

Old Mausers

By [Randy D. Smith](#)



Photo by Randy D. Smith.

I have a flaw in my character, an Achilles' heel if you will allow. Foremost among my "gun nut" afflictions, even greater than my interest in the in-line muzzleloader or slug shotgun, is a fascination with the Mauser bolt action rifle.

I log onto the Internet gun auctions and the first search term I always enter is "Mauser." The second is usually "8mm." I pass by the new rifles at gun shows and search out those dark corners of the sales racks where some old Mauser has been shoved out of popular inspection. And, while you may read the arguments of other writers who curse the sin of sporting conversions of these fine rifles, especially the ones in original pristine condition, I search them out. You can find sporterized 8mm Mausers within any price range from \$75 to well over \$1,000, depending on the quality of the work. Some of these rifles are nothing more than chopped up pieces of trash and others are beautiful examples of the gun maker's art.

I prefer the middle of the road sporting Mausers, especially those that were converted in the 1920's and 30's by a skilled gunsmith, although some of the newer M48 conversions are not bad. I am not a talented craftsman. I do not have the patience, the training, or the inclination to do fine work but I love to take a good old Swedish Husqvarna Model 96 sporting conversion, or a German Model 98 Sporting Mauser in rough shape and restore them to modern looking sporting rifles.

These old hunters usually have badly scarred or weak stocks, are in need of a good cleaning, or bluing, or have some other surface imperfections. Sometimes they are just the victims of shoddy conversion work. I know that as long as the bore is good and the action sound, these old rifles can be lifted from the dead and brought back to life. With a little tender loving care, old Mausers can be brought back to their former glory and continue life as a very effective bolt action sporting rifle.

In fact, my current plans are to take two restored Husqvarnas, an 8mm and a 9.3X62mm, on my return trip to Africa. These rifles are among my favorites. For what I have invested in the purchase and restoration of the 9.3X62 I could have had a new mid-level Winchester, Browning, or Weatherby.

Peter Paul Mauser, the genius behind these rifles, was born in Oberndorff, Neckar, in 1838. Mauser worked in an arms plant prior to entering the German Army in 1859. Working with his brother Wilhelm Mauser (1834-1882), he developed a needle gun that was adopted by the German Army in 1871.

Mauser's first successful design was a single-shot, 11mm, bolt-action rifle that became the forerunner of many improved designs. In 1880, Mauser applied a tubular magazine to his rifle, and it became the main battle rifle of the Prussia Army in 1884.

A new and improved Mauser model was adopted by Spain as the 7x57mm Modelo Espanol 1893, which began the evolution of the Mauser rifle to become the most desired military arm for half a century. This rifle was manufactured by Loewe & Co. in Berlin, and by Mauser for Turkey in 7.65x53mm with a magazine cut off device as the Turk Model 1893. The Spanish model was adopted by Brazil and other Latin American nations.

Derivatives were adopted by Chile as the Modelo 1895, China as the Model 1895, Serbia as the Model 1899, and by other nations under various designations in 7x57mm or a short version of the 7x57mm used by one Boer contract based on the 7.65mmx53mm case (the 7x53mm), or 7.65x53mm, as desired by the purchaser. Sweden adopted a 6.5x55mm carbine as the Model 1894 and a long rifle as the Model 1896.

In 1897 Mauser produced the Mauser Gewehr magazine-rifle. It is generally conceded that the Mauser Model 98 is the most successful bolt-action rifle ever designed. Peter Paul Mauser died in 1914 and did not see how devastating the German Mauser was in WW I.

In 1903 an improved form of 7.92x57 ammunition was introduced. This is what we call the 8mm Mauser. It featured a lighter "spitzer" (pointed) bullet of .323" diameter (as opposed to .318") and provided superior ballistic potential. This required modification of existing barrels and sights to the new standard. A certain number of Gewehr Model 1888 rifles were also converted to use the new ammunition. An "S" was stamped on the receiver to indicate conversion with the rear sight calibrated from minimum setting of 200 meters to 400 meters.

