Benelli's M2 TACTICAL

**Benelli M2 Tactical**

- **Type:** Semi-auto, inertia-operated
- **Capacity:** 5+1
- **Gauge:** 12 (3 in.)
- **Barrel Length:** 18.5 in.
- **Overall Length:** 39.75 in.
- **Weight:** 6.7 lbs.
- **Sights:** Ghost-ring sights with three-dot tritium inserts. Drilled and tapped for a scope-mounting base.
- **Finish:** Matte black
- **Stock:** Synthetic pistol grip with 14.3-inch length of pull
- **Finish:** Matte black
- **MSRP:** $1,200
- **Manufacturer:** Benelli USA
- **Phone:** 301/283-6981
- **Website:** www.benelliusa.com
If this clean-burning, recoil-operated auto isn't the perfect "Doomsday Gun," it comes pretty darn close.

By Greg Rodriguez

No other weapon system is as misunderstood as the shotgun. We've all heard gun store gurus extolling the blunderbuss' alleged point-and-shoot virtues. "Fire a load of buck down the hall and it'll lay low everything in sight," sage gunstore commandos often counsel. As ridiculous and inaccurate as those assertions are, there is no doubt that the 12 gauge's gaping maw is an intimidator. The distinctive sound that is made when landing home a round has stopped more than a few fights, too.

But the shotgun is not all bluster. In the right hands, the 12 gauge is a devastating fight-stopper.

I've trained with fighting shotguns for almost two decades. From cursory, old-school police academy instruction to a high-speed Blackwater course, I've spent an awful lot of time behind defensive shotguns of every stripe. Benelli's M2 Tactical, the subject of this review, is among the best.

HEART OF A WARRIOR

Benelli's simple, reliable, inertia-operated action is the heart of the M2 Tactical. Unlike conventional gas systems that belch unburned powder and gases back into the action, the M2's inertia-operated action vents the barrel, resulting in a cooler- and cleaner-running gun. Heat and crud are not conducive to reliability; eliminating them gives the M2 a leg up on the competition.

Its inertia-operated action also uses fewer moving parts than gas guns, which means there are less things to wear or break. In fact, the M2's action breaks down into just three main parts for cleaning—bolt body, inertia spring and rotating bolt head—though it can be further disassembled if need be.

Fewer parts and a cooler, cleaner action combine to make the Benelli as reliable as any shotgun I've tested. And that reliability isn't limited to a certain type of load. Benelli claims its guns will run with everything from field loads to three-inch magnum loads with 100 percent reliability, though I've found that high-brass six shot is about the minimum required to make an inertia-operated 12 gauge sing.

The M2 Tactical I tested has an 18.5-inch cryogenically treated barrel that's threaded for Benelli's Crio chokes. Beneath it, a five-round magazine tube stops four inches shy of the muzzle. Because it hides no springs or gas cylinders, the forearm is slimmer, with a dimpled underside for a sure purchase with slippery hands. A front sight with a tritium insert and rugged wings rides atop the barrel.

A ghost-ring rear sight with two tritium dots and a pair of steel wings to protect the aperture sits atop the receiver. All M2s are drilled and tapped for scope mounts. This one came from the factory with a 1913-spec rail already attached.

The M2's trim, aluminum receiver houses its rugged, lightweight action. The rotating bolt head's steel lugs lock up solidly into the barrel. An oversize, triangular safety button sits just aft of the triggerguard. The cartridge drop lever is just ahead of the triggerguard on the right side of the receiver. It drops down to reveal a red warning dot that serves as a cocking indicator. The carrier control button is just below the front of the ejection port.

The M2 Tactical's buttstock is my favorite shotgun stock. It is robust and ergonomic, though I'd lop it off to a more body-armor-friendly length if it were mine. I am particularly fond of the pistol grip, which makes manipulating the shotgun much easier than with a conventional stock. The pistol-grip stock really shines during one-handed operations such as loading the gun while keeping the muzzle on target.

ACCESSORIZING THE M2 TACTICAL

I mounted a Trijicon RX30-23 Reflex sight with integral ARMS mount on the M2's rail for testing. It has a 6.5-MOA amber dot reticle optic and a 42mm lens for improved low-light performance over the original RX01.

Its zero magnification, wide field of view and 6.5-MOA dot make the Reflex sight very fast. The dot covers a lot of surface area at 100 yards, but it's precise enough to make head shots a snap if you do your part.

Flashlights are a must on a fighting gun. I wanted to keep the M2 light, so I chose Insight Technologies' XTI Procyon. The compact, aluminum unit weighs next to
The heart and soul of the Benelli Inertia system is the rotating bolt and its unique carrier.

