

# SUPER STRASSER

by Keith Wood

EXPENSIVE IT MIGHT BE, BUT THE STRASSER RS 14 HAS TONS GOING FOR IT THAT JUSTIFIES THE PRICE TAG.

**T**hanks to my vocation, I usually end up flying with a rifle several times a year. Invariably, as I struggle through the airport carrying my gear along with a large rolling rifle case, I'm envious of the bird hunters with their small takedown setups. It always feels as though I'm dragging a coffin and they're carrying pool cues.

European hunters have this figured out, often favoring big game rifles that break down for easy travel. Among those European designs that have made it stateside is the Austrian-made Strasser RS 14 Evolution, a modular rifle that is both flexible and portable.

The RS 14 is a straight-pull bolt action, similar in operation to models such as the popular German Blaser. Europeans shoot lots of driven game and are generally restricted from owning semiautos, so the rapid capability of this style of action has become extremely popular across the pond.

Another factor in popularity is the regulatory limits on the number of firearms that are in place in many nations. If you were restricted to one centerfire rifle, you would want it to be as versatile as possible. The Strasser fits that bill in spades.

Though the straight-pull action is a great asset in the field, it's not my favorite attribute of the Strasser. More attractive to me as a hunter is the ability to quickly adapt the RS 14 Evolution to 25 different calibers merely by swapping a few components. Instead of lugging multiple guns on an extended multi-species hunt, such as African safaris or North America combo trips, a hunter could carry a handful of spare parts and be ready for anything.

By swapping the barrel, bolt face and magazine, the RS 14 is capable of handling cartridges ranging from .222 Rem. to the .458 Win. Mag. That's some serious versatility, and all of it can be done on the tailgate of a truck without special tools.

The RS 14 Evolution is available in several different grades or configurations that vary in price. They range from the utilitarian laminate-stocked Tahr to hand-engraved models with jaw-dropping wood. I tested the attractively finished Consul III, which sits toward the higher end of the Strasser catalog.

The Consul III pairs a satin black 7075 aluminum receiver with a matte black barrel and stunningly figured walnut. The rifle breaks down easily into four main components, each of which has a molded home in the premium Negrini hard case included with the Consul.

Though the internals of the RS 14 action are no doubt complex, the basic operation is relatively straightforward. The non-rotating bolt locks into the AR-like steel barrel extension inside the receiver via four rectangular elements that extend outward when in battery.

Firing the rifle—either live or dry—retracts the spring-wrapped lugs and allows the bolt to move rearward. For the shooter, this means a simple and fast operation. The shot is fired, the bolt is pulled straight back and then pushed forward, and it is once again ready to fire.

For an extra margin of safety, the rifle doesn't merely lock up at the bolt head; it also locks into the rear of the receiver below the bolt handle. Fast and strong.

The only segments of the rifle that Strasser outsources are the barrel blanks and the stocks. The steel parts of the rifle, which include the bolt assembly, are machined in-house from pre-heat-treated billets. This expensive manufacturing method makes machining difficult and is tough on tooling but eliminates the parts warpage that can occur if components are hardened after the fact. This is a company committed to building guns well and not to meet an artificial price point.

A single action size is used for all chamberings. Though it is available in either right- or left-handed configurations, they are interchangeable. Because there are ejection ports located on either

side of the receiver, the only component that a lefty needs to swap out is the bolt itself. Removing the bolt takes a handful of seconds to accomplish.

The Strasser's aluminum action is solid across the top, which leaves a great deal of metal in place and makes it very rigid. Ever notice how benchrest actions have very little metal removed to facilitate loading? Rigidity equals accuracy. A Picatinny scope rail is machined into the action so it can't come loose.

The RS 14 Evolution series' modularity doesn't end with the ability to change calibers. Stocks are also interchangeable. A user could fit a laminate stock for a sheep hunt and trade it out for fancy walnut to hunt in less-abusive conditions. Both traditional pistol grip and thumb-hole options are available.

Swapping stocks means loosening a single hex bolt on both the fore-end and buttstock. The two-piece Turkish Walnut stock on our Consul III was extremely attractive and comfortable. The Bavarian-styled cheek piece and Schnabel fore-end tip give the stock a decidedly Germanic feel. Despite the look, the stock has a



The RS 14 is a straight-pull rifle with an integral Picatinny rail atop the receiver. The trigger is a single-set, and the normal pull is adjustable from three to five pounds



Not only can stocks and barrels be swapped on the RS 14, but also it's truly ambidextrous, with ejection ports on both left and right sides.

SPECIFICATIONS	
STRASSER RS 14 EVOLUTION CONSUL III	
TYPE	straight-pull bolt-action centerfire
CALIBER	.243, 6.5 Creedmoor, 6.5 PRC, .270 Win., .308 (tested), .30-06, .300 Win. Mag.
CAPACITY	3+1, detachable box magazine
BARREL	22 in. threaded, 1:12 twist
OVERALL LENGTH	42 in.
WEIGHT	7 lb., 12 oz.
FINISH	anodized aluminum, DLC, black nitride
STOCK	two-piece Turkish Walnut
SIGHTS	none; integral Picatinny rail
TRIGGER	single-set adjustable; 2.9 lb. unset, 6 oz. set (measured)
SAFETY	two-position
PRICE	\$ 6,485 (as tested)
MANUFACTURER	Strasser USA, STRASSER-USA.COM

straight comb rather than the hogback hump that often accompanies that style. Push-button QD-style sling swivels are standard.

