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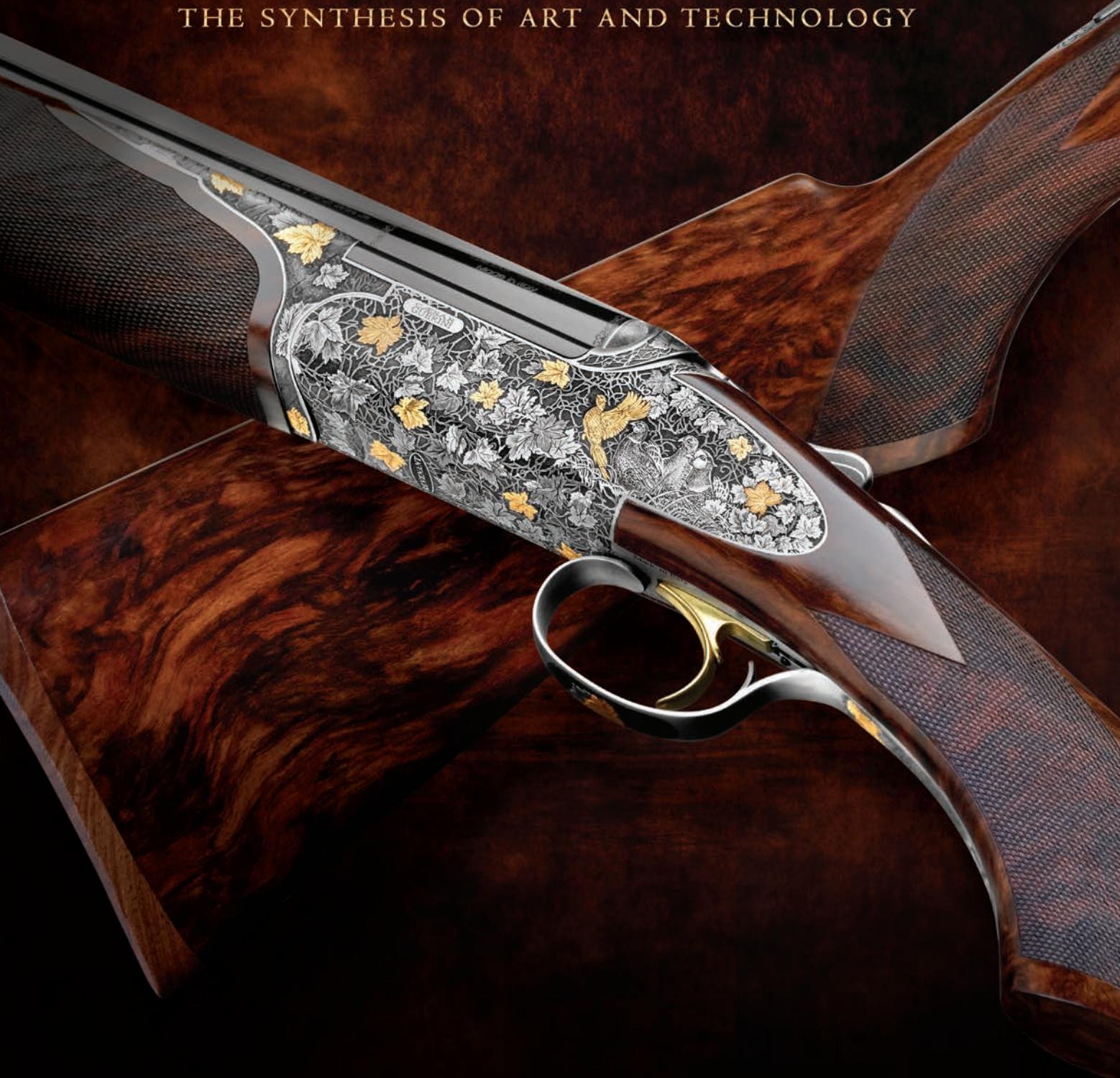
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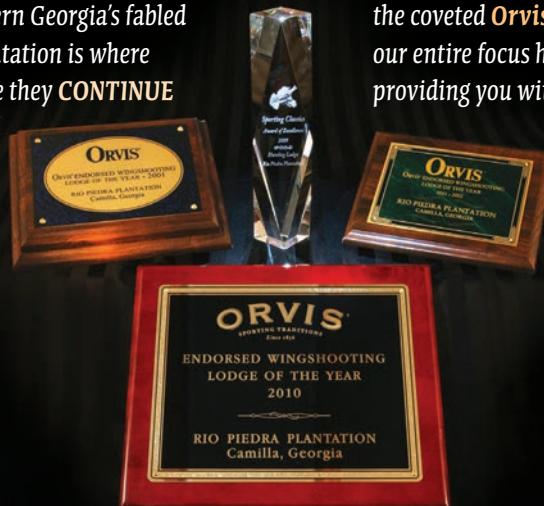
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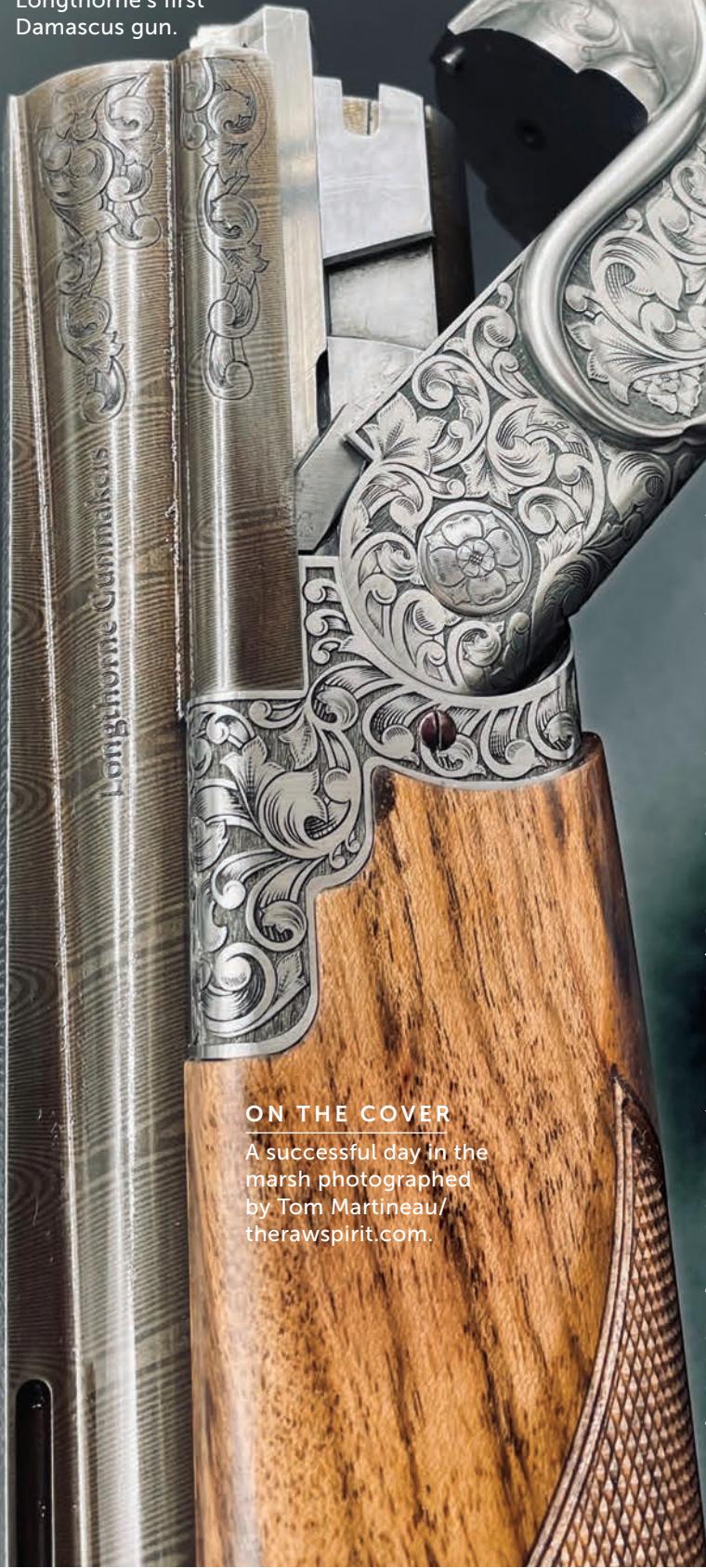


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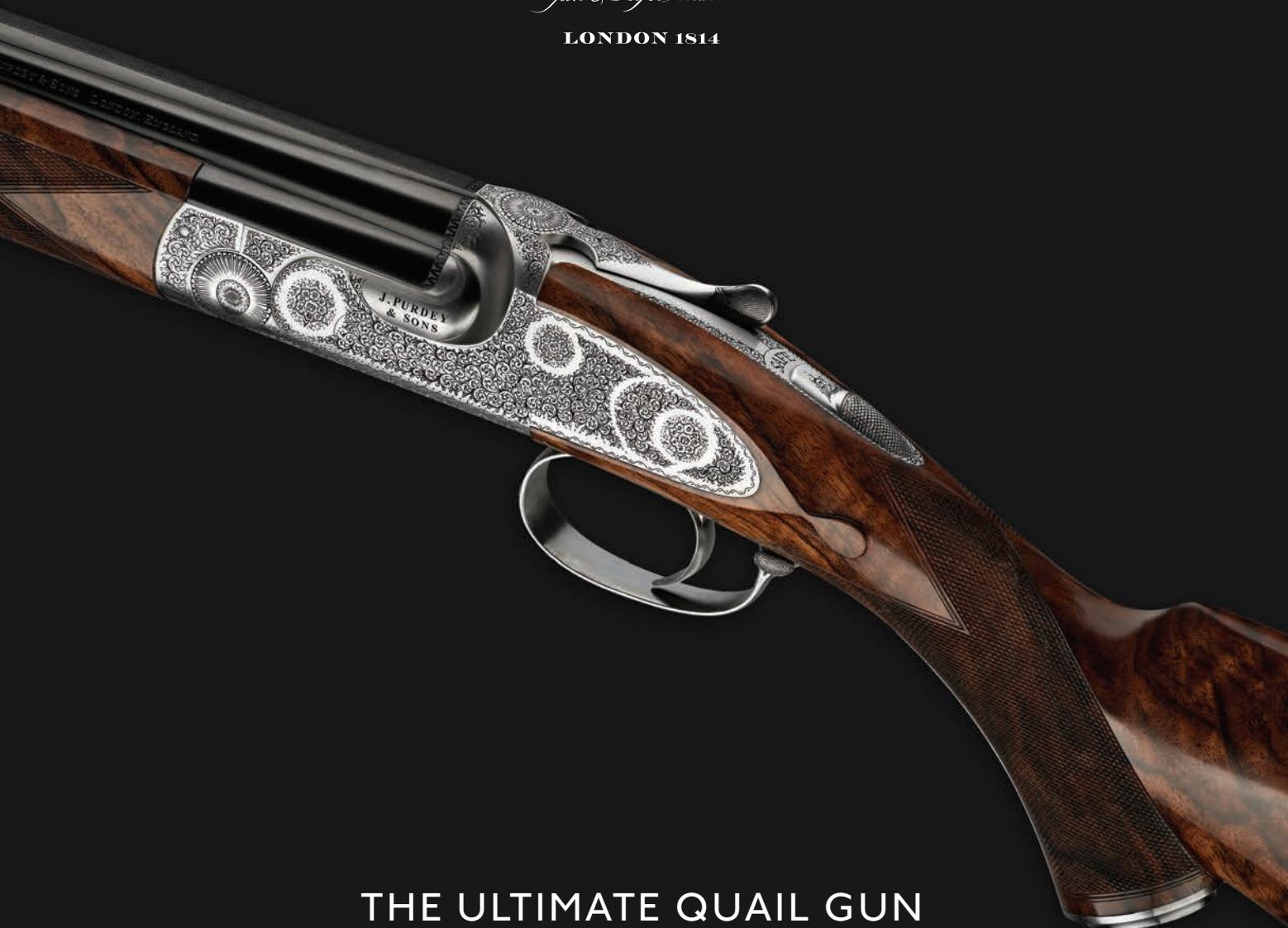




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From the Editor



Why are waterfowlers so angry?

Or at least you'd think they were from the photos in various advertisements. These days it's hard to find a waterfowling ad that doesn't feature a camo-clad hunter

scowling, frowning or with his arms folded like he's daring you to make a move. Are they trying to make hunters look intimidating? (*I pity the duck that circles my spread!*) Or to suggest that only the hardest of hardcore can handle those early morning wake-ups?

Whatever the case, those ads don't make waterfowling look fun. And they certainly don't make waterfowlers look welcoming to potential newcomers.

Which is too bad, because the waterfowlers I know are some of the most entertaining, laid-back, generous hunters I've spent time with. They also are some of the most dedicated, knowledgeable and skilled outdoorsmen going.

By its nature, waterfowling is often a team effort, with several hunters hauling gear, setting decoys and building blinds. It's also one of the most social types of hunting, with opportunities to enjoy the camaraderie of family and friends. Some of the most fun I've had outdoors has been on waterfowl hunts—time spent in blinds laughing, talking and sharing jokes and stories. And when the birds have cooperated, there have been celebrations of success or ribbings over misses—always lighthearted and in the spirit of good sportsmanship.

This issue is our annual celebration of waterfowling. From Oliver Hartner's description of a wood duck hunt in South Carolina's ACE Basin ("Good Enough to Die Here," p. 66) to Phil Bourjaily's promotion of the 20 gauge for fowling ("Go Light for the Flight," p. 60) to columns about hunting gear and nontoxic shells, we've included articles that will help you enjoy—and, yes, have fun in—the field this season.

Speaking of fun, our Readers & Writers Adventures program is in its 26th year and going strong. A number of this season's trips sold out early, so we added a couple of hunts to the schedule. At press time there remained openings for February 2022 hunts at Joshua Creek Ranch, in Texas, and Flying B Ranch, in Idaho. Both of these destinations are world class and offer mixed-bag opportunities not to be missed. For more information, visit the "Travel" page at shootingsportsman.com or contact Terry Bombeke at 207-594-9544, ext. 478; tbombeke@shootingsportsman.com.

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Letters

We appreciate receiving your comments, criticisms and suggestions. Please send correspondence to Letters, *Shooting Sportsman*, PO Box 1357, Camden, ME 04843; editorial@shootingsportsman.com.

SAGE GROUSE & COYOTES

I enjoyed the short article on sage grouse in September/October (see "Sage Grouse Show Accelerating Decline," Game & Gun Gazette), as the sage grouse is one of my favorite birds. I would like to add one suggestion, as I am the former Commissioner for Wildlife for eastern Oregon on the Oregon Wildlife Commission. What little expertise I may have only extends to eastern Oregon and perhaps eastern Washington and Idaho. It was my observation that while habitat is necessary, control of the coyote as a predator of sage grouse is paramount. The grouse nest on the ground and therefore have no defense against the coyote. Without coyote control, habitat is meaningless, although coyote control seems to be unpopular these days.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is the best agency to control the coyote, and our counties and wildlife agencies should support USF&WS in its budgets.

Carter Kerns
Pendleton, Oregon

DEWEY'S DOUBLE

I'm 70 years old, and until the September/October issue thought that Audrey Hepburn was the most graceful and quietly elegant thing I had ever seen. Then I saw Dewey's double ("A One-Off Original")! Sorry, Audrey.

Dr. Bruce Goldenberg
Via email



ADJUSTABLE TRIGGERS VS. LOP

Bruce Buck's review of the Syren Julia Sporting over/under (Gun Review, July/August) raises a question that I have mulled over for some time. In the article Buck states, "The dimensions of the Julia's stock are: 13.9" length of pull (slightly adjustable by moving the trigger blade fore and aft)"

Yes, I know LOP is measured from

the trigger to the center of the end of the butt. But I have always held that moving the trigger back and forth will change the LOP measurement but does nothing to change the practical or functional length of pull. If a stock is an inch too long, you can slide the trigger around as much as you want. The stock will still be an inch too long. The measurement will change. The actual stock length won't. This would seem to be especially true for a gun with a pistol grip where the hand is locked into position. The shoulder-to-hand distance is fixed no matter what adjustments are made to the trigger.

Moving the trigger will allow one to adjust for a more comfortable fit of the trigger finger to the trigger. I believe trigger-finger comfort is the true purpose for adjustable triggers, not somehow magically changing the length of the stock to make it fit properly.

Moving an adjustable trigger will change the technical Length of Pull measurement but is not the answer to adjusting a stock-length issue.

I know it may be a minor technical point, but I see the comment made often enough that I thought it worth raising.

John S. Duty
Winchester, Kansas

Bruce Buck responds:

John, I think that you are spot-on correct when you say that an adjustable trigger really doesn't alter the functional length of the stock.

Unfortunately, the gun industry insists on measuring stock length from trigger to butt, and that's the way the stock's dimensions are stated. Just as you say, it is the rear-hand-to-the-shoulder, or butt, that really counts. I've always felt that the most accurate functional measurement of stock length would be from halfway down

the front curve of the pistol grip to the butt. There is the same problem with cast-off not taking into account the thickness of the stock. Some common stock measurements just aren't precise.

STRIKING A CHORD

Tom Huggler's article "Literal Footsteps" (To the Point) was one of the first pieces I read when my September/October issue arrived. It struck a chord with me. You see, I have been a passionate waterfowler for almost four decades, but only recently have I begun upland hunting. I am trying to make up for lost time.

Over the past few years I have read many books filled with short stories by such authors as Gordon MacQuarrie, Harold P. Sheldon, Robert Ruark and Havilah Babcock. My favorite by Mr. Babcock is *My Health Is Better in November*. I can completely relate to the title, and in fact my wife might say I do my best to emulate Mr. Babcock. All of these authors write in such a way as to cause you to appreciate not only the game being pursued but also the sheer value of the entire experience of being in nature. However, the author I can relate to most is Nash Buckingham. I was born and raised in Memphis and was introduced to duck hunting on the lake he mentioned in so many of his stories: Beaver Dam. I do not duck hunt there now, but I have countless memories of paddling that lake with my dad, my son or a couple of friends looking for that special spot the ducks might want into on a cold, wintry morning. I have never hunted for quail in the places Nash and his friend Hal Howard did, but that is OK. I have the memories of Beaver Dam, and those can never be taken from me.

My dad has, as Nash would say, "crossed over the river to rest in the shade." My son and I still hunt together and are still making memories. Soon I will be hunting with his boys, and I trust in their later years they, too, will remember the steps they took with their granddad.

Bill Wardle
Trussville, Alabama



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SEE THE TREATMENT

In this issue's From the Bench column ("Finishing a Gunstock Butt," p. 44) gunsmith Del Whitman and *SSM* Editor at Large Reid Bryant discuss the why's and how's of finishing gunstock butts. Throughout history treatments have been practical, ornamental or combinations of both. Included is a discussion of Del's "one-screw buttplate," a hardwood checkered plate that is glued to the gun's butt and features an engraved screw that covers the stock's drawbolt hole. The finished product is lovely to look at as well as functional. To see the article online along with bonus images showing the process of creating the one-screw buttplate, go to shootingsportsman.com/butt-treatments.

FOLLOW THE FLIGHT

For those craving more information on all things waterfowl there is the Ducks Unlimited Podcast. As one would expect from an organization that bills itself as "the world's leader in wetlands and waterfowl conservation," DU speaks from a position of authority when it comes to just about anything to do with ducks and geese. The organization's podcast, hosted by Chris Jennings and Dr. Mike Brasher, covers science, research, hunting, migration and more. Guests include *Ducks Unlimited* Magazine contributors, state and federal biologists,

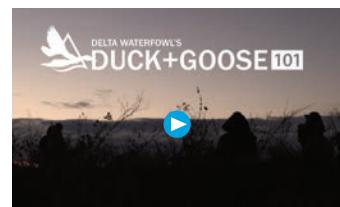


and DU conservation staff throughout North America. Past episodes have featured an interview with Brad Allen, three-time world duck-calling champion and owner of Elite Calls; a species profile of blue-winged teal; and an insider's look at retriever field trials and hunt tests

with Purina's Karl Gunzer. Bonus episodes during the waterfowl season feature biologists and other experts discussing weather, habitat, hunting and migration and giving "real time" information about where the birds are. To listen to the podcast, go to ducks.org/dupodcast.

