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Sporting Firearms Journal

**Sauer 303
Semiautomatic**

**Kilimanjaro's
New Flyweight!**

**The 1st
.450 N.E.**

July 2011 No. 257



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Kilimanja Walking Rifle

Ron Spomer

Okay, so it's a dream rifle. We all have them, don't we? A Winchester Model 92 .25-20, a Savage Model 99-E .22 High Power, maybe a brand-new H-S Precision M2000 VAR .204 Ruger with thumbhole stock. Mine (one of them anyway) just happens to be a double-lug bolt action no manufacturer has, to my knowledge, ever cataloged. But in .243 Winchester it's just what this doctor ordered.

This particular firearm is still not cataloged, and the one known example in existence was almost lost before it was completed. Its genesis was a Serengeti Tigercat I saw a few years back at a Safari Club International convention in Reno, Nevada, an annual shindig many of us hunting and shooting fanatics attend. You can find just about every dream rifle at this party, but not quite the little jewel I conjured up.

At the time, Serengeti honchos Larry Tahler and Rod Rogers were perfecting their idea of a light, trim, responsive little bolt action suitable for women and slighter-framed hunters. Their sample came close to what I've always imagined as the ultimate roaming rifle for still-hunting whitetails, stalking mule deer and

The Tigercat features a laminated stock, but you'd never know it.



A detailed photograph of a flyweight hunting rig. A wooden rifle with a black scope is the central element, resting on a brown and tan fur surface. To the right of the rifle is a box of Winchester ammunition, partially visible with the brand name in red. In the lower foreground, three brass bullets are scattered. Below the rifle, two hunting knives with colorful, multi-layered handles and white blades are positioned. The entire scene is set against a textured fur background.

ro's

The Perfect Flyweight Hunting Rig

Kilimanjaro's Walking Rifle

calling coyotes. Their first samples were built on Charles Daly mini-Mauser actions. While stock lines and overall workmanship looked impressive, and the rifles, at least the 6.5-284 Norma version I tested, shot beautifully, the oversized bolt shroud on the action overpowered the little rifle and contributed to wobbly and erratic

The Tigercat is everything one could hope for in a sleek, perfectly balanced sporting bolt action.

bolt travel. I suggested they try Kimber's 84M controlled-round feed action or Mel Forbes' Model 20 push-feed action as more balanced for the application. Rod and Larry looked at one another and nodded. "Funny," Larry said, "we were thinking the same thing."

A year later I had the pleasure of shooting a new version of the Tigercat in .338 Federal based on the Kimber 84M action and found it everything one could hope for in a sleek, perfectly balanced sporting bolt action. The stock belly was slim and slightly tapered, the grip open, the English walnut strik-



The Tigercat was delivered in a padded, nylon soft case plus a padded, Pelican-style hard plastic, lockable travel case.

ing without being gaudy – even the Schnabel forend looked right, terminating the classy stock with just the right saucy attitude. The five-point checkering pattern was understated but wholly functional, the satin finish was perfect and the metalwork smooth, precise and richly blued. The icing was the unique laminated stock. *Whoa* now. How can a gorgeous English walnut stock simultaneously be laminated?

Years ago a Montana gunsmith/stockmaker named Mel Smart answered that question with his ACRA-Bond Laminate in which he sliced a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch slab from the center of a stock blank, flipped it

over and end-to-end to reverse the grain both ways, then laminated it back into the center of the original two outer slabs. The resulting blank, shaped and contoured as usual, showed the classic mineral grain/marbling of traditional walnut with the exception of two thin lines and the unmatched center section running down the comb and belly where it was hardly noticed. Tests involving rain, snow banks and bathtubs proved the stock as stable as multilaminates but a whole lot prettier.

I ordered a Tigercat .243 Winchester.

Then the economy soured and, like many small, custom gunmak-



Left, the bolt root and trigger have been modified from the Kimber original. Talley one-piece aluminum mounts are in keeping with the light weight and smooth lines. Below, a flat milled on the side of the action reduces weight and provides a canvas for the maker's name, Serengeti.





