

Firearms

Handguns

George Wallace reminds us about prohibited firearms



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IN CASE YOU HAD FORGOTTEN, NEARLY ALL handguns – known to our legislators as ‘short firearms’ – were prohibited by the Firearms (Amendment) Act of 1997. The few survivors of that Act were rounded up and sent for extermination by the Firearms (Amendment) (No.2) Act later the same year.

This was in response to Thomas Hamilton’s butchery at the school in Dunblane and, since that was just prior to a General Election, each political party competed for public acclaim – ie. votes – by saying they would ban more guns than the others. In the process, they also managed to prohibit our possession of expanding ammunition and even the bullets for reloading.

Then there was an “Ooh er” moment when they realised that other legislation, as well as hunting ethics, actually requires the use of expanding bullets and also that quite a lot of people still needed, or had good reason to possess, handguns of one sort or another. So they had to devise a cumbersome exemption to give some handguns and ammunition back to us and then invent a new category of licensed road carrier to transport the stuff.

Who said you need brains to be in Parliament? So many of our rulers have university degrees coming out of their ears, but no experience whatever of real life and not enough common sense to cross the road safely.



One of the results is that the firearms laws – and a lot of other laws as well – are an unworkable and often incomprehensible mess. Then add that the licensing system is administered by a police service which, by and large, does not approve of the public being allowed to own guns, and you have a recipe for serious discontent.

From my own perspective that is, of course, a good thing because if the blighters administered the system properly I would have been out of work for the last quarter of a century!

Back down on Planet Earth, there are a number of situations when a gamekeeper might find an exempt handgun useful. It is, for example, not always easy to carry a shotgun or rifle along with feed bags, snares, traps or what-have-you, without risking damage to the gun or, as has happened several times, leaning the gun in a safe place while you do a job and then going back only to find it has been nicked. For shooting rats in such situations, or for despatching snared foxes or trapped mink and squirrels, a firearm that can be carried in a pocket or on the belt can be very useful.

BUT WHICH HANDGUN?

One of the most versatile has got to be a .410 shot pistol, either single or double barrel and loaded with shot or bullet as required. Apart from humane despatch, the Firearms Act also allows their use for shooting vermin in and around buildings, release pens, etc, where the blast from a 12-bore might do a bit too much damage. 9mm shot pistols are also permitted by the Firearms Act but, although I have never tried one, I would guess that they are probably not much use for anything bigger than a feral hamster.

From smoothbore pistols, we move on to rifled models which for our purposes might be from .22 rimfire up to .357 Magnum or even .44 if the animal concerned is large enough to justify it.

Such revolvers and semi-automatics are much less versatile than the .410 but are preferable if you need to despatch farm livestock or roadside deer casualties in circumstances when the use of

a high power rifle, or even a 12-bore shotgun, would be either inappropriate or actually dangerous.

Why does a school bus always arrive when you are trying to despatch a badly injured deer? At those times a pistol is much less intrusive and emotive than a rifle or shotgun. Out of the pocket, bang, back in the pocket – and the deer's eyes are still in its head, not hanging down its face to frighten the children.

People often forget the old .22 long rifle when choosing a pistol, but it is an excellent cartridge if you can put the bullet in the right place. Not suitable for bullocks and horses thrashing madly around in a confined space, but in more normal circumstances the little bullet penetrates well and can find the brain when the slug from a .32 might not get through the skull. Ammo is, of course, cheap and plentiful. You've probably got lots of it already.

The choice is yours, if you have a good reason to possess such a thing and can persuade your friendly local firearms licensing department that you need one. The Firearms Act is simple enough and says that the chief officer of police

shall grant your application provided you show good reason and can be permitted to possess firearms without danger to public safety or to the peace. How that is regarded by your local police may well depend on where you live, because whether your own licensing people are prepared to apply the Law as it is written and also follow Home Office Guidance to the Police is a complete postcode lottery.

And do not on any account allow yourself to be bullied into having the magazine of a semi-auto or the cylinder of a revolver reduced to only two-shot capacity and, in the case of the semi-auto, weld the magazine in place. That can make a semi-auto almost impossible to load and completely impossible to unload safely, and both that and blocking all but two of the chambers of a revolver are extremely poor practice in both engineering and gunmaking terms. There is no justification for the police to demand such a thing. Moreover, if you do it to a new gun, you will immediately invalidate the manufacturer's guarantee.



The top photograph shows Greener's .310 Cattle Killer. The pocket model is handy, but no use under what we could call normal conditions, because both it and the variant, which looks a little more like a conventional pistol, were designed to be used with the muzzle in contact with the animal's head.

Below is a Smith and Wesson Model 10; a much more useful design for our purposes. For small animals a .32 is adequate, but for anything larger than a ewe, the .38 Special or .357 Magnum is a better and safer proposition.





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