TAKE A FOWLING COURSE

Many veteran waterfowlers had mentors who showed them how to hunt, but often today's newcomers—especially those who take hunter-safety courses online—don't have that benefit. Which is why Delta Waterfowl—aka The Duck Hunters Organization—in partnership with Today's Hunter, the leading provider of online hunter-education courses, has developed an online course that teaches



the basics of successful waterfowling: Delta Waterfowl's Duck + Goose 101. According to Delta's Chief Conservation Officer, Joel Brice: "[The course is] full of the skills and knowledge to put the first-time waterfowl hunter into position to safely, legally, ethically and—maybe most importantly—enjoyably take that first duck or goose." Units include how to scout, tips for identifying ducks and geese, basic gear requirements, decoy placement, mastering simple calling skills, cleaning and preparing waterfowl, and dealing with field emergencies. The course costs \$30 and would make a great gift for any aspiring waterfowler. For more information and a short intro video, visit todayshunter.com/duck-goose-101.

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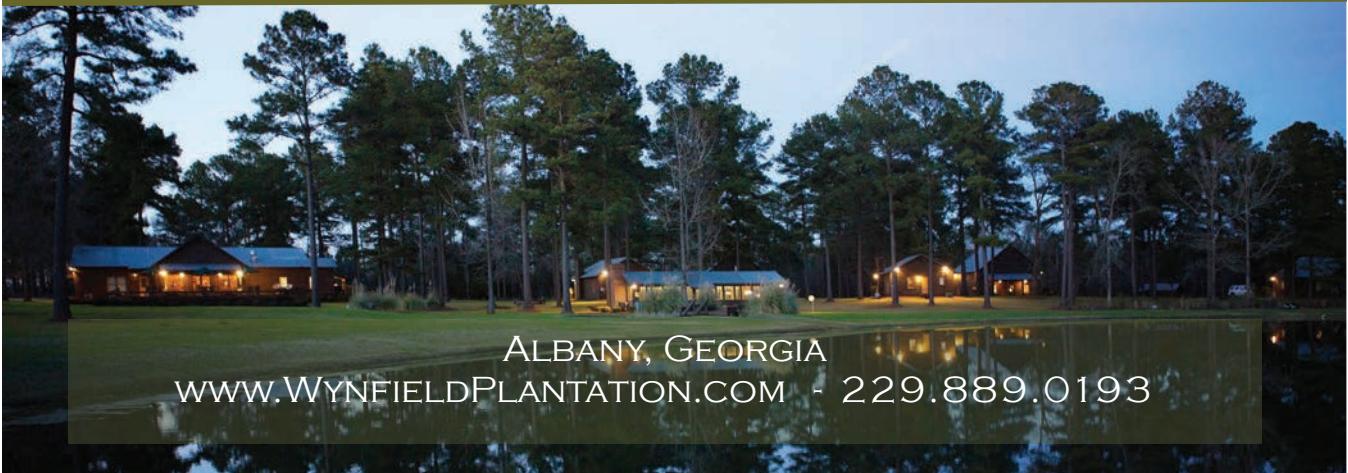
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Bow Wave

The first day of spring for me is the day the wood ducks reappear in my backyard wetlands. Nothing says winter is over like the squealing and splash-landings of some of North America's most beautiful waterfowl. When my wife and I first moved to our area, wood ducks were not common. But then one morning we awoke to an entire yard full of them. It was following a brutally cold and snowy winter, and we had started to feed the deer ear corn in our yard. When the snow melted that April, our yard was covered in leftover corn. Within two days there was a flock of more than 50 wood ducks cleaning up the kernels. These new neighbors were more than welcome. In hopes of keeping them around, we put up almost a dozen nesting boxes. We now have five to 10 nests in our yard every year. One tree in particular has two natural cavities and one nesting box. Last year it produced four broods of ducklings.

With all of these great "models" in the backyard, most spring mornings my destination is only 100 yards from the house. Being able to photograph the ducks at eye level in their own habitat is amazing. Nothing is more rewarding than seeing groups of 10 to 35 birds mere yards away showing off for their mates.

This particular drake was sitting for about 20 minutes on logs left over from a family of beavers. Suddenly a new pair of woodies landed next to me, and he immediately hopped into the water and started swimming as fast as he could toward them. I knew he had to go over one last log, so I upped my camera's shutter speed, thinking it might make a great action shot when he reentered the water. Although I took a quick burst of photos, only this shot turned out.

—STEVE OEHLENSCHLAGER,
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Game & Gun Gazette



Tom Beckbe Opens Flagship Store

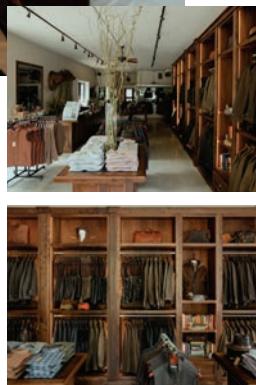
In 2015 Radcliff Menge and his wife, Mary, both former attorneys, founded sporting-apparel company Tom Beckbe in Mountain Brook, Alabama, just outside Birmingham. (Tom Beckbe is a play on the colonial name for Alabama's Tombigbee River.) Quickly the company became known for its signature waxed-canvas hunting jackets, which are lined with cotton twill that has been dyed with red clay found along the Tombigbee. Since then the couple has expanded its business by adding a growing assortment of men's and women's apparel and accessories and opening an outpost location in historic Wilson, Arkansas. This past August the couple took the next step by opening a flagship store in Mountain Brook.

The new store occupies 1,300 square feet and includes a cocktail bar and a glass-encased "Workshop,"

where brass plates are custom engraved for outerwear, bags and accessories and where the staff can produce made-to-measure hunting vests. The back storeroom, affectionately known as the "Loading Dock," features a custom bar with private lockers for customers' favorite spirits—to be enjoyed while shopping or attending in-store events.

"We wanted to create an immersive space for our customers in Alabama and beyond to check out our full assortment," Radcliff Menge said. "We also wanted to have a dedicated venue for hosting all of the great folks in the sporting community we meet around the country. This is more than just a store: It's a place for sportsmen and women to congregate, share their experiences and enjoy the finer elements of the sporting lifestyle."

For more information, visit tombeckbe.com. —TOM STERNAL



LONGTHORNE'S 'TWISTED' NEW GUN

If you think Damascus barrels mean light loads and Cylinder chokes, now is the time to swap those ideas for something more progressive. English gunmaker Longthorne, renowned for its one-piece barrels, has just built a twist-barrel gun that shoots steel.

Damascus, created when alternating bands of iron and steel are twisted about a mandrel and hammer welded into a homogenous whole, became popular in England during the 19th Century. Later it was replaced by fluid steel, but something was lost. Finely patterned Damascus barrels are as beautiful as well-figured walnut stocks or color-hardened actions.

In recent years Damascus has enjoyed a renaissance, with James Purdey & Sons building a small number of Damascus guns. Longthorne uses the same material that Purdey's does, which is supplied by Damasteel AB of Sweden. According to Longthorne Marketing Director Elaine Stewart: "We purchased the Damascus in 2013 intending to create a set of barrels but never found the time. Then in 2018 we mentioned it to an existing customer. He was intrigued by the possibility of the world's first one-piece Damascus barrels, so we calculated a price and he persuaded [my husband] James to make the barrels.

"Next the customer wanted the barrels proofed for 'superior steel.' Not wanting to disappoint, we visited the London Proof House, and the Proof Master offered to proof the barrels for lead first and then steel. I can't tell you how relieved we were when they passed!"

The barrels were finished in a traditional manner, and now the gun is a beautiful representation of old and new.

For more information, visit longthorneguns.com. —DOUGLAS TATE



Pyke's Northcutt Pant Performs

After my brush-pants review in July/August ("Brush Busters," Gear Guide), I was informed by Brent Pike, the owner of Pyke Gear, that I had not made an apples-to-apples comparison (see Letters, Sept/Oct). It turns out that the Pyke pant I had tested, the Kiowa, was designed for early season hunting in light to medium brush, not for wading through nasty, thorny thickets. Mr. Pike suggested that the company's Northcutt Upland Briar Pant would have been a more appropriate subject.

Since then I have had a chance to check out the Northcutt pant, and I can confirm that it is, indeed, a top-notch brush buster. Light in weight (1 pound 3 ounces in size 34), the Northcutt is deceptive in that it does not feel heavy enough to hold up in serious cover but it has no trouble doing so.

A key to the Northcutt's performance is its construction. Primeflex nylon uppers are breathable and offer ease of movement; bottoms of Taslan nylon lined with Cordura make for easy walking and ironclad protection from briars. Other features include a gusseted crotch, articulated knees, a snap front closure, two deep front pockets and one zippered rear pocket (I would have preferred a second).

In the field, the Northcutt pant was not only comfortable but also a champ in the thick stuff. The combination of stretch material and "give" in high-flex areas made for easy walking, hill climbing and stepping over deadfalls, and wading through thorns and briars resulted in nary a scratch. The DWR coatings on the fabrics kept moisture out as well. I would highly recommend this pant for hunting throughout the season in open

cover or dense.

The Northcutt comes in October Grey and in even waist sizes from 32 to 44. A double hem on the bottom allows the inseam to be taken from 32" to 34" suburb of Birmingham. Price is \$250. For more information, visit pykegear.com. —RALPH STUART



CHARLES LANCASTER RELAUNCHES

What's in a name? Plenty, if that name is Charles Lancaster. When the second Charles Lancaster died, in 1878, his protégé, Henry Alfred Alexander Thorn, simply adopted the name and in effect became "Mr. Lancaster." In the decades that followed Lancaster built scads of shotguns, pistols and rifles—many with signature features that are collectible today. Throughout the 1900s and early 2000s the company changed hands several times until purchased by the late Rigby riflemaker Ron Wharton. Now new owners George Juer (above, left) and Tom Cosby (above, right) together with Wharton's widow, Margarita Booker, and her business partner, Francis Beardsworth, have relaunched the brand as Charles Lancaster Gunmakers. The business will be based in Buckinghamshire, England.

Juer, formerly with James Purdey & Sons, and Cosby, who was with both Purdey and Atkin Grant & Lang, plan to reintroduce "some of the more historic models synonymous with the company," such as the Twelve-Twenty, the Vertical Barrel Gun and the back-action Wrist-Breaker.

In addition to shotguns, Lancaster will offer rifles as well as new and pre-owned guns from other British and European makers. Also launching is Lancaster Outfitters, an international hunting agency, and Lancaster Wholesale, offering products to the British Gun Trade, including ammunition, clothing, accessories and leather goods sourced from continental Europe and South Africa.

In a joint statement Juer and Cosby said, "We are excited and privileged to be in a position to reinvigorate this historic brand . . . It will be our absolute pleasure to dedicate our careers to returning the phenomenal brand to its heyday heights and its rightful place amongst the best of British gunmakers."

For more information, contact Charles Lancaster Gunmakers, info@clguns.com. —DOUGLAS TATE



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Scheels Revamps Upland Line

Hunters throughout the Midwest and West are no doubt familiar with Scheels, the sporting-goods retail chain with 29 stores in states ranging from Minnesota to Texas to Nevada. But a growing number of sportsmen are discovering the company through its robust online presence and reputation for offering a wide selection of products from well-known outdoor brands.

What some might not realize is that Scheels' private-label products—marketed under the Scheels Outfitters brand—are as good or better



than those from "name brands." And because these products are exclusive to Scheels, the company is able to offer them at prices that belie their quality and the design features and technical materials incorporated in them.

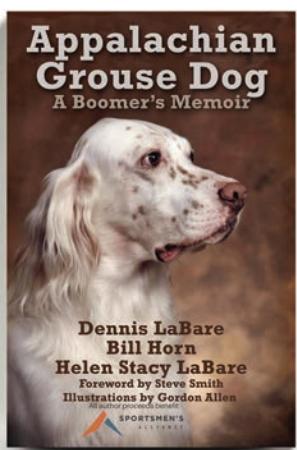
Of special note to wingshooters is that this fall Scheels has begun rolling out a revamped line of upland clothing and dog products. It includes several pairs of pants and shirts, a traditional upland vest (pictured), a strap vest, shooting gloves, a shotgun case, a dog vest, and a kennel cover and pad. Several of the items have been cobranded with Pheasants Forever.

Scheels Product Developer Ben Fleischacker is understandably enthused. "I could not be more excited about the new items we are launching this year," he said. "From entry level to high end, we are covering the gauntlet with quality and bang for our customers' buck. I don't even think we can use the popular tagline 'built by hunters for hunters,' as that doesn't even come close to what we are doing here. These upland products have been obsessively designed, built and tested by people with the absolute highest standards and expectations. We don't spend five to ten days each year chasing one or two species of birds; we are in the field behind dogs one-hundred-plus days chasing six to eight species in multiple states in every imaginable weather condition and terrain. From the chukar hills to the prairies to the grouse woods to the cattail sloughs, we have torture-tested our upland items—and in each category we have products that are worthy competitors to the best of the best."

Hunters around the country will be confirming the results this fall.

For more information, visit scheels.com. —THE EDITORS

THE TALE OF A DOG



Appalachian Grouse Dog: A Boomer's Memoir is in fact three memoirs written by three people about one animal: a Ryman-bred English setter whelped in 1993 named Cokesbury's Commander. Part I is written by Dennis LaBare, the dog's owner; Part II by LaBare's friend and grouse-hunting/bird-dogging mentor, Bill Horn; and Part III by LaBare's wife, Stacy, who became Commander's "mom" upon marrying Dennis, in 2001.

The sections are arranged in chronological order, with Dennis, who these days would be described as an "adult-on-set hunter," taking us through his acquisition of Commander as a pup and the joys, rewards and, yes, frustrations of their first year together. Then a

40-year-old "boomer" (read: aspirational workaholic) with no experience as a dog owner, LaBare made the mistakes we all do. Thankfully, he learned from them.

It's at this point that Horn picks up the narrative. His focus is the decade or so when he and LaBare followed Commander up and down the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia in search of birds—and along the way came to realize that Commander was a kind of genius, gifted with an uncanny ability to puzzle out tangled scent and pin even the wildest, wariest grouse. Writes Horn of those hallowed years: "Hundreds of contacts with the birds, his inherent intelligence, persistent gentle training, some overdue patience from

Dennis, and sensible expectations had come together I was glad to come along for the ride."

Stacy LaBare, for her part, sensitively limns Commander's transition from star performer to "spot reliever" and to full-time family companion—a role he accepted with the grace, good humor and remarkable equanimity that seems to have always characterized him. All of us who've been blessed with a once-in-a-lifetime dog—especially if the dog happened to be an English setter—will recognize parts of him or her in this fine, heartfelt book.

The hardcover, with a foreword by Steve Smith and black & white illustrations by Gordon Allen, is available for \$33 from sunburypress.com. —TOM DAVIS



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Eldridge Hardie

1940 - 2021

Eldridge Hardie, one of the preeminent sporting artists of our time and a man of great humanity, integrity and a steely but lightly worn resolve, passed away August 11 following a heart attack. He was 81. Hardie (above, left) and his wife, Ann, had lived in the same art-and book-filled home in the University Park neighborhood of Denver for more than 50 years, and it was there, in his cluttered upstairs studio, that he created some of the most evocative and enduring images that have ever stirred a sportsman's soul. The cornerstones of Hardie's subject matter were upland bird hunting, waterfowling, gundogs and fly-fishing, and he was that rare artist who was equally adept working in watercolors or oils (to say nothing of his pencil drawings, which were spectacular).

Named for—and inspired by—his uncle Eldridge King, a successful commercial artist in New York City, Hardie grew up in El Paso. He earned

a degree in fine arts from Washington University in St. Louis; then in 1966, attracted by the trout fishing, he moved to Colorado. He worked as an illustrator and graphic artist until 1970, when he took a leap of faith and hung out his shingle as a full-time sporting artist. His goal from the beginning, he insisted, was "to create paintings that people will want to hang on their walls."

"I'm essentially a landscape painter," he once told me. "But because I'm painting landscapes with a sporting narrative, the figures and the action have to be right . . . I just try to pick out things I'm interested in painting."

Those "things" that Eldridge Hardie painted made an indelible mark—and he unfailingly got it right.

In addition to Ann, Hardie survived by a daughter, Abby; a son, Tom; four grandchildren and a black Lab named Zinnia. The family suggests that those who'd like to honor Eldridge's memory make a donation to Metro Caring, <https://giving.metrocaring.org>. —TOM DAVIS

MONTBLANC x PURDEY MEISTERSTÜCK PENS

When the hammerless shotgun first appeared, it was thought to be the end for the hammergun. Similarly, the fountain pen was widely assumed to be obsolete with the advent of the ballpoint biro. Yet one gunmaker, James Purdey & Sons, continues to offer old and new iterations of both. In each case the new form has not replaced the older version but simply taken its place beside it.

Currently, in collaboration with Montblanc, a luxury-goods manufacturer in Hamburg, Germany, Purdey is offering pens that incorporate elements of a shotgun. Part of a larger collection that includes a notebook, a game register, a bottle of cigar-scented ink and cufflinks, the writing instruments are known as the Meisterstück ("Masterpiece") Great Masters pens. They are largely identical in terms of appearance and overall design and differ by one being a fountain pen and the other a rollerball. Both feature a reservoir barrel made from fine Turkish walnut checkered in the style of a shotgun grip and metal parts and inlays with engraving that evokes the embellishment of a shotgun action.

The dovetailing of Purdey and Montblanc tradition and craftsmanship is no coincidence, since both share Richemont as their parent company and have 322 years of luxury experience between them.

The Meisterstück Great Masters fountain pen costs £2,615 (\$3,570), while the rollerball is £2,530 (\$3,460).

For more information, visit purdey.com. —DOUGLAS TATE



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GEAR GUIDE

Wading In

Going deep with breathable waders

RALPH STUART

They call ducks and geese “waterfowl” for a reason. The birds like hanging out in the wet stuff. Which is why hunters who pursue them often find themselves having an immersive experience. Whether it’s slogging to a blind, setting decoys, standing in flooded timber or retrieving downed birds, waterfowlers find plenty of ways to jump in with both feet. If the water’s more than hip deep, this necessitates chest waders—and these days the choice is between neoprene (heavier, heat- and moisture-retaining, durable, cheaper) and breathable (lighter, moisture-wicking, more flexible, more expensive). For their versatility, lighter weight, comfort and flexibility, we decided to test four breathable waders to see which would stand up to water work.

BANDED ASPIRE COLLECTION CATALYST BREATHABLE WADER

The Banded ASPIRE Collection Catalyst Breathable Wader is like a modular armored wetsuit. Made of eVent waterproof, breathable fabric, the wader has Arc Welded, stitchless seam construction and seam mapping to reduce stress. An over-the-boot, removable pant attaches with a belt system and offers padded knee and shin protection. The rubber boot has 1,600-gram PrimaLoft insulation, a PrimaLoft Aerogel insert that locks out cold and heat, and serious tread on the outsole. Other features include side zippers, a removable interior hand-warmer pocket, an interior phone pocket, two exterior chest pockets, D-rings for attachments, and an LED light system above the chest pockets. The Catalyst wader was easy on-off and true to size. It was lightweight and roomy, offering complete freedom of movement and plenty of room for layering. The boots stayed secure in mud and offered excellent traction. Colors: Mossy Oak Bottomland (shown), Crocodile, Realtree MAX-5. Weight: 9 pounds 7 ounces (8 pounds 2 ounces without pant). Sizes: Regular 8 through 14, Stout 10 through 13. Price: starting at \$900. Banded, banded.com.

EDITOR'S
CHOICE





LACROSSE INSULATED ALPHA SWAMPFOX WADER

Geared more for cool and cold weather, LaCrosse's Insulated Alpha Swampfox Wader offers heavy-duty protection. The breathable, waterproof nylon upper has double-stitched and taped seams and an integrated layer of 120-gram lofted insulation. The upper can be rolled down and secured with the belt to convert the chest wader to a pant wader. The Alpha-constructed boot contains 1,000-gram Thinsulate Ultra and has a Swamp Tuff low-lug outsole. Other features include a chest pocket backed by a lined hand-warmer pocket, a hook-and-loop-closure belt, a cinch for tightening the chest and two clips on each side for adjustment. Because of its snug-fitting boots, the Alpha Swampfox required some effort to put on and take off. Once on, the wader offered decent mobility and plenty of warmth. The boots were secure in the mud and offered good traction. Color: Realtree MAX-5 (shown), Mossy Oak Bottomland. Weight: 10 pounds 5 ounces. Sizes: Medium 7 through 15, King 10 through 14, Stout 8 through 12. Price: \$370. [LaCrosse, lacrossefootwear.com](http://lacrossefootwear.com).



