

IP – 20 YEARS



ARS

UNDERGROUND



BY WILLIAM LLEWELLYN

Last issue we brought you an interview with one of the country's most prolific (former) steroid counterfeiters. The article stirred up perhaps the most feedback we've had to date, telling us quite clearly that our readers are interested in the goings-on of the nitty-gritty steroid underworld. In an effort to make edgy pieces like this a tradition, we've got an interview this month that is sure to get your attention. It is with the owners of the longest running underground steroid-manufacturing ring in the world. Most often identified by the initials "IP", International Pharmaceuticals has been around for over 20 years, and is as old school as it gets. This company operates from an undisclosed country in Europe and first started producing steroids for the athletic community way back in the 1980's, a time when underground labs were few and far between. Today, they continue to succeed in an ever-competitive underground industry, standing out with a reputation for quality that they have earned over their

many years of operation.

To many people, the IP operation is an icon of bodybuilding counterculture – the ultimate snubbing of governmental rules and regulations that would limit steroid supply and make criminals out of users. For many steroid opponents, however, they represent the ultimate affront to law enforcement – a criminal enterprise that has been profiting from the manufacture of illegal drugs without interruption for over two decades. Whatever you may personally feel about their business, I'm sure you will be interested in what they have to say. In what represents an extremely rare (perhaps unprecedented) opportunity, William Llewellyn was able to sit down with the principles of this underground operation in early April 2006, at a secret location in central Florida. He would get the scoop on what they are up to these days, and how it is they have managed to stay in business for so long. This interview is what followed.



Q: Let's go back to the beginning. What inspired International Pharmaceuticals? Why did you guys first open?

A: The Company began because we saw there was a big demand for quality steroids in Europe, especially at good prices. Back then things were very different than they are now. There were much fewer products on the European black market. We mainly saw steroids from big pharmaceutical companies in Europe. These drugs were expensive, and always came in small 1ml or 2ml ampules or blister packs with 20 or 30 tabs. We wanted to

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bring higher volumes to the black market. We brought out 10ml vials and 100 tablet pill bottles, and made our products much more cost effective than what was being sold at the time. There was little regulation, and even less competition before we started. It seemed like an easy decision.

Q: We've heard rumors that IP is under new ownership. Are you just new guys taking over an old company?

A: The rumors are not true, just rumors. We represent the original

ownership of IP. I don't want to go into too many specific partnership details, but can tell you that one of the two men sitting with you started the company. One of us is a partner, who later came in to further expand the company. We have both been here a very long time now, and this company has had an original owner for over 20 years.

Q: What about "IP Czechoslovakia"? I remember there were a lot of IP products floating around some years back that were supposedly originating in the Czech Republic. Was that legit, or counterfeit?

A: That was a legitimate operation. In 1995 we partnered with a Czech distributor, who legally sold our products in that country. Everything was official, so at that time we were technically no longer an "underground" company. But this partnership ended three years later, in 1998. Since then we've seen many counterfeits of the old Czech products. Needless to say, any IP labeled as Czech today is fake.

Q: You run the oldest underground manufacturing company in the world. How does an underground company stay in business for 20 years?

A: By focusing on quality. We have always cared greatly for our clients, and the products they use. We do not purposely under-dose any product, and have a policy of adding 10% extra steroid to our injectables and 5% extra to our orals. If you test them at a lab, most often they will come back slightly overdosed. We also work with a good product designer, and try to take as much good advice from the younger bodybuilders as we can. We constantly ask ourselves, "What are the young guys using?", "What do they want to see us produce next?" We think about the customer first, and I believe it has done a lot for us.

Q: I've seen many excellent tests on your line. I have paid to run

one or two of the tests myself. Do you believe your products, every lot, have always been excellent? I guess what I am asking is: have there ever been any mistakes?

A: First, know that we have our products manufactured in a pharmaceutical house, and both IP and this contractor take quality control seriously. But I won't lie and tell you we have never made any mistakes. We have made mistakes, but we care, and are quick to correct them when we do. We are always testing our products to make sure they are up to spec. Plus, not all mistakes are bad mistakes.

Q: Not all mistakes are bad mistakes? Can you elaborate?

A: Yes, this is a funny story. One time we received shipment of a 5,000 bottle Deca run. Our inventory was short, and trusting the consistency of our producing lab, we released the product to consumers before our own tests came back. When our testing was done, it showed that there was no steroid in the vial. This was a complete shock! But soon, people using the product started reporting excellent results. They were noticing great strength gains, but with little mass increases. The product was not acting like Deca, but was definitely acting like some type of steroid. We sent these vials to labs all over the world, even to Beirut, Lebanon. No steroid, no steroid, no steroid, they kept coming back. After a while, we found out that the raw material supplied was an accidental variant of nandrolone, made by a manufacturing fault, and structurally unique. This particular product soon sold out because it was highly valued among European competitive athletes as an undetectable designer steroid. It helped many drug-tested competitors use steroids even on the day of testing, with no failures ever. Once the 5,000 bottles were gone, however, we could not reproduce the product again. People were very upset when it disappeared.

Q: How much has the market changed in 20 years? What has happened with the prices?



A: Twenty years ago, prices for steroids were much higher in Europe. The high prices that you pay for steroids in the U.S. today are what we used to pay in Europe 20 years ago. Over the years we have seen a steady decline in the price of steroids. The opening of the Eastern Bloc countries has had a huge impact, bringing very cheap steroids into the market. The supply has steadily risen, making things much more competitive. Also, the

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adoption of the Euro has had a slightly negative impact in certain countries and their income. In some places people have less money than they used to for discretionary spending. We have to remain cost competitive in this market.

Q: Do you mind if I ask what kind of prices your products sell for? Wholesale? Retail?

A: The end consumer will probably pay about \$70USD for a 10ml vial of one of our injectables in Europe. Maybe you will find some rare guys who paid \$100 or more, perhaps from a dealer taking advantage of them, but generally \$70USD or so is the fair going price. We sell through distributors, and in bulk we get about \$38 to \$40USD for one of these vials.

Q: Has the Internet impacted your market much?

A: It has definitely changed the way products are distributed. Before the Internet, each buyer maybe had 2 or 3 contacts to get steroids from in their gym. Small to mid-level gym dealers were running most of the market. With the Internet, everything changed. The buyers now sit on the computer and just shop for steroids. They have access to hundreds of suppliers at the touch of a button. Our products are sold more through shops and

large online dealers today than the old small wholesale buyers that used to distribute them. Our typical customer has changed. That has been the biggest impact.

Q: What about Law Enforcement? Have you ever had any problems? Do you worry about it much?

A: We know there are risks with what we do, but it is not as bad as dealing in narcotics. Law Enforcement in Europe is generally not interested in anabolic steroids. We've been open for 20 years, and have had a few small experiences with law enforcement in our time, as you could expect from being in business so long. But it was never anything very serious. We're still here, and don't plan on leaving the business soon.

Q: Here in the U.S., laws make anabolic steroids essentially the same as narcotics in the eyes of the law. Penalties are very serious for their sale. Do you worry about U.S. influence changing European policy? I know the U.S. seems to have some of Italy's ear these days when it comes to steroids.

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A: (I am given two answers to this question, as the partners are not in full agreement). Partner A: I think the day may come. Political pressures and misunderstandings about these drugs may one day cause the laws to get much harsher. I worry it may happen. Partner B: I don't think most European countries will be too quick to do this. Where we live, our government tends to be very resistant to control of the European Union. I don't think it will be easy to drastically criminalize steroids here. There should be resistance. Italy is Italy. They have the harshest laws in Europe, period. Business laws, speeding laws, everything can be much tougher there. But they still have a strong market for steroids, and I doubt it will disappear soon. I do not think Europe will turn into the crazy USA when it comes to steroids.

Q: How is business for you?

A: In Europe we are very strong. We have been around for a very long time and people know our products. They know they can trust our quality. But there is always room to grow. We do not have distributors in the U.S. at this time, for example, and that is a market we would like to support also.

Q: What are your thoughts on the major proliferation of underground labs these days, especially all the small "basement" operations?

A: We don't worry much about underground competition. We only worry about our company, our products, and our customers. Small underground operations like these will startup up and fall down, startup up and fall down. What we do is what is important to us, not what others do.

Q: Have you made any significant changes to your line recently?

A: We have introduced several new products lately, including 10mg oxandrolone tablets, a new methenolone enanthate (Primobolan Depot), Halotestin tablets, and a drostanolone injectable. We are constantly looking for ways to better our line. Plus, we have recently changed the oil we use in our injectable products. We've found that there are often big problems with inconsistency and purity with the natural oils traditionally used for injectables. We wanted to address "quality of carrier" issues, and we did just that. We have now switched to a more modern synthetic oil blend (it contains 20% sesame oil), which makes our injectables even more comfortable to use than before. There is practically no pain, and the oil passes very smoothly through the needle. It was a big improvement we believe.

Q: How about counterfeiting? What do you do to deter duplication from unscrupulous counterfeit manufactures looking to profit off your good name in the market?

A: We at IP have always taken counterfeiting seriously. We also have earned much good will, which makes us a target for counterfeiters. For a long time we have had some unique features, which makes duplication a little more tricky than some other lines. For one, our 10ml vials are of a very unique shape. They are tall and thin. It is very difficult to find vials like these; so many IP fakes will be found with the more common stockier vials. Also, the information printed on these vials is baked into the glass, not silk-screened on. The ink is very hard to remove, a result of a process that requires high temperature heating in ovens. You will usually find this type of burning-in of ink with large pharmaceutical companies, not underground producers. We are in the process of taking this protection one step further as well, and soon will have implemented hologram stickers. We have always tried to make duplication less than easy for the counterfeiters, and will continue to do so in the future.

Q: So what does the future hold for IP?

A: We hope for many more happy customers and a long life of operation. Maybe we will be here for 20 more years. We're always looking to the future with optimism. In fact, we'd love to hear what your American readers would like to see from us in the future. Please pass the word that our ears are open.

Editor's Note: If you'd like to chime in with your own opinions about what IP should produce next, please visit our forums at www.bodyofscience.com. Representatives from IP will be checking the feedback.