

Shooting with BOTH BARRELS



Heralding an innovative new concept, Sportsmarketing's latest offering is a top-quality break-barrel package that not only comes with scope, mounts and a bespoke case, but also interchangeable .177 and .22 barrels. **Nigel Allen** assesses the Beeman Dual Calibre

Over the decades, very few production airguns have been offered with interchangeable barrels – although my first-ever 'adult' rifle, a Webley Hawk I bought new for £27.50 in 1976, was one of them! While I think that was more a gimmick than a genuine attempt by its maker to offer the shooter the benefits of both calibres – that's certainly not the case with SMK's new Dual Calibre break-barrel from Beeman. It's a full-powered, field-ready combo that comes complete with a 3-9x telly, mounts, fitted case and barrels in both .177 and .22. This gun delivers in a very serious manner.

I suppose the first question is 'why?' Why would you want a gun with two calibres? Well, there are a number of answers, and having it for 'gimmick value' is *not* one of them. You'll find many situations where one calibre is more suited than the other. For instance, controlling winged pests is generally more effective with the high penetrative qualities of a .177, while a .22's stopping power is better for rabbits, rats and squirrels. Practising (or plinking) with .177 pellets is much cheaper than with .22s, and shooting over longer ranges is easier with a .177 thanks to its flatter trajectory. Though .22s do tend to hold steadier on windy days. So, with SMK offering all these options on just the one combo, it clearly works out cheaper than buying two rifles.

With any airgun, .177 calibre tends to be less efficient than .22. In PCPs, that means you get less shots per charge for the same power, and in the case of a springer, like the Beeman, you either have to uprate the

spring in a .177 model, or accept a loss of up to 2ft/lb power output. As the Dual Calibre uses the same action for both barrels, the latter applies. So, my first task with the test rifle was to put it over my Skan Pro1/S3 chrono to see what the *actual* power differential was between the two calibres. After all, if the .22 set-up was doing 11ft/lb but 'gave away' 2ft/lb with the .177 barrel fitted, it would render it useless as a field rifle in the smaller calibre, 9ft/lb being far short of the 10ft/lb minimum I consider necessary for humane pest control work.

However, as you can see from the graph over the page, the four pellets I chose across the two calibres gave powerful results in both .22 and the less efficient .177. I chose these particular brands to test power as they represent a broad range of weights – from ultra-light to medium-heavy. I must admit, the results surprised me. For instance, I didn't expect the 15.71-grain Daystate FT to give the ultimate power in .22 – nor did I think the ultra-light, 5.1-grain U-Bolt would give the lowest in .177.

Generally, the .22s produced in the region of 11.5ft/lb, while the .177s returned around 10.5ft/lb. This difference of just 1ft/lb proved to me that the Beeman is capable of pest control work over typical airgun ranges with either barrel fitted.

Accuracy-wise, I have no complaints whatsoever, either. Both barrels fit the well-engineered breech block as though they've been custom-machined, though you do have to be careful that, when changing bores, you don't push the breech O-ring seal out of its seat in the block's



face. However, the manufacturer has foreseen this potential pitfall and a spare is provided should you lose it.

The barrel locks with a single, large grub screw under the block, and an arrow-chevron etching on the side of the block and barrel help you align everything correctly so that the screw locates into its pre-drilled recess. One thing I did notice, however, was that screw kept loosening with the .177 barrel in place and I eventually ended up using a quick-acting thread sealant to secure it. It was an easy problem to overcome and barrel changeover remained an easy enough procedure to carry out, even in the field.

Each of my barrels were well rifled, with smooth internal bores, and both calibres were lightly choked in the last 12mm. I'm sure this had a big part to play in the gun's overall accuracy in either calibre, and why they were able to shoot most pellets so well. As you'd expect, the more expensive brands proved to be the most accurate and I settled on Daystate FT in .22 and H&N Field Target Trophy in .177. At 25 yards, both these pellets were capable of printing sub-inch groups on paper, making them an ideal choice for hunting out to 35 yards.

As a sporter, the Dual Calibre is a man-size gun and certainly inspires confidence. It has a robust appearance and feel and, what it lacks in practical stock embellishments – there's no chequering or cheek-piece, just a raised comb and non-slip rubber butt pad – is more than made up for in its handling. The forestock is nicely extended to the end of the breech block to give plenty of hold options, the comb is ambidextrous and the perfect height for the supplied 3-9x32 scope, and the grip raked perfectly for good trigger attack.



There are cosmetic embellishments, though – black inserts neaten the side stock screw holes and there's a gold Beeman insignia inlaid on the left. The only slight gripe I have is that the pistol grip area is rather chunky. It strengthens this generally weak area, for sure – so I doubt the stock would fracture if you accidentally dropped the rifle – but I'd have welcomed a bit of a thumb muscle cutaway.

Despite the rifle's full power performance, the Dual Calibre goes off in your shoulder with hardly any kick at all. I did feel the recoil was slightly harsher in .177 set-up – possibly accounting for that loose screw – but it was very manageable, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to stick in the impressive groups that I did.

The two-stage trigger does its bit for accuracy, too. Its broad-bladed face has raised blocks for a good feel, and the sear engagement can be adjusted, via two tiny screws, without removing the stock. Once I'd tweaked the factory setting, I felt the trigger worked with much greater consistency – though this could be down to personal preference.

