



# WINCHESTER SX3 EXHIBITION SPORTING

A REPORT BY **TOM CERETTO**

**THE SX3 DOES SHARE A FEW FEATURES WITH HIGHER PRICED BROWNING CORPORATE SIBLINGS, BUT JUST A FEW. WHAT I DO LIKE IS THE SHORT-STROKE GAS PISTON THAT DRIVES THE BOLT BACK INTO THE RECOIL BLOCK AND COMPRESSION SPRING RATHER THAN ACTION RODS DRIVING THE BOLT BACK.**

I first shot the Winchester SX2 Sporting at a writers outing when the SHOT Show was in Las Vegas a few years ago – so now reviewing the SX3 Exhibition Sporting was interesting. Paul Thompson, Browning’s media guy, tells me that the ‘Exhibition’ in the model designation is there because Winchester exhibition shooter, Patrick Flanigan, uses this gun with an extended magazine tube for the shooting exhibitions he puts on all over the country.

Flanigan holds the world record for breaking 11 manually thrown targets, unassisted, from the hip before they hit the ground. Not only can I not get my hand around 11 clay targets, I don’t think I could lift a gun with that much ammo stuffed into the magazine tube! None-the-less, I can still lift an auto with two rounds in it, and shoot sporting clays modestly well for an old timer!

As with the SX2, the first thing that caught my attention when I opened the red hard case that came with the gun, was the almost, some would say, garish red anodizing on the alloy receiver, set off by the black composite stock. I don’t want to get into an aesthetic

snit about it, but its one of those ‘either you love it or hate it’ things with very little room in between. I think the younger set will love it, but some of the elders of the sporting clays tribe might think it’s a bit showy. I’m kind of ambivalent about it – and am of the school of “if it shoots well, who gives a damn how it looks, its what’s in the bright red receiver that really counts.”

## FLAWLESS OPERATION

The SX3 does share a few features with higher priced Browning corporate siblings, but just a few. What I do like is the short-stroke gas piston that drives the bolt back into the recoil block and compression spring rather than action rods driving the bolt back. Action rods have been proven to be troublesome on some automatics in the past and not having them is a big plus in my book. It is an excellent system and harks back to David Marshall “Carbine” Williams who designed the original system while in prison for brewing outlawed rotgut whiskey. That system powered the

original M1 military carbine that served from WWII to the Vietnam conflict. A version of that system, with its combination gas expansion chamber/piston sleeve, works flawlessly in the SX series shotguns.

The SX3 comes with two different gas valves that feed gases into the piston sleeve/gas expansion chamber. There is one valve for heavy loads and one for light loads – and they are prominently marked. As I was going to shoot the SX3 with my light fast  $7/8$  ounce reloads, I opted to use the light gas valve and it performed without a hitch. The heavy gas valve can handle any kind of high performance target ammo up to and including 3 inch magnum duck loads. This adaptability turns the SX3 into a true dual-purpose shotgun.

## TRIGGER ASSEMBLY

The trigger is not adjustable for length of pull, but the stock is. Trigger pull was a bit excessive at 6 pounds, but I did not find it difficult to use while shooting clays. The trigger assembly is easily removed by pushing out the



two pins that hold the trigger group into the receiver. Cleaning and lubricating is also easy to accomplish. Disassembly of the entire action is easily done and reassembly is quick and simple. A three shot adaptor plug comes standard with the gun for those who would like to use it for migratory waterfowl. It is easily removed if you care to do so, but I have always left them in whether I am hunting or shooting clays. Better to always leave it in than be caught without it while waterfowl hunting and pay the DNR a hefty fine and lose your license.

## FIRM GRIP

I like composite stocks. Length of pull measured 14 inches, but two 1/4 inch shims were provided with the gun to lengthen it out to 14 1/2 inches if desired. The Dura-Touch armor coated grip and fore-end proved very nice to use and eliminated the necessity of checkering the stock and fore-end. I found it comfortable to use and very effective. I liked it very much and hope more manufacturers might use a similar system on their composite stocks and fore-ends in the future.

