

A LONGTHORNE ORIGINAL

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY
DIFFERENT. VIC HARKER LOOKS AT THE NEW
LONGTHORNE SIDELOCK OVER-UNDER.



While the English gun trade is for the first time in many years producing new manufacturers, in the main it is a matter of them recreating what has gone before, and why not?

The English game gun achieved a pinnacle of excellence over 150 years ago. Created for a clientele with deep pockets and access to the finest game shooting in the world, British gunmakers met the needs of their customers so successfully that further research and development seemed a pointless exercise. Only the imperative of keeping prices within bounds has now demanded that while there is little room for anything revolutionary in design, the means by which the English gun is made has been modernised.

But recently I have been looking at an English game gun that has not only been produced with state of the art technology, it has some original features and at the same time retains those all-important qualities of feel and balance. Moreover as a genuine class sidelock, remarkably it carries a price tag of less than £13,000.

The Longthorne over-under is built by James Longthorne Stewart at Hesketh Bank in Lancashire. James's company are specialists in precision engineering and for many years made components for a number of firearms manufacturers in a number of countries. In 2006 his company began to develop the Longthorne over-under around the concept of a high quality English gun made entirely in-house at an affordable price. Most of the better over-unders from both the UK and Italy fall into a generic category that might be described as Boss/Woodward clones. Absolutely nothing wrong with that, both these London makers made such a huge contribution to the development of the modern over-under their influence can hardly be ignored.

My first impression of the Longthorne was its small dimensions. It's a modern sidelock with the bridle integral to the lock plate and intercepting sears reminiscent of a Beretta SO. The small fences and the bold beading that emphasise the action's side panels combines to give the gun both an elegant and purposeful look. The engraving on the standard model incorporating an open border and scroll design compliments

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this. The Longthorne also adopts the familiar system of draws and wedges that joint the barrels to the action, with a split bolt engaging in bites that locks the gun together, nevertheless for a number of reasons it avoids categorisation.

The barrel assembly is the aspect of the gun's design that is extraordinary and will raise a few eyebrows, however what it provides in a number of areas will, I believe, more than satisfy any potential critics. Instead of the tubes with the lumps soldered together and the ribs made and fitted separately, everything is machined from one single bar of high quality Swedish steel. I must confess I found the concept rather eye watering until I had actually seen and more importantly, handled the result. Beautifully light the 30" barrel assembly weighed just 1.42kgs and was entirely conventional in appearance except for a single integral middle rib dividing the barrels.

Apparently Joseph Whitworth experimented with the same idea and his patent of 1857 protected it. An inventor and manufacturer of all kinds of guns, he didn't however have the sophisticated machinery to successfully produce a one piece double barrelled assembly economically. James Longthorne Stewart did, the machining operations required being carried out in the CNC milling centres he was already using in his engineering business.

The manufacture of the barrels does however require some hand work in the form of exterior finishing but it's not the laborious task required of more conventional manufacturing methods. Longthorne's own 70mm flush fitting choke tubes come as a no cost option and the London Proof House passes the barrels for 3" high performance steel ammunition. On that basis its do anything go anywhere capability adds another dimension to this very different kind of game gun.



