

DESERT TACTICAL SRS .338 LAPUA

Stealth Recon Scout—
new breed multi-caliber
precision rifle!

BY CHARLIE CUTSHAW

Desert Tactical SRS has a bullpup configuration, allowing a full-length barrel in a package that is no longer than a short-barreled carbine. Full-length MIL-STD-1913 top rail provides mounting surface for optics and state-of-the-art night vision sights. SRS comes standard with Harris bipod.

enter the US Military Special Operations Forces and probably the conventional military as well. The USSOCOM solicitation calls for a “non-wildcat” factory-produced .338 cartridge, which, while not specifically mandating a .338 Lapua rifle, just about eliminates every other cartridge of the same bullet diameter.

The new rifle must be manually operated and capable of 1 minute of angle (MOA) accuracy from 330 to 1640 yards. Weight is limited to 18 pounds and overall length to 52 inches, excluding suppressor. While not specifically required, the solicitation implies that a detachable five-round magazine is desired. While MOA accuracy to 1640 yards may seem overly stringent, the fact is that we have fired our personal .338 Lapua ArmaLite AR-30 to 1500 yards and our particular rifle actually achieves better than MOA accuracy. The new rifle will replace all current Special Operations Forces precision tactical rifles, including the M40 and the M24.

Cartridge Details

The original .338 was developed by Research Armament in the United States in 1983 at the request of the US Navy. The .338 cartridge is based on a necked-down .416 Rigby case and in its original configuration launched a 250-grain bullet at nearly 3000 feet per second (fps) with a muzzle energy of over 4800 foot-pounds of energy (fpe). A prototype rifle and ammunition were produced and tested by the Navy, but the cartridge never was manufactured in the US. Lapua and

For those who keep track of these things, an emerging trend in military precision tactical rifle calibers is the .338 Lapua Magnum, a military cartridge whose time has come. Rifles in .338 Lapua have been adopted by several countries including Canada, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and others. In the United States a few military units use .338s based on the Remington 700 long action, but until recently there was no “official” interest in the cartridge. However, with the recent US-SOCOM solicitation for a new “Precision Sniper Rifle” the .338 Lapua will eventually



DOD PHOTO

The Desert Tactical SRS .338 Lapua Mag would be a great asset for our armed forces fighting in the mountains of Afghanistan.

DESERT TACTICAL SRS .338 LAPUA

Norma finished development and got the cartridge into production. Besides Lapua, Black Hills loads both 250- and 300-grain cartridges. In the latter configuration, the 300-grain bullet leaves the muzzle at 2800 fps with a whopping 5223 fpe. By comparison, a 168-grain .308 match cartridge has a muzzle velocity of only approximately 2600 fps and 2180 fpe. The .308 is totally overshadowed by the .338 Lapua, although most rifles in this caliber are only marginally heavier than precision tactical rifles chambered for the .308.

Naturally, a large cartridge like the .338 will necessarily deliver more felt recoil than lesser cartridges, but this can be offset by the use of muzzle brakes. As the .338 Lapua became accepted by a number of the world's military forces as replacements for or supplements to bridge the gap between the .308 and .50 BMG, it was only a matter of time before the US military began to consider it.

For the military, the .338 gives the precision tactical marksman a significant effective range advantage over any .308 caliber rifle, while adding little to the weight burden that every field soldier must contend with. At closer ranges, especially those associated with Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) that characterize operations in Iraq; and for law enforcement, where engagement distances are almost never more than 100 yards, the .338 offers the precision marksman the capability to defeat targets that would resist any .308 bullet. For law enforcement, the .338 bears examination as an alternative to .50 caliber rifles because most organizations do not require the terminal ballistics of the .50 BMG cartridge, but exceed those of the traditional .308 for positive vehicle stops, defeating hard targets such



SRS controls are fully ambidextrous with exception of bolt handle. All controls can be manipulated without taking hand from pistol grip. Mag drops free when release is pressed.

as brick walls and other situations where the .308 isn't sufficient, but where use of a .50 BMG rifle might be considered overkill and negatively viewed by civilians or the news media. Also, the .338 Lapua is one of the few cartridges whose bullet will reliably penetrate aircraft windshields and retain sufficient terminal ballistics to eliminate targets in aircraft cockpits. With the forthcoming adoption of a .338 Lapua

by American Special Operations Forces, the use of .338 Lapua caliber rifles by law enforcement is certain to grow and one of the candidates for the USSOCOM contract is the subject of this evaluation—the highly innovative Stealth Recon Scout (SRS) from Desert Tactical.

