

SUPERTEST THREE SPRINGS AND A STRUT!

Pete Wadeson scrutinises four keenly priced but top-quality mechanical-action-powered hunting air rifles

As with any other type of air rifle, there's a massive selection of mechanical action air rifles on the market specifically aimed (no pun intended) at the hunter. The term mechanical, in relation to the action, can mean the rifle is cocked by operating a breakbarrel, an underlever or a sidelever for each shot.

Although the market is dominated by PCPs, mechanical-action rifles are still a popular choice for hunting, especially for those new to the sport. That's also true for traditionalists who prefer the challenge of using a rifle that, unlike a PCP, displays traits you need to control by good gun handling. These are recoil and allowing follow-through as the rifle goes through its firing cycle once a shot is taken.

We have many rifles in this sector of the market that use gas struts, more commonly known as gas rams, to produce the power that is unleashed in the compression chamber to propel the pellet down the barrel, instead of the more traditional spring and piston. Therefore I've included a model (BSA's GRT Lightning SE) that I feel represents excellent value for money as well as being a good example of what this alternative power source offers. So, without further ado: on their marks, get set, fire!

WEBLEY STINGRAY HUNTER QUANTUM



BSA GRT LIGHTNING SE



WEIHRAUCH HW 99S



CROSMAN PHANTOM MK II



BSA
GRT LIGHTNING SE
SRP: £289
www.bsaguns.co.uk

CROSMAN
PHANTOM MK II
SRP: £199
www.a-s-i.co.uk

WEBLEY
STINGRAY HUNTER QUANTUM
SRP: £255
www.highlandoutdoors.co.uk

WEIHRAUCH
HW 99S
SRP: £195
www.hullcartridge.co.uk



SRP: £289

BSA GRT LIGHTNING SE

This is the gas-ram-powered version of the company's popular Lightning breakbarrel air rifle – and a punchy little fast-handling carbine it is too

We've seen many variants of the Lightning since its inception. Now BSA offers the option to buy the rifle powered by gas-ram technology.

The fully ambidextrous beech wood stock is well-proportioned,

and the rear is cleverly configured to give a good ergonomic feel for head position and shouldering. The high cheekpiece is complemented by a slim neck with shallow rake and a pistol grip with palm swell, plus a generous black ventilated rubber butt pad.

The forend is short and slim; three panels of deep-cut chequering are on either side, plus two panels either side of the pistol grip. The handling is probably as close to perfect as you can expect to find in a mechanical-action carbine.

The Maxi-Grip scope rail is another feature that deserves credit. The idea is simple: a layer of rubber is sandwiched between the cylinder and the raised scope rail, acting as a shock absorber for the recoil generated by the firing cycle.

The Volumetric silencer is a very capable unit and also serves as a handy cocking aid on what is a fairly short barrel. BSA is one of the few gunmakers that still manufactures its own barrels.

These cold-hammer-forged tubes are recognised as being among the



finest barrels fitted to any sporting air rifle.

The two-stage trigger unit has a nicely formed metal blade, and the mechanism uses a simple lever-style trigger safety with finger-friendly plastic head cap above the trigger. In use, the unit breaks crisply and cleanly with hardly any measurable amount of creep. The trigger is a standout feature that allows you to make use of the rifle's accuracy potential.

THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT

"This is a superb carbine with either a spring or gas-ram powerplant, but if you're looking to try the gas-strut unit, you might well be smitten by the low recoil and faster lock time it offers."

OVERALL SCORE

84



SRP: £199

CROSMAN PHANTOM MK II

With its centrefire styling, this spring-powered breakbarrel action sporter has more to offer than just its macho full-length bullbarrel shroud

The sleek synthetic stock design, reminiscent of some fullbore rifles, features a generous cheekpiece with a relatively low comb, plus a lengthy rubber butt pad.

The slim neck is sculpted so that both the palm and fingers

of the shooting hand can be comfortably wrapped around the steep drop-down pistol grip. The slim forend has a rounded underside and features lengthy panels of impregnated grip aids.

The more you handle the rifle, the more you feel the benefits of

the overall design. It's solid in the hold, balances well, and although it's a lengthy 44.5in overall, it still manages to come quickly and easily up to the shoulder.

Like many other Crosman air rifles, the Phantom is bundled with a scope and mounts. In this instance, you get a Center Point 3-9x40 AO optic and a sturdy one-piece mount, plus Allen keys for fitting. This package is ready to shoot straight from the box.

