

RIFLES: LONG ACTION MAGNUMS

SAUER'S NEW BUDGET RIFLE — THE 100XT IN 7MM REM MAG —

Words & Pics: Phil Day

► Phil carried the rig high into the Ruahines and found it easy in the hand and at shoulder.



SAUER IS A EUROPEAN COMPANY THAT'S BEEN IN THE GUN BUSINESS FOR A VERY LONG TIME, SINCE THE 17TH CENTURY TO BE PRECISE. GERMANY'S OLDEST RIFLE MANUFACTURER IN FACT AND A FIRM THAT NOT SURPRISINGLY MAKES SOME VERY NICE FIREARMS.

So, when an email came through asking if anyone was keen to do a rifle review on a new model Sauer in 7mm Rem Mag I said, "Yeah bro!"

I was slightly disappointed to discover that the test rifle was a new budget model called the 100XT – yes, it seems that as with other manufacturers today the "economy" rifle market is the place to be and Sauer has followed the trend. I can't blame them as this is where the biggest market share is by far for new rifle sales as any retailer will tell you and as confirmed by Hunting & Fishing's Andy Tannock in conversation at the last Sika Show.

And let's face it, for many people a \$1500 rifle is a big investment and nowadays most modern factory rifles in this price bracket are well made, shoot 'n' handle great, and do everything most NZ hunters want. The competition in the \$1500 rifle market is intense. The Tikka T3x

► The synthetic stock features a comfortable pistol grip and palm swell.

easily tops sales, but not everyone wants to conform to the masses and with a raft of other great options from Remington, Browning, Savage, Ruger and now Bergara etc., plus half a dozen other manufacturers on the shelf, this is by far the best value "price/rifle" category going.

Let's see how the Sauer 100XT stacks up.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The rifle came as a full package including a bi pod, an Aimpoint magnum suppressor and a Zeiss V6 3-18x50 scope.

It was a nice combo, slightly long and heavy (length all-up with suppressor fitted is 1295mm and the weight is 4568grams/10lb) but it's well balanced and it looked the ticket – so let's see how it comes together.

The bolt is a sturdy, large diameter design featuring three locking lugs, a nice 60-degree lift and it runs smoothly with a good positive

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closure coupled with an attractively machined and finished handle.

The trigger is also a nice unit that broke crisply at approx. 2.5lb with clean travel. The three-position safety is located on the right-hand side just behind the bolt handle like many other rifle brands so it's easy to use and remember. The stock felt good in my hands, it's a plastic unit with a well-

SAUER 100XT

CAPACITY:	5+1 rounds in Standard calibres
	4+1 rounds in Magnums
BARREL:	56 cm / 22" for Standard calibres
	62 cm / 24.4" for Magnum calibres
SIGHTS:	No iron sights supplied – Sauer HEXALOCK system for optics
OVERALL LENGTH:	106.6 cm / 42" for Standard calibres
	113 cm / 44.5" for Magnums
WEIGHT:	3.05 kg / 6.72 lbs in Standard calibres
	3.15kg / 6.94 lbs in Magnums

shaped pistol grip and finished off with a tulip tipped fore-end to give it a classic appearance. The barrel is a medium sporter profile with Sauer's own "Ceratech" finish. The detachable plastic magazine held four magnum rounds and overall it seemed like a nicely put together unit.

The inside of the barrel (i.e.; the bore) was another story, however. To my surprise it was filthy, so I gave it a scrub then it was off to Hawke's Bay to do some shooting. I was keen to see how the Sauer would handle a mix of factory ammo.

THE FIRST SHOTS

I chose to test/run factory ammo as I think that with a rifle in this price range it's a more realistic and honest way of evaluating a rifle – it's how it will be used in New Zealand and let's face it – modern factory ammo is pretty good. My choices were Federal 150 grain soft-point Blue Box, Winchester 140g Ballistic Silvertip, and Hornady 162g ELD-X Precision Hunters.

It was a typically nice sunny Hawke's Bay day. We set up some targets at 100 yards then began popping off some rounds.

The bolt ran smoothly with a positive cocking action and as stated the trigger is pretty good. The pistol grip/palm swell fitted my hand comfortably and combined with the length of pull made the

▼ A pair of hex head screws secure the bottom plate.





rifle a pleasure to shoot prone. The Aimpoint suppressor soaked up some recoil and noise (the rifle could be shot for three or four rounds without killing your ears!). This suppressor is a two-piece unit with a soft rubber outer coating and was very well made.

The Zeiss V6 finished everything off – this is an excellent scope with a good eyepiece and high-quality glass. The ZMOA reticle is a little tactical in style for a basic hunting scope but still very useable and not too busy. A good semi-target turret with nice positive clicks and a zero-stop function ticked all the boxes. Overall, it's a good unit.

