

(Pheasants Forever magazine 2004)

Two triggers? Better than one. AyA side-by-sides

by Scott Cherek and Tom Bulloch

We had walked only five minutes on a cold, crisp January morning when the day's first rooster took to wing behind me. I swung to my left, pulled the trigger, and the bird wobbled but kept climbing. I pulled the trigger again, and again, but nothing happened. Then the cock's wings beat once more and it collapsed in a heap. My old Lab Max tottered over to where it dropped and carried the big bird back to me. It was then I was aware of my hunting partner's laughter.

"You have two triggers on that gun for a reason," he called across the weed-choked draw we were hunting. My futile attempt to fire the second barrel had been obvious. Indeed, this was my first trip afield with a new AyA side-by-side 12 gauge, equipped with the dual triggers that are traditional classic English styling. "I didn't need the second barrel anyway," I answered, hoping to save some degree of face.

After years of shooting an over/under, I was eager to see how the pretty AyA side-by-side performed (after all, the British consider a side-by-side the only "true" shotgun). AyA, short for Aguirre y Aranzabal, has been making fine shotguns in Spain since 1915, and the quality of the company's firearms has been largely responsible for putting an end to an old perception that the Spaniards could not make a double that measures up to the great names of British game guns. In fact, AyA shotguns are today one of the best-selling side-by-sides in the U.K., and since the company's founding it has sold more than 600,000 shotguns around the world.

New England Custom Gun Service of New Hampshire, one of only a few exclusive AyA importers, recommended the AyA No. 2, stating flatly that "you can't buy a better shotgun for the money." The folks at NECG are gunsmiths, too, so they know very well how a gun holds up over the years. The No. 2 starts at \$3995, which includes everything you could possibly want, including being custom built to your measurements if you so desire. It is available in 12, 16, 20, 28 and .410 bore. The sidelock action is fully hand engraved and the walnut stock is rich and beautifully patterned.

28 inch barrels are standard on 12, 16 and 20 gauge guns, 27 inch on the 28 and .410 bores. Other barrel lengths can be ordered. You can also choose color casehardened, old silver or bright finishes on the action. NECG offers several other AyA models, some with substantially higher price tags, but for my money the No. 2 is an exceptional buy.

As handsome as they are, AyA insists their guns are made to shoot. I would wholeheartedly agree with this. Our hunt that day started with temperatures in the teens, making gloves and heavy jackets necessary, and warmed to where we were hunting in our shirtsleeves in the afternoon. After so many years of shooting relatively bulky shotguns, I found the AyA to be a very pleasant surprise. Its light weight (6.8 lbs.) and almost delicate lines made it handle just as easily with heavy clothing and gloves as without. It has terrific balance and is pleasant to carry. I found hunting with the AyA gave me an added measure of self-confidence, since it is so quick to the shoulder that I knew I didn't have to rush a shot.

I can justify the cost of an AyA, since I know I'll have it for the rest of my life. Renowned shotgun writer Michael McIntosh reports putting over 80,000 rounds through his, the only service required being a new firing pin. Terry Weiland, in his book *Spanish Best*, flatly states "the modern era of fine guns in Spain is defined by AyA." Those two gentlemen do know their shotguns, so I trust their opinions.

Oh, about those two triggers. I'm happy to report that sliding the finger to the rear trigger for a second shot quickly became second nature. I believe it helps me be more deliberate and accurate with a second shot, too. Besides, as I was happy to point out to my partner when I was up three roosters to zip, with the AyA I shoot so well that a second barrel is hardly even necessary. If a second rooster happens to get up, well, that's why two triggers are better than one.

(For more information, contact New England Custom Gun Service, Ltd., 438 Willow Brook Road, Plainfield, NH 03781, tel (603) 469-3450. e-mail bestguns@cyberportal.net, or visit)