

It's a shotgun built to the Italian giant's usual standards – and well worth the wait for WLSS's **Mark Heath**.

Beretta SL3



A brand new model from the Beretta dynasty is not something that comes along every day. I first laid eyes on the SL3 when it was launched with much fanfare at IWA last year. Since then, I've been keen to have a closer look and put the gun through its paces.

First impressions are important and the SL3 does not disappoint. This is a completely new product in the range that brings together the mass production of the Silver Pigeon and 690 series with the hand finishing of the SO premium Beretta range.

Beretta runs two manufacturing lines at the factory in Brescia, simply named 1 and 2. The first runs the mass production of the popular models, focusing on CNC production. The second is where all the skilled handwork

is completed on the top-of-the-range SO models. The SL3 is unique in that the parts are made on the CNC production line in factory 1 and hand finished and assembled in 2. The gun could be described as a boxlock that has been breathed on in the custom area of the factory. The locking system and ejectors are similar to that of the SO 10 and it has a whole raft of features to ensure that the gun will last, such as the easy replacement of key parts, including the main bolt, the locking shoulders, hinge stubs and the bases of the lower locking lugs.

The gun on test is a 30in fixed-choke version; there are Optima multichoke versions and also 32in barrels in the 12-bore version. The gun weighed in at 7lb 14oz with a barrel weight of 1,478g. Some would say this is slightly heavy

In the field

For the gun test, I selected a variety of cartridges, from 21gram to 36gram loads, and started the test on the 40ft tower with the light loads. The handling was neutral with no hidden vices. The gun moved well and the patterns were certainly excellent and consistent.

Onto the partridge clays, which the SL3 was equally adept at turning into a fine dust. These were followed by the high tower. This can be shot from four different locations simultaneously and on one particular side some extreme clays can be launched. Using a combination of 24gram and 36gram loads the gun showed no shortcomings, and even with just the ¼ and

½ fixed chokes the clays were vaporised.

The weight of the gun was perfect and absorbed the increased recoil exceptionally well. Next, I tried a few rather quick downwind grouse on the new layouts at the shooting school using some 28gram game loads. The SL3 performed very well on some fast clays at all angles.

One small niggle, common on Berettas, is the barrel selector being inadvertently moved across to fire the top barrel first as you operate the top lever.

The ejectors were effective and well timed, and the trigger pulls had a quality feel with appropriate pressure and crispness when operating.



Engraving is done using a five-axis laser.

for a game gun in both the overall and barrel weight but let's see how it handles later.

The stock measurements were pretty much what we have come to expect from Beretta at around 14¾in to the mid-point with an extra ⅛in at heel and ¼in at toe. The drop measurements were slightly higher than normal with 1¼in at the comb, 2in at the heel and

¼in cast off at heel. If I was in the market for a gun or, in a moment of generosity to myself, a pair in this price bracket, under no circumstances would I buy off the shelf but have factory-made, bespoke stocks after a full gun fitting.

The wood quality on the test gun was exceptional, showing excellent figuring with an English style rounded fore-end, a style I favour. The grip is slightly open semi-pistol grip, the barrels have a solid mid-rib and a narrow ventilated game style top rib; on the 32in barrel versions there is a tapered rib. The wood-to-metal fit is exceptional and the result, I am sure, of the hand assembly.

There are a number of engraving options. The test gun featured an English scroll design that was well executed and elegant; other options are a floral scroll design, a traditional game scene or there's a highly polished mirror finish available on special order – possibly an acquired taste.

Barrels are the familiar Optima Bore HP steelium with 3in chambers proofed for all shot types and the ejectors come from the SO 10. Multichoke versions use the higher grade Optima HP chokes, as used on competition guns. Triggers are similar to those used on the DT11, a premium competition gun, with leaf springs although not detachable.

So where does the SL3 sit in the Beretta catalogue? Clearly

Scores

Engineering: 9/10

The engineering on this new Beretta shotgun is exceptional; clearly a lot of thought has gone into utilising the best features from the premium guns.

Looks and finishing: 10/10

Overall appearance is exceptional, in particular the wood-to-metal fit is first class. The engraving is detailed and well finished; the game scene would be my preference, the mirror finish special order option is a little too flashy for my taste.

Handling: 9/10 This was very good on the test gun, however, under no circumstances would I order this gun without a custom stock from the factory after a full gun fitting with a try gun. This gives you additional options such as specifying the point of balance, giving you a magnificent gun for all of your shooting. This gun, set up correctly, would cover every aspect of your shooting: partridges, pheasants, grouse, duck

and clays. My personal choice would be a 32in with a tapered rib and, if you are offering, could I please have the same in 20-bore?

Reliability and customer service: 10/10

The SL3 brings together the precise CNC production methods and the skilled crafts for the assembly, a perfect combination for a first-class gun. Beretta has been around since 1526 so its reputation proceeds it. The firm's guns are the go-to default position for many game and clay shooters. Customer service and backup in the UK is provided by GMK, which has an excellent reputation for customer service. We use them for any warranty issues and the turnaround is quick and efficient.

Value: 10/10 When you look at the detail in engineering, engraving, woodwork and finish it is easy to understand why the price is around £18,000. Comparable guns would be a Perazzi or a Browning B15 or B25. They are all good guns, it's down to personal choice. **Overall: 48/50**

above EELL territory, which comes in at around £6,500, and just under half the price of the cheapest SO game gun, with the SO6 EELL priced at just under

£42,000. Clearly a lot of thought has gone into the aesthetics and the design of critical function parts on this gun, but does the Beretta SL3 work? Look left. ■



The SL3 is available with a mirror-polished finish as a special order option.



The top lever has a unique shape.