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SEPTEMBER 2022, VOL. 68, NUMBER 9, 813TH ISSUE



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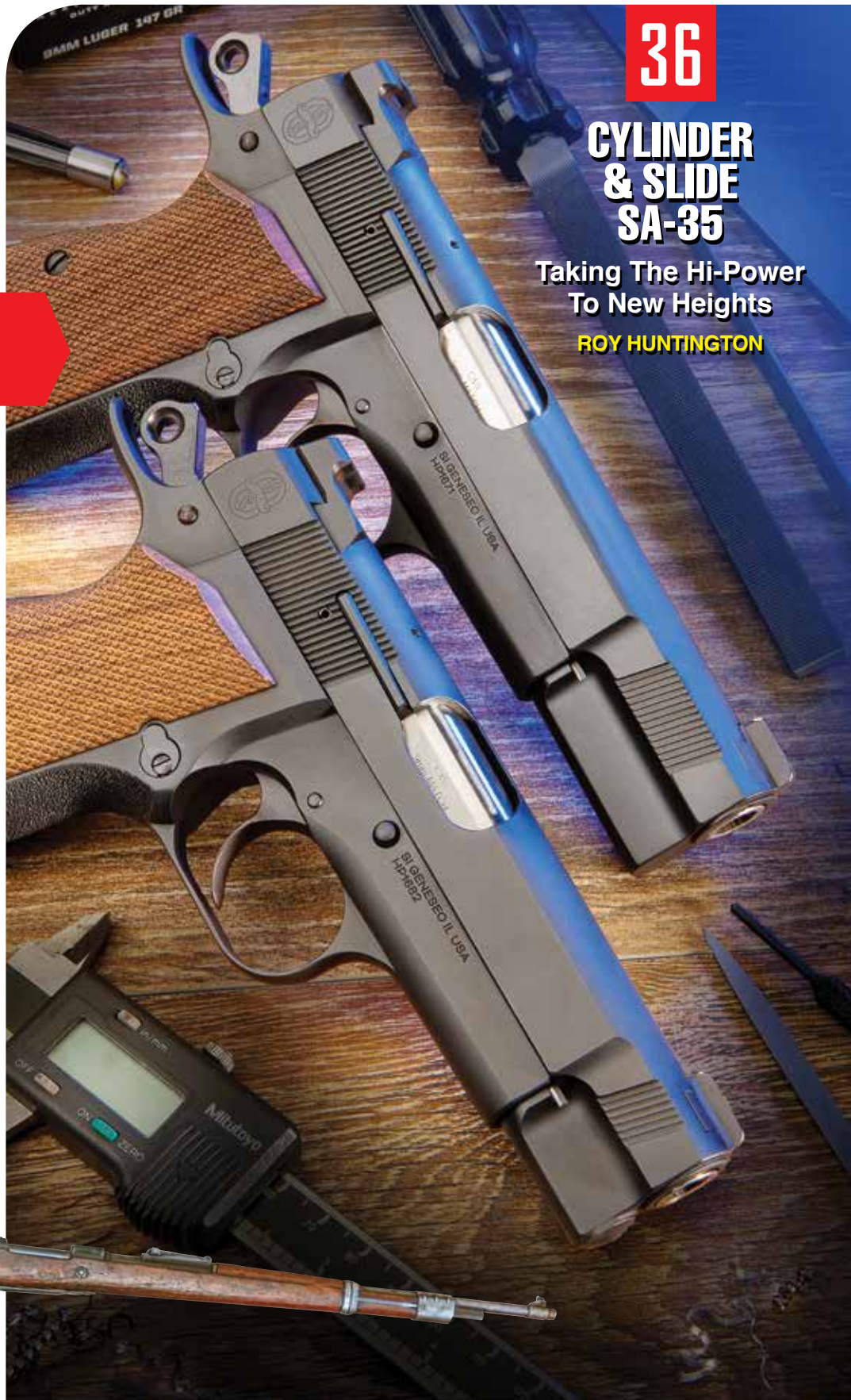
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ASTRA ENJOYMENT

I just read Payton Miller's article on the Astra M400 and M600. I really liked it. Some 40 years ago, I had an M400, back in the day when such things were affordable. Ammo was hit-and-miss in finding. I shot surplus ammo marked 9mm Largo, but I found some 9mm Steyr (also surplus) that worked as well. The occasional hang-fire used to scare the you-know-what out of me. I soon found out my M400 had a very heavy trigger pull. I only had it about five years or so then I traded it away. I remember in the movies only the bad guys had these pistols.

Myron Winchester

WHEN HORSES FLY …

Reading *Crossfire* in the July issue, I saw the response to the "Name Game" letter by Craig Kunz where Brent Wheat used the term "horsefeathers." It took me back, some 40 plus years. As a young patrolman in a municipality in the area of Southern California, I heard a watch commander, helping the dispatcher on a break, try to pronounce a Hispanic name he was unfamiliar with on the registration of a vehicle. After several sputtering attempts at the pronunciation, he said in his Texas drawl, "Awe, horsefeathers, I'll spell it for you!" Great memory, of one of the finest men I ever worked with!

Ron Beason

THE SAA AND THE HORNET

Tales on the Colt SAA and your Handloading column on the .22 Hornet pistols in the July 2022 issue of *GUNS* combined to remind me of my own experiences, and I thought I would share my reminiscences.



Colts SAAs were the first .22 Hornet handguns that I ever heard about. In the early 1950s, before SAAs became too valuable to carve upon a whim, several prominent gunsmithing firms made .22 Hornet conversions out of the old Colts SAAs. This stimulated my interest in a good high-speed .22 handgun. In the early 1970s, I got an early T/C Contender with octagon barrel chambered for the K-Hornet with a 2.5X T/C scope. By chance, I found 0.222" diameter 40-grain Jet bullets were extremely accurate in the gun and could be pushed to 2,650 fps using old data that is now highly

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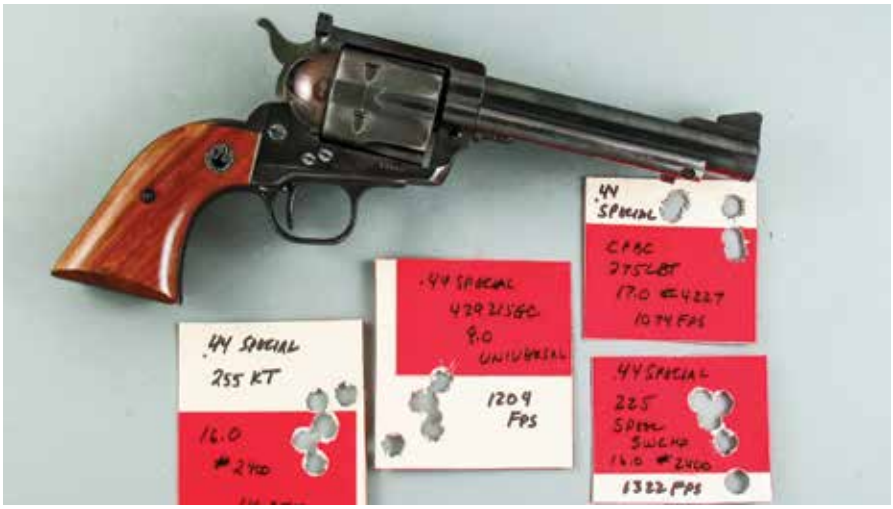
John Taffin


These 5-1/2" Ruger Blackhawks in blue and stainless steel also have auxiliary cylinders in .45 ACP.

In 1955, Bill Ruger went from his .22 Single-Six single-action revolver to a full-sized single-action with his .357 Blackhawk. Basically the same size as a Colt Single Action, the Blackhawk utilized the coil spring action of the Single-Six along with a flat-topped frame with a fully-adjustable Micro rear sight matched up with a ramp front sight on a 4-5/8" barrel. A longer 6-1/2" barrel was soon offered and then, very rarely, a 10" version. They never did offer the standard Colt SAA 5-1/2" and 7-1/2" so I had to make my own, which I did several times over the years. The .357 Blackhawk immediately became popular with outdoorsmen and Elmer Keith reported Ruger planned to soon offer it not only in .44 Special but .45 Colt as well. As often happens, something occurred to derail "soon." That something was the .44 Magnum's arrival in late December 1955.

A NEW REVOLUTION

At the NRA Show in 1956, Ruger displayed three .44 Magnum Blackhawks in barrel lengths of 4-5/8", 5-1/2" and 7-1/2". At least in the beginning of the .44 Magnum, Bill Ruger's prototypes were in the three standard Colt SAA barrel lengths. However, when he went to production, the standard barrel length was 6-1/2" and very rarely were 7-1/2" and 10" versions offered. No 5-1/2" versions were ever cataloged.



It may be a .44 Magnum, however this Blackhawk performs exceptionally well with .44 Specials

Keith looked at the prototypes and told them the cylinder was too short to accept his loads and the frame was too small for the pressure of the .44 Magnum. He did tell Bill Ruger he would like the short-barrel version to use as a .44 Special. Bill told him to pick it up at the end of the show; however, it got packed up too quickly for this to happen and subsequently Keith was proved correct as Ruger decided to do more testing. One of those first .44 Magnum Blackhawks blew up with a proof load.

Ruger went back to the drawing board and, as Keith had suggested, increased the size of the frame and cylinder. In the process, the idea of a .44 Special on the original .357 Magnum Blackhawk died and when Ruger brought out a .45 Colt Blackhawk in 1970, the .44 Magnum-sized frame was used. It would be over a half-century before a .44 Special Ruger Blackhawk arrived.

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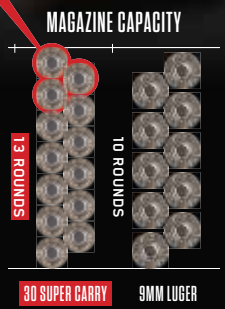
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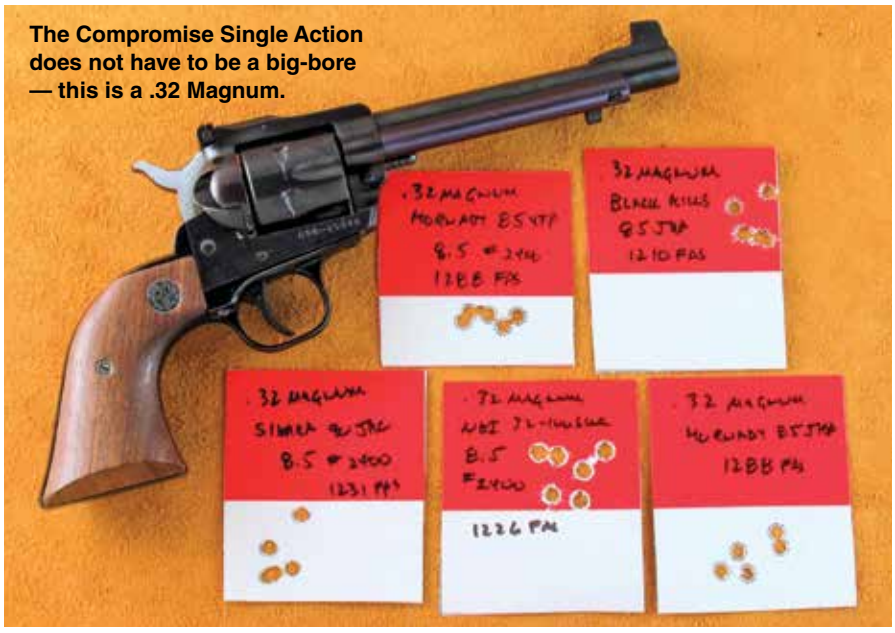
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In 2005 Ruger brought out the 50th Anniversary Model of the .357 Blackhawk. Since the .357 has been on the larger frame since 1972, it would have been quite easy for Ruger simply to use this for the special occasion. I'm certainly glad they did not. Instead, Ruger went retro and the Anniversary Model, although it is built with the New Model transfer-bar action, is otherwise a dead ringer for the original .357 Blackhawk.

It is not only the same size as the 1955 Blackhawk, it also went back to the original Colt Single Action grip frame, known as the XR3 frame, which had been lost with the "improved" XR3-RED grip frame. This frame arrived with the change to the Old Model Blackhawk in 1962. Now finally, the stage was set for a Colt SAA-sized Ruger .44 Special. I talked to the then-president of Ruger about this and he didn't say yes but he also did not say no.



The Compromise Single Action does not have to be a big-bore — this is a .32 Magnum.

TAKE THE LONG WAY

It finally did happen but in a slightly roundabout way, thanks to Lipsey's. Ruger actually began doing what they had intended to do more than 50 years earlier. The .44 Special Flat-Top New Model Blackhawk was first offered in an all-blued steel sixgun with the choice of 4-5/8" or 5-1/2" barrel lengths. Just before the 2009 SHOT Show, Jason Cloessner of Lipsey's called to inform me they would be offering a special run of Rugers. In itself this is not unusual as Lipsey's is a distributor that has offered many special editions of several firearms manufacturers over the years.

But this one was special; make that *really* special. Jason had called to thank me for doing everything I could to keep the .44 Special alive and more importantly, to let me know one of my very special "Special" dreams have come true. Ruger through Lipsey's would be producing and offering 2,000 .44 Special Flat-Top Blackhawks in 2009. The .44 Special has been a sixgun connoisseur's cartridge for well over a century and even today some sixgunners still say, "Why a .44 Special when the .44 Magnum is available?" Only those whose heart is in tune really understand.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Ruger offered not only the .357 and .44 Magnum Blackhawks, they also offered .41 Magnum and then later in the early 1970s, the .45 Colt. None of these were ever cataloged with a 5-1/2" barrel and the latter was the only one offered routinely with a 7-1/2" barrel length. The original .45 Colt Blackhawk Old Model was only in production from 1970 to 1973 with a total output of just over 23,000 units.

In 1973 all Ruger Blackhawks were changed to the New Model. The New Model replaced the three screws on the side of the frame with two pins and a transfer bar safety was added to the action. There was now a piece of steel between the hammer and the firing pin preventing any negligent discharge. The advent of the New Model action was a great step forward for single-action safety. There are several gunsmiths who can tune a New Model Ruger Blackhawk to absolute perfection.

HANDY, HANDS DOWN

It has been more than 65 years since I purchased my first Ruger Single Action and many more have been added over these all too quickly passing years. A few years back, I set about the task of coming up with 5-1/2" Compromise Ruger Single Actions. All four of the original chamberings, .357 and .44 Magnum, .41 Magnum and .45 Colt, were used to build this handiest of single actions.

To come up with the .44 Special, I went in two directions. Custom Gunsmith Ben Forkin built several for me using both Ruger .44 Magnum and Colt .44 Special New Frontier barrels on the original-sized crane. All of these were finished with case colored frames and hammers. Ruger liked the idea of a .44 Special New Model Flat-Top so well they became a catalog offering. I also have .44 Specials in both blue and stainless steel finishes.

Lipsey's and Ruger did not stop there and we soon had a Convertible New Model Flat-Top Blackhawk. Not only is the 5-1/2" offered in both blue and stainless versions, but with two cylinders, one in .45 Colt and the other in .45 ACP. It could easily be argued that this is the most versatile of Ruger Perfect Packin' Pistols.

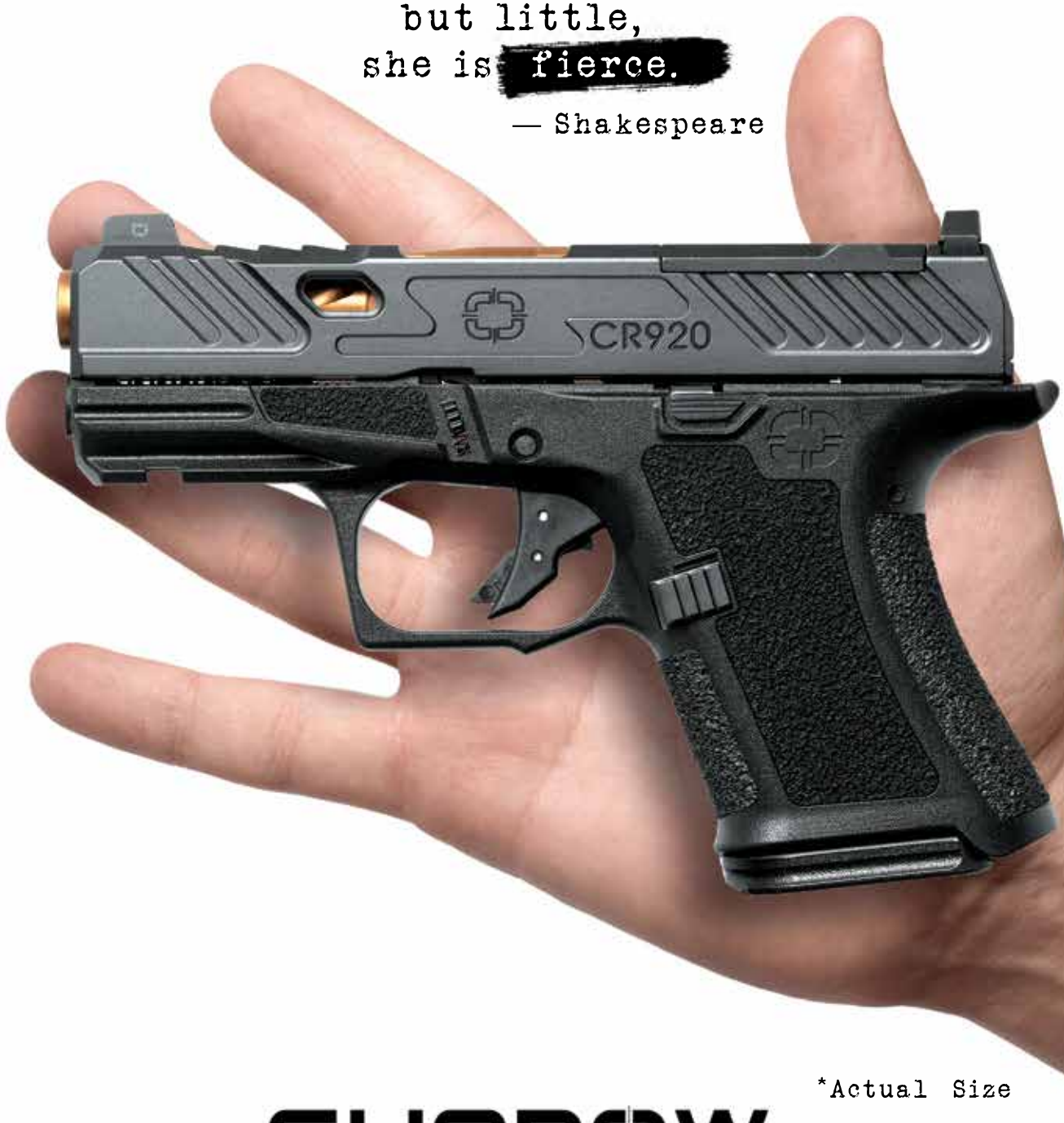
When we try to shoot shorter cartridges in the longer cylinders such as .38 Special and .357 Magnum, we never know how good the results will be until we try. The old .44 Magnum Flat-Top Blackhawk I had cut back to 5-1/2" also handles .44 Special superbly. Add in the abovementioned 45 Colt/.45 ACP and I have 10 cartridge options in 5-1/2" sixguns. There is nothing that cannot be handled with one of the choices. GUNS

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Massad Ayoob

Introduced in 1953 as the Military & Police Airweight, renamed the Model 12 in 1957, the lightweight version of Smith & Wesson's super-popular six-shot .38 Special service revolver went through its siblings' "dash-X" modifications up through Model 12-4 before lack of sales finally caused its discontinuance in 1986.

Born in the mid-20th Century USAF search for an ultra-light revolver for pilots that first gave us aluminum-framed revolvers — the Colt Cobra of 1950 and S&W's subsequent Airweight series — the Model 12 was the black sheep of the K-Frame family. Slightly larger and a few ounces heavier than Colt's Cobra holding the same six rounds and roughly a quarter-pound heavier and distinctly larger than S&W's own J-Frame five-shot Airweight, it was just a tad too big for pocket carry even with its original and definitely most popular barrel length — two inches. I just never saw the need for a Model 12 back when I could order one new for a reasonable price at the gun shop. I guess most others felt the same.

The more fools, we.

AWAKENING

One day in the 1980s, I was in one of the great American gun shops of all time, Riley's in Hooksett, NH, when I spotted a 2" round-butt Model 12 in the used handgun showcase. On a whim, I asked to see it. The bonding was like what happens when you meet the right puppy at the ASPCA. I "rescued" it and brought it home. I liked the way it shot and the way it felt in my hand — no revolver has ever fitted me better than a K-Frame Smith — and I shot +P FBI loads in it against S&W's recommendation, with a set of Pachmayr Compacs to cushion the recoil.

When one of my sisters-in-law needed a gun, I lent it to her. I had been carrying it because it felt so sinfully comfortable and being a guy who advocated packing more serious



Nickel 2" Model 12 (top gun) had square-butt Herrett stocks and Mag-na-porting when Mas found it. Blued square-butt 2" Model 12 (bottom gun): The original stocks are gone but Pachmayrs fit suitably to cover "frame gap."

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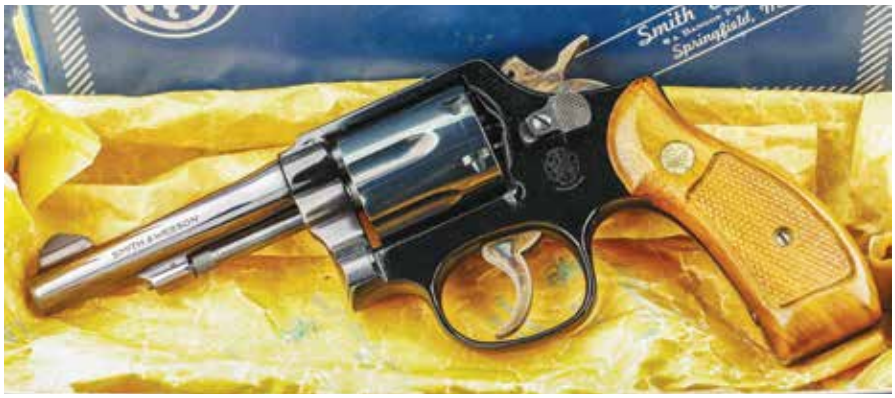
firepower, I felt a tinge of hypocrisy wearing a snub as primary. I went back to carrying service autos. When I finally got it back, it was missing its cylinder latch and I had mislaid its original stocks, a mistake since until the dash-4 model, S&W made these guns with thinner frames and regular K-Frame stocks didn't fit right. My friend Tom Givens, another Model 12 fan, later helped me out with a pair of original stocks. Thanks, Tom.

Along the way, I had read old friend Roy Huntington's paean to the Model 12 in *American Handgunner* and it reminded me of how much I liked the gun, perhaps irrationally. I picked up a 2" square-butt blued one at Welch's Gun Shop in Lebanon, NH, and a Magna-ported nickel duplicate with Herrett stocks at a gun shop in Louisiana. Neither, unfortunately, shot quite to the sights. I confess to envying Roy on this count, because his specimens shoot to point of aim/point of impact.

