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X TARGET
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X VINTAGE
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Dead Center pellets measure up?

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TALES

**DAVE BARHAM GETS TO GRIPS WITH THE NEW
BRK-BROCOCK RANGER XR2**

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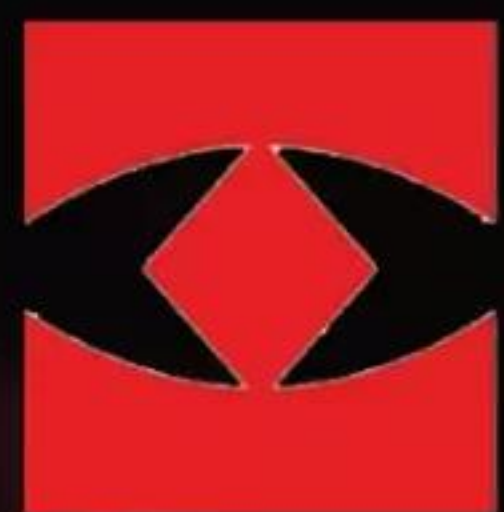
Former World Champion
Graham Freeman takes
the guest editor's chair

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when Terry Doe
stood up for
airgunning
live on air?



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GRAHAM FREEMAN

FOREWORD FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

My airgun journey started where many of yours likely did: with a BSA Meteor under the Christmas tree and a father who understood the weight of responsibility that comes with a rifle. My dad was my greatest influence, teaching me that accuracy is born from respect — respect for the air rifle, for the surroundings and for the fundamental discipline of breathing and maintenance.

I didn't find my true calling in competitive benchrest until 2009. I started modestly, with an Air Arms 400 Carbine and a front rest that leaked sand, but I quickly became hooked on the relentless pursuit of perfection. That "modest" kit eventually took me to Pilsen, Czech Republic, where I had the surreal experience of hearing the national anthem played for me after winning both Air World and European Gold. Since then, I've been fortunate enough to add British Championship titles to my cabinet and helped found Benchrest UK to give this discipline a proper home in our country.

Today, my setup is a bit more "specialist" — a highly modified

Steyr LG110 with my own custom harmonic dampers and wind flags — but my message to anyone starting out remains the same: you cannot "buy" accuracy. Success comes from knowing your rifle and fine-tuning your routine until it becomes second nature.

As we look ahead into 2026, I am incredibly optimistic. Benchrest is currently one of the fastest-growing and most inclusive branches of our sport. My own ambitions for the year are clear: I'm pushing to finish as the UK's No. 1 ranked shooter and secure my qualification for the 2027 World Championships in South Africa.

But beyond the medals, my hope for the future is to see more clubs embracing this discipline. Whether you are a junior just starting out or following in the footsteps of the late, great Ron Harding — who was still winning world titles at 83 — benchrest proves that airgunning is a lifetime pursuit.

So, pick up your rifle, check your flags and enjoy this issue. There's always room to improve the shot.

GRAHAM FREEMAN

APRIL 2026

EDITOR'S PICKS

WIN A NEW SCOPE

Nigel Allen says the Konus Wild 4-12x40 Red Green Mil-Dot Scope is the best "budget priced" scope he's ever tested. Fancy winning one? **Page 11**



NEW RANGER REVIEWED

Dave Barham gets his hands on the BRK-Brocock Ranger XR2, a tactical PCP launched at the British Shooting Show that'll turn a few heads. **Page 24**



NEW JTS PELLETS

Dave Barham also gets an early look at JTS' new .177 Dead Center pellets that come in three different weights. Are they worth the wait? **Page 54**



FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH NIGEL ALLEN

HAVE YOUR SAY

If you have any comments on the content featured in Airgun World, or have any thoughts on what content we should feature, what we're doing well or where we can improve, please email: airgunworld@twsgroup.com



THE MAY 2026 ISSUE OF AIRGUN WORLD IS ON SALE FROM 1 APRIL

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PRECISION GERMAN ENGINEERING

HW97 KT

This legendary spring powered under-lever air rifle is especially developed for field target shooting but makes a superb hunting gun too.

It is a single-shot rifle, with an auto-reset safety catch.

The fixed barrel action is equipped with the Weihrauch muzzle weight which reduces muzzle flip and increases accuracy.

Designed for scope use featuring a specially crafted high comb stock.

Calibres .177 & .22

**Scope and Mounts available as additional extras.*



Model featured: HW 97 KT with adjustable butt plate.
Also available in a black synthetic stock.

www.weihrauchuk.co.uk



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AIRGUN WORLD

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Overseas: +44 131 3576305
Online shop: shop.twsgroup.com
Subscription queries WhatsApp: 07971 359322

PRINTING/DISTRIBUTION

Newsstand distributor: InterMedia
Printed in England: ISSN 1741-1939
Printing: MRC Print Ltd



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IN FOCUS

The new JTS .177 Dead Center pellets, distributed in the UK by The Shooting Party, have been two years in the making and Dave Barham commences his two-part look at these American wonders on pages 54 — 56. Were they worth the wait? Head to the article to find out, and for more articles from Dave Barham on the Airgun World website, scan this QR code.



QUICK START GUIDE

CE FC R

Tare Function



Press the "TARE" key to subtract the weight of an empty tray or container



The display will now only show the weight of the contents.

Count

Please prepare samples before counting quantities of "25", "50", "75", or "100"



After preparing the sample, press and hold the "PELLET" key until "25" appears, then release it. If the sample quantity is not "25", press "UNIT" to select, and then short press the "PELLET" key for sampling. After successfully sampling, each additional press of the "PELLET" key will count another 25 pellets.



Calibration

You should periodically check accuracy using calibration weights and adjust the scale. The steps below will permanently adjust the scale's calibration. Make sure you use the correct weights when prompted.





1. Press and hold the "UNIT" button until "Value" appears, then release the button!




2. After pressing 'UNIT' again, 'CAL' will be displayed and the value will flash.



3. Place the corresponding weights in the middle position of the weighing platform


RoHS  

Counting, and prepare sample
"100" according to your needs



Press "PCS" button until "PCS" flashes and
weight does not match, please short
"PCS" button to complete the
count. The total number will increase by one.

Calibration if necessary.
Make sure you are using the correct



4. The LCD display will show
'Pass' and then return to
normal weighing mode.



gn
13.75



DEAD CENTER

Take Down Domed Airgun Pellets
400 ct. | 0.89 g | 13.73 gr



.177
caliber





Photograph Matt Kidd

THE BRITISH SHOOTING SHOW IS AN AIRGUNNER'S DELIGHT!

Shooting enthusiasts descended on the NEC Birmingham from 13 to 15 February, with airgunners enjoying an embarrassment of riches across three days of product launches, interviews and hands-on opportunities.

The Great British Shooting Show drew a 20% increase in attendance, according to new owners Time Well Spent Group, which also owns *Airgun World*.

Product launches and awards dominated the three-day event. FX Airguns' DRS Classic claimed *Airgun of the Year* at the Great British Shooting Awards, which formed part of the annual show. The Swedish manufacturer also launched its Pocket Chronograph D1 at the NEC, drawing steady interest from shooters seeking portable chronograph solutions.

HIKMICRO swept the optics categories, taking *Night Vision Optic of the Year* with the Alpex 4K A50E and *Thermal Scope of the Year* with the Stellar 3.0 SQ50L. The company also displayed its new Alpex Pro day and night-vision scope, which could be available as early as April by current estimates. NocPix secured *Thermal Attachment of the Year* for its Mate Ultra S60R.

Daystate mounted its largest-ever show presence with a 140m² stand and used the event to launch two stripped-back models – the Blackwolf Zero and BRK Ghost Zero – aimed at shooters wanting baseline platforms they can customise. The manufacturer ran a popular safari experience where visitors were able to test four rifles

selected from a line-up of eight of its latest releases on a dedicated 25m range.

AirMaks Arms announced its Krait Pro would soon launch in pink, while Tom's Targets introduced reactive targets, including pigeon, cowboy and zombie designs, that reset through shooting alone, eliminating pullstrings and magnets. Weihrauch's recently released HW100X was on display, alongside DNT's Zulus 4K day and night-vision scope and the NateChrony Extreme Ballistic chronograph with LED shot indicator.

The main arena programme ran throughout the three days, featuring interviews with HFT competitor Gary Chillingworth, Terry Doe, representatives from Donny FL, Sabre Tactical and FX Airguns, and farmer and airgun enthusiast Gareth Wyn Jones.

Airgun World's technical editor Dave Barham said: "There were loads of bespoke products for airgunners, plus the plethora of thermal, night-vision and glass scope innovations for 2026. It was great catching up with old friends in the trade, and bumping into many *Airgun World* readers for a chat. The BSS has been and will continue to be the pinnacle of shows for airgunners in the UK."

The show reflected the UK market's strong airgun focus, with Daystate noting the discipline was arguably better represented than at any other shooting exhibition worldwide. Daystate, MTC Optics and BRK-Brocock have already confirmed they will return next year.

For more information, visit shootingshow.co.uk



SHOOTER TO SHAVE OFF HIS TRADEMARK PONYTAIL FOR CANCER RESEARCH UK

Rifle shooter Chris Bartlett is sacrificing his 50cm ponytail to raise funds for Cancer Research UK after marking five years cancer-free.

Following a recovery involving life-saving surgery, Chris was inspired to act after learning a fellow shooter at the Emmett and Stone Range is currently undergoing treatment.

The head shave takes place at the Little Marlow range on Saturday 28 March at 11 am. For a £20 donation, attendees can take a turn with the clippers.

“Come along and add to my impending baldness,” joked Chris.

Supporters can also donate online at justgiving.com/page/chris-bartlett

GREY SQUIRRELS

SQUIRREL SHOOTERS GET GOVERNMENT BACKING – BUT IS IT ENOUGH?

Shooters are central to a new Government drive to control grey squirrels, which cost English and Welsh woodlands £37m annually. Defra’s Grey Squirrel Policy Statement, published on 29 January, funds three project officers to coordinate local control in Lancashire, Yorkshire and County Durham, while expanding squirrel management options within environmental land management schemes.

With England’s red squirrel population plummeting to 38,900, the policy

acknowledges that volunteers already perform 80% of control in northern strongholds. It urges landowners to utilise “well-trained, competent volunteers” nationwide.

BASC’s Ian Danby noted shooting’s role is “vital for delivering this policy”, with BASC’s Martin Edwards adding that the update “opens the pathway for shooting to do more”.



SCOTT COUNTRY INTERNATIONAL SHORTLISTED FOR A RURAL OSCAR

Scott Country International has been named a Scottish finalist in the Rural Enterprise category at the 2026 Countryside Alliance Awards. Known as the “Rural Oscars,” the nomination recognises the Dumfries-based firm’s 20-year commitment to supporting rural communities and the economy.

WIN A KONUS WILD RIFLESCOPE

Airgun World has a Konus Wild 4-12x40 Red Green Mil-Dot riflescope worth £90 to give away courtesy of Range Right. To be in with a chance of winning, head to airgun-world/get-involved and sign up to our e-newsletter. The deadline for entries is 1 April.

To read Nigel Allen’s review of the scope, turn to pages 42-46 of this issue. Good luck!

CLUB COMPETITIONS

LIFE AT THE RANGE BY GARY CHILLINGWORTH

A reader dropped me a message. He told me that due to work and family, he could not shoot the Nationals or the Worlds this year and asked if there were a few shoots that I would recommend for him and his HW98. I didn’t have to think long.

First up, The Paul James Recoiling Championships at Anston. If you enjoy proper springer shooting — and all the timing, technique and mild self-doubt that comes with it — this one’s a gem. It’s competitive, yes, but it’s also got that friendly, sleeves-rolled-up atmosphere where good shooting is admired regardless of what’s stamped on the action. Expect a testing course that rewards consistency, not luck, and a crowd that understands exactly why you’re muttering to yourself after a pulled shot.

Then there’s The Welsh Open at Nelson. Different scenery, different feel, same high standard of course setting and lots more sheep. These shoots have a knack for making

you think you’re doing well right up to the point you’re absolutely not. Clever lanes, deceptive killzones and that lovely mix of woodland and open targets — it’s HFT that keeps your brain working as hard as your trigger finger and you can win a Dragon.

Finally, The British Recoiling Championships at Nomads. If the Anston shoot celebrates springers, this one puts them on centre stage with the volume turned up. Nomads know how to build a course that separates tidy shooting from hopeful poking, and doing well here feels properly earned.

So, these are the three that I would do, if I could not shoot that Nationals or Worlds.



CALENDAR



14-15 MARCH

Scottish Air Pistol & Rifle Championships
West Lothian College
scottishtargetshooting.co.uk/sts-events

29 MARCH

Airgun-only Collectors Fayre
Melbourne Assembly Rooms, Derbyshire
ashbylife.co.uk/events

3-5 APRIL

Isle of Man Easter Shoot
eastershoot.im



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Industry-Leading Image Quality for Sharper, Smarter observation

Ultimate value for money entry thermal monocular receives some serious upgrades with higher sensitivity sensors, better displays, HSIS Shutterless technology, Zoom Pro & Image Pro 3.0 along with a completely redesigned, significantly more compact, pocket-ready chassis.

- F1.0 Thermal Lens System
- 5.5-4.5h practical battery life
- High-resolution AMOLED display

Lens	Thermal Detector	Mag. (8x)	F.O.V.	Min. Max.	Range	Price
LE10 9.7mm f1.0	256x192 12µ NETD <20mK	1.4-11.2x	31.7m 3.4m	500m	7m 750m	£399
LE15 15mm f1.0	256x192 12µ NETD <20mK	2.2x - 17.6x	20.5m 7m	750m	7m 750m	£549
LH15 15mm f1.0	320x240 12µ NETD <18mK	2.2x - 17.6x	20.5m 7m	750m	7m 750m	£799
LH19 19mm f1.0	384x288 12µ NETD <15mK	1.9x - 15.2x	24.2m 3m	900m	3m 900m	£899
LH25 25mm f1.0	384x288 12µ NETD <15mK	2.5x - 20x	18.4m 3m	1200m	3m 1200m	£1049
LH35 35mm f1.0	384x288 12µ NETD <15mK	3.4x - 27.2x	13.1m 3.5m	1800m	3.5m 1800m	£1149

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The 4K UHD digital night vision mode, with AI powered processing and Wizcolour technology, gives next-level image clarity, delivering sharp images in low-light conditions.

4-in-1 Functionality - Infrared Illumination, Laser Range Finder, Thermal Imaging & 4K Digital Night Vision

- High-Sensitivity Thermal Imaging
- Ergonomic Grip, Lightweight Design
- 0.49-Inch Full HD OLED display
- Up to 9 hours of runtime

Sensor (Thermal / Digital)	Lens (Thermal / Digital)	Range	Price
D225-4K	256x192 / 3840x2160	25mm / 55mm 1300m 1000m.....	£999.95
D335-4K	384x288 / 3840x2160	35mm / 55mm 1800m 1000m.....	£1499.95
D635-4K	640x512 / 3840x2160	35mm / 55mm 1800m 1000m.....	£1999.95

HIKMICRO See the World in a New Way

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The first 4K Digital Day/Night scope designed specifically for Airguns. 60% lighter and 25% more compact than its big brother the Alplex 4K whilst retaining its 30mm magnesium alloy tube body, the Alplex 4K Lite is perfectly matched to shorter range, smaller & lighter rifles. Go Lite, Strike Right.

- 4K UHD 3840x2160px CMOS detector for incredible detail and 800m identification range
- 3-1000m Laser Range Finder (A40EL)
- Intuitive Control Jog Dial
- 1 Second Super Fast Start

Lens	Max. Res.	Mag.	Min. Max.	LRF Range	Price
Alplex 4K Lite HM-A40E	40mm f2.0	3840x2160	3.5-20.5x	2m 1800m -	£499.99 £399
Alplex 4K Lite LRF HM-A40EL	40mm f2.0	3840x2160	3.5-20.5x	2m 1800m 3m 3000m	£599.99 £499

HIKMICRO See the World in a New Way

ALPEX Day & Night Rifle Scope

The same 30mm tube chassis as the Stellar thermal scope but with HIK's advanced night vision technology.

ALPEX 4K Day & Night Rifle Scope with LRF

Built on an all-new robust 30mm tube chassis for conventional ring-mounting, the new Alplex 4K LRF takes a winning formula and boosts specification and performance in every area - a new benchmark for 2024.

- Built-in Wi-Fi module
- Built-in video recorder
- Picture in picture • Colour nightvision
- Switching surveillance modes
- Dustproof & waterproof
- 4k UHD sensor for extreme clarity in daylight, twilight, starlight and full darkness
- Onboard laser range finder with ballistic calculator
- Improved and enlarged screen
- Updated control wheel design
- Adjustable aperture

Model	RRP	Price
Alplex 4K LRF A50EL	£849.99	£699
Alplex + IR 850nm Illuminator	£549.99	£499
Alplex 4K A50E	£749.99	£699

PARD NIGHT VISION NIGHT STALKER MINI NIGHT VISION RIFESCOPE

Impressive performance in a lightweight, 450g package. Built for those who value clarity, discretion, and ease of use, it offers advanced features within a design that closely mirrors a traditional daytime scope. Whether you're tracking at twilight or scanning through the shadows, it combines sharp visuals, practical handling, and dependable durability in one refined unit.

- Side focus knob
- Picture-in-Picture
- One shot zeroing
- Focus Range: 5 m-∞
- Exclusive 100mm eye relief
- 2560*1440 CMOS sensor
- 6 Reticle Styles & 4 Colours
- 3x optical and 2x digital zoom
- Interactive control knob
- Durable aluminium alloy
- 6000J Recoil Resistance & IP67 rated
- Compact, lightweight design

Night Stalker Mini - 35mm.....**£339**

N DNT OPTICS ZULUS HD V2 DIGITAL DAY & NIGHT VISION SCOPE

From bright midday sun to the blackest midnight, this next-generation scope keeps every target razor-sharp. Equipped with Sony's advanced STARVIS 2 sensor, ED glass lenses, and a 60Hz 1920x1080 Micro-OLED display, it ensures crystal-clear visuals around the clock. It rivals traditional glass in full daylight, stays crisp at dawn and dusk, and when darkness takes over, its digital night-vision engine pierces the night to reveal incredible detail.

Resolution	Mag.	F.O.V (HxV) yd@100yd	Min. Max.	Price
3-12x LRF	1920x1080	3-12x 13.9x7.8x16.0	5m 1000m	£549.99
5-20x LRF	1920x1080	5-20x 8.6x4.8x9.8	5m 1000m	£549.99

WULF HURRICANE COMPACT RIFESCOPIES

A compact, robust and lightweight unit perfect for shorter range air-rifle shooting. Weights from 600g, an upgraded illuminated etched-glass reticle with an HFT specific reticle option, make the Hurricane Compact rifle scope your perfect air-rifle partner.

- 30mm diameter tube
- 6063 T-06 aluminium alloy
- Second Focal Plane system
- Side focus down to 10yds
- Fully Multi-Coated lenses
- Exposed locking elevation turret
- Capped windage turret
- 11 intensity settings
- Waterproof, shockproof and fogproof

Model	Price
3-10x40 SF SFP - W-Mil 1	£199.99
3-10x40 SF SFP - HFT-PRO	£199.99
4-14x44 SF SFP - W-Mil 1	£209.99

WULF DEFENDER 30 RIFESCOPIES

A compact powerhouse of a rifle scope designed for air rifle and centrefire rifles. The Defender 30 is a feature rich SFP in a lightweight, streamlined package.

- Adjustable ocular focus
- Diopter lock function
- Adjustable zero stop turrets
- 6 Level intensity reticle illumination system
- Side focus / parallax adjustment
- Elevation & windage adjustment

Model	Price
3-15x44 ED SFP - W-Mil6	£289.99
5-25x50 ED SFP - W-Mil4	£329.99
5-25x50 ED SFP - W-MOA4	£329.99

HAWKE AIRMAX AO WA FOR SERIOUS AIRGUN SHOOTERS

A more traditional scope design, the Airmax is a great option for the serious airgun hunter that wants to keep the weight of their rifle down. Built in an adjustable objective chassis, the Airmax uses the non-illuminated AMX reticle to improve downrange accuracy of any airgun shooter.

Model	RRP	Price
2-7x32 AO WA	£179	£159
3-9x40 AO WA	£189	£169
4-12x40 AO WA	£209	£189
4-12x50 AO WA	£219	£199

HAWKE SIDEWINDER 30 SF HAWKE'S BEST SELLING SCOPE JUST GOT BETTER...

The must-have high performance multi-discipline scope. Parallax-free shooting from 9 metres to infinity assisted by an index matched rangefinding side wheel (removable). All models feature Hawke's H5 optics which boasts a stunning 24° ultra-wide field of view with generous 100mm eye relief.

- Exposed, Locking Turrets
- 30mm • Side Focus
- Illumination

Model	RRP	Price
4.5-14x44 SF	£469	£419
6.5-20x44 SF	£479	£429
4-16x50 SF	£489	£439
6-24x56 SF	£499	£449
8-32x56 SF	£519	£469
4-16x50 SF - FFP	£629	£579
6-24x56 SF - FFP	£649	£599

PAO Professional Airgun Optics HDMAX 4-16 x 44 SF FFP Ultra Compact

Feature-rich specification that combines Quality, Accuracy & Value unrivalled in the market today. The scope is rated for all Firearms-Air Rifles, Rim Fire & Centre Fire; has advanced Push/Pull Lockable, Resettable Turrets with a 'Zero-Stop' function that prevents accidental Loss of Zero, provides faster target acquisition and improved accuracy under pressure.

- Multi-coated lenses
- Detachable zoom throw lever
- Hard-anodised matte finish
- Fast focus eye-piece - Focus down to 10 yards
- Glass-etched First Focal Plane ("FFP") reticle
- Single piece of 30mm, aircraft grade aluminium alloy
- Shockproof, water, dust and fog proof, nitrogen purged
- Includes a large 8cm sun shade, opaque, flip-up lens covers and a large removable sidewheel

4-16 x 44 SF FFP **£229**

PAO Professional Airgun Optics F1 5-30x56 IR SF FFP

The all-new PAO® F1 5-30 x 56, offers a feature-rich specification that combines Quality, Accuracy & Value unrivalled in the market today. The scope is rated for all Firearms-Air Rifles, Rim Fire & Centre Fire; has advanced Lockable, Resettable Turrets with a 'Zero-Stop' function.

