

World-beating gun for the next century

AS90

THE BRITISH Army's new artillery weapon, the AS90 self-propelled field gun, has been put through its paces on Salisbury Plain by 1st Regiment, Royal Horse Artillery.

The Tidworth-based gunner regiment, which provides artillery support to the 3rd (United Kingdom) Division, is the first operational regiment to convert to AS90.

The Chestnut Troop, 1 RHA fielded eight guns for the weapon system's first full-scale, live-firing demonstration.

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In terms of battlefield capability, the AS90 will give the British Army more flexibility in the use of indirect fire through increased range and higher rates of fire, greater mobility and improved capacity for ammunition stowage.



The powerful AS90 in action. Its gun can hurl a 155km high explosive round more than 15 miles

The AS90's rates of fire (three rounds in ten seconds, six rounds per minute for three minutes) enable a regiment of

24 guns to crash three tons of high explosive on a target in ten seconds.

With its automatic gun-laying system coupled with electrically-driven elevation and traverse, the gun can come into action, fire three rounds and be away in 90 seconds.

AS90, capable of firing a 96lb shell more than 15 miles, will give the artillery greater range and hitting power compared with the gun it is designed to replace – the ageing 105mm Abbot, which fires a 35lb shell about ten miles.

"It has its own in-built navigation and orientation system which incorporates survey. As a result, the gun turns up on its platform and is ready to open fire in less than a minute," said Capt John Dawson.

"We are still working out standard operating procedures



Battle commanders of tomorrow? The subalterns from 1st Mechanised Brigade saw AS90 in action, and their verdict? "Well impressed!"



AS90 kicks up the dirt during a mobility demonstration on Salisbury Plain. It has an official top speed of 53 kmh



Inside AS90, Bdr Allan Reeve (No 2) and Sgt Mark Toy (commander) of E Battery, 1 RHA



Gnr Richard Denney prepares to load a 155m high explosive shell

for the gun, which has been designed to be user-friendly. It's a great improvement on any of the others. Each of its five crew members has his own personal stowage bin."

The commanding officer of 1 RHA, Lt Col Andrew Ritchie, was full of praise for AS90.

"Combined with its mobility and protection, it is a gun for the next century. Seen in conjunction with the Warrior OP vehicle which can send back digitally-encrypted data, BATES – the battlefield artillery target engagement system and the use of DROPS to deliver ammunition, the

system is a world-beater," he said.

Early next year, 1 RHA will put AS90 through the first in-service reliability demonstration, which will be followed by a troop trial.

Among the first non-gunners to become acquainted with the weapon system were a group of young officers from the 1st Mechanised Brigade who were being exposed to the many facets of the brigade and how it works.

Using AS90, they were able to develop their ability to call down indirect fire, an impor-

tant task for infantry platoon commanders and Royal Armoured Corps troop leaders who may have to call for support in battle to stabilise defensive positions or assist in their own assault.

This would be essential knowledge for a young commander if a forward observation officer or mortar fire controller were not available.

Four other regiments are to be equipped with four batteries of eight guns.

They are 3 RHA, 4th Regiment, 40th Regiment and 26th Regiment.