

FROM
£1,700

BENELLI LUPO IN .308

Paul Austin takes a look at Benelli's ultra-modern sporter - and he loves it!

Benelli is not a name you usually associate with bolt actions as they've made their name in the shotgun world, but that doesn't mean they're new to the rifle game by any means. They already produce the Argo range of semi-auto large-calibre driven-boar rifles for the European market, but this is their first bolt action - and it's a definitely a little different.

BELOW: The Lupo, an ultra-modern stalking rifle at a very reasonable price

I initially saw the Lupo at the UK launch event and it's been on the back burner ever since. The plan was to produce a hunting video to illustrate the Lupo in action, but endless delays caused by Covid repeatedly put a spanner in those works. Now, however, we're finally ready to take a look at this ground-breaking rifle both in print and on screen.

I really like Benelli's approach. They're known for what might be considered outlandish but often inspired ideas in their shotgun range and that mentality has clearly carried over to their new bolt action. They're a bit like the Lamborghini of the shooting world. If they think it's a good idea they just go with it, ignoring convention when needed, and that definitely applies to the Lupo.

INSPIRED ENGINEERING

Working from the recoil pan forward we arrive at the first bit of inspiration, namely the Progressive Comfort recoil system, which can be seen within the main stock. It's almost like a leaf spring design within a standalone module, with interlocking plastic elements that flex under recoil just enough to take the sting out of the shot. It works really well, with this .308 feeling very much like a .243 in terms of felt recoil.

The butt plate has the option for inserts to adjust the length of pull, two of which are included with the rifle, adjusting the LOP from 13.8" to 14.7", while the nicely textured rubber butt pad offers just the right amount of give and grip. There's also a rubberised (Combtech) cheek piece that's interchangeable with the flat unit seen here to either a medium or high comb.



PICTURES: PAUL AUSTIN



The next innovation, or more accurately adaptation, is the adjustability between the action and the butt stock. Just like the recoil system, this has been adopted from Benelli's semi-auto shotgun range and allows you to adjust both the cast and drop of the butt by means of inserts or shims at the union between the butt stock and the action. It's a simple but inspired cross-over idea that takes a tried-and-tested concept from the shotgun world and applies it to a rifle. And why not? It works perfectly.

There's an all-aluminium lower receiver (if you will), on top of which sits the steel barrelled action. Both stock and forend are a composite polymer that has a fish-scale chequered finish,

TOP: Real innovation across the board and the mag is certainly no exception

ABOVE LEFT: The bolt and bolt handle design are superb and scalloped in the middle to save weight and add style

ABOVE RIGHT: Integrated Pic rails make mounting any scope really easy

\\ WHAT'S REMARKABLE ABOUT THIS NEW DESIGN IS BENELLI'S CONFIDENCE IN IT //

again seen on Benelli shotguns, which is applied in all the right places along with a nicely scalloped shape to the forend.

What's remarkable about this new design is Benelli's confidence in it, with a whopping 10-year guarantee on the mechanics plus a staggering 25-year rust-free guarantee on the barrelled action. I've never come across such assurances before on any rifle, so it seems Benelli have a lot of confidence

in their bespoke BE.S.T. (Benelli surface treatment) finish, which is applied on all the steel components.

There's a simple rear-for-safe, forward-to-fire tang safety, showing a red dot when cocked. A small steel button on the right side of the action allows you to retract the bolt and any chambered round, even with the safety engaged.

On the left side there's a slim bolt-release button that allows you to

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ABOVE: A five-shot double-stacked mag with a flush fit to the forend. Very stylish!

ABOVE RIGHT: The taticool bolt design shares the same finish as the action



remove the reassuringly chunky bolt, which is slightly scalloped to reduce weight. It's a three-lug 60° lift affair that's again coated with the B.E.S.T. finish seen on the action and barrel. The bolt handle is very angular and raked back aggressively, and like everything else on the rifle it's very stylish but also completely functional, falling nicely to hand. More importantly it's as smooth as silk in operation.

