



More than 40 years separates the vintage Walther LGV target rifle (top) from the LGV Challenger sporter. Despite the hiatus, the quality remains consistent.

# THE WALTHER LGV RISES AGAIN!

After a hiatus of 40 years, Walther brings back its finest spring-piston air rifle. Gaylord says this one is better than ever! **By Tom Gaylord • Photos by Tom Gaylord unless otherwise indicated**

**T**he name Walther has been synonymous with quality firearms for 127 years. Following World War II, the company added airguns to its portfolio—airguns which, like their powder-burning brethren, were the finest money could buy.

Before there were world championships (1966) or Olympic competition for airguns (1984 for rifles, 1988 for pistols), Walther was building air rifles and pistols that could compete at that level and win. Their breakbarrel rifles were built in special target versions for many years before there was a stage on which to compete. Among these was a line of spring-piston target rifles that culminated with the legendary breakbarrel Walther LGV.

The LGV arrived on the scene at the precise moment when conventional recoiling spring-piston target rifles began to be upstaged by fancy new recoilless models such as Feinwerkbau's legendary Model 150 and Anschütz's oil-dampened Model 250.

These newer designs attenuated both the recoil and the vibration of the spring-piston powerplant, freeing the shooter to concentrate on the target without concern for special hold techniques or anything other than the bullseye.

The LGV recoils; so even though it was the smoothest spring rifle on the market at the time, its days were numbered. Like the Offenhauser Indy racer of the 1960s, it

was the high water mark of recoiling target air rifles—but newer technology soon trumped it.

## Locking Barrel

One thing Walther did put on the LGV that separated it from some other target rifles of the same period was a barrel lock. Target shooters of the period were expressing concerns that the breakbarrel design was inherently inaccurate, because the barrel moved while cocking and loading the gun.

They thought it didn't necessarily lock up the same every time, and they wanted assurances, so a barrel lock was added.





**The barrel latch at the fore-end tip must be pressed up to release the barrel for cocking. The LGV was the first Walther breakbarrel to have this feature.**

**The LGV Olympia baseblock has steel pins on either side to take up the slack between the action forks; these pins help prevent any sideways movement.**

**The Olympia was the slimmest and sportiest LGV. Its action, sights and trigger were identical to the other models, but it was better suited to casual shooting than competition.**

The lock is a positive mechanical latch that always puts the same pressure on the wedge that joins the barrel assembly to the spring tube assembly. In both theory and practice, it's a straightforward solution to a problem that may never have actually existed.

The LGV also had two steel pads—one on either side of the baseblock that holds the barrel. These blocks served to regulate the side-to-side play of the barrel between the action forks, which kept the barrel as stable as if it had been press-fit into a solid receiver.

#### **The Era Ends—LGV Passes to the Common Man**

As it passed from the world stage, the LGV entered into its second life—that of a prized vintage target rifle that the average guy could afford. Though they've never been cheap, the price of the all-wood-and-steel LGV remained about where it had been when production ceased in the 1970s, while the price of newer target air rifles continued to rise.

That was when I first encountered the LGV—as a vintage collectible that could also be used as an accurate target rifle. I was getting back into airguns and had narrowly missed the heyday of the Walther breakbarrel line.

The LGR single-stroke pneumatic target rifle was on the market when I came along; and it was recoilless, so it competed with all the other recoilless world-class target air rifles. But the LGV was affordable because thousands of good used guns were coming on the market from competitors and clubs switching to the newer technologies.

#### **LGV Olympia**

My first encounter with an LGV was when I bought an Olympia to test for the airgun newsletter I used to publish. Walther made several versions of the rifle. The Olympia had a stock whose shape compromised between competition and sport, and the wood was much slimmer in all dimensions.

That first rifle came to me cheap, in a fortunate deal from a guy who wanted me to have it to test. But it wasn't working when I got it. Its piston seals were shot—a problem common to all Walther, Feinwerkbau and Diana target guns made in the 1960s and 1970s. The synthetic material used to make their seals dry-rotted over time and even faster in the presence of certain types of oils. Alas, those were the days when everybody oiled the piston seals of their spring guns.

