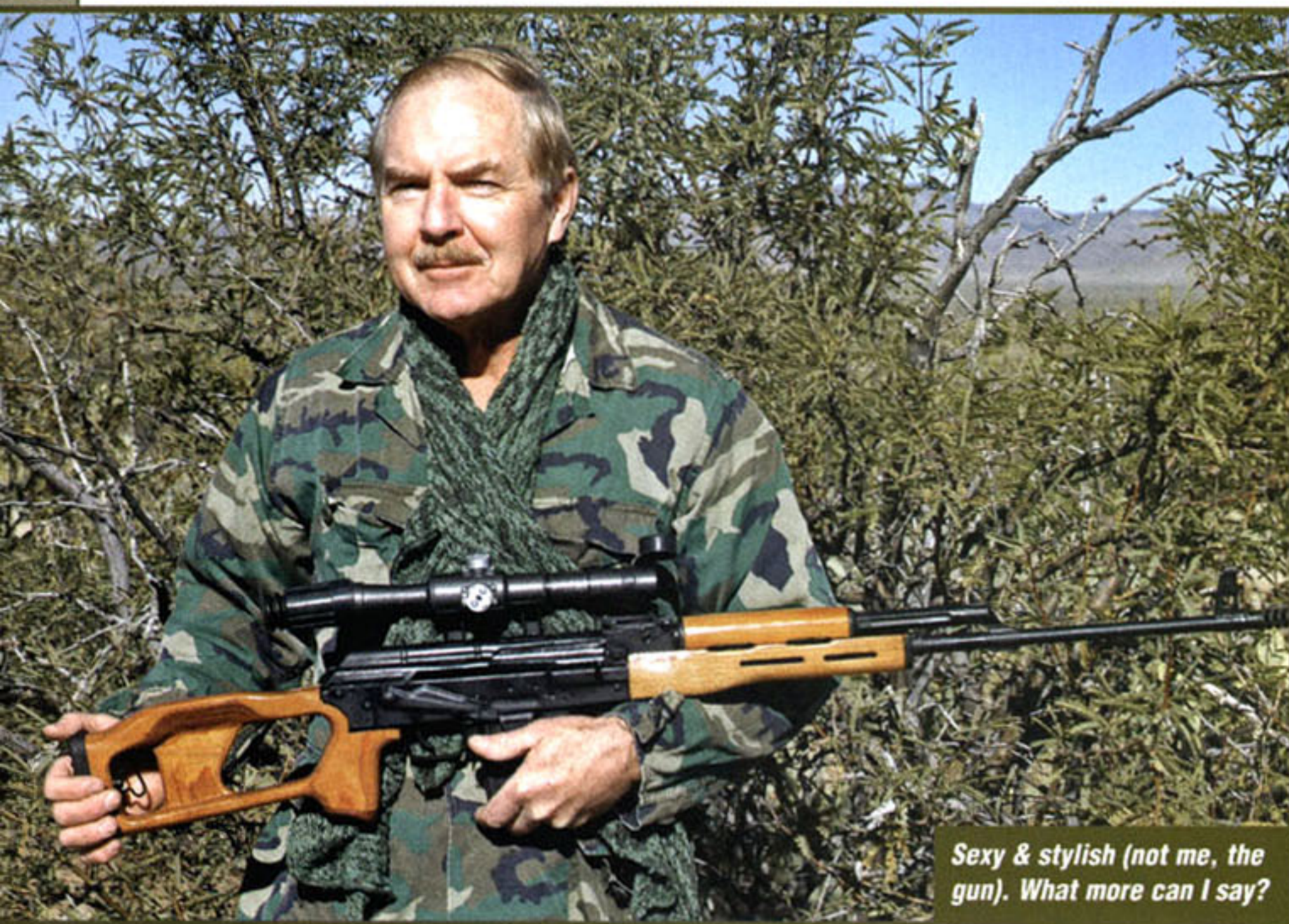


DRAGUNOV'S KIN

With a few changes Romania's PSL has the looks and performance of the famous SVD.



Sexy & stylish (not me, the gun). What more can I say?

Some have called it “sexy” and some “stylish.” Whatever adjective you choose, Evgeniy Dragunov’s design for a platoon-level sharpshooter’s rifle is one of the most distinctive rifles in the world. The Dragunov and its clones now even make the nightly TV news in the hands of Iraq’s current crop of domestic terrorists.