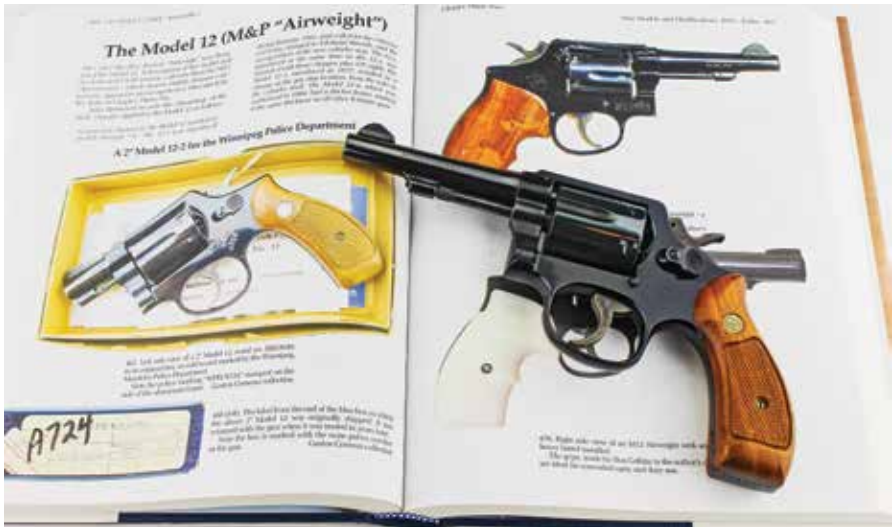
I even picked up one of the rare, short-lived Model 315 Nightguards, which shot great but because it had Scandium in it for +P durability, weighed 24 oz. instead of the original Model 12 snubby's 18 oz. This put the 315 about halfway between the original 18-oz., 2" Model 12 and the chunky 2" all-steel Model 10.

GRAIL GUN

I got the urge for a 4" Model 12. The slight added weight is compensated for by two more inches of barrel that significantly improve sight radius and lever the gun butt into the body for better concealment in a belt holster — counterintuitive, but true. My primary day job is that of instructor and I've found even in an auto pistol world, a double-action revolver lets you demonstrate trigger control better than anything else. As the instructor works the trigger, the students can see the even, uninterrupted rise and fall of the hammer and turn of the cylinder, as well as watching the long pull of the index finger on the trigger. I figured it would make a good teaching gun, and being old with sciatica, which interrupted my life-long comfort with a heavy pistol on my hip, a decent carry gun as well. With a six-shooter, a full-length ejector rod as on the 4" model is desirable, too.



The grail gun (above): 4" Model 12-3, "minty." The Model 12 (below) with its chapter in Tim Mullins' excellent book, *The K-Frame Revolver.*



OMG — try to find an affordable 4" Model 12, at a reasonable price, in the 2020s.

The search lasted for a couple of years and ended at Christmas of 2021, when my lovely bride found one on Gunbroker.com and put it under the tree for me. There it sat in its original box, pristine, practically needing a microscope to find a hint of a turn line on the cylinder …

… and I experienced a cognitive dissonance attack. Or maybe it was multiple personality disorder. My shooter self said, "Let's take this baby out and shoot it, now! That's why we have a range on our property!" But the ghost of my Scottish maternal grandfather seemed to say, "Nae, laddie, dinnae shoot it! Ye'll ruin its collector value!"

Which is why it's still in the safe, as yet unfired — and why I'm looking for a seasoned, "shooter-grade" 4" Model 12, preferably with a round butt.

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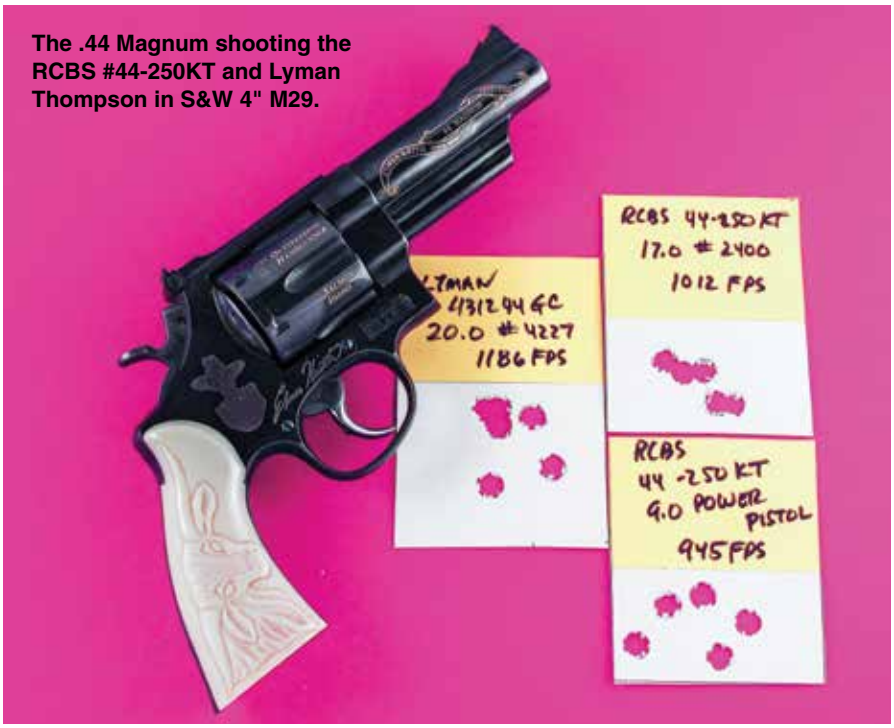
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CHOICES, CHOICES …

John Taffin

We are told there is no such thing as a magic bullet. Perhaps so; however, when it comes to the .44 Magnum there is one that comes almighty close. The bullet is Hornady's 240-grain XTP-JHP. Black Hills uses this bullet in their .44 Magnum offering and at 1,350 fps it has certainly been magical for me. My 7-½" Freedom Arms Model 83 has never seen any other load except this one. In the hunting field it has taken 26 deer/deer-sized critters with 26 shots. Yes, all shots were very carefully placed — the three most important things in hunting are shot placement, shot placement and shot placement — and I was rewarded with perfect bullet performance. This same load was used in a 6" Freedom Arms Model 83 to take a cougar from the top of a pine tree. He was dead when he hit the ground. I'd say 27 for 27 seems very magical to me. From the foregoing, it is not hard to figure what my jacketed bullet of choice is for reloads.



John loads traditional .44 Russian and .44 Special rounds with Lyman's round-nosed bullets #429383 and 429251 and uses Lyman's Keith bullet for heavier loads in the .44 Special.



The .44 Magnum shooting the RCBS #44-250KT and Lyman Thompson in S&W 4" M29.

KEITH, AND THE REST

The cast bullet most preferred by me and thousands of other shooters is the "Keith" bullet for the .44 Special and .44 Magnum. This .44 bullet is probably the most recognized and also most used bullet when it comes to shooting .44s even though it has been nearly 90 years since Elmer Keith first designed it. He didn't find it perfect the first time. Keith had tried several other designs before he hit on his improvement to a semi-wadcutter bullet, which had been designed by a man named Heath several years earlier.

Keith's design calls for three equal-diameter driving bands, one forming the base, one in the middle of the bullet, and one to ride above the crimping groove and serve as a shoulder on the outside of the cartridge to true up the bullet in the chamber. In between the bottom and center driving bands, there is a generous grease groove and a deep crimping groove between the top and middle bands.

The design has been changed slightly over the years and in fact it often goes back to the original design, then changes, then back, to the point one really does not know which design is being offered without examining it. That being said, I have Keith designs from Hensley & Gibbs, Lyman, NEI and RCBS and when it comes to shooting I can't find any differences accuracy wise. I have four- and six-cavity molds for the H&G bullet, two- and four-cavity Lyman molds, a four-cavity NEI aluminum mold, which is especially easy to use, and three two-cavity RCBS Keith bullet molds.

I keep a goodly supply of all of these on hand and sized from 0.429" to 0.432" for use in various .44 Special and .44 Magnum cylinders. The .44 Special cylinders especially can vary quite a bit from manufacturer to manufacturer and from manufacturing time period to manufacturing time period.

After more than 55 years of accumulating more than 300 bullet molds for just about every use imaginable, I don't hesitate to say I use these .44 molds more than all the rest combined. And the majority of these .44 bullets are



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used in .44 Special single- and double-action sixguns. The older ones from the WWI era are usually charged with 6.0 grains of either Unique or Universal that duplicates the original Special loading while most of the others see 7.5 grains of the same powder as an everyday working load.

IN THE FIELD

For hunting, I normally go to the old standby #2400 with the charge that will give me about 1,150 fps. In the .44 Magnum, especially in my sixguns from the middle of the 20th century, I rarely load full-bore loads but rather go with 10.0 grains of Unique or Universal for around 1,100 to 1,150 fps, which is plenty powerful for my use.

If I really want to reach back into history, I use round-nosed bullets dropped from Lyman molds #429251 or #429383. They weigh around 250 grains and work fine in duplicating early .44 Special loads and also for loading the .44 Russian, the father of the .44 Special and grandfather of the .44 Magnum. These are the bullets I load over black powder for use in the old Smith & Wesson single-actions — the Model #3 Russian and the New Model #3 — and smokeless powder for use in the Navy Arms replica Model #3 Russian.

Ray Thompson must've really liked the .44 Special as he designed two different bullets for it instead of one as he did for the .38/.357 and .45 sixguns.



The .44 Special NEI, RCBS and H&G Keith bullets from a Colt 7-½" New Frontier.

When Thompson came up with his .44 bullets, the .44 Magnum had not yet arrived; however, they easily made the transition from use in the .44 Special into excellent bullet choices for the .44 Magnum. All of Thompson's designs feature gas checks.

Gas checks add expense and time to the process of making our own bullets and Keith said they were unnecessary. Probably, except for the fact some .44s simply shoot better with gas check bullets; not that they shoot all that poorly with plain base bullets, they simply do their best with gas checks in place. A notable example is my Dan Wesson .44 Magnum.



Four versions of the .44 Keith bullet — H&G #503, Lyman #429421, NEI #260.429 and RCBS #44-250KT.



John's casting set-up with two RCBS #44-250KT double cavity molds used in tandem for fast and easy production.

Thompson's Lyman bullets are #431215 and #431244. (Now cataloged by Lyman as #429215 and #429244.) The last three digits represent the weight of each one but my molds drop them at 222 grains and 255 grains respectively with my alloy. The lighter bullet is a great choice for high-speed loads in either the Special or Magnum while the heavier bullet is excellent for hunting. My heavyweight favorite for the .44 Magnum is also a gas-checked bullet and basically follows the Keith design. It is NEI's #295.429 weighing just under 300 grains and when loaded over 21.5 grains of either H110 or WW296 makes an excellent choice for some of our tougher game. GUNS

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TRIGGER CONTROL

SIMPLE IN THEORY — DIFFICULT IN PRACTICE

Dave Anderson

Acquiring "good enough" skill with a rifle, at least adequate for big-game hunting at moderate ranges, is actually not terribly hard. Most game animals are shot at ranges under 200 yards, often considerably less, and generally from some sort of rest. It used to surprise me to find many rifle owners, even those knowledgeable and enthusiastic, had little interest in shooting.

For those who do want to be good rifle shots, learning trigger management is essential. Trigger control is the essence of good shooting, the single most important factor. Good trigger management covers a multitude of sins. Don't misunderstand, proper form and consistency matter. At the highest levels of shooting, competitors train so every aspect of stance, hold, grip and even breathing are as close to exactly the same as humanly possible for every shot. Yet, none of this matters if the last thing the shooter does is yank the trigger.

SHOOTING 101

What is good trigger management? It means pressing the trigger straight back, at constantly increasing speed, without imparting movement to the firearm. Simple enough, but making good trigger control a dependable subconscious skill takes thousands of quality repetitions.

Factory rifle trigger pulls have improved dramatically over the past couple of decades. The 1960s and much of the '70s were actually kind of depressing years for rifle enthusiasts. An era of manufacturing based on skilled hand labor and relatively simple machine tools was coming to an end, as skilled labor became less common and therefore expensive. The marvelous, extremely precise computer-controlled machine tools we have today didn't yet exist.



One of the reasons for the success of the Tikka T3 rifle is the excellent trigger, which was part of the package right from the beginning.



Dave shoots with this thumb on the same side as his trigger finger. He believes it keeps the trigger finger straighter, allowing the shooter to press the trigger straight back.

Many of we who lived through the era were left permanently scarred. We were certain quality control was a thing of the past and would only get worse. We're easily identified because we say "pre" all the time; pre-war, pre-'64, pre-1950, pre-lock, pre-number. Everything used to be better, at least so it seemed at the time.

Trigger quality suffered worst of all, partly I suppose because of the growth of consumer litigation and manufacturers' fear of lawsuits. From a risk avoidance



Dave needed lots of dry and live fire to instinctively keep his thumb near the trigger finger. It paid off on a 300+ yard shot at a New Zealand red stag.

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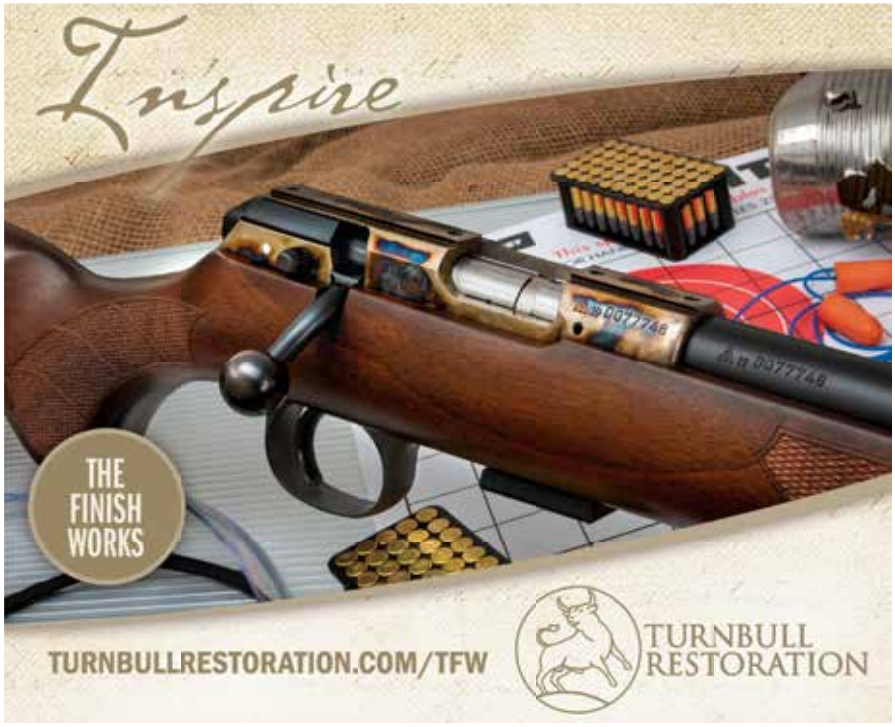
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point of view it made sense to make triggers non-adjustable, with plenty of sear engagement and a 6- or 7-lb. weight of pull. The average once-a-year hunter tolerated such pulls as just the way things are. Those who actually shot a lot simply factored in the cost of a trigger job or replacement trigger.

Rifle quality improved, slowly at first, then more quickly as manufacturers began adopting modern techniques such as computer-assisted design and computer-assisted manufacturing. Improvement in trigger quality seemed to come slowly, at least with the bigger American gunmakers. Some European imports and smaller American makers — Dakota Arms and Kimber come to mind — had decent triggers but were expensive and not widely distributed.

> "THE OLD SAYING 'PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT' ISN'T ALWAYS SO. PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT.

THE SHOT HEARD 'ROUND THE SHOOTING WORLD

In a just world, the name Ron Coburn would be as famous and revered in the firearms world as names such as Bill Ruger and Sam Colt. Coburn took over leadership of a nearly bankrupt Savage corporation and turned it into an industry giant. Coburn's genius was in leading and inspiring creative people to design products people wanted, at a price they could afford. Early in the 21st century he challenged his staff to design a trigger with a quality pull, crisp, reasonably light, adjustable, affordable and safe. The result was the Accu-Trigger, which became standard on Savage factory rifles around 2002–2003. Other manufacturers redesigned their triggers so quality



A light Savage rifle in .260 Rem. trigger pull is a couple of ounces over 3 lbs., crisp and clean right out of the box.

pulls were available to every rifle buyer, not just the wealthy and enthusiastic. I think shooters today are fortunate to have rifles with decent triggers widely available at reasonable prices, providing a headstart in learning good habits.

The old saying "practice makes perfect" isn't always so. Practice makes permanent. The neural paths controlling the muscles don't judge. They develop through repetition and will learn bad habits as thoroughly as good ones. Over the years, my views have evolved. I'm not as dogmatic about form and style as I once was, but there are basic elements I think are important. One is to have the trigger finger placed squarely across the trigger face so the pressure is straight back, in line with the axis of the bore. I've become more conscious of avoiding any side pressure on the trigger.

I like to have the trigger finger more or less in line with the bore, not angled diagonally as seems to happen with many pistol grip shapes. I keep the thumb of the shooting hand on the right side of the stock rather than wrapped around the pistol grip. This allows a lower grip so the trigger finger doesn't have to be on a diagonal angle.

It also encourages a light touch with the shooting hand. I find a light touch is more consistent, less prone to "steering" the gun or applying side pressure, plus it allows the trigger finger to move independently. Years ago I thought differently and who knows, I may think differently in the future. But today this is what feels right and more importantly, performs right for me. GUNS



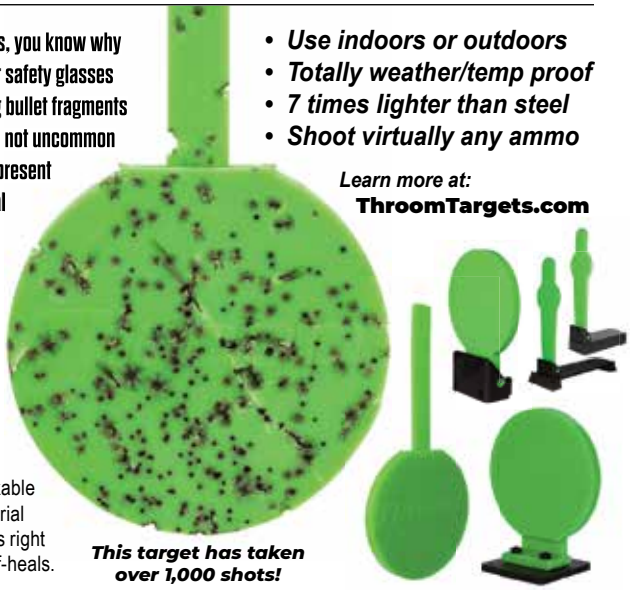
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A MOST-HEINOUS OFFENSE

FRIENDSHIP ONLY GOES SO FAR …

Mike "Duke" Venturino • Photos: Yvonne Venturino

A friend, to whom I have bestowed the nickname "Shrapnel" for reasons too involved to cover here, recently accused me of a most heinous offense. This column is my attempt to clear my sterling reputation from the smear of his accusation.

In order to make this affair clear we must go back to a Montana gun show in February, 2018. Another fellow and I were visiting behind his table when Shrapnel suddenly appeared and waved a very fine Colt Frontier Six Shooter under my nose.

BACKGROUND

For the uninitiated, Colt Frontier Six Shooter was a synonym used by Colt for their Single Action revolvers ONLY when chambered for .44 WCF — commonly known today as .44-40. The cartridge was originally introduced with Winchester's Model 1873 rifles and carbines and by 1878 (some sources give 1877), Colt realized having their popular six-shooters also chambered for it would be a grand marketing idea. Hence frontiersmen could pack one type of ammunition for both revolvers and lever guns.

Soon thereafter, someone at Colt decided to have "Colt Frontier Six Shooter" acid etched in a rectangular box on the left side of .44-40 barrels. Also tiny ".44 C.F." stamps were put on the left rear of trigger guards. As time passed, acid-etching the marking changed to roll stamping the barrels' left side in large-case letters. The small ".44 C.F." disappeared entirely. Later in the 20th century after .44-40 supplanted .44 WCF as the cartridge's most popular moniker, the large-case roll stamp evolved into "COLT FRONTIER SIX SHOOTER .44-40."

When my friend handed me the Colt, I noticed the roll stamp lacked the .44-40 and a glimpse of the serial number showed it dated from 1899. Moreover I nearly gasped in surprise at the Colt's condition. Perhaps high-dollar collectors would rate it as "very good." To a modestly paid gun'riter such as myself, it was downright exquisite. Overall I'd say finish was 90% plus. There was the tiniest bit of holster wear to the bluing at the muzzle, the colors of the frame's case-hardening had faded some with age and likewise on the hammer. The grips fit perfectly but showed very minor wear. Bore condition was nigh-on perfect.

Eagerly I asked how much. This is when the excitement died. Its owner was also a dealer at the show but he refused to put a price on the fine .44. To verify it, I even returned to the gun show the next day to ask the dealer one last time for a price. He wouldn't do it.

Now fast forward to December 2021. Shrapnel had a table at another town's gun show and as usual, I used it as a base for resting and to mooch sodas from him. We both had pretty much forgotten about the nice Colt Frontier Six Shooter.

WANDER AND WIN

On the show's second day I decided to wander and browse, whereupon a mere 20 feet or so from Shrapnel's table I found the display of the same dealer who wouldn't price the fine .44-40 nearly



This is the 1899 vintage "COLT FRONTIER SIX SHOOTER" that caused the alleged heinous offense against Duke.

three years past. Much to my surprise the "COLT FRONTIER SIX SHOOTER" lay there with a price tag! It was a high price but not prohibitive so I did the old gun show routine and said the following, "Give me your lowest price. No BS and if I can handle it you have a sale."

He dropped the price significantly and I began emptying every pocket of my clothing, and searching every crease in my well-worn wallet. I was $500 short. Yvonne was with me and instantly hot-footed to an ATM machine but this deal needed to be sewn up before something went wrong. So I returned to Shrapnel's table and said, "I've found something I really want and I'm $500 short. Yvonne went to an ATM but I'd like to finish the deal now." With no questions asked, Shrapnel handed me the money and I finished paying for the .44. By the way, I had conveniently forgotten to tell him what I needed the money for.

When I returned with my new treasure clutched tightly in my mitts, Shrapnel recognized it immediately and nearly hit the ceiling. He exclaimed, "That's mine! I found it first! You bought that out from under me and even borrowed money from me to do it."





