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# GUN TEST

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# SO5

**It has always been interesting to me that almost all over and under shotguns use all or part of features from shotguns designed in the first half of the twentieth century – Boss, Browning or Beretta SO5. Even the Cynergy, built in Belgium for Browning, is not completely new, but similar to an all stainless steel Swedish shotgun that saw the light of day for a very brief period of time thirty or forty years ago.**

Some shotguns embrace the Boss trunions with the Browning barrel lugs and bolt. Others are pure Boss, but instead of a rectangular or square bolt, use truncated cones and other oddly shaped bolts to lock up the action. The Remington 32, designed in the late 1920s, and subsequently the Krieghoff K32, K80, Valmet and others, used the Boss trunions with a sliding top latch to secure the action. More recently, the Beretta ASE, DT10 and SKB have used the Kersten cross bolt with the bifurcated lumps (trunions) of the Boss.





The Beretta SO5, the subject of this article, was designed in the early thirties by Tullio Marengoni, an employee of Beretta, as a state-of-the-art competition shotgun. He married the Kersten cross bolt with the bifurcated lumps of the Boss. Prior to Marengoni's design, cross bolts were used only on side-by-sides, so the design was considered revolutionary at a time when there were very few over and under shotguns being produced. It was expensive to manufacture these guns during the great depression that scourged the world at that period in our history. It was, therefore, surprising that Beretta would give the go-ahead to Marengoni's design, despite all of the evident economic reasons not to. It showed great courage to do so. That Beretta's decision to manufacture the SO5 was correct

is evidenced by the numerous Olympic Gold Medals won by competitors using it. Italians are as passionate about their target guns as they are about fast cars. Olympic Gold Medals and World Championships are very important to them – and Beretta is no exception.

What Marengoni wound up with in his final design was a very low profile (only 2 1/2 inches deep) target gun with a particularly strong action, exactly his goal. There are many variations of the cross bolt, some use a dolls head with a round or square hole which the cross bolt slides through. Some, like Marengoni's final design, use monobloc lugs protruding from the monobloc into slots in the receiver face that the cross bolt rides on top of to secure the action. The monobloc lugs on

the SO5 are positioned at the upper tube axis. The bifurcated lumps prevent the barrels from moving off face and the Kersten cross bolt prevents the action from springing open.

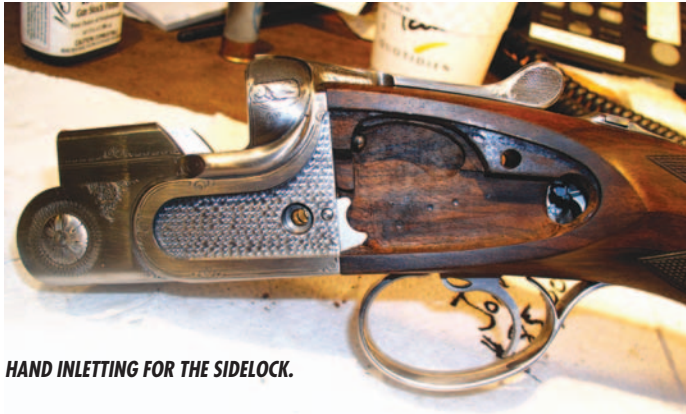
The SO5 receiver is machined from a solid block of forged Nickel-Chromium-Molybdenum steel that is hardened and heat-treated. The receiver is then hand finished to the final product. That the SO5 is a hand made shotgun was evident watching Ed Anderson, gunsmith at the Beretta Gallery in New York, hand fitting replacement parts to an older SO series shotgun he was working on. I was surprised at how



**ED ANDERSON, MY SHOOTING PARTNER FOR THE GUN TEST. MASTER GUNSMITH, MASTER CLASS SHOOTER, INTERESTING CONVERSATIONALIST.**



THE SO5 RECEIVER IS MACHINED FROM A SOLID BLOCK OF FORGED NICKEL-CHROMIUM-MOLYBDENUM STEEL THAT IS HARDENED AND HEAT-TREATED. THE RECEIVER IS THEN HAND FINISHED TO THE FINAL PRODUCT.



**HAND INLETTING FOR THE SIDELOCK.**

simple the entire action and side locks were. If simplicity is the mark of true genius, the SO5 is a prime example of that axiom.

The safety hangs from the top strap and is nicely checkered. The barrel selector is Beretta's standard configuration, right for the bottom barrel and left for the upper. Tension is excellent and the selector is not easily bumped off mark.

Aesthetically, the coin silver receiver and side plates are lightly engraved. The trigger plate is embellished with the P. Beretta trademark signature in 24-carat gold. Compared to the very high-grade show-off SO series shotguns, the engraving is minimal. It is what I call elegant simplicity – and what Beretta calls OF1 engraving. This is a target gun built for the purpose of breaking clay targets and winning gold medals, not necessarily for bragging rights. I am sure, that having said that, anyone showing up at a gun club with this gun would be the center of attention.

