

Hello / Dear XXXXX,

Regarding XXXXX's article "XXXXXXXXXX" by XXXXXXXXXXXX, I'd like to briefly bring to your attention that the auction house and the consignor have been portraying this lot in a rather misleading manner. I understand that your article simply communicates the fact of the auction event as opposed to an investigation of the content, but I thought you might like to be aware just in case you deem it worthy of perhaps adding a little note or caveat to the effect that there is some current skepticism – either to this past article or a future one. Attempts by myself and a number of other prop collectors and replicators to ask questions of the auction house and convey our concerns to them have yielded no headway, all either roundly dismissed or ignored, so I'm trying now as an alternative to at least spread the word to a few of the news organizations reporting on it. I'm not accusing your site of any misdeed; I'm just sharing the information.

I will include a more in-depth explanation along with sources at the end of this message if you are interested, but the gist is as follows:

[Note that I only assert that the auction house's and consignor's descriptions are misleading; it is possible to mislead without the act being deliberately deceptive, so I cannot and do not accuse them of directly lying.]

While the scope and some of the mounting components are verified as original to A New Hope (ANH) thanks to production photo-matches (and significant artifacts in their own right), Rock Island Auction Company (RIA) has presented virtually nothing to back up their claims about the base Mauser C96 pistol. They have shown absolutely no visual evidence – no production photos, no records – nor any direct and specific contemporary-source corroboration that this C96 was definitely used in Star Wars. They have also shown no evidence whatsoever that the gun was definitely used in The Naked Runner, as they separately claim in a YouTube video. Meanwhile, no one has been able to point to any mention prior to the consignor's discovery that there were three blank-fire blasters on ANH as opposed to the single hero that is known to have existed. Repeated requests for evidence by multiple parties have yielded no further substantive explanation.

RIA may have a good reputation for vetting authenticity in past auctions. But in this instance, their refusal to show proof for such an extraordinary claim - a completely unknown hero ANH DL-44, separate from the one that has been well-documented for many years – raises red flags. They also have deleted critical comments on their YouTube video and blocked further critical commenting, which I'd say is an odd sign of insecurity about a supposedly rock-solid \$500,000+ piece.

My motive for reaching out here is simply that I hate to see misleading claims go unchecked in the original prop market. While many will respond to such concerns with “just don't bid” or “buyer beware,” I'm not concerned here either as a bidder or on behalf of the bidder; I'm concerned on behalf of the thousands of people who have walked away and will walk away thinking they just saw Han Solo's screen-used hero blaster because the giant asterisks that ought to accompany these labels are not being highlighted. This is a piece that's drawing viewers at conventions, prompting online excitement (spurred by articles just like this one), and potentially destined for prominent public display.

I'm also concerned about the history of the DL-44 getting irreparably muddled; publicized sale at auction has a tendency to bestow a varnish of assumed authenticity that's nearly impossible to break through. I would not be writing to you about a \$1,000 or even a \$10,000 piece with provenance so flimsy; by the same token, you likely would not have published an article about such a piece. But this is claimed to be such a unique and special item that I think an especially high bar ought to be set for its evidence.

I will totally understand if you decide to not amend your article. Many news sites approach auction reporting simply by directing readers to the auction house, so while I would love to see a site or two provide more investigative analysis, I accept that that may not be your operating model. All I ask is if you could spare a little time to give the subject some consideration.

Thank you, and again, a more in-depth explanation follows.

In depth explanation:

The primary issue here is lacking evidence for the base Mauser C96 pistol's attribution. As is often the case with questionable authenticity, proving a negative can be exceedingly difficult. On rare occasions it can be proven that an object was definitively NOT on a particular film set, but it's a lot more straightforward to prove that an object was definitively present (through screen-matches, production photos, inventory records, contemporary source testimony, etc.). Therefore when it comes to film prop attribution, the burden of proof is logically placed on the claimant – the seller. In this case, the auction house RIA and the consignor Tony Watts are making a massively extraordinary claim – the discovery of a previously completely unknown example of arguably the most famous and valuable film gun. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, as they say. On the flipside, my assertion (that such attribution is not beyond doubt) is not such an extraordinary one.

