

THERMAL TEST THE HEAT OF THE ACTION

Thermal gunsights give hunters ultimate stealth and vision by revealing their quarry's heat signature – Mat Manning gives his verdict on the InfiRay Tube TL35

Thermal night vision optics have exploded in popularity over the past couple of years. This gear is now the first choice of many serious after-dark airgun hunters and there are several reasons why it has been so keenly embraced

Thermal optics provide remarkable stealth because they don't need a light source to create the sight picture. They also provide a phenomenal view of your quarry by showing you an image of its heat signature. You can see critters even when obscured by undergrowth – and this kit doesn't just work in darkness, you can also use it by day.

Thermal gunsights have also become less bulky, easier to use and, most significantly, more affordable. The fall in price is probably the biggest factor in this kit's rising popularity. It is now possible to pick up a decent unit for around a grand, but for those who are prepared to spend a little more there are some truly remarkable thermal optics out there.

With a price tag of £2,649.99, the InfiRay Tube TL35 falls into the latter category. The same price as a modest second-hand car, it's not the sort of kit you'd buy on a whim. But you get what you pay for, and for those who have the money, it is a very good hunting optic, especially for nocturnal pest control.

KEY SPECS



FROM: Highland Outdoors (highlandoutdoors.co.uk)

MODEL: InfiRay Tube TL35

PRICE: £2,649.99

LENGTH: 380mm (without eyecup)

WEIGHT: 945g

MAGNIFICATION: 3-12x

EYE RELIEF: 60mm

DETECTION RANGE: Up to 1,800m

FEATURES: Picatinny mounts supplied, video and photo capture, gyroscope, e-compass, choice of reticle design and colour palettes.



The soft rubber eyecup makes for clear, comfortable viewing and prevents the risk of shine-back blowing your cover

A quick twist of the front focus dial rapidly snaps the target into sharp relief

The InfiRay Tube is designed to mount and handle like a conventional gunsight, which means it feels very familiar in the aim

They may look like normal scope turrets, but the ones on the Tube are used for controls and house the spare battery and USB port

INITIAL THOUGHTS

The first thing to impress me about the Tube is that it's designed to look just like the other traditional telescopic sights.

It weighs just under 950g, is about 380mm long before you fit the soft rubber eyecup, and the tough aluminium housing comprises a 30mm tube that enables you to mount, position and look through it the same way as you would with a traditional daytime scope.

FEATURES INCLUDE CALIBRATION, ZEROING, COMPASS AND GYROSCOPE

The result is that handling feels very familiar when you're in the aim. Mounts to fit Picatinny-type rails come supplied, but conventional 30mm mounts will do the job if your airgun has dovetail rails.

Despite being loaded with hi-tech features, the Tube is surprisingly simple to use. Press and hold the orange standby button for about two seconds and the unit powers up. To switch it off, you simply press and

hold the same button until the on-screen countdown finishes.

A shorter two-second press of the standby button when the Tube is switched on sends it into sleep mode. This is a great way to extend battery life, and another quick press of the standby button kicks it straight back into action.

The neat thermal riflescope has an integral rechargeable battery. Charging is via a supplied C-Type USB lead which plugs into a port discreetly hidden beneath the right-hand turret cap. This battery has a runtime of up to eight hours, though

that time will reduce with the use of this scope's additional features.

You can get an additional two hours of runtime by fitting an 18500-type battery into the housing beneath the left-hand turret cap, and if you're planning a really long outing you can attach an external power bank via the USB port.

With the Tube switched on, you use the ocular focusing ring at the rear of the unit to get the display into



Four buttons on the rear console control all the features that you're likely to need in the field

focus for your eye. That's a job that only needs to be done once and you then use the front focusing ring to bring the target into sharp relief the same as you would with the parallax dial on a traditional telescopic sight.

FUN FEATURES

A short press of the top turret opens the quick menu which enables you to choose between six different reticle designs, four different reticle colour schemes and several other features.

A longer press of the top turret opens a more detailed menu where you can toggle in and out of the Ultraclear mode which provides a sharper image in rain and fog. In this menu you can also set Wi-Fi connectivity and video output.

Other features that are accessible through this menu include calibration, zeroing, e-compass and a gyroscope feature that displays angle of shot and the cant of the gun on dials on either side of the display. This menu also enables you to access settings to adjust video recording options and set date and time.

Zeroing is a one-shot arrangement by which you adjust the horizontal

and vertical axes of the reticle until it corresponds with the point of impact. It is a very fast way to set zero, and you can save various profiles either to cover different shooting scenarios or different guns.

It is highly unlikely that you'll need to use either of the above two menus when you're out in the field.

Once the Tube is set up, virtually all the controls you're going to need are accessible via the four-button console on the top of the eyepiece.

The right button adjusts the image's brightness up and down, and the left button shifts between the five different colour palettes for general viewing.

CAPTURING THE MOMENT

There is a real craze for recording and sharing video footage from hunting trips, and the InfiRay Tube is equipped to do the job very well. A short press of the rear button on the console captures a still image of the sight picture and a long press starts the video recorder.

The unit has 16GB of internal memory storage, which can hold thousands of stills and many hours of video, which can be uploaded either via Wi-Fi connection or USB.

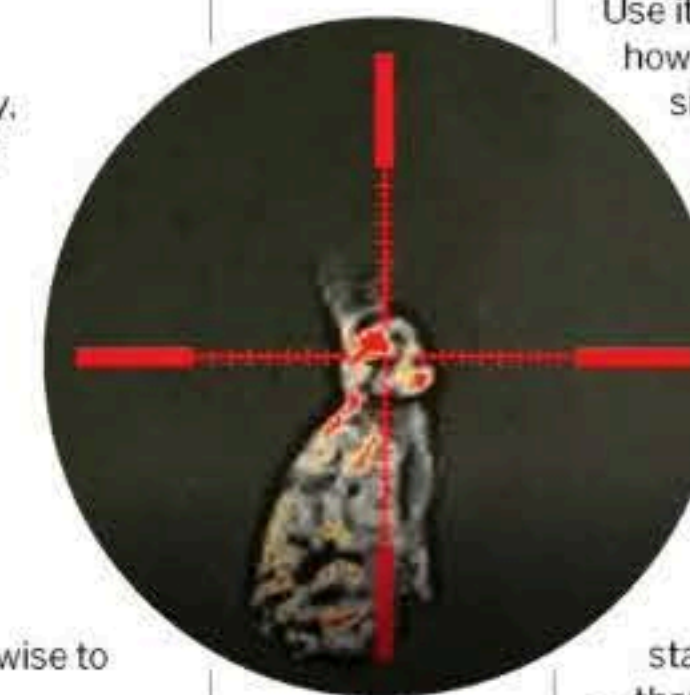
The Tube has a digital magnification range of 3-12x, which should cover everything from close-range ratty to longer-range bunny sniping.

The lower zoom range is excellent for spotting quarry, and you can always use the PIP (picture in picture) function (by pressing and holding the colour palette button) to double the magnification if you need more precision for longer shots. Zoom can be adjusted on the fly by turning the top turret clockwise to crank up the magnification, or anti-clockwise to wind it down.

It is a sophisticated piece of kit, but the InfiRay Tube TL35 is a doddle to set up and use, and I have had some great after-dark hunting trips with it mounted on my HW100 BP over the past few weeks. On my farmyard permissions it has enabled me to spot and pick off rats that I would have failed to notice with an infrared setup and it has been simply awesome for nocturnal rabbiting.



The scope turrets have been cleverly designed to incorporate features including advanced controls, a battery housing and USB port



The InfiRay Tube gives clear thermal imaging with a choice of colour palettes and reticle designs

And remember, this isn't just a piece of kit for hunting by night. Use it by day and you'll be amazed how easily you can spot the heat signatures of partially obscured rabbits and squirrels that could easily be missed by the naked eye.

Image quality is very good indeed. So good, in fact, that you are able to spot twigs and other pellet-deflecting obstacles that inferior thermal riflescopes can often fail to pick up. Detection range is stated as being up to 1,800m – that's almost two kilometres.

I didn't do any precise distance testing to confirm or deny that, but I will say that it enabled me to spot rabbits out to well over 500m. And the bunnies weren't just blobs at

that distance – the image clarity provided sufficient detail for confident identification.

As I said at the outset, the InfiRay Tube is a fairly expensive piece of kit, and I wouldn't suggest for one minute that everyone should rush out right now and spend their hard-earned cash on one.

There are cheaper alternatives, several of them in the InfiRay range, that can meet the needs of most airgun shooters. However, if you are in the fortunate position of being able to invest in a quality thermal riflescope without stretching yourself too far, the Tube is certainly worth its asking price.

It's a tough, dependable, user-friendly gunsight that produces a clear thermal image with plenty of detail, and will help serious airgun hunters put more pests in the bag. ●

THE AIRGUN SHOOTER VERDICT

"This premium thermal riflescope is packed with features and will deliver high-end performance, stealth and image quality to hunters who are prepared to make the investment"