



Pre Compressed Pneumatic (PCP) rifles with multi shot capacity have been around for a long time. Probably the earliest and best known is the Girandoni repeating air rifle from Austria, which was developed in the late 1760's and quickly adopted by the Austrian army.

The new Walther Rotex RM8 livening up the local sporting PCP market



A couple of centuries later the competitiveness of civilian target shooting revived the popularity of PCP air rifles taking advantage of their inherent accuracy due to negligible recoil and vibration and all but displacing piston powered target air rifles. This century we have seen the emergence of the practical and popularly accepted multi-shot PCP sporting rifle become a viable alternative to piston-powered sporting airguns.

The size of the indispensable air reservoir, that defines these sporting rifles, has over the decades ranged from insufficient, creating logistic problems, to too big which created handling problems. Positioning has also varied from under barrel to the buttstock, sometimes seriously compromising the aesthetic appeal and handling of the rifle. In recent years, radical development has given way to gradual refinement and a balanced design that gives similar weighting to reservoir capacity, handling and aesthetics has emerged. A good indicator of the maturity of current sporting PCP design is the similarity in appearance and features among the top brands.

Walther's Rotex RM8 is a fine example of a current high quality PCP sporting rifle. It gets the balance right between the shot capacity of the reservoir and its interference with the looks and handling of the rifle plus it offers a bolt-action repeating feature. A Rotex RM8 in .177 calibre fitted with a Walther scope duly arrived for a GUNS Australia review from Australian distributor Frontier Arms. As the 'hunting and leisure' tag from the distributor implies, the Rotex is a multipurpose rifle but one with a high pedigree. Walther has been one of the leaders in firearm development and manufacture for over a hundred years. Thus when Walther

brings out a new sporting PCP, after 15 years of the target oriented Dominator series, most air gunners will want to have a look.

Walther's Rotex RM8 is quick to attract the shooter's eye. First to be noticed, are the exaggerated features of the walnut stained timber stock that give the viewer a strong impression of purpose. A stubby 200ml air reservoir blends effectively into the outline of the hand filling fore end, and a shortish barrel completes the picture of a deep bodied, feature filled compact rifle. It weighs 3.61kg without scope and is 104cm long.

Hunting and pest destruction followed by informal target shooting and shooting practise are likely to be the main uses of the Rotex RM8. Excellent Accuracy and handling may encourage some owners to try the new Air Rifle Field Target competition that is taking off in Australia. The multi-purpose Rotex would be very competitive in its class or even in an open class match.

The repeating feature is based on an eight shot, rotating magazine and operated by a push-pull bolt with a typical turn to lock mechanism. Fully retracting the bolt cocks the trigger and allows the removal of the magazine after its retaining axle is pulled back via the magazine release slide. The magazine is directional, the driving ratchet is to the rear and the indexing dimples are at the front, so pellets must be loaded accordingly.

A substantial aluminium alloy block forms the receiver and houses the repeating mechanism, the trigger and the pressurized air metering controls. A standard 11mm dovetail forms the top of the receiver for scope mounting. A plastic shroud appears to extend the receiver forward, its purpose is to neatly cover the voids and mechanicals connecting the reservoir to the receiver. The trigger blade and the push-pull safety rod are also made of



plastic, a collective name for a large group of materials with wide ranging properties, some of which the designers obviously found to be the most appropriate for these components.

As the striker is cocked, the automatic safety moves to the rear and locks the trigger. The safety needs to be pushed forward before the rifle can fire. The push to fire safety is conveniently located above the thumb position. It has a small separate safety lever in the centre that needs to be pressed before the main safety can be moved to the 'fire' position. The extra safety is there to prevent an accidental bump from disengaging the trigger safety. Manual operation of the safety is also possible to allow for resetting the safety if a shot is not taken.

A two-stage trigger is fitted on the Rotex and it is adjustable for the length of travel. Adjusting travel affects the travel of both stages and the nature of the release that varies from a smooth no felt release to a felt release point. Most importantly, the trigger is easy to adjust to an agreeable release for the user and generally releases at 1.25kg force, a good compromise release for a sporting trigger that may at times, be used by a gloved finger.

