

**Thompson/Center Hawken .50 Cal. Retail Price...\$448**



**SPECIFICATIONS**

Warranty: 1 Year

METAL FINISH .....	Blued	FRONT SIGHT .....	Bead
WEIGHT .....	8.5 lbs.	REAR SIGHT .....	Shallow V
OVERALL LENGTH .....	42 in.	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN .....	USA
BARREL LENGTH .....	28 in.	TRIGGER TYPE .....	Set
RIFLING TWIST .....	1-in-48	STOCK MATERIAL .....	Walnut
BARREL SHAPE .....	Octagonal	BEST GROUP 100 YDS. ....	4 in.

**Our Recommendation: Too expensive. The T/C Hawken isn't four times the quality and performance of the Bobcat.**



This engraving is similar to the stamped mark used by Sam Hawken in 1850 to identify his factory rifles.

yards. That's all anyone needs for a close-range hunting rifle.

The Thompson/Center Hawken was an eye-catching rifle with its brass mounts and shiny stock of decent American walnut. There was a

cheekpiece on one side of the black walnut buttstock and a brass patch-box on the other side, along with a brass cross pin, escutcheons, forend tip, boss for the lock screw, trigger guard, buttplate, ramrod tip,

and even the two thimbles for the ramrod. Shined up, all the T/C's brass fittings gleamed like gold mirrors. The glossy stock was nicely finished and offered a pleasant background for the brass fittings. The lockplate and hammer had cast-in engraving and case coloring. The barrel was nicely polished and blued and had a good crown. This all made the T/C Hawken look lovely hanging on the wall, which is perhaps one reason for its long-term success. None of it, however, helps the hunter keep a low profile in the field.

The heft of the T/C Hawken provided steadiness in the field, where it is almost always fired offhand. This helped soften the recoil of heavy loads, too, and with all this weight there is no reason not to use a heavy hunting load. Recoil of our standard ball load in the heavy Thompson/Center rifle was insignificant. We fired that rifle with a 100-grain charge, and again there was negligible recoil.

The rifle had a pleasant feel to it, and the sights gave one of the best

**Buying A Used Muzzleloader**

The CVA Frontier, now discontinued, gets our recommendation elsewhere in these pages. It may be possible to find one of the guns new in some gunstores, but you may also have to resort to the used-gun market. How do you evaluate whether to buy a used muzzleloader?

The heart of any rifle is its bore. You can't look through a muzzleloader's bore, but if you wrap a small piece of aluminum foil around a suitable rimmed (empty) cartridge and drop it down the bore and shine a light into the bore, you'll be able to see the condition of the barrel pretty well. If it doesn't gleam, it's either dirty or pitted, most likely both. If the bore shines, it might still have some minor pitting or rust, but that probably won't hurt its shooting qualities. Use a magnifying glass to look for pits inside the barrel at the muzzle. Muzzleloaders usually have deep rifling, and that's what it takes to grab a patch to make the ball spin for good accuracy. You can polish out a small bit of roughness, but major pits are cause for rejection.

Next, look at the hammer and its relation to the nipple. Does it strike the nipple in the center? Make sure you can get the nipple out, and that it's not rusted in place. If you can't get it out of the rifle easily, better pass on the rifle even if the nipple doesn't need to be replaced yet. It

is vital to be able to get the nipple out to clean the rifle properly.

Make sure the lock works as it is supposed to. Cock the hammer and press forward on it. It ought to remain cocked. Many inexpensive muzzle loaders have broken leaf springs that are hard to replace. The usual fix is to replace the whole lock, and there goes your bargain. Check the stock around the nipple to see if it's charred badly, indicating lots of use and/or neglect. If the rifle has been properly cared for, there might still be some slight blackening there. If the wood is burnt through, better pass it up because this indicates general neglect.

Make sure the rifle is held securely in the stock by the forend cross pins. It can be very difficult to tighten the fit of the barrel to the stock and tailpiece, depending on the design of the rifle. Without a tight fit you won't get maximum accuracy.

Finally, be sure the stock is sound. We once saw a very old flintlock that had been repaired at the wrist with wood putty. The gun looked good but the stock was useless. If possible, remove the barrel and lock from the stock, and inspect the wood. If everything looks okay, you're ready to deal.