Ammunition shortages are creating opportunities for lesser-known manufacturers. That’s certainly true for Aguila—one of the world’s largest rimfire producers and a maker of center-fire pistol and rifle cartridges and shotshells. Is Aguila a viable alternative? Read on.

BY RICHARD MANN

Recently, the demand for ammunition has exceeded the production capacity of American manufacturers. This has led to the increased importation of ammunition from various alternative sources. One of those that has seriously stepped up for American consumers is Aguila, Latin America’s foremost ammunition maker. The company, whose name means “eagle” in Spanish, has manufacturing facilities in Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico, that were originally used years ago by Remington. Established in 1961, Aguila today is the primary supplier of ammunition to the Mexican military (and others), and is one of the world’s largest producers of rimfire ammunition.

Aguila’s sole U.S. importer, Texas Armament & Technology in Houston, Texas, now offers a broad product line that includes rimfire, center-fire rifle and handgun cartridges, and shotshell loads. At a time when finding ammunition can be difficult, having options is good. So, in order to see if Aguila was one worthy of consideration, I decided to review 10 common rimfire and center-fire loads, shooting each through a variety of firearms. Descriptions of the loads and the shooting results follow, and shotshells are handled in a sidebar by NRA Publications Editorial Director John Zent.

Sometimes the old way can also still be the best way. Aguila uses a 72-meter tower to drop and gravity-form its shot pellets. Neither fancy nor high-tech, many shooters nonetheless prefer ammunition manufactured using this traditional method.

Photos courtesy of Aguila
Center-Fire Rifle

Aguila offers fewer cartridges in its center-fire rifle line than others. In fact, it loads only four cartridges, but they are among those most commonly chambered in defensive rifles: .30 Carbine; .223 Rem.; 5.56x45 mm NATO; and 7.62x51 mm NATO. All sharing the key characteristics that might be expected from modern ammunition designed for training and general use—full-metal-jacket bullets and non-corrosive primers.

Five, five-shot groups were fired with the three selected loads at 100 yds. from a sandbag rest. Four rifles were used. The .223 Rem. and 5.56 mm NATO were tested in a Smith & Wesson M&P15 and a Mossberg MVP LR. A Remington Model 700 SPS and a DPMS GII were used for testing the 7.62 mm NATO load. One rifle was used for accuracy testing and the other to fire the remaining rounds provided. There were no stoppages related to feeding or extraction; however, there was one failure to fire.

.223 Rem. 55-gr: This is a common 55-gr. FMJ load for the .223 Rem., and velocity was typical. Out of the 16”-barreled Smith & Wesson M&P15, topped with a Nightforce ATACR 4-16x riflescope, about 2.5 minute-of-angle (m.o.a.) was precise as this load would shoot. It was not a tack-driver, but for general plinking and close-quarters dynamic shooting drills, it would be sufficient. The advertised muzzle velocity was listed at 3215 f.p.s., supposedly obtained with a 20” barrel. 5.56x45 mm NATO 62-gr: This 62-gr. load features a boattail bullet design. It was a bit snappier, generating in excess of 2800 f.p.s. from the 16” barrel of the Mossberg MVP LR. For most steel target or general-practice drills, it was plenty accurate out to 300 yds. or so. This was proven from the bench out of the Mossberg and in practice out of the S&W M&P15.

This load produced the only true negative related to the testing of the almost 1,000 rounds of Aguila ammunition. Round three delivered only a slight “pop” and a trail of smoke out of the action. As it turns out, the primer ignited, pushed the cartridge forward past the extractor, and compressed the case into the chamber. This happened because the cartridge case did not have a flash hole. The case had to be removed with a rod. The advertised velocity of this load from a 24” barrel is listed at 3150 f.p.s.

.30-cal. NATO load was accuracy-tested out of a 20”-barreled, Remington Model 700 SPS. Accuracy hovered around the 1.5 m.o.a. range, and there were no malfunctions when the load was fired from the DPMS GII. The actual muzzle velocity was only 15 f.p.s. less than the advertised 2750 f.p.s., which according to the Aguila website was obtained with a 24” barrel.

Shotshells:

Not Just The Run of the Mill

As an ammunition industry executive recently told me that every year, 2 billion shotgun shells are sold in the United States. Despite that astounding volume, just a handful of well-known manufacturers dominate this market sector, especially match-grade shotshells. One big reason is that the few firms with the ability to manufacture large quantities of ultra-high-quality pellets tend to sell their own branded product, and so secondary brands are less prevalent than with other types of ammunition.

Nonetheless, we may be on the verge of seeing another significant player enter the fray. Aguila Ammunition from Mexico isn’t exactly a newcomer, but apart from encountering odd lots at gun shows, how many American shooters have first-hand experience with its cartridges?

Through its Texas importer, Aguila is bringing its innovative shotshell line to America in a move that includes plans for a nationwide retail network designed to make it easy for shooters to obtain these shells at affordable pricing.

