

The gun room manager

Alastair Phillips, 29, William Evans



Photograph: Darren Crabb

Alastair Phillips bought his first air rifle with money earned from washing his neighbour's cars. His first experience of game shooting was as a loader for his uncle, Richard Holt. Such was the affect of the day that he went to work for Nick Holt as soon as he left school. An unexpected phone call in 2004 led Alastair to London and a pint with then William Evans gunroom manager Iain Nisbet, who was looking for an assistant. Alastair accepted and within two-and-a-half years he had taken over as gun room manager following Iain's departure for the plains of Africa.

Do semi-autos have any place on a driven day's shooting?

There is no real argument against them being on a driven day. Any concerns over safety can be overcome with

chamber flags. A lot of it comes down to the attitude and capability of the user. They don't necessarily give an advantage, especially as they are slower to load. The biggest benefit that I can see is the reduced recoil.

How many people would actually be happy to be surrounded by semi-autos is the bigger question. Personally, I would rather a guest of mine did not turn up with a semi-auto. For me, a semi-auto on a classic driven day would lessen the magic and tradition of what makes this sport so unique and utterly wonderful.

Does the success of the St. James' 20 bore suggest your customers favour smaller gauges?

It is undeniable that 20 bores have increased in popularity. At William Evans we have seen a considerable increase in sales of both 20 bore shotguns and cartridges. A few years ago they were seen as purely a ladies or child's shotgun. But now people enjoy the challenge,

benefits and merits of this lighter calibre. The fact is a typical 20 bore with sensible cartridges offers less recoil, is a lighter gun and there is no real difference in range.

Can a gunmaker ever truly consider a shotgun to be 'one of its own' if any of its components (i.e. the action) have been developed by another gunmaker?

Absolutely. Porsche didn't invent the spark plug and a tailor doesn't weave the fabric that he stitches. Every gunmaker has to adapt and evolve to create the most reliable and desirable gun they can. We as gunmakers owe it to our customers who place the orders.

Whilst brand loyalty plays a very large part in this industry, gunmakers have always adapted and used components/technology that have not originated from that gunmaker. It puts them in the best position to cater for very specialised requirements customers have.