

'THAT CHAP'S rather keen, isn't he?..' remarked a newcomer to our club, inclining his head towards Barry McCraw. The poor man had only called in to find out what airgun shooting was all about and to see just how far things had progressed.

He left four hours later, his brain totally confused by airgun facts and figures. Obscure subjects from parallax correction to gyroscopic instability were enough to give the poor chap a headache, along with several million theories and conclusions given by Barry — the world's most fastidious exponent of the science of airgun shooting!

Describing Barry McCraw as 'rather keen' is like referring to Genghis Khan as a 'trifle unorthodox'! He is, quite simply, a shooter totally consumed by the race to perfect everything to do with his sport. Enjoyment, McCraw style, is time spent up to his armpits in compressed air bottles and valve seals, trying to seek the unattainable. If Barry ever developed the perfect shooting system, with nothing to modify, re-calibrate or generally play with, I believe he would find a quiet corner in his workshop, swallow a tin of Superdomes, and quietly let nature take its course!



Above: Barry's modified Daystate is a work of art. Above right: Surgery time! Barry's painstaking attention to detail keeps him at the top.



Barry

the boffin

Terry Doe talks to airgun fanatic and top field target shooter Barry McCraw

Barry is one of those shooters who accepts that as long as men make machines, perfection will always evade him. This, of course, only makes him more determined to whittle away at reality in an effort to produce a rifle that will best reflect his extraordinary devotion and natural talent.

But he also insists that he isn't a 'natural', and knowing him as I do, I can understand why he feels this way. Natural ability cannot be quantified in any way and therefore doesn't come into the McCraw equation. Besides, volatile elements like talent and instinct are unreliable under pressure, and Barry sees little point in wasting time and effort on such unmanageable factors.

You could be forgiven for labelling Barry McCraw as a bit of a 'cold fish'! My introduction, although accurate, tends to describe McCraw the shooter and while shooting comprises seven-tenths of Barry's life, the remaining fraction of his make-up contains all you could possibly want from a good member. Barry is a field target ambassador and a generally nice guy, and if you ever have a problem with your shooting or equipment you can count on Barry to remedy it. It may take a week or two, but nothing escapes the curative powers of Mr McCraw.

His interest in field target shooting began four years ago using a .22 pre-charged Daystate Huntsman which, although scarcely recognisable today, still

claims the dubious privilege of being responsible for his tremendous success on the field target circuit. I say 'dubious' because the rifle lives under the constant threat of being dismembered at any time. The slightest loss of consistency and it finds itself in bits! If the rifle dares to let him down, or even displays the merest hint of an impending hiccup, Barry confines it to barracks and conducts some surgery of his own.

An example of his manic desire for perfection occurred during one of our frequent practice sessions. McCraw was untouchable, his Daystate placing pellet after pellet on a ½ inch disc set some 50 yards away. I could only sit and watch a further series of 18 consecutive strikes at a 40 mm target set at 60 yards — truly faultless shooting.

At the end of his faultless display, Barry was ready for a break and went back to the clubhouse for a drink. 'I think I'll just put a few shots over the chrono', he mumbled as

he left the range. All was not well when I went in for refreshments. The chronograph had revealed a shot-to-shot variation of 14 fps, and despite the rifle's immaculate performance, professor McCraw's expression meant that the Daystate was about to undergo some hasty surgery. For the record, 14 fps variation means absolutely nothing in terms of accuracy — at any range!

The evolution of Barry's Daystate has taken thousands of hours of trial and error — with the error being kept to a minimum thanks to his scientific approach. As a qualified engineer in the field of nuclear physics, Barry has been trained to accept only the best results possible in every aspect of his job, and it is only natural that the same care and attention should be applied to his hobby.

The first thing to come under Barry's scrutiny was the Daystate's barrel. He replaced the .22 Anschütz barrel with a .177 Walther to keep his mania for efficiency at

bay — for a week or two, anyway! Although he spent considerable time upgrading the rifle's internals, it was the woodwork that received the next eviction order.

