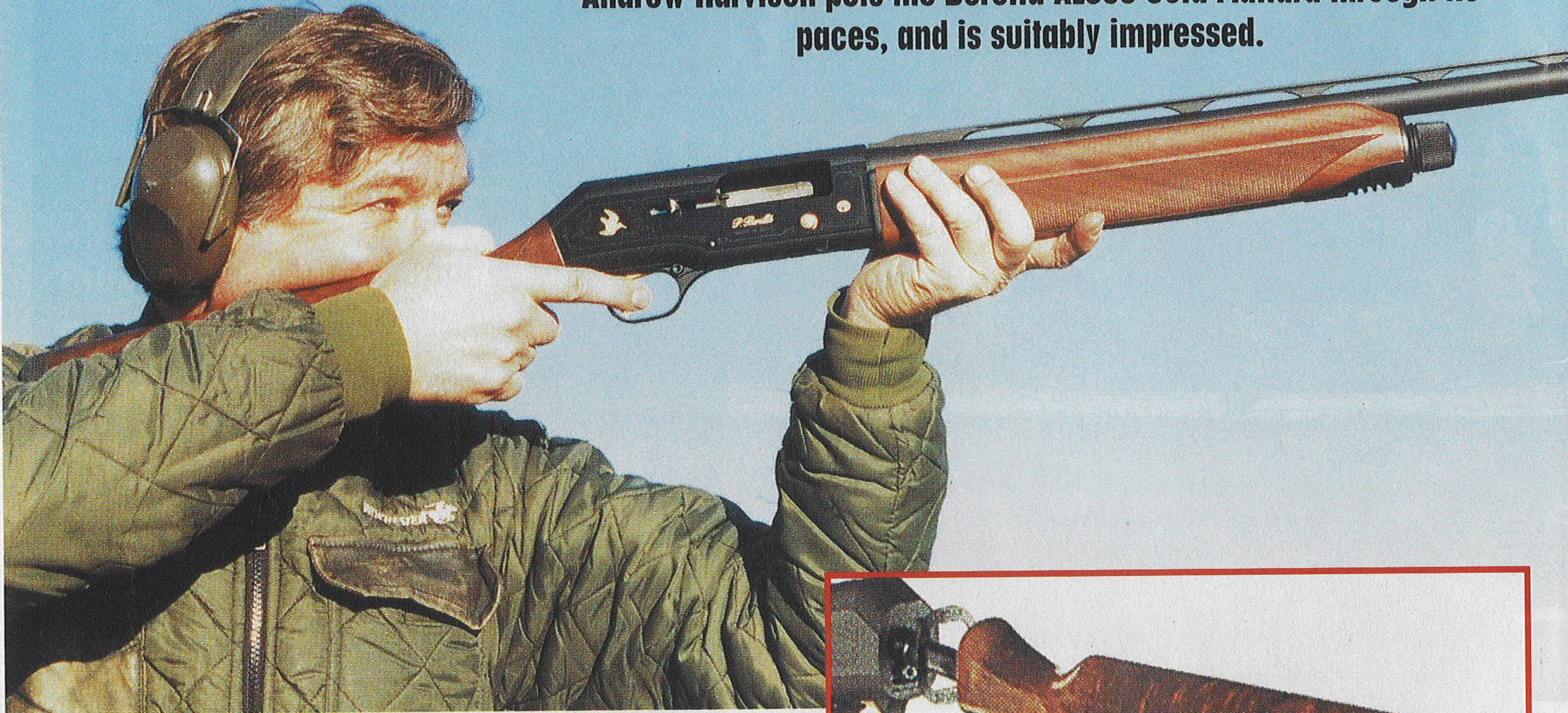


Automatic surprise

Andrew Harvison puts the Beretta AL390 Gold Mallard through its paces, and is suitably impressed.



What a very pleasant surprise this was... in fact I thought it handled wonderfully. Semi-automatics have their admirers and they certainly have their place in clay shooting, being particularly good for lady shots and youngsters, due to their low recoil, but I had never previously seriously thought of shooting one.

