



Simmons 60th Anniversary
1945-2005 2 of 1000

60 years of ribs, repair and service

A REPORT FROM SIMMONS GUN REPAIR BY **STEVE FISCHER**

THIS YEAR, SIMMONS SPECIALTIES (AS I ALWAYS REMEMBER THEM), NOW TRADING AS SIMMONS GUN REPAIR, WILL BE CELEBRATING 60 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE SHOOTING COMMUNITY. BEING IN BUSINESS FOR SO LONG CERTAINLY IS AN ACCOMPLISHMENT, BUT THERE IS ANOTHER REASON BESIDE JUST LONGEVITY THAT IS CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION.

In 1945 Ernie Simmons opened a gun shop in Kansas City and a decade later came up with an idea that literally changed shotguns forever – the ventilated rib! He devised an easily installed system of supporting posts that were soldered to the barrel, and to which a dovetailed slip-on rib could be attached. Both the front and rear of the rib would also be soldered to firmly lock the rib onto the barrel. Among other things, this system would allow for faster heat dissipation. It wasn't long before the major manufacturers, with Winchester one of the largest, came knocking on the door – and over the years literally thousands of shotguns would receive the new Simmons ventilated rib system.

The company grew and expanded its services to other areas of gunsmithing including repair and bluing and the regulating and rejoining of barrels that had ribs break loose, as well as parts sales and a retail outlet for firearms and accessories. For a short period, the company ventured into the retail and wholesale world, teaming up with Jerry's Sports Center chain.

When Ernie Simmons passed away, his son took over the reins and eventually moved the company from Kansas City about 30 miles South, to the 'burbs of Olathe, Kansas, and into three separate buildings along Rogers Road to handle retail sales, wholesale and warehousing, and the gunsmithing and rib installation business. Early

in the 1990s Jim Wright bought the company and reorganized it into a leaner and more successful operation based at just one location, eliminating the parts sales and wholesale distribution business, and concentrated on the repair and service industry.

SIMMONS TODAY

I arrived for my appointment to meet Jim Wright and to tour Simmons Gun Repair on a drizzling rainy and cold Kansas Wednesday morning. Having done business with them for many years, I was much interested in finally seeing the operation. As always seems to be the case, the mind's eye picture I had formed over those many years had

absolutely no resemblance whatsoever to the actual establishment now before me. My minds eye had conjured up a huge factory building with at least two stories and 50 employees. I was quite surprised when I pulled into the parking area and looked at the unobtrusive brick façade of the real thing! The huge staff of gunsmiths and employees I had imagined was actually a half dozen, plus Jim the owner. He greeted me in the showroom and as we small talked our way to his office I found the building to be larger than it looked from the outside.

I discovered on my tour of the facility that there was a maze of different rooms each with different



INSIDE THE WORK SHOP.

THE RIB IS SOLDERED AT THE REAR (AND THE FRONT) AND THE DOVETAILED RIB IS SLID OVER THE POSTS.

THE MILLING OPERATION THAT CUTS THE RIB POSTS TO THE PROPER HEIGHT.



functions – such as polishing, bluing, painting, shipping, and of course, the soldering of the ribs. The main shop area was quite large and contained several milling machines, soldering tanks, lathes, and the work benches of the gunsmiths – as well as the racks of guns waiting for repairs or ribs.

As we walked around the areas of the shop floor, I met the various gunsmiths and talked to them briefly about their specific jobs. It became quite evident to me that I was amongst a group of people who really did know what they were doing. For starters, repairing or replacing a vent rib or re-regulating the point of impact on the various doubles and over/under barrels



TECHNICIAN REMOVING A LOOSE SIDE RIB.

