

The New

THE NEW **BIG BOY STEEL RIFLE** STILL LOOKS LIKE A HENRY, BUT IT'S BEEN OPTIMIZED WITH FEATURES TO HELP HUNTERS PUT MEAT IN THE FREEZER.



The Big Boy Steel rifle continues the tradition of aesthetically pleasing rifles from Henry, packed into a light, compact package that's at home in the brush or in a deer blind.

Old Henry



► TEXT AND PHOTOS BY MIKE DICKERSON

STUDENTS OF AMERICAN FIREARMS history need no introduction to the Henry repeating rifle, also known as the Henry Model 1860 lever action rifle. If, by chance, you are unfamiliar with that original Henry, here are a few salient points you should know.

The Henry was one of first truly successful lever action rifles. Its direct descendants include the famous Winchester Model 1866 and all the Winchester lever action guns that followed. Roughly 14,000 Henry rifles, chambered for the .44 Henry rimfire cartridge, were produced by the New Haven Arms Company under the direction of Benjamin Tyler Henry, for whom the rifle is named.

Henry rifles arrived in time to see use during the Civil War, and were employed by a number of Union outfits from Kentucky, Missouri, Illinois and Indiana. They made a last-

ing impression on Confederate soldiers who had to face them. Confederate guerrilla John Mosby is credited with calling the Henrys “those guns that they could wind up on Sunday, and shoot all week.” It was, he said, useless to fight against them.

Henry rifles also made a terminal impression on General George Armstrong Custer and his men at the Battle of the Little Bighorn. Archeologists have uncovered evidence that as many as 62 Henry rifles were employed by the Lakota and Cheyenne warriors during Custer’s final indiscretion.

Today’s Henry rifles are cosmetically similar to, but differ considerably from, the original Henry rifles, which command high collector prices. One of the newest models from Henry Repeating Arms, called the Big Boy Steel Rifle, differs most of all. That, as it turns out, is a good thing when the rifle is used for its intended purpose.



The Big Boy Steel rifle is available chambered in .357 Mag., .44 Colt and .44 Rem. Mag., making it a great choice for hunting in a growing number of states that have adopted "straight wall cartridge" hunting laws.

OPTIMIZED FOR HUNTING

The Henry Big Boy Steel rifle is designed, first and foremost, for hunting. Gone is the shiny, game-spooking, polished brass receiver of the parent Big Boy model. As the new rifle's name implies, the receiver is made of steel with a matte, non-glare finish. Gone, too, is the heavy octagonal barrel. It has been replaced with a lighter-profile, rounded 20-inch version.

Another hunter-friendly change is the attractive, functional diamond checkering on the forend and grip area of the stock, versus the non-checked wood on the original Big Boy. There's no shiny barrel band on the gun. It has been replaced with a matte black stock forend cap, and the brass buttplate has been replaced with a ventilated, soft-rubber

recoil pad that does a good job of absorbing recoil. Two small-but-important additions to this model are a pair of sling swivel studs for hands-free field carry with a sling.

Visually, this is a good-looking rifle, despite its utilitarian design. Fit and finish were excellent and definitely a step up from most lever guns I've owned. The American walnut stock was of much better quality than I expected, with a bit of fiddleback figure in the buttstock and a nice satin finish.

Working the lever of the gun fresh out of the box, I was impressed with the smoothness of the action, a characteristic that today's Henry rifles are known for. Another thing that sets the Henry apart from many other lever guns is that the rifle can be safely carried fully loaded with the hammer in the

fired, resting position. It has no half-cock or crossbolt safety because it uses a patented transfer bar safety mechanism.

The transfer bar prevents the gun from firing unless the hammer is fully cocked and the trigger is pulled. If you're in the process of cocking the hammer and accidentally release it, before it is fully cocked, the gun will not fire.

The Henry does not have the sidegate loading port used by other lever guns. Rather, it is loaded via a cutout in the fixed, blued-steel outer magazine tube. You simply turn a knurled knob at the end of the magazine and withdraw the brass inner magazine tube, and drop rounds into the cutout (with the action closed and hammer down). Then push the inner tube back into place and turn



The Henry can be cleaned from the breech end by removing the lever screw and lever and withdrawing the bolt, being careful not to misplace the extractor.

the knob to the locked position. Magazine capacity is 10 rounds.

