

A more frugal approach to buying PCP's.

If I was someone who was about to put his foot on the first rung of the PCP ladder, where would I start? The magazines are filled with adverts for the latest, most hi-tech airguns ever devised and yet when we're thinking about parting with our cash, it's very easy to be swayed into following the crowd. Many of us have jumped onto the multi-shot bandwagon but there are many shooters who still prefer to stick to the "one shot, one kill" premise. Many newcomers are put off from buying multi-shots simply because of the price of some of the models available. There's a wealth of single shot PCP's on the market at the moment and the choice between them can be quite bewildering to the uninitiated. You've only got to look at the magazines to see that all of the major manufacturers are vying for sales at the budget end of the scale. So what would make a potential buyer choose one model over another? Price is obviously foremost but there are also many other factors to consider.

I had a chat with Tony Belas at Daystate some time ago and we were discussing the merits of my Huntsman PH6, when I mentioned that I'd never had a play with a Harrier. I've owned and shot countless makes and models of single shot PCP's but the Harrier was one that had never really got to grips with. As a result of that conversation, a beech stocked 0.22cal Harrier was put in a box and shipped to me for review.

I knew this article was going to be something of a challenge. How do I find a way to write about something that has had so much written about it already? The brief I had from Daystate was simple; "write what you like, as long as it's honest". That pretty much gave me a blank canvas to work on. I'm not an engineer or a "product evaluator", I'm just a shooter who knows what he likes and isn't afraid to say what he doesn't. I would have liked to keep this rifle for a bit longer but it's Daystate's and they want it back when I'm done with it.

The parcel arrived from Daystate and contained the Harrier and one of their Airstream silencers. I must admit to not being a great lover of this silencer. It's big and heavy and stretches the tape at 8 inches long. It's effective but it does add a little bit too much to what is a nice little carbine rifle...It's much more at home on a Huntsman. The rifle is 36 inches long without a silencer but at 44 inches with the Airstream on it, it takes the Harrier squarely into the long gun category rather than the carbine category it's intended for. You can get the little silencer that just slides on but not having one to use, I can't comment on it's sound suppressing abilities. Looking at this rifle's dimensions, it really does cry out for a neat little silencer for it and I think that a couple of dealers in the UK are selling the Harrier with the slip-on silencer as standard. To my mind, this certainly improves the look of the rifle. Granted, looks aren't everything but this gun lends itself to some shooting in tight, confined spaces and keeping the Harrier short helps this ideal no end.... The rats on one of my shoots didn't appreciate it!

This is the first time in a long time that I've taken a really close look at the finish on a Harrier. The first time I saw one, the words "cheap and nasty" sprang to mind but I'm assuming Daystate have refined the procedure for giving this gun it's non-reflective looks. It's nicely finished and I wish my Huntsman could be given it too. The quality is excellent but then again, I've never had a rough looking Daystate yet. The barrel matches the cylinder exactly and so does the Airstream. It's great to see that sort of attention to detail. I've seen some rifles in the past that have had a similar sort of finish but it was slightly different on each major component. It looks a lot darker now than I remember as well.

I suppose that every rifle has to have something about it that everyone criticises. On a Rapid 7, it's been the trigger, on a Webley Axsor; it's the magazine release... Daystates have their safety catch. Why it gets clobbered is beyond me. It's not the tastiest looking device in the world but it does its job faultlessly. I did suggest to Tony that maybe Daystate could fit a couple of little plastic covers to the ends of the catch just to tidy things up but to be honest, it's probably not worth the effort. We talked at length about the merits of safety catches in general and he was keen to know how shooters generally perceived the use of such devices. For example, do you think it would be worth Daystate's while doing away with it altogether? I was told that certain markets require the catch to be fitted or sales in these countries would be prohibited... Fair comment. Is it worth the effort to make separate rifles for different markets with different features? Would it be financially viable for a manufacturer to do so? I personally prefer a rifle with a safety catch on it. I don't think it's as important on a single shot rifle as it is on a multi-shot because you can nearly always de-cock a single shot airgun with a pellet still in the breech should the need arise. The idea of having a multi-shot without a safety does bother me a little quite simply because of the environments we use them in. Let's face it, who wants to have to discharge a pellet into the ground because you've got to climb over a gate when for the sake of a safety catch, you can continue to hunt without interruption? Whilst I fully agree that the best form of safety catch for a rifle is a responsible user, there are times when a device fitted can be of great benefit in certain situations.

