

# HOWA'S 7MM REMINGTON MAGNUM IS A REAL SLEEPER



The Howa 1500 in 7mm Rem. Mag. is at its best as a long range plains or mountain rifle. Few mid-calibre cartridges, either commercial or wildcat, shoot much flatter or hit any harder over a long haul.

The range of excellent Howa Model 1500 rifles and the extremely capable 7mm Remington Magnum cartridge both have interesting histories. It is one of the best big-game combinations there is.

**T**he Howa Model 1500 rifle is made by Dickson-Howa in Japan and its action is essentially the same as that of the Weatherby Vanguard, which was formerly marketed as the Australian Mountaineer, S&W Model 1500 and Mossberg 1500.

In this case the chicken did come before the egg and the Howa Model 1500 action actually evolved from the Sako L-61 Finnbear design back in 1961, and was introduced into America as the Golden Bear Model FSD-43. It was a clone of the Sako and identical in every way including having the tapered dovetails.

The Vanguard rifle was sold unchanged until 1979 when the Smith & Wesson (and Australian Mountaineer) versions appeared which had no recognizable Sako features; the action had undergone a major revamp, probably in order to simplify production. The bolt-mounted guide rib was replaced by a post-68 Winchester Model 70-type receiver rail with a slot in the right locking lug. The blade ejector was dropped away in favour of a solid left lug and a plunger ejector in the bolt face.

Weatherby's Vanguard version was easily recognizable from the S&W version by having a fluted bolt body, but kept the three



large gas escape holes in its right side which direct escaping gas down into the magazine well. The bolt sleeve was given a more distinctive contour than the cylindrical shape of the S&W. In recent years other minor changes have taken place – the two-position safety being replaced with a 3-position unit which allows safer unloading.

Highland Sports handles Howa in Australia and they presently list at least ten different versions. There's sporter and varmint models with blued or stainless metalwork and a choice of stocks - black or green Overmolded Hogue stocks, black polymer laminated nutmeg or pepper in standard or thumbhole. There's something to suit every taste and purpose.

The Howa 1500 action is made in two lengths – short and long. Maybe there's nothing outstanding about its design, every feature has been used in some other rifle in the past (and still are), but the rifles are well-made and nicely finished and have a good reputation for accuracy and reliability.

The Howa breach does away with what was one of the old Sako's weak points. In the original design the Sako bolt face counter-bore depth didn't match the protrusion of the case head from the chamber, leaving much of it un-shrouded. In the Howa the bolt's face extends past the locking lugs to enter a recess in the barrel face, thus the cartridge head is well supported on all sides, leaving only a minimum gap between bolt and barrel.

The extractor is a hook located between 7 and 8 o'clock on the bolt face, that pivots on a pin behind the locking lugs. A hole in the left side of the receiver ring supplements the gas-relief ability of three large holes in the bolt.

Howa's fire control system uses a one-piece firing pin, mainspring, cocking cam, pin and bolt sleeve. The cocking piece is cammed back into engagement with the sear by a cam in the root of the bolt handle traveling up a curved surface at the left rear of the bridge.

The receiver is hefty and flat-bottomed with a single recoil lug at its front. The bolt stop, which is located on the left side of the upper tang, projects into the left locking lug raceway receiver. Pressing down on its serrated upper catch depresses the stop allowing the bolt to be removed.

The 3-position safety is on the right side of the tang. It works in the conventional manner; back for "ON" and forward for "OFF." In the mid-position it locks the trigger but allows the bolt to be opened to remove a live round from the chamber. The trigger is adjustable for sear engagement, weight of pull and backlash.

The Howa I received for review has a stainless steel barreled-action cradled in a black Hogue Overmolded stock with high straight comb, flared pistol grip and flat-bottomed forend with finger grooves. The barrel is free-floating back to the receiver ring. Hogue stocks are user-friendly and a high straight comb, together with a soft rub-



**ABOVE:** Five-shot groups with 174gr Highland AX ammo (left) printed a bit higher at 100 metres than the 145gr stuff, but accuracy was very good for an untuned factory rifle with commercial ammunition.



**LEFT:** The Howa trigger is fully adjustable for weight of pull, sear engagement and overtravel. Catch at rear of bridge is the bolt release.

ber recoil pad makes them very comfortable to shoot.

I borrowed the Howa in 7mm Remington Magnum because this fine cartridge has largely been forgotten since the introduction of super-sevens like the 7mm STW and Remington Ultra Mag.

My own 7mm Rem. Mag. was a Mauser 98 with a 610mm Douglas barrel built by Bill Marden in 1976. Referring back to my early log book shows that the Norma factory load with 150gr SP bullet clocked 3160fps which was 100 fps short of the published figure, probably taken in a 650mm barrel. This was pretty good but not as impressive as the Winchester factory 160gr Fail Safe ammo that I chrono'd doing 2974 fps in 1995. A later lot of Remington ammo gave 2860fps with the 175gr bullet.

My favourite handloads were: 140gr Nosler BT and 70gr of Re-22 for 3260fps; the 160gr Speer Grand Slam and 71gr of H4831 for 3060fps; and the 175gr Speer and 69gr of H4831 at 2930fps.

