



AND THEN

Richard Rawlingson looks at the latest addition to the Beretta Silver Pigeon family

THERE WERE FIVE!



Make no mistake about it, looks sell guns. Forget weight, balance, chokes and forcing cones, many buyers choose a new gun with their eyes. It's not just guns either, which is why supermarkets are full of shiny red tomatoes that don't actually taste of anything.

If you are a small to medium sized gunmaker, the chances are that you can only afford to set a new model up with a couple of cosmetic finishes, a basic style and a higher priced deluxe grade perhaps. That means if a potential buyer doesn't like the look of the design you choose, he goes elsewhere. When you are Beretta sized however, the economies of scale kick in and you can do so much more, offering the same basic gun in many different sets of

clothes. The Italian giants have played this game very cleverly with the venerable Silver Pigeon range in recent years, bringing out a series of guns, all with very different styling. It started with the Silver Pigeon II, featuring dramatic deep relief engraving, through the Silver Pigeon III with more conventional scroll and game scenes and the IV, a striking combination of gloss black and gold.

Now we have the Silver Pigeon V and again it is a totally different presentation. Picking up on something of a trend among their Italian rivals for colour case hardening, the company has introduced another take on the Silver Pigeon theme, again with the addition of gold detailing. It looks totally different to the rest of the range (the whole idea of course) yet there are no expensive mechanical changes involved.

What is interesting — and

clever marketing — is that instead of making all these variations increasingly expensive, in say the manner of the Browning/Miroku grade structure, all are very similarly priced. Thus the recommended retail of the Silver Pigeon II is £1625 and none of the others is more than a couple of hundred pounds above that. It gives them four chances to hook the one potential buyer.

Both clay and game shooters are targeted by the collection, with Field and Sporting versions of each, as well as small gauge guns. The clay shooter who chooses one of these is likely to want a gun less overtly 'competition' than the 686/682E models, perhaps one that he can also use for game shooting without provoking comment, but there is still a competent claybusting gun underneath the more sober presentation.



TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

In essence the Silver Pigeon guns have changed very little since Beretta first unveiled their classic action in the mid 1950s, the only gun, says the company to pass 1.5 million sales. It is indeed one of the all-time greats of gun design, sleek, simple and mechanically efficient. It is only in the details that guns differ.

Running through our check list on this model, we find the familiar cold hammer-forged barrels, with the expected three inch (76mm) chambers. As is now the norm on 12-bore Berettas, these barrels were bored to the 18.6mm (.731") 'Optima Bore' dimensions, marginally more open than the 'standard' 12-bore measurement of .729". In keeping with the classic look, it has a solid mid rib, although there is a ribless section under the fore end, presumably to save weight. The top rib is ventilated, plain cut and tapering from 11 to 8mm. It came fitted with a single, simple white bead, but for those that like the 'high visibility' type there is a kit supplied offering red or green Truglo® sights.

As this is the Sporting version,



multi-chokes are fitted, these being the new longer 'Mobilchokes' to match the bigger bore. They are the thin wall type, machined to a high standard and very light.

The trigger blade is fixed and cannot be moved in the way that the out and out competition models allow.

On the 12-bore the games scenes feature gold pheasants (right side)...and below ducks (left)



Barrel selection is by Beretta's conventional sliding latch set into the safety catch.

For reasons that are not immediately obvious, Beretta fit a different fore end style on the 12-bore guns than the rest of the range. On the 12s, as on the test gun, it is a schnabel type, but the smaller gauges get a plain, semi-beavertail. The stock has plenty of meat through the comb area and the dimensions show 368 mm length (14.5"), with drop of 35 mm (1.38") at comb to 55 mm (2.17") at heel. It is finished with a substantial rubber pad and some adjustment of length is possible because two are supplied with the gun — 15 and 20 mm.

