

BY BILL LAVISTA BELL

PIONEER ARMS COWBOY

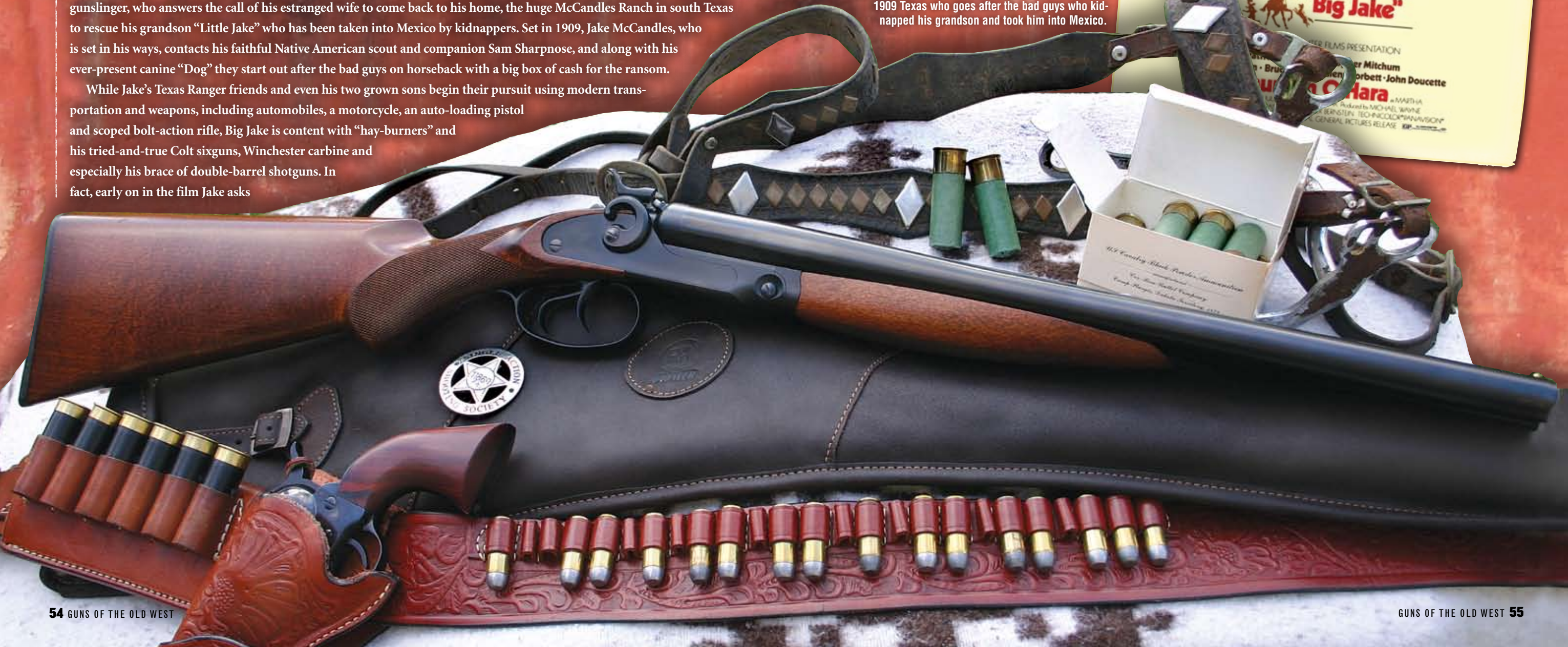
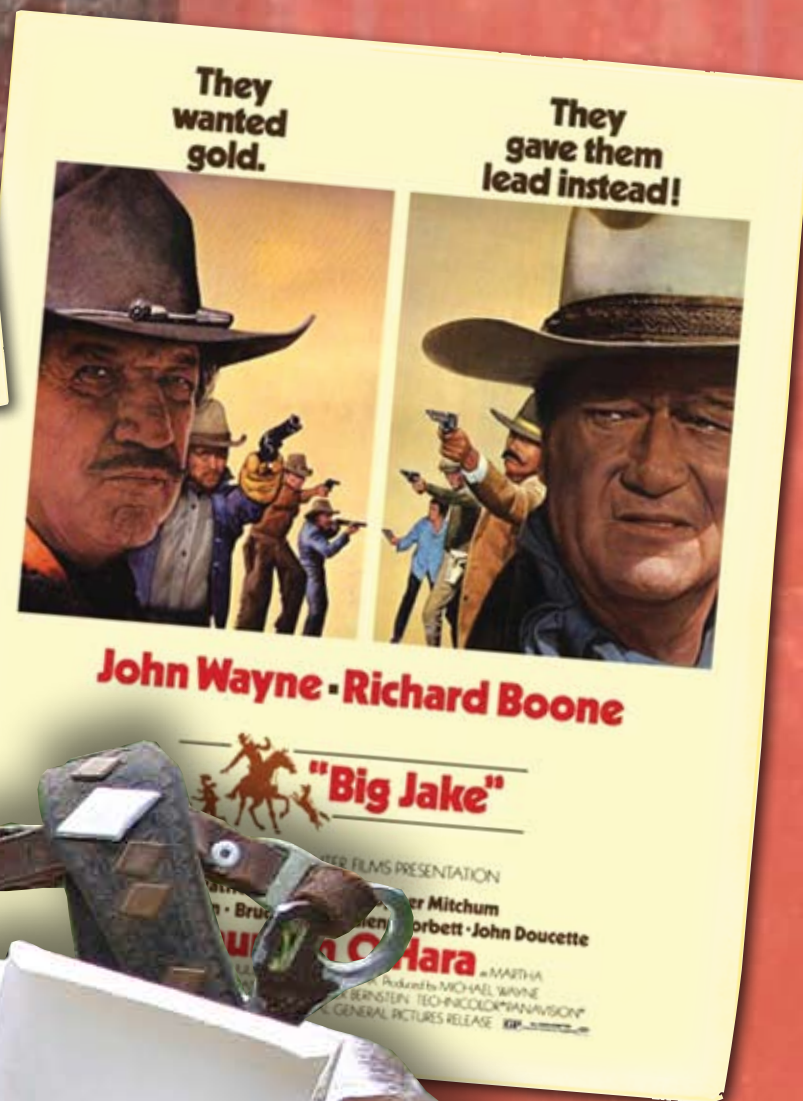
Based on the classic Greener, it's a double-gun made for CAS