- 34mm bodied tube
- Maximum light transmission
- First focal plane reticle
- Focus down to 10 yards
- "Zero stop" turrets
- Large side wheel
- 10cm shade
- Flip-up lens covers
- Life-time warranty

Model	RRP	Price
F1 5-30x56 IR SF FFP	£549	£499
F1 5-30x56 IR SF FFP Weaver Mounts	£549	£499

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READERS' RIFLES



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We want to see your airgun! Do you have a treasured air rifle that you are super proud of? Do you spend all your free time tinkering with it? If so, share it with AW! Email us the make and model, what you've customised, and what success you've had so far. Our favourite entry will win a 12-month subscription to *Airgun World*. Send to: airgunworld@twsgroup.com

RIFLE OF THE MONTH

GARY BLAKE, SOMERSET

Gary's Air Arms HFT500 helped him to secure the Benchrest UK Rookie of the Year title in 2025. Built with a match-grade Lothar Walther barrel and a custom Mark Sanderson stock, this rifle — which was previously owned by several Benchrest UK tour regulars including Hayley Kenward and Martin Hubbard — is a proven winner. Paired with the high-magnification Falcon Optics T50i scope, Gary secured 16th place overall in 2025, even out-shooting the 2024 National Champion at a local event.



MATTHEW GLEAVES BEM, DURHAM

Our own Matthew Gleaves BEM kindly sent in a pair of highly customised matched Anschütz 9015 HPs.

Going from front to back, each rifle is fitted with a custom silencer incorporating air strippers and sound moderation. The rifles are fitted to two Lothar Walther barrels prepared by The RAT Works. The actions themselves are also tuned by Simon Howarth at The RAT Works.

Both guns sit in 3D-printed carbon composite stocks designed and produced by Matthew himself and this will enable the gun to remain under the Light Rifle Class weight of 4,762g when carrying the substantial, exquisite Falcon Optics X60i Ultra scope, a 60x magnification scope fitted with Matt's own 3D eye cup enhancer.

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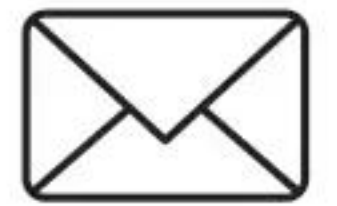
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LETTER OF THE MONTH

THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR UNETHICAL AIRGUNNING

BASC's David Gervers' article in the January 2026 issue struck a chord with me, particularly regarding how we treat our quarry. I am a sometime-pest controller (rats) and have always tried to adopt the same ethics as the likes of Mat Manning and Richard Saunders.

I watch the occasional ratting video and recently posted a critical

comment on one site. The video showed a shooter striking a rat in its hindquarters as it turned away. The animal was clearly injured and still alive, yet the shooter continued to target other rats without taking a follow-up shot to end its suffering. It would be unfair to single out this specific channel, as it is unfortunately not alone in showing such abuse of quarry.

Beyond the ethical considerations, there is a wider issue. The anti-shooting lobby is significant, and while they currently focus on game birds and moorland

management, airgunners should not assume we are immune to their influence. Mistreating animals in this way provides the perfect "peg" on which they can hang their deep-rooted prejudices.

The first response I often receive when I mention rat shooting is, "That's cruel" (which usually triggers my standard lecture on the environmental impact and cruelty of poisons). At the risk of appearing pompous, I offer two pieces of advice to airgun enthusiasts: always be prepared to take a follow-up shot to end suffering, even if it means missing a chance at other quarry; and if you haven't already, join BASC to help protect our shooting sports.

DAVE ANDERSON

CONGRATULATIONS, DAVE

Following his letter being chosen as the winner of Letter of the Month for the April 2026 issue, Dave will now receive a 12-month subscription to *Airgun World*!



DIY TARGETS WITH FLARE

I treated myself to a new Katran SC and a Nocpix Bolt P25 from Crackshot of Newton Abbot last autumn. Setting out to find the best pellet for my new rifle, I was aware that I would need a number of suitable targets; although Nocpix provided some thermal targets with the scope, I began experimenting with the idea of producing some of my own.

Using some cardboard from a grocery box, some kitchen foil and some masking tape, I had success. I cut the cardboard into squares to fit my target holder and attached a 25mm square of foil to the centre, leaving about 10mm of foil exposed using the masking tape. The foil will

always appear colder than the surrounding card to the scope, giving a clear aim point. In addition, any pellet passing through the cardboard will create friction, producing a thermal "flare" which lasts for a few seconds — long enough to alter the aim point. When this flare sits at the centre of the crosshairs, it's job done.

I hope this will be useful to anyone entering the world of thermal scopes, as I checked out a well-known auction site and was horrified at the cost of such targets. With thanks to the guys from Crackshot for their help in choosing what is turning out to be a rather brilliant shooting combination.

SIMON TALL

MORE PRAISE FOR TERRY DOE

I've just read Terry Doe's *Memories, Myths and Magic* column in the February 2026 issue, and I must say I totally agree with his passionate writing.

As a guitar player as well as a fairly new airgun enthusiast, I have seen the same kind of elitist, dismissive and critical statements on many guitar threads as those he describes on airgun forums. It seems that certain types of people, regardless of the subject, feel compelled to seek self-validation by undermining those with less experience, lower skill levels or simply much smaller budgets.

Terry is absolutely right to be appalled by the behaviour of a small minority who drag down the collective reputation of our community.

A community worth belonging to should have an ethos where no question is considered stupid and everyone is supported, even if they can only afford a budget rifle and scope. While it is great to have "shiny new toys", they should never be the price of entry.

Thank you, Terry, for saying out loud what all the "grown-ups" out there are thinking.

STEVE LOW

MORE TO SAY ON EXIT PUPILS

Further to Chris Marlow's letter in the January 2026 issue, I would like to add some more details regarding large objective lenses on air rifle telescopic sights.

Firstly, when the exit pupil is larger than the pupil of the shooter's eye, it allows the shooter to acquire the sight picture quickly. The person does not need to lose time fishing for the reticule image. The second point is interesting. If you use a really high magnification for a precise long range shot then the exit pupil

will shrink as the magnification rises. This means that the exit pupil will be much closer to the size of the eye pupil. Unless you look precisely through the eyepiece of the sight you will get an eclipse effect or shadow.

However, although it is more difficult to align your eye and avoid the shadow, when you do acquire a complete circle with a complete reticule image, you will automatically be looking dead centre and totally avoid any parallax in the image.

This means you have the best conditions for a longer range shot. Basically higher magnification with zero parallax. So, a 50x 10 telescope sight still has lots to offer the air rifle shooter. Your eye will naturally seek the centre of the exit pupil so it is definitely a useful piece of kit. Personally, I set all my air rifle telescopic sights to 4x magnification as the best balance for my own personal shooting opportunities.

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RESPECT AND ROUTINES



Guest editor and former benchrest World Champion Graham Freeman reflects on his competitive career and explains how Benchrest UK is helping to ensure the future of this rapidly growing and inclusive sport

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREW SYDENHAM

Airgun World (AW): Who is Graham Freeman?

Graham Freeman (GF): I am a 62-year-old IT engineer and a former World, European and British benchrest shooting champion. I live in East Sussex and

my home range is East Grinstead Target Shooting Club. I am the secretary and a founding member of Benchrest UK, the governing body in the UK for world rules benchrest shooting affiliated to the WRABF and ERABSF.

AW: When did you first become interested in airguns/benchrest shooting?

GF: I first got into air rifle shooting as a kid, when my dad bought me a BSA Meteor for Christmas, which I used to shoot on a friend's farm. I have



Graham has come a long way since he first began shooting benchrest in 2010

owned various air rifles throughout my life, but it wasn't until 2009 that I took up shooting benchrest and started shooting competitively in 2010.

AW: What was it about benchrest that attracted you to this particular branch of airgunning?

GF: I was attracted to benchrest shooting as it's about accuracy and precision; no matter how good your setup is, you are always looking to improve on it.

AW: What was your kit setup like when you first started shooting benchrest?

GF: When I first started shooting benchrest, I had an Air Arms 400 Carbine with a cheap scope, a Caldwell Rock front rest and a cheap back bag that leaked sand all the time.

AW: What was it like shooting with this kit – did it “do the job for the time being” or were you looking to upgrade

after certain milestones had been achieved?

GF: At that time, the Air Arms 400 Carbine was a popular choice for benchrest; an accurate and reliable rifle and the one that I used in the World Championships. I still have this rifle as I wouldn't part with it. The sport was in its infancy when I started and there was not a lot of choice for kit. I used what was available at the time.

Things have come a long way now, and as the sport has grown and progressed, so has the kit and the choice and availability of rests, back bags and equipment. I have upgraded my kit throughout the years, but I am a real believer in the saying “if it works for you, then don't change it”.

AW: Were you at all self-conscious about entering the sport with a modest kit setup?

GF: No, we all have to start somewhere and a modest kit setup does not mean that you can't win or shoot well.

AW: What is your message to anyone thinking about coming into airgun shooting who is concerned that they don't have the best rifle and all the other bells and whistles?

GF: It's been proved by my great friend Matthew Gleaves BEM and his AirAbility YouTube videos that benchrest can be done on a budget and still be competitive. Elemental Target Solutions are producing 3D-printed stocks for the Air Arms HFT 500, as well as rests and equipment which are budget-friendly. We only have to look back through the medal winners this year to see the varied rifles that medalled.

AW: Who were your biggest influences when you first started shooting?

GF: That would be my dad. He took ▶

“ We all have to start somewhere and a modest kit setup does not mean that you cannot win or shoot well ”



Graham pulls the trigger at his home range, East Grinstead Target Shooting Club

me up to the farm every weekend and taught me how to shoot. This went on to help me later on in life.

AW: What were the specific things that he taught you?

GF: My dad's first rule was always to respect the rifle. If I messed around with it, he'd take it away for a week, no questions asked. He taught me how to look after my gear, too – cleaning my gun every single time I used it, making sure everything was in good shape and so on.

Once I had the basics down, he moved on to sighting in the rifle and actually aiming. Later, he taught me how to breathe properly when taking a shot and how to read my surroundings instead of just staring down the scope. Those lessons stuck with me more than I realised at the time.

AW: Can you remember the first competitions you entered

and your motivation for doing so?

GF: My first competitive competition was at Portishead Shooting Club, the Brass Monkey Benchrest Shoot, run by Ken Stockham, which is still running to this day and is a great competition for all abilities. I had competed successfully in postal competitions and wanted to take it to the next level in shoulder-to-shoulder shoots. I wanted to see how competitive I was against other shooters from different clubs who had been competing for longer than me.

AW: At what point did you begin to take your competitive shooting more seriously – and what were your early competitive ambitions?

GF: When I got the invite to shoot for the UK and to take part in the World and European Championships in Pilsen, Czech

Republic. My early competitive ambitions were just to shoot for the UK. I did better than I thought and won Air World and European Gold.

AW: What was it like shooting in those early competitions – were you nervous? Did you have to approach your shooting in a different way given that every shot counts?

GF: I was nervous in the early competitions as it was all new to me and I had only competed at a club level. Shooting alongside 30 strangers was a bit daunting, but everyone was friendly and helpful and I have made lifelong friends through shooting. The main thing in approaching my first shoot was to remain calm, keep to my routine and not panic or dwell on it if I had a bad shot.

AW: How did it feel when you won the Air World and



European Gold? And did you think there was any extra pressure on you thereafter?

GF: I was overwhelmed with winning any medal, let alone taking the World and European Gold medals in my first World Championship. It's a moment I am very proud of and I will never forget that feeling listening to the national anthem. And on feeling any pressure — yes, definitely. Once you have won, you have a target on your back and everyone wants to try and beat you.

AW: What is your current kit setup and with which brands are you currently affiliated?

GF: My current kit setup is a Steyr LG 110 extended which has been greatly modified to become a highly accurate benchrest rifle. The scope is a Weaver T36 and the mounts are Tier One. The hand grip has been removed and replaced with a pinch post. I have a custom harmonic damper

on my barrel, both of which are my own design. The front rest is a Cicognani and, last of all, a Lenzi back bag.

I have been using this setup for a long time. I always tell people to get a setup that they are happy with and spend time fine-tuning it. I see too many people trying to “buy” accuracy and changing rifles and equipment from shoot to shoot, and it rarely works. I use my own custom-made wind flags along with crosswind indicators that I designed myself. I use H&N Baracuda FT 4.51 mm pellets. I am sponsored by H&N Sports and shoot in its benchrest team. The brand provides me with consistent quality pellets.

AW: What factors govern which brands you decide to affiliate with?

GF: I would only affiliate with a brand that I could compete with, that I believed in and that worked for me after lots of testing.

AW: How do you prepare for major benchrest competitions?

GF: I clean and make sure my rifle is in A1 condition, check seals and grease all moving parts. I don't really practise much before the competition, as that is what works for me. I don't make any major changes; I just make sure that the rifle is as good as it can be. I check all my other equipment, wind flags and front rest, and make sure I have everything I need ready to go.

AW: Who within the benchrest community do you admire most of all?

GF: The person I admired most in the benchrest community was the late, great Mr Ron Harding. He started shooting benchrest in his 80s and was crowned World Champion at the age of 83. He went on to shoot competitively until his sad passing at the age of 96. He is a legend in our sport and was rightly recognised as one by the WRABF in

Graham has put a great deal of thought into his current benchrest setup, with accolades including the Ron Harding Memorial Trophy a testament to his approach



Graham's talent and focus levels have stood him in good stead during his competitive benchrest shooting career

2019 with a special award. He was a great friend who helped me and many other shooters in his lifetime.

AW: Who is your favourite opponent?

GF: I have such a competitive drive I just want to beat everybody! Although I do respect the shooters who dedicate their spare time to perfecting the sport.

AW: Who's a better shooter, you or our very own Matthew Gleaves BEM?

GF: Me, but I would say that! Joking aside, Matt is on the ladder to be a World Champion: watch this space.

AW: What's the difference between first and second place in a competition?

GF: Our competitions are decided on the finest of margins and many are won on only one point, but it is always nice to come away from a competition with a medal. We shoot 25 targets at 25m, aiming at a 2mm bullseye. To score a 10, you must touch the 10 ring. To get the perfect score—an X—you must completely obliterate the 2mm ring.

Scoring often goes down to how many Xs are scored, so it's all about millimetres.

AW: How have you dealt with disappointments in major competitions?

GF: Disappointments are just part of life; you pick yourself up, dust yourself off and come back better and stronger. You learn by your mistakes.

AW: Who keeps you grounded inside and outside of the sport?

GF: Sonia, my long-suffering other half and fellow Benchrest UK committee member, keeps me in check. Sonia was once awarded a medal at a shoot for putting up with me! She is very good at keeping me grounded and is a constant source of support.

AW: How would you describe the health of benchrest shooting?

GF: Benchrest shooting is definitely a growing sport in the UK and worldwide. Running Benchrest UK competitions, I have seen numbers

increasing steadily and also more juniors taking up benchrest. Also, this sport is fully inclusive.

AW: What's the one thing all benchrest shooters can or should be doing to ensure the long-term security of the sport?

GF: They should encourage their clubs into trying benchrest and get fellow club members to have a go.

AW: What is your proudest competitive achievement to date and are there any ambitions you have yet to fulfil that you are going for in 2026?

GF: My proudest competitive achievement was winning the Benchrest UK Ron Harding Memorial Trophy. Ron Harding was one in a million, a great friend who spent a lot of time helping me and others within benchrest shooting, a legend in the sport and someone that I admired greatly. My ambitions for 2026 are to finish as UK No. 1 ranked benchrest shooter and qualify for the WRABF World Championship in South Africa 2027. ■

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BRK-BROCCOCK RANGER XR2

COMPACT CLASSIC EVOLUTION

Dave Barham reveals an exciting, brand new range of tactical hunting rifles from the BRK-Brocock stable

Lunched at this year's British Shooting Show, the BRK Ranger XR2 is another one of those rifles that falls under the "Want to Own" category as soon as you start shooting with it. What's more, there are four different variations of the new XR2, so there really is something for everyone in the new lineup.

I asked Tony Belas from BRK about the history of the original Ranger rifle and how it all came

about, and the transitions that have taken place in recent years to bring us to where we are today with the XR2.

"If we head back to 2020, BRK's US importer came calling with a very specific request: they needed a high-power air pistol that would allow the brand to compete in a new Extreme Field Target pistol class," explained Tony. "The first competition was pencilled in for October 2021, which didn't leave a great deal of time to go from a blank sheet

of paper to a working gun in the hands of competitors.

"As development took place in the UK, where high-power air pistols come with rather obvious legal complications, much of the early work was carried out using a carbine format instead. That proved to be something of a happy accident. Everyone who handled the little rifle quickly realised it would make a superb tool for pest controllers and hunters wanting something compact, lightweight and easy to carry all day.

"After all, many professionals spend eight or nine hours in the field but might only fire a handful of shots. Lugging around a full-weight rifle

BRK-BROCOCK RANGER XR2



BRK's tried and tested magazine and single shot tray are included

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

MAKE: BRK-Brocock
MODEL: Ranger XR2
TYPE: Pre-charged, multi-shot
CYLINDER CAPACITY: 150cc
MAXIMUM FILL PRESSURE: 250 bar
STOCK MATERIAL: Black synthetic
STOCK TYPE: Ambidextrous
COCKING: Side-lever
TRIGGER: Two-stage, adjustable
CALIBRES: .177, .22 and .25 (plus FAC)
SAFETY: Manual
OVERALL LENGTH: 838mm (33in)
BARREL LENGTH: 430mm (17in) (600mm/23in FAC)
MAGAZINE CAPACITY: 11 (.22) 13 (.177)
WEIGHT: 7lb (3.2kg)
SHOT CAPACITY: Around 130
VARIATION (10 SHOTS): 5fps
AVERAGE ENERGY: 11.6 ft/lb
RRP: From 950 (for test gun)
WEBSITE: brocock.co.uk

for that long soon loses its appeal, and for years there's been a steady demand for lighter, more compact hunting rifles.

BRK-Brocock already had strong links with pest control groups, including the Penrith Red Squirrel Group led by Jerry Moss, a stalwart pest controller, and early feedback suggested the prototype was exactly what many shooters had been asking for."

FROM ATOMIC TO RANGER

"Out of that original brief came two versions. For the US market there was the Brocock Atomic, offered as both a pistol and fixed-stock carbine. For the UK we got the Ranger, complete with folding stock and sub-12 ft-lb power," continued Tony.

"Over the last five years the Ranger has carved out a solid reputation as one of the smallest and lightest full power rifles you can buy. At UK power levels it's a superb hunting companion, but in export markets 12 ft/ ➤



The new rifle really looks the part



If you like tinkering with triggers, now's your chance



The fill gauge is easy to read



Dave loves the AK-style grip

lb doesn't go very far. That led to the development of the BRK Pathfinder, which retained the Ranger's compact dimensions but offered more power and a larger air supply.

"Shot count was also an area some users wanted to see improved. Forty shots per fill is ample for a hunting session, but less convenient for general plinking or range use where you can end up burning through air surprisingly quickly.

"Fast forward to 2026 and BRK has taken on board years of customer feedback — some of it contradictory — and opted for a simple solution: offer multiple versions so shooters can choose the one that best suits their needs. The result is the brand new Ranger XR2 line-up, consisting of four distinct models," Tony concludes.



It's very easy to adjust the power on this rifle



You can remove this rail, or use it to attach a bipod

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The build quality across the Ranger XR2 range is excellent, and this Tactical model I am testing feels especially solid thanks to its aluminium rear section. That extra mass gives it a nice neutral balance compared with the lighter-butt versions.

BRK has also revised the forend, extending the underside Picatinny rail to provide more room for accessories. Lightening cut-outs along the sides help keep weight under control, although the aluminium construction means it still feels reassuringly robust — there's no plastic flex here.

HUMA TECHNOLOGY

As you would expect, a rifle of this quality requires the very best regulator, and just like their other

PCP rifles, BRK has installed a HUMA unit which is linked to a floating hammer system. There is also a variable power dial on the right-hand-side of the action, which allows you to dial the power down — handy for shooting at close quarters in your back garden or within the confines of a small barn when ratting and so on.

Charge to the recommended 250 bar and shoot it down until the regulator drops off at around 100 bar. No fuss, no drama.

This regulator also comes into its own in the FAC versions, which are available in .177 (18ft/lb), .22 (27ft/lb) and .25 (30ft/lb).

SUITS YOU, SIR

Being on the taller side, I found the adjustable length of pull and trigger blade position genuinely useful

rather than just nice to have. Once set up, the rifle shoulders naturally and stays put on target with ease.

I really like the pistol grip on this Tactical model, it is more akin to an AK style rather than AR pattern. The flatter profile of the AK grip allows the action to sit slightly higher, resulting in a shallower overall layout.

As far as the barrel is concerned, it's a classic 17in Lothar Walther, and for those who shoot FAC there is also a longer slug barrel option for the higher-power models.

This rifle comes supplied with a split Picatinny scope rail up top and a long, single Picatinny rail underneath for adding accessories.

SIDE-LEVER AND MAGAZINES

If you like your side-lever rifles then you're going to love this one. It has ▶



The fill port is found underneath the end of the cylinder



There's a 1/2in UNF thread to take a moderator

been ergonomically designed and uses a relatively short stroke with minimal effort to cock the rifle. It features a machined aluminium drop-down handle, which sits really well between your thumb and forefinger when cocking. I particularly like the way they have drilled it out to reduce weight and also add some grip for use in wet weather, which, incidentally, just happened to be the conditions during my first hunting session with the rifle.

BRK's self-indexing magazines are also superb, you get 11 shots in .22 and 13 shots in .177. They're the "flip-up" cover version and are

extremely easy to load – turn the inner of the magazine all the way clockwise and drop a pellet in to hold it in place, then fill the remaining holes with pellets, flip the lid back over and you're done. The magazine inserts from right to left, and it's a magnetic one that clicks into place and stays there. The rifle also comes supplied with a single shot tray.

