



In 1911 Winchester brought out a newly designed shotgun to take its place in the ever-growing line-up of Winchester's fine firearms. The birth of the Model 12 Winchester Repeating Shotgun would prove to be one of the most successful pump shotguns in history, and a key player in the golden age of Winchester's distinguished history. Precision manufacturing using billets of forged steel, intricately machined, produced a nearly 'bullet proof' shotgun. It was known (and still is, for that matter) for its silky smooth action, strength, reliability – and that immeasurable yet most

Myth

important ingredient – handling.

Some two million Model 12 shotguns were produced over the life span of the gun, ending finally in the 80s. Another milestone pump came along in 1935, and was a close relative of the now venerated Model 12. The Model 42 pump was a scaled down version of its bigger brother, in .410 gauge. For the next 35 years (give or take) the pair almost ruled the trap and skeet fields. Many skeet shooters had a set of Model 12s in 28, 20 and 12 gauge, with the Model 42, for the .410 events. Shooting records still stand today, set by these shotguns and there are still many Model 12 trap guns in use, as well as scores of



WINCHESTER REPEATING ARMS COMPANY – NOW THERE'S A NAME WITH SOME SERIOUS CREDENTIALS! OLIVER FISHER WINCHESTER BEGAN PRODUCING FIREARMS, AND LATER, AMMUNITION IN THE U.S. OVER ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO. THOSE PAST YEARS HAVE SEEN MANY INNOVATIVE AND REVOLUTIONARY DESIGNS OF FIREARMS PRODUCED BY THIS LEGENDARY COMPANY. I COULDN'T EVEN BEGIN TO NAME THEM ALL, BUT A FEW TRULY HALLMARK GUNS COME TO MIND, MOST DEVELOPED BEFORE THE TURN OF THE LAST CENTURY, SUCH AS THE LEVER ACTION CARBINE MODEL 92 AND 94 OR MODEL 90 PUMP.



or magic?

**STEVE FISCHER REVIEWS
WINCHESTER'S LEGENDARY SUPER X-1**



hunters who swear by their Model 12 – often handed down from Father to Son.

Good, bad or indifferent, 1964 was the year that the Winchester Company changed its manufacturing processes, which included dropping almost all of the firearm designs that had been so successful for many years. Pressure from Remington Arms, their major competitor, who began producing guns with innovative manufacturing techniques – using more stamped parts and less costly machining requirements – was taking a large share of the shotgun market. The result of Remington's manufacturing techniques was lower production costs and a retail price on their two major shotgun entries, the 870 pump and the 1100 semi-auto, that was considerably lower than the Winchester line of shotguns. Not only that, but the

arena with their competition. Gone however, were the Model 12, the Model 42, and many of their fine rifles which were either dropped from the line, or re-designed. It is thought by some, that this decision to change so drastically the entire line of firearms was the beginning of the end of the Winchester dynasty.

A STAR IS BORN!

Early in the seventies, Winchester decided to venture into the semi-auto shotgun market with a new model. With the memory of the Model 12 pump gun's unprecedented success still in mind, the design department was given a rather free hand, with the suggestion that they come up with a semi-auto that would have the feel, looks, and reliability of their now famous albeit discontinued Model 12 pump. After several years of

to be used and interchanged without modification. There were field versions, trap versions, and skeet versions, and aside from a bit of scroll stamping on the sides of the trap and skeet guns not found on the field versions and some higher grade wood, all versions of the model were mechanically the same. Winchester was back with what looked like a winner.

Now for the bad news. The gun was expensive. Too expensive. Sales lagged and the company tried and tried to get this superb shotgun out of the red. Priced at around \$500 in the mid-seventies, a Remington 1100 could be had for around \$200 or so – thus you see the problem. Finally, in 1985, Winchester had to put the Super X-1 to bed. Around 87,000 guns had been produced.

