



<http://www.bellabarista.co.uk>

EXPOBAR OFFICE PULSER

A Closer Look



The details were correct at the time of writing, but the manufacturer and Bella Barista reserve the right to change the technical specification of the packaging, machines and any accessories supplied with the machine (including quantity and type of accessories supplied)

Overview

The Expobar Office Pulser arrived well packed in a very sturdy cardboard box that has a little space for accessories to be added. Nice to see the use of shaped polystyrene as a packing material. This machine is unlikely to get damaged in transit.

Externally the machine is well finished using high quality components and has a solid and quality feel. The construction is mostly high polished stainless steel apart from the front panel containing the steam and hot water knobs which is black painted or enamelled steel. The warmer tray is reasonably well sized but not as large as a Vivi, the machine is quite tall, there is sufficient clearance under normal height kitchen wall cupboards (non-standard height cupboards would almost certainly cause a problem), also there is not much room above to place items on the cup warmer tray. The Expobar Office Pulser had no rattles, even from the cup tray which was a snug fit on the test machine the vibe pump is reasonably quiet when operating and certainly it is not obtrusive.

The drip tray is not huge, holding around 600-700cc of water and made of plastic, but the bulk of it is hidden behind the curved steel front panel. On a machine of this price I don't think it is a problem and is fine to use. The Chromed steel grid for the cups above the drip tray looks nice and works well.

As with some other machines the portafilter basket comes assembled and the spouts in the right place. The standard equipment is a double portafilter (2 spouts) and a single and double basket plus a rubber disk to insert when backflushing.

The insulated boiler is a good size of 1.5 litres (not surprising because I am sure I have seen it before as one of the two boilers on the Expobar Brewtus II. It is a **Heat Exchanger** machine with a powerful 1200w heating element. This is more than sufficient to maintain temperatures and give fast recovery times. You can brew espresso and draw steam or hot water all at the same time with this machine. There is no special preparation required to switch it into steam mode as on some cheaper (and more expensive!) machines. It is a very strong steamer and the single hole steam tip works very well indeed, the recovery time after drawing water for an Americano is fast and has only a small impact on brew water temperature (while recovering).

Some of the things I loved were:

- The same or similar quality components used as on the Brewtus II.
- The water and steam wands are well placed, mounted on ball joints and the knobs are a really nice size. They use no compression valves (as used on the Andreja Premium), thinking about why they didn't use these valves on the Brewtus II made my head hurt, so I gave up trying to rationalise it.
- Just how well it was put together on the inside, the Spanish have certainly done a nice job on this machine, with a lot of attention to detail and quality
- It's price, pretty amazing for a HX machine of this quality and performance
- As always, there are a few minor changes that I would like to see, even for this machine (which I really liked), but no quality issues whatsoever. The changes are mostly design related so may be difficult to resolve and to be honest would serve to increase the cost of the unit.

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Servicing this machine will be easy as all components are quite accessible, top panel removal is 6 screws (for of them hex screws), and the water tank platform (which also needs to be removed). There is little potential for an inexperienced service engineer to damage the machine when removing the panels. Most work on the machine should be easy as the front panel also removes with a couple of screws giving increased access when necessary. To remove the whole case would be a lot more time consuming. The pump is quite accessible and pump replacement looks straightforward. The water sensitive control board is mounted in the area least likely to be exposed to water during filling the tank, or venting.

There are no instructions regarding lifting the Expobar Office Pulser from the box and it is a bit awkward. The best method is to lay the box on its side, slide the machine out in its polystyrene shells and then flip it upright. It's heavy and solid, but easily handled by one person.

In summary; The Expobar Office Pulser is very nice machine for the domestic consumer to use, easy for the reseller to support and maintain. It should provide years of reliable service with the minimum of maintenance.

This is a machine that I expected to be quite worthless and could not understand why Bella Barista bothered with it. It's also true to say that the owner of Bella Barista said "I don't expect it to be any good but you might as well review it anyway".

How wrong we were!

