

# Project All Rounder

*Project New Blood* was a new rifle for Editor-in-Chief Simon Gibson. Simon had hunted for decades with his trusty Sako in 7mm Remington Magnum and was ready for a lighter, more weather-resistant rifle that had increased accuracy and better long range potential. We had a lot of positive comments regarding the rifle so we thought we should do another one. This time we are building a rifle for **NZ Rod & Rifle** owner Kevin Power.



BY JOHN HERBERT

**ABOVE: AT THE END OF STAGE ONE**, our project rifle had been fitted with a Nightforce NSX 3.5-15 x 50 scope, mounted with Nightforce Xtreme duty Ultralight rings on an alloy 20 MOA rail. A Kalix Teknik adjustable cheek piece has also been fitted.

**OPPOSITE: INSTALLATION OF THE KALIX TEKNIK ADJUSTABLE CHEEK PIECE** is reasonably straight forward. Remove the butt pad by unscrewing the two Phillips head screws in the pad. Pull out the skeleton support piece with a pair of pliers, and remove the foam insert by screwing a coarse thread screw in and pulling back. Fix the template over the stock and drill the holes. The jig makes it easy, but it can also be done by hand. Once drilled, insert the unit into the stock and adjust to suit.

**Kev wanted a rifle that could cover a number of scenarios, a multipurpose rifle so to speak. Kev hunts mainly in the Central North Island and has access to properties that allow shots out to 500 yards and occasionally longer. His target species include reds, sika, fallow and goats.**

Kev also wanted a rifle that had he could use in steel plate shoots and that was suitable for taking multiple shots when helping family members cull goats on their farm. In the end we came to the conclusion that this would not be an ultra-light rifle but more of a mid-weight type with a precision scope and a little bit of weight left in the barrel, both to aid rigidity and to cope with the heat generated in culling and gong-shooting scenarios. Now Kev is a gear man and likes modern materials and design, so you can bet we'll have a few fancy bits on the rifle.

## **ACTION CHOICE**

Like Project New Blood we decided on an action that was familiar to New Zealand hunters and so we chose the Tikka T3. Kev got impatient waiting for a second hand T3 to turn up at the right price though, so he splurged out and bought a new Tikka T3x. The T3x is an improved T3, but for the purposes of this build the differences are largely irrelevant. The T3 (x) was our action choice

as the Tikka is currently New Zealand's most popular bolt action centre fire hunting rifle. It has a reputation for being well-finished and its smooth bolt, decent trigger and very good out-of-the-box accuracy have made it popular with Kiwi hunters. The T3 and T3x don't quite have the same level of aftermarket support as the Remington 700 does, but that's slowly changing as more and more rifles become available on the second hand market. The T3 action is a two lug design but it rotates only 70 degrees and allows good clearance between the bolt and the scope.

The main discussion point with this action is primarily its length. Tikka use only one length for all calibres from .223 through to .300 Winchester Magnum. This one length makes it only just long enough for the magnums and longer than necessary for the shorter cartridges. To be fair there are few complaints from users over this one-fits-all-action length but the magnum users are limited when using heavy (read long) bullets. In our case we'll be staying with a short case so, unlike the Remington 700 build where we had to extend the magazine box, we will have plenty of room to work.

## **FIRST STEP**

Instead of tearing into the rifle straight away we thought we would assemble it with the optic we had chosen and include a few extra

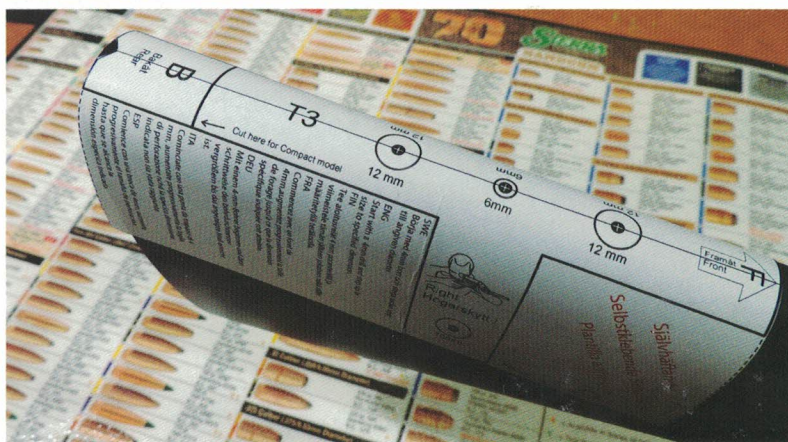
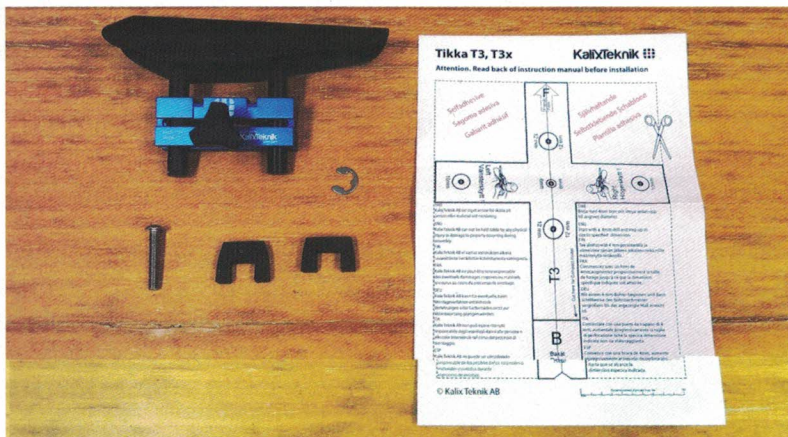


