Holloway & Naughton

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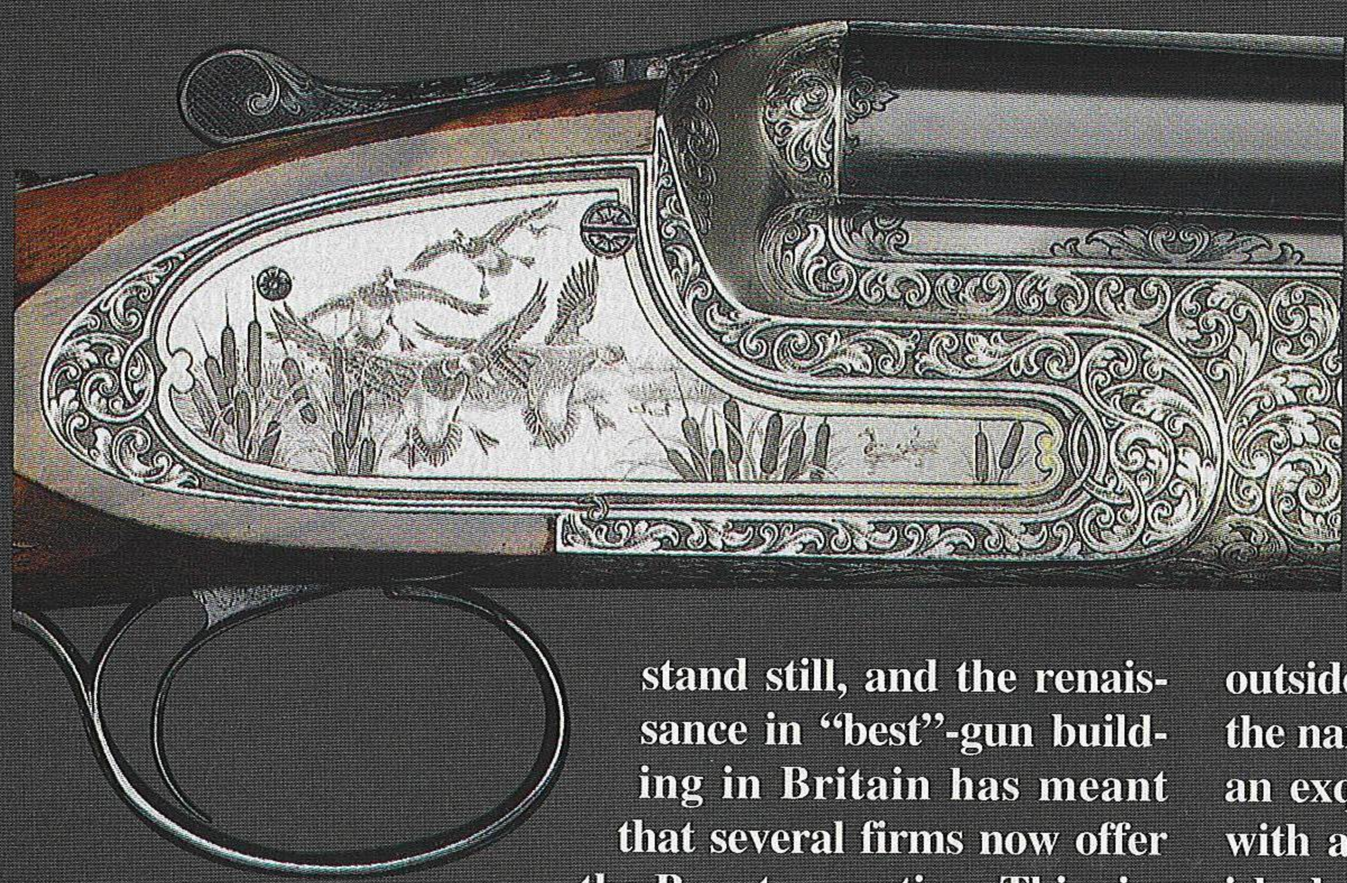
A lesser-known name rivaling the 'best' in the business

When you hold a Boss over/under—slim, sleek, sexy and balanced—you know you are holding more than just a shotgun," wrote Douglas Tate in his article "Boss is Back" (Jan/Feb '05). There is nothing in that statement I can disagree with.

