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THE ED TESTS THE ZBROIA HORTITSIA RIFLE

EDITOR'S TEST

ZBROIA HORTITSIA MK3

DAVE BARHAM tests the latest generation of this much-loved Ukranian PCP

PHOTOGRAPHY **DAVE BARHAM**



NICE STOCK

This rifle features a 'Monte Carlo' wooden stock, which is jet black to complement the rest of the rifle. It feels really nice to the touch and is dedicated to right-handed shooters. One thing I noticed straight away is the lack of stippling, both on the fore grip and pistol grip, which may or may not pose a problem for all-weather hunters.

I do really like the sleek lines of this stock, the fore end is flat with gently curved edges, and it's surprisingly comfortable in the palm of your hand. It also sits really well atop a gloved hand, so those who like to use a shooting glove will like how this feels.

You'll also notice that the stock has been crafted to incorporate the trigger guard into the stock, which again is a really nice touch.

Zbroia has been making the Hortitsia PCP rifle since 2014, so it was only natural that they released a Mk3 version. There have been quite a few changes, to boot, so I'll dive straight in.

>>

DIFFERENT OPTIONS

The Hortitsia is available in both .177 and .22 options, but there are three different lengths available in each calibre. The one I have here is a .22 330 model, which means it has a 330mm barrel, and this rifle measures 910mm in total length – it's the perfect tool for hunting. I should mention that this 330 model has a 200cc tube reservoir.

Next up is the 450 model, which as the name suggests, has a 450mm-long barrel, taking the overall length out to 1030mm. This version and the next one both have 230cc tube reservoirs. Last but not least is the 550mm barrel variant, and this one measures 1120mm in total. As you would expect there's a slight increase in weight with the two longer rifles, but it's minimal – 0.1 of a pound for the 450, and 0.3lbs for the 550.

As far as shot counts go, for the 330 model on test you can get 80+ shots from the .22 version, with over 100 in .177.

SIDELEVER ACTION

The sidelever on this rifle is rather interesting and not something I've come across on an air rifle before. It's kind of a hybrid between a sidelever and a bolt, more commonly known as a Fortner straight-pull system, more commonly found on biathlon rifles. As you can see from the pictures, when you pull the sidelever

backwards it disengages the bolt and it acts in the same way as a bolt action. I kinda like it, because once cocked you

can push the bolt forward with your thumb if you like – hence the concentric circle etching on the rear of the bolt. You don't have to do that though, and you can simply use the sidelever to push it back, but I found that using my thumb was far easier.

It takes a few shots to get used to this system, but once you've mastered it you can rattle off five shots in quick succession, as quickly as you can pull the lever, hardly moving off target at all. This is an absolute winner for someone who hunts regularly and likes to have a back-up or second shot ready to go in nanoseconds!

FILLING UP

The 200cc air cylinder sits directly underneath the barrel and can be filled to 300 bar. Zbroia actually states that they test their cylinders up to 495 bar when they manufacture them!

There's a rotating fill port cover on the end of the cylinder, which is easy to turn and reveals the fill port. You actually get two fill probes supplied; one with the regular screw end that connects directly to your hose, and another with a male Foster-type connection for those who have a Foster fitting on the end of their whip. Whilst I'm on the subject of fittings, there's a 160mm-long Picatinny rail up top for mounting your desired optics.

TRIGGER AND SAFETY

The trigger on this rifle is an all-metal steel design with a gently curved blade that sits nicely on the pad of your trigger finger. It comes with a short first stage straight from the factory, which comes to an abrupt halt, then the second stage release is really crisp with zero creep. It's a really easy trigger to get used to straight out of the box, but it can be fiddled with if you so wish. The length of the first stage and weight of the second stage can be adjusted, but in order to do this you must remove the stock. As far as pull weight goes, I'm guessing it's set to around a pound, it's not too heavy at all.

Immediately above the trigger on the left-hand-side of the rifle you'll find the manual safety lever, again manufactured from steel. Push it forward to shoot and pull back to make the rifle safe. It's nice and



You can fill the 200cc cylinder up to 300 bar.



You can keep six loaded mag's in the stock!



When you pull the lever back the bolt pushes out.



You can use your thumb to push the bolt back.



The manual safety lever is easy to use.