Right: A classic looking side-lock design

Small and attractive action body

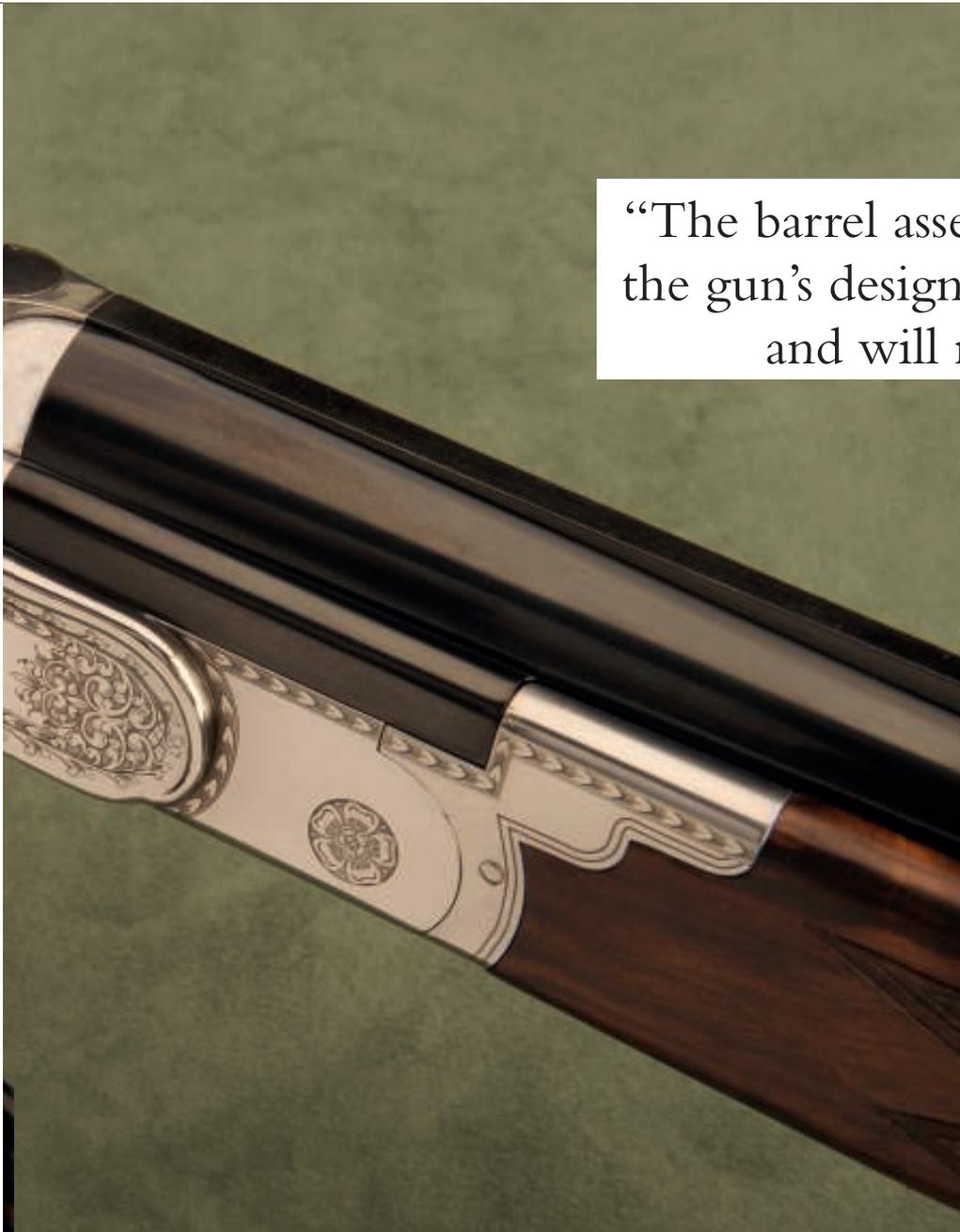
Shooting Impressions

THE STOCKING OF THE GUN can be ordered to any configuration. On the prototype the open radius semi-pistol grip combined with a slim tapered comb provided me with something I just didn't have to think about again after bringing it to my shoulder a couple of times - always a good sign.

In describing my impressions of shooting the Longthorne I have to be careful I don't lapse into hyperbole but I have to say it is the most remarkable shotgun I have ever handled. I shot

with it twice, at Ian Coley's Shooting Ground in Gloucestershire and then at the Longthorne factory, and on both occasions I came away delighted but bemused. The prototype was a reasonable fit but not especially so. Drop at comb of 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ " was spot on for me, but at the heel it was a tad too much at 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ ". Length of pull was possibly a bit short but rather than too long, and I would usually ask for a little more cast than the Longthorne had.

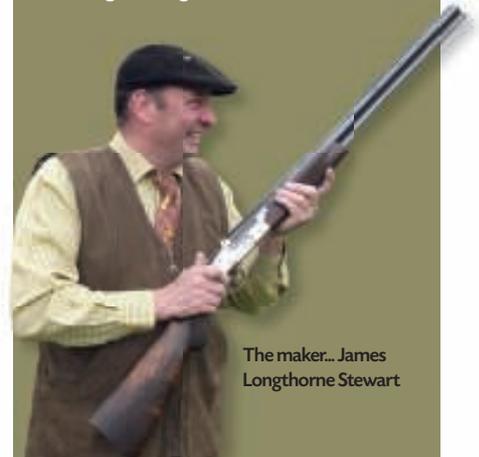
At the high tower I didn't miss anything! On other stands the odd one. I had trouble with



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Technical specification

Model: Longthorne Hesketh
Bore: 12 - chamber 3"
Chokes: To customer’s requirements or multichoke
Action: Sidelock
Rib: Tapered 8mm to 4mm
Stock: Semi-pistol grip
Fore-end: Rounded beavertail
Weight: 6lb 15oz approx
Price: £12,766
For other details: Tel. 01772 811215
www.longthorneguns.com



a target going away below me down a valley, but for most of the time the Longthorne made things seem so easy. Without having shot the gun, at an ounce under 7lb I would have looked for something with a bit more heft, even in a game gun. Wrong this time, the Longthorne is fast handling – point it and it just goes to the target – but it’s controllable.

I have mentioned the action body’s small dimensions and on that basis I would expect some felt recoil with anything but fairly low velocity cartridges. Wrong again. Using Express

Super Competition 1oz loads on driven doubles, which with the Longthorne I just couldn’t miss, the most notable sensation was the lack of it. Negligible recoil and no muzzle flip gets you onto the second target so much faster. Was this me or the gun? On reflection there was no doubt in my mind the Longthorne had flattered my shooting with the balance and handling of a best English gun together with a stability and lack of recoil that’s unique. I am inclined to believe this is due to the rigidity of the one piece barrel assembly. On this matter I intend to

delve deeper.

The Longthorne’s exceptional characteristics, not to mention its relatively low price, must beg the question, how has this been achieved? Its designer and manufacturer is unequivocal: “The gun costs what it should,” he says, “our great advantage over other new gunmakers was that we did not have to make a specific investment to produce the Longthorne, as both the technology and the know-how were already part of our engineering business”.

Surely, it will prove an outstanding success.