While many prefer the sidegate loading system, which allows you to keep stuffing rounds into the magazine while shooting, one advantage of the Henry design is that you can simply remove the inner tube and point the barrel down to dump rounds and unload the gun. This saves you from having to cycle every round through the action, as you must do to unload many side-loading guns. You can still unload the Henry that way, if you wish, but manipulating the magazine tube gets easier and faster with a little practice.

In any event, should you find yourself using the gun in a situation requiring more than 10 rounds, which will solve most com-



Thanks to a patented transfer bar safety mechanism, it's safe to carry the Henry with the hammer down on a chambered cartridge. The rifle will not fire unless the hammer is fully cocked and the trigger pulled.

“THE HENRY BIG BOY
STEEL RIFLE IS DESIGNED,
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mon problems handily, I would gently suggest that you should be using a different gun or be moving expeditiously out of harm's way.

A HANDY BRUSH GUN


The Big Boy Steel rifle is fairly light, tipping the scales at 7 lbs. unloaded. It's also compact, measuring 37.5 inches in overall length. That makes it very handy for hunting

in thick brush or maneuvering inside the tight confines of a deer blind. Follow-up shots, if needed, are readily available, and you can send rounds downrange as fast as you can work the lever, aim and fire.


I was pleasantly surprised with the accuracy-enhancing trigger on our test rifle, which broke crisply at an average pull weight of 3 lbs. 6 oz., as measured with my Lyman trigger pull gauge.

As it arrived from the factory, our test gun was equipped with an adjustable Marble semi-buckhorn rear sight with a white diamond insert. This piece is reversible, giving you the option to use a V- or U-shaped notch for aiming. Atop the muzzle, a bladed, brass-beaded front sight rides in a dovetail slot. The rear edge of the sight is serrated to reduce glare.

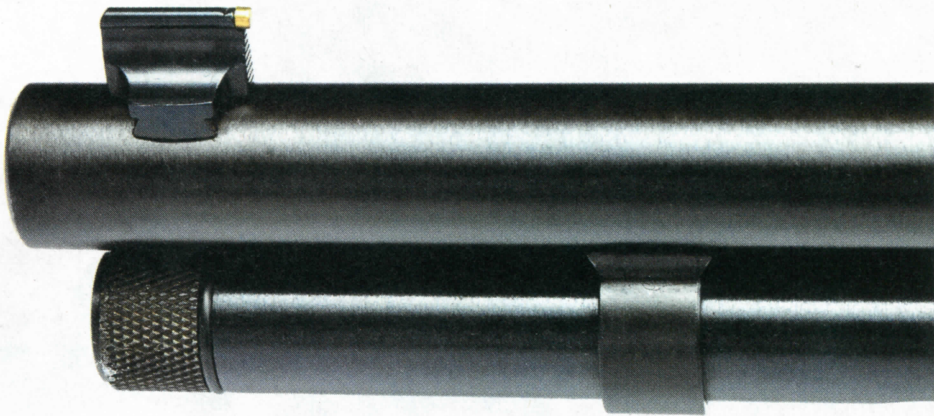
One thing I really like about the new



The author tested the new Henry in the field, taking this cull buck from a low-fence Texas ranch at 70 yards with a single .44 Rem. Mag. Hornady Custom load with a 240-gr. XTP bullet.



The grip area of the stock and forend have nicely executed diamond checkering, which replaces the smooth wood of the original Big Boy rifle.



The rifle comes from the factory with a brass-beaded front sight and adjustable Marble semi-buckhorn rear sight with white diamond insert.

Henry is the fact that you can clean it from the breech end, without risking damage to the rifling at the muzzle crown with a cleaning rod. You simply remove the lever screw and lever, and then pull the bolt from the receiver, taking care not to misplace the ejector.

The rifle sent for testing was chambered in .44 Rem. Mag, but it will feed .44 Special ammo, as well. It is also available in .45 Colt and .357 Mag. These options make the rifle a

great companion to those who pack handguns in these calibers. It's also a perfect match for hunting in states that have enacted so-called "straight wall cartridge" hunting laws.

A growing number of states that previously banned hunting with centerfire rifles, mostly in the Midwest, now allow hunting with rifles using these or similar "straight wall" cartridges. The theory is that the re-

duced range of these cartridges, compared to centerfire rifle cartridges, makes them safer to hunt with in built-up country, putting them on a par with muzzleloaders or shotguns with slugs.

