

ADJUSTABLE COMB OR BENDING?

Dear Technoid,

What success have you had with stock bending. I need the comb higher on my Browning 325. Several people have warned me of their own experience with the stock returning back to its original shape (either partially or in full).

We experience a great deal of humid heat down here. Could this be the cause? Would I be better off having an adjustable comb installed?

Thanks-F.B.

Dear F.B.,

Stock bending vs adjustable comb is a pretty standard quandary. "Generally" stocks do not return once bent. During the bending process, the stock is overbent because the stocker knows that it will immediately partly spring back and he takes this into account. Once it has "set", it generally stays where put. But not always.

I don't know exactly what effect your humid atmosphere has on springing back. Many of us store our guns in gun safes with some sort of humidity or dew point control (like a can of renewable desiccant or a Golden Rod). Shotguns should also be stored muzzle DOWN to take pressure off of the stock (and keep errant oil out of the wood).

Gun stocks are usually bent using either steam, hot oil or infra red heat. My local stockmaker/artiste says what he uses really depends on the particular wood and inletting. A good stocker will normally rebend for you if it springs back relatively soon. If it holds for a while, it really shouldn't come back. Then again the "steam" used in bending sounds an awful lot like "humidity", doesn't it. By the way, proper stock bending should NOT involve any refinishing. The steam/oil enters through the checkering in the pistol grip. Checkering does not have any finish on it as checkering is cut after finishing- or should be.

The advantage to bending is that 1) it looks correct and 2) it does not add weight. The disadvantage is that it is really sort of a one shot deal, is not all THAT precise, cannot be minutely adjusted day to day and may spring back.

adjustable stocks are the converse. Many people find them aesthetically incorrect and they can add a good bit of weight (though much of that might come from the massive trap-style adjustable butt plates some incorporate along with an adjustable cheek piece). The ridge in the cheek piece can also make them less comfortable to shoot, depending on how you cheek your gun.

It all really boils down to individual choice. One thing that an adjustable comb really will not cure is excess cast off at the pad. You will need to add an adjustable pad to cure that. That starts to really look sort of ugly as it hangs out in space, off center to the inside of the stock. It may

also impede gun mount. Most of the 325s and 425s come with cast off, so that is a consideration. Bending neatly handles the cast off problem at the same time it deals with height.

What do I do? Why, I am glad you asked. I shoot a Beretta 303 in 12 gauge and automatics are easily shimmed up, down and sideways at the receiver-stock head junction. This is one of the reasons I prefer autos. All autos come with slightly adjustable stocks.

On my O/Us, I find that Browning FN trap stocks with an extra 3/4" of spacers fit me perfectly, so I have not had to wrestle with the problem. On my game guns that required adjustment, I had the stocks bent. I really cannot see an adjustable stock on a nice English double.

If my O/U target guns did not fit me, I think that I would experiment with an adjustable stock rather than have them bent. I like the feature of adjustability in my gas guns and think that it would be nice in my O/Us. I would devote considerable effort to finding a set up that was light enough (unless I wanted to add a little rear weight- those new 32" 425s and Ultras balance about like a pig on a snow shovel).

I would probably just do the adjustable cheek piece at first, rather than also do the adjustable butt to try to save weight and because I don't think that adjustable butts may cause mounting problems in sporting clays. I would make sure that my adjustable cheek piece had a full range of lateral and eccentric motion to adjust for cast as well as height and comb "pitch". The piece should be able to move to the right in front and to the left in back, as well as up in back and down in front. Not all adjustable cheek pieces can do this, so choose carefully.

I would also get the cheek piece cut somewhat deeper than usual. Normally they are about 1"-1.25" deep and the side of your cheek can often uncomfortably feel the ridge and empty spot at the cut out. It is hard to cut it much lower and still keep the support posts out of the stock bolt hole, but I would challenge the stock maker to get around that somehow (perhaps by placing the cheek piece bolt bushings below the stock bolt hole). A 3" deep cheek piece would be MUCH more comfortable than a shallow one.

Of course, all of this is woulda, coulda, shoulda, mighta stuff. I have not personally installed an adjustable stock on any of my guns and I really do not see very many sporters with O/U adjustable stocks in serious competition. Perhaps they are popular in other parts of the country. The Southern parts of the US seem to have more Krieghoffs used in sporting and K-80 shooters are always adding huge chunks of shiny metal to their guns. It must be the German love of complicated mechanics.

New England still has more of an English influence and stock bending is the usual fix, not adjustable stocks. Still and all, as the Technoid, I do hold the ability to constantly tinker in high regard. I mean, how else can you get your gun absolutely perfect one day and then go and improve on it the next day.

Bend or adjustable? Your choice.

Regards,
Bruce Buck
Shotgun Report's Technoid