

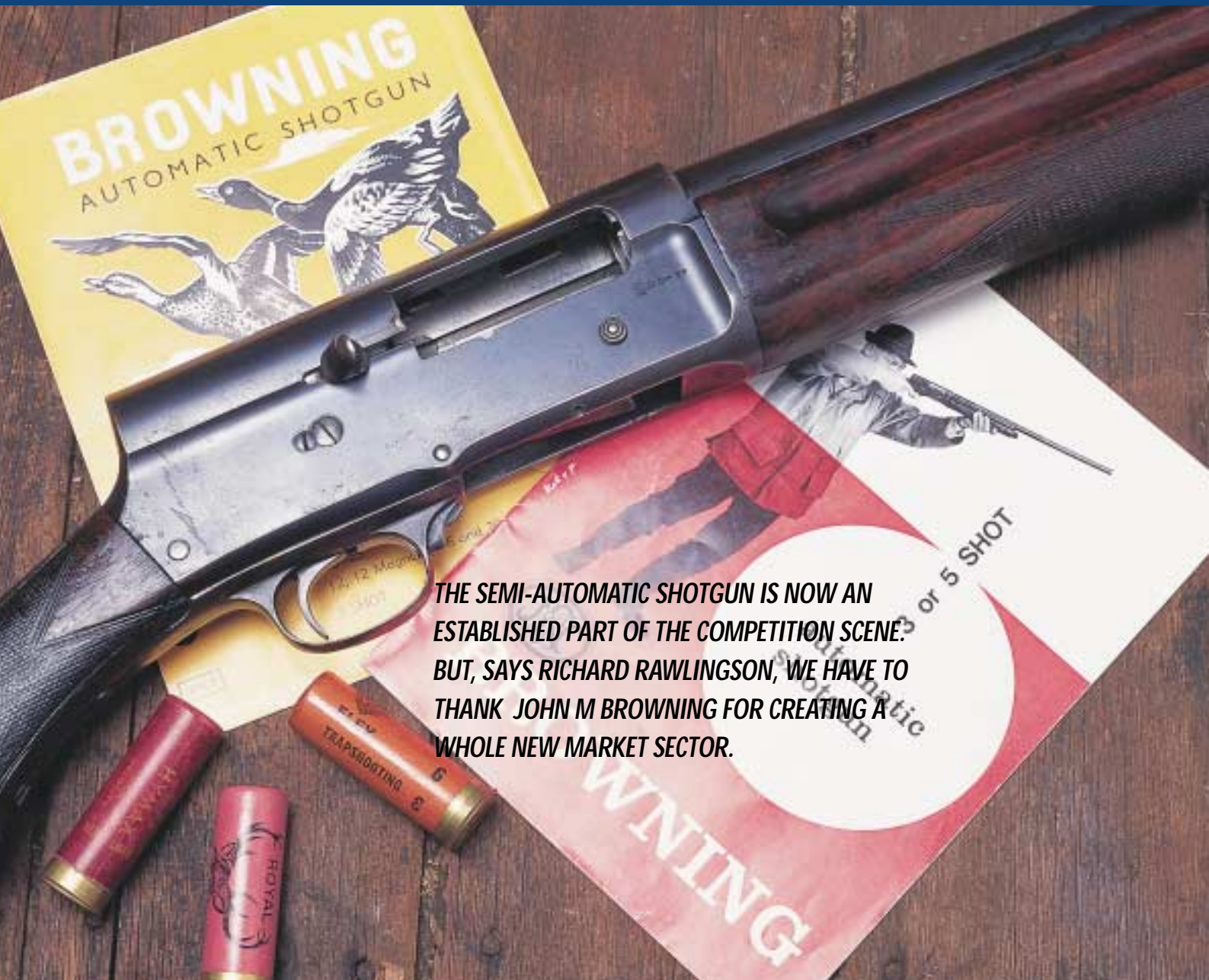
BROWNINGAUTOMATIC-5

GUNS
THAT
SHAPED A
CENTURY

IN THIS NEW
SERIES RICHARD
RAWLINGSON
LOOKS AT THE
MOST

INFLUENTIAL GUNS OF THE 20TH CENTURY
– THE GUNS THAT SHAPED THE SPORT OF
CLAY TARGET SHOOTING
AS WE KNOW IT TODAY.

BROWNING AUTOMATIC-5



THE SEMI-AUTOMATIC SHOTGUN IS NOW AN
ESTABLISHED PART OF THE COMPETITION SCENE.
BUT, SAYS RICHARD RAWLINGSON, WE HAVE TO
THANK JOHN M BROWNING FOR CREATING A
WHOLE NEW MARKET SECTOR.



I make no apologies for featuring another of Browning's creations in this second instalment of the series. As the greatest designer and inventor of firearms of his era, John Moses Browning left an amazing body of work that survived long after his death in 1926. Indeed it is the very

in several fields, most notably machine guns and automatic pistols. It was a logical step to apply this technology to a self loading shotgun.

The demand for the gun was undoubtedly there. The American market in particular wanted firepower and had taken to the single barrel 'pump' gun in a big way. Browning had already had a major influence on this market

was still going on and the variability of loads and the paper cases that housed them added to the problem. The inconsistency of shotgun ammunition made the effective application of Browning's principles much harder than on pistols and other weapons.

The solution proved, as is so often the case with inventions, to be ridiculously simple. An adjustable friction device, costing

THE "BROWNING"
12-BORE AUTOMATIC SHOT GUN.

Fires Five Cartridges by merely touching the Trigger Five times.

