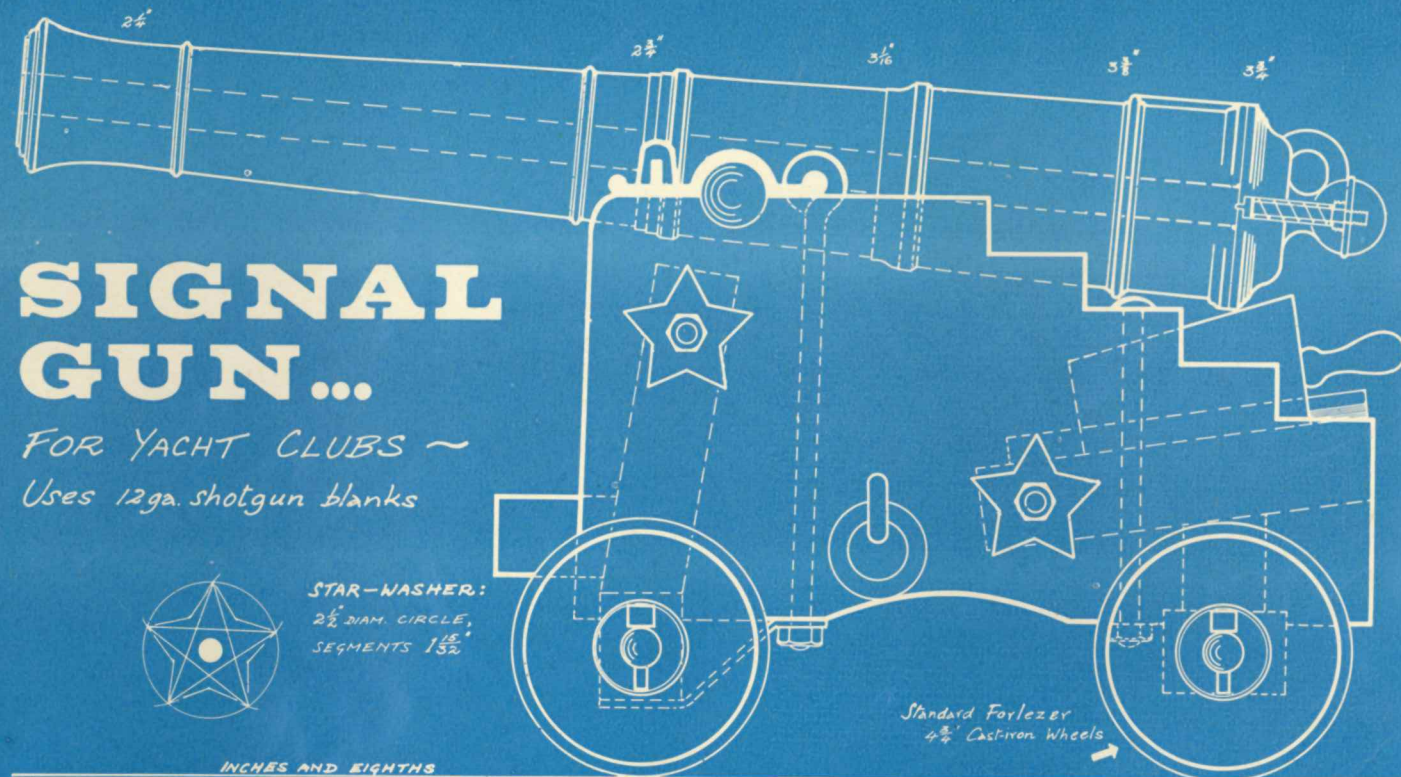




SIGNAL GUN...

