

Vic Harker looks at the guns that give clay shooters the edge

GUN TEST

ON TEST
THIS MONTH:
Beretta 686 White
Onyx Sporting

White lightning

A focus on reliable mechanics, beautiful balance and a high standard of finish means the Beretta White Onyx Sporting comes away shining from its test with Vic Harker

In an age when gun manufacturers endeavour to incorporate more and more bolt-on features into their products, it's a welcome change to review a new gun that eschews gimmickry and instead focuses on the fundamentals of fine balance, reliable mechanical function and a high standard of finish. My test gun this month incorporates all these virtues and never for a moment did I feel I was missing out on anything.

THE ACTION

The Beretta 686 White Onyx Sporting incorporates an action that offers all

the virtues of a quality over-and-under, and yet achieves this at a remarkably low cost. The hammers sit side-by-side and engagement with the sears is very direct, creating the crisp trigger pulls for which Beretta is renowned. It has long been accepted that the very best over-and-unders avoid the clumsy appearance of two barrels placed on top of one another.

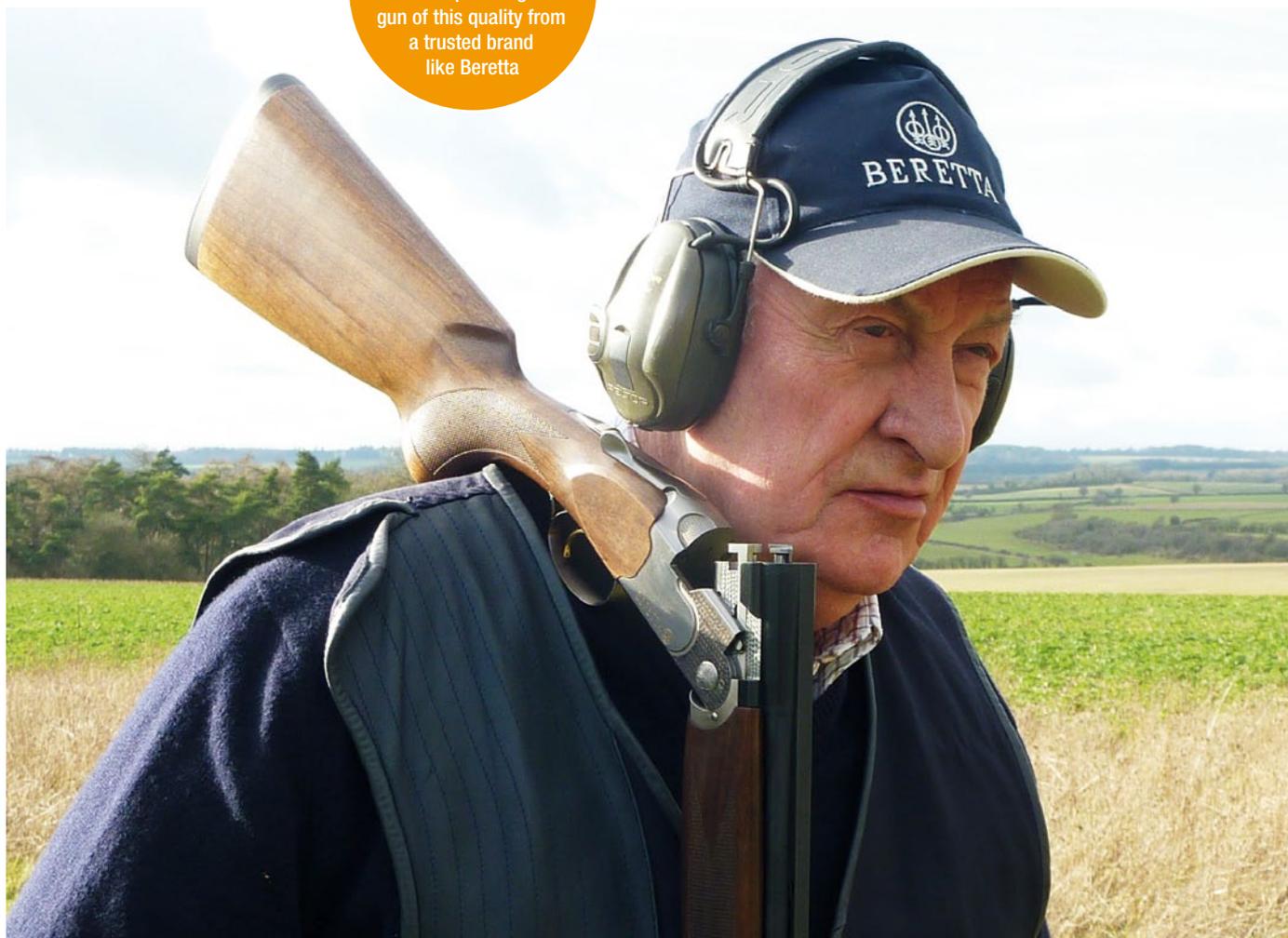
This, however, is usually a costly business to achieve, involving a bifurcated locking bolt moving forward from the breech face to meet with bites or bearing surfaces each side

