

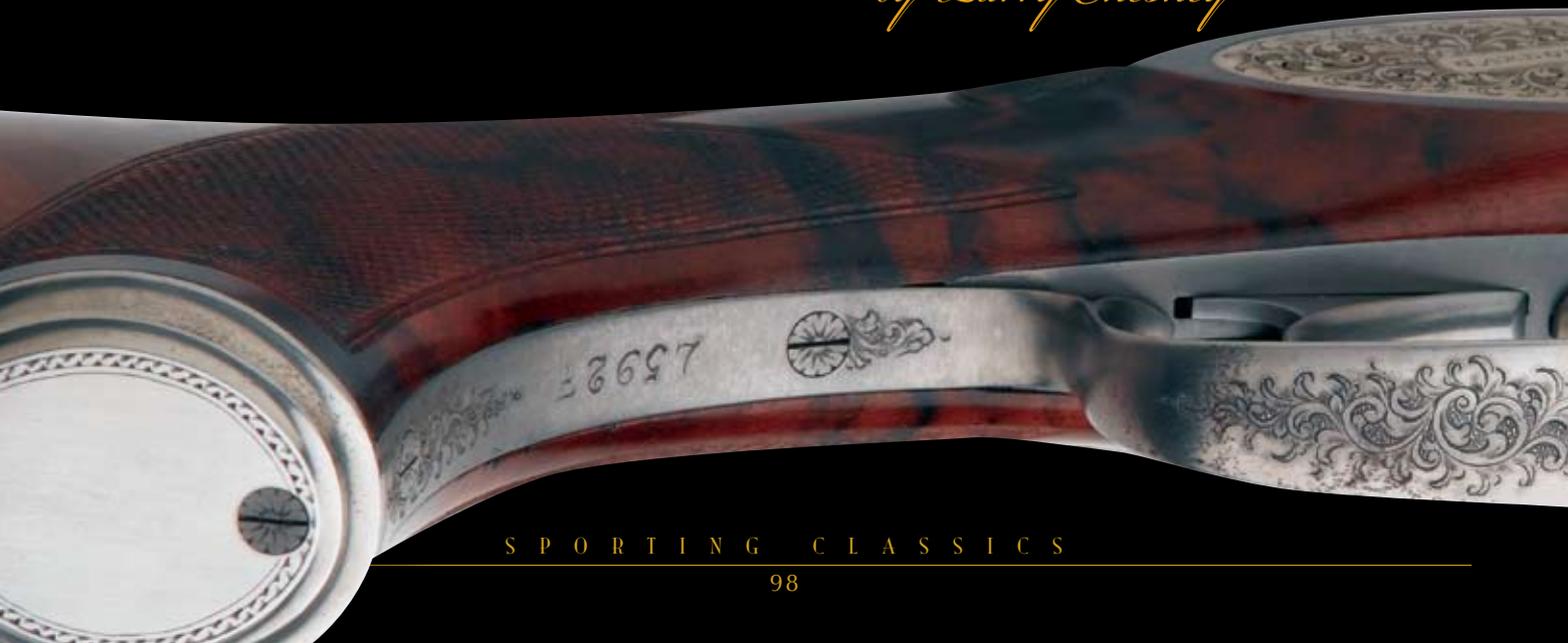


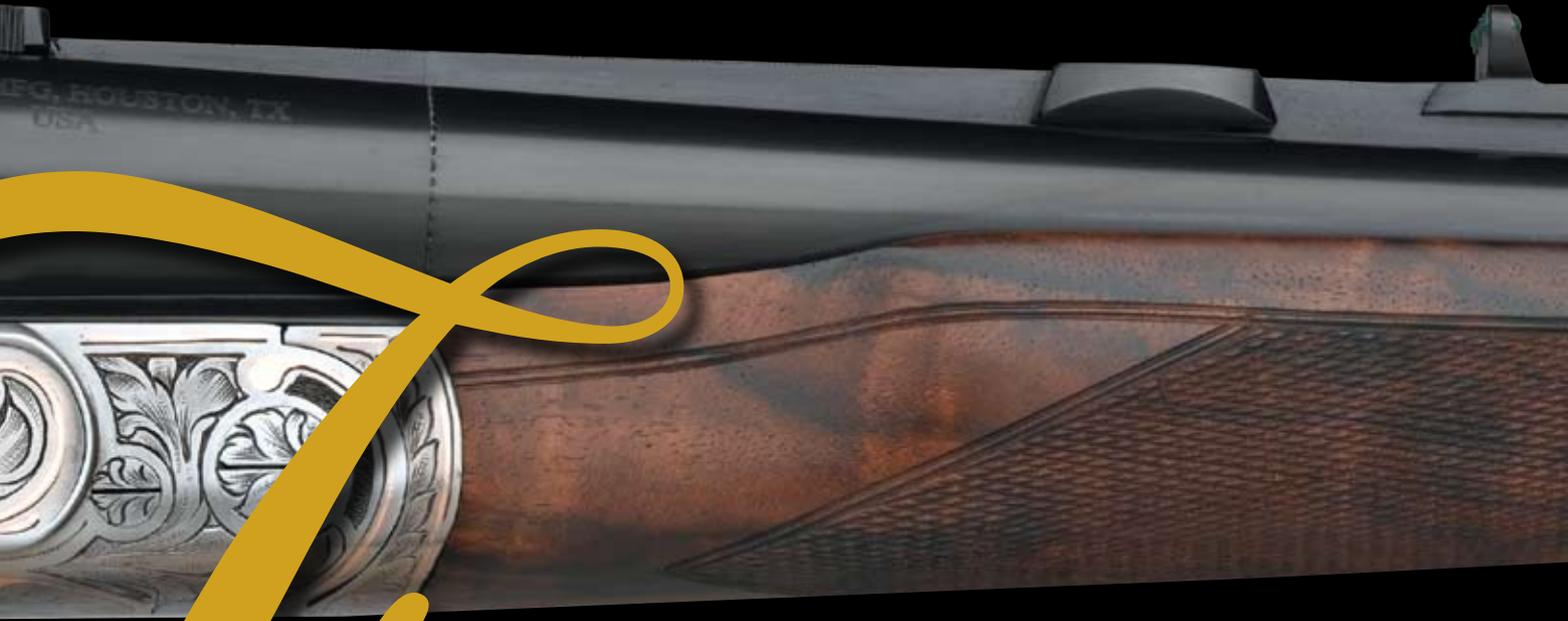
The Alaska EL exemplifies the superior workmanship found in all S.I.A.C.E. rifles, including both hammer and hammerless doubles.

All in the Family

The newest Gelmini generation

by Larry Chesney





Friday was our last day in Val Trompia, Italy, and it carried a full 12-hour schedule. After an early breakfast, Kathy and I met up with Veronica Gelmini, our translator/driver/historian/entertainer, who greeted us in the lobby of the Hotel Marcheno and then carried us to her home turf – S.I.A.C.E.

After two days of helping us gather the very best stories from the “competition,” she was, at last, able to show off her own family’s shop.

S.I.A.C.E. Fabbrica D’armi e Riparazioni (arms factory and repair) was a 40-year-old company when brothers Guiseppe and Ivano Gelmini took it over in 1995. Before that, the Valle Trompia natives, like so many from the region,

had grown up with guns and hunting. Eventually, both took jobs in the gunmaking industry – Guiseppe specialized in woodwork while Ivano focused on metalwork.

As avid hunters with a particular passion for side-by-sides, the brothers devoted their first years to the production of both hammer and hammerless doubles. Today, they also make over-and-unders as well as double rifles.

Nearly all S.I.A.C.E. (see-ah-che) shotguns are custom-made, featuring elegant stocks and forends, and smooth, reliable actions adorned with beautiful artwork by Brescia’s best engravers. They’re also not averse to repairing a fine gun, regardless of its style or brand. In fact, at the bottom of the S.I.A.C.E. sign in front of their facility are the logos of Beretta, Franchi and Benelli.

is keeping S.I.A.C.E. on target.



It was lunchtime when we arrived at the S.I.A.C.E., a bright yellow single-story building set against a forested hillside. As we entered the shop, Veronica explained why the place seemed deserted.

“The Italians take this part of the day very seriously,” she said. Working through lunch is, apparently, an American thing.

There was a homey, hands-on workshop feel to the place. One wall was lined with work benches cluttered with barrels and stocks in various stages of production. Hammers, chisels and other assorted tools, gloves, oil rags and safety glasses waited for the craftsmen to return from their midday siesta.

Veronica handled the tour herself, showing us the process of creating hammer and hammerless, side-by-side double rifles and shotguns.

