

MONTANA X2 & GPO SCOPE

A CLASSIC FOR THE MODERN AGE



Montana Rifle Company started up in 1990, building rifles on existing actions. In 1993 they started making their own barrels and in 1999 company owner Keith Sipe decided to make his own action, based on the

BY JOHN HERBERT pre-1964 Winchester Model 70.

THE MODEL 1999 OCCUPIES A SPACE that had for many years been left vacant; a controlled round feed action that had a high level of fit and finish. The pre-1964 Winchester model 70 was for many years considered the Rifleman's rifle by American gun writers; for Americans it meant high quality, a Mauser-style controlled round feed and three-position bolt-mounted safety.

The pre-'64 Winchester Model 70 is still very popular for custom rifle builds in the USA, especially for those with a bit more cash, who want something a bit special. The problem is however that they stopped making this model in 1963. The post-'64 action is perfectly serviceable but the design was changed, and fit and finish was not as good as the old guns; it had lost its mystique, so to speak.

THE RIFLE

The model 1999 is a product-improved model 70, that has a bit of the Mauser 98 in the design as well. The Mauser features include the Model 98 gas handling which in the event of a pierced primer or case failure pushes the gas down into the magazine well through two large oval holes, and it uses a Mauser-style flanged bolt sleeve to stop any errant gas from getting into the shooter's face. While pierced primers and case failures

are not common, when they do happen it can be very unpleasant. The other Model 98 feature relocates the coned breech face to the locking collar. This keeps the breech square, offering better cartridge support while still allowing a smooth entry of the cartridge to the chamber; the system is really a hybrid of the 98 and model 70 designs. The rest of the action is very much Model 70 with the classic swept back bolt handle, three position safety and the classic over-ride trigger. The ejector is mechanical and requires the bolt to be brought back with a bit of speed to allow clear ejection. The bottom of the action is solid, with an integral recoil lug that allows the barrel greater support in the action. The floor-plate uses a traditional hinged bottom with the release just in front of the trigger guard.

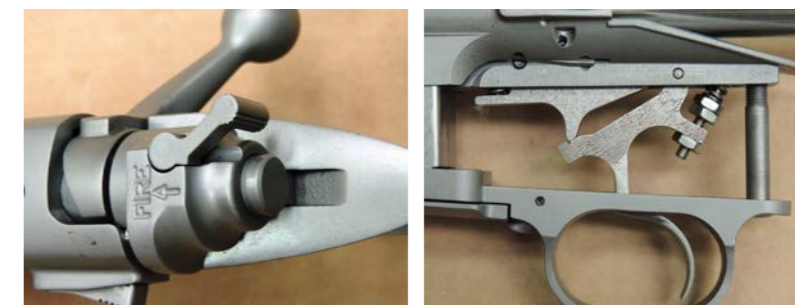
The rifle departs from the classic design by using a stainless barrel and action, along with a carbon fibre/Kevlar composite stock. The test rifle was chambered in the "Hot Rod" 6.5 284 Norma calibre. The Action for the 6.5 284 is a short action and this works just fine, thanks to the fact that the Montana has a generous internal magazine length of 3.125in (79.3mm) compared with many short action rifles that are limited to a maximum length of 2.82in (71.6mm). This also makes the action suitable for the WSM cartridges because, just like the 284-based rounds,

they were both designed around the longer Winchester short action length. The stock has a straight comb and open grip that while nice for point shooting doesn't allow quite the same level of control as a steeper grip, but the grip is a personal preference area for shooters; some prefer the open style. As mentioned, Montana make their own barrels; they use the button rifling method and every barrel is hand-lapped to remove any imperfections. The rifle is threaded for a suppressor or brake, and comes with a nice knurled cap to protect the threads.

TESTING

The action took a few rounds to smooth out but once it had been cycled a few dozen times and had a few shots through it, it was fine. Having shot a lot of Mauser-actioned rifles I'm used to the resistance when the claw extractor picks up the rim cartridge as it comes out of the magazine; this was very minimal on the Montana and shows that the engineering and fitting have had plenty of attention. The bolt has a very positive feel as you close it, and bolt lift is firm but positive. Cartridges outside the normal 308 or 30-06-based profiles can often present a feeding challenge, but the Montana had no issues with the fat 284 case.

