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**One Gunsmith's View...**  
**The Browning SxS Sidelock Shotgun...**  
**The Best & Most Economical SxS Sidelock Shotgun Ever Produced.**

*by James Flynn*  
James Flynn, Gunmaker, LLC.



The Browning Sidelock

**B**ack in 1984, Browning introduced their BSS sidelock shotguns in 12 and 20 bores in the style of the classic British game gun. Barrel lengths of 26 and 28 inches were offered in both gauges with typically modified and full chokes for the longer barrels while improved cylinder and modified were offered for the shorter.



Browning Sidelock  
click for bigger picture



Holland & Holland Sidelock  
Click for bigger picture

*These photos display superficial similarities and differences. The shape and grace of Holland are reproduced quite well in the Miroku. Although not gold, there are cocking indicators on the Browning's tumbler axles. Browning dispensed with the drop points, color case hardening, and disappointingly the quick detach "sidenail." The aforementioned sacrifices are justified by the more than reasonable price.*

A couple of my local clients bought them for about \$1,200.00 retail as I recall. Checking a 1986 Gun Digest showed a retail price of \$1,500.00 while a 1988 Gun Digest revealed a price of \$2,000.00. Sadly for discriminating double gun admirers, 1988 was the last year these lovely, under priced guns were

offered.

The guns were manufactured in Japan by Miroku and were excellent copies of a Holland and Holland sidelock game gun. The only configuration offered had a straight grip, double triggers, checkered butt, and splinter forends.

Excluding barrels and springs, all other metal parts look as though they are made from high quality investment castings, accurately fitted, hand engraved, and hard chromed to appear coin finished. The workmanship is generally neater and more precise than most comparable European guns at double the price.

One of my clients has shot his Browning Sidelocks well over 10,000 times and I have serviced them through the years. Neither gun shows any undue wear nor peening of critical wear points that so often accompanies well known higher priced Continental doubles. It is so common to see inferior or improperly heat treated sears, tumblers, cock bents, etc. with deformed contact surfaces in the latter mentioned guns.



[click for bigger picture](#)

*Detail of inside lock shows investment cast parts that are not highly polished but well fitted and certainly better fitted than many more expensive European guns. This gun has been fired about 10,000 rounds and shows little wear and no peening or deforming of contact and bearing points.*

Actually, I have not spoken with many other gunsmiths who have even seen the Brownings, which can be taken as a testament to their reliability or their poor sales record. However, those who have worked on them were quite impressed by workmanship one would expect on a more costly gun. In a recent conversation with Abe Chaber, he shared the same opinion as I concerning the value and quality of the Browning Sidelock.

Photographs display the rather neat inletting of the stock and forend with excellent wood to metal fit. The gun photographed has been fired many thousands of rounds with mostly target loads but also duck loads. There appear to be no cracks in the usual places, which is a testament to proper, inletting and fit. A poorly headed up sidelock will not be long in developing cracks at the tangs and the tails of the lock plates.

An unfortunate shortcoming of the Browning was its short length of pull. The length of pull on every specimen I have inspected has been 14 1/4 from front trigger to the center of the butt. This is certainly too short for a double trigger gun as 14 3/4 to 15 would have been preferable and far more flexible. A standard rule in stocking and gun fitting is that double trigger guns should be one half inch longer than single trigger guns. This allows for sliding the hand rearwards for the second shot and not having the length of pull become too short. Every gun came with a nicely checkered butt that allowed for the option of increasing length of pull to an easy 15 by adding a 1 recoil pad.

The lock panels are absent drop points that detract somewhat from the English style. This no doubt

saved on labor cost but at no sacrifice to function or mechanical quality.

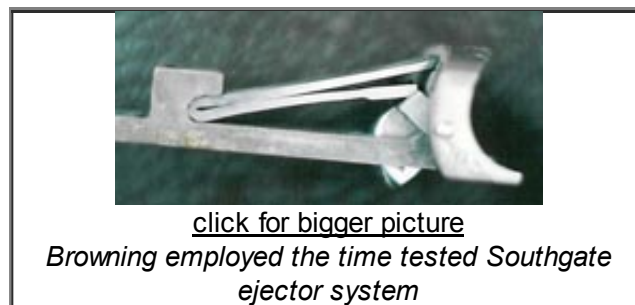
The comb is somewhat thicker than what is usually seen on British stocks and this is a slight deviation from their mode. Another issue of style is the American fashion of fluting the comb and I have never seen such on a Holland and Holland. The only English gun I can recall with a fluted comb is the Purdey over and under. Fluting the comb for the palm is primarily an American innovation and combined with the thicker comb tends to give the stock a hybrid appearance.

Checkering is well done but with pointed diamonds, not in the flat top style of pre-war British guns. Missing are the triple borders and the patterns do not join over the top of the wrist, as was the norm with Holland's.

The finish, no doubt some type of polyurethane, is applied with a low sheen and not all the pores are filled flush with the surface. The wood also appears to have a nice, warm, red tone applied much like the alkanet root dye so commonly used by the British stockers. Each stock has a silver oval inlet in the toe line for the owner's initials. These combined efforts produce a finish that is quite characteristic of the English style.

