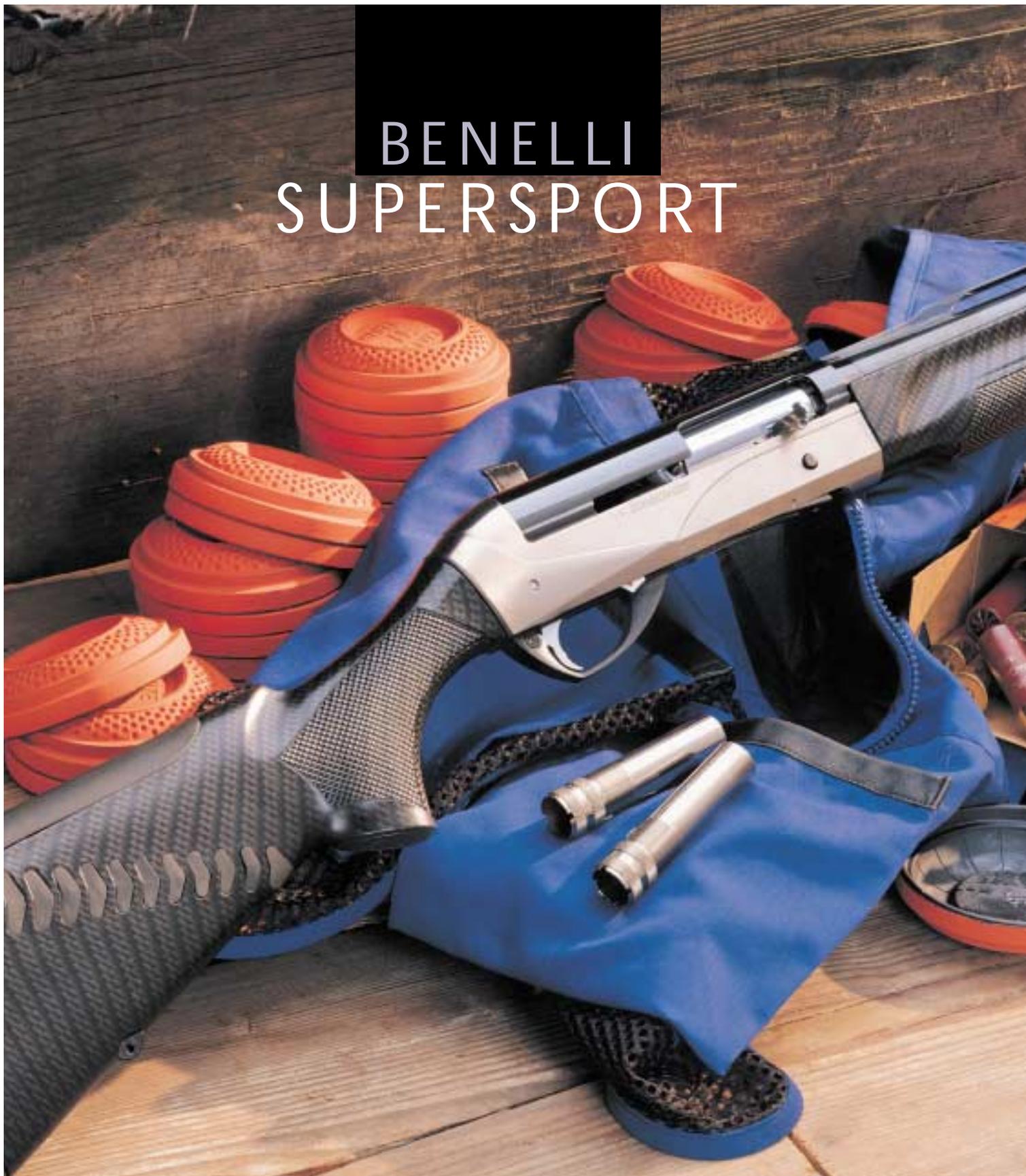


BENELLI SUPERSPORT





*THE LATEST VERSION OF THE
BENELLI SPORTING CLAYS
SHOTGUN, THE SUPERSPORT,
HAS SO MANY UNIQUE
FEATURES THAT IT IS DIFFICULT
TO KNOW WHERE TO START
SAYS **TOM CERETTO**.*

Aesthetically it certainly has a big wow factor. When you pop open the case, the first thing that strikes your eye is the simulated carbon fiber stock with the eleven chevrons marching down the stock from the rear of the soft comb insert to near the grip cap. The attractive minimally embellished brushed silver receiver stands out from the black stock and dark blue/black receiver top like a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader at an ugly contest.

