



SAUER 100 XT 6.5 CREEDMOOR

I was recently asked to take a look over the new Sauer 100 XT composite stocked sporting rifle chambered in the fascinating 6.5 Creedmoor cartridge.

I jumped at the opportunity to test this European rifle and scope package.

BY CRAIG O'NEILL

ABOVE LEFT: THE RIFLE SET UP FOR TESTING

ABOVE RIGHT: THE COMBINATION OF THE ZEISS OPTICS, SAUER RIFE AND THE 6.5 CREEDMOOR cartridge proved to be very effective on this young stag.

THE RIFLE ARRIVED COURTESY OF THE importer, Outdoor Sports NZ in Auckland. My first impressions were of a well-made quality European product that sat well in the hands, and came to the eye in a very natural manner.

The stock on the Sauer is called the ERGO-MAX; it's a black composite affair with coarse chequering panels moulded into the stock on both the fore-end and pistol grip areas of the stock. It's an attractive and functional design, with a nice Schnabel rolled fore-end giving a unique European touch. There is no detectable drop at comb apparent on the stock, which is in keeping with many modern hunting rifles, and this certainly helped to further manage the minimal felt recoil of this round when I fired it over the bench. Given that the rifle does not come equipped with any open sights, this is an excellent design choice by Sauer. They don't list a left-handed version of this model, but instead feature a neutral cast off in the stock for both left- and right-handed shooters.

The Sauer is fitted with a basic non-ventilated black recoil pad that worked to soak up the minimal recoil of the 6.5 Creedmoor cartridge, and on the whole I found the rifle comfortable to shoot both over the bench and out on the hunt. While I appreciate the form and beauty of a wooden stocked rifle, I must admit to being a recent convert to the

more modern synthetic and stainless-type hunting rifles that are now being produced, particularly for hunting. The synthetic unit is undoubtedly more practical and functional in the extremes of climate that we encounter here in New Zealand, although they're aesthetically less attractive than a classic wooden product. I'll always have a soft spot for a nice piece of wood, but when it comes time to pick a rifle off the rack for the hunt, nine times out of ten it'll be the synthetic/stainless unit that gets put in the truck these days.

The cold hammer forged barrel is 560mm (22.5 inches) long and features a tough Cerakote finish with a matt nickel-look appearance that should prove to be very robust in the elements. The twist rate on the 6.5 Creedmoor barrel is listed at 1:8.66 inches (220mm), so it will happily stabilize all the popular hunting and target loads up to 147 grain, but perhaps not the latest 150 grain long range offerings (where the recommended twist rate is 1:7.5 inch [190mm]). The modern trend is towards the use of more rust resistant material in firearms, and the Sauer is no exception; the action also has this same Cerakote finish. This really is the best of both worlds, as the coating provides the same, if not better, rust resistance than traditional stainless steel, but with a matt finish that won't reflect light to spook game in the field.

The action itself is listed as medium, but it is in fact very reminiscent of the Tikka T3x in that the action length is designed to accommodate rounds up to 30-06 in length. There is also a magnum length action listed, for the larger belted cases.

Other calibre options listed for the Sauer medium action include: .243 Win., .270 Win., .308 Win., .30-06, 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5x55, 8x57JS, 9.3x62. 7mm Remington Magnum and 300 Winchester Magnum are available in the longer Magnum action.

Factory rounds are loaded to a maximum overall length and governed by SAAMI specifications, but the hand loader should not be limited by these measurements. In the case of the 6.5 Creedmoor I tested, that additional action length is being wasted. The long 6.5mm projectiles can only be seated out to a point and the overall length of the loaded rounds is limited by the internal length of the magazine. I note that although the magazine in the test rifle was marked 6.5 Creedmoor/7mm-08, the magazine supplied is actually just fractionally too short to take full advantage of the potentially longer overall length of this cartridge.

The longer factory rounds from Hornady I tested (143g ELD-X) only just fitted into the magazine, and I personally think that a magazine designed for one of the true medium length cartridges (ie: 6.5x55) might be more appropriate for this rifle in this chambering, particularly if the owner intends to reload and seat the bullets right out. This combination would not only enhance the accuracy of this rifle (which wasn't bad to be fair - but wasn't excellent either) and allow for the use of the full capacity of the smaller 6.5 Creedmoor case.