The Boss O/U is, without doubt, one of the most iconic sporting guns of our time, and still it is made by the grand old London firm of the same name on Mount Street. However, time does not stand still, and the renaissance in "best"-gun building in Britain has meant that several firms now offer the Boss-type action. This signifies an interesting shift in production focus for gunmakers outside of London who used to thrive on medium- and lower-grade bread & butter guns. These days virtually every gun that leaves the shop of a British maker—be it in Birmingham, Leicester, Glasgow or Edinburgh—is of best quality. Market economics dictate that it be this way.



Recently I had in my hands a stunning gun that ably demonstrated the modern focus on quality outside the capital: a Boss-type over/under 12-bore bearing the name Holloway & Naughton. The gun was stocked with an exquisite piece of walnut—real honey-and-smoke stuff with a Prince of Wales grip—and paired with a coin-finished action, with fantastic heavy scroll on the action body and forend iron and highlighted with game scenes of pheasants, partridge and woodcock on the lockplates and under-

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF HOLLOWAY & NAUGHTON

Holloway & Naughton's latest effort is a Sporting Clays model—the one pictured here being a 12-bore with game-scene engraving and three sets of barrels.

side of the action. The maker's name in gold added the finishing touch.

Close inspection showed that the gun had been worked on by some of the best in the business. John Keen, who also has worked extensively for one of the acknowledged perfectionists of the English trade—Peter Nelson—did the actioning and signed the gun discreetly beside the trigger slot. The 30-inch barrels were made by another living legend: Bill Blacker.

Overall, the gun weighed 7½ pounds, a weight chosen because the fortunate owner wanted it for high birds and sporting clays—two activities that demand exquisite balance but also reasonable weight to absorb a real pounding.

I was examining the gun in the comfortable rural home of Andrew Harvison, the businessman-and-shooting-coach-turned-gunmaker who, for more than a decade, has been at the center of the resurrection of the Holloway & Naughton name. Harvison's home and business are based in the heart of Leicestershire, about two hours north of London. Here Harvison maintains a small workshop, but he has a relationship with a local toolmaking shop that supplies many parts for his guns.

In his book *Birmingham Gunmakers*, Doug Tate gives probably the most comprehensive version of the Holloway & Naughton story in print, and it is worth repeating the highlights of this lesser-known firm.

The middle of the 19th Century was not a good time to be young, vulnerable and fatherless, but that was the situation that Thomas Naughton found himself in. Forced by circumstance to begin his working life at just 10 years old, Naughton fell into the Birmingham gun trade when he was taken on by either Charles or Joseph Mayberry of St. Mary's Row. Tate speculates that the boy probably was given the task of pushing an old pram filled with gun parts from barrelmaker to jointer and from jointer to stocker in a familiar ritual. By 15, Naughton had begun training at the bench, and shortly after he gained employment with George Bonehill at Belmont Gun Works in order to learn about the machine manufacture of guns. Later, to learn about handmade guns, Naughton joined James Carr, and he emerged five years later as a fully trained craftsman.

Not long after this, Naughton met G. O'Connor Holloway, a hardware merchant and Birmingham city councilor. Holloway sold shotguns through his hardware business and, being no slouch, was interested in investing in the manufacture of sporting

guns. With that in mind, he rented some property to the young craftsman, and their business took off. The guns made under the Holloway name were an immediate success and included Anson & Deeley-pattern boxlocks, conventional sidelocks of the Holland & Holland pattern, double rifles of both action types, and bolt-action rifles. The firm won prizes at a major Paris exhibition, and customers clamored for so many guns that a new factory had to be built at 10, 12 and 14 Vesey Street in Birmingham.

Naughton managed Holloway & Co. for about 15 years, and though he was offered a proper partnership, he declined, the Holloway business eventually being sold to H. Ludlow England, the owner of Midland Gun Co. Naughton remained as manager and eventually bought back the company in early 1909, changing the name to Holloway & Naughton.

In 1911 the firm bought the famous name J&W Tolley, a move that brought a host of other models into the stable, including Tolley's well-known line of big-bore wildfowling guns.

In an interesting move that echoes clay-shooting champion Andrew Harvison's ownership of the company today, just prior to World War I Naughton employed W. Ellicot, an English clay-target champion, to act as a traveling salesman for the firm. Target shooting was very popular before the Great War, and the firm sold many guns for that purpose.

Naughton died in September 1921, and the business was carried on by his son, T.J., before being acquired in the early 1950s by F.J. Wiseman, whose father, J.H., had at one time rented bench space from the firm. F.J. Wiseman & Co., however, did not build any guns under the Holloway & Naughton name until forming a relationship with Andrew Harvison in 1992.

