

# Thames Valley Guns Armourers Report Ruger No. 3

## Introduction

Having completed my first Ruger No. 1, (see report Ruger No. 1 Part 1) and thoroughly enjoyed it, I therefore set about looking for another interesting model. Searching the Internet I found an No. 1 that looked slightly different, it had a different set of woodwork, what looked like a Ruger 10/22 style barrel, a front barrel band and a different cocking lever. Closer inspection revealed a Ruger No. 3 in .22 Hornet, but the seller was selling it as a No. 1 and for under £300.00 which set off the alarm bells. Was the seller really unaware he was selling a No. 3 and why so cheap as the the cheapest No. 1's tended to be around £450 - £500.00. Another factor was the No. 3 itself. Only 40,000 were manufactured and guns in their original condition even in the US are becoming increasingly rare. To find one on the UK, in its original condition was an opportunity not to be missed.



When the rifle arrived, the barrel and the rifles external condition appeared very good for a 1979 registered rifle with only a few minor transit marks as can be seen in the sellers picture. However the scope and mount setup didn't look right and the scope looked misaligned with the barrel. Upon closer scrutiny the Ruger bases were from a No. 1 and the No. 3 has a different barrel profile hence the misalignment. As that could be easily repaired, I was a happy bunny.

As can be seen in the image, there was some engraving on the barrel, F. Stampfli, Luzern. Initially I thought this may be an earlier or the initial owner. However further research revealed a gun shop, Stampfli Waffen AG in Luzern, Switzerland, which I am assuming was the initial seller, how the rifle found its way to the UK is a mystery.

## History

With the introduction of the Ruger No. 1 in 1966 and with its immediate success, Ruger decided to expand the range with the introduction of the No. 3 as a budget model in 1973. The No. 3 was a much more simple rifle that lacked checkering, scope bases, had lower grade wood, had parts from other Ruger models such as the barrel, iron sights, butt plate and was approximately \$100.00 cheaper than a No. 1 standard.

The breech block and trigger mechanism are interchangeable with a No. 1, however the cocking lever which had a different shape and secures differently, is a unique part. The rifle was marketed in the following calibres, .22 Hornet,



.223, .30-40 Krag, .375 Win, .44 Mag and .45-70. However over the years prices increased and by the time production ceased in 1985 only the .45-70 was offered.

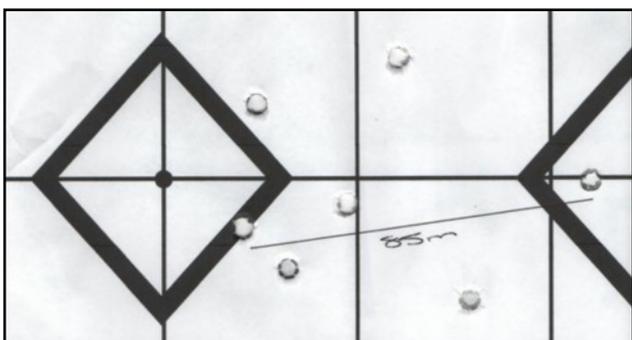
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#### Initial range test

When I purchased a rifle, the alarm bells were ringing due to the cost and the scope issues. Therefore the first task was to accuracy test. The scope that arrived with the rifle was a very cheap and was quickly disposed of in the bin. As mentioned earlier the rifle was fitted with No. 1 rings/bases and had been packed out to allow the rifle to zero. I serviced the breech mechanism, scrubbed the bore, and fitted a period and superior Redfield scope and headed off to the range. Ammunition was reloaded with 40gr Sierra hollow points, with the COL being set at the standard 1.78", which was originally for a magazine fed BSA Hunter. The lead on this rifle was measured at 1.92" which was quite a jump for small 40gr bullet. My first trip to the range to test fire the No 3 was a major disappointment. I expected problems with



the scope but even with the packing and maximum adjustment on the scope, I was still shooting 12" high at 100 yards. The rifle's mechanism functioned perfectly and the trigger release was relatively light for a Ruger at 3.09 lbs, so I was very pleased with the action. However the huge group of 85mm plus at 100 yards was no laughing matter and a major disappointment. It instantly reminded me of my early experience of my Ruger 77/22 in .22 hornet years ago, where groupings were equally disappointing. This early experience completely devastated my opinion of Ruger's rifles for years to come and now the same experience appeared to be repeating itself.

