



KAHLES HELIA 3.5-18X50I

Let there be LIGHT ...

By Selwyn Smith

Kahles, Austria's premier optics manufacturer, have hit another one out of the ballpark with their latest offering: a premier scope with a highly innovative, user-friendly customisable ballistic turret - let's see just how good this this new scope is.

Kahles are one of the most innovative high-end optics manufacturers in the world. They not only created the rifle scope as we know it today, but they also invented ballistic drop compensation (in 1904!) and pioneered the very first variable power scope in 1949. Impressive. First to invent a waterproof riflescope? Kahles. First to invent multi-coated optics with 90% light transmission? Kahles again.

We touched on Kahles state-of-the-art manufacturing facility outside of Vienna in *NZRod&Rifle* Volume 43, Issue 2 (2022). Innovation is one thing, whereas quality control and reputational excellence are another. Get the combination right and you'll lead the pack. Kahles have set new standards across the PRS and tactical market with a number of innovative features built into their outstanding 5-25K

model - the toughest of markets to crack. The Helia 3.5-18x50i looks set to be another leader across the light tactical/PRS shooter and long-range hunting markets alike.

THE HELIA SERIES

The Kahles Helia series has been around a fair while now and encompasses riflescopes, rangefinders, binoculars, red-dot sights and thermal imaging devices. Think of Helia at the mid/upper end of hunting optics. The Helia riflescope series features a hunting scope for every situation: 1-5x24i, 1.6-8x42, 2-10x50i, 2.4-12x56i, 4-12x44i, 3.3-10x50i and the newest scope - the Helia 3.5-18x50i. Released in 2020, this latest model replaces the Helia 5 and is the first of this series to feature parallax adjustment.

PORTER MACHINE WORKS RINGS

David Duprez of Kahles Australasia sent a set of Porter Machine Works rings with the Helia 3.5-18x50i. Porter Machine Works are an Australian company specialising in tactical and hunting scope rings. The massive 5mm twin crossbolts and top screws both utilise T20 Torx driver and are a seriously strong set of rings. This particular model ring set was 164 grams and designed to accommodate the biggest of objective bell scopes.

The quality of the rings was evident when I mounted the Kahles on a Ruger M77 Mk II Hawkeye Hunter test rifle (see *NZRod&Rifle* Volume 45, Issue 2 (2024)). The top rings mated with the lower exactly as expected, highlighting meticulous manufacturing tolerances. Levelling the scope and adjusting for eye relief was pretty straightforward. The massive Torx screws were a breeze to work with and allowed me to quickly swap the scope to my Tikka 595 rifle in .260 when the Ruger Hawkeye had to be returned. A final check to ensure eye relief was okay in the event of a steep uphill shot, and screws were torqued to factory recommendations. Interestingly, there's a sticker on the objective bell of the Kahles reminding users not to exceed 21lbs/inch. A great reminder that too much torque is too much!

3.5-18X50I SPECS

Designed specifically for the long-range hunter, this second (rear) focal plane scope features a one-piece 30mm main tube, illuminated reticle and an optional ballistic turret system that we'll look at in detail. Clicks are 1cm/100m. The scope weighs a mere 660 grams, which is reasonably good for optics with a 50mm objective.

At 380mm in length, this model sat well on both the Ruger and Tikka short-actioned

This clever system detects whether the rifle is in a shooting position and switches on when the firearm is being aimed. If the rifle has been motionless for two hours, the illumination setting switches to the factory-designated 'power down' mode.

rifles and was not too overbearing like many of today's long-range optics. The scope was finished in an appropriate matt black.

AT THE RANGE

The high model rings saw the scope sitting around 60mm above the centre of the bore - too high for both the Ruger and Tikka with their relatively standard comb heights. I added a simple padded cheek piece to increase the comb height and help to align my cheek weld and line of sight with the scope reticle. The magnification ring is quite low profile, so won't snag or get knocked in the field. It's firm to change power settings, and I found myself grabbing the power change ring with a reasonable grip to wind it through the power settings.

The reticle is what Kahles call their 4-dot. Contrary to the name, it features just one small dot in the centre with thin crosshairs either side joining much thicker lines to the scope outer edge. I found the reticle outstanding for precision work. The illuminated reticle is turned on by twisting the outer ring of the parallax adjustment ring and uses a sliding scale as opposed to clicks to increase brightness. Illumination was excellent on a black bullseye background, and throughout the range session, illumination stayed on! ▶

BELOW:
The dial-up settings are some of the best I've used - clear and concise.



LEFT:

The massive 5mm bolts on the Porter Machine Works rings use a T20 Torx driver.

RIGHT:

Adjusting the windage setting at the range after leaving the Kahles tool at home!



was difficult to see the young animal in the tall snow tussock. Then, some movement ...

Again, the scope was wound up, and again, I found myself cursing the fact I was sitting on 18x power and struggling to find the animal in the tussock. This was not the fault of the scope - more a case of me being overly zealous and wanting to make full use of the Kahles incredible clarity on full magnification. After winding back to 8x power, the yearling was back in view. I squeezed off and the young animal collapsed on the spot.

We didn't recover either of the 140gr TGKs, which is common - they're a more stoutly constructed projectile than some of the frangible plastic-tipped offerings from other companies. We've shot a fair few tahr and red deer with the TGKs and they continue to do a superb job without any fuss.

FINAL THOUGHTS

With outstanding glass, a highly effective ballistic turret system, illumination and a reticle purpose-built for precision long-range shooting, there's little to fault in the Helia 3.5-18x50i. I'd like to see a raised rib on the power change ring

to enable easier engagement of magnification when needed - although a simple aftermarket speed ring can be added if the user wishes.

The teardrop stickers are very robust; a couple are starting to show some wear after five days in the hills, yet none have moved - not at all. This might be a different story if they get wet, so time will tell. Irrespective, the more I think about it, the versatility of having multiple bespoke dial-up settings for any cartridge/load combination is outstanding. The turret is an extra \$360 so isn't exactly cheap - but it's so good that you really have to have it!

The Helia 3.5-18x50i has 4.7 Mils (47 clicks) adjustment with the ballistic turret and integral zero-stop design (one full revolution). This will take most modern cartridge combinations out past 600m with a 200m zero - more than enough for 98% of today's hunting situations. Kahles have changed the game yet again with this scope.

The Helia 3.5-18x50i is a real standout amongst the crowded array of dial-up hunting scopes. Optical perfection? You bet it is! This scope will seriously impress the most discerning of long-range mountain hunters. ■

MORE INFO

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