

THE BERETTA COLE SPECIAL

A REVIEW BY SHEPPARD KELLY

This article looks at the custom Beretta 680 series guns that Cole has offered since 2008. Having apprenticed with Beretta, he is the pre-eminent authority on Beretta shotguns, both the boxlock 680 series as well as Beretta's Premium SO offerings. The 680 Beretta's have been customized in the UK for a number of years (by Beretta with their Giubileo series) but no one until Rich Cole has taken this sturdy, if somewhat plain, boxlock action and turned it into a true custom shotgun. Let's look at the history of the series and then the offering that Cole's Gunsmithing provides to U.S. shotgunners.

The Beretta 680 Shotgun

Next to John Browning's magnificent Superposed, I doubt there is another O/U shotgun action as 'tried and true' as the Beretta 680. Appearing in the marketplace in 1979, the 680s were

an improved version of the S series boxlocks Beretta had offered since 1956. Continuing the monoblock barrel and conical bolt through the breech face locking system of the S's, the 680 was more robust than its predecessor in several important areas. In no particular order of importance, the ejectors were modified with larger engagement surfaces and the

hinge pins were made thicker. The exterior of the action received a makeover also – the receiver sides were given bosses and the tops of the shoulders were reshaped, sculpted if you will, to give a 'chiseled' custom look. The benefits of the design are numerous and have been recounted by writers since the actions introduction. Let me share

an endorsement that really identifies why this action style has stood the shooting test of time.

In 2011, I was fortunate to visit the Holland and Holland Shooting Grounds outside of London. Since my visit was the basis for an article about Holland and Holland and the grounds, I was given access (guided – can't let those pesky Colonials run amok) to the facility, including the gun-room where every gun used on the grounds for instructional purposes was stored. I walked in expecting to find an assortment of H&H side by sides and a few of their magnificent O/Us. They were there, but the rest of the guns predominantly were Beretta 680s in various barrel and stock lengths and gauges. Steve Denny, Grounds Director and Chris Bird, Chief Instructor, saw my puzzled look and smiled. "I know what you're thinking," Denny said – why Berettas? "We shoot hundreds of thousands of shells a year at the grounds with students of varying abilities and in

COLE GUNSMITHING AND RICH COLE NEEDS NO INTRODUCTION TO OUR READERS – CHRONICLED IN SEVERAL ARTICLES IN CLAYSHOOTINGUSA, MOST RECENTLY HIS SKILLS WERE REVIEWED WITH THE RESTOCKING OF YOUR CORRESPONDENT'S PERAZZI IN CLAYSHOOTINGUSA'S AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2015 ISSUE.



all kinds of weather. We have to have guns that require minimal to no maintenance and work every time the trigger is pulled. The guns have to fit all sizes of shooters, or can easily be modified, and must be 'shootable' – so the instructors can concentrate on the student and not be concerned about the gun. Beretta produces stocks in various dimensions (apparently for the European market) that allow us to adapt the gun to every student. We also use them as our 'try' guns for stock fitting. We retire the guns usually after 100,000 plus rounds – they are fully functional but 'tired'. We send them to our H&H workshop, where our gunsmiths tighten the actions either by fitting new conical locking bolts or, if the locking holes are too worn, filling the holes with weld and fitting the smallest size locking bolt. We may do a wood refinish and repair, and the guns then go on a special Shooting Grounds sale. Those guns will very likely go on for many 1000s of rounds more."

Bird opined that for a mass produced gun, the Beretta 680s are universally well balanced in all barrel lengths and gauges, with good triggers and an easily used safety system. "The ejectors are strong and reliable and the chromed bores prevent rusting in our frequently damp UK climate. We use fiber wad cartridges exclusively on the grounds and the bores facilitate cleaning – which we do perhaps once a year other than a quick wipe down after a lesson with a silicon cloth. They are the perfect continuous use shotgun," said Bird.

Noted UK gun reviewer and firearm historian, Mike Yardley, provides the perfect summary on the worth of the Beretta 680 – "Enclosed action, simple trigger/safety system, robust ejectors, well regulated barrels,

strong stock/forend. If I could have but one gun on a deserted island, it would be a 680 series Beretta."

The Cole Special

When I asked Rich Cole about the Cole Special, his answer was to the point. "We wanted to create a classic styled gun with fancy wood. Something built on a well-established frame, system and design but more personal as it would be produced in smaller quantities with a few unique characteristics."



12GA 680 SERIES BERETTA COLE CUSTOM ACTIONS ENGRAVED BY PEDRETTI STUDIO OF ITALY.