When the end came, there weren't many screams of indignation or begging that the gun

...ABOUT FOUR OR FIVE YEARS AGO, THE SUPER X-1 BEGAN TO SEE AN AWAKENING OF INTEREST BY SOME SPORTING CLAY SHOOTERS, LOOKING FOR A STURDY, DEPENDABLE AUTO-LOADER TO GIVE THEIR SHOULDER SOME RELIEF FROM THE POUNDING THEY HAD BEEN TAKING FOR SOME TIME WITH THE OVER AND UNDER...

work, and a few million dollars of investment, the Winchester Super-X Model 1 was born in 1974, and took its place in history.

Right from the beginning, customers and gun experts agreed that it did indeed have the feel of the Model 12 and it was certainly built much to the same exacting standards. Receiver, bolt, trigger guard and carrier were again machined from billets of steel, as in the days of the Model 12. Precision in every way was quite evident. A superb gas system, new in design, was extremely reliable, and would allow most shells from light to heavy

be kept in the line, and so the Super X-1 just slipped into a sort of dormancy.

About four or five years ago, the Super X-1 began to see an awakening of interest by some sporting clay shooters, looking for a sturdy, dependable auto-loader to give their shoulder some relief from the pounding they had been taking for some time with the over and under. They found the Super X-1 had superb handling characteristics and very soft recoil. They found the gun would also digest a large variety of loads with ease, and without having rings, dials, knobs, or

Remington guns were well accepted by the buying public. They were then, and still are, excellent shotguns. This, many say, caused the powers that be at Winchester to decide on dropping their current line, which had very high production costs, in favor of a totally new line, to be more competitive.

They chose to re-design and bring out a totally new line of guns. With designs that were cheaper to manufacture, coupled with parts that could be stamped or cast instead of machined, it was hoped that these changes would put them into a more competitive pricing



MAIN PICTURE: MISSISSIPPI FLYWAY – SCARCE AND A DESIRABLE COLLECTORS PIECE. ABOVE: ANOTHER RARE FIND – A SUPER X-1 NEW IN A BOX!

selectors to turn or move to another position to change from heavy to light loads or vice-versa. It had that mysterious and most difficult property to define – it felt right between the hands. It moved with ease and grace.

Heavy praise indeed, but to many single barrel lover's, this is the shot gunner's shotgun. It has that most sought after quality of pointability and the owners and users of this gun are as devoted to it as much as Ford or Chevy owners are to their cars!

THE SUPER X MODELS

Speaking of choices, they were

a tasteful bit of scroll stamping on both sides of the receiver, a higher grade of walnut and a recoil pad. Barrels were 26 inches for the skeet gun, and I have found the factory chokes to vary from about .003 to .009 in constriction, or a fairly loose skeet to almost improved cylinder. Either way, the targets don't have a chance. The trap guns featured 30 inch barrel choices in improved modified (.030) or a rather full, full (.042). The barrels had a definite rise towards the muzzle that can be seen quite readily. Strangely enough, almost every one I have pattern tested shot dead center. I

JEWELING ON THE BOLT AND CARRIER.



...WELL, BY NOW, YOU MUST BE THINKING THAT THIS GUN SOUNDS LIKE THE GREATEST THING TO COME DOWN THE PIKE SINCE SLICED BREAD, CRUSHED ICE AND BANANA HAMMOCKS...



SCROLL STAMPING ON TRAP AND SKEET MODELS.



TOP AND ABOVE: VIEWS OF THE CUSTOM WOOD ON THE AUTHOR'S SUPER X-1.

fairly limited. There was a field, skeet, a trap, and a really nice commemorative one of five hundred series known as the Mississippi Flyway. A few more were delegated to the custom shop for some fine engraving and gold inlay work and are truly rare pieces to find today. In the field line, barrels were 26 inches long with an improved cylinder fixed choke, or 28 inches with either a modified or 30 inch full fixed choke.

The skeet and trap versions had additional features that consisted of



L TO R: 26" SKEET, 28" MODIFIED FIELD AND TWO 30"

can only remember one or two that patterned even the least bit high, as would be expected for a trap barrel.

Well, by now, you must be thinking that this gun sounds like the greatest thing to come down the pike since sliced bread, crushed ice and banana hammocks. In many ways it really is. There are very few problems that come with this fine shotgun – and regular preventive maintenance takes care of most of them. The Super X-1 is an amazingly reliable semi-auto. It will feed just about anything – I've shot 24 gram shells, light 28 grams, and all the

fired, and is going strong. Probably my biggest problem with this gun is keeping the incidental dings and dents to the wood to a minimum.

