

Practical shotgun shooting (PSG) box magazine guns are now firmly established in the scene. It all began with the pump/auto Franchi SPAS 15, then the Russian Saiga 12 semi came along; in essence a 12-gauge AK47. The Akdal 1919 and the near identical Barak 99 both configured like an M16 also appeared. But a gun I have never seen is the Russian, Molot Vepr 12, which has been in production for some time.

I quite like the Saiga 12, however, I was told that the Vepr 12 is the 'mutt's nuts' by comparison, so here are my thoughts. But first a few words on box mag shotguns. In terms of fast reloads a box mag is ideal

and preferable to loading single rounds into a hi-capacity tube magazine such as on a Remington 11-87. However, a full 8/10-round mag is bulky and heavy and on hi-round count stages you might have to carry a lot of them.

MIXED BLESSINGS

For example a jungle run might require a minimum of 50-rounds, which would mean seven x 8-round mags and they are not cheap. Given the Vepr 12 costs just under £1500 then six more mags are going to up the price considerably and not the sort of kit you want to lose. Conversely on load-one-shoot-one or standard exercise stages which might require starting empty, filling up a box

is a lot slower than slipping rounds into a tube mag. So think long and hard as what appears to be a 'wonder gun' might not be the ultimate PSG machine you think!

The Vepr 12 is not pretty with none of the fine lines and instinctive handling of the more conventional PSG machinery. This example was once a skeleton, side-folding butt version but it has been permanently



Though heavier 3" loads are recommended the gun ran well with other types of ammo too; as always with a semi-auto find out what it likes and stick with it!

Pete Moore looks at what some say is the best AK-based semi-auto 12-gauge practical shotgun around



UNCOMPROMISING

fixed in the open position as is required by UK law. The lower receiver is pressed steel with bolt guides and fixtures spot-welded in. The 12-bore, multi-choke barrel is 26.5", but looks longer due to the short forend. The action uses a rotating bolt with a short stroke tappet/gas piston operating system. It's very much a hybrid AK47 mechanism with an identical cocking handle and safety catch on the right, the latter modified for competition use.

GO FASTER BITS

As standard the Vepr comes with AK-type sights, the rear is a tangent-type with a windage-adjustable U-notch probably similar to the RPK light machine guns. The front is at the end of the gas tube and consists of a fixed, U-shaped

protector with an elevation-only post. Rifle-style sights on a PSG gun are really only good for solid slug! However, the hinged receiver top cover shows a polymer Picatinny rail so you have the option of optics. A tiny, Pifad reflex red dot sight similar to the Shield Mini Sight was included.

In terms of the shooter the Vepr is more competition-ready than the Saiga. The standard, big and clunky AK safety sits on the right and has been augmented by thumb lever extensions on both sides of the action. Equally there's a polymer magazine chute under the mag well, with an ambidextrous, push-forward release catch. The pistol grip is large with finger grooves and gives a lot more to get hold of. The short/deep forend is also plastic and ribbed to offer a decent grip, there're

Picatinny rails underneath with shorter sections on the sides, and also under the gas block. A forward grip was supplied too. The butt is unusual as it shows a rotary cheek piece/comb, similar as I recall to the design of the Dragunov SVD paratrooper version that can be swung left and right as desired. Another useful addition was a slip-on, rubber recoil pad that extends the length of pull and widens the shoulder foot print. This was originally designed for firing rifle grenades off the AK to make it more comfortable.

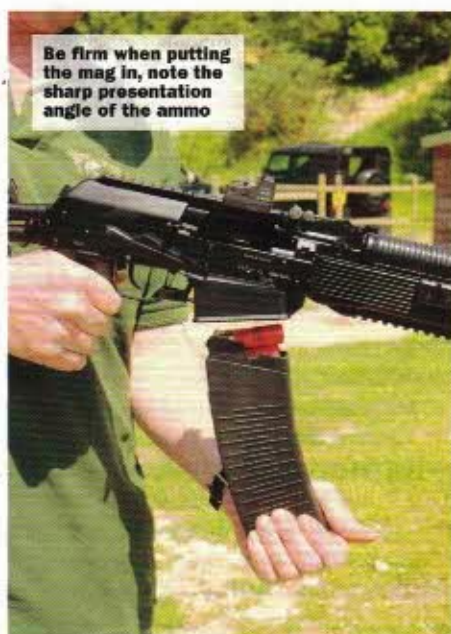
There are twin, forward sling loops on the forend and another on the right side behind the pistol grip. Overall the Vepr 12 is a big, brutal and purposeful looking design and is probably what I would have picked for PSG back when I shot it back in the 1980s and early 90s if I had had the option. ▶



