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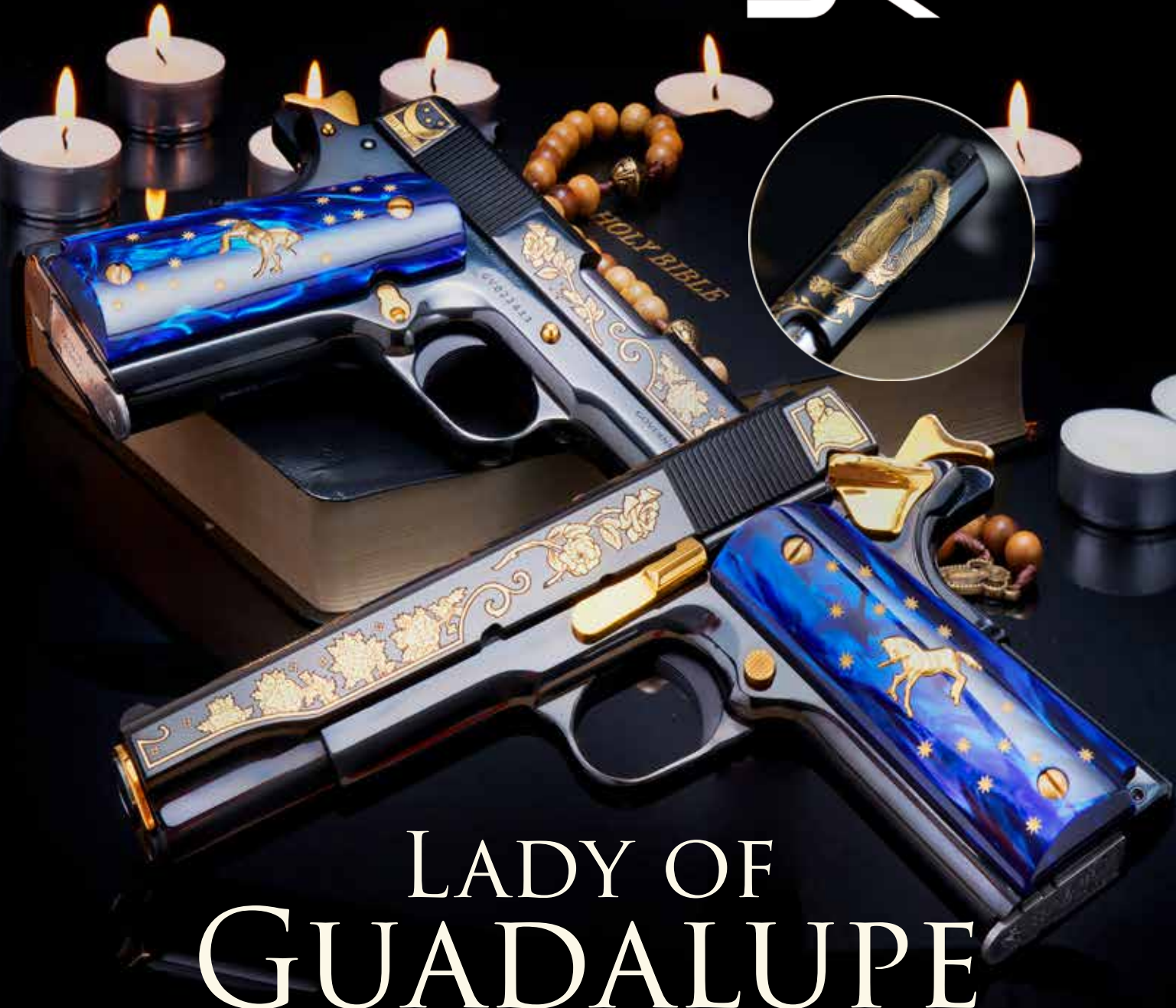
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**NOVEMBER 2023, VOL. 69, NUMBER 11, 827TH ISSUE**



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Single-action Done Best!  
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# CROSSFIRE

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### SCOPE TALK

While shopping for a new rifle scope, I noticed that Leupold uses "HD" glass; Tract uses "HT" glass; SIG SAUER uses "HDX" glass; and someone else that I don't remember uses "ED" glass. Other manufacturers don't even say what kind of glass they use. Are these designations some standard scale measuring glass or merely marketing ploys? Or are all the glass types so good a guy cannot tell them apart? Maybe I should be paying attention to other riflescope features rather than focusing on the glass?

William Rogers

Optics are one of those things that's hard for "normal earth people" to effectively test so we mostly depend on recommendations. One optic expert even admitted, "scopes are voodoo to most people."

The terms you mention all describe proprietary coatings — which our friends in the optics industry universally say make the biggest difference in light transmission. Yes, it is marketing hype but it is also a key piece of the puzzle.

In my experience, it's a matter of tiers: The great expensive stuff, good "everyday" stuff, and the rest. I will say even low-end glass today seems better than the high-end glass of 20 years ago as technology has advanced. In my opinion, once you get past the cheapest Chinese Amazon knock-off category, the rest are pretty decent. The biggest difference in cost is durability. Nearly all scopes look great out of the box but after bashing them around in the truck, through dust and rain, and a few trips down the airport luggage carousel, the lesser grades (which typically cut

corners to save money by using thinner, cheaper materials and less robust engineering) start to fall apart or fail.

Once you get to the "premium"-level optics, I feel like it mainly boils down to ease-of-use: knob placement, adjustments and overall user-friendliness.

Americans also suffer from "Bigger is Bestus" disease, which is why you occasionally see \$2,000 glass on squirrel rifles! Pick what makes the most sense for your needs. A good, rough rule of thumb is the optic should cost approximately the same as the rifle. Another tip: Spend \$100 less on glass and use the cash to buy practice ammo! Most shooters overestimate the importance of their gear and wildly underestimate the importance of their shooting ability! —BW

### AI "ADVANCES"

Regarding GUNS Podcast episode #193 where you talked about Artificial Intelligence and how it might someday replace writers, I think this is a totally AI generated website (link intentionally omitted). It's about guns but it gets lots of stuff wrong. For example it says a revolver can have a double feed but if you remove the magazine, you can clear the jam. Also, the Mossberg 500 has an exposed hammer.

Reader Name Withheld

All I can say is "wow!" I visited the website in question and you are 100% correct. Even a third-world, non-English-speaking contract writer (commonly used to build "link farms" and other junk websites) wouldn't have gotten things so wrong, so it likely is generated by AI — and nobody bothered to check it! "Why" is a question I cannot answer. —BW

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# THE PERFECT 10: RUGER SINGLE-ACTIONS

John Taffin

## 1972

I had just finished up my fourth summer in graduate school when I returned home and had a couple of days before I resumed teaching. Dot and I were out enjoying my freedom and we stopped at the Gunhaus to look around. There in a display case was an original Ruger Flat-Top .44 Magnum with the rare 10" barrel length.

I noticed three things immediately. The factory walnut grips were of exceptional quality with marble grain throughout, and the anodized grip frame had been re-plated with a gray color. The front sight had been replaced with a Keith Long-Range style with three gold bars inlaid for shooting at different distances. It was priced at \$150, which was real money in those days so, although I really wanted it, I passed it up.

### SHE'S A KEEPER

I went back out to our '68 Ford pickup where Dot was waiting and she asked me if I found anything interesting. I told her about the Ruger and she said, "Go buy it as a graduation present for yourself." Gotta love a woman like that! I did buy it and soon added an Al Goerg shoulder holster. This is a spring clip, very lightweight holster for handgun hunters and I also carried a unit on the opposite side with 12 loops for .44 Magnum cartridges. I had my first dedicated handgun hunting rig.

When Ruger introduced the Super Blackhawk in 1959, it was finished in high-polished blue and available in only one barrel length, namely 7 1/2". When the transition was made to the New

Model action in 1972, the bluing was now somewhat subdued and still only available in one barrel length.

I had decided I wanted a 10" Ruger with a scope and I certainly did not want to drill holes in either of my original Perfect 10s. So, starting with a blued New Model, I had a 10" barrel installed and the entire sixgun finished in a hard chrome. It looked somewhat



**A**



**B**



**C**

**A** This custom Ruger was originally a blued 7 1/2" Super Blackhawk. Grips are by Herrett. **B** The Ruger Maximum Perfect 10 includes the original .357 Maximum and the .445 Super Mag by Ben Forkin. **C** John's original 10" Ruger .44 Magnum Flat-Top with the Al Goerg shoulder holster; a near-perfect hunting rig.

like stainless steel, which had not yet arrived at Ruger. With the addition of a handgun scope and a set of Herrett's stocks filling in behind the square-back Super Blackhawk grip frame, I now had a scope-sighted hunting handgun.

With the spread of Long-Range Silhouette competitions in the late 1970s, gun manufacturers started to listen to shooters as to what they wanted for competition. Ruger, for the first time, offered another barrel length on the New Model Super Blackhawk by offering just what was needed, namely a long-barreled .44 Magnum.

By allowing a longer sight radius, the 10 1/2" proved to be much better for shooting silhouettes. Diamond Dot and I both competed with a pair of the new Rugers equipped with Pachmayr non-slip recoil-reducing grips. We found out early we needed different sight settings, so we each had our own. When Ruger went to a stainless steel Perfect 10, I bought one immediately and found it was even more accurate than the silhouette sixguns we were using.

Both of our blued guns have now been turned into Perfect Packin' Pistol lengths of 5 1/2", with one still a .44 Magnum while the other is a Heavy Duty .45 Colt with a five-shot cylinder. The stainless Ruger remains an iron-sighted hunting handgun and it has never let me down.

On the Golden Anniversary of the Ruger Flat-Top .357 Magnum, the Ruger Collectors Association (RCA) issued a very small number of 10" New Model .357 Magnum Blackhawks. I certainly had to have one as a companion to my original and it is also proven to be an exceptionally accurate revolver.

With the availability of 10 1/2" barrels for both the .44 Magnum and .357 Maximum, it became easy to come up with custom Perfect 10s. I contacted Gary Reeder who had "takeoffs" from other custom guns and he provided the barrels I needed.

### PERFECT FIT

I've always felt the .44 Special was pretty close to the perfect sixgun cartridge so I had Gary fit a 10 1/2" .44

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Magnum barrel to a New Model Flat-Top .44 Special. I know I keep saying this, but once again this turned out to be exceptionally accurate. Switching to the .357 Maximum 10 ½" barrel, Gary installed this on a New Model Flat-Top .357 Blackhawk and once again the result was — yes, here it comes — exceptionally accurate. The .357 was fitted with a brass Super Blackhawk grip frame along with stag grips. Both of these are embellished with my name on the barrels in gold — heirlooms for the grandkids and great grandkids.

Elgin Gates and Dan Wesson collaborated on a truly grand sixgun silhouette cartridge, the .357 Super Mag. Ruger countered with their Super Blackhawk chambered in .357 Maximum, a different name for the same cartridge, by using a longer frame and longer cylinder. It was absolutely perfect for silhouetting as it allowed the use of 200-grain bullets at the muzzle velocity of 158-grain .357 Magnum bullets. It was killed off at Ruger by those who did not



Here are 1911s built from the ground up for the 9x19: the double stack Wilson SFT9 (top) and single stack Springfield EMP. Photo by the author

understand the cartridge and tried to turn it into a “.357 Swift” by using the lightest possible bullets at the highest possible speed, resulting in flame coming off the top strap. I still have my original 10 ½" Ruger .357 Maximum.

When I was hunting on the Penn Baggett Ranch in Texas, I borrowed Penn's custom Ruger, which had been re-barreled and re-chambered to .445 Super Mag by Ben Forkin. It worked so exceptionally well I had Ben build one for me. In both cases the original cylinders were rechambered so these are six-shot sixguns and I shy away from some of the very heavy .445 loads which have been published. It remains just a cut above what is possible with the .44 Magnum.

Most of my shooting life has been with really heavy, big-bore cartridges. However, as I have grown older, I find I gravitate to less recoil producing loads. This means the natural direction was to come up with a Perfect 10 chambered in .32 Magnum. This is an exceptionally fine cartridge and starting with a Ruger New Model Single-Six I had a custom 10" barrel fitted resulting in — here we go again — an exceptionally accurate, easy shooting small game and varmint sixgun. **GUNS**

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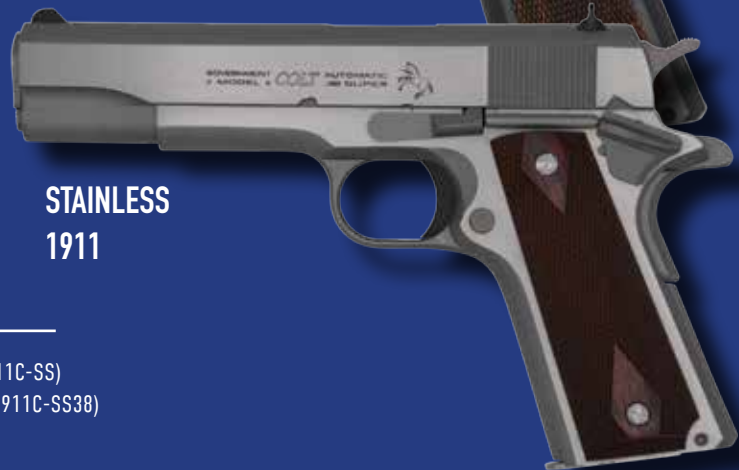


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# ABOUT THE 1911 ...

## CLASSICS NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE

Massad Ayoob

They say you keep coming back to your first love ...

I'm writing this during my annual sojourn of carrying and teaching with a 1911 pistol, if only to give me some re-acclimation and prep time before my favorite match of the year, The Pin Shoot. Those heavy bowling pins need momentum to knock them the requisite three feet back and the .45 ACP has historically done the job well.

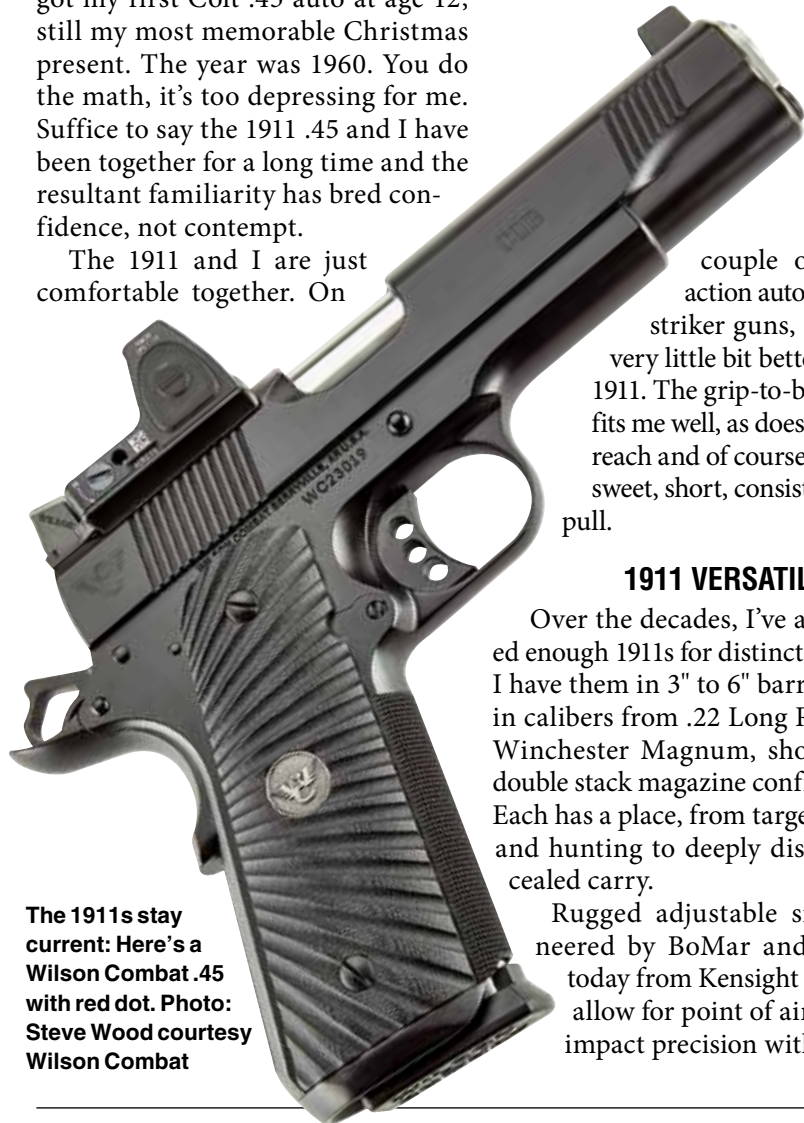
### REASONS

Why the 1911 platform? One reason, frankly, is habituation. I got my first Colt .45 auto at age 12, still my most memorable Christmas present. The year was 1960. You do the math, it's too depressing for me. Suffice to say the 1911 .45 and I have been together for a long time and the resultant familiarity has bred confidence, not contempt.

