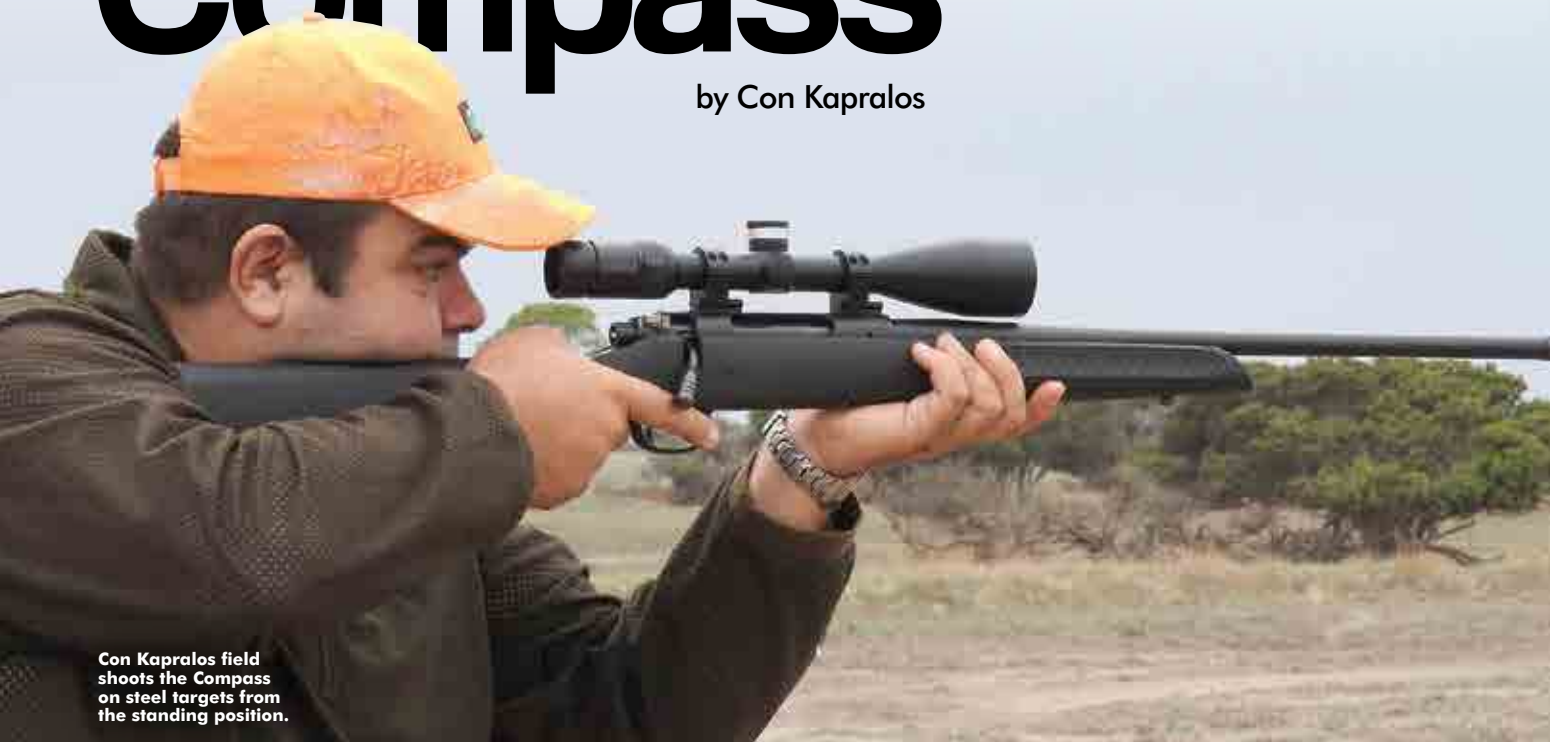


The Thompson/Center Compass

by Con Kapralos



Con Kapralos field shoots the Compass on steel targets from the standing position.

In the hotly contested sub-\$1000 centrefire rifle marketplace, the sporting shooter has never had it so good. There are so many rifles that fall into this price point which offer the new hunter or the seasoned shooter plenty of choices in a multitude of calibres and styles. Such has the competition been among manufacturers that they have been forced to up their game and offer more to the consumer, while still being mindful of the price. One such manufacturer is Thompson/Center Arms, based in Springfield, Massachusetts in the United States.

