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SHAKING UP THE RIMFIRE RIFLE SCENE

TIPPMANN ARMS

BY ARON BRIGHT A51967

Tippmann Arms of New Haven, Indiana, is a firearms manufacturer that builds rimfire rifles. These rifles are not only great for recreational shooting and plinking, but are very well suited for Steel Challenge competition. The diminutive MMSSA model would be perfect for young shooters or for anyone looking for a light and nimble rifle. The light weight of this rifle will make fast target-to-target transitions possible.

The MMSSA model is in the popular AR platform, and many or most AR components and accessories are compatible. The MMSSA came with flip-up adjustable iron sights. There was no adjustment



necessary on the rifle used in this review; the gun hit at 30 yards right out of the box. It comes with several features, such as a fluted 16-inch barrel, and upper and lower receivers that are both aluminum. The hand guard is composite and free floated. The stock is adjustable, and there is a top full-length Picatinny rail for placing other sights, dots or scopes. This is handy, as most Steel Challenge shooters are going to put different sights on this rifle.

Performance on the range has a lot to do with the trigger. The MMSSA comes with a factory-installed Elftmann match trigger. Elftmann triggers are very popular these days in competition. The trigger on the demo model is sweet, adjustable from four down to two and three-quarter pounds. It was light and crisp, and a pleasure to shoot, and the reset was positive. I cannot remember a better trigger on a factory rimfire rifle ever.

The first shooting to test the gun's reliability was in my back yard. The first demand on the competition range is boom, boom, boom; the serious competitor needs the gun to fire every time. After loading up three 25-round magazines with some really nice Remington Thunderbolts, I headed out to the backyard and a stump that I use for a back stop. All 75 rounds went off without a hiccup of any kind, which surprised me a little, considering the ammo. After two slow and steady magazine dumps, the third magazine was fired as rapidly as I could without shooting over the stump into the pole barn. The MMSSA passed the first reliability test just fine.

The second time it was fired was during the setup phase of the SNS Indiana 400. I fired several carbines that day and did some chrono work with all of them as well. During this informal shooting of the MMSSA, I confirmed the sights as spot on. From a rest, it would print postage-stamp-size groups on steel targets at 30 yards, which is more than adequate for steel shooting, and the excellence of the trigger was very noticeable. Acquainted with the gun. I used a variety of ammunition, and there was less than a handful of rounds that did not fire. The gun fed fine; several rounds of ammo showed the firing pin had struck but there was no bang. I believe the blame belongs to the ammo.

STEEL CHALLENGE AND TIPPMANN ARMS

BY JAKE MARTENS, A52987



THERE IS NO DENYING that Steel Challenge is growing; two of the most popular divisions are Rimfire Rifle and PCC. A rifle allows for three points of contact, making it easier to control during firing, especially a rimfire. Steel shooting with rimfire rifles has always been dominated by 10/22 variants. It is inexpensive, accurate, and there is an entire industry of aftermarket parts to make them into race-competition rifles. Pistol Caliber Carbine built on the AR platform have exploded in competition circles these last couple of years, including Steel Challenge. It only makes sense that having the same platform in your Rimfire Rifle as your PCC will make the transition back and forth during a match easier. Tippmann Arms has brought that model to market now for competitors and plinkers to use, an affordable AR platform 22lr that allows for most AR platform aftermarket parts for customizing it to your liking.

Tippmann Arms has an interesting history, one most commonly associated with their airsoft, paintball products and military simulation kits. Actually, they got their start manufacturing half-scale replica machine guns. These are highly sought after on the collectible market after the company stopped production and formed Tippmann Pneumatics Incorporated. They became the industry leader in paintball gear, having been accredited with the development of several technologies in this field. Tippmann was acquired by different private equity firms and companies, but in 2017 Dennis Tippmann, Jr. bought back the name Tippmann Arms from Tippmann Sports. Tippmann Jr had served as the President and CEO of Tippmann Sports until 2013 and was very excited to have the company that his father started in 1983 back under the ownership of the family.

Now back under family ownership, they got back to building 22lrs, this time with the release of the M4-22, a premium .22 caliber rifle with aluminum upper and receivers that are largely mil-spec compatible. The model that we reviewed is their competition-ready model, but they also have pistol models, a Classic and Tactical as well as a Pro model. If you were at the WSSC you also got to mess around with their full auto version. Starting under \$600, there are several models to pick from and to upgrade as to how you would want it for Steel Challenge.

I was able to grab a decked-out model from Brian Conley that he had at the Hunters HD Gold Tent to shoot in the Area 5 Steel Challenge. This particular Tippmann was painted by The Armory Guns and Ammo in Pelham, Alabama, and all the cool kids told me it was an "Iron Man" theme. I get it – Steel Challenge, Iron Man – it wasn't lost on me. I shot all eight stages during the A5 Steel Challenge Championship running the new CCI Clean-22 red high-velocity ammo. The only malfunction that I experienced with either model was during the match, of course, a failure to feed. Between the Tippmann MMSSA model for test and the Hunters HD Gold, there have been well over 2,000 rounds fired with a variety of ammo. If you are looking for a value-packed true AR-style 22, check out the offerings from Tippmann Arms. ■



I fired Federal 36-grain copper plated, Winchester 36-grain copper plated, Remington 40-grain Thunderbolt, and 40-grain CCI mini mags over the chronograph just to see how things went. The CCI ammo was the only one to match or exceed the velocity advertised on the box. (To be fair, the ammunition boxes were advertising muzzle velocity, and the chronograph was about 10 feet away from the muzzle.) The CCI exceeded the advertised velocity by 20 to 30 feet per second. All of this ammunition fed reliably through the gun on this day, with a few dud rounds here and there.