Of course, you don't have to live or hunt in one of those states to hunt with the new Henry rifle. You need only get close enough to game animals to put the rifle to productive use, as I did in Texas.



FIELD & RANGE TESTED

Beyond their historical appeal, there's just something inordinately gratifying about handling and shooting the uniquely American lever action rifle. Every time you work that lever to eject a cartridge case and load a new round, you are instantly joined to generations of countrymen who used lever guns to defend the cabin, settle feuds and put food on the table.

It didn't take me very long, after getting my hands on the new Henry rifle, to do the latter.

Although it had been quite some time since I had hunted with a lever action rifle, the Henry Big Boy Steel rifle just begged to be taken hunting. I was happy to oblige with an assist from Bryan Wilson, of Frio County Hunts, in Texas. Bryan operates a guided hunting operation on the family's 1,100-acre ranch bordering the Frio River in the south Texas brush country.

There are some exceptional whitetail bucks running around this low-fence ranch, and I had already taken a nice nine-point buck with another rifle while hunting with Bryan for

another future *Gun World* story. I brought the Henry rifle along with the intention of getting reasonably close to and swatting a fat doe or eating-size hog into the freezer.

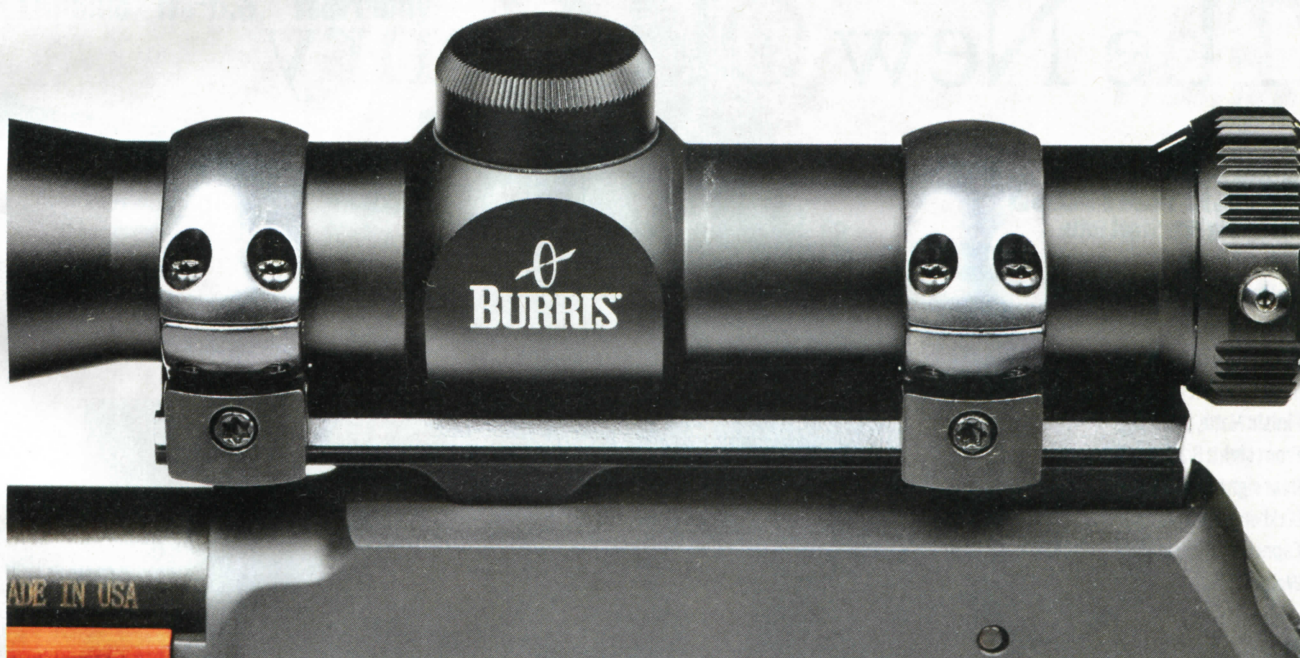
I began to reconsider that plan when a mature but small-antlered eight-point buck stepped out from the brush 70 yards from our blind. Bryan, a Marine Corps veteran who spent time in the less-than-idyllic environs of Falluja, must have sensed my itchy trigger finger. "That's a cull buck," he said. "You can take him if you want."

I responded by easing back the hammer on

HENRY BIG BOY STEEL .44 REM. MAG.

