

## Don Wheatly's BSA Martini Mark II

A few years ago, I visited with Don Wheatly because he said he had a BSA Martini he would be willing to sell. We looked at a few other rifles, all which were extremely interesting in their own right. The one that impressed me was the 22-high wall. Now if you know anything about high walls you know they are a pain to load. You push the round into the chamber about a quarter mile before the round is chambered. If you are shooting a 45/70 it's just fine because the cartridge is about a half mile long so it fits just about right. If the cartridge is a 223 you can tip the rifle down just a bit and the point of the bullet slides right in. But what do you do with a 22-long rifle, it has a round point and is really (in the cartridge world) short? You could spend most of the day fiddling with the first cartridge until you raised the block up just the right amount and blindly poked the little pill into the chamber. I suppose with a little practice you could get the hang of it and be able to shoot a match.

Of course, Harry Pope could rebarrel the high wall with a Pope barrel and you could shoot winning targets but the loading would still be a problem. Harry had a better idea, if you insisted on using a High Wall instead of a Low Wall, he could just cut away the side of the action and give you enough room to get your fingers into the chamber. Now if I did something like that the block would fall out the cut side of the action and it would not work. Harry figured it out so it works fine. He also moved the firing pin from center fire to rimfire. This was a Pope marked rifle what a joy to hold.

Harry Pope worked on his own schedule so if he said he would do something for you it might take a while. Many customers waited a long time for him to finish their work. Something about gunsmithing encourages the gunsmith to lose track of time. Everything takes longer than they predict and much longer than the customer hopes for.

Anyway, we got to the rifle I came to buy. It was a BSA (British Small Arms) Martini Mark II with a custom bench rest action, Redfield sight mounts and Unertl type scope mounts. It was made in 1948 and the wood was gorgeous. I looked down the barrel and it looked great. There was some wear on the bluing but nothing unusual for a gun this old. This type of rifle was imported into the United States in large quantities in the 1950's and 60's, many by Al Freeland and they were the premier offhand competition rifles during this time. The University of Iowa ROTC and rifle clubs used them. As an aside the UI rifles were deeded to the West Liberty Gun Club for club use. I didn't use them but they were available. I did borrow a sight set from one of them when I broke my front sight on my cross-stick rifle. They got it back the following week. These rifles were lost in the club house fire about 10 years ago.

Don sold me this rifle for a fair price. I had Richard cut the butt of the rifle so it would fit me. The rifle must have been shot by a very large man. It fits me beautify as an offhand or bench rifle. The nice thing about a Martini is the cartridges slide right into the chamber and you just flick the lever to close the block. The ejector is quite strong and will fill the back of your van up with spent brass if you park too close. The brass seems to spill out of my car whenever I get out of it, usually in some mall parking lot. It rolls under the van so I can't retrieve it. Oh well.

Last fall I went to a gun show up near where Don lived and he had a Parker Hale rifle scope. We made a deal (he told me what it cost) and I went home with the scope for my Martini. I have shot it some with the scope and have setting out to 100 yards. It's a ball to shoot offhand at those 4-inch steel bowling pins at 100 meters. I couldn't see them through my Redfield Olympic sights but they show up nicely in the scope. The scope is new compared to the rifle it was made in the sixties.



BSA Martini Mark II with Parker Hale scope