

ZOLI'S Z GUN HR

DAVE HOLMES REVIEWS HIS LATEST INVESTMENT

When it comes to the new Zoli HR (High Rib), one might think that the high rib is its main feature, but it's not –

even though the rib is well executed, about a half-inch high, tapering from about .430 to .320 and nicely machined. It has a hinged pivot-point at the breech and a wheel powered elevation adjustment at the muzzle. The wheel is secured with a locking screw, as is the rib once set. The rib settings run from 50/50, 60/40ish to 90/10. The ramp at the rear of the rib has a smooth finish and it doesn't stand out bold and black in one's vision.

Technical Specs

Beyond the attraction of the high rib there are plenty of other features that contribute to the market success of the Z Gun HR. The action was designed to produce a high-volume target gun. It utilizes the 'tween the barrels bolt lock-up of the Boss action, which in theory reduces strain on the locking mechanism. Barrels are restrained from forward motion by a lug that drops into a recess in the bottom of the receiver. It's a system simple in concept, although it must be competently machined to yield the desired

results. Properly fitted, this lock up system removes any strain from the trunnions, which become non-stressed non-wear pivot points for the barrels. The Z action is surface hardened, making wear a very minimal issue.

It comes with a detachable trigger, but not for a functional advantage in the trigger itself. It was designed that way so the action could be machined in a single piece, helping to reduce vibration and any possibility of flexing the action and compromising trigger/sear engagement by over-tightening screws. The trigger system is stout, simply designed and easily detached by loosening a single screw at the back of the trigger guard. The pulls on my gun are 4lbs.

Firing pins are easily accessible for replacement. If one is lucky enough to wear the locking bolt out, over-size replacements are available.

Reliable? I asked two high-volume Zoli shooters – Brad Kidd and Ashleigh Hafley. Both said they had put over 100,000 rounds through their guns with no issues, rebuilds or problems.

The frame of this Z Gun is trim. Overall action height at the fence is 2.52" with the forward section exactly half that. Barrels are closely set in the mono-block. The fences are attractively sculpted. Frame width is 1.775". The action comes

blued or plated for the same price.

Barrels are deep-hole drilled, reamed, honed and chrome plated. Bore size is nominally .730,

a figure Zoli feels produces the best ballistic results based on their testing. The bores in my gun measured .728 and .729 on a dial bore gauge. The forcing cones are short by today's standards, somewhere in the 1" range.

Barrels are straightened and regulated by hand in the time-honored fashion and are highly polished, inside and out, and threaded for choke tubes – extended in the case of this target gun. Barrels tip the scales at 1619 grams. The choke tubes are titanium nitride coated, easy to clean and weigh between 30-35 grams, depending on constriction. Constrictions of the five tubes that came with the gun are Imod/.026, Mod/.016, L Mod/.13, IC/.006 and Skeet 2/.003. The Z Gun HR comes with mid bead and light pipe front sight installed.

Management

If these features of the Z gun don't seem quite enough in a crowded market, another attribute that makes the HR stand out is Zoli's International President, Norbert Haussman. Regardless of any business title he ever holds, he will

There are a bunch of good sporters out there, but it's a crowded and tough market to crack. Each manufacturer likes to find a distinctive marketing edge but the problem is that every gun in its class has the same parts with only slightly different approaches to features, function or appearance. But the inevitable outcome is that some combinations of features have the edge.



NORBERT HAUSSMAN

always be a gunsmith at heart. He has been in the 'business' for a long time – starting when he was a teenager with Krieghoff.

Norbert got to know Paolo Zoli, who now captains the Zoli 'ship', many years ago. In fact, Paolo had asked Norbert for his input during the designing of the Z Guns. After stints with two prominent gun companies and a successful retail operation, Norbert founded Zoli International in May 2013. Demonstrating his commitment to the sport, he spent much of his time on the bench at the recent Gamaliel Cup/SE Regional, working on different brands of guns. You don't see the heads of many gun companies doing that.

