

Although CO2-powered airguns came 'off ticket' over a decade ago, it amazes me that the vast majority of guns that run this system are either pistols or fun-guns. A notable exception, however, is SMK's new TH78D Sporter – a full-powered sporting rifle designed for the hunting field.

CO2 format offers all the combined advantages of spring guns and precharged pneumatics, without any of their disadvantages! For instance, unlike a springer, you can keep a CO2 gun cocked for as long as you want, without having to worry about mainspring fatigue. A CO2 gun is pretty effortless to charge up, too. No cumbersome charging gear's needed, nor manual stirrup-pumps to break your back as with a PCP. You just drop in a self-contained gas capsule!

Well, in the case of the TH78D, you actually need two of the standard 12-gramme CO2 gas capsules – but that's because, at 11+ ft/lbs, it's a full-fat shooting machine (see panel opposite). That's around four or five times more power than the single capsules produce out of the pistols – yet, courtesy of its slow-release valve, SMK's twin-capsule hunting rifle still returns around 100 shots per gas-up.



Above: The thumbhole and its sculpted grip.

As with all CO2 guns, the actual power and shot output will vary dependent on the pellet type and ambient temperature, but I certainly found the system very effective when I took the TH78D for a spot of pest control work at my local farm over the summer.

I'd been ordered to seek out the rats and feral pigeon. This type of vermin control calls for a fast-handling sporter, and I couldn't think of a better gun for the task than the TH78D. It's very light, beautifully balanced and its deluxe thumbhole stock makes it handle like a dream. In fact, having shot many hundreds of rounds through this rifle, I'd go so far as to say this is the kind of rifle you'd want if you were a professional pest controller!

It's a fast-handling gun, too. Not just because of its manageable weight and beautiful balance, but also because of

its delightful, ultra-quick bolt-action. Once lifted from its lock position, the bolt – luxuriously gold-anodised to match the rifle's trigger blade – is easy to pull back and has a very short throw.

Once the bolt's fully drawn, the channel of the loading bay is opened to allow a pellet to be dropped in. This then gets 'breached', and the firing hammer cocked, once you return the bolt and lock it down.

The opens, which feature a red fibre-

Below: The gold-anodised bolt is a delight to cock and there's a well-sized pellet loading bay.



optic foresight and a fully-adjustable rearsight with green fibre-optic inserts, are pretty decent in my book – but this gun's far too good not to rig it up with a scope! I opted for an SMK 3-9 x 40 Mil-Dot, which required me to remove the rearsight, and this showed how the totally recoilless firing cycle of the CO2 system really makes the TH78D perform with pin-point precision.

Although most of my farmyard work never required a shot more than 20 or so yards away, I did drop a woodpigeon at 33 yards with the TH78D. It flew into a grain store opposite the hay barn I was in, and I took full advantage of the mil-dot reticle to drop the bird from distance with a perfectly executed head shot.

Its rifled steel barrel means you can

group your shots very tightly even at extreme ranges and the TH78D's three-way adjustable, single-stage trigger is perfect for getting the best from both rifle and shooter.

The safety catch, at the front of the trigger guard, is manual and perfect for hunters. You point it forward to fire, back to engage it, and an arrow points to either 'F' and 'S' to let you know its status.

I loved the rifle's stock. Its thumbhole grip is beautifully sculpted to fit into your palm, and its (right-hand) Monte Carlo cheek-piece is ideal for



scope use.

Besides its perfect sporter shape, it's also beautifully presented, with a rich 'red' finish highlighting the underlying grain a treat. A real advantage for me was the height-adjustable butt pad, though.

Nicely ridged and curved to nestle naturally into your shoulder, it moves up or down to give the best gun fit. I found that by not over-tightening the keeper screw, I could alter it 'on the fly' with the rifle in my shoulder. This helped when shooting at an upward angle – I simply slid the pad up to its top position, which dropped the butt and brought the gun on line with the target.

With CO2 capsules costing just around 75 pence and the rifle on sale in gun shops for only £179.95, I reckon SMK's new TH78D must be one of the

GASSING UP



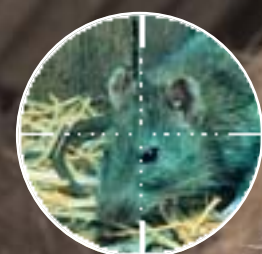
THE TH78D's full-power performance comes courtesy of two 12-gramme CO2 capsules, which locate in the under-barrel chamber. Remove the cap, drop in the first capsule, neck-down, then the second, neck-up. Screw the cap back on until you hear a hiss that signifies the 78's 'gassed up' and ready to go.

deals of the decade. I said earlier it's a rifle that would suit professional pest controllers down to the ground – but it's also such a beautifully finished gun that I'd want it in my gun cabinet for pride of ownership alone!

The trigger is backed-up by a manual safety switch on the side of the guard – rotate it fully forward for 'fire', as indicated on the left side. For improved handling, the butt pad is height adjustable.



BOLT-ACTION BEAUTY!



NIGEL ALLEN field trials SMK's TH78D Thumbhole Deluxe CO2 Sporter

FACTS - TH78D
Action: Bolt-action CO2
Source: 2 x 12g CO2 capsules
Calibre: .22
Length: 100.5cm
Barrel Length: 54cm
Weight: 2.4g
Trigger: Single-stage, three-way adjustable
Safety: Manual, resettable
Stock: Thumbhole beech
Sights: Adjustable fibre-optic opens
Power: 11+ Ft/lbs
Price: £179.95

