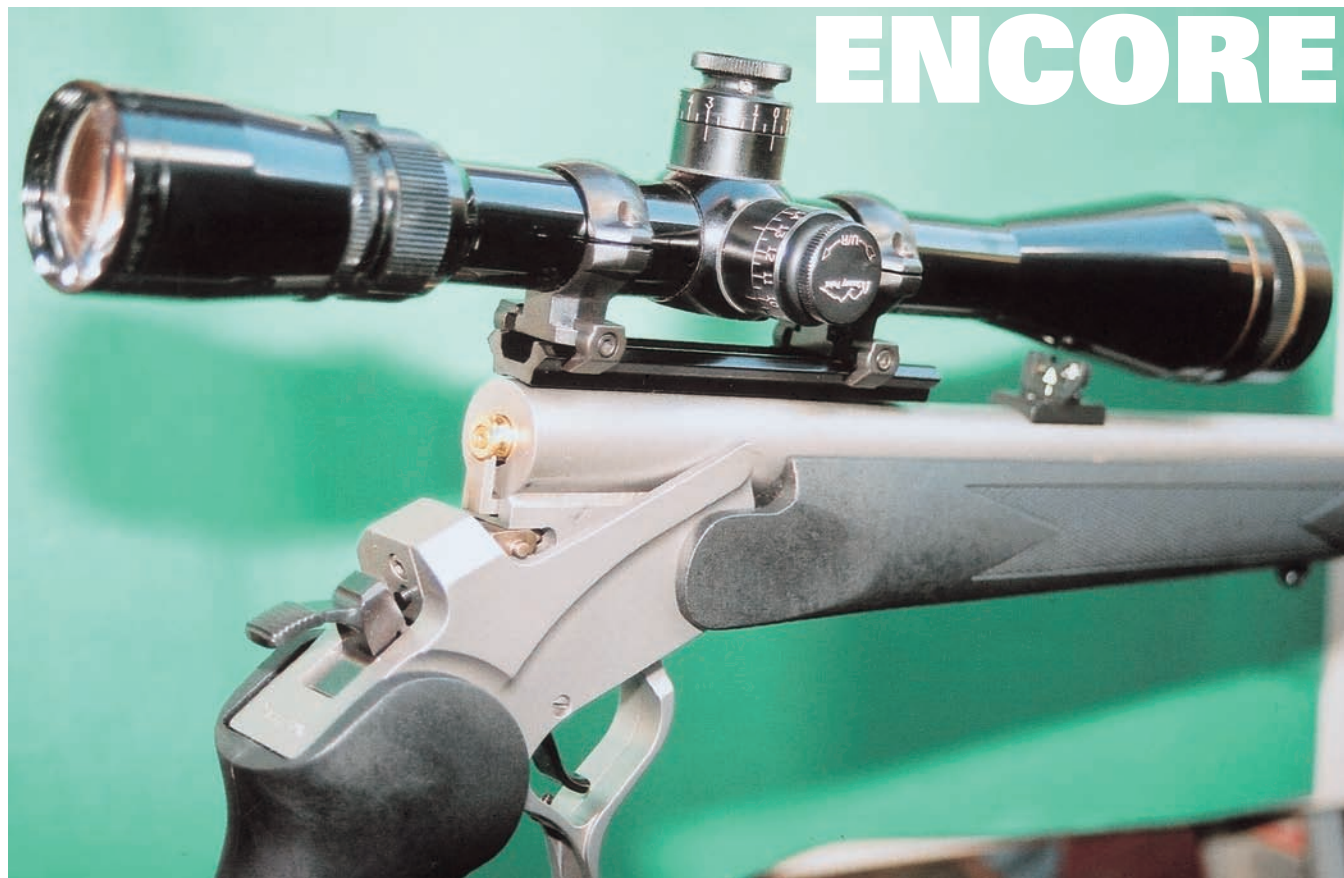


## TEST REPORT

# THE SENSATIONAL THOMPSON/CENTER ENCORE



The Encore breaks-open widely exposing the breech and allowing the fired case to be extracted and plucked out with the fingers.

