

A change of TACT

Professional pest controller **Pete Meek** updates his lamping gear to a more fashionable set-up, courtesy of the TactLED flashlight from SMK



Right: The TactLED from Sportsmarketing comes with a host of mod cons

People often ask me about my choice of shooting kit, and my answer is simple. As a professional, it has to be sturdy and reliable – and cost effective. There's little point shelling out the better part of a grand on state-of-the-art PCP combo because in this job, I simply wouldn't be able to recoup the investment any time soon. Anyone who thinks pro pest control is a lucrative business is wearing rose-tinted spectacles; most of us have to supplement our income with a second job. For me, it's more of a vocation!

I do have a PCP in my gun cabinet – a Theoben Rapid 7 – that I've owned for nearly 20 years, but I find myself drawn to spring power for most assignments. Partly because that's all there was when I started shooting, and partly because I like the fact that springers have a go-anywhere, self-contained powerplant. I don't have to worry about sensitive valves and power curves, nor load and unload dive bottles and pumps on a job. Plus the running costs are cheaper.

For years, my spring-powered rifle of choice has been the SMK XS20, in .22. I feed it a diet of Bisley Super Field and Crosman Premier and it's generally topped with a Bushnell 3-9x42 borrowed from one of my

rimfire rifles, though I'm not averse to changing ammo and glassware to suit the needs of a particular job. I've shot thousands of pellets through this break-barrel, and it's cleanly despatched equally as much vermin with no problems at all.

Despite its age, it's as up-to-date as I need because my results aren't suffering in any way – though, lately, I've begun to wonder if I'm a bit behind the times as far as my lamping kit is concerned. For years, I've stuck with traditional lamping outfits which are good, but which also have drawbacks when compared with the smaller 'tactical' torches that are now very popular among airgunners.

You don't have to worry about putting the battery on charge for up to six hours prior to going shooting, or have cables and wires to contend with – plus they have better battery life. Battery-powered torches can last up to 10 hours, compared to perhaps two (at best) with the other old-school units. It's easy enough to pop a couple of spare cells in your pocket, too – they're small enough!

Sportsmarketing have been well ahead of the game on the 'tactical' lamping front. I remember seeing them in catalogue many moons ago,



Below and inset right: Some scaly-tailed scavengers fall to the XS20 and TactLED combo



and now that the fashion's caught on, I looked no further than their latest catalogue to buy mine – the TactLED model. It comes with mounting bracket, pressure pad and click switch – all you need to get it rigged on scopes with objectives of up to 50mm. It has a beam that is good out to 100 metres – more than enough for my airgun pest control needs – and boasts a seven-hour battery life. The light-to-scope mount also has Weaver-style brackets, so you could add a laser if you wish. All in all, not at all bad for under 50 quid!

SETTING UP

I fitted the TactLED in a couple of minutes – it mounts via a few hex bolts, wrench supplied – and was immediately impressed with the



HEALTHY ATTITUDE

Remember that rats carry diseases, so always wear gloves and dispose of the carcasses safely at the end of your session. The landowner won't thank you for leaving anything behind, regardless of whether or not they're paying for your services, either! Cleaning up behind you is good etiquette for any airgunner involved with pest control.

freedom this type of lamping system gives you. No leads to get tangled up in, and no battery packs to carry. Another bonus is that as it's small enough to fit inside my gun bag in its attached state, ready to get into action at a moment's notice. And as it weighs next to nothing, it doesn't affect the rifle's balance, either.

THE JOB

It being mid-harvest, I was called out to go to a local farm where there'd been a few sightings of rats in the farmyard. They were obviously after then inevitable glut of spilled grain around the place – and as rat-culling is best done in the dark, it was the perfect opportunity to put my new TactLED kit to the test.

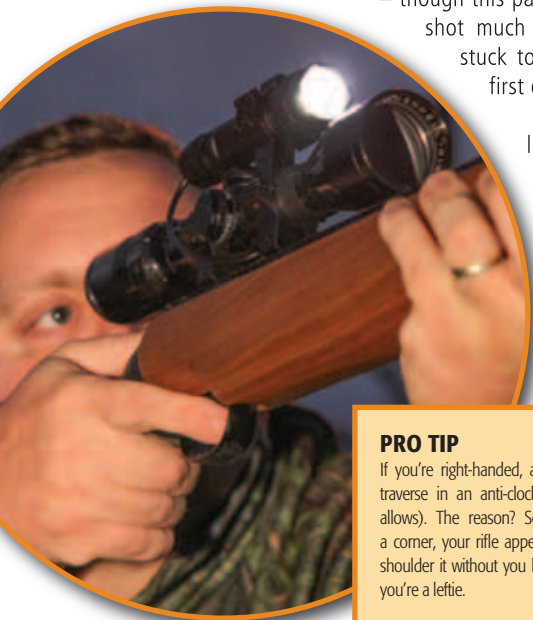
I got to site an hour before last light and let things settle down before starting my walk around the farm after dusk had set in. Given its size, I found the TactLED surprisingly bright. On most of my lamping jobs, I find that brilliant white light is a little too scary for rats, so some form of filter is always a good idea – though this particular site hasn't been

shot much for a long while, so I stuck to unfiltered light for my first outing.

Although it's got a lanyard, mounting kit and switch options, like most torches, the TactLED doesn't come with any filters – but I've got this sorted thanks to my local stationery

PRO TIP

If you're right-handed, a good tip for farmyard forays is to traverse in an anti-clockwise direction (providing the wind allows). The reason? So that whenever you walk around a corner, your rifle appears before you do, and it's easier to shoulder it without you being in full view. Mooch clockwise if you're a leftie.



Below: In a business where reputation is based on results, Pete's happy that his new TactLED will make the grade



shop! I use a sheet of acetate, cut into a circle a little bigger than the torch face, which I then secure in place with an elastic band. Simple! Better still, it comes in every colour you can think of to suit which works best for your particular quarry (and it can change on well-lamped venues). This is what I'll do for the TactLED on future sessions.

Back to the session in hand, and things started off a little slow, but as the night drew on the SMK combo began to amass a good bag of 'Rolands'. The TactLED worked a treat when scanning all the hidey-holes in between the barns and outbuildings. Although the weather wasn't great, it didn't seem to deter the smaller rats. I think the youngsters were too pre-occupied on the free food on offer to be 'lamp shy', whereas the older scaly-tails had wised up.

Most of the rats were taken between 15 and 25 metres, using heavyweight pellets that smack them stone dead every time. The ease of use and quick set-up of the TactLED are worth the asking price alone, and I'm now looking forward to trialling the tactical rig on rabbits as soon as possible. Though my reputation depends on my results, that first outing in the farmyard has given me every confidence that this little SMK light is going to do the business and not let me down. ●