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HUNTING PREP  
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MAN

# MAGNUM

FOR HUNTERS & SHOOTERS



## Howa

### Mini Action Rifle .223 Remington

RARE 1907 MAUSER  
AND 6.8x57 CARTRIDGE

New South African Gundog  
Field Trial



**SPRINGFIELD ARMORY**  
Echelon 4.5F Pistol - Threaded Barrel

**CANIK  
FACTORY  
TOUR**

**HUNTING**

Mountain Zebra  
Black Wildebeest  
Kudu



**TESTED**

DNT The One 7-35x56 FFP Scope

March/April 2025  
R80,00 incl VAT Namibia N\$80,00





# HOWA

# MINI ACTION

Dainty .223 Remington hunter



I HAVE always been fascinated by short, handy, bolt-action hunting rifles. To me these rifles make much more sense than a long-barrelled piece that snags on every branch when stalking, they are much more comfortable to carry all day as they are lighter, plus they are handier to use. Being well over 6 feet tall, I have it difficult enough winding my way under overhanging branches or through thick bush to have to worry about the rifle getting hung up on brush. Yet, I have never

owned a true mini action rifle as the calibres they are made in were too small for my purposes. I resorted to having the barrels of my regular hunting rifles shortened.

Mini actions were available locally – the Brno ZKW 465 comes to mind. But, chambered in .22 Hornet, I could not consider it for the type of hunting I was doing. Later there was the CZ 527 chambered in calibres like .223, 6.5 Grendel and 7.62x39, all short cartridge calibres. However, production of the 527 has been discontinued.

As far as I can determine, the only new mini action you can currently buy is a Howa. Most shooters are familiar with the well-known Howa brand from Japan. The company was established in Febru-

ary 1907 under the name of Toyoda Loom Works, Ltd. with the purpose of domestically mass-producing textile machines which were imported at that time. In 1936, Showa Heavy Industries, Ltd was established and started producing rifles, cannonballs, and parts for airplanes. Production of the Arisaka rifle started in 1941 and in 1945 the company was renamed Howa Machinery Ltd. Plenty of developments have occurred since then, notably the Model 1500 which is still produced and, in 2015, the mini action was released.

Being a mini action means that the rifle is lighter, shorter and, in theory, allows faster follow-up shots. The action is 12% shorter than the short action, with a length of 6 inches and weighing only 289g. In comparison, the Howa short action is 6.9" long and weighs 371g, while the long action is 7.4" and weighs 431g. This is a rather big difference which completely changes the feel of the various rifles.

The test rifle is chambered in .223



The mini is also available with a synthetic stock.



Rem and has a 20-inch threaded ( $\frac{1}{2} \times 28$ ) heavy barrel with a 1:8 barrel twist. Although classed as a heavy barrel, the diameter at the muzzle of the mini is 18.5mm – it's 21mm on the short action Howa rifle chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor. So, even the 'heavy barrel' has been scaled down to the action size.

According to Howa, the mini action rifles are available in 6mm ARC, .223 Rem., 6.5 Grendel, 7.62x39 and 350 Legend, although it is not a given that all these calibres will be available locally.

The standard stock is the HTI synthetic, which is pillar-bedded and has a rubber recoil pad. The test rifle came with a Boyds Classic walnut stock which gives it a more traditional look. I was disappointed with the finish on the stock as it had some teardrop varnish spots and the wood-to-metal finish was poor. I thought that this might just be the one stock but on checking another, the same poor finish was revealed.

The receiver is machined and the bolt, with two locking lugs, is forged. According to Howa, the firing pin can be removed without tools, but I did not try this. The bolt has an integral bolt handle, pressure vent holes to deflect gases away from the shooter (should the worst happen), and an M-16 style extractor/ejector is used. The 'bottom metal' which

includes the trigger guard, is made of plastic. This saves weight and although not as strong as steel, has proven to be durable.

Howa uses a three-position side safety which means the rifle can be unloaded with the safety catch engaged.

The 2-stage HACT Trigger features a creep free, crisp, light trigger pull and consistent let-off. To further ensure sub-MOA 3-shot groups with premium factory ammo, the barrels are cold hammer forged and chambered symmetrically at centre of axis with head space set to stringent and exacting specs. Bolt faces are trued and squared to the chamber.

A plastic 10-round detachable magazine is supplied with the rifle and the stock came fitted with sling swivel studs.

The overall rifle length is a mere 101cm and it weighs 3.2kg. This was a bit heavier than I expected but keep in

mind that it has a walnut stock and a heavy barrel. On the range I appreciated the weight as it made for a better balanced rifle, especially when shooting off-hand. Fitted with a lighter synthetic stock it might even be too light.

When I picked it up, the rifle felt just right. It came easy to the eye, the mini action was very smooth, and inserting the 10-round magazine was effortless. The release lever is in front of the magazine and big enough to manipulate quickly, yet small enough not to be pressed accidentally while stalking in the bush.

For the range session I fitted the rifle with two-piece Remington scope bases (the same as used on the short and long actions), and chose a Zeiss Conquest 2-8x42 scope that weighs 475g, as mounting a large, heavy scope would defeat the purpose of the mini action. My Swarovski Z3 3-10x42, weighing only 360g should be an even better choice for the diminutive package. Also, should you choose to add a suppressor, the short 20-inch barrel will ensure that you still



Quality .223 ammo is available for plinking or hunting. I even managed to get hold of a box of PMP rounds.



