



DON'T BREAK the bank

The name Stoen is probably more familiar to shotgunners yet the Turkish firm has been making 9mm pistols since the 1980s, predominately for the US market. But as Senior Correspondent Rod Pascoe reveals, some models of these economical pistols are now available here.

Previously there were six options in Stoen's STR-9 stable of handguns, all unavailable to Australian sporting shooters due to barrel length and magazine capacity requirements in this country. These readily affordable pistols are recoil-operated, polymer-framed, striker-fired self-loaders which come in either compact or sub-compact sizes primarily for the home-protection and self-defence market, another reason they've not been seen here.

Now a seventh offering, the STR-9FA, solves that problem with three options meeting Australian regulations: a standard open sight model and two red dot optical-ready (RDO) versions, one available in two-tone tungsten and one in FDE (flat dark earth) finish. Beretta Australia, local distributor for Stoen firearms, gave *Australian Shooter* the chance to try one.

One of the largest segments of the US

firearms market is the sub-\$400 9mm pistol sector, made up of local and foreign manufacturers. And the competition is fierce with each trying to outdo the others on price while at the same time striving to maintain a level of quality and attempting to come up with features - ergonomic, cosmetic and practical - to steal a march on rivals.

This burgeoning division has evolved for a couple of reasons, one being the increasing uptake of handguns by US citizens (mainly women for self-protection) aided by allowing concealed-carry in almost every state. The other factor is patents which protected the Austrian-made Glock so well up until now have expired. A similar thing happened when patents for the Colt AR platform ran out and everyone began making either complete AR-15 rifles or aftermarket parts for them. While many manufacturers are jumping on this bandwagon, some are finding it difficult to keep

pace with competitors who've found ways of saving a dollar or two somewhere on the production line but that's marketing for you.

The review firearm is pistol-club friendly, firing 9mm Luger cartridges from a 121mm barrel and housing a 10-round magazine. Furthermore, it has the option of being fitted with reflex optical sights making it more appealing to the action or practical-style competitions enjoying rapid growth at many clubs. Additionally, the STR-9 is listed on the IPSC Production Division list for approved handguns.

First impressions

The plastic padded case is tightly packed with accessories and gadgets some manufacturers tend to skimp on which could be part of a ploy to differentiate this pistol from the others by value-adding with extra enticements. Along with the two magazines is a cartridge loading tool (extra magazines

THE FIRST BERETTA HUNTING RIFLE



BRX1 LOAD YOUR INSTINCT

FAST

The BRX1 is faster, more instinctive and easier-to-shoot thanks to its linear reloading system, superb ergonomics and balance. It's also easy to adjust with a demonstrably quick caliber change, ambidextrous conversion and adjustable trigger weight.

ACCURATE

The concentric barrel and chamber are both cold hammer forged from one piece of premium steel. The special bedding geometry ensures the barrel maintains the correct position, resulting in at least a 3 shot group SUB M.O.A. guaranteed by the factory.

RELIABLE

The military based, ultra-tried and tested, locking system features a rotating bolt head with 8 locking lugs, or 16 for magnum calibers. Safe and strong, the BRX1 successfully passed the NATO tests which are performed on Beretta military firearms.

RRP \$2,599



www.berettaaustralia.com.au

Don't break the bank

are available at a reasonable \$60). Four machined steel adaptor plates which accept a wide array of popular brands of reflex dot sights are included along with a cleaning rod that will take a patch or cloth and one brass and one nylon bristle brush, a padlock, Allen key, small, medium and large backstrap inserts, a bottle of oil, instruction manual and holster.

The holster is designed to fit 2" duty belts whereas most competition belts are 1½" wide though I'm sure some clever modification can make them suit. But first check the holster specifications in the rule book for what is and what's not allowed for your particular competition.

After trying all three grip backstraps I settled on the one supplied on the pistol - the medium size gave the best hold in my hand and my thumb easily reached the magazine release. Additionally, length of pull between the hand and trigger finger was ideal with the medium backstrap while the grip angle promotes a high handhold and the finger grooves are also heavily textured for improved control during recoil.

The web of the thumb and trigger finger fit comfortably close to the bore line but not in the way of the recoiling slide. The magazine catch is reversible for left-handers and again the manual gives a full description of the process (the slide release lever is only available on the left of the frame). There's a three-slot rail on the underside of the frame for accessories and atop the slide is a metal insert to fill the cut-out when no optical sight is fitted. The two screws holding this blank in place are also used to secure one of the four supplied red dot adaptor plates.

The optical sight is not *co-witnessed*, meaning the reflex sight blocks the shooter's vision of the open sights should the optical sight fail. The fixed steel sights use the three white dot principle and both front and rear are drift-adjustable in dovetails for windage only (an adjustable rear sight is available as an option). In the top of the slide is a visual loaded chamber indicator - with a small window machined out of the slide and a corresponding cut-out in the rear of the chamber you can see the rim of the round sitting in the chamber.

It takes some effort to rack the slide but there are deep diagonal serrations on the front and rear which give a good grip. The magazine ejected smoothly and after reading the manual for the correct take-down procedure, I stripped the pistol to basic cleaning condition and removed the recoil spring and barrel from the slide. Reading the manual is essential as slide removal differs from gun-to-gun and damage can occur if not done properly.

Contents of the box.



Choice of three backstraps.



Red dot reflex sight on one of four supplied adaptor plates.



Top of the slide showing rear sight and cut-out for optical sight.

