

Czechmate!

I don't recall if I became aware of MRodAir's Air Max Precision model or Kalibr-gun's Ocelot model PCP pistol first, but have to chuckle at the obvious similarities in features and profiles. The features they share include swing-breech loading, external hammers, and three power adjustments virtue of adjustable regulators, transfer-port restrictors and hammer-spring pre-load. Pretty impressive stuff for mass-produced air pistols, though much easier to believe possible on a thousand-dollar European gun than on a \$250 Chinese-made air pistol. *Are you kidding me?*

Much as I wanted to get my hands on one or the other impressively-spec'ed air pistol, I felt it wiser to watch forum feedback before investing a cool grand on what should be an awesome European gun, or wasting a couple-hundred bucks on a cheap knock-off. Given the limited market for a \$1000 air pistol, no surprise how little feedback there was on the Ocelot. But considering the extreme affordability of the Air Max should attract whatever market might exist for such a feature-laden pistol, no wonder forum posts came pouring in as soon as the Air Max Precision (AMP) came available.

While the Kalibr-gun Ocelot remained a mystery, AMP-related posts confirmed a few bugaboos probably to be expected in a cheap... I mean, *inexpensive* new pistol loaded with so many features; some of those features heretofore found only on very expensive guns. Not too surprisingly, much feedback on the new AMP could be paraphrased in three words- "shoulda, woulda, coulda".

However, one advantage of cheap... I mean, *affordable* guns is reduced angst and fiscal risk of diving into them; whether the motivation be to improve performance, functionality, or just make the thing work! Forum posts seemed to suggest most Air Max owners working on their new pistols to improve performance and/or functionality, with a few just trying to "make the thing work" (right).

Posts were also divided between tales of success and woe. As AMP feedback rolled in, there seemed a common ill. Also, a common remedy. A common denominator in many discussions seemed that the AMP might not be the best choice for the non-mechanical. Nor, perhaps, the weak of heart! Not so, the weak of wallet (like me).

One bit of information I craved that remained murky even as other details came into focus concerned the guns' accuracy potentials. Posts that touched on the subject either offered disclaimers about the shooters' lack of pistol skills, presented only short-range groups, used sighting equipment ill-suited to fine accuracy, or some combination of these shortcomings. But at least the posters were honest! And speaking of honesty, the accuracy results presented were honestly pretty unimpressive. And while most posters seemed somewhere between satisfied and impressed with their guns once they had them running right, it wasn't possible to glean any hard conclusions about Air Max Precision accuracy potentials from posts prefaced with, "I'm no pistol shooter, but..."



The \$250 Air Max Precision (top) and \$1000 Kalibrgun Ocelot share many excellent features including swing-breech loading, exposed hammers and regulated output. Both guns also have adjustable power virtue of regulator, hammer-spring and transfer-port adjustments. Of similar profile, the Air Max feels considerably less cumbersome.

As I dissected such disclaimed posts confident I could do better, the question was whether or not that would be better enough to justify another gunsmithing project. In retirement I've become very selective about taking on unnecessary chores, as they seem always conspiring to monopolize my play-time! So I procrastinated acquiring an AMP. And procrastinated. And procrastinated.

Meanwhile, used Kalibrgun Ocelots would occasionally show up on the airgun classifieds, always at too lofty prices for me to bite. However, Ocelot feedback remained virtually nonexistent. Related? Specs and features being so similar to the cheap... I mean, *frugal* Chinese knock-off, lacking Ocelot feedback the most obvious differences I could ascertain between the two pistols were wood versus plastic grips and the **glaring** price difference. I mean, we're talking a FOUR-fold difference (for new guns)! And while I'm all about wooden grips and am virtually allergic to plastic, a \$750 price difference could buy a lot of relief from my OAS affliction. (Over-developed Aesthetics Syndrome)

About that point in time I horse-traded a buddy out of his like-new .25 Kalibrgun Cricket 'bullpup' PCP rifle. I'd never tried a bullpup, and wasn't particularly drawn to the super-short carbine design; but a Cricket was the only airgun to have bested me in our local long-range Benchrest Silhouette competitions. Just a few shots through that guy's Cricket made it obvious I'd been at considerable disadvantage with my .25 Career rifle. Besides an almost laughable difference in trigger actions (ounces versus pounds), the Career's twelve-shot power-band proved a royal pain in the ass for BRS competition.

Consequently I was hugely impressed to find my new (used) Cricket returns over **fifty** shots per 250 BAR charge (3650 PSI) with 34 grain JSBs at over 900 FPS! And it took only about *five minutes* for me to acclimate to the alien bullpup design. When in its first Benchrest Silhouette match mine prevailed over the other Cricket, the pain in my wallet area started subsiding. By the time I arrived home from the match, I was so intoxicated on the thrill of victory that the wallet-pains were well-anesthetized.

Upon cranking up the computer, it seemed to go to the airgun classifieds site almost of its own volition. And when, LO AND BEHOLD, there was a used Kalibrgun Ocelot pistol posted at the best price I'd yet seen, it seemed nothing less than omen!