THINGS TO KNOW

Okay, what's the catch? You might well ask. Every gun has some weaknesses or problems, so what about the Super X-1? The two most important parts in this gun that require vigilance and maintenance are the bolt buffer and the recoil spring. Since the bolt assembly is one of the parts machined from a solid steel billet, it's quite heavy. This is necessary not only for strength, but to accommodate the

ways to hot 36 gram shells with almost boring regularity. Also by now, you may have gathered that I am a fan of the Super X-1. Big time! I shoot it competitively and usually put 400 to 600 shells per week through it and would be hard pressed to remember the last time anything broke.

My current SX-1 (pictured above with the beautiful honey-colored exhibition grade walnut) has seen well over 60,000 shells

gas system's method of cycling. Without getting too technical, the bolt is driven by the gases metered through two small holes in the barrel against the gas piston and sleeve, driving the bolt rearward with considerable force. As a result, the rear of the bolt body slams into a plastic or nylon buffer, located just above the recoil spring tube in the rear of the receiver. This buffer has to take a considerable amount of abuse every time the gun is fired. After a while, it will begin to deteriorate. When it can no longer

provide ample protection for the bolt's repeated strikes against it, there is the chance that the bolt and more importantly, the locking block in the bolt, could get damaged or broken. When broken the gun will begin to have cycling problems – and the owner's wallet will take a pretty good hit in repairing this problem because the only part not available for replacement (you guessed it!) is the locking block. They can sometimes be repaired at the cost of around \$200, or the only other alternative is to buy a complete new bolt, for around \$300. However, all of this heavy-duty expense can be avoided simply by keeping an eye on the bolt buffer and replacing it when it begins to show wear. The bolt buffer costs about \$15 and the recoil spring about the same. I usually recommend replacement of both the buffer and the spring at the same time. It's an easy job and the value of the resultant preventive maintenance savings can be substantial.

Another part of good preventive maintenance is to keep the gas system clean. It is prone to rust, partly from chemical reaction of the hot gases through it and also to condensation, which collects in the piston sleeve and on the magazine tube where the gas system operates. The gas system is easy to remove and clean, with few parts or tricky assembly.

There are a few tricks to note for the Super X-1 that help with the maintenance. Plating the magazine tube, and all the gas system parts with hard chrome or Nitex (an electro-less process of plating) will greatly extend the durability and life of these parts. (Nitex is located in Uvalde, Texas.) There is also a stainless steel magazine tube available for the Super X-1. You benefit from a double life expectancy with the magazine tube because it is reversible. Should it



MAIN PICTURE: THIN WALLED CHOKES CAN BE INSTALLED. INSET LEFT: FACTORY BLUED GAS SYSTEM CAN BE HARD CHROME PLATED (MIDDLE PARTS) TO INCREASE LONGEVITY AND TO MAKE CLEANING EASIER. INSET TOP: RECOIL SPRING (TOP) READY FOR REPLACEMENT. INSET BOTTOM RIGHT: SOME SUGGESTED SPARE PARTS.

1ST. ROW: BOLT BUFFERS, RUBBER "O" RING – 2ND ROW: RECOIL SPRING FOLLOWER, TRIGGER GUIDE RETAINING PIN – 3RD ROW: HAMMER SPRING GUIDE (OUTER), HAMMER SPRING – 4TH ROW: BOLT CARRIER RELEASE AND RETAINING PIN, OPERATING HANDLE – 5TH ROW: CARRIER PIVOT PINS (R&L)

become excessively worn where the gas system sits, it can be removed from the receiver, turned around 180 degrees, and reinstalled.

'TRICKING OUT'

The current rage of modifying shotguns to 'competition' grade is running rampant. Just look at all the available options that can be done to the average shotgun – screw chokes, porting, lengthened forcing cones, special ribs, recoil reducing devices, adjustable combs, custom stocks, wild custom painting, space-age material recoil pads and more. Any or all can be done to the Super X-1. Whether or not they are needed is in the hands of the owner.

