

WHEN WE THINK ABOUT THE BRITISH GUN TRADE AS IT IS TODAY, WE SEEM TO THINK ONLY OF THE HIGH-END BESPOKE MANUFACTURERS LIKE HOLLAND AND HOLLAND, PURDEY AND OTHERS – BUT IN YEARS GONE BY THERE WERE ALSO QUALITY MANUFACTURERS OF LOWER PRICED SHOTGUNS IN ENGLAND. ITS JUST THAT IN THE UNITED STATES WE DON'T KNOW VERY MUCH ABOUT NAMES LIKE ARMY & NAVY, BSA, GREENER, PAPE AND LEWIS.

So, why did they too not manufacture over and under target guns for the shooting sports? After all, one of the best and most emulated shotguns ever designed, the Boss, was first produced in Great Britain early in the nineteenth century. Evidently, most British gun manufacturers thought the side-by-side shotgun was the only shotgun worth manufacturing. This adherence to tradition and the past probably doomed what was once a flourishing gunmaking industry in the British Isles.

When the Italians and the Spaniards started to export good quality economical over and under target guns to Great Britain, it truly was the death knell for many in the British gun trade, except for a few high-end bespoke manufacturers. The same thing almost happened in the United States. The only over and under target shotgun manufactured here



Holland & Holland

“WHEN YOU ARE INVITED TO SHOOT A HOLLAND & HOLLAND SPORTING CLAYS SHOTGUN YOU DO IT – EVEN IF IT REQUIRES YOU TO GO TO NEW YORK CITY TO DO SO,” SAYS TOM CERETTO.



GUY DAVIES – HOLLAND AND HOLLAND.

in the 1930s and 1940s was the Remington Model 32 and that excellent shotgun unfortunately died not long after the end of the war as it was deemed too expensive to manufacture. (The basic Model 32 design flourishes today as the Krieghoff K80 manufactured in Ulm, Germany). Many Americans think of the Browning Superposed as an American shotgun – but that's not true. While John Browning designed it here, it was manufactured in Belgium by FNH and in Japan by Miroku. Miroku also built the excellent Winchester over and unders. Winchester shotguns are presently being manufactured at FNH in Herstal, Belgium.

There are only three over and under shotguns presently being manufactured in the United States – The Kolar manufactured in Racine, Wisconsin, Rigby & Sons manufactured in Paso Robles, California and the Ljutic manufactured in Yakima, Washington. The Kolar is a specialized high quality target gun for skeet, sporting clays and trap. Rigby manufactures a high line of bespoke shotguns, but will build you almost any type of target gun you could want. Ljutic has manufactured over and unders for trap and skeet, but most of their production today is devoted to single barrel trap guns for American trap shooters. In truth, the American arms industry, unlike the British, survived because they started producing inexpensive reliable automatic shotguns – and high volume rifle production never wavered and was always lucrative.

H & H HISTORY

Fortunately for Holland & Holland, they were one of the

survivors of that dark period in British gun manufacturing – but are flourishing today. It's generally accepted that Harris John Holland started making and trading in shotguns in 1835 at 9 King Street, a bustling commercial street in Holborn, England. It is not known for certain if Holland, the son of an organ builder and a successful tobacconist, was a gunmaker or a gun manufacturer. A gunmaker was defined at that time as one who purchased components from cottage industry sub-contractors and fitted and assembled the components into a complete firearm and stamped his name on it. A manufacturer built all, or at least most, of his guns 'in house', purchasing only what parts they did not make themselves. As Holland's tobacco business grew and he became more affluent, he became well known as a crack shot. Harris Holland started to build guns at his King Street tobacco shop as a hobby for friends and customers of his tobacco business. It was not until 1848 that he described himself as a gunmaker as well as a tobacconist in the Commercial Directory. By 1857 he began to describe himself as a gunmaker and stopped calling himself a tobacconist.

Harris Holland had no sons of his own and in 1850 his nephew Henry Holland was apprenticed to his uncle at the age of fifteen. When Henry completed his apprenticeship in 1867, he was taken in by Harris as a partner and some time in the 1870s the firm was renamed Holland & Holland – and has remained so ever since.

When in the mid 1990s the company announced they were going to build an over and under sporting clays shotgun it surprised many and probably shocked more than a few. But Holland & Holland



thinks differently. They saw a niche market for a very high end over and under target gun and jumped into that niche with both feet.

TECHNICAL SPECS

Like many people, I thought the Holland & Holland sporting clays shotgun would be a side-lock, but I was surprised when I discovered it was what they describe as a trigger plate action with a removable trigger – they do not refer to it as a box-lock. It was

designed totally in house using the latest CAD CAM technology and CNC manufacturing techniques. However, the final fitting is done by hand by experienced craftsmen, making each gun unique unto itself.

The lock up is pure Boss with trunnions on the inside of the receiver walls engaging slots in the demi-block (please don't call it a monobloc) to pivot on. The bolts engage slots in the breach just south of the top barrel and lock up the receiver like a bank vault. The trunnions stop the barrels from

moving forward off face and the bolt keeps the action from springing open and negates any twisting forces imparted during discharge. The recoil blocks are large and impressive (recoil blocks and trunnions are replaceable). Outside of the Boss system used to lock up the receiver, the rest of the receiver, and the entire gun, is an in house design unique to Holland & Holland. They manufacture every part that goes into their guns, except for the Briley thin wall choke tubes.

