Recoil-friendly, rugged, reliable, customizable and fast!

SHE'S READY TO HUNT!

Any mention of a semi-automatic on a hunting trip will certainly scare most of the veteran hunters back into their treestands. It seems that in previous years this type of hunting rifle was not very accurate, somewhat unreliable and although some claimed it, recoil was not as soft as the technical people stated in their white-paper reports.

Over the years, things have changed for the better. Semi-autos are seen more and more in the hunting fields due to its short bolt lockup, consistent trigger pull, and more engineering time. I know from experience in shooting both the Browning BAR and the Remington Model 7400, that yes, they’re fun to shoot but you are going to be impressed with today’s automatic weapons. However, the fact still remains that all guns will malfunction if proper maintenance is not applied. Sure, the autoloader is a bit more finicky, but that’s the nature of the beast, especially when more parts are moving around inside the gun as compared to, say a pump or lever gun. Finally, if you shoot so much on a big game hunt that you are worried about a few spent casings moving out towards the pucker brush (read: headloader), then perhaps you should look at something other than a semi-automatic sporting rifle.

New products come and go and it’s refreshing to see something up to date appear on the market within the narrow confines of autoloading weapons. Under this heading, you will find the Benelli gas-operated rifle called the R1—engineered for the serious hunter in mind. To make this all happen, Benelli has chambered the gun in the .30-06 Springfield, .300 Winchester and now in the .338 Winchester Magnum calibers. In addition and along with a whole list of options, this is going to be one reliable gun in the field for nimrods and veterans alike.

FORMIDABLE FIT & FINISH

Fully assembled and out of its plastic hard case, this rifle is striking. The lines make it look like a very talented Italian design team got a hold of it—which they did—and upgraded it the way turn-of-the-century guns should look. The overall styling is certainly different, if not unique, with its rakish forend, scalloped recoil pad and very unusual receiver profile that in general reminds me of a cross between the Browning BAR and Remington 7400 in short. The fit, finish, overall quality and its uncluttered design will move you right into the 21st century immediately—and out to the game fields in a hurry!

If you happen to miss or wound a trophy bird with the first shot, the Benelli R1 is loaded and ready to follow-up shots. Its ARGO operating system can fire up to nine rounds before you stay on target.
The two-piece stock is exciting and currently you have a choice of Realeone APG, black synthetic or A-grade wal-nut. In profile, it should appeal to many American shooters. The length of pull is 14 inches from the face of the trigger to the rear of the recoil pad, which is part of a trio of innovations circling around Benelli's ComforTech system of recoil reduction—stated to reduce felt recoil by as much as 48 percent over the competition. Starting with this pad, it is designed with the physical stature of each shooter, so much in fact that the pad is not only soft to the touch but it has been engineered for both right- and left-handed shooters in mind. The pad has been designed and shaped to fit the particular contour of each shooter for maximum comfort and contact on the shoulder. The next step is the stock itself. Those chevron-shaped slots you see in the stock are actually filled with rubber, which allows the stock to give during recoil, dampening the rearward movement of the gun towards the shooter and pushing it away from the shooter's face. Combined with a more open cut at the base of the stock near the pistol grip, when shooting the R1, the stock in effect will flex with the force of this rearward movement to cushion the recoil. Finally, you have a choice of heights on the comb, again dictated by the soft rubber insert of varying heights to fit the contours of your face. The total effect of these three layers of protection are unique to the R1, and I find one sees it all as a positive move for those who may be sensitive to recoil.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR R1

Still another interesting feature of the R1 is that the stock is adjustable to meet any physical problem you may have. For instance, if the length of pull is too long, the recoil pad can be changed for a long or shorter one. While this is an extra-cost part, it invites the owner to almost custom-make the gun to his own shooting preferences. Another innovation is the fact that spacers can be employed between the buttstock and receiver to compensate for different movement—such as when you need to raise or lower the comb (pistol) for a better sight through the scope. Removal and subsequent reattachment of these parts are as easy as removing the pad, then a stock retaining and out-experimenting with the bag of shots that comes as standard equipment with the R1. The stock itself has a comfortable sweep to the pistol grip that is very in fashion today, and it has been slinned down and finished to fit both right- and left-handed shooters equally. An embossed checkering pattern helps you hold the gun in demned circumstances and being rather distinctive, it runs completely around the pistol grip. For field carry, a sling swivel hole has been molded in not far from the toe of the stock. The forend shows the same amount of detail and care in both fit and finish. It is tapered forward to allow a more comfortable grip on the work hand and has deep finger grooves for control. The base of the forend is broad, allowing it to fit the hand comfortably or allow for use in a field set. The same Realeone finish has been applied: checkering covers both sides and surrounds the bottom of the forearm in a modern point pattern. There is a finely executed "S" curve in the molded forearm where it meets the receiver, and up front is the attachment nut that secures it to the receiver of the gun.

