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NEF Uber Tamer Camp Gun

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- Gear reviews and tests - Emergency and survival -



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Description :

An economical camp gun that's still rugged and packs a punch.

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How to take a basic utility shotgun and turn it into a handy and durable camp and trail gun.

Camp Guns

Ask 5 people their idea of what makes a good camp gun and you're likely to get at least 5 different answers! Well, my personal idea of a camp is something rugged enough to withstand harsh conditions; long periods of exposure to the elements or periods sitting idle in a closet or vehicle trunk; something simple to use, and inexpensive enough that I won't feel bad if it gets banged up, scratched or rusted. A camp gun is a tool to me, it's something that's going to get used, not babied. It also has to be compact and handy enough to easily pack, carry, or store in a vehicle trunk, behind the seat of a truck, or out of the way in a cabin somewhere.

That leads me to the topic of this latest review of New England Firearms 12 gauge Pardner shotgun, suitably modified for camp and trail use.

Description

NEF has been making simple, reliable single shot shotguns for a long time now, first under the Harrington & Richardson name, then as New England Firearms, and now as H&R 1871. H&R still uses the NEF brand name for their basic models with the H&R label being reserved for their higher end offerings (although all H&R products are modestly priced). H&R 1871 is currently a subsidiary of Marlin Firearms.

At the core of the H&R/NEF line is a simple break open single shot known in its shotgun form as the Pardner. This shotgun is an exposed hammer type with an automatic ejector. In basic trim it has a 28 blued barrel with bead sight, a case hardened receiver and hardwood stocks.

I've used a number of these guns over the years and found them to be rugged but simple firearms. The fact that there are few moving parts means that there is very little that can go wrong. These guns see a lot of use as youth models and first shotguns due to their inexpensive price tag (under \$100 US, often as low as \$80 at the larger retail stores) and simple manual of arms. It's a good trainer but they often end up getting put in the back of the closet as shooters advance and move on to more sophisticated pumps, semis over and unders etc. Well, maybe it's time to either break out that old Pardner or pick one up and add it to the inventory...

Camp Gun Creation

My NEF was a gun such as that described above. It was a friend's nephew's gun that had sat idle for a number of years and eventually fell into my hands as part of a trade. Frankly I didn't think I really had a use for it either as I had a number of pump shotguns that saw regular use. It wasn't until I stumbled across a Choate Machine and Tool catalog that I had a vision....

Choate Machine and Tool (hereafter referred to simply as Choate) is a long time manufacturer of synthetic stocks for the firearms industry. I've used their products in the past and seen them on a number of firearms. I had just ordered a buttstock for a Mossberg 590A1 from them and received a catalog with my order. While perusing it I saw that they listed stocks for the H&R/NEF shotguns. They carry conventional styled buttstocks and foreends, a thumbhole stock with a hollow compartment in the butt called the Survivor and a trimmer thumbhole model called the Tamer. They also have an optional foreend with a hollow compartment for more storage space.

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Now, I had seen that NEF markets a .410 shotgun called the Tamer with a synthetic foreend and stock before and had even given it some consideration as a camp gun. I'd never owned a .410 before though and was a bit unsure of its capabilities so I never moved on my curiosity. After seeing the Choate catalog I realized that they apparently made the stocks for NEF and they made them not only for the .410's but for 12 and 20 gauge as well. Hmmm.....

So after a quick phone order and a short wait I had in my hands a Tamer stock for my 12 gauge Pardner along with a conventionally styled synthetic foreend. I had briefly considered the Survivor buttstock and hollow foreend but decided to pass on that idea. While that those items have the potential for you to store survival equipment or other odds in ends in them they appeared bulkier and that wasn't the role I foresaw for my NEF.

The Tamer stock is a pretty streamlined unit. While a thumbhole design its also skeletonized and fairly compact. It has a short length of pull (13) and a modest drop to it. As an added bonus it has a 3 round shell holder in the skeletonized portion of the butt making use of otherwise wasted space. The shell holder comes as a separate piece so if you didn't want to use it for some reason you could just leave it off. The foreend is a simple synthetic piece with a narrow profile.

Mounting the stock to the shotgun was fairly easy although having to work within the confines of the skeletonized portion of the buttstock to screw in the mounting screw was more awkward than it should have been in my opinion. Still, they installation was pretty straightforward and accomplished with a minimum of cursing and bruised knuckles.

Looking at the gun with the new stock installed I immediately realized there was a problem. Handling the gun confirmed it. The barrel was just way too long for this stock configuration. I'm sure it would have worked but it looked awkward, felt a little awkward (too front heavy), and didn't fit in with the foreseen role as a handy, easy to pack and carry camp gun. So out came our friend Mr. Hacksaw!

