

FNH SLP Mark I Shotgun

The FNH SLP Mark I is a defensive shotgun based on the short-stroke piston operating system first used in the Winchester Super-X Model 1 and later in the Browning Gold and Super X2 shotguns.

By Robert W. Hunnicutt

The Winchester Super-X Model 1 shotgun was introduced in 1974 in an attempt to quell the chorus of complaint that greeted the Model 1400, a gas-operated autoloader that replaced the recoil-operated Model 50 in 1964.

While the Model 50 was a highly polished steel and walnut assembly made in classic style, the Model 1400 had an anodized aluminum receiver and stocks with impressed checkering. It was and is a perfectly adequate gun, but not an easy one to love.

My dad gave me one for Christmas and I, already possessed of tastes too refined for my own good, whined until he traded it for a Fox Model B double. I'd have been better off with the 1400, but even 13-year-olds didn't care for impressed checkering.

The Super-X Model 1 was an attempt to deliver an autoloader that harked back to the beloved Model 12 pump gun. It had a steel receiver and fit and finish were "pre-'64," with a price to match. Winchester clearly hoped to bracket the market-leading Remington Model 1100, with the 1400 below and the Super-X above.

Apparently, it didn't work out too well, because the Super-X lasted only until 1981 as a catalog item, later being revived as a custom shop piece from 1987-92. I got a skeet model in about 1982 in a distributor closeout for, as I recall, \$260. I used it for international skeet competition as an alternative to my Krieghoff Model 32. It was fast-swinging and snappy shooting, and I enjoyed using it, especially on hot summer days when the 9-pound Krieghoff became a load.



The family resemblance between the FNH SLP and its predecessors is obvious, especially in the distinctive appearance of the shotgun's bolt assembly, with its separate slide and bolt head.

The only fly in the ointment was when the operating rod, which was spot-welded to a tab on the piston, broke off during a match. A Winchester engineer told me this was endemic to the gun, and repairs to the part were constant.

I eventually sold the Super-X and didn't think much more about the type until I was visiting Browning in the early 1990s and was shown a prototype of the Gold shotgun. It was immediately recognizable as a Super-X variant. That didn't surprise me, as its designer was Joe Badali, a former Winchester engineer. Badali was an interesting character who had been part of the Manhattan Project in World War II during Army Air Corps service.

Browning had at the time the evergreen A-5 and two versions of the A-500 shotgun, gas and recoil-operated. Neither of them was especially satisfactory.

The Gold revived the Super-X's operating system, but without some of the excessive cost engineering that led to its failings. Parts were made in Belgium and assembled in Portugal. When U.S. Repeating Arms Co. was acquired by FN, essentially the same gun was offered as the Super X2.

In this country, FN uses the Browning brand for sporting arms and the FN label for police/military guns, sold out of FNH USA in McLean, Va. So it was perfectly logical to apply the Gold/Super X2 platform to a law enforcement product.

The FNH SLP and SLP Mark I differ in sighting systems, with the SLP having a receiver-mounted rail and click-adjustable rear sight while the Mark I has a cantilevered rail with sporting-style folding rear sight. The Mark I is clearly aimed at users who will primarily use a red dot, holographic or reflex sight in preference to iron sights. The rail accepts Weaver-style rings.



This is a defensive gun, not one for the sporting course or skeet field, so the finish is a uniform flat black, combined with the matte surfaces of the injection-molded stock and fore-end.

The SLP's overall appearance is just the way we like guns here in SGN, an overall flat black, with the barrel and aluminum receiver in a matte phosphated finish. One side is deeply rollmarked "FN Self-Loading Police MKI," while the other reads "3" Magnum." There are steel threaded inserts in the top of the receiver that would allow scope mounting with a conventional barrel.

Buttstock and fore-end are black injection-molded plastic, with molded checkering. There is a grip cap on the pistol grip and a ventilated black rubber recoil pad.

