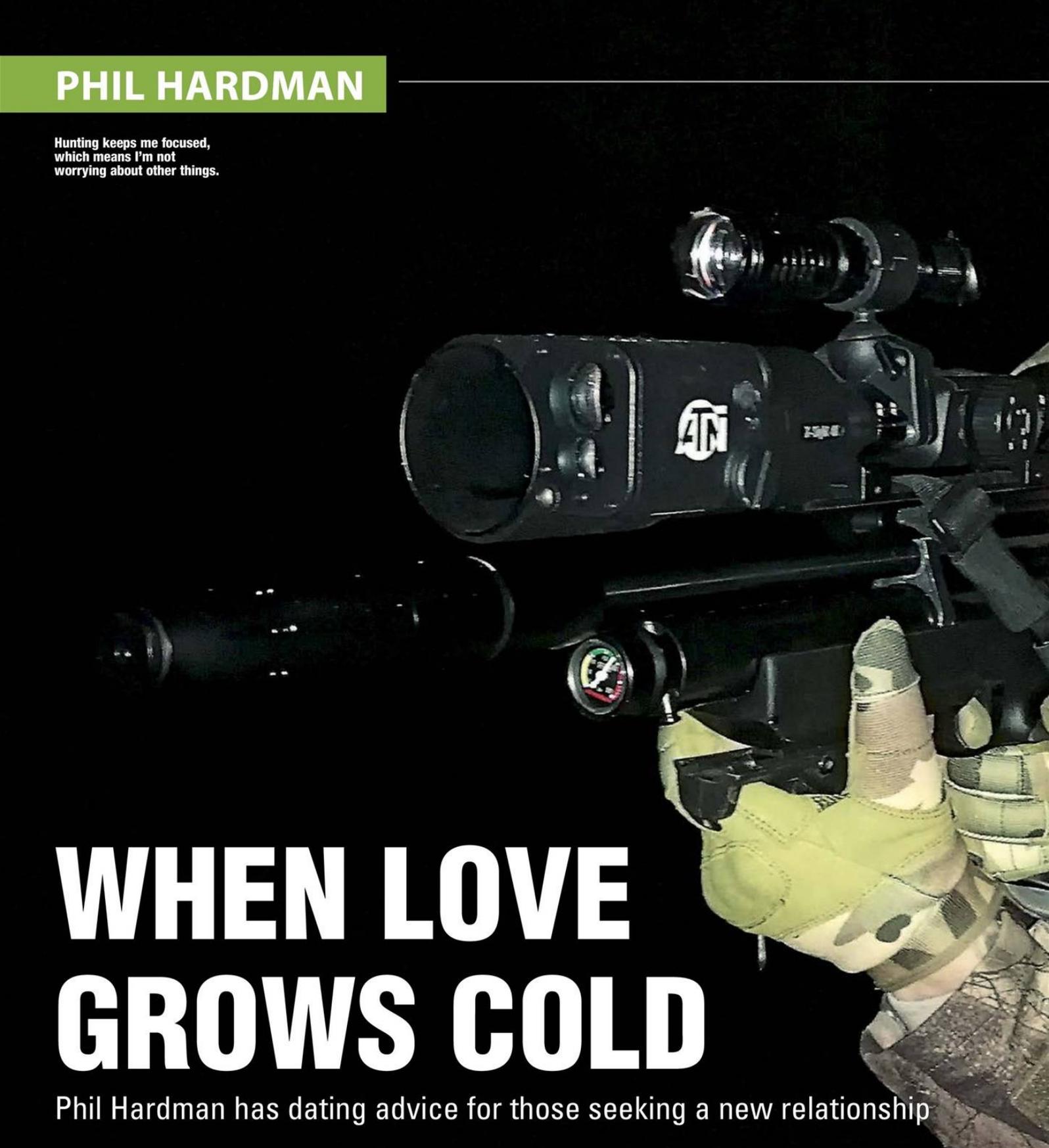


Hunting keeps me focused, which means I'm not worrying about other things.



