

Ample eye relief, a versatile reticle, plus precise and reliable adjustments make the Sidewinder 30 SF a great choice for powder-burners

# WHICH ONE?

**Jules Whicker** takes a detailed look at a pair of Hawke Sidewinder scopes

It's been a while since I tested a Hawke scope, but when a brace of their new multi-discipline Sidewinder 30 SFs arrived for review I quickly realised I've been missing something. Whatever I was expecting, it was immediately evident that these were better. A lot better.

## UNBOXING

In the box is a sunshade, 4" side-wheel, bikini-type lens covers, CR2032 battery for the illuminated reticle, a throw lever, instructions for the scope and ret, plus the customary Allen key and cleaning cloth.

The scope itself showed pleasing proportions, a sleek one-piece main tube, chunky windage and elevation turrets, a two-tier parallax and illumination turret on the left-hand side, and a fast-focus eyepiece. Immediately intriguing was the turn-indicator window at the rear of the elevation turret, in which a red indicator bar rises or falls alongside a fixed scale as the turret is rotated. Interesting.

## ELEVATION AND WINDAGE

The windage and elevation turrets have further appealing features: capless, they pull-up/push-down to unlock/lock, and the dials can be reset to zero by loosening a

screw in the middle with a coin. I would have preferred an Allen or Torx fitting to reduce the chances of marring the screw-head.

Both scopes have turrets calibrated in Milliradians (MRADs) to match their reticles (more about those later) with each click worth 0.01 MRAD. The range of adjustment is fair with +/- 13 MRADs on each axis. To put that in real-world terms, if you were to shoot in a 20 mph crosswind at a target 1000m away with a 6.5 Creedmoor you would typically need to dial-in about 4 MRADs of windage and 9 for elevation. In the same conditions with a legal-limit .177 air rifle zeroed at 35m, shooting at a 40m target, you would dial-in about 8.5 MRADs of windage and 0.5 MRADs of elevation. So +/- 13 is plenty. Nevertheless, these figures show why it's good to have 10 MRADs per turn on your elevation turret but that requires big turrets to keep the markings well-spaced, so Hawke's choice of 6 MRADs on a smaller turret is an acceptable compromise.

This works better on the elevation turret, which is marked from 1-6, than on the windage turret, which is marked 1-3 either side of zero, so has the potential to confuse when more than 3 MRADs are required. In response, I simply did my elevation correction on the turret and my regular

windage on the reticle, saving the turret adjustment for more extreme situations.

## PRECISION PARALLAX

The multi-discipline character of the Sidewinder SFs is apparent in a parallax system that will have a particular appeal for airgun shooters: namely, a parallax dial that focuses from 9m-∞ and an 'index-matched' side-wheel supplied as standard. The latter attaches to the parallax turret, providing precise focus control without obstructing the illumination dial.

I'd have liked to see a simple parallax pointer provided with the wheel to give a more visible indexing mark than the tiny white dot on the turret base; and to have more detailed markings in the 9m-50m range where parallax rangefinding actually happens. That said, most people will do as I did and cover the markings with masking tape and calibrate the wheel themselves.

## EYE OPENER

On first looking through the scope, I was immediately struck by how big the image seemed, and how bright and sharp. The impression of size is produced both by the ample 24° field of view (FOV) and by a roomy eye-box. Zooming in to 16x produced no



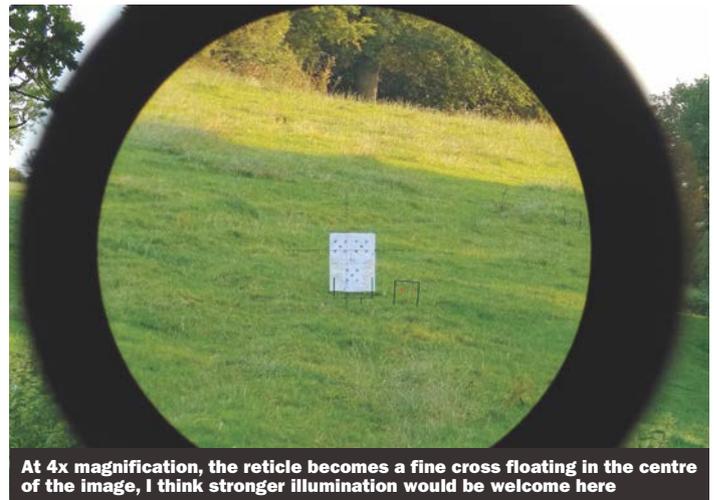
The push-locking turrets have resettable dials and 6 MRADs per turn, note the screw located on top



You get a generous eye-box, an eye-bell with a combined fast-focus and locking dioptre system plus a neat throw-lever



At 16x magnification, the FFP reticle fills the image, the centre section can be illuminated for greater visibility against dark targets



At 4x magnification, the reticle becomes a fine cross floating in the centre of the image, I think stronger illumination would be welcome here

unpleasant surprises either. Yes, the image was fractionally darker and head-position slightly more constrained, but not to a degree that mattered. Colours were natural too, though I was able to provoke some yellow fringing by pointing the scope at backlit branches, however, I have managed that with scopes costing four times as much as the Sidewinder.

