

GAIM VR SHOOTING SIMULATOR

Paul Austin goes virtual with a VR simulator that accurately mimics the ballistics of multiple real-world shooting scenarios

Mark Zuckerberg's dream of the metaverse, a virtual utopia (or dystopia depending on your point of view), is still a very long way off. His vision of legions of legless avatars transforming the internet into one giant (Meta-owned) VR space seems increasingly unlikely, but there has been one major benefit from the billions of dollars he's invested.

Gaim have been around for a while, a spin off company from Aimpoint, one of the giants of the shooting industry. Aimpoint initially developed their VR simulators as a training tool for the police and military, but their virtual efforts have now spawned a standalone business that directly targets the consumer market.

I'll be honest I've seen the software in action at several shows but watching someone in VR on a flat screen can never convey what's going on in the virtual space. Interesting perhaps, but hardly a serious shooting aid surely? To be honest, the name didn't help. 'Gaim' doesn't really inspire confidence, what I want is a serious simulator, not a first-person-shooter.

I'm sure the PR/marketing department at Aimpoint love their clever play on words, combining 'aim' into the new

brand but I don't think it's done them any favours in terms of attracting serious shooters to what on the face of it looks like an expensive toy.

REQUIRED KIT

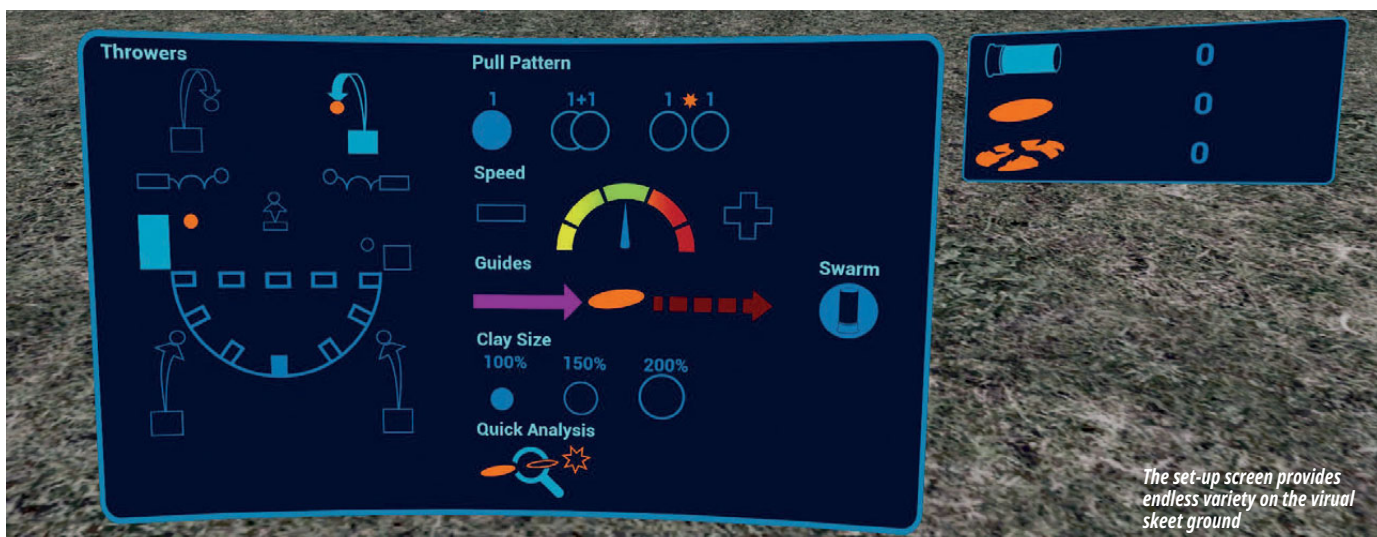
First you need a Meta Quest 2 VR headset and controllers, roughly £399 in the UK. Secondly, you need the Gaim rifle and the associated software, roughly 440 Euros plus import tax. So, not a cheap set-up.

Gaim sent over a headset pre-loaded with the software along with the rifle itself. Surprisingly this consists of a very decent piece of laser engraved timber formed into a full-size stock, including a recoil pad, although there is no actual recoil involved. At 1,645g it has sufficient weight and subsequent inertia, making it feel very believable.

