

# Rifles

Ron Spomer



*Classy to look at and a pleasure to carry, the Kilimanjaro Tigercat functions flawlessly and promises consistent accuracy, outing after outing, year after year.*

Felines. Lions and tigers and cheetahs, oh my. I've always admired cats for their elusive beauty, aloof confidence and quick, deadly power. And I now possess all of that in a hunting cat of my own, a Kilimanjaro Tigercat.

The Tigercat is an effective blend of classic materials and modern manufacturing techniques that are shaped into the classic style, which has defined an efficient sporting rifle since the late 19th century. Trim, light, lively, responsive, eminently shootable and a delight to the eye. It may not do to repel

a horde of home invaders under cover of darkness, engage an enemy force at 1,500 yards or even toss behind the seat of a pickup truck, but it's nigh perfect when one wishes to delight in the freedom to hunt the natural world for spiritual and physical sustenance.

You won't spot many Tigercats in retail stores because Kilimanjaro rifle company of Honolulu builds most of them to customer order.

*A special feature of Kilimanjaro's light and lively Tigercat is its ACRA-Bond Laminate walnut stock.*

There are standard features such as stainless-steel, match-grade barrels, special select Turkish walnut, Stealth Lamination, trim lines and light weight, but buyers can choose to have their rifles built on several bolt-actions receivers: Kimber 84M or 84L; Weatherby Mark V Lightweight; or Sako 85S.

Kilimanjaro craftsmen modify those actions by shaving superfluous weight; adding a custom recoil lug; and squaring, smoothing and polishing action components. With Kimber actions, which I consider the perfect foundation for these





elegant rifles, Kilimanjaro turns barrel contours so they appear to be one with the action, flowing from the receiver ring as if machined from the same block of steel.

Despite its African name and Pacific Island home, Kilimanjaro is very much a North American rifle company. Its genesis was Mel Smart, the Montana gunsmith/stock-maker who perfected what he called the ACRA-Bond Laminated walnut stock. By ripping a quarter-inch-wide slab from the center of any walnut blank, flipping it over and epoxying it back in place under massive pressure, Smart created the structural stability of plywood without the multi-layered look of a laminated stock. The single quarter-inch, center layer of wood, noticeable only along the top and bottom of each stock, prevents the stock from warping, even when it's soaked for days in water.

In 2003 Rod Rogers acquired ACRA-Bond Laminates to create Serengeti Rifles, makers of fine custom bolt-actions utilizing a refined Montana 1999 controlled-

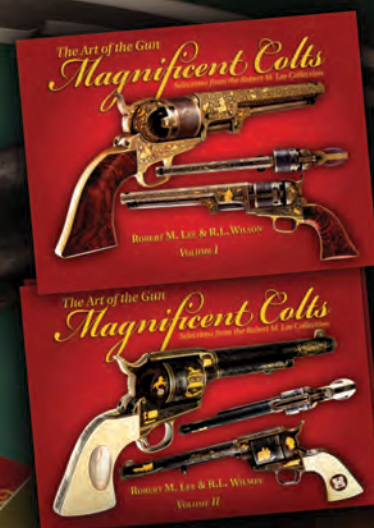
round-feed, double-lug action. In 2008 one of Serengeti's customers, Erik Eike, bought the Serengeti name, model lines and patents to begin building under his newly created "Kilimanjaro Standards" quality assurance manual.

The Tigercat custom 243 Winchester shown here was started under Serengeti and finished under Kilimanjaro. At 6 pounds 11 ounces with a Swarovski Z3 scope set in Talley Light Weight rings, this slim bolt-action, built on a stainless Kimber 84M controlled-round-feed short-action, represents my vision of an ideal stalking rifle. It's perfect for medium game such as pronghorns and deer.

I chose the 243 Winchester chambering in anticipation of shooting it a lot. The light-recoiling round is inexpensive and a delight to shoot at targets and steel plates while training. It's ideal for the occasional marauding coyote or rampaging rock chuck in the garden. With the right bullet and careful shot placement, it will suffice for elk.

The Best Grade Turkish walnut

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stock with its nascent Schnabel tip was shaped at my direction to fit my particular esthetic and rather small hands. At its narrowest point behind the forend tip it spans just one inch. At the mid-line of the five-point checkering panel the forend is but 1½-inch wide and equally deep, a pleasing balance.

Checkering on the gently curving pistol grip runs 22 lines-per-inch and is repeated on the forend and inside a skeleton grip cap. A shadow-line cheek pad helps weld my face to the stock and align my eye with the scope axis. Two-screw, Dakota-style inlet swivel studs provide attachment points for quick-detach slings. A black, ½-inch Decelerator pad brings length-of-pull to 13½ inches.

Less noticeable, but enhancing the function and durability of this little centerfire, are subtle touches to the metalwork. The 1-9 twist, 22-inch Lilja stainless steel barrel has

been contoured to mate flush with the 84M receiver ring. The junction was polished so precisely that the joint is impossible to detect. The bolt-handle root was reshaped to make it more elegant, as was the tang. The original Kimber bottom metal/floorplate was reshaped by Kilimanjaro craftsmen in Montana to a more rounded, flattering contour. They have an eye for this stuff, and it shows in the overall look of this rifle.

While I wanted the durability of stainless steel, I did not want the look, so Kilimanjaro finished all exterior and much interior metal with Kilimanjaro Black Serekote, a custom, ceramic metal coating from Cerakote that matches the matte black of most of today's scopes. Rogers added a custom-fabricated, oversized recoil lug, and then bedded the barreled action to the stock using steel pillars and epoxy.

The result of all this is a custom

rifle that does what a custom rifle should – satisfy its owner.

My Tigercat carries like a baton, handles like a wand and shoots like a machine. Winchester's 100-grain Power Point ammo groups .800-inch 3-shot clusters. Remington's 80-grain PSP Core-Lokt and 90-grain Sciroccos land .550- to .969-inch. Handloads of Hornady 65-grain V-Max over 41.5 grains of Varget generate 3,434 fps and have notched one-hole groups spreading .294-inch, while Berger's 95-grain VLD Hunting bullet, driven 2,900 fps with Hodgdon's 4831 powder, have landed inside .445-inch.

This performance has been consistent outing after outing, year after year. The rifle holds zero and maintains its accuracy while functioning flawlessly and looking classy in the process. It's a pleasure to carry, a confidence builder to shoot and a delight to call my little Tigercat. 🐅

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