



LUPO

a wolf in Benelli clothing

Con Kapralos



We were given access for just a few days as, being the only one in the country, it was in high demand.

The gunmaking firm of Benelli Armi SpA in Urbino, Italy is an offshoot of the Benelli motorcycle empire and started manufacturing firearms in 1967. Benelli is known for its fine self-loading and pump-action shotguns while in centrefire shooting circles, their Argo and R1 Big Game self-loading rifles are highly regarded throughout Europe. In 2000, Benelli became part of the Beretta Holdings Group and has continued to excel in long-arms but also impressed in the over-and-under fray with the superb 828U shotgun.

In 2016 Benelli decided to look at producing a bolt-action hunting rifle and four years of meticulous design and planning resulted in the release last year of the Lupo, Italian for wolf. A couple of months ago, Beretta Australia procured their initial shipment of this rifle and *Australian Shooter* was the first outlet in the country to gain access to the demonstration model in .30-06 Springfield.

It was evident in the international press

the Lupo is like no other centrefire hunting rifle on the market - could it possibly be the start of a revolution in hunting rifle design and manufacture? We were given access for just a few days as, being the only one in the country, it was in high demand.

At a glance

The rifle arrived with a Steiner Ranger optic already fitted and I could immediately see the similarities between the Lupo design and what Benelli had already released in the 828U o/u shotgun and their stable of self-loading and pump-action longarms.

Barrelled action

This incorporates a receiver made from mild steel mated up to Benelli's patented cryogenically treated barrel (CRIO) using a locking nut to precisely adjust the headspace when fitting barrel to receiver. The receiver has a rounded profile devoid of harsh angled flats or scalloped sections, the

top being slightly flattened to accommodate scope mounting hardware and is drilled and tapped to provide for their installation.

The rifle is supplied with two-piece Weaver-style bases as standard but there is provision for the use of a Picatinny rail with an extra set of base mounting holes on the receiver top. To the rear left of the receiver is a spring-loaded toggle bolt release button which makes removal of the bolt a simple operation. A small gas port is by the front left receiver ring to facilitate escape of hot ignition gases away from the shooter's face, while the ejection port on the right is to allow for unhindered case ejection and also means the magazine can be top-loaded by hand.

The barrel is in .30-06 calibre and of a sporter profile measuring 560mm in length and has a twist rate of one in 11" which will handle most popular .30-calibre bullet weights. The method of barrel manufacture isn't specified but the barrel is subjected to Benelli's Deep Cryogenic Treatment

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(DCT) which eliminates all residual internal tension and stresses in the barrel metallurgy and so enhances accuracy. The chamber and rifling are match grade and the muzzle has also a target-grade crown and is threaded M14x1 for use with accessories and covered with an appropriate cap.

The barrelled action is treated with a glossy finish which looks like a deep blue/black, reminiscent of rifles of yesteryear. Benelli call this their BE.S.T (Benelli Surface Treatment), a coating which results in high surface hardness and low friction coefficient, providing an indestructible barrier which is impervious to anything the elements can subject the metalwork to. It looks superb and is a refreshing change to all the ceramic coated finishes which seems part and parcel of rifles these days - nice touch Benelli.

Bolt, safety and trigger

The bolt is one of the characteristic traits of the Lupo, its design incorporating three locking lugs with 60-degree bolt lift. The bolt body is made from a single piece of steel with a scalloped section in the middle which permits cartridges loaded in the magazine to sit slightly higher, achieving better feeding in the process. The bolt head is a separate piece attached to the body with a pin, case extraction and ejection facilitated by a plunger through the bolt face and a claw recessed into the locking lug rim.

To the rear of the bolt, an aluminium shroud keeps everything intact and there's provision for field stripping the bolt by pressing a small tab near the bolt shroud and removing the shroud, firing pin and spring. The main shaft of the bolt handle lies at an angle to the side of the rifle in the bolt-notch but the handle then kicks

out at a slant, terminating with an overside oval knob. The bolt is also subjected to the BE.S.T finish and complements the rest of the metalwork.

The safety mechanism is a two-position design on a tang behind the bolt shroud, inletted into the head of the buttstock. Its linear movement is simple to use and benefits from a small safety over-ride button behind the bolt notch. With the safety 'On' the bolt handle is locked down and firing pin blocked, but by depressing the safety over-ride button the action can be cycled and the chamber cleared of any loaded rounds.

The trigger unit is attached to the underside of the receiver and is of a traditional single-stage design with crisp break and no evidence of creep or over-travel. The trigger is adjustable from 1-2kg and was set at 1.2kg from the factory, which was fine for testing.



Receiver, barrel locking nut, barrel and trigger group.

Magazine

This is designed to match the contours of the aluminium mini-chassis and is five-shot capacity made of polymer (four-shot for the .300 Win Mag). Loaded rounds sit in a twin-stack configuration and are held securely in this manner with design elements built into the follower and magazine body. The outside of the magazine has two polymer scalloped sections on either side which add to the strength while the magazine clips into place securely and sits flush with the base of the mini-chassis, removal done by pressing a clip release on the front edge. The magazine can be top-loaded through the ejection port without any problems.

