

## OVERLAPPING CALIBRES AND OTHER LICENCING ISSUES

By Jurie Nel

The issue of licensing firearms in South Africa is already an old one. There are quite literally tens of thousands of owners who applied to relicense their firearms under the “new” act (promulgated in 2000) – and who did so two and three years ago – and have simply heard nothing on the subject from the police ever since. In their case, fortunately, their old licenses remain valid until the new ones are granted. Applicants for new licenses tell similar stories – but their new guns lie with the sellers until the licenses are granted. How long does this take? Only time will tell.....

Now, when the application is considered, it is considered by people who are not necessarily knowledgeable on the subject of firearms, calibers or their use. However, they are empowered to take yay or nay decisions on the matter – in fact are entrusted with the responsibility to do so. This must be difficult, especially if they feel the weight of the responsibility and perhaps even the accountability of a wrong decision. Imagine an applicant being granted a license for a 9mm and then snapping and going off the rails, using the 9mm to kill a high-profile politician or two at a political rally. There will be an unprecedented baying for blood and for tighter gun control, making it even and ever more difficult to obtain or even to grant firearm licenses. But how do we make the consideration process easier for the decision makers?

Firstly, by keeping the application within the parameters laid down by the law. Period. No exceptions. Secondly, the applicant should anticipate any and every issue which may be problematic, and then in his application allay the fears of the decision makers. The applicant probably has a pretty shrewd idea what the factors are that make his application problematic. In the case of the dedicated hunter it should not be the number of guns he already has licenses for, but it will probably be the fact that this caliber is far too similar in performance to a caliber he already owns, or that that caliber is not viewed as appropriate to his stated needs. Let’s consider the following scenario:

You are a dedicated handgun hunter. You own and use an eight-inch 44 Magnum in Ruger Super Blackhawk, a 221 Remington Fireball in an XP100, a 30-30 WCF in a 14” barreled custom-made pistol on a Schuetzen action, and a 45-70 Gov’t in a 14” TC Contender. As a sidearm you carry a six-inch Colt Python – this is in case rapid follow-up shots or a coup de grace is required. The Python is the only gun not fitted with optical sights. You have hunted successfully, using this arsenal, for five years. You are in the far Northern Cape, on a springbok and gemsbok hunt, when the firing pin on the 30-30 breaks. What do you do? The Fireball may be OK for springbok, but you have already filled your quota. The trajectories of the 44 and the 45-70 are simply too rainbow-shaped for the ranges to do the job at hand – and you have already invested thousands of rands in this hunt. It looks as if you gemsbok hunting days, at least for this trip, are over.

Is the above not a strong case for a backup gun in the class of the 30-30 or a bit above? Perhaps a 300 Adrian? Or a 30 Whelen? I certainly believe it is! What is important,

though, is to persuade the police that you need this new gun, primarily for its own purpose but also to act as a backup for an existing gun in the event of a mechanical failure – an all too common occurrence. The issue is to properly motivate the application. It is possible to blind the decision makers with science, but I do not believe that that is the way to go. A well-reasoned motivation aimed at relaxing the decision makers and making them believe that, firstly, there is no risk in granting this license, and secondly, that granting it looks like the right thing to do, must carry the day.

Incidentally, I (and you probably too) have heard the argument that no one expects a mechanic to fix every conceivable problem on every possible car by using only a 13mm combination wrench. By the same token a hunter cannot be expected to hunt everything from a sandgrouse to an elephant with a 303. (Yes, yes, I also know Oom Steve, and I also know he did and still does it, but remember he uses an 8x60 AND, even though he is the best and most successful hunter you or I ever met, he still is a boer [farmer] first and a hunter second). The point is, the decision makers at the CFR (Central Firearms Register) already know that different calibers are required under different circumstances and for different species. The concept of “backup gun” may be new to them, but a case presented convincingly enough will succeed.

This opens another interesting field. A shooting crony of a few decades ago in the town then known as Pietersburg, Jaap Besteman, was a great handgun enthusiast. Those were the days of sanctions, and guns were scarce and hard to come by. Jaap had a collection of beautiful Colts, Brownings, Smith & Wessons, Walthers, Manhurins, Berettas and others – two identical guns of each model. During a bit of light banter I referred to Noah’s Ark, the drought in the Northern Transvaal at the time, and the futility of two of each as they were handguns. Nobody caught the intended joke – maybe I should have pointed out that they would not breed. However, this did give Jaap the opportunity to explain why two of each – he shot with one while keeping the other in pristine condition. I would rather take two identical shooting guns on a hunting trip, to ensure that I was ready to hunt, even if a gun had broken a firing pin...

Another point of interest, really of more interest to riflemen than handgunners: for those who like, for example, the 30-06 (and lots of people do..), here’s a good one for you. Sell some or other of your existing rifles, and buy two identical CZ’s or Sako’s or Tikka’s or BDL700’s or whatever, together with a set of dies. Buy a good 24 power scope for one, and load for it with premium 130gr solid copper expanding spitzer boattail bullets like Goodnel Plainsmasters for those long shots. Fit the other with a ghost ring aperture sight if you can use it, or a 2 power scope. Load 220gr bullets and use it for your bush and brush hunting. Now you have two rifles that work, feel and act the same, and given only sight adjustment, can bat for each other.

In the final analysis, decide what you want. Accept that you can attain it, if it is within the legal parameters – but you may have to work for it. And you will probably have to work harder than you planned to do. But once you have attained it you will feel that it has been well worth while ... and, maybe, start thinking about that TC Encore or that Wichita or that Merrill pistol you have always wanted...