

The Mechanic

Jules Whicker goes unplugged with the latest 'Tactical' version of the Daystate Ranger

Though I've been using a couple of Daystate's electronic guns – a 12 FPE Air Wolf and an FAC Mk4- as my go-to air rifles for some time, it's been a while since I shot one of the company's "mechanical" guns, so I jumped at the chance of getting my hands on the latest incarnation of their Air Ranger buddy-bottle PCP, the Ranger Tactical.

Sure grip synthetic stock

Some things were very familiar, of course. The Gary-Cane-designed ambidextrous stock, for example, feels as compact and controllable, and looks as sinuously elegant, as ever.

This time though, it's not presented in gleaming walnut and rosewood but in rubber-armoured beech. This method of construction was pioneered by stockmaking



specialists Minelli and offers many of the features of synthetic stocks, such as weather and impact resistance, whilst delivering the kind of stiffness and heft only provided by premium GRP stocks, and providing a uniquely stylish, stealthy and silent finish. You needn't worry about the lack of chequering, either, as the rubber offers a good, comfortable grip, even in the rain.

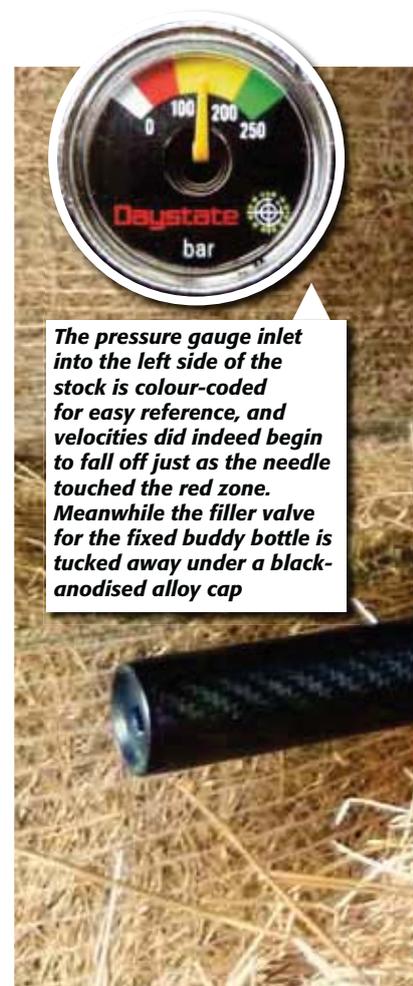
Up front, the 400cc buddy bottle is the same as ever, but now it's covered by an (optional) black leather sheath, which

(Below) The test gun was supplied in this hard ABS case by Negrini, which is lined with thick shock-absorbing eggshell foam and provides ample space for the scoped and moderated rifle, ammo, and other essentials

again adds style and stealth, plus grip and comfort if you like to hold the rifle by the bottle. Personally, I'd prefer a rubber sleeve or coating to match the stock, but admit that the leather adds a classy touch appropriate to the Daystate brand.

There's also a barrel support. This is quite a surprise, as both the Wolf and the Ranger have previously boasted fully free-floated barrels. It turns out, though, that this was down to looks rather than performance, and that the barrel support never harms, and often improves, accuracy. The support on the Tactical is optional too, however, so if you prefer your barrel free-floated, that's no problem.

Interestingly, the barrel isn't cradled in the support by an O-ring. Instead the support shows just enough tolerance to accommodate expansion/contraction by allowing the shroud to slide through it longitudinally, whilst ensuring that it can't be displaced laterally. As someone who regularly finds himself reaching out to pick up his Air Wolf by its (unsupported)



The pressure gauge inlet into the left side of the stock is colour-coded for easy reference, and velocities did indeed begin to fall off just as the needle touched the red zone. Meanwhile the filler valve for the fixed buddy bottle is tucked away under a black-anodised alloy cap

barrel, this is definitely a development I approve of, and I'll be getting one for my Wolf.

How does the mechanical Ranger compare to the electronic Wolf?

First there's the safety catch. On both guns this is a flat-type unit made of a disc of plastic, clear in the case of the Wolf and Red for the Ranger. You can adjust the catch's resistance on both guns, but it will always feel more positive on the Ranger because it's a mechanical lock rather than a switch.

A similar observation can be made about the trigger. The Wolf's electronic trigger can be almost too subtle, but the Ranger's mechanical unit has a really clear feel, and broke with glass-rod crispness straight out of the box. Adjustment, had it been required, is easily made to pull lengths and second-stage weight. You have to remove the stock to do this, but as there's just one big stock bolt, this is easily done.

