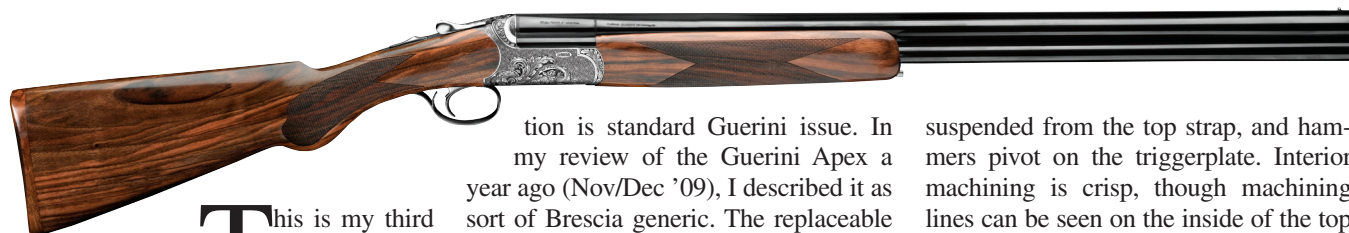


Caesar Guerini Ellipse EVO



This is my third Caesar Guerini review in the past seven years. That's a lot, but I have my reasons. Since its inception 11 years ago, Guerini has earned a prominent place in the shotgun world. The company's lifetime warranty and factory service are first-rate. The guns are well-made and have proven durable. Certain of the Guerini guns are absolutely gorgeous. The prices are not egregious. And, most important, every Guerini I've ever spent time with has been an easy gun to shoot well. Every one.

The subject of this review is the Caesar Guerini Ellipse EVO over/under, the company's first gun with a truly rounded action. This field gun costs \$5,495 and at this writing is built on a 20-gauge action with 28" barrels in either 20- or 28-gauge. As a 20/28-gauge two-barrel set, it runs \$7,220. If it were just the usual Guerini with the annual cosmetic upgrade, I wouldn't spend much time on it. But it's not. It is an excellent example of how a good basic gun can be transformed into something far greater.

The interior of the Ellipse ac-

tion is standard Guerini issue. In my review of the Guerini Apex a year ago (Nov/Dec '09), I described it as sort of Brescia generic. The replaceable Woodward hinge stubs and Browning underbolt are typical of B. Rizzini, Fabarm, FAIR, E. Rizzini, Fausti and others. Beretta is the notable exception with its mid-breech locking cones. The bottom of the Guerini action is solid, so the two locking

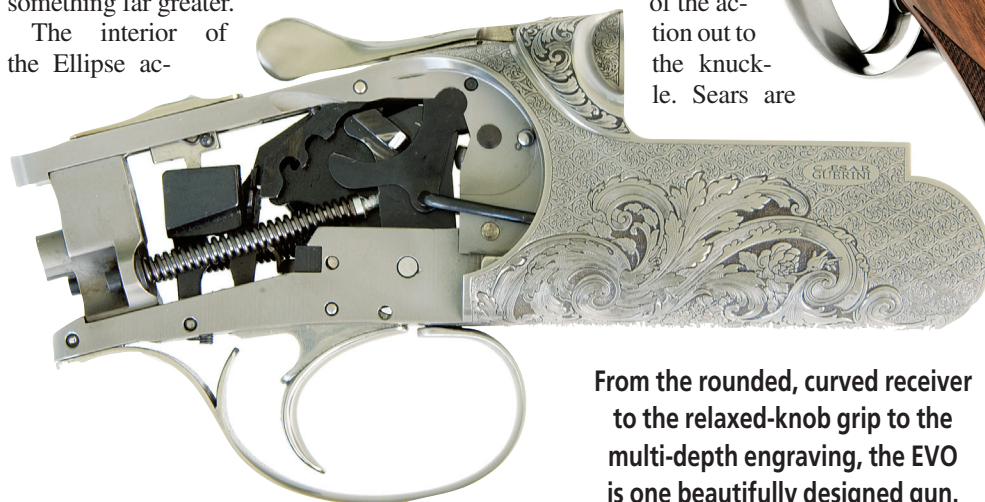
lugs on the mono-block engage it but do not penetrate through as they do on a Superposed. There's a large cocking rod up the middle of the floor, and ejector tripwires run inside the lower edges of the action out to the knuckle. Sears are

suspended from the top strap, and hammers pivot on the triggerplate. Interior machining is crisp, though machining lines can be seen on the inside of the top and bottom tangs. In all, the action is a good one and well proven.

