



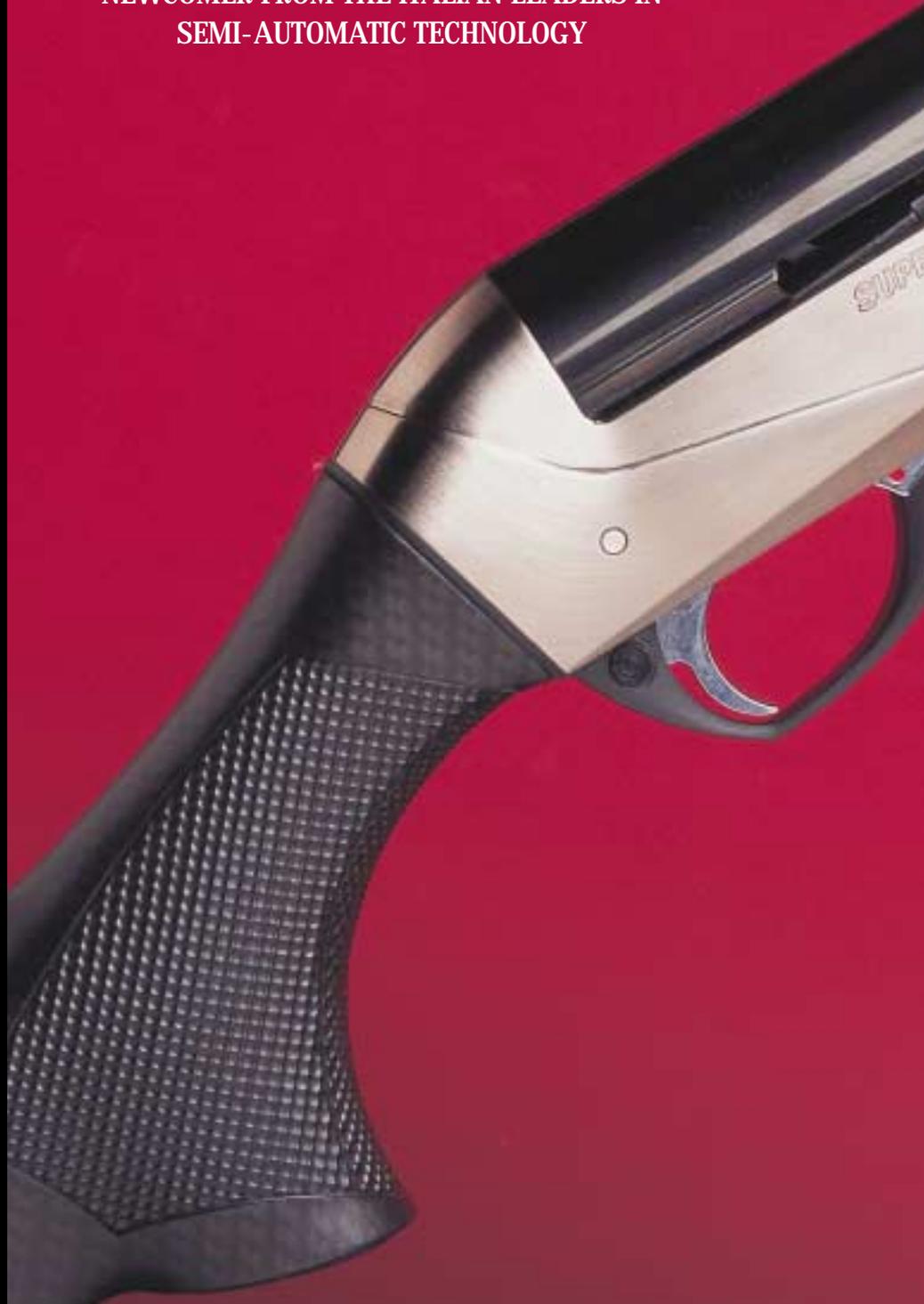
It is fair to say that this month's test has been eagerly awaited. Our sister magazine, Clays shooting USA, has been carrying advertisements for the new Benelli SuperSport for over a year now, giving us a tantalising glimpse of a gun packed with innovation and interesting features. The trouble is the advertising has been working too well, because the Benelli factory in Italy has been flat out keeping up with the demand, meaning that Beechwood Equipment, Benelli's UK distributor, has had to put their own launch plans on ice for most of the year. Even now, supplies are likely to be limited, but we can at last get our hands on a test gun.

It is some ten years since I first tested a Benelli semi-automatic and since then the company, the world leader in this sector of the market, has unveiled several very fine products. The frustrating thing has been that all of them have been compromise guns, trying to bridge the gap between field and competition use. For all their qualities, they often seemed to me to fall between two stools, certainly lacking the edge to really make an impact on the competition scene. Checking back through my files I find a repeated plea to Benelli's product planners to really go all out and produce a serious clay shooting gun.

Whether they listened to me is debatable, but there is no doubt that the SuperSport is that product. It takes all that is good in Benelli's unique technology and marries it to an exciting package of features, with the company's customary sharp styling. Did it live up to the promise?