of the bottom barrel. This design, involving expensive handwork, puts this type of over-and-under beyond most budgets.

The Beretta 686 avoids the costly business of hand-fitting by way of recesses machined each side of the gun's action body, creating shoulders integral to the barrels' monobloc that locate with them on the closing of the gun. It's a sophisticated design, cleverly simplified, but it is still very strong and provides the low-profile action so desirable in the modern over-and-under gun.

In the case of the Onyx, Beretta have also employed modern methods of decoration to

The 686 White Onyx Sporting retails at £1,695 - a very attractive price tag for a gun of this quality from a trusted brand like Beretta





'What constitutes a Sporter stock is dimensionally open to interpretation'

create a distinctive finish for the action body. The raised side panels are highly polished but otherwise left without adornment, except for the Beretta logo picked out in gold. The rest of the action body is covered with a close chequered design that enhances its appearance, together with the trunnion bosses and the sculptured fences that are also suitably engraved. This 686's overall appearance is both distinctive and elegant.

THE STOCK

What constitutes a Sporter stock is dimensionally very much open to interpretation. On the basis that Sporting clay targets should replicate the flight of gamebirds, a Sporter stock should, theoretically, have a configuration that resembles that to be found on a game gun. Would it be that it was as simple as that, but in terms of dimension each manufacturer has their own idea as to what that should be. In the case of the Onyx stock, drop at comb is 55mm, length of pull 37.5mm. There is the minimum amount of right-hand cast, a sensible compromise in my view, but an adjustable comb which is available represents the best option.

The fore-end wood is made to a suitably slim Schnabel, providing excellent manual pointability. As for the quality of the wood, it was close grained, and if stripped of its synthetic finish, the dark figuring would have been even more attractive.

Another benefit of the low-profile action is the fact that it can be stocked with a generous pistol grip, but the hands stay comfortably in line – an advantage that is sometimes missed but is invaluable to providing a coordinated gun mount.

It must be said that even in the case of the best modern gunmakers, relatively recent improvements to the off-the-shelf shotgun have enhanced it immensely. The ever-increasing size and height of the modern shooter has had to be accommodated for, and Beretta has risen to the

task. In the case of the 686 Sporting model, both length of stock and comb height have been revised in recent times with the help, no doubt, of Beretta's sponsored shooters. In general terms, stocks are both longer and comb heights revised, which means a little higher. The adjustable stock, which is now readily available for all Beretta clay target models, is another enlightened step forward to ensuring most shooters can take a Beretta that will fit them properly off the rack.

