

THOMPSON CENTER'S VENTURE IN .308 WIN

ACCURATE, WEATHER PROOF PERFORMER



It is unlikely that Thompson Center designed the Venture rifles with the Australian hunter in mind, but the universal appeal of good performance, coupled with weather protected steel and a tough polymer stock, make the Venture rifle just what the practical Aussie hunter is looking for.



Thompson/Center Arms (T/C) began making firearms in the US in 1965. The success of its original product, the Contender pistol, established T/C as an innovative, quality gun maker. Muzzle loading black powder rifles followed in 1970 and later the Encore carbine based on the Contender action. Contender pistols and the Encore carbines have been in Australia for decades but they were relatively unknown outside the Pistol Silhouette shooting fraternity, who found the accurate and versatile Contender ideally suited to their needs. Thompson/Center Arms became part of Smith & Wesson Holdings Co. in 2007 and in the same year released its first bolt actioned centrefire rifle, the Icon. A second bolt rifle, the much more affordably priced Venture, followed in 2009. With the recent arrival of these rifles, particularly the Venture, the average Australian shooter has a T/C product of interest.

All Venture rifles have injection moulded composite stocks. The barrel and action may be blued, or Weather Shield coated. A third option is the Predator series with fluted barrel and camouflage print all over. Barrel lengths logically depend on the chambering, 22" for short action and 24" for long action cartridges. Available calibres and further

LEFT: Accuracy can extend the horizons of a hunting rifle. The accuracy of the Venture allows the shooter to take longer shots with confidence.

MAIN: The Venture as it arrives, clean classic lines, sedate colours and no gloss – a robust hunting rifle.

details can be found on the importer's website (www.frontierarms.com.au). To emphasise its commitment to precision regardless of price, T/C guarantees minute of angle (MoA) accuracy for a three shot group at 100 yards for all Venture rifles, presumably with suitable ammunition, clean barrel etc. Frontier Arms, Australian importer and distributor has made a Venture Weather Shield/ Composite in .308 Winchester available to GUNS Australia for evaluation.

The Venture has no frills, gloss or eye-catching features, it is neat and compact in appearance and has that purely functional look of a dedicated modern hunting rifle. The receiver is a machined, thick walled cylinder whose rigidity is enhanced by the use of a detachable single stack magazine, that allows the use of minimum sized magazine and ejection ports. Further enhancing receiver strength is the absence of raceways as the bolt diameter is large enough to allow the three locking lugs to stay within its major diameter.

This sturdy action has the basic design features that result in excellent accuracy. The receiver is drilled and tapped for scope mounts and comes with Weaver bases factory

SPECS

T/C VENTURE .308

Calibre:
308 Winchester

Action:
Three lug bolt

Magazine:
Detachable box, plastic, three round capacity

Trigger:
Adjustable 3.5 – 5 lb

Barrel:
22" long, 1 in 10" twist

Stock:
Black composite,
Hogue grip inserts

Length:
39.75"

Weight:
7 lb

Price:
About \$1100
(blued barrel under \$1000)

Distributor:
Frontier Arms Company

fitted. Externally the receiver is coated with T/C's Weather Shield, a coating claimed to be highly corrosion resistant. A separate recoil lug is sandwiched between the barrel and receiver and measured just under 0.2" in thickness with the Weather Shield coating. The inside of the receiver and the 0.850" diameter bolt body are Melanite coated for smooth operation - it slides easily without any tendency to bind. The recessed bolt face is fully encircled and contains a plunger ejector. A small but effective sliding extractor is mortised into a locking lug face. Three locking lugs of the Venture allow a low 60° bolt lift (most two lug bolts use a 90° lift).

Clearance for the scope is increased but bolt lift is correspondingly heavier. A relatively short bolt handle further increases bolt lift effort. A highly visible and positively felt cocking indicator protrudes from the bolt shroud. A substantial pivoting bolt stop, which is also the bolt release lever, operates in a slot in the left side of the receiver. Safety is a two position, thumb operated lever, back for safe and forward for fire. Safety "on" allows the bolt to operate and unload the chamber safely by disconnecting the trigger. T/C resisted the American trend of giving the trigger a gimmicky name but did make it adjustable by the owner for weight of pull and it released at 1.9kg, or just over four pounds at its lightest setting. There is some distinct creep, but not much, it is a very acceptable trigger for a hunting rifle. There are two sealed trigger-setup adjustments but the manual is written with potential litigation in

mind and clearly states that these are not for the owner to adjust.

The barrel, like the action, plays a controlling part in rifle accuracy. The fact that T/C chose to put a match grade barrel on its cheaper rifle indicates that it was not about to compromise on components that significantly affect accuracy. Both the Venture and the Icon barrels use the Russian designed 5R rifling. A five-groove bore has some theoretical advantages over the conventional six grooves but it is not new. Much more significant are the 65° angles on the sides of the five grooves which create obtuse angles of 115° at the bottom avoiding the sharp 90° corners of conventional rifling grooves. These wider angles are claimed to result in less jacket fouling leading to better multiple shot accuracy, better gas sealing and easier cleaning when needed. Externally, the 22" barrel tapers conventionally to 0.65" (16.6mm) diameter at a point about 160mm from the muzzle, leaving a significant parallel or cylindrical section on the end, similar to many military rifles. The muzzle is recessed and neatly chamfered, "target crowned", for protection and accuracy. Like the action, bolt handle and shroud, the barrel is finished with T/C's Weather Shield for an overall dull silver-grey appearance. Note that T/C does not claim corrosion protection for the bore specifically, nor do they mention what the barrel is made of and in the case of the Weather Shield rifle this may mislead some owners to think that nothing can rust. Do not neglect the normal cleaning and protecting of the bore just because the



LEFT: The spring loaded sliding extractor operates in a mortise cut into a locking lug.

