

# Industry Spotlight

By John Steinhorst

## E.A.R. Inc.

**M**any older shooters can attest to the irreversible hearing damage that can be caused by the deafening blasts of a shotgun over time. But thanks to current advances in recreational ear protection, shooters can be safe and still enjoy the sport to its fullest.

To audiologist and entrepreneur Garry Gordon, creating a product to protect people's hearing sounded like a great idea, and in 1971, he founded and developed E.A.R. Inc.

After completing an education in the science and treatment of hearing defects at the University of Colorado, Garry began setting up hearing conservation programs nationwide for industrial accounts that needed to comply with state and federal regulations regarding noise. He positioned himself in the industrial hearing conservation market by working with companies such as Coors, Colorado Interstate Gas, IBM, Martin Marietta, Beech Aircraft, General Cable, and Stearns Roger.

"As a result of working with these types of companies and testing their employees for hearing loss, it was apparent that recreational activities such as hunting, shooting, motorcycling, and loud music were additional contributing factors to hearing losses noted on the audiograms," says Garry. "One particular sport that contributed significantly to the hearing losses was shooting."

So Garry partnered with a leading chemist in the field of silicone technology, Dr. Sydney Gurshkov. Together they focused their energies and developed high-grade silicones for the hearing health care profession in addition to industrial accounts. Today, this technology is used worldwide by ear mold labs, hearing aid companies, doctors, audiologists, industrial accounts, and the military. As a result of this partnership, E.A.R. has also partnered with several hearing aid corporations to manufacture high-quality electronic ear protectors, including custom-fit and behind-the-ear models.

"E.A.R.'s overall track record has been

The solid ear plugs are made from soft silicone, providing maximum sound suppression in a variety of styles and colors.



very comprehensive and remains so," assures Garry. "We have been responsible for setting up the National Ear Care Plan, which was designed to help consumers from large industrial accounts, in addition to individuals, get access to hearing aids at cost-contained prices.... E.A.R.

was also involved with Dr. Richard Krug (University of Colorado) in being on a faculty of professional presenters to certify industrial nurses and safety officers with the requirements set up by the Council For Accreditation In Occupational Hearing Conservation. And, finally, E.A.R. has traveled worldwide working with such groups as the USA Shooting Team, conducting seminars that pertain to the incidence of hearing loss within the shooting industry."

Today, with state-of-the-art technology for both silicone and electronic technology, E.A.R. and its affiliates serve approximately 2,000-2,500 different distribution points covering approximately eight to 10 different markets. The recreational shooting and hunting market is one in need of specifically designed hearing protection. But finding a place in this specific niche proved to be much harder than first imagined.

"I think the biggest obstacle was initially lack of experience," remembers Garry. "Requirements to market products through medical and/or industrial accounts are extremely involved, with stringent requirements to complete lab studies and documentation. These marketers are regulated, and it is critical to be in compliance, or your products will not sell. Unfortunately, the recreational market is not regulated, therefore we find it critical that the consumer

Gold, silver, and bronze medalists at the Atlanta Olympics used Garry Gordon's product with good results.



does his or her research before making their purchases. There are several great ear protection companies in today's marketplace, and we strive to be among the best."

Garry claims that numerous events have helped his company grow within the shooting sports, especially recreational exposure to such events and trade shows as the NSCA US Open, World Olympics, ATA Grand American, National Wild Turkey Federation, Ducks Unlimited, Bianchi Cup, World Cup, NRA Convention,

NSCA Nationals, etc.

"In many cases, we have been asked to work with writers of different magazines in addition to doing seminars on the topic of noise exposure and hearing loss," says Garry. "For the most part, we attend numerous sporting clays events, but during this time, we have been tied down to our work. In addition to this, we are seriously represented through

numerous high-profile sporting clay shooters who we sponsor, such as Jon Kruger, Casey Atkinson, Terri Rich, Gil and Vicki Ash, Ed Prechel, and many others.... Relationships are important, and the expertise I have experienced with these people has been unsurpassable.

"The only time we are successful is when the customer chooses us. It is critical to lead the way with top-quality products backed up by outstanding service.... E.A.R. Inc. is known worldwide, and we have had the honor of working with premium groups of people in need of high-quality products and services. I would say some of the hardest challenges include the development of new products that meet and/or exceed consumer expectations, followed by the task of getting this information to clients who can benefit from them.... Quality and durability has been high enough to now provide a two-year warranty."

E.A.R.'s product line is very broad, including both silicone and high-end electronics. It has also been assigned a distributorship for NYX eye wear with interchangeable lenses. The most demanded product is the custom-molded Insta-Mold ear protection, followed by a series of electronics that includes both analog and digital circuitry. Since digital technology is taking over the hearing aid market, E.A.R. has been striving over the past four years to develop digital electronic ear protectors at analog pricing. So far, Garry has been extremely successful in developing this market and will offer more exciting and affordable options into 2006.


"Of all the recreational activities we can imagine, shooting and hunting sports are considered clinically as one of the most (potentially) dangerous to both vision and/or hearing," stresses Garry. "Sporting clays is no exception. Our basic message that should be repeated whenever possible is: 'One shot is all it takes.' With modifications such as porting for shotguns and muzzle brakes for rifles, we have never seen as many acoustic traumas (instant hearing



E.A.R. Inc.'s custom electronic ear protectors can be used with CD, MP3, and DVD players, and computers, as music monitors, and more.

loss, often with complications such as tinnitus or ringing) as we do now. E.A.R. not only strives to be a key provider of high-quality ear protection but also facilitates numerous people with information and advice that helps them acquire high-quality hearing aids at affordable pricing.

"Trying to get by or stay in the market with the same old concepts is out of the question," says Garry. "Lately, we have been very successful in being able to make electronic ear protectors multi-functional by providing options that will allow them to be used with cell phones, two-way radios, on airplanes, motorcycles, or iPod-type configurations. Currently, the hot topic for the hearing aid industry is called open-ear technology, which permits a client to hear digital sound quality without the adverse effects of 'occlusion' or barrel-effect sensation. By the time you read this article, E.A.R. will introduce a patented, open-ear electronic ear protector that is built into a titanium case, is waterproof, can be programmed to an individual's hearing loss, and can be used with a cell phone, two-way radio, and/or hunting and shooting sports.

"Although the need for ear protection is 100% necessary for all shooting sports," stresses Garry, "the need for electronic ear plugs has been a highlight for sporting clays since most of the shooters want to hear the traps releasing while suppressing the loud sounds from gunfire. Through our research, it has been reported that approximately 47% of the participating shooters admit to some degree of hearing loss, and the advantages of having high-quality electronic ear protection have been most encouraging, let alone beneficial. Without any doubt, we have met the needs of thousands of sporting clay shooters worldwide." 

E.A.R. Inc., P.O. Box 18888, Dept. SC, Boulder, CO 80308; (800) 525-2690; [www.earinc.com](http://www.earinc.com)