wanted as an end result it became clear that the scope selection would dominate the build.

There are a lot of very good scopes in what we can refer to as the extended range class. By 'extended range' I mean scopes that have a maximum magnification capability in excess of the traditional 9 to 10 power range. In this category, maximum magnification is in the 12 to 18 range. Above that we get into true long range scopes and we have to pay a penalty in terms of weight, size, and cost and, in some cases, low-light performance. We identified that we wanted a scope with the ability to dial for longer ranges and, I guess it goes without saying, a scope that has very good optical performance. Our choice after much discussion was a Nightforce NSX 35-15 x 50. Those keen observers will already say "But what about smaller and lighter options?" Nightforce NSX scopes are to be fair neither small nor light but in this case we wanted a scope with proper turrets for dialling elevation and wind, and we also wanted the ability to shoot plates out to 1000 yards or so. In the end we agreed that the weight was a compromise we would live with. Admittedly it's heavier when compared to say a Leupold VX5 or VX6 or a Swarovski Z6i, but similar scopes with a hunter/tactical design like the Bushnell LRHS are of a similar weight. In the end the scope's performance, well-regarded adjustment dials, strength and build quality, swayed Kev and me over. The icing on the cake was the MOAR reticle which is one of the better hold-and-shoot reticles I have seen.

To mount the scope we stayed with Nightforce and used an alloy 20 MOA rail and Nightforce Xtreme duty Ultralight rings. The Ultralight rings are also alloy but have titanium cross bolts and jaws. From previous experience I knew that the position of the scope with the 20 MOA base would make getting a perfect cheek weld a little difficult; to this end we decided a cheek-rest was in order, and after looking at fixed options we decided to go with the new Swedish-made Kalix Teknik adjustable design. Kalix Teknik, as you will see from the photos, is a very well-designed product and can be installed at home but we chose to use the jig that Kalix Teknik agents, New Zealand Ammunition Company, had to install it.

To finish off the first part of the project we fitted an Atlasworx extended bolt handle and a shroud. Unlike the original T3, the T3x already has an upgraded alloy shroud instead of the somewhat flimsy plastic part fitted to the ▶







ABOVE:

**THE NIGHTFORCE NSK 3.5-15 X 50** combines excellent optics and adjustability in a rugged useable package. Short range to long range, this scope can do it.

MIDDLE

**THE KALIX TEKNIK ADJUSTABLE CHEEK PIECE** allows precise placement of the head for perfect scope alignment.

BOTTOM

**THE ATLASWORX EXTENDED BOLT HANDLE AND SHROUD** added both functionality and looks to the T3x.



original T3, but, we fitted the Atlasworx shroud as much as anything to give it a semi- custom look. I've become a fan of the alloy shrouds on the T3x after witnessing a plastic shroud pop off into a shooter's eye when he had a blown primer. The alloy shrouds are a much firmer fit and are far less likely to do this.

At this stage we have a rifle that many Kiwi hunters can identify with; we have added a very good scope and some accessories that make using it a little bit nicer. Shouldering the rifle however, it became immediately obvious that the stock comb height of the T3x was too low for our scope and ring combination.

A good test of this aspect is to close your eyes and then find a good solid cheek rest. Now, open your eyes and look at your scope. In this case I was looking just below the bottom of the scope's ocular bell. Most people will look for the scope first and set their cheek height based on that, but a compromised cheek weld will make consistent eye-to-scope alignment difficult, often resulting in a compromised shooting position – and subsequent poor recoil management – which of course leads us down the path of poor accuracy and missed shots. Lifting the cheek piece 18mm put my cheek in the perfect position, and because it's adjustable Kev can move it to suit, as his cheek height will no doubt be different from mine.

The Atlasworx extended bolt handle made the already smooth bolt feel like oil on ice. It's not until you try it do you realise how much quicker and easier the extra leverage of the longer handle makes it when cycling the action for a quick follow-up shot. Add cold weather and a gloved hand and the big bolt is a winner!

In the next issue of NZ Rod&Rifle, we step away from the basics and will look at alternate stock and magazine options, as well as new calibre choices. ■