So, just load her up and pull the trigger,

▲ *The large diameter, three-lug 60-degree bolt is sturdily constructed but on the test rifle at least, feeding reliability was less than 100%.*

right? Well this is where the wheels fell off slightly. While the XT was nice to shoot, loading fresh rounds and extracting spent cartridges was a mission. Also, the targets were a bit average, with only the Hornady showing any real promise. Things just didn't seem to gel, so I went home and spent a few hours over the weekend soaking and scrubbing out the chamber and barrel. I also stripped the rifle, checking the bedding



▲ *The synthetic magazine holds four magnum rounds.*

▶ *This free-floating front action bolt extends from the bottom of the tubular receiver.*



▲ *The recessed 10mm nut tightens up on the front action bolt but given the minimal clearance it's not easy to find a socket that will fit.*

etc, and everything else, then re-assembling the beast.

She's a funny design. The front action/recoil screw is a weird set-up. It consists of a "floating" front bolt mounted in the receiver that is fitted into and through the stock then tightened with a 10mm nut. The problem here is that you need to tighten it somehow and that's not easy as there's no tool supplied or room around the housing to fit a standard socket head. Luckily, I had a small 10mm ratchet spanner on hand (however I didn't know what torque to tighten it to). Then we come to the rear pillar action screw. Apparently, these come with a set of washers which were non-existent on this demo rifle, which surely didn't help the situation.

◀ *With the three brands of factory ammunition tested groups averaged 1.2 MOA approx. with the heavier Hornady rounds coming out on top.*

"ALL THREE FLAVOURS OF AMMO SHOT AT AROUND 1.2 MOA (GOOD HUNTING RIFLE ACCURACY) SO I DECIDED ON SIGHTING IN WITH THE FEDERAL BLUE BOX. WHILE IT'S THE CHEAPEST AMMO OUT OF THE THREE IT'S A GOOD BASIC SOFT-POINT BULLET DESIGN THAT KILLS WELL AND WOULD HAVE PLENTY OF GRUNT OUT TO 400 YARDS."

LET'S TRY THAT AGAIN

Yes, after another range session the rifle was shooting better and I'm starting to get a little more enthusiastic. All three flavours of ammo shot at around 1.2 MOA (good hunting rifle accuracy) so I decided

on sighting in with the Federal Blue Box. While it's the cheapest ammo out of the three it's a good basic soft-point bullet design that kills well and would have plenty of grunt out to 400 yards. Plus, I had a spare box sitting in the cupboard.

Off for a couple of walks and since the rifle came as a package, I decided to use it with the suppressor attached. While being quite long I only intended to use it out in open country so that wasn't a problem. The XT carried well and was nicely balanced even with the bi-pod attached.

On an evening hunt in the Ruahines with my mate Craig, we were sitting on the top of a large slip chatting quietly and glassing away when a couple of deer appeared in a distant clearing. I ranged them at 850 yards, a bit far for us and this untried set-up, so hopefully we'd spot something a little closer. Then within a few minutes a young spiker pops out on the rocks below.





I get set up, range 300 yards – it's a pretty steep downhill shot but I had a good rest, so I dialled in, lined up the scope then pulled the trigger. HIT!

The spiker stumbled. I went to load another round and with typical bad timing the round jammed. I bugged around sorting the problem having to dump the mag then reload and punch the mag back in. Luckily the spiker stood there on the crest of the slip somewhat incapacitated from the first hit. I lined him up again and "Boomfa", knocked him off his feet sending him summersaulting towards the bottom.

It was a bit of a steep, gnarly climb down the slope and I couldn't be bothered carrying the rifle and all my gear down then

▼ A red spiker, the Sauer's first kill, achieved with a couple of steep, downhill 300 yards shots from the new rig.



back up the hill just for a photo op. Just think of it as being a practical call.

Not the cleanest but the job was done, and the Sauer had taken the kill.

CONCLUSION

So, what do I think of the Sauer XT? Well, when you receive a demo gun that has a dirty bore and comes with a scope that's not even mounted straight it's not the best way to do things, so it did slightly sway my opinion towards the negative. Not the best way to start a relationship.

All in all it's not a bad gun but teething problems let it down such as the awkward front and rear bedding/mounting system and a bolt that, while it ran smoothly, had feeding issues plus a tendency to rotate in the action especially if the bolt release was pushed in (the bolt handle actually flicked over to the left hand side at one stage – a very odd experience). Little things like this can spoil your experience with a rifle, after all you will be spending lots

▲ Phil liked the Zeiss "Conquest" V6 scope. It's an open country model with excellent glass, exposed target turrets and a semi-tactical reticle. Note the Hexalock tip-off detachable mounts.

of time together.

Is it good enough to bump the T3 off as "best \$15-hundy" rifle on the market? No, and certainly not according to the sales figures – the Tikka has been an enormous seller over the past ten years and that's likely to continue.

Could it become a worthwhile option in the "value rifle" market? Yes, of course, it's a decent rifle. But I think it will take time to build a following and probably not until a second or third generation variant appears with some of the abovementioned teething problems ironed out. It's certainly got the heritage behind it but to me it's lacking that high Sauer design detail and finish. Now it's a workable rifle but not a great one.

As I said at the start – not everyone wants to conform with the rest of the sheep. It's cool to have character and be an individual, nothing's perfect and you won't always win but at least you can do things your way with your own style.

The 100XT is a little like this and isn't that what life's all about?

Philipo

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