

REFINED SIMPLICITY

The HW98 offers fuss-free shooting and much more, **MAT MANNING** discovers as he puts the high-end German break-barrel through its paces

PHOTOGRAPHY **JOE BRANSTON**



If there is a name that immediately leaps to mind whenever I think about high-quality, spring-powered airguns, it has to be Weihrauch. This German brand has produced some absolute classics, including the HW35, the HW80 and the inimitable HW77.

The gun that I've been putting to the test over the past few weeks is not as famous as some of its stablemates, but its performance is right up there with the best of them. The Weihrauch HW98 is a rock-solid, spring-powered airgun with the potential for match-winning accuracy, and it even has an adjustable stock. Its £610 recommended retail price might sound a bit steep for a break-barrel, but this is one of the best off-the-peg models that money can buy.

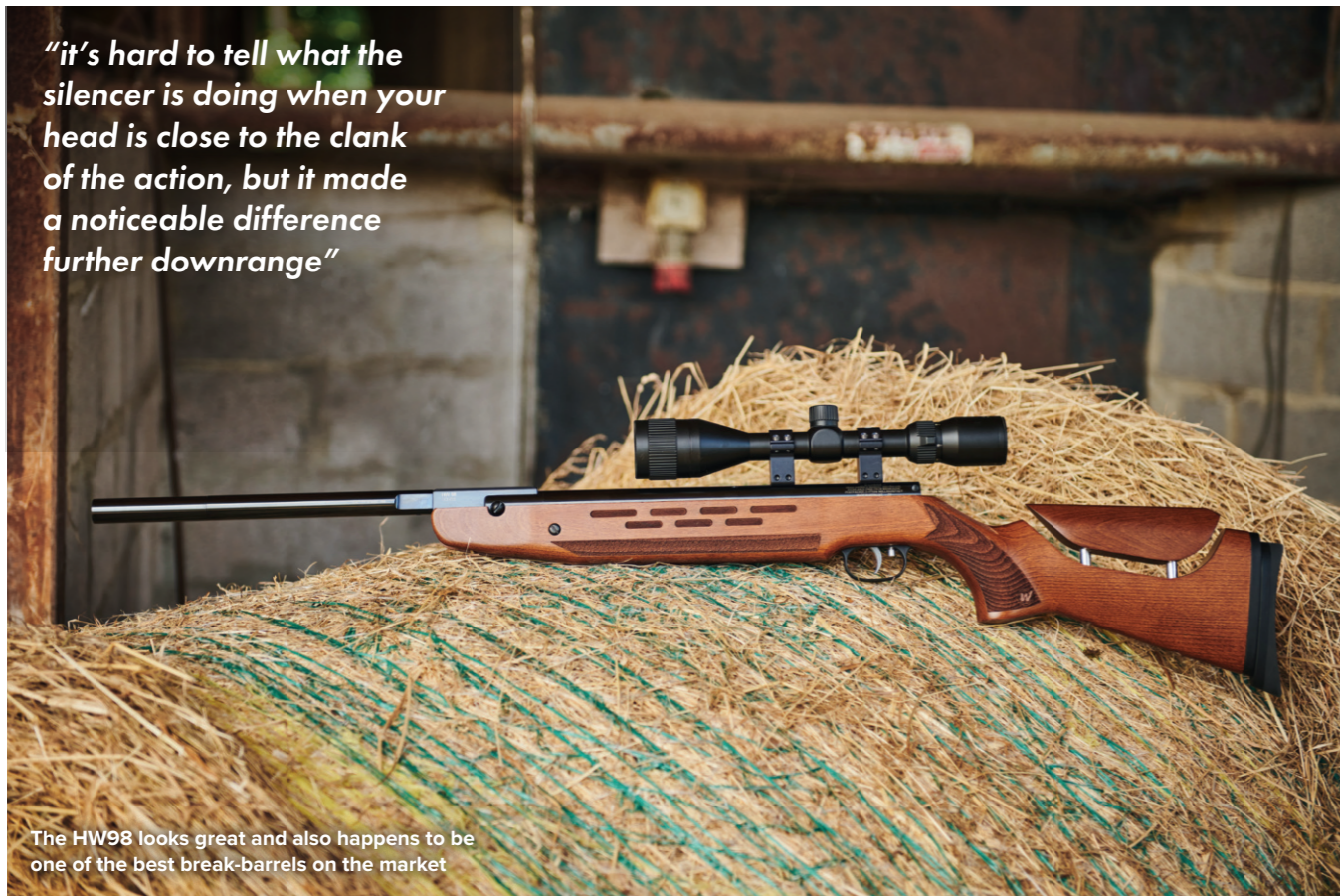
FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Lift the HW98 from its box and you will quickly realise that this is not a break-barrel for youngsters – it's made to fit adults. Length from muzzle to butt is 104cm without a silencer fitted and it weighs a pretty substantial 3.6kg. That bit of heft is no bad thing, though, because it helps to soak up this springer's modest recoil. Length of pull is 345mm and overall balance is a little front-heavy, which makes for a gun that feels both very pointable and stable at the same time.

Apart from being brilliantly engineered, the HW98 is also a great-looking airgun, styled along the lines of a traditional sporting rifle. It has an ambidextrous beech stock which has been very thoughtfully designed. The fore end is nice and long, so there are plenty of options in terms of your hold style, and notched areas on each side improve grip. There are also neat panels of stippling on both sides and on the underside of the fore end. The same stippling is present not just on both sides of the steep pistol grip, but also on top of it, which will be appreciated by anyone who likes to shoot thumb-up.