John Ford of Sportsmatch Mounts fame was producing a range of match-type stocks for various production rifles, and visualising the potential of 'tuneable' woodwork, Barry managed to obtain one. After hours of fussing around with adjustable buttplates, filler and resin, Barry eventually had a simple, no frills stock to

help him steer the Daystate action in a competent manner.

The metamorphosis of the rifle quickened as each minute improvement revealed to Barry equally minute — some have said imaginary — shortcomings in other, unmolested sections of his rifle. The compression tube, silencer, dump valve, hammer mechanism, bolt and trigger were all subjected to re-design or changed altogether in his quest for perfection.

Even the simple process of charging the rifle with air was 'improvable' according to Barry, so a one twist connector was employed to relieve him of five seconds required by the standard screw-in adaptor!

Daystate have an enviable reputation as manufacturers of some of the finest precision air rifles in the world, which is why Barry chose the Daystate Huntsman as a basis for his project. They also have a reputation for responding to the needs of their customers — and Barry's findings have generated considerable interest within the company. Positive changes in the length of the hammer stroke and a new match quality trigger are a direct result of Barry's research — a fact that Daystate's Mike Seddon freely acknowledges.

The emergence of the 'McCrawstate' begs the question: 'Why don't Daystate build an exact replica of Barry's rifle?' Well, if you calculated the man hours invested in the development and maintenance of such a hi-tech rifle, you can see why. Using an average hourly rate charged by some of the established tuning companies, I calculated the cost of Barry's rifle — from

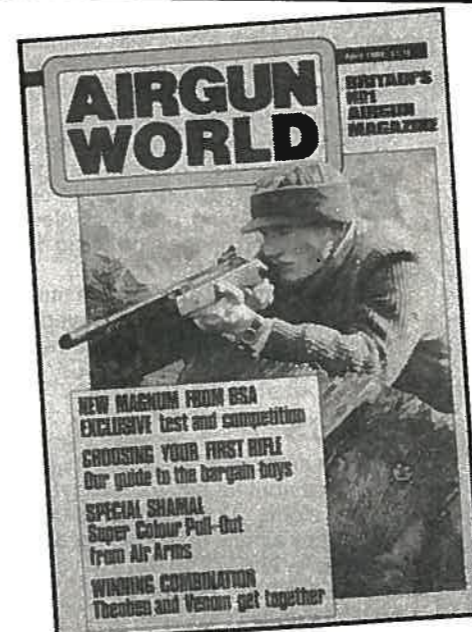
initial purchase to its present state — to be around £50,000 or so! His Daystate Nouveau is more of an instrument than an air rifle, and the specialised techniques essential for keeping it that way are beyond all but the McCraws of this world.

But Barry and his rifle aren't finished yet. Direct feed loading is his next goal and a flip-up transfer port is already on the drawing board. But take it from me, he won't stop there. One of the main reasons for his ability to devote so much time to his rifle is that he is not afflicted by that most restrictive of ailments — marriage! Although some loving couples have managed to combine matrimony with marksmanship — notably Shirley and J.J. Lasheras, Ann and Barry Mede, Dave Hammill and Frank Spencer — in general, wedded bliss and devotion to shooting are opposing factions.

The other reason for Barry's avoidance of a long-term domestic contract is a more basic one. Can you, for instance, imagine the consequences of a malfunction in a Mrs McCraw? If the unfortunate woman ever threw a tantrum, Barry would be reaching for his tool kit and heaven knows what could happen!

Barry McCraw will no doubt continue to evolve alongside his rifle, each trying to outshoot the other until a compromise is finally reached. When you next see him at a field target shoot, feel free to ask his advice on any airgun related problem you like. Reserve an hour or two for his remedy, though, for as the man said at the start, 'he is rather keen'!

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