The 1911 and I are just comfortable together. On

the shooting side of it, I've found my 1911s reliable because they're all properly tuned and maintained. I've won (and lost) matches with them, killed critters with them and taken criminals at gunpoint with them. I've never had to shoot anybody with one but never had a doubt my 1911s would get their part of the job done if I did mine in a life-or-death self-defense situation.

And they like me. Not in any anthropomorphized sense of the word, but because I simply shoot well with them. Not long ago I shot 10 times over the GLOCK Sport Shooting Foundation 50-shot indoor course from up close to 25 yards, with a couple of 1911s, a



The 1911s stay current: Here's a Wilson Combat .45 with red dot. Photo: Steve Wood courtesy Wilson Combat

couple of double-action autos and a few striker guns, and shot a very little bit better with the 1911. The grip-to-barrel angle fits me well, as does the trigger reach and of course there's the sweet, short, consistent trigger pull.

### 1911 VERSATILITY

Over the decades, I've accumulated enough 1911s for distinct versatility. I have them in 3" to 6" barrel lengths, in calibers from .22 Long Rifle to .45 Winchester Magnum, short butt to double stack magazine configurations. Each has a place, from target shooting and hunting to deeply discreet concealed carry.

Rugged adjustable sights pioneered by BoMar and available today from Kensight and others allow for point of aim/point of impact precision with a variety



Here are 1911s built from the ground up for the 9x19: the double stack Wilson SFT9 (top) and single stack Springfield EMP. Photo by the author

of loads if target shooting and hunting are part of your needs. If you've settled on one load, even more rugged iron sights might suit you better, especially for "heavy duty" use. And, yes, we have 1911s adaptable to red dot optics for carry and bigger glass (and even telescopic sights) for some competitions.

### ACROSS THE AGE AND GENDER BRACKETS

Having started at age 12 with 230-grain GI hardball, I favored the .45 most of my life and learned to appreciate the 10mm when it came along. But, having reached geezerhood with some serious arthritis, I've joined many of my fellow elders in learning to love the remarkably light recoil of the 1911 in 9mm. It took a long time for master gunsmiths like Dick Heinie to make that too-short-for-the-platform 9x19 round work in full-size 1911s John Browning designed for longer cartridges, but we have those guns now.

We also have 1911s engineered around the 9mm, offering superb reliability beginning with the little single-stack Springfield Armory EMP designed by Dave Williams introduced in 2005 and perhaps culminating with Bill Wilson's superb 15+1 round SFT9. If you want more rounds in a standard-size pistol, there is the Staccato and

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### TRAVELIN' MAN

When I fly to California to teach, I bring a Springfield Ronin 9mm (think "Lightweight Commander" format) with Blazer 115-grain 9mm for training

and 127-grain +P+ Winchester Ranger hollow points for carry loads. The latter "kick light" but come close to .357 SIG ballistics. Recent changes in California law seem to forbid us outsiders to buy ammo there; the airlines limit us to 11 lbs. of ammo in checked baggage; and 115-grain bullets are half the weight of 230-grain and lighter still with Blazer aluminum cases. I can carry enough ammo to demonstrate shooting

techniques and the court-defensible 1911 4.5-lb. trigger gives me no excuses for bad shooting.

The cocked-and-locked format and the short, easy trigger demand discipline born of training and practice! But if you commit to those, the 1911 format will serve you well, whatever your caliber choice. The slim 1911 profile makes it particularly comfortable with inside-the-waistband holsters and the cocked-and-locked carry the 1911 demands is likely to buy you time to rectify the situation if a criminal attacker momentarily gains control of your pistol.

It's always your choice, of course, based on your particular needs. But there are reasons why some of us — and not just senior citizens, either — have chosen to keep the 1911 for regular use instead of consigning it to "the gun museum."

**GUNS**



Mas finishes a pin table with Plaxco-comped Springfield 1911A1 .45.  
Photo: Gail Pepin

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# FAMARS USA ROMBO

## FOUR BARRELS? YEP, IT'S A THING!

Tom Keer

Every now and then, we gun collectors, shooters and hunters get a difficult-to-scratch itch for a new shotgun. We visit gun shops and shows, search online, talk with friends, and speak with gun experts. Most of the time, these searches bear fruit in the form of high-quality collectibles and commissioned custom guns. Occasionally even those efforts fail and when they do, a bespoke gun is the answer. Not just any bespoke gun will satisfy the discerning palate, what is needed is a make and model so entirely unique it will turn everyone's heads.

### QUAD RUNNER

Designers of custom shotguns usually begin with action, gauge and barrel configurations. Standard options included both single and double barrels, with the latter choice falling in the realm of side-by-sides or over/unders. Others may consider a Triplet, which is also known by its Germanic name of "drilling." But if you really want to up the

**Rather than create a four-barrel shotgun by stacking two barrels on top of each other, FAMARS opted for a diamond shape to improve balance and handling.**

**A straight English stock made from highly figured Grade 5 Turkish walnut is stunning.**

ante, there is a four-barrel shotgun known by its Germanic name of *Vierling*.

Four-barrel shotguns are uncommon but not so much as one might think. In fact, they've been around for quite a while. If you're ever near the Bass Pro Shops in Springfield, Mo., swing by the NRA Museum. On display is a four-barrel Lancaster .440 bore (28-gauge) built in the mid-19th Century by the legendary British barrel-maker-turned-gunmaker Charles Lancaster. He stacked two barrels on top of two barrels so the result is two side-by-sides or you've got two over/unders. Take your pick.

Over the years, many Belgian, French and German manufacturers have built Vierlings, with some chambers holding shotshells while others carrying bullets. Heck, in 2016, Winchester launched their own Vierling. It's different from the classic scrolling, exquisite fit and finish and gorgeous stocks found

on a bespoke gun, mind you. The Liberator series is a down-and-dirty model designed for use by someone who previously had never used a firearm.

But if you're looking for a bespoke shotgun today then you might consider a trip to Rhode Island. The FAMARS Shooting Grounds is located at The Preserve at Boulder Hills and you can see the Rombo by *FAMARS di Abbaticco & Salvinelli*.

### R&D

The four-barrel shotgun was developed in conjunction with Paul Mihailides, the owner of FAMARS USA. The lifelong shooter was interested in a modern masterpiece, but rather than simply stack barrels, Mihailides opted for a classic diamond shape. Balance is frequently lost in multi-barreled shotguns and the diamond shape offers more than just good looks. Its innovative design lends itself to a lower-profile

**It's easy to see how the diamond barrel configuration contributes to a sleek design of the Rombo.**





Sabatti deep-relief engraved scrolls (above) can be customized to each owner's tastes and preferences. Here is a game scene with gold accents. The Rombo's exquisite fit and finish (below) contributes to the unique shotgun's aesthetics.



and contributes to a nimble feeling in hand and better handling. Accompanying this interesting look is a fit and finish impeccable as one would hope.

With so much fluid steel comes added weight. To create a nimble shotgun, which feels alive and responsive in the hand, Mihailides focused only on small bores. The Rombo is designed in either a 28-gauge or a .410 bore. Top and bottom barrels are choked full while the right and left barrels are a corresponding IC/Modified.

### BANGING AWAY

Shooting sequence follows the choke constrictions, with the right barrel (IC) shooting first followed by the left barrel (Modified) followed by the top barrel (Full) and ending with the bottom barrel (Full). The chromelined barrels are 28" and cold-blued. They're matched to an elaborate Anson & Deeley sidelock and the total weight is 7.5 lbs. This might sound heavy but it lands in the realm of an average American-made 12-gauge side-by-side.

FAMARS bespoke shotguns are made to order and take between 12

and 18 months to complete. Each FAMARS bespoke shotgun is made with over 2,200 man-hours, more with the Rombo. The accompanying pictures are of a Rombo made for a customer who favored the Sabatti deep-relief engraved scroll complete with a game scene with gold accents. Grade 5 Turkish walnut delivered on a straight English stock with a 14 7/8" length of pull completed the classic design. This bespoke Rombo cost \$150,000 to build, and it landed in a private collection. Something tells me it'd be uniquely at home in a bobwhite quail field or an alder run for woodcock. A hunter would need to check with law enforcement if a plug would be needed for one barrel and the matter would be handled.

The FAMARS USA Shooting Grounds at Rhode Island's Preserve at Boulder Hills is worth a visit because the gun shop is close to the clays courses, five stand and other shooting games.

GUNS

FAMARS.com  
Photos courtesy of FAMARS USA

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# ABOUT BULLET CASTING

## MEMORY LANE BECKONS

**Mike “Duke” Venturino**  
**Photos: Yvonne Venturino**

Recently I sat down in front of one of my lead casting furnaces with misty eyes. The reason for the emotion was happiness because a variety of complications had kept me from casting bullets for over five months. There was some doubt I’d ever return to it. Contrary to the attitude of many bullet casters, I have never found pouring my own bullets an onerous chore.

### CAST AWAY YOUR CARES

That’s not the same as saying I’d like to do it every day. But when weather is foul and deadline pressures have been met, I find making my own bullets a relaxing endeavor. I’m especially fond of audio books and while casting, I listen to ones ranging from murder mysteries to World War II history. During my bullet production sessions I don’t answer the phone or door and even tell Yvonne to leave me be.

Once, she came running to my casting area, excitedly saying, “Come quick, there’s an emu in the yard!” Thinking it was ridiculous, my response was “Go away.” She persisted, so sighing in frustration I set the lead dipper and mold down and stepped out of the shop. Sure enough a six-foot-tall emu stood

there staring back at me. It eventually wandered off and we never saw it again.

From the first grade, school was a most hateful thing for me. One of the reasons I miraculously ended up with a BA Degree in journalism was I returned home nigh-on every weekend to target shoot with one revolver or the other. If it rained or snowed then time was devoted to casting more bullets. For spring break of 1971, with no funds or desires to head toward a beach, I set myself a goal of casting at least 10,000 bullets and actually ended up with 12,000. The majority were .38/357 semi-wadcutters but there were a thousand or two each of .41s, .44s and .45s. This was all done with single- and double-cavity molds. As I remember most of those bullets came from Lyman mold numbers 358477, 41032 and 454190. I literally cleansed my hometown of wheel weights that week.

A good question here might be, “Did you use any special techniques to produce so many?” I did use the dual mold method, meaning filling one while the other cooled. It didn’t hurt that beside my chair was a 100-lb. anvil upon which the cooling mold was set.

The huge hunk of steel sucked the heat right out of the mold blocks, speeding up the solidifying process considerably.

Toward the end of college, I acquired a Model 1903A3 Springfield and took up casting for rifles. Good .30-06 results with Lyman mold #311291 throwing a 170-grain RN came easily and caused me to continue to this day, trying cast bullets in most of the rifles I’ve acquired.

### TOUGH TIMES

During school years, money was tight and what cash and coins left after buying necessities were spent on powder and primers. If buying bullets — cast, swaged or jacketed — had been part of my handloading program, weekend shooting would have been greatly restricted.

During late college years, I began traveling westwards in summers. One year, I took along my S&W Model 19, a Colt SAA .357 Magnum and a Lyman 310 “tong” tool with 500 sized and

lubed bullets from my Lyman mold #358477. To my pleasure, four other fellows in our bunkhouse also had .357 Magnum revolvers. We had some fun evenings shooting but — as none of the other guys were handloaders — those 500 bullets didn’t last too long.

Thereafter, a propane camping stove, cast iron pot and dipper were added to my gear. Also the 310 Tool was set aside in favor of something I named my “reloading board.” It was about a four-foot-long, 2”-thick plank on which was mounted a single stage press, powder measure and lube/sizing machine. In use it was c-clamped to any available flat surface. Even after settling in one spot, this lash-up kept me in handloads albeit an electric furnace replaced the propane camping stove.

### THE ADDICTION

In time, affluence allowed me to become a “bullet mold junkie.” Literally, I’ve owned hundreds of molds ranging from .22s to .58s and from one to eight



**By using a machine-rest, Duke has been able to get his cast bullet loads to shoot like this.**





cavities, collectively dropping bullets weighing from 45 grains to 660 grains. Along the way, molds for bullet designs found unsuited to my pursuits were sold, traded or given away and the others — which gave fine results — have been treasured and NEVER, NEVER loaned.

Then, in 1985, came an impetus to my bullet casting. It is called Black Powder Cartridge Rifle Silhouette. It involves firing at metallic cutouts of animals out to 500 meters with single-shot, exposed-hammer rifles designed before 1896 or replicas thereof. Also bullets could be lead-alloy only. Brothers, did I get involved!

Needing to hit a ram silhouette measuring only 12" deep from belly to

backbone at 500 yards requires considerable precision. The result was many competitors turned to custom-made molds or prevailed on companies such as Lyman, RCBS and Redding SAECO to introduce new special silhouette designs. All this just served to increase my mold addiction. I've now owned over 50 BPCR Silhouette bullet molds while firing tens of thousands of rounds in load testing. This endeavor determined many bullet designs are suitable — the key is consistent casting, meaning variances of only a few tenths of a grain in a run say of 100 or so.

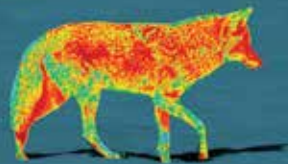
With age and accompanying infirmities, silhouette range time for me is reduced. For recreational shooting, I

**A** This photo shows the different shapes, sizes and weights bullet casters can pick for their specific shooting purposes. **B** A reader once commented on how nice Duke's cast bullets looked. He replied it helped he had over 50 years of experience and also that he chose the ones for Yvonne to photograph.

like shooting steel with handguns; most often Colt SAAs. For this, my own cast bullets are preferred. Some years back, a reader messaged saying, "I've just started casting bullets but they certainly don't look as good as yours in the magazines." My reply was; "There are two factors involved here. First, I've been casting for a half century. Second, I get to pick the ones shown in the photographs!" **GUNS**



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# BEAN COUNTERS THEY AREN'T NECESSARILY THE VILLAIN

Dave Anderson

“Bean counters” seems to be a pejorative term in the rifle community, usually delivered with an implied sneer: “All was well with Company X until the bean counters came along and ruined everything.” The term seems to be mainly used by those who have never been involved in managing a business of any size, never had to meet a payroll, negotiate a capital or operating loan or deal with suppliers. I suppose if you work for wages doing what an employer tells you to do, the “bean counter” can seem like the enemy. It’s rather like someone who has smoked, drank, and overeaten for 50 years who blames the doctor for diagnosing their emphysema, cirrhosis and diabetes.

## CRITICAL JOB

In any business, the most indispensable person is the bean counter, the financial manager. Any successful business has someone who understands finance, either by avocation or by training. A business or corporation is like a person in some respects. Just like a human, the first priority is to survive. Seems simple? It isn’t, which is why most businesses fail, some quickly and others more slowly.

