

Tactical Rifle Gadgetry

By: Michael Haugen

Many years ago a phrase was coined “Necessity is the Mother of Invention”. In modern times however, a more appropriate phrase could be “Invention is the Mother of the Unnecessary”. What I am referring to of course is the myriad of products that crop up as the result of some product or method becoming popular.

I am sure that everyone who reads this article can think of at least one product they have seen advertised that made them pause and think “why would anyone buy that?” Or perhaps read an article describing some technique that causes the reader to chuckle at the mere thought of actually attempting the reported method. Don’t misunderstand me, for every seemingly unusable or unneeded product or technique on the market, there are faithful followers who swear that they could not survive without it. Are these people crazy? Maybe but then again maybe not. My guess is that it is probably more of a matter of opinion although I really believe that it stems more from a lack of exposure, finances, and experience. If you are like me then you yourself have purchase some seemingly “high speed” piece of equipment only to find out it is really not very useful.

Since this article is appearing in a publication dedicated to tactical shooting I am sure you have surmised that I am referring to tactical weapons products that aren’t particularly useful or necessary. I am sure most of you have seen numerous items being advertised in the back of magazines that appear less than essential. At this point I need to point out that should I mention any product or method that you use and feel helps you, then please continue to do so. I am in no way saying that any item or technique is completely useless. I am merely suggesting that some products on the market today and methods being reported, as “sound” is not as good as they have been depicted.

Before I dig myself too deep and end up receiving hate mail by the bag full some of which would probably be from some legal office I must state that I am not slamming any particular product. Everything that I am commenting on is generic and not directed towards any specific company or individual. With that out of the way I will continue.

I have been carrying tactical rifles for some time and to tell the truth I really haven’t found a lot of “neat” add-ons that have made my life all that much easier. I always thought that a sling was a device used to carry the rifle. Yet I now see numerous variations that promise all kinds of improvements. I have come to believe that there are two types of slings, the assault sling and the normal sling. Of course on my long guns I continue to use the old tried and true military leather sling. It allows me to carry the rifle and if absolutely necessary use it as an accuracy aid. On my carbines I employ a type of assault sling that allows me to swing the rifle out of the way in order to allow access to my pistol or to allow the freeing of my hands. Paraphrasing someone else I would say if it promises do everything well it probably won’t do the basic task at all.

Being a military sniper and an avid long range-shooting enthusiast I have fired my fair share of rounds out of a scoped rifle. In all of the time I have been shooting I have never had a problem with rifle cant. This isn’t to say that a canted rifle won’t cause problems on the target, it will. But I guess I have relied on my sight picture to help me insure that the rifle is level. So when I started seeing all of these levels designed to bolted onto scopes and rifles being marketed I just had to take pause and wonder what the deal was. I don’t know about you but I have more than enough stuff to deal with when I am shooting. Messing around with a level bubble doesn’t seem to me to be a super effective tool. Perhaps at some time in the future I will be proven wrong but I don’t really think so.

I have seen a new trend developing in scoped tactical rifles. This trend seems to be to use two sets of rings on the optics. Now I have fired many different types of rifles from .223 up to and including 20mm. Even in the hardest recoiling rifles I have never seen a rifle equipped with quality steel tactical grade rings and bases have any problem with the scope flying off during recoil. I personally own several sniper rifles and own a variety of rings and bases and have never had a problem. I think that the dual ring arrangement looks good, but at around \$100 per set I would be hesitant to spend the money on something I really didn’t need.

In the world of tactical rifles image counts for a lot. This is especially true when the rifle in question is being used for an article. I have seen several tactical scoped long rifles sporting tactical lights (Taclights). Now there are some arenas where a taclight may be of use on a tactical long gun but normally this is not the case. Taclights are used primarily on assault type rifles or carbines and are used for clearing rooms. The question here I guess is really the anticipated use of the rifle. If you are a law enforcement sniper operating in urban terrain and your primary rifle is an AR type rifle then maybe you do



need a taclight on your gun. But, I think allowing your spotter or partner to clear the room first is a better way to go. Having a taclight on a long rifle only invites compromise through accidental discharge of the light; if your mission requires the use of a tac light on your long gun ensure you employ a lens cover.

For as long as there have been riflemen there have been attempts to determine a better way to carry ammunition. In the arena of sniper rifles it would seem that one of the more common methods used by beginning rifleman/snipers is the elastic round carrier that slips over the comb of the rifle stock. I too had one of these (truth be known I still have one lying around somewhere) but found out that it was more of pain than it was worth. For one thing most snipers do not need extra rounds in a position for quick reloading. Once in position the rifle is loaded and due to the fact that most rifles hold at least 4 rounds (most hold 5) the sniper is equipped with enough ammunition to deal with most situations. Also it is not wise to run around the woods with exposed rounds due to the reflection properties of the brass and the risk of loss during movement.

While on the subject of extra magazines I can't help but mentioning the extremely large magazines that I have seen advertised and used on some assault rifles. I am not sure what situation would require a individual to have a 100 round magazine (other than perhaps Somalia) but, I personally believe that the normal 30 round magazines will facilitate most situations.

Of course no article on gadgetry would be complete without mentioning those devices that allow you to crank the handle and fire automatic. Not exactly conducive to accurate fire not to mention the waste of ammunition. I am sure these devices are fun and somewhat exciting to someone never in the military but I cannot find any use for them in the tactical arena.

As a tactical rifle shooter and sniper the one thing that has really began to upset me is the rising cost of tactical grade equipment. One item in particular is rifle stocks. I have purchased numerous stocks for my rifles over the years and have generally accepted the fact that if I want a quality stock I will spend in the area of \$300 - \$600. I have recently seen a tactical stock being advertised that retails for \$950. This is absurd, any stock that costs more than the rifle itself is WAY over priced. For that kind of money the stock had better stalk, get into position itself and align itself onto the target. Although I am sure that these high priced stocks are "state of the art" and extremely comfortable they still do not warrant the high cost they are demanding. Keep in mind that a stock only facilitates the shooter to align the sights with his eyes and a tactical stock allows the shooter to do this in varied positions. Any stock that is good at one position (like prone) will not be good at most of the other positions. A good tactical stock is a "happy medium" between all stocks thereby allowing it to be used adequately in numerous positions.

As with the stocks it seems that custom rifle prices are beginning to rise. This is odd taking into account the good quality coming out of the factories. A custom sniper rifle today can cost as much as \$5000 without optics. While these rifles are definitely "world class" most are over built resulting in the high sticker price. Now don't misunderstand me, the innovative rifles like the take down designs and special application rifles do warrant higher prices due to the higher cost of manufacture. I am not saying the custom rifles should be comparable in price to factory guns (although that would be nice wouldn't it?) but I am saying that they do not have to require a second mortgage in order to purchase one. This is especially true in the area of optics. It seems that a scope isn't worthy as tactical optics unless it costs at least \$1500. It was not too long ago that these same scopes cost less than \$800 and they have not been significantly improved since then.

Although I find fault in some of the gadgets on the market and in use by some I still welcome their inventions. It is through the process of trial and error that we find what works and what doesn't. In fact I feel confident in saying that most if not all of the current trends in the tactical rifle world were at one time or the other thought to be "silly" or "useless" by someone. Even though the prices for the good stuff is rising, I like most of you will continue to spend my money on the latest and greatest.