This stock's key feature is without doubt its adjustability. The butt pad and cheekpiece can both be independently adjusted for height. Either adjustment can be made by simply slackening off the relevant Allen screws. Shift it to wherever feels best for you and then retighten the screws to lock in your chosen configuration. The result is a >>

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The HW98 looks great and also happens to be one of the best break-barrels on the market

stock that fits like a glove and gives perfect eye/scope alignment whatever your proportions or scope height.

FEATURES AND FUNCTION

The HW98’s metalwork is absolutely flawless, which is no surprise – if anyone knows how to apply blueing to a rifle, Wehrauch does. Scope-mounting is via dovetail rails that provide about 15cm of clamping space and feature holes

to accommodate an arrestor pin – not that this springer’s recoil is particularly harsh. The 300mm barrel is sleeved and comes fitted with a removable extension that provides additional leverage for cocking. It also serves as muzzle weight and provides a little sound suppression. Unscrew the extension to reveal the half-inch UNF thread at the end of the barrel, and you can replace it with a silencer if you wish. I was sent a Wehrauch

silencer with the review gun – it made for a good match in terms of styling and also did quite an effective job of quietening down the muzzle report. As with all springers, it’s hard to tell what the silencer is doing when your head is close to the clank of the action, but it made a noticeable difference further downrange.

Shot release is via Wehrauch’s famous Rekord trigger unit, which is still



Adjustment in the cheekpiece and butt pad ensures an excellent fit and perfect eye alignment

setting the standard for trigger design decades after its initial development. The blade has a curved, grooved face that delivers plenty of feel to the pad of your finger. You can adjust the two-stage release mechanism, but I don’t expect too many shooters will need to tinker with the factory setting. Out of the box, the trigger set-up on the review gun was spot on. First-stage weight and travel felt perfect to me and concluded with a

clear stop before a very crisp, creep-free, second-stage break.

The HW98 has an automatic safety catch. Conveniently positioned at the rear of the cylinder, it is activated by the cocking stroke. It’s in the ‘safe’ position when it’s raised on the left and you just nudge it in when you’re ready to shoot. It can be

reset – to do this you need to break the barrel again and draw it down until the button pops back out.

Even with the extender or silencer in place, the HW98’s barrel is comparatively short, which results in quite a stiff cocking stroke. Not that it’s much heavier than I would expect for any full-power



There’s no shortage of grippy contact points on the fore end, which is adorned with grooves and stippling



The steep pistol grip has panels of crisp stippling on both sides and even on the top



The cylinder features dovetail rails for scope mounting – the safety catch can be seen on the left



Unscrewing the barrel weight reveals a half-inch UNF thread for silencer attachment



Wehrauch’s famous Rekord trigger is adjustable and delivers refined two-stage shot release



The HW98's cocking stroke isn't the lightest, but it is very smooth and results in full-power performance

Loading is direct to the breech, which features a super-secure lock-up mechanism

break-barrel, and it is silky smooth. It locks down with a very positive click and loading, as you would expect, is direct to the breech, which is very straightforward. Once you've popped in a pellet, the barrel clunks back into position with what feels like an extremely secure lock-up mechanism.

PERFORMANCE AND POWER

In terms of power, the HW98 is close to the UK legal limit. The .177 calibre review gun was doing just over 11.5 Ft/Lb and doing it pretty consistently with variation staying within six feet per second over a string of 10 shots. As spring-powered firing cycles go, this one is fast and smooth. Felt recoil is only modest and it comes straight back into the shoulder.

It might be a break-barrel, but the HW98 is capable of producing accuracy to rival a PCP if you do your bit. I'm a pretty average shot with a recoiling airgun, but shooting from a bench, I was getting thumbnail-sized groups at 25m and mostly sub-one-inch groups at 30m. This is a versatile airgun that shoots well from most stances, so it would be a great choice for hunting. It performed very well for me on a couple of farmyard pest control sessions, but its level of accuracy also makes it a perfectly viable choice for competition shooting in recoiling classes.

WHY SPEND THE MONEY?

There are, no doubt, plenty of shooters who will question the reasoning for spending around £600 on a recoiling airgun when you can pick up a PCP for a similar price. My first response to that would be that I have yet to shoot a PCP at this price point that is built to the same standard as this Weihrauch. The HW98 is extremely well crafted and robust enough to ensure years of good service with very little maintenance. You also need to consider the fact that there are no additional costs with a break-barrel – it has a self-contained powerplant which doesn't require a pump or tank to keep the shots coming. Finally, there is something very gratifying about shooting a recoiling airgun. Cranking back the spring as you draw down the barrel and then feeling the kick of the moving parts as you take the shot always brings an extra dimension to the shooting experience, and I think most airgunners would agree that recoiling models are more fun to shoot.

I have enjoyed every minute spent

shooting the HW98 over the past few weeks and will certainly miss it when the time comes to hand it back. It may not be a lightweight, but it's a very refined shooting machine with rock-solid build quality – and all without the hassle and expense of charging gear. If you want a high-quality airgun, but don't want to take the PCP route, or if you simply want to relish the experience of shooting a truly excellent break-barrel, do give this one a go. ✕

TECH SPEC

Model: Weihrauch HW98

Type: Spring-powered, break-barrel

Stock type: Adjustable beech sporter

Trigger: Two-stage adjustable

Safety: Automatic

Calibres: .177 (tested) and .22 (.20 and .25 to order)

Overall length: 1040mm (41in)

Length of pull: 345mm (13.6in)

Weight: 3.6kg (7.9lb) without scope

Energy of test rifle: Avg 11.5 Ft/Lb

Variation (10 shots): 6fps

Website: weihrauch.co.uk

PRICE: From £610