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# THE STOLLE ACTION

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A search of my match records shows that I encountered the Stollers (Ralph and Eldon, to be exact) for the first time at the June, 1969 match at Johnstown, New York. I had my first bench rest rifle, a 222-1/2 heavy varmint built for me by Ted Boughton, and with this trusty dragonslayer, I showed up at Johnstown, the ancestral home of bench rest shooting (hallowed ground, and all that sort of stuff), to compete in the heavy varmint class, and watch the unrestricted class settle their little differences.

I wandered over to see my Connecticut friend, John Kohler, who was busily cleaning a gun with a stock so big that an entire forest must have given up its life so that the stock might have come into existence. "John, I'm looking forward to you winning this thing."

"That's nice. But don't bet money on it, though."

"Why not?"

"Because the Stollers are here, that's why."

Thus rebuffed, I next strolled over to where Ted Boughton was set up, who was alternately loading, untangling the family poodle, and trying to keep a pipe lit, and succeeding in none of them. "Ted, I wish you the best of luck; hope you win it."

"If you really want me to win this, go find where the Stollers are loading, and bend their scopes, or put dirt in their powder measure."

When the weekend's powder smoke had cleared, the winner was one Eldon Stolle sure enough, but the fates were unkind to Ralph that time, and he was destined to be fifth. (John Kohler was second, so much for pre-match pessimism).

I can remember looking at their two rifles, as they sat side by side on their loading table, massive and beautiful, dark wood stocks, and each built around a Stolle unlimited class action, the Grizzley model . . . . items of such desirability that any man in his right mind would have offered to trade bushel baskets of money for either. Alas, they were not for sale.

After an absence of many years from shooting, on my return to bench rest in 1980, one of the things that I wanted first was a Stolle varmint class action, the Panda model.

There had been an excellent write-up of the Stolle actions in the December, 1976 issue of **The American Rifleman** magazine, with two of the actions featured on the cover yet. The article, by Stuart Otteson and John Eaton was well written as are virtually all the Otteson works, and gave the reader a good insight into not only the actions, but their creator, Ralph Stolle, a master machinist and perfectionist.

Then, along came issue number 67 of **The Rifle** magazine (January-February, 1980 issue), with another write-up on the Stolle Panda action by the same Stuart

Otteson. The article started off with the sentence, "Ralph Stolle retired from the printing business in 1978, and moved out to the mountains of West Virginia to devote full time to making bench rest actions." Well now, that was simple and straight-forward enough, and it would lead one of nominal intelligence to presume that one with the requisite amount of greenbacks should be able to purchase a Stolle Panda action, right?

Sat down at the desk, and dashed off an inquiry to Bear Hollow Products, in Elizabeth, West Virginia. A nice, proper business inquiry, "Dear Sir . . . . Saw the excellent write-up on your product . . . . quite interested in same . . . . do you have any product brochures . . . . if not, can you confirm an exact price and estimated delivery date." Off went the letter, with a stamped, return envelope. A month passed, nothing. Sat down again, wrote a duplicate of my earlier letter, again with a stamped return envelope, and sent that off. Again, nothing.

Finally, after a bit of soul-searching and talking to myself, sat down and picked up the phone this time, and called a friend in the NBRSA world (who will be nameless here).

"Can you help me? I'm having a little problem with Ralph Stolle."

"Really? What's he doing to you?"

"Nothing. That's exactly the problem. I want to buy a Panda action. Since he's in business making the darn things, I've been laboring under the childish mistaken presumption that he was making the darn things for sale."

"As I understand things, he's such a perfectionist that production per se is darn small, and you literally have to know the right party to get one."

"Well, in that case, I'm going to start looking for the right party. Do you have any 'ins' with Ralph?"

"Nope, I don't. Do you know so-and-so?"

"Yes, I know him pretty well. Does he have the 'in' I need?"

"Nope, but he's a friend of such-and-such. Do you know such-and-such?"

"No, I'm afraid that I don't know such-and-such to talk to."

"Well, such-and-such is a friend of Ralph. So, what you are going to have to do is contact your friend so-and-so, and

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ask him to speak to such-and-such, and hope that such-and-such will put in a good word for you."

"Wait a minute, I'm not applying to be an ambassador to England. This whole scenario sounds like an Inspector Clousseau farce . . . . next you'll be telling me that I have to wear a trench coat and show up with the Pink Panther. I just want to buy a rifle action, that's all."

"Stop shouting at me. I'm just doing my best to answer your question truthfully."

