

BERETTA

PREVAIL

RICHARD RAWLINGSON TAKES A FIRST
LOOK AT BERETTA'S NEWEST SPORTER

New guns from Beretta are always big news. Such is the brand's position in the market, any new offering is going to cause a stir. When it is a major reworking of the gun that has been at the heart of the company's output for over half a century, then it is a very big deal indeed.

For sporting clays shooters the launch of the new SV10 Prevail has all been a bit of a tease. The field version of the gun – the Perennia – came first and the Gardone giant has made us wait for the competition model. That wait is now over and I have one on the desk beside me as I write this review. More importantly, I have been able to put it through its paces out on the

range, of which more later. First let's look at the gun in detail.

The SV10 family is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. It stays true to the basic design principles that can be traced right back to the S series guns first introduced in 1956. The S55 was a huge step forward, the first appearance of the low profile action that has become the Beretta signature on mass production over-and-under guns. Its key features were a complete absence of any locking bites or lumps under the bottom barrel, giving a the shallowest possible profile, and the distinctive U-shaped locking bolt with conical lugs that emerged from the breech face to engage holes in shoulder pieces either side of the breech. These trapezoidal shaped shoulders engaged in slots cut out of the receiver walls to provide secure barrel location and resist fore and

aft movement. (A trapezoid is a four-sided figure with two parallel sides, the top and bottom surface of the shoulders being parallel).

The work of the brilliant designer Tullio Marengoni, the S55 was not only innovative in concept but also in the way it was produced. It was the first Beretta that could be manufactured with interchangeable parts. Over-and-under guns were traditionally difficult to make, requiring much hand fitting and finishing. The S55 could be assembled from parts already blued, thereby reducing production time and cost considerably. This then was truly an over-and-under for the mass market.

It was a technical advantage that Beretta have exploited to the full ever since, the guns evolving with advances in production into the hugely successful 680 series, in all its myriad forms. In this age of computer controlled manufacture, however, the gun is now itself old



technology. New milling machines can shape wood and metal in ways Marengoni could only dream of, opening up all kinds of technical and stylistic doors. Rivals have emerged who are exploiting this potential in new and exciting ways and clearly Beretta see the need to compete. The new SV10 series guns are the Berettas for the CNC age.

Key Features

The first thing you notice on handling the SV10 Prevail is the subtle reshaping of the famous barrel shoulders. In fact (despite what the brochure copy writers say) they are no longer trapezoids at all, having no parallel sides. I am confident that the new irregular shape should be much more resistant to wear, as the leading edge now has a radius rather than a hard angle. The shoulders on the Prevail are not replaceable, as they are on current higher grade models, so the company clearly does not see them wearing out in a hurry. This shaping is how Marengoni would probably have preferred it, but it is a form that would have been impossible to reproduce consistently using older technology.

The same capability has been used to give the back of the receiver a deeply scalloped profile, although this is more a stylistic detail. The receiver is treated with a nickel based protective coating for high resistance to corrosion.

Inside the receiver we find that the hinge pins have been beefed up, again to prolong life. A subtle detail is the reinforcing shoulder incorporated into the leading edge, at the point of maximum stress.

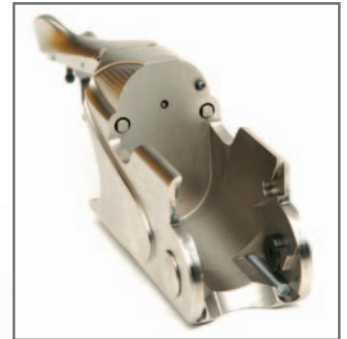
Of particular interest is the way the stock and receiver are attached. Beretta have abandoned the traditional long stock bolt for a system they are calling Q-Stock®. This allows the stock to be removed in seconds using a single key (supplied) inserted through the grip cap. In theory you could change your stock over in the

middle of a competition in about the same time as it takes to change chokes.

The same key can then be used to perform the Prevail's next party trick, as half a turn allows you to detach the complete trigger group from the receiver for simple cleaning and maintenance. It is not quite as quick as dropping the trigger out of a Perazzi, but still gives much greater access than is normal on lower priced guns. It is a very neat and cleverly engineered design and, one suspects, a short step away from a completely detachable system some point down the line. The trigger blade itself is made of mirror polished titanium.

Not having to disturb the recoil pad becomes more important if the gun is ordered with the optional patented Kick Off® recoil reduction system. The Prevail is

the first Beretta over-and-under to be offered with this system, which has some similarities to the proprietary Isis recoil reducer. It too uses oil filled hydraulic damper technology, in this case with twin dampers which smooth out the compression and release of three substantial coil springs. It is a neat



and compact unit that looks little different to a conventional pad when fitted. Beretta has some convincing graphs and video footage on their web site, showing substantial reductions in peak recoil. I have no doubt of their accuracy, although the tests were conducted with 36 gram ammunition which probably accentuated the effects.

