

# Sako's 85 Grizzly

by Con Kapralos



Con Kapralos puts the Grizzly through its paces in the field. In .30-06-calibre, it's very well suited to most Australian large-game species.

There is no denying that Sako of Finland manufactures some of the finest sporting firearms in the world. From the Model L42 rifle chambered in 7x33mm that Sako released in 1942, this company has certainly come to represent high quality for firearm owners worldwide. Having 'a Sako' is something many of us will aspire to.

The Model 85 range of bolt-action rifles was introduced in 2006 and has already become firm favourites worldwide. The 85 series had many changes over the 75 series and all of these improvements have been for the better. The 85 range caters for all tastes and persuasions, from sporters to varminters and lightweight rifles to big-game stoppers.

Several years ago, the designers at Sako decided to take the 85 series to a completely different level by introducing a range of rifles specifically targeted towards a niche market - the bear hunters of North America. The Sako Black Bear, Brown Bear and Kodiak were released in 2011 and the Grizzly was released in 2012. From reports,

all models have been accepted with very positive reviews worldwide. What's more reassuring is that these superb rifles can be used in all aspects of medium- to big-game hunting - they are not the sole province of North America's bear hunters, and will in fact be right at home in Australia's high country, Gulf savannah and anywhere in between.

The Australian Sako distributor Beretta Australia kindly supplied for review the Grizzly model in the ever-popular .30-06 Springfield cartridge. The Grizzly differs from the other three models by having a very high quality walnut stock with polished blue metalwork, whereas the other models use laminate or synthetic stocks and either stainless or matte blue metalwork. The Grizzly is available in seven short- and medium-action calibres, whereas the Brown Bear and Kodiak are only available in .338 Winchester Magnum and the venerable .375 Holland & Holland Magnum. Also included for the review was a set of Sako Optilock Quick Release bases and rings and a nice Burris FourX scope in >



The Sako emblem was beautifully inlaid into the base of the pistol grip. The rosewood was a touch of class.

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The Sako 85 Grizzly is the pinnacle of Sako's Bear series of rifles. It was a pleasure to shoot.



The Sako 85 conical dovetail rail will accept various scope base and ring attachments. However, the Sako Optilock rings and bases are beautifully made and mate with the dovetails perfectly.

1.5-6x42mm.

Upon opening the trademark black Sako carton, and removing the yellow transport cover, it was obvious that this Sako 85 was altogether in a different class from other Sako 85 rifles. Immediately noticeable was the beautiful, high-grade walnut stock. Finished with a lustrous hand-rubbed oil finish, the grain in the stock was certainly a sight to behold. It's pleasing that Sako continues to source quality walnut blanks for its riflestocks.

The stock adorned a pancake cheek-piece and had a beautiful but functional chequering pattern applied to the grip and fore-end area, which complemented the rifle very well. Another lovely touch was the rosewood on the fore-end tip and at the base of the pistol grip. The trademark Sako emblem was neatly inletted into the rosewood grip base and just oozed class.

The stock was removed from the barrelled action for inspection and the inletting around the receiver/magazine housing

and barrel channel was as expected - all cleanly cut and perfectly sealed from the environment. This stock also had two cross-pins in the receiver area, which help reinforce and strengthen the stock in the thinnest area. The cross-pins were expertly installed by Sako and externally finished off very well. This is what shooters expected from Sako and what was duly delivered. A thin, leather-covered Sako recoil pad was fitted to complement the stock and provided a 370mm length of pull.

The barrelled action is what sets this particular rifle apart from other rifles in the Sako 85 line. Essentially, the receiver is the much-lauded medium-length 85 action (for the .30-06 Springfield), but what's immediately noticeable are the open sights, which are referred to by Sako as 'adjustable fast acquisition iron sights' and comprise a series of longitudinal fluting on the barrel and the integrated barrel band swivel.

The medium contour barrel on the Grizzly on test measured 540mm and the profile measured 28mm at the Knox form, tapering down to 17mm at the muzzle. The barrel was fully free floating. Overall, the rifle measured 1070mm in length and weighed in at 3.379kg.