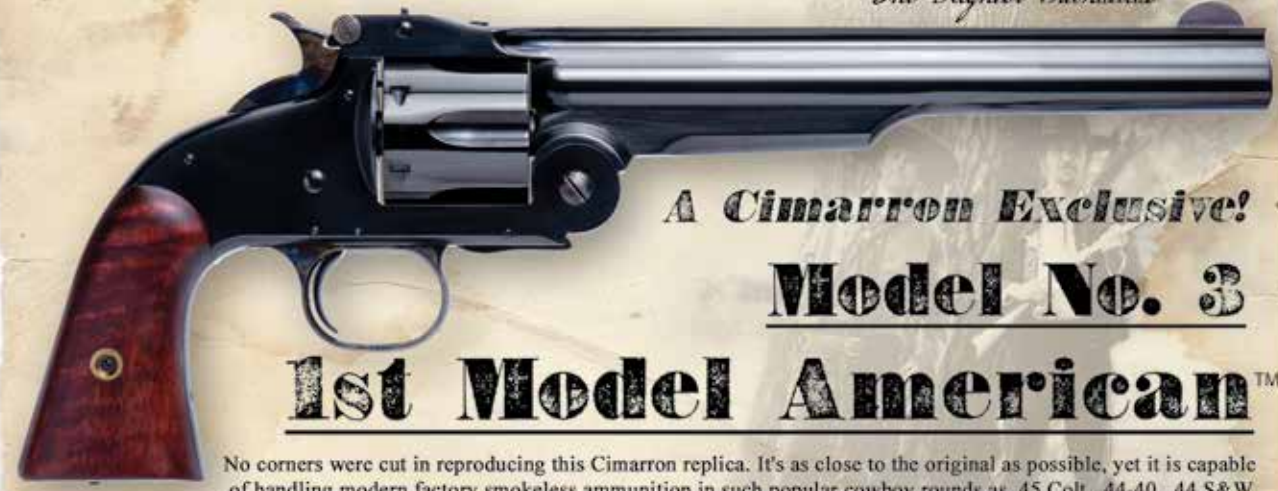
Bottom barrel (above), initially Colt acid etched their "COLT FRONTIER SIX SHOOTER" logo on the left side of .44-40 barrels. Top, a 44-40 was added to the roll stamp in the 20th century. Telltale: Duke's 1899 .44-40 (below) was roll stamped this way.

My defense was, "You found it three years ago. I found it this time. If you had just wandered from your table a mere few feet you would have seen it. It's mine fair and square." He retorted, "But you should have told me about it." To which I replied, "Would you have told me about it if you saw it first?" He said, "No, of course not, but in my mind that .44 should always be mine."

We're still friends. In fact we just came back from another gun show together. On the 300-mile drive home I practically begged him to come down on his price for a factory-restored Bisley Colt SAA .38-40 from 1905. He didn't budge an inch all the while reminding me how I "stole" his .44.

In the end I paid his price. GUNS

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Water and mud is found when hunting upland birds as much as when gunning waterfowl. If you clog a barrel, make sure it's clean before you pull the trigger.

WIN THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

HOW *NOT* TO RUIN YOUR BARRELS IN FOUR EASY STEPS

Tom Keer

Wild birds live in rugged areas and we go there for lots of flushes or knots of geese double-clucking their way into a field. It's easy to get distracted but our attention should be focused on keeping our barrels clear. Pulling a trigger when a barrel is obstructed can do a lot of damage to your shotgun. More often, it can do much worse.

BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Swinging a light 20 gauge on morning hunts for early season woodies and teal is a lot of fun. If you swap the 20 gauge for a 12 gauge for an afternoon pheasant hunt, make sure your pockets don't contain shells of different gauges.

For over 35 years, Doug Turnbull of Bloomfield, New York's Turnbull Restoration company has seen shotguns with barrel bulges. "Shotguns with barrel bulges mostly come from mixing shells of different gauges," he said. "Most common is dropping a 20-gauge shell into a 12-gauge barrel. When an unfired 12-gauge shell is added to the chamber and discharged, the compression causes a bulge, if not a full break, in the barrel wall. Those accidents can be incredibly dangerous, so be careful in the marshes and fields. There usually isn't much to be done to repair a barrel with that kind of damage. A new set is the best option if they're available and that's more easily done with a new shotgun. Finding a replacement for a classic American shotgun like a Winchester Model 12 or a Fox Sterlingwoth can be both challenging and expensive."



Bulges from stuck wads can ruin a barrel (left). They can also injure the shooter and his hunting buddies! Many accidents come from dropping a smaller-gauge shell into a larger-gauge shotgun (right). Ask any gunsmith and they'll tell you it's more common than you think. Photos: Turnbull Restoration

DROP THE RIGHT SHELL

Over the past century, shotshells have changed more dramatically than shotgun design. This means there are a variety of shells to drop into a chamber. These days, standard shotshells come in 2-¾", 3 and 3-½" lengths. While it's not a problem to shoot a shorter shell in a longer chamber, problems can come from dropping a longer shell into a shorter chamber. An unfired 3" shell measures 2-¾" so it'll fit into a 2-¾" chamber. The problem occurs when the firing pin hits the primer, the full crip expands and there isn't enough length in the chamber to



Have a vintage shotgun's barrels and bores mic'ed by a professional gunsmith before shooting. Photo: Lars Jacob Wingshooting

accommodate the expansion. Vintage shotgun chambers are still shorter and range between 2-½" and 2-9/16".

To further complicate the issue, different types of shot and higher compressions don't match all barrels. Damascus shotguns handle low compression shells as vintage shells perform well with Bismuth. Shooting steel loads through older firearms can cause damage, mostly because of higher compression and harder shot. Match shells to chamber length and give some thought about the type of loads you're feeding into your chambers.

THIN BARREL WALLS

A growing number of hunters appreciate the quality machining, highly figured walnut and outstanding fit-and-finish found in classic shotguns. There are a lot of options on the market and they're super affordable, especially those with Damascus barrels. "Before you shoot, have a gunsmith mic the barrels to determine barrel-wall thickness," says Lars Jacob of Lars Jacob Wingshooting. "Sometimes, the barrels have been reamed to remove rust or pitting. If too much steel is removed then compression can cause a bulge if not a burst."

While you're at it, measure your chokes. "Most older shotguns had tighter chokes which is a by-product of old-school shell design," Jacobs said. "While you're having a gunsmith mic your barrel walls, make sure the choke constriction suits your needs. Chokes can always be opened by a competent gunsmith."

OBSTRUCTION-FREE BARRELS

It's easy to clog a muzzle or barrel while slogging through soft mud. A stumble can dip the muzzle into the ground and fill it with mud, dirt or sand. It's part of doing business in the woods and marshes and it's happened to me and just about everyone I know. Using a shaft of cord grass or a cattail stalk is one way to free the debris but why not add a bore snake to your kit? The snake is lightweight and doesn't take up much space and it does a much better job of removing all the debris from a barrel.

Wads stuck in barrels create obstructions, which is why it's important to check your barrels following a squib shell. Manufacturers test shells to ensure the highest quality and reliability, but sometimes one just gets through. It also happens with hand-loaded shells. The "why" isn't important, but if you pull the trigger and hear a low pop instead of a loud bang, check for a stuck wad. Remove the wad before you fire the next round, even if it means holding off on a pair of greenheads trying to beat feet from your spread.

A little attention to your barrels will go a long way. Not only will it prevent a costly repair, but it also will keep shooters and friends out of harm's way. GUNS



THE DELIGHTFUL SAVAGE 1907

TEN SHOTS — QUICK!

Roy Huntington

No less a gunfighter than Bat Masterson said this about the Savage 1907: "A tenderfoot with a Savage Automatic and the nerve to stand his ground, could have run the worst six-shooter man the West ever knew, right off the range."

Perhaps even more interesting to me is the fact in the same ad showing Bat brandishing a 1907, the "second" reason for Bat's assertion is: "The Savage Automatic is quicker and gets in the first shot every time against a revolver. You can fire 10 shots as fast as you can *press* (not pull) the trigger." The italics and the "(not pull)" are in the original ad copy. Bat knew the ropes and this is why he eventually died of a heart attack at his desk writing sports copy for a newspaper rather than in the dusty streets of Dodge City.

While the Colt 1903 and even the Remington 51 are the darlings of classic pocket pistol admirers, it wasn't until I bought this Savage 1907 in .32 ACP I realized I had been missing out. I always enjoyed their ads with Bat, the distraught "housewife at home facing a burglar" ("Victory And Your Savage!") and even Buffalo Bill Cody himself touting it — but had never actually fired one. I thought them strange looking and they just didn't look as if they'd feel good.

I was exactly wrong.

THE ORIGIN

Many 1911 fans don't realize Savage's original design in 1907 by Elbert Searles for an 8-round double-stack .45 ACP was a finalist in the great race for a new fighting handgun for U.S. forces. Up against the 1911, the Luger and others lost out until it came down to the Savage and the Colt. Alas, the Savage cost considerably more and had manufacturing quirks causing malfunctions and parts breakages during extensive testing by the military. It was the "big boy" Colt up against a smaller company and Colt won handily due mostly to John Browning's genius. The 195 .45 ACP Savage test guns were returned to Savage where they were eventually sold. Value today is in the $20,000 to $40,000 range.

But Savage realized scaling things down to a pocket pistol might work, and they did just that. The "Model 1907" was introduced in .32 ACP in 1908. First year production was about 2,000 guns but in 1911 alone, they sold 20,000 guns. This trend kept up,



The Savage 1907 (top), Colt Pocket Positive and Colt 1903 were peers for personal protection in the teens of the last century.



Bat was the real deal and we're betting he'd have carried a 1907 (right) as a handy back-up if he could have.

with total production figures topping out in 1920 at about 208,800, with an additional 9,845 in .380 ACP models. Interestingly, while the U.S. military didn't buy any, the French did purchase 27,000 in .32 ACP for use in WWI.

THE DESIGN

I was amazed, frankly, at how good this gun feels in the hand. Savage made a great fuss about how it "points naturally" and I confess it points better than the Colt 1903. They talk about there being "… no need for any experience as it shoots just like the way you point your finger!" Great advertising copy, but not entirely true. I did find it very easy to shoot fast and accurately in close, though and I do think there's a bit of magic going on.

The "hammer" isn't really a hammer, which fools most people. It's a "Cocking Indicator" since the 1907 is actually striker-fired. If it's back, you know the gun is cocked. However, I wouldn't ever use it to "lower" the striker as there just isn't any way to get a good grip on it.

Like the CZ75, the slide rides "inside" of the frame so it's hard to grab onto. The burly serrations you see are there to lend a good gripping surface. The external safety (marked "Safe" and "Fire") is "on" when up and can be brushed downward off easily though I'm not sure I'd carry it "cocked and locked" like a 1911. Besides, you



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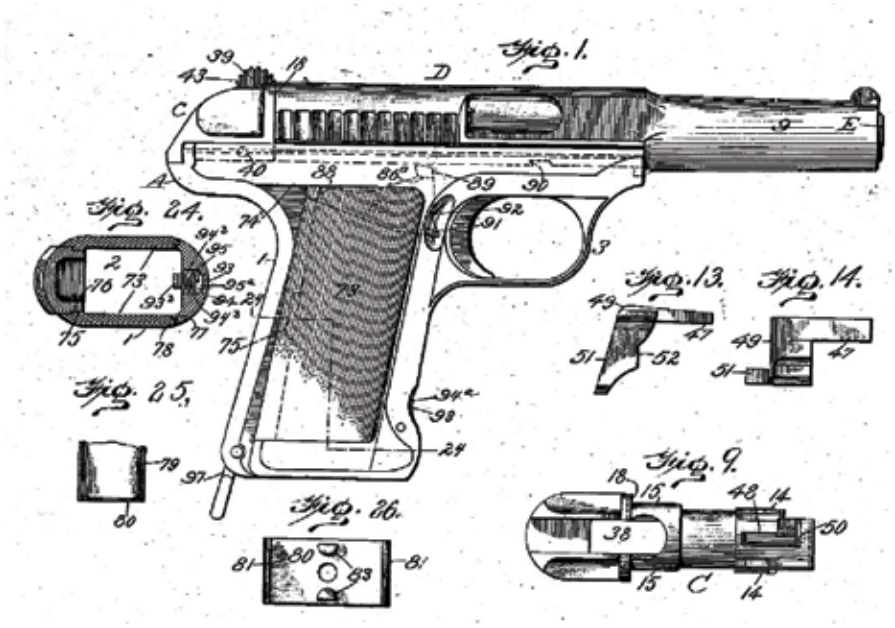
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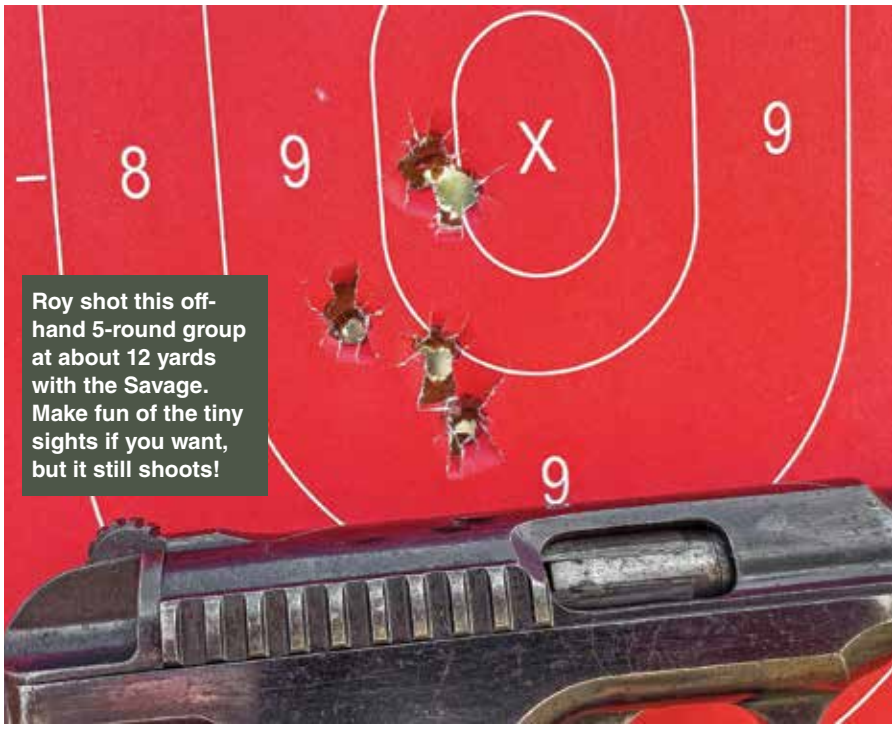
honestly shouldn't rely on an antique like this for protection unless you're really in a pinch.

The magazine holds 10 rounds and is a double-stack. Most pocket guns held six to eight at best so the Savage won the cartridge capacity battle handily. What's funny is at a glance, it's hard to tell the mags apart from the "new" breed of similar capacity pocket pistol magazines. Savage beat everyone to it — 110 years ago.

The mag is released with a tiny lever on the front strap. It's purported to be able to be released with your little finger but it's pretty fumbly for a "speed" load. Still, I think it's better than the classic heel release on so many of these guns. Sights are tiny, of course, but adds to the charm of shooting the old guns.

Take down is clever. You move the slide to the rear, then pull the cocking piece (the hammer-looking thing) down and twist the rear of the slide to the right. This rotates the fire control assembly and it will eventually pull out the back. The slide then goes forward





Roy shot this off-hand 5-round group at about 12 yards with the Savage. Make fun of the tiny sights if you want, but it still shoots!

off the frame, with the barrel, etc. coming free. You'll end up with six parts and it's very easy to clean and lube. The key is to remember to pull the cocking piece all the way down before you try to turn the assembly.

SHOOTING

Unfortunately, my gun has an aftermarket magazine so mine is "Eight Shots Quick" rather than 10. But I put about 50 rounds through it and it ran just fine. A fast mag dump at about five yards showed a nice tight group without really looking at the sights, just pointing. Maybe Savage was right? I slowed down and used the tiny sights at about 12 yards and got a tidy 1.5" group. And yes, I tried my 80-yard steel torso target and in eight rounds hit it three times once I dialed in the elevation. Now tell me that's not great fun!



Some old Hirtenberg .32 ACP clocked 980+ out of the Savage. Some of the old Euro stuff was hot!

I recommend if you like this sort of thing, keep your good eye open for one. They tend to sell for modest prices, say $400 or so for a "shooter," to more than $1,000 for a really pretty one. And pretty they can be, with the amazing polish and blue the old gunsmiths could manage.

But be warned, your first gun like this is only your first step on a long journey of marvelous fun. Suddenly, the used gun section of 1903s, 1907s, Remington 51s and the like will beckon. Prepare to lose your heart! GUNS

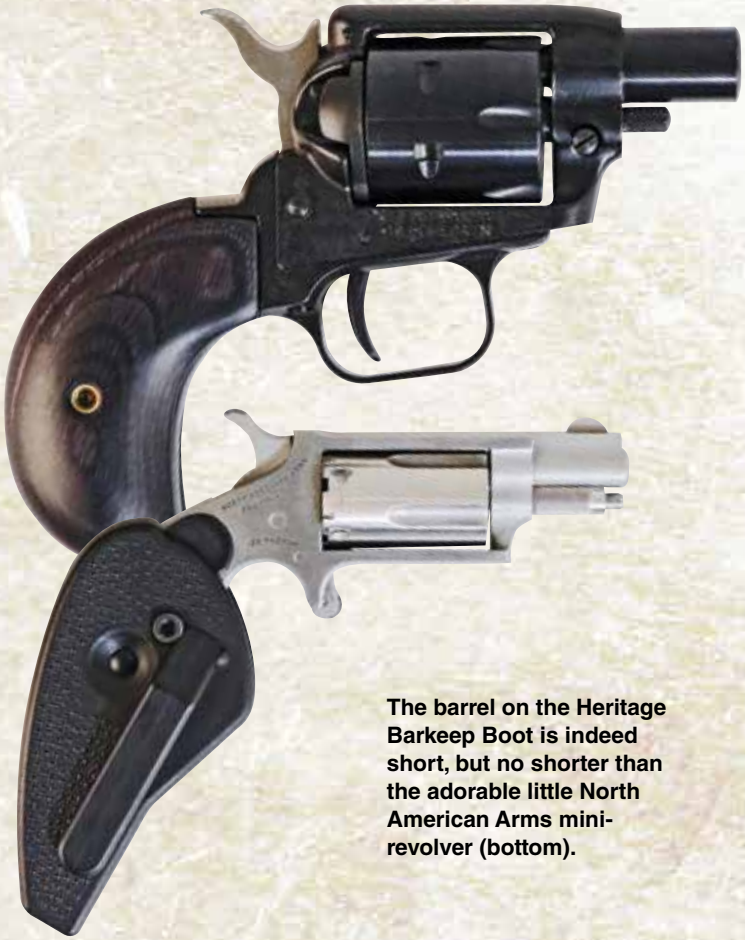




The Heritage Barkeep Boot may not be the first gun you'd choose for home defense or concealed carry, but it would be pure murder on snakes at close range.

THE HERITAGE BARKEEP BOOT

BECAUSE ANYTHING WORTH DOING IS WORTH DOING EXCESSIVELY



The barrel on the Heritage Barkeep Boot is indeed short, but no shorter than the adorable little North American Arms mini-revolver (bottom).

Will Dabbs, MD

In 2020 Heritage Firearms introduced their Barkeep .22-caliber revolver. Heritage produces all those bargain-basement utilitarian Western-style rimfire wheelguns you see everywhere firearms are sold. The most expensive of the lot, a fascinating revolving rifle version of their basic Peacemaker design titled the Rough Rider Rancher, still sports an MSRP of only $333. The Barkeep was, until recently, the opposite lower end of the spectrum.

All Heritage revolvers sport a common action that apes the timeless Colt Peacemaker. Cast frames keep costs down and there are enough options concerning finishes, grip styles and barrel lengths to entertain the most discriminating narcissistic gun diva. The Barkeep sports either a 2" or 3" barrel. For those who feel 2" might seem excessive, Heritage now offers the Heritage Barkeep Boot.

DETAILS

The Barkeep Boot uses the same 6-round alloy steel cylinder as the larger Heritage revolvers along with the generous Colt-style spur hammer. There is a classic bird's head frame along with a bewildering array of grip options. The barrel is a paltry 1" long.

The Barkeep Boot looks like a gun that had an unfortunate encounter with a meat slicer. It's not that this barrel is simply short, it's almost nonexistent. This whole gun will hide in the palm of your hand.

The barrel is way too short to accommodate an ejector rod, so there simply isn't one. The gun comes with a nifty little wooden-handled tool you can use to push the empties out from the front. If you ever lose it, any handy nail would accomplish the same mission.

Takedown is the same as any comparable Colt revolver. Press the cylinder pin catch, remove the pin and drop the cylinder out to the side. The right-sided loading gate works just as you might expect. The Barkeep Boot will accept the Heritage .22 Magnum cylinder (a bargain at $30) but the stubby little tube is too short to stabilize most .22 Magnum rounds. The gun will run safely with these loads but the promotional literature warns keyholing might occur. I rather suspect the noise it would make thusly charged would be detectable by the Mars Rover as well.

There's no room for a front sight. The top strap has the expected sighting groove but this is about it. Fret not, you'll not be ringing steel a kilometer distant with this thing anyway.

The left side of the gun includes an additional manual safety lever ruining the trim little gun's aesthetics. This rotating lever does indeed make the pistol safer to carry, but it looks about as natural as John Wayne in a tutu. I suspect some lawyer is responsible for it — the manual safety, not the tutu. To my knowledge John Wayne never practiced ballet.

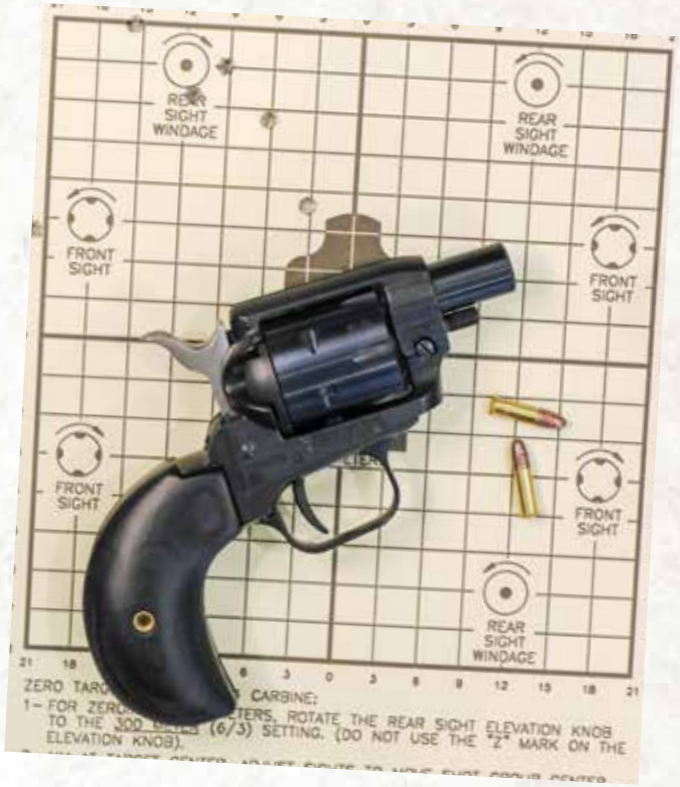
TRIGGER TIME

To be unrepentantly tasteless, the manual of arms is so simple even Alec Baldwin could manage it. Open the loading gate, put the hammer on half cock and fill the cylinder. Close the loading gate, point the gun at something you dislike, cock the hammer and squeeze. Repeat as necessary.