The cocking stroke is virtually effortless, due to the fact that the lengthy barrel shroud assembly affords a good degree of leverage.

The bullbarrel shroud is very effective at taming muzzle report: it has an unscrewable end cap that uses internal vent holes to direct expelled air back down the shroud.



The smooth firing cycle means the rifle is low in recoil in the first place.

The two-stage adjustable trigger unit has a metal blade, with the manual safety positioned forward of this; both are protected by an ABS trigger guard.

Accuracy for a 30m set zero produced ragged 25mm size clusters, while on targets at 45m the .22 calibre Phantom tested here delivered centre-to-centre groups of 28mm.

THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT

"A light rifle, even with a scope, this is a well-built, smooth, accurate and nicely balanced full-power springer suitable for many medium-range hunting situations."

OVERALL SCORE

82



SRP: £255

WEBLEY STINGRAY HUNTER QUANTUM

This striking, fast-handling sporter boasts one of the best full-length barrel shrouds with integral silencer currently available on a springer

Webley has long produced a spring-powered breakbarrel rifle with the Stingray name, but the latest is more refined in performance and build. There are a few variants, all

with the Quantum, a full-length barrel shroud-cum-silencer.

The polymer-stocked model is the one to choose, as it boasts a medium-height right-hand rollover cheekpiece, a large thumbhole and a full black rubber butt pad.

This, combined with its steep drop-down pistol grip, affords superior handling and trigger control. A generous channel for a thumb-up hold is on the right of the neck, and several panels of chequering are impregnated into the build. The forend is quite deep and ideally proportioned.

The rifle uses POWR-LOK technology, an internal powerplant and spring guide, which also uses a mech to help quell spring vibration. This results in a very smooth firing cycle. The Quantum silencer not only fully oversleeves the tube, but extends 170mm beyond. This creates more leverage, which makes cocking the gun simple.

The rifle's ace in the hole is its super-efficient moderator, the first to combine air rifle, rimfire and



centrefire moderator technology. The design works by using the first chamber to direct excess air from behind the pellet into the cavity and silencer wall. This slows down the air following the exiting pellet without loss of power, which helps reduce sound.

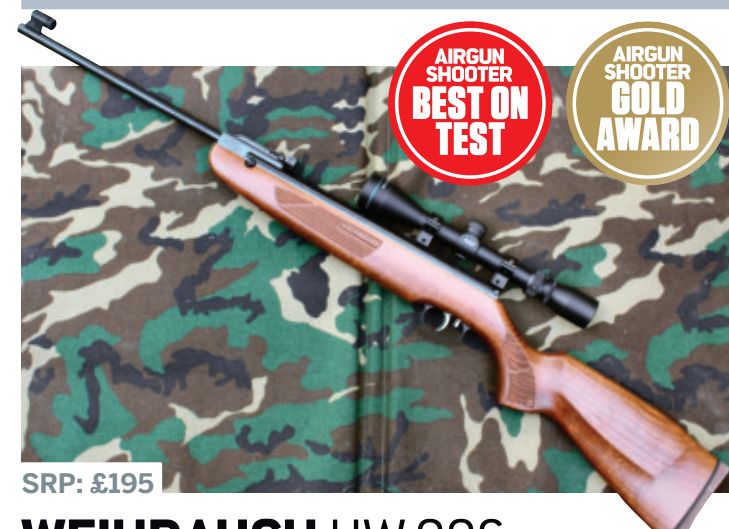
Accuracy for a 30m set zero produced ragged 20mm clusters, while on targets at 45m the .22 Stingray tested here delivered 32mm groups.

THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT

"The Stingray Hunter Quantum has all the features you could need. The all-weather stock is one of the best designs in this price bracket, so balance and handling are both spot-on."

OVERALL SCORE

87



SRP: £195

WEIHRAUCH HW 99S

Now resplendent in a modern Minelli stock, the HW 99S is surely one of the best carbine-sized springers available

The 99S is sometimes referred to as a lighter version of the legendary Weihrauch HW 80 breakbarrel springer, but weight loss is not its only redeeming feature: it's a highly capable, easy-to-handle full-power hunter.

The ambidextrous Minelli beech stock has a relatively low, yet well-defined cheekpiece with a slight hog's back, plus a brown rubber butt pad with black spacer. A shallow thumb shelf is crafted on top of the slim neck, and the forend is slim but quite deep, with

a nicely rounded underside. For grip, this stock features some very well-cut chequering, combined with some stippling.

