

Field & Hunter Field Target Shooting for all

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- A person is shown in a field target shooting stance, kneeling and aiming a rifle. They are wearing a dark jacket, a cap, and a backpack. The rifle has a scope and a bipod. The background is a solid purple color.
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Field Target and Hunter Field Target

Mark Camoccio explains how FT and HFT have evolved from common roots

My task here is to lay bare the facts and figures behind both Field Target and Hunter Field Target shooting; laying out the rules, showing the difference between the two, and illustrating just why there is a place for both sports to exist.

I was there – at the birth of FT

Yes, I was there. In a field behind a public house, in Magham Down, Horsham, Sussex; and jolly exciting it was too.

The year was 1980, and the Field Shooting Challenge tournament held in conjunction with the now defunct Sussex Armoury, was to prove a landmark event in the birth of our outdoor airgun sports. Basic metal silhouette targets in the shape of usual airgun quarry (crows, magpies, rabbits etc) were set out, with a bright orange or yellow Dayglo sticker acting as the kill area.

Everyone took their shots, then a marshall would have to walk out to the target and check for any hits. No mechanical FT targets existed then of course, yet this low tech format captured the imagination of all who participated. These were un-chartered waters don't forget, yet the prevailing atmosphere was electric, and all who were present, left the shoot that day, confident in the knowledge that they had played a part in something really rather special.



Variety is the spice of life

One key observation of that inaugural shoot concerns the equipment used. Shooters gathered with little comprehension of what was required, and came with few preconceptions of appropriate rifle types with which to compete. Basic break barrel 'springers' competed alongside 6ft/lb match rifles, with the odd multi-pump also making an appearance. Ironically, some of those low powered match rifles actually posted some well placed scores on the day, which just about says it all.

The all-inclusive atmosphere of the early shoots which followed, probably played a significant part in attracting some record numbers; with major flagship events such as Packington Park seeing well over 200 competitors take part.

Specialized

Getting started in our outdoor airgun sports today can be a slightly confusing business, as the various branches of the sport have inevitably evolved along the way. With evolution comes greater sophistication and organizational structure, and both sports have their own framework of rules which need to be absorbed. Of course the march of technology, in the name of progress, has inevitably influenced proceedings too, so I'll also put the spotlight on this side of things.



Field Target

The basics of FT competition shooting

Modern FT shooting now utilizes the re-active metal Field Target design, which falls when correctly hit by the shooter. The main front plate normally still resembles the silhouette of typical airgun quarry i.e. rabbit, squirrel, magpie etc., although there was a move by the PC brigade some years back, to encourage the use of circular moon shaped targets; deemed to be less offensive. Thankfully this unpopular folly seems to have died a death with common sense prevailing.

The kill area of the target is actually a circular hole cut into the front plate. If the pellet hits this front plate, then nothing happens, and the shooter scores zero. However, if the pellet connects with the all important kill zone, then the target falls backwards and one point is awarded. FT in the UK has long since unofficially adopted the top quality knock-down 'Field Target' from British manufacturer, Nockover Targets, which offers an extremely reliable design, worthy of national competitions.

These 'knock downs' are set into lanes, normally consisting of two targets. Where those early kill zones were more often than not, two inches in diameter, two kill area sizes are now permitted, being 25mm and the now standard 40mm. Targets can be laid out at any range between 8 and 55yds, and the shooter can expect to take shots at silhouettes either placed on the ground or elevated in trees. Those smaller kill zones can only be set to a maximum of 35yds incidentally.

Where those early courses consisted of 20 or 25 targets, competitors these days can expect to face a layout of normally 40 or 50 knock downs, all laid out over a wooded area or in an open field; where wind allowance can play a significant part in getting a correct hit. This number of targets obviously requires greater stamina and levels of concentration, and emerging with a high score is no easy task. Most shots are taken from a sitting position, but the



compulsary 'positional' shots often prove the deciding factor. Consider that over a 40 target course, 4 targets will be compulsory standing shots and a further 4 targets will be compulsory kneeling shots, and it becomes clear that much practise, and familiarity with ones equipment, are required.

Awkward terrain such as undulating hills and steep angles, can all add to the challenge on the day, and learning about the rifles trajectory and how this can be affected by extreme angles, is all part and parcel of the successful shooters approach.

Range-finding is all

Where Field Target really stands apart from other disciplines though, is with regards to the matter of precision range-finding. Competitors in FT are permitted to use telescopic sights which can help to calculate the range of a target, with astonishing accuracy. By utilizing the parallax adjustment on many modern scopes, it is possible to ascertain the target's range to within a yard or so, which is obviously a massive advantage. Different lighting and conditions can all affect results, but when all is in tune, the top exponents lead the way with stunning consistency.

Basically, the shooter slowly and carefully rotates the scope's parallax adjuster ring (either mounted as the front collar on older designs, or now offered as side-wheels on most modern scopes), until the target snaps into focus with crisp clarity. At this point - where perfect clarity is achieved - the range of the target is simply read from the distance dial on the parallax ring or wheel.

Range-finding using this method is best achieved with very high magnification scopes. A typical specification in use on the competition circuit these days would be 10-60x50, with all range finding possibly carried out with the



scope set to an eye popping 50 or 60x magnification. At these high mags, the scope's depth of field is accentuated, with the difference in clarity being far more obvious and easier to read.

With many competitions often won and lost on the longer range targets, the ability to clearly differentiate between a 50yd and 55yd silhouette can well be the deciding factor. These high mag scopes just make that task that little bit easier. Super large side wheels have taken off for this very reason, since they increase the gap on the graduated scale, between 50 and 55; again, in theory, improving the precision of the final readings.

High quality range-finding scopes will add several hundred pounds to the cost of a rifle combination, with the top quality models capable of adding a further £1000 to £1500. Bear in mind that top full power pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) rifles from the big names will set you back between £1300-£2500 approx, and the total outlay for a top line pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) FT rifle/scope combination can begin to induce palpitations. These costs may seem worth it to many but are deemed as extortionate by others.

But don't forget, this all concerns out and out FT rifle combos, where each component has been pushed to the technical limit. Many options exist to reduce this initial investment significantly, and as with any novice, in any sport, it pays to test the water rather than jump in with both feet and a second mortgage... Far simpler equipment is available – including PCP rifles - which can still be competitive, purely requiring a little more input/practise familiarity from the shooter. This more humble kit can be significantly cheaper than the more expensive top flight fare, yet still offers highly creditable results in the right hands. OK; those all-inclusive days have gone in this arena, and kit is far more stream-lined across the board, yet this equates to just understanding the requirements of the sport, and purchasing relevant models which are up to the job. Nothing stops a shooter competing with most legally available air rifles on the market, yet if superior

results are sought, then some makes and models are naturally more capable than others. The Air Arms s400, for example, is a PCP rifle that may have been designed as a hunting tool, yet its performance punches way above its weight - offering top class accuracy at an affordable price. If this model is considered too light, then many shooters get round this by simply adding weight and bulk where necessary, and it's this culture of personal customisation and self improvement that still prevails in today's Field Target, alongside shooters who can afford to buy the very best competitive kit straight off the shelf.

Whilst spring power has been superseded at the top level by the inevitable rise of the pre-charged pneumatic, some people still prefer to use a 'springer'. In some competitions springers sometimes get their own class, certainly in the Grand Prix Series run by the BFTA (the British Field Target Association is the sport's UK governing body) and the World Championships.

Power levels are always monitored at shoots, with the latest directive from the BFTA being that all competitor's rifles should generate velocities at least 5fps lower than that permissible by law with their particular pellet. This ensures for the most part, that shooters stay the right side of legal, and that events can pass off without a hitch.

Shooting's a bonus

Yes Field Target has evolved, and undoubtedly come a long way from its roots, but arguably losing a few devotees along the way. Yet its appeal has not diminished, and the modern format surely stands up as the flagship airgun sport, pushing the boundaries of technological achievement along the way.

Natural terrain and environment often adds to the enjoyment of FT, and there can surely be no better place than in a beautiful wood, on a warm sunny day, shooting Field Targets. Just being out in the open air, at one with nature, is reason enough for many to take part, and it's this aspect that undoubtedly keeps many coming back for more, irrespective of results.

Hunter Field Target

The So what of HFT, and how is it so different from FT?

Broadly speaking, the format of Hunter Field Target has actually been around long before the formation of the governing body (UKAHFT) and National Series of shoots; having been effectively practised in the Winter Leagues of several FT regions over the years.

With the UKAHFT organization now in place though, and a framework of rules laid down, HFT has been driven forward, with its popularity really growing over the last few seasons.

Scoring

Several factors make this sport attractive to the newcomer, with none more so than the generous scoring system. Where FT awards just a point for hitting the kill, HFT awards two points for the kill area, and one point for hitting anywhere on the front plate. At a stroke, this virtually guarantees that everyone leaves the course with at least 50% of available points, which is really encouraging for novices.

Secondly, a fundamental difference comes with the fact that Hunter Field Target bars the shooter from touching the scope at all, once they have started shooting the



course (normally 30 targets). This means that ultra high magnification, parallax adjustable scopes are completely useless, since most targets would appear as blurred without prior adjustment of the scope's dials. For this reason, the specification for an ideal HFT scope will normally be 9 or 10x magnification, striking a compromise if necessary with medium zoom magnification scopes such as 3-9x or 4-16x mag.

Targets will be laid out from 8yds-45yds (10 yds shorter than in FT), and the goal is to be able to see them with reasonable clarity throughout the range of possible distances, without adjusting that scope. In practise, if a scope has parallax adjustment, this needs to be set and left, at around the mid-point: say the 25-30yd mark. Targets then viewed at around this distance should be pin sharp, whilst targets viewed at the outer limit of 45yds, may appear slightly blurred, but crucially still 'shootable'. Likewise, targets viewed at the ultra close range of 8yds will be blurred, but again a level of usable clarity is the goal.



Mini Kills

As Hunter FT has evolved, so an increasing number of smaller kill sizes has crept into the equation, and part of the 2011 course format is as follows:

- 15-19mm hit zones can be placed at between 13yds and 25yds (4 per course)
- 20-24mm hit zones can be placed at between 8yds and 30yds
- 25-34mm hit zones can be placed at between 8yds and 35yds
- 35-45mm hit zones can be placed at between 8yds to 45yds

In addition, several 'positional' shots (to be shot from the standing or kneeling position – as decided by the course layer) are included on each course, with the introduction of a smaller 25mm kill area for some standing shots being the real 'cat among the pigeons' for the 2011 season.

Mini kills can be an exciting but worrying sight through the scope, and trying to connect with a 15mm disc for example calls for skill and determination in equal measure. Learning the rifle's trajectory to the nth degree is the name of the game; then learning to judge distance without the aid of parallax adjustment. Several methods exist, and there is simply no substitute for just sitting down and viewing targets through the scope. Making note of how various kill sizes appear against the scopes reticle, for a given range, is time well spent.

The modern trend for Mil-Dot reticles means most scopes will now offer a graduated reticle with multiple aim points, which is a vital tool in the competitor's armoury. Bracketing targets between dots to gauge the distance then using the dots as known aim points for particular ranges, is all part of the process. Armed with this information – all gleaned through serious homework sessions – and reasonable scores may start to become reality, breeding further confidence along the way.

Some familiar names rise to the top on a regular basis, through hard work and dedication to their chosen sport. Ever harder, more demanding mini kills should serve to help separate the top flight, hopefully proving a challenge to all without putting off the majority of shooters.



Match or hunter?

Nothing is perfect in life, and where some cried elitist against the rise of ultra expensive match rifles and scopes in Field Target, so the same problem is gradually creeping up on HFT, with many top shots now using Steyr's, Air Arms EV2's and the like. As with any sport, the top exponents will naturally push for supremacy, and whilst I've heard mutterings on the circuit of possible rifle classes to cater for this trend, I'm not entirely sure how this would be effectively administered, or even whether it should.

Take a look at a typical HFT shoot, and a good cross section of rifles are still much in evidence, with a real mix of participants proving the sports wide appeal.

Sport For All

Whether shooting FT or HFT, one thing is for sure – they are both genuine 'sports for all' and possibly the easiest shooting disciplines to start up in, as neither requires a licence.

With the advent of the modern pre-charged pneumatic in particular, manufacturers have been able to design and engineer some startling air rifles, which can offer full-power, in highly compact, lightweight configurations. Ladies, juniors and shooters of a slight build need no longer feel at a disadvantage. Indeed this point is now regularly demonstrated, with several top events falling to the fairer sex.

Joining a club is clearly the way forward, and also provides the perfect opportunity to check out the latest gear and rifles available, all in a safe and friendly environment.

So forget any preconceptions of our outdoor airgun sports and just give them a go. Get started today and check out the websites below for more information and dedicated club-finder directories.

In addition, the following websites provide further specialist information with regards to these increasingly popular airgun sports, including comprehensive listings of relevant airgun clubs across the UK.

United Kingdom Association for Hunter Field Target
www.ukahft.co.uk

British Field Target Association
www.bfta.net

Shooting Forum/information site
www.shooting-the-breeze.com

Field Target Overview

James Osborne explains the sport of Field Target shooting, arguably the cutting edge of outdoor air rifle sport

The clue is in the name and in its most basic form Field Target or FT shooting is just that, shooting at a target placed in a field. Now obviously the reality, especially after the decades that have passed since its birth, is slightly more complicated.

The umbrella organisation for FT in England, Scotland and Wales is the BFTA (British Field Target Association). The BFTA is made up of nine different regions to which individual clubs belong. Simply put the BFTA tries to look after the interests of FT and its shooters. It governs the rules and organises various national competitions such as the national Grand Prix series. That is probably where most shooters interests end as far as the BFTA is concerned but it also looks after the administrative minefield that affects the sport.

There is also a World Field Target Federation which (the last time I looked) contained no fewer than 31 member countries. This is a list that is growing steadily and shows just how popular FT is becoming worldwide. The growing WFTF has already begun to have an impact upon our sport in Britain, as its members all have slightly different ideas about the definition of FT, luckily though a consensus has so far been maintained.

What about the important part though, the shooting?

The targets you will find on a typical FT course are of the fall when hit variety produced by companies such as Nockover. They tend to take the form of a silhouette which is usually the shape of typical airgun quarry such as rats, rabbits and pigeons. Within the silhouette is a hole, a standard size being 40mm, and behind this hole is a plate which when struck by a pellet will activate the targets mechanism which allows the target to fall flat. Now we live in what can be sensitive times so you may also find targets of simple geometric shapes although some imaginative shooters have come up with some novel shapes over the years which do bring a smile to your face as you line up a shot.