Accuracy is about what you would expect for a pistol with a 1" barrel and no sights. Out to seven meters or so it shoots fairly straight. At 20 or more it becomes an area weapon system. However, there are lots of well-respected short-barreled pistols in the world. Your typical North American Arms mini-revolver or a Derringer of most any sort is in the same ballpark. Cut the Boot some slack.



Takedown is straightforward. The wooden-handled tool is used to press out empty cases. A nail or piece of coat hanger wire would do in a pinch.



This seven-meter group was fired from a simple rest with an aiming point in the bottom quarter of the target.

The Barkeep Boot is indeed fun to shoot and just stupid loud. It also produces the most delightfully brisk muzzle flash when fired at dusk. With an MSRP of around 200 bucks and the cheap availability of rimfire ammo, the Boot represents an exceptionally cost-effective way to kill time on the range.

SO, WHAT'S IT GOOD FOR?

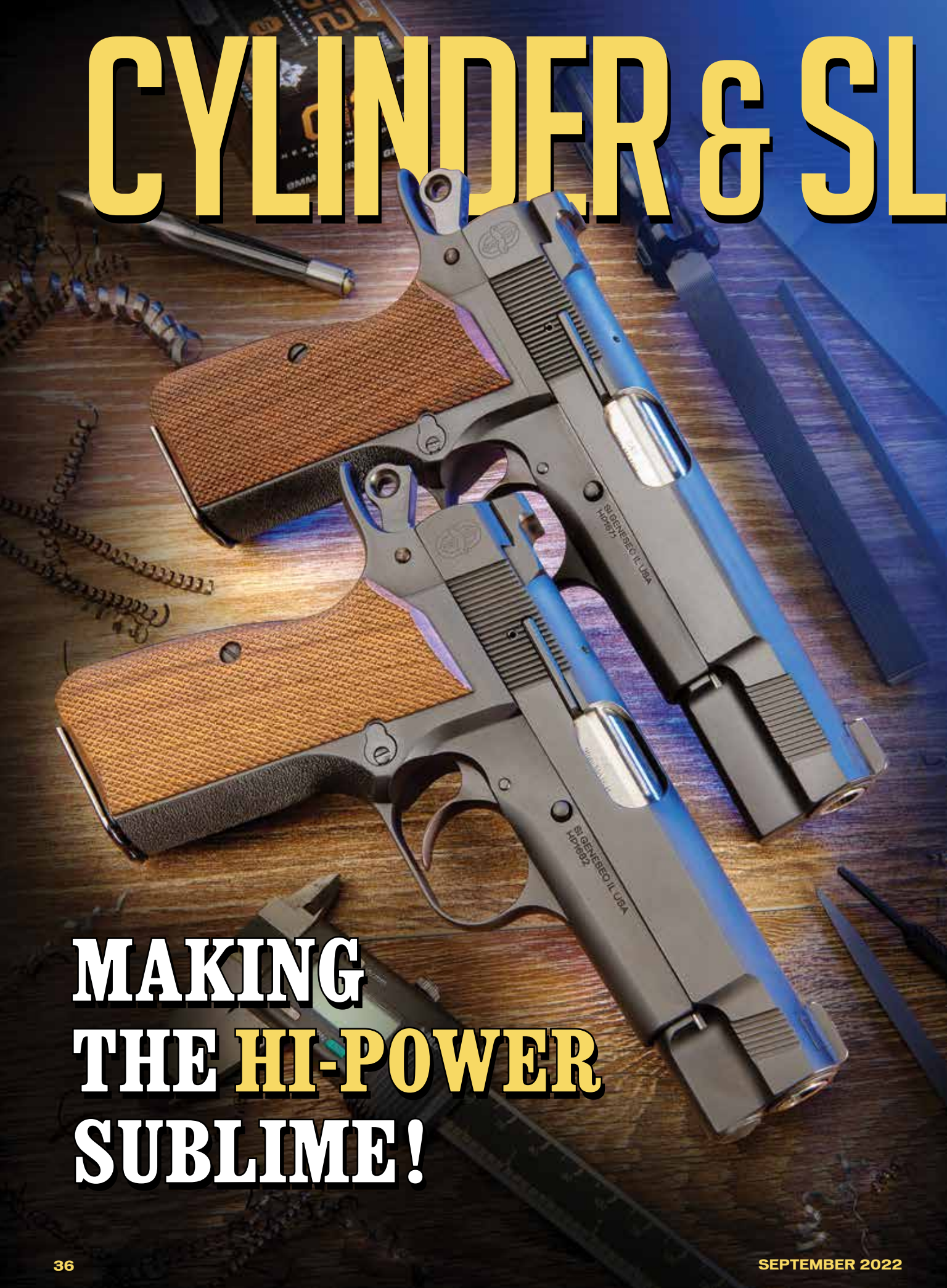
Honestly, this is a good question. It really would ride in your boot if you were willing to leave the chamber under the hammer empty and didn't wiggle around unduly. Likewise, the Boot would fit in the pocket of a decent jacket if you just didn't want to wander about unarmed.

The real practical application I see for the Boot is as a snake gun. If you don't live in the Deep South, just feel free to skip over to Mas Ayoob's column now. Down here, however, we are blessed with poisonous snakes aplenty. The Boot is cheap enough to keep in your tackle box. Stoke the rascal with rat shot and it would be just the ticket for sending water moccasins to snake heaven while out drowning crickets for bream.

The Heritage Firearms Barkeep Boot is just weird enough to be cool. It's not the gun you'd grab if you suddenly saw zombies staggering up your peaceful little cul-de-sac, but it has a legitimate place in a decent working gun collection. Cheap, quirky, cute and neat, the Barkeep Boot is indeed one nifty piece of iron. **GUNS**

HeritageMfg.com

CYLINDER & SL



MAKING THE HI-POWER SUBLIME!

IDE SA-35s

ROY HUNTINGTON • PHOTOS: ROB JONES/THE IMAGESMITH LLC

Sometime in 2017 Browning posted a message on their website causing the blood in the veins of shooters everywhere to chill a few degrees: "… the Hi-Power is technically out of production. Current dealer inventories will be the last available from Browning for the foreseeable future."

Aside from the collective "Huh?" and "What?" mutterings, most everyone either thanked their lucky stars they had a Hi-Power already, or gnashed their frustrated teeth for dawdling about and never "quite getting around" to buying one.

"But they can't be serious … can they?" lit up the forums.

They were indeed, and the much-vaunted and beloved P35, the great *Grande Puissance* — literally meaning "high power" — never rematerialized on the Browning books. Cue more teeth gnashing and add in hair rending, whatever that is.

Those "Browning" Hi-Powers were actually made by *Fabrique Nationale* in Belgium and anyone who has ever done business with a European gun company knows how they can be petulant, unpredictable and not always savvy about the American market. Fortunately, however, Springfield Armory is an American gun company and knows precisely what American shooters are looking for — usually hitting the bullseye exactly in the center.

When SA announced their version of the beloved Hi-Power in October 2021, it pretty much caught everyone by surprise. The surprise had most assuming it would be some sort of import with "SA" stamped on the side. Nope — wrongo. Springfield's aptly named SA-35 is American made, with machined forgings done right here in the U.S.A. The rest of the gun is superbly constructed, presenting a high level of attention to engineering and details — like their 1911 line-up — and immediately captured the shooting public's attention.

Indeed, many of those who were gnashing teeth before, swooped into the nearest gun store and snapped them up, often driving the $699 MSRP up into the $1,000 to $2,000 range. But at least they "got theirs" assuring Springfield they had a homerun winner on their hands.

THE IMPROVEMENTS

Springfield's thinkers took the opportunity to make some small but fundamental changes to the design. Prior Hi-Powers had a silly magazine safety thanks to military wishes. Their single-action trigger pull was often gritty and rough and most added the unevenness of a firing pin safety to the mix. Thanks to updated engineering and careful manufacturing, the magazine safety is gone, along with the firing pin safety, helping to contribute to a much better trigger pull.

Other changes include an updated hammer design, beveled mag well, redesigned and improved safety levers and bold sights. All of which neatly add up to the nicest "factory" Hi-Power I've handled. So why change things? That's easy — just look at the SA-35 as the perfect base gun to customize. It's already good, so now you can nudge things toward great.

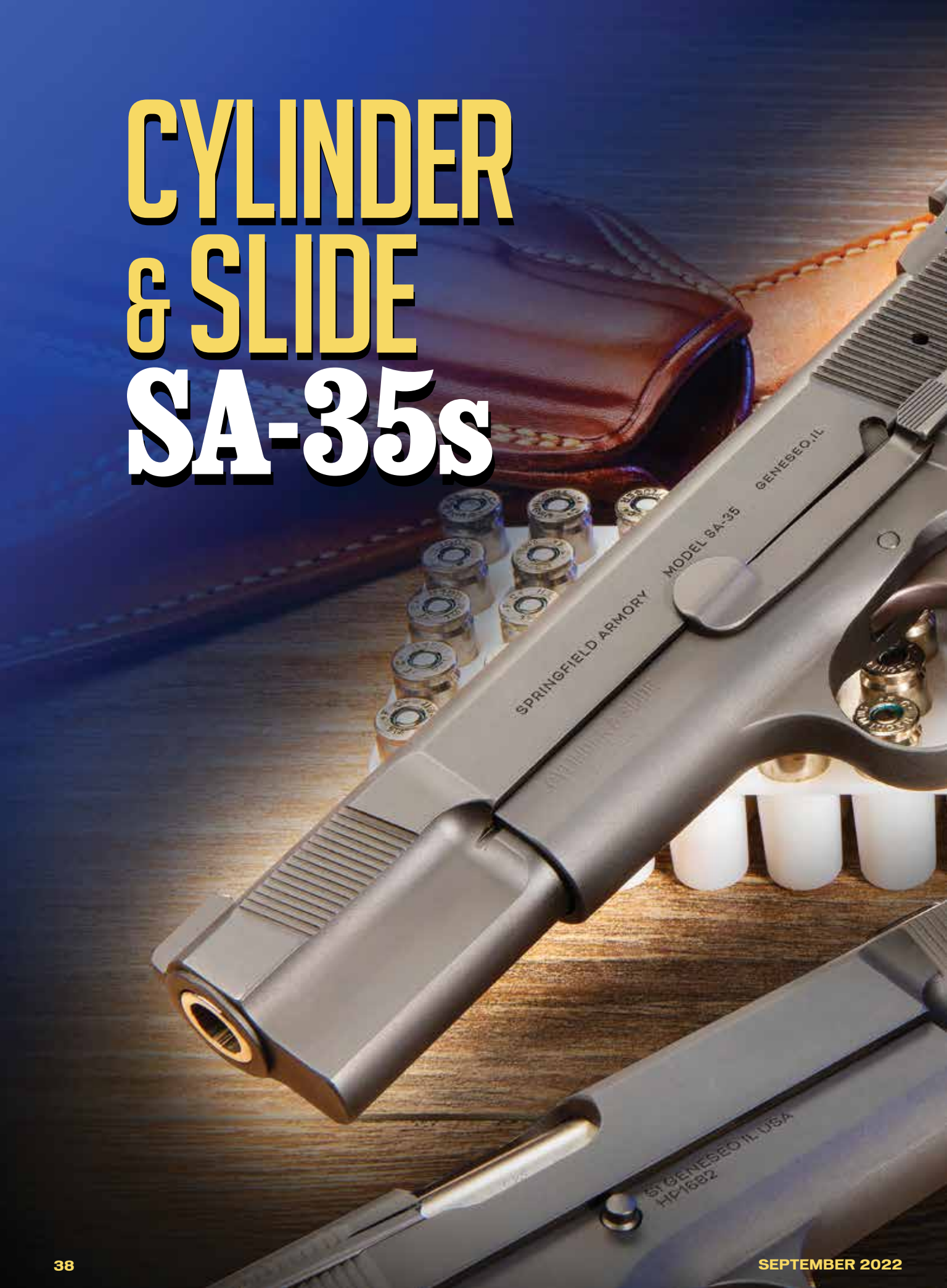


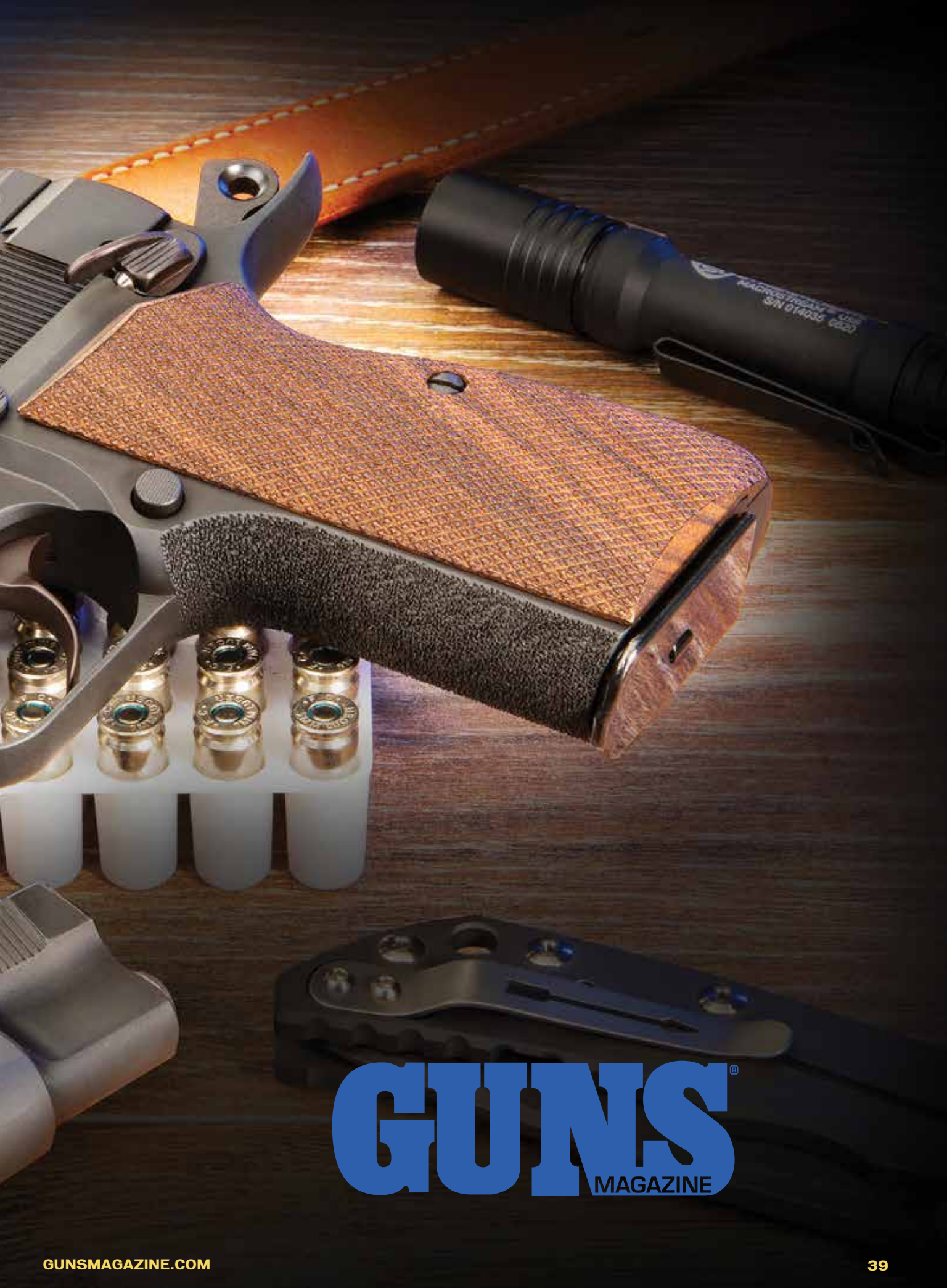




A The C&S Rollmark graces the rear of the SA-35. Yep, a 'stache graces the middle of the logo since C&S Owner Bill Laughridge is known for his signature cookie duster. B The upgraded sights include Heinie Ledge rear sights and C&S dovetailed fronts with 14 kt. gold beads installed. C The impeccable C&S beavertail allows a high and tight grip and really locks the gun into your hand.

CYLINDER & SLIDE SA-35s





GUNS® MAGAZINE



Wanna little more compact action? C&S also offers a ½" shorter bobbed version (left, bottom barrel) of the standard SA-35. The match-grade barrel (above), with throated feed ramp to ensure a reliably omnivorous diet, "shoots like gang-busters" and usually dishes out 1.25" to 2" groups at 25 yards.

C&S

Bill Laughridge, the irascible ne'er-do-well owner and founder of the Cylinder & Slide Shop in Fremont, Neb. is a card-carrying old school gunsmith of the sort you read stories about. Bill started in business in nineteen hundred and seventy eight, as they say, and I think photos were still all black and white then. Bill learned the business from the ground up, first as a gun-crazy kid like most of us, then, as the years passed, a genuine multi-talented and innovative gunsmith. Bill can fix anything — I know because I've seen him do it — and built the C&S shop from a dream into one of the leading custom shops in the world.

Bill's retro-1911 work recreating original first-production 1911 pistols is legendary, and what he knows about Hi-Powers could fill a big book. After working on them for so long, it's why Bill started to make C&S branded Hi-Power parts and today, the C&S shop is the go-to place to get what you need to keep your Hi-Power running. They're also celebrated for their no-holds-barred custom work on the platform.

I've hosted Bill at my house while he's taught 1911 build classes (and taken a few of them too) and we've spent the past 25 or more years talking guns into the wee hours too many times to remember. When he called me asking about Springfield's new SA-35, I challenged him to be the first to customize one.

"Hell," he said, "ask 'em to send me two and we'll do a short one and a full length one!" he said laughing. So I did, and he did — and here they are. But let's be upfront and explain Bill didn't do the work himself (he's much too important these days). His ace gunsmith, Ralph Gutekunst conducted the magic on these two SA-35s and after working with Bill for 25 years, Ralph knows a thing or three about the Hi-Power. I think it shows.

THE BASIC BUILDS

Essentially, I'd call these builds "identical" but with a few small differences. Both have a long list of customized features and parts, yielding all sorts of real-world benefits. Let's go over the goods, keeping in mind this applies to the "long" standard length SA-35, and the shorter version.

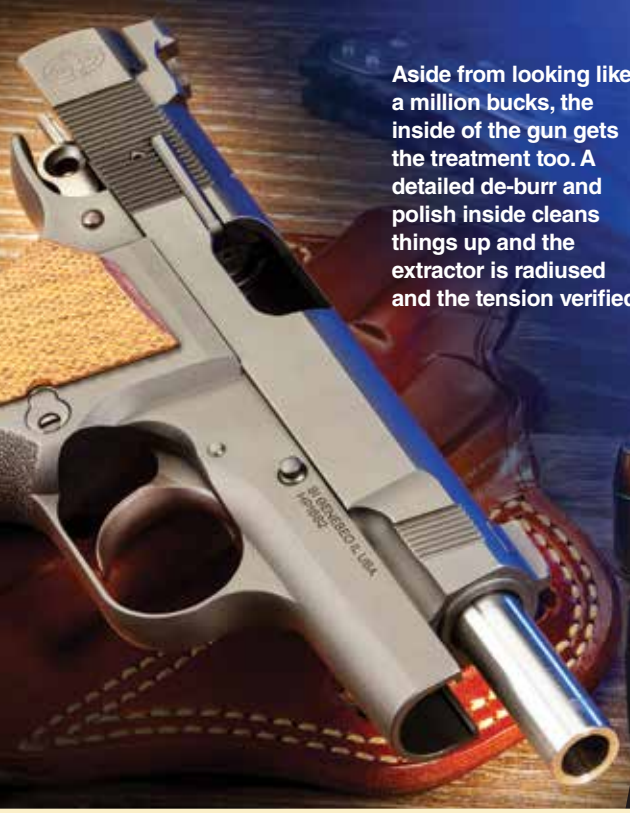
The match-grade barrel with hood and throated feed ramp helps make the guns shoot like gang-busters. Each gets a detailed de-burr and polish inside, the extractor is radiused and tension verified, the front and back straps are stippled and the mag well touched up. I want to talk about the stippling because it's got a unique feel to it. It sort of flows into your skin but isn't too aggressive, so it doesn't cause discomfort if you shoot it a lot. It makes the guns sort of just "stick" to your palm when you shoot and it's just great.

A highlight is installing the C&S beavertail to the frames. While SA modified the hammer to help negate hammer bite, the change in grip profile with the impeccably silver-brazed and blended beavertail is significant. It allows a high and tight grip and really locks the gun into your hand.

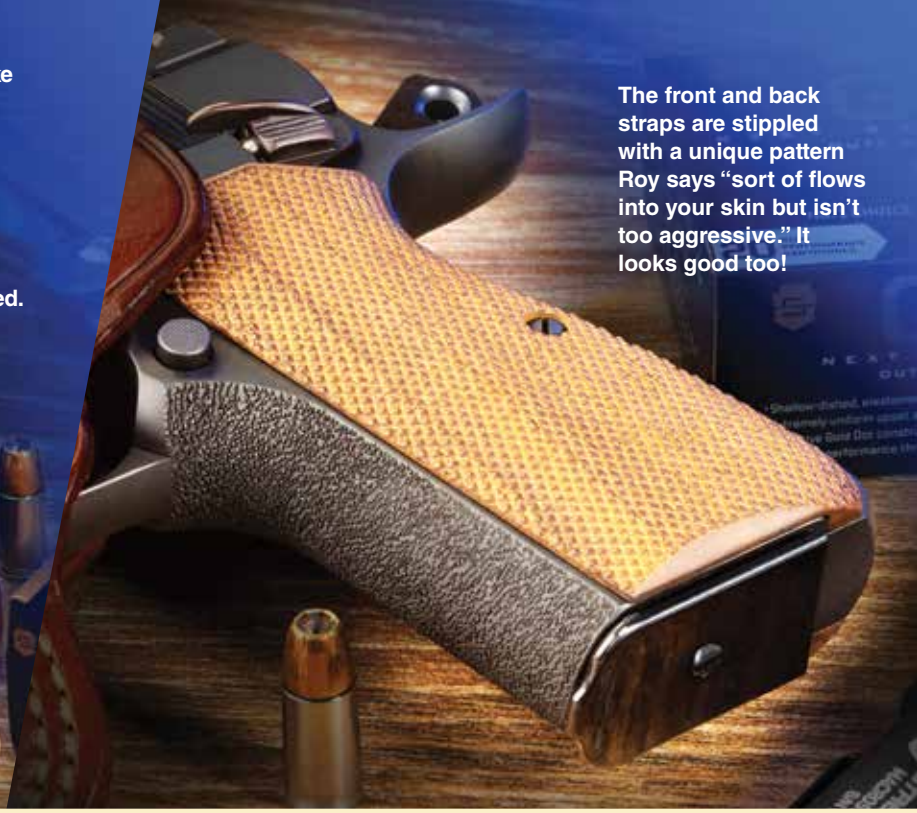
Ralph installed and fitted Heinie Ledge rear sights and C&S dovetailed fronts (with 14 kt. gold beads installed) on the guns, really changing things but in good ways. I particularly like the smooth, wide "combat" triggers they installed too. A wider trigger helps to make the SA trigger pull feel lighter than it really is. Although this action is crisp and smooth at about 4.5 lbs., the wide trigger is particularly enjoyable to use and enhances things.