There's an 'in-guard' safety that automatically sets on cocking the rifle. It's easy enough to push 'off' with the back of your index finger and can be reset. The rifle can also be decocked, and the overall cocking



Top left: The semi-hard case is a fantastic feature and allows for both barrels to be taken into the field

Top right: The 3-9x32 scope is a real bonus, as was the arrestor plate

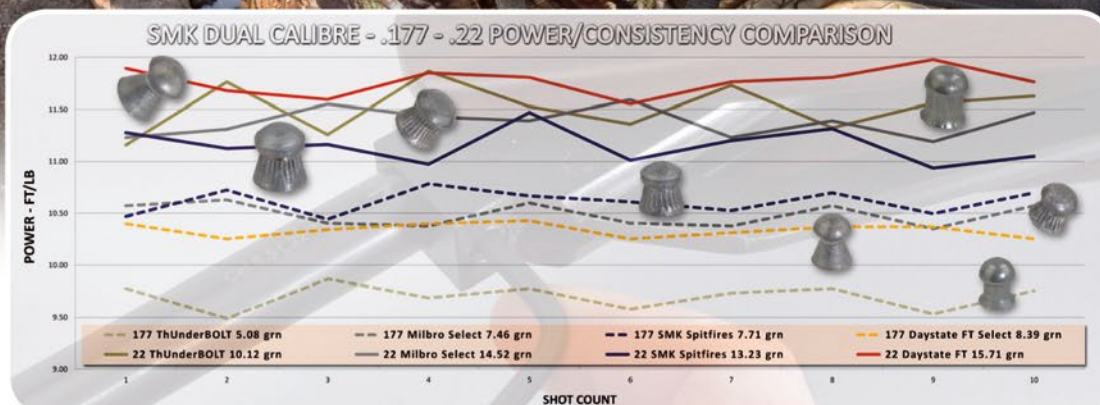
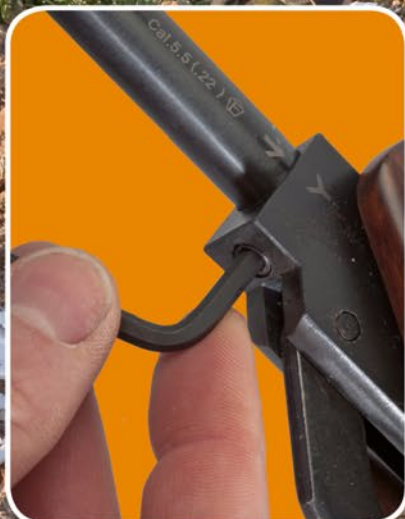
Far left: After some tweaking, the trigger let every shot go very consistently

Left: The breech lock-up is excellent – and note the forend screw covers

TEST: SMK DUAL CALIBRE

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Model:	Dual Calibre
Distributor:	Sportsmarketing
Country of Origin:	China
Type:	Spring and piston
Cocking:	Break-barrel (with decock facility)
Calibre:	.177 (4.5mm) and .22 (5.5mm) (both barrels supplied)
Overall length:	1,185mm
Barrel length:	457mm
Weight:	3.9kg (scoped)
Sights:	Scope rail only, with arrestor plate
Stock:	Beech (synthetic option)
Length of pull:	370mm
Trigger:	Two-stage, adjustable
Safety:	Automatic 'in-trigger', resettable
Power:	11+ ft/lb
Price:	£199.95 (wood or synthetic), including twin barrels, scope, mounts, bespoke canvas case, tools and spare seal
Contact:	Sportsmarketing, 01206 795333, www.sportsmk.co.uk



cycle is pretty easy given the gun's full-power. Part of this is because the barrel is a full 18 inches long, not including the ported muzzle brake, so you get a good mechanical advantage. Actually, I could easily cock the rifle holding it at around 14 inches, so I'd say this rifle would work well as a carbine. Spring guns don't need long barrels, unlike PCPs, so losing a few inches would cause no problems.

The scope that comes as part of the package is an absolute cracker, offering 3-9x zoom magnification, parallax adjustment, a Duplex-style reticle and finger-friendly BDC turrets – and its flat-top mounts also sport a screw-adjustable arrestor pin, making the scope suitable for use on other rifles. You don't need to deploy it on the Dual Calibre, though, because the dovetails are finished with an arrestor plate – and I'm pleased to see this is right at the end of the grooves, too. So many rifles have a mis-positioned plate, and you can't butt the rear scope mount tight against it. One thing I needed to do, however, was pack the rear mount of the scope as the Dual Calibre's design sports a 'droop' barrel – something once only found on the best break-barrels!

The finishing touch to what is a truly outstanding rifle package is the case. A semi-hard affair that's been designed to hold the action, barrels and scope individually via Velcro ties. There's full-zip closure and

carry handles, and even a protective flap inside to stop everything rubbing together. Because you have to split the barrel, scope and action to store the Dual Calibre in the case, I was keen to see how well zero held. While some minor tweaking of the scope was needed, I was never more than an inch out from either barrel's respective 'zero' every time I re-assembled the rifle.

Whether the .177 or .22 barrel was fitted, I loved shooting the Dual Calibre for its sheer usability. There is an old adage 'beware the one gun man', yet those airgunners who have two rifles in order to span both calibres will know it's often hard to get the best out of either when you're continually chopping and changing. But with the Beeman, you can get completely familiar with one rifle – and just choose your barrel according to the job in hand. Brilliant. ●

Above: The barrel-changing process was easy enough to undertake in the field

Above, inset: The etched arrows facilitate quick and easy barrel changeover

Graph: The chrono threw up some surprises, but clearly shows the rifle to be powerful enough for pest control in both calibres