



RANGE FINDER

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After five days in the scrub and with only one more to go the meat safe back at camp was still devoid of venison. Had it not been such a bad hunting trip venison-wise I'd have given this shot a miss. But the deer bedded down at the foot of a giant beech on the opposite ridge across the river was not "untakeable" and I decided to give it a go.

I guessed the distance with what I believed to be my accurate ex-fencer's eye and quickly looked up the cryptic drop table ballpointed on the outside of my survival pouch. Cripes! Two fifty to three hundred bloody metres! Although decidedly at the end of the tether for my .303, I still had the figures for 250 metres and boldly decided to have a go at it. I made myself comfortable, rested the rifle on top of my daypack, cranked my 3X9 scope up to maximum, aimed what I thought was about 60-70 centimetres high to compensate for drop at that range, squeezed off the shot and.....missed.

What appeared to be a large red hind got up and started running, I'd over-estimated the range by at least 50 metres and aimed too high. This is a not uncommon occurrence where hunters are concerned with most of us suffering from the "over estimating" affliction. If only I'd had a rangefinder.

Enter two of Newcon's Laser Rangefinders - the LRB 7X50 Binoculars - and the LRM 1200 - 1500 Monocular.

Let's start with the monocular first.

As the nomination indicates it sports a single ocular lens. With its 7X magnification you can, admittedly, see through it better than you would with your naked eye but with an Exit Pupil Diameter of only 3.6 mm, to my thinking about half the size it ought to be for good viewing, the device is in practice unsuitable for distance viewing.

Not too much of a problem since you wouldn't buy it for viewing but rather for its intended purpose as a rangefinder. Weighing a scant 420 grams, the LRM 1500 is excellently suited to being carried in your pack.

LRM stands for an advanced digital measuring system and its 10-bit binary counter almost instantly measures distance with 1.5 metre increments and as the manufacturer claims, a 75 centimetre accuracy.

This, in turn, would represent about 0.1 % of accuracy. In my tests I've found this to be not the case and an accuracy percentage of around 3% would be more like it. However, don't let this put you off.

Firstly this discrepancy would be absolutely negligible in ballistic terms and therefore be no drawback for the hunter, as your bullet will hit when compensating for the distance given by the rangefinder. Secondly, you'll soon learn to work out the distance to within the discrepancy quoted in the textbook.

The quoted maximum distance of 1460 metres which the LRM1500 is able to give a reading for, is only accurate on a white and/or other highly

reflective target. In the bush and mountains this distance is greatly reduced as you can imagine.

On features standing out from their surroundings the LRM Rangefinder proved to be accurate, with an almost instant display of measurements up to about 460 metres. On features blending in with their background, as is mostly the case in the backcountry, in my tests the LRM reliably and consistently performed only to about 350 metres. Beyond that the gadget proved to be less reliable, in many instances it would not produce a reading.

The LRM1500 is fitted with a nice retractable soft-rubber eyepiece protector. It's important to manually extend this tubing to its full length in order to have the proper eye relief. Now on to "Big Brother" - the LRB 7X50 Rangefinder.

With a 7X magnification and an Exit Pupil Diameter of 7mm (much more like it!) this gadget is not only a superb, consistent and accurate rangefinder up to large distances but is an equally superb pair of binoculars.

It's independently adjustable ocular lenses allow superb focus and crispness of picture while the 7 mm exit pupil enables a rocksteady aim at the target to be distance checked. The LRB 7X50 has a rubberised, waterproof outer and while it weighs no less than 1.3 kgs and measures about 150X200X80 mm it is, as said before, a superb piece of equipment.

While on the open tops of the main Kaweka Range I managed to get readings in excess of 960 metres, accuracy was consistently within the three per cent range and readings far and near were practically instantaneous.

Most pleasing was the LRB's ability to get readings from both reflective and non-reflective targets and there were no significant delays in measuring far off objects that blended in with their background.

Both units run on 9-Volt batteries and have a low-voltage indicator and the two-button operation is very user friendly - simple, effective and instantaneous. Considering the pressure needed to operate the buttons on the smaller unit just right, the buttons on the bigger unit trigger so light settings will change even by the pressure generated by the gadget's own weight. Being so simple to operate, that's not much of a worry though.



A very thoughtful feature is the tripod thread with which both units are fitted. Considering this an overkill on the LRM 1500 which I feel is unsuitable as spotting scope, this feature will turn the LRB 7X50 into a superb spotting scope/binoculars/rangefinder for alpine hunting. With a price tag of close to \$2500, the LRB 7X50 is more than twice the price of the LRM 1500. Considering the price of the latter though the LRB 7X50 represents far better value for money, as in fact it's three gadgets into one. This despite the fact that the (too) soft rubber objective lens protectors are not very effective as they keep coming off.

If I win the Lotto I will donate my spotting scope to my son and the expensive but exquisite LRB 7X50 will definitely be part of my hunting equipment to be flown in.

I rate the LRB 7X50 eight out of ten and the LRM 1500 seven out of ten

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