

Propstore

Entertainment Memorabilia Live Auction

DARTH VADER'S LIGHTSABER

S E P T E M B E R 2 0 2 5

Star Wars:

The Empire Strikes Back (1980)
Return of the Jedi (1983)

Lot No. 370
Darth Vader's
Hero Dueling Lightsaber

Treasures from
Film and Television



Los Angeles

Sept 4 - 6, 2025



Propstore

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**Petersen Automotive Museum:
Los Angeles, California Auction Launch Event
September 3, 2025**

Propstore will host an auction launch event at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM (PST) on Wednesday **September 3rd, 2025**. Select lots will be on display at the reception. Bidders are invited to attend the launch event, though space is limited; please RSVP to supportla@propstore.com or scan the QR code to confirm attendance.



Day 1

Thursday,
Sept 4

Lot No. 370 sold this day

Lots 1 - 433
In-Person Bidding Available
Petersen Automotive Museum

Day 2

Friday,
Sept 5

*online catalog only

Lots 434 - 770
Online, Telephone and
Absentee Bidding Only

Day 3

Saturday,
Sept 6

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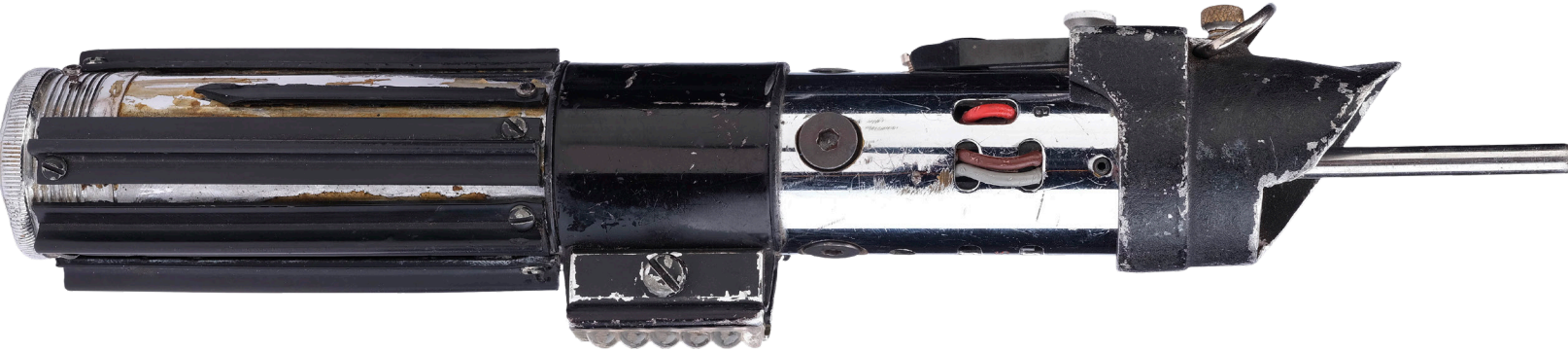
Lots 771 - End
Online, Telephone and
Absentee Bidding Only

Lot No. 370 Darth Vader's Hero Dueling Lightsaber will be sold on **Day 1, Thursday, September 4**

Auction Begins 10:00 AM (PDT) / 6:00 PM (BST) Each Day
Online, Telephone and Absentee Bidding Available on All Days
All days streamed live at propstore.com

Propstore CA Bond #72BSBGU4116





12.5" (37.75 cm)

Lot No. 370
Darth Vader's Screen-Matched Hero Dueling Lightsaber
Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back (1980) / Star Wars: Return Of The Jedi (1983)

This is Darth Vader's original hero dueling lightsaber prop, used extensively in Irvin Kershner's *The Empire Strikes Back* and Richard Marquand's *Return of the Jedi*. Among the most iconic artifacts in the *Star Wars* saga, Darth Vader's lightsaber was prominently featured throughout the original trilogy and appears in several subsequent films. Wielded by both David Prowse and stunt performer Bob Anderson, this is the primary dueling prop created for Vader's character in both *Empire* and *Jedi*. It saw extensive use during the filming of both movies and is one of the most significant film props ever offered at public auction.

Constructed from a Micro Precision Products (M.P.P.) Microflash—an English camera flash bulb attachment manufactured in the 1950s—this piece was expertly modified by the production team into a lightsaber. The flash's front name plaque was removed, but the black shroud, center band, and clamp were retained and integrated into the final design. Additional custom elements were added, including plastic "T-track" grips, magnification bubbles (sourced from a period digital calculator and inserted into the clamp), a D-ring to allow the lightsaber to hang from Vader's belt, and decorative wiring.

Lightsabers were central to George Lucas' earliest concepts for *Star Wars* and were originally referred to as laser (or in some drafts, "lazer") swords. Lucas envisioned a weapon that was elegant and defensive, symbolic of honor and the romantic ideals of combat. The first visualizations were by concept artist Ralph McQuarrie, whose 1975 production painting titled "Laser Duel" featured lightsabers resembling flashlight handles of the period.

Darth Vader's lightsaber was clipped prominently to his belt during his dramatic entrance aboard the Rebel blockade runner, providing the first-ever on-screen look at the now-iconic prop. Two versions of lightsaber props were made for Vader, as well as for Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness): a bladeless hilt for non-combat scenes and a dueling version with an attached blade. In the original film, these dueling lightsabers featured spinning blades coated in highly reflective Scotchlite material, designed to bounce light back toward the camera. This practical in-camera effect, though striking, was later augmented with hand-drawn animation to achieve the desired glowing effect.

For *The Empire Strikes Back*, the same approach was taken with lightsaber props: the piece offered in this lot was created as a bladed dueling version of Vader's lightsaber, and a separate bladeless hilt was also created. The two were not interchangeable—the hilt could not accept a blade, and the bladed version could not be filmed without one. Both were made from M.P.P. Microflash units, though it remains unclear whether they were repurposed from the original film or newly created for *Empire*. The design closely followed that of *A New Hope*, with subtle enhancements such as additional wiring near the shrouds.

The key distinction between this bladed dueling lightsaber and the bladeless hilt is the structural modification made to facilitate attaching a blade. An upper and lower cylinder, both solid aluminum, were installed in the handle, with the lower cylinder anchored to the body via large-headed allen-head bolts—visible in certain production photographs, though often concealed by the actor's grip. A smaller rod made of steel was mounted directly into these cylinders and served as the base for attaching a prop blade. The blades themselves were made from wood with an aluminum collar at the base and were secured to the steel rod in the handle via allen-head set screws. Multiple blades were used throughout the shooting of the duels: earlier in the *Empire* duel, they were still coated with high-reflective Scotchlite material, which produced a clean and bright line for animators to reference. This was later deemed unnecessary, and the blades were finished with simple white paint. No blade is included with this lot and no original prop blades are known to exist in private collections today.

