

What to do with the Winchester brand name in the shotgun market has been something of a conundrum for the Browning organization this past decade. There is no denying the famous galloping cowboy has a heritage others would love to own, but it comes largely from areas like mass market repeaters and over-and-unders that Browning has pretty well covered with its own products. Anything they do is likely to cannibalize other group sales to some extent. Secondly, there was the fact that the o/u legacy was largely built on the popular 101 series guns built by Olin-Kodensha of Japan and those guns were gone for good.

The short-lived (and quite different) Model 1001 aside, the over-and-under side of the business lay fallow for some years, while the

Browning organization itself went through a number of changes of ownership before being effectively nationalized by a takeover by the State of Wallonia, the government of the region that includes Liege, home of Browning International and the famous old Fabrique Nationale manufacturing plant.

That changed the perspective somewhat; the move was designed to protect employment in Liege and selling Browning Citoris and related products helps only factory workers in Japan. Suddenly a gun that could be built by FN and sold worldwide began to look attractive again.

The result in 2000 was a new model called the Supreme, one

that had no direct link to either Winchester guns of old or other current group products. In fact it bore more resemblance to arch rival Beretta's mainstay.

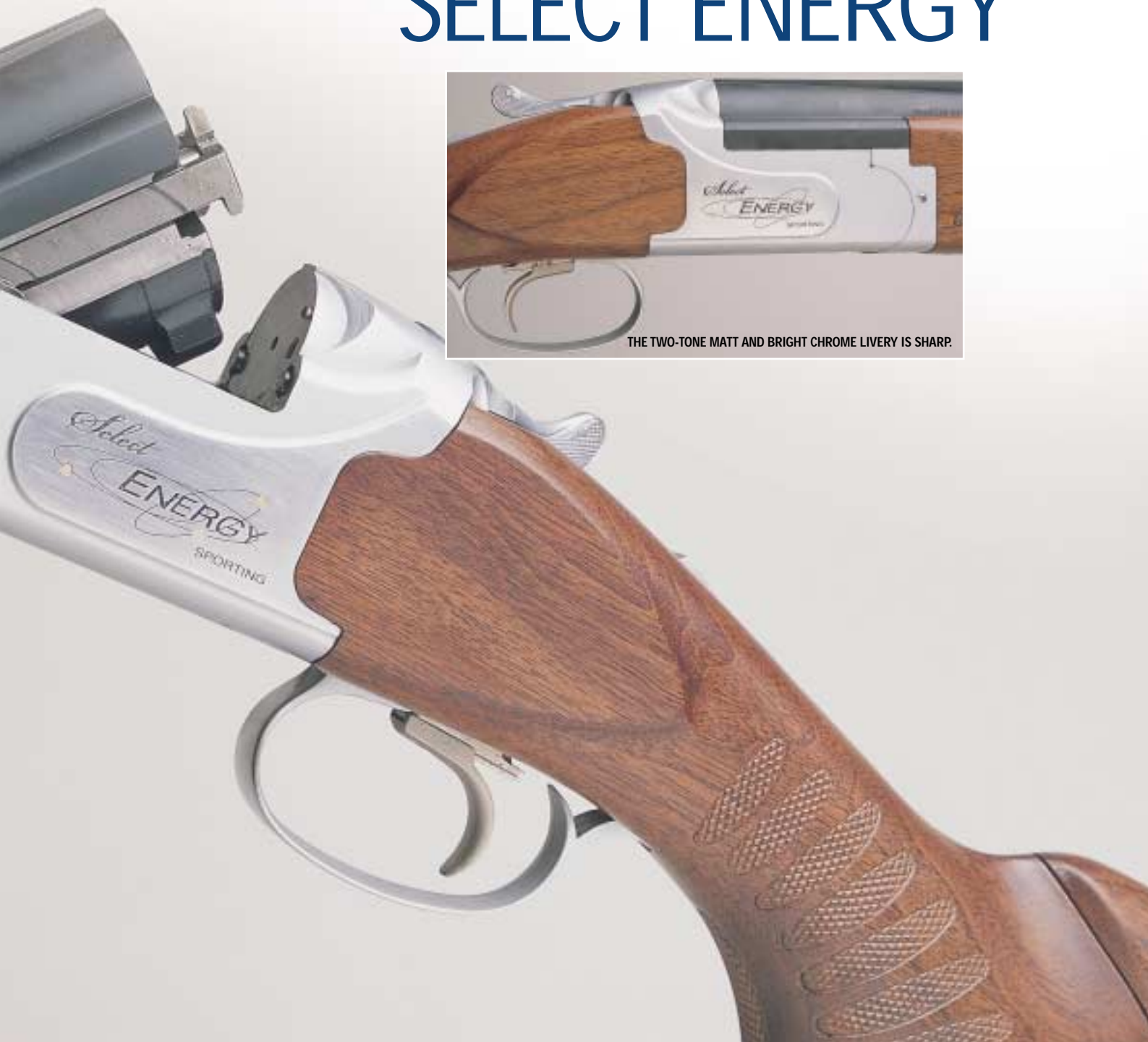
It wasn't enough to make the gun a success though. In fact it felt under-developed, particularly in the handling department and a hurried facelift made little difference. Now it has emerged once again as the Select Energy, looking, finally, like a gun worthy of the Winchester name. The new