The bedding system used on the Sauer 100 is an innovative, if slightly overdesigned, arrangement that does appear to work really well. Sauer call it their EVER-REST system. The stock features a rigidly-mounted aluminium bedding block with a small recess cut out of its back edge, which acts as the recoil lug. The receiver has a static threaded pin installed, that locks onto a hex nut arrangement that must be removed with a traditional socket before the stock and receiver will part company. While this is a novel and totally functional approach, stripping the rifle in the field just got a whole lot more complicated - however on the positive side, when was the last time you needed to disassemble your hunting rifle during a trip? Modern hunting rifles are robust by design and this

one is no exception, so it's highly unlikely that you'll ever need to do maintenance away from home.

The bolt on the Sauer 100 XT is a unique design, in that it features a three-lug lock-up and a novel dual plunger ejector set-up; the empty cases are thrown from the rifle with some authority. The extractor is a more classic claw-type arrangement, and the bolt is a low-lift design with a 60 degree opening. The bolt body itself is a full bolt with a recessed band just rearward of the bolt face: quite reminiscent of the Ruger American/Predator rifles but with a slightly narrower bolt body. The bolt knob is attractively textured to ensure a good grip, and the bolt handle itself is black rather than silver, adding yet another contrast to the rifle. The rifle fed and extracted smoothly and without fault over the course of the testing.

The modern manufacturing trend is to use lighter polymer type materials in non-critical areas like magazine and trigger guards, and the Sauer's magazine is a five-shot, flush-fitting polymer unit that is very well made. Its design is very reminiscent of the Steyr Ultralight rifles of years gone by, and it fed and functioned well over the course of my time with this rifle; I can find no fault with it in either design or function. The bottom of the polymer magazine is proudly embossed with the Sauer name and logo, and the trigger guard on the Sauer is a lightweight alloy material with a matte silver finish, which further adds to the quality feel of the rifle.

The trigger on the Sauer was crisp, with a complete absence of creep; it broke cleanly at 1350 grams. This is a single stage unit, adjustable from 1000-2000 grams by the owner. (A standard disclaimer: do not attempt to adjust any trigger unless you are fully competent to do so.)

I had the opportunity to test the Sauer on the range while working in the South Island recently; a special thanks to the Nelson Pistol Club for the use of their range facilities. A very special thanks also goes out to Shane Kelly of Kelly Country in Brightwater for making the arrangements, and to his friend Martin for being our host on the range on the day.

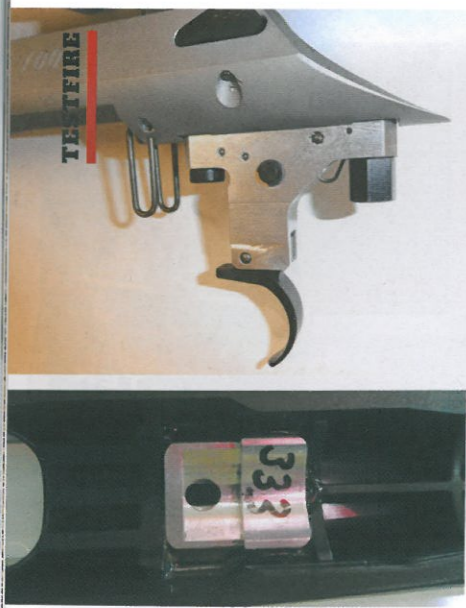
It's been my experience over the years that certain rifles prefer certain ammunition, and the Sauer was no exception to this rule. But while this particular model appeared to have a preference for the Swedish ammunition, this is not a reflection on the quality or overall



FROM TOP: THE HEAVIER BULLETS did not perform quite so well in this particular rifle. **HORNADY PRECISION HUNTER** load featuring the 147 grain ELD-X projectile.

THE HORNADY SST hunting load performed well, and delivered acceptable accuracy in this particular rifle. **HORNADY SUPERFORMANCE** load featuring the 129 grain SST projectile.

THIS FACTORY LOAD featuring the Swift projectile delivered the tightest groups of all the factory loads tested through the Sauer. The **NORMA FACTORY LOAD** featuring the Swift 130 grain Scirocco II projectile.



TOP RIGHT: **THE COMBINATION** of the Zeiss scope, Hexalock rings and Sauer Cerakoted rifle made for an attractive package

TOP LEFT: **THE SAUER FEATURES AN ADJUSTABLE TRIGGER** which can be adjusted by the owner from 1000-2000 gram let off.

