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Who's the Boss?

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The 1812 Edition, a triumph for Boss & Co

With a side-lever that fits to right or left, this ambidextrous over-and-under writes a new chapter in the history of London Bests

WRITTEN BY DONALD DALLAS



Boss & Co, London's oldest gunmaker, has announced its new '1812 Edition', introducing an innovation that has never been seen in gunmaking before. The result of four-plus years and the development of a purpose-built action, this is Boss & Co's first ever side-lever over-and-under gun, and the world's first to include two side-levers in the presentation case. Uniquely, it is a gun that can be changed and adapted for a left- or a right-handed shooter.

This bespoke gun takes Boss & Co's iconic over-and-under shape – which first appeared in 1909 and is, arguably, the most copied in the world, regularly praised for its elegance – and introduces a new, purpose-built action, incorporating a side lever rather than a top lever. Another side lever for the opposite side of the gun is handmade and

engraved at the same time to be included in the presentation case. This eliminates the challenge of a left-handed shooter inheriting his right-handed grandparent's or parent's guns and having to request a new lever be made and engraved. This also negates the possibility of the gun's original engraver having since retired or passed on.

What's more, all top lever guns traditionally open to the right and all previous side-lever guns have had the lever mounted on the right side of the gun, with few exceptions. That means there has never truly been a gun that works for both 'lefties' and 'righties'. Boss's 1812 Edition is finally that gun, taking its name from the date when founder Thomas Boss completed his apprenticeship.

Inspiration for this gun dates back more than four years, to a day when company owner Arthur DeMoulas was shooting with a pair of vintage Boss & Co side-by-side side-levers and was struck by the ease of

use they offered and the practicality of their layout in the field. Knowing that Boss & Co had, 20 years earlier, created a prototype over-and-under side-lever gun, DeMoulas discussed this with one of the company's most experienced gunmakers, John Varney, along with others in the business, to see if the idea of a bespoke over-and-under side-lever gun could be realised.

Over many months, DeMoulas liaised with the factory manager and the gunmakers, gaining their insight into how this gun could be created. It was a collaborative effort, guided by DeMoulas' vision but requiring the input and expertise of others at every stage. A bespoke action would have to be designed, which would require adapted barrels, stock, finishing, engraving and more. This wasn't just an adapted top lever gun, it had to be entirely new.

Sadly, shortly after the gun's conception John Varney passed away following 42 years with Boss & Co. However, his enthusiasm and technical knowledge were →



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the catalyst for the 1812 Edition, which is dedicated to his memory.

Jason Craddock, who worked on the bench next to Varney for more than 20 years, learned from the older gunsmith's experience and became an integral part of the project as the whole Boss & Co team took on the challenge of taking that first prototype gun and making it truly great. The result of their think-tank mentality – just as it has always been at Boss – was the world's first truly ambidextrous shotgun, developed over four years with a purpose-built action and turned into a reality in nearly 2,000 man hours.

LOOKING TO THE PAST

The process of taking the gun from concept to reality required an insight into Boss & Co's past, during which the company had produced hundreds of side-lever guns but only as side-by-sides, with all the levers fitted on the right-hand side, with just one or two exceptions. Boss & Co's team drew inspiration from the elegant designs of these guns, replicating and modernising the side lever and shape for the 1812 Edition. This delicate process of creation, with



Left: a flowing shape replaces the top lever. Top: a Boss stocker unites metal and wood. Above: a new, purpose-built action requires millimetre precision

an entirely new type of gun, required the finesse and experience of all the craftsmen at Boss & Co: stocker, actioner, barrel maker, engraver and finisher.

The new side-lever itself is a thing of beauty. The hand-engraved, chequered thumb push at the top is angled slightly forwards so that when depressed it is parallel with the action to stop the thumb slipping off. The lever curves gracefully around the action and such is the standard of Boss craftsmanship that if the gun is held up to the light, no daylight is visible between the lever and the action.

A great deal of design also went into the vacant top strap, now devoid of a top lever. Not a single part of it is flat, creating a traditional Boss & Co flowing shape as it tapers into a hand-engraved, beetle-back safety – again a traditional design from London's oldest gunmaker. The entire gun has been engraved by Boss & Co's engraver Christophe Rizzuto, with the firm's celebrated rose-and-scroll pattern – as developed by the famous Sumner engraving family, who engraved all the Boss guns pre-1939. The 1812 Edition can be further personalised to any customer's desire, →

Boss & Co / Matthew Brown

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Top: barrel jointing in the furnaces at 670°C. Above: hand-engraved rose-and-scroll by Christophe Rizzutto

with the largest selection of shapes and styles in the gunmaking industry.

DeMoulas said: "As this project developed, one of our gunmakers, Jason Craddock, said, 'Boss, guided by tradition, not bound by it' and the 1812 Edition is the perfect example of that. It's inspired by our past but it's very functional and practical, and its ease of use in the field is now available to all shooters – regardless of which side they shoot on – in a way that no other gunmaker has done before. We've also found that for female shooters, with slightly smaller hands, the side lever is an infinitely more practical solution. This is entirely a Boss & Co gun, marked out by its elegant shape and timeless design, and built by hand to the very highest standards by some of the most gifted craftsmen in the world.

"We see this as a pivotal moment not just in our history but in the history of gunmaking. Just as John Robertson revolutionised the sporting gun more than 100

“Boss, guided by tradition, not bound by it” – this gun is the perfect example of that”

years ago during his time with Boss & Co, we believe the company and our talented gunmakers are doing something similar here, establishing Boss & Co's name at the very top echelon in the gunmaking world for decades to come."

Boss & Co is famed for introducing innovations to the gunmaking world that go on to become commonplace. The Boss single trigger, introduced in 1893 by Robertson, was the first truly reliable single trigger mechanism, showcased to the public and press with a special side-by-side-by-side three-barrel shotgun operated from one single trigger. The firm's over-and-under gun of 1909 was the first British model and it is regarded by many as the most handsome over-and-under of all, too.

The new side-lever over-and-under has brought together many traditional Boss features: the side lever, the over-and-under action, Sumner engraving. Yet this is the first time all three have been combined together and that a true right- and left-handed gun has been offered. The Boss & Co gun is known as the racehorse of best guns and the new side-lever over-and-under can only add to that reputation. ■