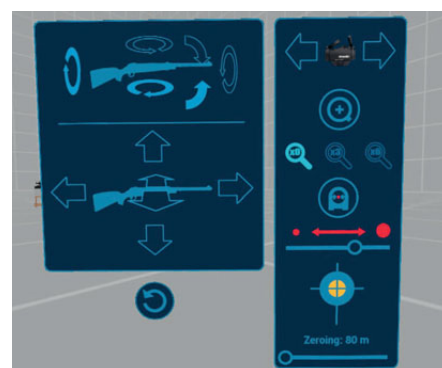
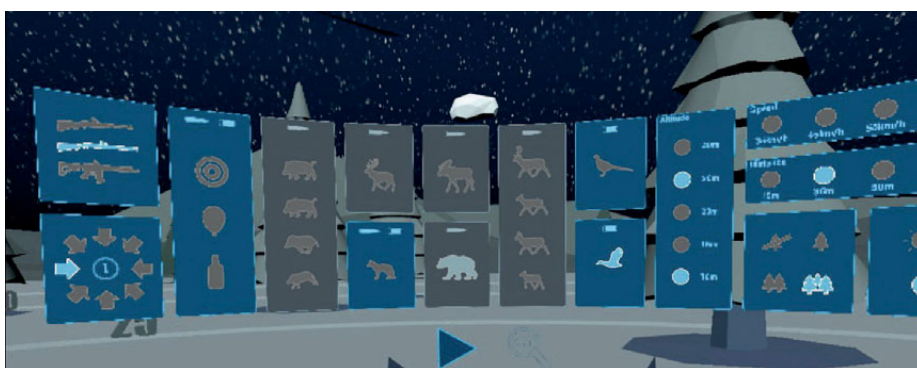
The stock doesn't have a barrel, however it's weighted at the fore-end to provide quite realistic balance to the rifle. The trigger was also a pleasant surprise, feeling very much like the real thing with a definite break and with real-world weight to it. This is nothing like clicking a mouse button or a controller, it has the feel of a real-world trigger, a little heavy at 750g, but very functional.

BELOW: Practice makes perfect and your living room is a pleasant place to do it!





The set-up screen provides endless variety on the virtual skeet ground



With one of the controllers connected to the rifle and the stock nestled in your shoulder you're ready to go. Just slip on the headset and you're in the virtual world. There are no wires to restrict your movement and you're completely enveloped and free to move as you will. It's only when you don the headset that you appreciate the difference between a flatscreen preview and the total immersion of the VR experience.

Graphically, it's more on a par with the Wii games console than the latest Xbox, Playstation or gaming PC but once you're in the simulation any qualms about image quality/realism soon dissipate the moment the shooting starts. It's a very immersive experience. So much so, that I've regularly found myself reaching for a rail on a virtual stand during a simulation.

It's also worth stressing that the Meta Quest 2 is a true games console, with hundreds of titles on offer, which I'm sure your kids will appreciate. Gaming, fitness apps plus an entire virtual world awaits. The Quest 2 can do a lot more than just shooting simulations. A point you might want to stress when attempting to justify the investment. It's also worth mentioning that the simulations do not always require an internet connection, so you can use the system anywhere.

INTO THE SIM

Once you slip on the headset and emerge into your virtual living room, you simply select the Gaim Simulation app and you're transported into the first selection screen. Click the rifle and you're off. The first task is to sort out your gun fit and zero your rifles. As gun fit is completely unique you do need a dedicated rifle/gun set up for each user. To do that, select a player and click the gear icon and you'll appear in the zeroing environment.

ABOVE: The Pro Sim environment allows you to configure everything for a truly customised practice session

ABOVE RIGHT: Gun fit still applies in the virtual world with each user creating their own gun profiles

BELOW: As a training tool it's superb but it is very focused on driven hunts

You can select from a bolt action, a semi-auto centrefire and a shotgun and the newly released handgun (controller sold separately). It's worth taking the time to set up each in turn, you only need to do this once. There are targets down range at 25 and 50m, with close-ups on your left so you can track your hits. A control panel on the right allows you to adjust the gun fit by clicking arrows to adjust the cant, scope/red dot/beam height, windage and elevation etc.

It's very straightforward to create a custom fit for any new shooter, large or small. You can also access the gun fit options and preferred optics within the various simulations if you need to make any adjustments on the fly.

Back on the main there's plenty of options. There are 6 rifle simulations plus 1 timed driven hunt, all of which feature pretty much anything you can point a gun at in Europe and North America, deer of various flavours, moose, bear, boars, foxes, you name it. And depending on the sim you choose these can be mixed together forming a very realistic (and often chaotic) driven hunt.