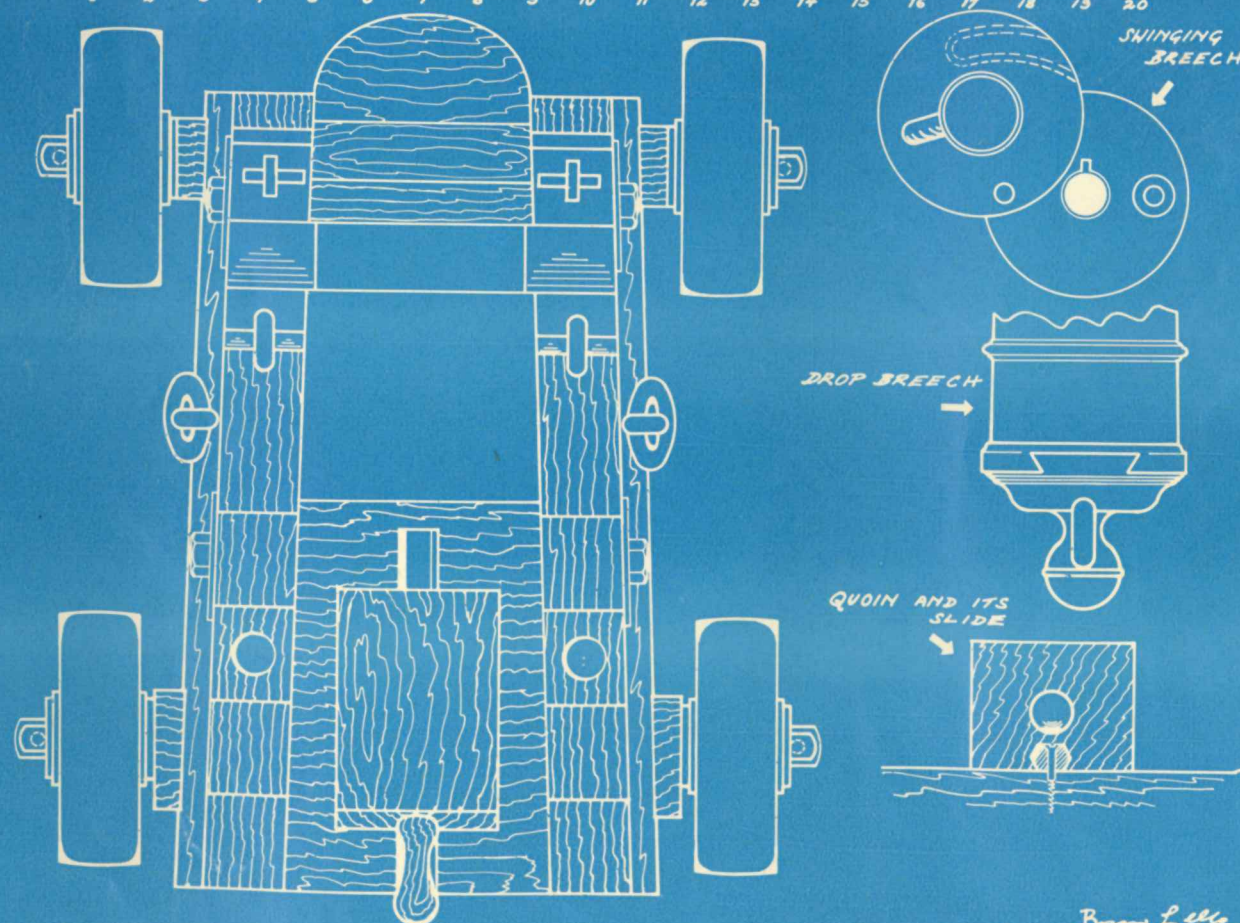
FOR YACHT CLUBS ~

Uses 12ga. shotgun blanks

STAR-WASHER:
2 1/2" DIAM. CIRCLE,
SEGMENTS 13 1/2"

Standard Forlezer
4 1/2" Cast-iron Wheels

INCHES AND EIGHTHS



Brian L. Lee

YACHTING is one of the things human beings don't have to do to keep alive—like growing wheat, catching fish and so on. We do it for pleasure, and out of respect for what it means and for its associations. Yacht racing is full of these somewhat artificial traditions which are there to make the game more difficult, colourful and, therefore, rewarding.

