

Review: The Mueller Scopes

Warren Wall with Rob Woods

Mueller Optics
LLC

Sales:
1-888-775-8885

General
Inquiries
1-989-705-8885
www.
Muelleroptics
.com

White Falls
(Canadian
Distributor)

www.
Whitefalls
.ca

When I first saw the Mueller scopes online (www.muelleroptics.com) I must admit, I wasn't entirely impressed. They seemed a little 'gimmicky', and the market already has its fair share of discount scope offerings. I thought they looked a little bulky and the red-dot, although perhaps creative, was just one more thing to go wrong.

However, reviews began to pile up suggesting these scopes were a little bit more than they first appeared. In fact, reading some of the reviews I wondered if some of the testers were starting to take things a little personally when the scopes DIDN'T break down or fail to perform. One tester even baked his scope in the oven, then put it in the freezer to see if he could induce a moisture problem or component failure. I'm not sure Betty Crocker would approve, but I was a little impressed.

So I decided to contact Mueller and see if the scopes were available in Canada yet, and try one out.

NOTE: This is an in-depth review. Those wishing the 'short answer' can turn to the back for the summary.

A Few Questions For Mueller

A scope is only as good as the company behind it in my books, so the first order of business was to have a chat with Mueller and find out a little about them.

I skipped over the usual web-site fluff, and started to ask the 'hard questions' about their product. Those who know me know I'm not afraid to kill an hour or two doing this kind of thing. Their representative was pleasantly open and forthright in his answers, honestly

discussing both the pros and cons, what problems they'd had in the past, and what they'd done to improve their designs.

General Impressions

So far, I liked what I was seeing. Mueller optics appears to be a young but mature company that has worked out many of its start up pains and is now a stable reliable company with good prospects for the future. They seem committed to keep growth manageable and are devoted to quality control before volume.

Their growth is obviously still leading to minor supply hiccups (they were out of both scopes I eventually tested, and I had to wait a week to get them), but that is to be expected with any newer company that is also experiencing growth. I found nothing that I was concerned about.

Calls were returned quickly, the staff was professional, and hearing about their business model and the work they've already done I get a strong feeling that this company is going to have long legs.

Glass And Parts

For the majority of their scopes, Mueller sources the glass in Japan, has it coated using a proven European technology, and then has the tubes and components assembled in China. The exception is the Tac 2 series of scopes, which are entirely manufactured in Japan.

Their initial process involved a drying time for the lenses that proved to be insufficient, leading to a few cases of moisture getting into the scope.

However, they adjusted their practices over time and resolved the issue. Certainly, reports from the field and my own experiences indicate this isn't a problem anymore.

The lenses are all Fully Multi-coated. For those wondering what that means, both sides of the glass in all glass components have been coated using a multi-coat system to allow for maximum light transmission and long life. It also means you should be slightly careful what cleaning products you use on the glass, as is the case with all fully-multicoated optics.

The Guarantee

I was interested in their return and Guarantee policies. And here Mueller was a little light compared to some of the competition.

They offer a lifetime manufacturers guarantee against defect. In other words, if the scope suffers any failure of a mechanical nature or 'wears out', They will repair or replace the scope. However, damage that is deemed to be 'caused by the user' is not covered. For those who are used to dealing with companies like Leupold, who will replace or repair any scope virtually without question, this might be a little concerning at first.

I dug a little deeper, asking some hypothetical questions and asking about real life returns they'd had.

First, I was impressed by how few scopes they've had returned. I won't quote the exact ratios, but suffice it to say their current production model scopes are suffering a below average number of failures. I was able to later confirm this with the Canadian supplier.

They further made it quite clear that they're not out there to give anyone a hard time about returning a scope that's not working. Unless there are obvious

signs of abuse (such as a large dent or the like), they will stand behind their guarantee.

Turn around time on a scope is acceptable. A number of scopes are kept on hand at their warehouse to replace any malfunctioning units as needed whenever possible, and quoted response times were acceptable. It would seem that Mueller has taken a number of steps to ensure that there are no long delays getting a scope back in the hands of an owner if they need to send one in. Mueller expects to improve their turn around time on returns as time goes on, but they are quite reasonable as it is.

