

KEY SPECS



MAKER: Weihrauch, Germany
(www.weihrauch-sport.de)
UK DISTRIBUTOR: Hull Cartridge
(www.hullcartridge.co.uk)
PRICE: £275
MODEL: HW 57
TYPE: Spring-piston underlever
CALIBRE: .177 (on test) and .22
LOADING: Single-shot via
loading gate
OVERALL LENGTH: 102cm
BARREL LENGTH: 36cm
WEIGHT: 3.2kg
STOCK: Ambidextrous sporter
SIGHTS: Open (supplied) and
telescopic (11mm dovetail rail)
LENGTH OF PULL: 37cm
TRIGGER: Two-stage, adjustable
TRIGGER-PULL: 2lb 6oz
SAFETY: Automatic, resettable
POWER: 11.6ft-lb

GUN TEST UNDERLEVER BELIEVER

Are you heading straight for an HW 77 or 97 if you want a Weihrauch underlever? Mike Morton offers you a third option with the HW 57

When people are asked to name a Weihrauch underlever, they'll almost always come up with the HW 77 and the HW 97, arguing the case for a scope-only rifle (the 97) against the merits of one that comes with open sights, but can easily be fitted with a telescopic sight (the 77). Both are excellent fixed-barrel springers that have stood the test of time.

So where does the Weihrauch HW 57 fit in? After all, this is an underlever too. But for some reason, it's been living in the shadow of its better-known siblings. It's time to see if it deserves its very own place in the sun.

LITTLE BROTHER

The standard carbine versions of all three rifles are identical in length – 102cm – but the HW 57 weighs just 3.2kg compared with the 4kg of the 77 and 97 when all three are wearing beech stocks. Perhaps for this reason, and because it's significantly cheaper than its big brothers, the 57 is often touted as a beginner/entry-level rifle.

But this is a full-power springer – the test gun records 11.6ft-lb with JSB Exact Express pellets in .177 calibre. It's also available in .22.

The HW 57, which was introduced in late 2000, sits inside an ambidextrous hog's back stock in lacquered beech, which is made by Minelli. This is perfect for shooting the rifle with open sights – which the HW 57 comes equipped with. It's also suitable for shooting the gun with a scope – as

you can adopt the thumb-up grip if you want, providing more control.

SMART SIGHTS

Notch-and-post open sights are fitted to the 57; while it would be possible to fit extra-high peep-through mounts so the irons could be retained when a scope is fitted, the dimensions of the rifle mean it's best shot with one or the other rather than both. The foresight stays in place regardless, while the rear

sight clamps to the dovetail rail like a regular scope mount, making it easy to remove and refit. The rear

sight offers tool-free adjustment for elevation and windage by rotating the respective micrometers, which offer definite and precise clicks.

The rear unit also comes with an ingenious feature: a choice of four sight elements – two sizes of rectangular notch as well as V- and U-shaped elements. This gives you the opportunity to choose the element that best matches your shooting eye and the type of target you're aiming at. It can easily be adjusted in the field,

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long as you are sensible about the size of the objective lens, keeping it small, and you fit mounts to keep it as low as possible. I fitted a Hawke Panorama 3-9x40 with Sportmatch mounts, a combination that was near-perfect for my eyeline and head position.

The pistol grip and forend have been treated to a mixture of stippling and chequering that have been laser-cut precisely, but weren't quite as grippy as I'd expected. However, the stock does have a gentle thumb shelf, so

Weihrauch's gently curved 'Liquorice Allsorts' rubber butt pad features a ribbed pattern on the contact area to secure it firmly into your shoulder pocket

The 11mm dovetail rail measures 22.5cm overall and can be used to accept one- or two-piece scope mounts, as well as the open sights that come with the package

Pellets are loaded via a gate that pops up automatically when the rifle is cocked, making the cocking and loading process both simple and safe

The HW 57 is very much a full-power springer, but is remarkably easy to cock, making this a great choice for junior or slightly built shooters

The underlever release catch is spring-loaded – just pull it back to free the lever when you're ready to cock the rifle

The laser etching on the pistol grip is a combination of stippling and chequering; it's been very well executed, but isn't quite as grippy as it could be

The Monte Carlo-style cheekpiece has only a gentle rise to it, making it ideal for iron sights, but you'll need as low mounts as possible if you decide to fit a scope

The red safety indicator is a Weihrauch staple, sitting within a recess in the action when the safety is engaged, but sticking out when the catch has been set to 'fire'

The chequering on the forend of the Minelli-made stock is a similar blend of stippling and chequering, offering the same degree of grip

The fixed barrel of the HW 57 measures 36cm, and with no moderator being fitted, that makes the rifle a handy size for both the range and the hunting field

NOTABLE FEATURES



SMALL GROUPS
It's easy to print sub-five pence piece-sized groups at 25 yards – in this case the HW 57 barrel seemed to really like JSB Exact Express pellets



REAR VIEW
The rear sight clamps to the dovetail rail, and can be adjusted for windage and elevation by turning the precise dials that are built into the unit

“WITH PRACTICE, BEGINNERS PROGRESS, AND THIS RIFLE WILL KEEP PACE WITH YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY”

as it's spring-loaded. Just pull it rearwards, rotate it until you've selected the element you want, then release.

