

Shooting the Oldies

Care and Feeding the Damascus Doubles

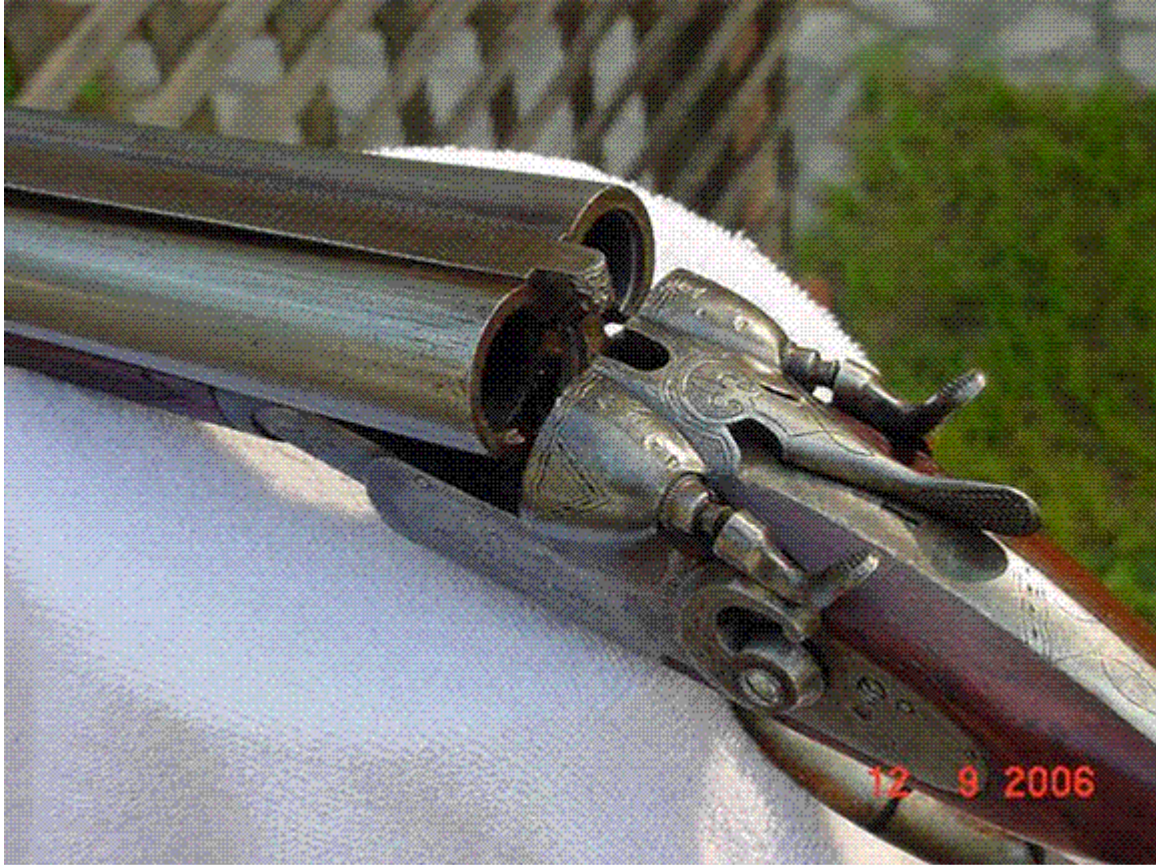


There is something very pleasing about hunting with a fine old double! In this day of high tech everything, it brings back to us a bygone simpler time when traditions were handed down father to son. In order to shoot and hunt with these fine old guns, certain rules apply that must be followed. First, remember some of these guns are over 100 years old, as is the one pictured.



Rule Number One!

The single most important thing to consider is whether the firearm is serviceable or a wall-hanger. A qualified gunsmith, familiar with fine doubles, will thoroughly check parts, frame, barrels, and wood. If the firearm passes this through inspection, it is time to consider loads. Although there are some fine substitute powders available today, I still suggest loading black powder. Unlike muzzleloaders with the closed rear barrels, doubles can be broken down for barrel cleaning. The best is a shotgun rod with a wool mop tip. Fill a pot with hot water. Add some dishwashing liquid, put the muzzles down in the water, and mop out the barrels with your rod. Dry with a clean patch and then oil. Wipe the inside of the frame with water, dry and oil. This is a simple method and will keep the metal from rusting. Stocks can be waxed. I like a good grade of Ox Blood shoe polish. Now you are ready to move on to Rule Number Two!



Rule Number Two

The next consideration is loads for your double. Here it depends on how traditional you want to be. The original shells were put up in either paper or brass hulls. Brass hulls are pretty, but required over size wads. Most large shot shell component companies still stock paper hulls. I still use good plastic hulls tough. As mentioned before, use only a good grade of black powder. The best I know of is “Swiss” brand, followed by “Elephant” brand. These two have far less dust and burn cleaner than other makes. Lee makes a set of dippers that work best for powder and shot marked 1 1/8 oz., 1 1/4 oz., and 1 1/2 oz. The standard practice of the day was to use the same volume of black powder as volume of shot. With these three dippers, you can load everything for a light field loads to a heavy field load.



Rule Number Three

Now it is time to buy your components. Ballistic Products Inc. has a fine line of components, including nitro cards, filler wads, and over shot wads. Graf & Sons carry a full line of Cheddite primed hulls also. Your basic components will be a supply of .135" nitro cards, 1/4" cork filler wads, and standard over shot wads. Some loaders but 1/2" filler wads, but the 1/4" wads are best for setting the height of the load column. BPI also carries a full line of shot in various sizes. Shot size depends on what you plan to hunt and today's standards still apply. Since you will not be using plastic shot wads, it is best to buy a better grade of shot. You can make some good shot protectors from the tubes you roll dimes in. Just cut them slightly longer than the inside of your shot/powder dipper. This is inserted into your hull before pouring the shot into the hull. You might consider buying a roll crimp head from BPI. This head can be used in a hand drill or drill press. The absolute best method for your rolled crimp is using the drill press and the BPI shell vise



Rule Number Four

Putting your load together is next! Dip your selected amount of powder and pour into your primed shot shell hull. Add your .135" nitro card and press it firmly down onto the powder with a 1/2" x 6" wood dowel. Pour your shot in and notice how many filler wads you will need. Pour the shot out and add your filler wads and press them down firmly onto your nitro card. Pour your shot in again and see how close it comes to the mouth of

the hull. The ideal is ¼". If it is lower, pour out the shot and add a .135" nitro. The overshot wad is added to the top of the shot and you are ready to roll crimp the shell. With a little of practice, you can adjust everything to fit nicely. We mentioned the Lee dippers, but there is another way to measure powder and shot that is worth mentioning. Black powder suppliers carry adjustable measures for powder. These work very well, but involve a little math. A bulk Dram equals 27.34 grs of black powder. A 3 dram load = 82 grs of black powder, 3 1/8 dram = 85 grs of black powder, 3 3/4 dram = 103 grs black powder. By setting the measure to grains, you can then use it for a shot measure for a balanced load.

Conclusion

Contrary to some articles telling one can use smokeless powder loads in Damascus barrels, I consider it to be extremely unwise!

There are smokeless powder loads that produce around 7,500 psi, but the pressure peak is more forward than where the same pressure peaks with black powder. This smokeless powder peak may be near the forearm, where the barrels are much thinner. It is better to be safe than sorry!