Radical in its appearance and in its modular design, the new Benelli Vinci proved itself as a bird-busting smoothbore on a couple of Workman’s early fall grouse hunts.

Boasting a truly modular design, this slick semi-auto is durable, reliable and versatile.

By Dave Workman
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omewhat dramatically introduced—one might even say over-dramatically—and with a profile that takes some getting used to, the Vinci semiautomatic shotgun from Benelli is something of a surprise package, right out of the unusual carrying case.

Designed in three sections, which include the buttstock, barrel and upper receiver, and lower receiver that encompasses the trigger group and tubular magazine, the Vinci assembles unlike anything that came before it. While this package raises eyebrows, once it is all together, it rocks.

Available in camo or basic black with a choice of 26- or 28-inch vent rib barrels, the Vinci may be one of those firearms that people either love or hate at first sight. But don't let first impressions scare you away. Get to know this baby and put a few birds in the bag, pack it up a steep ridge or through some heavy timber, and soon enough the Vinci will find a nice warm place next to your heart.

First announced at the 2009 SHOT Show, nobody actually saw the gun but only the oddball carrying case that looks like a section of fence post from a distance. It was in a glass case guarded by two guys in dark glasses and suits.

When the National Rifle Association gathered for its 2009 convention in Phoenix, the finished product was there for all to see. Now, anybody can put together a new firearm that seems to be somewhat different, with some cosmetics that catch the eye. The real test is not visual but practical, so with the encouragement of GUN WORLD Editor Jan Libourel, I got my sweaty mitts on a new Vinci wearing a Realtree HD APG camo finish and a 26-inch vent-rib barrel. It is also offered in Advantage MAX-4 HD and basic black.

I selected that barrel length— it's also available with a 28-inch tube— because my intent was to tramp the high ridges of the east-central Washington Cascades in pursuit of my favorite game bird, the blue grouse. To my delight, this scattergun is no heavyweight, and that becomes incredibly important when one is crawling over logs, busting through tangles of vine

The author caused this big Cascade Mountains blue grouse to tumble to a load of Federal No. 6s out of the Vinci. He hiked up some rough terrain to put this fool hen in the bag.
The Vinci comes in this square carrying case that takes people by surprise because of its compact appearance, but it opens up to reveal two compartments, one for the buttstock and lower receiver-magazine tube and the other for the barrel and upper receiver with the bolt.

maple and alder, tramping across older clear-cut and hiking up steep trails. Hitting the scale at less than 7 pounds, my test model (SN GC001878—and more about that in a moment) felt as though it weighed considerably less, even fully stoked with 2 3/4-inch shotshells.

Everything about the Vinci is different from a traditional design, yet the shotgun operates like a semi-auto should operate: fast, reliable and with no hang-ups. Credit for that may be largely due to Benelli’s new inertia system. Like other Benelli models, this system uses recoil energy rather than gas to cycle the action, so there is no worry about clogged gas ports. This design allows for a straight-line bolt return, which is not only fast but also appears to reduce muzzle climb during recoil, which comes in handy if a hunter needs to get back on target and fire a second shot.

The first thing one must overcome is the assembly. It is not difficult and after the first couple of times one does it (the Vinci must be disassembled to store in its factory case), you could probably do it with your eyes closed. However, this isn’t your granddaddy’s shotgun!

Remove all three components from the synthetic carrying case. First, attach the barrel and upper receiver section, which contains the bolt (and bears the serial number), to the polymer QuadraFit buttstock.
Assembly begins by turning the buttstock to lock up with the upper receiver and barrel, and the connection is very tight, with the rear of the bolt exposed.

Once the barrel and buttstock are together, the next step is to slide on the lower receiver with the trigger group and magazine tube.

This is a steel-to-steel hookup that requires a little muscle but a simple twist and click for a firm attachment. Line up a couple of marks and twist in a clockwise motion about 45 degrees, and the stock and receiver lock up tight.

Next, attach the trigger group and forearm, which includes the magazine tube and carries another serial number, but this number does not comply with U.S. firearm laws and federal regulations. It is also confusing as heck because the numbers don’t match. The number on my lower unit was BG001879, and the discrepancy is kind of an annoying peeve of mine.

The numbers notwithstanding, attaching this lower unit requires a bit of pressing and a twist of the magazine tube cap to lock everything together. Once it is assembled, the Vinci becomes a game bird’s worst nightmare, and a quick friend to its new owner.

Let’s be right up front about something, and I don’t expect my longtime pal Steve Otway, Benelli’s American head honcho, to disagree. The profile of this gun takes a bit of getting used to, and since beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the image that really counts is you with your first bag of birds.

For the record, I have never fired a Benelli semi-auto shotgun that didn’t work first, last and always. I’ve been thumped pretty good by the recoil of full-house 3 1/2-inch magnums in a Benelli Super Black Eagle, and had a bit of trouble once clearing the chamber of a Benelli Montefeltro for a quick reload (that was my fault, as I’d never done it before), but I cannot honestly recall a malfunction in any Benelli I’ve ever used, and that is a sterling performance record.