It has delivered and continues to deliver in style, not only is it a great machine for the money, it's also just a great machine. A simple but highly competent performer, it lacks a few frills like the worry beads (my term for the boiler and brew pressure gauges) on more expensive machines and certainly if you like to adjust things....this machine doesn't tell you what it's doing. If you're a trusting soul you won't have any problems with the lack of information and the Expobar Office Pulser will actually do what it's meant to do, perfectly competently, without any "adjustments" from you.

I can only say to again to Expobar, well done yet another great machine (and I don't praise these companies lightly). I don't believe the current Italian competition can even come close to displacing this machine or attacking its market, not a chance. Expobar have the price right, the design right and it works really well!

The machine carries its electrical rating sticker and serial number behind the drip tray.



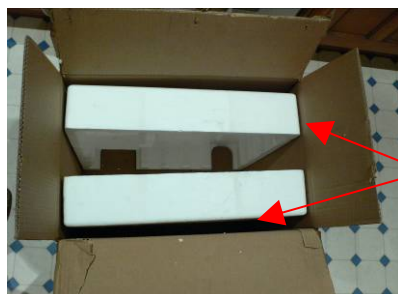
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The vital statistics for this machine are again a little conflicting and many reviews are of earlier models. An accurate view from measurement, rating plate information and internal examination, is as follows:

- Dimensions all approx. (not including steam/water wands) W = 240mm, D =420mm H=410mm
- Heating elements 1200W
- Boiler has a capacity of approximately 1.5 litres.
- Boiler are copper with brass ends and insulated
- Weight is approximately 20kg (I think it's lighter about 16kg but the web says 20Kg)
- Pump in the test machine was an C.E.M.E. 47W
- Group is an E61 style group (the e61 gaskets and shower screens fit), but is not an E61 (however Izzo, Isomac and Andreja portafilters all fit).

How it arrived and unpacking



Sturdy box and good use of polystyrene packaging obviously specifically designed for the machine. It is not easy to get the machine out of the box as there is limited room at the sides to reach down and get a good grip. Box needs to be placed on its side and the machine slid out.

The manufacturer's manual gives limited information as usual but the machine is very easy to use. It only covers the basics of machine operation and a very brief description of how to make coffee. The UK Bella Barista

guide will prove to be of significant help to the novice user.



A corner positioning of the Expobar Office Pulser is ideal, especially when located near a sink. Once in position on the counter the machine looks nice and does not dominate on standard sized work surface. It is a very tall machine as you can see, and there is not a lot of room under standard height kitchen cupboards.

Lower feet are apparently available at £9.95 per set as an option and Bella Barista are investigating the

possibility of making them a standard item on the UK Pulser machines. The "tall" feet, I seem to remember, are put on there to meet the regulations in some countries (which state a certain clearance below the machine. I think lower feet could also significantly improve the look of the machine (in my opinion, although I still think it looks OK)

Refilling the water tank can't be done without pulling the machine from under the cupboards and is annoying with those grippy little rubber feet!. This problem is easily solved with the addition of 4 felt furniture pads (as used on wooden floors).

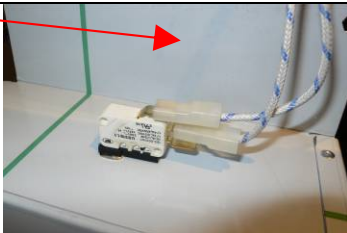

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Preparing the machine for use


Peel off any protective film, wash the cold water tank and fill it with filtered water. I never like the idea of using a machine without thoroughly flushing it through, especially considering that the machine may have stale water from factory testing (many months old), or manufacturing residues. Flushing through because of the design is fast and easy.

