

# The Remarkable Guns Of M. K. Jurek



Jurek displays two of his free pistols. One is for a right-hander, the other in left-hand persuasion. While not common, Jurek pistols are seen regularly in British shooting.

## WORKING BY HIMSELF, THIS INDOMITABLE POLE CARVED HIS OWN FULL-SIZED NICHE IN THE FIREARMS WORLD

by JERRY EVANS

"A RARE AND FINE quality 22 LR single shot target pistol by the noted specialist maker Dr. M.K. Jurek of 180 Bradford Street, Birmingham, England," was the description that caught my attention. That item was a catalogue lot offered for sale by the leading specialist auctioneers, Weller & Duffy Ltd. of Birmingham, England. A telephone call entered my bid and a few days later an invoice arrived telling me that my bid was acceptable and when I paid the balance owing, the parcel would be airmailed to me. An international draft in pounds sterling was dispatched and I was really most anxious to see what I had bought.

I know very little about handguns, less about 22 single shot target pistols, and Jurek might be a noted specialist in Birmingham, England, but no one that I knew had ever heard of him, other than a collector friend who thought he was a retired dentist.

In due course my pistol arrived and I was very pleased with my purchase. The workmanship was excellent and it was truly a fine quality 22 single shot target pistol with a barrel length of nine inches. The hand-fitted grip was not exactly made for my right hand, but not being a competitive shooter, I was not bothered by the tight fit. The trigger pull, lock time and over-all

mechanics of the pistol certainly exhibited expertise of workmanship and attention to detail not usually noted with backyard plumbers and pipe fitters. But who was Dr. M.K. Jurek? Did he design, make, command a shop, or was he a retired dentist? And was he still making pistols?

A letter sent to the Bradford Street address was not answered. The Birmingham telephone system did not have a listing for M.K. Jurek. Meanwhile, my collector friend acquired a Jurek 22 single shot target pistol that had a Birmingham address on St. Marys Row engraved on the color-cased action. A letter was sent to that

address, but while it was not returned by the British postal system, no answer was received either.

A couple of years later, while wandering about London, I was able to buy another Jurek target pistol. This latest acquisition was also 22 Long Rifle, but had an interchangeable extra barrel chambered for 38 Special. The barrel fit was such that the firing pin adapted to the rimfire 22 or the 38 centerfire cartridge. Again, this was a manifestation of handwork at its best.

My schedule was such that I was able to take a train to Birmingham for the purpose of finding the elusive Dr. M. K. Jurek to talk with him and learn about his pistol making. Despite the help given me by Stuart Crosswell of Westley Richards and Doug Nie from Waller & Duffy, both of whom had heard of Jurek, we could not find him. We found the shop on Bradford Street, but it was not open and a passerby

allowed us how that was the pistol maker's shop, but he thought he was only there on Tuesday evening between 7 and 8 p.m. Unfortunately, my day in Birmingham was Wednesday, so back to the train and on to London, thence to Heathrow for the flight back to California.

During the next two years, Doug Nie was able to get the home address and telephone number of Dr. Jurek. A letter to his home address elicited a reply from Jurek and within a few days I arranged a visit with the "noted specialist maker," Dr. M. K. Jurek. This fine gentleman rode a series of buses from his apartment to my hotel and we talked far on into the night.

Jurek is a remarkable man. At the time of our conversation he was 75 years old, quiet and soft-spoken, yet maintaining an aura of staunch independence. It was immediately obvious that Dr. Jurek was the epitome of an

all too rapidly declining breed of craftsmen, those for whom their work is a source of pride. There are not many such as Jurek and in this day to have the opportunity of meeting and talking with such a man is a rewarding and worthwhile experience, even though it took five years to find him.

