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FABARMS L4S GREY HUNTER

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 bird guns than perhaps anything else.

As a practical matter, a good bird gun must be easy to haul around. 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 in the uplands into a slog.

Aesthetically, it should be pleasing to look at. Life is too short to hunt with ugly guns, and given the state of modern manufacturing technology, there is no excuse for a shotgun to have unappealing lines and adornment. Whether between flushes or during a break in the action to water the dogs, having an attractive shotgun to admire is as much a part of the experience as wearing sturdy boots.

The Fabarms L4S Grey Hunter satisfies both these fundamental requirements. At 6 pounds 14 ounces, it is definitely at the lighter end of the scale compared to most 12-gauge semi-autos. The shotgun saves a fair bit of weight thanks to the aluminum receiver.

A Bold Gamble

The receiver is also what sets the aesthetic tone for the shotgun, combining classic touches with some more edgy elements. First off,

the receiver has some fairly dramatic cuts sculpted into it. The top of the receiver is round and smooth with an even matte finish that Fabarms calls "titanium." Pretty standard fare. But the lower half of the receiver has distinctive scalloping around the loading port and

combines different types of engraving (see "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 glossier 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. European-designed guns—this one is made in Italy—are particularly prone to this type of misstep, but domestically conceived shotguns are not immune either.

Following the cues of the metalwork, the wood has a couple different types of texture cut into it at the grip. Where the top panel in the grip has stippling, the lower one has traditional checkering, and they are separated by a fine solid line that slashes through them. Again, a bit unusual, but the texturing is functional and works well, providing the trigger hand a solid purchase.

On the forend, function takes a back seat to form in what I consider to be the only real aesthetic blunder. The texturing here tapers down

STATS

Gauge: 12

Capacity: 3+1

Weight: 6 lb. 14 oz.

Trigger Pull: 5 lb. 8 oz.

Barrel Length: 28 in.

Overall Length: 48 1/4 in.

Price: \$1,695

Contact: fabarmusa.com

NOTABLE FEATURES



The decoration on the metalwork is an interesting blend of styles. There are classic game figures (pheasants on one side, mallards on the other), traditional scroll elements, and modern geometric patterns. It's an unusual mix that nonetheless works.



The flush-mounted quick-detach cups on the shotgun caught my eye. Not only do they give the gun sleeker lines when you're not using a sling, but because they allow for 360 degrees of rotation, they will never come loose and will never cause a sling to bind up.

quickly to give the gun a racy look so that only the rear half of the forend has meaningful checkering. If you extend your lead hand while shooting, which is what you should do, you end up gripping smooth wood devoid of texture. This isn't a fatal flaw, but it is a good idea to provide checkering where the shooter's hands are supposed to go.

Beyond this, the finish of the shotgun is very nice. The walnut is hand oiled, and has a matte sheen that brought out the grain and moderate figure in my sample. The butt pad has a low profile and was attached with care to the stock. The vents on the rib have an appealing asymmetrical shape that compliments the rest of the gun's design.

Mechanics

Though the L4S has a striking look, it operates in a fashion similar to other semi-autos and requires very little familiarization to run. It loads like a standard semi, through the gate under the receiver, though the bolt release tab is located on the receiver's left side, which is not typical. The safety is a standard crossbolt design and is positioned at the rear of the polymer trigger guard.

The trigger itself is one of the highlights of the shotgun. It has a smooth 5 1/2-pound break that makes the shotgun feel like it is going off with nothing more than a mental cue from the shooter. I also really liked how well the gun sat in my hands. 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 presented little difficulty even when I started with a low gun. And normal-speed targets, including doubles and triples, shattered with satisfying regularity.

The L4S runs on a standard gas-driven 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 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 per-

forms that function, so that the only job for the fastener on the forend is to keep the wood in place. Fabarms 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 Fabarms provides, you have to undo two nuts instead of one, negating most of that benefit.

And that's not a bad way to look at this shotgun. It is a mix of great performance and quality construct with a few ordinary, and sometimes inconvenient, features thrown into the mix.

PERFORMANCE					DESIGN				VALUE	TOTAL
Handling	Reliability	Shootability	Meets Purpose	Versatility	Craftsmanship	Ergonomics	Durability	Aesthetics		
9	8	9	9	8	10	7	8	9	7	84