If you enter the bigger competitions such as a round of the Grand Prix you will face 50 targets on a course. I have been involved with competitions made up of 100 targets although that isn't usual, smaller open shoots or



club courses are more likely to contain 30 or 40 targets. Courses are split up into lanes or individual firing points, each containing two targets, so a 50 target course will contain 25 lanes. Targets should be shot in numerical order and these should be clearly marked, the easiest way to find the targets sometimes though is to pull the reset cord leading from the target back to the lane. The FT target string is truly one of the FT shooters greatest friends, as not only does it help us to find targets, but it gives us an excellent indication of wind strength and direction too, and also it performs the task it was designed for, resetting the target (assuming you knock it down in the first place).

There are guidelines and constraints when it comes to target position and size, these have been arrived at through years of experience and if followed should provide shooters with a challenging yet enjoyable shoot.

Target distances

Targets may be placed between 8 and 55 yards, the shorter distance is purely there from a safety point of view as occasionally a pellet may ricochet. The 55 yard maximum range is presently thought by most to be a distance at which a target can be hit in reasonable conditions without relying upon luck. Also many shooting grounds may find it hard to place longer targets on a course due to the physical nature of their land.

I have mentioned a 40mm kill size earlier and that is the size of target that will make up the majority of shots you'll take on a course. 25 and 15mm kill size targets may also be used in limited numbers but these will always be taken from the standard sitting position and the distance at which they can be placed is restricted too, again to try and eliminate reliance on too much luck. 20% of a course may also contain compulsory standing or kneeling shots. Usually these shots are approached with a certain amount of trepidation, this is mainly down to a lack of practice on the FT shooters part but they help to add variety to our shooting. Dispensations can be made on these shots for those with disabilities and is one area the BFTA is working hard on to try and find a satisfactory procedure for all concerned.

Scoring

The scoring system used for FT is very simple and I suppose relates back to its hunting origins. If you knock the target over by hitting the kill zone then you receive a cross on your scorecard which is worth one point. If you miss the silhouette entirely or just strike the faceplate then you will receive a zero. You only get one shot per target. Just as if you were hunting, one shot for a clean kill, you really wouldn't want it any other way.

In an ideal world there would be a marshal positioned on every lane of a course to mark scorecards and time shooters. Unfortunately this is not normally practical so shooters generally shoot in groups of two or three and self marshal. On the whole this works well though it does rely upon the honesty of the shooters within the group. Competitions such as the BFTA grand Prix rounds are very popular so each shooter is only given one minute to shoot each target (two minutes per lane). Two minutes per lane is actually plenty once you have got used to it and it does help the flow of the shoot, there is nothing worse than standing around for longer than necessary to take your shots.

Assume the position

The first step to mastering FT, and something new shooters find particularly tricky (to begin with at least), is to figure out a stable sitting position from which to shoot. 80% or more of your shots will be taken from this position, so it's important to get it right. There is little hope of me describing the best way to do this on paper, the best way to figure it out is by observing other shooters and giving it a go for yourself while an experienced shooter keeps an eye on things for you while offering advice. The trick is to find a position that doesn't rely on your muscles to support the rifle, you need to have a relaxed hold which will enable a smooth consistent release of each shot. The majority of shooters now adopt an 'off the knee' position over the once favoured 'over arm' position which seemed popular when spring piston rifles were a common sight at any FT event.

The standing position may be easier to adopt than the sitting position but is far less stable and therefore it is harder to start getting consistent results from shots taken standing. A more target orientated stance, with the elbow tucked in to your side, is normally used rather than a sporting style. Kneeling, once you have managed to get yourself into a good position that is legal, can be really stable. FT course designers have a habit of placing targets at all kinds of angles so whichever position you need to shoot a target from you have to be willing to adapt your position accordingly.

The kit

I haven't touched on equipment yet as I thought I would save that until last. There is sometimes a misapprehension among new shooters to the world of FT that you need to spend megabucks on equipment to have even the slightest chance of being competitive or even just to avoid being



looked down upon. I am not going to say here that you can shoot any old airgun and expect to get good scores at a competition but it is possible to set yourself up with something competitive without breaking the bank.

The majority of FT shooters use pre-charged pneumatics, usually regulated, from companies like Air Arms and Steyr. These rifles are generally no more accurate than rifles such as the Air Arms S400 which cost a whole lot less, however the more expensive models tend to be that bit more forgiving in a competition environment. When it comes to telescopic sights you require something with which you can range-find a target. Using high magnification and a scopes focusing system is by far the most common method of rangefinding and I would suggest a minimum of 30x magnification while 50x and sometimes more is widely used. I should perhaps add here that .177 is the calibre of rifle to shoot, its flatter trajectory than that of a .22 pellet is very marked at typical FT distances.

'Try before you buy' may be a well used adage but remains good advice, and something that is possible if you go along to a club or a shoot. Most shooters are more than happy to talk (at length, so be careful) about their equipment and providing you ask nicely at an appropriate moment they will let you have a shot or two. There is very little to choose between the common FT scopes and rifles, but you need a combination that suits your own style – see my article on this subject elsewhere in this publication.

Have a go!

Field Target shooting, as with any other form of target shooting, can be incredibly competitive. On the whole the competitive spirit of most FT shooters is very good natured, and the grading system put in place by the BFTA helps to ensure those of all abilities have a chance of some silverware should they have a good day. Don't be put off FT though, even if you don't feel you are a competitive person, because everyone goes to enjoy themselves. It may not always feel like it when you miss a target, but where would the fun be if we hit everything!

For further information on all things FT, visit www.thebfta.net where you will find details of your regional FT association and all the affiliated air rifle clubs.

Don't be shy, get along to an FT club and give it a go.

Essential FT

James Osborne goes through all his Field Target kit and explains why he needs it

Do I really have all that stuff?! Just to go Field Target shooting? Well I seem to have it in my possession, so how much of it is 'essential' and is some of it just desirable?

Like most hobbies FT requires a basic amount of kit to get started, on top of that you can add as much or as little as you feel necessary for your enjoyment and or progression in the sport. What follows is a bit of an analysis of my equipment, I will run through what I own and why, I'll try to be honest about its usefulness and highlight any alternatives that you might look into should you fancy dipping your toes into the world of FT.

At some point, you are going to need a rifle...

Lets start with the obvious, my rifle. I shoot an Air Arms EV2 in competition. I have shot Air Arms rifles for many years now and I get on particularly well with the EV2. I am lucky that Air Arms supplied me with the rifle I use, but make no mistake, if I thought I would gain an advantage from using a different rifle I would do. The EV2 comes with a fully adjustable stock as standard and also has some neat features such as a built in spirit level, which can be a nuisance to fit aftermarket on other rifles.

A wander up and down the course of fire at any FT competition should give you an idea of the popular rifles in use. You'll see Steyr LG110s and Walther Dominators along with offerings from Ripley Rifles, Anschütz and Daystate. It seems shooters like the top of the range rifles for FT but when shot properly don't write of rifles such as the Air Arms S400.

One obvious point here, if you own or intend buying a pre-charged rifle, which is the norm for FT, you'll need a method of re-filling the cylinder. By far the most common way of doing this is by using a diving cylinder but if you are feeling strong manual pumps are available.



Something to aim for

Possibly more important than the rifle is the scope. To hack it in FT today it needs to range find consistently well, preferably come with target turrets which will withstand constant use and be stable in different temperatures. Reticule choice is very much a personal thing but as always the main factor affecting choice is budget. Expect to pay at least as much for your scope as you do for your rifle, good optics don't come cheap. For the best part of the last ten years I have used a Leupold Competition 40 x 45 scope. Once you find a scope that suits you, try to stick with it no matter how tempting the latest adverts look, my Leupold has been mounted on three rifles so far.

If your budget allows, the Schmidt & Bender 12.5-50 FT scope is worth a look with build quality you would expect from such a mark. More realistically priced is the Nikko Sterling 10 – 50 x 60, this scope is a popular choice on the FT scene and therefore should come into consideration for anyone looking at buying a scope for FT. Scopes are a very personal thing, just because someone shoots well with one particular scope doesn't mean you will; as always, try before you buy.

Good lead

The rifle and scope are the two major items you need to go shooting at Field Targets, but there are some other things you will definitely require and pellets are at the top of that list. I shoot JSB Exacts (nominal .177) at the moment with an actual size (diameter) of 4.52. I find that these shoot



you wear to shoot, a waterproof coat is always a good idea for back-up in the UK's changeable weather.

Good footwear is advisable, it is surprising how much time is spent on your feet at a shoot and it really needs to be waterproof for shooting in our summers. I always wear a cap for shooting, it helps keep out unwanted light from my scope and gives a degree of protection from the elements. Try to avoid paying for caps, always be on the lookout for freebies, as caps never seem to last long.

I almost forgot about my shooting glove; it provides padding and warmth and most shooters seem to use them, if not for sitting shots, then for standing when they can help to reduce the effect of your pulse on your aim. I use one made by Kusterman at the moment and most of the major target shooting brands have gloves in their range of products. They vary an awful lot in price so shop around and try them on before you buy.

Other stuff

An important but often under valued item is a good quality rifle bag or case; for FT this should be well padded, waterproof (or at least water resistant), with strong zips or other fastenings, handles and straps. It should also be of a size to comfortably 'cradle' your scoped rifle, without being too huge to go in your car. Also a 'kit' bag of some sort is handy to carry accessories, spare clothing, and other essentials – perhaps even your air bottle and charging gear. This can be any strong bag that you are comfortable with, as it will probably be left in the car while you are shooting.

I do have my own 'Chrony' Chronograph for keeping an eye on the power of my rifle and checking the consistency of pellets. This can be quite expensive to buy but should last years. Chronographs can be a double edged sword, great for peace of mind but they can just as easily install a sense of paranoia that things aren't as they should be, so use with caution! Combro offer a value for money pocket sized chronograph which is ideal for a quick check of muzzle velocities.

A reactive 'knock down' or resetting target is another handy accessory when practising – some people prefer shooting at paper targets to get precision aiming, but there's nothing like shooting a real 'field target' to get a feel for the sport.

Add up the cost of your equipment and it can be a little eye watering, so it makes sense to look after it. Napier has a huge range of cleaning products specifically designed for airguns and it is these that I use. Buy a good quality set of Allen keys: it really does make a difference when using them. The same goes for any of the other tools that it might be necessary to use from time to time.

I feel that I have barely scratched the surface of the subject of equipment and it appears that all of the kit I have looked at above can be justified as necessary. It seems the more I think about it the more gear I have in relation to my shooting. Now what else do I need...



consistently well for me straight from the tin, so I stick with them.

Pellet brands tend to fall in and out of favour but ask other shooters what they are using, then use that knowledge as a starting point for your own testing. Webley, Air Arms, Daystate, JSB and Crossman are all brands successfully used on the FT circuit. The price of pellets seems to be going up and up at the moment so if you find some that suit you it might be worth buying in bulk to reduce the costs.

Seating and clothing

Another essential, although you could manage without if you really wanted to, is a shooting seat. The 'saddle' shaped bean bags used these days offer a surprising amount of comfort and warmth and come in useful for all sorts of things, working under your car, gardening, kneeling on to plead with your wife to let you go shooting, and so the list goes on. There are plenty of shooting seats to choose from out there including ones that you can have personalised from companies such as Rangesports.

I'll tackle the issue of clothing next. This of course is a personal issue but FT shooters always tend to wear the same thing when shooting and sometimes they even wash it in between times.

I use a shooting jacket made by Gehmann designed for match target shooting, there are a fair number now used for FT but they remain controversial, and the debate as to whether or not they give an unfair advantage - and even if they should be allowed - will rumble on and on. Mine is comfortable for me to shoot in and this should be your primary concern when deciding what to wear. Whatever

The Field Target Guide

Former World FT Champion, Terry Almond, explains FT - the ultimate air rifle target sport – and gives his choice best rifles and scopes

The sport of field target, or FT as it is commonly known, started some 20 odd years ago and attempted to simulate hunting conditions in a competition based environment.

Such is human nature and the quest for better scores, it wasn't long before the rifles, scopes, and ammunition started to improve beyond recognition. Today we have the most accurate air rifles ever produced, along with precision range finding scopes and super consistent pellets to match – all initially due to the demands of the field target shooter.

Organisation

The main organising body for the sport in this country is the British Field Target Association, or BFTA, and it is this organisation that controls things like rules and National events.

The UK is split into regions and within these are the clubs and members that make up the association, with regional, National, and World-wide events taking place. It is now truly an International sport with 16 countries in the World Field Target Federation.

The BFTA operates a grading system which all affiliated clubs adhere to and means that you don't have to feel intimidated by more experienced shooters going through the same course.

Competition

What is it that makes the sport so attractive to so many air rifle enthusiasts? Well first and foremost, it is very competitive. It is the ultimate test of shooter and rifle under constantly changing outdoor conditions. The sport requires a good knowledge of target shooting technique coupled with skilful range estimation and the effect of the prevailing conditions affecting the trajectory of the pellet.



You also need the ability to shoot accurately in 3 positions - standing, kneeling and sitting - plus the skill to be able to vary those positions due to ground conditions.

In all other target sports the shooter has an accepted shooting position, be it prone, kneeling or standing. Much the same as a golf swing, the position is learned and worked on until perfect. The ground on which the shooter takes his shot from allows this repetition shot after shot. Not so in FT! Each shooting position that the shooter encounters will have varying degrees of difficulty caused by the condition and angle of the ground around him, so he must have the ability to adapt his shooting position and still take a steady shot.

Another attraction is the location. Most FT shoots are held in rural areas, undulating woodlands and open fields are the most common venues. The shooter can enjoy the surroundings amongst like minded individuals who are usually only too willing to swap ideas and offer assistance.

Clubs usually operate 12 months of the year with a recognised winter and summer season. The winter season is where club members take part in winter league shoots, either amongst themselves or against other clubs in the region and shooting normally takes place on Sundays.

When the summer arrives all the National events start to appear and a percentage of club shooters will start to attend these, travelling far and wide to different grounds to test out their abilities to the full.

A course of fire will normally consist of between 30 and 40 targets, usually set at two targets per lane. Big events

can have as many as 50 targets per course. The targets are specifically metal knock down silhouettes of various quarry species (rat, rabbit, crow, etc.) with a circular hole - known as the 'kill zone' or 'hit zone' - cut into them through which the pellet must pass to make the target fall. It does this by hitting a paddle behind the target. The size of the hole can vary from 45mm down to 20mm depending on distance. Distances to target are usually between 7yds and 55yds, but long range 'side shoot' competitions can be out as far as 80 to 85yds.

The shooter makes his way through the course following the lane numbers. Only one shot at each target is allowed with a hit being scored only if the target falls and the shooter is credited with one point. A miss results in a zero on the scorecard. In National events the shooter is allowed 2 minutes to complete his lane. Time starts when the scope is raised to the eye for the first time and then runs continuously up to the 2 minute point. The shooter forfeits any target not taken within this time. A miss results in a zero on the scorecard and a hit is marked with a cross. The shooter with the highest score in his grade at the end of the day's shooting is the winner. What could be simpler!

