

Thousands of American shotgunners will have owned or used a shotgun made by B.C. Miroku of Japan, although only a small proportion will be aware of it. Unlike fellow enthusiasts in Europe, Australia or New Zealand, American buyers have never been able to buy a Miroku branded gun at their local gun shop, but the company has been a major player on the US scene for over 40 years. Today it would be hard to imagine a clay shooting competition taking

place without Miroku-built, but Browning badged, Citori and Cynergy guns.

The reasons for the company's anonymity are all down to marketing decisions taken in the dim and distant past, too complex to unravel here, but our story starts much earlier, in 1893 to be precise, when B.C. Miroku was established in the city of Kochi, on the southern Japanese island of Shikoku. The company specialized in hunting rifles, although it diversified into many other areas. The entrance to their headquarters is dominated by an enormous harpoon gun from the 1930s, evidence of the company's versatility.

It was, however, a very different post-war world that Miroku faced. As with the rest of Japanese industry, reconstruction depended on building trade with the West and that meant making

products that Western consumers would want to buy. With a large, skilled workforce, abundant raw materials (Japan by 1960 was the world's third largest steel producer) and significant technical expertise, prospects were good if the right products could be designed.

The answer for many Japanese companies looking to Western markets was 'adapt, adopt and improve'. They took established Western products, in everything from cameras to motor cycles, and made their own versions. In most cases they quickly went beyond pure imitation, refining both design and production techniques to improve on the originals or significantly reduce manufacturing costs. Canon and Nikon may have started out producing copies of pre-war German Leica or Contax cameras, but they swiftly became innovators, while Honda achieved standards of build and reliability the motor cycle industry could only dream of.

## THE BEST GUNMAKER YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF!

**RICHARD RAWLINGSON  
LOOKS AT MIROKU AND ITS LARGELY UNSUNG INFLUENCE  
ON THE AMERICAN SHOTGUN SCENE**



Miroku looked to Europe and their inspiration was John M. Browning's famous Superposed over-and-under shotgun, built in Belgium by Fabrique Nationale of Liege and sold in North America by the Browning Arms Company. Japanese rivals SKB also looked to the West for an o/u design, settling on the German Merkel.

Miroku retained all the essential details of Browning's original, but introduced some refinements of their own, most notably in the lockwork and also in using a conventional detachable fore arm, rather than the more complex permanently attached style of the Superposed.

Having the product is one thing, building a market is another – particularly one as vast and diverse as the United States – and some form of partnership with an established company made obvious sense. The New York

firearms importer Charles Daly had an established record of sourcing guns suitable for the American market, having been in business since 1875. The company had, from the beginning, looked to producers in Belgium, Germany – and later, Italy – to supply its guns, using the Charles Daly brand on a vast range of firearms.

With Browning's sales of the Superposed hitting record heights in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the potential of the Miroku look-alike was obvious, particularly as it could be sold at a significant price advantage. A range of Charles Daly badged Mirokus was introduced in 1963 and was an immediate hit. Nor was any attempt made to disguise the guns' origins. I have an early Daly catalog which declares on the front cover: "Manufactured to the most exacting specifications from the finest materials at the world

famous B.C. Miroku Gun Works, Kochi City, Japan." Both these field and competition guns for trap and skeet were offered in 12 and 20 gauge. The pinnacle was the Diamond Regent grade, lavishly engraved and inlaid with gold and silver, that sold for over three times the basic \$279 price of the Field model. As well as the over-and-unders, Daly also offered the Model 500, an Anson and Deeley type boxlock side-by-side.

**BELOW: NO MACHINE CAN CHECK FOR BARREL PERFECTION AS ACCURATELY AS THE TRAINED EYE.**



**ABOVE: THE CHARLES DALY SUPERIOR GRADE TRAP AND SKEET MODELS COST \$305 IN 1965.**



**MAIN PICTURE: TRADITIONAL TOOLS – TRADITIONAL SKILLS. INSET: CHECKERING A GRIP WITH A SIMPLE POWER TOOL.**

The new arrival on the scene must have immediately caught the attention of Browning because the company's official history records that discussions with Miroku opened as early as 1965. They were clearly fruitful because the first Browning/Miroku collaboration appeared just three years later – the BT-99 single barrel trap gun. It was joined in 1972 by the BSS side-by-side in both boxlock and sidelock form.

