



# The Gun Room

by Larry Brown



## A Pair of Over-Unders

Some readers undoubtedly know or remember the Ruger Red Label as an old friend. I remember the first one I ever saw. Although my preference runs to side-by-sides, it immediately caught my eye when I spotted it in a gun shop I visited frequently. Introduced in 20-gauge only back in the late '70s, the early guns sported nice wood and a plain, blued receiver. At that time, it was the only American-made O/U available, and I thought Ruger had done a very nice job. My son now owns one of those early 20s and loves it.

Ruger brought out the Red Label in 12-gauge in 1985, and in 28-gauge in 1994. The guns were made in various versions: "English Field" with a straight stock; "All Weather" with a black synthetic stock; as well as a special Sporting Clays model, and a "Woodside" that featured a unique stock design that had, as the name indicates, wood rather than metal surrounding part of the sides of the receiver.

Then in 2011, the gun went out of production – only to be reborn about a year ago. And, according to at least some current or former owners of the previous versions, the new gun – available in both 12- and 20-gauge – is better than the old one.

The gun Ruger sent me for field test was a 12-gauge with 28" barrels (26" and 30" also available). It tipped the scales at seven pounds 10 ounces but felt lighter than that to me. Stock dimensions on mine measured at 14-1/8" length of pull to a single, selective trigger; drop at comb

of 1 1/2"; drop at heel of 1/4". (Those figures are a little shorter and a little higher than the factory specs, but worked fine for me.)

The stock is fitted with a Pachmayr recoil pad. It's one of the Sporting Clays versions, with a hard insert at the top, which makes it less likely to catch on clothing when mounting the gun.

The gun comes in a semi-soft case, which makes a handy and quite attractive package. Five Briley chokes (just shy of 2 1/2" long) are included: two Skeets (measuring .002" constriction), Improved Cylinder (.006"), Modified (.015"), and Full (.031"). I like that selection, especially the

inclusion of the two very open Skeet chokes. Although the IC is also on the open side, I like it – and I think most hunters and target shooters will as well – when there's at least one choke more open than IC. There's also a premium quality Briley choke tube wrench rather than the cheap tool you get with some more expensive guns. The chokes are fine with steel shot, although Ruger recommends going with nothing tighter than Modified.

The bore measures .739, which is an overbore of .010" beyond the standard 12-gauge diameter. It also has three-inch forcing cones, which are longer than normal. Those two factors, at least according to some experts, can result in both reduced recoil and improved patterns.

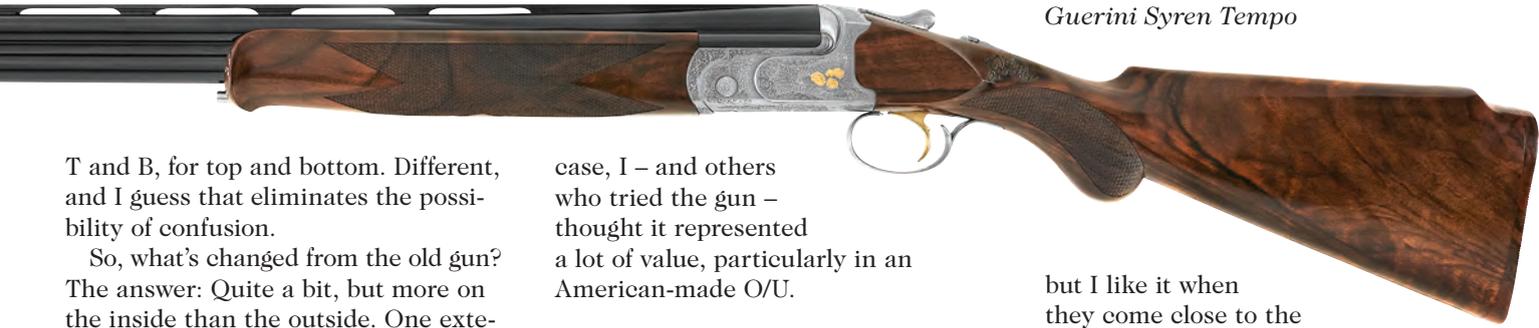
The trigger is mechanical rather than relying on recoil to reset for the second shot. Pull weights by my gauge were 6 1/2 and 6 3/4 pounds, which are not unreasonable and at least a bit less than the weight of the gun. One complaint I did have, as did one other shooter who tried the gun: there's a fair amount of slack in the trigger that has to be taken up.

