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Caesar Guerini Invictus



The Caesar Guerini ad trumpets: “Invictus. One million rounds.” That’s a big number to associate with the company’s new Invictus sporting clays gun. A million rounds is almost two flats of shells per week for 40 years. I doubt that this bit of advertising hyperbole reflects that kind of actual use. But it does bring attention to the durability of a gun with a unique action that is easily rebuilt as often as needed.

Like many Italian over/unders, the Invictus starts out in the usual Val Trompia action configuration, with trunnion stub hinges, bottom lugs and a Browning-style low-position locking bolt. It’s a good basic design that has been proven through the years. Due to the low locking bolt and lugs engaging the bottom of the receiver, the action is generally slightly deeper than those on Perazzis, with their Boss side bolsters, or Berettas, with their monoblock side lugs engaging notches on top of the receiver sides.

When a Val Trompia action wears, it tends to go first in the locking bolt, then the hinge trunnions, and finally the lugs on the bottom of the monoblock.

Locking bolts are generally fairly easy to replace with the next size up. Most hinges are also replaceable with a larger size, but this can involve a fair bit of work. What kills the gun is when the monoblock lugs no longer properly seat in the recesses in the bottom of the receiver and the action becomes seriously off-face.

Fixing that would require some very tricky welding, if it is possible at all. Replacing the trunnions will snug up the action for a while, but it won’t be permanent if the monoblock lugs don’t mate with the receiver recesses.

Caesar Guerini’s Invictus takes a novel approach to rebuilding. The low-mounted locking bolt can be easily replaced just like on any other modern O/U. It’s the trunnion hinge stubs and fixed bottom lugs that are the difference and merit the claim of extraordinarily long life. They can be changed easily so that the headspace will be returned to new.

The hinges are set up the opposite of those on most guns.

Instead of the hinge stubs extending in from the sides of the receiver to engage cutouts in the monoblock, the hinges, called Invictus Cams, are attached to the sides of the monoblock by Torx screws and engage recesses cut into the sides of the receiver. To change the Invictus Cams when they wear, one simply removes two Torx screws from each hinge, pulls off the old hinge, drops in the new and replaces the screws. This is very much easier than replacing conventional stub hinges.

But it gets better. The real bugaboo when trying to snug up an action is with the fixed bottom lugs. Here’s where the Invictus really breaks new ground. Rather than having conventional receiver recesses to receive the monoblock’s bottom lugs, the Invictus has the innovative replaceable Invictus Block. The block is attached to the floor of the receiver and mates with the bottom monoblock lugs to hold the barrels back against the breech face.

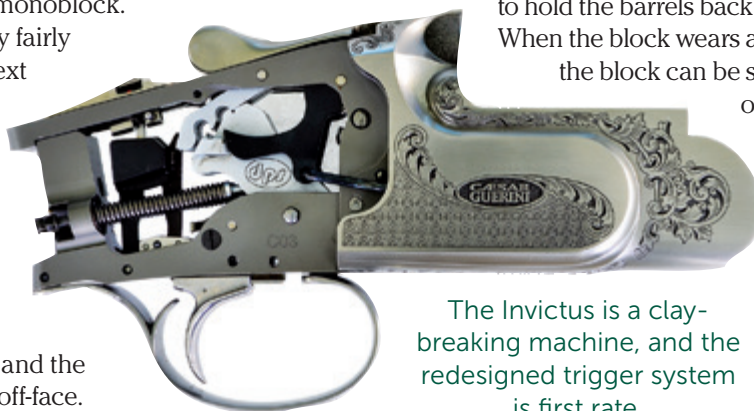
When the block wears and headspace increases, the block can be simply replaced with a new one by removing two screws.

Nothing easier. It is clever, novel and patented.

With an easily replaceable locking lug, hinges and receiver block, this gun might just go a million rounds.

The rest of the gun doesn’t break new ground, but it certainly is refined. The

The Invictus is a clay-breaking machine, and the redesigned trigger system is first rate.



interior of the action looks very much like those of the other four Guerini O/Us I’ve reviewed in the past 10 years. There are subtle differences, but the major aspects of the design remain the same. The machined-steel action has a separate triggerplate but is otherwise one piece. Sears are suspended from the top strap; coil-spring-driven hammers pivot from the bottom. The stamped actuating arms for the ejector cocking rods are still paper thin, as they must flex around the cocking nodules on the hammers, but they work properly, so all’s well. The manually operated safety

is of the classic Beretta design, with the barrel-selector toggle built in.

Caesar Guerini USA President Wes Lang talked me through the DPS trigger in the Invictus. There is a lot more than meets the eye. The trigger is inertia operated, not mechanical, so it relies on the recoil from the first shot to set the sear for the second. The trigger blade is adjustable fore and aft for about ¼" to accommodate different hand sizes. In a nice target-gun touch, there are screws to adjust trigger take-up and over-travel. That's a rarity.

All of the Caesar Guerinis I've shot have had good trigger pulls, but this Invictus, with the DPS trigger system's newly designed sears and hammers, was the best. Both sears let off at 2¾ pounds, with absolutely no creep or slop. None. Those pulls might be a touch light for some tastes, but in a steady target gun like this I thought they were perfect. If you would prefer heavier-yet-equally crisp pulls, the DPS system allows the trigger to be set on a different pivot axis to achieve this. I know of no other brand of gun with this feature. Also, the hammer and sears are specially plated with a high-lubricity hard chrome to greatly reduce wear.

