

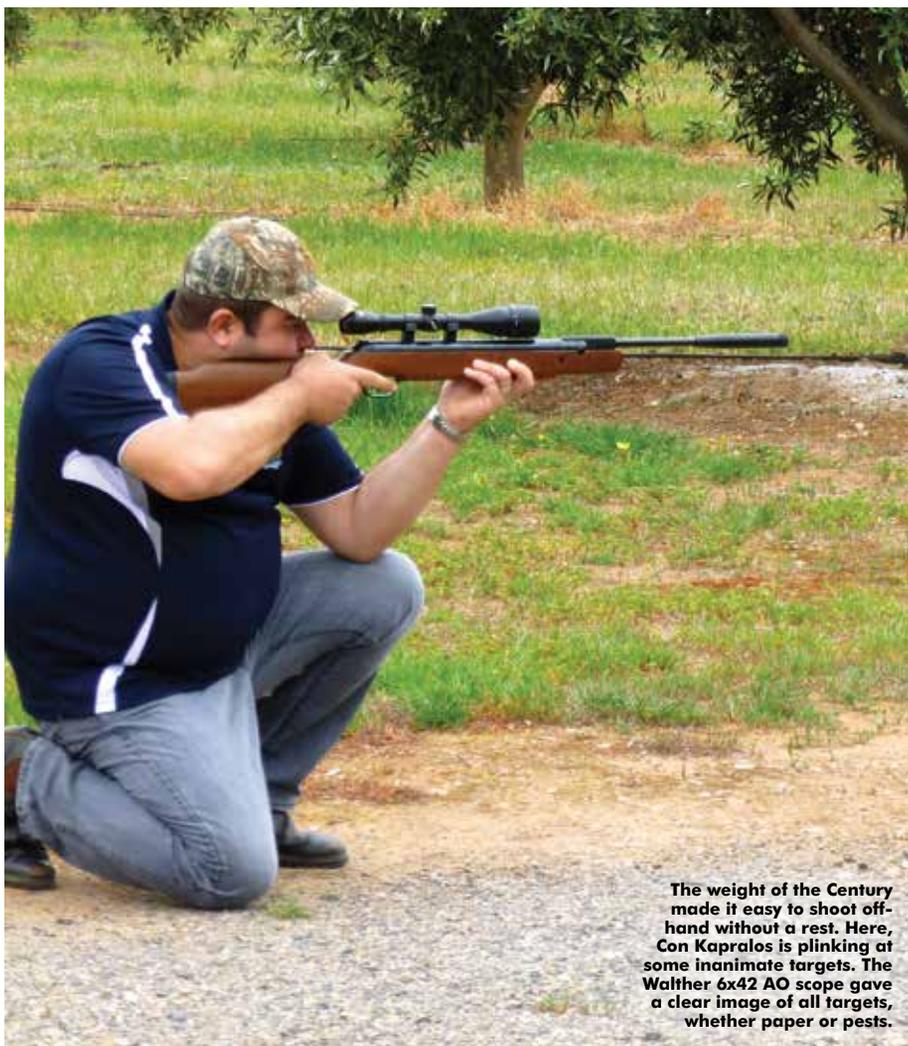
The Walther Century

- a strongman of spring-powered air rifles

by Con Kapralos



The new Walther Century is a high-quality, full-sized, break-open, spring-operated air rifle available in .177 (24 Joule) and .22 (16 Joule) calibres. It comes fitted with a quality Walther 6x42 AO scope and rings.



The weight of the Century made it easy to shoot off-hand without a rest. Here, Con Kapralos is plinking at some inanimate targets. The Walther 6x42 AO scope gave a clear image of all targets, whether paper or pests.

I was left scratching my head after being informed by Bernard Papps, of Australian Walther distributor Frontier Arms, that he would be sending me a new model Walther air rifle to review. It meant I would have to cast my mind back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when my cousin had an old BSA Meteor .177-calibre air rifle and we put thousands of pellets through it shooting feral pigeons on the derelict railyard sheds that dominated the tourist mecca of Victor Harbor in South Australia. Back all those years ago, Victor Harbor resembled a Wild West frontier town, with rough pubs and even rougher locals, who made a hard living from the Southern Ocean.

I would be being generous to say that the old Meteor could punch a hole in a drink can at 20 paces, because I swear that some of the pellets would bounce off. I am not bagging the BSA, because it was a fine air rifle when it was new and when used within range, it cleanly took those pigeons. However, the amount of use it had in our hands taught us a thing or two about hunting and how to look after our firearms.

