



# Dream-makers

If you build it . . . Beretta Australia makes  
Mark van den Boogaart's wish come true

It's a conversation that plays out every time a few hunting and shooting types come together. What if? What if you could build yourself a rifle? Just pick what you want and make it happen. We can all dream, tell tall tales and impress upon anyone who'll listen what we'd build and some of us, myself included, have even tried. Sometimes you get it right and it's so much better - and sometimes you don't.

But what if someone asked you to build a rifle? Something that'll be on display and be critiqued by thousands of readers - talk about pressure. Well that's what happened when *Australian Shooter* and Beretta Australia invited me to a 'virtual' meeting last year to discuss an idea they were cooking up.

My first thought when they offered me the chance to lead a rifle-build project was 'Yeah!' My second was the Homer Mobile. For those who don't understand the reference Homer, that's cartoon icon Homer Simpson, was asked by his long-lost mega-rich industrialist half-brother to build a

car that would be the flagship of his auto manufacturing empire. What Homer built destroyed the company and wiped out his brother's fortune in one beautifully ridiculous fell swoop.

### The build

What became clear after that initial meeting is this wasn't going to be just about choosing some stockroom accessories to bolt together. After receiving considerable feedback from industry, Beretta Australia has established a true gunsmithing service that's open to everyone and they can either help customise your existing rifle or build you a true one-off. If you have a dream they might just be the guys to make it happen.

Talking with Beretta's national sales manager Scott Allen and Byron Young (workshop supervisor and gunsmith) via Zoom meetings, emails and on the phone, we spent a considerable time working up ideas and concepts. The upside was we had the ability to experiment and try new things, the downside being the potential to

create the dreaded Homer Mobile.

We finally settled on an idea for a utilitarian rifle. Now that doesn't mean basic, rather something with broad appeal that could be used across a wide range of applications, in other words built to be used. We also wanted the rifle to stand out, to be truly unique and most importantly be an integral part of where your hunting and shooting journey might take you.

### The platform

Now we just needed a base rifle and after considering a few options and different brands I opted for a Tikka CTR in .308 Win. Why Tikka? They make good rifles and have a wide left-hand selection. Why a CTR? Well a couple of years ago I reviewed a CTR and was mightily impressed. Why .308 Win? Because it works, it meets all Australian state requirements and recommendations for hunting calibres and, in a world of supply chain troubles, you'll find .308 Win on the gunshop shelf.



The concept rifle.



Mesa Altitude stock in Mohave pattern.

## Dream-makers



Byron from Beretta Australia fluting the Tikka bolt.



Major components of the build.



### The stock

With the rifle sorted it was down to components and improvements and my first point of focus was the stock. The CTR's synthetic stock is perfectly serviceable but after carrying one for 10 days during a road trip hunting adventure I wanted something a little different so decided on a Mesa stock. Pondering aftermarket stocks I chose the Tikka Altitude, a hunting stock which uses layers of carbon fibre combined with a lightweight fill and included in the stock are bedded pillars, a steel recoil lug and a new set of action screws. I also chose the stock in the Mohave pattern, and yes, I did have an idea for colour and finish.

### Optics

For optics I chose Steiner as I've reviewed both Steiner scopes and binoculars in the past and honestly feel you get some major bang for your buck. Like the rifle, Steiner glass is utilitarian and would be a perfect match-up and there are plenty of models to choose from across the Steiner range which was a nice problem to have. As we were building what I hoped would be a high-end or top-shelf hunting rifle, I wanted top-shelf glass and that thinking led me to the Steiner Nighthunter Xtreme in 2-10x50mm, one of their flagship models with 30mm tube and illuminated 4A-i reticle.

### Mounts

I'm not a rail guy as I like the clean lines of a rifle receiver though the exception to that rule is my Scout rifle which comes factory fitted with a forward rail mount. Now I understand rails and recognise their value, especially if you want to mount night vision and thermal optics so in designing this rifle, fitting a rail was a significant consideration. In the end aesthetics won out and ultimately we went with a scope-mounting system that would be functional, though discrete, and chose Burris low profile hunting-style rings.



Concept rifle with bipod.

### Trigger

After mulling over the idea of an improved trigger I decided to stick with the factory version. This was one of those decisions I went back and forth on but I concluded that sometimes sticking with what you know is the safest way to go.

### Bipod

After reviewing some modern high-quality bipod systems in England a couple of years ago, I asked Byron if they could set the rifle up with a Spartan bipod and while not part of the regular Beretta Australia product line, they were able to source a bipod and mounting system for installation on the Mesa Altitude stock.

### Fluting

As part of the full gunsmithing option I decided to take up their offer to flute the bolt. Fluting isn't everyone's cup of tea and you can go a little overboard, so we decided on a straight-lined fluting pattern which primarily focused on reducing weight without compromising performance.



Steiner Night Hunter Xtreme in 2-10x50mm post-Cerakoting.

### Colour

If there was anywhere along the build process I stepped out of my comfort zone it was around the final finish. I'm a traditionalist at heart as I like blued or at least Cerakote blued barrels, actions and timber stocks though do have one laminate-stocked rifle which is about as crazy as it gets. But that's me and I recognise there's more than one view of the world, so moving away from (my) norm I went for a combination of colours and finishes.

Using the Mohave pattern of the Mesa stock as a starting point we decided on Cerakote FDE (Flat Dark Earth) for the main components and Cerakote Smoke for the minor elements. And with that we had a rifle - or rather the components of a rifle - and it was now up to Byron to put it all together so I could take it to the range and start doing what it was designed to do.

• Next month: Putting the custom-build to the test. ●