Rear sight detail – a bit OTT for a PSG gun, note the Pifad compact red dot which is probably better for slug shooting than irons



Note the ambidextrous and extended safety and mag catches, also the manual bolt release in the trigger guard



Be firm when putting the mag in, note the sharp presentation angle of the ammo



With only looks that a mother could love the Vepr 12 is one big and brutal looking gun which will appeal to some but not others, note the forward grip and 26.5" barrel

8-SHOT

The gun comes with one 8-round mag, which gives automatic, last round hold open. When this happens a large tab protrudes inside rear right of the trigger guard and pressing it up releases the bolt to go forward so speeding up reloads. A small plunger at the rear of the mag well allows a manual hold open as you just hold the action open and press it up. The 26.5" barrel offers a multi-choke facility, which can be useful even in a PSG gun, full and half chokes are included and the gun has a 3" chamber.

I grabbed three different types of ammo to check functionality and shootability as any semi-auto gun can be fussy! Plus given the way the ammunition is presented at a sharp angle; cartridge overall length can also be critical. I used a 28-gram #7 1/2 trap load at 2.75", #4 Buckshot (AAA) 1 1/16 oz also 2.75" and Winchester Supreme 3" 000 Buckshot. The #4's uses both crimped and rolled turnover ends with the trap and 000 being crimped, as I wanted to see if that made any difference.

LOAD, LOCK AND SHOOT!

The 8-shot magazine fills easily and rounds go in base-first from the front. You need to be aggressive when inserting a full one; especially on a closed bolt load as it's big and you have to compress the mag spring to ensure the release catch fully engages. Now just pull back and release the bolt handle and it should chamber and lock. As with anything like this be firm if not the bolt might not fully shut. One of my immediate action (IA) drills on any semi shotgun is to check the action is properly closed before I start shooting.

The safety catch is as ever a large and clunky control that flips up to FIRE and



Butt detail showing slip-on recoil pad, rotary comb/cheek piece, also shown the L/H side of the ambi safety, note the well sized pistol grip

pushes down for SAFE. Molot have looked at this and added extension thumb levers on the right and a shorter version on the left directly to the safeties hinge pin. These are made of thin pressed steel and are a bit sharp; also the stiffness of the main catch requires a lot of effort on these extensions to make them work. With use this control does smooth up a bit or you can bend it out a fraction and once sorted it does improve handling. Equally the ambi mag catch, which is a horseshoe extension of the original AK press-forward lever at the rear of the mag well. It's easy to operate and with practice you can dump an empty straight-out without having to pull it clear. However, the thin metal build is the same on this and the safety and I would have liked to have seen plastic boots on them for comfort and improved operation.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM!

I started off with the Trap load and though 2.75" it cycled the action and fed reliably, as did the AAAs and 3" 000 Buck. All ammo used held open on the last round too. 3" shells are recommended and despite my good results with shorter cartridges I'd go with full length ammo every

time! The slip-on recoil pad is well worth getting as it extends the length of pull and with more snotty fodder like that 000 Buck and slug takes some of the sting out. Though not fitted I have tested a muzzle brake before on a Saiga 12 and the extra control offered makes it a serious consideration too! The manual hold open button is a bit hard to access but as a safety feature for showing the gun is empty is invaluable!

Overall I feel the Vepr 12 is a good gun for PSG-type events, though not everyone's cup of tea. It's reliable, easy to operate and the extended controls and box mag makes it highly competitive! This is not a fun gun, nor is it cheap, but something for the serious shooter. Magazines; you get a choice of 2, 5, 8 and 10-shots and they cost! The gun comes with 1 x 8-shot and the FSU website shows that these are currently out of stock and don't give a price, but 10s are available and they are £99 each. I guess you'd need at least five to be competitive, which adds 25% to the bottom line!

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

■ Name:	Molot Vepr 12
■ Calibre:	12-bore
■ Capacity:	2, 5, 8 & 10 (DM)
■ Chamber:	3"
■ Action:	semi-auto
■ Barrel:	26.5" multi-choke (full & half included)
■ Length:	46.5"
■ Weight:	9.25 lbs
■ Prices:	£1495 inc 1 x 8-round magazine Muzzle brake £139-£189 (depending on fitment) Vertical grip £34 Recoil pad £34 Spare mags (10-round) £99 PILAD red dot £198
■ Contact:	FSU Connections 01344 750735 www.rusmilitary.com