Stock Design

It was Norbert's expertise that lead to the outstanding feature of the HR – the stock design. I have rheumatoid arthritis and have issues with recoil. After a totally disappointing FITASC performance at the SE Regional, I knew I had to find a better grip shape to compensate for the sorry condition of my hands – or quit shooting. Plan B wasn't too appealing. The kicker was that I

had long ago given up on over-unders because of recoil issues. I was an auto man through and through – but I didn't know of an auto grip that would be an improvement over the one I was already shooting, so I was willing to look at over-unders again. As I scoured vendor's row, it became apparent that the HR deserved serious consideration. I burned a bunch of shells on the practice field with it. I didn't get sore. I couldn't believe it.

LOP on the HR is $14\frac{3}{4}$ with the trigger in the middle position. Trigger to grip measured 4". The distance from standing breech to the comb nose is 8". This dimension is seldom mentioned, but can be significant in shooting comfort. If the distance is too short, the comb nose pushes into the base of the thumb and cams the wrist upward. That creates a lot of muscle tightness and can keep the gun from 'finding' the shoulder consistently, especially on high shots. The HR's 8-inch span is well chosen and the area between the grip and comb nose generously dished for proper hand positioning.

The palm swell is subtle. A variety of hand sizes have found the HR grip comfortable. The bottom line is that the grip is very well proportioned.

The comb is rolled on the left side. There is no 'soft' edge on the comb to annoy cheekbones. The comb is offset $\frac{1}{4}$ ", the perfect universal factory dimension. The adjustable comb allows at least another $\frac{1}{8}$ " offset – and it's a true offset comb, not cast on an angle. This is the only feature that could perhaps be improved on. As with any stock with an adjustable comb,



when the comb is set all the way over, the 'ledge' on the body of the stock can be uncomfortable on the face. A bevel to eliminate that edge eliminates that problem and would be a nice touch.

The lowest comb dimensions with the rib on the 50/50 setting are $1\frac{5}{8} \times 1\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ ". Changing the pitch on the rib for point of impact purposes changes those dimensions to a small extent. The comb hardware allows a bit of independent fore and aft manipulation. The posts are hardened and don't deform when the screw locks into them.

Even the recoil pad is well-done. I'm not above replacing a pad before even shooting a new gun, but the factory pad is still on my HR. It is soft and absorbs energy well, but the face is also slick and the edges rounded. It doesn't hang up on a low-gun mount. In a world of throw away factory pads, this one is fully functional and a 'keeper' (unless one must change the length).

Perceived Recoil

Pile all these features together and you have a gun that balances right around the trunnions, moves with grace and soaks up recoil, especially so since the barrels aren't over-bored or fitted with the long forcing cones that many turn to in pursuit of controlling recoil. I know – recoil depends only on the load used and the weight of the gun. But felt recoil, how that



energy is transmitted to the body, depends on stock design, bore lines relative to the butt of the gun, vibration, the efficiency of the pad, the comfort of the stock on the face and other factors people smarter than me understand. Everybody but one who has shot my gun has said it shoots softer than their usual gun.

If you like a bit more weight than the expected 8lb 10oz of the naked gun, the Zoli BHB balance system permits 6oz total to be added – 3oz each to the grip and under the forearm. It would be a simple matter to add muzzle weight with some long, steel choke tubes, ala Pure Gold or Kicks.

Norbert Haussman told me that he inspects each gun that comes into the country and makes any adjustments necessary. If the wood quality isn't what he thinks it should be, the wood is swapped out. I've heard nothing but good from those who have dealt with Zoli since he took over.

So there you have it. The high rib of the Z Gun HR is just one component of a model that gets every other feature just right. It is well-worth a look for anyone considering a higher rib gun – or maybe even a flat ribbed gun. The HR retail price point is \$7,230 with the BHB system, \$6,950 without. I've looked at plenty of shotguns lately and don't make this statement casually – it has the fit, the balance, the feel, the performance and the looks. What more can you ask for? ■