

Spitfires do BATTLE!

With many tins of pellets costing over a tenner, SMK's Spitfires range is pleasantly affordable at around a third of the price. It's understandably one of the biggest-selling brands of airgun ammo, too – and **Phil Bulmer** sends a load of the .177s downrange to find out why...

"That's a nice looking tin," said my youngest son as I unwrapped the Spitfire pellet samples I'd been sent to test – and there's no doubt the familiar RAF roundel is a striking design and a potent symbol for a tin of airgun pellets. It's also a nice, secure screwtop, and besides offering security while being deployed, I expect many tins will find secondary uses long after their contents have been spent downrange.

Spitfires are made in the UK for Sportsmarketing, and available in .177 and .22. They also come in the guise of roundheads and points, the latter having 'Pointed' printed above the 'Spitfires' name. Actually, the non-pointed version is more a semi-roundhead; it has a slight lip which helps it punch pretty clean holes in paper targets. As a .177 fan for most of my airgunning, my initial testing concentrated on the .177 (or 4.5mm) Spitfires.

Opening the tins reveals the pellets to have a slightly darker finish than many ammo brands, and an initial inspection showed Spitfires to be generally well formed with perhaps only a handful of specimens deformed in transit. By any standards, that's not a bad ratio at all. I've always maintained that a sign of how good pellets are... is what you find sitting at the bottom of the tin in terms of debris. I'm delighted to report that my tins were spotless!

The first job was to give the pellets a quick weight check – 7.95 grains for the Pointed and 7.9 for the standard roundhead. These vital statistics place both types in the light to medium weight category. Consistency was typical of a good all-rounder, with random samples of 10 falling within +/-0.1 grain. A good half of each sample was actually identical in weight, which is a sign of excellent quality control and machine set-up at the manufacturing stage.

Both types have ribbed, rather than smooth sidewalls. Ribbing serves two purposes: it helps to strengthen the skirt without adding too much weight aft of the centre of gravity and, in theory, should provide a little more drag stabilisation, which ultimately benefits accuracy.

The roundhead has a single, but very thick driving band around its head, whereas the Pointed Spitfire has a thin, twin-band arrangement. I must admit that this looked more precise than its round-headed



PELLET TEST: SMK SPITFIRES

SPITFIRE STATS		
RANGE	SPITFIRES	SPITFIRES POINTED
DISTRIBUTOR	Sportsmarketing • www.sportsmk.co.uk • 01206 795333	
CALIBRE TRIALLED	.177 (4.5mm)	.177 (4.5mm)
TYPE	Waisted ribbed diabolo	Waisted ribbed diabolo
HEAD	Semi-roundhead	Pointed
WEIGHT	7.9 grains	7.95 grains
VARIATION	+/- 0.1 grain	+/- 0.1 grain
CONTAINER	Screwtop tin, 500	Screwtop tin, 500

Left: Phil conducts his ballistics test shooting his old Daystate X2 off a makeshift bench

Inset Left: The famous roundel design used on these pellet lids is certainly eye-catching

sibling – and the thinner rings will, generally, make a good air seal and be more suited to conforming to the profile of the rifling.

I initially set out my targets up to 25 yards away from my benchrest table – a typical hunting distance – and chose my old (but trusty) Daystate X2 as the test gun. Being a recoilless PCP, it lends itself to accurate shooting – an important consideration when you're testing ammo! – and, unlike a springer, its more gentle air release doesn't inflate the skirts. Additionally, I know my Daystate's barrel isn't overly pellet fussy.

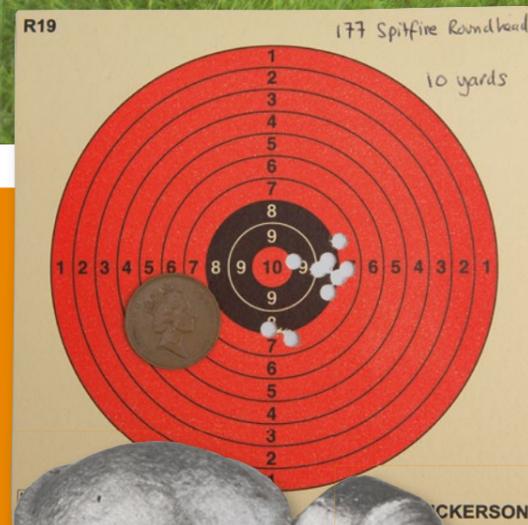
After letting the barrel settle in with the new ammo over a few dozen shots, I went straight to group-testing the roundheads on the 25-yard target cards. Out of my rifle, unfortunately some shots wandered away from the main group. Given their cost – which is a quarter the price of many of the Euro-made brands – I certainly wasn't expecting match-type accuracy from the Spitfires, and I'm sure SMK wouldn't claim it, either. However, I felt that pushing the pellet beyond 25 yards would be too much of a hunting 'ask' for this particular round – although Spitfires would be a good pellet of choice for economical plinking at tin cans and the like... as many tens of thousands of airgunners can attest to, of course.

I began my testing of the pointed derivative with a little trepidation. Ammo with a pointed head is notoriously difficult to manufacture from a ballistics point of view, and you only need the slightest flaw in the shape of the nose to turn a good pointed pellet into an abysmal one! However, I was enthused to see much tighter groups on 25-yard paper – although, again, I wouldn't want to push this distance any farther if I were using them for hunting.

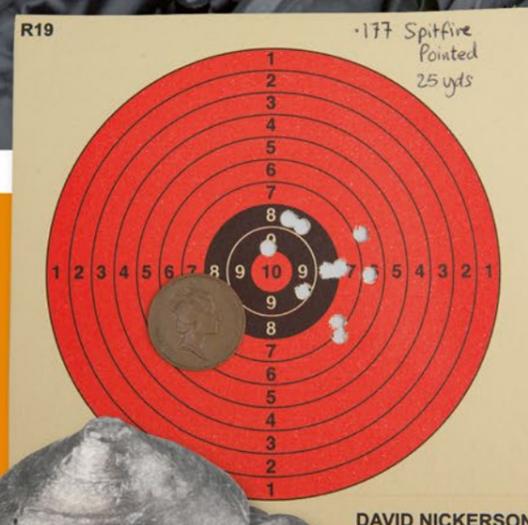
No matter what pellet you shoot, hunting requires group sizes of 35mm or less, and to push any pointed pellet too far only calls into question the hunter's responsibility – though the extra penetration afforded by a pointed pellet is certainly a good reason for selecting it as a hunting pellet (within its capabilities). Talking of capabilities, at sub-25 yards, Pointed Spitfires landed in a group that could be covered by a two-pence coin – and I can see why SMK claim in their marketing literature that these are ideal for rat control. Indeed, I would say that Pointed would be the best choice of Spitfires for close-range hunting – feral pigeons or rats in the confines of a pig shed, for instance.

While I personally wouldn't select the round-headed Spitfires for general hunting work where longer shooting distances are normally required, I can, however, vouch after my testing that these are seriously good value leisure rounds. And given plinking is by far the biggest pastime practised by airgunners, it's no wonder SMK sell as many of them as they do – just about every gun shop in the land has these tins of Spitfires on the counter.

That's understandable – at just four-and-a-half quid a tin, you could spend considerable time shooting without worrying about your bank account. And time wasted – or should that be *waisted?* – enjoying yourself with your airgun is, actually, time very well spent in my book! ●



The roundhead Spitfire has a single, thick band around its head...



...while the Pointed version has a thin, twin-band arrangement. Both pellets feature ribbed sides