

Musgrave Model 21

By Pierre van der Walt

The Musgrave name is to South Africa what Winchester is to America: a name deeply ingrained in the rifle psyche of the country.



Musgrave was founded by the late Ben Musgrave snr. It started out as a barrel making and customizing concern for the South African Bisley fraternity and evolved into a state-owned sporting arms manufacturer. The state sold the brand to Frik du Plooy of the Wildman group and so ownership of this historically significant company reverted to private ownership. Although Musgrave used surplus

Mauser K-98 actions as platform for its rifles for many years, it successfully dabbled with in house designs such as the single-shot RSA target action and its magazine-fed sporting derivative, the Vrystaat series. These were controlled-feed, external rotating extractor systems on dual opposed front locking lug designs.

From the 1980's Musgrave switched to modern, recessed extractor, push-feed action designs such as the Model

80 and Model 90. When Musgrave reverted to private ownership, the Model 80/90 designs were dropped. The focus reverted to the ample supplies of Mauser actions available to the company. In anticipation for the day when the supply of Mauser actions would dry up, Musgrave began design work on a thoroughly modern action not long after the advent of the 21st century.

It was appropriately decided that upon introduction the designation of the

new Musgrave would be the Model-21. About a decade ago the first prototype landed on Frik du Plooy's desk. Then the refinement began. He was adamant that all parts and components had to be low tolerance and mil-spec; in other words that all parts between all production versions would have to be fully and freely interchangeable. The action had to come off the production line essentially blue-printed and without any need for fitting.

Material selection was equally critical. Only the most suitable steel for every specific part would be used. Frik wanted to build a new Musgrave that could be handed down from generation to generation and which he could sell with a transferrable, no-questions, 50-year guarantee. In other words, a guarantee like no other the international gun trade has never seen.

About two years ago the design, which had progressed through several

prototypes reached the state where an industrialized version was ready. This version was subjected to field trials for over a year. Although it passed the field test with flying colours, daily use showed where its user-friendliness could be improved even more. These minor modifications were introduced, tested and then the green light for production given.



The Musgrave Model 21 action is a 3-lug push-feed design with the extractor recessed in one of the lugs. Ejection is achieved by means of a typical modern spring-loaded plunger recessed in the bolt face. The cartridge case head is fully enclosed with a rim that is thick enough so that it can be opened up to accommodate cases with rim diameters up to 13,84mm (0.545") or .404 Jeffery size, which obviously also caters for standard belted magnums.

It is a so-called 'fat-body' shaft design. The lugs have essentially the same diameter as the bolt shaft, but recesses have been machined into the shaft around them so that the bolt can engage the shoulders in the action ring. This kind of design controls gas that may escape a ruptured case very well.

The bolt handle is contoured for easy use and protrudes far enough from the stock to grasp easily. The handle is welded to the bolt shaft. The bolt shaft has been provided with oblong recesses for visual appeal and dirt collection. It is very modern in appearance.

The Model-21 system offers feature I have not encountered on a other bolt

action rifle. If the bolt is pushed forward, but not rotated, the bolt locks lightly into place. It is the only design that can be so carried without the bolt closing itself or sliding open. This is a deliberate feature to enable hunters to carry the rifle with the bolt 'lifted'. But secure.

The receiver bridge and ring geometry duplicates that of the Remington M-700. The action is drilled and tapped and the base hole spacings are exactly the same as on the Remington M-700 long action. That means that bases, rings and Picatinny rails will never be problematic.

The Model-21 is long enough to handle cartridges from .22-250 Remington to the .375 H&H Magnum. The standard magazine box interior measures 84,5mm. That is sufficient for cartridges with maximum a length equal to the .30-06 Springfield. A magazine spacer will be inserted and a shorter follower used for short cartridges. The action is beefy enough and specifically dimensioned to be able to handle magnum length cartridges.





The magazine and trigger guard assembly can best be described as similar to the CZ-550. The magazine latch is a spring-loaded plunger that holds the stirrup style floorplate in position. When the latch is depressed towards the front face of the trigger guard, the floorplate is released and swings open to reveal a traditional W-ribbon spring and follower. The profile of the floorplate is flat with just the edges rounded.

The bolt stop-cum-release assembly is situated on the left side of the receiver bridge. It is a big, sturdy unit that pulls away from the action. Unlike on a Mauser this latch is manipulated at the rear and not the front.

The bolt shroud is sized and shaped to block the lug raceways and deflect any gas that may flow back towards the shooter. It is equipped with a two-position side-swing safety and is reminiscent of the Winchester M-70 safety.

The trigger of the Musgrave M-21 is fully adjustable for creep, weight and overtravel, but the stock must be separated from the metal to make any trigger adjustments.

The Model-21 is designed to make the action interchangeable across the entire range of Musgrave platforms. This includes the following:

- Hunting rifles - equipped with Musgrave's De Luxe, Field, and Hunter stocks.
- Sport rifles - equipped with Musgrave's Laminated stocks and Musgrave Chassis Precision aluminum chassis.
- Professional rifles (PH model) - equipped with Musgrave's synthetic Lo-Coil stocks.



