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Gun Test Longthorne Sidelock

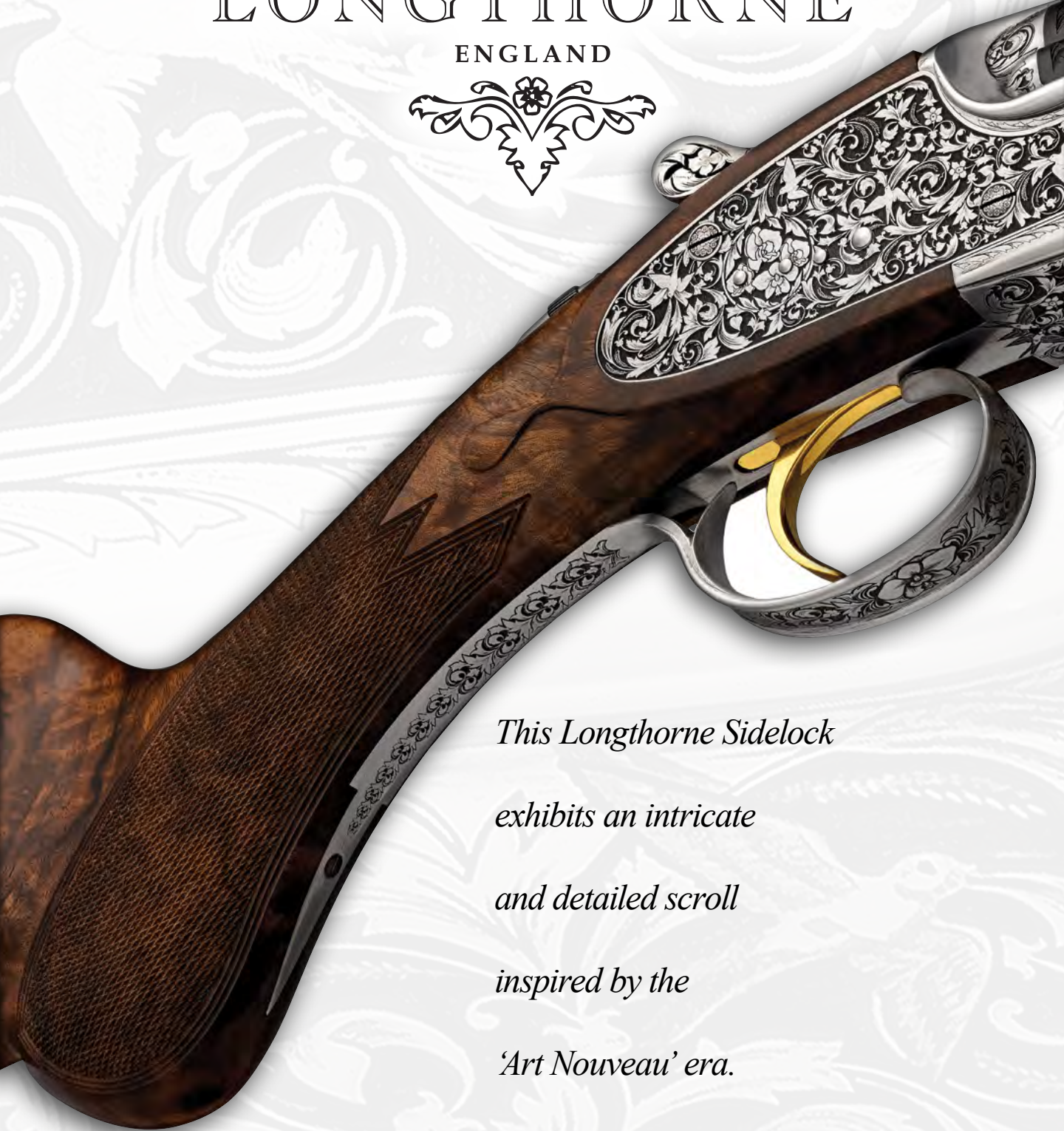
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*This Longthorne Sidelock
exhibits an intricate
and detailed scroll
inspired by the
'Art Nouveau' era.*



Longthorne 12 Gauge Sporting Sidelock O/U

by Mark H. Taylor

Photos courtesy of Longthorne Guns (except where noted)



A selection of Longthorne trigger plate actions.

