

UNMATCHED PERFORMANCE?

Dedicated club shooter, Randolph Bohannon III, offers an all-levels review of Weihrauch's remarkable HW44 pistol

Shooting is a wonderfully diverse hobby and the multitude of disciplines means that there is always something new to enjoy. I came to air-pistol shooting through the somewhat unlikely route of shooting black-powder revolvers and wanting a means of practising with less noise and fuss. I am lucky enough to shoot at a club where excellent support and coaching is freely given, catering for everyone from the rank beginner like me, to the current UK air pistol champion and everyone in between. The inclusivity of our sport one the best things about it and it has allowed the broad scope of this review.

I needed advice on air pistols and knew very little about them, so I could do no better than to ring the editor for an overview of what's available and for some more advice in terms of specific models to look at. Terry then told me he'd recently tested the

Weihrauch HW44 pistol and he felt he hadn't done it justice. When he heard I had access to the UK 10-metre champion, we hatched a plan to give that pistol a thorough shakedown in the hands of a champion and shooters of varying ability and experience levels.

REDUCED REPORT

This pistol is based on the established format of Weihrauch's HW110 rifle, so I knew it was going to be accurate. The degree to which the different testers could extract this accuracy would be a strong indication of how effectively HW had managed to bottle the performance potential of the HW110 action to the frame of a pistol.

The review pistol came with; an optional

HW moderator, two 10-shot magazines, a long eye-relief telescopic pistol sight, Allen keys, a filler probe adaptor, and instructions – all well protected in bubble wrap.

The moderator merits a special mention due to its novel and effective attachment method. Instead of a screw thread on the muzzle, the moderator has a shaped male flange to fit a corresponding socket around the muzzle of the pistol and under the foresight, which is secured by grub screws top and bottom. The flange is shaped accurately for a tight fit and is moulded to integrate beautifully with the overall design of the rifle, as well as the front sight. It reduced the report of this full-powered pistol very effectively on our small, indoor, 10m range, although preferences varied between the testers when shooting with it mounted.

It's safe to note that its accuracy potential is beyond question. I don't propose to go into the technical details of the action of the HW44 because, broadly speaking, they are identical to those of the HW110 rifle that has already been extensively reviewed in this magazine.

SIMPLE

I have no real experience of the HW110 rifle and I approached the pistol without any preconceptions, so my initial impression of the loading and shooting ergonomics of the HW44 are from the perspective of a complete novice.

The first order of business was to charge the pistol and test for shot count. To do this, I needed



The amazing Weihrauch HW44, as supplied by the editor.



Ready to be recharged.

to fit the supplied filling probe adaptor to the fitting on my air tank, and then fill it up carefully to the maximum working pressure of 200 bar. This was so simple that even a novice like me found this the work of a few moments, and with a freshly charged pistol I wandered off to the 10m pistol range to try it out.

WORKS OF ART

I had to wait, though, because the matte-black bits of metal coming out of the box and being assembled in the gunroom immediately attracted the attention of our club treasurer, who came over for a look. He observed that the ability to change the charging handle around to suit left-handers would be very useful to him, as a left-hander himself. I wasn't quite sure if he was just angling for a shot, or the whole damn pistol, in fact, after this opening gambit, so I tactfully said nothing, loaded a magazine and let him have the first shot. Of course, this led to everyone else wanting to have a go and naturally I let them. We found no real power curve to mention, and the manufacturer's shot count of around 100 in .177 was spot on.

The magazines themselves are miniature works of engineering art, designed to work in conjunction with the multiple locating shafts, rods and ball bearings found in the magazine well in the action, to ensure that the magazine is properly and concentrically located to deliver every pellet into the breech smoothly and without damage.

"I wasn't quite sure if he was just angling for a shot, or the whole damn pistol"

I dropped the magazine out by simultaneously pulling the side lever fully back, and the magazine release lever fully up with one hand, whilst pushing the magazine out of the action from right to left as viewed



My own efforts satisfied my, admittedly modest, requirements.

from the back of the pistol. I then loaded it with RWS Hobby wadcutter pellets and by shooting two-handed, I managed some respectable groups at 10 metres.

