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ED'S TEST

Relaxing into zen and the art of springer shooting. It's good to be back.



rites of spring

Terry relights his springer fire, courtesy of a Weihrauch HW97K

I'm a spring-gun shooter; always have been, always will be. Of late, it would be more accurate to refer to me as a lapsed spring-gun shooter, due to the fact that shooting pre-charged pneumatics occupies the majority of my work and leisure time. This lapse isn't a conscious thing; it just happened as reviewing and field testing commitments swallowed every second not demanded by my family, friends and essential outdoor activities. The fact is, I review and field test mainly PCPs, because that's what most of today's 'major' launches are, and when I need to restock the freezer with rabbits, squirrels and pigeons, I use either something I'm testing, or one of my own multi-shot, recoilless, easy-to-shoot pre-charged pneumatics. With all of that going on, my

beloved springers hardly get a look in. Frankly, this is unacceptable.

TIME TO CHANGE

For an airgunner who learned his trade with a spring-piston rifle, and who was introduced to the finer things of this shooting life via that same, beautifully engineered, thoroughly satisfying system, it's nothing short of shameful that I've all but abandoned it. It's even worse than that, though. My not-shooting a springer has eroded my technique, too. I'm in a lose-lose situation, and it's high time I started sorting myself out.

My day job still calls loudly enough to rupture any eardrum, so getting back on track will have to earn its keep. That's why I've combined a long-overdue review of a quality springer with a bit of a sermon on how to shoot one to the

best of its advantage, and yours. Coming up is one of the most satisfying, and productive gun tests I've ever done. First, we'll study the main subject, then we'll cover the exploitation of its many vital qualities.

THE WEIHRACH HW97K

The HW97K comes from Weihrauch, one of the most prestigious names in the shooting industry. It's a single-shot, underlever rifle, with a spring-piston action, an auto-reset safety catch, an adjustable, two-stage trigger and a fitted muzzle weight/silencer that houses the spring-loaded underlever latch.

This is a pretty rifle, isn't it? That multi-shaded, ambidextrous, blue-grey laminate stock is pleasing to the eye and brings a smile to the face. I especially like

the latest angled fore end tips, which exaggerate the 'scales' of the lamination, and softens the transition through the breech toward the barrel.

STOCK OBSERVATIONS

The 'double' cheek piece has been designed with scope use in mind – the HW97 isn't supplied with open sights like its HW77 stablemate, although I'd prefer more height in that area. I'd also prefer an adjustable butt pad (gosh, there's a surprise), and the thumbhole-stocked HW97 version has just such a pad. Personally, I'd have a skilled person do what Tim Finley does on pages 93 and 94 of this very issue, and go for the double upgrade. If any rifle deserves the best from its user, it's this one.

You'll notice that there's not a

scrap of chequering or stippling on the '97's stock. It doesn't need grip enhancement of any kind, at least not the way I prefer to shoot it, as you'll soon see. I need my springers merely rested, guided, but never gripped. I'm a minimal input type of springer shooter, and the lack of tackiness helps my system.

ACTION POINTS

As a fanatically devoted, competitive springer shooter of yesteryear, the main impression I get from cycling the action of this test rifle, is how similar it feels to the hyper-tuned, custom examples we once campaigned so successfully on the FT circuit. The 'opened' access port of the loading bay and the entire muzzle weight/moderator/underlever catch assembly being the most obvious pick-ups from the days of Airmasters, Venom, and their various custom shop rivals. The next feature that truly impresses is the feel of the action as the underlever is drawn toward that reassuring 'clack' of full cocking



Top tips!



Looks odd, but the 'minimal contact' technique really works.



Separation and isolation. Note the gap between the forestock and the knee.



Weihrauch's Rekord trigger unit has been an impressive mechanism for decades.



No matter how long you own a Weihrauch, you'll still forget to disengage that safety.

" so little mechanical noise that it feels much like a tuned rifle used to back in the day"



Always hold the underlever when loading. That beanbag is absolutely essential, too.

engagement. There's so little mechanical noise accompanying this action that it feels much like a tuned rifle used to back in the day. Of course, a genuinely skilled tuner could get an even sweeter song out of this powerplant, but as it comes, the modern HW97K is a fine thing to use.