When it comes to filling the 150cc bottle, the Ranger XR2 utilises BRK's quick-fill probe, and the fill port is cleverly housed underneath the main body of the rifle, underneath a magnetic fill port cap that simply pulls off.

TRIGGER AND SAFETY

The XR2 features BRK's classic two-stage adjustable trigger unit, plus a manual safety "switch", which is housed inside the trigger guard immediately in front of the gently curved, flat trigger blade. The .177 rifle sent to me for testing had a reasonably short first stage set, coming to an abrupt halt as it reached the second stage, which then takes very little effort to pull. It's clean, crisp and very easy to get used to – as you would expect from a BRK unit. The safety catch sits at the front of the trigger guard (left for fire, right for safe) and is very easy to operate.



These cut outs in the chassis help reduce weight



The drop-down handle on the side-lever is both functional and aesthetic



The Tactical rifle features a fully adjustable skeleton butt

TESTING TIME!

This was another one of those rifles that I'm really struggling to put down. It really is such a joy to shoot. This Tactical model truly is a "one size fits all" rifle, with a wide range of adjustment for all body sizes and it handles extremely well.

The .177 test rifle produced roughly 5fps difference between each step on the 13-point power adjuster, topping out at around 11.6ft/lb and averaging 785fps.

Shot count was in the region of 160 per fill, and with careful air management you could probably squeeze out a few more.

Accuracy is exactly what you'd expect from a BRK-Brocock rifle - it's pinpoint. Once I'd found the right pellet, my groups were happily stacking through the same hole out to 30 metres, with the smallest deviation out to 40 metres (the maximum distance available during testing). I'm in

no doubt it would perform at this same level out further in more capable hands!

What started life as a competition pistol project has evolved into a genuinely versatile compact rifle platform. The new Ranger XR2 lineup shows BRK is listening to its customers and responding with a range that actually makes sense.

The Tactical tested here is perhaps the most adaptable of the lot, is



The magazine is loaded from right to left



A seal kit is included



Every rifle comes with a test certificate



Each rifle is checked by hand before heading to the dealers

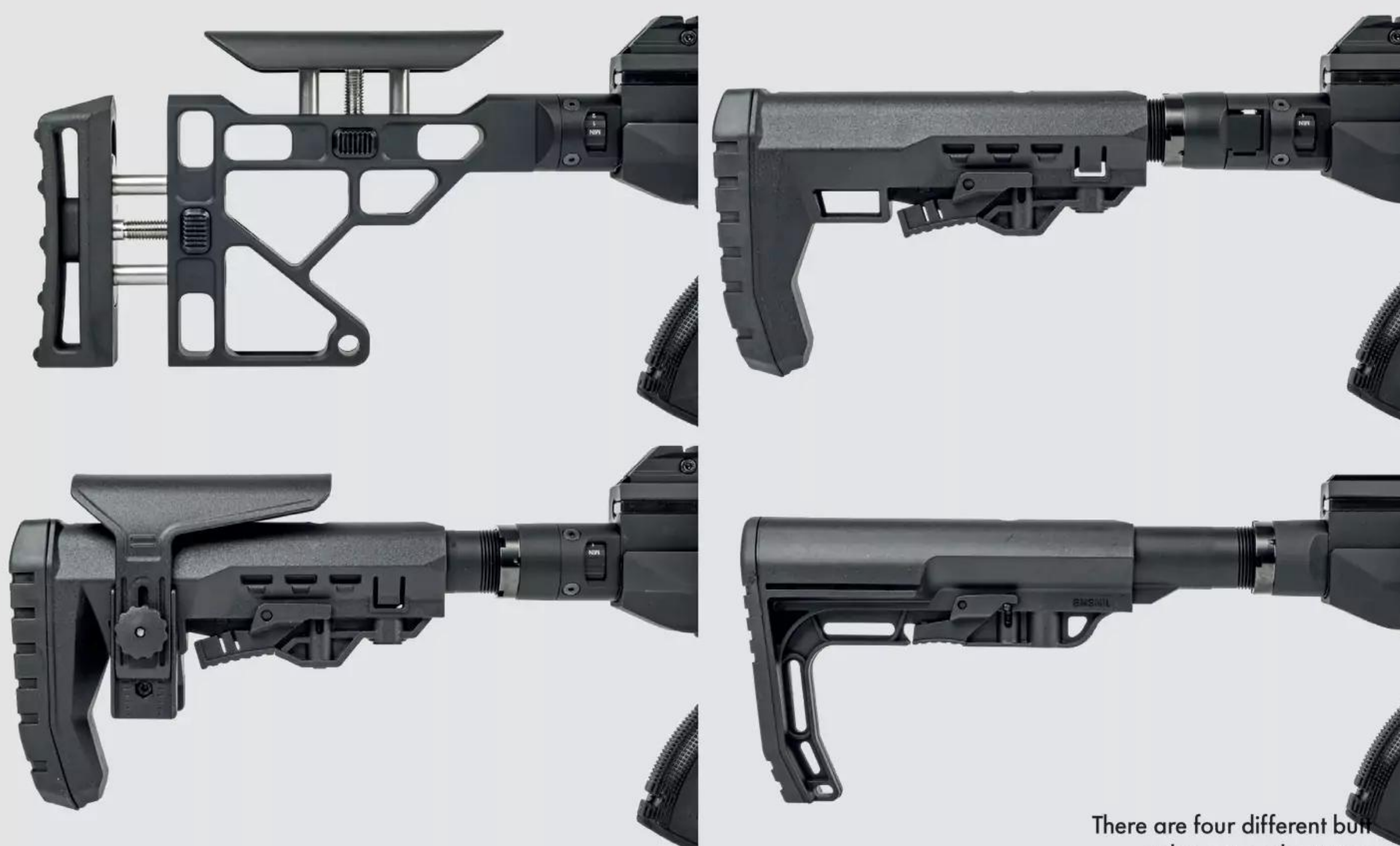
THE FANTASTIC FOUR

Ranger Compact: Closest in spirit to the original, retaining the folding stock but adding a slightly longer cylinder. Shot count climbs to around 65 and there's now a 13-step rear power adjuster.

Ranger Lite: As the name suggests, this one pares things back to keep weight and cost down. You still get around 150 shots per fill and a full-length barrel, making it a very sensible all-round choice.

Ranger Recon: A longer barrel and cylinder give this version true all-rounder credentials. It also gains an adjustable cheekpiece, absent on the original Ranger, for improved head alignment in more traditional shooting positions, along with the 13-step power adjuster.

Ranger Tactical: The test rifle here, and arguably the most fully featured of the bunch. While clearly aimed at target and bench use, it still retains enough versatility for field work. The rear end is fully adjustable, with cheekpiece and butt pad adjustable for both height and length. There's also the 13-point power adjuster and a three-position transfer-port control, allowing a wide range of tuning. That's particularly useful on FAC models, but even at 12ft/lb it lets you fine-tune for different pellets.



There are four different butt styles across the range

equally at home on the bench or in the field, and backed up by the accuracy and build quality we've come to expect from the brand. For anyone who liked the original Ranger but wanted a bit more flexibility, this latest generation might just be the sweet spot.

I really have given this rifle a proper thrashing during the short time that I have had it, and I have enjoyed every single second. As I stated at the beginning of the review, this is one of those rifles that you simply want to own as soon as you pick it up. ■

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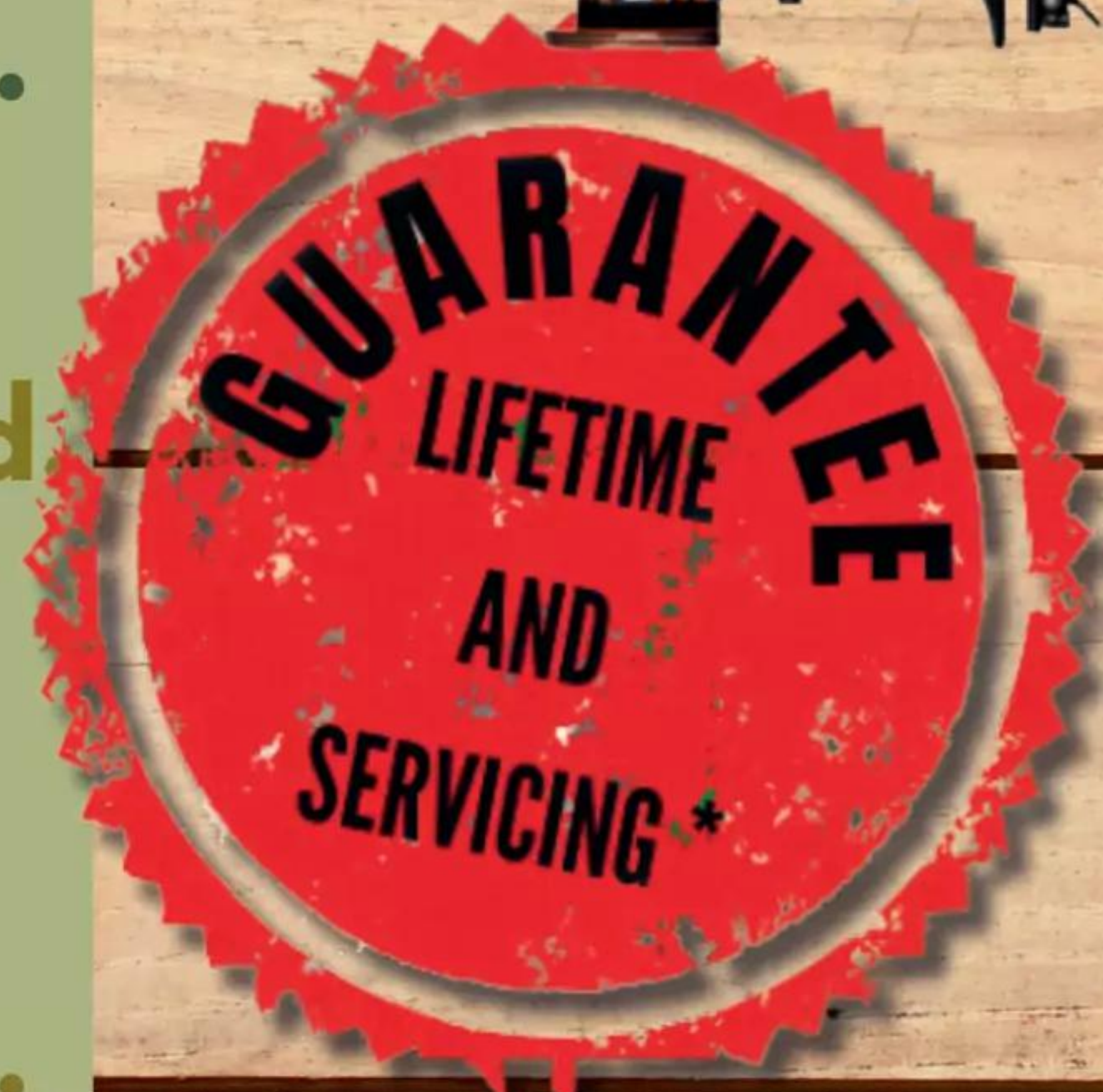
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DRIVING INNOVATION

Airgun World meets up with Elite Optical's marketing manager Andy Gowan to discuss everything from the rise of high-end digital optics to his brand's efforts to strengthen its market position in 2026 and beyond

Airgun World (AW): Looking back at 2025, what were the major highlights and key successes for Elite Optical specifically within the airgun market?

Andy Gowan (AG): The standout for us was undoubtedly the launch of the HIKMICRO Alpex 4K Lite. It was our first "ground-up" air rifle product — a day/night scope built on a compact body specifically for shorter ranges. We took a significant amount of weight out of the original Alpex to tailor it to this market, and it has been a huge success. On the glass optics side, our WÜLF brand saw the introduction of several

compact, air rifle-focused models. While our entry-level Fireball line remains popular for those on a budget, introducing higher-quality intermediate optics has been a definite step forward.

AW: Did any specific product line or technical innovation drive exceptional performance for you in the last year?

AG: It was definitely our expansion into the digital arena. Bringing high-end digital technology into the airgun sector has given professional users — those controlling rats, rabbits and squirrels — a serious advantage. It has essentially professionalised the use of air rifles for pest control in a way we haven't seen before.

AW: What were the biggest lessons learned in 2025?

AG: In this trade, every day is a school day. Even though HIKMICRO is a dominant force in digital and thermal, you can never let up; you have to keep pushing and innovating. We've also seen the continued strengthening of the air rifle market. Everyone wants a piece of that action now, which means a name and a reputation are no longer enough. You have to stay competitive on price and stay at the cutting edge.

AW: What are your primary goals for 2026, and what new technology can the airgun community expect?

AG: While I can't spoil the upcoming launches, the community can expect higher resolutions, faster processing and improved image quality, particularly regarding nighttime performance. As airguns become an even more dominant part of the overall firearms trade, shooters can expect more choice, more depth of product and better quality at various price points.

AW: Are there any new markets you are looking to enter or expand into?

AG: HIKMICRO is already expanding beyond the gun trade into industrial and photography sectors. For WÜLF, which is a British brand, we are looking to push beyond the UK and Ireland into Europe and the US in a much, much bigger way.

AW: What is the global outlook for the airgun optics market in 2026?

AG: It is growing massively, not just here but in key markets like the US. Historically, airgun optics were seen as "lower end," but we are now seeing high-end technology creeping in. As more players enter the market, we fully expect to see even more innovation and competitive pricing.

“ Everyone wants a piece of the action now, which means a name and a reputation are no longer enough. You have to stay competitive ”

Andy Gowan is proud to be a part of the Elite Optical team





The WÜLF Defender 30 is one of Andy's personal favourites when it comes to airgun optics

“ We also rely heavily on a group of professional pest controllers — real-world users who test pre-production units ”



AW: What do you consider the most transformative development in airgun optics during your time with Elite Optical?

AG: The Alpex 4K Lite stands out. It represented a genuine “step change” — high-end digital technology designed specifically for the requirements of an air rifle rather than being a repurposed riflescope.

AW: Elite Optical offers a vast range of reticles. Which design is currently most popular?

AG: Airgunners generally prefer “less busy” reticles; the standard half mil-dot remains very popular. Some of our more complex designs, like the Mil 5 and Mil 6, can be a bit off-putting for shorter-range shooting. However, our HFT Pro reticle in the Hurricane Compact has been very successful because it was designed specifically for that sport, even if it is a niche market.

AW: Do you have a personal favourite product within the range?

AG: For me, it's the WÜLF Defender 30. It offers a perfect balance of high-end glass, a simple etched-glass reticle and superb turrets, all in a lightweight, compact form. It hits that sweet spot between technical performance and value.

AW: Who do you consult for strategic advice when making marketing and sales decisions?

AG: Our MD, Stuart Grant, is an industry lifer with immense experience. We also rely heavily on a group of professional pest controllers — real-world users who test pre-production units. We don't just want “influencer” feedback; we want technical feedback from people using the gear day-in, day-out so we can make appropriate changes well before a product hits the shelves.

AW: What are your personal professional non-negotiables?

AG: Honesty and transparency. The product must work and deliver exactly what it promises. We are also incredibly proud of our service team. Things will occasionally go wrong — nothing is perfect — but the difference lies in how you put it right. We pride ourselves on having the best technical backup in the UK to support our customers.

AW: With many shooting shows on the calendar, do you have a favourite?

AG: For airguns specifically, the British Shooting Show is the destination. It's vital for connecting with consumers. As long as the key shows remain relevant and build their audience, the industry is in a good place.

AW: How do you balance high-end features with the need for affordability?

AG: It comes down to intelligent buying and specification. We have very close relationships with our vendors, and they listen to our feedback on the UK market. You have to get the “maximum bang for your buck”. Performance and ergonomics are key, but the service aspect is a huge part of that value. If you can't service or back up a product, it doesn't matter how well it performs — the consumer deserves that long-term security. ■

For more information on Elite Optical, visit eliteoptical.co.uk



NV RAZER

NOVA VISTA A New Benchmark for Beginner PCP Air Rifles

Nova Vista continues to strengthen its position in the entry-level PCP market with the launch of the Razer PCP air rifle, a well-balanced and affordable platform aimed squarely at shooters taking their first steps into pre-charged pneumatic shooting.



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The Nova Vista Razer PCP is set to launch in the UK on 18 February. With its combination of affordability and modern features, it stands out as a strong contender in the beginner PCP category and is likely to become a popular choice for shooters entering the world of pre-charged pneumatic air rifles.



For further information on the Nova Vista Razer PCP air rifle, trade enquiries, or dealer opportunities, please contact Trimex UK Ltd, the sole UK distributor for Nova Vista air rifles. www.trimex.co.uk (sales@trimexuk.com)



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Effective nighttime rat shooting relies as much on good fieldcraft as quality kit



ON THE NIGHT SHIFT

Danny Brookfield offers some essential after-dark rat shooting tips along with his suggestions for the pieces of kit that will offer humane kills time after time

Rats are a rarely glamorous quarry, but few pests demand such a blend of patience, fieldcraft and precision. They thrive on human activity yet vanish the moment it stops, learning quickly, moving quietly and exploiting every scrap of cover we leave behind. For farmers, waste managers and landowners, they're more than an irritation: they're a genuine problem. For the airgun shooter, however, they offer one of the most challenging and rewarding forms of pest control there is.

Modern equipment has transformed what's possible after dark. A capable PCP, paired with digital night vision and subtle infrared illumination, allows us

to work efficiently, safely and discreetly in environments where rimfire or lamping would be impractical. This article includes a look at a proven, real-world ratting setup: the Air Arms S510R Core, HIKMICRO 4K Lite and the The WÜLF Fi IR LED 940nm illuminator, and how to use it effectively across farms, yards and waste sites, without educating the rats faster than you can deal with them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD FIELDCRAFT

Unlike rabbits or pigeons, rats don't tolerate pressure for long. Miss one, rush a shot or blunder into a yard too noisily and you can wipe out visible activity for hours, sometimes days. They're creatures of habit, but also quick learners. Successful ratting isn't about turning up and

shooting everything that moves; it's about understanding how they use an area and inserting yourself into their routine with as little disruption as possible.

That's where the right kit matters. The Air Arms S510R Core is well suited to this kind of work. Its strengths aren't flashy; they're functional. The smooth firing cycle, consistent accuracy and fast follow-up shots are exactly what you want when rats appear briefly and often in pairs or small groups. In tight farmyards or cluttered waste sites, that control inspires confidence and confidence leads to cleaner shooting.

Mounted on top, the HIKMICRO 4K Lite brings clarity to environments that are rarely simple. Farmyards are full of contrast: dark doorways opening onto floodlit concrete, shadowed corners under feeders, reflective metal and wet ground. A good digital optic lets you manage those transitions without constantly fighting the image. The added bonus

reliable way to buy yourself a very quiet night. A far better approach is to arrive before dark, quietly assess the site, then settle in and let things calm down. Often, the first rat will appear exactly where you expected if you've done your homework.

LOCATING ALL OF THE HABITAT HOTSPOTS

Rats are motivated by three things: food, cover and dry routes between the two. On farms, those elements are everywhere, but certain areas consistently produce results. Feed stores and grain areas are obvious starting points. Spilled grain, torn bags and warm, dry shelter make these locations magnets. Look behind stacked bags, under pallets and along walls where runs form. Livestock sheds, especially cattle and poultry units, can support large populations thanks to constant feed and warmth. The most productive spots are usually the quieter edges: back walls, under raised platforms and behind gates that don't move often.

Silage clamps, straw stacks and hay barns offer dense cover and protection from the elements. Rats will often run tight along the base of these structures, emerging briefly

to cross open ground. Muck heaps and compost areas can also be extremely productive, particularly in colder months when warmth becomes a major draw. Water is another key factor. Drainage ditches, soakaways and culverts provide safe travel routes and reliable moisture. These areas demand careful shot placement and absolute awareness of backstops, but they're often worth the effort.

Waste and recycling sites bring their own challenges. Lighting can be harsh, surfaces reflective, and background clutter constant. However, where food waste exists, rats won't be far behind. Skips and compactors are classic hotspots, especially underneath where food residue and shelter combine. Pallet stacks, timber piles and stored materials provide excellent nesting cover, while perimeter fencing and hedge lines act as rat motorways. Even staff canteen waste areas can sustain significant activity. Digital optics really come into their own here, allowing you to manage contrast and pick out movement without introducing visible light. The key is patience — let the rats commit to movement rather than trying to force shots too early.

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of recording footage shouldn't be underestimated, either; it's invaluable for reviewing behaviour, showing landowners results, and refining your own approach. Illumination is handled by the WÜLF Fi IR LED 940nm illuminator, and this is where many sessions are won or lost. Rats are far less likely to spook under 940nm infrared compared to visible or lower-wavelength infrared. Used sensibly, it gives you enough light to identify targets and read the background without advertising your presence.

Ratting success often comes down to timing rather than effort. On farms, the best window is usually once human activity has dropped away: after the last feed round, once machinery is parked up and yard lights are reduced. Waste sites vary more, depending on security patrols and shift patterns, but the principle is the same — rats move when they feel safe. Arriving too early and stomping around with torches and clattering gates is a



Danny sets up the bait station



The air rifle, riflescope and illuminator used during the shoot

STICKY BAIT AND TECHNICAL EXECUTION

Baiting isn't about feeding rats; it's about controlling where they stop. A good bait station encourages a pause at a safe, visible point with a reliable backstop. Strong-smelling, sticky baits work best. Rat jam is excellent for creating a scent trail and staying put. Peanut butter is a classic for a reason: aromatic, sticky and difficult for rats to grab and run with. Nutella can be surprisingly effective, especially in colder conditions, while mashed sweetcorn is familiar and attractive on farms.

Place bait sparingly on a solid surface, a block of wood or flat stone tight to cover rather than out in the open. Rats want an escape route within inches. If possible, pre-bait for a night or two without shooting; confidence builds quickly, and the difference on your first live session can be dramatic. When using the HIKMICRO and the WÜLF Fi IR LED 940nm illuminator combination, restraint is key. Run only as much infrared as you need; too much can cause glare off wet concrete, metal

or plastic. A slight adjustment to the angle of the illuminator often makes a big difference.