THE BLUING, BOTH HOT TANK AND RUST BLUING FOR THE SOFT SOLDERED DOUBLES AND SOME OVER AND UNDERS AS WELL AS OTHER RIFLES, SHOTGUNS AND PISTOLS IS THE DOMAIN OF KEN LITTLE WHO HAS 10 YEARS OF EXPERTISE.

that had popped loose is not a job for the amateur or the gunsmith 'wannabe.' These folks are pros in every sense of the word. For example, John Tippin is the main rib man and has 37 years of experience! Another rib expert specializing in the

doubles and the over and under is Jim Clark, with 32 years experience. The general repair work on just about anything that comes through the door goes to Mike Calahan with 18 years in the trade. The man who puts extra barrel sets together, Paul Salchow, has spent 18 years in his job. The bluing, both hot tank and rust bluing for the soft soldered doubles and some over and unders as well as other rifles, shotguns and pistols is the domain of Ken Little who has 10 years of expertise. Shipping, sales, and the computer sciences is Zach Broni's job to keep the work flowing in and out. The owner, Jim Wright, has captained this team for the last 10 years, and judging by the way everyone gets along and can cover much of each others jobs, he has been doing it right!

NEW MARKETS

With rib installations the mainstay operation of the business, the company has not sat back and rested on their laurels. They have



A DOZEN WINCHESTER MODEL 12s WITH POSTS IN PLACE, WAIT FOR THE RIBS TO BE INSTALLED AND THEN BLUED.

completed set of barrels with extractors and in all the popular gauges. How about a nice 28 gauge set of barrels for that favorite 12 gauge? Hmmm!

POINT OF IMPACT ALTERATIONS

Here at Simmons, the point of impact of the barrel or barrels can be altered or adjusted to the desires of the shooter. This includes not only single barreled guns such as the venerable

and the Poly-choke devices. You can still get the 'donut' or round post ribs installed, or the 'duck-bill' style receiver extension of the rib that was popular on many of the Model 12 trap guns. Rib widths from 1/4, 5/16, 3/8, and 1/2 inch are available for installation. In honor of the company's 60th anniversary, a special edition of ribs numbered from 1 of 1000 are being offered this year. ■

For further information you can contact Simmons Gun Repair by phone at (913) 782-3131. Their web site address is www.simmonsguns.com, and their mailing address is: Simmons Gun Repair, 700 S. Rogers Rd. Olathe, KS. 66062.



RAW MONOBLOC'S READY TO BE MACHINED AND FITTED UP WITH EXTRACTORS AND BARRELS.

expanded into several new areas, one of which is Police and Prison system weaponry with specialty items such as shotguns designed to fire less lethal devices such as rubber bullets and tear gas. The stocks and forearms are colored a bright blaze orange – designating these shotguns to only have non lethal projectiles. The company has also come up with a new firearms finish they call 'Simguard'. It comes in several different colors and is guaranteed rustproof for two years. Traditional black looks very much like normal

bluing and would be a good choice for the competition shooter who handles his shotgun a lot. For the hunter who gets into severe weather conditions there is a three color camo finish available, as well as blues, orange and yellow. Color case hardening is also offered in their line of finishes – and their bluing in both hot tank and rust blue is excellent. Want an extra set of barrels for your favorite over and under? Need a dent or two removed? Simmons can do! They have unfinished monobloc's on hand and can build them into a

Winchester Model 12, which to this day is still flowing steadily into the shop, but virtually any single, over/under or side by side that the customer would like to print to a specific point of aim. This area is where the expertise of the technician is put to the test. Jim tells me that they have made guns for trap shooters to place the shot charge well over 100 percent high as gauged by the 30" circle at 40 yards. Others want a 50-50 balance, or perhaps a 60-40, or even 70-30. They check the placement by shooting in their indoor testing range, and verify the results before the final finishing is done.

For the record, Simmons still installs vent ribs, as was done years ago, on Winchester Model 12s, 42s, and still installs Cutts compensators (12 and 20 gauge)

A COMPLETED RIB JOB ON AN OLD REMINGTON 870 THAT WAS ORIGINALLY A PLAIN BARRELED GUN.