

MAT and KEV



Hunting with a Modern Classic

Mat Manning and Kev Hawker field test the Diana Model 34 Classic break-barrel sporter

Given the modern trend for gizmos and gimmicks, I sometimes feel that airgunners are forced to pay for extras they don't really need as gunmakers try harder and harder to outdo each other in the gadget stakes. But the gun Kev and I have been testing over recent weeks is certainly an exception to that rule.

The Diana Model 34 Classic air rifle is a true no-frills springer. Retailing for around £300, it isn't exactly cheap, but you get what you pay for and, in this case, that equates to excellent build quality and great performance. Diana is a German gun manufacturer and that is more than evident by the clean lines, neat engineering and well-blued finish the moment you lift this gun from its box.

At first glance, you could dismiss the Model 34 Classic as rather a plain looking gun; there's nothing particularly eye-catching about its beech stock, and it doesn't even have any chequering. But look closer and it's soon apparent that it's actually quite elegant; long and slender with a look that

harks back to the heyday of spring-and-piston air rifles.

Still, I don't want to get too hung-up on what this gun looks like because the biggest concern for the hunter is performance. So the first job was to get it out in the field and put it to the test against paper and knockdown targets to see how it fared.

Starting by zeroing at 15 metres, I was impressed by the very easy cocking cycle. At 117cm, the Model 34 Classic is a long gun. Its barrel is proportionally long and that helps greatly by providing extra leverage for the down-stroke that cocks and engages the spring. There's no grating or grinding; everything flows smoothly and clunks and clicks when it should – the barrel lock-up is good and tight, too.

The Classic has a neat little safety catch that sets itself automatically every time you cock the gun. The catch is actually a discreet little switch at the back of the cylinder that pops out to indicate that the gun is safe. This switch is perfectly positioned to easily push with the thumb of your trigger hand when you are ready to shift to 'fire' mode.



CLEVER ENGINEERING

It is evident that there's more clever German engineering at work when you fire the Classic, too. Being a spring-and-piston gun, there is inevitably some recoil caused by the travel of these components, but it is very smooth, crisp and easy to manage – especially considering the fact that that the test gun was consistently turning out over 10ft.lb.

The sighting system is impressive too. The fibre-optic elements really glow, giving a clearly discernable aim point. The foresight is of the tunnel variety and the rear element provides positive adjustment for windage (left and right) and elevation (up and down).

Now, that great firing cycle and impressive sighting system counts for nothing without a decent trigger mechanism, and I'm very fussy about triggers because I believe they can make or break any gun. I am delighted to say that, in this case, the trigger unit was of a seriously good standard – in fact, I would go as far as to say it is one of the best I have used on a gun of this type and price range.

The trigger blade isn't fancy but that doesn't really matter because the engineering behind it certainly does its job. On its factory setting, the two-stage trigger was neither too heavy nor too light and was very predictable with a crisp, clean break point – just the way I like them. The length of the first stage can easily be adjusted but I left it alone because it was spot-on.

With action, sights and trigger working in harmony, I quickly zeroed the .22 calibre test gun and was soon notching-up thumbnail-sized groups at 15 metres. Moving on to the knockdown target, the Diana consistently hit the mark using just its open sights out to beyond 20-metres, so I reckon its certainly up to the job of vermin control at close to mid-range.

Kev had a go using the open sights and was equally impressed – until I clawed the gun back off him so I could fit a scope to see what it was really capable of.

Fitting a scope did reveal a couple of possible niggles with the Diana. Firstly, the scope rail could do with being a little longer and, secondly, the cheek-piece, which is perfect for open sight use, is a little low for eye alignment with telescopic sights. The height was just about alright for my 40mm test scope, but hunters who like a bigger objective lens might find it slightly lacking.

HUNTING POTENTIAL

Nonetheless, the Model 34 Classic achieved some impressive accuracy when fitted with a scope. In spite of being long (and the fore-end of the stock really does look long) the gun balances well and this translates into good shooting. Hunting potential was confirmed as Kev and I had some great fun notching-up tight groups and whacking down knock-over targets out to beyond 25 metres.

So, with the Diana delivering the goods on the range, we decided it was time to head to the woods in search of squirrels to give it a proper test.

At under seven-and-a-half pounds without a scope, this is not a heavyweight gun, but I do think some chequered grip points would have made it easier in the hand. I haven't taken the Model 34 out in the rain, but I suspect that smooth expanse of beech might get a little slippery after a soaking.

Fortunately, I didn't have to carry the gun too far before we spotted the first squirrel of the session. The little-bushy-tail was squat in a tree just over 20 metres away and, using a tree to support myself (but not the gun as it would have bounced the recoil unpredictably) I was soon thumbing-off the safety in readiness to make the shot. The Diana did its job admirably and the first squirrel of the

Opposite: Kev gets ready to bag a squirrel during the Model 34's field test Below: The trigger blade may look plain but the unit behind it is impressive Middle: The automatic safety catch at the back of the Classic's cylinder is a great feature



Below: The Diana Model 34 is well engineered throughout



**MAT AND KEV
ON THE DIANA
MODEL 34
CLASSIC**



Above: Mat puts the Diana through its paces on the range before taking it into the field Below: The Model 34 Classic is fitted with a rail so you can add a scope on



morning crashed into the undergrowth after a solid smack to the head.

Incidentally, the Classic is surprisingly quiet. The test model didn't have a silencer but the muzzle crack was barely apparent when we were shooting targets in the open field; it was hardly any more apparent in the quiet confines of the woodland so I don't think a silencer is actually needed.

The surprising stealth of the un-moderated Diana proved true when Kev added another squirrel a few minutes later, and also proved itself on subsequent sessions after rabbits and more squirrels.

To conclude, the Diana Model 34 Classic is a cracking break-barrel air rifle. There's nothing fancy about it but I think that's a good thing because it means all you're paying for is quality and reliability. **AG**



WHAT KEV THOUGHT OF THE DIANA MODEL 34 CLASSIC

Like Mat, I thought the Model 34 was a great break-barrel air rifle offering good value for money.

It is quite long but is nicely balanced and handles very well. Spring-and-piston air rifles are good fun and very rewarding to shoot; this one is surprisingly easy to shoot, too.

If I could change anything, I would probably suggest some chequering to improve grip, and a higher cheek piece to give scope users better gun fit and eye alignment.

The trigger is fantastic – probably the gun's best feature. The open sights are very good too, and I would have no quibbles about using them for hunting out to 20 or so metres with a little practice.

I also thought the safety catch was one of the best I have used. The position at the back of the cylinder couldn't be better and I would be happy to swap it for the safety catch on any of my more expensive pre-charged guns – it's brilliant.

Diana air rifles are distributed by RUAG Ammotec UK Ltd. For more information, call 01579 362319 or visit www.ruag.co.uk