In 1907 all regular front line troops were equipped with the 1898 pattern rifle, including a special variation carbine with small diameter receiver ring and stacking rod, the Karabiner Model 1898AZ, dating from 1904. This had a sight calibrated from 300 to 2000 meters. The "A" stood for "with bayonet", the "Z" stood for stacking pyramid, meaning carbine Model 1898 with bayonet attachment point and stacking rod device. Reserves remained armed with the Model 1888 pattern rifle.

During WW I, both the Gew.98 and Kar.98AZ were modified. The rear sights and a stock bushing which could be used to dismount the firing pin and also to lock weapons together in a rack or shipping case were the most notable changes.

Germany lost most of her small arms after WW I. There was a strict limitation on new arms manufacturing and many German gunsmiths used Model 98 Mausers as the basis for sporting rifle conversions. These can often be identified by stocks with severely thin forearms and wrist areas. Many of these sport stocks were formed from original military stocks to make them light, fast handling, and delicate in appearance. Most have had the original military stampings ground off and are usually without serial numbers. Sometimes the gunsmith is identified but often he is not.

Under the Versailles Treaty the German Army was limited in many ways. Only carbines were permitted to be produced. A new type of "carbine" was introduced in the early 1920's, known as the Karabiner Model 1898b. The new rifle had a long Gewehr 98 type barrel, tangent rear sight, wider lower band with side sling attachment bar and side butt attachment point, and a turned down bolt handle.

All rifles in service were modified to conform to this pattern. New manufacture had an "S" for Simson & Co. in Suhl stamped on the receiver. This was the only entity allowed by the treaty to manufacture small arms for the Reichwehr. The old Karabiner Model 1898AZ was officially adopted as the Kar.98a.

In 1933 Mauser Werke in Oberndorf began producing a design to compete with Belgian and Czech Mauser export rifles. It was essentially a Kar98b with shorter 24" barrel. It

could be ordered with horizontal bolt handle as a short rifle, or turned down bolt handle as a carbine. It was marked on the rail "Standard Model of 1933."

This design was also made for domestic use by the DRP, the German Post Office, and many went to paramilitary formations such as the SA, the SS and other NSDAP (NAZI Party) units.

In 1934 a new variation, the "Standard Model of 1934" appeared. This lacked finger grooves in the forearm, which dated back to the Kar.98b design. This design was adopted as the Kar.98k and was made by Mauser, Sauer & Sohn and later others. A receiver ring code was adopted to indicate manufacturer and date of fabrication. The design was not officially adopted until June 21, 1935. ERMA, Berlin Luebecker Werke, and the old DWM factory called Berlin Borsigwalde, under Mauser Werke management, produced this design.

As the years went on, other plants in Germany and occupied states began making the Kar.98k to the standard pattern. A new marking scheme was adopted and, as WW II advanced, production short cuts were introduced. These essentially cheapened the design and degraded the finish in order to lower costs and increase production. A KrigsModel variation became the norm and this led to cruder variations in the last days of the war.

The French produced very late war variants of the 98k at Mauser Werke from June 1945, receiver codes SVW45 and SVW46. Many of these were issued during the Indochina war 1946-54.

Yugoslavia produced the last production Mauser rifle at the Kragujevac arsenal. This was the Model 1948 98k Short Rifle, otherwise called the Yugoslavian M48.

Yugoslavia produced quite a few of these rifles. Manufactured all of the way into the 50's they became obsolete with the onset of the semi-automatic battle rifle. They were stored under periodic inspection for the past 50 years. These rifles have been offered to the surplus market in new to like new condition. These 8mm rifles are excellent shooters that are well made and offer a unique opportunity for the shooter and collector to purchase a like new variant of the Mauser 98k. The M48 is a little shorter in barrel length, and thus overall length, compared to the original German 98k.

I had experimented with several military sporting conversions before trying a Mauser, including the Springfield 03-A3, the Enfield P-14, the British Enfield and the Mosin-Nagant, but I was never entirely satisfied with any of them. The P-14's seem awkward

to me and the British Enfields are crude, although not nearly as crude as the Mosin-Nagant. While Springfields are nice enough, they are getting expensive and good examples are difficult to locate.

Model 98 GEW 8mm Mauser



Photo by Randy D. Smith.