The telltale signs of piston seal failure were (and still are) lower velocity—until the pellet no longer leaves the barrel. And there will often be chunks of waxy brown material in the gun's bore. These chunks resemble candle wax in their consistency but were once a part of a strong synthetic piston seal. I've seen these original seals deteriorate while being stored unused in a plastic bag; so with or without use, they don't last very long.

Although the supply of original factory seals had (fortunately) dried up completely, new seals were just coming to the market. And the new seals were formulated from a different, blue-colored compound that airgunners later discovered to be virtually indestructible. This same material is still being used today by several airgun manufacturers.

I didn't get to shoot my new rifle until I'd acquired and installed the new piston seal. And that was when I first discovered that the LGV Olympia was the lightest-cocking spring rifle I'd ever tested. Even youth guns were harder to cock. The barrel broke at just 12 lbs. of force, making cocking a one-finger operation. It spoiled me forever for stiff-cocking spring guns.

The trigger of the LGV is an adjustable two-stage target unit that breaks cleanly at between about 6 and 14 ounces, depending on the adjustment. Because this rifle is fired offhand, most shooters will want the trigger pull to be set higher to avoid accidental discharges that can cost points in a match.

#### **Accuracy**

Recoiling target rifles of the 1960s and '70s were equally accurate. Both the Weihrauch HW 55 and Walther



**The LGV Speziale had a heavier target-style stock with an adjustable buttpad that was strictly for competition shooting. (Photo courtesy of Kevin Lentz).**



**The UIT was also a target model, though not as squared-off and blocky as the Speziale. The LGV held its own against never recoilless air rifles (Lentz).**





**The original Walther LGV Olympia trigger is adjustable for length of first stage and letoff weight. This one is set to break cleanly at 12 ounces.**



**Tyrolean-stocked target air rifles are rare because they were banned from competition soon after they appeared. The LGV Tyrolean is especially rare. (Lentz).**

LGV had the ability to win championships, even in the presence of the newer crop of recoilless wonders such as the FWB 300 and Anschütz 250. Indeed, in 1969, an HW 55 won the European Championship—although it was the last recoiling spring-piston target air rifle to do so.

With the LGV, Walther tried some of the latest and greatest attempts to beat back the competition, among them being double-set triggers, Tyrolean stocks for off-hand supremacy and tubular target sights. Each of these features, though used for years in the firearms community (and for a couple centuries, in the case of tubular sights) was declared illegal for international airgun competition.

The stocks of most LGVs have hollow chambers in the forearms to accept lead weights for increased stability. This was a common practice for target air rifles of this era. Several pounds of stabilizing weight could be added this way.

#### LGV Gives Way to Technological Advances

In the end, Walther had to abandon many innovations because new shooting regulations. Apparently, the governing bodies did not want the free rifle/free pistol equipment race—so common in the smallbore world—to cross over to airguns.

By the late 1960s, the LGV could no longer compete against the recoilless target air rifles and soon fell from grace. It was replaced by the newer LGR—Walther's first attempt at a single-stroke pneumatic target rifle. Recoil, or the lack of it, was the one area in which not only Walther but all the other airgun makers could compete, because everyone had their own take on how to make rifles that didn't recoil.

Where Walther used a pneumatic powerplant that needed only a single pump of air for power, Diana developed the Giss counter-recoil system, where a neutral piston that didn't compress air moved in the opposite di-

rection from the piston that did, balancing the power and cancelling all movement.

Anschütz had an oil-dampened mechanism to mute the shock of the piston's movement, and Feinwerkbau put the entire barreled action on steel rails that were inlet into the stock.

When an FWB 150 fired, the action really did recoil—but only on the rails. No movement was transmitted through the stock to the shooter. All FWB recoilless spring-piston target rifles feel strange when fired because the rear sight comes back at the shooter's eye about a half-inch.

In each case, these new designs isolated the shooter from movements imparted by recoil and vibration, and that made each shot more consistent. Instead of relying on shooter technique to stabilize the gun, the anti-recoil mechanisms did the job automatically and without thought from the shooter. As a result, it became impossible to influence the shot negatively except through aim, and this made the new crop of target rifles easier to use.

The older models, which included the LGV, fell out of favor among competitors and began selling on the vintage airgun market. Shooters who never competed prized them for their smooth and docile behavior, never caring that they were no longer on the cutting edge of shooting technology.