Test Rifle

Wildland was furnished with a Musgrave Model-21 on a light-coloured, solid walnut Musgrave Lo-Coil Varmint stock. The Varmint stock has a classic comb and a ventilated beavertail profile forend. The patented Lo-Coil stock was designed to manage recoil better than traditional stock designs. The grip incorporates a palm-swell with a bronze coloured Musgrave escutcheon recessed in a contrasting wooden grip cap. All panels are hand checkered in a point and ribbon pattern.

The Musgrave Varmint stock comes with a 25mm thick solid black recoil pad on a black spacer. The magazine swallowed five cartridges with ease. That means that it will take four cartridges in belted magnum or WSM case configurations.

The test rifle was chambered for the .243 Winchester and sported a 610mm (24") barrel with sporting contour that measured 19mm at the muzzle. The test rifle was also equipped with a 10-port Warrior EC-Tuner muzzle brake and tuner adorned the front-end of the barrel. Fully loaded and scoped with a Zeiss V4 Conquest 3-12x44 riflescope the Model-21 weighed 5,6 kg (12.35), belt inclusive. The scope was held in place on a Picatinny rail with Warne Maxima rings.

ZEISS V4 Conquest 3-12x44

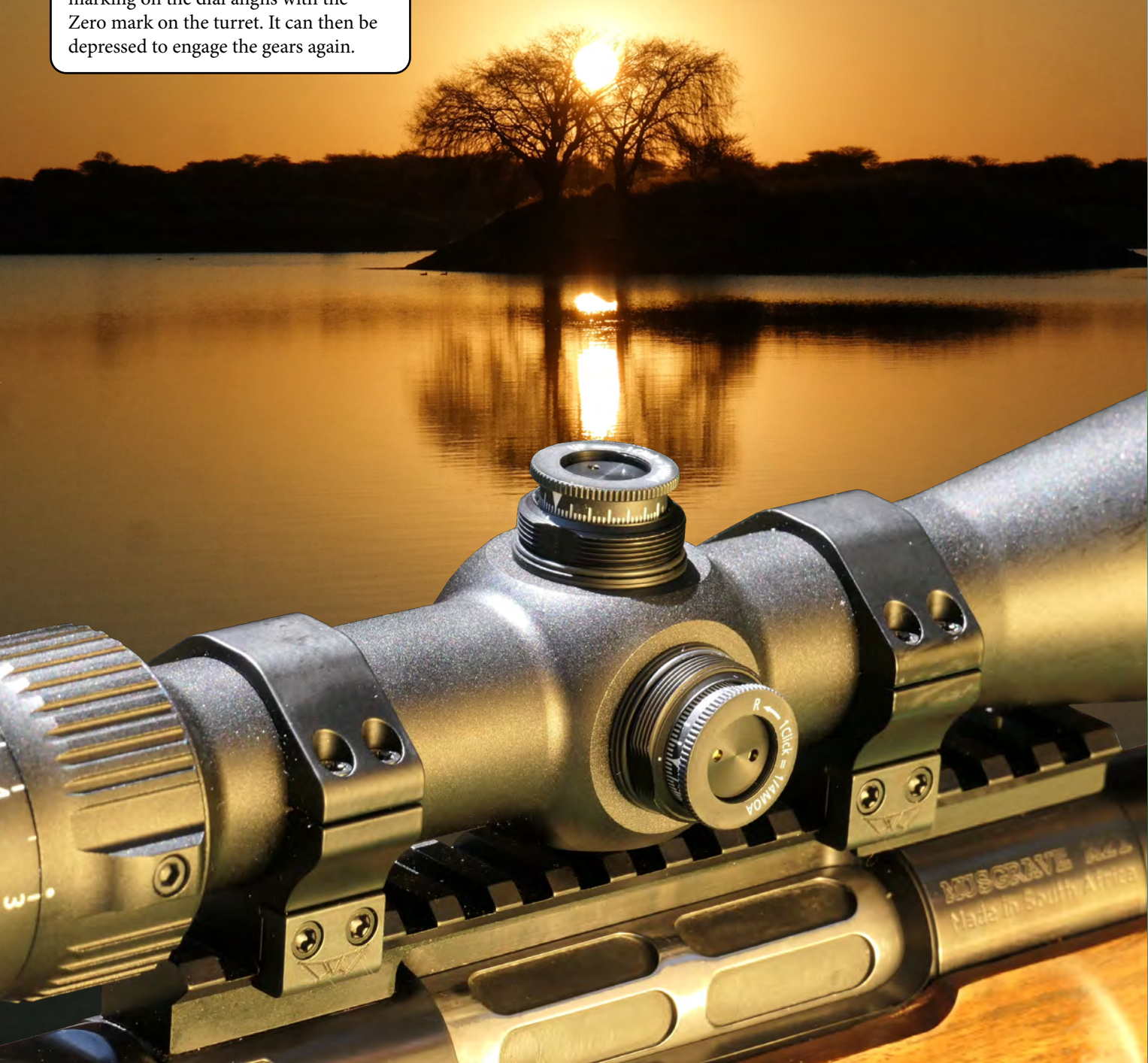
The ZEISS Conquest weighs 638 grams and is sufficiently compact for walk and stalk hunting. Image quality is primarily dependent on glass and coating quality. ZEISS optics have never disappointed in this regard and light transmission is good enough for all South African daylight hunting conditions.