One of the strongest selling points for the sport has to be the lack of red tape for the individual to get up and running. Under current legislation here in the UK, no licence is required for any air rifle with a muzzle energy not exceeding 12ft/lbs and these are the only ones allowed for FT. You have to be over 18 years of age to purchase any air rifle, and the only other stipulation is that if you are buying from a licensed airgun dealer the purchase has to be made 'face to face'. There are also no restrictions on buying and storing of the ammunition - airgun pellets.

This gives the would be FT shooter an easy path to obtaining what he or she needs to compete in the sport, unlike all the other branches of shooting which have many restrictions applied to both shooter, equipment, and of course, a safe place to shoot.

FT clubs can operate in a safe environment on almost any piece of open ground or wood, with permission of the

landowner of course, as long as basic safety rules are in operation.

There is no rule on what calibre to use, but .177 is far and away the most popular because of its flat shooting characteristics. With muzzle velocities up to 820 fps (in .177) depending on the ammunition used, today's non-FAC air rifles are amongst the most accurate weapons ever produced within their limited range. Out to 50yds they can be deadly accurate. At 55yds groups open up a tiny bit, and beyond this the pellets start to seriously lose power; weather conditions and to some extent the course itself can also affect the flight of the pellet.

The equipment

To shoot FT seriously will require the best equipment and it doesn't come cheap! However, once the initial outlay has been made and providing the choices have been wise, the investment should provide many years of enjoyment and satisfaction.

All top FT air rifles are pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) in operation, working on a charge of compressed air and filled from a diving bottle.

FAC air rifles, those with a muzzle energy above 12ft/lbs (the UK legal limit), are not allowed in FT shooting here in the UK, although they are allowed in the USA and some other countries. Despite this, only once in the 20 odd year history of FT has a shooter won the World Championship shooting a rifle over 12ft/lbs - which fairly conclusively proves that power isn't everything. It is pellet placement, skill and knowledge that will win every time.

FT Rifles

The following is a list of major manufacturers and importers to point you in the right direction. All rifles listed are precharged pneumatics that have been specifically designed or adapted for FT.

Air Arms EV2 MkII: An FT rifle ready to shoot straight out of the box with every bell and whistle included in standard spec (only the scope and mounts to buy). Contact Air Arms on tel. 01323 845853





Air Arms MPR FT model: Based on the S400, this rifle was developed to give a cost effective choice to shooters that want an accurate rifle with FT features. Contact Air Arms on tel. 01323 845853

Anschütz 8002: Superb match rifle imported and set up for FT by Dave Whelham of Airmasters who can be contacted on tel. 01442 66831

Daystate Mk4 Grand Prix: This is a brand new model, and will feature silver/grey laminate wood stock, silver and blue anodised action and a self-regulating electronic CDT firing system. Contact Daystate on tel. 01782 791755

Ripley Rifles: Custom hand built regulated rifles to order. Efficient and very accurate. Winner of every major competition on the FT calendar at sometime or other. Comes at a price! Tel. 01773 748353

Steyr LG110: Austrian made, this compact rifle comes with a fully adjustable stock and is both superbly accurate and efficient. Aesthetically it can be an acquired taste. Imported by Harry Preston, tel. 01904 705401

Walther Dominator: The heavyweight on the scene. Very accurate and fully adjustable stock, trigger, etc. Imported by Brocock on tel. 01527 527800

Feinwerkbau P70FT: Another fully adjustable masterpiece in the same style as the Steyr. Sparse chassis but very functional. Imported by Centra UK. Tel. 01483 756969

FT Scopes

The FT scope must be capable of accurately estimating the range to a target and reliably returning to the

same calibrated settings time and time again. High magnification helps this process, so don't look at anything under 30x magnification if you are serious. The following list features established competition winners, but keep a sharp look out in GunMart and Shooting Sports, as new models are being introduced all the time.

Schmidt & Bender: This company is one of the best scope makers in the world and they offer one purpose built FT model – the side-wheel focusing 12.5-50x56 FT. Reckoned to be extremely good – but doesn't come cheap! Imported by Sportsman Gun Centre, tel. 01392 354854 and York Guns, tel. 01904 487180.

Leupold Target: Can be purchased in many guises. 20-50x50 is the most popular. Side wheel focus. Superb optics and reliability at a price. Relatively compact and light compared to its rivals. Distributed by GMK, tel. 01489 587500

Burris: The 8-32x mag is common on the FT circuit. Great optics and side wheel focus options. Distributed by GMK, tel. 01489 587500

Hawke: Relatively low cost range compared to the others but never the less a good alternative. High mag and side wheel focus available. Distributed by Deben Industries, tel. 0870 4422600

Nightforce: A very well made scope in 8-32x50 format. Side wheel focus and super optics but it's expensive. Distributed by RUAG, tel. 01579 362319

Nikko Stirling: Massive 10x50x60 spec, side wheel focus, and under £400 makes this the bread and butter scope for a lot of FT shooters. Distributed by Highlands Outdoors, tel. 01858 410683

Playing the field

Chris Large, shooting record holder, and former World FT Champion, Terry Almond, give an introduction to Field Target Shooting

Field Target (or FT) has been around now for over 25 years. It's stood the test of time and due to technological advancement in equipment and communications, plus the dedication of a lot of people, its popularity continues to steadily grow - not just in the UK but worldwide.

Back in the early '80s spring powered rifles and humble scopes were the order of the day, and basic (often homemade) knockdown targets sat no further than 40yds away. These early days were great fun and hugely important to the subsequent future of FT and many of us are left with fond memories of those large inaugural regional shoots. Personally I can remember, as if it were yesterday, a big open competition in the mid 80s in the North West of England, shooting alongside a young man of huge talent - a certain Mr Andy Calpin. It was that shoot that gave me the encouragement and enthusiasm to continue to visit my little FT club on Sunday mornings and get involved in the sport at grass roots level. Now of course names like Andy Calpin, Mick Dawes or Nick Jenkinson are FT legends, but it was watching those people shoot that kept the interest alive for many of us.

As the years advanced so did air rifle technology and manufacturers like Daystate, Air Arms and Sportsmatch forged the way to the now common place pre-charged pneumatic (or PCP) FT rifles. These new breeds were a revolution on the FT circuit, opening up a host of new challenges for manufacturers and competitors alike. These new dream machines were somewhat easier to shoot consistently well for the majority of people. They were much lighter too, so great for beginners, and aesthetically they were a huge leap forward from the traditional 'springers'.

As well as advancements in rifles, the scopes that were used came on in leaps and bounds too, with names like Bausch & Lomb, Burris and Leupold breaking into the FT scene in a major way. These progressions in equipment meant that the courses and competitions had to evolve too, with more challenging targets and increased distances slowly breaking the early mould.

However, no matter how much has developed over the years one aspect of the sport has remained very consistent... it remains one of the few sporting hobbies



that is as friendly, enjoyable and open to all as the day it started. There aren't many other sports where a complete beginner on their first outing can be advised, helped or bought a cup of tea by a multiple world champion or national shooting legend.

FT Today

So where are we now? In terms of the equipment it's quite remarkable just how much development and energy has been ploughed into field target kit, from major UK and European manufacturers as well as talented individual engineers, gunsmiths and stockmakers. The accuracy of the equipment is awesome, with 10mm outdoor groups at 55yds being common place from the majority of mid range and top end PCP rigs.

In recent years we have witnessed an influx of converted indoor 10m rifles onto the FT circuit. These new breeds with lightweight, or multi adjustable contemporary styling have become extremely popular and have seen a great deal of success at all levels. A further advancement of course has come from the shooters themselves, and their enthusiasm and dedication has helped progress the sport tremendously throughout the UK and Europe, as well as the States, Russia and the Southern Hemisphere.

Over the past three to four years I have noticed the skill levels of the shooters and the course builders improve at an impressive rate, adding more and more enjoyment to the national, regional and local courses that run all year round.

So, how do you get involved?

It's quite easy to get started in this exciting and addictive sport, but like many activities, unless you know where to look it can often be difficult to find the correct, or most up-to-date information.

There is actually a huge amount of info and advice on FT available. The governing body is the British Field Target Association (BFTA) made up of 9 Regional Associations, and they are all working hard to raise awareness and increase the accessibility of the sport.

If you've now had your appetite whetted, and you fancy having a go then by far the easiest and safest route is

to find a local club affiliated (through its local regional association) to the BFTA. The majority of clubs have regular weekly meetings, usually at the weekends and sometimes on weekdays during the summer months. Naturally individual club activities will vary, but all clubs will have a core base of FT shooters that will also travel the country throughout the year to compete in league, regional and national competitions.

As with many topics these days, a quick, easy and convenient way to access information is via the internet. Most clubs and regional bodies have their own websites, and the recently launched official BFTA website (www.bfta.net) is a good place to start to get an overall picture of the scope and popularity of the sport. This site has general information on FT, plus an excellent club finder so no matter where you are based you can easily locate an affiliated club near to you. The site also has useful contacts, a gallery, regional and national shoot calendar, newsletters and the latest news and stories.

Further information can be accessed via several online forums that offer valuable and often in depth views and opinions, hints and tips and photos and of course general airgun banter on a daily basis. Two useful links are www.shooting-the-breeze.com and www.airgunforum.net

The other reliable source of course is the shooting press, which will give monthly reports and reviews on competitions and equipment to keep you up-to-date on what's new to the market.

First steps

So, now you're armed with this information, you have no excuse not to give it a go. Once you've found and visited your nearest club, you'll soon learn of the many various shoots and club meets available to you, and before you know it you will be getting stuck in to the sport.

If you don't yet have any equipment, I would strongly suggest that you ask the members of your local club for advice - you'll find that they will be more than happy to give you a full run down on the options available, and let you have a go with their kit so you can gauge what kind or style of rifle is suitable for you. There is a huge difference in the look, weight and feel of rifles used in field target, and



the only real way to see which one suits you is to have a go. Remember, that what may look the part may not always be the one best suited to your style, technique or physique.

Another key point to bear in mind when faced with buying equipment is that the overriding aim of our sport is to have fun. Of course there will always be an element of competitiveness, but enjoyment is the name of the game - so you don't need to spend a fortune when you first get involved. A basic, reliable PCP rifle and good rangefinding scope will be more than adequate to get you up and running, giving you time to get involved and learn the process before heading into an expensive outlay. There are plenty of these types of rifle available from the main manufacturers, plus at club level there is always a lot of used equipment (usually heavily modified and good value for money) that is up for grabs. As well as the rifle, don't forget the basics such as decent pellets, a good rifle case to protect your new purchase, outdoor clothes and a beanbag - believe me there is nothing worse than not being comfortable when faced with a 50 shot FT course ahead of you!

To help the beginners, most shoots are graded based on experience and skill level. These grades are usually AA, A, B, C & Spring (for non pneumatic rifles) - so no matter what your equipment or ability is you can be assured that you can take part, get a result and enjoy yourself. That's what I did over 20 years ago and I'm still hooked now!

What does it cost?

It all depends on how much you want to get involved, but it needn't cost a fortune to get going, and remember once you have the basic kit it should last for years. Pre charged pneumatic rifles vary in design and cost, but a new setup suitable for the job will cost between £500 and £1200.

A decent range finding scope is essential, and there are plenty on the market. Entry level range finding scopes are in the region of £150, but you will need £350 - £500 to get a good range finding scope that will serve you well for many years.

A good rifle case is essential in keeping your new purchase in tip top condition so this will be money well spent.

Most clubs buy pellets in bulk, so ask at your local club to see if they stock your preferred choice.

Don't forget the basics. If you visit a club or see images of FT you will notice a few items that are essential. A target style glove can help you shoot more accurately, particularly when kneeling or standing. There are specific target gloves available but to start with a well padded leather glove will get you going. As well as good outdoor clothing the final 'must have' is a bean bag. FT is shot in some pretty amazing landscapes, but they are not always perfect for sitting on, so a bean bag will keep you dry and comfortable.

Club memberships vary throughout the region, depending on their setup and facilities. Between £20 - £40 per year is the average.

What Kit For Field Target Shooting?

Ex world FT Champion Terry Almond gives us the low down on choosing a rifle and scope for this challenging discipline

I have been fortunate that during my 30 years in FT I have been able to meet shooters from all over the World, many of whom shoot anything from .308 down to .22 rimfire and almost without exception they agree that using a sub-12ft/lb air rifle for FT or Hunter FT is one of the biggest tests of skill and judgement that there is! Also, there's no licence required; Scotland being the sad exception, and practice is possible in the majority of gardens with a suitable backstop.

Of course, the correct rifle, optics, and set up are very important and to compete at the top level requires this, plus a great deal of dedication. However, between that level and the beginning is a very steep learning curve and we all have to start somewhere. I will go through the various steps required. Choosing an air rifle is the first step.

What power system?

What power system do I go for; spring or pre-charged pneumatic (PCP)? This will be governed by what floats your boat and your budget and what level of rifle you are thinking of buying. If it's new, you will get a manufacturer's guarantee and at the same time, have the



peace of mind that nobody has been tinkering about with the action. You will also have to budget for a telescopic sight and mounts. PCPs need an air bottle and gauge for charging; another must these days, is a case or bag to carry it in.

Stick to top manufacturers and you won't go far wrong but expect to pay extra for established models. The fixed barrel spring rifles that use an under or side lever to cock the action are the best choice. The Air Arms TX200 is a good example of a top-quality under-lever. Weihrauch still produce some great springers; the HW97 and 97KT are superb guns. Their predecessor, the HW77, is still a great rifle. It's also the daddy of FT shooters, and the only springer worth a carrot back in the mid and late 1980s.

As you get above the £350 mark, PCPs start to come into the equation. Very capable guns like the Air Arms S200 and S400 range (both unregulated) are very popular and tremendously accurate at the entry level of FT and beyond. The S200 particularly for Juniors! At the other end of the scale we have Anschutz, Steyr, Feinwerkbau, along with the Air Arms FTP900 and Daystate's new Tsar FT offering. Whatever you decide I'd recommend .177" as opposed to .22.



If you can't decide between a springer or a PCP consider these facts!

PCPs

- Need a 'filling kit' comprising of pressure bottle, filler hose and gauge, which adds to the cost.
- There's no mainspring to wear out but they require care and the occasional lubing of moving parts, trigger etc. Plus, O-rings eventually leak and proper servicing is required.
- They are practically recoilless and are much more forgiving in the firing process, so easier to shoot accurately!
- Unregulated guns have a 'power curve' as they cycle through a charge of air. It is important to know what to fill it to and how many 'good' shots are available from one charge.

