

SELECTIVE HEARING

Our new series, talking to the bigwigs in the shooting industry, timed perfectly with the launch of the Vario. we grabbed Jason Gibson, the man behind it, to see how he got into the industry and where his vision came from

You haven't always been in hearing protection. What did you do before?

I went into banking straight out of school. With the background I'd come from, I'd never known stability, and in those days banking was deemed a job for life. When I left Lloyds in 1996 I set up a financial services practice with two others. After three years we joined up with a company called Positive Solutions and became shareholders. We helped grow and develop that for the next six years. Our purpose was to take financial services paperless and convert companies like Legal & General and Norwich Union to digital application forms. Positive Solutions went from seven people to 1,700, and in 2006 we sold to Aegon. We kept the original practice, but wound down and I started to invest in London property and cars.

So how did you get into shooting?

I started shooting around four years ago. I was taken on a simulated game day by two friends. It was organised by the Really Wild Clay Company and it was an excellent day out – really well put on.

What got you hooked?

It was the atmosphere, the food, the social aspect. The final drive was over water, simulating ducks coming in to land. Our team won and my friend thought I could be good at shooting.

So the shooting came before the business?

Yes. I research everything before I buy, and I went to Chris Potter's to get kitted out. My first gun was a Beretta Diamond Pigeon and I bought all the gear to go with it, including



Vario's moulds fit any of the modules in the range

a pair of cans, but I kept hitting them when I mounted the gun. I bought a set of custom plugs, but I wasn't a fan. They were expensive, they fit poorly, they went back for repair twice and the customer service was awful. They looked great, but the battery drain was terrible. I then got chatting to Nicky James who was at Mayland & District Gun Club for Mercury Hearing.

Why would you have another go with custom ear protection after such a bad experience?

A bespoke anything should be better than generic. I liked the family story of Mercury and the NHS background. They make moulds for children's hospitals – babies as small as six weeks old. They had to be good.



Jason Gibson



The electronic modules will enhance ambient noise while blocking anything over 70 dB

ESSENTIAL INFO

- Multifunctional hearing protection
- Enhances while it protects
- Interchangeable modules
- Expand your collection at a later date

So you became part of the company?

I went away and did some research. I could see a gap, and an opportunity to expand the market further, so we joined forces.

But you're no longer associated with Mercury?

I came out of Mercury to launch the Vario. The family wanted to take Mercury in a different direction. The split was for the best. It has allowed us both to focus on our own priorities while still working together. Their office is only 10 minutes from ours and they still make silicone moulds for us, but now I can concentrate on Vario and my other company, Ottraco, which specialises in industrial applications, while Mercury focuses on motorsports and other recreational pursuits.

Where did the concept for the Vario come from?

The idea came very early on. I've always been a massive music fan – I was a rugby player and always listened to music in the gym. I used to wear generic buds, but they were always falling out. I wanted to find a way of customising the fit. I was the only person at Mercury who shot, so I could see that there

was a need for multi-tasking ear protection. I wanted to be able to listen to music, block everything out when I'm shooting, hold a conversation after the line and take a call on my phone, all without changing my plugs. It's all about interchangeability and flexibility. Not so long ago we all carried a phone, a wallet, an address book, a camera, a notebook, a calculator, maybe more. Now we just have a smartphone. I wanted my hearing protection to work the same way. I wanted to choose what I heard and when.

How did you put that into practice?

We went to a design house in Cheltenham and gave them a brief: dedicated on/off button, protected battery housing etc. That was really important to us – that the battery would be protected from the elements to prolong its life. It had to look good and it had to give the customer as many colour options as possible. But the most important factor was that it was upgradeable.

This is just the beginning for us. Our range will evolve and grow, but we don't want anyone left behind. You can buy a set from us with the passive modules, and then buy the electronics at a later date if you wish, which will fit in the same custom silicone moulds. Or your partner can come to us and buy you new modules for Christmas, knowing that they will fit. At the same time, as your ears age and grow and you need a new set of silicones, you can have new ones made without the expense of replacing the modules. We don't want our customers

to start from scratch every time our range changes and expands.

So how do they work?

There are several modules that fit into the silicone plugs – the blanks and passives most people will be familiar with. The electronics have two buttons on the front. The on/off

THE MODULES

Blanks

The blanks block out the most sound. If you want silence when you shoot, these are for you. No conversation, no fidgeting, not so much as a cartridge dropping.

Passives

These allow you to hear speech while still intercepting the sound of gunshot. You can hear the referee, but are fully protected. These are included in every Vario package.

Bluetooth

The Bluetooth module allows you to use your phone while still being protected. You can make and take calls, listen to music, and still protect your hearing on a shooting ground.

Music

The music module is available either in Bluetooth, or as a wired option to connect to your phone or mp3 player. The wires are detachable so you don't even have to change the module when you go on the line.

EXTRA SERVICE**YOU AREN'T JUST BUYING A PAIR OF PLUGS - YOU'RE ALSO GETTING...****Try before you buy**

The Vario is available to try before you buy, by using single-use generic buds that attach to the modules. These do not provide hearing protection, but do allow you to hear what the modules can really do before you commit.

Trade in scheme

Vario are offering £100 off the Vario electronics when you trade in your old digital cans or any custom fit plugs. They will keep them for 30 days and trade them back if you're not entirely satisfied.

Money back guarantee

Vario provides a no-quibble money back guarantee for 30 days after you receive your plugs. You don't have to give a reason - just send them back and get a full refund.

Warranty

All parts of the Vario are covered by a two year warranty - the silicone plugs and the modules.

button has a raised lump so you can feel which is which. The other button increases the amount you are able to hear. It doesn't just maximise your hearing, it enhances it. When you turn it on, it goes straight into setting one, allowing you to hear speech clearly, while still blocking gunshot. Pressing the button next to the on/off amplifies sound to a greater degree each time you press it, until it cycles back round to setting one. With the top setting active, you can hear a shooter sniff at the other end of the shooting ground, while still being protected from the sound of a shotgun. We have also developed breakthrough bluetooth technology, so with our bluetooth module you can listen to music on your phone and still be protected. We do suggest you put your phone into airplane mode while you shoot though!

What will you add next?

We're working on a number of health applications at the moment, as well as industrial. As Ottraco we already work with parts of the US Military, the RAF, Coca-Cola,

Nestle and others. But we will develop what people want. We want feedback from our customers - we want them to ring us, email us, engage on social media. We want them to tell us what they want from the product, and that's what we'll do.

Where can we get them?

You can have your impressions taken at thousands of high street shops, or you can have them done by us at any of the main events we will be appearing at throughout the shooting calendar. You'll be able to find a list on our website, which we'll keep updating. We'll also be going on a tour of shooting grounds around the country, starting with Southdown Gun Club. We'll be releasing details very soon. You can order through our website and pick any colour you like - we have 62 shades of glitter alone. You can have different colour combinations in each ear if you prefer. We are expanding our module colours by the day and will release limited-edition versions, so make sure you follow us on Facebook or Twitter to keep up to date. 📍



A near-infinite array of colour options is available

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