



Beretta A400 Xplor Unico Autoloading Shotgun

The Next Generation of Beretta Autoloaders

With two very successful gas-operated autoloading shotguns already in their catalogue, you'd hardly think that Beretta would need another new model. Since its introduction in 2000, the various models of the AL391 have proved to be very popular in the field and on the range. Chambered for 3 inch cartridges, the 391's versatility and fine handling qualities have ensured its success. First introduced in 2003, its bigger cousin, the 3 ½-in-chambered Xtrema, has become the ultimate gun for the serious waterfowler. Weighing in at 3.72kg (8.2lb), it's a big, heavy gun. The Xtrema's weight helps soften the punishing recoil generated by supermagnum loads, but the gun is not designed to cycle light target loads.

Each of these fine shotguns, in its own way, has set the bench mark for gas-powered autoloaders. But Beretta's designers have not been resting on their laurels. Their next generation of semi's, the A400 series, is intended to combine the best features of both of its predecessors and to add some further refinements of its own.

A400 Xplor Unico

The first version of this new A400 family is a wood-stocked model. Its Xplor and Unico labels need some explanation. Xplor designates this as a field gun for which camouflage and synthetic stocks will no doubt become available soon. Versions designed specifically for clay target shooting will be given a different designation, yet to be announced. Unico, (Italian for "unique"), describes the A400's versatility. Currently, it is the only autoloader designed to function reliably with shells ranging in length from 2 ¾in to 3 ½in and with payloads as diverse



Above: The A400's trigger group is a new design.

Top: The A400 will cycle as fast as you can pull the trigger. Here, two empties in the air, the third about to be ejected.

as 24 to 63 grams (7/8oz – 2 1/4oz) without any adjustment being necessary. A unique versatility indeed!

As supplied, the Xplor is fitted with a magazine plug that limits its capacity. Once this is removed, the gun becomes a 4-shot (3 in the magazine, 1 in the chamber) with 2 3/4 and 3 inch shells, and a 3-shot with the super-magnum 3 1/2's – providing plenty of firepower for the field shooter.

Presentation

The Xplor demonstrates that Italian flair for design. It's a very smart-looking shotgun with attractively slim lines, modern and stylish without going over the top. It is stocked in a medium grade walnut but the grain and the figuring have been enhanced by a dyeing process and then given a durable oil finish. The effect is a very attractive one.

The latest laser-cutting technology enables designers to indulge their imaginations when designing chequering patterns. The Xplor has conventional chequering, cut at 24 lines per inch, on the pistol grip, but the pattern on the elegant, slender fore-end wraps completely around the underside of the



Above: Fancy laser-cut chequering on the fore-end.

Top: Recoil is tamed by Beretta's Kick-Off plus the Micro-Core recoil pad.

fore-end and incorporates the Beretta three-arrow logo. Even the gas exhaust flange at the front of the fore-end has been redesigned to fit in with its slim profile.

The gun comes with a set of shims which enables adjustments to be made to stock drop and to cast.

Despite having to accommodate 3 1/2" shells, the Xplor's alloy receiver is significantly smaller than that of the 3 1/2" Xtrema2 and only marginally longer than that of the 391. It has been finished in an attractive matt grey-green colour which is very practical for a field gun.

The trigger guard, in a black, heavy-duty polymer, has been stylishly shaped and is big enough to accommodate a gloved

finger. Even the safety button has been redesigned. It is now a triangular shape, bigger than those of its predecessors and more convenient to use.

Operating system

The Xplor uses a similar system to that used so successfully in the Xtrema2. It has a breech bolt with a Benelli-style rotating head. The bolt is connected to two operating rods and the whole assembly, bolt and rods, is mounted on a polymer cylinder which fits over the magazine tube. This cylinder also encloses the mainspring which also wraps around the magazine tube making the spring easily accessible for routine maintenance – a great improvement over its butt-stock location in the 391 series.

I like the system that locks the bolt handle into place. It



THE XPLOR DEMONSTRATES THAT ITALIAN FLAIR FOR DESIGN.

eliminates any chance of the handle flying out during firing and rendering the auto useless. It's not an uncommon event. Some hunters who have had that frustrating experience have taken to carrying spare bolt handles with them in the field.

Since the introduction of the 391, Beretta's gas system has shown a constant evolution with each new model. Each has retained the usual gas chamber mounted under the barrel with its spring-loaded self-regulating gas valve in front of it. What has changed, is the design of the piston. The A400 has a small, sharply-waisted piston which features an expanding washer around its neck. This washer has a serrated edge so that when it expands, it acts as a gas seal and also scrapes carbon and powder residue from the inside of the gas cylinder. Beretta's publicity claims that during their testing of the A400, they fired 10,000 rounds through the gun without cleaning the gas system and had no malfunctions! Our testing couldn't match that number of shots. We fired only about 300 rounds of field



Above: The Xplor's light, fast handling makes it ideal for use from a layout blind.

Left: The rotating bolt and return spring assembly.

Below Left: The receiver sports a matt grey-green finish. Note the new shape of the safety button.

and target ammunition, but we didn't clean the mechanism at all during the test. Our photographs of the gas system were taken at the end of the testing and show just how clean the gas action remained. This is not to encourage sloppy habits. With a gas powered auto, the best way to ensure reliable performance is to give it a thorough clean after every use.