The lines of the R1 aluminum-based receiver makes it very attractive to the eye. Compared to others in its class, this receiver only measures about 2 inches from top to bottom sans magazine. When you include the stylish magazine, you are only looking at another inch in total. The bottom part of the magazine serves as a bumper of sorts in that it allows plenty of purchase when inserting it into the host receiver. When you need to charge the weapon, no matter the condition, there is plenty of bottom plastic to hold and guide it into the magazine well, even with winter gloves on.

To release the magazine, push inward on the release lever located at the front of the triggerguard. To reinsert it, attach the front of the magazine to the receiver and then lever it up and into the receiver. Keep in mind, this gun is made for rough treatment in the field, and a good hard push is required to secure it to the gun after loading. In mind, the magazine is only-issued in a capacity of four rounds for standard cartridges, three for Magnum. The magazine itself is double-column in design with a capacity of four rounds for standard cartridges, three for Magnums.

CONTROLS & ACTION

Shooter controls are handy, to say the least. Within the greaterboard, a crossbow safety locks both the trigger and sear. It is reversible so left-handed shooters need not be left out. Forward of that is the bolt release, which, upon pulling back on the open bolt while pressing this lever downward, allows the bolt to move forward. For a hunting rifle, I like the idea of a two-stage trigger as installed on the R1—pulling it slightly to the rear until it stops, then all the way back to fire the weapon. At this point, it broke at 5 pounds consistently with a minimum of take-up before releasing. On the right side of the receiver, the letters ARGO are spelled out. These four letters stand for Auto-Regulating Gas Sys- tems, whose move forward for those who may be sensitive to recoil.

***SPECIFICATIONS***

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<th>BENELLI R1</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CALIBER:</strong></td>
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<th><strong>PERFORMANCE</strong></th>
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<td><strong>LOADED CARTRIDGE:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>HORNADY 180 Grain Light Magnum</strong></td>
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<td><strong>WINCHESTER 150 Grain Power Point</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Note:</strong> Bullet weight measured in grains, velocity in FPR by Oehler-35P chronograph, and accuracy in inches for three-shot groups at 100 yards.</td>
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***FIGURE 2***

With the forend removed, the complete system is exposed for maintenance. From right to left, you have the barrel lock follower, gas collector cylinder, gas regulator, the rear by the bolt follower pin which rotate the bolt.

***FIGURE 3***

From under the gun, we see how both the bolt handle base and receiver fit neatly inside the receiver. For maintenance, it is just a simple matter of pulling out the operating lever on the bottom, then sliding the whole bolt out of the rear of the receiver.

***FIGURE 4***

This massive bolt is part of the new Benelli R1. Note the three lug, the pinned follower at one o'clock and extractor at seven o'clock.

***FIGURE 5***

When the gun is assembled and the bolt is moved forward, the follower pins should be extracted and made contact with the fins on the gas collector assembly.

Looking closely, we notice that the Benelli R1 has a very distinctive bolt head. Its overly large locking lugs go a long way in keeping the gun from malfunctioning by simply ignoring small amounts of debris if they are lodged in the breech. Three rather large locking lugs at much better than six or eight smaller ones, a fact that I'm sure Benelli learned from its MI-36c shotgun designs. Inside the bolt face, a plunger type piston and an extractor are contained.

Upon moving back, the piston assembly makes contact with a pair of bolt follower pins that then set the bolt body itself rearward and allows the gas piston and then lever it up and into the receiver. Keep in mind, this gun is made for rough treatment in the field, and a good hard push is required to secure it to the gun after loading. In mind, the magazine itself is double-column in design with a capacity of four rounds for standard cartridges, three for Magnums.

***FIGURE 6***

The magazine holds four rounds of .300 Springfield ammunition or three rounds of .30-06 Winchesters and .308 Winchester Magnums. It easily is installed or removed.

***FIGURE 7***

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The red pointer is shown here against the shims that allow the shooter to raise and lower the pitch of the stock to fit his or her average build. Located between the stock and receiver, they can be installed by simply removing the recoil pad and stock retaining nut from the back of the stock.

A longer period of time in an aid to making the apparent recoil that much softer. Since, in all probability, you will be taking game in a modified off-hand position (against a tree, off a backpack), those with any physical problems are going to love this gun.

With factory ammunition, accuracy was in line with most of the other semi-automatic rifles I have tested. On the other hand, handloading does have its advantages and I know for a fact that with my Browning BAR, working on my loads netted me groups at one MOA or less at 100 yards. With factory loads and a fresh barrel, all groups averaged out to around 2 inches for the morning, which again can be tightened by just finding the right commercial ammunition.

The way the gun fired, grouped and handled put me in a position where I could not fault this gun. It is made to be customized by the owner with various recoil pads, comb heights, length of pull and drop—something seldom seen today. As mentioned, accuracy is not a problem; a little work here and there and can shrink groups with any gun. The only thing you have to watch for is making sure the gun is cleaned thoroughly, since the operation of this piece is determined by cleanliness. With the ease in which the gun can be disassembled for cleaning and reassembled again, that is the least of your worries.

I find the Benelli R1 a pleasure to shoot and to have in any hunting battery. It is well made, fits right into our modern times, and if I see any hunters running for their treesstands, they are missing out on a great sporting rifle. ☮

For More Information

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