

THOMPSON/CENTER'S NEW ICON BOLT-ACTION

AT A GLANCE

Thompson/Center who is renowned for its Contender handgun and multi-gun Encore system, and undisputed leader in the field of muzzleloaders, has brought out a bolt-action aptly named Icon.

AFTER ALL THE budgetary boltguns I've been testing, of late, it was a refreshing change to get a high-quality bolt-action to review. The Thompson/Center Icon is a premium rifle with a distinctive appearance that lives up to its name. If we forget the religious connotations of something that's "iconic", then the term describes "something executed according to a convention or tradition." And the classic T/C Icon is all of that and a handsome looking rifle to boot.

The first thing that catches the eye is the stock, a handsome classic design, correctly proportioned out of highly figured dense walnut with a soft satin finish that glows like an Alpine tarn. It's a true Icon because it is a product of long evolution, and many skilled craftsmen have contributed to its final form. The overall appearance of this classic sporter shows the influence of fine custom rifles turned out in America by such talented stockmakers as Alvin Linden, Tom Shelhamer, John Dubiel, Al Biesen and numerous others who contributed to the refinement and perfection of the modern classic stock, especially for scope use.

For this purpose, the Icon's stock is ideal having clean, flowing lines which combine beauty with utility. The comb has been made thick and straight and has the same amount of drop at heel as at comb to lessen the recoil effect. There's no cheekpiece since it would be superfluous and serve no useful purpose. The forend is rounded in cross-section, slightly tapered and shaped to be comfortably grasped by the hand. The pistol grip, some 130mm in circumference, not only feels good but affords good control of the trigger.

Panels of cut checkering on forend and grip run 20 lpi, have curved edges and accents and are broken by ribbons. The grip is uncapped and the butt is fitted with a thin, black Sims recoil pad. Q/D sling swivel bases are standard.

Inletting around the action and bottom metal is close and neat, with a minimal gap along the upper edges of the forend where the barrel is fully-floating from the receiver ring to the tip. T/C calls the stock "select grade" and the fine figure and rich grain confirm this.

The stock may be attractive, but the Icon's action is unique, not only for its distinctive looks, but unusual



design. It has a solid top with integral Picatinny rail slots atop receiver ring and bridge. The ejection port in the short-action Icon I tested is barely 67mm long, being dimensioned to handle the .308 family of cartridges.

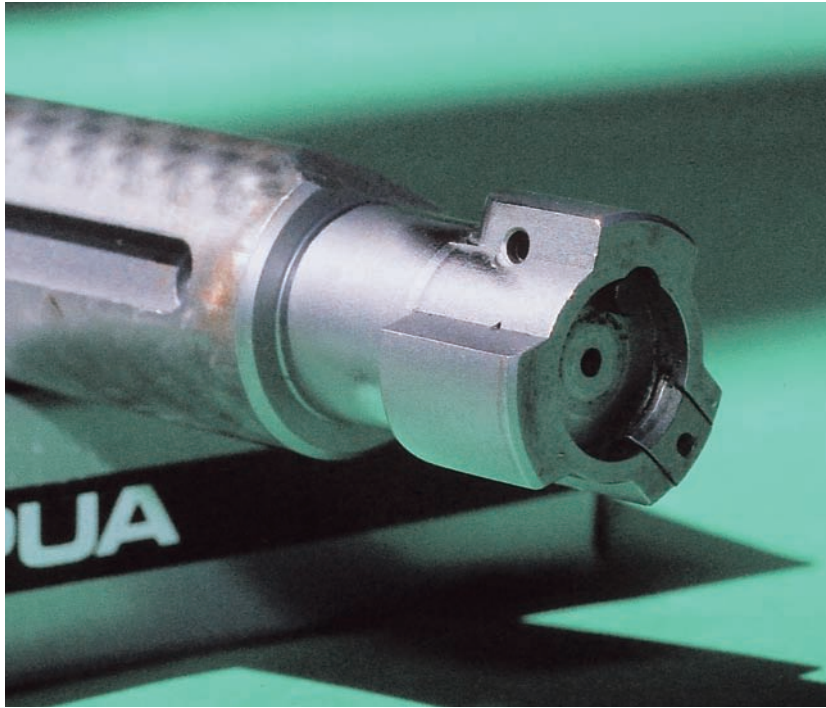
Having a solid top and heavy sidewalls makes the action strong and rigid and integral mount bases ensure a very solid scope mounting system – one that won't vibrate loose and cause the rifle to lose its zero. Having the bases milled into thereceiver means the Picatinny rails will accept any one of a number of Weaver-style scope rings and the rail cuts allow plenty of latitude for positioning the scope to take full advantage of its eye relief. My test rifle came with a Nightforce 2.5-10x24 variable scope cradled in Nightforce alloy rings which are locked in place with a pair of large nuts, forming a rock-steady assemblage.

