

UK AIR GUN LAW

This section reflects the law as of June 2005 and is for general information only and relates to non FAC airguns only. Any air gun that falls into the FAC category is subject to the full effect of the Firearms act 1968 and is not within the scope of this document. Replica guns are also not in the scope of this document. The law is always subject to change and modification and this website may not reflect changes to legislation.

SBFTC accept no responsibility whatsoever for any non compliance on the part of any individual or party to prevailing law relating to air guns. Any references stated or implied within this web site are intended to be used as an indication of the general requirements of the law as at June 2005 and we can not guarantee that content is current, complete or error free. It is entirely your own responsibility to ensure you are conversant and compliant with current law. All offences committed with air rifles are treated as a 'firearms offences' which carry significant sentences under UK law.

Please note that Northern Ireland has additional restrictions relating to both air guns and ammunition and requires a licence to be held regardless of power output. Taking, or sending guns or even pellets to Northern Ireland is likely to result in prosecution.

Air guns are also subject to different laws in Europe so do not assume you can take an air weapon to mainland Europe without restriction or that UK law is transferable. Be aware that there are also restrictions relating to the carrying of compressed air by air, sea or channel tunnel.

There are additional restrictions relating to shooting of live quarry. Some species are on an open licence and others are not. Do not assume that you are entitled to shoot anything if you are either on your own property, or have written permission to shoot from the landowner. The BASC website gives information regarding this, but be aware that the species listed do change occasionally. Under no circumstances shoot songbirds (i.e. sparrows, blue tits, blackbirds, thrush or robins etc) as this is illegal and serves no purpose at all. No quarry may be shot whilst at SBFTC grounds regardless of status. Note that it is also an offence to shoot domestic pets, even if they are feral.

Third Party Insurance

Although not a legal requirement, it is strongly recommended that you take out your own insurance. SBFTC has insurance that covers you at our range and if competing in a BFTA competition, but if you shoot at any other location (including your own land) you will not be covered. Both the BASC and NSRA can provide specific third party insurance cover for air guns as can some other insurers for about £50 per year.

Firearms Acts 1968 and the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2004

Air Rifles and Young Persons

17 years and over

You may buy, borrow or hire an air rifle and its ammunition and may use it where you have permission to do so.

Note that you need to be over 21 to supervise anyone under the age of 17. A potential problem is a 20 year old driving their 16 year old brother along with their rifles to a club. Both are committing an offence. Supervision is not only whilst shooting at a club, but at any time in a public place which includes a motor vehicle.

Aged 14 – 17 years

You may not buy or hire an air rifle or ammunition. You may not receive an air rifle or ammunition as a gift but you may borrow one. If you are under 17 then your air rifle and ammunition must be bought for you by someone over 17 – normally your parent, guardian or some other responsible adult.

If you are aged between 14 – 17 years you may use an air rifle on private premises without supervision with the consent of the occupier – normally the owner or tenant. If a pellet leaves the premises whilst you are shooting then both you and the person supervising you commit a criminal offence.

You may not carry an air rifle in a public place unless you are supervised by a person of 21 years or over and you have a reasonable excuse to do so, for example, whilst on the way to a club or land where you have permission to shoot. If carrying an air weapon in a public place it must be completely covered in a gun case or gun bag.

Young people under 14 years

If you are under 14 you may not buy, hire or receive an air rifle or its ammunition as a gift.

You may not carry an air weapon in a public place.

You may borrow an air rifle and use it under supervision on private premises with permission from the occupier – normally the owner or tenant. The person who supervises you must be of or over 21 years of age.

If a pellet leaves the premises whilst you are shooting then both you and the person supervising you commit a criminal offence.

Parents or guardians who buy an air rifle for use by an under 14 year old must exercise control over it at all time even in the home, garden or gun club.

Public Places

A public place is anywhere where the public are allowed to go even though they may have to pay to be there. Roads, streets, footpaths, public parks, play areas and canal towpaths are all examples of public places.

It is an offence for anyone to have an air rifle – whether it is loaded or not – in a public place unless they have a reasonable excuse for doing so, for example, whilst

on the way to a gun shop or to a shooting club, however, you are expected to take a direct route.

Note that under the Firearms Act 1968 your car constitutes a public place, so even if your airgun is locked out of sight in the boot, it is in a public place and you must have reasonable excuse.

Trespass

It is against the law to trespass on any land (including land covered by water) or in any building, while you have an air rifle with you. Whether the gun is loaded and whether or not you have pellets with you is irrelevant. If you go onto land without permission, you are trespassing, unless there is some right of access for the public. If there is a right of access for the public the restrictions set out above will apply. Trespass with an air rifle is 'armed trespass', a criminal offence, the penalties for which can be severe.

As well as the offences already mentioned, it is against the law, in England and Wales, to fire an air rifle within 50 feet of the centre of a highway, if by doing so you cause any member of the public, using that right of way, to be injured, interrupted or endangered. This offence could be committed, for example, by someone on private property close to a road who uses an air rifle in a way which endangers people on the road.

Magazines

Many air guns have multishot magazines. The Firearms Act 1968 states that if you have a magazine fitted to your airgun it is deemed to be loaded irrespective of whether the magazine contains ammunition or not. Additionally, if a magazine contains any ammunition (one pellet or more) the gun is deemed to be loaded even if the magazine is not fitted to the gun. Never have in your possession a magazine that is even partially loaded when not on your own property, a recognised club or land where you have permission to shoot and never transport your air gun with an empty magazine fitted. Despite the fact that there may be several feet between the magazine and your air gun, it is still deemed to be loaded as in law the magazine is considered to be part of the gun and you will face prosecution. There no defence in law to this charge.

A word on knives

Many air gunners carry a knife as part of their toolkit. The law permits you to carry folding knives under 3 inches, however, if the blade is fixed or has a locking mechanism you must show reasonable excuse regardless of the blade length. Under this distinction, carrying a sheath knife or locking blade knife (Stanley and craft knives fall into this category as well as some Leatherman and Swiss Army knives) in a public place, which in this definition also includes your vehicle, without reasonable excuse is an offence.

If you are convicted of any criminal offence (even non firearms related) you will automatically be prohibited under law from owning an air rifle for a minimum of 3 years, and in some instances there will be a life ban. Under the terms of SBFTC's insurance you will also be unable to shoot at the club during the period of this prohibition. Also note that any previous conviction must be

declared to the club, as under the Firearms act 1968 previous convictions are never spent.