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ONE OF MY ALL-TIME FAVORITE WESTERN MOVIES is the 1971 John Wayne film *Big Jake*. The plot revolves around The Duke's character Jacob McCandles, an old-time rancher and gunslinger, who answers the call of his estranged wife to come back to his home, the huge McCandles Ranch in south Texas to rescue his grandson "Little Jake" who has been taken into Mexico by kidnappers. Set in 1909, Jake McCandles, who is set in his ways, contacts his faithful Native American scout and companion Sam Sharpnose, and along with his ever-present canine "Dog" they start out after the bad guys on horseback with a big box of cash for the ransom.

While Jake's Texas Ranger friends and even his two grown sons begin their pursuit using modern transportation and weapons, including automobiles, a motorcycle, an auto-loading pistol and scoped bolt-action rifle, Big Jake is content with "hay-burners" and his tried-and-true Colt sixguns, Winchester carbine and especially his brace of double-barrel shotguns. In fact, early on in the film Jake asks

John Wayne took along a pair of Greener scatterguns in his 1971 shoot-em-up *BIG JAKE*. In the film The Duke is Jake McCandles an old-time rancher and gunslinger in 1909 Texas who goes after the bad guys who kidnapped his grandson and took him into Mexico.



specifically for his pair of “Greener” shotguns and here is where we get to the point of this particular article.

