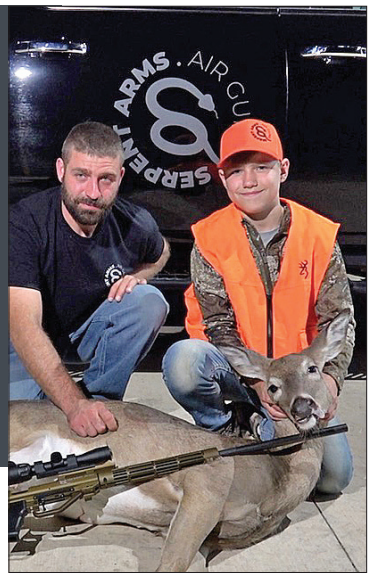




THE AIRGUN REVOLUTION HITS WISCONSIN



By Dan Small
Contributing Editor

When 10-year-old Eli Grotelueschen (rhymes with revolution) pulled the trigger on a mature doe in Marquette County on the first day of this year's Wisconsin youth deer hunt, he and his dad, Kevin, knew that he was very likely making history. Eli's hunt echoed the Vilas County hunt of the legendary Roy Case, who in 1930 became the first hunter in modern times to harvest a deer with a bow and arrow during a Wisconsin deer season.

As far as we know, Eli was the first hunter to legally shoot a deer in Wisconsin with an air-powered gun. A few days earlier, another Wisconsin hunter, Don Fitzmaurice, killed a bear in Bayfield County with the same model airgun, a .45-caliber 550L, made by Serpent Arms, of Juneau.

Air-powered guns are nothing new, however.

Captain Meriwether Lewis dazzled the Native American tribes he and William Clark met on their 1804-06 journey from St. Louis to the Pacific and back by demonstrating the power, accuracy, and rapid-fire capability of an airgun.

"My airgun ... astonishes them very much," Lewis wrote in his journal. "They cannot comprehend its shooting so often and without powder."

Lewis's airgun was designed by Italian inventor C. G. Girandoni and adopted by the Austrian military for use against Napoleon in the late 1700s. Its buttstock served as the air reservoir, which held 800 psi of air pressure delivered by a hand-operated pump that took 1,500 strokes to fill it. A tubular magazine delivered 22 .46-caliber lead balls one at a time as fast as the shooter could manage.

Lewis could fire all 22 shots accurately in less than a minute. The tribesmen did not know the expedition carried only one of these guns because Lewis kept the contents of his supply boat under wraps. Some historians credit the Girandoni with ensuring the safe passage of these 38 explorers and call it the most important gun in American history.

Today, a number of companies manufacture air-powered guns, and thousands of shooters use them for hunting and competition in the U.S. and abroad. Some are powered by a spring, like the Daisy BB-gun many youngsters of my generation learned to shoot with. Most modern airguns, however, use a pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) air tank and a regulated valve system to propel a pellet, slug, or shot charge.

According to the Airgun Sporting Association, airguns are legal for hunting at least some wildlife species in every



This is the Girandoni air rifle Capt. Meriwether Lewis used to impress the Native Americans he and William Clark encountered during their Corps of Discovery expedition to the Pacific Ocean and back in 1804-06.

Photo courtesy of the National Rifle Association

state. At least 27 states allow them for hunting big game.

Earlier this year, Gov. Tony Evers signed legislation making airguns legal for hunting in Wisconsin during any season in which firearms are legal. Airguns have long been legal for hunting small game in Wisconsin, but now they may be used for hunting everything, including turkeys, deer, and bear.

The airgun revolution has hit the Badger State, and Serpent Arms is poised to capitalize on it. Serpent Arms has made a 28-gauge shotgun for several years. This year, they are offering a .45-caliber rifle barrel that can be swapped with the shotgun barrel.

When asked why he developed an airgun, Serpent Arms founder Joel Braun said, "I like a challenge. I've shot turkeys

with a shotgun and a bow, so I thought I'd try something new."

This past spring, Braun and others shot turkeys with a Serpent Arms airgun. I shot two myself with one, and I'm planning to hunt small game and deer with one this fall.

On most modern airguns, a bulky air tank rides under the barrel. On Braun's gun, as on the Girandoni, the air tank is the buttstock, giving it a sleek profile and better balance, and making it lighter than most airguns. An adjustable buttplate is attached to the tank, which screws onto the gun's receiver. An air compressor is used to charge the tank to 4,350 psi, about five times the pressure of Lewis's Girandoni. Braun's

Kevin Grotelueschen and his 10-year-old son, Eli, with the doe Eli shot on the first day of Wisconsin's 2024 youth deer hunt. This doe is believed to be the first deer shot with an airgun in Wisconsin since airguns were made legal for big game earlier this year.

Photo courtesy of Kevin Grotelueschen

gun comes with a red-dot sight mounted on a Picatinny rail. The slotted foregrip accommodates the Magpul M-Lok mounting system to secure sling swivels, cameras, flashlights, and other accessories.

(See *Air Gun Revolution* Page 29)



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