

The Washington Post

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14 December 1979

Dear Mr. McCawley:

To recapitulate the problems I described to you today by telephone re the Model 788 (which I am shipping separately):

1. The ejection angle is so high my cases foul the windage knob on the scope and bounce back into the action. Only by rotating the scope 180° (which makes the Bullet Drop Compensator useless) could I get satisfactory ejection, and the problem was the same with a couple of other low-power scopes. Since the point of the project was to set up a weapon for hunting at the short to medium ranges common in the East, I have no need for a long scope.
2. The bolt does not lock in the closed position, whether the safety is on or off. This cost me the best shot I have ever had on a deer; at some point something had brushed the bolt handle and opened it part-way without my noticing it. Perhaps I should have noticed it, but so far as I am aware no other modern large-caliber rifle has a nonlocking bolt.
3. By far the most serious problem—in my opinion an unforgivably deadly one—is that when the piece is held by the small of the stock and slung over the shoulder, a type of carry commonly used by myself and every other hunter I know, the fleshy part of the hand between thumb and forefinger presses against the safety and as often as not will move it to the Fire position. The safety slips forward with very light pressure and little noise, and I was repeatedly dismayed to find myself unknowingly holding a piece that was ready to fire. I have unusually small hands; my ham-handed friends have found the problem even worse. And when I am wearing gloves the grip I have described will slip the safety nearly every time.

Compared to the trigger group problem on the Model 600 (which was my first choice for a piece I'm doing on a minimum-cost deer rifle) this is outrageously dangerous. I was amazed to hear you say no one else has ever complained of it. I can only hope that this is because everybody uses 788s for bench shooting. I would never take the piece into the field again, nor could I in good conscience sell it to another hunter. My good hunting buddy, who bought the same model at the same time so I could check my results against his, has put his 788

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away for keeps. Because the load we selected is mild (2400 fps) he, like myself, cut his barrel down to improve the swing in brush; this makes the piece unattractive to bench shooters and he wouldn't sell it to anyone else.

All of the above is a damn shame, because otherwise the piece turned out to be what I had hoped: a tough weapon of moderate cost and high accuracy. It shoots $1\frac{1}{2}$ " groups at 100 yards even though the barrel has not been glass-bedded; it handles nicely in the field (I have taken two deer with it, both one-shot kills); and it is tough. A friend of mine kicked it out of a pickup truck onto a paved road and then jumped on it without noticeably affecting its accuracy.

My kindly editor had scheduled my piece on the 788, but my field test was so disappointing—and alarming—that he now has reassigned it from the Outdoors to the Consumer section and wants me to write it yesterday. Please let me know as soon as possible what your Product Safety and R&D sections have to say about my fulminations.

Sincerely,



Hank Burchard

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