

Happy anniversary!

David Crofts hails Beretta's 694 Limited Edition Sporter

The Beretta Arms Company and the many types of firearms they produce under their own name (they also own other brands of rifle and shotgun manufacturers), are well known in this country, having been imported for many years. During that time Australian sporting shooters have used them successfully for target shooting and hunting and even to win Olympic medals. The company was founded in 1526, so in three years' time will celebrate their 500th birthday.

Under review here is the 694 Limited Edition Sporter, made to commemorate Beretta Australia's 20th anniversary, and is engraved as such on the underside of the monoblock. Only 50 of these were produced and imported and this particular anniversary model is only available with 31" barrels, unlike the standard 694 Sporter which comes with 30 or 32" barrels. The gun comes in an attractive silver Beretta

ABS case with three combination locks making it airline friendly.

Also inside the case are a stock bolt tool, an additional 23mm recoil pad, Beretta gun oil, choke spanner, three additional Optima HP chokes, a small screwdriver for trigger adjustment, spare pair of ejector retaining studs, a pair of 20-gram B-Fast stock weights, basic safety instructions, warranty and ABS case paperwork. During the course of the review I also noticed two 40-gram B-Fast stock weights were already secured inside the stock.

Barrels

The 31" barrels are 3" chambered, Steelium Plus bored with Beretta's 'Triple Cone' technology and have five Optima HP extended colour-coded multi-chokes as standard. The chokes supplied are Cylinder, Skeet, Improved Cylinder, Modified and Improved Modified. The barrels are fitted with an 8-10mm tapered rib which,

unusually for Beretta, has a tramline. The rib is fitted with a Bradley-type white bead at the muzzle and as the 694 has no mid-bead, I found the tramline helped as it was noticeable in peripheral vision if your eye wasn't centred over the rib (Beretta Australia will fit a mid-bead for a small fee).

The barrels are regulated at the factory for point of impact and when I tested the gun on a pattern board at my local club, results showed both shared the same point of impact. They're monoblock in construction and superbly finished with a dark gloss blue/black and no sign of rivelling or unevenness. The interior of the tubes are highly polished to a mirror-like finish with the barrels weighing 1520g, which is at the lighter end of the scale for longer barrels on Sporters.

This lighter weight compared to those usually fitted to a Trap gun can be a significant benefit in a model intended as a Field/Sporter shotgun. Unusually, this version of



The balance felt close to ideal for a Sporting Clays gun

The 694 being given a run on the skeet field.

the 694 doesn't have the option to fit B-Fast magnetic weights to the barrels. With the 694 being made in Europe, the gun has been proof tested in Italy for CIP Superior Steel Shot Proof, handy for the sporting shooter who wants to go duck hunting as it's safe to use with high performance steel shot.

Action

This is of the bifurcated type and due to positioning of the trunnions and conical locking bolts, means the receiver has a lower profile when viewed from the side than a Browning or Miroku-type action. The action finish is fairly plain but has a more contemporary 'racy' look with chunkier, angular bolsters unlike the 694's predecessors the 682 and 692. This extra meat in the action adds more weight for improved handling.

There are also similarities between the decoration of the 694 and DT11, both having a nickel-type finish and blue fill

to the lettering and line along the action bordering. The metal-to-metal fit and finish of this gun is exceptional. The top lever has been given a makeover and the thumb area is now angled like the DT range of shot-guns, which makes that top lever far more comfortable to use. The action fences have been slimmed down by fluting on either side (these flutes also run into the top of the walnut stock on either side of the top tang) to aid with target acquisition and the trigger is adjustable.

Barrel selection is obtained the usual Beretta way via a rocker-type switch on the safety catch. Having owned a few Berettas, this type of barrel selector would annoy me at times as I'd catch it with my thumb as I went to move the top lever to open the gun and change, sometimes unknowingly, which barrel shot first.

Yet with this 694, Beretta technicians have engineered a solution to that issue, as you can only change the barrel setting with

the safety in the 'safe' position. As soon as you push it forward into the firing position, the selector is locked in place so you can't change it by accident and, for me, that's top marks to Beretta. Trigger pulls were good straight out the box and averaged 1.65kg for the bottom barrel and 1.7kg for the top.

Woodwork

Timber furniture on the 694 Sporter is European walnut and I believe Beretta use walnut they grade as 2.5 as standard on this model, the wood fitted to this gun being of the paler, blonde type with some figuring. Wood-to-metal fit is excellent as are the stock shapes with a fairly tight radius pistol grip and palm swell. There's a slight right-hand cast and 375mm length of pull including an 18mm Beretta recoil pad, though different pad length and spacers are available to adjust stock length, with a longer 23mm pad included.

Stock shapes are reminiscent of those

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The 694 Limited Edition cased with spare chokes.

on Beretta's DT range and are a marked improvement on designs previously fitted to their mid-range Sporters. The stock comb is of a fuller design to help prevent head roll, dimensions being 35mm drop at start of the comb and 50mm at heel which suited me. The fore-end is of a rounded type which is fitted as standard to 694 Sporters and some variants of 694 Trap guns, the wood itself having an oil-type finish. Stock ergonomics made for good mount repeatability and handled the punchier (1350fps+) competition shot shells comfortably.

At the range

The 694 felt good in the hands, weighing 3.79kg and balancing on the hinge pin out of the box and to me the balance felt close to ideal for a Sporting Clays gun. Using it on Skeet, Trap and 5-Stand layouts I was most impressed by its handling characteristics and pointability. Overall ergonomics and feel of the 694 are a noticeable improvement on



The monoblock is jewelled.

previous models and felt recoil, even when using 1350fps+ 28-gram high-performance target loads, seemed low.

I managed some good scores during testing with the first box of shells I put through the gun giving me a clean round of Skeet, very pleasing from a gun I'd never shot before. Consistent patterns produced by the extended Optima HP Chokes broke the clays I connected with in a most satisfying way using target loads by different manufacturers.

In summary

The 694 Limited Edition Sporter is an excellent product which, even though priced around the \$7000-8000 mark offers good value, especially considering the longevity you can expect and Beretta Australia's excellent product support. Not only is this a great Sporting Clays gun, it'll handle up to 3" (76mm) heavy, high-performance steel loads which makes it ideal to double-up for duck hunting.

It's a shotgun which handles superbly, has the maker's reputation for reliability and durability, coupled with Beretta Australia's 'Forever Servicing' and up to a three-year warranty. Finally, a shooting mate of mine whom I call 'Beretta Bill' due to his love of their shotguns, likes to say: "Better buy a Beretta" and in the case of the 694 Sporter I'd agree wholeheartedly. ●

Specifications

Maker: P. Beretta, Italy
Distributor: Beretta Australia
Model: 694 Ltd Edition Sporter
Overall length: 125.5cm
Overall weight: 3.79kg (with 2 x 40-gram stock weights fitted)
Barrel length: 31 inches/79cm
Barrel weight: 1.520kg
Bore: Steelium Pus, 18.6 Tapered, 76mm Chamber
Chokes: Optima HP, 5 Extended Chokes with coloured bands included
Trigger pulls: Bottom - 1.65kg / Top - 1.7kg
Drop at comb: 35mm
Drop at heel: 50mm
Length of pull: 375mm
Warranty: Three years
Other info: RRP includes a free gunfit at Beretta Australia, Melbourne
RRP: Beretta 694 Sporters - RRP Starting From \$7799