Match conditions usually find a way to bring about gun and gear failures like no other factor out there; they work great in practice but like to choke in the match. Normally, the shooting portion of these reviews is just Jake and me. Since we were dealing with a rimfire rifle, I brought my son Royce along to do some shooting as well. This would give us a couple of advantages while testing this rifle – one, he is young and we can see how this rifle suits the younger crowd, and two, Royce can break anything, and usually right away. How rugged is this rifle?

Royce and I arrived before Jake; we did a little pistol practice, and then we set up the stages and did a little test firing of the MMSSA. Long before Jake arrived, we were out of ammo and had to wait on Jake for resupply. We fired about 1,500 rounds of ammunition during this early phase; there was no gun cleaning or lubing prior to shooting the gun for times. Jake arrived with some Winchester ammo that was expected to be problematic, but he also brought a

nice batch of CCI coated rimfire ammo, both the sub-sonic and super-sonic varieties. It's always nice to see Jake and even nicer when he brings ammo.

The first course of fire was *Showdown*. We set the course up to the proper distances with the proper-sized targets. However, we only shot from the left side box because of a light but steady rain; we put the shooting box under the carport in the bay so we could stay dry. (Standing outside in the rain all afternoon is a bad idea; that is how George Washington caught a fatal case of pneumonia. Besides, only mad dogs and Englishmen stand out in the rain.) Royce led off the shooting with times of 3.97, 3.56, 2.97, 3.81 and 3.36 seconds. This 12-year-old kid has done some steel challenge matches but not recently. He has a rifle outfitted with a dot so he is not used to iron sights, but overall it was a nice set of runs. Next, Jake rattled off times of 2.55, 2.43, 2.42, 2.56, 2.19 and 2.38 seconds; he has done steel match shooting more recently than Royce and I, but not with iron sights. My times were 3.03, 2.93, 2.45, 2.51, and 2.58 seconds. I cannot remember the last time I shot a rimfire rifle in a steel match, so I will take these times. Royce had said it earlier while we were burning through ammo, and he repeated, "this gun is fun to shoot!" I concur the fun factor was indeed very high.

Next we did some first shots with the



rifle, starting with the ready position and coming up for one shot only on the front left-hand plate of the *Showdown* array. Royce's times in the order shot were 0.95, 0.97, 1.34, 0.88, 0.90, 0.61 seconds. Jake's times in the same scenario were 0.60, 0.50, 0.48, 0.46, 0.46, 0.54, 0.55 seconds, and my times were 0.60, 0.56, 0.60, 0.63, 0.62, 0.55, 0.65 seconds. Obviously, the first shot is a place where some time is being left on the table by this trio. Some practice would be nice and we could all definitely benefit by bringing first shot times down, but the gear is going to get blamed here as well as is our lack of ability. As mentioned earlier, the flip-up iron sights we are using are accurate but not well-suited for the serious competitor. I cannot speak to the level of sight picture the other two shooters were getting here, but I was trying to see just enough to ensure a hit.

The next course was *Smoke and Hope*, with nice big targets that are fun to shoot fast. The rain had stopped so we ventured out from under cover and got down to business. Royce led off the action and recorded times of 3.85, 2.48, 3.51, 2.64, 2.92, 2.92 seconds on the six runs that he shot; Jake recorded times of 2.41, 2.50, 2.52, 2.56, 2.70, and 2.75 seconds, and my times were 2.40, 2.12, 2.30, 2.26 and 2.06 seconds. This stage is always fun because of the fast-paced action, and the experience was great using the MMSSA.

We decided to do a set of draws on the large steel of *Smoke and Hope* for comparison to the times on the smaller plate of *Showdown*. We were all warmed up now and figured this was our best chance to be impressive. Royce uncorked draw times of 0.65, 0.54, 0.60, 0.47, 0.52 seconds and was pretty pleased with his efforts. Jake put up some decent numbers as well with times of 0.49, 0.52, 0.43, 0.43, 0.42 seconds. My times were 0.46, 0.51, 0.45, 0.45, 0.38, and 0.49 seconds. These times just go to show that if you get close enough to big targets, fast times are possible regardless of shooting ability.

Regarding the magazines, they look like regular AR-style magazines; however, there is a release on the magazine that allows the cover to slide down and out of the way, exposing the inner mechanism. This allows the shooter to pull the spring and follower down out of the way and drop ammunition into place in the magazine much easier and faster than loading one round at a time in the traditional fashion. When loading the magazine in this fashion, one has to be careful that the ammunition falls into place in the proper orientation or the works will get jammed up. (Ask us how we know.) The magazines come with capacities of 25, 15 or 10 rounds. The gun comes with two magazines, and the buyers can decide what capacity they want.

Following the two stages of shooting for time, another shooting free-for-all broke out and we used up several boxes of ammunition. The gun was put through its paces and performed well. We did have a handful of rounds that had firing pin marks on the cartridge but did not go off; one particular round was tried three times without success. Obviously, you cannot blame the gun in this case.

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