One of the oldest traditions of yacht racing is the starting gun. It is an effective tool for the job, but of course its real associations go back to the times when ships went out to sea and, with their guns, kept the enemy at bay and the national honour high.

It is one of the most fundamental symbols in the practice of ship and smallboat handling.

Here again, we don't need to have a real gun. We could use a Chinese thunderflash from last year's Guy Fawkes Night or, for that matter, one of those acetylene-gas "baboon bangers" Magaliesberg farmers sometimes set up in their mealie fields and orchards.

Most yacht clubs make their sound signals with an old double-barrelled shotgun, with a sawn-off end to increase the noise. But there is only one really satisfactory thing for the job—and that is a real ship's gun, preferably one of those that men used when sailing was one of the most respected and demanding arts in the world.

The little quarter-scale model of a British ninepounder shown on the opposite page has been specially designed by S.A. Yachting to do the job of the sawn-off shotgun, using the same box of 12-gauge blanks, while at the same time adding a bit of dash and daring to the clubhouse scene and tickling the imagination of the Jack Tars of dinghydom.

who have never fought a seventy four—which means us all, of course.

The barrel has also been brought back very slightly into the mounting to improve the stability. In a frigate or sloop, of course, it was necessary to have as much as possible in front of the wheels so that there was plenty of business-end sticking out of the ships when the gunports were flung open.

The star washers are a decorative feature with a practical excuse. The edge that bites into the wood and distributes the load is far longer in a star than a circular washer. One can imagine a Yankee frigate master fitting his guns with 'em, and he would have a very sound basis for his imaginative notion.

We did not want to clutter up the drawing with measurements and distance lines with arrowheads, but there is a scale in the middle, and the eighths on the transverse line can be split into sixteenths quite easily. To multiply the detail drawings would also have been simply boring. Anyone with ordinary savvy can see what is needed to finish off the whole affair without school-marm instructions.

However a few things ought to be pointed out. The chamber of a 12-bore shotgun is 0.731 in., the bore of the barrel 0.72 in. The chamber should be a full 2 1/4 in. long.

This is a noise maker and an imagination-tickler, however, not a gun, so you don't have to worry about the bore. If you intend getting the barrel cast in iron, the simplest and cheapest thing is to give the foundry a piece of pipe with an inside measurement of 1/4 in. This will make the coring of the casting easy for them and cheap for you. There will be almost certainly enough shrinkage

a brace of BANGERS

It has been carefully worked out to reproduce the authentic appearance of one of those weapons that stuck their noses through the gun-ports in Nelson's time—but it is not a weapon that is going to put the local magistrate into a tizzy or run you foul of the law.

It should not cost too much to make and sensible clubs should get two or three done at the same time—for recall signals, of course, and for decorative purposes. Nothing could be more stirring, for example, than the battery of bronze cannon that graces the waterside rampart in front of the Royal Yacht Squadron in Cowes.

It would be a pity if a whole lot of yachtsmen or clubs all started building this gun separately, when all that is really required for the whole of South Africa is a single pattern for the barrel. Surely somewhere we have a boating type with a foundry who could undertake the casting of barrels at ordinary trade prices, and rail them round to whoever wants them? We should imagine that if this basic part was easily available there would be a pretty good market for the castings from ordinary folk with romantic notions, as well as yacht and powerboat clubs.

Copies of the plan published in this issue are available full-size for 50 cents, which is the cost of printing, for would-be builders.

All the metalwork in this gun could be done in brass or bronze, but this would needlessly put up the price. Cast-iron costs cents a pound from the foundry, brass and bronze varying prices up to a rand and more. The barrel, then, should be in cast-iron, bolts and bits and pieces in mild-steel galvanized after manufacture and the wheels are standard cast-iron items in the Forlezer and Curtiss range costing only 70 cents each. They run on 1/4-in. axles, which can be made from ordinary reinforcing rod or bright steel shafting, if you want to be particular.