Good too is the dioptre adjustment (reticle focus), which combines a rubber-covered quick-adjust ring with a knurled locking collar that works like a zero stop, letting you restore your setting with a quick clockwise twist. Behind the ocular bell, the eye-relief is a generous 100mm. Perhaps over-generous, because I found I had to mount the scopes as far forward as possible, nevertheless, the long eye-relief does serve as a reminder that these scopes are rugged enough to withstand heavy recoil.

### FFP OR SFP?

The two scopes on test are identical except for their reticles: a first-focal-plane (FFP) Half-Mil in one, and a second-focal-plane (SFP) SR Pro II pattern in the other, so we should consider the properties of each. In the FFP scope, regardless of magnification, 1 MRAD in the reticle will always correspond to

### JULES WHICKER SAYS:

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1 MRAD on the target. By contrast, in the SFP scope, the reticle subtensions will only be true at a specific magnification and in the case of the SR Pro II ret, this is at 8x. I checked both scopes against a 50mm grid at 50m and found them to be as perfectly calibrated as I could measure.

Which format (FFP or SFP) works best for you will depend on the kind of shooting you do as well as on your own preferences. Regardless, it's always worth preparing a quick-reference guide of some kind. The Chairgun app makes it easy to create scope strips, reticle diagrams and drop-charts for any ballistic profile. These can then be wrapped around turrets, stuck inside scope covers, taped to your stock, or just kept handy on your phone. Time spent waiting in

ambush can be put to good use memorising this data.

At the end of the day, if you use a laser rangefinder with Chairgun (or another ballistic app) and dial in all your corrections, it really makes no difference whether you have an FFP or SFP reticle. Moreover, a simple reticle will do as well as a complex one, provided it is sufficiently visible and precise enough to give a good point of aim (POA).

### SIZE MATTERS

The challenge with an FFP scope is to design the reticle so that it is thick enough to remain visible on minimum magnification, even in poor light, but thin enough not to blot out the target or lose precision on maximum. If you're trying to take a deer or fox at twilight

The illuminated reticle came in handy for picking out squirrels in the woods



The SR Pro II reticle is another good design: maximising open space but providing reference points wherever I needed them

with an FFP scope, you'll have to choose between zooming in to get a bolder reticle, at the cost of losing image brightness and FOV, or zooming out and having to guess where the reticle is centred.

By contrast, the reticle in an SFP scope won't lose visibility at low power, so you don't have to factor this in when setting your magnification. Additionally, the reticle always looks the same, which can help when a quick shot and instinctive shooting are called for. To a degree, FFP reticles can compensate for this with clever illumination, by incorporating a bright floating cross or dot at the centre of the design to create a clear and natural aiming point. Some even switch from illuminating the whole reticle to just the centre when you dial the magnification below

a certain power, assuming that this indicates a switch from precision to snap shooting.

**CROPPING**

Because those who prefer to aim-off rather than dial-in their corrections tend to prefer FFP reticles, people sometimes blame the layout for the fact that winding up the power for distant targets causes precisely the parts of the reticle required for long-range holdovers to disappear beyond the edges of the image.

However, the real limiting factor here is FOV, which reduces as magnification increases. Thus an SFP scope at full power will show no more 'true' MRADs than an FFP one. The solution in both cases is either to zoom out to accommodate the holdover required or to dial in the necessary correction.

**BACK TO THE SIDEWINDERS**

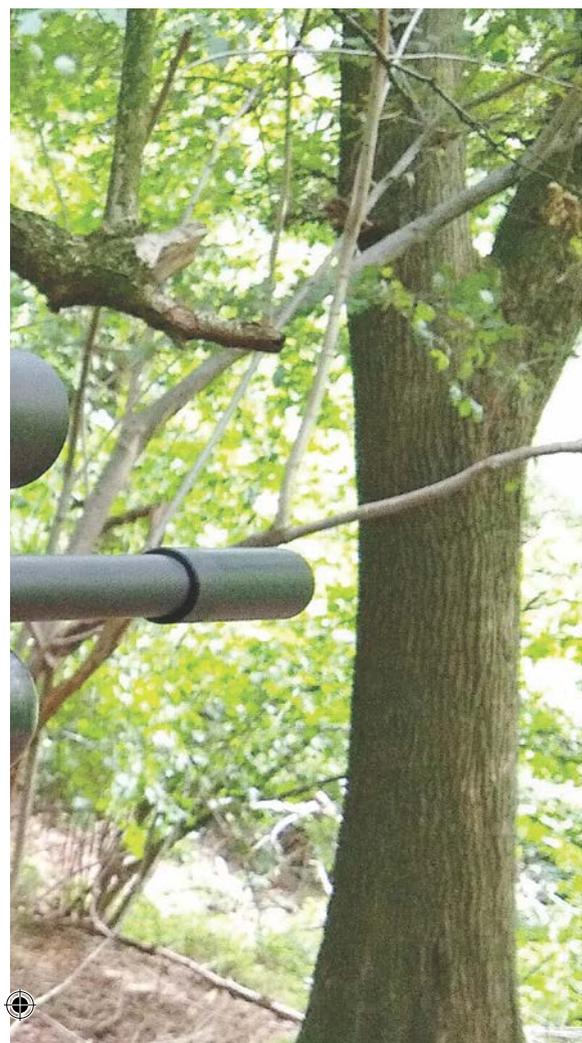
Shifting from the general principles of SFP and FFP systems to the specific scopes on test here, I found both reticles impressively crisp. The quality of the red multi-LED illumination was good too, with no bleeding or flaring. The off positions between each

