



ALL CHANGE!

The editor brings us part one of a fascinating study of the 'why' and the 'how' behind the release of the new Wolverine MK2

You thought it was an Air Ranger, didn't you? Me too, at first. In fact, even Daystate acknowledge that it looks like a Ranger, and that's why they disguised the prototypes by putting fake Air Ranger stickers on them, to avoid them being spotted. Then I looked closer; at that sturdy breech block and massive barrel fixing. More study brought the safety-catch into focus, and once I'd slipped the magazine from its housing I saw the tiny actuator piston, and I knew what I was dealing with. This is the new Wolverine MK2 from Daystate,

and if ever there was a 'more to it than meets the eye' airgun – this is it.

In this, the first of a two-parter, I'm going to be revealing the 'more', including that which doesn't meet the eye, as I explore this pre-charged pneumatic rifle and the philosophy behind it. By the time I've finished, I'm sure we'll all know what the Wolverine Mk2 inside-out, but let's begin with the question most of you will be asking; 'how come this new Wolverine looks nothing like the original?' Over to Daystate's main man, Tony Belas.

THE WOLVERINE MK2 CONCEPT

'To set the scene, when we built the first Wolverine, the 303, it was intended to be a flagship rifle and we didn't expect to sell too many of them. We knew the Wolverine action was destined to be the replacement powerplant for the company's range of non-electronic 'bottle' rifles, currently headed by the Air Ranger which is now 11 years old. What we didn't expect was to sell over 600 Wolverine 303s which took up a huge part of our production capability, and put back the release of the 12 ft.lbs. version, which was already late, by a year.

All of our guns, new, and established, are closely monitored from the moment they're released and every scrap of useful information is filed. It's the only way to move forward, and moving forward is the only way to go. Development,

refinement and feedback from customers, team members, consultants and the trade is a constant process, but obviously we have to reach a point where the product is ready to go, and that's where we are now with the Mk2.

Although it doesn't look anything like the Wolverine 303, the Mk2 is a similar design and runs the very latest Wolverine internals. We think it will provide exactly the rifle our customers need. It has everything the Air Ranger has, plus some significant practical developments, and with its reduced weight and ability to be fitted with either a 400cc or 500cc bottle, the Mk2 can be set up to produce anything from 12ft.lbs. to over 40 for FAC holders and for our overseas customers.

Another key fact, is that this version of Wolverine technology is well over £400 cheaper than the

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303, and it actually costs less than the Air Ranger, despite all the new developments the Mk2 contains. While an 'air tube' version will eventually also be offered, at the moment we have that area fully covered by our new Huntsman Regal, plus of course our electronic rifles will continue to offer a proven alternative to mechanical actions.

We're really excited about this latest Wolverine, and especially about the possibilities it provides, and I'm really looking forward to seeing what you think of it. We've tested the hell out of it at the factory and in the field, but I know you'll use and abuse it (as usual), and with autumn now with us, it's just the time of year to prove what a hunting rifle can do under proper field conditions. Let's just say I'm quietly confident!

There it is then; that's why the new Wolverine isn't a powered-down version of the previous model. If that's what it isn't, what is it? Here's what I think it is. I think it's the real-world manifestation of the Wolverine 303. To me, the Mk2 is the high-performance saloon derivative of the Formula 1 race car. This is the version designed to be accessible to thousands, rather than the lucky few. At £1098, the Mk2 is no starter model or mass-produced cheapie, but it's within reach of those who

The all-new Wolverine Mk2. Way more than meets the eye going on here.



want the best tool for the job, and in this case the job is hunting with a highly practical, match accurate, sub-12 air rifle. Perhaps I should have saved this statement for my conclusion, but somehow it seems right to clear up the 'why?' question before we get stuck into the 'what?' section. Don't worry, though, that section is coming right up.

THE RIFLE BEFORE US

What I'm testing this month is a pre-production prototype. It has no engravings or badges to disclose its

identity and the stock finish isn't representative either, but as far as performance goes, it's the real deal. I left the MTC Genesis 5-20 x 50 scope in place, but not before noting that this 30mm-bodied scope sat perfectly clear of the Mk2's barrel in its 'medium' mounts. Then I saw the slope at the front of the rifle's scope mounting block, and I realised that this is a feature rather than serendipity. Nice touch ... or doesn't touch, as in this case.

