

ON TEST THIS MONTH

Hawke Sidewinder 30 FFP 4-16x50

OPTICS TEST

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RRP
£599

HAWKE SIDEWINDER

The all-conquering FFP from Hawke has a new incarnation. Paul Austin takes a look at the Hawke bestseller that has just enjoyed a serious makeover

The original Sidewinder was Hawke's bestselling scope in the UK, which is likely to make the new Sidewinder the UK's next superstar scope. The original Sidewinder was somewhat of a landmark. Its unique looks made it instantly recognisable; it was also a familiar addition to many FAC air rifles and rimfires.

Its slightly 'boy racer' styling, with modern etched multi-coloured fonts and slim turrets, weren't to everyone's taste, but it introduced FFP (first focal

BELOW: The single screw unlock is an improvement over the Frontier design



PICTURES: PAUL AUSTIN

plane) shooting with illumination to many and offered a scope that could happily migrate from air rifle to rimfire/centrefire without a problem.

The high mag of 6-24x really appealed to new shooters, on the premise that bigger is always better. The latest version is also available in 6-24x, but for me, the 4-16x is a much more flexible and appealing option, as lower mag, at the low end especially, is often much more practical in typical shooting scenarios.

Whether you liked the styling or not, you can't argue with the feature set and the success of this accurate and sensibly priced FFP. Sales figures clearly testify to its appeal across the board, from pellet pushes to powder burners alike.

If you have a bestseller on the shelves, it's a very brave move to introduce a replacement. But, to Hawke's credit, that's exactly what they've done. Before moving on to the scope itself, it's worth just sparing a moment for Hawke themselves. Back in the day, Hawke were synonymous with air rifle shooting and, for many, they still hold the air rifle scope crown.

However, in recent years, they've made serious inroads in the higher-end centrefire market with their flagship line, Frontier, winning the hearts of

many, myself included. Great design and features, quality engineering – even the packaging screams quality!

You'll be hard-pressed to find anyone with a bad word to say about the Frontier line, and those core qualities have been imparted into the new Sidewinder. So, hats off to Hawke, a British company that covers all the bases from beginners to serious shots, taking on the scope market across all genres – and winning.

As I have already hinted, Hawke have wisely stolen some of the features from the Frontier line and incorporated them into the Sidewinder. All in all, the new model is a much more grown-up affair. At first glance, you'd struggle to tell a Sidewinder and Frontier apart. Not all the bells and whistles have made the transition, but the essentials certainly have – not least of which is the matching mil dot reticle and corresponding clicks on the turrets. I used it exclusively in last month's Tuning & Truing feature, and it didn't require any click value validation when dialling out to distance.

THE GUIDED TOUR

Working from back to front, we have the same 'set and forget' locking ocular adjustment as seen on the Frontier. The eye box is generous and

there's a whopping 100mm of eye relief – so it's at home with even the most heavily recoiling centrefire.

The much more useable 4-16x mag adjustment boasts the same fast throw lever as seen on its more expensive stablemates. In terms of fit and finish, the verdict's unanimous: German-esque engineering at its best. There's a lovely matt black satin finish on the anodised aluminium 30mm tube, with smooth adjustment for zoom and positive clicks on the turrets.

The only thing that's missing from its predecessor's design is the fitted aluminium scope covers, which have been replaced by a standard pair of bikini covers. It's a bit of a shame, but Hawke are no doubt aware that they'll need to maintain some separation between the Sidewinder and Frontier product lines.

Moving up to the turrets, it's all very reminiscent of the Frontier design, with slight alterations to the knurling, which I actually prefer over the Frontiers. The design, feel, fit and finish are all very similar to the flagship line with push/pull lockable exposed turrets.

Thankfully, Hawke have dispensed with the two-colour illumination, opting for red only, with on/off positions between each for easy on/off selection at the desired power level. The lowest power level is subtle enough for last light shooting or for a stop of lamping after hours – something which isn't always the case with many mid-range illuminated scopes. Not surprisingly, there's no zero stop, but that's hardly a surprise, as that feature is firmly in the domain of the Frontier line.

CONTACT

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A unique addition to the new Sidewinder is the new witness window – not a new concept, but certainly something new to the Sidewinder. Essentially, it's a rising or falling red bar on the elevation turret which gives you an instant overview of where you are in terms of dialled elevation. Many a critter has been missed because the turrets had not been reset after the previous shot. The witness window provides an 'at a glance' solution to that particular problem.

Optically, there're no complaints. The Hawkes H5 system delivers a clear and sharp edge-to-edge image with good contrast, along with impressive low-light performance, courtesy of the new H5 optics and 50mm objective. It's a smaller, lighter and overall, a more refined optic than its predecessor.

ABOVE: Excellent eye relief and a clear sharp image – there's a lot to like about the all new Sidewinder

BELOW: Paul found the 4-20x mag version offered him the perfect mag range for general shooting applications

THE BOTTOM LINE

Most things in life have their place on an exponential curve of cost versus quality. The more you spend, the more subtle the ROI. The same applies to scopes and the Sidewinder sits in a very appealing spot on the optical curve, offering a great combination of quality and cost. Or, as the three bears might say: it's not too hot, it's not too cold, it's just right! To be honest, I'll be sad to see it go. Another excellent release from Hawke! 

TECH SPECS



LENGTH: 339mm / 13.3"

WEIGHT: 725g / 25.6oz

EYE RELIEF: 102mm / 4"

FOCUS/PARALLAX SIDE FOCUS: 9m / 10yds to infinity

FIELD OF VIEW: 10.6-2.7m @100m / 31.8-8.1ft @100yds

EXIT PUPIL: 12.5-3.1mm / 0.49-0.12"

MAG RANGE: 4-16x

OBJECTIVE: 50mm

Ultra-Wide Angle 24° FOV

ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT: 1/10 MRAD - 26 MRAD

WINDAGE INCREMENT: 1/10 MRAD - 26 MRAD

OCULAR TYPE: Locking Fast Focus

LENS COATING: Fully multi-coated, 18 layers

MAG POWER SELECTOR: Knurled Posi grip with removable zoom lever

FOCAL PLANE: First Focal Plane (FFP)

OPTICAL DESIGN: Hawke H5 optics

PARALLAX: 9m to infinity

Resettable locking turrets with witness window

30mm mono-tube chassis

Side focus

Illumination (6 levels, off positions between each)

Side wheel, index-matched (removable)

FFP half mil reticle

