

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

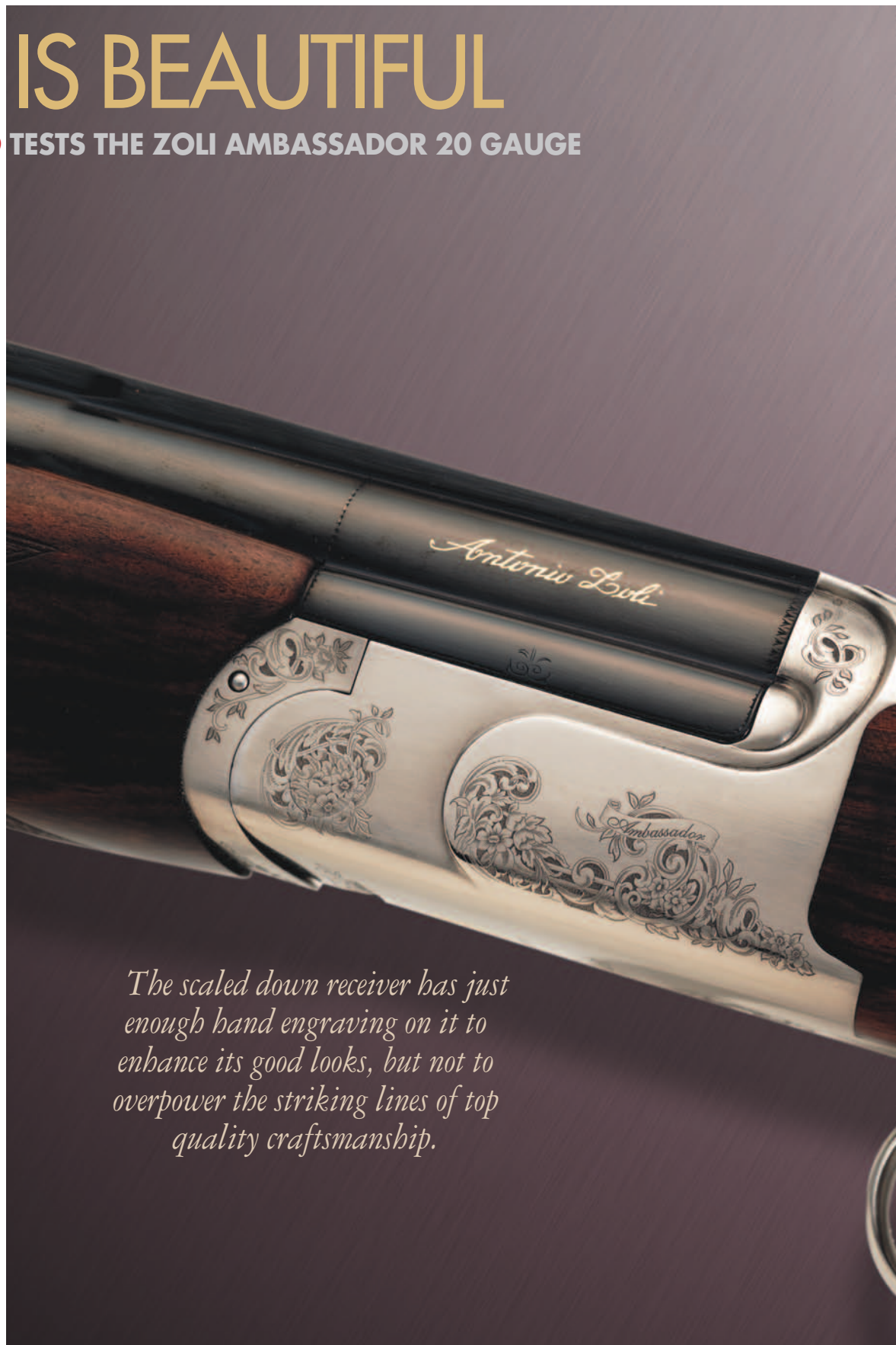
TOM CERETTO TESTS THE ZOLI AMBASSADOR 20 GAUGE

How lucky can a small bore aficionado get? First I received a 20 gauge automatic to review. Then I was able to evaluate a really nice three-barrel small bore set. And now I have an opportunity to review a just released, spanking new dedicated 20 gauge sporting clays shotgun. It doesn't get any better than that!

I must admit I had an aberrant thought when I picked up the new Zoli 20 gauge round body and shouldered it – I didn't think of shooting clays with it. I thought about hunting quail at White Oak Plantation in Alabama or Bienville Plantation in Florida. I should have known better – this gun kills clay targets like a champ.

