



THE BACK STORY... HOW WE DID IT

David Relf is the founder of Beagle Garden Products. He is in his 70s, is “very nearly retired” and is a most unlikely character to be establishing a new manufacturing business in the UK. With his wife, Victoria, David acquired and restored a twelfth century manor in south west France in the 1980s, and over the past 27 years they have designed and created a garden of which they are very proud.

In occupation under the ground for most of this time has been the local mole population, however.

Some 20 years ago their Portuguese gardener returned from a visit to his fatherland with a traditional Portuguese mole trap consisting of a metal tube with an entry flap at one end and a detachable cap at the other end. It works; trapping them alive or dead, dependent upon the frequency with which one attends the set trap.

One problem with this tunnel trap design, however: it can only trap a mole going in one direction, and of course one don't know from which direction it will approach the trap! Thus, when approaching the closed end, the mole pushes the trap out of the ground or diverts around it.

David therefore set his mind to solving this problem and found on the market a trap accessible from either end, consisting of a section of plastic tubing with two gravity flaps which would only open inwards. Unfortunately he found that it also permitted egress, as frequently the occupant could lift the flap facing it, and escape.

This type of trap is still available. To prevent the mole escaping, David came up with the idea of placing a wooden ball inside the tube. It necessitated making the trap a bit longer to accommodate mole and ball, which in turn means that you require a longer stretch of straight run in which to set the trap. The mole pushes open the gravity flap, which closes behind it and pushes the ball to the other end where it merely turns against the other flap (the mole biting chunks out of the ball in the meanwhile) and as it can't turn around inside the tube, voila! It is trapped. It has a particular advantage in that the sound of a live mole pressing the ball against the flap is quite audible.

David obtained a patent for this trap, protecting it in most countries in the Northern hemisphere wherever one finds moles, including the USA. He had a couple of dozen prototypes made and set about trapping moles with great success. In one year they trapped over 100 moles in France. But he was so preoccupied with his other interests that he did nothing about making them commercially.

In 2008 his business as a property developer became seriously challenged as a result of the economic downturn. Unlike the humble mole, he became an endangered species. So he decided to revive his interest in mole trapping and formed an association with an established supplier of mole and other vermin and animal traps and deterrents to manufacture and sell his patented design.

Next came the problems. Firstly, this trap would probably be sold as a humane live trap. This is debatable. It depends on how frequently the trap is visited. More often than not you will find that after a few hours the mole will be found dead, having died of stress and / or starvation. Hardly



humane, and a damned sight worse than an instant kill. Secondly, most mole trappers want their intruders dead. The market for live mole traps as opposed to dead is only about 20%. Thirdly, the cost of injection moulding such traps had risen in China (where nearly every trap is produced) making them uncompetitive with alternative pressed metal traps.

Not to be deterred, David decided to research the mole trap market, and discovered a range of horrendous antiquated killing mechanisms, utterly useless deterrents, and banned poisons. Only one trap proved to be really effective and a humane instant killer. That is the British designed 'Duffus' or Half Barrel Trap; but it is an absolute pain (quite literally) to set. One is liable to get a set of pinched fingers and / or a rather hard rap in the knuckles if one is not careful; which is never much fun on a cold wet morning.

The Duffus trap is currently the preferred trap of the professional mole trapper. Its success is attributable to its powerful mechanism and unobtrusiveness in the mole run and the positioning of the captive mole to ensure instant and humane killing. The challenge was therefore how to design a mechanism that was easier to set, but equally lethal to the mole. This ultimately led to the formation of Beagle Garden Products Ltd, and the creation of the **EasySet Mole Trap**.

David spent many a quiet evening conceiving and sketching possible trap designs, before engaging the services of two young designers: Brendan Young and Vanessa Bataglia. They took him to the next stage and they produced a number of prototypes that worked, albeit sometimes unreliably. The concept still needed improvement, refinement, testing, and ultimately manufacture, and with a successful contemporary design business of their own, Brendan and Vanessa simply didn't have the time to devote to getting Beagle's first product fully off the ground.

In 2012 David employed George Savell, who had just graduated from Cambridge with a degree in Manufacturing Engineering and Management.

George is **not** in his 70s, is **not** "very nearly retired" and is just starting on his professional journey. He is therefore almost the exact opposite of David... other than their combined passion for the design and manufacture of the very mole traps and garden equipment money can buy.

George is 23, and has spent the past 9 months establishing the manufacturing and commercial operations at Beagle Garden Products. From a standing start, he has now converted David's dream into reality.

It has been an interesting journey for George so far. Whilst still at university, he was initially attracted to an advert that simply said 'Wanted: Manufacturing Engineer to become MD of small start-up', and met up with David a handful of times whilst juggling his finals workload around trips to London to discuss the role.

George was impressed with the prototype design, and immediately saw the potential. The more he spoke with him, the more he saw David's genuine enthusiasm for the project. With a good job offer already on the table from Johnson Matthey, on their fast-track global management program, George



had a tough decision to make: go with the money and job security at a global corporation, or take a chance and do something he had always dreamed of – design, make, and sell something!

Having made the trip out to France to spend a couple of days with David and Victoria, George took the plunge and started work as a Director of Beagle Garden Products Ltd the day after his graduation.

“A year ago,” says George, I never thought I would be spending my days dreaming up killing machines for small mammals.” However, he is thoroughly enjoying running a new enterprise, in which every day brings a new challenge. In the first 6 months, amongst many other things, he has written a comprehensive business plan; learnt more about moles than he ever thought possible; created possibly the most comprehensive and user friendly source of information about moles and mole-catching on the web; almost entirely re-invented David’s original design concept; built (and broken!) countless prototypes; filed his first patent; learnt about the legal and accounting side of running a small business; experienced delight at the first successful prototype test... and met Lady Boothroyd over lunch to discuss how Beagle might help with her ‘plague’ of moles.

Since the launch of the EasySet Mole Trap in January 2013, George’s day-to-day role has changed somewhat. Whilst still maintaining a significant engineering design role as the business develops a suite of mole catching accessories, George is now working much more on the commercial side, dealing with sales, marketing, PR, and the despatch of traps to customers.

As sales have ramped up, George has been assembling, packaging, and dispatching traps. His spare room is currently filled with around 1000 mole traps waiting to be sent to new customers. The rest of George’s time is spent networking and running targeted marketing campaigns to professionals and industry leaders – not something he had ever expected to do when he started his Engineering degree at Cambridge, and according to George, another very steep learning curve.

The close network of entrepreneurs, start-up incubators, and SMEs in Cambridge has been fantastic for George. “Every time I have a problem”, he says, “there is always someone around willing to offer their time and advice to put me on the right track. I hope that other start-ups around the country are getting the same levels of support and encouragement!”

George is very pragmatic about his choice of career path. “Overall, not bad for a first job”, he says. “More variety and more real world hands-on experience than any of my contemporaries have gained working for large established companies on graduate training programmes.”

David continues to be supportive, and has helped to guide some of George’s decision-making, but ultimately he has allowed the young entrepreneur the freedom to make his own mistakes and achieve his own successes. George is certainly fired up and enthusiastic about the future of Beagle: “I can’t wait to move on to the next product, secure our patents, grow the business”.

FURTHER INFORMATION and IMAGERY

Please contact George Savell for further information and product photography.

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