Key features

Item/Description	Picture	Comments
No rattles!	Enough said!	
High pressure pump lines were simple high pressure plastic tubing not the steel braided pipes seen in some machines	I don't expect it will cause a problem, It is just an observation. No doubt braided pipe would have added to the cost, with little if any impact on reliability.	
Water tank platform and shield has a protective film on the inside surface. I decided to leave this on		Expobar should remove this prior to assembly, but again I can't see a problem with it being left on, certainly not worth the trouble of opening machine to remove it.
Small hole in water tank a blessing and a curse. The tank is well made and good quality		Means that crud doesn't fall easily into the tank and water doesn't slop over the sides when moving it (in fact you can fill it right up. The small hole however does make it more difficult to fill and much more difficult to clean (so don't go on holiday for 2 weeks with it full of water!)
When low on water machine just switches off. Power light (on switch) stays on.	A warning bleeper like the Vivi which starts beeping even though the machine switches off. Because you're only aware it has switched off when it goes cold!	
I hate it when the espresso shot just stops.	Second Micro switch to illuminate a low water buzzer or light a few oz before the machine will switch off due to low water level. Or a dual pole/position micro switch to replace existing one	

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<p>The badge looked great, not all metal, but looked the right size and quality for the machine</p>		<p>One of my pet hates, are these cheap looking labels some manufacturers use. This badge looked nice on the machine!</p> <p>But grr...someone at the Expobar factory cut through the film with a sharp instrument to remove a portion of the film and fix the badge. Leaving deep scratches!!</p>
<p>Access to the internal components is good and easy.</p>	<p>There are 6 screws, and the water tank platform to be removed.</p>	
<p>Wiring all braided and high quality. Much better than you would expect of a machine of this price</p>	<p>It's good, not as neat as an Izzo, but then so far no machine has come close to the neatness of Izzo wiring</p>	
<p>Brew Pressure, factory preset is around 12 bar, as are almost all Vibe pump machines. Possibly a little high, but as you havn't got a brew pressure gauge, you have nothing to worry about.</p>	<p>The pump was set a little high, with the blind filter in place, it was a little above 12 bar. You could lower this to 9.5-10 bar. To do this you would need to purchase a pressure measuring portafilter (possibly Bella barista may consider doing this for customers on request for a nominal charge).</p>	
<p>The rubber feet are nice quality, but do grip well.</p>	<p>A bit annoying when pulling it in and out to fill it with water. Fortunately these feet can easily have a "glide pad" or felt furniture pads fitted or even the use of castor cups with "glide pads" fitted. Moving the machine then becomes easy</p>	
<p>Strong Steamer with a nice single tip steam wand. Identical to that on Brewtus II</p>	<p>Steamed 400ml of water from 5c to 60 c in around 60-70 seconds (similar to an Isomac Millennium) and easy to steam small or large quantities of milk and micro-foam successfully. Wand is good for beginners or more experienced users</p>	
<p>The double portafilter holder comes ready assembled and spouts in the right place. Heavy and of good quality.</p>	<p>It is unusual to only have one on a machine of this level, but single and double filter baskets are included as is a rubber disk to seal the portafilter basket for backflushing.</p>	
<p>The water feed tube has a water softening filter already attached</p>	<p>One already fitted to the pipe</p>	
<p>Drawing water is good, nice and smooth</p>	<p>Wand is sufficiently long and with a good range of movement.</p>	
<p>Ok no boiler pressure guage</p>	<p>Nothing to give me a reason to fiddle with the pressure stat, so I will have to trust them. Seems to work OK though and keeps the price down.</p>	


