DESERT TACTICAL'S

STEALTH RECON SCOUT

A precision bolt action "bullpup" on a mission!

By Gary Paul Johnston

Having first appeared during World War I in bolt action rifles, the style called "bullpup" consists of a rifle that has its magazine and receiver behind the trigger and pistol grip. This arrangement puts the rifle's butt right behind the magazine, with the operator's cheek on the stock right over the bolt, thereby removing roughly 10–12 inches from the overall length of the weapon.

Interestingly, self-loading bullpup rifles also first appeared near the end of the Great War, such as the 6.5mm French Faucol-Meunier fielded in 1918. However, both the bolt-action and self-loading "bullpup" were all but forgotten until World War II. They didn't enter serious testing or production until after the war, with such models as the British EM-1 and EM-2, and continuing with the Steyr AUG, French FAMAS and British bullpup that became the L85A2. All of these were capable of selective fire (see *The World's Assault Rifles* from collectorsarmoury.com). The term "bullpup" is now all but a household word.

Throughout this time, bolt-action bullpup rifles continued to take a back seat. But they finally began to find their niche almost a century later, appearing as precision rifles for competition, hunting and military applications. Such rifles are now usually offered in mainstream calibers, including .308 Winchester (7.62x51mm NATO), .300 Winchester Magnum, .338 Lapua Magnum, and others. A few of these have been designed with quick-change barrel systems in these calibers. This means that an operator can quickly convert his or her bullpup to .308 Win., .300 Win. Mag. or .338 Lapua Magnum for the intended use.

Fifty is OUT!

What about the .50 BMG, you ask? Well, the 21st century European community, quivering in their way too tight shorts over John M. Browning's magnificent .50 caliber being just too mean to use on the poor little myrmidons of the "religion of peace," have declared it a "weapon of war," and have made using it on sub-homosapien barbarians by our heroic warriors punishable by spending the rest of their lives in prison…really! Yes, the .50 BMG long-range rifles can only be fired at materiel targets, such as vehicles and supplies. What if the ride is full of "pull-starts?" Well, OK, our troops can shoot at it (I think), but if the driver stops and they all un-ass the truck with RPGs and AKMs, using the .50 on them is a big no-no! The folks whose asses we saved from Hitler have even gone so far as to outlaw any cartridge based on the .50 BMG casing from being used against enemy personnel. Ah, but don't get me started.

A Happy Compromise

In the meantime, in 1983, Research Armament Industries had begun development of a new long-range cartridge case based on the .416 Rigby

Top: DTA's .338 Lapua Magnum Stealth Recon Scout Rifle is right at home in any terrain against any enemy you can see at any distance.

case necked down to .338 caliber. Hornady made cases with reinforced walls to handle the extra pressure and the late Macomb Cooper of Accuracy International did significant development of the cartridge, along with the Finnish company Lapua. Called the .338 Lapua Magnum (8.58x71mm), this cartridge has essentially been standardized as the optimum anti-personnel round for military use. Carrying a 250-grain bullet that leaves the muzzle at a velocity in the range of 3,000 fps and a range out to 1,800 yards, the .338 Lapua Magnum will likely be military's the long-range sniper rifle cartridge for the foreseeable future.

