

A Picky Old Codger Likes Dickinson

BY ROBERT MATTHEWS

I know you'd never guess, but I get asked a lot of questions! I figure it just comes with the territory. Everything from where to go, to forcing cones and barrel lengths. I don't mind a bit, because I'm basically a talkative cuss who really likes shotguns. I dearly love to hunt birds, too. And, if given the slightest opportunity, I'll spin a yarn or two in the process. Far and away, the most common question that I get, begins something like this:

"I'm just a workin' guy, and I don't have a lot of money, but I've handled a few side-by-sides. I really like the way they swing, the way they feel in the hands and I'd really like to have something that feels like that and looks pretty, too. The problem is, they're all so expensive! And God help, if your heart is set on a small-bore! It wouldn't have to be fancy. I just want something that's reliable to hunt with and reasonably well made. Where can I get something like that—without spending a bunch of money?"

At that point, I usually stammer a little bit, shift from right foot to left, and back again. Then I look 'em square in the eye and give the best answer I can, short of directing them to the unicorn department.

It usually involves directing them to be patient, and very, very careful. Of course it is possible to find what they're looking for in the used gun market. Perhaps a good "closet queen" of an American gun.

I've also had a modicum of luck with the "lesser lights" of the English trade. Mostly good Birmingham boxlocks, but occasionally a decent sidelock turns up.

Yep, there's some risk involved, but if you really want something, it's sometimes worth the wait and worth the gamble. Besides, if you're an unrepentant old gun trader like me, the hunt can be half the fun!

The "new" market, however, is just grim. No other way to say it! Good doubles are expensive to make, what with the cost of good materials and skilled labor. Worse yet, it appears that the art of the double is almost lost on gun designers these days. It seems to me that many of the newer "inexpensive" doubles were designed by "bean counters" rather than shooters. Most of 'em are "esthetically challenged" and don't handle any better





In addition to the double trigger model Matthew's tried, Dickinson carries single trigger guns.

than they look! Or, in the alternative, they're just not very well made.

Once upon a time, I had occasion to test an imported double that arrived unsolicited on my doorstep. When the rep wanted to know why I wasn't particularly fond of the gun, I responded that in my humble opinion, a gun that cost upwards of five grand shouldn't rattle when shaken! Shame on me, maybe, but it was "God's Own Truth!" And still is.

If that seems like bad news, relax. I've got some good news for you. A few months back, I got an e-mail from a reader about Dickinson arms. The substance of the ensuing conversation was that I really should put aside my prejudices and take a hard look at the Turkish guns that the company is importing.

"Turkish!!!!!!????? You gotta be kiddin' me!"

At the time, I just let the matter pass. But he really wasn't kidding. Then I got another e-mail from another reader. And a call. Then another, until I finally broke down and called the folks at Dickinson Arms.

"I'm old, stubborn and opinionated," I proclaimed. "If you've got something good, show me!"

The guys at Dickinson accepted the challenge and arranged to send me one of their "Plantation" models to test. I specified a little 28-gauge with a straight grip and a small, "almost-splinter" forend. Double triggers, ejectors, thirty-inch barrels and a decent piece of wood, too! I figured that

I might as well swing for the fence!

It came a couple of weeks later and I immediately gave it the "once over." Then I gave it the "twice over," and the "thrice over." Then I gave it a HARD, HARD LOOK. Took it apart. Took it to the pattern board. Took it to the range.

Here's what I found. The Plantation appears to be quite well made. It has a trigger plate action, dressed-up with sideplates. All the wood-to-metal and metal-to-metal joints are extremely precise. The company tells me that the component parts are CNC-made to extremely tight tolerances, and I believe it. Everything works as it should, and the selective ejectors are strong and well-timed. As near as I can tell, all the materials, from the



barrels to the nicely figured Turkish walnut stock, appear to be first rate.

Barrel regulation, which is often the Achilles heel of side-by-side doubles, is perfect. That's awfully important, because if the barrels don't print to the same point of aim, the gun is damn-near worthless. And I've seen six-figure "London Bests" that couldn't match the Plantation in that regard.

The little gun is light, slender and well-balanced. It looks like it was designed by someone who really knows side-bys. It swings about as well as any gun in recent memory. It's very quick and tracks crossing clays a lot better than it should at 5 3/4 pounds. Hitting is aided by a nice matte rib that helps the eye to subconsciously keep up with where it's pointed. The Plantation's not a fancy gun, but it has a beautiful, swan-like grace to it, and attractive, genuine bone charcoal case-hardening on the action and side plates!

I COULD SAY A LOT MORE ABOUT THE details of the little gun (and the company), but I'll save it 'til I've put a few hundred miles on it and a few thousand rounds through it. I plan to do that this fall, and I'll know a lot more by the time Christmas rolls around. In the meantime, I'm going to make living hard for the local quail, grouse, dove and woodcock population.

Dickinson makes several other models, including a nice round-action trigger plate gun and a "sho-nuff" seven-pin sidelock side-by-side, built on the legendary Holland & Holland pattern. They'll even custom-build your preferred stock dimensions into your gun, if you'd like. The company also makes an over/under and a couple of repeaters—all reasonably priced. No doubt I'll get around to checking them out, too, but for the time being, I've got my work cut out for me.

I'll go ahead and tell you this, right now. The gun looks like it should. It handles like it should and works like it should. That's a lot to say for a double that barely costs more than a good semi-auto!

Personally, I'd gladly pick this gun to hunt with, without hesitation. Any day of the week, no kidding! And I'm about the pickiest old codger you'll ever see when it comes to side-by-side shotguns! ■

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Safety Warning and Recall Notice for Henry Single Shot Rifles and Shotguns



Henry Repeating Arms Company has recently discovered a potential safety issue wherein, under certain conditions, it is possible that some of these models may discharge without the trigger being pulled if the hammer is partially cocked and released.

All H015 model owners should visit www.HenryUSA.com/recall email recall@henryusa.com, or call 866-200-2354 (M-F, 9AM ET- 5PM ET) to obtain additional information.