

Seagal to Promote Russian Rifle Model

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Putin and Seagal at the Sambo-70 sports complex in Moscow. **Aleksei Nikolsky**

American action film star Steven Seagal will become the face of a new Russian firearm, the actor announced at a Moscow news conference Friday.

Seagal also used the occasion to practice some local phrases, give two thumbs up to the Russian army and criticize the weapons used by President Vladimir Putin's bodyguards.

The U.S. actor has established friendly relations with Putin, who shares a penchant for martial arts with Seagal, and Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. One of Putin's associates, Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, asked the American star earlier this year to lobby for easing restrictions on the sale of Russian sporting rifles to the U.S. and said Seagal could participate in an international marketing campaign to promote the Degtyarev arms plant.

Seagal, a long-time marksman, said Friday he had worked with the market newcomer Orsis to design a new rifle model. The weapon, preliminarily called Orsis by Steven Seagal, is positioned as a sports model and is currently in production. It will undergo internal tests,

after which the company will present it to the public.

Lounging comfortably in an armchair in a military jacket and sunglasses, Seagal said that he expected the new model to become "the best long-range rifle in the world" and that he hoped to improve his personal shooting record of 2,600 meters when he tests it.

"My goal is to be able to do [consistent, accurate shots] at 3,000 meters," he said. "I am waiting until this weapon is done to try to do that, and I will do that on film with phantom cameras."

The camera work will be good practice for Seagal when he acts on his promise to feature the rifles in his future films.

"We want our rifles and the products that we make to have very concrete associations, such as precision, reliability, strength," said Yevgeny Shevtsov, commercial director at Orsis, explaining that the brand chose to work with Seagal because he evokes these kinds of associations.

While confident about the assets of his gun design, Seagal expressed a distaste for Austrian-made Glock pistols, which are used by Putin's personal security guards. At the same time, he praised the Russian army as "spectacular" and gave it two thumbs up.

Seagal's visit to Moscow was timed to coincide with the annual Arms and Hunting exhibition, which was held from Oct. 10 to 13 this year.

Russian and foreign weapon manufacturers met at the Gostiny Dvor exhibition center, a short walk from the Kremlin, to discuss partnership opportunities. The Kalashnikov Concern and Italian firearms maker Beretta Benelli are in discussions to manufacture hunting and sports guns together, said Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin at the exhibition's opening, Interfax reported.

"We are not only interested in getting weapons sold here, but also to have the best weapons traditions instilled in Russia through the creation of joint ventures," Rogozin said.

He added that if this partnership between the Russian and Italian companies went smoothly, they could also agree on a joint production of military weapons.

One such potential project was unexpectedly born during Seagal's news conference. Seagal got so carried away when he talked about pistols that Orsis managers offered him to design one for them, to which Seagal replied with the word "*poekhali*" [let's go].

Seagal said he had been in Russia for a couple of weeks, sightseeing and doing business. He made an appearance at the celebration of Grozny's 197th anniversary Oct. 5, which coincided with Kadyrov's 37th birthday. He performed the Chechen national dance, the lezginka, called Kadyrov his friend and brother, and expressed a desire to get better acquainted with the southern republic, Rossiiskaya Gazeta reported.

"I hope that in the future, I will become part of this republic," Seagal said at the birthday celebrations. "Ramzan Akhmatovich, I will always be your friend."

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