

# THE BIG TEST

ON THE FIRING LINE THIS MONTH:  
WEIHRACH HW35 EXPORT

# The all-time classic

The editor finally lives out a boyhood dream

**M**ore years ago than I care to remember, I worked in a gun shop on Saturdays and handled every new airgun that arrived with deep interest and all too often, desire. At that time I was shooting a Webley Vulcan MK1, which was powerful but not too sophisticated. One day, I arrived for work to find the fabled Weihrauch HW35 Export on the gun rack and immediately ran for the keys so that I could unlock it. There, in my hands, was what I felt was the finest airgun ever made and I was in awe. The weight of all that high-quality steel felt reassuring, and the smartly finished walnut stock was head and shoulders above anything I'd seen before. In my eyes, the Germans had stolen a march on making airguns feel like high-quality firearms. Working in a gun shop, I regularly handled top-quality shotguns and deer-stalking rifles, so I knew all too well what could be done to make a gun feel special, if you could afford it.

## MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

There was just one problem – I couldn't afford it. My meagre funds were already stretched to the limit running my Enduro motorbike in the off-road competitions I was entering. There was simply no cash for a new airgun.

As the years passed by, I was tempted by the HW35's big brother, the HW80 and eventually bought one, imagining it superior to the 35 by dint of being even bigger and heavier. I was wrong. The 80 was designed for the export markets where no power limit existed, and when turned down to our 12 ft.lbs. needs, was too much gun. It was unnecessarily big and heavy, making it a poor choice for long trips afield. The ground-breaking HW77 soon followed, along with my first foray into competition shooting, before I jumped aboard the good ship PCP and never looked back. However, in recent years, somewhere in the back of my mind was the yearning to own an HW35E, my first true love. It had been my dream rifle and I felt that my gun cabinet needed a springer of some kind, so that was the obvious choice.

## SPECIAL ORDER ONLY

I contacted Hull Cartridge, Weihrauch's loyal ↘



*The comb is at the perfect height for the open sights*



importer for 40 years, and asked if I could buy one. There was good news and bad. The good news was that they can still be ordered. The bad news was that you can no longer have the 22" Export length barrel. I was heartbroken. When we saw the longer barrels all those years ago, we simply 'knew' that bigger must have been better. Of course, we now know that it served no beneficial purpose at all, but I wanted one all the same. The long barrel made the Export version stand out from the crowd, but hey ho, I could only have what was on offer.

**"The bad news was that you can no longer have the 22" Export length barrel. I was heartbroken"**

Everything else looked just right. The stock on my gun is a nice dark walnut with fine chequering on the pistol grip, finished with a white line spacer and a stepped black cap. The fore end has the trademark deep finger grooves and the trigger guard is the classic cast-metal unit that we all thought was so cool 35 years ago. Because it uses an articulated cocking linkage, the cut-out in the fore end is very short, making the stock feel strong and stable.

*This is still a very handsome gun in my eyes*

This layout also means that there are no screw heads visible from the sides, adding to the clean looks.

### BARREL LATCH

Perhaps the most revolutionary feature of the HW35 was the sliding barrel latch. Again, we 'knew' that this would make the rifle more accurate. The solid mechanical lock-up simply had to ensure perfect alignment of the barrel to the cylinder, where the scope was fitted, so it made complete sense to us. The aura of this class-

leading brand's engineering expertise simply blew our minds, and this innovative feature fuelled our desire even more to own one.

In a neat piece of ergonomic design, the barrel latch disengages quite naturally as you slide your hand along the fore end, ready to pull the barrel down. With the latch released there's no need to bump the barrel down to start the cocking process. It quite naturally drops a few degrees before engaging the spring. With the breech open

you'll see that the barrel is fitted with a locking nut, as are all modern Weihrauch's. This modular system is superior to the old press-fit system in keeping the bore true.

In the name of purity I intend to use the open sights, keeping the lines unsullied by some vulgar, bulky optic. Of course, fitting a modern scope would reveal the rifle's true potential, but as I only plan to use the rifle for pleasure, ultimate accuracy is of no concern. I think the ones fitted are a more modern version of the classic sights and no doubt better for the improvements, but they keep much of the character of the originals, which pleases me. The rear sight has a plate that can be rotated to display four different notches, whilst the hooded fore sight has interchangeable elements as well. These are most certainly superior sights and can be set to suit almost any taste.

### RIGHT HEIGHT

The comb of the stock is set at the correct height for open sights and the rifle comes very naturally to the aim this way. I find it odd and a little sad, in all the time this rifle has existed, that very few manufacturers have corrected the height of their stocks to suit the near universal uptake of scopes. Most, if not all, stocks are still designed for open sights





when nearly nobody uses them. Strange ...

For the sake of authenticity I ordered a .22. I haven't shot .22 much at 12 ft.lbs for some 20 years, but again, I intend to use it as a 'super plinker' so the .177's ballistic advantages mean nothing, and as a young man I only ever shot the bigger calibre. It was much more powerful-er, you know!