A FAMOUS OLD
AMERICAN NAME FROM A FAMOUS BELGIAN FACTORY –
CAN THE SELECT ENERGY ENHANCE BOTH REPUTATIONS?

RICHARD RAWLINGSON INVESTIGATES

WINCHESTER SELECT ENERGY



THE TWO-TONE MATT AND BRIGHT CHROME LIVERY IS SHARP.

model has sharper styling and detailed improvements under the skin that could make it a serious contender in the sub-\$2000 market.

At its heart the same action remains. Although it has the Beretta-style locking lugs, it differs from the Italian gun in not having the distinctive interlocking shoulders. When the controlled explosion that is released by firing a shotgun takes place, the barrels and action try to force themselves apart in two planes: rotational (ie reversing the closing procedure) and by forcing the breech and the breech face apart. The locking lugs take care of the rotational force on both guns, while on the Beretta the interlocking shoulders keep barrels and action together. On the Select Energy this job is carried out by a small lump under the bottom barrel that engages a recess in the floor of the receiver. It adds a little height to the action but provides a solid enough lock up.

The big change to the Select comes from a new and lighter barrel profile, correcting the biggest problem with the original design, which was notoriously nose heavy. Vented mid and top ribs (the latter an excellent design with a center groove) help here.



The barrels are overbored to Browning's standard .740" and Invector Plus chokes are used, which also opens up a huge choice of aftermarket suppliers. They will do good business too, as only three chokes (full, modified and improved cylinder) are supplied with the gun. The barrels are also

ported as standard, part of a conscious effort to pack the gun with features that might not be expected in this price bracket. That can also be seen in the addition of a Truglo® front sight.

Although Field and Trap models are offered, it is the Sporting guns that interest us here and two versions are offered: the standard gun with a

suggested retail price of \$2002 and the optional adjustable comb model at \$2172 srp. This is a worthwhile feature if you are a 'non-standard'

shape. The base model has conventional stock dimensions with drop of 1 1/2" at the comb and 2" at heel. The length is 14 5/8" including a good quality recoil pad, complete with hard heel insert for snag-free mounting. The trigger blade has a choice of two positions giving a further degree of user customization.

Probably the most distinctive feature of the Winchester – and certainly the one that sets it apart

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Invector Plus chokes signify overbored barrels. Note the Truglo sight.

in a rack of guns – is the funky checkering pattern. This takes the form of a series of elliptical shapes on both stock and fore end that not only have visual impact but work well too. The fore end has been changed from schnabel to a plain beavertail design that I, for one, prefer.

