

Suppressor Shootout

DESERT TACTICAL SRS .338

SILENT AND DEADLY, three long-range big bore rifle suppressors for today's sniper!

BY LT. DAVE BAHDE



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The value of a suppressor on a sniper rifle has been subject to much debate. When suppressors were heavy, short-lived, cumbersome and affected accuracy, there was a basis for argument. However, modern suppressors help most shooters shoot more accurately. Improvements in materials technology and design have made them virtually maintenance-free, lighter and more compact.

Many operators are now seeing the value of a suppressor for their

sniper rifle. At a recent sniper school, about a third of the rifles were suppressed. Years ago, I was the only one with a suppressed rifle and many asked, "Aren't those illegal?" Suppressors are now seen at training, operations and competitions. Well-made suppressors are beginning to show up at police departments and military units, especially SpecOps units.

Although the .308 rifle is still prevalent for law enforcement and military sniping, .338s are becoming more popular. Although partially

driven by a .338 caliber sniper rifle contract currently in process with the Army, it is also driven by the need to reach out to longer distances.

The .30 caliber cartridges even in magnum form are still pretty much limited to 1000 yards or so. If you want to get to 1500 yards and beyond you need more. There are certainly bigger guns and cartridges that will do that but they often bring their own issues: cost, weight and/or overall dimension.



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DESERT TACTICAL SRS .338

The .338 in its many forms allows for ranges approaching or even beyond 1500 yards in a more standard-sized envelope. As these rifles become more common, the desire to suppress them becomes common as well.

There are a number of .338 caliber suppressors available. The three utilized in this test represent different modifications in design, and three different solutions to the problem of length on large caliber rifles: Since the typical .338 barrel is 26 inches or longer, this can make for a long rifle. Seldom will a rifle so equipped fit in a rifle case. It can also make the rifle heavy and a bit unwieldy.

Two of the suppressors tested utilize muzzle brakes that accept the suppressor over the brake. This has become quite popular, allowing the suppressor to be removed with no risk to the crown or threads and lessening the added length. This can be done for stowing it in a regular bag, or for jumping out of aircraft. The other uses two points of contact, sliding over the barrel to a point of contact behind the threads and crown. This not only allows for a longer suppressor with a shorter overall length, it provides for more contact with the barrel. This can make for more consistency and less chance of it coming loose.

Standard suppressors that simply thread at the end of the barrel require

constant attention: If they come loose your accuracy goes downhill. The bigger the bore the more this tends to be true. These suppressors deal with that in three different ways.

AAC Titan-QD

The AAC (Advanced Armament Corporation) Titan-QD is a titanium suppressor with a quick disconnect. The quick disconnect muzzle brake is compact and



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the suppressor uses a "ratchet mount." The rifle can be fired with the suppressor attached or with it off. The brake needs to be "timed" to ling up the port properly. It is 9.5 inches overall length and 1.75 inches in diameter. I could easily attach the brake, and the suppressor attached easily as well and did not come loose.

SPECIFICATIONS:

DESERT TACTICAL SRS

- ▣ **CALIBER:** .308, .338 Lapua, .338 Norma
- ▣ **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



SPECIFICATIONS:

	AAC	Jet	SureFire
OA Length (suppressor):	9.5 inches	13 inches	11 inches
OA Length (weapon):	47.5 inches	48 inches	47 inches
OA Length (diameter):	1.75 inches	1.9 inches	1.5 inches
Weight (with QD):	1.45 pounds	2.43 pounds	1.8 pounds

.338 NORMA AVERAGE DECIBEL PERFORMANCE

MANUFACTURER	MUZZLE BRAKE	SUPPRESSOR
AAC	107.5	87.5
Jet	99.6	83.2
SureFire	112.8	97.8

Brake and suppressor sound levels measured in dB (decibels).

FULL PAGE AD

SureFire FA338SS

The SureFire FA338SS Suppressor is made of stainless steel that also uses a quick-disconnect mount. This mount slides over the barrel about 2.75 inches. It requires the barrel to be properly contoured to accept the brake. The mechanism it uses to connect to the suppressor is a large nut that is tightened once the suppressor has been correctly mounted.

It differs from the AAC in that the suppressor does not actually "thread" onto the brake. It slides over the brake and the nut is tightened to hold it in place. It



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can be fired with the brake alone. It is 11 inches long and 1.5 inches wide. With this suppressor, make certain it is pressed all the way onto the brake prior to tightening the locking nut. This barrel had already been contoured for the Jet so it fit easily, and did not come loose.

**Mike's Guns Sales
& Service Jet**

The third suppressor is the "Jet." It is a titanium suppressor that uses a two-point attachment system. The

barrel is contoured to accept the suppressor. It slides over the barrel and threads on, making contact about 3.5 inches from the end of the barrel. It is not designed to be a quick-disconnect suppressor, although it does not take any time to remove it.

Although there is no muzzle brake attachment I also purchased their titanium muzzle brake for a proper comparison. This suppressor is 13 inches long and 1.9 inches wide. It attaches easily and has never come lose. The brake also attaches easily and there is a locking screw so you can easily time the ports.



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Gun Details

The rifle I used to test these suppressors was my Desert Tactical SRS rifle. One of the unique qualities of the system is its bullpup design, allowing the use of a suppressor without the cumbersome overall length. The longest combination in this test fit nicely in my Eagle HSRC bag with the suppressor attached.

