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# GUN-E-SACK

By Jon Sundra



■ Surely everyone knows by now that the legendary Winchester Repeating Arms Company no longer exists as such. A couple of years ago the parent company, Olin Chemical, sold the domestic gunmaking facility in New Haven to a group of private investors, mostly ex-Winchester management people, who now run the show as the U.S. Repeating Arms Company.

The ammunition division, which was always the more profitable of the two, was retained by Olin, as well as the international division which imported the Japanese-made O/U and S/S shotguns bearing the Winchester name.

For the past 20 months then, all U.S.-made Winchesters have been the product of the U.S. Repeating Arms Company, the exclusive licensee of the Winchester name. For the most part, the Winchester line for 1983 is much the same as it was before the changeover, still being produced by the same people in the same factory. There are, however, some important changes that have been made which should interest everyone who has a fascination with this American legend and the desire to see it once again occupy that position where "It's a Winchester" means everything it used to mean.

Now it would be easy for me to sit here with the typical 20-20 hindsight we all possess and speculate on the things the old Winchester organization did wrong since those dark days of 1964, but that would serve no purpose. Suffice it to say that too many non-gun people were involved in the design, manufacture and marketing of Winchester guns during those years and the end results were not up to standards the company had established for its products over the previous century.

What most critics like to forget is that it didn't take long for Winchester to realize their mistakes and do their damndest to correct 'em. In that late '60s and early '70s period, many upgrading programs were undertaken with the Model 70, 94, 1200 and 1400 shotguns, to name a few. They also brought out the 9422, one of the finest production firearms ever made. The same can be said of the ill-fated Model One gas-operated shotgun.

Despite Winchester's earnest efforts, they fell on an unresponsive consumer

American hunters and shooters are decidedly unforgiving, especially when they feel they've been betrayed. Vindictive is not too strong a word to describe how many of them greeted the post-1964 guns. To their eyes, their beloved Model 12 and Model 70 were no more, and pretenders aspired to the throne.

To make a long story short, Winchester had a tough selling job over the next 15 years, and, when coupled with severe labor problems at the plant, it became less of a plum for Olin.

Anyway, curious to see firsthand the New Haven factory since the USRAC takeover, I visited the plant for the first time since the mid-70s this past October and spent some time with the new management team—President Hugh Fletcher, along with Dick Felton, Charlie Rhodes and Bob Morrison. I sensed a much different attitude there, not only among management people, but the union people as well. There was a spirit of cooperation and genuine enthusiasm evident, an enthusiasm for making the best Winchester possible.

Toward that end, a quiet upgrading program is underway which will ultimately affect every model in the line. I'm not talking about superficial cosmetic changes like a new stock finish, a different pistol grip cap or a new front sight hood; I mean the small yet substantive changes and attention to detail which make a rifle or shotgun appeal to those who know and understand firearms. Take the Model 70, for example, the first Winchester to be subjected to this quiet upgrading program.

Chief design engineer, Ed Vartanian, showed me the subtle mechanical changes and new production procedures being implemented that should make the Model 70 one of the smoothest operating and accurate out-of-the-box production rifles available anywhere at any price. Tolerances are being held extremely tight throughout production. The inletting is now exceptionally close and all barrels