

Of good stock

The loss of the sight in his right eye almost meant the end of Paul Chapman's cherished sporting life.

Mary Bremner reports on how a crossover stock from A.W. Rule & Son helped him to rebuild his confidence.

Shooting is a fabulous sport enjoyed by many. Luckily, most people are able to carry on shooting, and shooting well, into old age without any problems, and without giving any thought to gun mount, eyesight or potential injury.

This was Paul Chapman's life until 14 years ago. Paul started shooting at the age of eight, loved it and lived for it. He was an excellent clay shooter, shooting Olympic trap for Great Britain in his teens. Also a keen game shot, he spent all of his spare time with a

“A crossover stock is curved to allow the shooter to shoot off his right shoulder with his left eye.”

shotgun in his hand. University and a banking career that took him to New York and London eventually put a stop to his clay shooting competitions, but he was an avid game shooter until a fateful day in 2002.

The then 35-year-old Paul was at a hotel and fell down a flight of stairs holding a glass. He put his hand out to brace himself but unfortunately fell on

top of the glass, which smashed into his right eye, resulting in him losing virtually all sight in it.

Paul didn't shoot for around a year after the accident and he missed it terribly because it had been a huge part of his life both socially and recreationally. He decided to try to retrain himself to shoot left-handed off his left shoulder but it just didn't gel.

“It didn't feel natural – my feet and eye co-ordination just didn't work – so I had to abandon that idea,” he explained.

Paul had heard about crossover stocks and had seen the odd one around, so thought that might be the answer to his problems. He found a gun with a crossover stock in a gunshop but it didn't fit. Undeterred, he decided to persevere with the idea so went to a sale at Holt's. He bought a 12 bore Beretta SO4 with a broken stock but had no idea who could re-stock it for him.

“I was told about Anthony Rule, proprietor of A.W. Rule & Son gunmakers in Somerton, Somerset. He was described as the equivalent of a Swiss watchmaker, but for gunstocks. He sounded like he might be able to help me so I got in touch.” ▶

Paul Chapman's determination to get back into the field after his accident is an inspiration in life as well as in sport.





The Somerton 28 bore with crossover stock from A.W. Rule has seen quarry around the world.

A LONG JOURNEY CROSS COUNTRY

Paul is now based just south of Edinburgh running Hornby Chapman, an executive search firm, so had a lot of travelling to do.

“The first time I visited Tony he measured me initially by sight; he knew

exactly what he was doing. They do have a full crossover try-gun but Tony was incredibly accurate without it. After he had set the try-gun up to the correct measurements I was impressed and reassured. He inspired me with his confidence and I knew he would get me shooting again.”

With Tony’s advice Paul was able to pick his piece of wood – a double-thickness walnut stock blank to accommodate the measurements of the new stock. To shoot well it is vital the dominant eye is looking straight down the barrel. A crossover stock has a curve in the wood allowing the shooter to shoot off his right shoulder but using his left eye, or vice versa. The metalwork needs to be altered to accommodate the new stock, with the top strap, lock and trigger plates all needing to be set to the correct angles to get the aesthetics and recoil right. The carving of the wood is down to a skilled stockmaker.

Once the gun was stocked but not finished, Paul visited several times to ensure exact fit. Tony then chequered and fully oil-finished the stock before servicing the gun. Then it was a matter of Paul practising and practising and practising some more.

“It took me about 18 months to be shooting well again. As I can only see in 2D I have no point of reference. I could be looking at a big bird at a distance or a smaller one close up. I had to train my mind to relearn the sight patterns and it took a lot of determination and perseverance. I shot a lot of clays and had some very expensive days missing pheasants but I love shooting so carried on. I was determined to get it right and it took time and patience, and after 18 months I had forgotten what it was like to shoot with two eyes and was almost back to the same standard as before the accident. Don’t get me wrong, I can still miss birds with the best of them, though.”

10 YEARS LATER...

Paul has now been shooting with his crossover stock for more than 10 years. Once he had mastered the art of shooting again there was no stopping him. He has since bought a 16 bore AYA off the shelf with a crossover stock that fitted him and commissioned A.W. Rule & Son in 2004 to make



The Beretta over-under was the first gun Paul had altered.

a new stock for a 28 bore gun, the Somerton. This is his favourite shotgun and the one he uses virtually all the time. He shoots game all over Europe with this 28 bore as well as at home, and recently took it dove shooting in Argentina. He shot so much with it that the leather hand-guard melted onto the barrels.

Sadly Tony Rule has since died but his son Gareth is carrying on the family business and is equally skilled in the art of stockmaking. The company is renowned for its ability with all aspects of custom stockmaking including crossover stocks. They are experts and can make a gun fit anyone whatever their size or ability.

“It’s all about confidence and the individual,” said Gareth Rule. “We can make a stock to fit almost anyone and once they know the gun fits correctly



With the crossover stock the gun is mounted in the right shoulder but is aligned to the left eye.

“I had some very expensive days missing pheasants but I love shooting so carried on.”

there’s usually no stopping them. It’s great to see our clients overcome their disabilities and we pride ourselves on our personal service. Paul started out as a customer and now he is a great friend. It was a pleasure to get him shooting successfully again and a joy to see him regain his confidence and get back to the sport he loves.”

The final word must go to Paul. “It was a horrible freak accident but you

have to get over the frustration and live with it. I had to accept I only have one eye but if you want something badly enough you will find a way. I have a great laugh out in the field with people teasing me about my bent stock and asking if I’ve run it over or can shoot round corners. If I have a bad day, I’ve always got the excuse I only have one eye! I can more than hold my own with two-eyed shooters, though. Thanks must go to Tony, and now Gareth, who is a chip off the old block. Without them I wouldn’t have been able to carry on with the sport I love.”

For more information about A.W. Rule & Son visit awruleandsongunmakers.co.uk