



A LIGHTER OPTION

The Weihrauch HW99S seems to defy the laws of physics and **Pete Evans** explains how this is so

None can deny that Weihrauch delivers a top-class product, which extends across its whole range of spring, pre-charged pneumatics and pistols.

If there ever was something amounting to a criticism, it would be that its spring guns can be on the heavy side. In the case of

Weihrauch, the equation of weight, solidity, build quality and use of quality materials equals longevity. When considering spring guns, weight does work in your favour as heavier guns soak up recoil, making them much easier to shoot accurately with less hold sensitivity. Conversely, full-power lightweight guns can be more "jumpy", punishing poor technique from the shooter at every shot.

I regularly come across Weihrauch guns that have been used and badly abused, which when given minimal attention rise from the ashes much as a Phoenix would. So, I suppose the question still stands as to whether it is possible to have a lightweight Weihrauch that shoots accurately, without compromising on that legendary longevity?

Despite the requests for a lighter option, there was one available and has been so for some considerable time. The HW50 ticked the boxes for many requests, although the



There's a gun suitable for everyone in the Weihrauch range



Pete usually uses a pre-charged gun in the field, but he wouldn't hesitate to take this one out



Cocking is smooth, and doesn't require a lot of effort

with the HW99S, which was a further development of the HW50. The HW50 title lived on for guns available on the home German market, and has been resurrected for the jubilee edition models currently available.

Despite much to commend the new HW99 (full-power lighter weight), I think it fair to say that it didn't quite gain the same traction as did the HW95, that is until some significant upgrades around 15 years ago.

CATCHING THE EYE

There is nothing like a new set of clothing to take someone's eye, and it's not so dissimilar to guns.

A new stock shape, and an important change to the cocking lever (more detail on that later and next month), certainly did much to recommend the HW99 to the airgun-buying public.

It was in September 2013 with a visit to Sandwell Field Sports in the Midlands, that my interest in

the HW99 was first piqued. Tony Wall, the proprietor and gunsmith, had just developed the "Imp". This was based on the HW99, with a shortened and screw cut barrel, short HW moderator and an internal tune based on his own spring and guide sets. I believe that the Imp did much to boost the gun's popularity.

Over the last 13 years I've had a few HW99s through my hands, from the very early models, to some more recent examples. Currently I have two .177 guns, between eight and 12 years old respectively. For the purpose of this article, I'm considering the younger of the two, although the currently available HW99 has an even better designed stock with a shallower butt stock, and rounded profile forend.

Mechanically they are identical, so this review adequately illustrates what you would expect to find on a new gun. It also serves the purpose of a long-term review, with fairly regular use over its eight-year life.





A compact, lightweight and fully powered air rifle

SMALLER SCALE

We have already established that the HW99 is substantially lighter than its stablemates and also compact in length. With an unscoped weight of 3.2kg, an overall length of 105cm, with 41cm of that being the barrel, it's going to be very portable and manoeuvrable in the field.

It is notable that the barrel diameter is 15mm as opposed to the 16mm of

the HW80/95. The breech block is correspondingly narrower, meaning that barrels are not interchangeable with the HW80/95. As standard barrels are available in .177 and .22, although I know that .20 and .25 are made, and perhaps could be available as a special order. As I write, I have a used .20 cal barrel on the way to me, purchased from the AirGun Forum.

Grooved at the muzzle to accept a foresight, it is possible to fit a specific HW moderator that fits around the foresight. If you want to fit a standard over barrel type, it will mean filing the grooves flat first. From a personal perspective I can't justify the need to fit a moderator, although if you intend shortening the barrel it would be useful if only to act as a cocking aid.



The barrel is 15mm in diameter, as opposed to the 16mm of the HW95/80



The low cheekpiece, designed with open sights in mind, is ambidextrous in nature



The generous chequering gives a firm handhold



More chequering to aid palm traction

Despite the barrel being a smaller diameter, the main cylinder has an internal diameter of 26mm, with a piston stroke of 71 mm. These statistics point to the fact that this gun has been designed for the UK market (12ft/lb) limit, rather than a gun whose power can be altered for differing markets by adding an alternative spring.

