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When I began reviewing the Chapuis X4 rifle I toyed with a working title of 'Perfectly impractical' or 'Classic from a bygone age' and, in a way, both were correct though a little misleading. At first glance, in a world of relatively inexpensive magazine-fed bolt-action rifles which guarantee MOA accuracy straight out the box, the capacity limitations of a two-shot rifle don't make that much sense. The misleading part is you may assume because of this the Chapuis isn't a very good rifle but there you'd be wrong.

Big game rifles are made for just that and during a recent hunt to the Northern Territory, the Chapuis X4 in 9.3x74R proved to be as equally devastating on monster boars and big buff as it was elegant in presentation and operation. Chapuis Armes, pronounced Shap-weis (like a Weis bar) is a French gunmaker from Saint-Etienne, a historic gun making region similar to Birmingham in England. With more than 100 years of operational experience to draw upon, Chapuis began life as an

action and barrel maker before developing into a complete firearm manufacturer.

But before we begin let's explain the double rifle. In essence it's a twin-barrel similar in appearance and operation to a double-barrel shotgun. Those barrels can be stacked (like an under/over) or side-by-side, and may be operated with a single or double-trigger configuration, again like a double-barrel shotgun. The Chapuis X4 is a single-trigger side-by-side rifle and as such, the barrels sit on each side of the centre line, meaning even in perfect conditions, shots from the left and right barrel will be separated by the space between the two.

To overcome this, double rifle barrels are regulated. What that means is that at a set distance there's convergence of shots, or more realistically there's a distance from the rifle (generally 50 or 100 yards) where shots land closest to each other. Regulating barrels is traditionally beyond your average hunter, yet Chapuis have taken a unique approach to this and developed a system which allows the owner to regulate their rifle to a desired distance and load, but we'll come back to that.

Built on a 28-gauge shotgun receiver with 550mm barrels and overall length of 1015mm, it's a compact rifle which points with the smoothness and comfort of a well-designed shotgun. It has a very natural feel when brought to the shoulder, while in the hand it's a balanced rifle that's easy to carry. The quality of timber (the stated AAA-grade Circassian walnut) is exceptional, while the clear-cut checkering and English or pancake-style cheek piece accentuate the overall look and feel.

Complementing that timber finish, the metalwork appears to be to a high level of fit and finish and while the barrels are deeply blued, the remaining metalwork has a plain matt finish (I assume this makes the most of the engraving). Every metal surface with the exception of the barrels and trigger carry decorative engraving, with a boar's head on the bottom of the receiver the main focus.

Considering the price of the rifle, timber quality and extensive nature of the engraving I assume it's laser-cut as there's a *lot* of engraving for it to be hand-cut. The

rifle supplied by Beretta Australia included an optics mounting rail, in this case for an Aimpoint H2. The gun does have well-made iron sights yet no matter how good they are, my eyes can't handle them so we agreed on an Aimpoint. In searching images of the rifle online, I also saw the Chapuis fitted with low-magnification scopes attached using the same rail system. Some may find this a little challenging to the idea of a classic but the possibility's there if, like me, you're optically challenged.

Diving a little deeper there are two points worth considering about the Chapuis, starting with its control centre. The rifle operates as a side-by-side shotgun, with barrels broken via a thumb lever located in the traditional position on the tang of the action. Even after considerable use the Chapuis remained tight on opening, though it does eject with some force.

Below the lever is the safety which again is traditionally designed and is a thumb safety you slide forward to engage and back to fire. Staying true to its dangerous game heritage the action closes to fire, not safe. For me this was a challenge as I generally carry a rifle with an empty chamber to avoid needing to rely on a safety. To overcome this, when hunting with the Chapuis I carried it in the broken position, removing the need to rely on a safety.

The second part of the equation is the innovative barrel regulation which, as mentioned, is all about tuning the rifle for accuracy, a process which can be overly complicated and technically difficult. Chapuis have overcome this by building a double rifle which can be regulated by the owner. Put simply, you can regulate the right-hand barrel to match the performance of the fixed left-hand barrel through a series of fine adjustments. In doing so you effectively zero the rifle to a desired distance using your choice of ammunition. And if you want to change things up, for instance use a lighter load or set your zero a bit further out, you can do so without requiring a gunsmith.

Chapuis refer to the process as user-friendly and acknowledging that term can mean different things to different people. I'd say if you have the tools and confidence to mount a scope, remove and refit a barrelled action or adjust a trigger, I believe you'd have the confidence to regulate the rifle using the prescribed method and adjustments. The hardest part for me was translating the French/English instructions.

By regulating the rifle you'll be able to achieve a stated 2 MOA accuracy at 100 yards though in my experience, relying on factory-set regulation was much better. Now



The results spoke of a good level of inherent accuracy

In its element.

X marks the spot

while 2 MOA at 100 yards doesn't sound great compared to current rifle and ammo performance, when you consider an adult buffalo stands anywhere between 1.5-1.9m tall at the shoulder, stretches from 2.4-3.6m in length and a bull can weigh more than 1000kg, being able to fire (in quick succession) two 286-grain projectiles 50mm or closer together is more than adequate.

Obviously an important part of reviewing a rifle, especially one you intend to hunt with, is range time and there's no other way to put this: the Chapuis is not friendly off the bench. Those fine lines and compact design may resemble a quail gun, though in this case looks are deceiving. Making things a little more uncomfortable is the recoil pad as the Chapuis doesn't have one! The stock is butt-ended by a separate piece of, again, wonderfully shaped and checkered timber.

