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THE KELBLY ATLAS



BY STEVEN BOELTER

A few months before the 2010 SHOT Show in Las Vegas, I heard about a new action underway over at Kelbly's (PS advertiser). The Kelbly family decided to offer their own version on the Remington 700 action, called the Atlas, complementing their existing centerfire action suite. This new action from Kelbly's was released right at what appears to be a steady climb in semi-custom actions popularity.

The current market of Remington 700 "clones" is focused towards the tactical and F-Class shooter, with some hunters using these actions in live-varmint rifles. The popularity of these actions continues to increase as more of these

clones come to market. Some of these actions are from new companies, while others like the Atlas are developed by well established manufacturers, and these tend to have subtle differences from just the basic Remington 700 copy.

I pulled Ian Kelbly aside at a trade show and asked him about their new Atlas action, and more importantly, why he picked the name Atlas. Ian stated, "Because it's a bear, and all of our actions are named after bears." Brilliant!

Just as a bit of history; the Atlas bear was a rather stout, reddish brown bear that had been the prize of many hunters going back to the time of Romans. Named after the mountain range where it was most common, the Atlas bear was a sub-

species of what we know as the common Brown Bear of North America. It is thought that the species became extinct somewhere around the late 1800s.

Ian went on to discuss that one of the driving reasons behind this new Atlas action was that shooters told him they were tired of purchasing a bone stock Remington 700, just to toss everything away except the action, then needing to dump another \$500 into it for blue-printing and tuning; a process that varies in description depending on who you ask. Even after that, there were still some features missing from the standard Remington 700 action that most shooters would appreciate.

ATLAS FEATURES

A couple of features that Ian pointed out about their Atlas was the trigger hanger bracket, allowing shooters to use the action as a true glue-in for benchrest competition, as well as an optional coned bolt face in the popular .222 based cases, as well as the PPC and BR cases.

Along with these improvements over the standard 700, they also incorporated their nifty TG ejector system. The TG is what I call a pas-



sive ejector, in that it does not have a spring putting pressure behind the loaded round when in the chamber. A traditional spring-loaded ejector causes the loaded round to be pushed off-center in the chamber, and some shooters feel this degrades accuracy.

On the TG system, when the bolt is closed there is no pressure against the rear of the case. When the bolt is unlocked and pulled back, the TG bumps against an internal stop in the action, pushing it forward and ejecting the case. The force of ejection is based on the force with which you pull the bolt back, so if you want to just have the empty casing softly rotate out into your hand, you just pull the bolt back gently. If you want to land the hot empty brass on your competitor's neck, just flick the bolt back with some force.

The Atlas action body is machined from a solid bar of 416 R Stainless steel in a single setup on Kelbly's CNC center. All the internal cuts are made, including the ejection port, action threading, and trigger slot. Prior to machining, the action and bolt are hardened to a Rockwell hardness of 34. There is no post heat-treating stage, due to

the possibility of dimensional shifting. The action threads are similar to their Panda actions ($1\frac{1}{16}$ " x 18 tpi), and with the use of a special washer you can use a barrel that's already been fitted to any Panda action.

On the left side of the action is the bolt stop and release, made large enough to easily operate with gloves on in cold climates. The front recoil lug is double pinned into place, making a switch barrel setup idea. The rifle in these photos is set up as a repeater from Kelbly's and features CDI Precision bottom metal. Both a single-shot and repeater version are available, depending on your shooting needs.

The bolt is made from a 4140 Chromoly, and fitted with a nifty little claw extractor and their TG ejector. The claw extractor sits in a small groove machined into the front of one of the bolt lugs. This is a much better setup than the reworked Remington bolts where an extractor is installed into the side of the bolt, posing a potential safety problem if a case fails. The bolt handle is TIG welded into the bolt for maximum strength.

Kelbly's offers this action alone for about \$700 in a single shot version, and \$760 for the repeater.

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The Kelbly Atlas

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They do offer complete rifles for shooters who would rather have the whole rifle built at Kelbly's. Options such as special coatings, magazine floor plates and other adjustments can be included in complete rifles.

COMMENTS

There are a few things that really stand out about the Atlas action from Kelbly's. First, the smooth

bolt operation and camming surface of the lugs makes this feel much nicer than any blueprinted mass-produced action. There is just enough clearance in the action for the bolt to operate in field settings, where dust and grit could collect in the action, but there's not the excessive amount of play that's common in an off-the-shelf Remington type action.

I also like the TG ejector and extractor quite a bit. These two features are commonly modified areas on a Remington, and very nice to have as factory options on this action. Some shooters may want to have the traditional Remington styled plunger ejector, and Kelbly's can setup the bolt to accommodate that.

Considering all these features, building one of these rifles is very straight forward. Basically, all you have is a simple barrel installation

job. There is no fooling with the action or bolt. For me, this is really a perfect live varmint action. I'm not much of a Tactical shooter, so I would opt for a single shot action and setup something around a .223 or .308 bolt face.

Like their other actions, the fit and finish of the Atlas is superb. And considering the base price, it's a pretty good deal for any shooter on a budget looking for a custom rifle.

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