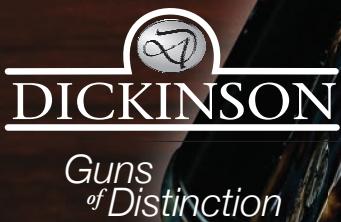
L.L. BEAN APEX WATERFOWL BOOTFOOT WADER

For getting the job done with minimal weight, L.L. Bean's Apex Waterfowl Bootfoot Wader fills the bill. The Apex has a tough polyester outer shell with Super Seam technology for strength and leak resistance, and the knees and seat are reinforced for durability. The waist belt adjusts on each side with hook-and-loop fasteners and is quick and easy to operate. The boot has 1,200-gram Thinsulate Ultra insulation and moderate tread. There is one large exterior chest pocket backed by a lined hand-warmer pocket, two small exterior chest pockets each with three neoprene shell holders, an interior phone pocket, D-rings for accessories, and two cinch chords for tightening the chest. The Apex Wader was easy on-off and fit well. It was slightly binding when bending and squatting and did not have a lot of extra room for layers. The boot was roomy, but it stayed secure in the muck. Color: Mossy Oak Shadow Grass Blades. Weight: 7 pounds 11 ounces. Sizes: S through XXL. Boot sizes: 8 through 13. Price: \$379. [L.L. Bean, llbean.com](http://llbean.com).



HIGH 'N DRY BREATHABLE WADER

Originally designed as workwear for the aquaculture industry, the High 'N Dry Breathable Wader is a rugged piece of gear. The wader features a four-layer, waterproof, breathable fabric and sonic-welded seam-sealing technology. Knees are reinforced with Kevlar backed by neoprene. The boot has a neoprene-and-synthetic-wool lining paired with Thinsulate Ultra insulation (1,500-gram in the mid- to late-season model; 800-gram in the early- to mid-season) and moderate tread. Exterior chest pockets include a reach-through pocket and a "rainproof" pocket with Velcro closure. There is also an interior phone pocket and D-rings for attachments. The High 'N Dry wader was easy on-off, but it did not reach to the top of the chest and did not have a lot of room for layering. Movement was restricted, and though the boots were a bit large, they stayed on in the mud. Colors: Mossy Oak Bottomland (pictured), Mossy Oak Shadow Grass Blades, Brown. Weight: 9 pounds 6 ounces. Sizes: Regular 7 through 15, Stout 9 through 15, Tall 10 through 15. Price: \$339. [High 'N Dry, hndoutdoors.com](http://hndoutdoors.com).



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SHOOTING

Young Guns

CHRIS BATHA



If a child is strong enough to control a shotgun and mature enough to understand instruction and safety, then he or she is ready to begin shooting.

Parents and grandparents treasure those periods in their children's and grandchildren's lives when they can spend time together sharing experiences and introducing them to their hobbies. This time is short and precious, as children grow up quickly and all too soon are off to college or work.

If shooting is the hobby and passion you wish to share, it is one that can be introduced at a fairly young age. The friends to be made and adventures to be enjoyed in the shooting sports are special and memorable—a real gift to any child or grandchild.

I work with a large number of young shooters and scholastic-shooting-team members, and in the beginning there are several points to be considered:

- Shooting a shotgun is an acquired skill, no different from other sports;

however, the most important rule is “safety is always first.” A new shooter must have the maturity to respect that a shotgun is a lethal weapon and must learn the rules of safety and safe gun handling.

- Mastering any sport requires time, good instruction and the right equipment for the job.

- As for what age is best to start instruction, it is not the child's age that is the determining factor but whether he or she has sufficient strength to control, mount and swing a shotgun and the maturity to understand instruction and the safety rules.

Learning shooting skills at a young age will ensure that a child has ample time to master the fundamentals of safe shooting. When the fundamentals have been drilled and well practiced, the next step is to acquire the

appropriate shotgun.

Choosing the correct shotgun is essential, as it must match the strength and build of the shooter so that it can be controlled and shot correctly and safely.

I often am asked what is the best shotgun for a young beginner. There is very little difference in weight between a .410, a 28-gauge and a 20-gauge gun, but my personal preference for young shooters is a 28 or a 20. Weight and gauge go hand in hand. Too little weight can result in excessive recoil; too much can affect the ease of mounting and swinging the gun. As a young shooter grows and gains strength and experience, a 12-gauge should be considered—especially if he or she becomes interested in competitive shooting.

The size of the stock and forend needs the same attention as the gauge



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and weight, as the majority of shotguns are designed for grownup hands. Often they will be too large for small hands, and young shooters will struggle to get the correct grip to control recoil and muzzle flip.

That said, the weight of a gun and its type of action have the most impact on recoil. The balance to look for is sufficient weight in combination with light loads to control recoil.

I always have preferred a break-action for a youth's first shotgun, as when it's open, it's easy to see it is unloaded and safe. But in many ways a semi-auto is a good first gun, with the autoloading action absorbing a good deal of the recoil. But autoloaders require instruction in both handling and loading, with particular attention paid to unloading, especially when hunting in the field. If your preference is a pump or semi-auto, I recommend using a chamber flag, which shows from a distance that the gun is unloaded and safe.

When it comes to gun fit with a beginner, near enough is good enough; but it's best to find a gun that is a

Once the choice of shotgun is made, the fun begins.

reasonable fit for a youngster's age and size. There is nothing worse than seeing a young person struggling to shoot a shotgun with a stock that was made for an adult.

Once a shotgun is found, it's a good idea to get a provisional gun fit in case the stock needs to be shortened. And keep in mind that children do have growth spurts, so gun fit will need to be checked periodically.

To say that young shooters are a growing market (no pun intended) would be a gross understatement. This past March, the Scholastic Clay Target Program (SCTP) College National Championship, in Marengo, Ohio, had more than 2,600 participants! This and other youth competitions in every region have caught the attention of

today's gunmakers.

Gunmakers have started producing shotguns with shorter stocks and smaller grips and forends. Often referred to as "youth models," these shotguns are designed in size and weight for the beginning shooter. Gone are the days of trying to find a lightweight shotgun and shortening the stock. These days the choices for young shooters are many compared to what was available just a decade ago.

Here are some excellent options:

BERETTA A400 LITE COMPACT

I have shot Beretta semi-autos for decades, so I may be biased, but the A400 is at the top of my list. All of Beretta's semi-autos have been time-tested and are very reliable. The A400 Lite Compact comes in 20 gauge with a 26", 28" or 30" barrel. It also comes with stock spacers, so that length of pull can be increased as the shooter grows. This is a great beginner shotgun. (Beretta USA, berettausa.com.)

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Silver Field Micro Midas is a lightweight semi-auto that comes in 12 and 20 gauge with a 24" or 26" barrel and a shorter length of pull. This is an ideal gun for young shooters and ladies, as its compact dimensions and lighter weight make it very easy to handle. (Browning, browning.com.)

MOSSBERG 500 YOUTH SUPER BANTAM
Mossberg makes an excellent entry-level shotgun for young and smaller shooters. The 500 Youth Bantam pump is available in 20 gauge with a 22" barrel and an adjustable length of pull. For a beginner, this shotgun is also a great "value for money." (Mossberg International, mossberg.com.)

REMINGTON V3 COMPACT

Remington's V3 Compact semi-auto is a coaching favorite and a good choice for beginners. Its V3 VersaPort gas system is extremely reliable and softens recoil, making this a 12-gauge that works for ladies and younger shooters. The V3 is a good choice for use in the field and on the clays ground. (Remington, remarms.com.)

STOEGER CONDOR YOUTH

The Stoeger Condor Youth is a great example of a youth-model over/under, with dimensions appropriate for young people. This shotgun is available in 20 gauge and .410 with 22" barrels and is an excellent choice for those who prefer an O/U for clay shooting or in the field. Stoeger also makes the Uplander Youth side-by-side in 20 gauge and .410 with a 13" length of pull. (Stoeger, stoegerindustries.com.)

Once the choice of shotgun is made, the fun begins. Practice, instruction, practice, instruction and more practice—all the while sharing the sport with the parents and grandparents who have spent a lifetime enjoying shooting and now get to spend their time with the next generation of shooting enthusiasts! 

Chris Batha's most recent book, *The Instinctive Shot*, can be ordered by visiting chrisbatha.com, which includes schedules of shoots and clinics with the author.



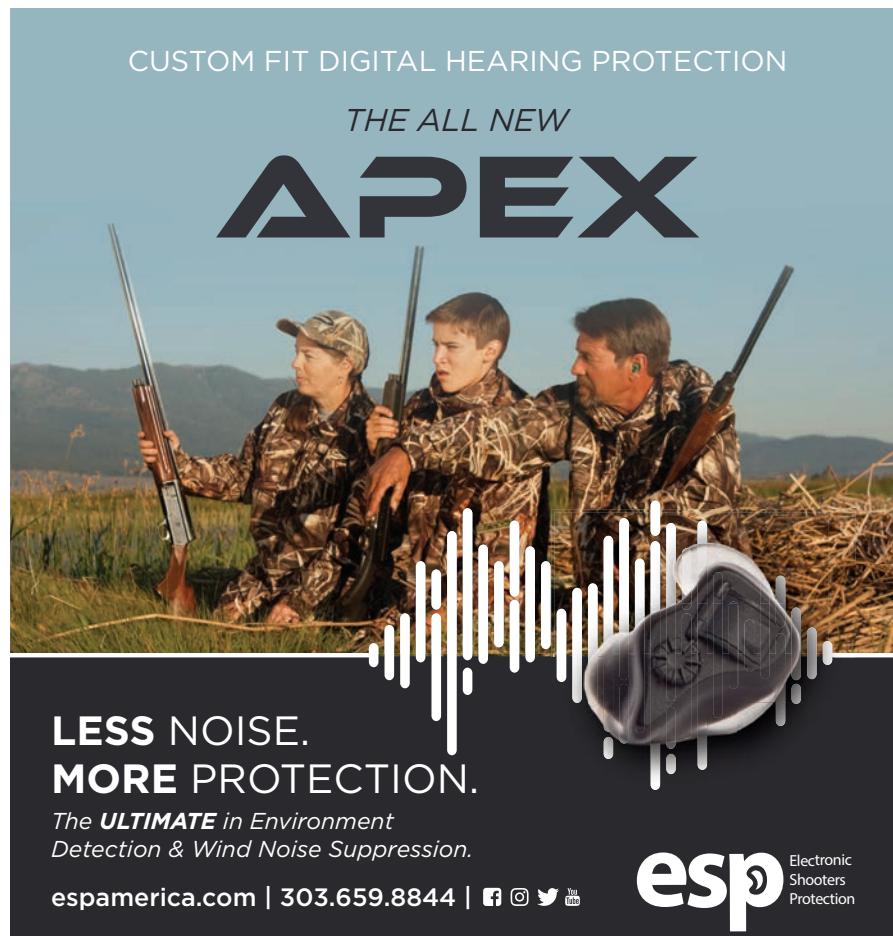
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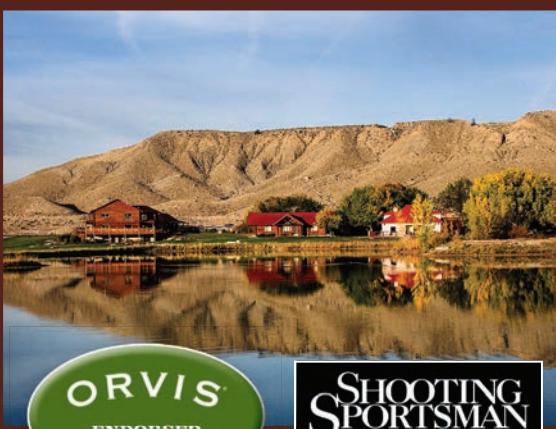
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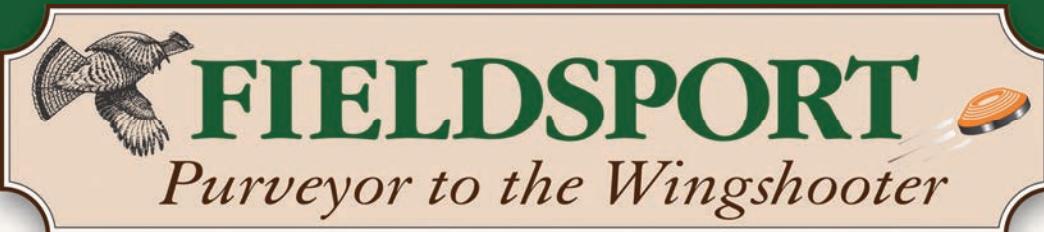


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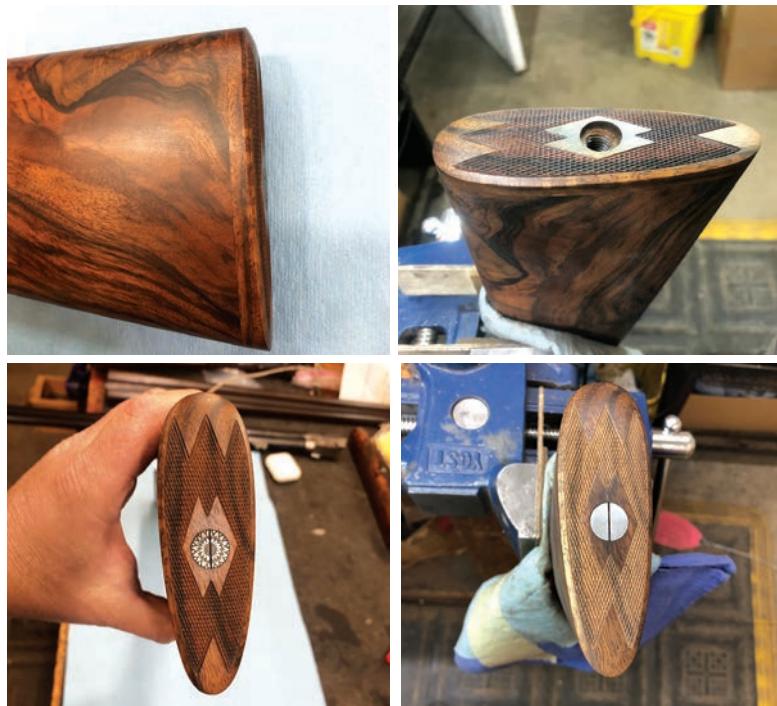
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FROM THE BENCH

Finishing a Gunstock Butt

DELBERT WHITMAN JR. & REID BRYANT



Clockwise from top left: author Del Whitman's "one-screw buttplate" shown from the side, the escutcheon in the hardwood plate to house the "screw," the screw threaded in to cover the drawbolt hole, and the elegant-yet-spare finished treatment.

A fine double gun is a marriage of form and function. When approached with a critical eye, nearly every detail on a fine gun is defensible. Each element either serves a purpose or served a purpose at a point during the evolution of the modern sporting shotgun. Nowhere is this concept more evident than in the shotgun butt, which may be finished in treatments that range from plain to wildly ornate. In each case, however, there is reason behind the plate, pad or checkered end-grain wood that composes the butt of the gun.

Let's begin with some definitions. The "butt" or "butt-end" is the flat

surface that is held against the shoulder when the gun is mounted, whereas the "buttstock" is the entirety of the wood that affixes to the action at the terminal end of the gun opposite the muzzles. The top of the butt-end, meaning the portion closest to the shooter's cheek, is known as the "heel"; the bottom of the butt-end nearest the shooter's armpit is the "toe." Note that despite variability in wood figure, the grain of the buttstock wood runs lengthwise, meaning that the butt-end is comprised of end grain, or the cut-off vascular fibers of the stock wood that carried water and nutrients up and down the live tree. As in any bundle of fibers, the strength of the

buttstock lies in its ability to resist flexion up and down or laterally and its ability to resist compression end to end. The exposed ends of the fibers, however, are susceptible to chipping out—essentially becoming separated from one another—particularly at the vulnerable points of the heel and toe. And this is why gunmakers began covering butts in the first place.

Over time butt treatments have come to perform three vital functions. First, they allow the butt to meet the shooter's shoulder in such a way that the butt slides naturally over clothing without catching yet provides enough friction to keep the mounted gun in place. Second, when and where



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possible, butt treatments provide some degree of recoil suppression or at least a sufficiently comfortable mounting surface to offset the discomfort of recoil. And third—and perhaps most notably—they provide some protection against stresses to the vulnerable heel and toe, which are prone to chipping, cracking or fractures due to the orientation of the wood grain.

Looking back in history, prior to the advent of breechloading guns, all guns were loaded through the muzzle. Muzzleloading guns were fed a load of powder and shot that was tamped into place with a ramrod, requiring the shooter to mash the load deep into the barrel to seat it against an unmoving surface. Physics required the butt, therefore, to be seated against a solid surface as the process of loading placed repeated impact against the vulnerable heel and toe. Many “poor boys”—or simple, inexpensive muzzleloading guns—lacked any reinforcement at the heel and toe that would mitigate chipping, which is why guns of that ilk commonly have ragged chips to the heel and toe.

To remedy this problem, gunmakers began to reinforce the butt with a wrought-iron plate that would cover the exposed end grain and provide a durable surface when loading. These iron buttplates experienced refinement over time as gunmakers saw a canvas for ornamentation. Engraving and decorative metalwork enabled the early, clunky iron buttplates to become quite pretty and often incorporated a scored, stippled or lined surface that would seat securely against the shooter’s shoulder.

With the arrival of the breechloader, the need for a rugged buttplate was rendered moot. Simultaneously, advances in metallurgy made steel a lighter, thinner barrel material and enabled buttplates to be thinned and lightened to balance the gun. In an effort to reduce weight while still protecting the vulnerable edges of the butt from chipping, skeleton buttplates and specific heel and toe plates were employed. These treatments reduced weight, maintained a canvas for ornamentation and exposed end grain in the central portion of the butt

that could be checkered for secure mounting. Though these treatments did little to mitigate recoil, they proved beautiful and functional, if somewhat costly to produce.

Recognizing that breechloading guns faced significantly fewer impacts to the butt than their predecessors, tastes and innovations in butt treatments turned gradually to focus more on secure gun mounting and recoil reduction. In an ongoing effort to solve for cost and weight and in acknowledgment that Edwardian-era gunners preferred a more austere, understated aesthetic, gunmakers began to employ simple buttplates of checkered hardwood or pressed Asiatic buffalo horn affixed with engraved screws. These treatments further allowed gunmakers to remove weight from the buttstock via lightening holes—voids that were in turn covered from view. More often, however, makers simply filed the hard edge off the butt and checkered the flat surface, plugging the lightening holes in such a way as to make them nearly invisible, and finishing the entire buttstock with

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oil or Slacum. The result was a clean, functional butt that did little to detract from the beauty of the wood itself.

By the later part of the 19th Century several innovations had arisen that would see ready use in the treatment of gun butts through the early 1900s. In 1839 Charles Goodyear serendipitously invented what would be known as vulcanized rubber, and in the 1880s Belgian chemist Leo Baekeland evolved his experiments with co-polymers to land in the early 1900s on a product called Bakelite, which would in effect be the first modern plastic. Moreover, in August 1874 H. Silver patented the rubber recoil pad, which proved a significant improvement over the stacked-leather and horsehair-stuffed "recoil pads" that had come before. As rubbers improved, soft pads by companies such as Pachmayr were introduced that could be easily covered in leather for a classy finish. All of these inventions not only lent a degree of recoil reduction to the treatment of the gun butt but also added the further value of branding to the gun. For the first time gun

manufacturers could impress a name or logo into the gun butt, distinguishing their signature product with a monogram or image or simply by employing a noted, innovative product such as the Silver's pad. As an added benefit, similar to the earlier plates, these treatments concealed not only lightening holes but also the drawbolt, or through-bolt, hole inherent on the increasingly common boxlock guns pervading the US market.

In the modern era butt treatments have seen clever innovations that showcase modern engineering and craft. Certainly there have been space-age recoil reducers of all shapes and sizes, many of which have gone in and out of vogue with changing aesthetic tastes. There have been more elegant refinements as well. Author Del Whitman has experimented with decorative plugs and screws that allow access to the drawbolt through a single, decorated screw head threaded into the center of the butt. In Del's "one-screw buttplate," a checkered hardwood buttplate is created and glued in place, but not before a threaded hardwood

escutcheon or insert is integrated into the back side of the plate. A single, large-diameter "screw" is threaded into the escutcheon, covering a drawbolt hole that is large enough to receive the wrench required to remove the stock. The screw head provides a sizeable canvas to showcase elegant engraving, and the whole buttplate composes a piece of the gun that is elegant yet spare.

There are many ways to finish the end grain of the buttstock and to treat the butt in a manner that is both aesthetically pleasing and functional. With that, this look at butt treatments serves to shed light on the myriad ways that shotgun butts can and have been finished and the reasoning behind the treatments that have been employed. ↗

To see this article online along with additional images, visit shootingsportsman.com/butt-treatments.

Delbert Whitman Jr. lives near Traverse City, Michigan, and is a professional gunsmith specializing in repair, restoration, stockmaking and engraving. Reid Bryant is an Editor at Large for *Shooting Sportsman*.