As might be expected, the Rotex has a Lothar Walther barrel that is 500mm long, 15mm in diameter, has micro-groove rifling and a 1/2" UNF thread for barrel attachments. A substantial aluminium barrel weight is fitted with a matching diameter screw off cap to protect the barrel thread and muzzle. The 25mm diameter weight looks appropriate on this short stout rifle. The polished steel barrel is protected from rust by a blue-black finish, it blends well with the black anodised barrel weight. The steel reservoir is painted matt black to match the matt anodizing on the receiver and trigger guard.

The eight shot rotary magazine is rated to take pellets up to 9mm long, however it is 10mm wide and because the entire magazine rotates, it may handle close to 10mm pellets. For the record, the 10.7gn Kodiak Extra Heavy pellets are 7.15mm, and the polymer tipped Predator pellets are 8.8mm long. The magazine looks well built with a one-piece aluminium main body, a neoprene ring to hold pellets gently in place and a harder met-

al insert for the indexing ratchet to prevent premature wear. Spare magazines are available from Frontier Arms for about \$45.

The 200ml capacity steel reservoir of the Rotex is described as 'non-removable' in the handbook. It can be filled via the filling port under the fore end to a maximum pressure of 232 bar. A pressure gauge graduated in bar (100kPa) units is conveniently located adjacent to the filling port. A filler connection is supplied with the rifle but a filling tube with connectors and a pressure relief screw as well as a dive bottle or an appropriate pump will be needed to refill the reservoir.

European Beech timber is used for the Rotex stock supplied by the Italian firm Minelli. The stock shape is ambidextrous, however the bolt action remains right handed. It has a strongly featured, almost a sculpted look, achieved by the tasteful removal of timber where it is not needed for any shooting position. It gives the rifle a purposeful and distinctive look.

The lack of any real recoil allowed the designer to put plenty of vertical depth into the

butt to favour a natural upright shooting stance without the risk of recoil-induced torque, which tends to flip the barrel upward. The high comb/cheek piece gives good support and shows the Germanic heritage of the rifle via the subtle 'hogback' curve.

A steeply curved pistol grip is used on the Rotex to assist 'offhand style' shooting. It has a good relationship to the trigger, gives a good grip thanks to the laser cut checkering and offers an optional upright thumb groove that places the thumb ideally for instant safety off

butt to favour a natural upright shooting stance without the risk of recoil-induced torque, which tends to flip the barrel upward. The high comb/cheek piece gives good support and shows the Germanic heritage of the rifle via the subtle 'hogback' curve.

A steeply curved pistol grip is used on the Rotex to assist 'offhand style' shooting. It has a good relationship to the trigger, gives a good grip thanks to the laser cut checkering and offers an optional upright thumb groove that places the thumb ideally for instant safety off



MAIN: The idea to merge the reservoir into the stock profile and a scope only option helped to produce a deep, wide, excellent fitting and handling stock.

TOP: Fill port and gauge are well positioned and do not interfere with handling.

ABOVE: The filler probe is supplied with the rifle but the filler hose and fittings are an optional extra unit.

The Rotex RM8 is a typical modern PCP sporter.

SPECS

WALTHER ROTEX RM8

Manufacturer:
Carl Walther GmbH

Model:
Rotex RM8

Calibre: .177

Length: 1040mm

Weight: 3.61kg

Power: PCP

Action: Bolt repeater

Magazine: Eight shot rotary

Barrel: 500mm Microgroove

Trigger: Two stage

Stock: Beech

Price: Around \$995

operation. A relatively short, wide and generously checkered fore end offers a very stable grip. Shooters who prefer to pull the stock into the shoulder via a long fore end hold, can use the reservoir whose textured finish gives a satisfactory grip.

There are no sling swivel bases but a nice recoil pad is fitted to prevent it sliding around on the shoulder or when stood in a leaning position. Trigger pull is a longish 368mm, fine for a long limbed person and alternatively easily shortened via a thinner butt plate.

Overall, it is a very effective and classy looking stock. The oversized trigger guard and the large plastic trigger blade may detract from the aesthetics, but they will be highly appreciated in colder regions where gloves can be a necessity. Stock finish includes a walnut stain and a low gloss outer protective layer.

