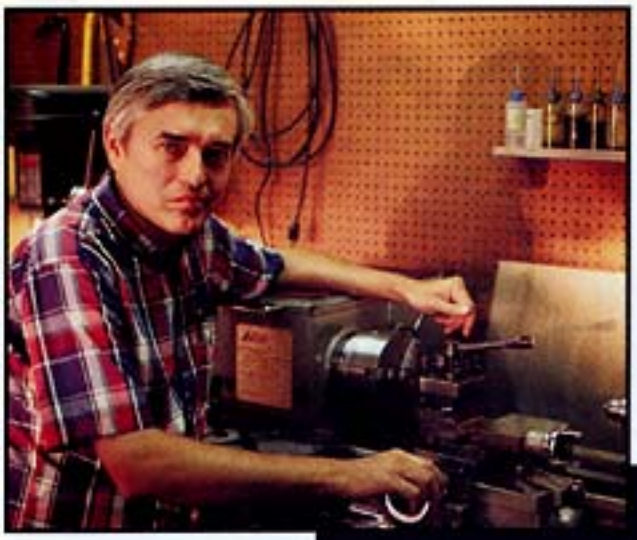
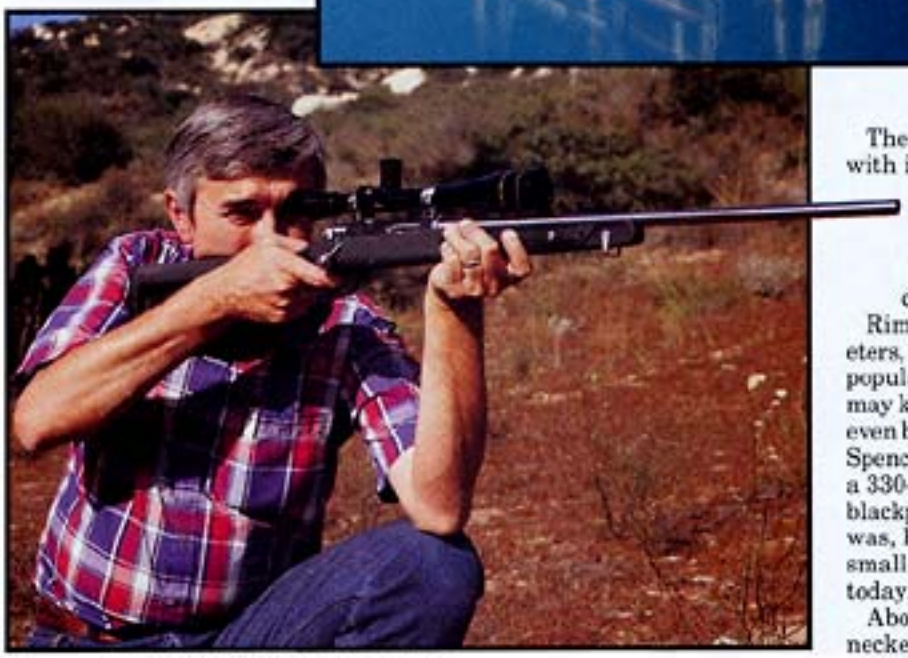


Steve Chernicky, one of the creators of the .17 Rimfire, is a benchrest competitor. He was on the Shooting Sports Research Council for the U.S. Shooting Team, and was director of the U.S. Shooting Team's Ultra Match (high-accuracy .22 rimfire ammunition) project until it was turned over to the Federal Cartridge Co. He developed the .17 Rimfire as a super-accurate, effective, low-noise, low-ricochet-potential, 200-yard varmint cartridge.



A MUZZLE VELOCITY of 2700 fps is a healthy one from any rifle cartridge, but that much speed from a rimfire round in a .22 Magnum-type rifle got my attention *fast*. The round that produces this velocity is a .22 Magnum case necked down to take a .17-caliber, 20-grain bullet. It's one of the quietest, lightest-kicking rounds I've ever fired, and I've been shooting varmint rifles for more than 35 years. It shoots flat enough and carries enough punch to take varmints out to 200 paces, and with half-inch five-shot groups at 100 yards, it's accurate enough for head-shooting small game far beyond the range of the .22 LR or .22 Magnum.

Before you get too excited, let me hasten to add that you can't rush out and buy rifle and ammo in this chambering from a major manufacturer—yet. There's no immediate commitment that it will be available commercially, though several major rifle and ammunition manufacturers are looking at the possibilities. Actually, some of them have done more than just look: I have fired experimental rifles and ammunition and one preproduction rifle. While a lot of companies seem interested in the concept, it's like the old story of which comes first, the chicken or the egg. Rifle manufacturers won't proceed without ammunition being readily available, and ammunition manufacturers aren't committing themselves to investing in production tooling without knowing there will be lots of rifles out there for people to buy ammunition for.

Who Is Interested?

Remington, the only U.S. firm that has the capability to introduce both rifles and ammunition at once, apparently isn't interested. The company has already had its go with a bottleneck rimfire cartridge in the form of the 5mm Remington Magnum introduced 22 years ago. The story of the failure of that cartridge, which was more expensive, less versatile, and only a slight ballistic improvement over the .22 Magnum, is history. But Federal, Olin (Winchester), and CCI are looking at producing the .17 Rimfire, and I know for a fact that Ruger, Mauser, U.S. Repeating Arms, Thompson/Center (in its Contender pistol and carbine), and Marlin are all considering chambering rifles for it. I'd call that pretty promising.

The .17 Rimfire that I've been experimenting with is far removed from the .20-caliber 5mm Remington Magnum. Before I get into a discussion of the current .17 Rimfire, however, let me briefly list a chronological background of bottleneck rimfire cartridges.

Rimfires firing bullets of a variety of diameters, from the .22 BB Cap to the .58 Miller, were popular prior to the turn of the century. As you may know, most of them used straight cases, but even bottleneck rimfires are not new. The .56-46 Spencer cartridge, introduced in 1866 and firing a 330-grain .44-caliber bullet over 45 grains of blackpowder, was a bottleneck rimfire round. It was, however, a far cry from the varmint and small-game rounds that rimfires have become today.

About 1920, A.J. Jones of Portland, Oregon, necked the standard .22 LR down to .14 caliber