

A high-performance pistol - the Hammerli Xesse Sport

by Rob Jackson



The Hammerli Xesse Sport is fully set up for paper punching out of the box.

A 25m 10-shot group supplied with the Hammerli indicates its accuracy potential.



For more than 60 years, the Hammerli name has been associated with high-performance target firearms in both pistol and rifle configurations. The Swiss arms maker established a reputation for high-performance, high-quality and high-priced target arms, which maintained its position on the international podium for shooting sports for half a century.

Hammerli originally established a benchmark with its .22 target pistols, particularly with the Hammerli 208 Sport/Standard pistol, which can be credited with international medal wins in the

hands of some of Australia's top-level female shooters in the 1970s. Hammerli upgraded the 208 with its S model, which had the addition of a fully adjustable trigger (where the original 208 was partly adjustable) along with a moveable trigger arrangement to allow the trigger to be position adjustable in the modified, squared-off triggerguard. This all-steel 208S was a very desirable target pistol, but its production cost put it out of range for the majority of shooters.

Hammerli addressed this problem with the 280, a magazine-forward design that made extensive use of fibre-reinforced polymer for the

manufacture of its frame and receiver housing. The 280 was, and still is, a very good target handgun and established an excellent reputation for accuracy, handling and reliability from its introduction in the early 1980s.

However, even after the introduction of the 280, the Hammerli 208 remained in production for much of the 1980s and remained the choice of champions in Sport Pistol events because its weight and balance suited the female and junior shooters for whom that match was intended. Once again, production costs required a rethink, resulting in the Hammerli 280 being succeeded by the SP20. The SP20 is currently available in a number of configurations, while basically following the magazine-forward design concepts of the 280.

With all of these top-level competition .22 self-loaders, cost is always a factor and should a shooter desire one, there is usually little change left over from \$3000. While serious competitors are prepared to pay the price for this performance, club-level shooters balk at an investment of that magnitude.

To fill this need, Hammerli, which is owned by Walther, has produced its Xesse model .22 self-loader. It too is available in a number of configurations. The sample received for review



Tony Cox shows the high hand position arising from the Hammerli Xesse Sport orthopaedic grips - an enhancement for many rapid-fire events.



The Hammerli Xesse Sport's adjustable orthopaedic grips enhance the pistol's handling over the standard models. They are palm-rest adjustable.



was the Sport (target) model, fitted with full orthopaedic grips made of moulded polymer with an adjustable palm rest. At about half the cost of the SP20, the Xesse is intended to deliver a high level of performance with respect to accuracy and handling at an affordable cost, thanks to its simplified manufacture and some compromises with respect to adjustability.

The Xesse is essentially a copy of the original 208, but it has plastic grips rather than walnut grips, a plastic triggerguard, limited trigger adjustment and an adjustable rear-sight mounted on the slide rather than independently frame-mounted as on the original 208. The important parts such as the frame, barrel and slide, however, remain steel and the fit and finish is up to the standard of the originals from which it was derived.

The Xesse has a square section barrel that is dovetailed on the underside, allowing a barrel weight to be fitted. The test pistol came with a plastic removable weight, leaving the Xesse relatively light at the front end. Additional steel barrel weights should be available and weights that fit a 208 could well slide onto the Xesse. The test pistol came with a 10-shot test target, which presented a very tight, ragged one-hole group shot at 25m.



The cut-out in the left side of the grips facilitates removal of the magazine, which would otherwise be recessed into the base of the grip.

The Hammerli Xesse can be stripped to this level for cleaning with the simple tools supplied.



The Hammerli Xesse slide is very similar to that of the famous Hammerli 208.



The satin-nickel-plated slide appears to be a precision investment casting.