The barrels were given one of the best blackings I have ever seen. The color is uniform, glossy black that looks good even in bright sunlight. Even more of a surprise is the fact that the barrels were made up from chopper lump tubes. This is one of the features of a top quality side by side as it gives maximum strength and rigidity to the barrel/action joining. The lumps which bear the bites (no, this is not misspelled computer lingo) that fasten the barrels to the action are integral. I will also mention that the locking method was the esteemed Purdey double under bolted system. The double under bites are the only locking points on this gun.

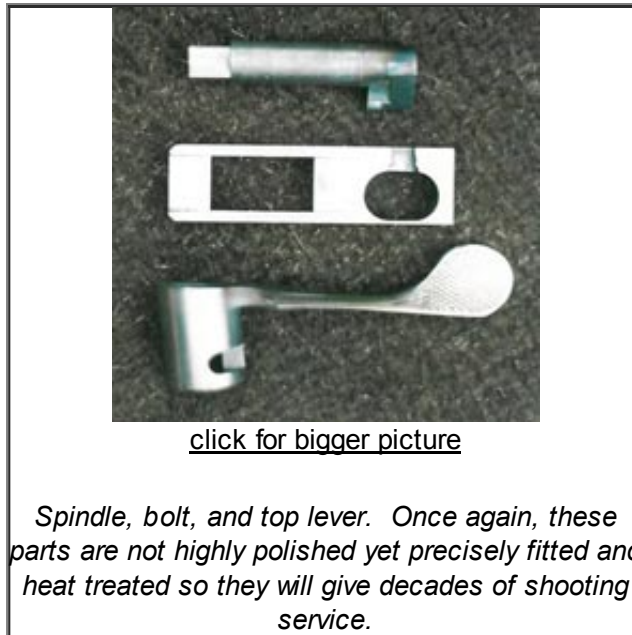
Correct for a Holland is the unpretentious, and most reliable Southgate ejector system. There is primary extraction when the gun is opened which facilitates easy removal of unfired cartridges.



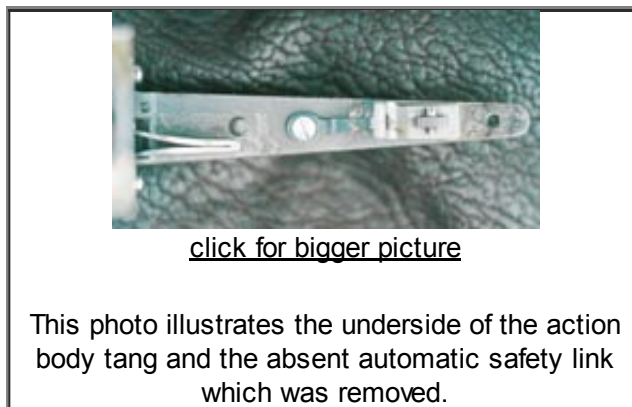
The locks are duplicates of the proven bar action English lock complete with interceptor sears. Even the bridles possess the classic half-moon piercing that so entertains stockers and prevents them from getting bored while inletting lockworks. Absent is the mirror polish that was typical on the better British internals but the tolerances and finish are worth more than the price. Though not highly polished, the parts are precisely made with no rounded edges and minimum slack for the axles of the tumblers and sears.

Also missing is probably the simplest and most efficacious system for removing locks; the H&H hand detachable lock bolt or side nail as the London men say. This highly desirable and ingenious system could

have been added for less expense than the two forward lock screws that are used. The Spanish regularly employ this patent on their sidelocks.



Every Browning Sidelock I ever worked on had an automatic safety but the photos of the sample gun do not show it as it was removed at the owner's request. The tang safety securely blocks trigger movement while the safety interceptor sears prevent the tumblers from falling if the sears are jarred off.



Comparing the Browning's dimensions with a 1910 Holland and Holland displays very little difference between the two. One would think that the Browning should be appreciable beefier as it was chambered to handle heavier 2 3/4 loads but such is not the case. The Browning weighs only an ounce or two more.

It was disappointing to me and even more so to Browning, that these delightful game guns did not sell but I can only speculate why. One serious manufacturing deficit was stocking them too short. As earlier mentioned, 14 3/4 should have been minimum while 15 would have been better. It is like a piece of rope, if it is too long one can always cut it.

The double triggers tend to terrify many people. This is beyond me but so many shooters eyes glaze over with stark fear when they see double triggers. It is similar to the dread observed in the eyes of the Bush Blaster Americanus when shown a single shot deer rifle. An inescapable fact of double triggers is that the shooter truly has two guns in one. If one barrels fails, if one trigger or lock malfunctions, one need only to pull the other trigger.



[click for bigger picture](#)

*Another shortcut that is practical and will work for a long time. The return spring for the triggers is made of music wire rather than a flat spring*

Higher priced European doubles of less fit and workmanship still sell and probably always will. The desire for quality double guns apparently remains extant. It seemed that Browning had the CIA do the promotion to market these guns, as precious few collectors know of them. Surely, the insignificant shortcuts taken in manufacturing these guns were unnoticed by most shooters. I must say that if Browning had spent another \$2,000.00 to \$5000.00 they could have produced a gun that would have put most all doubles in the shade, regardless of price. Whatever, they made what they made and created what I consider the best buy ever in a sidelock double.

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