

Hunting for TARGETS



The Daystate MK4 has long been regarded as the ultimate hunting rifle, but has had a dedicated band of advocates on the target circuit, too. We get **Malc Barnard** to put the latest MK4 incarnation through the mill... in both the hunting field and on the competition range...

Photos: Tharek Islam

Daystate's MK4 is considered one of the firm's flagship guns – an opinion vindicated by its crowning as the *Airgun of the Year 2011* in the *Airgun Shooter* readers' awards. Despite a reputation for excellence from hunters, there's always been a sub-section on the competition circuit who have sworn by their MK4 when knocking down metal targets, too.

Daystate, a firm renowned for listening to its fan-base, responded to this, and around 12 months ago unveiled the first prototype of what was then-called Panther. The name has since changed to the 'exactly what it says on the tin' MK4 Target.

At the heart of the MK4 Target lies the patented electronic heart – MCT, or Map Compensated Technology. As a newcomer to this tech, I'm still taken aback by it. I've heard from various fans of the rifle about how the electronically regged system becomes completely natural to use, but there's a nagging voice in my head that tells me I usually only have to fill my rifle with air and shoot it. Why should I have to charge up electrics, too? That begs a further question: do I really need all this technology in an airgun?

Whether it's an airgun purist thing, or the fact that I'm not always accepting of new technology, there's really only one way to find out whether I'm a fan of MCT-driven MK4 Target or not... and that's to take it out and give it a tough going over! So, with my test rifle all set up, I lined up a variety of situations to put the 'ultimate' airgun on the 'ultimate' challenge.

First up was one of my local farm permissions. This provided a good scenario to set and test my zero, and then allow me to go take a look to see if there were any rats about afterwards. Yes, this is the Target model, but let's not forget that the MK4 made its name with hunters.

First job: acclimatising myself with the rifle. I set my zero and took a few practice shots to get to grips with its unusual trigger and the various modes displayed on the LCD information screen.

It wasn't long before I got into the swing of things, and I was soon hunkering down in at a good vantage point over a rat-run to put a few of the farm's rats out of commission.

I was using the Daystate RangeMaster Li pellets that came supplied with the test gun, but even at just 7.9 grains, I knew one of these would cleanly drop a rat with a well-placed shot.

Within a couple of minutes, the first rodent popped out between the pallets and the rifle took its first kill. Although this pellet/calibre combination would not normally be my first choice for this kind of work, it ended up scoring me a flawless three-nil victory over the scaly tails. Not bad for a 'target' rifle!

During my impromptu ratting session, I had realised that there was a red glow emitting from the rifle's body – part of the electronic system – and this had been bright enough for me to notice it during the day. How could



Above: The Target passes its first test – claiming a three-nil victory over the rat population of Malc’s farm permission

Right: The rubberised, laminated stock seems to grip the pegs at HFT shoots



I possibly go shooting at night with a bright red LED shining in my face? Confident I’d found the first chink in the armour of this MK4 Target, I got on the blower to Daystate to ‘complain’ – only to be advised that I could switch off the ‘ignition’ light via one of the user-customisation programs! With my tail firmly between my legs, I decided I should, perhaps, spend some time reading Daystate’s quite superb owner’s manual! (And it was after doing so that I felt a lot more *au fait* with MCT technology...)

Even the most advanced air rifle in the world has its favourite diet of ammo, so I packed my new gear up and headed to the indoor ranges of Pete’s Airgun Farm with the .177 calibre MK4 Target and a selection of well-known brands in various head sizes in readiness for the next part of the gun’s challenge – an HFT shoot.

Just before my testing session, I’d been informed by one of the guys who helps out on Daystate’s ranges at shows that my rifle would most likely favour a diet of JSB Exact with a 4.53mm head size. As it turned out, he was spot-on. At first, I shot a 13.5mm group at 45 yards – impressive enough, but I was soon putting in 8.5mm c-to-c groups. Needless to say, I was more than happy with that kind of performance.

Daystate included an MTC 5-20x50 Genesis with my test rifle and I opted to try this combo at the ‘Diaboliol’ – a competitive HFT shoot run at Cambridge Airgun HFT Club, albeit with some of the rules for targets and placements slightly tinkered with.

