

MORE TO EXPLORE

Phill Price tries a new model from a famous brand

When I was a young man, there were famous British brands that we knew and respected; Webley and BSA for rifles, and Eley and Milbro for pellets. In recent years, the beloved old name of Milbro has been all too hard to find, but now it's reappeared on the side of rifles and scopes imported by those masters of value for money, SMK. The first to hit my desk was a large, break-barrel springer, called 'the Explorer', although I have no idea why.

At 48" long and weighing over 8lbs without a scope and mounts, this is a sizable rifle and a proper handful. It features a moulded-on silencer that adds to the muzzle-heavy balance on an already long barrel. This is no rifle for youngsters, or those of a slight build! Although the black synthetic stock looks deep from the pictures, it's actually quite slim, side

I found the firing cycle smooth and quiet.

to side. The pistol grip is well shaped with a stylish flare in keeping with the large build, and the reach to the trigger blade is best suited to those with long fingers. As on the pistol grip, the fore end has moulded, chequered panels that are very nicely formed, with notably sharp points that really do offer added grip.

LONG GUN

The fore end is very long, giving a good choice of hold positions, and despite the Explorer using an articulated cocking linkage, the cut-out is 7½" long, which is unusual. However, in use I hardly noticed it at all. There are cheek pieces on both sides of the butt, making the Explorer properly ambidextrous, and behind this is a nice, thick rubber butt

pad that gripped my shoulder well. At 14¾" the pull length is a touch longer than average, adding to the impression that this is a rifle built for the larger man.

Up front, the barrel and silencer assembly measure 22", making them a powerful lever with which to cock the main spring, and the force needed was noticeably easy. The synthetic silencer appears to be moulded onto the barrel permanently because I couldn't see screws for removal. On top, the fore sight element is moulded in and offers a bright red, fibre-optic insert that complements the green ones in the fully-adjustable rear sight. Some people question the point of fitting open sights when almost everybody uses a scope these days, but on a rifle intended for those just joining our sport, they're a very good thing. >>





A long barrel makes for easy cocking.



The adjustable rear sight has fibre-optic inserts.



The pistol grip is well shaped.



The silencer is part of the Explorer's quiet nature.



The tab in front of the trigger blade is the manual safety.

These ones are bright and clear, ideal for learning technique and short-range plinking

SCOPE RAIL

On top of the cylinder is a long rail machined in to accept scope mounts, and SMK included the 3-9 x 40 Clearview model, which is also from the Milbro catalogue. The mounts clamped solidly, and I noted no movement along the rail

"I'm so impressed that an inexpensive rifle like this can deliver such good vibration control"

during my test. The Explorer's rail has drillings and cross cuts to accept recoil arrestor pins, but the mounts didn't feature them.

The trigger is quite firm, as you'd rightly expect for a rifle at this price, and the second stage of travel quite long. This is because beginners need triggers that don't go off too easily, for the sake of safety. Right in front of the trigger is a manual safety tab, adding to the ambidextrous credentials. Not everybody likes a safety right against the trigger blade, but I have no difficulties with them.

PLENTY OF POWER

Over the chronograph, the .22 Explorer averaged 520fps with 16.7 grain SMK Victory Shock .22, which equates to 10 ft.lbs. muzzle energy. I was impressed by how smooth and quiet the firing cycle was. I'm sure that the silencer helped, but on a spring-piston rifle most of the noise comes from the action, so it shows just how well Milbro has done to mute the mechanical sounds. I suspect that they've employed long spring guides to dampen down the spring's vibrations inside the action, and it works very well. I'm so impressed that an inexpensive rifle like this can deliver such good vibration control.

To see if the rifle's accuracy lives up to the promise, I set out a target card at 25 yards and worked through a selection of pellets. After a while, the dieseling died down and I was soon getting just under 1½" groups, from the bench off soft-padded gun rests. It's always important to allow spring-piston guns to recoil naturally and to avoid contact with any hard surface during the firing cycle.

This feels like a lot of gun for the money and if you are average to tall in height, this rifle will fit you well.

Whether you stick with the open sights, or add a scope like the Clear View, you'll be sure to have fun shooting this sturdy, well-executed rifle, and it won't break the bank to buy one. ■

TECH SPEC	
Manufacturer:	Milbro
Model:	Explorer
Type:	Spring-piston
Action:	Break-barrel
Trigger:	Two-stage with manual safety
Calibres:	.177 and .22
Muzzle energy:	10 ft.lbs.
Length:	134cm
Weight:	3.65kg
RRP:	£109.95
RRP with camo stock:	£119.95
Scope and mounts as shown:	£54.99
RRP £109.95	