I gave the rifle to my wife to try simply because she's considerably smaller than I am and the Harrier is a rifle that has been bought by many people of a less "hefty" stature. I know of a few FT shooters who've bought them for their kids or their wives simply because they're a nice size in general. At around 7lbs unscoped, it's not the lightest rifle by any means but too light a rifle can be as bad as one that's too heavy. I would say that it's just about right for me. My wife found it pretty comfortable to shoot so Daystate have got the weight right as far as she's concerned. The balance of a rifle is just as important, if not more so, than the actual weight. With the Airstream on the front, the Harrier had a decidedly nose-heavy feel to it. Swapping over to the other silencer made it much better. With the Airstream silencer and a 3-9x50 scope on board, the point of balance falls just under the front section of dovetail.

Although the stock doesn't look as flashy as some, it has to be said that it would suit just about anyone. It's the sort of stock you can have on a rifle and not have to worry about it getting dinged on a fence or some such obstacle. Even though the stock on this one is beech, it's finished well considering it's only a fairly plain piece of timber. The chequering is a little bit vague and untidy in places but considering this is at the cheap end of the Daystate range, it's not really a major issue. If you want to have a really nice stock on one, fit one of their thumbhole stocks... this would make the rifle look the biz although it would bump the price up considerably. The cheek-piece on either side is subtle and well shaped and aligns my eye nicely behind a scope set in medium mounts. I've shot this rifle from my weak shoulder and even then I had no real problems lining up on a target. Sometimes an ambidextrous stock can be an advantage whichever way you're oriented. On occasion a shot will present itself on your "wrong side" and being able to switch shoulders can be very helpful. It's got a very thick and thoroughly pointless butt-pad on it, which is separated from the stock with the ubiquitous black and white spacers. These get some stick as well from some quarters but personally I like them.

The first thing I did when I got around to shooting it was to stick 2,600 psi of air into it via the quick-fill adapter that's included as standard and ran it over the chronograph. I was a bit worried with the readings at first as the chrono said the Harrier was running Barracuda Match pellets at 10.2 ft.lbs and Crosman Accupells were reading about 9ft.lbs. Ok, time to sit down, scratch my head and think why. Someone once said that the simplest reasons are usually the most likely to be right and so it was in this case. I hadn't realised that this little rifle is set up to run at comparatively low pressures. I fill my Huntsman to 2,500 psi and most PCP's that I've owned before have had their "sweet spot" at about the same pressure give or take a couple of hundred pounds per square inch. I assumed that the Harrier would probably run sweetest at a similar pressure too given that it has a SWP of 3000 psi. After a lot of dry firing and checking, the power crept up to a nice even 11.50ft.lbs with Daystate's own pellets, which is a safe and responsible power level. In the end it turned out that filling the rifle to 2,200psi gave the best compromise between shot capacity and consistency. Test grouping off a bench showed the Harrier to be an extremely accurate little tool. The best I managed was a 10 shot, one hole group at 40yds with the Daystate pellets that could be covered with a 1p piece. I was told by Daystate that I could expect to get around 80-odd shots out of the Harrier but being an FT shooter and a bit of a consistency freak, I only bothered with the really consistent part of the charge which ran from a starting pressure of 2100 psi and this gave me around 50 really good shots. I would think this is more than enough for anyone. The nice thing to remember about being able to fill a rifle with such a small amount of air is that it's nice and easy to fill from a pump and you'll also get a bit more air out of your tank too. Considering how unfit I am, I was grateful that using a pump didn't take long.

Daystate triggers used to be described as being very basic. Not anymore. I've passed comment on the trigger on my Huntsman before and I can only reiterate what a superb two-stage unit this is. I like my triggers set light and with a nicely defined first stage travel and a clear stop once the sears have released the hammer... This is exactly what I've got here. The adjustments are easy to use although you will have to remove the stock to make any necessary adjustments. In this day and age, manufacturers of pre-charged air-rifles really have no excuse for fitting a lousy trigger and I'm happy to say that this is one of the best I've used on a rifle of this price.

What else can I say about this rifle? Not much really except to add that it performed exactly as I would expect it to. Loading was nice and easy and I especially liked the little brass ring around the breech. This will doubtless be appreciated if you're out lamping because the loading port stands out clearly. The bolt handle is pleasant to use and looks far nicer than the original version. The inclusion of the newly designed bolt handle is a major bonus and just goes to show that the company do take heed of what the customer wants... In this day and age, I consider this to be a major plus point in Daystate's favour. There are a few rifles out there that are of a similar price and there isn't a lot to separate any of the ones from the major players. Daystate rifles like many others are built to last but a Harrier will probably last longer than most.

If you're considering buying a new rifle, I strongly urge you to take a good look at the Harrier. It reminds me of a "wallflower" at an old discotheque somewhere... It sits on the sidelines looking slightly ordinary and you never really give it a second glance because you're too busy eyeing up all the fancy looking models but if you pluck up the courage to pick one up, you'll be amazed at the response you get.