

# No-frills Classic



**Derek Landers** tries out one of the many versions of the Sharps rifle from the Pedersoli range

The Henry Krank website lists no less than 44 variations of the Pedersoli Sharps rifle, including a handful of capping breech loaders, with cartridge models ranging from .22LR to the massive .45/120.

For those with deeper pockets, this list could be expanded by opting for one or more of Pedersoli's deluxe options with fancy woodwork and/or engraving and gold inlay, although this would likely entail a lengthy wait for delivery.

The Silhouette version that we have here is a plain, no-frills example, and a request to Pedersoli as to where the name came from brought the reply that the gun was built at the request of shooters competing in silhouette matches who wanted a rifle that would conform to the maximum weight limit allowed. A quick

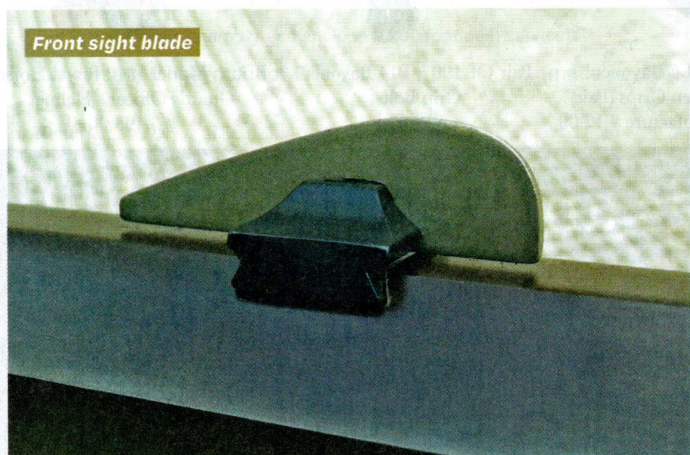
search for the International Metallic Silhouette Shooting Union, the governing body for this discipline, shows the United Kingdom as a "former member". Seemingly there is not enough interest here.

### Christian Sharps

Whilst there have been numerous books and articles written about the big-name players in 19th-century American gun making, such as Colt, Winchester, and Remington, information on the life of Christian Sharps is extremely sparse. Even the year of his birth is uncertain, as the parish records for his birthplace, Washington, New Jersey, were lost in a fire. The popular acceptance for the date is 1810 or 1811. During the 1830s, he was employed as an apprentice at

the Harper's Ferry Arsenal in Virginia, a major US Army firearms manufacturing plant and weapons storage facility. In this location, he was ideally placed to learn all aspects of firearms manufacture and would doubtless have seen the experiments and trials of breechloading arms carried out there in 1837.

He was granted a patent for his own capping breech loader in 1848, with production contracted out to a third party in Pennsylvania. Three years later, his arms were being made by Robbins & Lawrence in Vermont, where a separate enterprise, the Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Co., was established to produce and market the arms, with Christian acting as technical advisor. He was paid a royalty on each gun produced.



Front sight blade

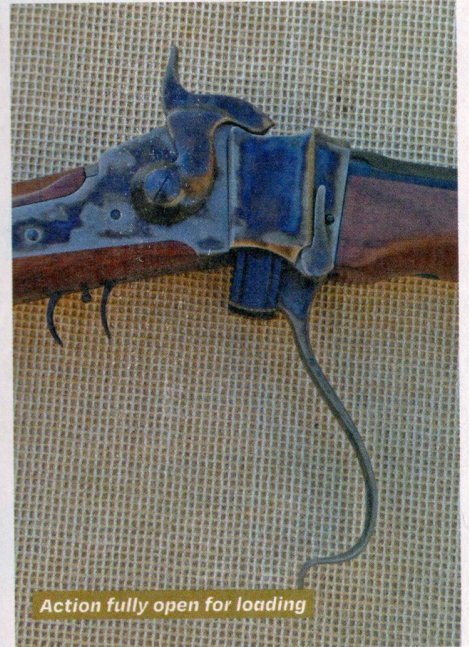


The extractor is positioned top left





Eye candy for those with deeper pockets



Action fully open for loading

For whatever reason, Christian left the company around 1853/1854 and struck out on his own, operating as C. Sharps & Co. with the manufacture of handguns rather than rifles. His initial creations were little more than scaled-down versions of his earlier rifle, but he quickly moved into the realm of metallic cartridge guns, firstly with a small .25 calibre six-shot revolver, and then to the guns that gave him lasting fame - 4-shot rimfire pepperboxes or derringers. Many thousands of these guns were made in various calibres, firstly in the United States and then under licence in England by the firm of Tipping & Lawden. Early in the Civil War, he formed a partnership with William Hankins and produced .52 rimfire calibre carbines for the army, but

by 1866, he was back on his own. With Sharp's death in 1874, his business closed.

The Sharps Rifle Manufacturing Co. prospered, now based in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and in 1871 began production of their most famous model, which subsequently became known as the Model 1874. Production continued until 1881 when the company closed, and although the numbers produced were not excessive, it was offered in a great number of variations. It is on this rifle that the majority of today's reproductions are based.

**Modern quality**

I have seen first-hand the care that goes into the production of Pedersoli firearms, and the pride Mr. Pedersoli has

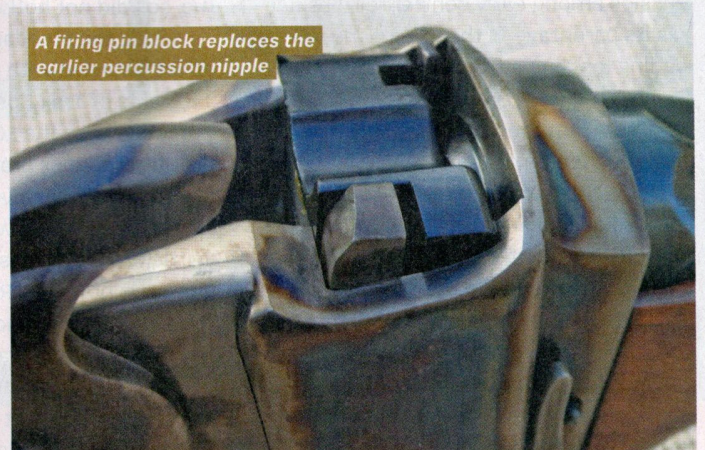
in his products and workforce. Some of the high-end items are real eye candy, but even the basic models, such as we have here, get the same care and attention. All of the woodwork for these guns is done in-house from scratch, and large stacks of timber can be seen seasoning outdoors at the plant.

The two pieces of wood on this model are straight-grained walnut and show a pleasing oiled finish. All the edges are clearly defined, and the wood-to-metal fit is excellent. The stock has a very comfortable pistol grip, and the butt is a generous 5 3/4" deep and finished with a blue steel plate. The forend is nicely contoured with a Schnabel tip.

Pedersoli long guns are fitted with their Premium Match Grade (PMG)



The strength of the action is in the two locking lugs, seen here from below



A firing pin block replaces the earlier percussion nipple



barrels, and the example we have here is octagonal, measuring 32" long, which is middle of the range for the 1874 Sharps models, with other versions offering 30 or 34". It is slightly flared where it meets the receiver and it tapers from a maximum width of approximately 1¼" at this end, to 7/8" at the muzzle. It is finished in a beautiful blued (actually black) gloss and all edges to the flats are sharp. The rifling is 6-groove with a twist rate of 1:18".

The receiver, hammer, and lever are case coloured with mixed shades on this example. The sides of the receiver and the top tang have large pale areas, with the hammer and lever being much darker. The colouring is done by a chemical process and obviously, no two guns are the same when it comes to this finish. I have seen many variations over the years, with the result that I don't like or dislike one shade more than another.

The sights are very basic, but the vast majority of users will likely upgrade to a more sophisticated setup, a large selection of which is offered on the Pedersoli website and available from Henry Krank. The top tang is drilled and tapped for this purpose and the addition of a decent Creedmoor rear and a hooded front with removable inserts will give you an infinite variety of adjustments. This rifle has a simple ladder sight, with the base dovetailed into the barrel and secured at its front end by a screw. This would seem to preclude any lateral adjustment. The ladder has a sliding elevator, with a v-notch, and is marked with graduations from one to eight. The small screw at the top of the ladder is merely there to stop the elevator from coming off the end. At the front end is a white metal blade on a base. This is also dovetailed in place and can be drifted left or right.

**Percussion modification**

The Sharps Model 1874 is one of the classics among early centrefire rifles and has its parentage in the Sharps muzzle-loading long guns from the middle part of the 19th century, retaining the large hammer from these models, mounted on the right side of the receiver. In this position, the hammer would strike a percussion cap and the flame was directed 90° left to ignite the main powder charge.

With the breech-loaders, the cartridge starts its journey into the breech from well behind the hammer, so there is no possibility of mounting a central hammer/firing pin. The solution is to fit the small spring-loaded firing pin



Faded case colours. Note the large percussion-era hammer

inside the breech block and transfer the energy from the hammer via a firing pin block located where the percussion nipple would have been. Sounds a bit fiddley but it works a treat.

**Potential winner**

When loading the Sharps rifle, I got into the habit of putting the hammer on half cock before lowering the lever. Not really necessary, but I just like to keep the hammer face away from the firing pin block when the lever comes back up with a live round in front of the pin. Dropping the lever exposes the breech and allows you to slide a cartridge along the groove in the top of the receiver. Pull the lever back up, draw the hammer to full cock, and you are ready to fire.

Like many of the models in the Sharps range, the Silhouette comes equipped with a double-set trigger, and they are a joy to use once you get used to the light pull on the set (front) trigger. Adjustment is made via a small screw between the two triggers. I'm not sure if there is a preferred setting for this trigger at the factory and I did not measure the weight of the pull, as out of the box it felt just about right for me, so I did not bother tinkering with it.

Using the standard 405-grain lead bullet, I started with a light load of 12-grains of Trail Boss powder, which is adequate on the 100-yard range that I use. It produces practically no recoil in a rifle weighing over 10 lbs. With the rear sight folded down, the v-notch is a little on the small side and the sight picture is not ideal. Raising the ladder brings up a deeper notch in the elevator (graduated to 200 yards in this position), which improved things somewhat, and with the light load, it was shooting a couple of inches below the point of aim



Rear sight in the raised position

and slightly to the left. With a change of powder charge (30-grains of IMR 4198), and while using the same bullet, all that was achieved was more recoil. These guns are really meant for long-distance shooting for which the optional sights would be mandatory, and they have the potential, in the right hands, of super accuracy. If you want to add a little fun, try a few loads with black powder.

**TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION**

- Name:** Pedersoli 1874 Sharps Silhouette
- Calibre:** .45-70
- Barrel Length:** 32"
- Overall Length:** 48¾"
- Weight:** 10.25 lbs
- Price:** £1536.00 (guide)
- Contact:** Henry Krank - [www.henrykrank.com](http://www.henrykrank.com)