Rather than staring at the bait itself, watch the edges: the gap under a door, the shadow line along a wall, the base of a pallet stack. Rats rarely appear fully formed; they leak into view in pieces. Learning to read those early signs lets you prepare the shot rather than rushing it. Recording sessions isn't just useful for sharing clips. Reviewing footage helps identify patterns: where rats emerge, how long they feed, and what causes them to spook. Over time, that knowledge is worth more than any single night's tally.

The biggest mistake new ratters make is over-pressuring a single spot. Clear a bait station hard and activity will often shift just out of sight. Rotating locations, working edges first, and allowing areas to settle between shots keeps rats moving naturally rather than locking down. Small details matter. Avoid silhouetting yourself against yard lights. Keep movements slow and deliberate. After a shot, stay still —

DANNY'S KIT BAG

Air rifle: Air Arms S510R Core (air-arms.co.uk)

Riflescope: HIKMICRO 4K Lite (eliteoptical.co.uk)

Illuminator: WÜLF Fi IR LED 940nm (wulfoptics.com)

the rest will often reappear if nothing else changes. Consistency and calmness kill more rats than speed.

Effective rat control isn't about one big night; it's about reducing pressure steadily and sustainably. A simple routine works best: survey the site, choose a handful of likely zones, bait carefully, return at the quietest time, and adapt based on what you see. With the Air Arms S510R Core delivering precision and reliability, the HIKMICRO 4K Lite offering clarity and insight, and the WÜLF Fi IR LED 940nm illuminator keeping your presence discreet, you're well equipped. The rest is down to understanding your quarry — where it lives, how it moves and how you fit in without being noticed. Do that, and the night shift becomes one of the most satisfying forms of pest control airgunning has to offer. ■

THE WÜLF FI IR LED 940NM ILLUMINATOR

This LED-based illuminator is a vital tool for nighttime vermin control, offering a high-contrast image for digital night-vision systems. Specifically engineered for covert operations, its 940nm wavelength provides a discreet light source invisible to the eyes of lamp-shy quarry. The unit features a 54mm head with a 50mm aspheric lens, allowing shooters to transition from a tight spot beam to a wide flood. Weighing 270g and built on a 25mm body diameter, it integrates with standard mounts. Powered by a supplied 18650 battery, it delivers a one to three-hour runtime with simple single-mode operation. wulfoptics.com



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MEMORIES, MYTHS AND MAGIC

Terry Doe on the exploding pumpkin that led to his breakfast TV debut

It was just after 6.30am in the mid 1990s, and I was settling in front of the TV with my porridge before heading for the *Airgun World* office. I was about half a bowl in when the TV presenter announced that the next segment would be devoted to “the airgun menace”, or some such scaremongering nonsense. What I watched next had me gagging on my breakfast.

A demonstrator wearing a lab coat cocked and loaded a Weihrauch HW35, aimed it at a pumpkin the size of a basketball, and as the sequence switched to slow-motion, the demonstrator squeezed the trigger. A split-second later, and still in glorious slo-mo, the pumpkin exploded, sending pulp, seeds and rind flying all over the place, in a perfect tribute to that memorable scene from *The Day Of The Jackal*.

The movie scene depicted the effect of an assassin’s bullet, whereas the TV version I was watching purported to demonstrate “the menace of airguns”. The gross, and deliberate, misrepresentation had me shouting at the TV, then reaching for my phone book and, after a convoluted series of calls, I secured a conversation with one of the TV show’s producers.

The poor man admitted that his special effects department had used an explosive device to blow up the pumpkin, and then had to listen to me ranting on for 10 minutes, non-stop. As I drew breath to resume my onslaught, the producer offered to broadcast an official apology, plus the chance to redress the balance further by appearing on the show the next morning. Eek! Me and my big mouth...

“ We scored a victory that day. I was given the chance to promote the positive side of our sport, and the media learned that gross misrepresentation would be challenged ”

I arrived at the TV studios bright and early next morning, and after a mercifully brief session in a makeup chair, I was shown to the green room where another guest was already waiting. That guest was none other than Sir Geoff Hurst, the hat-trick hero from England’s greatest footballing triumph, when we won the World Cup in 1966. Sir Geoff had the World Cup with him, too, and I got to have a photo with him, and it. What a way to start the day!

Meanwhile, I had a wrong to put right, and as the studio clock ticked down toward “going live”, I took my place on the sofa

alongside the presenters. I noticed that one of them was holding a 2p coin with a pellet-sized dent in the “head” side of it, obviously intending to use it as a visual prop to show how dangerous an air rifle could be. With 15 seconds to go, I told the presenter that defacing the coins of the realm in the way that they had was highly illegal, and would undoubtedly cause even more outrage than blowing up the pumpkin.

“You’ve effectively shot the Queen’s head, after all”, I muttered, as the final seconds elapsed. What I’d said was nonsense, of course, but they’d started it so I felt justified. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the issue, I definitely recall smiling as the presenter slipped the coin into his pocket.

We scored a victory that day. The apology was issued, I was given the chance to promote the positive side of our sport, and the media learned that gross misrepresentation would be challenged. I learned the importance of making those challenges, and it’s a lesson we all need to learn. It doesn’t matter if the lies appear on national TV or in a local newspaper; if they go uncontested those lies will be regarded as the truth. Just do your bit to properly represent your sport whenever the opportunity arises. You never know – you might get to meet one of your heroes! ■



ALPHA WOLF SHADOW

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You asked for it, we delivered. The Alpha Wolf Shadow is a new, compact and stylish addition to the Alpha Wolf line. At just 731mm and a little over 3 kgs in weight, the new Shadow features a 300cc carbon-wrapped air bottle and a stylish grey stock.

- Full 17" Leathar Walther barrel
- SMART Control electronics
- V3 Optic R008 Rail
- Gecko Butt P00
- BRK MP-121 Moderator
- Fixed hard case



from ARCA and featuring a blue MF Silencer the Ghost SE is made, race twin optic rail, performance cocking lever and Gecko recoil pad. The SE versions feature a tensioned barrel system, and come in a custom-fitted hard case.

A serious number of extras are included, making it a great value package. Plus, its unique colourway makes the Ghost SE stand out from the crowd.

Other features are the 'standard' BRK Ghost, including a 20-point power wheel, ambidextrous action in a one-piece machined block and super consistent regulator for incredible accuracy.

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WILD CARD

Konus adds a new model to its budget-friendly Wild range of riflescopes. With features including a red/ green IR crosshair, this 4-12x40 could be the scope bargain of 2026. **Nigel Allen** takes a closer look

Konus is a relatively new scope brand to us airgunners, though that's likely to change now it's supplied to UK gun shops by distribution giants, Range Right. My first experience with a Konus was the 2-16x50 Glory, a flagship model reviewed in the April 2025 issue of *Airgun World*. It impressed me, as a scope costing £550 probably should! So, when I was sent the Konus 4-12x40 Wild model, I wasn't sure what to expect.

This one's £90 price tag suggested a cheap 'n' cheerful optic that would be a far cry from Glory. I mean, besides its healthy 4x to 12x magnification range and a 30mm tube, you also get mounts thrown in. And on top of that, the Konus Wild boasts a dual-colour, multi-brightness illuminated reticle, adjustable parallax, push/ pull locking turrets, a zoom throw-lever and flip-up lens covers.

There's an adage that if a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Not in the case of this

Konus, though. Before I get started, let me issue a spoiler alert: this is the best "budget priced" scope I've ever tested.

Despite my very positive experience with the Glory, I had little expectation of a £90 scope with such a long list of specifications from an unfamiliar brand. Who wouldn't?

However, unboxing the Wild from its lack-lustre packaging, I

was immediately surprised at the build quality. Nicely engineered, its anti-reflective matt black finish is impeccable. Its bold, white graphics look expensive, and the zoom ring, turrets and adjustable objective all turn with the feel of a far more expensive optic.

Then I looked through it: wow! The sight picture the Wild renders through its multi-coated 40mm diameter objective is truly incredible.

The multi-coated 40mm objective renders an incredible sight picture



KONUS WILD 4-12X40 RED GREEN MIL-DOT SCOPE



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Make:** Konus
- Model:** Wild
- Magnification:** Variable, 4x to 12x (stepless)
- Objective:** 40mm diameter, multi-coated
- Tube diameter:** 30mm
- Mounts supplied:** Two-piece, 11mm dovetail clamp
- Reticle:** Mil-Dot glass-etched, second focal plane
- Illumination:** Yes, in Red or Green, each with five intensities
- Parallax adjustment:** Adjustable objective (AO), <10 yards to infinity (marked in yards)
- Turret adjustment:** 1/4MOA (6.35mm @ 100 yards)
- Elevation:** Push/ Pull locking, with 76MOA range; 60 clicks/ revolution
- Windage:** Push/ Pull locking, with 68MOA range; 60 clicks/ revolution
- Focus:** Quick-focus, +/-3 dioptre
- Eye relief:** 85-95mm (12x - 4x)
- Field of view @100m:** 9.2m (4x) / 3.07m (12x)
- Length:** 351mm
- Weight:** 680g (incl. supplied mounts)
- Extras included:** Two-piece mounts (dovetail clamp), threaded zoom throw lever, flip-up lens covers (opaque), hex and scope key tools, lens cloth, CR2032 battery, user manual and a two-year guarantee
- SRP:** £90
- Website:** range-right.co.uk



The IR feature is powered by a CR2032 cell battery located in the P/A side turret

Colour and sharpness match that of many a scope costing upwards of £250, with no colour fringing or "ghosting" at any magnification. I actually called Range Right to double-check the price; yep – £90 retail. (And just as an aside, the new 3-9x40 Wild model that's also joining the line-up is even cheaper at £70).

My optical tests (see *Optical Performance* panel) bore out my initial findings. The definitive scores the Konus Wild achieved at its lowest, and especially its mid-range and highest magnifications smashed my reasonable expectations out of the ballpark. Kudos, Konus!

My test scope carried on delivering once I got it out into the fields and on the range. Initially, I used the two-piece ringmounts supplied in the box to fit it to a

Weihrauch HW35E springer. One of these mounts feature a retractable stop-pin. Used at the rear, it means

Below: Both adjustment turrets are lockable: pull out to adjust and push in to lock

you can anchor the scope against recoil slippage by locating it into one of the HW's receiver holes.

Not only did the mounts hold the scope true, but when I "walked the zero" on a test target – 60 clicks Up, Right, Down and then Left – the group returned to the original point of impact setting. While I'd expect the "best fit" for any budget scope to be on a springer, my gut feeling is that this Konus deserves to be mounted onto a more expensive PCP. ▶



Having a screw-in zoom throw lever helps when changing magnification setting



So, most of the hours testing my sample scope were spent on recoilless hardware, where I'm happy to say its performance continued to exceed its price point. Additionally, my field tests were undertaken on chilly winter days, with both low temperatures and light levels.

Even when it was too cold to go gloveless, the objective bell's parallax collar turned without any stiffness, which can be a problem on some scopes. I found the magnification ring a little stiffer, but having a screw-in throw lever helped immensely when zooming through the powers.

For reference, the magnification setting is slightly different from the norm in that the pointer is on the ring itself, with the power settings fixed on the eyepiece.

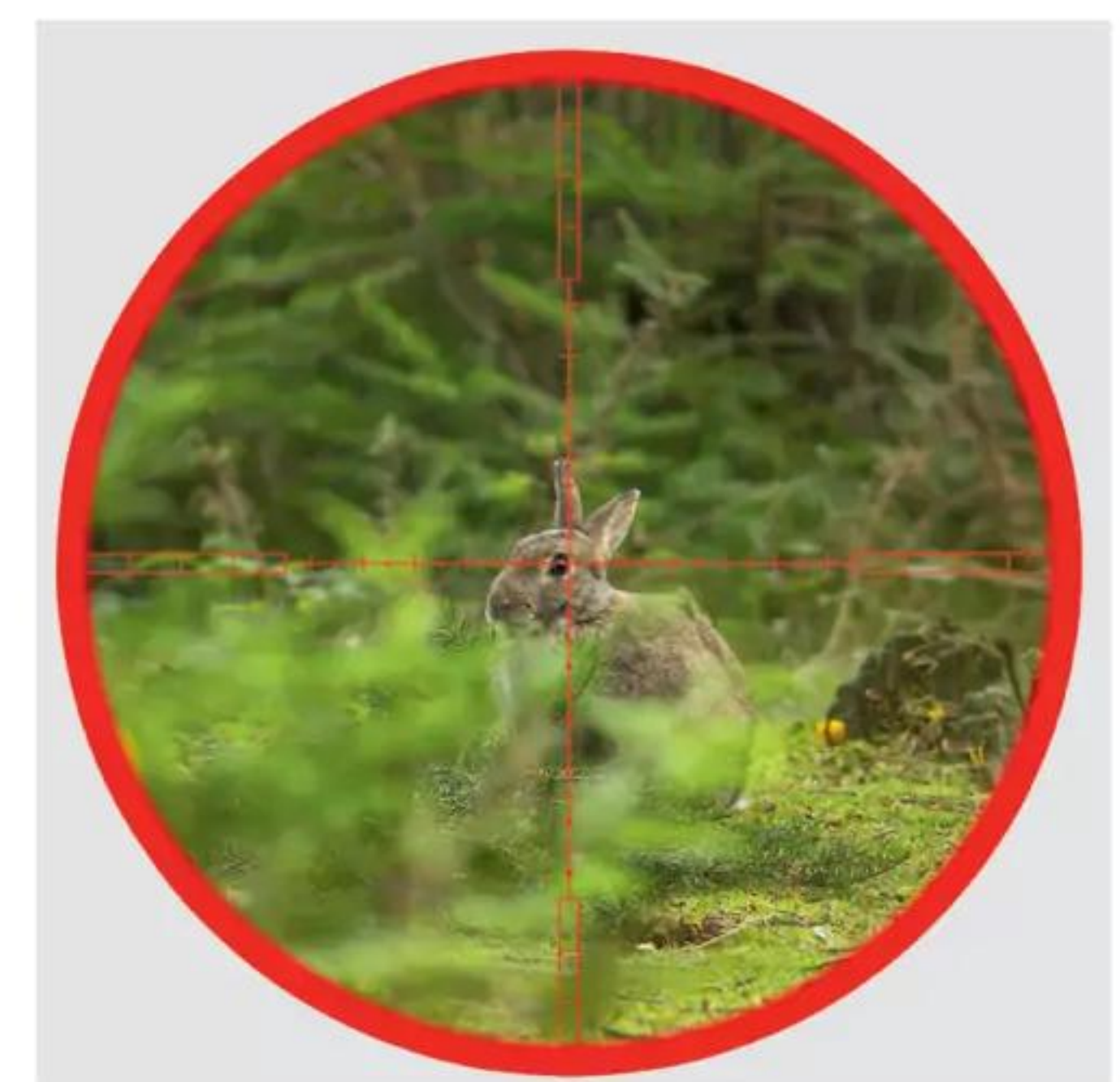
As for image brightness, even at the higher powers, the 40mm diameter, coated objective lens and 30mm body tube returned a sight picture that was as clear as you could ever wish for. And, of course, the Wild's illuminated reticle further aided precision aiming.

Powered by a CR2032 battery accessible via the screw-off cap on the left-hand turret, the Wild's etched reticle can be illuminated to one of five intensity levels in

either red or green. This means you never "lose" the reticle's fine stadia against the background. Black when "off", all the stadia light up when the IR turret ring on the left of the saddle is turned to "R" (red) or "G" (green), too.

If I have one criticism – and it's probably the only one I have of this scope – it's that the outer circumference of the sight picture also illuminates. At maximum brightness (5), I found it a little distracting. However, when a shooting mate had a go with the scope, he thought it helped "frame" the view.

Konus dubs the Wild's reticle as "Mil-Dot" because it's been designed around milliradian spacing. This is slightly misleading because being in the second focal plane (SFP), the MIL system only has relevance at 10x magnification. Also, there aren't that many dots, with the majority of



Below and opposite: The Wild's SFP crosshair offers plenty of aiming points and is illuminable to one of five intensities in either red or green. This makes it ideal to pick out against all types of target scenarios



TURRET ADJUSTMENT

The Konus Wild's turret click is 1/4MOA (minute of angle). Many airgunners prefer these over 0.1MRAD (milliradian) turrets because they allow for a more precise zero thanks to their finer click adjustments. One 1/4MOA click moves the pellet's point of impact (POI) by 1/4in (6.35mm) at 100 yards, whereas as one 0.1MRAD click moves the POI 10mm at 100 metres.

Translated to airgun distances, this means one click of a 1/4MOA turret moves the POI 1/16in (1.6mm) at 25 yards. On the other hand, one click of a 0.1MRAD turret moves the POI 2.5mm at 25 metres, which is the equivalent of 2.3mm at 25 yards. These may seem small differences, but that's what matters if you're after a super-precise zero!



WHAT IS PARALLAX?

Close one eye, then point your finger to, say, a tree in the distance. Now, open the shut eye, and close the open one; your finger will no longer be pointing at the tree. This is a good analogy for parallax which, in scope terms, is the error that can happen between the target and the crosshair should you align your eye down the eyepiece differently from one shot to the next.

Effectively, the crosshair moves all around the target according to how you're looking through the scope, even if your hold is rock-steady.

However, by setting the scope's parallax to the exact distance you're shooting over, any of these potential aiming errors are eliminated. No matter how you align your eye, the crosshairs will always be bang on.



aiming reference points being made up of small graduations.

Not that it's a problem. Indeed, I found the reticle extremely practical. It doesn't clutter the sight picture and offers plenty of aimpoints for airgunners, who have a lot more trajectory fall-off to contend by comparison with powder-gunners. The graduations of the left, right and upper quadrants are identical, with skeletal sidebars. The all-important lower quadrant is a little different, offering more dots and graduations, and a shorter side bar. It's a lot better than a conventional "Mil-Dot" reticle, for sure.

Actually, you don't have to use anything but the centre of the reticle. The Konus Wild has finger-operable elevation and windage turrets, so you can "dial-in" a dead-on zero to suit the distance you're shooting over. Of course, you'll need to work all your ranging first, but many shooters favour this method, especially with 1/4MOA click adjustments, as the Konus' are (see *Turret Adjustment* panel).

There's plenty of adjustment available on both turrets. What's more, each turret is lockable – pull to unlock, push to lock – and both verniers are resettable to "0" once you've synched your rifle, ammo and preferred zero distance. Konus even throws in a special tool to slacken off the turrets' vernier drums, which then lets you "free-spin" them into position.

This Konus scope is equipped with a parallax adjustment (P/A) feature, in the form of an adjustable objective (AO). Some may consider it less trendy than having a sidewheel P/A system located at the turrets, but let's not forget the price. Besides, when the P/A collar around the objective turns as easily as it does on the Konus Wild, it's no great hardship.

The important point here is that this Konus lets you remove any aiming errors caused by parallax, which is particularly problematic when shooting at the close ranges we airgunners shoot over.

Many airgunners will be aware that on very high-power scopes, P/A can double as a range-finding system by fine-focusing the image. However, even on its full 12x magnification, you'd be hard pressed to range-find accurately





Above: Konus provides a special tool so that once you've zeroed the scope, you can easily set the turrets' verniers to "0"

with this Konus, as you would most 12x scopes to be honest.

That said, I'd still recommend setting this scope to the distance you're shooting over to avoid those inexplicable misses. The vernier on the AO collar is well marked for airgunners – 10, 15, 20, 25, 30 and 50 yards being the most relevant reference points. Incidentally, the minimum parallax setting is around eight yards – great if you use this scope for a bit of back garden plinking.

Primary focus, namely getting the crosshairs looking at their sharpest, is obtained at the eyepiece, or ocular lens. Here, again, the Konus punches well above its weight as there's a quick-focus ring with plenty of dioptre adjustment. I wear spectacles but prefer to shoot without them, so getting both the target image and crosshair into focus is often tricky. There was so much adjustment on the Konus, though, that I could shoot either with or without my glasses on.

As the icing on the cake, the Konus 4-12x40 Wild comes with flip-up lens covers, too. This is a nice touch, although because

Despite its lowly price, the Konus Wild comes fully loaded with extras!



the objective flip-up rotates with the AO ring, I found it sometimes fouled the rifle's receiver. So for sessions where I was turning the P/A ring a lot, I simply removed it. It pushes on and off the objective bell easily enough.

The truth is, I really enjoyed shooting rifles with the Konus on board. Partly because I

was just so gobsmacked at its performance-to-price ratio, but mainly because it is just a very good scope. While the £550 Konus Glory impressed me, the £90 Wild knocked me over with a feather. If you're in the market for a new scope, this could well be the biggest bargain of the year. ■

There's no less than +/- 3 dioptres of primary focus



OPTICAL PERFORMANCE

CLARITY AT ...	CENTRE	EDGE
4X	7 5	6 5
8X	9 6	8 5
12X	9 5	8 4

Optical performance is carried out at 25m in typical daylight conditions, viewing newspaper print at low, mid and high magnifications. Scores achieved (in red graphic) are rated as absolute results. The black graphics indicate the reviewer's expectations, based on retail price and brand. Expectation levels will be greater for higher priced scopes from well-known brands, and lower for cheaper scopes from less well-known brands.



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.22	310
.25	310



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GET OFF TO A GOOD START

Mark Camoccio explores why this scaled-down, manageable airgun is the perfect way to introduce youngsters to shooting

I can still remember the event. I was at the old CLA Game Fair. I must have been around 12 years old, and with my good old dad, we sidled up to the shotgun "have-a-go" stand, where eagerly and excitedly, I took up

the invitation. The usual supposed "expert" was on hand, and I took my first shot with a shotgun; only to receive an almighty whack in the shoulder, as the gun did what shotguns do.

The first key point of guidance anyone should have given me

was to pull that gun firmly into the shoulder, to take up the recoil in a controlled manner. It's the real basics where shotguns are concerned, and they didn't! I'm sure it doesn't happen often, and I was probably just unlucky, but me and shotguns have had little to do with each other ever since. Admittedly, I became rather obsessed with airguns, and vastly prefer the somewhat quieter way they go about things. The rest, as they say, is history.