In 1981 I was living in Los Angeles and one weekend a shooting acquaintance asked me to go shooting with him and a friend at the Coto De Caza Shooting Club in Orange, CA. The friend of his we were shooting with was screenwriter John Milius (writer of the movie *Apocalypse Now*). When we arrived, John was already there and had taken some guns out of his car. Sitting in the gun rack were the most beautiful English-made shotguns including a Purdey, a Boss and a Holland & Holland. The look and feel of the Longthorne Sporting Sidelock shotgun I reviewed reminded me of this outing as there is a distinct look and feel of an English-made shotgun — and the Longthorne has it.



Truth-be-told, when the editorial offices of *Shotgun Sports* magazine called me for this review, I had to ask three times the brand of the shotgun as I had never heard of the Longthorne. And, given the fact I have been shooting all over the world since 1970, I would have doubted I could have been caught off guard by the name of a shotgun manufacturer...but I was.

Before getting into my review of the Longthorne Sporting Sidelock shotgun, let me describe how this shotgun is built and what makes the manufacturing process so unique. Unlike a traditional double-barrel shotgun which has upwards of seven separate components welded and soldered together, the Longthorne uses a monolithic barrel manufacturing process whereby the barrels are precision machined from a solid 59½-pound billet of high specification steel on a \$659,000 five-axis, computer-controlled lathe.

Everything in the barrels (except the ejectors and choke tubes) is fashioned from a single billet — including the ribs. As a result of this monolithic barrel manufacturing process, the Longthorne's barrels are extremely close together at the breech which ensures a

very consistent Point Of Aim (POA) and extremely uniform pattern over a greater distance. Another advantage of this monolithic barrel manufacturing process is that Longthorne's barrels are perfectly straight (without the distortion and metal-softening problems of many conventionally fabricated barrels) resulting in significantly reduced felt recoil and muzzle flip.

The Longthorne Sporting Sidelock sent to me for this review came in a low-profile, hard-sided, fitted silver luggage case with red velvet interior. The case top was embossed with the company's name in cursive. The inside of the case had dividers such that the stock and receiver are located in one part (with a velcro leather strap which goes around the pistol grip to prevent movement) of the case,



and the barrel and forearm are located in a separate part of the case. There are two other compartments inside the case where choke tubes and other miscellaneous items (e.g., cleaning cloth, gun oil, stock spacers, Allen® wrenches, etc.) can be stored. When closed, the case has three combination locks to prevent unwanted entry.

The over/under barrels attach to the receiver as most break-opens do, and the forearm attaches as usual. The forearm release lever is a push rod located at the top of the forearm in lieu of a pull lever situated on the bottom. The wood on the Longthorne was very attractive. It appears to be top-end English Walnut. The stock was cut such that the grain in the wood was highlighted to the maximum extent possible. The stock was a Monte Carlo with a four-way adjust-

able comb. The Longthorne had a 14½" Length Of Pull (LOP) with a black hard rubber recoil pad. The pistol grip and forearm had very comfortable checkering which was not too sharp but with enough grip to keep both hands in place even with sweaty palms. The forearm design would be considered "rounded" style, and it narrowed as it went away from the receiver towards the muzzle.

Longthorne makes both boxlock actions and sidelock actions. Since the gun I received had the sidelock action, it had sideplates with two screws on each side. The sideplates and top lever were lightly engraved with four European-style floral designs. The barrel selector sits right behind the top lever and works like many European shotguns. A small square button can be moved to the left-

and-right to change between top barrel firing first and bottom barrel firing first. Unfortunately, the test gun did not have indicators (i.e., one dot and two dots) for which barrel would fire first for the square button position — however, by utilizing two snap caps it was easy to determine and memorize.

