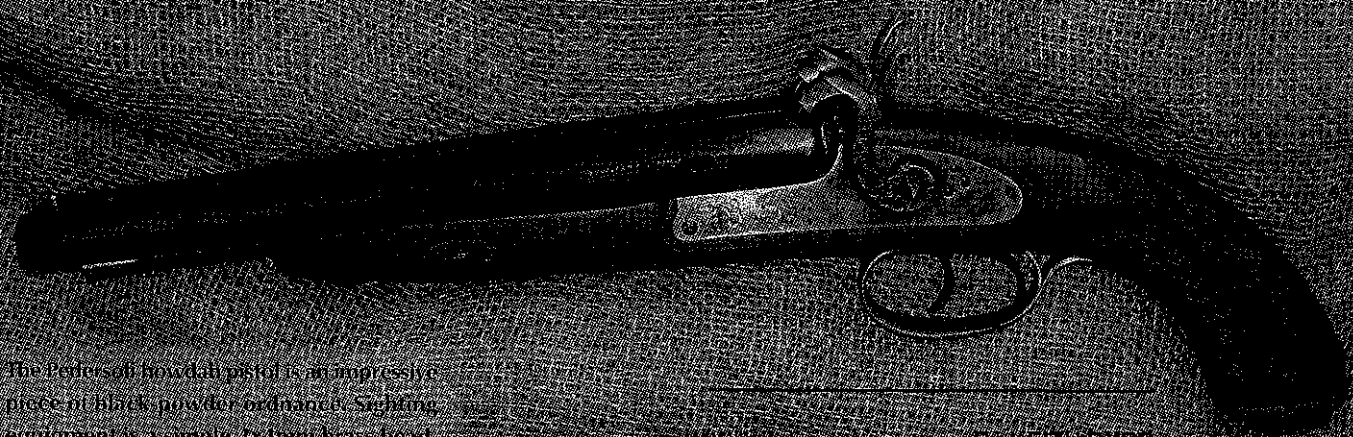


Tiger Taming – the Howdah Pistol



The Pedersoli howdah pistol is an impressive piece of black powder ordnance. Sighting equipment is a simple 4x4mm brass bead, adequate for the planned task, though.

by KEITH DYER

The howdah pistol has a colourful history. A howdah is a seat, often with a canopy, which may be attached to the back of an elephant or camel. Those designed for use on elephant in India could accommodate several people and were used for travel and tiger hunting.

In the days of the Raj this sort of hunting was not without hazards. It was not unknown for tigers to join the occupants of the howdah uninvited, or to at least make a determined effort to do so. And if *Panthera tigris* had been previously winged by a poorly-placed shot, he (or she) was likely to be in a foul mood. Generally regarded as the most ferocious of the cat family, an adult tiger may weigh up to 230kg and reach a length of four metres... and can leap up to a

height of four metres in one bound. Should a wounded tiger reach the occupants of a howdah things could become exciting. And this is where the howdah pistol came into play. It was a powerful close-range weapon of last resort and it is recorded that in instances where it was actually used it gave good value for money.

This double-barrelled, muzzle-loading side-lock action model from Pedersoli is in 50 calibre and can fire either round ball or elongated lead bullets. Each barrel is 9.9 inches long with 12-groove rifling, left-hand twist. Overall length is 465mm, or 18.3 inches, and unloaded weight 2.3kg. Controls are simple in the extreme, being limited to the smooth-faced double triggers and the external hammers. The triggers work in the tradi-

tional manner; rear trigger fires the left-hand barrel, front trigger the right. The rear trigger releases at about 3kg; the front trigger is significantly heavier, breaking at close to 4kg. Each hammer has a half-cock notch and the spurs are neatly chequered to ensure a secure thumb grasp. Up front is a 4x4mm brass bead set into the central rib about 10mm behind the muzzles. There is no rear sight. Mind you, when you consider the intended purpose of this weapon finely adjustable sights were not needed.

