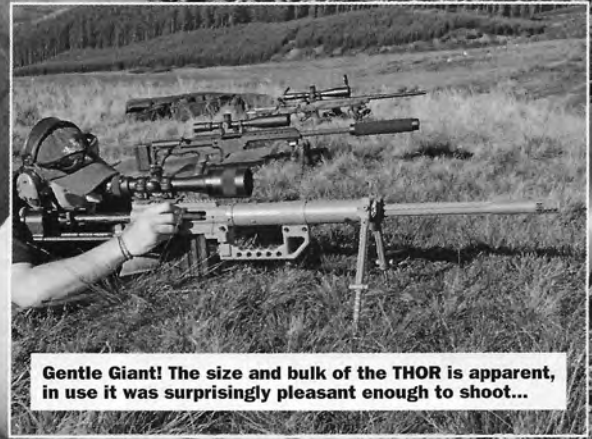


W Windrunner

Chris Parkin asks is bigger always better as he shoots the might Thor long range rifle in 408 Cheytac?



The Thor is a streamlined update of the EDM Windrunner and also a film star as it featured in the Mark Wahlburg film Sniper!



Gentle Giant! The size and bulk of the THOR is apparent, in use it was surprisingly pleasant enough to shoot...

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The aspiration by some to shoot big guns is no different to driving fast cars. I get the chance to shoot some real F1 beasts in this journalism lark and some are a real pain (in more ways than one) but others do fit the bill and show how technology moves on.

Other than size mattering, the main reason for the development of larger guns was for military purposes to engage targets at longer ranges, for both accuracy and the physical energy damage (anti-material). John Moses Browning was the first person to bring us a true heavy machinegun cartridge with his 50 BMG (Browning Machine Gun). Incidentally the .50 was originally designed in WW1 as an anti-balloon cartridge! However, the calibre offered a lot more and has lasted 100 years and is still in frontline military service today in both ground and vehicle-mounted roles.

In truth the 50 cal was never intend as an accurate round when compared to the surgical precision of say a quality, .30" sniper rifle or similar. However, with the right ammo it has proved highly effective in that longer range role and created household firearms names like the Barrett and others. But there is perhaps a more efficient solution than chucking a 750-grain pill at 2800 fps that will combine the surgical ability of the precision rifle with the heavy hitting ability of the 50 BMG! These days one effective and accurate shot seems to be the goal, let us see!

DIET 50 CAL

Modern guns have broken the 50's hold using similar case sizes but firing smaller diameter projectiles with superior ballistics. Energy is retained along with longer supersonic flight duration. This means where a 50 starts out at the muzzle with 12,000 ft lbs, its smaller competitors overtake it downrange with greater accuracy, avoiding the dreaded transonic flight envelope around the sound barrier for 500-750 more yards. I shoot guns regularly out to 1000-1200 yards but they are really running out of steam. The 338 Lapua Magnum is an absolute beauty of a long range calibre but has pretty much passed its accuracy peak by 1500 yards, a 300-grain bullet may extend this a little further.

So for the magic mile (1760 yards) and beyond, where next? Specialist, hand-loaded, 50 BMG is available but daunting in price, it is still the ultimate but 13,500 ft lbs is bigger than most targets can resist in the civilian world. Cheyenne Tactical are the new performers. I shot a 375 (possibly the ballistic ultimate?) a few months ago and it

seemed well mannered but how will its larger 408 brother perform?

I was invited to the WMS steel challenge facility in Wales by "Figure 14", the Importers of the THOR 408. Figure 14 are the UK-based partner for Thor Global Defence Group and managing Director John had brought this 408 to stretch its legs and reach out there to the loooooong targets. I have shot 50 BMG before at 3000 yards but engaging a blown up tank was akin to shooting a coke can with an air rifle. Without wind, it is just point and shoot work on a big target but the 408 promises sub MOA accuracy so I was keen to get more precise.

BLOW UP SCALE

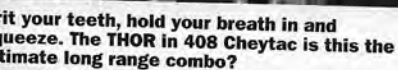
The THOR 408 is a direct descendant of the EDM Windrunner rifle, which although effective, looked like a collection of parts. Anyone who has seen the film "Shooter" with Mark Wahlberg will recognise the rifle as it is one he used on screen. A 30" fluted Krieger barrel with a 1-13" twist rate slots into the action and is secured by a hand-operable barrel nut in a tubular forend. This part has a hand grip that rotates axially about the gun to aid portability and the bipod is fastened at the front with a single handle to control both cant and extension.

Push buttons control height extensions for the large feet that can fold in either direction to aid storage. A laterally ported Muzzle brake tames recoil. The steel action forms the hub of the whole structure with a 7-shot, single stack magazine feeding it. Fire control uses a 2-stage trigger breaking at 2lbs with an AR15-style grip, above this is a 2-position safety lever. The bolt uses a twin-lug engagement with a lift angle of 90°. The butt consist of twin, telescopic steel rods that mounts the length and comb height adjustable sections, a rear monopod is included and certainly needed!

