

Equipment Analysis

Text and photography by Con Kapralos.

Miroku's Mk70 Sporter

INTRODUCTION

It's heartening to see that in this day and age, with all the new, computer designed and graphically inspired guns that are appearing on the market, that BC Miroku of Japan continue to produce great, honest, value for money guns. All the radical designs floating around these days, such as Browning's Cynergy, the new Blaser F3 and Fabarm's Axis tend to make us forget of the tried and tested guns that have been around for many years. Miroku took John Moses Browning's much lauded B25 Superposed and built a copy of it so successfully that Miroku would start to produce most of Browning's O/U's in their Kochi factory. Along side such Browning guns as the B425, B525, X Series guns, as well as parts for their much fabled and loved B25's, Miroku have produced such classics as the 3800, 4800, 6000, 7000 and 9000 O/U guns. A few years ago, when Miroku re-invested in tooling, they started to produce barrels made on the monobloc system, whereas originally they used the chopper lump method of barrel construction. To coincide with this change, the Miroku series of guns got a name change - the 3800 became the Mk38, the 6000 became the Mk 60 and so on. The 4800 was deleted, so too was the 9000, but the Model 10 was introduced, its back bored barrels being a big hit with many shooters. The beauty of the Miroku product is that there is a gun to cater for all tastes,

(Left) The Miroku Mk 70 Sporter certainly has the looks and pedigree to be a top performer in all areas - including the clay disciplines.

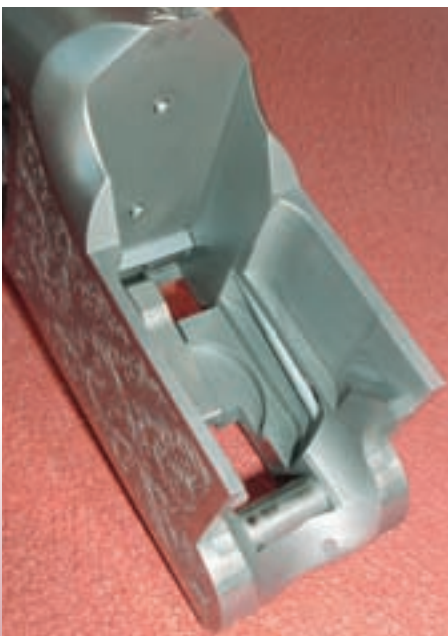


(Above) 3 inch chambers are standard on the Mk 70 Miroku - thus making it suitable for non toxic loads including HP steel and 3 inch shotshells. The Browning / Miroku ejectors are easy to replace, easier to keep clean.



(Above) The heart of the gun - classic Browning / Miroku internals which means reliability unsurpassed. Very easy to clean, and in the case of it needing a gunsmith's attention, very easy to work on.

(Left) The Miroku is termed a "tall action" - and you can see why. The locking bolt at the base meets up with a bite under the chamber to give a very strong locking mechanism - which actually wears in with time. Cocking rods pass through the walls of the receiver and are operated when the gun is opened and reloaded.



(Right) The ejector kickers housed in the fore end - these supply positive power to the ejector legs to remove spent hulls with ease.



SPECIFICATIONS

MIROKU MK 70 GRADE 1 SPORTER

Maker: Miroku, Japan
Action type: Boxlock O/U - come either with a silver or blued receiver.
Calibre: 12 gauge
Weight: 3.57 kgs (7 lb 14 oz)
Barrel length: 30 inch (28 inch also available)
Overall Length: 120 cms
Stock Dimensions: Drop at Comb 36 mm, Drop at Heel 56 mm, Length of Pull 370 mm
Chokes: Invector - 5 chokes (Skt, Cyl, IC, Mod, IMod, Full) with T spanner supplied
Metal Finish: Blued barrels, silver receiver
Safety: 2-position on rear tang
Distributor: Highland Sports
 www.highlandsports.com.au
Warranty: 12 months
Price: RRP \$1695

disciplines, and wallets - a Presidential O/U will set you back around \$10,000! Most models are made in different grades, ranging from the basic Grade 1 up to the opulent Grade 6 guns, with their stunning engraving and French walnut woodwork. Fixed choke guns are also available, a rarity these days as most of the big makers are obsessed with multi choke guns. The trap Mk 38 only comes with fixed chokes as does the Mk 38 / Mk 60 Sporter. Skeet guns, trap guns, Sporters, Deluxe guns - Miroku has the lot.