Hornady's low-recoil buckshot load yielded this tight pattern from 20 yards.

The M2 disassembled: This is a deceptively simple design.

nothing but emits a blinding 125 lumens of brilliant white light. Toggling the momentary or constant-on switch twice activates a disorienting high-speed strobe. The decked-out M2 Tactical looked tough, and I was anxious to test it.

ON THE RANGE

I started out with some close-up rapid-fire work to get a feel for the new Benelli. Not surprisingly, the M2 Tactical digested Federal’s nine-pellet 00 buck load perfectly, and it only took few adjustments to get the RX30 dialed in.

Unfortunately, the Reflex sight and M2 Tactical were incompatible. The drop of the stock combined with the height of the Reflex and its ARMS mount made it impossible to get a decent cheek weld. Reluctantly, I removed the sight and moved to the 20-yard line for some more rapid-fire and patterning work with the M2 Tactical and the supplied I/C choke.

I patterned three nine-pellet 00 buck loads: Federal’s load with Flitecontrol wad, Remington’s standard load and Hornady’s Low-Recoil round. I have extensive experience with Federal’s Flite Control loads and was not surprised to see the test gun put them in a tight, centered pattern I could easily cover with my hand.

Remington’s load didn’t pattern quite as tight, but it was close, though it hit a bit high and left of center. Both loads fed, fired and ejected flawlessly.

I like Hornady’s Low-Recoil 00 buck load. It usually patterns nice and tight in my pump guns and has noticeably less recoil. It yielded the tightest patterns in the Benelli, too. Unfortunately, it didn’t have quite enough oomph to cycle the M2’s action; empties stayed in the chamber every time.

The malfunctions were no one's fault—inertia-operated guns need a fair amount of recoil to work, and Hornady's reduced-recoil loads don't have enough. That's too bad, because Hornady's Low-Recoil load is a good one.

The only slug round I had on hand was Remington's one-ounce Slugger load.

TAMING THE DEFENSIVE SHOTGUN

The shotgun is as intimidating to some shooters as it is to the bad guys starting down its muzzle. There's no doubt that a full charge of 12-gauge 00 buck packs a lot of punch on both ends, but good technique can help just about anyone tame the big boomer.

• Most shooters fire their blunderbusses from the same blade position they used to shoot their favorite .22. The result is a great deal of muzzle rise that smacks them in the face and slows shot-to-shot recovery time. To put the brakes on that muzzle rise, square up to the target.
• Stand with your feet about shoulder width apart, with the toes of your strong-side foot just a few inches behind the toes of the weak-side foot. That position should put your body square to the target. Then pull the gun to the shoulder and lean forward aggressively at the waist. If you've got it right, the gun will barely move when you pull the trigger and shot-to-shot recovery times will be scary fast.
• Because the muzzle doesn't jump up and smack you in the face and your body doesn't whirl around at the shot, this position eliminates a great deal of apparent recoil. You might feel it the next day, but there's no escaping that if you're shooting defensive loads, so you might as well train right and look good doing it.
The M2’s pistol grip provides improved controllability, especially while reloading with the weapon still in the shoulder.

The iron sights turned out to be quite effective, as the ACOG proved a tad too tall for proper cheekweld.

Here the author is touching off the third shot in a rapid-fire string, and the muzzle is solidly on target. The author is only 5’3”, and the loads were full-power buck shot—clearly, technique matters more than size or brute strength.

The M2 Tactical delivered tight offhand groups a hair high and right at 25 and 50 yards.

With my impromptu accuracy testing out of the way, my training partner, Deputy Flores, and I proceeded to dump my last 100 rounds of Federal’s 00 buck as fast as we could pull the trigger. The M2 Tactical ran flawlessly.

**AFTER-ACTION REPORT**

My only complaints have to do with the way I set up the gun. The optic was too high to use, and the little Insight light was difficult to operate because the reach to the toggle was too long for my short arms. I’ll keep experimenting with sight options, but the light is an easy fix—Insight makes an inexpensive remote switch that will allow me to operate the light with my standard grip.

Benelli’s M2 Tactical didn’t give me grief. It was perfectly reliable with standard 2.75-inch loads, and its smoothbore barrel delivered lethal buckshot patterns and tight slug groups out to the real-world limits of combat shotgun range. Its recoil-operated action, great sights and crisp trigger make it incredibly fast, and its pistol-grip stock is the best fighting shotgun stock on the market.

If you’re in the market for a big bore boomer to keep by your bed, the M2 Tactical would be tough to beat.