

Few rifles can boast of the same popularity as the HW80.



# WHAT IS IT WITH THE '80?

It's big, bold, and break-barrel - it's the Weihrauch HW80

What is it with the '80? That was a question posed recently on an Internet airgun forum. A question phrased in such a way will provoke many answers, all valid because they represent an individual's thoughts on what is, without doubt, an iconic air rifle. My own response to the question went along the lines

of 'the '80 holds a special place in the hearts of airgunners of a certain (middle) age, and the important contribution it made to the airgun scene following its launch in 1982'.

Looking at the bigger picture, the HW80 must still be selling in substantial numbers or else Weihrauch would likely phase it out, so it

seems its appeal has spanned the generations, despite competition from within its own ranks — the HW95.

It's clear the HW80 has something of an 'X-Factor', and so is a rifle worthy of closer examination. It's worth noting that the HW80 is available in a selection of calibres, including



the mighty .25, but that will have to wait until next month. So let's get on and take a look at this German giant and see exactly 'what it is with the '80'.

## LETTER FROM AMERICA

It's quite clear that the HW80 is a German gun, but its concept lies further afield – the USA, to be more precise.

Anyone who cares to delve into airgun history will come across the name 'Dr Robert Beeman', a prominent figure in the annals of America's airgun scene. The story goes that Dr Beeman became frustrated by the lack of power produced by the Weihrauch HW35, which was fine as far as the Europeans were concerned, owing to their power limits, but unsatisfactory for the Americans due to their lack of restriction.

In an attempt to address this issue, Dr Beeman began exploring new designs. He was clear that he wanted the Weihrauch barrel and Rekord trigger, but also wanted to incorporate a synthetic, parachute-type piston seal. Some dialogue ensued with the Weihrauch team, prototypes were built, and by 1981, it was time to launch the new gun. It seems that there was a deal struck whereby this new gun would be called the 'Beeman R1' in the States, with Weihrauch marketing the European version as the 'HW80'. The HW80 was actually launched first, due to a hold up in the manufacture of the USA stocks which required a large blank to work with.

## BEST SELLER

The R1 sold in large numbers in the US because it was spring air rifle which offered power levels hitherto unknown. Accounts are given of the .177 gun producing over 1,000 fps, which is approaching the speed of sound! The rifle even inspired its own book, 'The Beeman R1 - super magnum air rifle' written



**Ginny, the 'G' in G&T Hunting, proudly displays my HW80 at the British Shooting Show.**

by Tom Gaylord and published in 1995. Gaylord describes the R1 as, 'The rifle that brought America fully into the world of adult guns'.

Coming back to home turf, British airgunners took to the HW80 like the proverbial duck to water. I don't know the figures, but it must be one of Weihrauch's best sellers. It seems that every serious airgun shooter has one, or has had one at some point.

I've said this a few times before, but the 1980s was the decade of the 'power hungry', and as the HW80 made power effortlessly, that surely was at least one of its appeals.

Much has been written about its hefty weight, which there is no getting away from. In fact, when I think about it, the only lightweight alloy componentry I can think of is the trigger blade and adjustment screw. The truth of the matter is that the solidity actually contributes to the function of this gun. A lightweight springer can be difficult to hold steadily on aim. Once fired, the extra ballast helps to absorb the recoil, resulting in a gun that shoots more accurately.

The HW80 was also a tuner's delight, both for the professional and the DIY brigade, particularly as the rifle was very easy to strip and responded well to a few basic tweaks here and there. Its potential did not go unnoticed by one particular tuning company, Venom Arms, who developed several custom versions of the '80 which today command very high prices, if you can find one.

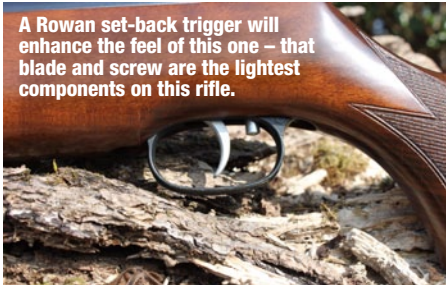
Writing this almost feels as though I am reminiscing about an old rifle sadly no longer with us, but the beauty is that this icon is still available to buy new, at your local shop. Just think about that; you have the ability to buy a rifle which has become a legend in its own lifetime.

## LEGENDARY PURCHASE

So, grounded firmly in the present, I went about getting my own little piece of HW loveliness. The first thing to confess is that before this latest edition to the family, I did already have two '80s, but as the saying goes, there's always room for one more.



**Just a little superficial damage, nothing to be concerned about.**



A Rowan set-back trigger will enhance the feel of this one – that blade and screw are the lightest components on this rifle.

It all happened within a few minutes of entering the gates of this year's British Shooting Show. I must have been one of the first through, having queued for a while to get the advantage. Whilst on the subject of the show, if you missed it, you missed out. It was absolutely brilliant! I was there for the full day and I didn't get to see everything I wanted. It really was sensory overload.

Anyway, what I did see was G&T Hunting from Skegness, and that's another thing about these shows – you get to see shops from exotic areas which you would never usually have the opportunity to visit.