In Australia, the “budget” Miroku offered is the Mk 70 Grade 1 Sporter, imported by Highland Sports. I use the term “budget” quite loosely, as the Mk 70 does also come in higher grades, as well as a designated field gun - but unfortunately we don’t see these guns in Australia. Miroku’s base grade gun is a model called the Special Sporting, a base grade, engraveless, black receiver model we don’t see here at all. Highland Sports now offer the Mk 70 Grade 1 as a Sporter in 2 guises - a silver receiver model and a blued receiver model (both with engraving), with the Invector choke system - if you wanted a fixed choke sporter the Mk 38 Sporter would be the only choice available to Australian shotgunners. As a matter of fact, in the whole Miroku range, there isn’t a gun you would call a “fence post”, testament to the guns they produce. All are built to exacting standards and are made to shoot with. It’s a pity that here in Australia, we only get offered a small selection of the whole Miroku range.

THE BARRELS

The Mk 70 barrels are presently constructed using the monobloc principle,

(Right) The Mk 70 is just the ticket to tackle clay disciplines such as skeet and sporting. 24 gram and 28 gram loads are particularly effective. The gun shot very well with both factory ammunition and home reloads, and comes with a selection of 5 choke tubes.

with separate tubes sleeved into a rigid forging which forms the chambers and lumps. Originally the chopper lump method of construction was employed, but re-investment in tooling at the Miroku plant produced a barrel system, which is touted to be stronger than the chopper lump method. The barrels are chrome lined inside, except for the choke areas, which greatly helps come cleaning time, as they are easier to clean. The bluing of the test gun is an even, deep blue, which complemented the gun very well.

The 30-inch barrels on the test gun weighed in at 3.570 kilograms, with choke tubes installed. Five chokes are supplied with the gun, being Skeet, Improved Cylinder, Modified, Improved Modified and Full. Such a selection of chokes cover all aspects of shooting, from clay target disciplines right up to field shooting and waterfowling with non toxic

(Below) Early Mk 70 sporters came with lovely scroll engraving - akin to the Germanic pattern found on the Browning D5G. Current guns have pleasant game scenes adorning the receiver. All engraving is machine made and very well executed.



shot. A ventilated top rib measuring 10mm wide is perfect for all shooting applications together with a tiny white mid-rib bead and another white foresight at the muzzle.

The chambers on this gun are 76mm or 3 inch, which makes the gun most suitable for steel shot, a fact that Highland Sports stressed when advertising this gun in the press over the last few years. Bores are of the standard dimensions, thus this gun is offered with the Browning Invector choke tubes. There is some school of thought that the standard bore guns are somewhat inferior to the back bored guns produced these days, but I have yet to be convinced that one is better than the other. I have owned both gun types (standard bore and back bored) and both seemed to shoot pretty well. The only minus point of the barrel system on the Miroku Mk 70 is the Invector choke tubes, which are pretty notorious for not measuring up to their dimensions. Whilst their overall finish is perfectly satisfactory, measuring the chokes with a micrometer and calculating the amount of choke (once the bores are



(Above) The Invector choke tubes offered on the Mk 70 fit flush to give a nice, subtle appearance. They also print very good patterns with careful cartridge selection. Bluing on the barrels is top notch too.

measured too) can reveal some discrepancies in the amount of choke and what was actually stated on the choke tube. Early Invector choke tubes were particularly errant - as much as 7-10 thou difference was evident. However current Invector chokes measure up quite well. The choke spanner is another plus here, the T spanner a quantum leap better than those nasty pressed steel models that were offered years ago. If you wish to use the standard Browning chokes, I would recommend getting them measured to determine their actual constriction. If you don't wish to use these chokes, there are plenty of after market makes available.