EVEN MORE FUN

An interesting modification is adjusting the re-set to be shorter and in my opinion, more "feel-able" and "clickier" if that makes sense. There's no mistake when re-set occurs. There's also a trigger over-travel stop added.



Aside from looking like a million bucks, the inside of the gun gets the treatment too. A detailed de-burr and polish inside cleans things up and the extractor is radiused and the tension verified.



The front and back straps are stippled with a unique pattern Roy says "sort of flows into your skin but isn't too aggressive." It looks good too!

If you don't think this is important, wait until you try it. There's the break of the sear then essentially — no movement. In the hands of someone who knows how to control a trigger, it adds a layer of magic you simply need to experience to appreciate.

Forward serrations are added if you like that sort of thing, a complete carry bevel is done breaking any sharp edges, and the famous C&S combat safety is fitted. This one isn't ambi and frankly, I've never liked ambi safeties on my autos as the off-side one seems to get in the way and threatens to brush off in the holster. If you're a lefty, go for it though.

There's a Browning Hi-Power firing-pin retaining-plate (forged steel, made by C&S), which C&S replaces just to make sure things are perfect. A C&S BHP extractor and chamfered hammer (edges are broken) and sear set are also fitted. The result of the trigger/hammer and sear and action work is the nicest trigger I've ever felt on any Hi-Power, period. I'm impressed by Ralph's work.

MODEL SPECIFICS

One of the significant mods is shortening the slide on one gun. It's done seamlessly and if you didn't know it was a custom job, you'd never know. It's about 0.5" or a bit less and the result is like the C&S "Pathfinder" model they do, based on a shortened Hi-Power. It turns the gun into a handy, lighter and more compact carry gun and I recommend it heartily. The same short gun comes with the C&S hammer strut with a nut securing the spring (handy!) and a 20-lb. recoil spring to handle the shorter slide assembly. The full-sized gun comes with a C&S 18.5-lb. recoil spring due to the weight of the stock slide. Both guns are matte-blued and look serious and authoritative.

If you're wondering, wonder no more. The cost of the shorter gun is precisely $4,707.68 — on a C&S supplied gun. The full-sized gun runs $3,842.70, also on a C&S supplied gun. But being true customs, this can change if you want other things done or if you supply your own base gun. Be creative.

BUT WHY?

I have quite a bit of experience with the base SA-35 so I sort of put my own gun against these customs. The winner? Well, it was sort of a tie in an odd way. The C&S guns ran beautifully, had terrific triggers, were beautiful to behold and shot like lasers. Groups at 25 hovered in the 1.25" to 2" range if I behaved — and those triggers were sheer delight to use! The grip treatment made them easy to hold onto and the bold sights a joy to use. In short, peerless fun at every level. So why was it sort of a tie too?

The stock Springfield SA-35 also does its job well. It shoots a tad bigger groups, has a trigger not quite as sweet, begs me to put some skateboard tape on the grip straps and now I keep noticing how the re-set and over-travel wants attention too. But — it runs 100%, is a pleasure to use and own and is, in a word, great fun. So now what? I think the lesson is don't doubt your stock SA-35 as it'll take good care of you.

But if you want a treat, want to ramp up the game, want something to get some attention at the range or when your guncrank friends visit, don't be shy about calling the C&S Shop. Owning a true custom gun built to your wishes and dreams is great fun. It enhances a base gun, generating big numbers in the fun scale when you shoot it, show it off or just gaze at it.

There's a reason people buy a Mercedes — while still having a Ford truck in the carport too. GUNS

Cylinder-Slide.com



Royal Tiger Imports

ETHIOPIAN ARMS

Frank Jardim

Ethiopian Emperor Melenik II is credited with fighting back European colonial incursions at the turn of the 19th century and preserving Ethiopian independence. He was an able leader, diplomat and military strategist who realized he could not hold off invading European armies with spears and a few muzzleloaders. Ethiopian soldiers needed good guns and Melenik II wheeled-and-dealed to get them wherever he could.

Adequately armed, Ethiopia was capable of defending itself and was never successfully conquered and colonized by any European power. Italy came the closest in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War after defeating Emperor Selassie's Army in 1935 and forcing him into exile. However, thousands of his people waged a guerilla war in his name and denied Italy control of the majority of the countryside.

CHANGING TIDE

The scales tipped in Ethiopia's favor at the start of World War II. In 1941, British forces attacked the Italians (now



Ethiopia got these M48 and remarked Nazi K98 rifles from Yugoslavia after World War II.



A view of part of one storage warehouse showing Boer War era Lee-Metford rifles, late WWII No. 5 Enfield carbines and Cold War era Czech Vz 52 semi-automatic rifles.



Once freed from the yoke of Nazi tyranny, the Czechoslovakians took on a contract to make the K98s for Ethiopia. Such rifles hadn't been seen yet by American collectors!

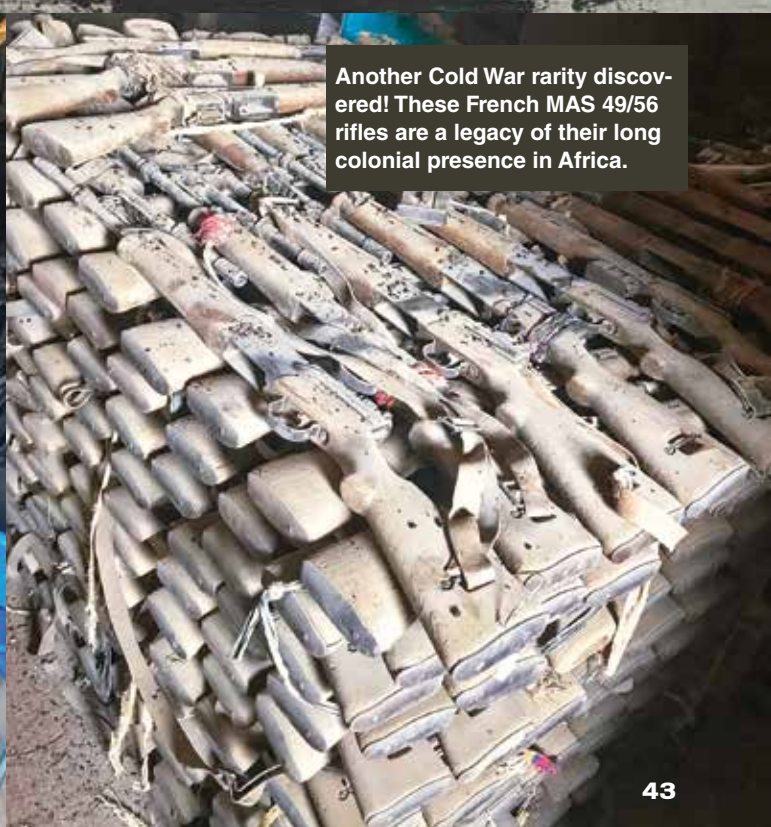
The Last Great Military Cache?

aligned with Nazi Germany) from their colonies in Sudan and Kenya; and Emperor Selassie returned to retake the country. When it comes to historical high drama and heroism, Ethiopian history from Melenik II through Selassie is about as thrilling as it gets. Now, thanks to Royal Tiger Imports, a number of the firearms used in Ethiopia by her soldiers and her adversaries are now available to American collectors.

There are few treasure troves of historic military arms as great, diverse and fascinating as the cache Uli Wiegand, president of Royal Tiger Imports (RTI), found and recovered in Ethiopia. Rumors of it had drifted around for years. Separating truth from fantasy was the starting point for an adventure consuming eight years of work and capital but resulted in the purchase of a collection of vintage military arms spanning flintlocks to Cold War machine guns, as well as a smorgasbord of civilian firearms confiscated after the communist Derg took over the country by force in 1974. One of the really engaging aspects of this arms cache, aside from the rock-solid provenance to Ethiopian martial history, is that it's a technological time capsule of now uncommon old patterns.

The Ethiopians sometimes marked their guns with the Orthodox Christian "Lion of Judea" symbol, and Amharic script indicating they were the property of the Emperor or Empress, but they rarely modified them except to reduce the barrel length. Most of their arms were never altered from their original European arsenal specifications which





Another Cold War rarity discovered! These French MAS 49/56 rifles are a legacy of their long colonial presence in Africa.





Ethiopian troops just after World War II (left) on parade with their new Czech contract K98s. Note the U.S. Army cartridge belt and combat suspenders. A trio of Austro-Hungarian M95 rifles (above), in remarkable shape for being over a century old. Many still have their WWI unit markings.



is why this cache is like a time capsule. For example, the Ethiopians bought surplus, black-powder cartridge, 11.3 x 52mm, Dutch Beaumont Model 1871/79 single-shot rifles in the late 1890s. Subsequently, virtually all the Beaumonts still in Dutch service were upgraded into repeaters and examples of unaltered single-shot rifles are now quite rare.

When Ethiopia bought surplus Austro-Hungarian M1895 Steyr-Mannlicher straight pull rifles, they kept them in the original 8x50mmR caliber while those M95 rifles remaining in circulation in Europe were almost all rechambered to 8x54mmR. Many of these M95 rifles still bear the marks of the Austro-Hungarian units that used them first. The time capsule factor enhances collector appeal of the Ethiopian cache in an extraordinary way you don't get from fresh looking, post-war arsenal-rebuilt surplus.

The cache was stored in several rather primitive, log framed, corrugated metal warehouses without lighting or environmental control but the arid climate helped preserve them. RTI bought everything and began the laborious process of sorting, cleaning, packing and shipping the best of it back to America. Among the most recent arrivals are American World War II vintage arms.

These French single-shot bolt-actions (left) were likely used by the Ethiopian Army in the decisive defeat of the invading Italians at the 1896 Battle of Adwa. The center rifle is an M1874 Gras, flanked by a pair of M1866/74 Chassepot-Gras conversions.



POST-WWII

During the Korean War, when Ethiopian soldiers fought alongside the other United Nations forces, they were equipped with American M1 rifles and carbines, M1 and M1928A1 Thompson submachine guns, M1918A2 Browning Automatic Rifles, water-cooled M1917 Browning heavy machine guns and M1919A4 and A6 light machine guns. Examples of all these were found still in storage. The machine guns were imported as demilitarized parts kits. The parts of each receiver were kept together during the ATF mandated torch-cutting demilitarization process, making it easier to build them up into legal semi-auto guns or dummy guns. Also, care was taken to preserve the markings.

Of special interest to collectors is the thoughtful manner in which the Browning light and heavy machine guns were demilitarized. Only the right side-plate was unriveted and destroyed, leaving the rest fully assembled and ready to display. From the left side it looks like a functional, complete gun and from the exposed right side, a technical study model.

In his day, Emperor Melenik II played the European powers against each other to amass a sizable arsenal of serviceable, if obsolete, black-powder cartridge military rifles. Among them were 10.75x58mm, Berdan II, single-shot bolt-action rifles from Imperial Russia. The Russians had no colonial designs on Africa but the Czar did not like the idea of Italy, a Roman Catholic country,



The Browning machine gun parts kits have only the right side-plate removed, making them excellent display guns as is or the basis for semi-auto rebuilds.

subjugating his fellow Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia. The French, whose African colonies bordered Ethiopia, sought to obstruct the plans of their Italian rivals.

From the national arsenals of France came M1874 Gras and M1866/74 Chassepot/Gras rifles and carbines, the latter being a conversion of the old paper cartridge M1866 Chassepot, of Franco-Prussian War fame, to take the French 11mm Gras metallic cartridge. With these single-shot weapons, the Ethiopians met and repelled invading Italian forces at the pivotal Battle of Adwa in 1896 and maintained their sovereignty. The guns used in the battle are now 130 to 140 years old, which makes it all the more amazing RTI found some still in storage. Holding one in your hands, it's hard not to feel a direct connection to the epic military events they were a part of.

BLACK POWDER BARGAINS

The obsolescent first-generation, small-bore repeating smokeless-powder bolt-action rifles of Europe's armies, some of them surplus from World War I, presented the Ethiopian military with an opportunity to make a technological upgrade on the cheap. From Germany came 8x57mm Gewehr Model 1888 rifles and carbines. From the vanquished and subsequently dissolved Austro-Hungarian Empire came Mannlicher Model M1888/90, M1888/95 and M95 straight pull bolt actions chambered in 8x50R. The M95 was the main battle rifle of Austro-Hungarian troops in World War I. From France came surplus M1886 Lebel and M1905/15 Berthier rifles.

Thousands of black-powder 10.4x47mm M1870/87 Vetterli repeaters were captured by the Ethiopians in the First Italo-Ethiopian War and put to use. In the Second Italo-Ethiopian War, the Italians lost the 6.5x52mm smokeless World War I-converted Vetterli M1870/87/15 rifles they brought with them to arm colonial troops as well as all their standard issue M91 Carcano rifles and carbines. The Ethiopians still had stacks of these guns in storage.

British rifles, from Boer War era Lee-Metfords to No. 5 "Jungle" carbines, were also discovered. These were among the best preserved guns with many World War I-dated No. 1 Mk III SMLE rifles and P14 Enfield rifles present.

Ethiopia was not a wealthy nation. For reasons of economy, they bought most of their military arms on the surplus market and examples of just about everything were represented in the cache RTI recovered. The Ethiopians bought Cz 52 semi-auto rifles from the Czechs, SAFN-49 semi-autos from the Belgians and M24/47 and remarked German 98K bolt actions from the Yugoslavians. Somehow, they got World War I American M1917 Enfield rifles.

While the majority of Ethiopian arms were used surplus, there were notable exceptions in the new Mauser model 1898 based bolt-action models contracted for by Emperor Selassie's order before and after World War II. In Belgium, *Fabrique National* produced their M1924 and M1930 rifles with Ethiopia's national crest and the Lion of Judah stamp on the receiver ring.





Stacks of Austro-Hungarian M1888/90 and M1895 Steyr-Mannlicher straight pull rifles (above), surplus bought by Ethiopia after the First World War. Holy smokes! That's a lot of rare British Enfield No. 5 "Jungle Carbines." (below) Some were in excellent condition despite the dust.

Mauser in Germany made Model 1933 and Model 1934 rifles for Ethiopia too; the former with the Mauser banner on the receiver ring and the Lion of Judah on the side, and the latter marked with Ethiopia's national crest like the FN rifles. After the war, Emperor Selassie contracted with the Czechoslovakians to build 98K Mausers for Ethiopia.

Made on the same equipment the occupied Czechs were forced to make weapons for the Nazis with, the Ethiopian guns are identical to World War II guns except for the markings and the addition of a unique stock disc depicting St. George slaying the dragon. Few, if any, of these guns had ever found their way to American collectors before the RTI cache.

LATE-MODEL ARMS

The most modern arms were 7.62 NATO British FAL and German G-3 select-fire battle rifles purchased for the army shortly before the Derg coup, and loads of Soviet machine guns starting with World War II era PPSH-41 and PPS-43 submachine guns, right through RPD light machine guns and AK pattern rifles. These were the weapons funneled to the Derg at Moscow's direction as the U.S.S.R. sought to expand its sphere of influence in Africa. American collectors hoping to see these guns imported as demilitarized parts kits will be disappointed to learn that because of their Soviet origin, they aren't allowed in.

The good news is there are still many treasures from this Ethiopian cache yet to be imported, including some of the oldest weapons found. They included flintlock and percussion rifles and muskets dating from the mid-19th century. These muzzleloaders were used by the soldiers of rival kings before Ethiopia existed as a unified nation. The best way to stay appraised of what is currently available is to visit the RTI website and sign up for email alerts. You just never know what will show up next from Ethiopia or when the last of it will be absorbed into the collector market. GUNS

RoyalTigerImports.com





10mm M&P

Massad Ayoob
Photos: Gail Pepin

The Smith & Wesson Military & Police series of polymer-framed semiautomatic pistols is approaching its 20th year. Having been chambered in 9mm, .40 S&W, .45 ACP, .357 SIG and even .22 Long Rifle, S&W gave us a Christmas present by announcing it in 10mm Auto. Built on the .45 frame, it still has excellent trigger reach along with a number of Gen 2.0 features and some of its own.

Built rugged for the notoriously potent 10mm, it stays relevant to the times with a carry optics cut and a set of mounting plates as standard equipment besides the usual M&P grip-adaptation accessories. Accordingly, it has the high CORE (Competition Optics Ready Equipment) suppressor-type sights to allow co-witnessing through a red dot sight window. It's not going to "auto-forward" the slide when you slam in a magazine as early 9mm versions did. Like almost all modern service-configuration pistols, it comes with a light rail.

The pistol comes with your choice of 4.0" or 4.6" barrel and commensurate length slide, and with or without an ambidextrous frame-mounted thumb safety. Ours was the longer model, complete with thumb safety. They come with two all-steel 15-round magazines. All have usable



The tightest group at 25 yards was Federal Trophy Bonded hunting ammo.



10mm M&P (above) is a direct competitor to the GLOCK 20 (below).

Step Up To The Big Time

slide serrations up front, which I can't recommend but a lot of consumers like.

The grip stippling on our test gun, serial number NKX9963, was aggressive. A tight grasp in dry-fire was moderately uncomfortable, but in rapid fire the pistol didn't move at all within my grasp — and that's what the rough stipple is for. Interestingly, once the shooting started, the discomfort disappeared or at least went unnoticed.

SHOOTING THE 10MM M&P

Dunno 'bout y'all, but when testing shooting characteristics, trigger pull is very high up on my list. One selling point S&W is emphasizing on this pistol is its new flat-faced trigger, a trendy thing right now. My friend John Strayer, a Five-Gun Master in IDPA competition and winner of many state and regional championship titles commented, "I got away from the M&P because I didn't like that two-piece curved trigger, but this is an M&P trigger I like!"

An early complaint with M&P triggers was mushy reset and S&W promises a crisper one on this pistol. Trigger feel is based on sense of touch and thus very subjective, but I didn't find the reset especially palpable, particularly in rapid fire.

Measured on a Lyman Digital Trigger Gauge, trigger weight averaged 5.418 lbs. at the "toe" or bottom edge

of the trigger and 6.175 lbs. from the center, where our finger is actually likely to be. The break was clean. I for one was happy with it.

One thing I've never cared for on the M&P was difficulty in hitting the slide release lever on slide-lock reloads, which is indisputably faster than the slide tug method. On this gun, I was happy to find the lever protruded enough to make the faster technique simple and positive. Empty magazines always dropped cleanly and fresh mag insertion was always positive, thanks to the tapered top of the mag and the well-flared magazine well.

I loved those big, high iron sights. They gave an excellent sight picture and drew cleanly from a Leather Arsenal Summer Surprise leather IWB holster built for a Springfield XD45 long-slide with high sights. I could see the high, non-ramped front sight being a snag point in a skeletonized Yaqui Slide type holster, though. The high rear sight worked well against the edge of the belt for emergency one-handed "wounded defender" slide operation.

The thumb safety was reasonably ergonomic and more positive than the ones on some earlier M&Ps. With the popularity of appendix carry, more shooters are appreciating this feature. I've documented enough cases where the bad guy got the good guy's gun and couldn't shoot him because he couldn't find "the switch that turns on the gun," so I appreciate manual safeties. I applaud S&W for giving you the choice.



Assorted RDS mounting plates come with the 10mm M&P.

Recoil? If you've shot this type of pistol with .45 ACP +P (185-grain at 1,140 fps) you've pretty much shot the 10mm version with a 180-grain 10mm bullet going just a bit faster. The heavier "bear loads," of course, will kick more. Light training loads will be pussycats by comparison.

As noted earlier, the sharply stippled grip was more help than hurt when shooting. I could see it getting



Newest M&P is the only 16-shot 10mm with optional manual safety.

tiresome for a thousand-round-a-day training course, but I don't know anyone who takes full-power 10mms to those events. Speaking as an elderly cripple, when I go to those things, I go down by, oh, about one millimeter. A thousand rounds of full-power Ten a day isn't training so much as its Iron Man Competition. Frankly, all on the test team who fired the M&P 10mm found it fun to shoot.

Carry? I wore it for a day in the Leather Arsenal holster. No issues. A T-shirt kept the stippling from being a problem, which I suspect it would have been if carried under the tee and tight against bare skin.

ACCURACY

Testing was my standard protocol here: three loads from as many different makers, fired two-handed from a solid Caldwell Matrix rest on a concrete bench at 25 yards. Five-shot groups to see what each gun/load combo would do from experienced hands in perfect, calm conditions, and an additional measurement of the best three with each because testing has shown this closely duplicates what all five would have done from a machine rest.

For a training load, I used 180-grain jacketed truncated cone Sellier & Bellot, rated for 1,165 feet per second (fps) velocity and 544 foot-pounds of energy (fpe). All five went into 4.85", with four of those in 2.35" and the best three in 1.60". All measurements were center-to-center of the bullet holes to the nearest 0.05".

The personal defense exemplar was Hornady's Critical Duty round, its hollow cavity filled with a pointy polymer tip. Hornady specs this load at 1,160 fps for its 175-grain payload, designed to be "barrier blind," delivering 523 fpe at the muzzle. The five-shot group measured 3.45" while the best three went 2.20".

Our hunting load was branded as such: Federal Premium Medium Game Trophy Bonded, comprising a 180-grain soft nose semi-jacketed right up to its broad, flat meplat. Federal specifies 1,275 fps and 650 fpe for this round. It proved to be the most accurate of the test. The whole five shots formed a 2.55" group, four of those being in 1.45" and the tightest trio measuring a mere eight-tenths of one inch.

