



Sauer 404 Classic XT

the best just keeps getting better

Con Kapralos

It's been six years since J.P. Sauer & Sohn released their successor to the much-loved 202 in the form of the 404 bolt-action rifle. While the 202 model was in production from 1993 to 2015, the 404 brought a raft of improvements which made the gun even better while maintaining the original design of a compact, take-down, switch-barrel rifle.

Make no bones about it, the Sauer 404 is a premium kit with true modularity, only limited by the owner's desire and budget and some of the higher specification options of the 404 are simply stunning. It's a rifle any shooting sportsman would be proud to own yet the Sauer 404 is still

a serious hunting firearm and one of their most popular models is the Classic XT, a synthetic-stocked rifle at home on a driven European hunt, African safari or pursuing all manner of Australian game species.

At the 2019 SSAA SHOT Expo in Melbourne, Jim Harding, Marketing Manager for Outdoor Sporting Agencies asked *Australian Shooter* to review the Sauer 404, yet it would be a year later in our COVID-dominated landscape before a demonstration model of the Sauer 404 Classic XT was finally available. In this instance it was a cased, two-barrel set complete with two matching Zeiss V8 riflescopes, specific for each calibre and

application - a 1.8-14x50 for the .308 Winchester barrel and 1-8x30 for the big-bore .375 H&H Magnum tube.

The fitted case also housed the spare bolt head, magazines for both calibres and all accessories including a Sauer leather rifle sling. I immediately deduced this kit as-is wouldn't leave much change from \$20,000 but reviewing the Sauer 404 with .308 Winchester barrel was the priority. Having reviewed the Sauer 202 many years previously, assessing the 404 would be interesting especially as I'd read international reviews, all from Europe, where the Sauer 404 is king in the driven shooting and hunting landscape.

Review rifle as supplied.



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While many pundits love to compare the 404 with the 202, naturally the 404 has seen many refinements which make it superior. For instance, manual cocking/decocking by pushing the safety catch forward or rearwards makes the rifle completely safe and is simple and effective. Another improvement is the scope-mounting system. Whereas with the 202 most users opted for Warne or Apel mounts, the 404 uses the Sauer Universal Mount (SUM) which is specifically designed to mate up with machined recesses in the top of the action. This saddle-style mount makes it possible for any optic to be removed and reattached with no change in point-of-impact and allows the owner to use iron sights for close-range hunting.

The action

Almost identical externally to the 202, the 404 is based on the switch-barrel concept and uses the same split receiver system to retain the barrel by three transverse bolts. The close-topped receiver is made from aluminium to reduce weight and the ejection port is large enough for single loading. The receiver block also encompasses the integral magazine well along with the triggerguard made from the same aluminium.

The bolt is a multi-piece affair with interchangeable bolt head for changes in calibre (and barrel) as well as the manual cocking/decocking system. Also housed in the receiver block is the 404 trigger system which has the added bonus of being able to be set at one of four pre-determined trigger-pull settings from 0.55 to 1.25kg by simply using the Sauer Universal Key (SUK). The SUK is the tool to which all user adjustments are carried out on the 404 from trigger pull, removal of the barrel set, fore-end and buttstock. This dandy little tool is located in the tip of the fore-end and also serves as the forward sling swivel attachment point. The triggerblade is also adjustable for length and pitch by using a small Allen key supplied and there's also a steel option for the 404 receiver.

Interchangeable barrel system

The review 404 was supplied as a two-barrel set with .308 Winchester and .375 Holland & Holland Magnum barrels respectively. Owners can choose from 16 available calibres from .243 Winchester right up to 10.3x60R and match the barrel with the appropriate bolt head required. Barrel lengths and profiles are also an option for buyers but in the case of the review two-barrel set, both sported iron sights (mid-barrel and muzzle), the .308 Winchester barrel being 560mm long with sporter profile.



Left-hand view of the action.



The manual safety cocking/decocking function.



Looking at the bolt with detachable head.



The barrel removed.

