

# Longthorne Vanguard Model 3002

GREG CARPINIELLO

I admire English shotguns for their pedigree of technical innovation, storied history, artistry and ethereal handling qualities. I extol their virtues often. The Longthorne Vanguard Model 3002 on review is a worthy example of the tradition of fine English shotguns.

About three years ago Jonny Carter from TGS Outdoors—a shotgun-based YouTube show—began cheering Longthorne shotguns. I respect Jonny's opinion, so I paid attention. This past winter Jonny arranged a meeting with Longthorne's two principles, Jim and Elaine Stewart, and me in New York. The couple's passion for their shotguns and the depth and breadth of Jim's technical knowledge were impressive. Jim also was happy to relate the Longthorne backstory.

James Anthony Longthorne Stewart established a modest atelier in the village of Hesketh Bank, England, in 1999 and began developing shotguns in earnest in 2006. Jim previously had made precision tools, high-quality bicycle components and medical prosthetic devices for a number of companies in Australia. The first Longthorne gun premiered in 2010. In 2015 Longthorne Gunmakers established a proper factory in Northampton, about 50 minutes by train from London. Jim invested millions in modern equip-



ment and materials and hired a crack staff of engineers and gunsmiths. Except for ricks of Turkish walnut and several tons of imported European steel, every part of a Longthorne shotgun is manufactured in-house. Longthorne matches 21st Century technology with Old World craftsmanship to create durable and artistic shotguns. Although forged in the crucible of English shotgun history, Longthorne is a comparatively new company. Which is why I approached the Vanguard with a measure of suspicion.

Longthorne has a unique manufacturing process for its barrels: They are milled from a 27-kg billet of steel. The process includes all of what most of us perceive as a shotgun's barrels—ribs, forend lug, lump and chambers. There is no monoblock. Longthorne does not “weld, solder or glue” any part of its barrels. Interestingly, in 1857 Sir Joseph Whitworth patented barrels made from a single piece of steel, but cost and technological limits precluded their success. Similarly, Karl Lippard partnered with John Wilkes in the 1980s to produce guns with SolidSolid barrels. I can attest that these were clunky, forgettable affairs. Longthorne perfected the process to create low-profile, durable barrels with superb concentricity and convergence. Longthorne maintains the end result is “rigid barrels” that afford a softer-shooting gun with no “harmonic vibration,” reduced muzzle jump and greatly reduced perceived recoil.

The 29" steel-proofed game barrels on our 20-gauge were overbored, at .637". They were absolutely gorgeous. All the machining was sharp and precise. The “hot” process used to blacken the barrels left a flaw-



The Vanguard has a triggerplate action, and its barrels are milled from a single billet of steel. (Note the "fin" extending from underneath the barrels.)

## SNAPSHOT

**Make & Model:** Longthorne Vanguard Model 3002

**Gauge:** 20

**Action:** Triggerplate Over/Under

**Chambering:** 3"

**Finish:** Coin-finish acanthus scroll

**Barrel Length:** 29"

**Weight:** 7 pounds

**Chokes:** 4 proprietary Longthorne chokes

**Stock:** 15" LOP, 1¼" DAC, 2" DAH, ¼" cast-off, adjustable comb

**Accessories:** Factory case, choke wrench, trigger-adjustment tool, owner's manual, quality-assurance checklist, two-year warranty

**Price as tested:** \$25,060

less, deep blue-black sheen. "Longthorne Gunmakers" was etched on both sides of the top barrel. The machine-filed game rib tapered from 5mm to 3mm and was finished with a silver post. The rib was curiously proud at the receiver—hardly a distraction but noticeable. Longthorne barrels have a "fin" that begins underneath the bottom barrel and runs along the sides of the top barrel. This fin fills the gap between the forend and the barrels. The width of the fin can be adjusted so that different-gauge barrels can be accommodated with the same forend. The breech end on our gun had bifurcated lumps, bites and hooks. The sides of the lumps had a unique engine-turned pattern. The ejector assemblies were polished, and the fit was excellent.

The 3" chambers transitioned to 1¼"-long forcing cones. The plastic case contained four 2¾"-long proprietary chokes made of 17-4 stainless steel. The chokes measured: Skeet, .005"; Improved Cylinder, .009"; Modified,

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.015"; and Improved Modified, .018". All were spot-on to nominal. They threaded effortlessly and seated a touch below the edge of the muzzle. I really liked the super-high-quality friction wrench, and it actually worked!

Longthorne's low-profile, square-back triggerplate action debuted in 2021, but it evidences years of attention to detail. The full-coverage, laser-etched, acanthus scroll engraving was on a gray background and meticulous in every detail. The fences were stippled, while the toplever had the same pattern as the receiver. "Longthorne" was engraved on both sides of the receiver. The trigger guard was blued. The action face and interior were exceptional—blemish free with no machining marks.

