

PRODUCT REVIEW

FABARM NOBILE MODEL II

By Jim Tomsovic

Two and a half years ago I became interested in shotgun shooting sports and launched myself into what has become a “magnificent obsession.” I began shooting a *Remington* 1100 my father gave me for my 21st birthday some 40 years ago. I quickly found that the ‘field’ barrel choked at modified was not the best medicine for the job and ordered a 30“ *Rem-Choked* barrel with a raised rib. My shooting improved noticeably. I also began shopping for a fancy over/under, mainly because I thought they looked cool and all the books and articles I read extolled the virtues of having one.

About six months passed and I ran into what appeared to be the right gun at a good price at my local “*Turner’s Sportsman*” store. It was a lightly used 12 gauge “*Fabarm* Gamma II Sport” at half the MSRP, of \$1900. *Fabarm* offers a lot of “bells and whistles” on an entry-level gun that normally appear on much pricier competitor’s models.

Fabarm guns are known for being robust and very well made with a lot of advanced technology. Things like lengthened forcing cones, overbored barrels and lengthened, hyperbolic-bored screw-in chokes (eight of them!) all of which reportedly decrease recoil and add to overall shot patterns. The gun also came equipped with *Fabarm’s* patented *TriWood* finish which enhanced the wood grain and made the nice, but plain-grained stock and fore-end look much fancier. The barrels are deeply and impeccably blacked, and the receiver is titanium-clad and very handsomely etched. The stock has a full pistol grip with a slight palm swell and ¼” castoff, an adjustable length of pull (by a moveable trigger,) and consistently came to my shoulder and cheek in the right alignment...that is, it fit me! The bottom line is that I bought the gun and it has worked very well for me at both trap and skeet. I have yet to get into five stand and sporting clays, but I’m sure that Gamma II will prove to be a better gun than I am a shooter.

Fabarm is an Italian-made gun (*Fabrica Brescia Armi*) and is well-known, respected and evidently a popular selection in Europe. *Fabarm* has been variously distributed in the U.S. by *Sigarms*, *Hk* and (I think) *TriStar*, but only to a very limited degree. Almost nothing appears on the internet or in the various gun and hunting publications. It’s too bad because, in my humble opinion, the gun has everything going for it at an extremely reasonable price. At almost eight pounds, it’s a great target gun, but a bit heavy for field shooting, particularly upland hunting. Also, *Fabarm* guns only appear in 12 gauge in the U.S.

Obviously, I have become a *Fabarm* advocate, and I promised myself that if a 20 gauge *Fabarm* field gun ever came out in the U.S., I would be first in line to get one. I’m sure that somewhere, sometime, there has been one of these guns in someone’s inventory, but I haven’t found it until now. Bill Hanus got a few of the brand new for 2008, *Fabarm* Nobile Model II and IIIs from somewhere and made them available through his website, www.billhanusbirdguns.com. As far as I know, I got the first (and only) Model II in the U.S. at this time! Yeah, OK, I am just a bit excited.

Just a little sidelight here. This is the first gun I have ever purchased online, sight unseen. I was a little leery; first about sending my hard-earned pension income off to a total stranger, and secondly about buying a gun I not only have never seen, but never even had an example to look at or put to my shoulder! I spoke with Bill over the phone and he gave me step-by-step instructions as to how the deal was to be made. First, I had to send him a check for the purchase price and shipping (no tax as he is in Oregon.)

Next I had to locate someone locally with an FFL for Bill to ship the gun to. I settled on an old friend and retired police officer who now owns *California Police Equipment, Co.* My total expense to him was \$95. He faxed his FFL to Bill and, upon cashing my check, Bill sent the gun to *CPE* (insured of course) via U.S. Mail.

Everything went smooth as clockwork and the gun arrived at *CPE* two days later.

Bill Hanus is a long-time hunter, shooter and birddog man. He specializes in dealing 28, 20 and 16 gauge guns. He is a prolific writer and is very knowledgeable about shotgunning in general. He has many articles available on the net and also writes features for several hunting and shooting publications. He was highly complimentary of the Nobile guns, and recommended it to me knowing that I cannot afford to go out and buy every new gun that comes down the pike just to see if it's nice. Yes, I recommend doing business with him.

OK, here's the rundown on what I got. The Nobile II differs from the Nobile III only in that the III is side-plated, has upgraded wood, comes in a fancier hard case and is about \$800 more. That's it! The Nobile II is a 20 gauge, side-by-side, with 28" barrels, screw-in chokes, an English-style stock and splinter fore-end, and weighs in at just under 6 pounds. The barrels are glossy blacked and the receiver is a titanium-clad, high-tensile, aluminum/titanium alloy (Ergal.) It has an Anson-Deeley-type boxlock action.

The overall appearance is very pleasing to the eye. The barrels are deeply and evenly blacked with an engraved band around the breech. The rib is swamped, concave and has a matte-finish. It tapers from 7 to 4mm and is topped by a single brass bead. The receiver is pewter gray with an engraved floral scroll on the sides and bottom, and a gold Nobile II logo on the floor plate. The trigger is gold. The fences are elongated and stylish, departing from the semi-hemispherical standard. The trigger guard is more stylized than traditional models. The stock and fore-end are nicely grained, hand-oiled walnut, with about 18 lines-per-inch, laser-cut checkering, very cleanly done. The wood to metal fit is slightly proud and excellent. Both the Nobiles have checkered walnut butt plates.

