

Savage Model 12 Varminter



SAVAGE MODEL 12

MANUFACTURER: Savage Arms, (Dept. AR), 118 Mountain Road, Suffield, CT 06078; (413) 568-7001; www.savagearms.com

CALIBER: .204 Ruger (tested), .223 Rem., .22-250 Rem.

ACTION TYPE: bolt-action, repeating single-shot rifle

RECEIVER: 400 series stainless steel

BARREL: 26" fluted stainless steel heavy barrel

RIFLING: six-groove, 1:12" RH twist

MAGAZINE: single-shot

SIGHTS: none

TRIGGER PULL: adjustable from 1 lb., 8 ozs. to 6 lbs.

STOCK: target-style wood laminate with ambidextrous palm swells, dual pillar bedding; length of pull, 14 1/4"; drop at heel, 1 1/4"; drop at comb, 1"

OVERALL LENGTH: 46 1/4"

WEIGHT: 10 lbs.

ACCESSORIES: trigger adjustment tool, manual

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: \$752

Savage Arms has long enjoyed a reputation for making quality affordable rifles, but often was viewed as being a few rungs below the big-name rifle manufacturing firms of Winchester, Remington and Ruger. Things began to change for Savage, however, in 1995.

Having led the company out of bankruptcy, Savage President and CEO Ron Coburn focused the company on making a new, improved Savage bolt gun. Word quickly spread that this plain vanilla rifle was accurate—tack-driving accurate. With its reputation for accurate

barrel building, Savage tackled the other half of the long-range accuracy shooting equation—the trigger. Savage set its sights on manufacturing target-quality triggers and, in 2002, introduced the AccuTrigger (June 2003, p. 69).

For safety, the AccuTrigger incorporates what Savage bills as an integrated AccuRelease: a slim blade through the trigger bow that, when depressed, unblocks the sear and allows the trigger to function. On varmint rifles, the AccuTrigger is adjustable down to an incredibly light 1 1/2 lbs.,

with no discernable creep and a crisp break. The new Savage Model 12 Varminter Low Profile Single Shot rifle incorporates this feature and many more.

The Varminter submitted for evaluation was a stainless steel short-action, laminated-stock varmint rifle chambered in .204 Ruger.

The first order of business was to adjust the trigger, which is accomplished by turning the adjustment screw. The trigger has a limited range of adjustment from 1 1/2 lbs. to 6 lbs., and it can't be over-adjusted at either end of its range.

The wood laminate stock features dual pillar



bedding and the barrel channel is sufficiently relieved to free-float the barrel. Designed for benchrest shooting, the low-profile rifle's pistol grip swoops down to a near-90 degree angle from the sighting plane but is totally devoid of checkering or any type of grip enhancement. The fore-end is straight and of generous size and features a front sling swivel stud.

Savage has made some great improvements on the finish of its bolt-action

rifles in recent years. The Varminter is not as butter-smooth as several other mass-produced rifles on the market, but it is a vast improvement over the old Savage 110 of a few years ago.

The Model 12 Varminter's action is CNC-machined from a billet of 400 series stainless steel and features a push-feed style bolt with a sliding-plate extractor and a spring-loaded plunger-type ejector.

The legendary affordability and accuracy of

SHOOTING RESULTS (100 YDS.)				
.204 Ruger Cartridge	Vel. @ 15'	Energy (f.p.s.) (ft.-lbs.)	Group Size In Inches	
			Smallest	Largest Average
Hornady No. 3040065 32-gr. V-MAX	4043 Avg.	1,162 22 Sd	0.57"	1.30" 0.95"

Measured average velocity for 10 rounds from a 26" barrel. Range temperature: 81° F. Humidity: 50%. Accuracy for five consecutive, five-shot groups at 100 yds. from a sandbag.

Savage rifles is the result of several things, one of which is the large barrel nut that attaches the barrel to the receiver. One of the most significant advantages to this unique approach is streamlined production time and lower costs. Additionally, Savage's

approach to barrel manufacturing is quite conducive to accuracy. After drilling and contouring, Savage puts each barrel through a precision reaming process that ensures each bore is uniform and of exacting dimensions. The rifling is formed by the button-rifling process, wherein a steel "button" with the reverse profile of the rifling's lands and grooves on its surface is drawn through the bore. The end result is a smoothly surfaced and uniformly rifled bore. The Varminter was fitted with a 26" fluted stainless steel heavy barrel with a 1:12" right-hand twist.

