

A showcase of new products for Delta Waterfowl members

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Kyle Wintersteen/Delta Waterfowl

FABARM XLR5 WATERFOWLER FABARMUSA.COM

The flat, slate-blue water lay in stark contrast to the rolling seas that had chased us off the New England bay the day prior, and the shift spurred ample flocks of sea ducks to vacate their hideaways. A long-tailed duck skirted the spread, and I raised up swinging a FabArm XLR5 Waterfowler. My first bird of the trip skipped across the surface.

Throughout the hunt, I found the Italian-made XLR5 lively in my hands. Like many of today's versatile autoloaders, it weighs just seven pounds, yet its handling seemed to mimic the smooth swing and effortless follow-through of the heavier duck guns of yesteryear. I also appreciated the "soft touch" coating on the stock and forend, a rubbery material that enhanced grip and comfort.

An optional 30-inch barrel (my test gun was 28 inches) further mirrors the classic duck-gun feel. Both barrel options are over-bored, with a long, tapered forcing cone to improve patterns by more gently transitioning the pellets from chamber to choke. A

raised rib extends across the receiver, and it's topped with a glare-reducing matte black.

The barrels are also pressure-rated for up to an extra-full choke with steel shot, unique among duck guns. That allowed me to select FabArm's EXIS DK extended full choke (three others are included with purchase), which proved invaluable. We often shot at blind-shy birds on the edge of the decoys, and my test gun put noticeably more shot on target. The added constriction was so effective at dispatching crippled eiders — on the water with only the heads of the thickly feathered birds exposed — that hunters began deferring to me to deliver the *coups de grâce*.

Light recoil was fostered by a cushy cheek piece, generous recoil pad, and a gas-operated action that FabArm calls its Pulse Piston system. When a shell is fired, a robust piston is cycled rearward into an action bar, which in turn cycles the bolt. I found it speedy and reliable. And with heavy loads (the XLR5 Waterfowler is chambered for 3-inch,

12-gauge), the system slows the bolt's rearward travel, creating a recoil sensation that's more akin to a push than a kick. Cleaning the uncomplicated parts was notably pain-free.

Salt spray tested the XLR5's rust-resistant enhancements, which include a physical-vapor-deposit finish on the bolt, chrome-plated bore and barrel extension, synthetic stock and camo-coated barrel. My test gun's "True Timber Viper" camo pattern also featured a corrosion-halting Cerakote receiver, while the brownish "Kryptek Banshee" version offers a camo receiver. My gun lock (required by Massachusetts when not actively hunting) rusted like a Corvair, but the gun was pristine.

Oversized controls, including the trigger guard, safety, magazine cutoff, bolt handle and magazine release, round out the XLR5's waterfowl-friendly features.

Every few years I test a duck gun that makes my firearms safe feel utterly incomplete. The FabArm XLR5 Waterfowler is one of them. — Kyle Wintersteen