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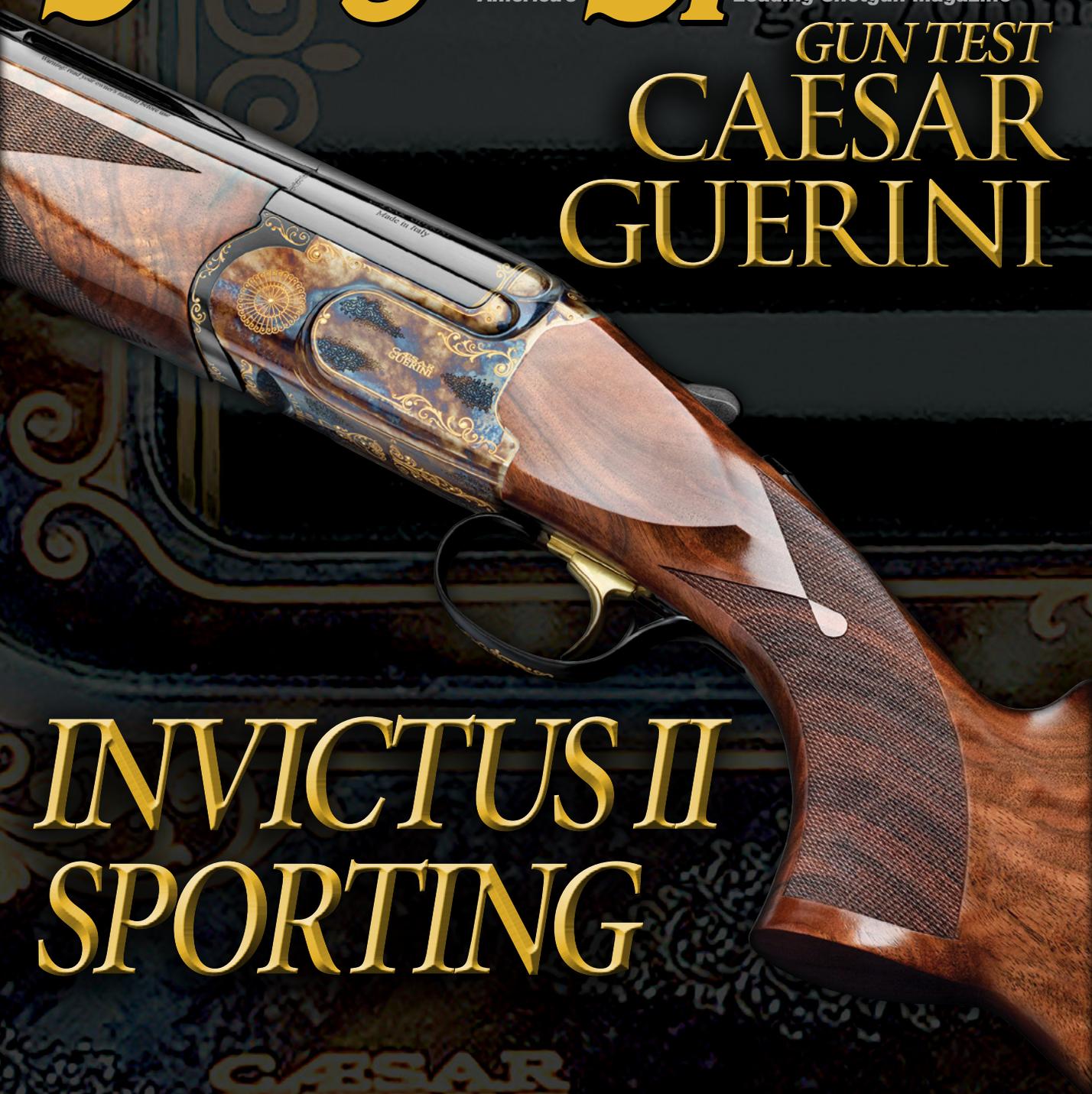
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by Mark H. Taylor

Photos courtesy of Caesar Guerini USA

In 1976 I purchased a used shotgun to shoot international trap with. I used that shotgun for countless national and international competitions as well as training at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs. Needless to say, that shotgun spent numerous hours in the service center having worn-out parts replaced. Fast-forward to the year 2014 when Caesar Guerini introduced the Invictus line of competition shotguns. These shotguns are designed and built to achieve a service life of one million rounds and even beyond.

