

Flirting with DIANA!

It's perhaps not the most well-known of air rifles, but after an unexpected introduction, **Nigel Allen** enjoyed a flirtatious affair with the Diana Model 280 – a break-barrel that should certainly turn heads

Wonder how many airgunners have heard about – or even seen – the Model 280 break-barrel sporter from well-known German gunmaker Diana? I confess I knew very little about this relatively new model and when Diana's UK importers, RUAG Ammotec, mentioned it to me in passing, they referred to it as 'only a low-end springer'! Forgive me, RUAG, but after playing with the 280 for the past three months, I think you're massively underestimating its potential. At around the £210 mark, it's a force to be reckoned with – fans of affordable break-barrels have to know about this latest addition to the Diana stable.

Diana makes the Mod. 280 exclusively for RUAG – and while its price might be considered 'low-end', the rifle most certainly is not. In fact, I'd liken it to the Feinwerkbau Sport of old – a classic rifle of which I'm still a big fan, even though production was ceased way back in the 1990s. Like the FWB, the Diana's German heritage is clearly highlighted in the quality of engineering and it, too, spits out pellets with unerring accuracy, smack bang on the legal limit.

Because of RUAG's initial description of the rifle, I began my testing with little expectation, but after only a few shots it became clear that this was a serious piece of kit – so much so that I even rang RUAG to confirm I'd been sent the correct rifle and given the right price. I had – and that's when my affair with the Diana started.

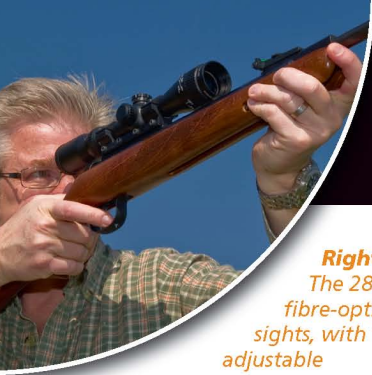
She's a gun that you just want to pick up and caress; so stylish from top to toe and one of the sweetest looking sporters I've clapped eyes on in a long while. Her beech stock is beautifully shaped, with an extended forend that tapers to the front as well, as swelling out and being perfectly rounded underneath, and a pistol grip that's curved at an ideal rake for maximum trigger control.

The sharply-cut chequering panels on both grip and forestock have each been designed in a triplet of elegant 'sails', while the rubber butt pad is neatly played off with a white line spacer. Unusually for a springer, the belly of the butt has been reverse curved to lighten its back-end appearance and, therefore, the gun's overall weight.

The cheekpiece's Monte Carlo profile runs on both sides, making it good for right- and

Below and inset: The finely-cut chequering is exquisite, and gives the thin 280 a fantastic charm





Right and inset: The 280 does feature fibre-optic rear- and fore-sights, with the rear micro-adjustable

Bottom: It's how a break-barrel should look and feel when you're taking her for a roll in the grass!



left-hookers, and the gloss-lacquered finish that Diana has applied really brings out the wood's grain pattern. It's a deluxe stock in all but material – being beech – and if Diana were to produce one in walnut, I'm sure many airgunners would splash out the extra. (I would.)

The Diana's vital statistics are perfect. The trigger's length of pull, forend dimensions, cheek height and balance point are all spot-on for perfect gun fit – and it's obvious that the action's performance has been shaped to match. The two-stage trigger is fully adjustable for let-off weight and first stage travel via independent screws – though I'd have liked the

serrated blade to curve a little more; it's just a tad too straight for the 280's sporter-like handling.

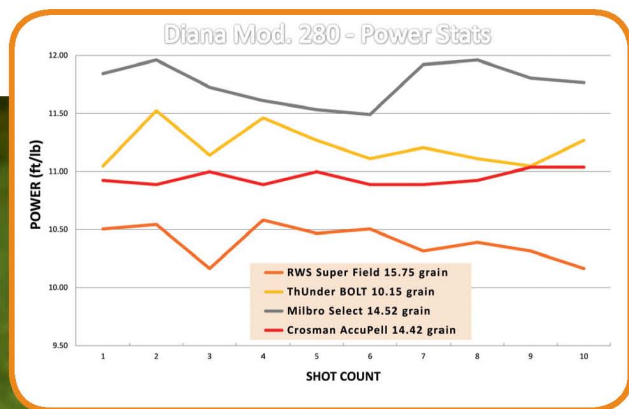
I was also a little saddened to see the shapely forend being somewhat ruined by a long cocking slot underneath – the Germans were past-masters at articulating cocking linkages and it's a shame Diana hasn't incorporated such a design into the Mod. 280's action.