Winchester is the classic example. The accepted narrative seems to be Winchester was the dominant maker of sporting arms after WWII. Then in 1964 the bean counters took over, dumped famous models such as the 12, 70 and 94, replaced them with cheap flimsy

versions, running the business into the ground. I remember an article in *Gun Digest* in which the author said Winchester “massacred” its model lineup in 1964 and liked the term so much he used it roughly 850 times.

The reality is rather different. Prior to WWII, labor was cheap and readily



The Winchester 94 .30-30 (above) made in the mid-1950s. By the 1960s, though they didn’t know it, Winchester was losing money on every one they made. In 1981, Winchester introduced the tremendously popular Featherweight (below) based on the post-’64 action. Quality control and appearance were vastly improved — because Winchester still existed!



available. Workers were grateful to have a job at all. Firearm production was based on cheap labor, including skilled tool and die makers. After WWII, some companies, notably Remington but also Savage, realized production methods had to be changed to make use of basic machine tools — mainly lathes — and reduce the need for skilled laborers.

Winchester didn’t change. They continued to use milling machines, complicated tooling setups, operated by skilled workers. Except skilled labor wasn’t cheap anymore. In the booming postwar economy, all sorts of manufacturers, from automotive and aeronautics to basic kitchen appliance makers, were desperately looking for skilled machinists. I can remember ads in magazines of the era such as *Outdoor Life* offering tempting lifestyles and wages to tool and die makers.

Make no mistake, there are plenty of old-timers (me, for example) who prefer the old ways. We love machined and polished steel, hard, straight-grained checkered walnut, hand fitting and tuning. These days I mainly buy guns made before 1960. I’m by no means the only one. But the fact is people like you and me are not typical gun buyers. Most buyers then and now simply want a reliable gun and their primary interest is in price.

## COST BENEFIT

Through the ’50s and into the early ’60s, Winchester firearms cost more than models of similar utility from Remington and Savage, and the gap was increasing, while Winchester’s quality control got steadily worse. Older skilled workers were retiring and replacements, if they could be found at all, were not cheap. To get them, Winchester had to compete not just within the firearms industry, but with Ford, GM, Boeing, McDonnell Douglas, John Deere ...

Finally in the early ’60s, Winchester management called in financial experts — “bean counters.” After a thorough audit they found Winchester was losing money on most of the firearms they made. Raising prices would just have further slowed sales. The company was perilously close to collapse and only

harsh medicine, and prompt action, could save it. The company dumped money-losing models like the Models 70, 12 and 94, replacing them with firearms cheaper to manufacture — less attractive to be sure but also, it must be noted, in some cases stronger and safer.

### SIMPLE TRUTH

Conventional wisdom says the market rejected the new models. Conventional wisdom is wrong. The new models far outsold the ones they replaced. Not only was Winchester producing and selling far more guns, they were making money on each one instead of losing.

For example, in the last five years of production (1959–1963), Winchester made just over 116,000 model 70s. From 1964 to 1968, nearly 226,000 of the new model 70 were produced. Between 1948–1963, Winchester made 1.086 million Model 94s. Over the same time period commencing in 1964, they made 2.818 million model 94s. Over a 60-year



After WWII, Remington redesigned its product line to reduce the amount of skilled labor needed. The 721/722 rifles were not as attractive as the Winchester 70 but they were accurate, strong, reliable and cost less than the Model 70.

period from 1903 to 1963, Winchester made just under 912,000 semi-automatic .22 rifles, all models combined. The post-'64 models 190/290 production was 2,150,000 in just 13 years.

I hold no brief for the firearms made by Winchester from 1964 to about 1972 when quality of fit and finish improved. But they kept the company alive, into an era of new and cost-efficient manufacturing methods. As a result, we got such splendid firearms as the 9422 (1972), the model 70 Featherweight (1981), and the Classic model 70 of the early 1990s.

Without those despised bean counters, I am convinced Winchester would not have survived the '60s. It would have gone the way of Parker Bros., L.C. Smith, Stevens, A.H. Fox, BSA, High Standard — either disappearing completely or being bought out by other gunmakers. And yes, there are bad bean counters just as there are bad doctors. It isn't easy to run a successful business. In fact, it is very hard. It takes skills not many people possess — and it never gets any easier.

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# PERCUSSION PART III

## DRAGOONS WITH ROUND BALLS

John Taffin

In late 1846, Texas Ranger Capt. Sam Walker put Colt back in business after their bankruptcy as he ordered 1,000 “heavy” revolvers complete with several improvements. By heavy, Sam Walker meant larger in caliber than the original Colt Pater-son and definitely stronger. These were to be true sixguns, six-shot, 9" barrels and in .44 caliber.

### HORSE PISTOLS

Walker himself held his Colts in high esteem saying they were good on man or beast out to 200 yards. However, the Walker Colt had two major drawbacks. These huge sixguns with 9" barrels weighed 4 ½ lbs. and were very heavy and cumbersome sixguns. Walkers are not only so heavy they are very difficult to use, especially one-handed; a second problem is the loading lever often drops upon recoil. It did not take long for the Walker to be improved.

In 1848, the Transitional Whitneyville Walker Hartford Dragoon appeared. The grip frame, the mainframe, and working parts remained the same. However, the cylinder was shortened slightly and the barrel was cut back to 7 ½". The locking arrangement of the loading lever was also changed, moving it from the center of the lever to the end with the spring-loaded male end matching up with the female stud on the barrel.

I find today's replicas, both from Pietta and Uberti, are very well made as to fit and finish,

authentically-styled and the cylinders lock up tightly. Over the past 30+ years, I have had extensive experience with Uberti Walkers. My last Walker purchase was the Transitional Walker Dragoon.

My standard loads are assembled with .454" or .457" Speer round balls and CCI #11 percussion caps. It averages just

over 1" for five shots at 20 yards using 30, 35, 40 and 45 grains of Hodgdon's Pyrodex P, which is comparable to FFFg black powder. All measurements are by volume using a black powder measure. With 45 grains, muzzle velocity is well over 1,050 fps. With Goex FFFg black powder used in the Walker, 50 grains clock out at 1,160 fps.

### DIAL IT BACK

Colt shortened the cylinder and barrel on the Transitional Model to make it lighter and somewhat smaller, bringing it to about 4 lbs. But how powerful were the 9" Walker Colts with their longer cylinders? Using a replica 1847 Walker with 0.454" Speer round balls and CCI #11 Caps over 55 grains of Goex FFFg with a lubed Thompson Wad in between powder and ball results in a muzzle velocity of 1,224 fps and places five shots into 1 ¼" at 50 feet. This is one of the most accurate loads I have found in my Walkers. Going up to 60 grains, something I would not recommend for continuous everyday use, gives a muzzle velocity well over 1,300 fps.

Several changes were made in the Walker to transition to the Dragoons. The grip was also changed and now had the familiar 90-degree cut at the top of the grip frame found on virtually all single-action sixguns produced since 1848. The barrel length was shortened to 7 ½" just as found on the transition model, which was known as the Whitneyville Walker Dragoon. The cylinder was shortened to accept a lighter charge of black powder, and the weight was now slightly over 4 lbs. To keep things from getting too complicated as far as



The 3rd Model Dragoon works well with these powders and plastic vials that contain up to 45 grains by volume.



Targets (above) fired with the 1st Model Dragoon. Targets (below) fired with the Whitneyville Walker Dragoon.



change of machinery goes, the original frame size was maintained so, with the shorter cylinder, there was more room between the front of the cylinder and the barrel assembly with the barrel extending backwards to meet the cylinder. These first Transitional Walker Dragoons maintained the standard Walker grip frame but it was soon time for more changes.

### STILL CHANGING

The First Model had a square back trigger guard, round cylinder-stop notches, no pins between the nipples on the back of the cylinder and there was no roller on the hammer where it contacted the mainspring. With the arrival of the Second Model Dragoon in 1849, the trigger guard had been changed to the now familiar round shape. However, some were also made with the squared backed trigger guard. Cylinder stop notches also gained the familiar and traditional rectangular shape, a roller was placed on the hammer to contact the mainspring, allowing it to slide easily as the hammer was cocked, and pins were placed on the back of the cylinder between the nipples. These pins matched up with a hole in the hammer to allow the carrying of the Dragoon with all six chambers loaded without having to let the hammer down on a percussion cap.

The Third Model Dragoons all have round trigger guards. Dragoons would be produced slightly over 10 years or until 1860 when the last improved .44 percussion Colt revolver arrived.

### RANGE TIME

Using the Uberti 1851 Third Model Dragoon with 0.454" Speer round balls and CCI Speer #11 caps, my best results have been obtained by pushing the Dragoon a little using 50 grains instead of 40 grains of powder. With 50 grains of Goex FFFg and Crisco placed over the seated ball to fill out the cylinder, muzzle velocity is right at 990 fps with five shots grouping into 1 1/4" at 50 feet. Switching to Pyrodex P using the same charge and lubing with Crisco, muzzle velocity is 955 fps with five shots grouping into 1 3/8" at 50 feet. So basically the results are the same with



The Whitneyville Walker Dragoon was the transitional model between the Walker and the 1st Model Dragoon.

black powder or Pyrodex. Charges below 50 grains resulted in groups in the 2 1/2" to 3" neighborhood.

For the 1st Model Dragoon, I used charges of 30, 35, 40 and 45 grains of Pyrodex P from Hodgdon's as well as 35 and 40 grains of Goex FFFg. Groups averaged just barely over 1" for five shots at 20 yards with the 45-grain charge of Pyrodex averaging right at 1,050 fps. All these were assembled by volume, not by weight, with 0.454" round balls and #11 CCI Magnum percussion caps. With 45 grains of FFFg black powder using the same size round balls, muzzle velocities run just under 1,000 fps. Just as with people, all sixguns have their own personality.

Both the Walker and various Dragoons were all more than a little heavy for fast work from holster in the hands of any mere mortal. Although the 1851 Model Colt Navy .36 was much easier to handle, and certainly easier to pack all day in a holster than the Dragoons, it was also an exceptionally large step backwards as far as power goes.

How powerful were the Dragoons? We can get some idea by looking at a few figures. The .45 ACP with a 230-grain bullet at 825 fps figures out to a muzzle energy of 345 foot-pounds. With the Dragoon, using a 140-grain round ball at 990 fps results in 295 foot-pounds while the Walker with a maximum load giving 1,300 fps with a 140 round ball is at 525 foot-pounds. That is a lot of power plus the soft lead round ball also adds to its effectiveness. Those sixgunners during the Dragoon-era were definitely not undergunned. **GUNS**

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# SAVAGE MODEL 23-B

## A FIRST-RATE .25-20 GAME-GETTER

Payton Miller

In the 129 years Savage Arms has been in business, the company has produced more than its share of iconic firearms — the Model 99 lever-action rifle, the Model 110 bolt-action rifle and the Model 24 shotgun/rifle O/U combination are three of the more obvious selections.

But many lesser-known models have come and gone and a lot of them warrant more than a cursory historical footnote. Here's a case in point.

### A SPORTING PROPOSITION

Beginning in the early 1920s, Savage began producing a "Sporter" series of economically priced bolt-action repeaters chambered to such cartridges as the .22 Long Rifle (M23-A), .22 Hornet (M23-D), .32-20 (M23-C) and .25-20 (M23-B).

Basically, these were small game and varmint offerings although the .25-20 and .32-20 did see use on deer. The .25-20, incidentally, gained a good reputation on turkeys in areas where rifles are permitted. Small game hunters and trappers appreciated the enhanced knockdown power of the heavy bullet loadings without the level of destruction seen with higher velocity rounds.

I was fortunate to lay hands on an M23-B Savage Sporter thanks to a collector/shooting buddy Doug Fee and — from an equally critical standpoint — a few vintage boxes of .25-20 ammo. In our case this turned out to be 86-grain Western SP.

Introduced specifically for Winchester's 1892 lever-action, the .25-20 also found its way into a few bolt actions — the Savage, of course, and a small number of Winchester's classic Model 43.



The caliber-inscribed 5-round magazine needs to be rocked forward to detach. The safety is easily accessible to a right-hand shooter's thumb. The open rear sight is adjustable for elevation, although windage adjustments require drifting.



The Savage 23-B is the .25-20 caliber member of the company's bolt-action Sporter series produced from 1923 to 1942.

The .25-20 WCF is a rimmed, bottle-neck cartridge; the product of a necked down .32-20. Earlier factory offerings included a 60-grain varmint load at 2,250 fps, according to *Barnes' Cartridges of the World*, which also lists our heavier load at 1,460 fps.

Naturally, we had to check this figure. Over our Shooting Chrony, we averaged 1,428 fps from the rifle's 25" barrel. The Extreme Spread was 70 fps. The noise signature was about on par with a .22 Hornet, although some bystanders opined it to be a bit less sharp.

Although the Model 23-B was officially discontinued in 1942, it was cataloged for the last time in 1945 at a sticker price of \$42.50. If this sounds like an insanely reasonable deal, keep in mind in today's dollars this translates to just under \$720. However, we've recently seen one in VG condition listed on Gunbroker.com at a beginning bid of \$600.

But if you're allergic to auctions, it's certainly not beyond the realm of possibility to find one in a Mom-and-Pop used rack for something reasonably close to this price.

Where things get scary, however, is the ammo side of the equation. The operative term for the .25-20 is "moribund." As such, expect to pay dearly for any full 50-round box you're lucky enough to find. We recently saw a box of Remington Hi-Speed 86-grain SP at a "Buy It Now" price of \$175 at Gunbroker.com.

Winchester and Remington cataloged it, but Remington's last catalog price was \$140.99 per box and listed it as "currently unavailable."

So if you're lucky enough to be gifted with a couple boxes of .25-20 ammo (like we were), it'd pretty much justify buying the rifle. At any rate, the case for reloading pretty much makes itself.

Fortunately, .25-caliber bullets can be had in 60-, 75- and 86-grain weights, and there are enough .25-20 fans out there to ensure plenty of loading recipes and advice.

### A DAY AT THE RANGE

Now to the rifle itself. Our M23-B Sporter features a 25" barrel, 6.5-lb. weight, a rather unprepossessing

oil-finished walnut stock, steel butt-plate, open step-adjustable sights and a 5-round detachable box magazine.

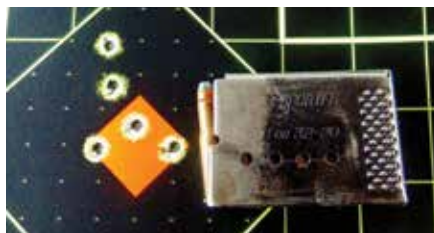
Our particular Sporter, incidentally, featured a Schnabel forend. Many of them did not.

After waiting for a dry day in an unseasonably wet June, we finally hauled the Savage to the range and set up shop.

At 50 yards, five-shot groups from a sandbag rest generally ran around between 2" and 3" — our Best of Show being 1.75" — which is considerably better than us older shooters have a right to expect with those open sights. Fittingly enough, it was shot by the rifle's owner, Doug Fee.

We even busted a few clay birds on the 60-yard berm, the operative term here being "few." Nobody was in the mood to promiscuously squander the precious .25-20 ammo. And, you can bet no brass was left to lie.

The trigger, incidentally, was excellent — a crisp 3 lbs. Recoil, as might be expected, was less than negligible.



**Five shots, 50 yards. With elderly 86-grain Western ammo, this group is nonetheless impressive. Just don't ask us to do it again! The bottlenecked .25-20 was originally introduced for Winchester's 1892 lever action.**



Our original magazine functioned flawlessly, a common trouble spot with vintage rifles. One thing to

remember is there's no mag release button, switch, lever or what-have-you. Simply rock the mag forward and pull down. That's it.

We were very impressed with the Savage M23-B. Although pretty much in the utility class, it represented a lot of value for the money.