INVICTUS II SPORTING

I recently received from Caesar Guerini their Invictus II Sporting shotgun to review and test. I reached out to a company representative at Guerini USA in Cambridge, MD, to find out what the difference was between the Invictus I and all the other Invictus models. He informed me that internally they are the same and the difference is all aesthetic on the higher number models...

engraving, wood grade and the addition of sideplates. So, bottom line is, once you have decided to reward yourself with a Caesar Guerini Invictus, personal preference will lead you to the right grade level knowing you will get all the benefits of what this model offers.

To start with, why does the company claim the Invictus shotguns are built to last beyond one million rounds?

Simply put, the Invictus line has seven significant modifications compared to other Caesar Guerini models: (1) the contact surface between the bolt and monoblock has been enlarged to reduce wear, increase strength and lessen the need to continually replace the locking bolt, (2) having Invictus Cams instead of hinge pins and trunnions allows the barrels to be moved back to eliminate



Mark H. Taylor, who tested the Invictus II Sporting, noted the most perceptible characteristics of the Invictus II were smoothness of the swing and lack of felt recoil and muzzle flip. Photo courtesy of Mark H. Taylor

an “off face” condition due to wear, (3) the DTS Action Control System allows the shooter to customize how stiff the action opens and closes, (4) a bushing has been added to the forend to reduce vibration, (5) the frame is wider which increases strength and reduces friction, (6) the Invictus Block enhances the durability of the action while increasing the locking surface

area between the barrels and the action — and like the Invictus Cams, are easily replaceable to allow the system to be rebuilt like no other target gun can, and (7) the DPS trigger has been redesigned making it more durable, more consistent and more precise. While I have been shooting competitively since the 1970s (and have seen a lot of shotguns), I am by no means a gunsmith; therefore, if



The Invictus II has two distinct engraving features that set it apart from other Invictus models (and almost all other shotguns in the competitive sporting clays market category): the funeral engraving design and the color case hardening.

these seven items can convince me the shotgun can go beyond one million rounds, I am sure you will have confidence in that claim, too.

As you can see by the pictures herein, the Invictus II has a very distinct engraving pattern which sets it completely apart from the other Invictus grades. Other than the Invictus I Sporting M-Spec (which is a specialty built sporting gun designed by Olympic Champion shooter Richard Faulds with fixed chokes and a tapered rib), all other models have a silver receiver with enhancements of engraving, gold inlays and sideplates as the grade numbers rise.

The Invictus II has two very distinct engraving features that set it apart from other Invictus models (and almost all other shotguns in the competitive sporting clays market category): the funeral engraving design and the color case hardening. The funeral engraving design is quite simply a thin gold outline throughout the receiver which accents the receiver’s flowing lines. On the Invictus II, in addition to the gold outlines, the Caesar Guerini name is highlighted in gold trim along with a sunflower burst on each side of the receiver. On the bottom of the receiver,

INVICTUS II SPORTING



On the bottom of the receiver and trigger guard, the decorative gold design is classy and sophisticated.

and on the bottom of the trigger guard, the decorative gold design is classy and sophisticated. Also, on the bottom of the receiver is the model Invictus II engraved in gold. Funeral engraving is a derivative of the 'funeral grade' of shotguns which is a colloquial term to describe a break-open gun of any quality but often of the very highest, bearing the least-possible decoration; with either no engraving at all or only a simple borderline.

