

The rifle rests on its point of balance, merely guided toward the target, and allowed to recoil without interference.

RECOIL IN AMAZEMENT

Terry finds there's not much more to say about a rifle with nothing to prove

I've somehow managed to put just short of 500 pellets through the Weihrauch HW97K I was testing last month. I've rediscovered the pleasure of shooting a high-quality springer, and with it the desire to pass on the path to that pleasure to as many of you as possible. Sorry folks, but the '97K has turned me into something of an evangelist, complete with every annoying trait that comes with it. I'm hoping it's a temporary aberration, but while it lasts, I'll be preaching the spring-pistol gospel – and you lot are my congregation.

A MONTH ON ...

I'll open this sermon with a confession. You see, in terms of

pure accuracy, consistency, handling and overall performance, the near-tinful of .177 pellets that have passed through that factory-made Weihrauch barrel have revealed little more than I discovered last month. This is a good thing, because total dependability and non-wavering output is the foundation of shooting success, and it's a feature of this rifle. In basic terms, once you've passed the 200-pellet mark, everything's run-in, you and the rifle have formed a partnership, and each understands the other's needs. From there, a lifelong relationship can be formed, a shooting union if you will, from which great things can be achieved ... provided you know how to get the most from the rifle.

THE BASICS

As I explained last month, to extract peak performance from any springer, you need to run a handling policy built around minimal interference. Again, I'm repeating what I said last month, but consistency is everything when shooting a recoiling air rifle, and the less you put into your handling, the less you'll need to repeat. That repetition must be applied identically, every time, or your recoiling rifle will produce changes in its recoil-path, and with it, changes in pellet impact.

SERIOUS ACCURACY

I shot six groups with the test rifle that just about ripped the edges of once-inch diameter circles at 47

yards, and if I'd had longer range at my disposal, I'm sure I'd have printed sub-inch groups at 50 yards. This is a factory rifle, with no tuning, tweaks or touches, and it shot like a thoroughbred. That's what it can do, if you let it.

I shot all of those groups from the sitting position, and the feeling of satisfaction is incredible, as you'll find out if you have a springer as good as this one, and you shoot it like this.

SOFT STABILITY

There are two types of sitting stance available to you; the 'overarm' and the 'off the knee', the latter being by far the most popular among the field target shooters of our nation, who are

Below: My preferred minimal contact trigger technique works best with a palm shelf.



Below: A proper target glove is best, but the important point is the separation between the rifle and the knee.



Below: After a series of inelegant attempts over the years, Weihrauch has finally nailed the underlever catch arrangement.



Below: Plenty of room to thumb a pellet into that protruding breech. Perfect.



some of the finest outdoor air rifle markspersons on this planet. Personally, I prefer the overarm stance, and it was from that version that I conducted a reasonably successful competition campaign a million years ago. You choose whatever works for you, but make sure you retain the principle of turning yourself into a living bench rest, where bones,

rather than muscles, are the main supports.

GENTLE GUIDANCE

Once the position is established and you're sitting comfortably on a properly padded beanbag, the rifle should rest within the stance, propped rather than held, and guided not gripped. Now do everything you can to relax into the stance and carefully guide the scope's cross hair toward your chosen target. Don't twist your torso to steer the rifle; instead, rotate the entire stance by pivoting on the beanbag.

RELEASING THE SHOT

Once full relaxation and stability has been achieved, pause your breathing, and squeeze the trigger, before holding perfect aim and sight picture through the scope, until you see the pellet strike the target. This final process is known as follow-through, and our Airgun Student, Naylor Ball, explains it perfectly on page 70 of this issue. Now, cock the rifle, reload, and repeat, until you establish familiarity and a workable routing and rhythm, whilst consciously relaxing before releasing every shot.

CHECKPOINTS

A target glove is the perfect accessory for those who use the off the knee stance, because it creates a padded support that insulates the rifle from the shooter's hard, bony knee. Unyielding surfaces are the enemy of the recoiling rifle shooter. Your rifle requires an absorbent rest that allows it to recoil 'naturally', without interference and you must become that rest in every stance you use.

Before each shot, get into the habit of checking that the rifle's butt pad locates your shoulder, or upper arm in the case of the overarm stance, in exactly the same place and under precisely

the same minimal tension. Then do the same for your trigger hand and face contact. When everything is repeated with total consistency, your results will follow in the same way.

VERDICT ON THE TEST RIFLE

Back to the HW97K, now, and all I can say is, it absolutely has to be on your shortlist if you're looking for a high-quality springer that can take whatever talent you have and turn it into downrange performance. The Weihrauch production and finish quality is of the highest standard and this rifle will last for decades. Find the perfect pellet, learn to shoot the '97K sympathetically, and you too could become a springer evangelist, and be every bit as happy - and annoying - as I am. ■



The 'overarm' stance is my favourite version of the sitting position.



The 'off the knee' stance, anchored by a beanbag and a pair of sturdy boots.



Whatever the stance, the handling must be relaxed and totally consistent.

TECH SPEC

Model: HW97K
Manufacturer: Weihrauch
Country of origin: Germany
Price: £450
Type: Single shot, under-lever
Calibre: .22, .20, .177, .25
Cocking: Under-lever
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

RRP £450