



RRP
£285

DI'ED IN THE WOOL!

George Stevens goes back to his hunting roots with the Diana 280 Carbine

When you look at this month's test rifle, do you see something a little old-fashioned? I do, and it's the type of old-fashioned that makes me want to get it scoped-up, zeroed-in and performing on the range. Perhaps 'classic' would be better than 'old-fashioned', but whatever it is, I like it. Depending on the angle of view, this rifle reminds me of a slimmed-down version of several all-time classics, including the BSA Airsporter, the Feinwerkbau Sport and the Air Arms ProSport, with not the slightest hint of Relum Tornado anywhere, I'm pleased to say. A far more poncy observer than I might describe the Model 280 Carbine as, 'classic meets modern, in a pleasing fusion of Anglo-Germanic sporting airgun styling.' It has to be said, this is a smart-looking sporter.

I've had the .22 calibre Diana Model 280

Carbine test rifle for just over three weeks at the time of writing, and that translates to a handful of pellets either side of 1200, so I'm ready to declare what I know and make a few judgements. Before I do any of that, though, I'd like to say something about where this rifle, and others like it, sit in the overall scheme of things. I want to do this because I remain concerned about how many of us, especially newcomers to our sport, regard rifles that aren't pre-charged and don't offer multi-shot, fast-reload capability.

Basically, there's a feeling in certain quarters that single-shot, spring-piston sporters have either had their day, or they're just a stopover on the way to a 'proper hunting gun.' I'm here to tell you, and in the

strongest possible terms, that this is utter nonsense. As someone who has put countless head of vermin in the bag with rifles built to the Diana 280's format, I absolutely assure you that a quality single-shot springer makes a fine, and totally 'proper', hunting gun. Furthermore, today's versions are mechanically superior to their forbears, they shoot better pellets, and they're guided by scopes and mounts of a far greater quality and performance. If I could hunt efficiently with the 1970s and 80s examples of the spring-piston sporter, and I could, then that efficiency can only rise with the modern

rifles. Please, don't dismiss these guns, or you'll cut yourself off from their unique appeal, and deny yourself an entire world of hunting pleasure. Sermon over, let's take a close look at this handy little Diana.

OVERVIEW

The Diana 280 Carbine is a slim, ambidextrous, break-barrel sporter, with an automatic safety-catch, a two-stage, adjustable trigger, a raised scope rail and no open sights. The barrel is threaded ½-inch UNF, and protected by a knurled cap. That threaded muzzle is essential to the use of this sporter and I'll return to that soon. Meanwhile, I see the

Diana designers at Mayer &



STYLE MATTERS

I was impressed by the classic sporter styling of the Diana 280 Carbine and this test made me realise how much the aesthetics of a rifle actually mean to me. I'll always appreciate shooting efficiency, but when it's done in style - it's definitely better.



Hunting with the 280 Carbine reminds me just how good a classic sporter like this can be.



The trigger is excellent and has classic styling to boot.



The neat little safety is positioned right under the thumb of your trigger hand.

Grammelspacher in Germany have opted for a single-piece cocking link, which, while being sturdy and simple, does require an elongated slot in the stock. This can be regarded as a weakness, but Diana seem to have preferred to keep the cocking link as strong as possible, and they've been in the airgun business for more decades than I care to remember, so I'd say they know what they're doing.

The ambidextrous stock is lacquered beech, with plenty of chequering at the grip and

moment; you'll definitely need one, and a sturdy one at that. I screwed on one of the 'deciBlocker' models from Prestige Airguns, and its solid alloy threaded mount held firm throughout my tests. That mount was a serious consideration with this rifle, due to the short (340mm/13.5 inch) barrel and the need to use the silencer itself as extra leverage. This puts quite a load on the silencer mount and repeated use could see movement of the silencer bore, causing pellets to 'clip' the baffles on their way out, or worse.

The deciBlocker gave me no such worries, and at 6

OFF THE BENCH

If I was going to design a rifle specifically for *not* shooting off a bench, the Model 280 Carbine would pretty much be it. This is a fairly 'punchy' sporter and I'm never completely happy resting recoiling airguns on a bench, even when I install padding (two beanbags) and make sure to 'suspend' the rifle in my hands, rather than let it rest completely on the padded bench. Sitting up to cock and load the rifle is a bit of a pain, too, because I have to re-settle before every shot, and that's not the best recipe for consistency.

Never mind all that; I did fairly well with the Model 280 off the bench but I couldn't

fore end. As ever, the fore end panels are too far back for my preference but that's no big deal, especially given the springer's need to be 'cradled' in the hand rather than gripped.

The trigger blade is gently curved, with top-to-bottom grooves, and the trigger itself has a level of precision that beats anything I've ever used from the Diana stable. My early impressions of this trigger were formed during the 'shooting-in' phase of the test, which involves nothing more than getting the scope in the right position, a bit of initial zeroing, and the firing of as many shots as I can cram into the time available. During this, less-than-technical part of the test, there's always something that makes its presence felt, and, apart from the need for a silencer as a cocking aid, it was the sweet, predictable nature of the trigger that impressed me most.

