CIMARRON'S CENTENNIAL MODEL

AT LAST! THE WINCHESTER 1876 .45-60 IS REBORN. COWBOY ACTION SHOOTERS GET A 10-SHOT BIG-BORE REPEATER.

MIKE "DUKE" VENTURINO PHOTOS: YVONNE VENTURINO

Back in the 1870's, Winchester leverguns were selling like hotcakes. People liked the idea of blazing away large numbers of rounds in short order. (Hey, they weren't much different from a lot of today's shooters, were they?) Winchester's dilemma came from their rifle's power factor. In short, it wasn't much.

By 1876 Winchester had only introduced two levergun cartridges. The Model 1866 took the .44 Henry rimfire round, which popped a 200-grain bullet out at about 1,150 fps. In terms of muzzle energy, one of today's .357 Magnum revolvers can do that from a 4" barrel. Then they came out with the .44 WCF (.44-40) round along with the Model 1873 lever gun. It was a real snorter (*not!*) with a 200-grain bullet at a bit over 1,300 fps. Only a pitiful .44 Magnum revolver can't beat that.

Real riflemen of the 1870's laughed at Winchesters. "Real riflemen" meant those who went out West with the intention of shooting big stuff like elk, moose and bison. Indian fighters on the other hand preferred rapid-shooting leverguns, but that's another story. The big single shots of the day mostly took cartridges firing charges of powder in excess of 70 grains along with bullets weighing 370 to 550 grains. They weren't going any faster than .44-40 bullets, but they would easily plow through two or more bison if you could get the critters lined up right. And they were accurate, too. Competitions all the way to 1,000 yards were fairly common back east.

Just like gun companies today, Winchester wanted more market share and to get it they needed more power in repeating rifles. Hence, in the year of our nation's Centennial, they introduced the Model 1876. In essence, it differed little in design from their Model 1873. A brass cartridge lifter still raised a round out of a tubular magazine into alignment with the chamber. That happened when the lever was opened while coincidentally the hammer was full cocked. When the lever was closed, the bolt shoved the round into the chamber, and the rifle was ready to fire. And it would do so as fast as someone could run the lever and pull the trigger.

Duke's original Winchester Model 1876 .45-60 (top) compares favorably with the Cimarron/Uberti new Model 1876 (middle). A Cimarron/Uberti Model 1873 .44-40 (bottom) is for size comparison.

Another feature the Model 1876 shared with Model 1873's was its method of locking the bolt shut with toggle links. That sort of breech-locking system is generally acknowledged as not being overly strong. Hence, the continuous warnings about only using mild ammunition in the Model 1873's today despite the fact they might be newly manufactured such as the Uberti ones made in the same factory as this new Model 1876.

On Steroids

In order to make the Model 1876 accommodate "rifle" cartridges instead of the heretofore "pistol-size" ones of Models 1866 and 1873, Winchester had to make the rifle *bigger*. Believe me — they are! A Winchester Model 1873 weighed about 8 pounds. A Model 1876 goes a full 11 pounds. A Winchester Model 1873 in standard rifle configuration has a 24" barrel. Model 1876 standard rifles had 28" barrels, except those in .50-95 caliber, which for some reason were given 26" barrels.

When introduced, a brand new rifle cartridge came with the Model 1876. Winchester called it the .45-75 WCF. What they tried to do was make a levergun cartridge to equal the government's .45-70 in power. It was close. Most .45-70 factory loaded cartridges used 70 grains of powder (as the name implies) in straight cases 2.10" long with bullets ranging from 400 to 500 grains. The new .45-75 WCF was loaded with 350-grain bullets and 75 grains of powder but in a case only 1.89" long. In order to get that much powder in such a short case, Winchester's cartridge designers had to make it bottlenecked in shape, with the case head being of larger diameter than the .45-70's.