BENELLI SUPERSPORT

**RICHARD RAWLINGSON TESTS AN EXCITING
NEWCOMER FROM THE ITALIAN LEADERS IN
SEMI-AUTOMATIC TECHNOLOGY**





TECHNICAL OVERVIEW

I will start with the elements of the SuperSport that are familiar and at the heart of the gun is the famous Benelli Inertia System, that sets the company's guns apart from almost all other autos. This is so simple, yet so effective and proven to be utterly reliable. It has very few moving parts and gives the designers a real advantage, because there is no gas piston adding bulk and weight to the fore end region.

For those not familiar with it, a brief description of the operation will show how clever it is. Inertia is an object's initial resistance to movement. When the gun is fired it immediately begins to move backwards under recoil. Because the bolt floats within the receiver, it stays in position momentarily and this differential movement compresses an inertia spring, providing the energy to complete the cycling of the gun, sending the bolt rearwards to eject the spent case and recock the hammer, at the same time compressing another spring in

the stock. That spring then returns the bolt to its original position, feeding in the next cartridge and rotating it to lock solidly against the barrel.

The inertia spring has a very predictable response that allows it to cope with a wide range of ammunition, typically Benelli guns will cycle anything from light 24 gram loads to the heaviest magnums. With so few moving parts there is little to go wrong and the guns are famous for continuing to work in even the toughest conditions and with minimal maintenance, making them a favourite for military and law enforcement applications.

Also carried over from earlier models is Benelli's cryogenic barrel technology. This subjects the barrel to extremely low temperature — minus 300 degrees F — a treatment the company says reduces the stresses caused by conventional hammer forging, allowing the barrel to expand and contract on firing in a more predictable way. Benelli say it also gives a smoother surface that resists fouling and improves pattern distribution. Matched to the barrel is the latest CrioChoke extended choke system. These tubes are 90mm long, the final 20mm extending beyond the muzzle. These are high quality items and five of them are supplied with the gun as standard.

The rib has a very definite step to it and a gentle taper from 10-8 mm. Unusually in the current market, there is no lurid high visibility sight, just a small pink dot, coupled with a small brass mid bead. The barrel options are 28 and 30 inch and, on



THE CHEVRON-SHAPED CUT OUTS ARE A KEY FEATURE OF THE COMFORTECH STOCK.



THE LARGE GEL PAD IS ERGONOMICALLY SHAPED TO PUT THE MAXIMUM AREA IN CONTACT WITH THE SHOULDER.

American specification guns at least, they are ported as standard.

COMFORTECH STOCK

So far what we have seen is no different to the existing Crio model, but this is where it gets really interesting. Bolted to the two-part receiver (also carried over from the Crio) is a composite stock Benelli have christened 'Comfortech'. This has three distinct parts: firstly, and most obviously, a pattern of chevrons running from the heel towards the grip. This is not mere decoration. Benelli say that the stock is only possible thanks to a combination of computer modelling, high-speed photography and state-of-the-art synthetic materials. The chevron shapes are actually cut out of the stock, with inserts of a different material. Under recoil the stock flexes in a controlled manner, absorbing and distributing recoil



and, more importantly, the user's perception of it. It was initially designed to soften the kick of using heavy wildfowling loads in what is a relatively light gun, but the company was quick to see its potential application in a competition gun. Benelli show a fascinating graph comparing the recoil curve of a gun with the new stock compared to a standard model, with the peak force at the moment of firing reduced by around a third.

The second feature is a very smooth and soft gel insert in the comb. As well as providing a very comfortable location for the cheek, it also allows the comb to move under recoil, so the cheek slides forward rather than riding the impact.

Finally, we have another new take on recoil pad design, with ergonomically designed gel pads in two different thicknesses to allow changes in stock length (although not perhaps enough variation). As well as being soft and squashy, these pads have quite complex shaping, designed to put the maximum surface area in contact with the shoulder. Because of this quite specific shaping, left and right handed versions are available. The pads just push on, so changing them is literally a five second job.

