

Bergara B14² Crest

Bruce Potts explores Bergara's Crest rifle, blending cutting-edge technology with precision craftsmanship. He likes what he finds

Bergara are a well-respected Spanish manufacturer, with their reputation largely made from their excellent in-house built barrels. Their relatively new venture into sporting rifles has been a great success, with their centrefire and rimfire rifles representing great value and becoming very popular here in the UK.

This B14 centrefire model, the most popular, comes in many forms, including sporters, specialised finishes, carbon wrapped barrels, semi tactical, carbine length and magnum.

This Crest Carbon, with its carbon-fibre stock and wrapped barrel, along with Cerakote finishes to the material parts, makes a superbly practical and light stalking rifle. Priced at only £1,850, the Crest offers great value for money especially considering

the high cost of carbon fibre in the manufacturing process.

Closer look

Bergara's successful B14 action, made from chrome moly, has a one-piece bolt for strength and integrity under pressure. Its spiral fluted surface reduces weight, while the traditional twin-locking bolt system and coned head induce a 90° bolt opening angle and smooth operation. The bolt handle itself has a slight backward slant with nicely tapered knob at the end with ridges for extra grip. When it is cocked, the bolt shroud shows an indicator protrusion in red as a visual warning.

The recessed bolt head encloses the rear section of the cartridge for safer enclosure and the strong inset extractor claw was

most efficient. Importantly, from a practical standpoint the Sniper Grey Cerakote finish to the metal parts make them immune to rust.

Cartridges are fed into the chamber via the polymer AICS-compatible five-shot magazine, so replacements are plentiful and cheap. Removal via the ambidextrous drop lever in front of the trigger guard is easy and fast to access, avoiding fumbling in the field with cold hands.

Fire control is from Bergara's own Performance Model trigger, based on a Remington 700. Its adjustability from 1.5-3.5lb is welcome, but the pre-set factory pull weight of 2lb 4oz with no creep or overtravel was perfect when tested. The safety is a traditional a two-position, right-side mounted system that allows the rifle to be unloaded with the safety on. Very sensible.



Easy scope mounting plus a very comfortable cheek weld and eye position

Carbon fibre delivers less weight, is warm in winter, and is a real bargain at this price point

The polymer AICS five-shot magazine is rock solid, does the job and will never rust!

Scope mounting is confined to the traditional drilled and taped action top, where a two- or one-piece rail mount can be attached. This allows a good degree of flexibility as to what type of optics or NV/thermal one can attach.

Most important is the barrel; if it's wrong all the other premium features are null and void. The star of the show on this Carbon model is its hybrid design, using CURE carbon-wrap technology. A slim, 20" 4140 chrome moly barrel with a $\frac{5}{8}$ " UNEF threaded muzzle is wrapped with a stainless steel mesh to dissipate heat and then interwoven into a top layer of carbon fibre. This is called Cold Bore Technology and avoids a change in zero as the barrel heats up when shooting. The rifle is guaranteed by Bergara to shoot sub-MOA 100yd groups with premium factory ammunition. The barrel also weighs 2lb less than a standard all steel barrel.

Barrel lengths options are 20", 22" or 24" depending on calibre. This .308 Win sports a 1 in 10" rifling twist and a 20" length, which will stabilise up to 220gr bullets.

Calibre choice is nice and varied, starting with the .223 Rem for foxes or small species deer here in Britain. Then come the venerable .243 Win and its – some would say – successor the 6.5 Creedmoor. You also can

choose the new 6.5 PRC cartridge, which is a fast, flat-shooting round or opt for the 7 PRC for longer-range use. The good old .270 Win is still offered, as is the 7mm Rem mag and .30-06 Springfield, so they are obviously still popular. Finally there are the 308 Win and the excellent, more powerful, .300 Win Mag brings up the rear.

To steer the Crest correctly Bergara have the knack of producing really well thought-out stock designs. This monocoque construction is formed by the resin transfer method (RTM) whereby layers of dry carbon fibre are hand laid on the mould. Then the slow addition of resin sets the dry fibres and a central carbon fibre spine runs full length of the butt for rigidity.

