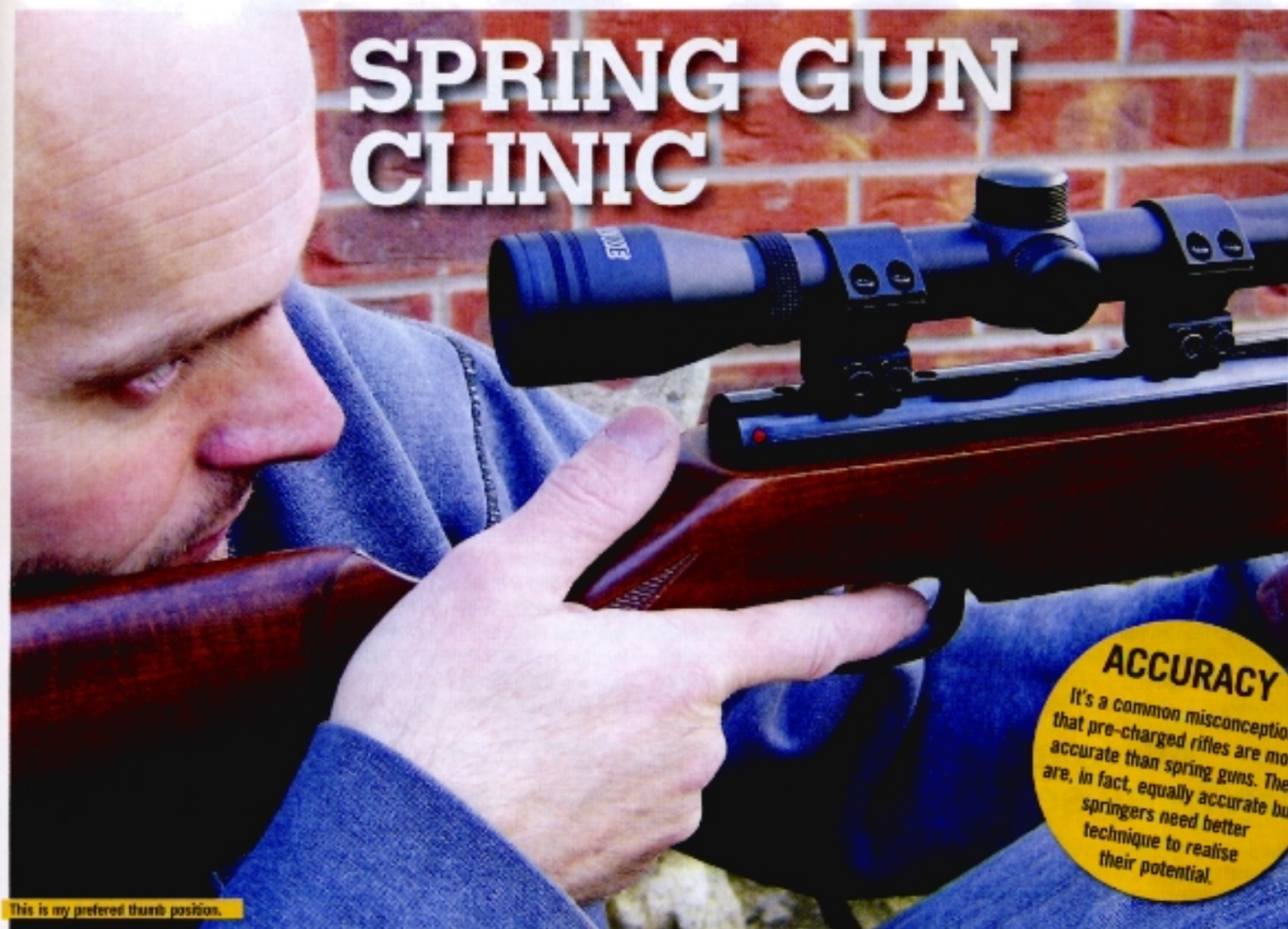




SPRING GUN CLINIC



This is my preferred thumb position.

ACCURACY

It's a common misconception that pre-charged rifles are more accurate than spring guns. They are, in fact, equally accurate but springers need better technique to realise their potential.

Two-time world champion, Paul James, shows you how to do it his way

Let's start off with the basics, the fundamental things that are the basis of any shooting form whether that be target, hunting or just plain fun. The first step to achieving consistent accuracy and hitting what you aim at is hold. As you'll no doubt have already learned, how you hold your recoiling airgun will influence

that of pushing the rifle into your shoulder. The butt of the gun should sit against the shoulder and be under no pressure whatsoever.

