

The A400's fast handling proved a match for these elusive targets.



The gun is stocked in a medium quality walnut that has been given Beretta's Xtra-grain treatment. Its grain is enhanced by a dye process and is then given a durable oil finish. The chequering on the long and slender fore-end and the pistol grip shows what can be achieved using the latest laser-cutting technology. The pistol grip has a conventional pattern cut at 24 lines to the inch, but the pattern on the fore-end wraps completely around the underside and incorporates the Beretta three-arrow logo. It's very well-executed and, in combination with some tasteful sculpting of the wood surfaces, adds to the understated elegance of this A400's presentation.

The alloy receiver has been given an attractive bronze finish, providing a nice contrast to the polished blue of the barrels. The whole presentation of this autoloader is very stylish.

TECHNICAL FEATURES

This 20-gauge is designed to be as versatile as its bigger brothers. Chambered for 3-inch cartridges, it is capable of cycling all 20-gauge loads ranging from 24 gram target cartridges through to heavy 36 gram magnums. Surprisingly, it manages to achieve this versatility without the spring-loaded, self-regulating gas valve which is a feature of the 12-gauge versions. The absence of this valve was the first thing I noticed when I assembled the testfire shotgun and I wondered whether it would

BY GARY GIRVAN

AN ELEGANT SUB-GAUGE SEMI

Here's some good news for 20 gauge enthusiasts...Beretta's A400 20-gauge is now in production and will be available here in time for the 2013 game bird season. For those sub-gauge enthusiasts who've been looking forward to its arrival, it's been a long time coming. We first reviewed the 12-gauge A400 Xplor Unico back in May/June 2010. However, the worldwide demand for the 12-gauge versions of the A400 family has been so high that it has taken three years for production-line

space to become available enabling the manufacture of 20-gauge versions of this highly popular, gas-operated family of autoloaders. The wait has been worthwhile; this sub-gauge version lives up to the reputation established by its bigger brothers.

The A400 will be available in two 20-gauge versions. Our testfire gun, the Xplor, comes with a soft recoil pad but without Beretta's very effective Kick-Off recoil-reducing device. The other, the Xplor Action, will have Kick-Off and the Gun Pod

feature. The Kick-Off version arrived in the country after the publication date of this issue, too late to be included in our review, unfortunately.

PRESENTATION

This new autoloader is a very smartly presented, eye-catching gun. It's a perfectly scaled-down version of the 12-gauge model. Its sleek lines and attractive finish generated a lot of favourable comment from the many shooters who tried it in the course of our testfire.

cope with the variety of loads we were going to put through it during our testing. I needn't have worried. We fired over 350 rounds of widely varying loads and the gun cycled them all without a falter.

As a bonus, it proved to be a clean-burning gas system. The gun did not need much cleaning even after extended shooting sessions.

Except for the simplified gas relief system, this model has all the operating features of the rest of the A400 family. It has»



Adam Green evaluates the A400's suitability for Sporting Clays.

BELOW This ammunition gave dense Full choke patterns from the Modified tube.



a breech bolt with a Benelli-style rotating bolt head that is connected by two operating rods to a polymer cylinder which fits over the magazine tube and the mainspring. This arrangement makes the whole assembly easily accessible for routine maintenance and contributes to the A400 series' reliability.

The trigger guard is in a black, tough, polymer material and is oversized to accommodate a gloved finger. Located in a convenient position at the front of the trigger guard, the triangular safety button is also oversized and is particularly easy to locate and operate (something that cannot be said for the safeties of all autoloaders!).

Like its bigger brothers, this gun also has the added safety of a magazine cut-off and the convenience of easy unloading of cartridges from the magazine tube.

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HP system has a lengthened forcing cone, a chrome-lined and over-bored barrel (up from 15.9mm to 16.0mm), and lengthened choke tubes. This combination is designed to reduce recoil and to produce superior patterns,

To test the Optima HP's performance, I patterned two 3-inch magnum lead loads that I had used with good success during last season's duck hunting. Patterning was done using the Modified choke tube.

Load One was an Armusa cartridge -36 grams of (Euro) #4

pellets. This shell produced well-distributed patterns, putting on average 140 of its pellets into the 30-inch circle at 40 yards giving a pattern density of 66%...tighter than you would expect from a Modified choke.

Load Two proved to be a real surprise. Federal Prairie Storm is a high-velocity shell with a payload of 36 grams of (US) #5 shot. It contains a mixture of conventional round pellets and belted shot, a combination that you would expect to result in patchy patterns. On the contrary, through the

Modified choke, the patterns from this cartridge averaged 152 pellets in the circle, producing Full choke patterns with a tight central density.