As with all Daystates, this one has its optimum charging pressure set into the action block courtesy of a discreet decal. This is a result of each rifle being individually set up for peak performance, which is another nice touch and saves the owner the bother of searching out the 'sweet spot'. For those who may have joined the pre-charged pneumatic party late, the 'sweet spot' is the charging pressure that produces the 'flattest' trajectory from the pellets over a given number of shots. In this case, Daystate advise 190-bar, from which this rifle will provide over 200 in .177, and over 250 in .22, from the standard 400cc buddy bottle. Should you wish to spend the extra 16 quid for the 500cc bottle, you can add a full 70 shots to the .177 calibre and a fine 85 to the .22. The bigger bottle option will be taken mainly by the high-power, FAC users, and with the action set at 40

ft.lbs., they can expect around 45, full-power shots. A 30 ft.lbs. setting gets you 80 shots, and we'll be exploring the high-power application of the Mk2 in a future issue.

Charging is a hassle-free process, thanks to Daystate's standard push-fit connector, although I've always found the inlet-valve cover a tad finger-unfriendly for my clumsy digits. The easy-read, on-board pressure gauge is mounted on the left of the action, directly above the charging valve, and a tilt of the rifle tells you instantly how much air-power you have in reserve. Again, with hundreds of shots available for the sub-12 users, the gauge will be mainly the reference source of the high-power club.

MAGAZINE SYSTEM

And now for something completely interesting; the Wolverine Mk2's magazine system. It doesn't look all that different, and it's still the internally-sprung, 10-shot pellet dispenser it always was, tensioned for use by manually rotating the pellet carrier and loading each empty bay as it presents. The loading bay cutaway was a stroke of simple genius, because it lets the shooter seat each pellet perfectly with just the



Now that's what you call a 'robust' action.



THE DAYSTATE WOLVERINE MK2

This is a prototype. The production rifles will have properly finished wood and metalwork, and both stock and action will carry 'Wolverine' graphics. There is no doubt that this latest model will look like it means business, and next month we'll have the full report on how it shoots.

targets – I'd lose the will to live without some sort of challenge during a session like that – and every time the chrono' showed a consistency return averaging 12 f.p.s. This is with Daystate Sovereign pellets straight from the tin, so if the production guns hit this level, and they really should, then the new action is really providing a service.

The full accuracy report will be published next month, but it will come as no surprise that this rifle more than matches the Air Ranger in terms of accuracy. There's a kind of non-fussy 'crispness' about the way the Mk2 dispenses its shots, and within minutes of starting my first session I was clanking down the 55-yard reset targets with robotic precision.

standard-issue thumb but there are internal doings afoot that have a huge effect on that mag's performance, and these come directly from the development of project Wolverine.

Rather than the passage of the bolt activating the magazine's indexing system, it's done by a small 'piston', powered by the air-blast that launches the previous pellet. If you're as tragic as I am, and most of us are, it's a fascinating thing to observe. As the rifle is fired, air pressure pushes up the tiny piston, which trips the magazine actuator and allows the mag' to rotate slightly to the right. Then, as the bolt is withdrawn during cocking, the magazine completes its arc to present a pellet to the breech. Closing the bolt loads the pellet and the rifle is ready to fire.

This sequence is begun by the firing of the rifle, and if that doesn't happen, the magazine won't rotate and the breech can't be double-loaded. There's more, though. Should the on-board pressure drop below 80-bar, the mini piston won't rise, preventing pellets being loaded without sufficient power to either do the job required, or even to fire them out of the barrel. Yet again, it's the mega-high air consumption of the FAC-rated versions that are more likely to run low on air, but that 'no double-load' feature is vital to us all and should be applauded.

BOLT-AND-BRACES SAFETY

The cleverness continues with the Wolverine Mk2's bolt-action cocking and loading, and this is an area where all manufacturers of sporting rifles should take note. In addition to a conventional – and extremely tidy - sliding safety catch at the rear of the action block, the Wolverine runs a 'bolt safety' mechanism. If you cock the rifle, regardless of the position of the safety catch, it can't be fired until the bolt is closed and fully locked down. Even with the bolt closed, nothing happens when the trigger is squeezed, unless you rotate the bolt right and down to the closed position. Top system, this, and as I say it's something we should see on more of our rifles.

