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Benelli’s long-anticipated Vinci is now officially “out of the box.” And the initial results are impressive. By Payton Miller

I don’t know if the term “hot gun” wingshooting originated in the dove fields around Cordoba, Argentina, but if it didn’t, it should have. For the sheer experience of being covered up with birds, the only thing I’ve seen that comes close is sandgrouse shooting around waterholes in Africa. The difference is that when sandgrouse stop coming in—generally after 30 or 40 mad minutes—things shut off as if someone had turned off a faucet. Around Cordoba, “slowing down” by local standards only means that you can put the gun down for a few seconds. If you want to...
The first time I shot dove in Argentina was nearly 10 years ago. We were using 20-gauge Benelli Montefeltros and M1s. In the days before the company introduced ComforTech stocks, the cumulative pounding from a 20 was significant. I was flat-out sore at the end of each and every day. To use anything larger would have been unthinkable. So when I was invited back by Benelli last March and told I was going to use a 12-gauge this time, I thought it was a cruel joke.

It wasn’t.

Upon arriving at Pica Zuro Lodge, about a 90-minute drive north of Cordoba, assorted editors and gunwriters were finally shown what Benelli’s rather intriguing “what’s in the box” teaser ad campaign for the as-yet-unveiled Vinci had been hinting at since the January SHOT Show in Orlando, Florida—not a cosmetically tattled-up M1, Montefeltro or Super Black Eagle, but a brand-new platform. One that designers Marco Vignaroli and Maurizio Broccossola had been laboring on for the past three years in a cloak of secrecy that would put the CIA to shame.

When Marco first popped open the Vinci’s sculpted case and withdrew the three modular pieces that make up the gun—barrel/receiver, trigger group/forearm and buttstock—it was a bit of a shock.

It would be an oversimplification to say that the Vinci incorporates everything Benelli has learned about inertia-driven autoloaders. Engineers have significantly tweaked—and simplified—existing features. The Vinci operates on what the company calls an “In-Line Inertia Driven” action, which has been shortened and has fewer moving parts. The entire operating system is contained in the receiver. The barrel/receiver assembly is a simple tube (the modified Inertia-Driven action is indeed “in-line”). Assembled, the Vinci bears a resemblance to the company’s R1 rifle—not pretty in the conventional sense of what a lot of guys would expect in a shotgun, but everything about it has a reason. You just have to shoot the hell out of it to appreciate it.

Benelli claims reduced recoil and muzzle jump and has the charts to show it, with which I’m inclined to agree. Muzzle jump is minimal; return-to-target time is fast enough that double and even triples are easier to make (not to mention hitting a bird that you missed on the first shot which, I more than most shooters present, came to appreciate).

The trigger group/forearm assembly is something different to be sure. There’s no screw cap at the end of the magazine tube in the conventional sense. The cap (which stays on) twists to lock the trigger group/forearm assembly to the barrel/receiver. There’s a button beneath the forearm you depress, then twist the cap to remove the forearm assembly. The entire magazine can be pulled out and replaced with another (of a higher or lower capacity) if desired. This feature is going to be even more significant when tactical or sporting clay variants of the Vinci appear (which is pretty much of a lead-pipe cinch).

There are several less obvious tweaks to the Vinci that I also appreciated. First off, the safety is located in a scalloped-out indentation at the front of the triggerguard. Once you get used to it (which took me awhile), you’ll appreciate that accessing it with your
Hearts of the matter: Benelli’s shortened, simplified In-Line Inertia-Driven bolt is easily disassembled for maintenance (right).

trigger finger is a more intuitive—and far quicker—motion that disengaging your whole hand from the pistol grip to reach a crossbolt safety at the rear of the trigger-guard. Whether or not this was a tip of the hat to John M. Browning (up until 1951, his legendary A5 auto featured a forward safety) or just a concession that “up front” is better, I don’t know. But it is appreciated.

In an ideal world, “fast” would mean how quickly you can hit things. And in this respect the Vinci earns the admittedly nebulous description of “fast.” Any auto (and most pumps) will cycle faster than would be necessary for any conceivable field situation. How little the barrel jumps and how well (and painlessly) recoil is distributed, far more important to actually addressing the problem of hitting a secondary target when the window of opportunity is a narrow and fleeting one.

What we were shooting were eared dove, which resemble mourning dove and are about the same size. Within a 100-square-mile radius of Pica Zuro, there are an estimated 40,000, 000 of them. The birds around Cordoba do not migrate; they’re there year-round. There is no season, no bag limit. They are considered an agricultural pest. At the end of each day’s shoot, they are picked up by Pica Zuro’s well-organized crew and donated to local charities, churches and public dining rooms. And yes, the shells get picked up, too.

As I shot (and shot, and shot) the Vinci, I became aware of certain things that you’d only notice in high-volume shooting. First, the fact that it’s a 12 has a major advantage—namely, it alleviates the Argentinian curse of “loader’s thumb.” Stuffing a 20 again and again, in my experience, necessitates tapping, for the simple reason that the smaller port offers enhanced opportunities for tormenting your thumb. I did, however, use a small strip of tape across the top of my thumb and experienced no discomfort over two days’ shooting. If I’d have been using a 20, things would have been different.

