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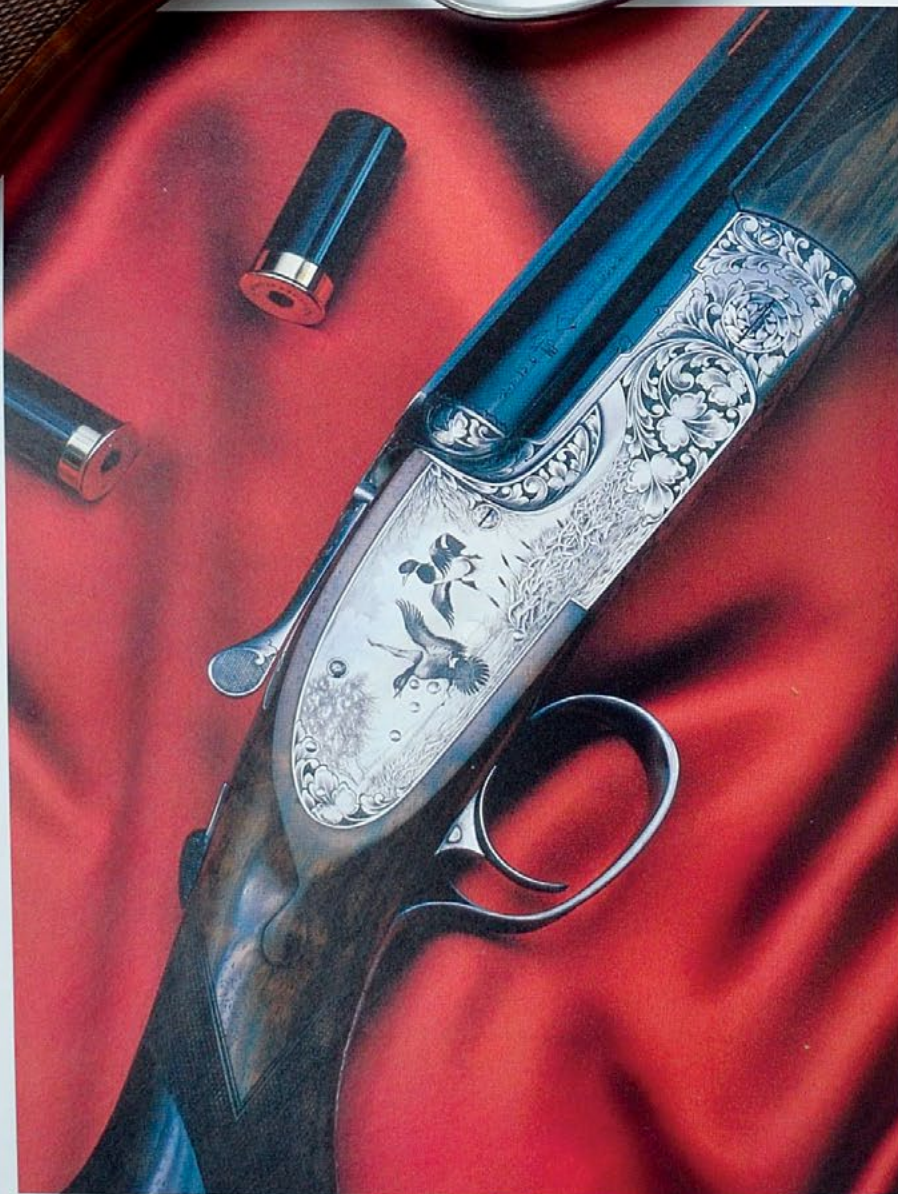


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Gun Test

Ellipse Evo

Richard Grozik, author of Game Gun (Country Sport Press, 1997 edition) identifies the important role the over/under has played in the evolution of the Game Gun. While many believe the "over-and-under" design can never duplicate the instinctive-shooting qualities inherent in the classic British Side-by-Side game gun, Guerini's Round Body gun seriously challenged that hypothesis during our field test.