## AT A GLANCE

The interchangeable-barrel single-shot T/C Encore is not a utility model, rather it's an incredibly accurate long-range performer.

The Thompson/Center Arms Encore rifle is unique. It combines the oldest type of break-open single-shot action with the most modern sporting arms features – interchangeable barrels, weather resistant finishes, and a wide variety of cartridge chamberings, including the 7mm Rem Mag and .300 Win Mag.

Its widespread popularity is the result of one of the most impressive sagas in recent firearms history, and the original T/C Contender is almost solely responsible for turning handgunning into a rifle-equivalent long-range sport for competitors and hunters. But T/C never rested upon its laurels and since it was introduced in 1967, the T/C has constantly been upgraded and improved to widen its appeal and include rifle shooters.

Designed by self-taught gunsmith Warren Center, the Contender was intended to be a small-calibre, lightweight pistol for small game hunting, plinking and casual target shooting. The gun was being produced in .22 LR, .22 WMR, .22 Hornet, .22 Jet and .38 Special when Center met New Hampshire toolmaker Ken Thompson and together the two men formed Thompson/Center Arms.

Realizing that the break-open action was strong enough to handle the heaviest magnum cartridges, before long the Contender was offered for many full length rifle cartridges and the name T/C became synonymous with power and long-range ballistic capability and accuracy. By 1986, the Contender was being offered in 33 different chamberings in the blued versions and 14 in a new Armour Alloy II version. Barrel lengths and styles included 250mm octagon and a 250mm bull barrel with screw-in choke and vent rib for shotshells, and a 356mm Super bull barrel.

Over the space of two short decades the T/C Contender became recognized as a handgun that delivered rifle



**LEFT:** The Leupold 6.5-20x Vari-XIII was mounted using a Weaver 410 one-piece base and medium height Millet Steel one-inch rings. Although front of base didn't touch the barrel, it was a rigid system.

**BELOW:** Close-up of the breech shows rugged construction together with rigidity.

accuracy and power out to 200 metres. The Contender changed the face of handguning. As well as seeing use for long-range handgun hunting and big-game handgun hunting, the Contender virtually gave the game of handgun metallic silhouette shooting a considerable boost. Warren Center was the 1980 winner of the Outstanding American Handgunner Award.

It was inevitable that eventually the Contender design would be re-engineered and carried over to a rifle, first the Contender carbine, then the Encore. This amazingly versatile platform has achieved cult status for its extreme versatility, and affordability of its interchangeable barrel system which includes a wide range of calibres – everything from the miniscule .17 HRM to the gigantic .416 Rigby in the Pro Hunter. This top-of-the-line model is a bit more costly than some budgetary boltguns, but the affordable Encore (on test) also offers additional barrels so that the shooter can have a wide range of calibres capable of handling everything from varmints to dangerous game at a fraction of what a battery of bolt actions would cost. The T/C Encore can be taken down into its two major parts for ease of transportation for plane travel on an overseas safari. This is the tremendous advantage being offered by Thompson/Center's versatile single-shot.

An important ingredient in this success story is T/C's ability to maintain precise manufacturing tolerances. It's Rochester, New Hampshire plant is equipped with modern CNC machinery which produces the action, a key element of which is that the frame will accept many different barrels with each and every one forming a very close fit.

The gracefully contoured receiver has reinforcing side arms that flow down from a square-shouldered breech and a short square tang. Break-open single-shots like



their shotgun counterparts attempt to unhinge on firing, and this lack of rigidity doesn't help accuracy, at least not the kind of extreme accuracy that's desirable for serious varmint sniping.

The T/C Encore deserves the distinction of being called the ultimate all-around firearm. Its modular system combining centrefire, shotgun and muzzle-loader comes closer to that ideal than any other firearms on the market today.

The beauty of the T/C Encore is that the frame will accept all available lengths, chamberings and configurations of barrels and their corresponding forearms with no special accessories or alterations. Switching barrels takes just a few seconds. You simply remove the forearm, push out the barrel's cylindrical hinge pin, switch barrels and reassemble.