The safety, which pivots right and left (as did the safety on the old Red Labels), is automatic, which many hunters prefer – although a lot of target shooters like a safety that does not reset automatically every time you open the gun. Typical markings on O/U safeties are O for over and U for under. On the new Ruger, however – apparently to avoid possible confusion with shooters who might think U means upper – the markings are

*An Old Friend Returns, and One for the Ladies*



*New Ruger Red Label*



T and B, for top and bottom. Different, and I guess that eliminates the possibility of confusion.

So, what's changed from the old gun? The answer: Quite a bit, but more on the inside than the outside. One exterior change, which results in a somewhat lighter gun: The side ribs between the barrels are gone. (That's a weight-reducing change Ruger did make on their previous 28-gauge guns.)

Although the contours of the action have changed from the straight lines of the old Red Labels (the rear of the receiver is now angled and somewhat curved rather than straight up and down), again it's more the inside than the outside that's been modified. The action was changed mainly to make it easier (and less expensive) to make, but the result is a new center of gravity. A couple of shooters who were familiar with the old guns tried the new one and said that it handled noticeably better.

The receiver on the new Rugers, like on the old ones, is bright silver. I don't know whether I'm in the minority, but I preferred the looks of the early guns, with blued receivers. The receiver profile, which was low on the old guns, remains that way on the new ones – and is a feature many shooters prefer for ease of carry when hunting.

I had a chance to try the gun on several rounds of skeet. Recoil was mild with standard target loads, as one would expect in a gun that's closer to eight pounds than seven. It fit me well, and I hit well with it once I got used to the slack in the trigger – which didn't take long.

Ruger's suggested MSRP for the gun is \$1,399, a reduction of about \$600 from the last list price of the old Red Label. Always nice to find a price reduction rather than an increase! And in this

case, I – and others who tried the gun – thought it represented a lot of value, particularly in an American-made O/U.

### Syren Tempio: An “Unladylike” Gun For the Ladies

When Steve Smith called and said he'd arranged to have me review a new over-under from Caesar Guerini, I was delighted. The Guerinis I'd seen and handled exceed “nice” by enough of a margin that I was thinking I might easily fall in love with one. And a lot of people know me well enough to understand that when it comes to shotguns, I fall in love about as easily as Don Juan. And falling in love usually means taking one home.

Then I discovered that the gun in question was from the new Syren line ([www.syrenusa.com](http://www.syrenusa.com)): guns designed specifically for women. Clever Smith, I thought, playing a trick like that on me. He's anxious to put a photo of me with a pink-stocked gun in *The Pointing Dog Journal*!

On that score, checking out the website before the gun arrived, I found that I could rest easy. Although the Syren line is all about guns for women, they're dead set against “stocks painted a silly color.” What they're about are guns that look like guns should, but with features (especially stock dimensions) designed “for the lady competitor, huntress, and shotgun enthusiast.”

The complete Syren line consists of an autoloader designed for sporting clays and three Guerini O/U models: one also designed for clays; one that's a double duty clays and hunting gun; and one – the Syren Tempio, which I received as my test gun – that's built with bird hunting in mind.

The Tempio is offered in 20- or 28-gauge. Factory specs say the 20-gauge they sent me was supposed to weigh six pounds, nine ounces. My test gun was very close; it went only half an ounce more. You always have to make allowances for slight differences due to wood density,

but I like it when they come close to the listed weight.