SUBLIME TRIGGER

This pistol is so easy to shoot that it flatters the shooter, at least in my case. The trigger is sublime by any standard, which is high praise indeed given that I am known to be fussier than is healthy about triggers on my own guns. It is a two-stage unit that combines a wonderfully smooth and consistent first-stage

pull with a distinct and equally consistent second-stage stop that breaks incredibly crisply and with a light-release weight, in an overall package that rivals the very best triggers available on any match pistol. All the

testers commented positively on the trigger.

Waldek Mickiewicz, the current British 10m pistol champion, said that it was comparable to the electronic trigger in his championship-winning, Steyr match pistol in terms of quality of pull. Plus, it doesn't need to meet a minimum trigger weight for competition, so was capable of being set to a safe and repeatable pull weight, much lighter than the 20 grams over the 500 gram competition regulation minimum of his match pistol. This is truly excellent performance from the Weihrauch.

SAFETY CATCH AND SIGHTS

A few words about the safety catch are in order, although we tend not to use them on target pistols at my club – it's much better to rely on proper gun handling and safety drills, in my opinion. The ambidextrous safety was positive, and aside from checking function, we left it alone.

The sights on the pistol are very good, with a fixed front sight and fully adjustable rear,

UK CHAMP TESTS THE HW44

familiar to owners of HW45 or 75 pistols. It takes a bit of experimenting to find the right target diagram for a six o'clock hold, but once found, the sights work very well, aided by the long sight radius.

SOLIDITY

In the next instalment, we put the pistol in the hands of various shooters and weighed their comments in proportion to their grouping.

The first impression upon picking up the HW44 is that the bulk does not translate into weight in the hand. The use of polymers helps in this regard, and I don't think they detract from the feeling of solidity and comfort that this pistol exudes.



Yes, you could say Waldek's been reasonably successful.

The balance is very slightly forward, which suited most testers, and I found it easier to keep steady on target – the match pistol shooters echoed this.

Given the excellent trigger, this balance, and natural 'pointability', made shooting good groups for one's ability level easy, and especially valuable because as it's intrinsically accurate, bad shots cannot be blamed on the pistol!

HOW ACCURATE IS IT?

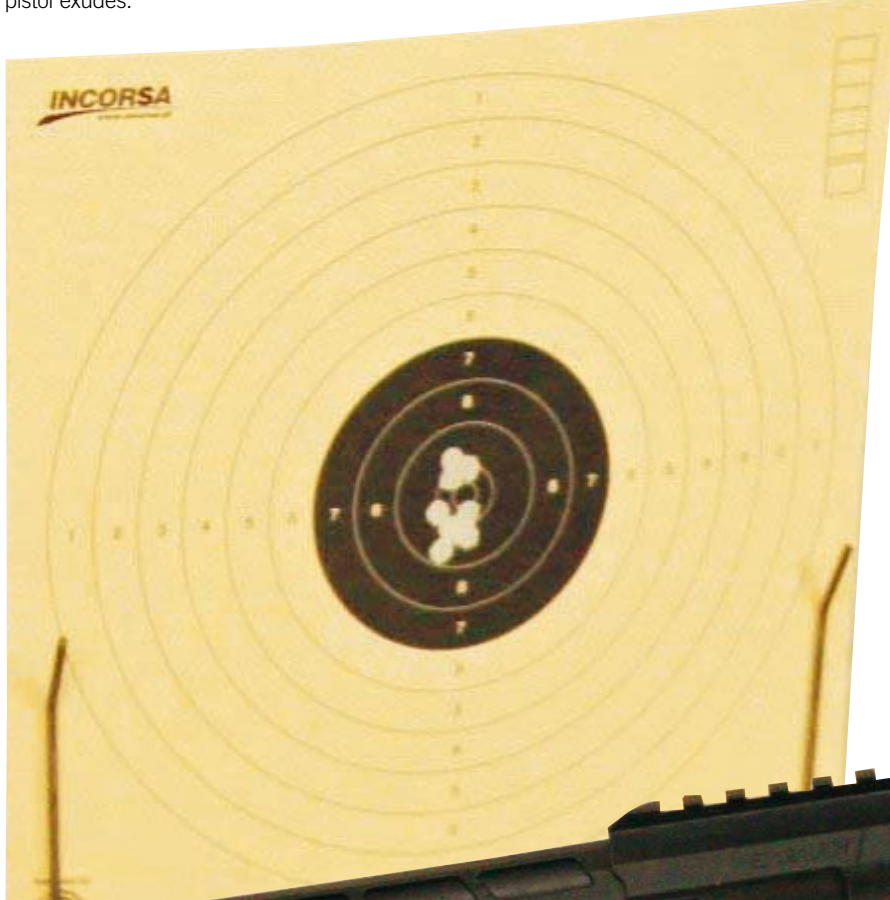
Please study the target shot by Waldeck Mickiewicz, two-handed, standing at 10m. The first three shots grouped a bit high and so he adjusted the rear sight and put the rest of the magazine through the slightly larger hole underneath. Having established that the thing could shoot, it was passed around for general appraisal. The pistol was very well received by all with much praise heaped on the excellent trigger, smooth action and quality sights.

