Shotgunning by Layne Simpson

THE BENELLI VINCI
A MOST WONDERFUL NEW SHOTGUN.

Thousands of rounds, no cleaning and no malfunctions—now that is worth more than just a casual look.

The officials of any company who would dare introduce a spanking-new and unproven shotgun to a group of writers in the dove fields of Argentina not only have plenty of nerve, they also have loads of confidence in the gun. That's exactly how Benelli chose to unveil the Vinci. The final design had already proven itself under tightly controlled conditions where it sailed through thousands of test rounds with zero parts breakage. However, while that's important, the true test would come not from firing the gun in a test fixture but from having it wrung out under dusty and dirty field conditions by a group of shooters, each of whom handles, holds and treats a shotgun slightly differently during firing. And wring out the gun we did.

I averaged shooting the Vinci six hours per day on three consecutive days, and at the end of it all my fired-shell count was 6,375 rounds. Our group consisted of six writers and seven guys from Benelli, several of whom arrived early and shot for five days. Our grand total for the week was 87,950 rounds.

How many guns did we break? As far as I know, not a single one. Malfunctions? I cannot speak for the others, but I experienced only two. Contrary to what is customary on Argentine dove shoots, our guns were purposely not cleaned or lubricated at the end of each day in order to subject them to the worst possible conditions. On top of that it was windy, so dust managed to find its way into every crack and crevice. A real torture test, you might say. On the second day I had a couple of failures to extract, so from that point on I applied a drop of oil to the locking lugs of the rotating bolt head and another drop inside the locking lug recesses of the barrel after each 50 boxes of shells. That was all the loving care my gun ever received, and the sailing was smooth from there on out.

Someday the Vinci will likely be offered in 20 gauge, but for now it is available only in 12 gauge. I've shot Argentina many times, most often with a 20-gauge gun, sometimes with the 28 gauge and .410, but never before with a 12. When several weeks before the hunt I was told we would be shooting a 12-gauge gun, a black-and-blue shoulder accompanied by daily shooter's headaches immediately came to mind. Truth be told, I was not exactly looking forward to the trip with great excitement, and that's saying a lot since I absolutely love Argentina. Before we headed south, they tried to ease my concern by describing the new shotgun as the softest-shooting 12-gauge autoloader I had ever shot. I'd heard that before and immediately stored the information away in my mental "hype" file. After all, a 12 is a 12, right?

Wrong. As I discovered with great joy, the Vinci may look like a 12 but it kicks like a 20. While shooting doves, I wore the same thin PAST recoil pad that I always wear in Argentina, and while it is effective, it will not always prevent a bruise to the shoulder if enough rounds are fired, even when shooting a 20-gauge gas gun. After three solid days of shooting, the outer edge of the strap-on pad had left a small abrasion on my shoulder, but I suffered no blistering or soreness whatsoever. My cheek had become a bit tender, but not once did I suffer from shooter's headache. I've been shooting shotguns for so long it takes something far beyond the ordinary to excite me, and you can believe me when I say I had to occasionally pinch myself to make sure I was actually shooting the Vinci rather than just dreaming about it.

Benelli autoloaders are recoil operated, and to be quite honest, when shooting them in the past I had not found them to be as comfortable to shoot as some of my gas-operated guns. The Vinci is also operated by recoil (or Inertia-Driven, as Benelli describes it), but when the new inline inertia bolt system is combined with a ComforTech Plus synthetic stock with the front and rear sections connected by 12 shock-absorbing rubber chevrons, the rule book is rewritten. Benelli engineers have proven the impossible to be possible—a light, recoil-operated shotgun can actually be softer-shooting than a heavier gas-operated autoloader.

Whereas most of the shotguns introduced during the past half-century are nothing more than 1980s technology with a slightly different twist, the Vinci is a totally new design. For starters, most autoloading shotguns—including both recoil- and gas-operated guns—have their recoil springs located either around the magazine tube in the forearm or in the...
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