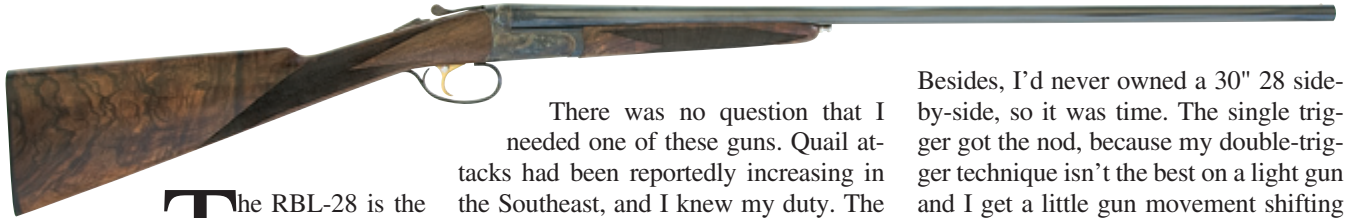


Connecticut Shotgun's RBL-28



The RBL-28 is the second in the RBL side-by-side boxlock series from Connecticut Shotgun Manufacturing Co. The first was the RBL-20 Launch Edition, announced in *Shooting Sportsman* in late 2005 and reviewed here in May/June 2008. The Launch Edition was eagerly anticipated and caused more Internet comment—replete with photo postings of each lucky new owner's gun—than any other shotgun in recent years.

The 28-gauge was announced two years later, in the fall of 2007. The base price had been raised from \$2,799 for the 20 to \$3,650, but then the 28 always has been an upper-crust gauge. It's not that the 28s actually cost more to make. The volume isn't there, so margin becomes more important. It's the same in the cost difference of 28-versus 20-gauge shells. Options had changed slightly on the RBL-28. Case coloring, which had been extra at \$250, was now standard. A single trigger, which had been a free option on the 20, was now \$175 extra. Wood options included 2X standard, 3X (\$350), 4X (\$600) and Exhibition (\$900). The H&H-type assisted opener was still available at \$450. Chokes were now fixed, not screw-in as on the 20. The gorgeous canvas-and-leather, fully accessorized case was included as before.

There was no question that I needed one of these guns. Quail attacks had been reportedly increasing in the Southeast, and I knew my duty. The only question was how to set up the gun to best deal with the threat.

Many feel that the 28 is the ideal plantation-quail gauge, and I'm in that camp. Its ³/₄-oz payload is large enough to be very effective but small enough to offer an excuse when you miff a shot and need sympathy. It's a win/win deal.

Half the fun of ordering a gun is determining how to spec it out. The RBL isn't exactly a custom gun, but the advertisements showed enough options to provide some entertainment.

I went for the English stock and splinter forend, because I prefer that look on a

Besides, I'd never owned a 30" 28 side-by-side, so it was time. The single trigger got the nod, because my double-trigger technique isn't the best on a light gun and I get a little gun movement shifting triggers. Those traditionalists with more digital dexterity would pick DTs. And finally, I splurged by ordering exhibition walnut, because I asked my dog and she sort of nodded.

A few months after ordering, I was at the 2008 Safari Club International Convention, in Reno, and spent an inordinate amount of time at the CSMC booth handling all of the different iterations of the RBL-28. Seeing the guns in person caused me to make one change. When shouldering the 30" gun, I felt that the long barrels drew my eyes away from the target too much, although the extra weight

up front was nice. I

called to switch my order from 30" to 28" and asked if the gun could be made with Skeet and Improved Cylinder quail chokes instead of the listed Modified/Full.

The gun arrived 13 months from the date of ordering—the same time it took for my RBL-20 to gestate. Frankly, I sort of like having a gun "on order." It is something to look forward to; something to make plans for.

As I go through the gun, I'll concentrate on the differences between it and the RBL-20.

The manufacturing process and basic makeup of the RBL series was described in the review of the 20-gauge.

The RBL-28's action is mechanically unchanged from the 20's. It's a prov-



The RBL-28 is light, fast, mechanically correct and properly proportioned. It also comes in a fully accessorized case and is available with first-rate exhibition-grade walnut.

small side-by-side. Admittedly, the very nice pistol grip and beavertail forend would allow for a touch more control, but sex sells. The 30" barrels were appealing, because a little extra weight up front might be advantageous in a light gun.

en Anson & Deeley design with Purdey-style double underbolts, Southgate ejectors, flat V mainsprings and a reliable inertial selective single trigger or double triggers as you wish. The major interior wearing parts are coated in durable gold-colored titanium nitride just like a high-speed drill bit. The coating is tough, rust-proof and looks nice.

Is the gun built on a true 28-gauge action? Maybe yes, maybe no. I put the 28-gauge barrels onto the 20-gauge receiver and the 20's barrels onto the 28's receiver just to see if I could. Everything fit. The opening levers came over the correct amount, and the guns locked up nicely. Kudos to the magic of CNC and EDM. The only real differences were the larger fences on the 20 and a few thou of width at the sides near the forend iron. I did not measure the difference in receiver weights, but it couldn't amount to much. Frankly, this sized receiver stuff doesn't really matter. The 28's receiver *looks* in correct proportion, and that's what counts.

All the RBL-28s have case-colored receivers. The optional French gray of the RBL-20s has been discontinued. Coloring is oven baked in a traditional bone-and-charcoal pack. As before, the engraving is done by machine, but the RBL-28's scroll with setter and pointer on the sides and a grouse on the bottom seems shallower, or at least less distinct, than the engraving on the 20. The 28's engraving gets lost in the case coloring.

