



BROWNING X-BOLT STAINLESS STALKER .243

IN THE HILLS AND ON THE RANGE
WITH A BROWNING 'CLASSIC'...

Browning's A-Bolt series of hunting rifles has achieved widespread popularity amongst Kiwi hunters – their out-of-the-box reliability and accuracy are proven trademarks.

I have always been a fan of the earlier A-Bolt, and while I haven't actually hunted all that often with one I have done some range time with a couple. With-

out going into full detail, they shot well while at the same time being pleasant to handle and comfortable to shoot.

Arguably the one feature the A-Bolt is most noted for is its 60-degree bolt throw. Any reduction in the amount of bolt lift has to be a good thing in terms of speed of reloading, but to be honest, throughout my entire deer hunting career I could count on one hand the amount of times a fast follow-up

shot has been required. Even the well-used bolt in my old M98 Mauser-actioned Husqvarna can be worked swiftly when required, however it is good to see the tradition of the A-Bolt being followed through in the newer X-Bolt.

OVERVIEW

The rifle that arrived for evaluation from Cameron Sports Ltd was a Stainless/Synthetic fluted barrel model fitted with a Zeiss

Terra 3x4-12x42 scope. Out of the box it is a pretty slick looking setup with a streamlined, low profile appeal. Even though I am somewhat of a wood/blued evangelist the All Weather X-Bolt would definitely be a top contender if I were in the market for a Stn/Syn rifle.

Features of this rifle include the X-Bolt Feather Trigger™, X-Lock Scope Mounting System™, Bolt Unlock Button, Inflex Technology Recoil Pad,



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- 1** | A three lug bolt for added strength.
- 2** | The Bolt Unlock Button allows the operator to safely unload the rifle with the safety engaged.
- 3** | A recoil lug designed to handle Magnum calibres.
- 4** | The X-Bolt comes with factory stock bedding.
- 5** | DNZ Game Reaper Scope Mounts are machined from a solid billet of top-grade aluminium – they are strong!
- 6** | Straight out of the box, the 90 grain Soft Point Prvi Partizan shot well.
- 7** | The polymer magazine is robust and rounds can be easily fed into it.
- 8** | A 200m sub MOA 3 shot group, mint!

and what I reckon is a pretty cool magazine.

Machined from solid steel, the bolt utilises a three locking lug design for increased strength. It is a pretty slick bolt to cycle and picks up each round smoothly. The top-tang safety works in conjunction with the bolt lock, allowing the bolt to be cycled with the safety on. When engaged the safety blocks the trigger sear while also incorporating a firing pin block.

The X-Bolt Feather Trigger



is a combination of three separate machined chromed steel components. Adjustable from 3–5lbs and factory set at 3.5lbs, it is crisp and clean and I found it a pleasure to shoot while I was on the range. For a hunting rifle a 3.5lb trigger let-off is an ideal weight and I didn't bother adjusting the pull.

Tapped into the receiver is

a four screw per base configuration (X-Lock) that basically provides a more secure platform for scope mounting. Sitting on top is the afore-mentioned Zeiss Terra scope which, on this rifle, has been mounted using Game Reaper (DNZ Products) X-Bolt billet aluminium mounts. Game Reaper mounts utilise a one-piece base and bottom ring



setup. Personally I prefer steel mounts rather than alloy, but I have used DNZ mounts on a few rifles now and they seem to do the business.

The Dura-Touch stock and Inflex Technology Recoil Pad combine well and make for a very comfortable to handle and shoot rifle. Dura-Touch is an applied stock treatment that helps improve grip and protects the stock. Both the fore-stock and pistol grip are textured.

Robust and ergonomic sums up the magazine perfectly. Constructed from a lightweight polymer, the detachable rotary mag holds three rounds and feeding it is no problem. Loading cartridges through the breech is a bit of a mission, to the point where it is easier to drop the magazine out to load. I think the A-Bolt, with its hinged drop down floor plate and detachable box magazine, may have it over the X-Bolt for ease of loading.

Our review rifle was chambered in .243 Winchester, very cool! I've shot a handful of deer and

1



“THE DURA-TOUCH STOCK AND INFLEX RECOIL PAD COMBINE WELL AND MAKE FOR A VERY COMFORTABLE TO HANDLE AND SHOOT RIFLE.”

- 1 | *The X-Bolt Stn/Syn tagged along on a couple of late winter hunts along the Southern Corridor Access – Southern Kaimanawas.*
- 2 | *A mature Te Puke doe that escaped a one way trip to the freezer...*
- 3 | *The Inflex Technology Recoil Pad where it began to separate from the stock.*

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goats with this cartridge and have always been a fan of it since reading Philip Holden's exploits with this calibre in his Sako Forester. Supplied with the rifle were two boxes of 90 grain Soft Point Prvi Partizans, a box of 95 grain Soft Point Federal Fusion and a box of 95 grain Plastic Tip Special Sellier & Bellot ammunition.

AT THE RANGE

A quick bore sight and a couple of shots at 25 metres, followed up by a couple more shots had me on target and on to the 100 metre mark. I started off with the 95 grain Fusion ammo and promptly shot a couple of sub MOA groups, nice! Next through the rifle were the 90 grain PRVIs, and these shot an even tighter group so out to the 200 metre target it was. A sub MOA 3-shot

group soon followed, awesome! Switching back to the Fusions I shot off five rounds, which resulted in a respectable 2.5" group. Overall this is great out-of-the-box accuracy.

The Inflex recoil pad easily soaked up any felt recoil and the tactile feel of the Dura-Touch stock provides a good grip. It really is a nice little rifle to shoot and in .243 you could happily shoot off a pack or two without much effort.

ARMED TRAMPING

I had a couple of trips to the Desert Road planned so I took the X-Bolt along. I had zeroed the rifle for 200 metres as the terrain lends itself to these kinds of ranges. My good mate Phill joined me on the first trip and we spent a great couple of days hunting off the Poled Route (see Sika Hunting Tips & Info,

Issue #146 – Southern Corridor Access). Phill carried the rifle for this trip and commented on its sleek profile and nice balance. We did see a hind at a distance but had already chosen to leave any hinds, so the X-Bolt barrel remained unfired. I carried it again on my next trip there, but once again no shots were fired.

Back in the BoP I spent a few afternoons in fallow country and on several occasions had does lined up at distances between 30-60 metres but opted to leave them be, as they would most likely have a fawn in tow. I also did an overnigher into the Kaimai Range and got onto some red deer, they however were pushing above the 500 metre mark and shooting deer at that kind of distance is of no interest to me.

On these hunts I found the X-Bolt a pleasure to carry and

handle. The stock in particular grips well in the hand. During our Desert Road hunts we experienced the full gamut of weather including snow and heavy rain and on my Kaimai and Te Puke hunts faced high temps, so with either soaking wet or sweaty hands, holding on to the rifle was no problem.

One issue I did have was that the top of butt pad began to come away from the stock. The butt pad itself split and then also separated from the edge of the stock. With time it looked as if it would eventually come right off...?

Overall I enjoyed my time hunting and shooting with the X-Bolt. I basically treated it as my own rifle (not necessarily a good thing...) thrashing it around the hills, enjoying several sessions at the range with it, and as a review rifle I made sure to give it a good nudge.

Apart from the issue with the butt pad it has a real workhorse feel to it. I would happily recommend one.

Nik