This gun's first public appearance was on the television show Pawn Stars in 2019 (after having been rejected by the auction house Propstore according to an expert who was consulted for its authentication). In that appearance, Tony Watts, who acquired Bapty a full 24 years after Star Wars, spoke about the gun as "the" original and presented as his sole visual evidence a single production photograph:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62yvlwsrtW8>)

The episode presented the photograph as though it was a match, but this was at best accomplished through creative editing; it is clear from screenshots that the photo was instead a well-known image of the single established hero exhibiting a non-matching serial number 2813 in contrast to this lot's 9415:

<https://www.therpf.com/forums/attachments/blaster-ps-witness-marks-bs-jpg.1607893/>

The original Star Wars armorer Carl Schmidt also appeared in the episode, but his statements remained entirely vague about this C96's specific authentication.

Fast-forwarding to the current auction, and setting aside the well-verified scope, the only evidence presented for the authenticity of the base Mauser C96 is a single letter written by the consignor Tony Watts. In it, he claims just two points relative to the base pistol:

- A) The armorer Carl Schmidt has out-of-the-blue recalled a 46-year-old memory that three C96's were converted into hero blasters on ANH.
- B) Watts personally, on his own, concluded that the C96 was "undoubtedly" an original on account of a re-lengthened barrel and "witness marks" on its side.

Regarding the first point, no corroborating statement to this effect has come to light from the intervening years prior to this gun's discovery, either by Schmidt or any other crew member. And all of the known documentation – production photos, screenshots, stunt prop castings, etc. – only verifies the existence of a single known hero gun. Regarding the second point, Watts provides no assurance that no other C96's ever had their barrels cut in the company's long history preceding his ownership, and the supposed "witness marks" on the side have not been identified by RIA in any listing image. In other words, we only have Watts's words to go on.

In fact, while RIA suggests that the blaster as a whole entity was authenticated by Carl Schmidt, Watts's own letter never actually states that the armorer confirmed the authenticity of the base gun as it does regarding the scope and mount remains; his positive id of the C96 is merely implied. Yet even if we assume that Schmidt did so, it's hard to believe that his memory of the subtle distinguishing marks on one specific gun would be infallible after so many decades have passed, especially considering that Watts himself states "all three C96 pistols were taken from Bapty & Co. stock and, being hand crafted, had minor differences and marks, the details of which are now lost in time."

Watts also suggests that the flash hider could be "feasibly the same one as used in 1977," but it does not match the known hero as the scope does, so this is only speculation regarding undocumented second and third blasters (plus there is doubt as to whether it is even a genuine MG 81 part).

To be entirely fair, RIA has apparently claimed in communications outside of the listing that Bapty supposedly possesses a matching production photo but that Disney will not allow them to disclose it. However, this is so suspiciously convenient as to be useless for authenticity purposes, and it really doesn't make much of any sense.

And as for the additional claim that RIA puts forward in their YouTube video that "serial number 299415 had seen previous screen time in the hands of Frank Sinatra in his film The Naked Runner," they've provided absolutely no evidence whatsoever; the listing only notes the scope (itself I believe a questionable claim, as I think this scope is only known to have appeared in *Sitting Target*). The documented hero pistol is confirmed to have been present at least as a backup on *The Naked Runner*, but no source has been presented to connect this C96 to that film, let alone an appearance on screen in Frank Sinatra's hands.

In sum, the ONLY components of this lot that can be confidently said to be original and/or screen-used, based on the information provided, are the scope and a portion of the mount. The rest might as well be described as an elaborate display stand, made slightly more interesting in that it has been assembled (albeit inaccurately) by the ANH armorer.

Is it still theoretically possible that the gun was associated with ANH in some capacity? Maybe. But by this standard, one could make practically the same claim about almost any sufficiently-old gun in Bapty's stock. How the consignor and the auction house have taken a vague hopeful possibility and turned it into indisputable fact is beyond me.

For further reading, much of my information is sourced from a lengthy discussion dedicated to this specific prop (dating back to its Pawn Stars appearance) on the Replica Prop Forum, predominantly by members of the DL-44 builders group. These individuals are well-known within the prop hobby as the established experts on the many fine nuances of the DL-44. I recently joined the forum after following the public posts for many years (though I am not an expert myself), and for orientation, I assembled a diagram on page 24 illustrating the portions of the piece that remain in question:

<https://www.therpf.com/forums/threads/han-solo-anh-blaster-on-pawn-stars.307009/>

The ANH DL-44's general history and construction are meanwhile covered at length in a separate discussion thread begun in 2011:

<https://www.therpf.com/forums/threads/anh-hero-dl-44-discussion-three-anh-greeblies-found-no-ps-discussion-other-than-photos-and-finds.118186/>

I'm confident that if you desired an expert quote, several would be more than happy to oblige.

If you made it this far, then doubly thanks!