

KRIEGHOFF

RICHARD RAWLINGSON REPRISSES THE PRIDE OF ULM

K-80



It is one of life's curiosities that the things you end up liking the most are the ones that were most challenging on first acquaintance. Take Guinness for example. This most famous of Irish drinks exports left me cold for many years; I just didn't get it. Then one day in a bar in Dublin it clicked and finally I could see what all the fuss was about. Was it because I was drinking it in context, or is it really true that it tastes better when brewed with the famous River Liffey water? Who knows? All that matters is that I am a convert.

Taste is a funny thing – and guns can be like that. What I call steady handling you might term ponderous. Likewise, the light and fast gun you love would feel uncontrollable to me. One of the guns that definitely polarizes opinion is the Krieghoff K-80. Partly it is the nature of the beast – it is a big gun with angular looks that some find unattractive – and partly Krieghoff's reluctance to compromise. The gunmakers in Ulm have their own way of doing things and they believe it is the right way. Others may change to follow the latest fashion but that is not the Krieghoff style. It makes the K-80 the shotgun equivalent of Guinness – you may have to work at it, but when you fall in love it will probably be forever.

For me that process took ten years. It is one of the joys of my job that I get to shoot a lot of guns. The downside is that I don't get to spend very long with any one gun. My own gun aside, which I have

owned for 15 years, a couple of weeks and a few hundred shells is all the time I have to evaluate each new model. (To save you writing to ask, my own gun is a Grade 5 Browning B325, heavily modified after many trials and much error). My relationship with the Krieghoff has, consequently, been an on-off one. Our early meetings were

awkward affairs. I couldn't really get past the

quirkiness and appreciate what lay beneath the surface. Greater familiarity and the chance to put more cartridges through the gun has changed my view gradually over the years. My latest spell with the current K-80 sporter has, I think, finally completed the process.

CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT

The gun supplied for this test was a 32" sporter fitted with the latest titanium chokes. That apart it looked little different from the very first K-80 I tested,

which if memory serves me correctly was as long ago as 1995. There have, however, been numerous minor modifications over the years, most of them under the skin.

I am sure everyone knows by now the Krieghoff story – how a 1930s Remington design crossed the Atlantic in the 1950s and returned as the Krieghoff K-32. This in turn evolved into the K-80 that we see today. What is perhaps less well known is the extent to which the gun still undergoes continuous development. Not content to rest, the factory is always looking for ways to make it better or adapt production to take advantage of the latest technology. Other manufacturers might have launched a dozen 'new and improved' models on the strength of this program; Krieghoff just quietly phases them in, invariably in a way that improvements can be retrofitted to older guns if required.

For the sporting range, one of the most important (and noticeable) innovations has been the introduction of those titanium chokes. These weigh around 20% less than the standard steel tubes and while the weight saved may not sound significant, it does have a noticeable impact because the gain comes at the very end of the barrels. I believe there has also been some subtle re-profiling of the sporting barrels to alter the weight distribution. On my test gun – fitted with the adjustable comb option – the balance was neutral on the hinge pin, giving the gun a much livelier feel than has been my experience with earlier Krieghoff sporters.

Looking at the rest of the specification, the gun had the entry level 'standard scroll' action and standard wood with a satin epoxy finish – high gloss can be specified if required. The stock was completed by a hard rubber pad with a smooth heel insert for a

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THE TEST GUN HAD THE STANDARD SCROLL ENGRAVING AND HIGHLY DURABLE GRAY NICKEL FINISH.

snag-free mount. At the other end the barrels carried the familiar ramped rib, tapered from 10-6mm and with a center channel. A brass mid bead and white front are fitted. Ribs and beads are very much a matter of personal taste. For me the tapered channel rib is the very best option on a sporting clays gun. The Krieghoff beads on the other hand I am less enthusiastic about. I would drop the center one entirely and replace the front with something less obtrusive – all easily done of course.

Whether the adjustable comb option is worthwhile will depend on your size and shape. There are several standard stock options that may well do the job for you if you fall within the ‘average’ parameters of build. Outside of that group, the system does allow an impressive range of adjustment, both in height and in cast on or off.

I can work happily with most off the peg stocks and left the comb flat and fully down. Even without any adjustment you still get a small ‘Monte Carlo’ step down at the heel which for me certainly was a benefit in putting

the whole butt plate in contact with my shoulder. The great English writer, Chris Cradock, was a firm advocate of the Monte Carlo stock for sporting guns and I too can see their merit, but it is something the trade has largely ignored, more for inventory control reasons than anything else I suspect. My gun was fitted with the standard Krieghoff Schnabel fore arm. I prefer their plain skeet shapes and this is a choice you can make when specifying a new gun.

