GUN-E-SACK

By Jon Sundra

■ The surest sign that you're getting old is when you no longer *enjoy* cleaning guns. Remember how as a youngster you actually looked forward to cleaning your dad's rifle or shotgun—'cause that's as close as you were able to get to 'em. "Playing" with dad's guns was strictly forbidden but doing the same under the guise of cleaning them, well, that was different. Amazing what we got away with under the pretext of work!

As big boys owning our own guns, the cleaning ritual (by then it had ceased to be play) was not something we actually looked forward to but it wasn't something to be dreaded either. I don't think it'll ever get to that point—to where I *dread* gun cleaning chores—but I sure don't enjoy them anymore.

Anyway, while swabbing out the bore of one of my favorite 7 mms after getting home from a particularly tough, wet hunt in Wyoming this past October, it struck me how a well designed, quality product can make even drudgery more pleasant. Case in point: the Belding & Mull cleaning rod and tips I use for all my bore cleaning chores. To you old-timers out there the name Belding & Mull is a familiar one. B&M's been making the best powder measure and cleaning rods for over a half century. It's one of those quiet little companies that just goes about its business; it's not out to set the world on fire or even change it much. They just want to build a good product for shooters who care and who know the difference.

The B&M cleaning rod and patented tips are still made in the same way and to the exact specifications they were back in the early '20s when W.S. Belding and N.H. Mull started the business. The rods are made of polished stainless in two diameters, one for .22 through 6.5 mm (.264) and one for .270 on up. The rods are not sheathed with any sort of protective covering as the folks at B&M feel that abrasives can be picked up and carried by such plastic coatings. The handle is also of steel, knurled across its entire surface, and a cone bearing inside allows smooth rod rotation.

I prefer B&M's 36-inch, one-piece cleaning rod but they also offer a Benchrest Model which is 42 inches long, as well as three and six-piece rods. Naturally, there's a pistol rod, too. The jointed rods have beautifully machined double dowel joints which fit so perfectly you have to look hard to find the seams.

Even more impressive than the rod itself, however, is the patented Mull tip. Like the rod and handle, the tips are individually machined from stainless steel. To ensure a proper fit in every bore, Mull tips are made in 16 different calibers from .224 to .458. Each tip has about a half-inch section of sharpened pin at the front to pierce and hold the patch centered in the bore. Behind is an annular ring of appropriate diameter to provide the proper fit between patch and bore. Behind that ring are four more of smaller diameter separated by sharp-edged grooves about 1/16-inch wide. Grit and residue collect on the patch at these annular grooves.

As I'm sure you've already surmised, the B&M rod ain't cheap, nor are those precision-machined tips. The one-piece 36-inch rods I use retail at $9.40, which is about double what other cleaning rods will cost you. The tips are three bucks each but when you see all the machining that obviously goes into the making of each one, you'll think that three-buck tag is reasonable indeed.

If your local gunshop doesn't stock B&M equipment, write Belding & Mull at Box 428, Phillipsburg, PA 16866 for a flier describing the various cleaning rods offered.

Like I said: truly well-designed, well-made tools can make even drudgery jobs almost pleasant.

REMINGTON M-700 EXTRACTOR

The largest-selling bolt-action centerfire rifle is the Remington Model 700, and has been for quite a number of years now. And with good reason; it's a fine example of a production rifle. The 700 has so much going for it—a strong, smooth action; excellent trigger; appealing lines; a broad spectrum of chamberings; and last but not least, a reasonable price.

If there is a weak link in the 700's design it would have to be the extractor, that thin, semi-annular spring which resides within a groove encircling the counterbored bolt face. This spring is held in place by a small rivet which is almost two-thirds the width of the extractor itself. Since the extractor measures only a tenth of an inch wide, drilling even a small hole through it for a rivet results in a thin, i.e., *weak* wall section out at the edges. It is at this point where the 700's extractor breaks. It's not like it's an epidemic, mind you; in fact, extractor breakage is not as prevalent as detractors of the design would have you believe. I've heard some writers intimate that the extractor's rivet connection somehow bears the brunt of extraction forces and therefore it's no wonder that they occasionally break. Ain't so. Virtually all the pulling force exerted upon the extractor is borne by the annular groove in which it rests. The only function of the rivet is to prevent the extractor from sliding around within that retaining groove; it will actually stay in place and function without the rivet—I've tried it. The spring tension of the C-shaped extractor keeps it within its slot.

Despite the fact, then, that it's a strong, reliable system, Remington engineers will admit that the 700's extractor could be improved upon. And from what I saw recently while sneaking around the Ilion plant in upstate New York, they've done just that.

On casually examining a bolt at an assembly station for XP-100s in the new 7 mm BR chambering, I noticed the absence of the extractor retaining rivet at the bolt head. I was told it was a new extractor design that was first being incorporated—without fanfare of any kind—into this production run of XPs.

The new extractor, which will eventually be incorporated in all Remington centerfires, does not look much different from the existing one; in fact, you have to look closely to see that it is different. It is of the same basic design Remington's been using right along these past 30 years except that there's a small hook at both ends of the "C" which engages corresponding holes within the annular slot. The rivet's gone. The holes maintain the extractor's position within the slot.

I was told the new extractor should be at least twice as reliable as the existing one and can be replaced in the field with nothing but a pen knife.

Let me state here and now that all you folks out there who own Remington centerfires shouldn't suddenly lose faith in Ol' Betsy. No company the likes of Remington would even try, much less get away with, supplying a breakage-prone extraction system for 30 years.

Oh, by the way, in answer to the question you're all surely wondering about: no, you can't replace your existing extractor with the new one. The sidewall within the counterbore is different on the new bolt. ■