

American Waterfowler

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Shotguns

FABARM XLR5 Waterfowler

By Jarrod Spilger

American waterfowlers have been blessed lately with an abundance of shotguns created specifically for them. This year, Italian gunmaker FABARM throws its hat into the waterfowling ring with the introduction of a new scattergun designed from the ground up to meet the needs of North American duck and goose hunters.

The new 3-inch 12 gauge Fabarm XLR5 Waterfowler is the latest, and possibly greatest, addition to the increasingly popular XLR5 semi-auto line. Over the past three years, XLR5 autoloaders have taken the clay target sports by storm with their unprecedented reliability and durability combined with a host of technical features rarely found on other competition guns. Fabarm engineers applied that same craftsmanship and ingenuity to the Waterfowler model—and added a few extra features to boot.

At first glance, one can't help but notice the gun's outstand-



ing Kryptek Banshee camouflage finish. This brown-hued pattern is like an impressionist painting. Up close, its snakeskin-style pattern of diamonds, dots and splotches doesn't really look like anything specific. From a distance, the shapes and colors merge to provide blob-free, unobtrusive concealment. I own several camouflage shotguns with more conventional patterns, and none of them looks as good as the XLR5 Waterfowler. Whether you hunt timber, cattails, or cornfields,

this excellent camo pattern will blend into the background.

The camo finish fully covers the gun, with one notable exception. The top surface of the ventilated rib was taped off during the camouflaging process and instead given a matte black finish to prevent glare and make the red fiber-optic front sight more visible. A steel mid-bead provides precise sight alignment. The rib also extends 4 inches beyond the barrel along the top of the receiver to provide a longer sighting plane. This Long Rib concept was first applied to competition models, and Fabarm included it on the Waterfowler.

The synthetic stock and forearm also have been given what Fabarm calls a Soft Touch finish applied over the camo to provide a rubberized feel and enhanced grip. It's similar to Browning's Dura-Touch finish, but less sticky. Everyone I showed the XLR5 Waterfowler to—men, women, boys, and girls—without exception commented first on the flawlessly applied Banshee camo and then, when they picked it up, on the Soft Touch finish. "Oh, I like that," was their collective response. If you have the opportunity to handle one at your local dealer, I'm certain you'll be uttering the same words.

Outward appearance is nice, but it's what's inside a shotgun that really matters, and in this department the XLR5 shines, quite literally. The internals have been plated and polished to resist corrosion and make post-hunt cleanup and maintenance easy. The action bar and barrel extension are nickel plated. The bore and choke tubes are chrome plated. The bolt and piston



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Shotguns



The XLR5 Waterfowler boasts a flawless Kryptek Banshee camo finish that will blend into a variety of environments. A Soft Touch finish on the synthetic stock and forearm provides a sure grasp in wet conditions.

are PVD (Physical Vapor Deposition) coated. The result is the shiniest internal parts on a semi-auto I've ever seen.

The XLR5 also is equipped with Fabarm's proven Tri-bore HP barrel with three sections of gradual tapering inside the bore. Essentially, the entire barrel is one very long forcing cone. The result is reduced recoil, less pellet deformation, and better patterns.

Specialized choke tubes also help improve patterns. Four chokes are provided: three flush mount and one extended. All are safe for use with steel shot. The flush chokes consist of Medium (modified), Long (improved modified), and Extreme (full) constrictions. The extended Exis DK tube is also a full choke, but it has been specially tuned for optimum performance with all nontoxic ammo and shot sizes. The tube's extended portion's camo finish matches the gun.

Although my demo gun came with a 32-inch barrel, currently only 28- and 30-inch barrels are available to the U.S. market. Despite that extra-long barrel, my test gun weighed only 7 1/4 pounds. It also should be noted that the recoil spring is not located in the stock, but rather straddles the magazine tube. This gives the gun a slightly weight-forward feel and prevents the spring from getting rusty if the stock is submerged.

The XLR5 Waterfowler comes standard with an oversized bolt handle for use with gloves—often an added cost feature on other semi-autos. The trigger guard is likewise oversized, as is the safety button located behind the trigger. Trigger pull was a consistent 6 1/2 pounds, about perfect for a hunting shotgun.

A bolt holdback button is conveniently located on the front, left side of the trigger guard. It's easily engaged by pushing it outward. When not engaged, the bolt can simply be pulled back to empty the chamber or swap rounds, negating the need for a magazine cutoff. The bolt release button is likewise located on the left side of the receiver, rather than on the right as on most autoloaders, so there's no danger of the oversized bolt handle hitting your thumb when the bolt returns to battery. The XLR5 Waterfowler is also available as a left-hand model, in which case all controls are reversed.

The heart of the XLR5's gas system is the Pulse Piston. Its

progressive braking slows the action with heavier loads, thereby reducing felt recoil. It also ensures reliable functioning with a variety of velocities and charge weights.

Indeed, during testing I never did find a load the XLR5 didn't like. Test loads included 1-ounce Gamebore Black Gold, White Gold, and Evo, Browning's new 1 1/8-ounce BPT Light, Winchester 1 1/16-ounce Xpert steel and even Winchester 24-gram International Target, which is less than 7/8 ounce. Loads in 3-inch Magnums included 1 1/4-ounce Black Cloud and Hevi-Steel and 1 1/8-ounce Xpert rounds. Velocities ranged from 1,145 fps for the Browning target load all the way up to 1,550 fps for the Xpert steel loads. Fabarm bills this gun as the fastest cycling semi-auto at 5 rounds in .31 seconds. I did not time the operation but the cycle is remarkably fast.

Since it was July, all testing was relegated to clay targets. I quit testing when it became evident the semi-auto would digest anything I could feed it. Although a load or two with an ultra-low velocity or charge weight may be out there that the XLR5 might not cycle, I'm confident most target loads and virtually all waterfowl loads will function properly in this versatile autoloader.

Other features include a cloth-covered hard case, ultra-soft recoil pad, sling studs, and stainless magazine plug. Three shims allow customization of drop and cast. The rubberized, black cheek piece on the stock is not adjustable, other than what can be accomplished with the shims. I would have preferred a soft gel insert in its place, but now I'm just nitpicking.

Finally, all XLR5 autoloaders are tested by the Italian Proof House and receive the highest possible rating of 1,630 BAR. While that might not mean much to most American hunters, be assured that these shotguns have more strength and durability than the average shooter will probably ever need.

Overall, I found Fabarm's XLR5 Waterfowler to be an exceptionally well-made and well-thought-out shotgun. Those looking for a new semi-auto with a bunch of standard features usually found only on custom models should consider the XLR5 Waterfowler. It will do everything you ask of it—and look good while doing it!

