

SNIPER

BRIEFING

- UNUSUAL SHOOTING POSITIONS
- HELO TRAINING
- SCOPE RETICLES

TESTED

- ACCURACY INTERNATIONAL AX
- BARRETT M107A1
- McMILLAN TAC-338
- NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM
- REMINGTON MK 13
- LARUE OBR 7.62

Remington

MSR

.300 WIN. MAG. | .338 LAPUA MAG.
.308 WIN. | .338 NORMA MAG.

+ Remington
XM2010

.300 WIN. MAG.

GOVERT

AN EXCLUSIVE TEST FIRE OF THE
SHORTEST 7.62 SNIPER EVER BUILT.





The Stealth Recon Scout (SRS) from Desert Tactical Arms (DTA) is a new application of the bullpup concept in a bolt-action configuration. It was developed in 2007, and when I first saw it at the 2008 SHOT Show, I was taken aback.

As a writer at that time, I tried and tried to get an assignment to cover what I was purporting to be the most important introduction of that show.

Unfortunately, the entire publishing industry was slow to notice this small company. As an editor now, I have the latitude to cover firearms that appeal to a reader with specific interests and am able to make assignments based on what the readers are talking about. These days I am hearing more and more armed professionals talking about the SRS Covert.

MAKING THE CASE

The Covert shares the same fundamentals as the original SRS, but for the price of a complete DTA rifle system, members of the law enforcement community needed a rifle that better adapted to their tight environments if they were going to get the necessary funds approved to replace their aging long guns.

"The SRS did little in the way of LE sales," says Nicholas Young, founder and president of Desert Tactical Arms. "The Covert has breached the LE sales market for us. The day we released it, multiple agencies bought it."

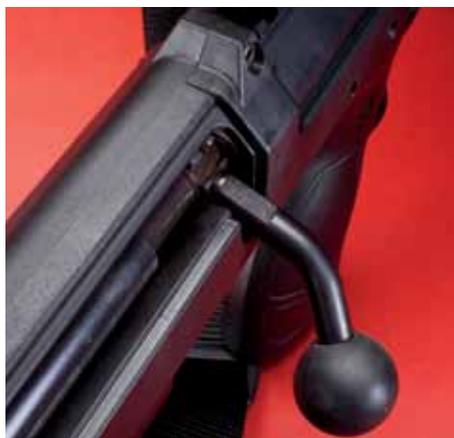
They bought it because the Covert is what Nick calls a "police sniper's dream gun." As the Covert measures just 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches from muzzle to stock, an undercover officer rolling in an unmarked unit can be ready to exit a vehicle with the SRS on his lap if he chooses. What other sniper rifle can you do that with? The officers I know give up space in their trunk for a rifle that you have to transport in a hardcase.

In a profession driven by the liability of errors, the Covert makes a lot of sense. When you compare a short-barreled, 7.62-chambered AR that's similar in overall length, it won't have near the precision of the Covert. For starters, the tolerances and build quality are far superior to an AR, which is just part of the justification for the system's cost.

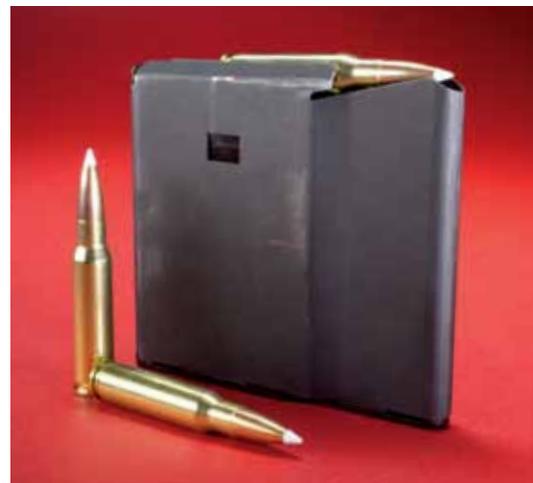
"We're not reworking a [Remington] 700 action or AR receiver," Nick says. "We've built the SRS from the ground up. Our methods of machining ensure complete concentricity from the receiver through the bore. When another company builds a rifle on another action, the best result that they can achieve is limited by the quality that they receive. We machine our own. We're not limited by anything."

When DTA developed the Covert, it was watching what other companies were doing with an 18-inch barrel. The good velocities and reliable performance of a short-barreled tactical 7.62 have surprised many operators in both military and law enforcement communities. Even USSOCOM is dropping back to shorter barrels in this caliber to make them more portable.

