

# FIXED-BARREL FINESSE

**MAT MANNING** gets his hands on the Weihrauch HW97 KT – one of the world's greatest off-the-peg springers

PHOTOGRAPHY **JOE BRANSTON**

It is all too easy to get complacent when you're testing different airguns week in, week out, but it has to be said that the subject of this review has been an absolute pleasure to shoot. The simple fact is that the Weihrauch HW97 KT, distributed in the UK by Hull Cartridge, epitomises everything that a great spring-powered air rifle should be.

Weihrauch has been making some of the world's finest airguns for a very long time. The brand is synonymous

with rock-solid build quality and super-refined German engineering. Those traits are more than apparent in this offering, which manages to pack the best of Weihrauch springer heritage into a modern fixed-barrel air rifle with a very stylish thumbhole stock. The HW97 KT has a recommended retail price of £655. That is quite an outlay for a spring-powered air rifle, but this is one of the finest spring-powered airguns that money can buy.

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This scope-only springer is equipped with a high cheekpiece and adjustable butt plate.



The thumbhole stock incorporates a thoughtfully contoured pistol grip with some crisp stippling.



The long flowing lines of the forend offer plenty of room for your leading hand.



A tapered muzzle weight provides extra forward heft and also incorporates the push-button underlever retainer.



Holes for recoil pins have been machined between the dovetail rails – not that the HW97 has much kick.



The HW97 KT's underlever cocking stroke is exceptionally smooth and very quiet.



### TAKING STOCK

This adult-sized Weihrauch measures up at 101 cm from muzzle to butt and weighs a solid 4.2kg. Those proportions make for quite a substantial airgun, but the extra heft helps to soak up what little recoil this rifle produces. Furthermore, the beech thumbhole stock features some clever design tweaks that make the HW97 KT very comfortable to shoot. With my chosen scope set-up, point of balance was about 9cm in front of the trigger guard, and the gun handled extremely well, whether shooting from the bench or taking standing, kneeling or sitting shots.

There are no open sights on this air rifle. It is capable of accuracy that more than justifies fitting a decent telescopic sight, so I assume that Weihrauch simply considered opens to be surplus to requirements. Consequently, the stock incorporates a high hogsback cheekpiece, which has been designed to deliver excellent eye-scope alignment. This version of the HW97 also had an adjust butt plate, which I really like. Apart from enabling you to shift its height up and down, the adjustment mechanism also facilitates some rotational shift, so there is potential for a significant amount of refinement to suit your frame. There is a synthetic stock version which doesn't feature the adjustable butt, though it is significantly cheaper at £510.

The HW97KT's stock is ambidextrous, but as a right-hander, I wasn't aware of any obvious compromise in its fit. The substantial thumbhole cutaway is easily large enough to accommodate most people's hands, and it sits behind a nicely contoured pistol grip, which really fills the palm. The backward-sweeping grip cradles your hand very

nicely and incorporates a grooved channel which steers your finger straight to the trigger blade.

Panels of stippling with a wood-effect pattern adorn both sides of the pistol grip and are repeated with substantial panels along the flanks of the fore-end. That crisp stippling really improves grip and also adds to this rifle's overall aesthetic. The fore end has lovely sweeping lines and it's nice and long so you're never at a loss for a hold point for your leading hand.

As beech stocks go, this is a very handsome one. The wood on the test rifle had a reasonable amount of patterning and had been treated to a finish that shows off the grain whilst not being so flashy as to attract unwanted attention in the field.

### FEATURES AND FUNCTION

I have already mentioned Weihrauch's reputation for excellent built quality. The standard of engineering on this air rifle is remarkable, as is the flawless finish of its metalwork. This model has a 30cm barrel which is capped with what looks like a silencer, but is actually a tapered muzzle weight. Nonetheless, I reckon it does provide some sound suppression.