The initial guns were offered in 12 ga., 30"/32" barrel lengths and with stocks configured for sporting clays. 20 gauge guns have been done with the same custom features, and future plans call for 28s and .410s. From the beginning, the guns featured the signature blue action with BERETTA SPECIAL accented in gold and unique to Cole's. Beretta provides the blued receivers to Cole specifications; on offer now is color case hardening, with Cole's doing the polishing and noted custom gun refurbisher Doug Turnbull, the hardening. The action internals are fitted by Cole, with barrels to customers requested lengths. The initial guns were with the Optima choke system and now utilize the new Optima HP.

Stocks have always been high grade Turkish walnut and available in varying lengths of pull and drop

dimensions. Lefties are not neglected with an equally elegant wood selection available for them. Recoil pads can be the Beretta Micro Core or to customers desire.

Joining blued and case hardened receivers, are custom engraved versions. The engraved models have been and are currently done by the Pedretti Studio in Gardone, Italy. The engraving is overseen personally by Stefano Pedretti and is limited to 20 actions a year. The patterns are varied and each is denoted as a Cole Custom. Cole's is unique in

Wales field style and had a minimal but functional palm swell. Checkering is machine done and quite well executed. The hand finished stock has a low sheen rubbed finish that fully fills the pores. A Beretta Micro Core recoil pad finished off the stock.

I requested a gun with the earlier Optima chokes vs. the Optima HP. The Optima bores run .732 (18.6) in size – a reasonable overbore in my estimation – and offers a better gas seal with the fiber wad cartridges I sometimes use. Extended and flush mount choke tubes are available, and of course, every aftermarket choke tube imaginable is available to fit the Optima or Optima HP system. Barrel weight was 1.470kg – this perfectly balanced on the compact 680 frame. Total gun weight came to a well-balanced 7lbs. 13oz. – not too heavy and not too light. Goldie Locks would be pleased.

And if the gun weren't already nice enough, it becomes truly resplendent in the Negrini custom case Cole's provide with each Special they sell. Negrini cases tell the buyer that the gun maker thinks enough of their product to case it in one of the very best gun cases sold. The case is internally and externally embossed with the Cole logo.

offering the only true hand engraved 680 actions in the U.S. Various patterns are available – and are exquisite.

Our review gun came with the blued action, 12 ga., 32" barrels and a Grade 3/4 Turkish walnut stock in sporting clays dimensions, forend of rounded field style sans the dreaded Schnabel beak. The grip was a nice compromise between the tightly curved target configuration and a Prince of



And in Review

No review is complete until the candidate shotgun is tested – on the range. A local club offers two challenging 5-Stand layouts, one close and quick and one long and quick. Using an assortment of ammunition with different velocities and payloads, and passing the gun on to other shooters, the observations were universally positive.

Our Cole Special is nicely balanced just a bit ahead of the hinge pin and coupled with a *'gee this fits me well'* stock configuration and a Micro Core recoil pad that really absorbs recoil, allowed the shooters to move quickly to those pairs of 'in your face' targets on the short course, and track the 40 yard crossers of the long course with ease. Chokes were left at IC/LM – and measured a correct .010 and .015. Both chokes delivered satisfying breaks on the long course – the pattern board revealed that when fed your correspondents favorite Federal SC177 1oz. loading of 7.5s at 1240fps., distribution was even without an excessively 'hot core'.

My experience with the long parallel tapers of the Beretta Optima and Optima HP choke tubes indicates nicely uniform patterns are the norm. I had intended to look at aftermarket tubes but the patterning results in all constrictions were excellent and negated adding more 'stuff' to the gun case.

And closing with one of your correspondents 'pet peeve' observations, the Cole Special ejectors were perfectly timed – fired shells left their chambers at precisely the same time and landed a satisfying distance away in neat synchronization. I mention this because I test guns twice the cost of a Cole and find indifferent ejection too frequently. Remember

COLE LOYALTY PERKS PROGRAM

Every purchaser of a new shotgun from Cole's is automatically enrolled in the 'Cole Loyalty Perks Program'. You receive the following:

- 10% off many clothing and accessory items for one whole year.
- Complimentary labor on the First Annual Service and Inspection. This ensures that your firearm is functioning and wearing properly and helps you nip any problems in the bud.
- Expedited repair/modification service should you have any problems with your new gun.
- When needed, a complimentary simple fitting/consultation to be sure you get the correct gun for your needs and that it fits you properly.
- All customers purchasing a new shotgun are entered to win a free gun. Drawings held quarterly.

that with a Cole Special, all parts are fit to the receiver by Cole himself, and he too recognizes that perfectly timed ejection is both functional and a sign of just a touch more 'personalization' to his guns.

The buyer of a Cole Custom gets a great deal for their money – a proven barreled action, hand fitted parts, a semi-custom stock with superb figure and a warranty/service program from Cole's that is second to none in the industry. And with all this, the owner has a 'good gun made even better', by one of the best gunsmiths in the country. ■

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