Trigger control

The trigger hand serves one purpose on the rifle and that is to operate the trigger. Again, it does not steer the

can squeeze between finger and thumb better without increasing pressure to the stock through my palm and thumb muscle, something that can tend to happen when the thumb is wrapped around the pistol grip of the stock. This squeezing motion is often referred to as like 'squeezing a lemon between finger

and the leading hand and do the same with the trigger hand, pulling the stock into the shoulder and trying to stop the gun's movement. When they take the next shot they do the same, or at least they think they do; in reality the pressure will differ and the point of impact (POI) with it. This is down to lack of consistency, and it's consistency that forms the foundation of sustained, accurate shooting.

At the heart of consistent shooting is an equally consistent, 'soft' hold. The reason for the softly-softly approach is that, in order to achieve a consistent POI, you must apply consistent pressure to the rifle, and support it in a consistent way and at a consistent point. Placing pressure to the stock and pulling the rifle tight into the shoulder is impossible to repeat with the exact same pressure every time, but building a hold

"HOW YOU HOLD YOUR RECOILING AIRGUN WILL INFLUENCE WHERE THE SHOT LANDS"

where the shot lands; change the hold and the point of impact (POI) will also change.

I always advise as loose a hold as possible. When standing for instance, the rifle should be rested on the leading hand, not gripped in any way, just rested upon it. This in itself will prevent you from the next mistake,

rifle nor hold it, and imparts no pressure to the grip. With the trigger finger on the trigger (the middle of the pad on the blade) squeeze the trigger smoothly and with consistent pressure until the shot releases. I prefer a 'thumb up' position on my trigger hand; my custom stock has a thumbhole option but I feel that I

and thumb'. The other three fingers merely wrap around the pistol grip, but do not grip it.

Recoil management

Newcomers to spring piston airguns will naturally feel a need to try to control the recoil by placing pressure to the stock. They grip tightly with



This hand position suits some people better than others.

around minimal pressure means it can be repeated again and again. Avoid resting the gun directly on anything solid at all times when shooting. Fences and trees and such are OK to lean on but make sure there's something 'cushioning' your rifle. This will be your hand most probably, if hunting or HiT shooting. distance from the eye, without the eye to ensure it's mounted at the correct when fitting a scope for the first time must be followed too. Time spent pressure between cheek and stock cheek piece and avoiding any undue Consistent head placement on the

Head/eye alignment

having to be moved to the correct fact taking the HW77K as an

under 'stance', which I will cover in a future article, but for now please take the time to get your head position absolutely spot on, because it affects terms of balance, hold and stance.

Accuracy potential

That brings me nicely to one point I would like to make regarding spring

and PCP accuracy. There's no difference. The recoiling airgun is harder to get consistent accuracy from, there's no doubt about that, but if the shooter does their bit,

there is no difference absolute accuracy. I have other airguns, as I

mentioned last month, a Weihrauch HW100 and a Steyr LG100 live in the gun cabinet with my HW97K and most recently, an HW77K. Off the bench there's nothing to pick between them, accuracy wise, in fact taking the HW77K as an

"AVOID RESTING THE GUN DIRECTLY ON ANYTHING SOLID AT ALL TIMES WHEN SHOOTING"

example, I shot a five-shot group with that on one of my first outings at the club, off the bench, rested on my beanbag. It measured less than an inch. It was shot at a freshly

Other factors that can influence POI are clothing changes. Typically, I wear a motorcycle type leather jacket for my competition shooting, always left unzipped so I can place the butt of the stock into my shoulder, and this helps in many ways. I can 'feel' the butt resting against my shoulder and so check easily any pressure changes against it, something I wouldn't be able to do if the stock was outside the jacket. Another advantage is that any difference in the changes between

I hope all of this doesn't sound like you have to be constantly on guard when shooting a recoiling airgun, checking hold and where the gun is sitting, afraid to breathe, or move even, shivering in winter because you haven't put a bigger coat on in case any flouting of the 'rules' results in missing your target. Yes, you do have to pay more attention when shooting a springer but most of it will become second-nature after a while, and, as with all shooting, the more practice you get, the more instinctive you'll become. Your shooting will flow and you'll do it without thinking about it, leaving plenty of time to concentrate on the target in question, whether that's a 55 yard knockdown, a rabbit's head, or a tin can. After all, it's a lot more fun when you hit what you're aiming at and that fun doubles when you do it with a spring gun.

See you next month!