Was this bottlenecked case a great innovation? No way. The government had actually tried them when developing the .45-70 and decided black powder bottlenecked cases gave significantly higher pressures with only a few feet per second increase in projectile speed. Why didn't Winchester just chamber their Model 1876 for the .45-70? It was too long and made the lever throw prohibitively lengthy.

Meager Sales

From the very beginning, the Model 1876 didn't set any sales records. Here's a comparison from figures compiled by the late George Madis, an authority on Winchesters. In 1874, the first full year of Model

1876 WINCHESTER	
Maker: Aldo Uberti, Italy Importer: Cimarron Arms 105 Winding Oak Road, Fredericksburg, TX 78624 (830) 997-9090 www.cimarron-firearms.com	
ACTION TYPE:	Toggle link lever action
CALIBER:	.45-60 (tested) .45-75, .50-95
CAPACITY:	10
BARREL LENGTH:	28"
OVERALL LENGTH:	48.5"
WEIGHT:	10.2 pounds
FINISH:	Color case-hardened receiver, blue barrel
SIGHTS:	Buckhorn rear blade front
STOCK:	Walnut
PRICE:	$1,395

The new Cimarron/Uberti Model 1876 has an attractive color case-hardened receiver and overall is a nice gun.

The toggle-link system of locking the breech of a Model 1876 is not strong, but will suffice for the modest pressures generated by proper .45-60 loads. This is certainly no candidate for magnum pressures.

The new Cimarron/Uberti Model 1876 has the trapdoor in the buttplate for storing a jointed cleaning rod, as did original Winchester Model 1876's.

Duke fired the Cimarron/Uberti Model 1876 .45-60 into his baffle box. All loads penetrated all 12, 1" pine boards.

LOADING THE .45-60

Long ago I shortened 100 rounds of Federal .45-70 brass to 1.89" and obtained a set of RCBS .45-60 dies. Actually, you can reload the .45-60 with .45-70 dies, except for the crimping operation. I did it for a while before my special ordered dies arrived. Because I was loading a full case of black powder no crimp was necessary. There was no space under the bullet for it to be pushed back into by the tubular magazine's spring pressure. A .45-70 seating-crimping die can be adapted to reload .45-60's simply by having about a 0.25" ground off of the die's base in a lathe.

Winchester introduced the .45-60 with 300-grain lead bullets. Any such bullet meant for .45-70 reloading will work with the .45-60, if sized properly. I slugged the barrel on this new Model 1876 and found it measured between 0.456" and 0.457". Therefore bullets measuring 0.457" to 0.458" in diameter are just right. I had three such in inventory — an Oregon Trail version weighing right at 300 grains and two I had cast. One came from RCBS mould 45-300FN. A gas-check, flatnose design, it weighed 324 grains cast from 1:20 tin-to-lead alloy. My second suitable cast bullet was dropped from Lyman mould 457122. It is a hollowpoint weighing 336 grains of the same alloy. Oregon Trail's bullet carried their hard lubricant. Mine were fixed with the much softer SPG lube.

This is a good reason to shoot a new Model 1876 instead of a $4,000 original. This one was blown up with a carelessly loaded smokeless powder handload.

Critical Length

One caveat about reloading these bullets in the .45-60 is overall loaded cartridge length for proper functioning through the Model 1876 is 2.10". If the rounds are longer they cannot be raised out of the magazine by the cartridge lifter. In such a situation, they must be fished back out of the loading gate, and believe me that is a major pain in the butt. I know from experience! Therefore, the RCBS .45-300FN can be crimped in the proper groove in 1.89" cases and give the correct overall cartridge length. That is not possible with either the Oregon Trail 300 grain, or Lyman's 457122. They must be seated so the crimp is applied just above the supplied crimping groove. This is no problem at all if the case is filled with black powder — the bullet then has no place to go. With smokeless loads the bullet could be pushed back in the case by magazine spring pressure.