In Russia, it is called the SVD or Samozaryadnaya sniperskaya vintovka Dragunova (the Dragunov semiautomatic, self-loading, sniper rifle). It was developed to replace the scope-sighted 1891/30 Mosin-Nagant and M1940 Tokarev deployed so

successfully in WWII.

Dragunov, the man, was an experienced competitive marksman and sporting rifle designer when he was asked to take on the task of designing a new sharpshooter’s rifle in 1958. When you look at the overall lines of the SVD, from its racy pistol grip stock to its light-contoured barrel, the competitive and sporting side of its designer really came roaring through.

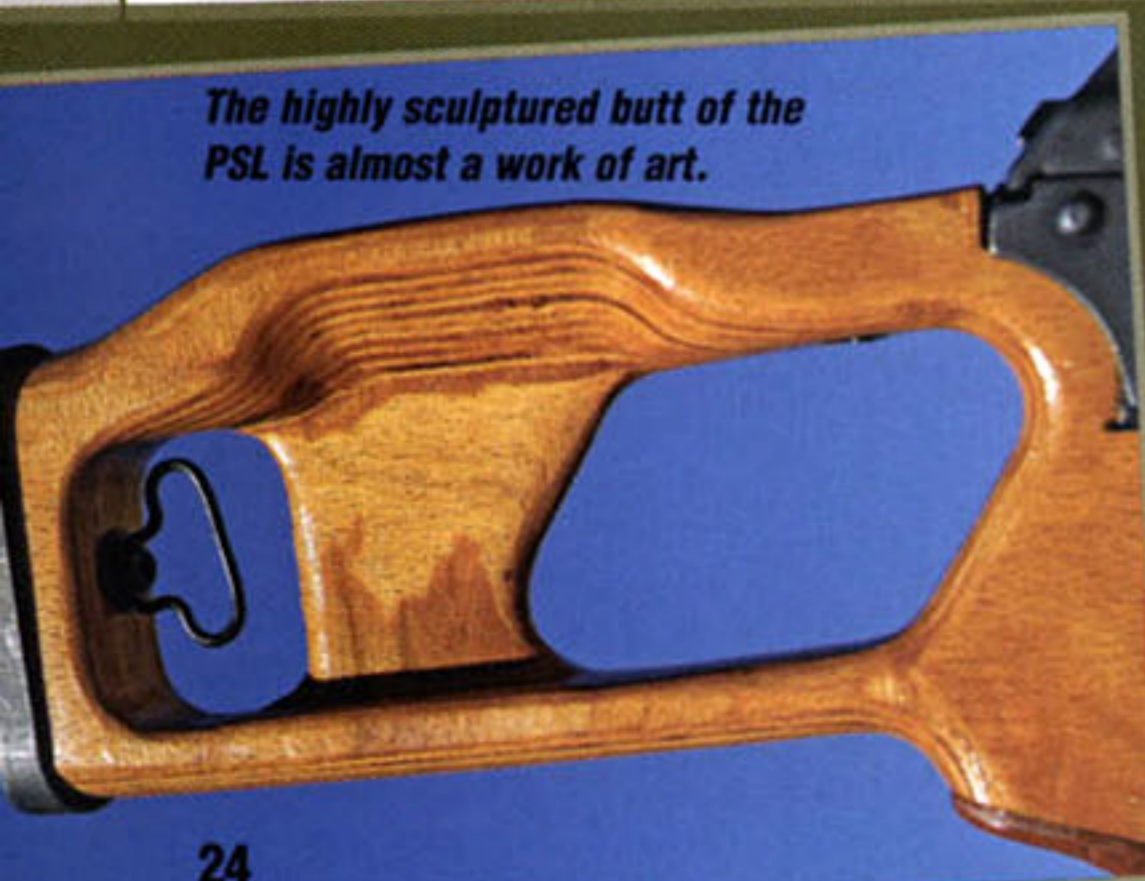
Dragunov admitted he had a challenge on his hands when he began the work. In his own words, “The principal difficulties

we encountered arose from the necessity to resolve all sorts of contradictions. It is sufficient to say that to achieve reliable action in difficult conditions, it is necessary to have the largest practical gaps between the moving parts; at the same time, to achieve the best possible accuracy, everything must be fitted together with minimal tolerances. In addition, weight needs to be low, but the best accuracy requires a rifle to be as heavy as possible, within reasonable limits of course.