Aguila has extensive experience in the manufacture of rimfire ammunition, including a wide range of offerings (above). The author found some to shoot to superb standards of accuracy.
Center-Fire Handgun

The interesting thing about Aguila’s line of center-fire handgun ammunition is the variety of cartridges offered. Individually, there’s not a lot of selection, but of the 17 loads offered you’ll find less-common offerings such as the .25 ACP, .32 ACP, .32 S&W Long and .38 Super +P, which has always been a popular cartridge in Mexico. Most bullets are of the full-metal-jacket configuration, but a few lead-round-nose and jacketed-hollow-point offerings are included in the mix. Non-corrosive primers are used throughout.

The selected handgun loads were tested by firing five, five-shot groups at 25 yards from a sandbag rest. The remaining 75 rounds were fired plinking and working through various drills. There were no stoppages related to feeding or extraction and no failures to fire.

9 mm Luger 117-gr. JHP: With an advertised velocity of 1250 f.p.s., this would seem to be a reasonably potent 9 mm Luger load. However, out of the test gun, a Wilson Combat Tactical Carry with a 5” barrel, actual muzzle velocity was only 1160 f.p.s. This is about what you would expect from a standard 115-gr. 9 mm Luger load. Accuracy was very good.

.38 Spl. 130-gr. FMJ: This load was tested in a Colt Single Action Army with a 5” barrel and factory sights. It produced an average muzzle velocity 41 f.p.s. slower than the advertised 850 f.p.s. Accuracy was exceptional, especially considering the Colt’s crude factory sights.

.45 ACP 230-gr. FMJ: Out of a Nighthawk Custom M1911 Commander with a 4.25” barrel, this 230-gr. FMJ load averaged 55 f.p.s. less than the advertised 830 f.p.s. muzzle velocity. It proved to be not only comfortable to shoot, it was very accurate, considering the short sight radius of the Commander.

Aguila’s rimfire loads and have had good experiences with them in the American, Soviet Bloc and Western European ammunition. Is it as frequent as a 1 in 1,000 occurrence? I doubt it, but have no data to support that assumption.

I was more than impressed with Aguila’s rimfire loads and have had good experiences with them in the past. I'd trust them for plinking, hunting and in some cases, competition.

The Verdict

All told, I shot 940 rounds of Aguila ammunition over five days. Of those, the two rimfire rounds that failed to feed are of no real consequence since the same issues have been experienced with American-made rimfire ammunition in that same rifle/magazine combination. The cartridge case missing the flash hole is a different story. While unfortunate, it was not dangerous. And as poorly as it might seem to reflect on Aguila, it’s something I’ve experienced with American, Soviet Bloc and Western European ammunition. Is it as frequent as a 1 in 1,000 occurrence? I doubt it, but have no data to support that assumption.

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I was more than impressed with Aguila’s rimfire loads and have had good experiences with them in the past. I’d trust them for plinking, hunting and in some cases, competition.
The same goes for the handgun loads. As for the center-fire rifle loads, none could be considered match-quality, but they are not offered as such. For most of the practical shooting any of us do, they would suffice.

Right now it can sometimes be easier to find a gallon of gas for less than $2 than to find the ammunition you want. If you see Aguila ammunition on the shelf, don’t pass it by—it works and is usually not overly expensive.

For more information, contact:
Texas Armament & Technology
(Dept. AR), 15850 Vickery Drive,
Houston, TX 77032; (888) 452-4019;
aguilaammo.com.

### AGUILA AMMUNITION SHOOTING RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cartridge</th>
<th>Vel. @ 10' (f.p.s.)</th>
<th>Energy (ft.-lbs.)</th>
<th>Group Size (inches)</th>
<th>Smallest</th>
<th>Largest</th>
<th>Average</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rimfire (50 YDS.)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>.22 LONG RIFLE Super Extra 40-gr. CP</td>
<td>1226 Avg. 22 133</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.51</td>
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<td>.22 LONG RIFLE Super Extra 40-gr. LRN</td>
<td>1019 Avg. 25 92</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<td>.22 LONG RIFLE Supermaximum HV 30-gr. CP</td>
<td>1762 Avg. 15 207</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.25</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rimfire (15 YDS.)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>.22 LONG RIFLE Super Colibri 20-gr. Lead</td>
<td>608 Avg. 17 16</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>2.41</td>
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<td><strong>Center-Fire Rifle (100 YDS.)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>.223 Rem. 55-gr. FMJ</td>
<td>2868 Avg. 30 1,004</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.52</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.56x45 mm NATO 62-gr. FMJBT</td>
<td>2865 Avg. 31 1,130</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.62x51 mm NATO 155-gr. FMJBT</td>
<td>2731 Avg. 27 2,567</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.85</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Center-Fire Pistol (25 YDS.)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>9 mm Luger 117-gr. JHP</td>
<td>1160 Avg. 10 347</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>2.30</td>
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<td>.38 Spl. 130-gr. FMJ</td>
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<td>.45 ACP 230-gr. FMJ</td>
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<td>1.96</td>
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Notes: Measured average velocities for 10 shots over a Shooting Chrony at 10 ft. Accuracy results for five consecutive, five-shot groups from a sandbag rest; ranges are specified above. Temperature: 48° to 62° F. Humidity: 54% to 65%. Abbreviations: CP (copper plated), FMJ (full metal jacket), FMJBT (full metal jacket boat-tail), HV (Hyper Velocity), JHP (jacketed hollow point), LRN (lead round nose), Sd (Standard deviation).