When I met Steve Lamboy at the recent SHOT Show and asked what was new, he showed me the new Zoli Z Sport sporting clays 20 gauge, but I didn't expect him to send me the new Z Ambassador round body high-grade for a demo. Steve knows how to strike the right cord when it comes to getting on the right side of a sporting clays scribe!

To say that the diminutive boxlock is a 'lovely piece' would be an understatement. The scaled down receiver has just enough hand engraving on it to enhance its good looks, but not to overpower the striking lines of top quality craftsmanship. Sometimes an over and under does not need a ton of embellishment to give it a striking appearance – and in the case of the Ambassador that is very evident. The scroll engraving on the sides, top and bottom of the receiver is just



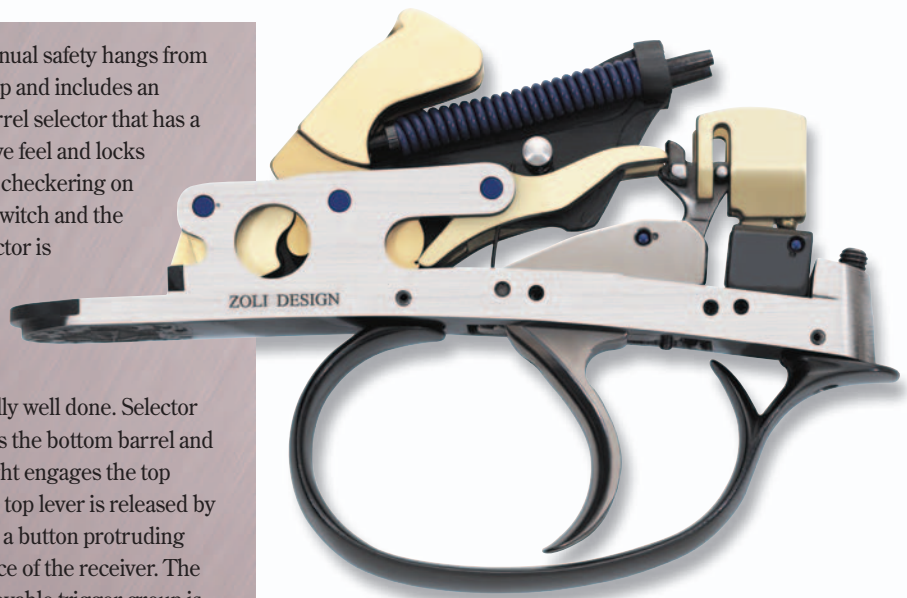
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perfect. The gold Zoli inlay on the bottom of the receiver and the Zoli bow-and-arrow logo finish off an excellent example of the engravers art. But enough about looks.

The box lock receiver is a scaled down version of the successful 12 gauge sporting clays Z Gun to exact scale. It is machined out of a solid block of forged steel alloy. It sports a removable trigger group that is easily detached for inspection using a T-handled hex wrench supplied with the gun. The receiver locks up with a U-shaped locking bolt that engages two lugs protruding from the monobloc. It is a slightly different version of the original Boss system – and very solid.

The manual safety hangs from the top strap and includes an integral barrel selector that has a very positive feel and locks firmly. The checkering on the safety switch and the barrel selector is

exceptionally well done. Selector left engages the bottom barrel and selector right engages the top barrel. The top lever is released by depressing a button protruding from the face of the receiver. The entire removable trigger group is designed in-house by Zoli. The scroll work and checkering on the



top lever is particularly well done. It is evident when you take a really close look at the receiver why it is a pricy example of the gun-makers art.

Trigger pull was 4 pounds 1 ounce for the bottom barrel and 4 pounds 3 ounces for the top barrel. The trigger release was crisp with no creep at all – one of the best I have tested lately. All Zoli shotguns have coil spring driven hammers and the second barrel is engaged via recoil block. Mechanical triggers are available for an additional \$150.00. If I were going to shoot sporting clays and skeet with sub-gauge tubes installed, I would opt for the mechanical trigger. Re-cocking is achieved via springs located in the fore-arm and a single flat hefty cocking rod down the center of the fore-arm and receiver.

The barrels measured 29 1/2 inches, which might seem an odd dimension, but on the Zoli

seemed to work out perfectly. The ventilated top rib tapers from 10 mm at the breech to 5mm at the muzzle – again an odd dimension that seems to work out well on the 20 gauge. The top rib has horizontal arcs machined the full length of the top rib that eliminates any reflection off of the surface of the rib. The center rib is ventilated from just forward of where the monobloc and barrels join to the muzzle. The deep black bluing is highly polished with nary a ripple visible. The barrels pivot on good-sized trunions on either side of the receiver.

My pre-production 20 gauge demo came with five flush chokes in cylinder, skeet I, light modified, modified and full chokes – but future models will be shipped with six titanium treated chokes standard.

