

# Beretta SL3 over-and-under

This new, upmarket model is certain to attract positive attention, thinks Michael Yardley, who was impressed by its mechanical design and found it crisp in action and solid in build

THIS month's test gun will arouse some special interest because it is a new, upmarket model from industry giant Beretta. The gun in question is the SL3 over-and-under. Prototypes were built last year and the first guns arrived in this country a few months ago. It is a sophisticated, trigger-lock design with sideplates. It begins a new generation with concepts taken from both the SO10, with which it shares a similar bolting system and V-springs, and the DT11, which has a similar sear arrangement internally and a similar safety-catch.

First impressions are good. The new gun has a quality look and feel to it. The action proportions please. The quality of finish is impeccable and the engineering appears sound with precise machining, as has become the modern CNC norm. The trigger lock (which is not quick detachable but looks as if it were originally designed to be) is very neat. The deep scroll engraving, which is achieved by five-axis laser technology, is especially attractive (and there are tight-scroll and game-scene options available,

too). The woodwork also impresses with good shapes and figure (and guns may be ordered with bespoke stocks).

The SL3 continues the modern trend for heavier game guns, weighing it at 7lb 14oz. It feels solid rather than heavy, though my preference would be for an all-up weight a

“ This gun has the potential for greatness... it might be used equally well for clays or game; it would excel as a high-pheasant gun ”

few ounces lighter (7½lb is about my ideal for a 30in, 12-bore game gun; a pound or so less for a 30in 20). The SL3 does have clean lines, however, impressive mechanical presentation and pleasing balance a fraction

back from the knuckle. The trigger-pulls are especially crisp, both breaking just over 4lb. The V-spring design no doubt assists with this – with V-springs, guns have less compromise with regard to sear angles than when helical springs are employed.

What does quality cost? Beretta is clearly pitching the SL3 towards the carriage trade, but it has a price that is not too frightening: £18,725 as tested with fixed chokes (£18,875 multichoked). It is significantly more attainable than the SO6 sidelock, which begins from £41,525 these days, or the SO10, which now starts at £72,625. By way of comparison, the new Purdey Trigger Plate gun begins at £55,000 plus VAT; a Purdey sidelock over-and-under would leave no change from £150,000 once the Chancellor's cut had been paid. Meanwhile, gold numbered and specially cased pairs of SL3s are available from £43,750 (the supplement for a pair is about 15%).

Returning to the specification, the SL3 has 3in-chamber, “Steelium” tri-alloy barrels. They are deep drilled from cold-hammer forgings and vacuum stress relieved. Made to the Beretta HP scheme, you would have to go a long way to find anything better (or tougher) regardless of cost. The barrels have a special profile and are fleur-de-lys proofed and compatible with all types of shot, including steel. Forcing cones are conventional at about 50mm but it is notable that the monobloc on the SL3 is longer than previous models from this stable (the SO10 dispenses with a monobloc and has demi-lump barrels).

The woodwork was unconventional in one respect: the test gun was supplied unchequered. This I believe was a design concept from Italy to accentuate the streamlined looks. I think, however, that you need chequering for full purchase at the grip. Happily, future guns for the British will have conventional diamonds and borders. An unchequered grip is always a test of its shape, though. This one passed well. It was a good size and not too acutely radiused. The standard stock measurements were on the money, too. The length of pull was 14¾in with 1¾in and 2in of drop at the front of the comb and heel respectively. Set by Beretta, this is increasingly the industry standard for over-and-unders. ■

This SL3 has 3in-chambered, fixed-choke, “Steelium” tri-alloy barrels deep drilled from cold-hammer forgings  
Right: the attractive, deep-scroll engraving is achieved by five-axis laser technology



**BERETTA SL3  
12-BORE**  
◆ RRP: £18,725  
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◆ 01489 579999  
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## TECHNICAL

The SL3 has a most intriguing action. It has a trigger-lock assembly that, as noted, looks as if it might have been intended to be quick detachable originally, like a DT10 or 11 (or Perazzi). The design and execution are impeccable. The lock-up system is new (but similar to an SO10). A bolt about halfway down the standing breech engages with protrusions on the lower section of the monobloc, which locate into the breech-face. On the barrel there are two replaceable studs, “lower hooks” to allow for tightening the gun with over-sizes in the future. The V-type mainsprings allow for a faster lock time as well as crisper pulls. There are new-style ejectors similar to those of the SO10, held into the chamber area/monobloc on a dovetail running right the way through. The monobloc itself is quite long. There is new top-lever with a tapered profile to its rear.



## SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

The SL3 was sound when shot. The good balance and trigger-pulls made it user friendly and the good stock shapes assisted, too. Even without chequering the gun was controllable and recoil through the hands (or at the shoulder) was not especially noticeable. It had the feel of an upmarket gun – crisp in action and solid in build. On the handling front, it was not especially lively – sometimes a good thing – but its fundamental engineering and conception were sound. If I bought one, I might be tempted to get a master barrel-maker to take a little weight out of the tubes. I might lighten the stock as well. With such custom work, the SL3 could become something spectacular. As tested, it is good or better but the gun has the potential for greatness. I was impressed with the mechanical design and the general presentation. It is not excessively expensive considering the quality. This gun might be used equally well for clays or game; it would excel as a high-pheasant gun and is supplied in a smart blue canvas hard case.

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