The .375 H&H Magnum barrel was much stouter at 620mm with a heavy profile. The overall rifle weight with the two barrels showed only a difference of 308g (3.397kg for the .308 Win and 3.705kg for the .375 H&H Magnum). The barrels are made with a cold hammer forging process which produces an excellent barrel for hunting accuracy.

Barrel changing is simple as, using the SUK, the fore-end is removed to expose three retaining bolts. With the bolt removed, sequentially loosening each one a couple of turns (from No.1 to 3) then lowering the barrel captive lever to the vertical position allows the barrel to be removed. Repositioning is the reverse process. As always it's a must to read

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the user manual before attempting barrel change (or any task) on the 404 and I found a barrel could be swapped in about five minutes.

Changing the bolt head is simple. A spring-loaded retaining lug on the bolt body is pushed back and the bolt head slid off the body, the new bolt head then slipped into place and snaps into position. When changing the barrel there's no need to insert the bolt (to engage the locking lugs) before tightening the barrel retaining bolts as the lugs lock directly into the barrel precisely. The barrels are in a matte blue to match the finish of the aluminium receiver block.

Magazine

The magazines supplied are made from pressed steel without a hint of polymer in sight. The .308 Winchester magazine was 3-shot capacity, the .375 H&H Magnum supplied with 3 and 5-shot magazines. All magazines clipped into place faultlessly and provision of a magazine safety feature, in which the release button is clicked forward, blocks it from operating and eliminates accidental loss of the magazine.

Buttstock and fore-end

The 404 was fitted with the Classic XT stock, one of two polymer synthetic stocks offered. There are beautiful walnut options but for a hunting rifle made to be used in the harshest of conditions, the Classic XT is an excellent choice. The stock is a green soft-touch polymer unit with elastomeric panels around the pistol grip and on both sides of the fore-end, a black schnabel tip on the fore-end adding a touch of class but, more importantly, this area houses the Sauer Universal Key (SUK) with the sling swivel loop attached.

The buttstock and fore-end are easily removed by using the SUK where their removal is warranted. With the fore-end, the SUK is inserted into a small hole on the underside and the retaining catch turned 90-degrees, enabling the fore-end to be slid off. For the buttstock the SUK accesses a stock bolt through a small hole in the recoil pad and easing off the stock bolt allows the buttstock to be removed.

At the range

Restrictions meant testing the Sauer 404 was limited, resulting only in a range test using the .308 Winchester barrel and matching Zeiss V8 1.8-14x50 scope. Once the rifle was boresighted in at 25m and 'on paper' at 100m, a selection of hunting loads as well as a handload was assessed, firing five 3-shot groups before a barrel clean between changes in ammunition.



Accuracy testing. Sauer 404 - .308 Winchester barrel fitted - 100m

Ammunition	Best group	Worst group	Average *
Remington Core-Lokt 150gr SP	32mm	50mm	40mm
Hornady Superformance SST 150gr	18mm	32mm	23mm
Federal Powershok 150gr SP	20mm	35mm	28mm
Handload - 140gr Tigershark over AR2209	10mm	20mm	15mm

*Average taken from five 3-shot groups at 100m

As expected, the Sauer 404 with .308 Winchester barrel attached yielded acceptable accuracy for a hunting outfit, with group averages from 40mm for the Remington Core-Lokt 150gr soft-point to the select handload, consisting of a 140gr Tigershark HT Monolithic projectile over a charge of AR2209. This load has always shot superbly in any .308 Winchester rifle and was best performer with a group average of 15mm for five 3-shot groups. The other factory load tested, offerings from Hornady and Federal, performed well with group averages of 23 and 28mm respectively.

Overview

The Sauer 404 Classic XT is an excellent option for hunters looking at a switch-barrel rifle system and the sky's the limit as to how many barrels the owner invests in. The synthetic stock is indestructible and impervious to the elements, while the rifle shoots superbly and for the hunter in us who wants the best, the Sauer 404 is well worth a closer look. For pricing, talk to your firearms retailer or visit www.osaaustralia.com.au. ●

The slick fitted case.