Keeping optics firmly in place are deep-cut scope grooves, with three arrestor holes machined on top of the slim and shortened 30mm air cylinder. The HW 99S takes quite a bit of heft to cock due to its shortened barrel. Lock-up is solid when closed, due to a well-sized wedge-shape detente lock; a generously sized breech seal also ensures this very important area remains airtight.

The HW 99S comes with a solid pair of irons. Open sights are always welcome on a rifle such as this: they add so much in terms of versatility. Incidentally, as the foresight unit is clamped onto a



short run of rails cut into the top of the end of the barrel, it can be removed should you want to fit a suitably sized slip-over silencer.

Due to the shorter barrel, the rifle has a distinctive "blat" on discharge, but it's certainly not something that's any cause for concern, and recoil is very low.

Accuracy for a 30m set zero produced sub-20mm c-c groups; at 45m it gave groups of 34mm.

THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT

"The HW 99S has always been a well-built, rugged, reliable and accurate carbine-sized springer, and due to the redesigned stock, it now looks as good as it shoots."

OVERALL SCORE

90



KEY SPECS

NAME	BSA GRT LIGHTNING SE	CROSMAN PHANTOM MK II	WEBLEY STINGRAY HUNTER QUANTUM	WEIHRACH HW 99S
SRP	£289	£199	£255	£195
MAKER	BSA Guns	Crosman USA	Webley & Scott	Weihrauch
UK IMPORTER	N/A	ASI Ltd	Highland Outdoors	Hull Cartridge
TELEPHONE	0121 772 8543	01728 688555	0845 0990252	01482 342571
WEB	www.bsaguns.co.uk	www.a-s-i.co.uk	www.highlandoutdoors.co.uk	www.hullcartridge.co.uk
TYPE	Single-Shot	Single-Shot	Single-Shot	Single-Shot
CALIBRE	.177 & .22	.22	.177 & .22	.177 & .22
COCKING	Breakbarrel	Breakbarrel	Breakbarrel	Breakbarrel
OVERALL LENGTH	950mm	1,130mm	1,060mm	1,030mm
BARREL LENGTH	370mm	476mm (including shroud)	260mm	395mm
WEIGHT	3kg	2.8kg	3kg	3.1kg
SCOPE RAILS	Fitted with a shock-absorbing unit, the Maxi-Grip Scope Rail	Comes with dovetailed riser block (scope and mounts are also included)	Yes	Yes
STOCK	Fully ambidextrous beechwood sporter	Ambidextrous synthetic, fullbore-style sporter	Polymer thumbhole	Ambidextrous beech sporter
TRIGGER	Two-stage	Two-stage	Two-stage	Two-stage
SAFETY	Manual	Manual	Automatic	Automatic
POWER	11.5ft lb	11.5ft lb	11.5ft lb	11.5ft lb

WEIHRACH IS A WINNER

The HW 99S pips a strong line-up to the post thanks to its versatility

When you choose a mechanical-action air rifle, because you manually cock it for each shot, the ease of use and even the size should be considered in relation to your own physical build. As these factors need to be taken into consideration, a visit to

your local gun shop is strongly advised, as you can request to handle a range of guns before you decide on which model best suits your needs.

It's a tough call to decide the running order of the rifles tested, but here goes. The Weihrauch HW 99S proves itself to be the most versatile of the bunch: not only is it

compact, accurate and light, but as it's equipped with open sights you have the bonus of having two sighting options.

The Webley Stingray Hunter Quantum will fit most shooters like a glove, and due to its high-tech internals it almost performs like a custom-tuned special; in addition, the integral silencer is so distinctive that it's possibly one of the best 'all-weather' hunters you'll find in this price range.

Though it comes in third here, the BSA GRT Lightning SE is an

ideal choice for those looking to try the gas-ram powerplant, with a pedigree worthy of one of the UK's top air rifle manufacturers.

However, the Crosman Phantom Mk II also merits serious consideration: not only is it a good-quality rifle, but being bundled with the extra ancillary kit included, it's a bargain. Unfortunately, some smaller-stature shooters might find it a tad lengthy, particularly if a compact gun is one of the major factors you're looking for. ●



THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT

"In this sector of the market, I'm sure the four air rifles featured here have made you aware that the choice at this price level is very varied. Even so, you can be sure the quality and build is not scrimped on, and the accuracy potential they offer is impressive. And although some use the term 'starter rifle' when referring to airguns such as these, remember if you're looking to begin hunting without spending too much money, this round-up of 'featured' airguns is proof positive it can be done."