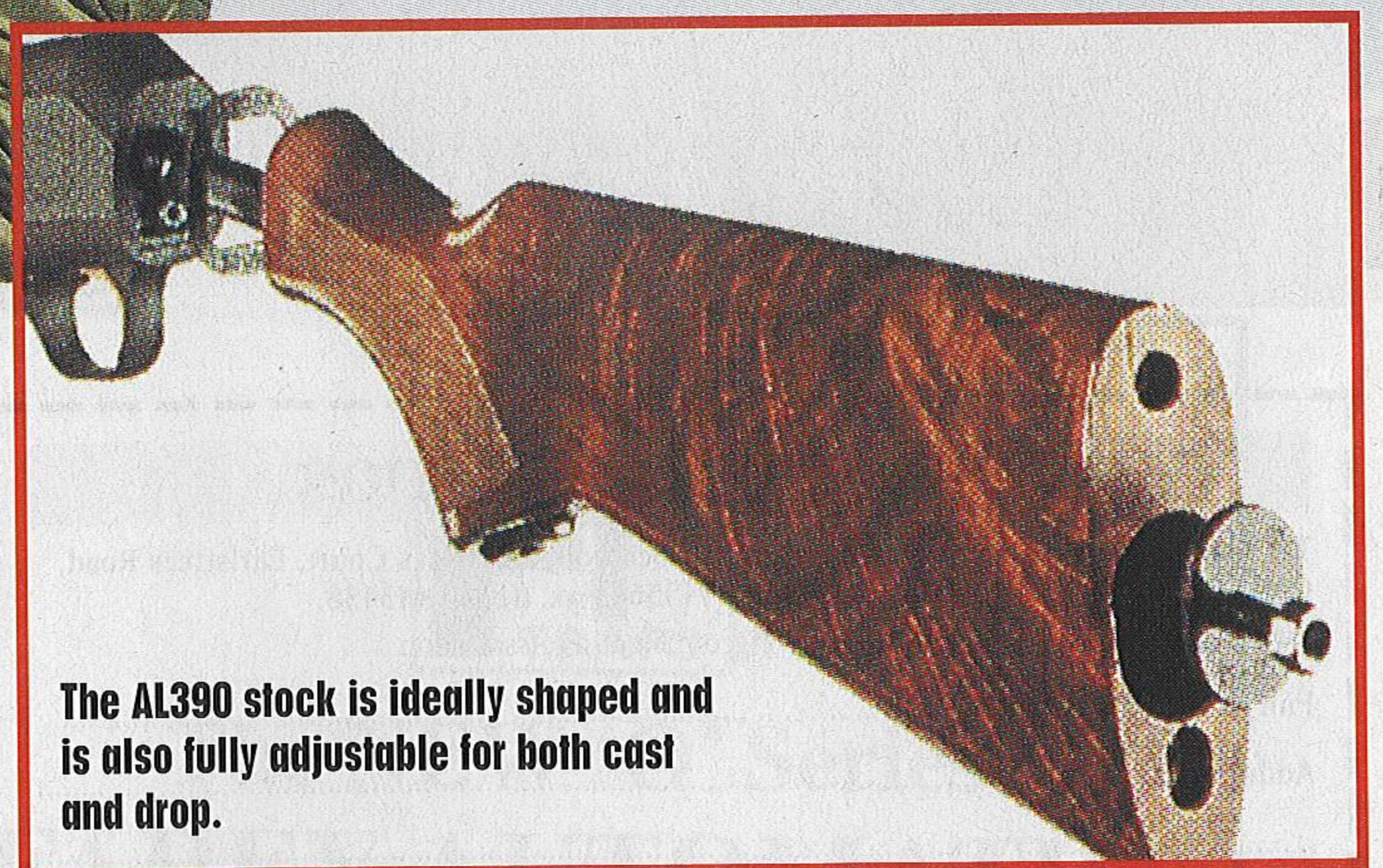
My perception has been changed radically by the Beretta AL390 Gold Mallard. For starters, as a piece of engineering it is excellent, but this is something we expect. The important part was the balance, stock profile and sheer handling quality.

