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KILIMANJARO'S "DOCTARI" RIFLE

Q: Could you please specifically tell me what characteristics you added to the Doctari rifle by Kilimanjaro Rifles? I have read the website information and I do not understand what is new or improved. I also do not understand why it costs \$14,000. That is the price of a new double rifle! I am aware that you know a great deal about rifles, and I am curious to know what specific modifications would be made to make this "the perfect rifle" for you.

A: I agree, \$14,000 may seem a lot for a bolt-action rifle, but please let me explain why this is so.

First off, the heart of the new Doctari rifle is a Granite Mountain Arms magnum Mauser '98 action--one of the best there is, and those actions alone run about \$3,500 apiece.

Then there is the stock, and this is what sets Kilimanjaro rifles apart. They use a patented process called "stealth lamination." Really fancy walnut, with lots of figure, looks lovely but in reality it is not as strong as straight-grained plain-Jane wood, especially in the grip area. The Doctari rifle will only be available in heavy recoiling calibers and it is my experience that if the stock on such a rifle is going to break, it will break in the pistol grip area. So to get around this problem, Kilimanjaro takes fancy AAA grade stock blanks and carefully cuts them into three slices. They then shuffle the pieces around and glue them back together under 50,000 pounds of pressure with a special glue which penetrates deeply into the wood. This de-stresses the wood and the end result is a really good-looking blank that is probably the strongest wood rifle stock anywhere. You have to look really hard to see the lamination. Most who inspect the rifles do not even see it until it is pointed out to them. As I'm sure you can imagine, this is not an easy or cheap process.

Only top-quality barrels are used, and then come the sights. The foresight is a copy of that on my personal .505 Gibbs and it is ingenious--well, I think so. It has a permanent hood or protector that flips rearward to expose a red fiber-optic foresight tube, which shines like a laser light on dark-skinned animals like elephant or buffalo. These tubes are quite fragile so the hood, when folded forward, protects it well, and what sets this foresight apart from others is that you can still shoot through it when it is closed or folded forward in an emergency situation. There is a slot milled into the top of the hood to let light in so the fiber optic tube still shines when its protector hood is closed. When you want to take a deliberate shot, it is a simple matter to then fold the protector hood rearward to expose only the fiber-optic foresight bead. I have been looking at and evaluating big-bore rifles for two decades and this is by far the best foresight configuration for such a rifle that I have ever seen.

The rear sight is a Ghost Ring aperture set on a Talley scope mount, which can easily be removed and replaced with a scope on Talley mounts as well. This, too, is an ingenious system--and one that was thought up by Gene Gardner, Kilimanjaro's

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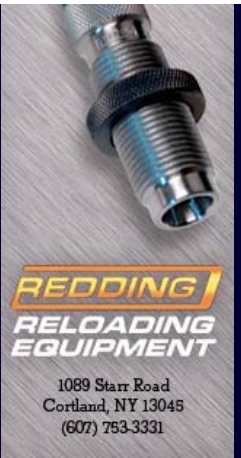
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How many times have you hunted in Africa? :

- Never, but I want to!
- Never; no real interest in it
- Once
- Two to five times
- More than five times



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master gunsmith.

I went to a lot of trouble to get the shape and feel of the Doctari's stock right. The process started off with a fitting at the renowned Holland and Holland Shooting School outside London. Then I tracked down an old Rigby stockmaker who happened to be in South Africa and I worked with him to get it right.

I once followed a wounded buffalo for twenty miles through some of the nastiest and thickest cover available. This was when I discovered that you cannot carry a dangerous-game rifle at port arms, ready for action, for any great length of time before your arms get really tired. So you end up carrying the rifle held by the pistol grip and balancing it against your shoulder. This way it is easy to carry a rifle for a long time, but you have to have just the right angle at the pistol grip so that your wrist is not bent at an awkward angle. You will notice that the Doctari has a Prince of Wales-type semi-pistol grip for this reason.