A LITTLE BIT ON TECH

Those who know far more than I about the intimate goings-on inside the '97 tell me that the original model had a 25mm diameter piston weighing in at 235grammes, giving 39.76cc of swept volume, whereas late '97s have a 26mm diameter piston weighing in at 265 grammes, giving 43.01cc of swept volume. Early '97s had a synthetic guide and a square-section mainspring, with about two inches of preload and no piston weight washers. The later rifles have a synthetic spring guide and a much shorter, round-section spring with minimal

preload, and the pistons are fitted with up to three small washers which act as piston weights for fine-tuning. Oh, and the trigger cage and bottom sear are slightly different on the later ones as well, but not to any great extent. I trust those who prefer their fingers oily and their degrees to the 'nth appreciated those fascinating facts. Meanwhile, back in my real world, let's do some shooting.

ON THE RANGE

Given the unwavering stability of a bench and the benign non-influence of a padded rest and a sympathetic shooter, the factory Weihrauch HW97K can produce groups that are right up there with a top quality, pre-charged pneumatic rifle. Yes it can, but the shooter needs to know the full deal.

To summarise that deal, I'll make this short statement: have the least input possible. I'll qualify that by stating that the shooter is always the weakest link in any, properly sorted, shooting chain, so the less influence that shooter has, the better the rifle will be



Shooting off the knee. A target glove on the leading hand would assist matters, here.



In this case, handsome is as handsome does.

allowed to shoot.

This translates as using 'soft' hands, the minimum of grip tension, and a relaxed posture within which the rifle can recoil unrestricted, time after time, in exactly the same way. That final bit is the key; if anything changes from shot to shot, the pellet's

" if anything changes from shot to shot, the pellet's point of impact is highly likely to change with it"

point of impact is highly likely to change with it. Consistency is everything, here, and 'less is more' is the perfect mantra to apply to your technique, because everything has to be repeated, every time, and the less there is of what you're doing – the less you have to repeat. For instance, no grip tension is simplicity itself to repeat, compared to 'a certain amount' of grip tension. Minimal input equals minimal requirement to repeat. Basic stuff, but so vital, and so effective.

LEAVE THE BENCH

If you really want to learn how to connect fully with a springer, get away from the bench rest and become your rifle's main support. Get yourself a beanbag seat – not a car mat, or a cushion, but a proper beanbag that will adapt to the ground you're sitting on – yes,

this is all about the sitting position – and can be scrunched into providing support for your important places during the shot. Get a beanbag, I can't emphasise this too strongly, OK?

Use either the 'overarm' stance, or the 'off the knee' one, the choice is yours. I'll develop these stances more next month, but for now just practise getting into a stable, comfortable and relaxed sitting stance, similar to the ones I'm using in this feature.

Once you've achieved that, you

can really see what a quality spring like the HW97K can do, and it's incredibly satisfying, believe me.

A LIGHTER TOUCH

See how I operate the '97's excellent Rekord trigger unit? I'm hardly touching the stock; it's

more like using my trigger finger as a remote switch. That trigger can also be tuned toward even greater smoothness, but like the rifle to which it's fitted, it's a hell of a device straight out of the box. Sub-inch groups at 45 yards were no real challenge for the .177 test rifle, and there's so much more to come as familiarity sets in over time. Of course, you'll need more muscle input from the standing and kneeling stances, but the 'less is more' theme still applies fully. Please apply it and reduce your

input as much as you can. Guide, don't grip, rest, don't hold.

HW 97 MANNERS AND PREFERENCES

The rifle's recoil is mild, virtually twang-free, and causes just a 'blip' from the sight-picture. After 15 shots I could see the pellet in the air, and that's when you know you're getting in tune with a springer. This rifle preferred Air Arms Field, but some early H&N FT Trophy did well, too, so I'd say there's plenty of room for pellet-testing.

This is a fairly heavy rifle once scoped, but that heft imparts stability when timing and technique are brought to bear. No shot should take more than five seconds once you're looking down the scope, so the '97's weight is actually a benefit during those essential seconds.

SO FAR

This test has been a voyage of rediscovery for me, and the Weihrauch HW97K has been just about the perfect vehicle for it. I know we'll hit new heights in time for next month's issue, so it's going to be the gift that keeps on giving. If you're still to be convinced of the sheer satisfaction of shooting a quality springer, I assure you – you don't know what you're missing. ■

TECH SPEC

Model: HW97K
Manufacturer: Weihrauch
Country of origin: Germany
Price: £446
Loading: Direct to barrel
Trigger: 2-stage, adjustable
Stock type: Ambidextrous laminate (other versions available)
Weight: 4.2kg (9lbs) Unscoped
Length: 1020mm (40 ins)
Barrel: 300mm (11.8ins)
Variation over 40 shots: 11 fps for .177 on test
Average energy: 11.2 ft.lbs.
Contact: Hull Cartridge www.hullcartridge.co.uk . Tel: 01482 342756

£446