To comply with local and federal gun laws I cut the barrel back to a modest 18 ½ in length. You could probably go 20 and still have a pretty well balanced piece but I wanted to trim the size down as much as possible. I had a large brass bead mounted on the end of this stubby tube and my creation was complete! If NEF calls their .410 the Tamer then its 12 gauge bigger brother has got to be the Uber Tamer.

Finished Product



The end package was pretty much what I envisioned in a good all around camp gun. Its short, 31 ¾ inches in length; lightweight (maybe 4 pounds, I don't have scale to put it on but its a featherweight); very handy, and simple to operate. The short length of pull is actually a blessing as it's easy to shoulder the gun even with a heavy winter coat so it's all season friendly. The stock is weather resistant as well and while the bluing and case hardening is nothing

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special it's held up pretty well so far with basic maintenance. Total cost of the is project would be well under \$150, even starting with a new gun (\$80 for the gun, \$50 for stocks, another \$20 to have the barrel cut and a bead mounted) depending on how much of the work you do yourself.

Being a 12 gauge I feel the Uber Tamer has enough punch to do anything you could ask of a camp gun. With light loads it'd do for small game and varmints and with buck and slug it'll take down most anything on four or two legs as the need arises. That's something that I had my doubts about with a .410. The .410 fills a niche but the 12 gauge covers a great divide of diverse possibilities. You just need to tailor your ammo to your perceived needs. Typically I carry No. 6 game loads and 12 gauge slugs. For my part of Western Pennsylvania that combination should do for any sort of game or critters that I might have an interest or a need to shoot at.

Field Use

I've used this NEF now for a couple of years with very good results. Its seen time at the range for casual testing, rode in the back of my SUV on many an excursion to the woods, and been at hand in camp or in the cabin awaiting need. Okay, okay, so I've dragged it around with me for a while now, but how does it shoot you ask?

Well, to be honest, it kicks like a mule! Keep in mind this is a lightweight 12 gauge with a short barrel and a short stock made of hard plastic and with no recoil pad. The butt also has a slight curvature to it reminiscent of some older carbine stocks that doesn't do much to transfer the recoil well in my opinion. A flatter shotgun style butt would have been welcome, as would a recoil pad.

Still, for the guns intended role of being always available but shot only occasionally its not unreasonable. With game loads you can usually shoot a few boxes before your shoulder begins to complain. Slugs and buck bring about the protests much faster, usually within 5 to 10 rounds. I'm not sure of any realistic scenario though where you'd be firing that many rounds through a camp gun in a short time though so I find the recoil an acceptable trade off to the handiness of the gun.

I shoot skeet with this gun at least a couple times of year just to stay in practice. It does surprisingly well at this despite, or perhaps because of, the short barrel. By cutting nearly 10 inches off of the original tube I've removed most vestiges of the original choke so the pattern opens up fairly quickly. Not enough to keep it from making solid breaks on clays though so I suspect that'd be good enough for defensive work and emergency or opportune game getting.

Slug performance was surprising to me. I didn't have very high hopes of how well I'd do with a short smoothbore barrel and a bead sight. Still, at 50 yards from a standing position I could easily engage a silhouette target and keep 3 rounds within a hand span, which I felt was plenty adequate for an 18 smoothbore with a bead sight.

Changes

If I were recreating this gun today I might make a couple possible changes. I'd seriously consider adding a fiber optic or possibly even a tritium sight instead of the plain bead. The plain bead is functional but having a sight that's easy to see in low light certainly couldn't hurt and the cost of either of these for a shotgun isn't really prohibitive, even for a budget priced field gun. A rust resistant finish would be a bonus, as would a recoil pad! I'd give some thought to sling swivels as well although I don't think they're an absolute requirement on a gun like this. It's very light to carry and trim enough to slip along the compression straps of an internal frame pack or into a ski or gear pocket on others.

The final thing I would consider if I were to make another Uber Tamer would be to consider the 20 gauge platform

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instead. I like the 12 gauge for its power and versatility and still think it's a good choice but, if I were making this gun for others to use (such as my wife) or didn't care for the thumping that full power 12 gauge rounds can give you in this little beastly, I'd give the 20 gauge a long hard look. You can likely do most of what you can with the 12 for camp gun purposes and spare yourself some black and blue marks in the process!

Conclusion



The Harrington & Richardson/NEF shotguns are one of the real sleepers on the market today in my opinion. I think you'd be hard pressed to find another shotgun as well made and reliable for the money and they have a long track record of reliability and durability. They may not have the visual appeal of a high end double, or the bell and whistles of the latest semi-autos but they'll provide solid pedestrian service for years and years. With a few inexpensive upgrades they can become even handier still and end up being a superb camp gun that's there when you need it to be.