

Test Report

by Nick Harvey



T/C VENTURE PREDATOR

Thompson/Center's Venture has been coated all-over with RealTree MAX-1 camo for the utmost concealment when hunting crafty predators like coyotes, but it will fool dingoes and foxes alike.

THOMPSON/CENTER'S NEW VENTURE Predator now available in a striking new RealTree MAX-1 camo pattern and topped with a Nikon Coyote 3-9x40 scope and mounts with matching camo finish is an eyecatcher, but only to humans. Game animals are not going to see it and be spooked by it as it blends in perfectly with most kinds of leafy surroundings. Camo clothing is big business today and it's effective - just as long as you don't go brandishing a shiny rifle that semaphores reflections to warn game of your approach.

The reality is that there is not and never will be any universal camouflage pattern, simply because the various terrains which we hunt across this continent differ too much in colour, types of foliage and soils. In fact, in many areas the wrong camo pattern may be worse than no camouflage at all, making the hunter more conspicuous instead of allowing him to blend in with the background.

The original RealTree was intended to serve the needs of hunters where big timber - either pine or hardwood - is prevalent. This tends to be dark-hued country with large tree trunks and vines, and relatively sparse or patchy undergrowth. And it did a great job in such country, but in open grassland or brushy areas it stands out like a rabbi in a mosque. It has a tendency to merge visually into a more or less solid appearing shape at a little distance against a sunny, pale green and tan landscape that totally lacks big trees.

The most remarkable new RealTree MAX-1 pattern is entirely different. Whereas the majority of patterns are essentially abstractions, MAX-1 is a very realistic rendering of the regional vegetation, at least in areas, where sifton bush, ferns and dry brush and grasses are dominant. It should be excellent for deer stalking in areas where there's a lot of secondary growth after bushfires. The motif predominantly shows green weeds and dry brush and grasses in contrast to the tree trunks, branches and large oak leaves of the original RealTree pattern. By using lighter tones and clumps of weeds and cunningly placed



OPPOSITE PAGE: The RealTree MAX-1 finish on the T/c Venture Predator blends in well with brush or grasses and weeds. Hogue rubber inlays afford a secure grasp for sweaty or bloodied hands.

LEFT: The rifle's camo blends in better than the author's parka which is better suited for wooded areas clothed in big timber.

BELOW: The Nikon Coyote 3-9x40 scope and mounts carry a matching camo finish which makes for a harmonious appearance.

brush, RealTree MAX-1 lends the illusion of depth and makes extensive use of the colour green, a hue that is actually pretty common where gum trees prevail.

It is not enough to obscure the firearm, the hunter should wear similar camo so that both his outlines and surfaces also blend in. To be effective your camo clothing should have a background of the same colour and tone so that it not only produces the illusion of shapelessness but also have low contrast to match the Thompson/Center Venture Predator. But enough about the rifle's finish, let's check out the stock itself.

The nicely proportioned stock is classic in design without any cheekpiece or fancy forend tip. It has a high, straight comb sloping upwards toward the rear which gives it slightly less drop at heel than at comb which lessens the recoil effect and makes it ideal for scope use. The slim forend is round in cross section and has a good feel. Combined with a 343mm length of pull the Venture is quick handling and easy to hold steady.

The injection-molded stock has the forend shell reinforced with X-shaped struts and the butt filled with foam to deaden the hollow sound of the bolt being cycled. There's no bottom metal, the trigger guard is molded as an integral part of the stock, and there are contrasting Hogue black rubber inserts in forend and grip, grooved to afford a secure grasp. These inserts didn't get the camo treatment. A black rubber recoil pad some 20mm thick is soft enough to absorb recoil, and a pair of Q/D sling swivel bases are fitted.



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TOP RIGHT: T/c Venture employs a polymer single-column magazine and a fully adjustable crisp trigger that gives consistent pulls.

TOP: The massive full-diameter bolt has three large locking lugs, a T-slot extractor, plunger ejector and bell-style bolt knob.

ABOVE: Slim stock has hollow forend with reinforcing struts. Inletting is close and barrel is free-floated.