In the traditional ship's gun the outboard wheels were always a little larger in diameter, to allow for the camber of the deck, but ashore this becomes rather a finicky little detail and might even cause comment from those of us

to enable the chamber to be lightly turned out to size. The rest can be left as it comes from the foundry. During the casting process the piece of pipe comes as near as nippence to melting itself, in the rush of molten iron, but of course the foundry will have rammed it first with a sand core.

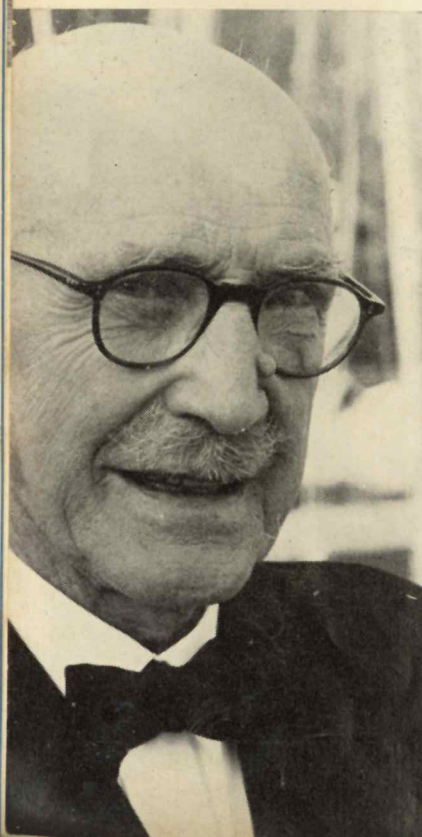
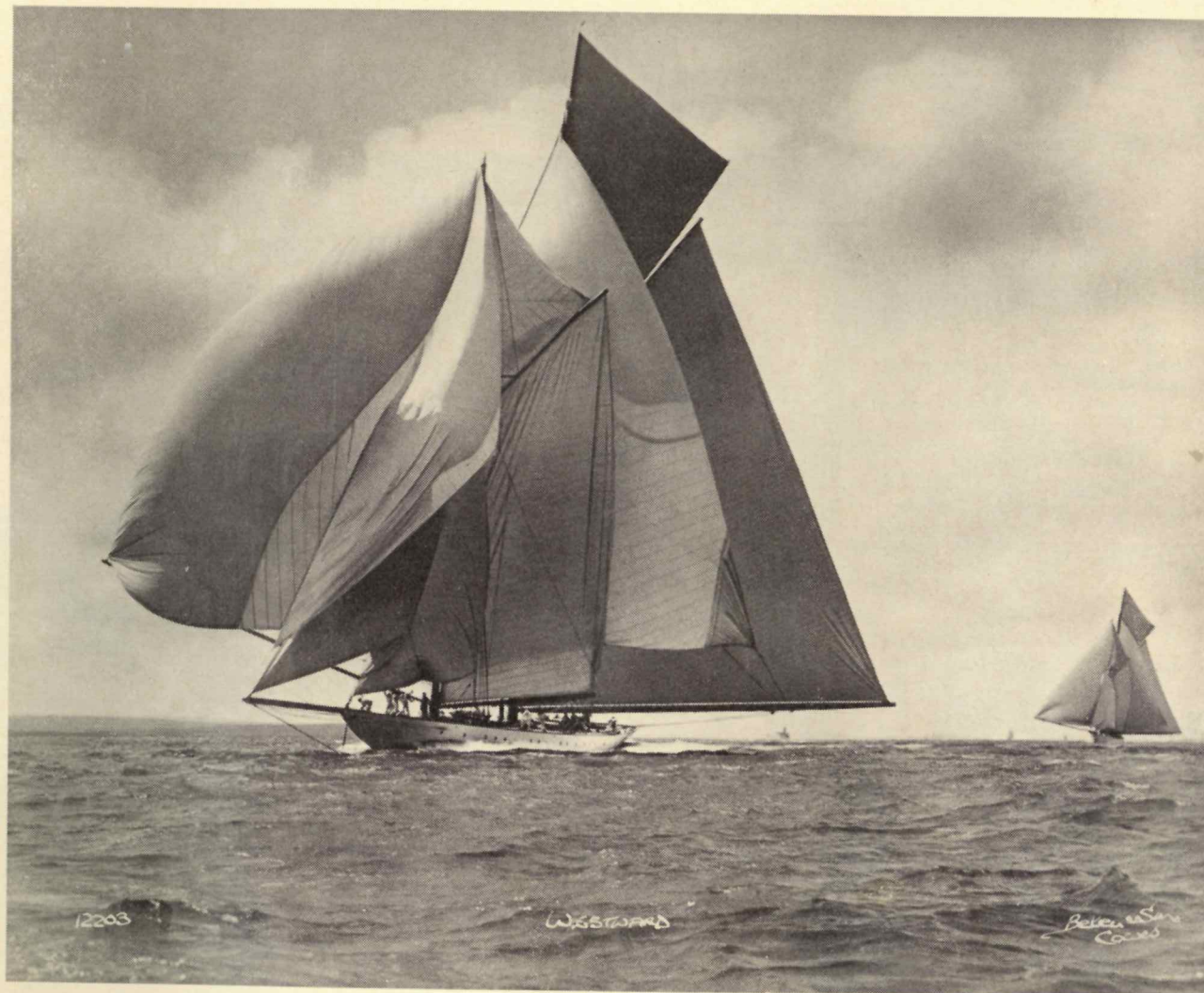
Another thing to remember about casting in that patterns for the sand mould must be a little bigger than the size you finally want. The shrinkage is plus or minus one eighth of an inch for each foot of length. In making the chamber a small nick must be left on the periphery to allow you to hoick out the "empty" after firing. Alternatively, you can use a ramrod, which would be a permanent part of the gun's equipment.

