

THE TEKNYS GOLD TARGET SHOTGUN REVIEWED BY MICHAEL G. SABBETH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL MUMFORD



I watched Teknys shotguns being made about a year ago during a tour of Beretta's main production facility in Gardone, Val Trompia. Production of the receivers was most intriguing. Billets of nickel chromium steel were stacked in a rack about ten slots wide and twenty high – gleaming in the direct overhead sunlight like precious bullion bars.

The long extension arm of the massive bright yellow robot removed a billet from a slot, and, in spastic bursts, moved it at changing angles for the drills to cut, shape and polish the steel. Machined to tolerances of about 1/10,000 of an inch, the completed receiver was returned to rack and, with computerized precision, the robotic arm withdrew another raw billet.

I became a fan of the Teknys shotgun series several years ago when I bought a 20 gauge sporting clays model. I was thus enthused to test the Teknys Gold Target and to share my impressions and observations. I provide a brief

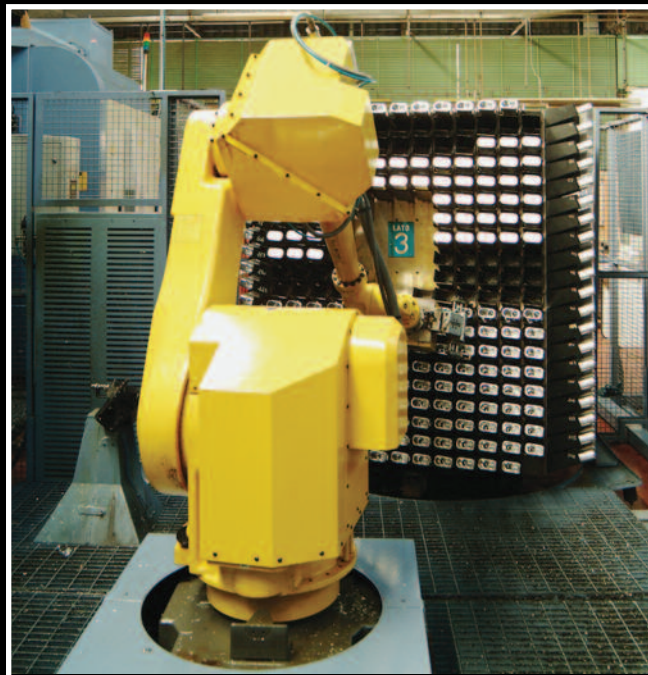
history of the Teknys to illustrate the upgrades in the Gold Target model and then describe the shooting regimen I used to test it. Comments about the gun from novice shooters to well-seasoned coaches, in addition to my own, add to the evaluation of this shotgun.

Technical Specifications

As always when writing about Beretta guns, I obtained background information on the Teknys Gold Target model from Jarno Antonelli, the brilliant marketing manager with the fifty gigabyte brain at Beretta's main office in Gardone. The name 'Teknys' was coined by Beretta to capture overtones of technology, research and innovation combined with practical experiences from the field and clay target courses.

The origin of the Teknys is the AL391 Urika (AL stands for Automatico Leggero – Lightweight Automatic) designed in 2000 and which replaced the AL390 series that was manufactured commencing in 1994. The Beretta family, primarily President Ugo

BERETTA STRIKES GOLD!





Gussalli Beretta and son Franco, wanted a semi-auto shotgun series more refined than the Urika. Their collaborative efforts with dozens of engineers and research managers and designers resulted in the Teknys series, introduced in 2002.

Design advances included a receiver with a highly scratch and corrosion resistant nickel-based finish, a new gas valve design to reduce maintenance, a new barrel profile (Optima Bore), new choke tubes (Optima Choke), new recoil pad (Gel tek) and a luminous front sight (Truglo type).

Other changes enhanced the gun's elegance and aesthetics – such as an innovative wood finish for the standard version (X-Tra Wood), an up-graded oil-finished wood for the Gold models, a green enamel insert for the Teknys field version and a blue enamel insert for the competition configuration. A new checkering pattern was also introduced.

As with all Urika and Teknys model, the Gold Target employs a self-compensating gas operating system. Gas from the fired cartridge cycles the action by being vented through the spring-loaded valve in the cylinder. The system adjusts automatically to the pressures of each cartridge, thereby

achieving flawless and reliable performance with an array of shot loads ranging from 24 to 57 grams of any factory cartridge or equivalent. This gas system offers exceptional recoil reduction.

The Gold Target features Optima Bore barrels and Optima Choke tubes. These 12 gauge barrels have internal profiles of 18.6 mm of diameter (0.732 inch) whereas conventional barrels normally have 18.3/18.4mm (0.720/0.724 inch) diameters. The Optima Bore profile has been specifically designed for competition purposes. Beretta claims that its design considerably improves shot pattern distribution, felt recoil reduction and shot velocity optimization.

The Optima Bore barrel only accepts Optima choke tubes. The five choke tubes included with the gun are longer and slimmer compared to the traditional Beretta Mobilchoke tubes. Their internal profile is designed to enhance the concentration and distribution of shot patterns. Barrels and chokes handle steel shot.

