

THE ULTIMATE

NIGHT SIGHT FOR FOXING?



Bruce Potts
tests Thomas
Jacks Centaur
165 XR-5 Night
Vision sight



The unit has a high sightline, so a raiser may be needed on the stock's cheekpiece

To be honest quite I have seen and reviewed enough Night Vision (NV) equipment to realise that claims and performance can be widely variable in reality. That old saying you get what you pay for real comes to the fore with regard to any optics, and especially night vision equipment. You can't pay under a grand and expect full-bore range capabilities, just forget it. You might be OK for rimfire and air rifle, but beyond this you are really asking too much from the kit.

To achieve real long range or peak, high resolution – that is day as night resolution – call it what you may, you really do have to

pay serious money for it. Also, if you intend forking out that sort of capital on one product, you had better be sure that the supplier is bona fide, i.e. they have direct contact with the trade source and can back up any repairs by a warranty, especially when you consider that most main stream NV equipment is sourced overseas.

Thomas Jacks have been largely a silent trade supplier and high end player in the NV market for years. They have some very good, reliable trade contacts and so can guarantee their products and continue a steady supply.

Ashley Beard of Thomas Jacks contacted me with the

opportunity to try one of their upper end Night Vision sights for use on centre fire rifles and at the far end, price wise, of the NV range spectrum. With the thick end of over five grand of scope on my test rifles I was not about to skim on the test regime. Quite the contrary, serious kit deserves a serious work out, as if you are shelling out that sort of money then it had better be worth it.

Ashley explained the finer points of Night Vision and Intensifier Tube qualities and limitations to me, and I soon realized I was out of my depth technically! To me the technology and terminology is all well and good, but I need to see,

quite literally, the results in the field to be convinced of the sights capabilities.

The test unit

The Centaur 165 NV is an impressive looking scope. Dimensions of 395mm long and 90mm width actually belie its light weight of 0.95kg because of the use of space age composite materials. All the controls are well placed and the mounting system is both robust and adaptable to offer mounting on a wide variety of rifles. This being the case I wanted to test it on a .17 Ackley Hornet, .243 Tikka, .260 Remington Custom and a thumping .338 BR round.

The basic Centaur 165 is actually a chassis from which a variety of grade tubes and configuration can be assembled. Depending on the client's budget, anything from entry level Gen 2 up to SuperGen, XD-4 Hyper Gen and XR-5 top end tubes can be fitted. I opted for the highest grade XR-5 tube with a typical 70 lines per mm resolution and high signal to noise ratio of 28; of course all this came with a corresponding price tag. I have to say of all the NV scopes I have tested the quality of the Centaur was second to none. That is not to say it was without its faults, but regards optical/resolution in all lighting conditions the Centaur 165 was a real eye opener, literally.

The basic chassis can accommodate either a 100mm

lens or 165mm lens, as in the case of the test rifle. This offers a magnification of 6.1X and an aperture of f2.0. In real terms the magnification is more than enough to target and shoot a fox at distance whilst still maintaining a good field of view. Interestingly with the 165mm lens fitted the inbuilt IR tube for additional illumination is slightly obscured and causes a third shadow on viewing the target. Ashley said this is known and a lengthened mounting bracket to reposition the IR illumination is available.

There is the usual elevation and windage adjustment set at the rear of the scope's main body and the accuracy of adjustment was both precise and wide. I set a target up at 100 yards and proceeded to shoot a group at varying 10 click intervals to ascertain accuracy of click adjustment and vertical variation from the vertical plane. I am happy to say that the scope zero adjustment is stated at one click equals 7.2mm adjustment at 100 yards. Well, ever the doubter, I set up a grid target of one inch squares and shot a group at 10 click intervals to ascertain the accuracy of the elevation adjustment and then return to zero. I found that every 10 clicks over an average of 50 clicks related to one click representing a movement of reticule of 6.2mm, so finer than advertised, and return to the original position was within 0.25 inch with only a 0.5 inch variation in vertical axis deviation. In real terms this is spot on and what you expect from a quality built sight.

The IR illumination settings have an 'On' position and then two further degrees of illumination. Under normal star light conditions I really did not need any additional illumination, which is brilliant (excuse the pun), and the only case where I deemed the IR light source necessary was when there was zero star light and therefore complete darkness.

Reticule position and size can be of consternation to some people. Some like a large reticule while others prefer a finer more defined reticule type. The Centaur has a centrally placed Mil-dot reticule that only covers the central portion of the scopes field of view. To me that is fine, others I know were less keen. The reality is that on a fox silhouette target the precise correlation between reticule size and game can be relied on to estimate range. In this case the first stadia break from the central cross hairs and the first mil dot down on the vertical axis directly corresponded to a foxes torso size at 100 yards. Therefore, as a quick reference, with the fox bracketed in these parameters the distance will be around 100 yards, if the fox looks smaller it is further away and if it is larger it is obviously also closer. The reticule moves in relation to adjustment range, but if you have a good mounting system then the reticule should remain largely within the centre of field of view.

Mounting the Centaur posed no problems as it has a universal Weaver style base attachment. The mounting clamps could also be repositioned with the scope mounting housing to thereby accommodate a very short or very long receiver length, which makes it highly practical unit. I did test a return to zero after removing the sight and refitting, and was happy to say that accuracy fell below one MOA variation and was thus very good.