We tested the rifle in the new .204 Ruger chambering on the range and experienced no malfunctions of any kind. It displayed excellent accuracy, possibly aided by the adjustable trigger that broke cleanly when set at 1 lb., 8 ozs. with no discernable creep.

Overall, we were impressed with the .204 Ruger Model 12 Varminter. For anyone in the market for a no-nonsense, accurate varmint rifle that requires no additional work right out of the box, the Savage Model 12 Varminter Low Profile Single Shot is well worth a look.



The Savage Model 12 Varminter has the impressive AccuTrigger system (l.) that allows for an adjustable, crisp setting. A slim "blade," protruding through the trigger bow releases the sear and allows the trigger to function. Unique to Savage rifles, the barrel nut (below, l.) streamlines production time and costs. The dual-pillar-bedded, laminated wood stock has a barrel channel that is sufficiently relieved to free-float the barrel (below).



The American Rifleman has used the phrase "Dope Bag" at least since 1921, when Col. Townsend Whelen first titled his column with it. Even then, it had been in use for years, referring to a sack used by target shooters to hold ammunition and accessories on the firing line. "Sight dope" also was a traditional marksman's term for sight adjustment information, while judging wind speed and direction was called "doping the wind."

WARNING: Technical data and information contained herein are intended to provide information based on the limited experience of individuals under specific conditions and circumstances. They do not detail the comprehensive training procedures, techniques and safety precautions absolutely necessary to properly carry on similar activity. Read the notice and disclaimer on the contents page. Always consult comprehensive reference manuals and bulletins for details of proper training requirements, procedures, techniques and safety precautions before attempting any similar activity.

Wilson Combat Professional Model



One of the increasing trends in the past few years is the appearance of custom carry enhancements on factory-made M1911s. Not so long ago, guns with beavertail grip safeties, rowel hammers and combat sights were solely the products of custom gunsmiths, but today it's hard to find a stock G.I.-style M1911.

Wilson Combat's Professional Model is a fine example of a custom pistol that still stands out from the pack. It combines a full-size M1911 steel frame with a short Commander-length slide, a 4½" cone barrel fitted directly to the slide without a bushing and the flat mainspring housing of the original M1911. Also, a hollow plunger retains the gun's recoil spring and one-piece guide rod.

Ergonomics are one of

the Professional Model's strong suits. The front- and backstraps have 30 line-per-inch checkering, and this texturing, combined with the checkered ebony wood grip panels, makes for a reassuringly positive feel. There are also slanted cocking serrations on the slide between the rear sight and the ejection port.

Controls include an extended thumb safety and slide stop, a skeletonized rowel hammer and a beavertail grip safety with palm pad. Because the Professional Model is intended primarily as a carry gun, these have not been overly widened, although they are extended for better purchase. In keeping with its carry purpose, the gun's exterior surfaces have been thoroughly dehorned as well. The Professional

Model incorporates many reliability enhancements as well, including the polished feed ramp on the frame, the generously lowered and flared ejection port and a carefully fitted "Bullet Proof" internal extractor.

Although the magazine release button is the same diameter as that of a G.I. .45, it stands higher. The magazine well is beveled for smooth magazine changes and contains an eight-round single-column magazine. Slotted cutouts running down the side provide a visual cue as to the number of rounds remaining in the magazine. Additionally, a synthetic bumper pad protects the floorplate.

Sweat and holster abrasion take a toll on firearms, so corrosion resistance is an important area for a carry piece.

PROFESSIONAL

MANUFACTURER: Wilson Combat/Scattergun Technologies (Dept. AR), 2234 C.R. 719, Berryville, AR 72616; (800) 955-4856; www.wilsoncombat.com

CALIBER: .45 ACP
ACTION TYPE: recoil-operated, semi-automatic, center-fire pistol

FRAME: carbon steel
BARREL: 4½", stainless steel

RIFLING: 1:16", RH twist

MAGAZINE: eight-round detachable box

SIGHTS: dovetailed front and rear with luminous tritium, three-dot inserts; drift adjustable for windage

TRIGGER PULL: single-stage, 4 lbs., 2 ozs.

OVERALL LENGTH: 7½"

WIDTH: 1½"

HEIGHT: 5½"

WEIGHT EMPTY: 36 ozs.