The ejectors on this gun are typical Browning / Miroku, consisting of the two-piece, non spring-loaded units, which are very easy to remove to clean or replace in case of breakage. Ejection is produced by kickers that are attached to the fore end iron, and work to eject the fired cartridge once the gun is open.

(Right) Current Browning / Miroku guns are supplied with the T wrench, while the Briley tubed Mk 10 Miroku's have the Briley Speed wrench.



THE RECEIVER

The Mk 70 receiver is typical of that found on all current Miroku / Browning O/U's modelled on the B25 design. This action comprises of a full width hinge pin which mates with a hook under the barrels. A robust bolt runs along the action floor, locating with a bite in the rear of the lump when the gun is closed. This method of locking is very strong indeed, and allows for the locking mechanism to wear in even after thousands of rounds of use.

Inside the mechanism there are no elaborate mysteries - hammers hinged from the trigger plate and sears suspended from the top strap. Coil main springs run on guide rods and the trigger action transfers to the second barrel via an inertia mechanism. The safety and barrel selector are in the usual place, on the top strap behind the opening lever. The lower firing pin is spring loaded, thus when the gun is opened, the tip keeps clear of the cartridge head, whilst the top firing pin is free floating. The receiver is held onto the stock with a long stock bolt, which passes through the hand of the stock. This is easily removed with a large flat bladed screwdriver.

The trigger is a standard, non-adjustable unit, however all the better in my opinion. Trigger pulls were quite satisfactory, measuring around 4lbs for each trigger, with only a hint of free play. Nevertheless a nice trigger for this type of gun.

The engraving on the Mk 70 is quite ornate for a Grade 1 gun, even though it is machine made. The test gun (my own

personal gun) is an early model, with some nice scroll engraving, akin to the pattern found on the Browning B25 D5G - but not as intense - lets remember, this is machine engraving, not done by hand! Later models of the Mk 70 have very pleasant game scenes on both sides of the receiver, which give the gun a subtle look, very pleasant to the eye.

THE WOODWORK.

The fore end and the stock on the test gun were of a plain, but functional walnut, with some slight figure in the stock, but being a Grade 1 Sporter, you don't expect fancy woodwork. The colour was a normal walnut, which suited the gun well, but I have seen some current guns with darkish red coloured walnut. The fore end was the normal Schnabel sporter configuration, which fills the hand very well and is suited to all shooting, probably with the exception of trap shooting. The stock had sensible dimensions to it, with a length of pull of 370 mm, drop at comb of 36mm and drop at heel of 56 mm. There was a slight right hand cast to the stock and no palm swell - with such dimensions, this gun should fit the majority of shooters pretty well straight out of the box. A thin plastic butt plate is normally provided as standard but I have fitted a Pachmayr SC100 Sporting Clays pad to my gun - I assume this is another cost cutting measure by Miroku to make the gun even cheaper from the outset.

Checkering of the stock and fore end was functional, with the odd over run evident, but on a grade 1 gun, you would expect the odd over run or two. The checkering was sharp and gave a positive grip, very important if the gun would be put to use in the field where it could get wet. My only gripe with the woodwork was the quality of the finish, a matter that has been very evident of late on many Miroku / Browning guns. This gun, when originally purchased, was no exception. It looked to have an oiled finish, but the woodwork looked quite porous, as if the grain hadn't

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been filled properly. From reading posts in many shotgun forums on the internet, some shooters have had a problem with finishes on Miroku / Browning guns. If the gun gets wet, they can get white splotches on the woodwork which then require drying out - possibly a sign of a poorly finished stock. This gun required further finishing to bring it up to an acceptable weatherproof finish - several coats of Tru-Oil did the trick. I have noticed that recent Mk 70 guns are now finished in a varnish - which is fine for the interim, but varnished stocks tend to accumulate scratches easily - and they show up more easily too. A properly sealed and finished oiled stock is my preferred choice for all the shotguns I own. Wood to metal fit was excellent, an area where Miroku excel.



(Above) The Mk 70 Grade 1 comes with functional walnut - for the retail price we can't expect fancy woodwork. Nevertheless, it is very practical, and the checkering layout is particularly good - giving positive grip in all conditions. Current guns are finished in varnish - but I prefer an oil finish over varnish any day.

