

THE SOT HANSON 14.5 IS A NO-EXCUSES, WORKING-MAN'S RIFLE READY TO DELIVER EXCELLENT PERFORMANCE.

BY SEAN UTLEY

NO MORE

EXCUSES

IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME.

In fact, I can't remember the last time I've shot a rifle with a barrel length beyond the 12-inch marker. I know there are some ballistic disadvantages that come with shorter barrel lengths, but I don't care. I mean, I do care. It's just that I'm convinced, should I have to use a rifle for protection purposes, it will more than likely be within effective ranges for short barrels.

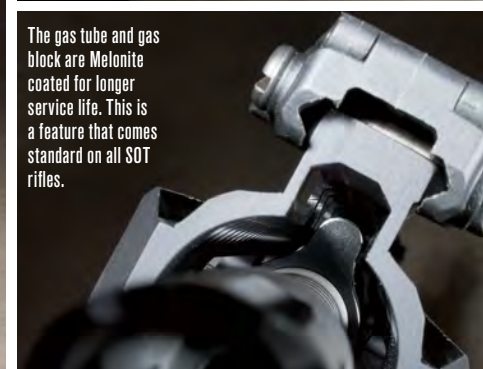


The SOT Hanson 14.5 is an optics-ready rifle that is generous in rail space.

The 12.6-inch free-floated SOT proprietary rail design is clean and allows a good look at the stainless barrel.



The gas tube and gas block are Melonite coated for longer service life. This is a feature that comes standard on all SOT rifles.



Having been confused by a swarm of new products from many new manufacturers over the past couple of years, I sort of lost track of what was really going on in the AR market. I'm going to assume that your time is just as hard to come by as mine, so as you know, it gets tough to keep up with certain developments unless you are truly devoted. Sort of like your Facebook page.

A buddy of mine brought Special Ops Tactical to my attention. He had shot one of their rifles and was impressed. In his usual barrage of highly technical firearm verbiage, he conveyed to me some of the features that were unique to this rifle, ones that set apart this AR. So I decided to give Special Ops a call to see if I could give one a shakedown.

THE COMPANY

Based out of Apopka, Florida, Special Ops Tactical was started by Garrett Potter and Clint Hanson. The company has been around a very short time, about two and a half years. I'd say they classify as new, but that's not to say they aren't experienced. Both Garrett and

Clint have many years working with the AR platform. Both were previously with Spike's Tactical, where Garrett was involved with LE sales and Clint built and tested rifles. Clint now works with Special Ops Tactical and Ballistic Advantage LLC as a master armorer. Ballistic Advantage specializes in high-quality precision barrels and components for the discriminating shooter. The base product from Special Ops is nothing new, a direct-impingement AR. No pistons here.

I asked Garrett why he would want to start another gun company, especially when the AR market is already so competitive. According to Garrett, money is not the reason. Rather, he has a love for the AR and a desire to continue to enhance and improve upon it.

THE GUN

I opted for the Special Ops Tactical (SOT) 14½-inch Hanson Shoulderless Profile. That's a mouthful. It has a 14½-inch stainless steel barrel with a permanently attached YHM Phantom flash hider, bringing total length to 16 inches. Man, that's long. More on the barrel

later. Support hand and accessories reside on a 12.6-inch free-floated rail, of SOT's design. The flattop upper receiver sits on a Mil-Spec lower and is machined from 7075-T6 aluminum.

The gun is handsome. I've often wondered how some ARs look so much better than others. Obviously, the rail style, length of forend, stock and grip make a difference. But I'm convinced there are elements that play into my senses when it comes to this aesthetic impression. Whatever it is, some of these rifles have "the look" and others don't. This one does. The initial unpacking of the SOT Hanson reveals a very attractive finish on the gun. The receivers have an even, matte finish, one that exudes a quality appearance.

Upper and lower receivers are Mil-Spec, as are countless other parts on the SOT Hanson such as the trigger group, buffer tube and bolt-carrier group. The gas tube and gas block are coated in Melonite to minimize damaging effects of wear and corrosion. It's worth mentioning that the Melonite coating on these parts is standard across the whole line of products from Special Ops. You don't have

All parts are well fitted using quality Mil-Spec components. The SOT-badged Mil-Spec bolt carrier sports an MP-tested bolt.