STOEGER X3 TAC (JUNIOR MODEL)

Compact and bijou:
the Stoeger X3 TAC

Synthetics allow
for weight saving
throughout the stock



to fully appreciate the challenge and satisfaction, whatever the chosen shooting discipline. My tale of woe concerned shotguns, but it's equally off-putting, (and I've seen it at some open day events over the years), where airguns are concerned. Many airguns are simply way too heavy and unwieldy for youngsters to handle either safely or effectively, and handling unsuitable kit at the outset can be enough to put them off and they'll simply walk away.

DEDICATED KIT

We really don't want that, but if we want the next generation of shooters to get involved, and come and enjoy some fresh air, we all need to do our bit. Dedicated junior airguns are a vital piece of the jigsaw for sure, and little gems like the gun on test here can really make a difference and play their part. Welcome, then, to the Stoeger X3 TAC, and a very smart little gun it is too.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Make: Stoeger, Italy

Model: X3 TAC

Type: Break barrel, dedicated junior starter model

Power source: Spring piston

Calibre: .177 only

Weight: 4.6lbs

Length: 35.4in

Barrel: 14.5in

Stock: Scaled down, synthetic sporter configuration

Trigger: Two stage

Velocity: 10 shot string using:

BSA Goldstar pellets/ Remington Pest Controller pellets

High 428fps High 470fps

Low 412fps Low 452fps

Ave 422fps Ave 462fps

Total spread 16fps Total spread 18fps

Energy: 3.4ft/lb 3.4ft/lb

RRP: £120 (guide)

Website: stoegerairguns.com/ gmk.co.uk

Youngsters need to be encouraged and signed up to our great shooting sports, and that takes time and effort and a smoothed path



Detail of the
rubber pad



Little hands will love the scaled-down drop-down grip



That moulded muzzle assembly doubles as a cocking aid

Stoeger has slowly evolved its airgun line-up, and as part of the Beretta organisation, it has some really stylish Italian-designed hardware. This X3 TAC is a no-nonsense starter gun for juniors, but Stoeger deserves credit for going the whole hog. Every single element has been carefully thought through, with juniors firmly in mind: it's low weight and deliberately low power offer easy cocking, and it has scaled-down dimensions.

Many parents simply won't want the hassle of a PCP, with all the paraphernalia and high pressure air issues that they entail. So a basic, traditional spring-piston design makes sense for ease of use, storage and safety. The current asking price

of this model means it is easily affordable, too, which can be a big factor when youngsters are showing an interest in something, only to drop it on a whim a few weeks down the line.

"Ergonomic tactical-style stock" is how Stoeger describes the X3 TAC's handle, and the all terrain qualities of the synthetic material certainly looks the part with plenty of stylish features all part of the moulding. Synthetic stocks are practical, too, given they allow for significant weight loss all over, courtesy of the cut-outs throughout the thumb-hole configuration. The drop-down grip is scaled down for small hands, and with attractive chequering here, and both sides of the forend, proper

control is assured. A fairly short barrel and scaled-down cylinder again keep weight down, and with the X3 TAC tipping the scales at a mere 4.6lbs, this model can be handled with ease by all.

GETTING STARTED

Cocking this Stoeger is a civilised affair, and it's an easy sweep down to break the barrel and cock the action. This is only as it should be, given the deliberately low-powered action. A weaker spring, and less swept volume, just keeps everything easy for youngsters, and that's exactly what they need at the start of their shooting experience. Look to the rear of the cylinder, and there's a large

Fibre-optic open sights are always a welcome feature



There's a fully adjustable rear sight complete with finger wheels



STOEGER X3 TAC (JUNIOR MODEL)



That angled forend provides good grip



Plenty of grip moulded into the forend panels

safety catch button. It automatically engages when the action is cocked, and a white dot then shows to confirm the gun is "safe". Nudge it forwards, and the X3 TAC is ready to go. If you need to reset the safety then that's possible too, so all very user friendly.

It's worth noting at this point that it is possible to de-cock the X3 TAC by gripping the barrel and controlling it, nudging off the safety then pulling the trigger and letting the barrel rise up gradually. Most springers are now fitted with an anti-bear trap mechanism, so this makes a refreshing change here. There are times when the action has been cocked, yet we realise we've had enough, or need to check

something, so being able to de-cock the system matters in my book.

PERFORMANCE DETAIL

Down on my range, this Stoeger soon began to shine. As mentioned, breaking the barrel open and cocking the action is really easy, but another plus is the chamfer that's machined into the breech. This means that many pellets just drop in, rather than needing a squeeze to sit flush. This does mean that the barrel needs to be kept pointing down slightly whilst the breech is closed, just to stop pellets falling out, but that's good from a safety aspect in any case.

Fibre-optic open sights come fitted as standard, and with a red

hooded foresight element and green elements in the rearsight, the sight picture is spot on. Full finger wheel adjustment is on offer too, and as usual, I would recommend persevering and learning the ropes with the "irons" first. My eyes have changed over the years, but I could still manage groups sub- $\frac{1}{2}$ in over 10 yards, and around the 1in mark over 20 yards. Fixing an appropriately compact scope in place (the Hawke Airmax 2-7x32 was a perfect fit), soon closed things down, and had me drilling groups of around $\frac{3}{8}$ inch over 20 yards. Proof then that this diminutive sporter has what it takes to reward good technique. ▶



A basic trigger features, but it's more than acceptable



Stoeger branding is laser etched into the cylinder



At 4.6lbs, the Stoeger X3 TAC is very easy to handle indeed



The large user-friendly auto safety sits at the rear



Conventional dovetail rails are here, so plenty of sighting options await



Detail of the break barrel breech configuration



A properly de-rated power plant means the cocking stroke requires little effort

As expected at this price point, the trigger is basic, but with so little work to do (as in far less loading from a weakened power plant) the end result is fairly light. It is creepy, but very acceptable.

As for firing cycle characteristics, low power here equates to modest recoil, and if my test gun is anything to go by, a surprisingly civilised shot release — just a simple metallic ring, with little to no spring resonance.

VERDICT

It's difficult not to like the Stoeger X3 TAC. It's well thought out, has all the features, accuracy and all importantly easy handling that's required in a properly designed dedicated junior gun. ■

Thanks to Range & Country Shooting Supplies in Sleaford, Lincolnshire, for the kind loan of this test rifle. For more information, visit rangeandcountry.co.uk



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NEW PELLETS



DEAD CERTS

JTS .177 Dead Center pellets have been two years in the making, but has it been worth the wait? **Dave Barham** certainly thinks so

The Shooting Party, which distributes these JTS pellets in the UK, has worked closely with the founders of JTS in Katy, Texas, for over a decade, and has been its manufacturing partner for many of its most successful products. JTS Airguns officially introduced its .22 Dead Center Pellets to the world on 4 January, 2023. Having spent more than two years reviewing the current market offerings, it determined that there was a need to produce a competitively priced

product that has performance characteristics better than the industry's best.

JTS commissioned a multinational group of engineers with disciplines in mechanical, industrial, aerospace and design to set this project in motion. This team quickly determined that airgun pellet manufacturing had essentially been unchanged for years. Current pellet processing is inconsistent and requires sorting of all production products to ensure that consumers receive acceptable products. This inspection process is both expensive and time consuming.

The team took the next step in the evolution of pellet manufacturing and designed proprietary equipment that would stabilise the manufacturing process and ensure its consistency, thus reducing the need for sorting. Once the manufacturing equipment was completed the team moved on to the next step in this evolution.

Pellet production consistency is also largely affected by the tooling required to make each pellet. The JTS tooling was designed with three key things in mind. These keys were Standardisation of Tooling, SMED (Single Minute Exchange of Dies)

and No Adjust Tooling. These three concepts are what sets Dead Center pellets apart from their competitors.

The next step was to design pellets that were accurate across as many platforms as possible. As we are all aware there are many styles of airguns from break barrels to high-end competition PCPs. JTS designed the pellets utilising the latest in aerospace designs to ensure that the finished pellets would be superaccurate and consistent. The designs then went through extensive testing across a wide range of airgun platforms and environmental conditions. All JTS pellets are manufactured using state-of-the-art production processes, ensuring uniform weight, shape and balance throughout the tin. The domed head profile supports straight, stable flight and energy retention downrange, while the consistent construction contributes to tighter groupings.

IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

I reviewed the original .22 pellets at the back end of 2023, having used them extensively while reviewing all manner of .22 test rifles, as well and getting out in the field and hunting with them. To say I was impressed is an understatement. I couldn't believe how consistent they were across multiple platforms.

I have recommended them to many .22 shooters since, and have had no negative feedback to date, which says a lot.

You can imagine how excited I was when Mike Hurney from The Shooting Party called me to let me know the .177 pellets had landed! I know for a fact that JTS embarked on a mission to bring us this range of .177 pellets two years ago, after the success of the .22 range. It has taken just over two years to get everything right whilst developing this new waisted .177 pellet line, and from my initial findings it was well worth the wait.

THE RANGE EXPLAINED

I had intended on making this review an all singing all dancing "mega test", but as many of you are aware, at the time of writing it has been raining every day for well over a month. I have taken them to my local club range, and I got some really good results in the rain. I could have winged it and included that data, but I want to be fair to everyone involved and test these pellets in perfect conditions to get the absolute best out of them. If it doesn't stop raining in the next couple of weeks I shall endeavour to drive to an indoor range to do this part of the testing. So watch this

space next month for my thorough testing on the range at multiple distances, plus all the relevant chronograph data to boot.

For now, though, let's have a look at the three different .177 pellets that are available, what they are designed for, plus some techy blurb. I actually sat there and weighed every single pellet from all three tins, and I'm quite frankly astonished by just how uniform they all are. If you've ever weighed pellets yourself, you'll be completely amazed by these findings.

I must make one thing clear before we start. My digital scales are calibrated to 50g and then the unit is switched to grains (gn on these scales). They are super accurate and they were just sitting on my living room table – hardly laboratory conditions, but we are talking in one hundredths of a grain differential here, which is remarkable. The consistency is what blew me away. Pellet after pellet weighed exactly the same as the one before it, with just a tiny minority of deviations.

You may well get slightly different weights on your own scales at home or down on the range, but I would be very surprised if you also get much difference in the consistency of the weight differentials themselves.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE THREE PELLETS

TAKE DOWN DOMED 8.7GR (LIGHTWEIGHT)

These pellets are constructed from high-quality lead alloy typically used for airgun ammunition, providing reliable deformation characteristics on impact for effective energy transfer. They're actually slightly harder than some other pellet brands, which helps them keep their shape and consistency.

They're the lightest pellets in the range with a familiar diabolo shape, and I'm sure these are going to be a firm favourite with target shooters. My initial testing on the range at 30m in the rain returned some excellent results, but more about that next month.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

RRP: £17.99

Pellets per tin: 500

Stated weight: 8.7gr

Average weight: 8.78gr

Weight difference: 0.03gr (488 x 8.78gr, 5 x 8.79gr, 2 x 8.8gr, 5 x 8.77gr)

Pellet length: 6.4mm





TAKE DOWN DOMED 10.4GR (MIDWEIGHT)

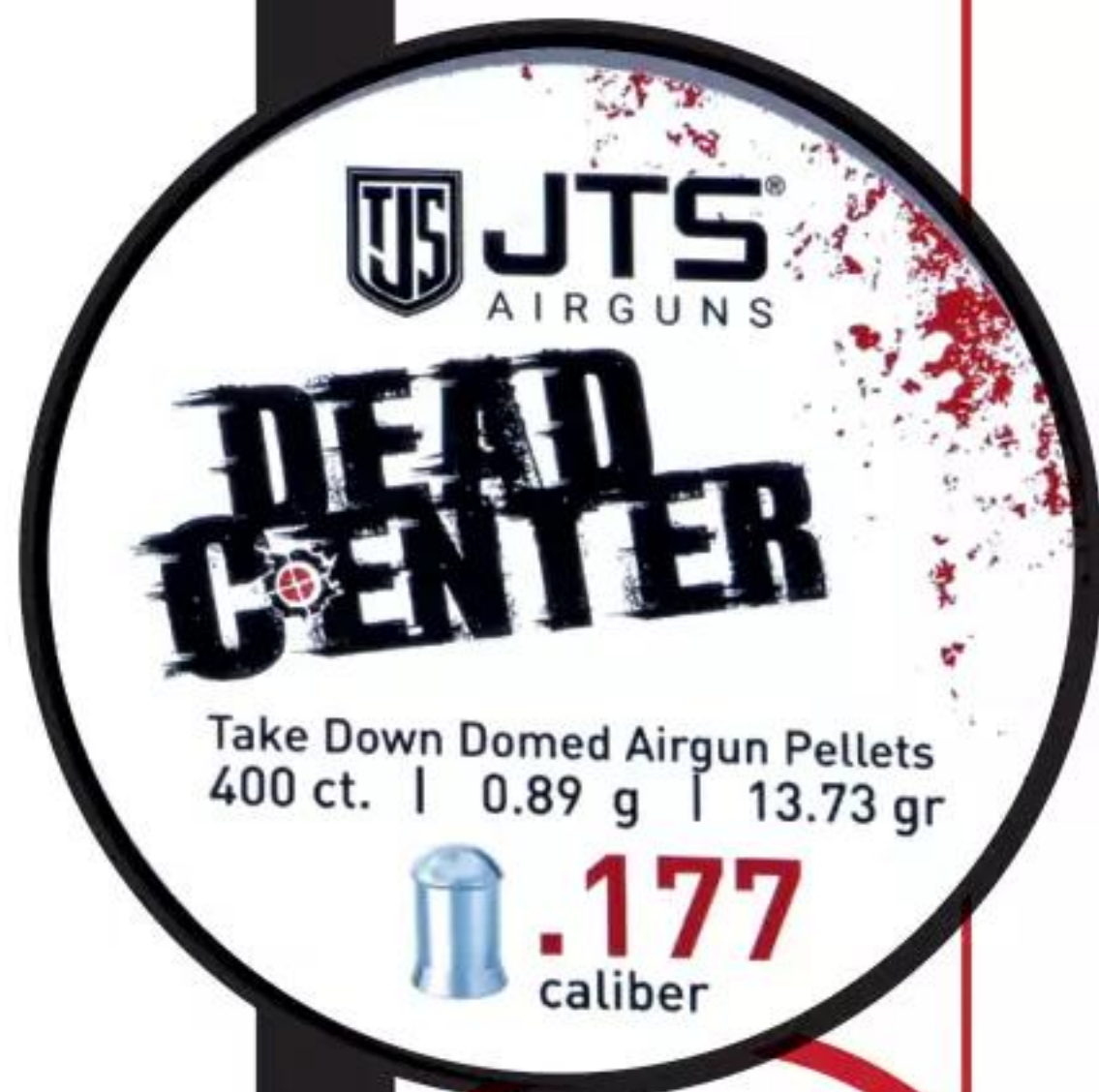
These midweight domed pellets are designed to generate superior velocity and harder hits compared to the lighter ammo, and JTS claims that these pellets carry more downrange energy than standard pellets.

You'll notice that they have a shape more akin to a pellet/slug hybrid with a slightly shorter profile and more mass in the mid-section. These pellets are sure to be a big hit with hunters, but you can also use this .177 pattern for target work and competitions too.

From my initial testing, I'm quite confident that these are going to be my new midrange hunting pellet of choice.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Price:** £18.99
- Pellets per tin:** 500
- Stated weight:** 10.4gr
- Average weight:** 8.37gr
- Weight difference:** 0.04gr (481 x 10.37gr, 6 x 10.38gr, 12 x 10.39gr, 1 x 10.36gr)
- Pellet length:** 6.0mm



TAKE DOWN DOMED 13.73GR (HEAVYWEIGHT)

These are the real brutes of the range, weighing in at 13.73gr – that's nearly 4gr heavier than the .177 pellets I currently use for my hunting!

These feature a domed head profile to help with stable flight, and they're the longest of the bunch measuring in at 7.0mm. That said, they really are getting close to slug territory, with minimal gap under the semi-hollow skirt and a whole lot of mass in the main body. This small gap under the skirt still helps ensure a good seal in the barrel, though.

Again, my initial testing out to 30m has been very interesting, and I think some hunters are going to love these. The added mass and profile is going to help with wind drift downrange, but I think they're going to be especially good for short range rattling with some serious hitting power. ■

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Price:** £18.99
- Pellets per tin:** 400
- Stated weight:** 13.73gr
- Average weight:** 13.75gr
- Weight difference:** 0.03gr (484 x 13.75gr, 5 x 13.77gr, 9 x 13.76gr, 2 x 13.74gr)
- Pellet length:** 7.0mm



NEXT MONTH

In the next issue I'll really be going to town with my in-depth accuracy and velocity findings from 20m out to 50m on my local club range. I think you'll be just as impressed as I am! Until then, for more details on this new JTS .177 Dead Center pellet range, visit shootingparty.uk

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The Shooting Party

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The JTS team took the next step in the evolution of pellet manufacturing and designed proprietary equipment that would stabilise the manufacturing process and ensure its consistency, thus reducing the need for sorting. Once the manufacturing equipment was completed the team moved on to the next step in this evolution. Pellet production consistency is also largely affected by the tooling required to make each pellet. Current pellet tooling is dirty thus leaving the finished product in that state. The JTS tooling was designed with three key things in mind. These keys were Standardisation of Tooling, SMED (Single Minute Exchange of Dies) and No Adjust Tooling. These three concepts are what sets Dead Center Pellets apart from their competitors.

Simply put-Dead Center pellets are more consistent and group better than the current market leaders. *They're Simply the Best!*



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**Mike Morton, Airgun Shooter,
May 20**

**“In a head-to-head test review JTS were found to be between
8-10 times more weight consistent to comparable JSB Exact
and Air Arms Field pellets**

**Mark Camoccio, Countryman’s Weekly,
September 2023**

MODEL	RRP
.177 8.7gr (500)	£17.99
.177 10.4gr (500)	£18.99
.177 13.73gr (400)	£18.99
.22 16.08gr (250)	£ 9.99
.22 18.13gr (250)	£10.99
.25 25.39gr (150)	£13.99
.25 29.6gr (150)	£14.25
.30 45.06gr (100)	£14.99

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A VALUABLE ROLE TO PLAY

BASC's head of biodiversity **Ian Danby** explains how Defra's new grey squirrel policy recognises the important role of airgunners

Grey squirrel control is rarely far from debate, but every so often a policy document lands that quietly acknowledges a reality many of us in the shooting world have known for decades: if you want healthier woodlands and a fighting chance for red squirrels, you need the people who are already out there doing the work.

Defra's recently published *Grey squirrel policy statement: managing the impact of grey squirrels* does just that. It recognises the scale of the problem posed by this invasive non-native species and, crucially, it places landowners at the heart of practical delivery. And we know they rely on us to actually go out and control their numbers.

Grey squirrels are not simply a nuisance species. Their impact on woodland health is profound and well documented. Bark stripping damages trees, reduces timber value and weakens woodland resilience. Their presence also undermines efforts to conserve red squirrels, which continue to cling on in isolated strongholds. Addressing these issues requires sustained control, ideally on every farm or estate so there is a landscape network of control to deny larger areas of the countryside to grey squirrels — something no central authority could hope to deliver on its own.

THAT IS WHERE SHOOTERS COME IN

The new policy works across five broad themes, and shooting interests are embedded in each of them. One of the most important objectives is to increase the amount of land entering Countryside Stewardship for grey squirrel control. This sounds

straightforward on paper, but in reality most landowners need knowledgeable, trustworthy people on the ground to assess damage and carry out effective control. Across the country, those people are

“ Grey squirrel control is one of the clearest examples of how airguns can be used responsibly and effectively in conservation work ”

already there — often equipped with an air rifle, an intimate knowledge of the ground and a long-standing relationship with the landowner.

For airgunners in particular, this policy matters. Grey squirrel control is one of the clearest examples of how airguns can be used responsibly and effectively in conservation work. Quiet, accurate and well-suited to woodland environments, air rifles have long been a practical tool for those carrying out regular, humane control. Defra's recognition of volunteer involvement reinforces the legitimacy of this role.

Partnership working is another welcome feature of the policy. Local Nature Recovery Strategies are highlighted as a mechanism for encouraging coordinated grey squirrel management, and this is an area where BASC has been heavily engaged. We have responded to dozens of consultations, consistently making the case that ignoring grey squirrels undermines wider biodiversity ambitions. You simply cannot talk about woodland recovery while leaving one of its most damaging pressures unchecked.

The commitment to allow volunteers to assist with control on Forestry England land is also significant. This is not an untested

idea. BASC has a proven track record of delivering structured, safe and effective volunteer-led control through partnerships such as the National Forest. Those volunteers were all using airguns — shooting at baiting stations with inbuilt backstops. Opening the door to more of this work is a sensible, pragmatic step.

Of course, control today must sit alongside solutions for tomorrow. BASC continues to support research into longer-term approaches, including immuno-contraception work led by the Animal and Plant Health Agency. Volunteers have already played a role in field trials, helping to assess squirrel numbers and practical delivery methods. At the same time, we remain engaged with pine marten reintroduction projects, recognising that natural predation may form part of the wider picture — but it is not a silver bullet.

Training, guidance and communication underpin everything. Effective grey squirrel management depends on skilled practitioners who understand welfare, legality and best practice. Providing that support to shooters and volunteers is something BASC takes seriously, and the new policy aligns closely with work already underway.

What this policy ultimately shows is that shooting is not a problem to be managed out of existence, but a solution to be worked with. For airgunners, it is another reminder that what we do matters — not just for sport, but for the health of the countryside we care about.

If Defra's words are matched by continued support on the ground, this could mark a genuinely positive step forward. Grey squirrel control is hard, unglamorous and ongoing — but with shooters properly recognised and enabled, it is achievable. ■

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Whether for display or use, the wooden-stocked SLR L1A1 is an excellent replica with a deluxe touch

THE WOODEN WONDER

John Milewski reviews a deluxe, real-wood replica of the Lee Enfield L1A1 SLR, an air rifle commissioned by The Shooting Party that really brings British military history to life

As a long-term fan of the FN FAL/SLR platform, I have featured the various replica models that have been available over the last two years. Some have sold out pretty quickly, demonstrating the popularity of the FAL/SLR with others and not just this scribe. This month, I'm grateful to Mike Hurney at The Shooting Party for the loan of what is perhaps the top-of-the-range "deluxe" model of the SLR: the wooden stocked early British variant.