Going back to the workshop revealed that the barrel was not only touching the forend tip but also at other points along the barrel trough. I also thought that the barrel band could be effecting accuracy and that I should reload my ammunition with bullets seated at 1.92", which was a modest 0.025" off the throat.

#### General

Whilst the breech block and trigger assembly is the same as a No. 1, the use of different woodwork and barrel alter the No. 3's handling and shooting characteristics. Firstly with an overall length of 38.5" and a barrel length of 22" the rifle is sometimes referred to as a carbine, which is technically incorrect as a carbine is defined as having a barrel length of 20" or less. However depending on calibre, my opinion is that the No. 3 would typically engage targets at ranges a lot less than a No. 1, say 100 -300 yards and I think Ruger reflected this in their calibre choice.

The forend design is somewhat of a curiosity. Bearing in mind this is a budget rifle, why add a barrel band, plus the extra machining action required, as this all adds cost. In my opinion a plain beavertail would be more cost effective and potentially more accurate. However the band and the straight grip stock does add a element of "old west" character, which may have been Ruger's aim.



Straight grip stocks are typical of both military and sporting stocks from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century period. For anybody who has shot a military rifle from the period, handling is not as good as the later semi grip stocks. However, Ruger has been very clever in my opinion with the design of the cocking lever as the



profile forces the user to place two fingers into the cocking lever thereby creating a semi grip configuration and improving handling.

A less obvious difference with the No. 3's receiver is a small detent for retaining the cocking lever in the closed position.

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Built into the cocking lever is a small spring plunger, which engages in the detent, securing the cocking lever.

Sling swivels are the most basic available and suitable only for shoulder carrying the rifle. Whilst effective, the one item I regard as tacky is the black plastic recoil plate. The Ruger No. 1 is probably the USA's most elegant factory rifle and whilst the No. 3 is a budget version, it is still from the same stable and therefore, I believe Ruger could have produced something better with regards to this component.

## Restoring a Ruger No. 3



The No. 3's barrel had seen very little use and therefore wear to the lead or throat was negligible. As mentioned above, the barrel lead measured at 1.92" and most reloading manuals state the COL at 1.78", that's a 3.54mm jump for a small for 40gr bullet, which leaves lots of room for bore/bullet misalignment. Factory ammunition also tends to have a similar COL as it has to cycle through magazines and therefore I have to question why Ruger chamber their .22 Hornet rifles with such long leads. As can be seen from the image to the left, I have produce some cartridges with the extra long COL of 1.92". With the No 3 being a single shot action, the extra long COL does not impact on the function of the rifle, as it would in a magazine fed rifle.



As mentioned earlier in the report, the bases and rings that accompanied the No. 3 where a mess, not only because they where poorly fitted but because Ruger rings are very poorly manufactured and can easily damage a scopes tube. When adding a set of rings, matching them to the rifle is important. A picatinny rail and tactical rings would look out of place on a No 1 or No 3 and therefore a good quality set of 1" American rings with corresponding blocks would look more appealing as can be seen in the image. Therefore I chose to use Leupold blanks which where machined to the barrel radius, aligned with the bore and used the original mounting holes.



The next task was to restore the woodwork. The woodwork had some minor scratches, the handguard was cracked and different parts of the barrel trough where touching the barrel. As can be seen in the image below, I repaired the cracks, relieved the barrel trough and restored the finish. As the barrel band had the potential to effect accuracy, I

planned to accuracy test the rifle with and without it.

As original rifles is relatively rare in general and even more so in the UK, I wanted to retain as much originality as possible. Therefore I relieved the barrel trough, restored the butt and forend. Initially I would test with the barrel band and if accuracy was acceptable I would leave the rifle as is. However if the accuracy was still poor, I would test without it. If the rifles accuracy improved without the band, then long term, I planned to to remove the forend tip of the handguard as it would look odd without the band and fit an ebony tip which will make the rifle a little more elegant.

