

Longthorne's Hesketh Game, the new face of bespoke English shotguns



North – West's Best

A bespoke English 12 – bore for less than £13,000... there's no such thing or is there? Mark Stone tests the new Longthorne Hesketh that's both bespoke and well within budget

For many of us our shotguns represent the best we can afford for the purpose we have in mind.

However, it's not unusual for any of us to comment that we'd like a full custom build or, if we could, exactly how we'd alter the shotgun we have to our own personal liking. But where many of us get by, often with excellent results, James Longthorne Stewart along with wife Elaine decided to take the process to its logical conclusion, the end result being a stunning new English sidelock that as far as James' is concerned is the best there is.

Enter the Hesketh

Taking its name from the small Lancastrian village of Hesketh Bank, the Hesketh is the culmination of one man's continued dissatisfaction with existing shotguns allied to



Hesketh designer and builder James Longthorne Stewart explains the concept to author Mark Stone

his profession as one of the country's leading precision engineers and life long love of shooting. Although the end result displays visual deference to other well respected predominantly Italian makes and models, there's a significant

hint of another English make and an unintentional mark of respect to a design conceived over a hundred and thirty years ago in Manchester, so making the whole Hesketh experience singularly unique and unreservedly 'northern'.

In other words it's the best bits of three, and a practical conception that many thought would never be seen again.

"The original idea for the Hesketh started to become reality in 2006 when the barrels were first designed, a follow on from our existing precision engineering business that encompassed the production of rifle barrels and other firearms componentry", explained James. "Also one piece is inherently better than several, is stronger, looks better, simpler and because I could actually do it. That said it took four years to perfect the process and whilst monobloc barrels are still cheaper and easier to produce, the one-piece unit gives a level of strength, accuracy, quality and a feel unlike any other, as the Hesketh demonstrates. Equally, even though the process had originally been carried out by

Whitworth it was only after we'd made ours that we found out it had been done before".

The end result is that with both cylinders being straight and parallel the shot doesn't have to be as James refers to it 'tidied up by chokes', the Hesketh's accuracy is akin to a finely tuned rifle, unlike many shotguns that have almost imperceptible bends and twists due to the various pieces being jointed together along with heat build up during continued discharge. This also means that if your Hesketh has been built for you it will unfailingly look exactly where you do.

The choice is yours

Even in basic form the Hesketh is a genuinely attractive 12 bore as are the standard hardwood frame and panama canvas or luxury leather and calfskin travelling cases, along with the rosewood cleaning kit and tools. The long external surfaces of the four pin Boss influenced sidelock are picked out with small clusters of scroll work with an attractive pattern of corn ears that pick out the borders and forend irons, rosettes picking out the hinges. And for those who want to personalise their Hesketh, all engraving designs and art work, like the gun, are carried out and applied in – house, the process undertaken by James' daughter Chloe. This means that no matter how unusual or intricate the end result will be exactly as you require.

The deep trigger guard that sweeps back into a short bottom tang houses a fixed trigger – blade whilst the top tang maintains the wheaten pattern along with the short throw top – lever and manual or auto safety. Most notable are the deep cut fences that sweep down and out along the sides of the action effectively giving the surface an attractive degree of depth. Opening the gun immediately reveals the Boss – style action inspiration along with the physical characteristic of being easy to open and close. Intentionally built this way, unlike others the

High grade walnut is standard and you can opt for a rounded grip or a straight stock

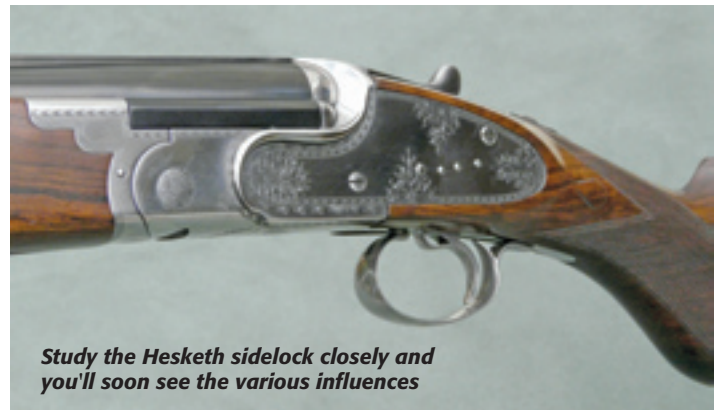


Hesketh doesn't have to be 'shot-in', the relaxed attitude of the mechanism and bite purposely designed this way.

As one

Initial inspection betrays very little about the barrels apart from the fact their hot blacked, beautifully finished, well balanced, and steel proofed and culminate in a 3" chamber. Where the difference becomes instantly apparent is that due to the high chrome contents of the steel used no chrome lining is required to protect them against the detritus that naturally builds up during the shooting process. Equally, unlike nearly ever other shotgun on the market, the barrels and chambers are machined from one solid piece of steel. Not since the Manchester engineer Sir Joseph Whitworth first perfected and patented this procedure back in 1857 and 1870 has this been done in the UK, although a less refined version of these barrels was developed over in the USA. Manufactured by using hydraulic pressure to eliminate air pockets, Sir Joseph's famous Whitworth Steel became an instant success within the gun making trade for quality, durability and balance. However, it's the expense, potential for scrap and the time required that precludes most other barrel makers from adopting the one piece system.

The end results are barrels that have no joints, everything apart from the ejectors being one complete piece. Similarly, they are completely true whilst the 3/8" forcing cones allow the



Study the Hesketh sidelock closely and you'll soon see the various influences



The trigger can be either selective or fixed



The safety can be either auto or manual.



Based on the Boss action, the new Hesketh Longthorne sidelock is as stunning as it is innovative

cartridge to discharge the shot directly into the main bore. This in turn means you technically don't especially need choke. That said, tighter restrictions can be engineered in during the manufacturing process whilst James' own designed and manufactured multi – choke tubes are available if you insist. Where these one solid piece barrels show their true worth is in the overall balance, there being no variation in metal distribution or a fluctuation in internal bore diameter.

Physical illusion

As you'd expect of any new gun, the test Hesketh is James' own pre-production and customer test 12 bore. To that end and since each gun will be built to each customer's dimensions those quoted are more general in an effort to suit a cross-section. However, apart from the fact it shot fractionally high for me, it was a matter of just a few shots before man and machine were more or less working correctly.

Weighing 6lbs 10oz in game form although the sporter will tip the scales at a slightly heavier 7lbs 8oz, the Hesketh game has achieved the near ideal compromise of being light enough to carry and shoot over extended periods combined with a mass that soaks up recoil. Drops at comb and heel are 1 3/8" and 2 1/8" with a length of pull measuring 14 15/16" and a precise and fully predictable trigger weight of 3lbs 4oz. But where the theoretical anomaly appears comes the moment you hold the Hesketh. Although you know you're holding a 12 – bore every aspect of the gun tells you it's a 20. The weight, handling, balance, physical dynamics and sheer presence tell you that the Hesketh is smaller than it actually is.

The main reason for this is that like all great game guns it embodies fluidity. Balancing perfectly between the hands, the easy radius and curvature of the grip drops instantly into the hand and merges with the rest of the gun to allow the Hesketh



Engraving and detailing are, like the rest of the gun, carried out completely in house



The barrels are machined from a solid section of steel bar

to maintain its reactive yet solid characteristics. Combine this with the London – style forend and this 12 bore's inherent pointability and you have a shotgun that reacts in an instant. The gun drifts to the shoulder whilst the 30" barrels pivot around their muzzle, the view along the 8 – 4.5mm game rib exactly as it should be, my much favoured 'gun down' style became mandatory, the Hesketh floating onto target whilst the Cylinder restrictions still ensured each and every clay shattered in an instant.

It's also whilst shooting the Hesketh that the one – piece barrels and full length stock bolt design make their mark. Shooting a whole variety of targets that were thrown whilst I walked around James' test facilities, the initial load was my favourite 28g Express World Cup fibrewads eventually increasing to 40g game load and powerful non – toxics. All assured of highlighting any shotgun's fallibility to recoil the Hesketh's reaction was the exact same whatever the load, testament to the fact that every aspect of this brand new 12

bore is exactly right whilst the inertia driven v-spring action transfer is faster than you'll ever be, the deftness of the trigger a sheer pleasure to use.

Old rules, new rules

Over the years various theories have been expounded in respect of shotgunning especially when it comes to barrels, boring and choking. Whilst most have gone along the well trodden path of extending forcing cones, adapting and developing muzzle restrictions along with back-boring and other inner bore technology, the new Hesketh exemplifies the alternative route. Produce one piece barrels as near perfect as is physically possible, keep forcing cones to an absolute minimum along with precise boring and fractionally larger shot size than normal and you'll have a shotgun that nigh on performs miracles. Problem is gizmo free shotguns tend not to sell since buyers like to see as much design input as possible in their modern shotguns. But if you're a potential customer, go and try the Hesketh and I warrant you'll be stunned, more so if I hadn't already told you about the barrel structure.

With the competition version ready to debut, a 20 bore in the wings along with a boxlock side-by-side and the potential of a double-rifle, Longthorne certainly aren't standing still. What I will say is that as each Longthorne hits the market it'll be as near faultless as is mechanically and humanly achievable, and more importantly, affordable. And yes, some of the famous London-best boys are worried and so they should be, and whilst the Longthorne name maybe completely new and theoretically lacking big name pedigree, always remember they too used to be unknowns. All I can add is that if the Hesketh's £12,766 falls within your financial remit, head north and try one for yourself, place your order and own a hundred percent English designed and built shotgun, something you probably thought you'd never be able to achieve. **GM**

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Name	Longthorne Hesketh
Calibre	12 – bore
Barrels	30" as tested
Action	Break – barrel sidelock
Stock	Sporter
Weight	6lbs 10oz
Chokes	Fix 1/4 both barrels
Price	£12,766
Contact	Longthorne Guns 01772 811215 www.longthorneguns.com js@longthorneguns.com

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- Lyalvale Express;** www.lyavalexpress.com
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