The Invictus basically has the same barrel tubes used on other Caesar Guerini sporters. And that's a good thing. The barrels on our test gun were 32", currently the most popular length for sporting clays O/Us, but 30" tubes are also available. Both the top and side ribs are vented. The top rib is blessedly flat, with a 10mm-to-8mm taper, a Bradley block white bead up front and a small stainless mid-bead. The barrels were smoothly struck, solder joints were perfect, and



The innovative, replaceable and patented Invictus Block attaches to the receiver floor and engages the monoblock lugs to hold the barrels back against the breech face.

the bright bluing was correctly applied. Jugging of the muzzles to accommodate the Maxis screw chokes was noticeable, but this also reflects the careful barrel-contour control used to keep weight down and maintain a lively feel. No jugging would have meant thicker, heavier, screw-choke barrels.

The chambers were 2¾", with trendy 3¼"-long forcing cones. The chrome-plated bores were both .735", a fashionable overbore. Six Maxis chokes, also hard-chromed for easy removal, come with the gun. They are ¾" long—¾" of that extending in front of the muzzles. Choke designations are clearly marked on the extensions. The front choke rims are smooth and notchless. The very nice choke wrench is of the tapered friction type with both a cross bar and a knurled section for operation. Chokes included were Cylinder (.000" constriction), Skeet (.005"), two Improved Cylinders (.010"), Light Modified (.015") and Modified (.025"). The Modified choke was a touch tighter than the usual .020", but the others were spot on. The skirts of the chokes were about .013" larger than the bore. This forces the shot to make a bit of a jump when entering the chokes,

but it also ensures that the chokes won't get shot out if things gum up.

As with all Guerini guns, cosmetics are important, and a lot of attention is paid to them. The Invictus's receiver is matte silver and laser engraved to a high standard by Bottega C. Giovanelli. The acanthus-leaf borders have some real depth. Laser engraving has come a long way during the past dozen years, and Giovanelli produces Italy's best. The receiver, which is slightly wider than those on other CG clays models, is also heavily sculpted with ornate double fences and side cheeks. As additional touches, the monoblock sides are engine turned, and the receiver and forend show no visible screw heads.

The Invictus's stock has a classic straight comb rather than a humpy Monte Carlo. The wood on our sample gun came with target-gun dimensions of 14¾" length of pull (with the adjustable trigger in the rearmost position), 1⅜" drop at comb and 2⅛" drop at heel. There were 5° of pitch and a normal amount of cast-off. The comb is slightly higher than those of some other makers, like Browning. But it is interesting to note that as many shooters become more accomplished, they cheek the stock more firmly, requiring a higher comb and a bit more length. Left-handed stocks are also available.

There is a slight right palm swell on the moderately large competition grip.

The laser checkering is 26 lines per inch in a conventional borderless pattern. A solid ¾" recoil pad was on the butt. It had a third hole drilled for the long hex-head stock wrench, which made stock removal easy. The



modern, glossy oil finish was well applied and filled the grain, unlike on many Italian guns. Even the insides of the head of the stock and forend were given protective coats to forestall oil damage. Many makers ignore this. Wood-to-metal fit was correct. The wood was uniformly slightly proud to allow a refinishing or two. The forend, which is nicely rounded, uses an Anson pushrod rather than the usual Deeley latch. The pushrod was made of aluminum—the only aluminum I found on the gun. And last, the wood had very nice figure and was clearly a couple of steps up.

The Invictus comes in a lockable, black ABS case that seems sturdy enough for the rigors of air travel. Inside you get the gun nicely wrapped in cloth sleeves, the six Maxis chokes in their own box, plus the very nice friction wrench, an Allen key for trigger adjustment and the stock wrench. The manual is one of those generic "covers all our models" things that is more or less useless. What certainly isn't useless is Caesar Guerini's lifetime warranty, backed up by the company's superlative service. Guerini sets the benchmark in this area.

Fortunately sporting clays were in season when I tested

the gun. The 32" Invictus felt long, but it was very well balanced and didn't feel as ponderous as some of the earlier Browning Citori sporters or standard Krieghoffs. It was slower on the short, fast stuff than my favorite 30" Fabrique Nationale Superposed bunker gun, but it was delightful on the longer shots.

On the close shots, if I paid extra attention to my pickup points and shot sustained lead or pull-away, the long barrels were fine. On the longer shots the barrels allowed precision and a little bit more follow-through momentum, which greatly simplified things. The Invictus seemed equally at home shot low gun or premounted, a rare duality. The gun was more centrally balanced and "handled lighter" than its 8¹/₄ pounds would indicate. Its handling was in the same ballpark as the new light-barreled Krieghoff K-80 Parcours or a Perazzi MX8 ordered with barrels in the 1.570 kg area. And that's a compliment.

Being brand new, the Invictus was a little stiff to open and close, but it certainly will loosen up with the usage this gun is designed to handle. The excellent trigger pulls were much appreciated. The gun functioned correctly in all respects except for the two times I mounted it too loosely and there wasn't enough resistance to set the second trigger. That was my fault, not Guerini's. Recoil seemed normal for a gun of this weight.

By any standards, this is an excellent serious sporting clays gun. It retails for \$6,750. That's \$3,000 more than the basic Caesar Guerini Summit sporter or the Browning Citori 725 Sporting but thousands less than the elaborately decorated Guerini Apex and Forum sporters. The price of the Invictus is about the same as the Blaser F3 and the Perazzi MXS sporter. It is around \$4,000 less than the Krieghoff K-80, Perazzi MX8 and Beretta DT11 sporters.

More important than the obvious durability of the Invictus is the fact that the gun is a marvelously balanced shooting machine. That it is backed by the best guarantee in the business doesn't hurt either.



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