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JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2021



An Imminently Satisfying Double That's Affordable

BY ROBERT MATTHEWS

It's a peculiar thing, but for many years, newly made, well-constructed side-by-sides have been as scarce as the legendary hen's teeth. And the few that were available had prices that would daunt an Arab oil sheik!

THAT WASN'T THAT WAY IT WAS WHEN

I was a kid. Back then, there were a good many decent doubles made. There were even some that were fairly inexpensive, and anybody who had the urge to do so could give one a try. Recently, though, the guy who just wanted a reliable entry-level side-by was just out of luck. The only available alternatives were to either fork out a moderate fortune or gamble on the used market with all its perils. And that, my friends, is not for the faint of heart!

BECAUSE OF THAT, I've lobbied folks in the industry for at least 40 years to fill the void when the opportunity came along. After all, a double is not such a complicated piece of machinery. How hard could it be to make one of reasonable quality for the average shooter?

Several years ago, I made the pitch to Caesar Guerini's Wes Lang. We were on a quail shooting foray in Georgia and had some time to shoot the breeze as we followed the dogs through the pines and broomsedge. Caesar Guerini seemed a likely candidate—they make excellent over/unders at reasonable prices. Wes' response pretty well mirrored that of most of the industry folks I've talked to. He allowed that the subject came up occasionally, but never seemed to generate enough steam to go forward. Cost-benefit analysis and all that sort of stuff. However, he assured me, he'd keep it in mind. Wes did note in passing that it might be a good project for Fabarm.

If I remember correctly, which is always a chancy proposition, it seems to me that the conversation occurred just about the time that Guerini acquired the well-established and respected Italian firm. Fabarm has an enviable reputation for producing good, solid, well-designed repeaters and over/unders. Over the years, I've used a number of its guns with total satisfaction.

If we fast-forward a few years, we find ourselves in the midst of a modest revival in side-by-sides. As interest has risen, several companies have taken an interest in producing side-bys for the common man. And, sure enough, Fabarm is one of them!

A couple of months ago, I was talking with Shaun Burkowski, Marketing Director of Caesar Guerini USA, about Guerini's "Revenant" over/under, which I like a lot, and is now available in 28 gauge. At the end of our conversation, Shawn paused for a moment before asking if I remembered my conversation with Wes. Actually, I did, to the amazement of all parties. With that, he dropped the question, "Well, we're about to introduce one through Fabarm. Would you like to see the first one in?"

OF COURSE, YOU KNOW THE ANSWER.

And now I have it in my hot little hands! Not only do I have it, but I've had the chance to hunt quail in South Georgia with it. Real, honest to God, wild quail, mind you, not the pen-raised variety, so I've got a pretty good idea how it handles on the "real deal."

The gun is called the "Autumn," and the one that I have is a neat little rounded action box-lock 20-gauge with 28-inch barrels and a wonderful concave, eye-catching, matte rib with a medium



Lock-up is via a novel four-lug system that should prove to be very durable.

The forend is attached with a classic Anson style latch.

The Autumn has an upgraded stock using deluxe grade Turkish walnut with an oil finish.



The stock features a hand-fit walnut butt plate to make mounting the gun easier and to avoid snagging on clothing.

sized silver bead. It tips the scales at a smidgen under 6 1/2 pounds, and balances just a touch forward, like a proper side-by-shoulder. The Autumn will also be available with a pistol grip and semi-beavertail forend, if that's your preference.

The monoblocked barrels have a high-luster finish and come equipped with a full complement of choke tubes, giving the gun a high degree of versatility. Lock-up is via a novel four-lug system that should prove to be very durable. As always, time will tell on that issue, but it certainly looks to be strong to me. It has a single selective trigger that's inertia operated, and non-automatic tang safety. The automatic, selective ejectors are well timed and robust.

The stock is especially gratifying. It's a classic English-style straight-wrist, paired with a splinter forend. I really like the stock's details. It's made of nicely figured European walnut with a satin, medium-luster finish and is finished off with a nice, contrasting wood buttplate. The checkering is clean and crisp. The wood is fit slightly proud of the metal to allow for a refinishing somewhere down the line. It's not only traditional, but practical as well.

The receiver has a nice, conservative case-color finish and features what appears to be a multi-technique floral engraving pattern. The overall effect should prove quite pleasing to most folks, and I guess that's the point. Fanciers of side-by-side doubles are nothing if not traditional and I think the folks at Fabarm "hit the nail on the head" with this gun.

Shaun was gracious enough to allow me a little extra time so that I could open the Georgia quail season with the Autumn, and for that I'm extremely grateful, considering the



The rounded action features ornamental style scroll engraving with elegant color case hardened finish.



The action is monolithic design machined from a steel forging for the ultimate in strength.

number of writers waiting to review this gun. I just hate that I've got to send it back now.

As for the field test, it couldn't have gone better. South Georgia in the first week of quail season is about as glorious as life on this planet gets. "Sweater weather" mornings quickly yielded to shirtsleeve afternoons. It was still early fall there, and there's just nothing quite like following a brace of pointers through the first glimpse of life's most beautiful season with a lovely, well balanced side-by across your arm.

I HONESTLY CAN'T BRAG ABOUT MY SHOOTING, because I've been a bit of a slump lately, but I'll gladly brag about the handling of the little Autumn. As with most production guns, its stock dimensions are tailored for the mythical "average man." Drop at comb is about 1 1/2 inch and drop at heel is 2 1/4. Since I'm about as average as a guy can get, those dimensions suit me just fine.

With the introduction of the Autumn, Fabarm is helping to fill a gaping hole in the shotgun market by bringing out an imminently satisfying double that's affordable for most people. It's a solid, slick handling, 6-poundish 20-gauge side-by-side, and now you can have one while avoiding the considerable hazards of the used gun market! What more is there to say? ■