

Remington Model 700 XCR LRT (Metcalf)

The new Model 700 XCR Long Range Tactical rifle redefines current expectations for accuracy and long-range performance from a Remington factory-production bolt-action gun. From its introduction in 1962, Remington has always described the Model 700 as "the most accurate out-of-the-box production rifle on the market." When I bought my first Remington Model 700 BDL .30-06 more than 39 years ago, I believed that was true, and I continued to feel the same way about many of the Model 700s that have passed through my hands since. Unfortunately, for the past dozen years, that hasn't always been the case.

Of course, the basics were still there. Nearly any recent Model 700 can be tuned and customized into an exceptional shooter, and Model 700s from the Remington Custom Shop have continued to be worthy of their reputation. But when it came to the standard store-shelf versions, the quality and performance of Remington's entire contemporary bolt-action line has been, at best, erratic. One rifle might be really good, the next several, not. Recent mechanical improvements and new introductions from competing brands such as Savage, Browning, and Sako surpassed the Model 700 in terms of trigger pull, bedding, and accuracy, and their gun-to-gun quality was dependably

superior; at a competitive, often much better, price. Understand, I say that from the point of view of a long-time Remington fan. I still own more Remington rifles than all other brands put together. But for the last ten years, I've seldom come across a new Remington factory-production bolt-action that I would spend my own money on.

The new Model 700XCR LTR changes that. It is one of the first of an entire new generation of Model 700s (and Model Sevens) introduced in 2007 that embody a number of new features, engineering redesigns, and quality-control improvements which once again legitimize Remington's claim that "the Model 700™ is the most accurate production rifle available today"--changes which have upgraded me from a old Remington fan into a new Remington enthusiast.

DESIGNED FOR PERFORMANCE

The Model 700 XCR Long Range Tactical Rifle is designed for the long-range, precision shooter and hunter, and is available in .308 Winchester, .223 Remington, and .300 Winchester magnum chamberings. At its core is a 416 stainless steel barreled action with a new extractor system. The rifle comes without sights; the receiver is drilled and tapped for standard Model 700 scope-mount bases. The standard-style Model 700 hinged-floorplate magazine has a five round capacity in the .223 Remington

version, four rounds in .308 Winchester, and three rounds in .300 Winchester Magnum. The 26-inch varmint contour barrel is free-floating, and has wide tactical-style fluting for rapid cooling, with dish-style target crown.

All exposed metal surfaces feature Remington's proprietary Black TriNyte® Corrosion Control System. This micro-thin multi-layer process consists of electroless nickel and proprietary PVD (Physical Vapor Deposition) coatings on the entire stainless steel barreled action, providing diamond-hard abrasion resistance and virtual elimination of corrosion. The resulting combination of stainless steel with bonded high-tech overcoat just might provide the most enduring and durable firearms finish ever developed. (I'll let you know after I've used it for the next 20 years.)

The barreled action is housed in a newly-designed ambidextrous Bell and Carlson tactical-style stock featuring full length aluminum bedding block; tactical beavertail fore-end; and recessed thumb hook located behind the pistol grip for enhanced shooting performance. The aluminum bedding block eliminates potential receiver shift or roll (one long-time criticism of the Model 700's round-receiver/non-integral recoil lug design). The beavertail foreend is wide enough for solid non-tipping support on

sandbag, shooting sticks, or field pack rest, without being too large for a comfortable grasp from your hand in conventional field shooting. The thumb hook in the bottom of the buttstock allows the shooter to press the stock firmly into the shoulder with the non-firing hand when operating with a bipod or forend rest in the prone position. The composite stock is reinforced with Aramid fibers and is finished in OD Green with a black webbed overlay. Dual front swivel studs and rear stud complete the stock package. Total weight is 8.5 lbs., the same as a standard Model 700 varmint rifle or Model 700 Sendero hunting rifle. Overall, it's a very shootable configuration.

THE TRIGGER IS THE KEY

However, the key ingredient of the Model 700XCR LRT, in my opinion, is Remington's 40-X trigger system. Remington's initial press releases for the rifle, and the information pages on the Remington website, originally specified that the Model 700XCR LRT would be equipped with the company's new "X-Mark Pro™" trigger design. It is not. According to John Fink, Remington's Brand Manager for rifles, "The Model 700 XCR Tactical guns are equipped with the 40-X triggers. The 40-X trigger is externally adjustable for trigger pull. These guns were structured

with the 40-X trigger because the X-Mark Pro did not exist at the time of their development. The 40-X trigger is adjustable from 1.5 pounds to 3.5 pounds."

The 40-X trigger is included on all chamberings of the M700XCR LRT and also on the new M700XCR Compact Tactical models. Boy, am I glad. All serious rifle shooters know that the three critical elements of a rifle's accuracy are bore, bedding, and trigger--and the trigger is the only point where the shooter actually interfaces with the system. No matter how "mechanically accurate" a rifle may be, if it has a stiff, crawly, inconsistent trigger pull it will not be capable of consistent, precision accurate shooting--even in the hands of a champion marksman. Remington's original standard Model 700/Model Seven trigger mechanism (now superceded on non-tactical rifles by the new X-Mark Pro[™]) was a good design with multiple adjustment capabilities; capable of precise tuning in the hands of a skilled riflesmith. But Remington didn't want you to adjust it, and told you not to, in no uncertain terms. If the shellac seals on the adjustment screws were broken, it would void the gun's warranty.

Also, it was a tricky mechanism to set properly in the first place, requiring factory assembly fitters to reach an exact balance for each individual trigger mechanism in the

positioning of the various adjustment screws. This is the primary reason for the great variation in trigger-pull quality from gun to gun among the Model 700s and Model Sevens coming from the Remington assembly line in recent years. And, as the many Model 700 users who have ignored Remington's strictures and adjusted their triggers themselves discovered (like me), it was also very easy to over-adjust, leading to a situation where the sear might not hold when the bolt was closed, or where disengaging the safety might release the firing pin.