Despite its scarcity and cost, the .25-20 cartridge is responsible for much of the rifle's appeal. I must confess to having a soft spot for the .25-20, having owned a Winchester 1892 in the same caliber when I was a teenager. Unfortunately, the bore was so shot-out it was impossible for me to get an idea of what the cartridge was really capable of, so I sold it to a guy who promptly rechambered it to .357 Magnum.

But to be honest, the Model 23-B/.25-20's particular niche could most likely be filled with any number of pistol-caliber carbines today. However, it's unlikely any of them would have the aesthetic appeal of Savage's long-gone classic. **GUNS**

**COMBAT READY**

**DUTY READY**

**CARRY READY**

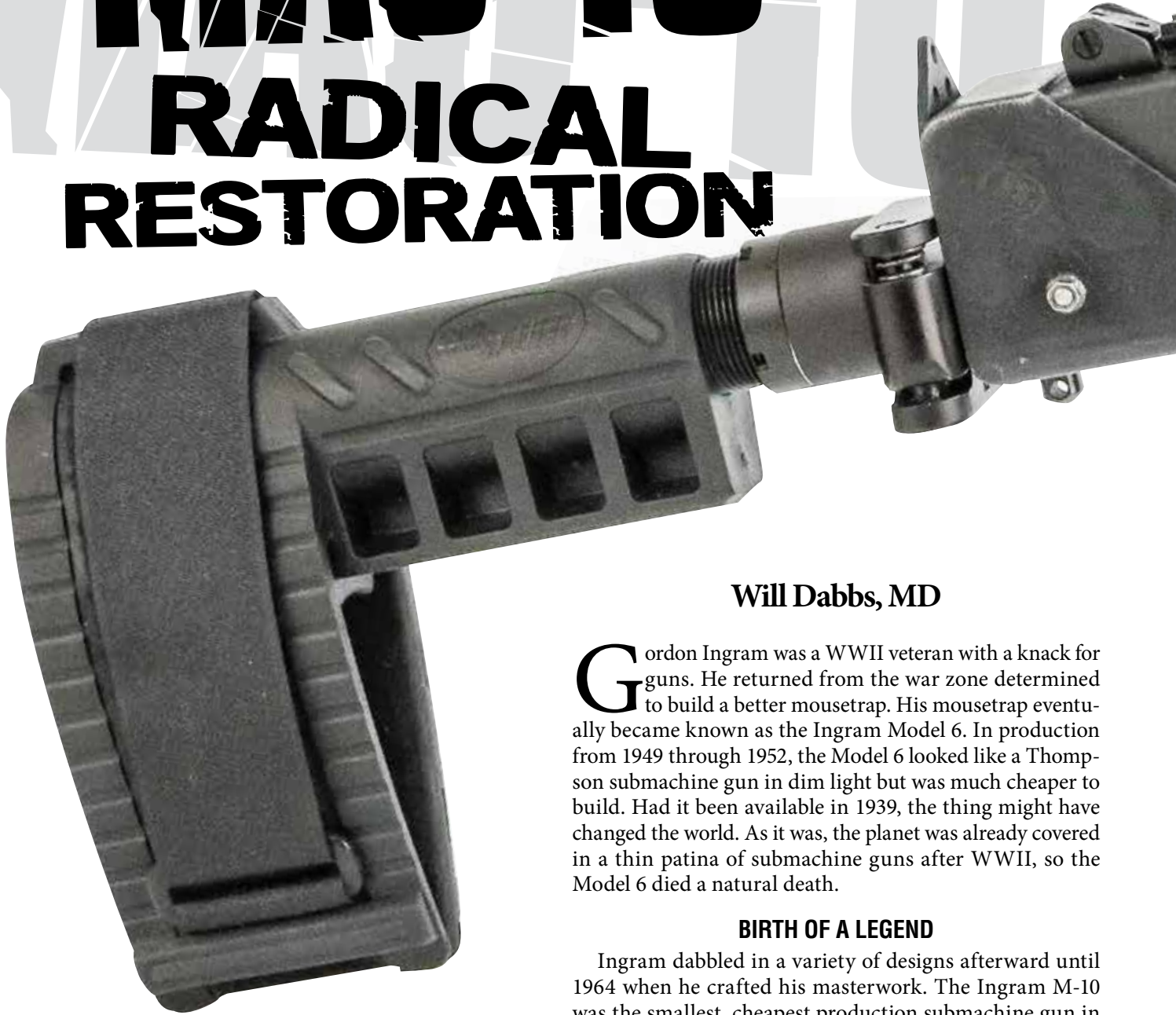
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# MAG-10

## RADICAL RESTORATION

**Returning  
Balance  
To The  
Gun World**



**A crime against nature — some lunatic actually did this to a classic 1980s-vintage open-bolt M-10. Will says he developed a rash just looking at it.**

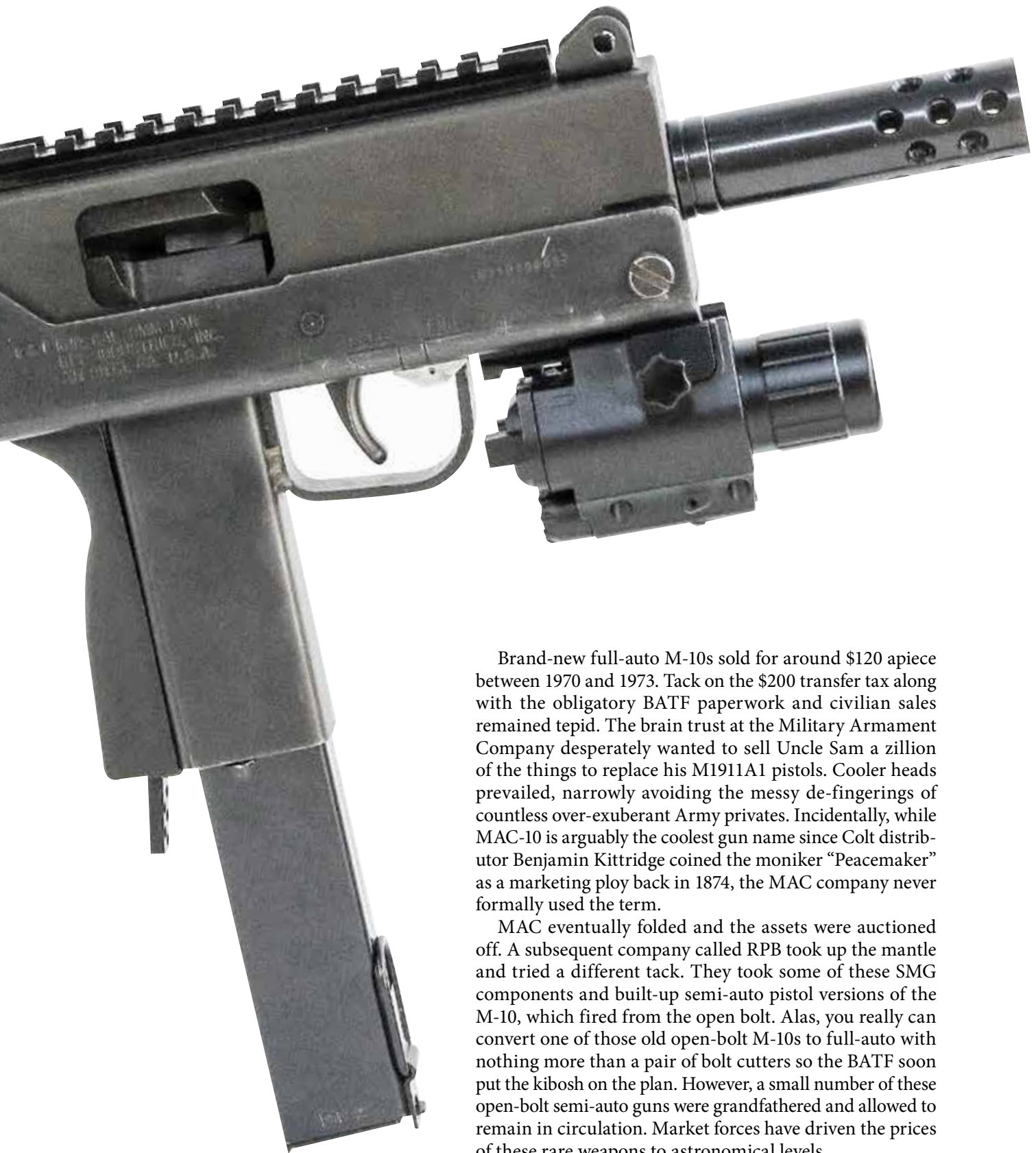
**Will Dabbs, MD**

**G**ordon Ingram was a WWII veteran with a knack for guns. He returned from the war zone determined to build a better mousetrap. His mousetrap eventually became known as the Ingram Model 6. In production from 1949 through 1952, the Model 6 looked like a Thompson submachine gun in dim light but was much cheaper to build. Had it been available in 1939, the thing might have changed the world. As it was, the planet was already covered in a thin patina of submachine guns after WWII, so the Model 6 died a natural death.

### **BIRTH OF A LEGEND**

Ingram dabbled in a variety of designs afterward until 1964 when he crafted his masterwork. The Ingram M-10 was the smallest, cheapest production submachine gun in the world at the time. With a collapsed length of less than a foot and chamberings in both 9mm and .45 ACP, the M-10 was a fistful of dynamite. The guns cycled around 1,000 rounds per minute on full-auto.

The M-10 was designed from the outset with manufacturability in mind. The receivers and ancillary bits were industrial stampings welded as necessary. Aside from the bolt, trunnion and fire controls, little else about the weapon required complex machining. The guns were heavy at 6.26 lbs. empty but they would fill a room with pain.



Brand-new full-auto M-10s sold for around \$120 apiece between 1970 and 1973. Tack on the \$200 transfer tax along with the obligatory BATF paperwork and civilian sales remained tepid. The brain trust at the Military Armament Company desperately wanted to sell Uncle Sam a zillion of the things to replace his M1911A1 pistols. Cooler heads prevailed, narrowly avoiding the messy de-fingerings of countless over-exuberant Army privates. Incidentally, while MAC-10 is arguably the coolest gun name since Colt distributor Benjamin Kittridge coined the moniker “Peacemaker” as a marketing ploy back in 1874, the MAC company never formally used the term.

MAC eventually folded and the assets were auctioned off. A subsequent company called RPB took up the mantle and tried a different tack. They took some of these SMG components and built-up semi-auto pistol versions of the M-10, which fired from the open bolt. Alas, you really can convert one of those old open-bolt M-10s to full-auto with nothing more than a pair of bolt cutters so the BATF soon put the kibosh on the plan. However, a small number of these open-bolt semi-auto guns were grandfathered and allowed to remain in circulation. Market forces have driven the prices of these rare weapons to astronomical levels.

### **RAW MATERIAL**

I am ever on the prowl for cool gun deals at regional auctions advertised online. They are my kryptonite. While

much of the fare is indeed pedestrian, stick with it long enough and you can find some proper gems.

The customized weapon in question looked like an octopus had a baby with a toaster. This blocky souped-up monstrosity had stuff sticking out of it all over the place but the auction pictures were of decent quality. I zoomed in really close to check out the markings on the side of the frame and saw “SAP RPB M-10.” Score.

SAP is short for Semi-Auto Pistol. RPB only placed these markings on their open-bolt semi-auto pistols. This could indeed be the foundation for something fairly epic.

The previous owner had absolutely violated this thing. The original upper receiver had been replaced with an aftermarket side-cocking version and the bottom of the frame had been drilled and tapped for a short length of accessory rail. Upon this rail was mounted an utterly cheesy cheap plastic airsoft tactical light. The back of the gun had been fitted with a mount for a bulky side-folding

pistol-stabilizing brace. Just studying the thing online made me a bit queasy.

While hardly cheap, I still landed the gun for less than market value. Apparently, not just everybody had bothered to study the receiver markings in detail prior to the close of bidding. When the gun arrived, it was even more offensive than I had imagined.



**Somebody put a fair amount of effort into accumulating all this stuff and mounting it — poorly — on Will’s M-10.**

sports a simplified extractor and the upper receiver lacks the pressed-in grooves designed to keep crud out of the action. Additionally, the charging handle is bigger and uglier. Regardless, as I couldn’t find an alternative, I

## SOURCING THE PARTS

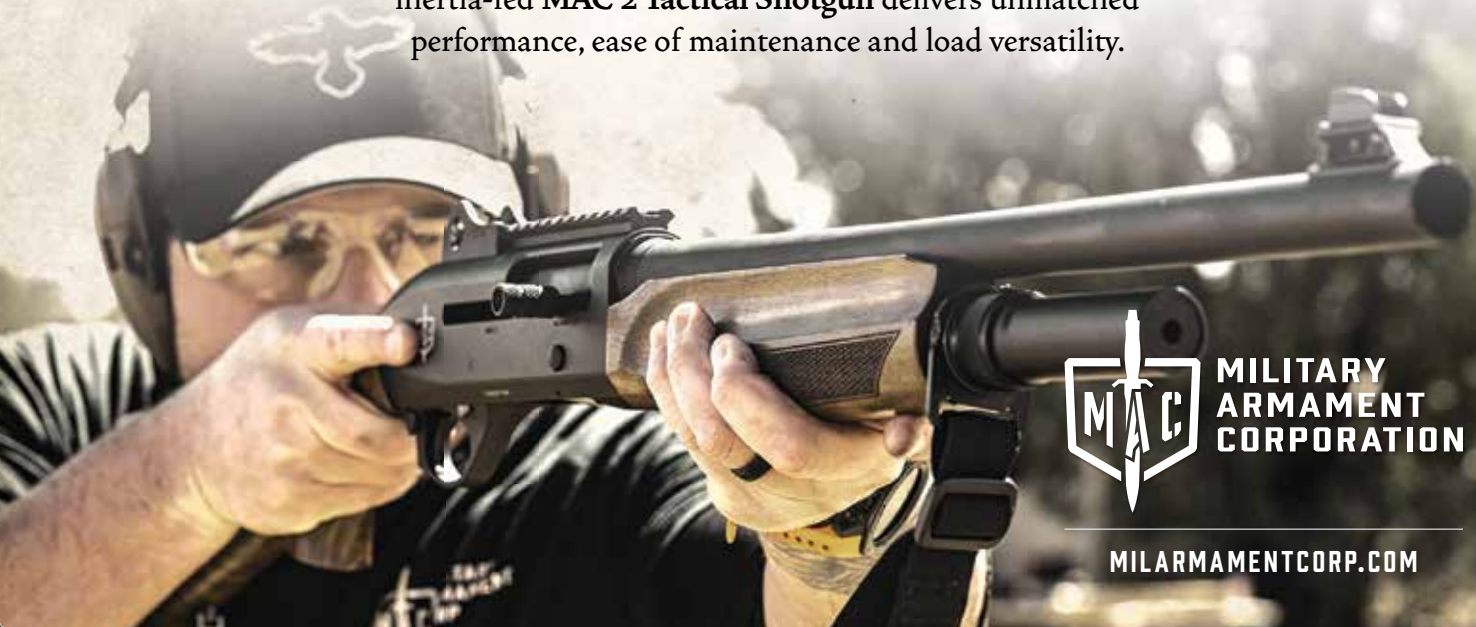
There was a time when M-10 parts were both ubiquitous and cheap. You could order complete parts kits without a receiver for beans from a variety of gun magazines. Then, like most every other cool thing in life, the supply eventually dried up.

Nowadays, FTFIndustries.com still offers a respectable selection of M-10 spares but their parts are aftermarket. The newer bolt design



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Once restored to its original glory, the 9mm open-bolt RPB M-10 SAP is still big, heavy and ugly. However, it does add flavor to even the most seasoned gun collection.

ponied up the cash to buy a new 9mm barreled upper assembly.

