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When I left that gun show table back in 2004, I thought I was “merely” walking away with a beautiful Westley Richards 20 Ga. two-barrel set. In reality, it was a fascinating link to Victorian England, the foibles of British aristocracy and literary giant, Oscar Wilde.

But my glorious little Westley Richards would keep this secret from me for nearly a year. And, if it were not for the persistence of Westley Richards Chairman, Walter Clode, the gun’s provenance may well have remained buried forever amidst the firm’s yellowed records.

Instead, I was ultimately lucky enough to discover that the gun I’d purchased had once been the coveted property of Lord Alfred Douglas, son of the Marquess of Queensberry, close friend of Oscar Wilde and correspondent of George Bernard Shaw. Lord Alfred Douglas, or “Bosie” as he is often known, was also a Victorian poet, literary figure in his own right… and an avid bird hunter.

Eventually, it would be Bosie’s association with Oscar Wilde that would electrify both turn-of-the-century Britain and the world. But more of that later.

I had no portent of these things when I spotted this lithe English 20. Or, rather, it spotted me. The truth be known, this was not merely one of those guns that “talk to you.” Nothing that prosaic issued from this one. Instead, my svelte and highly engraved little beauty reached out, clutched me by the arm, and dared me to go home without her. The feeling was entirely electric. As if Joan Collins had smiled at me over a dry martini...
A Case For Renovation, II.

An interim step for this case was to somehow upgrade the looks of the handle attachment repair. One attachment loop was original and in fairly “okay” condition for its age. The other was a totally new replacement. And while certainly functional, this new loop was left square-ended and without much of a finished edge. I decided to do what I could to add some elegance.

In this regard, I chose to make up some brass reinforcement plates that you occasionally see on old high-end original cases... and some new repro cases as well. For example, FEI uses them. But since the attachment loops of this old Brit case were individuals, I just couldn’t order some plates from FEI. I had to make them myself.

The old original loop of the case suggested that a traditional arrowhead shape would work, but size had to be carefully considered. The plate for the original loop had to look “right” in installation... and visually balance the plate that would mask the true nature of the new loop. Therefore, I made a paper test-template based on the inside stitching pattern of the original loop... but enhanced slightly with the bottom arc of a small jar that happened to be on the workbench. Frankly, I can’t remember which one it was, but it just seemed to be “right.”

I overlaid the resulting template on the square-ended portion of the new loop and (as I’d hoped) discovered that it would be possible to trim this square butt of leather to a
When I bought my Chas. Hellis, side-by-side, it still had it's original checkered butt which was nicely done and still in good condition. Like most 2-inch 12 bore guns of the 1920s and 30s, it was made for a woman or child.

But at 13-3/4", the length of pull was too short for me. I installed this pad to add .8 inches of length and bring it closer to what I needed. I could have added spacers as well, but I believe that anything over an inch begins to look clumsy on a gun and should only be done if absolutely necessary.

I always thought that the toughest part would be cutting and covering the screw plugs of a leather covered pad, so I decided to away with them. Why? Because I figured that the only reason to remove the pad would be for stock replacement or refinish and, in either case, removing the pad will be of little consequence.

I have, however, managed to make the pad removeable and replaceable with a minimum of damage. This can still be done neatly, except for two small slits in the leather which can be easily reglued.

The subject here is a Pachmayr Decelerator pad that now graces the butt of my Chas. Hellis. I also put this pad on the gun as it weighs about 5 lbs. 10 oz., and even the 2-inch shells can make their presence known. This type of pad, having a back plate, won't look as smooth as the traditional covered red pad.

To do a job like this, here’s what you will need:

- AcraGlas or some other similar epoxy, preferably of a gel viscosity
- Release agent
- Sandpaper
- Barge cement. This is a special cement for
Here we have a fine shotgun with a Rodney Dangerfield complex: Its just not had the respect it deserves. This is an 10 ga. double made by Neumann & Co. of Liege Belgium. It has 32-inch barrels, a stock of sound but plain French walnut, and a modest amount of engraving. And it was found on a dealer’s rack for a great deal less than its actual worth. The owner was an avid goose hunter so he headed to the blind with the new gun and a box of BBB steel shot. At the end of the season he examined the bore and found lengthwise grooves in the choke area.

Conferring with a local gunsmith, it was decided to send the barrels out to have the typically European tight bores opened up to American standards and the gunsmith would install choke tubes. Here is where the problems begin.

First, the barrels were only marginally thick enough for screw-in choke tubes… and his gunsmith used a dull tap to cut the threads. The barrel wall was so thin that the tap, instead of cutting the entire thread, pushed some of the metal outwards, leaving ridges on the outside of the barrel. The gunsmith also forgot to take into account the fact that some longer barrels will actually converge past touching. To do this the gunmaker will file the contacting sides of the barrels so they may sit closer to one another. This provides even less barrel wall for those threads. On these barrels there was only .005” of steel between the two choke tubes.

What can be done with this mess? Polishing the ridges off the outside of the barrels will only make them thinner and do nothing about the lack of metal between the bores. The idea of cutting the barrels to 30
AT ISSUE: Are Damascus barrels safe to shoot with modern target ammunition? And if so, what issues should a prospective buyer consider before buying a Damascus barreled gun?

Kirk: First, a good set of Damascus barrels can be shot with the appropriate loads... if they have good wall thickness. And the current “featherweight” target loads are especially appropriate. They generate about 6,000 pounds pressure. Then again, a bad barrel should not be shot with any loads... Damascus or fluid steel.

What to consider in a Damascus barrel? Get it professionally checked out! And that goes for any set of barrels... Damascus, or not. It’s funny but I used to set up my equipment at gunshows and offer a professional barrel measurement and assessment.