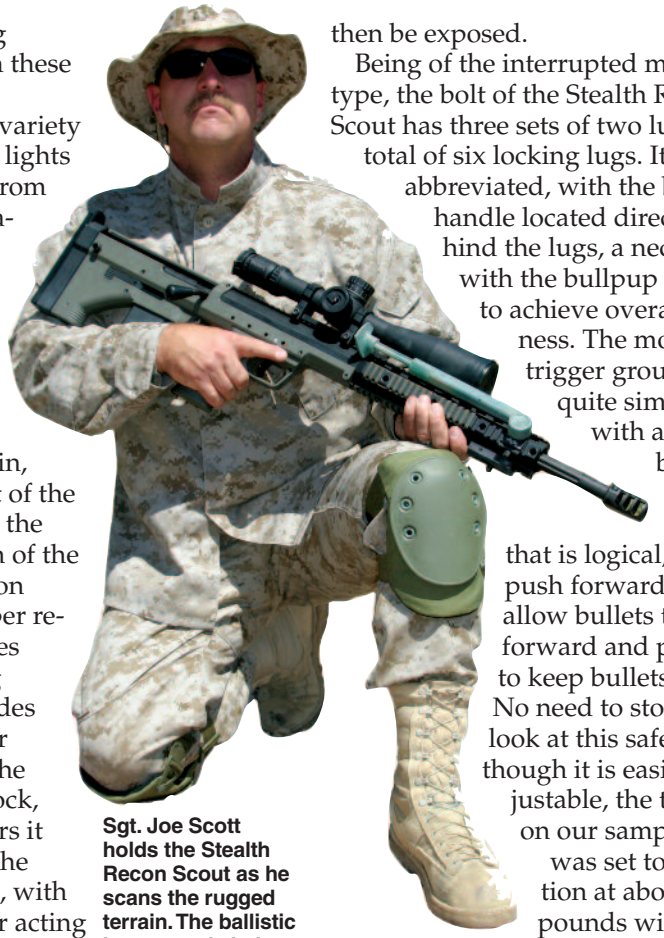
The Stealth Recon Scout

Gaining momentum around 1990, the .338 Lapua Magnum began to appear chambered in a variety of bolt-action rifles, a trend that continued for almost two decades. More recently, however, with the advent of modern 21st century bullpup bolt-action rifles, the cartridge seems to have found a new home in repeating rifles. The latest is from Desert Tactical Arms, of Utah, USA. It is fittingly called the Stealth Recon Scout (SRS), a catchy name, but one that also fits.

The simplest way to describe the construction of the Stealth Recon Scout is that it uses a hard-coat anodized aircraft alloy monolithic receiver component similar to that of the self-loading 5.56x45mm NATO caliber AR-type rifle introduced by Lewis Machine & Tool several years ago. The main difference is that Desert Tactical designed this component to use a bolt-action repeating system of operation. The other difference is that the SRS' receiver group is housed in a robust, glass-reinforced polymer stock somewhat similar to that used in the Steyr AUG, but being comprised of right and left sides held together by hex cross bolts.

Integral with the top forward portion of the receiver is a long MIL-STD-1913 style rail running to the front end of the handguard. On the section that creates the fore end are three additional integral rails at 3-, 6- and 9 o'clock, and at the fore and aft ends of both side rails are quick-detach sling mounts. On these rails can be mounted a variety of excellent lights and lasers from such companies as SureFire, Laser Devices, Insight Tactical and others.

Once again, reminiscent of the Steyr AUG, the rear portion of the Stealth Recon Scouts' upper receiver carries the rotating bolt and slides into the rear portion of the polymer stock, which covers it and forms the cheek piece, with the polymer acting to protect the face from heat and freezing cold. On the right side is a channel in which the bolt handle moves fore and aft, and underneath the stock is the magazine well with an ambidextrous magazine release that is pressed in to release the formed metal magazine. All magazine bodies use the same exterior with modifications made to the inside to fit the various calibers in which Desert Tactical offers the SRS. These include .243 Winchester, .308 Winchester (7.62x51mm NATO), .300 Winchester Magnum, and of course .338 Lapua Magnum. The bolts themselves are also essentially identical and have conical knobs, making them easier to operate.



Sgt. Joe Scott holds the Stealth Recon Scout as he scans the rugged terrain. The ballistic knee guards he's wearing proved quite valuable.

The SRS' bolt is installed/removed by first depressing the butt plate lock (located at the toe, or bottom of the butt) forward while pushing down on the butt plate. Because the rails holding the butt plate in place are interrupted, the plate needs only to be pushed down an inch or so in order to remove it rearward. The channel for the bolt will then be exposed.

Being of the interrupted multi-lug type, the bolt of the Stealth Recon Scout has three sets of two lugs for a total of six locking lugs. It is also abbreviated, with the bolt handle located directly behind the lugs, a necessity with the bullpup design to achieve overall shortness. The modular trigger group is quite simple, with an ambidextrous safety that is logical, i.e., push forward to allow bullets to go forward and pull back to keep bullets back. No need to stop and look at this safety. Although it is easily adjustable, the trigger on our sample SRS was set to perfection at about two pounds with slight take-up.