It is also chambered in .338 Norma Mag. This seems to be the "bell of the ball" of the new .338 calibers right now in both the civilian and military circles. Although the .338 Lapua Mag is certainly
(continued on page 94)

**FULL
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(Continued from page 42)

the front runner, the .338 Norma seems to keep coming up in the sniper circles. It is a cartridge specifically designed to utilize the 300-grain SMK bullet in a shorter case.

I was able to secure several rounds of what is an "experimental" load that Black Hills "might" be making commercially available at some time. I felt it was a good test of the suppressors as it is the heaviest bullet in this or the Lapua caliber. In the 300-grain loading the Lapua and Norma are vi-



able 1500-yard cartridges. I measured the muzzle velocity at 2800 fps (feet per second) with my Oehler 35P Chronograph.

Range Time

Suppressors generally promise to do several things. There are general claims of sound reduction, recoil reduction, blast reduction, and either increased accuracy or at least no loss of accuracy. It has been my experience that all good suppressors do most of these things to one extent or another.



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Many of these benefits are subjective. I limited my testing to the tangible, but they represent simply my observations and experience. With the required brakes the AAC will set you back around \$3500, the other two about \$2500 (not including the \$200 tax stamp).



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Regarding muzzle blast, recoil and accuracy, all three suppressors performed well. As there is no real way to accurately "measure" them for average folks I am going to simply stipulate that they all do these things well in my judgment, based on some 10 years of testing such implements.

Quantified scientific data looks good on a website or at a show, but most shooters just want their rifle to be easier to shoot, not give your position away, and



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maintain accuracy. All three of these suppressors did all of these things.

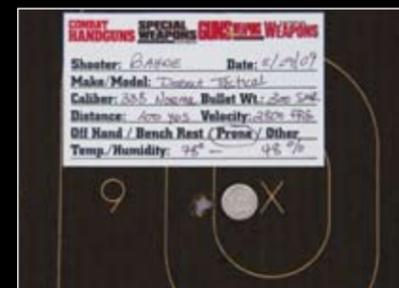
The best group I was able to get was easily covered with a dime using the Jet Suppressor. The others were all a bit larger, but adequate. There was no visible "flame" and little disturbance from the blast. I could not tell any significant difference in recoil among them.

Sound suppression on a range or on a deployment can be very subjective. Since I deploy in the real world I tried to replicate reality as best I could. I placed the sound meter where my observer's head would be. For me, that is to my right with his head at about my right elbow. I was outside in an uncovered firing position. I measured over a 3-shot group and then averaged. I gathered readings suppressed and with the muzzle brake for a comparison.

The AAC and Jet were the quietest with the suppressor attached. The quietest by far without the suppressor was the Jet. That being said, muzzle brakes utilized as quick attachments are often designed for the best operation with the suppressor attached. They can be used "alone" but seldom are they designed for that purpose. That was likely the case in this instance. The stand-alone muzzle brake is designed to be as quiet as possible while still doing its job.

The second thing I tested for was any change in impact with each device. Since all of these suppressors can be fired with or without the brake it is important to know how much of a shift in impact there would be. All of these suppressors shot low in comparison to their unsuppressed shots. There was little to no horizontal deviation. As an operator it is much easier to compensate for one variable than two.

Although the Jet produced the best group and was the quietest, it also produced the greatest shift in impact. It is the heaviest as well. The SureFire may have been the loudest and lightest, but it was limited to a 1.75-inch shift and that is pretty good for a large bore rifle.



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"Any well-built suppressor will enhance your shooting experience."

The last things I included were the overall length of the suppressor, its weight, and the overall length of the rifle with the suppressor attached. Although the lengths of the suppressors differ, they made little difference in the overall length of the weapon system. All of these systems fit easily in a standard drag bag with the suppressors attached. Having deployed suppressed sniper rifles, this is an issue with a .30 caliber rifle. To be able to do this with a 26-inch barreled big bore is down right fantastic.

Final Notes

What is "best" with any rifle suppressor is subjective. To keep this fair it was simply a gathering of data and my experience with these three suppressors. I picked them because I found them interesting and available. I personally have no need for a quick disconnect. For me, standard threading is fine.

For some, how quiet the suppressor is would be most important. Others have an absolute need for the quick-disconnect devices. It really depends on the shooter, their system, and their needs. In any case here are a couple of generic observations I found interesting.

The data seems to indicate that the more you affect the weapon system the more the shift in impact between suppressed and unsuppressed. The heavier the suppressor and the more it suppresses the sound and blast the greater the shift. It often has the greatest perceived effect on felt recoil as well.

The converse was true as the suppressor that was the loudest and lightest seemed to have the least affect on the point of impact. If you are most interested in sound reduction you can probably expect a greater shift in impact. That



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has held true for me with the .30 caliber suppressors as well. The QD cans are cool and they seem to work fine. They are getting better for sure. If you have the money or need, then do not hesitate. With a bit of ingenuity, these companies have built three completely different suppressors while maintaining a workable overall length. The bottom line is that any well-built suppressor will enhance your shooting experience. Improved equipment is supposed to enhance your ability, and suppressors do just that. You really cannot go wrong with any of these: They all do what they are designed for and do it well. Just a caution though, once you shoot a suppressed rifle it is really hard to go without.

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