Inside, things have moved on a great deal because Weihrauch have installed all the latest upgrades that have moved their spring/piston rifles forward so much in recent years. An improved spring supported by efficient guides delivers a smooth cocking experience, and a well-controlled and quiet firing cycle. This is head and shoulders above the rifles we desired so desperately in the '70s straight from the box, with little benefit to be had from tuning these days.

### FOR THE REKORD

The other design item that blew us away was the now legendary Rekord trigger. This was such a huge step-up over any other trigger available, at that time, that we were barely able to believe its performance. It's a multi-lever system, so it was able to be delicately adjusted to suit your taste, whilst delivering full sear overlap to ensure complete safety in operation. To this day, few triggers have bettered its performance – quite an



*This isn't the original rear sight but an improved, more modern version*



*The barrels are now fitted into the breech block with a locking nut*



*This barrel-locking system was ground breaking when I first saw it*







*The Rekord trigger is every bit as good today as it ever was*

incredible endorsement, in my opinion. Like most of the Weihrauch rifles of the day, the reach to the trigger blade was rather long and I still find it that way today. There are companies that offer set-back blades for a more comfortable reach, but I won't be fitting one to my 35; straight from the box is how this one will stay.

The safety is a cross-bolt system that pops out automatically as the action is cocked, and is in a good place to be disengaged just before firing. Once disengaged, it can only be reset by cocking the action again.

**“with the engineering improvements that Weihrauch has added to the build, it's an even better gun than the one I first saw”**

When disengaged, a small red pin protrudes from the right side of the action, warning you that the rifle is ready to fire. Just as I remembered, it makes a distinct metallic click as it's disengaged, and more than one rabbit had its life saved by this noise in my Weihrauch hunting career.

With all this nostalgia coursing through my veins, I needed to get down to some proper testing to see if the rifle could live up to my

*An articulated cocking linkage keeps the fore end slot short*



*I'm trying out the various sight elements to see which suit*

dreams. A few minutes over the chronograph with my standard test pellet, the Air Arms Diablo Field (16 grains) showed a suitably consistent 570 fps for a healthy muzzle energy of 11.54 ft.lbs., just as I'd like it to have been set.

### OPEN SIGHTS, AT YOUR AGE?

Next, I came to my biggest challenge – to shoot with open sights. At my age, it's no big surprise that my eyesight isn't what it was, but my short-sightedness is now being matched with my close vision worsening

too. I have the worst of both worlds, as my optician enthusiastically informs me. Thanks for the good news!

Anyway, I found some pistol cards from my good friends at Target Air, with a big bold bull that allowed me to see it clearly, and shot a few groups at 20 yards. To my amazement and delight I had some quite respectable groups. I was honestly shocked. I tried with my glasses, and without, and was unable to tell which was best. To lighten the pressure on myself, I gathered some small windfall apples and stood to plink them off hand, again at 20 yards. Watching them explode and the bits go flying, took me right back to the beginning of my shooting career. There's a word for this type of shooting, if only I could remember it. Oh yes, I've got it ... FUN!

I was just revelling in the simple pleasure of a break-barrel springer, with open sights, blatting little apples for the simple pleasure of shooting. What could be better? Then it occurred to me that this was very useful off-hand shooting, something I practise far less than I should. I avoid taking standing shots whilst hunting as best I can, but sometimes there's no other option if you want to bring home the bacon, so it's a skill that every hunter should work on hard.

### IMPROVEMENTS?

Of course, being a technical type, I was already thinking about working on the



*Blatting windfall apples is what fun is all about*

open sights to make them easier to shoot. The front sight accepts a range of interchangeable elements so I'm trying the different permutations. Then, I thought about adding some colour to them, such as white or fluorescent orange to make them easier to see. You see, as much as I'd like to keep the HW35 stock, hitting the target is too important to overlook.

They say that you should never meet your heroes, but I'm saying that in this case they're wrong. This is every bit the rifle I lusted after and with the engineering improvements that Weihrauch has added to the build, it's an even better gun than the one I first saw. It's also very inexpensive for such a fine rifle, in my view. My gun will not see a scope, will not be tuned and will not have any accessory added. It's a truly superb rifle just as its makers envisaged it, and some classics need to be respected for what they are. On a personal note, I want to say thank you to Weihrauch for keeping this beautiful rifle in your catalogue. I may not be not the wildly overly enthusiastic young man I was 35 years ago, but your rifle hasn't aged one day and my love for this gun burns just as brightly as it ever did. ■

## SPECIFICATION

**Manufacturer:** Weihrauch

**Importer:** Hull Cartridge

**Tel:** 01482 342756

**Model:** HW35 Export

**Type:** Spring-piston

**Action:** Break-barrel

**Length:** 110cm

**Weight:** 3.8kg

**Trigger:** Two-stage adjustable

**Sights:** Open, fully adjustable

**RRP £348.00**