



**TARGET SHOOTER**  
MAGAZINE

# SAVAGE ARMS F T/R REVIEW



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BY CHRIS PARKIN JANUARY 2015

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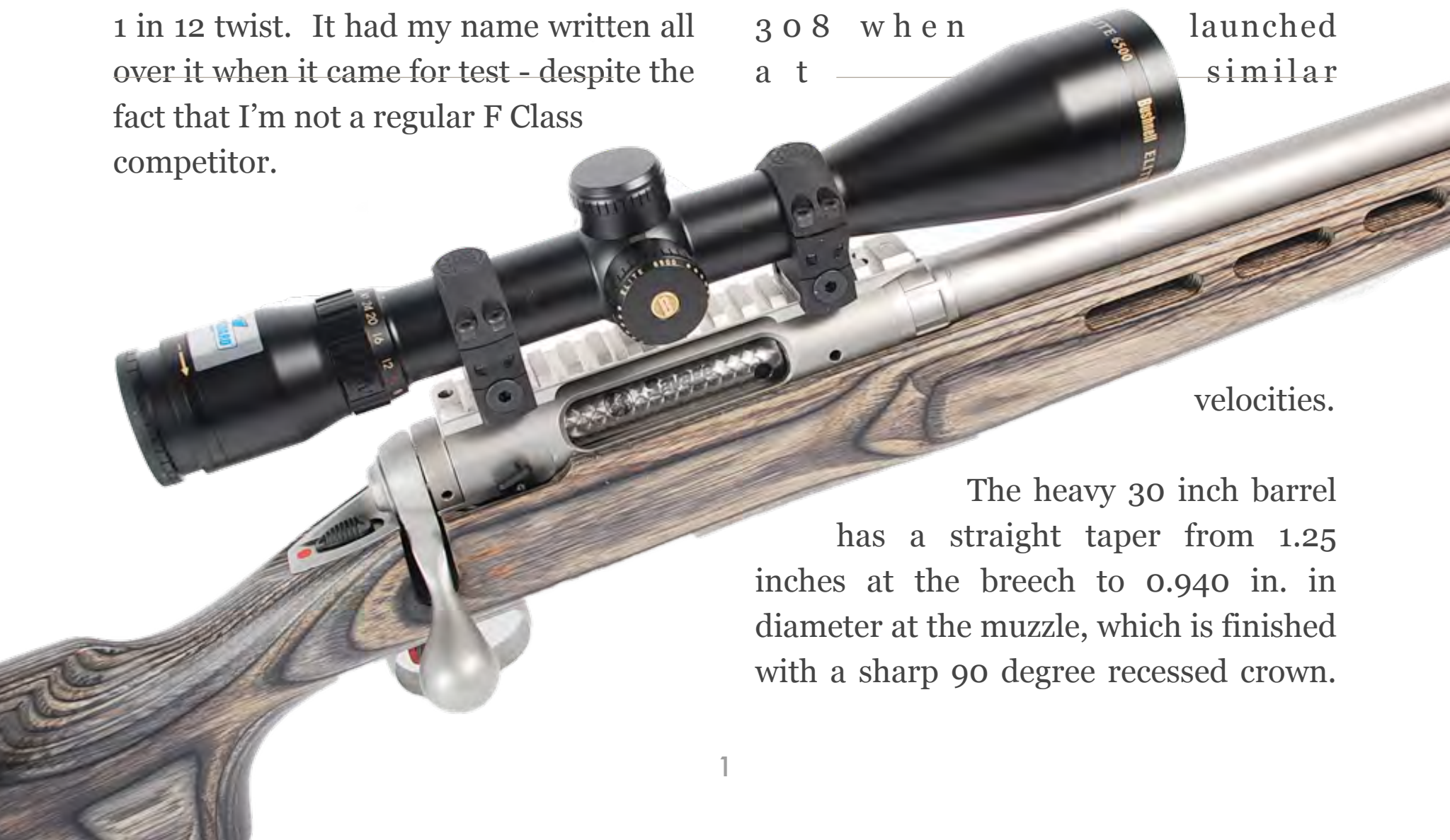
*I have* wanted to get my hands on one of these rifles for ages. This gun is the epitome of what Savage seems to do so well - observe the developing rifle markets and produce guns that specifically fit evolving disciplines and competitive rulebooks. The Model 12 FTR is Savage's suggested route for direct factory rifle ownership to suit the rapidly growing world-wide F Class discipline. Available in the two FTR cartridges - a 223 Rem with a 1 in 7 twist rate and here, the 308 Winchester with a 1 in 12 twist. It had my name written all over it when it came for test - despite the fact that I'm not a regular F Class competitor.