I first got hooked on Mausers when I made a bid on an old GEW 8mm sporter at a household auction. A lady's estate was being sold off. Among a few old guns was this rifle that her husband had brought back from Germany after the end of WW II. The legend is that he found it in the closet of a bombed out house. He brought it home, perhaps hunted with it for a few seasons. Then it rested in his closet for seventeen years after his death, until his wife passed away.

The original bolt had been converted to a severely turned down butter knife pattern and a new ivory bead front sight added. It still had the original military rear sight. The original military stock had been trimmed back to a very slim profile with an elegantly checkered wrist. It retained the original military butt plate. The stock was dry, scarred and chipped, but you could see that it had once been a handsome piece.

The length of pull was much too short for me. Other than a "GEW 98" stamped in the side of the receiver there were no other visible markings. When I examined the rifle I realized that it had not been fired much. The rifling was excellent and the bolt functioned as crisply as a new piece. I made a bid against virtually no competition, and took it home.

I gave the rifle a good cleaning and a cold blue job to bring back some of its old luster. I removed and carefully stored the fragile stock, then ordered an inexpensive Corelite Mossy Oak pattern replacement stock over the Internet. The action dropped into the stock with no alterations. Even the 90-degree bolt cleared the stock with no need to rasp in a slot.

I purchased some Winchester 8mm hunting ammunition and took it to the range. From my shooting chair, my first three rounds grouped inside three inches at 100 yards with open military sights! The old rifle fed and shucked the cartridges perfectly. It did indeed function as well as any new rifle. I thought I had myself quite a bargain.

I hunted deer with it that fall using Winchester loads and found it to be an excellent short range whitetail rifle in spite of what I have read about the lack luster performance of American 8mm sporting loads. The rifle's main limitation is the sights, but I refuse to alter them.

This rifle makes a great saddle and truck gun, adequate for big game hunting out to a hundred yards. Beyond that range it is difficult to take precise aim, but I want to leave the rifle unaltered.

9.3X62mm Husqvarna



Photo by Randy D. Smith.

When I was hunting in South Africa I received my first introduction to the 9.3X62mm cartridge. I shot a CZ Model 620 chambered for 9.3X62 and liked the way it performed. I decided to read more about the round when I came home. (See "The 9.3x62mm" on the G&S Online *Rifle Cartridge Page*.)

To make a long story short, I'd say that it comes pretty close to being the "Gun that Won Africa." With 232-250 grain bullets it is roughly comparable in performance to the .350 Remington Magnum; with heavy 270-293 grain bullets it is not far behind the .375 Holland & Holland Magnum. The basic strength of this cartridge was that it had enough raw power for big game and relatively manageable recoil.

What sealed its popularity was that it was chambered in the inexpensive Mauser bolt action rifle. It was the poor man's big game rifle used by thousands of farmers, game control officers, and professional hunters in literally all of the African colonies. It is still considered one of the premier hunting cartridges for African game and a popular big game round in Northern Europe.

The only reason for its relative obscurity was the destruction of German arms plants during WW II and a shortage of newly manufactured ammunition for a decade after. It was replaced by the .338 Winchester Magnum and the longer .375 Holland & Holland Magnum. Today, the round is available in rifles through all major European manufacturers and is enjoying a modest revival in North America.

I became intrigued with the 9.3X62, and when I happened upon a 1940's vintage Model 96 Swedish Mauser action Husqvarna on the Internet I bought it. I believe that I paid much less for the rifle than I would have otherwise because of its caliber. It is a beautiful example of the European big game rifle with fixed Express sights and Turkish walnut stock. Husqvarna rifles are known for their Swedish steel and fine craftsmanship.

Tradewinds imported a similar rifle with a more modern safety system in the late 1960's. The rifle is very similar to the modern CZ Model 550 Safari Magnum. CZ currently offers an American style Model 550 chambered in 9.3X62.

Finding inexpensive ammunition was a problem, however. American big game loads tend to run over \$50 for a box of twenty. If you are a reloader this isn't a problem, but I'm not.

After some searching I located some 285-grain soft point Sellier & Belloit hunting rounds through Mid-South Shooters Supply (www.midsouthshooterssupply.com) for around \$22 a box. I got hooked on Sellier & Belloit ammunition after purchasing some .30-06 Springfield cartridges through Cabelas and later some excellent .38 Special and 9mm Parabellum rounds for my handguns. This Czech ammunition is of first-class quality and is usually very reasonably priced. This stuff is certainly adequate for deer, elk or even moose size game.