Both of these results demonstrated just how efficient the Optima HP is.

TESTFIRE

We had this autoloader over the summer. There wasn't a lot of game to be hunted, but the A400 had a thorough workout on Sporting Clays and skeet. Both of these clay target sports provide a good predictor of a shotgun's handling qualities in the field.

This model of the 20 gauge is a lightweight gun. Unloaded, it weighs a mere 2.62kg (5.8lb). But although it weighs so little, it does not have the characteristic whippiness you associate with guns of this weight. With its 28-inch barrel, the gun has refined handling. Its balance lies well between the hands so that while it has the virtue of fast-pointing, it is also very controllable and smooth-swinging. Experienced shooters enjoyed the gun's handling at both these disciplines.

The one game shoot I managed to get using this gun was an evening shoot at pigeons returning to their home roost in a barn. The A400 proved to be a great little pigeon gun and great fun to shoot. Its responsive, fast handling proved ideal for these jinking, elusive little targets.

People who have not had much experience of shooting a 20 often assume that it is a soft-shooting sub-gauge. However, the opposite can be true. The combination of lightweight guns and heavy loads can make recoil a serious issue with 20 gauge shotguns. The standard cartridge load for a 20-gauge is 24 grams. With this load, the softening effect of the gas action combined with the very effective Micro-Core recoil pad made this A400 a delightful gun to shoot. Recoil was not an issue. However, I did shoot a 100-bird Sporting match using 28-gram loads throughout and this was a different story. You can't shoot the equivalent of 12-gauge loads through a gun this light without paying the penalty of sharply-felt recoil. By the end of the day, I was becoming very aware of a tender shoulder.

If you are using your 20 for duck hunting, you will be aware of the kick that magnum hunting loads generate. For my early-season duck hunting, I tend to use a 20-gauge autoloader in combination with magnum loads:

3-inch cases with 32 or 36 grams of lead shot. I am prepared to tolerate the inevitable sharp recoil for the benefit of using a fast-handling, hard-hitting little gun. And to be realistic, with today's lower bag limits and the marked decline in mallard numbers, I am not likely to fire enough shots to be too punished by the recoil.

For the duck hunter, the Xplor Action with its Kick-Off device would be the recommended version of the A400. Although we did not have an opportunity to test this model, my experience of using Kick-Off in Beretta's 12 gauge models has convinced me of its effectiveness in softening the punishing effect of felt recoil and in taming the muzzle flip that often accompanies it.

CONCLUSION

I was impressed by the handling qualities and reliability of this A400 sub-gauge. Its presentation and finish were up to the high standards that we have come to expect from Beretta. My only reservation about the model we tested was that its light weight meant that recoil did become an issue when using magnum loads. If your shooting does not require the use of heavy field loads, then this version would be highly suitable and a delight to use. If you intend to shoot a lot of magnum shells, then the Kick-Off version will be the one for you. **RGR**

The Optima Bore HP system has a lengthened forcing cone, a chrome-lined and over-bored barrel (up from 15.9mm to 16.0mm), and lengthened choke tubes. This combination is designed to reduce recoil and to produce superior patterns.

» Specs

MAKE & MODEL: Beretta A400 Xplor Action

TYPE: Gas-operated autoloading shotgun

GAUGE: 20 gauge

BARREL:

- Length: 28in. (71cm); 3-inch chamber
- Optima Bore HP interchangeable choke tubes
- Bore: 16mm (0.630")
- Chromed bore

RIB: 6mm ventilated. Single red sighting bead

RECEIVER: Alloy with anodized bronze finish

TRIGGER PULL: 5lb 9oz average

SAFETY: Crossbolt at front of trigger guard

MAGAZINE (CAPACITY): 2 3/4": 3 + 1 in chamber; 3": 2 + 1

STOCK:

- Walnut with Xtra Grain and oil finish
- Dimensions: length of pull: 14 1/2in (368mm)
- Drop at heel: adjustable 50 - 65mm
- Cast: adjustable for L or R hand with shim kit
- Recoil pad: 16mm black Micro-Core

WEIGHT: 2.62kg (5.8lb)

ACCESSORIES:

- Fitted ABS case
- Three choke tubes: Cyl, Mod, Full, plus wrench
- Stock shim kit
- 2 magazine reducers, Oil, handbook
- 2 quick-detachable sling swivels

RRP: \$2899.00 (\$3299.00 for model with KO and Gun Pod)

» Up Close

Benelli-style rotating bolt head.



The gas piston and gas cylinder operate effectively with no regulating valve.



If you shoot magnum cartridges the Kick-Off version is the one for you.

