



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE MINNESOTA DEER HUNTERS ASSOCIATION

WHITETALES

PROTECTING THE FUTURE OF DEER AND DEER HUNTING THROUGH HABITAT, EDUCATION, ADVOCACY AND LEGISLATION

SUMMER 2026



PASSING THE RIFLE
BY JOEL HERRLING

DOES AND FAWNS IN SUMMER
BY MN DNR

AIRGUNS: THE NEW RAGE!
BY TOM CLAYCOMB

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ANTLERLESS DEER TAGS
BY WES DAVID

THE DIABETIC OUTDOORSPERSON
BY ROY WELCH

**TRAIL CAMERA STRATEGIES FOR
EARLY SEASON BUCKS**
BY RYAN ROTHSTEIN



AIRGUNS: THE NEW RAGE!

BY TOM CLAYCOMB

"WHAT?!" was my first thought when over 10 years ago I stopped by my buddy's house, and he excitedly told me to come out in the backyard and try out his new airgun. Understand, he and his wife were both professionals and they didn't have any kids, so he had all the cool guns and outdoor toys. Why would a grown man regress to airguns? It was beyond me. I basically hadn't touched an airgun since I was 12 years old and graduated to a .22.

But I'd been hearing rumblings about the new airguns. I'm an outdoor writer and as such I am always scrambling to find new topics since I write for multiple magazines, newspapers, and websites. So, I thought I

would check them out, after all, it could be worth one to two articles.

Things didn't start out so well, however. To help you shorten the learning curve and to save you from getting frustrated right off like I did, let me tell you some of the frustrations I hit. It's a miracle I didn't give up on airguns on the first attempt, but for some reason I kept after it.

Here's how I'm going to do this. Let's pretend we're sitting around a campfire, and you ask me what it would take to get into airguns. I'm going to start off by explaining how I got into them and the trials and tribulations I encountered to help speed

up your learning process and make it less painful.

Shortly after visiting my buddy, I was at a POMA (Professional Outdoor Media Association) Convention. A rep for Winchester was there exhibiting its break barrel airguns. I told her if she sent me an airgun, I'd test it and write about it.

I soon had one in my hot little hands but was immediately disappointed. I could only get 1 3/4-inch groups at 15 yards. That'd never cut it. With airguns we're hunting small game and a small kill zone.

I don't know why, but I didn't give up right then. Later I got invited to the first two GAMO (a Spain company, and the world's

largest producer of airguns) Squirrel Master Classics which was a competition squirrel hunt in Alabama. There were six teams, each consisting of a TV star, an outdoor writer, and a 4-H kid. Each team had a guide with a squirrel dog.

Same scenario. We were supplied with .177 break barrels, which were not very accurate. The second year they supplied us with .22 cal. airguns that had better kill properties, but still weren't accurate.

Again, why I did not drop airguns is beyond me. But, shortly thereafter, I met with Crosman/Benjamin at the SHOT SHOW and was soon on pro-staff with them. They started sponsoring my airgun hunts and seminars.

These airguns were immensely more accurate than the ones I'd shot up until this point. With their break barrels I could at least get 5/8-7/8-inch groups semi-regularly. Then, I got into the Pre-Charged Pneumatics (PCPs) and started getting good groups, which convinced me it was possible to hunt with airguns.

Somewhere in there I started testing all the airguns for Sig Sauer. They were smart in that all their airguns mimicked their real firearm cousins. They had the same features, making them great training tools if you owned one of their real firearms, but all were CO2 powered, except one break barrel.

I quickly discovered while CO2s are great for practicing, due to their low power, they're no bueno for hunting. Most are advertised at 500-750 fps (and nearly all manufacturers embellish fps). I'd safely say to be effective for hunting a pellet gun must be at least 850 fps.

By now I was a died-in-the-wool airgunner. I soon met Umarex and am currently on Pro-staff with them. I use the Umarex Gauntlet2 SL25 for my small game hunting adventures.

Now, let's drop down from 30,000 ft. to 20,000 ft. and fill in some details we passed over. After all the above, you may still ask, why hunt with an airgun? No doubt a small percent of the reasons may be in the same line of reasoning as to why a rifle hunter later starts black powder hunting. Or archery hunting? Maybe the challenge? Who knows?

But a huge benefit of hunting with airguns is it opens a ton of new hunting access. I've only been denied access once from a farmer or rancher. I do a lot of pigeon and Eurasian dove hunting in feedlots. I'm talking about big feedlots with up to 100,000 head of cattle in them.



Pigeons and doves are what I classify as an agricultural type of bird, so farms, feedlots and barn yards open a lot of new hunting opportunities. These birds create a mess in the feed bunkers, on farming equipment, and in the barns when roosting so the landowner are glad to have you thin them out.