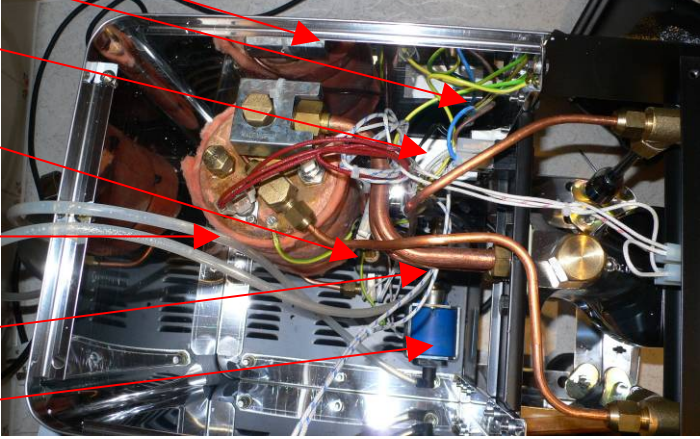
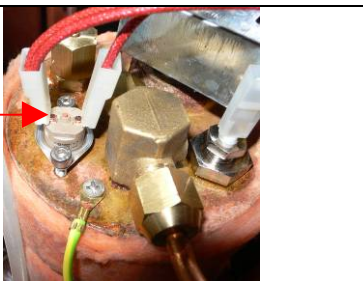

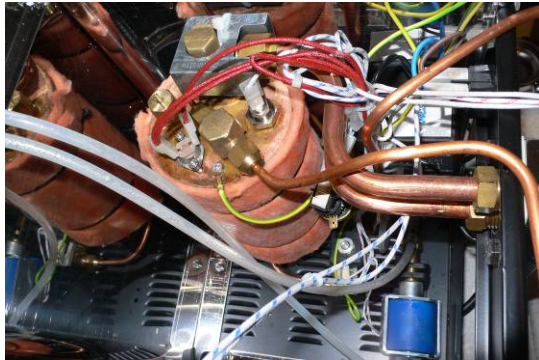
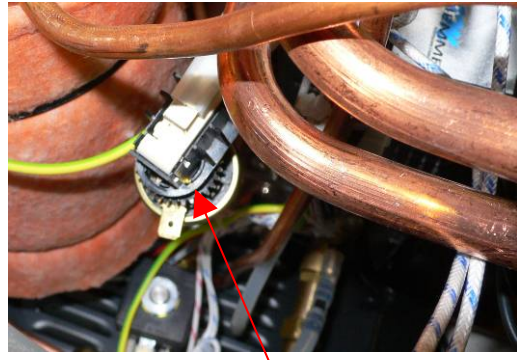
<p>Water & steam valves had a great feel, the knobs were a good size and the wands being mounted on ball joints is a real bonus. They are non compression valves like those on the Andreja Premium and the knobs although almost identical to the Andreja actually feel much more solid on the Expobar!</p>		
<p>Nice quality steel case</p>		
<p>Wiring routed neatly</p>		
<p>Giemme control Unit</p>		
<p>Accessible pressure stat</p>		
<p>Insulation on the boilers is a great idea it certainly will prevent heat loss and helps keep the components cool.</p>		
<p>brew pressure is reasonably easy to adjust</p>		
<p>Pump quite accessible and easy to change. C.E.M.E. 47W.</p>		
<p>Nice sturdy feet easy to adjust to level machine</p>		
<p>All components very accessible. This should make servicing quick and easy.</p>		
<p>Protective thermostat on boiler. I obviously couldn't test it but am 90% sure that it's resettable too using the little red button in the middle.</p>		<p>Having high limit thermostats should reduce the incidence of failure due to fill and level problems. A small detail, but one that could save an expensive repair bill</p>
<p>Fair sized cup warming tray, machine is not as tall as the Brewtus, so you will get some useful items on there.</p>	<p>The lower feet could help a lot!</p>	
<p>Drip tray is plastic, but works OK</p>		<p>It holds about 700 ml, removal is easy, but there is a small trick. A slight squeeze inwards on the back panel allows it to clear the bottom of the group (actually the metal shroud covering the vent) without having to tip it</p>
<p>The water tank platform and switch is hinged at one end and only uses a single spring.</p>	<p>This design seems to eliminate the rattles and the simplicity of design appears to be reliable and efficient. I certainly prefer it to the more usual design seen on prosumer espresso machines</p>	