The act of firing the first cartridge opens the breech and ejects the fired case, and re-loads and re-cocks ready for firing the second.



Price ... **£9 0 0**

DESCRIPTION.

The Barrel is of Steel, 28 inches long, choked and chambered to shoot the ordinary 12-bore Paper Shot Cartridge.
The Weight of the Gun is 7 1/2 lbs.
The Barrel can be easily taken off the Action for packing in a case.
Full Instructions sent with every Gun.

longevity of many of the guns he designed that is the mark of his genius. The Superposed we featured in the last issue is still going strong after 70 years; the Winchester Model 1897 pump gun stayed in production for 60 years, while the Automatic-5, the subject of this article, was finally put out to grass 95 years after it first went into production!

Technically, the Auto-5 was perhaps the most notable of all. Browning had successfully harnessed the power of spent gases to power automatic weapons

with his designs for Winchester – the Model 1893 and its successor the Model 1897. The pumps gave the capacity and rugged reliability needed in guns which were hard working tools, designed to put food on the table. How much better though if the manual shuffle could be eliminated and a gun designed which would reload automatically after every shot.

It was no easy task. Ammunition at the turn of the century was nowhere near as reliable as it is now. The change from black powder to smokeless

just a few cents, allowed the Auto-5 to be set up for a wide range of ammunition and made the gun a practical proposition. It was first unveiled in Browning's patent application of 1900.

The gun operates on what is called the 'long recoil' principle. The barrel is floating and linked to



WITH ITS DISTINCTIVE 'HUMPBACK' RECEIVER, EVEN A MOTHER COULD NOT CALL THE AUTO-5 HANDSOME, BUT IT HAS THE APPEAL OF A TOOL WHICH FILLS ITS INTENDED PURPOSE WITHOUT FUSS OR FRILLS.





Browning's first call after the break up was to Marcellus Hartley, President of Remington and he received an enthusiastic reception and an immediate invitation to discuss terms. Sadly, the story is told that Hartley died of a heart attack while Browning was waiting in his office for the meeting that would seal the deal.

With Remington in turmoil, Browning looked finally across the Atlantic to the Belgian company Fabrique Nationale of Liege, with which he had already worked on his automatic pistol design. They lost no time in gearing up for production and the gun was unveiled to the public in 1903, with Browning himself placing an order for 10,000 guns for sale in America through the

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a large spring running down the outside of the magazine tube. Under recoil, the barrel moves backwards, compressing the spring and cycling the action. The return of the spring to its original position leaves the gun ready to fire the next round. The magazine could hold up to five shells, hence the name.

Interchangeable barrels added to its versatility. Much was also made of Auto-5's reliability – in the words of a Browning catalogue: *"The Browning has no delicate functional peculiarities. With reasonable care this gun will provide years upon years of pleasant and dependable service. The initial purchase price should be your only investment – the best you could possibly make."*

Until this point Browning had sold the majority of his sporting arms to Winchester, a partnership that had proved very profitable for both parties and had given Winchester almost total market dominance in repeating sporting arms. T.G. Bennett, the boss of



Winchester, was however a deeply conservative man and he had reservations about the revolutionary new gun and Browning became extremely frustrated at Winchester's reluctance to commit to production. It caused a parting of the ways.

newly created Browning Arms Company.

It soon became clear however that FN could not compete effectively in America because of restrictive tariff barriers, so in 1905 they and Browning licensed the gun to Remington for the American market where it was sold as the Model 11. FN retained the rights to all other world markets. So tightly drawn were the patents that for ten years no competitor could come up

with a rival product that did not infringe them in some way, although many tried. It would be 50 years before a viable competitor appeared in the form of the J.C. Higgins gas-operated Model 60 of 1955, swiftly followed by Remington with their Sportsman-58. As the patent protection expired, copies were made by several other firms in different parts of the world, especially Italy, while official Browning production was switched to the Japanese Miroku factory in 1976.

Over the last 100 years the



Browning Automatic has found its way into virtually every part of the shotgun scene. For three generations it was the American hunter's standard upland game gun, often in 20-bore or the popular 'sweet sixteen'. As a 12-bore Magnum it was just as much at home in the duck blind. Trap and Skeet shooters found it very much to their liking also and many variations and grades were produced specifically for target shooting on both sides of the Atlantic, including a 3-shot variant of the Remington Model 11 called the Sportsman.

World records were set with it at the 1924 Paris Olympics.

Remington's post-war streamlined version, the 11-48, proved very popular with Skeet shooters and did much to change attitudes to autos among competition shooters, paving the way for the runaway success of the Remington 1100 in the 1960s.

And still the original ploughed on. By 1961 FN alone had produced over 1.3 million guns, with Remington's version adding nearly 900,000 more to that total. With its distinctive 'humpback' receiver, even a mother could not call the Auto-5 handsome, but it has the appeal of a tool which fills its intended purpose without fuss or frills. Many of the early guns still survive and are capable of use, testament to the production standards of the time. A thriving

collector's market makes high grades and custom guns highly desirable.

Production in Japan ceased in 1998, although new examples are still to be found around the trade. By the end, the Automatic-5 had become a historical curiosity and it had certainly long since lost any relevance to the competitive clay shooting scene. In some ways it was a sad end for a gun that had dominated its field for over half a century but its place in history was secure.

Every sporting clays shooter who chooses a modern semi-automatic should be grateful to John M. Browning for turning concept into reality. And all it took was a dime's worth of friction adjuster!

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SHOTGUN PORTING
1/2 PAGE ADVERT
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