

made in BRITAIN

Meet the modern British gunmaker enjoying its position in the market. By **Will Hetherington**.

Ten years ago, if you asked anyone with a passing interest to name the famous British gunmakers the answer would no doubt have included names like Purdey, Holland & Holland and Boss. And anyone who has read articles by our own Donald Dallas over the years would be able to add plenty more names to that illustrious trio. But apart from the modern gunmaking genius that is David McKay Brown there couldn't have been many other contemporary names on the list. There were a number of world-renowned individual craftsmen, such as David Sinnerton, but hardly any other established manufacturers displaying at the game fairs and running their own factories.

However, fast-forward to 2017 and that situation has changed quite notably. Now if somebody wants a British gun from a new maker there are two very attractive options. Boxall & Edmiston in the West Midlands is one of them and Longthorne Gunmakers, now based in Northampton since their move from the north west last year, is the other. And I had the pleasure of visiting Longthorne's impressive new facility on the western fringe of the town centre in January.



Elaine and Jim Longthorne Stewart at their Northampton factory.

A BRAVE NEW WORLD

Elaine and Jim Longthorne Stewart were new to the gunmaking industry when they first launched their business in 2010. Their background was in precision engineering where they made parts for all sorts of projects as

sub-contractors. They ran a successful business in Australia but decided to return to the UK in 1999, eventually settling in Lancashire. The pair opened a factory in the north west that had high precision tools in a business that focused on the high tech end of the engineering market. They had been making gun parts in Australia and supplied equipment for the medical market, as well as racing bike parts and components for the automotive trade.

This was not enough for Jim, though, who had become disillusioned with not being in control of the whole process. His passion was for design so he wanted to produce something from start to finish: "After 20 years of working for other people we didn't want to just be a supplier any more. We had invested millions in machinery but we were never in control of our own destiny. It was the right time for us to launch our own business, where we would be in control of the whole process. We realised we were quite capable of standing alone and the concept of making the barrels entirely out of one piece of steel was what gave us the angle to move into gunmaking."

And it's that concept which continues to grab the headlines today, following the move to Northampton >

A pair of Longthorne over-unders: modern British guns for the modern game shooter.



“Choose between the standard engraving, game scene vignettes or something bespoke.”



One of the key points of Longthorne guns is that the barrels are made of one block of steel.



In this family business daughter Chloe is the artist responsible for the engraving.

last year. As I toured the factory with Jim and Elaine it was fascinating to see the barrel-making process. Thick rods of steel which resemble mini fence posts are machined for hours to produce the outline of the barrels, before they are then drilled out and more accurately machined to eventually become the over-under barrels on your new British sporting shotgun.

Jim explained where the concept of making the barrels from one piece of steel came from: "A friend was shooting clays with a really old Greener and the ribs came loose. When I looked at it I realised there was no reason the barrels couldn't be made out of one piece of metal, thereby avoiding this sort of problem all together."

A JOINT VENTURE

Jim and Elaine take an equal share in the tour of the factory, and both seem to know every detail of the machines here. It's clearly a joint enterprise but the family involvement doesn't stop there, as daughter Chloe is also the artist behind all the engravings on the guns. Customers can choose between the standard engraving, game scene



If you should venture into the blank room either be decisive or prepare to be in there for a long time...

“Selecting your own wood remains one of the great joys of ordering a bespoke gun.”

vignettes or something more bespoke should they so wish.

As we moved from the machine shop to the handworking area it was, as always, fascinating to stand in the wood room and look at the myriad blanks of Turkish walnut. Elaine told me a recent trip to a supplier in southern Turkey very near the Syrian border was fascinating. One of the reasons this region is able to produce the perfect wood for gun stocks is the ideal length of the growing season. And selecting your own wood remains one of the great joys of ordering a bespoke gun. Of course it's a subjective area, with some people opting for the most flamboyant grains, while others prefer the under-stated options. Whatever your preference it would seem that

Longthorne, with their carefully nurtured contacts in Turkey, will be able to meet your requirements.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Up until now they have only made over-unders but that situation is changing this year with the first side-by-side rolling out of the factory. The only reason they haven't made a side-by-side before is lack of demand but now they are looking to produce 20-25 a year, as more and more customers have expressed an interest. The as-yet unnamed new model will cost in the region of £20,000 and with the opportunity to visit the factory for a personal gunfit, to choose the wood for the stock and to select your engraving (among other options far too many to list here) this is quite an opportunity for anyone looking for a new British game gun. It's a bit early for an accurate estimate on the waiting time for the new side-by-side but it will probably be between nine and 12 months.

And there is another exciting new development on the horizon too. Having only made the over-under sidelock previously, Longthorne will also soon be offering a boxlock. Jim said: "The new boxlock/sporter will cost in the region of £8,500, and will have an adjustable stock and multi-

chokes and we hope to eventually make 100-150 a year."

One of the attractions of Northampton is its convenient location. Less than 70 miles north of London and 50 miles from Birmingham it's on the M1 motorway and is the sort of place any customer may well be passing at any time of the year. So what better way to brighten up a dull motorway journey than stop off and see the progress of your new entirely British-made sporting shotgun? 🦋

For more information, tel. 01772 811215, email: admin@longthorneguns.com or visit longthorneguns.com

The current range

Currently there is a nine-to-10 month waiting time for a new Hesketh over-under sidelock and they are available in 12,16, 20, 28 bore all for £15,200 for the standard model. And you can have a Hesketh .410 for £17,000. All of these options are steel proofed and you can add any number of extras priced accordingly should you so wish. The top of the range gun at the moment is the Rutland which includes top grade wood and the 12 bore comes in at approximately £28,000. The Duchess of Rutland is one of Longthorne's customers, hence the name.