

Rifles

By Ron Spomer

Not many of us have need for a 505 Gibbs bolt-action rifle that throws 600-grain bullets 2,100 fps. Kevin Robertson does. The rest of us want to.

And Erik is offering to help.

Erik is Erik D. Eike, president of Kilimanjaro Rifles, custom-crafted rifles of graceful line, stunning beauty and precision performance. Robertson is an African veterinarian better known for his exploits as a professional hunter. In that capacity he is expected to "sort out" various dangerous beasts improperly sorted out in the first place by his overly excited clients.

You can forgive us amateurs for getting overly excited when first facing our long-dreamed-of lions, tigers and bears, oh my. Not to mention buffalo and elephants. But stuff happens, and that's why there are sleek, slick, quick, dependable rifles chambered for 505 Gibbs cartridges. This oversized cartridge is a 1911 creation of modern shape, meaning rimless and bottlenecked with a shoulder, though there appears to be a lot more neck than shoulder in this big .50-caliber shell. The base is more than a half-inch across (.640-inch). Handloaders don't pour powder into this reservoir, they shovel it in. At 3.8 inches, the complete cartridge stands like a silo.

Kilimanjaro's beautiful Doctari dangerous game rifle combines the handling qualities of a fine double shotgun with the ballistics of a howitzer.



Kilimanjaro Rifles' Doctari No. 1 in 505 Gibbs and Norma African PH cartridges loaded with 600-grain Woodleigh Protective Point bullets.

But that's okay with Robertson because he's more interested in what the cartridge does when some 128 grains of powder ignite. We have lift-off. The bullet explodes from the muzzle carrying roughly 5,900 foot-pounds of buffalo-stopping energy.

Power is just the start. It does precious little for you if you can't control it. At 6'3" and stout, Robertson has enough power to tackle the 505. What he needed was finesse. He wanted a rifle shaped and balanced to assist rather than hinder his efforts.

Enter Kilimanjaro.

Erik Eike is a practical romantic. While he loves the lore and history of African hunting and rifles, he also appreciates the functional durability of proper materials and engineering. And he wants them put together perfectly. So he and master gunmaker Gene Gordner

at Kilimanjaro's Montana manufacturing facility listened to Robertson, and vice versa. The result is the Doctari No. 1 rifle in 505 Gibbs, which we first handled on the floor of the Safari Club International show in Reno last January. Gorgeous? Absolutely.

Classic? Certainly, but with twists and turns. Specific to Mr. Robertson's unique geometry. The guy has a Jordanesque 6-foot, 8-inch wingspan.

Doctari No. 1 starts with a Granite Mountain Arms double square bridge African Magnum Mauser '98 action. The name alone sounds hell for stout. Obviously, this action has all the features that have made the Mauser 98 *de rigueur* for African dangerous game – no-nonsense double-locking lugs, third safety lug, controlled-round feed, that massive leaf-spring claw extractor, a standing blade ejector and a three-position shroud safety, all CNC machined, hand-finished, hand-lapped and case-hardened.

The steel, drop-box magnum magazine is precision machined with a steel, straddle-style floorplate

with push-button trigger bow release. Good though the GMA action is, Gordner tweaks and refines it to make it Kilimanjaro perfect. Then he affixes to it a chrome-moly #6 contour Krieger barrel cut at 25.5 inches. While long for convenience in brush, the length is necessary to achieve the perfect "between-the-hands" balance for Robertson and his unusual length-of-pull stock. Convenience is important in any rifle, but perfect balance can be a life-saver in a dangerous game rifle.

While Robertson wanted blued steel, Eike talked him into the more durable, corrosion-resistant finish of his Kilimanjaro Black ceramic, which is tailored to match most matte black scopes. The ceramic finish looks as good as matte bluing, it just doesn't rust and wear off like bluing.

The barreled action was fitted into Kilimanjaro's proprietary Stealth Lamination, fancy walnut stock. Banish those plywood images from your head. While "fancy walnut" and "lamination" don't seem to belong

in the same sentence, they combine nicely in these unique stocks.

A Kilimanjaro Stealth Lamination stock starts as a high-grade walnut blank that's sliced lengthwise. A thin section from its center is reversed, flipped and bonded under 50,000 pounds of pressure to the outer slabs. The result is a gorgeous, highly figured walnut stock with lamination lines barely visible on the top and bottom edges of the butt. When showing me his rifle, Robertson explained: "Most people don't even see this until I point it out to them."

Given the heavy recoil of the 505 Gibbs and other dangerous-game calibers for which Doctari rifles are chambered, the laminated strength of these stocks is more than sensible because it's stronger than one-piece walnut, particularly through the wrist or the pistol grip. And on Doctari No. 1, this is surprisingly narrow.

"You can't carry a dangerous-game rifle at port arms, ready for action, for any great length of time," Robertson admitted. "I end up carrying it so . . ."

He upended the Doctari so the top of the barrel was resting on his shoulder, much as I carry an upland shotgun. "You need just the right angle to the pistol grip or your wrist gets bent at an awkward angle. See?" I saw. And then understood why Doctari No. 1 sports an unusual Prince of Wales grip usually reserved for shotguns.

A sharp, tight grip with a flared cap certainly enhances shooter control and accuracy at the bench, but it does nothing for carry-comfort and speed in the brush. Dangerous game hunting is all about comfort and speed or, as Robertson told me, "... the handling qualities of a Purdey double. Combined with the ballistics of a howitzer!" He laughed, then turned deadly serious.

"I've been charged three times and there's no time to aim. You just point and shoot. So we designed this rifle to have shotgun-handling qualities. And succeeded."

Critical to fast shooting are the right sights, and Doctari No. 1 has two. They both work. This is no small thing. With

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most rifles stocked for scope sights, the comb is so high that you can't get down easily to use the open sights. Shape the comb for proper eye alignment with open sights and you have to raise your cheek off the stock to use a scope.

Kilimanjaro solved this conundrum by building a custom mount for a ghost ring rear sight. Gordner engineered the base, fully adjustable for windage and elevation, to mount on the rifle's bridge rails machined to fit Talley quick-release rings. The shooter can switch from ghost ring open sights to a scope in seconds just by turning the quick-release levers. Head position on the stock remains the same.

"While a scope might not sit atop my 505 Gibbs any time soon," Robertson admitted, "anyone getting a Doctari in, say, 416 Rigby or 458 Lott, can fit a scope and use it with soft-points for buffalo or plains game."

The rifle's front sight features interchangeable NECG inserts - fiber optic pipes - under a hinged hood. A hole in the "roof" admits skylight to activate the fiber optic while the surrounding matte-black hood blocks distracting side light. Or flip the hood completely back when entering deep shadows for a wounded buffalo.

I had the opportunity to shoot Doctari No. 1 at Monty Kalogeras' Safari Shooting School in Texas last summer. Unfortunately, I was nursing a SLAP tear in my right shoulder at the time. To make matters worse, I concentrated so hard on hitting the target, a small watermelon at 40 yards (didn't want to embarrass myself), that I held the Kilimanjaro like a .22 rimfire instead of the big bore it is. The resultant recoil inspired me to try no second shot. I did terminate the melon.

Lest you think the rifle or cartridge at fault, I can tell you that Monty, who is smaller than I, fired it repeatedly with no more ill effects than perhaps a glazed look and slurred speech, but that could have been the Texas heat. Seriously, recoil is well controlled. The rifle is a gem precisely built to its owner's needs and desires - just as every Doctari dangerous game rifle will be built for its new owner. And you get to pick the caliber. 🐾