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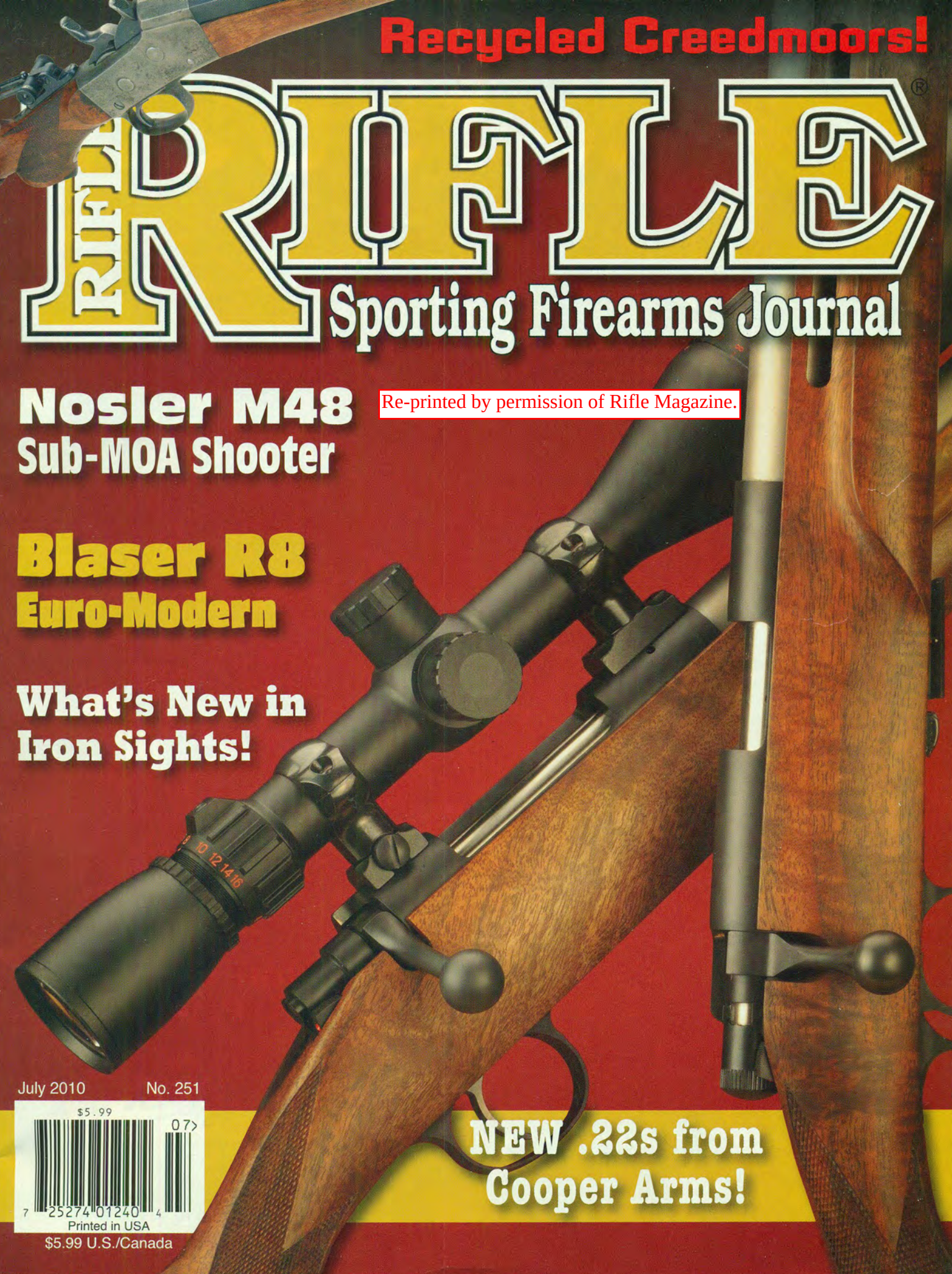

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MARCH SCOPE

OPTICS by Ron Spomer

I'm biased. When I see or hear about a new scope made by a new company, I assume it's a piece of cheap junk. In the case of the March, I assumed wrongly.

Federal Express brought the new scope to my office door moments ago. My editor had alerted me it was coming and instructed me to write a review. This is it.