NO MORE EXCUSES

to buy one of the high-end rifles to get these enhancements. That's definitely something worth noting. With all of the AR choices in the marketplace, it's imperative to be aware of the seemingly little nuances with each make and model. Having these features standard, especially at competitive prices, is an obvious advantage.

My sample rifle came optioned out with Magpul furniture: CTR stock, MBUS, MOE grip and triggerguard. Standard setup would include an A2 pistol grip, M4 stock and no sights.

BALANCING ACT

The SOT Hanson feels extremely good in the hands. I weighed mine at six pounds, 9.6 ounces. Initially, it didn't strike me as a lightweight rifle, though it really is. Moreso, it feels balanced. The gun's mass seems to be distributed linearly throughout the entire length of the gun. There is no perceptible area that is awkwardly heavy. When I draw the rifle up to my shoulder and look down the sights, it feels like I could stay there all day. The balance is excellent. The gun feels tight, and the components are fitted together nicely. I took my support hand off the rifle, and it remained on my shoulder nice and stable. I did this repeatedly, gun up, gun down, and it just felt right. I love to shoot, but the feeling of

Special Ops Tactical Hanson

TYPE	Direct impingement, semiautomatic
CALIBER	5.56 NATO
CAPACITY	30 rds.
BARREL	14.5 in., 410 stainless steel
OVERALL LENGTH	31.5 in. collapsed, 34.75 in. extended
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 9.4 oz.
HANDGUARD	12.6 in. handguard
STOCK	Six-position collapsible
GRIP	Magpul MOE
FINISH	Hardcoat anodized Type III, Class 2
TRIGGER	Mil-Spec, 7.5 lbs.
MAGAZINE	30-rd. magazine
MUZZLE DEVICE	YHM Phantom flash hider
SIGHTS	Magpul MBUS (optional)
SAFETY	Two-position selector marked in bullet pictogram
MSRP	\$1,490 (with A2 grip, M4 stock, no sights)
MANUFACTURER	Special Ops Tactical 407-814-3801 specialoptactical.com



The CTR stock was a much-needed upgrade to the legacy six-position stock that comes standard on the SOT Hanson 14.5.

A set of Magpul MBUS comes standard on the SOT Hanson 14.5. They are quality, capable sights for tactical work. Inset: The MBUS folds cleanly out of the sight line should you choose to employ a low-profile optic.



The Magpul MOE grip was a welcome upgrade from the standard A2 grip that comes with the factory SOT Hanson 14.5.

NO MORE EXCUSES

The SOT Hanson free-float rail is a 12.6-inch precision-machined piece that sports a generous six QD mounting rings for individualized sling placement.



this rifle really makes me want to shoot. Not every gun shares this capacity. For all I knew, this thing could shoot like total crap, but I felt confident in its abilities before ever going to the range and pulling the trigger.

What is arguably the biggest factor in the balance of the Hanson is the match-grade barrel. It is 410 stainless steel at a length of 14½ inches and has a mid-length gas system, which is considered by many as the ideal gas system for the AR platform. The Hanson-profile barrel (named after its creator, Clint Hanson) is intriguing. It is a shoulderless-profile barrel devoid of the typical shoulder or notch where the gas block fits, so there are no right angles. No right angles and no sharp edges equals less distortion and vibrations equals improved barrel harmonics and accuracy. The barrel also gradually and seamlessly tapers from the muzzle to the breech end, widening slightly where the gas block is fitted over a specially and proprietarily tuned gas port. The low-profile, Melonite-coated gas block is secured by set screws, which hold it firmly in place. This is a different approach that works well. I am always amazed by the innovative enhancements that go into the AR platform and continue to improve its already inherently good accuracy. The barrel sports a 1:8-inch twist rate with six grooves.

Special Ops Tactical guarantees sub-MOA accuracy from this rifle when it is coupled with high-quality ammo. Many shooters should find this comforting, as it takes out the factor of the gun when shooting performance is not what one thinks it should be. Personally, I like knowing that the tool I'm using is better than I am, because then I am (mostly) free of any blaming or excuses for poor accuracy. In my mind it allows me to focus on improving



The YHM Phantom flash hider is drilled, pinned and welded to the 14½-inch shoulderless-profile Hanson barrel. This brings the overall length to 16.01 inches.

my skill set. A good rifle will do that. I don't want to be chasing down mechanical causes of sub-par performance. Truth be told, that gives me anxiety. Not to mention that for as long as ARs have been made, there really shouldn't be any mechanical issues with a new one right out of the box.

