

Buying that first gun

Introduction

The decision to buy that first rifle is an important step in your development as a shooter. Unfortunately it's not an easy choice as there are so many options and your knowledge of what is suitable may be limited.

We'd better start with the current legal situation. This may not be the most interesting thing to read, but it is vitally important. In the case of younger shooters, you should also get your parents or guardian to read it as aspects affect them as well:

SECURITY

All air rifles and pistols must be secured (locked away) to prevent their being accessed by persons under the age of 18. This may involve keeping them and their ammunition in a locked room or cupboard, or use of a device to prevent the gun being removed by unauthorised persons or to prevent it being fired (trigger lock).

ADULTS

You may never have an air gun in a public place without proper reason. An airgun must be covered and must be unloaded. An air rifle is **loaded** if there is a pellet, dart or anything else in the gun (whether it is cocked or not) or in the magazine, if it has one. A public place is anywhere where the public are allowed to go even though they may have to pay. Roads, streets, footpaths, canal towpaths, public parks and play areas are all examples of public places.

AIR GUNS AND YOUNG PERSONS – PERSONS AGED UNDER 18

May not buy an air gun or air gun ammunition of any kind. If you are under 18 years your air rifle and ammunition, must be bought for you by someone over 18; this should generally be your parents, guardian or other responsible adult.

Aged between 14 and 18, you can use an air rifle on private property, where you have a right to be, without supervision. If a pellet goes outside these premises onto someone else's property you have committed an offence.

You may not be in possession of an air gun or ammunition in a public place.

PERSONS UNDER 14 YEARS

Those restrictions applying to adults and the people in the 14 – 18 age groups apply; additionally - **Anyone giving or selling an air gun or ammunition to a person under 14 years commits an offence.** Parents wishing to buy air guns for persons under 14 years to use, must keep control of it at all times. A young person under the age of 14 must be supervised by someone of, or over the age of 21 years, at all times when they have an air gun in their possession, even within their own home.

If a pellet goes outside these premises onto someone else's property both the child and the adult commit an offence.

DISCLAIMER

This information is given in good faith; however it is the responsibility of the individual to ensure that they and those they are responsible for, know, understand and comply with all aspects of the law relating to possession and use of air guns and their ammunition.

AM I READY TO START LOOKING?

There are two key questions which you should be able to answer; if you're unsure about either, it will probably be better to postpone your purchase until you are sure.

1) What do I want to do with it?

You may be looking for a rifle for informal target practice at the club or maybe even in your garden if it's safe to do so.

You may fancy having a go at competition shooting.

You may have access to land where you have permission to shoot, where you can hunt or engage in pest control.

2) How much do I want to spend?

Shooting can be a very relaxing past time and a bit of an escape from the daily stress; spending more than you can really afford is more likely to cause stress than ease it, so count up the cost and be realistic about your finances. It's a general fact of life that quality costs more, which is why question (1) is so important. Remember to factor in the cost of scope, scope mounts and a gun bag; also possibly charging gear if you go for a P.C.P.

Once you have decided how much you are willing to spend and what you want to do with the rifle, you are ready to start looking.

WHAT ARE THE CHOICES?

Spring/gas ram (recoiling) or pneumatic (PCP)?

The basic facts, advantages and shortcomings of each system are outlined in the MKARC Shoot Intro, which can be found on the Club website; below are a few more subjective comments:

A quality recoiling rifle can shoot every bit as well as a sporting grade PCP; they are however less forgiving of imperfect technique. For a novice shot, this means that you may find hitting the target a little more difficult at first. It is also a fact that even experienced shots don't get perfect results every time, which is why top level competitions are usually won by PCPs and many hunters also prefer the extra latitude gained by using a PCP.

It is generally agreed that a skilled shooter of spring or gas ram guns can usually shoot a PCP without too much of a problem, but the reverse is not always true.

The principal of shooting either type is the same, only the greater intolerance of poor technique separates the recoiling guns from their PCP counterparts.

If you watch the club instructors in action, they will use both recoiling and PCP rifles, the former to teach technique, the latter to build confidence.

What calibre?

One of the oldest questions in air-gunning. For range use, the faster, flatter shooting .177 is almost universally preferred as it is more tolerant of minor errors in range finding. The real arguments start when discussing the same question for hunting rifles. Today's experts prefer .177 for most applications for the same reason as the range shooters, the exceptions being when shooting rats and feral pigeons, where .22 and even .25 retain strong followings. Follow the debate on the forums if you feel so inclined.

Caveat Emptor (Buyer beware!)

A few comments of guidance to steer you along the way.

- 1) Don't rush out to buy a rifle too soon. Come along to the club for at least a few weeks before making the decision.
- 2) If you are offered the opportunity to shoot somebody's rifle, take it but don't abuse it. This will give you the chance to experience a range of different rifles.
- 3) Check out the features of the rifle; would they enhance the rifle for you? An example of this could be a magazine on a PCP (and even a few springers): desirable (but not essential) for hunting, greedy for ammunition on the practice range and rather a liability in competition.
- 4) Choose an appropriate rifle for your needs and aspirations: a budget Chinese springer or CO2 powered rifle can give you a lot of fun in the garden (providing it's safe) and on close targets at the range, it may even be suitable for close range hunting (<25 yds). It's not reasonable to expect it to be capable of delivering the accuracy to knock down many targets at 50m though.
- 5) The best quality air rifles are made in the UK, Germany, Sweden and Austria; most of the best German rifles have unpronounceable names!
- 6) Read reviews in magazines, just remember they won't slag off a rifle from a major advertiser no matter how much it deserves it. Reviews can also be found on the internet, but again must be read with caution.
- 7) If you've seen something that you're interested in, but you're not sure, talk to the club instructors. We've shot a lot of rifles and may have experience of what you're thinking of getting. We don't get paid by advertisers so will tell you our experiences, even the bad ones, stating whether it's a personal dislike of a certain feature or whether there is a genuine concern with the rifle.

