

Lightweight champion

Assessing the Sako Finnligh II, Stuart Wilson finds an ultra-light rifle that's punching well above its weight performance-wise

The Sako stable of rifles have always been solid, dependable and good quality, finding favour with recreational shooters and professionals alike, and the superb Sako 75 even finds its way into the hands of rifleshooters for rebarrelling and custom work – a testament to the reliability of the Sako pedigree. I am familiar with most of the Sako range, and know the main features – some I like, others I am perhaps indifferent to – and I remember the first Finnligh I ever handled, a lightweight rifle in .30-06, which left me feeling a bit of a kick, but certainly opened up the concept of

a 'mountain' rifle to me. My own preference has usually been for a heavier rifle, but recently I have been really impressed with a few of the lighter variants of rifles that are currently on the market, and moreover the accuracy they can deliver down-range.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The test rifle I received this time around is a Sako Finnligh II in .308 Win, a good all-rounder for deer stalkers in the UK. I will happily take opportune fox while stalking as well. Some may say .308 is overkill for fox, muntjac and Chinese water

deer – and if the comments on my videos for The Shooting Show are anything to go by, everyone has an opinion on this! In reality many stalkers try and use one rifle for everything, and with that in mind .308 Win is a good compromise for all of our UK deer species.

Slipping the lid of the Finnligh II's box reveals a black, synthetic-stocked rifle with a tungsten grey barrel and action, with two clearly visible rubberised inlay panels on the pistol grip and forend. The obligatory shouldering of the bolt-free rifle is almost instinctive; the stock feels tactile and pops into the shoulder like a dream. This is partly down to the superb job Sako have done and a little to do with my inner child relishing



With the cheekpiece in the raised position, the stock is still very streamlined



The trigger and safety are straight from the Sako 85 – the aluminium trigger guard is the only difference

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Overall length: 40.5in
Length of pull: 14in
Barrel length: 20in
Muzzle thread: 14x1mm
Weight: 3.1kg (6.8lb)
RRP: From £2,575
Contact: GMK 01489 579999 gm.k.co.uk



“There’s no doubt that this is a nice, light, pointable rifle”

the new toy! There’s no doubt, though, that this is a nice, light, pointable rifle.

STOCK

The composite stock of the Finnlight II is of a fibreglass construction with aerospace-grade RTM (Resin Transfer Moulding) technology – basically cutting-edge techniques for component production from precision moulds. The end result is an extremely accurate rifle, with superior manufacturing tolerances translating to better performance. The composite stock helps the Finnlight II keep its weight low, and it hides a no-expense-spared carbon fibre bedding system designed to give excellent temperature stability and subsequently maximum accuracy in a wide variety of scenarios.

The pistol grip and forend of the stock have rubber inlaid panels that look good and also provide excellent grip and comfort to the shooter. Made from a robust elastomer, they aren’t the same as the rubber inserts on the old Sako 75 synthetic stocks, rather a textured panel giving a superior feel. The Finnlight sports sling

The cheekpiece button can be depressed to allow raising and lowering of the comb for a perfect cheek weld

swivels fore and aft and comes with the usual neat pair of Sako one-inch swivels, bagged and in the rifle box, along with the bolt tool for cocking and decocking the bolt – something I don’t tend to do for fear of forgetting to re-cock a bolt and missing an opportunity.

My favourite feature of the stock is the adjustable cheekpiece, and it’s a really elegant solution. A simple push button allows the shooter to raise or lower the comb to suit, with the spring-loaded button engaging back into a notched pin to lock the chosen height, with two guide rods keeping the cheekpiece perpendicular and twist-free. The push button is slightly recessed and will present a snag-free stock, which could prove useful when belly crawling through thick undergrowth to get to a shooting position.

The overall feel of the Finnlight II stock is good, and despite its light weight the

whole unit is pretty solid. While I would be unlikely to shoot this rifle from a bipod, the forend is more than rigid enough for any shooter choosing this method. The butt pad is a simple rubberised unit, which soaked the recoil nicely, keeping the rifle in shoulder while not impeding the process of shouldering. Continuing with the adjustable theme, length of pull can be adjusted with the available spacers.

BARREL AND ACTION

The Finnlight II action and barrel are the tried-and-tested Sako 85 system, differing only slightly with the addition of a Cerakote finish for extra durability. When you consider that this is a stainless barrel and action with a weatherproof coating, you realise that this rifle really has been built for all conditions!