Two wedges are milled into the sides of the receiver, and cocking-rod tubes are milled through the bottom. Replaceable trunnions sit at the knuckle. Lock-up is a "Woodward derivative." The barrels swing on the trunnions, and the draws on

## *The Longthorne triggerplate action is an uncluttered mechanical wonder.*

the bifurcated lumps engage the wedges in the receiver. Bolts emerge from the action to engage corresponding bites at the breech. According to Jim Stewart: "When the action closes, it pulls up on the draws and wedges and is not so reliant on the hinge pins when being shot. All the load is taken on the action face and wedges." The trigger is a proprietary inertia design with a "mechanical fail-safe," so the second barrel always fires. The adjustable trigger has 16mm of

travel. The pull for the bottom barrel on our gun averaged 3 pounds, and the top was 2½. I am especially particular about trigger pull unless it exceeds the weight of the gun itself. But these triggers were spectacular, and the pulls were according to spec per Jim Stewart. There was a slight bit of take-up and a crisp, glassy break. The manual safety/barrel selector is disappointing. It is oversized for the trim receiver. It works, but it feels like an afterthought rather than an integrated mechanical element of the overall design.

**I**nternally, the Longthorne triggerplate action is an uncluttered mechanical wonder. Ours was finely machined and free of stray marks or burrs. There was nothing extraneous. There are two self-contained mainspring assemblies, stout blued hammers, sears, a barrel selector and a lifter. The bottom firing pin was at a noticeably steep angle in relation

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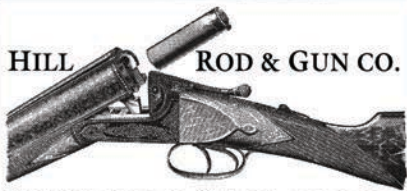
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to the hammer, and this could present a reliability issue without proper maintenance. The safety mechanism rides on a simple pin and flat spring. The fire-control components are positioned on the triggerplate rather than at the top tang. The fire-control unit is obscured by a housing but could be easily accessed by a gunsmith. Orvis Gunsmith Connor Carson complimented the action as simple to disassemble and work on, and he praised it as "clean, linear and precise."

The stock on our gun was lovely Turkish walnut with stunning contrasts of dark and light. It was a spectacular game stock that hinted at a traditional Woodward stock but really had a shape, lines and feel all its own. The long gentle

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radius and shape of the grip were elegant and a delight in the hand, and the wrist and reach were natural and satisfying. The aesthetic appeal and comfort were undeniable. The dimensions were: 15" length of pull, 1¼" drop at comb, 2" drop at heel, with ⅛" cast-off. The laser-cut checkering was particularly good. It had deep, distinct borders and precise cuts. It was aggressive but agreeable. The head of the stock was fully finished. The slim game forend filled the hand without feeling cumbersome. The forend iron was fully engraved. The Deeley latch locked with a definitive snap and was easy to open. The iron met the knuckle perfectly. The underside of the forend was fully finished, and the inletting around the iron was gap-free. The well-fitted ¼" rubber butt pad had a nifty embossed Union Jack emblem. The stock was a touch too proud where it met the top of the receiver but appro-

priately proud elsewhere. Overall, the wood-to-metal fit was marvelous.

While I really liked the stock, there were a few disagreeable qualities to its finish. The low-gloss, hand-rubbed-oil application was a bit thin at the wrist. Portions of the grain were not fully filled, and some minor imperfections were trapped under the finish. There was some filler, although it had been used sparingly, in two areas that I did not like. None of these anomalies were horrible. Only fastidiousness revealed them. But with a \$25,000 gun, I am going to be fastidious.

My shooting partners and I headed to the patterning board with Winchester Super Target 2¾" 1,200-fps ⅞-oz loads of No. 8 shot. Barrel convergence was perfect. The gun patterned 70/30 with the IC and M chokes. While I would prefer a slightly lighter 20-gauge in the field, the 7-pound Vanguard was fine for walking the clays course. It balanced just behind the knuckle. With the 29" barrels, I sensed a touch more weight under the forend. We shot all manner of targets and enjoyed remarkable success. The stock was a pleasure, and the gun was so lively it seemed to fly to the face. It was quick handling, pointed with ease and allowed a smooth, graceful swing. I liked it on crossers, and one of my peers enjoyed success on several swift rabbits. On high in-comers the Vanguard excelled. The perfectly timed ejectors threw shells three to four feet over the shoulder. And true to Jim Stewart's convictions, there was little recoil and no noticeable muzzle jump.

I returned the Vanguard to its classy, leather-trimmed Negrini case and gathered my thoughts. Jim Stewart had been inspired by the "idea of creating and designing and producing an innovative English shotgun of uncompromising quality." He has achieved this with aplomb. Despite a few minor deficiencies, this is a fine shotgun ready for clays and the field, and it carries on the grand heritage of British best guns. Sir Whitworth would be proud. ✦

For more information, contact Longthorne Gunmakers, longthorneguns.com.