

Gunroom

By Bill Harriman



Fusion fever reaches its peak with a unique Indo-European “fusion bundhook”

When it comes to the latest in trendy cooking, the buzzword is “fusion”. You can’t pick up a menu in most Indian or Oriental restaurants nowadays without being offered “fusion this” or “fusion that”. What makes me howl about all this nonsense is that “fusion” is simply a way of describing blending or bonding disparate elements together, rather like an alloy. It’s not a new idea. Different cultures have borrowed ideas and skills from their neighbours since the dawn of civilisation. Modern English still carries a lot of words that are hangovers from the days of the British Raj. We call a single-storey house a “bungalow” and our nightwear “pyjamas”. Ex-military chaps often refer to any gun as a “bundhook”. This comes from the Urdu word *banduk*, meaning firearm.

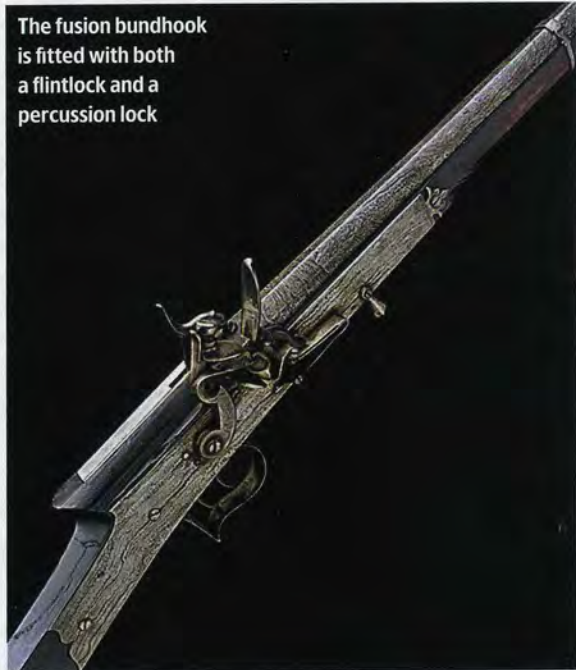
When I was at Holt’s last month, I saw an amazing gun that combined both Indian and European features. Its overall form was that of the long-barrelled, slender stocked Indo-Persian matchlock gun known as a Toradar. However, it was a good deal more sophisticated than its string-burning counterparts as it was fitted with both a flintlock and a percussion lock for good measure. I’ve seen joint ignition flintlock and matchlock French muskets, but never a gun with both flint and percussion locks — other than Colonel Peter Hawker’s fantastic double-punt gun. Consequently, I was rather at a loss to classify this strange beast. So not wishing to be out-trendied by celebrity restaurateurs, I’ve decided to call it the “fusion bundhook”.

A belt-and-braces gun

The traditional Indian Toradar has a long barrel, normally 4ft or 5ft long and a slender, straight stock of pentagonal section. The lock is different from the European matchlock as the serpentine — the part that holds the burning matchcord — moves away from the shooter rather than towards him. The trigger is spring-loaded, which allows the firer to control the descent of the match towards the priming pan. The pan has a pivoted cover that the user opens with a flick of the finger prior to shooting. Though matchlocks are the norm, some flintlock Toradars are known. Matchlock Toradars were still made in India well into the 19th century, at least 150 years after they were obsolete in Europe. Some leviathan examples were made as rampart guns. These were oversized muskets used for long-range sniping at the enemy, especially his officers, gun crews or engineers. Matchlocks may have been long gone from European battlefields, but they lived on behind the battlements of Indian city states. In a strong defensive position where the musketeer was under no pressure, a matchlock was not a disadvantage.

The fusion gun in Holt’s has a 25-bore (approximately .577in) tapering, octagonal, Damascus steel barrel which is just over 4ft long. The flintlock mechanism is mounted on a watered steel plate. It is a sophisticated piece of work with

The fusion bundhook is fitted with both a flintlock and a percussion lock



a French cock, rainproof pan and roller frizzen: all features you would expect to find in a best-quality lock circa 1810 to 1820. The percussion lock is made as a boxlock and is mounted at the rear of the barrel. The line of the nipple corresponds with that of the vent. There are two triggers (one for each lock) enclosed by a square-backed guard with a pineapple finial, another European feature. At a guess, I’d say this remarkable gun dates from around 1830; about a decade after the invention of the percussion cap.

It seems odd that a gun should be made with both types of ignition. I think that its owner understood the benefits of the percussion system but was concerned he might not obtain a ready supply of caps if he was away from major urban centres. Flint is plentiful and even the most ham-fisted person can knap a functional gunflint from a pebble. This was a belt-and-braces gun.

When Rudyard Kipling wrote *Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet*, he hadn’t reckoned on the fusion bundhook, which unites both Indian and European features to make one of the most remarkable firearms I’ve ever seen. It’s certainly my favourite Indian takeaway. ■

Next time Lewis Potter remembers the break-open Rook and Rabbit Rifle — a piece of Britain’s gunmaking history