The entry level sporting clays model at \$85,000 is minimalist engraved, but very well done and quite attractive. The De Luxe, at \$125,000, sport complete coverage in exquisite bank note (don't call it bullion) and scroll engraving. When you run your finger lightly over the engraving the difference in feel between the scroll engraving and bank note engraving is almost a tactile pleasure. I have never been fond of a lot of gold inlays but the engraving on the De Luxe was about as perfect as you can get. The receiver was finished in what Holland & Holland calls coin finish brush bright – and perfectly done.

The trigger group is removed by pulling a small lever located at the left rear of the trigger guard. Pull back on the lever and the trigger drops right out into your hand – a quick and easy process. If simplicity in design is a true mark of genius, then this is it. I have rarely seen a trigger group that looks as uncluttered and simple and that worked as effectively.



THE ENTRY LEVEL SPORTING CLAYS MODEL AT \$85,000 IS MINIMALIST ENGRAVED, BUT VERY WELL DONE AND QUITE ATTRACTIVE. THE DE LUXE, AT \$125,000, SPORTED COMPLETE COVERAGE IN EXQUISITE BANK NOTE (DON'T CALL IT BULLION) AND SCROLL ENGRAVING.



Holland & Holland

THE ONLY DOWN SIDE TO THE HOLLAND & HOLLAND SPORTING CLAYS SHOTGUN IS THAT MOST OF US WILL NEVER SEE ONE UNLESS WE ARE INVITED TO AN EXCLUSIVE GUN CLUB IN THE HAMPTONS. AND THAT'S TOO BAD, BECAUSE THEY SHOULD BE SEEN AND ADMIR

Trigger pull went off at just under four pounds and snapped off as crisp as a good piece of Italian biscotti. A pair of impressive looking leaf springs, that can be changed in the field in less than a minute, power the hammers.

The barrels are a source of pride – and one look at them and you can see why. They are deeply blued, polished to a high luster – and as smooth as glass from breach to muzzle. Bores are 0.729 and barrel lengths are available from 25 inches to 32 inches. Our demos sported 28 inch barrels and 2 3/4 inch chambers, but 3 inch chambers are available on request. The top rib is vented and the mid rib on both demos were solid. I did not ask if a vented mid rib is available on bespoke guns, but as almost anything you could wish for is available, I would guess they could be had on request. Chokes for the sporting clays guns are manufactured by Briley in Houston, Texas and sent to England where the barrels are threaded and the chokes fitted.

Wood on the entry level sporting is what Holland & Holland calls standard grade, but it was hardly what I would call standard. The wood on the De Luxe demo was lovely with marble cake showing. A hand rubbed oil finish is the finish of choice on sporting clays models, but any finish you desire can be had on a bespoke gun. The grip on both demos did not have a tight radius, but were more inclined towards a Prince of Wales grip although they seemed a bit tighter than those I have encountered before. To say the hand checkering was well done would be an understatement – it was beautifully done. The stock and fore-end are carved by hand.

I loved the fore-end. It was, to me, perfectly executed – slim, but

large enough to fill the hand nicely. The modified Anson fore-end iron on the De Luxe was tastefully engraved. The wood to metal craftsmanship on both guns is probably the best I have ever seen.

ON TEST

The demos we tested at Orvis Sandanona weighed slightly over

8 pounds with their 28 inch barrels, but bespoke guns can be had from 7 1/2 to 8 1/2 pounds. Balance was precisely between the hands on both guns. Movement from target to target on report and true pairs was executed with ease. Let me assure you that the Holland & Holland sporting clays shotguns are serious competition guns – they are not ‘warmed over’ field guns with sporting clays

stock dimensions. They are rugged enough to take the day-to-day pounding of a dedicated sporting clays competitor (albeit a well heeled one).

I have dispensed with the usual list of specifications I include with most of my gun reviews because of the bespoke dimensions and options available that makes such a list superfluous. If you purchase an in-stock sporting clays model at the New York gallery, you will be fitted by a local specialist while trigger pull would be adjusted to your preference by a local authorized gunsmith. Waiting time for bespoke guns is usually about two years.

The only down side to the Holland & Holland sporting clays shotgun is that most of us will never see one unless we are invited to an exclusive gun club in the Hamptons. And that’s too bad, because they should be seen and admired. Would I purchase one? You bet I would, in a heartbeat. I hope I win the lottery! ■

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I WANT TO THANK DAVID CRUSE AND GUY DAVIES, EXECUTIVE SALES DIRECTOR FOR THEIR HOSPITALITY AND CO-OPERATION. I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO EXTEND SPECIAL THANKS TO BOB PEARSON JR., ADMINISTRATIONS DIRECTOR, AT THE NEW YORK GALLERY, FOR HOSTING A HALF BLIND OLD GUY ON A VERY ENJOYABLE TRIP TO ORVIS SANDANONA SHOOTING GROUNDS. WHAT A GREAT PLACE TO SHOOT!