The HW97's cylinder is machined with dovetail scope rails, which incorporate three holes to accept a recoil arrestor pin – not that I think this gun's recoil is snappy enough to cause any problems with scope creep as long as you use decent mounts. Those rails provide about 21 cm of clamping space, which should be sufficient room to keep most optics well clear of the loading port.

Beneath the barrel weight is the retainer







Loading is direct to the breech – and there's plenty of room to access it from either side.



Driven by a curved blade with gold bling, Weihrauch's famous Rekord trigger unit is crisp and predictable.

for the cocking lever. Press the button at the front to unlock it, and the lever draws down with a very smooth, almost silent, action to cock the spring. The cocking stroke concludes with a nice positive click, setting the automatic safety catch which is positioned at the rear of the cylinder.

Loading is direct to the breech. The opening is exposed by the cocking stroke and has been designed to allow plenty of room for you to reach the breech from either side – it's quite surprising how quickly you can thumb a pellet in there once you get the knack. After seating the pellet, swing the underlever back up into its retainer and you're ready to shoot.

Weihrauch triggers need no introduction – they have been setting the standard by which others are judged for decades and the HW97 KT has a match version of the famous Rekord unit. The blade, which has been given some classy gold bling, has a gentle curve and a wide grooved face which transmits plenty of feel to the pad of your finger. This two-stage trigger unit is adjustable, though I chose to use it on its factory setting, which was excellent and utterly free from creep. The first stage felt just right and came to a very clear stop before a crisp, positive second stage let off.

## POWER AND PRECISION

This is a full-power airgun, and the .22 calibre test rifle was churning out around 11.2ft.lbs. with a variation of eight feet per second over a ten-shot string using Weihrauch FT Exact Jumbo pellets taken straight from the tin. Not only

***“Weihrauch triggers need no introduction – they have been setting the standard by which others are judged for decades and the HW97 KT has a match version”***

does this gun boast pretty impressive shot-to-shot consistency, but it also has a very smooth and quick-firing cycle with minimal twang. The kick is very modest and comes straight back into the shoulder, making it easy to manage.

That consistency and smooth shooting combines with the precision of the fixed barrel to deliver some very impressive accuracy. This airgun can compete with a PCP if you do your bit – plus it doesn't have the added expense and hassle of charging kit. Shooting off a bag on the range, I was soon printing cloverleaf groups at 30m without much trouble and smacking 30mm spinners at 40m was pretty much a formality. My spring-gun shooting standard is disappointingly average, so I have no doubt that springer aficionados will be able to achieve even better things.

The Weihrauch HW97 KT is a truly excellent spring-powered air rifle which has been built to give years of fuss-free shooting with minimal maintenance. I think it is a beautiful-looking airgun, but it is also a very slick performer. It has more than enough punch and precision to make easy work of pest control, but the level of refinement in its super-accurate

fixed-barrel action means that, in the right hands, it is also more than capable of picking up some serious silverware on the HFT competition circuit.

As I said at the outset, this is not a cheap springer – but it is one of the best off-the-peg springers in the world. Factor in that there is no additional outlay for a tank, pump or compressor, and its asking price suddenly starts to sound like extremely good value, and not only does it buy you a brilliant airgun, but you also get the added reassurance of the tried and tested Weihrauch brand. ✕

## TECH SPEC

**Manufacturer:** Weihrauch

**Model:** HW97 KT

**Type:** Fixed-barrel springer

**Stock type:** Thumbhole sporter

**Cocking:** Underlever

**Trigger:** Two-stage adjustable

**Safety:** Automatic

**Calibres:** .177 and .22 (.20 and .25 to special order)

**Overall length:** 1010mm (40in)

**Barrel length:** 300mm (12in)

**Length of pull:** 355mm (14in)

**Weight:** 4.2kg (9.3lb) without scope

**Energy of test rifle:** Avg 11.2ft.lbs.

**Variation (10 shots):** 8fps

**Website:** weihrauch.co.uk

**PRICE:** £655 (for model tested)