“In general, the end had been reached by 1962 after a long series of alternating success and failure. Now I can only say that the magazine took us over a year. The fore-grip assembly, however simple it might look, was the most difficult and we only resolved the final shape at the very end.”

While currently being advertised as Romanian “Dragunov’s” in surplus ads, the Dragunov-looking rifles being imported from Romania are technically not Dragunov’s. They are an adaptation of the Kalashnikov AKM or RPK design. Romania gives their model the designation of PSL or Puska Semiautomata Luneta (scoped semiautomatic rifle).

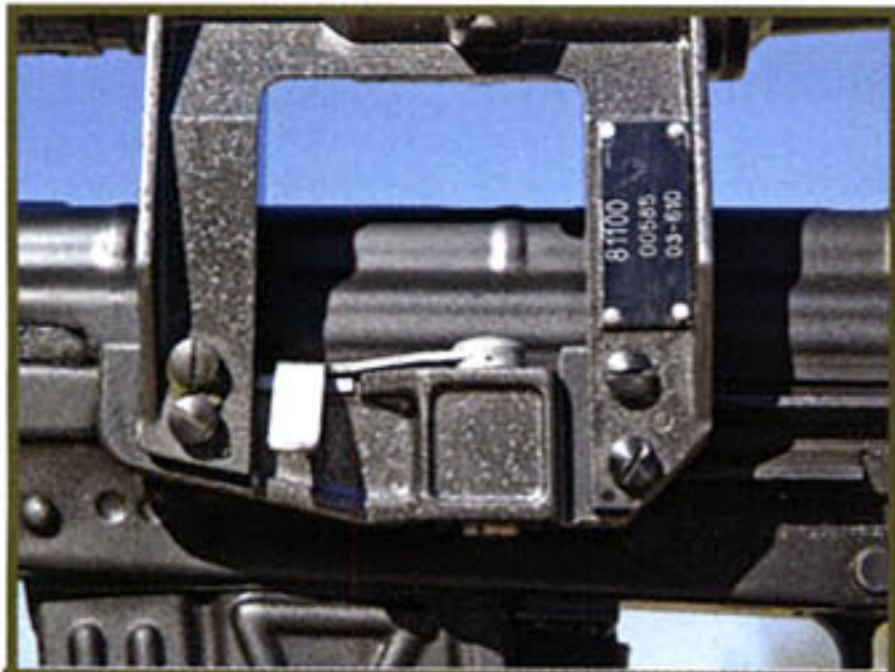
The primary differences between the original Dragunov and the PSL are the Dragunov receiver is milled while the PSL’s is formed from stamped sheet metal and the Dragunov utilizes a unique spring-loaded, short-stroke gas-piston rod that is not attached to the bolt carrier while the PSL uses the long-stroke AK/AKM system in which the piston rod is integral with the bolt carrier. There are other minor differences like the design of the cheek piece, the forearm, the trigger, the muzzle brake, disassembly, quality of



The highly sculptured butt of the PSL is almost a work of art.



Left: Mechanically, the Romanian PSL is based on the AKM platform rather than on the original Russian Dragunov design. The stamped PSL receiver is reinforced at the rear with two steel plates just ahead of the buttstock.



The PSO scope mounted smoothly and locked up firmly on the PSL's optics rail.



The Romanian copy of the Russian PSO type scope is light, tough and easy to use. Used in conjunction with the graduated elevation turret, the range-finding PSO reticle is excellent, if a bit busy.

machining, but basically from an overall external profile, both models look exceedingly similar.

While it could be argued that the solid receiver of the Dragunov coupled with its refined short-stroke gas system would be the more accurate, the Romanian PSL leaves little to be desired in terms of precision if fed quality ammunition. Looking at it from the Romanian point-of-view, the PSL is cheaper and faster to produce plus being based on the AK/AKM/RPK design, its operation, disassembly and maintenance are immediately familiar to the average Kalashnikov toting conscript.

The brand new Romanians currently being imported and offered on the surplus market are made by CN Romarm SA/Cugir. Chambered in 7.62x54R and recently in 7.62x51, they carry the model designations of PSL or SSG-97. The PSL I worked with was chambered in the original 7.62x54R caliber and is imported by Century Arms Int.