The left side of the receiver has a large angled flat surface in the centre and is most attractively contoured around the bolt release, while the rear of the bridge is streamlined to blend in with the sharp angle of the bolt shroud. The "ICON" logo is etched into the surface of the sculpted flat area.

The underside of the receiver forms a flat bedding platform, with three integral peglike recoil lugs protruding 6.35mm. These lugs are threaded internally to take three stock screws which secure the receiver to another of Thompson/Center's major accuracy features – called the Interlok bedding system. This is a uniform, one-piece aluminium bedding block epoxied into the stock to provide a solid platform for the flat-bottomed receiver. The triple recoil lugs sit squarely in their recesses and lock the action into the bedding block to

T/C's new Icon bolt-action is a stylish classic-stocked sporter which boasts a number of innovative design features. The rifle was topped with a Nightforce compact variable scope.

TEST REPORT

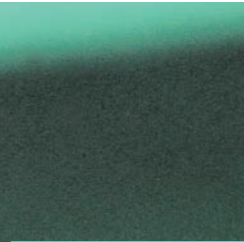


ABOVE: The jewelled, full-diameter bolt is equipped with three massive head lugs which provide the lock-up.

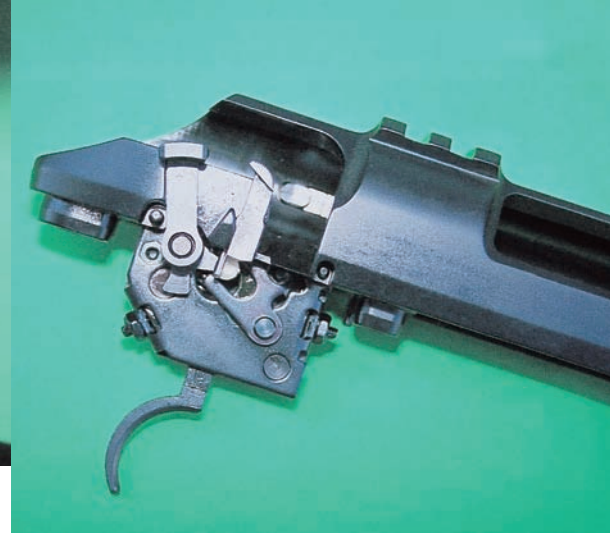
distribute recoil forces evenly over a large area, thus eliminating any chance of stressing the wood stock.

The bedding block has some significant innovations. The sides of the block are corrugated to let the epoxy flow in and get a better grip. The holes are drilled undersize and take octagon head screws, but before the block is screwed into the wood, epoxy is injected into the screw holes. When the screws are tensioned they bite into the screw holes, and any excess epoxy flows into the gaps provided by their octagonally-shaped heads.

Like the receiver, the Icon's bolt is machined in one-piece from solid barstock and has three massive locking lugs cut on symmetrical 120-degree centres. It is jewelled and has a body diameter of 21.56mm. Being one-diameter helps prevent binding and does away with the need for cutting raceways in the receiver walls. It provides a short 60-degree bolt lift that allows plenty



BELOW: Trigger is fully adjustable for weight of pull, sear engagement and overtravel. Test rifle came with a 1.36kg pull which is ideal for a hunting rifle.



of space between the bolt handle and scope's eyepiece for the shooter's hand.

