were not available at the time and other options were limited.

The CZ has a very positive two stage safety on the right hand side of the tang that is easy to operate albeit a little agricultural looking. A three position safety would have been a lot safer and more suitable because when the safety was on the bolt was locked and you had to put the rifle into the fire position before you could remove the round. This was my biggest dislike of the CZ550, however I can live with it. There is a button on the left of the bolt shroud

**This rifle would be the ideal dangerous game rifle. It is constructed and designed for the ultimate reliability and function and constructed out of sensible materials for an African rifle**

that you press to disassemble the bolt for cleaning etc. If this was depressed when unloading the rifle it acted as an additional safety and also made bolt assembly and disassembly a very simple operation.

The bolt has two medium sized locking lugs that are more than adequate and the mechanical ejector cut isn't through the locking lug which is a better design than many other actions. The actual ejector is a lever at the rear of the action similar to the Winchester Classic and some Sako models and is a strong and reliable system.

There is a small cocking indicator on the back of the bolt shroud but unless you looked hard it was impossible to tell if the rifle was cocked or not. A more obvious



cocking indicator might be a useful thing when hunting dangerous game.

The bolt release is a lever on the left side of the tang; simple and reliable. Bottom metal consists of a nicely machined hinged floor plate with a steel spring and well finished steel follower. There is nothing plastic or junky to be seen anywhere on this action, however when you remove it from the stock and look closely at the machining there are rough edges and tool marks that have not been removed. This has no effect on the action although a fussy person might notice these cosmetic blemishes.

### The Bedding

The action has large integral recoil which the king screw homes into. There is an alloy bedding block built in which offers a very strong and reliable system as long as there is a good fit between the block and the action. A light skim of bedding compound could correct any poor fit if it required.

This rifle has very good express sights as an integral part of the barrel which was bedded at this point with a small amount of compound. I believe barrels are better to be completely free floated back to the action and wondered if this is part of the reason I had a flyer in a couple of groups I fired? In saying that, the overall groups were still very

good but would have been amazing without the flyers.

### The Trigger

This is a very good out-of-the-box trigger and, as a bonus, you can push it forward to set it to a hair trigger. The trigger isn't heavy unset, however it had some creep which would annoy a discerning hunter. When set it is light and crisp as a trigger should be. I had a quick play with the adjustments on the trigger and was able to remove the creep in the standard set of the trigger but was then unable to push the trigger forward to set the hair trigger. It could be sorted but I decided to put it back to the factory setting and use the set the trigger for the precise shots.

guard hit me in the finger a couple of times when shooting off a rest. This is a common occurrence when shooting a heavy recoiling calibre off a rest with this type of stock design. When you are looking for reliability and function as you should be with a dangerous game rifle, strength and stability is important in a stock. This one is ideal for the job.

### Scope and Iron Sights

Depending on your use for this rifle different scopes can be suitable. For a true dangerous game situation something like a 1-4 power scope with a large field of view would be ideal. I prefer the circle type reticle for a quick and close shooting application. Swarovski, Schmidt & Bender and



*Top Left: The CZ featured a good adjustable trigger that could be pushed forward and set as a hair trigger. Top: The in-stock alloy bedding system. Above: You can't beat nicely machined steel for bottom metal.*

### The Barrel

The barrel is 24.5" or 625 mm which is a good length for a 375 H&H. The contour is heavy, around number 5 or 6 contour which you need in a heavy recoiling caliber. The barrel is hammer forged and the finish looks good and the fact that the rifle shot extremely well can be attributed to a well made barrel.

### The Stock

I am sure the CZ's stock was a Bell & Carlson with an integral alloy bedding block. These stocks are fibreglass and have an attractive paint finish with a spider web design in a light colour.

The finish and design was very good and the installation of a 1" Decelerator pad was ideal for this rifle. I prefer a deeper pistol grip rather than the shallow one on this rifle; the trigger

Nightforce all make ideal scopes to suit although they are all in the upper price range.

The 375 H&H is actually a reasonably flat shooting cartridge with the right load and is ideal for plains game as well as dangerous game. It is the ideal choice for someone going to Africa and wanting to use one rifle for everything. You are a little limited with scope choice as the express sights would prevent the mounting of longer scopes unless you mounted one very high. For this reason I put a 3-9x40 Minox scope on the rifle for testing. These are very good scopes with German Schott glass lenses and assembled in the USA with an unconditional lifetime warranty. I chose the ballistic reticle because it gives good long range options, however

the scope has a good calibrated re-zero turret.

The CZ had reasonably sophisticated and expensive looking express sights with 100, 200 and 300 markings..

The 200 and 300 blades flipped up as required. Some people would be happy to shoot with open sights and at very close range they have some advantages over a scope in speed of acquiring the target. I personally prefer the scope option no matter what hunting situation although they offer an excellent back-up if your scope happens to die during your very expensive African Safari.

**Shooting the 375H&H**

Shooting a 375H&H off a bench-rest is never a really pleasant job, especially

a lot of target rifles, however the flyers were a little hard to explain. I suspect it was caused by the additional bedding point half way along the barrel below the iron sights. I decided that the rifle had way too much potential not to look at this further so I decided to remove this bedding and try again. The results were not good so I replaced the bedding and was left to ponder the flyers.

**Conclusion**

This rifle would be the ideal dangerous game rifle. It is constructed and designed for the ultimate reliability and function and constructed out of sensible materials for an African rifle. The synthetic stock and alloy bedding are the sensible differences that you don't



Left: The two position safety-I prefer a three position version. Right: The decelerator recoil pad was excellent.

when there isn't a muzzle brake to take the sting out of it. Being a heavy rifle fitted with a decent decelerator recoil pad, the rifle was relatively manageable to shoot. I certainly wouldn't want to take it rabbit shooting in an infested area of Otago, however a reasonable day's shooting in Africa wouldn't be too difficult to manage. The set trigger certainly made it easier to shoot. The strange thing was that in my first group I had 4 shots into 15mm and the 5<sup>th</sup> went 23mm out of the group. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> group I had 4 shots into 12mm with the 5<sup>th</sup> shot 25mm out of the group.

This rifle actually shoots better than

see in a lot of rifles that people take to Africa. They are generally a little prettier than practical.

If I was to go to Africa hunting dangerous game, my choice would be either something like this or something along the lines of a pre-64 Winchester type actioned rifle. I know 375 H&H isn't the largest selling caliber rifle in New Zealand but if you are contemplating one you should check this rifle out. I have seen people spend a great deal more money on rifles that wouldn't hold a candle to the CZ550, especially when the going gets tough and function and reliability become very important.



Left: 300gn Hornady- 4 shots into 15mm then a flyer. Right: 300gn Woodleigh-4 shots into 12mm and another pesky flyer!

Specifications	
Magazine capacity	5
Rate of twist	1:12
Weight	9.4lbs
Overall length	46.5"
Barrel length	24.5"
Length of pull	13.7"
Price	\$
NZ Agents	Kilwell Sports