Purdey 20-gauge over-under. Photo by William W. Headrick, courtesy of Lewis Drake & Associates.



Caesar Guerini's Elite Round Body Game Gun

by Ron Jones

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OVER-UNDER

DURING THE LATTER PART of the nineteenth century, when English gunmakers were seeking solutions to adapt shotgun form and function to "shoot" a wide variety of game birds, they experimented with configurations, stock designs, and actions. Through the thriving gun trade in London, they produced three-barrel and four-barrel guns with various lock and trigger arrangements.

As a side-by-side game gun, the most practical barrel arrangement was developed by gunmakers. The modern double gun was developed by French and English gunmakers. The new sport of shooting wild game was the obvious solution to the limitations of nineteenth century ignition systems which,

Ellipse Evo



Ron Keller helped me test the Caesar Guerini Ellipse Evo on the skeet field. We used Low Gun/Delayed Pull rules to see how the gun would respond in the field. It handled like an old friend. The Evo moved effortlessly during the gun mount and throughout the execution of the shot.

Caesar Guerini shotguns have only been with us for 13 years. In that short period of time, they have risen to the top in the world of field and competition shotguns with a degree of understated elegance most discriminating shooters find engaging. Others have reviewed their Round Body Game Gun

from the standpoint of design engineering. We'll give you the bird shooter's perspective.

Guerini lists a number of gun models on their website under a category titled Field Guns, suggesting guns in that category were designed as game guns as opposed to target guns. I previously

reported on one of these field guns, Guerini's 28 gauge Magnus Light, in an article titled: "The Diminutive 28s". So when Shaun Burkowski's e-mail arrived inviting me to test one of his Caesar Guerini Field Guns, I was pleasantly surprised to see their magnificent Ellipse Evo listed as one of the guns I could choose.



The Ellipse design is not included, along with Woodlander, Tempio, Magnus, Maxum, Apex & Forum models, in the category titled Field Guns. But a quick look at the product description explained why Ellipse guns enjoy a category all their own: “Fast as a grouse’s wing tip, sleek as a pheasant’s tail feather – The new Caesar Guerini Ellipse EVO represents the next generation of upland game gun.” Now in its fifth year of production, the Ellipse is a complete redesign of the frame, barrels and stock used on their standard over/under shotgun, setting it apart from other guns designed for the wingshooter.

The name suggests a meaningful evolution in design. To my mind, the Evo melds elliptical curves into a pattern, producing a pleasing and complimentary juncture of walnut and steel. You have to see and handle the gun to fully appreciate the symmetry. The Guerini design engineers have created a profile which can only be described as Regal. Others have developed gun models classified as “Round Body Actions”, but few have gone the extra mile required to turn the action body into an engraver’s utopia, while simultaneously enhancing the functionality of the gun.

The Guerini guns employ a time-tested lockup, frequently described as the basic Browning under-bolt. Mechanical reliability is time-tested and beyond question. In searching for a review which would encapsulate the thinking of shotgunners worldwide, I went to the United Kingdom’s *The Field*...a sportsman’s publication in existence since 1853. In an article titled: “The World’s 20 Best Shotguns”, *The Field* editors chose Side-Plated 687 Berettas and Caesar Guerini’s as the best choice of guns in their price range. And while the Ellipse Evo is not a side-plated gun, it’s easy to conclude the Ellipse guns would be the equal of the guns chosen by the editors of *The Field* in terms of performance and reliability, with a design I would argue is a cut above boxlock gun models with faux side-plates. In a review of Guerini Round Action guns by *The Field*’s Michael Yardley in the fall of 2010, he stated: “This gun offers elegance and functional efficiency. If we had such a category, it would be a Best Buy”. High praise, indeed, from the English.