Tan is an optional colour on the Howa mini.





Three-position safety lever on the right, and bolt release on the left of the action.



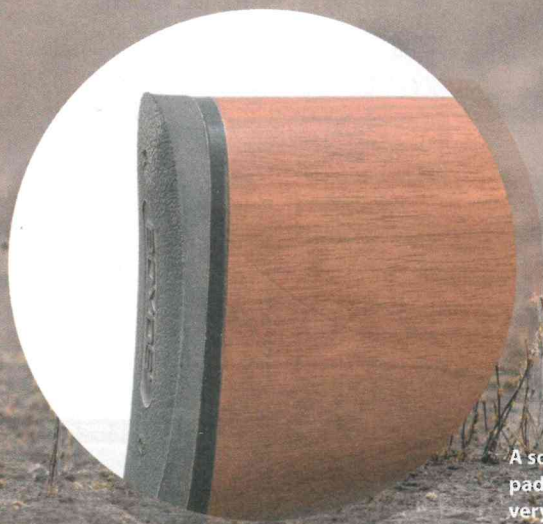
A .308 Win cartridge gives scale to the action.



A 10-round magazine is supplied.



Cartridge overall length will be determined by the magazine's size.



A soft rubber recoil pad reduced the very little recoil even further.



The bottom 'metal' is made of plastic.

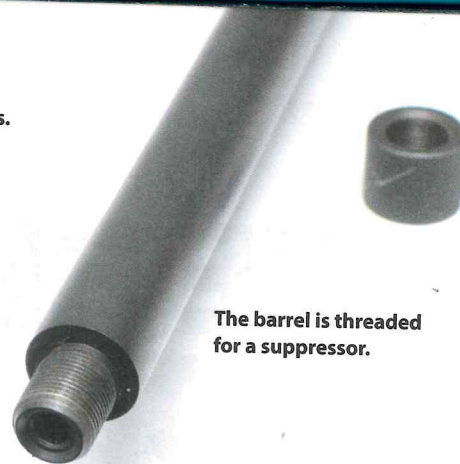




The short bolt has two locking lugs and pressure release vents.



All three cartridges have 55gr bullets. Note the difference in the cartridge overall length.



The barrel is threaded for a suppressor.

have a relatively short, lightweight rifle.

I used JBM Ballistics' website to see which bullets would stabilize in the 1:8 twist and the figures were encouraging for all 55gr bullets, for example the 55gr Hornady V-MAX has a stability figure of 2.42 which is very good. The heavier Hornady 80gr ELD Match bullets might work, just missing out on a green (good) rating, while 65gr Sierra Gamekings and even 70gr Barnes Triple Shok bullets got the green light. However, keep in mind that this does not guarantee these bullets will work well in the specific rifle but, from past experience with the JBM calculator I know that it is fairly accurate.

Using handloads with long for calibre bullets might be a problem if you want to feed from the magazine as it had about 2mm of space left to seat bullets further out than the PMP factory ammo 55gr soft point bullets. Norma's factory ammo with 55gr Oryx soft points had a shorter cartridge overall length than the PMP ammo.

The two-stage trigger did perform as claimed. It had slight creep but broke at a crisp 3lbs as measured on my Wheeler Trigger Pull Scale.

For the test I only had three types of factory ammunition available: STV Scorpio 55gr FMJ, Sellier & Bellot 55gr FMJ and a pack of PMP 55gr soft points. The first three shots (STV ammo) that I used to get the scope on target at 50m, touched. At 100m a three-shot group with the same ammo measured 11mm (.38MOA), and the Sellier & Bellot ammo

delivered a spread of 25mm (.86MOA) centre-to-centre. The PMP ammunition performed the same with a group of 24mm (.83MOA) c-c. I shot two more groups with each type of ammunition and all the results were less than 1MOA at 100m. This seems to support Howa's claim that the mini action is a sub-MOA rifle.

I recorded the velocities of the two types of full metal jacket ammo with a Labradar LX; the Sellier & Bellot averaged 3 269fps while the STV ammo was 3 172fps. These velocities are on par with, for example, Hornady's 55gr V-Max factory ammo with a claimed velocity of 3 240fps. However, keep in mind that the Howa delivered these similar velocities with the short 20-inch barrel.

Although the .223 calibre of the mini action limits hunting use to small animals, good quality hunting ammunition is available and Norma 55gr Oryx factory ammo comes to mind. These bullets are tough but expand well, and should work well on springbuck or smaller game.

I was surprised at the accuracy of the rifle, especially given that the FMJ ammo I used is very cheap. Recoil with all loads was mild and at between R11 and R12.50 per round, the Howa will make an excellent training rifle.

These dainty rifles will very easily become your favourite once you've tried them. They are the opposite of the modern trend to use heavy barrels, adjustable chassis or stocks, and long suppressors. I think many hunters have forgotten what a pleasure a small rifle is to use in the veld. The mini will also make for a good bakkie rifle, taking up less space and should work well for problem animal control.

If you are in the market for a small, lightweight hunter that is also an excellent choice for teaching novices and youngsters to shoot, the Howa mini action is a perfect choice. Price is around R17 500 (for the heavy barrel version), which is good value for money. For stockists contact African Outdoor Sports [admin@aosports.co.za](mailto:admin@aosports.co.za)

