

Benelli MP95E

Hidden Target Treasure

The Benelli name has long been associated with Italian motorcycles. The origins of the company are tied to one family who operated out of Pesaro Italy from 1911

Theresa Benelli, then a widow, invested in her sons' futures (she had six boys) by setting up a business to service guns, cars and motorcycles. In 1919 the company established itself as a motorcycle manufacturer. All six boys were involved in the business from engineering, designing and racing their creations.

The firearms manufacturing business was set up as a separate entity 1967 and is now owned by Beretta. The motorcycle business was purchased in the early 200's by a large Chinese motorcycle manufacturer (CJ).

Benelli is well known worldwide for its inertia operated autoloading shotgun design and its speed, simplicity and reliability has seen its acceptance for both sporting and tactical applications. This really clever design has few moving parts, a very strong 3-lug rotating bolt lock up and very clean operation as there is no gas involved in cycling the action

Less well known are Benelli's handguns, possibly because the company only makes two – a .22LR and .32 S&W Long on the same chassis – the MP95E semi-auto in .22 and the 95S in .32 S&W. Both are specifically designed for high-performance target shooting in the Olympic and ISSF disciplines of Rapid Fire, Sport Pistol and Standard Pistol with the .22 and ISSF Centrefire with the .32 that can also be used in the PA Unrestricted Service Match.

Both models are basically identical apart from the heavier components used on the .32 to handle the recoil of the larger cartridge and some other minor variations to the trigger system.

Beretta Australia sent GUNS a sample of the .22 for testing and as luck would have it, I had already had a go with a .32 Benelli that was owned by a member of my pistol club. The test pistol looked like it had seen a bit of use, and arrived in its case without its manual. Lorenzo from Beretta Australia sent me a link to Benelli's site where the manual could be downloaded and that solved that problem. The link, should any reader want to check out



The Benelli MP94E is well suited to a number of ISSF matches for men, ladies and juniors.

the pistols features and functions is: <http://www.benelli.it/sites/default/files/manuali/GB/pistols.pdf>

The Benelli MP95E follows the design trend established by Walther's GSP with its magazine forward design. The magazine is located in front of the trigger guard and although the Benelli is over 220mm long, the barrel length is only 110mm.

This design has a number of competitive advantages over target autoloaders that have their magazines through the grip. For a start, there is no frame or magazine well to interfere with the orthopaedic design of the grip to obtain the best grip angle and configuration.

Secondly, the hand position can be established very high on the pistol with re-

spect to the bore axis. This makes for better recoil control and less vertical movement of the pistol in recoil. In addition, the weight-forward balance of the Benelli also enhances its handling and recoil control characteristics.

Muzzle-light target pistols might feel good to a new target handgunner, but they will soon find out that control is a lot more difficult, as is the shooter's ability to hold the sight picture steady during the execution of the shot.

The MP95E has a polymer barrel weight attached to the underside of the barrel and it can be removed to slightly lighten the front end of the pistol. If the owner wants to add a bit more forward weight, the polymer unit



ABOVE: The MP95E magazine holds 6 rounds. The button on the serrated section of the slide locks the slide open.

LEFT: The trigger group needs to be removed to make adjustments. Removal of the cross pin in the frame allows the assembly to be dropped out. There is no safety fitted to this model – its location if fitted is marked by the red dot.

SPECS

BENELLI MP95E

Manufacturer: Benelli Armi SPA

Calibre: .22 LR

Action: Semi-auto blowback

Magazine capacity:
6 rounds – one supplied

Barrel length: 110mm

Rifling pitch: One turn in 450mm
– 8 groove rifling

Sights:
4mm wide front – fully adjustable
rear – 218mm sight radius.

Weight: 1100g unloaded.

Grip:
Laminated wood non-adjustable
ambidextrous orthopaedic.

Trigger: Adjustable factory set to
1000g minimum.

RRP: Stainless as tested – App.
\$1900. Blued model – App.
\$1600 shop around

has two large cavities moulded into its underside and these can be filled with lead shot or any other stable items. A rough calculation indicated that the two cavities filled with say, #8 lead shot would add at least 50g to the forward weight of the Benelli.