ACCESSORIES: two, eight-round-capacity magazines, instructional video, nylon pistol rug

SUGGESTED RETAIL

PRICE: \$1,945

Accordingly, the Professional Model is coated with Wilson Combat's Armor-Tuff—a thermally cured satin finish permanently bonded to the surface. Additionally, Armor-Tuff contains molybdenum disulfide to improve the surface-to-surface lubricity of coated moving parts. Armor-Tuff is available in black, gray and green, and our sample gun came in a two-tone finish. The frame is green, but the slide, trigger and hammer are black. In contrast, the stainless steel barrel is left uncoated. The finish is very businesslike, and decorative touches are kept to a minimum.

Sights for a carry gun have to be precise and devoid of sharp edges that can snag on clothes or cause discom-

fort. Accordingly, the Professional Model is fitted with low-profile Tactical Combat sights. The rear unit has Wilson's "Combat Pyramid" contour, which presents the shooter with a wide rear blade, although its top outside corners have been eliminated to aid dehorning and to guide the shooter's eye to the U-notch for faster sight alignment. Tritium inserts in both the front post and rear blade provide the popular "three-dot" alignment configuration for precise aiming even in low light conditions. Although they are considered fixed sights, their dovetail mounting does provide the user some measure of windage adjustment.

Wilson Combat states it carefully hand fits each slide and frame to maxi-

SHOOTING RESULTS (25 YDS.)

.45 ACP Cartridge	Vel. @ 15' (f.p.s.)	Energy (ft.-lbs.)	Group Size In Inches		
			Smallest	Largest	Average
Black Hills 230-gr. JHP	709 Avg. 11 Sd	257	0.74	1.21	0.96
Hornady No. 9112 200-gr. JHP	727 Avg. 9 Sd	235	0.85	1.04	0.99
Federal No. P45HS1 230-gr. JHP	763 Avg. 10 Sd	298	0.86	1.01	0.94
Average Extreme Spread:			0.96		
Measured average velocity for 10 rounds from a 4½" barrel. Range temperature: 81 °F. Humidity: 50%. Accuracy for five consecutive, five-shot groups at 25 yds. from a sandbag. Abbreviations: JHP (jacketed hollow point).					

mize accuracy potential, and the lack of vertical or horizontal play in our sample definitely shows the success of its efforts in this area. Confident in its work, Wilson Combat makes an accuracy guarantee of 1.5" at 25 yds. using Federal Hydra-Shok ammunition. With that in mind we mounted the Professional Model in a Ransom Rest

for accuracy testing with defensive loads from Federal, Hornady and Black Hills. Our accuracy results shown in the accompanying table compare favorably with and even better Wilson's claims.

Given the gun's defensive purpose, we also set up a number of shooting drills with multiple IDPA targets at both short and long range, in which the gun excelled.

The Professional Model's single-stage trigger, which measured 4 lbs., 2 ozs., broke cleanly with minimal take-up and almost no perceptible overtravel. The quality of the trigger combined with the full-size frame made it easy to exploit the mechanical accuracy of the gun when firing at obscured or long-range targets.

All in all, it has to be said that there is particular joy in shooting a quality gun like the Professional Model, whose inherent accuracy and shootability makes the most of its user's shooting skills. Admittedly that quality and performance come at a price, but if you are one of those shooters who will settle for nothing less than a no-compromise, accurate, reliable M1911, then the Professional Model is certainly worth your consideration.



A hollow plunger (above, l.) retains the Wilson's recoil spring and one-piece guide rod. The pistol's polished feed ramp on its steel frame (above, r.) ensures flawless feeding of a variety of bullet types. We experienced no malfunctions of any kind.



Tritium inserts provide the popular "three-dot" alignment configuration (above and l.) for precise aiming, even in low-light conditions. Although considered fixed sights, their dovetail mounting provides some measure of windage adjustment.

Zeiss Conquest 3-12x56 mm MC



The newest addition to the Zeiss Conquest line features a 30 mm tube, a light-gathering 56 mm objective and a useful 3-12X magnification range.



The windage and elevation turrets feature a movable sleeve (arrow, above) with markings that can be zeroed against a reference mark on the scope body. An easily focusable eyepiece (r.) is a boon for those needing diopter changes.

Though the Zeiss name has been renowned for super-sharp German optics, its riflescopes have always seemed a bit too pricey for the average American shooter. In 2001 the company introduced its Conquest line of riflescopes, whose German-made components are assembled in America, yielding a substantially more affordable price.

Initial Conquest offerings included 3-9X, 3.5-10X and 4.5-14X models, all built on 1" tubes, with features designed to appeal to North American shooters, such as click adjustments in English rather than metric units, and, on some models, smaller objective lenses than are preferred in Europe.

The new 3-12x56 mm MC is the latest model in the Conquest line and is the first to offer a 30 mm tube, along with a 56 mm objective, fully multicoated lenses, three reticle choices and a powdercoat finish.

Our 3-12x56 mm Conquest came with a Zeiss No. 8 duplex reticle, whose location in the front focal plane makes its apparent size change with

varying power. The thicker parts of the plex are 55 m.o.a. apart and about 6 m.o.a. in thickness at all magnification levels, allowing the reticle to be used for rough range estimation.

We mounted the Conquest 3-12x56 mm MC on a Howa Model 1500 bull-barreled action in .308 Win. installed in a McMillan A-2 tactical fiberglass stock using a Ken Farrell Picatinny-style base and FA Enterprises steel tactical rings. At the range, we fired a single three-shot group at 100 yds., and then dialed in, successively, 12 clicks each of up elevation, right windage, down elevation and left windage, firing a group with each adjustment. The resulting square, 3" on a side, validated the nominal click value.

We liked the scope's clarity and brightness, as well as its quick-focusing eyepiece, which has markings to indicate plus and minus diopter changes. Smooth movement of the power ring was assisted by a small tab on the ring which also gave visual confirmation of the approximate magnification level. Torture-testing the scope by drop-testing it 6 ft. onto a rubber mat, freezing it overnight, and then immersing it in hot water all seemed to produce no ill-effects, such as condensation, leaking seals or reticle shifts.

This scope's \$1,050 list price—about \$450 less than the comparable V-series model in the Zeiss line—makes it worth a look by American shooters.

CONQUEST

MANUFACTURER: Carl Zeiss Sports Optics, Guelstrasse 3-5, D-35576 Wetzlar, Germany

IMPORTER: Zeiss Optical, Inc., 13005 N. Kingston Ave., Chester, VA 23836, (800) 441-3005, www.zeiss.com

MODEL: 5214709908 CONQUEST 3-12x56 MC

MAGNIFICATION AND OBJECTIVE: 3-12x56 mm

FINISH: black matte powder coat

FIELD OF VIEW: (ft.@100 yds.) 27.6 ft. (3X), 9.9 ft. (12X)

EYE RELIEF: 3.2"

M.O.A. @ 100 YDS.: 1/4"

WINDAGE AND ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT RANGE: 30" (W), 30" (E)

RETICLE: fine crosshair, Zeiss No. 4, Zeiss No. 8 (tested)

LENGTH: 15 1/2"

WEIGHT: 25.8 ozs.

PRICE: \$1,050



Crimson Trace NRA Lasergrips

For some, a laser sighting device is simply an affectation. In the early days of elaborate mounts and bulky lasers, that belief might have been forgiven.

Times have changed. Technological advances have made lasers smaller and better. An excellent example is Crimson Trace LG-305NRA Lasergrips for Smith & Wesson J-frame revolvers.

At first glance, the Lasergrips would appear to be simply a set of aftermarket synthetic stocks. Described as a "rubber overmold," the stocks weigh a mere 2.5 ozs. with batteries installed. They are embossed with the NRA logo and fully encompass the grip frame of the revolver. Additionally, they extend the length of the gripping surface down approximately 1/2", allowing for a four-finger hold.

Two specific features indicate the Lasergrips' true nature—a "button" on the frontstrap and a "hous-

ing" on the upper right section of the stock. Activation is accomplished by simply tightening the shooting grip over the pressure-activated button and the Class IIIa visible laser diode unit produces a non-pulsating red dot. The laser unit itself is located in the roughly 1" long housing and protrudes a scant 1/4". It runs off either two CR2032 or DL2032 lithium cells and, in our tests, ran for nearly five hours of constant use. A master on/off switch is located on the base of the unit.

The stocks installed easily on a Smith & Wesson Model 642 Airweight. The manual states Lasergrips are pre-sighted at the factory and often require



no adjustment. To adjust the laser, two Allen head screws are turned for windage and elevation adjustment. Insert the supplied Allen wrenches and turn them in small increments until the laser dot moves to the desired point.

We fired the 642 with Speer's excellent .38 Spl. +P 135-gr. GoldDot hollow-point ammunition. Fired from an Airweight, this cartridge can produce notice-

able recoil, but the Lasergrips allowed for a solid hold.

The NRA Lasergrips offer the shooter a unique accessory that adds almost no bulk or weight.