Carl Walther, based in the German city of Ulm (like fellow compatriot Krieghoff) is a pioneer in the manufacture of quality sporting and competition rifles, pistols and air arms. The firm's lineage goes way back to 1886 and its current domicile in the gunmaking centre of Ulm will ensure that it can prosper for another 120-plus years.

In 1993, Carl Walther joined what is now the PW Group and in 2006, the firm opened

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The action of the rifle in its open state. Some effort is required to cock the action, as is the case with all quality, break-open, spring-powered air rifles.



The barrel weight helps to give the rifle a better balance and feel, as well as a more positive grip area where the user's hand is placed when cocking the action.



The chamber block at the breech end of the barrel mates up with the end of the piston chamber. The rifle's calibre and serial number are located on this block. The larger screw is the pivot point, which the barrel hinges on. The wedge lock release lever is clearly shown on the front of the stock.

a state-of-the-art research and production facility occupying more than 12,000 square metres, complete with a company museum, which illustrates and documents the history of the famous German name. However, with modern manufacturing processes in place, visions of tomorrow are quickly becoming reality. From firearms for sporting applications to law enforcement and the military, Walther will continue to excel in producing arms for its clientele market.

Upon receiving the new Walther Century model for review, something seemed immediately different. Even just handling the cardboard carton it was packed in, the reasonable heft signalled that the enclosed air rifle was one serious bit of kit. Opening the carton, the Century came into full view and it instantly impressed. The Century is in industry parlance what is termed a 'break-barrel, spring-operated air rifle'. The test rifle on review was the .177-calibre (4.5mm), 24 Joule model complete with a full-sized beech stock. It is capable of propelling the .177 pellet at a velocity of around 985fps. The rifle also comes in a .22-calibre (5.5mm), 16 Joule model, with a

mean pellet velocity of 575fps.

Looking at the Century in more detail, the rifle's considerable weight of 4.7kg (with the Walther 6x42 adjustable objective scope fitted) is attributed mainly to the metalwork. This consists of the barrel assembly, receiver/piston assembly and the wedge locking system, which ensures a snug barrel fit for positive form-fit and force-fit, which ultimately results in consistent precision. The rifle is not equipped with open sights, so the provision of the quality, purpose-built Walther air rifle scope and matching High Power air rifle rings is a nice touch - and clever selling point at that.

The barrel of the Century is 405mm in length and what is noticeable is the barrel weight attached to the muzzle end. The weight is fabricated from aluminium and measures 65mm long, tapering from 20mm in diameter at the breech and up to 25mm at the muzzle end. The barrel weight is additionally threaded for use with a sound moderator where permissible. The role of the barrel weight is naturally to bring some balance to the front portion of the rifle, but also serves as a holding point when cocking

the rifle, giving the barrel some additional support in the area where the hand would be positioned when cocking.

Cocking the Century is a simple affair. It does take some strength (naturally, as you are compressing a quality, hardened spring), but the mode of breaking the action open and locking it back up is taken care of by a wedge lock. A small lever protrudes from the front portion of the stock and this is pressed upwards to release the wedge that holds the barrel and receiver in perfect alignment. On working the barrel in a downward arc, this compresses the internal spring and moves the 30mm piston to the rear of the cylinder.

Bringing the barrel back up, towards the horizontal, the wedge lock then acts again to ensure positive lockup - what Walther terms 'form-fit and force-fit barrel lock'. Ensuring that the barrel bore and the piston/cylinder arrangement (inside the receiver) line up in a completely linear manner is imperative for consistent precision. Each pellet is loaded by hand in a single manner into the loading port once the barrel is opened and the action cocked.

The trigger and safety mechanism on the Century is another bit of Walther know-how that comes from years of air rifle design and manufacture. The Century is fitted with the XM trigger, which is fully adjustable for first stage travel and trigger pull weight. I found the setting of the trigger quite acceptable from the factory and no further adjustment



The grip is nice and open for a comfortable hold. The panel of chequering and the 'WALTHER' name at the bottom is a nice touch.



The loading port for the .177-calibre pellets. The O-ring is of high-quality rubber and positively seals the chamber against the piston assembly. It ensures all the compressed air in the piston travels up through the barrel propelling the pellet and is not lost elsewhere along the line.

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was required.

The safety mechanism was automatic, in that breaking the barrel to cock the rifle would engage the safety, acting directly on the trigger mechanism itself. The safety was located on the rear portion of the receiver tang (compression chamber) and was fashioned like a sliding cam, in easy reach of the user's thumb and easily operated in this manner when ready to shoot. It was smooth to operate, with no hint of binding or hold-up. The top of the receiver contained milled-in dovetails 75mm in length to which the Walther 6x42 AO air rifle scope in High Power rings was attached. This set-up employed by Walther earns top marks in my book. The scope worked well and not even once did it crawl along the dovetail. The High Power ring mounts clamped solidly to the dovetail, with the two screws per base ensuring it stayed put.