The good folk at G&T had a rather nice HW80, which was obviously an older model because it didn't have the safety warnings embossed on the cylinder, nor did it have the moderator, and it had open sights and a .22 carbine barrel. The gun was up for £180, which given its very good condition I thought was a good price. I indicated my interest, requesting a closer look, and was told that they had the original box – could it get any better?

A close examination revealed a very nice gun, the only two marks being a small patch of rust and a scratch, both near the scope rails. Apart from these, there were no signs of abuse, and I doubted this gun had ever been apart. The box looked a bit tatty and aged, and my guess was that this gun had spent the larger part of its life in there on top of someone's wardrobe. The deal was quickly completed, and it was just what I needed to complete the HW trio; open sights, carbine, and a bit of age. These days, the vast majority of '80s have the



There is something almost therapeutic about shooting a break-barrel.

moderator and factory-threaded barrel, which is great, but doesn't give the open sight option that I wanted to explore.

**BACK AT EVANS' HEADQUARTERS**

First job whenever I buy a used Weihrauch is to check the age on the useful online data base; just punch in your serial number and it will give you a good idea of when the gun was made. Mine came back as 1993.

The box contents were quite complete, even

down to an unused bottle of oil – remember when you used to get those? Hunting about under the polystyrene packing revealed an unopened packet of foresight elements, good news indeed.

Next job was the chronograph, to get an idea of where things are at power-wise, and with JSB Exacts this was hovering around 9.4 ft. lbs., which given this gun's powerhouse reputation was quite low. My initial thoughts were that the piston seal had perhaps



Rear sight offers differing blade options, which vary the sight picture.



That breech just exudes strength; many list the HW80 as their choice for a 'desert island' gun.



Always worth checking the transfer port size. Many people have enlarged theirs, but my advice, unless you're sure of what you're doing, is 'leave well alone'.

degraded over time, and also perhaps the breech seal, which would correlate with the guns age and lack of use.

The fun bits are out on the range when you really get to know the gun, and get a feel for its firing manners and any idiosyncrasies.

### OPEN INVITATION

Inspired by the editor's recent article on the use of open sights, I was keen to reacquaint myself with their use, and to see how I fared. Starting out at 10m and then stretching to 15m, I was connecting with 1" spinners with encouraging regularity. My initial confidence bubble was burst as I moved out to 20m, and by 30m it was 'large bean can only' territory. A practical proposition for pest control? Well, at very short range, yes, but anything beyond would be too risky for me. What it did highlight for me was the pure enjoyment you get from unmagnified images, quick target acquisition, and unexaggerated wobble. I think everyone should give it a go from time to time.

### SIMPLE ENJOYMENT

Another highlighted fact was the enjoyment you get from a simple break-barrel rifle. The break, cock, load, close, sequence becoming almost hypnotic in nature, it was shooting in its purest form.

I decided to keep things simple and classic in nature, so I fitted a gloss finish Bushmaster 4x40, in a one-piece Sportsmatch mount, keeping everything as close to the rifle's action as possible. With the new sighting option, the 30m targets were magnified just enough to prove that this rifle had real



potential as a field gun.

The firing cycle would be what I have come to expect of guns of this era, a pronounced, 'Barrpp' – I think that's how it's spelt. So, that's one thing to sort for the next instalment. The recoil itself was unimpressive. I think sometimes people hear the twang, and somehow equate that with recoil, when in fact they are two different entities.

The proportions of this gun suggest that it might be a bit of a handful for a lightly built youngster, so trying before you buy would be advisable, as should be the case with any purchase. The cocking effort is not too heavy, even with a carbine barrel for the sub-12 ft.lb. rifle.

Given the design, principally that 30mm diameter cylinder, the '80 lends itself to uprating to FAC status by your RFD, providing

you have the requirement and necessary available 'slot'. I have yet to try a high power '80, but I gather that they can shoot particularly well at around 18 ft.lbs., although higher power is possible. My own opinion, for what it's worth, is that if you are going to the trouble of securing an FAC gun, it is probably worth aiming for a power of 30 ft.lbs., for which you are better served by a PCP. Springer purists might throw their hands up in horror, but having owned a 17 ft.lb. springer and a 30 ft.lb. PCP, it's the PCP that still resides in my cabinet.

Noises aside, shooting the '80 was a very pleasurable experience. It was clear to see how this rifle has won and sustained a huge legion of fans.

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

So, it's time to give some thought to the next step which will be to strip the gun down, take a look at what is involved in changing to a larger calibre, attempt to restore the power levels to circa 11.2 ft.lbs., and ditch some of the mechanical acoustics. It shouldn't be too much of a problem.

All that's left for me to ask is, 'Do you have an '80, and if not, why not? Go on, you know you want one! ■

### CONTACTS

G&T HUNTING AND OUTDOOR:

[www.airriflespellets.co.uk](http://www.airriflespellets.co.uk)

HULL CARTRIDGE:

[www.hullcartridge.co.uk](http://www.hullcartridge.co.uk)