If the Benelli was to be a permanent resident in my target pistol collection, I would do something about the width of the rear sight notch. The light gap between to front sight and the rear notch is quite tight, and while this works for slow-fire precision shooting, it may not be so good in those matches that require rapid fire sequences or where the main aiming area happens to be a black target as is the case on Sport Pistol Rapid Fire and the Rapid Fire match. On my target handguns, most now have rear sight gaps of at least 100 thou., and typically about 120 thou.

The MP95E was supplied with a set of tools – hex keys – for all the takedown and adjustment requirements, but I was a little disappointed that the pistol only comes with one magazine. Beretta Australia advised that additional magazines are available as an optional extra.

The magazine holds 6 rounds, according to the specifications, but it is unlikely that target shooters would ever get to find out as all ISSF matched have 5-shot sequences. The mag with the test pistol was of excellent quality – stainless steel with a polymer base and stainless steel follower and performed flawlessly during the tests.

One really useful aspect of the Benelli's design that is easily overlooked is that the barrel housing is milled to take a set of Weaver-type sight bases or a rail that can fit the dovetail and slots. I have fitted rifle scopes at one time or another to most of my target handguns so that I can accurately assess their performance with particular types of ammunition.

In my experience, this is important with .22 Rimfires. As almost all pistols will show a preference for some type or brand of ammunition. Some target ammo may well shoot groups at 25 m half the size of those with another type of standard velocity target ammo, and price is not always the determinant of the performance of a particular pistol/load combination.

I don't think this capability of fitting a scope to the Benelli has anything to do with ammunition testing. This model is also called the Atlanta – a reminiscent connection to the Olympics in that year and also aimed at the US target pistol market.

When I started shooting target handguns in the late 1960's, the National Matched shot in the USA were not all that different to our Standard pistol match, except that were shot on a target with larger scoring rings and the slow fire event was shot at 50 yards and the 20 second and 10 second courses were shot at 25 yards. This came to be called the Mayleigh Cup on this side of the ocean.

The big change came some years ago when the rules were changed to allow optical sights to be used on the pistols in a number of the matched and the obvious advantage of using optical sights over open sights changed the game considerably.

For that reason, some of the European high-end target autoloaders have been set up to accommodate the fitting of optical sights.

The scope mounting arrangements on the MP95E are quite versatile. There are two sizes of dovetail built in to the frame. The section in front of the chamber has both a Weaver rail and an 11mm rail piggybacked on to it, and a lower 11mm rail behind the chamber. I assume the rear rail is for the fitting of a small holographic sight that only required a short section of dovetail.

I was impressed with the potential accuracy of the Benelli after the off-hand shooting session where my best 10-shot target managed 7 '10's'.

To better evaluate the accuracy potential of the pistol, I fitted with the 2-7X Barska air rifle scope in Weaver mounts that needed to both be mounted forward of the scope turret. The advantage of using a scope like the Barska AR scope for this type of testing is that it can be range focussed to fairly close ranges, so setting it up to be focused at 25m is just a quick turn of the focussing objective lens.

Many conventional rifle scopes in the 2-7x or 3-9x zoom range have fixed range focus at 100m or infinity as they are intend-



an eye on this unit as it will wear over time and may require replacement, which is a simple press-in operation. The tubular end of the recoil spring housing rests against the recoil buffer and if it wears excessively, a gap may between the recoil spring housing and the buffer and the slide will then not always be pushed firmly against the breech face and misfires may result.

A good way to check the condition of the recoil buffer is to check the position of the locking block in its slot. It should be pressed firmly against the rear of its slot. If there is any fore and aft movement of the block, it is an indication of a worn buffer.

The MP95's trigger was quite close to the regulation minimum 1000g release weight according to my Lyman trigger pull gauge and it also had a two-stage release, which I like on any target handguns that need to shoot rapid fire stages, at it provides a smoother and more progressive trigger release.