(Left) The underside of the Miroku Mk 70.

ON TEST

Having owned many Browning / Miroku guns in the past, this gun performed very well and would be an ideal all rounder, at home on clays and in the field. With its 30 inch barrels and a selection of 5 choke tubes on hand, I was determined to put the gun to a good test.

The test gun, with 30 inch barrels balanced just forward of the hinge pin, giving a good balance between weight and handling - just right for a clay and hunting gun. Some purpose built clay guns weigh far too much to be used in the field, and on the other hand, some hunting guns are far too light to shoot stout loads through. The Mk 70 has got the right combination of both - shoot clays one day, shoot wildfowl the next. The gun is supplied in a cardboard box, with a good instruction manual and warranty card. A fitted gun case is an extra expense for the shooter, but a worthwhile one, as it offers a higher level of protection than a gun slip or the original box.

Firstly a trip to my local clay shooting ground for some trap and skeet shooting. With Improved Modified and Full chokes fitted, the gun performed flawlessly on the DTL layout, using 24 and 28 gram loads in size 7 and 7 1/2. Breaks were quite good, but at range some were a bit chippy. Experimentation with different loads could alleviate this. On the skeet range, it performed well with the more open chokes, and shoots to the point of aim, which is what you would expect of a sporter of this make. The short-range skeet targets were powdered with an assortment of loads in size 9 shot. Whilst the standard Invector chokes gave satisfactory results on the clays, I used some Teague chokes I had on hand in the same gun and the results were quite impressive to say the least, especially on the trap targets. I also shot some 5 stand with both the standard and after market chokes and there was a difference in the way the clays were broken, but then again a broken target is a broken target! With careful patterning and cartridge experimentation, you can and should be able to get good results from the standard Invector choke tubes. After market chokes such as Teague and Briley's are produced with high quality control and measure up very accurately.

Overall for clay target shooting, the Mk 70 Grade 1 Sporter performed very well for a gun of its price range. For sporting clays and skeet, it can match it with the best of them! As

a matter of fact, the fixed choke brother of the Mk 70, the Mk 60 and its predecessor, the Miroku 6000 have a huge following in the United Kingdom, where the gun has notched up countless wins at County and National level. Top UK FITASC shooter Mickey Rouse even won World FITASC Championships with the Model 6000 - so the gun's target crunching potential is evident.

In the field, the gun performed as it did on the clay range - very well. Shooting at hares, rabbits, starlings and feral pigeons, the gun performed with an assortment of ammunition, ranging from 28 gram loads up to 36 gram loads for distant hares and rabbits. The gun ejected the cases positively and chambered all loads, including reloaded ammunition without any problem. The gun handles the heavy loads quite well, and can also take 3 inch shells if need be, but the thin plastic butt plate (provided as standard) may give the shoulder a bit of a pounding. As I use heavy loads now and then, I have had a quality sorbethane recoil pad fitted to the gun to minimise felt recoil. For 24 and 28 gram loads, the standard butt plate is fine. With the duck season still closed, I am keenly waiting to put some steel loads through the gun to see how it performs. I feel there shouldn't be a problem with non-toxic loads, provided you use the correct amount of choke as recommended by the manufacturer.

CONCLUSION

The Miroku Mk 70 Grade 1 Sporter comes in a cardboard box with all instruction manuals, warranty and 5 choke tubes with T spanner. For a RRP of \$1695, I find it hard pressed to find a gun which comes close to this gun in terms of reliability, build quality and shooting feel. It will handle all shooting scenarios required of it as well as having the back up of Miroku / Highland Sports for any after sales service and parts that may be required in the future after many years of use. The Mk 70 Grade 1 Sporter is a perfect all rounder for our Australian shotgun shooting climate, at home either on the clay range, duck swamp, farm paddock - or all three! It certainly was a pleasure to use. Moreso, it is a gun which shares its identical mechanics and construction attributes with its brother, the Browning range of over and unders. With such build quality to go by, I feel you can't go wrong with one of these Miroku Mk 70 sporters.