Screw-in chokes will certainly

give a wider spectrum of use for the shooter, although the factory fixed chokes deliver absolutely beautiful patterns from every barrel I have tested. Should you decide to have the screw-in chokes installed, most all of the after-market choke companies can do the job quite adequately. As with any shotgun, getting the Super X-1 fitted to you is smart money well spent.

Should you find a Super X-1 with a heavy trigger pull, a nice crisp trigger job to about four or four and one half pounds will do nicely. About half way through production, Winchester modified the trigger on the Super X. You may hear talk regarding the 'Stage one' or 'Stage three' triggers. There are minor differences between the two, with

the earlier trigger wider and serrated and the later trigger narrow and smooth. Both can be set to crisp and clean sear engagement, and I have not found it necessary to have to upgrade a Stage one to a Stage three.

SPARE PARTS

I wasn't kidding when I said this gun doesn't often break down. Even so, there are a few parts that you should have just in case. First and most important, have at least one bolt buffer. If you shoot a lot, say 8 or 10,000 rounds per year, have a couple on hand and at least one extra recoil spring. At about \$30 for both a spring and a buffer, it is cheap insurance. When the bolt begins to

feel like it's getting very easy to open, you're probably ready for a new recoil spring. I change them when the overall length of about 30 inches shrinks by 3 inches to around 27 inches or so.

The Super X-1 also uses a rubber 'O' ring, similar to the Remington 1100. They seem to last quite a while, but can be damaged accidentally when installing or removing the barrel. A couple of spares are a good idea. A spare operating handle is also a smart move, just in case you lose one. Firing pins rarely break, but the return spring is a bit overly stiff and occasional light hits do happen. I trim about five coils off the return spring and find that the problem is eliminated.

The carrier is attached to the trigger plate with a pair of pivot pins. They are not a pressed-in fit and can be accidentally dropped and lost when the trigger plate assembly is removed from the receiver. I usually keep them in place by staking the metal around the pin's hole with a prick punch. On barrels with a screw just in front of the front sight, holding down the rib, I recommend some strong loc-tite. It can come loose occasionally, or even fall out, allowing the floating rib to move forward and try to come off the posts. Pinning the rib and soldering can eliminate that problem. Later barrels were soldered from the factory and do not have a screw through the rib.

Spare parts and service, including wood, barrels, and all internal parts (except the locking block) are still in good supply and readily available. You can get them from Nu-Line Guns, Dept CS, 1053 Caulks Road, St. Charles, MO. 63304. Parts and service are also available from both Bob Baumgart, Dept. CS 1489 St Road. 164, Hubertus, WI. 53033, and myself, Steve Fischer Gunsmithing, Inc. 4235 SW 75 Av. Miami, Fl. 33155, Ph.

305-261-1820, e-mail, stevefischer2@mindspring.com.

FINDING A SUPER X-1

By now your interest might be piqued enough to want to get your hands on one of these fine old shotguns. Well, there are still quite a few out there in used gun land. You can find them on the Internet from several of the auction and firearms sales sites and in published gun sources such as the Shotgun News or the Gun List. If you travel around the country on business or pleasure, a fun way to find them is to check out the gun stores and pawnshops in the towns you stay in or pass through. I have acquired several that way – and usually the price is negotiable.

The rise in popularity of this gun has increased the price on the used market a bit, but there are still plenty of bargains out there waiting. When you do find a Super X-1, before you take it to the range or shoot it, change out the recoil buffer, especially if you bought a gun that has been stored and not used for several years. The buffers may look okay, but time can make them brittle and they can fracture on the first few shots.

Well, we've covered quite a bit of territory on this fine shotgun. Many, including myself, consider the Winchester Super X Model 1 to be about the best semi-auto shotgun ever built. But far beyond the arguable points of strength and reliability, lies the true beauty and the magic of this gun – the feel and the handling characteristics. No myth about that! It feels almost alive between the hands, and moves so smoothly to the target. Almost everyone who picks one up, or gets a chance to shoot a few shots, comes back with the same remark, "You know, I could shoot this gun." I always reply with a wry smile and the same comment. "Yep, I'll just bet you could!"