AKM Lineage

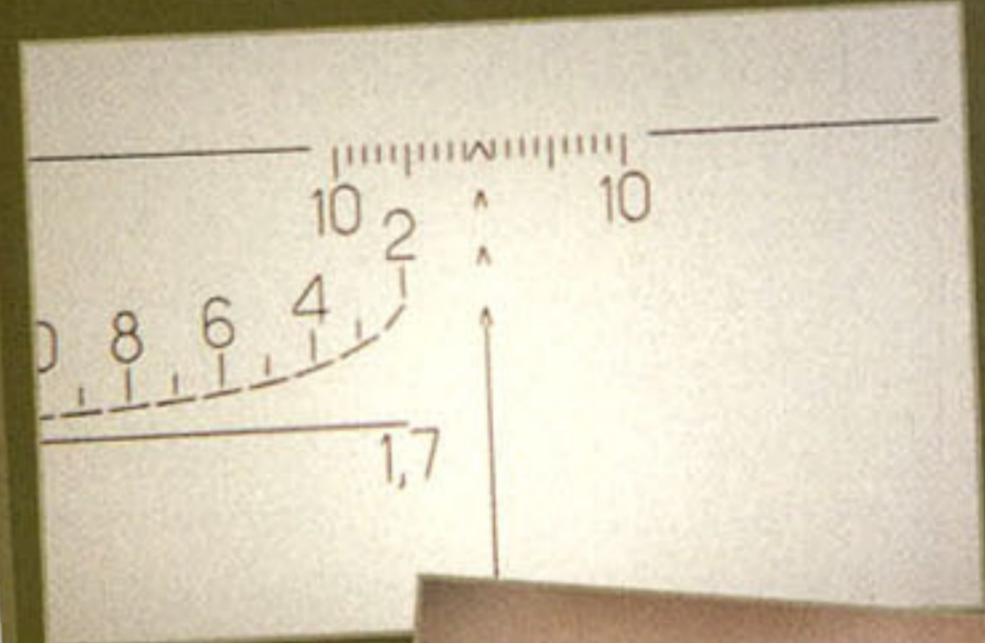
As supplied to the customer, the new PSL's come with a correct PSO type, quick-detachable 4X scope with scope cover and filter, two 10-round magazines, a cleaning kit and sling. The only item lacking was a good instructional manual for both the rifle and the scope. If you are at all familiar with the AK/AKM family, 50 percent of the problem is taken care of. The PSO scope can be a bit of a challenge.

True to its AKM lineage, the PSL features a stamped, spot-welded receiver with

an attached optics rail on the left-hand side for mounting the scope. The stamped receiver is reinforced by the addition of two plates on either side of the receiver where it joins the stock. The bore and chamber of the light 24" barrel are chrome plated, and the barrel is capped off with a muzzle brake sporting 12 vents. The heavy-walled magazine rocks into place like that of an AK and is released by pushing forward on the release paddle. The side safety/dust cover is pure Kalashnikov. The sculptured, Dragunov-styled, pistol grip stock is formed from laminated wood, the vented forearm from solid wood, and the butt plate is corrugated metal. With scope, the PSL weighs 10 pounds.

While the PSL is mounted with a tangent rear sight adjustable to 1,200 meters and a Kalashnikov-type front sight adjustable for windage and elevation, the primary sighting system is its intriguing PSO type scope. The scope is a copy of the original Russian PSO-1 design for the Dragunov but lacks the Russian model's ability to detect infrared light sources as well as its battery operated illuminated reticle. And what a reticle it is!

As you can see from the image I shot through the eyepiece, it's busy. The primary aiming point is the tip of the top chevron with the 10 Mil hash marks on either side being used for windage corrections, leads, and range determinations. The three lower chevrons are calibrated for 1,100, 1,200, and 1,300 meters respectfully when the elevation turret is set at "10" (1,000 meters).



The distinctive PSL forearm is vented for cooling.



The PSL muzzle brake is highly efficient, practically eliminating felt recoil from the 10-pound rifle. Lookout for flying debris when firing from prone, though.



DISASSEMBLY:

The Romanian PSL disassembles exactly like the common AK/AKM.

1) Remove the magazine and cycle the action to ensure the chamber is unloaded and cock the hammer. 2) Push in the spring latch at the rear of the receiver cover. 3) Remove the receiver cover up and back. 4) Push forward on the latch and spring retaining rod and remove them to the rear. 5) Pull the operating rod to the rear until the flanges of the bolt carrier are aligned with the four notches in the side rails of the receiver. Lift the bolt carrier with attached piston rod up and withdraw it to the rear. 6) Separate the bolt from the bolt carrier by turning it counter clockwise. 7) The Dragunov disassembled. Reassemble in reverse order.