Thompson/Center Arms, or T/C as the firm is more commonly known, has been making sporting arms since 1967, when it released the Contender, a single-shot,

break-action pistol with barrel interchangeability. Since then, T/C has produced an impressive array of interesting gun designs, be it muzzleloaders or sporting rifles. Some, like the bolt-action Icon are modern-day classics, while models such as the Encore, Venture and Dimension continue to sell well worldwide.

However, fuelled by changing attitudes in the American marketplace, with consumers demanding no detriment in performance at any price point, the designers at T/C decided to create a new rifle, taking all the best attributes from their previous models for a fresh type which gives the hunter performance at an unbeatable price. Enter the T/C Compass.

The T/C Compass has been available in

America since early 2016 and only recently has the Australian T/C distributor, Frontier Arms in Adelaide, been able to import the Compass. Having won many accolades in the US, including the *Guns and Ammo* publication's Rifle of the Year 2016, the T/C Compass was eagerly anticipated. When chatting with Bernard Papps, sales director at Frontier Arms, he mentioned if I would like to do a review on the new Compass - to be specific, the same rifle that was used in the highly popular *Hunting the Menu* series on Australian television. It was an invitation too good to pass up and I duly accepted. Once the current series of *Hunting the Menu* had finished filming, the rifle was passed onto me for review, fitted with a Swarovski Z3 4-12x42 riflescope. The



The T/C Compass fitted with the Swarovski Z3 - hot off the *Hunting the Menu* television series and destined to make a return. A great optic for a great rifle.

The Thompson/Center Compass



The round action is a pleasing change from angled-flats seen on many rifles these days. The T/C Compass logo is etched in white into the stain blued action and looks very attractive. The bolt-release button is polished aluminium.

review rifle was in .308 Winchester calibre.

The Compass is modelled around the typical synthetically-stocked, push-feed bolt-action sporter with matte black metal-work and a detachable magazine. That is where the similarities end and the exciting features of the Compass take over.

The barrelled action

Disassembling the Compass, there were no initial surprises, as it follows the typical bolt-action sporter with a detachable magazine and synthetic stock. Looking at the action, it is identical to that employed on the T/C's other bolt-action, the Venture. It is machined from round bar stock and has a pleasing rounded profile, with no 'slab-sided' flats to be seen on the action. T/C, very thoughtfully, supplies fitted from the factory two-piece Weaver-style aluminium bases, which is an excellent move, as it is one less item that the buyer has to worry about and fitting suitable scope rings and a scope is a simple task.

On the left-hand side of the action, the words 'T/C Compass' are tastefully laser etched in white into the satin blue finish. This gives the rifle its identity and looks attractive in the process. To the rear of the

left side of the action a well-proportioned bolt-release lever is fitted, which enables the bolt to be removed from the action when drawn fully rearwards. The right-hand side of the action contains a well-designed ejection port, which permits faultless ejection and extraction of any cases that are chambered - fired or unfired. A small gas port is positioned just forward of the ejection port and assists in venting any gasses away from the shooter's face when required. On the underside of the action, near the barrel, is a cut-out that mates to a steel insert held into the stock. This recoil lug arrangement also ensures that the barrelled action is correctly positioned in the stock.

I quite warmed to the design of the action on the Compass - it is perfect without being complicated. The bolt on the Compass draws from T/C's experience with the Dimension, Venture and Icon rifles. It is a steel bolt of full-diameter that is satin blued, giving a slick bolt travel throughout its entire cycle. A large channel of the bolt's left side mates to a tab on the bolt stop/release and ensures that the bolt travel is without any undue slop or wobble, while being smooth and silky.



The action of the T/C Compass. The ejection port is well designed for trouble-free case manipulation and the solid bolt with a 60-degree bolt lift and triple locking lugs works very well.

The bolt head, which contains three locking lugs, is a separate unit, which is retained to the bolt body with a substantial pin but with the clever design of the bolt by T/C engineers, the bolt head will never fall off. Added to that, the bolt can be stripped fully for maintenance if required using the instructions supplied with the rifle. Ejection and extraction of the cases is supplied by a sliding-plate extractor that firmly removes cases from the chamber, while a plunger-type ejector through the bolt-face propels the cases through the ejection port with authority.

The bolt handle is a little different, its elongated appearance with three etched rings around its diameter unlike any that I have seen. It does offer very good grip and ergonomics but I would have preferred a round bolt knob with some knurling a la Remington 700. However, I am quite sure that T/C does offer other bolt handle styles, which can be retro-fitted to the Compass, similar to what is offered with the Icon. A choice of bolt handles would be a good



The T/C Compass in its component form.