I asked the seller *point-blank*, "Does the gun have any issues whatsoever not mentioned in the ad, functional or cosmetic?" On his assurances that it didn't, I jumped on the .22 caliber Ocelot. Unfortunately my new (used) Kalibrgun Ocelot pistol *did* have issues not mentioned in the ad, seen in the photos, or divulged in phone conversation. "Minor scratches" that **were** mentioned in the ad were actually major by any measure, and had been touched-up with a felt-tip marker! And the badly cracked wooden grip was never mentioned in the ad or conversation. Nevertheless I decided to keep the gun, rather than wrangle with a seller so obviously devoid of integrity. Such are the risks of long-distance buying of used guns. At least the issues were mostly cosmetic.

Mostly. Turned out there was also a lot of blow-by at the breech seal. Excessive blow-by, matter of fact. After correcting that issue, testing resumed.

Like my Kalibrgun Cricket bullpup rifle, the Ocelot pistol is rated to 300 BAR charge pressures (4350 PSI). However, more than one trustworthy opinion suggested it better to not habitually exceed 250 BAR. Ocelot chronograph results looked like this-

14.3 grain JSB, 250 BAR, 42 shots- Low= 584, Hi= 598, ES= 14, SD=2.5, Av= 589 FPS/11.0 FP

Impressed with the consistency, shot count and power level (for the time being), I was anxious to get on with the fun stuff. Accuracy testing! Expecting impressive results, I mounted a 3-9X rifle scope in order to engage tiny aiming spots. And hopefully, see tiny groups!

Alas; try and try as I may, five-shot groups at any range consistently printed larger than expected. Furthermore, no amount of diagnosis, testing, tinkering, bore cleaning or ammo experimentation produced results to be expected of a **\$1000** pistol.

The most accurate ammo in the .22 Ocelot was 14.3 grain JSB Express; but five-shot groups at 25 yards stubbornly hovered no better than 1" center-to-center. Fifty yard groups went about twice that. In other words (and my opinion), consistently *mediocre*.

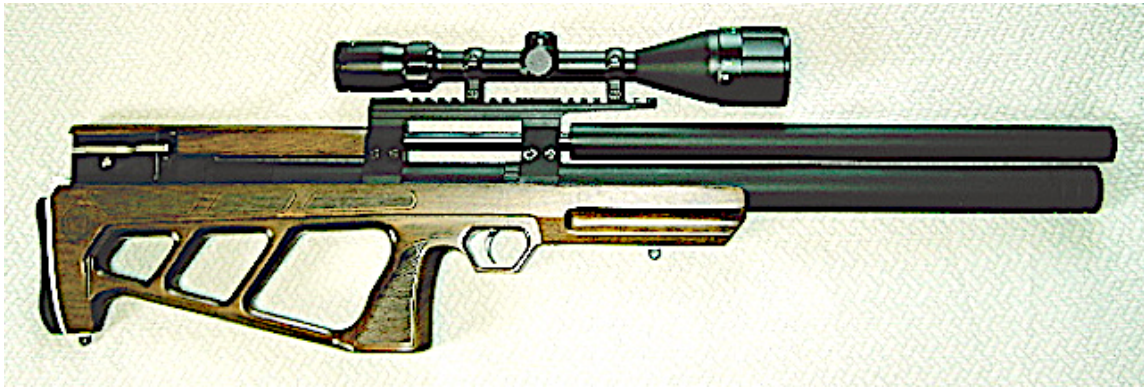
Most handgunners might be satisfied with 4 minute-of-angle accuracy from most pistols. But I'm not most handgunners, and the Ocelot is not most pistols. It's a **\$1000** pellet pistol! (brand-new)

So the Ocelot got passed along in pretty short order. I didn't miss it; but did miss its collection of impressive features. And what I'd *hoped* it might be.

Given my disappointment with the Kalibrgun Ocelot, but always impressed with the quality and performance of my extremely affordable MRodAir CPM1 model Co2 pistol and Plinkster Co2 rifle, I grew evermore curious about how a \$250 Air Max Precision Chinese pistol might compare to the (otherwise) similar thousand-dollar Czechoslovakian Kalibrgun. Yet I still resisted what forum threads suggested might likely become another project. That is, until news that MRodAir's usual bargain price for Air Max Precisions was lowered to a **sale** price of just \$199.95! Potential project be damned, I finally jumped on a cheap... I mean, *irresistibly affordable* .22 caliber AMP!

The design, features, quality and execution of my new Air Max seemed not just hilariously similar to those of the Ocelot, but embarrassingly *equal* to it! But the noticeably trimmer AMP was less cumbersome than the Ocelot. And the plastic AMP grip no worse than the *broken* wooden grip of the used disappointment... I mean, *Ocelot*.

I was able to easily crank the AMPs power up to the 15 foot-pound level I wanted virtue of its **three** power-adjustment features. Unfortunately, velocity consistency on the brand-new Air Max pistol left much to be desired. Matter of fact it was downright erratic; more-so than an unregulated gun. In fact so erratic that I dove *headlong* into the gun, thinking even if I didn't find the problem I'd at least learn to work on it.