Being one of limited intelligence and short attention span, I wandered away in search of new prophets. In 1980, I heard various pieces of information that circulate in bench rest circles . . . . that Ralph had a heart-attack before the Super Shoot at George Kelbly's range in Ohio, that he was recovering all right, and then in the spring of 1981, I heard a rumor that he and George Kelbly had formed a partnership for the making of Stolle actions (both the varmint weight Panda and the heavy gun Polar model), at George's North Lawrence, Ohio address. I was able to talk to George at the Precision Shooting board of directors meeting this spring, and satisfied myself not only of the correctness of what I heard, but also of the fact that Panda actions were indeed available for sale to the public, within a very reasonable time frame for delivery.

I won't go into a full technical description of the two actions here. If you will send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Kelbly's, Inc., 7222 Dalton Fox Lake Road, North Lawrence, Ohio 44666, they will be pleased to send you an excellent brochure and current price list.

The varmint model, the Panda, has been priced at \$450 (without trigger) for the entire year of 1981, but I understand that there is tentatively scheduled a \$50 price increase for January 1, 1982. For the base price, either a right-handed or left-handed version is available, with bolt face sizes for .222, PPC or .308. For the same base price, one may, if desired, order a right-hand bolt with left-hand loading port, or a left-hand bolt with a right-hand loading port. Either right-handed or left-handed model may be ordered with a double loading port for \$20 additional.

The larger Polar model has essentially the same options available, at a \$50 higher price level.

One may order an extra bolt for the Panda, at a \$150 price, or \$130 for the Polar. Before you ask, the Panda bolt is

fluted, the Polar bolt is not, hence the price differential.

Kelbly's Inc. stocks Hart and Atkinson blanks for varmint rifles, and Hart blanks for the Polar action. Around 30 blanks are in stock at virtually all times. Shilen two ounce triggers are also stocked, and a fiberglass thumbhole varmint stock as well as a classic pattern varmint stock made of polyester are stocked for the Panda model, while the Polar model has stock blanks of both laminated cherry and fiberglass shown in the catalog. For those who wish, they can turn out a completely finished rifle.

Questions posed to George Kelbly for this article were answered thus:

**QUESTION:** George, what options, if any, are available that are not shown in your catalog?

**ANSWER:** First of all, while the Stolle action is historically a flat bottomed action, we will make it cylindrical for customers who want it this way. We will make it without the integral full-length dovetail rib on top, if desired. Finally, if the customer is going to use a fiberglass stock other than one of ours, which are especially set up for the Panda, we will taper the back tang, bringing it in on both sides and sloping it.

**QUESTION:** How long a waiting period for a Stolle action these days?

**ANSWER:** Two weeks to two months, but more often than not, two weeks is available. Complete rifles are a two or three month proposition.

**QUESTION:** Any special lubrication recommended?

**ANSWER:** No special from any other actions. I myself use STP or Lubriplate, which is a trade name item lubricant that comes in tubes . . . . a lot of lawn mower shops carry it around here.

**QUESTION:** What are your thoughts on using them in installations?

**ANSWER:** I strongly favor the glue-in method. Fiberglass stocks are a big improvement over wood, but they are still moving a bit. If you don't glue in, you should re-bed once a year. Many

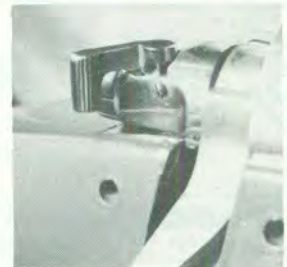
fiberglass stocks will start post-curing at 140 degrees. Leave them in direct sun, or in a hot car, on a hot enough day, and you just might be surprised at what "inert" fiberglass will do!

The actions are largely aluminum, with steel inserts at critical points. The Panda model is eight and a half inches long, and weighs 31.4 ounces. The Polar model is 14.875 inches long, and weighs 66 ounces.

The combination of Ralph Stolle and George Kelbly appears to be an excellent one for bench rest shooters. The desirable Stolle action is now available. Although it does take a lot of the fun out of sitting down in one's easy chair at home some evening, and pondering, "Who do I know that knows someone . . . . that knows someone . . . . that knows Ralph Stolle?" While wearing your Secret Squirrel trench coat, of course!

"Let's see . . . . Larry Engelbrecht is (at that time) NBRSA president. I wonder if he knows Ralph Stolle? Rick Hornbeck knows him, but he might be mad at me because I keep calling the big guns "the unlimited class" in my writing. Seely Masker knows Rick, but he might be mad at me because of all the harrasment I give him over his using Norma powder. Maybe I ought to call Doc, ask him to call Seely for me, then Seely will (hopefully) call Rick, Rick will (hopefully) call Larry Engelbrecht, who (maybe) knows Ralph Stolle. If he doesn't, who can I ask next?"

Those were the days!



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