Mini-chassis, buttstock and fore-end

The aluminium mini-chassis is made using state-of-the-art CNC machining lathes which enable precise tolerances and



Benelli Lupo in disassembled form.

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measures 225mm at its longest point by 39mm wide. The chassis serves several purposes and provides a rock-solid platform for the barrelled action to mate up to, using two action screws.

One action screw is positioned into the rear of the chassis through the top of the bolt raceway, the other anchored into the underside of the front receiver ring just forward of the recoil lug. The lug is affixed to the chassis body and mates up with a machined slot in the underside of the receiver. The chassis also serves as the magazine well which accepts the polymer detachable box magazine and additionally has the bolt notch and triggerguard designed into it.

The two-piece buttstock and fore-end attach to the aluminium chassis via through-bolts, one at the front end (for the fore-end) and one through the buttstock proper anchoring into the rear. The polymer buttstock and fore-end are profiled for great ergonomics and have that Benelli style (textured grip panels), the aluminium chassis anodised in a matte black finish with the Lupo name inscribed just under the front receiver ring.

One main feature of the Lupo is the ability for users to adjust length of pull and cast of the stock to suit their requirements. While the review rifle wasn't supplied with any shims, they are provided on purchase. Benelli also fitted their superb Precision Comfort recoil pad - a shock absorber-like recoil management device - and it doesn't end there as the buttstock comb also has the ComfortTech padded insert installed, providing a soft surface for the user's cheek to rest on and help further dampen the effects of recoil. This insert is interchangeable for height.

The fore-end and buttstock have provisions for rifle sling attachment moulded into the polymer body and this is the only minus, as I could see these anchor points prone to splitting or breaking. Standard QD sling swivel studs would have been a better way to go but there's a provision option on the underside of the fore-end for a stud to be affixed.

Range testing

With the Progressive Comfort recoil management system and ComfortTech comb insert, shooting the Lupo was a delight. The rifle cycled all ammunition fed through the five-shot dual-stack polymer magazine without an issue and extracted fired cases with no problems.

The Federal Premium Power-Shok with 150gr Soft Point and Winchester Super-X with 180gr Soft Point both shot

Two-position tang safety just to the rear of the bolt shroud.



Table 1: Benelli Lupo accuracy testing at 100m

Ammunition	Average group size*
Federal Premium Power-Shok 150-grain Soft Point	30mm
Remington Core-Lokt 150-grain PSP	45mm
Winchester Super-X 180-grain Soft Point	35mm

*Average group size taken from five 3-shot groups at 100m from a benchrest



Left-hand side of the Lupo action and chassis.

well, average group sizes of 30 and 35mm respectively making both brands perfect for hunting larger game, though the rifle didn't like Remington Core-Lokt 150-grain loads (45mm average group size). As is the case when looking for a factory load for your hunting rifle, try a few brands and when you find one that shoots well, stick with it.

Overview

I'll be the first to say it - the new Benelli Lupo will revolutionise the way modern hunting rifles are designed. The incorporation of an aluminium mini-chassis as a bedding platform for the steel barrelled action, which also incorporates the magazine well and triggerguard, is masterful work. Additionally, having the capacity to adjust length of pull and cast of the rifle, something previously reserved for the shotgun fraternity, is another plus.

The Progressive Comfort recoil system and soft ComfortTech comb inserts, which were also interchangeable, made for a superb shooting experience and retailing for \$2599, the Benelli Lupo sits neatly in a price point between two of Beretta Australia's proven greats in the Tikka T3X and Sako 85. For more information ask your firearms retailer or visit www.berettaaustralia.com.au ●

SPECIFICATIONS

Manufacturer: Benelli Armi SpA, Urbino, Italy

Distributor: Beretta Australia

Calibres: .243 Win, 6.5 Creed, .270 Win, .308 Win, .30-06 Sprg (tested), .300 Win Mag

Chassis: Aluminium alloy

Action: Medium: Steel with BE.S.T treatment. Receiver top drilled and tapped for scope mounting provisions. Rifle supplied with two-piece Weaver-style bases

Bolt: Three locking lugs, fluted, BE.S.T glossy

Trigger: Adjustable for reach (+/- 2mm) using spacer (1mm) and shim (1mm), trigger pull adjustable

Safety: Tang-mounted two-position with bolt locking lever

Barrel: Sporter weight: 560mm on standard calibres, 610mm on 6.5 Creed and .300 Win Mag CRIO stabilised and BE.S.T glossy finish. Muzzle threaded (M14x1)

Magazine: Double stack detachable - five rounds in standard calibres, four in .300 Win Mag

Stock: Black techno-polymer with Progressive Comfort recoil system

Length: 1082mm (.243 Win, .270 Win, .308 Win, .30-06 Sprg), 1133mm (6.5 Creed, .300 Win Mag)

Weight: 3.18kg (.243 Win, .270 Win, .308 Win, .30-06 Sprg), 3.23kg (6.5 Creed, .300 Win Mag)

RRP: \$2599