Cosmetically the gun looks the part. The matt blacking of the barrels contrasts well with a two-tone chrome/brushed steel finish on the receiver. The only decoration is the Select Energy script and logo, contributing to the overall feeling of crisp, clean lines.

ON TEST

The work on the barrels has paid dividends and given the gun much more forgiving handling, an important factor given that the pricing is likely to attract the less experienced user. The bias is still forward but only to a degree that promotes a smoother, steadier swing. A more experienced shot would certainly be able to get it to work effectively straight out of the box, always a sign that the fundamentals are right. I particularly like the open radius of the grip, one of the things I look for

in a sporting gun. The Italian trade, steeped in the traditions of bunker trap shooting, often gets this wrong in my book. The men of Liege, however, have 75 years of Browning Superposed behind them and were always more likely to understand what is required.

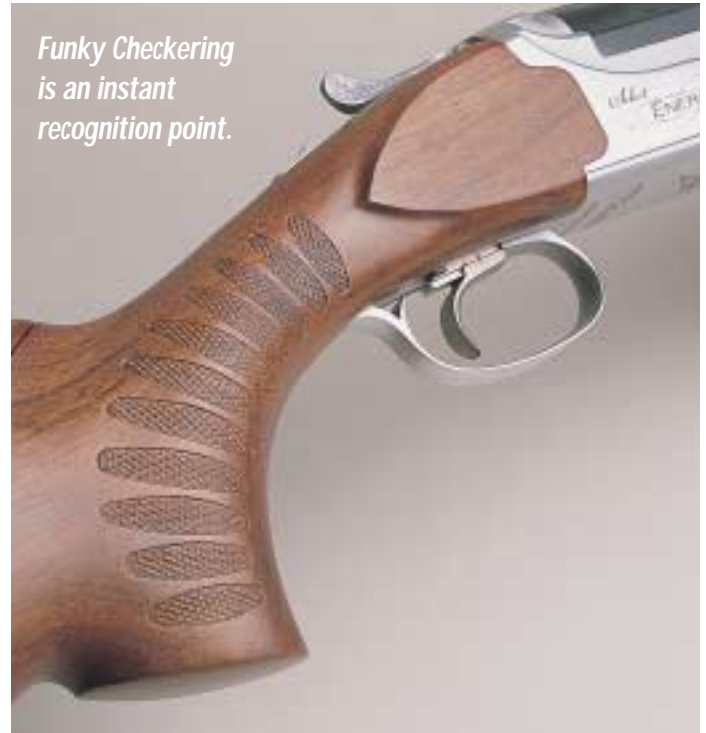
The weight varies from 7¼ lbs with 28" barrels to 7¾ lbs for the 32". Opting for the adjustable comb adds just a fraction to that, not enough to materially affect the weight distribution. You could argue that another half pound or so would be better, not that recoil was an issue. Some years ago I had the chance to give an extended test to otherwise identical standard bore and overbored Brownings and I came away convinced that the recoil reduction claims were valid. Porting I am less certain of, but I guess it does no harm except perhaps increase noise levels for bystanders.

Barrel selection is by the conventional H-pattern on the safety catch, Browning fashion, but unbolt the stock and you will find lockwork that has little in common with Japanese made guns. There is very little free play on the trigger and the pull on our test gun was

crisp. My pull gauge registered 5lbs on the first barrel, around half a pound more on the second, not heavy enough to be objectionable but not in the very top class.

The Select Energy is now a credible contender as an affordable first competition gun. From the viewpoint of one who has

always had a soft spot for the Winchester brand (my very first gun was a 101), it is a shame that this was not the gun that first appeared. That said, the strength of the name and the Winchester marketing should ensure it does well. At last – a gun to put a smile back on the cowboy's face. ■



Funky Checkering is an instant recognition point.

The adjustable comb is a strong selling point in this price bracket.

