



An early Blanch shotgun (number 2 of a pair) showing some exquisite Blanch style engraving and the Damascus steel barrels with the original browning.

# The Best of British

Shotguns can be a good investment, and pleasurable too, says Andrew Tonkin in this first article of a new series on investing in ‘best’ quality shotguns.

**A**s in most other collectable fields, investment grade shotguns are governed by market forces, and the correct interpretation of these is necessary by collectors if astute investments are to be made. Prices at the upper end of this market approach those of new motor vehicles, and knowing what to look out for will prevent many a financial hangover.

As a rule, private South African investors spend money in three areas; property, motor vehicles and financial instruments (stock markets, policies, etc.) Now a house is a necessity and, under most circumstances, quite pleasant to own and usually a reasonable investment in Rand terms. The problem with regard

to the investment value is that the Rand has lost more than 95% of its purchasing power since 1970. Thus, a R25 000 house of 1970 has not appreciated at all if sold for R500 000 today. Good motor cars are nice to have, but are a disaster as an investment (collector’s items excluded). Financial instruments? Need I say more?

Therefore, it is with some amusement that I listen to educated and informed people who say ‘you paid WHAT for that gun?’! My usual response is to ask them what they paid for the family limo, and what they think it would be worth in 20 years’ time. Yes, to the informed collector who knows what he/she is looking at, quality guns are fantastic to own, (compare it to the pleasure of owning an endowment

policy), are a very good Rand hedge investment, and are internationally redeemable to boot.

There is no substitute for actual involvement as a tutor for investing in guns. However, for somebody with the basic passion, but as yet limited exposure, some guidelines are in order.

The parameters that determine a gun’s desirability as an investment can be separated into two categories. Firstly, there are qualification factors (i.e. a lack of these factors will disqualify a gun as an investment) and secondly, there are multiplication factors (i.e. factors which will cause an investment gun to be more valuable than an equal gun that lacks these factors).

The qualification factors are succinct

and easy to understand and interpret. They are simply QUALITY and CONDITION. For a gun to qualify as an investment piece, the original quality as manufactured must be superb and the condition of this gun today should be good. A battered and abused Holland and Holland Royal is not worth much, and a mint condition Harrington and Richardson Topper is not worth much either. Recognizing both quality and condition is an ability easily acquired by simply examining as many guns as possible.

The multiplication factors are sometimes more complicated and subtle, but certainly no more difficult to learn and to apply. I am of the opinion that the best places to observe multiplication factors are the big gun auctions held in the UK and USA.

The first factor observed is that British-made guns command a premium. The reason for this is a topic for another article, but suffice it to say that with a few notable exceptions (mostly modern guns by some top makers from Italy, Belgium and Germany), British is best from an investment point of view. This then accepted, the make of the gun is very important. The top four makers from London (Purdey, Holland & Holland, Boss and Woodward) command a premium over the other top London makers and the top Scottish makers, who in turn command a premium over the Provincial makers.

The configuration of a shotgun is very important. Pigeon guns and waterfowl guns are cheaper than game guns, and box lock guns are cheaper than sidelock or triggerplate action guns. A 12 bore game gun, being the most desirable con-figuration, should weigh between 6<sup>1/4</sup> and 6<sup>3/4</sup> pounds, be a sidelock, have ejectors (preferably Southgate type), have chopper-lump

barrels, toplever (or sidelever) opening, barrels 28 to 30 inches long and some form of assisted or self-opening mechanism. This implies that guns outside the above start with a disadvantage regarding inclusion with the top dogs.

The next important point is the proof status of the gun. Being within proof is of importance mainly for safety considerations in South Africa (with no proof rules for second hand shotguns) and the USA (with no proof rules whatsoever), but it is illegal to sell an out-of-proof gun in the U.K. It is very

wrecked) in South Africa than I have had hot meals. However, the amount of original hardening colour on a gun is very important, as it is usually a good indicator of previous use. Hardening colour should **never** be brushed off and/or renewed.

If a gun needs to be re-stocked, the saleability will not be reduced, but once again, the quality of work must equal that of the original manufacturer. Let me hasten to add that I have seen no more than two people in South Africa equal to this task. The same considerations hold true for other heavy maintenance such as re-laying of ribs and re-jointing.

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important to remember that a gun that states "Nitro Proof" is not necessarily in proof. A certain amount of expertise is required to ascertain proof status. Barrel wall thickness, although not contributing to proof status, is also of extreme importance.

A subject of much debate has been the desirability of original finish on guns. I am not too concerned about original finish. The reason for this is that many old-time shooters had their guns serviced by the original makers every few years, which sometimes included re-blackening of barrels and refinishing of stocks. Therefore it is impossible to determine if the stock or barrel finish is original. Refinishing will not decrease value, as long as the quality of workmanship equals the original. I have seen more poorly re-finished guns (thus substantially

Finally, all things being equal, scarcity and/or uniqueness will increase the value of a gun substantially. Smaller gauges, over/under sidelock or trigger plate configurations, ejectors on hammer guns, special engraving and a host of other factors will make these guns scarcer and therefore more valuable than their brethren.

Collecting and investing in quality shotguns is a topic which many books have been written about, some good, some atrocious. It is a subject of immense scope, and the final word will never be spoken. Bearing this in mind and with the readers' indulgence, I will be happy to elucidate on some of the above points in future issues of Wingshooter. ▲

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**A typical Greener shotgun in good condition, in its original oak and leather case, with accessories.**