In the lower left side of the image is a choke-type range finder based on a standing man 1.7 meters (5'7") tall and calibrated from 200 to 1,000 meters. In use, the target's feet are placed on the horizontal line and the distance in hundreds of meters is read off the point where the target's head touches the upper curve. The range is then dialed in with the bullet drop compensating elevation turret.

The reticle does not remain centered and moves slightly in the direction of the adjustments. For example, the aiming point moves down as the elevation is cranked up.

The elevation turret is calibrated from 100 to 1,000 meters for the 7.62x54R military 149-grain loading. From 100 to 300 meters, the click adjustments are in 100-meter increments. From 300 to 1,000 meters, the clicks tick off 50-meter increments.

The windage turret is graduated in 1/2 Mil units. My inclination would be to use the Mil hash marks on either side of the primary chevron for windage compensation, unless the range exceeded 1,000 meters.

I like this scope. It's clear, fairly bright, but not a low-light scope, and offers a generous field-of-view. The adjustment turrets are easy to read, easy to operate and consistent. The integral mount slides smoothly on or off the receiver rail and locks firmly and consistently into place with the flip of a locking cam latch. Its very functional integral sunshade slides

forward and locks in place and a collapsing rubber eyecup blocks out extraneous light. The eyecup is even vented so it doesn't suck out your eyeball.

The only problem I have with the set-up is that the comb of the stock is too low for the height of the scope, eliminating the possibility of obtaining a true stock weld.

Then again, the Europeans tend to shoot with a head-up position that feels unnatural to most Americans who like to crawl into their stocks.

While machined portions of the rifle, like the locking lug recesses and bolt carrier are rough, the quality of the PSL trigger was a pleasant surprise. It's a two-stage trigger.

Where there's conflict today, look out for the Dragunov.



The first stage is long and spongy, but the second stage, while gritty, breaks suddenly and cleanly at about 4 pounds. In short, the trigger's controllable.

How does it shoot?

We know that the Russians load match-quality sniper ammunition and I expect the Romanians do, too. Not having any, I put together some quality handloads using Sierra MatchKing bullets, Graf brass and Federal 210 match primers. If you break down 7.62x54R military ammunition, you will normally find that the projectiles weigh 149 grains exactly and the powder charges, 47 grains, exactly. (A powder charge of 47 grains indicates the use of a medium burning rate powder such as IMR 4064 or H4895 to provide the proper gas-port pressure.) The bullet forms vary tremendously from the short, hollow-based, lead-core Bulgarian projectile to the long, boattail, steel-core missiles. Bullet diameters are uniform at .311". For testing purposes, I added Wolf's current 149-grain FMJ and Bulgaria's brass cased, 149-grain lead-core load from Factory 10 to the mix.

The best handload, turning in three shot groups averaging .75" to 1" at 100 yards, consisted of Sierra's 174-grain (.311") HPBT MatchKing with 47 grains of IMR 4064. The second best recipe, averaging 1" to 1.25", was put together with a 150-grain (.308") HPBT MatchKing with 47 grains of Varget. That great Factory 10 Bulgarian surplus averaged 1.25" while the Wolf load scattered to 2.5".

The muzzle brake is very efficient, but with four of its vents pointing down at the 6 o'clock position, watch out for flying debris if you're shooting from the prone position.

In no case, did the point of impact of any of the loads correspond exactly to the scope settings, but that's merely a matter of turret adjustment.

Can Romania's PSL shoot? You bet it can with the proper diet, but like a good Kalashnikov, it really chewed up Graf's beautiful brass. Honestly, I own bolt action sporting rifles that don't shoot as well. The PSL reminds me of a T/C Contender pistol. It shouldn't shoot little groups, but it does.

Issued to a designated marksman, the Romanian PSL certainly fulfills its role as a highly accurate sharpshooter's weapon. Given good ammunition, its ranging capabilities are limited only by its 4X scope and the ability of the shooter. I wouldn't want to be standing within 800 meters of one. At 1,300 meters, I wouldn't exactly feel safe in a vehicle either.

Sexy? Stylish? Yes, and lethal. Get 'em while you can! The Romanian PSL is a modern military classic.

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