

GUN TESTS SHORT SHOTS

Our Advice: Buy Sheehan's .22LR High-End Walther Pistol/Rifle Kit

Some of the most interesting innovations in gunmaking occur at the margins of the firearms business. Herewith, we take a quick look at an interesting product for competition shooters.

Longtime GUN TESTS readers know that this magazine's bread-and-butter stories are when we shoot similar guns side by side, then criticize and recommend them (or not). But we also get lots of requests for guns and accessory testing that don't fit this formula. In almost all cases, your notes to us contain inquiries about guns or services that can't be evaluated in a head-to-head arrangement, either because the products or services are new, thus there aren't competitors for them, or because they're generic enough where a test of one item in the segment would cover the category.

As a result, we've recast the Short Shots column which previously covered firearms-industry news, to handle some of these single topic problems you lay on our doorstep. We can't always give you exactly the answers you seek-especially when the question is broad, such as, "I'm going deer hunting in Texas. What ammo should I buy?"-but we can cherry-pick these topics and cover a handful of them periodically. We hope you enjoy the show.

- Todd Woodard, editor

Sheehan Walther GSP Conversion Rifle

Our recommendation: If you're willing to pay a lot of money for topnotch .22 LR performance, then this gun is for you. If you're a plinker, pass on it.

Rimfire shooters realize one central limitation of the 22 LR round's accuracy: We must take what we're given. Since we must shoot factory ammo and can't reload rimfire rounds to match our guns, getting the best possible accuracy returns, as it should, to a focus on the firearm.

One of the more accurate rim-fire firearms we've tested to date is a new hybrid gun from Earl J. Sheehan Jr., the "Earl" in Earl's Repair Service of Tewksbury, Massachusetts.

Sheehan's Repair Service is a national warranty and sales facility for Germany-based Walther firearms and he knows his way around the firm's competition handgun and rifle products. In fact, four years ago he had an idea for making the well-regarded GSP auto-loading .22 handgun into a rifle, and he set about creating it. The results are the pricey but heavy-on-performance Standard kit, \$995, and the \$1,295 Super Match kit. These products are now standard factory items at Walther (which Sheehan licensed the parent company to make), but are exclusively available through him in the United States.

Both of these kits, which Sheehan more grandly calls conversion units, take your existing GSP handgun action and trigger group and mate them to a superb Lothar Walther barrel blank and competition riflestock. Thus, if you don't already have a GSP, add another \$1,000 to the project cost.

Is it worth it to spend thousands on a .22? It depends on why you want it. A Super Match conversion gun we tested recently shot magnificently with several brand/ lots of match ammo we poured through it, and the stock design and trigger were equally good. In our experience, this is a rare trifecta of performance, and for the person who wants to win at games like smallbore silhouette and Sportsmen's Team Challenge, the dollars are much better spent buying a gun like the Super Match rather than on trifles like food for the family.

The less expensive Standard kit's contents include a right-handed laminated rifle stock in black, brown, or camo finishes, along with a match-grade fluted rifle barrel with threaded compensator. The compensator



Above: The Sheehan GSP autoloading .22 handgun/rifle unit we tested was the \$1,295 Super Match kit, which included a competition stock, barrel, adapters, and tools.

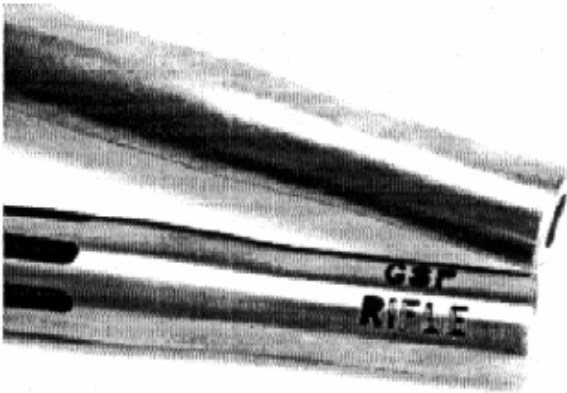
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can be removed for those disciplines that demand and a thread-protecting blank installed instead. also a heavy-duty 1mm recoil spring, two 5x45mm Allen-head machine screws for assembling the parts, two 5mm washers, a 4mm Allen-head wrench, a stainless 7/16 hex screw for attaching the barrel, and instructions. Options include a stainless extended cocking piece, scope rings (which require machining the receiver), a 1,000- or 1,360-gram two-stage triggers, extra magazines (5, 8, or 10-shot), the Super Match stock, a handy Walther-emblazoned soft rifle case, or a deluxe leather case with fitted compartments for the rifle and pistol components. Also available are left-handed Super Match thumbhole stocks.

At the minimum, we recommend buying the cocking piece, rings, and soft case. The cocking piece, which is a large hook-shaped extension on the bolt, helps the shooter work the action. The rings are tasteful and fit the gun's modern lines, and the soft case is beefy and includes a shoulder strap.