The W.W. Greener Company was a firearms manufacturer based in Birmingham, England and they were famous for their well-designed shotguns. The Greener cross-bolt action was first invented in 1865. However, in 1873, the action was improved by the addition of a “bottom holding-down bolt” and was afterwards called the Treble Wedge-Fast action. W.W. Greener Company also perfected the choke bore in 1874 and their shotguns became world-renowned for winning many awards and the London Gun Trials of 1875, 1877 and 1879, plus the Chicago Field Gun Trial, held in 1879. Needless to say, the Greener action was widely copied, especially after the patent ran out, and many shotguns with imitation actions were marked “Greener” in various ways as a sales gimmick. I can’t say for sure, but given The Duke’s Greeners were a cased set, my bet is that they were the “Real McCoy.”

At the 2008 SHOT Show I was on the lookout for Cowboy Action Shooting (CAS) related firearms and accessories when I came

SPECIFICATIONS

Pioneer Arms Cowboy Shotgun



Gauge: 12 • **Barrels:** 18.5 inches • **Weight:** 8.7 pounds (empty)
Sights: Brass bead front • **Stocks:** Hardwood • **Action:** Greener cross-bolt
Finish: Hot blue • **Capacity:** Two • **Price:** \$1,290 (special introductory price)

upon the booth of a company I was unfamiliar with, Pioneer Arms Corporation. I knew the fellows manning the booth were my kinda guys as one big, tall “galoot” was decked out in full cowboy regalia and had an alias of The45Kid. They had a fine-looking double-barrel shotgun on display and as I examined it and broke the gun open, I was pleased to find that it had an authentic Greener Treble Wedge-Fast action. That in itself was enough to excite this old cowpoke, but add to that exposed hammers and exacting metal-to-metal and wood-to-metal fit and this was looking like one extraordinary scattergun. A really interesting fact is the shotgun is manufactured in Radom, Poland, home to the national arsenal that

this shotgun was being made with CAS in mind. Most notable is the checkered, wide-spur, “mule-ear” hammers that can easily be brought back to full-cock with a sweep of



Here you can see the Greener cross-bolt action opened showing the bolt protruding from the receiver. Note the hole in the lug between the barrels.

one hand, making the gun instantly ready to fire. On most other exposed hammer shotguns of recent manufacture that I have tried, such a performance capability came only after some expensive custom gun-smithing. However, on the Pioneer Arms shotgun, this is a standard factory feature. This gun is so easy to cock it might just make a hammer-gun fan out of you cowboys who are used to hammerless double-guns.

Another item to note is just how easily this Pioneer shotgun breaks open for loading or unloading. Of course, being a true side-lock double, you don’t have the internal hammers being cocked during the opening of the action as you have on box-lock type shotguns, which tends to make breaking the gun open a stiffer proposition. The barrels are thick and somewhat heavy which also adds to the ease of breaking open the gun. It can be opened whether or not the gun is cocked and the operating lever on the upper tang is positioned far to the left so that it is easily manipulated with the thumb of the shooting hand, be you a right-hander or a

“southpaw.” You won’t waste a precious second or two searching for this lever; it’s right there and is also checkered for good purchase.

This gun has the looks and lines of the classic coach gun with its 18.5-inch barrels, generous-sized triggerguard and wide double triggers; a fair-sized brass bead front sight, and hand checkering on the pistol grip and fore-end of the stock. Let me embellish a little on this checkering. Outside of a custom-made long gun, this is the finest factory checkering job I’ve seen. The diamonds are sharp and perfectly shaped with no overruns so no extra borderline is needed to hide errors. The pistol grip is rounded like it was done in the good old days, with no silly-looking cap and the fore-end has that rounded “fish-belly” profile that makes for a better grip with the palm of the support hand. The stock has a hand-rubbed oil finish, so don’t put solvent on it. I have only two complaints; one is the wood while having a uniform grain (since the butt stock and fore-end is cut from the same blank) is strictly “plain Jane” on my sample gun and if you note the suggested retail price, you might expect something with some nicer grain patterns. That and a steel butt plate would be preferable to the black, shiny, plastic one.