DTA was a little hesitant in approaching such an extreme that the long-range community hadn't seen before. How could such a small rifle be accurate? If you're one of those asking this question, the numbers I've seen in testing the Covert and SRS reveal little loss in the way of performance. Looking back to the velocities from a 22-inch barrel I first tested on the original SRS, I'm seeing only about 100 feet per second loss when comparing my results with those I've gathered while testing the new Covert. Desert Tactical Arms reports the same.



DTA manufactures nearly all of the components—from the one-piece base and ring system to the adjustable trigger—to minimize the stacking of variables that could influence the system's accuracy. Surprising to most who think they know bullpups, this bolt action is very fast to cycle and extremely adaptable.



“When we saw the numbers,” says Nick, “we determined that the 7.62 was still supersonic at 1,100 yards. We tested it out to 1,150 and found that it’s still accurate. It kind of surprised us. In reality, you only lose 15 feet per second per inch that the barrel is shortened, so it wasn’t as much as many in this industry think.”

GREAT THINGS

The price point isn’t ideal to attract a lot of law enforcement sales, but the Covert offers so many advantages that it justifies its own cost to departments that can afford it. What makes the Covert particularly suited for police work is that it will still accept other SRS conversion kits. The officer gets a 1,100-yard-capable sniper rifle in a package that rivals most modern submachine-gun lengths (including the MP5) carried by SWAT. With the chassis system, a sniper team can look to other barrel options with different twist rates to best accommodate subsonic ammunition passing through a suppressor or full-power ammo needed to penetrate barriers. And a barrel change is accomplished on the scene at the operator level.

You do lose rail space with the Covert chassis compared with a standard SRS, but this compromise was necessary for the ability to install such a short barrel. You can still get certain night vision devices in front of the scope. Currently, SF operators are excited about the Covert for use from a helicopter where there’s limited mobility, but this compactness isn’t limited to foreign operations. It also serves the discreet law enforcement officer assigned to provide sniper cover from inside a vehicle in an urban area or quickly respond to an active-shooter call out.

DTA tells me that its clients are asking for a complete package. In step with the PSR demands of our military, they want a rifle delivered with immediate suppressor capability, maintenance and tool kit, and a



The overall length of the Covert makes it shorter than most carbines with 16-inch barrels. Combine this fact with its far-reaching accuracy, and this system enables police departments to expand their tactical capabilities.

softcase to pick up and go. When an officer goes to his special-purpose rifle, the situation is often developing quickly and he can’t afford the time to sort through a bag of gear. He wants a high-mobility package.

IMPORTANT ASPECTS

The SRS series has built a reputation for unusual accuracy in all calibers because it’s built on the core components of accuracy: a match-grade and free-floated barrel, a high-quality trigger, match chambers and a return-to-zero barrel mounting system. The part about this rifle’s accuracy that makes it unusual apparently comes from the barrel interface with the receiver. DTA indicates that it’s like having a barrel shank. The Covert possesses similar barrel whip characteristics as an AR barrel that’s six inches shorter, which

is known to encourage better accuracy. If you were to shoot the Covert in a mounted fixture, Nick confirms my suspicion that the 16-inch-barrel Covert would likely outshoot an SRS with a 22-inch barrel—but you’re not going to see that result while trying to shoot the Covert on a bipod or with a cheap scope.

The reinforced stock panels encase the bolt-action assembly. The stock panels attach directly to the receiver, which acts as a full-length mounting chassis and eliminates the need for traditional bedding techniques. The Lothar Walther barrel has a 1:8-inch twist rate and is finished with a suppressor adapter designed and machined by DTA.

The SRS-QD brake adapter was developed using high-speed video in an effort to maximize recoil reduction. Coincidentally, it also helped in reducing barrel whip. This benefit combined with a uniform gas dispersion and harmonic stabilization allowed the SRS-QD to enhance the system’s accuracy. In order to minimize ground disturbance and flash interruption of night vision devices, there was only one direction to orient the ports—horizontally. One adapter utilizes two muzzlebrake ports to tame the .338 LM, while a single port adapter is used for barrels chambered in .308 and .338 Win. Mag. These adapters are purposefully designed. Thirty-caliber

DESERT TACTICAL ARMS SRS COVERT

TYPE:	Bolt action, bullpup configuration
CALIBER:	.308 Win. (tested), .300 Win. Mag., .338 LM
CAPACITY:	6 rd. (.308 Win.), 5 rd. (.300 Win. Mag. and .338 LM)
BARREL:	16 in., Lothar Walther, stainless steel, 1:8 RH twist (.308)
OVERALL LENGTH:	28.25 in. (w/o suppressor)
WEIGHT:	9.7 lb. (w/o suppressor)
STOCK:	Polymer, glass filled (OD green, black, flat dark earth)
FINISH:	Hardcoat anodized (aluminum)
MSRP:	SRS Covert chassis: \$3,072 .308 barrel kit: \$1,590 Covert softcase: \$264 Maintenance kit: \$355 Harris bipod and Picatinny QD mount: \$189 Horus Vision Blackbird scope: \$960
MANUFACTURER:	Desert Tactical Arms, 801-975-7272 deserttacticalarms.com

ACCURACY RESULTS

DESERT TACTICAL ARMS .308 WIN.