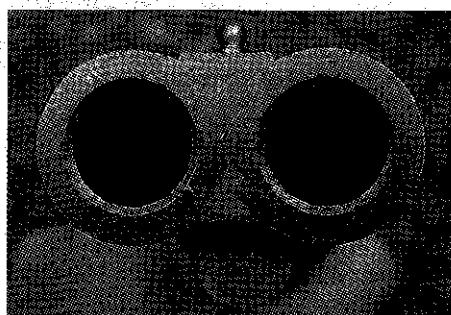
Overall fit and finish is excellent with high quality blueing on the barrels. The hammers, side-plates and trigger guard appear to be case-hardened. The side-plates are nicely engraved, the right plate showing a warthog, the left a leopard – these at the

request for an African

Left: Triggers are smooth faced. Rear trigger fires the left-hand barrel, front trigger the right; all very traditional. **Right:** Hammer spurs are chequered for a secure thumb hold. **Inset:** In this picture one of the hammers is at half-cock position.



Below: A sight to – hopefully – strike fear into the heart of the most savage tiger. With luck, you won't have to shoot.



flavour' by Classic Arms who kindly provided this gun for evaluation. Nestling in the stock beneath the two barrels is a 265mm brass-ended ramrod. The left barrel bears the gun's serial number and the wording Pedersoli, Italy, Black Powder Only, Cal 50 plus Italian proof marks. Both muzzles are neatly crowned. One might perhaps find slight fault with the inletting of the metalwork into the stock, but to be fair this is not a hand-built sporting gun. The stock itself appears to be walnut and has a nice grain. Happily the furniture has not been given a shiny finish. The pistol grip is neatly chequered.

All my previous black powder percussion handgun experience, and I can't claim that to be extensive, has been with cap and ball revolvers. When the time came to actually shoot the howdah pistol I realized that I had absolutely no idea of where to begin with powder charges. Consequently I turned to Christiaan Kruger of Classic Arms. Christiaan is an enthusiast and an active shooter who can usually supply a load off the top of his head. Having shot this gun with black powder and Sannadex he was able to recommend loads using both propellants. He also sent me a quantity of 177gr Hornady Lead Round Balls and some 360gr Bushveld Game Stalker bullets. For the Hornady RB he suggested 50.0gr of FFFg and 15% more for Sannadex, which amounted to 57.5gr. His recommended FFFg charge for the Game Stalker bullet was 40.0gr. With Sannadex an increase of 15% more resulted in a load of 46.0gr.

It is extremely dangerous to use black powder in a hopper-type measure designed for nitro propellants. Smokeless powder is more forgiving than black. If black power granules are crushed within the feeder mechanism, there is a danger of static discharge. You can in fact buy brass hopper chargers specifically for use with black powder. I prepared the charges of Wano FFFg by weighing the first on an RCBS 5-0-5 scale and then tipping it into a very useful Tedd Cash brass powder measure, finally adjusting the central pin until the charge was level with the mouth of the measuring tube. Subsequent charges were ladled straight into the measure until the powder reached the brim and then levelled off with a piece of card. The theory was that all further charges should be of the same weight, and so it proved. This procedure worked equally well with Sannadex, which smells like toffee and looks like curry powder. All

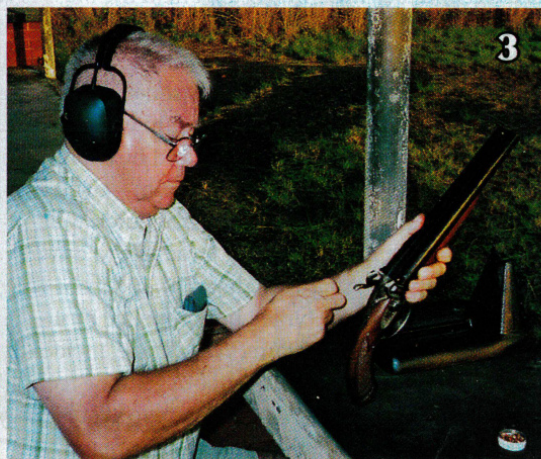


Getting ready for the shoot.

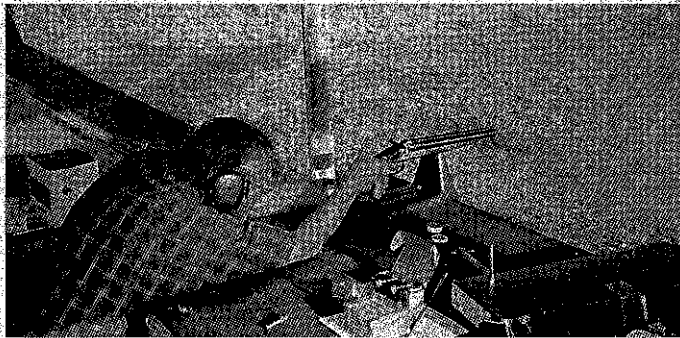
charges, clearly marked, were stored in 20ml clear plastic medicine capsule containers which I have hoarded over the years. CCI No.11 caps were used throughout.

Being set to go, but inexperienced, I called on *Magnum* contributor and black powder fundi Roger Ingle for assistance, who gladly showed me the route to follow. The 177gr round balls were loaded with an Ox-Yoke Originals Wonder Patch, pre-lubricated patches of pure cotton which undoubtedly ease fouling and make loading easier. The 360gr Game Stalkers were hand lubricated prior to seating.

Seating a bullet or ball to the correct depth in a percussion revolver is pretty straightforward; simply position the projectile until it is level with or slightly below the chamber mouth. It's a visual thing and you can hardly go wrong. But in a double-barrelled howdah pistol, it is imperative not to leave an air space for fear of ringing the barrel, or worse. However, you cannot simply pound the ball down on the powder charge... It turns out that 'feel' is all important. When the first round ball was seated correctly, Roger marked the ramrod, hence there was no doubt about future loading. The same procedure was followed with the Game Stalker bullet. It follows that a good ramrod is essential – don't lose it. (In the army of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia from 1740 to 1786, the ramrod was considered so important that in some instances its loss could earn the loser the death penalty.)



1. Loading powder. 2. Ramming home the ball. Be sure that no part of your hand is covering the top of the rod. Should the charge accidentally ignite, you may suffer serious injury. 3. Capping; do this last of all.



First shot – from the bench. Note lack of muzzle rise, indicating a moderate load.



Above: Mr Ingle's answer to tigers in the Durban suburb of Morningside. Right: Final results; hardly minute-of-angle stuff, but life-saving in an emergency.

On account of the primitive sighting arrangement of this howdah replica, target work was set at 10 metres instead of the expected 'real-life' distance of about ten inches. As genuine tigers were in short supply (and beyond *Magnum's* budget for this sort of report) an ersatz substitute in the form of a photostat of a tiger picture was pinned up. I held the brass bead on the cat's nose and, shooting over a rest, opened fire. The triggers, although heavy as mentioned earlier, broke cleaner than expected and the first two shots printed a reasonably satisfying 80mm apart. Unlike all subsequent shots the group was more or less vertical. I then handed over to Roger Ingle and he soon did better, his best effort, with the same load, being 70mm – and off-hand at that.

In fact the Pedersoli performed about as well off-hand as from a rest. Shooting in this manner I was able to drive two 360gr Bushveld Game Stalker bullets ahead of 40.0gr of FFFg into 80mm. Roger, using the same bullet, but propelled by 46.9gr of Sannadex, coaxed two shots into 70mm. This charge, incidentally, was the only one that produced any semblance of genuine recoil. All other loads simply gave a moderate degree of muzzle lift, certainly nothing that would inconvenience an experienced shooter.

However, offhand work introduced a hazard not found when shooting from a rest. On firing, the percussion caps split, which is about par for the course, but the one to port showered my left wrist – now positioned alongside the action – with hot debris, which immediately got my attention. Be aware of this possibility if you intend to fire this, or a similar gun, off-hand.




Roger Ingle at work offhand with top Sannadex load. (The roof panels were missing prior to the shoot!)

All told this pistol is exhilarating to shoot. But because of the restricted sighting equipment don't expect pin-point accuracy. Indeed it was because of this limitation that chronographing of the loads was not attempted. (I've recently made exploded diagrams of too many chronographs.) If you do want to know the muzzle velocity and energy these charges generate in the howdah pistol, all I can answer is 'adequate'.

Muzzle-loading pistols of serious calibre were popular throughout the heyday of the British Empire, particularly the double-barrelled side-by-side, smooth-bored or rifled. The breech-loaders used either the common under-lever locking, or the later top-lever snap-action; to all intents and purposes these pistols were cut down versions of double-barrelled sporting guns. They were chambered for a wide range of cartridges, up to and including the standard 12-gauge, loaded with either round

ball or buckshot. Such handguns were descendants of the muzzle-loading howdah pistol of the type under discussion here. And not only were they used as back-up guns by big game hunters, but also as military weapons. Which was not such a bad idea, bearing in mind the ferocity of some of the Queen's enemies plus the poor stopping-power of the issue 450 Boxer revolver cartridge.

Illustrated in the late Geoffrey Boothroyd's book *The Handgun* is a Damascus-barrelled, side-by-side percussion pistol – probably in 12-gauge – by British gunsmith E Windsor and, although not a direct copy, this Pedersoli could have been inspired by such a gun. One-handed shooting is not really feasible with the Pedersoli howdah; there are, no doubt, those who can do it, but they are few in number. I once shot a British-made howdah pistol chambered for the 577 Snider rifle cartridge and found one-handed shooting quite easy to manage.

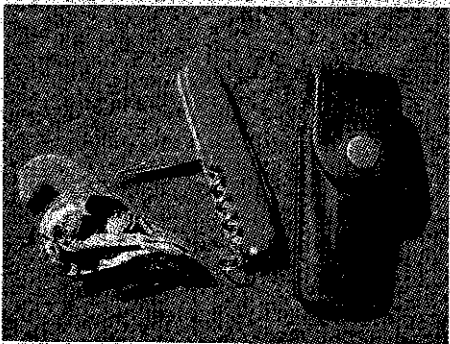
Although the test piece came with two 50-calibre barrels it is also available as a kind of Cape pistol, .50/20 gauge, or as a 20ga double. Prices? The 50/50 retails for R6750, the .50/20 at R6375 and the 20/20 at R5800. Our thanks to Classic Arms for providing the test piece. Contact them on 013-656-2923 for further details and better. 



GALLERY

COUP DE GRÂCE

We all want to kill our birds cleanly and as humanely as possible. If you have been shooting birds for long enough however, you will know that unfortunately, this does not always happen. Despite the fact that you shoot well within range, use the appropriate size shot and choke and practice before the season on the clay pigeon range, birds still occasionally get wounded and your dog presents you with a bird that is still alive. You must dispatch it as quickly and painlessly as possible.



This discomforting subject must be discussed. Over many years of wingshooting I have tried various techniques, from ringing their necks to hitting them on the head with a stick, but all left me rather uncomfortable as to the efficiency of the process. Then, on a recent hunt, PH Dirk Kruger taught me the correct method of administering the *coup de grâce*.

In the case of a right-handed person: the wounded bird is held firmly under the left arm while its head is wrapped over the index finger of the left hand (held in place from behind by the thumb) with the bill clamped between the middle and index fingers (all of the left hand). Gripped firmly in this way the bird cannot move, and the right hand is freed to drive a sharp object in to the bird's brain. This method is quick and efficient and the birds die

instantly with a minimum of blood loss. Observe the bird for a few moments to ensure that it is dead, just in case you missed the small brain. I have found the awl on my trusty old Victorinox folding knife the perfect tool for the job. Carrying the knife in a pouch makes it easier to get out and less likely to get lost. With the corkscrew, it probably makes it the most perfect all-round pocketknife any wing-shooter could wish for. **Kobus de Kock**

PEDERSOLI TO THE FORE

Pedersoli firearms are highly regarded in this country, and for those who have bought such guns, or are about to do so for confirmation of their choice they need look no further than the European Muzzle Loading Championships held in August in Parma, Italy. Shooters using Pedersoli guns achieved some outstanding successes, winning 33 Medals in all: nine Gold, 10 Silver and 10 Bronze plus a noteworthy 11 fourth places. **KD**

JONGSTE LESER ?

Na aanleiding van MP Dreyer se stukkie oor die jongste *Magnum* leser (September 2007) wil ek net sê dat hy heel moontlik nie reg is nie. Ek dink my Lisa (foto) is tans die jongste *Magnum* lesertjie... vretertjie. **Tosca le Roux**



**AWARENESS
& TRAINING
COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE**