



The Walther Q5 Match SF is the latest refinement in the PPQ family of pistols. Launched at the 2019 SHOT Show in Las Vegas, this version has taken a giant leap in design and production technology by, among other things, adopting an all-steel frame, something Walther hasn't done in a centrefire pistol for nearly 40 years.

Almost the entire Walther history, as far as centrefire pistols is concerned, relates to the production of firearms for the military and police markets. Most of us remember the P38 of World War Two. There have been occasional commercial spin-offs but by and large the emphasis has been on chasing lucrative law enforcement and Defence contracts and their centrefire sporting



Walther shows its metal

The PPQ Q5 Match

Rod Pascoe

guns have essentially been, until now, variations of their Defence product line. While Walther is by no means the only manufacturer adopting this philosophy, this time they have made something that screams *competition specialist*.

There are three models in the PPQ steel frame range and this review is based on the Q5 Match, supplied by Australian distributor Frontier Arms of Adelaide. The Q5 Match SF is a striker-fired semi-automatic pistol chambered in 9mm Luger, aka 9mm Parabellum or 9 x 19mm.

What's in the box?

The plastic case is designed to house a number of Walther models but in this part of the world the PPQ Match is supplied with three 10-shot

magazines, magazine loader, empty chamber indicator, screwdriver for rear sight adjustment, two hex keys and two screws for attaching the reflex sight base plates of which three are supplied for Leupold, Trijicon and Docter/Noblex/Meopta. Also included is a test target and comprehensive multi-lingual instruction manual.

First impressions

For those familiar with the polymer-framed PPQ, the points of difference in new SF's external appearance is the large beavertail above the grip and, at the muzzle end, the frame has been extended to match the length of the slide which also includes extra Picatinny slots to make up the length. Also of note is the large round magazine

release on the new model which sits proudly in front of the grip panel rather than being partially recessed into the grip/frame of the polymer version. Finally the rotating take-down lever is another new addition to the steel version of the PPQ.

The internal differences appear more to do with the change to the frame - the trigger group and firing mechanism now have their home in steel. From what I could see Walther intended to stick to the features that worked well in the past and move these to the steel-framed version. The polymer-framed PPQ already had a reputation with its accuracy and Quick Defence trigger so essentially the firing components in the SF have changed little. The slide's shape, size and internal



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components appear unchanged. It's not until you pick up the Q5 SF you really appreciate what the fuss is all about. It's heavy - and I mean that in a good way. The weight and balance of this pistol reminds you of what pistols used to feel like before the polymer revolution of the 1980s. At 1200g as opposed to around 775g of the polymer version, the SF is truly made for competition. In fact the Q5 SF is approved for IPSC Production Division meaning that, among other things, a minimum power factor (bullet weight multiplied by velocity) of 125,000 is required and judging by the weight of the recoil spring and the force required to rack the slide, I think my light Service Pistol loads are not going to work too well.

The 127mm hammer-forged barrel has a polygonal rifling profile with six lands that look more like circular arches rising between curved grooves. The barrel/breech is made from one piece of material and while that might sound fairly obvious, at one stage Walther did produce a separate rifled barrel tube for the P99 that was screwed into the breech block, much like a rifle, as a cost-cutting measure - not so with the Q5.

Some barrels designed for straight wall cases have a step in the chamber, reducing the diameter by about four-thousandths of an inch. This was first introduced in 1910 in one of Georg Luger's patents and appears in some models of the Pistole 08. The Q5 SF has a step about 5mm from the seating point (case mouth) and is intended to improve the way the case expands in the chamber on firing to reduce rearward escaping gases from fouling the pistol as the propellant burns.



Adjustable LPA sight on one of four supplied adaptor sight plates.

Four screws attach the one-piece moulded wrap-around grip panel, the sides and backstrap textured with dimples that stick well to the hand. There's only one grip supplied but I found the palmswell in the backstrap and subtle finger grooves on the sides were a perfect fit for my average-sized hand. Under the grip there are recesses in the steel frame that house four nylon magazine guides or rails that provide a smooth surface for the magazine to travel during loading and unloading. The magazines themselves have an anti-friction coating that acts like a lubricant.

The generous beavertail is not there to eliminate hammer bite (there *is* no hammer) but to allow a shooter's hand to get as high as



Deep slide cuts and removable front sight - frame extends to the end of the slide.

possible on the grip - and it does just that. There's a captive flat wire spring on a steel guide rod that's fairly typical in Walther pistols, the advantage of a flat wire spring being it provides more active coils that will store and release more energy than a round wire spring. An ambidextrous magazine release is not supplied out-of-the-box but changing it to left hand is possible by the user and instructions are provided.

The LPA adjustable rear sight is fitted into a dovetail on one of four sight adaptor plates. The front sight can be removed, favoured by some shooters using reflex dot sights, and an aftermarket Patridge sight is available as an accessory.

The slide is essentially the same as the PPQ polymer version and features a durable Tenifer nitride corrosion-resistant coating. It has deep cuts forward of the ejection port and shallower ones at



Barrel and recoil spring removed.



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the rear which are also weight modifications that enhance the balance of the gun.

One of the three safety features is incorporated into the blue polymer trigger by way of a blade that prevents the trigger from moving until the blade is depressed. For a striker-fired pistol the trigger has a very short travel and just 2.5mm reset path, the take-up of the trigger effectively in two stages and very smooth. The second stage is precise and breaks crisply which suits precision shooting. I tried some practice draws from the holster to get my arm muscles used to the sight picture before moving to the next step of the appraisal - shooting the Walther Q5 SF.

