



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo



Contributed Photo

ABOVE: A tiny Trumbo with his father after a successful squirrel hunt with the Topper 158, propped against the fence at right.

LEFT: Getting the feel for a newly restored classic.

FATHER, SON, CLASSIC SHOTGUN

■ Discovering an old photograph provokes nostalgic memories, leads to restoration of an H&R Topper 158 model

You recognize the name, but shrug with indifference at its mention. In mint condition, they compare not to the finer side-by-sides of the past. They sell for pennies on the dollar relative to the spendy, yet (occasionally) affordable names like Fox and L.C. Smith, and may as well be a door prize for simply viewing a Parker. Although less glamorous, the single-shot Harrington and Richardson (H&R) shotgun may arguably be one of the simplest and most prominent firearms to grace American hunting and shooting history.

H&R boasts an ornate heritage dating back to the inception of the company in 1871 as Wesson and Herrington in Worcester, Massachusetts. Established by Gilbert H. Harrington and William A. Richardson, the manufacturer we know as H&R was not so named until 1877. Harrington supposedly bought out Dan Wesson's investment and re-branded with Richardson, carrying the H&R name and parent operation through 1986. Their doors remained closed until 1991 when a new company started under the name H&R 1871.

H&R was known into the 1880s for their revolvers, but evolved quickly to manufacture shotguns and rifles with dozens of different models. But the name as I and many others have come to know is married to their single-shot shotguns.

In 1901, H&R produced their first single-shot, the Model 1900. A series of small-bore .410 single-shots followed, chambered in two-inch in 1911, the Model 1915 chambered in two-and-a-half inch, then a three-inch chambering in 1937. It appears the more commonly known "Topper" model did not appear until the 1940s.

The H&R Topper Model 158 (Topper 158) was manufactured between approximately 1962 and 1973, becoming the shotgun many of today's hunters associate with the H&R name. While this model was chambered in everything from .17 to



UPLAND PURSUITS

BRAD TRUMBO

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.300 magnum caliber, smooth bores appear to be most common.

The Topper 158, like its predecessors, carried a hardwood stock, but the rubber butt pad didn't appear before this model, according to vintage advertising. Their actions were color case hardened, boasting a beautiful tiger-like, almost holographic striping. Twelve, 16, 20 gauge and .410 bores were available with barrel length ranging from 28 to 36 inches and housing an immaculate shell ejector. The 28-inch barrel package weighed a scant 5.5 pounds. The forearm on early models were held tight to the barrel with a center screw, which was changed to a sleeker clip-in mechanism in 1971.

These guns may not have been dazzling, but their reputation as lightweight, reliable and affordable, led to hundreds of thousands of sales while in production. Original cost for a standard Topper shotgun was listed at \$28.50 in 1957, and the Topper 158 at \$36.95 in 1971, according to vintage advertising.

Present-day value for a used Topper 158 in excellent condition runs between \$150 and \$225, but monetary value does little justice for the antiquity of these "working class" scatterguns. As W.E. (Bill) Goforth said in his in-depth volume on the H&R company, firearms enthusiasts are led to " ... the belief that the value of a collectible firearm is measured by its cost." This dis-



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo

A Eurasian collared dove christened the restored Topper 158 after 30 years of rusting on an attic floor.

misses historical relevance, allowing monetary value alone to determine the "worth" of a firearm, exemplified by H&R.

Aside from monetary or historical significance, sentimental value can eclipse all. I inherited my father's Topper 158 as a child and carried it after gray squirrels through the deciduous forest. I recently discovered a photo of my father taken at his parent's home, approximately 1981. He knelt in the yard holding me, barely a toddler, and a pair of gray squirrels with the Topper 158 leaning against the fence in the background. That photo triggered a desire to rescue and restore the gun as a piece of my father's legacy. A shotgun built for everyone, and fitting of his humble, reliable personality.

The christening of the old 12-bore sporting renewed fashion came a nation away from its Virginia origin with a passing shot at a Eurasian collared dove. A bird I doubt my father had ever heard of considering their entry into the U.S. occurred

not long before his death. Memories overlaid by time rushed to the surface, cued by the thump of the lightweight single-barrel driving against my shoulder.

With such talk of commonplace style and mechanics, it may be surprising that in 1880, H&R became the sole American licensee for the manufacture of quality English Anson & Deely double-barrel box-lock shotguns, producing approximately 3,500 of various "grades" between 1882 and 1885. Not to belittle the company's contribution to the U.S. armed forces over the years.

In November of 2000, the Marlin Firearms Company purchased the assets of H&R 1871, Inc. Presently marketing its products under the brand names of Harrington & Richardson® and New England Firearms®, H&R 1871 is currently the largest manufacturer of single shot shotguns and rifles in the world. So why are single-shot scatterguns so uncommonly seen afield? With a wealth of quality doubles and auto-loaders on the market, it

seems hunters value style and the opportunity for a second chance.

The H&R name and Topper 158 claimed their worthy place in American firearms history, and the story continues with current Topper models. Still produced under the Harrington and Richardson name, the Topper Deluxe Classic sports a vented sight rib, screw-in choke tubes and checkered American walnut stock.

Various vintage Topper 158 and youth models can be found for around \$100 if you are willing to watch auctions and make some minor repairs. Cheap enough to determine for yourself the wing-shooting "worth" of H&Rs classic single-shot.

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Spring fling: Hunting morels

If you haven't tried morel mushrooms you're missing out on nature's best outdoor treat. Or for that matter, the best food ever since manna dropped down from heaven in the wilderness. I've been in the beef business nearly all of my life so I can get good steaks. But for eating pleasure, a morel will rate right up there with a choice ribeye.

There are quite a few edible mushrooms in the Northwest but I'm not comfortable picking more than a few varieties. I took a mushroom class but still don't feel comfortable venturing out of my comfort zone.



BASE CAMP

TOM CLAYCOMB

If you make a mistake and pick the angel of death, well, let's just say that you and God had better be pretty good friends!

So now that I've scared you spitless, let's proceed. For your first season you ought to go mushroom picking with an experienced old-timer and have them show you the ropes.

They may be able to help you

identify morels, shaggy manes, cauliflower, puffballs and calf brains mushrooms. The good news is, morels are easy to identify. The only thing that I've seen that even remotely resembles a morel is the snow morel/false morel. But again, make sure that you go with an old-timer the first season.

The growing season on morels is short. I'll say something like a one- to two-week period, max. They'll pop out earlier at lower elevations and then you'll find them later up higher.



Tom Claycomb/Contributed Photo

See **Morels** / Page 6B

A fine morel mushroom.