At the business end of the gun we find a variation on the expected Optima-Bore® barrel profile. Dubbed Optima-Bore HP (High Performance), the Prevail's barrels have longer forcing cones and are matched to new HP extended chokes. These are longer and slimmer than before and protected by a nickel-alloy coating. Five chokes are supplied, plus the option of a special negative value Skeet choke – they are color coded for ease of

recognition. The bore diameter is 18.6mm (.732"), more open than traditional Beretta barrels but still not a significant degree of over-boring by current standards. All guns are built with 3 inch chambers and the gun can be fitted with 28, 30 or 32 inch tubes.

Also completely new on the Prevail is the ejector work. The extractors have been redesigned to give a larger contact area with the head of the shell, while the ejector legs are reinforced and guided over the full length of the monobloc. For the first time the user has the option of automatic or manual extraction.

With the fore end removed, a screw can be turned a few degrees to switch off full ejection, which I consider an excellent idea. It has always puzzled me why competition guns need to fling spent hulls several feet away with





all the consequent littering problems. Staying with the fore end, we also find not only a modified shape, with a plain semi-beavertail rather than schnabel front end, but also a patented internal mechanism that automatically adjusts to maintain optimum barrel to receiver fit. It is the last of the series of small tweaks that should, together, add significantly to the life of the gun. Berettas are pretty durable anyway but with prolonged heavy use they will shoot loose eventually. Time will tell, but my guess is that these changes will delay that moment still further.

Styling

We have become used to Beretta guns being more overtly 'styled' in recent years and the Prevail continues that trend. Some of it is purely cosmetic – the arrow head shaping on the receiver walls for example – some has ergonomic benefit. The wide head of the top lever certainly falls into this category and the elongated fore end release also gives a smoother action thanks to increased

leverage. The safety catch has a large surface area and includes the sliding barrel selector in time honored Beretta fashion.

The overall look of the gun is sporty but restrained. Clearly great care has been taken over small details and the shaping of areas such as the fences and the flow of lines from receiver to barrels. I like the simple way the stylists have exploited the new technology but not got carried away with it. My launch information also shows a game scene version, which in my view really does not work at all with the strong lines of the receiver. I think the plain option will prove much the stronger seller. The elliptical design theme is continued through the shaping of the checkering, pleasing in form without compromising function. The woodwork is matt finished and with the characteristic dark stain that Beretta favor.

On Test

On the scales, with 30 inch barrels but without the Kick-Off reducer, this gun is exactly 8 lbs. It balances almost exactly on the hinge pin. My personal preference is for more weight overall and more forward bias, so the gun's handling was a little on the quick side for my taste, but within the margins of the fine tuning I would expect to carry out on any off the shelf gun.

I like the fore end's simple shape a lot. Like many shooters I like to extend my fore finger to point along the barrels and

schnabel shapes never feel as comfortable. The open radius of the grip is ideal for a sporting clays gun but I would like the ability to change the position of the trigger. I noticed its absence because the nose of the comb is quite large and with a pronounced undercut that just caught the base of my thumb. Anyone with larger hands than mine might find it uncomfortable. The measurement from the center of the trigger to the nose is one of the minor details of gun fit that is often overlooked and one that I have become more attuned to over the years. On the Prevail the distance is 120mm, whereas my own gun and two others I have to hand with what I would call 'English style' stocks measure 130mm.

The stock has the 35/55 mm drop that is Beretta's factory standard and a good average setting. Length of pull with the factory fitted rubber pad is 14.5" (370mm).

Beretta triggers rarely disappoint, and the Prevail lived up to expectations with pulls that are crisp and sensibly weighted. My gauge showed 4.5 lbs on both barrels, a weight that few would argue with. Even fresh out of the box there was a smoothness to all the controls that speaks of fine tolerances in the machining and good quality control.

A couple of rounds of sporting clays is only ever enough to get a flavor of a new gun, and my initial reaction is that the Prevail has few vices. My test ground throws

tough championship standard targets and the gun was up to the challenge as long as the driver was. Several accomplished shooters gave it a try and all agreed it was a gun most people could adapt to with some ease. That may sound like damning with faint praise, but in this sector of the market, pleasing most of the people most of the time is a virtue.

The SV10 Prevail is an interesting newcomer that ends a quiet period for Beretta in this segment of the market. Most of the development from the existing models has been done with a purpose and done well. How it fits within the Beretta portfolio will be interesting to see in the coming months. The market will ultimately decide, but my bet is that the Prevail/Perennia is the start of the next generation of the long running Beretta dynasty. ■

More information: www.sv10prevail.com