

Pedersoli Winchester 1886/71

Pete Moore looks at Pedersoli's recreation of the Winchester 1886/71 and finds despite its looks it's not a cowboy rifle!

With any new gun I test I always do some research, certainly with the time line. With Pedersoli's classic recreation of the Winchester 1886/71 you might well assume it was around in the generic western era, but as we shall see that is not the case.

Up until the creation of the 1886 Winchester's legendary lever-actions all drew from the same wellspring – the original Volcanic. This was morphed into the Henry by B Tyler Henry, which in turn became the gate-loading Winchester 1866 and 1873. All in short pistol-type calibres Winchester beefed up and modified the 73 to become the 1876 to offer a true big bore option. However, its toggle link locking system was about at its limit. With more powerful guns being offered by the opposition Winchester turned to John Moses Browning to give them a rifle that could truly compete.

THING OF BEAUTY!

So the 1886 was born, which with its solid, though open-topped receiver and rear locking action proved the inspiration for the Model 92 and 94, tube magazine lever-action rifles. It was a strong design and offered such chamberings as 45-70 Govt, 45-90 and even the massive 50-110, as well as the .33 WCF (Winchester Centre Fire). I had a new 1886 which was the rifle version with a

26" octagonal barrel, full-length magazine tube and pistol grip butt. It was modern-manufactured and made in 1999 by Miroku of Japan for Browning who by that time owned Winchester. It was also big and heavy fully bombed-up with 10-rounds (+1) of 45-70 Government, but a thing of beauty!

Today we seem to write off most lever-actions of this type as cowboy guns, which research showed was certainly not the case with the 1886/71 as it first appeared in 1935 – 49-years after the original. It was also only offered in one calibre .348 Winchester (8.8mm), which is a big, bottle-necked case based on a necked-down .50 WCF. There were originally three loadings - 150, 200 and 250-grains, which was reduced to just the one 200-grain later on. This however was generating a healthy 2,530 fps/2,840 ft/lbs. The 250-grainer made 2350 fps/3060 ft/lbs, again respectable!

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

The jury is out on whether the 71 was a success or failure. In essence it is an 1886 pretty much re-introduced in 1935 in a more sporterised format, which stayed in production until 1957, so on the books for 22-years – not too bad. It was however starting to look a bit dated despite the US love affair with lever-actions. Add to this it was only ever chambered in 348 Winchester, which is more a big game cartridge than a deer round. Plus the open-topped action offered no way of mounting a

As every Pedersoli offer an exceptional reproduction of a historical firearm, this is the standard grade rifle, but versions with colour case-hardened frame and better would is also available

PETE MOORE SAYS:

"Gendellantios eum que sum volo dolorepta nulparitis pore delibus rem qui repudae sum andisqui aut quam hil expe"

scope, something Marlin with their 1894 and later 1895 did with their solid receiver build the latter in calibres such as 45-70 Government.

So Pedersoli's choice of reproducing the 71 as opposed to the original 1886 does seem a little odd and despite being a classic design this is much more a hunting tool than a rifle for punching paper at the Trafalgar meeting! This is also attested to by the fact they also offer a barrel-mounted base that replaces the rear sight so allowing the fitting of a red dot or even intermediate eye relief scope. Currently only

chambered in 45-70 Government this would make a great choice for driven boar or close-in big game work. As despite its age this calibre is a serious contender and with the introduction of new ammo from Hornady with their Leverrevolution series it offers some hi-tech performance for a round that is 138-years old and still going strong... Checking out their website now shows two, 19" carbine versions called Boar Busters and fitted as standard with the scope base, which includes a basic rear sight too. Also chambered in 444 Marlin one is even in blaze camo, which does look odd on what was originally a classic rifle.

HANDS ON

As always Pedersoli makes a superior product and the 1886/71 is no exception. I have the Standard version on test that shows well blued barrel, magazine, action and operating lever. The woodwork is two nice pieces of chequered walnut with what appears to be a hi-lustre oil finish. The pistol-grip type butt is wide and deep with a 23mm, Ultra light, Microcell memory recoil pad that does not look out of place and is to be appreciated! QD sling loops are located at the tip of the forend and under the butt. The Premium version is identical but shows a colour case-hardened action and better grade timber!

The medium weight barrel is 24" with a 1-18" twist rate to suit large, slow moving bullets. At 7.5 lbs this is not a heavy rifle though well sized at 42.5" muzzle to butt.

WE RECKON

- ★ Beautiful recreation of a classic big bore lever-action
- ★ Dedicated design which is more hunting than target
- ★ Reassuringly expensive...



Unlike earlier lever-actions the 1886 locked by twin vertical lugs at the rear of the receiver, which for its day offered a very strong action, also note the holes for the aperture sight



(Above) The Browning-designed 1886 was Winchesters first true big bore lever-action, the 86/71 holds 5-rounds (Right) Old and new left - classic 405-grain lead flat nose loading, right - the flexible rubber tip of the 325-grain Leverrevolution bullet



138-years young, for hunting Hornady's Leverrevolution ammo really improves what the rifle can do no end

Winchester 1886/71 Pedersoli now recreates this classic lever-action sporter in 45-70, which is aimed more at the hunter



The rear sight is a standard, semi-buckhorn elevator wedge type and is good out to 100-yards



Action open showing the locking lugs, the curvature of the lever does tend to push on the middle finger

► Sights consist of a semi buckhorn elevator/wedge at the rear - this can be removed when fitting the scope base - and there are also two threaded holes for mounting already cut into the barrel. A brass-tipped blade in a removable tunnel sits up front.

The bolt is rectangular and locks by twin vertical lugs at the rear. The open-topped receiver does not allow for scope mounting over the action, as ejection is straight up and back. But as with the original the rear of the bolt is drilled and tapped and Pedersoli offer an aperture sight to suit. The rifle loads on the right via a sprung gate to a capacity of five, plus one in the chamber. There's no separate safety catch as found on the Browning/Miroku 1886, which is located on the tang. Instead the hammer offers a half cock option that lifts it clear of the tail of the firing pin for a safe carry that is easy to

thumb back into action. The operating lever is curved to conform to the shape of the pistol grip.

GRADE 2

Given the age of the 45-70 cartridge, firearms manufacture has moved on considerably since then and today you can very much put rifles chambered for it into four distinct bands as to the power of the ammunition and strength of the action. Band 1 - original and reproduction BPCRs like the Sharps and trapdoor Springfields etc, Band 2 - lever-actions like the various 1886s, Band 3 - Marlin 1895 lever-action and Band 4 - Ruger #1 single shot and the few bolt actions available. This is really only of concern to handloaders as all 45-70 factory ammo is made with the weaker, Grade 1 actions in mind. Though is still more than capable of delivering the goods on big animals!

As a 45-70 shooter I loaded up some Band 1 loads for the 71 using Lee Precision dies with 405-grain lead flat nose bullets and brass all from Henry Krank & Co Ltd. This was with a maximum charge of 31-grains of Hodgdon H4198, which is producing around 1400 fps/1600 ft/lbs. This makes a good practice/plinking load. But for hunting power I chose Hornady's 325-grain Levevolution ammo which uses a flexible, polymer-tipped JSP-type bullet that is doing 2050 fps/3032 ft/lbs at the muzzle. The pointed nose is ballistically more efficient and can be safely used in a tube magazine

as the flexible polymer tip will not detonate the primer above it under recoil. This design takes this calibre out of its short range/mediocre accuracy slot and improves it no end.

A TAD LIVELY

The 45-70 is a bit baky in light rifles and the 71 is no exception, especially when you are shifting heavy bullets of 400-grains +. I was very glad of the modern recoil pad as the lead loads if anything kicked more than the lighter and faster Levevolution ammo. With iron sight you can expect 1-2" at 50-yards and 3-4 at 100, obviously a scope would improve that and I would say shots over 250-yards on game are easily achievable.

Operation was initially a little firm and the curved face of the lever tended to place pressure on your middle finger as you cycled the action. However, this smoothed up a little, but as a matter of course I would wear a shooting glove.

For me the 71 would primarily be a boar rifle or for big game in close cover. Those big/heavy bullets carry serious weight and energy that belies their apparently low launch speed. Add in the 5+1 capacity and the easy of filling of the magazine at any time along with an action that leaves both hands on the gun at all times and it's all there! The down sides however are a classic design and a high price tag in what is a specialised rifle.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

■ Name Pedersoli 1886/71 (S 740) Standard version
■ Calibre 45-70 Government
■ Capacity 5+1
■ Action lever
■ Barrel 24"
■ Weight 7.5 lbs
■ Length 42.5"
■ Sights Y
■ Barrel drilled and tapped for base
■ Price £???
■ Contact Henry Krank & Co Ltd, 0113 256 9163
■ www.davide-pedersoli.com
■ Lee Precision, bullets and brass - Henry Krank
■ www.leeprecision.com
■ Hornady Levevolution ammo - Edgar Brothers Ltd, 01625 613177
■ www.hornady.com

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