The Venture action is a totally modern design having a rigid cylindrical receiver with walls 8mm thick machined from bar stock. It has a length of 207mm and a diameter of 34.60mm. There's a shallow groove some 130mm long on the left sidewall and the receiver ring and bridge are round-topped being separated by a long flat surface. The test gun chambered in .308 Winchester has an ejection port 61mm long and 17.20mm wide. Evidently the same length receiver and stock is used for short and long cartridges by lengthening the ejection port and magazine well. The Venture uses the same 3-round detachable single-column polymer magazine box with a spring-loaded latch in its forward end as the up-market T/C Icon.

The front action screw is threaded into the underside of the receiver ring directly under the locking lugs and the rear screw engages the bottom of the short, heavy tang. When both screws are tensioned, pressure evenly distributed and the receiver is supported at the front the same as at the back. This prevents the receiver from bending under tension, even though I think it would be nigh impossible to bend such a heavy receiver.

Like the majority of cylindrical actions, the Venture has a separate recoil lug sandwiched between the barrel shank and receiver ring. The Venture's large recoil lug is 6mm thick and 28mm wide with a depth of 9.50mm where it bears against the rear wall of its mortise in the stock.

The T/C Venture features a hefty one-diameter bolt of 21.60mm machined from bar stock. The bolt face is milled away to leave three non-protruding locking lugs measuring 12.86mm long and 9.70mm wide with a depth of 4.50mm evenly spaced around the bolt face. Each is made large and deep enough so that they combine to provide adequate strength without multiple rows. The locking lugs and their receiver seats are of uniform size and cut on a symmetrical 120 degree pattern. A low bolt lift of 60 degrees allows enough



rotation to overlap the cam bevels and thus centre the actual contacting faces to provide optimum bearing efficiency. The entire bolt, including the handle, has been given a corrosion-resistant black-nitride Weathershield finish which matches the black inserts in the stock and the magazine floorplate.

Then bolt face is deeply counterbored to house a plunger ejector and a T-slot extractor is set into the face of the right locking lug and urged into engagement by a tiny entrapped coil spring. The extractor is a flush fit which allows a flat-pattern breech. Barrels are faced off square at the rear, to allow a relatively close-fitting gap (about 0.05") to the bolt. Besides fitting close to the bolt, the barrel's chamber mouth has very little chamfer. A short feed ramp milled into the rear of the barrel allows a little extra exposure around the lower portion of the cartridge head, but like the Icon, the Venture's bolt face completely surrounds and supports the case head.

The receiver ring has a gas port in the right side which aligns with the cutaway section behind the lugs. Any gas entering through the firing pin hole is directed downward into the magazine through an oval hole in the bolt body. Any residual gas that makes it back through the action is deflected by the solid rear wall of the bolt sleeve which has the same diameter as the bolt body.

The bolt release catch, located on the left side of the bridge doubles as the bolt stop. A lug on the rear end rides in a longitudinal slot milled in the bolt body and contacts the front end of the slot when the bolt is drawn fully to the rear. It also acts as a bolt guide and anti-bind device. The bolt shroud is shaped to blend in with the contour of the tang to give the action a streamlined appearance.

The bolt handle is raked back and has a bell-shaped knob. The root of the bolt handle turns down into a notch in the tang to form an auxiliary safety lug. The Venture's tri-lug bolt has a relatively weak camming system, and combined with a heavy mainspring, the short-lift bolt makes the handle very hard to lift for off-the-shoulder cycling. This makes fast follow-up shots difficult because you have to lower the rifle to reload.

The Venture's two-position thumb safety lacks the Icon's bolt lock. When it is engaged the bolt is not secured and the handle can be lifted by rubbing against the shooters

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RIGHT: Flush-fitting 3-round polymer magazine has release latch in its front end and feeds like silk.

SPECS

T/C VENTURE PREDATOR

Manufacturer:

Thompson/Center Arms, P.O. Box 5002, Rochester, New Hampshire, 01104, U.S.A.

