

MEET THE NEW BOSS

The new 1812 Edition over-under from Boss & Co is a marriage of tradition and innovation. **Alec Marsh** talks to current owner Arthur DeMoulas about the gun and his vision for the firm.

In the annals of shooting history, several great innovators stand out. In 1818, the gunsmith Joseph Manton gave us the tube lock, which transformed the flintlock and made it a much more compact and well-balanced proposition for sportsmen. A century later, Robert Churchill revolutionised game guns by shortening barrels – introducing the famous XXV. For decades, long barrels were nowhere to be seen.

Then there was the gunsmith John Robertson who, from 1893 until his death in 1917, was in charge of Boss & Co, the London gunmaker founded in 1812.

In 1909, Robertson gave the sporting world the Boss over-under, which reimagined the format through innovative engineering that lowered the action and thereby allowed the gun to become a slim, svelte thing of swan-like beauty – as well as a paradigm of utility much respected to this day. And the over-under wasn't Robertson's only patented breakthrough; there was the firm's hammerless ejector in 1897 and the 1894 Boss single trigger, which is widely regarded as the first reliable single-trigger design. Robertson would later build an audacious-looking triple-barrelled side-by-side with a single trigger to



Arthur DeMoulas bought Boss in 2015 and sees himself as the firm's custodian.

demonstrate its safety to customers. Pretty soon, they got the point.

In the years since, the firm has been decidedly quiet on the innovation front. But that is about to change because, after waiting more than a century, Boss has a new gun to shout about. So it's no small moment, then, when Boss's owner, Arthur DeMoulas, welcomes me into his office at the firm's factory in Kew, south-west London, to show me the new gun. And what a gun it is.

But first, let's meet Arthur. With a background running his family's

billion-dollar supermarket chain in New England, the American is as straight-talking a businessman as any you'll find. And his passion for Boss, I imagine, is matched by his forensic focus on the firm and the implementation of his strategy for its regeneration.

Game plan

He bought Boss nearly six years ago, though he came very close to buying it in 2001, and all those years of waiting have whetted his appetite for the task – and given him ample time to develop his game plan for the future of this venerable London gunmaker. It's a world away from the supermarket business, he concedes. "What I liked about this is it's like having one store," he says. "It's a family-owned business for over 208 years and counting."

His first act upon getting the keys to Boss was to put a stop to any suggestion that the firm might make second-tier guns. Instead it would continue to focus only on making 'best guns' with price tags of around £100,000. It was a brave move – and one that goes against the prevailing direction of travel of other London gunmakers. For Arthur, however, the firm's legend – 'Builders of best guns only since 1812' – was not just

The 1812 Edition from Boss & Co combines tradition and innovation to create a truly special gun.

a strapline, it is a lore embedded in the gunmaker's very soul alongside the rose and scroll engraving motif. And that's because – Arthur believes – it's only by making the best that the firm can afford to employ the best actioners, stockmakers and engravers. Interestingly, that was also the view of John Robertson.

Next, he set about piling money into the firm and its staff and is proud to have grown the headcount to just over 20, including bringing on a handful of apprentices who can learn the skills of gunmaking at the very highest level and, in time, pass them on to the next generation.

Shooting passions

But at the same time – a fact not made public until recently – Arthur also started on the new gun, with a view to re-establishing Boss's credentials for innovation.

"I can't tell you that I have a passion for engineering," Arthur says to me as he begins the story of the new gun. "What I would say is that I come into gunmaking fairly unbiased... with a fresh look. That

has been very helpful. I have a clean sheet in my mind – a clean canvas. That's the way I look at it."

So while Arthur does not bring Robertson's engineering expertise, he does bring a lifelong passion for shooting, one which brought him to Boss in the first place, more than 20 years ago.

"I don't think there will be any other gunmaker in the world doing what we are doing. It's very exciting for us."

It means that Arthur knows what customers expect from the best and is restless about achieving it.

"Boss is known for innovation," Arthur explains. "Boss developed the single trigger in the 1800s, we are known for the Boss ejector system, we are known for the Boss

side-by-side round body... we are also known for pioneering the first British over-under – we made it beautiful, we made it stylish, we made it elegant." (He breaks off to explain how: "Our action drops in... which is why our profile is so much lower than everybody else's – that's why our over-under is so revered.")

So the company is going back to doing what it's not done for ages, he says – still without telling me quite what the surprise is. "This new gun has a purpose-built action," he announces, comparing it to Ferrari's short wheelbase California Spyder. "They didn't just take the chassis from another car and cut 6in off it to make the short wheelbase – that's not a purpose-built chassis. This action is purpose built for what we've designed it to be specifically for this gun."

That prompts another thought. "What I like about what's happened is... listen, it's been a great team effort to get here," he says. "It's been a collaboration and we've had some of our really experienced gunmakers really pick >



The gun is the product of vision, exceptional skill and solid teamwork.



Boss remains faithful to traditional methods of gunmaking under Arthur DeMoules.



Boss makes only best-quality guns, meaning it can afford to employ craftsmen of the highest calibre.

up the ball and run with it.” He lets that settle then asks: “You want me to get the gun?”

