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A Stylish Italian Semi-Auto for Upland Game and Waterfowl. By John B. Snow

While we’re bird hunting, we spend a lot more time carrying our shotguns than shooting them. This fact has done more to shape the look and design of our guns than perhaps anything else.

As a practical matter, a good shotgun must be easy to handle and to store. It can’t be too heavy and it should balance with whatever carry technique is used. A cumbersome shotgun can turn an otherwise fine day of hunting into a slog.

Aesthetically, it should be pleasing to look at. Life outdoors—hunting, fishing, and the like—can be demanding, and it’s nice to have a gun that reminds us of the beauty of the world we’re trying to enjoy.

A Bold Gamble

The Fabarm L4S Grey Hunter satisfies both these fundamental requirements. At 6 pounds 14 ounces, it is no excuse for a shotgun to have unappealing lines or to be the only real aesthetic blunder. The texturing here tapers down well, providing the trigger hand a solid purchase.

On the forend, function takes a back seat to form in what I consider the most impressive part of the design. The decoration on the metalwork is an interesting blend of styles. There are classic game figures (peasants on one side, mallards on the other), traditional scroll elements, and modern geometric patterns. It’s an unusual mix that nonetheless works.

The trigger itself is one of the highlights of the shotgun. It has a satisfyingly firm pull, much like the popular “three-phase” triggers. It loads like a standard semi, through the gate under the receiver. Though the L4S has a striking look, it operates in a fashion similar to other semi-autos. The gunship is a bit heavy and it should balance with whatever carry technique is used.

The reception has some fairly dramatic cuts sculpted into it. The top of the receiver is round and smooth with an anodized finish that Fabarm calls “titanium.” Pretty standard fare. But the lower half of the receiver has distinctive scalloping around the loading port and combines different types of engraved [“Notable Features,” at right]. In addition to that, the middle third of the receiver, which contains the game scene and traditional scroll work, is offset with a glossy finish than the rest of the metal.

Suffice it to say there’s a lot going here. The designers of this shotgun gave themselves plenty of metaphorical rope to hang themselves with, but they managed to pull it off. This is no small accomplishment. Very few shotguns that attempt to have a bold modern look are able to make it work. Euro-designed guns—this one is made in Italy—are particularly prone to this type of mishap, but domestically conceived shotguns are not immune either.

The trigger is one of the highlights of the shotgun. It has a smooth 5½-pound pull that makes the shotgun feel like it’s going off with nothing more than a mental cue from the shooter. It also greatly increases the gun’s versatility. The balance point is right at the bolt face and even with a 28-inch barrel, the gun comes to the shoulder and swings in a lively manner. Together, these qualities make the L4S a nimble and fast-handling shotgun. Fast outgoing targets present little difficulty even when I started with a low gun. And normal-speed targets, including doubles and triples, shattered with satisfying regularity.

The L4S uses a standard gas Of-lvyn piston system to cycle the action. Mine operated reliably with light and heavy target loads and didn’t require any break-in period.

One different feature in the shotgun’s construction is how the forend attaches to the magazine tube. Normally, tightening the forend nut that holds the forend on is what applies pressure to the collar beneath the barrel, pushing it tight against the receiver, keeping the whole works together. On the L4S there is a separate nut that provides forms that function, so that the only job for the forend on the forend is to keep the wood in place. Fabarm’s says this takes pressure off the forend, making it less likely to crack, which is certainly true. The company also says this allows for easier maintenance, because you can now remove the forend and expose the metal parts without having the shotgun come apart. I suppose that’s the case, but when you do want to take down the shotgun, like to transport it in the nice case that Fabarm provides, you have to undo two nuts instead of one, negating most of that benefit.

And it’s not a bad way to look at this shotgun. It’s a mix of great performance and quality construct with a few ordinary, and some-times inconvenient, features thrown into the mix.