



New arrival

Mark Ripley takes delivery of a new foxing rifle and, after the customary range work, wastes no time in getting it blooded in the field

If there's one thing that's always exciting other than gaining new shooting ground it's gaining new shooting gear!

At the end of November I was exceptionally lucky to acquire a new rifle in the form of a Savage BA Stealth in .223. The generous guys at Scott Country International kindly sponsored the 260rips YouTube channel with this stunning rifle to use to test their various

night vision and thermal scopes, so I wasted no time in fitting it with an MAE moderator from JMS Arms and getting out to zero it.

On top of that, I've recently been testing the Sightmark Wraith, which I've been pretty impressed with especially at its asking price of £700. So I was keen to mount that on the rifle and try it out. Something I really like about the Wraith is that it's so easy to use, and that was

in evidence here – I had it zeroed an inch high at 100 yards with only four shots. It is, however, possible to zero with a single shot if your first shot is visible on the paper. I opted for a rough zero at 50 yards then a tweak at 100 just to be safe.

Everyone has their own methods for breaking a new rifle in. Some clean after each shot for the first 10 shots, then each five, and so forth. I tend to clean after each five shots for the first 20 rounds or so, then clean after each outing thereafter. This method doesn't seem to have any detrimental effect on my rifles – all of them shoot very well.

With two final shots on paper at 100 yards within half an inch of each of each



The Savage BA Stealth topped with the Sightmark Wraith and MAE Compact moderator



Credit: Franca Krijnsen / EyeEm / Getty Images

other and aligned over the target's centre, I was confident to hunt with the new arrival. The overall feel of the rifle feels similar to my .260 (though considerably lighter) and I immediately felt comfortable with this rifle.

I do like a short, compact rifle when foxing and stalking – it can be very annoying when a long barrel is constantly

catching low tree branches, or the butt stock continually knocking into you when dragging a deer. This rifle sits comfortably over the shoulder with a sling attached, which is good as, since it's mostly metal, your hands quickly get cold carrying it in winter!

The 10-round box mag is made of a strong plastic polymer by the looks of it,

but functions well and feeds as it should with an oversized lever release to drop the mag out easily, even in gloves.

One of the first things I added was a bipod, as I use them a lot. I only had an old Harris bipod, which I borrowed off my .22, but I will replace it with an Atlas bipod when funds allow.

Another small modification I intend to make is to the bolt knob. The standard one is fine when used with a regular day scope, but used in conjunction with the bulkier body of a digital day-night unit, it runs a little close to the scope. At some point I will get Dane & Co to switch it for a slimline tactical version.

The rifle has a pleasing AR15-esque feel to it – it's nice to look at, but more than that, it makes for a pointable gun with a nice little 45-degree slope moulded into the body just forward of the magazine well where your forward hand naturally sits, helping to pull the rifle into the shoulder. The heavy barrel and shooter-adjustable Accutrigger are no doubt key to this rifle's accuracy out of the box, seemingly achievable with any decent quality ammunition.

If I was to highlight a single area on this gun that I'd like to see altered, it would be the safety catch, which is a shotgun-style tang safety. The slide safety is flat and difficult to feel with cold hands or in gloves. A more raised safety would be better and a little more positive in its three settings (one of which keeps the rifle safe yet frees the bolt so it can be unloaded). That said, with a little more use it seems to be freeing up and sliding a little easier.

So with the run-down of the rifle's features out the way, how does it shoot? In a nutshell: really well. Given the overall balance and handling of the gun, I can see it becoming popular with PRS shooters, especially in factory rifle categories and using the popular 6.5 Creedmoor calibre.

This .223 model has a 1-in-9 twist barrel, meaning it will shoot best with around 55-grain bullets and upwards, making it an ideal long-range contender too with the heavier bullets. With various calibres available in true left or right-handed configurations, it's sure to find favour with many shooters.



Testing it in the field, it didn't take long to draw first blood with the rifle. As you might expect, the unfortunate victim was a fox.

A session in a high seat from which I normally shoot deer was on the cards, as invariably when I am waiting out there's always a fox or two that wanders through, and I invariably leave them be so as not to spook any deer in the area with a shot. Not this time, though – tonight I decided to go out with the sole intention of finding a fox, especially as the farmer would be lambing in the not-so-distant future and had already dropped a few hints about seeing too many foxes around.

I waited until dark before heading down to the seat. Of course, as sod's law dictates, the customary fox traffic had dried up, and for once I found myself sat there in the cold for an hour and a half seeing nothing.

Finally a fox appeared on the edge of the wood to my left before trotting across the field towards me. It was mousing about in the grass when I got the Wraith scope on to it. It looked up as I flicked on the IR, clearly aware of it. Though it could see me, it wasn't overly bothered and just stood staring. At around 70 yards from me, it was far from a testing shot and it dropped instantly to the bullet strike where it stood.

I walked over and collected a good-sized vixen. As I did so, there came a bark from within the wood, probably no more than 100 yards from the boundary. I figured that since this was early December, this was most likely a

dog fox calling to his potential (but now deceased) mate.

I dragged the vixen back to the high seat in the hope that the dog would come out of the wood and follow her scent. Climbing back up into the seat, I barely had to wait a minute before the fox came out of the wood, clearly following the vixen's path. That was until he reached

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the area I had shot it; here he clearly picked up my scent as well, and bolted back to the wood before I could get a shot. I tried a few squeaks, but despite my best efforts this old boy was having none of it

and wisely slunk back into the wood for another day.

The Wraith scope I'm currently using on the rifle is also a pretty impressive unit for the money – it is certainly worth every penny. I like the way this scope is a no-nonsense, easy-to-use proposition. Day imagery is exceptional for a night scope in full colour, making it a very versatile unit. For night use it offers a high-mag zoom function, though at higher mag, as you might expect for a digital scope, it does pixelate. Still, is still very usable to at least 200 yards.

The scope offers various reticle styles and colours as well as two night settings – the usual black and white as well as a green setting, which is pretty cool. It will also record footage to a Micro SD card, though annoyingly, in common with many night vision scopes, it won't record audio. This is a pity and hopefully something Sightmark and other companies will consider adding on future models.

I've also fitted the longer rail for the Wraith. These rails greatly improve the eye relief, making it a much more comfortable scope to use.

Along with the bomb-proof MAE moderator (in this case the new compact model), this set-up makes for a very handy foxing combo. It's simple to use, very accurate, and I'm sure will account for a good number of foxes during the 2020 lambing season. ■

