

A BEEMAN SMILE!

The HW80 makes a good second-hand purchase.
Pete Evans takes a look at an early model in .177

When large asteroids hit the earth, they set off a chain of events, which are never pleasant and change matters considerably for the future. In some ways, the launch of the Weihrauch HW80 was similar. It certainly made a big impact, challenging the status quo, but thankfully changing matters for the better, showing us just how good a break-barrel airgun could be. Progress in any field is usually born out of dissatisfaction, and in this case it was Dr Robert Beeman's dissatisfaction with the HW35 that became the catalyst for the HW80, or 'Beeman R1' as it was known in the States.

In no way would I wish to denigrate the HW35 because it was and still is a fine rifle, but it was more the performance, or more accurately power, that Dr Beeman found frustrating. These frustrations should be taken in the context of the unlimited power levels

afforded by the American market, of course – in the UK, the power produced by the HW35 was just about right. Following designs and dialogue twist, Dr Beeman and Weihrauch, the European market got to see the HW80 in 1981.

POWER WITHOUT POWDER

The big plus point for both markets was the fact that this new gun made power at hitherto unknown levels for an airgun. Where power

using Webley Vulcans, BSA Airsporters, which with a good wind behind them, never threatened the magic 12 number. Weihrauch's new rifle made power without even breaking a sweat, and at times the main problem was curbing its enthusiasm, made all the more problematic by the fact that very few people possessed reliable chronographs.

Without doubt one of the challenges for a buyer of a used HW80 will be establishing that

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limits were unlimited, the rifle easily produced 18-20 ft.lbs., which meant that it was substantially de-tuned for the UK market. To put matters in context, at the time we were

the power is correct. Other than that, the big 80 is a sound second-hand buy because they are renowned for their build quality, which promises a long and fruitful life so long as

It made a big impact when launched, with ongoing after-effects.





Classic loading, a system many hunters prefer.

simple maintenance procedures are adhered to. The subject of this month's article was manufactured in 1983, which exemplifies perfectly my former assertions.

ROOM FOR ONE MORE

Being something of a HW80 fan boy, I already owned four examples prior to this month's purchase. All date from the late 1980s onward, so will be what the public have come to know

Just prior to the world-changing event we have come to know as the Covid pandemic, some of us were lucky enough to attend, and thoroughly enjoy, the Shooting Show at the NEC. Anyone who attends these shows will be familiar with Cheshire Gun Rooms, who always have one of the biggest stands, literally jam-packed with new and used airguns, often with a few interesting examples that you don't necessarily see every day. As you would

but stop and think for a moment about when this gun would have been sold.

BIG IS BEAUTIFUL

It is often written that the 1980s was the decade when the pursuit of power was seen as the primary purpose of home-tuning, and knowing the .22 calibre to be more air efficient, it would be this calibre that would prove more popular, especially so for a gun like the HW80. Polls conducted during this time supported the fact that most hunting was undertaken with guns in .22 calibre, whilst target shooting favoured the smaller calibre.

Attitudes have changed considerably over the years, both in terms of the goals for tuning, and the positive benefits of using .177 in hunting applications, which of course is a cause for celebration. The fact remains, though, that a .177 HW80 from the early

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as the Mk2 model, although this is not a moniker you will hear used by Weihrauch. We will explore the differences between the marks, but first let me tell you a bit more about this month's study.

expect, they had several HW80s, but two stood out from the usual fare because they were early examples, and one of these stood out even further because it was .177. Now, on the face of it, being .177 is no big deal these days,



The original models had angled fore ends.



Chequering remains sharp, despite 38 years of use.



The later MK2 models had extended woodwork, with a more rounded appearance.



1980s is a fairly rare beast, especially when found in fine condition, and that is what I was faced with. It would have been rude not to buy it, and it would not be unreasonable to use the well worn phrase, 'Where would I find another?' so with my wallet £215 lighter I walked off with my little calibre big gun.

ON YOUR MARKS

The HW80 under review here is from 1983, within two years of the model's introduction, and often referred to as a Mk 1, so how does this differ from later models? The stand-out feature is the stock, but more to the point, its design, which is quite distinct from later models. Starting at the fore end, the wood stops short of the breech bolt, and cut at an approximate 20-degree angle, which to my mind is reminiscent of other European guns of similar age. The underside of the fore end is flat and tapers slightly toward the 30mm diameter cylinder – the sides being flat,



The Mk1 had the flat underside, which is stable on an open palm.



Full-length and carbine - both had excellent open sights.

devoid of curvature.

The pistol grip is generously chequered, and the rake is such that the index finger comes into line with the trigger at a better angle, especially for those who like me have small hands. In fact, I don't feel it a necessity to fit an extra set-back trigger on this gun. A medium height comb, suitable for open sights, and a trademark rubber Weihrauch butt pad completes the package. In the shoulder, the stock is comfortable, the best description I can think of is a 'retro' feel, which will be down to the fore end design.

STANDARD ISSUE

The gun's action is pretty much standard HW80, which for this gun includes a standard length 20" barrel. The length certainly gives extra leverage for cocking, although for aesthetics, and practical use in the field I do prefer a carbine length. In the early years, I remember seeing many guns having silencers added to the full-length barrels, which effectively turned the gun into a drey-poking stick. This led to many guns losing a few inches off the barrel, which didn't always bode well for accuracy. Considering the age of this gun, it really is in very good condition, with just a few marks here and there. My guess is that it has spent the majority of its life on top of a wardrobe,

or under a bed, certainly not out in the field in all weathers.

ON TARGET

In keeping with the age of the gun, I decided to try it out with some H&N Field Target Trophy, Vintage Eley Wasp, and some RWS Superdomes. All gave energies between 11.2 - 11.6 ft.lbs. , the FTT edging things in the accuracy stakes, over a 30m range.

In the spirit of peer comparison I got out a

remarkably well. Its robust recoil possibly due to a shrunken piston seal, and the spring 'twang' could definitely be improved upon by a pair of well-fitted spring guides, but that can wait for another day.

RIGHT FIRST TIME!

If you do have an HW 80 that needs improvement, the whole process, including a change to .25 calibre, was covered in my August/September 2019 articles, so to avoid

"the HW80 established its position in the British market as the rifle to aspire to"

BSA Airsporter of similar age, and value at the time of purchase, which would have been the competition the HW80 faced on the British market. There is no denying the fact that the Airsporter was and still is a fine-looking gun, which handles particularly nicely, but from a performance standpoint, it just can't keep step with the HW80. Lacking in power and accuracy compared to the HW80, it's not difficult to see how the HW80 established its position in the British market as the rifle to aspire to for the serious hunter. Given this gun's age, and probable lack of maintenance, it shot

repetition I will leave the situation as is. Even though this gun has been around for 40 years, the stripping procedure is the same as a new HW80, which just goes to show that Weihrauch got it right the first time round! ■

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Cheshire Gun Room
29, Buxton Road. Heaviley.
Stockport. SK2 6LS.
www.cheshiregunroom.com

Early models had two scope arrestor holes, as opposed to three on later models.

Always worth checking for cracks here on second-hand break-barrel guns.

