WET & WILD! THE WATERFOWL ISSUE

GUN DOG
THE TRAINER OF UPLAND BIRD AND WATERFOWL DOGS

HEAVEN ON EARTH
SWEET MISSOURI TIMBER HOLES

SPOTLIGHT
REMINGTON'S CLASSIC 58

NOTES FROM THE FIELD
THE TRAINED RETRIEVE

SHOTGUN REPORT
FABARM'S XLR5 WATERFOWLER

BOOSTING THE ODDS
TACTICS FOR STALE DUCKS

LEGENDARY DUCK CLUB
BACK TO BEAVER DAM
Waterfowler’s Delight

What’s so fab about the new Fabarm? Everything.

NOTHING TAMES RECOIL like a gas-operated shotgun, and Fabarm’s Waterfowler does a great job of it. This semi-auto is loaded with features aimed directly at waterfowl hunters. Designed by Fabarm president Wes Lang, an ardent duck hunter and top shot, he made it the kind of shotgun he would take to the blind. We all know the hunting gets good when the weather ain’t. Better cold in front of an icy storm, conditions when gloves are a must, and gun handling is a challenge, the XLR5 comes through with an extra-large gloved-size trigger guard, and a large button safety. The bolt handle extends a full inch and a quarter from the receiver with a knurled surface for a sure grip. The loading port is sculpted, making shoving shells into the magazine easier.

Unique to the Waterfowler is the black ventilated rib. The XLR5 is covered with Kryptek Banshee camo, impervious to weather and saltwater. Coupled with a Soft-Touch finish, covered with Kryptek Banshee camo black ventilated rib. The XLR5 is the magazine easier.

IN A BLIND OR PIT, GETTING THE Muzzle down the rib than extended back over the receiver. The Waterfowler’s rib is the same, extending four inches on the receiver to provide a 35-inch-long sight plane with the 30-inch barrel. A longer barrel is another touch only a long-time duck hunter would want. In a blind or pit, getting the muzzle blast out away from your buddies is a great idea. I vividly recall hunting Southern Illinois geese near Marion years ago. Sharing the two-man pit was a guy with a Browning BPS 10, who, in his misguided wisdom, had cut the barrel to 24 inches. When he took a shot at a goose, I thought baseball great Red Schoendienst, who was hunting in a nearby pit, whacked me on the side of my head with his Louisville Slugger. Aside from practical safety, longer barrels provide a little more sight plane and about 10 feet more velocity per inch than a shorter barrel.

THE GUTS: The gas system uses Fabarm’s proprietary Pulse Piston that proportionally slows the bolt’s rearward velocity depending on the shell being fired. Truthfully, gas-operated autos don’t really block recoil, they spread it out. The gas system adds a bit of forward weight that adds inertia to the swing, making it a bit harder to slow when taking the shot. The action-return spring is wound around the magazine tube, and the entire unit disassembles in one piece. The XLR5 uses a two-piece carrier as do many Italian-mad autos. To hold the bolt open you must push a little flipper on the left side of the action to drop the carrier. One quirk with the XLR5 is that the bolt release is located on the left side of the receiver. It projects out a bit from the action and the metal surrounding it has been sculpted for an easy shot even with gloves. Speaking of the left side, the XLR5 is available in a lefty model for about $175 more.

FIELD TEST: Aside from being covered with Soft-Touch finish, the synthetic stock ends with a really good, soft rubber pad. My test gun arrived the morning I left for the last two days of Maryland’s goose season. No time for shooting clays or checking the fit on the plate; just put it together and skedaddle. Many pads are sticky, but this one isn’t; no hang up on the jacket, just a good mount. For me, the gun fit right out of the box. I’m looking right down the rib, but if it weren’t, I could adjust for drop and cast with the supplied shim kit.

The barrel is internally chrome-plated and the bolt is PVD-coated for corrosion resistance. Boring is by the proprietary TriBore system that makes a smooth transition from the 3-inch chamber through the extra-long forcing cone into the .735 bore that tapers to .7215 just behind the screw-in choke skirt. The XLR5 comes with three choke tubes, No. 5 Medium range, No. 7 Long range and one labeled Extreme. I did some post-season pattern testing with both the No. 5 with a constriction of .018 and No. 7 at .0265 using Browning’s new No.2 steel. The No. 5 tube (70 percent) outshot the No. 7 (67.4 percent) so tighter isn’t often better. I used the No. 5 for end-of-season geese, and it worked just fine.

Fabarm service is located in Cambridge, Maryland, where they have gunsmiths standing by should a problem arise. With pattern testing and hunting, I’ve put about two full boxes of 3-inch waterfowl ammo through the XLR5 with nary a hitch, and I don’t expect any in the future, because this one’s a keeper, and when Fabarm’s chief bean counter asked for it back, I sent a check.