

**OFTEN IN ERROR,
NEVER IN DOUBT
BY BRUCE BUCK**

JOEL ETCHEN BERETTA 687 SILVER PIGEON III SIGNATURE SERIES COMBO



Sometimes you need a new gun. Sometimes you don't need one, but you most definitely deserve one. The gun being reviewed here is not one you need. That would be a reliable custom-fitted 12 bore sporter which can be shot on any course at any time. No, this is a gun you deserve because, well, just because.

The review gun is a Beretta 687 Silver Pigeon III Signature Series Combo two barrel sub gauge competition set sold by Joel Etchen Guns in Pennsylvania. The guns are based on the tried and true Beretta 687 action, and come with barrels in combos of 20/28 and 28/410. The field combos have 28" barrels, 1/4" wide top ribs, small metal front beads and automatic safeties. The sporting

clays combos come with 30" barrels, wider 3/8" top ribs, Bradley white dot front beads, and a blessed manual safety. Our test gun is the 30" 28/410 sporting clays combo. Retail price is \$4,250. The field models are \$100 less.

Etchen has been selling these combinations since 1995. That they have proven popular is an understatement. For clays they are the epitome of the fun gun - out of the ordinary, yet great looking, well made and with that sub gauge cachet which appeals to accomplished shooters.

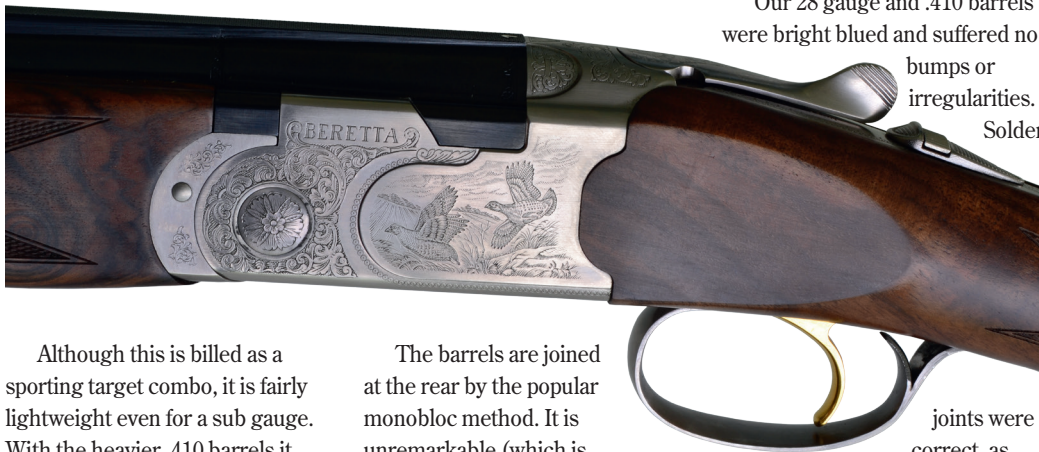
There isn't much I can say about the Beretta 680 series action that you don't already know. It has been around forever for a reason. It works well, looks good, and is simple to repair if it ever does need help. It may well be the most popular O/U action in the world, and for a good reason.

The combos made for Etchen are Silver



of that shallow computer engraving on their silver receivers than a Grade I. As this is their 28/410 combo, it is built on Beretta's "baby frame", which is a tiny bit smaller than their 20 gauge frame used on the 20/28 combo. On the sides are acanthus leaves, quail and woodcock. On the bottom, amid the acanthus leaves and surrounding a grouse is "J.E.G. Special" standing for "Joel Etchen Guns".

Pigeon Grade III guns. That means they have a little more



Although this is billed as a sporting target combo, it is fairly lightweight even for a sub gauge. With the heavier .410 barrels it weighed 6lbs. 9.5 oz, while with the 28 gauge barrels in place it was 4.4 oz less at 6lbs. 5.1 oz. But the weight distribution was most interesting in that the lighter 28 gauge barrels carried more of their weight up front, balancing 1 ½" in front of the hinge, whereas the heavier .410 barrels had more of their weight in the monobloc area and balanced only 1" in front of the hinge.

The trigger is mechanical, so it will reset with light .410 shells without a problem. Trigger pulls were 4 ½ pounds for the bottom barrel and 4 ¼ pounds for the top. It doesn't get much better than that. Well, yes it does. The trigger pulls were amazingly crisp and totally without creep. They broke like icicles. Well done indeed. The safety was manual, which befits a target gun and maintains our sanity. The barrel selector is a lateral toggle built into the safety lever.

The Beretta 687 action hinges on stubs which engage cutouts in the sides of the monobloc. The stubs are replaceable should you live that long. The bolting is via conical locking lugs. The mid-breech location contributes to the action's low profile. As the action wears, the conical lugs simply self-adjust by refitting themselves a little deeper in.