One nice fact for **Canadians** is there is a Canadian distributor who will deal with Canadian customers, even if the scope was not purchased in Canada. **White Falls**, (www.whitefalls.ca), is a Manitoba based company and distributor for Mueller Optics. This keeps shipping costs of damaged scopes and all the attendant border issues to a minimum.

Another positive note – the warranty is fully transferable. So if you buy one of these scopes second hand, the warranty still stands.

And The Big Question...

"Why the Heck are your prices so low".

We all know you don't get something for nothing. I mean, come on. Fully Multi-coated optics? Bright clear view? Red dot? Rugged and dependable? For THAT price?

Something has to give – you have to cut costs SOMEWHERE. (They chuckled when I mentioned this. "Yeah, we get a lot of that here".)

Well, they did cut. Mostly, they cut advertising. We discussed that a bit, and I have to admit they've got a point.

Mueller Multishot



Mueller Tac II



The big scope manufacturers spend literally millions of dollars in magazine, newspaper, and other forms of advertising. Mueller spends virtually none. They rely on word of mouth and online reviews. Money goes into quality, quality becomes word of mouth, word of mouth is their form of advertising.

The other place they've cut a bit in my opinion is their Guarantee.

Most manufacturers are offering some form of 'unconditional' guarantee, where they claim they will replace a scope even if the user damages it. Some are better than others at honoring this, but that's the marketing trend.

That means that somewhere along the lines, the manufacturer has to make you, the consumer, pay for mistakes that others make. Some twit backs over their scope with a truck and the manufacturer sends them another one. Someone has to pay for that scope, and that someone is the consumer.

Mueller has not gone that route. Regular wear and tear from using the scope (hey, who hasn't dropped a rifle?) is one thing, but if you do something stupid, you'll have to replace the scope.

Frankly – considering their prices are considerably lower than scopes of similar quality, I don't have a big problem with this. I could buy two tac 2's for the price of a comparable 'unconditionally guaranteed' scope anyway, and as you'll see the performance is similar.

These facts, and some particularly clever thinking in the manufacturing process, allow them to keep costs low and markup minimal and still do well.

So I Got A Couple

After all this, I decided that maybe these scopes were worth a closer look.

I'd seen the stress testing reviews, and the range reports, all of which were favorable. So I wanted to do something a little different, and see how they stood up in real hunting conditions.

Mueller agreed to send me two scopes to try out. They sent their 2-7x32 Multi-shot scope, as well as their new 3-10x 44 Tac II.

I made the rules brutally clear – I couldn't guarantee the survival of the scopes, and if there were problems with the scope, it would get a bad review. (Hey, it's not like I'm getting paid for this after all. I'll say what I want to say).

The Scopes Out Of The Box.

Taking the scope out of the box, I was pleasantly surprised at the feel and look.

I've bought 'affordable' scopes from Swift and other companies before, and found them to have a 'lightweight' and 'plastic' feel to them that spoke of the potential for failures. (indeed – two of my swifts failed, although the other two are holding up well).

By comparison, the Muellers felt solid and well built. The markings are clean and the appearance is quite good.

They sent a small neoprene camo cover for the 2-7. I put it on. The scope looked like a stick. Ok, it's SUPPOSED to look like a stick, but if I wanted something on top of my gun that looked like a stick, I'd mount a stick. I took it off. Turkey hunters will love it, but it wasn't to my tastes. It was easy to install and effective as camo though and fit the scope well.

So, the score was one point for Mueller over all. Good look and feel, and mounted to the guns these boys looked impressive. On to the testing.

Through The Looking Glass

Not wanting to wait to get to the range, I set the Muellers up, did a quick focusing, and had my first look at a rooftop about 130 yards away that is favored by many of the local seagulls and crows.

It was a clear day, with the sun just beginning to think about setting. My first impression was 'wow'. The color was very good on the 2-7, and was simply outstanding on the Tac 2. The Tac 2 was noticeably better than the 2-7, as was to be expected as it's a higher priced and higher quality scope, but both were better than I expected. The images at all powers were clear and crisp, light gathering was good, and clarity to the edge was good.

A few days later, I shipped the tac 2 to my friend Rob Woods, a long time hunting guide and long distance target shooter, to see what kind of performance he could squeeze out of it. The 2-7 went on top of my Remington 7600 30-06, a gun noted for fast action in bush and tight conditions where the features of the 2-7 should really stand out, or fall flat on their face.