And that was it for the rifle—or so we all thought. Walther, however, had a different notion.

#### The Rebirth of the LGV in 2012

In 2012, the airgun world was surprised to learn that Walther was again going to be selling an LGV rifle. And

not meet with approval. Those who were familiar with the LGV name were upset by Walther's reuse of the classic moniker, and those who had never heard of an LGV were unimpressed—probably the exact opposite reaction that the Walther marketing department anticipated.

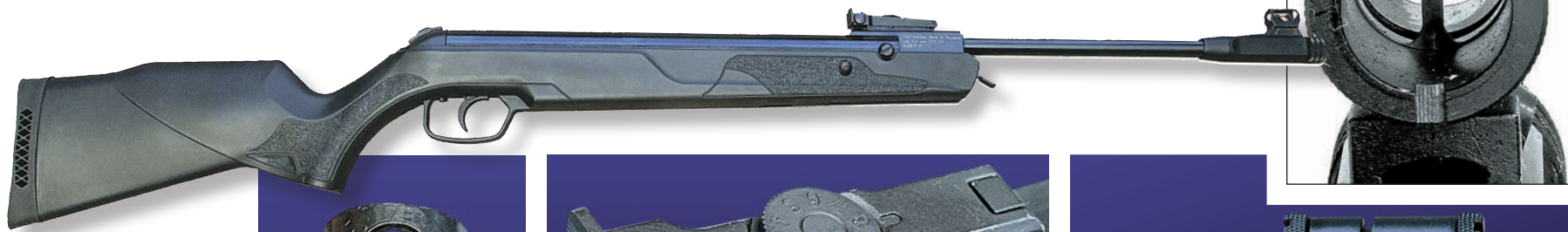
I was one of the naysayers who just knew they wouldn't get it right this time. So, I went to the 2013 SHOT Show with a chip on my shoulder, daring Walther to please me.

Walther airguns are imported, distributed and supported in the U.S. by Umarex USA. Headquartered in Ft. Smith, Ark., they have a huge operation that not only backs the Walther brand but many others for both airguns and firearms. So, I saw the new LGVs for the first time in the Umarex booth at the SHOT Show.

#### An Early Test

I requested an LGV to test as soon as possible, so I could start inventing ways to spread the unhappy news that the sky had begun to fall. For its part, Umarex USA provided me with a sample gun from the batch that had hung in their booth at SHOT, and wasted no time doing so.

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**The LGV Challenger is the base model in the new lineup. It has the adjustable trigger, smooth powerplant and solid barrel locking latch of all LGVs**

**The Challenger's front sight has a fiber-optic rod at the top of a squared-off post. Generous open holes in the hood admit lots of light to the rod.**



**The Challenger rear sight has fiber-optics as well. It's adjustable in both directions with precision clicks. It's an effective alternative to scopes.**

**The LGV Master Ultra has a front sight globe with interchangeable inserts that's better suited for formal target shooting than the fiber-optic sight.**



**All of the new LGV models have threaded muzzles, which allow installation of accessories like silencer tubes. A knurled protective ring is provided.**



Gaylord found the Walther LGV Challenger smooth and easy to shoot. Precharged pneumatics get most of the publicity, but breakbarrels have their place.



The blue finish on the metal parts is deep and lustrous—a departure from the norm for today's new airguns but in keeping with the LGV of the 1970s. Everything about the rifle tells you the company that made it is proud of this product.

All the new LGVs have threaded muzzles protected by removable caps. The thread pattern is 1/2"x20, which is the standard UK pattern for a silencer. Silencers are popular throughout Europe; but on a breakbarrel spring-piston rifle, they make about as much sense as trying to quiet the dashboard clock on a nitro-methane funny car. The muzzle is simply not where the gun makes its noise.

### A Miracle Happens

I'm an airgunner, so the first thing I do after taking a gun from the box is shoot it. One of the charms of most airguns is that you can shoot them almost anywhere. I have a silent pellet trap set up in my office. So, it was only natural for me to cock the new rifle to just sample the experience for the first time.