Marian K. Jurek was born in Poland in 1904 and by 1919 he was scrounging and making parts for guns that he was building. He enjoyed shooting and was experimenting in gun making. Jurek continued his education at Krakow University in Poland and achieved his doctorate in chemical engineering, although he told me that it was mostly mechanical engineering that held his interest. By 1937 Dr. Jurek had advanced to head the research department of an ammunition factory in Warsaw. His interest in gun making was such that when using a weapon of his design his score of 529 points won a



Upper gun, with two barrels shown, is the 22 and 38 caliber Jurek Model 5. The lower gun is the Jurek Popular model 22. Actions are closed in this photo. Obviously, the guns were built for different users, judging by the very different dimensions of the curved walnut grips. At what stage either Stevens had the grips is unknown, but the guns obviously shoot well.



Action open, the Model 5 gun reveals it is solidly constructed, with deep and full fit in the length of the frame. Jurek guns, as target arms, do not eject the fired shell, but simply lift it portaway out of the chamber.

gold medal at Helsinki. Earlier, he had posted a score of 562 which was his best.

The Nazi war machine was sweeping through Europe and Jurek, who had been injured by grenade debris during the first World War, used devious routes through Rumania and France, and escaped to Great Britain. His brother, Karl, was less fortunate. He had a four-year stay at Buchenwald.

M. K. Jurek spent the war years in several branches of the British services, but while a member of the Parachute Regiment, found time to design and make his first free pistol. In October, 1946 his first of two 9mm SMG's were tested in Britain, but were rejected.



A Dr. M. K. Jurek 22 LR single shot match rifle. This rifle incorporates his own design of bolt action operated by pulling the handle to the rear which retracts the bolt by means of a toggle action. The receiver is marked "patent pending". Floating heavyweight round barrel with sight dovetail at muzzle, rearsight dovetail at left of action, adjustable trigger and special walnut stock with dovetail slide for adjustable buttplate, large finger grooved pistol grip with thumb hole, cheekpiece and adjustable handstop, palm rest for offhand shooting, alloy hand stop, tunnel aperture foresight, fully adjustable rearsight with camera type adjustable iris diaphragm.



M. K. Jurek blinked his eyes for the camera in this photo made in the lobby of the Grand Hotel in Birmingham. He is holding the last pistol he made, shown below.



This narrow little building at 180 Bradford St., Birmingham, was the Jurek shop. It has now been demolished, following considerable disagreement with the U.K.'s Inland Revenue, and the machines and inventory sold off and, in short, Jurek makes pistols no more.



This .360 caliber muzzleloader is owned by the author. It was, in fact, made for him. The design differs from the Model S only in that the receiver is cut away to permit the percussion nipple to seat itself in the same position a centerfire cartridge primer would occupy. Thus, the action breaks for nipple-seating and a nice straight-line ignition path is provided.

Dr. Jurek doesn't think his guns were given a fair test. He feels the low cost of production and reliability would have made his machine gun a replacement for the Sten gun. He asserted, to me, that his SMG would fire at a rate of 350 RPM and with accuracy. This rather slow rate of fire was made possible by firing from a closed bolt and a separate hammer. Another feature was a small diameter recoil spring that was mounted on a guide rod that was removable and ran through the breech block. I nearly ended the interview at that point by remarking that I didn't think that accuracy of a machine gun was all that important. That got me a long, studious look and I was told, in a soft, slightly accented voice, that accuracy is important in all firearms.

During our conversation at the Grand Hotel in Birmingham, Jurek produced all of his shop drawings, working drawings and patent drawings for all his SMGs, free pistols, and automatic pistol designs and innovations. On a scale of 10, my mechanical knowledge and ability would rank about minus 5, but the good Ph.D. and engineer, Dr. M.K. Jurek, adroitly identified those areas that he felt were different, unusual, and worthy of note.

After the SMG rejection, Jurek made a prototype automatic pistol similar to the Colt-Browning. On the Jurek pistol, while the barrel and slide locking ribs are the same as Browning, the barrel movement is controlled by parallel twin linking systems. This method causes the barrel to return to exactly the same position for the succeeding shot, he said, and therefore results in greater accuracy.