The Hunts

Rob lives in Northern BC, where he's guided for many years for bear and moose. I myself live in southern BC. So between us we had a chance to take the scopes to a large range of climates. I took the multishot to bc's southern interior, then up north a ways to the great Cariboo-Chilcotin areas. Rob put his through its paces in the cold hilly country near Burns Lake.

We decided to team up and finish it off with a hunt in the southern coastal rain

forest areas chasing after sitka-blacktail deer.

The 2 – 7 X 32 Multi Shot

General Impressions

Originally, Mueller marketed this scope as a 'shotgun' scope. The lower powers (2 – 7 vs the traditional 3-9), the circle and cross reticle, and other features all benefit the shotgun hunter.

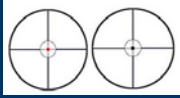
I'm sure that it makes a fantastic shotgun scope – but in my books, the design is one of the single best all around rifle hunting scopes I've run across for general use. The more I used it, the more I realized it's potential. Long shots, short shots, fast acquisition, good light, low light, small targets, big targets... you name it, this scope can adapt and do very well in any normal hunting conditions out to at least 400 – 500 yards. Only at the longer ranges does it begin to leave you wanting a tiny bit more magnification and light for some applications, like varmint hunting.

Many people make the mistake of only considering a scope's long range performance. But just as important to me is 'what happens when the animal is close in'.

Here the muellers do a LOT better than many of their similarly priced competition scopes do. At 2 and 3 power I was able to easily see and clearly focus on items only a foot or so in front of my gun with no adjustments. At 4 power, I had to go out to about 5 feet.

That means if you're stomping through the brush, or sitting and spotting, and an animal appears right on top of you without warning you're going to bring the gun up and see animal, not blur. Or, God forbid, you have an 'unexpected encounter' with a hostile animal while you're hunting and need to make a snap shot close in.

Mueller Multishot Reticle



The Reticle

The 'shotgun' reticle on the Multi-shot (seen in the sidebar) is a little different than standard crosshair reticles. But it took next to no time to fall in love with it.

Mueller claims that the circle will cover 15 inches at 40 yards at 2 power, but a little math told me it would also cover 15 inches at 100 yards at 5 power, or 30 inches at 200 yards on 5.

To me, this was much more valuable. I found that very quickly in the field I could make a 'quick and dirty' estimate of range on animals just by seeing how much of the reticle their brisket filled up. It worked surprisingly well. Distance estimates were accurate enough for hunting, and I could tell in a split-second if an animal was too far for the 'max point blank' range of my gun.

The scope comes onto target like it has a mind of its own. Your eye tends to put the circle-dot right on the sweet spot before you even think about it.

The center dot is small. Mueller says it's a 1 MOA dot, and they're not kidding. It's large enough to be easily visible and useful, but small enough to allow for pretty precise shooting at the range.

The Red Dot

Did I call this feature a gimmick? I was dead wrong.

The dot is small. So small in fact that in full daylight on most targets I couldn't even see the red, just the normal black of the center dot. However, slide over to a dark target and there it was.

But where it REALLY stood out was on grey mornings just at first light. You really have to try it to see how effective it is, but once again the scope pulls itself on target like it's got a mind of its own.

I tracked a young doe with it just as the first hint of light was coming into the sky. The doe was easily visible in the scope, but the black of the reticle was hard to see. That red dot wasn't, however, and keeping it tucked right on the sweet-spot was so natural I tended to do it without thinking.

To test the batteries, I left the unit on 24 hrs a day to see how long till they died. I checked it every day. It took about 12 days to die, and that's with the battery that was already in the scope when I got it. As time went on, I noticed the dot getting a little dimmer, and turned up the settings to keep it where I liked it. Considering that you don't NEED the dot to use the scope it wasn't a worry, but it's good to know that even forgetting and leaving it on for a day or two won't kill the battery. I tended to turn it off during the midday, where it really didn't help much anyway. But it was always on during evening or morning.

Ruggedness

I was not kind to this scope. What the heck, I thought, let's see what it can do.

During our moose hunt, it was frequently freezing at night, and above zero during the day. The gun was frequently moving between the cold air outside and the warm air of the stove-heated wall tent.

We used a 6 wheel Polaris to get into the back areas, and it rode in a makeshift scabbard that bounced like mad as we navigated over bumps and pits.

