

The Case For and Against the Tikka T3

The Tikka T3 is becoming increasingly popular in the US after enjoying a very large following in the rest of the world. Tikka, part of Sako Finland (owned by Beretta) has hit a home-run in sales with this rifle after a series of quality rifles that never went mainstream here in the US. As the T3 evolved from the 595/695 series, it changed in a few ways, some good, some not so desirable. All in all, it serves as a solid foundation for a precision rifle (or other type but we won't cover that here). In this article, we will first take a look at the general design specifications of the T3 and then examine its pros and cons. Note again here we will be looking at the action itself, especially regarding the role it can play as a precision rifle. We will look at the rifle from the view of someone who will probably replace the stock, possibly have a premium barrel installed, etc.

The T3 is an evolution of the 595/695 series from Tikka. The 595 was for the short action calibers and the 695 was for the long action calibers, much like the Remington 700 short and long action. The T3 deviates from the earlier rifles in that it is a round bottom action as opposed to being a flat bottomed action. Further, the T3 is available in only one action size, whether you purchase a .223 or a 300Win Mag. The differences in cartridge lengths are accommodated by different magazines (all the same outside length) with blocks inside the magazine of appropriate length for the round. One clever feature Tikka came up with was a front latching magazine. This is not particularly novel in itself, but it allowed them to move the magazine rearward so that it butts up against the trigger. Since there is no space between the trigger and the magazine (as on a Rem 700 or Sako TRG for example), they could make a more compact action than has been traditionally possible.

The T3 carries over the 2 lug bolt that requires broached raceways. Instead of the usual 90 degree bolt throw for 2 lug bolt, the T3 requires only 75 degrees of bolt throw. This makes it feel somewhat like the short 60 degree throw of a 3 lug bolt, but without the difficulty upon unlocking. It carries a spring and plunger ejector, and of course the Sako style extractor. The bolt shroud is a carryover from the 595/695 series, it is made of plastic but aftermarket options are available. The bolt handle is dovetailed into the bolt in a very robust setup and is removable. Aftermarket oversize handles are available as well. The bolt release is located on the side of the action and is a standard spring loaded pivoting device.

Another notable change in the T3 from the 595/695 was the recoil lug configuration. The earlier design had a round spigot sticking down off of the bottom of the action. This spigot interfaced with a counterbore in an aluminum piece in the stock. The T3 has a slot milled into the bottom of the action like the Sako TRG. There is a recoil lug built into the stock that fits into this slot. It has two action screws, both M6 metric threads.

The T3 uses the same standard trigger that was on the 595/695 and can be found on many different Sako and Tikka rifles. This trigger is single stage and adjustable. It is generally a well regarded trigger, and a few after market alternatives are available. It appears that a TRG trigger will even work though we haven't done any extensive testing.

An important note for those wanting to rebarrel their T3, the barrel tenon threads are standard "inch" threads, being 1"x 16 TPI. Tennon length is roughly .98".

The top of the T3 action is flat with several threaded holes in a metric pitch. It has a straight dovetail similar to the TRG. Some models come with a Picatinny base and canted bases are readily available.

The Pros:

There are many, these are listed in no order

-Easy to work on: With the large Remington style recoil lug absent, a gunsmith can easily chuck up a barreled action to thread the muzzle or recrown or do other work.

-Inexpensive: Having the action cut from round bar stock and having only one action size greatly increases manufacturing efficiency. As a result, a complete rifle is available for only 520 dollars new, after being imported. The cheapest ones do come with chincy stocks and plastic floorplates.

-Good Factory Trigger: The factory trigger is quite good and is adjustable. Some users have achieved a very nice light trigger pull by trimming down the screw that holds the trigger to the action, which allows the shooter to further unscrew the trigger pull adjustment screw. Of course Tikka probably doesn't recommend this.

-Feeds Smoothly: Whether using the factory single stack magazine or an aftermarket stock that uses an AICS magazine, the T3 feeds like butter.

-Long OAL allowed: Shooters running short action calibers in the T3 with aftermarket stocks can use AICS magazines with the front spacer removed. This uncorks the true OAL capability of the magazine.

-Short Bolt Lift: The 75 degree bolt lift in the T3 speeds up the cycling of the action and is much more pleasant to use than a 90 degree bolt lift.

-Action Smoothness: The T3 action is a very slick action. Working the bolt back and forth yields a very pleasing, smooth motion without the grinding and binding felt in some other actions. It gives the rifle a distinct feel of pure quality.

-Side Bolt Release: The bolt release on the T3 is located on the left side of the action and is very simple to operate and functions very well.

-Plunger ejector yields greater bolt head integrity: A fixed ejector requires a slot cut into the bolt, even through the bolt face and sometimes a locking lug. The T3 eliminates that cut, instead utilizing a round hole drilled into the bolt face.

-Flat Top for Rail Mounting: The top of the T3 is flat, which makes it easy to properly fit a scope base.

-Generally Good “trueness”: We have to take this one on the words of gunsmiths we’ve talked to. The word is that the T3 actions are generally less out of spec than other commercial actions. Some gunsmiths don’t even do a full blueprint on them.

-Long Tenon Length: One feature of aftermarket actions, either Remington clone actions or pure custom actions, is that they all strive for long tenon threads. This helps the action support the long, heavy barrels used on precision rifles. The barrel tenon, or shank, is about .980” long on the T3, which is significantly longer than the Rem 700 and is as long as some custom actions.

The Cons:

-One Action Size, the Largest: The downside of having one action size is that when you want a .223 rifle, you end up carrying around a 300 Win Mag sized rifle that only shoots .223. Fortunately the T3 action is not very heavy so this isn’t a deal breaker. But it’s just not as compact as it could be in the smaller calibers.

-Requires Modified Mags for .223: If you want to run an aftermarket chassis using AICS magazines for your T3 in .223, you have to modify the plastic AICS magazines. When AI designed the plastic .223 AICS mags, they made the feedlips beefier (because it’s plastic instead of steel) and this causes the mag to not fit up into the T3 action. Some slight trimming on the feedlips is required. It’s fairly simple but still a con.

-Not a Robust Aftermarket: The T3 aftermarket is small but is growing. You can get custom parts but not on the scale of the Remington 700.

-Weak Factory Recoil Lug: The recoil lug that comes imbedded in the factory T3 stock is aluminum and it deforms when you fire the rifle. Some have concluded that the overall design of the Tikka recoil lug is faulty. This is not the case. Sako uses that same exact setup in the TRG-42 in both 300WinMag and 338 Lapua Mag. The fault here is using aluminum as a recoil lug. This is not an issue with aftermarket stocks, but we felt we needed to address the sentiment that has been spreading a bit.

-Undersized Ejection Port: The T3 ejection port isn’t way undersize like the TRG, but we would prefer more room to get access in there. The upside is that a smaller ejection port yields a stronger action, generally speaking.

-Plastic Bolt Shroud: It just seems cheap and flimsy. European users report breakages. Replacing the factory shroud with a metal one is the most popular T3 mod we have seen.

-Short Magazine Well: If you have a T3 in a long action caliber like 30-06, and want to put it in a chassis type stock using an AICS magazine. You will find that the magazine opening in the bottom of the T3 action is too short for the AICS magazine, and the follower in the magazine may catch on the underside of the T3 action. We will be experimenting to see if we can find a way around this, and there’s a Swedish company working up a new magazine just for the T3 in long action calibers.