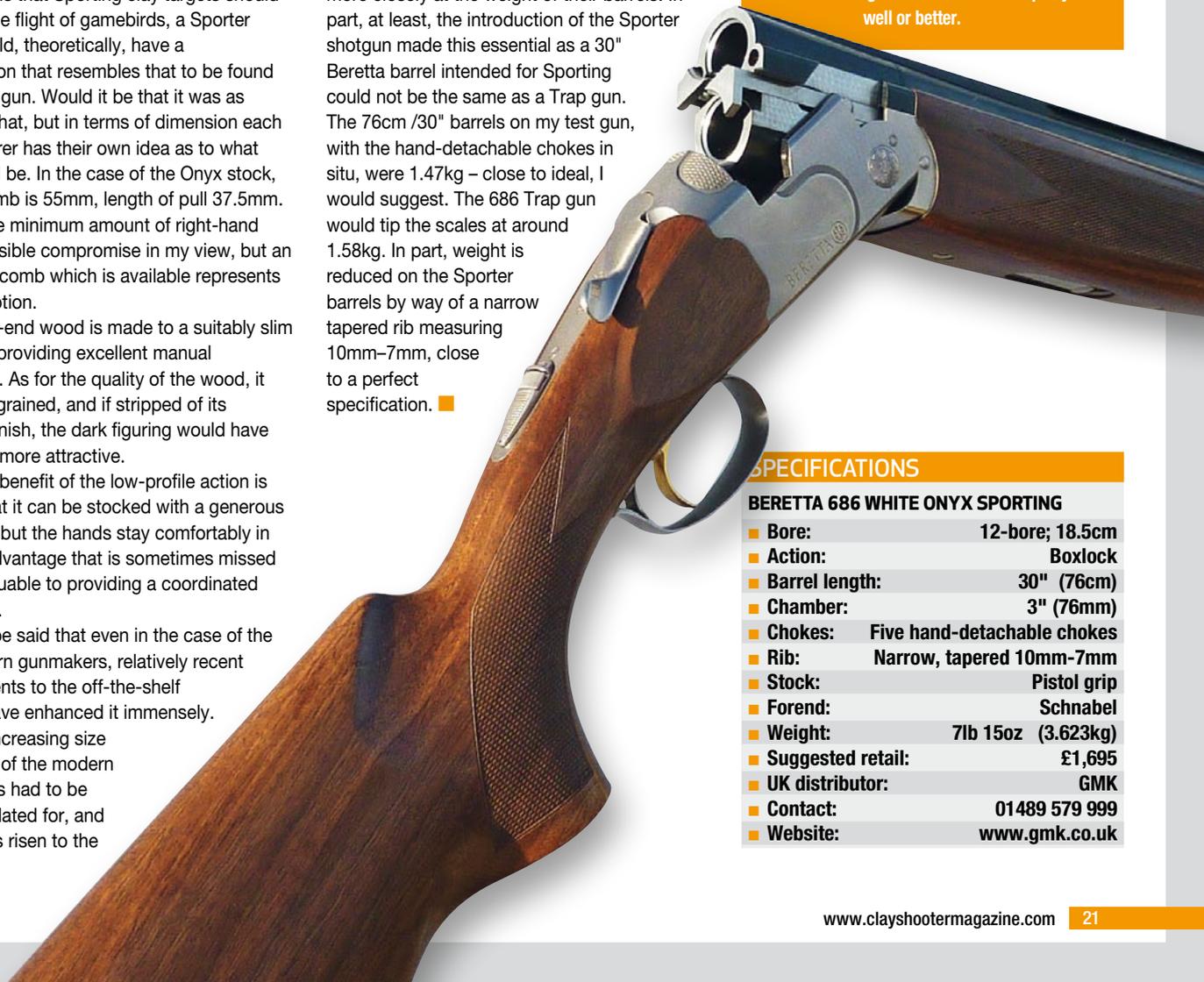
THE BARRELS

In recent times, manufacturers have looked more closely at the weight of their barrels. In part, at least, the introduction of the Sporter shotgun made this essential as a 30" Beretta barrel intended for Sporting could not be the same as a Trap gun. The 76cm /30" barrels on my test gun, with the hand-detachable chokes in situ, were 1.47kg – close to ideal, I would suggest. The 686 Trap gun would tip the scales at around 1.58kg. In part, weight is reduced on the Sporter barrels by way of a narrow tapered rib measuring 10mm–7mm, close to a perfect specification. ■

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

Hefting the Onyx Sporting between my hands, I had no doubt that, with a little application from me, we could break some targets together, and so it proved. We saw the 680 series clay guns come of age some time ago, but there is no doubt that the specifications have been tweaked a little over the years and have now reached a point where there is little room for improvement.

In the case of the Onyx, my impression was that with an all-up weight of 7lb 15oz, the 686 had put on a little weight in the barrels, and it was all the better for it. Half a dozen clays off the high tower and my confidence was rewarded. This Beretta and I worked well together, but the most important factor is that most shooters with a modest degree of skill could do equally as well or better.



SPECIFICATIONS

BERETTA 686 WHITE ONYX SPORTING

■ Bore:	12-bore; 18.5cm
■ Action:	Boxlock
■ Barrel length:	30" (76cm)
■ Chamber:	3" (76mm)
■ Chokes:	Five hand-detachable chokes
■ Rib:	Narrow, tapered 10mm-7mm
■ Stock:	Pistol grip
■ Forend:	Schnabel
■ Weight:	7lb 15oz (3.623kg)
■ Suggested retail:	£1,695
■ UK distributor:	GMK
■ Contact:	01489 579 999
■ Website:	www.gmk.co.uk