

Beretta 687 Silver Pigeon III

Michael Yardley tests the latest version of the popular Beretta over-and-under, more than a million of which have already been sold. He judges it the best Silver Pigeon yet

THIS month's test gun is the latest version of one of Beretta's most popular models – the Silver Pigeon. Designated the 687 Silver Pigeon III, it's a single-selective trigger over-and-under with 'Optima HP' multichokes, 3in (76mm) chambers and steel shot proof. The gun is presented with smart, new, laser-applied, game-scene engraving and improved woodwork. There is an enhanced, oiled finish with better filling of the grain and better colour to the wood (a little darker than previously). It's a noticeable improvement to some earlier Silver Pigeons where wood finish was one of the few areas that might be criticised in a production process normally distinguished by extraordinary quality control.

There is no significant mechanical difference from previous Silver Pigeons. The gun retains a low-profile action with bifurcated lumps, monobloc barrels and hinging on replaceable trunnion studs. The barrels are hammer forged, as ever. Lock-up is achieved by Beretta's clever conical bolts (which, like the hinging studs, are available in various over-sizes to account for future wear almost *ad infinitum*). In other words, this cosmetically improved gun starts with one of the best proven – and now most-popular – over-and-under designs of all time.

The Beretta 600 series stands as an extraordinary success story with more than a million units made to date. The 600 models trace their ancestry to the similar 55 and 56E trigger-plate guns. And, like the 600, they are not properly called 'boxlocks' because the action does not contain the springs and hammers (which are attached to the separate trigger-plate attached to the main action body).

These guns, and the equipment developed to make them in large numbers,

“ This cosmetically improved gun starts with one of the best proven over-and-under designs ever ”

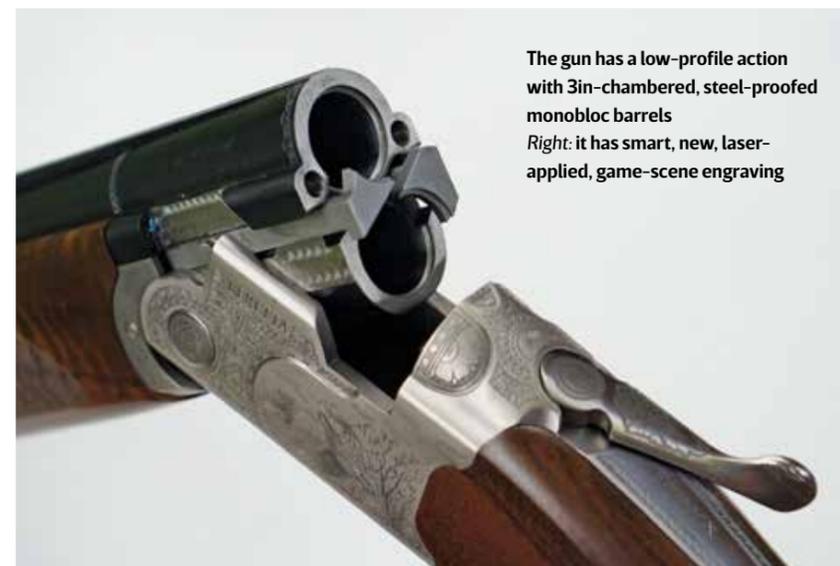
began the Italian gun-making revolution that has so influenced firearms manufacture at all levels ever since. Beretta mastered new techniques of industrial mass manufacture that have now become commonplace. Birmingham developed the 'interchangeable principle', the Gardonne giant took it to a completely new level with rationalised design for modern manufacture and the application of

ever-improving machine and, later, computer-design technology.

Any visitor to the Beretta factory floors today cannot help but be impressed by the vast investment in multi-axis CNC and other computerised machinery. Beretta has an extremely sophisticated research and development department (which now models the human user as well as the gun). It has created machines to simulate long-term use (greatly accelerating the normal wear process), the firm has its own laboratory to test materials and samples from production, and its own branch of the Italian proof house. No other mass manufacturer comes close to it in all these respects, especially in regard to sporting gun manufacture (although Beretta benefits from military experience, too).

Returning to the Silver Pigeon, the first 686, the direct progenitor, appeared in the late 1970s (the first gun in the 600 series, however, was the 680 made for clay shooting). The 680, 686 and other 600s introduced easily replaceable hinge discs. The 500's hinging stud bearings were fitted in place and then hammered over to locate them permanently (the 600 hinge discs just screwed in). The fore-end latch went from a quite basic rolling catch to a Deeley & Edge-type fastener. The action face lost old-fashioned gas check channels (which were intended to relieve pressure but proved to be unnecessary in practice). Most importantly, the cocking rods – the internal means of cocking the action's springs and hammers – were changed from a double fork-like arrangement to simpler, and better, straight rods. The action was also streamlined externally with a rounded bar, and internally, with smoother, easier-to-machine shapes also less inclined to collect debris.

From this sound mechanical foundation a whole range of 68 models came forth (multichokes appearing in the mid 1980s). They may have slightly different specifications but all share this evolved and still current chassis, later supplemented by the SV10 (Perennia and Prevail – now discontinued) and, the most recent and further refined, 690, 692 and 694 guns. ■



The gun has a low-profile action with 3in-chambered, steel-proofed monobloc barrels
Right: it has smart, new, laser-applied, game-scene engraving



**BERETTA 687
SILVER PIGEON III
12-BORE**
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TECHNICAL

The Beretta 600 series are a low-profile, trigger-plate design with bifurcated (split) barrel lumps to either side of the monobloc and trunnion hinging. Hammers are hinged from the bottom and powered by strong coil springs that sit over rods held in place by collets and nuts. The ejector extractors, also coil spring powered, are held into the monobloc by a sliding dovetail system that provides directional stability and strength.

When the trigger is pulled the hammer goes forward, hits the relevant cocking dog (and striker), moving it forward and against the ejector trip in the fore-end. This engages with the ejector extractor. As the gun is opened, the main springs are compressed and the hammers cocked back losing contact with their 'cocking dogs'. The latter then move, allowing the ejector trips in the fore-end to disengage from the ejector extractors, which, under spring pressure, eject spent shells.



SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

If there is one word that sums up Berettas, it is consistent. The test gun shot exactly as expected and consistently well. Build quality was good. The gun had a slightly forward balance, like most multichokes. Recoil was softer than average with an 18.5mm bore suited to plastic or fibre wads. The grip offered good purchase (and seemed improved). The gun was a little heavy for the field at 7½lb, although still an excellent weight for a machine-made 12-bore with multichoked, 30in barrels. The 6mm ventilated rib presented a good picture. I liked the plain metal brass bead. It was a whisker low in the comb for me but that did not impact the shooting greatly and little was missed. Overall, this is an excellent, strongly built and proofed gun at a sensible price. A useful all-rounder, it is the best Silver Pigeon yet.

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