

# 2023 GOOD YEAR OR BAD?

Our new columnist **Karl Waktare** discovers the first rule of writing (you can't do it until you have to), and muses on the year just passed and its implications for the trade

## 1 January

This year I resolved to get on top of my deadline for my second Gun Trade News article, but today I have a monster hang-over. We stayed dry on New Year's Eve and had people round on the first. A bit of a 'Leo Sayer' (all dayer).

So, I called out to the wife, "Where's my laptop?"

She replied, "I don't \$%@ing know, it's your laptop. Where did you see the thing last?"

I move a couple of empty wine bottles aside and an ashtray with a couple of stubbed-out cigars in it, and there it is. I open it, stare at the screen for a while, and then close it again.

## 18 January

Why do I always do this to myself? Why am I such a t\*\*\*? Here I am on deadline day again and nothing written... Here goes anyway.

## 2023 The year in review

Let's face it, on most counts 2023 was a bit smelly. In some respects, you could say it stank. I think to understand 2023 we have to think back to the three previous years. We all recall how 2020 shut down as a year in March and then we were all delighted with how well things recovered once we re-opened. 2021 was a year of stop/start as the vaccine rolled out, and we moved in and out of lockdowns. 2022 looked to be the one where we all went back to normal, then some crazy Russian decided that the biggest country on earth needed more land. Seriously Vlad? WTF!

## It's the economy, stupid

As the phrase goes. In the interests of truth, I looked it up—James Calville coined it circa 1992, when the political consultant and author—known as the 'Ragin' Cajun'—was Bill Clinton's lead strategist. I remember in my early days at GMK trying to draw some correlation between our turnover/profit and various other factors such as certificate numbers. The answer became clear. If the economy is strong, consumers have money, and feel secure about their finances. All the ingredients for someone to buy a new gun, use ammo and book a shooting trip.



What happened in 2020 was that the UK, in common with other countries around the World, pumped a ton of borrowed money into the economy to boost demand. We may not have been aware of it at the time, but this effectively led to some very good years for the trade. I think part of the reason it didn't feel that great at the time was due to battles with supply shortages, uncertainty, travel restrictions and general doom and gloom in the mainstream media. When you have lots of money, but difficult supply, you inevitably get inflation. If you like, the Cameron/Osbourne years were my

However, I would argue that the number of certificate holders and new applications is closely related to the state of the economy. When you are short of money it is unlikely that you are going to take up a new, relatively expensive sport. The median age of the UK populations is around 40, the average certificate holder is about 55. Our sport attracts older people because to shoot you need time and money, and carrying a bit of timber is not too detrimental. The downside of having an older customer base is that far more of them go and die on us or decide to just stop shooting as they

it was down to existing customers buying more guns.

As for those all-important new shooters, in 2019 21,000 new shotgun certificates were granted and 8,500 new FACs, these figures hit a low of just 10,500 SCs and 5,000 FACs in 2021. Again, these are massive figures—nearly half the number of newcomers. There are some positives, in that these figures are back on the rise with 15,703 SCs and 6,300 new FACs in 2023. There Police seem finally to be getting their house in order.

Dealers comment that there are lots of very good condition second-hand guns coming onto the market which they have bought. Their shelves are now full, and they will now only offer punters a sale or return deal even on very decent guns. This obviously has a knock-on effect on new gun sales, shops sell what they have and can make money on. Often there's a better margin to be made on a second-hand gun bought at the right price, and they take up shelf space previously occupied by new guns.

I have steered away from other issues such as lead transition, the attacks from antis and the cost inflation of game shooting, clays and ammunition. These are important but perhaps not as significant as the factors outlined above. The whole world is changing, there is not much we can do about that. Economic cycles, by definition, go up and down, it won't stay tough forever and there are always opportunities. **GTN**

**“ Our sport attracts older people because to shoot you need time and money ”**

New Year's Eve, Boris (and Truss) were my New Year's Day (cheers) and the hangover on January 2 was 2023. The Russian invasion only worsened and accelerated the crap that was always coming. It's like Vlad rocks up at 6pm on new year's day (uninvited) with a couple of bottles of Vodka. We all know there is no great pleasure from necking Vodka—it will only make your hangover worse.

## Licencing & demographics

Unlike many other pastimes, you cannot buy a firearm without a licence.

get dodderly. A brand new 40-year-old shooter is our ideal customer. They need guns, a gun safe, tuition, and tend to be keen, so therefore shoot more and use lots of ammo. When our Police Firearms Licencing departments start restricting the passage of newcomers, this is a real problem as we have seen. In 2019 there were 567,000 shotgun certificate holder and that has fallen to just over 500,000 in 2023 (-12.5%), FACs have fallen by 12,600 or 7.8% over the same period. These figures are huge and clearly demonstrate that if we had some good years,