Also, the NRA emblem isn't merely for show—it represents a partnership between NRA and Crimson Trace. For every set sold, Crimson Trace will donate 10 percent of the total sale price—one half to the NRA Disabled Shooting Services Endowment and the other to the NRA Firearms & Marksmanship Training Endowment. Additionally, NRA members receive a discount off the \$330 suggested retail price.

Contact: Crimson Trace Corp. (Dept. AR), 8089 S.W. Cirrus Drive, Beaverton, OR 97008; (800) 442-2406; www.crimsontrace.com. NRA Member Price: \$280.

RCBS Mini-Grand

Ask any experienced handloader, and he'll tell you the best way to learn to reload shotshells is with a single-stage loader. They are the most economical to buy and the simplest to operate, all the while teaching the novice how to properly put together a good round. Frankly, there aren't many loaders from which to choose; Lee's Load-ALL, Ponsness/Warren's 375, various versions of the MEC, and now a new single-stage loader from one of the great and familiar names in reloading: RCBS.

Built in the same manner as every other RCBS loading tool, the Mini-Grand is rock-solid. Running on a hefty 3/4" round central column, it is smooth in operation. Available in 12 or 20 gauge, it uses commonly available Hornady or Ponsness/Warren powder and shot bushings. You can purchase an inexpensive adapter from Ballistic Products that permits the use of MEC powder bushings, thereby expanding the possibility of obtaining optimum accuracy of powder drops.

In use, the shell moves in a smooth counterclockwise direction guided by a series of scalloped shell holder/locators around the interior perimeter of the shell plate. Beginning at 11 o'clock, the fired hull is deprimed and partially sized. The Mini-Grand's shell plate is lifted as the handle is pulled down, so all operations are carried out at eye level. However, it is not a requirement to fully cycle the shell plate between all stations. In fact,

the only time a full cycle is required is in resizing, priming and at the station where the powder is charged and where the wad is inserted and shot dropped. Otherwise, the handle need only be cycled far enough to permit the hull to pass from station to station. It must remain consistent, though, in order to provide uniform powder drops.

Once the hull is deprimed and resized, a primer is placed in the cup at the next station and the hull located over it. Other than the concentric rings that define the spring-loaded priming station, there is no guide, so some centering of the deprimed hull is necessary. Priming is by feel, but straightforward. Next, powder is charged by moving the hull under the drop tube and the charge bar moved to the right. The hull is then moved to the wad-inserting station. The wad is set in the fingers and the handle cycled to fully seat it and, without moving the hull or raising the handle, the charge bar is cycled back to the left, dropping the shot.

The crimp can be either a two- or three-station operation. The fully charged hull is moved under the crimp start—the Mini-Grand arrives with the eight-point starter installed and a six-point starter is included in



the accessory bag—and the operating handle cycled. With the crimp defined, the hull is moved under the crimp die—the same crimper used in the progressive Grand—and the handle fully cycled. At this point the round is loaded and ready to go. Pump and semi-auto users may want to purchase the optional taper-crimp die that smoothly tapers the hull's mouth for positive feeding.

To empty the powder and shot hoppers, unscrew the two thumbscrews that attach the reservoirs to the top of the Mini-Grand, holding the charge bar still. With a finger holding the top of the powder hopper, drain the shot, then the powder. To

change the bushings, drain the hoppers then unscrew the charge-bar handle that projects from the front of the hopper assembly and slide the bar either way, keeping your hand under it to catch the bushings.

We found the Mini-Grand easy to use, and the loads produced were excellent. A steel shot conversion kit is available that permits the loading of both large lead shot (as set up, the shot drop tube will accommodate up to No. 5 lead shot) and steel pellets. The Mini-Grand is adjustable to load 2 3/4", 3" and 3 1/2", 12-ga. shells or 2 3/4" and 3" 20s. The directions are clear, as is the trouble-shooting guide. Set up for 2 3/4" target loads, we encountered no problems or difficulties other than a short learning curve getting to know the tool, something required with any new loader. Once we got the hang of it, loading speed increased with no diminution of the quality of the rounds produced.

Regardless of the handloader's experience level and even if his primary loader is one of the progressives, it is always handy to have a single-station loader. This little RCBS is handy for small-batch testing of a new load or to put together specialized hunting or steel loads, which because of their complexity are only possible on a single-stage tool. The Mini-Grand is simplicity itself in operation, and its results are excellent.

Available from: RCBS (Dept. AR), 605 Oro Dam Blvd., Oroville, CA 95965; (800) 533-5000; www.rcbs.com. Suggested Retail Price: \$125.

