The "Revolutionary" .17 Rimfire

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produce a solid 2700 fps with 20-grain bullets (22- or 24-inch barrels), are impressive, not only in terms of velocity from a rimfire cartridge, but in terms of accuracy. All of Chernicky's rifles that I fired produced exceptionally tight groups when the wind permitted.

Wind is a definite factor in .17-caliber shooting. Varminters using the .17 Remington centerfire round have long recognized this problem; even with a velocity of 4000 fps, the .17 Remington drifts more than much-slower .22 centerfires. Drift is even greater with the rimfire round because the velocity is so much less. Hence, time of flight is greater, and time of flight is the primary factor in wind drift. (The other major factor, ballistic coefficient—a product of sectional density, which is a product of bullet weight—is not in a .17's favor, either.)

I remember calling foxes and wanting to preserve the pelts when the .22 Magnum was the best commercial solution. This new .17 Rimfire beats the heck out of the .22 Magnum in this department. It's a lot more accurate and produces much higher velocity, for one thing, possibly getting to the animal before it has a chance to move and spoil bullet placement. More importantly, none of the 25-grain bullets fired in any of the .17s were particularly destructive. This is to be expected with the Hornady and Remington bullets, designed for .17 Remington velocities. The bullets custom made by Chernicky perform well out to about 125 yards, but are also too tough to expand violently on small varmints at the longer ranges the cartridge is capable of.

Friends and I took a number of ground squirrels with the .17 Rimfire, at distances from 150 to 200 yards, and relatively small exit holes were the rule. We also took one cottontail rabbit with the .17. It destroyed no more meat than a .22 LR would have; the rabbit was completely edible. Apparently, the bullets are fine as-is for small game at these distances.

Chernicky's bullets have a jacket wall thickness of .012 inch near the base. He speculates that a jacket wall thickness of about .008 inch would be ideal to produce the explosive expansion with the round that most varminters want on inedible game.

Little Fouling & High Accuracy

One of the great things about this cartridge is that, because of its velocity level and the small quantity of powder it consumes, it doesn't foul a rifle's bore like the much-maligned .17 Remington centerfire. Chernicky reports firing 500- to 600-round strings *without* cleaning the bore, with a continuing high level of accuracy. A barrel with several thousand rounds through it shows no appreciable sign of throat erosion, either, and looks almost new.

The rifles I've talked about so far in this review were all custom barreled by Kopp or Chernicky. I fired yet another rifle, however, this one right out of the Mauser factory. It's the Model 201 bolt action in .17 Rimfire, and it commonly delivered half-inch five-shot groups at 100 yards.

I fired the Mauser rifle with three different experimental loadings using Chernicky's 20-grain bullets. The lowest-velocity loading clocked only 2182 fps 12 feet from the muzzle, and produced 2.7-inch, five-shot accuracy at 100 yards. Load number two metered 2639 fps with 2.3-inch accuracy, while the third load, the fastest I fired in this rifle, clocked 2678 fps with .5-inch accuracy.

Check Out These Groups

I fired Chernicky's three rifles each with one load only. His converted Ruger 77/22 Magnum was fitted with a 22-inch barrel and a Leupold 12X scope. His Remington 40XR was fitted with a 24-inch barrel and a Leupold 6.5-20X scope. The H&K Model 300 wore a 24-inch barrel and a Leupold 12X scope. The Remington averaged 1.1 inches, the Ruger 1.0, and the H&K .82 inch with this load.

These groups were fired in a fairly stiff wind. If the flyers I felt were due to the wind were eliminated, the averages would have been .6 inch for the Remington, .8 for the Ruger, and .5 inch for the H&K. Remember, the H&K is a semi-auto, and ammunition was fed from the magazine! This usually buggers up the bullet or bends the case slightly, neither of which is an aid to precision. But I didn't experience either of these problems with Chernicky's .17 H&K. This rifle produced numerous half-inch groups, and it functioned flawlessly.

Velocity averaged 2739 fps for the Remington (24-inch barrel), 2701 for the Ruger (22-inch barrel), and 2683 for the H&K (24-inch barel). The Remington and H&K rifles were fitted with Shilen tubes while the Ruger wore a rechambered .17 Remington barrel.

I believe the .17 Rimfire cartridge has the potential to be one hot seller in this country. If factory rifles and ammunition are as accurate as the Chernicky and Mauser rifles I've fired, the cartridge would create quite a stir. It needs a velocity of at least 2600 fps, I feel, with a 20-grain bullet (22-inch barrel) to suc-