

T/C ICON PRECISION HUNTER

The Icon: Thompson/Center's rendition of a varmint rifle is a truly specialized outfit that offers a high degree of accuracy.



Laminated stock is amply proportioned for a varmint. The beavertail forend and high monte-carlo comb make the gun easy to hold steady and well-suited for scope use.

INTRODUCED IN 2005, the Thompson/Center Icon is now offered in several configurations - the Original Icon Medium-Action Rifle with Ultra Wood stock, available in .22-250, .243, .308 and .30T/C, is now being offered in a Hogue over-molded composite stock version with Realtree camo finish; the Classic Long Action Venture rifle, stocked in American walnut with cut checkering chambered in .270, .30-06, 7mm Rem. Mag., and .300 Win. Mag. or Weather Shield; and the Warlord Tactical fitted with Olive Manner's composite stock with all the bells and whistles, chambered in .308 Winchester with a match chamber, carrying a 1/2-minute guarantee. Another recent introduction is the Precision Hunter, similar to the basic Icon model, but with laminated varmint-style stock, chambered in .204 Ruger, .223 Rem., .22-250, .243 and .308.

The heart of Thompson/Center's Precision Hunter is the Icon, a totally modern action that's innovative in terms of features. This new breed of bolt action has a CNC-machined receiver milled from solid bar stock with a solid top equipped with integral Weaver-style scope bases fore-and-aft. This mounting system eliminates any chance of the movement that often exists when a separate base is held to the action with three or four dinky 6-48 screws. Unlike many production rifles the Icon's receiver has a flat bottom which sits squarely on an aluminium bedding block for the utmost stability.

The solid-top receiver has an ejection port that bears more resemblance to a benchrest gun than a sporter. The extra thickness of steel along the top and sides of the Icon's receiver contributes a great deal to its strength and rigidity, thus increasing the inherent accuracy potential of T/C's design. The flat-bottomed receiver has three integral recoil lugs protruding 6.35mm (0.25-inch). The lugs are located underneath the receiver ring, bridge and rear tang and are threaded for three stock screws that attach the receiver to T/C's Interlock bedding system - a one-piece, aluminium bedding block firmly epoxied into the laminated wood stock. All three recoil lugs bear against the bedding block and, because there's no wood to compress, the system distributes recoil forces evenly throughout the rear portion of the stock.

While the Icon's action may be a bit heavy to use for a light mountain rifle, being beefy and hefty is a positive attribute in a varmint. On the right side of the receiver, just in front of the ejection port, a gas relief hole vents gas in the event of a pierced or blown primer. Inside the receiver, the Icon's bolt also machined from bar stock, slides smoothly, without

showing the least tendency to bind. Having a full-diameter bolt and eliminates the need for machining raceways in the receiver walls. The three-lug design allows a short, 60-degree bolt lift that allows more room for the shooter's hand between bolt handle and the scope's eyepiece.

Three solid locking lugs each having a length of 13mm, a width of 9.65mm and a height of 3.4mm are spaced equidistantly around the bolt head. One lug is slotted for a sliding T-slot extractor, leaving a solid rim of steel around the case head. The bolt face is deeply counterbored and there's a plunger-style ejector.

The hefty bolt has a diameter of 21.60mm and has T/C's matte blue metal finish which matches the receiver and barrel. There's a longitudinal slot along the bolt body in which the sculpted polished steel bolt stop rides. The bolt handle is an odd dogleg shape with hollowed-out tactical-style knob. The root of the bolt handle turns down into a notch in the side of the tang to act as an auxiliary safety lug, although one could hardly conceive of its ever being needed. The Icon features a skeletonized bolt shroud and a large cocking indicator contoured to match the streamlined rear end of shroud and receiver.

The stock is walnut-coloured consisting of about two dozen laminates in classic varmint style. The Monte-Carlo cheekpiece has a high comb which raises the eye on a level with large- objective varmint scopes that necessarily must be mounted high, and a broad beavertail forend flat on the bottom to sit steady on a rest.



