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Go nuts!

Benelli's Lupo Walnut a hunter's dream, says **Con Kapralos**



Since its inception several years ago Benelli's Lupo sporting rifle has certainly given pundits something to think about. Having gleaned the best concepts from their shotgun expertise and applied them to a blank canvas when designing the Lupo, a modern classic was born.

While the original Lupo sported a black glass-filled polymer buttstock and fore-end mated to the aluminium 'mini-chassis', the new models embrace hydro-dipped camouflage patterns applied to the buttstock, fore-end and chassis frame for more visual appeal together with matte-finished barrelled actions.

Yet Benelli also realised rifle purists would have to be catered to with a walnut-stocked version and the result is in the spotlight here - the Lupo Walnut - the rifle a superb example in aesthetics, form and function. Beretta Australia supplied one in the booming .300 Winchester Magnum calibre, the rifle fitted with a Steiner Ranger optic along with ammunition from Sako and Sellier & Bellot for testing.

At a glance

The impressive shipping carton contains a comprehensive user manual, itemised contents list, Benelli Surface Treatment (BE.S.T.) technical brief and test target. The bare rifle weighs 3.27kg and measures 1125mm with the 30mm recoil pad and spacers fitted.

Chassis, buttstock and fore-end

An aluminium chassis is milled using state-of-the-art CNC machining lathes, producing a single entity with precise tolerances. The chassis provides a solid platform for the barrelled action to mate up to, with one action screw in the rear of the chassis through the top of bolt raceway and another anchored into the underside of the front receiver ring just forward of the recoil lug. The recoil lug is affixed into the chassis



Layout of the action with high gloss BE.S.T. metal treatment and one-piece Picatinny rail as standard.

body and mates 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 trigger-guard in its design.

The individual walnut buttstock and fore-end pieces attach to the chassis via through-bolts, one at the front end (for the fore-end) and one through the buttstock proper anchoring into the rear of the chassis. The aluminium chassis is anodised in a matte dark-grey finish with the 'Lupo' name inscribed in gold just under the front receiver ring.

The satin-finished AA-grade walnut buttstock and fore-end is nicely profiled with a pleasant ambidextrous cheekpiece and raised Monte Carlo comb allowing excellent cheek-weld when using an optic. Chequered panels adorn the pistol grip and fore-end and are perfect in their positioning and execution. There's also provision for fitting sling swivel studs to the buttstock and fore-end and studs are supplied with the rifle, rubber plugs covering the points where these can be fitted.



The walnut buttstock is well profiled with ambidextrous cheekpiece and Monte Carlo comb for positive cheek-weld.

One main feature is the ability to adjust length-of-pull and cast of the stock to suit requirements. Benelli offer different shims to adjust cast and stock height/drop, the full set supplied with the rifle and each marked according to its purpose. Benelli also fit their superb Precision Comfort recoil pad.

Barrelled action

This comprises the receiver made of mild steel mated to the patented cryogenically treated barrel (CRIO) using a locking nut to precisely adjust headspace. The receiver has a rounded profile with the exception of the top which is flat and additionally drilled and tapped to take scope-mounting hardware, the rifle fitted with a one-piece Picatinny rail as standard.

To the rear left of the receiver is a spring-loaded toggle bolt release button, with a small gas port located in the front left receiver ring to divert ignition gases away from the shooter's face. The ejection port on the right is designed for unhindered case ejection and also enables the magazine to be top-loaded by hand, something appreciated by hunters.

The 610mm barrel is in .300 Winchester Magnum calibre and of a sporter profile, having a twist rate of one-in-11" which will handle most popular .30-calibre bullet weights. The chamber and rifling are match grade and the muzzle finished with a target-grade crown as well as being threaded M14x1 for use with accessories and covered with a cap.

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Go nuts!

The barrelled action is given a glossy finish which looks like a deep blue/black, reminiscent of rifles of yesteryear. The BE.S.T. results in a high surface hardness and low friction coefficient, an indestructible barrier that's impervious to anything the elements or user can subject the metalwork to.

Bolt, safety and trigger

The bolt incorporates three locking lugs with a 60-degree lift and is 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 via a plunger through the face and claw extractor recessed into the locking lug rim. To the rear an aluminium bolt shroud keeps everything intact and there's also a provision for field stripping the bolt by pressing a small tab and removing the bolt shroud, firing pin and spring.

