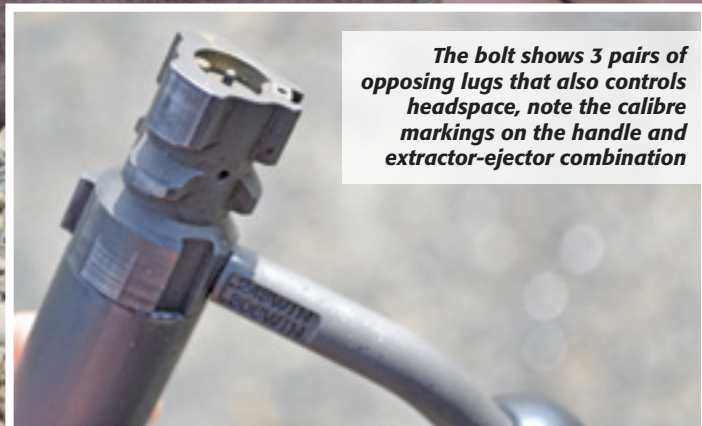


Buttless Wonder

Chris Parkin tests the DTA Stealth Recon Scout Bullpup precision rifle from Desert Tactical Arms



The bolt shows 3 pairs of opposing lugs that also controls headspace, note the calibre markings on the handle and extractor-ejector combination



Four clicks with the torque wrench, turn the locking catch 180°, open the bolt and the barrel slides out

The Desert Tactical Arms SRS rifle is a new design and an unusual one too,

as to my knowledge it's one of the few bullpup, switch barrel precision designs available.

The back to front design – magazine behind the pistol grip and a butt that doubles as a receiver - reduces size and increases versatility, as does its ability to swap calibres/barrels, so making it of interest to the military/police sniping community.

However, the question is does short necessarily mean sweet?

Chassis system

The rifle comes as a chassis unit to which a calibre conversion kit is added. These comprise of a barrel, bolt and magazine, all specific to the chambering used. Bolt face dimensions and

twist rates, along with barrel length are specifically tailored to a type-specific requirement, from a short 22" .308 Win up to a 26" .338 Lapua Magnum (both on test here), all within a relatively compact package offering quick calibre change. Other options include; 243 Win, 6.5x47, 260 Rem, 7mm Rem Mag and 300 Win Mag.

The barrels both show a fluted heavy contour although there isn't much of it on show, with the 22" .308 version, which only just peeps out of the 4-way Picatinny forend. This one came threaded 5/8"x24 with a neat protector for a brake or moderator. The longer .338 is fitted with a laterally ported muzzle brake to tame an accuracy-biased but heavy recoiling cartridge. The build negates any bedding issues; as it's a precise metal to metal fit all the way through.

The 12 o'clock rail extends back into the receiver for scope mounting. DTA's own scope mount features a 20 minute of angle (M.O.A.) incline to add long range versatility. In .308 Win, a 6-round steel magazine offers smooth feeding but direct single

loading by hand into the chamber requires care. The 338 magazine only sacrifices one round to hold five. Watch out for hot loads as you need to break from the



20" of 308 barrel in a gun this compact, what's the catch?

shooting position to overcome heavy bolt lift. The magazine latch is presented on both sides of the stock so is ambidextrous, it has a positive function and feel, though the mag does not fall free and had to be removed by hand.

Promised versatility

DTA quotes a barrel change time of just 60 seconds, which was not far from the truth. The first step is to slacken the four Allen bolts 1/2-turn (torque wrench supplied) recessed into the right side of the stock. On the left, just above the trigger guard, there's another which has a 180° lock/unlock movement. Now open the bolt and the tube slides out of the front end. Reinstallation is the reverse; the barrel is rotationally indexed so it will sit in

the correct position to slide back in. To change the bolt (if required), clip off the butt plate so it can be slid out. This system worked consistently well, returning to zero time after time as promised. I managed 73-seconds without breaking sweat although nobody was shooting back at me!

The bolt features six opposing lugs that lock into the rear of the chamber and ensure correct headspace. A clever sliding rear extension guarantees smooth and fast operation. The handle with its large plastic ball sits at the front of the bolt body to specifically improve ergonomics that are unique to this design layout. On shorter cartridge

lengths (COLs), there is a small filler stop that sits between the bolt and the recoil pad to restrict its travel to bring it into line with the different magazine sizes with their respective COL filler blocks.

The trigger is described as match quality and is neither single nor two stage, it travels smoothly until it breaks and, although you expect it to hit a second stage, it doesn't. This suits very heavy recoiling weapons to prevent a flinch, not a compact tactical/precision rifle, even in .338 Lapua. Two, injection-moulded plastic skins form the stock and provide a solid, comfortable fit although cheek weld is non-adjustable and a little tight. These skins wrap the mechanics of the gun very nicely into a minimalist, 'no frills' unit; form definitely following function here!