Springers

- They carry their own integral power source all the time.
- Springs 'wear out' and also need lubing correctly from time to time.
- They have unique recoil, which makes accuracy susceptible to changes in hold technique.
- Their actions are heavier than a PCPs, due to the weight of the spring/piston and associated parts.

Second-hand Rifles

You can stretch your budget a lot further if you think about buying second-hand but beware! Ideally, you should know something about the particular rifle and be able to test fire it. Those sold privately, often come with extras; often everything you might need, from the adjustment tools down to the ammunition that shoots well in it. You need to ask a few questions about its history. The airgun fraternity has its fair share of 'tinkerers', who can ruin a perfectly good rifle in minutes! This tends to apply to the lower end of the market, where for instance, a middle range springer has been 'modified' by the inexperienced owner, either by fitting a spring off a 747 undercarriage, or feeding the action with a gallon of oil every tin of pellets. Result: a rifle



that Rambo would find hard to cock, and if he did manage to fire it, would leave him with double vision and cracked dentures due to the terrible vibration! They are out there, believe me!

Questions to ask: Was it bought new? How long has the present owner had it? Is it modified in any way and if so, who did the work? Why is it being sold? The old 'unwanted gift' excuse is hard to justify with a kitted-out rifle. Rusting on any part of the action will tell you that the owner has not cleaned it very well after use. If it's dirty outside, how about the internals. Apart from a wipe down externally, they require internal cleaning. What about the barrel. It may never have been cleaned. On the other hand, it may have had a dyno-rod down there, scrubbing away at the rifling. With air rifles, more barrels are damaged through incorrect cleaning than ones that never get touched. Its only soft lead that is travelling down it at relatively low velocity, propelled by air.

Shine a light

At worse, an unclean barrel will cause inaccuracy, which can be rectified with a good cleaning. If possible, you need to shine a light down one end and have a visual check. Check for marks that appear as shadows and follow a noticeable path as the barrel is slowly turned. If it appears stationary, it is probably exactly that: a shadow! Usually, your thumbnail will reflect enough light down the

barrel from a decent source of daylight to allow a quick inspection.

Inspect the business end, making sure that the rifle is un-cocked and unloaded first of course! The end of the muzzle (crown) should be free of any marks or knocks. This is the last contact that the pellet has with the bore, and if it's damaged, inaccuracy will result and no amount of shooting or cleaning will make it shoot straight. The good news is re-crowning is a relatively simple job for a gunsmith.

If time and facilities allow, push a pellet through slowly from breech to muzzle. Examine it after it emerges. It should have the marks from the rifling imprinted around the waist and skirt. They should appear cleanly cut and uniform all the way round. Any other marks will need further investigation! The pellet should tighten up towards the end of the bore, as all air rifle barrels are 'choked' for a couple of inches to aid accuracy. In the case of a springer, cock the action and feel for roughness. It should be smooth all the way back to the cocked position and not make any undue noise as it's compressed. When fired, it should be reasonably quiet, grease on the spring is there to silence or 'dampen' it.

Doing well

You will be doing well if you can check all the above things, but try to get through as many as you can. If you're buying from a shop, the person behind the counter should be able to satisfy most of the questions and demonstrate that the rifle is in good order.

Looking specifically at PCPs, many of the same checks can be made and questions asked. If it's not charged, ask to see it charged and then check for obvious leakage. The main areas are at the muzzle and breach. Simply get your ear near to them and listen, safely of course! Unlike their springer counterparts, PCPs can be 'dry fired'. In other words, they can be fired without the need to load a pellet. To do this with a spring gun is a big no-no and could wreck it. The big heavy piston requires back pressure to stop it slamming into the transfer port end



of the cylinder. The pellet provides this back pressure. The PCP has no big heavy piston, only a small 'hammer' and spring, which strikes a valve to release a measured amount of air. So it can be safely cocked and fired empty without damaging the action.

Feel for smooth and positive cocking and check the trigger action. A ropey trigger is not normally cause for concern, as virtually all are adjustable but if in doubt ask the question. A PCP should discharge with a nice sharp 'crack' or 'pop'. It shouldn't sound like a sheep with diarrhoea. A sort of 'Bbllaatt!' This could simply mean that it needs filling, so make sure it is charged and try it again. If the noise is still the same it probably indicates 'valve bounce'. A sure sign that someone has been fiddling with the action. Give it a wide berth!

PCP safety

PCPs operate at high pressures, up to 3000 psi and above, which are potentially dangerous, so care when filling and handling rifles and pressure bottles needs to be exercised. Don't panic, as they are perfectly safe when used within their limits. Read all safety instructions thoroughly and keep the charging equipment clean and away from direct heat. Air expands when heated, which can take pressures up above recommended levels.

Have fun choosing the right rifle for you. If you can afford it, go for a PCP and a decent scope. Buy it in .177" and believe me, you will have a gun for every occasion.



What Optic?

With your FT rifle hopefully sorted, it's now time to look at suitable optics, so let's consider some options.

FT allows the scope to be used at any magnification the shooter desires, with adjustments on the fly but requires something capable of at least 25x with good eyes. This allows it to be used to 'range find' the target, using its shallow depth of field at high mag. Most shooters use upwards of 35x for focusing. Actually taking the shot is down to personal preference. Shooting distances go from 10 to 55 yards. All but designated kneeling and standing lanes must be shot in the customary sitting FT position unsupported. If you are reasonably able bodied and like gadgets and 'twiddling', this is the one for you! Finally, if you just wish to enjoy your rifle outside of official competitions, shooting any way you choose down at your local club, the choices become more plentiful with the following considerations

Spoilt for choice

Parallax adjustment is also something to consider when shooting at higher magnifications. The target may be perfectly clear at 30 yards, but look at something 15 yards away and it will be blurred and very difficult to make out the spot you need to be aiming at. It will also suffer from Parallax error! This is when the reticle moves together with your eye movement and is caused by the focal plane of the scope falling in front of it. Not recommended for accurate shooting! This error increases at closer ranges and higher magnifications and can mean as much as 10mm from the intended impact point.

Re-focus

Fortunately, error and focus more or less coincide with each other. Scopes fitted with parallax adjustment allow us



to re-focus the target and practically eliminate the error by placing the focal plane and the reticle in a spot where they coincide. On some scopes, the adjustment is done on the front objective lens! More popular is to position it on the left of the saddle in the form of a turret, which is more user friendly! FT scopes are available from Sightron, Hawke, Kahles, Leupold etc. so spend time checking out what's available.

Mount Up

The mounts are obviously what connects the scope to the rifle, so require some thought before purchase. They are available in straight or 'reach forward' design, which allow more eye relief. Low mounts may not be an option if the scope has a large front (objective lens). It may require medium or even high mounts just to clear the barrel. High mounts can be used even with a smaller objective lens for other reasons. For example, to lift the head up into a more comfortable position when the rifle is shouldered, although this leads to other things. Usually, when extending the scope height, the cheekpiece will also need to be extended to avoid the head 'floating', without any contact with the stock.

The height of the mounts will also determine how the trajectory of the pellet behaves from muzzle to target. In a nutshell, lower mounts mean a more gradual trajectory out to around 20 yards, making it easier to hit closer targets as the ranging doesn't have to be precise. Higher will cause the trajectory to climb steeply from the muzzle requiring precise range estimation to keep within 15 or 25mm of a circle. The upside of the highs is that the trajectory is somewhat stretched out, with less pellet drop at longer ranges. This allows a bit more error in the range estimation with a better chance of success.

Adjustables

If you really want things spot-on, then you may want to go for adjustable mounts and you need look no further than Sportmatch UK! They make for every discipline, including their excellent, 2-piece adjustable set. Available



as up/down plus right/left or just up/down adjustable, they allow the scope to be 'optically centred', with all external adjustments being in the middle of the adjustment range. This ensures that the best possible sight picture is available through the centre of the optics. I use the single adjustment set, up and down only, and have found them to be perfect for my needs.

Fitting the Scope

Keep the base mounts as far apart as possible on the scope rail; this distance will vary between rifles depending on the length of the rail. The further apart you get them, the less prone they become to accidental knocks, which can cause a change in the zero. Once the distance is decided, tighten the clamps securely and evenly a bit at a time.

After placing the scope into the cradle of the mounts, fit the top clamps loosely with just a little friction to stop the scope from sliding freely but loose enough to enable you to move it. Now check that you have the correct 'eye relief'. That is the distance from your eye to the eyepiece. The way to do this is to close your eyes and mount the rifle to your shoulder then open your eyes! The view should be a perfect circle to the periphery of the lens. Now is also the time to adjust the reticle for sharpness, by looking skywards and turning the focusing adjuster at the rear of the scope until it's sharp and clear.

Getting cross

Next is to align the reticle vertically with the rifle. Don't rely on just shouldering the rifle and guessing the setting! I have been amazed at how far off vertical it can be using this method. The rifle will end up being 'canted' to one side, more of this in a moment.

One method is to set up using a gun-vice or similar, using a small spirit level to make sure that it is absolutely

upright, then hang up a piece of weighted string some distance away or focus on a vertical or horizontal post. Look through the scope and align the vertical line of the scope with the string or object. Don't be surprised if it looks a mile out when you shoulder the rifle. It is now showing up your natural canting position. A level bubble on the rifle will keep this in check. You now need to tighten up the top mounting straps.

Again, frustration can set in because having gone through the above procedure meticulously, you find that after tightening up the straps the scope has rolled off vertical! Be sure to tighten the bolts evenly and just a tad at a time. A spirit level on top of the scope can help during this operation. The gap between the top strap and the base mount should be even on each side when fully tightened. Go easy with the muscle power. Nipping up the bolts after having applied a drop of 'LocTite' is much better than proving how easy it is to strip a thread or bend an Allen key! A final check on alignment and you're good to go.

The addition of some scope caps to keep the grit away and maybe a screw on sunshade for the front if it has provision for one when shooting against a bright background and it's ready to be zeroed. Once set, you're off!

Happy & Safe Shooting
Terry Almond



Field Target: An Introduction

Regular competitor Neil MacKinnon introduces you to the wonderful world of Field Target shooting.

Field Target is a shooting sport with its origins back in the 1980's, and like many fine sports, it originated in Britain.

All those years ago FT didn't look so different to the way HFT does now, except a 6 mag scope was considered flashy, .22 break barrel springers were commonplace and pre-charged rifles didn't exist yet; at least not for any other use than shooting tranquillisers into large dangerous animals! As all sport always do, FT quickly developed and grew and the rifles that were used for rats, rabbits and FT became a thing of the past, as did the 6 mag scopes, hold over and rangefinding by bracketing.

These days, FT has its own specific requirements and competitors their own preferences when it comes to equipment, but the rules are the same for all.

Clubs

By far the easiest way to start shooting FT is to find your local club, I'll list some details of where you can search at the end of the article, but the chances are you are not too far from a club.

All FT clubs are organised into regional groups within a National organisation, the British Field Target Association (BFTA). Within each region there are a series of competitions held, these take place at each of the clubs within the region and quite often shooters from one club will car share to get to a competition elsewhere within the region. As well as regional competitions, there is a National BFTA Grand Prix series, usually comprising seven competitions, held at venues all around the UK. You don't



need to be a member of the BFTA to take part, but if you wish to compete in GP's on a regular basis you will need to join. It costs £3.50 a year and is arranged by your club secretary.

What is Field Target?

So, having established that you are best joining a club, what precisely is Field Target?

In short, it is an outdoor target shooting discipline using air rifles limited to a maximum of 12 ft/lbs. The targets are steel knock down types, with a hole that exposes a paddle; when the paddle is hit by a pellet, the target falls and a point / hit is scored. The targets are laid in a course of up to 40 targets at regional level and 50 for a GP. The course can be in open fields or woodland or a combination of both. Sometimes clubs are able to leave the targets out all the time, others lay the course for club days or competitions only. The targets are set at random distances of between 10 yard minimum and 55 yard maximum. The hole in the target can be between 15 and 40mm diameter depending on the course setter's preference; the smaller 'kills' being used at closer ranges and the 'full size' kills being used at longer ranges and on discipline shots. Two minutes are allowed per lane, so you have to range and shoot the two targets quite quickly.

At a competition, you pay your entry and are given a scorecard; you then team up with a partner or two. This is an excellent way to meet people from other clubs, as FT is fundamentally a sociable sport. Once teamed up, you and your partner(s) find a lane where you can start shooting and then proceed to shoot each target in turn, scoring an X for a hit or a 0 for a miss, you move in sequence from lane to lane until you have shot all the targets on the course, you then shake hands with your partner(s) and go hand in your score card, it's as simple as that.



Sitting Down On The Job

FT has three shooting positions, freestyle, kneeling and standing.

Freestyle can be almost any position, including prone, but pretty much 100% of shooters sit on a beanbag of some sort. Kneeling is done with three points of contact with the ground, front foot, back foot and knee, a bean bag or kneeling roll can be used to help support the shooter and there are very specific rules covering what is and is not acceptable. Lastly, standing shots, which are taken.... standing. During the competition you will find several targets or pairs of targets that are designated as discipline shots, so either kneeling or standing; there will be a sign at the gate to the shooting lane telling you which, all other targets can be shot freestyle.

To ensure that all competitions are even handed, every competitor is given a grade; these grades start at C and go up to AA. Without getting too bogged down with this, new shooters always start in C grade and then over a few shoots they will find their correct grade, based on the average scores they put in. This grading system ensures that you are shooting against people of similar ability, rather than an ex World Champion. There is also an Open class, that has been introduced in order to allow for less able shooters, who find it difficult or painful to shoot some of the discipline shots, to continue shooting. Competitors in Open class shoot all target in the freestyle position, this also allows for wheelchair shooters.

What about the kit?

It is not essential to have a fancy rifle to shoot FT, what is essential are the following:

- An air rifle, preferably single shot and in .177 calibre.
- A tin of pellets that suit the rifle.
- A good scope, preferably with a magnification of around 32 or higher.
- A bean bag, as you have to sit on something for freestyle shots.
- A pellet pouch or tin, as you need to carry ammo.
- A pair of decent boots, as FT is shot outdoors all year round.

That's it, that's the only essential kit, all the rest either enhances your ability to hit targets, or is just nice to have:



like, a windicator, a bubble level, a leather and canvas shooting jacket, a shooting glove, a hoody, a baseball cap, the list goes on and you will acquire and keep or discard various items and accessories as your skill increases.

On the course

Lets briefly look at what is involved in shooting an FT target.

All the targets on an FT course are at random, unmarked distances and so we use a higher magnification scope, which has a shallow depth of field to help estimate the distance to each target, effectively using the scope as a rangefinder. We can then adjust the elevation turret on the scope or the point of aim using the reticle for the distance we have estimated, load a pellet, allow for any wind drift and release the shot.