I've covered the history of the FAL/SLR platform in my previous reviews, so while not wishing to go over old ground, I will briefly outline why the airgun replica looks like it does and consider it in British Service.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Britain was heavily involved with the development of what was to

become the FN FAL and a decision to adopt the FAL was made in the early 1950s, with troop trials commencing in 1954. The rifle was formally adopted as the L1A1 or simply SLR for Self Loading Rifle in 1957, and then saw service up until the late 1980s, after being replaced with the SA80/L85 in 1985.

The SLR saw heavy use in Malaya with British forces, then colonial conflicts such as Dhofar and Aden, as well as use closer to home in Northern Ireland. Early models had wooden furniture and The Shooting Party has commissioned a wooden stocked version as their top-of-the-range SLR replica. Many CO₂-



The Brothers In Arms logo is discreet as the wooden carrying handle covers it when at rest

THE SHOOTING PARTY'S LEE ENFIELD L1A1 'SLR'



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Make: Lee Enfield

Model: L1A1 SLR

Power source: CO₂ 12g cartridge

Shots per cartridge: 40 – 50

Type: Single-shot repeater

Magazine capacity: Up to 18 rounds

Sights: Front post elevation adjustable, windage adjustable rear with choice of two apertures

Construction: Wood forend and butt stock, metal receiver and barrel to scale of the original rifle

Muzzle velocity: Advertised up to 420fps. Slightly more on test

Recommended ammunition: Steel BBs or copper-coated lead ball

After-market options: Sling, optics, original parts such as sights and bayonet

RRP: £299.99

Website: shootingparty.uk



A hinged butt trap is nicely replicated for an oil bottle or perhaps some Pellgun oil

powered replicas are stocked in fake wood-looking plastic, which to be fair is often difficult to tell from the real deal, but no such fakery with the SLR. The wood is real and the test rifle had a lovely dark reddish tinge to the finish, which really makes it stand out.

One criticism at the entire range of CO₂ replica FAL/SLRs is that some parts don't exactly replicate the originals. There is a good reason for this, in that the firearm platform was adopted by some 90 countries and therefore numerous variations exist. One such country was Austria, who called theirs the SA-58. Years after the Austrians replaced their SA-58 with the Steyr AUG bullpup, the FAL tooling was bought by U.S. company David Selvaggio Arms (DSA). In honour of the Austrian model, the basic DSA model was named the DSA-58 and it has been

updated in recent years with for example a Picatinny rail over the dust cover.

REALISM VERSUS BUDGET

The Far Eastern manufacturers of the CO₂ replicas chose the DSA-58 as their base model, which is why parts like the stock resemble the Austrian FN more than the British L1A1. Mike Hurney explained that investing in moulds to better replicate the pistol grip for example or maybe the butt stock itself would add considerable cost to the model and place it beyond the budget of many enthusiasts. By offering wooden furniture, this has added around £50 to the cost of the polymer version but in my view, it is a worthy investment.

For those seeking greater authenticity, there is nothing to stop an owner upgrading some parts on the SLR, as indeed I have with

some of the models I have tested in the past. For example, an original SLR aperture sight will fit the CO₂ replica, as will a sling and original bayonet with just a little grinding required to make the latter fit. ➤



Controls such as a spring loaded bolt and take-down lever move but serve no purpose beyond replicating originals



The wooden furniture oozes class. The Shooting Party supplied a sling but John had an original handy for the photo shoot



The front sight can be screwed up or down for adjustment using the supplied tool – don't lose it!



The top Picatinny rail allows optics such as the PAO red/green dot that is supplied by The Shooting Party to be fitted

For added authenticity, original SLR parts such as this aperture sight can be sourced from militaria or firearms dealers



Possibly an original stock can be adapted but I have not tried doing so. These options are not cheap but infinitely possible.

That said, when the test rifle arrived, it was immediately apparent this was a quality replica. The box artwork features the rifle along with images of it in use with 1980s era British forces and it really stands out. The replica itself is protected by plenty of foam, shaped to fit and upon taking it out of the box, the wooden furniture really gives it a classy look, so I'm delighted that The Shooting Party decided to invest in wooden furniture for this model. The wooden furniture is solid rather than hollow, which results in an increased weight of 7lb 6oz, so more than the polymer stocked version.

PERFORMANCE

Stunning looks may be one thing but let's see how the SLR performs downrange. The CO₂ cartridge and 18-round magazine is housed within the steel outer magazine case, a feature first found on Russian Yunker 2 and Russian Yunker 3 airguns at the start of the 21st century. The mechanism

is also the same but with slightly increased power.

The Shooting Party claims muzzle velocity up to 420fps with steel BBs. However, the test rifle bettered this claim. Steel BBs weigh around 5.5g, whereas a copper-coated lead ball such as Smart Shot is heavier at around 7.4g. I'm no fan of steel BBs as they can ricochet and damage steel targets, so I tend to use Smart Shot almost exclusively. The test SLR averaged 413fps with the highest velocity recorded with Smart Shot being 430fps. This equates to 2.8ft/lb, which is above average for a CO₂ replica airgun.

Velocity is one thing but accuracy is more important. I was therefore delighted to find the SLR grouped well under an inch when fired standing unsupported. Shots landed around two inches low though, with the front sight set as low as possible. It was still possible to connect with a tin can placed 12 yards away by aiming at its top. The presence of the Picatinny rail may detract slightly from authenticity but it does allow an optic such as the PAO red dot sight The Shooting Party kindly included with the test rifle to be used. Fitting

the sight meant I could aim directly at a target and be sure of hitting it at 15 yards and even more, so there are no complaints from me in the accuracy department. I particularly enjoyed firing rapid shots at a 40mm bell target aperture placed 10 yards away, which made a substantial racket when hit multiple times!

TRIGGER TECHNIQUE AND THE BIG SCREEN

The trigger pull is long, as pulling it tensions a hammer spring in a similar manner to a double action revolver before the hammer is released and opens the valve for a single shot. I tend to take up 80% or more of the slack quickly and then slow down for the remainder of the pull, so as not to disrupt the sight picture by moving at the vital moment. However, the long pull is light enough to keep the SLR on aim throughout, if that is your preference.

The SLR can be seen in several films and one of the best to include wooden stocked versions is *The Siege of Jadotville*. The Alan Clarke play *Contact* is a very gritty and tense portrayal of the SLR in British hands during The Troubles, while *The Wild Geese* gives the classic rifle plenty of screen time. The SLR also featured in TV series *The Professionals*, which was a personal favourite of mine.

The SLR is certainly a quality replica that displays well and shoots well. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with this one and ended up buying it. My sincere thanks go to Mike Hurney and the Shooting Party for the loan and sale of the test rifle. ■



John found the SLR's box artwork pops in an old school way, when companies made an effort with box artwork and presentation

L1A1 SLR
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With a robust build reminiscent of its military predecessor, this CO2 air rifle exudes strength and reliability. Its solid steel construction ensures durability and longevity. Featuring a 4.5mm steel BB calibre, this air rifle delivers exceptional accuracy and power, making it ideal for casual target shooting and plinking enthusiasts.

SPECIFICATION

- Calibre: 4.5mm Steel BB
- Power Source: 12g CO2
- Magazine Capacity: 15 rounds
- Shots per Capsule: 40-50
- Metal Barrel & Receiver
- Hardwood Forestock & Backstock
- To 1:1 scale of Original Rifle
- 1913 Picatinny/Weaver sight rail

HARD WOOD STOCK!

True to its military-inspired design, this air rifle boasts the authentic features of the Lee Enfield British L1-A1 rifle, and bears the Lee Enfield logo. The original rifles were manufactured at a number of sites in the UK, including Enfield in London and at BSA in Birmingham. From its rugged stock to its distinctive barrel assembly, every detail reflects the classic aesthetics of the original firearm.

This 4.5mm steel BB CO2 air rifle offers an exciting blend of nostalgia and performance. Experience the thrill of shooting with a timeless classic reimagined for modern enthusiasts. For more shooting fun, we have added the optional picatinny/weaver rail to allow the use of Reflex and Red Dot sights, which were added to some later UK versions.



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A LIGHTER OPTION

The Weihrauch HW99S seems to defy the laws of physics and **Pete Evans** explains how this is so

No one can deny that Weihrauch delivers a top-class product, which extends across its whole range of spring, pre-charged pneumatics and pistols.

If there ever was something amounting to a criticism, it would be that its spring guns can be on the heavy side. In the case of

Weihrauch, the equation of weight, solidity, build quality and use of quality materials equals longevity. When considering spring guns, weight does work in your favour as heavier guns soak up recoil, making them much easier to shoot accurately with less hold sensitivity. Conversely, full-power lightweight guns can be more “jumpy”, punishing poor technique from the shooter at every shot.

I regularly come across Weihrauch guns that have been used and badly abused, which when given minimal attention rise from the ashes much as a Phoenix would. So, I suppose the question still stands as to whether it is possible to have a lightweight Weihrauch that shoots accurately, without compromising on that legendary longevity?

Despite the requests for a lighter option, there was one available and has been so for some considerable time. The HW50 ticked the boxes for many requests, although the



There's a gun suitable for everyone in the Weihrauch range



Pete usually uses a pre-charged gun in the field, but he wouldn't hesitate to take this one out



Cocking is smooth, and doesn't require a lot of effort

earlier models didn't seem to run at a power that was acceptable for the UK market. In retrospect their power output was very respectable, but remember back in the 1980s unless a rifle produced as close as possible to 11.9ft/lb it didn't have the X factor.

The launch of the HW95 was a significant milestone for Weihrauch, taking the market by storm, with its scaled-down HW80 size, full-power output, it was everything the spring hunter wanted.

Not content with one full power mediumweight break-barrel gun, Weihrauch took a step further

with the HW99S, which was a further development of the HW50. The HW50 title lived on for guns available on the home German market, and has been resurrected for the jubilee edition models currently available.

Despite much to commend the new HW99 (full-power lighter weight), I think it fair to say that it didn't quite gain the same traction as did the HW95, that is until some significant upgrades around 15 years ago.

CATCHING THE EYE

There is nothing like a new set of clothing to take someone's eye, and it's not so dissimilar to guns.

A new stock shape, and an important change to the cocking lever (more detail on that later and next month), certainly did much to recommend the HW99 to the airgun-buying public.

It was in September 2013 with a visit to Sandwell Field Sports in the Midlands, that my interest in

the HW99 was first piqued. Tony Wall, the proprietor and gunsmith, had just developed the "Imp". This was based on the HW99, with a shortened and screw cut barrel, short HW moderator and an internal tune based on his own spring and guide sets. I believe that the Imp did much to boost the gun's popularity.

Over the last 13 years I've had a few HW99s through my hands, from the very early models, to some more recent examples. Currently I have two .177 guns, between eight and 12 years old respectively. For the purpose of this article, I'm considering the younger of the two, although the currently available HW99 has an even better designed stock with a shallower butt stock, and rounded profile forend.

Mechanically they are identical, so this review adequately illustrates what you would expect to find on a new gun. It also serves the purpose of a long-term review, with fairly regular use over its eight-year life.



A compact, lightweight and fully powered air rifle

SMALLER SCALE

We have already established that the HW99 is substantially lighter than its stablemates and also compact in length. With an unscoped weight of 3.2kg, an overall length of 105cm, with 41cm of that being the barrel, it's going to be very portable and manoeuvrable in the field.

It is notable that the barrel diameter is 15mm as opposed to the 16mm of

the HW80/95. The breech block is correspondingly narrower, meaning that barrels are not interchangeable with the HW80/95. As standard barrels are available in .177 and .22, although I know that .20 and .25 are made, and perhaps could be available as a special order. As I write, I have a used .20 cal barrel on the way to me, purchased from the AirGun Forum.

Grooved at the muzzle to accept a foresight, it is possible to fit a specific HW moderator that fits around the foresight. If you want to fit a standard over barrel type, it will mean filing the grooves flat first. From a personal perspective I can't justify the need to fit a moderator, although if you intend shortening the barrel it would be useful if only to act as a cocking aid.



The barrel is 15mm in diameter, as opposed to the 16mm of the HW95/80



The low cheekpiece, designed with open sights in mind, is ambidextrous in nature



The generous chequering gives a firm handhold



More chequering to aid palm traction

Despite the barrel being a smaller diameter, the main cylinder has an internal diameter of 26mm, with a piston stroke of 71 mm. These statistics point to the fact that this gun has been designed for the UK market (12ft/lb) limit, rather than a gun whose power can be altered for differing markets by adding an alternative spring.

The synergy of stroke length and cylinder diameter bode well for this rifle, in relation to how it behaves in use.

ON-GOING DEVELOPMENT

I mentioned earlier about some changes Weihrauch had made that improved the status of the HW99.

It seems that over time some of the earlier models developed

problems caused by the underside of the cocking link contacting the underside of the cylinder causing friction, and in some cases galling.

The addition of a spring-loaded strip helps to keep the cocking link insulated from the cylinder maintaining a smooth operation.

The good news is that if you have an earlier model the updated cocking link can be retrofitted, and they are not very expensive. This is a good example of a manufacturer monitoring their product, listening to customer feedback and responding in providing a solution to an issue.

RETAINED COMPONENTS

As with the majority of the HW spring gun range Weihrauch has seen fit to use the legendary Rekord

trigger unit, which as we all know wants for nothing, apart from perhaps a Rowan set back blade.

As I have already stated the stocks fitted to the current models differ slightly from the gun pictured, although they are not too dissimilar.

Made by Italian maestros Minelli, they are crafted from beech, with a generous amount of chequering at the fore-grip and pistol grip.

Designed with a low comb for use with open sights, they are also fully ambidextrous. I liked the inclusion of a flat section at the rear of the stock, placed in a neutral position for the thumb up hold in either right or left hand. Despite this being a lighter rifle, the stock is a full adult size, sits comfortably in the shoulder, the cheekpiece being most suitable for



Open sights are part of standard equipment, and fully adjustable



It is good to see provision for the thumb up hold



It is also good to see the HW99 fitted with the legendary Rekord trigger

a scope in medium mounts. An optic such as a 2-7x32 would be ideal in my view, anything much bigger could make the rifle unbalanced and could look a bit "odd".

Although not a factory option, I know that Custom Stock of Sheffield makes a walnut stock, with its usual options, if you fancy something a bit more special.

THE SHOOTING EXPERIENCE

I've already alluded to the fact that this rifle's statistics stack up well on paper, but how does that actually translate in practice?

To establish that, it's out with the JSB RS Exacts (a lighter pellet is my preference for spring guns), and some targets set out at the customary 30 metres.

Before testing it is as well to check the power of this rifle which has received several years of running in.

Peaking at 11.1ft/lb, with 11fps spread over a 10-shot string, is perfect in my book. I seem to remember this rifle hovering around 10.7ft/lb when new, which with a spring gun in .177 is just right. I certainly wouldn't want to make any adjustments now that it has settled

at 11.1ft/lb, as there is a fine line between a sweet and harsh firing gun, especially in a .177 springer.

Using this rifle is a revelation, especially for anyone who baulks at the thought of spring gun recoil. The best description I can give is that the rifle feels unpowered, as in very little felt recoil. It's just so pleasant to shoot, and as I've suggested earlier seems to defy the laws of physics. Lightweight springers, especially in .177, shouldn't behave in this way — but this one does.

Because there seems so little "going on", this gun gives an excellent account of itself on targets, keeping groups of five inside a 16mm circle at 30 metres. Although these days I tend to use a PCP for pest control, I wouldn't have any hesitation taking this out on a hunt. The light weight and high performance would make it a winning combination.

WHERE FROM HERE?

This gun doesn't need any attention at this point, although I've picked up another HW99, which hasn't led such a charmed life as the test subject. My newest acquisition, bought from Neath Gunshop for £120, quite frankly could do with an overhaul. It's power is a bit low, and doesn't feel as smooth as it should, but I'm confident that with a modest outlay it can be improved greatly. If I can get the .20 barrel in time I may even give that a go as well. There's much fun to be had with a springer. ■

Weihrauch air rifles are imported to the UK by Hull Cartridge. For more information visit the brand's website at weihrauch.co.uk



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XM1 Bullpup with NEW carbon fibre barrel sleeve.

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THE STORY OF THE SCHIMMEL GP-22

Jon Young explores how the iconic Luger inspired the Schimel GP-22, an air pistol introduced in the 1940s that was powered by an 8g CO₂ bulb

Until recently, most people would have been able to recognise one of the world's most identifiable

handgun designs: the famous Luger. Now that we are told that all guns are bad, it's up to us to try to remember them! Unfortunately, you can get into all sorts of arguments

over correct identification and designations, but only if you are as sad as those arguing whether this should be called the Parabellum P-08 or something equally accurate,



The pistol in the release position surrounded by 8g Sparklet soda siphon bulbs

and just as boring. To post-war generations, rightly or wrongly, it has and always will be known as "the Luger". This iconic pistol was referenced repeatedly in popular culture for many decades thereafter.

Returning GIs bringing these home as war trophies may have helped to fuel interest. In reality, the design had been around for roughly four decades before, entering Swiss military service in its earliest form way back in 1900. Once, there was even localised

assembly taking place in Britain by Vickers Limited.

So, back to airguns. What's the coolest thing imaginable to anyone wanting to buy a neat new airgun? Well, it would help to be one that was modelled on a famous handgun or rifle. The Germans had been at this for years, releasing lead ball and pellet guns styled on the Mauser K98 rifle and the Luger. With things settling after 1945, heads settled down and got to work designing and working out ideas — looking back but thinking forward.

The aim was to manufacture a new air pistol, one with the iconic styling of the Luger. What would power it? Springer power was an obvious choice, but it had been done before with Haenel's pre-war pellet pistols: the early and very rare Haenel air pistol, the later Haenel 28 and 28R Repeater, and even the simpler Haenel 26. Most were too expensive to make now, and because of that iconic styling, the crossover to air pistol had meant very low power.

Carbon dioxide gas was well known as being a useful propellant. It had, after all, been used in Giffard airguns. Since then, it had been used in a number of weird and wonderful ways and by this time had been around for as long as the Luger itself. Sherlock Holmes had his own personal Gasogene dispenser for creating carbonated drinks at 221b Baker Street, thanks to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. These early gas bottles came complete with cane or wire frames, as the glass had a habit of exploding if the CO₂-producing powders were mixed wrongly. These gave way to new British-made soda siphons with their steel CO₂ Sparklet bulbs. Queen Victoria would have sampled a much safer whisky and soda as a result, although for decades many later siphons still retained safety restraints!

These little bulbs of pure energy were quickly adopted for other uses. Model plane and boat engines in the Edwardian era had been powered by these rather than fuel. More recent innovations in our story's timeline were dispensers for personal use for dental hygiene. Blasting your teeth clean at home with one of these contraptions may have been less scary than going to the dentist, but only just. The larger 8g size was soon the industry standard for both British Sparklet and more recent American Soda King dispensers.

THE GP-22 MAKES ITS DEBUT

Fast forward to the late 1940s and the Schimel Arms gas pistol, Model GP-22, finally appeared. Looking like dad's wartime Luger, the Schimel was a pellet gun powered by the 8g bulb, with a working toggle action. In reality, this was simply the pellet probe on a hinged ▶



A closer look at the toggle lock pellet probe, steel sear bar and trigger release

arm for a single-shot design. Pulling this up manually retracted the probe backwards, revealing the pellet breech. Available in .22 only, it was originally designed to take pellets and round lead balls, with the manufacturer once supplying small branded card tubes of ammunition.

Inside the air pistol there was no hammer, no sear, nor any valve! So how could this be? There are a number of different and complicated ways to describe how the Schimel works, but let's go for the simplest, as the design is just so simple it trips many up.

The inner pellet barrel passes within the hollowed frame above the grip area. Two large rubber cup seals slide onto the back end of the barrel along with a final large steel olive fitting. In situ, the seal to the front is static; the rear one slides back and forth with the olive. The area between the two seals forms a chamber. Gas enters and pressurises this chamber; the moving rear seal and olive naturally seek to move rearward along the barrel. Externally in the pellet breech area, a sprung bar stops them dead from doing this by jamming against the visible face of the steel olive.

The seal behind inside now sits conveniently over a slot cut into the barrel, keeping this CO₂ exit path shut. Pulling the trigger, the sprung bar is free to swing out of the way; the breech olive and seal shunt further rearward, exposing the slot in the barrel, then the gas flows out into the barrel behind the pellet. In modern terms, the slot is the transfer port, the sprung bar acts as a sear, and the chamber area a valve of sorts.

After the piercing process, the rear charging arm is released out for every shot then closed shut. This allows a portion of gas up the transfer tube into the chamber to fill it beforehand. If you have your Wurzel Gummidge thinking head screwed on tightly, it stands to reason that after taking one shot, the exit is still open. All gas will be lost if another shot is attempted. The trick? Remember to use the reset button on the side of the frame! This physically pushes the breech olive with the seal behind it back into position, sealing over the transfer port slot. Told you it was simple!

It's so simple a design it's mind-blowing. There are no delicate parts to wear out — well, compared to a modern CO₂ job. As a factory-made item, allegedly the first to use small Sparklet-type CO₂ bulbs, the Schimel could prove troublesome, however, due to the seals. Advice at the time was not to leave your Schimel charged with CO₂ gas for any length of time and certainly never for storage. Discharging all remaining gas by deliberately not pushing the reset button back was actually good housekeeping. In theory, the Schimel design is logical and faultless, as under the pressure of expanding gas the seals balloon out, forced tightly against the inner surface of a circular chamber as in a hydraulic tube. The original seals used came from within the hydraulics industry after all. Sourcing good quality cup seals was and still is the issue today. Seals will eventually leak on any CO₂ design. Putting up with this, you have an accurate, well-balanced air pistol.

Today many dozens of recent military-style CO₂ air pistols have flooded the market. It all started with the Schimel. ■



The pistol's reset button, which needs to be pushed forward before use

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WHATSAPP

ON THE BENCH WITH MATT

Matthew Gleaves BEM shares his personal thoughts on the skills that are required for consistent benchrest shooting success

My experience has taught me that a champion shooter's skills are spread across three main headings, which I refer to as "The Pillars of Air Rifle Benchrest". They are: marksmanship, mental strength and technical ability. A champion exhibits these in equal measure, as the potential for long-term success is limited without any one of them. While quality equipment helps, remember that money cannot buy success.