The Remington Sales Dept. had decreed that the 7mm Rem. Mag. would never sell. They were dead wrong! The 7mm Mag. turned out to be one of the most successful

big-game cartridges to be introduced since World War II. Other rifle manufacturers took notice of the success of the "Big Seven" and soon every rifle manufacturer was chambering rifles for it and every cartridge manufacturer picked it up. The belted 7mm magnum just about killed off the .280 Remington, which never recovered, despite several attempts by Remington to revive it.

Basically, the 7mm Rem. Mag. offers a considerable edge over its major rival, the .270 Winchester. It drives a 140gr bullet 100fps faster than the .270 does a 130gr, and has almost 250 fps more velocity left at 400 yards, for a gain of about 33 percent in impact energy at that distance. Its actual ballistics may be closer to the 7mm Weatherby Magnum than factory ballistic tables would indicate. This is reflected in data published in various reloading manuals.

The 7mm Rem. Mag has many advantages for those who think they need more power than is given by the .270 and .30-06. For one thing it gives less recoil than the .30 magnums, and consequently is more pleasant to shoot and rifles for it can be built light enough so that are not burdensome to carry.



**BELOW:** The 7mm Remington Magnum (left) just about killed off the .280 Remington, outsold the 7mm Weatherby Magnum and survived an onslaught by the 7mm STW.

**LEFT:** After being modified several times over the years, the Howa 1500 action of today bears no resemblance to the Sako Finnbear that inspired it.

**INSET:** One-piece bolt has Sako-style extractor and plunger ejector. Three large holes in bolt body direct escaping gases down into the magazine well.



They can generally be shot more accurately too, since they will not bruise the shooter's shoulder or kick him out from under his hat.

Today, the 7mm Rem. Mag's glory has become tarnished after suffering an onslaught from a number of newer, more glamorous 7mm magnums. The first of these was the 7mm STW, a wildcat adopted by none other than Remington in 1996. Based on the 8mm Rem. Mag. case necked down, the 7mm STW outdid its predecessor by driving the 140gn bullet at 3400fps, the 160gn at 3200fps and the 175-grainer at over 3000fps.

Not long after they chambered the 7mm STW, Remington surprised everyone by bringing out a super-seven of their own – the 7mm Remington Ultra Mag which shaded the 7mm STW by about 100-200 fps with bullet weights from 140 to 175 grains. At 300 yards it delivers 24 percent more energy than the standard 7mm Rem. Mag. and 12 percent more than the 7mm STW. In the hands of a skilled marksman these big sevens are a superb choice for the trophy hunter for long range deer and antelope. But this increased performance exacts a high price. Barrel life can be very limited due to increased throat erosion and immense heat caused by burning huge charges of slow powders. For all-around use, the 7mm Rem. Mag. still has a lot to offer. It's an excellent choice for the one-gun man.

The next attack came from a twin assault in 2001 with the introduction of the 7mm WSM and 7mm SAUM both based on a shortened and slightly modified .404 Jeffery case. Both equaled the 7mm Rem. Mag. while fitting into easy-carrying, fast-handling short-action rifles. Neither cartridge drew as much attention as the .270 and .300 WSM's, and both practically died at birth.

The truth is, there's no substitute for cubic capacity and the short magnums work at an

average 63,000 psi against around 55,000 psi for the 7mm Rem. Mag. Handloaders often complain about difficult extraction and short case life with the short magnums. As a consequence, many shooters are taking another favourable look at the belted magnums.

The mounts that accompanied the Howa 1500 rifle set the rings so far apart that there was no chance of mounting the Nikko Stirling 3-9x42 Diamond scope. Luckily, I had an old Redfield Jr. bridge mount that got the job done in fine style with the scope low over the receiver and the bell just clearing the barrel.

After getting the rifle sighted in to be printing 64mm high at 100 metres with the 145gn Highland AX ammo, the 174gn load printed 76mm high from the same zero. This is a good feature about most of the 7mm Rem. Mag. rifles I've tested; for all practical purposes they have put the 160gn and 175gn bullets in the same group at 200 metres. Thus it would be possible to sight in with any of these loads and yet use any of the others on game to 250 metres and never notice any difference. Five shot groups with the 145gn bullet averaged 1.4 MoA and the 174gn load averaged 1.75 MoA. This is pretty good accuracy from a stock standard factory rifle and ammunition.

The Howa has the proper dimensions and heft for a 7mm magnum. Cut the barrel below 610mm and you not only lose a good deal of velocity, but the muzzle blast will start your ears ringing. Cut the weight below this outfits 4 kilos and you get belted pretty bad.

Taking everything into account, and balancing power, versatility, trajectory and hitting power against weight and recoil, I can think of no better combination than the Howa 1500 in 7mm Rem. Mag. It is a great combination. 🔫

## SPECS

### HOWA MODEL 1500 7MM REM. MAG.

**Manufacturer:**

Dickson Howa Japan

**Model:**

1500

**Action:**

Turnbolt

**Safety:**

Thumb-operated  
3-position on trigger

**Calibre:**

7mm Rem. Mag

**Barrel length:**

610mm

**Metal and action finish:**

Stainless steel

**Magazine capacity:**

3 rounds

**Weight:**

3.4kg

**Overall length:**

1140mm

**Stock:**

Hogue overmolded; length of pull,  
355mm; drop at comb, 22mm;  
drop at heel, 10mm

**Likely Retail price:**

\$POA

**Trade Enquiries:**

Highland Sports

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