

The Tikka T3x TAC A1

by Rick Huckstepp



Rick Huckstepp sights-in the TAC A1 off the back of his four-wheel drive.

Tikka has begun its foray into the world of long-range firearms with the release of the T3x TAC A1. This manoeuvre away from the norm of conventional stocked rifles is no real surprise considering the popularity in the United States of full chassis rifles that take on more than a hint of militaria. Now if you forget the 'take on the look of' aspect as regards military and replace it with 'more practical than', you will realise the reasoning behind the change in furniture attached to these barrelled actions. Ruggedness combined with practicality in the recreational shooting arena is the theme behind this model.

When considering reviewing this limited range of rifles, I had the choice of a 24"

barrel 6.5 Creedmoor calibre, which is aimed at, but not restricted to, the long-range target shooting fraternity (see the June 2017 *Australian Shooter*) or alternatively a 20" barrel in .308 Winchester. Being more bush bound than urbanised and more into hunting than shooting paper, the decision was pretty easy.

The .308 Winchester rifle was shipped in a Negrini gun case with Tikka logo. It had the muzzle brake detached and thread protector screwed on the muzzle along with two 10-round magazines as well as a tool kit consisting of three Allen head keys. Also, the distributor, Beretta Australia, forwarded a Steiner 3-15x50 GS3 scope with S1 reticle and 30mm heavy-duty Burris XTR Signature rings

plus a Hy-Skor bipod with 6-9" adjustable legs. The bipod was attachable to the supplied Picatinny rail that I fitted to the underside of the fore-end.

One of the outstanding aspects of any rifle with this style of chassis is the fact that the barrel is truly free floating all the way to the front of the action. On top of that, ventilation is even all round the fore-end and the gap between it and the hot barrel at any point is equal, ensuring that cooling takes place at the same rate around its circumference.

The 510mm medium contour cold hammer forged barrel on the TAC A1 is built with a four-groove, 11" twist with a 5/8x24 muzzle thread with a protective cap. The supplied brake was a hefty affair

being steel with three ports each side. The rearmost pair of ports project the blast slightly forward of a 90-degree angle to the bore to reduce the effects of muzzle blast on the shooter. The other two exit at right angles to the travel of the bullet as it passes through two partitions, which reduce in size towards the exit point of the brake. This design brake has been used effectively on Sako rifles and the manufacturer claims a 30 per cent reduction in recoil over a bare muzzle.

The barrel end has a circular groove machined, in which a locating screw in the top of the brake is screwed and an Allen head bolt underneath squeezes the thread of the brake snug on that of the barrel. This ensures that as the thread wears the brake can be fixed in the correct position and in a nutshell, it is not going to accidentally fall off.

The other end of the barrel is screwed into the action in a typical manner but a bracket that slips over the barrel and comes up tightly against the action has two heavy bolts that secure into the lower chassis and another bolt that screws into the front of the Picatinny rail, effectively locking the three components together. The barrel is further anchored by a typical locking lug recessed into the receiver bed. Another three bolts additionally secure



the lower chassis to the action and the M-Lok-designed fore-end cramps onto the sleeve that protrudes from the front of that securing bracket. This fore-end may be swapped out with one of the many aftermarket options available.

The 'all-in-one' lower section of the chassis is crafted from aluminium including the magazine well and triggerguard. The well has an ambidextrous release button, which swings on an axis in front of the triggerguard, levering a square metal block out of a corresponding hole in the rear wall of the 10-round double stack

magazine. The magazine is steel with a rubber bottom cap to prevent scratching surfaces it might rest on when shooting. There was a minute amount of play when the loaded magazine was in situ but this did not affect rounds feeding smoothly and I failed to notice any 'rattling' using the rifle in the field.

The adjustable double-stage trigger was easily accessible by a gloved finger thanks to plenty of space in front of it and the bottom rail of the guard is flat so the trigger finger can be steadied as it is pulled back on the blade.

The rubberised pistol grip is secured to the bottom section by a single screw accessible through its underside, which has a door that swings open after releasing a catch on the back of the grip. This catch can be released using the bullet point of a live round. Most pistol grips of this style have no end cap or if there is one, it is a push-on rubber plug that fits in the hole. I have lost most of the plugs out of the grips of my work rifles so I liked this idea and in any case it was a good place to stash a couple of back-up rounds.