intensity setting are convenient, but limit the number of steps to six. Overall, I would have liked a wider intensity range – low enough at the bottom end for compatibility with rear-mounted tubed NV, and high enough at the top end to function like a red dot in bright sunshine.

The FFP reticle shows both full and half-MRAD stadia each an appropriately different size, but adding some numerical markings would have saved some counting and made the reticle quicker to use. At full power, the FFP Half-Mil reticle shows 12 MRADs, which is equivalent to a 90m shot with a sub-12 ft/lbs air rifle or a 1,200m shot with a 6.5 Creedmoor (on a 0 MOA rail), this is obviously plenty: so it doesn't matter that, instead of revealing more MRADs as you zoom out, the reticle becomes a free-floating cross so as to give you the clearest possible view downrange. I found the holdover points viable down to about 8x, after which they became hard to tell apart, but every shooter will have a different opinion/experience.



The sunshade did its job perfectly, and the scope covers are stretchy enough to fit it, but I'd still buy the optional honeycomb ARD



More positive and precise than the basic parallax turret, the sidewheel proved perfect for quick engagements when stalking the woods and hedgerows



The turn-indicator window is ingenious and distinctive but a simple zero stop would be faster and more foolproof



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### ILLUMINATION

The reticles differ in regards to illumination, too. On the Pro II reticle, the vertical axis below the centre cross, and the windage/drop indicator bars that extend from it, light up, but the main crosshairs at 12, 3 and 9 o'clock don't. By contrast, on the FFP reticle, the horizontal and vertical axes lights up, but not the array of subordinate crosses radiating below and on either side of the centre that serve as reference points for combined windage and drop compensation. Some will like this, but in the two scenarios in which I use illumination –to engage a target in low light or on the move- I'm not making complex trajectory-compensated shots, so all I want is a strong red centre to the reticle.

### DIALLING IN

If you prefer to use the centre of the reticle as your POA and the surrounding information for measurement only, then you'll be glad to know that the adjustment provided by the turrets leaves nothing to be desired. On both scopes 10 clicks produced precisely 10cm of adjustment at 100m, and the scope returned to zero no matter how much I messed with the elevation and windage adjustments. As already noted, the

dials are easy to reset to zero, and the push-down-to-lock system reliably prevents accidental movement. However, the turn-indicator 'witness window' was really too small for my ageing eyes and zeroing the elevation dial loses zero on the turn indicator, so I'd rather have a single horizon for a fast return to zero, or better still, the 'hard-reset' of a zero stop.

### CONCLUSION

Looking back at the details I've taken issue with here: screw slots, turret size and markings, illumination design and intensity, it's evident these mostly come down to personal preferences, shaped by my own tactics and habits. Yours will undoubtedly differ. What is clear is that optically and mechanically these are properly good scopes.

In conclusion, then, the new Sidewinder SF scopes from Hawke have given me a new appreciation for the marque. The image is big, bright and sharp. The mechanism is precise and reliable. The controls are easy to

operate. Prices are attractive – especially so for SFP models - And everything is backed up by Hawke's unbeatable 'No Fault' lifetime warranty, and by the confidence that comes from buying from a genuine UK company. That's a lot to like!

### TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| ■ <b>Name:</b>                 | Hawke Sidewinder 30 SF 4-16x50 (FFP and SFP versions) |
| ■ <b>Body tube:</b>            | 30mm  |
| ■ <b>Reticle options:</b>      | FFP Half Mil /SFP SR Pro II                           |
| ■ <b>Length:</b>               | 339mm   |
| ■ <b>Weight:</b>               | 725-grams   |
| ■ <b>Illumination:</b>         | Yes (red)   |
| ■ <b>Elevation Increment:</b>  | 1/10 MRAD   |
| ■ <b>Elevation Adjustment:</b> | 26 MRAD   |
| ■ <b>Windage Increment:</b>    | 1/10 MRAD   |
| ■ <b>Windage Adjustment:</b>   | 26 MRAD   |
| ■ <b>Eye relief:</b>           | 102mm / 4"  |
| ■ <b>Price:</b>                | £599 (FFP)<br>£469 (SFP)                              |
| ■ <b>Contact:</b>              | Hawke Optics<br>uk.hawkeoptics.com                    |