Earlier I alluded to the fit and exacting tolerances of the metal and now I will expound a little bit here. The finish is uniform with a nice polish, but more subdued, almost a matte finish. The action mechanism



1) Compare the checkering on the shotgun stock above the Pioneer Arms shotgun; the European hardwood is hand rubbed with an oil finish and hand-cut checkering so precise that a borderline is not needed to cover overruns.

2) One very noticeable item was the width of the barrels on the Pioneer Arms shotgun (right). At 2.04” this made getting the shotgun into my gun cart a bit of a challenge and the same problem occurred on the gun racks at the loading tables on the range.



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and associated parts are deep blue finished, while the barrels have true rust blue. The barrels actually are fitted into a mono-block breech and the fit is so exacting that the seam is nearly invisible. Furthermore, the fit of the side-lock plates into the receiver is just plain awesome. The rib that runs down the top juncture of the side-by-side barrels forms at the breech part of the action's locking mechanism and along the top surface it is finely serrated to reduce glare. The barrel chambers are expertly polished, so shells literally fall in and empties easily extract; with a quick rearwards "toss" expended hulls go flying. There is a manual safety located on the top tang, just to the rear of the top lever. I'm not sure just why it's needed on a hammer-gun except to make it more "importable" and litigation-proof to some extent. With the safety in the rearward "safe" position, a small gold "S" is exposed and if the hammers are down, you cannot cock them; if they are cocked and the safety applied, you cannot pull the triggers. As you CAS participants already know, all shotguns on



The operating lever on the Pioneer Arms shotgun is offset to the left to give the shooter a little edge in speed getting the action open for reloading.

any kind of match stage must be unloaded and the actions open, so maybe you can find some application for this device if your scattergun does double-duty for home defense. Here again, while the bluing on the receiver is top grade, it sure would have looked dressier if those side-lock plates had been done with a

color-case hardened finish. I also noted that there is not a single stamped or engraved word, serial number of anything on the exterior surfaces of the shotgun. This in itself is pretty unusual, but sure does add to the "business only" appearance of the Pioneer fowling piece. You will find some stamping down below the barrel, just to the rear of the hinge, when you break the gun open, and there is the serial number, company pedigree, etc. An engraver would have a lot of nice area to do some work if the owner was so inclined.

Takedown on the shotgun is simple and is accomplished in mere seconds. First, make sure the gun is unloaded, then grasp the barrels with the non-shooting hand and with the other hand pull downward and outward on the front of the stock fore-end; it will pop right off. With the barrels still in the support hand, break open the shotgun and the barrels will now pull away from the receiver at the hinge. You can reattach the fore-end stock to the barrels if you plan to store the shotgun in this manner. You are now ready to do routine cleaning and the manufacturer



(Above) On the left are green paper hulls of US Cavalry Scattergun shells for those who prefer the smoke of black powder and on the right are the author's favorite smokeless 12 gauge shot-shell for CAS competition the Remington low-brass Game Load. (Left) This pattern target shows how well-centered the barrels are to point of aim at 25 yards.

does not recommend further disassembly as it may void the service warranty. Put the shotgun back together in reverse order. The owner's manual also warns against repeated dry firing without the use of snap-caps; as doing this could damage internal parts and render the shotgun inoperable.

The Pioneer Arms cowboy shotgun is chambered for 3-inch magnum 12 gauge shells and will also take regular 2-3/4-inch shells, with high or low brass. I assembled some boxes of factory-produced shot-shells that I use regularly in CAS competition. This included my favorite load the Remington "Dove & Quail" 2-3/4-inch field load, a low-brass shell with one-ounce of #7-1/2 shot in a black plastic hull. These shells do the trick on close range pepper-popper targets, with low recoil for fast repeat shots and best of all the empties seem to fly out of the chambers on their own.