The 40-X version of the traditional Remington trigger differs in several significant respects. For one, it has an external adjustment screw that allows a very light, precise trigger pull. And, it is hand-honed and hand-fitted by Remington to a perfect interface. In my opinion, it's the best trigger mechanism Remington has ever produced. These new M700XCR Tactical rifles are the only production-cataloged Remington models available with the 40-X trigger. Other model rifles with the 40-X trigger are available only from the Remington Custom Shop, or as special order law-enforcement and military special-operations items.

Incidentally, none of this implies that Remington's new X-Mark Pro™ trigger system now being offered on non-

tactical Model 700s and Model Sevens is not also a great improvement over the previous standard trigger. From the box, it offers as much as a 40% lower out-of-the-box pull weight than the previous Model 700 trigger design, with virtually zero creep. It is also 100% adjustable for pull weight--"by a qualified gunsmith," as Remington says. And, it is completely retro-fittable into any existing Model 700 or Model Seven rifle, right-hand or left-hand, all the way back to their original year of introduction. Remington will not sell the X-Mark Pro™ mechanism as an accessory to ordinary customers, but it will be available to certified gunsmiths, and Remington officially recommends you send your rifle to an authorized Remington Service location (nationwide list available on the Remington website: www.Remington.com). For rifles not offered with the 40-X, it's a wonderful improvement.

PERFORMANCE AT THE MAX

I expected none of this when Remington called last Summer and said they were sending me a new Model 700XCR LTR in .308 Winchester to review, and they wondered if I'd be interested in taking it on a pronghorn hunt in Wyoming to prove its long-range capabilities. I'm always game for a Pronghorn hunt, but I frankly wasn't expecting anything out of the ordinary from the rifle. Then I took it out of the

box, looked it over with a nod of approval for its configuration, fit, and finish, inserted the bolt, and tried the trigger pull. My jaw actually dropped. It was the best trigger I'd ever felt on a Remington rifle. Glass crisp, as advertised, at a measured 2.5 lbs.

So I quickly mounted the Zeiss 4-12X Diarange scope with integral laser rangefinder I was going to use on the hunt (also a review project), took a box of the Remington Premier 150-grain Scirroco II they had sent me for the hunt, and went out to the benchrest. The first three sighting-in rounds grouped 0.75 inches at 100 yards. Sub-MOA accuracy with commercial hunting ammunition from a factory-issue rifle. Now I WAS a believer. I next chronographed the load, and plugged the velocity and bullet specifications into the RCBSload ballistics software in my computer to determine the Maximum Point Blank Range (MPBR) for a 10-inch target (which is a conservative diameter for a pronghorn's kill zone). The result gave me a 340-yard MPBR, with a 280-yard zero, and a 100-yard offset point four inches high. I adjusted the scope for that 100-yard impact, and taped the trajectory table out to 500 yards to the butt of the gun. Off to Wyoming, ready to hold center on any pronghorn worth the shot out to 340 yards.

I always verify the trajectory and zero of my rifles in the field whenever possible, so I had the outfitter bring along a plastic gallon milk jug filled with water as we headed out to the plains the first morning. Along the way into the hunt area along a ranch trail, we placed the jug along a fenceline and backed off a ranged 350 yards. I sat down with the rifle resting on a Stony Point field tripod and considered: there was a continuous 20/25 mph prevailing crosswind, and the trajectory table said that would create about five inches of drift at 350 yards. The guide had a 60X spotting scope on a window mount, so I decided to ignore wind on the initial shot and just check the base trajectory, holding on the neck of the jug to allow for the predicted five-inch drop. At the shot, the guide said, "Looked to be just barely to the right, elevation good." So I kept the same elevation, moved the vertical crosshair to the left edge of the jug, and squeezed. The jug exploded. GREAT confidence-builder.

Later in the morning after scouting several small herds, we spotted a shooter buck in a group about 350 yards out. By the time I could get set up to shoot and range the distance through the DiaRange scope, they'd drifted to 365 yards, slowly feeding away. I tracked the buck in the scope until he turned broadside and paused at 371 yards,

then put the correct drop indicator of the DiaRange's RapidZ reticle center on his chest, shifted slightly to allow for the wind, and fired. He stumbled a few paces and went down. One shot, 370 yards in a 25 mph crosswind, trophy pronghorn. Takes a GOOD rifle, with a good load and a good scope, to do that, no matter how good a shooter you are--and I'm no championship marksman, just careful.

Impressed greatly with the Model 700XCR LRT's performance, as soon as I returned to Illinois I embarked on a serious review project to see what the gun was capable of under more controlled conditions with tailored ammunition. Working with my ballistic research colleague Richard Window, we selected 13 different .308 bullets, and worked up a total of 33 different handloads using a variety of propellants and standard recipes from standard manuals. All that grouped under one MOA at 100 yards we then fired at 200 yards. All that grouped under one MOA at 200 yards we then fired at 500 yards. All that grouped under one MOA at 500 yards are on the chart, along with the best-performing .308 Winchester commercial ammunition that I had in inventory. We would have liked to have had the time to have tinkered with the load recipes of some of the bullets that didn't make the cuts, because we're certain that some small alterations in propellant charges would have put them

on the chart as well. But the deadline for this report got in the way. I intend to continue working with this gun, however, and have already obtained a .300 Winchester Magnum version of the Model 700 XCR LRT to give a similar workout.

Bottom line? The Remington Model 700 XCR LRT is the Model 700 as it should be, and every other new-generation Model 700 and Model seven that shares its new and refined features will be likewise--"the most accurate production rifle available today."

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