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THE McMILLAN TAC-338

MOST KNOW McMILLAN FOR ITS STOCKS, BUT IT HAS BUILT RECORD-SETTING RIFLES, TOO.

BY TOM BECKSTRAND

SNIPER magazine wouldn't be complete without a quick visit to McMillan. Not surprisingly, McMillan continues to offer an extensive line of riflestocks for all members of the shooting community. But in case you didn't know, McMillan has been building a number of rifles for years including Canada's C15 Long Range Sniper Weapon (LSRW), which is based on the TAC-50. For most of the last decade, Cpl. Rob Furlong's record-setting 2,430-meter kill across the Shah-i-Kot Valley in Afghanistan stood atop the sniping pyramid. McMillan rifles are what I'm most interested in.

McMillan offers hunting, long-range hunting, tactical and competition rifles. A quick survey of the company's tactical rifles reveals four different bolt actions, two rifles built around the M1A, and the Tubb 2000. These are all interesting in their own right, but the one that I had never studied was the TAC-338.

The sniper community and its equipment are rapidly evolving. Mil-Dot reticles, data books and first-focal-plane scopes are all becoming endangered species. The role of the sniper is also changing. Sniping was once thought of as an esoteric art that revolved around rural stalks, single shots, then exfiltration. While these are all still pertinent aspects of sniping, they are no longer the only aspects.

Two new fields of study are now required for the sniper: urban operations and long-range sniping. Urban operations for the sniper are touched on elsewhere in this magazine, but let's consider the long-range aspect.

With troops still deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, we find that the ranges at which we're required to engage the enemy are much longer than doctrinally accepted just a few years back. We're not in the

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jungles of Vietnam anymore. Vietnam had its own set of very difficult and dangerous obstacles for the sniper to overcome. The open and arid terrain of the desert means that shots out past 1,000 meters are now common. When our snipers provide overwatch, they are often required to shoot from one ridgeline to another. This stretches engagement ranges.

WHY THE TAC-338?

Today's sniper needs two rifles to function effectively across all aspects of his operational environment. He needs a short-barreled semiauto 7.62mm for urban and patrolling ops, and a bolt-action .338 Lapua Mag. for everything past 800 meters. The TAC-338 represents the type of rifle best suited for employment in that "everything past 800 meters" environment.

Chambering in .338 Lapua Mag. is a requirement for the long-range sniper rifle. The McMillan TAC-338 fits that bill and has a 26½-inch barrel with a muzzlebrake attached. The barrel is what McMillan calls a medium-heavy contour. I'd call it about a No. 5 contour. The barrel has a 1:10 twist that handles both 250- and 300-grain bullets well. It threads into a McMillan action that has the same footprint as a Remington 700 and will even accept the same trigger. Called the G30, the action is pillar-bedded to the stock and has some



The Tac-338 comes with an Accuracy International five-round detachable box magazine. AI has been making these magazines for quite some time. They are the best mags available.

well-thought-out features of its own.

The G30 comes available with a controlled-round feed for those who so desire. The action on the TAC-338 I received was just a normal G30 long action. It includes a Sako-style extractor, so there's a nice claw that rides over the case rim pulling extraction duties. The G30 also has not one, but two ejectors.

One is the plunger-type Remington

affair we all know and recognize. The other is a traditional blade-type ejector that rides up through a groove in the bottom of the bolt when the bolt is pulled to the rear. Positive ejection is a definite plus, especially when we're in a hurry.

Another relevant feature of the G30 is the ability to disassemble the bolt without the use of any tools. Bolt disassembly is required to clean the firing-pin assembly. While this procedure is not required often, debris does occasionally get inside the bolt and could cause problems.

McMillan makes the action body out of 17-4 stainless and the bolt out of 9130 steel. The company holds to extremely tight tolerances and ensures that the face of the action is perpendicular to the centerline axis of the bolt. The bolt/action relationship is a key component to accuracy.

Upon assembly, the barrel will mate against the action face. If this is not exactly perpendicular to the bolt when the locking lugs of the bolt rotate into the action, lockup of the centerline axis of the bolt will be at an angle to the centerline axis of the bore. This inconsistent relationship will negatively affect accuracy.

STOCKS, BRAKES AND SUCH

The stock that McMillan puts on its TAC-338 is its own A-5. The A-5 has a number of features that I feel make it an ideal choice for a .338 Lapua.

The Tac-338 is best suited for long-range tactical scenarios. Securing airfields and manufacturing or storage facilities represents the most plausible areas where it would make sense to have a .338 Lapua on overwatch.





McMillan makes the G30 action that serves as the heart of the Tac-338. This beefy action is well suited to the abuse the .338 Lapua dishes out. A 20-MOA bias Picatinny rail sits atop the action for mounting whatever optic the shooter may desire.