I talked earlier of the little Krieghoff quirks and one of the most obvious is the double palm swell grip. Normally I loath palm swells on sporting guns with a passion. I fail to see why a gunmaker, who has never met me or seen my right hand, should dictate how I hold my gun. Oddly, having two is not twice as bad. It is something you can get used to very quickly.

Barrel selection is by the small tab ahead of the trigger rather than on the top strap. It can be locked in position if required with a hex wrench. The trigger blade itself

has a useful range of movement to get the most comfortable position. The safety catch is conventionally placed on the top strap and has a push-button release to prevent it being engaged accidentally.

ON TEST

When it comes to competition guns the K-80 is top dollar, even more so as the continuing strength of the Euro feeds through into higher retail prices. The gun will now cost from \$9,395. The adjustable stock adds \$495 to that and the titanium chokes are a \$250 upgrade over the standard tubes. Of all the premium priced competition guns however, none can match Krieghoff in providing the reassurance of money well spent. This has nothing to do with handling or how well you shoot the gun, but the feeling of quality and precision. From the moment you open the superb fitted case, it exudes quality. No rivals have that same hewn from solid feel or can

KRIEGHOFF'S DOUBLE PALM SWELL IS ONE OF THE LITTLE QUIRKS THAT NEWCOMERS MAY FIND STRANGE.



THE K-80'S LOCKWORK PRODUCES SOME OF THE BEST TRIGGER PULLS AVAILABLE ON A COMPETITION GUN.

There are reasons to respect and admire the K-80, but not to buy one unless it is going to do the job. For me at least, the journey is complete because twice in the last year I have spent time with a Krieghoff and twice I have come away wanting one very badly.

match the watch-like quality of the lockwork. It is not that long a journey along the autobahn from Ulm to the Mercedes car factory and you feel the engineers of both companies share common standards and values.

Which is not to say a K-80 will never go wrong. It is a complex instrument and things can get out of synch occasionally. With proper routine maintenance however, this should genuinely be a gun to last a shooting lifetime, easily capable of hundreds of thousands of rounds. What wears out can be easily replaced, but the basic structural integrity of the gun should never be in question.

These are all reasons to respect and admire the K-80, but not to buy one unless it is going to do the job – which brings me back to where I started. For me at least, the journey is complete because twice in the last year I have spent time with a Krieghoff and twice I have come away wanting one very badly.

My test gun weighed 9¼lbs. and felt every ounce picking it off the rack. That neutral balance makes the pounds drop away however once the gun is on the move. Overcome the inertia and it feels so smooth and controllable. It

is not a gun for harsh inputs. Changes in direction should theoretically be slower but I find the stability of the K-80 seems to buy time, particularly if a station demands a big move to get on to the report target. Noticeably low felt recoil and muzzle jump more than compensate for any reluctance to change direction. I shot my test targets with a friend who was using his Perazzi and I watched over his shoulder as he shot the same targets with both guns. The K-80 had significantly less muzzle flip.

My recoil sensitive shoulder certainly appreciates the Krieghoff's ability to soak up the kick. Having over 9lbs dead weight helps of course, but Krieghoff have long been advocates of long forcing cones and a degree of overboring, which I am sure add significantly to the smoothness. As does, in this case, having the gun low in the shoulder thanks to that Monte Carlo step.

The K-80 trigger, with its spring-assisted return to the second barrel position is another of those little quirks that you soon get used to. The pulls are



THE LATEST TITANIUM CHOKES GIVE A USEFUL WEIGHT SAVING AT THE MUZZLE.

wonderfully crisp and perfectly weighted at 3¼ lbs – they are up there with the very best.

The Krieghoff K-80 has been a great gun for a long time. Thousands of top class trap and skeet shooters are not wrong. It is now, in my opinion, also a great sporting gun. Small and subtle changes are partly responsible for my shift from respect to love, but also I believe the sport has moved towards Krieghoff. At the top level, competition targets are becoming more technical, with greater use of

range. Standards are so high that every miss is costly and competitors demand repeatable precision from their guns. That is what the K-80 does best.

It may be too that, like me, you need to mature into a Krieghoff. I certainly don't think it is a gun for an inexperienced shooter still struggling to find a consistent style, but I think you will know when you are ready for it. That just leaves the small matter of the cost. Time I think to grit your teeth and remember the old adage: "the quality lingers long after the price is forgotten."

More information:
www.krieghoff.com ■

THE ADJUSTABLE COMB IS AN OPTION BUT THERE ARE SEVERAL STANDARD STOCKS AVAILABLE FOR THE SPORTER, INCLUDING MONTE CARLO TYPES.

