

The Thompson/Center Venture rifle

by Technical Advisor Brendan Atkinson



The Thompson/Center Venture in .30-06.

In the October 2008 *Australian Shooter*, I reviewed the Thompson/Center Icon rifle and was very impressed with the quality and accuracy of that firearm. It was not cheap, but it was considered that the prospective owner would certainly get what they paid for. Following the trend of firearm manufacturers to produce budget-priced models, Thompson/Center has now released their own version of this with the Venture. Chris Papps from Frontier Arms in Adelaide advised me of the impending delivery of the Venture and when it finally arrived in Australia, he was quick to deliver one to us for testing.

So, is this the poor man's Icon? I think yes, but if he's a bush shooter, he won't be disappointed with the Venture! The Icon featured a magnificent selected walnut stock, which would bring tears to your eyes if you damaged it. The stock on the Venture is of moulded plastic and if you scratched it

pushing through the bushes, well, bad luck, but it's no disaster.

There's a lot of the Icon in the Venture though. It is a bit like what Sako have done with the A7 - built on a proven product, but economise in areas such as the stock. That's usually how firearm manufacturers get the price down.

The action is interesting, in that, it uses the 'fat bolt' method to obtain a three locking lug set-up. It's certainly not a new idea, but it is effective. The nitrided bolt body resembles a cylinder and it is a hefty 0.85" in diameter. Those familiar with the Omark bolt will know what it looks like, although the Omark did have a detachable bolt-head and the lugs locked into the barrel. With the Icon, the lugs lock up in the action. Now, having three locking lugs gives the distinct advantage of a 60-degree bolt lift. In the open position, the bolt handle is around 90 degrees to the stock, so there is

no danger of it ever fouling a scope or scope caps. The usual downside of a 60-degree lift is the increased effort need to lift the bolt.

I can report that the Venture is not too bad in this area, although it is definitely heavier than an equivalent two-lug action. The bolt handle is short and is angled to the rear. I remember that when I tested the Icon, the bolt handles could be replaced easily with different styles. This is also possible with the Venture and different shaped bolt handles are available at extra cost. A Sako-style extractor sits in one of the bolt lugs and the plunger ejector tossed cases clean off the bench when testing the rifle.

The Venture is factory equipped with Weaver-style bases and as this is one of the most common types of scope base, it gives the owner an enormous range of scope rings to choose from.

A thumb-operated safety sits at the right-hand rear of the action and is a simple on/off switch. If it is on, the trigger is locked, but the bolt may still be removed. In my opinion, this is the best arrangement for a safety catch. A cocking indicator may be seen at the back of the bolt when in the cocked position.

The detachable magazine is released from the front and holds a single stack of three cartridges. The magazine itself is constructed of moulded black plastic. I don't have a problem with plastic magazines (as long as they are well constructed), as it is one less thing to rust.

I am sure we have all heard of the term



Assembly and disassembly is undertaken by way of two take-down screws.



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'fully adjustable' when referring to triggers. The Venture is supplied with a small Allen key, so that external adjustments to the weight of pull (that's the resistance you feel when you pull the trigger) can be made. The sear engagement and overtravel have been set at the factory and should not be messed with. On top of the trigger is a small hex-head screw. By turning this screw clockwise, the triggerweight will be increased and by turning it anticlockwise, it may be lightened. To prevent accidents, it can only be lightened to what Thompson/Center considers a safe level. The factory setting is said to be between 3 and 3.5lb. Our test rifle was slightly heavier than this, but it was very crisp and clean. Measured over 10 pulls on our triggerpull gauge, it averaged out at 3lb 10oz.

The sporter-weight barrel has no provision for open sights. It's 24" in length and was chambered for the .30-06 Springfield calibre. It is button rifled with 5R rifling and claimed to be of match grade. For those who



The Thompson/Center Venture's bolt handle is short and angled backwards. It is easier to use than it looks.

are unfamiliar with the term '5R', this refers to the shape of the rifling. Look at normal rifling and you will see defined sharp edges, like a castle wall, for the length of the barrel. With 5R, the angle of where the rifling meets the bore is graduated. This gives a non-symmetrical engraving to the bullet. It is used on such accurate firearms as the Remington M24 SWS and is claimed to produce greater accuracy with less fouling. On our review rifle, the twist rate was measured at one turn in 10", which should stabilise the heaviest factory loads available for this calibre. The muzzle is cut off square, then recessed and squared off to prevent damage in use.

I have previously mentioned the stock; it is of composite construction in matte-black and has grey plastic textured grips on the fore-end and pistol grip. There is no cheekpiece and a left-hander would have no trouble using it.

Sling swivel mounts are supplied at the front and rear. The recoil pad is thick and 'squishy' and did a good job of soaking up some of the recoil of the .30-06 cartridge.

There is no additional bedding under the action, which is pulled into the stock by two take-down screws. Doing the usual checks for bedding by loosening and tightening the screws revealed that the set-up that Thompson/Center has used seems to have the action sitting very comfortably in the stock, so no problems there.

There was a scope supplied with the Venture. It was a Nikon Buckmasters



The muzzle is squared off and then recessed for protection against damage.



The Thompson/Center Venture is factory equipped with Weaver-style bases, giving the owner a vast selection of rings to choose from.



The fore-end and pistol grip have plastic panels. They work okay, except for when your hands are sweaty.



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(#6420) in 3-9x40 NP. The 'NP' stands for Nikoplex and is the design of the reticle. This scope is made in the Philippines and appears to be of good quality. It has quarter-minute clicks and to my eyes, it was clear and bright throughout the power range.

