

HFT specific!

Mark Camoccio Czechs out a rifle aimed provisionally at Hunter Field Target shooting



Something tells me the sport of Hunter Field Target shooting has really come of age, and it's all rather exciting, inevitably, as the sport gathers momentum, manufacturers are choosing to get involved; and with a rush of new models arriving of late, all aimed specifically at this highly demanding discipline, it's obvious that HFT is being taken seriously. Air Arms with their HFT500; BSA with their Gold Star specials; and now the model on show here - the MK300 Sniper from TAU BRND in the Czech Republic, are all jostling for a piece of the cake.

FEATURES LIST

Apparently this model has been available in Europe, but Sure Shot Airguns are the first to import them to the UK. HFT shooters are a demanding bunch for sure! Whilst the sport permits the use of most makes of airgun, any model destined to make a serious impact, needs both serious performance and inherent sophistication. First Impressions of the MK300 Sniper are certainly favourable, and I was intrigued to see how this compact target oriented rifle would shape up on test.

Slab-sided best describes this model, and there's no denying the forend is very



Cocking that ultra thin lever is effortless though it does feel a bit fragile



No thumb groove pity that, but a full target grip none the less



That snazzy air stripper is an unusual design



My test version of the MK500 Sniper required the cylinder to be removed to be charged. However a quick-fill version is also available

boxy, chunky, and squared off. Look closely though, and the features stack up: muzzle air stripper, adjustable cheek piece and butt pad, full target grip, full-blown match trigger, side-lever cocking, regulated recoilless action and barrel mount. Quite a features list, so let's get started.

COMPACT

One thing that really hits you with this model is the ultra compact design; and despite coming fitted with laminate furniture, an overall weight of just 7.1lbs un-scoped, has to make this one of the lightest rifles of its type.

My tester came fitted with the blue laminate woodwork, which displays plenty of attractive grey/blue figuring through the layers. Whilst the forend is boxy (ideal for bench rest disciplines) the butt section has been trimmed of unnecessary material on the underside, with no compromise to performance. This all helps reduce overall weight of course, yet the design still manages to incorporate a full, drop-down target grip with finger grooves and thumb shelves. Negative observations have to include the lack of a

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‘thumb-up’ groove at the back of the grip, and in keeping with other full blown match rifles, I would round off the tip of the forend as it's a little blocky in the aim. A few small air bubbles were present in the lacquer finish of my test gun too; yet overall, the feel and handling is well above average!

Adjustability is becoming increasingly popular lately, and this model competes with Air Arms' HFT500, by offering an adjustable butt section and cheek piece. The same interchangeable plastic spacers are used in the butt and cheek assemblies and whilst they are a little fiddly to set up, it's all fairly straight forward. To set the butt, the screw in the adjustable sliding rubber pad is slackened off, then the pad slides down and up to reveal top and bottom bolts. With these slackened off, additional spacers can be slid into place,

and the bolts re-tightened. Once set, most sensible shooters will then leave well alone, so it's largely a one-off inconvenience, and wholly worthwhile, to get scope/head alignment exactly right.

Final feature of the woodwork is that standard accessory rail, neatly recessed into the underside of the forend, to accept a blood, counterweights, or other add-ons deemed necessary.

REMOVABLE CYLINDER

Looking to the action, the barrel and block are chemically blued to a good standard, although a little dull when compared to some. To charge the Sniper, the main cylinder has to be removed from the action. I'm no fan of dismantling large sections of action each time you want to fill the gun, however, the HFT version of this model will

► come with a quick detachable cylinder - filled in situ.

For the record, to charge my test rifle, I first had to press the button just to the left of the breech, which is the 'dry fire' function. This allows the trigger mechanism only, to be cocked and fired for practise, without expending air. A handy little feature, but cocking it before unscrewing the cylinder, effectively seals the valve and prevents total air loss. Once out hook it up to a diver's tank and charge to the prescribed figure. The fill pressure varies, from a minimum of 200 up to a whopping 300bar. Most will stick to a more practical 200bar, so I did, for the test.