Marksmanship is the most obvious skill, but it involves more than just pointing the gun. It requires mastering sub-skills like shooting in the wind and trigger control, while managing the biological interface between rifle and shooter. You must learn to control your body position, grip strength, breathing and even your heartbeat. Ensure your training incorporates all these attributes, and always practice exactly as you intend to compete.

The Three Pillars of Air Rifle Benchrest — few in number but big in impact



Matthew was Benchrest UK National Champion in 2023 and 2025

Mental strength is often the least practiced skill. Calmness, focus and concentration are learned abilities, not mystical powers we toggle at will. You must manage your self-talk to keep the "monkey on your shoulder" at bay. Make decisions based on data and conditions rather than emotion, and avoid short cuts that will eventually bite you. Benchrest is defined by details, so you must have the mental fortitude to stick to your practiced routines during competition and refuse to settle for half-measures.

Technical ability is the most overlooked skill. While you don't need to be a gunsmith, you must understand how your rifle works and how that affects accuracy. A chronograph is essential; a total pellet speed spread over 15fps is the first sign of a mechanical issue. You should know how to perform simple fixes, like replacing breech or fill port seals, and carry spares with you. Additionally,

learn to adjust the hammer spring and regulator within legal limits to ensure your pellets are running at their most accurate velocity. Learning the "feel" of a correctly running rifle requires significant time behind the butt.

Though spare time is often limited, dedicated effort in these three areas gives you the best chance to be the best shooter you can be.

SHOOTING TIP

The biggest skill I've learned is when *not* to take a shot and reset yourself. Once there is any doubt or self-talk "that it will be okay" you must stop as things must be right to press that trigger.

JOIN THE GANG

Benchrest UK is the only tour affiliated to both the European and World benchrest federations. If you want to know more and get involved visit benchrestuk.com and airability.uk. Also see Facebook and YouTube. ■

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Pete Muir, one of the founding fathers of what has become a treasured HFT group



IT'S GREAT UP NORTH

Airgun World talks to Pete Muir, one of the founding fathers of Northern Monkey HFT, to find out what the past 10 years has taught the group about running events and much, much more

AIRGUN WORLD (AW): WHAT EXACTLY IS NORTHERN MONKEY HFT, AND AT WHOM IS IT AIMED?

Pete Muir (PM): The Northern Monkey HFT group consists of a number of like-minded airgunners who enjoy the sport of Hunter Field Target (HFT). The goal of the group is to hold monthly HFT shoots in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, while simultaneously ensuring the courses are always first-class, without compromise and delivered within a safe environment. The events cater for all-comers. You could have a complete novice on one side of you and a world-title-winning shooter on the other.

AW: WHEN WAS NORTHERN MONKEY HFT FOUNDED, AND WHO WERE THE FOUNDING MEMBERS?

PM: The group was founded by chance in 2016. At the shooting range where we are still based, a few of the local shooters had talked about trying out the HFT side of the sport. Unfortunately, there was nothing within 100 miles, so we decided to set up our own. We initially thought it would be an informal, small practice for maybe half a dozen of us now and again. As the only person who had shot any HFT, I was somehow pushed to the forefront.

Surprisingly, we still have some of the same founding members from

those early days. Dave Dresser is my right-hand man and generally gets the blame for my frequent inadequacies. Tom Ireson is still in the background doing all the "techy" stuff that Luddites such as myself can't do: score spreadsheets, looking after the "interweb" stuff and even fixing targets in his workshop. Tom is an ever-present cog in the machine.

AW: WHERE DOES THE NAME COME FROM?

PM: The name wasn't anything we thought long and hard about. I have a few shooting friends from down South, and they used to lambast me with the "Northern Monkey" moniker whenever I was visiting shoots. We went with "Northern Monkey HFT" for no other reason than it was a working title for our original project. Ten years on, it has



never been changed. It suits what the group is all about.

AW: WAS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NORTHERN MONKEY HFT STRAIGHTFORWARD?

PM: Setting up the group was fairly simple, as we weren't originally looking to achieve anything more than a handful of targets to practise with. Bob Dunkley is the owner of the range where we are based; he has been a multiple world champion in various shooting disciplines and is a huge advocate of target shooting. He gave the group lots of encouragement and help in the early days.

The first events were held at Woodview Air Rifle Range. The range has a large adjoining woodland which is fantastic for HFT. As I mentioned, it was originally

meant to be a small introduction to HFT for those new to the sport. Each month, however, we seemed to move on from that, and very soon it became a full 30-target course run to strict rulings.

We started with absolutely nothing. The range owner donated some targets, we begged for others from various people, and the original members generously dug into their own pockets to purchase targets. Most of the other equipment was "acquired". It's funny looking back; everything was scrounged, borrowed and, er, borrowed again.

AW: WHAT WERE THE VALUABLE LESSONS YOU LEARNED EARLY ON?

PM: One of the first lessons we learned — which has stayed with us — is that safety rulings must be strictly enforced. At a standard HFT shoot, the safety side of things is generally well-adhered to. When we first started, however, the rifle handling of some newcomers was frightening, to say the least. From the outset, we made sure there were no half-measures. People either follow the safety rulings or they aren't allowed back. Safety can't be compromised; there's always someone who thinks they know better, but we don't accept risk-takers. These are only basic rules, and I always make a point of saying that if junior shooters can follow the guidelines, there's no excuse for stubborn older folk.

AW: WAS THERE A SINGLE MOMENT WHEN YOU THOUGHT "THIS COULD BE A SUCCESS" OR WAS IT A MORE GRADUAL THING?

PM: It's hard to define "success". We started with the idea of a few practice targets, but it's been a gradual upward momentum from day one. We moved from a few targets to a course, then a new course each month, then a competition day, then a full series. Eventually, our courses started to get recognition for the work that goes into them, and we've been invited to set courses for the UKAHFT, the WHFTO and other one-off events. We've set the bar high, but there is still a long way to go.

One thing I will say that equates to success is when a lane is wrongly

called "illegal" by a competitor. "That target is over distance" or "that kill-zone size is incorrect" — those comments are music to a course setter's ears. I try not to be smug, but it's a fantastic feeling when you put so much effort into a target — say, a range trap — and it works exactly as intended.

AW: WHAT RULES/ MANTRAS ARE YOU GUIDED BY IN THE RUNNING OF NORTHERN MONKEY HFT?

PM: Safety aside, we are a very laid-back bunch. The Northern Monkey HFT group is known for being one of the friendliest in the country, and we work hard to keep it that way. Just follow the guidelines and show respect to your fellow airgunners, that's all we ask.

AW: WHAT MAKES A GOOD HFT COURSE AND WHAT ARE THE HALLMARKS OF ONE LAID OUT BY NORTHERN MONKEY HFT?

PM: A good HFT course should be one that's always "clearable" but doesn't actually get cleared. In an ideal world, you want at least a couple of lanes where the competitor scratches their head, clueless, after the shot, wondering why they missed. It's far too easy to set a long course in the open on a windy day, or set everything at maximum distance. That latter point is a common mistake made by new course setters; stretching a target to its maximum isn't the only way to keep scores down.

Some of the top shooters these days are phenomenal, and it takes more than long shots to fool them. I like to include range traps, different-sized targets, odd kill-zone sizes, varying light effects and elevated shots. I have some tricks up my sleeve that I'm not aware of others doing; they seem to work, so they stay secret. It's a satisfying challenge to outsmart the top shots.

AW: HOW DO YOU KEEP COURSES INTERESTING, AND FROM WHOM, IF ANYONE, DO YOU TAKE INSPIRATION/ GUIDANCE?

PM: The legendary Ian Bainbridge told me right from the off: "Everyone should be able to shoot your courses." All lanes need to be





Shooters of all ages and abilities are welcome to come and have a go

suitable for everyone — clear for either hand, accessible for those using sticks, and catering to every ability. At our venue, we always try to have a new firing line. We are fortunate to have access to a large, mature woodland, so we mix it up each month. It means a lot of hard work for the volunteers, but that's one of the appeals of Northern Monkey HFT — it's always different.

AW: IS THERE SUCH A THING AS THE PERFECT COURSE?

PM: No course setter would ever say there is a perfect course, as they always chase the impossible and are never happy with the result. It's well known they're a

grumpy, miserable bunch chasing perfection! But a venue combination of Emley Moor, Furnace Mill lakes, Cloybank's notorious wind and Anston's grounds would be fantastic.

AW: IS THE WEATHER A FRIEND OR FOE?

PM: For me, the biggest factor in missed shots is the wind. The shooters consistently at the top of the leaderboards are those who can shoot well in the wind. I once read: "You don't learn how to shoot in the wind by not shooting in it." I've unashamedly stolen that mantra. My advice is to practise in the wind, whereas many people will call off a session for that reason.

Most course setters pray to the wind gods the night before; I, on the other hand, set a course for no wind. Our woodland is deceptively sheltered. You can hear the wind rushing through the treetops but feel nothing below. It's sometimes hard to get any movement on a pellet's flight, so I set targets as if there will be none. But that's the beauty of an outdoor sport — we can't predict it. We've had to move pegs or firing lines when a pond's edge was underwater on shoot day, and we even had to cancel once when a storm took several trees down exactly where we were meant to be lying.

AW: WHAT DOES LEGACY MEAN TO YOU?

PM: Would we leave a legacy if it all ended tomorrow? I doubt it. But we were one of the first in the country to have a "Sticks" class,

and it's nice to see that this has been adopted at a national level and even found a place at the World Championships. I believe we have helped push HFT in the North East over the last 10 years.

I know for a fact our antics will always be talked about. The social side of NMHFT is unsurpassed. I consider many of the regulars to be good friends. One of my best friends is a fellow "primate" — I'm not sure if that's a good or bad reflection on me! When we go to the WHFTA, we take up the whole hotel. Everyone wants to get involved that weekend, not because we are the greatest shooters (we aren't) but because a "Monkey Weekend" is one big laugh from beginning to end.

AW: WHAT ARE YOUR IMMEDIATE AND FUTURE PLANS FOR NORTHERN MONKEY HFT?

PM: We are currently rounding off our successful Winter Series. We will be designing the course for the UKAHFT at this year's Northern Country Sports Show in Harrogate, and then we will be holding the prestigious Andrew Luckley Memorial Shoot, where we raise money for the group's running costs and for the Lochaber Mountain Rescue Team.

AW: WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE TO ANYONE THINKING OF COMING ALONG TO ONE OF YOUR EVENTS AND HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CURRENT HEALTH OF THE HFT SCENE?

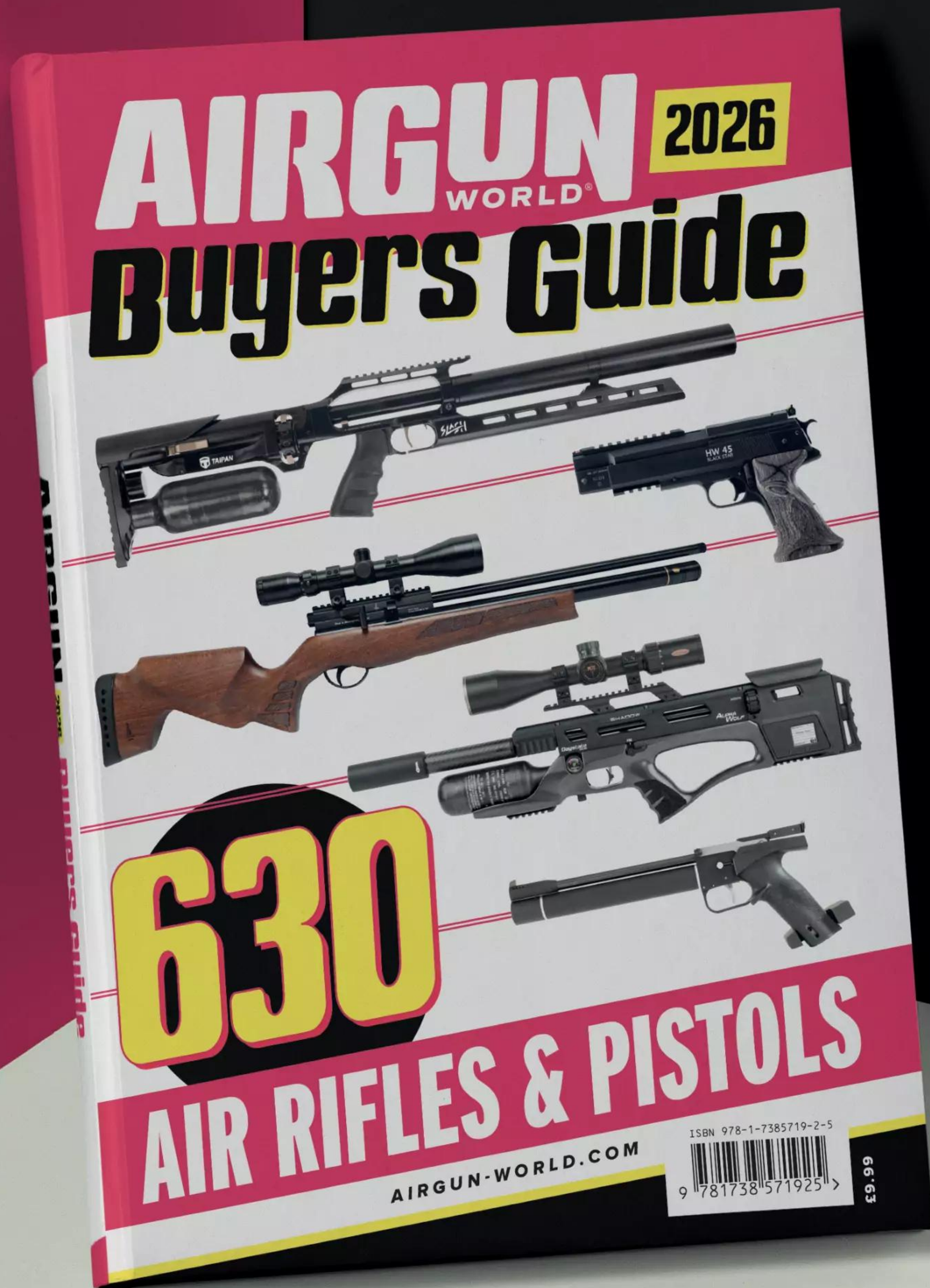
PM: I feel HFT is in a great place. The top 20 shooters in the country are shooting at such a high standard it's hard to understand how they walk off with such high scores. It's also pleasing that it's not just about the "Open" class anymore; every class now has a healthy following.

To anyone thinking about giving HFT a try: get yourself along. Northern Monkey HFT shoots are perfect for beginners or veterans wanting practice. There's no judgement, no prima donnas and no "gun tarts" (well, maybe the odd one). It's a friendly bunch, and if we have our way, it always will be. ■

For further information, head over to the Northern Monkey HFT Facebook group and request to join

The Sticks class is something that Northern Monkey HFT has championed from the beginning





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A TALE OF TWO WOLVES

Gary Chillingworth compares the fit of the understated Daystate Blackwolf Carbon Grey with the adaptable Daystate Blackwolf Zero Tactical

In the world of precision air rifles there are few stories that get shooters talking like the arrival of the Daystate Blackwolf. It is a platform that dared to rethink what a modern PCP rifle could be. Modular, adaptable and full of sophisticated engineering. Yet within this range are variants that at a glance might seem almost identical, but when you look deeper, they reveal deliberate choices by Daystate to suit different owners. Two of those cousins are the Daystate Blackwolf Carbon Grey and the Daystate Blackwolf Zero Tactical.

Both of these wonderful air rifles share the same beating heart. Both of them use Daystate's modular architecture that lets you change barrels, calibres, trigger cassettes, butt pads and air sources with surprising ease. Both of them are excellent performers with superb action design and modern ergonomics. But subtle differences in stock design, accessory fitments and the adoption of barrel tensioning set them apart in the sort of ways only a seasoned shooter will truly appreciate. So pour a cup of coffee, let your mind settle and let's take these two rifles apart to see what makes each of them special.

SAME PLATFORM, DIFFERENT FOCUS

At their core both rifles are a Blackwolf. That means a modular PCP platform with fast change barrels, a 20-position power adjuster, ambidextrous controls and an adjustable trigger. These are features that define the Blackwolf family and give you performance that punches well above what its size suggests.

But even before you lift them the differences begin. The Carbon Grey and the Zero Tactical are built around slightly different priorities.

The Carbon Grey is closer to what Daystate envisioned as the baseline Blackwolf package. It can



Gary with the two rifles side by side ready for a run out

stock. Not just the look, but the philosophy behind it.

The Carbon Grey stock is simple yet functional. It is made from a hard-wearing synthetic with an ambidextrous profile and adjustable cheekpiece. It feels light and natural in the hands. It is exactly what you want if your days are spent walking woodlands, stalking or plinking targets across field edges. There is something inherently comfortable about the way a grey stock just fades into the background and lets you focus on the shot.

This stock matches the rifle's broader personality. It is versatile enough for casual hunters yet capable under serious range work. It doesn't shout, but it performs with quiet confidence.

Contrast that with the Zero Tactical's chassis-influenced stock. Here Daystate clearly leaned into the tactical aesthetic without cramming a bunch of unnecessary furniture onto the rifle. The tactical stock is more rigid, more adjustable and gives you a platform that is perfect for mounting accessories, rail segments or tactical grips. With a single bolt you can remove the swept-back grip and replace it with a vertical grip that is more popular with target shooters.

Mechanically both stocks offer cheekpiece height adjustment and butt pad adjustment so you can fine-tune fit. But with the Zero Tactical, at the push of a button, you can increase or decrease the reach

or adjust the height of the comb. The tactical stock feels more like a tool built for purpose. It's not just about ergonomics but about giving you a foundation that stands up to a variety of shooting positions, whether you are prone, off bags or standing unsupported.

And that is where you start to see the personalities diverge. The Carbon Grey is a refined sport rifle that just happens to be very capable. The Zero Tactical is a platform ready to be adapted, upgraded and personalised.

THE TENSIONED BARREL SYSTEM

If you spend much time with precision rifles you will soon learn that the barrel is the heart of the accuracy story. Barrel harmonics, vibration patterns, muzzle tension and consistency play massive roles in how tight your groups are at range. Daystate recognised this early and developed what it calls a tensioned barrel system. It is not standard on all Blackwolves and is a £50 to £70 option depending on barrel length.

In the Blackwolf range this system is designed to improve barrel rigidity and optimise how the barrel oscillates during firing. In simple terms the tensioner adjusts the way the barrel vibrates. This affects how the pellet leaves the muzzle, which in turn can have a dramatic effect on accuracy. I just need to work out how to fit one on my TX200.



be ordered with a Hi-Lite carbon bottle or standard cylinder and is available in a clean, understated grey finish that speaks of a rifle built to work in the field without theatrics.

The Zero Tactical, on the other hand, wears its intent more visibly on its sleeve. This is the version that nods to tactical shooters and customisers. Alloy chassis, modular interface options and a look that suggests serious work ahead.

Taken together they are cousins that share DNA but not temperament. Both are excellent, but they represent two ways to approach the same brilliant concept.

STOCK DESIGN: COMFORT MEETS PURPOSE

One of the first things you notice when comparing these rifles is the



A kneeling shot taken with the Carbon Grey



The adjustable comb on the Zero Tactical makes eye alignment easy on this large rifle

HANDLING AND ERGONOMICS

One of the joys of shooting modern PCPs is how well they handle in real-life scenarios. Both the Carbon Grey and Zero Tactical share an ambidextrous low-profile action with a trigger-to-barrel centre that aids natural pointing. Both give you a Picatinny rail with a downward tilt for better scope alignment.

But there is a subtle difference. The Carbon Grey feels slightly lighter and more nimble. It balances beautifully whether you are shooting offhand or working from a rest. The stock contours are friendly without being fussy. This is a rifle that invites you to walk, explore and take shots when they present themselves.

The Zero Tactical feels a bit more planted. The chassis stock adds mass and rigidity, which some shooters

will love because it stabilises follow-through and dampens recoil impulses. If you enjoy a rifle that feels like an extension of your body in every shooting posture, then the Zero Tactical stock delivers that sensation with confidence.

Both rifles have a reversible side-lever cocking system and ambidextrous safety levers, so left- and right-handed shooters are equally at home. Both accept easy barrel and calibre swaps. Both have a stunning trigger and to be honest I think this is one of the best triggers I have ever used.

THE ADVANTAGE OF CHOICE

In the end it really comes down to what you want from your rifle.

The Carbon Grey is brilliant for the shooter who wants a versatile, high-

performance rifle that is comfortable in the field. It is understated yet potent. It can be a hunting rifle, a range rifle or a competition rifle. And if you later decide you want a different stock, it can be adapted. This adaptability is the essence of what makes the Blackwolf such a remarkable concept.

The Zero Tactical is for the shooter who wants a ready-built tactical platform with a solid foundation for customisation. Its stock feels purposeful and ready to accept accessories or modifications without hesitation. If you like a rig that feels serious from the moment you pick it up, then Zero Tactical delivers that feeling while leaving room for further tuning under the skin.

FINAL THOUGHTS

If you look at these rifles side by side and wonder if one is better than the other, you are asking the wrong question. The real question is which one fits you best today and where you want to be tomorrow.

For a comfortable, versatile rifle ready for hunting or targets, the Carbon Grey quietly excels.

For a platform built as a foundation for tactical or precision builds, the Zero Tactical feels just right.

