



GUERINI

by Mark H. Taylor

*Photos courtesy of Caesar Guerini USA
(except where noted)*

Upon hearing I would be reviewing the Caesar Guerini Invictus I Sporting M-SPEC, I was quite pleased. The M-SPEC is one of the most ultra-competition-ready shotguns produced by Caesar Guerini, and I have been anxious to shoot one ever since its release in 2014.

The M-SPEC was the brainchild of Wes Lang and based on input by Olympic Gold Medalist and Caesar Guerini Pro-Staff shooter Richard Faulds. Designed specifically for competitors shooting Sporting Clays, FITASC and 5-Stand, the M-SPEC is a 12-gauge (only) over/under shotgun offered in either 32" or 34" barrels. The M-SPEC has fixed chokes to reduce weight at the muzzle and improve the overall handling characteristics.

The 34"-barreled M-SPEC arrived in a hard plastic case with CAESAR GUERINI inscribed on the top of the case. The case has four latches to fasten it, with the two outside latches being combination locks to keep it secure from unauthorized entry. The inside bottom is molded to hold the receiver in one area and the barrel (with forearm attached) in another area. The receiver and the barrel each have their own velvet sleeves to protect the wood and bluing from scratches. A half-dozen foam cut-outs allow the buyer to place them around the barrels and receiver for extra protection. There is also a small open area which can be used to store some cleaning supplies and/or miscellaneous items like blinders. Also, in the bottom section is a small foam strip which holds the wrench to adjust the trigger travel. The inside of the case has a velvet top

lid secured by two velcro straps. The top lid of the case opens to two storage compartments. The stock wrench tool was in one of the compartments, but there is still plenty of room for other essentials, such as gloves, ear plugs, cleaning cloths and shooting glasses in both compartments.

The M-SPEC assembles and disassembles like a traditional break-open shotgun. Just behind the top lever is the safety, which moves forward and backward. The barrel selector is integrated on top of the safety lever and moves sideways to select which barrel will fire first (when a single red dot is showing, the under/lower barrel will fire first and when two red dots are showing, the over/upper barrel will fire first). In order to move the barrel selector from one side to the other, the safety button has to be pulled back (where the letter 'S' is showing above the button). After the barrel selector is on the correct first-firing-barrel, the button can be pushed up into the firing position.

Inserting some snap caps, I tried the triggers. Using my Lyman mechanical trigger pull gauge, the bottom broke at a very crisp 3 pounds and the top barrel broke at a very crisp 3.25 pounds. The M-SPEC has an inertia trigger mechanism.

With the M-SPEC having fixed chokes, I next used my shotgun bore

micrometer to find out exactly how they measured. My micrometer showed the choke in both the top barrel and bottom barrel measured at .735. The bottom barrel's constriction measured .715, while the top barrel's constriction measured .710. With these constrictions, the M-SPEC I reviewed had fixed chokes of Modified and Improved Modified. This is an outstanding combination of chokes for some of the long-range FITASC targets and being able to get solid (confidence-building) hits on the close-range and medium-range presentations.

Since the M-SPEC is built on the Invictus platform, it is built to last beyond one million rounds and incorporates these seven significant modifications compared to other Caesar Guerini models: (1) the contact surface between the bolt and monobloc has been enlarged to reduce wear, increase strength and lessen the need to continually replace the locking bolt, (2) having Invictus Cams instead of hinge pins and trunnions allows the barrels to be moved back to eliminate an "off face" condition due to wear, (3) the DTS Action Control System allows the shooter to customize how stiff the action opens and closes, (4) a bushing has been added to the forend to reduce vibration, (5) the frame is wider, which

After testing the gun on a variety of presentations in sporting clays and 5-Stand, the author commented, "The pointability and swing feel of the M-SPEC is phenomenal." Photo courtesy of Mark H. Taylor



increases strength and reduces friction, (6) the Invictus Block enhances the durability of the action while increasing the locking surface area between the barrels and the action — and like the Invictus Cams, are easily replaceable to allow the system to be rebuilt like no other target gun can, and (7) the DPS trigger has been redesigned to make it more durable, more consistent and more precise.

The M-SPEC is the only Invictus model to have a deep blued finish on all metal surfaces. Subtle gold accents highlight both sides of the receiver and the bottom of the receiver. INVICTUS I is embossed on the bottom of the receiver, while the name CAESAR GUERINI is embossed on both sides. The highly grained wood is a beautiful Turkish Walnut which is hand-rubbed with oil.