WHEN LOVE GROWS COLD

Phil Hardman has dating advice for those seeking a new relationship

This month's piece was inspired by a conversation I had with a fellow shooter recently, who was thinking about selling up and quitting the sport entirely, because he no longer had the motivation to go out shooting – he simply didn't enjoy it any more. As we got deeper into the conversation, it turned out that he hadn't actually been in a while, so it wasn't so much hunting that he didn't enjoy, it was the mere thought of it that was putting him off.

I knew only too well what he meant. I have experienced it myself many times over the years, and like him, it's usually around the beginning of winter when it happens, so I thought I'd talk about that this month because I am sure we aren't alone in feeling that way from time to time.

FAVOURITE SEASON

Hunting in the winter can be either something

you really look forward to, or something you dread, depending on where you hunt, what you hunt, and when you like to do it. For me, winter used to be something I tolerated, at best. My preference by far is the spring, through to summer and into harvest, when quarry numbers are at their greatest, cover is thick, and hunting opportunities can be found around every corner, and up almost every tree. Of course, there have been winters that I have



Shooting the rats is the one thing that I can do more effectively, and for greater reward during the winter than any other time of the year, so as you can imagine, I spend most of my winter doing just that. I do go out during the day, and once I'm actually out there, I love it, but I must admit the thought of it is never very appealing, and I really have to push myself hard to get the motivation to do it.

Night hunting isn't all that different in that respect, and because most of my time is spent shooting after dark, when the weather tends to be at its coldest, and most hostile, I find that anything that can boost my morale or interest is always welcome. Despite loving it when I get out there, sometimes standing in a warm house, with the central heating on, and looking out into the cold, black, rain-swept world out of the window, I can feel myself becoming reluctant. Luckily, these days there are plenty of toys for us shooters to play with, that are designed with night hunting in mind, and nothing is more motivating than going out to play, it doesn't matter if you're 7, or 37.

FUN IN THE DARK

Night-vision is fun, simple as that, as is thermal-imaging gear, and it's this that I use as my main motivator. I don't care if it's cold; I don't care if it's wet, I want to play with my toys! This is one aspect of technology that I haven't really seen covered all that much, but it's a highly important one. No one likes to admit they sometimes don't want to go out because it's too cold, or wet, or there isn't enough quarry around to make it worthwhile. Hunting is a world in which being hardcore and dedicated is seen as a badge of honour, but I think it's something we all go through from time to time, so it's important to talk about it.

For me, there is no more effective reason to draw me out, than a new toy to play with, and in the summer it is probably a rifle, but in the winter it tends to be night-vision gear. The great thing about this is, it takes a long time for the novelty to wear off because we only get a few hours per night to play with it, and we might only get out a couple of times a week, if we're lucky, so this new bit of kit can last as the sole motivator, to keep me getting out all winter, and well into the following year, by which time spring will have returned, and I won't need the push any more.

MOTIVATOR

I've had the ATN X Sight 4k pro fitted to my Weihrauch HW100BP for months now, but the novelty hasn't even come close to wearing off. I love it, I'm hooked on it, it's just so much fun to use, so even the worst of the weather hasn't been able to dampen my spirits when I'm out in the field. I've used many different night-vision devices in the past, but the ATN is by far my favourite, and when coupled with the ATN

enjoyed greatly, and if you are an avid squirrel shooter, with masses of really good woodland permission, winter is fantastic; no leaves on the trees so you can finally hit them properly, in which case you're probably reading this and thinking, '... but I love the winter time!' Unfortunately for me, I no longer have the old woodland permissions of ancient woodland that I once enjoyed, so winter is now much more of a struggle.

RELUCTANT HUNTER

The rabbits on my local farm permission all but vanish, along with the majority of the woodpigeons, so my average bag shrinks vastly once the dark nights arrive, and any daytime shooting I do is more me battling the elements, than the quarry. My one saving grace of course, is rats that have moved into the yard for the winter, to seek shelter and an abundance of food that is stored there.



Thermal spotters open up a whole new world after dark.



A quick break to warm my hands before I crack on.

ABL laser rangefinder, and the ballistic calculator, it's a real game changer. Of course, the kit we use can also make our lives much easier in the field, and that's very important, but the reach that it has goes far beyond actual 'in the field' effectiveness, especially if you enjoy using it so much that it's the primary reason you pick up the rifle and head out in the first place.

THERAPEUTIC

The Weihrauch HW100BP arrived around the time that my terminally ill mother was finally losing her battle with cancer, and it single-handedly got me through one of the most

stressful periods of my life. It drew me out shooting time and time again, when I needed it most – the therapy of being out in the field. When she eventually passed, I bought the ATN X-Sight, and it got me out hunting when I honestly don't think anything else could have, and once again, the therapeutic nature of being out there very likely saved me from an extremely difficult time. I don't do so well with change; it's one of my biggest triggers in regard to my mental health, and hunting, which is constant, each and every year follows the same rough pattern, is probably the most stable thing in my entire existence.

Even that is of no use if I lose the motivation

to go out there, though, so anything that can help to keep me interested is of massive benefit, especially when quarry numbers are down, and the weather is bad.

REASON TO HUNT

One of my latest acquisitions, and one of my favourites is the Viper VX buckle-up gun carrier, which at £80 isn't the cheapest gun bag around, but for sheer quality takes some beating. Now, maybe a new gun bag isn't something that will really inspire you to go out day in and day out, but trust me, you'd want to use it, and you'd tell yourself that you needed to test it. That's the thing with shooting, we all love it once we're out there, and whilst the weather, family life, work, or whatever else you have going on in your life might offer up excuses for not going, something as simple as trying out some new pellets will give you a reason to go, and once you do, you will be reminded exactly why you loved it in the first place.

Since I began writing in this magazine a decade ago, I've been lucky enough to meet thousands of fellow shooters, and whilst we all might have our favourite rifle manufacturers, or differing political views, we all have one thing in common, and that's a genuine love for airgunning, be it hunting, target shooting, plinking, or whatever else, but like any love, it takes work sometimes. It takes commitment, but also, it can fade a little, and that's okay. I've been hunting most of my life, and yeah, I fall out of love with it occasionally, usually during the winter, but I know that despite how I might feel about going out sometimes, deep down I adore it, and my life would be a lot emptier, and a much darker place without it, and I'm sure yours would too.



Soaking wet and freezing cold, but still loving it.



Something as simple as a new silencer can give you a reason to get out there.



Decent clothing can help keep the worst of the weather off you.



The Viper VX buckle-up gun carrier is my latest acquisition, and I love it.

GOOD ADVICE

As it turned out, the guy who inspired this article felt very similar to me, and once our conversation got more in-depth, I could tell he

he couldn't, he had decided the only answer was to sell up.

I advised him to sell his gun, much to his surprise, but he wasn't using it, so why not? I

“without the motivation to go out, he was unable to remind himself of why he loved it”

loved airgunning deep down, but without the motivation to go out, he was unable to remind himself of why he loved it. I could tell he didn't want to give up shooting, he just wanted to fall back in love with it, but because

also told him, before spending the money on anything else, to go to our local gunshop and try some other rifles, just to hold, just to see if he was going to buy a replacement, which he would choose. And once he chose, to buy it.



Not a cheap set-up, but this lot has been a life-saver this year.

You see, he'd had the same rifle for years, with the same scope, used the same pellets – he was bored, not of hunting, but of hunting in the same way, with the same gear. He said he wasn't sure if he wanted a new gun, so after a bit of a chat he thanked me for the advice, and off he went.

WHATEVER IT TAKES

I didn't really think that much more about it, until I received a message from him a couple of weeks later on the Internet. Turns out he followed my advice exactly, and had purchased an HW100TK, and couldn't put the thing down. It wasn't even the rifle that made the difference, particularly, that was just the thing that motivated him to go out, but once he did, he fell back in love with hunting all over again. That's what made the difference, being out there!

So, if you find yourself sitting reading this and it describes how you have been feeling lately, then put the magazine down, and go fall back in love with airgunning, and if that means going to your hunting permission, then do it! If that means going to the gunshop for a new toy, do it!

In fact, do whatever it takes to motivate yourself to get out there, because once you do, I promise you, the love affair you've always had with airguns, will be right there waiting for you - whatever the time of year! ■

KEEP UP WITH ME ON YOUTUBE AND SOCIAL MEDIA..
www.youtube.com/huntingwithhardman/
www.facebook.com/huntingwithhardman/
www.instagram.com/huntingwithhardman/