I’ll admit that I’ve not been the biggest fan of MTC scopes in the past, but I’m always keen to approach new products with an open mind – and, after reading Thom Jarrino’s review in the January issue (*Brilliant Performer*), I was of the opinion the Genesis *could* change my opinion. Certainly, the initial impressions had been favourable during my ratting foray and the edge



sharpness and glass clarity was certainly fantastic. The parallax error – an important factor in HFT as scopes are ‘no touch’ once you’re on the course – is acceptable, and the build quality is very good. Its illuminated reticle had already proven itself in the fading light during my rat session and I’d fallen in love with the floating crosshair, too. So with experiences all being positive, I entered the ‘HFT phase’ of my testing confident of the scope’s all-round versatility, as well as the MK4’s.

Oh dear, though! As my setting up progressed, I felt that the MTC’s Advanced Mil Dot (AMD) reticle was giving me spaces where I wanted reference markers; my 45-yard aim point was just ‘floating’ in the space between the cross and the line underneath, for instance. I also missed having something to use as a reference point on the horizontal crosshair when allowing for wind – and with the scope just not ‘working’ at a mil-dot’s usual 10x magnification, I was soon on the phone to Daystate again.

This time, it wasn’t my error... and it was, in fact, an error with the scope. It turned out my test rifle was fitted with a pre-production optic; this MTC’s mil-dots were actually true at 12x. No wonder the reticle wasn’t lining up the way I expected it to at 10x! To be fair to Daystate, however, they had expected me to be testing the rifle, not the scope.

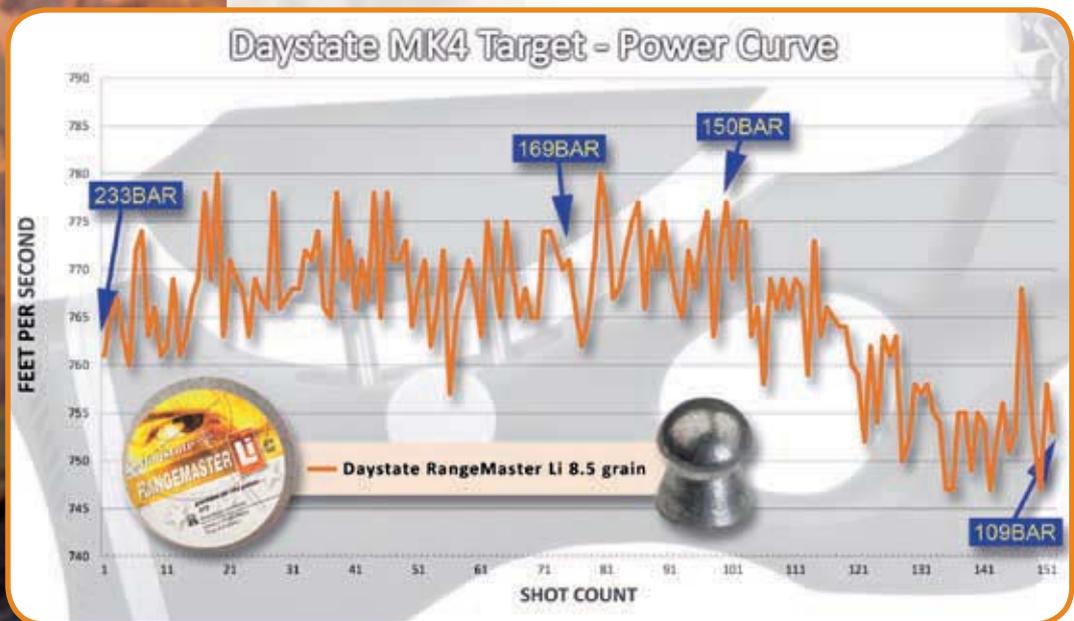
Armed with that knowledge, and the scope re-calibrated to account for its unorthodox set-up, I arrived at Cambridge with the rifle – charged both electrically and pneumatically! – and a tin of JSB 4.53s. As soon as the MK4 was pulled from its case, people were talking; it’s certainly a rifle to turn heads, if not simply because of its tactical rubber covering, match-style adjustable cheek, butt and the optional forend ‘hamster’.

But this is a target rifle; it’s not about how it looks, it’s about how well it performs... and early-on in my round, I was facing a kneeling shot, one of my least-favourite shooting positions. However, with the supreme ergonomics of the test rifle, everything felt just right as I lined-up the knock-down in the MTC’s optics. I’d fitted the optional hamster and must say it really helped make the kneeling stance super-stable. Brimming with confidence in the hold, it was simply a matter of assessing the range and windage... and a click of the electronic trigger later, and the target had dropped with a satisfying clunk.