The adjustable fast acquisition iron sights complemented this particular rifle perfectly. Being designed for shooting in dense vegetation (ideal bear habitat), where close-in shots would be expected, the sights were beautifully designed. The muzzle sight consisted of a vertical post with white dot



The very well crafted and positioned barrel band will accept standard QD sling swivels.

The medium contour barrel with the adjustable, fast-acquisition iron sights, barrel band and distinctive barrel fluting. This is the trademark of the Sako 85 Bear series of rifles and what sets it apart from other Sako 85 rifles.



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The Sako 85 Grizzly taken down for review.

covered by a round hood. The rear iron sight was fully adjustable and had a shallow V-blade and a white central marking. Shouldering the rifle and using only the iron sights, I found they lined up perfectly as expected.

The fluting on the barrel was also precisely machined and consisted of two 150mm sections of six flutes separated by the barrel band. The first series of flutes start 110mm from the receiver and run for 150mm. The 21mm barrel band, incorporating a sling swivel stud, is then positioned on the barrel, before another series of six 150mm flutes terminating 65mm from the muzzle.

The positioning of the barrel band and sling swivel is done in conjunction with the 540mm barrel. When the rifle is carried over the shoulder with a sling, the position of the barrel band ensures the muzzle is located so as to avoid snagging on head-high branches and overhead vegetation. This is a simple but brilliant innovation that will be appreciated by owners of the Bear rifles.

The barrel is cold hammer-forged and in the test calibre, had a one in 11" rate of twist. The receiver, bolt and magazine arrangement was on par with the standard Sako

85 - the silky-smooth bolt with three locking lugs, 70-degree bolt throw, controlled-round feed, mechanical ejection of fired cases and the detachable steel magazine holding four rounds. It's great to see a rifle such as the Sako 85 still being made with a steel detachable magazine, whereas many manufacturers have decided to produce polymer magazines. Well done, Sako!

The trigger on the test rifle was of single-stage configuration. Fully adjustable, it broke at 3lb with no hint of creep. The safety on the 85 Grizzly was the standard two-way safety, with a bolt release lever that enables the bolt to be cycled when the safety is on. The receiver naturally was equipped with the Sako 85 conical dovetail rails, enabling owners of the rifle to mount any optical sights they require.

Beretta Australia supplied Sako Optilock quick detachable bases and rings and a Burris FourX 1.5-6x42 variable scope for the test. This rifle is made to be used with the Sako Optilock QD bases, as it enables the user to have an open-sighted rifle for close-up shooting and then be able to quickly fit a scope on the dovetail rail with the Optilock QD bases and rings and be assured of the scope maintaining zero every time.

The rifle was supplied with an excellent

manual, a pair of 1" QD safari sling swivels, a T25 Torx key and a cocking wrench, which is very useful for carrying out maintenance or cocking/decocking the bolt. The metalwork on the rifle was of a lovely polished blue and complemented the walnut very nicely.

### Range testing

The Sako 85 Grizzly in .30-06 Springfield-calibre was tested at the range in its two configurations: using the open iron sights only, and then with the Burris FourX 1.5-6x42 scope fitted. As the test rifle was brand-new, it was given a thorough clean prior to use to remove any factory preservatives. Shooting was to be carried out slowly, so as not to overheat the barrel.

I had on hand a quantity of factory .30-06 ammunition from Winchester, Federal and Remington in 150-grain loadings, which I use to very good effect in my own rifle. I am a fan of the 150-grain load in the '06 for all the hunting I do and I have never felt the need to move up to the more popular 180-grain load.

Using the rifle with the open sights was a real joy. Using the bench and suitable front and rear rests, targets were shot at 50m and the three-shot groups were very satisfactory indeed, ranging from around 2 to 3 MOA. The barrel was cleaned thoroughly between different makes of ammunition. However, the most enjoyment was had shooting freehand at Rifle Metallic Silhouette targets at 50 and 100m. This certainly was a challenge and great fun. The gun shouldered beautifully, recoil was very comfortable, and eye alignment with the open sights was spot-on. This set-up would



The barrel channel is sealed and very well finished. Note the rosewood fore-end tip and recoil lug bedding arrangement. The barrel free floats.

