

KEY SPECS



MAKER: Weihrauch Sport (www.weihrauch-sport.de)

UK DISTRIBUTOR: Hull Cartridge (www.hullcartridge.co.uk)

MODEL: HW98

PRICE: £485

TYPE: Break-barrel

CALIBRE: .177 (on test) and .22

ACTION: Spring piston

OVERALL LENGTH: 110cm (43.3")

BARREL LENGTH: 41cm (16.1")

STOCK: Ambidextrous beech

SIGHTS: Scope only

LENGTH OF PULL: 34.5cm (13.6")

TRIGGER: Two-stage, adjustable

TRIGGER-PULL: 2lb 1oz (934g)

SAFETY: Manual, resettable

MUZZLE ENERGY: 11.5 ft-lb

GUN TEST SUPER-SOLID SPRINGER

Mike Morton shoots the Weihrauch HW98 – a target rifle with a split personality that's just as happy to be taken hunting or plinking

Break down the types of shooting that can be done with an air rifle and you'll end up with three main categories – target shooting, hunting and plinking – with a massive choice of rifles for each. But the lines between them are often blurred, with a good example of this being the Weihrauch HW98.

This scope-only break-barrel springer is primarily geared towards target shooting, as it has an adjustable stock and heavy barrel, but as we'll see here, the 98 can easily double up as a hunter and precision plinker too.

STOCK

There's no doubt that gun fit is one of the most important elements to consider when buying a rifle. After all, if you can't point the gun exactly where you want, you won't have a great deal of success when it comes to hitting your target. A big part of good gun fit is the ability to adjust the height of the butt pad and the comb, and while the stock on the HW98 is ambidextrous, it does allow you to adjust both.

The black rubber butt pad can be slacked off with a 4mm hex key, but in addition to letting you adjust its height, you can also adjust its angle. If you remove the pad, having first found its optimum height, you'll see a metal



Two-piece mounts will work perfectly well with this springer, as long as you make use of one of the arrestor pin locator holes



This break-barrel offers the simplicity of direct-to-breech loading, which has been combined with a thoroughly solid lock-up

plate with a series of notches offering two positions to the left and two to the right of vertical in roughly the 10 and 11, and 1 and 2 o'clock positions. If your rifle naturally sits to the left or right when you shoulder it, you can now ensure it stays level by adjusting the angle of the butt pad the opposite way. This feature isn't that well advertised, and while many people probably won't make use of it, it's a brilliant addition for those who need it.

The cheekpiece can also be adjusted to get the height of the comb just right for your build and choice of scope. To do this, you'll need to use a slotted screwdriver on the two retaining screws. I'd recommend using a hollow-ground bit with a wide blade to maximise contact and minimise the risk of it slipping and damaging the surrounding woodwork.

Sporter stocks tend to have a pistol grip with a shallow rake to assist fast-handling, while those geared more towards target shooting have a steeper rake. This makes them a bit slower to come to the aim, but offers far more comfort and control. The grip on the 98 has a decent rake to it, and I naturally adopted the thumb-up grip when shouldering this rifle. Ambidextrous stocks can be something of a compromise, but I don't think the 98 suffers because of this. My son is left-handed, and neither of us



In keeping with Weihrauch's other springers, cocking the rifle will automatically set the safety catch



Multi-directional stippling and the steep rake of the pistol grip work together to deliver plenty of grip and plenty of control

experienced any problems when adopting our respective holds when shooting this rifle.

While most Weihrauch stocks feature a traditional chequering pattern, the stock on the 98 has instead been given massive amounts of stippling on the grip and forend. These areas have been treated to a neat black stain, highlighting the stippling and making the rifle look distinctly different to most other break-barrels. The forend is also flat, which makes it easy to adopt the artillery hold, should you prefer shooting the 98 this way.

Another unusual touch – which is also finished in black – is the inclusion of some slotted cut-outs that have been set into the forend. Slots like these are usually applied to centrefire rifles to help keep the barrel cool. The ones on the 98 haven't been done for this reason though, and the slots don't even go all the way through the wood. Instead, they just add some elegant aesthetics to the rifle while giving your fingers extra purchase should you choose to use a wraparound grip with your leading hand, while still maintaining a gentle hold.

FEATURES AND FUNCTION

The HW98 is closely based on the HW95 sporter – but with some important exceptions. While the 95

comes screw-cut and fitted with a moderator for the UK market, the barrel of the 98 has not been cut and can't accept a suppressor. The other major difference is the addition of a slip-over barrel shroud that's held securely in place with two grub screws.

Elsewhere, the action is the same, featuring Weihrauch's normal standard of deep, lustrous bluing as well as a safety catch that's automatically applied when the rifle is cocked, and a Rekord trigger with a gently curved blade that features a ribbed pattern.

I measured length of pull on the test gun to be 34.5cm (13.6"), which is slightly longer than many other rifles. That's great news for people like me who have long arms. But should you find length of pull a tad too long, you can shorten it by fitting a setback trigger from Rowan Engineering.

The 98 has been specifically designed to be shot with a telescopic sight, and it features a standard dovetail rail with a choice of three slots to locate the arrestor pin on your scope mounts. The test rifle came to me with a 3-9 Weihrauch scope already fitted, and so this was left in place throughout the several months that I shot this rifle on test. With the heavy shroud encasing the barrel, it was no surprise to find that the rifle was very muzzle-heavy, with its centre of balance roughly half-way up the forend.

I was expecting the extra weight of the barrel to assist with cocking, but found the lock-up to be so precise that I had to tap the barrel to break it each time before it could be fully cocked. This isn't a flaw of the rifle in any way, more a comment on the high level of engineering that's been applied to it. There are some shooters, and reluctantly I include myself among them, who believe a fixed-barrel springer offers greater accuracy potential than a break-barrel, but the lock-up is so precise on this gun, even after thousands of shots, that I'm starting to doubt my own beliefs here.

Whenever the rifle is cocked, the safety catch is automatically applied, and when you're ready to take the shot it's simply a case of pushing it across from left to right. Should you change your mind and want to reapply the safety, go through the cocking motion again until you both feel and hear the catch reset itself.



Weihrauch's classic Rekord trigger is put to good use at the range as well as in the field when fitted to the HW98

I shot this rifle in a number of stances including offhand, kneeling and resting in the palm of my hand that in turn was supported by a bag. I'm not a good enough shot to comment on the 98's qualities when shot standing unsupported, but in the other positions I found the heavy barrel really helped to keep the muzzle steady over the target.

PERFORMANCE AND PRECISION

Where possible, I like to shoot test guns as they come out of the box and so didn't adjust the trigger at all. Trigger-pull was 2lb 1oz (934g), perhaps a touch heavy for a target rifle, but first stage travel came to a definite stop, while the second stage let-off was predictably clean.

Over the chrono, the rifle returned a pleasing variation in muzzle velocity of nine feet per second using what seemed to be its favourite pellets, JSB Exact Express.

I had no complaints about the accuracy of the rifle over the test period, repeatedly shooting the HW98 indoors at 25 yards, a distance over which it was happy to shoot one-hole groups, and dropping targets out to 45 yards outdoors on my club's HFT course.

Recoil was a little more lively than I'd expected, but this was offset by the gun's many positive features. I haven't been hunting with this rifle, but reckon it would perform very well in the field, with the gun's inherent accuracy being boosted by the great gun fit offered by that stock.

However, I did take my HW95 out wearing the 98 stock, as the inletting is identical, and anyone who wants a 98 stock for their 95 can order one through their local gun shop.

But let's get back to the 98. This is a rifle that's so accurate it thinks it's a fixed-barrel, while retaining the simplicity and ease of loading of a break-barrel. Ninety-eight? Great! ●

THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT

LOOK & FEEL	STOCK	BUILD QUALITY	SIGHTING UP	COCKING	LOADING	TRIGGER	HANDLING	ACCURACY	VALUE
8	8	9	9	9	9	8	8	9	8

OVERALL SCORE

85

"The HW98's glorious looks are matched by its superior accuracy and handling qualities, making this high-end springer suitable for tackling so much more than just paper targets on the range"