Like all modern quasi-military weapons, the parts are all readily interchangeable. As a result, the new upper was just plug-and-play. However, once I got to the range, the results were underwhelming.

The gun just never ran well. Stoppages were commonplace and my patience grew thin. I cleared the thing and tucked it back into the gun box to simmer for a while.

I try to skim a little GunBroker.com most every day. If you've not had the pleasure, GunBroker.com is a 24/7 gun show stretching from coast to coast. Whether your particular proclivities orbit around 19th-century pocket pistols, rarefied trap guns, home-defense tools or uber-expensive classic full-autos, you can find all that and more on GunBroker. I love those guys. During one of my random forays, I tripped over an original 9mm RPB open-bolt upper receiver assembly. As these things do not come up for sale very often, I dusted off the plastic and made it mine.

It turns out the front trunnions on these guns came in two broad flavors. This one was too wide to fit in my frame but 20 minutes of careful attention with a fiber-reinforced cutoff wheel on my Dremel tool rectified the problem. A little touchup with some cold blue left the modified component looking near-factory. Now my classic RPB open-bolt M-10 SAP pistol looked like Gordan Ingram originally intended.

### TRIGGER TIME

Oh, this thing is awful. The trigger is as heavy as Aunt Edna's prize Christmas fruitcake, and the ergonomics do not suit any actual human who has literally ever lived. The thing is awash in harsh square corners and it balances about as well as an orangutan left to wander a distillery unsupervised. At least, now it is reliable.



**At 10 meters, fired offhand over the sights, the M-10 SAP would keep its rounds on a typical silhouette easily enough.**

The open-bolt design synergistically combines with the crude pressed steel sights to make tactical accuracy more an aspiration than a practical reality. There's no way to run the gun comfortably or well. Magazine changes are pretty timely, so there's that. Most every other practical aspect of the gun is simply ghastly. Anything the open-bolt RPB M-10 SAP will do, a GLOCK 17 will do infinitely better.

Of course, there is a fair possibility whoever butchered this gun in the first place simply drew the same conclusion. Despite its undeniably homely visage, the ugly version I got from the auction would accept an optic and could be stabilized to fire offhand. Regardless, none of it justifies the crime against humanity that was the original transformation.

### RUMINATIONS

The frame still has a few ugly threaded holes it lacked when it left the factory, but it will now pass for an original if you squint. It also runs reliably, so all is finally right with the world though it took some proper effort to get there.

If whoever originally visited such mechanical blasphemy on this 1982 vintage classic gun is out there reading this, I sure wouldn't admit it to anybody. You'll no doubt have to answer for your crimes in some teleo-cosmological sense on the Day of Judgment. For now, these sins have, at great cost and effort, finally been made right. As an obsessive-compulsive gun nerd truly committed to his craft, I can finally rest easy.

If anybody wants a big box of bug-ugly MAC-10 accessories, I'll let them go cheap. Just don't tell me what you plan to do with them.

**GUNS**

# FREEDOM ARMS MODEL 97

## A super-premium single-action



**Roy Huntington • Photos: Rob Jones/The Imagesmith LLC**

I was at the SHOT Show a few years ago and was visiting with Bob Baker, owner of Freedom Arms, homebased in a scenic mountain valley in Western Wyoming. If you've paid any attention at all to the shooting world, you likely know Freedom Arms essentially single-handedly wrote the book on high quality single-action revolvers. Or perhaps I should better say, they wrote the book on the best single-action revolvers you can find — period.

A single-action revolver is a juxtaposition of history, gut-feelings and “been there, done that” panache, offering a combination of self-confidence, mechanical trust and

just-plain good fun. Factor in a revolver sporting peerless craftsmanship, striking design touches and a degree of mechanical exactness almost impossible to imagine and you have a Freedom Arms revolver.

In this case, the revolver is their Model 97, a “90%” sized version of their bigger Model 83. Since the first Model 83 was introduced in, oddly enough 1983, the passing of some 40 years has simply honed Freedom Arms' penchant for quality, detail and real-world performance. The Model 97 was introduced in 1997 and has since steamrolled its way to becoming what might just be the most-favored bespoke

quality field revolver out there. If you're serious about what you're doing in the wilds, and have the sense and good taste to demand the best, you likely have a Freedom Arms revolver on your hip.

### COMPELLING COMPONENTS

All this fuss about quality means we have to talk about just why that's the case. Unlike "big factory" produced guns, the small crew at Freedom live, work and breathe what they do. Since it's a small shop, everyone knows what everyone else is doing — and what they should be doing. I'm sure strong peer pressure and a personal commitment to doing the very best work possible keeps FA at the top. Picture a single gunsmith laboring alone in his shop painstakingly building top quality custom guns. Now expand the vision with modern machinery, up-to-date production methods, unerring quality control and Bob Baker overseeing it all personally and you can get an idea of what goes into your Freedom Arms revolver.

The sum of the parts being greater than you can imagine, each gun built is tested, targeted and — only once all the boxes are checked — sent to the client.

These are special order guns, so you call, talk to an experienced staffer and between the two of you, your dream gun comes alive. If you're wanting a big bore boomer capable of taking anything up to and including elephant, you can get it. The Model 83 can be had in a wide range of calibers, including the almost unstoppable .500 Wyoming

Express, .45 Casull, .475 Linebaugh and all the way "down" to the .357 Magnum.

The Model 97, on the other hand, is handier, call it more svelte, easier in the hand and a delight to carry. Barrel lengths can be anywhere from 3.5" like our sample gun (a special order) to up to 10" for some calibers. Available in .45 Colt, .44 Special, .41 Mag., .357 Mag., .327 Federal (a great caliber for this gun!), .224-32 FA (a proprietary caliber developed by FA), .22 LR (shoots like a rifle, as they all do) and the .17 HMR. All of which means you can get your dream gun in a caliber suited precisely for what you need it for.

### TECH & SPEC

Keeping in mind these are true, full-custom revolvers, prices start around the \$2,800 range and go up from there depending upon your choices of barrels (even an octagonal option), caliber chosen, sight options, crowns, action work, sling swivels and/or studs, dovetails and more. You can even opt for your name or initials on the back strap (I had them put our home's logo, a sort of leaping gazelle, on mine), jeweled hammer and trigger, matte finish and other options that tempt gloriously.

My gun has a rounded butt and attractive synthetic grips, weighing in right at 34.5 oz. empty. All their models are made of stainless steel so weather on the trail isn't an issue. The models all have a sliding transfer bar in the hammer so they are perfectly safe to carry fully loaded — five rounds in the 97. You can also get a fitted .45 ACP cylinder for the .45 Colt, which I plan on doing later for this gun. Cylinder conversions run between \$435 to \$600 or so depending on options and caliber. Round-butting runs about \$295 and I recommend it heartily as it really changes the feel. If you have smaller hands, it tends to make things more comfy and tidy.

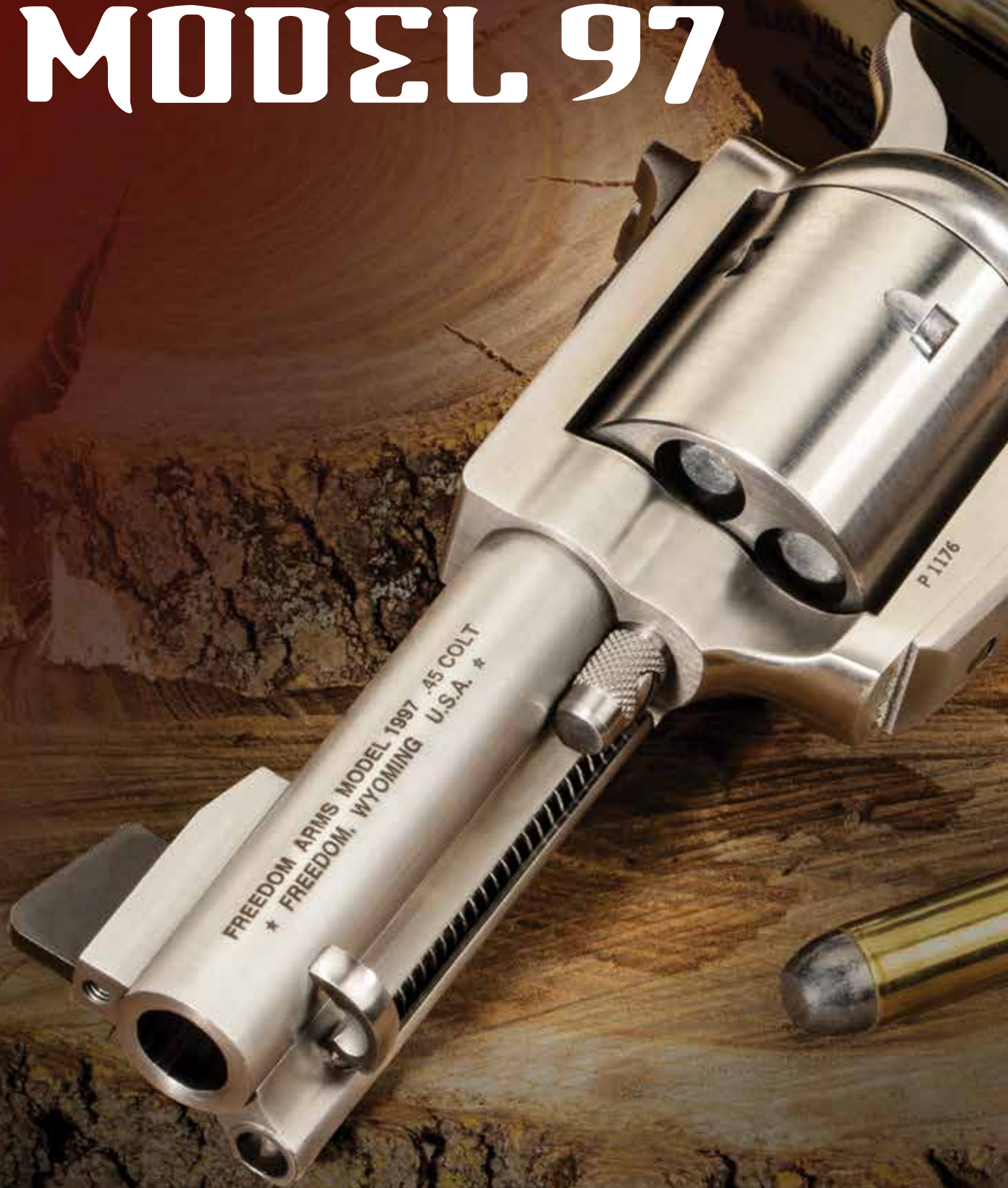
A small but particularly handy feature is the fact the ejector rod button runs in a cam slot in the housing. This cam holds the button against the barrel, out of the way, until you push it. It's then cammed down and you can run the ejector rod. Very handy. One small issue with the really short barrels like our test gun is the fact the rod doesn't quite eject the empty cases completely. So if you have a stout load or sticky case, you get it started then pick it out. This isn't a gun you speed load with anyway so I think it's a moot point when balanced by how handy it makes the gun to carry.

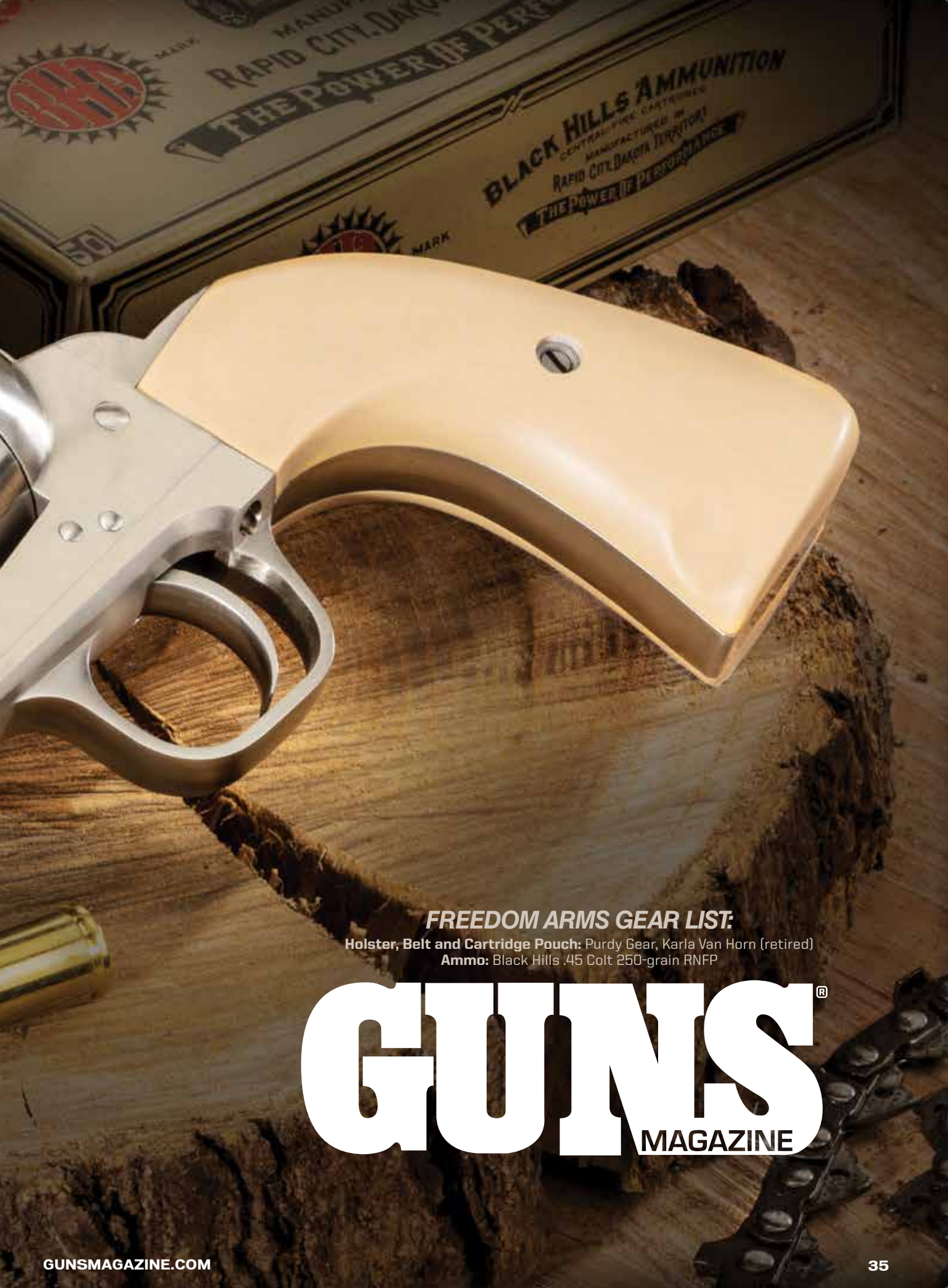
A nice touch too is the fact you can get a special serial number (\$295) just for your gun. So a name and year, a favorite dog's name or just about whatever you can think up can really help to personalize your dream gun.

