

# First LOOK



Latest offerings of SMK's Supergrade XS38 Custom Deluxe pack in a raft of new updates.

We grab a look at how this top-end underlever just got even better...



SMK has re-jigged the sighting set-up on the new XS38, introducing fibre-optic inserts

The rearsight is still fully adjustable, and sits in a re-designed base

**S**hooters who are serious about eking out every drop of accuracy potential from a spring-powered air rifle look toward fixed-barrel models. Unlike break-barrels, fixed-barrel rifles are by their very nature more accurate in the long run as there's no wear, tear and sloppiness to creep in to the all-important breech lock-up area. Granted, a well-engineered break-barrel will shoot with pinpoint precision straight out of the box... but after many thousands of rounds, there's every likelihood that the barrel closure will just be that little less effective.

The downside is that fixed-barrel springers will be a little weightier – because they need an additional lever with which to cock the rifle – but the upside is that this extra weight can also combat the recoil by dampening some of the movement, particularly in the case of those underlevers which mount their cocking lever directly under the barrel. In short, if you're man-sized enough to handle an underlever, you've got the potential to shoot with the kind of accuracy that would put many PCP users under pressure!

Sportsmarketing has for years brought a superb fixed-barrel underlever into the UK in the shape of the Supergrade XS38 – and it's sold in its thousands not just because of its incredibly affordable, sub-£200 price tag, but because it bears testimony to the superior performance that this type of springer possesses. The fact that it delivers a power bang on the legal limit, and is rather well presented – especially in the case of the Custom Deluxe model – only serves to help its cause.

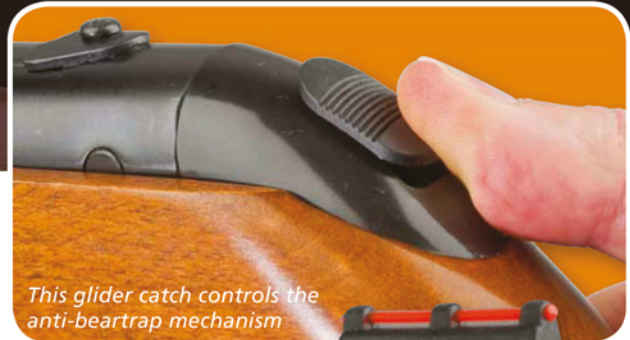
Now, though, this nicely-priced underlever has had quite a makeover. In fact, some of the changes are radical enough to warrant it being a



## FIRST LOOK: SMK XS38 CUSTOM



*A synthetic pull-back system releases the cocking underlever*



*This glider catch controls the anti-beartrap mechanism*



*The articulated cocking linkage's slot extends well past the breech, leaving most holds unaffected*

**Main image above:** SMK's changes to the Custom Deluxe variant of the XS38 are evolution rather than revolution, but each change improves the rifle

whole new model – although SMK have decided it best not to confuse the market and has introduced their 'mark 2' version with the same, famous moniker upon which its reputation has been built.

As before, there's still a lesser-specced XS38 – the Deluxe – which (in less stylish woodwork) is £30 cheaper. But at just £199.95 for the flagship Custom Deluxe XS38, it's the top-of-the-line model that is set to steal the plaudits, especially in the all-new guise unveiled here.

In truth, the 'look' of the new rifle isn't all that much different from its forebear, and you can instantly associate it with the XS38 stable. However, delve deeper, and you begin to see quite a few new elements that highlight why this model, in its latest format, is quite the current buy.

Most notably, the latest XS38 Custom Deluxe comes with open sights that boast fibre-optic inserts for faster target acquisition and more accurate aiming against tricky backgrounds. And it's not been a case of just sticking the light-gathering strips into the existing sights, either – this latest Supergrade boasts an all-new sighting set-up.

The rearsight remains fully adjustable for lateral and vertical POI shift via serrated thumbwheels – numbered (0 to 9) in the case of the elevation wheel and with L and R arrows for the windage turnscrew. However, the unit – a mix of metal and heavy-duty synthetic – has had a total redesign, with all the central unit sitting within a protective base station that sports raised sides. The sightline is slightly raised to accommodate the new foresight arrangement and the thumbwheels click extremely positively, with no sloppiness or inconsistency.

The rear's square-cut notch is flanked by green fibre-optic dots that align with the red fibre-optic of the foresight bead in the usual

fashion. There's no protective tunnel around the foresight as there was on the original model, so due diligence needs to be shown when on the range or in the field – but it's not something to make the sights a write-off. In fact, the total sight base of 425mm, coupled with the precise adjustments of the rearsight unit, make for some extremely tight groups downrange in the right hands. Those who are tempted to shy away from a scope will be surprised at just how well – and at how far – they can get results with the XS38's new open sight set-up.

There's a new business end on this latest XS38, too, with the muzzle shroud-come-lever-catch being re-designed, in synthetic, with a more fashionable look about it. The squared-off end has been replaced by one which has a hint of silencer about its appearance – although there's no sound suppression as the 475mm barrel runs almost to the very extreme of the brake's muzzle end.

