

Pimp my *rifle*



Sporting Rifle's Byron Pace picks up from his recent review of the Tikka T3, taking a look at essential aftermarket accessories

Having tested the Tikka T3 alongside the Kimber SVT, I noticed a number of inherent weaknesses in its design. The plastic bolt shroud, magazine and poor recoil lug arrangement have been flagged up by many people over the years. But Tikka owners need not despair, and there's no need for these issues to be the deciding factor that puts you off buying a T3. There is a solution.

I had been speaking to Pete Lincoln at Roedale about the new Viper skins for AI stocks, when he offered to let me test some of their own aftermarket Tikka accessories. How could I refuse such a tempting offer? With the Roedale kit arriving from Germany, and the stainless varmint T3 already waiting in the gun cupboard, I had an exciting weekend ahead.

There is nothing really wrong with the original bolt handle except that it is particularly shiny. However, given that we are about to fit this varmint rifle to a tactical stock, it makes sense to marry it to a suitable bolt. The coated, machined alloy is a weighty addition but it remarkably enhances the cycling motion. Tikkas are renowned for their smooth bolt anyway, but after fitting Roedale's aftermarket handle it was even slicker. Nothing fundamental has changed, but the extra weight and leverage makes the bolt cam effortlessly over when loading. It was so satisfying that everyone I handed the rifle to couldn't help but cycle it half a dozen times for their own pleasure.

The plastic bolt shroud has always been a gripe for Tikka owners, not just because of the poor material choice, but also because it had a tendency to crack. The replacement shroud is formed from machined

anodised aluminium, providing a light yet robust alternative.

There is a bit of a knack to fitting it, and it should be done at the same time as replacing the bolt handle. Firstly use a hex-head key to pull the cocking indicator out from the large notch in the bolt shaft. With this done, rotate the shroud and indicator past the first small notch until it will go no further. At this point the shroud will slide off, allowing replacement.

If you intend to replace the bolt, hold off fitting the new shroud. Placing the hex-head key in the gap under the cocking indicator, turn it back into the large notch. The firing pin assembly will now be free to remove if required, and the bolt handle should easily slip out. Fixing the new handle in place, pull and twist the unit back past the small notch, remove the hex-head key and slide on the new shroud as previously explained. Turning the shroud back to the starting point completes the process, with the cocking indicator dropping back into the large notch.

The final action part upgrade comes from the bolt stop, which is also plastic. Replacement is straightforward, and achieved by pulling out the stop pin and substituting the new one. Be careful when the pin comes out, as the stop is spring-loaded and will disappear over your head if caution is not observed.

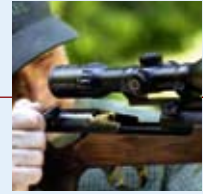
Turning our attention to the stock, Tikka's synthetic options are basic and functional, but that is about it. Here we would be breaking



The recoil slots with the AI magazine in between



Rifle accessories: Tikka



The tactical bolt is noticeably chunkier and easier to grip

the action free from its injection-moulded housing to fit one of Roedale's RCS II tactical stocks. Based on the legendary Accuracy International aluminium chassis design, this concept has been used in British sniper rifles since their introduction in 1982. Indeed, it was an AI rifle that claimed the world record for longest confirmed sniper kill in 2009. Corporal Craig Harrison of the Household Cavalry recorded two confirmed kills at no less than 2,475 metres. There is no doubt as to the design's pedigree.

Roedale has customised it further to allow Tikka owners to benefit from the same performance upgrade previously only afforded to those with Remington 700s. This bedding system cleverly solves the biggest flaw in the T3 design: the flimsy recoil lug. It also allows you to dispense with the plastic magazine, as the new stock accepts the trusted AI system.

The aluminium bedding block makes use of two raised ridges on the Tikka action, found in line with the action screw threads. On tightening the provided screws through the stock, the raised ridges are pulled down into two corresponding recesses in the bedding



The revamped Tikka benefits from a new bolt shroud

Get the kit

All accessories available from Roedale Precision. www.roedale.de

- RCS II Stock €750
- Bolt shroud €75
- Bolt Handle €120
- RH50 Match Bipod €265
- Viperskins (black/green) €205

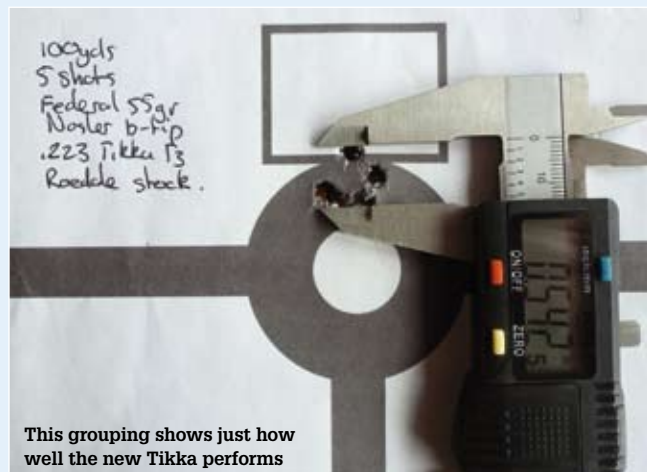
Tikka Stainless Varmint available from GMK. Note: the Tikka Tactical would be a better fit for this stock, but the varmint would suffice.

block, while the rest of the action cradles into the raised surface. The barrel is kept free floating. The machining tolerances are extremely tight, and I did struggle a bit to get it all aligned. With a little fiddling everything did come together, pulling in snugly. This was now one mean-looking rifle.

Unlike the AI stocks you will be accustomed to seeing, Roedale's version comes with the new Viper skins, streamlining and skeletonising the appearance. Available as a replacement for the old style, the modular design allows the new skins to be bolted onto the chassis in no time. I found this stock incredibly comfortable to use, aided by the adjustable length of pull and variable cheekpiece positioning. It is not intended as a stalking outfit, but excels when shooting prone or from the bonnet of a vehicle.

So how does it perform? Well, the only addition that should really have any noticeable affect is the stock. Putting the rifle through its paces showed immediate improvement. There was no question that the rifle's shootability had transformed. The extra weight and improved ergonomics ensured that. But there was more. Having run out of the Tikka's preferred 40-grain ammo, I used 55-grain Federals for testing, having previously recorded three-shot groups of 0.8in at 100 yards. Once on target, the newly pimped Tikka cut an impressive 0.54in with five shots. The improvement at longer range was more dramatic, with the 350-yard groups better than halving.

Sometimes aftermarket accessories are more about looking cool than making tangible improvements. This is certainly not the case here. The T3 in its factory clothing is like a caged animal desperate to be set free. It would be cruel not to open the door and let the Tikka fulfil its potential. ■



This grouping shows just how well the new Tikka performs