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SHOT TALK

Common-Sense Waterfowling

TOM ROSTER

As we enter the 2021-'22 waterfowling season, certain trends and conditions are going to direct and restrict our ammunition and gun choices perhaps more than in any season in the past couple of decades. A bit of common-sense knowledge will help get you through.

AMMO & COMPONENT SHORTAGES

Consider first the ongoing ammunition and reloading-components shortages that began at the end of 2020. New-gun sales have yet to abate, and thus the demand for additional ammo for new-gun owners continues to be stronger than ever. As explained in my July/August column, this likely will continue to divert most ammo manufacturers' shotshell efforts into making centerfire ammunition and, to a lesser extent, centerfire reloading components. Therefore, it is only realistic to expect that the current shotshell and component shortages are going to continue for many months.

To counteract this, shotgunners would be wise to get their names on one or more dealers' waiting lists for factory-loaded ammo or reloading components. Shooters also are going to have to be vigilant in repeatedly checking with even the smallest dealers. All of them, big and small, will continue to periodically and unpredictably receive shipments. If you're there when the shipments come in or are on a waiting list that hasn't been cancelled, that's your best bet for getting at least part of the factory ammo or reloading components you're after.



Common-sense waterfowlers shoot modest-velocity loads, which have just as much lethality and usually better patterns than high-velocity loads.

NONTOXIC LOAD CHOICES

As covered numerous times here but which bears repeating: In terms of nontoxic shotshells, required for all waterfowl hunting in North America, steel shot factory loads and handloads remain king, comprising better than 80 percent of all nontoxic-shotshell sales. Second are the very much more expensive but still popular—especially for long-range shooting—tungsten-composite loads. With higher densities than lead and especially steel, tungsten-composite loads offer greatly increased lethality for long-range shooting. Coming in a distant third but growing over the last three or four years are bismuth loads.

There are now at least five manufacturers offering a variety of

bismuth loads in a variety of gauges and pellet sizes. And bismuth always has been available for reloading. Because bismuth shot is soft like lead but additionally is frangible, it does not pattern as well as steel or tungsten-composite loads. It is also lower in density than lead but higher than steel, which in the final analysis renders it perfectly acceptable for close-to-medium-range waterfowling.

In steel one must always remember that a two-sizes-larger steel pellet is needed to deliver the same energy downrange as a lead pellet, whereas with bismuth shot a one-size-larger pellet is needed. With the very high-density tungsten-composite pellets, one usually can shoot a one- or two-sizes-smaller pellet to get the same job

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VELOCITY & RECOIL

The current trend in factory steel and most tungsten-composite and bismuth loads is to offer very high-velocity loads. I speak here of velocities exceeding 1,400 fps in steel and tungsten-composite and 1,325 fps in bismuth. As I have discussed here previously, it does little good to start a ball faster, as it simply slows down quicker; so pellets leaving the muzzle at greater than 1,400 fps basically have shed their increased velocities by the time they reach 40 yards. These increased velocities also degrade patterns, as they cause increased deformation to soft pellets like bismuth and a greater disturbance from muzzle-blast disruption to harder nontoxic pellets. Even more serious is that they greatly increase recoil, which always decreases shooting success.

So there is very little to be gained with the current fad of high-velocity loads. The common-sense waterfowler, especially older shooters who wisely have come to hate recoil, seek out

modest-velocity loads, which have just as much lethality and usually better patterns than high-velocity loads. If they can't find what they are looking for in factory loads, more and more shooters are reloading their own.

PELLET-TYPE MIXTURES

Another trending fad is offering factory loads with two different pellet types loaded in them. A common mixture is steel and bismuth shot. Such loads primarily are made up of steel (usually 60 percent or more), with the lesser amount of the load comprised of bismuth shot. While this does help the lethality of the load slightly because of bismuth's slightly greater density than steel's, from my testing I have yet to find a steel-bismuth mixed load that offers *significantly* increased lethality over a pure steel or bismuth load of the correct pellet size for the bird being hunted. The only exception was HEVI-Shot's now-discontinued original HEVI-Metal load, which at the time consisted of much-higher-density HEVI-Shot pellets on top of a primarily steel load.

CHOKES

There is an amazing array of choke tubes on the market. I haven't tested them all, but I have tested most of them. And I can tell you this: There isn't a lot of difference among many of them. Just how your chosen nontoxic load and shot size will pattern with them can be determined only by pattern-testing. And if you choose not to do this, you are shooting your shotgun blind. All in all, my testing repeatedly has indicated that in most screw-in chokes, Modified tubes offer the broadest utility and lethal performance with the various nontoxic-pellet types. It therefore represents the best common-sense constriction for waterfowling.

That's all for now, and all the best this season. 

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HUNTING DOGS

Developing a Trailing Dog

CHARLIE JURNEY



Trailing is something that a dog wants to do instinctively, and it is a valuable ability when trying to recover a bird that has been hit but has run off.

Seeking out the trail of a running bird and following it for a distance is a skill that grows with a dog's experience. There's no substitute for hunting time in the uplands with lots of bird contacts. However, you can do some work in the off-season to get a head start on this important trait.

I'm going to outline the basics of how I work with young dogs to unlock their enthusiasm and confidence for trailing—a system that is easiest to explain in four steps. This system could apply to either retrievers or pointing dogs and is a valuable ability to draw on when you're trying to bring a wounded, running bird to bag.

Practicing trailing is different than every other command you teach a dog for one major reason: It's something your dog wants to do instinctively, and you're going to let it. This is quite different from requirements such as fetch and hold, remaining steady to shot, or walking at heel, to name a few. Therefore, I don't introduce any formal trailing exercises until I've worked through obedience, force-fetching and the like.

Introducing your dog to trailing is simple, and I use the encouragement of "Find it" to help the dog link the task with the scent of feathers. Set up Step One of your drill on flat ground with very short grass. Take a freshly killed

bird (a pigeon is fine) and pluck out a few feathers at your starting point. Tie a string to the bird and drag it beside you as you walk directly into the wind. Then, at the end of the trail, untie the bird and leave it. The length of the trail could be very short, say 25 yards, for a young dog or maybe a bit longer for a dog that already has some experience.

With your dog in front of you on a short rope, lead it to the start of the trail. As soon as the dog puts its nose down and shows interest in the bird scent, give an enthusiastic "Find it; find it!" You want to let the dog work out the trail on its own, but use the rope to guide the dog back to the trail if it gets wildly off course. Once the dog finds the



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dead bird, reward with lots of praise.

It shouldn't take more than a few sessions to help your dog connect the dots between the action and your "Find it" command.

Step Two is similar to Step One, with one big difference: Now you're going to run this drill with the wind at your back. Depending on your dog's progress and ability, you'll want to start lengthening the trail. But keep the drill simple enough that your dog can't help but find the bird. Multiple successes will breed confidence; you can introduce more challenging drills later.

Again, keep the rope on your dog for control and guide the dog over to the start of the trail. This is going to be a bit tougher than Step One. Your dog might zigzag a bit more as it tries to figure out the trail. Some dogs will hold their heads high as they try to air-scent the trail, while others will keep their noses tight to the ground. That makes no difference, as long as the dog is focused on the task at hand and responding to your "Find it" cues.

When your dog is handling Step Two with confidence and you can see

Be sure your dog has mastered each step before moving to the next one.

its skill developing, you can up the challenge a notch. So for Step Three it's time to introduce a turn into the drill. After all, you can't count on a bird trying to escape in a straight line. This is also the point where you could move to slightly heavier cover, to ensure that your dog keeps using its nose and not its eyes.

Set up your trail again, but this time start walking against a crosswind, and then make a turn into the wind. Keep a rope on your dog when you start out on this new trail just in case the dog blows past the turn and you need to guide it back into the area of the scent.

Step Four is similar to Step Three,

but for this final act you're going to make that turn so the wind is at your back. To be successful on Step Four, your dog will really need to focus on the ground scent, as there's no chance a breeze will blow the scent toward it.

How long is this supposed to take? That depends on your dog. You might stay in Step One for several sessions, or you might have a quick learner who aces the concept and allows you to move to the next stage very quickly. Regardless of how quickly your dog picks up on the skill of trailing, be sure it has mastered each step before moving to the next.

Once your dog figures out how to be a great trailer, it only will get better season after season—and that's one more valuable asset you'll be able to count on in the uplands. ♣

Charlie Jurney has been training performance and hunting breeds for more than 30 years, during which time he has produced hundreds of titled dogs. He and his wife, Cathy, own and operate Beaverdam Kennels, in Terrell, North Carolina. For more information, visit finisheddog.com.

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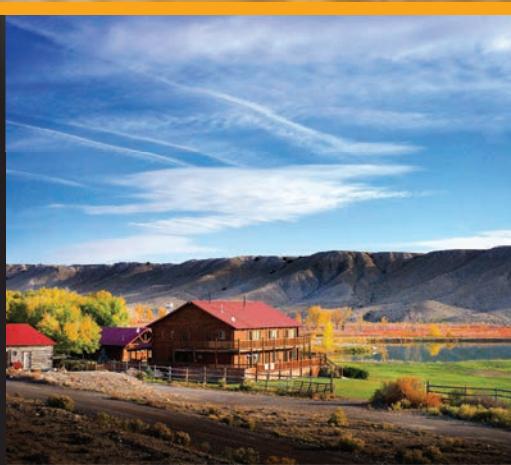
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Waterfowling with 20-gauge guns

by Phil Bourjaily



A

honk behind me broke the quiet boredom of a long, duckless morning. Two Canadas passed low overhead, flew downwind, hooked around and came in low on their final approach. Clutching the 20-gauge Benelli M2, I watched the birds grow bigger and bigger until they hung over the decoys at 15 yards. Both geese hit the water stone dead, as surely as if I'd shot them with a 12.

There's a trend toward 20s in the blind right now as a growing number of waterfowlers embrace smaller-bore guns. While I am generally of the belief that anything any other gauge can do a 12 does better, last year I joined the crowd and hunted most of the season with 20s to see what the fuss was about.

And what I found is what plenty of other hunters already have discovered: There's a lot to like about a 20-gauge duck gun. It's easy to handle in any kind of blind, from a pit to a layout. It rides lightly on your shoulder on the walk in and out. Minimal recoil helps you get back on target for a second shot. It's enough gun for decoying waterfowl. And given the way Americans feel about small gauges, a lot of people

think it's fun to shoot big birds with little guns.

From the increasing selection of 20-gauge waterfowl guns available, it's clear there is more interest in downsized duck guns now than there has been for many years. Improved ammunition helps make the 20 a valid choice. Steel loads are better than they were 20 years ago. The wide availability of bismuth shot, now loaded by Boss, Kent, HEVI-Shot, Rio and others, means you can pack more punch into a smaller hull than you can with steel. If you want to spend extra for HEVI-Shot or a lot extra for TSS, you can make a 20-gauge shoot to 12-gauge ranges.

What's odd, though, is that the 20 is having its moment now, when arguably the best years of nontoxic alternatives were the early 2000s. The original bismuth shot was more brittle back then, but it still hit harder than steel. Before the price of tungsten skyrocketed, you could buy Kent Tungsten-Matrix, Fiocchi Tundra Shot, Winchester Xtended Range, Remington Wingmaster HD or original HEVI-Shot all at semi-reasonable prices. Those tungsten-based loads shot as well or better than lead and had the potential to make a 20-gauge the equal of a 12 loaded with steel, yet the 20 didn't take off then as it has now. It could be that hunters were still smarting from the range limitations



Whether it's because an aging population prefers softer-kicking, lighter shotguns or because waterfowlers in general find it more rewarding to shoot birds up close, there currently is a trend toward hunting ducks and geese with 20-gauge guns.

imposed by steel, because in the 2000s everyone wanted ammunition and guns that would kill at long distances—and that meant 12s and 3½" 12s.

So why are we going to 20-gauges now? One simple explanation is that the waterfowling population is aging. A friend tells me an outfitter he knows in Nebraska had to change all his blinds because his customers were having trouble climbing into pits. An elderly hunter I knew was part of a group that bought Ab Rocket exercisers to put in their layouts. The Ab Rockets gave them spring-loaded boosts, because they no longer could sit up quickly to shoot on their own. It only follows that older hunters might want softer-kicking, lighter shotguns. And shoulder and neck surgeries and other infirmities of age make a petite, low-recoiling 20-gauge a prudent choice for some. Compare a standard one-ounce, 1,300-fps 20-gauge duck load in a six-pound gun to a 1,450-fps 1½-ounce steel shell in a gun weighing 7½ pounds, and there's a very noticeable difference of 25 foot-pounds of recoil for the 20 compared to 36 foot-pounds for the 12.

Age is one explanation for the 20-gauge trend, but it isn't the only one. In recent years hunters in their prime have turned to 20s as well. Tony Vandemore of Habitat Flats, in Missouri, is a big, strong guy capable of shooting any gun, and he's chosen a 20-gauge M2 for the past several seasons. He originally bought it as a lightweight turkey gun, and then liked it enough to start shooting it for September teal. He tried it on geese and big ducks, and now the only time he shoots a 12 is during spring snow goose hunts. Vandemore says the 20-gauge is all the gun he needs. "As a guide, I'm the last to shoot," he said. "With a tight choke and



HEVI-X 4s or 6s, I can kill birds cleanly to 40 yards." He has noticed, too, that more and more of his clients have been showing up with 20s.

Parsing Vandemore's thoughts on the 20 reveals a clue to the reason for the gauge's popularity. If he is the last to shoot and he's killing birds out to 40 yards, obviously he's calling the shot when the ducks are much closer. I know that to be true, because I've hunted with him. Moreover, when I surveyed guides across the country, they estimated that their clients' average shots were taken at 20 to 25 yards—well within range of a 20-gauge gun. And it's not just outfitters that like their birds close. These days it's almost all of us.

Waterfowlers used to be obsessed with long-range shooting—think Nash Buckingham or refuge firing-line geese—but we've decided that shooting birds up close is more rewarding. You don't hear much about pass-shooting anymore. Maybe it's an evolution that began due to the limitations of steel, or it might be that hunters realize that fooling birds into close range is more satisfying than picking them off at long range. Whatever the cause, I think it's a change in hunters' attitudes for the better, and it's a change that opens the door for the 20-gauge waterfowl gun.

There's one more reason to shoot a 20: In a few places you *have* to shoot one. If you're a guest at one of the growing number of California duck clubs that restrict shotgun gauges, you shoot a 20 or you don't hunt. The idea is that the smaller guns inhibit skybusting, and the quieter report of the 20 doesn't cause as much disturbance as 12-gauge blasts, helping the clubs hold ducks on their properties. I have a hard



time believing ducks are less spooked by the report of a 20 than a standard 12, but California hunters I've talked to insist that it's true. And I do know from experience that hunting with a 20-gauge does make you think twice about taking long shots.

Last season I left my 12-gauges home and hunted with a Benelli M2 Waterfowl Performance Shop and a CZ Redhead over/under. For ammunition I chose HEVI-Steel one-ounce loads of No. 2s, Rio one-ounce loads of bismuth No. 3s and some 1 $\frac{1}{8}$ -ounce Federal MeatEater bismuth also in 3s. Because I often see geese as well as ducks in a morning, I've come to rely on steel No. 2s or bismuth 3s as all-around pellets. They're big enough for geese and small enough to have sufficient pellet counts per ounce to put enough hits on target for ducks. To 30 yards and beyond, all the loads I tried had enough density for ducks and geese, especially when I shot them through the Rob Roberts T2 (Light Modified) choke included with the Benelli.

I wish I could say the season was epic. Drought shrank my river-bottom pond to a mud puddle, and I would have to wait for a rain to run out and hunt the next morning before the water level fell again. Tossing my floaters into any part of the shallows where they wouldn't run aground and then sticking silhouettes in the mud, I would put on my ghillie jacket and lurk in the weeds. There weren't many birds around, and I would stare at empty skies most of the morning. When I did see a duck or goose, however, it usually was locked up and coming. The ducks gave me the chip shots I wanted, from the teal and gadwalls of an early flight day to the lone greenhead that came to a

▲ The 20-gauge is not meant for long-range pass-shooting, but for in-your-face work on decoying birds it can be just the ticket.

hole in the ice the day the pond froze. Five or six bonus Canadas visited the pond, too, and all of them fell quickly and cleanly to the two 20-gauges.

It wasn't until after duck season closed and I relocated to a bigger pond where geese like to loaf that I ran into the 20's limitations. One windless morning honkers decoyed short, and I had to take shots at longer distances. As the ranges stretched, the quick-pointing 20 that had been such a delight to shoot at birds hanging over decoys didn't move as surely as a heavier 12. That's my story, anyway, and while I killed a limit that morning without losing any birds, there was far too much cripple shooting and chasing involved. Unwilling to limit my shots for the rest of the year, I finished goose season with a 12-gauge and 3" BBs.

That last hunt didn't sour me on 20s as much as it made me aware of their limitations. There's a time and place for 20-gauges, and the good news is that they are some of the best times and places of all: sunny mornings in flooded timber, cloudy sunsets by a wood duck roost, snowy flight days at the edge of a pothole. In all those settings and any other times ducks work close, a 20-gauge delivers as well as 12, and with less recoil, less weight and trim lines that make you even happier to be right where you are. ♣

DU and *Field & Stream* shotgun columnist Phil Bourjaily loves all waterfowling and would request a roasted Canada goose for his last meal.

20s TO 'TAKE 'EM'

Following is a selection of 20-gauge guns that will serve well in the field or blind.

BENELLI M2 WATERFOWL PERFORMANCE SHOP

My main gun last season, Benelli's M2 Waterfowl Performance Shop combines light weight with a 28-inch barrel to feel great in the hands. Benelli's proprietary ComforTech stock reduces felt recoil, making it easy to move the gun from one bird to the next. It has the enlarged bolt handle and release hunters want these days, and the chokes from Rob Roberts Gunworks print excellent patterns. A paracord sling and Optifade camo complete the package. Price: \$2,699. *Benelli USA, benellieusa.com.*

BENELLI SBE 3

Benelli's big introduction for the year was a 20-gauge version of the SBE, which is simply the Super Black Eagle scaled down to a 3" 20, with its already trim lines downsized even more. It has the positive locking bolt that eliminates the out-of-battery-inertia misfire. Benelli lists the weight of the SBE 3 20-gauge at 5.8 pounds, and the Mossy Oak Bottomland and Optifade Timber camos offered make me think that a lot of these guns will wind up in the flooded woods. Price: starting at \$1,699. *Benelli USA, benellieusa.com.*

BERETTA A300 ULTIMA

Beretta's A300 long has been my pick as a great value in a gas gun. It's essentially Beretta's great 391 model with a few changes and made in the US. The latest version of the A300, the Ultima, features the enlarged bolt handle and bolt release waterfowlers like, and it has Beretta's effective Kick-Off recoil reducer as a standard feature. Better yet, it comes in 12 gauge and 20, both with 28-inch barrels. Price: starting at \$799. *Beretta USA, berettausa.com.*

BERETTA A400 LITE

Beretta's A400 Lite is a synthetic-stock version of the company's flagship semi-auto, and it comes with 24-, 26- and 28-inch barrels in 20 gauge. (There's also a scaled down Compact model with a 24-inch barrel.) It features Beretta's Kick-Off recoil reducer and a Micro-core recoil pad that work effectively with the gas system to reduce felt recoil. The Lite has redesigned "checkering"—a kind of "S" pattern on the grip and forend to make it easier to hang onto the gun with wet hands. The 20-gauge Lite comes in black and Realtree MAX-5 camo. Price: starting at \$1,500. *Beretta USA, berettausa.com.*

BROWNING BPS FIELD COMPOSITE

Introduced in 1977, Browning's venerable BPS underwent a little redesign this year. It has a larger, sleeker trigger guard and a stock with a parallel section near the butt that allows you to trim the stock and use the factory pad without additional grinding. In all other ways it's the same well-made, bottom-ejecting pumpgun with a top safety that endears it to left-handers and break-action owners. Price: starting at \$719. *Browning, browning.com.*

