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Semi-Custom Siamese Mauser, Not To Be Confused With...

were used. Once ammunition designers found small bore, jacketed, spitzer type bullets were more efficient on the battlefield; a new magazine design was called for. Pointed bullets in a tube magazine are a disaster waiting to happen!

Designers worked to develop a reliable magazine that could safely retain pointed type bullets. One of the first of these was the type 91 Mauser. While the system worked, it was clumsy. The magazine protruded far below the bottom of the action. On the battlefield the magazine was prone to damage. In trench-type fighting the magazine could get in the way. The [Russian Mosin](#) action also had a protruding box magazine for the rimmed [7.62X54R](#). The Mosin magazine is steeply angled and part of the lower assembly forms part of the trigger guard, it is quite strong. The [British SMLE](#) also has a protruding magazine. Between the two World Wars the British decided to replace the rimmed [.303 round](#). Not that there was, or is for that matter anything wrong with the .303, however, the British realized a rimless cartridge was the way to go. They developed a new cartridge. It was almost exactly like the 7mm 08 of today. They saw the inherent superiority of the shorter, smaller bore, rimless cartridge. However, entrance into WWII shelved the new round and new rifle. They were already set up to produce the SMLE, and needed every

Historically speaking, firearms design, Mil-Surp or otherwise, has been guided by advances in powder and ammunition. The transition from black to smokeless powder necessitated new metallurgy. Tougher, harder steels were required to take the resulting higher pressures of smokeless powder. Single shots gave way to repeaters. While flat point, rimmed ammunition was still in vogue, tubes fed repeaters

rifle on the line as fast as they could be produced.

Mauser, staying at the forefront of firearms design, went to work and developed the famous type 93 Mauser action at the end of the 19th century. It had all the latest innovations in firearms design. It won hands-down against all competitors in the Spanish rifle trials. One of the new features was a staggered column, 5 round, flush fitting magazine. Since most, but not all countries moved to rimless case, pointed ammunition; Mauser did a brisk business in supplying arms around the world. See the article on this site: "[The Spanish Mauser Inquisition](#)".



Siamese Cat!!!!

Still, some countries clung to rimmed ammunition, even after it was clearly obsolete for military purposes. They wanted a Mauser type rifle, but wanted it to use rimmed ammo. It is somewhat difficult to get a rimmed case to feed from a straight sided, box type magazine. The rims will hang up on each, other causing the rifle to jam. Mauser solved the problem by designing a magazine box with a forward rake at both ends of the magazine. In this way the magazine could still have a double column, but the rimmed cartridges would feed without hanging up. The most important feature of the Mauser design is what others failed to achieve. Mauser's design kept the magazine within the stock. It was protected and didn't get in the way.



Siamese Mauser Long Rifle

Between WWI & WWII the British civilian gun trade bought many, many Mauser actions fitted with the special box magazines. They were building sporters destined for Africa and India. Many of the British big-game hunters favored rimmed cartridges. This was due to the popularity of the double rifles. However, a "best quality" double rifle cost a small fortune, and could take up to

two years to complete! A Mauser sporter built by one of the best makers in either London or Birmingham was comparatively inexpensive, and could be completed rather quickly. To the coinsurer, a "best quality" double rifle was the status quo; while a Mauser actioned repeater was considered rather Unitarian!

Siam (now Thailand) was one of the eastern countries that clung to a rimmed, bottleneck case with an 8 mm spitzer bullet. They originally contracted with Mauser for rifles. The Mauser produced examples are rarely seen. Apparently the Mauser contract was rather small. Siam later contracted with Japan for the lion's share of the rifles. The Japanese made rifles are extremely well made arms and mirror the Mauser produced examples. They were made in peacetime and exhibit careful craftsmanship and high quality blueing.

During the sixties, [Siamese Mauser's](#) were sold in the US. Both actions and complete rifles were sold. Since there was virtually no original ammo available, except for a few rounds in collections, the rifles and actions sold quite inexpensively. Gunsmiths quickly found out the bolt face were a good fit on the 30/40Krag, 7.62X54R and .303 British. The action would also feed these rounds quite well.

Other gunsmiths took the Siamese action to the next level. With a bit of lathe work, the bolt face could quickly be opened up for the 45/70 round. After that, bit of careful shaping on the feed rails and a Siamese would reliably feed a 45/70, even with a cast, flat point bullet. The extractor hook needed only slight alteration. A new barrel in 45/70 completed the package. When the actions were very plentiful, at least one commercial outfit in the 1970's were building Siamese 45/70's ready made.

