

## SILVER COMET – HOW IT HAPPENED

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***In this first blog, Frank's son Stanley Lowy, Non-Executive Chairman of Unicorn Darts who spent his entire working life at the company, talks us through his father's story. Stanley outlines a brief history of Frank's early life and details how the 'Silver Comet' came to market, changing the face of darts.***

My father, Frank Lowy, was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1901. His father moved to America four years later to seek his fortune and he intended to call for his wife and the three children to join him when he was able to support them. His wife never heard from him again and with his father away, Frank grew up very impoverished in Hungary with just his mother to care for him and his two siblings.

During the First World War, he began an engineering apprenticeship which would later hold him in good stead, but by the end of the War there was no more work available and he was forced to look elsewhere for employment.

Frank was then invited by a childhood friend's father to work in a Patent Office. He convinced Frank to take a job as the perfect foil to his own son, working in tandem in the Patent Agency.

Soon after joining the Patent Agency, Frank began to realise that there was another way to make his mark in the company. He noticed that they would send and receive forms in English but that nobody in the office actually knew what they said, bar the parts they needed to take action on.

So Frank decided to take action of his own. He began taking English lessons, which he would pay for by taking what he learnt in his lesson, and use it to teach his own lesson to others for a fee.

He later told me that if one of his students had a question that he wasn't able to answer, he would reply by saying "that's next week's lesson!". Ingenuity clearly ran deep.



Frank Lowy

He remained in Hungary until 1927, but due to his acquisition of the English language, another work opportunity arose. A client of the Patent Office had an invention which concerned refractory material used to line furnaces. That client wanted to sell his invention in England, and so an agreement was reached for my father to be released on a sabbatical from the Patent Agency and sent to England as a sales agent for the refractory invention.

My father quickly decided that he wanted to settle in England. Post-war Hungary's political climate had become incredibly unstable, and combined with widespread persecution of Jewish people in his homeland, he viewed England as an ideal country to raise and provide for his family.

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In 1929, two years after my father went to England, my mother and infant sister joined him and the family took up permanent residence in South London. I was born in England 3 years later.

Sometime around 1931/2 the refractory project that brought him to England came to an end and he returned to his expertise in Intellectual Property, finding work as technical translator for patent offices in London.

His multilingual abilities (he spoke 9 languages by the end of his life) allowed him to build an embryo practice from an office in Chancery Lane, the home of the Patent Agents profession.

A couple of years later, whilst on holiday in Devon he was introduced to the sport of darts, which to him was a strange and unknown pastime. He became interested enough that upon his return to London he began to play darts with a neighbour in the hall of our home, even hanging a dartboard on the back of the front door to indulge in his new favourite game.

However, he was not satisfied with the equipment available at the time and, being the inventive type, he set about to design 'a better dart'. The problem, he believed was the primitive design of the darts, particularly when you consider that the entire game is based on precision.

At the time, there were two types of darts available, the first of which was known as a French Dart, due to the country of origin. The body of the dart was made entirely of wood with a band made of lead to give it weight. The dart had a metal point inserted at one end and three or four turkey feathers stuck on at the other end to serve as flights.

The alternative to the wooden dart was a dart with a brass barrel, fitted with a 7.5mm diameter piece of cane. The cane had a cross slotted in its end into which a folded paper flight was inserted. The cane was unprotected at its end, which led to a lot of 'Robin Hooding', whereby a player would throw a dart into the cane of another dart already in the board making the dart 'no score' as it was not in the board. In addition, often the paper flight would fall out as the dart was thrown and the dart would fall to the floor and also becoming a 'no score'.

The 'better dart' my father created was made of metal, a brass barrel chromium plated and an aluminium slotted shaft to receive a vulcanised fibre flight. The shaft had a protective streamlined cap screwed on its end to prevent the flight falling out in play. The whole dart was silver with a bright red flight. Due to his work in the Intellectual Property business, he quickly drafted and applied for a patent for his invention.

