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AUGUST ISSUE (27 JULY-24 AUGUST)

“The iconic French gunmaker has a reputation for reliable and attractive guns – particularly its double rifles.”



Vive, la Chapuis!

From pistols and rifles to shotguns of great repute, Chapuis Armes, one of France's last remaining game gun manufacturers, continues to impress craftsmen and customers alike. By Caroline Roddis.

The town of Saint-Bonnet-Le-Château, perched like a stone wedding cake on a hill in the Loire, was built on French craftsmanship. First came the medieval locksmiths, then the boules makers, and finally the gunsmiths. The latter originally developed here to feed the demand from nearby Saint Étienne, the home of French gunmaking (think Birmingham but with more sun and longer lunch breaks), for sub-contractors who could

supply mechanical components for their products.

Despite doing the tricky bits, however, the subcontractors of Saint-Bonnet-Le-Château were poorly remunerated for their work. Rather than go on strike, Jean Louis Chapuis decided to go it alone, starting to produce his own high-quality guns for la chasse (orange is the new tweed). Although he had founded the company in the 1930s, it was not until 1951 that the first 'Chapuis'

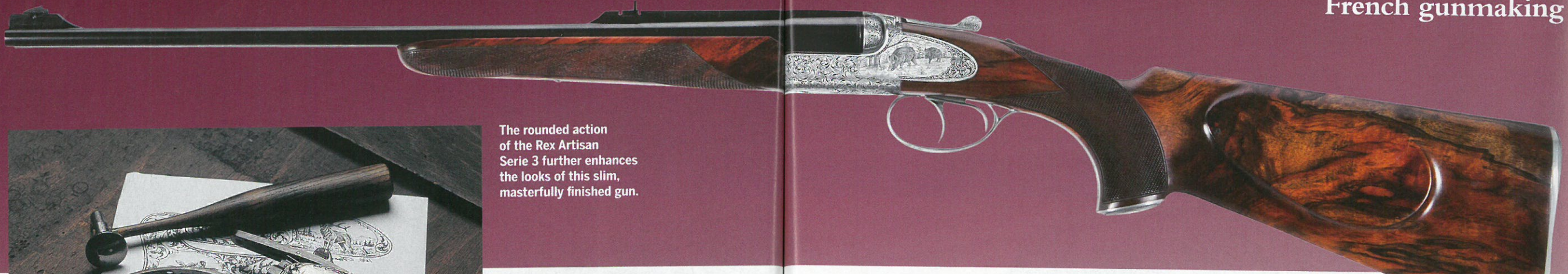
rifle was produced. As time went on and responsibilities fell to first his son and then his grandsons, Chapuis gained a reputation across Europe for its reliable, accurate and attractive-looking guns, particularly its double rifles.

This being France, where pistol shooting is still joyously practised, the company also has a pistol factory, Manurhin, acquired in 1998. These pistols are so sought after worldwide that Chapuis cannot keep up with demand. Since

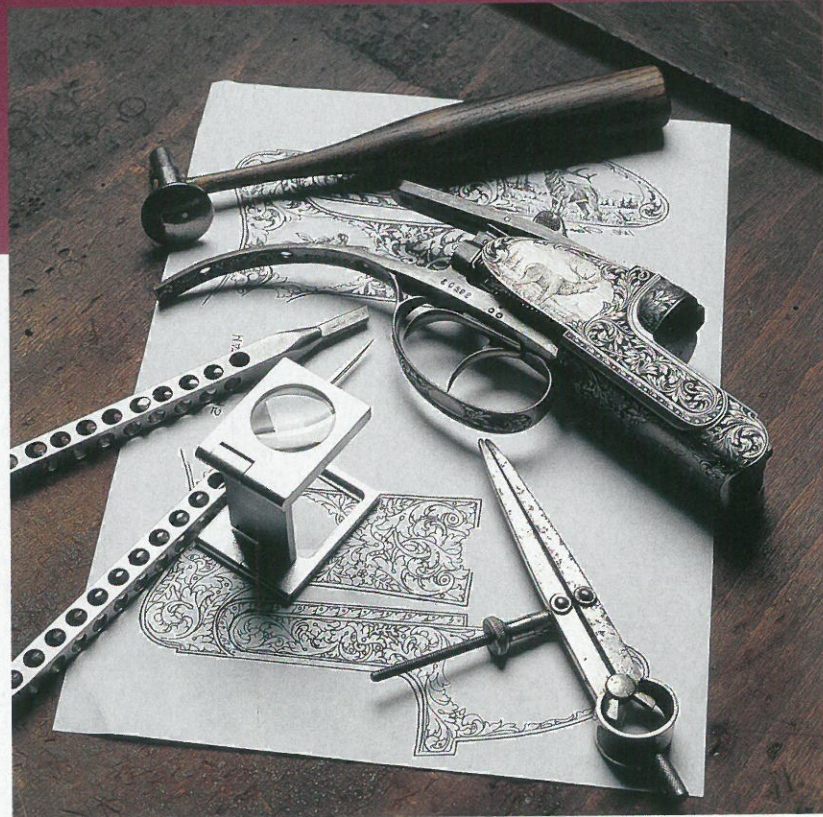
January 1990 Chapuis Armes has been based at a 3,000m² factory, designed by René Chapuis around two tunnel ranges. The company continues to invest heavily in this facility, recently installing the latest CNC machines and using them to refine their designs. Now one of the last remaining game gun manufacturers in France, Chapuis has established itself across Europe, Russia and the US, but remains something of a hidden gem here in the UK.