Built in to the shroud is the underlever cocking lever's catch, which is released via a synthetic pull-back release mechanism. As on the original gun, the underlever linkage is articulated with the advantage that there's only a short, stock-weakening cocking slot cut into the forestock, which itself is extended well past the loading breech area to give plenty of hold options.

The XS38 also hasn't lost its anti-beartrap mechanism – a good thing, as safety is paramount on sliding-breech guns like this, where your fingers can be vulnerable when loading. However, whereas the original system was a little ham-fisted, requiring the user to pull back a lever, awkwardly situated behind the trigger blade, before the cocking lever could be returned to the closed position, this latest model has come up with a stroke of design genius.



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### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS - XS38

<b>MODEL:</b> Supergrade XS38 Custom Deluxe
<b>UK DISTRIBUTOR:</b> Sportsmarketing 01206 795333 • <a href="http://www.sportsmk.co.uk">www.sportsmk.co.uk</a>
<b>ACTION:</b> Underlever, spring and piston
<b>CALIBRE:</b> .22 only
<b>OVERALL LENGTH:</b> 1,142mm
<b>BARREL LENGTH:</b> 485mm
<b>WEIGHT (EXCL. SCOPE):</b> 4.0kg
<b>TRIGGER:</b> Single-stage
<b>SAFETY:</b> Automatic, in-guard, resettable. Anti-beartrap cocking system
<b>SIGHTS:</b> Fibre-optic opens, adjustable.
<b>STOCK:</b> Beech sporter (r-h)
<b>POWER:</b> 11.4ft/lb (according to pellets used)
<b>PRICE:</b> £199.95

*The in-set safety and trigger have been spruced up – with greater access to the trigger thanks to a more discreet safety catch*



*The 11mm dovetailed receiver features an arrestor plate*



The remodelled cylinder end block – now beautifully curved, à la the old BSA springers, rather than simply ‘plugged’ with a serrated cap – sports what appears to be a thumb safety. But, in fact, things aren’t what they seem... because this serrated glider button is the anti-beartrap release system – you push it forward to enable the cocking lever to be swung home. Ingenious!

The safety catch proper is situated inside the trigger guard but, again, this – along with the pressed steel blade itself – has been completely restyled for the better. No longer does this ‘second trigger’ safety catch cramp your index finger’s style, though, thanks to the set-back design of the blade and the thinner, shorter shape of the safety lever, which operates in a far less intrusive manner.

Being automatic, the safety catch comes on during the cocking process – itself a fairly effortless affair, especially given the rifle’s full-power energy output – and it’s easy enough to pull back (to ‘off’) with your trigger finger when you need to take the shot. Similarly, it can be reset – by pushing forward, easily and quietly – if you need to make the rifle safe again.

As for the trigger, the XS38 was never known for its poor let-off... and things haven’t changed in that department with the new model. However, the test sample’s trigger appeared to be more single-stage than two-stage in its operation, although the set-back style of the curved blade certainly helped ensure this was anything but a hindrance to good shot release.

To assist on the accuracy front, the XS38 still sports an 11mm dovetailed receiver for standard ‘airgun’ mounts should you want to fit a telescopic sight for longer-range shooting. They provide 135mm of mounting space, and include an arrestor plate against which you can

butt the rear mount to stop the scope ‘creeping’. This is placed right at the end, too, allowing the full length of dovetails to be utilised. The new XS38 also has four cross-hatches milled into the receiver, between the rails, for use those mounts that have cross-pin type arrestor systems.

The ‘Custom’ tag of the flagship model identifies the rifle’s beech woodwork, which is extremely well matched to the action to provide good handling. Although it’s devoid of any chequering panels, it’s beautifully presented in a high-gloss lacquer. The grip is pleasantly raked to offer good trigger attack, the forend is gently rounded along its full length for a comfortable hold (wherever you choose to grip it) and the butt boasts both a right-hand Monte-Carlo cheekpiece and a ventilated recoil pad. Though the .22-only rifle is sold with a right-hand bias, it perfectly suitable for southpaws to shoot off the left shoulder.

Besides its woodwork, the finish of the new XS38 Custom Deluxe’s metalwork is also far more high-end than its price tag would suggest, with a good standard of polishing and blueing to the action, barrel and underlever. The silver-finished inner cylinder withdraws on cocking to reveal a solidly engineered breech, along with a highly efficient cup seal that prevents air leakage from the transfer port on firing. This plays an important role in both the rifle’s power and consistency, as seen by the velocity stats below.

For the money – under £200, let’s not forget – the ‘new’ style Supergrade XS38 Custom Deluxe is certainly a gun to turn heads and do the business. While many ‘budget’ guns meet their price point with compromises somewhere down the line, it’s a very pleasant surprise to come across one which seems to do the opposite. This is a rifle that remains very competitively priced, even though it’s just got a whole lot better. ●



*The breech’s cup seal plays a major part in the rifle’s consistent power output*