## Little or large?

What differentiates a capable FTR rifle from any other 223 or 308 is predominantly barrel-length. To achieve reliable supersonic flight all the way to 1000 yards, possibly even 1200 yards, inches matter. Although the twist-rate of the 308 on test is pretty standard for the caliber at 1 in 12, the 1 in 7 twist on the 223 is there to stabilise bullets in the 80-90 grain category - capable of holding their own against the 308 when launched at similar

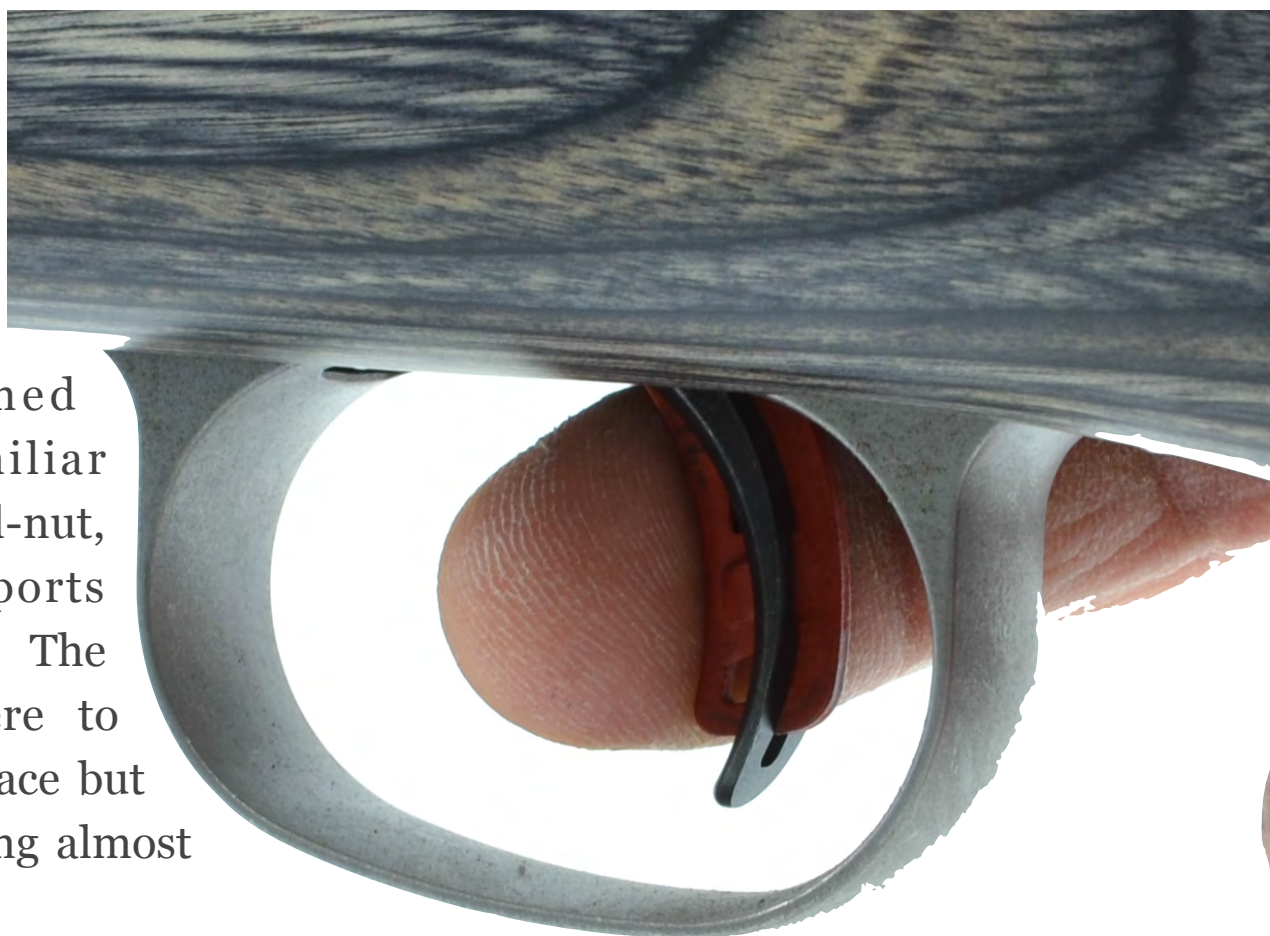
velocities.