And when I cocked the breakbarrel action the first time, a miracle took place. All the frustration with Walther for reusing the LGV brand name on this new imposter melted away as I felt the bank-vault solid barrel glide through its cocking arc and catch the sear without the slightest trace of mechanical movement.

I didn't know it at the time, but the piston in all modern LGV rifles is held tightly in front by a piston seal that's fitted with zero clearance and by special low-friction piston rings at the rear that are similarly fitted. Walther took the modern airgunsmith's trick of installing bearings around the piston to isolate it from the spring tube throughout its length, and they adapted that technology to mass production.

The barrel latch was recreated by faithfully following Walther's own 1964 engineering drawings of the original latch. Even the cocking link that on most rifles is just a steel rod is supported by bearings for zero play on the LGV.

The calendar rolled back 40 years, for I was holding a genuine Walther LGV rifle again. This one had been made in the 21st century; but aside from the synthetic stock and higher cocking effort, it was an LGV in every sense of the word. I was, and I remain, impressed! That has not happened to me with a new spring-piston air rifle in this century.

### Testing the LGV Challenger

Umarex USA sent me a .22 cal. rifle, so I expected the velocities to be lower than those of a .177—and they were. They ranged from 585 fps for lead pellets of medium weight to over 700

fps for lightweight lead-free pellets. The bottom line was a power potential of 12 foot-pounds.

While that seems weak compared to the magnum spring rifle of today, it's twice what the vintage LGV target rifles developed. And it's also enough energy to make the new LGV a serious hunting air rifle.

But the story isn't the power the gun develops. The real story is the smoothness of the firing cycle and the easy yet smoothly positive cocking stroke. Just lever up the barrel latch with the thumb of your cocking hand, then slide down to the muzzle brake and start applying downward force. The barrel breaks open cleanly and without any sideways protest, until the sear catches the piston positively. Only 33 lbs. of force are needed to cock the rifle.

Insert a pellet in the breech and close the barrel again. It locks with a satisfying click that tells you the gun is locked up tight once more. This entire cocking cycle is so smooth that you'll think the rifle has been tuned by a master airgunsmith; but because of the remarkable new design, each and every rifle leaves the factory with exactly the same feel. Now, the rifle is cocked and loaded, and you're ready to shoot.

### Trigger

The trigger is a wide plastic blade with a shallow curve that allows you to engage the very tip of the blade. Walther offers an optional metal blade for those who prefer it, but I find the blade that came on the rifle satisfactory.

The trigger adjusts for the length of the first stage and pull weight by a single screw in the trigger blade. Stage two is crisp and positive and breaks at 1 pound, 10 ounces. On my test rifle, stage one requires only 4 ounces to reach the stage-two stop, so the trigger is incredibly crisp. The LGV Olympia trigger, also an adjustable two-stage, is lighter, of course. It breaks at between 6 and 14 oz., but that's to be expected of a target trigger (mine is set for 12 oz.). It would be unsafe to have such a light trigger on a sporting gun, unless it was fired only from the bench.

Each time the rifle is cocked, the safety automatically sets. The shooter must deliberately take the rifle off safe to fire the shot. The slide is located in the top center of the pistol grip, where it's equally accessible to either hand.

The way the rifle is designed, it's impossible to take the safety off to uncock the gun. This is an anti-beartrap device that prevents fingers from getting pinched if the barrel should close suddenly while you're loading. If you cock the rifle, it must be fired. I still recommend holding onto the muzzle as you load the rifle, the same as for any breakbarrel spring rifle—just to be safe. [Cont. to page 78]

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The rifle arrived in a plain brown cardboard carton because this was a trade show sample. I got no manual, but I'm an airgunner. How hard could it be? My rifle was a production model, but an early one that was sent only to be displayed at the SHOT Show. Undoubtedly, it had been fired by Umarex USA employees on their high-tech indoor range, but it was essentially a new-in-box example that had just been handled a lot.

### The Rifle

The first thing I did after unboxing it was examine the .22 cal. Walther LGV Challenger rifle. It's a medium-weight spring-piston rifle, tipping the scales at 8.4 lbs. While that sounds heavy compared to a mountain rifle, it really isn't that much when it comes to modern, powerful spring air rifles.