Now to the breech. The whole idea is to be able to load the gun without destroying the illusion that it is really an authentic muzzle-loader. Any ingenious fellow can think of several ways of achieving this, and two are shown on the drawing. Both breeches shown would need the wooden pattern for the foundry to be about 1/4 in. wider at the point on the barrel directly below the 3 1/4-in. measurement, to give extra metal for cutting right through the casting at that point.

By the way, if you decide to go the whole hog, and make a genuine muzzle-loader, using black powder, wads and so on, the correct scale bore would be 1 1/16 in., and the bore would stop just short of the present firing pin position. A touch-hole would have to be drilled.

The simple firing pin mechanism has been contrived to keep up this illusion that the model is an old-time weapon. The pommel (round knob at the back is split and 1/4-in. pin threaded into it. At its other end it has a flange to take the spring pressure and then the firing pin proper, which should be 3/32 in. in diameter. It should not strike deeper than 3/32 in. into the percussion cap either, to avoid blow-back. The spring, which is coiled round the main

(Continued on page 29)



Frank Beken gave this magnificent shot of the South African-owned top-sail schooner Westward to S.A. Yachting when he passed through Cape Town recently. It recalls the palmy days when T. B. Davis of Durban was the most colourful figure in the Solent season, and raced against King George V's cutter Britannia and all the other "greats". Davis was, of course, one of the first great sponsors of the University of Natal. Westward was taken to sea and ceremoniously sunk after his death.

BEKEN of COWES

BY FRANK ROBB

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THE phone rang. The caller says: "Beken is in town." "What beacon?" I asked. "What town?" "Beken of Cowes," said the phone. "Cape Town. In the Edinburgh Castle. Cabin A35."

I put the phone down—just like that—and hied me to the Edinburgh Castle.

