

What is airsoft?

Airsoft is a product of the far East and is now available in the Western world. It has spawned a sport, a growing following, and an industry that spans several continents.

Airsoft replicas

Airsoft guns are full size 1:1 scale replicas of real world firearms. They shoot small plastic balls, 6mm in diameter with approximately 1 Joule of energy. This energy level is very low when compared to most other shooting genres and is a safe energy for use with both paper and human targets (i.e. you can be hit by a BB fired from one of these guns and barely notice it, but it can usually still put a small hole in a paper target).

These replicas are commonly made entirely from plastic with only a few metal parts inside to increase the reliability and durability of moving parts. Construction quality varies wildly from model to model, as does the use of materials. For example, a Marui made MP5 replica has a well made, but creaky plastic body, where as the ICS MP5 has more detailed full-metal body parts installed and is a far more rigid overall structure. This makes the ICS a better and stronger replica, although it does cost slightly more.

Airsoft guns can be powered by electricity (from a battery pack inside the gun), by spring (the user manually compresses the spring before each shot) or using an expanding gas (refrigerant gas is commonly used from a reservoir either inside or outside the gun).

It is important to note that Airsoft replicas CANNOT in any way be converted to fire live ammunition! The only thing airsoft replicas have in common with real firearms is their external size and shape. Inside, these models have totally different workings to the internal mechanism of a firearm, and the materials used for construction could not possibly withstand the explosive forces of a bullet that real weapons are designed to take.

Collectors enjoy airsoft because of the excellent level of realism in the replica models. Airsoft also represents the only available legal way that the general public can enjoy owning and using these small objects of desire.

Military fans enjoy airsoft because the replicas look identical to the guns used by Armed Forces.

Law Enforcement groups around the world now use airsoft replicas to

improve their training scenarios. Airsoft provides them with a reliable weapon that is safe to use for training, while providing a level of realism not found using any other training device. The comparatively low cost of using Airsoft for training purposes also helps to ensure that the officers have as much training time as they need, without financial restraints kicking in.

Airsoft - the game

A new sport is rising throughout the UK, the US and Europe. Commonly known as

"Airsoft Skirmishing" or "Airsoft Wargaming"

and similar in essence to paintball, two or more teams are pitched against each other in a game of skill, speed, accuracy and tactics. Originally designed to simulate a war zone with far more realism than can be achieved with paintball, these games are played on privately owned and insured sites dotted around the country. Normal Airsoft replicas are used and strict safety limits are imposed in order to make sure that everyone has fun and no one gets injured.

A days play will usually cost you about £15 to £20 (about \$25 to \$40). This normally includes all games during the day and hire of eye & face protection. Some sites will even provide lunch. Airsoft Skirmishing is generally far cheaper than paintball. For example, 100 paintball shots will usually cost around £6 (approx US\$10). 100 Airsoft shots costs about 15 pence (about 25c in the US). Put simply paintball ammunition is about 40 times more expensive than airsoft ammunition.

Airsoft games can have many scenarios that are unworkable in paintball, but there are some old favourites that bridge the gap. "Capture the flag", "hostage rescue" and "last man standing" are popular paintball games that have been adapted for airsoft, but as airsoft has more flexibility, games such as "Pistol duel", "Close Quarters Combat" and true "Re-Gen" simulations (games where getting hit means that you are only considered "out" for a few seconds before rejoining the action) become possible.

To play airsoft, you must be wearing the correct protective clothing. As with many other sports (fencing, motor-sport, horse racing, cricket, etc...) you are only safe if you are properly dressed. After all, you would not expect to see Michael Schumacher getting in to his formula 1 racing car wearing his favourite t-shirt and no helmet! An Airsoft BB hit on bare skin will leave a small mark on the surface of the skin that will look and feel like a bee-sting. The more powerful the airsoft gun, the more it will hurt if you get hit, but with site energy limits in the UK being largely 1 Joule, there is no possibility of a BB causing a penetrative injury. With this in mind, airsofters wear eye & face protection, sturdy boots and tough clothing. For extra protection gloves and a scarf can be worn to give cover for your hands, neck and ears.

Info with thanks to Arnies Airsoft