Gun Details

To say that the SRS is innovative is a huge understatement. First, the SRS is a bullpup. Bullpup rifles have several advantages over conventional designs, in that a bullpup rifle can have a full-length barrel in an overall configuration that's about the same length as a short-barreled carbine. For operations in urban terrain, this is a significant advantage in close quarters. Likewise, when deploying from vehicles, the shorter overall length of a bullpup is a tactical advantage. Our test SRS, for example, has a 26-inch barrel (less muzzle brake) in a package that is only 39.5 inches in overall length, almost identical to that of a standard M16A2 with 20-inch barrel. It should be noted that by removing the adjustable buttstock spacers, the rifle's overall length drops down to 37 inches.

Despite the advantages of a bullpup system, many shooters prefer conventional configurations for a variety of reasons that have been specifically eliminated from the SRS. The most common complaint about bullpups is a poor trigger, engendered by the fact that the trigger is separated from the actual fire control mechanism by several inches. Although the trigger and fire control of the SRS are separated, the trigger is as good as any we have ever encountered on any precision tactical rifle. The trigger on our test SRS broke at just less than 2 pounds with no perceptible creep or overtravel.

In fact, the trigger on this test rifle was actually too light for a precision tactical rifle whose trigger should break in the 3- to 3.5-pound range. The reason for this is to reduce the possibility of accidental discharges in stressful situations. That said, the SRS trigger is fully adjustable for overall pull weight, travel and backlash, so if we were to actually deploy with the SRS, we'd increase the trigger pull a bit.

Another common bullpup complaint

is that the magazine is behind the rifle's pistol grip. In a tactical carbine this is a disadvantage, but this isn't the case with a precision tactical rifle that is typically fired from the prone position. Instead of having to reach forward with the right hand to drop the magazine, the SRS magazine system enables the shooter to remove and replace magazines without moving his right hand from the pistol grip. The shooter simply removes his or her left hand that is used to stabilize the rifle in the shoulder pocket, press in on the release and the empty magazine drops free. Insert a fresh magazine and the rifle is ready for action.

About the only complaint that the SRS doesn't address is that it isn't fully ambidextrous. Nick Young, the designer, said that as much as he'd have liked to overcome that complaint, he couldn't because he'd have to have made the rifle eject out the bottom, making it a single shot; a detachable magazine was a must, although the rifle can easily be fired



Once new barrel is inserted, retaining bolts are re-tightened and torqued to 65 inch-pounds. Seekonk preset T Handled torque wrench from Brownells makes precise torque a "snap."



Barrel is removed by turning three retaining bolts a half turn and then sliding barrel out the front of the stock/receiver assembly.

in the left-handed position, the operator's head must be lifted slightly to operate the bolt, the selector switch is fully ambidextrous and the production guns will have an ambi mag release too. The SRS operating mechanism is completely surrounded by the stock and receiver assembly except the ejection port/bolt channel and magazine well, which is closed when a magazine is in place. In areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan where



Bolt can be removed for maintenance or caliber change by just pressing a pin, sliding off butt plate and pulling bolt out of the rifle's stock/receiver assembly.

SPECIFICATIONS: DESERT TACTICAL SRS

- CALIBER:** .243Win, .308, .300Win Mag, .338 Lapua
- BARREL:** 22 to 26 inches, depending on caliber
- OA LENGTH:** 31.5 to 37.5 inches, depending on caliber
- WEIGHT:** 9.4 to 12.4 pounds (empty), depending on caliber
- SIGHTS:** None
- STOCKS:** Injection molded
- ACTION:** Bolt action
- FINISH:** Hard coat anodized
- CAPACITY:** 5-shot mag (.338), 7-shot mag (.308)
- PRICE:** \$3275-3585



DESERT TACTICAL SRS .338 LAPUA

dust the consistency of talcum powder gets into everything, this is a significant improvement over conventional bolt action rifles whose actions are completely exposed to the elements.

Another goal in the SRS design was accuracy and here the rifle exceeds in spades. One more aspect of the SRS is the fact that it's a multi-caliber rifle. Nick Young originally envisioned the rifle as a dedicated .338 Lapua, but military and law enforcement precision tactical marksmen he consulted during the development process stated that the ability to convert the rifle to other calibers such as .300 Win Mag or .308 would be highly desirable. Hence the SRS can be converted from one caliber to another by changing barrels, magazines and bolts. The changeover has little effect on point-of-impact when changing from one previously zeroed barrel to another, due to the barrel mounting system, which isn't unique to the SRS, but is also used in other multi-caliber precision tactical rifles such as the French PGM Ultima Ratio and German DSR-1.

