

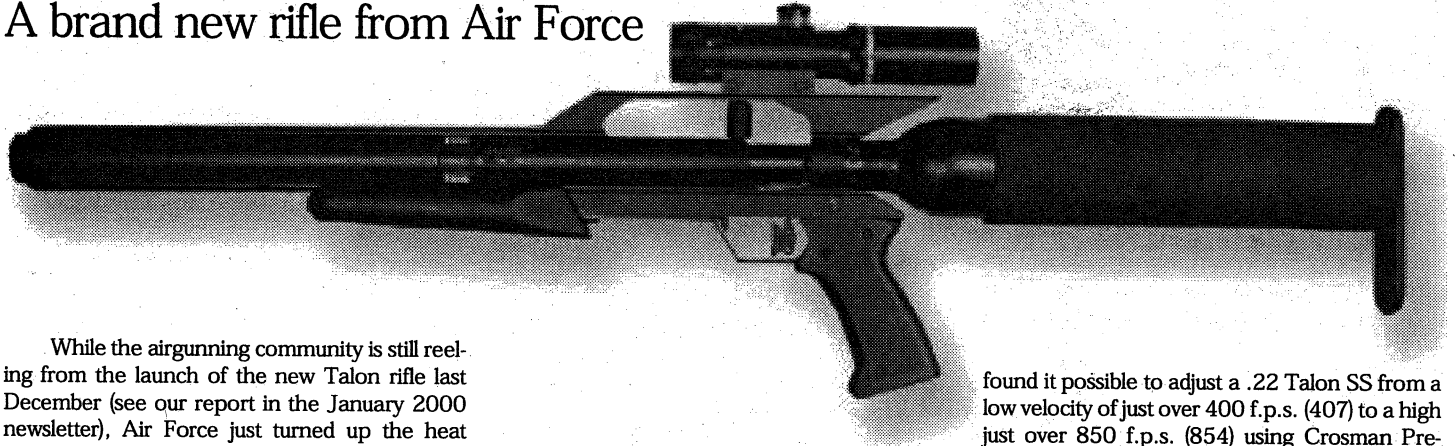
The Airgun Letter

A monthly newsletter for airgun users and collectors

November 2000

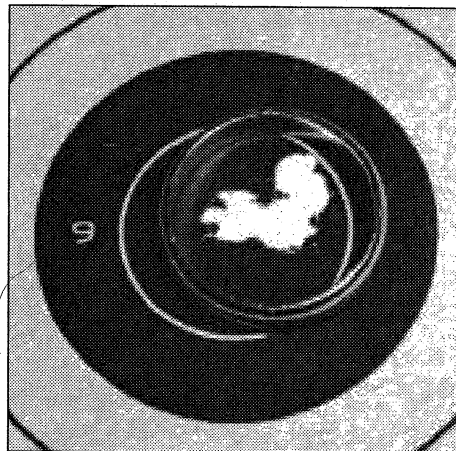
Talon SS

A brand new rifle from Air Force



While the airgunning community is still reeling from the launch of the new Talon rifle last December (see our report in the January 2000 newsletter), Air Force just turned up the heat another notch with two second-generation models. The new Talons look much like their predecessor, except for some features I will review for you here, but the big news is—one of them is a brand new model: the Talon SS. Looking sleeker than its long-barreled brother, the new SS completely encloses the 12" Lothar Walther barrel in an extended shroud with a special airstream-smoothing muzzle cap. It's the cap that will have people buzzing about this gun.

Air Force owner John McCaslin wanted to try the extended shroud idea to see whether there would be any benefit in removing the turbulent muzzle blast. Indeed, there was! Not only is this rifle inherently more accurate, it also seems quieter, with the sharp report from the short barrel held back in the 4-1/2" chamber formed between the muzzle and the muzzle cap. A bonus for the



Though no overt attempt was made to make it one, the Talon SS is a "wedding ring" gun at distances out to 35 yards.

effort! Of course, 10-meter rifles have used this same barrel shroud design for many years, so John isn't doing anything new, but this is the first time this idea has been applied to a sporting precharged rifle of this power.