There is a move in Europe to introduce a .22 Rimfire version of IPSC. The Hammerli Xesse appears well set up to handle this additional responsibility, should it arise in Australia. Hammerli has introduced its Xesse IPSC for that particular reason and this variation comes with ambidextrous grips, enlarged safety catch, a white dot front-sight and the extended magazine base that is common to all models, including the Sport model, which is the subject of this review. The IPSC model can be supplied with an optional Picatinny rail that allows optical sights to be fitted if required.

In addition to the IPSC version, an Xesse short-barrelled variant is listed in the Hammerli catalogue. This variant comes with a 115mm barrel, rather than the standard 150mm barrel.

The controls on the Xesse are well placed, with the magazine release button at the root of the triggerguard, an easy-to-reach safety on the left side of the frame and 10-shot magazines with extended bases to facilitate easy insertion.

The sights are fully micro-click-adjustable and the front-sight is a standard Patridge-type square 3mm blade, which provides the Hammerli with a good sight-picture. The front-sight is triangular and can be rotated to set the front-sight width to best suit the shooting conditions or the shooter.

The red and black moulded polymer grips set off the black and silver color scheme of the slide and barrel assembly, making for an eye-catching package. The grips are very well formed and fitted my standard-sized hand very well, with the long

palm shelf providing good longitudinal support.

The Xesse was shot with a range of standard-velocity ammunition including Federal Champion, Focchi Pistol Match 320, RWS Club, Winchester Supreme and SK Pistol Match. The out-of-the-box trigger pull was close enough to the regulation 1000g that no further attention was given to it. The pistol was shot two-handed from a bench rest at 25m and offhand at a standard 25m bullseye target with its 50mm '10' ring.

My preference is for more weight at the front of any handgun, so the light front end of the Xesse was not well suited to my normal handgunning techniques. This was particularly so when a series of fast shots was fired, as the lighter front end tended to bounce around. It is not such an issue in slower fire sequences though.

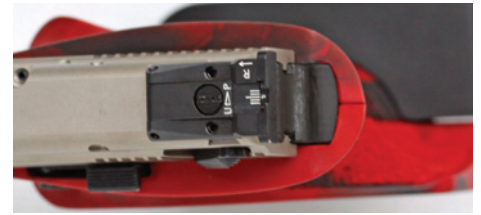
All of the ammunition tested had no problem staying within 25mm in the X-ring of the 25m target from the two-handed rest, but without

the benefits of a machine rest, I was not able to match the test group that came with the pistol.

For offhand shooting, the Xesse handles very well. Although the magazine is through the grip and this places some limitation on the configuration of the grips, the shooting hand sits high on the Hammerli with the orthopaedic grips and this goes a long way towards minimising vertical recoil movement. The higher the bore of the gun and the recoiling parts are to the shooter, the more the recoil is translated into a direct rearward movement and not vectored into a vertical movement, as the pistol rotates around the wrist if the bore line is high above it.

The Xesse is supplied in a padded plastic carry-case, along with a test target, extra magazine and a set of tools required for taking down and servicing the pistol.

The Hammerli Xesse Sport offers competitive pistol shooters a very accurate and reliable pistol at



The target rear-sight is clearly marked for adjustments.

a reasonable price, with a heritage that is second to none with respect to performance firearms.

For more information on pricing and availability of the Hammerli Xesse Sport pistol, contact the Australian distributor Frontier Arms on 08 8373 2855. ■



The Hammerli Xesse Standard models come in two barrel lengths. The standard grips and relatively light weight detract from their handling for competitive shooting compared to the Xesse Sport.

Specifications

Manufacturer: Hammerli (Carl Walther GmbH)

Model: Xesse Sport

Distributor: Frontier Arms

Calibre: .22 Long Rifle

Barrel Length: 150mm

Trigger: Adjustable from 1000 to 1360g

Sights: Micro-click-adjustable rear-sight, three-width adjustable front-sight, 11mm rail for optical scope mounting

Magazine Capacity: 10 shots

Grips: Orthopaedic polymer with adjustable palm rest

Barrel Weight: Removable optional

Overall Weight: 1040g

RRP: \$1750