I spent an afternoon watching a trail leading into a meadow in the rain.

The scope was jostled, bumped, thumped, bounced, frozen, thawed, soaked, dried, dropped, scuffed and generally treated with a complete lack of respect. I also ran a couple of boxes

The Multi Shot was far less of a gimmick and far more useful than I expected.

A rugged, all around hunting scope with solid performance.

An excellent short range performer that's got no problem going long when you want to.

Bear hunters will love this scope for sure. I can't wait for the spring season.

of ammo through it over the course of testing and hunting.

Back at the range at the end of the season – it still held perfect zero.

(this was nothing compared to the true beating that the Tac 2 was subjected to, but more on that later).

Image Quality

In looking at the general quality of the image, clarity, and brightness, I compared the scope to a few leupolds I had access to that were similar, as well as a few other scopes.

Seeing as most people seem to use the VX series as a standard, I'll use that to compare.

I found the clarity and brightness to be superior to the VX-1, and pretty darn close with a VX-2. Like wise, color definition and crispness was very similar to the vx-2, and certainly noticeably better than the vx-1.

It beat the snot out of the other cheapies I had laying around, so I won't even bother.

It was not in the same class as the VX-3 or the Tac 2 Mueller, but it was still very good, especially considering the cost of the scope.

In the field, I was showing Rob the scope on the way back to the truck to demonstrate it's low-light performance. It was dark out, with only moonlight for lighting. He looked through the scope and said "hey – there's a deer!". Sure enough, a deer ran across the road 40 yards or so up.

Any scope you can see a deer in by moonlight is going to be just fine for hunting in my books.

Nobs And Adjustments

At the range, I was pleased with the ¼ click adjustments. They were easy to turn with the hand, very positive and audible clicks, and every click moved the bullets point of impact precisely as expected.

Eye Relief

Here, both the TAC II and the Multishot fell a little behind expensive scopes such as the Leopold.

Eye relief is good, but it's less than you'd expect out of a Leopold. It was no issue on the 30-06, but be a little careful when using a big gun. It's in the same class as the elite series from Bushnell, good but not brilliant.

General Hunting Performance

No matter where I took this scope, I found it was well suited. Long-range performance was just fine, it did well in the daytime, and it did well in low light. But where it really stood out as a cut above most scopes was in the ugly grey of a morning in the mist or drizzle, or at evening time, especially in the thick forests of the coast.

It is a remarkably fast scope, with superb close-in performance. And yet you don't give up the ability to 'reach out and touch someone' if you need to make that long shot. You'll find with a bit of practice, you can track the animal with two eyes open, and when you close the 'off' eye, the scope and dot are right on the target perfectly.

As a general hunting scope, this is probably one of the more versatile and flexible scopes that one could imagine. It would work nicely on a shotgun, or a deer rifle, or a bear gun, or a magnum for moose. It gives you ranging features, fast target acquisition and tracking for close in, and strong long range performance.

The Tac II was a real surprise.

It could play with big brand names costing much more with ease.

Considering the price, this scope deserves serious attention even from quality buffs.

This scope comfortably performs like scopes costing at least twice the money, yet has a host of additional features as well.

The TAC II

The standard Muellers seemed to be pretty good scopes, but this was their high end offering so I sent it to play with a friend of mine who could give it a real workout.

Rob's a 1000 yard competition shooter, as well as a hunting guide and avid moose and bear fanatic. He also has a particular love of breaking things. So I knew he'd be perfect.

General Impressions

Before I sent it off, I compared the TAC II (or tac 2 for those who prefer numbers to numerals) to a number of scopes, including the Mult-shot.

The scope's clarity was fantastic, and the colour and clarity seemed excellent.

Once Rob got the scope he put it on his Tika T-3 in 300 win mag and got to work.

Like most people's experience, at the range the scope performed like a high end scope. He was able to get sub moa accuracy even after several clicks and returns.

Rob compared the scope to a few leupolds and some bushnells, including a 3200. His observations were echoed by the others at the range – the TAC 2 was brighter and clearer than any of them.

The Reticle

Unlike the Multi-shot, there was nothing terribly revolutionary about the mil-dot reticle of the TAC II. It is not

illuminated (no need in a scope as bright as that).

