

Girls and Guns

By Tim Smith

Sue has always been one who does not mind getting her hands dirty. She tills the garden, used a tractor to dig the koi pond, and allowed ducklings to stay in the house until they were fledged and ready to live in the barn. So, it was not a surprise that she jumped right in to work on airguns.

Sue received her first airgun in 2005. With that first airgun, she learned gun safety and how to aim. She lost her fear of guns and replaced it with respect. She gained confidence by being able to shoot in the backyard and having an airgun that was accurate. An accurate airgun seems to be the key for winning over new shooters. Her favorite saying is, "It isn't any fun if you can't hit the target." Over the years since receiving that first airgun, Sue has purchased many others. One of her favorite recreational activities is to customize modern Crosman airguns. While the guns were on display at the airgun shows around the country, many men asked her if her airguns were for sale, even though some had "Susan J. Smith" engraved on the air tube. Making a custom airgun is often a puzzle and her way of accessorizing. Matching wood and metal color combinations is one of her talents. She has even designed her own muzzle brake for her favorite airgun, affectionately called "Hex Gun."

What began as a hobby became our family business- Smith Airgun Repair. Sue now repairs and restores many of the vintage Crosman, Benjamin, and Sheridan airguns. She is a published author, as well. She has had several repair, how-to, and customization articles published in Airgun Hobbyist Magazine, and



she has also been quoted on Daisy's airguns website.

Dozens of different models of airguns have been manufactured over the years. Most of the vintage models that she and I repair date back to the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, while some date back as far as the 1920s. Each variation is a different puzzle to solve. Making the puzzle a little more challenging at times is the fact that some of these airguns may have been repaired decades ago with mismatched parts. The final part of the puzzle is fabricating tools and jigs to perform specific functions.

After repairing so many of the vintage airguns and seeing the quality of the materials used back then, Sue decided to take a rundown Benjamin 312 air rifle and restore it to its past beauty. She completely disassembled the airgun, and cleaned the grease, oil, and grime on each component. She sanded the stock down to unveil the beautiful wood, while the character of the wood was left intact by retaining the occasional scratch, scrape, and dent the airgun had acquired over the years. She finished it off with a couple of coats of poly. On the Benjamin airguns, the barrel and air tube

were made of brass. Sue removed what little of the original black finish was left and polished the brass until it shined. (On a collectible-grade airgun, she would not strip it so it would retain its value.) Next, she removed the rust and sanded the steel parts so she could re-blue them. Lastly, she replaced the worn valve components and reassembled it to have a beautiful, fully-functional air rifle for herself.

With the shop located behind the house, our kids are often popping in to see what's up. She takes

the time to teach our kids about the cleaning and parts of the airgun that she is working on. As I taught her several years ago, she is teaching our kids to respect the airguns, that they are not toys, and not to touch them without permission.

Whether it is working on airguns or shooting them outdoors, Sue has loved learning to work on so many different models. She hopes that one day, when they are a little older, that both our son and daughter will enjoy building, fixing, customizing, and shooting airguns with her. Tim Smith has published articles in Airgun Hobbyist Magazine and on the Umarex USA web site. He has been married to Sue Smith for 20 years. They live in Concord NC with their two children; Ben and Emily. Along with repairing airguns with Sue at their business, Tim is also the editor of Airgun Hobbyist Magazine. He is also the owner of the Airgun Artisans, a resource web site for the custom airgun hobbyist. Tim can be reached for Smith Airgun Repair at tim@smithairgunrepair.com or for Airgun Hobbyist Magazine at tim@airgunhobbyist.com.



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