The overall length of 43.1 inches is also about average for an adult air rifle these days. The Challenger is the base-priced LGV that comes in a black synthetic stock. Even so, you'll pay upwards of \$550 to add one to your gun cabinet.

That increases by \$200 when you move up to the LGV Champion Ultra, which is at the top of the list. In between, there are various models that offer a choice of wood or synthetic stocks, plain butts or adjustable cheekpieces, globe front sights with interchangeable inserts, or the hooded fiber-optic post that was on my test rifle.

The stock is thin at the wrist and butt but thick through the forearm to accommodate the wide spring tube. Being synthetic allows for more latitude in the dimensions because the material is stronger than wood. Stippled panels on either side of the pistol grip and again on the forearm provide some measure of grip but are too small for my tastes. The butt is shaped with a Monte Carlo profile, and a stylized cheekpiece panel raises up ever-so-slightly on both sides of the butt. It's more of a styling statement than a working cheekpiece.

The pull is a man-sized 14.50 inches that I find perfect. The rifle hangs like a 1917 Enfield military rifle in my hands.

The baseblock of the new LGV has smaller steel pins to shim the sides, but it fits the action fork just as tight as the vintage rifle baseblock does.



The LGV sporting trigger is adjustable, much as the vintage target rifle trigger was. This one is two-stage and is set to break crisply at 1 pound, 10 ounces.



The LGV safety slides on each time the rifle is cocked. It can be reapplied at any time. The holes on top of the spring tube are for scope stop pins.





The Ultra models offer increased power, but the smooth powerplant, security of the barrel latching system and the adjustable trigger remain the same.

The Competition Ultra is the top of LGV line. It's a wood-stocked rifle with an adjustable cheekpiece, interchangeable front globe sights and upgraded power.

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### Firing Behavior

The original LGV earned a reputation for being one of the lightest-recoiling target rifles ever made. It did so by using weight to counter recoil mass. That's fine and it does work, but there's a limit to what can be done. The target LGV develops only about 6 foot-pounds, which is an 8-grain target pellet leaving the muzzle at around 580 fps.

The new sporting LGVs develop anywhere from 12 to 16 foot-pounds, which is twice to almost three times the power of the target model, yet they don't weigh any more than the old gun did.

In fact, the LGV Challenger weighs two full pounds less than the lead-loaded target rifle. Yet, the recoil, while admittedly greater, is still less than almost any other recoiling spring-piston air rifle in its power class today. It feels like a target rifle of the 1970s, though it puts out more power than most air rifles could produce back then.

A slight twang is transmitted through the synthetic forearm when the rifle fires, but that's about all you feel—a twang to go with the sound of the shot and virtually no other movement. The recoil is more of a rocking pulse to the stock than a rearward movement. And that's all there is. This is truly a sophisticated powerplant!

Companies often oversell their new products with baseless marketing claims, but this time all the claims are founded on fact. Walther has achieved recoil reduction and vibration damping by cushioning the piston at the end of its travel. This can be felt by the most calloused of shooters.

The trigger they call a target trigger is much better than the majority of sporting air rifle triggers available these days. And the smoothness you feel when cocking and loading the gun has to be experienced to be appreciated.

Hard-bitten airgunners have been fooled too many times to believe words alone. But if I were a Walther executive, I would bet my career on this line of rifles—to the extent of running any promotion I could dream up where the public gets to hold, cock and shoot one of these rifles. I would take a serious supply of rifles along to such an event—believing that none would be returning with me after it was over.

### More Power

I've mentioned that there are also certain new LGV models that develop greater power than the .22 cal. Challenger. Umarex USA sent a second rifle for me to test. This one was a wood-stocked LGV Master Ultra in .177 cal. that generates higher power.

The Master Ultra develops more than 16 foot-pounds of energy at the muzzle, which in .177 cal. would be an 8-grain pellet leaving the gun at about 950 fps.

The test rifle launches heavyweight H&N Baracuda Match 10.6-grain pellets at an average 831 fps, which produces 16.21 foot-pounds of muzzle energy, and lighter Crosman Premier domed pellets weighing 7.9-grains at an average 893 fps, which is almost 14 foot-pounds. Undoubtedly, this rifle would top 1000 fps with the lightest pellets, though it seems to like the heavier pellets more and does develop more power with them.

Like the LGV Challenger, the Master Ultra has very little in the way of recoil—just a rocking pulse is all you feel. The buzzing is a little more pronounced with this rifle, but it's generating another 25% more power.

The Master has a beech stock with laser-cut checkering and the Walther logo on both sides of the pistol grip. The forearm remains smooth and untouched. The comb of the butt is a Monte Carlo profile, but there's no raised cheekpiece, making this a fully ambidextrous rifle (like the LGV Challenger).

The wood stock is thicker at all points than the synthetic stock, as it must be, for strength. I prefer the slimmer synthetic stock because it hangs just right in my hands, but the LGV Master stock does have a longer 14.75-inch pull that larger shooters will enjoy. Like the Challenger, this model also has a thick black recoil pad.

### Accuracy

All the smooth functioning has to support an accurate air rifle or it's all for naught. And I tested both new LGV rifles thoroughly in that respect. Starting at 10 meters, I discovered which pellets each rifle preferred. This gave me a good opportunity to see how well the open sights performed, and both rifles did fine.

The fiber-optic sights of the Challenger are something of a liability from a precision standpoint; because if they're used as intended, there's too much error in the front sight element. But they're designed so that a well-lit target with the shooting position in a relatively dark spot gives a perfect squared-off front post with no hint of the glowing fiber-optic colors.

I don't shoot five-shot groups for accuracy. My groups have 10 shots in

them because that's a true test of both the rifle and the shooter's ability to handle it. What follows are 10 shots at each distance, as stated.

The .177 cal. LGV Master Ultra shot nearly as well as the Challenger, despite pushing an additional four foot-pounds out the muzzle. It buzzed a little more from the extra power, and the cocking effort rose from 33 lbs. to 40 lbs., but all of the other characteristics of the Challenger—the sweet cocking stroke, light crisp trigger and pinpoint accuracy—remained the same.

### In Summary—I Bought the Rifle!

Anyone who reads gun reports knows that when a writer tells you he bought the gun he just reviewed, it means something. We get to test hundreds of different models each year, and, to tell the truth, we become jaded by the experience. Opening boxes of new airguns just isn't the same thrill for us that it is for those who aren't in the testing/writing business.

But after a week of handling the new .22 cal. LGV Challenger, I sent an email to Justin Biddle, the Umarex USA marketing director, informing him that I would be holding onto this particular rifle as long as I could, until their supplies of guns finally hit these shores and he could sell it to me.

Now, we do get a writer's discount when we buy a gun this way, I won't lie to you. But we are still very calloused by constant exposure to every new thing that hits the market. So, even when there is a discount, it means something when a writer buys the gun he's tested.

JB responded to my email, telling me that Umarex USA would like to give me the rifle I had in my possession. I normally do not do that, for obvious reasons, but as I had every intention of writing them a check, I thanked them very much and the LGV Challenger got a new home.

The last spring-piston air rifle I bought was an Air Venturi Bronco—a rifle I helped develop. I bought it because during testing I modified the stock to fit a peep sight, but also because I wanted an example of the gun I'd helped create. So, buying the LGV Challenger is a big statement for me. I think it's the best breakbarrel spring-piston air rifle to come along in the last 40 years.

### Thank You

My thanks go out to Umarex USA, and especially to their marketing director, Justin Biddle, for providing the rifles for this test. I'd also like to thank Pyramid Air ([www.PyramidAir.com](http://www.PyramidAir.com)) for providing all the ammunition used in this test. Finally, thanks go out to Kevin Lentz, an airgun collector who supplied several of the photos of the vintage Walther LGVs.

Finally I would like to thank Carl Walther, GmbH, for building this fine air rifle. In a day when the bottom line and lawyers rule the roost, it's refreshing to see real gun makers who can still ply their craft. May their efforts increase manifold for this gift to the airgun world. ©



At 25 yards, the Challenger shoots like a 10-meter rifle! That's 10 shots in .356" with JSB Exact RS pellets. Few .22 cal. spring-piston air rifles can do as well.



When the rifle is as good as the LGV Challenger, you can expect groups like this one, which measures .989". Shot with .22 cal. JSB Exact RS pellets.