As noted above, the basis for the Super Match rifle is the GSP action and trigger, both proven in 2-meter Olympic Standard Pistol games. To disassemble the unloaded handgun, the shooter removes the grips and barrel. With the action, magazine well, and trigger remaining, the shooter then fits the rifle barrel and stock to the GSP action with Sheehan's parts. The procedure, which should take less than 10 minutes, is simple and straightforward.

With a Leupold 6.5-20X Vari-X III EFR rifle scope on board, the Super Match weighed in at an even 10.4 pounds. If you need less weight, you'll need to use the fluted Standard barrel. Both rust-free barrels have approximately 1-in-16 twists and measure 16.75 inches in length. The Standard barrel is 18.25 inches including the compensator.



Above: The fluted Standard barrel, bottom, measures 18.25 inches in length, including the compensator. The Super Match barrel, top, lacks the adornment of the Standard unit, but shoots slightly better.

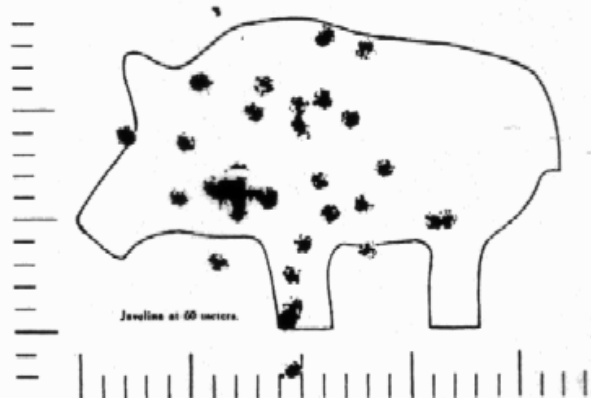
Sheehan said, "The barrel is a combined effort. It is my design, and it is half machined in my shop, and half at Lothar. I have exclusive rights to it in the U.S."

"The Super Match barrel doesn't look like much," said Sheehan, referring to the lightly brushed blunt-ended Super Match tube. "The Standard barrel treatment with flutes and compensator is better looking, but on the Super Match, we put all the money into the bore."

And if our testing is any gauge, it was money well spent. Our test gun shot five-shot groups as small as 0.21 inch at 50 yards (Eley Match Xtra) and averaged 0.36 inch. RWS R50 also shot dots, averaging 0.36-inch groups as well. Ten-shot groups with Fioocchi Pistol Match were a ragged hole half an inch (0.53 inch) in diameter, and ten-shot RSO groups ran 0.54 inch on average. However, the gun didn't like 48-grain bullets in Lapua's Scoremax groups) brand, and it was middling with Eley Tenex (0.67 inch) and Federal Ultramatch (0.70 inch, all five-shot groups at 50 yards). On the shoulder, we found the gun's handling in crucial areas to be well thought out. Just ahead of the magazine well, the Super Match has a nice, flat patch of real estate that comfortably accommodates the shooter's fist, palm, and split or bridged fingers. As delivered, the gun's 15-inch length of pull seemed long at first, but we grew to like the way the adjustable plastic buttplate canted the gun into the shoulder and chest. The LOP is adjustable.

Two levels of stocks are available; we tested the more expensive thumbhole Super Match version in Walther blue. The grip was stippled and had a palm shelf for the shooting hand, which helped control the gun. Much of the buttstock was relieved to show off the laminated wood pattern in dark blue, light blue, and gray shades. The stock had a high cheekpiece, onto which we welded our faces for a firm, consistent head position.

With the gun up, charged, and ready to fire, we noted the Super Match's next strength: its trigger. The Walther 1,000-gram unit in our test gun had two stages; the shooter pulled up the first stage, removing two thirds of the total pull weight. It then came to a defined stop and was ready to break the shot. On target, this was helpful, because as the shooter's position stabilized inside the outline of a metal target or a bullseye, he simultaneously pulled up the first stage. When the gun



Above: We liked a number of things about the Sheehan conversion, including its accuracy, reliable autoloading system, stock design, and two-stage trigger. Together they allowed the shooter to find the target, break a clean shot, recover smoothly, and break another shot, as this perforated piggie will attest.

settled, it was a simple matter to break a good shot. In fact, we fired 50 rounds into turkey and pig paper targets and shot only three or four outside the animal outline. It's unusual to have a self-loader with a trigger that good.

Furthermore, the autoloading system was reliable, and it helped the shooter fire quickly and accurately in the right conditions. Shooters used to bolt guns know their rate of fire isn't that swift, which can be a competitive disadvantage when conditions are twitchy. With the Super Match, we comfortably broke shots on a 7- or 8-second turn, emptying five well-aimed shots in just over half a minute, without breaking position.

Gun Tests Recommends

We regularly assess how much value a given gun delivers, based on our judgments about what it costs and how it shoots. The Sheehan gun shot as well as many competition bolt guns we've encountered, perhaps better. That it's an autoloader is even more remarkable. Not everyone needs the level of performance the Sheehan GSP Conversion Rifle offers-i.e., for squirrels, it's overkill. But for the competition shooter who must have the best, this gun is on par with any top-grade Ruger-based conversion we've seen. If you already have a Walther GSP .22 LR handgun, the Sheehan conversion kit is an attractive alternative to buying a separate high-grade .22 rifle.

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