



Opposite page: The Ruger was a natural for off-hand shooting and great from the bench. We averaged 100-yard groups measuring barely more than an inch with Winchester ammunition. Above: We liked almost everything about this Ruger rifle, chambered for 7.62 x 39. It's a matter of taste. We suppose, but our team thought the butt should be filled in.

the barrel was tight in the channel—like most Ruger rifles we've examined. Overall metal-to-metal fit was superb, with excellent transitions from one part to the other. The receiver and bridge had Ruger's usual dovetails for scope mounting. Rings are provided.

Handling the 7.62 x 39 was pleasantly easy. Recoil with the cartridge is minimal in any case, but the butt pad—a hard-rubber piece with deep horizontal grooves—kept the rifle in place under all shooting conditions. The gun's balance point was directly at the receiver ring, which made it easily managed for off-hand shooting. The grip was positioned in such a manner that large-handed individuals could easily reach the trigger; smaller shooters found they had to stretch for a comfortable grasp. The forearm was flat on the bottom, making it suitable for bench work as well as the traditional shooting positions. The Ruger features a 3-position safety located at the rear of the bolt. The middle point makes the rifle safe, but allows the bolt to be opened for unloading. At its rear point, the bolt is locked. This worked quietly and as it should. The magazine floorplate release, located on the trigger guard, was easily accessed and locked securely.

Operationally, the only problems

we experienced with the Ruger were ammunition-related. We had a number of misfires using Winchester's USA label when the primers failed to ignite. The problems didn't occur with any other brand of ammo we tried. This rifle has a Mauser-type long extractor and ejector, but it isn't a controlled feeding action. The bottom part of the bolt face is not cut away to permit the cartridges to slip under the lip of the extractor. In our opinion, a good system could be made excellent with controlled feeding. Bolt movement was smooth and didn't have the excess play we've encountered with other Model 77 Ruger rifles we've tried. Extraction and ejection were routine, with spent shells thrown 2 or 3 feet to the right front of the shooter.

If there is one area we'd like to see improved on the Ruger, it would have to be the trigger. It was a little heavy, breaking at just under 5 pounds on our scale. Yet, even with the lawsuit-resistant trigger, accuracy was well above average. We equipped the 7.62

with a stainless steel Simmons 3x9 variable scope, and produced excellent groups at both 50 and 100 yards. Winchester 123-grain ammunition produced five-shot groups averaging just over an inch at 100 yards. The best we printed was 0.69 inch. Even when shooting with a very hot barrel, the groups never surpassed 2 inches. Steel-case rounds from China North Industries were satisfactory, shooting to the same point of aim, but never coming close to the Winchester brand's performance. We averaged 2.5-inch groups with the Chinese product. At 50 yards, the Winchester brand literally produced one-hole accuracy, while the Chinese ammo averaged 1.75 inches.

Bottom Line: The Ruger 7.62 x 39 is suitable for plinking, small game, or possibly even small deer. Its stainless-steel construction and synthetic stock will serve you well in bad weather and under conditions where you can't conveniently clean the rifle. We enjoyed shooting it, and give it our recommendation. ■

Coming Up in Gun Tests

- **.32 Automatics.** The little cartridge has been a favorite in Europe for years, but guns chambered for .32 don't get much attention in the U.S. We look at a handful of very affordable .32 autoloaders.
- **The Newest .45s.** Not everything in that famous caliber is a 1911, as shown by new offerings from Glock, Ruger, and Smith & Wesson. We pit these three against the more established Sig Sauer P-220. Is there a surprise winner?
- **Progressive Reloading.** We test progressive reloading presses by Dillon, Hornady, RCBS, and Lee Precision. Are there any differences—besides price?
- **Over/Under Shotguns.** In a battle of 12 gauge scatterguns, the Savage 312 challenges a Navy Arms version of the old Winchester Model 96 and a Churchill Monarch from Ellett Brothers.