

HOWA'S .223 MINI ACTION

HAYDEN STURGEON REVIEWS THE LATEST OFFERING IN THE HOWA 1500 RANGE...

The Japanese-based manufacturer Howa has been producing quality rifle packages ever since its founding in 1907. Many of their WW2-era weapons are sought after collector's items, but a lot has changed since then. When Nik sent me the new Howa Mini-Action .223 to review I couldn't wait to see just how this little rifle would fair against some stiff market competition.

The Mini Action uses the Howa 1500 series action as a base for the build, but there have been some very serious changes

on first appearance. What they have created is a light weight varmint action designed for the .222, .204, and .223 cartridges.

The bolts on Howa's Short Action rifles cycle almost seven inches and weigh 13.1 ounces. In contrast the Mini Action cycles

just a whisker over six inches and weighs only 10.2 ounces, which is a serious reduction in weight and size. With these changes the overall weight of the bare rifle with bases is 2.638kg (5lb 13oz) which makes it one of the lightest and most portable hunting rifles for New Zealand conditions.

The Mini Action comes with a 22-inch stainless light contoured barrel that is factory threaded for hunters who like

SPECIFICATIONS: HOWA MINI ACTION .223

Overall length:	39.5"
Weight (bare):	5.7lbs
Action:	stainless
Barrel:	22" hammer-forged, threaded
Rifling twist:	1:9
Stock:	Hogue, straight comb, synthetic
Magazine:	10-round detachable
Safety:	three-position
Trigger:	HACT two-stage, adjustable (2.5 – 3.8lbs)
Importers:	Cameron Sports Imports Ltd, Albany, Auckland
RRP (Package):	with 3-9x Panamax \$1099 with 4-12x Panamax \$1150



◀ WITH HALF MINUTE OF ANGLE ACCURACY POTENTIAL, THE HOWA MINI ACTION MAKES A GREAT LIGHT VARMINTING RIG. THE MUZZLES COME THREADED FOR A SUPPRESSOR.



▲ THE NIKKO STIRLING PANAMAX 4-12X50 AO SCOPE IS A GREAT OPTION FOR THE PRICE POINT OPTICS BUYER.

◀ THE TURRETS DIAL AT 1/4" MOA CLICK ADJUSTMENTS.



“The bolts on Howa’s Short Action rifles cycle almost seven inches and weigh 13.1 ounces. In contrast the Mini Action cycles just a whisker over six inches and weighs only 10.2 ounces...”



▲ PARALLAX ADJUSTMENT CAN BE LOCATED ON THE OBJECTIVE OR AS A TURRET.

to use a suppressor. There is also an easy to fit protector cap to keep the thread clean and damage-free. Other features that add to this already feature-packed rifle include the Howa Actuator Controlled Trigger, or HACT. This trigger is a two-stage system that is nice and crisp and breaks at around 3lbs. It can be adjusted if need be, but I found that this was light enough for the job and my nephew had no trouble with it at the range.

The safety arrangement is a three-stage system – when the lever is right back the safety is engaged and the bolt is locked. Stage Two is the safety

◀ YOU GET A THREE-POSITION SAFETY AND AN ADJUSTABLE TRIGGER. HOWA ACTIONS ARE NICELY MACHINED AND FINISHED.

engaged, but the bolt can be lifted at any time, and Stage One is ready to fire. This is a smooth system and worked well. The Mini has a twin-lug, one-piece bolt with an M16-style extractor and plunger ejector. The action cycles very smoothly and cleared the spent cases perfectly throughout my review.

Another notable addition is the 10-round detachable magazine. This is constructed of plastic which helps keep weight down while allowing enough capacity for any varmint shooter. The magazine was simple to load/unload when removed from the rifle and it clipped back into position easily.





▲ **FACTORY AMMUNITION AND HAYDEN'S HANDLOADS ALL PERFORMED WELL IN THE MINI ACTION.**

The detachment clip is located at the front of the magazine and on a couple of occasions in the field the mag detached due to me moving my hand back and forth on the fore-stock, thus bumping the quick-release clip. After becoming aware of the problem and adjusting my hold I had no further issues. However, ideally I would like to see the clip at the rear of the magazine.

Howa run with the Hogue's synthetic stock that has a straight comb, a rubber recoil pad, and a wider fore-end that fits nicely in your hand up front. The pillar bedding arrangement allows for free-floating of the barrel.

AT THE RANGE

To set the rifle up for this review the importers, Outdoor Sports in Albany, kindly supplied a Nikko Stirling Panamax 4-12x50 AO scope. This scope has the new



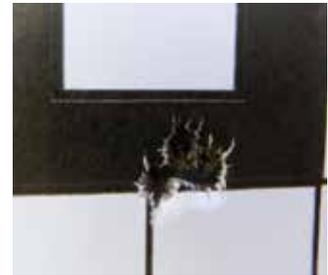
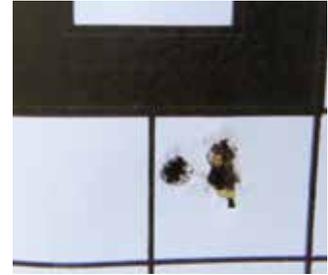
wide-angle lens offering approximately 20% more view than your standard one-inch models. It is a well-presented scope that has capped dial-up turrets with 1/4" MOA increments, plus a front mounted parallax ring that is easily adjusted for shooting at longer ranges. The Panamax has a Half Mil Dot reticle that was clear and easy to focus throughout the magnification range.

