

GASSING UP

Gas-ram rifles are an alternative to spring-powered rifles, but are they any good?

RICH SAUNDERS takes a look at four of the best on sale today, to find out

As a schoolboy in the early 80s, most break times were spent talking about airguns with my mates. We covered all the important topics: .177 versus .22, and whether British guns like BSA and Webley were better than exotic brands like Weihrauch and Feinwerkbau. One day, someone brought in a copy of Airgun World. We gathered around. A page was turned and there it was – a picture of the new Theoben Sirocco. The break-room went quiet and I'm sure our collective mouths fell open. Not only did this incredible rifle set a new standard for aesthetic perfection, but it also represented a completely new technology – the gas-ram. Although

it looked and operated like the break-barrel springers we were all used to, the reviewer explained that power came from compressing a sealed chamber of gas rather than a spring.

Sadly, Theoben went the way of many other British air rifle brands. However, the innovative concept apparently inspired by the suspension on a Suzuki motorbike has endured, and today, most manufacturers have at least one gas-ram in their line-up. Detractors criticise a harsh firing cycle; devotees counter by arguing that the lack of a spring bouncing around results in a faster lock time. So, here are four of the best gas-rams.

WEIHRAUCH HW90K

£630 HULLCARTRIDGE.CO.UK

Weihrauch is perhaps known for making some of the best spring-powered rifles ever made and several models have been in production for 50 years or more. However, its HW90K is no spring chicken either, but remains the company's only gas-ram.

Carrying a recommended retail price of £630, this is a premium rifle costing more than most other spring break-barrels, and is on a par with some of the premium under-levers, too.

Part of that is perhaps down to the fact that gas-ram power plant is based on Theoben's design. In fact, many consider the HW90K to be the Sirocco's spiritual successor.

Panels of laser-cut chequering on both sides of the pistol grip and fore end embellish the elegantly proportioned beech ambidextrous stock. Tipping the scales at 3.8kgs unscoped, and measuring 1,140mm, this is a full-size rifle, but with a point of balance slightly forward of the trigger, much of that weight disappears in the shoulder and helps to reduce the muzzle report to a purposeful thud.

Weihrauch's springer reputation is largely built on its fabled Rekord trigger, which is still something of a benchmark today, but the gold-coloured and fully-adjustable Elite unit on the HW90K is just as good. Like the Rekord, the two stages are smooth and the let-off breaks cleanly and predictably.

In another departure from the cross-bolt safety catch on its spring-powered siblings, the catch on the HW90K is located forward of the trigger and not on top of the action. Cocking the 310mm barrel – a process made easier by a very effective silencer fitted to a ½-inch UNF thread – is smooth and sets the



safety catch automatically. A second button allows you to reset the safety without having to re-break the barrel.

A substantial breech ensures that the barrel locks up solidly and should you notice any movement over time, tightening a couple of large screws should take care of things. The firing cycle is fast, and anyone used to a diet of Weihrauch springers will immediately notice the absence of any 'twang' caused by a main spring clanking up and down the chamber.

On the range, and using JSB Exact pellets, our .177 calibre test rifle punched 19mm five-shot centre-to-centre groups at 30 metres with ease. The chrono' showed a commendable 11.15 ft. lbs. with 8.44 grain pellets and a spread of just eight feet per second over 10 shots. »

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