Why do FT shooters use .177 calibre? Simply because the pellet has a flatter trajectory than other calibres, such as .20 or .22; this allows a greater margin of error when estimating distance, no other reason than that, and the reason FT shooters have complex looking rifles and huge magnification scopes is the same, as these pieces of equipment further reduce the margin of error. That said, I was recently handed a rifle to take some demonstration shots at six targets that had been set up on an open field. The set up consisted of an Air Arms S400 action housed in a metal stock with a 15 year old BSA Platinum scope. I ranged the targets, called out the range to the rifle's owner who told me where to adjust the elevation turret and I then hit all of the very challenging targets; so the fancy kit is nice, but not essential and you can shoot FT on a budget.

Be Sociable

As I have said, Field Target is an extremely sociable form of shooting, both on club days, when people are practicing or setting up a bit of new kit, or at competitions. After all, you are going to be spending a couple of hours with a partner at a competition, so you are going to be pretty unlucky to end up with someone who barely breathes a word... although it has happened to me before now. FT courses are usually full of natter and laughter and good natured banter; yes, the release of the shot is a serious business, as you are doing your best to hit every target, but you are there to enjoy yourself, the open air, the camaraderie between fellow shooters and the whole experience.

Clubs

There are clubs all around the UK, most of which can be found by going to www.thebfta.net and looking at the club finder section. Once there, click on the map of the UK and the regional organisation will pop up, another click should then get you a web site or a list of clubs.

You could also go to www.shooting-the-breeze.com and ask if there is a club near you.

Give FT a go, it is challenging, fun and sociable- what's not to like?

FT Scopes

Neil MacKinnon considers the options available to the aspiring FT shooter, and looks at a number of possibilities.

A telescopic sight is the heart of any Field Target set up. You can use a simple rifle with a good scope and put in respectable scores, whereas the reverse just will not work. So what do you need? What is available? And how much will it all cost?

Without getting overly technical and sending you to sleep, the reason scopes used for FT are high magnification is because they give a very shallow depth of field, i.e. when in focus, the target should be sharp and clear, but anything a yard closer or further away will be out of focus, that is how we use scopes to range find. There are any number of higher magnification scopes, but for accurate rangefinding around 32 mag is considered the lowest you can go and still be in with a chance, so we'll confine our search there for now. Whether you choose fixed or variable mag, front focus or side wheel is as much as anything personal taste, at least to start with.

A quick glance around the net and local gun shops will soon inform you that suitable brand new scopes start at about £450 and go up, but do you really need to spend £2500 plus on a scope? No, you do not, so let's have a look at a couple of suitable scopes.

Sightron SIII FT. 10-50 X 60

www.aimfieldsports.com

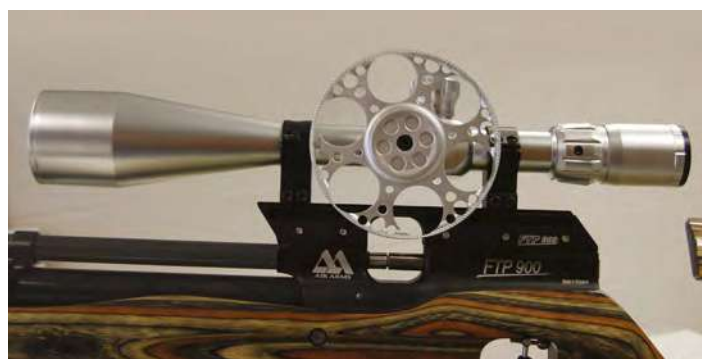
There are several versions of the SIII, and even more options within the range, so if you fancy one, do your homework, take a look through a few (if you can) and decide which one best suits your needs.

As with our previous two offerings, the SIII is a sidewheel focus scope with a minimum mag of 10 and maximum 50. On the FT model, the turrets are 1/8 MOA target type with covers. There are two different reticules available; both have lines rather than dots on both the horizontal and vertical cross hairs and a small dot in the centre. The sight picture is excellent, crystal clear and bright with fine definition, but at full magnification it can flare / white out when looking at a target with either the sun or a very bright sky behind. Reducing the mag to around 40 will remove the flare and adding a sunshade will help prevent it to a greater degree.

Rangefinding is precise, accurate and repeatable and



it is unfussy about how you focus, not a characteristic shared with all FT scopes. Significantly, the SIII weighs 1.9lbs, and this is where a lot of the extra cost is at an RRP of £1,135.



Falcon T50. 10-50 X 60

www.falconoptics.com

The T50 is a scope pretty much built for FT, and with development input from Jon Harris, a precision engineer with over 30 years of FT experience, it is far more scope than the £450 price suggests.

The T50 is a variable magnification sidewheel focus scope. Minimum mag is 10 and maximum is 50. The scope comes with sunshades, Jon Harris designed side wheel, flip up covers and even a set of stick on range numbers. It has nice chunky 1/8 MOA elevation and windage turrets and a Mil-Dot reticle. The sight picture is clear, sharp and bright. It can suffer with flare (a whitening of the sight picture) on full mag and the sight picture can at times be a little dark, but reduce the magnification to between 30 and 40 in either situation and all is once again well with the world.

The T50 rangefinds well and reliably, which is the key to any FT scope. It will differentiate to around 1.5 yards and I fancy that with practice you can get that down a bit. At 2.2lbs, it is no lightweight, but at this price point that is only to be expected.

The T50 is not as plentiful as it could be, there are any number of reasons why but mostly I suspect people believe it is not possible to get such a good scope for such a reasonable price. My advice, don't ignore the Falcon when considering your first FT scope.



Nikko Stirling Diamond 10-50 X 60 aka 'The Big Nikko'

www.hilandoutdoors.co.uk

This is currently probably one of the most popular and numerous scopes on the FT scene worldwide, they are everywhere and at every level.

The Big Nikko has adjustable magnification from 10 up to 50 mag, it comes with either Mil Dot or NATO reticules and has 1/8 MOA target turrets with screw on covers. It is a side-wheel focus scope and comes with a large diameter wheel to aid with accurate rangefinding. Talking of which, the rangefinding of the Nikko is excellent and very repeatable once you have found the technique that suits you best. The sight picture is bright and clear, but can be a tiny bit grainy in the wrong light conditions; this does not affect the rangefinding and can sometimes actually help resolve the sight picture. It does have some weight at 2.3lbs, but that is one of the reasons it cost hundreds, not thousands. Talking of which, the RRP is £898.99, but a Google search or two should get that down a bit.

As I said at the start, the Big Nikko is used by some of the best shooters in the World; there is a good reason for that.

Others

There are a number of other offerings at both ends of the price range, but which I have not yet had the opportunity to use. C-More make a 3-30 x 56 side wheel scope that has a clear sight picture, useful reticule and will do the job. At the other extreme of the price scale, at around £3,000, we have Schmitt and Bender with the PMII 12.5-50 X 56 (www.schmidtundbender.de/en/), not a scope I have spent any time with, but used by a few shooters in the FT world. Also, the new Kahles 1050FT (www.ruag.co.uk), at around £2,000, has the focus wheel on top. This scope has an FT specific reticule, clear sight picture and excellent focus. Last, the range of scopes from March, (www.marchscopes.co.uk) with both the 60 and 80 mag examples being used on the FT circuit. These scopes have the best, cleanest, clearest, brightest sight picture I have seen and those that have them love them, but they take some getting used to and they are in the region of £2,500 depending on mag and other options you choose, so, you pays yer money and makes yer choice.



Hunter Field Target needs You!

An introduction to HFT by Mark Camoccio

Most sports claim it, but airgun shooting in general, is a genuine sport for all. There's no barrier to taking part, and everyone can get involved. Hunter Field Target (HFT) is just one part of that jigsaw, yet with its runaway success over the last few years, it has become arguably the fastest growing sector.

But don't just take my word for it. Instead, take a look at the plethora of related products now filtering onto the market to satisfy demand. Specialist sports encourage innovation, and any manufacturer trying to stay one step ahead in an increasingly competitive market place, has to try that bit harder. Dedicated HFT rifles are therefore becoming more common place for sure, yet that said, a major attraction of the sport is the very fact that most airguns can be used, as long as they comply with the UK 12ft/lbs power limit; more of which in a moment. Of course some are much more accurate than others, yet the principle stands.

Simple Format

It's the simple format of Hunter Field Target that acts as a major attraction for so many. A course of 30 or so metal knockdown targets are laid out through a wood or across a field, with the idea that the shooting situations overall, mirror that of a typical real world hunting trip. The shooter moves through the course of targets, lane by lane, taking one shot at each, whilst touching a designated 'peg' with some part of the body. Those knock down targets consist



of the faceplate (approximately 8 inches x 5 inches, into which is cut a hole - called the kill zone or kill area. This kill zone is usually anything from 15mm up to 40mm, and with the rules specifying particular target sizes at specific ranges, some idea of distance can be crudely calculated.

Being entirely shot outdoors, the sport pitches the shooter against the terrain, and the elements, so mastering the wind and being able to judge distance, are two vital skills, which any would-be competitor needs to master. One key rule which sets HFT apart from FT, bars the use of the sitting position, so when targets are 'freestyle' the prone position is normally adopted. Each course also has a designated number of what are termed 'discipline' shots, where the shooter is required to stand or kneel, and these of course are harder shots to master.

In much the same way as the early days of Field Target Shooting, HFT also began with an all-comers attitude, with shooters using all manner of air rifles in an informal atmosphere. The sport has of course slowly evolved, and today's competitor can expect a challenging and rewarding experience to test their skills to the limit.

Great appeal

That all inclusive atmosphere still prevails, but as smaller kill zones have now become more common place, the skill level has risen; leading to the quest in certain quarters for supposedly more sophisticated kit. Those small kill zones often act as a decider between the top shots on the day, and the concentration required to hit a half inch circle for example (when the pulse is racing, and the specific range of the target is unspecified), should not be underestimated.

Yet HFT can be enjoyed on a level of your choosing.



One of the key principles that underpins the sport remains unchanged - namely the generous scoring system; and this alone, ensures that most leave the venue with a sense of achievement at least. Unlike FT where 1 point is awarded for a hit and nothing for a miss, HFT awards 1 point just for hitting the faceplate, and 2 points for hitting the kill zone and knocking the target over. In practise, this means that most shooters, if not all, will manage a score of 50percent or over, giving HFT great appeal to the newcomer or junior shot.

I've often said it, but with Field Target, you could actually have shot fairly well on a particular day, only to have missed many targets just outside the rim of the kill zone. FT's unforgiving scoring would see you leave with an embarrassing outcome, yet HFT flatters the average shot, with that faceplate rule.

OK, topflight FT is still arguably the flagship division of airgun shooting, and a fantastic sport that pushes the boundaries of both competitor and equipment, but HFT now appeals to many more average shooters across the board, and we undoubtedly need both disciplines.

Scopes

Another difference that sets HFT apart concerns the scope. Competitors are not permitted to make any adjustments at all to their telescopic sight, throughout the duration of the

shoot, and in practise, that instantly renders the ultra high magnification models utilized for FT shooting, redundant. Instead, a medium power mag needs to be selected, typically 9 or 10x, and any parallax adjuster set to a mid range distance of 25yds, for example. Ideally all targets from 8-45yds should be clear enough to shoot with the scope set in this way.

Starting out

So what's the first step to take, if this sport sounds like your cup of tea? Well joining a club is always a good idea. At club level, just meeting people with the same interests, passions and aspirations, can work wonders. A club is also a great place to meet other shooters, who invariably, are only too willing to share their knowledge and enthusiasm for the sport. Most people will be only too happy to let others try out their rifle too, and its here where you can gain a good sense of just what is available on the market. Trying before you buy is always the best policy, as one particular gun may suit an individual perfectly, yet just not feel right to others. Clubs provide the perfect opportunity to glean as much impartial advice as possible, from a total cross section of shooters. After a while, once personal taste and bias is removed from the equation, an informed unhurried decision can be made, along with hopefully the ideal purchase.

To find a club near you, check the listings from the suggested websites at the end of this article.

Expectations

'You're only shooting against yourself at the end of the day' - it's a phrase I've heard so many times, but it's true enough. Concentrate on your own results rather than other peoples, and for those less competitive, posting a 'personal best' score can be immensely satisfying. Everyone can enjoy their own personal battle, away from the cauldron of pressure at the top.

Many people's first experiences of competition may well be at club level, and here inevitably, the action is more informal. Pluck up the courage though, to attend one of the big national rounds, held around the country, and you may be pleasantly surprised just how friendly the atmosphere is.

At the range

On arrival, they'll be somewhere to go and book in, and since pre-payment by post should have taken place by this stage, you'll just be issued with your scorecard and the number of the lane on which you'll start. Refreshments and breakfast is often available, which can be most welcome on a cold winter morning. A practise range is always available, so last minute checks of the rifle and zero can be made; and it's at this point that the shooter can try and familiarize themselves with conditions (i.e. strong winds) on the day, with a view to applying anything they learn later, on the target course.

Shooters are pre-arranged into two squads, with one



shooting in the morning, and the other in the afternoon. Start times may vary, but normally, the first squad is called to a safety briefing, which everyone must attend, by around 0930am. Shooters then split into either pairs, or groups of three, and move through the course, marking each others cards as they go. Marshalls are on hand throughout the match if any problems should arise too, and safety is of course the number one priority.

If you do attend a National Series shoot, then expect to have your rifle tested, to ensure that it falls below the legal power limit. A chronograph is normally placed on one of the target lanes, so no-one can easily avoid it - and it makes sense. Guns over the limit could well be classed as firearms, so apart from any unfair advantage that more power may give to the shooter, the equally serious matter of legal repercussions for the shooting ground comes into play. Keeping legal is therefore in all of our interests.

Remember- no one is scoffing at results, and with a raffle normally held at the end of the day, everyone has a chance to win something. With many big manufacturers in the industry sponsoring events, there's quite often a rifle or other significant prize up for grabs too, which keeps some interest to the end of the day.

Equipment

As far as kit is concerned, the vast majority of legally available airguns could be used on an HFT course; and special categories exist to cater specifically for users of spring powered guns, or .22 calibre, as opposed to the easier to use, pre-charged pneumatic guns. Juniors have

two age categories too, and the number of entries is heart warming to see. Favourite rifles for the open class over the years have included the ubiquitous, but rightly popular Air Arms s400 range, and Daystate MK3 and MK4 electronic models. Many other guns are suitable, and are extensively reviewed elsewhere in this publication.

Likewise, a raft of scope options await the budding enthusiast. Again, search out reviews in this handbook for some pointers in that direction, as it's a subject in itself.