Cycling the action over an empty magazine, the bolt is slick, and glides back

and forth with ease. The bolt handle does what it should – it is well placed for rapid reloading, and also has a good feel in the hand when ejecting and reloading cartridges while shooting. Sako rifles have always given superb feeding of rounds to chamber – it's a result of both the design of the magazine and the way the bolt picks the round from the mag. All Sako 85s are controlled feed: the bottom of the bolt pushes the round from the magazine, the spring pressure of the magazine pushes the next round towards the top, and this round pushes the 'fed' round up into the Sako 85 bolt face, which is machined out at the bottom to allow the round to engage with the bolt face. This aligns and centralises the feed of the round, making for smooth, jam-free reloads.

The top of the action has the 'tapered wedge' rail system taking a full range of Optilock base and ring combinations – really easy and very reliable. If you want to go down the route of a weaver/picatinny rail, these are available from some reputable manufacturers.

The magazine for this action is a 5+1 capacity; personally I would opt for a full magazine of five, loading one from the magazine as the stalk begins, rather than sneaking the +1 into the chamber before slipping the full mag into place. The magazine is a double stack, with the base and clip having the Cerakote finish, and as usual the magazine features the Total Control Latch. Basically, the magazine has to be pushed in slightly before the release button will work, avoiding accidental loss of the magazine when crawling through rough terrain.

The barrel is light-profiled, fluted, stainless, muzzle threaded in 14x1mm, and as previously mentioned, Cerakoted in a tungsten grey finish, weatherproof and with a pleasing satin appearance. Sako's barrel accuracy has always been fantastic, machined and finished in-house by a team of highly skilled craftsmen. From drilling to honing, on to hammer forging and finishing, all barrels are then inspected by eye – not just any eye but the eyes of skilled barrel smiths. This .308 review rifle has a twist rate of 1 in 11in; Sako choose their twist rates for each calibre for optimal accuracy and performance. Calibres available range over different action sizes, starting with .22-250 and going up through the usual calibres to .30-06.



Lightweight, streamlined, fluted and Cerakoted, the barrel even sports a muzzle thread



The bolt dimensions and layout offer fast reloads if the need arises



Aesthetically pleasing and weight-reducing, there's a lot to like about the fluted barrel on the Finnlight

“ The safety is a simple, sensible system that I think should be an industry standard ”

SAFETY AND TRIGGER

The Finnlight II's safety catch is two-position: forward fire, rear safe, with the ability to depress a bolt release tab while the safety catch is on, allowing the bolt to be operated for safe unloading of a rifle. It's a simple, sensible system that I think should be an industry standard. The bolt has a cocking indicator, showing that the firing pin is cocked and ready to fire, with a small red dot to the top, which disappears when the rifle is fired.

The trigger is great. I have to admit I didn't even remember to use the trigger gauge to measure the weight, which I can only take as a good sign. Usually if I am reaching for this gauge it means the trigger is a touch heavy; adjustable from 2-4lb gives a good workable range for most shooters. A single set upgrade is available at the point of order – not my preference, but all the same options are welcome. The final piece, the trigger guard, which on the standard Sako 85 is an all-steel construction, on the Finnlight and Carbonlight model are made from lightweight hard-anodised aluminium, finishing the rugged, lightweight rifle nicely.

ON TO THE RANGE

Quickly bore sighting at 100 yards, it took only four shots before I got the Finnlight grouping 1.5in high, allowing for effortless shooting out to 200 yards. Using Winchester 150gn Ballistic Silvertips and Winchester 180gn Powerpoints, I was pleasantly surprised to find that 180gn rounds grouped the best. At 200 yards the best group of the day was five shots in 1.25in, shot from the bonnet using a padded rest under my front hand.

The recoil was manageable, even from this lightweight 6lb rifle – no major issues and certainly no rearing up and bucking. I would say that a decent lightweight moderator would complement the Finnlight II, and I felt the groups may just shrink a little more with the addition of a decent mod.

So, would I buy one? Well, I am a tight Yorkshireman, who usually prefers a heavier rifle. But if I had the spare cash, damn right I would. It would make a cracking rifle for general stalking, Highland hunts and even for guiding guests. It's a joy to use, it does what it should and more, and it pretty damn accurate down-range. ■