The three lugs are of identical width and length (12.75x9.85mm) and 5.75mm high. To avoid the need for more than a single array of lugs, the head of the Icon bolt is undercut to a 15.50mm diameter behind and between the lugs. The counterbore in the bolt face has a diameter of 12mm, thus the bolt rim walls have a thickness of 3.50mm ensuring that a solid ring of steel surrounds and supports the case head. Hence strength is assured in this critical area.

The breech is a simple flat patterned type. Barrels are faced off square at the rear, then fit relatively close. The cartridge base seats in the counterbored bolt face, which forms an unbroken ring of steel since the small sliding T-slot extractor is in the face of the right lug. The push-feed action utilizes a plunger ejector. The narrow extractor is spring-tensioned but lies flush with the bolt nose contributing to a close breech fit.

The close relationship between the flat-nosed bolt and squared-off barrel fitted to within .020" of the counterbored bolt face allows minimum cartridge head protrusion and forms an effective seal. While lacking a shrouded bolt nose like the Remington and Weatherby systems, the clean and simple construction of this breeching pattern bears a close resemblance to the Texas Ranger, but has also seen use in rifles from Savage, Champlin, Voere, Husqvarna and others.

A flush fitting sleeve on the rear end blocks escaping gas coming back through the bolt which in any case would be minimal since most of the gas would be vented either through a hole in the right side of the receiver ring or downward into the magazine well

Accuracy Results

	MV	Energy	Group size		
			Smallest	Largest	Average
Win. Super-X 150gn Silvertip	2810	2630	.76	1.00	.88
Win. Supreme 150gn BST	2786	2585	.65	.90	.80
Lapua Match 170 FMJ	2767	2890	.60	.85	.75

Velocity average 5 rounds from 610mm barrel. Accuracy five 3-shot groups at 100 metres from benchrest.



Icon action has integral Weaver-type scope rails with Picatinny cuts and butterknife bolt handle. Note white metal cocking indicator at rear of bolt shroud.

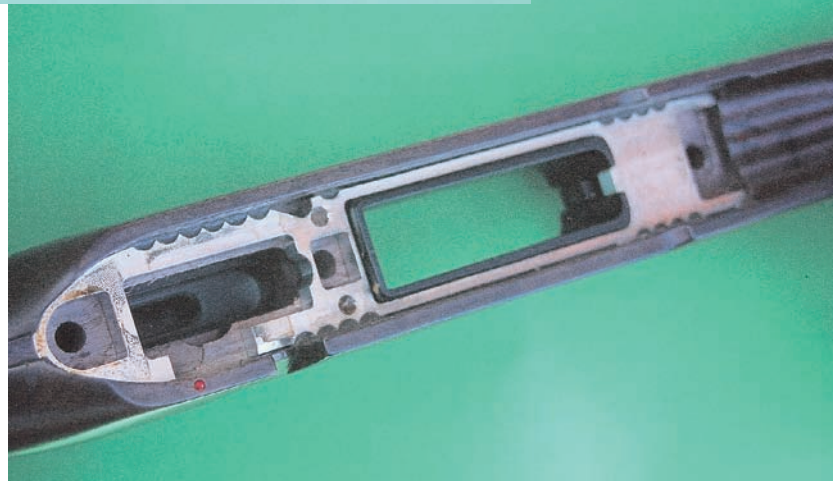
through a large oval hole in the forward end of the full diameter part of the bolt body.

The low-lift bolt handle is a polished, sculpted butterknife design and conforms with T/C's penchant for incorporating Continental features into its designs. The root of the bolt handle turns down into a notch cut in the tang and acts as an auxiliary safety lug in the unlikely event of a complete failure of the head lugs. On the left side of the bridge directly opposite, is a matching sculpted, polished steel bolt release/stop. It has a lug which rides in a longitudinal groove along the bolt body.

