

The value of a good gun cabinet

by Bruno Pollini



The value of a good gun cabinet was something I'd never given a lot of thought to beyond the requirement to have one which would pass inspection by the local police. However, I have come to learn that a heavy-duty model can protect your guns from more than theft or misuse.

One morning, a few months ago, I was walking up the paddock to check my cattle when I noticed a thick column of black smoke coming from the direction of a neighbour's property. I raced home and telephoned the fire brigade. By the time I got to the neighbour's place, the homestead that had stood for 100 or so years, surrounded by beautiful trees and gardens, was well alight. The rural fire trucks were quickly on the scene and did their best to fight the flames, but it was a futile task.

After the ruins stopped smouldering, our

neighbours could find very little of value to salvage. Some twisted metal was pulled out and identified as the remains of their gun cabinet. It contained a .410, two .22 rifles and a couple of 12-gauge side-by-side shotguns. While the first three had been used basically for vermin control, the other two, both boxlocks, were family heirlooms, going back three generations. All were charred and looked pretty much beyond further use.

As a keen hunter and gun owner from

The BSA and Greener shotguns salvaged from the house fire.

boyhood, the thought of these pieces being bulldozed with the rest of the ruins led to me offering to take them home to see if anything could be done with them. I started on the .22s, one of which proved to be damaged beyond repair, but the other, a single-shot Lithgow, was in better shape and with

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cleaning, oiling and the wood rubbed back, it functioned well again.

The .410 responded in a similar way and I then turned my attention to the two 12-gauge models. The Greener did not look good; its mutton-leg case was badly burnt and had to be ripped apart to free the gun. The heat had melted about 12cm of the lead solder off the bottom rib, the wood was black and the opening lever would not move. I put it aside, as I was not confident I could do anything with it.

The other 12-gauge, a BSA, was not quite as bad; the bead on the end of the barrels was damaged, the fore-end and butt were burnt black and the gun would not break open. Both of these old shotguns were a challenge and I started working on them. I began with the good old standby, WD40. It came in handy to get the moving parts working again. A few hours of cleaning, rubbing and polishing got both guns back into working order. They're not handsome, but they work again.

Both guns have 30" barrels and double triggers. The Greener is fairly tight with half and full chokes, while the BSA's right barrel must have been opened up at some stage to almost open choke and the left seems to be full. I like the old BSA, as it

comes up well to the shoulder and has a lovely balance. I prefer it to the Greener simply because it is what fits you that is important.

After all the effort to get the guns working, I wanted a bit more done on the BSA and got in touch with Bevan Brown of Fyshwick Firearms in Canberra. It needed a new bead on the end of the barrels and a pad fitted to the butt. In my opinion, a field gun should have a sling, so I asked for swivels as well.

The work was done by Rob the gunsmith and it was then time to put it to the test. The hill beside our place is always handy for a few bunnies and on a nice, sunny winter's morning there is always the chance of picking up a fox or two.

When I opened the gun cabinet, Ralph the Jack Russell yelped in excitement - he knows that sound! He is a born hunter and we have hunted foxes and rabbits together over the years. As we walked out past the pointers in their kennels, they whimpered their disappointment at not being able to come with us - the drought has been a very lean time for them.

Ralph worked with his usual enthusiasm among the rocks and in more than an hour or so flushed two foxes for me. The BSA



Bruno Pollini with Ralph the Jack Russell and the foxes taken with the resurrected BSA 21-gauge shotgun.

did its job well, as it will continue to do for many years and generations to come.

The lesson learnt from all this is the importance of a strong gun cabinet, one of solid metal construction, which could make a big difference in minimising any damage to your firearms in the unfortunate event that your house burns down. ●