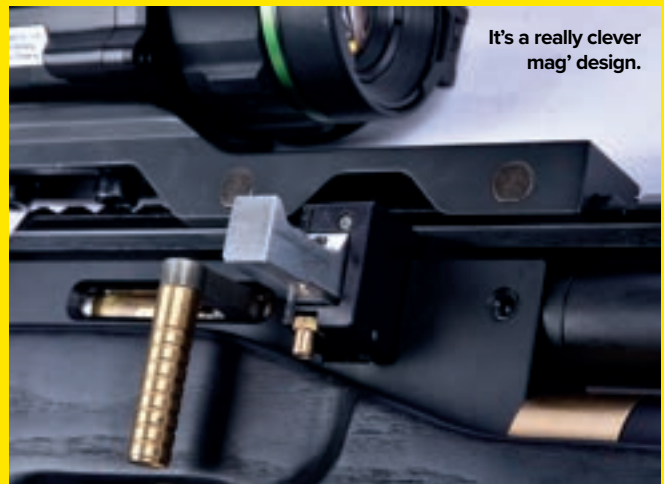


There's a rotating shroud that reveals the fill port.





The steel trigger is very comfortable.



It's a really clever mag' design.

"Once loaded you push the magazine fully into the loading port on the right. As you cock and fire the rifle the mechanism inside pushes the mag' along"

smooth, with just the right amount of pressure to make using it a doddle with the rifle shouldered.

INTERESTING MAG'S

The previous incarnations of this rifle featured rotary magazines, but this Mk3 model utilises push-in stick magazines, of which there are six supplied.

Each magazine holds five shots, and they're a very interesting design. Machined from aluminium, they feature a small magnet in the base so that all six mag's can be slotted into the retainer on the right-hand-side of the stock. They drop in and lock solid with a satisfying 'click' as the magnets do their job.

When it comes to filling each mag', there are two small ball bearings that sit on each side of each pellet to hold them in place and prevent them from falling out. It's not something I've seen before and it really does work. I was a little apprehensive at first, thinking that they might damage the skirts of the pellets, but the resistance is so slight, literally just enough to hold the pellet securely, that no such damage occurs. I even tried poking all the pellets out



These 'Stick' mag's are brilliant!

using the inside of a Biro to act as a probe, and there was absolutely no damage to any of the pellets.

Once loaded you simply push the magazine fully into the loading port on the right. As you cock and fire the rifle the mechanism inside pushes the mag' along via the aid of a spring to give you your next shot. It's a very clever design that works faultlessly. What's more, the spring is quite powerful and I had minutes of fun ejecting a fully-loaded mag' by pressing the little brass button at the base of the loading port in – it jumps a good foot in the air when you do this with the rifle lying on its side!

TESTING TIME!

The first thing I noticed when I shot this rifle in my back garden was just how quiet it is. The barrel is shrouded, although there is a screw cap at the end to reveal a 1/2in UNF thread, so you can add a moderator if required, but you really don't need to.

The second thing I noticed after half-an-hour of shooting is the weight. It's really quite light at just 6.8lbs. Wandering around a field for three or four hours whilst carrying the Hortitsia will be no problem at all.

I got bored with cutting out bullseyes on my 25-metre back garden range, so I headed to my local club to ping a few 40-yard spinners, and this rifle handled them all with ease. I'm very impressed. The

Hortitsia is definitely one of those rifles that you need to get to know.

My first impressions out of the box were way too unkind. Without even picking it up, I thought it was going to be a cheaply-made, clunky old girl, but half an hour of getting to know the rifle soon had me singing its praises. If you have a go with one, you'll see exactly what I mean, it's a real little gem of a rifle and an absolute joy to shoot. X

TECH SPEC

Model: Hortitsia
Manufacturer: Zbroia
Distributor: Artemis Outdoors
Type: Pre-charged, multi-shot
Bottle Capacity: 200cc
Max Fill Pressure: 300 bar
Stock: Right-handed, wood
Cocking: Sidelever/bolt
Trigger: Two-stage, adjustable
Calibre: .177 and .22
Safety: Manual lever
Overall Length: 910mm (35.8in)
Barrel Length: 330mm (13in)
Magazine Capacity: 5 (.177) and 5 (.22)
Weight: 6.8lbs (3.1kg)
Shot Count: .177/80+ .22/100+
Muzzle Energy: 11.4 ft.lbs. 8fps variation over 10 shots
Website: www.artemisoutdoorsuk.co.uk

PRICE: £795