Rotate the magazine tube cap until it locks the whole assembly in place.

The Vinci is designed with Benelli’s new inertia recoil system that is efficient and reliable.
Workman found the front fiber-optic sight to be a winner on grouse, which are a dark bird often flushed in darker cover.

The lower section features a ribbed fore-end that fully encloses the magazine tube.

Before hunted. I made four trips up there and encountered birds every time. Some of them even went home with me for dinner.

Loading up with Federal No. 6s, I worked through a huge clear-cut that had been logged some years before and was now growing thick with huckleberries and small fir and pine trees. Even as I was driving down a fairly steep logging road I spotted several of these big fool hens launching off the high side banks ahead of me, gliding over the road grade and down across canyons to sweep up and land a few hundred yards away.

The trick to hunting these big blues in such environments if you are driving the roads is to watch where the buggers come to ground, roll to a stop in your vehicle, climb out and load up as quietly as possible and work your way to the spot. It never ceases to amaze me how monumentally stupid some blue grouse are. They land and often stay put, as if whatever it is that spooked them will not take the effort of pursuit. I have filled my plate more than once with such cooperative fowl, and plan to keep it up.

If one simply works the clear-cut ridges away from the roads, it is essential to remain keen-eyed because they will show up in a variety of cover, from brush tangles and huckleberry thickets to conifer stands.

Now along comes the Vinci, and once again, the Benelli record is spotless. Once the shotgun was assembled, I grabbed my hunting vest, a bunch of extra 12-gauge shells and headed to the “High Lonesome” of Washington’s western Kittitas County. In the fall of 2009, I stumbled upon a real honey hole of blue grouse in an area of a favorite ridge that runs for about 4 miles east to west that I had never
Shells are quickly elevated into proper position for insertion into the chamber as the action closes. The synthetic follower is orange, allowing quick visible confirmation that magazine tube is empty.

Spot them and move in slowly. Sometimes they will flush, and other times they will stand almost dead still until you forcibly push them skyward. (I have in the past been able to headshoot the dumb ones with a .22 rifle or pistol but that doesn’t work too well when one stumbles on a group of these birds because invariably one or two get nervous and then there is an explosion of feathers, and only a shotgun will suffice.)

Happy to report that the Vinci seems well designed for this kind of endeavor. Shells go in smoothly and one can chamber rounds through the ejection port. Allow that bolt to slide forward and go to work.

On my first tramp through the brush, I could hear birds explode out of view ahead of me, so I got back to the truck, rolled down the grade about a half-mile and found more blues in a huge older clearcut. This time they cooperated. Climbing up a steep bank from a muddy logging road is no small task, and it gets more difficult with a shotgun in hand. As noted earlier, though, the Vinci doesn’t weigh one down, and I owe that to the use of polymers in the major components.

Another advantage of polymer components over traditional wood, at least for this kind of hunting, is that the synthetic material does not scratch or nick. This is rough country, and it is roughest on fine wood stocks.

It took some hiking, but I
The lower section houses the trigger group.

The buttstock twists into the rear of the upper receiver, and this lockup is solid.

The shotgun comes with three adjustment rings that allow a shooter to adjust the drop at comb and heel.

The buttstock features a moulded ring to attach a sling swivel, a sling being a potentially useful accessory for waterfowl and turkey hunters.

approached one bird from the blind side of a big bush, and when I came around the corner, it suddenly occurred to this feathered knucklehead that he had company. It occurred to him about 10 seconds too late. Oh, that Vinci is a straight shooter, and it is fast!

I have become accustomed to top tang safeties as I hunt birds primarily with double-barrel shotguns. The Vinci’s crossbolt safety is located on the front of the trigger guard, just within reach of the index finger.

Shotgunners ought to warm up to the Vinci for several reasons, not the least of which is its 14 3/8-inch length of pull, which seems to fit just about everyone comfortably. Of course, it comes with a three-piece shim kit to adjust the drop, which is 2 inches at the heel and 1 3/8 inch at the comb with just the stock installed. The Vinci has a beveled magazine loading port that allows for speedy shell insertion, and they seem to glide right into the tube.

Five choke tubes come with the Vinci, ranging from Full to Cylinder, and they fit flush to the muzzle when properly inserted. The Full and Improved Modified choke tubes are marked “No Steel Shot” while the Modified, Improved Cylinder and Cylinder tubes are marked “Steel Shot OK.” A choke wrench is supplied with the tube kit, which fits into a padded plastic case.

For my shooting, I used the Modified choke with lead, and it seemed to perform just fine. The birds did not complain; when the shooting was finished, they were in no condition to do so.

For wild turkeys, ducks and geese, chukar, and other game, the Vinci would undoubtedly meet the challenge. This is a shotgun that combines proven technology with state-of-the-art innovations and materials. Pretty hard to beat a package like that; game birds certainly cannot. GW