With the scope levelled up and ready, it was time to think ammunition. I'd been supplied with two packs of .223s from

Buffalo River, the 55 grain BlitzKing and the 55 grain GameKings which were both ideal hunting rounds for the Mini Action. I set the rifle up on a bipod with a sandbag in the rear and soon had it on target, ready to shoot some groups. With near perfect conditions I was able to shoot consistent groups under an inch without any drama, with the best being approx 1/2"(12mm). This was fantastic accuracy from factory ammunition and shooting in a field-like position, ie; prone – no bench.

The Howa functioned perfectly, feeding and extracting without any dramas. With the rifle shooting more than adequately with factory ammo, I decided to see if I could extract any more accuracy by handloading. I stuck with readily available off the shelf ADI powder and opted to shoot two different projectiles that I'd

◀ **THE MINI ACTION'S DETACHABLE MAG IS MADE OF TOUGH PLASTIC AND HOLDS 10 ROUNDS.**



▲ **GROUPS LIKE THESE INDICATE THE ACCURACY THE HOWA CAN ACHIEVE.**

◀ **THE NIKKO STIRLING PANAMAX 4-12X50 AO AIDED IN PRODUCING SOME FAIRLY DECENT GROUPS.**

“...the Howa is not fussy in terms of ammunition. This is a big plus for an outdoorsman wanting supreme accuracy without the dramas and costs associated in finding that optimum load.”

had good performance from in the past. These were the 50 grain Hornady V-Max, a great varminting round, while for a larger deer load I opted for the 60 grain Nosler Partition pushed along with 2206H powder and CCI primers. These loads performed as expected at the range with both loads consistently shooting well



◀ QUINN PRACTICED WITH THE HOWA AND WAS PROUD TO TAKE PART IN THE HUNT.

under an inch, which goes to show the Howa is not fussy in terms of ammunition. This is a big plus for an outdoorsman wanting supreme accuracy without the dramas and costs associated in finding that optimum load.

My nephew Quinn had been chomping at the bit to go on his first hunt and was showing an interest in what I was doing at the range. The Mini Action would be the perfect rifle for him to learn with, and after a mandatory safety briefing including dry-firing the rifle, Quinn was ready to shoot some paper. He took on board all the key elements about shooting straight, and after a couple of enjoyable hours at the range I decided he could come with me to test the .223 in some broken country that held a few fallow.

IN THE FIELD

I opted to take the 55 grain GameKings on the hunt as they are a suitable load for light-framed deer. With the ute loaded and a very tired looking nephew (it was 4:30am!) we hit the road in darkness to make

the two-hour drive. I wanted to be on a favoured spur just as the light was breaking.

Sadly, upon arrival we were greeted by a fully whited-out valley and the fog didn't appear to be going to lift anytime soon. It was 10am before the conditions broke and revealed the country we were wanting to hunt. Quinn was eager to lock eyes on his first deer which didn't take too long once the binos were put to work checking the likely spots.

I had decided that if we could get into a shooting position Quinn would be given the first opportunity to take a deer. I was putting pressure on myself to make it happen, but nothing can be taken for granted in hunting. We covered a lot of country and stalked a few different animals, but just couldn't get quite close enough to make the deal work.

Then late in the day we picked up two fallow bucks feeding from cover and made our move. One looked to have some potential and the other needed removing from the gene pool so we got ourselves

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set up on a small knob. Quinn's Dad, who had accompanied us, slipped behind the Mini Action due to the range being over 150 yards. Just as he was about to take the shot the bucks started moving back into cover. With a whistle from me, the scrubbier of the two stopped in his tracks and Josh pulled

a great shot off. The buck ran 50-60 yards and crashed down for keeps. The Howa Mini Action and the 55 grain MatchKing projectile had performed as expected – the bullet hit right where it was aimed, ending what was an awesome day. Quinn posed proud as punch with the buck and Mini Action in hand. Another hunting generation hooked.

CONCLUSION

Howa really has put some thought into the Mini Action and the rifle met all my expectations. It is a smooth, light-weight and effective rifle that can easily be used for off-hand shots, yet is capable of real accuracy. The only let-down, as stated earlier, is the magazine detachment lever in front of the mag. If you aren't careful it's easy to bump, which is less than ideal in a focused hunting situation.

Overall bang for bucks however you get a lot of rifle and I feel the Mini Action is a great addition to the Howa family.

Hayden