However – it performed very well and produced excellent accuracy and results. As those familiar with the mil-dot will know, it's not just great for distance and elevation, it's good for a quickie rangefinder too.

The cross hair is VERY thin, yet stood out well against the background.

Ruggedness.

Boys and girls – This is one tough scope.

The scope took the pounding just fine from the 300 winmag. No real surprises there. It shot a good amount of ammo, went hunting for a season, took several animals, came back and was still right on the money.

Not satisfied, Rob threw it on a 375 H&H that had just the year before demolished a bushnell that had been on a 338 his friend had for years in only a couple of shots.

It took the pounding from that gun just fine too.

The next week, STILL not satisfied, and wanting to see just what it took to wreck one of these things, he borrowed a 458 Lott from his buddy to see what that would do.

After only a handful of shots, Robs shoulder gave out. The Lott is a Lott-a gun.

The scope, however, did not. So – back it went on the 300 the next day, and lo and behold it gave him 5 touching circles. Several rounds later, it was still performing as it was out of the box.

Any scope that can take that kind of punishment, AND a season of hunting with Rob, is a scope that is built to last.

Brightness and Clarity

As was mentioned – the TAC 2 can stand up to any of the more expensive offerings such as the Bushnell 3200, the 4200, and the Lepould VX 3 and do better. Although it's a close thing with the VX 3

Mueller also included a scope cover with see-thru lenses that was a cut above the usual cheap yellow lens ones I've gotten before from manufacturers. This one actually helped in the field – and let the user pick out colour distinctions and definition well in many lighting conditions.

This is a very bright, and very clear scope with excellent colour definition.

In the field, the scope did exactly as one would expect from one of the better quality hunting scopes.

Eye Relief

As mentioned before – eye relief is good, but not generous. Be careful on the really big guns.

Rob's "Quote Of The Day"

When I asked him to sum up his experiences he offered these words of wisdom to potential purchasers:

"I'll be buying more of 'em. So buy one ya Frikkin idiot!".

(You can see why I did his share of the review ☺)

Both Mueller scopes were found to be good value for the money.

The Mutli Shot is a good General Purpose hunting scope suitable for most rifle and shotgun hunting conditions.

The TAC II was a real surprise, excellent quality, low price.

I'll be putting a Mueller on my next rifle. It's just too good a deal to pass up.

Summary

Here's our thoughts on the scopes:

	Multi-shot	TAC II
Value	Very good value. Stands up to scopes worth 1.5 to 2 times the money.	Excellent Value. This is a quality scope at less than half the price you'd expect.
Ruggedness	Good. Although we didn't push it as hard, it stood up to some tough hunting and lots of shells and did perfectly	Excellent. You'll probably break before the scope does.
Clarity and Optics	Very good - in around the VX 2 range. More than enough for hunting in low light at normal distances	Outstanding. Did better in testing than the VX 3. Great colour definition lets you pick out objects in very low light.
Reticle	LOVED the Circle-dot-cross.	Good. Those who like mildots will love the scope. Those who don't will still probably love the scope.
Red Dot	Less gimmicky and more useful than I thought	N/A
Eye relief	Adequate but not generous for both scopes. No problem at all for mid power guns such as the 30-06 or even the 300 win mag (though Rob did manage to bonk himself), but you wouldn't want to hunker too close on a really big gun. No problem for me, but those who like to 'crowd' the scope might prefer a little more.	

And Now The Big Question:

Whenever I'm looking at a discount product I ask myself "Would I buy one instead of another brand if it were the same price?" If I won't pay the same price as I would for a 'brand name', it can't be that much of a bargain.

The short answer here – Yes. I would definitely consider the Muller offerings even if they were the same price as a similar Bushnell or Leupold.

I would expect to pay SLIGHTLY less for the Mueller than a Leupold because of the warranty – Mueller's is good, but Leupold's is better. Possibly a little less due to the eye relief as well.

But all else being equal, I'd expect them to be in and about the same price range. I would expect to pay slightly more than for a 4200.

In my books – that makes the Muellers a real bargain.

And remember folks – I didn't get paid a nickel for this. Although Mueller may find me hard to get a hold of when it comes time to give the scope back ☺

We tried very hard to find more things to dislike about these scopes, and just couldn't. I am genuinely surprised. If you buy one, I would expect you to find it money well spent.