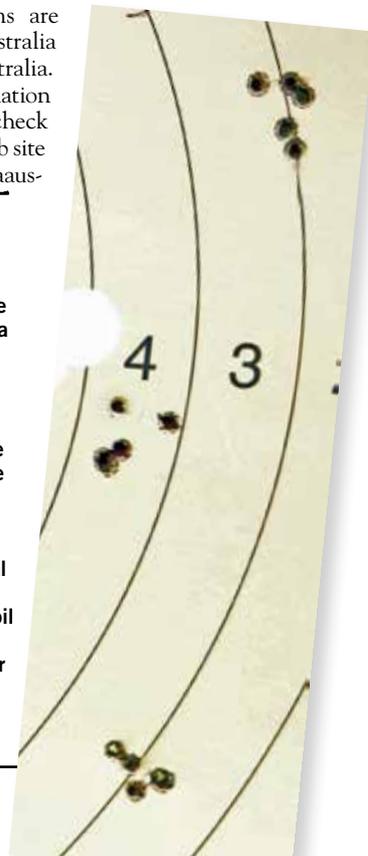
A very useful feature of the MP95E is its grip design. This model does not come with an adjustable palm rest but I believe they are available. The laminated timber grip on the test pistol fitted me very well for my normalized hands and has the major benefit of being 100% ambidextrous as well and was equally comfortable in my left hand.

From all angles, the Benelli MP95E is a very competitive target pistol and represents extremely good value for money compared to its European competitors who may have more whistles and bells but are unlikely to shoot any more accurately or handle significantly better than this outfit.

Benelli firearms are distributed in Australia by Beretta Australia. For more information on availability, check the company's web site at www.berettaaustralia.com.au. 🔫

RIGHT: Some of the groups shot from 25m with the scope fitted from a less than perfect rest. The scoring rings are 25mm apart. Absolute accuracy would be about half the size of these groups.

TOP: The MP95E was shot in several test sessions. Handling and recoil control, combined with a good trigger system produced consistently good performance.



ed for hunting at normal hunting ranges. At closer ranges, the target may be out of focus and there will certainly be some parallax movement of the crosshairs.

Some standard velocity .22 target ammo was lined up to test the Benelli with the cope fitted, with some RWS R50 at the top end and some Federal 714 at the economy end.

I shot off a fairly basic rest and off a range table that was not totally stable, and shooting with a rifle scope set at 7x certainly highlights just how much movement occurs at the target – typically around 10-15mm around the aiming point, so timing the shot release is critical. The upside is that any groups shot under such a setup area 'worst-case' scenario.

For that reason, the accuracy achieved by the test pistol was outstanding. Shooting 5-shot groups with RWS R50, RWS Rifle Match, RWS Pistol 25, Eley Pistol, Geco Pistol Match and Federal 714 produced the largest group around 30mm with the Federal 714, which is a semi-high velocity load and close to 12mm with the R50 while most of the other target loads averaged no worse than 20mm.

Given that the '10' Ring of a 25m ISSF target is 50mm in diameter and the 'X' ring is 25mm in diameter, the Benelli looks like it is capable of 'possibles' with just about any ammo that is fired from it. Given that the Benelli has a barrel only 110mm long, it delivers a level of accuracy that would put many rifles to shame.

Without the instruction manual, disassembling the Benelli would be a mystery, but in practice it is about the simplest arrangement for this type of autoloader. There is a cross pin through the frame above the trigger, and this pin can be easily pushed out of the frame with a suitably sized punch.

This releases the trigger assembly and it can be pivoted downwards and comes clear

of the frame. It contains the hammer and all the trigger adjustments. On this model, it is made from polymer and there is a location on the housing for a dry-fire switch that is not fitted to this model.

One the trigger group is removed, with the slide in the closed position, there is a roughly wedge shaped part called the bolt locking support just in front of the rear sight. This has finger grips on either side and is removed by pulling it up and forward. One this is out, the slide can be removed from the frame. Reassembly is just as quick and easy.

With the slide removed, the very neat design of the MP95's internals are easy to see. The firing pin is a short and light stainless steel flat item that is actuated with a small hinged plate at its back end that is struck by the hammer that is in the trigger group when the trigger is released.

There is no safety on the Benelli, which is not unusual for this type of target handgun but the interrupter system on the trigger will allow the hammer to be released until the breech is practically fully closed.

For this reason, an owner needs to handle the MP95 carefully when de-cocking the pistol for storage as the slide needs to be only about half a millimetre from the breech face to get the hammer to drop. It is good practice to dry fire rimfire firearms with the breech fully closed. If it was mine, I would arrange a bit of thin cardboard or plastic to slip into the breech to de-cock the pistol. The test pistol came with a red polymer chamber safety insert, but leaving this in the chamber during storage would leave the hammer permanently cocked, which is a condition that does not appeal to me.

The bolt locking block houses the polymer recoil buffer and it is important to keep