Comments from the members were very favourable and, more importantly, shooting the thing converted a few sceptics from the sidelines.

Experienced, club-level shooter, Andrew Scrimshaw, commented:

'I have been eagerly awaiting the arrival of the HW44 after seeing it pictured at various trade shows. It's a well-made and sturdy pistol, as you would expect from Weihrauch. My thoughts have been about where it would sit usage wise in the categories of air pistols.'

A few people have admired it at my club. With the inclusion of the moderator it is very quiet and would make an excellent pistol for shooting at home without disturbing any neighbours,

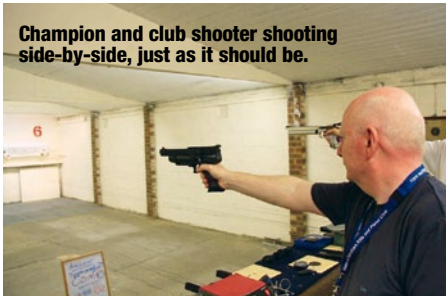


The UK champ's first 10 shots. The lower five pellets went low, so he adjusted the sights and produced the upper group with the next five shots.

TEL: 0161 637 0347-0, FAX: 0161 637 0347-50



I prefer elegance and style over clinical accuracy. *Cough!*



Champion and club shooter shooting side-by-side, just as it should be.



My first effort on the right, and on the left a stage in my personal evolution to becoming ... slightly above average.

whilst observing the usual safety rules and legal requirements. It could also be used with the open sights in many of our club competitions, namely the 60-shot precision (10 metres); sport pistol (25 metres); 30 shots precision; 30 shots duelling, that's with turning target; 3 seconds facing; 7 seconds to reload. We also have a 50-yard competition – yep – shot single-handed, standing at 50 yards PL7 targets. The accuracy is excellent as one would expect from a PCP.

All in all, it is an accurate and well made pistol that occupies the space between the many basic plinkers, but without going to the expense of one of the high-end match pistols.'

COMMENTS FROM A CHAMPION

Waldek's comments were perhaps the most

telling of all because he is able to extract every last scrap of accuracy from any given pistol:

'The accuracy of this pistol is match-pistol grade, easily the same standard as a top match pistol. The trigger is its best feature; it is

"this is a good thing. Any poor shots with it are down to user error"

up to match-pistol standards of smoothness, and capable of being set as low as a couple of hundred grams with perfect safety and repeatability – this is excellent performance.

The HW44 is suited to many different competitions, as Andrew has mentioned, as well as being a great plinking pistol – we have even tried field air with it!

MY THOUGHTS

My own thoughts are that this pistol is more gun than I am capable of using, and this is a good thing. Any poor shots with it are down to user error and so it makes a fantastic training

tool. Complete confidence in one's equipment, along with practice and discipline, makes a difference at the target.

Since this pistol has been in circulation amongst the members, it has been tried with multiple disciplines and found to suit, or even excel in them. A member has decided to buy his own HW44 and I believe there is talk of customising the grip to something approximating the sort of anatomical one found on his match pistol. It will be interesting to compare the one-handed scores, with the playing field levelled.

WHERE DOES IT FIT?

Some have questioned where this pistol fits into the grand scheme of things, and this is perhaps natural, given that there is nothing like it on the market, and the natural conservatism of shooters where new things are concerned. The price tag might seem high at around £600, but it is a fraction of the thousands that a multi-shot, similarly match-grade accurate pistol would cost from the main players.

Any pistol discipline that benefits from superb accuracy and ergonomics, plus a bit more energy behind the pellet, will suit the HW44, and I can give no higher praise than to say that it won over everyone who shot it. ■



I look on in awe as Waldek completes his first 10 shots. It's easy to see why he's the UK champion ... and I'm not.