The receiver is machined from forged steel. By varying the time and temperature of the heating process, only the exterior is hardened to avoid brittleness inside. The rounding of the Ellipse begins at the receiver. Just how do you significantly round the underside of an over/under action? You can't just grind away metal, because the ejector tripwires run through the receiver's lower edges. Guerini first widened part of the action. The Ellipse has sort of a cheek on the side of the receiver, much like some Berettas. The

usual Guerini receivers are cut away some .035" in front of the cheek up to the knuckle. In designing the Ellipse this cutaway was restored so that the front of the receiver had the same width as the rear. This wider receiver enabled a greater rounding of the lower edges.

But when the front of the receiver is widened, the forend iron must be widened also. Then Guerini had



From the rounded, curved receiver to the relaxed-knob grip to the multi-depth engraving, the EVO is one beautifully designed gun.

to widen the monoblock shoulders of the barrels. None of these changes were much over $\frac{1}{32}$ ", but they meant new machining for each part. The result was a modestly rounded receiver and a most comfortable one-hand field carry.

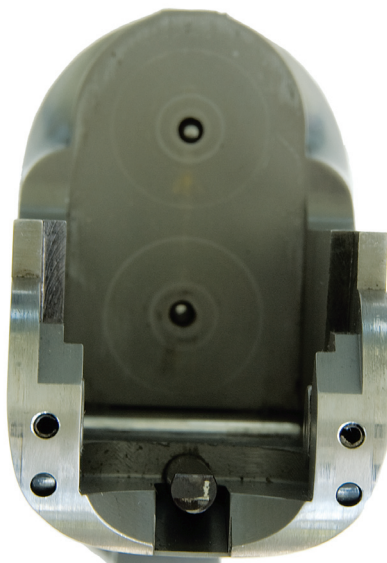
The changes didn't stop there. As you can see from the photographs, the Ellipse receiver has a beautiful semi-circular cut at the rear. It results in a much more attractive line than the usual vertical junction of the stock head at the back of the receiver. The curve flows smoothly into the tapered top tang. It's really classy, but it took some work.

The rest of the Guerini line—and most other modern Italian boxlock O/Us—usually use a tab on the top of each side of the head of the stock to engage a cutout in the receiver. This tab keeps the stock head from spreading apart as it is snugged down. The Ellipse's sensual curve eliminates this cutout, but the stock still has to be kept from being split apart by the wedge of the upper tang. On the Ellipse the stock head was given two very substantial interior side tabs, which engage cutouts on the inside of the receiver's rear sides. It is all invisible until you remove the stock. It's much more difficult to machine but much smoother and more pleasing to the eye.

The single trigger is inertia operated and has a couple of nice touches. Just aft of the blade are two small screws; one adjusts take-up and one over-travel. Getting to those screws may require an engineering degree, but at least the option is there. These are the only exposed screw heads on the outside of the gun. Trigger pulls on our sample were a consistent $\frac{3}{4}$ pounds lower and $\frac{3}{4}$ upper. Just about perfect.

What I didn't find perfect was the manual safety. It worked correctly, but the Beretta-style safety/barrel-selector toggle has been eliminated. Our Ellipse's trigger was non-selective. I asked Caesar Guerini USA president Wes Lang about this change. He said that it was done because the non-selective safety was slimmer and more in keeping with the attractive lines of the gun. True enough, it is slick-looking and many upland hunters always shoot the bottom barrel first. But, Lang added, if a buyer prefers the traditional toggle-selector safety, Guerini will install it for free at any time. Personally, I'd get the selector.

As mentioned, barrels for the first run of Ellipses are 20 and 28 gauge, and they are all 28" long. Perhaps other choices will be added later. Our 20-gauge test barrels were similar to those of the Guerini Apex in that they were properly hot-blued, ripple-free,



Guerini designers skipped the usual thinning taper of the front of the receiver in favor of rounding the bottom edges.

chrome-lined, 3"-chambered and screw-choked. There is a bit of barrel bulge at the chokes, but it's not too bad.

Five flush-mounted nickel-plated chokes come with the gun: Cylinder, Improved Cylinder, Modified, Improved Modified and Full. They appear to be of average quality. At $2\frac{3}{8}$ " long, they have about $\frac{1}{2}$ " parallel after the constriction and about .010" jump from bore to the relieved rear of the choke. The chokes use a *very* fine thread that required 72 turns of the supplied wrench to remove and insert just one.

The side ribs of the barrels are solid and extend back to the monoblock. The top rib is a glorious, upper-class solid rib so appropriate on a field gun. As on the Apex, this 8mm-to-6mm tapered rib gives the gun a more attractive line. It is more resistant to the inevitable field knocks and dings. There is a proper brass bead at the muzzle and no silly mid-bead to clutter things.

The wood on our Ellipse EVO—and the wood on the other EVO samples I've seen in photographs—is really snappy walnut. Obviously samples will vary, but an effort has clearly been made to put the good stuff on these guns. Wood samples I've seen have ranged from blondish to dark. All have been heavily figured.