Far more complex than the original film's duel between Vader and Obi-Wan, the duel in *Empire* was the one of the film's major action sequences, and actors Hamill and Anderson underwent extensive duel choreography training under stunt coordinator Peter Diamond. The intensity of these scenes proved challenging for the props: grips originally affixed with glue often detached during combat and were subsequently reinforced with small screws.

This hero dueling lightsaber was again utilized in the filming of *Return of the Jedi*, along with the original bladeless hilt from *Empire*. It served as Darth Vader's primary dueling weapon in both films. Although backup versions were also used, those were not constructed from M.P.P. flash units and differed slightly in visual appearance.

The lightsaber duels between Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi* are among the most pivotal moments in the *Star Wars* saga. More than battles, they are turning points that reveal deep personal and thematic stakes. In *Empire*, Luke confronts not only Vader but the shocking truth of his own lineage, setting up an internal struggle between destiny and choice. In *Jedi*, their final duel becomes a test of morality—Luke comes close to falling to anger but ultimately chooses compassion, offering his father redemption. These duels encapsulate the core themes of *Star Wars*: the tension between light and dark, the importance of legacy, and the enduring power of hope and forgiveness.

The piece is photo-matched to a production still from *The Empire Strikes Back*, identifiable by a distinctive curvature in the D-ring attached to the back of the shroud. It also screen-matches to a close-up shot from *Return of the Jedi*, in which a prominent dent is visible on the edge of the lower endcap. In comparing the piece today to production photos from *Star Wars: A New Hope*, there are some compelling similarities in the visible wear on the shroud, but not enough to state definitively that the piece was also used in the first film. Many props did carry over from *A New Hope* to *Empire* and it is possible this dueling lightsaber was first used in *A New Hope*, but it cannot be proven.

As expected from a prop that saw extensive usage, the piece bears authentic signs of wear. A section of the top shroud is cut away—likely removed after a breakage to eliminate a potential hazard. The back of the shroud has a visible crack, and one of the seven grips is partially broken away and missing. Surface wear and scratches are present throughout. Far from diminishing its value, these marks serve as compelling evidence of the lightsaber's direct involvement in the action—testament to its film-used authenticity.

Darth Vader's hero dueling lightsaber stands as one of the most historically significant *Star Wars* artifacts ever presented at auction. This is the weapon of the most recognizable character in science fiction history, featured in the most critically acclaimed film of the franchise, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and in the trilogy's epic conclusion, *Return of the Jedi*. The lightsaber has become the most iconic sci-fi weapon of all time—instantly recognizable and unmatched in cinematic legacy. This is the finest example of a genuine lightsaber with verifiable screen use ever offered at public auction. It is more than a film prop—it is a piece of cinema history. Dimensions: 12.5" x 2.5" x 2" (32 cm x 6.5 cm x 5.5 cm)

Estimate: \$1,000,000 - 3,000,000



Scan here to see a full rotation of this lot

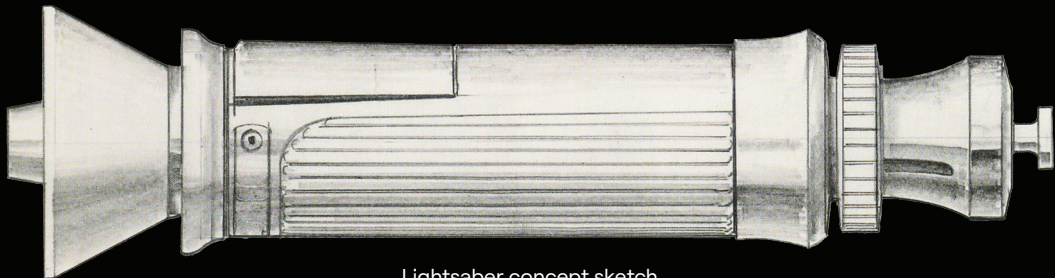


"I wanted something that was romantic like a sword, but I wanted it to be high tech and sci-fi to fit into this world. It was out of that that I came up with the idea of a sword that was created out of a laser, that could cut through anything, but could be turned on and off like a flashlight."

— George Lucas,
Star Wars Audio Commentary, circa 2004

EARLY LASER SWORD CONCEPTS

Laser swords, or “lazer swords” as they were initially known, were a key element of Star Wars from George Lucas’ earliest story treatments in 1973. The third draft of Star Wars, circa 1975, introduced the term “lightsaber.” The first visual concepts were done by seminal artist Ralph McQuarrie; he depicted a simple, short handle that looked similar to a flashlight. In these early story concepts, other characters such as stormtroopers were also equipped with lightsabers.



Lightsaber concept sketch by Ralph McQuarrie, early 1975.

“George said it was a ‘lasersword,’ and I know that when you project a laser beam, it doesn’t just end after three feet, it continues to project out. But because it had to be used in fights, I gave it about the length of a medieval broadsword. I tried to make the laser beam as bright as possible, and I changed the colors for the various swords—a color for the good guys and a color for the bad guys. The lightsaber was just a cylinder thing that you could grip in your hands, a little longer than a cavalry saber and more like a two-handed sword.”

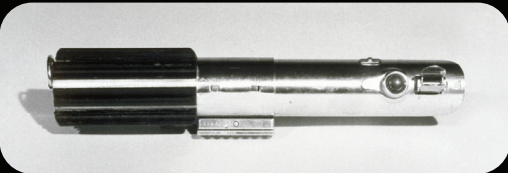
— Ralph McQuarrie



Production illustration by Ralph McQuarrie, “Laser duel,” early 1975.

LIGHTSABER PROPS
STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE (1977)

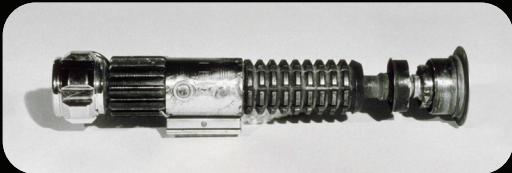
Star Wars: A New Hope introduced the first on-screen lightsaber props, with unique designs for three of the principal characters: Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), Darth Vader (David Prowse), and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness). Two types of lightsabers were created for filming: bladeless hilts, and bladed dueling versions. The hilts for Luke and Vader’s lightsabers were based on existing camera flash attachments. Obi-Wan Kenobi’s hilt was cobbled together from a variety of disparate found objects and components.



Luke Skywalker



Darth Vader



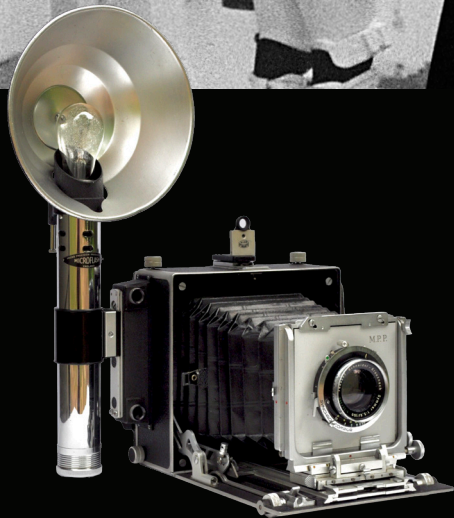
Obi-Wan Kenobi

Original production photographs of bladeless lightsaber hilt props from A New Hope, circa 1976.