A dangerous-game rifle must, I believe, have the handling qualities of a Purdey, combined with the ballistic capabilities of a Howitzer. The secret to such a rifle lies in its fit, feel, and balance. It must have between-the-hands balance for a lively feel. I have been charged three times in my PHing career and believe me, there is no time to aim--you just point and shoot, like you would a shotgun at a flushing quail. So in other words, a dangerous-game rifle needs to have shotgun-type handling qualities and I think the Doctari has. Heck, I have even shot a clay out of the sky with my .505 Gibbs!

I have for many years been involved with the training of PHs and guides. Everyone who has passed through my hands has been able to handle and shoot my personal .505. And I have never found anyone who cannot shoot my rifle. It just seems to somehow fit everyone, from 99-pound ladies to big hulking bruisers like myself. I have not come across many rifles in my time that just seem to fit everyone like mine does, and this is what I think makes it different.

Usually, dangerous-game rifles are stocked for either open sight or scope use. To minimize the considerable recoil of the cartridges I deem suitable for dangerous-game work, the shooter's head needs to be firmly anchored on the top of the stock's comb. If such a rifle is stocked for open-sight use, and then you fit a scope, the shooter usually has to lift his head off the comb a bit to see through the scope clearly because a scope cannot be mounted as low as open sights. Felt recoil, when the head is lifted even a little bit, is a lot more than when it is snuggled down firmly onto the comb. Conversely, when a rifle is stocked for scope use, and you try to use it with open sights, you often find that you cannot get your head down enough to see the open sights easily. So, most dangerous-game rifles are stocked for open-sight use, and they are then terrible to shoot when a scope is mounted.

With the Doctari, we figured a way to sort this problem out. The aperture ghost ring is on a Talley mount and high enough so that when a scope is fitted the shooter's head does not need to be lifted at all to see through the scope.

I just returned from Reno and SCI where I saw for the first time what will be my personal Doctari rifle. It was on display there for all to see and handle. This rifle is stocked for my Neanderthal body proportions yet, even though the length of pull was a bit too long for most, it fit well just about everyone who handled it. We were able to switch quickly between ghost ring aperture and a low-powered variable scope to demonstrate how I believe we have got the stock shape and sight configuration on these rifles exactly right. Head position on the stock when either sighting system is used is the same, and there are darn few rifles out there which can boast this fact.

Personally, for PHing, I will only use the rifle with open sights and 600-grain .505s at around 2,150 fps, but I'm sure there will come a time when a really accurate, long-range shot will need to be taken with this rifle. When it does, I reckon a scope and good 400-grainers at about 2,350 will do the trick.

For a safari client, I reckon the Doctari will be the ideal all-round safari rifle. In, say, .416 Rigby when elephant are on menu, I'd recommend it used with 430-grain solids and open sights. Fit the scope and use it with soft points for buffalo, the cats, or plains game.

This sighting system and stock design will turn cartridges like the .458 Lott from a pretty darn good choice for elephants (with open sights) to super lion or buffalo medicine when a scope is fitted and appropriate weight and type of bullets are used.

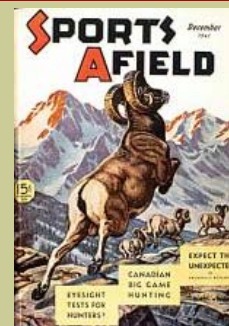
These rifle are put together entirely by hand, which is many, many hours of work.

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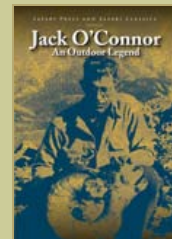


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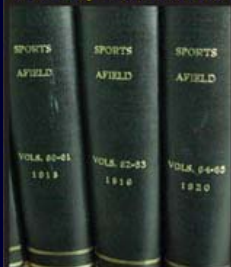
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So at the end of the day, you get a rifle that feels and handles like one which costs 10 times more, is as hard-wearing and rugged as a Land Cruiser safari car, and looks as good as it shoots and feels.

The amount of effort that has gone into getting this rifle right will, I think, surprise you. For more information, see Kilimanjaro's web page.

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