

An essential tool in any target pistol shooters arsenal is a .22 autoloader and most target handgunners acquire such a pistol early in their pistol shooting career.

SUPERIOR STANDARD PISTOL WALTHER'S SSP

There are three international matches shot with .22 autoloaders in Australia – Standard Pistol, Sport Pistol and Rapid Fire. This last match has initiated another level of development in high-end .22 target auto development due to a significant change in the rules instigated by the ISSF (The sport's governing body). The original Rapid Fire match was shot with specialised pistols using .22 Short ammunition, vented barrels and unrestricted trigger weight, that had virtually no recoil. The Rapid Fire Match, shot on a set of 5 turning targets, that are exposed for series of 8,6 and 4 seconds require very good recoil recovery, especially in the 4 Second Series, hence the characteristics of the original Rapid Fire pistols.

About 5 years ago, the rules were radically

changed to eliminate the use of the .22 Short and requiring that Rapid Fire Match pistols were to have the same specifications as those used for Standard Pistol and Sport Pistol – 150 mm barrel length, no muzzle brakes or battle vents, minimum 1000 g trigger and .22 Long rifle only.

This has led to a new generation of match .22 autoloaders that have a higher level of recoil management and subsequent improved handling characteristics than many of their predecessors. The Walther SSP is just such a pistol.

The SSP complements, rather than replaces, the time-tested Walther GSP, that pioneered the magazine forward design that has been adopted by a number of Walther's competitors. It is a completely new design that is original in every respect.

TOP: Accuracy out of the box – 10 shot test group certifies the SSP's.

The SSP gets around the grip design limitations arising in rear-magazine pistols, from having the magazine inserted through the bottom of the grip, by inserting the magazine through the top of the open breech. This allows a lot more flexibility in grip angle and design and is not new to the Walther – the Domino/FAS was the first target auto to do it in the 1970's.

One advantage of the SSP over its forerunner, the GSP, that appeals to Junior and Women shooters particularly, is that that balance of the pistol is not as front-heavy as the GSP design. This combined with the pistol's relatively light overall loaded weight



LEFT: The Walther SSP's handling is enhanced by the high shooting hand position on the pistol. JR found that the SSP had very little vertical recoil movement in any of the rapid fire series.

BELOW RIGHT: Rear sight is adjustable for width as well as windage and elevation.

BELOW LEFT: The multiple trigger adjustments are accessible through the trigger guard.



SPECS WALTHER SSP

Maker:
Carl Walter

Calibre:
.22 Long Rifle

Dimensions(L,W,H):
290mm/50mm/135mm

Weight:
970g

Trigger weight:
1000-1300g

Sight radius:
220 mm

Barrel length:
153mm

Magazine capacity:
5 rounds

Distributor:
Frontier Arms

of just under 1000 g, makes it an easy pistol to handle over the long haul.

The SSP has all the standard features that could be expected for a top of the line match pistol, including adjustable orthopaedic grips, fully position and function adjustable trigger, match front and rear sights, each also adjustable for width (and depth for the rear sight notch).

The ergonomics of the Walther are very well thought out. The slide counterweight is at the front of the barrel shroud. It has two release buttons built in to it. Pulling the slide to the rear with the fingers on the buttons will lock the slide back, and it is as easily release by grasping it by the forward finger groove and pulling it back slightly to release the slide lock buttons and close the slide. With the slide open, the loaded magazine is inserted by simply pushing it base-first into the breech until it clicks into place. A large button in the right hand grip panel release the magazine and an ejection spring pushes it far enough out of the breech to be easily removed.

The SSP has a very slab-sided appearance

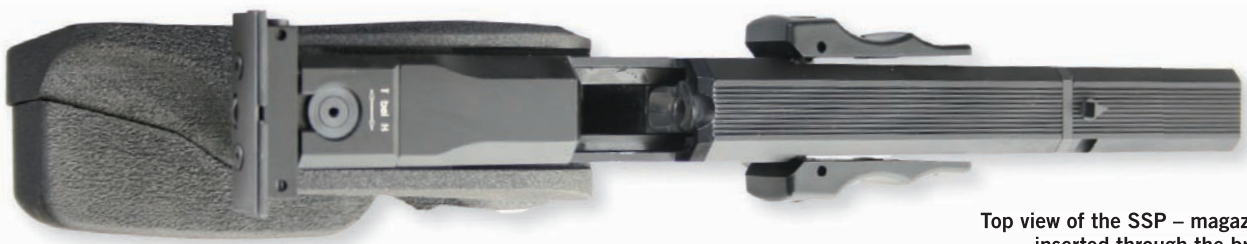
“The striker arrangement does away with a conventional hammer and ensures that the impact energy generated by the firing mechanism is in the same axis as the pistol's bore.”

as it is very deep through the frame in front of the trigger guard. The reason for this is that this area houses the pneumatic recoil buffer system and firing pin spring in two side-by-side tubes inside the frame under the barrel.