Often, 28-gauges are made on 20-gauge frames to save manufacturing costs, and as a result end up slightly heavier than the 20s because the chamber walls on a 28 are thicker. But the 28-gauge Syren Tempio's weight is listed at five ounces lighter than the 20, which means it's built on its own (smaller) receiver. Good for Guerini! Most people who buy a 28-gauge field gun are looking for some weight reduction and quicker handling.

The very attractive stock – Guerini uses nice wood – is a Monte Carlo (better for women, they say) with a round knob grip. I measured the dimensions at just under 14" from the single trigger to the wooden buttplate (factory specs are 13-7/8") with 1¼" drop at comb and 2¼" drop at heel. It also has a quarter inch of cast off for the right-handed shooter, and – with special consideration for a woman's anatomy – half an inch of toe out. That moves the point of the stock away from, well, away, making shooting significantly more comfortable. The buttplate is attached with screws, which makes adding a recoil pad easy without cutting the stock.

Barrels are 28", and the gun comes with five choke tubes: Cylinder, IC, M, IM, and F. The bore on my test gun measured .625", which is an overbore of about .010" from standard 20-gauge dimensions, and should reduce recoil somewhat.

Standard equipment is a manual safety, but automatic is available as an option. The trigger is of the inertia variety. Trigger pulls both measured right around five pounds, and there is just a tiny bit of take-up required.

The forend is a Schnabel with a plunger-type release.



MSRP is \$3,950, which puts it more or less mid-range in the Guerini offerings.

Although I wanted to put the guns in the hands of some women so they could shoot it and give their opinions, I decided to try it out myself. At 5'9", I'm not all that tall, and I'm usually okay with a 14" stock on a gun with a single trigger. The cast-off on this one seemed to be about right for me as well. When I mounted it, I was looking right down the rib. Men in general don't really need the toe-out, but that didn't bother me either. I'm thinking that if a woman ends up with one of

these and has a husband, significant other, or son who isn't too tall, she'd better keep the gun under lock and key lest it end up going hunting or target shooting with some sneaky male – like me, for example, if my wife owned one.

I and others shot both sporting clays and skeet with the Syren, and other than the stock being short for some of the taller guys, most did not realize – until I told them – that it was designed for women. And it worked well for me. Balance and handling, I thought, were excellent. Misses were operator error and not the fault of the

gun. At the end of a round of clays, I did kid a regular shooting companion about having outscored him using a ladies' gun. He told me I'd probably be a better shot if I spent more time getting in touch with my feminine side. Sore loser!

I put the gun in the hands of Sarah Beasland, Wisconsin gunsmith Mark Beasland's daughter. Sarah can flat shoot. I saw her break her first 100 straight at our winter skeet league championship shoot a couple years ago, and walk away with the winner's trophy. She shot a round of clays with it, liked it, but being used to heavier target guns, felt it would be better suited for hunting.

My second test subject was Lauren Kriesel. I first shot with her when she was a high school freshman. She's now a college freshman with a fair amount of experience shooting targets and hunting. Lauren is a lefty, which I forgot when I contacted her about shooting the gun. She said it came up well enough for her and she shot it pretty well. However, the recoil bothered her – I think in part due to the significant toe out on the stock when what she needed was toe in. But she made a good point in remarking that women tend to be more recoil sensitive, and a factory recoil pad (available as an option) might make more sense than the wooden buttplate, even on a hunting gun.

She also remarked that the Syren Tempio is likely to appeal to a man if he's looking to buy a shotgun for a woman. I think that's an accurate observation, and one with which I agree totally. Smart marketing on Syren's part.

The entire Syren line looks to me like one of those "it's about time!" things: designed for women shooters and hunters, by women shooters and hunters. Enough with the silly pink stocks and modified men's or youth models for women. With more and more women coming into the shooting sports, why not a line of guns all their own?

For women looking for something a little less expensive, the Syren Elos Venti – that's the 20-gauge O/U made with both hunting and targets in mind – runs about \$1,000 less than the Tempio. Nice to offer not just one gun for the ladies, but a range of choices. 