Here's what I did. The RCBS bullet was seated and crimped normally. The Lyman bullet was seated over a case full of black powder and then a light crimp applied over the bullet's ogive. A single Oregon Trail 300-grain bullet was seated in an empty but sized and belled case. I then pushed the bullet against the wooden edge of my reloading bench with all of my considerable might. It did not budge a fraction, so I then loaded it over smokeless powder charges, confident if I couldn't force the bullet rearwards in the case, then the magazine spring wouldn't either. It didn't. All of these .45-60 handloads fed and functioned through the new Model 1876 with perfection. Its magazine will hold 10 rounds and several times I filled it and then pumped it dry quickly. (Sometimes I like fast shooting, too!)

The three loads test fired in the Cimarron/Uberti Model 1876 .45-60 included (from left) 300-grain Oregon Trail FN with loaded round, 324-grain RCBS 45-300FN with loaded round and 336-grain Lyman 457122 with loaded round.

Data

So how do you go about coming up with a smokeless powder load for a cartridge like the .45-60, for which no recognized reloading manual offers data? First, I looked up the ballistics of original black powder .45-60 factory loads. A reprint of an 1899 Winchester catalog said from a Model 1885 Winchester Single Shot rifle with 30" barrel the .45-60's 300-grain bullet should be doing 1,271 fps. They also said such a load would penetrate 111/2 pine boards of 1" thickness at 15'.

My pick of smokeless powder for reloading almost all antique and/or obsolete big-bore rifle cartridges with lead alloy bullets is Accurate's 5744. Therefore, I began working with it and the RCBS bullet. When a charge weight of 24 grains was reached, the 28" barrel of the new Model 1876 gave a velocity of 1,267 fps. I figured that was right on the money and started shooting on paper with that charge and both RCBS and Oregon Trail bullets.

For shooting the Cimarron/Uberti Model 1876 Duke used Swiss 1.5 Fg black powder with Federal 215 primers and Accurate 5744 smokeless powder with Winchester Large Rifle primers.

Also I should mention I found through trial and error the Lyman hollowpoint cast bullet would seat to the proper depth over a charge of 55 grains of Swiss 11/2 Fg black powder, with a 0.060" vegetable fiber wad placed between powder and bullet. Primers for the smokeless powder loads were Winchester Large Rifle and, for the black powder load, the hotter Federal 215 Large Rifle Magnum. The .45-60 handloading chores were as simple as that.

The Cimarron/Uberti Model 1876 .45-60 is in full recoil from a black powder round.

1873 production they made 2,599 of those pistol-cartridge lever guns. The next year brought 8,598 Model 1873's, and then in 1876 11,825 were produced. Conversely, in 1876, only 1,429 of the new rifle-size Winchester leverguns were made, followed by only 2,149 in 1877, and 4,387 in 1878. Then, in 1879, the figure dropped to a meager 1,003.

So what does any self-respecting gun company do when sales drop off? They introduce new calibers, of course. (They still do that.) So in 1879 they announced both .45-60 WCF and .50-95 WCF chamberings. Both used only 300-grain bullets over their respective powder charges. In 1881, along came the .40-60 WCF, one of the puniest cartridges ever put into a full-size rifle. Its 210-grain bullet couldn't even break 1,500 fps.

Cimarron's Debut

Finally we get to Cimarron's new Model 1876, for which the first chambering offered is .45-60. Many times I have written that of all the imported firearms coming over from Italy, the Uberti Model 1873's are my favorites. They put darn good barrels in those guns, and in general their fit and finish are a step above other Italian-made rifles and handguns. I've owned several and never had a bad one.

This new Uberti Model 1876 mirrors those nice Model 1873's in every way. Fit and finish are very good. The wood is European walnut and figured. The rifle's receiver is color case-hardened, along with the lever and hammer. Uberti color case-hardening does not match original Winchester's, but it is attractive in its own right. The new rifle's barrel, magazine tube, sights, forearm cap, dust cover and buttplate are all deeply blued. And lastly, there is that attractive brass cartridge lifter so distinctive to both Models 1873 and 1876.