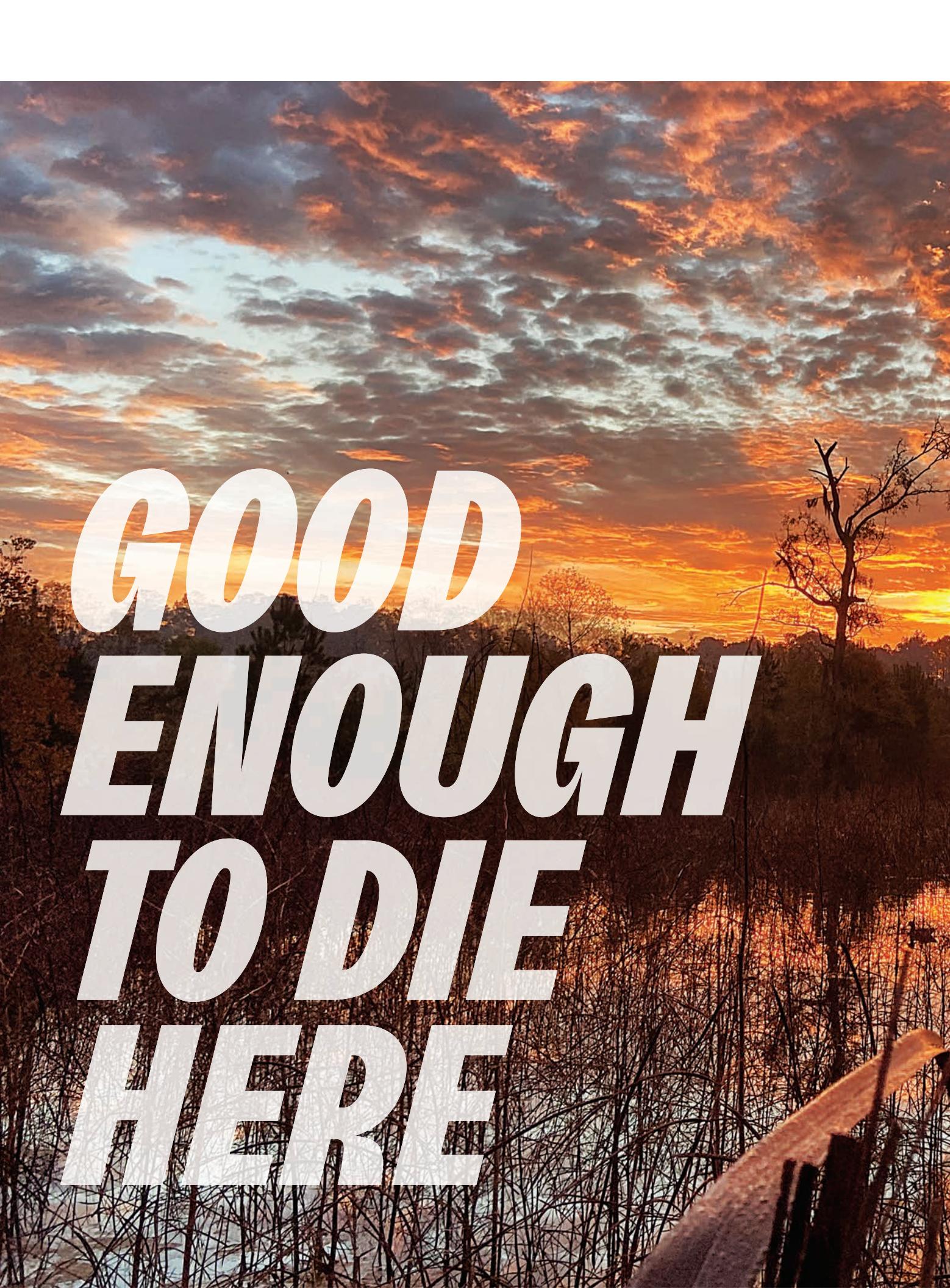
CZ REDHEAD PREMIER ALL-TERRAIN

My first thought on unboxing the CZ Redhead Premier All-Terrain over/under, a 20-gauge with 30-inch barrels, was: *This would be a perfect dove gun.* And it would be, yet it's no slouch in the duck blind either. On the heavy side for a 20-gauge, it's got the weight and front-end heft to make a smooth-swinging gun, and it would be my choice for a 20 if I were going to invest in TSS and try shooting at long range. (The gun is available with 28-inch barrels also.) It has satin walnut wood and an O.D. green Cerakote finish that protects and hides it. Sling-swivel studs and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 100



Top: Benelli M2 Waterfowl Performance Shop.
Bottom: CZ Redhead Premier All-Terrain.

A scenic sunset over a valley, with a wooden railing in the foreground. The sky is filled with dramatic, orange and yellow clouds. A single tree stands on a hill in the background. The text is overlaid on the image.

GOOD
ENOUGH
TO DIE
HERE



Conservation creates a Carolina Lowcountry haven

by Oliver Hartner



◀ Lucy Mahon trying to entice some dabbling ducks into range.

▼ A stoked fire pit sets the mood for pre-hunt festivities.

September, when mourning doves dive into withered sunflowers, and by month's end falling temperatures push flights of blue-winged teal into flooded fields of rice and corn. Wood ducks, wigeon and gadwalls arrive just in time for holiday feasts and festivities, and hunting waterfowl over such splendor is an opportunity never to be missed.

THE AIR FELT balmy during the first two weeks of December, and a light fleece was all it took to stay comfortable. It didn't feel like waterfowling weather, but my friend Philip Matthews invited me for a hunt at his uncle's place in the ACE Basin near Edisto Island, South Carolina. "We've got so many wood ducks that we won't have enough food for the migration," he said. "I need some help down here."

A glance at my calendar showed no prior obligations. "Sign me up," I said. "I'll see you in a couple hours."

Night fell before my arrival, and I chose a rack in the bunkhouse while Philip stoked the fire inside a pit on the patio. He eclipsed part of the flame with a steel plate, and by the time I joined him a bushel of oysters hissed atop the hot metal from beneath a dripping croaker sack. My eyes tracked the wafting smoke and steam upward as they joined patches of cumulus clouds in the night sky. Gaps in the pillowowy blanket revealed bright stars burning in their proper places upon the celestial plane, but a cold beer Philip placed in my hand brought my attention back to Earth. A pair of headlights weaved around an alley of oaks bedecked in Spanish moss, and our friends Lucy Mahon and Margaret Ellen Pender arrived just as

FLORA AND FAUNA pay the ultimate price for the acres we pave and plow, and we seldom calculate the cost in its entirety until long after the ink dries upon a contract. Not all development is bad, but when weighed against the sacrifices we demand from the resource, places where there's little difference between the way things *were* and the way things *are* seem more precious than another strip mall.

As bulldozers and backhoes churn the earth across South Carolina's Lowcountry, at the confluence of the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto rivers—an area known as the ACE Basin—many of the roads are still gravel and most of the businesses are still small. Around these parts, boat captains read the tides and know every bend of the saltcreeks turn by turn, steering their weathered trawlers between corridors of cordgrass until they reach open water. Brackish rivulets finger off the main creeks like blood vessels, carrying creatures to their favorite near-shore nooks and crannies. Just before the Ides of March, wild turkeys gobble from the boughs of hardwood trees anchored by thick roots in the swampy bottoms, and during the sultry summer months fly-fishermen whip their rods back and forth from the bows of skiffs until just the right moment of release into a school of redfish. Wingshooting starts the first week of





▲
A traditional evening oyster roast in the South Carolina Lowcountry.

►
The rewards of successful wildlife management: a limit of wood ducks.

we shoveled the first batch of oysters off the fire. We shucked and grazed through the first batch, chasing their salty succulence with sips of bourbon and beer. We pulled a second batch from the fire and slowed our pace of consumption, then shucked and bagged whatever couldn't be finished. We fueled the fire one log at a time to keep it alive, but fatigue overwhelmed us soon after midnight and we abandoned the flames in favor of a few hours' rest.

Five-thirty felt as though it arrived as soon as my eyes closed. We girded ourselves with waders, guns and gear before piling onto an ATV and heading to the impoundment with Philip's Drahthaar, Ellie, and Lucy's Boykin spaniel, Mac, running just ahead of us. We discussed strategy, and Philip suggested we cover each quadrant of the impoundment by splitting our group. "You'll hear them first," he said. "Then they'll fly over one of these flooded fields. It's a coin toss as to which they'll choose first, but the shooting will move them between the two. Just be ready, because they're never late; and they'll hang around for a while, so don't feel rushed."

He sent me to the southwest corner of the flooded corn, and I settled into position. As darkness gave way to twilight, the sun's ascent revealed a row of trees still wearing some foliage. Since winter winds hadn't bared their branches, I positioned myself beneath the canopy for concealment and waited. Across the levee, I heard the first flights of wood ducks squealing and shrieking like a tribe of monkeys in the Costa Rican jungle. It seemed they'd chosen to fly above the other

'We watched 'em land for a while once we got our three.'



impoundment, but a flight of four appeared above my head and I caught a fleeting glimpse of them between the yellowing leaves.

With the wood ducks circling, the seconds seemed to pass like minutes before legal shooting time. When my watch ticked the last torturous second past 6:28 AM, I planted my boots and wrapped my off-hand around the forend of my shotgun. The ducks swarming my blind disappeared, but an opening salvo from across the levee initiated the hunt and sent a squadron soaring over me at three-o'clock high. A clear shot presented itself, and I mounted and emptied my Beretta autoloader but failed to connect. Another pair passed overhead while I fed ammunition into my gun. They squealed and circled and committed to landing, and my second shot tumbled one just above



◀
Hanna Matthews
with four handsome
wood duck drakes.

▼
A beautiful morning
in the lowcountry
duck marsh.

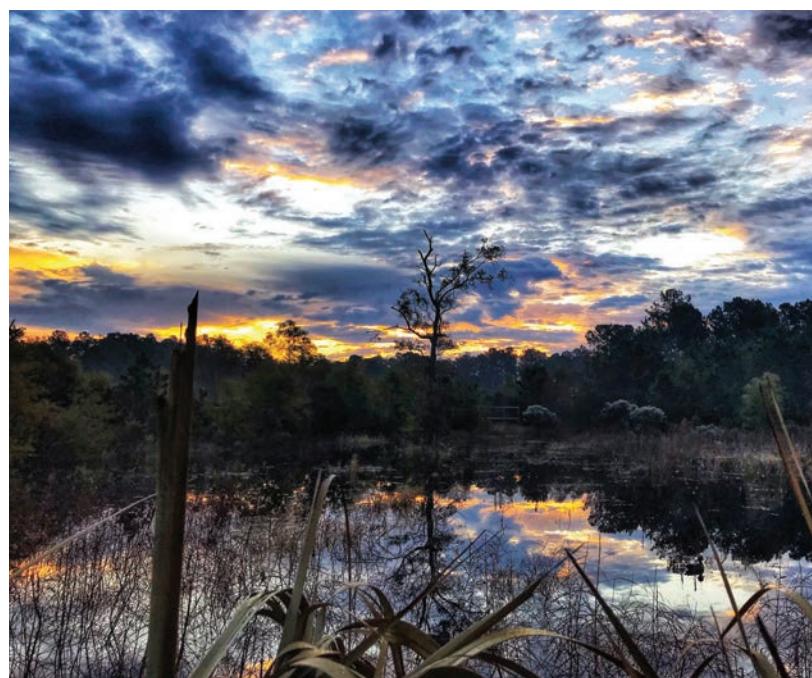
shooting," I replied, "but I managed a pair." Lucy and Margaret Ellen ambled over from across the levee with a limit of wood ducks on each of their game straps. "We watched 'em land for a while once we got our three," Margaret Ellen said. We loaded the ATV with our guns and game, and while everyone piled aboard, I felt inspired to walk back to the bunkhouse at a leisurely pace. The dark of night had denied me a proper introduction to this lowcountry vista, and I intended to make up for it.

Sunrise had supplanted twilight, and as the sun burned behind a blanket of blue-gray clouds, it smeared streaks of warm yellow hues across the horizon that melted into the marsh. While I strolled along the levee, my mind wandered through the places and spaces I'd inhabited during my life, and I recognized that while I was grateful for my Louisiana roots, the rest of me had grown better once planted in South Carolina soil. This place grabbed my soul, and as I explored more of it, particular locales within the ACE Basin spoke loudest to me. But in an era before my time, the majesty and culture of this region had come under threat by monied men who'd stood to gain a king's ransom from its destruction. They'd envisioned long stretches of beach clubs and attractions that would sprawl over every feasible site between Charleston and Beaufort. In 1988 renowned conservationists, government agencies and concerned citizens mobilized the ACE Basin Task Force and told them they would go no further. Federal and

the cornstalks. It fell heavy like a stone, and after several minutes of calm, I waded from the wood line, sploshing through the stalks and husks and water to retrieve my mark. I found the wood duck drake belly-up atop the water, and his beautiful plumage reminded me of the complex duality faced by all who honor the resource and its gifts—saddened that this beautiful creature met his end but relieved that a single cartridge delivered the *coup de grâce*. One life ended to sustain another. I carried him back to the wood line and looped his legs into my game strap before tying it around a low branch.

During a moment of inattention, the silhouettes of three more wood ducks flying overhead reflected back at me in the water. I gazed up at the skies to find them but didn't get a visual until they'd flown out of range. Several more wood duck flights passed over—and several more cartridges were spent—before a single crossed the levee and presented a shot like a high driven pheasant. As the wood duck closed in, I shouldered my gun, led it and fired. The duck spiraled and splashed into the water almost close enough to catch had my hands been empty. I added the second drake to my game strap, and after a long cessation of shooting, I heard the engine of the ATV signal the conclusion of our hunt. Philip and his wife, Hanna, motored over, and I emptied my chamber and collected the cartridge hulls bobbing in the water. A wooden staircase aided my ascent of the levee berm and, before I completed the climb, Philip asked, "How many'd you get?"

"Not nearly enough to account for all that



state wildlife agencies secured portions of the ACE Basin for the public good, while private interests holding grand swaths of property entered into strict conservation easements. These private landowners viewed themselves as custodians of the resource rather than owners of it—choosing legacy in lieu of profit—and they allied themselves with organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy and several smaller easement programs. This collaborative patchwork of private properties with restrictive easements created a fortified barrier to irresponsible development, and it ensured most of the area would remain habitable for wildlife in perpetuity. When Philip's uncle purchased the place we hunted, air-conditioned structures on the property were limited to 5,000 square feet and more than 75 percent of the land had to be dedicated to management for wildlife habitat. He built the bunkhouse and other outbuildings, planted fields in food sources for whitetail deer and wild turkeys, sowed sunflowers for doves and dug impoundment ponds for waterfowl. These days when the time is right, they cut and burn as needed to conserve their corner of creation.

Before I made it back to the bunkhouse, Philip and Lucy had started breakfast while Hanna and Margaret Ellen had concocted Bloody Marys. Venison sausage patties popped and sizzled in a cast-iron skillet while their savory aroma wafted around the kitchen. Lucy fetched a pot of salt water from the creek and brought it to a boil before adding a couple cups of local grits milled a few miles away. She cooked them low and slow, thickening them with a block of Brie from our charcuterie the night before. Philip plated the venison patties and broke a half-dozen eggs into the hot skillet, sopping up the sausage flavors as he stirred them to a scramble. We heaped the creamy grits and eggs and sausage onto our plates and seated ourselves in a row of Adirondack chairs overlooking the marsh. Between bites of breakfast and swigs of Bloody Marys, our conversation drifted toward aspirations we held for our golden years; and though a piece of this ground appealed to us all, Philip assured us it was not for sale. "That's just as well," I said. "There's no emergency care within half an hour for somebody elderly. If something happened and you needed a doc, you'd better make it to Walterboro or Charleston by land or Beaufort by boat."

"Well," Lucy said as she drained her Bloody Mary, "as far as I'm concerned, it'd be good enough to die here." ♣

Oliver Hartner is a South Carolina-based writer covering sporting-life interests. His work has appeared in *Covey Rise*, *Quail Forever Journal*, *USA Today Hunt & Fish* and *South Carolina Wildlife*. He serves on the South Carolina State Committee of Ducks Unlimited as its secretary.



DU's CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Conservation is a key component of sporting life. Without it, the resource dwindles to a point beyond recovery. Ducks Unlimited has been on the forefront of conservation efforts for the past 80 years, and as of 2021, the organization along with a network of members, donors and volunteers has protected more than 15 million acres across North America. These protected areas not only sustain waterfowl populations, but they also ensure the survival of other species, including humans.

One of the avenues used by DU to meet conservation needs has been its easement program. These legal agreements, entered into voluntarily by landowners, protect properties from development for a fixed number of years or in perpetuity. When several neighboring properties enter into these agreements, it creates a shield against overdevelopment and encroachment. Unlike the practice of land preservation, land conservation requires intense management in order to provide a net benefit for the resource. Conservation easements stipulate best management practices tailored to the property and assign a conservator to visit the property for ensuring these practices are being followed.

As of 2017, Ducks Unlimited in South Carolina had permanently protected more than 127,000 acres—to include the ACE Basin—under its conservation-easement program. The enormous success since the program's inception, in 1989, has grown into the Lowcountry Initiative and provided a springboard for launching other DU conservation-easement initiatives across the US. For more information about DU's conservation-easement program, visit ducks.org and search for "conservation easement program." You also can find out how to volunteer with a local chapter and become more involved. —O.H.



▲
On display in Fausti's Italian
showroom is the company's
extensive line of shotguns.

▲
The Class SLX is an
eye-catcher, with gold-
embellished sideplates. It
is part of Fausti's Core line,
which the company will be
promoting in the US along
with its new logo and slogan:
"I'll Be Your Gun."





Fausti Going Forward

The Italian gunmaker is focused on the future

by *Phil Bourjaily*

Only one of the Sunday-morning regulars was still there when I pulled into the club. He stopped closing up the skeet houses when he spotted the sleek 20-gauge over/under I set in the rack and came over to see it. New guns have a magnetic appeal at gun clubs, especially good-looking guns like this one.

“What is that?”

“It’s a Fausti.”

“I don’t know much about their guns, but I sure like looking at the gun sisters,” he said. Mike is an ardent shooter and hunter, with several Italian O/Us already in his safe. Still, like a lot of gun people, he’s seen Giovanna, Barbara and Elena Fausti in countless ads but hasn’t shot their guns. “Can I pick it up?” He mounted

the gun and enthused over the balance. I told him he should shoot it.

He smacked a high and a low house from a few steps behind Station 4, and then he did it again, commenting on the gun’s low recoil before handing it back to me a little regretfully. If selling review guns weren’t frowned upon, I could have closed the deal right there. As it is, a Fausti might join the other Italian O/Us in his safe someday, especially after I told him the gun came in 16 gauge on a scaled frame.

After 73 years in business, Fausti doesn’t have a problem making good guns. It does face the challenge of getting more of those guns in front of American shooters and into their hands, where the guns can sell themselves. Making good guns is difficult. Selling guns



in a crowded market is even more difficult.

Fausti has a plan for the next 70 years—a plan that concentrates on the all-important American market. In an email outlining the company's plans to elevate its profile among American shooters, Giovanna Fausti said, "Hard times required hard steps, and we think that a new image in line with the modern times can give a clear message to our customers: Fausti is here."

Giovanna, the middle daughter of company founder Stefano Fausti and now the CEO of the company, followed up with me by Google Meet for an update. Although we've never met, I recognized her immediately from so many Fausti ads over the years. Giovanna, Barbara and Elena have been the very visible faces of Fausti since taking over their father's business in 1996. Known as "the gun sisters," they are unique in the male-dominated world of gunmaking; and while they have been front and center in the company's ad campaigns over the years, Giovanna told me it was time for a change. "Our old ads with the sisters helped us stand out," she said, "because there are so many Italian gun companies but only one run by three sisters. People know us. Now we want people to know our guns."

Fausti's new slogan, "I'll Be Your Gun," lets the company's guns speak for themselves—and as I saw at my club, the guns are perfectly capable of speaking volumes to shooters. Pick any current Fausti gun and look at it. The entry-level Caledon O/U impresses with the quality of its fit and finish and especially the depth of the engraving in a gun of its grade. The Class SLX I've been shooting is an eye-catcher, with its gold-embellished, case-colored sideplates. At the high end, the full-sidelock Senator is a gorgeous fine custom gun correct in every way down to its hand-detachable sideplates.

YOU CAN'T MAKE guns without a gun factory, and since Covid precluded a visit, our interview continued with a quick virtual tour of the Fausti plant

in the town of Marcheno, near the top of Italy's long, narrow gunmaking district of Val Trompia. One of the early business decisions the sisters made in the 1990s was to bring all their production in-house and focus on quality over quantity. These days all of Fausti's guns come from its factory, which employs about 30 workers. The factory is clean and modern and shows the result of recent investment in new technology and top-of-the-line CNC machinery. Machines that work on several parts at once to tolerances human hands can't match share space with old-fashioned gunmaking benches bathed in natural light where artisans fit wood to metal on high-grade guns.

Fausti produces a wide range of guns: O/Us, side-by-sides and double rifles. The company makes competition and hunting guns and even a gas semi-auto. The line is divided between "Core" production guns and "Boutique" custom models, with a full line of each being offered. While in the past Fausti partnered with American companies to build guns to their specifications, Giovanna assured me that going forward Fausti will direct its energies into raising awareness of the company, not confusing people by making guns for others.

