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SPORTING ROAD: The Perfect Quailin’ Gun
Benelli Super Black Eagle II Performance Shop Waterfowl Edition

Benelli's Super Black Eagle II was the first semi-auto 12 gauge with a 3 1/2" chamber. It was a big seller among waterfowlers for nearly a generation before it was replaced recently with the updated version Super Black Eagle II. This one incorporated a number of new features, the main one the Comfortech stock with the 11 recoil-reducing chevrons.

The Benelli being reported on here is the even-sweeter Black Eagle II Performance Shop Waterfowl Edition. The Comfortech stock remains, although now there are 12 of those recoil-dampening chevrons. Of course, none of the Benelli semi-autos is gas operated, so recoil reduction is important. Further, Benelli brags that its Super Black Eagle II is a lot lighter than most of its competitors' semi's, sometimes a full pound lighter. Admittedly, the Comfortech does a good job of taking out recoil sting, so those chevrons have been a good idea.

The Performance Shop Waterfowl Edition has a different shaped and larger operating bolt handle that will be easier to operate in cold-weather gunning when wearing heavy gloves. Similarly, the bolt closer button is also enlarged, for cold-weather use, but those larger bolt closer are already popular on many sporting clays semi-auto models.

Yet another Performance Shop feature is the "paracord" survival sling. The entire sling consists of this closely wrapped together paracord. In seconds this sling can be unraveled to convert to 50 feet of strong paracord rated for 550 lbs. It will pay to know how to "un-string" the cord in case you need to do it some day, but it looks to me that once the paracord sling is unraveled, it's probably going to be pretty difficult to thread that cord back into a sling. I'm guessing that Benelli or the sling manufacturer has a pig to do this quickly and easily.

The Custom Rob Roberts Triple Threat Series screw chokes are also unique to the Waterfowl Edition. These are long screw-ins that I measure at 3 1/4". While other Benelli chokes are typically Crio treated, as well as darn long, these Triple Threats have a 1 1/2" parallel section that should stabilize pellets after the initial "squeezes" into the construction part of the choke.

The operating handle for the bolt is large and extended for easier operation with gloves in cold weather.

The three unique chokes have a burn gold/copper color and are made of heat-treated 17 4ph stainless steel. No doubt they are hard enough to handle any of the non- toxic shot types, but Benelli claims that these screw-ins also handle lead shot very well. Interestingly, the threads are at the midpoint of these screw-ins, while most choke threads are at the top or the bottom of the tubes. Perhaps this midpoint threading is done to prevent the Triple Threats from being threaded into other barrels—or other chokes from being threaded into the Performance Shop barrels.

Using computerized pattern analysis, these chokes are said to produce consistent and even patterns. If that is true, those patterns should hold up at longer distances. All three chokes have been tested for optimal performance with Federal Black Cloud steel ammo.

The T1 tube is the most open, said to be ideal for smaller ducks like teal but also mallard-size waterfowl coming to the decoys as well as ducks being hunted in flooded timber. I used this tube a lot during my testing, and it was ideal out to at least 25 yards. But the T1 could also be used on longer clay birds using No. 7 1/2 and 8 lead shot. I measured the T1I received at 718" constriction. The barrel bore went .233", so that's .6485" constriction, about like any skeet choke. But as already covered, the Triple Threat is not your average choke, and Benelli suggests Black Cloud No. 4s through them.

The T2 measured .708" for .015" constriction, followed by the long parallel section. Use the T2 for most waterfowling situations, including geese to 45 yards, but it is open enough to also do well on ducks coming to or within the decoys. Ideally, Benelli likes Black Cloud 2s and 4s with the T2.

The T3 is the tightest Triple Threat choke, which I measured at .686" for .025" constriction, again followed by the long parallel section. Benelli likes No. 2 steel with the T3. Obviously, this is your long-range choke. The company says that the T3 will bring down waterfowl out to 50 yards but that it also is a good choke for crows, handicap trap (using lead as well as non-toxic), and can even be used for shooting deer with buckshot.

The Super Black Eagle II went 7 lbs, 7.5 ozs. on my digital postal scale. Personally, I would not shoot a 3/4" magnesium shell out of this gun, but that's me the recoil puusy cat. The fore-end has a very light feel at 5.4 ozs. The 28" barrel went 2 lbs, 14.5 ozs., which might be heavier than most 28" barrels, but don't forget that the back of the barrel is actually the top of the receiver in Benelli semi's. The forcing cone is not only lengthened but also highly polished.

This gun functions with the Inertia Driven System, which mainly consists of a strong spring that's situated behind the bolt. As the bolt comes back to compress this spring. When the spring has been fully compressed and is ready to slan forward, the shell in the magazine has already been released and is on the carrier's elevated position. The returning bolt then slams the next shell down into the chamber. Although the Inertia Driven System has proven to be very reliable, it has been highly polished on this Performance Shop Waterfowl Edition to further ensure reliable function.

The front of the bolt has two lugs that actually turn into matching recesses just behind the chamber, resulting in a very strong semi-auto lock-up. On the front right of the trigger guard there's a small, bright release button. Press this button up and the bolt stays open when you bring back the operating handle.

The stock is dipped in RealTree Max 4 camo. There's a bit of a recurve to the pistol grip. Most claim such a grip enhances gun control. Matching the recoil-dampening chum is a gel comb pad on top that treats one's cheek very softly. The recoil pad is slide and made of a soft gel material in an ergonomic shape that Benelli says fits the shoulder pocket better than traditional-shaped pads. The fore-end is relatively short and features "finger grooves." The rib has a slight step. There's a metal mid bead, while the front fiber-optic sight is a green Hi-Viz. Additional inter-changeable Hi-Viz colors are included in the Performance Shop package. The trigger is also "custom" tuned for better performance. I thought the trigger was very crisp on my test gun, averaging just under 5 lbs. on my Lyman Digital Trigger Pull Scale. On a magnesium waterfowl gun, I don't think anyone would want a lighter trigger.

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SPECIFICATIONS
Action: Semi-auto with Inertia Driven System
Gauge: 12 with 3 1/2" chamber
Weight: 7 lbs, 7.5 ozs.
Barrel: 28" Chokes: Rob Roberts Triple Threat T1, T2, and T3
Stock: Dimensions: length of pull-14 1/2", drop at comb-1 1/4", drop at heel-2 1/2"; extra spacers that fit between back of receiver and front of buttstock can increase or decrease both drop at comb and comb
Suggested Retail Price: $2,899
Manufacturer/Importer: Made in Italy by Benelli/Imported by Benelli USA, 17603 Indian Head Hwy., Dept. SC, Accokeek, MD 20607; (301) 383-5981; www.belleniusa.com

The Benelli Super Black Eagle II’s fore-end is light and features finger grooves and RealTree Max 4 camo pattern. The grip has a bit of a recurve, which some feel offers more control of the gun.