



By Gary Girvan

Caesar Guerini Maxum 20 gauge

Although it is a relatively new name in shotgun manufacturing, the over-and-under shotguns manufactured by the Italian firm, Caesar Guerini, have achieved high popularity and critical acclaim overseas, particularly in the United States and Great Britain.

In 2003, the first year of the brand's introduction to the USA, two of the biggest American hunting magazines, *Outdoor Life* and *Field and Stream*, each awarded different models of Caesar Guerini shotguns their Best Shotgun of the Year award. Not a bad achievement for a new boy on the block and Guerini continue to pick up awards from the USA.

The greatest accolade, I think, has come from England. When William Evans, the prestigious London manufacturer of "Best English" guns recently decided to introduce a new line of "affordable" under-and-over's, they chose Guerini to manufacture the gun but with the stock and the final engraving to be finished in London. This is a remarkable tribute to the quality of the design and manufacture of the Guerini shotguns. William Evans' new model, the St James, will retail at around UK £9,500 – in excess of NZ \$28,000. It's not quite what most of us would consider to be "affordable", but it does make the top-of-the-line Guerini, the *Forum*, with its hand-engraved sideplates and select Circassian walnut stock seem something of a bargain at a mere \$13,495.

Guerini over-and-unders are offered in two distinct styles: competition and field models. (We reviewed one of the competition models, the *Magnus*, in our May/June 2006 issue.) Within each style there is a large range of different models. The



Top shooting does not just 'happen'. Here Mark and his keeper Pete reflect on the day and discuss ways of fine tuning the shooting opportunities. Below: Superb deep relief engraving in the Gothic scroll style.



TESTFIRE

base model, the *Tempio*, is an attractive boxlock with game scene engraving. As you move up the grades, the guns feature side plates with increasingly ornate styles of engraving and with higher grades of Turkish walnut. When we had the opportunity to field test a hunting model, we selected the second-highest grade, the *Maxum*, as the subject of our review and we opted for a version in 20 gauge.

Retailing at \$7,549.00, this will strike many as being an expensive gun, but when you compare it with side-plated, factory-engraved shotguns of comparable quality from other manufacturers, the *Maxum* is, in fact, very competitively priced.

All Guerini shotguns, regardless of their grade, share the same action and quality of manufacture, so comments that we make about the handling and reliability of the *Maxum* apply to the whole range of field models.

Appearance

Any shooter who is looking to purchase a shotgun that is a bit special in its presentation but which is not outrageously expensive would have to consider this Guerini. The *Maxum* is stocked with a superior grade of Turkish walnut. It is styled with a Prince of Wales pistol grip, a smart looking Schnabel fore-end (which incorporates an Anson push-rod release), and a chequered walnut butt-plate. The woodwork has an oil finish, hand-rubbed to create a durable and attractive sheen, which accentuates the beauty of the figuring in the wood. The cut-chequering on the pistol grip and the fore-end is crisply executed at 26 lines to the inch. Wood to metal fit is superb.

Hand-filed fences in a double scallop style are features which are usually found only on much more expensive shotguns. However, this styling is to be found on all the Guerini models, and it certainly contributes to their distinctive appearance.

But the most striking feature of this model is the quality of the engraving. The sideplates are dovetailed into the action. As a result, this pinless surface provides an ideal area to display the engraver's art. The action and the side-plates are adorned with a very dramatic, deep-cut, scroll engraving in the Gothic style. Guerini have worked in conjunction with the Italian engraving house, Bottega Incisioni C.Giovanelli, to develop an affordable style of elaborate engraving whereby the initial pattern is laid on the metal by laser and then is finished by hand. On this model, the result is stunning. But if this engraving is too dramatic for your taste, other styles are available. The Essex model, for example, features a more subdued and



Above: The barrel selector is incorporated in the safety catch. Below: Rathmoy: walking up through a cover crop of chicory. Rick Stephens and Paris hunt for a bird flanked by husband and wife keepering team, Kim and Pete.

traditional English-style rose and scroll pattern.

The top-end Guerinis have other small touches that distinguish them. The top rib on this model, for example, is not ventilated but is a tapered solid rib, a style that is so practical for a game gun.

Technical Details

All Guerini over-and-unders share these same general design features. Different models vary only in their style of decoration and in the quality of their wood.

