

Shotguns

By Robert Matthews

In late 2009 Beretta announced its new-generation semi-auto shotgun to a small convocation of writers in South Dakota, and after a week of shooting, we all came away impressed with the new design. It was evolutionary to the previous Berettas and so displayed the toughness, reliability and shootability of its predecessors, but also incorporated a number of improvements. The A400 won the *Sporting Classics* Award of Excellence that year.

Since South Dakota was crawling with pheasants, I had the opportunity to give the gun a real thrashing under field conditions. The Beretta folks had obviously put a great deal of thought into the new design. Despite the fact that the A400 displayed several technological improvements, the characteristics that I most liked about the A400 Unico were “old school.” I loved its light weight, balance and versatility. Its ability to handle almost any 12-gauge shell from the very lightest to the heaviest 2-ounce, 3½-inch magnum made it very near the ultimate all-purpose shotgun. Consequently, the 12-gauge A400 series went on

Lightweight and incredibly quick, Beretta’s new 20-gauge Action semi-auto exhibits the balance and handling characteristics of a fine double.



to become staples in the Beretta line, and the original Xplor Unico spawned the Extreme waterfowl gun, as well as the Xcel target guns and the Action upland field guns.

As soon as we realized that we had an exceptional gun in the A400, we wanted to know when we would see a 20 gauge. The answer was “as soon as possible.” There have been several iterations of the 12-gauge A-400 since then, but no 20 bore.

Fast-forwarding to October of this year, word again went out from Beretta to convene at Joshua Creek Ranch in Texas for some big news.

The agenda for the event, which was billed as a “Shotgun Summit,” included some “class time” and a couple of days in the gamefields.

Joshua Creek Ranch is a spectacular venue for anything that has to do with shotguns or

wingshooting. It’s one of Beretta’s prestigious Trident lodges and boasts an impressive 2 Trident rating that’s well deserved.

Set in the hill country of Texas, the ranch is one of the prettiest places that you could imagine for hunting quail. The ranch’s lush green pastures are dotted with

scrub oak and laced roundabout by the beautiful creek that serves as its namesake. Joshua Creek is buttressed here and there by dramatic limestone cliffs that are the perfect setting for driven pheasant hunts. Escapees from the driven hunts make for some pretty impressive walk-up gunning. The ranch also offers guests a gorgeous sporting clays course with stunning high-angle views of the hill country.

Our class time reacquainted us with some of the old stalwarts of the Beretta shotgun line, as well as some new entries. We had

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several O/Us in the Perennia line, including some Perennia Is as well as some new Perennia IIIs. They also brought along a couple of their new DT-11 target guns, which sport several improvements over the DT-10 and weigh a little more in response to the clamor from target shooters for a heavier gun.

Later, they paraded their excellent new A400 Excel target guns, distinctive with their bright Beretta Competition Blue receivers. All of the target guns performed extremely well on the clays course, and the Perennias made it fairly rain roosters on a couple of pheasant drives.

One of the interesting new items they brought along was the new A300 Outlander, which is a slightly plainer grade semi-auto in 12 gauge that should sell like hotcakes, because it's a *real* Beretta, yet is priced to compete as an entry-level gun.

The star of the show, however, was the soon-to-be-released, 20-gauge version of their A400 Action. Beretta brought along the first 20s to appear in the U.S. and gave us the chance to give them a workout on quail, pheasants and clays.

The gun weighs in at a paltry 6 pounds, 4 ounces and is incredibly quick without being flighty. Recoil was inconsequential on both the "kick-off" fitted guns and the ones that didn't have the excellent recoil reduction system. The 20 gauge Action features a new system that requires less gas to operate, and should prove to be even more reliable than its predecessors.

What really sold me on the 20 gauge Action was its handling and shooting characteristics. Balance was very much "between the hands" and seemed to be about where it would be on a double of the same weight and dimensions. In fact, the overall handling qualities of the little repeater were almost "double-like." And that's not something that I expect to find in a repeater of any kind!

The night before we were

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scheduled to shoot the 20s, I picked one from the rack and spent about 15 minutes adjusting the stock to fit. Beretta's system allows up to 5mm of vertical adjustment and 3mm of cast. Since it seemed to be pointing a bit high as it came from the factory, I lowered it a little and put in the maximum amount of cast-off. Things lined up just right and I marked the gun so I could find it the next morning.

In the morning we worked several bends in the creek and shot a passel of quail and pheasants over pointing dogs, with little English cockers doing the flushing. A couple of pheasants flushed right under-foot and the gun was so quick that I was able to head-shoot each bird rather than risk tearing them up. Even the quail were no match. At the same time, the gun was so steady that I never over-swing. As a result, it made me look like a much better shot than I am. And that's a good thing!

In May I'll be taking a couple of the Action semi-autos – a 20 and a 12 – to Argentina for a “stress test” to confirm that they live up to the high standards of their predecessors. Organized by John Burrell of High Adventure Company, the trip is slated to be a bird-hunting marathon and will include all that Argentina has to offer the wing-shooter. We'll hunt doves and pigeons in numbers, and waterfowl and perdiz as well. Then we'll travel to the south of the country for quail. The 20 will probably get most of the action, with the 12 being reserved for waterfowl. If the guns survive the torture test that I put them through, they'll be certifiably tough! No doubt they'll pass, but I plan to have a lot of fun proving it.

I don't think it will surprise anyone to hear that I'm not easily impressed by repeaters, but this little 20 pushes all my buttons. If you're in the market for an upland gun, you might want to give this new Beretta a look.★



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