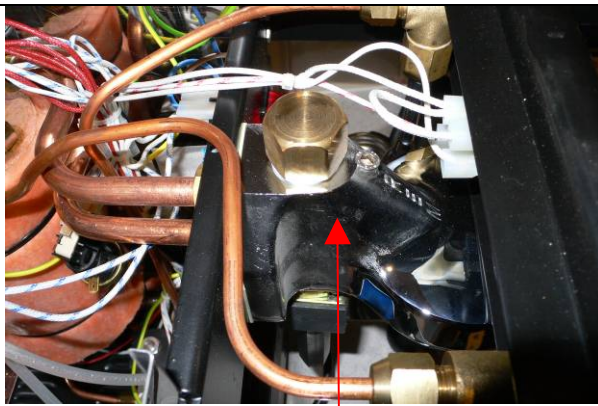
Photo gallery



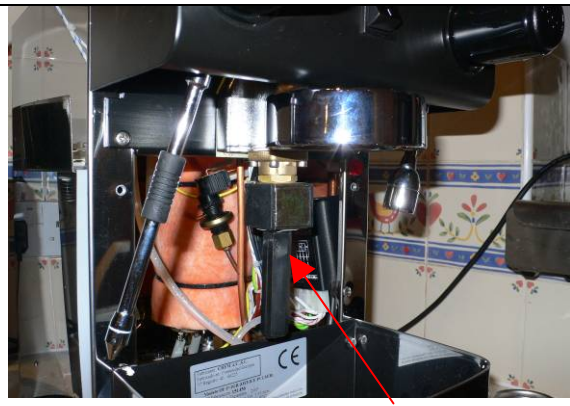
Top of the boilers with hi limit stat, vacuum breaker and safety valves



The pressurestat.



The heavy group, no it's not an E61, but styled heavily on the E61,



A shot with the front panel removed, showing the 3 way solenoid valve for venting the group after a shot



A shot with its clothes on!



The group from the bottom, look familiar, it should, all standard 58mm E61 shower screen and gasket in there

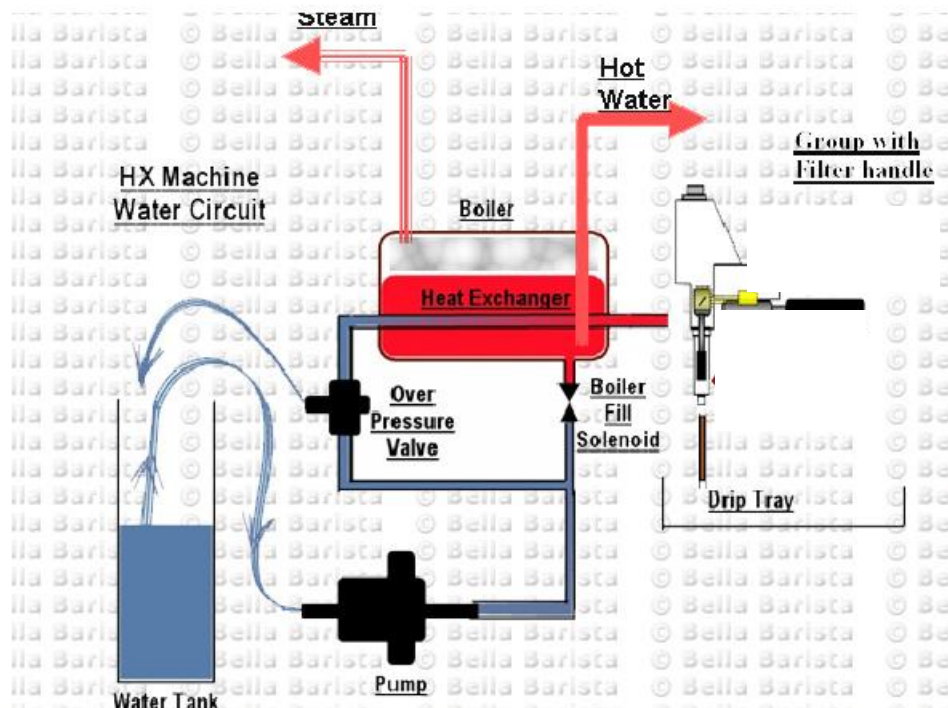
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How it works

. The diagram shows a simplified HX machine. The pump keeps the boiler about 60% filled with water that is heated and kept at a pressure of 1.3-1.4 bar (about 22 psi). The temperature of this water is above boiling point and has an area of steam above (similar to a pressure



cooker).

