

ADOPTING A NEW 'PUP

Phil Hardman is incredibly excited about a new arrival from Weihrauch

It's here! Finally, my new rifle has arrived! Getting any new piece of hunting equipment is exciting, none more so than a new rifle, but I'm not a gear geek, so I rarely ever change rifles. Instead, I prefer to know and use just one, mastering it, learning my aim points, trajectory, and becoming so comfortable with it, that it becomes an extension of my own body, as natural as pointing my finger when I bring it up on aim. It's very rare a rifle comes along that I see and I think, 'I need that in my life'. However, Weihrauch did just that when they announced the HW100BP.

I've been a major fan of the HW100 since it was launched. I used one for several years before I ever started writing for the magazine, and after a spell using Daystate electronic rifles, I went back to my trusty HW100 – not a decision I have ever regretted. The HW110 was released a couple of years ago, and I love it. It's a fantastic little rifle, but it never came close to replacing my HW100 as my 'main' hunting gun.

HEL'ISH EFFECTIVE

I once compared the HW100 to the AH64 Apache Attack helicopter; not the prettiest, but so effective that it somehow still managed to look brutishly handsome. The A10 Warthog is another example of a machine that is no vision of loveliness, but the pilots who fly them wouldn't want to be in any other plane, and when it comes to killing tanks, nothing can touch either of these two flying machines. To me, that's the HW100. Yes, there are sleeker looking rifles out there, there are newer designs too, but when it comes to bagging vermin, I wouldn't want to be behind the trigger of anything else.

What happens then, when that timeless, superbly engineered design I use and love so much, gets a revamp that brings it right up to date with the latest in airgun designs? The HW100BP is the ultimate evolution of the HW100 design, and it has a lot to live up to.

HUGE ADVANTAGES

Bullpups are not new. Military firearm

manufacturers have known about the advantage for decades, and even airguns in bullpup configuration, something that was once a rare, custom job, is now as mainstream as a carbine barrel. Bullpups, to put it as simply as I can, are rifles that have the action moved all the way rearward in the stock, and the trigger assembly moved forward, creating a shorter overall rifle, but maintaining the same length barrel, and in the case of an airgun, the same length air cylinder. The advantages are huge, same shot count, same accuracy, better handling and in some cases, better balance.

They can come with downsides, of course, the bolt moves rearward, as does the magazine, and safety catch in most cases, and depending on the design, the compromises can be too much and ruin the usability of the rifle. I knew even before I received the rifle, that it could only go one of two ways. I would love it, or I would hate it. There will be no grey areas here for me, and I literally couldn't wait to get my hands on it to find out if this would indeed live up to expectations, or leave me bitterly disappointed.



It took me a while to get used to carrying the BP, such is the difference compared to a conventional sporter

A BIT OF A LOOKER

Well, one day last week, I finally received a call from the great folks at Hull Cartridge, the UK distributor, that my rifle was ready for me to collect from my local gunshop, Bradford Stalker Firearms. I've dealt with the lads at Bradford Stalker for years, and they're a great bunch and extremely knowledgeable, but given how excited I was, I just wanted to grab the gun, and get going, home then straight out into the field, but I stayed for a cuppa and a chat, allowing the staff and customers to have a hold of the new rifle, to get their opinions on it while I was there. A couple of things became immediately obvious, and not only to me. Pretty much everyone who saw it declared

'Wow! It's so much nicer than in the pictures I saw!' I must admit, I wasn't blown away by the looks of it in photographs, but in the flesh, she's a bit of a looker. It keeps the 'brutishly handsome' theme of its HW100S and HW100T sisters, but it also has a futuristic look about it, unlike those two which are firmly in the 'traditional' category.

GREAT HANDLING

The second thing that everyone who handled it said, was, 'It handles superbly!' That's because it does. Shouldering it in the shop I was blown away by the balance, which is as close to perfect as I have ever seen in any rifle, ever, and also the pointability of the thing is insane. It's almost instant to come on target and then it just stays there with very little effort needed to keep it up on aim.

I took a chance to line it up alongside the HW100KT hanging on the rack on the wall, and was really surprised to see that the BP is shorter, and this is the full-length version I have! The pistol grip on the BP is a definite improvement; in fact, it is quite easily the most comfortable I have ever held. Somehow, they managed to make it ambidextrous, without any compromise. It's equally comfortable no matter which hand you use. I'm not sure who designed it, or what kind of magical trickery





Could this be my favourite-ever airgun?



I just cant stop shooting this gun. Even pine cones have become legitimate quarry lately!



Even a rifle that shoots as well as this, benefits greatly from a stable rest.

they used to achieve it, but they're a genius!

Of course, being impressive in a gunshop is one thing, but it takes a lot more than good balance to make a good hunting rifle, so I would have to get it out into the field to see if it could really cut it, not just as a good hunting rifle, but as a worthy replacement for the number one slot in my gun cabinet. Anything less than the greatest hunting rifle on the market, in my book, would be a failure, because currently that's exactly what the HW100S is to me.

SUPERB ENGINEERING

Once I got home, I headed out to zero the scope, which I had taken off my HW110 until I get my hands on a compact scope to fit to the HW100BP, and I was amazed to see that it only took me three shots, and less than 12 clicks of the elevation adjuster, to get it dead on. That's some pretty good engineering; two rifles by the same manufacturer shoot within an inch of each other at 35 yards, straight out of the box with no scope adjustment. It's also a bit of a testament to Weaver rails, which both rifles have.

The trigger, I'm pleased to say, feels exactly like the one on my HW100S, which I was relieved about. I'm not sure how Weihrauch have managed to move the trigger forward, but

they haven't changed the feel of it at all, and the triggers on HW guns are excellent – this one is no different.

SOUND PERFORMANCE

One major difference is the sound upon firing. It's a very sharp, louder sound from the shooter's perspective. It took me a few shots to realise why, but because the action sits so far back in the stock, your head is resting on it when you fire and so the sound is transmitted directly to your jaw, and into your ear. When the rifle is fired by someone else, it sounds exactly like a 'normal' HW100, which is, well, very quiet. Accuracy from my .177 model was phenomenal. That balance and perfect handling means that whatever you shoot at, you hit, even out to extreme airgun ranges. Targets are one thing, but I'm a hunter, so with my confidence high, I headed home, ready to go out at first light to see how it would perform under real-world, field conditions, where it really counted.

SAVAGE SHOTS

I headed out at 3.30am, but was a little early, so I sat in my car and loaded the pair of 14-shot magazines that come with the rifle, whilst I waited for it to get light enough to

shoot. Once it was, I headed out to stalk the fields at the bottom of my permission. Cocking and shooting the rifle is so slick and silky smooth, and my worry about the sidelever being too far rearward was unfounded because Weihrauch have moved the sidelever forward and upward compared to the original HW100, and also fitted a biathlon cocking handle, which I must say is a really good feature, and something I'd like on my HW100S.

It didn't take me very long to bump into my first rabbit, which due to the long grass I was forced to take from a standing position. The range was a mere 15 yards, so while it was no huge challenge, for my first shot of the day, with a brand new rifle, I would have preferred to take the shot kneeling. I needn't have worried, because I dropped it stone dead on the spot, aided by that super-sweet balance I've been harping on about. This thing just locks onto targets; it really flatters you as a shooter. I went on to claim nine rabbits, collecting eight, and leaving one out for a pair of buzzards that are nesting nearby. My longest shot was a 42-yard kneeling shot, that hit the rabbit precisely where it was supposed to. This gun is a savage when it comes to dropping vermin. Could I have made the same shot with my HW100S? Yes, of course I



There were plenty of rabbits about, which meant some challenging stalks.



A 45-yard rabbit, HW100BP, and a supremely confident shooter – this was only going to end one way.

could, but I would have taken fractionally longer to get it on target, and felt fractionally less stable on aim, and all these fractions can sometimes make the difference between a kill and not.

ULTIMATE EVOLUTION

At this level, improvements in design are harder and harder to achieve. The difference between a £100 rifle and a £300 gun are huge, but the differences between a £900 gun and one that's just over £1100 are much less, but there is a difference, and for anyone good enough to exploit that extra performance, there should be no doubt about it, the HW100BP is the superior gun. The advantages of the bullpup configuration, have come with none of the expected disadvantages, as far as I can see. It shoots as accurately as you'd expect from any HW100; it handles better, it cocks as smoothly, the trigger is as good, the mag' is just as easy to slip in and out of the rifle despite its rearward position, it does most things as well as its sporter sister, but it does some things better, and that is enough for me to absolutely adore it already. A couple of years ago, bullpups arrived and flooded the market, whilst Weihrauch resisted the temptation to rush one out and hop on the bandwagon.

Instead, they quietly developed one of their own, much like the HW100 itself, which was a relative latecomer to the PCP party. They made sure they got it right before release, ironed out the potential disadvantages of the bullpup configuration with some extremely clever engineering solutions, and released it when it was ready.

VERDICT

This is the ultimate evolution of the HW100, no doubt about it, and it is, for me, even after less than a week of ownership, shaping up to possibly be the best hunting air rifle I have ever used. Of course, it's early days yet, and I'll need to do a lot more field testing to be sure. See you next month! ■



As far as maiden hunting trips go, I'd say this was a success!