Because Frank Beken occupies a unique position in the yachting world. Breathes there the yachtsman with soul so dead . . . Who never to himself hath said . . . This lovely photo of a yacht . . . Must surely be a Beken shot?

To stick-and-string men throughout the world no name is better known, and his appearance at any place where there is enough water to sail a model brings the devotees flocking round. Hong Kong, Rio, Hamburg—Chicago, Bloemfontein, Sydney—it makes no difference—because his art transcends all language barriers.

And so I want to tell you about Beken the man—not the photographer.

I found Beken (he has long attained the status at which one omits the Mister) having a quiet lie-down. In view of the fact that in the past 48 hours he had delivered three lectures, a number of speeches, had been enthusiastically welcomed and "shown the town" by local yachtsmen and photographers, it is understandable that a gentleman of 85 should feel the need for a little relaxation.

I apologised conventionally for my intrusion. Within 30 seconds my qualms were put at rest. Beken has that rare "quality of courtesy" which sweetly and securely hides the riddle of whether you are a welcome guest or a confounded nuisance.

We settled down to a gab-fest. About boats. About

SOUTH AFRICAN YACHTING: March, 1965

yachts—*Candida*, *Rainbow*, *Cariad*, the *Endeavours* and the "famous" yachts. About Thames barges and Brixham trawlers and Chinese junks. He modestly denied that he was a yachtsman (" . . . I used to footle around with International Fourteens") which I suspect to be somewhat less than the truth.

Of *Britannia* he said simply, "When they towed her out for the sinking—I wept."

We paged through a whole sheaf—60?, 70?, 80?—of Beken's best photographs, lingering over this one or that one discussing technicalities and personalities—Lipton, George V, Uffa Fox, the Duke (" . . . as human as you or I") and a host of others.

I saw photographs of his delightful house at Cowes, overlooking the yacht anchorage, and he told me how his business had been smashed by the two Wars and of his struggle to re-build it. Also that one of his three sons was following in father's footsteps—the firm is now "Beken and Son".

About his son he made one remark that I treasure. Beken is utterly modest about his attainment—but no real artist despises his own work. Beken is a true artist, and he let slip one revealing remark. After telling me how his heart was warmed by his son joining the business, he added: "I think he will be even better than I am."

This was a quite subconscious revelation—but my heart was also warmed thereby. Because Beken is a dedicated man and—basically—he knows that his work is good.

At 85, he is sprightly and active. About half-way through the talk he said, "You and I are skinny fellows—but we last longer than fat men". He added—wistfully—"I wish we could split a bottle and talk about boats until sun-up. But the doctor says no."

We regarded each other with mutual compassion. It was obviously the occasion for a small session but—at 85 years—the spirit was willing (and available)—but the doctor was adamant.

I like to think that I was a welcome guest rather than a confounded nuisance, because, when I was about to leave, Beken said, "I would like you to have one of my photographs".

This involved re-rifling through the whole file of pictures. When, finally, I chose the picture of *White Heather* he chuckled and said, "I rather thought that you would pick out that one. Normally I do not photograph a yacht with the light striking at that angle—it shows up the slightest wrinkle in the sails. But this time I was justified".

The set of the sails is—almost—perfection.

Almost. When Beken autographed the photograph he laughed and said, "When Tom Ratsey saw this picture he was displeased. He said, 'Frank—I've been trying to get that crease out of the foot of jibs for 20 years.'"

The photograph was taken a long time ago. It now adorns the wall of my bed-room, and when I arise blearily in the morning and when I hit the sack at night I look at it, and it gives me pleasure.

How many other pictures from the same studio are hung on how many thousands of walls as little monuments to the art of Beken of Cowes?

* Occasionally more so?

DURBAN yachtsmen, too, were pleasantly surprised to meet Frank Beken during his round-Africa trip, writes Bianca Lavies.

What made him start on yachting photography?

"As a child I lived in a house which ran down to the Solent. Here, when I was 14 I started taking pictures of yachts with my box camera. I sold so many prints that soon I bought a small launch to get around. Then I needed a better camera."

