

Air It Up

For most of us the history and experience with air rifles begins with the beloved lever action Daisy Red Ryder Carbine BB gun. Still the perfect tool with which anyone should begin their marksmanship training. Attesting to this fact is that in 1968 the U.S. Government had Daisy make the Model 2299 "Quick Kill" lever action with no sights for teaching instinct shooting.

The first Daisy air rifle was invented by Clarence Hamilton at the Plymouth Iron Windmill Co. and began manufacture in 1888. Plymouth became the Daisy Co. in 1895. The first Red Ryder was the Model 1938 holding 650 rounds of death on wheels pushing a BB/.177 caliber projectile down the smooth bore barrel at a sizzling 280 to 350 feet-per-second. Remember, "You'll shoot your eye out, kid." Shooting glasses please.

Since 1958 Daisy's home has been Rogers, Arkansas and they have sold over 9 million Red Ryder Carbines. Add millions more with their sales of other models of rifles and pistols that are single/multiple pump pneumatic or use CO2 cartridges.

Air guns have been around a long time. The oldest existing mechanical air gun is in a museum in Stockholm and is dated from 1580. This is believed to be ground zero for the modern air gun. In the 17th century air guns in calibers .30-.51, were used to hunt big game. These air rifles were charged using a pump to fill an air



TOP: The classic Daisy Red Ryder Carbine BB gun.
BOTTOM: The 1968 Model 2299 "Quick Kill."

reservoir that produced velocities from 650 to 1,000 feet per second. Those speeds are still impressive.

Air guns have also gone to war. The Girardoni Military Repeating Air Rifle supported the Austrian army from 1780 to 1815. Military advantages included 30 rounds of firepower per air filled reservoir, no smoke and little noise out the barrel. The disadvantage was it took 1500 strokes with a hand pump to fill those reservoirs and any crack in the hammered sheet iron reservoir rendered it useless.

The most famous air gun on the planet is a Girardoni carried on the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-06. The rifle held twenty-two .46 round balls in a tubular magazine and was capable of emptying the magazine on target in under a minute in the hands of Meriwether Lewis.

This "air gun diplomacy" was used at

many Native American encounters during their trek to the west and the locals were awed by the firepower. Lewis never ran the rifle dry to give the impression it would shoot forever. It worked because no shots were fired in anger during the expedition. This very air gun is currently on display in the National Firearms Museum in Fairfax, Virginia just outside of Washington, D.C.

As the Daisy Red Ryder introduced most of us to air rifles it was Benjamin and Sheridan that opened our eyes to the multiple stroke forearm pneumatic rifles with .22 and .20 caliber rifled barrels. The kid with a Sheridan Blue Streak was king of the hill. If you pumped till you busted a gut you could get around 700 fps from your pellet. The Beeman Company founded by Dr. Robert Beeman in 1972 is responsible for creating the adult airgun market in the U.S. They began by

a lucky few. Beeman sold the company in 1993.

A Feinwerkbau Model 124 opened my eyes in the 70's. The "break-open" design requires only one cock of the barrel. A pull of the trigger releases a spring loaded piston that provides the air pressure to drive a .177 pellet at a muzzle velocity of 830f.p.s. The quality barrels, fit and finish of these rifles deliver match grade accuracy. Their match grade rifles have won many gold medals in international competition including the Olympics.

The Beeman Precision Airguns is now owned by S/R Industries offers Chinese made airguns in a variety of configurations. The airgun rifle and pistol choices they now have boggle the mind. Here are a few of the more popular offerings. An interesting model is the Bear Claw Rifle X2 Dual Caliber. This spring piston powered rifle comes with interchangeable barrel in .177 caliber with a velocity of 1000f.p.s. and a .22 caliber barrel that pushes the pellet to 830f.p.s. The barrels feature a ported muzzle break and the stock is a European hardwood thumbhole style. It comes with a 3 to 9 by 32mm scope and mounts. This rifle is in the \$250.00 range

and their website is www.beeman.com.

The hottest company on the block is Gamo Outdoor USA. They are the U.S. importers for Gamo Precision Airguns manufactured in Spain by a company that has been in business since the 1880's. They kicked into high gear with the introduction of the spring piston powered Whisper line. They feature a fluted and rifled steel barrel with a patented double integrated noise dampener attached so you can surprise pesky critters. Go ahead and call it a silencer because this is not a firearm.

This feature filled rifle line comes with an all-weather black synthetic stock, excellent trigger and a 3 to 9 by 40mm scope, all packaged with several types of projectiles. Here is the thrilling part, depending on which rifle you choose, when using their PBA Platinum pellets velocities in .22 go up to 1300 f.p.s and .177 scorches up to 1650 f.p.s. Prices run from \$100.00 to \$350.00 so scope them out at www.gamoussa.com.

So many choices, so little space. A great way to research available products is through the Eleventh Edition of the Blue Book of Airguns online and for ordering at www.bluebookofgunvalues.com. **TAD**



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