

GUN TEST

ON TEST: WILLIAM EVANS ST JAMES 12-BORE

RECOMMENDED
RETAIL PRICE
£11,750

A class act

Mike doffs his hat to the stylish and solid William Evans St James 12-bore

This month we have a bit of quality for you, the new 12-bore William Evans St James over-and-under gun. The 20-bore version was introduced a couple of years back and I have to declare a bias; I was a consultant in the early stages. The guns, however, have evolved far beyond my input. They are partially built for William Evans by Caesar Guerini in Northern Italy, delivered 'in the white' and finished in the UK.

First impressions are very positive. It is a smart looking gun, with a beautifully engraved, side-plated action, and an especially elegant stock with a rounded, Boss-style fore-end and well proportioned semi-pistol grip. The quality of finish is exceptional, and the styling as you'd expect from both firms. The pattern of the engraving – applied by high tech means and finished by hand – was taken from a gun William Evans built in 1910 for HRH The Duke of Connaught.

The bottom line is ten grand plus VAT, so the St James isn't cheap, but it's a very smart and rather exclusive bit of kit, and just about within the reach of normal mortals.

So, it looks good, but what does it feel like? In a word – solid. In 30in

form, as tested, it hits the scales at just over 7lbs 10oz (there's a range of 7lbs 2oz to 7lbs 12oz, depending on barrel length and stock wood). It's not a lightweight, but it has a steady quality as it comes up to face and shoulder well. It is, moreover, lighter than many modern sporters.

Don't forget, it is intended as a hybrid game and sporting clays gun. As such, it's well weighted. The just sub 7lb 30in St James model 20-bore is near ideal if I was looking for a normal game gun; but the 12-bore St James will be a better high-bird gun, a much better wildfowling tool, and a better clay buster too.

What about barrel length? The 12 and 20-bore are available in 28 and 30in, with 32in as a special order. All are multi-choked, with Teague chokes as an option. I tend to advise 30in for most sporting shots; 32in guns should be considered experts' tools for clays, on high bird shoots, and for wildfowling. Longer barrels allow precision on harder targets, but you need skill to use them.

You also have to consider the gun in question but as far as the St James guns are concerned, I'd go for a 30in 12-bore for wildfowling, high-birding, or if using the gun for clays as



Mike acted as a consultant to William Evans in the early stages of the gun's development

well as game. For normal game, I'd probably go for 28in barrels.

Looking at the gun on the test bench, the St James barrels are especially well put together. They are monobloc, beautifully blacked, and have well machined and rimmed 76mm (3in) chambers. The bores

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on the test gun measured 18.6mm top and bottom – ideal in my book. The forcing cones are a little longer than the average (good too), and the bores exceptionally well presented. Unlike many guns today, the tubes are perfectly straight with concentric shadow circles all the way down when held up to light.

I've noticed some manufacturers are letting their production slip in this vital aspect (cost is no guarantee

Monobloc, beautifully blacked barrels are especially well put together and well jointed to the action

TECH SPECS

- MAKE William Evans
- MODEL St James
- BARRELS Chrome lined 30in (28in option, and 32in by special order)
- CHAMBERS 3in (76mm)
- RIB Solid tapered
- WEIGHT 7lbs 10oz
- RRP £11,750

by **MIKE YARDLEY**



GUN TEST



of straight barrels these days). The St James maintains the standard.

The 10-7mm solid and tapered rib was well down with a file cut surface. This presented an excellent picture to the eye, naturally leading focus to the target. The traditional metal bead is shaped like a little mushroom and perfectly suited to the rib – being brass it is much more durable than a plastic sight.

The action of the St James is not revolutionary, but it is beautifully presented and well jointed to the barrels. Recesses on the monobloc mate with stud pins near the action knuckle as in a Beretta, Perazzi, Rizzini or Woodward. A full-width slot bite beneath the bottom chamber mouth is engaged by a bolt that emerges from the bottom of the action face in Browning style. This results in a slightly deeper action than a Woodward or Boss style system, but the action looks pretty trim, which may be down to good styling and some subtle and elegant shaping of the action body itself.

The mechanics of the action design may not be radical, but are well proven. A single, selective, trigger is recoil activated, coil

springs power the hammers, and there's a modern style of combined barrel-selector and safety on the top strap.

Stock-wise, the St James's butt and svelte fore-end are made from superior walnut which has been traditionally oil finished and are well chequered. I could wax lyrical about the shapes and dimensions, but then I did have a hand in them! The slim, but not too slim, fore-end is first class; it might only be improved by a metal cap to the release button.

The half pistol stock is superior too. The hand is ideally positioned so that the wrist does not need to be cocked too much (making the gun easier to control). The taper comb is classically British and also gets an unequivocal thumbs up.

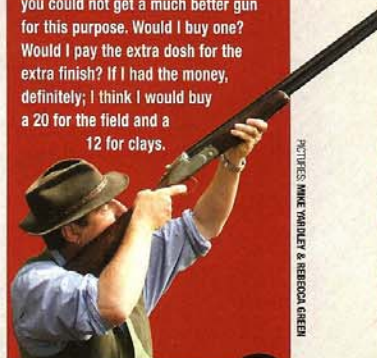
Length is 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ in with a thin Pachmayr black rubber with hard heel plate. Drop is 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ in and 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ in – my 'shelf' ideal for o/u. There is slight cast for a right-hander but a left-handed version is available. ●

The engraving, finished by hand, was taken from a William Evans gun made in 1910

SHOOTING IMPRESSIONS

I have shot this gun in the field – at driven pheasant and partridge at the excellent Mornacott shoot near South Moulton, courtesy of Andrew Blowers – and I have shot the gun on the sporting layouts at Bisley. It impressed on both occasions. It's well balanced and feels refined. I found it quite hard to miss clays with it. Recoil was light, and it was very forgiving and natural to use. As for game, it was good too, but no-one hits everything, even with a superb gun. Frankly, I prefer the classically proportioned 20-bore for live quarry – you could not get a much better gun for this purpose. Would I buy one? Would I pay the extra dosh for the extra finish? If I had the money, definitely; I think I would buy a 20 for the field and a 12 for clays.

PICTURES: MIKE YARDLEY & NEREOGA GREEN



WE LIKE



The quality of finish
The style
The engraving
The forgiving and natural way it shoots

WE DISLIKE



The price! But quality does not come cheap today

Modern style combined barrel selector and safety



Superior walnut stock – and a lovely shape