The 1812 Edition

Quick as a flash, Arthur is out the door, his brown Oxfords ringing on the metal steps to the floor above where Boss’s world-renowned guns are handcrafted. He returns 30 seconds later holding a gleaming, polished Boss over-under. He’s grinning and his hands are even shaking a little with excitement.

“I should have a cape on it,” he jokes, holding up the new gun for me to see. “You probably won’t even notice what we’ve done here...”

But of course I have. Where the top-lever should be there’s just a perfectly smooth strap and the beetle bevelled safety, and then on the right-hand side of the action there’s a side-lever – with an elegant curve that makes me think of a treble clef. It’s a handsome gun and I tell him. He hands it to me and we step out into the hall.

As it happens, both Arthur and I shoot left-handed, so we know



The company prides itself on the skill of its master gunsmiths.

about using top-levers – and pushing them from the weaker position on the thumb versus a right-handed person. It’s also easier for people who have smaller hands to use, notes Arthur, and for both sets of users it means not having to change the grip of your hand when breaking your gun.

I try it out: the lever works beautifully; the engraved end is just in the right place for the pad of my

thumb. When pressed it delivers an elegant click that’s every bit as reassuring as the sound of the door closing on a Rolls-Royce Phantom.

“I think it has a beautiful rake to it,” observes Arthur, gazing down at the lever. “It has beautiful style and it complements our Boss shape. And I’ll tell you something else important – we took it off the design of one from the late 1800s. And we did almost identical



The Boss 1812 Edition features an elegantly curved side-lever.

engraving. That's where we're guided by tradition but not bound by it," he adds, quoting one of his gunmakers, Jason Craddock.

Of course Boss, like many old gunmakers, has made side-levers before – hundreds of them in fact. Boss even made around 40 in the first half of the 20th century, Arthur tells me. But they've never done a side-lever on an over-under before.

"Here's the real kicker with this gun," says Arthur. "You order one, you order a pair... you're going to get a side-lever for the left side of

the action and the right side of the action made specifically for that gun."

So there's a lever fitted to the gun, and then a spare lever, engraved identically, for the other side in the carbon-fibre case. As a result, the gun is ambidextrous and says Arthur: "That makes this a gun for a left-handed shooter and a right-handed shooter. There's not a gun specifically designed for both left-handed and right-handed shooters on the market.

"We're calling it the 1812 Edition," he adds, "because one, that's when Boss was founded and

two, this is a whole new addition to Boss's gun line-up."

The gun is being dedicated to the memory of John Varney, an actioner at Boss who died in 2015 – one year after Arthur bought the company. He had worked at Boss for 42 years and created a prototype of a similar gun more than 20 years ago, but that did not have a purpose-built action. "The gunmaker that shaped up this new action was trained by John Varney," adds Arthur.

It's a poignant statement, and one that underlines the personal aspect



Boss is guided by tradition but is not bound by it.



The 1812 Edition is specifically designed for both left- and right-handed Shots.

of the endeavour for the owner and, I sense, his craftsmen at Boss alike.

I ask him why companies like Boss stopped making side-levers. He doesn't know why, but tells me he asked *Shooting Gazette* contributor Donald Dallas the same thing.

"The side-lever never should have gone out of style, because it's so functional," recalls Arthur, "and now it's even more functional because we can put it on either side of the action. The other thing is it's more functional for more people. It's easier to open."

But will people buy it? Back in 1909, Arthur acknowledges that "it took a long time for the over-under to be accepted" but Boss has "quietly already had a great response" to the new gun, which was completed in 2020 ahead of launch this year. Ultimately, it's clear that he thinks its functionality will win any sceptics over.

Moreover, the new gun is part of his plan for the future of the company. "I don't think there will

be any other gunmaker in the world doing what we are doing," Arthur says, insisting he does not want to appear arrogant.

"We are about to do things that no gunmakers are going to offer because of the difficulty of making it – we make it by hand." And that's fine for Boss, he says, because "we are never trying to have the numbers – we're not looking for volume."

That said, he predicts that other manufacturers will come out with side-levers as a result, if for nothing else because "they can be used by a left-handed or right-handed shooter or the lever can be put on whichever side the shooter prefers".

Greater glory

The new gun is intended for the greater glory of Boss, Arthur tells me, which fits with the role he has set for himself as the firm's custodian. He may be American, he told me, but the company is British and he sees himself as a

trustee of it. "We are just trying to do everything that Boss has been known for," he concludes. "I think it's very exciting for us." He picks up the new 1812 Edition and gazes at it lovingly. "I don't know what we can do to that gun to make it better."

It's hard to disagree with him.

Arthur compares the gun to the 1963 split-window Corvette Stingray – and shows me a picture of the car on his phone. Both are surely things of desire. "We are just driven to get the best-looking shapes on our guns you can find," he declares, adding: "It puts us right where we want to be. This is with a lot of work and a lot of things we have coming, and I think it's very exciting for us and it positions us unlike any other gunmaker".

For more information on Boss & Co, visit: bossguns.com