

WET & WILD! THE WATERFOWL ISSUE

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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 huntin’ gets good when the weather ain’t. Bitter 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 glove-sized 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 coupled with a Soft-Touch finish, impervious to weather and saltwater. Traditionally, the entire gun is coated. Lang felt it important to have the rib stand out, so he has gone the extra step of leaving the top of it coal black. Oldtimers will recall the Winchester Model 12’s “Duckbill”



Close-up of action with enlarged trigger guard, extended bolt handle and black rib

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-made 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 shove 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,

FABARM Waterfowler	
Manufacturer	Fabarm (fabarmusa.com)
Action type	Gas-operated semi-automatic
Gauge	12; 3-inch
Trigger Pull	6 lbs. 1.9 oz
Magazine	Four rounds; two with installed plug.
Barrel	28- or 30-inch, Tribore, 3 screw-in chokes
Sights	Black vent rib with fluorescent red bead
Stock	Synthetic with Soft Touch finish
Drop at comb	1½-inch
Drop at heel	2¼-inch
Overall Length	50¼ inches (30-inch barrel)
Weight	7.8 lbs
Metal Finish	Kryptek Banshee
Proof	Extra magnum proof 1,630 BAR (23,640 p.s.i.)
Accessories	Stock and trigger wrench, choke case, choke-tube wrench, Integrale hard case.
MSRP	\$1,650; \$1,825 lefty

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. *