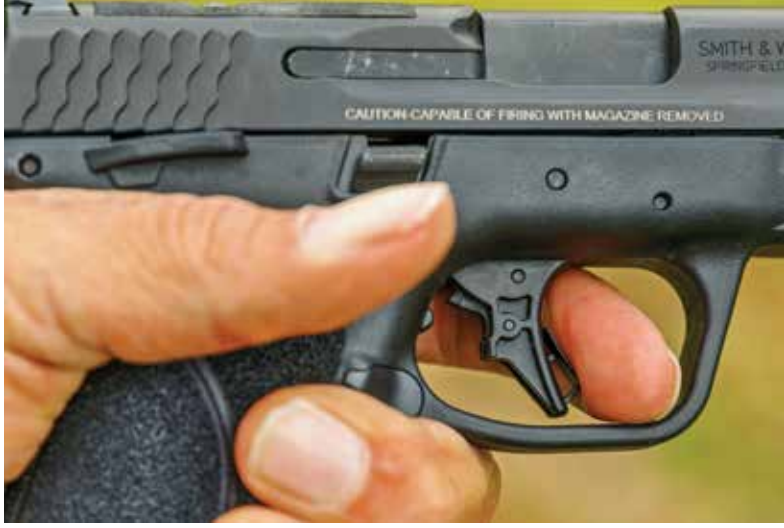
All grouped left. The aforementioned John Strayer was the first of us to diagnose why. The front sight was definitely right of center in its dovetail. I can't blame S&W for this for sure. The test gun had been well used before it got to me, as witness some smutz on one of the magazines, and a previous tester may simply have moved the sight because he or she was shooting to the right. Drifting it in the dovetail is an easy fix in any case. The sights were dead nuts-on for elevation with the Federal load, and pretty close for the other two.

BOTTOM LINE

Everyone who shot our test 10mm M&P liked it. With ambi slide stop, safety levers and reversible magazine release, the pistol proved totally southpaw-friendly. The ammo drought prevented a marathon torture test, but with three figures worth of "mild to wild" 10mm through it, we experienced 100% reliability.

If you're looking to find out what the resurgence of the 10mm pistol is all about, the M&P is a good place to start and a good value at $665 MSRP for the variation we tested. GUNS

Smith-Wesson.com



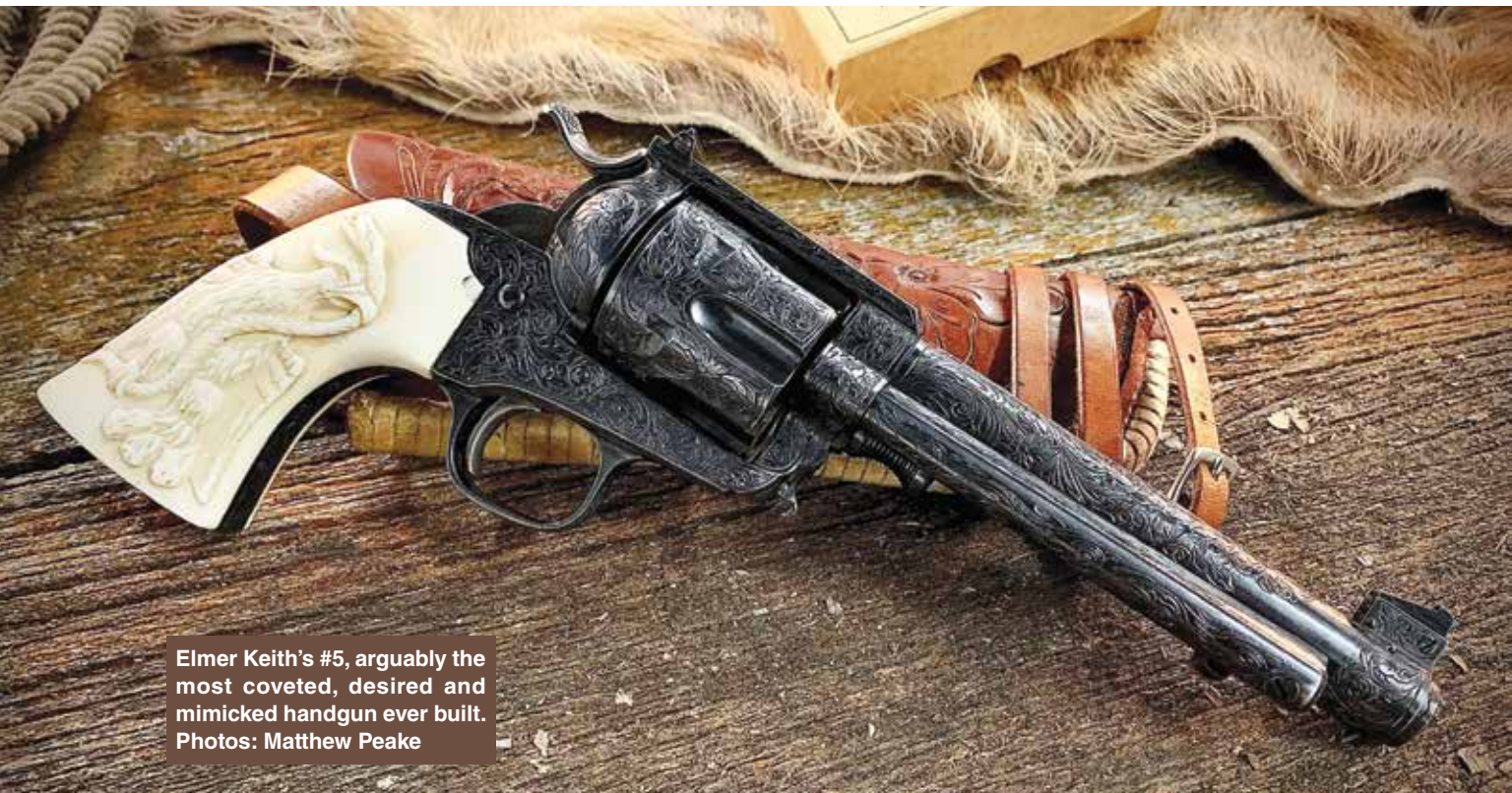


Trigger reach (above) was excellent, allowing distal joint placement for leverage if desired. High rear sight (below) enhances emergency one-handed slide manipulation.



Here's another fancy custom by Tyler Gun Works, influenced by the #5.

The Influence of ELMER KEITH'S #5



Elmer Keith's #5, arguably the most coveted, desired and mimicked handgun ever built. Photos: Matthew Peake



The #5's influence can definitely be seen here (top to bottom): A Ruger factory Bisley in .480 Ruger, a Magnum Research #5 BFR in .500 Maximum, a .475 Linebaugh built by John Linebaugh on a Ruger Bisley.

The Gun That "Started The Conversation"

Jeff "Tank" Hoover

In the May 1929 issue of *American Rifleman*, Elmer Keith wrote his famous dissertation, "The Last Word." In it, Keith describes the virtues of his famous #5 sixgun, a custom job built on a Colt SAA platform modified to Elmer's specifications. It made the gun more user friendly for his daily tasks as a cow puncher. The most distinguishing characteristic of the #5 is the grip frame comprised of blending a Colt Bisley backstrap mated to the front strap/trigger guard of a Colt SAA.

Elmer also demanded adjustable target sights for this sixgun, allowing him to dial-in his handloads for distant targets. We know Elmer was capable of hitting targets out to 700 yards routinely. He also wanted a locking cylinder base-pin, preventing base-pin jump from recoil, which effectively rendered the gun useless if it happened.

In a nutshell, Elmer desired an accurate, reliable sixgun capable of shooting heavy handloads accurately and the #5 fitting the bill perfectly. Elmer set the stage for people to mimic or build custom guns to their own specifications.

THE BISLEY NAME

The famous Bisley Matches date back to the 19th century and are associated with the Victorian-era clubhouse first built in 1865, then moving to its current Bisley location in 1895.

The matches challenged shooters to wring the most out of their guns and shooting skills. Colt provided an edge, releasing its Target Model in 1894. A specialty gun, it had a flat top, complete with drift-adjustable rear sights and removable blade front sight. The Target Model also had a funny-shaped grip.

The Target Colt proved itself at the Bisley Matches, later becoming commonly known as the Colt Bisley — after further refinements were made to the grip-frame and hammer. Thereafter, the "funny"-gripped gun was associated

with the Bisley name and appears on guns from a range of makers. The Bisley grip-frame, namely its backstrap, is the heart and soul of #5-style sixguns.

THE RUGER BISLEY

Bill Ruger proved those thinking him foolish wrong on several occasions. Bringing out his rendition of the Bisley in 1984 is but one example. Not a true copy, it has a fuller grip than Colt's version, with less radius on the inner strap. I got my first Ruger Bisley after years of shooting "heavy" .45 Colt handloads with "Ruger-only" recipes. Traditional plow-handle Ruger revolvers are small in my hand, the shape not conducive to managing heavy recoil.

Ruger's Bisley grip-frame fixed the plow-handled knuckle-basher, giving my hand — and many others — more grip to hold onto. More importantly, the grip angle is different. Now, recoil comes straight back into the meaty part of my palm, saving my knuckle in the process. Additionally, the stylish drooping curve of the Bisley hammer accommodates one-handed cocking during target shooting while also adding to its stylish good looks!

The Bisley is my favorite factory grip design, especially amongst Rugers in big-bore boomer calibers. It's no surprise custom builders like John Linebaugh use the Ruger Bisley model as their platform for their custom builds.

MAGNUM RESEARCH

Around 2015, Magnum Research added their rendition of the Bisley grip frame as an option to their BFR line. A few years ago, I tested Magnum Research's version of Elmer Keith's #5 in .500 Linebaugh. Using their version of the Bisley grip frame makes shooting the heavy-recoiling big-bores much more comfortable and manageable. It's nice seeing other manufacturers follow suit with this style of grip frame.

Magnum research also offers a locking base-pin latch from their custom shop, just like Elmer's on his original #5. It is a very cool offering not seen or even offered by many builders.

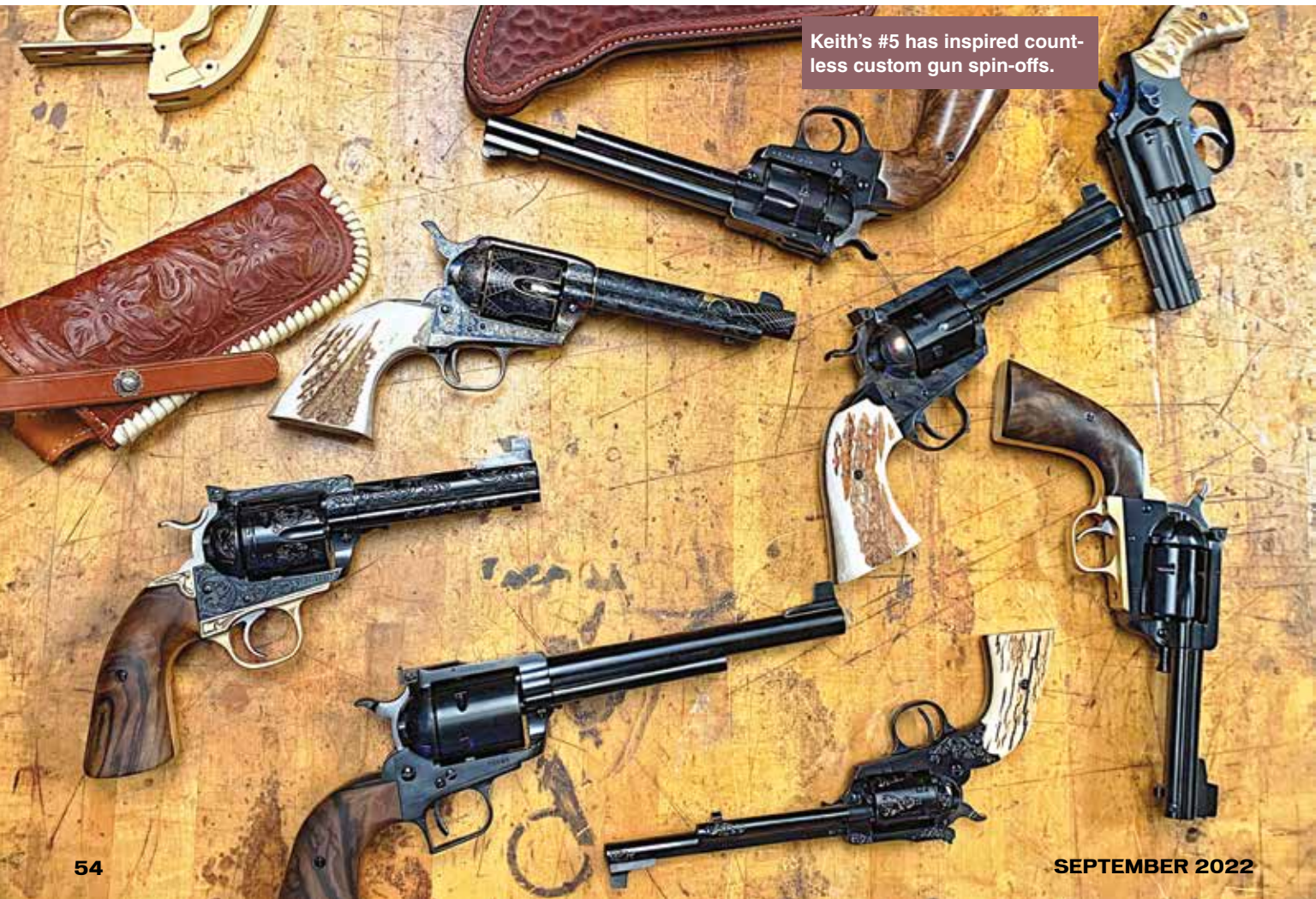
TYLER GUN WORKS

Well-known custom builder Bobby Tyler of Tyler Gun Works utilizes brass grip frames from Ronnie Wells on his interpretation of #5 builds. The brass grip frames beautifully accent blued frames of the guns. By adding engraving, it really makes things "pop" on his beautiful builds. While not a true copy of #5 *per se*, you can definitely see the influence on Bobby's guns. His use of engraving, metal finishes and the blending of brass to blued-steel adds style and grace to his custom builds.

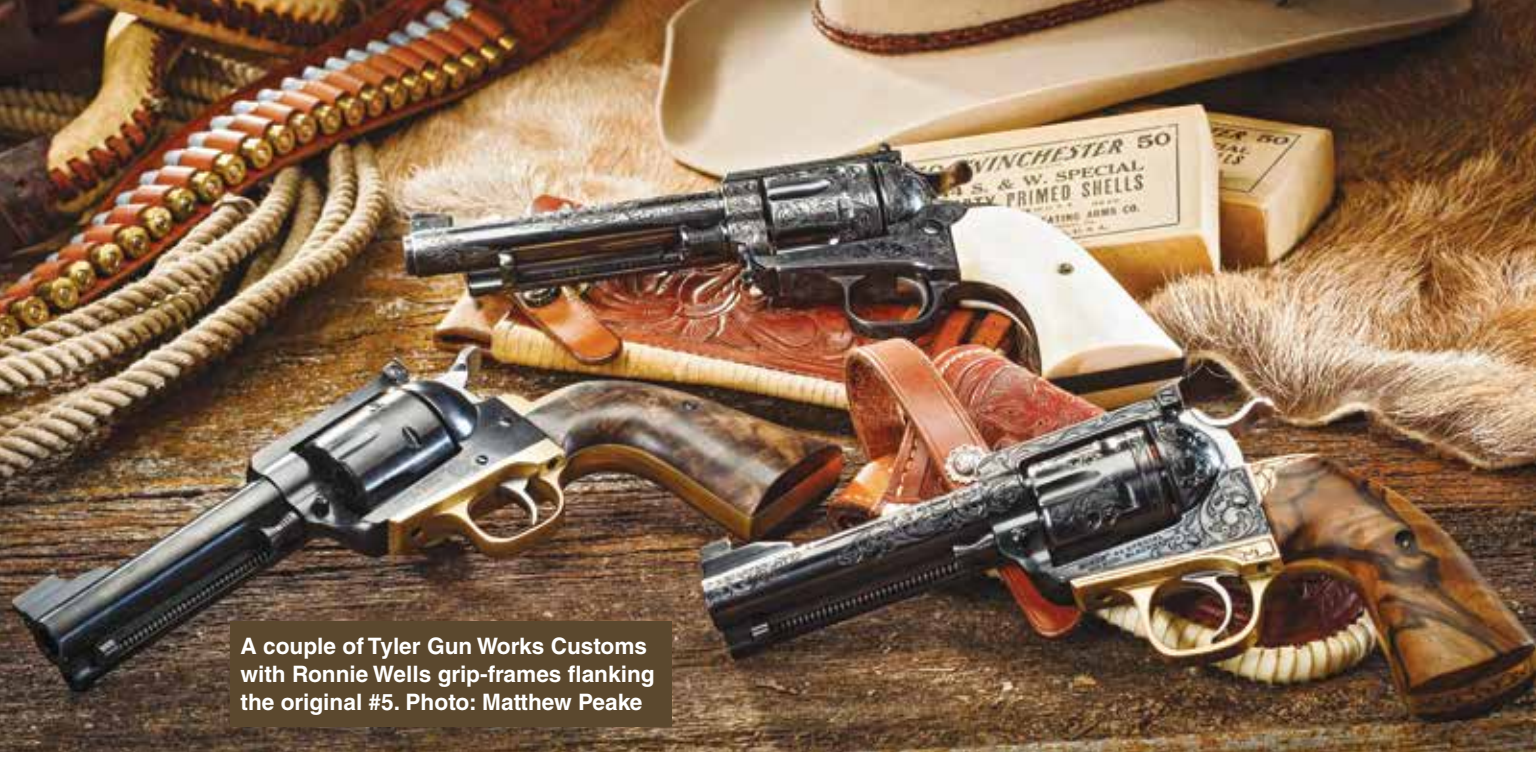
Besides being beautiful works of art, Tyler's guns are wonderful shooters, too. Bobby perfectly times and tunes each gun, as well as giving them his accuracy package.

SIZE MATTERS

As mentioned, the first thing people notice on the #5 is the grip frame. Harold Croft, Elmer's friend and fellow gun connoisseur, used R.F. Sedgley's design on his #3 custom gun consisting of a Colt Bisley backstrap mated with the Colt SAA front strap/trigger guard.



Keith's #5 has inspired countless custom gun spin-offs.



A couple of Tyler Gun Works Customs with Ronnie Wells grip-frames flanking the original #5. Photo: Matthew Peake

Now remember, while Elmer's reputation was larger than life, his physical stature was on the small side, having a mere 5-½-sized boot.

I'm sure Elmer's hands were on the small size too so the #5 grip-frame wouldn't feel comfortable for everyone. This is where a proper grip-frame comes in. By acknowledging the many different shapes and sizes of hands out there, there is a definite need for different style grip-frames.

GRIP-FRAME GURU

Ronnie Wells is the grip-frame guru of the handgunner world. I guarantee he has the perfect grip-frame to fit your hand and tame recoil whenever shooting the big boomers. Or, if you want a different, cool looking grip-frame for a custom build, he can accommodate you there, too. Ronnie offers over 300 current grip-frames and can size up most people's grip-frame needs with a 2-minute phone conversation.

Ronnie offers brass and aluminum grip-frames. He told me each grip-frame goes through a total of 147+ different cuts on a CNC machine while being built.

For the #5 grip-frame alone, Ronnie has 64 different variants to choose from. First there's old- or new-model-style Blackhawk. Next is thickness of frame, 0.500" or 0.440". Then there's Bisley, Dragoon, OM, or NM shaped trigger guards. Other considerations are amount of space from rear of trigger guard from your knuckle. If you're going to build a custom gun, give him a call. You won't be disappointed.


Here's a small sample from the 300 different grip-frames Ronnie Wells offers.

SUMMATION

While many want to mimic a #5-styled sixgun, there are other options available that may fit your needs better. Get your hands on a #5 grip-frame before committing to one. After examining Elmer's #5, for my hand it should have been a tad longer so my pinkie could also grip the frame, providing more comfort and control.

Having adjustable, sturdy sights is also a must if you demand top-notch accuracy. Also, being well-balanced makes its weight appear lighter. Elmer's #5 was deceptively light when first picking it up. It was a natural pointer, too, with sights automatically lining up when aiming. These are the traits to strive for with a custom build. As it's been said, Elmer's influence was "merely getting the conversation started" for custom builds.

We can see the #5's influence in several factory-made sixguns, too. Luckily, we have more resources than ever before for having our dream guns built today, thanks to the influence of Elmer's #5. GUNS

RUGER *Old Army*

John Taffin

Colt had produced five Dragoon Models from 1847 to the early 1850s, consisting of the original Walker, the Whitneyville Walker Dragoon/Transition Model, and then the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Model Dragoons. All of these used 0.45" round balls, and being percussion pistols, were loaded from the front of the cylinder with powder and ball. Percussion caps were then placed on the nipples at the back of the cylinder.

The first four models all had the square-backed trigger guard Bill Ruger later used on his Super Blackhawk. However, the 3rd Model Dragoon switched to the round trigger guard. The original Colt 1851 Navy also had a square-back trigger guard. However, the grip frame was the size and shape that would ultimately be found on the Colt Single Action. So, for the Super Blackhawk, Bill Ruger basically used a grip frame that Colt had dropped more than 100 years earlier.

CAP AND BALL REDUX

By the 1970s, black powder shooting had become a renaissance of sorts and Bill Ruger did not miss this. The replica percussion pistols of the time were not always of the best quality and strength so Ruger set out to produce a high quality cap-and-ball sixgun. The result was the Ruger Old Army that carried on where the Colt Dragoons left off. However, at least in my mind, Bill made two mistakes. I am one of those who found very little help with the Super Blackhawk Grip frame with the square-backed trigger guard pounding the knuckle of the middle finger of my shooting hand with every shot. The same grip frame on the much milder shooting Colt Dragoon suited me just fine. I am of the opinion Bill Ruger should have equipped his original Old Army with the Dragoon/Super Blackhawk grip frame and he should also have called it the Ruger Old Army Dragoon.

The Super Blackhawk grip frame in brass was offered as an option on the Ruger Old Army and my most-used Old Army — which is a true match-winning pistol — has

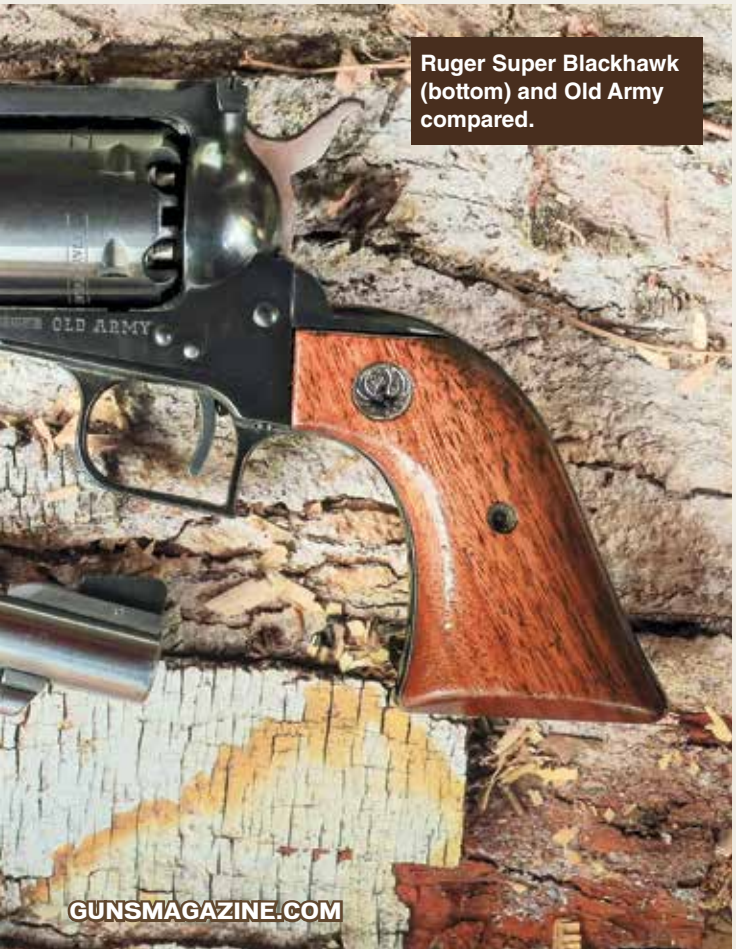




Colt's last Dragoons were the 3rd Model .44 . Note the round trigger guards.

