

B.B.Game by A.A.Brown & Sons

An article written in 1997 by David Grant, Photographer and Writer.

Every shotgun specifically made for a shooter, has the stock measurements and overall dimensions, wood, engraving and barrels all created according to the purchaser's wishes and to suit his/her eyesight, arm length and height. Clearly this is an ideal for any gun purchase but to buy a bespoke gun is a costly exercise. And while it may be a good investment this knowledge will do nothing to reduce the initial financial outlay.

There is also the option of customising a gun, not merely of improving the fit of a new or second hand gun, but also embellishing it to the user's requirements. Most of us never even consider such a possibility. So the majority of guns bought are standard off-the-shelf models.



While some will ensure that a few adjustments are made by a local gunsmith to improve the fit, very few take it any further. The guns are bought for how they look and tend to stay that way. Yet, with some attention to detail and the skills of a good gunsmith the standard production line model can be transformed.

Enter Brown and Beretta. Not names normally associated with one another, and probably a most unlikely double act, yet both high quality gunmakers in their own chosen spheres.

Beretta, the oldest gunmakers in the world, are one of the most familiar names in the mass over-under market, vying with Browning for top spot on sales in this country thanks to Bjorn Waktare and his team at Gunmark who have done a spectacular job in marketing the Italian guns over the past three decades.

A.A. Brown & Sons on the other hand are tiny in comparison, do very little marketing, relying on the quality of their traditional English side-by-sides to speak for themselves. Beretta turn out thousands of guns each year whereas Browns produce a very modest number. So how did this amalgam of Italian and British gunmaking skills come about?

A very good client, already owning a pair of Brown's side-by-sides, came to see them with a 20 bore Beretta 687 EELL asking Robin Brown to make it shoot as much like his side-by-sides as possible. He needed it for dove shooting in the Argentine and did not want to run the risk of losing his best guns in transit between the two countries. He had chosen the Beretta for its lightness, reliability and for its relatively modest cost in comparison to the side-by-sides -



opting for the 687EELL, he had chosen what is for many a favourite. But the problem was that he didn't like shooting with them. Perhaps, he felt, that the designers of the gun had clay rather than game in mind when the gun was conceived? Whatever, the task for Robin was to give it an English feel and to echo those handling properties which are associated with English guns.

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The Beretta is based, albeit somewhat loosely, on the Boss principle with bifurcated lumps, and as such is slim, particularly in 20 gauge. It is also side-plated and on the most expensive model is attractively scroll engraved with game scenes. It was agreed that no alteration would be made to the action and barrels - these being of excellent quality and needing no work to improve mechanical performance, other than converting to double trigger if required at the owner's request. It is fortunate that Browns are Beretta agents and knew the gun intimately.

First the stock, bulky with a heavy pistol grip, but with good figure and contrast was taken off the action in order to facilitate the removal of the pistol grip. The entire stock was shaved, slimmed and converted to a straight hand grip, the comb shaped more to the English style and the butt was fitted with a leather covered recoil pad. The fore-end, supplied by Beretta as a schnabel type, was slimmed to a splinter shape and both fore-end and stock totally rechequered. The furniture to the action received treatment too. The top lever was removed, filed down and reshaped. The trigger guard was then remodelled by filing it down and giving it a traditional bead rolled edge. A trigger guard tang was added to the underside of the stock to aesthetically



balance the top strap, and together with the double triggers (which in the original condition are gilded), all were polished, as is the norm in a best English gun. The fore-end catch, remarkably plain on the Beretta, received decorative embellishments to make it look more like a traditional Deeley version. All lock pins, the trigger guard and top lever were re-engraved and polished and to complete the

Anglicization of the gun, the fore-end and stock were given the loving care and attention of a traditional English oil finish normally reserved for the highest grade guns.

The result? A very classy looking, high grade 20 bore over-under with remarkably similar characteristics to an English over-under 20 bore but at a fraction of the price. Well worth considering if you want to enhance the appearance of your gun and give it the 'English' feel - in this way you can have the looks, handling and reliability but you won't have to pay hand-made prices. Anyone can buy and quite satisfactorily use an off-the-shelf gun, indeed probably the majority do just that. But the astonishing difference in the feel and handling made to that self-same gun by a skilled gunmaker can only be imagined until the before and after versions are compared.

Hardly surprising then that Robin Brown has created an enormous amount of interest both at home and overseas in his Brown-Beretta. The original version comes with inbuilt quality but the treatment it has been given puts it way, way above its original class into that verging on the hand-made variety. Robin emphasizes that the main core of AA Brown & Sons business will always remain in the building of traditional bespoke side-by-sides but customising is surely a further welcome string to their bow!