Get involved

In this article I've really only scratched the surface with this sport, but hopefully I've got the message across, that anyone can take part in Hunter Field Target and all are welcome. It really is a great sport, that's fun and exciting, first and foremost, and secondly, as challenging and rewarding as your skill will allow.

And never lose sight of the golden rule- remember to enjoy yourself!

National competitions usually require pre-booking, and all the details are on the UKAHFT site. For more general information on this fast growing sport, check out the website www.shooting-the-breeze.com . Click on 'Shooting Clubs Map' for a full listing of airgun clubs across the country. For the official website for United Kingdom Association for Hunter Field Target, enter <https://sites.google.com/site/ukahft/> .

Information on the annual World Championship event is also available at the dedicated site <https://sites.google.com/site/whfta1/>



Come Get Involved In ... Hunter Field Target

By Mark Camoccio

Time check 2016, and outdoor airgun sport has come of age. Just look at the myriad of opportunities available to today's enthusiast, and it really is a cause for celebration. As someone who was at the very first Field Target shoot, held in Magham Down in Sussex, way back in 1980, I've witnessed the slow evolution of our sport from several angles, and thanks to the hard work of several notables behind the scenes, we now have a wealth of different knockdown target competitions and disciplines in which to take part; that all owe their existence to that fledgling tournament.

So just what is hunter field target?

So just what is Hunter Field Target, and what is the HFT format that has proved so popular? A typical course consists of thirty steel animal shaped knock down targets, with varying sized kill areas (the hole cut into the front plate), and these are laid out in an outdoor setting; either through a wood, or across fields. The targets are set at distances between 8yards and 45yards, (ten yards shorter than FT incidentally) and rules govern what size kill areas can be laid at specific distances. The smallest kill zone is 15mm, and these can be set out to a maximum of 25yards, which is still an ultra demanding shot, especially when a breeze gets up! Kills range in size up to 45mm in the rules, but in practice, 40mm seems to be the accepted norm, and 45mm ones are rare.

The shooter moves along the firing line, where there's one target to shoot per lane. He/she has to touch what's termed the 'peg' whilst taking the shot, and then move on to the next lane. Unlike FT, where shooters are allowed to sit, HFT actually bars this position, which means that most freestyle shots are taken from the prone position. Getting settled into a solid position here, with a supported hand against the peg, can often be a super stable set-up, and whilst fitness always plays a part in overall performance, (like any sport) the fact that most shots are supported in some way, is a big help to most.

Discipline pegs with compulsory standing or kneeling shots really keep everyone on their toes, and the course overall is a good three hours of exciting sport.



Hunter Field Target could be described as a simplified format, when compared to FT, but there are various factors that lay at the heart of its wide appeal. Where FT has a ruthless scoring system- i.e. one point if you hit the kill area, and zero if you hit the front plate, HFT awards one point for the front plate and 2 points if the kill area is struck. This makes a big difference and virtually guarantees that all participants in HFT will score at least 50percent, just by hitting the front plates alone. This is a great confidence boost to newcomers, and one of the key rules that work so well.

Scopes - no touch rule

Perhaps the most significant difference though between FT and HFT, comes with the rule that states that the shooter cannot touch the settings of the telescopic sight in any way, once the competition has commenced. At a stroke, this means that the ultra high magnification, parallax adjustable mega scopes used so successfully to range-find in FT, are totally redundant for HFT; given their deliberately shallow field of view.

The brief therefore for HFT, is to arrive at a setting in practice, where all targets are relatively clear throughout the target distances (8yds- 45yards), without having to adjust anything. Here we arrive at an ideal magnification between 7x and 10x, and if the scope has parallax adjustment, this will probably be best set on around 25yds. Obviously partly dependent upon individual preference, but the aim is to arrive at a scope spec where all targets have an acceptable level of clarity. That said, there's always a compromise of sorts, and where a 25 yard target, for example, will be crystal clear, if the scope has been parallax adjusted for that distance, an ultra close target placed at the minimum 8yds, will be at least slightly blurred. Blurred but still shootable is therefore the aim, through all HFT target distances.

As for aim points, a scope with a reticle, which can provide plenty of reference points for trajectory, is the name of the game- and with this in mind, Mil Dot reticles are increasingly popular.



Sport for all

Many sports claim it, but HFT really is a sport for all, and this aspect is underlined with the list of shooter Leagues on offer within the UKAHFT structure. The Open League is for the majority, (probably shooting PCPs for the most part) and whilst anyone can opt to shoot in it, several other classes exist to act effectively as a handicap system. What lies behind this thinking of course, is the fact that a modern pre-charged pneumatic is so much easier to shoot than anything else, given its recoil free action.

The following are available to enter at each UKAHFT shoot:

- Open League (as mentioned, anyone can opt to shoot in this)
- Veteran Class is new for this year, and is open to anyone 60 years and over.
- Juniors 9-13
- Juniors 14-16
- Ladies Class
- .22 Calibre (PCPs and semi- recoiling .22 or .25 calibre)
- Recoiling Class- all recoiling rifles irrespective of calibre
- Club Team

Trophies are awarded for each of these classes at each UKAHFT national round, and it all adds to the excitement- certainly for those who are competitively minded. For those who aren't quite so single minded and cutthroat on the firing line, the joys of HFT can still be appreciated- just at one's own speed or level. Shooting against yourself, and trying to better a personal best score for example, is quite

enough of an adrenalin pumper for some, and that's fine. No one is forcing the pace, OR scoffing at scores- so just enjoy it!

Hft masters

The last couple of seasons have seen the introduction of an additional series of HFT competitions, the HFT Masters- run to slightly different rules- juniors shooting for free, and spectators encouraged, to name but two, and it seems to have been very well received, so the choice of events for us enthusiasts is now greater than ever. Details of the HFT Masters events are available via the websites listed.

Antidote to ft?

Look along the firing line at a typical FT shoot these days, and the ultra high-tech nature of the sport becomes immediately obvious. That's not meant as a criticism; more an observation, and for many a novice, just taking part can be a daunting prospect. FT arguably remains the flagship outdoor airgun discipline, in terms of the technology on show, and the demands placed upon the shooter, to push everything to the limit. That said, Hunter Field Target is becoming increasingly competitive, and stands as an exciting, ultra challenging sport in its own right.

Undeniably, HFT requires a more instinctive approach to range finding, and with the door open to using more simplified hardware, the sport has possibly wider appeal across the board.

Start-up costs

As previously mentioned, super-high mag scopes are of no use in the HFT arena, and when you consider that the UKAHFT National Series has on occasions, been won with a sub £100 telescopic sight, that vital point is perfectly illustrated. The term 'arms race' has come to mean the increased use of high tech gear, and whilst it is true that more and more full specification match rifles are creeping onto the HFT competition circuit, not to mention some high-grade glassware, on balance, far more humble rifle/scope combinations can still be very competitive in the right hands.

A plethora of rules govern the UKAHFT shoots, and rifle dimensions such as the depth of the stock, are a prime example. That said, the super elaborate butt hooks of FT rifles, can be too much for HFT, and fall foul of the rules if you're not careful. In fact, it can pay to have a blander stock configuration, which allows for a subtle change in head position etc. in the heat of battle. Any gun in theory however, generating power within the UK 12ft/lbs legal limit, is permissible.

What to expect at a shoot

Competitions are normally booked in advance, although whether payment is taken in advance depends on the event. HFT events are very sociable, and on arrival, there will more often than not be catering of some sort, and a bacon roll and a cuppa is always a nice way to start the day. There will be a practise range too, so a carefully zeroed gun can be double checked before the action starts.

Next comes a safety briefing, and then everyone moves off together into the wood or field, and onto the course. What's termed a 'shotgun' start sees everyone start at the same time on a different lane, and move through the course in sequence. There will also be one lane where shooters will pass through a chronograph power check, to ensure that all in attendance are shooting within the law.

There's normally a squad of shooters in the morning, and a squad in the afternoon, and when all are finally finished, scores are processed, and the silverware can be awarded. Shooters are normally entered into a raffle too, and it's worth staying until the end, as some serious prizes may be on offer.

So get started

Getting started really couldn't be simpler, and the old adage about joining a club, is still top advice. The sport's popularity means that there's now a widespread network of clubs around the country- so get along to your local venue and sample the sport properly. There will be a wide selection of rifles and scopes on show too, and this may well open the eyes as to exactly what is available. Shooters are invariably a very helpful sociable bunch, and most are only too willing to show off their kit and let you get a feel first hand. Everyone has their favourite brands, but several opinions will soon be forthcoming as to what constitutes a good purchase, and a valuable trend may emerge.

Take sound advice, do your research, and make a purchase when ready. Then practise, practise, practise! It's great fun, challenging, and you may just find it addictive.

Best of luck and see you at a shoot soon!

Contacts

For pre-booking application forms and downloads regarding established UKAHFT events (where bookings are still possible), and all the latest information on anything connected with Hunter Field Target shooting, take a look at the following websites:

<https://sites.google.com/site/ukahft/>

www.shooting-the-breeze.com

<https://sites.google.com/site/whfta1/>

In addition, details of the new HFT Masters events can be seen at

www.hftmasters.net



Hunter Field Target a genuine 'Sport For All'

By Mark Camoccio

Sometimes the simplest of ideas can be the best. Seeing an idea through however - from conception to realization - is often a challenging business, involving hours of hard work and determination.

So it was with Hunter Field Target shooting (HFT), enjoying something of an explosion of interest since its introduction as a national series of competitions in 2003.

The idea wasn't exactly new, having been unwittingly piloted for many years at club level through winter leagues up and down the country. Yet the push to have it accepted as a national discipline, and an exciting sport in its own right, was to prove a major turning point in the sports progress.

From FT to HFT

In order to understand the whole concept of Hunter Field Target, it's firstly necessary to reflect upon the fortunes of Field Target shooting - how it began, and how its gradual evolution led to inevitable changes in how the sport was perceived.

I feel rather privileged to have been involved in the very first field target shoot ever; held on that sunny afternoon at Magham Down in beautiful Sussex. The year was 1980, and history was clearly in the making as we excitedly gathered to contest the silverware.

An amazing assortment of rifles was on show, spanning almost the entire field of airgun design, as we lined up to take a major step into the unknown. I myself competed with a basic little Webley Vulcan and open sights, alongside 6ft/lbs indoor match rifles - all determined to do our best and have a great day into the bargain.

The targets took the form of static steel plates in the shape of accepted airgun quarry; rats, rabbits, magpie and so forth, onto which was placed a 2inch circular fluorescent day-glo sticker. This was pre-knockdown target days remember, and after each competitor had taken a shot at a bank of targets, a whistle would be blown and a marshal would literally walk up to each target, check whether the shot had hit the sticker, and replace it if necessary! All laughable by today's standards, yet you couldn't have wished for a more exciting atmosphere. Historically, this



event set a huge learning curve in motion, and sowed the seeds for all of our competitive outdoor airgun sports that we see today.

As with any sport, the top exponents will constantly try to gain an advantage, pushing the rules to the limits and exploiting every technical edge that can be gained.

Increasing sophistication of the air-rifle itself was to play a big part in shaping the sport, and despite several years of the top spring-piston models dominating the results, the re-emergence and meteoric rise of the pneumatic design was to inevitably eclipse all before it.

Rapid unstoppable evolution was to follow. Whereas FT events had seen many shooters enthusiastically discussing the merits of various tuning processes on their beloved 'springers' (with Airmasters and Venom Arms famously fighting over the spoils, up and down the country) so this was largely replaced by a sea of comparatively soulless, match-style pneumatics. With their recoilless actions came more easily attainable accuracy of course, yet somehow a little of FT's simple magic was lost along the way.

A further hammer blow to the original all-inclusive concept was the emergence and development of specialized range-finding telescopic sights.

In FT, by utilizing an on-board parallax compensation system, the competitor can sit down, turn the parallax dial, and once the image becomes crystal clear, read off the range of the target on the dial. On the right day, if your eyes aren't playing tricks, the system can be accurate to within a yard!

Together, these developments have led to a general assumption that in order to be competitive in a modern FT shoot, an investment of around £1500 is required. With many competitors using top flight, match rifles at £1000 - £1500 apiece, plus an ultra high magnification, parallax adjustable scope for a further £500 minimum, you can see why!

I'm firmly of the view that it is indeed possible to compete at top level for considerably less, yet there's no doubting the benefits of sophisticated technologically advanced kit.

FT still remains a fabulous sport, indeed it is still the flagship discipline promoting technical development, and pushing the boundaries within the industry. It's just that with natural evolution, the sport has become increasingly

disconnected from its roots; and now appeals to a completely different type of competitor. A gap had clearly emerged for a sport to encourage newcomers, and appeal to the grass roots once again, in much the same way that FT had when in its infancy.

This is where HFT has scored so highly. So let's take a look at this fledgling sport, and see why it has caused such a stir on the airgun scene today.

Where HFT differs from FT

The main brief for HFT is similar to FT, in that it requires the shooter to walk through a course of targets (normally around 30), laid out in a wooded area or in an open field, and set between 8 and 45yds (whereas FT targets can be as far as 55yds). The competitor takes one shot at each (again as in FT), yet several differences exist from hereon in.

Firstly in HFT, the rules require the competitor to touch a designated stake or 'peg', marking a particular target lane. He/she must touch the 'peg' with any part of their body as they take the shot. With pegs being sometimes deviously laid out, it may be that the shooter is forced to strain their body around an obstacle in order to get a clear view of the target. Awkward shooting positions are all part of the fun, and there's often more tactics involved than you may think with regards to selecting the correct (i.e. easiest) shooting position.

The targets used in HFT are primarily the official 'Field Target' knock-down design. This normally takes the form of an animal shaped steel front plate, into which is cut a circular 'kill area' (or 'kill zone'). If the pellet strikes the front plate then the target remains static; but if it passes through the kill area, striking the paddle behind, then the target is designed to fall backwards or collapse altogether.

The kill areas can now vary in size, being anything from 15-19mm (targets to be set between 13 and 25yards); 20-24mm (set between 8 and 30yds); 25-34mm (8-35yds); and finally 35-45mm (between 8 and 45yds).

Another fundamental difference between HFT and FT concerns the scoring. With FT, the scoring is fairly ruthless and unforgiving towards the novice. The competitor scores one point if they hit the kill area and knock down the target. Otherwise, they score zero. On a tough course, in strong winds, some fairly low scores can ensue.

With Hunter Field Target, the scoring is somewhat more generous, awarding one point just for hitting the front plate, and two points for actually connecting with the 'kill zone'. This is significant, since hitting the front plate is easily within most people's capabilities, resulting in the vast majority of shooters scoring over 50 percent - somewhat flattering, yet highly encouraging for newcomers to the sport. The top exponents will still fight it out at the business end, decided over a few tricky targets, whilst most competitors will leave the ground with a modest sense of achievement at the very least.