It's customary to actually test a scope before writing a review, but, since first impressions count for something, let's jump right in. This instrument is chunky and heavy. At 12.25 inches long, the 30mm main tube with its large side focus dial and 1.25-inch adjustment turrets looks like a running back of the scope world. A 2-inch diameter objective bell housing a 42mm objective lens contributes to the stocky build. The matte black finish looks rich and feels silky. There are no ostentatious markings on the unit either. No colored rings, elaborate coats-of-arms or oversized letters. Just a subdued "March" on the side focus dial. Classy and understated.

In hand this scope feels as solid as it looks. On a postal scale it scores 21.7 ounces. The zoom ring is imprinted with white or etched silver numbers from 2.5 to 25. That's a 10-times zoom range! I didn't know scopes could zoom that far. The numbers sit atop the up-sloping front edge of the power ring, so you can read them

without raising your head completely off the stock. The magnification adjustment dial is deeply knurled and turns smoothly with just the right degree of tension to prevent accidental turning. It turns clockwise from lowest to highest magnification.

The side focus, or parallax adjustment dial on the left side of the turret saddle is also etched with silver numbers representing distance in yards from 10 to 500, plus an infinity mark. These can also be easily read from the shooting position.

Knurled caps on the elevation and windage turrets spin off in about three complete cycles to reveal ¼-click MOA dials that move the elevation reticle 25 MOA in one complete revolution. There are four complete revolutions, or 100 MOA of adjustment in each dial. The windage dial is unusual in that, instead of just an arrow pointing R(ight) and L(eft), it is etched with right and left MOA markings that begin at a 0 setting in the center of the dial. Quarter-click hash marks separate R1, R2, R3, etc. and L1, L2, etc. This virtually eliminates dialing errors. If you need a 2 MOA correction to the right when sighting in, turn the dial to R2. If wind is deflecting your bullets 3 MOA right, dial L3. There is a setscrew for loosening the indicator dial, so after sighting in, one would reset the dial to zero.

Both adjustment dials turn rather hard and snap crisply into place. It takes a bit of practice to prevent jumping more than one click due to inertia. One tends to zip past the desired stopping point at first. The turret dials are wide, low and easy to grasp. I like these better than traditional, high turret dials, and I really appreciate the hard clicks. This scope shouldn't accidentally change settings (bumping against pant leg, gun case, scabbard).

Unlike so many new scopes, this March does not include the European-style quick-adjust diopter ring on the end of the eyepiece. It uses the old American style in which the entire eyepiece cup turns on fine threads, then locks into place with a for-

ward locking ring. While not fast, this system is superior for maintaining the correct diopter setting without fear of accidentally bumping it off. Some fast twist eyepiece adjustment dials use so little tension and change focus with so little ring movement that they are easily pushed out of focus during typical field use. Raising your rifle to align crosshairs on a deer only to find them severely out of focus benefits no one but the deer.

Puzzling is the 10x zoom range of this instrument. Traditionally, scopes zoomed 3x (3-9x, 4-12x, etc.). A 4x zoom range came next, then 5x and, within the past three years, 6x (Swarovski) and 6.5x (Bushnell). And here sits a March scope mechanically zooming 10x. How? Your guess is as good as any. Not even the U.S. distributor, Ian Kelbly of Kelbly's Inc., could tell me, because the engineers at DEON Optical Design

Corporation in Japan will not tell him. Manufacturing secret. One assumes the erector lenses glide along a spiral camming groove in the erector tube. Of course, any optical engineer willing to drop $1,820 can lay hands on one of these and strip it to decipher the mechanics. As shooters, it's enough for us to know we can own a 2.5-25x scope. But how practicable can that be? Does anyone really need that zoom range? And is 25x usable with a little, 42mm objective lens? Let's field test this baby and find out, but before we do, let's review a few more parameters.

According to March literature and the owner's manual, this scope is fitted with multicoated lenses for optimum light transmission. It also incorporates ED glass that minimizes color fringing, a problem at high magnifications because strongly bent light waves do not focus back to the same, precise point without corrective lenses. ED glass minimizes separation of colors, so you shouldn't see a yellow, green or purple halo around the edges of subjects. Such softening becomes more apparent as power increases, so at 20x and higher there's real, practical value here. Targets should stand out sharply without soft edges. Antlers should look crisp and defined, not lost in the background clutter. Overall, images should look crisper, sharper. We'll check all this out during field testing.

Judging optical quality by looking through an instrument is highly subjective, especially if there is no benchmark, so I compared the March against a proven Swarovski Z6 2.5-15x 44mm. While looking west into the setting sun, both instruments controlled flare beautifully. I detected virtually no veiling haze, no orange glare, and I could clearly distinguish details in shadows. If not for the greater field of view in the Swarovski, I would not have known which instrument I was peering through. This performance remained constant at all magnifications.

For resolution testing, I viewed black lettering on a bright, white background at 70 yards 10 minutes after sunset. At 15x both scopes could just resolve letters ¼ inch high, though the Swarovski appeared to have a slight sharpness advantage. At 25x the March resolved the lettering and

continued to do so 15 minutes after sunset. I was quite surprised to clearly see the reticle against a black fabric 85 yards away at 30 minutes after sunset with the March set at 25x. At that power the exit pupil was a mere 1.68mm. At 45 minutes after sunset, the 25x was still usable for placing the black crosshair on a brown cardboard box, some red rocks and even open shadow areas among the rocks. In the deep shadows the reticle disappeared. Impressive performance overall.

The Swarovski did show better edge-to-edge sharpness – practically perfect across the field. But the March was close. Edge sharpness in a scope is of questionable value anyway. Scopes aren't for finding game but targeting game, and for that you use the middle of the field of view.

To check for color fringing, I observed the hard edges of a metal stove pipe against a clear blue sky at midday and compared the March against a Burris Fullfield II 6.5-20x 50mm plus a Swarovski Z5 3.5-18x 44P, both one-inch tube scopes and both set at full power. The Fullfield is not Burris's top-of-the-line scope, so I expected to find color fringing and wasn't disappointed.

Specifications

Power: 2.5x to 25x
Objective diameter: 42mm
Tube diameter: 30mm
Exit pupil diameter: 6.8mm at 2x to 1.68mm at 25x
Length: 12.25 inches
Weight: 21.7 ounces
Click adjustments: ¼ clicks, 25 MOA per revolution, 100 MOA total in dial
Eye relief: 4.5 to 4.75 inches
Field of view: 8 degrees at 2x, 0.8 degrees at 25x
Focus/parallax adjustment: side dial on saddle
Focus distance: 10 yards to infinity
Reticle: duplex
Lenses: fully multicoated
U.S. distributor:
Kelbly's Inc.
7222 Dalton Fox Lake Rd.
North Lawrence OH 44666

There was a fairly wide, deep-yellow fringe on the shadowed side of the pipe. The Swarovski, while a top-notch optical instrument, doesn't have extra low dispersion glass, so I expected it to show some color fringing. It did, but only if I shifted my eye off axis. Then a pale, yellow halo appeared along the down-light side of the pipe, but less saturated than that from the Burris. Finally, I tried the March at 25x. No color fringing, no yellow bloom or halo or fuzz anywhere on the pipe. The ED glass apparently performs as advertised.

I mounted the March on a Remington R-15 .223 Remington mostly because it had 30mm rings. To test the accuracy of turret adjustments, I fired at a mark, dialed 6 MOA down and fired again, 6 MOA right, etc. until the settings were back where they'd started. All bullet holes at 100 yards landed within the grouping potential of the rifle/load, the final hole appearing .5 inch from the first. That's precision adjustment. Next came the point-of-impact shift test during which I fired at various power settings to determine if point of impact changed with power settings. In the first test, the shots fired at 8x seemed to cluster significantly higher than those shot at 12x and 25x, so I ran the test two more times and changed loads once. Despite a rather disappointing 2-inch group plus one high flyer at the 25x setting, all shots fell within each load's normal circle of dispersion, and there was no clear pattern in distribution at any one power setting.

At $1,820 and 21.7 ounces, this is neither a cheap nor lightweight scope, but it appears to be a good one. It would be particularly useful on a dual-purpose rifle used for everything from jumping deer in cover to targeting game at extreme distances. For varmint shooting, it would be ideal for dialing power up and down to match atmospheric conditions.