Premier Reticle Scope

Our sample Desert Tactical SRS came with the factory 34mm scope mount, which held a Premier Reticle 5–25x56mm illuminated reticle scope using a 34mm tube. This scope uses the USMC Gen IIXR MilDot reticle, which we found totally impressive. Premier's LeverLock system requires only the rim of a spent cartridge to unlock the turret to make fine adjustments to windage and elevation.

Quick-Change Barrel

The Desert Tactical Stealth Recon Scout can be had with all four caliber barrels, two of which (.243 Win. And .308 Win.) use the same bolt and magazine. The .300 Win. Mag. and .338 Lapua Magnum calibers use their own bolts, but use the same magazine. To change a barrel to another caliber, after removing the magazine and bolt and making sure the chamber is empty, use the supplied torque wrench to loosen four barrel locking screws in the right side of the stock; then turn the

barrel lock on the left side of the stock 180 degrees counterclockwise. The barrel can then be removed out the front of the rifle.

With the initial barrel removed, a different barrel is then carefully inserted from the front of the receiver, making sure the feed ramp is positioned correctly. Final reassembly is in reverse order using the furnished 68 foot-pound torque wrench. The proper bolt is then inserted and the butt plate replaced, all in less than two minutes. Total field-stripping simply requires the removal of the remaining stock bolts using the provided Allen wrench, but is seldom necessary. In any case, reading the instruction manual is vital before any disassembly or removing the bolt.

The Stealth Recon Scout disassembles as shown in about four minutes. Barrel changes take less than half that long.

Trigger Time

Because of traveling requirements, I was only able to have the Desert Tactical Stealth Recon Scout for three weeks. Although I had lots of .338 Lapua Magnum brass, I did not have any quantity of live ammo to test. Luckily, Cor-Bon and Hornady came through in one week and a break in the weather allowed a day of shooting at the private range of Jim Carroll, of Carroll Targets, and home of the World's Most Accurate Shooting Rest, which we used for all sighting in and 400-yard shooting. Also on hand was Sgt. Joe Scott, a special response unit sniper with our local sheriff's office and a long time rifle shooter.

Sgt. Scott checks the location of a target on the far side of the canyon above the range used to test the Stealth Recon Scout. The Vltor ModPod bipod proved excellent.

With Sgt. Scott and I both using Carroll's Ultimate Precision Rifle Rest, we took turns shooting 3-shot groups at 400 yards. A unique piece of equipment, the Ultimate Precision Rifle Rest holds the rifle's fore end, and is quick adjustable for windage and elevation, with fine tuning done by turning knobs on threaded shafts. Spring-loaded, ball-bearing tracks in the upper portion provide some recoil attenuation, as the unit is abutted on the front of a bench or in the ground. Originally designed for fast pace varmint shooting in a target-rich environment, the Ultimate Precision Shooting Rest is equally at home for bench rest competition.

Ballistic Knee Guards

On the advice of SOF publisher Lt. Col. Robert K. Brown, I had obtained a pair of the new ballistic knee guards (tacarm.com). Designed by a US Army Special Forces veteran, these new knee pads resist penetration from high velocity fragments and projectiles from RPG rockets, artillery shells, IEDs, land mines and more. They have been certified by the USNIJ as well as MIL-STD-662F requirements for body armor. Sgt. Joe Scott also certified them against "knee-monia" from the rugged rocks he had to scale in the accompanying photos here.

Groups with both the 250-grain Hornady .338 Lapua Magnum, and 300-grain Scenar Cor-Bon were shot until mirage became too much for precision shooting, so we waited to return early a few days later. On this occasion, in order to compare with using the SRS off a bipod, we switched, but I replaced the Harris Bipod furnished on the rifle with the Vltor ModPod. Consisting of two separate pieces, the ModPod mounts one leg to the 3 o'clock rail and the other to the 9 o'clock rail, placing the locking fulcrums above the bore. This way the rifle actually hangs between and below the bipod instead of on top of it, making for an extremely steady mounting platform.