The hand-fitting really shows when you cock the gun. There are two distinct "clicks" going from half-cock to full cock. You need the half-cock to rotate the cylinder to load and unload. The trigger is smooth-faced and my gun breaks very cleanly right at 3.2 lbs. or so. The thing that consistently astounds me is the fact the cylinder has no play either when the hammer is down or at full cock. I'm not saying it "doesn't wiggle very much" — I'm saying it's locked tight as a



# FREEDOM ARMS MODEL 97





**FREEDOM ARMS GEAR LIST:**

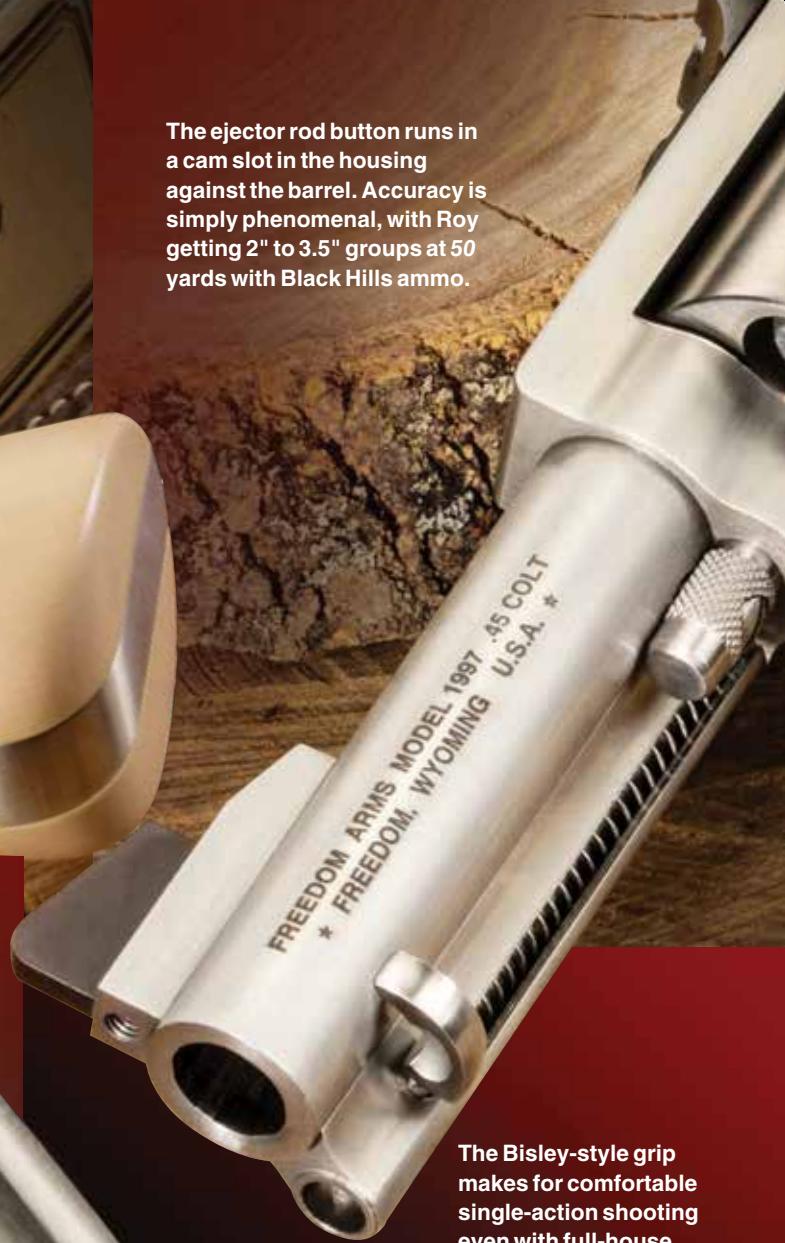
**Holster, Belt and Cartridge Pouch:** Purdy Gear, Karla Van Horn (retired)  
**Ammo:** Black Hills .45 Colt 250-grain RNFP

# GUNS<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE



The ejector rod button runs in a cam slot in the housing against the barrel. Accuracy is simply phenomenal, with Roy getting 2" to 3.5" groups at 50 yards with Black Hills ammo.



The Bisley-style grip makes for comfortable single-action shooting even with full-house loads. Roy had Freedom Arms add the icon of his house to the backstrap for a true custom.



drum with no fore-and-after or rotatable movement at all. It's as if the cylinder is a machined part of the frame. Simply amazing workmanship.

The cylinder-to-forcing-cone gap is 0.0015" on my gun. That, my friends is one and a half thousandths of an inch. Most factory revolvers hover in the 0.004 (excellent) to upwards of 0.010" range. Gas escaping from this gap is essentially non-existent and has no effect on velocity. I've never seen this sort of mechanical accuracy on anything other than on a very few custom revolvers from the likes of Hamilton Bowen's shop and a rarified few others. But Freedom Arms does it gun after gun.

The total result of all this work is a gun "just so" in every respect. I assure you won't be disappointed when your dream gun arrives. When I got mine there was never a moment of "Oh, I wish that was nicer" or "Gee, if only the action was smoother." Nope, not anything.

## SHOOTING

The Model 97 simply begs to be carried. In the right caliber for your needs, you can also tailor the load to fit your desires exactly. There are also options of every sort in factory ammo today, from Buffalo Bore's heavy dangerous game loads, to lighter-bulleted defensive loads and the gamut in between. The shorter cylinder of the Model 97 means you're limited to bullets up to around the 300-grain range. But, you can also balance that with the fact virtually any heavy load you can dream up can be safely fired in a Freedom Arms revolver. I've shot some pretty nasty 300+ grain heavy .45 Colt loads in mine (can you say 1,300 fps or so?) and while recoil was very definitely attention-getting, the gun shrugged it off and, in actuality, due to the Bisley-like grip shape, was controllable and not that ugly.

Shooting "cowboy" type loads like a 200 or 250 hard cast lead in the 750 to 850 fps range is a grand delight. One nice thing about big bores is

they virtually always shoot great, even with modest loads. Factor in the penchant Freedom Arms has for perfection and the inherent accuracy



**This group, shot with Black Hills cowboy ammo, is just a bit over 2". That wouldn't be bad for any revolver at 25 yards — except this was shot at 50 yards! Photo: Roy Huntington**



**Using CCI "Big 4" shotshells loaded with No. 4 shot, excellent shot spread and penetration at five yards showed this combo would be deadly on rats and snakes as needed. A perfect tool for a field revolver. Photo: Roy Huntington**

of many calibers, their revolvers have become legendary for good reasons.

Using Black Hills cowboy ammo (a 250-grain RNFP at about 725 fps from my gun), I got 2" to 3.5" groups at 50 yards. Accuracy at 25 was almost too good to believe and if I did my duty, using my EyePal aperture stick-em on my glasses, ragged one-hole groups were possible, call them 0.85" to 1" or so. I have some experience shooting Model 83s at 100 yards and groups in the 3" range or better are very possible. They are honestly only limited by how well you can see the sights and squeeze the crisp trigger.

This sort of performance is one of the most compelling reasons to treat yourself. While most stock single-actions shoot in the 2" to 3.5" range at 25 yards, the innate accuracy of the Freedom Arms guns is addictive. I find myself pushing to see if I can hit a 6" steel round I have at 100 yards and, lo and behold, even with this compact gun I can do it at least once or twice in each cylinder. You have to try it yourself.

The 97 makes a fine trail gun, truck gun, hunting gun, target gun, ATV, Tractor or Gator gun, bear defense gun in a pinch and even a personal protection gun if it was called upon to do so. It's as close to a do-everything handgun I own, and I value the fact I can chamber dinosaur defense loads, plinking loads or even CCI shot cartridges, all in the same compact revolver.

## FINAL THOUGHTS?

I'd like to quote Freedom Arms' own website so you can hear just how they think:

"We realize that purchasing a Freedom Arms firearm goes beyond ownership of just another firearm. It's an investment."

Exactly. Overbuilt guns, near-perfect tolerances, engineering and quality control standards the envy of any gun company, allows cartridges to reach their maximum levels of power and accuracy. They tailor each gun/

cartridge/barrel/cylinder for the exact cartridge it's shooting. Then they line-bore things to assure absolute perfection in barrel/cylinder alignment.

I think Freedom Arms says it best when summing up what they do: "Dedicated to maintaining the stringent standards needed to achieve uncompromising quality and reputation, the craftsmen at Freedom Arms power the success of our product line."

Take a few minutes and check out their website and enjoy being introduced to Freedom Arms. But keep your checkbook handy, I warn you! **GUNS**

FreedomArms.com

# THE MYSTIQUE OF THE COPPER QUEEN

## LINK TO THE LAST DAYS OF THE OLD WEST

### Alan Garbers

**A** “Copper Queen Colt”! The very name makes the pulse quicken! But what is a Copper Queen Colt and why are they so desired? The answer lies in the territory of Arizona’s history.

Most of us know at least part of the history of Tombstone. The gunfight at the O.K. Corral cemented it in the minds of history buffs and movie lovers for generations. But, few know about another mining town about 20 miles or so to the southeast called Bisbee.

### IN THE BEGINNING

The story of the Copper Queen starts like many stories of the southwest. In May of 1877, Lt. John Rucker and 15 men of Company C, Sixth Cavalry, were performing a reconnaissance, searching for signs of renegade Apaches. Scout Jack Dunn knew his business and suggested they check out the cool mountain springs and refresh their stock in the lush valleys of the Mule Mountains.

Dunn searched the canyons, finding water and something else. An outcropping of rock had the appearance of minerals indicating lead, copper and silver. Returning with the Lieutenant, they agreed the ground looked promising enough to stake a claim but at the moment they were too busy chasing Apaches to do it themselves. Unfortunately, the man they selected to stake the claim cut them out of the deal and none of the fabulous underground wealth made it into their pockets.

Unlike Tombstone, few precious metals were found in the new mining district but there were vast veins of base

metals, some running as high as 25% copper. Investors, miners and speculators rushed in. There was no limit to the wealth beneath their feet and they gave the mines names to match the excitement — the Copper King, the Copper Prince, and of course, the Copper Queen.

Then, in 1886 the Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Company opened the Copper Queen Mercantile. Generally, the company store had a bad reputation for keeping mine workers perpetually in debt. This was not the case at the Copper Queen Mercantile, affectionately called “The Merc” by locals. Between local competition and a patriarchal corporate policy, the prices were kept economical and all Bisbee citizens could find the latest fashions and home goods. If a bartender, gambler, rancher, soiled dove or clergyman needed anything from soup to nuts, they went to The Merc.

As the Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Company expanded to other locations, so did the Copper Queen Mercantile — in Douglas, Lowell, Warren, Morenci, Naco, and Dawson and Tyrone, New Mexico. As the Merc grew into the largest retailer in the western U.S., it used its buying power to become a wholesaler to its competitors.

Among other products, Copper Queen Mercantile sold Colt firearms — many of them. If anyone needed a Peace-maker or one of the new-fangled semi-autos, The Merc could oblige.

### SHIPPING RECORDS

From the beginning, Colt has kept detailed records of their firearms. Their log books state the model, serial number, barrel length, grip material, finish, ship-to location and the number of guns in the shipment. It may also list the person placing the order, unique grips and engraving.



This 4 3/4" Colt Frontier Six Shooter in .44-40 shipped to the Phelps Dodge Mercantile in Douglas, Ariz. — the successor to the Copper Queen Company Store — in 1919.



As the Copper Queen Mercantile grew, it bypassed the jobbers in New York, Cincinnati and Chicago and, in 1892, started ordering guns directly from Colt. Thus was born the Copper Queen Colt.

So what makes a Colt shipped to the Copper Queen Mercantile special? All collectors want a physical link to the past and a Copper Queen Colt is a tangible piece of the wild west of the Arizona Territory.

### THE WILD FRONTIER

While Bisbee became the third largest metropolis in Arizona and challenged Prescott, Phoenix and Tucson for modern conveniences, it was still a mining town with every vice available 24/7 in Brewery Gulch. One said it was “the hottest spot between El Paso and San Francisco.”

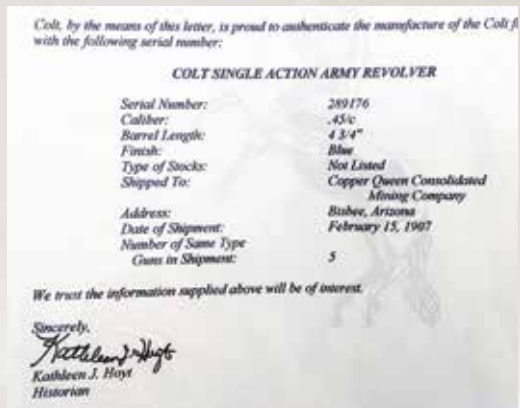
The local newspapers filled their pages with stories of saloon gun fights, rustlers and outlaws but few rose to the heights as Augustine Chacon. This small-time outlaw was crowned King of the local crime elements by editors from San Francisco to New York. Robberies and murders in the southeastern Arizona Territory were blamed on Chacon. When cattle were rustled, horses were stolen, a lone miner was found dead at his claim or a stage held up, it was Chacon.

With a bogeyman named Chacon terrorizing the lonely canyons, people wanted the comfort of a Colt in their pocket, desk drawer or holster. It didn't matter if the stories were made up or witnesses never existed. Chacon stories sold newspapers and guns.

In truth, Chacon's associates Burt Alvord and Billy Stiles were more dangerous. As trusted lawmen, they



**Arizona was still a territory when this Colt SAA (above) was shipped to the Copper Queen Store in 1907. Photo: From the Leo Loyd Collection. The letter from Colt (below) verifying the SAA was shipped to The Merc in 1907. Keep in mind Arizona was still almost five years to the day (Feb 14, 1912) from becoming a state!**



crossed the line into armed robbery and murder. They staged robberies and then joined in the pursuit to mislead their fellow officers. According to some historians, they even went so far as to kill two men, dig up their corpses and send them back to the Arizona Rangers in the hopes they would be thought dead. The plan didn't work. Ultimately, both outlaws returned to the right side of the law.

In reality, they were small potatoes to the rough elements ruling the saloons and bawdy houses in the neighboring border town of Douglas. Douglas was important for the Copper Queen Consolidated Mining Company as it had two smelters turning ore into copper ingots and rail lines to take the copper to the industrial east. But, it also had outlaws with no qualms about ambushing the Arizona Rangers. The captain of the Arizona Rangers, Tom Rynning, made it clear in his autobiography *Gun Notches* how rough the area was.

The area was ripe for cattle and horse theft as the international border was right there. A ready market for cheap beef on both sides made the “midnight cattle drive” commonplace.

### RIOTS

No history of the area would be complete without mentioning the 1906 labor riots in Cananea, Mexico. The Mexican miners wanted higher pay and shorter hours to match their American contemporaries. When their demands went unheeded, riots broke out and American workers were slain. The remaining Americans fortified up in



**The town of Bisbee in the early 1900s as it wandered down the twists of Tombstone Canyon. The bulk of copper-rich Sacramento Hill is in the distance.**

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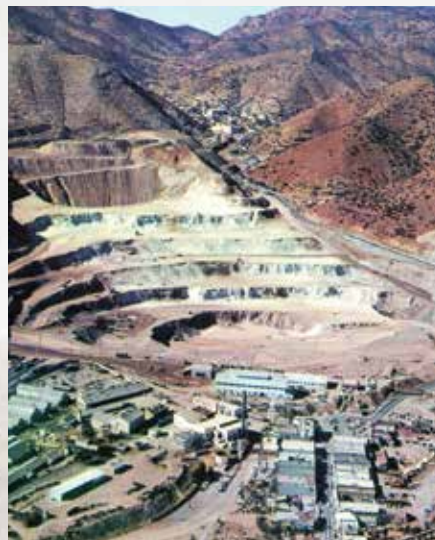
the home of the mine's general manager's house and exchanged gunfire with the rioters while the women and children of American miners attempted to take a train north to Naco.

Hearing of the situation, Rynning, a few of his rangers, and a couple of companies of Americans commandeered a train and headed across the border in violation of international law. Luckily, the Mexican governor and a high-ranking general arrived and commissioned Rynning into the Mexican Army. The riot was quelled and Rynning and his volunteers returned home as heroes.

### ON THE HUNT

If setting out on a journey to collect a Copper Queen Colt, you need to know the dynamics of the quest. Colt kept detailed records but the ledgers were segregated by model. To make matters more confusing, the Copper Queen Mercantile was rebranded to the Phelps Dodge Mercantile on March 31, 1917. Shipments were made predominantly to Bisbee and Douglas but they also went to other Copper Queen locations, including the corporate offices in New York.

