

Stock styling mixes traditional and modern features to achieve good looks and handling. More pistol grip than thumbhole, the grip is the dominant feature of the stock profile



Walther's Multipurpose LGU Varmint

Accuracy, Power and Simplicity

Walther's LG series air rifles have a competitive pedigree; this lineage goes back to the 1964 when Walther introduced a barrel locking system with the LGU so their break-barrel target rifles would be more competitive against fixed barrel spring-piston guns.

A major refinement upgrade of the spring-piston power plant occurred in 2012, a fixed barrel underlever design was later introduced as the LGU and now we have the LGU Varmint.

Australian Distributor, Frontier Arms supplied the Walther LGU Varmint.

It has a futuristic neither thumbhole nor full pistol grip style stock, cleverly avoiding the 'highly dangerous' military pistol grip categorization. Moulded synthetic stocks are practical rather than pretty, but the rifle also displays tradition and aesthetics with the nicely polished and blued metal parts. Available in .177 and .22 calibres, the review rifle has the hunter friendly .22 bore.

The LGU is a large and weighty rifle as powerful spring-piston rifles need to be, its length is 108cm and weighs 4.26kg without scope. It will suit left or right-handed shooters with the loading somewhat favouring the right handed.

The LGU Varmint is a serious air rifle for the full adult size shooter interested in hunting small game, eliminating furred or feathered pests, target practise or casual air rifle competition right up to Field Target. There are no open sights, so plinking is out, and

the necessary scope should be selected after thorough consideration of the uses the rifle will be put to.

The diversity of uses that a quality air rifle and scope combination can perform well, is governed to a large extent by the versatility of the scope. A quality variable magnification air gun scope will probably exceed the cost of the rifle but it will also allow it to perform at its full potential in a variety of uses.

Spring-piston power plants have been the mainstay of air pellet propulsion for a long time and will continue to be used in the future. Spring-piston guns are generally trouble free, they have a cost advantage and the external power source lies with the physical capacity of the shooter. It does not have the extra complication of ensuring a supply of pre-compressed gas.

These advantages over a Pre Compressed Pneumatic (PCP) rifle are compelling in their simplicity and convenience for a multipurpose air rifle. Walther uses the traditional steel spring in the LGU rather than the captive gas version. Walther's LG series steel spring-piston operation is considered the smoothest in the industry thanks to the 2012 upgrade to eliminate heavy metal to

metal contact and the associated clearance required which are responsible for much of the noise and vibration in the loading and more importantly in the firing process of many spring piston guns.

Other refinements include a free to rotate piston and spring relationship and a pneumatic buffer to limit the piston strike at the end of its travel. The practical effects are very subdued sounds and a smooth, almost vibration free, firing cycle.

Scope mounting is via 11mm dovetail grooves milled into the air chamber housing and blind holes to lock the mount against sliding due to recoil.

The standard trigger from the LGV/LGU series is fitted to the LGU Varmint. It is a two-stage trigger adjustable for length of first stage travel and release weight. Accurate shooting with a two-stage trigger requires more training and concentration from the shooter as there is more blade movement and first stage weight needs to be maintained before the second stage pressure is applied for release. Adjusting this trigger to achieve the shooters preferred release is also a complex operation because altering either adjustment will have some influence on the other.



A relatively free hold to produce a consistent recoil is vital for accuracy in a spring-piston air gun.

While trigger adjustment can turn into an extended exercise, the upside is that it involves a lot of shooting, the trigger gets the necessary wearing in and the shooter learns the affects the numerous adjustment combinations.

Perseverance is likely to lead to an ideal setting for the shooter and a lot of enjoyable and accurate shooting. There are obviously two-stage triggers that are better than others, but in many cases, these triggers seem to be unjustly criticised simply because of they are poorly adjusted not because they lack the potential to suit the shooter.

After a short adjustment session this LGU trigger settled into long and very light (free-play like) stage one, followed by a very short (almost crisp) second stage releasing at a consistent 750g. The author found this setting to be a good compromise for hunting and offhand or rested target practise.

Fixed barrel air rifles have the accuracy advantage of a consistent relationship between the barrel and the air chamber that supports the scope or a long sight radius metal sight.

For the serious air rifle competitor, the fixed barrel allows for any length scope including a sun shade to be used.

Barrel length is also free of leverage considerations and can be made to best suit accuracy and balance. The 16mm diameter barrel is 300mm long but it is made to look longer (400mm) by the addition of a barrel extension that over reaches the cocking lever to support it and for aesthetics. A substantial steel barrel block fixes the barrel and the air chamber.

A spring loaded detent ball mechanism is screw attached to the polymer barrel extension to locate and hold the cocking lever when not in use. 'O' rings near the end of the lever give the shooter sufficient grip to release the lever from the detent and are also helpful in the cocking process. The alloy steel micro groove barrel, barrel block, air chamber and cocking lever are polished and richly blued while the barrel extension has a gloss black finish.

An automatic trigger safety can be a polarising feature on a firearm but in the case of spring-powered air rifles where the shoot-

ers fingers are in a potentially dangerous position during the loading of the pellet, they are fully justified. Safety is automatically applied as the piston is fully pushed back and the rifle is cocked. For shooters not used to this feature it can be annoying to line up a great sight picture and find that the trigger will not cooperate.

Fortunately it does not take long to make the 'safety off' a part of the shooting routine. The convenient location of the sliding safety is helpful in this respect, it is directly above the thumb of left or right handed shooters.

An injection moulded polymer stock is the main difference distinguishing the LGU Varmint from the timber stocked Master model. The colour and finish are low sheen black with generous areas of effective textured surface on the fore end and pistol grip to offer a firm hold in any shooting position. The left or right hand comb-cheek piece combination has a moderate Germanic hog-back curve and its height requires high scope mounts for comfortable use.