From the factory the trigger broke at 3lbs (1.35kg); we adjusted it down to just over 2lbs and it was a pleasure to use. For testing, the rifle was fitted with a German Precision Optics Passion 6, 2.5-15 x 50 scope, mounted in Tally rings and bases. Off the benchrest the recoil was mild but the rifle did jump around a bit and this resulted in a few annoying flyers. These flyers were quite frustrating and made shooting tight groups a bit of a challenge, so I used a bipod for extra weight and used the "hand on scope" rest to calm things down. This worked and groups became a lot more consistent. The recoil is far from heavy but it is sharp enough to require solid concentration and good technique. A suppressor would calm things down and a good brake would turn it into a pussy cat. I had three loads for testing: Norma 130gn Golden Target, Norma 156gn Oryx and a hand load consisting of a 140gn Berger elite Hunter over 49.5gns of Hodgdon 2213sc. Each load shot well once the flyers were managed; in fact point of impact at 100 yards barely differed, with the two Norma loads being marginally more accurate than the hand load. Interestingly all 3 loads shot ¾ MOA groups, but as mentioned, it took a bit of effort to get there. Velocity-wise the 130 Golden Target load averaged 2964 FPS, the 156 Oryx



2742 FPS, and the 140 Berger 2912 FPS.

CONCLUSION

The Montana X2 is a desirable rifle, especially if you like a blend of traditional design and modern materials. The heart of the rifle is the action and there's a lot to like about it. It's big for a short action and the extra room offered in the magazine well shouldn't be overlooked, especially if you want to shoot WSM or 284-based rounds.

When I finished shooting the rifle the barrel cleaned up very quickly and there was very little if any copper fouling to be seen; it's clear this is a hand-polished component. Little touches like the threaded muzzle, very useable safety, a generous recoil pad and good trigger all add to the overall package. To me the rifle is a looker; with elegant lines and great presentation. For the half-cock users the Montana probably won't work for you; the spot is well-defined but if the trigger is pulled then the bolt will drop and the firing pin will touch the primer. Weight wise the X2 is just over 7lbs, so it's more of a mid-weight than lightweight and a lot of that can be attributed to the beefy action. Accuracy was good at ¾ MOA but I left the range with the feeling there was potential for much more. If owned this rifle I would have it bedded and

TOP: THE MONTANA ACTION IS BEEFY. Note the lack of plastic.

MIDDLE LEFT: THE 3 POSITION SAFETY allows locked bolt, safe with bolt movement and fire. If you are a safety user its one of the better designs.

MIDDLE RIGHT: THE CLASSIC OVERRIDE TRIGGER is easy to adjust for weight of pull and sear engagement.

BOTTOM: THE EXTRACTOR ON THE X2 IS CLASSIC MAUSER but like a model 70 this one will snap over a rim if you drop a cartridge on top of the magazine follower.

SEE OVER PAGE FOR SPECS >>>



TOP: **THE GPO PASSION 6 IS A VERY GOOD SCOPE,** with sharp bright optics and a useful feature set

LEFT: **THE CAPPED RESETTABLE TURRETS** adjusted accurately and the combined parallax/illumination dial keeps everything tidy

RIGHT: **EYE RELIEF WAS GOOD** at 95mm and even at max power eye position was not critical, the power adjuster was firm but the rubberised lever gave excellent grip.

It'd fit a lightweight suppressor.

GPO SCOPE

German Precision Optics is new optics company formed by former Zeiss CEO Richard Schmidt. The basic premise of GPO is German engineering, design and quality at a more affordable price point. While research, design and quality control are done in Germany, the manufacturing is outsourced to Japan. This may seem like a contradiction but in the world of optics this is pretty common; brands like Leupold and Nightforce have used Asian optics for years now. The Passion 6 has a 6x magnification range and uses a 30mm tube. The scope features HD lenses, side parallax adjustment, illuminated reticle, fast focus eyepiece, hydrophobic lens coatings and low profile resettable windage and elevation dials. The reticle is a German # 4 style with slightly thicker crosshairs than the usual Plex Reticle, but not to the point that it obscures the view. The centre dot illumination works very well and is my preferred type of red dot for hunting use.

TESTING

At the range the Passion 6 gave a nice clear sight picture when shooting on the 1 inch benchrest targets. Adjustments are 1cm at 100m; I put a tall target out at 100 and clicked up 30cm. The centre of the group was 30.5 cm above the first and that was well within

the margin of error from the group size (19mm). Zeroing was simple, and there were no unexpected POI shifts - I confirmed this back in the gun room by using a collimator to test the elevation and windage movement.

There are just on 50 MOA of elevation available, so assuming a bit of dialling-in you will have 20 MOA to play with. If I were shooting longer distances I'd run a 20 MOA base so I had peace of mind that I was making adjustments in the middle of the elevation range rather than at the end.