The Super Sport's neo-modernistic appearance may not please everyone, but I like it despite my affection for a nicely marbled piece of walnut. This is, after all, the twenty first century and the Benelli SuperSport is definitely a twenty first century shotgun. How a target gun shoots, not how it looks, is the most important factor. I found that the Benelli SuperSport shoots very well.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

When I unscrewed the fore-end nut and removed the fore-end to assemble the Benelli there were no O-rings, plastic or metal washers, gas ports, metal rings, cup shaped doodads or any parts of any kind surrounding or attached to the magazine tube. An inertia operated system does not need any of that stuff to operate. While recoil operating systems are not new to firearms, the Benelli inertia system with a rotating bolt is unique for an automatic shotgun. The only other shotgun currently being manufactured with a rotating bolt, that I am aware of, is a pump.

Gas operated shotguns rely on bleed-off pressure generated by the burning gases that propel the shot charge down the barrel to cycle the action. This is at the same time a plus and a minus. The plus is that it reduces recoil. The minus is that they can be difficult to keep

clean and maintain in optimum operating condition. The gases used to cycle the system carry residue from unburned powder that can gum up and disable a marginally maintained gas gun in short order. Stamped metal parts, O-rings and bolt rails need to be replaced more often than parts on a fixed breach shotgun such as a double barrel or pump. Most gas guns are inexpensive to manufacture and can be purchased at a low initial cost, a definite advantage for gas gun manufacturers and shooters.

The Benelli inertia recoil system relies on the predictable energy of an inertia spring to operate. The initial short movement of the gun rearward on discharge is the key element in compressing the inertia spring and cycling the entire system. It is a fairly simple system that is easy to maintain with few moving parts. In fact, I counted only twelve moving parts in the entire system – and that included the bolt handle and two retaining pins. The Benelli engineers believe in the KISS (keep it simple stupid) school of shotgun design.

The entire receiver, bolt assembly and rotating bolt head are CNC machined out of solid steel. There is not a stamped metal part on the entire receiver assembly or for that matter the entire shotgun. Benelli could easily have used a piece of formed sheet metal for the

receiver cover but did not. It looks as if it is machined out of a single piece of thick walled seamless tubing. The machining is well executed.

The disadvantage of the Benelli system is that it is composed entirely of precision-machined parts and is expensive to manufacture compared to gas-operated shotguns. At a suggested retail price of \$1,600 the SuperSport approaches the cost of an entry level over and under target shotgun. But it does offer the ease of maintenance of a double and the advantage of much lighter recoil than a gas gun provides. You could say the SuperSport offers the advantage of a gas gun – lower recoil – and the advantage of a double – ease of maintenance and reliability – in one gun. A pretty good advantage over both competitive designs.

The only knock against the inertia system is that it cycles faster than a gas operating system and because of that does not spread recoil over as long a period of time as a gas gun. Because of the shorter recoil cycle it is rumored to recoil sharper. If there is a recoil problem with Benelli shotguns – and I do not think there is – it might be

because of gun weight. The gun I evaluated weighed only 7lbs 5ozs, which is a tad light for a competition shotgun.

ON TEST

One of the claims Benelli makes is that their guns will function efficiently with any shells from 3 inch magnum goose loads to light skeet loads. I had to prove this to myself and I did. On my first outing I shot 1,350 fps 1 ounce Federal FITASC loads, Winchester 1¹/₈ ounce 1,200 fps Super Target loads, Winchester 1,350 fps FITASC loads, 1 ounce 1,185 fps Remington Gun Club loads and my wimp reloads through it without any problem. The FITASC loads did thump me a bit, but they thump me a bit with every shotgun I have shot them through including my Remington 1100 and a Beretta 391 I borrowed for comparison.

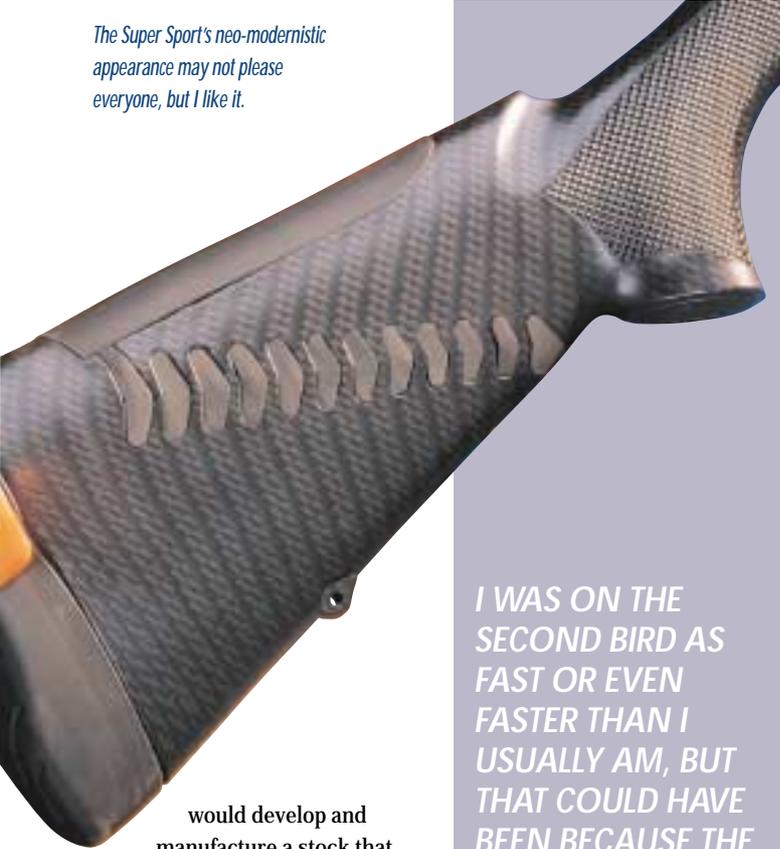
The SuperSport stock has so many features it is difficult to decide where to start describing them. Who would ever have believed someone

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would develop and manufacture a stock that actually slides and dissipates recoil energy? It certainly is a new and completely out of the box concept, but seems to work very well. In order to determine how much the ComforTech stock reduced recoil I would have needed a Benelli that was not equipped with one. As I did not have one without a ComforTech stock I could not make a side-by-side comparison. It would have been interesting to do that, but alas I could not. I perceived no irregular stock movement when I shot the SuperSport despite the fact that I knew it did move. I was completely unaware of any movement at all. I was on the second bird as fast or even faster than I usually am, but that could have been because the SuperSport is very lively and sweet swinging gun to shoot.

The checkering wrapped around the entire grip. I was not sure if I would like it at first, but

after using it for a while I grew to like it very much. It is a minor, but nice little touch that other firearm manufacturers might be wise to emulate. The grip has a fairly short radius and is designed with competition in mind. The radius is not overdone in the manner some trap guns are. The grip is generous without making it uncomfortable for shooters with small hands. It should accommodate most shooters quite well.

It did not take me long to appreciate the ergonomic gel filled recoil pad. It snaps on and off the stock easily and is available in left and right hand configurations and two lengths of pull. The standard pad, supplied with the gun, has a $14\frac{3}{8}$ inch length of pull and the only optional pad has a 14 inch length of pull. The only downside to the otherwise well designed pad is that is only available in two lengths of pull. The ergonomically shaped butt pad fits comfortably and snugly into the shoulder pocket, a welcome aid in mounting the gun consistently in the same manner.

The easily removable recoil pad makes it convenient to access the inner workings of the butt stock to adjust drop, cast on or cast off. There are several shims and two steel plates that allow a variety of adjustments to the stock. The stock may not adjust with absolute perfection for all shooters, but should easily accommodate the vast majority of them. I added a bit more cast off and adjusted the comb a tad higher with little trouble.

The fore-end is shaped a bit differently than most shotguns, but felt very comfortable in my hand. The checkering, if it can be called that, is molded into the synthetic stock and fore-end and nicely done. The pseudo-checked surface offered a good grip with gloves on or off.

BARREL WORK

The barrel, like the other major components of this shotgun, has more attractive features than a Las Vegas showgirl. Most interesting is that all Benelli shotguns have cryogenically treated barrels. Cryogenic barrel treatment is not new to shotgun barrels, but Benelli is the first shotgun manufacturer that I know of to supply cryogenically treated barrels on all of their shotguns.

Practitioners of this sub-zero black art believe that hammer forging barrels leaves stresses in steel that can cause the barrel to vibrate and move unpredictably under force of firing. Subjecting the barrel to -300°F changes the molecular structure of the barrel and provides a more stable barrel that vibrates more harmoniously.

Cryogenically treating shotgun barrels has been popular with trap shooters for many years. Like trap shooters who have had this process done to their trap guns, Benelli believes cryogenically treated barrels have shorter shot strings and print better and more consistent patterns. They claim their cryogenically treated barrels improve patterns by 13.2%. How all this transfers into better patterns I do not know, but I will take Benelli's word for it because the gun hit targets very well. The first time I shot the Super Sport, the temperature at Waukesha Gun Club was 28° , a bit too cold to print patterns.

The five extended choke tubes supplied with the SuperSport are also cryogenically treated. They are $\frac{3}{16}$ inches long and weighed one ounce. Two $\frac{1}{8}$ inch knurled rings about $\frac{3}{16}$ of an inch apart provide a good grip for removal and installation. I was disappointed that a light modified choke was not supplied with the shotgun. I say that because the difference in

constriction between the improved cylinder and modified chokes that came with the gun is 0.013. That is too large a gap for a competition gun. Light modified is a favorite choke with many sporting clays shooters.

The 30" blue/black highly polished barrel did not have a ripple on it. It sports a filed and tapered 10mm step rib, long forcing cone and is nicely ported. Porting does not lessen recoil, but does mitigate barrel jump. The ported barrel and soft comb combination on the SuperSport eliminates any trace of cheek discomfort. I loved the soft gel filled comb, it felt great. I think a soft comb encourages a shooter to keep his or her head firmly on the stock.

MULTI DISCIPLINE

I shot sporting clays, five-stand and skeet with the SuperSport in trying winter conditions and the gun performed equally well at all three disciplines. Everyone that shot it commented on how well balanced and lively the SuperSport was to shoot. The only automatic shotgun I own is a 12 gauge Remington 1100 skeet gun. I bought it because I believed then, and still believe it to be, one of the best handling automatic shotguns ever made and is the standard by which all automatic shotguns are compared. But I must admit, the Super Sport handles as well or better than the 1100, albeit at almost twice the price.

The only bothersome issue I have with the SuperSport is trigger pull. At almost six pounds it is too heavy. But in defense of Benelli and all firearm manufacturers, heavy trigger pull is a sign of our litigious society. Should some idiot mishandle a firearm with very light trigger pull and cause injury, a lawsuit will certainly be filed. If a

shooter has the trigger modified to a lighter pull by a gunsmith the manufacturer may be off the hook or at least not gored as badly in a lawsuit. That is a sad commentary, but true.

I have heard rumors that the SuperSports predecessors recoiled sharper than gas guns, but as I have never shot any of them I cannot make a fair comparison. No one that shot the SuperSport complained about excessive recoil when shooting heavy target loads. All had nothing but praise for the ergonomic features of the gun.

I would like to see more optional recoil pads available for the SuperSport. The difference in width between the standard pad

and the only optional pad is quite large at 3/8 of an inch. That is a bit too much. In fact, because you cannot install after market recoil pads of various thicknesses or shims to adjust length of pull on the SuperSport, factory supplied optional recoil pads in 1/8 inch increments from 14 inches out to 14 1/2 inches would be most welcome. Offering optional width pads would only enhance the gun's appeal to prospective buyers. If a prospective customer is to spend \$1,600 for a state of the art automatic shotgun, a few additional bucks for an optional recoil pad to make the gun fit perfectly would be a nominal additional cost.

SUPERSPORT SPECIFICATIONS

Gun weight:	7 lbs 5 ounces	
Length of Pull:	14 ³ / ₈ inches	
Optional LOP:	14 inches	
Bore (measured):	.718	
CHOKE CONSTRICTIONS		
Cylinder	.724	-0.006
Improved Cyl.	.711	0.007
Modified	.698	0.020
Improved Mod.	.690	0.028
Full	.683	0.035

THE ONLY PROBLEM I HAVE AFTER SHOOTING THE SUPERSPORT FOR A WHILE IS HOW TO CONVINC MY WIFE THAT I REALLY DO NEED ONE...!

FINAL VERDICT

The fit and finish on the SuperSport is without question the best I have ever seen on any automatic shotgun. The machining is superbly done and there are no stamped metal parts, O-rings, pushrods or rails to break at inopportune times. It is easier to clean and maintain a Benelli than any other automatic I have ever evaluated - I don't think you would have to carry any emergency parts with the Benelli! I know it is a bit flippant to say that as no shotgun is perfect, but the quality of workmanship and simplicity of the inertia recoil action leads me to believe that may very well be true.

At a suggested retail price of \$1,600 the Benelli SuperSport is expensive for an automatic shotgun. But it does set a new standard in craftsmanship and innovation for that genre. It may very well be worth every penny of the asking price. The only problem I have after shooting the SuperSport for a while is how to convince my wife that I really do need one. ■

