



AUSTRALIAN ACCURACY

Lithgow's LA101 Crossover rimfire rifle

BY LOWELL STRAUSS

The land down under is famous for its unique native wildlife – kangaroos, koola and platypus. It's also known for feral critters that run amok in the outback, including cane toads, rabbits and feral cats. Australia is less well known for manufacturing firearms.

However, since 1912, in conflicts around the globe, Australian troops have carried weapons made in Australia by Lithgow Arms. The list of firearms

manufactured by Lithgow includes:

- Lee-Enfield 303 British
- L1A1 Self-Loading rifle – the Canadian equivalent was the C1A1 or FN FAL
- Lithgow F90 – the Australian version of the Steyr AUG, the EF88
- Vickers machine guns
- Bren guns
- F1 submachine gun

There's no doubt that Lithgow is the

home of small arms in Australia. For more info on the company's history, check out <http://lithgowsafmuseum.org.au/history.html>.

But Lithgow also manufactures rifles for the civilian market. And in a target-rich environment like Australia, shooting varmints with accurate rimfires is an extremely popular pastime. From the first time I saw a Lithgow rimfire at the SHOT Show, I was impressed. ➤



The LA 101 Crossover has a two-position safety, which allows the bolt to be opened with the safety engaged.



The bolt locks in the rear of the receiver - a strong design not typically found in rimfire rifles.



The Lithgow LA101 rimfire appeared to be a match-ready rimfire rifle capable of punching paper and ringing steel, as well as ventilating vermin. This was one rifle I was excited to review.

LA101 FEATURES

It took a while to get my hands on one. But the wait was worth it. Opening the box, I found the rifle safely tucked in

a cloth draw-string bag – a soft sheath which proudly wore the Lithgow logo. A nice touch compared to the usual plastic bag most rifles are delivered in. With eager anticipation I reached inside, pulling the rifle from its protective cloak. As the dark walnut stock with a unique, wavy grain emerged, I knew this rifle was something special. The fit of the recoil pad was flawless. The ac-

tion mated with the stock perfectly and the inletting for the trigger guard and magazine were exact. I simply could not find any mistakes in the workmanship.

Lithgow uses the same materials, machinery and process to build the LA101 as they do in their military products. If the rifle functioned as superbly as it looked, I was in for a treat. Drilling deeper, I noted that the LA101 includes

The LA101 shot well with most ammunition tested. Eley Sport produced the best five-shot group of 0.38 inches at 50 yards.





premium features not typically found on a rimfire rifle.

If it's the trigger that makes the difference between a good rifle and a great rifle, Lithgow's single-stage, match-grade trigger sets the bar high. I measured the trigger pull at 1.25 kilograms (2.75 pounds) – a little lighter than factory specs. The trigger has no take-up and a crisp break, but with a noticeable overtravel. I think it's a great hunting trigger, but on the heavy side for serious target work. A two-position safety blocks the trigger. Opening the bolt is possible even with the safety engaged.

A 20.5-inch, cold hammer-forged barrel retains its hammered finish rather than being machined smooth. The medium, varmint-weight barrel tapers from 25 millimetres (one inch) at the receiver to 17 millimetres (0.67 inches) at the 11-degree target crown, where it's protected by an 0.5-inch by 20 threaded cap. Rifling in all Crossover models is six groove, right-hand twist. The 17 HMR uses a one-in-nine-inch twist while the .22s (LR and WMR) sport the standard one-in-16-inch twist. Both the barrel and receiver are coated with Cerakote for a low-sheen satin finish.

The action's beefy rear-locking design gains strength from three locking lugs on the bolt, a feature usually reserved for centerfire rifles. It has a push-feed design with a 60-degree bolt lift. Compared to rimfire rifles that rely on the bolt handle to lock the action, this design is much stronger. Due to its tight tolerances and positive locking system, there's no need to be gentle. I can run the bolt fast and hard thanks to its smooth feed and the short bolt throw. During testing, the rifle cycled flawlessly with no failures to feed, fire, extract or eject cartridges. If I find the bolt getting sluggish, it's easily disassembled for cleaning or repair.

The rifle is fed from a flush-fit, five-round detachable magazine. It is made from a see-through polymer, which makes visual inspection easy. Time will tell if this magazine stands up to the rigors of field use, but given the fact that the polymers in the LA101 are the same as used in the Lithgow Arms military weapons, chances are good that it's durable. Rifles come with one magazine, but should you need a replacement or extras, magazines for the CZ 452/455 fit the LA101.

The wood stock is a modern design; a tactical rifle stock combined with the graceful lines and clean, crisp checkering of a classical walnut stock. The stock features a cut out on the bottom called a butt hook, like the McMillan A5 tactical stock (not the same as a butt hook on an Olympic target rifle). Its purpose is for either riding sandbags or controlling the rifle with the non-trigger hand. The action is bedded in the stock and the barrel is fully free-floated.

ACCURACY

So, after much drooling over the rifle's appearance and features, it was time to head to the range and see how the LA101 in 22LR rifle shoots. In the lineup were seven different types of ammunition, including Federal American Eagle, CCI Blazer, CCI Sub-Sonic, Remington Golden Bullet, Winchester Wildcat, Winchester M-22, Eley Club and Eley Sport. At 50 yards, the best five-shot group measured 0.38 inches with Eley Sport, neck-and-neck for second and third place were Winchester Wildcat at 0.45 inches and Federal American Eagle 0.47 inches. Remington Golden

Bullet (bulk ammunition) surprised me, shooting a 0.58-inch group. Winchester M-22 lagged way behind the rest with an abysmal 1.58-inch group. But then, this ammunition is designed for high-volume plinking, not precision shooting. This testing proved again that even in a match-grade rifle, it's still important to test different ammunition to find which one the rifle likes best.

I think there are several reasons why the Lithgow LA101 is such an exceptional shooter. They include a match-grade chamber with tighter tolerances than the SAAMI specs, bedded action and a medium weight, free-floated barrel. Lithgow Arms has also added a choked bore (slight narrowing of the bore diameter near the muzzle) to the Crossover – an additional step in the manufacturing process to further improve accuracy. Add to this a bolt with three locking lugs and a good trigger, and you have the makings of a tack driver.

The LA101 Crossover exhibits a quality found in high-priced European rimfire rifles. Lithgow Arms calls the LA101 rifle the Crossover – both a hunting and target rifle. Its modern design, classic good looks, outstanding accuracy and unstoppable reliability means it excels at both.

The LA101 Crossover is available in three rimfire calibres: 17 HMR, 22 LR or 22 WMR, and in your choice of walnut, laminate or polymer stocks. MSRP is \$1,400 to \$1,495 based on model and options. They are distributed in Canada by Trigger Wholesale and sold at dealers across the country. For more info about these rifles, see Lithgow's website at www.lithgowarms.com. 