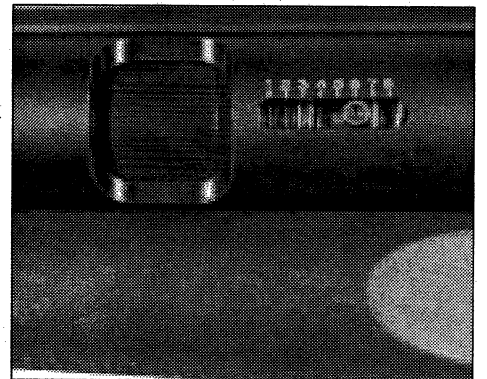
How much power, you ask? Well, that depends. Both new Talons, like the original rifle, have adjustable power. Unlike the first gun, you can adjust the power of these new guns externally without tools! That's right—the power adjustment wheel is operated by thumb pressure, and it adjusts in the smallest increments you can imagine over a very wide range.

Each turn of the adjustment wheel has 32 indexed divisions, but they're only a reference. You can stop in between the marks, and there are eight or more full turns of the wheel. In testing, I

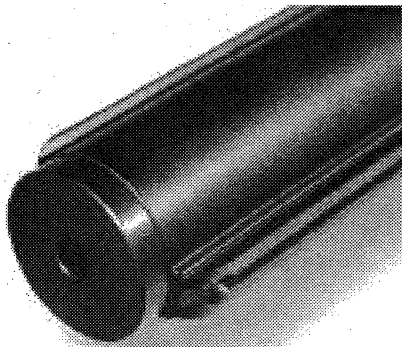
found it possible to adjust a .22 Talon SS from a low velocity of just over 400 f.p.s. (407) to a high just over 850 f.p.s. (854) using Crosman Premiers. That works out to a span of from five to almost 23 foot-pounds—not only a broad span but a very useful one, as well. With a turn of the wheel, you can change the rifle from a near-silent basement plinker into a powerful hunting carbine! And you can easily return to the same power level by selecting the same settings.

I found the SS to be very forgiving of the actual pressure in its reservoir when it came to shot-to-shot consistency. I tended to shoot the gun down to 1,500 psi, and even lower, without a noticeable power loss. I said noticeable because I'm quite sure velocity does drop when the pressure gets low. I just didn't notice it while shooting at targets.

As we reported in the first Talon article, the valve is a flow-through design that aligns the main air reservoir perfectly with the back of the pellet.



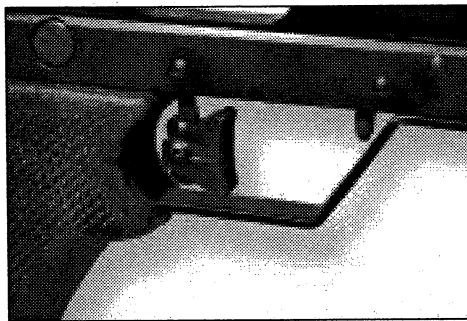
The power wheel moves smoothly with thumb pressure. This prototype does not have the Vernier divisions on the wheel, but production guns will. The screwhead indicates whole numbers on the scale to the right.



The Talon SS muzzle cap strips off the turbulent air from behind the exiting pellet, providing added stability in flight at the critical start point. As an added benefit, the 4-1/2" dead space inside the shroud effectively quiets the report!

There are no corners for the air to turn, so all the energy is expended in a straightforward direction.

With the outside adjustment wheel available, the Talon no longer has an adjustable valve stem like the first rifle had. All adjustment is done with the wheel. Both the new Talon rifle and the SS have the outside wheel. Stealth guns (predecessors to the Talon) and older Talons cannot be upgraded to the new configuration.



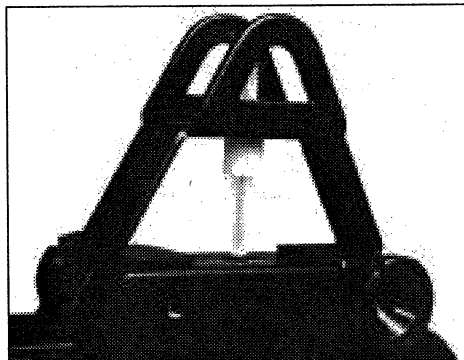
The Talon trigger looks like the one on the older rifle, but it's noticeably better. The safety also doesn't intrude as much in the trigger-guard. It now snaps back on cocking and is released by pressing forward—a more natural movement.

Another change to the new gun is a better trigger and a new style of automatic safety. The trigger is a nonadjustable two-stage type that breaks very cleanly at 24 ounces. All the people who shot the prototype during testing commented on its nice feel.