The overall style of the stock follows the curvy trend currently common for upmarket air rifles with a bottom-braced pistol grip added. The style is distinctive and very effective from a handling perspective. Trigger pull is a longish 37cm, which then combines with the pointy ends of the recoil pad to catch on the clothing of shorter than average height users.

Other than the impractical pointy ends, the recoil pad is soft and tacky and helps to prevent the rifle from slipping when cocking or at the shoulder. The main action holding screws are in the fore end with star washers to lock them. It is a good policy to check their tightness periodically, even on well-made smooth firing rifles such as the Walther.

Accuracy is the main feature a buyer is likely to look for in the LGU Varmint following the decision to go for spring-piston simplicity and pricing. The Varmint shot well with the usually reliable 13.4gn H&N Match pellets producing 15 to 18mm groups in the outdoor breeze at 25m.



This is a high level of accuracy and may improve with a more suitable pellet. It certainly has the accuracy for outdoor target competition and target practise. For hunting, an air rifle needs both accuracy and power and to calculate the rifle's power we needed the muzzle velocity of the 13.4gn H&N Match pellets.

The chronograph showed an average velocity of 721fps, which resulted in a muzzle energy of 21 joule or 15.5ft.lb. A commonly used minimum energy level for humane air rifle hunting is 12 ft.lb or 16 joule, the LGU Varmint comfortably exceeds this power requirement and therefore together with its fine accuracy it easily fulfils the basic requirements as a hunting and multipurpose air rifle. Small discrepancies in power values for an air gun should not concern the shooter. They occur because power is not measured at the source, the spring in this case, but as the kinetic energy of the pellet in flight.

This method allows variables such as bore size and pellet weight to affect the conversion of spring force to pellet velocity resulting in noticeable power variations. In general, larger bores and lighter pellets tend to result in higher power figures.

Loading an underlever is more complex and slower than that for a break-barrel air gun. It is one of two major 'trade off' features, the other is extra weight, for gaining the fixed barrel benefits. Loading quickly becomes a smooth routine and the magnitude of effort required is similar to barrel cocking. For a young shooter the LGU is made easier to cock because the cocking process can be broken down into four separate stages, with a rest in between if needed. Walther calls the loading gate or 'bear trap' safety system the 'piston safety'. It has three ratchet style clicks or potential stops along the compression arc plus the short final stage of setting the trigger. An adult user will simply swing the underlever until the trigger-setting click is heard.

The primary purpose of the ratchet stops and piston safety is to prevent injury to loading fingers should the trigger operated spring



ABOVE: Cocking action is similar to break-barrel but loading is more complex.

FAR LEFT: Lever locking has no mechanism to counter the side thrust tendency of the detent operation.



LEFT: Underlever adds weight but ensures consistent barrel-scope alignment.



BELOW: Two of the piston safety stops are visible on the closed compression tube in front of the safety release toggle.

and piston retaining mechanism fail. The piston safety toggle has to be continuously held down to allow the piston to move past each stop as the cocking lever is closed after loading the pellet; this setup ensures that one hand is closing the lever and the other is pressing the toggle as the loading port is closed thus removing any chance of trapped fingers. This system also enables a safe de-cocking and unloading process as explained in the manual.

Frontier Arms offers a good quality Walther 6x42mm genuine air rifle scope with parallax adjustment and lockable mounts as an optional extra with the rifle. This general-purpose scope will suit hunting and target practise quite well. However if the buyer is looking to outdoor target competition, a more specialised scope may be needed.

The actual shooting was a pleasant experience thanks to Walther's vibration and noise reduced shooting cycle that not only aids shooting comfort, it also improves accuracy. The automatic safety caught us out a few times, as target shooters are not used to safeties but that is just a familiarity issue.

Another small issue was the tendency and ability of the detent lock of the underlever to push the lever sideways instead of locking as intended if the alignment of the closing motion was a little careless. All up, the LGU is a likeable and user-friendly rifle.

Handling is a strong point for the LGU Varmint. It is well suited to offhand and partially rested field positions with the pistol grip offering good control over rifle cant and trigger release. The fore end also promotes good handling with its hand filling beaver-tail bulge and Hi-Grip surface.

The rifle also handled and shot well off sandbag rests providing the golden rule of 'a gentle grip for springers' was applied. The high comb of the stock is best suited to high scope mounts and this will promote the relaxed head up shooting style preferred by many offhand competition shooters. The point of balance is close to the front grip making the rifle front heavy, a preference for

deliberate or accurate offhand and rested position shooters. Butt length fit favours long limbed shooters, average and shorter will want a thinner and rounded end recoil pad for good handling in all field positions.

Walther's LGU Varmint is an accuracy and target biased multi-purpose air rifle. Its heritage of target competition and proven accuracy fits well with its name that implies precision hunting.

The Varmint's potential for hunting is supported by its 21 joule power and good handling. If we add the trouble free, always ready nature of a spring-piston power plant and Walther's smooth and pleasant shooting characteristics and durability, we have a versatile and desirable air rifle. At a price around \$800 it offers sound value and with the optional scope package for \$150 the shooter is fully set up with a quality multi-purpose air rifle.

For more information on Walther products, contact the Australian distributor – Frontier Arms Company as www.frontierarms.com.au. 

SPECS

WALTHER LGU VARMINT

Manufacturer: Walther, Germany

Calibre: .22 (also .177)

Length: 108cm

Weight: 4.27kg

Barrel: 300mm, microgroove

Stock: Synthetic

Trigger: Two stage adjustable

Muzzle energy: 21.7J (16ft.lb)

Cocking effort: 16.8kg

Price: RRP \$800