

Mark Camoccio tries the new Diana 440 TH and finds a fixed barrel, under-lever rifle with plenty of potential

TARGET Hunter

Adults only - The Diana 440 TH Target Hunter is a big and heavy rifle aimed at both hunting and FT use

One glance at the latest RWS Diana product brochure reveals that is clearly on the offensive, with a wave of upgrades and models catering for all tastes and budgets. The flagships of the Diana spring gun range have to be the Target Hunter (TH) models, all offering an impressive spec. There are three options carry the 'TH' badge, with the recoilless fixed barrel side lever cocking Model 56 heading the charge, which includes a no compromise thumbhole stock as part of the package. A near identical, yet slightly more slim-line version of this woodwork comes fitted to the other two – both fixed

barrel under lever cocking rifles - the Model 470 and the 440 (the latter on test here).

ADULTS ONLY

The 440 TH is a very striking piece of machinery! Designed primarily with Field Target shooting in mind. The configuration includes a competition-inspired stock, along with the usual standard of component manufacture that we have come to expect from this top-end German brand.

The difference between the 440TH and 470 versions is simple; the former is just a slightly shorter and therefore lighter version of its larger stable mate. This is hard to believe, given it tips the scales at a rather significant

9 lbs un-scoped - and this is the lighter model?... You have to wonder who would opt for the 470, carrying nearly half a pound more! Mind you, the Model 56 Target Hunter weighs in at a whopping 11.1lbs, so Diana are clearly pitching these products at the mature, adult sector.

Weight is a matter of personal taste and whilst I seem to now favour light to mid-weight rifles, plenty of shooters will fit lead inside their stocks to beef up the overall mass. So maybe I've answered my own question. This is a particularly popular trick that many FT aficionados adopt, and since the 440 TH has one eye on this sector, Diana's marketing strategy may just pay off. Weight equals stability up to a point, and if the rifle is manageable, then the sheer mass can prove an advantage in the heat of competition, helping as it does to flatten out any breathing/pulse aberrations.

LAYOUT AND FEATURES

The layout of the 440's action largely mirrors that of the other top class under-levers on the market - namely that of the HW77 from Weihrauch, and the TX200 from Air Arms. So just to clarify, a spring/piston powered action is cocked by an under-barrel lever. The advantage here is a fixed barrel which should improve accuracy and consistency.



The 440 TH is a worthy edition to the Diana range

Diana have dispensed with traditional chemical bluing for these models, opting for a non-glare, glass bead blasted metal surface. The end result contrasts well with the woodwork, affording a slick, professional air to the 440. In fact my only gripe on the visuals is the surprising inclusion of a plastic trigger blade. Given the upmarket target audience for the 440, the use of plastic seems inappropriate, since it actually slightly distorts under the pressure of the shot. That said, the let off is still reasonably light, and did not prove a barrier to good results as we shall see.

That non-glare finish is practical in more ways than one, minimizing the chance of spooking the quarry out in the field, whilst also being far less prone to corrosion. Traditional bluing has to be meticulously cared for with an oily rag, if rust is to be kept at bay. No such fuss required with the finish here, although a light oiling would of course still be good practice.

PUT IN A THUMB

These new thumbhole target stocks really are nicely finished. From the angular yet supremely comfortable forend, right through to the butt, this stock aids the shooter and offers technical advantage where it matters. Perfectly applied laser-cut chequering appears at the front of the forend and each side of the slim-line pistol grip. The deep, box-section just forward of the trigger guard allows the shooter to comfortably deal with standing shots, or raise the line of sight in a stress-free manner when adopting the sitting position, especially in my favoured over-the-arm style.

The thumb hole area is perfectly comfortable, but I have to highlight the fact that the slab-sided top join of the grip section means no provision is made for a thumb-up hold; instead forcing the shooter to use a thumb-through style at all times. The

cheekpiece is prominent and in use gave perfect alignment when using the scope. Add an adjustable, deeply concave rubber butt pad into the mix and I think we can safely say this stock handles! Diana pick out the new branding neatly with a 'TH' for Target Hunter, subtly cut into the woodwork just forward of the butt. With the attractive grain of the beech timber all sealed in a heavy varnish, it's difficult to criticize the presentation.

COCK AND LOAD

Diana make scope mounting simple by the inclusion of a sturdy raised dovetail rail. The crisply machined, chunky rails mean that any mounts get a good purchase, which all helps breed confidence and in turn, clears the path to good results. Cocking the action requires the under-lever to be gently released from its spring-loaded catch at the muzzle, and then pulled down until the trigger engages. The attractive barrel weight doubles as the lever catch, but it should be noted that the lever is not locked when in position, so the fitting of a sling to the barrel would be problematic.

I found the cocking stroke required significant effort, with the sear engagement occurring when the lever reached 90°. With the 440 conceding nearly three inches of barrel to it's larger stable-mate, I suspect that the 470 is a little more forgiving in this area, as the lever would be correspondingly longer. Yet this is the trade off with this 440 TH; effectively the carbine of the range.

JUDDERMAN...

The cocking action also exposes the sliding breech, where the pellet can then be directly fed into the barrel. Attention to detail at the design stage means this rifle allows for any dropped pellets to just fall out of a cut-out in the bottom of the breech recess, in much the same way that the Air Arms TX200 does. On closing the lever, once the safety tab has

been depressed, the test model did display a curious judder from the breech cover, yet this had no detrimental effect on performance.

On the range, the balance and handling really began to show. The two-stage trigger, as previously stated, drops a point or two for the unacceptable use of a plastic blade, yet it still offers a fairly precise, light release – which means results aren't compromised to any great degree. Indeed with 3/16" 30 yard groups shot over-arm FT position, accuracy was in a word superb! RUAG sent in some 4.51 RWS Superfields for the test and with results like that, I didn't look elsewhere! On firing, this action felt a little harsh and in desperate need of a professional strip down and lube, yet the groups just kept forming. Being significantly front heavy, the rifle just sat on the target from the sitting position, and that stock ensured that standing and kneeling all felt equally assured.

CONCLUSIONS

In short, the sheer weight and cocking effort of this 440 Target Hunter, means it is a specialized tool, for fit adults only. That said, in the right hands, it clearly has the potential to be a winner, combining as it does, a comprehensive list of features, in a beautifully presented package.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

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| ■ Name | Diana 440 TH Target Hunter |
| ■ Type | Under-lever spring/piston |
| ■ Calibre | .177 on test/ .22 available |
| ■ Weight | 9 lbs |
| ■ Length | 41" |
| ■ Barrel | 15.4" |
| ■ Stock | Beech thumbhole target configuration |
| ■ Average Velocity | 794 fps using RWS Superfield 4.51 pellets |
| ■ Max. Spread | 25 fps |
| ■ Average Energy | 11.76ft/lbs |
| ■ Trigger: | 2-stage adjustable |
| ■ Price | £517 |
| ■ Options: | 470 TH (rifle length) model |
| ■ Contact: | RUAG Ammotec, 01579 362319 |



The push/tab safety sits to the rear, but could be broader and less sharp edged for comfort



The sliding breech design offers easy hand loading and if you drop the pellet it falls through too



Cocking the 440 takes a fair amount of effort