The biggest tangible difference between the two guns



The Ranger Tactical's can be specified with either a 400cc or 500cc buddy bottle, which is protected by a black leather sleeve. Note the barrel support that mounts to the end of the bottle with 3 grub screws



The Tactical's bolt has a smart black powder-coated finish while the safety catch is a thumb-friendly red polymer disc. Note the top of the twin "thumb-up" grooves in the stock



The Ranger Tactical is a handsome and practical gun: handy, steady, deadly-accurate, and with the Airstream Mk5 moderator fitted, as stealthy as any hunter could wish for



Daystate's current QD filler valve (front), supplied by industry leader Best Fittings, is neater than its predecessor (rear) and has a proven maintenance-free life of over 30,000 fills

is felt when operating the bolt. On the Wolf the electronics take care of the valve, so all the bolt has to do is index the magazine and chamber the pellet. This results in a supremely light, fast, bolt throw. The Ranger's bolt, meanwhile, also has to cock the hammer, resulting in a markedly longer, and heavier, cycle.

What I like about the mechanical action, however, is that it helps you keep track of the rifle's status. If there's tension on the Ranger's bolt, it's not cocked, and so the chamber is probably empty; and vice versa if there's no tension.

The Wolf's bolt, by contrast, is never under tension, so the only way to confirm whether

you reloaded after the previous shot is to remove the magazine and check the breach.

Of course, it's an elementary rule to treat every gun as if it were loaded, but this characteristic of the mechanical action means you're less likely inadvertently to double load the Ranger or to pull the trigger on an empty chamber than you are with the Wolf.

Range time with the Ranger

As for performance, the Harper "Slingshot" hammer and valve used in the Ranger is one of the most efficient and consistent systems yet devised, so your buddy bottle will deliver more

shots than you're ever likely to be bored enough to count, at velocities more consistent than you can be bothered to measure! Sorry if this sounds flippant, but the Ranger really is an impressively dull rifle to chronograph!

I tested the Tactical with Daystate's new 7.9-grain Rangemaster Li pellets and their 8.44-grain Select FT ammo, as well as some RWS Superdomes (8.6 grain) and Bisley Magnums (10.4 grain). The Bisley Magnums topped the chart for consistency with a spread of just 6 FPS over a 10-shot string, closely followed by the Li (7 FPS) and the Selects (9 FPS), with the Superdomes

bringing up the rear (14 FPS). As regards energy, the Selects and Magnums averaged 11.3 FPE, the Superdomes 11.2 FPE, and the Lis just 10.4 FPE.

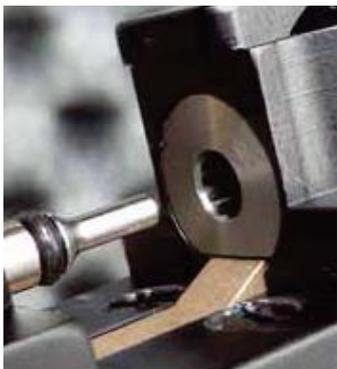
If I was surprised to see that the new lightweight pellets left the muzzle a few FPS slower than the Selects, I was even more surprised that they seemed to shed less energy downrange, giving the same point of impact, despite the Selects' advantage in weight and MV. Perhaps it's down to the Li's shape, whose overhanging head is reminiscent of Crosman's Premier ammo. Indeed, like the Premiers, the new Li pellets are made on state-of-the-art CNC machinery in the USA, ▶



The trigger is adjustable, with a blade that is comfortably broad, smooth and curved, and protected by a metal guard



Daystate's Mk5 Airstream moderator is both shorter and lighter than its predecessor, and, along with the short barrel shroud, contributes to the Ranger Tactical's compact dimensions



At the breech a stainless steel probe fitted with an O-ring takes care of seating and sealing, whilst the angled bar underneath indexes the magazine.

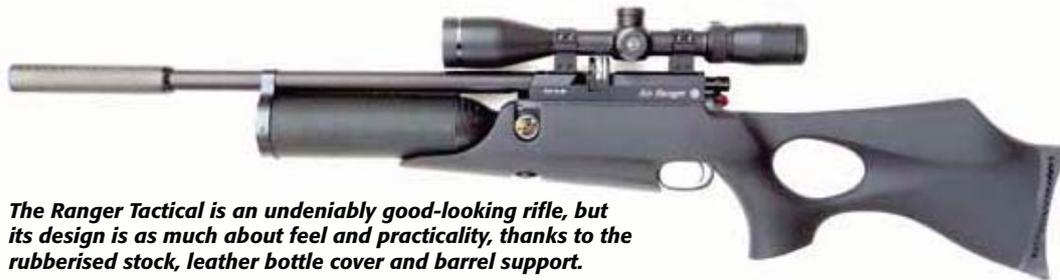
using a single die for optimal uniformity of weight and size.