The Thompson/Center Compass

option for the Compass.

The three-position safety on the bolt is obviously gleaned from the Winchester Model 70. It is simple to use, with the rear-most position being 'safe'. In this position, the safety blocks the firing pin and bolt operation. The mid-position still locks the bolt but allows the user to cycle the bolt for unloading or loading. The forward position is 'fire' with a cocking indicator showing when the bolt's firing pin is cocked. The three-position wing safety is a vast departure from the usual tang or trigger mounted safeties and it is one big plus on the Compass. The trigger affixed to the bottom of the action is a single stage similar in design to the pre-2006 Winchester Model 70s. It is fully adjustable from approximately 1.4 to 2.3kg, but from the factory was set at 1.6kg. For a hunting rifle, it was perfectly acceptable and showed no creep and just a little over-travel.

The detachable magazine on the Compass was of polymer construction and of a rotary design, accepting five rounds of the .308 Winchester. The advent of rotary magazines on recent centrefire rifles such as the Compass, Browning X-Bolt and Ruger American among others is certainly a huge step over three-shot single-stack magazines, which are frankly redundant compared to the rotary design. Loading five .308 cartridges into the magazine was easy and they fed into the chamber smoothly, without any problems whatsoever. The detachable rotary magazine sits flush into a recess in the stock and is easily removed by depressing a small latch on the front of the magazine itself. When positioned, it sits firm without any wobbling or rattling.

Moving to the barrel, this is one exciting feature of the Compass and several of its unique qualities would only be found on higher priced rifles. The barrel on the review rifle measured in at 550mm (just less than 22") and is of a sporter-weight

The well-proportioned bolt with its satin blued finish, polished blue bolt handle and three-position wing-style safety.



The three-lug bolt head, with the plunger ejector and floating claw extractor.

The knurled cap, which protects the thread for accommodating a muzzle brake or moderator (where permitted). The cap also protects the recessed target-style crown.

profile. For the .308 Winchester chambering, the barrel has a one in 12" rate of twist. More importantly, the barrel is button rifled with the 5R rifling profile.

5R rifling, for those who are not familiar with it, has five grooves and each land is opposite to a groove. This rifling helps to minimise bullet deformation and achieves a higher level of accuracy. Additionally, the 5R rifling has grooves that have gently sloping sides resulting in wider bottom corner angles, which helps greatly in cleaning fouling from the bore.

Looking at the tests from the range, you can certainly validate such facts regarding the accuracy of the 5R barrel. I am certainly no Benchrest shooter but the groups achieved with the six factory loads tested were impressive. Another feature of the barrel is the provision of a threaded muzzle (5/8"-24 UNEF thread) with a matching protective cap. This allows users to fit a muzzle brake if needed. Such an item would set you back at least a couple of

hundred dollars if you were having it done by a gunsmith, but with the Compass it comes as standard. The crown was slightly recessed and given additional security from the knurled protective cap, which ensures the thread for the muzzle brake is not damaged. The entire barrelled action has a satin blued finish with the only polished item being the bolt handle, which is blue.

The stock

The stock on the Compass looks similar to many composite units that adorn most 'budget' rifles. However, the designers at T/C did think carefully what constitutes a decent composite stock, achieving the performance required while not cutting any corners. Externally, the stock has a pleasing profile with a straight comb and a prominent cheekpiece to assist with correct placement of the face on the stock, relative to the scope ocular. The pistol grip radius is open, allowing for a comfortable grip, and the integral triggerguard, which is moulded



The profiled cheekpiece allows the user to align their eye more readily when using a scope and is quite comfortable. The soft recoil pad certainly absorbed the recoil from the .308 Winchester with authority.



The five-shot rotary magazine was superb, a positive move away from the single-stack magazines that many rifles offer.

The Thompson/Center Compass

into the stock, is generous enough for use with gloves during cold weather.

Panels of embossing on both sides of the pistol grip and along both sides of the fore-end give positive hold, be it summer or winter. The pattern of the embossed grip panels blends with the overall lines of the rifle and to top it off, the Thompson/Center logo is inletted into the base of the pistol grip in the form of a fine grip cap. The stock is furnished with blued QD sling swivel studs and to the rear of the buttstock is a soft recoil pad, similar to sorbothane but softer. This did assist in reducing recoil of the .308 Winchester round, especially when range testing. Internally, the requirements that make a decent composite stock were evident. Aluminium bedding pillars were moulded into the stock and these ensure consistent bedding and a free floated barrel in the process. Additionally, aluminium bedding pillars also avoid the need for expensive bottom metal/triggerguards as the action screws can be correctly torqued without any fear of crushing the composite (polymer) stock.