When I feel like really burning some powder I select CorBon's US Cavalry Scattergun Shot Loads. These 2-3/4-inch high-brass, paper hulled shells are right out of the Old West and carry a charge of 55 grains of modern black powder, underneath a full ounce of #8 shot. You get the smoke and boom of black powder without the corrosion of sulfur-based, charcoal powder.

One other item that deserves mention is the optional carrying scabbard for the Pioneer Arms cowboy shotgun. This case is made from dark brown, antique finish cowhide and has a flap closure with a strap and buckle arrangement to keep the flap secure. The inside of the scabbard is lined with natural wool fleece which helps protect the gun from damage while inside.

There are also some other useful leather goods offered by Pioneer Arms and these include a lace-on recoil pad and sling combination for your shotgun, which is also made of dark brown leather and is an easy-on, easy-off carry option. If you need a shell belt, Pioneer can supply that too. Made of the same type of leather as the other items, this 20-round belt will fit up to a size 44 and has short 1-inch shell pockets for fast loading during CAS matches. They also make an accessory or pistol bag that looks like a large antique leather doctor's medical bag and will dress up any cowpoke's outfit.

Shooting Impressions

I took my test sample Pioneer Arms shotgun with me to an early August CAS match near a little spot on the map in Southern Indiana called Pleasant. This area is home to

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Author puts the Pioneer Arms shotgun to good use on the range shooting with the Pleasant Valley Renegades in Southern Indiana. For the shooter who wants a quality hammer-gun that is ready for CAS competition right out of the box; this shotgun is hard to beat.

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a group of modern-day gunslingers known as the Pleasant Valley Renegades and they put on a pretty darn good shoot. For August we couldn't have had nicer weather as temperatures never went over the low 80s. It was partly cloudy and a nice breeze kept the gun smoke out of our faces some of the time. There were six main-match stages and a goodly number of the participants were in my age group, which does not mean they were all old and slow, mind you.

I noticed right off that the Pioneer Arms shotgun was wider than any double-gun I'd ever seen. Across the barrels at mid-point it measures 2.04 inches while my personal side-by-side scattergun is only 1.85 inches wide; so this new gun might be a challenge fitting into your gun cart or gun rack at the range. Other than that, everybody I showed it to was impressed with its looks and features.

I don't normally shoot an exposed hammer double, so I had to quickly adapt to this new way of doing things. For one thing it saves a smidgen of time if you stage the gun with the hammers cocked. I really didn't think of it at first, but on your "hammerless" double, the hammers are cocked when you break it open to put it on the table or wherever you have the shotgun before the stage begins.

We had quite a few shotgun targets that day with about half the courses having six shotgun targets and the rest four. I mentioned how easy the Pioneer Arms shotgun is to cock and this really helped me out. After flipping out the empty hulls I immediately re-cocked and moved or loaded, depending on the stage procedure. By the end of the day I was doing pretty good.

Early on I had two light hits with the right-side hammer and I'm not real sure if that was

somehow operator error or a slight mechanical problem that worked itself out, because after that one stage, it never happened again. That Greener action worked just like it was meant to and came open with ease, while at the same time locking as tight as a drum.

The extra weight absorbed the recoil of my low-brass Remington loads for rapid follow-up shots and I did not have to fire more than one shot at any of the falling-type shotgun targets. I also liked the out-in-front balance of the gun, which helped in the swing from one target to the next. The barrels were well regulated, shooting to the point-of-aim.

Final Notes

To make a long story short, even with a new gun I'd never fired before I came away with a third place ribbon in my category. Of course, none of you Renegades better tell how many I had to shoot against! I can honestly say that I would have no qualms recommending this gun to any of my fellow shooters and I'm sure Big Jake would have been pleased and proud to have pulled a Pioneer Arms double out of his gun case before setting out after the bad guys. ★

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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