At the range

I was initially concerned the SF didn't come with interchangeable grips offering a range of sizes for different shooters' hands as the polymer version does. I recruited several club members of different shapes and sizes to try the grip and we were all satisfied our hand position allowed the index finger to sit comfortably across the face of the trigger. And there was no movement of the gun required in the hand once a two-hand hold was established.

I filled the magazine with the aid of the supplied loader although the magazine spring is light enough for manual loading, the nylon inserts in the frame allowing the steel magazine to slide smoothly in and out. To rack the gun I found I could get better purchase on the slide using the deeper slide cuts



Trigger group including dark blue trigger bar.

forward of the ejection port rather than the ones at the rear under the sight.

Setting up a Service Pistol target at 25yds and using a bag of rice for support, I started testing with handloads using different powder and projectile combinations. Included in the projectile selection were some .357" Hawkesbury River 126gr flat point bullets which have no lube groove meaning there's more bearing surface on the polygonal rifling, something resembling a jacketed bullet. Other than that the bullets, including factory loads,

Generous chequering to front of frame and trigger guard.



all measured .355" in diameter. Taking aim, the red fibre front sight lit up like a spotlight on my north-facing range in full sunlight (I usually prefer a plain Partridge sight under those conditions). Under cover or with the sun behind me the red glow was easy to pick up, otherwise the front and rear sights aligned perfectly with just enough light-gap either side of the post. I had to adjust my muscle memory to raise the front slightly, probably due to mainly shooting lighter-framed guns and any slight differences in the angle of the grip. After a little practice I was able to get the front sight to sit in the right spot consistently when drawing from the holster.

I enlisted the help of top IPSC shooter Gary White to assess the pistol from his discipline's perspective. Overall he was pleased with the gun's feel, weight and balance and the way it recovered



Four plastic 'rails' eliminate friction between magazine and frame.

after recoil, even shooting single-handed he felt muzzle flip was quite manageable. Gary would, however, have preferred a slightly smaller grip - his hand is about the same size as mine but his right thumb fell just short of providing a positive force on the magazine release button without moving his hand in the grip.

At time of writing there was no information from Walther about making a range of different sized grips but some aftermarket manufacturers in the US are already on to it. The other thing that may help Gary is an extended magazine release button, available as an accessory. Apart from that he loved the trigger: "It's the best trigger I've felt on any striker-fired pistol." That's not a bad endorsement and supports Walther's decision to stick to the proven Quick Defence trigger.

The ammunition used was a mix of factory and home loads and, as expected, all functioned well though I did determine by trial and error that a minimum power factor of 110,000 is required to make the gun function reliably. I suspect aftermarket gun parts manufacturers are already working on alternative recoil spring kits to deal with reduced loads.

Of the factory ammo the Geco 115gr Jacketed hollow-point performed best while top home load was five grains of AP-100 behind a 126gr Hawkesbury flat point projectile of .357" diameter. Power factors for these loads were 130,000 and 127,000 respectively, enough for IPSC Minor and well over the 120,000 required for Service Pistol or Action Match. As with any precision firearm, meticulous load development will result in custom home loads to match your requirements.

Other factory loads used were American Eagle 115gr Syntech; PPU 124gr JHP; Winchester 125gr lead RN; Geco 124gr lead RN copper plated and handloads tried were Top Score 115gr RN, 4.3gn AP70; Black Widow 115gr RN, 5.2gn AP100; Hawkesbury River 115gr Conical, 3.7gn APS450 and X-Treme 124gr RN copper plated RN, 5gn AP100.

In summary

The polymer-framed PPQ will continue to be available alongside the Steel Frame versions. The two other models in the PPQ SF range include



Best factory load tested.



Best home load tested.

the Champion with low-profile magazine well, magazine extensions and an adjustable trigger. The mag well in blue or black is also available as an accessory for the Q5 Match. The Expert has the magazine well and extended magazine features of the Champion plus a choice of a flat or curved trigger shoe.

The Expert trigger has a pull of 2000g out of the box as well as take-up and trigger stop adjustment. Over time, as in the past, we'll see a number of aftermarket items appearing for shooters to customise their competition guns and Walther are already offering a wide range of PPQ accessories to add to, and enhance, existing and new models. All updated information on models, spare parts and accessories is at frontierarms.com.au.

Walther has an enduring reputation for producing medal-winning air and rimfire target rifles and pistols and now have a centrefire pistol of which they can be just as proud. The decision to build a steel frame model based on their best competition gun is probably an indication that Walther are joining the ranks of the other, mainly European, competition centrefire handguns. ■

Specifications:

Models: Walther PPQ Q5 Match SF (reviewed), Q5 SF Champion and Q5 Expert

Calibre: 9mm Luger (9x19mm)

Operation: Short recoil, locked breech, striker-fired semi-automatic

Barrel: Hammer forged, 127mm (5") 1:10 right-hand twist, six-groove polygonal

Trigger: Quick Defence trigger, pre-cocked

Trigger pull/travel: 25 Newtons (2500g)/9mm (same for every round fired)

Safety devices: Trigger, striker and disconnect-safety

Materials: Slide, barrel and frame Tenifer-treated carbon steel

Sights: LPA fibre optic front and adjustable rear, 181mm radius

Weight: 1.2kg with empty magazine

Overall dimensions: L 220mm, W 36mm, H 137mm

Recommended retail price: \$2995