The 20-MOA bias is necessary to get the elevation adjustments required if we want to dial our scopes out past 1,000 meters. With a 20-MOA bias and a .338 Lapua Mag., we can dial out past 1,500 meters.

The muzzlebrake on the TAC-338 isn't much to look at, but it works very well. When I first saw it I thought someone took a drill press, poked nine holes in a pipe and threaded it onto the barrel. I'm exaggerating a little, but the muzzlebrake isn't pretty, it's different. I've been slapped around by more than one .338 Lapua on the firing line, and while I do enjoy a little of the rough stuff every now and again, I can appreciate pain-free range sessions as much as the next man.

The adjustable length of pull and adjustable cheekrest are required for any rifle used for long-range shooting. Long-range shooting requires the shooter to be comfortable and consistent to be effective. The A-5 facilitates both. The A-5 stock has a wide, yet rounded fore-end. So often we find wide, square fore-ends on stocks, but such stocks are intended for prone shooting only. A square fore-end is a dream riding the bags or off a bipod, but positional shooting is an exercise in self-abuse. A square fore-end will beat the hell out of your support hand in improvised or positional shooting.

The rounded fore-end of the McMillan A-5 still rides bags and bipods well, but it is much more shooter-friendly than a square fore-end for practical purposes. The A-5 also has a flat toe at the rear of the stock. Flat toes are critical to stable shooting, as they allow us to effectively use a bag to stabilize the rear of the gun. For those who are so inclined, the A-5 also has a butthook (McMillan's term, not mine) that is used to pull the rifle back into your shoulder.

A sign of the quality of workmanship McMillan puts into each rifle can be observed in how closely the stock is inletted to the rest of the rifle. Anywhere you look on the rifle, the stock comes right up to the metal. The inletting of the stock even follows the contour of the barrel. Details such as

this take a lot of time to achieve and require the hands of a true craftsman.

Other pertinent features of the TAC-338 are the detachable box magazine, 20-MOA biased rail and effective muzzlebrake. The detachable box magazine is made by Accuracy International (AI) and holds five rounds. These mags are always the way to go for a tactical shooter. Nothing beats the speed or ease of a detachable box magazine when it comes time to reload. And, of course, AI mags have become the industry standard.

Sitting atop the receiver is a 20-MOA biased Picatinny rail. The rail is attached with 8x40 screws.

THE TAC-338 ON THE RANGE

I spent my time at the range evaluating the accuracy of the TAC-338 from the 700-yard line (this was the farthest distance the range allowed). A .338 Lapua Mag. is made to shoot at very long distances. Accuracy evaluations done at 100 yards do a tremendous disservice to both the rifle and shooter.

Most rifles chambered in .338 Lapua require about 200 to 300 yards for the bullet to stabilize in



The smooth action and detachable box magazine make the Tac-338 a joy to shoot. The rifle's action doesn't bind even when cycled rapidly, and the magazine is quick to replace.

THE McMILLAN TAC-338

flight. Any attempts to test for accuracy at closer ranges will yield erratic results due to unstable projectiles.

The TAC-338 did very well at the 700-yard line. I was shooting two loads: Black Hills loaded with 250-grain Lapua Scenar bullets and some Hornady loaded with the company's 250-grain BTHP. I expected to see the rifle favor one load or the other (they always do), and indeed that's what happened.

The Black Hills load grouped three shots into 2½ inches at 700 yards, which comes out to be .35 MOA. It's important to remember that .35 MOA measured at 700 yards is much more telling than .35 MOA measured at 100 yards.

The Hornady load grouped 5½ inches at 700 yards, or .78 MOA. This is still a respectable accuracy measurement at 700 yards and mostly indicates that this TAC-338 gives a nod to the Black Hills load over the Hornady load.

The flat toe of the Tac-338 rides a rear bag well and makes the rifle stable and easy to lie on comfortably. McMillan's attention to detail shows in how closely the inletting of the stock follows the contour of the barrel. The small, even gap between stock and barrel speaks to the craftsmanship required to assemble such a rifle.

PARTING THOUGHTS

The TAC-338 represents the type of rifle a sniper would want to shoot on those long-range missions. The stock is adjustable for a wide variety of shooters, the tighter tolerances pay off in accuracy gained, the 20 MOA gives us the elevation we need for the really long stuff, and there's the McMillan name and customer service to offer some peace of mind.

The TAC-338 was a dream to shoot due largely to the crisp trigger, comfortable stock and well-designed (if unsightly) muzzlebrake. It is a soft-shooting magnum capable of putting rounds accurately wherever you might



need them. It's an excellent choice for today's uniformed sniper or anyone looking to hit small objects at long distances. For more information, visit mcmillanusa.com. **SNIPER**