

# OUTDOORS

with Ken Cook



## The old gray mare ain't what she used to be

Today's air rifles are vastly advanced from the BB gun you owned as a kid. Though both types are single-shot and have to be cocked (pumped or break barrel), the new-age models look and perform much like a modern hunting rifle. In fact, they are designed for small-game hunting and target shooting.

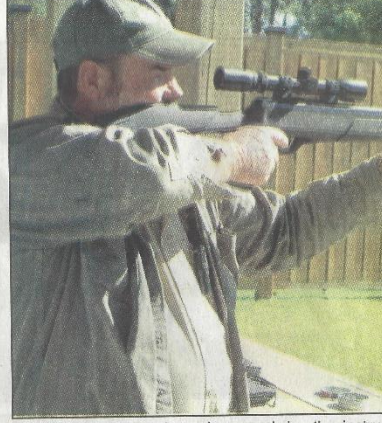
The new breed accepts .177- and .22-caliber lead pellets and features good optics (scope), as well as sound suppressors or muzzle brakes to reduce recoil and noise. Length and weight are somewhat similar to small-caliber rim-fire hunting firearms. Synthetic or wooden stocks, even camo-clad, are also available. Most importantly they pack an astounding wallop.

On my request, Crosman Corporation, makers of the Benjamin brand, shipped me a new Benjamin Trail Stealth air rifle in .22-caliber to test and write about. The Trail Stealth arrived with a 3x9 variable scope, which Franklin's Gun Shop of Athens mounted and sighted in for me.

After purchasing a Crosman tin of pellets (175-count) for \$4.95 and



Amanda Parham is a first-time air gun shooter.



David Sowell is a park employee and shooting instructor.

a few 39-cent targets, the Benjamin was ready to fire, right out of the box. Quick footnote: Never operate a new firearm of any type without carefully reading the user's manual and following basic gun-safety rules.

Stepping back three years, my mounting interest in modern-day air rifles prompted me to purchase a Daisy Powerline 901 that could shoot BBs or .177 pellets. It was lightweight and functioned reasonably well, but it (or I) was never accurate outside

10-15 yards, and the muzzle velocity of the BB dropped rapidly once it cleared the barrel. To reload a second BB required 10 noisy "crunch pumps" of the forearm, and by that time, the squirrel was running like a scalded dog toward the top of a big white oak.

Recently, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources cut the ribbon on a new archery and air-rifle range at Veterans State Park near Cordele and I was invited to attend. What a

great opportunity to test the new Benjamin Trail Stealth among novice shooters and seasoned hunters. With shooting instructors on hand (Calvin Cole and David Sowell) and me as an observer, the Benjamin ran the gauntlet.

Also on the gun rack for trial were a Ruger Air Hawk with 4x32 scope; a Beeman Sportsman II with 4x32 scope; Stoeger X10; a Daisy Powerline; and the Benjamin. All brands, except the Benjamin, shot .177 pellets.

Though this was a ran-

quiet, but heavier to mount and hold steady, and somewhat hard to cock (break) the barrel. Oddly, Amanda Parham, a first-time shooter (see photo), put a three-pellet group inside the first two rings, one of which hit the bullseye. Range distance was fixed at 15 yards.

With the gun rated at 1,100 fps (feet per second), I'm convinced that the Benjamin Trail Stealth will perform above expectations in the field on squirrels and rabbits. And with a list price of \$294.95, it's perfect for teaching kids to target-shoot and safely handle firearms. Crosman also just announced extended warranties on its break-barrel air guns, a first in the industry. Visit [www.crosman.com](http://www.crosman.com).

dom trial and not a scored competition, the Benjamin was found by shooters to be very accurate, comparatively