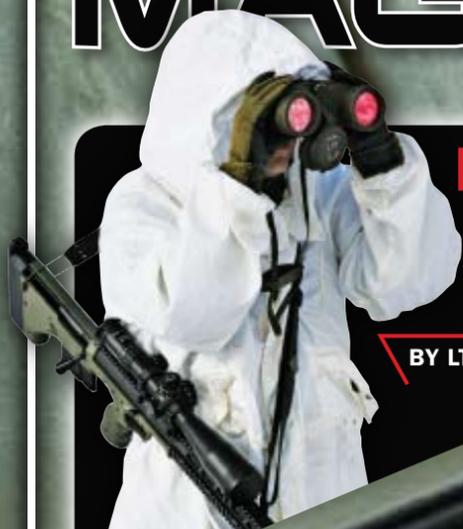


COMPACT SNIPER MAGNUM



**DESERT TACTICAL ARMS'
CUTTING-EDGE BULLPUP
PACKS A PUNCH.**

BY LT. DAVE BAHDE



With an overall length similar to an M4, this new bullpup sniper rifle may change the way snipers deploy in the future. With just one Allen key, this rifle can transform into another caliber in just one minute.

Police snipers seldom train or deploy at ranges approaching 1,000 yards. The most popular police sniper round still is .308 Win., with .300 Win. Mag. gaining in popularity. But as S.W.A.T. teams gear up and train for anti-terrorist missions, the heavier, very-long range .338 Lapua Magnum's demand is growing. Until now, the problem with these more-capable calibers have been that they require a lot more rifle in terms of weight and dimension. Because of this, the .338 Lapua Mag. is most often selected as a caliber upgrade.

At one time I used to train quite often from 600 to 1,000 yards. Most

police snipers believe ranges from 600 to 1,000 yards are a bit on the impractical side, but it is good training. Like most, I started with the .300 Win. Mag., but as I trained with snipers from other parts of the world, I discovered the .338 Lapua was becoming popular for long-range police work.

On advice from a friend, a former U.S. Army Ranger and sniper, I spent several years shooting .338 Lapua Mag. rifles built by G.A. Precision, Accuracy International, Sako and others. I used them extensively from 600 to 1,500 yards, and as far out as a mile and performed some significant ballistics testing for TTI Armory in this caliber. This experience provided a solid background and a newfound respect for the caliber and its

capabilities. Although its practicality is subject to debate for police missions, it is less for military missions—or the military type missions police may anticipate in the global war on terror.

For law enforcement work, there were drawbacks. The .338 rifles were bigger, heavier and longer. They did not always fit in an existing bag or case. This caliber was infrequently used, so you needed two rifles. The .308 is still the standard for most police snipers and many agencies could not afford to have both. But the heightened need for a more powerful, longer-range round for anti-terrorist missions has many departments looking beyond the drawbacks and going ahead with a rifle chambered in .338 Lapua Mag.

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Enter Nicholas Young and the Desert Tactical Arms rifle, with tactical fixes to many of these drawbacks. No one rifle system does everything, but this one offers more than any other—and in my experience it delivers what it promises well.

I met Nicolas while shooting the .338 Lapua Mag. rifles. He had some really good ideas about how to build a better rifle. Few people had spent more time with a .338 so I am generally skeptical about radical change with magnum sniper rifles. I was pleased to be able to shake down the prototype incorporating his new ideas. What follows is my experience with this rifle and a critique of what makes this system different and useful. Except for cosmetic points on this shooting prototype, what we tested was the real deal.

