NACHO SAME OLD

AGUILA

THE MEXICO-BASED AMMO COMPANY REBOOTS ITS BRAND

BY DAVID MERRILL

You may be familiar with Aguila Ammunition, especially if you’re a rimfire shooter. In the United States, Aguila’s mostly known for cheap .22 LR and its exotic shotshells, and perhaps some dubious quality control. More on that in a minute.

Aguila was first established in the early 1960s under the tutelage of Remington Arms in a previously undeveloped part of Mexico just outside of Cuernavaca. Other companies, such as Nasser, followed suit and soon the region was bustling. Industries Tecnos (the parent company) eventually expanded Aguila into a massive 120-acre complex that employs more than 850 locals.

Aguila makes a lot of rimfire ammunition. Twenty-seven varieties of rimfire to be exact. This isn’t exactly surprising, given its location. While centerfire calibers are restricted to .308 and smaller for civilians, rimfire and shotshells remain largely unregulated in Mexico. Aguila does indeed produce centerfire ammunition, quite a bit of it in fact, but mostly for the Mexican national police, military, and for export. Aguila manufactures an astounding 85 percent of all legal ammunition in Mexico.

And not a whole lot more is known after that. When we received word Aguila had revamped its entire organization, quality control, and product line, we were excited to check it out for ourselves. Was this going to be just another company overhauling its lap or would there be more going on?

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

Back in 2011, Aguila Ammunition hired an American company, Texas Armament and Technology (TXAT), headed by Leon Finner, to begin a program which it called the Modernization and Optimization Project (MOOP). TXAT was to inspect the entire operation, from components to manufacturing to management, and implement any needed changes. Essentially, they hung an “Under New Management” banner and got to work.

Nineteen machines were installed while old ones were scraped, westernized quality control was implemented, and security at the plant was heightened.

Stop for a minute and imagine what a factory floor in Mexico must look like — what you envision is the polar opposite of what you actually get at Aguila. Factory floors were clean, machines appeared to be well maintained, and there were security controls all over the place — hardly a so-called Third-World operation.
As part of MODOP, there were some major management changes in the pipeline as well. Luis Baiza, the new CEO who has been in the position for about a year, was recruited from one of the largest concrete manufacturers in the world, Lafarge. Yuriko Luna, previously an underemployed executive assistant with an engineering degree, was made the major products supervisor.

"Everyone wants to be Budweiser. ...dress up their company like it's an American company," Baiza said when asked about the new direction of Aguila. "We don't want to be Budweiser. We want to be Corona, the preferred quality foreign brand — not an imitator or imposter."

The Wolf was also brought in. In 1994's *Pulp Fiction*, the Wolf (played by Harvey Keitel) was a general fixer and cleaner. The real life Wolf's name is Rodney Taylor. No, he doesn't clean up dead bodies and he's (probably) not a trained killer. What Taylor does is modernize ammunition production. He started out at Lake City, but has worked around the globe over the last four decades: IMI in Israel, LMI in Italy, ADI in Australia, POF in Pakistan, and now Aguila in Mexico.

Rodney was frank, forthcoming, and unapologetic about missteps that came before his time. We talked about our previous experience with Aguila ammunition, including unburned powder in cartridges, funky smells, and dubious accuracy. He didn't even try to blow smoke like so many would in his position. He put it succinctly: "I'm not here to apologize for past mistakes; I'm here to make sure they don't happen now.

Increasing accuracy with zero Aguila is my mission."

Others in Aguila and Tx-AT were just as open. "There's a reason the guys who used to do these jobs aren't here," said Chris Sadler, director of operations of Tx-AT, while detailing some of the new quality control initiatives. It's been an uphill battle, four years in the making, and now they're ready to reintroduce themselves to the American public.

**SPECIAL (FORCES) SECURITY**

The elephant in the room was security. It's no secret that Mexico has had its share of problems with cartels and other narco organizations, often leading to violent conflict. In short: lots of physical security at the plant itself, military-escorted convoys during shipment, restrictions of calibers produced, and a lot of general operational security.

During the tour of the factory, RECOIL got an inside look at the company's daily operations. There's a whimsical mix of old and new technology. On the one hand, you have the largest old-school, gravity-fed lead shot maker in the world (molten lead is poured from great heights into water, and the size of the shot created is based on the elevation of the poured
lead) abutted against a building where the newest loading machines churn out boxes of .308 by the thousands.

It’s not every day you run into a famous high-ranking former Special Forces guy on a Mexican factory floor, but that’s exactly what happened. Strengthening the argument that Tx-AT and Aguila’s partnership has attracted the best people in the world, retired U.S. Army Sergeant Major Creed McCaslin was hired as a special security advisor and consultant. Creed was on hand during our live-fire testing to help anyone who wasn’t familiar with any of the weapons, and to accidentally embarrass everyone else with his phenomenal shooting.

Did we say live-fire testing? Oh yes, there was a lot of that. Aguila has many weapons on site; some from the extensive family collection, others for testing, and still more for security personnel. Given the history with Remington, it was no surprise that Big Green products made up a good chunk of the collection. There were also some outliers; from the lowly Raven .25 ACP, to the Mendoza HM-3 subgun, to this author’s favorite, the Galil ACE-21. Of course you had to have the ubiquitous Glocks, 1911s, and M4s. Of the hundreds of rounds fired that day, true to Rodney Taylor’s words, there were no
stoppages or malfunctions. We didn’t get an opportunity to perform formal accuracy testing on any of the loads, but we were shown some ballistic demonstrations.

Aguila’s ballistic supervisor, Ricardo Espinoza, fired various rounds into not only the ever-popular-on-video watermelon, but also into calibrated ballistics gelatin and through vehicle doors. Of particular note was the Supri-Colibri .22 LR and the new IQ defensive ammunition.

The Super-Colibri uses a double primer charge, without any traditional powder, as a propellant. The IQ projectile is constructed of cast zinc, which we understand to be a derivative of Zamak. The IQ rounds are supposed to condense and penetrate when it hits hard surfaces, and expand and separate in soft tissue. Check out the pictures to the right showing its performance.

We found all of the staff at Aguila and Tx-AT to be guileless and sincere. The openness of both Luis Baiza and Rodney Taylor about the day-to-day operations was especially refreshing. In the end, it all comes down to the product, and in this case that means ammunition. By all appearances, the old smelly and inconsistent Aguila is a thing of the past. How do you know if you have the new or the old stuff? Aguila just began rolling out some all-new packaging to make it easier to identify. Now, that doesn’t mean that if you find an older logo on a box in your local gun store that it’s pre-MODOP, but rest assured if it has the new logo, it was made under the guidance of Tx-AT and the new management team.

If you’ve never fired Aguila ammunition or it’s been a while since you have, give it a (second) chance. Then, have a Corona afterward.

SOURCE
Aguila Ammunition: www.aguilaannc.com