



Kodiak Express muzzle-loading rifle.

Modern Classic

The historic big-bore, double rifle of the early 1800s is back. I have gazed upon it, held it in my hands, and fired it. 'It' being a .72 calibre percussion muzzle-loader with graceful side-hammers and a straight English-style stock – and it's beautiful. On the engraved side-plate you will not find a name familiar to the early big game hunters – names like Purdy, Holland, Gibbs, or Lancaster – yet I'd bet that, given the chance, Baker, Oswell or Cummings would have been keen to snap up one of these for his African battery.

The extra slow twist in the heavy barrels keeps a ball on track for a 'long' shot whilst a heavy .72 conical would put down anything that these legendary hunters ever had to face. But this particular double gun is a 'modern' classic... another superb replica from Davide Pedersoli of Brescia, Italy. Sold as the Kodiak Express Rifle it carries engravings of a Kodiak bear and an American bison. Personally, I think the name and the choice of animals is a mistake – they should have chosen Cape buffalo and African elephant, and named the gun 'African Express' or 'Safari'. After all,

By **ROBIN BARKES**

double rifles were used more in Africa than America and it is about time the continent that gave, and still gives, the world, big game hunting was suitably honoured.

Anyway, my story is about four grown-up boys who set out early one morning to test fire this new express rifle. Mike, the proud owner, picked me up first, then Andrew whose family farm we were headed for, and lastly Gavin of Bushbuck Trading – all members of the East Cape black powder brotherhood and all a'ringing to smoke things up. An hour later we were at a well chosen spot in the bush where we could safely shoot without disturbing too much wildlife – a great portion of the farm is a reserve over which elephant, rhino, lion, buffalo and numerous other wild animals roam – just like they did in the days when guns like this were used.

No bunch of broody women clustered around a new born babe could have outdone the oohs and aahs of the boys as Mike

unwrapped this masterpiece in wood and metal. Soon the gun was passed from hand to hand and raised to waiting shoulders with the heavy barrels searching out imaginary charging beasts. Once all the makings were laid out on the tailgate of the truck, the loading procedure in Mike's experienced hands was fast. After snapping a cap to clear each nipple, a carefully measured 90gr of FFg was poured down the first barrel. This was followed by a patched ball driven down by the ramrod which was left in the barrel while the powder measure was again filled for the other tube. Leaving the ramrod in the loaded barrel is a good habit because during a hasty reload it prevents an excited shooter charging one barrel twice – a mistake that could cost the hunter of dangerous game his life. It is usual to charge the left barrel first but fire the right barrel first – if it were to be empty when a bad-tempered buffalo was... well you get the idea.

Once the Kodiak was fully loaded and capped, Mike stepped forward to take the first left and right from his new gun. The target was the killing area of a 'rhino' (half



Above: The author ready to receive the charge from – well, anything.

Right: All the makings laid out and ready to make smoke.



a 44 gallon drum) set up twenty-five paces away. A hush settled on our little group as we watched the burly Irishman lean into the shot... the explosion came with a deep thud. A great cloud of white smoke enveloped the shooter whose stance had changed from that of a graceful quail point to a boxer who had just received a vicious uppercut. Only then did all the eyes swing onto the 'rhino' and a cheer went up when the great holes were seen. "Give it the other barrel, *boet*." Someone shouted and again the mighty gun spewed out smoke and fire, and thunder rolled across the veld.

We were all now lining up for a shot and in no time at all our target had been peppered with inch wide jagged holes. As usual with big guns, its weight absorbed most of the recoil and there was no discomfort whatsoever. I had to sacrifice my red bandana to use as patch material as, after the first few shots, it proved too difficult, if

not impossible, to get a ball wrapped in the circular patches supplied down the fouled barrels. With my thinner bandana patches well covered with Ou Sanna lubricant, the balls were easily seated, although these flimsy patches were totally shredded and hardly recognizable.

Reading patches is important; they can tell you what's happening inside the gun when it is fired. A ragged patch with the centre burnt through is obviously too thin and has not done its intended job; whilst a patch with a blackened, but intact centre, will indicate it has done all that is required.

A loosely patched ball in a double gun can be dislodged – and separated from its powder – by the discharge of the first barrel. A gap between powder and ball is dangerous; you could damage the gun and injure yourself and bystanders. Always check the seating of the charge in the second barrel after firing the first and there is no harm

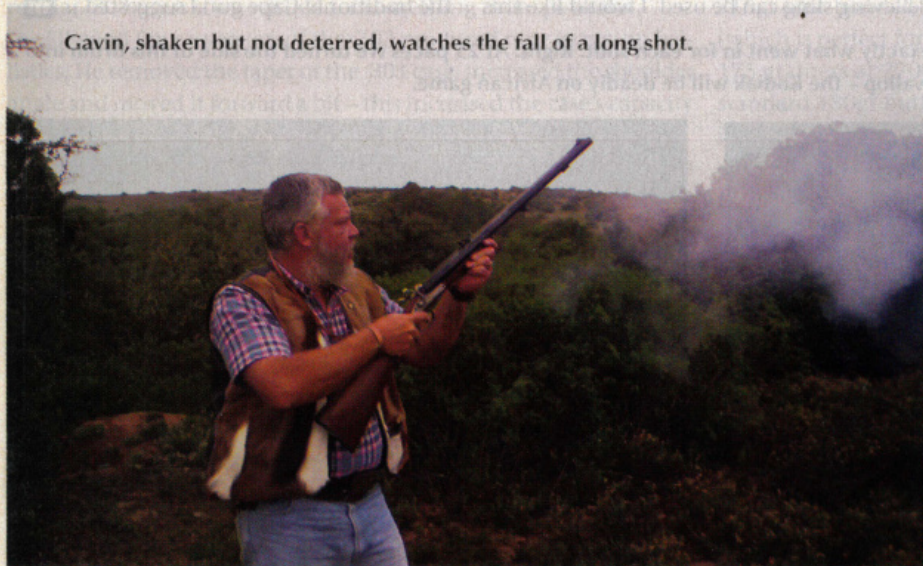
in checking both barrels from time to time if the gun is carried loaded for some time before finding your quarry. Just remember to uncap the piece before thumping around inside a loaded barrel.

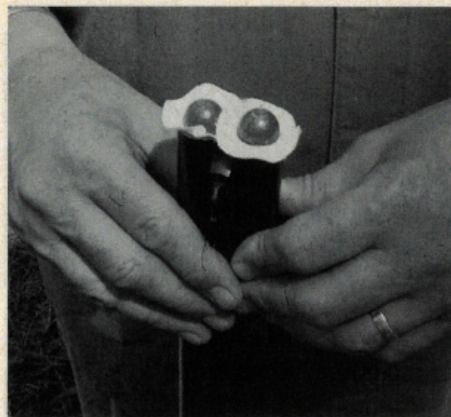
Also, if the patch is too loose the ball will not spin in flight. As a matter of fact, so touchy is a muzzle-loader about its patches, that accuracy will differ if material of various thicknesses and quality is used and this also applies to different lubricants and the amount applied. The thing to remember is that although a tight-fitting patched ball will always deliver the best performance, it must not be so tight that it has to be hammered out of shape in order to seat it. The front of the ball should remain round if any accuracy is desired. This is particularly important with smaller calibres when longer shots are taken at small game.

After we had all bagged a few 'rhino' it was time to load up with the heavy 720gr conical bullets and go for 'elephant'. Unfortunately we immediately found that the driving bands of the big hollow based bullets were a wee bit oversized. (Check before you leave on a real elephant hunt.) The only way to drive them into a fouled barrel was to use a heavy metal ramrod. Not having a way to reduce the diameter of the conicals, we had to revert to using balls. Pity.

The next stage of our test firing was to determine the maximum accurate range of the big gun. This was achieved by shooting at different marks in a deep donga and it did not take much burnt powder to tell us that at 50 to 60 yards a big animal could be hit in the vital area – but beyond that it is best to hold your fire. That's what good hunters did in the old days and that's the way it should

Gavin, shaken but not deterred, watches the fall of a long shot.





Left: The heavy balls await seating. Centre: Fouling made it necessary to use thinner patches – so the author's bandana was sacrificed. Right: The driving bands of the 720gr conical bullet were slightly oversized, which prevented them being seated.

be done now, even though we think we are smarter than the hunter of 150 years ago.

While the boys went on to shoot Gavin's cap and ball revolver and .50 cal Hawken I examined the Kodiak Express rifle more closely. As usual with Pedersoli guns, the metal to wood finish was good and all I would do if I were lucky enough to be its owner, would be to darken the nicely chequered stock. The really heavy barrels are 25½-inches long with the breech area thickened just like an original ball and shot flintlock. Although the makers recommend using only 80 to 90gr of powder, I believe this gun could easily take a more powerful charge; but this would be over-kill at short range on soft skinned game, so why waste powder?

The sighting arrangement is interesting in that each barrel has its own flip-up back sight if the shooter wishes to fine tune it. This double sight system saves the makers the laborious (and costly) task of regulating the barrels to put their bullets as close as possible to each other at a specific range. You can get both barrels to strike the vitals with one back sight, so only accur-

acy fanatics will try to use both back sights in an attempt to get those bullets to shoot through the same hole. They won't, ever, not even with a Holland or Purdy.

The selection of the right bullet is a matter of choice. It is generally accepted that a twist of 1 in 66-inches is just the business for a ball shooting gun. The tapered barrels of the big double have a twist of 1 in 86-inches to their six lands and we proved this worked just fine to hit your hat at 50 yards. A .715 round ball with a .010 patch provides a tight-fitting load and the ball weight of 545gr packs a real wallop. Of course, the heavy conical of 720gr would have even greater energy and penetration, but whether it is as accurate as a ball will have to be determined by further tests. I would also like to try using lopers – twelve AAAs fit comfortably in a 12-bore plastic shot cup and should be deadly on small game at close range. We'll see, come hunting season.

At 10½ pounds the Kodiak is heavy, but sturdy swivels of the best quality are fitted so, in the absence of a gun bearer, a weight-relieving sling can be used. I would like this

Pedersoli to have larger nipples to take top hat musket caps; fiddling around with tiny No 11 caps on such a big gun seems out of place. However, I must admit that the smaller caps squeeze on tighter and there is less chance of them falling off at a crucial moment.

The idea of the Kodiak range of muzzle-loaders is actually not new and was the brain child of the late Colonel Mike Powasnick of Trail Guns Armoury way back in the early 1980s. The guns were produced in calibres of .50, .54, and .58 and called the Kodiak Mk III line – all built by Pedersoli. Then in 1991, the Kodiak Mk IV came out as a .45/70 breech-loader and the first two experimental guns were brought out to Africa by the Colonel and America's top black powder writer, Phil Spangenberg. Today I am lucky enough to own the gun used by Colonel Powasnick on his safari. Now, at last, a true African big-bore double rifle has arrived in the form of the muzzle-loading Kodiak Express Rifle. This is something I suggested years ago in the pages of this very magazine. I wonder if Mr Pedersoli reads *Magnum*? If he does, what about the traditional Cape gun I suggested... **11**

Left: The makers suggest 90gr of FFg and that's exactly what went in for each shot. Right: At 25 paces we turned the side of this drum into a giant cheese grater. The 545gr balls pack a real wallop – the Kodiak will be deadly on African game.