This operating system results in a very fast-cycling action. In an impressive display of speed, our testfire gun cycled shells and spat out the empties as fast as we could pull the trigger.

Optima-Bore HP Barrel

Beretta are well-known for the quality of their barrels and the Xplor was no exception to this. Designed to cope with steel shot, its 28in chrome-bored barrel was lightweight yet very robust and featured Beretta's Optima-Bore HP internal profile. This incorporates a very long forcing cone with a moderate degree of over-boring - 18.6mm (0.732") – designed to enhance pattern performance and, to a degree, to reduce recoil.

I was surprised to find that it came with only three choke tubes: Cylinder, Modified, and Full. For a gun costing the thick end of \$4000.00, you could expect to be provided with a full set of five tubes, however, the Imp-cyl and Imp-mod tubes are available as extras.

Other Features

Shooters familiar with convenience of the magazine cut-off and the easy unloading system of the 391 and Xtrema will be pleased to see that the Xplor comes equipped with both these features. As well, this gun is packaged in a newly-designed ABS carry case which bears the Beretta logo.

Light Weight vs Recoil

When every one of our testfire shooters first handled the Xplor, their initial comment invariably was about the gun's lightness. It weighs only 3.2kg – just a shade over 7lb – and is, in fact, significantly lighter than a 28in-barrelled AL391 which typically weighs around 3.4kg. This light weight makes for a lively, fast-handling shotgun, but it does raise fears about the pain factor generated by the recoil of magnum and supermagnum shotshells.

To counter this, the Xplor incorporates three features. It is

fitted with Beretta's recoil-taming Kick-Off device as fitted on the Xtrema2. This system consists of two oil-damped cylinders which compress under recoil to spread and ease the effects of recoil. To complement the Kick-Off, a new, third hydraulic cylinder has been incorporated into the butt-stock. Its function is to absorb the impact of the bolt against the back of the receiver as it reaches the end of its travel. Finally, Beretta have designed a completely new recoil pad which they call Micro-Core. Constructed from an open-cell technopolymer foam, this soft pad performs its cushioning job very effectively. Pads of different thicknesses are available so that the length of pull can be adjusted to suit.

Our testfire would determine how effective these recoil-reducing features were.

Testfire

We were able to give the Xplor a good workout in the field and on the range. It proved to be a very pleasant gun to shoot. Its light weight made it a very fast-pointing and responsive shotgun. When using high speed steel loads – Federal 1 1/4oz in the 3 inch case, recoil was perfectly manageable. Beretta's recoil management system performed admirably. As expected, recoil was more pronounced when using 3 1/2in loads – in this case, Federal's high velocity load of 1 3/8oz of Tungsten-iron and steel. The recoil was felt not so much a sharp, painful punch, but as a giant push against the shoulder which made the muzzle flip difficult to control for subsequent shots. It was an impressive performance from a gun as light as this.

As promised, the gun performed flawlessly with target loads as light as 24 grams, and the gun's handling proved to be ideal for skeet and for five-stand clay target shooting.

When you're shooting big steel pellets such as US#2's, it's difficult to get consistently satisfactory patterns. However, our pattern testing at 40 yards using the Modified choke and Federal ammunition showed that Beretta's Optima-Bore HP produced consistently well-distributed Full choke patterns which averaged around 78%.



Typical pattern with high velocity steel.



Above: Evolution of Beretta's pistons: (l. to r.): 391, A400, Xtrema2.

Top: The gas-operated system will handle all these loads reliably.

Conclusion

Retailing at \$3999.00, the Xplor is an expensive autoloader, but you are getting a lot of gun for the money. It is a very attractively presented shotgun which has been manufactured to the highest standards. Its versatility, reliability, and fine handling will endear it to all field shooters except, perhaps, to those who might need to use 3 1/2 inch ammunition more extensively than most. For a dedicated Canada goose hunter, the Xtrema might still be the preferred option. But certainly, with the introduction of the A400, Beretta have again raised the bar for their competitors in the gas-operated autoloader market.

Specifications	
Make & model	Beretta Xplor Unico with Kick-Off
Type	Gas-operated autoloading shotgun
Gauge	12 gauge
Barrel	Length: 71 cm (28 in). Chambered for 89mm (3.5in) cartridges Optima Bore HP interchangeable choke tubes Bore: 18.6mm (0.732") Chromed bore
Rib	6mm ventilated. Single sighting bead.
Receiver	Grey-green anodized aluminium alloy
Safety	Cross-bolt with triangular button at front of trigger guard
Magazine capacity	3+1 in chamber
Stock	Material: walnut with Xtra-wood and oil finish Laser-cut chequering at 24 lines per inch. Style: pistol grip stock with slim fore-end Dimensions: Length of pull: 362mm (14 1/4in) Drop at heel: adjustable 50-65mm Cast: adjustable for l. or r. hand with shim kit Recoil pad: Kick-Off with 16mm recoil pad
Weight	3.20kg (7.0lb)
Accessories	Fitted ABS case 3 choke tubes: Cyl, Mod, Full, plus wrench Sling swivels, oil, handbook.
RRP	\$3999.00
Distributor	Beretta New Zealand. www.berettanewzealand.com