

A good time with Gibbs

- a Pedersoli Gibbs muzzleloader, that is!

by Winston Coates



The rifle has a Creedmoor sight and tunnel front-sight.

In 60 years of black powder shooting, mostly in Queensland but in several other states, I don't recall ever enjoying shooting a rifle as much as I do the Pedersoli Gibbs muzzleloader that went on sale a few years ago. Pretty much a dead ringer for the original 1865 target rifle made by English gun manufacturer Sir George Gibbs, it is a true long-range piece good to 1000 yards.

Long-range black powder shooting is a far cry from the round ball in a cloth patch shoots that are so popular at Rendezvous and short-range matches at most SSAA ranges around Australia. My own black powder shooting began in Queensland in the 1950s and then only because black powder, not being imported so soon after the war, suddenly came back on the market because ICI (Australia) began manufacture in Melbourne. It was a quality product put up in half-pound red painted tins and was just cheap enough to allow most of us to purchase. I wonder how many shooters today know of this.

There were no imported replica rifles then, so we scrounged around for original

rifles, of which there were a surprising number in those days. However, some time in the late 1950s, my mate Noel Pascoe and I became the proud owners of the two very first replica muzzleloaders ever imported. These were made in Belgium and were .40-calibre flintlocks on traditional Kentucky lines.

Incidentally, they posed a problem for the then Queensland Police Firearms Branch inasmuch as they had never seen a flintlock and had no idea how to load and fire it. There weren't even cleaning rods long enough for those Kentucky barrels available. The rifles were imported for us by well-known dealer and great bloke George Shaw, whose gunshop was then right in the very heart of Brisbane.

It cannot be denied that Pedersoli Gibbs black powder rifles are stylish, high-quality arms. In my mind, they are instrumental for the great revival of black powder sports shooting. There are others rifles, chiefly those by Parker-Hale of England, but none in the style and class of the Gibbs.

This style, along with the Irish-made Rigby rifles, were the peak of muzzleloading

development. Indeed, in 1872, the New South Wales Government paid for the importation of 12 Rigby rifles to try to give Victoria a thrashing in intercolonial matches! The Rigby rifles were very similar to the Gibbs, but a few years later in manufacture, and were fitted with false muzzles - a feature which I dearly wish Pedersoli would copy.

A recent triumph for the Gibbs was a match at Kilkivan, near Gympie, where the locals put out a five-shot event invitation to see how many could hit an iron pig target at 600 yards. There was only one muzzle-loading rifle in competition, a Gibbs fielded by Graham Salisbury of Mackay, with the remaining eight rifles being black powder breechloaders. Graham hit four of the five targets, and the best the rest could do was two hits!

I'm told that a Quigley Bucket Shoot in Victoria was notable for the fact that the only person to hit the target was using a Gibbs. And that at the most recent World Long Range Muzzle Loading Shoot at Bisley in the United Kingdom, Gibbs rifles were right up there, with some being used by the very successful South African team.

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Winston Coates' Gibbs is a .45-calibre rifle with a one in 18" twist, blue steel octagon barrel.

Technically, my Gibbs is a .45-calibre rifle with a one in 18" twist barrel. Pedersoli moulds throw a .451"-diameter projectile of 520 grains. The most popular powder up here in 'Bananaland' is Swiss 1½, but I've got to say it isn't cheap. The usual load is 90 grains, but shooters may have up to 100 grains for the 1000-yard competition.

The English Higginbottom-Rigby-style 540-grain paper patch bullet is especially favoured in the Gibbs and has set long-range shooting records. This is what Graham used to hit that pig target, which, at 600 yards, looked like a small white mouse.

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My best 100-yard bench group so far is a five-shot one hole just more than minute of angle. This was shot with 85 grains of Swiss 1½ with a vegetable fibre wad and the Pedersoli bullet cast 40:1 and lubed with SPG. These wads, available from the Buffalo Arms Company in the United States, along with SPG lube, are part of the main fodder used here in Queensland by half a dozen Gibbs shooters. Forbes Wholesale in Victoria, which sells Pedersoli Gibbs rifles, has pretty much everything you need, including moulds, dies, spares and so on.

Regarding wads, it is a highly controversial subject among black powder shooters the world over - some like them and some

don't. Pedersoli says they are not necessary, though I personally get better results when I use them, including wads punched from beer coasters and dipped in my own lube of beeswax, castor oil and lard.

The Gibbs uses small percussion caps, so you can save a dollar over the large musket caps. Loading is done through a tube and funnel, and of course, thorough cleaning between shots is mandatory. For me, the routine of clean, load, settle on the range and cap-up with a Pedersoli Gibbs muzzleloading rifle is a leisurely business of nothing but thorough enjoyment. I haven't even fired my black powder breechloaders in ages! ●