The synergy of stroke length and cylinder diameter bode well for this rifle, in relation to how it behaves in use.

ON-GOING DEVELOPMENT

I mentioned earlier about some changes Weihrauch had made that improved the status of the HW99.

It seems that over time some of the earlier models developed

problems caused by the underside of the cocking link contacting the underside of the cylinder causing friction, and in some cases galling.

The addition of a spring-loaded strip helps to keep the cocking link insulated from the cylinder maintaining a smooth operation.

The good news is that if you have an earlier model the updated cocking link can be retrofitted, and they are not very expensive. This is a good example of a manufacturer monitoring their product, listening to customer feedback and responding in providing a solution to an issue.

RETAINED COMPONENTS

As with the majority of the HW spring gun range Weihrauch has seen fit to use the legendary Rekord

trigger unit, which as we all know wants for nothing, apart from perhaps a Rowan set back blade.

As I have already stated the stocks fitted to the current models differ slightly from the gun pictured, although they are not too dissimilar.

Made by Italian maestros Minelli, they are crafted from beech, with a generous amount of chequering at the fore-grip and pistol grip. Designed with a low comb for use with open sights, they are also fully ambidextrous. I liked the inclusion of a flat section at the rear of the stock, placed in a neutral position for the thumb up hold in either right or left hand. Despite this being a lighter rifle, the stock is a full adult size, sits comfortably in the shoulder, the cheekpiece being most suitable for



Open sights are part of standard equipment, and fully adjustable



It is good to see provision for the thumb up hold



It is also good to see the HW99 fitted with the legendary Rekord trigger

a scope in medium mounts. An optic such as a 2-7x32 would be ideal in my view, anything much bigger could make the rifle unbalanced and could look a bit "odd".

Although not a factory option, I know that Custom Stock of Sheffield makes a walnut stock, with its usual options, if you fancy something a bit more special.

THE SHOOTING EXPERIENCE

I've already alluded to the fact that this rifle's statistics stack up well on paper, but how does that actually translate in practice?

To establish that, it's out with the JSB RS Exacts (a lighter pellet is my preference for spring guns), and some targets set out at the customary 30 metres.

Before testing it is as well to check the power of this rifle which has received several years of running in.

Peaking at 11.1ft/lb, with 11fps spread over a 10-shot string, is perfect in my book. I seem to remember this rifle hovering around 10.7ft/lb when new, which with a spring gun in .177 is just right. I certainly wouldn't want to make any adjustments now that it has settled

at 11.1ft/lb, as there is a fine line between a sweet and harsh firing gun, especially in a .177 springer.

Using this rifle is a revelation, especially for anyone who balks at the thought of spring gun recoil. The best description I can give is that the rifle feels unpowered, as in very little felt recoil. It's just so pleasant to shoot, and as I've suggested earlier seems to defy the laws of physics. Lightweight springers, especially in .177, shouldn't behave in this way – but this one does.

Because there seems so little "going on", this gun gives an excellent account of itself on targets, keeping groups of five inside a 16mm circle at 30 metres. Although these days I tend to use a PCP for pest control, I wouldn't have any hesitation taking this out on a hunt. The light weight and high performance would make it a winning combination.

WHERE FROM HERE?

This gun doesn't need any attention at this point, although I've picked up another HW99, which hasn't led such a charmed life as the test subject. My newest acquisition, bought from Neath Gunshop for £120, quite frankly could do with an overhaul. It's power is a bit low, and doesn't feel as smooth as it should, but I'm confident that with a modest outlay it can be improved greatly. If I can get the .20 barrel in time I may even give that a go as well. There's much fun to be had with a springer. ■

Weihrauch air rifles are imported to the UK by Hull Cartridge. For more information visit the brand's website at weihrauch.co.uk



Medium height scope mounts are the order of the day, so make sure you choose a suitable size scope



A lightweight, full-power Weihrauch: that will be the HW99S.