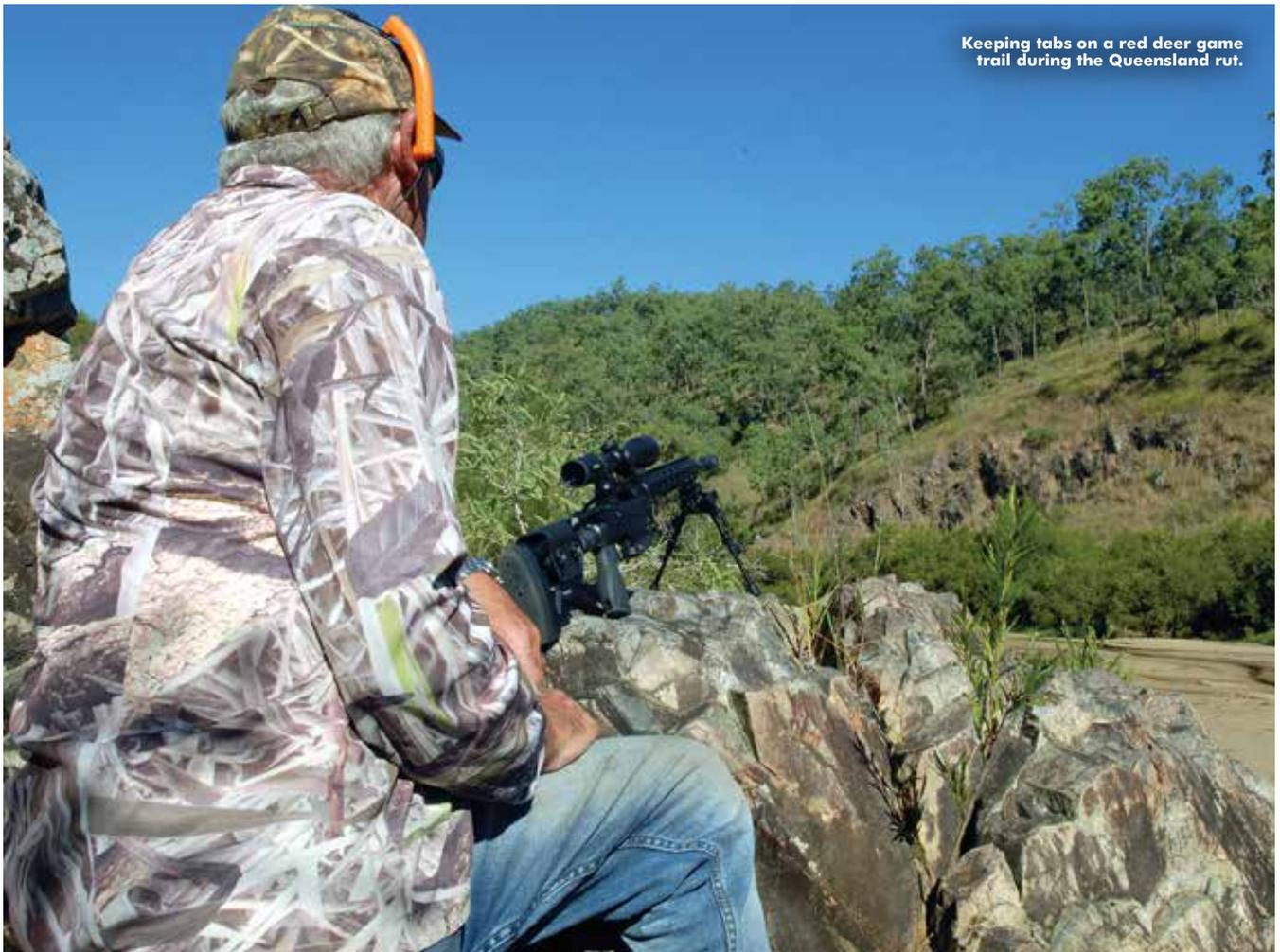
The receiver has a typical Tikka-style bolt release lever on the near side for that which has a 70-degree lift angle and a bulbous bolt knob that may be optioned to another design at a later date. At the time



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of this review no options were available but given a little leeway the entrepreneurs will no doubt fill the void.

The top of the receiver proper is fully covered in with an ejection port machine cut offside. The top is grooved for scope mount attachments as you would find in a conventional rifle. With the TAC A1 being far from conventional, we find a bolt-on 0 MOA Picatinny rail on top of the receiver, which aligns neatly with the continuous 0 MOA rail that is part of the fore-end moulding. The offside of the action hosts the rocker-style two-way safety catch that locks the bolt down when in 'safe' mode. A bolt release lever in front of it, when pulled up, allows the cocked bolt to be lifted and live round ejected without the rifle going into 'fire' mode. Nice safety design, there.



Another welcome facet is the folding stock. In fact, those versed in engineering will marvel at the tolerance found in this aspect of the rifle; a perfect snug fit with no movement whatsoever once the stock is folded out and locked in place. To fold the stock, depress the metal button behind the rear of the closed bolt and the stock will swing around and lock. To fold back, depress the button fully and lock back in place. The practicalities of this style of stock won't be wasted on those who need compact storage for travel or at home as the rifle folds to an overall length of just 776mm with the brake removed. It also assists in maintenance as the stock may be folded out to 90 degrees to the action to allow the rifle to stand alone and upright for cleaning. Hence the rising cheekpad need not be lowered from its setting to perform cleaning maintenance or simple removal of the bolt.

The near side of the rear of the receiver has a push button release bayonet-style sling attachment as part of the moulding and into its rear is fitted a ring for a clip-on attachment. The sling attachment for the fore-end may be placed where preferred with the use of an M-Lok attachment.