**LEFT: The Encore with forearm and barrel removed. Disassembly and reassembly is simple and straightforward.**

**BELOW: The underbolt is welded to the underside of the barrel. It withstands axial and radial forces and dampens the harmful impulses of bending pressures very well.**



The safety of the gun's mechanism is reinforced by having the internal capability to automatically move the mechanism to the safety position whenever the action is broken open, and it remains in safety mode until the trigger is pulled. An independently operated interlock also prevents the gun from firing if the barrel is not completely closed and locked.

Every feature of the T/C Encore has been designed to maximize performance and handling ease for the shooter. The composite stock has racy lines and is ambidextrous for both right and lefthanded shooters having a high Monte-Carlo comb sans cheekpiece atop the buttstock. The wide, smooth target-type trigger is screw adjustable for let-off travel and the hammer has wide, cross-grooved target spur. The standard T/C pistol grip was ergonomically designed for recoil absorption and is very comfortable to grasp.

The Encore platform offers 610mm and 650mm barrels in a choice of calibres – .204 Ruger, .22-250, .223, 6.8 Remington Special, .243, .25-06, .270 Win., 7mm Rem Mag., 7mm-08, .300 Win Mag., .30-06 and .308.

The latest Pro Hunter model features a stainless 650mm fluted barrel and black synthetic Flex Tech stock. It comes without sights and scope rail and rings included. Barrels for the .338 and .416 Rigby are available.

For those who favour carbine length longarms, the Encore is available in a compact "Katahdin" version with composite stock, 457mm barrel with muzzle brake in .45-70 and .450 Marlin or .460 S&W and .500 S&W. And if you favour a slug gun, the Encore Pro Hunter can be converted into a 76mm 20 or 12 gauge with the addition of a rifled slug barrel.

The Thompson/Center G2 Contender rifle is similar to the Contender pistol but in compact rifle format. It weighs a mere 2.5kgs. It features interchangeable 584mm barrels

chambered for .17 HMR, .22 LR, .223, .30-30 and .45-70; plus a .45 calibre muzzle-loading barrel.

The G2 Contender has an added refinement – a dual firing pin system with a hammer-mounted manual firing pin selector, which can be switched to position a hammernose over either the rimfire or centrefire firing pin in the frame.

My testing of the T/C Encore was confined to only one aspect of platform; a centrefire big varmint rifle in popular .223 Remington calibre. A handy thing about this system is that, because the scope is mounted on the barrel itself, changing barrels is not going to raise any problems with a shifting zero, requiring sighting-in. That is, if you already have a different scope mounted on each barrel.

For testing I mounted the matte-stainless Encore with a Leupold Vari-XIII 6.5-20x40 equipped with Stoney Point target knobs, using a Weaver 410 rail mount and a set of medium height Millet steel rings.

I noticed that the front end of the rail mount wasn't a perfect fit for the barrel, which seemed to taper a bit too fast. Nevertheless, the rail mount formed a close and solid fit where the four screws held it to the barrel so although it wasn't cosmetically pleasing, the base was rigid enough. In addition, the T/C Encore has a good stiff barrel that can be guaranteed to produce tight accuracy. An added ballistic bonus is their extra length which will generate slightly higher muzzle



**Nick dropped this billy from about 150 metres with the Encore. He rolled down into a gully and landed in the rocks.**

## SPECS

### Thompson/Center Arms Encore

#### MANUFACTURER:

Thompson/Center Arms,  
Rochester, NH, U.S.A

#### TYPE:

Break-open single shot

#### CALIBRES:

From .204 Ruger to .300 Win  
Mag.

#### BARREL:

610mm matte stainless steel

#### OVERALL LENGTH:

962mm

#### STOCK:

Black synthetic with  
chekering on pistol grip and  
forearm

#### WEIGHT

3.16kgs

#### SIGHTS:

Ramped white bead front  
and fully adjustable leaf-type  
rear

#### PRICE:

Owing to our fluctuating  
dollar, ask your local gunshop

#### TRADE ENQUIRIES:

T/C arms distributed by  
Frontier Arm, GPO Box 2317,  
Adelaide, S.A 5001. PH: (08)  
8373 2855

velocities than a bolt action rifle of comparable length with a 550mm barrel.