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I could spend the next few paragraphs outlining the many innovative features of the Ellipse Evo, describing in detail the deluxe features previously available only on guns selling for ten times the asking price. But I’ll try to be brief and to the point...allowing me more space to comment on our experiences at the range and in the field. The minute you open the Negrini case, your eyes are instantly drawn to the deep, detailed foliate and tight scroll engraving by Giovanelli Creative Arts Studio, covering the entire round action, trigger guard, top lever, tang, forend iron and fences.

The Ellipse guns are amazingly similar in spirit to the profile and adornment of Round Action guns produced by world-renowned Scottish gunmaker David McKay Brown.

The Ellipse guns are amazingly similar in spirit to the profile and adornment of Round Action guns produced by world-renowned Scottish gunmaker David McKay Brown. Guns which most of us would only dare dream about in our most private moments. Photographs of the Guerini Round Body Game Gun are so compelling as to defy meaningful description by this author. What you see in the photographs is what you get. Attractive, highly figured, oil-finished wood, flawless 26-line borderless checkering, standard stock dimensions, a forend combined with a relaxed grip and tapered rib configuration which favors instinctive shooting, chrome-lined Monobloc barrels with precision choke tubes, and equally as important, a trigger release which will satisfy the most discriminating wingshooter. Add a lifetime warranty and

factory service, and you have the complete package.

Performance Analysis

I’m sure the Guerini Ellipse Evo would be equally suited for hunting any of our upland game birds across America. Grouse, woodcock, dove, quail, chukar and sharptail hunters would all enjoy their hunts with this delightful Round Body Game gun. But, my initial impression of the Guerini Ellipse Evo 20 gauge is it is well-suited for pheasants. The 6 lb., 8 oz. weight of my demo gun would be perfect for hunters dividing their hunting time between cropland drives, corn row blocking and end-of-the-day rough shooting with the dogs. Here in mid-Michigan, I spend most of my pheasant hunting days walking briskly behind my flushing retrievers. I want my gun to be an afterthought, as I focus on communicating with my retrievers and move into position for the shot. At a minimum, the gun you are carrying should not be a distraction.

But it’s one thing to project how a gun will handle in the field, yet another to experience it firsthand. So I headed to my favorite Michigan hunt club to see for myself how the Evo would respond when I was distracted from focusing on my gun-handling technique by the chaos which ensues when my Golden Retrievers encounter hot scent. How would the gun handle when the hunting pace escalates from a leisurely stroll down a farm lane to an intense chase through dense sorghum or corn in pursuit of a rooster intent on using his legs to put some distance between him and those pesky Golden Retrievers.

Young Jak was transitioning from a neophyte hunter to a full-fledged bird dog, and I wanted to make sure his efforts were rewarded. So I chose the Cylinder choke for the lower barrel of the Evo and the Improved Cylinder choke in the upper (second) barrel. I based my choke selection on the pattern performance covered later in this article. With 3", 1¼-ounce FIOCCHI Golden Pheasants (#6 plated shot) nestled in each chamber, we set out looking for roosters. We weren’t in the field 15 minutes when Jak hit bird scent. In the next 45 minutes, he located, flushed

Ellipse Evo

and retrieved three beautiful birds. Jak worked up the first bird in the sorghum. Circling around to the upwind side, he ran that rascally rooster back in my direction. The flush came directly at and over my head, corkscrewing me into a pretzel before I had time to do my “Stanbury two-step”. If there was ever a shotgun-mounting maneuver which would test the mettle of a gun's dynamics, that was it. But not to worry, I managed to get enough pellets in the bird at that short range to bring it down. And Jak did the rest.

The last two birds led us on a spirited chase through dense cover, and these birds fell 30-plus yards from the gun. Both birds were perfectly centered by the pattern delivered by the lower barrel, which proved dense enough to stop both roosters cold in mid-flight. And the best part of all — I have no memory of slipping off the safety when the birds took to the air, no recall of any gun-mounting issues as the birds exploded into flight and zero recollection of recoil. I was able to maintain total concentration on Jak's marking and retrieving performance. It was as if I had hunted with the gun for years.

