

IN THE FIELD

JUNE 2024

By Sir Johnny Scott Bt.

ELEY STAYING AHEAD

At the end of April, Holts Auctioneers attended the annual four day Huntex exhibition at the Gallagher Convention Centre in Johannesburg, the largest international hunting and outdoor enthusiasts show in southern Africa, catering for hunters, sport shooters, game farm owners and game breeders. Personal and defensive protection requirements, anglers, security and trade professionals; the latest in hunting, tactical and defensive firearms, ammunition, accessories, shooting and reloading equipment, optics. Footwear, knives, archery, taxidermy, safari destinations, vehicles, wildlife art, and much more. Over six hundred exhibitors filled the centres five halls and manning the Holt's stand in Hall Two, the hot spot, were Charles Montgomery, Holt's representative in South Africa; Robert Morgan, Holt's antique expert and of course, Nicholas Holt, himself. Among the many people he met over the four days, was Rodrigo Crespo, the managing director of Eley Hawk since 2019. Rodrigo very generously offered to supply the cartridges for this year's Holt's annual Charity Clay Pigeon Shoot at the Royal Sandringham Estate on Friday 16th August, in aid of the Bob Champion Cancer Trust, by gracious permission of his Majesty the King.

As the oldest cartridge manufacturer in the UK, Eley Hawk and the Eley brand have been synonymous with excellence and innovation for nearly two hundred years. Founded in 1828, by brothers William and Charles Eley, when they acquired the rights for "wire shot concentrators", patented the previous year by Joshua Junor. Shot concentrators were an early attempt to keep shot together before choke boring was invented and were wire baskets containing shot enclosed in a cardboard cylinder, inserted on top of the powder charge in the muzzle loaders of the time.

Initial reviews for the shot concentrators were disappointing and Charles Eley left the business, but with help from James Purdey and a bit of fine tuning by William in 1836 to reduce the risk of shot balling, the Eley Improved Patent Wire Cartridge was considered by aficionados to be worth its weight in gold and the company prospered. Disaster struck in 1841, when an almighty explosion was heard from the Eley premises on the corner of St. James's and Jermyn Street. After the dust cleared, William was found to have blown himself to smithereens, experimenting with a new type of percussion cap. Undeterred by this calamity, his three sons carried on the business, with the eldest, William Thomas, who had inherited his father's innovative flair, taking control.

With the advent of the breech loader, WT Eley was instrumental in developing the first pinfire combustible cartridge, both for shotguns and firearms, making the company one of the largest ammunition producers in the world. Centre fire cartridges followed ten years later and in 1870, paper cases to replace the



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Sir Johnny (as he is better known) is an author, natural historian, broadcaster, columnist, countryside campaigner, artisan snuff manufacturer and retired hill farmer.

He wrote and co-presented the BBC2 series *Clarissa and the Countryman* with Clarissa Dickson Wright. He writes for a variety of magazines and periodicals on field sports, food, farming, travel, history and rural affairs.

A lifetime devotee of the countryside and its sports, he is currently:

- Joint Master, The North Pennine Hunt
- Regional Director, Vote OK.
- President, The Gamekeepers Welfare Trust.
- President, The Tay Valley Wildfowlers Association.
- President, The Newcastle Wildfowlers Association.
- President, The Association of Working Lurchers / Longdogs.
- Centenary Patron and Honorary Life Member, British Association for Shooting and Conservation.
- Patron, The Sporting Lucas Terrier Association.
- Patron, The Wildlife Ark Trust.
- Patron, The National Organisation of Beaters and Pickers Up.
- Board member, The European Squirrel Initiative.

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MARCH 2024

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early brass shotgun cases. There were obvious disadvantages to paper cases and Eley, ever innovative, set to and developed a damp protective varnish, marketing them as the "Pegamoid Waterproof Cartridge". These won the Grand Prix medal at the Paris exhibition of 1898 and the Grand Prix and Gold medal in 1900. To commemorate this, Eley produced their famous, orange cased Grand Prix cartridge in 1903, with which people of my generation all learnt shoot.

More innovations were to follow; in 1924, Eley introduced the first trap shooting cartridge to respond to the rise in popularity of clay pigeon shooting and in 1933, they pioneered the first plastic shotgun cartridge case, although it would be some decades before these appeared on the market. The Eley Kleena fibre based wad, a unique development which cleaned barrels as cartridges were fired was invented in 1959 and in 1966, plastic cases became readily available and the old cartridge extractors that hung from everyone's cartridge bag became redundant. During the 1980's, the Hawk Best Ammunition brand was acquired, which became Eley Hawk in 1989. In 2004 and 2012 Eley won the Shooting Industry Award for best clay cartridge and again in 2017, for the best game cartridge with their copper coated Zeniths.

Ever quick to respond to changing circumstances, Eley Hawk produced their VIP Bismuth cartridge following the 1999 introduction of the lead shot ban for wildfowling and wetland shooting, offering almost identical performance qualities to lead. This lead alternative works perfectly guns proofed for lead and has been proven to be effective in the field. The unique formulation of the bismuth alloy has many properties similar to lead in terms of density and hardness. The alloy mix ensures a certain malleability, which transfers energy into the target to deliver good knockdown power and is available in their groundbreaking Eco wad, the UK's first and only dissolvable biodegradable wad launched in 2019.

In embracing the current phasing out of lead shot, Eley have produced a range of "non-toxic" options; VIP steel, award winning copper coated Zeniths, Grand Prix Traditional Eco Steel – the modern equivalent of the old original Grand Prix and the Eley Grand Prix Traditional Bismuth Pro Eco. As a longstanding supporter of the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, the Grand Prix Traditional Bismuth Pro Eco has been designed in cooperation with, and sponsored by, the GWCT, with Eley Hawk sharing a proportion of the income generated from sales of the cartridge with the Trust.

The 21st century is proving to be a tricky time for shooting and conservation, but whatever challenges politician and environmentalists dream up, Eley Hawk always manages to be one step ahead.



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