What sight?

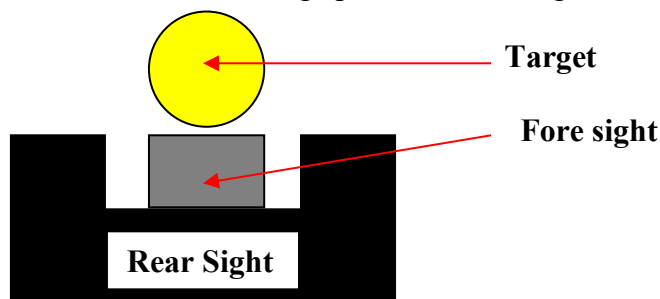
Budget to medium priced spring rifles often come equipped with open sights included in the price; all other rifles will require a separate sight to be purchased.

The relative benefits and limitations of open sights compared to telescopic sights (known as optical sights or scopes) are summarised below.

Open sights are rarely fitted to top grade recoiling rifles or P.C.P.'s as most users prefer the use of an optical sight as it allows full exploitation of the rifle's capability.

IRON SIGHTS

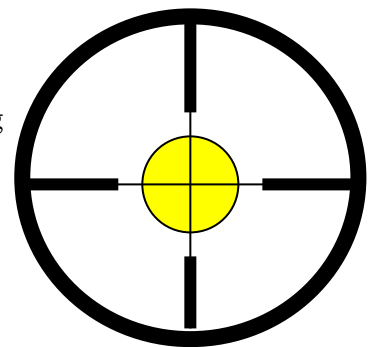
- +** Included in price
Tough and lightweight
Relatively simple to use
- Not very precise, especially as the range increases
Difficult to focus on the target, fore and rear sight simultaneously
Obscure a large portion of the target/background



TELESCOPIC SIGHT

Usually an extra to the cost of a gun*; also allow for the cost of mounts.

- +** Magnifies target
Precise aiming
Makes better use of available light
“Parallax adjustable” or Mil-Dot can assist in range finding
- Cost
Weight
Relatively fragile
Magnifies wobble
Reduced field of view



A sub-class of sight is the “Red-Dot” sight, which can be thought of as a non-magnifying telescopic sight; they are at their best for close range (<20 yards) shooting, especially under conditions of low light.

*Some rifles are supplied with a “bundled” telescopic sight. The quality of such sights is highly variable.

What spec. scope?

Detailed explanations of scope terminology are reviewed regularly in the shooting publications, however a brief explanation of the basics may be of help.

Scopes will normally be described by listing their magnification (possibly a range) and their lens diameter, i.e. 3-9 X 40: A scope with a magnification range (zoom) from times 3 to times 9 and a 40 mm front lens.

There are a number of factors which need to be considered, including intended use and cost, remembering many scopes require the mounts (the blocks which attach the scope to the rifle) to be bought separately.

The higher the magnification, the larger the target looks, which can be helpful; however less background is seen (reduced field of view), which may make the target difficult to find and higher magnification also magnifies wobble, which is not so good, especially for novice shooters.

Magnifications above X 10 or 12 are likely to require a focusing adjustment (known as “Adjustable Objective” (OA), Parallax Adjustable (PA) or “Side Wheel Focusing” (SW or SWF)). This adds to the list of skills to be learned.

Scopes described as non-adjustable or for “firearm use”, can often be adjusted to suit air rifles, but consult the club instructors before buying. Air rifle scopes are usually “parallax adjusted” for around 25-30 yards.

Larger front lenses admit more light and are expected to give a brighter image, however they also need higher mounts which may not suit the stock design of your rifle.

Be sure the scope will fit your rifle; this is especially important with break-barrel rifles, where the scope can obstruct or prevent loading.

Scopes come with two diameters of tube (the bit of the scope the mounts fit on to) – 1 inch and 30mm; it is important to get the correct diameter mounts to fit the scope. The mounts are an important part of the overall rifle; buy good quality ones and ensure they are the right size.

Scopes come with a selection of different aiming marks (reticules), which differ in design and complexity; it is best to examine a selection of the different ones available before deciding on which you prefer.

For hunting, HFT and general shooting, a 3-9 X 40 scope (or there about) will probably meet your requirements. Expect to spend at least 20% of your budget on the scope (slightly more for budget combinations).

For Benchrest & FT, a larger scope with at least X 24 magnification and some form of focusing is recommended. This will permit optical range-finding, an essential skill in FT. A decent quality scope of this type will probably use about 30% of your budget. A typical scope in this range would be either a 6 – 24 X 44 or an 8 – 32 X 44, which make excellent introductory scopes, starting with low magnification when developing initial shooting skills; then increasing the magnification as capability allows.

Quality optics are expensive; expensive scopes tend to contain better lenses but be sure to balance the cost against your real need. Also be aware of the point of diminishing returns – a £400 scope will be substantially better than a £100 scope of

similar basic specification, but it will not be 4 times better! There are scopes out there which can cost more than your rifle.

Ask the club instructors for advice; there are many scopes which on spec. and price look too good to be true – unfortunately in many cases they are! There are also scopes which are very expensive, yet are over-engineered or unsuitable without expensive modification for our purposes.

It is very important to remember, the scope and rifle must not be thought of as two separate items, they must function as one, so the purchase of each must be given equal consideration and the combination scoped rifle considered as a package where each part works in synergy to produce the required results.

In summary, decide what type of shooting you want to do and how much you want to pay; look at the options; see if anybody at the club has what you are looking for, ask their opinion; talk to the instructors; make your choice and pay your money!

Good Shooting!