The bolt handle is functional as well as aesthetic. The main shaft lies at an angle to the side of the rifle in the bolt-notch but the handle then kicks out at an angle, terminating with an oval knob. It comes to the hand nicely, allowing for positive grip and fast cycling of the action and the bolt also has the BE.S.T. finish which complements the rest of the metalwork.

The safety mechanism is a two-position affair 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. When the safety is 'on' the bolt handle is locked down and firing pin blocked but on pressing the over-ride button, the action can be cycled and chamber cleared of loaded rounds. The trigger unit is attached to the underside of the receiver and is of a traditional single stage design with a crisp break and no evidence of creep. The trigger is adjustable from 1-2kg and was set at 1.4kg from the factory, fine for testing.

Magazine

This is designed to match the contours of the aluminium chassis and is of a four-shot capacity made of polymer. Loaded rounds

sit in a twin-stack configuration and are held securely with design elements built into the follower and magazine body. The magazine clips into place securely and sits flush with the base of the chassis, removal done by pressing a clip release on the front edge. One pleasing feature is it can be top-loaded through the ejection port.

Range testing

With the Lupo Walnut in .300 Winchester Magnum, I decided to revert to three-shot groups purely for shooting comfort. Beretta Australia supplied two factory loads from Sako and Sellier & Bellot and I added another factory load in Federal's Power-Shok.

What was immediately evident was recoil control. With the superb Progressive Comfort management system, shooting the Lupo Walnut was acceptable though you still knew it was a Magnum and opting for three-shot groups instead of five was a smart move. What did help in reducing felt recoil was the overall weight of 4.08kg with the Steiner Ranger optic fitted and shooters could also use a muzzle brake to help reduce muzzle flip.

The rifle cycled all ammunition without issue and likewise extracted fired cases. Accuracy was acceptable for a calibre suited to large game species, with average groups all coming in at around 1.5 MOA (~42mm) or less. The Sako Super Hammerhead load was the stand-out and would be my choice for a hunting load.

Overview

Of all the current Benelli Lupo models the Walnut is cream of the crop. It looks beautiful with its glossy BE.S.T. barrelled action and AA-grade walnut with subdued satin finish. The rifle's inherent design features give it the utmost in form, fit and function for the discerning hunter. While the big .300 Winchester Magnum was a handful, calibre-wise a Lupo Walnut in any of the standard calibres fitted with a compact 3-9x or 2-10x hunting optic would make a sweet stalking/hunting rifle. All Benelli Lupo models retail around the \$2899 mark. More at berettaaustralia.com.au ●

The four-shot magazine holds rounds in a double-stack fashion and clips smoothly into the chassis body.



The Benelli Lupo Walnut preferred Sako Super Hammerhead 180-grain loads when tested over the bench.

Specifications

Model: Lupo Walnut
Manufacturer: Benelli Arms, Italy
Distributor: Beretta Australia
Calibres: .300 Win Mag (tested) also available in .243 Win, 6.5 CM, .270 Win, .308 Win, .30-06 Sprg
Chassis: Aluminium alloy
Action: Steel with BE.S.T. treatment.
Bolt: Three locking lugs, fluted, BE.S.T. gloss finish
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
Magazine: Double stack detachable, five rounds in standard calibres, four in .300 Win Mag
Stock: AA-grade walnut buttstock and fore-end, Monte Carlo profile
Length: 1082mm (.243 Win, .270 Win, .308 Win, .30-06 Sprg) | 125mm (6.5 Creed, .300 Win Mag)
Weight: 3.27kg (review rifle)
RRP: Around \$2899

Two-position safety is just behind the rear tang.



Benelli Lupo Walnut in .300 Win Mag: Accuracy Testing at 100m

Ammunition	Best group (mm)	Worst group (mm)	Average group size (mm)*
Sako Super Hammerhead 180gr Bonded Soft Point	17	46	28
Sellier & Bellot 180gr SPCE	29	42	37
Federal Power-Shok 180gr Soft-Point	34	49	41

* Average group from five 3-shot groups at 100m using front benchrest and rear bag