The two-position safety locks the bolt handle down. It is supplemented by having a separate bolt lock lever, in front of the safety lever. Without disengaging the safety this lock can be depressed allowing the bolt handle to be raised for clearing a loaded round from the chamber. When the safety is pushed forward in the firing mode, the bolt lock is automatically pushed forward and disengaged. There's no compulsion to use the bolt lock which nestles unobtrusively below the safety catch; you can simply forget all about it and use the safety like any other normal two-position job.

There's a visual red dot behind the safety catch, but at the back of the receiver, a white metal cocking indicator forms a close fit with the shroud. When the rifle is cocked, it protrudes and can be felt with the thumb.

A skeletonized bolt sleeve caps the rear of the bolt. It has curving cuts which lighten and it is shaped to blend in perfectly with the angle on rear of the receiver. T/C supplies a tool which allows you to strip the bolt into its component parts (and at the same time change the butterknife bolt handle to another style if you wish).

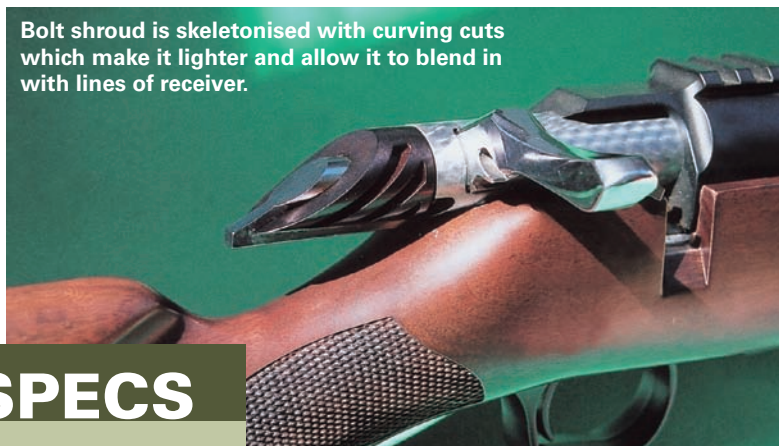


Simply relieve the spring tension, push down on the shroud to remove the bolt handle, which leaves the firing pin with its spring free to be withdrawn from the bolt body. Reassemble in the reverse order.

The barrel on my Icon was 610mm long and medium weight. All my own rifles have barrels of this length and it ensures the full ballistics of the .308 Win will be gained. T/C produces its own button-rifled, match-grade barrels in its state-of-the-art barrel making facility, using 5R rifling to achieve the desired 1/2 minute accuracy. The 5-groove rifling has lands with angular sides to reduce jacket deformation and copper fouling as an aid to increased accuracy. As well, a 60-degree target crown exerts less influence on exiting bullets by allowing vented gas to exit the muzzle to the sides of the bullet instead of behind it. Being recessed the crown is protected against damage.

Icon's flat-bottom receiver sits squarely atop alloy bedding block, epoxied and screwed into stock wood. Recoil is taken up by three lugs entering recesses in block.

Bolt shroud is skeletonised with curving cuts which make it lighter and allow it to blend in with lines of receiver.



SPECS

Thompson-Center Icon

MANUFACTURER:

Thompson/Center arms,
Rochester, NH 03866, USA

ACTION TYPE:

Turn-bolt; solid-top, CNC
machined from 4140 barstock

BARREL LENGTH:

610mm

RIFLING:

5-groove 1:12 R/H twist

MAGAZINE:

Detachable box, 3-round
capacity

SIGHTS:

None, integral Picatinny bases

OVERALL LENGTH:

1118mm

WEIGHT:

3.4kg

TRIGGER:

Fully adjustable from
1.13kg to 2.72kg

STOCK:

American walnut; length of
pull 356mm; drop at heel,
38mm; drop at comb, 38mm.