*My .25 Kalibrgun Cricket bullpup has been impressive in every way- quality, power, shot-count, handling qualities, and 1.25" average hundred-yard groups! She gets over 50 shots per charge with 34 grain JSBs at 915 FPS, and shot a five-shot group at 60 yards measuring a mere .15" center-to-center. That **one-quarter MOA** group is the best accuracy I've achieved in thirty-odd years of testing well over 400 airguns of all kinds!*



Very impressed with my Air Max Co2 guns above, I rolled the dice on their PCP pistol.

Once apart, I thoroughly degreased everything inside the AMP, scrubbed the bore, and drilled and tapped the grip-frame to anchor the ass-end of the barrel with a set-screw; that being the biggest issue and remedy described in others' forum posts. The AMP was easy enough to work on that I even took the Belleville washers out of the regulator to clean and inspect them for correct orientation. They were dry and oriented correctly from the factory, and I found no gremlins responsible for the erratic velocities.

On reassembly, unfortunately the velocity issue persisted. So I started monkeying with the power-adjusting features in hopes of finding consistency; hopefully still at high power. After backing the transfer-port screw out of the way of air flow, I searched for a combination of regulator and hammer-spring adjustments that would return high power and consistent velocities. After a **lot** of adjusting, best I could get was an unregulated-type power-band of disappointing shot-count.

*18.1 grain JSB, 2800 PSI, 15 shots- Low= 591, Hi= 625, ES= 34, SD= 11, Av= 607 FPS/14.8 FP
Five consecutive five-shot groups at 35 yards averaged 1.31" center-to-center.*

Accuracy wasn't bad, but unexciting. So I put the gun away for awhile. After a couple subsequent test sessions yielded similar results, "awhile" became *quite* awhile.

Occasionally I'd handle and admire the gun, thinking how nice a pistol it could be if performance was as impressive as the features and (subjective) 'feel'. I also did a lot of pondering about how to achieve regulated consistency from the regulated pistol.

No epiphany forthcoming, I searched the airgun forum for clues. Specifically, other folks' Air Max Precision testing and 'smithing results. More specifically, I searched for regulated-consistency shot-strings I'd seen posted months before. Locating those posts and based on that information, I tried reducing the hammer-spring tension in hopes of finding consistency at saner power levels. But to maintain high velocity at reduced power, I switched to lighter, 16 grain Air Arms pellets for testing. BINGO!

16 grain Air Arms, 3000 PSI, 30 shots- Lo= 581, Hi= 606, ES= 26, SD= 9, Av= 596 FPS/12.6 FP

Happy to have finally found good consistency **and twice as many shots per charge**, I wondered if maybe, *hopefully*, the changes in velocity, consistency and ammo might also produce better accuracy. So after mounting a 2.5-8X pistol scope, I commenced serious bench-rest accuracy testing. With crossed fingers!

I conduct accuracy testing at the far end of distances I consider appropriate for a gun's intended application. Consequently, I usually test meager-power air pistols at 15 to 20 yards, medium-power air pistols at 25 to 35 yards, and magnum air pistols at 35 to 50; "meager", "medium" and "magnum" power defined by my own opinions.

Most field target pistols being of medium to magnum power, I usually test them at the maximum field target distance of 35 yards. And since the tuned .22 Air Max is what I consider medium to magnum power, I felt 35 yards a suitably long range to wring it out.

The first five-shot group at 35 yards went just over an inch. It being 1:00 AM and 30 degrees, I couldn't resist trying another group; else I wouldn't get any sleep anyway. The next five pellets were downright **painful** to load, but I persevered. And though that group measured just .75" c-t-c, I had no choice but abort the testing to thaw my frozen digits in a hot shower! By then it was 2:00 AM. Nevertheless, sleep did not come easily.

Gusty winds the next day prevented any meaningful accuracy testing until the wind lay just before sunset. So I shot as many 35 yard groups as possible before dark.

Considering all the trials and tribulations I'd endured with the AMP and Ocelot pistols, the .70" c-t-c average of five consecutive five-shot groups at 35 yards was not only extremely gratifying, but a huge relief! I couldn't wait to test the Air Max again.

Unfortunately conditions were not ideal the next day. However, the variable winds seemed light enough to at least confirm whether yesterday's excellent results simply fluke. Not likely, considering they were an average of **five** consecutive **five**-shot groups.

Besides being well-inspired, I'd grown familiar enough with the pistol, scope, my rest and firing behavior of the AMP to feel unusually well 'dialed-in'. Wondering if that might be my imagination during the first couple groups, the dialed-in feeling persisted through all five groups I was able to get in before losing shooting light.

Apparently the feeling wasn't my imagination, as the five groups calculated to an extremely impressive .61" center-to-center! Since I consider 3/4" average groups at 35 yards to be pistol field target-worthy accuracy, all questions about the Air Max's potentials had been answered in no uncertain terms. **YES!!!**

Though it took no small amount of tinkering, testing and monkeying, the cheap... I mean, **BARGAIN** Chinese PCP pistol shoots **way** beyond its \$200 price-tag. Given such startling performance, the AMP gets a new name. *Chung Dun Won!*

