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Fabarm XLR5 Composite Hunter

THE NEWEST MEMBER OF FABARM'S XLR5 FAMILY OF SEMIAUTO SHOTGUNS ISN'T DRESSED TO IMPRESS, BUT ITS BUILD QUALITY AND VERSATILITY MAKE IT A STANDOUT IN THE GAS-GUN MARKET.

FOR years, Fabarm has been building top-quality Italian over/under and semiauto shotguns, but the brand has only recently begun receiving the attention it deserves from wingshooters and waterfowl hunters. Fabarm's guns stack up well against competing firearms and offer a long list of class-leading features at a very competitive price point, and that's why I was thrilled to have an opportunity to test the company's new XLR5 Composite Hunter semiauto 12-gauge.

Although it's certainly the least flashy of all the semiauto Fabarm shotguns, the XLR5 Composite Hunter is a no-nonsense scattergun that's equally suited for the competitive clay shooter, upland hunter, or waterfowler. What it lacks in Turkish walnut and engraving, it more than makes up for in build quality and refinement. And although it's a bit of a dark horse, this Italian stallion might be the winning bet for the best all-purpose gas gun on the market.

THE XLR5

At the heart of the XLR5 is Fabarm's revolutionary Pulse Piston operating system that debuted in 2003. Fabarm pistons contain an elastomer insert that acts as a drag to slow the rearward motion of the piston when shooting

heavy magnum loads. After firing, gas traveling down the barrel is vented into the gas system and the piston moves rearward. Light target loads simply push back against the piston and the action cycles normally. Magnum loads push a bit harder, and that causes the friction acting on the elastomer to slow the piston and act as a progressive brake. This reduces perceived recoil, and

makes Fabarm semiautos some of the softest-shooting 12-gauge guns available. Elastomer is durable and resists deformation or damage for thousands of rounds, so there's no need to worry about it breaking down over time. This design allows the XLR5 Composite Hunter to handle everything from light target ammo up to magnums reliably, even after years of hard use.



SPECIFICATIONS

ACTION	Gas-operated semiauto
GAUGE	12
CHAMBER	3"
BARREL LENGTH	28"
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 14 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	48 1/4"
LOP	14 3/4"
STOCK	Soft Touch Composite
RECEIVER FINISH	Anodized black
BARREL FINISH	Matte blue
CHOKES	5 INNER HP
SIGHTS	Fiber-optic front bead. Receiver machined for optics mount
MSRP	\$1,725
WEBSITE	fabarmusa.com

Since the XLR5 Composite Hunter's main spring isn't located within the buttstock and the forearm doesn't play a role in the operating system, Fabarm's engineers had full control when designing the stock of the XLR5. With its rather steeply angled pistol grip, the XLR5 Composite Hunter offers complete control of the gun, and the natural hand and wrist position helps reduce fatigue. The grip angle also positions the hand so the finger naturally lands on the trigger. A soft rubber insert in the comb of the stock reduces the impact of recoil on the shooter's face, and three interchangeable stock shims are included with the gun.

The Fabarm's forearm is trim and comfortable. The flat side panels feature checkering that offers added grip that's ideal for wet mornings in the forest or duck blind, and both the stock and forearm feature a soft-touch finish with a rubberized feel, which further enhances control.

The XLR5's controls are similar in function to other semiauto shotguns, although the Fabarm's control layout is slightly different. There's a bolt-release button that's recessed into the left side of the receiver. The magazine cutoff lever is also on the left side of the gun and sits just in front of the trigger guard. After shells are loaded in the tube magazine, pressing the magazine cutoff from right to left releases a shell onto the carrier, which is then loaded into the chamber.

There's a crossbolt safety positioned at the rear of the trigger guard. A magazine stop makes it possible to unload the gun without running every shell through the action: By simply turning the gun over and depressing the stop with your thumb, you can drop each shell individually from the magazine to your hand.

Beveling on the lower portion of the

checkering from the forearm extends onto the lower portion of the receiver—a functional and stylish touch.

The Italian National Proof House pressure tests all shotgun barrels to a standard of 1,200 Bar of pressure, but Fabarm (one of only three Italian gun companies that make their own barrels) has their barrels tested to 1,630 Bar—roughly 23,500 pounds per square inch. That's far more pressure than most barrels will ever endure under normal conditions, but it offers peace of mind knowing that Fabarm guns are built to survive the worst.

The XLR5 Composite comes with a TRIBORE HP barrel, which tapers from about .740" in front of the chamber to about .725" at the choke tubes. Theoretically, there are two primary purposes for this barrel design: First, the open overbore portion of the barrel reduces felt recoil, and second, the conical design increases velocity as the load moves down the narrowing barrel channel. XLR5 shotguns come with five INNER HP choke tubes, and their hyperbolic design allows for the use of nontoxic shot in chokes tighter than modified constriction—a real bonus for waterfowl hunters.

The Fabarm's barrel is topped with a 6mm flat rib with a red fiber-optic front bead. There's a green fiber-optic insert in the rear of the receiver that contrasts with the red bead and helps ensure a consistent sight picture—unless, of course, you're color blind. Other added features include QD sling swivels, an easy-to-grip magazine cap, and a stylish zippered case that's a significant step above the plastic cases offered with many shotguns.

IN THE FIELD

There's little doubt that the XLR5 Composite Hunter is designed for the shooter who wants a single gun that's

receiver makes loading the gun simpler and easier than competing semiauto shotguns, and a cutout in the front of the carrier reduces the risk of pinched thumbs. The rather concave shape of the lower receiver also offers a natural hold point when carrying the gun.

SHOTGUN REPORT

good for all seasons. It offers durability and concealment needed when hunting waterfowl, the balance and weight of an upland shotgun, and the reliability of a clay target gun. Waterfowlers will love the XLR5 Composite's INNER HP choke tubes, durable matte-black finish, and PVD coated bolt, but this is one of the few guns that I'd be equally happy carrying to the upland field. Sure, there are certain situations where a more specialized shotgun makes sense, but for a broad swath of upland, waterfowl, and clay games, the XLR5 is about as effective and versatile a semiauto gas gun as you'll find.

There are plenty of affordable composite semiauto shotguns on the market, but the Fabarm's Pulse Piston System is the primary feature that sets this gun apart in this crowded field. I shot a total of four rounds of trap and skeet with the Fabarm, as well as two rounds of sporting clays, and throughout the test I continued to check the gun's operating system for signs of failure or exces-



sive fouling. I found none. What's more, the XLR5 is a very soft-shooting gun. I patterned the gun with Federal's 3" 1³/₈-oz. Prairie Storm load, and while that ammo will rattle your fillings with most lightweight upland guns, it's actually relatively comfortable to shoot through the XLR5. The Pulse Piston design also makes the XLR5 an

extremely fast-cycling semiauto. John Yeiser recently set the world record for breaking 25 straight trap targets in just 64.14 seconds using a Fabarm XLR5.

The XLR5's stock and metalwork will effectively stand up to the rigors of the field, and upland hunters will appreciate this gun's weight and balance. Having the ability to unload the chamber (for fence crossings or while handling dogs) without having to empty the magazine is a real bonus, and I like being able to quickly and easily remove the sling swivels with the touch of a button. I'm also a fan of the soft-touch stock, which offers a secure hold on the gun without feeling sticky.

There is a long list of versatile 12-gauge semiauto shotguns, but the Fabarm XLR5 Composite Hunter stands out from the crowd. It boasts one of the best operating systems of any gun in this class, a long list of hunter-friendly features, and a build quality that's every bit as good as the biggest names in the market. **GD**