RECOIL
Recoiling spring-piston rifles will move no matter how hard you hold them. The heavy steel piston travels down the cylinder at around 200mph and then comes to a sudden stop, producing a form of recoil in the other direction. Nobody can stop it so don't even try to.

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I place the rifle's butt inside my clothing for optimum consistency.



With your elbow tucked in like this, the weight of the rifle is carried through the bones not the muscles.



The more you practise, the tighter your groups will become. Obvious, but oh so true.



Note that my trigger hand is relaxed and barely touching the stock.

One-to-one tuition

This month's reader query comes from Edward, who writes...

...I enjoyed reading the article 'Winning The Worlds!' in December's edition of *Airgun World*. I started off with a CO2 rifle and quickly moved to PCPs, which I have been shooting in HFT competitions for the last year or so. I have many PCPs but recently, for a laugh, got an Air Arms Pro-Sport in .177 calibre. I've been finding it quite challenging, so I have a few questions for you:

Shooting from a bench, I am currently getting one inch groups at 25 metres, which isn't too bad,

different target) will move the POI and I'm worried that, as I change from benchrest shooting to standing, prone or kneeling, I will get different results. How do you shoulder your rifle and what tips can you give in this regard? Is there a book on springer technique you can recommend that might help?

Also, in the article, you state that you changed from a Pro-Sport to HW97. I'm a big fan of Air Arms, their rifles just work - I have the S200, S410 and MPR too. Most people today say there is very little between the Pro-Sport and the HW97, so out of interest, what was

shot. An aftermarket adjustable curved butt pad is a great aid to consistent butt placement against the shoulder, so it may be worth investing in one. This is something I'd like to see fitted to more airguns, or at least as an optional extra.

You're always going to experience POI shift when shooting off a bench compared to sitting, standing,

PRACTICE

Consistency is vital for anyone hoping to shoot well. Once you learn the correct techniques, practice is the key to making the best of them. Regular sessions are the best way to achieve meaningful and lasting improvements.

repeatable hold.

I suppose I was just ready for a change when I sold the Pro Sport and bought the HW, and if I was going to demonstrate HWs at game fairs and the like, I realised that I'd better lead by example. Yes there's little difference in the top spring guns, just like the PCPs, and it comes down to personal preference and balance when selecting one over another. I could have just as easily fitted a custom stock to the Pro-Sport, but for me I think it was a good decision. Adding weight to the rear of the stock not only helped damp the recoil, it also shifted the point of balance of the rifle more to my taste.

Adding weight might help you, but experiment by adding some at varying points on the stock before getting the router out. Practise your shooting from your most used stance which I presume will be prone for HFT, and don't be too hard on yourself if the first results are erratic or disappointing. You are trying something new and it's going to take time and practise to get right. I don't know of any books relating to spring gun shooting and techniques, but perhaps this and future articles will help. ■

"A ONE-HOLE GROUP IS WHAT I EXPECT OF MYSELF BUT I FIND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO ACHIEVE CONSISTENTLY"

except every now and then I manage to get a one-hole group (with 8 shots or so). A one-hole group is what I expect of myself but I find it very difficult to achieve consistently. Am I being too hard on myself?

I've adjusted the excellent AA CD trigger, and this has helped accuracy somewhat. My left hand is under the fore part of the stock (between gun and beanbag) and I'm making sure I don't grip the stock there as I hold it. What I find, is that the gun is very sensitive to how I shoulder it. I've tried pushing the stock firmly into my shoulder and I have tried holding it there lightly, but as long as I hold it consistently the same way, I get a good grouping. The problem is shouldering it consistently. Changing body position even slightly (to shoot a

the reason for your change? I presume you could have made a custom stock for the Air Arms too? Does the 2.5lb extra weight really makes such a difference and if so, is there a gap in the market for stock weights?

Hi Edward,

Thanks for your kind words and I'm very glad you enjoyed the article. To answer your first question, the main reason I'd say that you're finding it difficult to achieve consistent grouping is the change in pressure you are putting on the gun, in particular pulling it into the shoulder. Follow my tips from this month's article concerning hold, use the smallest amount of pressure as possible, and this way you'll be able to produce it more easily shot after

kneeling or prone shooting, that's inevitable, I'm afraid. When I shoot off the bench I use either my beanbag or a purpose made benchrest style rest with a sandbag support coupled with another sandbag that's designed to sit at the rear of the stock. This way the fore stock of the gun is rested on the bags and the leading hand is brought back to squeeze the rear bag and adjust the aim. This method eliminates all but the slightest of shooter input to the rifle, making for a very consistent and



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