



SEMI-AUTO **BREAK-ACTION** PUMP-ACTION EXPLODED VIEWS HISTORICAL ACCESSORIES



Pioneer Arms Coach Gun

good choice for Cowboy Action Shooting competition.

By NRA Staff

Cowboy Action Shooting (CAS) has grown to such size that a number of companies now offer excellent replicas of Old West guns. One of the most difficult guns to simultaneously replicate and optimize for competition is the side-by-side shotgun. That is particularly true when talking about a double with external hammers. Nevertheless, the gun reviewed here is an excellent version of the classic hammer double, often referred to as a coach gun. It is the Pioneer Arms shotgun made in Radom, Poland, and imported by Pioneer Arms of North Bennington, Vt.

The Pioneer Coach Gun is a 12-gauge side-by-side with thick 18 1/2-inch barrels, dual triggers and external hammers. It features a reddish-tinted European hardwood stock with an appropriate amount of drop and a period-correct rounded-ball pistol grip. The grip has conservative, well-executed checkering with a matching pattern on the fore-end. Capping the buttstock is a hard composite buttplate. The fore-end locks in place under the twin barrels by means of a barrel hanger and a strong, spring-loaded catch in the fore-end iron. Simply inserting one's finger between the barrel rib and the pointed fore-end's tip and pulling downward releases the fore-end. Once it is off, pressing the top tang lever to the right allows the barrels to be removed.

The dual triggers are mounted on a plate screwed to the action body. The front trigger releases the right hammer and the rear the left. The rebounding hammers are checkered at their tops and may only reach their respective firing pins when the triggers are pulled. The Pioneer is an extractor-only gun, and a lug on the front of the action presses the extractor rod rearward as it is opened.

Above all other authentic features of the Pioneer gun, the Greener-style locking crossbolt stands out. Developed by W.W. Greener, noted English gunmaker of the Victorian era, it is an elegant but strong way to keep shotgun barrels locked into the breech assembly. It is a third fastener comprised of a round bolt moving horizontally through a matching hole in the receiver top. This happens when the shooter closes the action. When he or she sweeps the top tang lever to the side, the bolt emerges on the left side. When the inner end of the crossbolt clears the hole in the barrel extension, the barrels pivot down for extraction and reloading, as needed. Under the monobloc, there are two underlugs, and the forwardmost protrudes through the bottom of the action. To work smoothly, the various parts must be precisely fitted, and these certainly are.

More often than not, shotgun targets in Cowboy Action Matches are close and stationary. Usually, they are no farther than 25 yards, so a CAS competition

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shotgun needs to be quick to handle and shoot, as well as to reload. The Pioneer is heavier than it needs to be in order to reduce recoil. Much of the weight comes from exceptionally heavy barrels, which shift the gun's balance forward. There is a grooved rib atop the barrels, and a single brass bead at the muzzle. The right barrel measures 0.729 inches in diameter and the left 0.730 inches.

Most matches require reloading, so the top tang lever is angled off at 7 o'clock to give the shooter a bit of an advantage in opening the action.

There is a manual sliding tang safety. Fortunately, it is not automatic. In competition, that would slow things down. As the Pioneer is a hammer double, the shooter must cock the hammers, which is easier than usual because of the light hammer springs, which allow the shooter to cock both hammers with a sweep of the shooting hand.

In the matches for which the gun is intended, targets are close, so the patterning paper was placed at 25 yards, but the 30-inch outer circle and the 21.2-inch inner ring remained the same. For patterning, we used a Remington light target load with No. 7 1/2 shot.

Around 85 percent of the pellets impacted within the 30-inch circle, and more than half of them struck within the 21.2-inch inner one. For a cylinder-bore shotgun, this was outstanding performance. And it shot dead-on to the point of hold.

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It is also a gun that handles quickly in terms of opening, loading, cocking and firing. The triggers are light for speed work, and the gun handles perfectly for the job at hand. The blue barrels and matte action showed remarkably good polish for a gun in this price range, and the wood-to-metal and metal-to-metal fit were a pleasant surprise.

The Pioneer 12 gauge is a specialized, well-made competitive firearm. It is seldom that we see any design so precisely and handsomely executed. For the asking price of under \$1,300, its fit, finish and function are excellent to outstanding.

Manufacturer: Pioneer Arms Corp.; Radom, Poland

Importer: Pioneer Arms Corp.; (309) 226-4226; Pioneer-pac.com

Gauge: 12 ga., 3"

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Action Type: side-by-side, break-action, external hammer shotgun

Frame: polished blue steel

Barrels: 18 1/2" blue steel

Chokes: fixed, cylinder bore

Trigger Pull: dual mechanical: 4 lbs., 4 ozs., right barrel; 4 lbs., 14 ozs. left barrel

Overall Length: 35 7/8"

Weight: 8 lbs., 10 ozs.

Stock: European hardwood: length of pull, 14 3/4"; drop at heel, 3 1/8"; drop at comb, 1 1/4"

Suggested Retail Price: \$1,290



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