Now like most rifles, recoil is only a bench issue as in the field I didn't notice it at all and really, this isn't the rifle you take on a Saturday morning plinking session. But I still needed bench time so had to get inventive, much to the range officers' enjoyment. Considering the issue, I'd replace the timber butt cap with a quality recoil pad, though the reason's not what you might expect. Sure it'll go some way to taming recoil but it's more about protecting the rifle. Hunting can be hard on equipment, especially on foot, and with that in mind I fitted a recoil pad to primarily protect the butt of the stock and that lovely piece of timber.

All told I shot the Chapuis at the range on two separate occasions. The first was all about learning how the rifle performed, especially in relation to the optics and natural variance in shot placement due to the left and right-hand barrels. On my second visit I decided to get serious and after a few more practice shots, fired a sighter at 50m and landed a V-bull, which was completely unexpected. Yet it did give me height and windage indication so I increased the elevation and fired both barrels.

The result was honestly better than I expected. My intention was 50mm high at 50 yards with a 2 MOA spread and I was managing that without adjustment. I surmised 50mm high should put me dead on at 100 yards, so I waited for the ceasefire and set up a target at that distance. My new target was essentially a cross overlaid in a standard paper target so I fired both barrels, though not in succession. Considering I was shooting with a 2 MOA Aimpoint optic mounted on a short-barrelled double rifle, I was happy with the results.

That being the case I again waited for the ceasefire and, while walking back, decided



An example of the engraving which adorns the Chapuis.

to place the target on the 50-yard frame just to double check the double. Firing both barrels again, what I got was little high at 50 and a touch low at 100, though when you subtract bullet diameter from the overall spread, the results spoke of a good level of inherent accuracy.

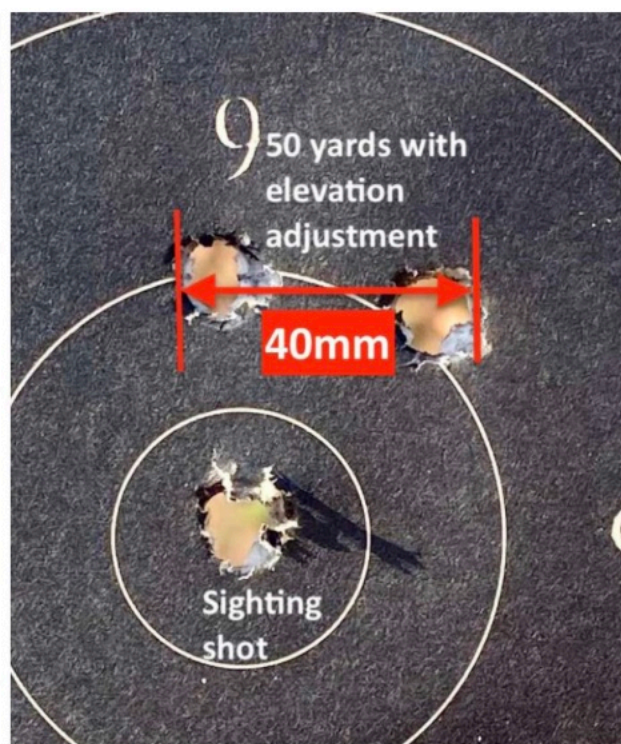
Not long after came my chance to make the most of the rifle. In early September I headed to the Territory and over six days' hunting carried the Chapuis X4. I used it to back up other hunters, take a very nice boar and, on a particularly hot and dry afternoon, drop two buffalo of my own. Every time the gun performed just as a double should being light to carry, quick to shoulder and shoot and deadly on game. I also found the Aimpoint H2 invaluable with its bright red dot easily picking up targets among the scrub and offering a clear, clean aiming point

while the Sako Hammerhead 9.3x74R ammo delivered the punch needed for big game.

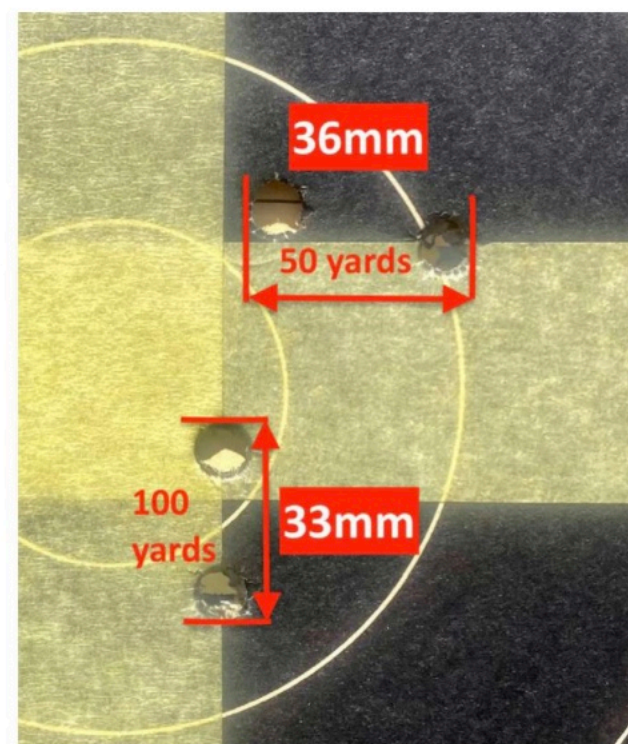
As they say, ships aren't built for harbours and double rifles aren't meant for the range. Fit for purpose has fast become almost a throwaway line and, while I first imagined the Chapuis X4 to be something of an olde-worlde oddity, it proved the very opposite and really is fit for purpose. It's unashamedly built for hunting, especially hunting things capable of coming after you.

It's an elegant and finely-crafted rifle made for adventure, representative of a quality not often seen at your local gunshop and a price that puts it in range of those looking to own something that's a whole lot more than a typical bolt-action rifle.

• Next month: Mark goes hunting with the Chapuis X4. ●



Getting serious.



That'll do nicely.