The top of the action sports two Picatinny rails in the style of two action bridges either side of the ejection port, but I believe there's also an option for a full-length rail if required. Beneath that sits the very unusual and angular Lamborghini-esque magazine well and accompanying mag.

This is another striking feature of the design, fitting flush to the rifle and holding five double-stacked rounds in .243, .270, .308, 6.5CM, 6.5 PRC or

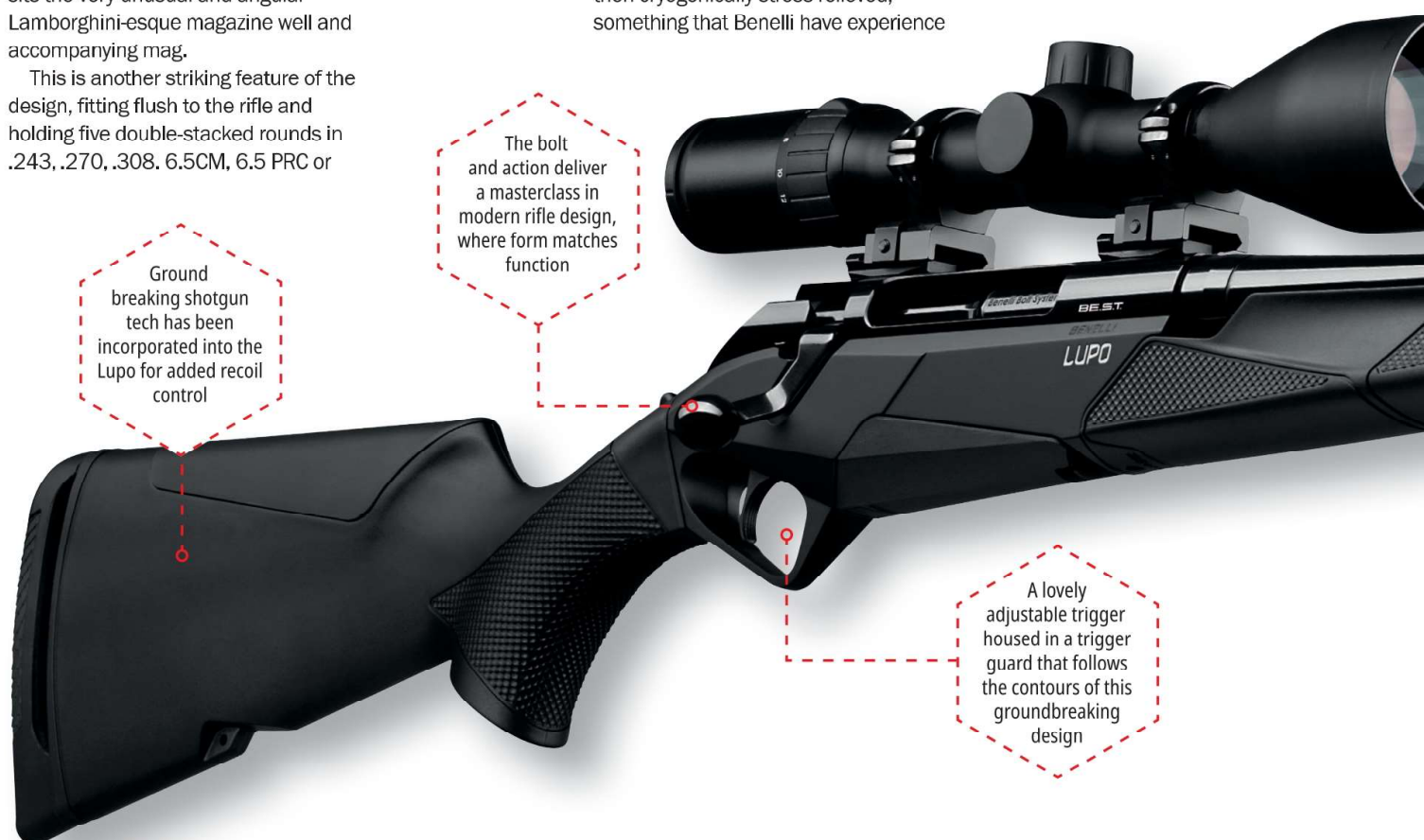
7mm Rem mag and four in .300 Win mag. The .300 Win, 6.5 PRC, 7mm Rem Mag and 6.5CM models boasting 24" barrels while the others offer 22". All variants are threaded at 5/8x24 with twist rates varying according to calibre; 1-11 in the case of the .308 on test.

Loading is effortless with this funky looking mag and you also have the option to push-feed ammo into the mag either detached or installed in the rifle. You can also just drop individual rounds straight into the ejection port and simply slide the bolt home for bench work.

The barrel is hammer forged and then cryogenically stress relieved, something that Benelli have experience

in with their shotgun barrels and chokes. It's connected to the action via a very sizable barrel nut, with the barrel itself free-floating all the way up to it.

The trigger is adjustable from 2.2-4.4lb, with a slightly rounded and serrated front face. Out of the box it was fine for me, so I felt no need to tinker with it. Best of all, it's completely free from creep and breaks beautifully with minimal overtravel. The trigger guard is part of the reassuringly strong, single-piece aluminium receiver section, again styled to match the angular look of the rifle as a whole, and there's plenty of room within.



Ground breaking shotgun tech has been incorporated into the Lupo for added recoil control

The bolt and action deliver a masterclass in modern rifle design, where form matches function

A lovely adjustable trigger housed in a trigger guard that follows the contours of this groundbreaking design



The angular bolt handle is definitely a little different, but once installed it compliments the rifle perfectly



The only slight oddity are the integrated swivel mounts front and rear rather than the traditional sling studs, but as you're probably starting to appreciate, there's nothing traditional about the Lupo. Fortunately there is a sling stud location point on the forend, so it is quite straightforward to add a mounting point for a bipod but as this is a loaner I didn't want to tinker with it too much and shot off bags during testing.

OUT ON THE RANGE

Benelli are guaranteeing sub-MOA performance with quality factory ammo, and all the loads

tested certainly achieved that. With a bit of effort at the reloading bench I'm fairly confident you could half that 1" MOA promise.

The Progressive Comfort system really tamed this .308 and it was a pleasure to shoot, not only from a comfort perspective but also in terms of seeing impacts on target thanks to the minimal muzzle flip and reduced recoil. I teamed the Lupo with the new Ranger 8 scope from Steiner, which is an exceptional hunting scope and perfect for anyone who wants to stretch the legs of the Lupo.

Up front I added a Stalon X moderator, which again was a great fit for the

ABOVE: A big ejection port and those all-important easy-fit Picatinny rails up top!

Lupo, reducing muzzle flip and indeed the bark of this .308 considerably. I experienced no bolt stuttering, jams or difficulties throughout testing, with easy feeds and strong ejection of spent brass. It really is a nicely engineered rifle right across the board.

It certainly isn't a classic sporter in the stylistic sense, but it may well become something of a classic in its own right. It's great to see some real innovation in terms of rifle design and Benelli need to be applauded for producing one of the most unique and technically excellent rifles I've seen in a long time. Is there a downside? Yes, alas they don't do it for lefties like me. If they did, I'd already be trying to sneak one into the cabinet without the other half finding out! **RS**

CONTACT

GMK

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Steiner's Ranger 8 scope was the perfect partner for the Lupo. Cutting-edge stalking tech across the board

A nicely scalloped forend that employs the same fishscale-style chequering as seen on the rest of the stock

A slim hammer-forged barrel, which like all the other metalwork enjoys a massive 25-year guarantee

TECH SPECS

Action:	Bolt action
Barrel length:	22"
Overall length:	44.225"
Twist rate:	1 in 11"
Threaded:	5/8 x 24
Adjustable:	13.8-14.75"
Calibre:	.308 Win (multiple calibres available)
Stock:	Two-piece black synthetic
Weight:	3.2kg
Trigger:	Single stage
Magazine:	Five-shot polymer