The barrels are joined at the rear by the popular monobloc method. It is unremarkable (which is good) except for the fact that the Beretta auto ejectors are particularly easy to remove and replace for maintenance. Most guns are harder.



Our 28 gauge and .410 barrels were bright blued and suffered no bumps or irregularities.

Solder

joints were correct, as

well they ought to

be. Beretta makes thousands and thousands of barrels and they have had many years to get it right. Inside the barrels are chrome lined for ease of maintenance. Each barrel set comes with five flush mounted screw chokes (Cyl, Sk, IC, Mod, ImpMod). In the .410 I'd really like to also have a Full, but extra choke tubes are readily available, so that's not an issue.

What is an issue is the miserable choke "wrench" which Beretta supplies with the gun. It's a wretched flat stamping that is a joke and a bad one at that. Fortunately, Etchen understands this and makes available a proper 28/410 wrench. You definitely want to ask for this.

As mentioned, the top rib is 3/8" wide. It is flat, low and untapered, helping it get out of the way, just the way a rib should. If you like those Brooklyn Bridge ribs, look elsewhere. The front bead is one of those Bradley white bead things which seems oversized on these little barrels. There is also one of those useless center beads for those who like to aim really hard. The classic side ribs are solid and go all the way back under the forearm to the monobloc.

And then there is the wood. The stock has a slightly relaxed pistol grip, rather than one of

those vertical grips which force you to hold your elbow low. Dimensions on our sample were 14 11/16" x 1 ½" x 2 ¼" including a ½" pad. An extra ¾" pad was supplied if you wanted more length. The pads are smooth, non-sticky rubber with nicely rounded edges. They aren't grabby like so many lesser ones. The stock and forend laser checkering is in a tasteful classically restrained pattern with a high LPI count which offers a good grip. The forend on the 28/410 is slender with a good looking, rounded svelte front. The 20/28 combo isn't as lucky and has been saddled with one of those Schnable snouts. By the way, each barrel comes with its own forend. This avoids the "gapitis" of using a 28 gauge forend on .410 barrels. That said, if I had to find something to whine about, the wood at the head of the stock was just a little bit too over-proud of the receiver.

An oil finish has been used and it is very well applied to fill the grain with no holidays. So many European gunmakers fail to fill the grain, but not this time. There is also a nice brass initial oval at the bottom rear of the stock. You'll probably want to have a jeweler engrave it for you because you aren't going to want to sell this gun.





And then there is the quality of the walnut used in the stock and forends. What can I say? Look at the photos and draw your own conclusion. If you are a “woodie” type, this Etchen gun will get your heart pumping. Our gun had serious wood. Really serious wood. The Etchen website, www.joeletchenguns.com, lists their stock of the 687 Silver Pigeon III Small Gauge Combos complete with detailed photos of each set so that you can pick the exact gun with the wood that most appeals to you.

The gun comes with the two barrels, two forends, five flush screw chokes, wrench, ABS plastic take-down case, stock and barrel fabric sleeves, manual and a three year guarantee if you register the gun with Beretta. Etchen also sells some upgrade take-down cases which are very attractive if you want to dress things up.

Of course it all comes down to shooting, and shooting this gun was difficult. That’s because I kept looking at that beautiful wood

instead of the target. Just kidding, but the gun will cause envious comments regardless of how well or poorly you shoot it. I was a little more comfortable with the 28 gauge barrels because even though they weighed less than the .410 barrels, the weight of the 28 was farther forward. It gave the gun a bit more of a front balance bias, which I preferred. Better shooters may beg to differ.

My rule of thumb is that the lighter the gun, the more of its weight I want up front to give it a steadier feel. I thought that the .410 barrels were just a little light for my personal preference, but the 28s were pretty much spot on. Others who shot the gun either didn’t notice it or didn’t care.

As one would expect from Beretta’s classic 680 series, the gun’s mechanical function was correct in all respects. The chokes stayed put, the trigger remained crisp, ejectors did their job without hurling those valuable 28/410 empties into the next county, and

the barrel convergence seemed to be spot on. Both barrels fit on the action with the same amount of friction, showing that they were skillfully paired to that receiver. So often one barrel set of a combo fits differently from the other.

Not everyone will be in the market for a 28/410 combo, but those who are are likely to have been in the shooting game for a while and have developed an appreciation of good guns. The Joel Etchen Beretta 687 Silver Pigeon III Signature Combo is definitely a step up. If you have always hankered after a sub gauge sporter, this classy combo should be high on your list. And, yes, you do deserve it.

That’s all for now. Boots off. Beer open. If you have a question or a comment, drop me a line at TheTechnoid@gmail.com. ■

DICK DOUMITT PROUDLY SHOWS HIS ETCHEN COMBO

