From this swim I could see the rats on the next.

LIGHT SAVER!

Light in the hand and light on the wallet, the new PR900W is set to cause waves in the PCP market

Unless you've been out of the airgun scene for the last 15 years it cannot have missed your attention that pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) rifles offer many advantages over spring-piston guns. The recoilless firing cycle is much easier to manage, resulting in superior accuracy in the hands of the ordinary shooter. The downside was that they were generally much more expensive and required either a pump or a dive bottle to fill them, which adds to the total price.

In recent times, several major manufacturers, such as BSA and Walther have brought high-quality PCPs to the market at the £400 mark, a great deal lower than was previously available, but with a pump added you'd still be looking at over £500. So imagine my surprise when SMK offered me their PR900W PCP rifle that they're offering at £219.95! It's close to half the price of any other PCP I've seen.

The beech stock is ambidextrous.

"the pull length is the industry standard 14 1/2" so this is no junior model"

On picking it up, my first impression was of a slender and very light rifle, albeit with full adult dimensions. In fact the pull length is the industry standard 14½" so this is no junior model. The stock is quite plain, being lightly stained beech with pressed chequering panels on the pistol grip and fore end. The cheek piece is set at the correct height for the open sights fitted, but still worked well enough with the scope tthat SMK packed with the rifle. Before the scope could go on I needed to remove the rear sight which fits on the top of the barrel support. This is only 4" in front of the action rather than the more usual place further down the reservoir.

WELL FINISHED

The fit and finish was remarkably good for such a cheap rifle, showing just how much gun making in the Far East has improved in recent years. The PR900W is also equipped with a pressure gauge in the belly of the stock, something I feel all PCP rifles need. It's a little unusual in that it's marked in megapascals (MPa) rather than the industry standard bar. 1 MPa equals 10 »

A single-shot tray and a magazine are included.

Getting a pressure gauge on a rifle at this price is excellent.

A NEW TOP-VALUE SMK PCP

The long, slim sporting lines are right up my street.

bar, so the conversion isn't hard. The manual tells me that the maximum fill pressure is 20 MPa, so that's what I filled it to. It uses a probe-type fitting at the muzzle end of the reservoir, but I noted that there was no dust cover, so great care should be exercised in keeping this area clean.

The trigger has a rather long and indistinct travel and the blade is quite square-edged. It released at 2¾"lbs according to my trigger gauge, which is just right for a sporting gun. At the front of the chunky trigger blade is a cross-bolt manual safety that blocks the trigger completely. This position makes is just as useful for lefties as the rest of us. The bolt handle is quite short and I found that I needed to grip it carefully or I'd trap my thumb nail against the scope mount. Cocking was light and smooth and the firing cycle undramatic. The manual says that the unit on the muzzle has a silencing effect but it's not as effective as the much larger units that most of us use, which is logical. Its tiny dimensions offer less volume for the high-pressure air to expand into. Those looking to clean up the rifle's lines can unbolt the fore sight blade.

In the box you'll find plenty of spare 'O' rings, a single-shot tray and a rotary magazine which holds 9 shots in .177 and 7 in .22. This rifle looks like a great little hunter, so I was glad to see the magazine included. The tray and mag' slide in from the left and are held by neat little magnets, which I think is a very smart touch on a rifle at any price.

Seeing the rifle as a potential hunter I chose to test it with the Remington Thunder Field target Trophy .22 pellet. These averaged 560 fps at the muzzle for a healthy 10.65ft.lbs, plenty of punch for my chosen quarry.

RATTING

I have a friend who is one of these obsessive carp fishing types who'd been telling me that rats had been spotted around the fishery club house. I love a bit of ratting, but seldom get the opportunity, so I was on for this job. After zeroing the rifle and checking its accuracy, I felt ready to hunt. At 25 yards I was getting regular 1/2" groups with the odd flyer opening it out to 5/8", so felt confident to hunt at that distance. It was accuracy I could repeat without any special effort, just as you'd expect from a PCP.

I was told the rats would be on the move at any time, including daylight, so I dropped in mid-morning and had a prowl about. I stuck close to the building, hoping to ambush the rodents as they scurried out from cover, but they often nip from one bit of cover to another before you can get the sights on them, so I needed a bait. My pal recommended some smelly 'boilies' he was fishing with and we ground a couple into the dirt, so the rats would need to dig around to find a meal.

My patience was soon rewarded when a young one bolted out, drawn by the scent, and I sent the heavy .22 on it way. It connected with the back of its skill, severing the spinal cord, and it dropped without a twitch. Ten minutes later an adult stepped over it and began to scratch the ground. I aimed at the side of the skull below its ear and it dropped too.

MOVING ON

Happy with my quick success, I strolled around the lake to find my friend and tell him what I'd achieved. He told me he'd thought of another ambush point. By sitting on one swim I could see across to another which an angler had used the previous night before heading home. He'd been cooking and had tipped the fat from his frying pan onto the earth, which we hoped would also act as bait. I took a test shot from a relaxed sitting position and the pellet made a neat hole in the leaf just where I'd aimed. I was ready.

As ever when ratting, patience was required, but movement in the grass alerted me to the rat's presence, so I lifted the rifle onto the aim and hoped it would show. Sure enough, a huge male rat went straight to the fat and began to lap at the tasty food. I squeezed the trigger gently and followed the pellet's flight to the rat's skull. It dropped and rolled down the bank into the water, making retrieving it tricky. I asked for my friend's long-handled landing net and he looked at me like I was mad. 'That disgusting thing isn't going anywhere near my £200 net' he said. However, he did know where there was a litter picking grab, so I used that instead. Again the little rifle had proven its worth.

I have to say that I like this little gun. Sure it's too light for competition use but for anybody looking for a short- to medium-range hunter that's easy to carry, I recommend you have a good look at this rifle. It would also make a great project gun for the skilled gunsmith to develop. A trigger job, crown the barrel and fit a proper silencer, and I think it could be excellent, performing well above what the price would lead you to expect. It looks like PCP performance has just become a lot more affordable. ■

"I squeezed the trigger gently and followed the pellet's flight to the rat's skull"

Lightweight? Oh yes ...

SPECIFICATIONS

Manufacturer	SMK
Web	www.sportsmk.co.uk
Tel	01206 795333
Model	PR900W
Length	37.4" (95cm)
Weight	4.62lbs (2.1kg)
Trigger	Two-stage
Fill pressure	200bar
Calibres	.177 and .22

RRP £219.95

Overlooking my bait gave me two rat kills.

The bolt handle is quite short.