The M-SPEC provided for my review was a right-handed model as it was cast-off and had a very nice (but not too bulky) palm swell on the right side of the stock. The stock on the M-SPEC came without an adjustable comb, but the dimensions appear to be optimal for a sporting model (i.e., the drop at comb and drop at heel are shallow enough to provide for a good low-mount approach while still allowing the beads to line up perfectly). However, a quick glance at the Caesar Guerini website shows this model can be ordered with an adjustable comb and in a left-hand configuration.

The stock has a black rubber recoil pad, which will work well when using a low-mount, and the length-of-pull measured 14.75". The wood-to-metal finish is exceptional all the way around. The forend style of the M-SPEC is a rounded forend, which is perfect for sporting as it is not too thin and not too bulky. The forend release uses the Anson push-rod release where the button at the end of the forend is pushed down to remove it.

When it was time to shoot some clay targets with the M-SPEC, I first headed out to Colorado Clays in Brighton, Colorado. Being somewhat short on time, I came up with a game plan in which I would shoot one round of trap to get a feeling as to the gun's point of impact (POI), then head to specific sporting clays stations on the course.

With one box of light 8s attached to my right hip, I shot all 25 trap targets from Post 3. Every few shots, I alternated from shooting the lower barrel to shooting the upper barrel. After about 10 shots from the 16-yard line, I was very much convinced the M-SPEC had a POI somewhere between 55/45 and 60/40 for both barrels. For the last 10 shots, I grabbed the microphone and strode back to the 27-yard line

(remaining on Post 3) and solidified the fact I had the POI dialed in. From there, it was on to the sporting clays course.

Colorado Clays, like many other sporting ranges, provides the shooting public with an outstanding variety of presentations. Some of these presentations could be considered easy while other presentations could be considered difficult. Therefore, with limited time, I strategized so I would encounter the most difficult stations.

My first stop was Station 12, which has a crossing target 50 yards downrange from the shooting cage. I grabbed a few boxes of AA Super Sport Sporting loads in 7½ and headed there first to see how the 34" barrels would be on a long-range target. Having shot this target before I knew the amount of lead needed, I chose to shoot this target with a pre-mounted gun and to shoot it with the lower (Modified choked) barrel first. I shot it four times, and each time the target broke solidly into multiple pieces. Switching to the top (Improved Modified choked) barrel, I again shot four times and the tighter choke produced significantly better "crushing" breaks.

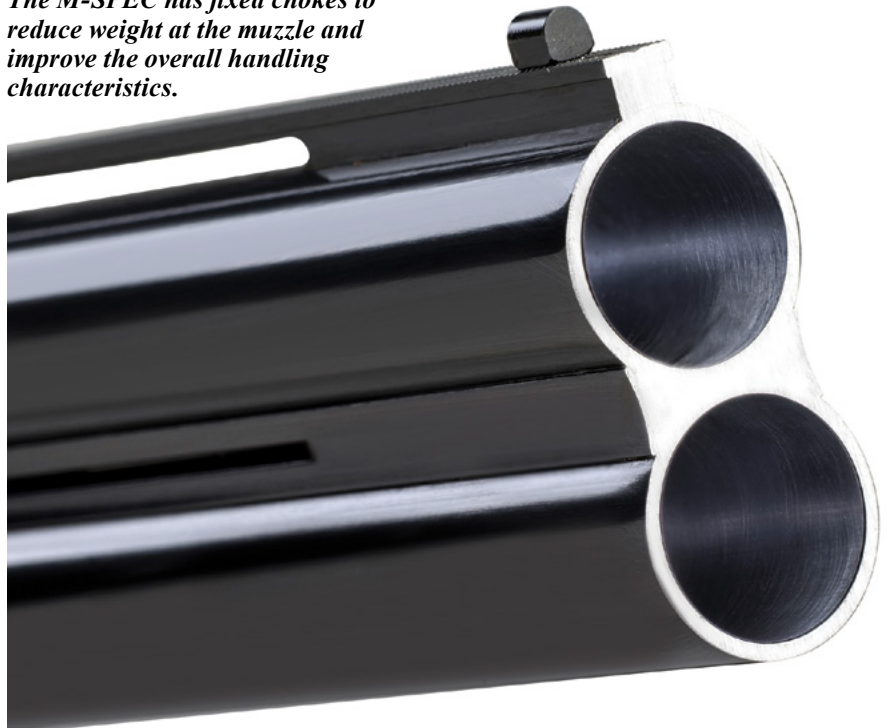
My next stop was Station 14 where a lift on the left side of the cage throws two dropping tower targets from left to right as a true pair. I will admit I cheated for the first two pairs and shot them as a report pair. I somewhat did this on purpose as I wanted to feel how the gun would swing when I went back for the second target. The pointability and swing feel of the