The recoil lug arrangement I touched on previously, being a steel lug glued into a recess in the bottom of the stock, which mates up with a slot milled into the underside of the action. When the rifle is assembled, the action sits firmly and securely within its cradle and the barrel free floats along its entire length. The inside of the fore-end has ample cross-bracing, which gives it plenty of rigidity. It still can flex when using a bipod or bench rest, but in the main, it was adequate for its intended purpose. The stock has a charcoal coloration and complements the satin blue finish of the metalwork.

The Compass has an overall length of 1042mm and weighs in at 3.29kg bare.

At the range

The Compass was supplied fitted with a Swarovski Z3 4-12x42, having been used on the *Hunting the Menu* television series, which Frontier Arms, and of course the SSAA, proudly sponsors. The rifle was cleaned thoroughly before range testing commenced in earnest. Five three-shot



The position of the trigger group in relation to the rest of the action. The trigger was fully adjustable but as set from the factory, it was perfectly acceptable for hunting.

groups were made with each of the six factory loads evaluated through the Compass in .308 Winchester, with the barrel being cleaned between groups and testing being carried out slowly over two days. The 5R rifling of the sporter barrel certainly produced some excellent groups, with more than a few nudging around the 9 to 12mm mark.

Averaging group sizes pushes them up accordingly but none of the factory loads tested went over the 30mm average. That says something special about the Compass. The match-grade 5R rifling guarantees to deliver minute of angle (MOA) accuracy and T/C gives a 1", three-shot group at 100 yards using premium ammunition guarantee with the 5R barrels. Looking at my results, I would tend to agree with the guarantee.

I did manage to take the Compass into the field but only fired at some steel plates at 200m and 300m both prone and free-hand. The Compass was comfortable to use and never once did it present any issues. I would have liked to give the rifle a go on game but it had to be returned to Frontier Arms for more television appearances.

Summary

Thompson/Center has really come up trumps with the Compass. It can be confidently stated that the firm has designed a rifle not with a price point in mind but with a target audience as the main goal. The creators have succeeded in giving us a rifle packed with features that many hunters look for in a rifle, without cutting any corners. The competitive

price point is a bonus and I have seen the Compass retailing around the \$750 mark. The Compass comes in 11 calibres from .204 Ruger right up to .300 Winchester Magnum, and includes the exciting 6.5 Creedmoor. It certainly is pointing in the right direction and is a feature-rich hunting rifle that's easy on the wallet.

For more information on the T/C Compass, ask your firearms retailer or visit www.frontierarms.com.au ●

Specifications

Manufacturer: Thompson/Center Arms, Springfield, Massachusetts, USA

Model: Compass

Action: Push-feed bolt-action, satin blue barrelled action

Barrel: 500mm (22") sporter weight, button-rifled 5R rifling, one in 12" twist, free floating, threaded muzzle (5/8"-24 UNEF thread)

Calibre: .204 Ruger, .223 Rem, .22-250 Rem, .243 Win, 6.5 Creedmoor, .270 Win, 7mm-08 Rem, 7mm Rem Mag, .308 Win (tested), .30-06 Sprg, .300 Win Mag

Sights: None fitted. Rifle supplied with Weaver-style bases fitted as standard

Trigger: Single stage, adjustable, set at 1.6kg

Magazine: Detachable, polymer construction, rotary style, hold five rounds (standard calibres) or four-rounds (Magnum calibres)

Stock: Composite polymer with integral aluminium bedding pillars, QD sling swivel studs, recoil pad

Overall Length: 1042mm (41")

Weight: 3.29kg (7¼lb)

Distributor: Frontier Arms

RRP: \$745

.308 Winchester accuracy testing

Ammunition	Bullet Weight and Type	100m (mm)	Average (mm)**
Sako	123-grain FMJ	12-19	15
Tikka	150-grain Bonded SP	22-29	25
OSA Buffalo River	135-grain HP	9-20	16
Federal Premium	130-grain Speer HP	19-26	22
Hornady	165-grain Interlock	22-30	25
Geco	165-grain Express	11-24	17

**Average of five three-shot groups at 100m.