T/C's Interlock bedding system uses a one-piece aluminium block expoxied into the stock on which the receiver sits squarely.

A new feature is T/C's Convection Enhancement System. The bottom of the forend has seven evenly spaced holes bored through it and the wood in the barrel channel has horizontal slots cut perpendicular to the barrel channel. This works to disperse heat by drawing cooler air up through the bottom of the forend around the largest part of the barrel, producing maximum air circulation for cooling. The barrel is also free floated allowing more clearance for air flow as an additional aid to consistent accuracy.

The pistol grip is rather thick and closely curved. In place of checkering it's stippled to ensure a sure grasp. The forend has finger grooves along its upper edge. A black recoil pad some 15mm thick and a pair of Q/D swivel bases complete the stock furniture. For my taste, I'd have liked a

SPECS

THOMPSON/ CENTER PRECISION HUNTER

MANUFACTURER:

Thompson/Center,
Rochester, NH
03866 U.S.A

ACTION TYPE:

medium turn bolt,
centrefire

CALIBRE: .204 Ruger,
.223 Rem., .22-250,
.243 and .308 Win.

MAGAZINE:

detachable polymer
box, 3 shot capacity

BARREL LENGTH :
550mm fluted with
5R rifling

OVERALL

LENGTH:1067mm

WEIGHT: 4 kgs (8lbs)

STOCK: classic
varmint style,
laminated hardwood
with cheekpiece and
beavertail forend.

LENGTH OF PULL:

343mm

FINISH: matte blue
with Weather Shield

SIGHTS: none,
integral two piece
picatinny rail

LIKELY PRICE:

\$2650 RRP



Flat-bottomed receiver has three integral recoil lugs that attach it rigidly to the Interlock bedding block.



Full-diameter bolt has three massive, solid locking lugs, plunger ejector and sliding T-slot extractor.

INSIDE: T/C Icon has solid-top receiver with Weaver-style scope bases that anchor scope rings so solidly they cannot move.

slimmer more gently curved grip, but that's just a personal preference and most shooters will adapt to it all right.

The Precision Hunter's heavy contour, 550mm hand-lapped button-rifled barrel is deeply fluted, has 5R rifling and the muzzle carries a recessed 60-degree target crown which allows escaping gases to exit uniformly to the sides of the bullet instead of behind it. The 5R rifling has five grooves and lands with angular sides which significantly reduce jacket deformation and copper fouling. Non-symmetrical engraving results in a better bullet seal for more stable pressures shot-to-shot and better balance during flight. The barrel has a diameter of 30.75mm at the receiver ring tapering off to 27mm over the chamber and reaches 24mm at the start of the flutes. The fluted section gradually slims down to measure 20.36mm at the muzzle. T/C experimented with several different fluted styles before they found the one that gave the best accuracy.

A two-position safety is located at the rear of the bolt handle, together with a separate lever which is an independent bolt lock. With the safety engaged, the bolt can be cycled to clear a loaded round from the chamber. But when the bolt lock is pushed forward with the thumb, it locks the bolt handle down, preventing it from being opened accidentally while the rifle is being carried. However, when the safety is thumbed forward to ready the rifle for shooting, the bolt lock moves with it and is automatically disengaged.

The bolt is nitride-coated and there's a magazine-release catch in the front of the alloy magazine floorplate unit. A polymer magazine box holds 3 rounds of .22-250 cartridges.

The Precision Hunter is not all that ponderous or unwieldy for a varmint, weighing 3.6 kgs with an overall length of 1067mm. A pair of Weaver rings attached my old Leupold Vari-X III 6.5-20x44 scope to the test rifle. It has a standard Duplex reticle and focusing objective and increased the outfit's weight to 4.75kgs (10-1/2lbs) - plenty of heft to hold steady and all the accuracy you want,



together with a trigger that makes it a pleasure to shoot.

