

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

DOINKER

Doinker founder Bill Leven took a hard look at his company during the pandemic shutdown. After an 8-month halt in production, rumors of the legendary company's demise are unfounded.



BY ALAN CLEMONS

Doinker burst onto the archery scene about 30 years ago after founder Bill Leven created stabilizers for some friends and an Olympic shooter. Things took off immediately and Doinker became one of the best-known companies in the archery industry.

When the pandemic hit, and California state officials imposed closures and lockdowns, Leven sent a letter saying Doinker was suspending operations. Approximately 8 months later the company resumed operations. Within

the industry, Doinker had disappeared amid all the confusion and rumors going on with various businesses. Now, Leven is back with new ideas, fewer products and a gung-ho enthusiasm.

“Doinker stopped making stabilizers for about 8 months or so, and I sent out a letter to dealers saying that,” Leven explained. “In hindsight, I shouldn’t have sent out the letter like that, and it’s taken us a while to get back in the running. With the changes we’re doing, going to one size and cutting the extraneous items, it has

▲ Founder Bill Leven with the EXO Doinker.

given Doinker a little different look.

“We’re as strong as ever, and have been in the same building for the last 8 or so years. We’re here. My goal is to make our core product better than ever. We’re not going for the fancy stuff like we used to do, but we’re very solid. I’m very enthusiastic about the direction we’re going, and what we’re doing.”

Leven spoke with *Archery Business* for this month’s “In the Spotlight” column. Here is a lightly edited Q&A about Doinker, its past and what’s going on now.

AB: It’s good to talk with you, and I appreciate your time. Doinker has been around for quite a while. Tell us a little about how you got started.

BL: We're here in southern California where I started the business in 1992. In the '90s I started shooting archery again after years of not shooting. I went to a shop called Arrowsmith West in the Simi Valley area. It was owned by parents of Justin Huish, who won double gold medals in the 1996 Olympics.

I worked for Entrepreneur magazine and that wasn't my cup of tea, so I was looking for something new in my life. I started shooting archery and contemplating what I was going to do with my life. I didn't like the feeling of the bow and stabilizers. I started watching the bows, and the action and the limbs, in relationship with the stabilizers. They bounced in the same movement or frequency, and I wondered if it would help if you detached the weight and let the weight act independently of the bow. I made a little cap, went down to an industrial hardware store in Burbank, and found some rubber pieces. I figured how to put it on the end of the stabilizer, and it happened to fit the weights I was using. Of course, the weights moved independently of the stabilizer itself. I thought it would work. I had to shoot it to figure it out. So, I'm standing on my bed in my bedroom shooting out the door into an archery bag in the front room!



▲ Doinker Mounts

AB: Whatever works, right?

BL: I was telling myself that needed to go back to school, do something else, all these hairbrained ideas. But I shot it and it was immediate, the realization that something was changed for the better. I took it off and shot, and it was (bad) like before. I put the stabilizer back on and it was noticeably better. I made some more of them, covered them with tape, and put them on the bows of some of the shooters at Arrowsmith. They couldn't see it but they could feel the difference, which is what I wanted find out.

From there I worked on improvements, met with an attorney, and tried to come up with a name. I gave some to the kids who went to the



▲ Doinker Side-Kick Side Bars

Olympic team trials, and they said everyone wanted one. They also told me they had a name for me: Doinker. I couldn't believe it. That wasn't even a word! I asked how they came up with that, and they said when they put them on a bow it just goes "doink."

I got with Justin's mom to figure out how to spell it, and met the next day with patent attorney. He asked about the name. When I told him Doinker, he just about fell off his seat laughing. But he said it was the perfect name because it's not a word. He said if it becomes big it would be like Kleenex.

We had a recognizable name, and a successful shock absorbing device. The rest is history.

AB: So you're growing in the area and industry, and then Justin wins at the 1996 Olympics. What happened next?

BL: I came out with a stabilizer line in 1996 or sometime around there, maybe later. I'm doing this out of my garage, a small business just like other companies. I think Bow & Arrow magazine was doing a story on stabilizers, so I gave them some of mine. They gave it a "best of show" and said it was the best they had ever shot. I couldn't keep up with production, had to hire people, and it went from there. Luckily, we have a lot of very, very dear friends in the industry. Our industry is strong and we compete against each other, but we also help each other and

look out for each other. That's as it should be. We've been in business for more than 30 years. Our company has undergone lot of changes, as usual. Bow technology has undergone lots of changes, with parallel limb bows and many other improvements. It's up to us as a stabilizer manufacturer to keep up with the bow tech.

as is everything in the world. I decided we'll have one size – under a half-inch – and we'll offer the same stiffness ranges in that size but with a different modulus of carbon used in them.

AB: You said “can't do everything for every single person.” What do you mean by that?



AB: How tough is that, keeping up with the changing technology?

BL: You must have a feel for it. You have to read the trade mags, talk with people in the industry, get a feel for what's going on, and then decide which way the company has to go. As an example, say five years ago, we made a line called the Avancee that had different thicknesses and stiffness. During the shutdown I'm analyzing everything, really, in regard to the processes, materials, time to manufacture, shipping, the works. I reassessed everything we did and how we did it, and ultimately . . . you can't do everything for every single person.

We had to come up with one size. We already had started making stabilizers with small diameters. Carbon technology is getting better but is also more expensive,

BL: We have a Swiss tool to make our caps and parts, but we spent so much of our time changing things for our different size stabilizers. It was thousands and thousands of dollars for one cap and one size, which was money down the drain. We had to get away from that and be more efficient with our time. I took a hard look at things we made that people like, but maybe there's another company that needs to start up and make those little things. For us it was too time consuming and wasn't what got us to the dance.

AB: How as your staff handled all this change?

BL: I'm incredibly thankful for our staff. I have a core of people any company would die for. No one person is more important than someone else. We all work



▲ Doinker A-Bombs ready for packaging.

together as a team. We have meetings to discuss new items, what's going on, what they've heard, what's going on in the industry and how we're all doing. We all talk about all kinds of things, and we didn't really do that in years past, say the last eight years or so.

I made a lot of changes and cut down the staff. I thought we were top heavy, and didn't like the way . . . I just wanted to change the direction we were headed. I wanted to get back to what got us to the dance. I wanted to make the very best stabilizers out there.

AB: What kind of response have you received? Y'all were “dead” and, surprise — you're back!

BL: (laughing) It's been very good, and we've heard from a lot of old friends in the industry and new friends, too. We just got through with the Vegas show a few months ago, and they were like “Oh, you're still in business!” I was able to renew old friendships, and they were pleased to see we were making products again.

AB: What's it like being written off as dead, and letting everyone know the rumors of your demise were not true?

BL: It's one of those things where you go, I'm still here but things happened. The way things were, I can see where people wrote us off as dead. And then the Covid situation was a big, big deal for us. For eight months we didn't ship anything. We had no backlog of items. There were other issues we had to deal with, too. All that time, it was me pretty much by myself, early on, just regrouping and getting things back together.

I'm pretty stubborn. I may not be the smartest guy in the world, but I will be extremely persistent, and in the end I will come out on top. I really, really believe in that. One thing that is so important, along with that, is realizing who you are and realizing everyone in your workforce has an



▲ Doinker Champion Stabilizers ready for order..

opinion. Just because you're the boss doesn't make you right. Their opinions and thoughts may be better than yours.

There's an old quote, I know President Reagan was fond of it,

about there being no limit to what we can do or where we can go as long as you don't mind who gets the credit. You're not on an ego trip saying, "Look what I did." You're on a trip where you say, "Look what our company did." It's not about you.

AB: I'm a dealer. Give me the elevator pitch: Why I should put Doinker products in my shop.

BL: Because they work. It's a product that is made extremely well. It works. It's guaranteed for the life of the owner, we have the utmost faith that our products will hold up. We think they'll hold up for your lifetime. As far as they function and what they do, I'll put them up against anybody's stabilizers. We really pride ourselves in making the very best out there.

A dealer comes up and asks why I should get Doinker because I have this one stabilizer that is performing well. I'd tell him or her that I'm not going to knock someone else's product. I'm sure it's performing well for you. But I'd say, take our product to the range and try it, and compare, and they tell us if you can feel the difference. Some will, some will stay with what they have. But we believe in our products, and would only ask for a fair comparison.

AB: It's been a pleasure talking with you about Doinker. Thanks very much for your time.

BL: Thank you for the opportunity to tell the folks in the archery world about myself and the company. It's been 30 years. We're back, and we'll be here. 