



Love at first sight

Becky McKenzie confesses to having her head turned when she encountered a Longthorne for the first time. Then she was lucky enough to borrow one for a month

We made a welcome return to the Game Fair this year, though the heavy traffic en route to Ragley Hall was not so appreciated. However, my mood soon cheered once I was walking around the grounds of the Warwickshire stately home with my husband, John. We watered the dogs and treated ourselves to an ice cream and then made a beeline for the Perazzi stand, as it is my brand of choice when it comes to guns.

Then we passed the Longthorne stand. John suggested we have a look, though I felt a little bit out of place entering the

premises of such a posh gun manufacturer. The guns were impressive, even the 'basic' ones, though you cannot really call any Longthorne gun 'basic'.

A friendly gent working on the stand came over and asked me if I would like to look at a Longthorne and try it on my shoulder.

told him I wasn't. I did, however, pluck up the courage and asked how much the gun cost, which was a little bit beyond my budget. One can but dream, which I did as I looked at some of the other models on display.

Then a second and most knowledgeable gent on the stand came over for a chat.

“All the guns and their parts are made in-house, the exception being the firing spring pins”

I did not need a second invitation and selected a sideplate over-and-under with acanthus scroll engraving.

I was informed that this was the Deluxe model. I took a moment to admire the beauty of the gun, which is a real head-turner. I noticed the grip looked quite big but on closing the gun, which was rather stiff to shut, and placing my hand in the correct position and popping it into my shoulder, it felt rather good.

The man asked me if I was in the market for a new gun and I rather embarrassedly

In for a penny I thought, so I asked if it would be possible to do a gun review on a Longthorne. Yes, of course, came the reply. This gentleman turned out to be Jim Longthorne. He invited me down to the factory and said that he would sort me out with a stock that fitted, so I could give the gun a “proper good testing”.

A week or so later, John and I headed down to Northampton from our home in Nottinghamshire.

But, first, a little bit of history. The Longthorne family, who hail from Lancashire,



Turkish walnut stock custom fitted to suit Becky's grip

INFO ➔ Available in 12-, 16-, 20- and 28-bore ➔ 30in or 32in barrels ➔ 3in chambered ➔ Steel proofed ➔ longthorneguns.com



Becky tested the Regency model on clays and in competition

have run precision-engineering companies for the past 30 years or so. James became involved in engineering gun parts during a spell he spent working in Australia. The idea of an English designed and engineered shotgun was conceived following a discussion with a friend when James returned to the UK.

He started with a modest workshop at the rear of the family home and slowly built up the business with the help of a considerable amount of investment in high-tech equipment. Years of hard work and development culminated in the first Longthorne model being unveiled at the 2010 Game Fair, also held at Ragley Hall.



The barrels are made in-house from a single steel billet

The company expanded and moved to its current premises in Northampton in 2015.

Family affair

Longthorne is, however, still very much a family business. James's daughter, Chloe, an engraver, joined the company and has developed the patterns on the guns' distinctive metalwork. Elaine, James's wife, who has a professional background in marketing and technical sales, is the marketing director.

We were greeted by Jim and Elaine when we arrived at the factory and were given a brief tour. It was fascinating to see how guns are made. We are so used to just picking one up off the shelf and expecting it to go bang.

Walking around you see large lumps of cylindrical metal, or billet. I picked one up and it was very heavy. This is put into one of the many engineering machines and the process of making the action begins.

The same for the barrels, which are also made from a solid billet of incredibly strong steel, not two barrels welded together. The barrels, mid rib and top rib are all one piece, which arguably makes the Longthorne

Tech specs	
Model	Regency sideplate boxlock
Bore	12-bore
Action	Boss locking system, inertia
Barrel length	32in
Chamber	3in
Chokes	Multichoke half and half
Rib	8mm – 5mm
Fore-end	Slim fitting
Weight	8lb 7oz
Price	New starts from £11,995; the Regency £24,000

barrels the strongest around. I have not heard of any other barrels that you can jump up and down on and do no damage to – look for footage on YouTube. Not that you would really want to do this, but it proves that these are exceptionally strong barrels.

Everything about Longthorne bespeaks quality. All the guns and their parts are made in-house, the exception being the firing pin springs, which are manufactured by a company in Walsall. So a Longthorne gun is 100% British made. »

The wood is another eye-opener. There is a library of stock blanks of Turkish walnut that Jim has selected and if you appreciate a good-looking Turkish walnut, you won't be disappointed. Jim had a stock that he had made a while back and spent a couple of hours fitting this to me.

They spoil me for choice: what barrel length did I want? What rib height? Which engraving? I settled on the Regency (Model 2010), a clay gun that I thought people would enjoy shooting. It had similar engraving to the Deluxe and I could have happily looked at it for some time, which, as I was being lent the gun for a month, I could do.



A Union Jack pad is a fun detail on this British-made gun

First impressions? It was the best gun I had ever laid eyes on. The stock fit was pretty good – the rib height was 2mm higher than a standard flat rib, or the rib on my Perazzi MX2000S. The top rib tapered 8-5mm, lovely and slim. The action was an over-and-under sideplate boxlock. The boxlock is similar to some other manufacturers, but Longthorne has spent a long time engineering detailed improvements on a number of parts, so this gun really stands out. Every part has been designed by Longthorne, so every part suits the Longthorne mechanism.

I found the gun stiff to shut which did cause me a bit of an issue. I consulted Jim and he coached me on how to close it correctly. It turned out that I had been shutting guns incorrectly for 17 years, disguised by the fact that most actions are somewhat soft and floppy, which make the process easy and can mask poor technique.

Magnificent

Out on the ground I wanted the first set of targets to be relatively easy to get my eye in. On shouldering the gun it



Shouldering was easy, the Longthorne comes up perfectly smoothly



Regency model has similar engraving to the Deluxe

came up sweet and target acquisition was easy – the rib gave me a really good site picture. The trigger was smooth, light and crisp, and felt recoil was negligible.

When I moved on to more challenging targets – gun down, FITASC style – the gun again came up smoothly and quickly into the shoulder, and the barrels moved easily to where I was looking at the clay, the lead, and more were smashed.

There were one or two that I just couldn't find, but I put that down to 'pilot error' although the thought crossed my mind that such an expensive gun should smash every last clay. I also competed in a couple of Sporting competitions, with mixed results, but the targets I missed were due to my failings, not the gun's. I also did a back-to-back test with the Longthorne and my MX2000S. To my dismay, the Longthorne not only gave me a better site picture than my own gun, it destroyed more targets.

At that point I decided to put it back in the cabinet because I was seriously falling for the Longthorne, and couldn't afford it and a divorce. I will always be grateful that I was given the chance to shoot a Longthorne. It is undoubtedly the nicest, best-looking, well-balanced gun I have ever had the privilege to shoot and test. A richly deserved 10/10. ■

The Longthorne offer

- If you are thinking about buying a Longthorne, these are a custom fit, custom-designed gun. Choose exactly what you want, be it clay competition, game shooting, sidelock over-and-under, sidelock side-by-side, boxlock over-and-under, sideplate action, squared back standard action. In addition, there is custom engraving, custom fit stock, choice of wood grades, choice of bores. All the guns are 3in chambered, steel proofed up to half choke, which you can also have multichoke or fixed choke.
- For more information, visit: longthorneguns.com