I would put a production rifle through more rigorous operational testing, but this shooting prototype is close enough to indicate how the production rifle would be expected to perform. The setup provided by DTA was in .338 Lapua Mag. with a .308 Win. barrel changeover kit. The changeover kit consists of a barrel, bolt, and magazine. The magazines are the same size so there is no change to the stock, it is just altered to feed the .308-caliber round. This rifle

PERFORMANCE				
Manufacturer	Weight	Average Group	Best Group	Caliber
The Hunting Shack	168 Grain AMAX	.66 inches	.27 inches	.308
Black Hills	175 Grain BTHP	.68 inches	.33 inches	.308
Federal Gold Medal	168 Grain BTHP	.65 inches	.45 inches	.308
Black Hills	300 Grain BTHP	.1 inch (300 yards)	.57 inches (300 yards)	.338 LM

SPECIFICATIONS			
OA Length	Barrel Length	Weight	Caliber
37.5 inches	26 inches	12.37 pounds	.338 LM
31.5 inches	22 inches	11 pounds	.308
39.5 inches	22 inches	12 pounds	.308 (w Suppressor)

was equipped with their one-piece 34 mm mount with built-in 40-minute-of-angle (MOA) of elevation. This mount also has optional 30 mm inserts for the more common tube size. The scope was the top-of-the-line Schmidt Bender 5-25 variable power with metric adjustments. The .308 muzzle was threaded 5/8 x 24 and would accept my Jet titanium suppressor. The .338 barrel

is threaded 3/4 x 24 and will accept the Jet .338 suppressor. It included a sling and was packed neatly in a Pelican hard case.

Small Enough for a Pack

When setting the DTA rifle up in the .338 Lapua Mag. configuration next to my 20-inch barreled .308 duty rifle for comparison, it is easy to observe that it is several

inches shorter, especially when the .308 has the suppressor attached. Set up in this configuration next to my patrol rifle, which is an 18.5-inch M14, they appeared almost identical in size. I normally carry the M14 in the sleeve of an Eberlestock M3 pack, so I traded it with the Desert Tactical just to see how it would carry. In .338, it sticks out just a tiny bit less than the M14, making it very easy to carry. I switched out the barrel with the .308 barrel and found that it was even shorter. Without a suppressor it is about the size of an M4; with the suppressor it is about the size of my standard bolt rifle. In terms of size it is pretty hard to beat. Even if you were to add a suppressor to the .338 setup, it would still fit easily in the pack, or in a standard drag bag. Having a suppressed .338 that will fit in a standard drag bag is pretty handy.



“A sniper rifle must shoot well... I test rifles as I would deploy them, and made no exception for this rifle.”

Quick Barrel Change

Never having changed the barrel on this rifle before, I left for the range with a set of metric Allen wrenches and some simple instructions. It was incredibly simple to take apart. First, remove a pin at the back of the stock, then tap the end lightly and it drops. Loosen three Allen screws on the side of the stock about 3/4 of a turn and pull out the barrel. Install the other barrel in reverse order. I accomplished this task with no hitches in just minutes. Nicholas can do it in less than a minute. This rifle does truly allow for a quick-and-easy barrel change with no special tools.

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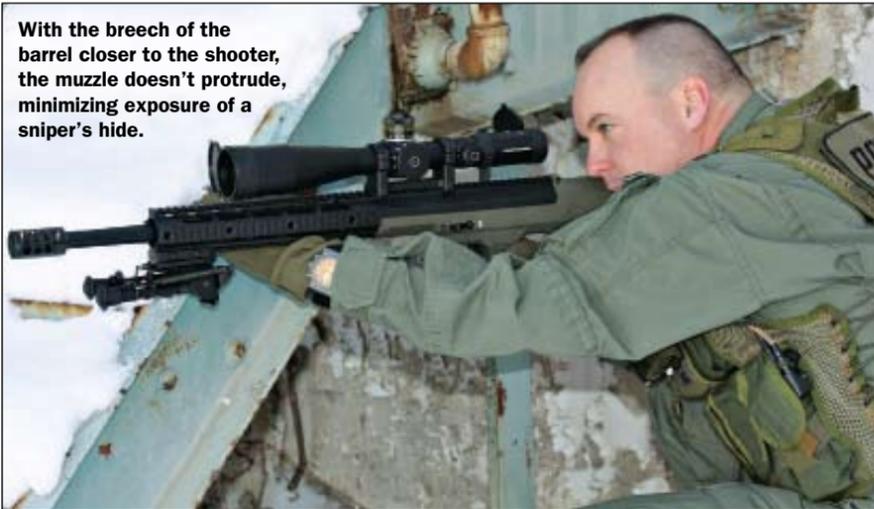
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With the breech of the barrel closer to the shooter, the muzzle doesn't protrude, minimizing exposure of a sniper's hide.