M-SPEC is phenomenal. The movement of the 34" barrels is so fluid it almost feels as if the gun is moving itself. I shot this with a low-gun mount so I could see the targets clearly, and it mounted just as smooth as it would swing. These targets are not fast nor are they far away, so the M-SPEC easily turned both targets to smoke.

The final three pairs I shot as a true pair presentation, shooting the trailing target first. Had I not shot before I got to the second target on the fourth pair, I would have hit them all. I then made my way to Station 7, which has two very high chandelle targets (one from left to right and one from right to left). These are shot as a report pair and I shot two pair — shooting the A target then the B target — before switching them up for the final two pair. Since I like to shoot chandelle targets as they peak, I opted for a low FITASC mount (since I had some time after I called). For the first pair, I shot the lower barrel first, and then on the second pair I shot the upper barrel first. I did that same pattern when I changed to shooting the B target first. I enjoy shooting chandelle targets, and this was evidenced as I left all eight targets in balls of smoke.

The smoothness and fluidity of mounting the M-SPEC was very evident using the FITASC low-gun starting position. The last station I visited was Station 2, which has a long incoming target that drops considerably at the end of its flight path. I shot this target

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six times all with the lower barrel, but each shot I changed how far I was under the target. I hit four of the six I shot at and concluded I needed to be one foot below. The part that stood out most to me was how well those 34" barrels came down with the target and how that long rib helped me track it along its lengthy flight path.

Since I had to drop off some reloading supplies to a friend at Golden Gun Club, I put the M-SPEC in the car and headed to the city of Watkins, Colorado. Golden Gun Club has an excellent 5-Stand, and I was looking forward to trying the M-SPEC on it.

The single target on Station 1 was a high, hard right-angle target (similar to a 90-degree, 3-meter right-hand bunker trap target) which started 35 yards away from the cage. Luckily it was a single target, as I had to use both shots to break it. The M-SPEC, with its 34" barrels, swung through

this extreme angle beautifully and felt extremely smooth.

Another challenging target on this 5-Stand is the rabbit target going quite fast from right to left. It required more lead than I initially thought, and I found myself hitting the back half of the target when I had success. And, similar to the high hard right-angle target, the swing characteristics of the M-SPEC was what allowed me to hit the rabbit at all. I ended up shooting two rounds of 5-Stand with the M-SPEC (using the AA Super Sport Sporting loads in 7½) and hit a 24 on each round. The one target I missed on both rounds was that dreaded rabbit (it hit a piece of debris on the ground and took a funny bounce).

The M-SPEC, with an MSRP listed as \$8,320, performed as well as I hoped it would. Beyond all the advantages the Invictus line of shotguns provides mechanically, the pointability and swing characteristics of the M-SPEC are remarkable. In Don Currie's book *Gunfitting*, he defines "pointability" as the proper interaction of: (1) the overall weight, (2) the balance point, and (3) the moment of inertia — this gun fits this definition spot-on. I would strongly suggest all serious sporting shooters take the M-SPEC for a test drive on some challenging targets and see for yourself just how good this gun is. **SS**

Mark H. Taylor has over 40 years of shooting experience. He has won many regional, state, national and international clay target competitions. He is the author of the book *Clay Target Shooting – The Mental Game* and co-author of the book *Break 'em All*. Mark is a NRA Certified Advanced International Shotgun Coach and a High-Performance Shotgun Coach for USA Shooting. He is a Caesar Guerini and Cabela's (in Thornton, CO) Pro Staff shooter, and teaches monthly beginner shotgun clinics at Colorado Clays in Brighton, CO, and travels nationally and internationally teaching coaching courses and working with world-class athletes. You can email him at coloradotaylor@gmail.com.

The Invictus I

Sporting M-SPEC

displays a deep blued finish

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