Double Duty

The Franchi Affinity proves the days of affordable, versatile semi-autos aren't gone.

MY FIRST VIEW of Matagorda Island occurred just after 4 o'clock in the morning. Matagorda is a barrier island that stretches for almost 40 miles along the coast of Texas, providing crucial habitat for wildlife, including migrating waterfowl.

Traveling via fan boat from Bay Flats Lodge in Seadrift, Texas, Benelli's Joe Coogan, outdoor writer Bryce M. Towsley and I set out in search of the migrating ducks that funnel into Matagorda each year. Guide T. J. Christensen pulled the boat onto a bar of broken oyster shells and helped the three of us unload our gear. Then he turned the boat and the roar of the fan lowered as he drove down the island and hid the boat, returning to our blind by starlight.

After T.J. set the decoys, Joe, Brice and I settled into the blind. Out of the darkness, I heard the whistle and splash of a couple dozen ducks landing in the decoy spread.

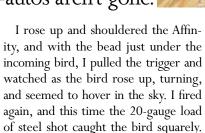
"Not time yet," T.J. said. Legal shooting light wouldn't begin for some time, but we already had a group in the decoys. They stayed until shooting light, rafted up on the edge of our decoys.

"Go ahead and load up," T.J. said. "It's time."

I picked up my Franchi Affinity, and loaded the Black Cloud 3-inch magnums as another flock of ducks wheeled out over the marsh flats.

"If this group turns, we shoot," T.J. said. On cue, the birds tilted in the morning light and doubled back toward our spread. As they approached, I waited for T.J.'s call with my hand wrapped around the pistol grip of the Franchi.

"Shoot!"



SEMI-REVOLUTION More than any other type of shotgun, semi-autos have undergone major changes over the past two decades. In years gone by semiautos were do-all guns, strictly made of wood stocks and blued metal. Almost every semi-auto sold in the mid-20th century served as a multipurpose gun, taking quail and rabbit as well as ducks, geese, deer, and even bear. Because of their more complex mechanical structure, semis cost more than pumps (if you expect the gun to do all the cycling work you'd better expect to pay extra), but they didn't cost as much as over/ unders and side-by sides.

Today, however, autoloaders look radically different than in the past. Many are treated with realistic

pattern dips. Actions have undergone a variety of changes also, and different manufacturers tout their system as the most reliable. In addition, the price point has jumped considerably as well. And even today, the role of the semiauto continues to change.

For Franchi's Affinity to add something remarkable to this nearly saturated segment of the shotgun world, the company would have to find a way to create a gun that handled well and was reliable, good-looking, and moderately priced.

That's no small order, but the Affinity impresses on a variety of fronts. First,

looking gun. In either black synthetic or camo versions (Realtree's MAX-4 or APG), the Franchi has classic lines. With a stylized recoil pad that dips into the stock, a step-up rib and a rear sling stud that is molded into the stock, the Affinity offers something for the modernist without offending the traditionalist. Stock shims allow for a customized fit,

Specifications

Manufact	urer	Franchi
Ga	uge	12, 20 (tested)
Barrel len	igth	26, 28 (tested)
Cho	okes	3 (IC, M, F), 2 (IC, M) with compact version
Sig	ghts	Red Fiber Optic Bar
Fi	nish	Black, Realtree MAX-4, Realtree APG
We	ight	6.4 lbs. (12 gauge), 5.6 lbs. (20 gauge)
Len	igth	471/4 inches, 491/4 inches
Cont	act:	www.franchiusa.com or (800) 264-4962
MS	SRP:	\$849-\$949

and a compact version of the Affinity is that performs reliably. And available with stock extensions that actu- we also prefer semi-autos ally look natural on the gun.

When your company's tagline is "Feels 23/4-inch loads Right," as Franchi's is, your guns better or hefty not handle like a piece of rough-cut timber. The Affinity's slim fore-end and pistol grip make it easy to swing and point, and the textured grip surfaces make it easy to hold onto when hunting in the moisture and muck of a duck blind. The heel of the

rally in line with the eye.

handle as well as the Affinity.

that will feed light,

with equal dependability, which gineers. The Affinity incorporates the Inertia Driven System that has helped make parent company Benelli

pad is guns rely on the rearward force gener- tered thorn and cactus of the coastal so as not to gun. The design is simple, effective, that morning. Hunting over pointing ing vests or jackets, of its inertia-driven counterparts, the of Prairie Storm through the Affinity, and the red fiber-optic Affinity's recoil spring is located around and it worked well. bar front sight comes natu- the magazine tube as opposed to inside

innovation, shooters expect a system finish that is resistant to weather and upland hunting.

gun cleaning solvents.

The narrow fore-end, aluminum alloy receiver and simple Inertia Driven system also make the Affinity a very lightweight semi-auto; the 12-gauge version weighs only about 6.4 pounds while the 20-gauge weighs just 5.6 pounds. Despite the light weight, I isn't an easy task for en- shot most of a box of Black Cloud 3-inch ammo through the Franchi without excessive discomfort.

After lunch, we headed out to a nearby ranch for a quail and chukar Rather than fuss with pistons, hunt. The Affinity was once again in O-rings, and gas valves, Inertia Driven tow, and it was as popular in the scatated by the shot charge to cycle the plains as it had been in the duck blind and lightweight. However, unlike many dogs, we managed to put several boxes

I didn't have any luck with quail, but did manage to fold a chukar that The balance point is near perfect, Cleaning of the system is fast and drummed up between two lumps of resting between the hands and making easy, and with only three parts (bolt thorn and headed straight out over the the gun easy to swing. Simply put, there body, inertia spring, and rotating bolt flat, dry plain. As the Affinity was are few if any semis past or current that head) there are far less moving parts tested by all of the outdoor writers to malfunction or become damaged in attendance, the verdict remained than on other design types. To add to unanimous: this new Franchi was out-INERTIA-DRIVEN After a century of overall reliability, the Affinity has a standing for both waterfowling and