The Last Dragoon

been so equipped. Ruger wisely fitted his Old Army with excellent adjustable sights offering both blue and stainless steel versions. Two of my other Ruger Old Army sixguns, one blue and one stainless steel, have been equipped with Super Blackhawk grip frames. One blued and one stainless-steel-style nickel-plated, for my hand they work just fine.



Ruger Super Blackhawk (bottom) and Old Army compared.

With the arrival of the great popularity of Cowboy Action Shooting, Ruger furnished fixed-sighted models of the Old Army with 7-½" versions in both blue and stainless as well as 5-½" stainless steel sixguns. I used a pair of the latter in competition for Cowboy Action Shooting, while I used the Dragoon-gripped longer-barreled adjustable-sighted models for competing in black powder matches.

Ruger's Old Army was a completely modernized version of the old-style cap-and-ball sixguns in several ways. The chamber of the old Army is tapered to provide a very tight seal and help prevent a double discharge but it is still a good idea to use a wad or top off each chamber with a black powder lube. I make my own with beeswax mixed with mutton tallow. This not only helps prevent a second chamber from igniting but perhaps even more importantly, helps to keep the bore clean. The Ruger Old Army takes a larger diameter bullet than the standard 0.451" or 0.454" size of Colt or Remington be they original or replica, working best with a 0.457" round ball or conical bullet.

The conical bullets give excellent accuracy in my 7-½" Old Army. Using a 225-grain conical over 35 grains by volume of Pyrodex P results in a muzzle velocity of 870 fps with six shots in 1" at 25 yards. Energy-wise, this makes the Old Army the equivalent of .45 ACP Hardball. This accuracy, of course, is aided by the excellent adjustable sights on the Old Army. Using 40 grains of Pyrodex P or Triple-7 FFFg resulted in muzzle velocities are well over 1,000 fps with a 0.457" round ball with excellent accuracy. Now we have surpassed .45 ACP



The Walker of 1847 (top gun) was quickly improved to the Whitneyville Walker Dragoon, Transitional Model.



Targets fired with the 7-½" Ruger Old Army — no lack of accuracy here, either!

Hardball and are in the +P range using a percussion sixgun with black powder.

FALLING DOWN

One of the problems with both original and replica percussion pistols, especially the Walker and some of the Dragoons, was the propensity for the loading lever to unlatch and fall down when the sixgun was fired. My original Remington replica did this quite often. With the Old Army, the loading lever is positively locked into place and will not drop down upon firing. The loading lever, rammer and cylinder base pin are an inter-related assembly that can be removed from the sixgun with a simple turn of the large screw in the front of the frame. This is easily accomplished by using a coin as a screwdriver. This loading lever exerts the best leverage in seating the ball over the powder of any percussion revolver ever produced.

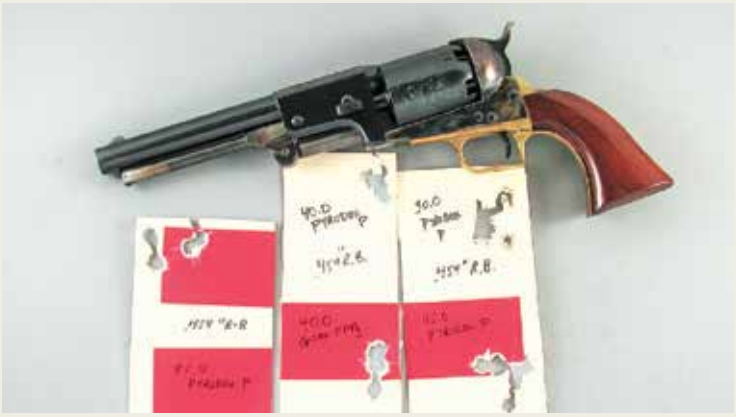
The Old Army was built on the Old Model action and until production ceased, they remained the only Ruger single-action with a traditional half cock and no transfer



Grip frame options for the Ruger Old Army include (left to right) nickel-plated Super Blackhawk, blued Super Blackhawk, standard stainless steel XR3-RED and brass Super Blackhawk



The Colt Dragoon has three basic parts. You'd have to carry a spare loaded cylinder, but the idea of "speed loading" your sixgun is over 150 years old!





Targets fired with the Colt Dragoon (above). No lack of accuracy here. Targets (below) fired with the 5-½" Ruger Old Army. Targets fired with the 5-½" Ruger Old Army.

bar safety. This is one traditional-action sixgun that can be carried safely with six rounds as there are safety recesses in between each chamber for resting the hammer. They should always be used unless the hammer is resting upon an empty chamber.

Stainless steel nipples are set deeply into the cylinder to help prevent fragments of fired caps falling in the mechanism or behind the cylinder, thus causing a jam. This has never occurred with any Old Army revolver I have used. The Old Army is also the only percussion revolver that can be dry-fired as the hammer nose is designed to clear the nipples by 0.005".

A few years back I started having misfires with my original Ruger Old Army. I replaced the factory nipples with custom bronze nipples and now all of my other Ruger Old Army sixguns have been fitted with stainless steel SliX-Shot nipples from SliX-Springs.

The original Old Army from the early 1970s was offered in both blue and stainless with adjustable sights. Production ceased in 2008. At the time, prime examples could be easily found for around $300–$350. Expect to pay triple that today. The last Old Army offered before they were dropped from production were both blued and stainless-steel fixed-sighted 5-½" barreled easy packin' sixguns. Most cartridge shooters seem to prefer shorter barrels as witness Ruger's great selling Vaquero is about 97% short barrels and only 3% is in 7-½" lengths.

Until the arrival of the 5-½" Old Army, most cap-and-ball shooters had been restricted to the longer barrels on factory guns, or they had to have them custom cut to shorter lengths. The Old Army makes a most-attractive shorter barrel sixgun. The Old Army short barrel was a good starting point and now both the Remington New Model Army and the Colt Models 1851, 1860 and 1861 are all available with shorter barrels.

GETTING DIRTY

When shooting black powder, especially if each chamber is topped off with a black powder lubricant, things tend to get a little messy and greasy. This is part of the fun, however, with smooth grips being matched up with black powder-fouled grease, things not only get a little messy, they also become a mite slippery. This is where it is nice to have checkered grips and even the Eagle Gunfighter Grips little shelf at the top of each grip panel that gives us something to hold on to. There is not much recoil, relatively speaking, with a percussion sixgun such as the Old Army. However, there is enough to make the gun slip in the hand. The checkering on the grips helps to prevent this from happening.

These Old Armies perform well with Speer's 0.457" round ball, Thompson's Lubed Wad and CCI's #11 percussion cap. My normally used three powders are used in both 35.0 and 40.0 — *by volume* — charges. Those powders are Goex FFFg black powder, Hodgdon's Triple-7 FFFg and Pyrodex P. Charges are measured with a Thompson/Center powder measure. With 35.0 grains by volume of Triple-7 FFFg, muzzle velocity is 925 fps with six shots in 1-⅜" at 20 yards. Moving up to 40.0 grains of Triple-7 FFFg yields 1,130 fps and a group of 1-¾". These velocities are right at, or even exceed, the same obtained with the longer barreled Old Army. These loads are not necessarily recommended for Italian replicas of Colt or Remington percussion revolvers.

Some sixgunners do use the Old Army for hunting and this can be done within reason. If a standard .45 Colt load or a +P .45 ACP load would be appropriate for whatever is being hunted, then the Old Army is also appropriate. **GUNS**

Ruger.com

WHAT'S IN YOUR POCKET?
AMERICANCOP.COM EDITOR SHARES HIS SECRETS

Erick Gelhaus

So, *GUNS Editor* Brent reached out to me — as the editor of AmericanCop.com, the newest editor in the FMG world — and asked I go over my own kit of everyday gear. While I'm a retired cop, I'm not interested in doing cop stuff anymore but paying attention to the realities of the world today, there are times when I'll scale it up.



This is the gear Erick carries on a regular basis, all of which is based "… on an honest assessment of *my* world.

STOP THE BLEED

After the military and before becoming a cop, I was an emergency medical technician working on a search and rescue team and an ambulance so carrying medical supplies is the norm in my life. For this, Live The Creed has an easy-to-carry pocket trauma kit. It's a wallet-sized pocket kit holding QuikClot gauze, a SWAT-T tourniquet, adhesive dressings, gloves and a couple other handy things.

LIGHT IT UP

You can't identify things if you can't see them — and you can't see them if they aren't illuminated. How do you illuminate? With a flashlight of course. Ever been in a building when the power went out? What about trying to find something in the dark?

I've bought and used a bunch of lights over the years. Sadly, I've lost many but my day-in, day-out light is a TerraLux TT-1. It runs off a single CR123 cell. I can attest it's water-resistant, given the number of times I've washed it by mistake. This model has worked for me for several years.



A small, purpose-built med kit and a notebook holder for things Erick needs to remember.

Unfortunately, the TT-1 is no longer made, so as an alternative I'd recommend Streamlight's Pro-Tac 1L-1AA for a general-purpose light.

POCKET TOOLS

Multi-tools are the epitome of the *Jack of All Trades* concept. Besides being easy to carry, they do a bunch of things though not any one thing well. I've used various models over the years — Leatherman, Gerber, Swiss Army, Schrade, etc. At the advice of a friend in the aviation world, I picked up a Leatherman Skeletool. It's a minimal design so it's light and doesn't have a doohickey to do everything but it's lean and easier to carry. The roster includes pliers, a single knife blade, flat and cross-tip screwdriver, with both a pocket clip and a spring-loaded gate for attaching.

The Skeletool has proven to be a godsend for the road trip I'm taking while writing this column. The sway bars for the trailer I'm towing have spring-loaded locks. The only thing with me that releases them every time? The Skeletool's flat tip screwdriver blade!



Erick's pistol, a Smith & Wesson Performance Center Shield in 9mm (with optic), knife and reloads.

I like this design so much, I've bought more.

Several months ago, I also started carrying a notebook. I use one from Eagles & Angels which holds a notebook and business cards so I don't forget suggestions or ideas.

But what about guns and knives? We'll get there.

The contemporary environment has changed radically over the last few years. As a result, I like the idea of having OC spray available. A POM OC canister is attached to my keys. To steal a line from Chuck Haggard of Agile Tactical Training, it's nice to have something between a harsh word and a gun.

What about guns and knives?

Yes, I carry a knife. A smaller design of the Colonel Blade is my regular fixed blade. Sadly, they too seem to have gone out of business.

I also carry a handgun and a spare magazine as a matter of course. Most of the time, it'll be a Smith & Wesson Performance Center 4" Shield 9mm with a pistol-mounted optic. The extra magazine has a +2 extension for a total of 10 rounds. The holster is from JM Custom Kydex and I've bought more than a few holsters from them. The mag pouch comes from Tucker Gunleather.

If you've been following AmericanCop.com, you've seen a series about evaluating your situation to make an informed decision on your gear choices. In *my* reality, this setup handles over 90% of the difficulties in my life. Base your gear choices on a realistic assessment of your world. GUNS



Erick uses the Skeletool more often than anything else. The POM is nice to have, but it hasn't been needed — yet.

EaglesAndAngelsLtd.com
Leatherman.com
LTCreed.com
Streamlight.com
POMPepperSpray.com
Smith-Wesson.com

CROSSFIRE
SAA And The Hornet
continued from page 8

suspect. From a sandbag rest, the load gave 10-shot groups of one-and-a-half inches at 100 yards. My problem with the gun was not its accuracy, but its portability — it required a large and bulky shoulder holster. I found it so inconvenient that I sold it. Your mention of second-generation SAA in .357 that shot 6" to the left exactly parallels a personal experience. In about 1965, I shot on an NRA bullseye team and one of the other team members had a 2nd generation SAA in .357 that also shot 6" to the left. I wonder how many other .357s did the same. Thanks for inspiring reminiscences.

Marshall Williams

Thank you for writing again Marshall! Wouldn't it be great if we still have those cheap Colt SAAs to customize? Even the Italian replicas are getting too expensive to experiment with. —John Taffin



TAKE YOUR PICK

I greatly enjoyed the article "Compromise Part III: The Single Action Army" by John Taffin reviewing the history of the Colt SAA. As he reviewed these firearms, he mentioned some of the calibers, but failed to mention one I have, the .38 Special, which I believe is a Second Generation. It is a real pleasure to shoot, but may not meet Mr. Taffin's standard for a defensive gun.

Ronald Weddle, MD

Did you know the Colt Single Action Army was made in over 30 calibers? Can't mention them all! Plus I do not have one chambered in .38 Special. —John Taffin GUNS



The Zero Tolerance 0308 picks up where its forerunners left off. At 8.75" overall, 3.75" in a stout CPM 20CV stainless steel blade, it's an ogre.

ZERO TOLERANCE 0308

BIG 'N BEEFY 0308 EDC IS IN THE HOUSE

Pat Covert

Zero Tolerance was launched in 2006 as an upscale version of the Kershaw brand geared toward military and law enforcement users. All their knives, folders and fixed-blades are stout and overbuilt. Two folder series in the line, the 0300 and 0350 — designed by knifemakers Ken Onion and Strider Knives — were absolute beasts and achieved guru status right out of the gate. The new ZT 0308, although different in configuration, picks up where they left off.

To say the ZT 0308 is an overbuilt brute would be understating the case. At 8.75" in overall length — 5.25" in the handle — this is a massive folder that can fill the most sizeable of mitts. The 0308's stonewashed 3.75" blade is a Drop Point with a harpoonish dip on its backside saber grind. The blade steel is premium CPM 20CV stainless and opens via a flipper assisted by glass-smooth KVT ball-bearings. The pivot has a fixed nut atop allowing for field adjustment with a 0.5" wrench. The front side of the handle is 3D-machined textured G10 (ours is the Coyote Brown version) and out back is a matching-texture Titanium frame slab featuring a burly frame-lock mechanism with hardened-steel lock bar insert. Zero Tolerance provides a black-coated stainless pocket clip (reversible for southpaws) that can be switched out with a variety of aftermarket options.



The ZT 0308's machined Titanium frame slab has a sturdy frame-lock mechanism with a hardened-steel lock bar insert. The pivot can be adjusted with a 0.5" wrench.

WHY YOU'LL LIKE IT

Needless to say, if you like a large folder strong enough to withstand an atomic bomb blast and beg for more, the ZT 0308 is glad to facilitate. This is a knife that's happy doing tough field chores or taking a window apart during a drug raid. You couldn't ask for more in mechanics, materials and fabrication. From its tough upscale steel, vault-like Titanium Frame-Lock and slick ball-bearing action, this super-sized ZT burger has it all — and it does its predecessors proud. GUNS

MSRP: $400

ZT.KaiUSA.com

MINELAB VANQUISH 540 METAL DETECTOR

BRENT T. WHEAT

I'm a newbie to the world of "treasure hunting" and the only reason I wanted the Minelab Vanquish metal detector was to find stuff I dropped in the grass on the range — rifle shell casings, gun parts or my expensive in-ear hearing protection. For this it works great, so long as there isn't too much debris on the ground, but it's also like using a 16" navel gun to shoot a deer!

The Vanquish is top-of-the-line and without getting into the mumbo-jumbo of multi-frequency technology and bias adjustment, this thing is basically a computer tied to a search coil. Unlike cheap metal detectors I'd messed with in the past, the Minelab Vanquish actually gives you a good indication of what lies below and how far. After just a few minutes, I could easily distinguish between aluminum junk, steel goodies and the occasional treasure. It turned out to be great fun and I've got an addictive new hobby!

Street price: Around $400
Minelab.com





NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM 1911 MAGS

ROY HUNTINGTON

The finest 1911 handgun in the world is simply a fishing weight without excellent magazines. I'm always amazed at how many shooters spend thousands on a custom gun, then dig into the junk box of mags at a gun show to buy magazines to use in it. Really?

Nighthawk Custom is world-renowned for impeccably made custom 1911 pistols and sends them out with the best magazines they can find — all made in America — to their specifications. News flash: If you use good quality ammo in good quality guns with good quality magazines, a funny thing happens — the gun works. It's honestly as simple as that. If you're carrying for personal protection, why on earth would you not spend the $30 or $40 to assure your gun is in top form? NHC's lineup of magazines accommodates Officers and full-sized 1911s and are available in several design options. Just do it.

MSRP: From $29.99
NighthawkCustom.com

ATHLON MIDAS CF36 TRIPOD

BRENT T. WHEAT

I asked Athlon for a tripod and they sent me one — and it was more than I deserved.

This thing is hell-all stout at 7.7 lbs. (and with a lifetime warranty!) but the weight is a blessing rather than a curse. It'll handle 66 lbs. of whatever you plan on fitting onto it and remain rock-solid-stable until the earth itself decides to move. It also comes with an impeccable padded carrying case in addition to the leg pads for shoulder-carry.



Most striking to me is the overall build quality. The fluid ballhead, central mount and leg brackets are machined rather than something pressed or investment cast. With carbon-fiber legs and more features than a new Tesla, I actually had to read the owner's manual, a first. I now feel like a tripod snob whenever I carry it onto the firing range or video shoot — and I love it!

MSRP: $812 but less "on the street"
AthlonOptics.com

STREAMLIGHT BANDIT PRO

ROY HUNTINGTON

I live in the country and it gets dark as all get-out here. When I moved here 13 years ago, I thought "night" was like it was in suburban America. We forget there's street lights, porch lights, car headlights, business fronts and gas stations all over the place. It never really gets dark. Take all that away and presto — it's pitch black out. I soon found myself with flashlights on every countertop, on the tractor, truck, garage, shop, pole barn — everywhere. In spite of all this, my two single most-used lights are a small Streamlight Microstream and their new Bandit Pro headlamp.



The USB rechargeable Bandit Pro blasts 180 lumens for 4.5 hours or 21 hours on low. I like mine on the included hat clip as it's much brighter than the normal $5 junk ones you see around. It also comes with a head band. For less than $30, it's bulletproof and my original Bandit is still going strong after six years so that bodes well! GUNS

MSRP: Less than $30
Streamlight.com

GAME TIME!

SEPTEMBER IS THE START OF CAMPAIGN SEASON

Dave Workman

Two months out from the mid-term elections is the perfect time to start thinking about the possibilities looming in January if there is a "red tidal wave" in November. This could mean a radical shift of power on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures across the country.

You want to win in November and turn the tide against those seeking to eviscerate the Second Amendment? Get in the game. Now is a good time. Yesterday would have been better.

BE NICE

Don't misunderstand. Nobody needs to get in any candidate's face about gun rights; belligerence is not the way to win the hearts and minds of people who may get elected this fall — and whose votes you will need when it's time to pass legislation. We've seen before how this can backfire, resulting in another defeat snatched from the jaws of victory, something for which conservatives and occasionally gun rights activists are famous.

The first thing to remember is to not repeat the mistakes of anti-gunners, the biggest one being overreach. Virginia anti-gunners went overboard when they grabbed power in 2020 and it cost them all three statewide offices and the legislative majority in Richmond.

Gun owners need to practice self-control, while at the same time moving our agenda forward without being boorish about it. Be willing to work with lawmakers to further their understanding of your issue while acknowledging their concerns

Settle on a handful of priorities — and stick to them. Address each issue, and once you've accomplished one thing, move on and solve another. By moving forward one step at a time, you're less likely to hit a wall.

Let's say Republicans sweep Congress, same as they did in 1994 via the Contract With America. This has certainly been the prediction for the past several months and Capitol Hill anti-gunners are worried. What should a victorious Second Amendment community push for in January?

First and foremost, if gun owners do win, make sure the new majority nails the coffin permanently shut on Joe Biden's extremist gun control agenda:



- NO to one-gun-per-month
- NO to bans on original capacity magazines for rifles and pistols
- NO national waiting periods
- NO to bans on modern semi-auto sport/utility rifles
- NO to licensing and registration and regulation of sport/utility rifles under NFA 1934.

At the state level, a good start would be to work on passage of "constitutional carry" in your state. Twenty-five states — half the nation — now have permitless carry and it is time for the other half of the country to get aboard. All of the arguments against this commonsense approach to exercising the right to bear arms are nonsense since the criminal element already carries without a license or permit. It's time for the good guys to have an even playing field with the bad guys.

Another effort with enormous positive benefits would be to push for basic firearms safety classes in the public schools. Right now, during the campaign season, is a good time to bounce this idea off candidates looking for your support, just to see how they react.

Of course it will not be as simple as just snapping one's fingers. One key to success in January and February is to get out the vote in November so you can help elect a veto-proof majority in your state legislature. If you can do that, it's game on when your legislature convenes even if you have an anti-gun governor. September is the month to start working on getting out the vote, because you can bet your enemies are working overtime to get their voters out.

This November's election could be the most important in your lifetime. Do not sit this one out, expecting others to do your job. Too many gun owners have done this in the past, only to wonder why national organizations such as the NRA, GOA or CCRKBA didn't save the day. As the late Neal Knox used to remind every audience he spoke with, *you* are the "gun lobby."

ATTEND THE 'TOWN HALL' FORUMS

Campaign season really gets rolling in September, often with Labor Day picnic appearances by candidates who want your vote. From now until the election, they will be hard at it.

Such events are usually published in community newspapers or websites, and there may be notices posted at local grocery stores and post offices on the community message boards by the entrance. You need to pay attention to these message boards. I attended a legislative forum at the local city hall about two years ago after spotting such a notice and the first thing I saw when I walked into the room was a row of

women all wearing "Moms Demand Action" T-shirts. It was impossible not to notice. If they can do it, so can you.

With advance notice, you can be there in numbers large enough to impress the candidates. Make sure you're cleanly dressed and behave yourselves because your conduct reflects on all of us.

Follow candidates to appearances even if they are not in your community. The other side does this. If there is a gathering in your legislative or congressional district, make an effort to be in the room. If someone from the other side complains they saw you at a meeting elsewhere, politely tell them the same thing in reply.

Ask candidates about Second Amendment issues, including "constitutional carry," gun bans and other critical topics to see and hear how they react. It is imperative to be the adult in the room at such events and not the bully. Remain calm, reasoned and polite. Have your facts straight to respond to any questions and keep them simple:

> "DO NOT SUCCUMB TO ANY NAYSAYERS WHO TELL YOU YOUR VOTE DOESN'T COUNT. IN NOVEMBER, IT WILL COUNT PLENTY.

