

Thames Valley Guns

Armourers Report

Ruger Hawkeye LRT

Introduction

In early 2019 I purchased a Ruger American Ranch and Predator. The Ranch was purchased as a cost effective experiment with the .300 Blackout and for me to learn about that cartridge and nothing more. During that experimentation I purchased a Magpul Hunter stock but couldn't get the magazine to reliably feed the blackout cartridge and therefore I had a redundant stock and purchased a predator to accommodate it. I had no intention of keeping either



rifle, I simply wanted to assess them and sell them on. However I was impressed with the accuracy of both rifles and therefore when a Ruger Hawkeye LRT "demo rifle" became available and at a reasonable price in 2020, I thought I'd take the opportunity to put one to the test as a possible candidate for the McQueen competitions. It was a "long shot" as you are up against AI's and other expensive and precision pieces of kit. But wouldn't it be a bit of a coup if you could win or do well in the McQueen's with a modest priced factory gun.

General

Tactical rifles are a popular format in the UK and the Tikka T3 TAC or the Ruger Precision are good examples. They provide that sniper/tactical image but at a considerable lower price than a genuine sniper rifle and having owned a Tikka TAC, which highlighted their good performance. What drew my attention to the LRT was the ten round magazine, the stock configuration, stock finish, the big 26" barrel, calibre, muzzle break, adjustable cheek pad, scope and bipod mount, in fact, pretty much everything, including the previous experience gained with the ranch and predator in 2019. Having said that, I'm not really an "off the shelf" factory gun type of guy and therefore purchasing this type of rifle is a risk for me. A good example was a few years ago when I purchased a Tikka T3 Varmint which was a superb factory gun but I got bored very quickly and sold it on.

Unlike the Ruger Precision, the LRT's configuration is more traditional and sports a wooden laminate stock with a dark earth and black mottled finish. The laminate stock is designed for prone long range tactical shooting and therefore is fitted with a picatinny bipod rail, ten round detachable magazine, butt palm grip, adjustable cheek and recoil pads. The receiver is from Ruger's Hawkeye range and therefore has a modern Mauser bolt action which is married to a heavy 26" barrel and muzzle brake. The receiver is fitted with a 20 moa picatinny rail which is design to sit over the top of Ruger's traditional integral ring mounting system. Specifications are an overall length of 48", with a barrel length of 26" and an unladen weight of 11 lbs. The floating hammer forged barrel is in 6.5 CM has a 1 in 8 twist and 5 groove rifling.

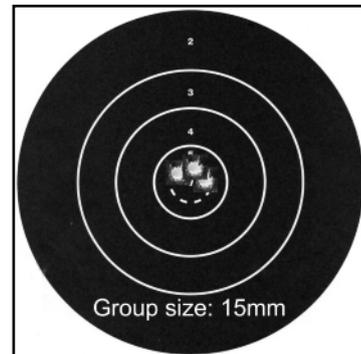
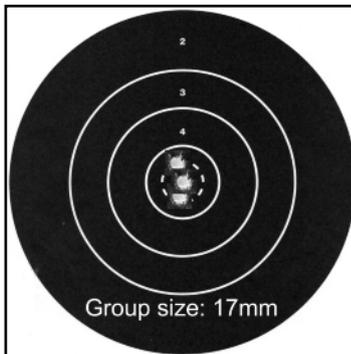
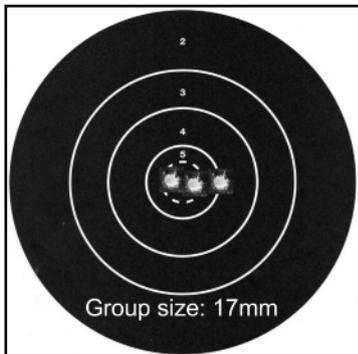
Initial outing

I like to personalise my rifles, but that does mean to add lots of gadgets but to fine tune, restore, accurize or make the rifle slightly unique in some way. With a factory gun, it is obvious you cannot restore, fine tuning can be limited and the Hawkeye is a good example. The first thing to achieve is a baseline and therefore I set the rifle up to basically shoot straight out of the box. As seen in the image above, I cleaned the bore, lubricated the bolt, fitted an Atlas bipod and a Primary Arms 6-18x50 Creedmore scope using Rechnagel rings.

Thames Valley Guns Armourers Report Ruger Hawkeye LRT

However before the baseline can be set, the scope will need to be zeroed and the barrel will need to be "run-in". Shooting fully supported from a bench at 100 yards, I zeroed the scope so it was within four inches of the V-bull and then ceased shooting to scrub and cleaned the bore.

With the next detail, I zeroed the scope onto the V-Bull and obtained the first 17mm group, the second group was identical, when I stopped,



scrubbed and cleaned the barrel for a second time. The last group was 15mm, having shot 20 rounds in total. The mauser bolt action is not as smooth as some actions, but the rifle fed and cycled without fault and to be fair that was my only minor criticism. The rifle was very muzzle heavy and therefore generated a stable shooting platform and despite the windy day it was very easy to hold and maintain the target. Approximately midway through the shoot, I noticed my cheek getting pinched slightly during recoil and therefore I adjusted the pad upwards and slightly to the rear. The quick release single clamp mechanism used by the LRT was a pleasure to use and I liked it a lot.

