At the writers shoot the day before the SHOT Show last January I stumbled across what has proven to be an outstanding clay target gun.

Several shotgun makers had their wares on display, and Champion set up eight of their EasyBird 6-Pack traps for live-fire testing. I spotted a really sexy looking Benelli, which the guy at the booth identified as their 12-gauge, semi-auto SuperSport, adding, "This is the ultimate speed gun for sporting clays." As regular readers know, I shoot all the clay target guns—so the load of about 25,000 rounds a year—with Perazzi, Krieghoff, and Browning over/unders. I don't have anything against semi-autos, but the knockheads shoot what they know, and if you're going to throw a shotgun, don't appreciate flying hulls in the face. And besides, it's such a pain to shag all those empties.

The Champion traps threw good, strong birds, but space constraints limited target presentations to showing-off stations with a maximum 60 degree horizontal spread, and no wobble (no vertical variation)—sort of like "kiddie traps." The SuperSport seemed really light, so I expected it to be squirrelly on the swing. Wrong. With its long receiver and 30-inch barrel, the damned thing swung like a 32-inch-Krieghoff-K-80.

As a result, I smoked the first eight clays, then killed one of my infamous whole-body flinches at the instant of trigger pull, missing one by a good six feet. Then I ran the rest of the box for a 24, every one of which was literally vaporized. Recoup was almost non-existent, and barrel rise was nearly imperceptible.

Returning the SuperSport, I wandered around for a while, but just couldn't get that gun out of my mind. It fit perfectly, and was an absolute delight to shoot. Recovery time after the shots was the quickest I had ever experienced, and I just had to try it on doubles.

The Benelli was happy to give me another go, and even walked over to watch. The EasyBird 6-packets are single-shot only, but they cycle really fast, so I loaded four rounds and told the kid to just hold the button down.

BLAM...BLAM...BLAM...BLAM—four pairs of orange-tinted hulls in the still air. "Unbelievable!" I exclaimed to the Benelli guy. "That's the quickest recovering shotgun I've ever fired!"

BLAM...BLAM...BLAM...BLAM—four more pairs of orange-tinted hulls. And four more. And four more. Twenty straight in five rounds—I felt like friggin' Tom Knapp (The Benelli pro shooter who throws six clays into the air and smokes them all before they hit the ground).

The SuperSport is basically a Benelli Legacy optimized for the wild, multi-target presentations encountered in sporting clays. Central to the design is Benelli's Inertia Driven operating system. With only three primary parts—body, inertia spring, and operating bolt head—it offers greatly reduced mass, and cycle times that are lightning fast. The absence of a gas system with its collection of cylinders, springs, and operating rods housed under the forearm—makes it handle like a fine double gun. In fact, the unloaded balance point on the 30-inch SuperSport lies directly under the bolt head when in battery. Another major advantage is that combination gases and unburnt powder never enter the action, making it the cleanest semi-auto yet devised.

Back at the office, my first call was to Dottie Gates at Benelli to order a 30-inch SuperSport, plus the optional raised and extra-high ComforTech gel combs. The gun arrived in early February, and I started shooting it immediately in modern skeet—similar to traditional skeet (or as we real shot gunners call it, "kiddie skeet"), except you shoot from the low gun position and the traps wobble, adding considerably to the degree of difficulty.

Benelli says the SuperSport allows shooters to recover from the first shot up to 69% faster, and exhibits up to 48% less perceived recoil than other semi-autos. With over 1,500 rounds now on the gun, I have no reason to quibble with either statement. Benelli ports the SuperSport's barrel, and equips it with their innovative ComforTech recoil-dampening buttstock. Computer simulation showed Benelli engineers the path of recoil, so they incorporated a series of synthetic rubber chevrons into the buttstock along the recoil axis as a recoil-absorbing barrier. A set of stocks shims is also included to let the shooter dial in stock drop and cast-on/cast-off to his personal preference.

The combination of Inertia Driven operating system, barrel porting, and ComforTech System, plus a cushy gel recoil pad and gel comb insert, works to almost completely eliminate perceived muzzle rise, and reduce perceived recoil to well below 50% of what I'm used to with the best of my over/unders.

The SuperSport's barrel and extended Gr8 choke tubes (Cylinder, IC, Modified, Improved Modified, and Full included) are cryogenically treated at 300°F to relieve the stress caused by hammer forging and create an even-grained, slicker bore surface for less friction with wads and shot. This smoother bore surface also results in much more uniform— if somewhat more dense than typical—pattern.

The SuperSport's cylinder tube puts every last pellet into a 30-inch circle at 20 yards, so that's what I use for skeet. I substitute a Breda helically-silled diffusion tube (.005" constriction) for those in-your-face Session 8 shots.

For me, the gun shoots a perfect 50/50 pattern (half the pellets above point of aim/ball below) with the standard comb—just what I like for skeet. The raised comb moves the pattern upward to about 60/40—just what I like for sporting clays and trap doubles. And the extra-high comb yields an 80/20 pattern—just right for 16-yard and handicap trap singles. This is truly a gun for all clay target games.

I shot my first-ever 50 straight in southern Skeet two weeks into my run with the SuperSport, a feat I've repeated three more times since. My high straight now stands at 74, just one bird short of the silver ring (you don't get the gold ring until you run 100 straight).

My shooting buddies may be knockheads, but they're not stupid. After only 25 or 30 hot empties between the eyes they all learned to jibber in my left ear instead of my right. And I find that the prospect of going 75 straight (or 100 maybe) more than makes up for having to chase those empties. To say that I like the gun would be like saying Hillary Clinton "kinds of" wants to be President.

Benelli offers the 12-gauge SuperSport with either a 28- or 30-inch barrel, as well as a 26-inch 20 gauge, all priced at $1,800. A walnut-stocked version called the Sport II, which does not include the ComforTech System or interchangeable gel combs, is available in the same gauges and barrel lengths, all priced at $1,580. See them at your local firearms retailer, or contact Benelli USA, Department OT, 17603 Indian Head Hwy, Accokeek, MD 20607; Web: www.benelliusa.com; Tel: (301) 283-6981.