Several of the guys from Benelli USA — Jason Evans, Steve Okvay, Steve McKelvain, Joe Coogan and Joe Troiani — had been shooting for a couple of days prior to the arrival of the writer/editor types—an intimidatingly talented group that included Outdoor Life’s Todd Smith, Shooting Times’

Pressing the button on the forearm and twisting the magazine cap will remove the trigger group/forearm assembly. The entire magazine can then be removed.

The Vinci’s loading port has been beveled. The bolt lock lever in front of the trigger-guard indicates—tactically and visually—that the gun is ready to fire.

Layne Simpson, Turkey Calls J. Wayne Fears, American Hunter’s Kyle Wintersteen and Sporting Clays Magazine’s Nick Sisley.

Throughout the shoot I did not use a strap-on PAST recoil pad (although I swear by them for benchresting obnoxious rifles), although, to be honest, I didn’t approach the sheer shooting volume of some of the other attendees (Benelli’s Joe Troiani easily took the Iron Man title in that regard). I also loaded my own gun (as did Joe), which slowed me down somewhat.

Naturally, one of the most saleable characteristics of the Vinci revolves around the ultimate autoloading shotgun dilemma—namely, how to reduce gun weight and recoil at the same time. Everybody likes a light gun. Unfortunately, nobody likes a lightweight gun with heavy recoil. Since Benelli’s reputation hinges on high-volume shooting, the Vinci’s designers realized, obviously, that elevating the comfort level of an inertia-operated 6.9-pound 12 gauge would require some tweaking in that regard. After all, when you can’t rely on gas bleed-off—or raw weight—to soften things, you’re going to be looking hard—and creatively—at ergonomics. What the company did was to enhance the
The pistol grip of the ComforTech Plus stock has been designed to facilitate a straight-line trigger pull. The efficient buttplate spreads recoil over a larger shoulder area.

Kick-absorbing qualities of the ComforTech stock system—Benelli’s flexible brainchild that depends on recoil-absorbing chevrons. What the engineers came up with was the ComforTech-Plus, a system that, along with the horizontal V-shaped chevrons, also employs a high, cheekbone-friendly gel insert to complement the pad. Both these items now work in concert with a hard stock shell that flexes as well.

I’m no engineer by any means, but the system works. At the end of a day, I could hoist a glass of local wine without wining. And, more important, it’s forgiving of hurried. Under the Ampic and God Knows Where mounts in the field. And with Argentinian dove shooting, it’s a pretty safe bet that a lot of your gun mounts would give an English shooting instructor fits.

In fact, the only discomfort I can recall was a bit of tiredness in my upper arms from hoisting the 6.9-pound Vinci to my shoulder continually. But to be sure, the Vinci is a real featherweight. Benelli’s 28-inch-barreled Cordoba, scarcely a club itself, weighs in at 7.2 pounds. I remember somebody’s crack to the effect that if the Vinci weighed a pound more, that difference would have amounted to lifting an extra ton or two over the course of the hunt. I found the Vinci to be light and lively, but more important, it fit me. Not having to fight my head down on the comb, I was able to shoot without thinking about what I was doing, which, for me, is a good thing. Long ago I discovered that if I have to think about what I’m doing, I’ve already missed.

The ammo we were shooting was a mix of Federal, Fiocchi and R&D (a local Argentinian brand). Mostly, the shot size was 7½. In six days, 10 Vincis pounded through 89,000 rounds. There were no malfunctions that I saw, save for a few duds and what not with the local R&D ammo. Choke-wise, I—along with everyone else I saw—stayed with

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The Vinci’s minimal (6.9 pound) weight was much appreciated by shotgun authority Nick Sisley, who found himself hefting it several thousand times.
the Improved Cylinder choke tube. And I saw shots consistently made at long yardage, so maybe this “long shot, tight choke” fixation is way past its shelf life. Or maybe there is something to Benelli’s Crio treatment of barrels and choke tubes after all.

Some guys are going to be wishing for a 3½-inch version of this one. Not me. The company’s already got a pretty good platform for those mega-twelves with the Super Black Eagle II. And even if you're a fanatic turkey/goose hunter, I'll never be convinced that there's enough advantage in 3½ to make up for the kick-and-cost factor anyway. Will the Vinci be the platform for the future of Benelli? It's a safe bet that there will be offshoots from it. A ported clays model (if in the Cordoba), a tactical variant and a rifle-caliber slug version could be only the beginning.

What the Vinci represents, however, is a bit more elemental: a simplification and modularization (if that isn't a technical term yet, it probably should be) of what, up to now, has been the preeminent high-volume system extant. And, although the term “user-friendly” has been pounded into the ground in this computer age, it pretty much describes the Vinci. What else would you call a gun that, in the words of Layne Simpson, “carries like a .410, shoulders like a 20 and shoots like a 12”?

If you’re an average American shotgunner who bangs out six or eight boxes of shells a year on dove, duck, quail and maybe a turkey or two (plus a couple of boxes at the local skeet, trap or clays range for pre-hunt tuneups), you’ll be fine with any pump, gas-operated gun or O/U you’ve been using. True, a lot of shooters have a tough time getting their head around an autoloader that’s in the same price bracket as many entry-level O/Us. But make no mistake: The hoary contention of many shotgunners that Benelli inertia guns kick more than gas guns is a dead issue.

If you like to shoot a lot—and if painstaking cleaning procedures involving toothbrushes and anti-carbon elixirs aren’t your thing—you ought to check out the Vinci. It’s an easy-handling, light-kicking, dead-reliable workhorse.

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