The .223 barrel on my test Encore had a diameter of 25.30mm at the breech end and was straight tapered to 18mm at the counterbored muzzle. The chamber was surrounded with a 8.36mm thickness of steel, unbroken except for where the rim was slotted for the 7mm wide extractor.

The two-piece stock may worry some shooters since bedding is often a problem, but with the T/C the forearm provides little pressure on the stiff barrel. A more serious threat to extreme accuracy in break-open single-shots is their lack of rigidity and the way they attempt to unhinge on firing. T/C moved to correct this problem early on by relocating the trigger guard pivot pin that forms the fulcrum by which the break-open mechanism is unlocked. The original location of this pin was in front of the trigger guard; in 1984 it was moved to a position directly over the trigger. This not only improved leverage of the break-open spur on the trigger guard and made opening the action much easier, but also increased the rigidity of the lock-up and increased the gun's accuracy potential.

What impressed me most was that the overall length of the Encore which despite having a 610mm barrel was 118mm shorter than my Ruger Hawkeye .257 Roberts – 962mm against 1,080mm.

Accuracy testing was carried out using Winchester Supreme ammunition loaded with the 55gn Ballistic Silvertip bullet at a nominal 3,240fps. Five 3-shot groups with this factory load at 100 metres averaged 0.94 MoA and gave 3,235 fps. A handload with the Hornady 50gn V-Max and 27gn of AR2208 clocked a solid 3,345 fps and averaged 0.80. Another roll-your-own load with the 60gn Hornady V-Max and 26gn of AR2208 left the muzzle at 2,994 fps and grouped in 1.00. The T/C Encore has plenty of accuracy for

varmint-feral hunting. It was never intended for serious stretch-out work in any case but rather to be handy walkabout outfit.

I found it difficult to ascertain the rifle's true accuracy potential with a trigger that broke at a hefty 2kgs because half that weight would have been closer to ideal for a varmint rifle.

The medium weight rifle held its point of impact throughout testing even though it rapidly heated up in the December temperature of 38 degrees C. Groups were consistently round with no obvious fliers. Functioning of course couldn't be faulted, which wasn't surprising for a break-open gun.

Once you shoot a T/C Encore for a while you'll quickly appreciate its simplicity. It is exceedingly quick to operate. Just pull back on the trigger guard spur. The mechanism will break open – like any single-shot shotgun – and the barrel will tilt down. As it does, the extractor will automatically lift the fired case from the chamber far enough so it can readily be plucked free by hand. When the action is closed, the cocking mechanism resets itself, and all you need to do is cock the hammer and fire. After the hammer falls, the gun cannot again be cocked until the action is reopened and closed. A safety hammer stop built into the mechanism prevents the hammer from striking the firing pin except when the trigger is pulled. In design and operation, the Encore is a very safe firearm.

Changing Encore barrels is extremely easy. Remove the forearm by unscrewing the retaining screws, open the action and tap out the large hinge pin at the front of the receiver, lift off the current barrel, line up the new one, reinsert the hinge pin, and screw the forearm back in place. The job shouldn't take more than a few minutes.

After the rifle was tested for accuracy I carried it in the field to get a goat for dog meat. Out of the loads I'd fired on the range I decided on my handload with the 55gn Hornady. My opportunity came when my drathaar pointed a herd of billies feeding on blackberry clumps about 150 metres away. I sat and rested the rifle against the side of a tree and waited until a sleek black goat turned nicely side-on. The bullet landed high behind his shoulder. He dropped on the spot and rolled down into the gully; it was all over bar the skinning and dressing. There was no chance for a second shot as the goats spooked at the shot and speedily vanished from sight down the steep sidehill.

Some purist riflemen adhere to the concept of one shot one kill, but my own preference is for a repeater like T/C's new Icon bolt action which is a classical dream. To my way of thinking single-shots work fine for varmint sniping where having only one shot poses no handicap. The Encore with its stiff barrel certainly has all the necessary features, including extreme accuracy in calibres like the .204, .223 and .22-250.

Hunters who like the idea of building up a battery suited for all manner of game by buying a number of barrels will find the T/C Encore has a lot to offer. In any event I found the .223 I tested was not only pleasing to look at, but accurate and well balanced into the bargain. ■