- The monobloc barrels have chrome-lined bores and hinge on trunnions set into the action walls. These trunnions are replaceable if necessary.
- The barrels are magnum-proofed to 1370 BAR.
- Lock-up is achieved through a Browning-style wide locking bolt that engages a bite beneath the bottom barrel.
- The strikers are rebounding, and powered by coil springs. A single rod in the bottom of the action floor cocks the action.
- The single trigger is inertia-set for the second shot. Barrel selection is by a switch on the safety catch.
- The safety catch is a manual, not an automatic one.
- The sears hang from the top strap of the action. They have a second notch for added safety.
- The selective ejectors feature oversize cams. Disc retainers add strength to the system.
- An Anson-style push rod releases the fore-end. The fore-end iron has an interchangeable steel insert which



can be replaced should the fore-end come loose through exceptionally heavy use.

Handling

Before we took this shotgun into the field, we gave it a pre-season workout on clay targets to assess its handling. The gun performed admirably at club-level 5-stand and at skeet. Its balance is very slightly nose-heavy, which promotes a smooth swing in a gun which weighs only 3.05kg.

Our patterning tests showed that the Guerini's interchangeable choke tubes performed satisfactorily. Using B&P target ammunition, for example, (28 grams of

for Guerini shotguns, came up with an unexpected proposal. Would we be interested in joining him at the Rathmoy pheasant preserve to try the gun on a day's walked-up pheasant hunt? No need to ask twice.

Rathmoy, situated near Hunterville, has already established a reputation as an exciting and challenging traditional English-style driven pheasant shoot. This year, in an effort to broaden the appeal of preserve pheasant hunting, they are also offering walked-up shooting. A party of up to three shooters can enjoy a day of hunting behind dogs over varied terrain with a generous limit of eight birds per gun.

Not knowing quite what to expect from such a shoot, the Editor and I set out early on the appointed morning for Hunterville, our labs in the back of the truck. We drove through a ferocious and bitterly cold southerly storm to arrive at Rathmoy where the weather suddenly cleared to a mild, still morning – a good omen for the success of the day. As we drove down the farm road, dozens of pheasants, cocks and hens, were calmly strutting around the verges, completely unfazed by the truck. It was hard to imagine that birds like these could provide satisfying hunting. We were soon to find out how wrong that impression would be.

At Rathmoy's splendid hunting lodge we were met by Rick and by Mark Grace, proprietor of the shoot. A quick cup of coffee while Mark explained the scope of his pheasant

“ In the course of our walked-up day, we hunted five different areas. Each of them presented a different terrain and a different hunting situation ”

operation, then we were off to meet Pete, Rathmoy's English gamekeeper and his wife Kim who is a real country woman and hunts and beats as keenly as her husband.. Pete was to act as guide and supervisor for our hunts. He and his wife would do the beating for us. Their three dogs, a lab, a springer, and a Jack Russell terrier added to the dog power of our three labs.

Our first hunt could have been taken from the pages of an English shooting magazine. A flat expansive field planted with chicory as a cover crop provided shelter for a good number of birds. Under Pete's direction two shooters walked through the crop in a line with the beaters. The third gun walked outside the fence-line some distance off and slightly ahead of the line to act as a flanking gun and intercept birds flushing off to the side. These pheasants were toey. They erupted from the chicory well ahead of the dogs, presenting going-away or quartering challenges and exciting shooting. There were no gimmies in this lot.

The next hunt was completely different. We three guns were positioned along the side of a typically steep Rangitikei hillside while Pete and his team flushed birds out of a cover crop high above us. Testing long-range birds, these ones. Rocketing out of the crop, and then curling in a glide around the contour of the hill, these pheasants provided a challenge we don't encounter in our sand dune hunts.

Another hunt took place along the banks of the Rangitikei River. River flats with willow, poplar, and lupin cover were familiar territory for me. What was not familiar was the number of birds we were able to put up.

In the course of our walked-up day, we hunted five different areas. Each of them presented a different terrain and a different hunting situation. Our dogs had flushed more pheasants in the



The Maxum's fine handling contributed to this limit bag of wild cocks.

#7.5 lead shot in this case) the Modified tube produced very satisfactory patterns of evenly-distributed shot which averaged 57% at 40 yards.