The illustrations best show how these work. The left hand spring is the firing pin (striker) spring while the right hand spring is the recoil spring. These chambers also act as the recoil buffering system and can be adapted to whatever ammunition is being used in the Walther. The striker arrangement does away with a conventional ham-

mer and ensures that the impact energy generated by the firing mechanism is in the same axis as the pistol's bore.

The trigger has all the necessary adjustments, including trigger pull length (a second trigger unit is supplied to increase the adjustment range, and the trigger itself is also adjustable for cant. Screws in the underside of the frame in the trigger guard control the trigger pressure, take-up, backlash and trigger pressure settings. None of these needed adjustment on the test pistol, as it was already adjusted to as close to ideal as possible, with a release weight just over 1000 g and



Top view of the SSP – magazine is inserted through the breech.



ABOVE: The recoil management system is adjustable via the two hex headed plugs under the muzzle.

negligible extraneous movement elsewhere apart from the first pressure take-up.

The test group supplied with the SSP was around 15 mm at 25 m for 10 shots. The type of ammunition used was not listed. The Walther was put through its paces with several types of match ammunition, including Geco Pistol Match, SK Pistol Match, CCI Standard and RWS Pistol Match. These loads were also chronographed through the SSP out of interest, with the three European brands registering around the 975 fps mark, with the CCI being a little slower at 950 fps average (for 10 shots). The CCI, which was the cheapest by half compared to the European ammo, produced the most consistent results in this brief test, with a standard deviation in its velocity of around 15 fps, while the other brands ran around 25 fps SD.

No problems with feeding or functioning were experienced with any of these loads and the only issue that was flagged up during the testing of the SSP, which would need to be watched by an owner, was the safety catch. This is a lever on the right side of the frame in front of the trigger. In the horizontal position, it is on 'Safe', and is turned down to the vertical position to 'Fire'.

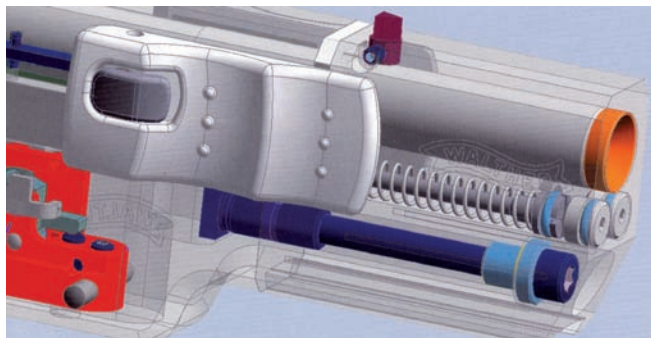
The safety turns fairly easily, and if the pistol is laid on the bench right side down, it is possible that it might be inadvertently moved far enough to put the safety on. This could be costly in a competition, as the shooter would not know that something was wrong until he or she attempted to fire the first shot, to find that nothing happens. This happened once during the range tests, and once the user is aware of this phenomenon, it is easy enough to check that all is well.

An additional safety device on the Walther is a cocking indicator in the form of a large red dot that is visible through a hole in the left side of the slide, just above the front of the trigger guard when the pistol is cocked.

The accuracy and handling characteristics



ABOVE: The SSP's full kit – a full set of tools, additional trigger unit and two magazines.

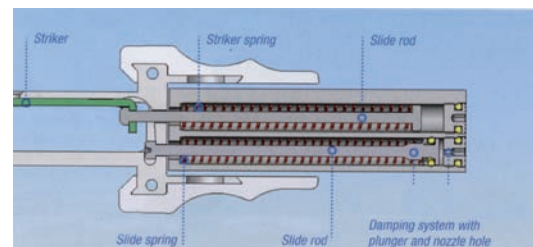


LEFT & BELOW: These cut-away views show the unique adjustable recoil management system on the SSP.

of the Walther SSP, are, as expected, very good. There is very little vertical movement of the pistol in recoil and the standard grips fitted me very well with my average sized hands. The Protouch polymer grips have a textured finish in the contact areas and the very high hand position in the grip with respect to the frame is also a major contributor the SSP's good handling. Grips are available in three sizes (small, medium and large) and in medium size for left-handers. Laminated timber grips are also listed in the Walther catalogue for the SSP, listed as the SSP Plus, and come at a premium to the Protouch grips.

Other accessories supplied with the outfit include a barrel weight (50g aluminium) that attaches to the underside of the barrel in a dovetail slot (100 g steel weights are available) and an additional magazine, as well as the necessary tools to service the pistol. I prefer a front-heavy balance, and found the SSP handled better for me with the weight attached.

The rear sight adjustments are a little unusual in that they are all done via hex head



screws and the tool supplied with the pistol needs to be used for these adjustments. A screwdriver will not do it. All this comes in a fitted hard plastic case, along with a comprehensive instruction manual.

This performance does not come cheap, and there will be no change from \$3000 if you want to put an SSP in your target shooting arsenal but that is about average for .22 match autoloaders of this type.

For more information on Walther pistols, contact Frontier Arms Ph: 08 83732855 or check the web site at www.frontierarms.com.au. 