Don't break the bank

The only negative I found was having to use the points of two screwdrivers to prise the take-down tabs to allow removal of the slide. Apart from the heavy spring the tabs themselves sit almost flush with the frame, a simple problem but one that could be easily fixed on the production line (I think they want to keep the gun as low profile as possible to avoid the tabs snagging on clothing in concealed-carry mode).

After eventually field stripping the pistol I lubricated the contact surfaces between frame and slide as well as the recoil spring assembly and wiped out the bore for later testing at the range. The recoil spring is of the flat wire type and held captive on a stainless rod guide.

At the range

For something different I decided to use only factory ammunition to test the STR-9FA as I figured the likely customer for this gun will be either a pistol club or new shooter who'll have access to factory loads initially.

I fired a mix of brands - Sellier & Bellot, American Eagle and Geco - three with copper jacketed and two with lead round-nose projectiles of 115 and 124-grain bullet weights. Departing from my normal testing routine I thought I'd duplicate competition conditions and shoot several timed sequences from the Service Pistol and WA1500 matches rather than groups from a fixed rest. Everything was shot with open sights from a standing unsupported position and drawing from a competition holster, not the holster provided. I repeated some of the same sequences using a Leupold DeltaPoint reflex sight, again with a mix of ammo types.

The magazines were simple to load with or without the loading tool provided, the slide racked normally and took up the first round easily. Texturing on the STR-9's



With a small window machined out of the slide and corresponding cut-out in the rear of the chamber, you can see the rim of the round sitting in the chamber.

grips is rough enough to keep the gun from moving in the hand but not rough enough to punish it. Yet some of the factory loads were quite a handful, especially those with the lighter 115gr bullets but generally the gun handled recoil well despite its light weight.

Muzzle jump was controllable and the white dot open sights were clear and easy to pick up quickly for follow-up shots. The trigger was surprisingly good for a budget gun, one thing which has certainly improved in striker-fired handguns since the Glocks of 40 years ago. The trigger breaks at around 5½lb and has a fairly long take-up for the first shot and a crisp let-off, unlike the spongy creep in early Glocks. After the first shot the trigger has a short reset for fast follow-ups.

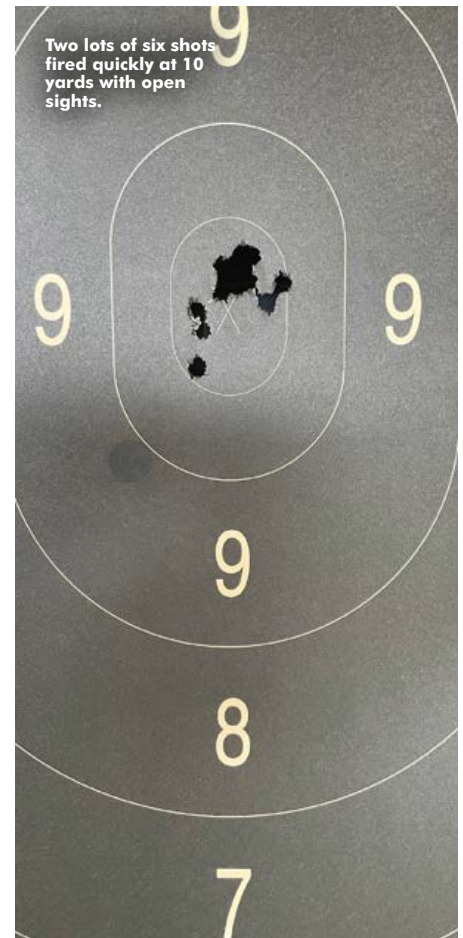
The size of all groups using open sights proved reasonable at 10 and 25 yards despite fall of shot printing in different places on the target depending on brand of ammo and bullet type (some windage adjustment will fix this once the desired load is found). There's a fully adjustable rear sight available as an accessory retailing for just over \$100 but one wasn't available for this review.

Groups using the red dot were marginally better and landed in the same place on the target as those fired with open sights. Shooting offhand showed up my ability (or lack of) but the exercise better represented a real-world practical shooting environment. The point was more to do with testing the gun's functioning as well as the mechanics of fast magazine changes, access to slide release and sight picture acquisition.

The magazine release was easy to locate and reloading unsighted wasn't an issue, fast repeated fire showing no signs of any feeding or extracting and ejecting problems. The exterior mounted extractor isn't as big as on some other brands but does its job well, leaving the fired brass in a neat pile. This applied to all brands and types of ammo and the slide always stayed locked open after the last shot was fired.

Summary

The Stoeger STR-9FA is a value-for-money handgun for the first-time pistol buyer or someone not considering competing at the top level and would also make an economical club gun for come-and-try shooters and new members. Apart from the problem with the take-down tabs in the frame it otherwise appears well made, reliable and reasonably accurate - and at around \$720 for the RDO version you can't argue with the price. ●



Two lots of six shots fired quickly at 10 yards with open sights.

SPECIFICATIONS

Make: Stoeger

Model: STR-9FA

Action/operation: Striker-fired, short recoil, cam-operated, tilt-barrel, locked breech self-loading

Ammunition: 9mm Luger (Parabellum), 9x19mm

Barrel length: 121mm

Length: 204mm

Width: 30mm

Height: 142mm

Sight radius: 176mm

Sights: White dot open sights dovetailed into slide. Four reflex sight adaptor plates included

Weight unloaded plus empty magazine: 750g

Frame: Fibre glass reinforced polymer with steel inserts

Barrel: One-piece steel with black nitride finish

Slide: Steel with black nitride finish

Safety: Trigger safety, loaded chamber indicator, firing pin block and out of battery safety

RRP: STR-9FA open sights \$650, STR-9FA RDO \$720

Distributor: Beretta Australia