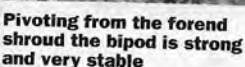
The massive, steel receiver mounts a Picatinny rail attaches any desired optic with little fuss. Now for some plain speaking - every part of the THOR is HUGE! All in weight runs at 30lbs with a collapsed size of 48" extending to nearly 60" in firing mode. It is a sight to behold and the ammo alongside it doesn't look that threatening until you see a single round of 408 Cheytac compared to the bolt of my Remington 700. Tan DuraCoat and black anodizing completes the desert looks on all components.

GENTLE GIANT!

A US optics scope was fitted with x17 maximum magnification. We had good weather on the day at WMS, ammunition resources meant a 100 yard zero check



it your teeth, hold your breath in and squeeze. The THOR in 408 Cheytac is this the ultimate long range combo?



Pivoting from the forend around the bipod is strong and very stable



THOR showing all major features, note the large bolt and telescopic/adjustable butt design



Going large, left to right - 260 Remington, 338 Lapua Magnum and 408 Cheytac



A very effective brake (it needs to be) without too much noise either, but you are still burning around 125-grains of powder

▶ followed by immediate engagement with as many steel plates at varied ranges as possible to record the best data available. Ballistic applications for smart phones work well but nobody wants to waste £5 per shot unnecessarily in the future.

Recoil is the first factor people fear on large calibres but having shot quite a few, I was more concerned with ear protection. Brakes deafen you if treated carelessly and I followed ear plugs with ear defenders and made sure I was never in the pressure zone 45° back from the muzzle. After hearing the first few shots let off, the gun was actually reasonably tame noise-wise so I dropped into position for my first shot.

No matter how many times I shoot these guns, it's always when I put it into my shoulder from the prone position that my brain remembers how heavy they are. Monopods are welcome as supporting that weight with muscle and bone alone is hard work! Military-style triggers are usually 2-stage and it seems to be desirable to make them a little vague, it encourages a gentle squeeze through of the shot rather than a snatched flinch. The first shot immediately displayed a good solid 'shove' from the gun but nothing at all sharp or painful as long as your eye is well off the scope; gentle giant describes it well.

BALLISTIC ARGUMENTS

The ballistic figures can be argued until the cows come home but firing a 420-grain Rocky Mountain bullet at 2850 fps with a G1 ballistic coefficient in the 0.861 region predicts supersonic flight to approximately 1900 yards. Specialist 50 BMG ammo with ultra-high BC bullets will exceed this by 500 yards, but with nearly double the muzzle energy and powder consumption, it is also very expensive. 50 cal Hornady A-max bullets are £3 each for starters. Standard US military ball ammo is subsonic at 1600 yards and carries less energy at this distance. With 7500 Ft lbs at the muzzle, it has required the 50 BMG to develop over 12,000 ft lbs to exceed the 408 ballistically and those before you take powder into account!

IF YOU WANT ONE

Of its breed, this is one of the better large calibre rifles I have shot, I put about 20-rounds through it and the bullet trace through still air can be seen easily as it arcs into the target. In the right circumstances this visibility will help any team, as realistically a spotter is mandatory, at long range to steer the shooter into target. It is not the kind of gun you will get a variation for without realistic usage intended.

Although like a 338, it does not carry the .50 cal stigma, you won't be shooting one at

Bisley anytime soon, as it far exceeds the energy limitations. To be honest, this is the kind of gun that for a civilian is never likely to see use on paper targets or animals. It is for long range plate shooting and John's involvement in the Fifty Calibre Shooting Association is a good step towards its likely use, shooting reactive steel targets (well armoured at that) well beyond 1000 yards. Extra barrel and bolt assemblies will give extra calibres to this gun but is a 338 Lapua really any more acceptable? The 375 Cheytac is ballistically even more slippery!

Each gun is supplied with 100 bullets and cases but long term they are £2 each which added to 5p per primer and 125 grains of powder at 75p you are looking at £4.80 per shot depending on how many times you re-use the brass. Something like an RCBS Ammomaster II press is needed to take the larger dies and bullets. Dies come in from CH4D or Viers Co. at around £350 for a set. Other bullets are available such as solids from Lutz Moeller in Germany which are approx. €200 per 100. Not cheap but these premium components compare well with Mil-Surp 50 cal ammo which is far inferior in terms of ballistic specification, consistency and accuracy.

↑ FOR

- Large but easily portable specification
- Good trigger
- Very effective brake
- Surprisingly gentle if noisy to shoot

↓ AGAINST

- You need deep pockets
- You need a big space

→ VERDICT

- Mad but huge fun
- The ability to reach out and touch is always attractive
- Expensive to run as well as buy

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

■ Name	THOR M408 Cheytac
■ Calibre	408 Cheytac (375 also available)
■ Weight	30 lbs
■ Scope Mounting	Picatinny rail
■ Length	48-54.5" (folded-open)
■ Barrel	30" Krieger 1-13" twist
■ Muzzle Brake	Lateral Ported
■ Price	£7995
■ Contacts	www.figure14.com 07547 570610 info@figure14.com THOR rifles www.thorgdg.com UK fifty cal shooters association www.fcsa.co.uk