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

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 sand grouse shooting around water holes in Africa. The difference is that when sand grouse 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 M.I.s. In the days before the company introduced ComfortTech stocks, the cumulative pounding from a 20 was significant. I was fine, but not at the end of each and every day. To use anything larger would have been unkind. 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 authorizing intriguing “what’s in the box” teaser ad campaign for the newly unveiled Vinci had been intimating since the January SHOT Show in Orlando, Florida—not a cosmically tailored M.I., Montefeltro or Super Black Eagle, but a brand-new platform. One that design engineers Mario Viganioli and Maurizio Boccaccio had been laboring on for the past three years in a chalk of secrecy that would put the CIA to shame.

When Mauro first popped open the Vinci’s sculpted case and withdrew the three modularity 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 R.I. rifle—not pretty in the conventional sense of what most shooters present, came to appreciate.

That the group/forearm assembly is something different is to be sure. There is 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 sport clay variants of the Vinci appear (which is pretty much a dead pipe cinch).

There are several less obvious tweaks to the Vinci that I also appreciated. First, the trigger—yes, the trigger!—is not a Lyman. It’s a production Battenfeld trigger. Second, there’s a safety at the rear of the trigger guard. Once you get used to it (which took me awhile, you’ll appreciate that accessing it with your trigger finger is a more intuitive—and far quicker—mention 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. A.

By Payton Miller

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HOT GUN
Pica Zuro

Pica Zuro Lodge, located in the heart of Central Argentina, is but one of several hunting (and fishing) lodges operated by David Denyes Wingshooting (www.daviddenyes.com). It’s located 50 miles north of the Cordoba City International Airport. It’s an elegant 19th century house that was totally renovated about eight years ago, and it features verandas overlooking gardens, vineyards and orchards.

The crew of guides (one is assigned to each shooter) runs with clockwork (but good-humored) precision under the direction of Horacio Dartiguelongue, Pica Zuro’s manager. The daily schedule usually starts with breakfast at 8 a.m., followed by a drive to whatever shooting area has been selected by the lodge’s scouting team. These areas are generally on farms and have the essential elements for successful dove hunting: feed, water and roosting areas. Lunch is served on a dining table in the field, generally in a shady grove. Shooting continues until near dark, upon which you head back to the lodge for cocktails and an early dinner.

The food, incidentally, is outstanding. Breakfast includes anything from eggs Benedict to French toast to several types of omelets. Lunch means grilled beef, pork, sausage and dove. There are also local cheeses and several types of salad or vegetable dishes. Dinner can include things like rabbit over grilled polenta and bitter orange sauce or slow-cooked baby goat. Needless to say, the wines and desserts should convince you that you are by no means "roughing it." Brown (ap until are the highly revered of the finest dove shooting on the planet. Photo: Marcos Parer)

Blind’s eye view: Without a doubt, the Cordoba region offers the finest dove shooting on the planet. Photo: Marcos Parer

Station B, anyone? Outdoor writer J. Wayne Fears reaches for some "tail birds." 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-lb 4-ounce 12 gauge would require some tweaking in that regard. After all, when you can’t rely on gas bleed-off—or

Heart of the matter: Benelli’s shortened, simplified In-Line Inertia-Driven bolt is easily disassembled for maintenance (top).

The Vinci’s repositioned and redesigned bolt release is unobtrusive, yet easily accessible. The overall silhouette of the receiver is similar to that of Benelli’s RI rifles.

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

The safety has been moved to the front of the triggerguard. Once you’re used to it, it’s a lot easier to reach and disengage with your trigger finger.
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.

raw weight—to soften things, you’re going to be looking hard—and creatively—at ergonomics. What the company did was to enhance the 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 wincing. And, more important, it’s forgiving of hurried Under the Ampit 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 7¼. 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 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
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.

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-loading factor anyway. Will the Vinci be the platform of the future for Benelli? It’s a safe bet that there will be offerings from the A ported clays model (à la the Cordoba), a tactical variant and a tumbled-billet 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 prominent 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 and shoots like a 12”?

If you’re an average American shotgunner who buys 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 OU 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 OUs. But make no mistake: The hasty conversion 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-corrosion cables 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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