

AIR GUN LAW IN THE UK

Airguns in the UK are subject to the firearms acts, under the Firearms (Dangerous air weapons) rules 1969 they are classified as low powered Air Weapons and as such they are restricted to a maximum power of **12 foot pounds force for a rifle** and **6 foot pounds force for a pistol**.

Above 12ftlb a rifle is classified as a Section 1 Firearm and requires a licence called a firearms certificate, and a pistol above 6ftlb is again a Section 1 Firearm requiring a firearms certificate in the UK.

The definition of a firearm under the act is

"a lethal barrelled weapon of any description from which any shot, bullet or other missile can be discharged".

It further defines "lethal weapon" as "a weapon capable of firing a projectile with sufficient force to inflict more than a trivial injury i.e. "with sufficient force to puncture skin".

The Home Office consider the lowest level of muzzle energy capable of inflicting a penetrating wound is **one foot pound** (1.35 joules) hence guns producing less than 1ft/lb are not covered by the act and therefore not classified as air weapons or subject to any restrictions.

The 1997 Firearms Amendment Act made handguns illegal in the UK but Air Weapons were excluded under Section 5 (1) subsection (aba)

"a prohibited weapon includes a firearm with a barrel length less than 30cms and an overall length less than 60cms, other than an air weapon, a muzzle loading gun, or a firearm designed as signalling apparatus".

UK Legal Power Limit

To calculate the power of an airgun it must first be fired through a chronoscope to measure the speed of the projectile.

The weight of the projectile must be measured in either grains (7000 grains = 1 pound) or grams (1000 grams = 1 Kilogram). Once you have this information the Energy (E) of the airgun can be calculated using the equation below.

(to calculate energy Imperial units of grains and feet/second have been used in this equation)

Kinetic Energy: $E = 0.5 \times \text{Mass} \times \text{Velocity}^2$ divided by $32.16 \times 2 \times 7000$

for example:

a **.22 projectile** with a mass of **14.4** grains fired through the chronoscope measuring a speed of **612.53** feet/second will have an Energy value of

$$E = (0.5 \times 14.4 \times 612.53 \times 612.53) \text{ divided by } (*32.16 \times 2 \times 7000) = 12\text{ft/lbs}$$

This gives the result of **12 ft/lbs** which for the mass of this particular projectile is at the UK legal limit for a non firearm air rifle.

***32.16 is the acceleration due to gravity in feet/second and 7000 is the number of grains in 1lb**

Similarly, A .177 pellet weighing 7.9 grains at the legal maximum speed would be 826.98 ft/sec

For Air pistols at the legal maximum limit, using the same projectile mass, these figures would be

433.12 ft/sec for .22 calibre and 584.76 ft/sec for .177 calibre.

The projectile mass used in the above calculations are a middle weight choice for these two calibres, however when using different projectiles, always obtain their accurate mass figure before performing the calculation.

The Law as relating to the use of airguns by young persons

Under 14 yrs of age

- An air rifle can be used under supervision on private premises with permission from the occupier – normally the owner or tenant.
- The supervisor must be at least 21 years old.
- An air rifle or ammunition cannot be bought, hired or received as a gift, or shot, without adult supervision.
- Parents or guardians who buy an air rifle for use by someone under 14 must exercise control over it at all times, even in the home or garden.

14-17 years of age

- An air rifle and ammunition can be borrowed
- You can use an air rifle, without supervision, on private premises where you have permission
- You cannot buy or hire an air rifle, or ammunition, or receive one as a gift.
- Your air rifle and ammunition must be bought and looked after by someone over 18 – normally your parent, guardian or some other responsible adult.
- You cannot have an air rifle in a public place unless you are supervised by somebody aged 21 or over, and you have a reasonable excuse to do so (for example, while on the way to a shooting ground).

18 years and above

- Those above the age of 18 can buy an air rifle and ammunition, which can be used wherever permission to shoot has been given.

Public Places and Highways

- You may never have an airgun in a public place without proper reason for doing so. If you are travelling to and from a place where you have the right to shoot, the gun must be in a case.
- Any airgun is loaded if there is any form of projectile in the barrel, whether or not it is primed for use.
- Any airgun which uses a magazine and the magazine has projectiles in it, irrespective of whether the magazine is fitted into the gun or not, even if there is no projectile in the barrel of the gun, the gun is considered loaded.
- It is an offence to fire an airgun within 50 feet of the centre of a public highway, If by doing so you cause any member of the public using that highway to be injured, interrupted or endangered. This applies even if you are on private property adjacent the highway. Public highways include roads, bridleways and public footpaths.

STORAGE

- A person in possession of an air gun should take reasonable precautions to prevent any person under the age of eighteen gaining unauthorised access to the air gun.

Trespass

- If you go on to any land, including over water and in buildings, without permission you are Trespassing. If you have an Airgun with you it is classed as Armed Trespass which is a serious Criminal offence even if the gun is not loaded.

Airgun Prey

The following pests are considered suitable for controlling using a sub-12 ftlb Airgun.

- Brown Rat, Grey Squirrel, Rabbit, Crow, Rook, Magpie, Jay, Wood pigeon, Collared Dove, Feral Pigeon, House mouse, Sparrow, Starling, and recently Mink have been added to the list. These are not always considered pests and only Authorised Persons can shoot them in all circumstances.

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

All bird and animals are protected by law. Certain species are classified as pests or vermin and only these species can be legitimately shot and then only by authorised persons. An Authorised Person is someone who has the proper permission from the land owner to control pests on that land.

Within that list of designated pests some are not suitable prey for an airgun producing less than 12 ftlbs.

Offence Penalties

Statute Law

The Penalties for breaking current UK firearms laws with Airguns are as follows:-

- Carrying a loaded Air-weapon in a public place 6 months imprisonment and / or £5,000 fine.
- Trespassing with an air weapon 3 months imprisonment and / or £2,500 fine.
- Trespassing on private land with an air weapon 3 months imprisonment and / or £2,500 fine.
- Possessing or using an air weapon if sentenced to 3 months or more in custody 3 months imprisonment and / or £2,500 fine. In addition if original sentence up to 3 years 5 year ban on use of firearms. Or if for 3 years or more Life ban on use of firearms.
- Killing or injuring any bird or protected animal unless authorised £5,000 fine.
- Firing an air weapon within 15m / 50ft of a public highway £1,000 fine.
- Selling or hiring air weapon or ammunition to person under 17 6 months imprisonment and / or £5,000 fine.
- Making a gift of air weapon or ammunition to person under 14 £1,000 fine.
- Having air weapon or ammunition with intent to damage property 10 years imprisonment.
- Having air weapon with intent to endanger life Life imprisonment and / or appropriate fine.
- Using air weapon to resist or prevent arrest Life imprisonment and / or appropriate fine.
- Threatening others with an air weapon (even if unloaded) to cause them to fear unlawful violence 10 years imprisonment and / or appropriate fine.

It should be borne in mind by every airgun shooter that the unexpected could happen and there is also a risk of being shot and killed by the police should you not obey instructions when challenged by them, they cannot tell if you have just an airgun or a more lethal firearm so will treat all arms as lethal and respond accordingly.

Civil Law

It should be borne in mind by every airgun shooter that the unexpected could happen and they could find themselves facing a civil action for damage to property or even injury to persons or livestock. Every airgun shooter should have Third Party Public Liability Insurance before venturing out of doors, and joining one of the bodies representing shooters interests is the best way to achieve this.

Scotland and Northern Ireland are subject to different rules than those above.