

Air rifles are precision instruments that need to be well maintained. Apart from accuracy issues you also need to consider the fact that on a PCP rifle you have a metal canister that holds almost 3000psi, and that's enough to cause serious injury if it fails. Rust is a potential problem and as FT is an outdoor sport water is bound to come into contact with your equipment at some time. It's worth wiping down all metal parts with an oiled rag after each outing, even if it didn't get wet as this will ensure you don't get rust on those wet days and even salty fingerprints in summer can cause rust to appear in a matter of hours. Water can cause problems with wooden stocks, even ones that are varnished or oiled, so make sure that you thoroughly dry out the rifle before you put it away. If it does get drenched, take it out of the stock as soon as you get home, wipe it down and let it dry out naturally away from sources of heat such as radiators. Applying a heat source to wood can cause it to split so be careful not to get it hot. Leaving it in a warm room with good air circulation overnight usually does the trick. Also allow your gun bag to dry out completely as foam can hold moisture for some time. Dust and dirt are usually not too much of a problem, although keeping your rifle slightly oiled will attract dirt. If you get dirt on the lens of the scope you do need to be careful as you could end up scratching it. Use camera lens cleaning equipment and a soft brush to clean grit or water marks. Vacuum the inside of your rifle bag or case periodically to keep it free of grit. It's important not to drench your rifle in oil as there are some parts that you don't oil, and don't spray the scope with WD40, it has solvents that can work their way into the body. Read the manual that came with the rifle to ensure that there are no special finishes on your rifle or areas that shouldn't be oiled.

Cleaning your barrel is not something you need to do on a frequent basis and some rifles don't shoot well after being cleaned so it's something that comes down to the individual rifle rather than part of a regime. If the group sizes are beginning to open up it's worth cleaning the barrel with a cotton pull through with a small amount of oil on it or a felt pellet, again with some oil on. When using felt pellets always load one into the breech and then load a normal lead pellet directly behind it and fire the rifle. This will help to compress the felt into the rifling and also prevents piston seal damage in spring guns. You may need to put a few through to get it really clean. Afterwards, you may find the group size becomes worse. This is because some (but not all) rifles need a very thin lead coating in the barrel and this will happen naturally after firing 20-50 pellets and is quite normal. Never use caustic or brass pull through brushes intended for live round rifles as air rifles don't get a carbon build up and they could potentially damage the rifling and contribute nothing to the cleaning.

Most air rifles require a service every 12 months and although they are relatively simple devices they can be dangerous if re-assembled incorrectly so we recommend that you return the rifle to an authorised agent for the service to be performed. You can do it yourself but remember you're dealing with devices that contain 3000psi and need to be set up perfectly in order to be safe and accurate. If you do service, lubricate or disassemble any part of your rifle, put it through a chronograph to ensure it's below the 12ft/lb limit and then check it periodically as the parts settle.

Your regime should be:

1. Wipe all metal surfaces with an appropriate oil (check manual) after EVERY use. Even in summer the salt in your sweat can cause rust spots to appear.
2. Make sure the stock is dried slowly if it gets wet. Never put it on a radiator or use a hair dryer. Use bee's wax or linseed oil to finish it. Ensure that scratches are repaired on lacquered stocks to prevent water getting under the finish. If it's become really wet, take the action out.
3. Clean barrel as required. Probably after every 2 - 3 tins of pellets.
4. Chronograph the rifle to ensure it's legal at least monthly, more frequently during summer on PCP's.
5. Check your zero at least monthly using paper targets and check that the scope is securely mounted.
6. Service at regular intervals (see manual) even if used infrequently as rubber seals perish over time

Why do I need to ensure my rifle is below 12ft/lbs?

In the UK, the maximum power that any air rifle can produce without the owner having a firearms certificate (FAC) is 12ft/lb. Above this you're committing a serious criminal offence which can involve a prison sentence and a fine. At the club we will test any rifle that we suspect is over powered and may report the owner. Anyone who does not allow their rifle to be tested will be expelled from the club without recourse or refund. For target shooting there is no benefit in exceeding this limit as the majority of competitions will put your rifle through a chronograph to ensure that you are at least 5fps below the 12ft/lb limit. If you're over you get disqualified even if you're legal. FAC's can be obtained for air rifles but the process is just as stringent as for a live round rifle and you'll need to keep it in a gun safe. SBFTC do not permit any FAC power rifle to be used at the club as it isn't covered by our insurance.