So which is my favourite? Well, as a target shooter the Zero Tactical is the obvious choice due to its adjustability and target DNA. However, every time I go to the range, I grab the Carbon Grey, and I don't know why. ■



The two stocks together: note the Tactical (top) has the option of removable grip sets and that it's just a push of a button to adjust reach and comb height

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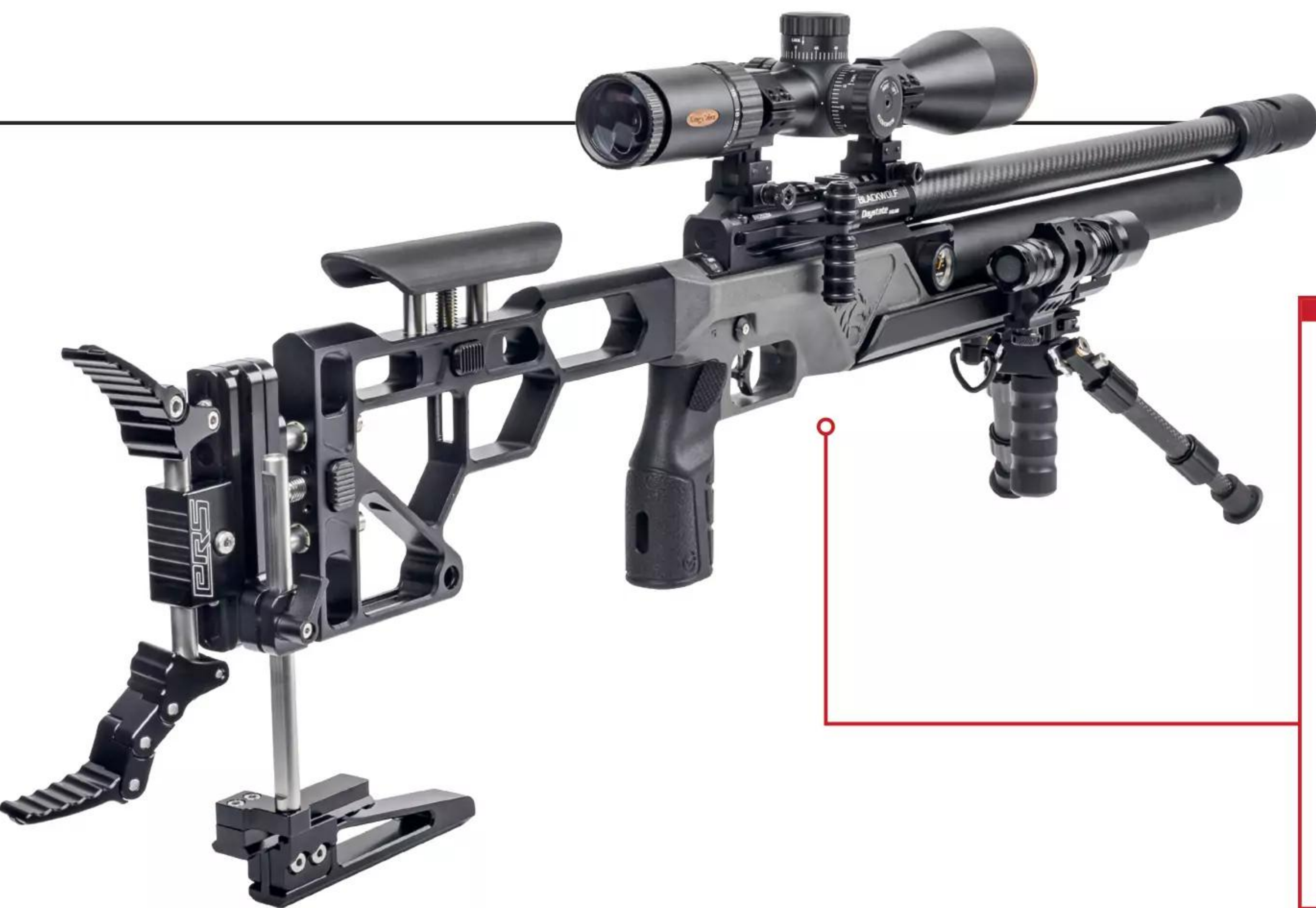
Airsport-SL air rifle

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BSAGUNS.CO.UK

Hand-built in Birmingham, this next-generation sporting PCP features a regulated system and a cold-hammer-forged barrel for match-grade accuracy. With a side-lever action, carbon-wrapped reservoir, and a 10-shot capacity in three calibres, it delivers an industry-leading shot count. The robust synthetic stock includes an integrated Picatinny rail and a five-year warranty. The Airsport-SL air rifle is available in .177 / .22 / .25 calibre and comes with a five-year warranty.





DAYSTATE
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£1,950
DAYSTATE.COM

This modular platform offers unprecedented freedom to personalise your setup through an interchangeable stock and barrel system. Designed to evolve, it features four butt pad options, alternative grips, and a power upgrade chamber extension. This future-proof system allows shooters to reconfigure their rifle as disciplines change, ensuring lifetime versatility and value.



BRK-BROCOCK
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BROCOCK.CO.UK

Debuting in 2026, this compact carbine features a HUMA-AIR regulated system and an advanced 13-position side power wheel for precise control. Equipped with a 600mm ART-developed barrel, it offers diverse stock options — from Safari textured wood to ambidextrous polymer. It includes a two-stage adjustable trigger and integrated Picatinny rails for professional-grade versatility.



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UTTINGS.CO.UK

This compact trail cam offers rugged, weather-resistant monitoring with a light-sensitive CMOS sensor and 60 invisible infrared LEDs for discreet night imaging. Ideal for hunters working in harsh conditions, it features LTE connectivity for mobile transmission and an integrated 2.4in display, and provides 32GB of internal storage. It is engineered to perform reliably from -20°C to +55°C.



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REXIMEX

Lyra synthetic air rifle

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This sleek PCP air rifle features a high-quality synthetic stock and a smooth side-lever action for efficient cocking. Equipped with a 580mm threaded barrel and a 260cc air tube, it delivers approximately 110 shots per fill (.177). The 11.3ft/lb platform includes two magazines and an adjustable four-way trigger. Available in .177, .22 and .25 calibre.



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This regulated PCP air pistol combines classic aesthetics with modern precision, featuring a chequered walnut grip inspired by the traditional 1911 design. It delivers exceptional shot-to-shot consistency via a 50cc aluminium cylinder, offering up to 55 shots. Weighing 1,005g, it includes a dovetail rail, silencer adaptor, and two multi-shot magazines. Available in .177 and .22 calibre.



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This month, we turn our attention to spring-powered air rifles up to £799

CROSMAN



Phantom Springer

£130 • RANGE-RIGHT.CO.UK

The Crosman Phantom is a spring-powered break-barrel air rifle built for reliable performance and everyday shooting. Its modern synthetic stock offers weather resistance and

confident handling, while the rifled steel barrel supports consistent accuracy. Features fibre-optic sights with micro adjustment and two-stage adjustable trigger. Supplied with a Centre Point 4x32 scope and mounts, it delivers great value for plinking and target practice.

Calibre: .177 and .22
Overall length: 1,137mm
Barrel length: 464mm
Capacity: Single shot
Power: 11.3 ft/lb
Weight: 2.73kg

BSA



Meteor CLX

£365 • BSAGUNS.CO.UK

New to the BSA stable, this full-power, British-made break barrel is a design classic, combining luxury and simplicity. Using BSA's extremely accurate cold-hammer forged barrel,

which is complemented with the included 1/2in UNF attached moderator, two-stage adjustable trigger and addition scope rail, all mounted in a beautiful beech stock, this rifle truly is a worthy product to carry on the long-standing tradition of the BSA Meteor.

Calibre: .177 and .22
Overall length: 1,048mm
Barrel Length (including moderator): 438mm
Capacity: Single shot
Power: 11.5 ft/lb
Weight: 2.76kg

GAMO

**Swarm Roadster Gen 2**£319.99 • GAMO.COM

Utilising currently the world's most successful 'Swarm' rotary magazine fed multi-shot break-barrel system, the Gamo Swarm Roadster takes break-barrel air rifling to another level.

Manufactured in Barcelona, Spain, this air rifle also uses the over moulded Whisper Maxxim barrel with integrated sound moderator, Recoil Reduction rail for ultimate scope protection, "CAT" adjustable trigger and comes complete with a 3-9 x 40 scope.

Calibre: .177 and .22
Overall length: 1,017mm
Barrel length: 520mm
Capacity: Single shot
Power: 11.3ft/lb
Weight: 3.1kg

WEIHRAUCH

**HW97 KT**£750 • WEIHRAUCH.CO.UK

This legendary under-lever spring-powered air rifle is engineered for field target and hunting applications. Featuring a fixed barrel and integrated muzzle weight to reduce flip, it prioritises long-range accuracy.

The HW97 KT's high-comb stock is specifically designed for optics and is available in blue laminate, synthetic or traditional wood finishes.

Combining a crisp internal firing cycle with robust build quality, the HW97 KT remains a benchmark for precision in the mechanical airgun category. (* denotes special order)

Calibre: .22, .20*, .177 and .25*
Overall length: 1,030mm
Barrel length: 300mm
Capacity: Single shot
Power: 12ft/lb
Weight: 4.3kg

AIR ARMS

**TX200**£799 • AIR-ARMS.CO.UK

This world-beating under-lever rifle has forged a reputation for match-grade consistency across global hunting fields. Its internal mechanics feature a balanced mainspring and piston system running on low-friction synthetic

bearings, delivering an expertly tuned feel as standard.

Equipped with a two-stage adjustable trigger, an integrated moderator and a secondary "bear trap" safety, the TX200 is a reliable performer offering reduced recoil and high efficiency in both beech and walnut stock (illustrated) configurations.

Calibre: .177 and .22
Overall length: 1,055mm
Barrel length: 395mm
Capacity: Single shot
Power: Up to 12ft/lb (or FAC)
Weight: 3.9kg

EAST GRINSTEAD TARGET SHOOTING CLUB (EGTSC)

This multi-discipline Sussex facility caters to air rifle and air pistol enthusiasts seeking a welcoming and nurturing environment

While East Grinstead Target Shooting Club (EGTSC)

has long been a staple of the Sussex small-bore scene, its evolution into a destination for airgun enthusiasts has become a defining characteristic of the modern club. Tucked away in East Court Park near the A264, the facility has transitioned from its 1945 Home Guard origins into a sophisticated hub for precision air rifle and air pistol shooting. This shift was solidified in 2015 when the club incorporated Taylors Air Rifle and Pistol Club.

The airgun facilities are anchored by a dedicated indoor range

Guest editor and benchrest shooter Graham Freeman is a regular visitor to the club

Multiple airgun disciplines call this club their home



designed for six-yard and 10m disciplines. Within this space, three specific 10m firing points are available for air rifle and pistol shooters. All activity here is restricted to sub-12ft/lb airguns, ensuring that the range remains a specialist environment for non-FAC equipment.

This focus on the 10m Olympic standard makes it an ideal training ground for those pursuing match-grade accuracy, though the club maintains a welcoming stance toward those who simply wish to plink and improve their personal consistency.

Technical development is at the heart of the club's airgun operations. Shooting is conducted exclusively on club-supplied paper targets, with an emphasis on formal competitive structures. The club is a primary participant in various postal leagues, where members shoot witnessed cards that are sent to central scorers.

This system allows airgunners to benchmark their progress against a national field of shooters with similar averages, providing a structured pathway from novice all the way to international standard.

The club's role as a specialist airgun venue extends to supporting the Modern Pentathlon. Twice a month, EGTSC hosts members of the Pony Club who utilise the range specifically to hone the air pistol discipline required for their sport. This partnership underscores the club's commitment to promoting sport

shooting across different athletic disciplines. To ensure these shooters have the best possible environment, the club maintains a centrally heated clubhouse described by many as among the finest in the south east, complete with a kitchen and full disabled access.

Instruction at EGTSC is highly regulated to ensure the highest standards of safety and technique. All initial inductions for airgunners are carried out by NSRA-qualified coaches and instructors who are fully DBS checked. For younger shooters aged 14 and over, the club provides one-to-one supervision. This mentorship is designed to guide them through the nuances of trigger control, breathing and range etiquette, eventually leading them to become fully independent shooters by 18 years of age.

While the club continues to host significant regional events, the leadership remains focused on the daily needs of its members. Recognising the growing popularity of the airgun disciplines, there are active plans to investigate the expansion and improvement of the indoor air range. These upgrades aim to increase capacity and provide an even more refined environment for the disciplines that have become the club's fastest-growing sectors. ■

For more information on EGTSC, visit the website egtsc.co.uk



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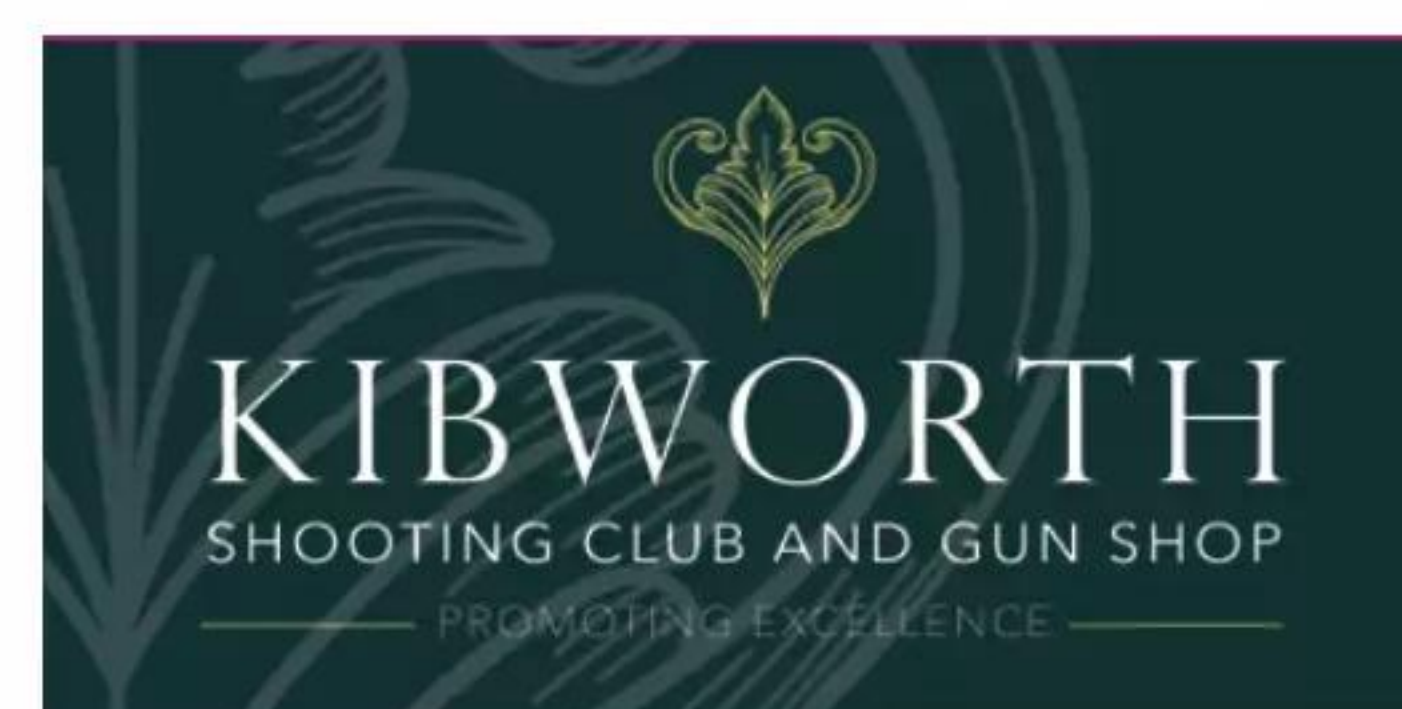


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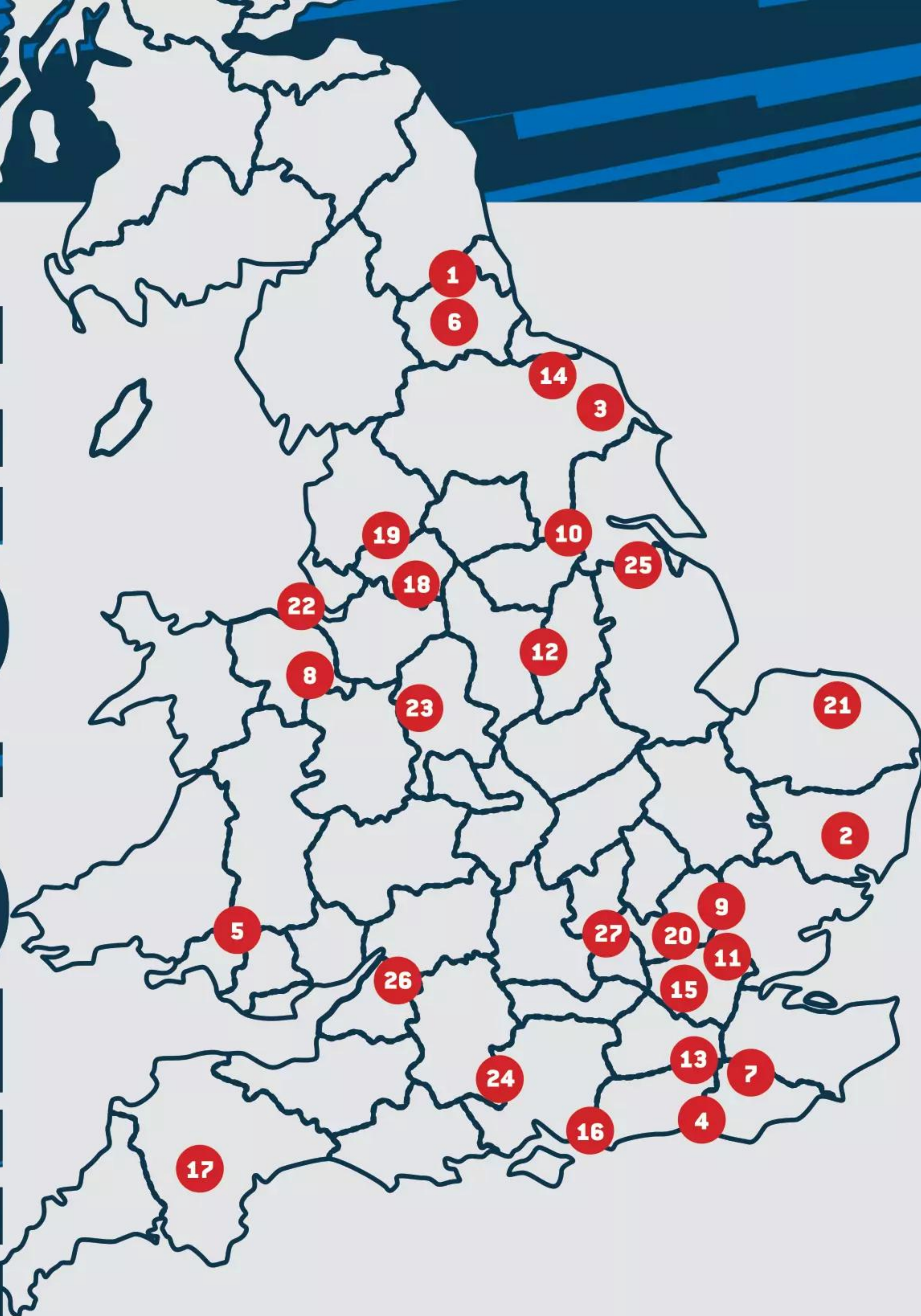
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I AM AN AIRGUNNER

STEVEN RALPH

From teenage hunting trips with his uncle to a permission on a golf course and ambitions to own a Steyr Pro X, this train driver from Bedfordshire has quite a story to share

Your earliest memory of airgun shooting is:

I remember being on a school trip when I was nine or 10 years old. They had an air rifle shooting range at a country house we visited. It was just a simple break-barrel .22 and a paper target but I won the competition and was instantly hooked.

Who taught you to shoot airguns?

My uncle Iain. We shared a passion for guns and shooting. I'd go out hunting with him when I was in my mid teens. He had several permissions and lots of airguns and rimfire rifles, and I learned basic fieldcraft and shooting techniques from him.

Go-to airgun range:

I used to run my local air rifle range but unfortunately the owner passed away so it closed a few years ago. I mainly go to Wold Farm Fisheries now if I fancy a day at the range. It's a great place with literally hundreds of spinner targets to shoot over three ranges.

First gun you ever bought:

It was a Webley Sport .22 break barrel. I was 14 (it was bought by my dad) and I absolutely loved it. I must have put thousands of pellets through it. Hours and hours of shooting in my back garden.

Current airgun:

I own several but my main rifle is my AGT Vixen Long in .177. It's a fantastic piece of equipment. An absolute tack driver. I also use an FX DRS around the farm that I shoot at.

One gun you wish you owned:

Wow, where to start? Loads over the years

but lately I've fancied a Steyr Pro X. They look and feel amazing, but the price tag makes it a gun versus divorce scenario unfortunately, so it remains a dream.

Favourite accessory:

I have to say my LE-032 laser range-finder. It was a "budget" buy, but my God it's a game changer. I have it on the side of my scope via a Picatinny rail and it's easily the best £100 I ever spent.

Do you hunt or target shoot?

I mainly hunt. I am lucky enough to have a golf course with a bunny problem and a farm with a corvid problem to shoot on, so I am quite spoiled. Every now and then, if I fancy a range day, I take a few rifles to the range and I do have a blast.

How much time do you spend shooting?

I go out shooting a few times a month for four to five hours at a time. But, honestly, the amount of time I spend tinkering, oiling and just generally handling my rifles is

probably hundreds of hours.

Greatest achievement:

When I was a teenager my uncle Iain took me rabbit shooting for the first time with his Air Arms S410 and I got five rabbits. I've shot hundreds more since that day on my own permissions but they were my first. My uncle passed away a few years ago so it's a memory I look back on very fondly and remember that feeling of being on top of the world.

Why do you shoot?

Just out of pure enjoyment. I love all aspects of shooting. I especially enjoy the pest control or hunting side of it. I like that controlling pests is helping other native wildlife. Plus being out on my own for a few hours is really enjoyable (don't tell my wife).

The most satisfying part of shooting:

I would have to say when I go out for a hunt and I end up with a well earned haul. There's nothing nicer than that for me.

What don't you enjoy about shooting, if anything:

I don't enjoy people who are not responsible shooters. It's a sport/hobby which is under attack from the powers that be, so we all need to be safe and responsible.

And lastly, how long have you been a reader of *Airgun World*?

I think I bought my first magazine in the early 2000s and have been hooked ever since. The last few years I have had a subscription, which I would fully recommend as it's the best value for money and delivered to your door. ■



Become next month's airgunner

If you would like to share the background to your passion on the *I Am An Airgunner* page, contact airgunworld@twsgroup.com



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