The grip and trigger guard are part of these skins and offer a comfortable hold with a good reach to the blade and ambidextrous sliding safety catch mounted just above it. Here it's back for SAFE and forward to FIRE. Quick release studs are fitted to the stock to facilitate various carry styles from over shoulder to Biathlon-type slings and cross chest formats, the butt pad is a large, fairly solid rectangular shape with a number of spacers to adjust the length of pull (LOP). All metalwork is finished in a matt black coating to give serious protection from the elements. Just in front of the recoil pad, sits an optional, integral rear monopod. Up front on the underside of the generously



Fast reloads are not as hard as you might expect once you alter your technique slightly

Form follows function, note the safety catch location and the synthetic outer shell (skins)



Even with a 24" barrel and brake in 338 Lapua Magnum, the gun was easily supported in a tactical kneeling position



The DTA mounts are a bit low and that comb could do with a bit of padding too

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Model	Desert Tactical Arms Stealth Decon Scout Bullpup
Calibre	308 Win and 338 Lapua Magnum (on test)
Capacity	5 and 6 accordingly (DM)
Calibres available	243 Win, 6.5x47, 260Rem, 308Win, 7mmRem, 300Win, 338 LM
Barrel	22-26"
Weight	11.5-12.25lbs
Length	32.5-38.5"
Trigger	3 lb fully adjustable
Effective range	800-1900 yards (308W-338LM)
Prices	Chassis £3000 Conversion Kit £1750 (£1950 in 338) Scope mount £200 Rear Monopod £300 Muzzle Brake £175 Magazine £100
Contact	Bench Grade Brands 01604 686800 www.deserttacticalarms.com

floating forend, sat an Accushot Atlas bipod offering the usual adjustability and tracking flexibility along with 6-9" legs. Easy to use it folds in both directions which on such a compact gun, might come in handy.

Curse of the Bullpup

The gun was tested using both the .308win and .338 Lapua setups, fitted with a Schmidt & Bender 12.5-50x56 PMII scope. After zeroing - which with either calibre was luckily only one MOA different - it really had its legs stretched. In .308 with 168-grain factory ammunition from Hornady and Remington, accuracy was into the 3/4 MOA region. Handloads improved upon this with a little tailoring but I never managed a consistent 1/2 MOA. As was to be expected from a short barrel, velocities were a little low at 2550 fps but horses for courses; this is a mid-range build spec. Handloads using a 155gr Sierra bullet at 2740 fps seemed a better option when tackling steel plates at 800 yards at the WMS Steel challenge.

When the opportunity to engage distant steel plates on a pleasant June day with light winds drops in your lap, it's hard to ignore. So I swapped barrels and let rip with the .338 Lapua. The gun was supplied with custom ammunition by Bench Grade Brands and this recipe really was a tried and tested formula for success. A 300-grain Sierra Matchking driven by Vihtavuouri N560 showed a 3-shot zeroing group as a dirty blob at a hundred yards, without wishing to waste precious time and ammo, the SRS confidently moved straight out to more testing distances.

Recoil transmission

The muzzle brake made the gun roughly similar to a 30-06 in felt recoil, fairly acceptable for such a compact unit. The scope mounts, although offering an inbuilt 20 MOA elevation, were just too low to achieve a comfortable head position on the stock which itself is virtually straight, owing

to the bullpup design. Several firers commented on the need to cant their heads a little too much and squash down hard, cheekbone to stock to attain a full sight picture. Although this is perhaps a personal comment, it translated to the plastic of the stock, communicating a hard ring straight into the skull which although not painful, was a little tiring. The virtually solid steel build and compact length inherent with this design type led to a very dense feel to the gun, leading to a different but easily accommodated balance point and recoil feel, the muzzle was perhaps a little jumpy in 308.

Having said this, even though the trigger took some careful control, the consistency and effectiveness of this SRS was hard to ignore. At 1500 metres, hits on a 20" steel gong were easily within the shooter's judgement of the light winds, shot after shot. The real surprise was that it took very little time to get used to the unusual bolt location! A slight alteration of hand position and technique allowed cycling just as quickly as guns using design ergonomics we shooters have trained on for over a hundred years. It will never be as fast and yes, it needs a positive approach to ensure no snagging, but shooters should be very wary of a hard bolt lift anyway! The fact that a sluggish extraction stroke often sent hot brass into your knuckles was a constant reminder not to dawdle and to maintain positional consistency shot to shot.

The rear monopod was excellent, a slight downward pull engaged the quick elevation extension and then careful rotation of the foot provided precise control. Like most supports, it was complemented when used with a small, soft rear bag under the foot. All this however comes at a price, which you would expect and to get on the road with one calibre; less scope mount, which is not mandatory will cost you £4750. This puts the SRS on par with the Unique Alpine. Overall a great multi calibre design that delivers exactly what is promises! **GM**