

# A VISIT to PURDEY

— LARRY'S SHORT STORIES #200 —

One of the ultimate "bucket list" items, for a guy like me who's seriously interested in fine shotguns, is a visit to Purdey in London, England. Not just the showroom in Audley House, but also a tour through the workshop — where "things" are made. Purdey has been making guns since 1814 — beginning with flintlocks, then percussion and finally cartridge guns. In 200 years, they've made just over 30,000 guns — averaging only 150 per year — every one made entirely by hand. In the workshop, each craftsman is a specialist — barrelmaking, lockwork, actioning, stocking or finishing.



Mark Heath (right), manager of the West London Shooting School, discussing gun fit with Russell.

Since every Purdey is made to order — to the Customer's unique specifications, it takes two years from order to delivery. There were fifty-five line items on my

specification sheet, starting with gauge and ending with the initials to be engraved on the oak and leather case. Every single detail must be called out.

The ordering process normally starts at the West London Shooting School, where a splatter board and a few clay targets help the shooting instructor determine the stock dimensions to help the client put the middle of the pattern in the middle of the target. We used a 20 gauge side-by-side try gun, with adjustable stock. The instructor only made one adjustment from his original setup; and this was after we saw the pattern on the splatter board.

Next comes a visit to the basement of Audley House, where the Turkish walnut blanks are stored. The



Russell and I standing in the Purdey Workshop.

Customer chooses from hundreds of blanks, each one unique in its presentation of dark mineral streaks against the lighter background.

With the stock dimensions determined and the stock blank selected, it's then time to

**"...it takes two years from order to delivery."**

sit down in the Long Room and write up the specifications for your gun(s). This is easy at first — gauge, barrel length, rib and chokes; but it gets increasingly complicated — do you prefer a "beetle back" or a "button style" safety catch? Non-automatic or automatic safety? How about a standard, round or ultra-round action? Single triggers or double? What weight of pull on the front and the back triggers? Often it's necessary to refer to in-house samples or pictures.

Lastly, but equally important, engraving and any gold inlays the Customer might require to personalize his/her gun are specified; you can add a lot to the price at this point; but, after all, it's a Purdey!

**USA**  
**Midway**

Larry Potterfield

James Purdey and Sons  
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In the Long Room, Nicholas Harlow, Tom Nicholls, and I discuss the specifications.