Walther's Rotex showed its great accuracy potential at the first opportunity. The weather was not great, but the rain kept away and more importantly, the wind was down to a whisper. Two shooting friends were present and the author was happy to hand over the shooting task in exchange for comments on the rifle.

Greg zeroed the scope close to centre at 25m and his first three shot group was a neat clover leaf. The lull in the breeze did not last and the following groups opened up to 12 to 13mm size. This is excellent outdoor accuracy, it seems the Rotex can shoot as well as the shooter can hold and judge the wind and trajectory. The pellets used were the relatively heavy 9.57gn K&N Barracuda Hunter

Extreme, chosen following a recommendation, and the accuracy shown by the Barracudas avoided the need to try other pellets to check rifle accuracy.

Velocity and power (pellet energy) are both high priorities in sporting air rifles. Increasing velocity flattens the trajectory, making targets at unknown distances easier to hit and sufficient power is vital for humane hunting. In the closed system of air rifle ballistics, power and velocity are inversely proportional because velocity can only be increased by using a lighter pellet, which will produce lower power.

Chronographing and power calculations of two different pellets from the Rotex shows this. The heavy 9.57gn Barracudas averaged 810fps and produced 15.5ft.lb or 21.0 joule, the mid weight Gamo Match pellets at 7.56gn averaged 866fps producing 12.7ft.lb or 17.2 joule of energy. Velocity was measured 1.5m from the muzzle so these figures are lower than formal power data.

In practical terms the Rotex has plenty of power for hunting with heavier pellets and should reach well over 900fps with lighter pellets.

Handling of the Rotex was also impressive, the rifle felt good in any shooting position and other experienced shooters who used the rifle only had positive comments. The large area of checkering on the wide rounded fore end assisted with a good hold almost anywhere the front hand landed. Operating the bolt for a repeat shot was easiest when the rifle is left at the shoulder because the bolt needs a firm pull toward the end of its rearward movement to cock the action and this is easiest to achieve when the butt is held against something. The tacky recoil pad helps during this operation by holding firm at the shoulder while the stock is held only by the front hand.

Mechanically the rifle performed well overall but one problem did surface. The magazine rotation developed some stickiness during the shooting, possibly due to newness or lack of wearing in. The forward stroke of the bolt activates a mechanism to rotate the magazine but any resistance to magazine rotation appears to be multiplied by the mechanism and the bolt stops instead of rotating the magazine.

Excessive force may complete the loading process

but it is better if the magazine is given some gentle rotational assistance, which then allows loading to proceed smoothly. Pushing the pellets fully forward in the magazine is a big help and gave almost trouble free loading. Pushing lubed pellets fully forward with a pencil, (during the loading of the magazine on a flat surface) totally eliminated the problem in this rifle. This situation may correct itself as the parts wear in.

The Walther Rotex RM8 lives up to its multipurpose sporting airgun advertising. It looks good, it is very accurate and has a repeating function. The handling is excellent, left-handers will also like the stock and quickly adapt to reaching over to reload with the right-handed bolt. The power is more than adequate for hunting and so is the shot capacity of the air reservoir. The lack of sling swivel bases and the fussy loading on the test rifle are likely to be outweighed by the positives, particularly the very competitive pricing of this class rifle.

An optional Walther scope and mounts package is available with the Rotex. It is a fixed six power, 42mm objective scope with fully coated lenses, nitrogen filled and 1/4" click adjustments. Clearly designed for air rifles, parallax can be focussed down to 10m via the objective lens. The a German style cross hair reticle has heavy side bars for low light hunting and centre cross hairs for precision. The sturdy mounts have a locking pin option if needed and four clamping screws per ring.

The scope is very clear and performed flawlessly, playing its part in shooting some excellent groups.

It is a very good general purpose or hunting scope and it comes with mounts for \$100 extra.

For more information on Walther air arms, contact the Australian distributor, Frontier Arms Company, at www.frontierarms.com.au.

The first and second group shot with the Rotex at 25m demonstrate its accuracy and also the effect of the slight breeze during the second group. Pellet accuracy also deserves recognition.

