



TACCOM 2023 — THE PEOPLE

A glimpse of Canadian gun culture

BY ODELIA CHAN

TACCOM 2023. Exciting. Uplifting. Memorable.

Attendees were cheerful and respectful; show exhibitors explained technicalities with a smile; at each booth, people exchanged gun stories and opinions. Needless to say, I didn't stop grinning all four hours I was there. (And it was just Friday afternoon!)

I chatted with some of the wonderfully diverse people making up Canada's firearms culture, and I owe them much thanks for the shared laughs and stories. I learned a lot from our conversations. The five different perspectives to follow give a taste of what Canadian gun culture looks like today, what we might expect in the near future and, above all, what makes the Canadian firearms community so amazing.

THE TRUTH ABOUT FIREARMS IN CANADA

Let's begin with a conversation I didn't expect to have (but was thrilled to hold!) with Zach Schwingenschloegl of GunGuard, part of Acera Insurance Services. Schwingenschloegl is the bridge between gun businesses and business insurance companies, telling insurance companies the truth about the actual mechanics of firearm use and procurement in Canada and walking gun businesses through proper business management and best insur-

ance options.

When asked about insurance claims GunGuard has faced so far, Schwingenschloegl told me, "The biggest claims we've had to deal with on the regular are people stealing trucks and driving them into stores, not really stealing much in the process." Once, a stolen gun was found several blocks down from the business it was taken from, rejected after the perpetrators realized it was a black powder rifle.

Another GunGuard associate shared that on the personal insurance side, the usual claims have to do with accusations of improper storage and transportation of guns, often stemming from unfounded overreactions by people who don't understand guns. GunGuard regularly addresses prejudices against guns as a result of ignorance in both personal and professional worlds.

"People think what they see in movies is real," Schwingenschloegl said. "But that's just not the case here in Canada."

CANADA'S FIREARMS COMMUNITY

What about the people who do know a thing or two about firearms? Donovan Dewis from the Canadian Access To Firearms (CATF) publication was kind enough to share what he saw of the

state and "mind" of the firearms community across Canada.

As the second-generation publisher of the CATF, a national publication previously run by founder Paul Rogan, Dewis expects to see firearm sellers closing their doors in the wake of handgun and certain rifle model bans.

"People are worried," Dewis said. And they have good reason to be. As more and more guns are taken off the non-restricted list and placed on the restricted list — or, God forbid, the banned list — the people who use and own guns for tactical and competitive shooting will likely decrease until we only have mostly rifle/shotgun hunters. In a time when the gun you legally hunted with on a weekend could be illegal by the time you come home, Dewis' advice is simple: "Take things day by day."

However, these restrictions have actually unified and solidified our national gun community. Previously, most hunters wouldn't pay much attention to handguns, AK-45s or AR-15s. But now that these weapons are banned or restricted, shotgun and long rifle owners know they could be next. As Dewis sees it, changes in firearm regulations tend to bring different gun factions together under the same banner of liberty and common sense.



LEFT: The author gets behind a .50-calibre gun at TACCOM.

RIGHT: Some of the wonderfully diverse people making up Canada's firearms culture.



After an interesting discussion on recent and upcoming changes in Canadian politics and their effects on firearm rights, Dewis closed with an exhortation to all Canadian firearm owners: We must keep up the fight, no matter which party leads the country.

PERSPECTIVES & IMPACTS OF GUN LEGISLATION

Coincidentally, I'd just met a fellow fighter before talking with Dewis. Jennifer, a volunteer at TACCOM, has been shooting 3-Gun matches for more than three years and has a seven-year-old daughter who'd also love to compete someday. She and her daughter have been writing letters to MPs and other officials about recent changes in handgun laws, articulating just how and why such restrictions are unlawful and unnecessary.

Like all law-abiding firearm owners, Jennifer sees firearm restrictions, especially those of October 2022, as "an attack on private property, and attacks on an entire community of Canadians" and "a whittling of human rights and freedoms in the country." On a personal level, restricting what new sport shooters are allowed to own and train with forces shooting competitions to keep modifying and adjusting competition categories and techniques, until shooting sports will no longer be what they used to be — as is the case already.

WHAT SAY THE CRAFTSMEN?

Exciting as shooting matches and hunting may be, we wouldn't have the guns we have today without our firearm manufacturers. One booth I returned to again and again, Crusader Arms, is at the cutting edge of Canadian firearms design and manufacture. The modern-looking semi-autos belied the Templar Knights-style of their brand. Their tagline, "Humility, honour, sacrifice," appealed to me; on the spur of the moment, I walked

up to a friendly sales associate at the exhibit and asked him how he, as one of Crusader Arms' firearms assemblers, lives out their motto as he puts the guns together.

His response? "Well, I sacrifice a lot of my time and energy to build these guns. With humility, I know they are some of the best on the market. And I am honoured that people like them, buy them and use them."

I believe all the manufacturers and designers at TACCOM 2023, such as TriggerTech's innovation on Frictionless Release Technology, would say and feel something similar.

NEW SHOOTERS: TRENDS & ADVICE

On that note of firearms innovation in Canada, I had the honour to spend a few minutes with Gilles Stubbins, Mossberg's sales manager for Canada. What would he say to the new shooter who's wondering where to begin on their shooting journey — who's perhaps lost, confused and wandering through TACCOM 2023 even as we spoke?

His thoughts: Don't go after the well-known brands, flashy gun builds or camouflage underwear. What works for the best shooters doesn't mean that's what you should get. "Check your budget, try a few guns out and use what fits you and feels right for you," he said. Even if it means choosing that \$550 rifle that has all you need and works well for you, over a \$2,000 build everyone else is gawking at.

As Mossberg's national sales manager this side of the border, I thought he'd be the perfect person to ask for a glimpse of the current firearms market. Of all the demographic groups getting into guns in recent years, Stubbins said, the top three were these:

Ladies: They'd like to hang out more with the guys in their life (or the girls they'd thought were crazy!)



The hard-working administrative team at the NFA booth.

Young people: Guns look fun, thanks to movies and video games. Stubbins laughed as he described how young fellows would pick up a Mossberg shotgun at his display, drop to a knee and pretend to be in an epic face-off with an invisible opponent.

Hunters: As food becomes more expensive in grocery stores, more people get into hunting to bring in food for themselves and their families.

PERSONAL TAKEAWAYS

A personal highlight of the gun show, besides the conversations I've had with men and women who've been in the firearms world for many years, was getting to shoulder guns I'd dreamed of owning for some time. What made me most thankful at TACCOM 2023, however, was seeing people from all walks of life come together to learn, celebrate and connect over a shared passion, interest and understanding of firearms. Guns are pretty cool — but even more powerful and memorable are the friendships, knowledge transfers and ever-improving craftsmanship that go into Canada's firearms culture. 🇨🇦