Unlike previous Teknys models, the Gold Target has the same improved spinning and self-cleaning valve system as the Urika 2. As gas pressure is fed into

the gas cylinder, a series of expandable fingers on the piston expand outwardly to clean the gas cylinder as the action cycles. During cycling, the piston spins, causing the sharp 'scraper teeth' on its leading edge to cut into, dislodge and remove carbon deposits on the cylinder's forward interior section. This improved cleaning action greatly contributes to enhanced reliability and longer functioning shooting periods between cleaning.

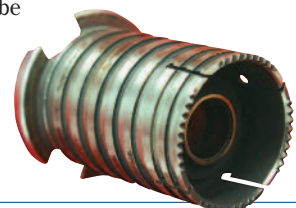
The four major enhancements of the Gold Target model elevate it to an out-of-the-box world-class target shotgun suitable for all clay target disciplines. The Gold Target has the Beretta Balance System to alter forward weight by adding an additional cap to the base forend cap. Three weights are provided, 10, 70 and 110 grams.

Beretta has added to the Gold Target an adjustable stock with a memory system. Comb height and cast-on and cast-off settings can be easily changed by using the patented locking design of the memory system. The device is made from a carbon reinforced technopolymer for durability.

Comb adjustments are made within seconds by inserting the supplied hexagonal key into slots in the device and loosening and tightening as desired. Cast-on and cast-off adjustments are equally easy but require the removal of the comb.

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BERETTA GAS VALVE WITH SERRATED EDGE AND BARREL WITH EXTRA RIB.



The shotgun is supplied with a second rib, 10 mm wide and slightly stepped to the rear. Whereas the rib mounted on the gun is designed to shoot a 50% pattern over the aiming point, the second rib is designed to shoot 70% above the point of aim. I confess I shot only a few rounds using the second rib. I did not count pellet holes on the pattern board but my observation led me to conclude that the percentage distribution as described was reasonably accurate.

The engineering design of this rib system is creative in its durability and simplicity. With the barrel removed from the receiver, only thirty seconds or so are needed to remove and replace the ribs. A disassembly punch tool is inserted in a slot on the rib located a few millimeters behind the front bead and used to slide the locking metal strip rearward. By special order, two other ribs are available, one yielding a pattern 60% over point of aim and another yielding an 80% pattern over point of aim. (Please note that the ribs are not interchangeable with the Teknys Gold Sporting or Trap ribs.)

The system I found most impressive is the Recoil Reduction System. It is a removable spring-mass recoil reduction device installed in the stock, just above and going rearward from the pistol grip. As I describe in detail later, it is stunningly effective. Combined with the inherent recoil absorbing qualities of the self-compensating gas system, it is difficult to imagine a softer shooting shotgun.

A few other features of the gun merit mention. The Gold Target, only available in 30" and retailing for \$2100, boasts a select oil-finished walnut buttstock and forend, which is slimmer than standard Beretta Urika and Teknys forends. It has a 3 inch chamber, a

cross bolt reversible for left-handed shooters, a quick bolt release that can be easily installed, a white front bead and a steel mid bead and weighs, with the light forend cap, eight pounds. The gun also offers the shim buttstock adjustment system found in all Urkia and Teknys models. The gun is packed in a high-density plastic carrying case which includes a bottle of Beretta oil and an array of tools.

Testing

My plan for thoroughly testing the Gold Target had several components. I wanted to use a broad spectrum of factory and hand-loaded cartridges of dramatically different pressures, velocities and weights to experience their effects on recoil and the reliability of the gun cycling the different loads. I also intended to compare the recoil of the Gold Target with that of my own and older Urika model and with my eight-pound plus 12-gauge over/under target shotgun. Finally, in addition to my own testing, I wanted other shooters, from novice to experienced, to shoot the gun and give me their assessments.

To achieve the first requirement, I sought the support of colleagues from several ammunition manufacturers with whom I've worked over the years – Jason Nash from Federal Ammunition, Patrick Thomas at Rio Ammunition, Jonathan Harling at Chevalier Advertising who represents

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Winchester Ammunition and Jackie Stenton at Fiocchi USA. Chris Hodgdon of Hodgdon Powder sent me supplies of several powders for crafting hand loads. About sixteen different factory and hand loads were used in testing.

To fulfill the third requirement, I visited three of the fine clay target ranges within an hour of my home that collectively offered trap and sporting and skeet formats – my thanks to Mark and Brenda Moore at Kiowa Creek Sporting Clays, Doug Kraft at Colorado Clays, Doug Kraft at Colorado Clays and Jerry William at Quail Run.

To help me test the Gold Target, Doug at Colorado Clays hooked me up with several highly skilled competitive trap shooters. At Kiowa Creek I spent an hour shooting with renowned multi-discipline instructor Warren Watson and I took a bunch of friends who were beginner shooters to Quail Run to shoot skeet, trap and sporting clays.