Raising visibility begins—literally—with a new logo. Emblazoned on the trigger guard of every new Fausti gun, the twinned, back-to-back gold Fs help the guns stand out on dealers' racks. The Fausti coat of arms served as the company's symbol from its



The DEA side-by-side is one of Fausti's best-selling guns in the US. The new logo on the toplever leaves no doubt who makes it.

The Fausti factory is clean and modern and shows the result of recent investment in new technology and top-of-the-line machinery.

founding, in 1948, to present. The letters of the new logo intertwine at the bottom to resemble both a stag's antlers and the shield in a coat of arms.

The logo, I will confess, didn't do much for me at first, until I saw it on a gun. It actually appears twice on the Class SLX: on the trigger guard and on the toplever. It's good looking and distinctive, and it leaves no doubt that the gun is a Fausti. It's also a logo designed to look good on clothing





Sisters Barbara (left), Giovanna (right) and Elena Fausti have been the “faces” of the company in the past, but now they want the guns—like this DEA side-by-side—to speak for themselves.

and shooting accessories.

Making Fausti guns stand out is the crux of the company's new push. Everyone agrees that Fausti already makes good guns. “I can't remember the last time I had to send one back,” said Bryan Bilinski of Fieldsport, in Michigan, one of Fausti's dealers. “Fausti quality control is excellent. The wood-to-metal and metal-to-metal fit is all great. They are quality guns.”

According to Joel Etchen of Joel Etchen Guns, in Pennsylvania: “We are really impressed with the Fausti line of guns and with the three sisters. The DEA side-by-side is one of our store favorites. People like its trim build and quick pointability. The redesigned guns with new engravings are very attractive, and our customers have been very pleased with the products.”

Along with a network of higher-end dealers, Fausti helped raise its presence in the US enormously with the establishment of Fausti USA in 2009. Located in Fredericksburg, Virginia, the facility serves as a showroom, repair center and warehouse. There is a Fausti dealer, Elite Shotguns, at the National Shooting Complex, in San Antonio, to help the company serve the target market. Fausti also has a booth at the National Shooting Complex to build brand awareness and let shooters try the company's guns at events like the National Sporting Clays Championship, held in October. The company plans to expand its number of dealers in the US as well.

At the same time Fausti is expanding dealerships, it is shrinking its offerings. The company won't stop making the high-end Boutique guns or several other models, but it does plan to focus efforts in the US on the seven best-selling guns from the Core lineup.

Among those seven best-sellers is the Class SLX that I shot. It's appropriately named, as the gun exudes, well, class. An O/U with sideplates, the Class is the most ornate of the Core over/unders. The gun comes in all gauges, and Fausti

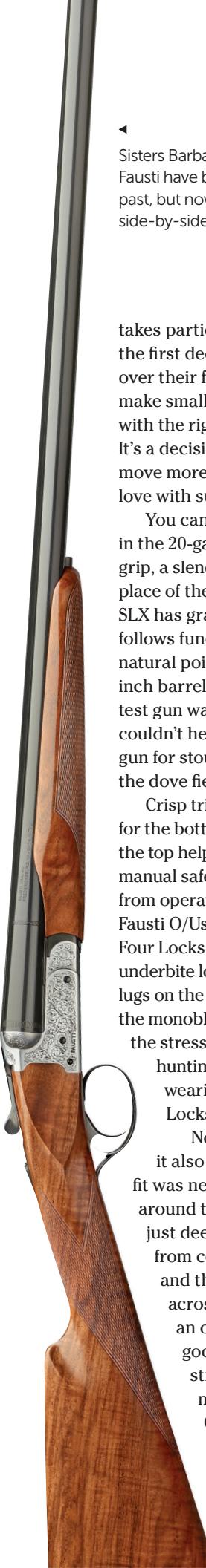
takes particular pride in its smaller bores. One of the first decisions the sisters made upon taking over their father's business was to learn how to make smallbore guns on their own frames and with the right barrel dimensions to perform well. It's a decision that will serve them well as they move more forcefully into an American market in love with sub-gauges.

You can see that experience brought to 3D life in the 20-gauge Class SLX. With a Prince of Wales grip, a slender wrist and a rounded forend in place of the all-too-common Schnabel, the Class SLX has graceful lines. And since form generally follows function, those lines help make it into a natural pointer. At 6 pounds 10 ounces with 28-inch barrels and a bit of weight-forward bias, my test gun was easy to shoot at skeet targets—and I couldn't help thinking it would have made a good gun for stout pheasant loads or an afternoon in the dove field.

Crisp triggers that broke at 4 pounds 13 ounces for the bottom barrel and 4 pounds 9 ounces for the top helped the gun's shootability, too, and the manual safety assured I didn't lose any targets from operator-induced failures to fire. Like all Fausti O/Us, the Class SLX features the company's Four Locks action—Fausti's twist on the common underbite lockup seen on so many Italian guns. Two lugs on the sides of the frame engage recesses in the monoblock to keep everything together during the stress of firing. It's likely not necessary on a

hunting gun, but if you're worried about a gun wearing out on your grandchildren, the Four Locks design might bring you peace of mind.

Not only does the Class SLX shoot, but it also looks good doing it. Wood-to-metal fit was nearly perfect, including the inlaying around the sideplates. The laser engraving is just deep enough that it doesn't disappear from certain angles, as some laser work does, and the gold pheasants and partridge flying across a canvas of case colors may not be an original décor scheme, but they look good. The walnut on my gun was fairly straight grained, and while lack of figure might be the one quibble I had with the Class SLX's appearance, I couldn't find any fault in the color of the wood, the





FAUSTI'S CORE LINE

American buyers will be seeing more of Fausti's Core line as the company promotes its best-selling guns. A custom gun still can be ordered, of course, but the seven Core best-sellers have a lot to offer all but the highest-end customers. All double-barreled guns except for the L4 Sport come in all five gauges, and many offer a choice of 30-inch barrels along with the more common 26- and 28-inch tubes.

CALEDON

The entry-level Caledon over/under features the Four Locks action, a full pistol grip and a silver receiver half-covered in deep scroll engraving. The stock has enhanced Optiwood grain and sells for \$2,200 in 12 and 20 gauge; \$2,800 in 16, 28 and .410.

CLASS SLX

The Class SLX O/U (which I shot) comes in all gauges and 26-, 28- and 30-inch barrel lengths. It comes with five choke tubes and a hard case, as do all the Fausti guns with the exception of the .410s, which have fixed Modified & Full chokes. The Class SLX lists for \$3,560 in 12 and 20 gauge; \$4,160 in 16, 28 and .410.

CLASS APHRODITE

Fausti's women's O/U is stocked to better fit women, with a shorter length of pull and slightly raised Monte Carlo

stock. The silver receiver is covered with scroll engraving, and there's a cameo of Aphrodite on the bottom. It comes in all gauges; in 26-, 28- and 30-inch barrel lengths; and with 3" chambers, to make it suitable for hunting and clays. Prices are \$4,200 in 12 and 20 gauge; \$4,800 in 16, 28 and .410.

L4 SPORT

Fausti's over/under clays gun, the L4 Sport has a silver receiver with blue accents, a fairly low rib design and a ventilated mid-rib. The competition-style stock features an adjustable comb. Prices are \$3,150 in 12 and 20 gauge; \$3,750 in 28 and .410.

DEA

A light, trim side-by-side, the DEA is advertised as weighing less than five pounds in 28 gauge, making it an ideal carrying gun. The Anson & Deeley boxlock has a case-colored or coin-

finished receiver and scroll engraving. It has a straight stock, splinter forend and single, non-selective trigger. Prices are \$3,850 in 12 and 20 gauge; \$4,450 in 16, 28 and .410.

DEA SLX

The top grade of the DEA comes with a silver, sideplated receiver and AAA walnut in place of AA. In all other ways it's configured like the DEA. Prices are \$5,150 in 12 and 20 gauge; \$5,750 in 16, 28 and .410.

PROGRESS UPLAND

Not as well known as Fausti's break-actions, the Progress Upland is a soft-shooting, easy-cleaning gas gun. It has a silver receiver embellished with scroll and gold birds, and the stock has Optiwood-enhanced walnut grain. The 12-gauge has a 26-, 28- or 30-inch barrel; the 20-gauge has a 26- or 28-inch tube. Price is \$1,700. —P.B.

checkering or the oil finish.

You don't make a good-looking, well-balanced gun like this by accident. Giovanna told me that her father, who passed two years ago, approved of his daughters' management of the company. "He was proud of us," she said, "and he was very proud of the team we had formed. It takes a team to build guns. Some of our workers have been with us for over thirty years." While the Core guns are largely machine made, unlike the Boutique line, all of the guns undergo final fitting and rigorous inspections before they leave the factory.

"My father taught me that a gun is a living thing," Giovanna said. "You have to hold it and listen to the sound it makes as it closes."

If you close a Fausti gun and listen carefully, you might just hear it say, "I'll be your gun." ♣

For more information, contact Fausti USA, faustiusa.com.

Phil Bourjaily writes the shotgun columns for *Field & Stream* and *Ducks Unlimited* magazines and is an enthusiastic waterfowler and upland hunter.



The Public Option

Pheasant hunting, 21st Century style

by Tom Davis



GARY PALMER/GARYPALMERILLUSTRATION.COM

In our second season hunting together, Rumor, my English cocker spaniel, and I found ourselves sizing up a state wildlife management area in northern Iowa. A shallow basin with low, prairie-grass-covered hills sloping gently to a series of marshy linked wetlands, it was big, vaguely rectangular and very inviting. There were even a few raggedy rows of standing corn stippling the western horizon—just enough to sweeten the pot. “Corn and cover,” of course, has been the mantra of pheasant hunting in Iowa ever since there has been pheasant hunting in Iowa.

The weather was unseasonably warm and humid for November; the landscape was shrouded by a gray mist—not falling so much as simply hanging in the air—and, with the grass wet from overnight rains, I was faced with one of those “pick your poison” wardrobe dilemmas: try to stay dry, or try to stay cool. I ultimately decided to layer a light waterproof shell between my shirt and my vest and leave the chaps in the truck.

There was a well-defined seam between the tawny upland cover and the paler, heavier slough grass, and, with Rumor pinballing around in her usual hyperkinetic fashion, I followed its meandering course. After 40 years of hunting pheasants with pointing dogs, hunting them with a flusher remained a work in progress. It felt a little off, a little out of sync, as if all the moving parts weren’t meshing yet.

Being acutely aware of this, I made a concerted effort to stay focused, ignore the conditions and keep my head in the game. It should have paid off.

When Rumor bounced the rooster out of the slough grass a half-hour or so into the hunt, I was ready. But as I swung the 12-gauge Superposed, I sensed, almost subconsciously, that something wasn’t right. Or, more precisely, that something had gone terribly, sickeningly wrong. When I squeezed the trigger and met unyielding resistance, I knew exactly what it was: Somehow I’d nudged the safety, which doubles as the barrel selector, to the in-between position—a mechanical no man’s land

that renders the safety inoperable.

And for want of a nail . . .

The pheasant, merely inconvenienced, barreled over the hill—and I reflexively fell to my knees in despair. And disgust. And disbelief. Bad words were uttered also. Roosters don’t come easy in these punishing times, especially for those of us who have to rely on “the public option,” and to screw up this royally on a bird that presented himself on a silver platter . . . It was to weep.

Little did I know that the Pity Party was just getting started.

Iowa does a phenomenal job managing its public hunting areas, many of them distinguished by luxuriant stands of native forbs and grasses as fetching as any you’ll lay eyes on. Shaggily wild, in untamed counterpoint to the regimented fields of corn and soybeans all around them, they seem like the hides of great beasts, rippling in rough red waves beneath the press of the prairie winds.

These properties are so beautiful simply to look at, and they so perfectly match the Platonic Ideal of pheasant cover that you see in your mind’s eye, that a buoyant rush of optimism is the default response to them. (Or at least a tingle, if you’re

a particularly flinty sort.) You feel a longing that borders on romantic desire; you can’t imagine a place that looks this good *not* holding birds.

Ah, but there’s the rub. As well managed and beautifully birdy as these areas are, they are still a shared resource open to any and all who possess a valid hunting license. And no matter how many articles you’ve read along the lines of “Expert Tactics for Public Land Roosters,” the biggest determinant of success or failure, by far, is the hunting pressure a given area receives before you hunt there. Everything else is just marginalia.

This is completely out of your control, obviously, and only knowable within narrow limits. Absent a smoking gun—fresh tire tracks, bootprints in the snow—you just have to hitch up your pants and take your chances.

T

here were four of us on that November hunt, and while you shouldn’t put too much stock in the fact that we could boast 200-plus years of collective experience chasing pheasants, it does suggest that we had some ability to read cover and work it in a plausibly effective manner. We could all still walk, too, which is pretty damn important; we were good if not great wingshots

When the bird fell,
Rumor all but tore
down the fence to get
to the retrieve.

(when we were able to make our guns go *boom* at least); and while our dogs might not have been world-beaters, they did know their business. In addition to Rumor, this crew included Terry Barker's rangy English setter, JJ, and Erik Forsgren's tirelessly athletic golden retrievers, Senna and Mika.

After three days of hard hunting, all of it in indisputably excellent cover, our body count stood at four roosters. If things had broken just right, we could have had two or three more; but the bottom line is that we weren't seeing a lot of birds—and as a result getting very few chances. Rumor made a nifty water retrieve on the one rooster I shot (he splashed down in a pond), but the fizz from a single piece of dogwork, no matter how gratifying, lasts only so long.

The weather had gone to hell on us too. Midday on day one, the winds clocked around from southwest to northwest—we could see the front darkly massing ahead of its advance—the temperature dropped 30 degrees in 20 minutes, and what had been a benignly warm mist morphed into a cold, pelting rain. Then, as the winds intensified and the thermometer continued to plunge, the rain turned to snow, at times creating near-white-out conditions and accumulating inconveniently in the places we wanted to hunt.

It was a freaking winter wonderland.

By then the Pity Party was in full swing. Thankfully we'd laid in a supply of high-test bourbon at the cabin we were renting along with plenty of wine, beer and NSAIDs, allowing us to attack our pain from multiple angles.

Terry Barker, who'd been hunting this area for years, was our nominal leader. But as the weather worsened and the hunting failed to improve, the burden of command began to take a toll. His normally sunny disposition soured; he seemed defeated, a captain who'd lost confidence in his decision-making

ability. This came to a head when his hopes of getting us on private land, slender to begin with (and tethered to a notoriously unreliable local contact), were conclusively dashed. At that point I suggested it was high time we explore some new country—specifically, a cluster of public areas lying roughly 40 miles to the southeast.

"What do we have to lose?" I asked, semi-rhetorically.

It was one of those somber days when the sky stretches gray and featureless to every horizon, and the landscape, too, is leached of color. All things considered, though, it was a promising day to hunt. There was no wind to speak of, it wasn't snowing (yet) and the temperature was in the upper 20s—just about perfect.

Still, the early returns weren't encouraging. We looked at several pieces of bottomland that were too heavily timbered to be grade-A pheasant cover, also a large, multi-fingered wetland dotted with muskrat houses that didn't have quite enough upland habitat to suit us. Then when we came to an area that really made our antennae quiver, we discovered, unhappily, that other hunters had beaten us to it.

We almost had exhausted the possibilities in that neighborhood when we pulled up to a rectangle of cover, 60 acres or so, nestled into the southwest corner of a section. A marshy waterway bordered by a few spindly trees curved through the low ground; beyond that, on the long side of the rectangle, lay a rumpled band of prairie grass red as the coat of an Irish setter.

The best sight of all, though, was the unblemished snow in the parking area—meaning that it had been at least a couple of days since anyone had hunted there.

It didn't take long to come up with a plan. Terry and I would take JJ and work the perimeter of the area counter-clockwise (Rumor would sit this one out), while Erik and the other

member of our foursome, Don Steffin, would dig into the heavier interior cover with the goldens on a generally clockwise course.

A few minutes in, JJ had what pointing-dog people commonly describe as a "sketchy contact" with a rooster, giving Terry one of those unrealistically long chances that you take only because you think you should. Then as we made the turn toward the back side of the property, another cockbird flushed wild out of a finger of stalky horseweeds and flared south over the road. Having endured some prolonged birdless stretches (read: death marches) over the previous days, this level of activity was a positive sign—and when JJ struck an emphatic point near the far fenceline, it was game on.

This time the rooster held fatally tight, and Terry, who shoots a lovely 16-gauge Arrieta, folded him. Two more roosters in that pretty swatch of grass made the same mistake, while another that resisted the idea of being pointed failed to give himself quite enough cushion when he blew out at dicey range. I made a torquing shot with the Superposed, and while it wasn't a clean kill, JJ, after a few tense moments, was able to run down the fugitive.

Erik killed a cockbird also. "We hadn't seen a thing," he told us when we reconvened, "and the dogs put him up fifty yards from the trucks." In an hour's time—maybe—we'd bagged five roosters, one more than we'd harvested in the previous three days.

Welcome to pheasant hunting, 21st Century style.

Later that morning a good, old-fashioned prairie blizzard whipped up. We crawled back to the cabin, white-knuckling it all the way, at a blazing top speed of 30 miles per hour. Fortunately the front was a fast-moving one, and by mid-afternoon the fields of northern Iowa lay glittering and almost blindingly white beneath a dazzling blue sky. With time for one last close-to-home push,

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Terry—back in good form now that he had a limit of roosters under his belt—led us to a spot where Rumor and I could take the 80 acres on one side of the road while Erik, Don and the goldens could take the 80 on the other.

As Erik had observed more than once on this expedition, there was no shortage of cover. Sometimes there just weren't enough birds to fill it.

I

I followed Rumor east along the south fenceline, zigging and zagging to hit as many of the birdy-looking patches as possible, then turned north at the corner post. The snow, knee-deep in places, made for tough going in combination with the heavy grass—especially for my short-legged partner, who struggled to maintain forward progress.

There's a reason, though, that cockers are known in some circles as "little big dogs." About halfway up the far side of the property, I sensed a sonic commotion, heard a chalky squeal and realized that the dark, plump objects hurtling away at high speed were Hungarian partridge—the ultimate "bonus birds" in that part of the world. Somehow I managed to put the muzzles on a target, and when the bird fell, tumbling onto the wintry steppe of the adjoining stubblefield, Rumor all but tore down the fence to get to the retrieve.

"Not to be denied," I think the phrase is. How she didn't snag herself on the barbed wire, I'll never know—but I'm terribly grateful for it.

The Huns were the only birds we moved in that spot (not that I'm complaining), the pheasants apparently having decamped to the other side of the road—i.e., where Don and Erik were hunting. They killed two roosters and had a crack at a third, so it ended up being a productive day all across the board.

You always hope to finish strong—it tends to blur the less-pleasant memories—and we accomplished that. It would have been nice to get on some private farmland, though. 

Tom Davis is an Editor at Large for *Shooting Sportsman*.

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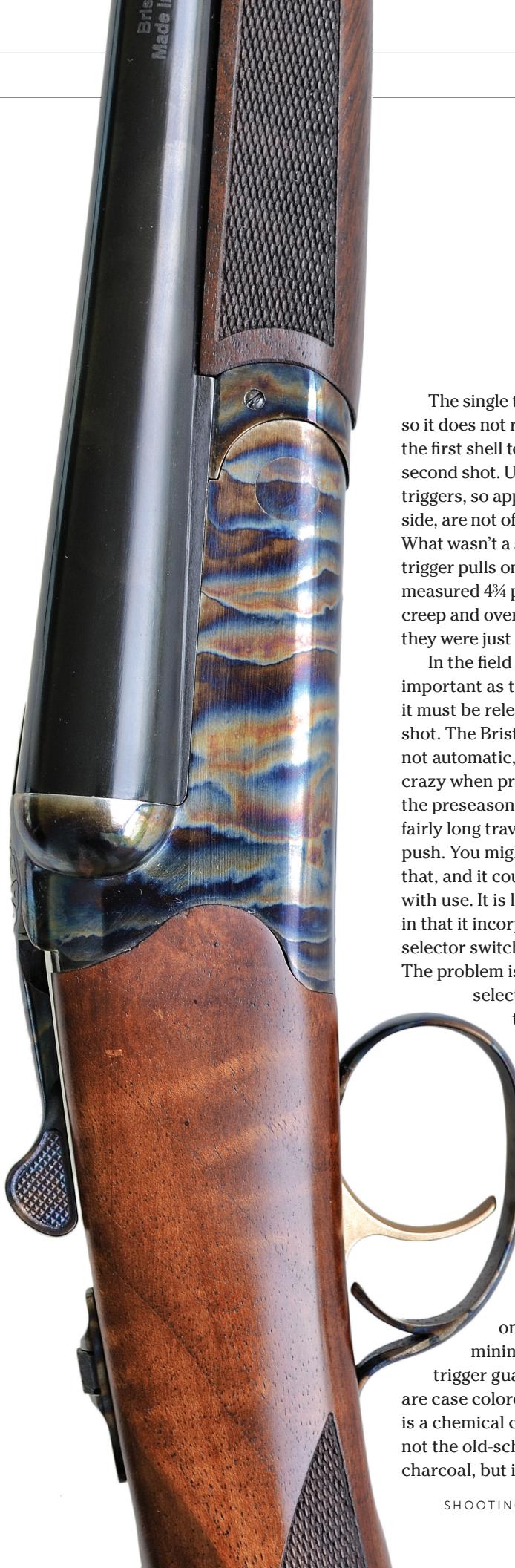
TriStar Bristol

BRUCE BUCK

The TriStar Bristol shotgun reviewed here is a 28" 20-gauge side-by-side made in Turkey by Khan Arms. Khan was started in 1985 and today is a large producer of all kinds of sporting shotguns plus rifles and tactical shotguns. The TriStar Bristol is basically Khan's K-005. US importer TriStar Arms markets a wide variety of shotguns plus a line of pistols. What is most noticeable about the offerings in the TriStar line is that they are very modestly priced. Our test case-colored Bristol stands near the top of the price range at \$1,100 in 12 and 20 gauge, while the 28 and .410 are \$1,130. There is also a Bristol Silver, which is the same gun with a nickel-finish receiver, laser engraving and gold inlay for \$1,040 and \$1,070.