The bladed dueling versions of the lightsabers were made by the special effects department who attempted to capture the blade’s glow with an in-camera effect; the blade was coated with a reflective scotchlite material that reflected light back to the camera with great intensity. A motor was installed in the handle, and when the blade spun it simulated flashes and pulsing. The effect was not as impactful as hoped, and an animated glow was added to the blades through visual effects.



Darth Vader’s unforgettable entrance is also the first on-screen appearance of a lightsaber, prominently hung from his belt.



Vintage MPP press camera with side-mounted Microflash flash gun; Darth Vader’s lightsaber props were built from these flash guns.

Prop Making

The basis of the prop was a camera flash handle attachment called a Microflash, manufactured by Micro Precision Products (M.P.P.) in England. The black shroud at the top and the center band and clamp are native elements of the Microflash. The prop department dressed the found item with plastic “T-track” grips, calculator bubbles fitted into the clamp, and a D-ring to allow the prop to hang. The Microflash suited Vader well with its dark shroud and clamp.



Micro Precision Products brochure for Microflash camera flash attachment, circa 1950s.

**DARTH VADER’S LIGHTSABER PROPS
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (1980)**

There were two separate Darth Vader lightsaber props primarily used in The Empire Strikes Back: a bladeless hilt, and a bladed dueling version. It is uncertain whether these were the same exact props used in the first film or were newly assembled for Empire. The overall lightsaber design is the same as A New Hope, with some subtle enhancements such as the installation of colored wires.

BLADELESS LIGHTSABER HILT



The bladeless lightsaber hilt was intended to hang on Vader’s belt or to be handled when the blade was not ignited. This hilt was not able to attach a blade.

George was adamant that these things were really, really heavy, that we couldn’t take a hand off. We always had to have two, like Excalibur, it was 40-50 lbs of weight.

— Mark Hamill,
Star Wars Featurette: The Birth of the Lightsaber, 2004

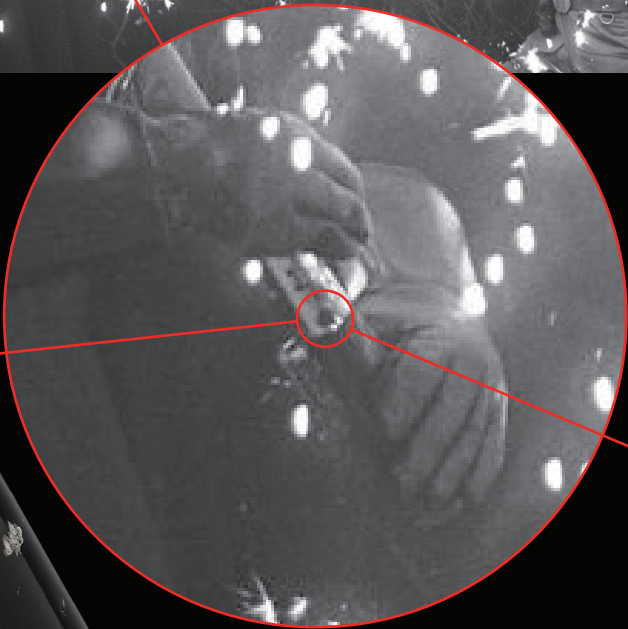
LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER’S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER



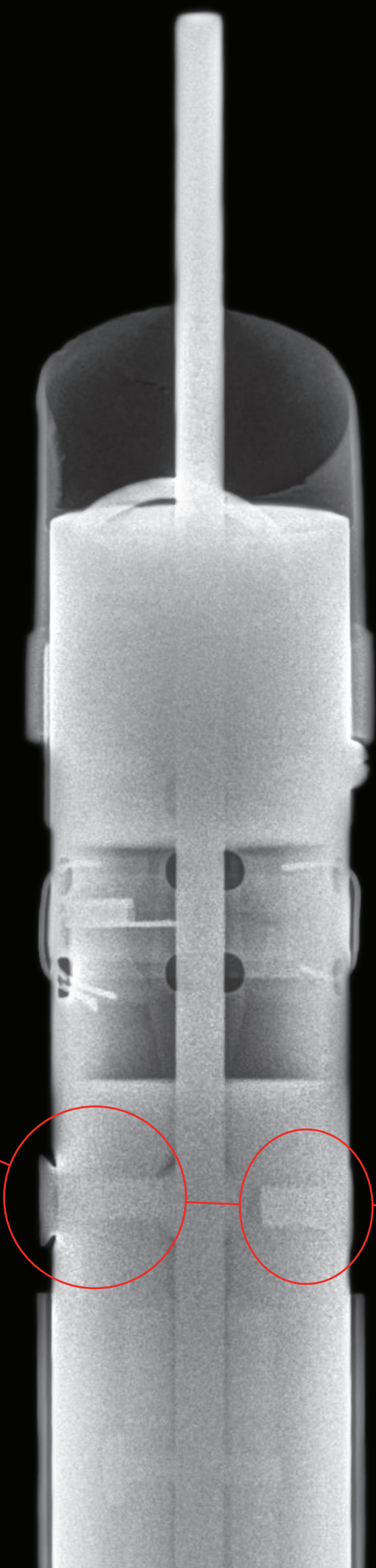
The bladed dueling lightsaber was a separate prop to the bladeless hilt. It was modified to accept a wooden rod mounted as a blade, enabling the performers to act out the duel on camera.

LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER
BLADE ATTACHMENT

The exteriors of the bladeless hilt and the bladed dueling hilt props were extremely similar. The key difference between them was the structural modifications made to the latter to facilitate attaching a blade. An upper and lower cylinder, both solid aluminum, were installed in the handle, with the lower cylinder fastened to the body via large-headed allen-head bolts. These bolts were frequently covered by the performer's hands in the film, but are visible in some production photos. A smaller rod made of steel was mounted directly into these cylinders and served as the base for attaching a prop blade.