"This I built myself in 1898. It is made of mahogany—a whole-plate camera—and we are still using it. It has two handles and the shutter release is a rubber ball held between the teeth which leaves the hands free to hold the camera steady."

"The mechanism is completely enclosed and just the lens sticks out. The wood is covered with canvas and is painted each year to protect it against sea water and salt air."

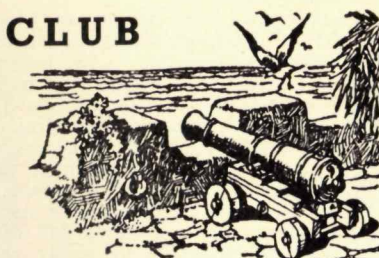
SOUTH AFRICAN YACHTING: March, 1965

"This camera gives a 8½ in. by 6½ in. negative. Later we built an exact duplicate for a five-by-four negative that we use for colour."

He knows the South African yacht *Cariad* very well and was very surprised to hear she was in Durban. She made a record, he said, by winning the Queen's Cup three times.

Another of his surprises was the fine model of the schooner *America* in the Royal Natal Yacht Club. "How the dickens did it get there?" he asked, a question which no one has been able to answer so far.

YACHT CLUB SIGNAL GUN



(Continued from
page 23)

part of the pin, should be about 1/16 in. diameter giving a loading of about 12 to 15 lb. If you can achieve as much as 1 in. "travel" this would be fine.

Firing can be done by simply pulling and letting fly the back half of the pommel, or a spacer could be inserted and yanked out smartly with a lanyard.

The pattern for the barrel is a pretty simple piece of wood turning, scaled off the drawing. The trunnion, or barrel's pivot bearing, must be turned separately and carefully mortised into the main piece of wood. It would be 7½ in. long with pivots 1¼ in. diameter and 1½ in. long. The eye for the recoil rope on the pommel would also have to be added, as well as the little "flat" just forward of the breech, on top.

Really fancy guns, of course, used to have two deeply arched dolphins just above the trunnions on each side of the barrel, to provide two more "eyes" for rope when slinging the guns or otherwise manhandling them.

The bolts, eyes and so on are all made from ordinary ¾-in. mild steel rod, the washers from ¼-in. plate and the hinged bearing for the trunnion from 3/16 in., with a wedge through at one end to hold the whole lot down.

The wood is 1½-in. teak, oak or some other non-splitting hard wood. It must be remembered that the carriage tapers fore and aft, and the sides slope inwards ½ in. each. The front edge tapers backwards ¼ in. These small details make all the difference to the appearance of a gun that must appear to sit tight and four-square on the ground.

The wheels should have ¼-in. washers both sides and a ¼-in. pin with square head to hold them tight, as shown.

The quoin is the wedge that elevates the gun as it is moved fore and aft, and it should work on a tapered slide of some really tough wood like green heart, spotted gum or even brass.

If in cast-iron and steel, the metalwork should be galvanized—hot-dipped for the steel and sprayed for cast-iron which does not like the bath of zinc. Before painting, the primer to use is calcium plumbate which does not fight with zinc and will grip on the fresh metal without etching. The barrel can be painted with good black roof paint, likewise the wheels. Fittings to your own fancy colour.

The woodwork should be treated with a sealer such as Cellseal before assembly and then varnished.

The whole model is about 26 in. long, which fortunately just suits our purposes. The bore for 12 gauge blanks does not look too small and the barrel length is about right for maximum noise. It is not too big and heavy to move around, and yet it is big enough to make a noticeable decorative feature.

Many of us know that American-made 10 gauge starting gun one occasionally sees. We feel it is neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring. In spite of the bigger charge it is smaller than this gun and, to say the best, its appearance is half-baked. Ready-made it costs more than this model can be built for—and its ammo is very expensive and now virtually impossible to obtain.

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