Once the season was open, we were able to give it a real test on Kapiti Coast sand dune pheasants. When you are working behind flushing dogs, you need to be able to react quickly to an unexpected flush. A fast-pointing and smooth-swinging gun is essential, and the 20 gauge *Maxum* proved to be ideally balanced for the job. Its weight made it a pleasure to carry over a long day's slog. While the main credit for a hard-earned limit bag of wild cock pheasants must be given to the hard-working dogs, ultimately, it is the gun and the shooter that must perform at the critical moment. The *Maxum* proved to be a pleasure to carry and to shoot. In particular, I found the open radius of the Prince of Wales grip very comfortable for field shooting.

Walked-up Pheasants at Rathmoy

Our first satisfactory field testing of the *Maxum* completed, Rick Stephens of Outdoor Outfitters, New Zealand distributors



P44, l.h.column, caption should be modified to read: Mark Grace, your host at Rathmoy, offers the country lodge dining experience.

course of this one day than they would be likely to encounter in a couple of seasons of regular hunting.

The experience of this day's shooting had reinforced just how well suited the 20 gauge Guerini is for this kind of hunting.

Conclusion

The Caesar Guerini range of field over-and-unders is an extensive one. The Testfire *Maxum* is from the more expensive end of the range, but the quality of its wood and of its engraving justifies the price. Like all the guns in the range, it is a fine-handling shotgun with a very high standard of design and manufacture.

It is a hard job for any distributor to establish the reputation of a new brand of shotgun in the mid to high price-range. Buyers are naturally cautious when making such an investment and they tend to stick to the well-known and familiar brand names. However, the formidable and well-deserved reputation that Guerini have earned overseas should reassure potential buyers here in New Zealand that the brand is going to be around for the long haul and that the guns represent good value for money.



Rathmoy

In the middle of Hunterville up on the hills to the right is the Grace Family's home farm of 'Rathmoy' which was first farmed in 1935. Following SH1 north for 5 kilometres you come to a right hand turn on top of Vinegar Hill that leads to Rangiwahia and Fielding and the end of 'Rathmoy'. It is here that the Grace family have built a luxury lodge on the banks of the Rangitikei River. It is a secluded and private retreat that caters for that perfect 'family getaway', weddings, small conferences, corporate entertainment, trout fishing, claybird shooting and pheasant shooting.

The Lodge, 'The Fish & Pheasant', offers luxurious décor, furnishings and fittings, and a magnificent stone fireplace that is the focal point in the evenings. Your stay can be self-catered or a fully-catered option is available.

Booking is essential as the Lodge has proved popular with those wanting to sample the activities in the Hunterville area such as golf and sightseeing. During the gamebird hunting season, the driven or walked-up pheasant shooting that the Rathmoy Game Preserve offers is very popular. Early booking for these shoots is recommended.

Not many country retreats offer such a diverse range of interests, especially for the shooting man. See 'Rathmoy' on www.rathmoy.co.nz

Specifications for the Testfire Gun

Make & model	Caesar Guerini Maxum
Type	Over and under boxlock shotgun
Gauge	20 gauge (also available in 12, 28, and .410)
Barrels	Length: 71 cm; chamber: 76mm; bore: 15.8mm. Chromed bore. Interchangeable choke tubes (5 provided)
Ribs	Solid, tapered top rib; solid side ribs. Single brass sighting bead.
Receiver	Steel, with sideplates and deep relief engraving. Coin finish.
Trigger	Single selective. Recoil-set for second shot.
Safety	Manual. Incorporates barrel selector.
Stock	Select walnut. Hand cut chequering. Oil finish. Prince of Wales grip, Schnabel fore-end. Dimensions: Length of pull: 373mm (14.6in) Drop at comb: 36mm (1.4in) Drop at heel: 57mm (2.24in) Cast for right hander. Grooved walnut butt plate.
Weight	3.05kg (6.7lb)
Accessories	ABS case with two combination locks; 5 choke tubes: Cylinder, Imp-cyl, Mod, Imp-mod, Full; choke wrench; gun socks; sling swivel attachments.
RRP	\$7,549.00
Distributor	Outdoor Outfitters. www.outdooroutfitters.co.nz