All this means that the Crest's 100% carbon fibre stock only weighs 900g. This, combined with the semi-tactical flat or slab sided profile and scalloped shape of the stock, means that shots from prone, off sticks or even off-hand can be accomplished with ease and less fatigue.

Visually the carbon fibre weave pattern is evident beneath the painted blue/black tiger striping, which gives a mild camouflage effect that is quite pleasing to the eye. Not having and moulded-in chequering or stippling would seem to be an error, but

the tactile nature of the upright pistol grip and semi-lipped bottom edge to the forend obviates the need for either.

Unlike the thumbhole Wilderness model I tested recently (tinyurl.com/B14wilderness) there is no adjustable cheekpiece, but the flat comb is high enough for correct eye alignment with a scope fitted.

Sling fitment is via two options. There are q/d sling recesses in butt and forend on the both sides of the stock, which is very handy, and the traditional q/d studs on the bottom of the forend. I found that the rearmost interfered with my hand position, so I would remove it for comfort. The length of pull is a tad short at 13.75", so a spacer would help make for a more comfortable hold. Other than that it is a really stable, weatherproof and ultra-light stock that impressed me.

Interestingly there is no synthetic bedding compound or aluminium bedding pillars to the stock screws, but as the tests proved it would seem to be unnecessary.

Ammo tests

I fitted a rather nice Steiner Ranger 6 3-18 x 56mm scope via Leupold 30mm mounts clamped to my benchrest quality Ken Farrell 20 MOA one-piece scope rail. To reduce the muzzle report from the short 20" barrel, »

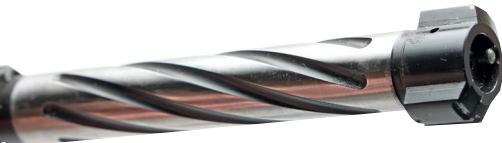




The B14 action has become a classic among modern bolt-action rifles and is very reliable and smooth to operate



Two-lug 90° bolt lift, comfortable bolt handle and cocking indicator



The fluted bolt saves weight and looks good. The twin cone-shaped locking lugs engage the abutments very positively

an Evolve lightweight aluminium sound moderator was also attached. This proved to be a well balanced and a remarkably quiet combination in the field tests.

First up at 100yd were the factory loads and I kicked off with the Federal 150gr Power Shok bullets, which achieved a healthy 2725fps for 2474ft-lb energy and a 0.59" group of three shots. A good start. Next were

the Hornady ECX 125gr lead-free bullets that generally shoot well but not today, achieving a group size of 1.37" and a muzzle velocity of 2997fps/2494ft-lb. More than acceptable, though.

Another lead-free loading were the Sako PowerHead Blade with its 162gr monolithic bullet that shot great 0.61" group at a sedate 2564fps and 2365ft-lb. Good for larger species deer such as fallow or red that need a bit more penetration and an extended wound channel for lethality.

Hornady's 165gr SST lead-cored bullet shot a similar-sized group at 0.64" with a velocity of 2756fps/2784ft-lb – nearly 200fps faster than the Sako. It just shows how similar weights from different manufacturers

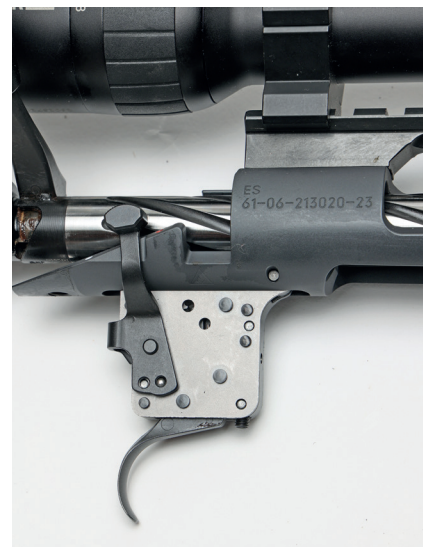
can yield very different velocities. Again, a great red deer load if you don't have to use a lead-free round on your stalking ground.

