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More on the 17-caliber Rimfire Cartridge
by
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Issue 437 was a wealth of information on the 17-caliber rimfire cartridge.

On page 12, Lew Curtis' information on the High Standard 17 of decades past began. Page 20's SHOT Show 2004 report mentioned the new 17 Mach 2 cartridge, then Scott Logue's Industry News (page 28) gave us more on this interesting round.

I would like to add what I have learned about the new little "seventeens."

One of the great surprises in the cartridge world during the last few years has been the tremendous sudden popularity of the 17-caliber rimfire. In just a short period of time, an entirely new category of cartridge has arisen.

The first full-production 17 rimfire cartridge, designated "17 Hornady Magnum Rimfire" (17 HRM) was introduced just a few years ago. It was developed during 2001, and made its industry debut early in 2002 at the February 2002 SHOT Show, held in Las Vegas, Nevada. Its introduction found a number of firearms manufacturers already committed to offering firearms in that caliber. In the rifle field, Anschutz, Chipmunk, Marlin and Ruger announced rifles for the new cartridge. Taurus offered a revolver. A semiautomatic pistol was even offered, the "Cheetah" by Volquartsen. Other manufacturers soon followed suit with 17 HMR chamberings.

The 17 HMR was well-suited to firearms that could handle the 22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire (22 WMR) cartridge. For, in truth, the new 17 was developed by necking down a 22 WMR cartridge case and using the proper charge of powder to propel the new 17-grain 17-caliber jacketed bullet. The bullet was a tiny boattail spitzer, which gave excellent accuracy and was reportedly effective on varmints and small game.

That the 17 HMR quickly became popular is probably an understatement.

Another introduction, much more subdued, was made in 2002. For some time, rumors had circulated that the Mexican firm of Aguila was working on a 17-caliber cartridge based on the 22 Long Rifle (22 LR) cartridge case. Such a cartridge, called the 17 Aguila, was advertised by Aguila at the 2002 SHOT Show, but no specimens were available. Volquartsen planned to offer the Cheetah pistol also in 17 Aguila, but had no source of ammunition.

As 2002 passed, the popularity of the 17 HMR increased. Still, the usefulness of a Long Rifle-length 17 was apparent. Such a cartridge could be adapted to any type of rifle, pistol or revolver that used the 22 LR cartridge.

In January 2003, High Standard Manufacturing Company, together with Aguila, announced the introduction of a new 17 rimfire, the 17 High Standard. The cartridge was very similar to the original 17 Aguila. The concept had interested High Standard as a possibility for use in their semiautomatic pistols designed for the 22 LR cartridge.

Digging through old company history, High Standard's Alan Aronstein was surprised to learn that the company had actually developed a 17-caliber cartridge based on a necked-down 22 LR case back in 1940. At least one pistol had been made in that chambering. World War II apparently stopped developmental work, and the project lay forgotten. (Note that this information differs from that presented in Issue 437, which speculates that the High Standard 17 was developed in the early 1950s. I was not there, and can only pass on what was related to me.)

With this background, High Standard and Aguila got together on the project. Reportedly, the original High Standard round was only slightly different in dimensions than the specifications of the 17 Aguila. Slight modifications were made, and the redesigned cartridge was introduced in *Shotgun News* on January 20, 2003 as the "17 High Standard." With its 20grain bullet, the pressure was balanced to that of the 22 LR so that any Hi-Standard semiautomatic pistol could be converted to the new 17 by simply changing the barrel.

A month later, at the February 2003 SHOT Show held in Orlando, Florida, the designation of the cartridge had been changed slightly to "17 Hi-Standard." This was puzzling, but there was really no lack of logic in this change. Both spellings have long been appropriate in different contexts. The company has always been called "High Standard", and the pistol models designated "Hi-Standard." Thus, either could have been used, and the shorter name was apparently the one chosen.

Still, although demonstration models were shown in early 2003, no production pistols were available in the new 17 Hi-Standard (17 HS) caliber. When a year had passed, Aguila still had not begun producing the ammunition. At the February 2004 Las Vegas SHOT Show, an Aguila representative told me that the cartridge had not yet been approved by the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers Institute (SAAMI).

During that year, much had been happening. Hornady and CCI had been jointly working on a different 22 Long Rifle-length 17. After reported trials using a necked-down Long Rifle case, they decided on a slightly longer case - the length of the case used with the 22 Stinger hypervelocity cartridge. The longer cartridge case, loaded with the same 17-grain bullet of the 17 HMR, provided a cartridge with the overall length of the 22 LR.

The new cartridge was introduced earlier this year at the February, 2004 SHOT Show, in Las Vegas, as the "17 Mach 2." Original plans were to have a relatively inconspicuous introduction at the SHOT Show, then make the official introduction at the National Rifle Association (NRA) annual meetings and exhibits in Pittsburgh, during April 2004. By now, the shooting world is well aware of the 17 Mach 2, although few people have actually seen the cartridge.

Production plans were for Hornady to supply the bullets. St. Marks Powder (St. Marks, Florida) would supply special powder and CCI would assemble loaded ammunition. Eley of England also planned to manufacture the 17 Mach 2 ammunition.

The attraction of the 17 rimfire is obvious. Hornady reported selling 146 million rounds of its 17 HMR ammunition in 2003. The 17 HMR has established a place for itself and has now become a widely-accepted "standard" cartridge.

The new shorter 17 Mach 2 cartridge will not be commercially available until September 2004. However, a number of companies, among them Anschutz, Browning, CZ, Marlin, North American Arms, Ruger, Savage, Taurus and Thompson/Center, are planning to offer a variety of firearms for the new 17 Mach 2.

Where does this scenario leave the 17 Hi-Standard? Is there room in the rimfire field for more than one Long Rifle length 17 cartridge? It will be interesting to see how this plays out.

At any rate, the 17 rimfire has made a niche for itself, and that niche is expanding. Those of us interested in ammunition have a rare ringside seat at the beginning of a whole new class of cartridges.



The 17-caliber rimfire cartridge has provided us with a surprising amount of interest in the past few years. From left, the 17 Hi-Standard, a sample round made by Aguila; the new 17 Mach 2, as made by CCI; the 17 Mach 2, as made by Eley, and the earlier 17 Hornady Magnum Rimfire, the cartridge that created the present 17 rimfire niche.

| Ballistic Comparison Chart (figures from several different industry sources) | | | |
|--|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Cartridge | Bullet Wt. | Barrel Lgth | Muzzle Vel. |
| 17 HMR | 17 grains | 24 ins | 2550 fps |
| 17 Mach 2 | 17 grains | 24 ins | 2100 fps |
| 17 Hi-Std | 20 grains | 18 ins | 1850 fps |