When I received the ammunition I was disheartened to learn that it was a bit too long for the Husqvarna and cartridges stuck in the magazine. After more investigation I learned that original 9.3X62 ammunition was round nosed and, in fact, a bit shorter than most modern soft point rounds. After some slight grinding of the lead bullet tips on the Sellier and Belloit rounds, the rifle fed and grouped them beautifully.

I liked the rifle so much that I decided to have the stock refinished and the metal reblued by a professional gunsmith. This was not inexpensive, but the restored Husqvarna is gorgeous.

Later, I found some Yugoslavian soft point 285-grain 9.3X62 PRVI Partizan hunting ammunition through Grafs and Sons, Inc. (www.Grafs.com) that was priced a bit lower at \$20. These cartridges also need some shortening to fit the Husqvarna magazine. Midway USA carries premium A-Square heavy hunting loads with 286 grain bullets in Monolithic Solid, Dead Tough and Lion Load configurations. When I go back to Africa this rifle is going with me.

Turkish 8mm Mauser



Photo by Randy D. Smith.

I was elk hunting in Utah as the guest of my good friend, Doctor Gary White, and while going through the goodies in his shop I noticed a couple of sawdust covered old Mausers stacked in the corner. Doc said that they were old Turkish rifles that he intended to make into sporters some day but had never gotten around to. I examined them and eventually took one home with me.

Most of the Turkish Mausers now for sale are a version of the Model 98, made in Turkey in the early 40's. These Model 38 rifles are fairly plentiful and cheap, and as of yet have no historical value. This means that they are perfect raw material for the amateur gunsmith.

These are long rifles of late 19th and early 20th century military pattern with a straight bolt sticking out at a horizontal angle from the stock. My rifle was packed with Cosmoline and it took some time to clean it. Turkish Mausers are available from many sources for prices ranging from under \$50 to just over \$100. The quality varies from poor to reasonably acceptable and accuracy falls into the same range of categories.

Doc also sent along seventy rounds of corrosive Turkish 8mm military ammunition. I took that old relic to the range just for the experience of shooting a Mauser battle rifle. About one out of twenty of the old rounds failed to fire on the first trigger pull, but I had a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon burning up that ammo.

The surprising experience was that the rifle not only functioned very smoothly, it was still accurate and dependable. I liked the heft and handling characteristics of it. I could easily see that it was an excellent and rugged tool for the combat soldier.

More than that, I realized just how efficient these old rifles are if the bore is good. Without any alteration at all, these Turkish Mausers would make acceptable big game rifles; the perfect rifle to store in that hunting cabin for emergencies.

The better ones would make fine sporter conversions, but the expense can be prohibitive. In today's market there are some fine new commercial rifles from companies such as Howa, Remington, Savage and Weatherby that can be had for much less than a custom conversion. And these new rifles will usually exceed the performance of any of the old Mausers.

However, you can mount a good composite sporter stock for between \$70-\$250 and still use the military sights. Personally, unless the stock is in pretty bad shape, I'd probably leave it as is. I don't mind updating an old sporter, but a complete customization of a military rifle with new barrel, turned down bolt, drilling and tapping for a scope, safety revision, and new stock probably isn't worth the expense compared to the new rifles I've mentioned.

I took mine home, blued it, stained the stock, and stuck it in my gun safe. I drag it out periodically just for the sheer fun of shooting it, and it makes an interesting comparison piece to my other Mauser rifles. However, for a serious hunting rifle I would opt for the Yugoslavian M48, as the Turkish rifles are pretty well used up.

Husqvarna 8mm Custom Carbine



Photo by Randy D. Smith.

The man selling the rifle over the Internet described the rifle this way: "What can I say? This poor rifle has seen it all. Must shoot well though as it has 20 notches in the fore end to indicate successful hunts. Started life as a standard small ring Husqvarna sporter in 8x57mm (8mm Mauser), then someone chopped the barrel back to 19.5". They then removed the open sights and installed a side scope mount. Later they switched to Weaver bases on top so they filled the side mount holes but didn't patch the stock. Speaking of the stock, it started to crack at the tang (common with these rifles) so they put in a huge brass crossbolt and repaired the crack. On the bright side, it functions perfectly, has good headspace, and a bright and sharp bore. Perfect rifle to loan to a brother-in-law or keep as a truck gun."