Also, with the popularity of little 5-acre ranchettes, you're able to clean out varmints without alarming your neighbors. They are the perfect choice for hunting in suburban type of situations or in short range weapon areas and around livestock.

What caliber should you get? A .177 is a step above worthless. A .22 is twice as effective and a .25 is wayyy more effective than a .22, so the .25 is my go-to airgun.

Airguns are also great for ground squirrels. I used to use a .22 LR before I got into airguns and, yes, they have a little longer reach, but one benefit of airguns is they are quieter and the ground squirrels pop back up faster, providing more shots.

There are three popular power sources: CO2, Break Barrels, and PCPs.

As discussed above, a CO2 is not a viable hunting option (other than maybe barn rats and sparrows). A break barrel is the most powerful, but not as accurate as a decent PCP, yet is still a viable hunting option. If you get serious, then you'll probably gravitate to PCPs but, yes, they are more detailed and expensive to shoot due to the need for air tanks and/or compressors. Everyone has some kind of budget so you can get a decent break barrel for under \$300.00.

But hold on, there's another cool airgun hunting option - big game hunting! In 2020,

I went on my first big game airgun hunt using the then new Umarex .50 cal. aptly named "The Hammer."

Big cal. airguns are good for a few reasons. First, many states are now allowing their use for hunting big game. Secondly, they are great for short range areas, and thirdly, they are quiet so they're good for hunting in suburbia situations and around livestock.

Here's another unique angle. The Safari Club International now has an Airgun Record Book, so if you want an easier way to get into the record books, try the airgun route. Talking about SCI leads into one of the biggest reasons to promote the use of airguns. I conduct seminars every year at the SCI Convention and five years ago I approached SCI about letting me conduct an AIRGUN: THE NEW RAGE seminar. Their first response was Tom, we have the most affluent hunters in the world attending our convention, they would not care at all about hunting with airguns.

I politely listened and then pointed out. Look, I conduct seminars every year for you. There are rich dads and granddads attending my seminars. If we advertise airguns as a great way to introduce your kids and grandkids into shooting and hunting, do you not think the dads and granddads won't attend and bring along the kids? I know, I'm the daddy of all daughters. They then replied, "Ohhh, ok then, do your little airgun seminar." I've conducted airgun seminars for them ever since.

Which brings up the fact airguns are an awesome avenue to break kids and non-hunting adults into shooting. There's basically no recoil and no hearing protection



is needed. We had a friend from Iran named Nagmeh Pannahi that we went to church with. Her son was going to attend the SYHC camp ("Scooter's Youth Hunting Camp") I help with. My wife and I took her and her son out shooting to break him in beforehand.

Nagmeh said, "Tom, the only gun I've ever seen were the machine guns the Iranian Guards had pointed at me." Within 20 minutes after first shooting an airgun she was shooting my Henry lever action .22 and then a 12 ga. shotgun! So, airguns are an awesome way to break newbies into shooting.

Now for another angle, the Umarex Air Sabre is an airgun that shoots arrows. The arrow doesn't have a nock so it can slip over an aluminum tube, which expels the air when you pull the trigger. They spit out arrows at 440 fps. Remember, your trusty ole compound only cruises along at about

330 fps. The bad deal about the Air Sabre is they are so accurate you can actually shoot Robin Hoods. So, if you try to sight one in and shoot five times at the same spot, you're going to knock the fletching off all five arrows. UMAREX also has the Air Javelin FishR, which is awesome for bowfishing.

Choosing the proper pellet could be a whole article in and of itself. We all know how important it is to select the correct ammo to achieve any level of accuracy in our big game rifles. It is just as important to choose the correct pellets.

When I first started testing and trying to achieve some level of accuracy, I concluded airguns were just inherently inaccurate. To achieve faster speeds, some of the manufacturers made lightweight alloy pellets that could fly faster. No doubt that theory worked... they're fast, but you just didn't know where they're going! I then discovered JSB (Predator International) pellets. Wow!

My groups tightened big time, like down to 3/8-inch and even some 1/4-inch groups.

As we close, I notice there's getting to be more airgun gear on the market. I told Heather at OTIS we ought to develop an Airgun Cleaning Kit. The OTIS Airgun Maintenance & Cleaning Kit is now on the market. I believe it's the only airgun cleaning kit offered.

Finally, a few years ago Heather showed me their new Lead Cleaning Hand Wipes. I told her oh my gosh, those are perfect for airgunners since we're handling lead pellets all day. I would suggest using them before you eat lunch while out in the field hunting.

Even though we are out of room, we are not out of angles, and all the angles I've covered have been from a 30,000-foot view. Hopefully, I'll get to circle back soon so we can delve into deeper detail. In the meantime, hopefully you will get into "airgunning"! 