Jurek then went to work for Webley and Scott as a pistol designer where his automatic pistols were remade and various additions and changes were redesigned by Jurek. As another project, while at Webley and Scott, he was able to create the beautiful color-case hardening that is so attractively a typical feature on the box lock actions of Webley and Scott shotguns today. The company was having some distortion problems and was not consistently attaining the colors desired. Delving back into his chemical engineering background, Jurek produced a bone-meal formula and established rigid temperature controls and the problems were solved. Very simple, he told me.

After several years of working for Webley, the quiet, soft-spoken Dr. Jurek decided that he was becoming something less than enamored with



Jerry Evans collects big game trophies as well as Jurek pistols, obviously. Here he is admiring his Jurek Popular 22.

the mass production of firearms. He had won the pistol championship of Great Britain three times, he said, and he had instructed and coached the crack shooting squads of Britain for years. Precision workmanship and accuracy were his goals so he quit and started his own business. He had designed and applied for a U.S. patent on a bolt action that was easily adaptable for left- or right-handed use and he had a British patent on a 22 rifle with a toggle trigger assembly.

During the years that Jurek operated his gun shop, he employed no one. Every part of the target pistols and rifles was made by him. He carved the grips on his target pistols from a mould of the shooter's hand so that the fit would be perfect. Jurek has records of two of his earliest 22 free pistols. One has fired slightly over 1,000,000 rounds and the other, serial #3, has had 600,000 rounds fired. There has not been a single malfunction nor parts breakage on either pistol. To me, that exemplifies precision workmanship at its finest.

Jurek's years of the one man gun shop produced 186 22-caliber Popular models, 13 Model S with two barrels (one 22 and the other 38 Special), 127 22 caliber slide action free pistols with various barrel lengths, 19 toggle action target rifles, 4 target rifles with left or right bolt actions called Universal models, and 3 muzzleloading target pistols, two of which were 360 caliber and one .45.

At some point in our talk, I asked Jurek if he had ever studied dentistry. That question got quite a chuckle and the story that he had been told by his

dentist that he had a loose front tooth and it should be pulled. Jurek gave the dentist a negative shake of his head, left the chair and hiked himself to the gun shop. He wired his tooth up and it held up for a couple of years until he pulled it out with a set of gun barrel pliers. That was the extent of his knowledge of dentistry and he returned to the DDS for the fitting of a replacement.

Some years ago, Dr. Jurek decided that the British equivalent of our Internal Revenue Service was getting a bit too demanding and he would pay no more income tax. He wrote a letter to the Inland Revenue telling them that, "The Government has governed my business until I don't know who owns it any more. I have been enrolled, cajoled, required and commanded until I don't know where I am."

That august and authoritative body, Inland Revenue, took a rather dim view of such independent thinking and in 1978 revoked his gun maker's license, condemned the shop building he rented and demolished it. At the time of our conversation, he had sold his lathes and hand tools, and all that was left was a nearly complete serial #3, 360 caliber muzzleloading target pistol that he told me would be the last Jurek gun. He promised to complete it for me and send it to me. And he did so.

After that, Dr. Jurek thought he would visit his international banker son in Paris and then return to Poland to the wife he hadn't seen for twenty-five years. What he will be doing next he doesn't know. His letter to the British Inland Revenue ended with the statement, "The only reason I cling to life is to see what on earth happens next."

#### EDITOR'S NOTE

- Such solitary gunmakers as M.K. Jurek are fascinating. I have met and published articles on one or two Americans of similar bent and cannot resist getting the story told every time a new one comes along.

Jerry Evans has here produced a remarkable amount of information from a single interview. I know one such American well and we were friendly and I visited him off and on for a couple of years and over the whole time found out not much more than you can now know about M.K. Jurek.

There are only 352 guns bearing his mark. The survival rate will doubtless be high, but right here is most of what will ever appear in print. KW