

THE GUN ISSUE

JUNE/JULY 2017

OUTDOOR LIFE

THE 2017 GUN TEST

**WE SHOT, ABUSED,
AND RATED 21
NEW RIFLES AND
SHOTGUNS**

EDITOR'S CHOICE:
The Kahles 624i
and Bergara B-14
HMR won top
honors.

★
**RIFLESCOPES:
FIRST-PLANE
RETICLE
REVOLUTION**
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PLUS

6.5

**CREEDMOOR:
THE ULTIMATE
RIFLE ROUND**



KAHLES



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Remember the old days, when a riflescope was an accessory to a rifle, an aiming device that was interchangeable between guns? You can still buy those basic scopes with duplex reticles in the second optical plane. But if submissions to this year's riflescope test are any indication, those simple optics are being displaced by task-specific scopes that have sophisticated—and sometimes caliber-specific—reticles optimized for defined shooting challenges and dedicated rifles.

This trend toward specialization has been building for some time. But we've never seen more scopes with first-plane reticles and aiming systems (which we define as the interplay of turrets and reticle) designed for long-range shooting as we saw in this year's *Outdoor Life* Optics Test. These are serious precision instruments, and they're often seriously big hunks of glass and metal. Four scopes in this year's test are built on 34mm tubes, and their average weight of 2½ pounds makes them a poor choice for a walkabout rifle.

Luckily, there's a riflescope for every shooter in this year's test—high-priced precision scopes alongside inexpensive 1-inch riflescopes. You'll find a few with attributes to appeal to long-range shooters, but with the versatility to be useful in a wide range of shooting situations.

NIGHTFORCE
ATACR 7-35X56

WITH THIS GARGANTUAN scope, Nightforce has built the ultimate long-range precision optic. Get a load of these specs: 35X top magnification, 100 MOA of elevation adjustment inside the 34mm tube, 2½ pounds. It is a supremely precise and extremely durable scope built for... a very narrow niche. This iteration of the ATACR is designed for shooters who are reaching out a mile or more and need powerful magnification and tons of elevation adjustment. For the rest of us, Nightforce's 5-25x56 ATACR is more versatile. But if you have \$3,600 lying around for the most powerful precision optic on the market, this 7-35X is a great choice.

SCORE: 86.5 PRICE: \$3,600
CONTACT: NIGHTFORCEOPTICS.COM

SIG SAUER
WHISKEYS 3-15X52

LET'S START WITH the sweetness of this scope in a configuration that can pull double duty on AR platforms as well as hunting rifles. The optics are stunning—the Whiskey 5 tied for best resolution score. The second-plane Triplex reticle is sharp and aids in fast aiming, and the illuminated cant indicator is useful. Now for the sourness: The reticle is primitive for a precision scope—the lack of holdover references requires shooters to “get on the knobs” to dial in their dope. It's easy to get lost in the windage dial. I'd swap out the production elevation turret—which features a smart revolution indicator—for a custom ballistic turret.

SCORE: 85.6 PRICE: \$1,650
CONTACT: SIGSAUER.COM

SWAROVSKI
ZBI 1-8X24

BECAUSE OF ITS configuration, ultra-bright glass, and smart illumination, this scope would be a top pick for a dangerous-game optic. But there's a surprising amount of precision work that can be done with the second-plane 4A-IF reticle inside the 30mm tube of this 1-8X beauty. At 8X, the center-dot aiming point and outer ring can be used to calculate holdovers out to several hundred yards. The eyepiece illumination module gives shooters the choice of two intensity settings and infinite brightness adjustability. The glass is up to Swarovski standards: The ZBI tied for the best resolution score.

SCORE: 84.9 PRICE: \$2,610
CONTACT: SWAROVSKIOPTIK.COM

BUSHNELL
ELITE TACTICAL DMR II 1-3.5-21X50

THE FIRST THING you'll notice about the latest version of Bushnell's battle-hardened tactical optic is its length. At only 13 inches, it easily fits on almost any AR or carbine. Next you'll notice the platter-sized controls—the elevation turret measures a whopping 1½ inches across, and its eyepiece is almost a quarter of its length. The large controls and magnification-control lever make manipulating the scope a cinch, even with heavy gloves on. Look through the 34mm tube at any power and you'll appreciate the precise and uncluttered references of the illuminated G3 milling reticle.

SCORE: 84.5 PRICE: \$1,600
CONTACT: BUSHNELL.COM



**KAHLES
624i 6-24X56**

KAHLES IS THE oldest riflescope maker on the planet, but there is nothing backward-looking about the Austrian company's bright, tight, innovative precision scope. In a field that includes scopes with layered-on features that increase the price without adding much performance, Kahles's 624i stands out, with thoughtful attributes that make it one of the most shooter-friendly scopes on the market and the consensus pick for our Editor's Choice award.

It would have been tempting for Kahles to chase the magnification rabbit, offering this scope in 30X or even 36X. But because

increases in magnification have a cost—in narrowing fields of view, an inability to keep the target in view under recoil, and in image distortion from heat waves—serious precision shooters prefer their top-end magnification at 24X or 25X. Kahles serves this market with a useful magnification range behind a 56mm objective lens that can be mounted low on a rifle but has ample mounting latitude along its 34mm tube.

Then there's the reticle. The illuminated first-plane milling SKMR3 reticle (affectionately called the "Skimmer3" by fans of its clear design and useful subtensions) offers plenty of holdover and holdoff references without being overly busy. The big, tactile turrets move in .1 milliradian adjustments,

and a red indicator pin pops up after a single revolution, so shooters won't get lost in their elevation adjustments.

All of these thoughtful details would be window dressing without great optics, and the Kahles delivers a stunning picture. The 624i finished near the top of our low-light test, and also turned in a good resolution score, as you'd expect from its European glass and optical design.

The Kahles is a pricey scope, but its useful features, first-rate controls, and sharp optics make this excellent precision-aiming instrument a smart investment.

SCORE: 87.7
CONTACT: KAHLES.AT/US

PRICE: \$3,000

INNOVATIONS: KAHLES 624i REVERSIBLE CONTROLS

If you're a left-handed shooter, as I am, you can order a 624i with the windage turret on the left-hand side of the scope—opposite the normal arrangement—where it's easy to adjust while keeping your cheek on the rifle's stock. So where is the focus control? Curiously—and usefully—it's located just under the elevation turret, in a spot that's so easy to reach, and so easy to adjust with just your fingertips, that I wonder why other scope manufacturers haven't adopted this arrangement. On the right side of our test scope, where you'd expect the windage turret to be located, is the illumination dial. Smart. Useful. Innovative.