The stock on the Century was of full adult size and profiled from beech. It was perfectly functional, with a slight Monte Carlo cheekpiece, which assisted greatly in lining up the shooter's eye with the scope. The fore-end contained no chequering of any description, but the pistol grip contained two panels of machine cut chequering, which were neat and tidy, with the 'WALTHER' name also etched into the beech at the bottom of each panel. This small detail is just another little thing which sets the rifle apart.

The rear of the stock had a ventilated rubber recoil pad, which assists in keeping the rifle on the shoulder more securely, but would not play much of a part in reducing recoil, as the gun's weight would soak up most of it. The stock gave a length of pull of 370mm, which would suit the majority of users just fine.



The safety tab on the receiver tang of the Walther Century. The safety was automatic, being engaged each time the rifle was cocked. Sliding the tab forward to 'F' meant the rifle was ready to fire.

On the range and in the field

The Walther Century came with the scope fully fitted, but I checked all the scope ring screws thoroughly with my torque wrench and gave the barrel a good clean to remove any factory preservatives. For testing, I decided a maximum distance of 50m would be ideal, so setting up an ad-hoc range at my brother's olive grove was arranged. I had a selection of pointed .177 pellets in my brother's shed, but I also decided to splurge and buy some quality RWS Meisterkugeln .177 match pellets.

I got the pellets hitting the bullseye at 10m and then took the targets out to 30m, which would be the most applicable range that the .177 pellet would be employed to down pest species. After adjusting the point of impact to be dead-on at this range, several targets were shot with five-shot groups, with all producing pleasing results. As expected, the RWS pellets gave the best groups, but the old Winchester pellets, once cleaned of their cobwebs, performed well too. I then took two targets out to 50m and shot another string of three-shot groups using the RWS pellets. Any larger target such as a rabbit or feral pigeon would be in serious trouble at this range.

I wanted to test the penetrating power of the 24 Joule Century at 50m, so I filled two plastic bottles with soil and placed them on the range. Thinking that I was shooting a centrefire, I was waiting for the bottles to explode, but this didn't eventuate. However, walking up to examine the bottles, I saw that the pellets had cleanly passed through both sides and the soil inside. A punchy air rifle? You had better believe it! I was impressed, to say the least.

While I was range-testing the Century, I noticed a few feral pigeons whizzing



The fitted recoil pad was more of a help in keeping the Century's stock in position in the shoulder pocket, rather than reducing recoil.

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about the property. The neighbour had recently demolished an old outhouse, which contained a few dozen 'flying rats', and had welcomed me to shoot any that perched on top of my brother's shed. Positioning myself around 20 paces from the rooftop, 10 shots resulted in 10 fewer pigeons before the others gained an inkling something was not right and vanished. All pigeons were cleanly killed on the shot.

I would have liked to test the Century out on some bunnies, but they did not fancy sitting still long enough for a shot to



be taken. However, in areas of high rabbit densities, I think the Century would be a great ally in thinning out the pests, without the loud report of a rimfire rifle or shotgun.

The Walther Century is one of the new breed of spring-powered, break-barrel air rifles. Walther has termed the Century the 'strongman' of this particular air rifle design and rightly so. It is a full-sized air rifle suited to informal plinking at inanimate targets, as well as sniping at pest species up to 50m with well-placed shots. The supplied Walther 6x42 scope and High Power scope rings make this very achievable. It is a quality air rifle package and one that would take pride of place in any gun safe. Its Germanic pedigree from a company that knows a thing or two about designing fine firearms will win many fans in Australia.

The Walther Century air rifle retails for \$650, in both the .177 and .22 calibres. For more information, see your firearms retailer or visit www.frontierarms.com.au ●

The RWS Meisterkugeln match pellets shot well through the Walther Century. These two three-shot groups at 50m indicate what the rifle is capable of. All .177 pellets tested at 30m gave five-shot groups within a 25mm (1") circle.

Specifications

Manufacturer: Carl Walther, Germany

Model: Century

Action: Break-barrel, spring-powered air rifle

Calibre: .177: 24 Joule (tested), .22: 16 Joule

Barrel: 405mm, 1/2" UNF thread on end to accommodate muzzle brake (where permitted) with aluminium barrel weight fitted

Overall Length: 1095mm

Weight: 4.2kg with Walther 6x42 AO scope fitted

Stock: Beech

Trigger: Adjustable match trigger (first stage travel and trigger pull)

Safety: Automatic, two position

Sights: Walther 6x42 adjustable objective scope in High Power rings supplied

Distributor: Frontier Arms

RRP: \$650