« There are 5 shoot gun sims including duck flighting and pheasant shooting plus skeet, trap challenges and a 5-stand comp, all of which can be played as multiplayer competitions.

There are 3 IPSC style (practical shooting) timed sims, the kind of thing you see in two and three-gun steel target shooting competitions. The focus is very much on the AR15 in your arsenal and the optional handgun, but if you fancy going full-on 'John Wick' there's plenty of time challenges on offer.

The final section is the Sim Pro options. Although it's the plainest to look at I've spent more time in here than anywhere else. The environment is basic but the after shot analysis is superb and it's here where you'll do the bulk of your serious practice shooting, with both the rifles and shotgun. You can even practise for the shooting licences across a range of European countries prior to a hunting trip abroad.

BELIEVABLE BALLISTICS

Admittedly the graphics do appear a bit old-school compared to modern PC games and consoles and the animation is rudimentary on occasion but it's the ballistics and post shot analysis that really matters and, in that regard, the Gaim system is superb!

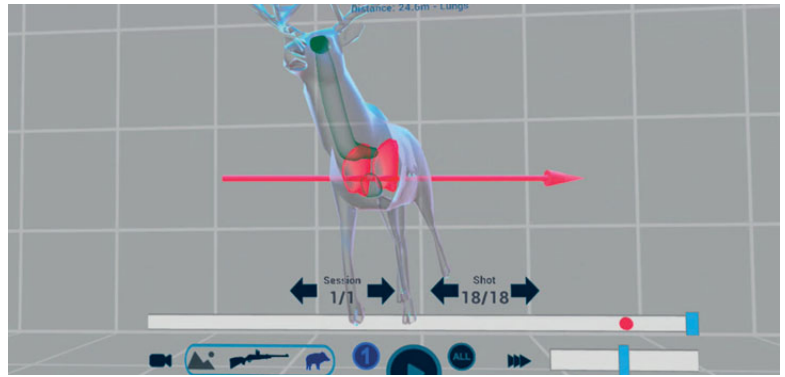
The basic principle that carries across all the simulations is the same. When you take a shot the system takes a snapshot of that instant in time and overlays that information into the live action. The simulation itself continues but each near miss overlays a ghosted image of the animal, bird or clay alongside where your shot actually landed; this can be a clean miss or perhaps a hit that didn't connect with the vitals.

The target drops if it's a hit correctly but just keeps running/flying if not, but it's the ghost that shows you exactly where your round ended up, these 'ghosts' linger on-screen for several seconds, so it's easy to see where you went wrong in terms of aim or lead, even during the heat of a driven hunt or busy clay busting session.

The Pro Sim scenarios and indeed the live action challenges take this to an extreme with post shot analysis allowing you to go through all your shots individually, analysing them with real-time playback of your lead (aimpoint) and the trajectory of the shot itself, which track three dimensionally through the animal. You can even rotate the quarry to get a 360 view of the shot from any angle.

Within the Pro Sim simulations, you have almost total control of the environments and targets. You can specify animal numbers, their speeds, the mix of species and their distances. On the Pro Sim Skeet layout, you can specify pretty much every parameter, from the size of clays, their speed, doubles, singles, on report, which of the eight towers/throwers are active. You can even add guides to the clays to help you spot the correct line.

Combine all the above with the option to shoot from 10



ABOVE: Post shot analysis in the virtual world or as a replay within the sim itself

locations on the layout and you can generate any type of clay or angle of shot you could want and it's while using the shotgun especially that you really start to appreciate the accuracy of the ballistics.

THE BOTTOM LINE

So, should you rush out and buy the Gaim VR shooting simulator? If you're a typical UK rifleman, probably not. It really is great fun but on the rifle side it's all about driven hunting. If you travel to Europe to hunt then yes, it's definitely worth serious consideration, providing a superb and indeed accurate freehand shooting experience that will definitely hone your skills when it comes to driven game.

For the UK audience, it's the shotgun sims that really makes sense. Go clay busting with a few friends and ask them why you missed and you're likely to get a different answer from each. With the Gaim system you can see exactly where you went wrong.

You can spend hours practising those tricky fast crossers you can never quite nail in the real world. Yes, it's an expensive system, but if you shoot a lot the savings on clays and ammo alone could be significant. The intensive training it provides translates really well into the real world and it can dramatically improve your shooting. Highly recommended! [RS](#)

BELOW: The driven hunts are excellent and include penalties for unsafe shooting

BELOW: Multiple clay sizes, towers, and shooting positions plus guides make the shotgun sims particularly useful