In the early '90s F.J. Wiseman Managing Director John Wiseman, F.J's son, along with business partner Harvison decided to design a new over/under. Harvison was well known in the English gun trade at that time, as he had been a member of Britain's clay-shooting squad since the 1970s. He had represented England in sporting, down the line, trap and skeet, and he had captained the sporting and skeet squads. Harvison's honors included winning the British Open Sporting championship in 1984 and English skeet titles in 1987 and 1988, and he twice won the prestigious Coronation Cup. (The latter is a trophy presented to the competitor with the best combined all-around score in the British Open Sporting, skeet and down the line).

The original gun was a 12-bore with 28-inch barrels, and it was made "so the barrels hinged on side projections and bolted midway down the action face." This made for a shallow, elegant gun weighing about 7½ pounds.

This was the H&N design that American shooters may have seen at various shows and exhibitions throughout the 1990s, and it found a number of very satisfied customers. However, a couple of years ago Wiseman's and Harvison decided to go their separate ways, with Harvison retaining title to the Holloway & Naughton name for the production of sidelock O/Us and sidelock side-by-side shotguns along with sporting rifles on a variety of actions, including sidelock side-by-side doubles and a very handsome single-shot.

Being something of a perfectionist himself, Harvison decided that if he were going to continue building Holloway & Naughton guns, the guns would have to be the best. "I have gathered around me a great team of craftsmen," Harvison said recently, "including John Keen and Bill Blacker, who are both synonymous with the very best work. We settled on the Boss-type over/under because it is such an elegant design. We have made a couple of modifications, including a redesign of the single trigger to make it as reliable as modern-day shooters expect, but other than that it's the classic benchmark design that people know." Harvison

A 12-bore Sporting Clays model in the white.

A 20-bore O/U with color-case-hardened receiver and classic bouquet & scroll engraving.

A game-scene-engraved 12-bore O/U suitable for game shooting or sporting clays.

decided not to use the old Boss-design turret single trigger, due to, he says, "the slow cycling time from one barrel to another." Instead, new Holloway & Naughton guns are made with simple inertia bob-weight single triggers, which, according to Harvison, cycle very quickly.

Harvison adds that he has been involved with his engineers "hands on" right through the process of parts manufacture. He says that parts are made to his exacting specifications, so "the gunmakers can create the handling characteristics and aesthetics I require.

"When the relationship with Wiseman's ceased, I contacted all my current suppliers in Leicester and set about making the new guns as close as possible to a true Boss design. I consider this time and experience as undoubtedly being the hardest part of the development operation. It was exacting, getting everything right."

The quality of the latest H&N Boss-type gun is obvious to all who handle it; it just screams "best." Members of the British gun trade not connected with H&N have seen the gun and pronounced it to be excellent, and photographer and regular *SSM* contributor David Grant, who has seen and handled untold numbers of guns by top-end makers, says he thinks the gun is "outstanding."

But what sort of customer buys a new Holloway & Naughton? Harvison believes it is the type of person who values the relationship built with a small and specialist maker. "Typically, my customer is looking for someone who will cater exactly to his individual requirements for a best gun," he said. "My business ethos includes extremely close contact with the client throughout the ordering process and building of the gun. I put special emphasis on servicing the client's every need, from initial contact to monitoring performance after delivery. Gunfitting is of absolute paramount importance, and I will always make a try-stock for a client before stocking a new gun. This requires bringing the stocker together with the client and shooting some sporting clays to understand the way the client shoots. I believe my level of service is second to none because of the standards I set and my long experience of working with shooters, my competitive background and my understanding of the market."

This sort of service—along with the superb quality evident in new Holloway & Naughton guns—does not come cheap, and a gun like the over/under 12-bore I fondled costs £50,000. (Side-by-sides are £45,000.) As mentioned, rifles also are available, and a double based on the Holland-type action will cost £50,000 in .300 to .470 (at press time a .416 Rigby was available in the white), and a take-down single-shot will cost £16,000 in the same calibers. Depending on the options chosen, delivery time is between six and 24 months.

If there's one lesson that gun buyers should learn, it's that quality is everything, and although the Holloway & Naughton name may not be as well known as some others, the quality of the company's products stand shoulder to shoulder with the very best produced by firms in the English capital.

Author's Note: For more information on Holloway & Naughton, contact Andrew Harvison, 01144-116-2596592; www.hollowaynaughton.co.uk.

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