A cry of 'elitist' is often levelled at FT; a view I personally don't subscribe to. Yet there's no doubting that HFT can be

far more satisfyingly rewarding to the average shot, for that scoring system alone.

Don't touch!

The other main difference, and to my mind, the making of the sport, is that Hunter Field Target rules stipulate that the competitor has to set the scope to his liking before the event, and then cannot touch it throughout the entire competition.

Consider that most top FT glassware now operates at between 40-50x magnification, (to optimize the accuracy of the range-finding facility), and that the clarity is unusable unless the scope is adjusted for each shot, and it becomes clear that these expensive devices are largely redundant where Hunter Field Target is concerned.

Accepting that the scope cannot be touched, medium settings across the board are therefore desirable, with clarity throughout the target ranges a priority. Again, in practise this means that a magnification of around 9x -10x is often used, with any parallax dial (if fitted) set to its mid-point (around 25-30yds). This should allow the sight image to remain reasonably clear through all the ranges, but there's obviously no substitute for taking the time to check clarity on targets from 8-45yds, and know that the intended scope is usable without adjustment.

Near targets are always going to pose a problem, and will still show as slightly blurred, but the key requirement is that the target remains 'shootable' - i.e. blurred to an acceptable level, if you like.

Despite having parallax adjustment removed from the competitors' armoury, there are other tools to be utilized - all with a view to making life easier out on the course.

Dedicated HFT scopes are now very much in evidence, and the buzz-word on the circuit is 'Mil-Dot' reticles.

The Mil-Dot concept originated from military use, basically taking the form of small dots set along the horizontal and vertical lines of the scopes 'cross-hair'. These are placed at regular intervals and are in proportion to target size, according to their design. For example, the gap between the dots could represent the size of a man, viewed at a given range (the obvious military application with specific calculations possible). On the HFT scope variant, the Mil-Dots often perfectly 'bracket' a standard target 'kill-area' size of 40mm at a particular range. That is to say that the 40mm disc may perfectly fit between two Mil-Dots.

The whole idea is to offer a basic range estimation indicator. If the target appears larger than the gap, it could be nearer; smaller than the gap - then it could be further away. With a little practise, and that all-important steady hand, a surprising degree of accuracy can be achieved in range calculation.

All well and good in theory; yet the system is only foolproof if the precise target 'kill area' size is known. In the heat of competition, and under a possible imposed time limit, identifying the correct target spec can be testing to say the least.



At the end of the day, the Mil-Dots are handy but not vital. Some form of reference points are, however. I myself have competed with great success, having never possessed a scope with this feature; preferring to rely upon a proportional, and therefore relevant, standard 30/30 conventional cross-hair thin/thick post reticle. On my system, the 40mm kill area fits exactly between point zero at the centre of the cross-hair and any of the four thick posts – simple but highly effective. Everything else stems from this.

A plethora of reticle designs now exist for the enthusiast, with many being dedicated to the task. Two highly popular variations come in the form of the MAP system from Hawke Optics and marketed by Deben, and the MTC Optics specialized 'Christmas Tree' reticle. MTC's design even includes ½ Mil Dots, all in a bid to provide the competitor with a multitude of aim/reference points, with which to try and make sense of his surroundings.

Rifles and rules

Part of the undoubted attraction of HFT is the need for flexibility when faced with a variety of challenging targets and conditions. The typical HFT course layout will automatically require the shooter to adapt his/her shooting position accordingly, to see round trees, or rest on obstacles etc. Unlike FT, the sitting position is not allowed. In HFT most shots are taken from the prone position, but several targets on the course can be compulsory standing shots, kneeling shots, or unsupported prone; with others allowing the use of natural supports at the shooters disposal.

Official rules govern the shooting positions, and marshals are even on hand to enforce the accepted approach, and check that the spirit of the law is respected. Common sense normally prevails, but like any walk of life, some participants will always try and push regulations to the limit!

Appropriate rifles for HFT is an extensive article in itself, but a few basic pointers are worth bearing in mind when selecting a gun.

For a start, overly angular stock surfaces can be a hindrance; such as a tyrolean cheek-piece found on many upmarket configurations. With the shooter needing to be totally adaptable, often adopting awkward positions, a far more streamlined, even bland design, would allow the body to easily slide into an alternative stance.

Sporter styles have a lot going for them, and it's no surprise that the Air Arms' s400 and the Daystate Hunter

for example (both being hunting rifles after all) have proved such winners on the circuit.

Class act

It's a measure of the original ethos behind the sport of HFT in its infancy, that a list of classes exists to cater for all. At each National round, organized by the umbrella organization: United Kingdom Association for Hunter Field Target shooting (UKAHFT), the competitor can enter one of the following classes:

- Junior Class (9-13years of age)
- Junior Class (14-16 years of age)
- Open Class (PCP rifles and semi-recoiling rifles of .177 or .20 calibre)
- .22 Class (PCP rifles and semi-recoiling rifles of .22 or .25 calibre)
- Recoiling Class (All recoiling rifles – i.e. springers - whatever calibre)

It should be noted however, that competitors can always opt to shoot in the Open Class regardless of rifle specification, if they so wish.

The National rounds organized by UKAHFT, are held all over the country, and with nine events in the 'series', the rules to date have stipulated that the best six scores be taken from the nine, effectively allowing for the weakest three rounds to be dropped. The aggregate scores then decide the winner of the National series - and hotly contested it is too. In these days of spiralling fuel costs, some 'double -header' weekends have been introduced, in a bid to minimize travel, and offset some of the costs of competing for a season. In practise, these can be highly enjoyable, sociable affairs; with many shooters camping on site, or (if you're a 'Southern Softie' like my good self, seeking refuge in the nearest hostelry). Individual events can be shot, whether the series is completed or not. The choice is yours.

As for the future of the sport, only time will tell. With more and more match rifles creeping into the results, and being used in general, for that matter, it maybe only a matter of time before the introduction of a further rifle category; to deal with the perceived advantage. I wouldn't necessarily agree with such a move, but we shall see.

In short though, HFT can be as competitive as you want it to be, but the emphasis at these events remains the same - i.e. the promotion of air rifle target shooting in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, and to that end, the organizers deserve much credit.

If you fancy taking part in one of the fastest growing shooting sports (they all claim it I know!) then get down to a club near you and have a chat with like - minded enthusiasts. Booking a place at the events has often been required in advance, but this does change; whilst many smaller local events are springing up as we speak.

So take a look at the official website at www.ukahft.co.uk where full details are but a click away!

A shooting sport for all

Mark Camoccio explains the popularity of Hunter Field Target (HFT) competition

On a glorious sunny day back in 1980, airgun shooters gathered from all over the country for the first Field Target Competition and history was in the making. An electric atmosphere prevailed, and all who were present surely realized that here was something special - a surprisingly long time coming, but undoubtedly the start of something big.

Here was a meeting of minds; airgunners of all ages and backgrounds, coming together with a common interest, competing with just about every different design of air rifle too! Basic beginner's spring rifles lined up against indoor target rifles, all in a bid to connect with a series of worryingly distant dayglo stickers placed on animal shaped steel plates! But the seeds were sown – and we were hooked.

And it's not hard to see why. Competing outdoors with an airgun is a great pastime and the satisfaction of correctly judging wind and trajectory, then placing a pellet within the kill area of a distant target, is hard to beat. The advent of the steel collapsible knock-down target brought added excitement (not to mention spectator involvement), and Field Target Shooting as we know it was born.

Over the years, FT's gradual (and inevitable) evolution, has led to highly sophisticated match rifles, topped off with equally sophisticated parallax range-finding scopes, all being used in a bid to maximize performance and take advantage of the technology available.

All very well and good, and one glance at a top level FT event today will reveal just why this terrific sport is



regarded as the flagship discipline, pushing the boundaries of outdoor airgun performance to an amazingly high level. All undeniable, but so too is the fact that modern FT bears little resemblance to the sport in its early days, losing much of the all-inclusive nature, and the requirement for instinctive shooting that then prevailed.

Not everyone wants to invest huge sums of cash on match rifles and top-end glassware either, and that's where HFT comes in.

Driving force

Every sport needs enthusiasm and determination to push it forwards, and in affable Welshman Pete Sparkes, we are decidedly lucky to have just such a driving force. His vision of establishing a national network of Hunter Field Target (HFT) clubs and tournaments, began to see light





of day back in 2002. A year later, the United Kingdom Association for Hunter Field Target shooting (UKAHFT) was formed; and the sport has grown from strength to strength ever since.

So what can any prospective shooter expect at an HFT event? Well the basic format is the same as FT, in that a course of metal animal silhouette 'knock-down' targets (normally 30) are laid out in woodland or a field setting, to loosely represent typical airgun quarry in their natural environment.

A safety briefing is given out, explaining the rules and safety procedures to all present. Shooters then make their way onto the course in groups of two or three, where a 'shotgun start' is used (each pairing starts on a different lane) to get everybody shooting at the same time

Shots will be taken at each target in turn, whilst touching a designated 'peg' with some part of the body. With the FT sitting position outlawed, most free shots are taken from the prone position, with a smattering of compulsory discipline shots (kneeling and standing) being spread around the course.

What gives HFT such great appeal?

As far as the technology goes, HFT is largely a level playing field, and with different classes in place, the organizers have strived to attract shooters across the board. The classes are as follows:

Open; Juniors (9-13 years old); Juniors (14-16 years old); Ladies; .22 Class; Recoiling Class; plus Manufacturers Team and Club Team.

Of course the inevitable arms race is already underway, with more and more match rifles creeping onto the circuit; yet compete with any half decent accurate rifle and put the time in to become familiar with your rifle/scope combination, and I'm convinced anyone has a chance of success. In fact I'll go further than that –results this year, (which I'll come to later) have conclusively proved as much! Of course you need the skill and ability, but 'match grade' equipment simply isn't a prerequisite.

HFT scope rules – OK?

One of two key rules upon which HFT hangs, concerns the telescopic sight. Oversized parallax adjustable range-finding scopes (a must-have feature of FT) are of no use whatsoever here. Why? Because the rules state that from the moment the competitor has entered the competition course arena, at no time can the scope be adjusted or altered in any way. At a stroke this confines super high magnification to the scrap heap, since the demands of a typical HFT course necessitate a more general specification. Consider that targets can be placed between 8 and 45yds, and again that the scope cannot be touched throughout, and it becomes clear that the scopes specification and settings prior to a shoot, are of paramount importance.

Basically, what the sport requires from any prospective rifle scope combo, is an acceptable level of optical clarity throughout those given target distances. In practise, this means a typical magnification of 9 or 10x, and if the scope comes fitted with a built-in adjustable parallax

facility, then this, in turn, needs to be set to an acceptable mid-point: normally around 25yds, dependant upon the scope. Any targets subsequently viewed should then be reasonably clear. Again, in practise, targets placed at the extremes of the range may appear slightly blurred, but the aim is to have an acceptable level of 'blurredness' yet enough clarity for the shot to still be possible. Maximum target distance is stipulated as 45yds, and with the scope parallaxed at 25yds, the 45yd target may appear slightly 'fuzzy'. Ultra close shots at 8yds can often pose the biggest problem, so time taken to experiment with settings on the practise range can really pay dividends before a competition takes place.

Bracketing for range

Accepting that the use of parallax range-finding is restricted, competitors with any designs on the silverware need to embrace the theory of bracketing, which is why scopes geared towards HFT invariably come fitted with Mil-Dots on the reticle stadia. To the uninitiated, the basic principle is of viewing a known target kill area size against the reticle and gauging by its proportions, the distance of the target. In simple terms, the further away the target is, the smaller it will appear against the reticle, and vice versa. Homework is the key here, and can pay handsome dividends to those prepared to set time aside to study the art.

Of course the target kill size isn't always known, or maybe just difficult to ascertain, and in these instances good old instinct has to take over and make the vital front line decisions. Knowing when to take notice of the scopes

information, and when to take an educated guess is, of course, all part of HFT, but the end result now is a sport which has really found its feet, placing many different demands on the competitor, largely unlike those of FT - which is as it should be. We now have two standalone sports which in my view compliment each other.

HFT Scoring

Equally significant to the success of Hunter FT, is the other key rule referred to earlier – and that relates to the scoring.

Where FT awards one point for placing a pellet through the kill area and zero for anything else, HFT offers the deliberately generous format of two points for downing the target, and one point for just hitting the front plate! This is crucial and plays a big part in attracting and encouraging newcomers to the sport. With very modest ability required to hit the target plates, the vast majority of shooters unsurprisingly leave the competition with at least 50% of the total score possible, which boosts confidence no end.

An impressive feature observed at national events, is the large number of both ladies and juniors now taking part. Indeed many families regularly compete around the country and with modern pre-charged pneumatic airguns allowing for radical pint-sized styling and configuration, the days of slightly built shooters having to grapple with ultra heavyweight cumbersome rifles are well and truly over. Rifles such as the Air Arms s200 and Falcon Lighthunter have played a big part in attracting beginners with their easy handling and inherent accuracy, but last year saw some fascinating results in general.



Indeed, it shouldn't be forgotten that 2009 saw the first lady to win a national round, as Rachel Waite simply destroyed the opposition gathered at Basingstoke. Not only did she win outright but she made the point emphatically, clearing the course with a stunning 60x60. Rachel's been shooting for just two years, and having recently become a proud mum, her performance speaks volumes not only for her undoubted ability, but the all inclusive nature of the sport.

Oh, and she won the round using a Daystate X2 - an excellent yet fairly straight forward PCP rifle with not a solenoid in site. This was a top event with all the big hitters in attendance, and proof positive that despite a sea of Steyr and Walther match rifles slowly emerging, they can be beaten if you have the ability and determination.

Ben Russell is another classic case, winning no fewer than 4 of the national rounds in his Junior 14-16 class, which unsurprisingly proved enough to take the Junior title by the end of the season. Of course Ben's fast approaching an age where he will have to fight it out with the grown-ups, but since he's beaten most of us already on a regular basis, it should be a seamless transition!

Assume the position...

Part of the attraction of Hunter Field Target is undoubtedly the positional challenge posed by some deliberately awkward target layouts. Whilst it may be all too easy to adopt a conventional approach, sometimes a little imagination, not to mention gymnastics, is called for, in order to see round an obstacle. A classic solution is to touch the lane peg with the foot, whilst laying at full stretch to the right or left - thus enabling a shot to be taken by bypassing the obstacle altogether. Not for the feint-hearted or long-term back sufferer; but if you're desperate, give it a try.

Recent seasons have seen a rule change or two; most notably the 'unsupported prone' shots, whereby the competitor has no lane peg upon which to rest, but instead, a flat disc to mark the lane. The shot still needs to be taken when touching the marker, but is effectively, as specified, unsupported.

Bear in mind that the HFT competitor now has to think about the effects of wind on the pellet, the shot's

trajectory, then decide upon which stance to use for a particular target, and high scores are no longer a given. Add in those compulsory kneeling and standing lanes, and the pressure is well and truly cranked up; but if we're honest, we wouldn't have it any other way.

The organisation

A network of HFT clubs now exists to cater for this popular sport, details of which are all listed and accessible via the UKAHFT web sites below. With the UKAHFT National Series well established, any budding competitor has an abundance of exciting shoots at which their skills can be tested to the full. The series comprises nine rounds held at varying locations around the country, which are treated as individual events in their own right, as well as counting towards the National Series Championship title presented at the end of the season.

The competitor's best six scores (taken from the 9 rounds), count towards the combined championship, which is significant since this format effectively allows for an 'off day', and the fact that shooters may simply not be able to attend all nine rounds. In practise, some nail-biting finishes have added to the excitement of recent years, with some very competitive battles being fought, up and down the country - often going down to the wire at the last event.

Generous sponsorship from a host of the big names on the airgun scene, is the icing on the cake. Trophies for the main positions on the day in each class are awarded, and many goodies including rifles and scopes etc often find their way into a raffle, for anyone to win once their shoot entry card has been submitted.

Add to this an annual World HFT title to contend (sponsored by Countryman's Fairs), and one could say the sport is on the up!

Sport for all

The beauty of this highly enjoyable and demanding branch of outdoor airgun shooting is the fact that the individual can enjoy it at a level of his/her choosing, just how far you take this genuine 'sport for all' is up to you.

For more information go to www.ukahft.co.uk or www.shooting-the-breeze.com



Guide to match target air pistols and air rifles

By Ian Morris

The Equipment

There are various target air pistols and air rifles available in both right and left-handed models. Single shot and multi shot are also available. All target guns are in .177 calibre and usually recoilless (most modern match pistols/rifles are pneumatic). The ammunition is precision match pellets which are flat headed (wadcutters) which will cut a perfect hole in paper targets and therefore will make it easier to see the score.

Target pistols are almost all the same weight and size as the rules are very specific about dimensions. Most companies make junior versions of their guns which are usually the full size gun with a shorter barrel and air cylinder. Almost every gun has some form of anatomical grip which is allowed in the rules.

The Rules

Target shooting is a Commonwealth and Olympic sport, and is therefore governed by the International Shooting Sport Federation (I.S.S.F.). Because not everyone will be at this level, the National Small-bore Rifle Association (N.S.R.A.) has its own set of rules which are designed to be a little more flexible for the novice shooter.

Competitors use two sets of rules depending on the competition they shoot, internationally recognised competitions use I.S.S.F. rules and all other UK competitions use N.S.R.A. rules. Both sets of rules have a strict code of safety which is enforced at every meeting. At N.S.R.A. & I.S.S.F. events, pistols and rifles are tested and measured, checking weight and size, and in the case of pistols, the draw weight of the trigger.

The Competition

There are two basic types of shooting for pistol; precision and multi shot. With rifles there is just the precision discipline.

In both pistol and rifle, precision competitions are shot over 10 metres, with 60 shots in 1 hour 45 minutes for men and 40 shots in 1 hour 15 minutes for women. The types of targets shot are mostly paper but occasionally electronic targets are used, the most common type being Sius Ascor



for precision events. Competitors shoot one shot per target on paper or all 60/40 on an electronic target.

There are several competitions for multi shot pistols, "Air Pistol 5 Target" which uses knock down plates and "Air Pistol Standard" are both shot over 10 metres, and other events like "Standard Pistol", "Rapid Fire" and "Sport Pistol" are shot over 25 metres using paper targets. (Information can be found on the W.A.A. website at www.welsh-airgun.org.uk)

Anybody interested in getting involved need only contact the N.S.R.A. tel. 01483 485500 and they can advise them on the nearest club where they can 'have a go'. It should also be noted that the Scouts and other youth associations often run shooting/training courses using air rifles, and some pony clubs have 'Biathlon' style competitions combining horse riding and pistol/rifle shooting for youngsters.

Get shooting now!

Match pistol and rifle shooting is easy to get involved in, and best of all there's no need for a licence and it can be practised at home (with a suitable and safe backstop). So why not give it a try – you might have a latent talent for it, and who knows, you could end up shooting for your country in the 2012 Olympics!

About the author

Ian Morris is the Match Secretary for the Welsh Airgun Association. He also shoots in the Welsh match pistol team and represents his country at all levels of competition, and he will be competing at the 4 Nations 2010 in Wales. If anyone would like more information on match shooting, you can contact him at the Shooting Centre, on Tel. 01978 680290 or via email to shooting@orange.net or Twitter @Real_Ian_Morris.



An Introduction to: 10 Metre Shooting

Lifelong airgun shooter and A.T.E.O co-founder Dave Mills has got the Match Rifle bug, but what's it all about?

To begin with, I am not a 10 metre match shooting expert; I participate at local levels and in postal leagues, and do so as a form of relaxation. My first efforts at match shooting began some 10 years ago when I no longer had time to do FT. I initially joined a Bell target club, where I was made welcome and I made some good friends who invited me to join them at Aldersley Stadium, to have a go at 6 yard and 10 metre rifle shooting. I now tend to think of 10 metre as being THE Olympic discipline in both rifle and pistol, among others that we rarely see any news about, like 3 positional, and .22 50 metre prone.

Before I begin, and after many years of shooting experience, I have to say that trying to repeatedly take the 10 ring out at 10 metres is the most difficult and frustrating thing I have ever tried to do! To get 4 tens and then come to pieces on the last shot on a card to give a 9, or even worse an 8, is extremely annoying.

10 metre match shooting is overseen by the NSRA, who have a rulebook that is very comprehensive when and if you get to the national competitions. But first off, let's start at local level; it is surprising how many clubs there are, many of them shooting just once a week in a scout hut or village hall; participants are of all ages, from around 12 years old to mid and late 80's. This is the first step, join a local club; from there, work and practice to improve your personal best (very hard), at some point you will become hooked and hopefully start to compete within the club and outside via postal leagues etc.



Equipment

Rifles

When I first started I used an old Walther LGR single stroke rifle that I bought for £150 (I still have it and it is not for sale) I shot my first perfect 50 on a card with it and still also have the card. Many of the older guns have since started to rise in price but it is still possible to get an old, perfectly good rifle or pistol for £300 or so. By joining a club you get into the loop for good equipment, as many shooters, once hooked, upgrade to space age rifles from Anschutz, Feinwerkbau, Walther, Steyr and my own brand Tesro.

Pistols

As with the rifle I started with a Daisy single stroke pistol that cost me, if I remember correctly, £95; this was soon replaced by an old Pardini, I now shoot a range of Tesro pistols. If you look on the net, the range of pistols available is staggering; most of them coming from EU countries.

Both Rifles and pistols are designed to give precise shots at a lower power level than we are used to in the UK, rifles typically are around 7.5 joules and pistols are tuned down to give consistent recoilless shots. Many of the competitors are manic about the equipment being totally dead on discharge, with no muzzle flip or other movement caused by the action or the trigger release. Regulated power is a must.

Sighting systems

Due to the level of precision, we use dioptre sights on the rifles and open iron sights on the pistols, the range of eye pieces for the dioptres is almost as large as the range of rifles, as due to eye problems and keeping everything in focus, we use adjustable rear sight units and a range of foresight irises of different sizes and colours.

Clothing

10 meter shooting is all about precision, so not surprisingly, at the top end level, there is a plethora of

specialised equipment, when I first started I used an old leather jacket and a shooting glove. As things have progressed I now have a Sauer shooting suit (jacket and trousers that were made to measure) (you don't want to know the price or at least I don't want my wife to know!) I use shooting gloves and even a pair of shooting boots to give stability in the standing position. I have friends watch my technique and try to point me at the things I do wrong that cause that 8 instead of a 10. While I was at Sauer recently, the German Olympic squad were in being measured for their shooting suits and equipment. Photographs were taken of shooting stance to allow for the leather and canvas to be cut precisely to the shooter's requirements. Allowing for a shoulder that is dropped when in stance or a slight twist on a neck, or back muscle.

When everything is tailored to your fit rifle/pistol, jacket gloves etc. then you are ready to have some professional coaching, the top shooters all have their own coaches and a formal training regime. You can also get a training aid that fits to the rifle and via a lap top link, breathing, trigger release and shooting technique can all be analysed to teach repeatability on the perfect shot.

The sport of 10 metre rifle and pistol shooting is all about personal development, with shooters competing to improve their personal best, and to score that elusive 50 ex 50. Once you are achieving scores you are happy with is the time to start to have a go at postal leagues or trying



to get into the local leagues. Or, like a lot of my friends, we now have a shooting club for the over 60's, very few now compete at top level but we have fun and range space is limited on a Wednesday and Friday; even though we have 26 firing points, last week 55 shooters turned up.

Since starting 10 meter Match shooting, I have made a lot of friends from a different field of our great sport. I shoot with 2 friends; one is now a pistol shooter after arthritis stopped him from shooting rifle after a lifetime of being a gamekeeper. (He cannot believe he now enjoys shooting holes in a bit of paper) my other mate gets really annoyed with that odd flyer into the 8 ring, what a way to get frustrated and annoyed with yourself.

To sum up, 10 metre paper target shooting is a disciplined sport that will test your patience, annoy the hell out of you, and make you think a lot about the perfect shot that is a 10 rather than an 8. But above all, you can compete without getting cold and wet!

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Ever Green!

Is it possible to get the accuracy needed for FT and HFT from a lead-free pellet? Neil MacKinnon comes over all green to see if it is...

Shooters all over the World are being put under varying degrees of pressure to abandon lead based ammunition. Depending on your discipline, this may or may not be feasible, either now or in the future. However, some manufacturers are investing time, effort and resources in order to produce lead free ammunition, so I thought I'd try a few pellets that are applicable to both FT and HFT and see what kind of results I get compared to the more usual fare.

To lead or not to lead?

There are two things that strike me immediately about lead free/green pellets, first is the price, which can be up to twice that of lead and the second is the weight of the pellets, or lack thereof. I predict that both of these facts are major factors in why it is currently rare to find anyone running lead free. That said, there must be a market, and people must be buying them, otherwise manufacturers would not make them and distributors would not stock them.

When choosing pellets to test, I decided to try and get the closest equivalents to lead pellets that are already used or at least applicable to FT and HFT. That ended up being a pretty short list and getting hold of them looked like it was going to be difficult, as most of the mail order suppliers had some, but not all of the pellets I had chosen. In the end a local dealer came to the rescue.



The pellets

I ended up with- H&N Field Target Trophy green, Baracuda Match green and Excite Dynamic, RWS Hyperdomes and SMK Thunder Bolt. The FTT and Barracuda Match have direct equivalents available in lead, the Hyperdomes are very similar to Superdomes and the last two are both a similar design to H&N Snipers.

What's in the tin?

For a start, not as many as you'd usually see, with one exception.

- H&N FTT: 300,
- Baracuda 200 Excite: 300
- Hyperdomes: 200
- Thunder Bolt: 500

All the pellets are bright silver and are clearly not made of lead, they are also all much lighter than the lead equivalent.

- FTT: 5.56 gr
- Baracuda: 6.5 gr
- Excite: 8 gr
- Hyperdomes: 5.5gr
- Thunder Bolt: 5gr



Looking at the individual pellets they are all well made with sharp clean edges and good uniformity pellet to pellet. Some brands were brighter than others and when I opened the tin, it was apparent that the Excites were more akin to Sniper Magnums than Mediums, which was my mistake but what the heck I have them here, so let's give em a go.

To the Chrono, and beyond!

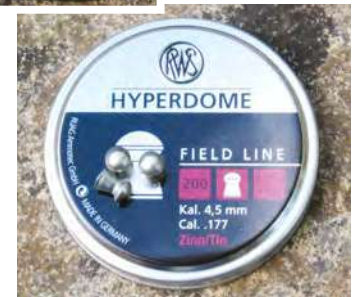
I am using two rifles for the test, both .177; my RAW TM1000 and my BSA Gold Star SE. The reason for the rifle choice is because they are both unfussy about what I put through them, producing good accuracy with a wide range of pellets. So, time to chrono. I will fire a 5 shot string of control lead pellets through both rifles to get a baseline. Later, I will use the same pellets to set an accuracy baseline.

Some surprising results were gained in the initial chrono testing. Obviously, the light weight of most of the pellets has a bearing on both velocity and energy, but the fact that all the pellets struggled to reach 11ft lbs had me a little worried about their ability to not reach the target but to knock it down once it got there.

But can you hit anything?

Initial zero tests at 25 yards off the bench were a surprise, as all the lead-free pellets I have used in the past have performed very poorly, but the new generation pellets were remarkably good with both rifles. The BSA really didn't seem to mind which pellets I used, they were a little left of my usual zero but I was able to put 5 to 6mm groups together using a 10-mag scope. The TM1000 was a little fussier, some of the Thunder Bolts were a little tight and these did not group well; however, with those that fitted the barrel well I was able to place pellet on pellet. The TM also liked the Excites a lot and I managed to put five shots through the same pellet hole, exactly as I would expect to do with lead pellets

Proper accuracy testing was done at regular ranges between 25 and 55 yards, with the baseline set using lead pellets and with strings of five shots taken from the FT sitting position (sorry UKHFTA!). The groups were shot at the same time of day, over three days (August



16th, 17th and 18th) in the same location and in almost identical conditions.

As a final test, I took the TM1000 and the H&N Baracuda Greens to my FT club, and on a breezy afternoon I managed to drop a tricky 50-yard target five times out of five, not only proving consistent accuracy, but also that the H&Ns actually have the power to drop a target at that range.

Conclusion

Let's start out being fair here, it is early days in the world of quality lead-free pellets and several manufacturers added the caveat that the pellets are suitable for up to 30m / 27 yards, so expecting them to perform beyond that is a bit of an ask, but if you don't try you won't know!

I will let the figures speak for themselves, but almost universally the lead free pellets perform just as well as their lead counterparts at close range. Out to around 35 yards, some of them can hold their own, BUT, most of them are easily taken off track by the wind, and not very much wind can make what looked to be a good group into a disaster in the time it takes to reload the rifle.

The obvious winner was the H&N Baracuda green, as they were the only pellets that held a reliable group beyond 45 yards.

This was an interesting exercise, but for now I would say that pellet weight, or lack of and the price will restrict the use of these pellets to those that are compelled to by legislation and those who control vermin at close ranges in environments where lead is unacceptable.

My thanks to Damian at Pull the Trigger in Plymouth, as he was able to supply all but one tin of pellets from stock!