The controls on the RS 14 are relatively simple and intuitive. The safety sits at the rear of the bolt where it can be accessed with the thumb of the firing hand. Down is the Safe position and up is Fire. A visible red indicator makes it clear to the shooter whether the safety is engaged.

To release the bolt without firing, a circular bolt release is located at the center of the safety catch. Simply depress



Four steel elements or locking lugs spread out and lock the bolt into battery.



The barrel is clamped, so there are no parts to wear. A steel pin in the receiver ensures the barrel is properly indexed during a change.

ACCURACY TEST				
STRASSER RS 14 EVOLUTION CONSUL III				
.308 Win.	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Norma Whitetail	150	2,787	17.0	0.9
Federal Premium/Trophy Copper	165	2,658	4.7	0.9
Hornady Precision Hunter ELD-X	178	2,578	11.6	1.2

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of three three-shot groups at 100 yards from a bench rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded on a LabRadar Doppler chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle.

the button and the bolt handle can move rearward freely.

The nitrided gold titanium trigger is an adjustable single-set design. In normal operation, my test rifle's trigger broke at a very crisp 2.9 pounds. To engage the set trigger, the blade is pressed forward until it clicks. With the trigger in this setting, the pull was reduced to just six ounces. This was a nice feature when it came to shooting groups from the bench.

To adjust the trigger, drop the trigger assembly out of the action and move the trigger spring pin between its three positions. No tools are required, and this simple system offers settings of roughly three, four and five pounds of pull.

The RS 14 uses a straight-column, steel, detachable box magazine. Capacity is 3+1 for standard calibers and 2+1 for magnums. The rifle's magazine locks into place flush with the receiver and is removed by pressing rounded release buttons on either side of the action. The placement of the releases is such that the

magazine falls right into your palm when removed.

If you've loaded many rifle mags, you know that it can sometimes be a chore to ensure that cartridges are correctly seated to ensure reliable feeding. The RS 14's magazine has a feature that I haven't seen on other rifles. The cartridge rims actually ride inside a slot that resembles a stripper clip to keep them in position at all times. This is especially useful in the heavier calibers since the inertia of recoil can send cartridges forward in the magazine. If the magazine is empty, the shooter can easily single-load cartridges through either ejection port.

The barrels are black nitrided inside and out, protection from both corrosion and erosion. Barrel length is 22 inches for standard calibers and 24 inches for magnums. Barrels are threaded at the muzzle and protected with a steel cap.

What makes the barrels unique is the way they interface with the receiver. Takedown rifles have been with us since the dawn of the breech-loading era, but nearly all have relied on attachment methods that are prone to wear and must be used sparingly. The Strasser's barrels are effectively clamped into place rather than threaded, so there is little risk of wearing the system out by repeated take-downs. My sample gun came with both .308 Win. and .300 Win. Mag. chambered barrels so I could evaluate the simplicity of changing from one cartridge to another.

Before I get into changing calibers, it would be best if I described the method by which the RS 14 Evolution is disassembled and reassembled. The procedure is very, well, Austrian. It's not a difficult process at all, but one might not figure it out the first time around without consulting the owner's manual.

To break the rifle down into its major components, the bolt is drawn to the rear and then removed while pressing a circular release button inside the action raceway. A lever at the tang then releases the trigger group. Housed within this group is a small hex wrench that loosens the fore-end wood and allows for its removal. A small steel rod is secured inside the fore-end. This tool is inserted into a lever at the front of the action, which

moves 90 degrees to release the barrel. To assemble, simply reverse the process.

Taking things further, changing my rifle from .308 to .300 required an ex-



Cartridges ride inside the box magazine with their rims inside a groove. This prevents rounds from riding forward under the inertia of recoil.

change of bolt heads. This process is far simpler and faster than it sounds. Simply remove the bolt and actuate a small lever on the bolt body with your fingernail; the bolt head pops right off. With a little practice, you could disassemble the rifle, change both the barrel and the bolt head, and reassemble in roughly one minute.

Shooting the RS 14 was simple and straightforward. Recoil was as you'd expect, and the rifle handled, balanced and pointed naturally. Accuracy was generally very good, though I found that shooting the barrel until it was scorching hot did cause some vertical stringing. In any reasonable schedule of fire, this would be a non-issue.

The straight-pull bolt was simple and lightning fast from both the bench and field positions, and reliability was 100 percent. I didn't get a chance to hunt with this rifle, but I would not hesitate to take it anywhere for any game animal.

The features included on the RS 14 don't come cheap. The modular Evolution series of rifles starts at just over

\$4,000 retail, and the Consul III's suggested retail price is \$6,484 for standard calibers. For those seeking a straight-pull option without the ability to trade barrels, the Solo version retails for \$3,450. Custom rifles are available, with more than 25 configurations currently offered.

Rifles are available both from retailers and from Strasser USA in Montgomery, Alabama. I found Strasser's U.S. agency to be helpful and accessible, which is always a good thing when buying an imported product.

Though the Strasser is relatively new to the U.S., I've been fortunate enough to have my hands on three examples over the past year. Each time, I came away impressed. At this price, it isn't a gun for everyone, but I can still appreciate the technology involved. This rifle is innovative, unique and extremely versatile. The quality of the construction, fit and finish is evident throughout the rifle and its components. If you have the means, the Strasser RS 14 Evolution has much to offer. ■