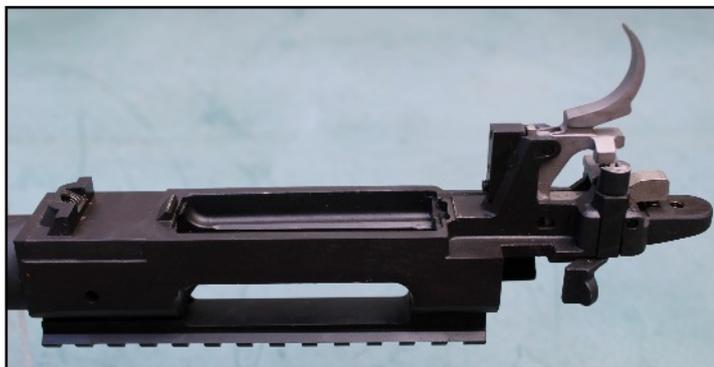
The wind was extremely gusty on the day, blowing 15-20 mph and therefore an "out of the box" gun, shooting an average of 16.3 mm was, I thought quiet reasonable.

Receiver

Ruger have long been a effective user of investment castings with their firearms and the Hawkeye is no exception. Casting technology is so accurate that only minimal surface preparation or metal removal is required, thereby making it a very cost effective process, especially once the initial tooling costs are absorbed. As the Hawkeye's heritage is based on the Ruger 77, which would make current tooling costs minimal. The receiver is not the only component that is casted, the bolt release and safety catch are also manufactured from the same process.



As can be seen in the images, the Hawkeye's receiver is flat sided and this is advantageous when it comes to the receiver/stock fitting. Woodwork can be machined to tight tolerances and this Hawkeye was a good example of a good receiver/stock fit and therefore if standard accuracy is required, then the rifle does not need bedding.



Unique to Ruger is the recoil lug. The recoil lug is cast into the receiver and is not a separate component as with many rifles. The recoil lug thread is machined at approximately 40° which permits the master screw to "pull in" the recoil lug to the corresponding face in the stock. At the rear of the receiver is the safety and trigger housing and running parallel to the housing is the spring loaded ejector. Between the trigger housing and the recoil lug is the magazine well.

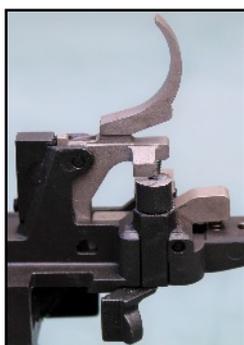
Thames Valley Guns Armourers Report Ruger Hawkeye LRT

On the left wall of the receiver is engraving for the rifles brand, name, casting marks and the bolt stop/release. On the right wall is the ejection port, which normally would extend vertically, but on the LRT this is restricted due to the 20 moa scope rail. As with the original Mauser action the front scope mount sits higher than the rear and therefore different height scope rings are required. Why Ruger maintains this outdated feature on a modern rifle I am unsure. Altering it would add weight, there would be minimal cost to change the casting moulds and there may be some financial loss with the ring sales. However, Ruger's competitors, especially those from Europe are moving forward with more modern designs, such as one piece scope bases which benefit the shooter and may give them the edge in sales.

Trigger mechanism & safety catch

The trigger mechanism is a traditional trigger and sear arrangement, releasing the cocking piece/sear located on the bolt. Trigger is adjustable for length of pull and release. The trigger has a first and second pull and releases at a crisp and pleasant 1.8lbs, which in my opinion is quite good for a factory trigger.

What I do like is the safety mechanism as it physically engages both the trigger and the firing pin. There are many discussions as to what safety systems are the best for rifles.



Safety catches which engage only the trigger cannot prevent the firing pin striking the cartridge if there is a mechanical failure, therefore they are not 100% safe. The Hawkeye trigger has three positions, the first or forward position is fire, the second position locks the trigger, and the sear cannot be released, but the bolt can be cycled and therefore the magazine can be emptied. The third position continues to lock the trigger, locks the bolt and the firing pin, therefore regardless of any catastrophic trigger failure, the firing pin cannot strike the cartridge.

Externally the operator may be forgiven into thinking the bolt release has similarities to the original mauser, but despite some functional similarities, it is a substantially different design. As a bolt stop and release it functions in the same way, however the spring system is different as it the method of fitting. The biggest difference is the lack of the integral ejector as this is located in the receiver and on the left side of the trigger mechanism.

Barrel

The barrel is what visually differentiates the LRT from other Hawkeye's in terms of performance and visual appearance. It is a substantial free floating heavy barrel, 26" long, 1.18" at its widest point, narrowing to 0.84 at the muzzle. The



barrel is fitted with an effective steel muzzle brake, which together with its locking nut adds a further 2" to the barrels overall length. As modern factory rifles go, I cannot recall a rifle with such a large barrel. As a long range rifle, not only is this a very efficient as all the propellant burns within the barrel but in the prone position, the whole rifle system is very stable. The heavy weight of the barrel, together with the muzzle break effectively tames the felt recoil.