The barrel change can be accomplished in about a minute by pressing out a pin, removing the bolt, loosening three retaining screws and then removing and replacing the barrels, bolt and magazines. Retaining screws are torqued to 65 inch-pounds. This torque specification is common to many precision tactical rifles and is facilitated by using the Seekonk "T" handle pre-calibrated torque wrench from Brownells. All one has to do is use the correct bit and turn the handle until it "snaps." Presto! Proper torque is automatically applied. By a simple and quick barrel and bolt change, the SRS can be employed in an urban environment where a .308 is all that is usually required to extreme long-range shots as might be encountered in the Afghan mountains.



SRS comes in custom case with spare barrel, magazine and accessories.

Barrels are fully free-floated and chambers are cut to military match specifications. Another benefit of the SRS system is that the manual of arms is the same, no matter which cartridge is selected.

The overall ergonomics are excellent. The selector switch can be engaged and disengaged without moving one's hand from the pistol grip and the large curved bolt handle gives plenty of leverage to cock the action. The throw length is just below 6 inches and the action is butter smooth. Feeding and ejection were smooth and positive. The rifle is adjustable for length of pull, but not for cheek rest height. According to Desert Tactical, the cheek rest height was designed into the rifle to be optimized with their scope rings, thus providing best mounting height for any scope with an objective lens of 56mm or less. We found that the SRS met
(continued on page 85)



Florence, AL SWAT sharpshooter test fires the SRS .338 from pickup truck bed. SRS is sub- $\frac{1}{2}$ -MOA accurate with both .308 and .338 barrels using Black Hills ammo.

FULL PAGE AD

DESERT TACTICAL SRS .338 LAPUA

(continued from page 10)

the company's claim. Our eye relief was perfect and none of the others who shot the rifle had any issues with cheek rest height, although our senior citizen eyes require longer eye relief than our younger colleagues, but the full-length MIL-STD-1913 rail on the SRS allowed us to easily move the scope forward or backward to make changes in eye relief simple with negligible change in zero. The full length MIL-STD-1913 rail also facilitates mounting state-of-the-art night vision optics and thermal sight. Another ergonomic feature of the SRS is the raider butt pad that enables the shooter to position his or her shoulder almost directly in line with the barrel, minimizing felt recoil and muzzle rise.

Since the SRS is a multi-caliber rifle, each caliber installed in the rifle will have a slightly different zero because the ballistics of every caliber cartridge are different. A



The 300-yard .338 group was approximately 1"—that's ¼ MOA accuracy. Single round at top left was sighting round. Lower three rounds we fired after adjusting scope.

so we didn't have the opportunity to really put the SRS through its paces, although we have seen photos of verified 1000-yard .338 groups of under 6 inches. Our test with Black Hills 175-grain .308 match ammunition gave us consistent half-MOA groups, while Black Hills .338 Lapua match ammo at 300 yards was even better at about a quarter-MOA.

The SRS fed with utter reliability and smoothness and was one of the most accurate rifles we have ever tested. Even though each caliber has a slightly different zero, we found that the difference was consistently repeatable so when we reinstalled each caliber, we were easily able to see the Horus Vision reticle to maintain two separate zeros without turning knobs. In sum, the Desert Tactical SRS offers the precision tactical marksman or tactical team a rifle that can quickly transition to any one of a number

of calibers and should meet the most demanding reliability and accuracy requirements imaginable. **SW**



SWAT sharpshooter conducts field training operation in full ghillie suit.

rifle zeroed at 300 yards for .308 will not be zeroed when the caliber is changed to .300 Win Mag or .338 Lapua. For this reason we removed the conventional scope that came with the SRS and replaced it with a US Optics SN3S 3.2-17x scope with optional illuminated reticle and Horus Vision H-25 military reticle. The US Optics scope is designed for target engagement to 1500 plus yards, ideal for the SRS. The SN3 scope body is made from 6061-T6 aluminum finished in Type III hard anodizing. Elevation and windage knob components are a combination of stainless steel, brass and 4130 chrome moly steel with tungsten carbide ball detents. The SN3 scope is large and relatively heavy, but it will take the punishment of any caliber rifle's recoil and keep coming back for more.

Shooting Impressions

We tested the SRS with Black Hills 250- and 300-grain .338 Lapua ammo and with Black Hills 175-grain .308. Unfortunately, the nearest range we have that has the capability for shooting at ranges over 300 yards was unavailable,

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