Another spring-loaded feature is the underlever release catch. This is a ribbed collar, which is pulled back before the lever can then be pulled down. Once the gun's been cocked, the lever snaps back into the locked position – there's no need to pull back on the collar on the return stroke.

And what of the cocking stroke itself? This is where things get interesting. The muscle memory that I'd built up firing my own HW 97 and various other 97s and 77s over the years had to be discarded and learned



The pop-up loading gate may be quirky these days, but does mean the HW 57 offers the peace of mind of a fixed-barrel springer with the ease of loading of a break-barrel

again – but in a good way. The cocking lever measures roughly 32cm to the linkage, which is quite generous considering the relatively small size of this rifle, and that makes for easy cocking – far easier than my HW 97. The cocking stroke applies the automatic safety, as normal, but it also raises the loading gate.

Loading a pellet is simply a case of thumbing it in place then pushing the gate down. The gate doesn't click into place, just riding smoothly down on a central pillar, so make sure it's been pushed down as far as it can go so the pellet is lined up with the bore. It is possible for the pellet to fall out of the gate if its head or skirt are

particularly small, but this can easily be overcome by holding the rifle level while the pellet is being inserted and the gate pushed home. I didn't carry out a great deal of pellet testing with the review rifle because I didn't really need to – JSB Exact Express seemed to shoot very well from the off, so I stuck with this pellet throughout my several weeks with the gun.

It's the unusual combination of underlever and loading gate that make this rifle so different to its brethren. The first time you cock it, you'll instinctively want to hold the lever open with your spare hand while loading the pellet with your other. But there's no need to do this. Cock the rifle and immediately return the lever to its starting position, where it can't possibly do any harm should you inadvertently disengage the safety and pull the trigger. Only then do you need to load the pellet and push down the loading gate.

This makes the 57 an excellent choice for beginners, as there's no way the lever can snap back up using this technique – providing your hand is on it all the time. And the fact that this rifle uses a loading gate means your fingers will never be anywhere near the compression chamber because this

component is not exposed, unlike most underlevers.

One thing to watch with this system is resetting the safety. Just like other Weihrauch springers, the safety on the Rekord trigger can be re-engaged by taking the underlever through the cocking stroke, where the final part of the stroke will reactivate the safety. This will also cause the loading gate to pop back up – still containing the unfired pellet – so remember to push it back down again before you go ahead and take your shot.

One minor niggle is the way you have to clean the barrel. Unlike a regular underlever, it's not possible to gain access to the breech, so you are limited to shooting felt cleaning pellets. You won't be able to shoot a lead pellet behind the felt one, as you would normally do, as you can't double-load this action. But that's a small price to pay for a loading system as safe and reliable as this.

Out of the box, trigger-pull was 2lb 6oz, which I found too heavy, so I lightened it to just under 2lb. It's a lovely trigger, with a small, but positive first stage, and a predictable and crisp second stage.

If you're worried about alerting quarry – or neighbours – the rifle isn't moderated and the barrel isn't threaded for one, but there is a workaround. The combined foresight unit and underlever retention housing straddles the muzzle, and custom tuners make replacement housings that accept a moderator. These are a straight swap if you punch out the retaining pin and remove the original foresight unit.



The metal foresight blade can't be removed, but doesn't interfere with your sight picture, even with the scope mounted as low as possible and set on minimum magnification

muzzle velocity of 808 feet per second, with a spread of 10fps over a 10-shot string, giving it a muzzle energy of 11.6 foot-pounds. The loading gate was consistently reliable.

It's an accurate rifle. I zeroed the test gun at 25 yards, after which it would happily deliver five-shot groups that fit underneath a five-pence piece. Back at 30 yards, the HW 57 would connect with a 10p-sized killzone all day. These results could probably be improved upon with better pellet selection, but as it is I'd be more than happy to hunt at short to medium ranges with this rifle.

I mentioned earlier how this rifle's weight and price may have earned it the label of a beginner rifle. But with practice and experience, beginners progress, and this rifle will keep pace with you every step of the way. It's also well worth considering if you're looking for an underlever that won't break the bank. ●

ALSO CONSIDER...



DIANA K98
£458 www.shootingsports.edgarbrothers.com
This underlever is inspired by the bolt-action Second World War-era Mauser Kar 98K



SMK XS38 CUSTOM DELUXE
£199.95 www.sportsmk.co.uk
This affordable underlever has an automatic safety catch, adjustable open sights and high polished bluing



WALTHER LGU MASTER
Around £400 www.umarex.com
This underlever features a rotary piston, Walther's Super Silent Technology and a vibration reduction system

THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT										OVERALL SCORE
LOOK & FEEL	STOCK	BUILD QUALITY	SIGHTS	COCKING	LOADING	TRIGGER	HANDLING	ACCURACY	VALUE	82
8	7	8	8	9	8	8	9	8	9	
“The Weihrauch HW 57 is an unusual, but ultra-safe, sweet-shooting rifle. Far from being the poor relation, the 57 deserves a dynasty all of its own”										