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AyA 12-Gauge No. 2 Sidelock By Greg Rodriguez



Though the Spanish double gun firm of AyA (Aguirre & Aranzabal) has long been popular among the shotgunning cognoscenti, I never laid my hands on one until my wife and I toured the factory on a recent holiday in Spain.

There, I learned that AyA has been building guns in Spain's Basque Country since 1915. But it wasn't until the company started making high-quality copies of a sidelock Holland & Holland and a boxlock Westley Richards for the London gun trade that American and European shooters recognized the quality for which the small firm is known today.

AyA still employs the classic, long workbench for which Spanish gunmakers are known, and each gun is still passed down the bench and largely hand-made by talented gunsmiths. But modern CNC machines that whittle solid chunks of bar stock down to actions before they are placed on the bench speed the process along. Though the manufacturing process is more modern, the quality of these fine shotguns is decidedly old-world.

I was sufficiently impressed with AyA's mix of old-world craftsmanship and modern manufacturing methods that I ordered one of the sidelock No. 1s in 28 gauge while at the factory. Since I knew it would be a while before I would receive my new quail gun, I asked AyA USA to send me one of the No.2s for testing and evaluating.

The No. 2 Up Close

AyA's No. 2 differs from the No. 1 that I ordered for my personal use in that its wood is not quite as fancy, and the engraving is done by machine rather than by hand. Both share AyA's sidelock action, which is a copy of a classic Holland & Holland design. AyA's version is CNC-machined from a solid block of steel with double underlugs and hand-detachable sidelocks. The sideplates are removed by turning an engraved lever on the left side. Seven polished pins are clearly visible on each side of the color-casehardened action. The lovely

scroll engraving is well-done.

Disk-set strikers allow easy replacement of the striker or striker spring, a feature common on English best-quality guns but rarely seen on guns that cost less than a new truck. Another nice touch is a replaceable hinge pin, which allows a heavily used gun to be made tight again by a qualified gunsmith. Intercepting safety sears prevent the tumblers from moving forward and firing the gun in the event of a fall or a hard knock.

Forged, chopper-lump barrels are another AyA standard feature usually found on much more expensive guns. Since they are made from a single forging, chopper-lump barrels are expensive to make, but they are far more solid when done right. The No. 2's 28-inch barrels are topped with a concave rib. The 12-gauge chambers are 2¾ inches, and the fixed chokes are Improved Cylinder and Modified, which are ideal for a game gun. The barrels wear a deep, rich black finish.

My test gun has double triggers, with the front being an articulated design.

In keeping with its classic lines, the oil-finished stock has a straight, English-style grip. The wood is dark and nicely figured. While the hand-checkering on the butt doesn't soften the No. 2's recoil, it looks great. The splinter fore-end and grip are also hand-checked. The work is nicely done with crisp, sharp points and straight lines.



Bela Karolyi shoots skeet with the AyA No. 2. Bela liked the gun so much he bought it when the author completed his testing.

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Though machines speed the process, AyA's guns are still largely hand-built.

The test gun was well-made and beautifully finished. The action locked up nice and tight, and the triggers were crisp. The front trigger broke at 4 pounds, 2 ounces, and the back broke at 5 pounds, 6 ounces.

Afield With The No. 2

I was quite taken with the pretty, new AyA, and I was anxious to shoot it in the field, so soon after receiving it, I took it on a pheasant hunt with my friend Bela Karolyi, the renowned gymnastics coach, at the Rio Brazos Hunting Preserve in Simonton, Texas.

I started out with some pre-hunt clay targets to get used to the No. 2, and I quickly found that I hit pretty well with it despite the fact that the stock was too long for me. It didn't take long before I'd broken enough clay targets that I felt comfortable enough to head out on the heels of our guide's well-trained pointers in search of some of the hard-flushing pheasant, quail, and chukar for which the Rio Brazos is known.



The AyA No. 2 sidelock is easy to disassemble. A simple

lever makes removing and replacing the sideplates a snap.

We hadn't walked far when the dogs locked up hard on a grassy covert. We approached cautiously, but the sound of the covey rise still gave me a start. I recovered in time to find a bird fleeing right to left. My finger found the front trigger as the gun found my shoulder, and the bird tumbled hard. A flash of movement to my right turned into a flushing bobwhite that I crumpled with the left barrel. A crisp double was all it took--I was falling fast for the new Spanish beauty.

I continued to shoot the No. 2 well the rest of the day. I usually hunt quail with a 28 gauge, so I had to restrain myself a bit to allow the birds to get far enough away that I didn't destroy them with the big 12, but I had no trouble hitting them farther out. I even dropped a few pheasants and chukar out to 45 or 50 yards. Some of the credit must go to the chokes, which seemed a bit tight for I/C and Mod., but the gun's great lines and trim stock made it point and swing quite well in my hands.

A Best-Quality Double

My experience with fine English guns is somewhat limited, but I've seen and shot enough of them to know that the AyA is every bit as good as the best English smoothbores in many ways.

The No. 2 came up to my shoulder easily and swung as nicely as any best-quality double. Mechanically, it was also very solid. Its triggers were crisp and clean, its Southgate-style ejectors sent empty hulls sailing, and its action opened smoothly and locked up tightly.

Aesthetically, the No. 2 was simply beautiful. The barrel blacking was as fine as any I've seen, and the engraving, though not done by hand, was nicely executed. The wood was gorgeous, with an expertly applied oil finish, and the wood-to-metal fit was flawless. An examination with a magnifying glass might reveal minute flaws you wouldn't find on a Holland & Holland, but the test gun looked perfect to me.

If you've got time to look for minute flaws with a magnifying glass, go ahead. But if the AyA's I've seen are any indication, you'll be hard-pressed to find any. As for me, well, I'd rather spend that time and the money I saved by buying an AyA instead of an English gun on a whole bunch of really good hunts.



The No. 2's removable disk-set strikers are visible in the

receiver face. This is a feature normally reserved for much more expensive shotguns.

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