The Bristol side-by-side has a boxlock action. With the stock removed, the first thing you notice is that the main action body, top tang, triggerplate and rear vertical connection are all cut from the same piece of steel. I have seen this in the CZ Sharptail, made by the Turkish company Huglu. Typically, the triggerplate is separate in most guns. This one-piece frame would make the action very strong. The frames are sized to the gauges.

The interior of the Anson & Deeley-type action is about as simple as it can be. Sears are suspended from the top strap, while the hammers pivot on the bottom plate. Hammers are impelled by horizontal coil springs stabilized by an internal guide. Everything looks as though it is straight off the CNC, and that's not a bad thing.

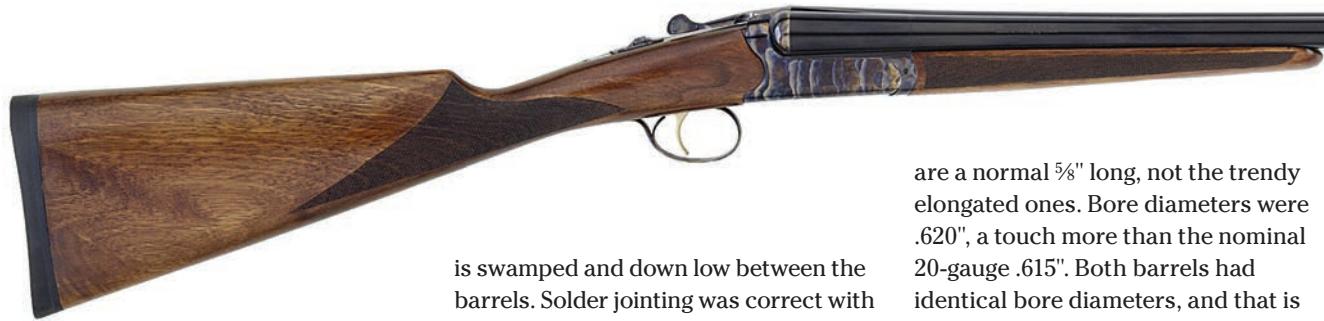


The single trigger is mechanical, so it does not require the recoil of the first shell to set the sear for the second shot. Unfortunately double triggers, so appropriate on a side-by-side, are not offered. That's a shame. What wasn't a shame was that the trigger pulls on our test gun both measured 4 1/4 pounds with little creep and over-travel. For a field gun they were just about perfect.

In the field the safety is just as important as the trigger, because it must be released before each shot. The Bristol safety is manual, not automatic, so it won't drive you crazy when practicing on clays in the preseason. The safety has a fairly long travel and takes a good push. You might well get used to that, and it could get smoother with use. It is like the Beretta safety in that it incorporates the barrel-selector switch as a lateral toggle. The problem is that the barrel

selector must be fully to the right or left to select the barrel, and there is no detent to keep it from staying in the middle. If it moves to the center or nearly so, the safety cannot be disengaged and the gun won't fire.

The cosmetics on the receiver are minimal. The receiver, trigger guard and opening lever are case colored. The case coloring is a chemical cyanide treatment, not the old-school bone-and-charcoal, but it looks very nice.



There is no engraving on the receiver except for the name "TriStar" in gold on the bottom. While things have been kept to a minimum, the lines of the nicely rounded receiver are attractive and classic.

All the Bristol barrels, regardless of gauge or model, are 28" long. That's not a bad thing and should please most shooters. On the outside, the barrels are conventionally low-luster blued. There were some very slight ripples in the steel, but they would be noticeable only to some anal-retentive gun reviewer. There was no noticeable jugging of the barrels at the muzzle to accommodate the chokes. A simple single brass bead was up front. The solid concave top rib

is swamped and down low between the barrels. Solder jointing was correct with no holidays until you got to the rear of the top rib. The jointure between the rear of the top rib and the segment of the rib built into the monoblock did not mesh perfectly, but it was close and not too noticeable. What *was* noticeable was that there was no bottom rib aft of the forend latch back to the monoblock. This leaves a 3" section between the barrels subject to collecting all sorts of dirt and detritus. On the plus side, when the gun is assembled, you can't see it.

Inside, the barrels are pretty conventional. They are chrome lined and suitable for steel shot up to a Modified choke. The 20-gauge is chambered for 3" shells, which will be handy if steel shot is used. The forcing cones in front of the chambers

are a normal $\frac{5}{8}$ " long, not the trendy elongated ones. Bore diameters were .620", a touch more than the nominal 20-gauge .615". Both barrels had identical bore diameters, and that is rarer than you might think.

Five 2"-long flush-mounted screw chokes are included. The chokes are Beretta-style, with the threads at the front. Constrictions were Cylinder at -.003", Improved Cylinder at .007", Modified at .015", Improved Modified at .022" and Full at .030". According to the Briley choke chart, nominal constrictions for these chokes are all within a couple thou, except that the Full choke was about .006" tighter than nominal. The bases of the chokes are open to about .635", so there is a good jump from the .620" bore but no chance of the shot catching on the rear of the chokes if manufacturing tolerances vary. The chokes were of conventional taper/parallel design with about $\frac{5}{8}$ " of a

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SNAPSHOT

Make & Model: TriStar Bristol

Action: Boxlock side-by-side

Gauge: 20

Chambering: 3"

Finish: Case colored, no engraving other than name on bottom

Barrel length: 28"

Weight: 5.9 pounds

Chokes: Five flush screw chokes: C, IC, M, IM, F

Stock: 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 1 $\frac{9}{16}$ " x 2 $\frac{11}{16}$ ", zero cast, 2° pitch

Accessories: Chokes, choke box, wrench, manual, 5-year warranty

Price as tested: \$1,100

thing that is just a little too thick to fit properly into the wrench notches in the choke rims. Five minutes with a file would solve that.

As to the wood, the Bristol Silver comes with a pistol-grip stock, but our case-colored Bristol sports an attractive English stock with a slender wrist and nice lines. My faithful Combo Gauge showed the stock dimensions to be: 14 $\frac{3}{8}$ " length of pull, 1 $\frac{9}{16}$ " drop at comb and 2 $\frac{11}{16}$ " drop at heel. This may

seem a touch low, but it is measured from the sunken top rib, so the sight picture is actually a bit higher. There was very modest pitch and zero cast. At the butt there is a $\frac{1}{2}$ " hard-rubber, black recoil pad.

The forend is a 9"-long, slender field-style piece, just a touch wider and thicker than the absolute minimum. It will give your hand a little more protection when the barrels get hot. The forend is attached with a Deeley latch halfway back on the bottom. I like this better than an Anson button



The TriStar Bristol has a one-piece frame and an Anson & Deeley-type boxlock action.

stabilizing parallel at the front. Chokes are notched on the front edge, with the number of notches designating the constrictions. This is all well and good except for the wretched wrench that comes with the gun. It is a flat stamped

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up front, as the button can get in the way if you extend your forefinger around the front of the forend when you shoot.

I would rate the quality of the walnut on our test gun as quite nice. It had some good figure. Wood-to-metal jointure was correct: just very slightly proud with no gaps. The trigger tang is a short one and not extended far into the stock. TriStar says that the stock has an oil finish, and it seemed nicely done in a rich brown. Unlike many more-expensive European guns, the Bristol's oil finish fully filled all the grain in the walnut. The very-fine-lines-per-inch checkering appears to be laser cut and is borderless. The overall pattern is conservative. Very-fine-LPI checkering actually doesn't do too much to help grip the gun, but it sure looks classy.

The total Bristol package was very basic. Packed in a cardboard box, the gun came in clear cellophane sleeves. Included were the little plastic box of chokes, the wrench and a very basic manual. What isn't basic is that TriStar warrants the gun for five years. TriStar service has a good reputation.

Shooting the Bristol was mostly very nice. TriStar's website lists this gun as weighing 6.4 pounds, a decent weight for a 20, but our gun weighed a svelte 5.9 pounds. That is a great weight for an upland gun of that gauge. The balance point was about 1" in front of the hinge pin. It is nice to have a little forward weight bias in such a light double, as it adds some stability.

The gun functioned mostly correctly. I say "mostly," because once it doubled on me. Only once, but that does get your attention. Other than that it was great. It swung well, the barrel convergence was spot on and the gun certainly shot where I looked. The ejectors pitched empties around 10 feet and were timed properly. The trigger pulls remained consistently excellent. I would be most confident taking this gun into the field. While it has some little flaws, the case-colored TriStar Bristol is quite a gun and well worth its modest cost. ♣

For more information, contact TriStar, tristar.com.

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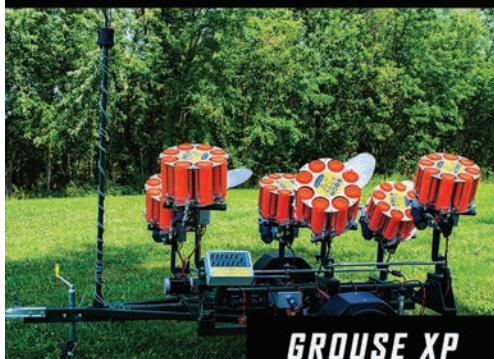


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Seasonal Selections

THE EDITORS

From the early teal opener to spring's Light Goose Conservation Order, the waterfowl season is a long one. Duck and goose hunters in it for the long haul experience a variety of situations and conditions, and having the right gear to meet different challenges makes hunting more fun and productive. The following selections may help put more birds on your game strap this season.



BERETTA WATERSHIELD GLOVES

▲ For hunting in wet and windy conditions in moderate temperatures, Beretta's WaterShield Gloves provide protection and a secure grip. The gloves are made of breathable Polartec Windpro material and have a water-resistant membrane. Fingertip inserts allow for using touchscreen devices, and index-finger tabs can be secured open with hook-and-loop fasteners. The gloves have elastic neoprene cuffs and anti-slip inserts on the palms that aid in gripping. Sizes: S through XXL. Colors: Green (shown) and Otter. Price: \$79.

Beretta USA, berettausa.com.





DUCK CAMP 3L ULTRALIGHT RAIN JACKET

► Duck Camp's 3L (3-Layer) Ultralight Rain Jacket is waterproof and breathable, offering sweat-free protection from the elements. With a ripstop-nylon facing, a waterproof middle layer and a soft backing, the three-layer system is tough on the outside and comfortable on the inside. The jacket has 6 large pockets, pit vents, a hood with built-in visor, adjustable hook-and-loop wrist closures and a drawcord waist. All zippers are waterproof, and all seams are sealed. The jacket also packs into its own pocket for easy storage. Color: Early Season Wetland camo. Sizes: S through XXXL. Price: \$229.

Duck Camp, duckcamp.com.

FILSON CAMO SPORTSMAN DRY BAG

▼ For keeping gear dry, organized and protected, Filson's Camo Sportsman Dry Bag is a waterfowler's best friend. The bag is made of 900D nylon with a TPU (thermoplastic polyurethane) coating. Seams are radio-frequency welded. The top opening has a heavy-duty T1ZIP waterproof zipper and buckle-secure over-flaps. There also is a top flap that secures with buckles and a snap. Inside there is a padded, removable insert with adjustable dividers as well as a zippered mesh pocket. Other features include zippered end pockets, a clear pocket beneath the top flap, a detachable padded shoulder strap, D-rings for gear attachment, and a top carrying handle. Dimensions: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (l) x 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (w) x 14" (h). Color: Mossy Oak Shadow Grass. Price: \$375.

Filson, filson.com.

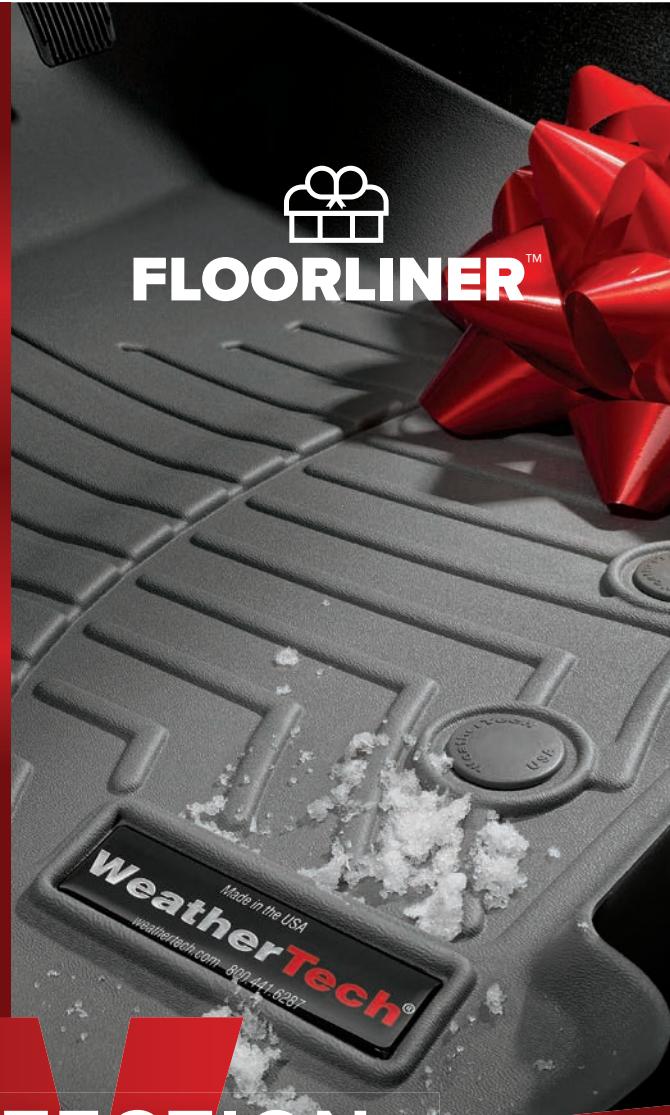




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OVER UNDER WINGMASTER DUCK CAMO FIELD JACKET

▲ Waterfowlers searching for ironclad protection from the elements need look no further than Over Under's Wingmaster Duck Camo Field Jacket. Made of 8-oz waxed canvas from a 100-plus-year-old Scottish mill, the jacket has gusseted shoulders for easy gun mounting and features expandable front bellows pockets, hand-warmer pockets, interior and exterior cellphone pockets, a "concealed carry" pocket and a rear game bag. It also has brass buttons and fitted wrist cuffs with snap closures. A matching hood, removable blaze orange safety collar and nylon wading belt are included, and the jacket can accommodate the company's zip-in Quilted Briar Vest (sold separately). Sizes: S through XXXL. Price: \$389.

Over Under, overunder.com.



LUCKY DUCK LUCKY HD FLOATER

▲ Pole-mounted spinning-wing decoys are great—until you have to set up in deep water or swift currents. Enter the Lucky HD Floater from Lucky Duck. This oversized decoy sits on the water with the rest of your spread, and its magnetic corrugated wings generate a large duck-attracting flash. It has a weighted keel and a waterproof "brain box" that slides into the top. The Lucky HD Floater will run for 12 to 14 hours on 4 AA batteries and will operate with an HD Remote Kit 2.0 (sold separately). It is available as a Drake Mallard or a Bluebill. Price: \$110.

Lucky Duck, luckyduck.com.



ALPS OUTDOORZ WATERPROOF GUN CASE

▲ Transporting a gun to and from a waterfowling spot can be fraught with danger—for the gun. The new Waterproof Gun Case from ALPS OutdoorZ serves to keep a gun dry and safe from harm. The case has an outer shell of 500D welded PVC and an inner shell of high-density closed-cell flotation foam. A padded liner provides extra protection. A buckled roll-top closure ensures a tight seal to keep out water. The case accommodates guns with barrels up to 28" with extended chokes. There is a carrying handle as well as a removable padded shoulder strap, and a D-ring on the end allows for the case to be hung for drying. Dimensions: 58" (l) x 9" (w). (53" long rolled closed.) Weight: 1 pound 9 ounces. Color: Olive Green. Price: \$100.

ALPS OutdoorZ, alpsoutdoorz.com.



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is the premier pheasant hunting operation in the country and was the first sporting venue to ever receive the prestigious Beretta Trident rating. Located in

the heart of South Dakota pheasant country, The Signature Lodge is operated by High Adventure Company. The perfect mix of agriculture crops, native warm season grass, and shelterbelts provide ideal habitat for one of the most popular game birds in the country, the ringneck pheasant. Over 40,000 square feet, The Signature Lodge is an experience in itself. The lodge has 32 single occupancy rooms,

South Dakota's only ice bar, and a spa and fitness center for our non-hunting guests. Chef Sean Finley produces some of the finest food in the business out of our kitchen. From the very personalized service in the lodge to the top guides and dogs, our attention to detail makes The Signature Lodge an unforgettable experience for the passionate bird hunter.