BOTTOM LEFT: **THE SAUER FEATURES** a unique bedding system

performance of the American product. In fact I carried the Hornady 129g SST Superformance load on the deer hunt, as I had had great experiences with this projectile on game in the past.

As always, I would suggest that the owner of any rifle tests several different brands of factory ammunition to ascertain what his/her particular firearm prefers - and then stick to that load.

The accuracy testing was done on a bench and sandbag rest at 100 metres on a calm Nelson day. With each factory load several three-shot groups were shot, by several people, to verify the results, and the best groups are reported here. I did not chronograph any of the loads out of the Sauer. It must also be said that none of the accuracy results can be considered bad, as all the groups shot on the day represent perfectly acceptable accuracy out of an un-tuned factory rifle being used for hunting purposes.

- Norma 130g Swift Scirocco II - 16mm
- Hornady 129g SST Superformance - 30mm
- Hornady Precision Hunter 147g ELD-X - 35mm

The test rifle came fitted with a Zeiss Terra 4-12x42 Scope mounted in a set of the excellent Sauer Hexalock tip-off detachable mounts, although I do question the need for tip-off mounts on a sporting rifle on a rifle that is not designed to be taken down. What can I really say about this Zeiss branded optic, other than it was a quality and functional scope to use? The image and clarity of the scope were adequate and it displayed excellent light-gathering qualities which were particularly appreciated at dawn and dusk.

The Zeiss was a pleasure to use during

both the range work and the deer hunt that followed. The adjustments were crisp and precise and the rifle was zeroed onto the paper in no time during the range session. While the Terra might be the entry level scope in the Zeiss range, and is stamped "Designed by Zeiss" and "Japan", the quality of the brand is still very apparent and this scope reflected that reputation in every aspect of its operation. We are really blessed to have so many affordable European-designed optics available to us here in New Zealand, and at some very reasonable prices. Well done to Sauer for allying themselves with such a prestigious manufacturer, and for marketing such a fantastic rifle/scope combination. This package stands out both for value, and the excellent handling of the scope and rifle, separately and together.

You may have gathered that I'm am a huge fan of this rifle and scope package; I make no apologies for that. The rifle handled well, shot well, and was basically a pleasure to have around. Coupled with the excellent 6.5 Creedmoor cartridge it proves it's possible to have the best of all worlds. This is a fantastic, well-mannered, all round versatile game-gathering rifle.

I am not a fan of products that don't work properly, particularly when you're counting on them to do so out in the hills. The Sauer/Zeiss combination worked perfectly in all respects however, and it was with some reluctance that I had to send it back to the importer at the completion of the review.

I'm also a real fan of the 6.5 Creedmoor cartridge. It delivers performance out of all proportion to its diminutive size, and is both an excellent long-range target round and a splendid medium/large game hunting

cartridge when loaded with the appropriate bullet. There are many appropriate bullets/factory loads now available from several ammunition manufacturers, and it's no wonder that the Creedmoor (in both 6.5mm and more recently a 6mm variant) have taken the shooting world by storm. Its success is guaranteed as more shooters discover its almost magical properties of accuracy and retained energy way out yonder.

The Sauer 100 XT is well-placed in the market when compared for both quality and performance with other European rifles currently out there: the Tikka T3x



ABOVE LEFT: **THE SAUER BOLT FEATURES** a 60 degree bolt lift and two plunger type ejectors.

ABOVE: **THE MAKER'S MARQUE** and calibre are clearly engraved into the barrel metalwork

PROS

- **Great overall handling, design and balance**
- **Nice adjustable crisp trigger**
- **Accuracy with a variety of factory loads.**

CONS

- **Complex bedding system/stock-action disassembly (OK - it was excellent, and there just aren't many cons!)**

and the Sako A7, for instance. It will surely find favour with anyone looking for a lightweight, durable, fast-handling, accurate hunting rifle that will work well over many years of service.

The package with the Zeiss Terra scope retails from \$2199 depending on rings selected, and there's certainly room in our current marketplace for this price bracket.

At 3.05kgs bare, the Sauer is a true modern lightweight sporting rifle. It utilizes standard Remington 700 bases, so scope mounting is a breeze. Adding a sensible scope and rings to the rifle would add approximately another 1 kg to the overall weight, making for a portable package that won't break the body or the bank balance too much. ■

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