

## KEY SPECS



**MAKER:** Weihrauch, Germany (www.weihrauch-sport.de)

**UK DISTRIBUTOR:** Hull Cartridge (www.hullcartridge.co.uk)

**MODEL:** HW98 Grey Laminate

**PRICE:** £640

**TYPE:** Spring-powered break-barrel

**CALIBRE:** .177 (tested) and .22.

**OVERALL LENGTH:** 1040mm

**LENGTH OF PULL:** 350mm

**BARREL LENGTH:** 300mm

**WEIGHT:** 3.65kg (without scope)

**TRIGGER:** Two-stage adjustable

**POWER:** 11.6 ft-lb

# GUN TEST BRILLIANCE MADE BETTER

Mat Manning puts the Weihrauch HW98 Grey Laminate through its paces and concludes that a spring-powered airgun doesn't have to be a compromise

**T**oo many shooters regard spring-powered airguns as a compromise. The assumption is that they offer an affordable solution for those who can't stretch to the cost of a recoilless PCP and an easier option for those who don't want to be burdened with the hassle of charging gear. While there is more than a grain of truth in that, if you spend some time with an air rifle like the Weihrauch HW98, you might just discover that a spring gun can actually deliver the best of both worlds; combining accuracy and simplicity in one low-maintenance package.

The model that I have been testing over recent weeks is the new Grey Laminate version of this acclaimed German air rifle, which is distributed in the UK by Hull Cartridge. The slinky new handle, which is very kind on the eye, bumps the recommended retail price up to £640. While that is quite an outlay for a break-barrel springer, it is still extremely competitive when compared with the cost of a high-end PCP plus charging gear, and it has to be said that this airgun oozes pedigree as soon as you clap eyes on it.

## TAKING STOCK

The laminate stock is the big update on this model and it certainly does what it was intended to do – it looks fantastic and brings

the gun bang up to date. Apart from giving the HW98's aesthetics a real boost it is also extremely functional. Correct gun fit makes a huge difference when it comes to shooting accurately, and this ambidextrous stock offers plenty of tweaking to help sculpt it to the shooter. Slacken off the single screw in the recoil pad and the butt section slides up and down. For further refinement, loosen the two screws beneath the cheekpiece and it slides up and down with plenty of play to achieve correct eye/scope alignment with low or high mounts. If only Weihrauch had also factored in angle adjustment to introduce some cast, they would be pretty close to the perfect spring gun handle with this one. You can, however, adjust the angle of the butt pad to make sure the gun



Adjustment in the cheekpiece and butt pad enable you to tailor gun fit to your own proportions



The shrouded barrel gives the gun a purposeful look – it's fitted with a muzzle weight and can be swapped for the supplied silencer



Positive shot release comes courtesy of the adjustable two-stage Rekord trigger unit

Aesthetics are boosted by the new grey laminate stock, which features a long forend, sharp stippling and recesses styled as vents

Adorned with sharp wraparound stippling, the steep pistol grip makes for great trigger attack



The cocking action is very smooth and requires surprisingly little effort for a full-power airgun



The long dovetail scope rail features holes to accept mounts with recoil pins, not that the HW98 has a great deal of kick

sits perfectly upright. If you remove the pad you'll find a plate underneath that offers two positions to the left and two to the right of vertical. If you're the type of shooter who naturally cants the rifle when you shoulder it, you can now keep it level by angling the butt pad the opposite way.

One thing I did notice when studying the stock was a number chalked on the underside of the cheekpiece and on the top of the section beneath it. This little detail is typical of Weihrauch's meticulous attention to detail and ensures that the cut-out piece ends up on the stock it was cut from, resulting in an exact match with the grain on the two sections. Many manufacturers settle for a mismatch or coat the top piece to hide the grain.

The overall styling of the stock bridges the gap between sporting rifle and target rifle, and still looks very elegant despite that adjustability. The mix of grey and black on the laminate is eye-catching without being garish, and I reckon it's subtle enough not to attract unwanted attention from sharp-eyed quarry in the field.

In terms of design, the pistol grip is nice and steep with plenty of swell to fill the hand. It is adorned with sharp and very tidy stippling which extends all the way around. The same stippling is also present on the underside of the forend, which features some neat-looking fake vents



Weihrauch's adjustable two-stage Rekord trigger is the measure by which other mechanical triggers are judged

THIS LITTLE DETAIL IS TYPICAL OF WEIHRAUCH'S METICULOUS ATTENTION TO DETAIL

that enhance grip. If you like a long forend, you will love the stock on this airgun, which extends 36cm in front of the trigger guard and will accommodate a wide variety of different holds.