The barrels on the 28 carry a good-quality, medium-gloss rust blue. CSMC tried a military-spec, thermal-set barrel coating on the early RBL-20s but went back to doing it the old-fashioned way. Chambers are 2³/₄", as befits the 28 gauge, and forcing cones are standard length. As before, the barrel bores are chromed, but this time screw chokes are out and fixed chokes are in. My guess is that this was done to keep the barrel weight down and the gun's balance neutral. Barrel lengths of 26", 28" and 30" are now offered instead of only 28" on the 20-gauge. If you request it, CSMC will give you whatever fixed chokes you wish. If you don't stipulate, the 26" barrels get Skeet and IC, whereas the longer tubes come Modified and Full. The top rib is a beautiful English-style swamped game rib, which lends a graceful look to the gun's profile.

Due to a hiccup in communication, my 28" barrels came through with the M/F chokes, but I was promised one-day factory turnaround to open them up. This is a good place to mention that CSMC has earned an excellent reputation for quick

and courteous service. The company was quick to make good on any initial flaws in the early production RBL-20s. I measured both bores at .551", almost a perfectly nominal .550" for the 28. The barrels on my gun are quite light, and no wonder: Barrel-wall thickness just behind the chokes was .065". This is certainly safe, but it is a good bit svelter than so many of the clunky mass-produced barrels made by some other makers today. Give credit to first-rate machinery, first-rate machinists and those fixed chokes.

The wood options on the RBL-28 are the same as they were on the 20: English or pistol grip and splinter or beavertail forend. As it should be, the wrist on my 28 was slimmer than the wrist on the 20, and it felt much better. The 28 retains the "no screws" long trigger-guard tang that slips into a hidden fastener in the stock.

In all, the 28 is a gorgeous and properly proportioned package. My only little touches of aesthetic whining are that the trigger guard seems a bit oversized, the curve of the single trigger isn't particularly graceful (but it is comfortable) and the bright silver of the Anson forend push button seems out of place against the bluing and case coloring of the rest of the gun. But these are small things, and you may very well prefer them the way they are.

Then there is the wood. My gun was ordered with exhibition walnut for an extra \$900. All of the RBL exhibition walnut I've seen has been absolutely first rate, but my piece hit the lumber Lotto. Lascivious walnut won't improve my shooting, but it sure takes the pain out of the misses.


I took the gun through a combination of barrel testing, considerable clay shooting and three days of plantation quail. The barrel tests showed that the chokes shot tight as expected for M/F. If I were to use the gun for distant doves, these might work, but for quail, grouse, woodcock or snipe you would be well to consider the .006" and .012" Skeet and Light Modified for best coverage in the 15- to 30-yard range.

Barrel convergence—the ability of both barrels to shoot to the same point—was spot-on perfect. This is a critical but often overlooked aspect of a gun. Surprisingly few doubles have perfect convergence, so this is a tribute to CSMC's barrel regulation. One major maker feels that 8" separation is acceptable at 40 yards, but I don't. That would cost you a third of your effective pattern.

The gun is set up to shoot flat. For most people, the standard stock drop of 1¹/₂"

at comb and 2³/₈" at heel will show a fair amount of rib, but the gun does not shoot as high as it looks. It worked out perfectly for the majority of the shooters I loaned it to. Initially, many complained that the stock was too high, but they were pleasantly surprised when the gun shot dead on for them. Others who are used to high combs felt that the gun shot a little lower than the sight picture indicated, and they had to cover their targets to get a hit. Light-barreled sub-gauge side-by-side guns, like this 28, are reputed to have more barrel down flip than other guns. This might be why the gun shoots so flat while showing an elevated sight picture. The choice of 14¹/₄" or 14³/₄" lengths of pull makes the gun suitable for a broad range of shooters. I felt that the stock could have used a bit more pitch, but no one else commented on this, so I must be the odd man out.

The most noticeable shooting characteristic of the gun was its swing speed. At a featherweight 5 pounds 10 ounces—versus 6 pounds 2.4 ounces for a similarly set up RBL-20—and balanced on the hinge pin, this RBL-28 is Ferrari fast. It reminded me very much of the 28-gauge Parker Reproduction: Both move like lightning. In exchange for the reflexive speed and the ability to make instant corrections, you will be required to concentrate more on your swing so as not to stop the gun. The inertia of the gun won't keep it moving for you the way it will on a gun with more weight forward. For comparison, I tried a 30" RBL-28 with a beavertail forend and pistol grip. It was a little more sedate, but not much.

Compared to the RBL-20 Launch Edition, the RBL-28 is a more specialized gun. It is featherweight, lightning fast, mechanically correct and absolutely gorgeous. It's a classy gun in a classy gauge. And it won't stop there. CSMC is now also producing RBLs in 12 and 16 gauge. The hefty 3" magnum RBL-12s I've handled have been built with a weight-forward bias meant for waterfowl and sporting clays. The scaled-frame RBL-16s are a good bit lighter and more neutrally balanced for upland work. CSMC has even added a 20-gauge rifled version of the RBL-20 for sabotaged slugs complete with iron sights and scope mounts. All continue the RBL tradition of an American-made shotgun of good quality at a reasonable cost. Well done, indeed. 

Author's Note: For more information on RBL shotguns, contact Connecticut Shotgun Mfg. Co., 860-225-6591; www.connecticutshotgun.com.