Benelli Ultra Light Semi-Auto Shotgun

With its 24-inch barrel, aluminum alloy receiver, shortened magazine tube, and carbon-fiber vent rib, Benelli says that its new six-pound-even Ultra Light is "the lightest 12-gauge, 3-inch, semi-automatic shotgun ever produced."

The Ultra Light is built around the same inertia-driven operating system that powers all Benelli semi-autos. Comprised of only a bolt body, inertia spring, and rotating bolt head, it offers reduced weight, lightning-fast cycle times, and substantial reduction in perceived recoil. By eliminating gas cylinders, springs, and operating rods, the balance point is moved well aft. In the case of the 24-inch Ultra Light (26-inch barrel also offered), the unloaded balance point is at the center of the bolt when in battery.

The Ultra Light incorporates Benelli's Crio barrel and choke tubes that are cryogenically treated at -300°F to relieve the stresses of hammer forging, create a slicker bore for less friction, and provide more uniform patterns. Five flush Chro tubes are included (C, IC, M, IM, and F).

The stock is a slimline design with a reduced magazine capacity of two 2.75- or 3-inch shells. The stepped, carbon-fiber rib—complemented by a matching carbon-fiber grip cap—is fitted with a small red fiber-optic front sight and a tiny silver mid-rib bead. Stock dimensions are spot on for American shotguns, with a length of pull of 14-3/8", drop at comb of 1-1/2", and drop at heel of 2-3/8". The walnut buttstock and forend are finished with Benelli's WeatherGuard, a process that enhances the figure of the wood and makes it virtually impervious to weather. The wood on our sample gun looked like a million bucks, and it was impossible to tell how much of the figure was real versus "enhanced." Borderless laser checking on the forend and neck is sharp and clean. The barrel and receiver are finished in a deep blue, and a polymer trigger guard houses a big safety button and gold-plated trigger. A cushioned gel butt pad is fitted to the buttstock, and a set of three plastic stocks are included to customize drop and cast. A fitted plastic case is also included.

If you were thinking that the Ultra Light's 3-inch chamber might lend itself to turkey or waterfowl hunting, dash that thought right now! I fired two rounds of 2-3/4 Federal Mag-Shok High Velocity Turkey loads—1.75 oz. of lead shot at 1,300 fps.—out of the Ultra Light, and really wish I hadn't. This is an upland bird gun, plain and simple, and as such it carries points, swings and balances better than any other 12-gauge semi-auto we've ever tested. See it at your local gun shop (for $1,385), or for more information contact Benelli USA, Department OT, Website: www.benelliusa.com. Tel: (301) 283-6981.

—Bill Battles

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