

CHECK YOUR LOCKS

This month, **Tim Greenwood** talks us through maintaining the lock-up of your gun



Tim Greenwood has more than 30 years' gunsmithing experience and is relied on by many of the top names in clay shooting

If you are a regular reader of my articles in Clay Shooting Magazine (my thanks to those of you who are), you will know how important I think it is to have your gun serviced by a competent gunsmith, and if you don't how your gun is quite liable to let you down when you really need it.

During your service, one of the points a gunsmith will check is how much wear there is to the lock-up of the gun; in other words, if the gun shuts properly so there is no play or wobble between the barrels and the breech face of the action.

This is easy to check at home, and indeed it should be checked regularly, because if the barrels are not tight on the standing breech, gasses can escape

and there is an increased risk of the gun blowing open when fired, with potentially dire consequences to you and those around you. First, check the alignment of the top lever in relation to the top tang. As you can see in picture (1), the top lever of this fairly old Browning B25 is slightly off-centre. This shows that there is considerable wear to the locking mechanism. The top lever should be to the right of centre, near to the wood if new or rebuilt, as in picture (8). Next, to check how bad the wear is, remove the forend and hold the pistol grip of the gun in one hand with the stock trapped between your arm and side. Hold the barrels about halfway up with your other hand and see if you can wiggle them up and down or side to side. If you feel even the slightest movement, there is a problem with the locking mechanism, and although the gun may not blow open on the next shot, or the next, it will in the near future and you



do not want to be holding it when that happens! Also, check for any daylight between the breech face of the barrels and the standing breech. It is rare, but a gun can feel tight yet have a gap from which gasses can escape, usually as a result of a bodged tightening. If there is a gap, you can feel movement, or the top lever is centred or left of centre, **GET IT CHECKED**. Do not risk firing it until you have been advised by a competent gunsmith.

When the locking of the barrels to action is loose, it also puts quite a lot

The Gunsmith



causes the bottom of the top lever shaft to shear off, meaning you are unable to open the gun using the top lever. Also, when the gun is fired, the locking bar can move back a fraction and hit the stub, which adds to the chance of the stub shearing. Should this happen, the gun has to be partially stripped, or at least the stock removed and a lever used from the inside to pull back the locking bar. This can happen when you have just loaded the gun so you have live cartridges in the chambers – not a very good position to be in – and it is dangerous to fire the gun with a top lever/locking bar fault because if the shaft has sheared off, there is no pressure from the top lever spring onto the locking bar to keep the gun shut when the discharge occurs. While this can occur due to a fault in the metal of the top lever shaft, it is almost always caused by a lack of maintenance allowing a build-up of dirt and wear in the lock-up of the barrels to action.

The other Sunday while I was in the workshop (yes, I work an average 60-hour week), I received a phone call from a friend of mine asking for a special favour. This friend's best mate is none other than Mr. George Digweed, who I am sure, needs no introduction.

While George and I only live about 20 miles apart, we have had very little dealings with each other; he certainly does not need my advice on gun fit and I am sure Perazzi, who sponsor him usually, take care of his maintenance and gun needs. I have, on occasion, worked on several of his other guns, but always



of strain on the locking mechanism as the locking bolt hits the end of its travel without being slowed at all by the chamfer of the barrel lugs mating with it. The small stub which engages with the locking bar at the end of the top lever shaft receives almost a 'kick back' from the pressure of the top lever spring driving the locking bar home via the stub and the shaft with no resistance at the end of its travel. In some cases, this



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through Chris Potter's or one of George's agents.

George's Perazzi had broken and as he was due to fly out to the World FITASC championship the following Wednesday, he was worried that he would not be able to take his favourite gun. He knew that his mate Paul and I were friends, so he asked Paul to phone me to see if I would be willing to help him as a special favour. That evening the gun turned up at my workshop. As you can see in pictures (2), (3), (4) and (5), it was pretty mucky inside the action – not surprising with the amount of shooting George does with this gun – and, lo and behold, the top lever had sheared at the base (6).

Fortunately, Chris Potter's, our

local gun shop, keeps a good selection of Perazzi spares in stock so first thing on Monday morning, Paul was able pick up a new one for me to fit. While waiting for the part, I put all of the mechanism from the top of the action, the action and barrels into my Ultrasonic Cleaning tank (7) to ensure the top action, barrel lumps and ejectors were spotlessly clean. The new top lever needed a little 'fettling' to make it fit and its operation to be smooth; interestingly, the new top lever was past centre to the left when assembled with the locking bar and the barrels fitted, which, as stated earlier, coupled with the dirt I had found, would have caused it to shear, so I then

set about rebuilding the locking bar with a softer, sacrificial metal, which would mean that the barrel lugs would never wear and it would be simple to rebuild when required. Using this method not only saves the cost of a new locking bolt every time the gun becomes loose, it also negates the chance of the barrel lugs ever wearing and having to be rebuilt by welding – a very precise and expensive operation. Once I had built up the locking bar, I fitted a new top lever spring, set the bite to the far right of the top tang, as mentioned earlier (8), then lubricated and re-assembled the whole gun for Paul to collect on the Monday evening. During the day, George popped in to thank me personally for my help and presented me with a large bag of his sausages – a gesture I was very pleased to receive.

So, it just goes to show, even world champions sometimes need the help of a small, provincial gunsmith when they are in trouble and even their guns can break if they are not maintained.

Next month, from this, (9) to this, (10): more about this disaster and the restoration of a 'burnt out' pair! ■



WHAT CAN TIM GREENWOOD DO FOR YOU AND YOUR GUN?

- Tim offers a full gunfitting service and free help and advice
- He can do anything required to your stock, barrels or action
- He specialises in wooden stock extensions matched to your existing stock
- Tim will also make any specialist parts as required and offers full servicing and maintenance services
- Visit the website: www.greenwoodgunsmiths.co.uk or ask Tim's advice by emailing: asktheexperts@blazepublishing.co.uk