Also worth mentioning is the M4 nickel boron (NiB) barrel extension, with extended feed ramps for reliable functioning. At face value everything on this gun adds up to be a winning combination. Nothing is overdone or unnecessary, just a straightforward, sensible approach to making a rifle.

EXCUSES

I don't understand why, but every time I go out to test a gun, the weather is less than ideal. I never seem to get the perfect conditions. Maybe perfect conditions don't exist, but I know that crosswinds in gusts from 23 to 30 mph are as far from perfect as you can get. I saved the chronograph from falling over three times. More sandbags fixed the issue. The Indiana winds were strong enough that leaving the gun in sandbags sitting upright would result in it blowing over on its side, off of the bags and onto the bench. Awesome.

I attached my trusty Leupold 3-9X for accuracy testing and used a ProChrono for measuring velocities of five variations of ammo from

NO MORE EXCUSES

Performance

Black Hills 77 gr. Sierra MatchKing	Privi Partizan 55 gr. (M193)	Silver State Armory 64 gr. Bonded	Silver State Armory 69 gr. HPBT	Silver State Armory 77 gr. Sierra OTM
Velocity (fps)				
2,496	2,892	2,593	2,673	2,581
Standard Deviation				
38.26	51.15	25.79	39.98	27.51
Extreme Spread				
89	120	60	93	64
Best Group (in.)				
.88	1.81	1.25	.81	1.25

Special Ops Tactical guarantees sub-MOA performance right out of the box with quality ammo. The SSA 69-grain barely bested the Black Hills 77-grain. Impressive performance in less than ideal shooting conditions.



three manufacturers: Privi Partizan 55-grain (M193), Silver State 5.56mm 64-grain PPT Bonded, Silver State 5.56mm 69-grain SSA HPBT, Silver State 5.56mm 77-grain Sierra OTM and Black Hills .223 Remington 77-grain Sierra MatchKing Hollow Point. My group shooting was done from the prone position.

In the end I was very happy with the results, considering the mildly breezy conditions and the documented 7½-pound trigger pull on the Hanson. (Oops, looks like I found an excuse.) The SA 69-grain posted a .81-inch group. The Black Hills 77-grain came in right behind at .88 inch. Both the SSA 77-grain and 64-grain loads landed at 1¼ inches, and I was most surprised by the bargain-basement, carbine-class-champion ammo Privi Partizan 55-grain load, which printed a respectable 1.81-inch group in the first string of fire. What's most interesting is that each of the five shots of Privi landed next to each other in a horizontal string, with very minimal vertical deviation. This brought to light the negative effects the high winds were having on the bullets. No malfunctions were encountered during testing.

There is no doubt in my mind that with less wind and/or the installation of a better trigger the SOT Hanson would have delivered all of these various projectiles at MOA or better.

BRINGING IT HOME

I like this rifle. There is a lot that I'd like to explore with it. That being said, I'm going to look into getting a better trigger installed and place a faster optic on it. Then I'd like to run it hard for a couple of days in a carbine course to see how it will fare under a more rigorous pace. It's not that I don't think that the gun will hold up or function flawlessly. Rather, I just really want to shoot it more.

The Special Ops Tactical Hanson 14.5 Shoulderless Profile is priced at \$1,490, not including Uncle Sam's portion. That's a pretty good value for what you get right out of the box. They're definitely telling the truth about its accuracy capabilities. All this rifle really needs is an optic to fit whatever application you want it for. Once you decide on which optic, just grab some ammo and get to it. The trigger is replacable.

SOT is definitely a new kid on the block as far as names are concerned, but the product they are turning out points to the experience of its developers. This is a good, straightforward rifle that will deliver what you need it to. Be ready to check your ego before indulging, because all excuses will hold no weight in the wake of the SOT Hanson. ✪



The Mil-Spec charging handle is one of many basic features on this rifle. The SOT logo is eye-catching and deeply machined to allow for future color fillings, as are the company info and bullet pictograms.