The fore-end is secured using a hefty 1.16" magazine sleeve that passes between the fore-end and magazine cap, covering the front of the eight-round magazine tube. This presumably helps protect the magazine tube from rough handling and provides a mounting point for lights and lasers.



Two pistons are provided, one for loads above 1½ ounces of shot and the other for lighter charges. We found that 2¾-inch loads would cycle the gun with the heavy piston, but ejection was soft.

The barrel is chrome-lined and measures .725" inside diameter, a bit less than the nominal .729". Accordingly, choke tubes are the original style Standard specification rather than the Invector Plus tubes that were introduced along with backbored barrels on Browning sporting guns.

The sample gun came with improved cylinder and modified tubes, though there wasn't a lot of difference between the two; .007" constriction for the modified, .005" for the IC.

The front sight is a fiber-optic bead, florescent orange in hue.

Like its predecessor the Super-X Model 1, the SLP is gas-operated on the short-stroke principle. On firing, gas passes out two ports in the barrel ring, pushing rearward on the piston. Unlike the Super-X, in which the piston head

and sleeve were attached, the SLP's piston is a separate piece. The rubber O-ring that rode on the magazine tube of the Super-X is here in the barrel ring.

Two pistons are provided, one for loads less than 1½-ounces of shot, the other for 1½-ounce loads and above. They are etched on the side with that information, but are easier to distinguish by the spring retaining ring in the base, which is red for the heavy load piston, black for the lighter one.



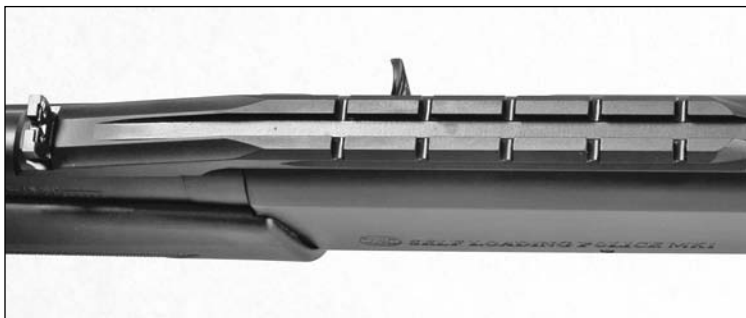
The bolt head simply rests in the slide. On firing, the single operating rod presses back on the slide, drawing the bolt head out of engagement with the barrel extension and allowing cycling.

The pistons are identical in weight, and I was perplexed at the difference until I noticed the red retaining ring was taller than the black one, thus compressing the interior spring more.

The piston acts against the gas sleeve, a carbon fiber cylinder that incorporates the operating rod on its top left. Its interior is 10-sided in shape, presumably reducing friction against the magazine tube and giving any fouling room to accumulate.

The operating rod passes through the left side of the receiver and contacts the bolt carrier at its bottom front. On firing, the piston, sleeve and operating rod travel only about 9/16", transmitting energy to the bolt slide. As the latter moves rearward against pressure of the recoil spring in the butt, it pulls the bolt out of engagement with its recess in the barrel extension.

The bolt assembly then is free to recoil fully, ejecting the empty shell before returning to battery. The piston/gas sleeve assembly is returned forward by a separate spring around the magazine tube.



A cantilever mount extends rearward from the barrel. The receiver is drilled and tapped, with steel threaded inserts, but the cantilever presumably allows larger and heavier scopes to be mounted.

The short-stroke piston is a system well-proven in guns like the M1 Carbine and SKS. The recoiling mass is reduced, and fouling, which is spread over some distance in a long-stroke system like the Remington 1100, is more contained. You can tell the difference even in cycling the action by hand; the 1100 has a now-familiar series of crunches, while the Super-X/Gold/SLP system has a much cleaner sound.

The drawbacks? The 1100 and similar shotguns have double operating rods, putting the load on both sides. My experience with the Super-X 20 years ago demonstrates the hazard of putting all your eggs in one operating rod basket. Benelli uses two in its M4 military shotgun for that very reason.

One the other hand, the SLP system inspires a lot more confidence in that the piston is a separate piece with shock absorbing springs for light and heavy loads, and that the operating rod extends from a hefty boss on the side of the gas sleeve. It certainly looks a lot sturdier than its ancestor.

Disassembly of the SLP is conventional, though a bit more complicated than sporting guns.

After ensuring the magazine is empty and chamber clear, retract and lock back the bolt. Turn off the magazine cap and withdraw the magazine sleeve and fore-end from the magazine tube. Pull the barrel forward out of the receiver. Then pull the piston and gas sleeve forward off the magazine tube.

Press the bolt release at the bottom right of the receiver and allow the bolt to move forward under control. Pull the operating handle out of the bolt carrier to the right. Then allow the bolt assembly to move forward out of the receiver. The bolt simply rests in the slide, and pops right out. To remove the trigger assembly, push out the two pins above it.

Reassembly is in reverse order; the only tricky part is to ensure the bolt slide link fits into its socket at the rear of the receiver. It may be necessary to manipulate it with a screwdriver or other small tool.

I pattern-tested the SLP with NobelSport Law Enforcement Buckshot at 25 yards. Point of impact was a bit high, but right down the middle so far as windage.

The idea of changing pistons for 2¾-inch and 3-inch loads probably gives some pause, though probably not the law enforcement users for which this shotgun is primarily intended, as they will issue gun and ammo together.

I was curious whether the gun would cycle 2¾-inch ammo with the heavy piston installed. The short answer is that it would, at least with the Winchester 2¾-inch slugs and Kent Cartridge field loads I tried. Ejection was leisurely, but positive. If you wanted to take the SLP on an impromptu dove shoot, you could just leave the 3-inch piston in place. If you needed for some reason to use 2¾-inch ammo in a defensive situation where reliable function was a matter of life and death, I'd recommend substituting the proper piston.

Operation was smooth and positive. The safety button is large for reliable function with gloved hands. The downside is that if you put the shotgun down on the bench, you may find the safety has been engaged.

The only problem I had was that some 3-inch Wolf ammo was a bit hard to load in the magazine, as its high brass tended to bind at the mouth of the magazine tube. It was no problem in some leisurely test firing, but would be highly annoying in a defensive situation. This reemphasizes the need for training with the ammo you plan to use.

Recoil was quite soft with 2¾-inch loads and not at all objectionable with 3-inch rounds. The action operates very smoothly and quietly, giving the user the feeling of confidence this shotgun's rather high price merits.

The SLP is clearly aimed at the armed professional, but if you want a modern and reliable shotgun for home defense, this one will thoroughly fill the bill. ©

FNH SLP Mark I Pattern Test

Average of 10 shots at 40 yards

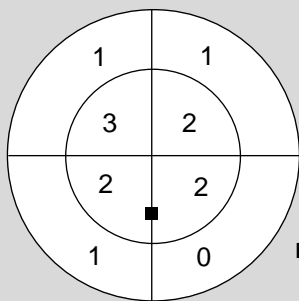
■ = Point of Aim

21¼" inner circle: 9

30" outer ring: 3

Total = 12 / 100%

NobelSport Law Enforcement Buckshot
12 pellets 00 Buck at 1290 fps



FNH SLP Mark I

Manufacturer: **FNH USA, Box 697, Dept. SGN, McLean, Va. 22101**

Type:	semi-automatic shotgun	Drop at Heel:	1¼ inches
Gauge:	12, 3-inch	Drop at Comb:	1¼ inches
Magazine Capacity:	8	Trigger Pull:	6 lbs
Weight:	8.16 pounds	Sights:	fiber-optic front, adjustable rear
Overall Length:	43 inches	Accessories:	cylinder, improved cylinder choke tubes, spanner, cable lock, carrying case, sling swivels
Barrel Length:	22 inches		
Length of Pull:	14 inches	Price:	\$1,061