Ergonomics

The best-looking rifles are often the least comfortable to shoot. When it comes to the cool "tactical" appearance, this has it. It looks like a rifle you would see in the movies made by some prop guy. But for me at least, the feel of this rifle matches the looks. When you pick it up, it balances extremely well. This was true of both the .338 configurations and the .308 (even with the suppressor). It feels like you are picking up an M16 rifle. The grip falls naturally in your hand, it

points easily and it carries very well. When slung, this rifle sits like a carbine across the chest. The grip is reminiscent of the grip on the McMillan A5 stock. Your trigger finger falls in just the right spot and when you climb behind it, the stock fits nicely in the "pocket" and your cheek drops right into place. Nicholas points out that a lot of work went into determining the cheek weld with respect to the typical eye relief of a scope.

Looking at it, one would think you would need cheek spacers, but you don't—a sur-

prise given the size of the Schmidt Bender optic. It lined up every time with no scope shadow. In prone, it was as comfortable as any rifle. I could easily spend hours peering through the scope of this rifle. Most members of my sniper team tried it and all agreed that it was very comfortable.

I have been using a bag as a rest most of the time now. The bull-pup design allows you to push the rifle closer to the bag. You are pushing on the trigger guard and not the magazine. It allowed the operator to get very stable on the M3 pack. A magazine change is very easy from prone and single-load manipulation was fast and easy. The forend design accommodates night vision so there is no need for an expensive mount.

Shooting Performance

A sniper rifle must shoot well. The accuracy below is what you would expect in an operation, as all of the shooting was done atop my M3 pack with a shooting glove on my off hand. There was no "happy sock" and all shots were fired from the same prone I deploy with—I test rifles as I would deploy them, and made no exception for this rifle.

I zeroed the rifle for the 300-grain Black Hills .338 Lapua Mag. ammunition and fired

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a couple three-shot groups of .75 MOA. For me, this is pretty good. I tend to shoot .338 rifles better at 300 yards than 100 yards. Switching out the barrel and bolt, I moved on to .308 Win. Mostly .5 MOA or better, a few covered with a dime. I am not a big "group" shooter as it has little relevance to police work, but it does indicate the rifles' capabilities. Switching back to the .338 barrel, I fired a couple more groups just to see if groups changed: Nope, the same.

I moved to 300 yards and fired more. Groupings were about the same as at 100 yards with one three-shot string that measured .557 inches. Overall, it shoots as well as any sniper rifle. For its weight, ergonomics, and size, the .308 suppressed was like shooting a .22 LR. There was very little recoil, and you could about watch your impacts at 100 yards.

The .338 was what you would expect, but it was also comfortable to shoot. With added weight of the suppressor it would be even more comfortable, I am sure. The small size and ergonomics does not seem to give up anything here. This rifle has a 60-degree bolt throw, making for fast manipulation. Staying "attached" to the stock is critical, and one can stay on the scope and in the cheek weld without having to come "off the rifle," even with the .338 configuration. Once you discover that it slides by, you can stay right on the scope. It ejects the .338 brass with authority, yet it can be controlled if you want to. Overall, it's smooth and easy to operate.

The Bottom Line

As I have been behind a sniper rifle for close to 10 years, I was somewhat skeptical of this project. I strongly favor the practical, and came away pleasantly surprised. This rifle is all it is cracked up to be and does what it set out to do: It is a compact package that is very comfortable to carry and shoot. It has a truly easy and quick barrel-change that actually works, making multiple calibers practical, especially with the improvements in variable high power scopes now available. With a 5-25 adjustable power scope you can easily deploy from 50 yards (with the .308 Win.) to 1,500 yards (with the .338 Lapua Mag.). It accommodates current night vision and most other add-ons, fits in a standard drag bag (even with a suppressor) and, in the .308 configuration, will fit in an M4 case. The differences in this system equate to actual differences that work. Most of the complaints I have about the .338 Lapua Magnum rifle have been answered within this system.

Would a department buy one of these rifles? They would, and likely will.

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