Here are a couple of details about the steel buttplate. First, it has a right and proper deep crescent shape. Second, it has a trapdoor in it for storing a jointed cleaning rod — also right and proper. None of the Uberti Model 1873's I have ever seen have had the buttplate trapdoor, so finally seeing it in the new Model 1876 is pleasing.

Sights on the new Model 1876 are also correct, consisting of a buckhorn rear adjustable for elevation by the usual notched slider. Windage can be changed by drifting the sight in its dovetail. The front sight is the usual blade type, and it too can be drifted in its dovetail. (Whichever gun'riter gets this new Model 1876 next should be happy with me. As I received it from Cimarron Arms, it shot very low and a considerable distance to the right. I now have it sighted in perfectly — with my handloads at least.)

Handloads Only — For Now

And speaking of handloads, I have been reloading the .45-60 WCF for over 15 years for use in an original Winchester of 1881 vintage. Since originals are so old, and most of their receivers likely forged of iron instead of steel, I recommend they only be fired with black powder ammunition. Certainly it's a minor pain to clean up afterwards, but certainly less of a

CIMARRON ARMS MODEL 1876 .45-60 28" BARREL

Bullet (brand)	Weight (grains, type)	Powder (brand)	Charge (weight, grains)	Velocity (fps)	Group Size (inches)
OREGON TRAIL	300 RN/FP	AA 5744	24	1,268	3.25
RCBS 45-300FN	324 RN/FP	AA 5744	24	1,267	3.28
LYMAN 457122	336 HP	Swiss 1.5 Fg	55	1,296	3.50*

Notes: All loads fired at 100 yards in five shot groups except where noted. Chronograph figure compiled with PACT Professional Model chronograph. Four 5-shot groups fired at 100 yards were averaged for group and velocity. *Only 3-shot groups were fired with the black powder load. Brass was Federal .45-70 shortened to 1.89". Winchester Large Rifle primers used for smokeless loads. Federal 215 Large Rifle Magnum primers used for the black powder load. Oregon Trail 300-grain RN/FP bullet was 0.457". RCBS and Lyman cast bullet designs were sized 0.458".

HIBBARD, SPENCER, BARTLETT & CO.

Winchester Rifles.

Model 1876, 45 Calibre, 60 Grains, Straight Shell.

This form of the Model of 1876 Winchester Rifle has been put upon the market to meet the wants of those who desire an arm having greater power and range than the 44 calibre Model of 1873, but less power, range, *and cost* than the regular 1876 or 45/75 Model. It is the same in every particular as to form, weight, etc., etc., as the regular Model or 45/75 Bottle-Neck Rifle, except that it is chambered for and uses only a *straight shell* cartridge, with 60 grains of powder and 300 grains of lead.

Sporting Rifle, Octagon Barrel, 45-60 Calibre.

Price List.

No.	ROUND BARREL.	EACH.
2180	28 inch Round Barrel, Plain Trigger (Regular Length), 12 Shot, Weight 9¼ lbs.,	$27 00
2218	28 inch Round Barrel, Plain Trigger (Regular Length), Case Hardened, 12 Shot, Weight 9¼ lbs.,	28 00
2038	28 inch Round Barrel, Set Trigger and Case Hardened,	32 00

No.	OCTAGON BARREL.	EACH.
2108	28 inch Octagon Barrel, Plain Trigger (Regular Length) 12 Shot, Weight 9¼ lbs.,	$29 00
2118	28 inch Octagon Barrel, Plain Trigger (Regular Length), Case Hardened, 12 Shot, Weight 9¼ lbs.,	30 00
2138	28 inch Octagon Barrel, Set Trigger and Case Hardened,	34 00

No.	HALF OCTAGON AND HALF MAGAZINE RIFLES.	EACH.
4108	28 inch Half Octagon Barrel, Plain Trigger, 12 Shot,	$29 00
4118	28 inch Full Half Magazine, Case Hardened, 7 Shot,	30 00

Fancy Pistol Grip Stock, Creedmoor Rifle.