Left, the original Kimber tang has been slightly reshaped, as has the bolt root. Note the three-position wing safety. Above, the original Kimber floorplate was nicely fitted.

ers, Serengeti was not moving enough stock to keep the doors open. It appeared my little dream rifle would die aborning. Then Erik Eike swooped in.

Eike, a Hawaiian attorney and businessman, had come to shooting and hunting rather late in life, beginning with shotgunning. However, once he tried rifles, he was hooked. Then he tried African big game hunting. Being an exacting individual who appreciated – no,

insisted on – the finest workmanship, highest quality materials and unfailing performance, he not unexpectedly was drawn to the few but stunning classic rifles coming out of an obscure plant in Kalispell, Montana: Serengeti. He bought several, and then he bought the company name, patents and other assets in the summer of 2009, rolling them into his newly formed Kilimanjaro Rifles company. Just in time. At no small

cost, Eike assumed responsibility for completing and delivering all Serengeti's outstanding orders while simultaneously launching 20 experimental prototype rifles in order to evaluate various actions, production techniques, quality controls and the like for future production.

Within two months my Tigercat was finished and delivered in a padded nylon case within a sturdy, wheeled Pelican-style travel case.

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Kilimanjaro's Walking Rifle

I opened it slowly, expecting to be delighted, fearing I might be disappointed.

As we say in deer hunting, there was no ground shrinkage; the little .243 Winchester rifle was gorgeous. As part of its custom services, Serengeti had forwarded for my approval photos of the rifle at various stages of production. Finding the stock lines a bit visually heavy, I kept requesting them to



Above, the Tigercat's muzzle is countersunk. Right, the smooth, contoured trigger shoe is a modified original.

be trimmed and the Schnabel forend toned down. My intent was a 6-pound rifle that would feel as lively and responsive between my hands as the Winchester Model 94 I'd begun deer hunting with in the

Below, the shadowline cheekpiece aids in aligning eye under scope. There is virtually no recoil to absorb. Below right, the grip end is checkered and protected with a scalloped steel skeleton plate.



1960s. Compared to bolt-action sporters I've grown accustomed to over the years, the new Serengeti Tigercat felt almost like a Red Ryder BB gun. Maybe a bit too trim and light. Had I exceeded my intentions? No.



After test firing and then hunting with the rifle, I quickly adapted to its trim lines, superb balance and quick handling characteristics. It now appears this is indeed the rifle I was imagining.

The toned-down Schnabel tip was just what Spomer had in mind.

The trigger snaps at a light 1.75 pounds with no perceptible creep nor overtravel. The oversized shoe makes it feel even lighter. I worried that this might be too light for effective control afield, especially in the cold with gloves on, but that didn't prove to be the case. During five days of coyote hunting with

The new Serengeti Tigercat felt almost like a Red Ryder BB gun.

temperatures ranging from 20 degrees Fahrenheit to the mid-60s, I fired six times and flattened five coyotes, missing one by pulling the shot right as it loped straight at me. It wasn't the trigger's fault. I credit the rifle's quick handling and instant trigger break with helping to catch a fleeting coyote as it raced between brush patches at about 80 yards.

While a broad, hand-stuffing forend is usually recommended for stability control, I discovered, as hoped, the trim front end of this rifle fits my smallish hands better than most factory stocks, providing a secure grip that makes me feel as if I have complete control and can swing the rifle into action instantly. At the same time, the rounded bottom snugles quickly and securely within the tapering rubber grips of a





Above, virtually every combination of powders, primers and bullets tried shot well. Right, this coyote ran but couldn't hide from the smooth, fast little Tigercat.

Bog-Pod yoke as well as the narrowing V of a Steady Stix II bipod. The fat, flat-bottomed forends of full-on varmint stocks fit these ta-

pered rests poorly and tend to tilt if not perfectly centered. The Tigercat's narrow, rounded belly almost self-centers.

Before shooting the rifle for the first time, I took a sight-seeing tour down its barrel with a Hawk-eye borescope. It was a smooth

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Kilimanjaro's Walking Rifle

trip. The tube was smooth with no tooling marks and no obvious metal fouling, even though the barrel came dirty due to proof-shooting at the factory. After cleaning it shined like a mirror and looked even smoother. The test target sent with the rifle showed three holes spanning .558 inch on centers with Remington 80-grain Pointed Soft Point factory ammunition.