It was a similar story around the rest of the course largely because of how well the rifle – even though relatively new to me – handled, whether I was taking standers, kneelers or prone shots. For sure, I found that the stock, once adjusted correctly, gave me a definite advantage in positional

Top: With an ergonomically designed stock – offering plenty of adjustment – no shooting position should pose much of a problem

Right: The electronic regulation system provides up to 150 usable shots from a 230BAR fill





This kind of precision is impressive... even in a top of the range target rifle

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

MAKER: Daystate
MODEL: MK4 Target (formerly known as Panther)
POWERPLANT: Precharged pneumatic
ACTION: Rear bolt
CALIBRE: .177 (4.5mm) and .22 (5.5mm)
MAGAZINE: 10-shot rotary, removable and single-shot tray
FILL PRESSURE: 230 BAR
SHOTS PER FILL: 150 – .177; 180 – .22
OVERALL LENGTH: 928mm
BARREL LENGTH: 430mm
WEIGHT: 4.2kg (excl. scope)
STOCK: Ambidextrous soft touch rubber coated laminate, fully adjustable
TRIGGER: Electronic release adjustable for weight and length of stage
SAFETY: Manual, electronic rotary lever with key-switch isolator
OPTIONS: Left-hand bolt, black bolt handle, sling swivels, MK5 Airstream silencer and Hamster grip
SRP: £1,360
CONTACT: Daystate, 01782 791755, www.daystate.com

shots. Considering it was just a test rifle and I'd only had it a short while, I put in a very creditable score, finishing 12th out of around 100 shooters. I should also mention that the rubberised finish helped when gripping the pegs – and although it took an absolute hammering that day, things looked as good as new after a quick wipe-down.

Upon arriving back home, I got the rifle out of the bag and set the electrics to charge, wondering why I had been so convinced this would be a big problem. When you think about it, it's just like charging a mobile phone – except you do it a lot less frequently! (About once a month, Daystate estimate in the manual.)

A few people at the shoot asked what the power and shot count was like, so I put it over my chronoscope the next day, in controlled conditions. As you can see on the previous page, my .177 rifle delivered close to 150 shots from a 233BAR charge. Thanks to the controlled air regulation created courtesy of the MCT system, there's no curve whatsoever, and every pellet, from the first to the last, is therefore delivered with unerring consistency. My qualms about the electrics had all but vanished after seeing the evidence from my own shooting and the cold, hard objective facts of its efficacy.

Having lived with this rifle for a month or so, now, I feel we've experienced quite a lot together. We've shot targets and vermin, slogged around the woods at Cambridge and Lea Valley AGCs... and have both needed recharging afterwards!

This really has been a thorough test – I've even had to read the manual! – and I thought I'd be glad to see the back of the tough assignment the editor set. But, if I'm honest, I'd have loved to have kept the MK4 as my own (if I could have afforded it).

It's heavy, at 4.2kg – and that's unscoped, so I'd highly recommend the optional sling swivels – but you can't help but get the feeling you're shooting something special when you have a MK4 in your hands. This rifle does, after all, have a computer beating at its heart. The MK4 Target's stock dimensions and adjustability make it a fantastic gun for HFT and FT, with the incredibly fast lock time afforded by MCT aiding downrange accuracy. While I initially balked at the thought of having to charge batteries to run this gun, it was, in practice, no big deal – and I never had any battery issues. Setting different shoot modes was a breeze, too – although if you use a MK4 for one purpose only, you don't really have to keep altering them.

This rifle is a lot of money, but when you weigh up what you are getting, it's hardly surprising. Daystate are pushing the boundaries of air rifle technology and if you buy one of the MCT rifles, I think you can feel like you're contributing to the future.

The rifle has had quite a hard time since it's been with me. It's been dropped in dirt at the HFT meetings, rained on when out ratted and kept coming back for more. Regardless of whether its springs or circuit boards inside, that is what *anyone* wants to see in a high performance air rifle. ●



The electronics in the MK4 Target take less getting used to than many think, and only need charging once a month



The optional forend 'hamster' is a worthwhile investment for those planning on competing in HFT