As mentioned in my other No. 1 reports, scopes with 30mm tubes look out of place and therefore I opted for a classic Redfield 6-18x40 Traditional scope. Being a classic American scope brand, dated from the same period as the rifle, I thought it would compliment the No. 3 perfectly. As this rifle would only be used on a 100 yard gallery range, x18 magnification was more than ample.

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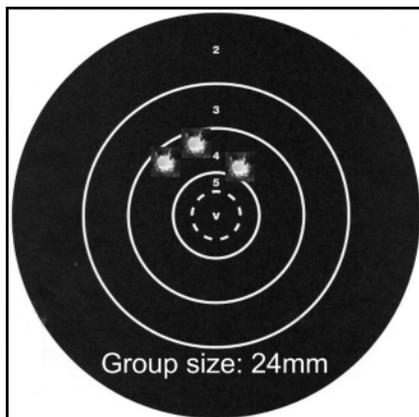
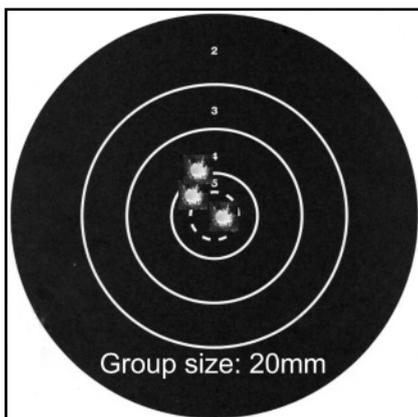
## Second range test

As I wanted to maintain the rifles originality as much as possible, I corrected the faults that would not impact on that concept. Therefore I corrected the bullet seating depth, relieved the barrel trough and fitted a decent set of Leupold



rings and bases. However despite these repairs it was still possible that the barrel band and the barrel quality could influence the previous poor groupings, but that could not be identified without another accuracy test.

On this occasion, ammunition was to be made up of Sierra 40gr Blitzking bullets, small pistol primers and 10gr of VV N110. The rifle was to be shot from the 100 yard bench, utilising a front and rear rest. First rounds would be to zero with the new scope and mounts and then follow up with a series of groups. The range test was conducted in May 2020 as the UK was coming out of the Corona pandemic and therefore I was limited to electronic targets and the poor quality range printer. As the print quality was so poor, I reproduced the targets below. The targets are the actual target screen used on the range, but the bullet strikes are computer generated and you will have to trust my honesty.



Having zeroed the rifle, I settled down to produce some groups. The rifle is nice and light to handle, but with sufficient weight to absorb the mild recoil of the .22 hornet cartridge. This is slightly let down by the straight grip, as it is not so comfortable to hold as the No. 1.

Bearing in mind the rifles early performance, my concerns melted away as the early groups showed promise of around 25mm. As I continued, it became apparent that groupings were remaining consistent and as can

be seen in the two target images of around 20-24mm. Remembering this rifle was manufactured as a budget model and I have not enhanced it in any way, I am happy with the rifles accuracy performance and really enjoyed shooting it.

## Summary

I never planned on purchasing a No. 3 as I didn't think that one would be available in the UK and whilst I have an interest in assembling a small collection of No. 1's, currently my plans are to convert them into target rifles and therefore finding this No. 3 has been an education and a move away from those original plans. In complete contrast to the No. 1's, the fact that this rifle has remained in its original condition since 1979, meant that where possible, it has to stay that way. I still wanted it to be accurate, but in only in terms of its original condition.

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The rifles early groupings had been a major disappointment but with some TLC and by extending the COL of the ammunition I had restored the rifles performance to an acceptable level.

Being able to compare the No. 3 to the No. 1 has been an education. The falling block action is one of the things I like most about this rifle, but the introduction of a straight grip butt and the different cocking lever, gives a completely different feel to the rifle, that loses that elegance of the No. 1. I know I am being overly harsh as this is a good rifle



but from a production point of view I cannot understand the concept that when coupled with the available calibre choice, this rifle becomes more of a working and functional tool, which in my opinion explains why the rifle never did well. I am not in anyway some sort of salesman, but the No. 1 was a special rifle with its elegant, single shot, falling block action, that attracted that special shooter, who craved that well placed single accurate shot.

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