Several historians have listed Colts shipped to Waco, Texas as being a Copper Queen. Research has shown no Copper Queen or Phelps Dodge facilities were ever in Waco. However, it is believed by many collectors these guns



As seen in this postcard from the 1970s, Sacramento Hill had been mined into a pit. Bisbee is in the background. The Colt Bisley was heavily favored in the American Southwest.



These Bisleys were ordered together in 1906 with pearl grips but became separated over the next 112 years. Through perseverance and luck, they were reunited, one with the original grips, one without. Photo: From the Ten Below Firearms collection

were shipped to Naco, a small town on the Arizona/Mexico border.

Decades ago, gun historian Keith Cochran researched the Colt archives extensively and produced a list of Colt Single Action Army revolver serial numbers shipped to the Copper Queen Store. This can be found in his *Colt Peacemaker Collector Handbook & Guide*. Since then, other collectors have built on the list and it is estimated over 700 have been identified.

While most associate Colt's famous Peacemaker with Arizona, Colt historian and author William Goddard listed more than 200 semi-automatic pistols shipped to the Copper Queen in his book *The Government Models*.

We should assume other models of the time period were shipped, including the M1877, M1878, the highly collectible Colt Lightning rifle as well as other models.

Perhaps the most productive route to find a Copper Queen gun is to go to every regional gun show and talk with "Old West" firearms dealers. Build a relationship with them and let them know you are in the market. The key is to have cash ready to jump when a deal manifests itself.

Another way is to keep an eye on the online gun brokers or one of the higher-end auction houses for a lettered Copper Queen Colt. Don't expect them to go cheap!

The most exciting way is to buy a Colt in the right time frame and then pay the Colt Archives to research the serial number. Sometimes you win the lottery and it's a Copper Queen Colt!

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# *Fantasy* REMINGTONS

*Current replicas aren't faithful copies – but are still great!*

**John Taffin**

**H**ere in the opening quarter of the 21st century, we are blessed to have access to virtually all the 19th century single-action percussion revolvers produced by Remington and Colt. These come from such Italian firms as Pietta and Uberti now, and in the past from others such as Armi San Marcos and Armi Jaeger. My very first example in the late 1950s/early 1960s actually came from Belgium via Navy Arms. It was a Remington New Model Army, now mostly referred to as the Remington 1858 by the manufacturers. Yes, I wish I still had that one!

## **CURRENT CROP**

As we look at the different models being offered today, most of which were never offered originally, realize all sixguns mentioned have been offered in the past, are now in production or will be in the future. With so many models being offered, especially by the Italian manufacturers Pietta and Uberti, it is impossible to produce every model every day. In fact I have been waiting, with my name on several lists, for one particular model — a 12" stainless steel .44 New Model Army from Pietta — for over two years now as this is written.

Long before Henry Ford and his Model T “could be had in any color as long as it was black,” .44 Remington

Brass-frame Remington New Model Army .44s are available in three barrel lengths.



Sheriffs Model Remingtons are available with brass frame, stainless steel finish, blue finish and case colored frame.



New Model Army revolvers were available in any configuration desired as long as it was black with an 8" barrel. Today, thanks to replicas, we really can have just about anything we want. These "Fantasy Models" never existed in the 18th century but current shooters have a large range of Remington models to pick from. Currently, barrel lengths offered are the original 8", along with 5 1/2" Sheriffs Models, 12" Buffalo or Bison Models, and even a 3" version known as the Ace. The selection of .36 New Model Remingtons is not even close, with only blued versions offered in barrel lengths of 7 1/2". I believe it is possible to find a .36 Sheriffs Model.

At least five different finishes are offered, although not with every barrel length listed above. These include standard blue, blue with a case-hardened frame, stainless steel, brass mainframe and even an Antique or Original finish that removes most of the bluing to give the sixgun a look of a 150-year-old revolver. All four of the above versions are available in blue, with the first three barrel lengths also offered in stainless steel as well as brass-frame versions.

In addition to standard models, several are available with adjustable sights. This includes all of the 12" models and 8" versions in both blue and stainless-steel configuration. A note on adjustable sights — whoever designed the Pietta rear sight must have been an experienced sixgunner as they are excellent sights with a square rear notch. The Uberti version is more traditional with the rear sight notch being more of a wide "U" shape. Sights are purely subjective; however, for my eyes, the Pietta works best.

I have found all Remington New Model Army replicas to be excellent shooters. I routinely make one change and that is replace the made-to-a-price factory nipples or cones, whichever you prefer to call them, with high quality stainless steel SliXshot nipples. These are shaped to better accommodate Remington #10 or Speer #11 percussion caps and are also vented on the side to help prevent cap jams.

### CARTRIDGE CONVERSIONS

In 1857, Smith & Wesson came forth with the first successful cartridge-firing revolver. This was a small-framed, seven-shot, tip-up revolver chambered in what we now know as the .22 Short. Smith & Wesson's patent prevented anyone else from using the idea of a bored-through cylinder to accept cartridges. In February 1868, Remington and Smith & Wesson came to an agreement that allowed Remington to convert their New Model Army percussion six-shot sixguns to a five-shot revolver chambering the .46 Remington Rimfire. Nearly 4,600 were converted. By the second half of 1869, New Model Army revolvers were available with six-shot cylinders accepting what was then known as the .44 Centerfire Martin Cartridge.

By 1870-1871, the Remington Cartridge Conversion was available in .44 Colt Centerfire, which I assume to be the .44 Long Colt. A few .45 Cartridge Conversions have also been discovered and remaining cylinders will accept the .45 Colt. The .44 caliber cylinders accept the .44 Martin, .44 Remington and .44 Russian cartridges.

The Remington Navy Model revolvers were chambered in a .38 Centerfire, again which I assume to be the .38 Long

Colt. The New Model Navy was offered in both rimfire and centerfire cartridges and as mentioned above, the Navy Model was slightly smaller than the Army Model, while today's replicas use the same size frame.

Remington Cartridge Conversions are offered today with 5 1/2" and 7 1/2"/8" versions in .38 Special, which also handles the .38 Long Colt quite well, and .45 Colt, which can also be used with the .45 Schofield round. All of the Remington Cartridge Conversions are rated for smokeless powder; however, only standard pressure loads should be used and with cast bullets.

All of the original Remington Percussion Pistols and Cartridge Conversions



"Sheriffs Model" Remington New Model Army sixguns in blued, stainless steel and blued with a case-colored frame.

had main frames with a top strap and a grip frame that was an integral part of the mainframe. Everything is one-piece. Colt uses the open-top frame design

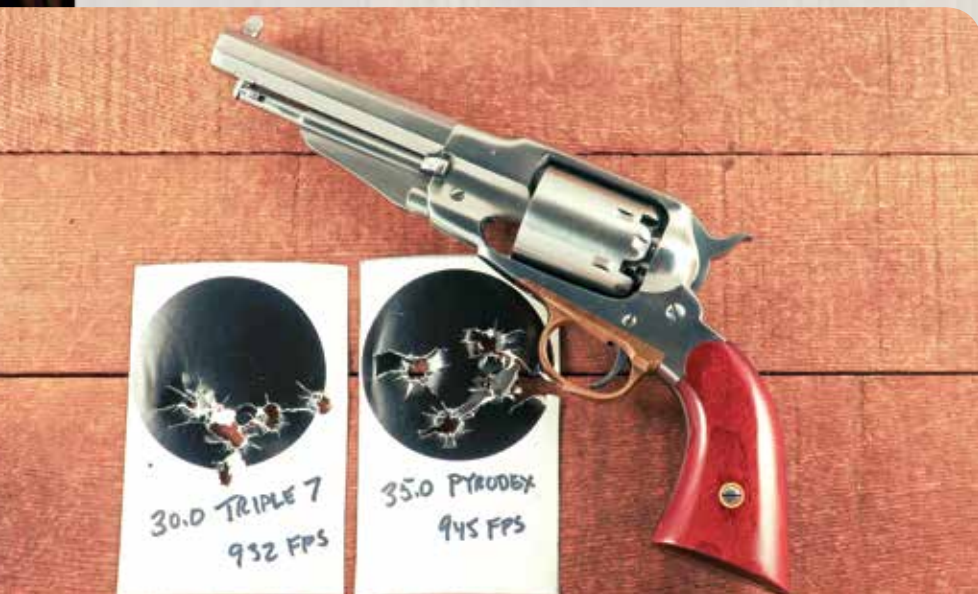
with a removable barrel and a two-piece grip frame attached to the mainframe with screws. All replicas follow the same patterns.

For the Army trials of the early 1870s, Colt submitted their 1871-72 Open-Top and were sent back to the drawing board. They took a good look at the Remington solid frame and the resulting sixgun was the Colt Single Action Army .45 of 1873. Two years later, it was Remington's turn to look at the Colt design and their answer was the Model of 1875. Remington maintained the solid one-piece frame and grip frame and also put a distinctive looking web underneath the barrel of their new cartridge firing sixgun.

The original Remington 1875 sixguns were chambered in .44 Remington and then, in 1878, Remington offered two more chamberings, the .45 Colt and the .44-44 (.44 Winchester Centerfire or WCF). Remington entered into bankruptcy in 1886 and was reorganized in 1888 as the Remington Arms Company. The final batch of 1875 Remington guns had 5 1/2" barrels and, with the leftover parts from the Model of 1888, was assembled with the same barrel length and chambered in .44-40. The final Remington sixgun, the Model of 1890, was offered in barrel lengths of 5 1/2" and 7 1/2" but only one chambering, namely .44-40. Slightly only 2,000 are being manufactured. They are easily distinguished from the original Model 1875 as the web under the barrel is almost nonexistent.

### CALIBER COUNTDOWN

Today, replica Remingtons are offered in both the 1875 and 1890



The stainless steel Sheriffs Model Remington (above) shoots as well — or better than — many so-called modern revolvers. Targets fired at 20 yards (below) with the .45 Remington Cartridge Conversion.



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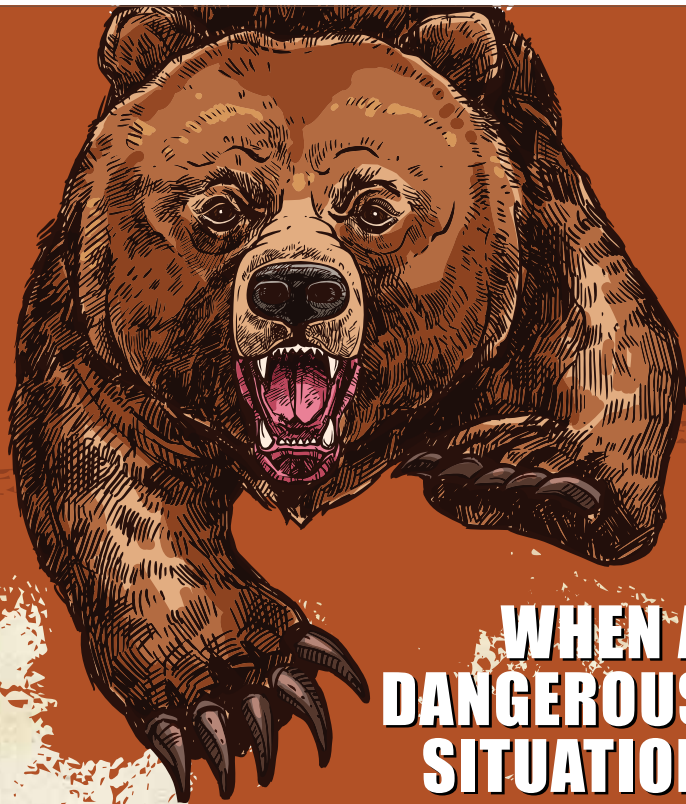
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CALIBER	BULLET WGT., TYPE
.357 Mag.	180 gr., RNFP w/Gas Check
10mm Auto.	200 gr., RNFP-Hard
.41 Rem. Mag.	230 gr., SWC w/Gas Check
.44 Mag.	305 gr., WFN w/Gas Check
.45 Colt	325 gr., WFN w/Gas Check
.454 Casull	325 gr., WFN w/Gas Check
.460 S&W	325 gr., WFN w/Gas Check
.45-70 Govt.	450 gr., RNFP w/Gas Check



Models with chamberings of .45 Colt, .44-40 and .357 Magnum. Both blued and nickel-plated versions are offered. For a very short time, Hartford Armory offered a high-quality Remington capable of handling .44 Magnum and heavy .45 Colt loads as well as some chambered in .44-40. One of the few complaints I have about any of the Remington models is the cramped space for my hand between the trigger guard and front strap. These Hartford Armory Remington took care of this and were very hand-friendly. Unfortunately, very few of these were made and I never did receive the pair I had ordered.



Remington Percussion Pistols can be changed to cartridge firing with the addition of a conversion cylinder.

One big plus for the Remington percussion pistols and the cartridge-conversions is the sighting system. While the Colt has a rear sight which can only be accessed when the hammer is cocked, revealing a very slight V-shaped cutout in the top of the hammer, the solid-frame Remington has a rear sight cut in the top of the frame. This is just like the hog-wallow trough rear sight found on Colt Single Actions today, matched with a front sight in a dovetail allowing easy windage adjustment. The front sight is tall enough to allow it to be filed in to match point of aim and point of impact.

Remington replicas represent a good value and are often priced around  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of what a modern cartridge-firing revolver or semi-automatic demands. However, when it comes to accuracy, they do not have to take a backseat to any so-called modern handguns and in fact will often outshoot them.

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# TRIFECTA OF .32-20S

## A fine and pleasant madness

**Mike “Duke” Venturino**  
**Photos: Yvonne Venturino**

**E**ver gotten off on the wrong foot with someone? This cliché can be attributed to me and the .32-20 cartridge. First it started in 1972 with a K-Frame S&W M&P. I bought it used for \$75 — first shots revealed it only tumbled bullets because its barrel was ringed. Twenty-five bucks were lost on the deal. Now fast forward to 1979 when I bought a 1915 vintage Colt SAA with 4 ¾" barrel. It wouldn't shoot worth a hoot. Best 25-yard machine-rest groups were 4". After much fussing about, I learned its barrel groove diameter was 0.314" but its chambers were only 0.310" — a lousy combination for shooting precision. The Colt was disposed of quickly.

### THE TROUBLES

Now, let's go to SHOT Show 2005. Colt had recently reintroduced .32-20 as a chambering option for 3rd Generation SAAs. My boss at the magazine to which I

was contracted at the time asked me to talk to the Colt people for a consignment .32-20. We would feature it on the cover along with my article about shooting with it. I approached one of the “stuffed shirts” standing in the Colt booth and handed him my card with a request for a new .32-20. Now, keep in mind that by this time I'd been getting test guns from Colt for 25 years. The “stuffed shirt” handed me back my card and said, “I've never heard of you and we're not sending you anything.” As we walked away Yvonne said, “Why aren't you mad?” I responded, “That Yo-Yo is such an idiot it's not worth the trouble.”

Until 2020 I had not seen one of the new Colt SAA .32-20s in person and only viewed precious few of them on Internet firearms sites. Then late one night when unable to sleep, I was browsing those websites again and spotted a used .32-20 with a 7 ½" barrel, my favorite length. It had been made in 2009. Its price was extremely reasonable but there was a reason why. Its owner said when he took it out of its factory box, the color case hardened frame had light surface rust all over. To keep it from getting worse, he used a chemical to remove the



Duke's .32-20 trifecta with 7 ½", 5 ½" and 4 ¾" barrel lengths.



This was the first of Duke's new interest in Colt SAA .32-20s. Note its frame is gray because the first owner removed the case hardening chemically.

frame's coloring, leaving it a mottled gray color. Conversely, its blued parts, i.e., barrel, ejector rod housing and grip frame were still perfect.