Using the same two brands of ammunition, Sgt. Scott and I again fired a number of three-shot groups at 400 yards. In comparing all the groups of both loads with each other, we found no discernable difference in the performance of the SRS. This was important, as the rifle would be used off a bipod or a natural platform in the field. The results of all groups fired at 400 yards by both shooters with both brands of ammunition were also interesting. The average

The Stealth Recon Scout's bolt was easy to manipulate. The rifle's safety is simple, positive and ambidextrous. The Premier Sniper Scope performed superbly.

spread with the Hornady 250-grain OTM .338 Lapua Magnum was 3.19" and with the Cor-Bon 300-grain OTM 2.91", both well below 1 MOA. The best 400-yard group with the Hornady ammo was 1.03" center-to-center, and the best from Cor-Bon measured 2.26" (both by Sgt. Scott).

Since 400 yards was the farthest distance at which target stands were used on Jim's range, we used the remainder of the .338 Lapua Magnum ammunition on a 12-inch armor square Jim had hung in front of a huge rock at 880 yards down the canyon. Although we had to hold well under at 400 yards to avoid having to re-zero with our limited ammunition, we held dead on at 880 and were surprised to find we were good to go.

At this distance, we agreed that the Cor-Bon again held tighter than the Hornady, but we only had about a dozen rounds of it left.

Continuing with the Hornady, all three of us fired another couple of boxes to strengthen our findings, even though they weren't on paper. We judged that the Cor-Bon was holding at about 10 inches and the Hornady at about 15 inches with fliers. Unknown winds up the rugged zigzag canyon from the range could have also played a part, as we felt all of our presses had been good.

Shooting the converted Stealth Recon Scout in .308 proved equally spectacular after I left the rifle with Jim Carroll. Testing the SRS with several brands of Federal 168-grain .308 Match ammunition at 100 yards, Jim's best three-shot group measured just 0.242", and his largest group was 0.84" with a handload. The average of all groups, including Winchester, Hornady, Federal and handloads from two sources, was an astounding 0.52"!

The sample Stealth Recon Scout came in a fitted OD green Pelican Case with accessories and a .308 Winchester barrel, bolt and magazine, and all tools necessary to convert the rifle. The optional .308 conversion also makes practicing with the SRS easy and economical.

Desert Tactical Arms offers the SRS in a have-it-your-way format. Available in .243, 308, .300 Win. Mag. or .338 Lapua Magnum, the rifle can be had in one or all of these calibers with or without accessories, scopes and so on, or in a rapid deployment package similar to what I was sent. As you read this, DTA will offer a sound suppressor for the SRS system. Designed in .338 caliber, this suppressor will be suitable for use with all other SRS calibers as well, but that's not all.

Desert Tactical also offers its Hard Target Interdiction (HTI) package. Available in .50 BMG, .408 and .375 CheyTac and .416 Barrett, the HTI can be had in all of these calibers and/or a rapid deployment package similar to that for SRS. Prices for all DTA weapons vary with options, but the base price for the .338 Lapua Magnum SRS without accessories is $5,022.00 (suggested retail). For complete information, contact Desert Tactical Arms, 801-975-7272, or deserttacticalarms.com. To keep your Desert Tactical Arms rifle and the rest of your guns, JOIN THE NRA… DO IT NOW!

Characteristics:	DTA/Steal Recon Scout
Calibers:	.243 Win., .308 Win., .300 Win. Mag. and .338 Lapua Magnum
Muzzle Velocity:	3000 fps in .338 Lapua Mag
Operation:	Bolt action repeater
Barrel Length:	26"
Rate of Twist:	6 grooves, 1-in-10-inch RHT
Overall Length:	37.5"
Weight: (gun alone)	12.4 pounds
Safety:	Positive ambidextrous
Sights:	None
Stock Furniture;	Black, OD green or tan, glass-reinforced polymer
Finish:	Matte black, hard-coat anodized
Price:	$5,022.00 (sugg. ret.) base rifle in .338 Lapua Magnum

Other Contacts:

Carroll Targets
(970) 240-8600
(carrolltargets.com)

Ballistic Knee Guards
TACARM
(tacarm.com)

Vltor Weapon Systems
(866) 468-5867
(vltor.com)