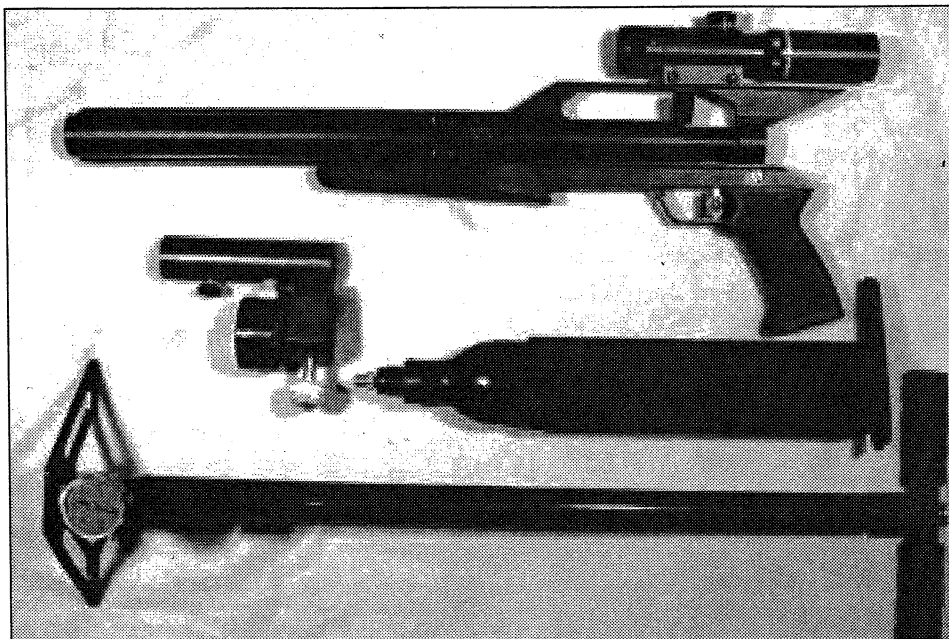
The safety on the first gun was also automatic, but it released by pulling backwards and crowded the trigger finger for some shooters. The new Talons have much more room for the trigger finger. The safety releases by pressing forward—away from the trigger. You push off the safety with your trigger finger without removing your hand from the grip.

I said the trigger is not adjustable, but that only refers to the pull weight. The actual blade that contacts the finger can be adjusted up and down on its stalk.

Some things about the Talon haven't changed. For example, it's still got three accessory rails for mounting just about any accessory you can imagine. Besides a scope, which I'm sure most shooters will want, you have the option of a bipod, a sling, a night vision device, infrared or white light



Front sight is a fiber-optic rod that adjusts up and down to suit the shooter's sight picture with the straight stock.



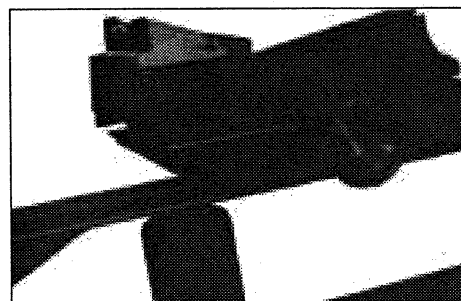
Broken down, the Talon, the filler device and a new-style pump make a compact 11-pound package. All you need to add are pellets. Talk about getting off the grid!

spotlights, a tactical flashlight and just about anything else you might imagine. John wasn't clear where the bayonet goes, but I'm sure clever owners will find a way!

Open sights are provided, and they look as high-tech as the rest of the gun. Fiber-optic rods embedded in both the front and rear sights make quick target acquisition a snap. The rear sight adjusts in both directions, but the front sight also adjusts up and down in larger amounts to accommodate different-sized faces on the relatively high comb of the air bottle buttstock.

I shot the gun for accuracy with both a .22 barrel and a .177. The Talon is not that fond of Crosman Premiers in either caliber! At least this one wasn't. Normally, Premiers are a given for any air rifle, but I found Beeman Kodiaks to be far superior—especially in .177. Premiers are made of a much harder alloy than most pellets, plus they can be a little smaller at the skirt than most. Though the .22 Kodiaks are smaller still, so that doesn't bear out in this case.

On a blustery, rainy day at the range, I shot some very impressive groups with .177 Kodiaks lubed with the Whiscombe honey pellet lube we have been using for the past few months (see our September 2000 newsletter for more info and the formula). In fact, if the wind hadn't blown a pellet



Rear sight has two yellow fiber-optic dots to frame the front sight. It's adjustable for both windage and elevation

or two wide of the mark, I wouldn't have known for sure whether I was hitting in the same place or missing by several inches. Although he didn't intend to make the Talon a tackdriver, I believe John McCaslin stumbled onto something big when he capped off the barrel shroud. Time will tell, of course, but the SS with its plain cap does not behave at all like a gun with a silencer, which can be very twitchy. The cap simply strips off the turbulent air without bothering the pellet itself.