Any premium model shotgun should have a nice piece of walnut and the walnut stock and fore-end

on my demo were carved out of a nice hunk of walnut that showed some very attractive marble cake. The checkering on the stock and fore-end was artfully done and grip was good with or without gloves on. The quality of walnut was commensurate with the quality of workmanship on the balance of the gun – top notch.

Thankfully, the fore-end lacked a Schnabel that everyone deems necessary on every sporting clays shotgun manufactured today. The fore-end is slim and elegant, but fills the hand quite nicely. It is attached solidly to the barrel with Edge and Deeley improved style fore-end iron.

It is a pleasure to receive a shotgun that fits well the first time you pick it up. Zoli has done their homework well when it comes to fitting the American shooter. All of my friends – I do have one or two – that had an opportunity to shoot the gun remarked how well it fitted them even though they were of various dimensions from skinny me to a bit rotund. For me, the beads were stacked one on top of the other in a perfect figure 8, just like I have learned to like them over the last fifty plus years I have been shooting.

The Ambassador weighed in at 7 pounds 3 ounces and I must admit I thought it would kick a bit. It didn't, even with the 1,300 fps Winchester sporting clays loads I was shooting at the time. Standard 1,200 fps target loads were mild to shoot and with 1,130 fps Remington reduced recoil skeet target loads it felt like I was shooting a 28 gauge.

If I were to purchase this gun, I would replace the thin recoil pad. Length of pull measured 14 3/4 inches, which is slightly long for me, but with the thin recoil pad installed does allow a taller shooter to add a thicker recoil pad and lengthen pull. It's a good compromise in LOP for most



shooters who are probably going to add a recoil pad of their choice anyway.

After a few true pairs to become accustomed to the gun, transitioning from target to target on true pairs was a piece of cake. To me, that is the true test of a sporting clays shotgun. The Zoli allowed me to accomplish the transition with little effort.

Trap type going away targets, which give me fits on

occasions, were despatched with alacrity. Targets from any angle were engaged and destroyed seemingly without effort. With 29 1/2 inch barrels and only slightly over 7 pounds in weight, the Zoli was quick to maneuver, but not as whippy as some lightweights tend to be. Controlling gun movement was very easy. Balance was slightly ahead of the trunions – right where you would want it to be.

You can order the Zoli 20 with a factory installed adjustable stock, if you so desire, at an additional

\$400.00. A Monte Carlo stock is also available at an additional \$500.00. The adjustable stocks I saw on display at the SHOT Show were very well done and seemed solid enough to the task.

For those of you that are skeet shooters, Zoli is now manufacturing a full line of skeet target guns for your consideration. Zoli Z Sport shotguns vary from \$4,775 for the entry level Z Sport to \$9,500 for the Z Ambassador EL sporting clays and skeet gun. While they can get a bit pricy for the top-of-the-line models, they seem to be worth every penny asked. ■

SPECIFICATIONS

- SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: \$8,690
- AMBASSADOR Z SPORT EL ROUND BODY (TESTED)
- BASIC Z SPORT: \$4,775
- GUN TYPE: MODIFIED BOSS BOX LOCK
- RECEIVER: EDM MACHINED FORGING
- GUN WEIGHT: 7 LBS. 4 OZ. (WEIGHED)
- LENGTH OF PULL: 14.75 INCHES
- DROP AT COMB: 1.5 INCHES
- DROP AT HEEL: 2.4 INCHES
- CAST AT HEEL: 1.6 INCHES
- OVERALL LENGTH: 47 1/8 INCHES
- BARRELS: 29.5 INCHES
- SIGHTS: FRONT WHITE BEAD – CENTER METAL BEAD
- CHAMBERS: 3 INCH
- BORE: .615/.615
- FORCING CONE: LONG EXTENDED
- CHOKES SUPPLIED: 6. EXTENDED, CYLINDER, SKEET, IMPROVED CYLINDER, MODIFIED, LIGHT MODIFIED, FULL
- TRIGGER: ADJUSTABLE FOR LOP
- EXTRA REMOVABLE TRIGGER: \$850
- TRIGGER PULL: 4.1 LBS. BOTTOM & 4.3 LBS. TOP
- SAFETY: MANUAL TOP TANG SINGLE SELECTIVE
- TOP RIB: 10X5MM TAPERED
- CENTER RIB: VENTED

AFTER A FEW TRUE PAIRS TO BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO THE GUN, TRANSITIONING FROM TARGET TO TARGET ON TRUE PAIRS WAS A PIECE OF CAKE. TO ME, THAT IS THE TRUE TEST OF A SPORTING CLAYS SHOTGUN. THE ZOLI ALLOWED ME TO ACCOMPLISH THE TRANSITION WITH LITTLE EFFORT.