BELow: Outstanding accuracy from the unassuming lead tipped 150 grain Winchester Power Point cartridges. Only two groups fired and both well below the MoA Venture guarantee. Average 100 yard group size was 0.586".





Disassembly is easy and conventional, the loose but important washers and the old fashioned slotted screws will require careful assembly.

outside of your rifle is "weather proof", (small print on page 22 of the manual tells you this).

The Venture has a detachable box magazine with cartridges stored in a single vertical column. This allows the use of a narrow magazine and very reliable cartridge feed but the holding capacity is reduced when compared to staggered column magazines. It holds three rounds, which most hunters would consider sufficient for most of situations. Made of a low friction polymer, it is light, smooth and quiet in its operation. The magazine protrudes from the stock but only enough to let the user know it's there, it is easily removed or replaced with one hand (just don't try to put it in front first).

An injection moulded polymer stock helps to keep the price down on the Venture. Rubbery traction inserts help the shooter's hold on the narrow rounded fore end and the pistol grip. A classic straight comb and standard proportions ensure that the Venture holds well in the shooting positions likely to be encountered in hunting.

The Venture bedding is designed to free-float the barrel and does this with neat and uniform clearance thanks to the quality of the polymer and the trussed ribbing resulting in a strong and stable stock. Good consistent bedding is important for accuracy and T/C ensures this by moulding aluminium pillars into the stock.

With this composite arrangement, the tension of the action screws put the pillars under compression rather than the polymer of the stock. The metal pillars also eliminate the need for a metal bottom plate, this and the integral moulded trigger guard are examples of keeping the price down without sacrificing accuracy or function. Injection moulded stocks have come a long way in their strength and stability from the early nylon examples, however the butt of the Venture still has that disconcerting hollow feel and sound. Quick detachable sling swivel studs, a neat and effective recoil pad and a T/C logo

on the pistol grip cap complete the stock.

Using the Venture revealed a good handling, easy to carry, reliable hunting rifle. Some negative impacts on its hunting pedigree are the noisy operation of the safety and the relatively heavy bolt-lift, which makes quiet bolt operation difficult because the effort required tends to cause a real clunk as the bolt handle hits the receiver at the top of its movement. The heavy bolt lift also detracts from the otherwise smooth operation of the bolt.

This may improve slightly as the camming surfaces wear smoother but the heavy cocking spring must remain, (needed for a fast lock time, i.e. accuracy) so the real answer is a longer bolt handle, it is easily removable but at this stage T/C only offer one for the Icon. The well-designed stock and recoil pad ensured that shooting the Venture was effective and comfortable in all positions. There were no mechanical malfunctions or difficulties, the loading, feeding, removal and replacement of the polymer magazine, were remarkably smooth and quiet.

Thompson/Center's guiding philosophy is pragmatism rather than tradition or aesthetics. This effectively makes function and performance its main criteria. It is not surprising then, that accuracy, probably the most important and certainly the most readily evaluated feature of a rifle's performance, is emphasised by guaranteeing minute of angle grouping for all Venture rifles. This Venture certainly could deliver. Not with all ammunition tried, it did not like the Winchester 130 grain Varmint Special load but the next three shots, Norma's 178gn soft points, shot into 1.053" followed by Foicchi loaded with 180gn SST projectiles producing a 0.986" group. Not much was expected from Winchester's relatively plain 150 grain Power Points so they were left for last. The first group measured a surprising 0.548", to remove the possible fluke factor, it was followed up with a second group at 0.624". This is very impressive performance from a light barreled hunting rifle and of

course it fully upholds T/C's accuracy guarantee. (Group shooting was done at the 100 yard distance where a minute of angle closely approximates one inch.)

Shooters rarely miss recognising an opportunity when it comes to improving firearms, a minor digression along these lines may be permissible as it relates to the most prominent feature of the Venture. The .308 Winchester is a very versatile cartridge for hunting in Australia. It can cover the vast majority of hunting situations with the exceptions of edible small game and the very largest game. If an accurate hunting rifle like the Venture, in the versatile .308 Win. calibre, was to have a wide power-range scope added, say 2-12X or 3-15X, the outfit could do a fair job on varmint style precision hunting as well and it would then form an exceptionally useful hunting tool.

Thompson/Center's Venture is a very effective hunting rifle judged by the basic requirements of handling, reliability and accuracy. Mechanical strength and accuracy are up there with the best regardless of price but aesthetic refinements are missing in order to keep the cost in the average shooter's price range. Features like barrel length related to case capacity, easy cleaning barrel, all-weather external protection and removable box magazine are good features, but what makes them extra attractive is that they come in a remarkably accurate rifle. Practical minded Australian shooters are going to find T/C's Venture a tempting proposition because they will appreciate the function and accuracy bias built into this rifle as well as the potential for versatility made possible by its outstanding accuracy.

P.S. T/C's philosophy of not cutting corners on accuracy or function in order to produce a lower priced rifle, supported by the demonstrated performance, has impressed the writer sufficiently to purchase this rifle, fit it with a 2-12X scope to fully explore its potential for versatility. It has not disappointed! 