

# Roosevelt's '76

**"The Best**



*Doug Turnbull Restorations perfectly recreated the 1876 rifle in .45-75 Win. shown in Theodore Roosevelt's hands in one of the legendary sportsman's most famous images (above, r.), including John Ulrich engraving.*



## Gun For Any Game."

Rough Rider, NRA Life member and U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt was an avid shooter and hunter, who said, "Personally, I prefer the Winchester." Now you can enjoy a "Roosevelt Experience" with your own Model 1876 from Doug Turnbull Restoration.

By PHILIP SCHREIER  
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Photos courtesy of NRA archives

In September 1883, a New York assemblyman by the name of Theodore Roosevelt arrived in the Badlands of Dakota Territory for his first Western hunting expedition. Enamored with the spaciousness of the West, the clarity of the air, abundance of game and the demeanor of the American cowboy, he purchased a ranch, named it the Maltese Cross, and began a short career as a gentleman rancher.

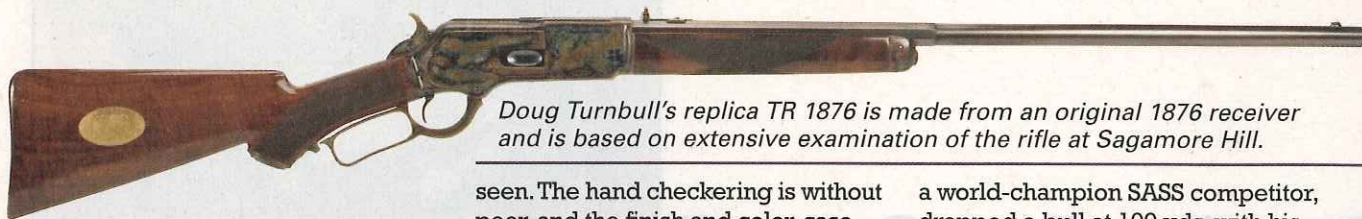
In 1884, he returned to the Dakotas with a new battery of firearms; all were special-ordered from Colt and Winchester. These were the first in a long line of special orders he would place over the course of his active life.

Perhaps the best known of these Badlands guns was his prized Winchester Model 1876 rifle in .45-75, serial number 38,647. The gun epitomizes Roosevelt's "Bully attitude" as he posed with it for a famous set of photographs of him in buckskin garb and a sterling silver hunting knife fashioned by Louis Comfort Tiffany.

In *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* he wrote of the 1876: "... stocked and sighted to suit myself, is by all odds the best weapon I ever had, and I now use it almost exclusively, having killed every kind of game with it, from a grizzly bear to a big-horn." He continues by saying, "... the Winchester is the best gun for any game to be found in the United States ..."

The rifle was one of two Roosevelt special ordered in 1884, the other being a Model 1873. The 1876, or "Centennial Rifle," he ordered in .45-75 Win. with a half-round, half-octagon barrel, a half magazine, a color-casehardened receiver, and with a pistol grip





Doug Turnbull's replica TR 1876 is made from an original 1876 receiver and is based on extensive examination of the rifle at Sagamore Hill.

stock and checkered fore-end. The gun was given full engraving coverage by John Ulrich, and it featured a bison, deer, elk and antelope on the receiver. A gold plaque in the stock was engraved with a grizzly bear. It is one of the finest 1876s known and, of all the known Roosevelt rifles, it is certainly the most recognized. A priceless piece of Americana, the 1876 is currently on display at TR's Long Island home, Sagamore Hill, near Oyster Bay, N.Y.

Few of us have been fortunate just to handle one of his priceless firearms, and I can tell you from experience, it is a singular thrill to look down the barrel and line up the sights knowing that TR had done the same, just over a century ago. Roosevelt admirers, such as myself, have long dreamed of re-creating the famous gun, and Doug Turnbull of Doug Turnbull Restoration in Bloomfield, N.Y., has made that dream come true.


Turnbull has pledged \$250,000 to the National Firearms Museum's Firearms Conservation Lab through The NRA Foundation. One of the projects helping him and his skilled team of artisans to reach this goal is his re-creation of Roosevelt's 1876 rifle. Doug and his assistant, Pete Koppmann, were granted exclusive access to the original rifle by the National Park Service to photograph and measure the rifle in exact detail.

After five years of work, the result is an accurate replica that even TR himself would have trouble distinguishing one from the original. Made from an original 1876 frame, Turnbull has recreated TR's rifle, inch-by-inch, even down to flawless copies of the original Ulrich engraving. The figure of the wood is without question, some of the finest I have ever

seen. The hand checkering is without peer, and the finish and color-case-hardened frame, hammer and lever sparkle with vivid color. Holding the .45-75 rifle and sighting down the barrel can almost take you back to 1884 and Roosevelt's stories of hunting expeditions and encounters.

I accompanied Doug and Pete on a buffalo hunt at the Hawes Ranch in Ford, Kansas. We took one of the 25 Turnbull Roosevelt 1876s back to the prairie. The host of Outdoor Channel's "Cowboys," Tequila, used a Roosevelt rifle on the hunt. (I had to make do with a Turnbull 1886 Winchester in .50-110 Win. valued at \$15,000—such is my luck.) Tequila,

a world-champion SASS competitor, dropped a bull at 100 yds. with his first and only shot. The president would have been proud, as on his own first hunt his first shot missed completely. He quickly quipped, "I may not shoot well, but I know how to shoot often."

Only 25 of TR's 1876s will be produced. Each is serial numbered TR-(01-25), and TR-08 through TR-23 are still available. Part of the proceeds from each rifle will benefit the National Firearms Museum Endowment of The NRA Foundation. To find out more, contact Turnbull Restoration at (585) 657-6338 or go to [www.turnbullrestoration.com](http://www.turnbullrestoration.com). 

## Making The Old Look New

In addition to its custom guns and special projects like the TR 1876, Doug Turnbull Restorations does ground-up restorations of classic Colts, Winchesters and American side-by-side shotguns, (plus others upon request). Think of what DTR's gunsmiths do as being like what a talented automobile restorer could do with a well-worn Studebaker, "returning the guns to their original beauty."

This 16-ga. L.C. Smith Field had, well, seen better days. It was functional and all there, but that's about all that could be said for it. The owner wanted an American classic for his grandson to hunt with but didn't want to devalue a pristine gun or give his grandson a "dog." Enter Doug Turnbull. Upon receipt by DTR, this Sweet Elsie was disassembled, the metal was annealed and polished—including inside the barrels—and the barrel dents were raised. The factory markings and lettering were re-cut, the barrels were rust-blued and DTR replicated the original color-casehardening for an L.C. Smith of this vintage. As with everything they do, DTR's craftsmen paid careful attention to the original wood. It was stripped, the dents in the butt and fore-end were steamed up, and the wood was totally refinished. Careful attention was paid to keep the wood above the metal, which is tricky. The original checkering was chased, and an appropriate L.C. Smith replacement buttplate was fitted and added.

Handwork by gifted craftsmen doesn't come cheap, as total cost of all the work was about \$3,600. Those who have had Doug and his staff restore a gun might wince a little at the price when they open the invoice, but never complain about the quality or beauty of the work thereafter.



*Turnbull's craftsmen turned this well-worn L.C. Smith from a beater into a thing of beauty, it looks as if it left the factory yesterday.*

—MARK A. KEEFE, IV