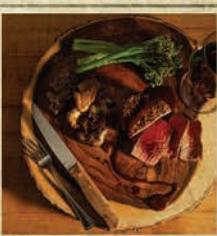
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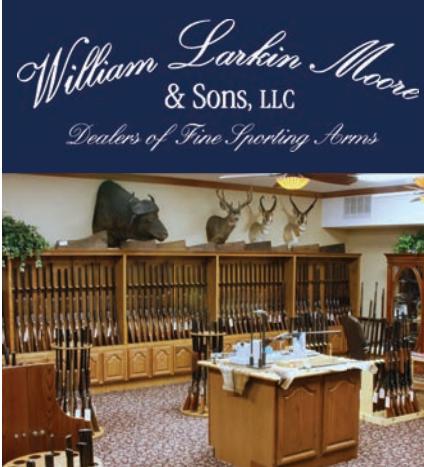
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BERETTA, S06 EELL, BEST SIDELOCK, 12GA O/U, SST, ejectors, coin finished action, game scenes with ornamental scroll, 29 1/2" bbls, vent rib, 2 3/4", Teague chokes, exhibition grade walnut, pistol grip, trim forend, top 14 3/8, 1 5/16, 2, 7lbs 12oz, cased, as new.....\$29,500

BERETTA SSEL, SIDELOCK 12GA O/U, dbl triggers, ejectors, coin finished action with beautiful full cover floral scroll, 28" vent rib bbls, 2 3/4", Teague chokes, gorgeous highly figured walnut, straight stock, trim forend, top 14 1/4 to ck butt, 1 7/16, 2 7/16, 7lbs 4oz cased, as new.....\$12,950

JAMES PURDEY & SONS, BEST QUALITY SIDELOCK 12GA S/S, dbl triggers, ejectors, self opener, beautiful pre war action, tight scroll with bouquets, 30" Whitworth bbls, 2 3/4 proofs, 1/4, full chokes, standard game rib, beautiful highly figured walnut, straight stock, splinter forend, top 14 5/8 to ck butt, 1 7/16, 2 1/8, 6lbs 14oz, original leather case with accessories, 1926 mfg. date, excellent.....\$23,950

J.P. Sauer, 1951 Vintage 12ga & 20ga Sidelock S/S from Abercrombie & Fitch, 12ga & 20ga both 100% case colored actions with scroll engraving, sidelocks, 3rd fastener, sst, ejectors, 12ga: 28" bbls, 2 3/4, Mod/IM, raised game rib, beautiful figured walnut, ST/SP, top 14 3/4, 1 1/2, 2 1/2, 7lbs 2oz, 20ga: 26" bbls, 2 3/4 SK/IM, raised game rib, beautiful figured walnut, pistol grip, splinter forend, top 14 3/4, 1 3/8, 2 7/16, 6lbs 4oz, cased with A & F leather case with accessories, in excellent original condition!.....\$14,500

LEPAGE, DELUXE BOXLOCK, 12GA S/S, DT, ejectors, case colored action, sidelocks, deep cut fences with scroll engraving, 30" bbls, 2 3/4, Mod/IM chokes, raised game rib, beautiful color streaked walnut, straight stock, splinter forend, top 14 3/4 to best leather pad, 1 7/16, 2 3/8, 7lbs 4oz, 98% original ...\$3,950

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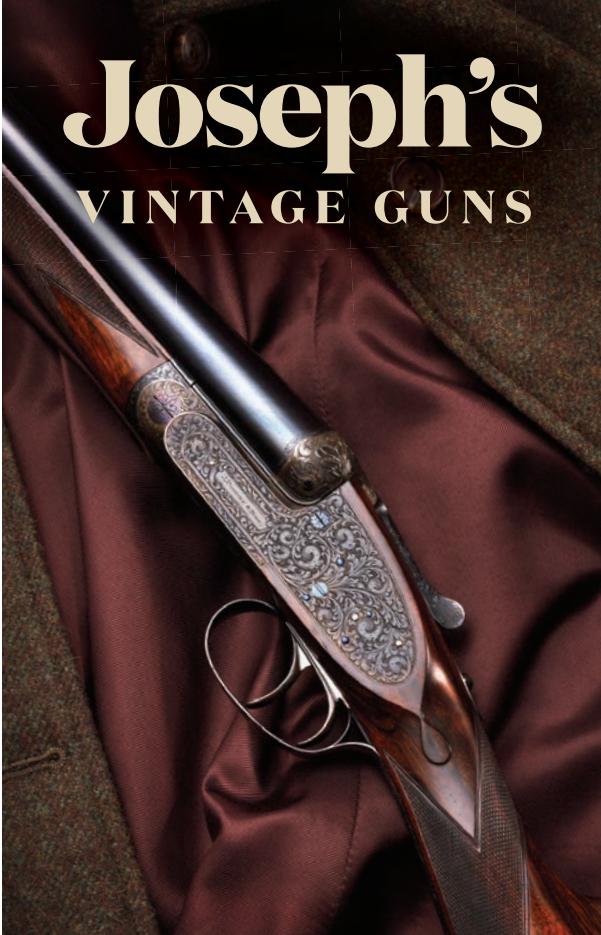
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This is a partial list of available inventory

E J Churchill, 12 bore assisted-opening "Hercules" BLE with 25" nitro chopperlump barrels, 14 1/4" LOP, 21/2" chambers, cased. \$11,500

W. W. Greener, "Grade G3" self-acting ejector gun w/ 30" barrels, 14 3/8" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers. \$8,900

W P Jones, 20 bore BLE with three sets of barrels (original 29 1/2", original 28" and 28"), 14 5/8" LOP including buttplate, 23/4" chambers, cased. \$7,950

William Powell, 12 bore BLE, 28" barrels, 14 3/4" LOP, 21/2" chambers. \$12,500

Pair William Evans, 12 bore SLE, 28" barrels, 15" LOP, 21/2" chambers. \$26,000

Charles Lancaster, 12 bore self opening BLE with 30" nitro reproved damascus barrels, 15" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers. \$5,900

A. A. Brown, 20 bore SLE with 25" chopper lump barrels, 15" LOP, 23 3/4" chambers, cased. \$19,300

Lebeau Courally, .500NE BLE rifle with 25 1/2" chopper lump barrels, 14 3/4" LOP. \$22,600

Joseph Lang, 16 bore BLE with 28" barrels, 14 1/4" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers. \$4,800

Stephen Grant, 12 bore SLE, 23 3/4" chambers, 28" barrels, 15" LOP, cased. \$18,700

Holland & Holland, 12 bore "Royal" SLE, 21 1/2" chambers, 30" barrels, 14 1/2" LOP, cased. \$28,000

Midland, .410 HG, 28" barrels, 14 1/2" LOP. \$5,900

Purdey, 12 bore SLE, 21 1/2" chambers, 25" barrels, 14 7/8" LOP. \$18,300

Thomas Horsley, 12 bore SLHG, 21 1/2" chambers, 30" damascus barrels, 14 3/4" LOP. \$6,900

W J Jeffery, 12 bore SLE, 28" barrels, 15" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers. \$9,100

Boswell, 12 bore BLE, 28" barrels, 15 1/4" LOP, 23 3/4" chambers. \$7,950

W Richards, 12 bore BLE, 28" barrels, 15 1/8" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers, cased. \$7,900

William & Son, 12 bore SLE, 28" barrels, 15" LOP, 23 3/4" chambers, cased. \$56,000

William Evans, 12 bore BLE, 30" barrels, 15" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers, cased. \$6,100

Westley Richards, 12 bore, 2 barrel set BLNE, 30" barrels, 14 1/2" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers, cased. \$7,300

William Ford, 20 bore BLE, 25" barrels, 14 1/2" LOP with pistol grip, 23 3/4" chambers, maker's case. POR

Gye & Moncrieff, 12 bore SLE, 30" damascus barrels, 14 1/2" LOP, 23 3/4" chambers. \$6,200

Army & Navy, 12 bore SLE, 30" barrels, 14 3/4" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers, cased. \$11,500

William Moore & Grey, 12 bore U/L hammergun, 30" barrels, 14 1/2" LOP, 23 3/4" chambers. \$4,200

Stoakes, 12 bore BLNE pigeon gun, 30" barrels, 14 3/4" LOP, 23 3/4" chambers. \$5,900

Henry Atkin, 12 bore SLE, 28" barrels, 15 1/8" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers, in its maker's case. \$17,500

J McNaughton, 20 bore BLE, 27" barrels, 15" LOP, 21 1/2" chambers. \$9,300

Harry Kell engraved Purdey, 12 bore SLE pigeon gun with 29" barrels, 15 1/4" LOP, 23 3/4" chambers. Cased. \$75,000

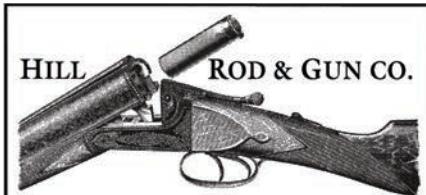
Pair Holland & Holland, "Royal Brevis" model, 12 bore SLE, 26 1/2" chopperlump barrels, 14 1/2" LOP, 23 3/4" chambers, cased. \$44,000

Pair Charles Hellis & Sons, 12 bore "featherweight" SLE, 28" barrels, 15" LOP w/ leather pad, 21 1/2" chambers, in maker's case w/ accessories. \$24,400

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Pair 12g Henry Atkin Best s/s Self-Opening Sidelock Ejectors, 28" barrels, 2 1/2" chambers, choked Imp Cyl & 1/2. Nicely figured 14 5/8" straight hand stocks with gold ovals. Self-Opening actions with bouquet & acanthus scroll engraving with 1 & 2 inlaid in gold. Supplied in makers best leather motor case with accessories & canvas outer cover **£24,995**

Pair 12g Stephen Grant Best s/s Sidelock Ejectors, 28" barrels, 2 3/4" chambers, choked 1/4 & 1/2. Well figured 14 3/4" straight hand stocks with 1" leather covered pads and silver ovals. Classic Grant actions with fluted fences and bouquet & scroll engraving. Re-barrelled by the maker in 1971. Supplied in makers oak & leather case. Circa 1904. **£17,995**

12g James Purdey s/s Best Self-Opening Sidelock Ejector, 28" barrels, 2 1/2" chambers, choked 1 1/8 & 3/4. Well figured 14 3/4" straight hand stock with 3/4" wood extension & gold oval. Self-Opening action with bouquet & scroll engraving. Supplied in original makers oak & leather case with accessories. Circa 1900. **£13,995**

Pair 28g AYA s/s Round Body Sidelock Ejectors, 29" barrels, 2 3/4" chambers, choked 3/4 & Full. Nicely figured 15 3/4" straight hand stocks (#2 with 1" wood extension) with silver ovals. Supplied in Best leather lightweight double case with accessories. **£9,995**

12g Stephen Grant s/s Best Sidelock Ejector, 30" barrels, 2 1/2" chambers, choked CYL & 1/4. New highly figured 15" pistol grip stock with gold oval & new matching forend wood. Action with classic Grant fluted fences and small bouquet & scroll engraving. In makers Best oak & leather case with accessories. Recent full renovation. **£9,995**

12g Stephen Grant s/s Best Sidelock Ejector (two barrel set) original 30" Damascus barrels with 2 1/2" chambers choked 1 1/4 & 1/2. New 26" barrels completed in 1982 by the maker with 2 3/4" chambers. Nicely figured 15" straight hand stock with gold oval. Renewed colour hardened action with makers name in gold. Gun was totally renovated by the maker in 1999. **£9,495**

12g James Woodward Best s/s Sidelock Ejector, 29" barrels with 2 3/4" chambers and choked 1 1/8 & 1/4. Highly figured 14 1/4" straight stock with silver oval. Side clips to action, classic Woodward arcaded fences with small bouquet & scroll engraving. Supplied in re-lined Best leather case with accessories. Circa 1893. **£8,995**

12g Henry Atkin Raleigh Single Trigger Sidelock Ejector, 27" barrels, 2 1/2" chambers, 3/8 & 1/2. 14 7/8" straight hand stock with a 1 3/8" wood extension. Single trigger action with auto safe. Profusely engraved with bouquet & scroll, vines leaves on the fences and makers name in banner on each side of action. Action retains a good amount of the original colour hardening. Supplied in original makers case with canvas & leather case. **£4,750**

12g W.R. Pape Best Boxlock Ejector, 30" barrels, 2 1/2" chambers, choked CYL & 7/8. Highly figured straight hand stock with silver oval. Anson & Deeley double trigger action with auto safe. Profusely engraved with bouquet & scroll, vines leaves on the fences and makers name in banner on each side of action. Action retains a good amount of the original colour hardening. Supplied in original makers case with canvas & leather case. **£4,250**

New (unfinished) .470 NE Carl Russell & Co Best s/s Sidelock Ejector double rifle with 24" barrels. Double trigger H&H style action with extended toe strap and bolted safe. Highly figured 15 1/2" pistol grip stock with leather covered recoil pad & gold oval. Engraving to be chosen by client. A best gun in every respect & will be supplied in best oak & leather case with canvas outer cover & full compliment of tools. **POA**

New (Unfinished) 20g Carl Russell & Co Best o/u Sidelock Ejector, 30" barrels, 2 3/4" chambers with Teague multichokes fitted to both barrels. Single trigger Woodward pattern action with auto safe. Highly figured 15" pistol grip stock with gold oval. Engraving to be chosen by client. A best gun in every respect and will be supplied in best oak & leather with canvas outer, full compliment of tools and 8 Teague chokes. **POA**



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Henry Clarke 12g., top lever with top-tang safety!, 30" Damascus	\$2,800
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From top: Mossberg Silver Reserve, Retay Masai Mara Waterfowl, Stoeger M3020.



extended choke tubes are among its waterfowl-ish accessories and, in a touch of genius, it has tiny rare-earth magnets in the ejectors that are strong enough to hold shells but don't interfere with ejection. This lets you load the gun easily even with the muzzles angled upward, which is convenient and safe in the blind. Price: \$1,159. *CZ-USA, cz-usa.com.*

CZ BOBWHITE G2 ALL-TERRAIN

CZ's All-Terrain family also includes the Bobwhite G2 side-by-side for those who would like to shoot ducks with an affordable, classic-styled gun. The Bobwhite has satin wood and Cerakoted metal and comes with a straight grip, slim forend and twin triggers. It has 28-inch barrels, choke tubes and extractors with the same tiny magnets as the Redhead. Price: \$855. *CZ-USA, cz-usa.com.*

MOSSBERG INTERNATIONAL SILVER RESERVE

Mossberg's latest Turkish-made O/U should prove a good fit in the duck marsh. Satin wood and matte blue finish won't glare and spook ducks. The 26-inch barrels

have ventilated top and side ribs, 3" chambers and extractors, to keep the gun simple and let you maintain control of your empties. Despite its subdued finish, the Silver Reserve has a good-looking, nicely shaped and checkered walnut stock, and at 7 pounds it has enough weight to absorb a steady diet of 3" magnums. Price: \$692. *Mossberg International, mossberg.com.*

RETAY MASAI MARA WATERFOWL

Retay guns are taking hold in the US as well-made, attractively priced inertia guns. Retay has its own bolt design that does away with the dreaded "inertia click" misfire when the gun gets bumped out of battery. The trigger group drops out with the push of a button too. Although Retay makes synthetic-stock waterfowl versions in black and camo (with 26- or 28-inch barrels), I'd be tempted to get a walnut-stock gun, because the wood on the Retays I've seen and shot has been gorgeous. Price: starting at \$1,099. *Retay USA, retayusa.com.*

STOEGER M3020

For hunters who'd like to dabble in 20-gauge waterfowling without spending a lot of money, the Stoeger M3020 would make a good choice. A sub-six-pound inertia gun, the M3020 comes in various finishes, including a spiffy Cerakote metal/camo-furniture model. The barrel has a stepped rib and fiber-optic bead and comes in 24-, 26- and 28-inch lengths. Price: starting at \$559. *Stoeger Industries, stoegerindustries.com.*

WINCHESTER SX4

The latest of the Winchester "X" series, the SX4 (Super X4) combines gas operation with Browning/Winchester's soft Inflex recoil pad to cut the kick as it delivers duck loads as reliably as any gas gun. Shims and stock spacers let you tailor the fit of the 6 3/4-pound gun, and it has the enlarged safety, bolt handle and bolt release popular on waterfowl guns. Barrels are 24, 26 or 28 inches. Price: starting at \$960. *Winchester, winchesterguns.com.* —P.B.

1934

That was the year William James Lindskov purchased his first quarter of land. Eighty-three years later, things are a little different—or at least the scope of them is. You see, Bill's son, Les, had a vision: to share with the world the beauty and splendor of the immense Lindskov Family Ranch through a lodge called Firesteel Creek.

In 1999, the world was supposed to end, but Les, his wife, Marcia, and their four sons, Monte, Bryce, Mark, and Todd, had other plans. While the world worried about Y2K, the Lindskov Family lodge rose on the banks of Firesteel Creek, in Isabel, South Dakota. A decade later, they added Timber Lake Lodge, with its herds of American bison, Rocky Mountain elk, and whitetail deer. A legacy was born.

Today, the birds fly wild and strong. Pheasants, sharptails and Huns bursting from cover. The deer and antelope really do look through the kitchen window, yet it never ceases to amaze how well they can hide when they want to.

As I gaze off into the vastness that is western South Dakota, I sometimes wonder what draws hunters to Firesteel Creek and Timber Lake from all over the world. Surely there are a host of destinations to choose from, yet we have been fortunate that so many have returned to

our lodges time and again. Is it the scope of infinite acres spotted with grainfields or one of Dad's famous cocktails—a glass of pop with a stick in it"—personally delivered in the lounge?



'Life is worth enjoying; come visit us.'

Perhaps it is our talented hunting guides and their canine companions—each tuned so flawlessly it's like watching an orchestra play. To them it's not a job as much as a passion—the ability to come home each evening and say "That was a great day."

But the biggest reason people return must be Mom. Perhaps it's her chicken-fried steak or fried chicken, or maybe it's her buttermilk pheasant or famous roast beef. Then again, it could be her moon pies, chocolate cakes, or fantastic apple crisps—made from apples picked in her front yard. I may be biased, of course, but I think many would agree: Mom's cooking is where it's at. Mom is also a true role model—one who can fry three dozen eggs, make biscuit gravy, greet a stream of guests and not miss a chance to see what her grandchildren are up to that day.

So there may be many reasons sportsmen keep returning to our ranches. And we hope that one of them is because they love it here—just like we do. We love that there are no roads or people. We love that we can walk out on the porch and hear nothing apart from nature. We love it this way, because life is simpler and moral out here. We hope you, too, can experience the way we are blessed to live every day. Life is worth enjoying; come visit us. —Mark L.

Like his brothers, Monte, Bryce and Todd, Mark Lindskov is a third-generation guardian who manages the Lindskov Family's Lodges.



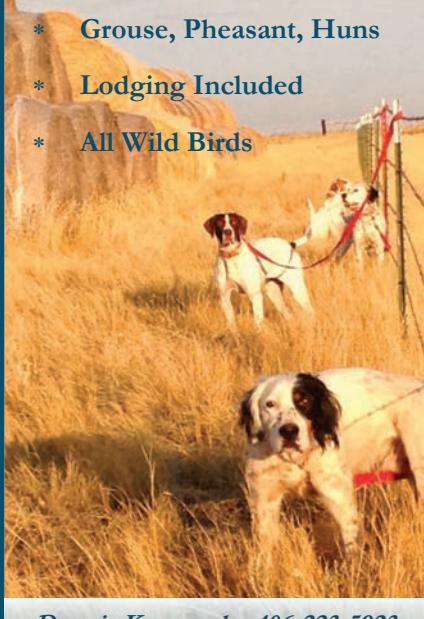
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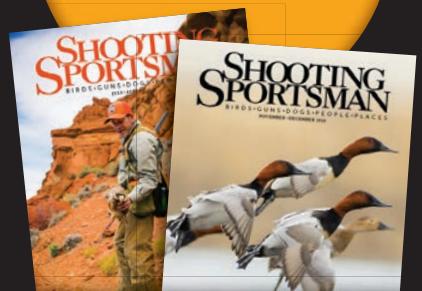


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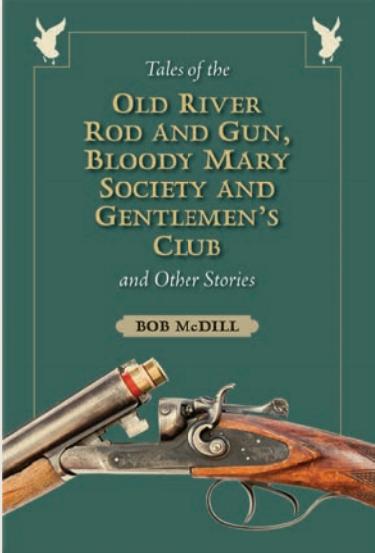
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Dad Was a Duck Hunter

TOM HUGGLER

I never knew if it was my father's experiences in the merchant marine or his time on a US Navy ship during WWII, but Dad sure was drawn to big water. An active sportsman all his life, it was only natural that he loved to hunt waterfowl. When it came to duck hunting, though, Dad was only average at best, convincing few mallards that the call he blew was the real thing and owning untrained retrievers that wouldn't sit still in the blind. As a kid, I also remember a duck boat that leaked and those heavy wooden decoys, some of which sported frayed tether lines or were missing their anchors. Looking back, I realize now how tough it must have been to run a business during the 1950s recession, raise a growing family and still have time to be a successful duck hunter.

Laying out a mallard or two on our kitchen linoleum, he would say, "I got lucky." But when I stroked those glossy green heads, shiny as No. 6 pool balls, I knew my dad was the world's greatest duck hunter—and I couldn't wait to grow up and go with him.

Dad and his younger brother had found a piece of heaven, and in the fall of 1959, when I was 14, they shared it with me. Fletcher's Floodwaters was a 10,000-acre impoundment on the Thunder Bay River, in the northeast corner of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. The shallow, stump-

strewn reservoir was the color of Hires root beer. The men had found it that summer on a fishing trip when they'd seen more ducks than they could count. There I shot my first one: a blue-winged teal.

Of course, it had to start somewhere with someone. If you're lucky, as I was, it began with your father who said, "You're a duck hunter now." He was right about that, and I've been one ever since.

I remember the last duck hunt with Dad too. It happened nearly 40 years ago on Lake Huron at Harbor Beach, Michigan. The world's largest freshwater harbor is a sanctuary for migrating waterfowl whenever storms wrack the big lake. That rough-weather day Dad and I were guests of my friend and his father, who had turned their family pontoon boat into a deadly floating blind. We four gunners took turns on our way to limits of scaup, goldeneyes and buffleheads that flocked to the decoys like barn pigeons to spilled grain.

"Best duck hunt I ever had," Dad said on the drive home. He was right about that too. ▶

Tom Hugller's *Grouse of North America* and *A Fall of Woodcock* won national acclaim and are now collectible. His *Quail Hunting in America* (Stackpole) is still in print. *A Fall of Woodcock* was reprinted recently by Skyhorse Publishing.



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