T/C has fitted a fully-adjustable trigger to the Icon which is attached to the bottom receiver with two cross pins. It has an adjustment range of 1.13 to 2.72kgs (2-1/2 to 6lbs). The trigger on the test rifle had been preset at the factory to let-off at 1.81kgs (4lbs) which is way too heavy for serious varmint work. Using the factory provided tool, I backed the screw off to get a crisp

1.13kg pull that suited me just fine.

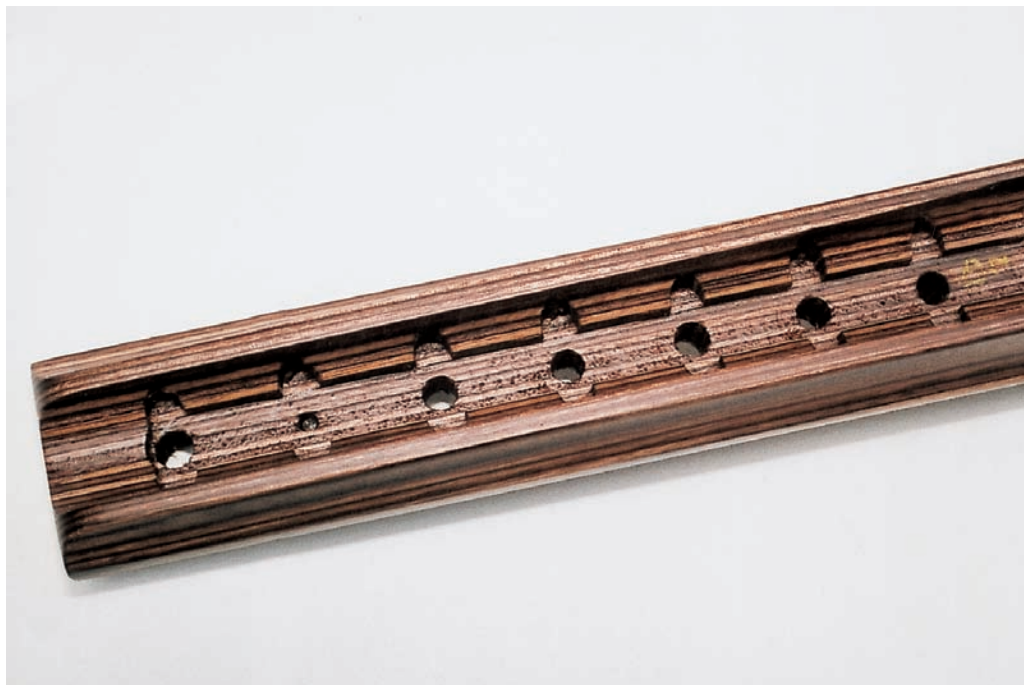
The Icon Precision Hunter carries an accuracy guarantee of sub-MoA grouping for 3 shots at 100 yards. The results of T/C's Computer-Aided Targeting System showed a tight 3-shot group shot with Hornady factory ammo loaded with the 50gn V-Max that measured about half this - 0.49.

Although many shooters are a bit skeptical about factory guarantees for accuracy, experience has shown me that rifles can live up to such claims, but only with one or two loads; more often than not, you'll have to try a number of different loads before you hit the jackpot.

While premium factory ammo can deliver this kind of performance from a well set up varmint, the majority of serious pest-poppers rely almost exclusively on handloads carefully assembled in their home workshop. And for good reason. While the factory fodder loaded today is of truly excellent quality, an experienced handloader can generally improve his rifle's accuracy by carefully experimenting with different bullet-powder- primer-case combinations until he arrives at a load that may give truly superior results.