Stretching the limits

Testing from a weatherproof shooting lodge is all well and good, but I really needed to try the sight on a variety of guns to ascertain its worth out in the real field conditions. The sight is termed 'weather proof', but I erred on the side of caution, as with 5 grand's worth of kit on my rifles I was not about to take it out in a monsoon. However I did test it in a variety of light conditions ▶



The Weaver style one piece mount fits any generic Weaver base



Left side of the unit showing the battery housing, IR Illuminator and IR 'On-Off' switch



The elevation and windage adjustment is very precise



Centaur 165 fitted to Winchester Coyote Light rifle in .22-250

► from full moon through overcast and into the depths of pitch black that only the Scottish night can produce.

It was note worthy that the extra IR illumination was not necessary for additional illumination under any of the conditions except when it was pitch black, when the IR did serve to add some additional gain to the image but with the corresponding lack of contrast.

It is this feature of contrast that really stood out in the Centaur. I have tested NV scopes before and have been impressed by illumination but not so by contrast or target definition. In the Centaur both illumination and target clarity was quite frankly astonishing. Green Day light is a term often banded around, which in most cases is just not true, but the XR-5 tube gave a very clear, vivid, high definition image to ascertain and direct an accurate shot at a fox. But at what range could you consider the maximum range?

When people talk of Night Vision capabilities their attention is often swayed towards the maximum range of detection of an object, in this case a fox. To me this is total bunkum, as if you are using a NV scope you are covert and virtually undetectable by old Charlie, so why would you want to shoot out beyond 200



The Centaur 165 on a Sako rifle in 17 Ackley Hornet proved an excellent fox gun

yards? The factor of extreme range and safety really come to play here and to me the fact that a particular NV scope can detect at 200 yards means that a fox can be taken well within this range, yet the area behind the target can be safely scrutinised for a safe backdrop. A high end NV scope can give you longer range but far more importantly it gives you a more precise, clearer and well defined image to aim at, with the additional knowledge that your back drop is also safe.

For my tests I set several fox silhouettes targets at differing ranges to test reticule compatibility out to 200 yards. The results were very interesting. From a zero at 100 yards in daylight, the addition of the night vision and subsequent re-zero

under night time conditions doubled the group size, i.e. 0.5 inch went up to just under an inch, which is the norm, and to be expected. At 150 yards the group size had increased to 3 inches and was still accurate enough for a body shot on a fox, but consider a fox's torso is only 5 inches top to bottom, and you are really getting close to maximum range. At 200 yards shots on target were still good, but a few misses were recorded and so 200 yards was absolute maximum in my book and that is with a variety of calibre rifles.

So although the target was clearly defined at 200 yards I would not want to shoot a fox at this distance, even though a further 200 yards distance could also be clearly defined as a safe

backdrop. I'm happy with a positive 150 yard shot with the safe knowledge that you can see the safe area behind the target and in my mind that is what you are paying for in a top quality NV scope such as the Centaur.

One thing to pay attention to is the mounting height of such a large objective lens NV unit. In this I mean that the scope height will usually place your head off the rifle's cheek-piece, due to the enlarged central bore axis to sight length. No matter, I used an old 500 Jeffery's case sandwiched under a Hunters Neoprene Cheek piece to give an elevated and comfortable shooting position. Couple to this some Deben elevated scope mounts on an adjustable height one piece mount, and I was able to sight in and set up the Centaur with maximum elevation adjustment and comfortable viewing potential.

In the field

Out in the field I set up some roe deer gralloch to act as an attractant to foxes and positioned my self down wind at 75 yards and some 150 yards from the woodland edge. Sure enough the pungent aroma soon had a vixen literally careering across the field in hot pursuit of a free lunch. What was

interesting was at 150 yards I could have taken the shot, at 100 yards I could have taken the shot, but she had no idea I was there and so at 75 yards or so I took a well directed shot with the safe knowledge that there was nothing behind the fox when I shot and therefore it was completely safe to do. Subsequent to that night's foray I had further successes with fox at increased range and the Centaur had proven its worth to me. Despite a few alterations of

IR illumination mounting and the small reticule size, the Centaur 165 is a very serious NV sight, and you will have to be very serious to buy one, but rest assured you have the technical support from a long established name in NV equipment to back you up. Thomas Jacks are trade only, but can be contacted on 01789 264100 for information and brochures and sights can be ordered through their dealer network.

GM



View of a fox (at approx 100 yards) down the Centaur (without IR illumination) showing the small bracketing reticule (centaur spare) Fox at long range viewed through the Centaur



Fox silhouette target showing hits from a variety of rifles tested with the NV sight

Tech Spec

Centaur 165 XR-5 Night Vision unit	
Dimensions:	395x95x90mm
Weight:	0.95kg
Objective Lens:	165mm f2.0
Magnification:	6.1x
Field of View:	8 degree
Focusing:	10m to infinity
IR Illumination:	Built in 75mW
Batteries:	2x 1.5 V AA
Temp range:	-40 to + 50 degrees C
Guarantee:	One Year
Mounting:	Weaver Base type
Price:	poa
Contact:	Thomas Jacks 01789 264100

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Simply superb - the Centaur 165 offers the best NV foxing rig that the author has used

For more information, please contact:

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