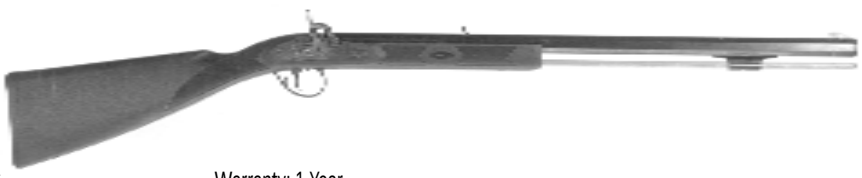
continued from page 15

rel was 26 inches long and 15/16 inch across the flats. The Bobcat had an enlarged trigger guard with a single trigger, and a weight of only 5.4 pounds. The trigger guard allowed us to shoot it while wearing gloves. The barrel's twist rate was 1 in 48 inches. The straight-hand black-plastic stock was held to the barrel with a single cross pin. There was no rib under the barrel, and that helped keep the weight down. The rear sight had a very odd buckhorn configuration that gave poor elevation reference for the front brass blade. Adjustments were made by drifting for windage, or by filing for elevation. The CVA Bobcat's single trigger was satisfactory, but not outstanding, in our view.

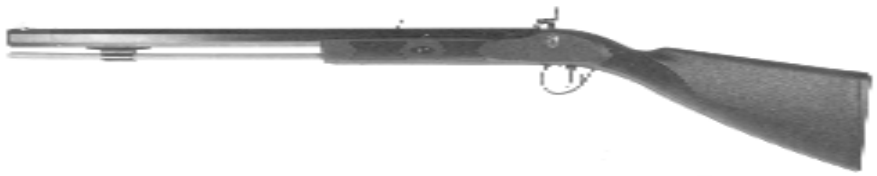
CVA Bobcat .50 Cal. *Retail Price...$126*



SPECIFICATIONS Warranty: 1 Year

Metal Finish	Blued	Front Sight	Blade
Weight	5.4 lbs.	Rear Sight	Buckhorn
Overall Length	40 in.	Country of Origin	Spain
Barrel Length	26 in.	Trigger Type	Single Stage
Rifling Twist	1-in-48	Stock Material	Plastic
Barrel Shape	Octagonal	Best Group 100 yds.	1.5 in.

Our Recommendation: We like the $126 CVA Bobcat a lot. It is light, accurate, and easy to maintain.



The CVA Bobcat shot extremely well. Our best round-ball group with the Bobcat was three shots into 1.5 inches at 100 yards, and all groups were under 4 inches. However, the saboted XTP Hornady bullet shot only 7-inch groups, indicating that either more testing is needed to get better groups or that the rifle's twist rate works much better with round ball than with the heavier saboted .44-caliber pistol bullets.

The first shot out of the Bobcat told us that this rifle had a significant flaw. The surface of the black plastic stock where it contacts the face was very rough, like sandpaper. This had to be fixed, so we wrapped the stock with soft paper toweling to cushion the roughness.

The plastic-stocked Bobcat handled the same as the wood-stocked CVA. The balance point was right under the rear sight on both rifles. Both were equally lively, yet the Bobcat weighed a lot less. This was not without its price, however. It kicked like Billy-be-damned with anything approaching a hunting load. The fix was to sight it in with heavy hunting loads and use light loads for practice.

Early caplocks and flintlocks can be decorative, and many owners choose to display them. The plastic-stocked CVA muzzleloader just didn't cut it for this purpose. However, there was some nice engraving on the Bobcat's blued lockplate and hammer that added to its stark appearance. So what purpose does the unsightly plastic stock serve? That part of the stock closest to the nipple gets a great deal of powder charring. If this is not attended to, the wood will turn permanently black and eventually erode, and here the plastic stock helps. Plastic stocks can also be durable yet light, and are easy to maintain.

Long ago, mountain men realized that shiny, brass-mounted rifles advertised their location to hostile eyes. Instead, they preferred rifles that had iron mountings finished in dull brown, and dull-finished stocks that didn't reflect sunlight. The dull-finished black-plastic stock of the CVA Bobcat was the darkest, dullest rifle in this test. In our view, this finish makes as much sense today as when these rifles were first built.

T/C Hawken

Our Recommendation: *Because the CVA Bobcat was able to do anything the T/C Hawken could do (except look lovely), we can't justify the T/C's $448 price. The T/C is not four times better than the CVA Bobcat.*

The .50-caliber T/C's barrel was 28 inches long, and it measured 15/16 inch across the flats. It weighed 8.5 pounds, 3 pounds more than the CVA Bobcat. The T/C Hawken had a coil mainspring inside its lockplate instead of the leaf spring in the other locks. However, inside the lock of the T/C, two of the screws holding in the lock's guts were loose and, because of that, the hammer didn't always fall all the way down to strike the nipple. Tightening the screws fixed the problem. Our test T/C Hawken's set trigger had a heavy pull initially, but we adjusted it to our liking. The barrel was held to the stock just like the CVAs. A hook breech engaged the rear tang, and a single cross pin secured it to the forend.

The T/C didn't like our round-ball load. Where the other rifles cut one hole at 20 yards, the T/C couldn't put three shots within 3 inches of each other. To our joy the T/C shot like a house afire with sabots. It grouped a saboted Hornady 240-grain jacketed XTP bullet, propelled by 70 grains of FFg GOEX, into consistent 4-inch groups at 100