POWER

The power data for the SS has to be different from other guns, because power is so widely adjustable. In .22 and using Premiers, I went from a low of 400 f.p.s to a high of 850, as mentioned earlier. In between, there were infinite possibilities, plus I could return to any velocity to within 10-15 f.p.s. simply by re-indexing the power wheel to a previous setting. And that was while using just the whole numbers on the scale—the prototype didn't have the Vernier scale with 32 divisions. When that gets added to the wheel, accurate power settings will take on a whole new meaning.

Like a Career 707, you can dial up the power as the air pressure drops to compensate for velocity loss, although I did not find it necessary during the test. The valve seems to retain velocity very effectively throughout the fill.

Velocity at any one setting was also quite consistent. It takes a few shots after an adjustment, then the gun settles down and gives a performance like this:

Air Force Talon SS in .22

68°F • Muzzle 1' from start screen • 10 shots

Crosman Premier, 14.3 grains
Oiled with Whiscombe honey

High power
High
Low

854 f.p.s.
845 f.p.s.

Average	849 f.p.s.
Extreme spread	9 f.p.s.
Standard deviation	2 f.p.s.
Muzzle energy	22.89 ft.-lbs.

It would be easy to fill this entire report with velocity tables like this, because of all the possible power settings between low and high plus the two different calibers I tested. And that's just with one pellet. As you experiment with other pellets, the possibilities become infinite! Suffice to say, the Talon is extremely adjustable and very stable once it has settled in on an adjustment. My advice would be to find one or two best pellets for whatever caliber barrel you have and stick with them. That way, you will have the time to become experienced with how your rifle performs in a variety of situations.

For those who are not familiar with this rifle from our January newsletter report, the Talon is a completely different precharged pneumatic rifle. Made by Air Force in Texas, its predecessors were the Stealth, which was and is primarily sold by GunPower in the UK, plus the American Talon that came out last December. All these airguns share a similar design, in that the removable butt is also the air reservoir.

The gun is made of modern aircraft aluminum extrusions that are manufactured to final dimensions by machine to keep labor time to a minimum, which is how the maker keeps the price as low as he does. But an added benefit is that the rifle is also extremely light—especially in view of its available power.

Coupled with the light weight is the ability to break the gun down to a very small package. With a modern Swedish manual pump thrown in, it becomes an extremely handy survival gun. Far ahead of even a .22 rimfire when the weight of ammunition is factored in. And then there is the matter of reliability.

One of the few criticisms that can be made of this design is that it uses a lot of air. The reason for that is—this rifle does NOT have the failure-prone O-rings found in other PCP rifles. There are only two O-rings in the entire design, and neither is needed for the gun to work. If both fail, you can still fire the rifle and go right on doing so. They are both in the sliding cocking cover and they do seal some air but neither is vital.

The reservoir doesn't have a single O-ring in it. What keeps the air inside is a hard Delrin valve seat. That makes this a very reliable PCP gun that will probably function for many many years without a problem. Add to that the extremely simple design, and you also have a gun that's easy to fix when things do go wrong. John McCaslin built it that way, and he continues to improve the design in ways that are not easy to see.

The appearance of the gun makes an instant and definite impression on everyone. It may not be to your personal tastes. But if you're looking for something small, powerful and accurate, don't overlook the Talon and Talon SS. They deliver more performance for the dollar than any .22 rimfire, plus they operate at a fraction of the cost. This is America's first-ever line of precision, adult sporting air rifles, and they're worth a closer look by all sportsmen, as well as veteran airgunners.

WRAP-UP

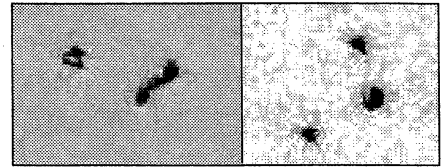
Air Force Talon SS precharged rifle in .177 & .22

Pro—Well-made, very accurate, widely adjustable power, great reliability, comes with fill device, crisp trigger, three accessory rails, light weight and small size.