In retrospect, I found the Evo very convenient to carry in the field. I generally follow my Goldens with the gun in a perpetual “gun ready” position, only occasionally shifting to an over-the-shoulder or crook-of-the-arm carry when game is not imminent and safety permits. The advertising is not hyperbole — the elliptical geometry of the action does indeed make the carry more comfortable. In short, the Evo carries like a lighter gun.

Pheasant Loads and Recoil in the 20-Gauge Guerini

The ability to withstand shotgun recoil varies widely among wingshooters, so I enter into a discussion of the topic with some misgivings. But it is worth noting, the Caesar Guerini line of 20-gauge field guns are of a compromise weight which makes the guns easier to carry afield than most 12-gauge guns, while possessing sufficient heft to dampen the recoil of loads designed to harvest larger birds at an acceptable range. Various formulas pro-



Young Jak put my gun-handling skills to the test during a spirited chase after two of these roosters. The third bird tried to turn me into a pretzel, as it flew right at and just over my head. If there are any design flaws in the Guerini Ellipse Evo, they didn't show up in our field test.

The last two birds
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duce slightly different values for the recoil produced in shotguns of varying weights, but the online calculator I chose for simplicity of operation produces realistic values.

In an effort to establish a range of relative recoil values which puts the Caesar Guerini 6 lb., 8 oz. bird guns in perspective, let's start by establishing the recoil produced by the standard 3¾ dram, 1¼ oz. pheasant load in a

7 lb., 12-bore gun. My calculator estimates 32 ft./lbs. of recoil for that combination. Many hunters have found that level of recoil acceptable over the decades. By comparison, 20-gauge Focchi Golden Pheasant 3" loads, sending 1¼ oz. of shot out of the muzzle at 1,200 f.p.s., produces an estimated 26 lbs. of recoil in the 6.5 lb. Ellipse Evo. As a 20-gauge baseline value, the standard 1 oz. 20-gauge field load shot at 1,200 f.p.s. produces 18 ft./lbs. of recoil in a 6.25 lb. gun. So the calculated recoil of our test gun is about halfway between the gentle shove of a 20-bore grouse gun and the spirited punch of a 12-gauge pheasant gun.

P.O.I. Analysis

During my pattern analysis, I also performed a static point-of-impact analysis. Both barrels shot essentially a 50/50 pattern with a small amount of rib showing above the breech. And the upper barrel centered the composite patterns horizontally. However, the center



Two of the birds were stopped cold in mid-flight by the Evo/Fiocchi Golden Pheasant combination. All aspects of shot execution took place automatically as the birds exploded from dense cover, allowing me to concentrate on monitoring and controlling Jak's marking and retrieving performance.

of the pattern for the lower barrel was approximately 2.5" right of center at the standard P.O.I. distance of 16 yards. I noticed the same tendency for the lower barrel to place patterns off center to the right on individual patterns shot for analysis, although it is difficult to evaluate P.O.I. on single patterns. Small pattern placement disparities between barrels are easily addressed by your Gun Stock Fitter.

Original Skeet with the Evo

Wingshooters who buy bird guns don't buy them to maximize their clay target scores, and I've known bird hunters who refused to shoot clays, professing the experience is detrimental to their performance in the field. I'm not one who subscribes to that theory, as I feel confident shooting clays increases my success in the field. But some clay target games are more useful than others. I believe the low gun/delayed target release rules of Vintage Skeet and Hunter's Clays serves the upland hunter best when testing the dynamics of a new

We take for granted the performance of choke tubes supplied with modern guns, but our confidence may not always be warranted.

gun or practicing for the upcoming bird season.

