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CYLINDER & SLIDE'S SCHOOL OF THE .45

BILL LAUGHRIDGE: Man of De-Mystification

JIM GARDNER

Given your 'druthers, would you choose to go to a self-taught doctor or one with a prestigious sheepskin hanging on his wall? Yeah, me too. Like a lot of things in life, the best way to learn pistolsmithing is by seeking out qualified instruction.

When it comes to gunsmithing pistols, the short-gun most guys want to learn about is that ancient artifact from before the Great War, the ever-popular M1911. Some want to try their hand at making a living by customizing and repairing the good old Colt, while others only wish to tune up their personal guns. Regardless, where do you go to de-mystify the beast?

Would you like to learn from perhaps the best .45 man in the country? Or maybe from an instructor who's been building noteworthy custom 1911s on a full-time basis for nearly 30 years? How about keeping the class small, say six students, to insure close personal instruction? At the end of a five-day class would you feel okay about taking home a fine custom .45 you built from the ground up? If all that sounds good to you, it's time to talk to the man with the moustache.

And that of course, is Bill Laughridge of the famous Cylinder and Slide shop in Fremont, Nebraska. Bill's not just a world-renown pistolsmith, he's a born teacher as well. Classes are held at his home shop in Fremont and at several

remote locations around the country, and I recently caught up with him at a class in San Diego. Asked why he teaches these classes, Bill responds:

"Because there's a real hunger for this knowledge. After a lot of requests, I started with short classes on trigger work. But there were always guys who wanted to know more, which is how this class evolved."

Hang On

There's not much about the old warhorse you won't learn if you just keep your ears open. Starting with a stone-stock, base model gun (Bill has very good results with Springfield Armory pistols), you'll begin by learning how and where to polish-out tool marks to produce that greasy-smooth "custom gun" feel.





Dirty work comes next, including fitting a beavertail grip safety, match trigger and long ejector as well as lowering and flaring the ejection port. To make that pistol feed flawlessly, you'll fit and tune the extractor before shaping and polishing the breech face, as well as the frame and barrel feed ramps. All done, just like the big boys.

Clean that pistol spic-n-span then stand by to learn how to tighten slide-to-frame fit, install a Bar-Sto barrel ("They're the very best," says Bill), perform a flawless trigger job, fit up an ambi-safety and install your choice of Novak or Bo-Mar sights.

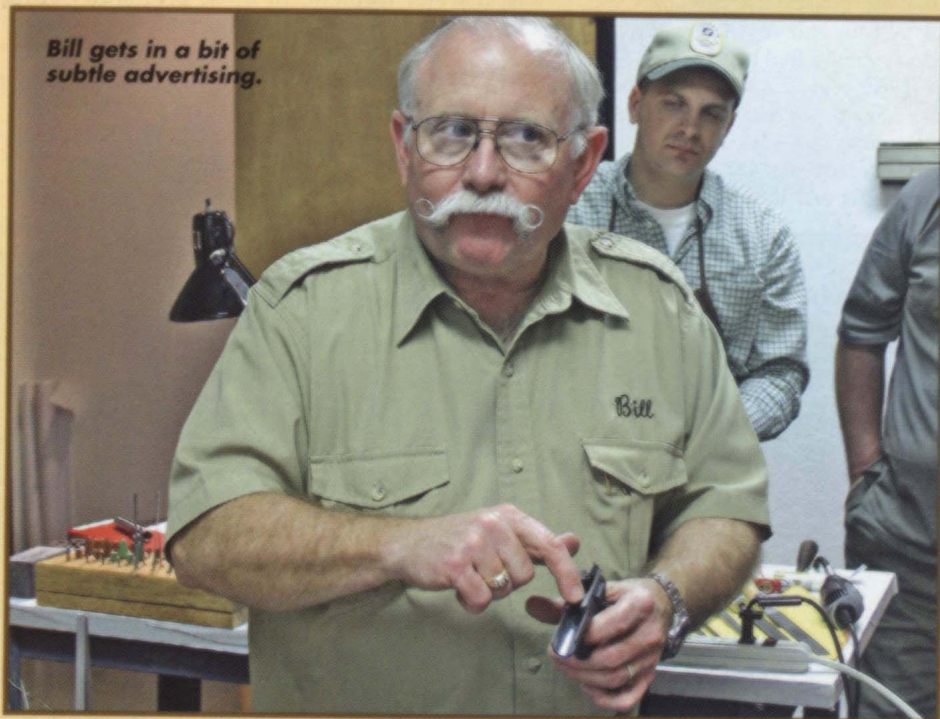
Thinking Cap Anyone?

It's gobs of work, but honestly, that's just scratching the surface. Not only will you learn how to accomplish all those jobs (and a lot more); the best part of the class is in the form of impromptu lectures from Bill.

Laughridge is a "hands-on" kinda' guy, and his course outline doesn't include a lot of long drawn out lectures. Instead he'll have you at work as soon as your foot makes past the door. Throughout the day a question or a problem with a specific pistol will prompt a short but thorough explanation, and that friend, is the time to reach for your notebook.

Bill's long experience comes through clearly at those particular moments, and these little nuggets of wisdom will help the practicing gunsmith keep his cus-

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Bill gets in a bit of subtle advertising.



Sparks fly as Laughridge demonstrates how to re-cut a barrel seat.



tomers happy; while preventing the home gun crank from making costly mistakes. Keep that pencil sharp and handy.

Not only is Bill sharp as a tack when it comes to pistol work, he's funny too, which makes the roughly 50-hour class fly by. Speaking of the dangers of sloppy trigger work, Bill smiles: "It takes only two tenths of a second to empty a full magazine when one of these goes full-auto," Bill warns. "And let me tell you boys, it's a religious experience!"

"Not only is Bill sharp as a tack when it comes to pistol work, he's funny too, which makes the roughly 50-hour class fly by."

Happy Campers

The wealth of knowledge and fun atmosphere of the class left every student satisfied. Bryce P., a 20-year old from Texas attended the recent class. He's considering gunsmithing as a profession. "It was a great experience!" Bryce exclaimed. "Bill's a fun guy and I learned everything I wanted to know."

Berge K. is a working full-time gunsmith. He commented, "It's been a privilege to tap Bill's knowledge. He's successful, extremely skillful and more than willing to share his experience." Berge recently completed two years of instruction at a specialized gunsmithing school and was very impressed with Bill's methods.

Matt C. is a peace officer in one of our western states who hopes to build high-end competition and duty guns after his retirement. He shared his thoughts at the end of the class: "It was an awesome class! Bill is just great; he's fun and he sure knows what he's talking about." Asked what was the most important lesson he took from the class, Matt thought a moment before grinning and replying, "Everything."

Obviously such a learning opportunity is not going to be inexpensive, but the opportunity to draw on Bill's knowledge makes it well worthwhile. As proof, one of the San Diego students was attending for the second time, while another was making arrangements for a second class in the near future.

For the details on class costs and schedules, see the C&S Web site: www.cylinder-slide.com, or call them at: (402) 721-4277.