The image was as you would expect: sharp and bright. On the USAF 1951 optical chart I could resolve down to 6 on the far right test pattern, which is pretty good resolving power for a scope with only 15x magnification. Scopes with big erector values need to have their lens formulae spot-on and it appears that GPO has this sorted. The usual optical aberrations were well controlled, and there was no evidence of pincushion or barrel distortion at low magnification while at maximum magnification the image view was nicely flat; resolution dropped off a little at the edges, but it was minor.

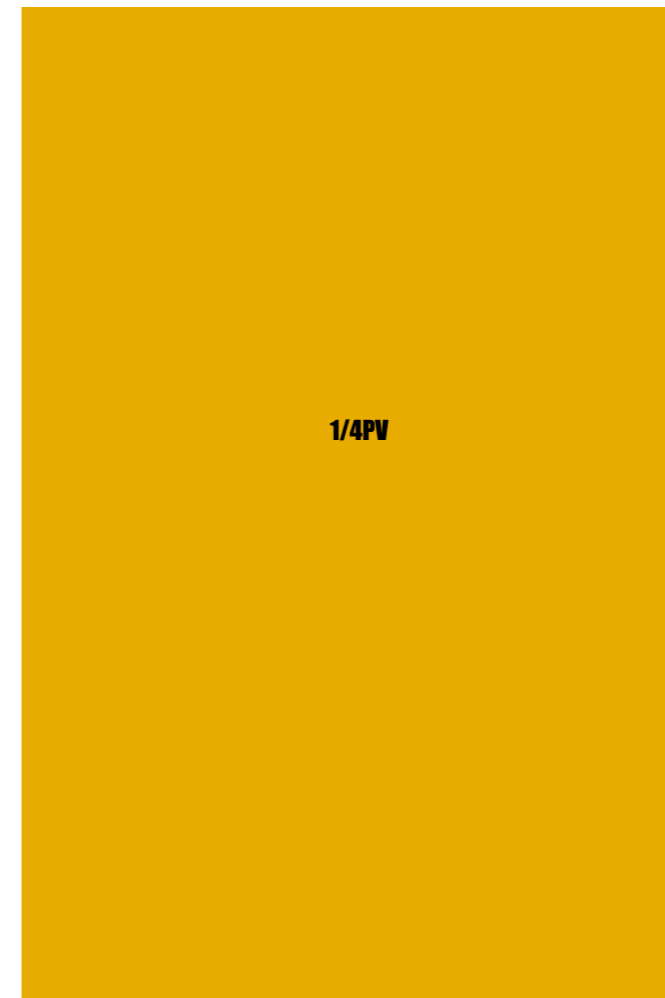
CONCLUSION

Yet another very good choice for the Kiwi hunter. We are in a golden age for optics with so many good choices; now we can add one more. The GPO Passion 6 2.5-15 x 50 is a very useable scope for mid- to long-range work. It ticks all the boxes with a full feature set, good sharp optics and a design that works in the



field. As you'd expect it's waterproof, fog proof and fully multicoated, and GPO offers a full lifetime warranty. GPO claims it has 92% light transmission and the quality of the image in low light situations would back that up. Looking at the way the scope is put together, the quality of the optics and the design it's clear that GPO know what they're doing, and while the scope doesn't offer advances over the best in the industry it's certainly up there with them and well worth a look, if a quality optic is on your radar.

ABOVE: **A DAY AT THE RANGE ALWAYS INVOLVES A BIT OF GEAR,** the Lab Radar chronograph makes measuring bullet speed a breeze



MONTANA X2

SPECIFICATIONS:

WEIGHT	3.2kg (7.1lbs)
LENGTH	1.143m (45 inches)
BARREL LENGTH	610mm (24 inches)
BARREL TWIST	1/8 Free floated
TRIGGER	Adjustable for sear engagement and weight of pull
ACTION/BOLT	Stainless, Winchester Model 70/ Mauser98 style, blueprinted at the factory.
STOCK	Composite carbon Fibre/Kevlar
FINISH	Matte stainless, black stock with grey accents.
RRP	\$3900

PROS:

- Classic design that works
- Long magazine box
- Fit and finish
- Easily-adjustable trigger
- Safe action if there is a case failure

CONS:

- Heavy action
- Has potential for better accuracy

GPO SCOPE

SPECIFICATIONS

MAGNIFICATION:	2.5-15
WEIGHT:	700g
LENGTH:	381mm
OBJECTIVE:	50mm
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ADJUSTMENTS:	.36 MOA at 100 yards/10mm at 100m
ELEVATION:	50 MOA
LIGHT TRANSMISSION:	92%
EYE RELIEF:	95mm
PRICE	\$2800

PROS:

- Very good optics
- 6x magnification range
- Quality is high
- Accurate adjustments

CONS:

- Elevation is adequate but a bit low for long range.
- Only one reticle choice