Accuracy with all the pellets tested was such that after a few shots I decided not to bother with comparative groups at my zero range of 35 yards but set up the target at 50 and got to work. A light but gusty cross-wind caused the kind of horizontal stringing that shows why this is too far for hunting, but the vertical size of the groups remained impressive, running from just over 1 1/4" to just under 1/2" over twelve separate 5-shot strings, using pellets loaded into the magazine straight from their respective tins.

In the field

Having sighted it in, I took the Ranger Tactical to one of my shoots, where the barns are filling up with grain and drawing in plenty of collared doves, wood pigeons, feral pigeons and magpies. I found a position on a stack of bales that let me observe the yard through a gap in the end of a barn, and set up a stepladder I'd brought with me so I could use the gap on the adjoining side to cover the wall of a manure clamp and the field beyond. I'd have to move from one to the other, but in the dark shadows of the barn it was unlikely I'd be spotted.

A couple of trial shots into a dead tree 30 yards away across the farm yard, and at clods of dirt in the field to my right, to give me an idea of the effect of the wind, and I was ready for business. The first arrivals



The Ranger Tactical is an undeniably good-looking rifle, but its design is as much about feel and practicality, thanks to the rubberised stock, leather bottle cover and barrel support.

were a trio of collared doves that set down in the middle of the yard. A neck shot laid the rearmost one flat and disturbed its companions so little that after a brief circuit they landed back in the same place and I added another to the bag.

Then I heard chattering and saw a magpie in the dead tree. I held it in the crosshairs until it stopped bobbing its head up and down, then sent a pellet through its brain, and waited for the rest of its clan to show up. Experience has shown that birds favour certain branches, and this occasion was no exception, so I was ready and waiting when the first bird arrived, and it had barely alighted when I added it to the Tactical's tally.

The rest of the evening yielded steady action, with the Ranger giving such a good account of itself from a range of shooting positions that I didn't feel handicapped not to have a bipod. I did, however, regret the lack of a sling when changing position and picking up. But when I asked Daystate's Tony Belas why they don't fit swivels as standard, he told me that feedback from customers indicates that most prefer not to have them. Well, it takes all sorts!



Daystate now make their action blocks from a lightweight super-strong titanium alloy, whilst their Blueprint scope mounts are precisely matched to the height of the current low-profile 10-shot magazine.

I also appreciated the compact feel of the rifle, which is due to the combination of a short barrel shroud and the over-barrel design of the new Airstream 5 moderator – whose carbon-fibre-wrapped body is now 1/2" shorter

than that of its predecessor, and 15 grams lighter.

Overall, then, the Ranger Tactical is hard to fault, gives little if anything away to its electronic stable mate, and handles and shoots beautifully, shot after shot after shot. **GM**

OPTIONAL EXTRAS

One of the beauties of buying a rifle from Daystate is that they cater for all tastes. So even while their 'basic' Ranger Tactical model has a notably high spec as standard and will operate perfectly straight out of the box, you can still have many optional extras to tailor the rifle precisely to your own tastes. These include the option of having a higher power output – this can be factory set from 18

to 80ft/lbs (from £100 extra) for FAC holders. A larger 500cc buddy bottle can be specified (at no extra charge), and you can also order accessories such as a Negrini hard ABS case (£99), Airstream Mk5 moderator (£55), additional 10-shot magazine (£40), Sling swivel studs (£58), Leather bottle cover (£22), barrel support (£22), and you can even go southpaw with a left-hand bolt (£45).



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

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| Model Type | Daystate Ranger Tactical Multi-shot, bolt action, buddy-bottle PCP air rifle |
| Calibre | .177 tested (.22 available) |
| Weight | 7.7lbs |
| Overall length | 38.5" (40.5 with silencer fitted) |
| Barrel length | 17" |
| Trigger Stock | Fully adjustable Ambidextrous hardwood thumbhole sporter with rubberised coating |
| Power source | 400cc buddy bottle fitted (500cc option) |
| Velocity (over a 10-shot string) | Daystate Rangemaster Li 7.9 grain: average 772 FPS; spread 7 FPS Daystate Select FT 8.4 grain: average 777 FPS; spread 9 FPS RWS Superdome 8.6 grain: average 767 FPS; spread 14 FPS Bisley Magnum 10.4 grain: average 700 FPS; spread 6 FPS |
| Shot count | From 400cc bottle. Legal limit: 300 shots in .177; around 400 in .22 |
| Fill pressure | 230 bar |
| Energy | 12 ft/lbs (model on test) FAC versions available |
| Price | £1066 incl. 10-shot magazine, single-shot tray, filling adaptor |