

Coming soon - the Lithgow Arms LA105 Woomera

by Daniel O'Dea

Back in January I was lucky enough to be among the first to experience Lithgow Arms' latest offering, the LA105 Woomera when it made its public debut at the US SHOT Show's Industry Day At The Range. Those initial few shots definitely whetted the appetite and I was looking forward to some more time behind the Woomera closer to its Australian release date.

That chance came when I was invited to a media event at the Lithgow Arms Factory hosted in conjunction with local distributor Outdoor Sporting Agencies. The occasion would include a chance to tour the facility and engage with management and staff of Lithgow Arms.

Lithgow is a regional town at the base of the Blue Mountains about 140km west of Sydney. The Small Arms Factory is the town's largest employer with many locals having generational links to the factory that has operated there for more than 100 years. The Apprentice Of The Year board, proudly displayed in the factory's foyer, shows the name Winterbottom twice with father and son winning the same award 26 years apart.

Some aspects of rifle manufacture have changed little during the Lithgow years, with the occasional machine still in use today dating back to the factory's earliest history. The tour started in the Metrology Lab where a robotically-controlled Ruby Probe darts back and forth across the featured parts precisely measuring specifications within five microns, or one-20th of the thickness of a sheet of paper, as part of the quality control process.

Moving down to the main floor the



Daniel O'Dea runs the bolt on the new Lithgow Arms LA105 Woomera.

centrally-located barrel forge, as a shared resource, geographically divides military defence manufacture from that of civil, supplying barrels to both sides of the factory. A unique capacity, the Lithgow Arms Factory is the only place in Australia manufacturing barrels using the cold hammer forge process. Starting with a round blank of special grade high tensile steel, the blanks are first faced, chamfered and deep hole drilled, then the outside is turned down before drilling and reaming the inside wall and honing to produce a good internal finish to remove any imperfections or defects.

The barrels are carefully inspected with a digital borescope that projects upon a TV monitor - if any imperfections remain

it can affect the finished product after forging. The blank is placed in the forge where a swaging mandrel is inserted while four tungsten carbide hammers work the outside material at a thousand strokes per minute to impart the rifling in the bore.

Different stations make various components on CNC machines throughout the factory with other processes such as heat treating, honing, bead blasting or Cerakoting all taking place as and where required. All the various components come together in an area resembling a small supermarket of gun parts, all sitting ready to be picked as required to build the pre-finished product.

Within the supermarket assembly area some stations put together components



A rack of barrelled actions sit outside of the assembly area. This batch is all new LA102s in 6.5 Creedmoor.



Freshly honed barrels are inspected with a digital borescope for any small imperfections prior to barrel forging.



Modern high-tech CNC machines perform various duties across the factory, this one cutting barrel chambers.

The Lithgow Arms LA105 Woomera

such as trigger constructions and bolts to streamline the process. After this the rifles go to the indoor range for proof and accuracy, a process where a special proof load is first fired in each firearm producing pressures well in excess of the maximum factory cartridge standards to prove integrity.

Once out of the proof room the stock is fitted up then accuracy testing takes place on the range before the finished rifles are returned to the assembly area for the final clean, inspection and packing. At the time of writing combined LA101 and LA102 production was running at up to 60 rifles per day.

The tour finished with a visit to the high security gun room. I guess when you're a firearms manufacturer your product showcase-come-meeting room just has to be in a vault. Set up boardroom-style, on the room's walls firearms are securely displayed representing Lithgow Arms products past and present, military and civilian. It was a fitting venue to debrief after the tour.

Moving to the range after a quick safety briefing from our host, Lithgow Arms Small Arms & Weapons Test & Elevation Manager Richard Basladynski, we were given a brief introduction to the new LA105 Woomera before hitting the mats.

For targets, Richard's team had set up a board full of balloons for all shooters with each balloon being around 20cm across. At 850m this represented targets measuring approximately .2 mil (or thereabouts), that although stapled to the board moved around a little with the wind. Also present to offer expert coaching was Jay Orange from Orange Accuracy Australia, who provides long-range rifle training. Running a Kestrel and AE Ballistic program, he supplied both the elevation and windage calls as well as sharing the spotting duties with other members of the Lithgow Arms team.

Although it was minus three degrees



Finished LA105s in the packing room having their thread protectors fitted, with some great pieces of timber among that batch.



A Lithgow Arms employee gauges rifle bolts as part of the online quality control process.

when I left the nearby hotel that morning, Lithgow had turned on a beautiful day with the sun shining and a mild wind only requiring a four to six-point left hold. Once the dope was worked out we were all calling out and popping balloons with regular monotony.

Shooting the LA105 Woomera was a pleasurable experience. The rifle's three port muzzle brake worked a treat and the whole set-up transmitted minimal-felt recoil. This allowed the shooters to stay on the gun and spot their own shots landing through the scope. The 6.5 Creedmoor was bliss in that respect but the .308 Winchester was equally manageable when I had some time with a Woomera in that chambering later in the day.

The trigger was also a delight, as Lithgow's match grade trigger features three-way adjustment for weight, sear engagement and draw length. Adjustable from 0.75-1.9kg the factory sets release at 1.5kg or a bit over 3lb in old language, but the break is clean and crisp and another aspect conducive to good accuracy.

The event was well run and certainly highlighted the capacity of Lithgow Arms' latest market entry. Talking with my fellow media representatives at the end of proceedings, discussion was heavy with



Up in the gun room the walls display past and present Lithgow Arms products, with just a small sample shown here.

glowing praise. Lithgow Arms has put together a great package with the LA105 Woomera. It basically provides an out of the box solution for anyone moving into long-range precision shooting or relevant competition disciplines. It offers all the key desirable features at a competitive price point. With a proposed price of around \$2800 it's bound to be on target both on and off the range.

For more information on the LA105 Woomera as well as other products from Lithgow Arms visit lithgowarms.com.au

• A full review of the LA105 Woomera will appear in a forthcoming edition of *Australian Shooter*. ●



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