

Caesar Guerini Essex

Some of the used shotguns that are bringing the highest dollars these days are the previously owned English side-by-sides from Purdey, Boss, Holland & Holland, Lancaster, and a number of others that are perhaps not quite as well known. If you've ever had the opportunity to take a close look at the engraving on these exceptional shotguns, it's not the type of engraving that seems to turn the most heads these days. However, Wes Lang at Caesar Guerini USA believes the engraving tastes of many shooters are returning to the more traditional style we saw on those famous English makes, especially those produced around the 1930s—less ornate, not as bold as some of the engraving that has become popular over the last couple of decades.

This is the type of engraving that you will see on today's new Essex from Guerini. All those aforementioned English side-by-sides were almost invariably sidelock guns, and this is where the engraving was concentrated. But all Caesar Guerini shotguns are over-unders. This Italian gun maker offers both standard boxlocks and boxlocks with side-plates. The Essex is a side-plated over-under with old-style engraving. Maybe we can call this engraving "understated" because that's what it is, compared to bolino, deep relief, any engraving where the lines are particularly close together, where "ornate" might be the byword. I'm betting you, too, like the engraving on the coin-finished receiver. Note also from the accompanying photos that there are no screws on the gun's side-plates, less cluttered than side-plates on true sidelock guns that might have one to several screws.

Interestingly, Lang says a new roll process was developed for this special engraving on the Essex. Of course, plenty of hand finishing is required after the roll process, but don't make the mistake of thinking that the roll portion of this engraving is old hat. Not only is this process new, it's much more expensive to incorporate into a gun than acid-etched engraving and certainly more expensive than the roll engraving procedures currently in use. Lang told me that his partners at Caesar Guerini have explained the new process to him, but he admits to not yet fully understanding it. Lang also explained that my test gun was among the first to go through this new engraving process and that in the weeks following my gun's production, the engraving was getting even better as Guerini in Italy learns more about the how-to of the process.

There's similar English scroll on the receiver bottom, receiver top just behind where the barrels attach, top tang, and trigger guard. Both sides and the bottom of the fore-end iron also are embellished with this traditional English scroll. There is very minimal engraving on the blued barrels, and these show high polish and not one blemish to the bluing job. The monobloc is beautifully jeweled.



The engraving on Caesar Guerini's new Essex resembles that which once embellished some of the most treasured English side-by-sides.



The fore-end release button is at the front of the schnabel tip.

SPECIFICATIONS

Action: Over-under with underlocking lug

Gauge: 12, 20, 28, and .410 (20 tested)

Weight: 6 lbs., 15 ozs. (20 gauge)

Barrels: 26" and 28" in Field model; Sporting models with 30" barrels available

Chokes: Five supplied (cylinder, improved cylinder, modified, 3/4, and full)

Stock: Circassian walnut with very good figure; dimensions for 20 gauge: length of pull—14.75", drop at comb—1.62", drop at heel—2.25" (each gauge will have slightly different dimensions)

Suggested Retail Price: under \$4,000

Manufacturer/Importer: Caesar Guerini USA, 700 Lake St., Dept. SC, Cambridge, MD 21613; (410) 901-1131; www.gueriniusa.com

The new Essex is available in both Sporting and Field models and in 12, 20, 28, and .410. I've been putting a 20-ga. Field model through its paces, and I've really enjoyed shooting it. There's a lot of checkering on both the fore-end and the

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Prince of Wales-style grip, cut at 26 lines to the inch, which is very fine. I didn't put a jeweler's loupe to this checkering, but I can't find the first flaw with the naked eye. The Prince of Wales grip is a nice touch for a hunting gun. I'm guessing that you will find a more traditionally shaped grip on Essex Sporting models.

The Circassian walnut stock is exceptional on my test gun, featuring lots of figure on both sides of the buttstock but straight-line grain through the receiver area, the latter important to ensure strength. The good-looking walnut wears a fine oil finish that goes along with the tradition the Essex exudes with its English-style engraving. The wood-to-metal fit around the side-plates is exceptional.

For most of my life I looked at side-plate guns (side-locks, too) with sort of a jaundiced eye. I've seen many a stock crack around the side-plates, and for that reason I've always looked upon simple boxlock guns with more favor. But I believe Guerini and other modern makers of shotguns with side-plates have figured out ways to avoid the stock-crack problems of old. I just don't see all that many of these modern side-plate guns with cracks. Consequently, I'm looking a lot more favorably toward side-plate guns these days.

The fore-end walnut matches the buttstock, and the fore-end attaches like all Guerini guns, via a push button at the very front. With a downward flare at the front, the gun has a schnabel fore-end tip. The fore-end snaps on and off in a very positive manner, but it is not overly difficult to remove or replace.

The trigger appears to be made of stainless steel. The safety is non-automatic, and the barrel selector is a part of the safety. It's fairly hard to move that selector right or left. This is a good thing because it prevents shifting the selector and not realizing it. Like all Caesar Guerini over-unders, an underlocking lug extends forward from the bottom of the receiver to engage ledges milled into the bottom of the monobloc.

Breaking with some tradition, the Essex has a solid top rib. It tapers slightly



The Prince of Wales-style grip is very appropriate for a field gun and is checkered to 26 lines per inch.



The inertia-type trigger is stainless.



Sisley loves walnut buttplates on hunting guns because they contribute so well to flawless gun mounts, plus the horizontal serrations help keep the gun solidly in place while firing.

