

WEIHRAUCH HW35 – the gun which started everything

I think back to the 1970s there are a few very vivid memories which jump right out at me: running away from playschool when I was three-years-old; the hot summer of 1976 – not because of the weather but the horsefly which nailed me on the leg; the Silver Jubilee street party in 1977, and 1978 was the year I learned to speak German aged just seven. When I say learned to speak German I might be exaggerating fractionally because it was just a single word: Weihrauch.

My dad came home from a little gunshop – can't remember the name of it now – in the market town of Marlborough with a Weihrauch HW35 and I would accompany him whenever possible on trips out hunting rabbits. It was during this time I became hooked on shooting and hunting and was fascinated with the HW35. There was just one problem though: the rifle was simply too big and heavy for me at that age to shoot it unassisted.

To get over this problem my dad would rest the barrel on his shoulder and I would stand behind him and shoot at empty shotgun cartridges he would strategically place at various distances. He would always bring a pocketful of empties and once we'd bagged a bunny or two it was time for me to have a go.

The gun which started my passion for shooting was the Weihrauch HW35

The empties weren't just lined up but would be placed behind things so just a small amount of the target was visible, or way out on a fence post. Despite the rifle being too heavy and long for me I was able grip it in a slightly unconventional way because I only had short fingers and the HW35 trigger quality meant I didn't have any problems squeezing the shots off. I was quite consistent at hitting my targets.



I was responsible for the demise of many empty shotgun cartridges over the next couple of years but things would change on Christmas Day 1980 when I opened up a box which contained a Webley Victor break barrel air rifle. This junior sized rifle meant I was no longer just an observer on hunting trips.

Jumping forward to the present day and both guns, like me, are now in their 40s and still with me. I have super-fond memories of my Webley Victor, but the gun which started my passion for shooting was the Weihrauch HW35. It's incredible to think the first HW35 came off the Weihrauch production line in 1951, 28 years before my dad brought one home. The fact it's still in production and available today shows how good and desirable it still is.

People might run their eye over the HW35 today and say it looks old-fashioned and dated – compared to many of the air rifles on the market today I suppose it does – but to me that's all part of its beauty. The beech sporter stock has no bells and whistles, there's no chequering on the grip or the fore-end, just a simple finger groove running along each side. The buttstock has no cheek rest on the standard rifle and there's no end cap on the pistol grip which has more of a rounded pommel-style design.

Right at the front of the fore-end on the left-hand side there's the crescent-shaped cut-out which caters for the barrel catch when the rifle is cocked. Because of barrel catch on the HW35 it means the fore-end is shorter than more modern break barrel guns where the stock extends and covers the hinge which connects the barrel to the receiver. That amount of exposed metalwork is something you don't see on break barrel guns anymore.

The barrel latch is a prime example of 'German engineering'. To begin with you might think the barrel latch is a bit fiddly but it really isn't; it's a cocking mechanism which gives the upmost accuracy and it does this by the barrel catch locking in place and ensuring the surfaces of the barrel and cylinder perfectly meet up and align once you've performed the full cocking procedure.

This mechanism gives the HW35 a very distinctive noise when being cocked. It's a very audible 'crack' as



the catch hits against the receiver and something eventually addressed by Weihrauch as newer models have a roller inside to eliminate this noise. It's an excellent improvement because a rabbit's hearing does tend to pick up the sound of an early HW35 being cocked.

It's not possible to talk about a Weihrauch without bringing up the topic of the trigger. When Weihrauch introduced the Rekord trigger unit it simply blew everything else on the market out of the water. With it being fully adjustable and match quality, the Rekord trigger was one of the top-selling points of this rifle and – like the barrel latch cocking mechanism – contributes enormously to the accuracy of the HW35. It was the smooth and crisp trigger which enabled me to consistently hit small targets out to about 30 yards when I was small.

Between us we own three generations of Weihrauch air rifles. Dad has his HW35, still in amazing condition considering its age. Hull Cartridge have been the official distributor for 40 years but this HW35 has Edgar Brothers Liverpool stamped on it. I have the HW97K which I bought back in 1997 and the HW110 I bought early in 2016.

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I love to shoot the HW110; it's lightweight, made of modern materials, multi-shot, recoil-less and extremely quiet, but it's not always the go-to gun if I'm going out with an air rifle.

Sometimes it's nice to head out with a springer under your arm and a bucketload of nostalgia around your shoulders.

A springer is not as forgiving as a pre-charged pneumatic (PCP). It's generally going to be a bit heavier, it's going to have that recoil and a bit of a twang – something which doesn't exist in the PCP world and you don't have the option of a quick and quiet back-up shot if you need it. A springer will make you work a little harder for your shot but this HW35 which has been shot for 42 years is still a very capable hunting rifle.

Over the years there have been some lovely-looking spring-powered air rifles made and two which instantly come to mind are the Air Arms TX200 HC underlever and the Air Arms ProSport underlever. Beautiful, beautiful guns but all beauty is in the eye of the beholder and although the HW35 might look like a plain Jane these days, in my eyes it will always be an absolute stunner and the gun which started everything for me.



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