Steam - The pipe for the steam wand is at the top of the boiler (in the steam area) as the steam tap is opened, steam is forced through the steam pipe and as the pressure drops more of the water instantly flashes to steam, giving a continuous supply.

Hot Water - The pipe for the hot water tap is at the bottom of the boiler. As the hot water tap is opened, steam pressure forces the hot water from the boiler through the pipe and out of the hot water outlet.

Coffee Brew Water

Coffee brew water for the group does not actually come from the water in the boiler, but is pumped directly from the tank through a "heat exchanger" (essentially, a big copper tube) that passes through the hot boiler. As the cold water from the water tank passes through this tube it is heated to the correct temperature for brewing coffee.

Operating the switch on the front panel controls the pumping of brew water, and an electronic 3 way solenoid valve controls the release of pressure (**all 140 psi of it**) from the group head, so you can remove the filter handle safely when you have completed the shot (the excess water goes into the drip tray when pressure is released).

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Brew Water Temperature

The Expobar Office Pulser ran quite hot, which is usual with Heat Exchanger (HX) machines, because of the tight compromise between continuously available steam, and production of brew water for espresso. The pressure in the boiler is directly related to the temperature, a higher pressure gives higher temperatures. Because of the way HX machines work most require a cooling flush prior to drawing the first in a series of espressos, the Pulser in common with other machines of this type also requires this "cooling flush". It required the usual 4-6 Oz, and between shots a few Oz kept things under control.

Espresso

As long as a cooling flush is performed, the Pulser makes consistently good espressos and easily maintains the temperature during the pour. Domestic volumes of espresso one after another will be absolutely no problem with this machine.

Steam Production

The Pulser is a very strong steamer but the steam wand is well designed, and very forgiving. I like single hole steam tips as used on the Pulser and micro foam with large or small amounts of milk is quick and easy...

Hot Water

Plenty of really hot water on tap, the 1.5 litre is large and has plenty of water available. The water draw is smooth and controlled, recovery time after drawing water for an Americano, is rapid due to the 1200W heating element.

The group head is largely styled on an E61 (an industry standard), and many other industry standard components are used in the machine. This means that parts such as, pumps, gaskets, shower screens, filter holders, filter holder handles etc. are all a standard size and readily available from multiple suppliers. This also means that the pricing of these spares is highly competitive. There are a few components specific to the Expobars, like the parker solenoid valves (in the Auto fill circuit) and the pressure stats which I haven't come across before....but if the competitive price of the machines is anything to go by I would imagine these components will also be keenly priced. If not, there is always MATER or CEME and Sirai to use as alternatives!

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Final Thoughts

It is another great machine from Expobar and a great performer, especially when you consider the price. It's so easy to use, really because you have nothing to distract you.....switch it on, wait and then make coffee, using the single switch for brew water and that's it. The design although not innovative, is robust, well built and well above the bar for machines of this cost. You could reasonably not expect all the things you get on a machine of this price:

- Non compression valves
- Ball joint mounting of steam and water wands
- HX system
- 1.5 litre boiler (insulated)
- Big 3 litre cold water tank
- Mostly high polished stainless steel, only a small area of painted steel (good heavyweight construction)

Expobar seems to even take a lot of trouble attending to details and quality on its cheaper machines. This means you the customer get good value for money and it really highlights how many of the manufacturers of domestic machines have sat back and in some cases become complacent. I also think that you could get some quite inferior machines in the high street for only £100 less! As always though you the consumer will finally decide who is still around in 20 years time and I feel sure Expobar will be there making great machines.

I really cant see a competitor easily beating this machine for performance and value

Congratulations to Expobar another great machine at a great price!

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