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# Gottlieb Köthe in Graz

Written by Felix Neuberger

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An American journalist commented recently, that he had never heard of Styria, the southeastern province of Austria, but that it must be an important area of the country, since it gave Arnold Schwarzenegger, "The Terminator," to the world.

This Austrian province has other merits as well besides this megastar of the entertainment industry: it has developed into the "Detroit" of Middle Europe within the last two decades, with its multiple production sites for automobile assembly and components. This does not come as a surprise, as Styria has a strong history of basic processing industries of iron ore and ferrous metals. With such background and contemporary presence in metal-processing, one may ask if there is an excellent gunmaker in this part of Austria.

The answer is yes, it is in the person and company of Mr. Gottlieb Köthe in Graz, the metropolis of this province.

In my previous *DGJ* articles on gunmakers of Austria or Czechia, it was a nostalgic look back at product excellence of collector items built in bygone days by companies which no longer exist today or which ceased gunmaking and turned to the operation of a trading house.

This time it's the contrary, it's a presentation of an admirable and strong contemporary gunmaker personality and his excellent products, who turned his trading house into a genuine gunmaking business.

I met Gottlieb Köthe years ago and my first impression of him was that of a professor of art or history, with his gentle manners and his soft spoken voice.

Gottlieb Köthe works out of his workshop in Graz, Schlossergasse 2 and the normal way you meet him is in his green apron behind the workbench, his sleeves rolled up, holding an action system or barrels in his hands, the gold rimmed eye glasses down the nose, the "gun professor" in persona.

Three virtues characterize his mindset and work: perfection, passion, and pride. The perfection is for his one hundred percent control of every phase of the production process, even to include the selection of hides and brass corners for his oak and leather cases, his own tools to make

one-piece extractors, the soldering of the ribs, the wood-to-metal fit, the homemade locks, the stock finish and more.

Gottlieb, who has an engineering degree from the Ferlach school of gunmakers, has a passion to build the best guns and rifles in the world, not merely to a certain price level. With this same passion he managed to get a trunk of a walnut tree in the vicinity of his house, which yielded a wonderful pair of stock blanks.

Gottlieb takes pride in his work, and this has been true of him since the very first gun he built. He is the contrary to a "wheeler-dealer," who considers guns a commodity to be moved from countries with lower price levels to those with higher ones. All in all, a perfect example of one hundred percent vertically integrated or at least "controlled" gun production, "Austrian" and "Best."

He is the scion of ironmongers, who founded their company back in 1821, and keeping with the tradition, the company name includes the name of the ancestral founders in addition to his own.

When I visited him last time, for the purpose of raising a dent in my Holland & Holland, the gun rack was full of top British guns awaiting end-of-season maintenance and repair, beside some unfinished guns and rifles of his own production: a sidelock ejector double rifle in 8x75RS in the white, an "Ischler rifle" (one of his first pieces), a finished drop-down rifle in 7x65R, a pair of 20-bores and system parts with gold inlays exactly as ordered by the customer. The new restrictive Austrian gun legislation as well as the political change in neighboring Germany have reduced the sales revenues of the merchandised part of his home business. To cope with this situation he is forcing the high end side of the market, where demand for his work has steadily increased and where his skills are best utilized.

Gottlieb Köthe is not geared to a specific product type; typical Austrian generalist that he is, whatever a customer wishes to order, he is willing and ready to make, so long as it is representative of his best efforts.

Who are his customers? The ones who kindly agreed their names to be mentioned are Count Goess-Sarau and Dieter-Hugo Stinnes, but there are many more of the



Gottlieb Köthe  
"Styrian Gun Professor"

celebrities and affluent people.

What are his public achievements? He won a gold medal at the IHM fair in Munich in 1980 and first places at the Graz fair and the Styrian International Hunting Fair.

What are his production volumes? Gottlieb has been in business since 1972. With a present delivery time of two years, he is now building an average of six guns per year. His company has built a total of about ninety guns and rifles, a third of which are double guns and rifles, twenty single-shot rifles including five "Ischler rifles," a dozen combination guns, and the rest are repeating rifles, some of these built on customer supplied actions.

Gottlieb employs six full-time people and occasionally uses freelance workers to help with repairs and stockwork, which he receives in abundance.

Gottlieb Köthe has three sons, so it is very likely that one of them will follow in his footsteps under the "Gottlieb Köthe and Sohn" company heading. This, I am sure, would make him very proud.

This story of Gottlieb Köthe and his work is comparable to a well-known Styrian song, the refrain of which is "Styriamen are very good." Up until now, Gottlieb Köthe and the work done with his "golden" hands and under his direction has been the best-kept secret of a relative few affluent gun aficionados.

*His address is Gottlieb Köthe, Schlossergasse 2, A8010 Graz, Austria. Tel. 43 316 832662, fax 43 316 825047.*