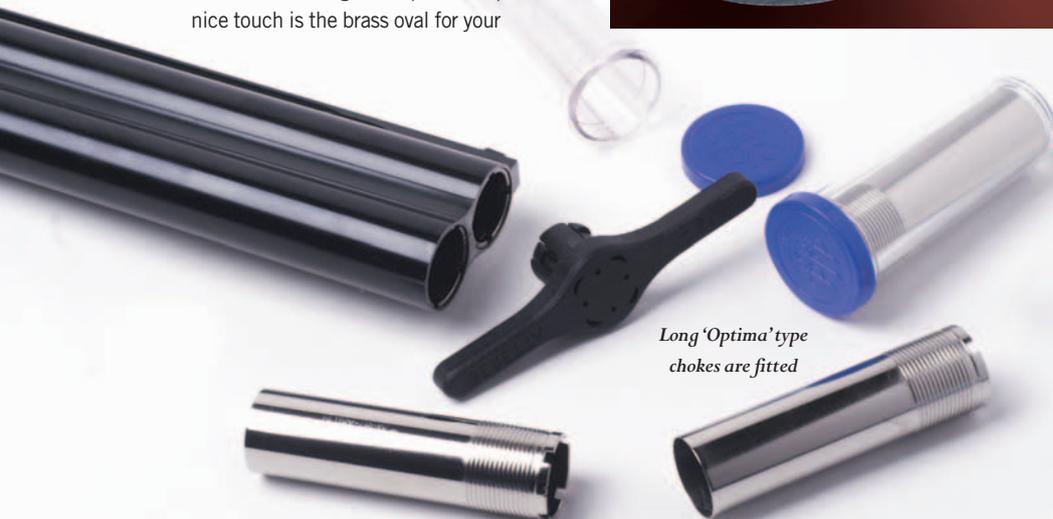
COSMETICS

On a gun that is all about presentation, this is the nitty-gritty: does it deliver in the looks department? We are getting deep into the realms of personal taste here, so I expect there will be as many who love this gun as hate it — but then that's the point of the whole Silver Pigeon exercise. Because there are all the other models, the styling doesn't have to be bland and inoffensive; it can — and does — make a bold statement. Whether I like it or not is irrelevant, if enough people buy it then it is a success. I hear cries from the back of 'get off the fence' so I will say that I love the colour hardening, but could do without the gold birds. For me the black and gold Silver Pigeon IV had the bling market covered and they missed a chance to be more understated with this one.

The stock is dark finished Turkish walnut, with strong figuring and an appropriate dull oil finish. The chequering is laser cut in elegant elliptical shapes. A nice touch is the brass oval for your

MEET THE FAMILY

THE SILVER PIGEON V IS THE FOURTH ADDITION TO THE SILVER PIGEON LINE UP JOINING (FROM TOP TO BOTTOM) THE SILVER PIGEON II WITH DEEP RELIEF ENGRAVING; THE SILVER PIGEON III (GAME SCENES) AND SILVER PIGEON IV (BLACK ACTION)



Long 'Optima' type chokes are fitted



The chequering is laser cut.



Colour hardening has been used very sparingly on Beretta guns over the years.

initials, let into the underside of the stock.

The plastic case supplied with the gun is not lockable and, although functional, it's not the most appealing bit of kit to have come out of Gardone recently.

ON TEST

GMK could only let me have a left-handed gun (a no cost option throughout the Beretta range), although the grip has no palm swell and the cast isn't that pronounced. It was certainly shootable for a right-hander. The test gun had 30 inch barrels, weighing 1460 grams (3.2lbs) with the chokes fitted.

The catalogue specifications suggested the total weight would be around 3.4kg (7.5lbs), at the lighter end for a sporter these days. In fact my sample weighed nearer 3.7kg (just over 8lbs), the second test Beretta in succession to come in well over stated weight and confirming my belief in not trusting what is printed in gunmakers' catalogues! I should add that in this instance the 'error' is entirely

beneficial, making the gun far better equipped for competition use.

Judging by the balance, the extra heft is coming from wood density, because the gun was absolutely neutral in its handling. Most sporters have some degree of weight forward bias these days so this could appeal to those who like more life in this department.

The trigger is mechanical, not inertia (that is it does not rely on recoil to select the second barrel) and the pulls — as ever with Beretta — are excellent, crisp and sensibly weighted at around 4.5lbs. It all adds to a quality 'feel'

Although dressed in fancy clothes, this is still a more than able competition gun. Not everyone wants the uncompromising look of the 686E and 682E models, so this is a viable alternative. All the familiar Beretta qualities are there but in a package that is distinctly different to most of the guns you will see at your local ground on a Sunday morning. If you want to stand out from the Beretta crowd, this family of guns has much to offer.



Simple white or high visibility — the choice of bead is yours.

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