ACCESSORIES:

Bolt tool, trigger adjustment
tool

LIKELY RETAIL PRICE:

Icon, \$2,000. Nightforce 2.5-
10x24 \$1650.00

TRADE ENQUIRIES:

For more information
contact, Frontier Arms Co, Pty.
Ltd, GPO Box 2317, Adelaide,
SA 5001. PH: (08) 8373 2855
FAX: (08) 8373 2930

One thing's for sure; you can't achieve the company's goal of 1/2-minute accuracy without a good trigger. T/C's designers and in-house engineers came up with an excellent unit for the Icon. The trigger is pre-set at the factory to give a crisp, totally inert let-off of 1.36kg, however it can be adjusted anywhere from 1.13 kg to 2.72kg to suit individual preference. The Icon's trigger is easily adjustable by the user with a right angle wrench without removing the rifle from the stock. It can be adjusted for initial takeup and overtravel, but incorporates stops to prevent over-adjustment which would render it unsafe.

My short-action test gun had a single-column detachable box magazine which together with the trigger guard/magazine well assembly was made of some synthetic polymer material. European hunters like this feature since it makes for convenient loading and unloading of the rifle for transportation and they can carry an extra loaded magazine in their pocket. But I think the overwhelming reason was that T/C will be selling Icon rifles for tactical purposes where a detachable magazine is mandatory. The magazine release is at the front edge of the clip and when it is pressed back the clip drops out into the hand.

An unusual feature is a trigger guard with a concave back to protect the second finger from recoil. Long-action Icons differ by having a standard floorplate which most Aussie hunters prefer for its simplicity and security.

My testgun weighed 4kg scoped. That's a bit heavy for a .308 sporter and I'd like to see some of the excess pared off it, so that the Icon would weight no more than 3.175kg bare, and about 454 grams more with a scope. Undoubtedly T/C will bring out a synthetic stocked version some time in the future and it will lower the weight to a more comfortable level.

On the range the extra heft softened felt recoil and made the Icon a real pussycat to shoot off the bench. Functioning was flawless, the bolt worked like a well-oiled piston with each round sliding smoothly into the chamber. Fired shells extracted and ejected with gusto.

For accuracy testing I used the Nightforce 2.5-10x24 scope that came with the rifle. Listed as a Hunting Compact, it was designed as an all-around scope, for deliberate long range sniping and fast acquisition for



Icon had sub-MoA accuracy. Lapua Match ammo shot the tightest groups, but Super-X and Supreme were nothing to be sneezed at.

close-in shots at jumped game. It has a rather unusual reticle which is a slim variation of the the European three-pronged reticle. It floats in the centre of the field instead of extending clear to the edges, and has fine centrewires, two short sidebars and an even shorter post at the bottom. The scope showed a sharp, clear image in bright light which decreased somewhat in low light. While displaying fine optical quality, the physical limitations imposed by a small objective and 2.4mm exit pupil meant that performance in extreme low light situations was necessarily compromised. This is the unavoidable penalty for the advantage of compact design.

The Nightforce range consists mainly of Japanese-built, high-range variables with 30mm tubes, featuring sophisticated optics. Some models feature graduated reticles for help in range finding and windage for long range shooting. Sporting larger objectives and exit pupils than the one tested, no doubt they would handle light extremes with more aplomb.

The factory target that came with the Icon showed a 3-shot group measuring .41 MoA at 100 yards, with two shots in the same hole. This is phenomenal accuracy for a sporter, and was achieved with a T/C Computer-Aided Acoustic Targeting system. The loads I had on hand were Winchester Super-X with 150gn Silvertip, Supreme with 150gn Ballistic Silvertip and Lapua Match with 170gn FMJ bullet. Fortunately I had enough ammo to sight the rifle in and fire five 3-shot groups with each load.

The rifle was a pleasure to shoot, but the magazine design made it impossible to feed cartridges singly, so I had to load the magazine for each group. Grouping was tight, but of course not quite as close as the factory target, nor did I expect it to be. The results are in the table.

The Icon is an outstanding American bolt action of modern design and superior quality and workmanship. The stock is a faithful rendition of the classic form and T/C's engineers really came up with a worthwhile bedding block system. The way the three action screws hold the barreled action in the stock guarantees that this wood-stocked gun will hold a constant zero regardless of hunting conditions. It's a darn fine gun and also has one of the strongest locking systems. ■