Magnification is much less important than optical quality, but even so I recommend a minimum of 1x extra magnification for every 45 metres (50 yards). That means that the V4 is good for 550 metres. The V4 3-12x44 does not have parallax adjustment, which makes it a good choice for quick shooting situations and ranges to 300 metres. The Z-plex-20 (duplex) reticle is easy and fast to use. It still is the most popular reticle design for traditional hunting, but not for those carried away by 'shooting groups on animals.'



I am not going to bore you with edge definition, adjustment tracking perfection, and click crispness. It is a ZEISS after all. It offers 90mm of eye relief, which is suitable for all non-dangerous game cartridges given appropriate rifle weight. The V4 also features a fast-focus ring with rubberized edge at the rear-end of the ocular bell to protect the shooter's eyebrow against membership of the halfmoon club.

The adjustment dials are capped. Once the scope dials in ¼MOA increments. The dials have a Return to Zero feature. Once the scope has been zeroed, the dial top can be lifted to disengage from the gears and turned until the arrow marking on the dial aligns with the Zero mark on the turret. It can then be depressed to engage the gears again.



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Alexander (L) and Jaydon (R) on the shooting range with the Musgrave M-21 and ZEISS telescope.



André Jr. shooting the Musgrave M-21



The excellent grouping that was shot by the Musgrave M-21 and ZEISS V-4 Conquest telescope.



Jaydon with At Willers (farm owner) by the impala ram that Jaydon shot, his biggest one to date..

On the shooting range and the hunting field

Wildland has always believed that when testing a hunting rifle, it should be done on both the shooting range and in the field. The fact that the new Musgrave M21 is in .243 Win caliber limited us a bit, as we never recommend using light calibers on larger game. Therefore, we decided to test the Musgrave and ZEISS at At Willers' farm just outside Naboomspruit and At agreed that we could hunt a rooibok. Since it was school vacation, we also took the opportunity to get the young boys back in the field.

Fortunately, At has a proper shooting range on the farm where you can shoot up to 200 meters away. Together with the Musgrave, we also got 30 handloaded cartridges from Frikkie du Plooy to use. It only took three shots to line up the rifle and scope, and then we let the Musgrave speak. First André Jr, then Jaydon, Alexander, and finally the eldest. We rang the gongs shot by shot up to 200 meters and just couldn't stop shooting. Alexander, the youngest, just wanted to know why he couldn't have such a rifle because "it doesn't kick at all". Each cartridge was fed perfectly from the magazine and flawlessly chambered. The same goes for the ejection of the shells - they were kicked out of the rifle smoothly. Even the children had no problem operating the rifle's action.

Fortunately, I noticed at one point that there were a lot of shells on the ground, and when we picked them up,

there were only eight cartridges left. The shooting was immediately stopped because we still had to shoot a grouping and go hunting. We first shot with another rifle to let the Musgrave cool down, and then Jnr took it and shot an incredible grouping. We didn't measure it because the necessary equipment wasn't available, but the three shots cut each other, and that says it all.

After drawing lots, it was decided that Jaydon would be the first to try the Musgrave M21 and ZEISS 3-12 X44mm Conquest to shoot a rooibok ram. The grass was very long because it was a proper rainy season, luckily the rooibok were not too wild yet and could be stalked. After many attempts, where we searched for the bucks with the bakkie and then stalked further, we finally had a ram in the scope. Unfortunately, a young man takes longer to shoot, and the ram did not give enough time, so the whole process started over. Because Jaydon is shorter than André Jnr, it's even harder because André could see the bucks but not Jaydon, so they had to find an opening between the grass and branches every time he wanted to shoot. Eventually, Jaydon got the opportunity late in the afternoon and shot a ram that was standing in an open space at about 70 meters away. The ram jumped and disappeared among the bushes. Fortunately, we found blood quickly and shortly after that, the ram. Jaydon was beside himself because it's the biggest rooibok he has ever shot to date.

In conclusion

The Musgrave M21 is a proud South African product that has impressed me a lot. I know how much time and money is spent on the development of hunting rifles, not to mention the excessive production costs. I believe that Frikkie du Plooy and his team of craftsmen have managed to raise the Musgrave flag even higher, and that it will be seen more and more in the future. The ZEISS Conquest 3-12X44mm is the ideal choice for bush hunting and can of course also be used with great success on the open plains. I realize that there are hunters who prefer

larger magnifications, but ZEISS also makes provision for them. One thing about ZEISS that has always impressed me is the fact that the light transmission of all their products is so high and of course the rich colors, especially under low light conditions, make the hunting field look even more beautiful. As far as I'm concerned, you would have to search far and wide to find such a quality combination at reasonable prices, as the Musgrave and ZEISS. For more information on these excellent products, please contact any Wildman store. **WL**