According to the annual *FBI Uniform Crime Report,* more people are murdered with blunt instruments, knives and "personal weapons" (feet and hands) than with either rifles or shotguns of any kind.

More than 21.5 million people are currently licensed to carry in the United States.

Forty states have firearm reciprocity laws, meaning all authority for setting gun laws rests with the legislature. This guarantees uniformity of gun laws from border to border. "What could be more sensible than that," you can ask rhetorically. If the other side tries to react, they may sound like fools.

If you know you will not be able to vote on Election Day — say you've got a hunting trip scheduled or you will be otherwise traveling — now is the time to inquire about absentee ballots. Each county has an office or agency responsible for this. Do not wait until the last minute because you may forget this important responsibility in the rush to get everything else done.

GUNS Magazine readers have a lot at stake this fall. By this time next month, you should all be better organized and ready to cast your vote. Do not succumb to any naysayers who tell you your vote doesn't count. In November, it will count plenty. **GUNS**





28-GAUGE 3" SUPER BLACK EAGLE 3S

BENELLI USA

The new *28-Gauge 3" Super Black Eagle 3* models are part of Benelli USA's Super Black Eagle series. Offered in 3" chamber 28-gauge, the SBE 3s meet the needs of water fowlers who hunt flooded timber in the southern regions as well as the beaver dams and cattails of the north. These models perform as well as the Super Black Eagle but in a lightweight, faster-handling package. They work with standard 2 ¾" shot shells as well as the new class of 3" loads. MSRP: From $1,799. For more info: (301) 283-6981, BenelliUSA.com



R3D SUPPRESSOR/RMR HEIGHT SIGHTS

XS SIGHTS

XS Sights introduces the *R3D Suppressor/RMR Height Sights* for the HK VP9 Optics Ready pistol. These taller sights give a clear view of the target as well as accurate alignment while using a suppressor. They also work as backup sights for optics and allow a lower 1/3 co-witness with the Holosun 507, Vortex Viper and Trijicon RMR series of red dot sights. The XS R3D Night Sight offers a traditional 3-dot tritium, notch and post sight picture with the notch 15% wider than the front sight. MSRP: $143. For more info: (888) 744-4880, XSSights.com



TLR-6

STREAMLIGHT INC.

Streamlight Inc. introduced a laser model of its ultra-compact *TLR-6* rail-mounted weapon light. It fits the Taurus GX4 micro-compact handgun. The new model uses a bright white LED to deliver 100 lumens and 2,000 candela over a beam distance of 89 meters. It is also equipped with a 640–660nm red aiming laser. The TLR-6 is 2.5" long and weighs 1.12 oz. MSRP: TLR-6 for the Taurus GX4 is $187.43. For more info: (800) 523-7488, Streamlight.com



B-TM HEAT SHIELD FOR RUGER 10/22

SAMSON MFG. CORP.

The *B-TM Heat Shield for Ruger 10/22* from Samson Mfg. adds tactical style and is the ideal replacement for factory heat shields. Made of a durable, impact-resistant injection molded glass-filled polymer, the heat shield is precision-contoured to fit. It converts your favorite .22 into a Mini-14 look-alike. The matte black heat shield accessory easily and securely installs in minutes without gunsmithing using a single screw. MSRP: $23.99. For more info: (888) 665-4370, Samson-Mfg.com



PLUS-2 MAGAZINE BASE PAD EXTENSION

APEX TACTICAL

Apex Tactical offers a *Plus-2 Magazine Base Pad Extension* for the FNX-45 model pistol. Machined from aluminum and black hardcoat anodized for durability, the base pad increases magazine capacity by two rounds and provides space for the stack to compress the magazine spring. The base pad's finger grooves make stripping a magazine easy. MSRP: $34.95. For more info: (623) 322-0200, ApexTactical.com



HOLSTERS FOR SPRINGFIELD SA-35

CROSSBREED HOLSTERS

CrossBreed offers *Holsters for Springfield Armory SA-35* pistols. The SA-35 is a modern interpretation of the classic P-35 handgun designed by John Moses Browning. Holsters include IWB and OWB models like the SuperTuck, SnapSlide, DropSlide and more. CrossBreed's hook-and-loop style off-body pistol holsters and mag carriers are also available for the SA-35. MSRP: From $36.95 depending on model. For more info: (888) 732-5011, CrossBreedHolsters.com



HOLSTERS FOR SPRINGFIELD HELLCAT PRO

1791 GUNLEATHER

Holsters for Springfield Hellcat Pro are now offered by 1791 Gunleather. The Hellcat Pro is compatible with many of 1791 Gunleather's Optic-Ready holsters: 1) the Optic-Ready BHC; 2) Ultra Custom BHC; 3) Ultra Custom Size 3; 4) Smooth Concealment Holster Size 3; and 5) Fair Chase Size 3. For carrying without optics, 1791 Gunleather's 2-, 3- and 4-way holsters will fit the Hellcat Pro. MSRP: From $59.99 depending on model. For more info: (800) 407, 2792, 1791GunLeather.com



SILENT HERO 4
TOPS KNIVES

Introducing TOPS Knives' first new model of 2022: the *Silent Hero 4!* It's an EDC version of the original Silent Hero, designed by Anton Du Plessis. The handle and blade shape of the full-sized knife were ideal for a variety of tasks. While the smaller version looks the same as its predecessor, there are differences: The blade is 1/8" instead of 3/16"; the finish is Sniper Grey Cerakote instead of Black River Wash; and the knife comes with a Kydex sheath instead of leather. MSRP: $255. For more info: (208) 542-0113, TOPSKnives.com



.375 WINCHESTER BULLETS
NORTHERN PRECISION

Northern Precision offers a new line of *.375 Winchester Bullets* made in 180-, 200-, 225- and 250-grain flat tips. Bullets are custom-made in the weight of your choice. The bullets' thin jackets offer extra expansion and can be made in bonded core for nearly 100% weight retention. Spitzer bullets are also available for single-shot pistols as well as big game rifles. These can be made using either thin or heavy jackets, making them ideal for varmints, deer and other large game. MSRP: $35 for 50 bullets. For more info: (315) 955-8679, NPCustomBullets.com

GOLDEN TURKEY TSS
FIOCCHI

Fiocchi expands its Golden-series line of hunting shotshells with *Golden Turkey TSS.* TSS or Tungsten Super Shot delivers deep-penetrating performance at long range and dense shot patterns. Fiocchi makes available four models in today's popular platforms — 1) 12-gauge, 3", #7 shot, 1 5/8-oz., 1,200 fps; 2) 12-gauge, 3", #9 shot, 1 5/8-oz., 1,200 fps, 3) 20-gauge, 3", #9 shot, 1 3/8-oz., 1,225 fps; and .410 bore, 3", #9 shot, 13/16 oz., 1,100 fps. MSRP: About $54 per box. For more info: (417) 449-1039. FiocchiUSA.com



RUST PREVENTION GUN & AMMO BAG
BONE-DRI

Engineered with advanced materials to wick moisture, the BONE-DRI *Rust Prevention Gun & Ammo Bag* protects handguns, ammunition, accessories and tools from rust. The patented Absorbits material pulls moisture from the inner mechanisms of hard goods. Constructed of heavy-duty industrial 800D PVC nylon, the Gun & Ammo Bag holds two handguns up to .45, five magazines and a tool kit. MSRP: $29.99. For more info: BONE-DRI.com



GEN3 SOUND MITIGATION BUFFER SMB
ARMASPEC

The Armaspec *Gen3 Sound Mitigation Buffer SMB* is a single-stage captured drop-in replacement for your standard buffer and spring. It is designed to keep the buffer spring from rubbing against the inner wall of the buffer tube, removing a lot of the twang you would normally hear from a mil-spec buffer spring. It also creates a linear motion to provide smoother and more consistent cycling. MSRP: $59.99. For more info: support@armaspec.com, Armaspec.com



BUCK-NIP
WILDLIFE RESEARCH CENTER

Buck Nip is a powerful deer attractor made from secret plant derivatives. It is one of three premium scents added by Wildlife Research Center to its popular pressurized spray cans. The other two are Golden Scrape and Golden Estrus Elk, both with Scent Reflex Technology. Simply spray in your hunting area and watch the results. They will bring in deer all season long. These 3-oz. pressurized cans come standard with a high-output sprayer. MSRP: From $15.99 to $19.99. For more info: (800) 873-5873, Wildlife.com



VAULT BLIND BAG
ALPS OUTDOORZ

ALPS OutdoorZ's *Vault Blind Bag* is a technical pack for hunters pursuing birds in flooded timber and wet blind environments. The dual-compartment modular internal shelf and external support system allows the pack to be secured out of water and mud while giving hunters access to essential gear. The Vault Blind Bag comes in Realtree's Timber camo pattern. MSRP: $229.99. For more info: (800) 344-2577, ALPSOutdoorZ.com



SUBMIT YOUR ENTRY ONLINE:

GUNS Magazine
GOM September 2022
PO Box 488
Escondido, CA 92033

If you are unable to enter online, mail a postcard with your name and address (no envelopes please). Entries must be received by September 30, 2022. Limit one entry per household.

WINNERS CHOSEN BY RANDOM DRAWING. Limit one entry per household. To protect the privacy and security of winners, their names will NOT be made public. Contest void where prohibited by law. Winners must undergo a background check and comply with all other federal, state and local laws. Taxes and fees will be the responsibility of the winner. Contest open to U.S. residents only. Employees and agents of Publishers' Development Corp. are not eligible. No purchase necessary. Winners will be notified by certified mail on official letterhead. Attention deployed military: Use stateside address! Giveaway guns and accessories may have evidence of being test fired or exhibit minor handling marks. Factory warranties may apply in some cases.The Gun of the Month package is awarded only to the entrant drawn and will not be awarded if the firearm presented is illegal in the jurisdiction of the winner. An alternate, authorized winner will be selected. No substitutions or transfers to a third party are allowed.

MOSSBERG 940 PRO TACTICAL PACKAGE

Mossberg has released the newest member of its 940 Pro family of 12-gauge shotguns — the optic-ready *940 Pro Tactical* 8-shot autoloading shotgun. Based on Mossberg's cleaner-running and redesigned gas-operating system, the 940 Pro Tactical delivers ease of operation, reliability, adjustability and performance-driven features including optic-ready receiver; oversized controls; M-LOK compatibility; stock adjustability; and an 18.5" barrel with interchangeable choke system. And like all 940 Pro shotguns, the 940 Pro Tactical has corrosion-resistant internal parts and finishes including a nickel boron-coated gas piston, magazine tube, hammer and sear. Enter the *GUNS Magazine* September 2022 giveaway for a chance to claim this shotgun as your own.

940 PRO TACTICAL

Manufacturer: Mossberg
(203) 230-5300
Mossberg.com
Caliber: 12-ga., **Capacity:** 7+1,
Barrel Length: 18.5", **OAL:** 37.5",
Weight: 7.5 lbs.
Value: $1,120



DEFENDER P15

Manufacturer: AceBeam
AceBeam.com
(800) 523-7488
Value: $114.90

CKAGE GIVEAWAY

ENTER TO WIN

TOTAL VALUE: $1,294.89

The *Defender P15* can quickly switch from an everyday carry light to a tactical light. Just remove the back clip and mount with a Pic mount or MLOK. It's reliable, rugged and versatile with modular design. The Defender P15 produces 1,700 lumens of light at a beam distance of 330 meters. It takes only 2.5 hours to fully charge. One 18650 battery is included.

The fixed-blade *Deschutes Caper* hunting knife is ideal for gutting and skinning game. It has a 3.3" blade made of D2 steel blade with a full-tang construction and stonewashed finish. The ergonomic handle is polypropylene with an olive rubber overlay. The Deschutes Caper has an overall length of 7" and weighs 1.7 oz.

The prizes in our *GUNS September 2022* giveaway are something to crow about — a Mossberg 940 Pro Tactical shotgun, Defender P15 EDC light from AceBeam and a Deschutes Caper from TOPS Knives. So join now. You won't get a chance to win if you don't! Go to GUNSMagazine.com/giveaways or mail a post card. —*Jazz Jimenez* GUNS







DESCHUTES CAPER

Manufacturer: Kershaw Knives
Kershaw.KaiUSA.com
(800) 325-2891
Value: $59.99

CAST LOADS FOR SPRINGFIELD'S SA-35

SHOOT THE NEW HI-POWER CHEAPER!

Jeff "Tank" Hoover

In a world of striker-fired, poly-framed, semi-auto shell shuckers, Springfield Armory surprised everyone with an old school, forged billet all-steel shooter. Now mind you, there's nothing wrong with poly-framed shooters, I love them. But face it — at the end of the day, traditional shooters relish the heft and feel an all-steel pistol provides.

The gun we're talking about is one of John Browning's most popular designs, the Browning Hi-Power. Dubbed the SA-35, holding one rekindles long-lost feelings of nostalgia for combat pistols made the old-fashioned way. It brings a sense of American pride when holding it in your hand. Even British Commandos appreciated the accuracy and reliability of this gun, making it their side-arm choice, calling it the L9A1.

Yup, Springfield Armory's release of the SA-35 makes what has been a traditionally expensive and collectible pistol in the used market now an affordable proposition. There's reason to celebrate and Springfield Armory should be commended for making the SA-35 available for the many pistoleros pining for a traditional shooter.



Clear-powder-coated 140-grain slugs (above) ready to load on Tank's 550C Dillon press. The 15-round magazine (below) provides plenty of firepower and reliability for the SA-35 even when using cast bullets.



SHOOTING

Shooting the SA-35 was a chilly affair with the temperature in the low teens and 4" of crusty snow on the ground. I already had an impromptu shooting session just to check the sights and reliability of the gun. Needless to say, the short session teased me into wanting to really wring out the SA-35.

The SA-35 feels really good in my hand as the checkered walnut stocks provide a nice gripping surface. The thumb-safety is easily within reach, having a positive audible click when engaging it. The wide U-notch rear sight allows plenty of light on either



Here's the cast of characters used for testing. Left to right, MP Molds 124-grain HPs, MP Molds 140-grain solid, Lee 125-grain RFN and X-Treme 124-grain copper plated bullet.

side for the white-dot front sight and provides a good sight picture.

Trigger pull was just under 5 lbs. and very smooth. There were no malfunctions of any kind while shooting. The SA-35 balances well, making its weight feel lighter than it is.

CAST LOADS

I have a few standard 9mm molds I use for my 9mm shooting needs. Two are from MP Molds and the third is from Lee Precision. The first mold is an eight-cavity MP Mold dropping a 140-grain radiused flat-nose slug. The second is a double-cavity 124-grain HP design. HP pins allow casting either pentagonal or round HPs. A flat pin allows casting solids for versatility.

The Lee mold is a six-cavity mold dropping 125-grain radiused flat-nose bullets. I size my 9mm bullets 0.358" as I've found best accuracy in my 9mm guns sized this way. Standard loads for these slugs consist of either 5.5 grains of Unique or 4.5 grains of 231.

Velocity runs just over 1,200 FPS from the SA-35 with the 140-grain MP Molds solid and almost 1,300 FPS from the 125-grain bullets. Powder does not seem to affect accuracy in the least, with both powders providing the same degree of accuracy for the bullets used.

X-TREME COPPER PLATED PROJECTILES

I've been known to use copper-plated cast bullets from time to time from X-Treme. They're a little more expensive than regular cast/lubed slugs but some guns seem to prefer them and it's handy to keeping some around. I normally use 124-grain bullets in my practice/plinking loads as it's the same bullet weight I carry for factory defensive loads.

RESULTS

Targets were fluorescent orange 2" squares. Distance was 50 feet, each load shot and averaged three groups of five rounds. Shooting was done with my forearms propped on a 6"x6" block of carpeted wood. The 124-grain HPs and 125-grain Lee RFNs averaged 1.7" for five shots. The 124-grain X-Treme copper-plated bullets also averaged around 1.7" for five shots.





Above, the MP Molds 8-cavity mold really makes a pile of bullets in a hurry. Below, close-up of MP Molds 124-grain HP mold.

The 140-grain MP Molds RFNs averaged just under 2" for five shots. I experienced no misfires, failure to feed, eject or extract while shooting. The SA-35 performed perfectly.

FINAL WORD

The Springfield Armory SA-35 is a wonderful cast-bullet shooter. It also handles copper-plated bullets such as those from X-Treme very well. If you're looking for a less expensive alternative for practice loads, have no fear, cast bullets and/or copper plated bullets will not let you down. GUNS

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A PERSONAL PROBLEM

This presented a dilemma. Vehemently not wanting to waste game but also not wanting to get up close and personal with muck and detritus, I internally argued over the next step. Eventually the sense of responsibility all hunters *should* possess reared its ugly head and I became resigned to what needed to be done. After stowing my wallet and cell phone in my shooting bag, I smashed through the green wall of cattails and slowly eased into the vegetation-carpeted water.

> STUPID SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY. WHY CAN'T IT BOTHER SOMEBODY ELSE AT TIMES LIKE THIS?

Stupid sense of responsibility. Why can't it bother somebody else at times like this?

I gasped upon discovering the nasty black soup lurking beneath the duckweed was colder than I had imagined. It was also deeper, immediately coming to mid thigh and releasing huge black bubbles of putrid methane gas with each step of my now-full boots. A disgusting oily sheen rose to the surface until the duckweed quickly closed around my legs. To the casual observer, it appeared I was sinking in putrid green quicksand.

It was slow going as I carefully waded, blindly feeling for sticks and other trip hazards as the water eventually reached just under my armpits. Gun held overhead, mental pictures of soldiers in Vietnam doing the same thing immediately conjured thoughts of leeches. After a brief full-body shiver not due to temperature, I put this thought away though my mind was not satisfied until it had also considered snapping turtles, snakes, malaria, flesh-eating bacteria and a host of other things you don't want to contemplate when armpit-deep in a swamp. In the distance, a frog laughed.

Reaching the other side of the deep channel, I pushed aside more cattails and could see the dead bird a few feet away, still held aloft on a cushion of vegetation. After some careful thrashing, I retrieved the hapless duck and began the return trip. Though I had been very vigilant, my urge to get out of the "water" overwhelmed caution and when I was only a few feet from safety, my hurrying foot caught on a submerged branch.

RUIN AWAITS

Everything happened in slow motion. First, the 870 disappeared as the green blur rushed higher. I snapped my head upward, fighting to keep my mouth dry in the knowledge ingesting even a few drops of the green-and-black fluid would prove exceptionally unpleasant for anyone who isn't a big fan of chronic diarrhea. Fortunately, the greasy water only rose to my chin before my arms hit bottom. With the urgency of a man falling into a shark tank, I scrambled back onto *terra firma*. Black, blue and speckled with green, I was quite colorful.

I've always been taught you should keep your firearms clean and lubricated and I do so religiously. In light of countless dire warnings on the buildup of dirt, old oil and powder residue, I idly wondered why I had never been warned against allowing live vegetation and pond scum to pack the inner workings of your gun.

Fortunately, the Remington is a robust design and after a complete disassembly — including finding a stowaway crayfish hiding in the breech bolt — it was none the worse for the experience.

Now a year later, only one minor gun-related problem remains: figuring out how to explain to hunting companions why my shotgun smells like a trash fire at the salad bar. Then again, given my history, most of them aren't too surprised. GUNS



DUCK AND COVER!

GREEN WATER AND BLUE-WINGED TEAL EQUAL CALAMITY

Brent T. Wheat

September in our neck of the woods is still rather hot. Coming on the heels of the Hades known as "August," the ninth month is generally warmish but it is also the first time you'll feel an occasional breath of cool air rushing down from the north, hinting at the welcome relief of fall. After a few days, the weather patterns will shift back to the "broil" setting but in the meantime, those brief September cold fronts bring welcome relief from the heat — and flights of teal.

I'm an inveterate duck hunter but in my case, don't take enthusiasm to correlate with any skills. Regardless, I still have loads of fun, at least when I don't end up with undergrowth lounging around the breech of my shotgun. Let me explain.

MY HAPPY PLACE

Whenever I'm in the area, I always keep a sharp eye on my friend's swamp. It's a place he considers basically a wasteland full of muck and detritus, but in truth, it's actually a fantastical wild landscape full of muck and detritus. While driving past one day, I saw the unmistakable flash of ducks on final approach over the country road bordering the wetland. I immediately pulled over and soon marked another group inbound. It was easy to see, based on the size and speed, it was a flight of blue-winged teal.

The swamp covers about 40 acres, most of which are reeds and cattail growing shoulder-to-shoulder in shallow water, along with occasional stands of shrubbery mixed in for good effect. On one edge of the vegetable morass, there is a strip of deeper open water of approximately one acre. The swamp is technically full of water, though most of it is completely covered by duckweed, a tiny floating plant resembling green confetti and dearly loved by waterfowl.

The other exciting thing about spotting the blue wings was the fact the next day was September 1, the opening of the early teal season in our state. Though I couldn't greet the morning in the swamp due to work commitments, I resolved the ducks and I would have a nice meeting towards sundown.

After a rushed early dinner, I parked alongside the gravel road, gathered my gear and staggered toward the field of battle. I was wearing camouflage hunting togs and a pair of knee-high rubber boots as I did not intend to seriously challenge the bottomless mire, instead planning to pick off ducks around the perimeter as they descended into the evening roost.



I soon discovered getting to the shooting spot would be difficult. The landowner had once mowed a path down to waterside but this late in the season it had become an overgrown jungle of 10-foot-high willow shoots and other weeds. The path was punctuated by a nifty collection of outsized September spiders who enjoyed nothing more than spinning webs at face level to see if they could frighten any passing writers to the point of incontinence. And — trust me here — you don't want to experience incontinence while wearing tall rubber boots.

Hacking through the undergrowth took longer than anticipated. The sun was only a few fingers above the horizon when I finally arrived at a spot near the open water where I felt it reasonably likely to both intercept incoming birds *and* retrieve any who might intersect with my shot column.

While still getting comfortable in up my pass-shooting hide, my reverie was interrupted by a swish of wings. Hot dang, a flight of teal landed nearly at my feet! In one smooth motion, I hoisted my camouflaged 12-gauge Remington 870, stood up, shouted and took the first bird to mistakenly fly overhead. The #4 steel shot did its job admirably and the duck crashed onto dry ground 30 yards away. I had scored in less than two minutes!

Before I could even retrieve the first, my thoughts were interrupted by yet another whisper of wings as more birds set to land. Another shot and another duck fell. Things were going far too well — and I should have realized my old friend Fate would soon show up to stick a finger in my eye.

I passed up several more shots after judging a hit bird would fall deeper in the swamp than preferred. A few moments later, another flight was inbound with the correct angle and velocity for a likely recovery so I fired. In a final act of defiance, the mortally wounded duck swerved and aimed for deep into the accursed bog as he trailed feathers like a crashing fighter jet.

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