Other than the stock the rifle didn't look too bad in the photo and the seller had mentioned the critical elements of concern, headspace and bore condition. I made a bid and I owned it. When it arrived I was more than pleasantly surprised. The stock was in bad shape but the rest of the rifle was in pristine condition. I purchased a black Ramline synthetic stock and with a bit of rasping to the bolt slot to allow the bolt to fully lock down in firing position it fit very well. I cold blued some wear spots and fitted a favorite 1.5-6X Bausch & Lomb 4200 Elite scope on Leupold rings.

When I was finished I had a great looking carbine with an excellent bolt spring and good trigger. I couldn't wait to get it to the range where it did very well.

During my cartridge search I found some Bosnian Igman 170-grain soft point cartridges through J and C Sales (www.jandcsales.com) over the Internet at \$40 for 100 rounds. I also found some excellent FMJ 8mm 180-grain Greek Olympic cartridges through Mid Way USA (www.midwayusa.com) for less than \$7 for a box of twenty. All of the commercial rounds I have mentioned are non-corrosive and accurate.

Being active in muzzleloading, I don't have a problem with cleaning a rifle after firing corrosive ammunition. With the many grades of good bore solvents on the market it is not difficult. Non-corrosive military surplus ammunition is also commonly available. I've made it a rule not to shoot corrosive ammunition in my better 8mm rifles but I often use the stuff in the older ones. Clean up usually takes less than ten minutes.

The Husqvarna carbine shot excellent groups with both the Greek and Bosnian rounds. As with any carbine in .303, .308, .30-06, 7.62X54R, or 8x57mm it has an uncomfortably loud report and warrants the use of first class hearing protection at the range. Of course, ear protection should always be worn no matter what you are shooting.

The only problem I have with this rifle is that the three-position flag safety does not clear the scope, so the gun has no effective safety when the scope is mounted. This is a potentially dangerous situation and in its present condition this is not a rifle that I would loan out or put in the hands of anyone other than the most experienced shooters. There are several scope-friendly safety conversions available for installation by a competent gunsmith.

Military Mausers are commonly available in .308 Winchester, .30-06 Springfield, 7X57mm, 6.5X55mm and 8mm JS. All of these rounds are excellent hunting cartridges. Conversions have been built in almost every conceivable caliber. Some of the finest bolt action hunting rifles in the world are based on custom Mauser military action conversions. If a person is careful and waits for the right opportunity, an excellent sporter conversion can be found at a bargain price, especially in 8x57mm.

Even with American loads, the 8mm Mauser is a great hunting round. I have been very impressed with its performance on deer and feral hogs. The American loaded 8mm doesn't compare very well to a .30-06 on paper, but in the field you are not going to notice much difference. I'd venture to say that most hunters would find the 8mm Mauser round to be highly accurate and effective.

With a minimum of skills and some of the fine optional updates available through retailers, especially over the Internet, it is not difficult at all to set up your rifle with some excellent ammunition and refinements at reasonable prices. Many of the Yugo M48 Mausers are in literally brand new condition and are good values in today's gun market. Boyd's (www.boydboys.com) markets custom sporter stocks for this model.

Another quality I like about the old military Mauser conversions is their absolutely dependable nature in all types of extreme weather. The same Mauser action that was designed for use in war is almost foolproof in the worse dust, mud, snow and rain a hunt can dish out. I've heard stories of modern bolt actions, especially close tolerance European rifles, completely jamming in the penetrating dust and grime of Africa. I seriously doubt that you will ever hear about such things happening with these old Mausers.

You want to be careful when buying an old Mauser. Have a competent gunsmith check out any rifle you question. Be sure of the rifle's caliber, which is sometimes not marked, and be patient until just the right old Mauser comes along. More times than not you'll end up with more invested in the rifle than you can get hope to get back. But then again, how is that different from any new gun?

I like old Mausers for their fine design, beauty, performance, and dependability. They are definitely an addiction that I have no intention of breaking.