It was cool, cloudy and threatening rain when I fired my first shots with the new rifle. I shot off a portable Shooter's Ridge bench in the desert with a traditional table top tripod under the forend and eared sandbag under the toe. A Swarovski 3-9x 36mm scope set in Talley one-piece aluminum rings handled the alignment. I managed to park three 95-grain Winchester Ballistic Silvertips inside one inch and three 100-grain Winchester Power-Points inside .800 inch. The next time out Remington's Premier Scirocco Bonded loads drove a trio of 95-grain bullets into .894

inch and three 100-grain Core-Lokt PSPs into .969 inch.

Such performance was adequate for all the coyote-through-deer hunting I'll probably do, but no rifle nut can leave a good thing alone when there are Redding dies in his gun room and a variety of bullets and powders. I began handloading bullets from 55-grain Nosler Ballistic Tips to 95-grain Berger VLDs. As the table shows, groups varied from a discouraging 1.95 inches to a heartening .294 inch. All were shot outdoors under varying weather from a portable, folding Shooter's Ridge bench.

I could continue testing and tweaking, but I'm satisfied this

.243 Winchester Tigercat Select Handloads

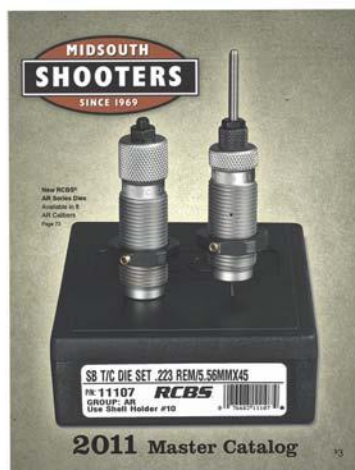
bullet (grains)	powder	charge (grains)	primer	velocity (fps)	group (inches)
55 Nosler Ballistic Tip	Big Game	49.0	CCI 200	3,852	.706
58 Hornady V-MAX	Varget	44.0	Federal 210	3,657	.774
65 Hornady V-MAX		41.5		3,434	.294
70 Nosler Ballistic Tip	Big Game	44.0	CCI 200	3,385	1.075
75 Sierra hollowpoint		43.5		3,305	.589
80 Nosler Ballistic Tip	H-414	45.0		3,325	1.190
80 Barnes TTSX		45.5	Federal 210	3,260	1.330
85 Sierra boat-tail hollowpoint		45.0	CCI 200	3,243	1.090
95 Berger VLD	H-4831sc	45.5	Federal 210	2,980	.910

Be Alert - Publisher cannot accept responsibility for errors in published load data.


Specifications

Action: Kimber 84M, stainless steel, short action, double lug; bolt handle and tang custom contoured
Floorplate, trigger bow and follower: original Kimber custom contoured
Safety: three-position wing
Barrel: 22-inch Lilja stainless steel
Twist rate: one in 9 inches
Metal finish: Kilimanjaro black SereKote (by CERAKOTE) toned to match most satin-finished scopes
Recoil Lug: custom made from block steel to 0.25x0.625x 0.75 inch
Bedding: epoxy with steel pillars
Sling swivels: Dakota-style inletted, two screw mounts
Scope rings: Talley one-piece aluminum
Stock: best grade Turkish walnut
Checkering: four-panel deluxe at 22 lpi
Stock finish: tung oil/urethane mix
Recoil pad: Pachmayr Decelerator .346 inch with black .223-inch black spacer
Grip cap: steel, skeleton surrounding checkered wood
Trigger: original Kimber reshaped and slicked

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little sporter is shooting as well as I need or can handle. I call it an honest MOA rifle, possibly ¾ MOA with the right loads. That's more than sufficient for rough field shooting. I'm not going to shoot varmints with it from a bench nor ask it to lay out 6-ounce ground squirrels at 500 yards. Coyotes, pronghorns, mule deer and whitetails, look out. And I might try an elk with a TSX bullet some day. This little Kilimanjaro Serengeti Tigercat with the big name has definitely fulfilled a dream. 



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