Recognition was coming on both sides of the Atlantic. Even the conservative British market was forced to concede the merits of the newcomer from the East. The famous English writer Gough Thomas was notoriously sniffy about anything not made in Britain, so when he wrote in 1965: *"This gun was notable for the exceptional accuracy of the machining, for the full hardening of all wearing parts, and for the high quality of the trigger pulls"* it was praise indeed.

Ties between Browning and Miroku grew throughout the 1970s, particularly after the introduction of the first Citori model in 1973. This was essentially identical to the last of the Charles Daly line and although



**RANKS OF COMPUTER CONTROLLED WORK STATIONS PRODUCE THE PARTS FOR BROWNING AND MIROKU GUNS.**

sales through Daly continued through to 1976, it was clearly the beginning of the end. Many of those early guns survive however, and because of the market's obsession with brand names are seriously undervalued. A clean Charles Daly Miroku can be a real bargain and thanks to specialists like Wisner's ([www.wisnersinc.com](http://www.wisnersinc.com)), parts should not be a problem – even for the early V-spring powered guns.

As any keen shooter will know, the Citori line and its



**ALTHOUGH MECHANICALLY IDENTICAL TO THE BROWNING GUNS, EUROPEAN MARKET MIROKUS HAVE A VERY DIFFERENT BRAND IDENTITY, WITH RATHER CONSERVATIVE STYLING.**

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## INSIDE THE MIROKU FACTORY

The company has grown significantly since those early days and now occupies four separate sites around Kochi, employing nearly 1000 people. Like most of its rivals, Miroku has invested heavily in computer-aided design and manufacturing technology. It boasts one of the most advanced barrel making plants in the world, producing some 120,000 shotgun barrels each year.

Alongside all this technology however, traditional gunmaking skills remain vital to the Miroku operation. Hand tools are still widely used and guns are assembled 'in the white' by skilled technicians, using time-honored dye-transfer methods to ensure perfect fit between parts. Working on the principle that the most important stroke of the file or cut with the chisel is the final one, Miroku guns come together through the hands of men and women, not machines.

Some 200,000 pieces of walnut pass through the factory each year. All the final drying takes place in controlled conditions in Japan and hand checkering of the finished stocks is still widely used. A large engraving department embellishes the high grade guns. Finally, guns are test fired and patterned in the factory before being passed for shipping by the quality control department.

derivatives has become one of the great success stories of the last 30 years. In that time it has been made in a bewildering range of styles and gauges to suit every kind of shooting situation, field or competition. Affordable, reliable and, above all, eminently usable, it is the rock on which the current Browning business is built.

The Browning link became a three-way one, when Miroku

assembled in Belgium from Japanese parts.

Today, marketing of Miroku guns is part of the wider Browning International business, formed when the company was taken over by the government of the Walloon State in which FN is situated. As we know, the Citori and new Cynergy lines are significant products in the world market, but outside of North America the

hands of some of the top British shooters. Whereas Browning products are regularly updated and 'restyled', Miroku guns retain a very conservative look, little changed from those guns of the 60s (and none the worse for that, some might say). Whatever name they carry, one thing is indisputable – the shotgunning scene would be much poorer without the guns from Kochi. ■

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joined Fabrique Nationale in acquiring most of the outstanding stock of the Browning Arms Company in 1977. Production of the famous Browning Auto-5 was transferred to Japan, while Miroku's production quality was given the ultimate accolade when FN introduced the B125 model, essentially a Superposed

Miroku brand is sold alongside Browning. Those Charles Daly guns were effectively Miroku's Model 800, as it was called elsewhere, and that gun has evolved through several generations to be now known as the MK38 and remains a consistently strong seller, regularly featuring among the prizes in the

- 1 ASSEMBLY 'IN THE WHITE' IS STILL THE JOB OF SKILLED CRAFTSMEN.
- 2 A LARGE IN-HOUSE ENGRAVING DEPARTMENT IS KEPT FULLY OCCUPIED.
- 3 COLORED POWDER IS USED TO ACHIEVE PERFECT WOOD TO METAL FIT.
- 4 ALTHOUGH PRODUCING MAINLY FOR THE MASS MARKET, MIROKU IS CAPABLE OF BUILDING GUNS OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY.