



A DIFFERENT KIND OF AUSTRIAN PERFECTION

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Strasser's RS14 Straight-pull Renews Our Enthusiasm for All Things Ballistic

Getting paid to travel the world and shoot guns is pretty much the definition of a privileged existence. But once you've analyzed the latest striker-fired 9mm handgun (again) and yet another AR that's claimed by the manufacturer to offer something that no one else does, just like every other company out there, well things start getting a little same-y. We know, first-world problems ...

MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

There are some things in the firearms realm the Europeans do a bit differently, and some of those are objectively superb. Of course, there are glaring examples where good ol' 'Murican engineering and manufacturing outclasses anything coming out of that continent (G36 and L85 anyone?), but there are other cases where we'd struggle to match them. Hailing from the corner of the globe that in 1898 set the standard of what a bolt gun should be, Strasser is a comparative newcomer, but one that started with a clean sheet of paper.

Since the turn of the 20th century, the gun-buying public has pretty much decided that a bolt-action rifle should have two locking lugs — three if you're particularly daring and avant-garde — and should be manipulated by first lifting up the bolt handle to cock the action, then pulling the bolt to the rear to eject a spent case through the ejection port on the right, before reversing the

ter, but in this publication a bolt gun had better be pretty damn exceptional if it graces these pages.

This is one of those exceptional, nut-kicking guns, and every time you delve a little bit deeper, it delivers another love tap.

Then something comes along to kick you in the nuts, slapping you with the realization that yes, you could be back swinging a hammer for a living and daydreaming about the weekend when you get to shoot your favorite guns. As you've probably noticed, we're not big into hunting rifles here at RECOIL. Over on the Carnivore side of the house, well that's their bread and but-

The RS14 bolt is an engineering masterpiece. The lighter-colored locking lugs are driven into engagement with the barrel extension by the firing pin sleeve, which itself is locked in place by the bolt handle. Entire bolt head can be swapped out in seconds

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Trigger pack is removable and can be set to three different weights without tools. The pack houses a short Allen wrench to remove forend.



Standard magazine handles around 20 different cartridges, and rounds load straight down from the top, rather than down and back.

process to chuck a fresh round into the chamber. While there's been the occasional side excursion into straight-pull territory, the Mauser 98 has been the gold standard, because it's tried and true, and it just works. Straight-pull designs have traditionally struggled when things get hot and dirty, as most lack an effective means of primary extraction.

It might be worthwhile at this juncture to discuss just what primary extraction is, and why it's important. Once you've lit off a round, the cartridge case expands to seal off the chamber, preventing hot, high-pressure gases from escaping and ruining your new haircut. As the bullet exits, barrel pressure drops to match the surrounding atmosphere, but the case doesn't shrink back to its original dimensions. There's a certain amount of stickiness between brass and steel, which needs to be overcome in order to get the case out of the chamber. In

turnbolt rifles, this typically happens as you lift the bolt — at the end of its upward travel, there's a cam surface between the bolt handle root and the rear of the action that provides extra leverage to get the case moving. In Mosin-Nagants, this extra leverage should rightly be supplemented by beating on it with a 2x4, but in straight-pulls, it's usually absent. No upward component to the bolt's movement equals no primary extraction.

You've guessed it — the RS14 has a mechanism for primary extraction. It achieves this by means of a plunger in the bolt shroud that's cammed into engagement with the rear of its 7075 T6 aluminum receiver, levering the case out of the chamber's tight embrace. Now that the biggest potential impediment to reliability is out of the way, let's take a look at the rest of the gun.

Its bolt locks up to engage a barrel extension, much like in an AR, only



in this case the lugs expand outward from the bolt head, rather than rotating. Just as in the case of America's favorite rifle, this means that so long as the bolt and barrel are in-spec, they can be swapped out without a gunsmith and with a minimum of tools, which in this instance are actually carried onboard. Neat. Those locking lugs and barrel extension are made from hardened tool steel and tested to 120,000 psi, so the RS14 may be one of the few bolt guns currently capable of withstanding a steady diet of SIG's new 277 Fury cartridge, without modification.

We visited the Strasser factory outside of Salzburg, Austria, and watched as barrels and bolt heads were being produced. As the bolt body is unstressed, it can be made of an easier-to-machine grade of steel, while the bolt lugs and barrel extension are hard-

er than woodpecker lips. According to CEO Mathias Strasser, "The barrel extensions are initially machined a few thousandths of an inch oversize, then heat treated after headspacing. They are then placed in our Swiss centerless grinder and ground very precisely to their final dimension. This removes any material that may have warped and is why our barrels can be removed and replaced without loss of zero."

Should you become bored with your current caliber, or want to go from a buffalo-busting 458 Win Mag to something a little easier on the shoulder, the Strasser's got you, fam. Lift up on a small lever on the bolt body, and the bolt head can be swapped out to match the case head diameter of whatever you've chosen, while a quick twist of the wrist will swap in a new barrel. Changing between cartridges with different head diameters will also

require a different magazine, but if you stick within the same cartridge family (e.g., 243 Win to 30-06), you can get away with just a new barrel.

To change out the barrel, first remove the bolt and magazine, then press a small catch at the rear of the receiver to detach the trigger pack. Yes, there's a removable trigger pack, which we'll get to in a minute. Inside the trigger pack is an abbreviated Allen wrench, used to loosen a clamp holding the free floating forend in place. Once loosened, the forend pulls free to reveal another tool located inside. Tucked into a groove in the forend is a tiny cheater bar, which you pop out and insert into the barrel clamp. After about 70 degrees of rotation, the barrel pops loose, and you can either swap in another or take down the rifle to minimum dimensions for storage in a backpack.

QD sling swivel cups are thoughtfully located on the stock and free-floating forend. Stock cheek piece is very Germanic.

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All the pressure-bearing parts reside inside the RS14's receiver. Because the barrel extension and bolt lugs handle the stresses of lighting off some pretty heavy-duty rounds, this component can be made of 7075 aluminum, rather than steel. "We use 7075, as it's a material we're very

familiar with," says Strasser. "Our core business is making parts for the European Space Program, which calls for a lot of lightweight materials such as aluminum and titanium alloys." It would seem that in this case, making rifles is indeed rocket surgery.

The RS14's trigger group can be ad-

justed without tools to break between 2.5 and 3.6 pounds by shifting the position of a spring-loaded rod, which acts as the trigger return spring. If you want something even lighter, pushing forward on the trigger bow cocks the set trigger, which can be adjusted as low as one-half pound. As you'd expect, trigger feel in both modes is exceptional with a crisp, single-stage break and zero overtravel — the proverbial glass rod.

Our test model came equipped with some pretty fancy walnut, which according to the Strasser catalog is mid-range — there are another couple of grades above it that are both achingly beautiful and eye-wateringly expensive. According to the manufacturer, there's a synthetic stock coming soon that should drop the price tag into the range of us mere mortals, but we can't help wondering whether this is a good thing or not. Rifles like this are heirlooms, made to be passed down through the generations, and putting plastic on both ends kinda defeats the objective. Perhaps the answer, as always, is to get both — a synthetic stock for use in the field and a set of walnut for display. Like everything else on this rifle, the stock is also modular; just twist one bolt and it can be pulled free of the receiver.





HMS STRASSER RS14 EVOLUTION

CARTRIDGE:

222 REM - 458 WIN MAG

CAPACITY:

3+1

BARREL LENGTH:

22 INCHES

OVERALL LENGTH:

40 INCHES

WEIGHT:

7.1 POUNDS

URL:

STRASSER-USA.COM

MSRP:

\$3,400

URL:

WWW.HMS-STRASSER.COM/US/

ROUNDS DOWNRANGE

The transition from turnbolt to straight-pull takes less time than you'd imagine. It's pretty intuitive to just slap the bolt back and forward; doing so brings home just how fast follow-up shots can be delivered. No, it's not as fast as a semi auto, but in calibers with a decent amount of recoil, you can have another round in the chamber before the sights settle back on target. Not having to deal with bolt raceways and protruding lugs means the bolt itself glides like it's on ball bearings — instead of pushing it all the way into battery, it's easy to just give it a flick and let it slide the last couple of inches forward while your hand goes back to the trigger.

Rather than just doing the needful on a flat range, we decided that a fine hunting rifle should be tested in the field, so a trip to New Mexico to fill the freezer was in order. After outfitting the Strasser with a scope made six hours up the road from the factory in Wetzlar, Germany, we zeroed it with 168-grain Hornady Interbond loads, stuffed it into a case, and threw it in the back of a truck. We achieved sub-MOA groups with most of the ammo we tried, but the Interbonds had a winning combination of accuracy and high BC to maximize the chances of

taking down a cow elk cleanly at reasonable hunting ranges. In the end, we sealed the deal at around 175 yards and wound up packing out in the dark — see RECOILtv for video of the hunt and for some of the dishes we made from our animal.

The Strasser RS14 has that rare combination of good looks and stunning engineering. When you put hands on one, there are so many “aha!” moments that it's difficult to keep track of them — for example, the non-fenced mag-release buttons, which you just know is a disaster waiting to happen and will result in your magazine taking a dive for the dirt at the most inopportune moment. Then, you notice that both right and left side buttons have to be pushed simultaneously, and when you do, the mag falls gently into your palm, ready to be exchanged for a fresh one.

No firearm is perfect, however, and were we to level any complaints, it'd be that the stock might be a little too long for American tastes. And of course, the price tag is right up there with the likes of Blaser and Steyr. But if you're looking for that “one gun,” then it's tough to beat the RS14's feature set and versatility, which may just ensure it becomes one of those heirloom guns we all lust over. ■

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