Standard stock measurements for the Ellipse are the same as they are on the Apex 20-gauge field: $1\frac{7}{16}$ " x $2\frac{1}{4}$ " x $14\frac{3}{4}$ ", with a touch of cast-off and 4° of pitch. Our sample was true to the standard. The Ellipse comes with a very relaxed round-knob grip. Few Italian guns get the round-knob genre right, but this

one is good. I really liked the relaxed, capped Prince of Wales grip on the Apex, but the one on the Ellipse is also very nice. On special order, left-handed and English stocks are available.

The forend appears to be identical to that of the Apex, and that's a good thing. Eschewing the trite Schnabel beak, the Ellipse's forend is slender and smooth with a nicely rounded front. Your hand will be comfortable anywhere along it. Guerini uses an Anson pushrod for the forend release, necessitating a slightly deeper forend than with the usual Deeley latch, but Guerini does the Anson well and the forend retains its grace. An interesting note is that the only non-steel metal I found on the gun, other than the brass front bead, was the aluminum pushrod. Good place for it, as it saved some weight at no expense in strength.

The borderless laser checkering of 26 lines per inch was mechanically perfect and in a conservative pattern. As befits a field gun, the Ellipse uses a wooden buttplate. It looks classy, but if you find it slippery, it is easy to substitute a rubber pad. The medium-gloss stock finish is listed as hand-rubbed oil, and it was first class. The grain was properly filled, and everything was smooth. Even the inside of the stock head and forend got a coat or two for protection. Wood-to-metal fit was about .020" proud everywhere to provide a bit of leeway for eventual refinishing.

I've saved the engraving for last because it is so outstanding. Like the work on Guerini's other engraved guns, it is done outside the factory by Bottega C. Giovanelli, the largest of Italy's mechanized engraving houses. Giovanelli is not always forthcoming about the engraving processes used, but Lang felt it probably involves laser, hand chasing and perhaps some EDM. It is far, far more advanced than the engraving on the company's Summit that I compared it to. I think it's also nicer than that on the more expensive Apex, but that's just personal taste. It is multi-depth engraving, not all on a single plane like most other laser efforts. The varied depths in the foliate pattern also show up better because of the new receiver finish. Instead of the protective nickel plating used previously, Guerini simply polishes the metal and coats it with a proprietary clear-coat process. It is said to be extremely durable and rustproof, and it certainly shows the engraving to advantage.

Another big thing about this engraving is that it goes around the curves. Often you see machine engraving that stops at a rounded edge and then starts up again

after a space because it can't turn the corner. The EVO's mechanical engraving is the first I've seen to take curves in stride. This is a *big* deal. You really notice the unbroken engraving on the rounded parts.

The Ellipse is also sold in the Limited model. Mechanically identical, the Ellipse Limited has a chemically case-colored receiver, modest border engraving, and wood that is just a notch less magnificent than that on the Evo. But you get the same sensuous lines and marvelous handling for \$1,500 less.

The Ellipse EVO comes in a standard ABS takedown case with odd-looking pseudo-suede patches on the outside. Included are a plastic box of five chokes and a wrench. It also comes with Guerini's lifetime guarantee, backed by an enviable service reputation. The guarantee and service have earned a loyal following for the brand.

I shot the Ellipse at skeet, 5 Stand and sporting clays, all low gun. It was mechanically correct, with no flaws or failures of any kind. Chokes stayed put, ejectors ejected, triggers stayed crisp and nothing fell off. Like the Apex before it, it moved well. The relaxed grip allowed shooters of different statures to adjust fit a bit. It was an easy gun to shoot.

One of the reasons it shot so well was that the balance was slightly forward, and at 6 pounds 11.3 ounces, the gun had a bit of heft. Great for shooting, less-good for carrying. Most of the Beretta 680-series 20-gauge guns are around 6 pounds 4 ounces, so the Ellipse is a bit buxom. Of course, if you ever take advantage of the 3" chambers, you'll welcome the extra weight.

At the range, I showed the gun around. Without exception, everyone felt the Ellipse EVO was absolutely gorgeous. The Ellipse's rounded lower edges and curved receiver smoothly transitioning into the tapered top tang give it a design artistry unequalled in its price range. The engraving pattern and its quality really are a step up. The solid rib, tastefully smooth forend and graceful grip seal the deal. And, good looks aside, it's a shooter. It has the feel. That's the highest compliment I can pay any gun.



Author's Note: For more information on Caesar Guerini shotguns, contact Caesar Guerini USA, 410-901-1131; www.gueriniusa.com.

Check out Bruce Buck's "Technoid Talk" blog at www.shootingsportsman.com.