



Budget stock
Not the finest quality wood
but quite serviceable

Boxlock action
Based on an Anson
and Deeley design

A no bull straight shooter

Charles Smith-Jones looks at the Matador, a durable and capable workhorse made by Spanish manufacturer AYA for the US market

Just as any British shooter will be familiar with the English range, mention AYA to any American equivalent and the Matador will almost inevitably be brought into the discussion. It had an enormous influence on establishing the company in the US market at a time when mass production by machine, with stamped parts and impressed chequering, were very much standard for entry-level guns. Even the more affordable Spanish guns, by comparison, featured

Mention Spanish gunmakers to any group of shooters and AYA will almost certainly top the list.

For the first half of the 20th century Aguirre y Aranzabal was just one of many similar companies that turned out solid, workmanlike guns for the domestic market. Things changed dramatically with the introduction of its 'English range', the No 1, No 2, No 4 and Best Quality Boxlock. This ensured their entry into the UK market, resulting in the start of AYA's enduring association with the British shooting scene

Encouraged, the company took its first tentative steps towards exporting to the US with another model, the Matador. It was

initially designated F.I. Model 400E by the importer when introduced in 1955, but US shooters prefer their shotguns to have names rather than numbers and this was changed to Matador the following year.



The chequered pistol-grip stock



The single-trigger action



Vent-rib barrels
Introduced from the Matador II onwards

CHARLES SMITH-JONES SAYS:

“This is a durable gun with many examples still in regular use today”

Tech specs

Configuration	Side-by-side
Action	Boxlock
Choke	Fixed
Chamber	2¾in standard; some 3in models
Barrel length	26-32in
Trigger	Single selective
Safety catch	Automatic
Ejector/non-ejector	Both available
Weight (12-bore)	Around 7.5lb
Available in calibres	10, 12, 16 and 20-bore and .410
Cost new	N/A
Cost used	From around £400, depending on model, year and condition



The red butt pad emulated pricey guns

a higher level of hand finishing, which was quickly recognised and appreciated.

Models

Three versions of the Matador were eventually produced. The first, made until 1963, was based on an Anson and Deeley boxlock action and supplied in a variety of barrel lengths and calibres. In many ways similar to the AYA No 4, it had something of a more solid feel to it and was functional rather than elegant. It had more in common with the Yeoman, another AYA gun imported in large numbers to meet the demands of the UK economy market, in being relatively plain but durable and strong. Although their looks were nothing to write

home about and the wood used for stocking was usually unremarkable, both the Yeoman and the Matador shot well.

It has often been said that although AYA has produced some cheap guns, they never made a bad gun. A great many of both models were produced and the Yeoman became the mainstay in Britain, and the Matador in America.

The first Matador model, marketed as the Hammerless Double, featured a chequered pistol grip stock and a beavertail fore-end and was offered in a number of fixed choke combinations.

Single trigger

Unusual among Spanish guns, which usually had double triggers – a preference of the domestic market – it came with the option of a single trigger to cater for overseas preferences. The woodwork and engraving, while simple, tended to be functional, though not unattractive. While the 10-bore Matador I came with 3½in chambers, the rest were 2¾in apart from the .410, which came in 3in.

In 1964 an upgraded Matador II came onto the market in 12- and 20-bore, some with 3in chambers and featuring vent-rib barrels and a few minor modifications, followed by the very

similar Matador III in 1970. Production ceased in 1985.

The Matador is a strong gun and even AYA's official company history describes it as 'hefty'. That, however, is rather misleading and does it something of a disservice. It is usually found cast for the right-handed shooter and it handles and shoots well. Do not be put off by some of the talk you occasionally hear of 'soft steel' in Spanish guns manufactured in the 1960s and 1970s; AYA steel has always been excellent.

Furthermore, the Matador's ejectors have a reputation for strength and positivity, and even though sourcing parts may be a problem, there will be little to go wrong that a good gunsmith cannot rectify. This is a durable gun with many early examples still in regular use today and showing no sign of their age.

Not many Matadors made it into the UK as it was always intended for the US market, though they still show up occasionally on the used gun racks.

Although not a top-end gun, it is still of good quality and an excellent choice for general-purpose game shooting, though (as with all older guns intended for wildfowling) it pays to check the proofing carefully before contemplating putting steel shot through the barrels. ■

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The first Matador featured a beavertail fore-end