A final flourish of simple genius can be found at the rear of the bolt where the removal of a couple of fixings allows you to flip the handle and go left-handed inside five minutes. Switch the stop pin to the other side of the magazine housing, and the switch to southpaw is complete. So many smarts in such a practical sporter.

BLOCK, STOCK AND BARREL

This rifle is what my less cultured chums would call 'a proper unit'. By that I mean it's a sturdy workhorse that's been built to do a full-on job, and to keep doing it no matter what

the conditions. Study the photo and you'll see solid chunks of alloy bolted together with hefty fixtures in a reassuringly straightforward way. Within that foundation there's a ferociously efficient, self-regulating firing valve, the full performance of which I'll reveal in next month's test of the production Wolverine Mk2.

The numbers produced by this prototype, however, can not go unannounced.

Despite seeing some heavy testing action, the test rifle had a remarkably consistent output during the three prolonged chronograph sessions we both endured. Three times I chalked-up 150 shots, admittedly while also shooting

ROLLING OUT THE BARREL

I should now make mention of the bombproof nature of the Wolverine's barrel assembly. A full 12mm in diameter, the Wolverine's 440mm barrel is sunk 80mm into the action block, so no further support is needed. Around this match grade, Lothar Walther barrel fits a 23mm diameter shroud that extends the length of the barrel unit by 80mm. A locating collar at the muzzle of the barrel proper keeps everything centralised, plus it has radial vents to channel back the muzzle blast into the void between the shroud and the barrel. This void becomes an expansion chamber, into which the sound-energy of the blast can dissipate, reducing noise to a



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The centre 'piston' rises under air pressure to activate the magazine.



The bolt handle goes southpaw in a couple of minutes, and you're looking at a mega-safety system.

perfectly acceptable level for my kind of hunting. I use an Air Ranger regularly, and there's no way I'd fit an extra silencer to the threaded male fitment. It might be a different case for FAC models, but the sub-12 crew can quietly go about its business without worrying about kicking up too much of a racket.

STOCK CONTROL

The stock fitted to the prototype is as pure ambidextrous Air Ranger as makes no odds, but none the worse for that. I'll re-bleat a perennial whinge, here, and call for a height-adjustable butt pad, but there's a skipload of vermin that I've taken over the years with my own Ranger that provides the finest possible proof of how well that stock design works. I'm reliably informed that the production stock with carry 'a degree of laser-etched

embellishment', so we'll wait for that before I launch the full critique, but before we leave the Wolverine's woodwork, let's confirm why some things don't change while others do.

The Air Ranger's stock was developed over 10 years and the first version only saw the light of day after five, full-scale prototypes had been found wanting. I recall those phases of refinement, mainly because my own Ranger became part of it, as I helped test the upgrades before they went 'live', and I had brief experience of the work required to make each improvement work. That sort of development isn't just thrown away for the sake of change, it's only replaced when something better is ready to go. The Wolverine Mk2's stock works and it works well. The refinements will come, but until they're here, this stock is a case of 'don't fix what isn't broken'.

ALL CHANGE

I asked Tony Belas if he could list the main changes between the Wolverine Mk2 and the Air Ranger it's designed to replace, and after thinking about it and calling the Daystate workshop he shook his head. 'Apart from the bottle, which is made for us by an outside company, and the section of the inlet valve that engages the push-fit adaptor, it's all different. Even the inlet valve dust cap and stock bolts have changed. So, as much as it looks like a Ranger, it's an all-new rifle, in that no part of it fits its predecessor.'

And now for some surprisingly good news. The Wolverine Mk2's £1098 price tag is £44 cheaper than the Air Ranger. How can this be, especially when the components of the Wolverine are collectively more costly than those of the Ranger? Well, Tony Belas explained

in detail that the Wolverine is far quicker to build and calibrate, and that lessons learned from over a decade of Ranger production have been well and truly learned. When a new, better, rifle is the equivalent of a decent set of mounts cheaper than the model it replaces, that has to be good news.

NEXT MONTH ...

By the time you read this I'll have swapped the prototype Wolverine Mk2 for the production version and my full range of tests will be well under way. There's a new trigger to explore and that accuracy envelope to push to its limit, plus I may even swap the rifle to southpaw configuration and let a sinister shooting mate have a play with it. All in all, there's plenty to crack on with and I'll reveal all in the November edition. See you there. ■

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