T/C hasn't overstated the accuracy of their Icon varmint rifle. The first series of four 5-shot groups with the Precision Hunter test rifle proved the gun was capable of consistently averaging under one-MoA for five shots let alone 3 shots. Four different loads were tested - Winchester Super-X factory ammo shooting the 55gn PSP bullet clocked 3533 fps and a typical group had five shots in 0.973 with the first three in 0.658; a handload consisting of the Hornady 50gn V-Max and 36gn of WIN-748 trumped this by planting three shots a neat 0.629 but averaged 0.865 for four 5-shot groups while turning up 3666 fps. In each instance the first three shots were tightly clustered together with a spread of 0.62 to 0.70. Another handload using 20 precious bullets from my dwindling stock of Remington 52gn Benchrest bullets over 36gn of WIN-748 clocked 3515 fps and delivered the best accuracy of all - two 5-shot clusters of bullet holes measuring 0.455 and .510. Nor was it any

Test Report



ABOVE: The Precision Hunter taken down into its major component parts. Trigger guard assembly is polycarbonate as is the detachable box magazine.

TOP: Showing details of T/C's Convection Enhancement System which draws cool air up into the forend to dissipate heat more quickly.

surprise when an old box of cheap Winchester USA ammo loaded with a 45gn JHP at 3902 fps produced 5-shot groups averaging 0.955.

For the hunter looking for real performance from a varmint rifle, the T/C Icon varmint in .22-250 is a wise choice. The .22-250 is capable of starting a 55gn bullet off at around 3700fps, and is accurate enough to use out to 350-400 metres, under ideal wind conditions. Winchester's standard Super-X factory loading with 55gn PSP grouped into Sub-MoA. This makes especially potent medicine for foxes and even tougher dingoes.

Only a varmint shooter would carry a 4.75kg outfit afield, and use scopes up to 20x magnification to aim at small pest animals and birds. But the "varmint hunter" isn't really a "hunter" in the true sense of the word. No careful pussyfooting through the woods or stalking into the wind for him. The object of most dyed-in-the-wool varmint shooters

isn't to stalk closer to the game, but quite the opposite - he wants to see how far away he can hit 'em with some degree of regularity.

For his purpose he uses equipment best suited for the job; his rifle isn't chosen for ease of carrying or its fast handling capability - instead it must shoot flat and be finely accurate at ranges out to 400 metres or more. The T/C Precision Hunter is a fine example of a varmint shooter's rifle. It sports a heavy barrel with matching stock and is capable of the accuracy necessary to knock-off tiny targets at long range. In addition it is chambered for our most popular varmint cartridges.

Obviously, the Precision Hunter was intended to be shot from a rest of some kind, so its not unusual for a varmint shooter to drive up within sight of a rabbit warren and unload sandbags or a rifle rest, as well as a ground sheet to lie on.

Long-range varmint shooting is mostly a stationary sport carried out at a single elevated stand commanding a good view of one or more sizable warrens.

The Precision Hunter, even in .22-250 develops some recoil but the outfit's weight helps dampen it and make the rifle more controllable. Of course, rifles with that much weight aren't ideal for carrying long distances, but for an afternoon spent driving around in open country, doing only a limited amount of walking the Icon equipped with a sling and bipod isn't going to give anyone fallen arches. Nor is there any need to mount a heavy high-powered target scope, something like my old Leupold 6.5-20x Vari-X III or a Sightron Big Sky 4.5-14x44 doesn't add too much weight whether you like to sit on a hillside and take leisurely shots at cottontails glassed at long range or go driving and go walking about to spatter any varmint that crops up.

The Icon Precision Hunter combines all the desirable features one could wish for in a varmint gun - a stable laminated stock of ample proportions, a deeply fluted barrel which reduces weight without affecting its stiffness, a rigid, accuracy enhancing action with an integral picatinny scope rails, crisp trigger, and inert aluminium bedding block. All these things combined make a valuable contribution to obtaining peak accuracy.

My overall impression of the Precision Hunter? I didn't find anything to dislike or worthy of criticism. The rifle functioned in a foolproof manner without a single failure to feed, extract or eject. It looks as if Thompson/Center is destined to become as honoured a brand in bolt action rifles as it already is with its single shot Encore handguns and rifles. The Icon is one of the most consistently accurate factory varmint rifles I've ever tested. That's a pretty strong factor in its favour and if T/C runs true to form, the Icon family is likely to have another offspring before too long.

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