UNCHARTED WATERS

In an effort to do new things, Gary Chillingworth tries his hand with a .22 air rifle that bears a striking resemblance to one he knows well

Shooting a .22 in a competition is hard, very hard in fact, and that is why I have shied away from it in the past. I am a fan of the .22 and it certainly has its place in the shooting community. If you are a hunter and have a rangefinder, or know the range you are shooting at, there is no doubt that a .22 will leave its mark and that wide pellet will impart more energy into your quarry considerably quicker than a .177 will.

In FAC, shooting a .22 or a .25 is commonplace and preferred, but when you are shooting in competition, especially in HFT, shooting a .22 can be tricky because you have to be able to establish range confidently — given the .22's trajectory this is not easy to master.

I'll give you an example. In HFT, you can't dial in a scope or use a rangefinder. If you are at the peg and looking at a target 40 to 45 yards away, you have to ask yourself a question, is it a 35mm target at 45 yards or a 30mm at 40 yards? When you look through your scope, both these targets look the same, so as a shooter you need to use various techniques to see if people have missed high or low. Sometimes it is possible to work it out, but there are times when you need to hedge your bets.

My TX200 is very efficient down range and the pellet drop between 40 and 45 yards is only 27mm. If I get the wind right, I can put my 40-yard aim point in the top of the kill and my 45-yard aim point will be in the bottom of the kill, so, even if I get the distance wrong, the target should fall over.

A .22 pellet, however, has a much different trajectory because the pellets are heavier. Even if you use pellets like the JSB Jumbo RS, which weigh 13.8grs, the drop will now be over 40mm between 40 and 45 yards. You can no longer hedge your bets; you need to be spot on with your range and this is where the skill of the .22 shooter comes into its own.

NEW EXPERIENCES

So why am I shooting a .22 all of a sudden? The first reason is I am trying to do a few new things. The second reason is more practical. In September, I entered the UKAHFT .22 Championships at Longwater HFT Club. I have had two .22s in the past, the first was a Diana 54 (a semi recoiling springer that was on loan from Highlands Outdoors), the second a brilliant HW100.

I am also lucky to now own a HW100KT in .177 and this has the adjustable butt pad, check riser and a 3D printed hamster. I simply swapped the stocks over and I now had a .22 HW100 in a fully adjustable stock at my disposal.

What about pellets? The most popular .22 pellets are the 16gr from Air Arms Field. However, I wanted the lightest pellet that I could get and these came in the form of the JSB Jumbo RS. Weighing in at 13.43grs, these will fly flatter than the AA Fields — but had I made the right decision?

I went onto my range at home with my tin of JSB Jumbo RS pellets and started to develop my range card. Despite the 13.42 JSB only being about 50% heavier then my normal 8.44 .177 pellets, the aimpoints were massively different. For me, with my springer, with a 40-yard zero, 45 yards is a .3 of a mil-dot below the crosshairs. The top of my trajectory is .8 mil-dots above cross hairs, so, for me everything between 12 yards and 45 yards is within .1.1 of a mil-dot and my eight-yard is two mil-dots below. When I looked at my .22 trajectory, 45 yards was a mil-dot below the crosshairs and the top of my trajectory (20 yards) was nearly 2 mill-dots above. My eight-yard was now my secondary zero, or to be honest, just below. I looked and looked at this card and it made no sense, but when I shot the gun, everything was spot on.

THE INFLUENCE OF WIND

It was then time to start looking at other variables. As an HFT shooter, you often have to shoot elevated targets and this is not normally an issue, just aim half a kill low as the pellet will rise (the rifleman's rule), but for my .22 this seemed to be about half of what I normally give. Wind speed was about double. At 45 yards with a right to left breeze at around 10mph, I normally give around 20mm of wind, but for the .22 this was nearer 40mm. This is because the pellet is travelling slower, 580fps at the muzzle as opposed to 780fps with a .177. When it gets to 45 yards this is around 480fps for the .22 and 600fps for the .177.

Shooters have told me that a heavier pellet is better for higher wind as there is more mass to push, but this is something I need to test. The one good thing is that as the pellet is flying slower, it is easier to track with the eye — on top of the HW100 I was using an MTC Viper Connect with the 24mm objective lens and this worked well in competition.

What did I learn from my time with a .22? If I was shooting it indoors at a known distance, it is no different than a .177, but when you get out in the field you need to be good with the wind and good at working out your ranges. The HW100 is a cracking rifle and I think I may need to spend some more time with it in the future. ■

Gary intends to spend a lot more time with his HW100 .22 in the future