

This is a really big gun

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Mankato Free Press Brian Ojanpa

It's 36 feet long, weighs 1,200 pounds and — yes — it really does shoot.

— Arnie Lillo has made a name for himself with his outdoor metal silhouette creations that adorn area landscapes.

His rural Good Thunder yard is rife with them, so much so that people routinely engage in drive-by rubbernecking. Sometimes, they even stop and chat, as one guy did last summer.

“He drove up alone in a black SUV,” Lillo says. “I was mowing the lawn and he walked over.”

The guy introduced himself and Lillo, not a big sports fan, asked him what he did for a living.

“I own the Minnesota Vikings,” said Zygi Wilf, who was in Mankato for the Vikings’ training camp. “I drive out here every year to see what new stuff you’ve added.”

Wait until Wilf gets a load of Lillo’s latest creation, which for now looms large in his workshop.

According to Lillo, it’s the world’s largest firing rifle, and it’s his pride and joy.

“This is what I’d call the masterpiece of all I’ve done so far.”

He gazed at the 30-30 lever action Winchester Model 94 replica that, at 36 feet long and about 1,200 pounds, is clearly too big for its britches.

“It’s gonna be a challenge to get it out of here.”

Lillo, who has been making metal creations for 15 years, says inspiration for the whopping weapon struck during another grass-cutting stint.

“I was mowing out front and I thought, ‘Ya know, something I haven’t got is a big gun.’”

It took him two months to make the steroidal metal copy of the first rifle he ever bought in 1966. He’s customized a trailer to haul it, and he plans to truck it to parades and other events that lend themselves to an enormous gun that exceeds by a foot the one touted as the world’s largest firing rifle.

According to Lillo’s Internet research, that would be “Big Ernie,” a 35-foot-long black powder piece.

Lillo’s rifle also uses black powder, which brings us to the question: What does it fire?

“Golf balls,” Lillo says, pointing to some stacked cardboard at one end of the shop.

Lillo tried out the firing mechanism one day in the shop. He says the golf ball struck the cardboard and began ricocheting around the building.

A cannon expert he knows estimates the rifle will propel golf balls one-half mile, though in the interest of prevailing municipal laws he says he may have to shoot out something like oatmeal instead.

His next challenge is to find the appropriate fabric to fashion a weatherproof case for his sculpture.

Which brings us to another question: Does your wife think you’ve lost your mind?

“We discuss that every once in awhile.”



Good Thunder metal artisan Arnie Lillo says his 36-foot rifle replica is his tour de force.