As for cocking, I found it so easy that I was convinced the rifle was doing sub-10 ft/lb – but, as you can see from the power graph to the left, my .22 calibre test Diana was healthily on the legal limit with all but the heaviest of pellets. Straight from the tin, shot-to-shot variation was good, although AccuPell were the most consistent.

You might be surprised with the Milbro Select's high-power performance – but they, like the gun itself, are somewhat of a hidden treasure. Since Milbro has relocated to the east of England, it's introduced a lot more checks and other quality-enhancements to the manufacturing process, and I've found the latest batches pretty impressive in a range of barrels.

At 25 yards, each brand I tested recorded sub-inch groups, and at 35 yards all were within an inch-and-a-half – Super Field and U-Bolt printed the tightest. (For U-Bolt, the Diana's barrel had to be scrubbed completely clean.) The 280's barrel is a German Walther, and choked for the last 20mm – so it'll shoot most brands with impressive accuracy.

As with any break-barrel springer, accuracy is very much attributable to the quality of the breech lock-up – and even though myself and the test team has put well over 2,000 rounds through the Mod. 280, everything in this area still feels very tight.





Above: The Diana's 120mm ramp sports two arrestor holes

Above left: The breech face features a tight rubber O-ring, and seats pellets well



Above right: The safety, positioned at the back end of the cylinder, can be pulled on at any point

The barrel pivots around a bolt, rather than a pin (so can be tightened to counteract any wear) and the ball-catch closure is well engineered and showed no sign of sloppiness even after months of testing. I'll be the first to admit that this was a bit of a weak link in rifles of the past, like the FWB Sport. My 27-year-old example is a bit prone to stringing its shots nowadays because of a worn ball-catch – but given it's shot over 100,000 rounds (it was used by a professional pest controller for 10 years!), I don't think I'd be worrying about it any time soon on the Diana.

As for the barrel's breech face, Diana has angled this for a good closure, with an O-ring let into the block side to maintain an airtight seal. There's a deep chamfer on the lead-in, which makes for good pellet seating, and, providing you thumb home the pellet properly, you won't shave off the back of the pellet's skirt when you return the barrel.

I did most of my testing with a scope, opting for a fairly compact Hawke 2-7x32 AirMax to maintain the rifle's slender look. This I married to the rifle's 120mm-long, raised scope ramp with a Sportsmatch one-piece mount – and I didn't need to use either of the two arrestor holes to keep things locked down. Though it's relatively lightweight and, therefore, a bit jumpy at the shot, the scope's minimal mass was too low to creep during recoil.

One of the many things sure to appeal about the Mod. 280 is the fact it comes with fully-adjustable open sights – fibre-optic Tru-Glo ones at that. The foresight's red, and the skeletonised protective tunnel maximises light transmission. This you line up in the rear's U-notch, which is flanked by two green dots – and whether you're an experienced opens user or a rookie, it makes for a very clear sight picture and one that's fast to acquire in even the duller of shooting conditions. Adjustment of the all-metal rearsight – for both elevation and windage – is via thumbscrews, so you don't have to worry about finding a coin or screwdriver to undertake it in the field.

Hunters will be pleased to hear the safety catch at the end of the cylinder – which automatically engages when the rifle's cocked – can be pulled back to 'on' at any time, and because there's no anti-beartrap device fitted, the rifle can ultimately be de-cocked in the usual way should you decide to rest the mainspring.

To say I'm impressed with the Diana is quite an understatement, and I'm at a loss as to why RUAG aren't making more of a big thing about it. It's a real hidden treasure. Accurate, powerful, beautifully styled and with a high class finish to both wood and metal – plus it comes bearing the famous huntress logo that's long been a hallmark of the quality associated with the Diana brand. And all this for just £210? You've got to be kidding me... ●

Right: A true huntress – the 280 follows well in the footsteps of the forest goddess the company lends its name from



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Manufacturer: Diana (Mayer & Grammelspacher GmbH)

Model: Mod. 280

Country of origin: Germany

Type: Spring and piston

Uses: General/Hunting/HFT

Cocking: Break-barrel (with de-cock facility)

Calibre: .177 (4.5mm) and .22 (5.5mm) (tested)

Overall length: 1,082mm

Barrel length: 435mm

Weight: 3.4kg (unscoped)

Stock: Beech, sporter (with gloss finish)

Trigger: Two-stage, adjustable

Safety: Automatic, resettable

Power: 11+ ft/lbs

Price: £210

Options: Mod. 280 Pro, with bead-blasted anti-reflective finish and muzzle weight in lieu of open sights – £300.

Contact: RUAG, 01579 362319, www.ruag.co.uk

Left: The barrel breaks around a bolt that can be nipped up to alleviate wear