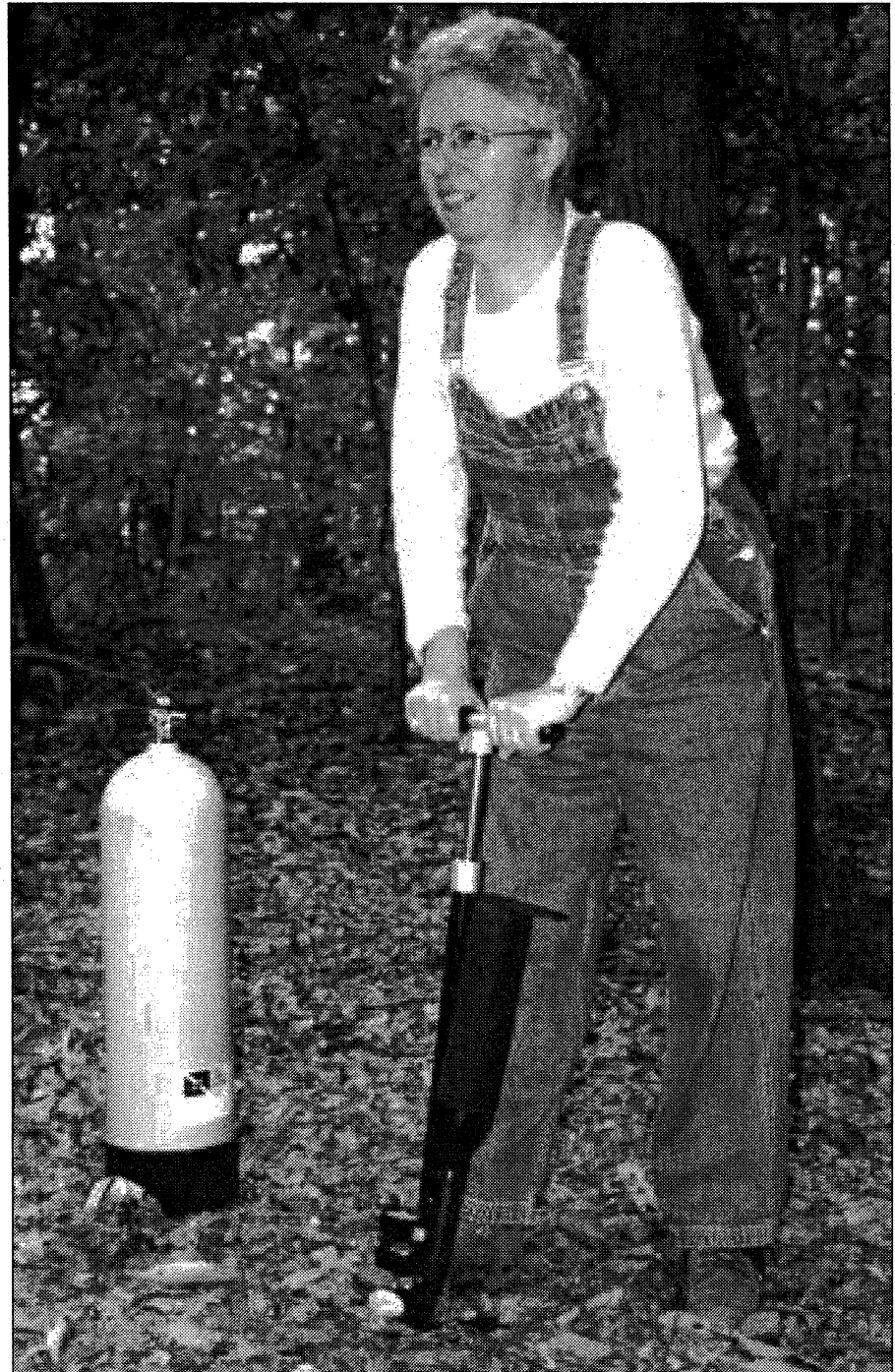
Con—Straight line stock takes some getting used to.

Cost: Retail \$499.95 with open sights and fill device. Shipping is extra.

Availability: Air Force 877-247-4867, Central, or online at www.airforceairguns.com.



Two groups of .177 Kodiaks at 30 yards prove the accuracy of the new Talon SS. Both were shot on a very windy, blustery day in driving rain! The larger holes in the groups contain four (left target) and three (right target) shots.



The most portable way to refill the Talon is with a pump. Nancy McDonald uses the AxSOR from Sweden. An 80 cu. ft. scuba tank stands by for more convenience.