

I'm a real fan of spring-powered airguns, plus I have a penchant for models with a finish and spec-chart fit for a connoisseur. So that makes the new SMK TH208 Thumbhole Sporter an air rifle that's right up my street!

The flagship of the Sportsmarketing's new break-barrel 208 Series – which also includes a standard sporter, and models with skeletal woodwork and a synthetic sporter stock – the £199.95 'TH' version comes dressed in the finest thumbhole livery I've seen on a rifle for a long time, and the reason why this 208 model sits at the very top of the pile.

It's 'maxed out' in every department – power, accuracy, handling and finish – making it a particularly suitable choice if you're serious about your airgunning. I am, of course, and I'd happily make room for the TH208 in my gun cabinet.

Over the chrono, my test rifle spat out SMK Spitfires at bang on the legal power limit. And despite its fair old poke, I found the TH208's 48cm rifled barrel pretty easy to cock. Even on the longest of practice sessions, my arm didn't ache at all.

SMK's new rifle is well engineered from butt to muzzle, but I was particularly impressed with the breech

lock-up area which, on a break-barrel, is all important. A heavily sprung ball keeps the breech faces tightly closed, whilst not making the gun too difficult to 'break' when cocking – and there's also a sturdy axis bolt which you can tighten up down the years should the barrel start to get sloppy through constant breaking.

Like all spring-and-piston powered air rifles, the TH208 recoils, but it's very manageable and SMK have added plenty of features to make it so. At one end is a neat looking, blued steel barrel weight and at the other is a ventilated recoil pad to absorb any movement in your shoulder. (The latter also doubles as a handy ammo store – just push some pellets into the holes!)

The muzzle weight brings a forward bias to the TH208, but as there are no open sights, this evens out once you fit



The new SMK TH208 Thumbhole Sporter – a stunning break-barrel and worthy flagship of SMK's new 208 Series.

FACTS - TH208
Action: Break-barrel
Calibre: .22
Length: 114.5cm
Barrel Length: 48cm
Weight: 3.81g
Trigger: Two-stage, adjustable
Safety: Automatic, resettable
Stock: Thumbhole beech
Sights: Adjustable fibre-optic opens
Power: 12 ft/lbs
Price: £199.95

and hunters will be pleased to know that the barrel can be de-cocked to relieve pressure on the mainspring.

On paper, the TH208/3-9 x 50 combo was pretty devastating, with sub-inch groups easily 'do-able' out to 30 yards – but the rifle didn't need ring targets to prove its worth in the field.

“I'd happily make room for the TH208 in my gun cabinet”

by dampening barrel flip during the shot, the end weight improves accuracy so much that I was very comfortable shooting the TH208 at the limits of my normal hunting ranges.

Finished in a rich brown that shows up the superb grain of the beech below it, the thumbhole grip of the TH208's beautiful stock gives you full control of the trigger. What's more, it's been cleverly designed to be ambidextrous, so you can shoot from either shoulder and make full use of the raised Monte Carlo cheek-piece which has been profiled both sides of the butt.

The fore-stock is gently rounded underneath to offer a good hold, and to bring you every conceivable field advantage, it's been extended right to the front of the breech block and sports a neatly-cut chequering panel on each side.

The trigger blade has a gentle curve, exactly how I like my triggers to feel on a sporting rifle. It's two-stage and



Above: The TH208's receiver is grooved for a telly and features an arrestor plate at the end.



The extended fore-end looks neat and offers some serious practical advantages in the field.

adjustable for length of first stage and pull weight, although I left mine at its factory setting.

The rifle has an automatic safety catch which pops out at the end of the receiver when you cock the rifle; an 'S' (for Safe) is visible when it's on. Its design is such that it's easy to push off, and just as easy to re-set if you wish –

Whether I was shooting from the prone, kneeling or standing position, the stock's attributes and that dampened muzzle made it an absolute joy to use against quarry.

As is befitting of a flagship rifle, and to match the woodwork's luxurious finish, the TH208's metalwork is beautifully presented in an even, rich blue that comes up even better once you've 'conditioned' it a few times with a silicone cloth and I'd be as happy spending hours lavishing some TLC on this rifle as I would shooting it. It's worth all the attention – and certainly got mine from the moment I squeezed its trigger for the very first time!

Courtesy of the thumbhole grip, extended and chequered fore-end and resettable auto-safety (insets), Nigel Allen found the superior handling of the SMK TH208 Thumbhole Sporter break-barrel a joy to use in the field.

NIGEL ALLEN'S verdict on the new SMK TH208 Sporter

A FLAGSHIP FOR THE FIELD!



Loading up. The TH208's break-barrel breech has a very positive lock-up.



The trigger is a two-stage, adjustable affair.



A great tip for the ventilated recoil pad! Simply press in some pellets for an ultra-handly ammo store!