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be perfect for those hunters who pursue tough Top End boars in the savannah at close range or large game in very dense scrub.

The rifle was then fitted with the Burris FourX scope in the Optilock rings and bases, and we proceeded to shoot some three-shot groups at 100m targets, again cleaning the barrel thoroughly between the changes in ammunition. The scope had already been boresighted and the point of impact at 100m done beforehand, but this was its first serious range test. The Burris scope was crystal clear and shooting done set at 6x magnification.

The gun shot very well with the factory loads tested, giving excellent groups between 1 and 1.5 MOA. For a rifle suited to large game, this sort of accuracy is very good indeed. Not once was the rifle deemed uncomfortable to shoot, with many observers at the range having a few shots with the 85 Grizzly and commenting very positively on the handling and shooting qualities of the rifle. The rifle was certainly not fussy when it came to what was shot through it.

### In the field

As it was the middle of winter at the time of review and with quite a few properties being under water, the only viable option was to put the 85 Grizzly in .30-06 against some species of deer I regularly hunt for the pot. Several sorties to a few properties yielded several rusa and fallow deer taken cleanly with 150-grain factory loads and my venison supply, which had been dwindling for some time, was replenished.

What was perhaps more appealing was that carrying the rifle over the shoulder while hunting on foot was a revelation. Its light weight and lower-than-normal carrying profile meant I could easily tackle the thicker scrub with ease, even while walking long distances. Never once did



**Factory 150-grain loads from Remington, Federal and Winchester produced excellent three-shot groups between 1 and 1.5 MOA.**

the barrel catch on any overhead branches or vegetation when traversing very thick mallee scrub.

I would have liked to have tested the rifle on other large-game species, but time constraints and inclement weather meant that it was not to be. I caught up with an old university friend who bought a Grizzly in .308 Winchester when he first arrived in Australia and he couldn't sing its praises high-enough. From the Top End of Australia to the peaks of New Zealand's South Island, this particular Grizzly has been hunted hard and it never let him down, taking all manner of game including some huge Kiwi red stags, sika and sambar, as well as the usual suspects in goat, pig and countless foxes.

### Summary

Sako has designed a series of beautiful rifles in the Bear series and the Grizzly certainly is the cream of the crop for a hunter wanting a stylish, versatile hunting rifle, which can be used either with open sights or with an optical attachment. The warmth of the hand-oiled walnut stock, the finely polished blued metalwork and the overall set-up of the Grizzly will win it many fans.

What is very amusing though is that many shooters who originally were quite dismissive of the Sako Grizzly by its looks, really warmed to it once they had given it a good looking over and taken a few test shots with it. It's a classic rifle suited to the discerning large-game hunter and will be equally at home for Australian game as it is for larger game species overseas.

The Sako Grizzly has a recommended retail price of around \$2660. For more information, ask your local gunshop or visit [www.berettaaustralia.com.au](http://www.berettaaustralia.com.au) ●



**The triggerguard and magazine assembly was perfectly inletted into the base of the stock.**

## Specifications

- Manufacturer:** Sako, Riihimaki, Finland
- Model:** 85 Grizzly
- Distributor:** Beretta Australia
- Calibres:** Short action: .308 Winchester, .338 Federal; medium action: .30-06 Springfield (tested), 8x57 JS, 9.3x62, 9.3x66, 7x64
- Weight:** 3.379kg bare
- Sights:** Adjustable fast-acquisition iron sights, optical sight attachment via Sako 85 conical dovetail rail
- Action:** Sako 85 manually operated bolt-action, three locking lugs, controlled-round feed with mechanical ejection
- Barrel:** 540mm, cold hammer-forged barrel with fluting, barrel band swivel attachment, free floated
- Stock:** High-grade oiled walnut, rosewood endings on pistol grip and in front of stock
- Magazine:** 4 plus one in chamber, detachable two-row staggered steel magazine
- RRP:** \$2660



**The muzzle (crown) of the medium contour barrel. The metalwork is finished in a lovely polished blue.**