Thames Valley Guns

Armourers Report

Ruger Hawkeye LRT

Bolt Assembly

As a person who works regularly on classic Mauser's, it is a little odd to work on a new rifle that functions, using 100 year old technology. The similarities between the modern and classic bolt are substantial, the large twin locking lugs,



the large claw extractor. However the differences, making this a modern bolt are very visible upon closer inspection. The most obvious differences are the firing pin shroud and the bolt handle. The bolt handle is swept to a greater angle and to the rear (dog leg) for better functional performance and in fact is similar to another Mauser design, the British P14 . An obvious modern feature of the bolt handle is the large scallop to facilitate good clearance when a scope is fitted. The firing pin shroud is an altogether more modern and visually appealing design, without the ugly flag safety associated with earlier mauser designs.

Another feature, not shown in the images above, is a shoulder on the middle left hand side of the bolt body. This shoulder supports the bolt as it cycles in the receiver, minimises excessive bolt movement and improves cycling performance.

Unlike the original Mauser the ejector passes directly into the bolt face and not through the locking lug and the cartridge rim is partially supported by the extended locking lug. The large extractor claw remains an obvious glue to its heritage, however one thing that the Ruger can do, that the original Mauser claw could not do is feed singular rounds into the chamber without damaging the claw.

Stock

The LRT's stock is manufactured from laminated wood and coated in dark earth and black stipple, which in today's



shooting world of plastic and aluminium stock is slightly more traditional. Despite being "traditional" the stock is well thought out and therefore in my opinion a good design. Despite being relatively light, the stock has two bolts passing through the stock either side of the magazine housing which strengthen the stock and prevents fractures caused by recoil. Rather than the traditional QD sling swivel, the stock is fitted on the left side with front and rear heavy duty quick detachable sling housings. The stock layout is designed for prone long range shooting, with a distinctive pistol grip, palm grip in the butt, adjustable recoil pad, adjustable cheek pad and integral picatinny rail for a suitable bipod.

Thames Valley Guns Armourers Report Ruger Hawkeye LRT



The recoil pad is adjustable by removing the two screws and inserting or removing the spacers as required, The cheek pad is a quick release clamp, which when released allows the pad to adjusted for height or length.

One of the primary reasons for purchasing this rifle, was its ten round AI style magazine. Unlike other Ruger Hawkeye magazine housing's which tend to be plastic, the LRT is aluminium and has a central magazine release catch as can be seen in the image to the right. Magazine release and insertion is easy and does not suffer from any misfeeds.

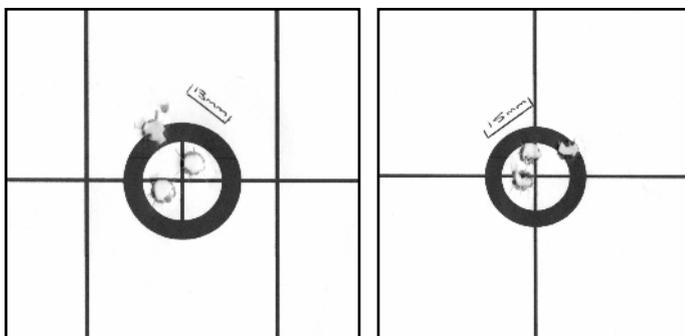


Summary

As a modestly priced rifle, the Ruger LRT is very good value for money. Except bedding the rifle and developing some rifle specification ammunition I have not done anything else to improve accuracy.

As a factory "off the shelf" rifle with nothing more than fitting a scope, I was achieving group sizes of 15-17mm at 100 yards, which in my opinion is fairly commendable. Bedding and some minor load development tightened that to 13-15mm on a new barrel. I'm sure you could spend countless hours carrying more load development and as the barrel "settles in" you might be able to improve on that grouping slightly, but to be honest I doubt it.

Whilst I am not a lover of Mauser actions, the rifle functions flawlessly and the shoulder on the bolt body reduces that bolt wobble that WWII Mauser's where infamous for. I have not had time to put the rifle through it paces but its hard to find fault. The rifle is comfortable to shoot and the long



heavy barrel provides a very stable shooting platform. Whilst my reloads are on the modest side with a velocity of just over 2500 fps, the muzzle brake is effective and felt recoil is surprisingly light.

At the time of writing this report, the Corona Pandemic is still with us and whilst shooting is back up and running, competitions are only just restarting and I have not had chance to challenge the "bigboys" in the McQueen shoots.

Thames Valley Guns Armourers Report Ruger Hawkeye LRT



My next challenge is to start testing the rifle at 200 yards and to see if it will stack up against my RPA Rangemaster, Unique Alpine and a Barnard SM. Its a tall order and I know I am asking a lot, but as I said at the beginning of this report, wouldn't it be bit of a coup if I could stand my ground with a modest priced factory gun and that would be quite a credit to a Ruger rifle.

Paul Green
Thames Valley Guns
www.thamesvalleyguns.co.uk
Email: paul.tvg@ntlworld.com

First published: 30th August 2020
Second update:
Third update: