

MARK ARIE CROSSED THE ATLANTIC WITH FELLOW AMERICAN TEAM MEMBERS FOR THE 1920 OLYMPIC GAMES IN ANTWERP, BELGIUM, CAPTURING THE INDIVIDUAL GOLD MEDAL FOR TRAPSHOOTING BY BREAKING 95/100.

HIGH RIB SPORTERS

A REVIEW BY **DANA FARRELL**

Arie, a six time All American, also recorded the first ever 100 straight in Trap Doubles and twice captured the Doubles title at the Grand American. The list of his shooting accomplishments go on and on, but what's remarkable isn't just his scores, but what he shot those scores with – a plain barreled model 28 Marlin pump gun with no rib.

Times have changed, shotguns have evolved and ventilated ribs are standard on today's shotguns. Trap shooters have favored tall ribs for years, but for the most part, sporting clays shooters (until recently) have stuck with lower rib guns. If it's worked so well for the game of trap for all these years, why has the sporting clays crowd been so slow to catch on? Maybe it's due to tradition and the

reluctance to stray from the sport's game field roots, or the comparative youth of the sport itself. Regardless of why it's taken so long, one thing is clear. Looking at recent sales figures, high rib target guns are now more popular than ever. According to Kurt Grates of Great Lakes Sporting Arms, 60% of the sporting clays guns he now sells are high rib models.

Benefits

Trap is a game shot with a pre-mounted gun, and it doesn't take a deep thinker to come to the conclusion that it's easier to see the trap house when the gun barrel is lower, out of the shooters' line of vision – the sight picture a high rib gun can provide. With a higher rib, peripheral vision improves, especially on targets coming from below, making a tall rib a natural fit for trap shooters.

Two eyed shooters can see through a high rib gun more easily, improving target acquisition, which naturally translates to better scores. Proponents claim the more upright head position associated with a high rib lessens muscle and eye strain – a significant

consideration, especially for aging shooters whose flexibility and visual acuity is less than optimal.

Shooting a standard rib gun often necessitates craning the head far forward in order to place the eye over the rib, forcing the shooter to peer through the top of the eye socket, which in addition to adding to muscle and eye fatigue, can lead to problems for shooters who wear prescription shooting glasses. Prescription lenses are commonly designed with an upright head position in mind, with the corrective prescription centered on the lens. When shooting with one's head far forward, the user is not looking through the optical cylinder – the part of the lens where the prescription is typically ground.

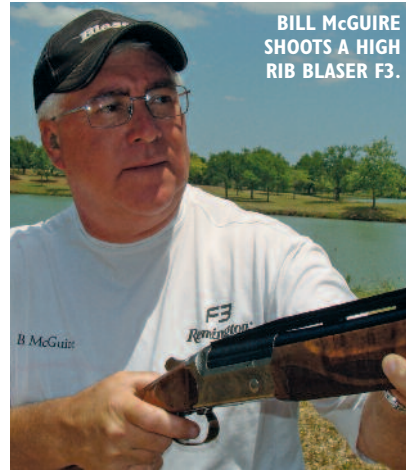
Aftermarket Conversions

Back in the early 1990s, Dennis De Vault of De Vault Industries wanted a higher point of impact on his Perazzi, so he raised the comb until he got the result he wanted. He admits raising the level of the eye high above the rib can cause “a little bit of a dissociative eye function” as he puts it. “On really tough birds, your brain just doesn't know where the gun's at.” He showed it to Jon Kruger who thought the gun felt awkward due

to looking down the top surface of the rib. So, De Vault went home, thought it over and fabricated his own tapered rib, which corrected the ski slope sight picture. He ran into Kruger again a few months later and Kruger liked the gun enough to say he'd like to try a similar set up someday. Kruger sent him a barrel and De Vault put a 1/4" to 5/16" high rib on the gun – “just enough to get Jon's head up and not jammed down into the stock. I sent it to him to use that weekend at a DU shoot in Atlanta and he said he'd call me on Monday and let me know how it went.” De Vault was a little nervous to hear how Kruger did with the new set up, but was relieved to hear he had broken back to back 99s! Kruger's been shooting a high rib gun ever since.

De Vault's ribs are made of Delrin, a trade name for a thermoplastic also known as acetal, a material known for its stiffness and workability. They are colored throughout, so a nick or scratch does not produce an unsightly mark. De Vault installs the ribs himself, by attaching it on top of the existing rib with high quality double sided adhesive tape and custom cutting the rib blank after it's installed on the gun to the slope and width the customer desires. They range in price from \$375 to \$425.

Two time National sporting



BILL MCGUIRE SHOOT A HIGH RIB BLASER F3.

clays champion Robbie Purser used a De Vault Delrin rib to win the gold medal twice at the Goodwill Games in Lake Placid and Bill McGuire had one put on the Beretta 686 he used to shoot. McGuire later switched to a standard rib Krieghoff, but not seeing the success he was used to, asked De Vault to install one on his K 80. McGuire has since moved to a high rib Blaser F3.

There are plenty of other gunsmiths able to provide aftermarket high rib conversions – including such companies as Simmons, Money Maker Ribs, Keen Sights, Meadow Industries and Add-A-Rib. The latter is the brainchild of Ray Braun, a 69 year old entrepreneur from Holbrook, New York, who also owns aftermarket shotgun parts company Stock Positioning Systems, manufacturer of adjustable butt

plates, recoil reducers and adjustable comb hardware. Braun's machined aluminum, non-tapered, epoxy painted ribs are user installed using high quality 3M tape. Ribs come in seven heights, from 3/8" to 1 1/2" high and in two lengths, with models specifically crafted to complement different shotguns.

Craig Sheaffer, owner of Montlake Classic Clays outside of Chattanooga,

Tennessee, does stock alterations and fittings and has recently installed around a dozen Add-A-Ribs for customers. His 'head up' philosophy echoes many others. “When you drive down the highway or walk on the sidewalk you have your head in a straight up position – so why not shoot that way?” According to Sheaffer, adding an aftermarket high rib to a gun is not without its complications. It's not as simple as just adding a rib to a gun without making other adjustments to the stock. Point of impact will be too low if a rib is added without also raising the comb. Shooters usually need longer comb posts in order to raise the comb enough to get their desired POI back, often creating a large gap between the comb and stock, which is a turn-off for some shooters. One way to alleviate this is to have a larger comb piece built, effectively making the adjustable comb into a Monte Carlo.

Factory Sporters

Gun buyers have spoken and leading manufacturers have listened, with Krieghoff, Blaser, Caesar Guerini, Kolar, Perazzi and Zoli all adding high rib sporters to their product lines. Industry heavyweights Krieghoff and Blaser both report that at least 50% of new



JON KRUGER SHOOT A HIGH RIB K-80.



TOP: PERAZZI HIGH RIB SPORTER. BELOW: KRIEGHOFF HIGH RIB K-80.



sporting guns are of the high rib variety, and with list prices somewhat higher than their low rib equivalents, shooters have proven they are willing to pay extra for them. Being more expensive to manufacture, the high rib Blaser F3 Sporter lists for \$1025 more than its low rib version, but that doesn't seem to deter buyers. Rich Kaysa, Vice President of Sales and Marketing at Blaser USA, says, "I hate to call it a trend, because trends go away. I think high rib guns are here to stay due to the fact that it's an easier way to shoot, with less felt recoil and because it makes visual pick up of the target easier, translating into better scores."

Alex Diehl, General Manager at Krieghoff International claims manufacturing costs are a little higher for the K-80 Pro Sporter, which translates to \$300 more per gun at the retail level. Diehl credits Jon Kruger, who now shoots a Pro Sporter, with providing very valuable input into the high rib design, but perhaps the best endorsement Krieghoff had for the high rib K-80 came from Gebben Miles, who started shooting it just one month before the 2009 Sporting Clays National Championship. "I didn't plan on shooting it at the Nationals that year but tried it a couple of times and the feel suited my style so well

– it was a very easy transition from my 34" low rib Perazzi to the 32" high rib Krieghoff," says Miles.

Zoli has perhaps come up with the most creative approach when it comes to hedging their bets on what the shooting public wants in a target gun. Effectively playing both sides of the fence, the new Bilanx VCS (stands for Variable Clays System) comes with a removable clamp-on high rib and two adjustable comb pieces that make it a snap to convert from a low rib to a high rib and back again in minutes – while keeping the same point of impact. It will be interesting to see if other manufacturers follow Zoli's innovative lead.

Suit Yourself

With so many top shooters extolling the benefits of high ribs, why aren't all shooters moving to them? The answer is simple – they don't suit everyone. Some top shooters claim raising their eyes so far above the gun causes a mental disassociation with the barrel. David Radulovich, winner of the 2009 Sporting Clays US Open, shoots a standard ribbed Blaser F3 and thinks after the market is saturated with high rib models, the pendulum will swing back in the other direction. "In my opinion a gun should be designed



DAVID RADULOVICH (ABOVE) AND ZACH KIENBAUM PREFER STANDARD RIBS.

WITH SO MANY TOP SHOOTERS EXTOLLING THE BENEFITS OF HIGH RIBS, WHY AREN'T ALL SHOOTERS MOVING TO THEM? THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE – THEY DON'T SUIT EVERYONE.

to be an extension of your hand and eye and to minimize any error in movement by being very sleek and low-profile," says Radulovich.

Zach Kienbaum switched to a high rib Perazzi last year and his scores tanked – coming to a head at the World English Sporting Championships, where he shot poorly in the 5-Stand, Pre-lim and first half of the Main Event. "Other top shooters were in the mid-90s. They're not 10 birds better than me – but I was consistently 10 birds behind. I felt I had to change something and went back to my standard rib gun and shot a 48 or 49 in Super-Sporting and a 93 in the Main Event on Sunday," he says. Kienbaum admits shooting with two eyes you can see around the high rib gun easier, but that didn't keep him from switching back to his standard rib after only nine months. "My experience with a high rib was that I could see the target really well, but on the flip side of that I wasn't as sure of where the gun was. Believe it or



not, I'd miss trap targets – anything really low or in a dark background – and the frustrating part of that was not just missing, but I wouldn't know how I missed or why... everything felt right... I know I was looking at the target and properly focused, so it was really frustrating."

With so many choices available for the shooter to consider, it's easier now than ever to have the gun that fits your idea of what the perfect target gun should be. Standard rib, factory high rib or aftermarket conversion – the sky's the limit. One can only wonder, with all of the options currently available to shooters, what would Mark Arie have been shooting today? We can only wonder. ■