Shims supplied with the gun allow the stock to be adjusted for drop and cast. Adjusting the stock is easy to accomplish and does not require a degree in nuclear science to master. Good thing too. All I had to do on my demo was add two shims to stretch it out and I was ready to go slay clays.

## BARREL WORK

The Perma-Cote UT (Ultra Tough) dark grey barrel on my demo was smooth from chamber to muzzle. A slightly raised rib that is 1/4 inch wide from stem to stern is equipped with a fiber optic front sight and a white mid bead tops the barrel. Bore is the standard Browning/Winchester 0.742 Invector overbore and the barrel sports Invector Plus chokes. Chokes are provided in improved cylinder, modified and improved modified. The tips of the 3 3/16 inch long knurled choke tubes have a smooth anodized red band that prominently displays the choke constriction. I like that. It is much better than the notches that designate the constriction on many competitive products. Why not display the constriction properly and prominently? A handy choke tube wrench is included with the gun.

I tested the SX3 at my home club, Waukesha Gun Club, site of the 2009 Wisconsin Sporting Clays Championships. I like to go there with my demos because it is one of the few places I can shoot sporting clays, 5-Stand, skeet and trap at the same club. It's nice to be able to evaluate target guns at other disciplines to assess their adaptability to all of the shotgun sports. The permanent patterning board and steel plate are also very handy. The targets on the sporting clays course are always more challenging than those at most clubs. Besides, I burn less than a



gallon of expensive gas getting there and back home. Gas is beginning to be a budget squeezer for all of us.

## ON TEST

I shot most of the targets using the improved cylinder or modified chokes. Both despatched targets with alacrity. I missed a few long range targets because I was too lazy to change chokes – that was my fault. I managed to break most of the 100 targets I shot and found the SX3 to be very reliable. Many new autos I test require a few

## SPECIFICATIONS

<b>GUN TYPE:</b> GAS OPERATED AUTOMATIC
<b>SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE:</b> \$1,349
<b>RECEIVER:</b> 12 GAUGE ALLOY CNC MACHINED
<b>GUN WEIGHT:</b> 7.3 LBS.
<b>OAL:</b> 49"
<b>BARREL:</b> 28" ONLY
<b>BORE:</b> 0.742"
<b>CHAMBER LENGTH:</b> 3"
<b>TOP RIB:</b> 1/4" VENTED
<b>BARREL FINISH:</b> PERMA-COTE UT
<b>SIGHTS:</b> FIBER OPTIC FRONT, WHITE MID-BEAD
<b>CHOKES:</b> 3 INVECTOR-PLUS INCLUDED
<b>CHOKE LENGTH:</b> 3 3/16"
<b>IMPROVED CYLINDER:</b> 0.011"
<b>MODIFIED:</b> 0.021"
<b>IMPROVED MODIFIED:</b> 0.030"
<b>STOCK &amp; FORE-END:</b> COMPOSITE WITH DURATOUCH GRIP AND FORE-END
<b>SAFETY:</b> TRIGGER GUARD PUSH BUTTON
<b>LOP:</b> 14"/14 1/2" ADJUSTABLE
<b>DROP AT COMB:</b> 1 3/8"
<b>DROP AT HEEL:</b> 2"
<b>CASE:</b> HARD COMPOSITE

rounds through them before they function properly, but not the SX3. It performed like a champ from start to finish. Moving to the second target on report pairs and true pairs was done with ease, no doubt aided by the light overall weight of 7.4 pounds.

I enjoyed shooting the SX3, but I do have two issues. I believe the SX3 should be offered with a choice of the neo-modern red anodized finish or a gray receiver like the SX3 field guns. I know the red receiver is kind of a trade mark on Winchester automatic target guns, but I think sales would be improved if a plain grey Perma-Cote UT receiver was also available. But I am only a humble scribe so what do I know? The second issue was the 6 pound plus trigger pull, but that's easily fixed. On the plus side, I think the SX3 is competitively priced at \$1,349 and should be attractive to a wide range of shooters – particularly the younger set. ■