LOAD 1

Hornady A-Max 155-gr. Match
 Muzzle Velocity (18-in. barrel): 2,860 fps
 Muzzle Velocity (16-in. barrel): 2,597 fps
AVG. 100-YD. GROUP: 0.840 in.
BEST 100-YD. GROUP: 0.310 in.
AVG. 200-YD. GROUP: 1.510 in.
BEST 200-YD. GROUP: 0.980 in.

LOAD 2

Hornady TAP FPD 168-gr.
 Muzzle Velocity (18-in. barrel): 2,700 fps
 Muzzle Velocity (16-in. barrel): 2,464 fps
AVG. 100-YD. GROUP: 0.915 in.
BEST 100-YD. GROUP: 0.667 in.
AVG. 200-YD. GROUP: 1.346 in.
BEST 200-YD. GROUP: 1.173 in.

LOAD 3

Hornady Superformance 178-gr. BTHP Match
 Muzzle Velocity (18-in. barrel): 2,775 fps
 Muzzle Velocity (16-in. barrel): 2,587 fps
AVG. 100-YD. GROUP: 0.645 in.
BEST 100-YD. GROUP: 0.345 in.
AVG. 200-YD. GROUP: 1.250 in.
BEST 200-YD. GROUP: 1.035 in.

suppressors will only fit the smaller adapter. This helps prevent baffle strikes, damage to the suppressor and a mismatched system. The suppressor threads over the break using patent-pending technology that spins the can to keep it tight.

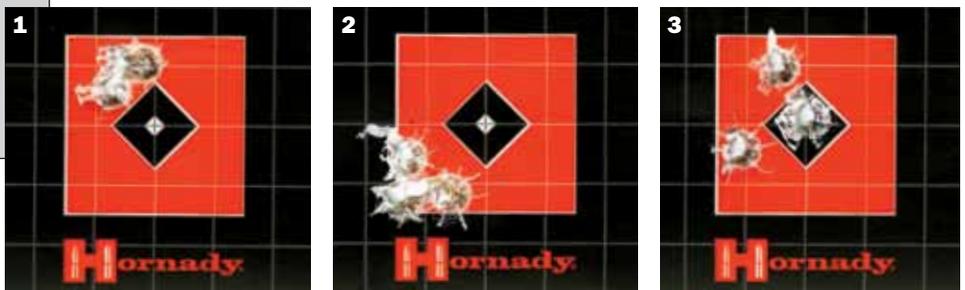
The Covert quad-rail fore-end shares the same basic design as the original SRS with full-length fore-end. The threads are carefully timed so the top Picatinny rail lines up and perfectly engages an index keyway machined into the top of the receiver. DTA adds Loctite for extra security.

OTHER DETAILS

The original SRS series and the Covert fall into two different classifications.

Even so, the Covert shares modularity with all SRS full-size kits. This provides the agency that purchases a Covert now and barrel kits later with the most versatility that this rifle can offer. DTA manufactures most of the parts that go into its products, and it is only developing new offerings that it can readily support with supply. The adjustable trigger appears on all SRS rifles and leaves the factory set to a default position. Although the trigger on my sample was set at 2½ pounds, triggers are adjustable between a range of one to six pounds.

Nick gets a lot of questions about adapting the polymer lower to accept AR grips. He asks me, “Do you think people will pay \$5,000 for an



LOAD 1—The most impressive target during accuracy testing came from this three-shot, 100-yard group using Hornady A-Max Match. It measures .31 inch. **LOAD 2**—The 168-grain TAP ammunition had the smallest deviation and averaged a .915-inch group at 100 yards. **LOAD 3**—This three-shot group was fired from 200 yards and best illustrates the advantage of the Superformance load in the Covert. This group measured 1.035 inches.



