



M&P 45: THE NEXT COMBAT PISTOL?

COMBAT ARMS

2010

FIRST LOOK

L129A1 

BRITS CHOOSE LMT .308

EXCLUSIVE

REMINGTON

ACR

THE MASADA MATURES

TESTED

LWRCI

REPR

**MEDIUM-RANGE
7.62 TACTICAL
PLATFORM**

ENDURANCE TESTED:

BEST BOOTS

- > BLACKHAWK LIGHT ASSAULT
- > DANNER STRIKER II
- > BATES DURASHOCKS STEEL TOE

BEST LIGHTS

- > STREAMLIGHT TLR-2
- > SUREFIRE E2D LED DEFENDER
- > INSIGHT X2 COMPACT

BEST OPTICS

- > NIKON TACTICAL SERIES
- > TRIJICON TA11H-G
- > ZEISS-HENSOLDT 4-16x56mm



STEALTH RECON



In the world of bullpups where shorter is better, Desert Tactical Arms has proven that shorter can be versatile and highly accurate as well. First introduced to the world at the 2008 SHOT Show, the Stealth Recon Scout (SRS) started rolling off the production line in January 2009. The SRS offers a unique collection of features: bolt-gun accuracy and reliability, the

short stature of a bullpup design and the flexibility of interchangeable barrels and calibers.

The genesis of the concept came when a fellow hunter and long-distance competitive shooter asked Nicholas Young which rifle he felt was best. His reply: "It has not been built yet." Nick was looking for a sniper-quality rifle—meaning high accuracy and

extreme durability—but he wanted a more compact and lighter package than what was available. He drew up a list of features he felt were needed to design his own, and the two discussed plans to go into business together. The partnership idea didn't work out, but the rifle concept did and Desert Tactical Arms was started in 2005 with Nick as the proprietor.

SCOUT

DESERT TACTICAL ARMS'

STEALTH. RECON SCOUT IS

SHORT, MULTI-CALIBER AND ACCURATE.



BY DAVID KENIK
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE ANSCHUETZ

Originally, the SRS was going to be a dedicated .338 Lapua Magnum rifle. The .338 LM

is Nick's favorite caliber because it can be built with nearly the same size and weight characteristics as .308 rifles, yet it has a trajectory that rivals the .50 BMG. While the .338 LM does have

The SRS is deceptively simple in design, eliminating wasted effort throughout. Function and flexibility are intuitive, and swapping calibers can be done easily.

also has very good penetration when using military AP ammunition.

Nick soon realized that military and police had an interest in being able to switch from a large caliber such as the

more recoil than the .308, it is quite manageable and far less than the .50. The .338 LM

.338 LM for long shots in mountainous and desert terrains to a smaller caliber such as the .300 Winchester Magnum or .308 Winchester, which would allow the rifle to be deployed in a more compact form for urban environments where mobility is required and lower penetration is a benefit. Another benefit is that by having both capabilities in one platform, shooters need only learn one system and new shooters can be trained on the smaller, easier-to-shoot calibers. Thus, the SRS multi-caliber concept was born.

The DSR-1 rifle by DSR-Precision was a source of influence for Nick's design, since it offers many of the characteristics he desired. In his mind, though, the DSR was not perfect. Numerous changes were made to simplify the design, decrease the weight and strengthen the structure for increased durability.

Without the benefit of an engineering background or having previous firearms design experience, Nick took his hand drawings to local machinists to have prototypes made. The response was that the complicated processes to build the parts required 3D computer machining, so Nick ended up buying a software package and teaching himself computer modeling.

In designing the SRS, Nick stated to me that his design principle was to "take the core components of accuracy and wrap them in as lightweight and durable a package as possible." His number-one concern was accuracy, and the key to accuracy was a strong and repeatable barrel-mounting system along with a quality barrel.

Barrels for the SRS are manufactured by Lothar Walthar and/or Kreiger from stainless steel or chrome-moly. Match-grade with a military match-spec chamber, they are held in place by four Allen screws and a locking helical. Barrel installation and removal are accomplished quite easily by the user in less than a minute with the supplied torque wrench.

Beyond swapping out the barrel, a caliber change necessitates only one additional step—changing the bolt. This is accomplished by sliding the

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bolt out of the receiver by way of the removable buttstock pad. Of course, use of the

appropriate magazine is required as well. When mounting a barrel, head-spacing is accomplished by installing the bolt and locking it into the action before tightening the barrel-retention screws. Simple as that.

The SRS was designed and built around the ballistic requirements of the .338 Lapua Magnum cartridge for strength and durability. Interchangeable bolts and barrels were scaled for .243 Win., .308 Win. and .300 Win. Mag. The initial rifle can be purchased in any of the available calibers, with additional caliber kits (which include

The sliding design of the ambidextrous safety just above the trigger makes it easy to manipulate without removing your hand from the pistol grip.

a barrel, bolt and magazine) added as needed.