LOAD	AVG. MUZZLE VELOCITY (FPS)	AVG. 100-YARD GROUP (INCHES)	BEST 100-YARD GROUP (INCHES)
Black Hills 240 gr. JHP	1637	1.47	0.97
Federal Fusion 240 gr. JHP	1735	1.56	1.46
Hornady Custom 240 gr. XTP	1759	0.99	0.71
Winchester 250 gr. Platinum Tip	1598	1.52	1.33
Winchester 240 gr. JSP	1690	2.01	1.76

"THE TRANSFER BAR PREVENTS THE GUN FROM FIRING UNLESS THE HAMMER IS FULLY COCKED AND THE TRIGGER IS PULLED."



To mount a scope on the Henry, the author removed the rear iron sight and used a base supplied by Henry and a set of Weaver Grand Slam top mount steel rings.

the Henry. A few seconds later, when the buck turned broadside at 70 yards, the Henry spoke, and a 240-gr. Hornady XTP bullet did its job perfectly. The buck dropped in his tracks. I instantly jacked another shell into the chamber, but that was more for the pleasure of doing so rather than out of any necessity. The buck wasn't going anywhere but straight to my friendly neighborhood meat processor.

The performance of the Hornady round was no surprise. That round, as you will see, delivered a stellar performance in testing at the range.

To squeeze maximum accuracy from the rifle in testing, I mounted a Burris Timberline 3-9X32mm scope on the rifle using a base supplied by Henry and a set of Weaver Grand Slam top mount steel rings. I chose the scope for its light weight and generous eye relief, and it worked out well paired with the Henry.

I began testing by running five different factory loads, in 240 to 250-gr. bullet weights,

over my Competitive Edge Dynamic M2 chronograph. While velocities for the squat handgun bullets were rather pedestrian by centerfire rifle standards, the 20-inch barrel gave the rounds a respectable boost, with all of them stepping out at 1,600 fps or faster. The Hornady custom 240-gr. load, with the XTP bullet, was the hottest load of the bunch, clocking in at an average of 1,759 fps.

It was also the most accurate round tested, turning in average 100-yard groups measuring just under an inch and a 0.71-inch best group. The Black Hills 240-gr. JHP load produced a sub-MOA best group, and averaged under an inch and half. Two loads from Federal and Winchester also averaged around an inch and a half. The worst performing round in the Henry produced two-inch average groups.

Feeding was a little sticky with the Winchester 240-gr. jacketed soft point bullet, but all other rounds fed and ejected without issue.

Of course, if you're going to hunt with rel-

atively slow pistol bullets, which have a tendency to drop like a rock past 100 yards, it's helpful to have both a working knowledge of the trajectory of your bullet and an awareness of its limitations. For the purpose of illustration, let's say we zero the rifle with Federal's 240-gr. Fusion bullet. Hitting two inches high at 100 yards, it would strike a bit less than three inches low at 150 yards. From that point on, things start to get iffy. The bullet would be more than seven inches low at 175 yards and, at just 25 yards beyond that distance, the bullet will hit nearly 14 inches below point of aim.

Inch-and-a-half accuracy is perfectly acceptable for most hunting applications, and sub-MOA groups, like those produced with the Hornady load, are to be envied in any rifle. At the relatively short distances at which this rifle should be used for hunting, the level of accuracy shown by the Henry Big Boy Steel rifle will get the job done each and every time if you hold up your end of the deal. **GW**

The New Old Henry

SPECIFICATIONS

Henry Big Boy Steel Rifle

Action: Lever action

Caliber: .44 Rem. Mag., as tested

Barrel: 20 in., 1:38 rate of twist

Overall length: 37.5 in.

Stock: Straight-grip American Walnut

Finish: Matte, blued steel

Front sight: Brass beaded

Rear sight: Adjustable Marble semi-buckhorn with white insert

Capacity: 10-round tubular magazine

Weight: 7 lbs.

MSRP: \$850.00



CONTACT

Black Hills Ammunition
Black-Hills.com

Burris Optics
BurrisOptics.com

Federal Ammunition
FederalPremium.com

Frio County Hunts

Henry Repeating Arms
HenryRifles.com

Hornady Ammunition
Hornady.com

Nagel's Gun Shop
NagelsGuns.net

Weaver Optics
WeaverOptics.com

Winchester Ammunition
Winchester.com