The action features a single, selective trigger with the barrel selector being incorporated in the safety on the top strap (button to the right for the right barrel, button to the left for the left barrel.) The safety is manual. The trigger is inertia activated so that the recoil from firing the first barrel sets the sear for the second barrel. There is an interceptor mechanism which prevents doubling or accidental discharge if the gun is dropped. The trigger pull is a crisp five pounds for both barrels. The top lever is ergonomically designed. The action-opening tension can be adjusted. Another feature is that the ejector mechanism can be adjusted from eject to extract in case you don't want your fired hulls to hit the ground. The ejectors throw the empties five feet and they land on top of each other.

One of the special features of all *Fabarm* guns is the *TriBore* barrels. First, the barrels are deep-drilled from solid cro-moly steel bars. The chambers are for both 2 3/4" and 3" shells, followed by an extended forcing cone, an overbored barrel which tapers down to a parallel section with the standard bore (.615"), and terminates in an 82mm long, screw-in, hyperbolic-shaped choke. The chokes provided are labeled 'Extreme' (full,) 'Long' (improved modified,) 'Medium' (modified,) and 'Short' (improved cylinder.) Hanus is providing a fifth choke as part of his package called "Paradox," or what is essentially skeet with 1" of rifling which imparts spin and expansion to the shot pattern. All the chokes can accommodate steel shot! Another feature of the barrels is that there are four lumps, which pretty much insure that the gun will not shoot loose for a long time.

Some of the overall measurements are as follows. Overall length, 44 7/8". Barrels, 28". Length of pull, 14 3/8". Drop at comb, 1 1/2". Drop at heel, 2 1/4". Cast off, 1/4" at heel. Palm swell, none. 8" round-end splinter fore-end with an Anson button release. These measurements fit the "average man" well, and since I fit in to the "average man" category the gun fits me nicely. The balance point is just in front of the hinge with shells in the chambers. The MSRP is \$2900. Hanus' offer is \$2600 plus \$40 shipping, and includes a \$25 "Paradox" choke.

A nice surprise for me when I opened the shipping carton was to find that my gun came in a hard, lockable, leatherette "*Esthete*" case instead of the advertised soft case. Nice touch *Fabarm*. It also has a choke tool and spare choke storage box.

If I had the opportunity to design the gun, I would have given it a raised rib with a mid-bead (because that's what I'm used to.) I would have eliminated the slight muzzle bulge (to accommodate the chokes) like the *Franchi Highlander* and *Beretta Silver Hawk*. I'd also like to handle the gun with a Prince of Wales grip (though I love the lines of the straight English stock) and a beavertail fore-end. I may have gone with double triggers. All this is purely for personal preference.

OK, to be fair, here's what disappointed me. Under bright light I could see some filing marks on the barrel under the bluing. The wood could have used a little more fine sanding and filling. It seems rather ridiculous that the words "Read owner's manual before using gun" are stamped on the barrel since my gun did not come with an owner's manual. Maybe one will be forthcoming. All things considered, that's not much to grouse about.

Unfortunately, there is no way to communicate with *Fabarm* in Italy via e-mail to answer a few questions I had. There is no identifiable *Fabarm* distributor or importer in the U.S. at this time. Luckily for me, through a friend I do have a contact in Italy who can take care of my questions.

My first official act with the gun was to take it to the range and pattern the chokes. Firing *Federal* field loads (2 ½ dr./7/8 oz/#7 ½ shot/1200 fps) from a fixed rest at 30 yards, 90% of the shot column was within a 20 inch circle using the "Extreme" (or full) choke, and stayed there with three additional rounds. The pattern opened up to 25 inches at the same distance using the "Long" (or improved-modified) tube. The patterns were roughly 30% above/70% below the centerline which told me that I estimated my hold-point from the rest too low. (I'm not used to the sunken-rib "sight picture.")

I then fired six rounds (three from each barrel) from the shoulder with a naturally mounted gun and my pattern moved up to a conventional 60% over/40% under distribution. At first I thought that the barrel regulation was a little off because it appeared that the left barrel was impacting low and to the left of the right barrel. After firing from the shoulder mount that problem seemingly disappeared! So much for shooting from a rest; the gun did better from the shoulder!

I repeated the procedure using the "Medium" (or modified) and the "Short" (or improved cylinder) chokes at 25 yards. The Medium gave a 25" spread and the Short gave a 30" spread, all well-distributed. The Paradox choke was a surprise. It is a short range choke, but at 25 yards there was a big hole in the middle of the pattern, and the shot pattern radiated outward in four arms like a big X with the ends somewhere off the 30" square paper! I moved in to 20 yards and saw satisfactory coverage of the whole sheet. At 15 yards the center of the target was decimated. Bottom line is that I wouldn't depend on Paradox for anything over 20 yards, or short incomers on the skeet field.

During this testing I was flipping the barrel selector from right to left and back with no hitches. The safety was flawless and easily moved from on to off. The action opening and closing was a little stiff, but will break in with use. The top lever falls well to the right when the action is closed, and the gun has a tight and secure feel with no rattles.

As the saying goes, "The proof is in the pudding (or in the shooting in this case.*)" Hopefully I will be shooting both trap and skeet in the next week and will see how the gun performs on the range. At this point I am very pleased with my purchase and am looking forward to making an impact on the dove, quail and pheasant populations this coming fall.

JT