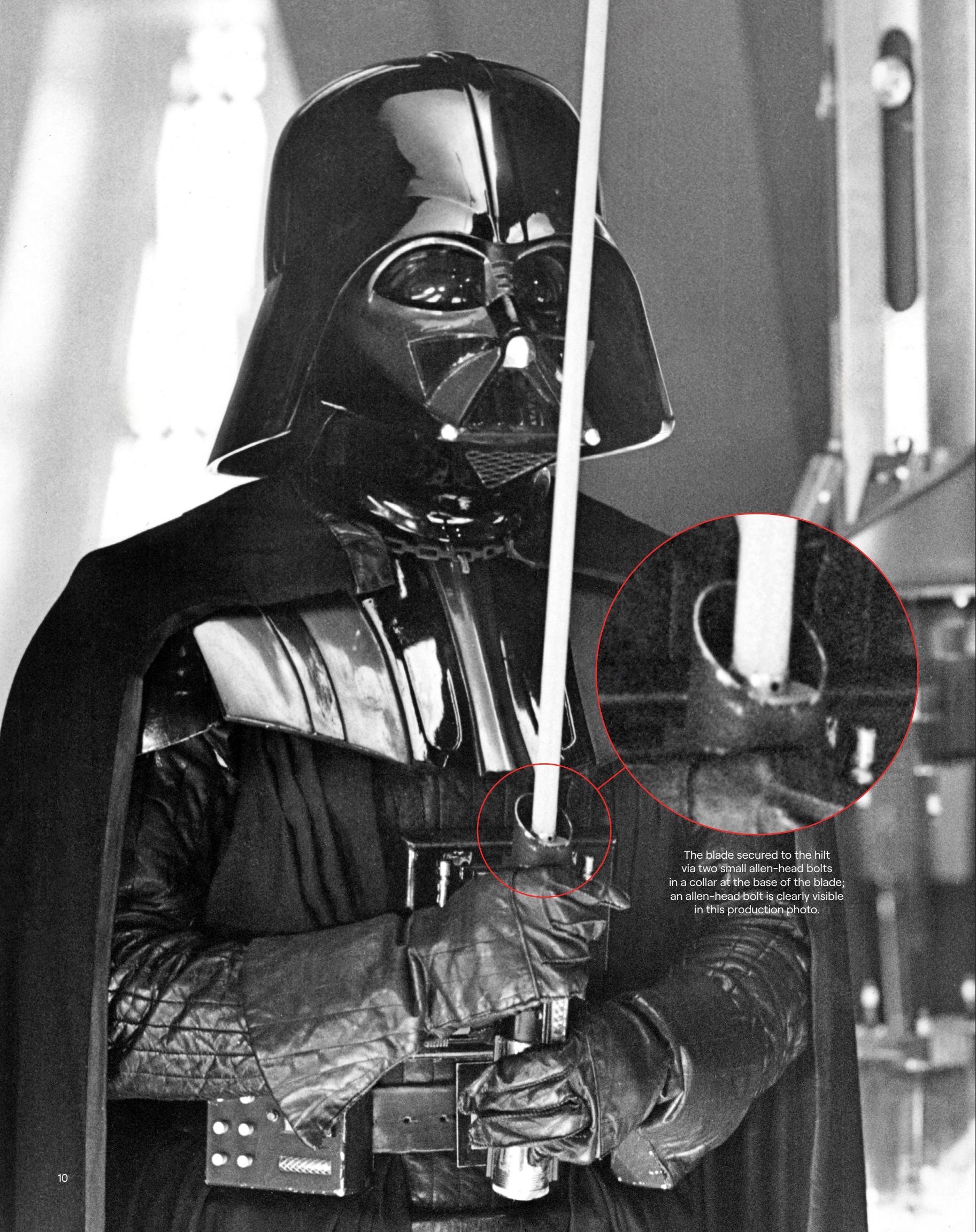
This production still, from the cave sequence on Dagobah, shows Darth Vader's dueling lightsaber with an allen head bolt clearly visible.



An X-ray of Vader's dueling lightsaber reveals the aluminum cylinders and steel rod installed to facilitate blade attachment. The lower cylinder was secured with large allen-head bolts.



Luke Skywalker's (Mark Hamill) dueling lightsaber in Empire utilized the same blade mounting system as Darth Vader's. The allen head bolts are frequently covered by performer hands and rarely seen, though they are visible in this ESB production still.

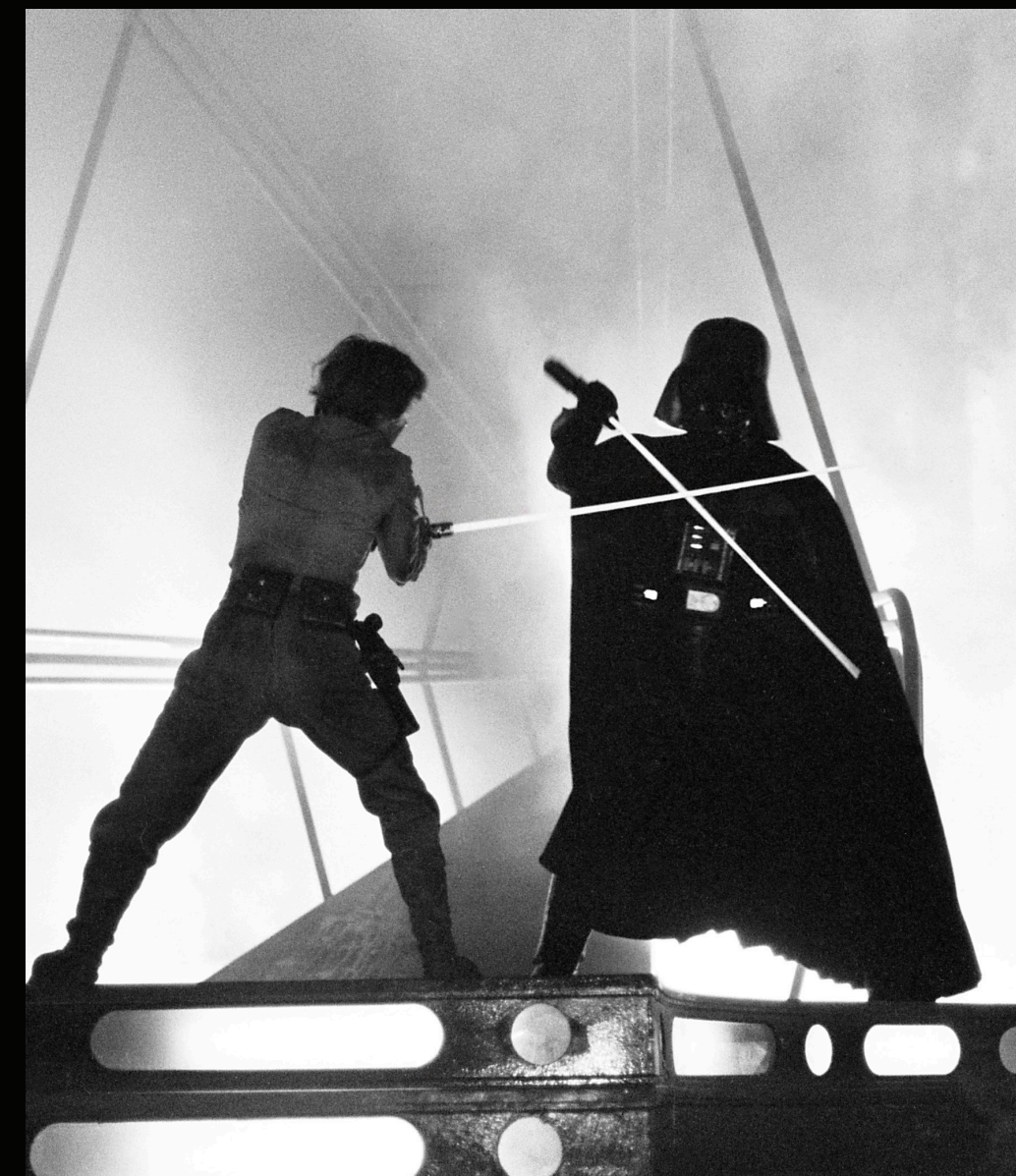


The blade secured to the hilt via two small allen-head bolts in a collar at the base of the blade; an allen-head bolt is clearly visible in this production photo.

LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER THE BLADES

The prop blades used in filming were just over 39" long and likely made from real-world found objects, such as billiard cues or military antennae. The blades used in *The Empire Strikes Back* were coated in a reflective scotchlite material. An early trailer for *Empire* shows these reflective blades in their raw state, before the animated glows were added. For *Return of the Jedi*, the scotchlite material was abandoned and the blades were simply painted white. The blades had the potential to break or become damaged, so a number were used through filming. There are no known original blade props in private collections today.

39.5" (100 cm)



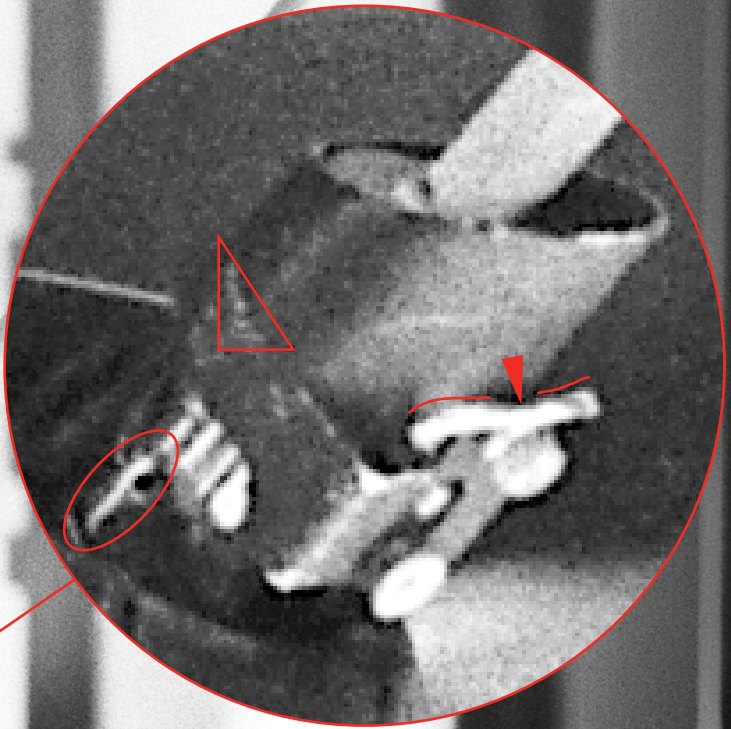
This production photo shows the reflective scotchlite coating used on some prop blades. This created well-defined lines for animators to rotoSCOPE over, but was later deemed unnecessary and blades were simply painted white.

Artist's illustrated rendition of lightsaber blade; no original prop blades exist in private collections today.

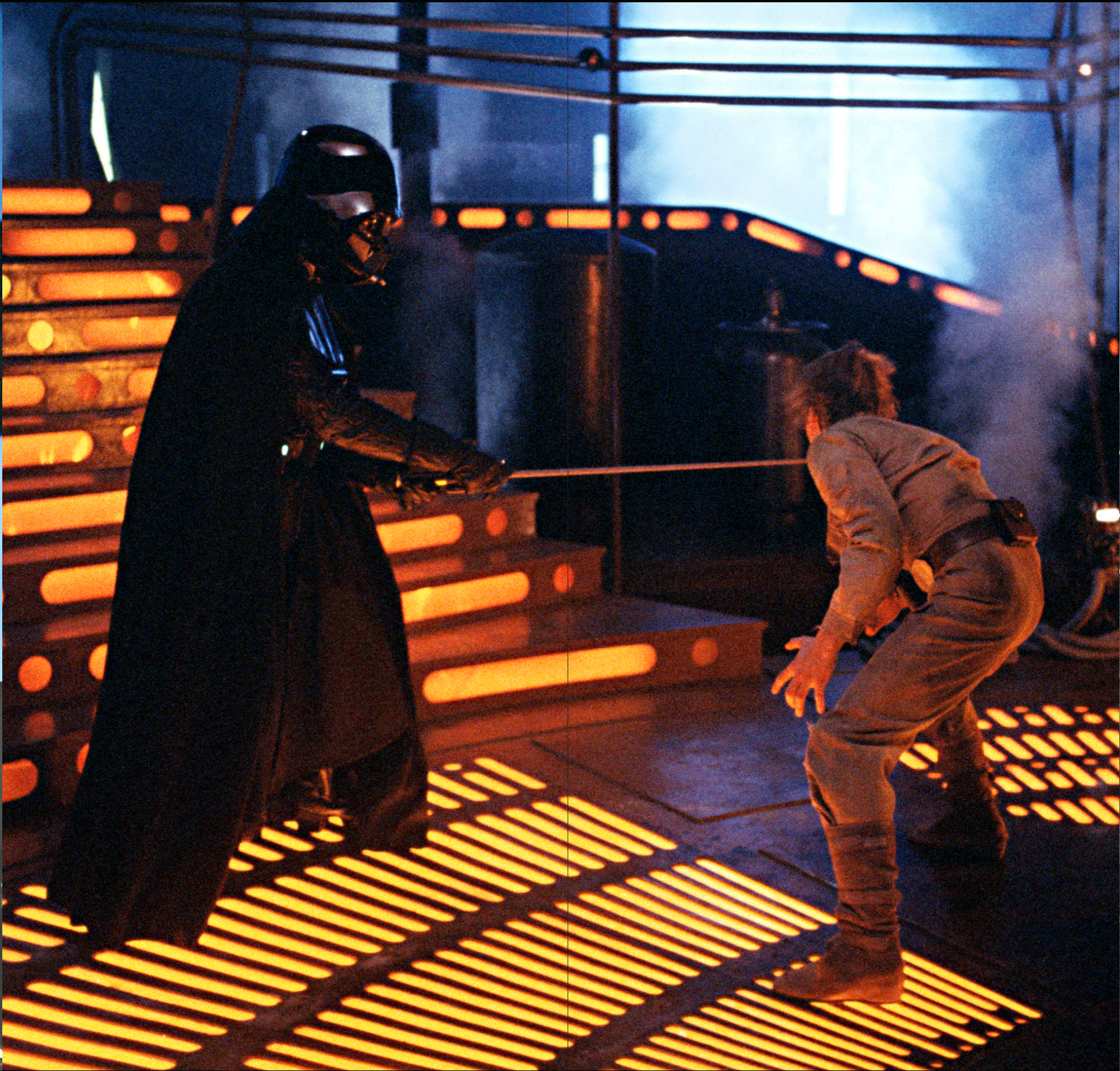
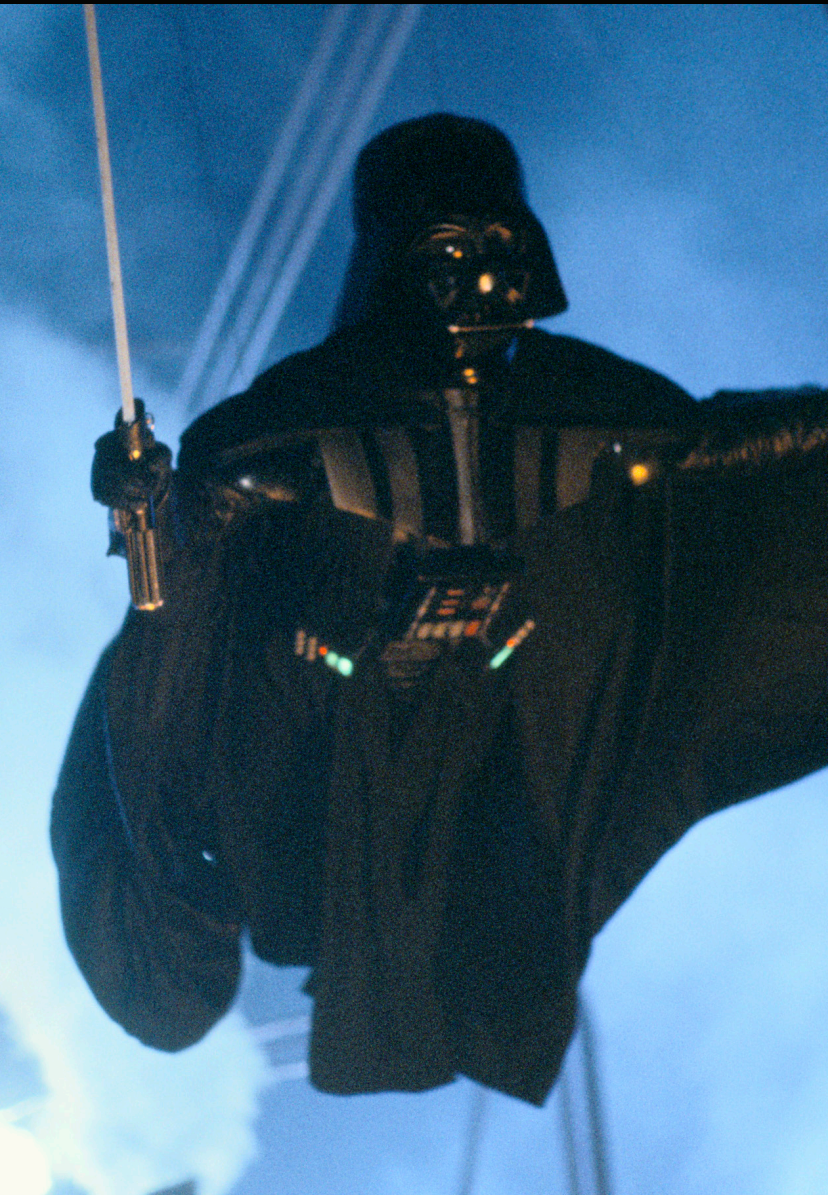


**LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER
THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (1980) PHOTO MATCH**

Production photos showing the bladed dueling lightsaber well are scarce, as the handle is frequently obscured by Vader's gloved hands. This still provides a good view of the top of the prop and shows unique attributes that photo-match to the prop today, such as the curvature in the D-ring (D-rings are manufactured flat.) Wear to the aluminum shroud is also consistent, along with the thin white electrical wire inserted in the ports of the flash handle.



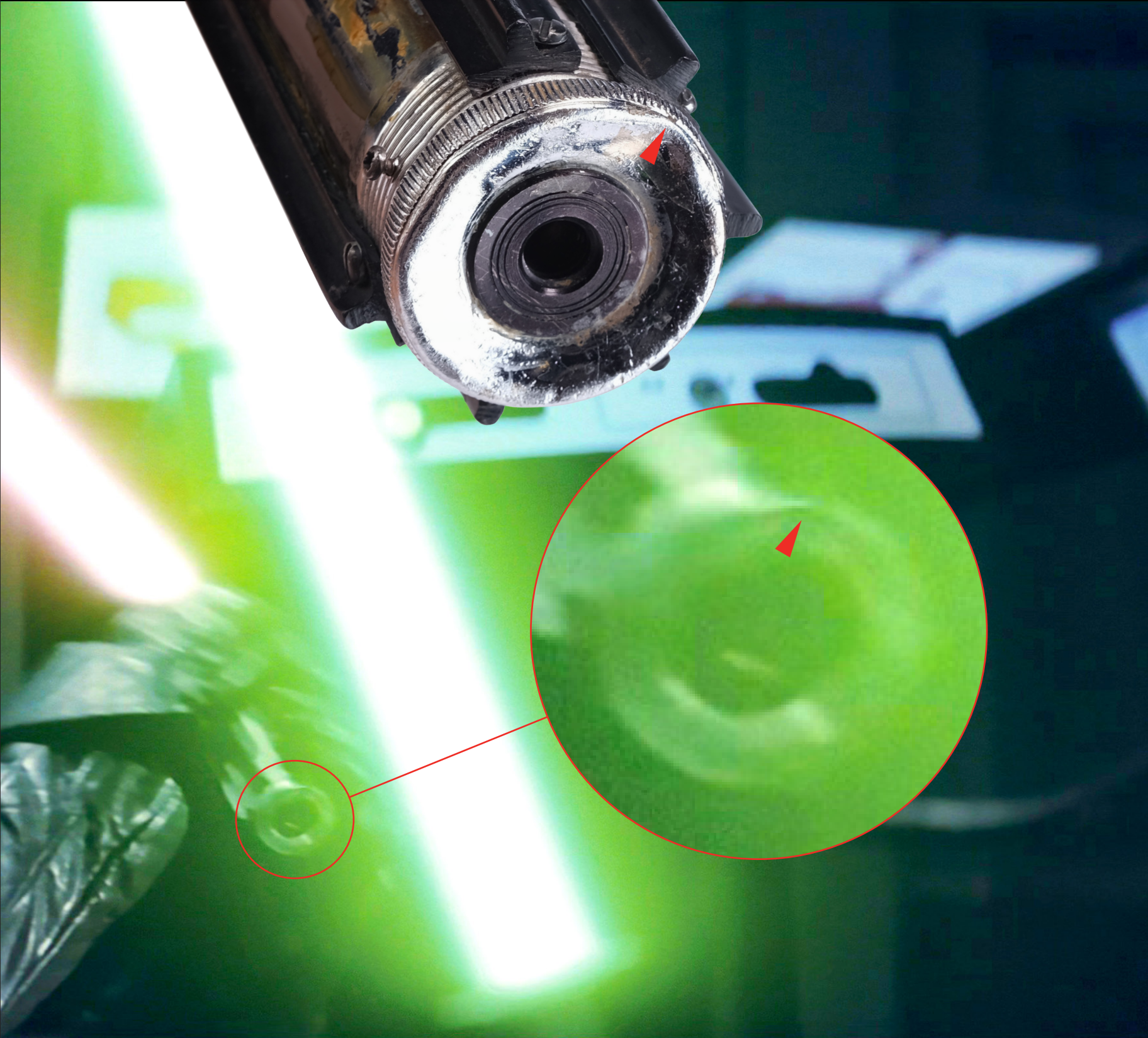
ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION PHOTOS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK (1980)





**LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER
RETURN OF THE JEDI (1983) SCREEN MATCH**

Return of the Jedi re-used the exact same Darth Vader lightsaber props from The Empire Strikes Back: the bladeless hilt, and the bladed dueling version. The dueling lightsaber saw extensive usage during the film's climactic final showdown aboard the second Death Star. The conflict between Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker is at the very heart of Star Wars, culminating in the Return of the Jedi duel and the trilogy's epic conclusion.



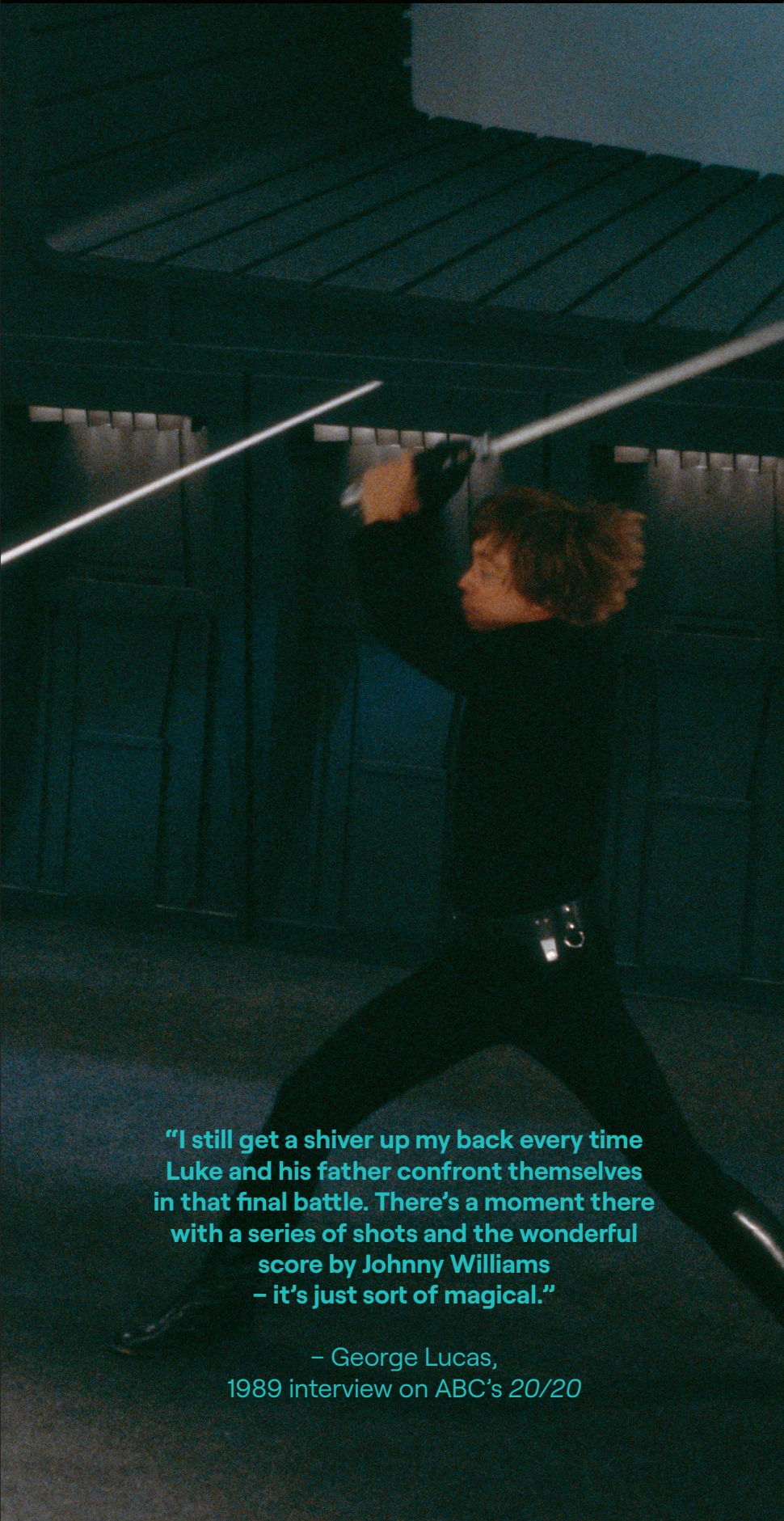
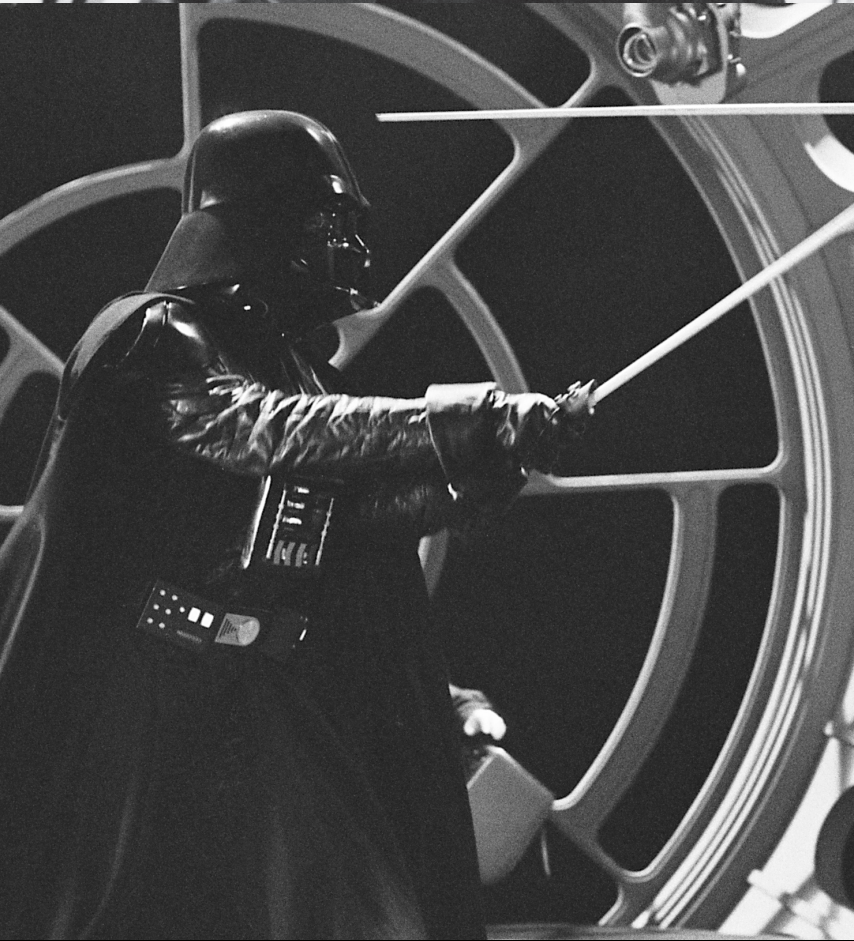


Marks on the center band of the prop's clap screen match to this shot from the film. The grip alignment is also the same, with a small grip screw clearly visible the shot.

LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER
RETURN OF THE JEDI (1983) SCREEN MATCH



ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION PHOTOS: RETURN OF THE JEDI (1983)



"I still get a shiver up my back every time Luke and his father confront themselves in that final battle. There's a moment there with a series of shots and the wonderful score by Johnny Williams – it's just sort of magical."

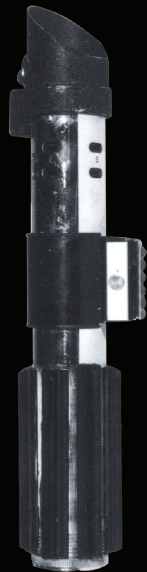
– George Lucas,
1989 interview on ABC's 20/20



**LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER
POSSIBLE USE IN STAR WARS: A NEW HOPE (1977)**

While it cannot be conclusively proven, it is possible that Lot No. 370, Darth Vader's Hero Dueling Lightsaber, was originally used as a bladeless hilt prop in *Star Wars: A New Hope*. This piece was definitively used in both *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, but the limited photo reference from the first film makes it more challenging to determine any potential use in *A New Hope*. It is generally understood that at least two bladeless Vader hilts were made from M.P.P. flash handles for the original *Star Wars*, and this dueling lightsaber bears a number of similarities to the version with silver sidebars on the center clamp. Scratches and wear on the top hood are especially compelling; it is also possible that some components on this dueling lightsaber trace back to *A New Hope* while others do not.

**A NEW HOPE (1977)
BLADELESS LIGHTSABER HILT**



Production photo
circa 1976 of
Darth Vader bladeless
lightsaber hilt from
Star Wars: A New Hope.



**LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S
HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER**



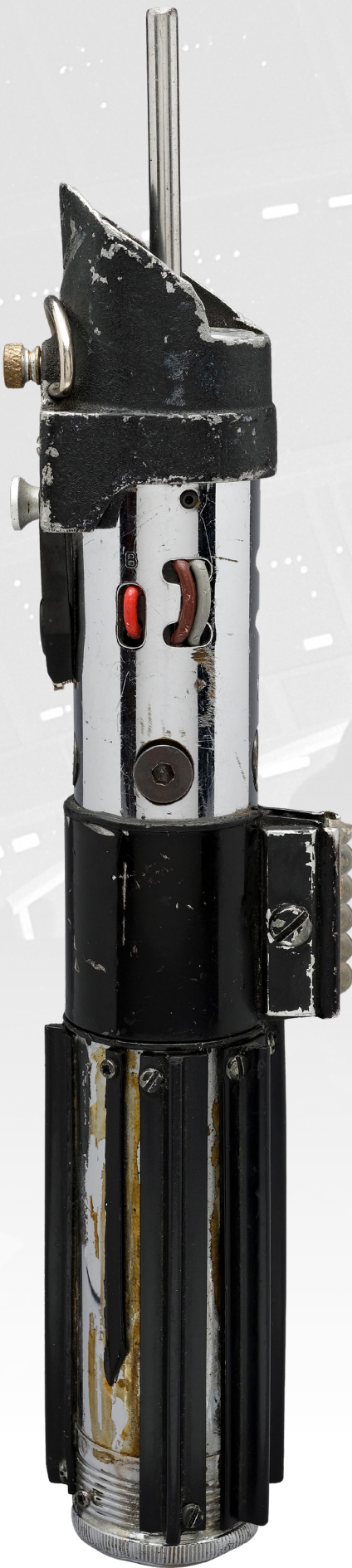
A small section of the hood has been cut away at a right angle. It was likely damaged during filming of a duel scene and was cut off so as to not be a hazard.

One of the *A New Hope* bladeless Vader hilts had silver sidebars; the clamp on this hero dueling lightsaber also had silver sidebars that were crudely painted black for *Empire*. Calculator bubbles were mounted in the clamps of several ANH lightsaber hilts, though these do not appear to match exactly to this photo. The grips are a different length to those in ANH and are almost certainly specific to *Empire*.

The plastic grips are held on with small screws that were believed to have been installed during filming on *Empire* after attempts to glue them on failed. Some production photos from *Empire*, taken early in filming, show grips that are loose or missing completely.



LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER



**LOT NO. 370: DARTH VADER'S HERO DUELING LIGHTSABER
A PIECE OF CINEMA HISTORY**

"IMPRESSIVE. MOST IMPRESSIVE."
— Darth Vader, *The Empire Strikes Back* 1980

Darth Vader's hero dueling lightsaber is one of the most historically significant Star Wars artifacts ever brought to market.

Darth Vader is the central tragic hero whose fall and redemption defines the Skywalker saga. From the original trilogy to the prequels, Star Wars is ultimately Vader's story. And no symbol is more closely tied to both Vader's identity and the visual language of all of Star Wars—than his lightsaber.

This is the weapon of the most recognizable character in science fiction history, featured in the most critically acclaimed film of the franchise, *The Empire Strikes Back*, as well as the original trilogy's conclusion, *Return of the Jedi*. *Empire* is widely regarded as one of the greatest films ever made, topping an *Empire* magazine list of the 301 greatest movies of all time. While *Jedi* doesn't sit as high on those lists, it was the most anticipated film of the saga and represents a unique moment in cultural history. Star Wars fever reached a peak with *Jedi*'s release; *Time* magazine even gave the film its cover in May of 1983. Both *Empire* and *Jedi* had several nominations and wins for both Academy Awards and BAFTA Awards.

More than four decades later, Vader's image—and his lightsaber—remain cultural touchstones. The lightsaber has become the most iconic sci-fi weapon of all time, as instantly recognizable as any prop in cinema history. Vader's lightsaber, specifically, is symbolic of his strength and his capacity for evil.

Original lightsaber props are the "ruby slippers" of cinema's modern era. This is the finest example ever offered at public auction—an artifact of incredible significance that sits directly at the intersection of storytelling, design, and cultural legacy.

***"It was a symbol of a simpler time,
a time before the Empire had taken over, a time when honor ruled.
It was more a symbol than an actual weapon in the movie."***

— George Lucas,
The Birth of the Lightsaber Featurette, circa 2004





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