Type: three-lug bolt-action centrefire

Action: cylindrical with solid top. CNC machined from bar stock

Barrel: 550mm. 5R button-rifled, 5 groove with 1:12 R/H twist

Calibres: .204 Ruger, .223 Rem., .22-250, .308

Overall length: 1053mm

Weight: 3.75kgs with scope

Stock: injection-molded polymer, camo finish, Hogue rubber inlays

Length of pull: 343mm; drop at comb 13mm; drop at heel 12mm

Trigger: single-stage externally adjustable, 1.36kgs from factory

Safety: pivoting 2-position

Sights: none; receiver drilled and tapped, Weaver bases supplied

Likely price: rifle \$1350.00 Scope and rings \$625

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belt or getting caught in brush. How many times have I cursed a rifle like this when I've found the bolt hanging open and the cartridge left lying on the ground somewhere along my back trail?

The Venture is equipped with the same simple, adjustable trigger found on the Icon. On the test gun it was set to break at 1.36kgs and had no discernable creep or overtravel. I could have made the trigger lighter using the tool supplied, but I've found that weight ideal for hunting. The nicely curved trigger is made of polymer instead of steel, but you'd never tell any difference.

The Venture Predator has a button-rifled, match-grade barrel that's fluted from 30mm back of the forend tip to within 12mm of the muzzle. The 610mm medium-weight, sporter-contour barrel has a diameter of 30mm in front of the recoil lug and carries that diameter forward for about 26mm before starting to taper off over the chamber to reach 16.55mm at the muzzle where the crown is recessed. A 60 degree target crown not only protects the rifling, but allows gases to vent around the base of the bullet as it leaves the muzzle, thereby lessening the disruptive influence on the commencement of its flight.

To further improve accuracy T/C uses 5R rifling which features five grooves with angled groove-land junctures

that is claimed to reduce jacket deformation and fouling. This results in a barrel that is faster, more accurate and less prone to fouling than conventional rifling.

My test Venture came with a pair of Weaver-type scope bases factory installed, together with a Nikon 3-9x40 Coyote riflescope. Scope, rings and bases had all been given a matching RealTree MAX-1 finish which T/C calls the "best in seclusion technology." No argument from me about that, but I wish they'd furnished lower rings as the scope was mounted too high. When I cheeked the stock the scope's eyepiece was on a level with my forehead and I had to lift my face off the comb to get my eye in line with the scope. That's not to criticise the outfit in any way, just to illustrate the need for rings of the correct height.

I found there was plenty to like about the way the Venture Predator operated. The bolt cycled like a well-oiled

“The bolt cycled like a well-oiled piston which is virtually what it is.”

piston which is virtually what it is. The magazine drops out easily into the hand, but is awkward to replace unless you remember to insert the back end first.

This well-stocked rifle has clean and handsome lines and the RealTree MAX-1 camo finish is nice to look at as well as being entirely practical. The Venture Predator is nicely balanced and comes to the shoulder smoothly. Barrel and action are supported rigidly by the classic stock making it an instrument of precision.

The camo finish on the Nikon Coyote scope was a perfect match for the finish on the rifle's metalwork and stock. The multi-coated optics of the scope were bright and clear and the adjustments were precise enough to make sighting in easy.

The scope was equipped with a Nikon BDC Predator reticle consisting of three open sighting circles of descending diameters on the lower vertical crosswire. The simple reticle design can be fine-tuned to match the trajectory of your ammunition. The ballistic circles enable you to accurately compensate for bullet drop out to 400yds. using the .223 Rem. or the .22-250 with 55gn bullet. The scope comes with full instructions for using the Coyote scope.

On the range the rifle was sighted in to land the bullets 2-1/2" high at 100 yards. The Venture comes with a 3-shot MoA guarantee. Thus testing was the average of three 3-shot groups using Winchester Supreme ammo loaded with the 150gn Ballistic Silvertip and 168gn HPBT Match. Average grouping with the 150gn BST was 0.96 MoA and 0.86 for the 168gn HPBT. Considerably intrigued by gaining such tight groups from a fairly light barrel, I broke out a box of Lapua Match ammo loaded with a 170gn FMJ bullet which chronographed 2730 fps and averaged 0.72.

It wasn't difficult to get tight groups with the Venture Predator whose trigger is set at 1.36kgs at the factory to give a consistently crisp let-off. The straight stock and soft recoil pad made the .308 a real pussycat to shoot from the bench, and its camo finish is going to prove very attractive to predator hunters and deer stalkers alike. ■