SRS chassis?" The short response to this question reflects the fact that he tries to minimize the overall cost of the system by not altering the chassis to accept AR grips. That's important, but what many operators might not realize is that the AR-style grip is not made for a heavy prone gun, and when you shoot an AR chambered for a caliber larger than the 5.56, the grip screws would work themselves loose if not for lock washers.

In keeping with the mission of achieving maximum accuracy, DTA has developed a unique shoulder retention feature in all SRS-series magazines. This is designed to prevent the bullet nose of the cartridges from slamming forward into the magazine's inner wall during recoil. This detail might seem unnecessary, but it's just another way DTA has tried to protect the design's inherent accuracy by attempting to eliminate the chance of a deformed projectile from diminishing accuracy. Along the subject of magazine details, the SRS internal magazine length is four inches long, which is .4 inch longer than comparable magazines. This makes it possible to load the 300-grain bullets (or larger) to their max.

RANGE EVAL

In preparation for an upcoming winter sniper course in Utah, I've been hiking up and down hills to my long-gun shooting station. Packed and strapped across my back in its specially designed softcase, the Covert system has enabled the easiest trek in reaching this snow-covered location than any sniper rifle I've tested.

The scope arrived with a Horus Vision Blackbird 1.5-8X scope with Horus reticle. I'm a proponent of the reticle, but this scope's quality was lacking in glass and build quality for use with such a precise rifle system. The ON-OFF-ON-OFF illuminated reticle feature didn't work for me, and during the closing hours of daylight, the scope aided little in terms of light transmission. One particular plus is that with this scope, there is still room to add an AN/PVS-22 night vision



Ammunition feeds from a detachable, single-stack magazine. When cycling the bolt, it only has to travel 4¼ inches to be ready to strip another round from the magazine and guide it into the chamber.

device in front of the Blackbird's objective lens on the Covert's shortened rail space. Besides that, an actual end-user for this rifle would be better served with something akin to a 3-12X optic that exploits this rifle's fine precision and 1,000-yard capability.

The compact bullpup nature of the SRS series shifts the weight rearward. This provides an intangible feature in that it makes handling better balanced than a tradition rifle with similar barrel length. It's faster to swing and carries without favoring one end or the other.

To add a bit of control to the accuracy gathering, I decided to use three different loads from the same manufacturer—Hornady. I've shot these rifles before and know their potential, but to see which bullet weight and load this configuration would prefer, I decided to try and keep ammunition quality consistent.

When shooting the Covert, you feel little recoil. It might be the muzzlebrake or its weight. I'm not really sure. It could also be the fact that this 16-inch barrel isn't burning 20 to 30 percent of the cartridge's powder, so less energy than from a barrel of a longer length is traveling rearward as the bullet exits. That might have something to do with it.

The Covert is heavier than similar-length carbines of a smaller caliber, so the mental hurdle of shooting a rifle weighing 9.7 pounds and measuring 28¼ inches might be something that you just have to get over. The weight and balance are likely going to help you stay near point of aim after firing each shot.

As daylight began to fade, my unsuppressed test setup revealed the orange fireball bursts in front of me. I fired 120 rounds across three

days without incident and gathered five five-shot groups and chrono data from each load. The result was a slight favoritism toward the new Hornady Superformance ammunition the more distance I put between myself and the target. Superformance ammunition is designed around a special formula

of powder that helps each bullet fly farther and faster than a comparable counterpart. My results confirm that this rifle is a sub-half-MOA rifle with the 178-grain bullet at 100 yards and a sub-MOA rifle with all three bullets at 200 yards. The design of the Covert does a lot to make up for other variables that can affect accuracy.

My data supported the assertion that the Covert is perfectly suited for police sniping—not only in terms of superior accuracy, as it also offers snipers maneuverability while trying to sneak into a hide, working around corners or moving within buildings. Best of all, even with the 16-inch barrel, it can deliver a crisis-ending blow many times beyond typical LE sniping distances.

CONCLUSION

The SRS was debuted for proof of concept more than three years ago by a company that started with just five employees. Today Desert Tactical Arms operates with 30. Interest from SOCOM and the law enforcement community drives the direction of its products, and the company has only just begun to offer a complete system—cases, tool kits, slings, optic mounting solutions, even a pending line of ammunition and suppressors.

"We're fixated on controlling what we can to achieve unparalleled accuracy," Nick says. "We're going to make the most accurate weapons in the world smaller, lighter, faster and more reliable. We're a force to be reckoned with. A lot of the surprising things that we hear from USSOCOM is based on how impressed they are that such a small company can stand up to compete with this industry's giants." If everyone test-fired a DTA SRS Covert, they would all be impressed. **SNIPER**