No.	FANCY OCTAGON RIFLES.	EACH.
2178	28 inch Octagon Barrel, Plain Trigger, Case Hardened, Fancy Checked Pistol Grip Stock,	$45 00
2188	28 inch Octagon Barrel, Set Trigger, Case Hardened, Fancy Checked Pistol Grip Stock,	49 00

Carbine, Creedmoor Caliber.

This Cut illustrates full size and form of Cartridge used in the Model 1876, 45-60 straight shell Rifle.

No.	CARBINE, MODEL 1876, 45/60	EACH.
3002	22 inch Round Barrel, Plain Trigger, 9 Shot, Weight 8¼ lbs.,	$25 00

CONTENTS.	
Powder,	60 Grains.
Lead,	300 Grains.

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The 1876 Winchester was the firm's first foray into a big-bore rifle. Although it sold for only $2 more than the 1873 according to this 1884 Hibbard, Spencer and Bartlett catalog, few were actually sold. It was discontinued in the late 1890's with less than 64,000 made. Although the catalog states the 1876 is a 12-shot, it is, in fact, a 10-shot rifle.

The .45-60 is one of life's more pleasurable cartridges to shoot. For size comparison, the new Cimarron/Uberti Model 1876 (top gun) is demonstrably larger than the Cimarron/Uberti Model 1873 .44-40 (bottom gun).

pain than picking pieces of steel out of your noggin because you blew up a valuable old original. (A friend did exactly this to a $4,000 Model 1876 Winchester, but luckily managed to avoid the flying pieces when it let go.)

Two great attractions of the new Uberti/Cimarron collaboration are (1) they won't be costing $4,000, and (2) if you use some commonsense, there is no reason they can't be fired with *proper* smokeless powder handloads. Because of their toggle-link breech-locking system these new Model 1876s still are not strong rifles, but shooting smokeless powders in them *with loads duplicating black powder velocities and pressures* will be no problem.

The new Cimarron Model 1876 shot at 100 yards just as I figure such a rifle wearing only a buckhorn rear and blade front should shoot. Averages of four, 5-shot groups ran just over 3" with the smokeless powder loads. A couple of individual 5-shot groups went down around 2", and a couple went as large as 4".

For the black powder load, the average was nearly the same *for 3-shot groups.* Why only three shots with the black powder loads? Because by the time five rounds were fired, the barrel was fouling up and some wide flyers were happening. That's normal and it happens with my original Winchester Model 1876 also, and with just about every Model 1876 and Model 1886 regardless of caliber I have test fired with black powder loads.

The rear sight on the new Cimarron/Uberti Model 1876 is a traditional buckhorn type.

Here's an interesting tidbit. I have a baffle box holding 12 1x6" pine planks. All three .45-60 handloads were fired into it from 15' and all penetrated the 12 boards and sailed into the dirt bank behind. This .45-60 with 300- to 336-grain bullets might not be an elk rifle, but it would surely be a good one for deer at modest ranges as long as you don't have to pack it too far.

This first — and so far only — new Uberti/Cimarron Arms Model 1876 replica .45-60 is a fine rifle by anyone's standards. It looks good, functioned flawlessly and shot as accurately as the sights will allow (at least with my 57-year-old eyes). The only thing I would change on it would be to have its tang drilled and tapped for mounting a tang sight. And speaking of druthers, I hope they will bring us a carbine version before too long. The only other stumbling block is a lack of factory ammunition. It still doesn't exist, but I know at least one ammunition company is looking at the idea. Coming up with suitable brass is easy. The .45-60 cartridge case is merely the .45-70 shortened from 2.10" to 1.89". My guess is we'll see it before too long.