The 32" barrels were quite magnificent. They were, in fact, manufactured as described above...out of one solid block. The rib was a flat, low-profile rib which tapered significantly from breech to muzzle. The rib did not have a mid-bead, so the only bead was the round-silver bead affixed at the muzzle. The Longthorne Sporting came with four Teague Precision Chokes (Skeet, Improved Cylinder, Modified and Improved Modified). The Teague chokes were 3-1/8" in total length with ½" extending beyond the end of the barrels. They were easy to install and remove with only my fingers, but came with a tool which I used for the final tightening. The top and bottom barrels both measured an identical .732 constriction. With the Improved Cylinder installed in the lower barrel it brought it to .725, and with the Modified installed in the upper barrel it brought it to .718. Given how 'right-on-the-money' these two chokes were, I tried the Improved Modified and was not at all surprised when I got a measurement of .706. The trigger pulls for both barrels measured in at an identical 3.5 pounds...and, to be honest, it was the crispest 3.5-pound trigger I have ever felt.



Longthorne offers engraving styles such as the Renaissance with gold-inlaid game birds and flowers (above) and Rose & Scroll shown on a ribless model (left).



To test the Longthorne Sporting Sidelock, I asked Bill Hofmann to meet me at Golden Gun Club in Watkins, CO. Bill and I have shot together since 2005 and have coached all clay target disciplines together since 2010. Bill is an accomplished international and American trap and skeet shooter, a USA Shooting Certified Coach and a USSF & NSSA referee. Golden Gun Club has a good patterning board so we went there first to pattern the Longthorne Sporting Sidelock. At 30 yards using the Improved Modified choke in the lower barrel, the Longthorne's pattern was the most evenly distributed pattern I have tested so far. There were no holes in the pattern, and the spacing between the pellet hits was almost identical between each one. The POA was perfectly 50/50. Moving the Improved Modified choke to the top barrel, we patterned that barrel and the pattern was virtually identical in every way. I found the Longthorne's claim of consistent POA and uniform pattern to be spot on.

While Golden Gun Club does not have a sporting clays course, it has quite a good 5-Stand, so we headed that way with the Longthorne Sporting Sidelock and 100 rounds of ammunition. Bill brought 50 rounds of Aguila 12 gauge (1oz, 7-1/2 & 1275 FPS), and I had 50 rounds of Herters 12 gauge (1oz, 7-1/2 & 1180 FPS). The 5-Stand at Golden is challenging, as it features a right-to-left crossing shot, an outgoing straightaway, a left-to-right rabbit, a low incoming dropping target, a fast high-arching chandelle and a target which starts behind the cages and drops rapidly by the time it is visible to a shooter.

Bill and I took turns shooting each of these as singles, true and report pairs with the Improved Cylinder choke in the bottom barrel and the Modified choke in the top barrel. While we weren't keeping score, we each guesstimate we shot in the mid-40s out of 50. For me the rapidly dropping target was my nemesis and accounted for the majority of my misses. After the completion of the rounds, I asked Bill his impression(s) of the Longthorne Sporting. He agreed with me in that the gun pointed remarkably well...probably better than any shotgun I have shot previously. The outstanding point-ability of the Longthorne Sporting was most evident when shooting targets using a low mount.

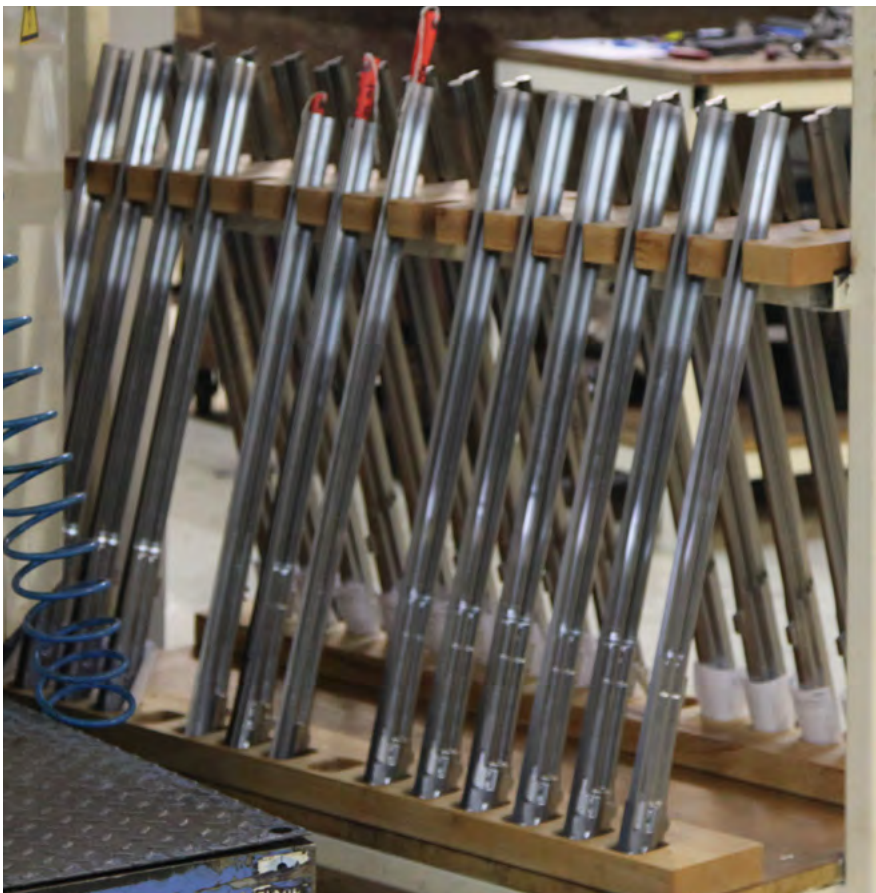
Since Bill's background is in international skeet (which uses a low mount as

a mandatory starting position), I asked Bill to shoot a round of international skeet with the Longthorne Sporting. Bill did not have regulation 24g international skeet loads so he used the same Aguila shells and proceeded to smash 23 out of 25 targets. One of the doubles targets on Post Four and one of the doubles targets on Post Five both saw dust but no visible piece. He again praised the gun's ability to point and come up to his face in a very natural and comfortable way. Since all Longthorne shotguns are known for having significantly reduced felt recoil, I asked Bill if he noticed that characteristic, and he affirmed that recoil was less than his other competition shotguns.

Even though the Longthorne Sporting Sidelock is a sporting clays model, I still wanted to see how this good pointing gun would perform on 27-yard trap targets. So, I installed the Improved Modified choke in the lower barrel, raised the comb 1/4" and grabbed a box of heavy 7/8s to try long-yardage trap. I finished the round with a 22 out of 25 after missing two on the first post and one on the second post while I struggled to accurately determine what that 1/4" did to the POA. That 1/4" brought it to a 70/30 POA, so once I figured that out, it allowed me to run the last three posts. While I shot the trap targets using a pre-mounted gun, the exceptional pointing ability of the Longthorne made moving towards these

USA Shooting Certified Coach, Bill Hofmann, noted the outstanding point-ability of the Longthorne Sporting while shooting 5-Stand and international skeet. Photo by Mark H. Taylor





Longthorne barrels in progress (above) and almost ready for proof (below). Longthorne manufactures its barrels from a solid block of steel, including the monoblock which enables them to produce perfectly straight barrels without the distortion and metal-softening problems of many conventionally fabricated barrels.



targets extremely smooth. And, even using heavy target loads, the recoil was not noticeable.

After spending a day on the range with the Longthorne Sporting Sidelock shotgun, I walked away with three very strong impressions: (1) the shotgun points like no other shotgun I have ever handled, (2) the shotgun imposes very little felt recoil on the shooter and (3) the shotgun's POA for both barrels is as close as I have ever seen two barrels to be. Since Pacific Sporting Arms is the U.S. importer/dealer of Longthorne shotguns in the United States, I encourage you to view their website to see all the Longthorne models available. (*Editor's note: Visit www.pacificsportingarms.com and see their ad on page 35 in this issue*). And, if you are in the market for a shotgun to add to your collection, I strongly urge you to consider this brand...as I can all-but guarantee you will be impressed. **SS**

Mark H. Taylor has over 40 years of shooting experience. He has won many regional, state, national and international clay target competitions. He is the author of the book *Clay Target Shooting – The Mental Game* and co-author of the book *Break 'em All*. Mark is a NRA Certified Advanced International Shotgun Coach and a High-Performance Shotgun Coach for USA Shooting. He is a Caesar Guerini and Cabela's (in Thornton, CO) Pro Staff shooter, and teaches monthly beginner shotgun clinics at Colorado Clays in Brighton, CO, and travels nationally and internationally teaching coaching courses and working with world-class athletes. You can email him at coloradotaylor@gmail.com.



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