Clearly a lot of thought has gone into the gun as during a period of a month I have given it to several other people to try and almost without exception they seemed to like it. It has a thinner stock than the normal Beretta and its face is practically vertical. It also offers the facility of simple adjustment of stock drop and cast, and as a result it will fit most people, and give that all important firm cheek-to-stock

contact which is such an important ingredient to successful shooting.

I tried the gun with both barrels - the 7mm flat field rib, and 10mm sporting step-rib. Again, much to my surprise I found that I preferred the step-rib, something which I have never particularly liked. But it is a modest step, and just enough to lead the eye perfectly along the sighting plane towards the target.

The really interesting aspect is that during the last two or three years I have been looking for the perfect all-round

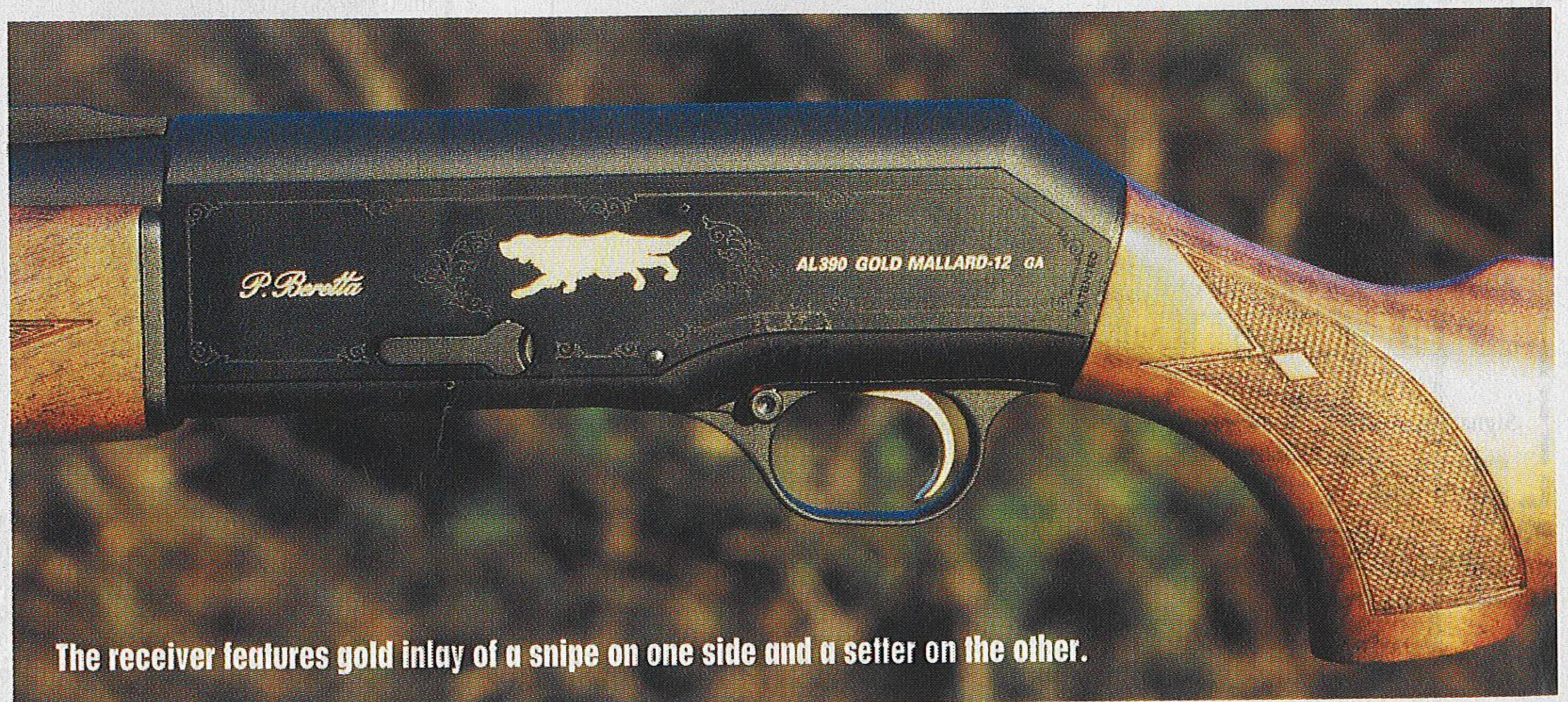


The AL390 stock is ideally shaped and is also fully adjustable for both cast and drop.

sporting gun, and have come to the conclusion that no such thing exists. Basically, depending upon one's build, for sporting shooting you need a heavier type of gun for slower more deliberate trap and skeet

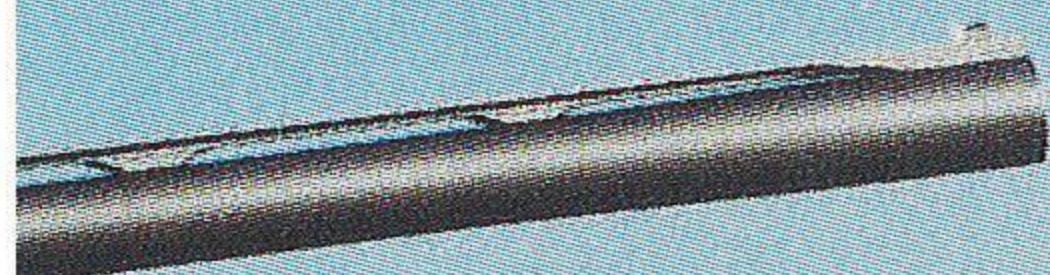
type targets, but a lighter more responsive gun for quicker targets, or the type of shot where you are required to change direction after taking the first bird.

Remarkably this gun is the



The receiver features gold inlay of a snipe on one side and a setter on the other.

Andrew Harvison shooting the AL390 Gold Mallard... note the step-rib on the sporting barrel.



closest to an ideal all-rounder that I have come across, and believe me, I have tried everything! I have shot every type of target with it and never found it wanting (though it is multi-choke, I used mostly half choke). Its facility for simple alteration to cast and stock height is undoubtedly an added bonus. And the weight at 7½lb is perfect.

The gold inlay may not be to everyone's taste, but it is beautifully executed, and indeed the overall finish of the gun is excellent.

Sounds too good to be true.

There were however one or two minor irritations. I felt the grip for instance was a bit too steep and shallow, and anyone with big hands might have problems with their thumb knuckle riding too high. The makers of mass produced guns are paying more attention to this area, and a variable trigger can help overcome this particular problem. Also, I feel that the loading mechanism under the action body could have been made smoother and less sharp to the fingers - the new Browning auto is much better in this respect. I would add that it functioned perfectly, and of the 1000 cartridges I put through it there was not the slightest hint of indigestion, other than one old 2½" game load (which was most likely the fault of the cartridge). The trigger pulls too were ideal, even though in my opinion the trigger could be adjusted a little further forward as on compression it virtually closes up to the trigger guard.

On a personal note, unfortunately I will not be switching to one as due to an eye problem I cannot wear glasses whilst shooting. When wearing eye protection I have difficulty in seeing targets clearly in fading light. Glasses are a must with all autos, to protect the eyes from any occasional blowback of dust or particles.

But any criticisms are minor, and are more than offset by the exceptional handling quality and versatility of the gun... plus, of course, very low recoil. This is an outstanding semi-auto, and anyone currently in the market for a new gun would do well to check it out ■

FACT FILE

Stock & fore-end: Selected walnut with interchangeable rubber recoil pad. Adjustable cast and drop.

Barrel: Nickel/chromium/ molybdenum steel, inside chromium plated - 28" or 30" (also 26" in 'field')

Rib: 10mm sporter step rib (or 7mm flat 'field' rib)

Choke: Multi-choke

Sight: Front bead sight

Weight: 7½lb

Receiver: Anodized light alloy. Anti-glare matt black finish with gold inlay of snipe on one side and setter on the other.

Safety: Crossbolt, reversible for left handed shooters.

Operation: Semi-automatic, gas operation with exhaust valve.

Price: £985.