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COUNTRYMAN'S WEEKLY

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WEEKLY**



Gamekeeper & Sporting Dog

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HUNTING BILL DUMPED BY SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT?



Sporting Dog

AUSTRIA has a long history in gunmaking which has, until comparatively recently, been overlooked in the UK.

I first became fully aware of Austrian craftsmanship some years ago when I came across an exquisite .270 rifle, made by Ludwig Boronvik, of Ferlach, who had had it custom-built for his gamekeeper in recognition of a lifetime's service.

The workmanship and engraving were second to none.

Ferlach is the gunmaking centre of Austria where there is a school dedicated to grooming the very best craftsmen.

It is from here that many of today's finest gunmakers have graduated, achieving the highest level in competence. Traditional skills are blended with modern technology.

Gunmaking business

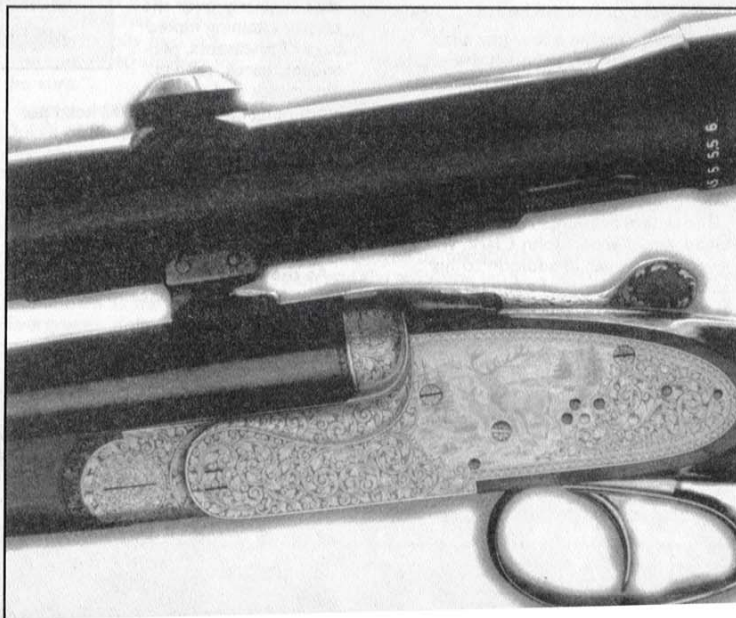
Gottlieb Kothe graduated from Ferlach with a degree in engineering and, in 1972, set up his own gunmaking business in Graz in the south eastern province of Austria.

Descended from a 19th-Century family of ironmongers, his ambition was to build only the very best guns and rifles. His goal was perfection, nothing less would be acceptable to him.

As in Britain, Austrian gun legislation is draconian and has drastically reduced private ownership of weapons, a situation which has damaged trade within Gottlieb's own country.

Hence, he has had to concentrate on foreign markets, something which can only bring success by building the finest guns to rival established makers, not just in the continent but in

Only the very best rifles and shotguns from Gottlieb Köthe



by the
GUN EDITOR

the UK and America.

Gottlieb Kothe will make any calibre or configuration requested by his clients, his only stipulation being that every weapon must be a true reflection of his own craftsmanship.

Thus his reputation has grown throughout the western world, and he has accumulated a number of illustrious clients.

Among these is Count Goess-Sarau, in London, for whom Gottlieb has built an exquisite pair of 20-bores. He has also built some beautiful Ischler hammer rifles. This model is named "Kaiser Franz Josef."

A true reflection of the quality of Gottlieb Kothe's work is that in 1978 he won a Gold Medal in Germany. Two years later he was awarded another at the IHM Fair in Munich. Other accolades have followed at the Styrian International Hunting Fair and the Graz Fair.

Master craftsman

In addition to building his own guns, he carries out repairs and maintenance to fine British shotguns. This, in itself, is indicative of his growing reputation, for who would allow anybody other than a master craftsman to work on their Boss, Holland & Holland or Purdey?

Currently Gottlieb Kothe has a small workforce of six but he employs qualified part-time craftsmen to cope with his growing volume of repairs.





● Kaiser Franz Josef Ischler hammer rifle.



produced annually, with delivery time approximately two years. Since the founding of his business he has built just under 100 weapons of various calibres, a third of which have been double shotguns and rifles.

He has also produced drillings (rifle/shotgun combinations) which are popular with continental sportsmen. Along with these are some single shot and repeating rifles, all made to extremely high standards.

One of the appeals of fine guns is the engraving. Gottlieb Kothe's engraver is Martin Strolz whose work is highly regarded worldwide.

Whereas many engravers often specialise in a particular area of the art, Martin is a master of English-style, bulino, acanthus, traditional Ferlach work and also highly competent with gold inlays.

We have only to look at his game scenes to appreciate that he is a true artisan. One example of his work which impressed me most was that of stags fighting during the rut, displayed on a beautiful drop-down .300 Win Mag, so lifelike as to be almost photographic.

Another portrayal on a D calibre 9.3 x 74 shows a stag which is surely the envy of all hunters and stalkers.

Guns laws

There is a lesson to be learned from the gun laws which exist in Austria, one which must not go unheeded by both the gun trade and sportsmen in Britain.

As already stated, private gun ownership has been drastically lowered in Austria to the extent that the trade

there has been decimated.

The signs are that in the UK it is heading this way unless a determined stand against mounting restrictions is made. The worst scenario will see an exodus of traditional gunmakers to America where many of our best secondhand guns are already being bought by overseas buyers.

We shall be left with a small nucleus of gunmakers and shooters whose freedom has been brought to the brink of extinction.

The only way to ensure that the worst does not happen is to campaign vigorously. The likes of Gottlieb Kothe are some consolation to us for he is still building fine guns in a country which has stricter laws than our own.

Furthermore, he has three young sons whom he hopes will join the family business and continue the tradition of fine Austrian gunmaking.

Gottlieb's gunmaking skills and positive attitude towards the future are an encouragement to us all in this difficult era.

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