With the .243 caliber, the barrel

measures 26 inches and has a twist rate of 1:7 inches. The rifle's overall length is 35½ inches, and it weighs 12 pounds. In .308 the barrel measures 22 inches and has a 1:11-inch twist. The SRS's total length is 31½ inches, and it weighs 9.4 pounds.

For the .300 Win. Mag. cartridge, the barrel measures 26 inches and has a 1:10-inch twist. Overall length is 35½ inches, and it weighs in at 12 pounds. With the .338 Lapua, the barrel length is 26 inches and has a 1:10-inch twist. The

rifle's length is 37½ inches, and it tips the scale at 11½ pounds.

A bullpup design was chosen for compactness and better balance. With the action and magazine behind the pistol grip, bullpups are substantially shorter than their comparably barreled conventional counterparts. As a comparison, the SRS rifle chambered in .338 LM with a 26-inch barrel is 11 inches shorter than a comparably barreled, typical sniper rifle. With its 22-inch barrel, the SRS in .308 is about the same size as the 16-inch M4.

Beyond merely shortening the overall length, the bullpup design's rear placement of the action changes the balance point of the rifle by shifting weight rearward. The SRS balance point is just in front of the triggerguard, which makes off-hand shooting more comfortable and reduces fatigue from holding the rifle steady.

The SRS is made up of a 775 aluminum receiver (for strength and light weight) sandwiched between two halves of a glass-filled polymer "skins," which form the frame. The frame surrounds part of the receiver and comprises the magazine well, buttstock, trigger housing and pistol grip. Looking at it, it appears to resemble a lower receiver. The polymer frames are bolted to the receiver to form a very strong and durable finished body. The integrated buttstock encompasses three removable recoil



The intimidating muzzle brake is extremely effective, but observers won't want to be standing off to the side when firing .338 Lapua.

The upper receiver is light, simple and strong. The Allen screws which secured the barrel are plainly visible.

pads, offering a total of 1½ inches of length-of-pull adjustment.

Due to the long linkages required to connect the trigger to the sear and hammer at the rear of the rifle, the quality of bullpup triggers has traditionally suffered. To improve the trigger design, Nick evaluated other bullpup triggers and took the best ones as a starting point to design his own. The result is a match-grade, single-stage trigger that rivals conventional match triggers. Users can adjust the SRS's trigger travel, weight (from one to six pounds) and backlash from underneath the triggerguard without any disassembly.

An ambidextrous safety sits above the trigger in the middle of the triggerguard. The sliding, push-pull design is easily manipulated while in the shooting position, as the hand does not need to be removed from the pistol grip. A free-floated quad-rail system manufactured from 6061 aluminum surrounds the barrel and offers plenty of rail estate for scopes,

Buttstock shims can be added or removed to allow for adjustment of up to an inch and a half of pull. Making a change takes a few seconds.



night-vision accessories, bipods, lights and lasers. Sling points are balanced with the centerline of the SRS to ensure that the rifle lies flat when slung.

Desert Tactical Arms offers its own one-piece scope rings designed specifically for the cheekrest and rail height of the SRS, negating the need for an adjustable cheekrest. Working with scope bells of 56mm or smaller, they are available in both 34 and 35mm widths. Inserts are available for 30mm scopes as well. For extreme distances, scope rings are offered with

QD-style sling attachment points line both sides of the SRS to allow for almost any style of carry.

a choice of 20-, 30- or 40-MOA tapers. If you prefer to use your own rings, a height of 1.55 will fit the vast majority of shooters.

As if those innovations weren't enough, there's one more. The SRS's magazines offer a shoulder retention feature, which was designed and patented by Desert Tactical Arms. The contour of the magazine hugs the shoulder of the cartridge, which keeps the cartridges in the magazine from being damaged by hitting the front of the magazine wall during recoil. Shooters no longer need to single-load their rifles to maintain ultimate accuracy.

DRAWBACKS CONSIDERED

A couple of drawbacks associated with bullpups are their inability to be used ambidextrously and slow magazine changes. Nick analyzed how and in what positions magazine changes are done with different rifle platforms. While a bullpup design hindered change-outs on an infantry weapon, the rear placement of the magazine on a sniper rifle actually enhanced its speed. A traditional long, heavy sniper rifle forces the shooter to tip the rifle on its side, reach forward and use two hands to rip the magazine from the mag well. This effort is exacerbated by a 17-plus-pound barrel-heavy design. With the SRS, the operator needs just one hand to reach and release the magazine. As the SRS is designed with a free-fall mechanism, releasing



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the magazine is much easier than with traditional rifles.

Try as he may, Nick couldn't figure a way to make the SRS completely ambidextrous. Doing so would require a bottom ejection system, but that would necessitate giving up the magazine system, which was not an acceptable trade-off. However, unlike a semiauto bullpup, gases and cases are not thrust into the shooter's face with a bolt gun, which alleviates that issue. Also, the SRS can be fired comfortably left-handed. The only catch is that the shooter's head must be lifted to cycle the bolt left-handed.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MARKET

With prototypes in hand, Desert Tactical Arms displayed the SRS at the 2008 SHOT Show. The overwhelming

industry response gave Nick the confidence and ability to go full time with his endeavor. The first production units shipped in January 2009. The company has grown tremendously since then. With a full-time staff of 20 people, Desert Tactical Arms now manufactures all its own components in-house with the exception of the barrels and injection-molded parts.

ON THE RANGE

If you're like me, you are probably saying, This all sounds good, but can it shoot? And will it rezero after a barrel change? In short, yes and yes.

My test gun was supplied with both .308 and .300 Win. Mag. kits. I chose Black Hills' 168-grain Match hollowpoint .308 and its 190-grain Match hollowpoint .300 Win. Mag. rounds for my test ammo. Black Hills has earned its reputation for quality, accurate match ammunition by loading to the highest standards. Every batch of ammunition is made with the same batch of components for ultimate consistency.

Black Hills Ammunition offers 38 dif-



Three mags for three chamber lengths. Note the case stop in the rear of the .308/.243 length mag.

ferent loads in 12 rifle calibers ranging from .22-250 to .338 Lapua Magnum. Its handgun line offers 22 loads in nine calibers from .32 H&R Magnum to .45 ACP. Especially popular are its 9mm, .38, .40, .45 and .223 rounds in its remanufactured line, which offers new components in a once-fired case. I have shot many of its rifle and handgun cartridges in both the new and remanufactured line with great results.

For glass, I mounted a Nightforce Optic 5.5-22x56mm NXS scope. Designed for long-range shooting, the large 56mm objective is an excellent option for low-light shooting. The extended magnification is well suited to both precision aiming and for target identification. Dialing down the scope to its 5.5 magnification offers a wider field of vision for locating targets.

Nightforce's scopes are designed to withstand repeated recoil from the largest calibers, extreme shock and severe temperature changes. The NXS line is built with a 30mm tube and features quarter-MOA adjustment clicks. Internally lit, there are 14 laser-etched reticle designs offered for every kind of shooting, from tactical to benchrest.

Magazines insert and fall free with ease, and they are manipulated without difficulty.



SOURCES:

Black Hills Ammunition
605/348.5150
www.black-hills.com

Desert Tactical Arms
801/975-7272
www.deserttacticalarms.com

Nightforce
Lightforce USA Inc.
208/476-9814
www.nightforceoptics.com



I have used several Nightforce scopes, all with great success.

Desert Tactical Arms not only boasts the SRS to be half-MOA accurate, it guarantees it. My bench shooting at 100 yards proved it to be true. My groups were half inch and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch consistently. I am confident that a more stable shooting platform than I had available would reduce the $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch groups.

In terms of the barrel changes, I shot the gun and removed and reinstalled the barrel when it was hot. I shot the gun cold, took out the barrel, let it cool and reinstalled it. I also changed calibers back and forth. In all trials, the point of impact returned properly. There was, of course, a change in the point of impact with the different calibers, but with the rifle consistently returning to zero it's easy to measure the change and compensate with scope adjustments.

Besides how it shoots, there is also the question of how the SRS handles. Manipulation of the bolt and chambering rounds was smooth. I did have a problem with one magazine, but that was replaced quickly, which solved the problem. The safety, although in an unusual position, was easy to reach and actuate.

The gun shouldered comfortably and securely. The contoured grip was comfortable, although its pistol-grip shape enticed me to squeeze it like a combat rifle—a problem with my technique, not the rifle.

As promised, the Desert Tactical Arms scope rings were the perfect height for me to align my eye to the glass without the need for an adjustable cheekweld. The trigger had a different feel than my other precision triggers, but was light and crisp. Once I got used to it I found it to be just as accurate as those on my traditional rifle. The change in balance point was very noticeable while shooting offhand. Although it was still a heavy gun, having more of the weight rearward was helpful. All in all, the benefits the company touted held true.

By the time this magazine hits the stands, Desert Tactical Arms will have introduced two variants, a Hunter model with an extra-thin barrel and lighter-weight handguard and a Covert model sporting a shorter barrel and suppressor. Nick has another project up his sleeve as well, but at least for now he swore me to secrecy.

The SRS's chassis retails for \$2,560,

and caliber kits range between \$1,300 and \$1,625. A price of \$3,860 (rifle chassis plus a .243- or .308-caliber kit) might turn some heads, but if you factor in the cost of a high-quality, half-MOA-capable rifle (typically only custom rifles are capable of this level of accuracy) and add in the cost savings of converting calibers rather than buying an additional firearm, then include not having to buy additional scopes, bipods, slings and other accessories, the price becomes much lower than the alternative. Another benefit of the interchangeable-caliber capability is that the shooter maintains an identical cheekweld and trigger pull across all platforms. If you are looking for a single-caliber rifle, the SRS offers quality manufacturing and high accuracy in a compact, easy-to-function design. If you are looking to shoot multiple calibers, the SRS may just save you a small fortune as well. **CA**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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While the .338 Lapua and .300 Winchester Magnum barrels stick well beyond the forearm, the thread-protected muzzle of the .308 barrel only slightly protrudes ahead of the rails and bipod.