This shotgun comes in a very sturdy plastic case which is internally molded to hold the receiver in one area and the barrel (with forearm attached) on another area. There is also an area to hold the box of chokes and the choke wrench. The receiver and the barrel each have their own velvet sleeves to protect the wood and bluing from scratches. A half-a-dozen foam cut-outs allow the buyer to place them around the bar-

rels and receiver for extra protection. The Invictus II comes with six Caesar Guerini Maxis chokes. I put an Improved Cylinder in the lower barrel and Light Modified in the upper barrel and took some measurements. The bore diameter of the bottom barrel was .725 and the Improved Cylinder had a constriction of .726, while the top barrel had a bore diameter of .735 and the Light Modified had a constriction of .720. Since the Invictus II only comes in a 32" barrel length, these chokes appear true to their markings.

There is something different about the overall feel of the Invictus II shotgun. The first description which comes to mind is this gun is more 'filled-out' than other sporting shotguns. What I mean by this is when I hold some other sporting shotguns and then hold the Invictus II, it feels like there is more gun to hold on to. The pistol grip is thicker, the palm swell

completely fills the palm space, and the forearm satisfies the entire hand holding it. This 'filled-out' feeling is the result of the seven significant modifications including the wider frame.

Upon arriving at the shotgun range to test out the Invictus II on the sporting clays course, I first headed to the trap field to shoot this gun at some 16-yard targets. I locked the trap to throw straightaway targets from Post 3 and shot the Invictus II using a low-gun mount from all five trap stations. This gave me a feel for how the gun shoots using known angles, target speeds and target distances. I hit all 15 of the targets I shot at and determined that the gun shot for me with a POI of 50/50 (when looking at the beads covering each other in-line). Doing this exercise before shooting sporting clays also gave me a chance to get a good sense of how the gun feels between the hands and mounts while



moving toward the target. Both were outstanding, and this “filled-in” aspect of the gun helped remove any whippiness felt with other shotguns.

I usually stick with only 1 oz. loads on the sporting clays course, but for this review I grabbed two boxes of 1 oz. 8s at 1,290 f.p.s. and two boxes of 1½ oz. 7½s at 1,200 f.p.s. just for a comparison. Of the 15 stations at the club, I only got to 10 of the stations before I exhausted the 100 shells I brought. On multiple stations I found myself shooting the same target with both barrels and both shells to see if I could notice a distinguishable difference. I would be lying if I said I could find a clear difference when I applied the fundamentals correctly. I was able to smoke targets at most distances without issue.

The two most perceptible characteristics of the Invictus II were (i) smoothness of the swing as I moved upon seeing the

target, and (ii) lack of felt recoil and muzzle flip. I attribute both of those positive qualities to the slightly larger frame and balance being right at the hinge point. I finished off my day at the range by shooting one round of skeet. I had a box of 1½ oz. 9s at 1,145 f.p.s. which I shot using a low mount (except on Post 8 where I pre-mounted and looked to see who was watching when I left two balls of smoke hanging in the air). If I had not stopped my swing on Post 5 Low House, I would have had a 25. As on the sporting course, the smoothness of the swing and lack of felt recoil stood out.

Overall, I was duly impressed with the performance of the Invictus II Sporting shotgun. I found the POI out of the box to be an excellent setup for both skeet and sporting clays. This model has the option of an adjustable comb which I always recommend to exponentially increase the versatility of the shotgun.

Currently, Caesar Guerini offers the Invictus line of shotguns in five grades. As I really admire the look of color case hardening on a shotgun, the Invictus II would be my choice. The Invictus II Sporting 12 gauge 32" has an MSRP of \$8,125. Regardless of which engraving style appeals to you, the Invictus shotgun is sure to provide many years of outstanding service for you and future generations who are lucky enough to own one. **SS**

Mark H. Taylor has over 40 years of shooting experience. He has won many regional, state, national and international clay target competitions. He is the author of the book *Clay Target Shooting – The Mental Game* and co-author of the book *Break 'em All*. Mark is a NRA Certified Advanced International Shotgun Coach and a High-Performance Shotgun Coach for USA Shooting. He is a Caesar Guerini and Cabela's (in Thornton, CO) Pro Staff shooter, and teaches monthly beginner shotgun clinics at Colorado Clays in Brighton, CO, and travels nationally and internationally teaching coaching courses and working with world-class athletes. You can email him at coloradotaylor@gmail.com.



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