It was a gorgeous Fall day when I visited Colorado Clays to shoot with Kim Butorac and Nick and Russ Digesualdo. After the initial few shots I tinkered with the adjustable comb for a few minutes



LEFT: BRENDA MOORE. BELOW LEFT: STEVE GRIESEN. RIGHT: WARREN WATSON.

to eliminate recoil on my face. Thereafter recoil was a non-factor.

Every shooter, irrespective of their skill level, used the word “smooth” to describe the experience of firing the Gold Target. Kim had her own highly tuned Beretta Urika Gold. Trying the Gold Target, she exclaimed, “Wow! Smooth. Really smooth!” Nick and Russ, both high level competition trap shooters, commented favorably on the smoothness of its swing and its outstanding balance.

One trap shooter, who returned his \$80,000 matched pair of highly customized Krieghoffs to the rack to try the Gold Target, said, “This gun can do it all – it can get you to the top!” Although he did not offer to trade guns, using the Gold Target he consistently turned the clays into puffballs from the 16-yard line with a selection of my ammunition.

It's Amazing!

I wanted to give the Gold Target a legitimate and tough test. I'd shot thousands of rounds through a bunch of Urika and Teknys shotguns, but this one was supposed to be better. I wanted to determine if that were true.

I used an extensive array of ammunition. On the light end of the spectrum were the Winchester Xtra Lite 2³/₄ dram, 1 ounce 1150fps loads and my custom hand loads used for my Damascus barrel vintage shotguns; ⁷/₈ ounce, 1290fps, 5500psi, powered by 25.6 grains of IMR 7625.

On the heavy end, I loaded a few boxes of shells I deemed to be at the outer limits of sanity: 31.2 grains of Longshot that, according to the Hodgdon Manual, pushed the 1¹/₈ ounces of shot at 1400fps with 8,200 PSI. Other heavy loads included the Winchester Super Sport Sporting

Clays, 1¹/₈ ounce, 1300fps, the Federal Handicap 1¹/₈ ounce 3 dram load, the Rio high brass 1¹/₄ Game load and the Fiocchi Crusher, three dram, 1300fps, 1 ounce load.

Within these polarities I used hand loaded shells matching the 24 gram Winchester International Target loads and mid-range one-ounce loads at listed velocities of

folks at Colorado Clays.

I and my friends fired almost one thousand rounds during the ten days we tested the gun. No matter the load or the sequence of the loads fired, not a single cycle failure occurred – even when shooting the low pressure IMR 7625 loadings. Most amazing, however, was the reduction in recoil. Using the Winchester Xtra

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1180fps up to 1250fps. I used Hodgdon Clays, International, Longshot and IMR 7625 powders and Winchester Super Target powders.

Some additional factory loads included the Fiocchi Spreader, the Winchester Heavy Target load, the Winchester International Target load, the Fiocchi Target load and the Rio Target 3 dram 1¹/₈ ounce load.

Friends, Steve Griesen and Lucas Schiff, both beginner shooters, shot trap, skeet and sporting clays with me at Quail Run. Although each had their own shotguns, they did noticeably better with the Gold Target. “Really smooth,” Lucas enthused, echoing the assessments of the

Lite as the base for comparison of recoil, cartridges of considerably greater power yielded insignificant increases in felt recoil. For example, the 1¹/₈ ounce 1400fps Longshot load yielded recoil only minimally greater than the Xtra Lite load. The recoil of any load was greater with my Beretta Urika than with the Gold Target and the recoil for any load was greater yet with my over/under. It is unarguable that the Gold Target dramatically reduces felt recoil compared to my heavy over/under target gun and to my Urika, which in its own right is an inherently soft-shooting semi auto.

Not only did I feel less recoil with the Gold Target, but

according to Warren's observations when shooting at Kiowa Creek, there *was* less recoil. He watched me shoot many loads, ranging from the Xtra Lite on a springing teal target to the nutty 1400fps Longshot recipe that crushed sixty-yard crossing targets. “There was no snapping back of your head,” he noted. “When shooting shotguns,” Warren said, “the first part of the body that goes is the head. That's where the fatigue and pain and mental breakdown begin.”

Concluding Comments

This is an impressive shotgun. Peter Horn, Director of the Beretta Gallery in Manhattan, notes the success of the Gold Target is due to the high degree of personalization the user can impose without the need of a specialized gun fitter or gunsmith. It is easy to fine tune the sight picture and point of aim.

Warren Watson extolled the Gold Target's mechanics. “The trigger is the heart and soul of the gun,” he emphasized. “The better the shooter you become, the more trigger sensitive you become. You can always depend on the quality of the Beretta semi auto trigger – they are consistently good. And Berettas are dependable. Period. They last.”

In conclusion, the Teknys Gold Target allows the shooter to transition fluidly from one target discipline to another. Offering the finest accolade for the Gold Target, Warren said, “With the adjustable comb, rib and shims, the Gold Target allows the everyday working man or woman to own a world class target breaker.” Fine praise, indeed, and well deserved in every regard. Beretta has struck gold. ■