



Sharps Lyman 1878 Model.

Lyman/Sharps Commemorative Rifle

Over the years, many gunmakers have commissioned handsome collector's pieces to commemorate historical events, prominent shooting and military personalities, anniversaries and so on – all considered important in the gun world. So it is not surprising that Lyman commissioned Pedersoli of Italy to commemorate the year 1878, this being the year when Sharps and Lyman came together to produce a famous rifle. The replica rifle is a magnificent 1877 model Sharps breech-loading, black powder, long-range target rifle, fitted with replica sights made by Lyman. The original model is thought by many to be the pinnacle piece in the Sharps story. Sadly, the year that followed, while seeing the birth of Lyman, was also the start of the rapid demise of the Sharps Company. Their final 1879 models had Borchardt actions.

Engraved on the side of this replica's beautifully finished action is '1878' and the name 'Lyman'. This should not be confused with the rifle's 1877 model number – 1878 was the year Lyman sights were first fitted to the original rifles. The name Lyman is well-known to handloaders and bullet casters

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as a maker of top quality reloading presses, sizing dies, numerous iron sights and just about anything else in the handloading and shooting world. In recent times the company has brought some well-known brands like Pachmayr and Butch's Bore Shine into the fold. This steady growth goes back to the late nineteenth century, before its strategic purchase of the Ideal Reloading Tool Company eighty odd years ago. Along the way, Lyman have used their reputation in the USA to brand and distribute some European-made replica black powder guns. Two examples in an early *Gun Digest* manual are a .50 calibre Great Plains muzzle-loading rifle and a .50 calibre muzzle-loading trade rifle.

Across the Atlantic, one of the best known European replica gunmakers is Davide Pedersoli & Co. Based in Gardone, Italy, the Pedersoli name is regarded by black powder shooters throughout the world as a leading manufacturer of superb, premium grade replica guns. Their quality and workmanship is outstanding. It is therefore significant that

the good name of Lyman is associated again with Sharps through a European manufacturer in producing this splendid replica. The Sharps Model 1877 long range target model was the last classic side-hammer action to be equipped with sights that were intended for precision target shooting. A model was introduced in 1878 equipped with a tang sight created by William Lyman, which became famous under its creator's name. The Pedersoli rifle is chambered in .45-70 calibre. It is equipped with a double set trigger and a Lyman Precision tang-mounted back sight and a front tunnel sight. The fore-end is embellished with an ebony tip and a high-quality chequering pattern. The lock is the classic back action type and has the script 'Model of 1878' on the side and on the butt plate.

The original Sharps action was a capping breech-loader. On closing, the rising breech block cut the base of a paper cartridge in the chamber which exposed the charge to a flame passage or flash-hole communicating with an external cap and nipple which was struck by an external hammer. With little modification, this intrinsically strong action was upgraded from the transi-

tion paper cartridge design into a robust metallic cartridge firing action. Most of the components were retained, including the external hammer. The government-issued .45-70 cartridge, .45 being .450" calibre and 70 being 70 grains of black powder, was progressively lengthened to .45-90 and even longer to achieve the necessary extreme range hitting-power needed for hunting the tough yet shy bison of North America's great plains (solely for their hides). The rifles were known as 'Old Reliable'.

While a popular choice for 'buffalo' hunting, in the end the rifles suffered a decline due to the collapse of the bison herds – the result of the relentless demand for leather. Almost at the end of its production activities, the Sharps Rifle Company produced these long range match rifles – then the only viable market for large rifles. The 1877 model was known as the English model, its thirty-inch barrel being produced in England. Manufactured between January 1877 and March 1879 in a limited run of only ninety-eight rifles, the 1877 Model is considered by historians and collectors to be the rarest, most elegant and best developed of the famous single-shot external hammer rifle family. Originally with a single trigger and weight reduced to under the 10lb limit to qualify for the Creedmoor competitions, the production included forty-six No 1 Long Range Rifles and fifty-two



Frame and lock.



The butt plate with the Lyman name.

No 2 Long Range Rifles. The two models were differentiated by the finishing of the fore-end, with or without a black horn tip, or by the metal butt cap on the pistol-grip stock. **m**