The heavy 30 inch barrel has a straight taper from 1.25 inches at the breech to 0.940 in. in diameter at the muzzle, which is finished with a sharp 90 degree recessed crown.





The stainless-steel is finished, like all the metalwork, with a satin bead-blast. The action and barrel are attached together with the familiar cannellured Savage barrel-nut, with twin gas-escape ports broadside the bolt-recess. The barrel-nut system is there to speed-up assembly/headspace but it's a useful feature, allowing almost DIY barrel-changes.



A conventional but stout recoil-lug is sandwiched between the action and barrel but the bolt assembly is somewhat less than conventional in that the separate two-lug bolt-head is pinned to the bolt-body. There is a conventional plunger-ejector and sliding extractor-claw inlet into the right lug face. Behind this, we see Savage's characteristic

*I really like Accutriggers, especially when considered they basically feel to function like a two stage unit.*

secondary lug pairing, also floating to promote bolt-face alignment and, should a calibre change ever be desired, easily replaced if bolt-face alternatives are required.



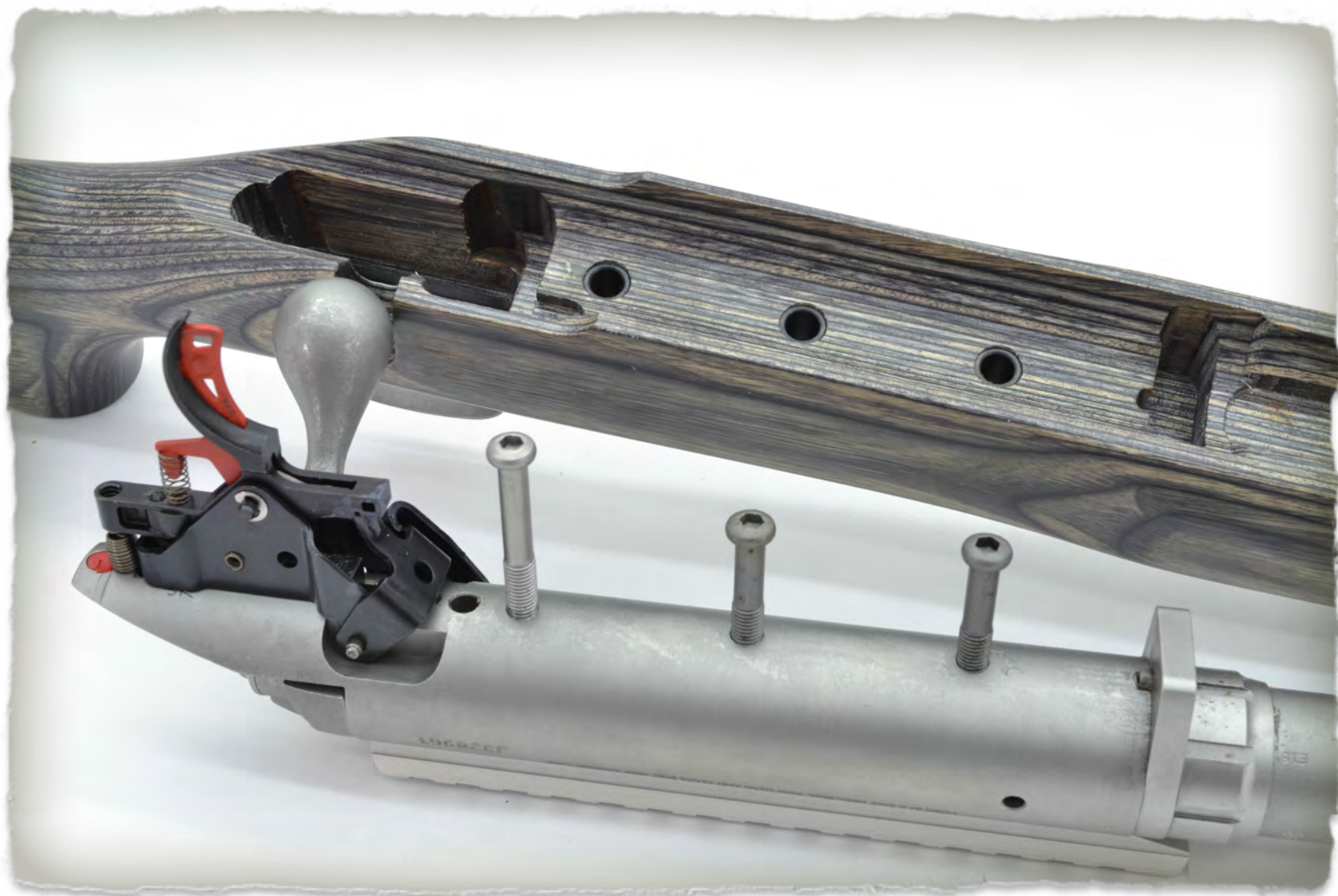
*Bolt operation soon slicked up. Simultaneous trigger and release catch pressure is needed to remove the bolt*

The bolt itself is a stainless shaft, engine turned for slick appearance and handling with the separate 'tear-drop' bolt-handle retained by the rear shroud, which is screwed into the rear of the bolt body. There are around 50% more parts in the Savage bolt than say a typical Remington bolt and although the prime reason for this is ease of manufacture, it also contributes to Savage's unique inherent accuracy.



The solid-bottom action has a very small ejection port to increase stiffness and comes with four threaded holes to permit the fixing of scope mounts and these days, that means a Picatinny style rail - with a built-in taper if the user intends to explore the extreme range capability of this rifle.

action. The Savage Accutriggers are a safety feature and are a bit 'Marmite' but, the one fitted here is an ideal partner for the gun. Showing the red internal 'blade' to identify it as a target rather than hunting model, it broke crisply at 12 ounces and I really liked it. It gives a mass-market take on safety yet



*The three bolt action is reported to benefit further from experimental bolt torque settings. Note steel pillars are present.*

A tang-mounted safety sits to the rear of the bolt for convenient thumb-operation – push forward to fire. To the right side of the action, above the trigger, is the bolt-release lever - depress in combination with pulling the trigger for bolt removal, it also indicates a cocked

with the light pull required for a through-and-through target gun.

Three action bolts secure the barreled-action to the wood-laminate stock, with an 11 inch Anschütz-type accessory rail inletted into the underside of the fore-





*An Anschutz rail is perfect for large FTR bipods*

end. The stock is smoothly finished throughout with a satin lacquer and the open-radiused grip follows the lines of a hunting stock rather than vertical target type. Having said that, this rifle is



*Over 2 inches of elevation at the rear was on tap from the butt's taper*



*The plastic cheek raisers are pointless and ugly, this was the closest I got to using one.*

The stock is otherwise very plain and straight, allowing the gun to work in conjunction with a rear bag. The taper on the underside of the butt offers useful elevation adjustment simply by sliding the rear bag back and forth. Wood-laminate stocks are not always 'true' but the machining of the Savage stock is totally straight, with the axis of the bore truly parallel to the external bearing



surfaces of the rifle. This assists in keeping the rifle tracking straight under recoil. Three slots are machined into the fore-end either side of the fully floating barrel – is this meant to be a cooling aid – maybe but they do add a beneficial tweak to the visual appeal of the gun.

## All the gear and some idea

**Edgar Brothers** kindly supplied a set of Weaver 30mm low rings and a Bushnell Elite Tactical 4.5-30x50 scope to complement the rifle. These particularly low rings kept the 50mm objective low down, nice and close to the barrel. The bore cleaned up easily after a few break-in shots, which displayed the expected tiny slivers of copper but quickly disappearing as any tiny machining marks in the button-rifled tube were polished away.

I was in something of a hurry to get the gun shooting as I had a 1000 yard FTR shoot at my club in less than 48 hours after receiving it and a quick trip to my usual zeroing range was done in trepidation. Could I sort out a load and get the gun to shoot to competitive standard virtually out of the box? That's a big ask!

## Ding Dong

I looked into the popular ammo options for FTR usage and took some Sierra 155gr HPBT bullets and Berger 185gr `Juggernauts` to the range, all loaded into virgin Lapua brass and primed with Fiocchi primers. Powder choice? Vithavuori would have been the easy option but I opted for the increasingly popular double-based Ramshot stable and I hedged my bets with four options, using TAC and Wild Boar to ladder test both projectiles from SAAMI standard 2.810" OAL specification.

Hallelujah! All combinations performed straight away, well within the confines of my personal steering ability. The 185 Juggernauts generate a little more recoil than the 155 bullets and, when shooting a long-range gun, control of the recoil is paramount to avoiding vertical stringing.



*Both loads showed excellent potential but the 155 - TAC combo was the easier to shoot initially.*

I was drawing most of the 185s within half an inch at 100 yards but couldn't help occasional 'vertical' stringing.

Switching to the 155s, I seemed to find the accuracy spot more easily, with solid round 'blobs' appearing in the target. I thought I would take the easy option and go with this load - 45.7 grains of TAC, generating a spectacular 3145 feet per second. It just plain worked, was easy to shoot and the figures on paper led me to believe the small groups hovering tantalisingly just above a quarter-inch for three shots would fly happily all the way to 1000 yards without dwindling into the deadly transonic speed region.

***WARNING – THESE LOADS WERE SAFE IN MY RIFLE BUT MIGHT NOT BE SAFE IN YOURS. BE SAFE, WORK UP THE LOAD SLOWLY IN SMALL INCREMENTS.***

Extreme velocity spreads of 15-20 feet per second in any of the loads looked very positive and, when I checked, I had plenty of elevation left on the Bushnell scope, which would comfortably take me to 1000 yards. The 185s would, without doubt, resist the wind better but, at 2737fps average, a little slow to be competitive with this particular powder choice. I shall be further testing them to refine the load to

its maximum. Ramshot Big Game is likely my next trial.

### **If it sounds too good to be true.....**

At 1000 yards the following day, my first sighter in the '3' ring pleased me no end but, conditions were difficult and I didn't score very well although held my ground and, most importantly, I really enjoyed shooting the Savage. I'd fitted one of Dan Pohl's flexible bi-pods up front which anchored the feet solidly and my anti-cant bubble didn't drift off line for the entire 22 rounds. All that was required was gentle shoulder pressure into the rear bag for small elevation tweaks and adjustment.



***Setup with the "flex bipod" my anti cant bubble remained stationary throughout 22 rounds loaded and fired***

Recoil was light and delivered in a straight line, tracking in the rear bag



exactly as I wanted it, only my shoulder and trigger-finger touched the gun. I really like the Accutrigger for this. You can gently `find` and take up what is effectively `first stage` pressure on the trigger and then, your fingertip meets the metal blade itself, all calm and relaxed, ready for that tiny increase in pressure to trigger the shot in complete control.



*Ejection was assured but primary extraction was a little weak.*

Ammunition ejection was positive but primary extraction was a little on the weak side, requiring a definite pull on the bolt to dislodge it - rather than just sliding it back. Bolt-lift force didn't seem to disrupt the gun's position at all, although I do partially attribute this to the Flexipod being so laterally stable yet flexible on recoil. It's a bit like shooting from a pedestal rest with a full F Class Open gun - a nudge from the shoulder returns the gun to `battery`.

Scoped-up with bi-pod and ready to shoot it weighed-in at 7.6kg meaning that the Savage is comfortably within the strict 8.25kg limit for the class. I was left with only a single negative thought about the gun - they maybe could have extended the fore-end a little but, it wasn't desperately needed, just why not when there is weight to spare to increase the `wheelbase`? Well stock blanks get a lot more expensive when they get longer so there is your answer I suppose. Savage can't please us all!



**For**

- A gun I really enjoyed shooting. The Savage FTR fulfills the design brief perfectly. Probably the only mass-produced factory rifle that is ‘competition ready’ right out of the box.
- The Accutrigger is a good solution to the quandary of providing a light but safe factory trigger.

**Against**

- Plastic cheek raisers are pointless and ugly, why bother?
- A little weak on primary-extraction.

**Verdict**

This is *THE* factory rifle that most closely matches its competition requirements that I have ever used. Hats off to Savage - I want to keep it!

**Specification - Savage Model 12 F/TR**

<b>Recommended Retail Price</b>	<b>£1999.99</b>
<b>STS Picatinny scope rail</b>	<b>£35.99</b>
<b>Cartridge</b>	<b>308 Win on test (but 223Rem also available)</b>
<b>Capacity</b>	<b>Single shot</b>
<b>Trigger</b>	<b>Accutrigger breaking at 12oz.</b>
<b>Barrel</b>	<b>30 inch 1 in 12 twist</b>
<b>Finish</b>	<b>Stainless-steel satin bead blasted</b>
<b>O/L Length</b>	<b>50 inches</b>
<b>Weight</b>	<b>12.65 lbs in total for rifle and scope mounting</b>
<b>Stock</b>	<b>Black/Grey Birch laminate</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>Bushnell Elite 4.5-30x50 Tactical scope, £799.99</b>
<b>Rings</b>	<b>Weaver Tactical Rings, £39.99.</b>

**Contact**

Edgar Brothers 01625 613177 (Trade only)

**Accessories/Ammunition**

<i>Lapua Brass, Berger Bullets -</i>	<i>Hannams Reloading 01977 681 639</i>
<i>Fiocchi large rifle primers -</i>	<i>Edgar Brothers 01625 613177</i>
<i>Ramshot Powders, Sierra Bullets -</i>	<i>Henry Krank &amp; Co. 0113 256 9163</i>
<i>Pohlabel Flex Bipod -</i>	<i>Fox Firearms 07941 958 464</i>



Try the fabulous Savage F T/R Rifle - (& many others)  
at The Shooting Lodge by Osprey Rifles, situated at  
Diggle Ranges in Greater Manchester - see our website  
for further details.



The rifle above features an optional Ceramic coating available for an additional cost. All new Savage Rifles come with a three year warranty.

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