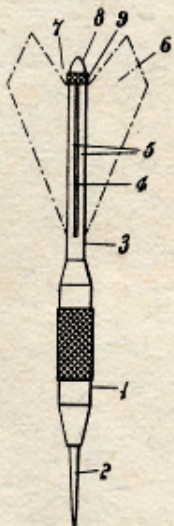


Fig. 1.



## PATENT SPECIFICATION

Application Date: Nov. 4, 1937. No. 30259/37.

Complete Specification Left: Jan. 28, 1938.

Complete Specification Accepted: May 3, 1938.

## PROVISIONAL SPECIFICATION

Improvements in or relating to Darts



484,292

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The application date of the patent was 4th November 1937 and it has been convenient for us to take that as the date the business was founded.

However, my father did not have any manufacturing facilities so he arranged for a contract engineering firm to manufacture his dart. He also arranged for a firm to make boxes and another to make the dart flights, both of which he designed. He then sent the boxes and flights to the engineering firm who assembled the finished product and delivered it to his office in Chancery Lane.

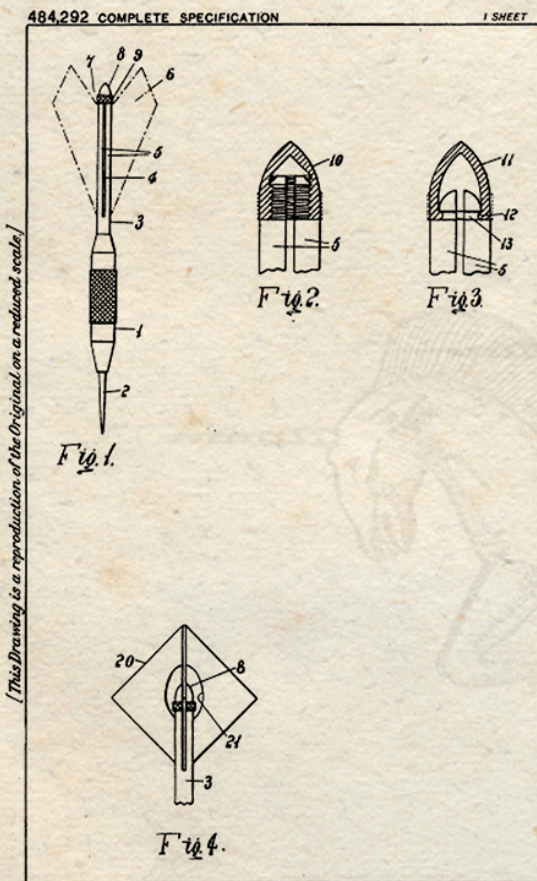
With the manufacturing sorted, he needed a name which combined the look of the dart and the way in which, when thrown, it flew through the air like a missile to the dartboard.

He hit upon 'Silver Comet' for a name and, because he was in the Intellectual Property business, sought to register the name as a Trademark. Unfortunately, he discovered that it was already registered and owned by John Wisden & Co Limited.

Frank contacted Wisden, who asked what he wished to use 'Silver Comet' for. Upon discovering that my father wanted it for the name of his new dart, Wisden & Co decided that it did not conflict with its original use for the name on a tennis racket.

Having inspected the product, Wisden enquired how Frank intended to bring the Silver Comet to market and immediately offered to act as distributor as Wisden already had distribution facilities and a sales team calling on sports shops.

Frank accepted the offer and a sole distribution agreement was put in place. He sold a set to Wisden for one shilling (5p) Wisden charged its customers one shilling and sixpence (7.5p) and the shop retailed the set for two shillings and six pence (12.5p). Three darts could, at the time, be purchased for sixpence (2.5p).



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## PROVISIONAL SPECIFICATION

### Improvements in or relating to Darts

I, FRANK LOWY, a British subject, of 27, Chancery Lane, London, W.O.2, do hereby declare the nature of this invention to be as follows:—

This invention relates to darts of the kind wherein the tail end of the dart or of a separate flight holder connected to or mounted on the dart is provided with a plurality of prongs which may be formed by separate elements or a single element which is axially split or slotted over part of its length, the flight being mounted between said prongs.

According to the invention a dart of the kind set forth is provided with a clamping element adapted to be mounted on or near the tail end of the prongs of the dart or flight holder, whereby the entire portion of the flight engaged between the prongs is firmly gripped therebetween.

The invention embraces a dart of the kind set forth, wherein the flight is formed, recessed or apertured to clear the tail end portion of the prongs of the dart or flight holder, means adapted to be mounted on or near the tail end of said prongs being provided for compressing together said prongs and thereby causing the prongs firmly to grip the whole of the portion of the flight engaged therebetween.

The flight may be shaped or constructed in any suitable manner, but however the flight may be made the prongs project tailwards beyond the portion of the flight engaged between them and clamping means are mounted on said projecting portion of the prongs to press them together.

For example, where the flight comprises two pairs of wings, one pair being disposed at right angles to the other in well known manner, each pair of wings may be substantially of triangular, heart or butterfly shape, the peripheral portion of the pair of wings near the tail end of the prongs being fashioned in any suitable manner to clear said tail end of the prongs. Or, where it is desired to employ a conventional type of flight folded in well known manner of a square blank so that each pair of flight wings

represents a square one diagonal of which substantially coincides with the axis of the dart when the flight is mounted in position, the blank may be suitably apertured, so that when folded and mounted the flight shall clear the tail end of the prongs by virtue of the apertures. A suitable way of aperturing the blank is to provide congruent apertures at equal distances apart from the centre of the square blank symmetrically bisected by the diagonals. However, the flight may be formed in any suitable manner other than herein described by way of example.

The clamping means for compressing together the tail end of the prongs may comprise a cap or thimble, which may have a cylindrical or tapered plain or tapped bore and is adapted to be mounted on the correspondingly formed end of the prongs. The prongs may be provided with an annular groove near their end and the cap or thimble may be provided with a corresponding inner annular bead adapted to engage in the groove of the prongs when placed in position.

Preferably, the prongs are springy and preferably also the cap, where such is provided, is so constructed that when mounted in position its outer surface shall form the continuation of the surface of the prongs, the cap tapering to a point, so that the cap shall form a "streamlined" tail piece for the dart.

The invention also embraces a dart made entirely of brass with the exception of the point and the flight, this having the advantage that comparatively thin springy prongs may easily be formed. In this case the main body of the dart may be turned of a comparatively thick brass rod and a tail portion forming the flight holder may be turned of a comparatively thick brass rod which is screwed into the main body at one end and is slotted at the other end to receive the flight. The slotted end is preferably reduced in diameter over a short distance, the reduced portion receiving a clamping cap as described. However, the flight holder may also be made of aluminium or other light

[Price 1/-]

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And so the Silver Comet dart came into being. It was an immediate success and substantial sales followed.

However, despite many customers finding it the right weight for them, some found it too heavy and others too light. Frank decided that the solution was to call the original dart 'Medium' and to add 'Light' and 'Heavy' versions to his range.

Despite the success of the Silver Comet, in late 1938 Wisden & Co got into financial difficulties and a Receiver was appointed meaning the distribution agreement with Wisden came to an end.

My father decided to take on a former Wisden salesman who lost his job when Wisden went under and they began selling direct to the retail sports trade under the business name 'Frank Lowy'.



The original box for the Silver Comet bore the Royal Coat of Arms as Wisden & Co held the Royal Warrant for the supply of sports equipment to King George V.

When the Wisden agreement ended my father was clearly not entitled to continue displaying the Royal Coat of Arms, but he felt that the box needed a symbol or trademark to balance and provide continuity to the box design.

Gazing at the Royal Coat of Arms, my father's eyes arrived on the Unicorn, with its customary single horn. In his eyes, the horn symbolically suggested the point of a dart barrel.

He commissioned an artist to sketch several Unicorns and took the features from a number of the sketches for the final design. From that moment, he decided to adopt Unicorn as a trademark.

Stanley R Lowy 2018