The 1984 Gun Digest whetted my appetite for a Siamese 45/70. It ran a story about a fellow who acquired a Siamese action and had it converted. He had gunsmith friends who were retired or semi-retired and willing to do the work on the cheap. I wanted such a rifle to hunt in wet, brushy country. I thought my Siamese 45/70 would just remain a dream. As we shall see, it was a dream that would come true. However, I would have to learn a lot, and



Note Model 70 Type Safety, Bolt Handle Lowered And Contoured. Peep Sight Makes Sense In Foul Weather Hunting.

wait 5 years before I touched off the first round from my Siamese 45/70.

In mid 1985 I rotated back to the States from a tour in Germany. I kept my ear to the ground, and made inquiries about Siamese actions or a complete rifle.

Some fellows said, "A what? Never heard of a [Siamese Mauser](#)."

A couple of times guys said, "My buddy has one of those". Invariably it would turn out to be a garden-variety model 98.

Others had heard of it, but could offer no leads. Then a fellow said a gun shop had an action that was already converted. After work I made beeline for the gun shop to see the Holy Grail. It was a Siamese action all right. Unfortunately, some all-thumbs person, who fancied himself a gunsmith, had completely ruined the action. The bolt face looked like it had been opened up free hand with a dull Dremmel tool. The rails looked like they had been worked over with a chisel! The safety didn't work.



Siamese Mauser, Note Original Safety & Straight Bolt Handle

It would make a nice paperweight. I just smiled and passed on it. One Day in late 1988 I walked into Brown's Mills Hunting & Fishing Supplies. Jimmy, the best

guy on earth to ever have a gun shop asked if I was still looking for a Siamese Mauser. Remembering my experience with that butchered action, I guardedly said I was still looking. Then Jimmy said a fellow he sees about once a week came in and offered him a complete Siamese! Wow...could it be real? Jimmy said he could have it there the next week. All week I thought about that rifle. Would it really be a Siamese, or another model 98 someone thought was a Siamese?

Jimmy was good to his word. The next week a complete, unaltered Siamese was in the shop! Other than a bore eaten by corrosive primers, the rifle was in fine shape. I finally had the basis for a 45/70. Then my research began.

I already had the specifications in mind for my project. A turned down bolt handle, model-70 style safety, metallic sights and Weaver scope bases, semi-gloss blueing, long barrel with 6 or 8 lands (for cast bullets). I wanted a classic styled stock with a shadow line cheek piece. A steel recoil bolt and a good recoil pad would round out the stock. Knowing what you want and getting it at the right price can be two very different things.

Most of the individual builders who do quality work were priced way out of my league. Others were backed up several years and could offer no delivery time. One fellow said he simply had more work than he could handle and couldn't take on any new clients. He was only taking new orders from long time clients. I didn't blame these men a bit. The very best men, with an established reputation, can command the highest remuneration for their efforts. The others were being very honest. No one likes to hear a firm delivery date, and then have it constantly pushed back again and again.



Siamese Mauser, Another View Of Original Safety & Straight Bolt Handle

One day I was reading [Shotgun News](#). A large ad proclaimed they had model 98 bolt sleeves already converted to model 70-safety configuration. The price was attractive. If you sent them a trade-in bolt sleeve, they would take off \$5.00. Knowing there were slight dimensional differences between regular Model 98 and Siamese Mauser's, I called the company.

I queried the man who answered the phone if he had Siamese bolt sleeves and if not would a regular model 98

sleeve interchange. He said, "No, and the question comes up quite often. I can't get enough Siamese sleeves to offer it." Then he rattled off the size differences between Siamese and model 98 sleeves! I asked if I were to send my Siamese sleeve to him, he could convert it and return it to me. He said, "At this price I have no way to track an individual sleeve through the shop".

While I didn't get a converted Siamese bolt sleeve, I did learn something. The need was out there, and someone had to be doing the work. Since the fellow could quote size differences from memory, he must have done at least one, probably for himself.

One day a fellow showed me a commercial FN action that had been recently rebarreled, blued and sighted by a company called E.R. Shaw, www.ershawbarrels.com

During the 50's, Sears imported commercial FN 98 type actions and had them barreled, blued and stocked by High Standard. They were then sold as a Sears's house brand. He had acquired the rifle and had E.R. Shaw rebarrel, add sights and reblue it. They installed a beautiful 8-land barrel of their own manufacture; Williams's sights were added, then glass beaded and blued the works. The blue job looked like rust bluing. It shot as well as it looked too!

E.R. Shaw's pricing was within my means, and the turn around time was good. I got their brochure and saw they also offered Siamese conversion, turning down bolt handles, D&T for Weaver bases, Williams sights etc. Cool! There was still the issue of the safety conversion to deal with first, before the action could be shipped off to E.R. Shaw.

In the classified section of Shotgun News I saw an ad from an individual gunsmith that converted model 98 bolt sleeves and actions to model 70-safety style configuration. The price was attractive. I gave Ed Delorge of Thibodaux, LA a call. Yes, he could convert a Siamese action to model 70-safety configuration, and had done so before. I queried him if the regular model 98's and Siamese were the same. He replied, "No". Then he rattled off the size differences! The fact he instantly provide detailed information, gave me confidence in this man. Ed said he could complete the work and get it shipped back to me within a week of receipt. We talked guns for a few minutes. I had a good feeling about this fellow. The next day the Siamese action, written instructions and a money order were shipped to him. (NOTE: I recently tried to contact Ed. He is no longer listed in the directory)



Caliber designation & a B-I-G Cartridge!

Anytime you send your hardware and money to someone, you are taking a chance. As good as FedEx and UPS are, items occasionally do get lost. If you are contracting work with a person unknown to you, there is always the chance he will not deliver the work as promised. As in any trade or business, there are unscrupulous people. If possible, see work done by the individual or ask for references. In some shooting disciplines just the fellow's first name is enough to guarantee satisfaction! When

a small-bore competitor says, "Karl built my trigger", everyone knows exactly whom he means, and they know it's the very best trigger made, bar none.

As I said, I had a good feeling about Ed, so, my Siamese action made the trip from Fort Dix NJ to Thibodaux Louisiana. Within two weeks the Big Brown Truck brought it back. I couldn't have been more pleased! Ed did a beautiful job on the safety. Another money order, more written instructions and the action was on its way to E.R. Shaw in

Pennsylvania.

I had been perusing the catalogs of several makers of semi-inletted stocks. I decided to stock the Siamese myself. Richards Micro Fit had a semi-inletted blank in the classic style at a good price. I posted an order for the stock. I also got a Pachmayer Decelerator recoil pad and a Military Mauser steel recoil bolt to fit to the stock. Various grades of wet & dry paper, various grades of steel wool, Brownells ArgoGlass Gell, Birchwood Casey TruOil, and several items for the Dremell tool rounded out the items I would need to complete the stock. In the interim, I read every article & book I could get my hands on concerning fitting & finishing a semi-inletted blank. A 2.5 power scope was also ordered.

A few months later the Big Brown Truck reappeared. This time a long box was delivered. I felt like a kid at Xmas when I opened the box! It was beautiful! Even, soft, semi-gloss finish, Williams's sights, Weaver bases and a beautifully turned down & polished bolt handle. The heavy 45/70 barrel looked extremely smooth with 8 lands. Now the job was to mate the barreled action to the stock.

Anyone who says, "A semi-inletted blank has 99% of the work done", has never fitted one! First the magazine assembly is seated into the stock. The reason is that the barreled action must not touch the top of the magazine once it is seated. The orientation of these two components is critical. It seems like you remove some material, try the barreled action for fit, and remove it 1000 times before you are finished. However, at the end of each session, the barreled action sinks deeper into the stock. A semi-inletted blank only has a ½ X ½ "starter" barrel channel. A Dremmel with a flex shaft and sanding drums really help here. Still, it is free hand work and attention to detail must be maintained or it will look terrible.



A Simple 2.5 Power Scope Is Good Optics For Short Range Work

Once the magazine assembly and barreled action are fitted, then it is time to ensure the barrel is free floated full length. Free floating allows the barrels harmonic cycle to progress in its regular pattern. However, the first two inches of barrel channel won't be free floated. The action requires support for a heavy barrel. Actually, the first two inches of barrel channel and the action both require positive support. This is where Brownells ArgoGlass Gell comes into play. But first, the stock

requires additional insurance from the effects of recoil. This is why Mauser wisely designed the rectangular steel recoil bolt to be fitted to a stock.

Even the densest walnut is wood fiber, and wood can only take so much pounding. The recoil bolt provides support 3 ways. It provides support against the recoil shoulder of the

action. It provides a support for the bottom of the action, and the retaining nuts help hold the thin sidewalls of the stock together during recoil. Since I was stationed at Ft Dix NJ, I took a drive up to Sarco. I got a new, surplus, Mil-Surp FN Steel recoil bolt. Again, this is where a Dremmel tool, with the correct wood cutting bits, is worth its weight in gold. The recoil bolt should be fitted to allow a thin layer of Agroglass to be between it and the action for a perfect fit. I also drilled 1/16-inch holes along the side of the retaining nuts to allow a thin layer to flow outside the stock. This permanently locked the recoil bolt to the stock. Heavy recoiling rifles can and will damage stocks, if the stock is poorly fitted, or recoil doesn't protect the stock bolt. I've personally seen 2 Sako .375 H&H Magnums split their stocks, one right out of the box after 3 rounds of factory ammo! I have heard of a third rifle doing the same. Recoil bolts are considered ugly because they break the visual plain of nice looking wood, but cracked stocks are far uglier!

After the Agroglass Gell had set, the barreled action was removed. Cutting the stock to the required length can be tricky. One has to remember to figure in the length of the recoil pad AND the thickness of the most likely clothing to be worn while shooting.

Attaching the pad is easy. The tricky part was maintaining the stock lines while trimming the width of the pad. I secured the stock to the bench with the end hanging over, and free handed the trimming. Now it's files, and sanding to shape and smooth the stock. After progressively finer grades of sand paper its finer and finer grades of steel wool until the stock looks polished, without a drop of finish on it. The last order of business was finishing the stock.

I used Birchwood Casey TruOil to apply the finish. The secret is to apply 6 to 8 large drops as one coat. Let it dry and apply another coat. In dry climates, many coats can be applied in one day. An oil finish gives the wood a warm glow. It had taken a long time, but I had a 45/70 Siamese Mauser.

Some may carp this gun really isn't "custom". The truth is; almost no custom makers do all the work themselves. Many just do custom metal work, but not blueing or stocking. Often the client will have one man do metal work, get the barreled action back in-the-white, then go to the stocker who will measure the client for the stock. After the stock is completed then the metal work goes to be blued. Many stockers work from semi-inletted blanks too; except, they have their own special "custom pattern" they have their blanks turned to, before fitting it to an action and to a client's particular dimensions. Some clients will supply that special blank of wood to the stocker themselves. Other clients will select a piece of wood from the stocker's inventory. Often, when a client and stocker have a long time relationship, it is common for the client to just tell the stocker he wants the stock made from, say; AAA Turkish Circasuian. The client trusts the stocker to select an appropriate blank.

I prefer to think of the 45/70 Siamese as a "semi-custom" rifle. The components of this rifle, with the exception of the safety, are all off-the-shelf items. However, when one takes a Mil-Surp to this level of redesigning and rebuilding, it surely is more then the sum of its parts. When considering how personal such a rifle is, the term "semi-custom" seems most appropriate.

While the stock work was proceeding, I ordered dies, shell holder, bullet mould, sizing chamber, top punch, gas checks and brass. The barrel was right on the money at .457. I

ordered a .459 sizer die for the cast bullets. To determine the correct sizer die or sizer kit for a barrel, see the article on this site "[Slug, Measure & Match](#)".



45 Caliber Cast Bullets Punch Big Holes In Both Paper & Game.

017; a shortened version at 350 grains did just as well. Many sporters won't shoot cast bullets well until they are broken in with jacketed bullets. The Shaw barreled Siamese required no such formal break in.

It really is thrilling to fire a gun you designed, selected components for, and guided through its completion. Of course, the proof is in the shooting. A rifle may have many good features, and be in a desirable caliber; however, if it doesn't shoot well, it's simply not a good gun. I started off with cast bullets from a Seaco # 019 mould. It is a very well designed bore-riding bullet of 465 grains. The fact they immediately grouped nice and tight is a tribute to the smoothness of Shaw's barrels. I later found Seaco #

These 15 years, the Siamese has been on many hunting trips to the north woods. When brush

is thick and shots tend to be taken at fairly short ranges, a big-bore express type rifle makes sense. Like any other rifle that goes to the field often, the Siamese has the scars to prove it. The stock has taken its share of dings and scratches. Scopes and rings have been switched. The Williams barrel mounted rear sight has given way to a Williams peep rear sight. The Siamese groups just as well today as it did in the beginning. There is a lot to be said for having a gun unlike any other.



The 9 Ring Shot Is What Happens When I Fail To "Follow Through"!

If you desire a personalized gun, the first step is to decide exactly what its purpose is. Next, do the research and talk to others who have been down this road. Finally, select a builder and the components to make your dream come true. With careful planning it can

happen a lot sooner and at less expense than you may think.

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