Back to that silencer for a

inches (153mm) long and weighing just 4.5oz (135 grams), it provides enough of a hand hold and hushes the bark of the compact Model 280 a treat. I'm sure other silencers would do a good job on this rifle, but make certain you fit one that's up to the job of being a cocking aid, too, or you'll be

relax fully with it, until I took it for a stroll around the shoot at the end of my garden. Here, I compromised slightly on the efficiency of the bench rest and used handy trees for stability, while still suspending the 280 in my hands, keeping the hold and stance as

DIANA 280 TO6 CARBINE

Manufacturer: Mayer & Grammelspacher
Country of Origin: Germany
Distributor: RUAG Ammotec UK
Type: Spring-piston, single-shot sporter
Calibre: .22 and .177
Cocking: Break-barrel.
Loading: Direct to barrel
Trigger: Two-stage, adjustable.
Sights: Scope rail only
Stock Type: Ambidextrous, beech sporter
Weight: 3.03kg (6.7lbs.) (unscoped)
Length: 952 mm (37.5 ins.)
Barrel: 340mm (13.5 ins.)
Power: 11-plus ft.lbs.

COST: £285 with beech stock as shown

I couldn't really split them in terms of performance. I ended up using the Falcons because my stocks of Defiant are running low and I need to reserve them for testing, until I can blag some more off the Airgun World editor, who also rates them highly.

Using the Falcon Accuracy-Plus 13.4 grain .22s, the Diana 280 Carbine initially produced 11.6 ft.lbs., and this settled to just under 11.5, with an average variation of 11 f.p.s. over 30 shots. I noticed that,

"TODAY'S VERSIONS ARE MECHANICALLY SUPERIOR TO THEIR FORBEARS, THEY SHOOT BETTER PELLETS, AND THEY'RE GUIDED BY SCOPES"

wondering why you can't hit anything with this potent little Diana.

With a springer, I prefer to shoot at least 50, preferably a hundred 'establishing' shots, to clear any excess lubricant from the powerplant and to get 'tuned in' to the way the rifle shoots. After that's done, the accuracy testing proper can begin, so let's go there now.

tension-free as possible. This worked better than I'd hoped, and the 20mm groups I'd managed off the bench at 35 yards, closed slightly once I'd assumed more 'natural' shooting positions.

My preferred pellets were the consistently excellent Defiant 'Medium' 5.5, and the equally impressive Falcon Accuracy-Plus, and

for the first couple of shots of any chrono' session, the rifle would record slightly higher velocities, but I'd expect that from any new springer. That said, I'd still advise any hunters using this, or any new rifle, to 'clear' the action by firing it twice safely into the ground before setting off, just to make sure no excess lube has crept into the

ON TEST: DIANA MODEL 280 CARBINE



chamber.

My final accuracy stats were impressive – at least they were to me – as I recorded three sub-inch groups at 45 yards, which is a full 15 yards beyond my decided hunting range with this rifle. After I really get to know the 280, I'll probably extend my maximum range with it to 35 yards, but only if I can't get closer. The Diana can go further, as I've shown, but I can't guarantee to do so under hunting conditions, so I won't try. All in all, this 280 Carbine is one of those special rifles that's pretty to look at, and shoots even prettier. What about handling and field performance, though? Read on.

IN THE FIELD

The 280 weighs well under 8lbs with the lightweight, Nikko Stirling Mountmaster 3-9 x 32 I fitted to it, so carrying it in the field will not be a problem. This is good to know, but fitting a sling is still an option for those who plan to yomp miles across fields to their hunting hotspots. I've never been a fan of slings, but they certainly come in handy if you need to carry other gear, such as ammo nets, decoys and the like.

The balance point, with the scope fitted as shown, comes within a finger's width of the centre of the rifle, making the 280 Carbine feel neutral on aim. I found the cheekpiece fractionally low with the mounts supplied with the Nikko, but there was a bit of room to bring the scope down if I'd gone for lower mounts. Oddly, the editor had a session with the test

rifle and found the scope position fine, as did my son, so it's very much a personal thing. On a related matter, I was pleased to see that the scope didn't shift on its supplied, two-piece mounts, and that raised mounting rail makes scope fitting about as easy and secure as it could possibly be.

What did I shoot with the test rifle? Nothing. Not a rabbit, rat, pigeon or crow. I splattered countless crab apples, obliterated acorns at ranges I'd never consider for quarry, and I even dislodged my grandson's glider from a tree by shooting off the twig that was holding it, but I just didn't get a proper chance to put anything in the bag with the Diana. Had the chance presented itself, the test rifle would have taken it, of that I couldn't be more certain. That chance will come, though, because, after trying this one, my nephew's going to buy a 280 Carbine and he wants me to take him hunting.

I was concerned that he'd struggle to cock the 280, but that turned out to be no problem once he'd learned to bring down the barrel in a controlled 'sweep', rather than inching it downward until it cocks. He soon got used to it, as will you if you buy one. The short, fast recoil was another concern, but that too was accommodated without any dramas.

The trigger helped



Diana have screw-cut the barrel ready for a silencer - and you'll definitely need one.

acclimatise everyone who tried the Diana, and I must once again commend the designers on it. It's been a while coming, but this trigger unit really does match the rest of the rifle in terms of quality and function.

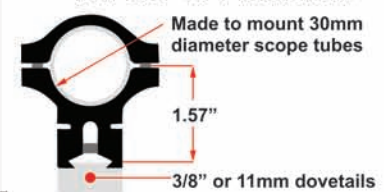
The engineering of this Diana is solid (as you'll see when you try to open the barrel against the heavily-sprung detent) without being bulky, and elegant without being fragile. At £300, this isn't a cheap gun, but it's not supposed to be. It's an expertly made, hard-hitting, straight-shooting, spring-powered, and extremely nice looking sporting air rifle for those who value such things. Count me very much among them, and while you're at it, put me down as a big fan of the excellent Diana 280 Carbine. ■

The ball detent in the breech block gives a super-solid lock-up.



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