Going a little more traditional, the Sako 150gr Game Heads are a good all-round performer in .308, with a velocity of 2772fps/2560ft-lb and a 0.85" group. I saved the best to last with the Norma Eco Strike. These are lead free and also 150gr like the Sako GameHeads, but the Crest digested them with relish for an amazing 0.33" group at 2750fps/2520ft-lb.

I tried only tried a few reloads. First, a nice light 110gr V-Max, which is always good for foxes. A load of 41.0gr of Alliant RL10X powder and a Federal Match primer (used for all the reloads) achieved 2811fps/1930ft-lb



The five-shot, AICS-compatible, single-stack magazine in polymer works a treat



Bergara's Performance model trigger

and 1.0" groups at 100yd. Switching to the same-weight lead-free Hornady GMX bullet, velocity went up a tad to 2886fps for 2035ft-lb and a lovely 0.52" three-shot cluster. My old favourites the Nosler 125gr Ballistic Tips are a good all-rounder for deer or foxes and a tried and tested load of 43.0gr of Alliant RL10X powder achieved 2989fps for 2480ft-lb energy and decent 0.77" groups.

Barnes 130gr TTSX are a good lead-free option and I achieved 1.5" groups with a load of 48.5gr of Ramshot Tac at 2811fps and 2282ft-lb energy. Better were the 150gr Nosler Ballistic Tips and a more traditional bullet weight for the .308 Win round. A loading to start with of 46gr of Alliant RL15 powder achieved 2540fps/ 2149ft-lb and sub-MOA groups at 0.94 of an inch. That wasn't as good as I expected, so I upped the load to 47.5gr and got a 0.88" group and 2701fps/2431ft-lb energy.

200yd is a nice range to shoot at to sort out the wheat from the chaff, so I took the Norma Eco Strikes and Federal 150gr loads back to 200yd to have a go on some roe targets and steels to test their mettle. Unsurprisingly both shot superbly well despite the choppy winds, with the Eco Strikes shooting an excellent 1.65" group. The Federals shot 2" or thereabouts, which is still very good, with the steel fox target ringing out with every shot.

In the field

It was just at the end of the Chinese water deer season, so I opted for an evening's foray to the ditches and hedgerows. Evenings



A nimble and trim rifle to tout about the fields and it feels very well planted in the aim

always seem best with CWD as you can often get into position an hour or two before last light and then observe as they emerge from their warm and sheltered beds in the aforementioned ditches.

So there I was, loaded up with the Norma Eco Strike zeroed at 100yd and the Crest supported on a Harris bipod, when I spotted a CWD buck at 350yd through the new Pulsar Telos thermal imager. It was just 30 minutes before last light, so I crept out of sight along the ditch for 125yd to rest at a convenient deployment spot as the buck rounded a hedgerow in front of me. At 165yd I lightly touched the trigger and he collapsed instantly with a high heart/lung shot. So the Eco Strikes were not only accurate but must also expand well.

Conclusion

The Bergara Crest delivered great accuracy from factory ammo and reloads when tested. Its great handling qualities are brought out through its light weight and rugged exterior, making it a very capable field rifle. Ergonomically the action is smooth and reliable, with a fumble-free mag release. The design of the carbon fibre stock gives great confidence and fatigueless stalking in rough terrain. Overall it's another accomplished centrefire rifle from Bergara. ■



A cracking end-of-season CWD buck harvested at 165yd with Norma Eco Strike

Tech specs

Manufacturer	Bergara Spain
Model	B14 ² Crest Carbon
Type	Bolt action
Calibre	.308 Win on test, 5/8" 24 UNEF
Length	40"
Weight	6.8lb (3.1kg)
Barrel	20" carbon wrapped
Finish	Sniper grey cerakote and carbon
Stock	Carbon fibre synthetic camo finish
LOP	13.75", extension pieces to 14.75"
Trigger	Single-stage adjustable
Safety	Side lever
Magazine	Detachable five-shot polymer
Distributor	Artemis Outdoors UK 01579 362319
Price	£1,850.00