A FRENCHMAN IN ENGLAND

Despite this, you don't need to venture across la Manche to get one of these guns, as they have a good network of dealers across the UK. One company who said 'oui' to Chapuis was Stephen & Son, which is not only a dealer but also its main UK repair centre. Founded by compatriot Stephane Dupille in 2011, Stephen & Son is a small firm, comprising Stephane, fellow Frenchman Vincent, and an apprentice, which focuses on



The rounded action of the Rex Artisan Serie 3 further enhances the looks of this slim, masterfully finished gun.



Customers wanting the best from their stock will have to be patient and prepared to wait.

gun repairs but has also branched out into sales.

For them, Chapuis was a natural fit. During his early gunmaking career in France, before he worked with UK companies such as Watson Bros and Holland & Holland amongst others, Stephane had become well acquainted with Chapuis guns.

"I liked the brand and the way it worked," he explains. "The guns are modern but look traditional, sleek and well-finished. Not only are they good but you have the choice of having a bespoke model made. They are very competitive on price and what you get for your money is quite exceptional, especially the mid-range."

Patriotism, however, didn't really come into it. "It's nice to be selling French guns," says Stephane, "but it's really just the fact I like the product, what Chapuis does, and its

spirit, too. Chapuis has a big factory, and if it wanted it could increase production and sell its guns cheaper, but Chapuis is happy to stay like it is, because it wants to make sure

"The guns are modern but look traditional, sleek and well-finished. What you get for your money is exceptional."

it spends the time creating a good product. Chapuis wants to be certain that its clients are happy with what it does and that everyone is pleased – me and my customers included."

Despite this amour, however, Stephane still keeps Chapuis on its

toes. "The speciality of our house is stockmaking", he says. "If it's a bespoke gun, I make the customer choose their wood and I'm very fussy – and Chapuis knows that I'm very fussy! If I see something I don't like I send it back, it's that simple." Overall, the relationship has proved to be a very good one particularly as, even in the days of Google translate, English customers find it reassuring to order through a bilingual dealer and avoid misunderstandings.

"We are selling quite a lot," says Stephane, who also partners with Chapuis on stands at various game fairs. "It's a lot of time and money invested but every customer that places an order is very happy. It's very rare I have to send one back, they are pretty strong. We don't have much warranty work, apart from when they are new and perhaps a little bit stiff."

AN IMPRESSIVE RANGE

Customers looking for a Chapuis gun have a variety of options to choose from. The company makes a number of side-by-sides, over-unders and rifles, all of which are categorised into three ranges: Classic, Artisan and Grand Luxe. "The mid and top ranges are bespoke. You choose the wood, the engraving, and spec the gun exactly as you want. My customers love it," says Stephane.

All the ranges are steeped in game-shooting tradition. Light, well-balanced and elegant, they are respected for their finesse and durability, something borne of many decades' innovation and many of their own patented components. Customers who buy a gun also

have the chance to visit the Chapuis factory in Saint-Bonnet-Le-Château to select their options personally – handy if they also want to visit the nearby must-see Musée International Pétanque et Boules.

The Classic range is the Chapuis 'off the peg' option, fitted by the gun dealer. There are still things for customers to agonise over, such as grip shape and trigger, but overall these are elegant, well-finished guns with a very friendly price tag.

The next step up, the Artisan range, delivers a lot for your money. Guns here are in the £5,000 – £10,000 bracket and come with hand engraving and AAAAA luxury grade walnut, while the customer also has a lot more choice over details such as sideplates and grip.

Stephane uses an Artisan 12 bore himself, which he lends to customers who want to get a feel for the Chapuis range. "People are surprised by the weight, the balance, how compact it is, the wood they use, and the general finish. You can tell it's a product that's finished by hand, it's obvious. And that's where the competition struggle in this range – the level of finish is not to the same standard."

At the top end, both in price and quality, are the Chapuis Grand Luxe guns, featuring exhibition-grade wood and fine engraving. Whereas a Classic might take two months to make and an Artisan over four, a Grand Luxe will take at least six months to make.



Chapuis Armes builds well-finished guns with a friendly price tag.



Precision has been a by-word for Chapuis Armes guns since the company was founded by Jean Louis Chapuis in the 1930s.