BARREL CONFIGURATION

Fitting a scope to this model is fairly easy and unusually it comes fitted with an additional dovetail block, which can be slid along the barrel then tightened in place. Sure-Shot Airguns, the importers, assured me that several FT shooters were keen to mount and bridge directly across the barrel, with a view to minimizing zero shift. Personal taste will play a part here, but it's an intriguing inclusion. If you don't like the idea, then the usual two-part rail spanning the top of the action can be utilized.

One other point of note concerning the barrel, is the way it runs through that support block with a snug fit. With many enthusiasts preferring a fully floating configuration, this may be an area where customisation comes into play.

Any match rifle with high aspirations, needs a proper match trigger, and this model comes fitted with the real McCoy. Release weight is adjustable down to around 2oz, which pretty much says it all; but with further adjustment for blade position, angle, and first stage, everyone should be happy.

As for that subtle side-lever, pulling it back to cock the hammer mechanism is a smooth and effortless operation. Looks-wise, it is rather shapeless and basic, and could do with being beefed up a little. Likewise, the loading channel is a little cramped, but everything does its job nonetheless.

MUZZLE ART & PERFORMANCE

When I first saw this model and clasped eyes on that air stripper at the muzzle, I was intrigued to see how it performed. In theory, with four separate 'chambers' that the pellet passes through, plenty of turbulent air should be stripped out, leaving it to continue its path in stable flight. In my experience, a particular barrel may shoot accurately in any case, even with the stripper removed, yet the theory is compelling. One thing for sure - this MK300 Sniper has a particularly distinctive and satisfying signature on firing - very slick, with no rasp.



The butt shows both adjustable cheek piece and comb, so no problems on setting length of pull and scope alignment



A full match trigger unit features here that can be set as low as 2oz



The loading port is a little on the mag side

As for performance, I began with a chronograph check, and from the 200bar fill pressure, I recorded 100-shots with a total spread of 28 fps using Air Arms (JSB) Diabolo Field pellets. Obviously 300 bar would greatly increase the shot count, but frankly ...so what? It's unnecessary.

Impressive $\frac{1}{4}$ " centre-to-centre groups at 35yds, and $\frac{1}{8}$ " or better over 45yds, was near text book for this grade of gun, and all the evidence I needed to conclude how effective this gun should prove in outdoor disciplines. Sure Shot Airguns are set to offer FT accessories, a range of hard cases, and quick fill cylinders; all of which should be on stream by the time you read this.

CONCLUSION

An extraordinary lack of weight, and a host of subtle features, has to grab the attention. Match that ultra manageable configuration with slick operation, and serious down range accuracy, and this TAU BRNO MK300 Sniper can't fail to impress, right across the board. Yes, the lack of heft should find favour with ladies and juniors, but with such an impressive technical specification, this model's appeal goes much further. A bright future then for the brand coming soon, to an HFT or FT course near you.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Model	TAU BRNO MK300 Sniper
Type	HFT/FT Match rifle
Action	PCP
Capacity	single shot
Calibre	.177
Weight	7.1lbs
Length	37.75"
Barrel	19.75"
Cocking System	Side lever
Stock	Laminated match, with adjustable cheek piece and butt
Trigger	3 stage match unit, adjustable down to 2oz
Fill Pressure	200 to 300bar
Shot Count	100 @ 200bar
Velocity	[fps] using Air Arms Diabolo Field pellets
High	798
Low	770
Avs	782
Spread	28
Energy	11.4 ft/lbs on test
RRP	£840 as listed inc charging adaptor and tools
Options	Rail/cheek spacer inserts Blued or Black lacquered beech stocked version £1190 Sniper QF (quick fill) - beech £830/laminated £890 Sniper HFT (quick fill and hamstar) - beech £850/laminated £930 Ripcord and hand strap £20 Hard Case £40 Larger case and FT accessories to come
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