The skeletonised stock is attached to the folding hinge on the back of the receiver by way of a castle nut so stocks may be swapped for something else that might take your fancy. As supplied it has a long heel for bench rest or prone shooting and a Picatinny rail built onto its underside allows for attachment of risers



The fore-end sleeved bracket holds the bottom metal barrel and Picatinny rail together.

and other accessories to steady the aim. The rifle ships with butt spacers to tune the length of pull and the handled Allen key tool inserts through the rubber recoil pad to release a screw to raise or lower the butt pad to suit the individual.

The recoil coming through the in-line stock is effectively dealt with and manageable, thanks to a soft fitted butt pad that has similar properties to the aftermarket LimbSaver butt pads; and butt pads that quell recoil don't come much better than those.

The Tikka's bolt is typical in design for all its actions with twin locking lugs, a robust plunger and hefty ejector claw and it ejects live and spent cartridges well clear of the rifle with little effort. >



Tikka has simple and effective bolts across its range of rifles.



A close-up of the brake's attaching components.



The business end of the TAC A1's barrel.



The butt pad may be adjusted vertically to suit personal preference.

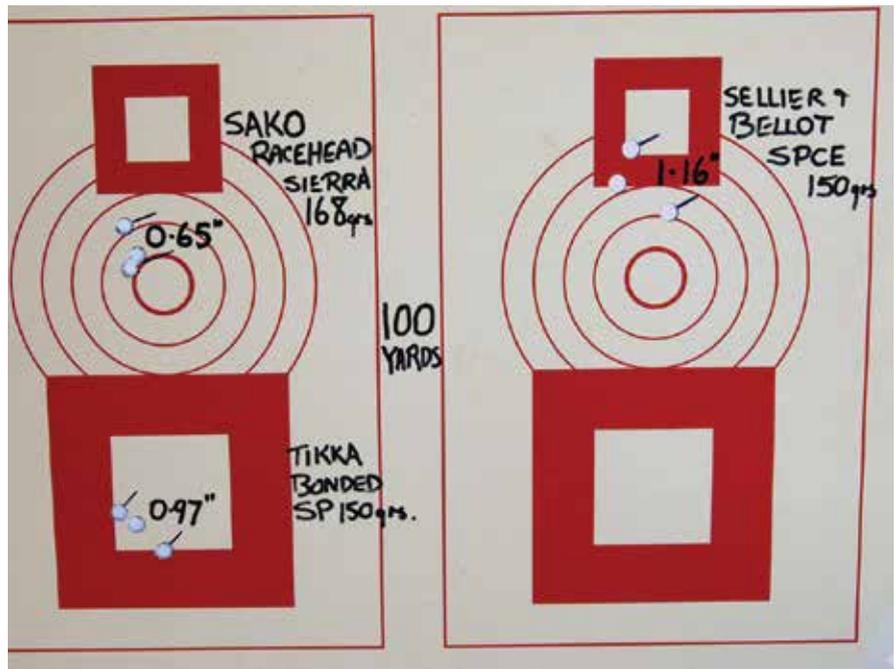
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The trigger exhibited around 4mm of free travel before it came to the firing stage. From there, it broke cleanly and adjustments may be made between 2 and 4lb.

Fully accessorised, the TAC A1 is going to be a handful to carry and anything but short treks would see the need for a good sling in the mix. Its weight without any accessories or brake is 4.9kg and the brake alone weighs in at 160g. With the M-Lok system there is any amount of room for bolt-on accessories should you wish to carry the payload. Folded out, the overall length without brake is 1011mm and folded just 776mm. The brake measures 73mm in length.

The Steiner scope was crystal-clear with no aberrations in its field of view and held its own in the low light transmission stakes. This was evidenced when scoping three red hinds hiding among trees and lantana 150m distant pre-dawn after picking up their eyes in the LED lights on the Polaris buggy. The venison-full Waeco freezer on the truck is proof to its definition considering lighting conditions at the time.

With a few field rounds through the bore, I put the TAC A1 to paper at 100m



and the holes tell the story. A Benchrest shooter, or one in the field steadier than me, will no doubt do better. The TAC A1 in this format oozes quality in its craftsmanship and I could think of a no more practical and robust field rifle (its weight aside) for the rough and tumble of hunting in the outdoors.

Not being an exponent of target shooting, Rick Huckstepp was happy with the results.

The Tikka T3 TAC A1 is distributed by Beretta Australia and retails for around \$4490. For more information, ask at your local gunshop or visit berettaaustralia.com.au



Specifications

Manufacturer: Tikka
Model: T3x TAC A1
Calibre: .308W (tested), 6.5 Creedmoor
Action: Bolt
Barrel: 20", one in 11" twist, fully floated
Trigger: Double-stage adjustable from 2-4lb
Magazine: 10-round double-stack, metal with rubber boot
Finish: Matte blackened steel, black anodised aluminium, Teflon-coated bolt
Scope: Steiner GS3 3-15x50 30mm tube (standalone RRP \$1525)
Rings: Burris XTR Signature 30mm (standalone RRP \$195)
Storage: Negrini case
Distributor: Beretta Australia
RRP: \$4490 for the package as reviewed