The HW98 imeasures 104cm without a silencer fitted, and length of pull is about 35cm. It tips the scales at just under 3.7kg before you add a scope – that might sound heavy but I like weight in a spring gun, as it helps to soak up recoil. The weight is probably a little further forward than on most springers, and I like that. Its overall balance makes it a very nice gun to shoot.

FEATURES AND FUNCTION

Build quality is excellent and, as I would expect from Weihrauch, this airgun feels to be extremely well made. I like the black finish of the metalwork, and the engineering looks flawless. There are no open sights – this gun's precision more than justifies a set of telescopic. The cylinder is machined with long dovetail rails that should offer plenty of space to mount most scopes and also has holes to accept mounts with recoil pins.

As is currently fashionable, the barrel features a shroud which makes for a chunky bull-barrel

appearance. The front section is actually a very discreet muzzle weight, which screws off to reveal a 1/2" UNF thread for silencer attachment. This airgun comes supplied with a Weihrauch silencer which is nicely fitted to the barrel. It is hard to tell how much difference a silencer makes on a spring gun as your face is so close to the mechanical noise of the internals when shooting. However, Weihrauch's moderator is one of the best on the market and it certainly reduces downrange noise. Swapping the muzzle weight for the silencer increases the gun's overall length by 10cm.

Muzzle energy on the .177 calibre test gun is a punchy 11.6 ft-lb with an impressive shot-to-shot variation of just nine feet per second over a 10-shot string. Considering that this gun is churning out full UK power, it is very smooth to cock and doesn't require a great deal of effort. Typical of a break-barrel, pellets are loaded directly to the breech. Weihrauch has a reputation for producing very secure barrel lockups and the one on the HW98 feels like it will remain that way for many years.

Weihrauch's Rekord trigger has been setting the standard by which other mechanical triggers are judged for decades. The two-stage adjustable unit on this gun was brilliant. The blade design is spot on, the first stage weight and travel are perfect, and the second stage break is crisp. You really couldn't ask for more when it comes to shot release.

Cocking the gun engages the auto safety, positioned at the rear of the cylinder. You can re-engage it after pushing it off by drawing the barrel down until you hear a click. You take the safety off by thumbing it from left to right.

ON THE RANGE

A good spring-powered airgun is as accurate as a PCP. The only limitation is that you need to manage the movement caused by the travel of the piston, and the best way to do that is to adopt a consistent, but gentle hold so that the recoil always follows the same path.



The HW98 Grey Laminate comes supplied with a Weihrauch silencer, which is one of the best moderators on the market

The HW98K Grey Laminate has a very smooth firing cycle. There is no reverberating twang, just a smooth thud. The recoil is very modest, and what little movement there is comes straight back into the shoulder. The result is that this is a comparatively easy spring gun to shoot with precision.

Shooting from the support of a bench, while keeping my hand between the stock and my bench bag in order to manage that recoil, I was able to print ragged one-hole groups at 30m, and I am certain that a better shooter could achieve similar results at 40m. That's accuracy to rival a PCP, and it's down to the combination of a smooth firing cycle, that adjustable stock, an excellent trigger and a very secure barrel lock-up. I achieved my best groups from the support of a bench, but the HW98 is also comfortable to shoot from kneeling and standing stances, as long as you can manage its weight. Some shooters

may also assume that the heft of this airgun could be a hindrance in the field, but I would be inclined to disagree as the bulk of my hunting is done from a static position. Hunters who like to rove for miles on end may think otherwise.

I have a Weihrauch HW95 of my own, and I absolutely love it. The HW98 is based on the same action, but it is an even better gun, and although it may be a little more challenging to shoot with absolute precision than a PCP, I actually think that a bit of recoil makes it more fun. Admittedly, it isn't cheap but it isn't outrageously expensive either when you consider that it's a very high quality break-barrel springer that has the power and precision to tackle live quarry or serious target shooting. If you want an airgun that has the potential to deliver remarkable accuracy but comes without the hassle and expense of charging equipment, give the HW98 Grey Laminate a try. ●

THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT

| LOOK & FEEL | STOCK | BUILD QUALITY | SIGHTING UP | COCKING | LOADING | TRIGGER | HANDLING | ACCURACY | VALUE |
|-------------|-------|---------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|-------|
| 9           | 9     | 10            | 8           | 9       | 9       | 9       | 9        | 9        | 9     |

OVERALL SCORE

90

"A serious springer offering break-barrel simplicity with accuracy to rival a PCP. An adjustable stock ensures excellent fit and its new laminate attire brings this classic bang up to date."