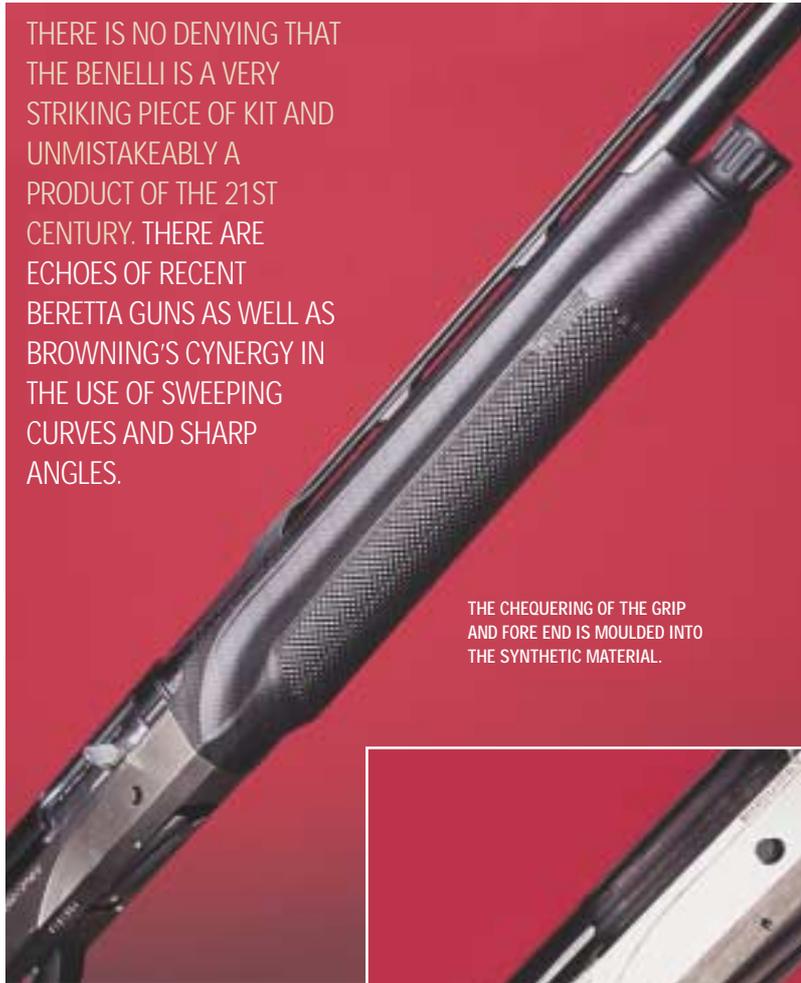
The rest of the stock is ambidextrous in that cast-on can be provided with the conventional shim system, while the grip has a double palm swell reminiscent of the Krieghoff K-80. The grip itself has a moulded chequering pattern that wraps round the whole area and retains good purchase even when soaking wet.

COSMETICS

There is no denying that the Benelli is a very striking piece of kit and unmistakably a product of the 21st century. There are echoes of recent Beretta guns as well as Browning's Cynergy in the use of sweeping curves and sharp angles. The use of synthetic materials also allows the designers to produce complex shapes such as the fore end that would be very difficult to achieve in wood.

The stock and fore end have a mock carbon fibre finish, rather than plain black and it contrasts with the bright brushed surface of the main part of the receiver. All the metalwork has a quality feel to it and the stock is free from any moulding marks

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or rough edges as sometimes found on these composite materials if they are not finished off properly. The two-part receiver has practical benefits in that access to the bolt and trigger assemblies for cleaning is very much easier.

The gun is nicely presented in a fitted — non-locking — ABS case that can only be described as rather wacky, looking in profile like a small family car!

ON TEST

Because there are so few parts, Benellis generally tend to come up rather light. The SuperSport is heavier than most at 3.3kg (7.3 lbs) but still relatively light compared to a typical over-and-under. All the thinking behind the Comfortech stock is about allowing this light weight without a trade-off in increased recoil.

The first thing that is apparent on picking the gun up is the very neutral



THE SUPERSPORT IS EVERYTHING I HOPED IT WOULD BE, AS IT NEEDED TO BE AT A RETAIL PRICE OF AROUND £1280. THAT IS TOP MONEY FOR AN AUTO AND IT COULD NOT AFFORD TO BE JUST AVERAGE AT THAT PRICE.

balance, it seeming to lie absolutely flat in the hands. There is nothing beneath the very slim fore end except the magazine tube, where most autos have gas ports and pistons and other assorted gubbins, all of which tends to make them feel front heavy.

Light weight and neutral balance usually produces a fast handling gun and the Benelli certainly gets moving smartly. It will stop quickly too if you don't finish the shot off — you can't get it out in front and leave the gun to its own devices in the

way that you can with a big, heavy o/u — but once you make the adjustment it is a smooth performer.

I limited myself to a selection of 24 and 28 gram cartridges and it cycled them all without a glitch, even the slower light loads. I did throw in some of the latest 'extreme' FITASC loads and even with those the recoil was very well contained. Those recoil graphs looked impressive on paper and it transferred out to the shooting ground; remember there is no gas system smoothing out the kick — a friend who tried the gun rated it as smooth to shoot as his Beretta Teknys.

No one could claim that the Benelli's trigger is up to the standards of a good over-and-under, there is too much drag for that. At 5lbs pull weight it is however not excessively heavy, so it is not that obtrusive.

Much more impressive were the patterns delivered by those long chokes. I used mainly Improved Cylinder on my test and to see the way it combined with some 24 gram Express Excels to demolish the targets on Wylde Valley's notoriously tricky pool shoot really made my companions take note. A 20 yard rabbit was turned to dust with the same combination, so quite what full choke would do I don't know. The word overkill springs to mind.

The SuperSport is everything I hoped it would be, as it needed to be at a retail price of around £1280. That is top money for an auto and it could not afford to be just average at that price. It is far from average though, packed with innovative features that bring genuine benefits, not just bullet points in a glossy brochure. It has taken ten years but I have finally found a Benelli that delivers the goods as a complete package.



THE LONG CHOKE
TUBES THROW
SUPERB PATTERNS.

**MORE INFORMATION:
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