During my years of writing shotgun reviews I have stayed out of contentious conversations about what is best – side-lock triggers or box-lock triggers. That is because I have had very little experience with side-locks (unless shooting an old L.C. Smith counts). That said, the triggers on the SO5 are the best I have ever had the privilege of

pulling. Both upper and lower barrels went off at exactly 3 pounds without a bit of creep or hesitation. Lock time seemed as fast as any target gun I have ever shot, even a Remington Model 32, which is renowned for its fast lock time. The care in machining, machined turned finish and the hand fitting are evident everywhere on the side locks. The side plates are easily removed for cleaning, maintenance or lubrication of the locks. If I owned an SO5, I would remove side plates just to admire them! Alas, I have the desire, but not the wherewithal.

Does it get any better than Boehler Antinit hammer forged barrels? I think not. They are as smooth as a newborn's backside from breech to muzzle and finished to a high luster. The demo I shot was equipped with 30 inch barrels and flush chokes. A second model SO5 is available with 28, 30 or 32 inch barrels with Optima Bore and extended chokes instead of 28 or 30 inch flush choked barrels – buyers choice. The standard barrels have 2 3/4 inch chambers while the Optima Bore barrels are equipped with 3 inch chambers. Both barrels have ventilated 10mm X 8mm tapered ribs with checkered surfaces. I think most competitive shooters would opt for the Optima Bore barrels at 32 inches.

The wood on my demo was as elegant as one would want on a target gun that gets banged around traveling to shoots – especially by air. It had the standard 14.7 inch length of pull, which is about 3/8 inch longer than I usually shoot – making it a little unwieldy for me. The grip is pure competition with a fairly tight radius and a right hand palm swell that fits the hand very nicely. The SO5 can be had with left hand palm swell and stock as befits a target gun in its price range. Finish on the stock is hand rubbed, well filled and very well done. Wood to metal fit is one of the best I have ever seen. Fitting a side-lock gun is not an easy task. Without doubt a good portion of the cost of an SO5 is in the meticulous hand

inletting of the stock that is necessary for the lock plates. There is not a machine that can do that as well as an experienced and competent craftsman. It is a time consuming and delicate undertaking. The inletting work on the SO series shotguns I saw was first rate.

If a shotgun manufacturer feels it necessary to build sporting clays shotguns with a Schnabel fore-end they would do well to emulate the SO5 fore-end. It is the most elegant and comfortable I have ever seen or used. It fits the hand well and the sharp checkering made for a secure feel. The inletting of the Deeley and Edge modified fore-end iron was well executed and as good a job as I have ever seen. The fore-

## SPECIFICATIONS

### MANUFACTURER:

FABBRICA DI ARMI PIETRO BERETTA  
VIA PIETRO BERETTA, 18  
25063 GARDONE VAL TROMPIA  
(BRESCIA)  
ITALIA

### U.S. DISTRIBUTER:

BERETTA U.S.A.  
17601 BERETTA DRIVE  
ACCOKEEK, MD 20604  
301-283-2191  
WWW.BERETTAUSA.COM

### ACTION:

CNC MACHINED KESTEN CROSSBOLT SIDE LOCK

### SUGGESTED RETAIL:

\$25,000

### RECEIVER DEPTH:

2 1/2 INCHES

### ENGRAVING:

HAND CUT SCROLL

### GUN WEIGHT:

7.6 LBS.

### OAL:

OPTIONAL

### LOP:

14.7 INCHES

### DROP AT COMB:

1.50 INCHES

### DROP AT HEEL:

2.36 INCHES

### BARRELS:

30" TESTED 28" AND 32" AVAILABLE

### FRONT BEAD:

RED GLOW DOT

### CHAMBERS:

2 3/4" 3" AVAILABLE

### BORE:

.724" TESTED .733" AVAILABLE

WITH OPTIMA BORE

OPTIONAL

### CHOKES:

3 3/16" OPTIMA BORE

### CHOKE LENGTH:

LONG EXTENDED

### FORCING CONE:

FLAT 10mm X 8mm TAPERED

### TOP RIB:

SOLID

### CENTER RIB:

FIXED

### TRIGGER:

3.0 LBS LOWER 3.0 LBS UPPER

### STOCK & FORE END:

HIGH-GRADE WALNUT

### FORE END:

SCNABEL



end snapped on and off easily, but was tightly secured without any movement fore and aft or sideways when installed.

## ON TEST

Balance was right where it should be, right between the hands – even though the stock was a bit long for me. Transition from target to target on report pairs and true pairs are accomplished with ease. Targets when centered were despatched with a satisfying puff of white smoke. Needless to say, my companion on the outing to Peconic Gun Club on Long Island, Ed Anderson, (who is not only a Master Gunsmith, but a Master class shooter) shot a little better than I did! Ed was great fun to



shoot with and a good conversationalist on the long drive to the gun club and back. I thank him for a pleasant day of shooting.

I am occasionally asked what is the best target shotgun I have ever shot. My usual answer is that it could be the next one I shoot – politely avoiding having to answer

the question. It is, to a writer, a loaded question that will inventively come back to bite him in the backside. But I will say that the SO5 is probably the best over and under target shotgun I have ever shot until I shoot a better one. Is it worth \$25,000? You bet it is.

Many of the specifications for the SO5 are optional when purchased as a bespoke gun, but Beretta High Grade dealers and the Beretta Galleries do stock guns to standard dimensions, so I have included the standard dimensions in the gun specification panel. ■