My initial test was on the skeet field next door, equipped with my voice-activated Clay Delay, set to international random 3-second delay. I had previously shot my favorite Beretta 687EL the day before, giving me the opportunity for a direct comparison. I am delighted to report I outshot my 25-year, 20-gauge companion on the

first try. Call it beginner's luck, the Guerini responded as though I had shot it for years. I did miss Low House 7, but I attribute that to an intentional attempt to correct for the off-center pattern placement I observed in the P.O.I. test described above, by intentionally missing 3-4" left. I did just that. Then, I repeated my option directly on the target, and it evaporated. So much for the tendency of the lower barrel of the Evo to shoot about 3" left at 20 yards. Maybe in my static P.O.I. analysis but not in a dynamic scenario.

Choke Efficiency

There are many fundamental properties of a shotgun that define the high-performance game gun, but few are more critical than pattern efficiency when shooting extends beyond 25 yards. If the choke(s) doesn't perform as expected, clays won't break consistently and game birds will be crippled. We take for granted the performance of choke tubes supplied with modern guns, but our confidence may not always be warranted. In the November 2015 issue of a gun journal most of us receive as a result of our allegiance to gun rights in America, two O/U shotguns were reviewed by the editors. One of the guns produced patterns at the low end of normal, and the other produced patterns I would consider well below acceptable standard.

My criteria for pattern performance is simple. I like to see a choke produce pattern averages within the range of the following criteria. I prefer skeet chokes which produce 40-yard patterns in the 35-45% range, Improved Cylinder chokes 45-55%, Modified chokes 55-65% and Full chokes 65-75% when being tested with high-quality lead target and field loads. Keep in mind, performance will vary with the ammunition and shot size being tested, but it is generally better to have chokes shoot patterns a little tighter than normal than to shoot pattern percentages significantly below industry standards for the choke being tested.

Evo Pattern Performance

I patterned the Cyl/Skeet (0.000), Improved Cylinder (0.009) and Modified (0.014) chokes provided by Guerini

Ellipse Evo

with the EVO, using a 7/8 oz. handload of #5 magnum shot (149/load), powered by classic Unique powder at 1,200 f.p.s. The Cyl/Skeet choke produced perfect Improved Cylinder patterns, and both the Improved Cylinder and Modified chokes produced perfect Modified patterns. For those who typically warm up before the upland bird season on the skeet field, it is worth noting #9 shot typically patterns one choke constriction more open than Magnum #5 shot. During our rounds of Vintage Skeet, the Evo behaved as though it was choked Skeet IN/Skeet OUT.

The Bottom Line

The MSRP for the Evo is \$6,275, but I found dealers online selling new guns for up to 15% below that price. Seems like a reasonable price for the value delivered. The gun is now available

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in 12, 20 and 28-gauge versions along with a 20/28 combo package (\$8,275). The manufacturer's specifications list the average weight as 6 lbs., 10 oz. for the 20 gauge, so a gun you purchase may weigh slightly more than the gun I tested. My gun had a manual return to "Safe". Guns are shipped *sans* barrel selector, but that option can be requested at no charge. Caesar Guerini wood is treated with a traditional oil finish. Not as durable as the plastic/varnish finish on some competitive guns, but the beauty of the Turkish Walnut is

best exhibited with a classic English wood treatment. Just keep in mind, you'll have to touch it up occasionally (finish-refurbishing kits available on gueriniusa.com). I agree with Michael Yardley's assessment of the gun: "This gun offers elegance and functional efficiency. If we (*The Field*) had such a category, it would be a Best Buy". **SS**

Ron Jones is a retired pharmacist of 49 years who confesses his first love after family and God are shotguns and hunting. His first shotgun experience was his grandfather's 1911 Ithaca Flues 20, and that experience nearly caused him to look for more pleasurable avocations. He admits to missing all 50 targets his father threw with their Remington hand trap, and the experience resulted in a headache which wouldn't quit. But his love for guns, particularly vintage scatterguns, has remained with him in the ensuing 60 years. Our heritage is important. Preserving and embracing the values and traditions which our forefathers have handed down will enrich the experiences of those who follow. In some small measure, Ron hopes to contribute to that body of knowledge the younger generation embraces.

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