“It is a lengthy process, with certain custom guns requiring over a year to complete,” she told us.

Meanwhile in the recesses of the shop, a checker was intent on her woodwork, seemingly oblivious to the time of day. Nearby, Ivano Gelmini, Veronica’s uncle, was checking the action on a nearly finished side-by-side.

“The boss’ work is never done,” she said.

We were able to handle several beautiful guns in various stages of completion. A custom Yukon Lusso double rifle in .30-06 Springfield really caught my eye. Its cold hammer-forged chrome-moly steel barrels are regulated at 50 yards and can be ordered with detachable scope mounts. You can also order interchangeable smoothbore barrels in 20- or 28-gauge and .410. A finely engraved French gray action, engraved barrels and fancy walnut stock add beauty to the fine balance and feel of the rifle.

Veronica explained that for the past year her father and uncle had been developing a new shotgun and rifle. “It’s the Big Hunter Nitro Express,” she said. “We should be ready to present it to the public at the next national and international Shows in Italy and Germany.”

The path taken to create this weapon has been long and hard,” she continued. “The investment of money and time was large, so we hope the new model will have success. Buyers in the American, Russian and Italian markets have already shown interest in the new gun.

“Of course, the gun will be produced on a custom-order basis, so each will be personalized in details and finishing. That’s very important to us – to offer to our customers full service such as stocks made to their dimensions and custom engravings. In fact, all of our guns are 100 percent hand-engraved – no laser at all. The customer doesn’t have to buy

his gun from the shelf, he can create it, exactly as he wants it.”

The firm’s newest smoothbore is the Elegance, a round-bodied side-by-side that is “dedicated to the gauge,” Veronica noted. “That means that every caliber has its own action and parts.

“The shotgun is very elegant, but strong, reliable and light. The barrels are demi-block, nicely engraved with gold lines at the breech. The action is finely engraved by hand in English scroll. The stock is in Turkish walnut . . . selected high-grade quality. And of course, the blanks are hand-carved to the customer’s dimensions.”



Giuseppe Gelmini and his brother Ivano (top) share in the production of all S.I.A.C.E. shotguns and rifles with their father, sister and two brothers. Right, from top: The beautiful 350 G Super Lusso showcases fine English scroll, gold borders and select, hand-checked walnut. • The BIS EL Superlight is built in both 28 and .410 bore with a dedicated frame and demiblock barrels.

The economic crisis has affected gunmakers around the world, compelling them to search out new markets to make up for the shortfalls. For S.I.A.C.E., their primary challenge has been to strengthen their presence in their current markets.

"Italy is still our most important market," Veronica explained. "It's also where our repair service is very well known."

Despite the sour economy, S.I.A.C.E. continues to hold its own in the United States. "Increasingly," she said, "customers in the States contact us directly via Internet, or more and more often now, they come here to visit. They personally decide on every detail, select the wood, choose engravings and the like."

Whether a customer orders via the Internet or in person, the company keeps buyers updated on the progress of their firearms by sending photographs throughout the production process.



"We are also working closely with the growing market in Russia," Veronica said. "Especially in Moscow where there's an increasing interest in side-by-side double rifles."

"In Great Britain, our hammer guns and side-by-side shotguns continue to be very popular. And in the last year, we have begun receiving more orders from such countries as Australia, Canada, Greece and Albania."

"Thanks to the efforts of my father and uncle," Veronica said, "and their dedication and desire to work with new technologies without giving up craftsmanship and traditions, we've continued to enjoy a healthy growth."

"Today, it is a family business, with six Gelminis here including Guisepppe and Ivano, their two sons, Ferdinando and Daniele, my sister Benedetta and myself."

The enthusiasm and creativity of the new Gelmini generation, combined with the knowledge and experience of the original Gelmini brothers, have led to the development and creation of new models.

"The hammer and hammerless double rifle side-by-sides, and the brand new over-and-under shotguns – these are some of the models that will represent the first works of we younger Gelminis," Veronica noted. "Our first challenge outside the shop will be to introduce them at several national and international trade shows. We're very excited about the future of S.I.A.C.E." ◀

Editor's Note: If you'd like to discuss a custom shotgun or rifle, contact S.I.A.C.E. by phone at +39 030 8912613/Fax +39 030 8911518 and skype: siace_armi.

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