So, the Venture looks and feels good, but how did it perform on the range? I was supplied with some Hornady factory ammunition to use in this rifle. To this, I added a few packets of other brands, along with a few handloads that I have found to be accurate in my own .30-06. I happen to like this calibre and have hunted pigs, goats, deer and feral donkeys with it. The .30-06 has the ability to reach out and touch things just that little bit further than some other popular calibres, without having to resort to the Magnums.

Having an extended shooting session with a .30-06 over a bench rest is not a lot of fun with a light rifle. If we were firing just a few shots, it would not be a problem. However, with a bit of shoulder padding added, it wasn't too bad and besides, I like to enjoy my shooting.

I set up targets at the SSAA Para Range at 100, 200 and 300m and ran-in the barrel with some hunting handloads left over from the last pig shooting trip. The barrel cleaned up well and had all but stopped 'coppering up' after about 12 rounds. A good look down the tube with the Hawkeye borescope showed that all was well. Being a sporter-



The Thompson/Center Venture has a single-stack detachable magazine that holds three loaded rounds. These are Federal 180-grain AccuBonds.

weight barrel meant that one could not rush the testing, as it heated up very quickly. Fortunately, it was only about 13C on the test day, so cooling off did not take too long. There is no sense in abusing the equipment.

For accuracy testing, I elected to shoot a five-shot group at 100 and 200m with each brand of ammunition. Those that

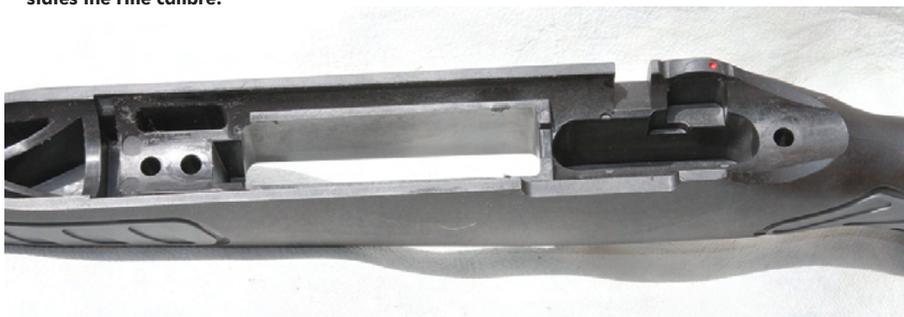
shot well would then be shot at 300m. The accompanying table represents the actual group sizes obtained. Now take a look at those results and consider that this is not an ammunition test, but a test of a hunting rifle. I can assure you that any hunting rifle that will put factory ammunition into less than 1" for five shots is really exceptional.



The engraving was of a good standard for a budget rifle and clearly states the rifle calibre.



The Thompson/Center bolt is a hefty one. The cylindrical section is 0.85" in diameter. The three-lug set-up allows for a 60-degree bolt movement.



The action beds directly onto the composite stock with no additional bedding compound. This rifle shot very well and the bedding system does not need any changes.

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In fact, having ascertained which one shoots best in your rifle, why would you set up to handload if you only fired less than 100 shots per year?

Speaking of handloading, I put some match loads through the Venture so that I would not die wondering. I had some loads ready, which were constructed using Sierra 168- and 155-grain MatchKing bullets and



AR 2209 powder. The best 100-yard group with these was much less than 1" at 100m and better than 2.5" at 300m.

Conclusions

It was very easy to like this rifle. The sort of accuracy that I obtained was quite outstanding for a sporter-barrelled firearm. I would happily take the Thompson/Center Venture hunting anytime, with the knowledge that if I can see it, I can hit it, all things being equal.

It is pleasing that this sort of accuracy can be bought for so few dollars and at the time

A variety of factory .30-06 loadings were used to cover a wide area of hunting needs.

Accuracy testing with the Thompson/Center Venture rifle

| Brand | Type | 100m | 200m | 300m |
|------------|-------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Federal | 150-grain Power-Shok SP | .896 | 1.654 | 2.986 |
| Federal | 180-grain AccuBond Vital-Shok | .904 | 1.807 | 3.017 |
| Hornady | 150-grain BTSP Interlock | .886 | 1.743 | 2.912 |
| Norma | 180-grain SP Alaska | .984 | 1.788 | 3.132 |
| Remington | 150-grain CoreLokt SP | 1.083 | 2.096 | |
| Winchester | 150-grain Power-Point | 1.102 | 2.118 | |
| Winchester | 165-grain Fail Safe | 1.004 | 2.158 | |

These are five-shot groups at 100 and 200m. Those that shot well were then fired at 300m.

of writing, one local gunshop was selling them for \$1100. Just put a quality scope on it, sight it in at the range and go hunting.

Thompson/Center firearms are distributed by Frontier Arms. The Nikon scope and Hornady ammunition were supplied by Outdoor Sporting Agencies. ●

Specifications

Manufacturer: Thompson/Center Arms Company, Rochester, New Hampshire USA

Distributor: Frontier Arms, Adelaide

Model: Venture

Calibres: .270 Winchester, 7mm Remington Magnum, .30-06 (tested), .300 Winchester Magnum

Action: T/C bolt-action repeater

Barrel: Chrome moly match-grade with 5R rifling

Stock: Black composite with textured grips

Overall Length: 44"

Weight: 7lb

RRP: \$1100