My feeling was I'd buy it, test fire it and if accurate, I'd do a .32-20 reloading piece and then decide perhaps to have its frame color case hardened — again — and keep it. Alternately if it shot like my first SAA .32-20, I'd pass it on to its next owner quickly. Well long story short; it's still here, it's beautifully color case hardened and it even wears fancy walnut one-piece stocks. The work was done by Bill Fuchs of Spring Creek Armory of Ten Sleep, Wyo.

Not only is it finely accurate with virtually every .32-20 handload combination tried, it placed bullets where its sights were pointed or very close thereto. With velocities in the 800/900 fps range, muzzle report was mild and recoil from the 3-lb. revolver is almost non-existent. My long-held .32-20 bias was gone in a single range session.

When you're as old as I am and lived an active life, your hands, shoulders, elbows and knees begin to hurt. My thumbs especially do. Thus .32-20s have become some of my favorite plinking and steel plate popping handguns.

### DIVE IN

Notice I said ".32-20s," meaning plural. That's because, in my usual fashion, I don't just stick a toe in the water. I jump in. Early in 2022, I spotted a 3rd Generation SAA .32-20 for sale — you guessed it — on the Internet. This one was new-in-box with a 5 1/2" barrel so I nabbed it at a much higher price than the 7 1/2". Its serial number rates also rates it as 2009 manufacture. Like the longer barreled one, this .32-20 also shoots tight groups but just a mite higher than I would like.

By the way, after satisfying myself both of these 3rd Generation .32-20s were great-shooting revolvers, I

satisfied my curiosity about their barrel/cylinder specs. Sure enough their barrels slugged at 0.310" as did their cylinder chamber mouths *except* one chamber mouth on the 5 1/2" went to 0.311". No big deal there.

Let's take a brief break from my Internet adventures. Although I don't recall doing so, I must have sold or traded all my .32-size bullet molds during my long hiatus from .32-20 handloading. Since this was all happening during Covid-19 times, finding molds made by the usual reloading tool companies proved impossible. Therefore I turned to a couple of smaller custom mold makers.

In Utah there is Arsenal Molds whose website showed a copy of RCBS's #32-98SWC mold for a 0.314" SWC. I ordered one in brass with four cavities. Also I turned to a European source — MP Molds of Slovenia. Their website showed their #640-115HP mold in stock, again brass with four cavities. It was in my hands in seven days.

MP Molds offers a unique option for hollowpoint molds. It's a nifty pin arrangement allowing the user to cast all HPs or all solids or combinations of the two styles. The basic bullet is a 0.314" RN/FP style weighing 120 grains of my 1:20 tin/lead alloy or 115 grains as HPs. The above-mentioned Arsenal SWCs dropped out as 100 grains. All three of these bullets were sized 0.313" and lubed with DGL.

### IT'S A GAS

Also due to Covid-19, smokeless powders have had reduced availability. However, I do have stocks of four pistol powders on hand. They are Bullseye, Titegroup, W231 and Unique. With the above three cast bullets, my favorite charges turned out to be 3.0 grains of Bullseye and 3.5 grains of Titegroup. Think about this for a



When Duke discovered his 115/120-grain bullets gave too long overall cartridge length, he ordered another MP Mold to drop 100/105 grain bullets. At right is Magma Molds 115-grain RN/FP that also has a crimping groove placed properly for correct overall length in lever actions.

moment. This charge of Bullseye nets 2,333 loads per pound of powder. The 3.5 grain charge of Titegroup gives 2,000 loads.

All my .32-20 handloads have been assembled with an RCBS "Cowboy" die set intended specifically for lead-alloy bullets. They worked to perfection. My only handloading blip came when the hammers of both Colts tended to puncture primers. It's not unsafe but the escaping high-pressure gas will erode the firing pin. The problem was easily solved by using small rifle primers. Does it increase pressures? No or not enough to matter. For instance, with 3.0 grains of Bullseye under the 100-grain SWC Winchester, small pistol primers gave 840 fps from the 7 1/2" barrel. The same load with Federal #200 small rifle primers gave 845 fps and with no gas leaking.

### LEVERAGE

Still my .32-20 adventures have not ceased. Anyone with a single action .32-20 *always* wants a companion

lever gun. I bought a Cimarron/Uberti Model 1873 saddle ring carbine. Upon arrival, I quickly loaded the magazine with some of my handloads only to sit for a bit while every single one was laboriously fished back out the loading gate. They were too long to feed from the tubular magazine. Winchester lever guns, Models 1873, Models 1892 or replicas thereof, require an overall loaded cartridge limit of 1.592". My

handloads measured over 1.60". The bullets I had cast couldn't just be seated deeper, for without a good crimp, magazine spring pressure forces bullets back into cases — not a good thing in any manner.

So back to MP Molds I went for their #640-100HP set of four cavity brass blocks with the HP pin arrangement. It was quickly in my hands with cast bullets falling at 0.314"

**Duke also ordered this four-holer from MP Molds of Slovenia. It has a unique manner by which it can case either hollow-point or solid-point bullets at the same time.**



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To replace his lost .32 bullet molds, Duke turned to Arsenal Molds of Utah for a 100-grain SWC.

weighing 100 grains as HPs and 105 grains as solids. So far I've just loaded them over the above charges of Bullseye and Titegroup. Both bullets are accurate from the lever gun and perhaps even more accurate than the heavier bullets from the revolvers. In fact, the lighter bullets brings the 5 1/2" barrel's point of impact almost perfect to point of aim.

And I'm still not through. Remember, I said this article is about a .32-20 trifecta. Another 3rd Generation .32-20 popped up on the Internet. I instantly knew it had to be mine as it wore the 4 3/4" barrel to complete my trifecta of 3rd Generation .32-20s. I only had it for a few days before the Montana winter set in but 100 rounds through it indicated it might possibly be the most accurate of the three, and it darn sure shoots to its sights.

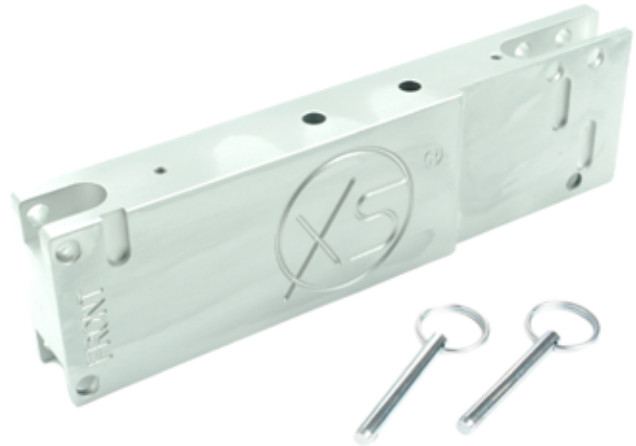
I slugged its bore and measured chamber mouths and they are right on at 0.310" for barrel grooves and chamber mouths. Interestingly, a note came with the Colt signed by Ken Hackathorn, a respected writer, saying this .32-20 was from his collection. I've never met Mr. Hackathorn but can attest he takes good care of his firearms. This one was in 99%-plus condition and was made in 2005.

As said, I tend to jump into things with both feet, so be aware I also landed a very fine condition Winchester Model 92 saddle ring carbine in .32-20. So far, only a measly six rounds were fired from it out the back door during a lull in a snow storm. I think it's going to be a keeper to go with my trifecta of Colt SAAs.

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## FIELD SHOOTING TIPS

### FIVE COMMON MISTAKES HUNTERS MAKE

By Gary Smith

Being a hunter and a guide, I’ve seen a lot of mistakes during my 45 years of being in the field. Some mistakes couldn’t be avoided, but there are several I’ve seen being made time and time again. So, here are five tips to keep your hunting experience enjoyable:

1) Be Ethical. Most hunters really believe they’re ethical hunters. They don’t poach or mistreat the land, but being ethical is also making the shot. Missed shots or bad shots are caused by the distance being greater than the hunter’s skill level. An ethical shot is a shot you can make 100% of the time with a 100% hit rate. Don’t try the 500- or 600-yard shot because you’re worried it will get away. The worst that can happen if you don’t take the shot is the animal is out there

to hunt another day and it has not run off wounded.

2) Focus on Shot Placement. Many hunters tend to look at the animal to see where they want the bullet to impact.



Positional shooting isn’t the same as sitting at a zeroing bench. A good hunter tries all sorts of positions, even unorthodox ones, to be prepared for whatever happens in the field.

The reality is you need to transition your focus from where you want the shot placed back to the reticle or front sight. Focus on the sighting system, not the target, and the shot will be where you want.

3) Anticipation. Did you make the hit or did you pick your head up to see the animal as soon as you pressed the trigger? If you look over the optic, your body will pull the gun down and this will normally result in a low shot as you are actually moving the gun before the shot has left the muzzle.

I see a lot of anticipation of recoil. This is where everything is lined up just right and we think it’s going to hurt, so we tell the trigger to “go now.” This is also commonly known as “mashing” or “jerking” the trigger.

Then, there’s trying to time the shot. This is where the sights or optic are moving around a bit. Hunters will quite often try to time the movement,



**Gary Smith is Facilities Manager at Gunsite Academy in addition to being a long-range rifle instructor. When not at Gunsite, he also works as a big-game guide in Arizona and is credited with the second-largest black bear ever taken in the state.**

which results in the shooter attempting to “tell” the gun to go off at a certain time. This usually causes bad results on the target end.

To curb anticipation, you should realize all of these factors are going to be there, so just accept them and learn to control them. Hold still and focus on the reticle or sight, press the trigger and follow-through. You *should* be able to watch your animal fall through the sights or optic.

4) See The Angles. Proper shot angle is often forgotten with the excitement of stalking an animal. Most animals will not be perfectly broadside to you. I’ve often seen animals significantly quartered away but the hunter will hold on the vitals as if it were broadside. In reality, learn where to hold to get into the vital zone. If your animal is angled away and you hold for the center of the vitals, you may miss the kill zone and end up with a wounded animal. To make a good vital shot on a quartering target, you need to hold behind the vitals to get the shot placement in the center.

5) Sight In Today. You sight in your gun, go hunt for the season, then put it away. Then the next hunt comes around and you keep missing shots. Why? What’s changed? Probably the ammo. You used a certain type one year and then the next time you used something else. You may have found the same grain bullet but, it’s a



**Squirrels aren’t exactly a big-time, big-game animal, but chasing tree rats is a great way to prepare your shooting skills ahead of hunting larger game.**



**If you hunt dangerous game, showing up with an unfamiliar rifle is borderline suicidal. Here a hunter prepares for a safari by taking on the charging game simulator at the famed FTW Ranch in Texas.**

completely different brand. We assume it will be close enough. Well, close enough is not good enough out in the field. Check your zeros before going out in the field. This includes a borrowed gun. If someone else sights it in, it may only be zeroed for the person using it.

Bonus tip: Slow Down. Yes, it’s exciting when you spot the animal you want but excitement can get the best of us. The urge to hurry and get into position before it leaves overtakes us. But this causes extra noise and faster movement which the animal will detect. Stay calm, move slow and easy and pick a location to your advantage. Look for things like trees, rocks or downed logs, not just to

hide behind but also to use as shooting aids. This thought process will not only mask your presence, but now you’re using Mother Nature to help with the perfect shot.

Lack of knowledge is what causes an unpleasant hunting experience. If you are not sure what to do, ask someone to go with you who knows, spend some time reading about it and/or take a training course. Gunsite holds a Hunter Prep class right before the season opens. Take the time to learn what’s right and wrong. Don’t let poor habits waste an animal that might feed your family and give you some of the best memories of your life. **GUNS**



Columbia River Knife and Tool's Matthew Lerch-designed LCBK (Lightweight Crossbar Knife) pushes the design envelope without breaking the bank.

## CRKT LIGHTWEIGHT CROSSBAR KNIFE (LCBK) SLEEK SLICER

Pat Covert

Columbia River Knife & Tool (CRKT) has been prolific at releasing forward-thinking knives over the years, both in their styling and mechanics. The company has a deep design team of custom knifemakers in their stable and Matthew Lerch is one of them. Matthew, known for his clean design, was originally trained as a jeweler/watchmaker and he grew into a stellar knife designer over the years. The LCBK (Lightweight Crossbar Knife) is his latest and CRKT pulled out the stops to make it as good as it could be.

The LCBK 3.48" blade is a thumb-stud-activated Clip Point design with all the style and grace of a missile. Blade steel is 154CM stainless, a favorite of custom knifemakers before the



Here you can see the Crossbar Lock conveniently located just forward of the upper rear handle spine. The thumb studs, pivot and lock-bar caps got some fancy machining as well.

proprietary particle steel revolution took hold. Some still prefer it as it's darn good steel. The LCBK's 4.52" handle is sculpted black G-10 composite over a short pivot and lock assembly housed in stainless steel liners.

On the lower handle spine there's a black-coated, jimped spacer bar that

is pure Matthew Lerch. The crowning touch is the ambidextrous, pull-down Crossbar Lock located just forward of the upper rear handle spine for easy access. Such "bar lock" mechanisms are a tad rare in the folding knife world and it works like a charm with Lerch's clean space-age design. The thumb studs, pivot and lock-bar caps got some fancy machining touches as well. Out back there's a clean, skeletonized pocket clip for tip-up carry. All this goodness weighs in at a paltry 2.80 oz. A drawstring pouch is included.

### WHY YOU'LL LIKE IT

The LCBK has the clean, cock-o-the-walk styling befitting a thoroughly modern EDC. This is the kind of knife CRKT likes to do, lest you think they're sleeping on the design front. They've done it many times over the years — they never sleep. Although the LCBK is upscale at \$215 MSRP, it's not going to break the bank and given the features and upgrades, it more than justifies the price.

**GUNS**

CRKT.com



## RUGER SUPER WRANGLER

Both regular readers are aware of my undying love for the Ruger Wrangler. It's an inexpensive but good-quality .22LR single-action everyone from new shooters to old coots enjoy shooting. What could be better?

The obvious answer to the question is “.22 Magnum!” Fortunately, Ruger's new Super Wrangler incorporates all the wonderful DNA of the original Wrangler and adds a .22 Magnum cylinder to the mix along with adjustable sights. The resulting package makes a great trainer, a fun plinker and would serve perfectly as a versatile farm/ranch gun or companion to outdoor adventures. It's not hyperbole to claim the Super Wrangler deserves a place in every shooter's gun cabinet!

**MSRP: \$329**  
Ruger.com

## LEUPOLD RX-1500I RANGEFINDER

If you're going afield with intentions of lethally pestering antelope, mountain goats or even deer at longer-than-spitting distances, you need this gizmo I call a “hunter's rangefinder.”

It earns this honorific because it's small, lightweight, simple and chock full o' features at a reasonable price. Best of all, it's not so over-the-top with gizmos you'll need a college-level course to figure out what the numbers mean. This palm-sized unit features ½-yard accuracy, 6x magnification and ballistic integration with Leupold's proprietary DNA ranging engine to calculate uphill/downhill range and 10 mph wind hold. It also has bowhunting mode for the string-pullers.

I bashed it around on a recent hunt and while I didn't use every advanced feature, it did survive the adventure perfectly and provided quick and accurate ranges when needed, making it one of those “all you need without the stuff you don't”-kind of hunting accessory.

**MSRP: \$299**  
Leupold.com



## 5.11 RUSH RBD LIMA 56L DUFFLE

I needed a discreet duffel capable of holding all the flotsam a traveling editor carries — boots, rain gear, hearing protection, external microphones and lots of other junk — when making short-duration trips. After considering the nearly limitless possibilities, I settled on the 5.11 Rush RBD Lima 56 liter Duffel. Now, after several media trips, I can say it was exactly what the doctor ordered for my needs.

A little too big to be a carry-on (though some people will undoubtedly pull it off), it perfectly bridges the gap between overnight bag and full-sized suitcase. The quality is bomb-proof, the wide zipper mouth allows easy packing of odd-shaped gear and there are a couple of small pouches for odds and ends. Best of all, the carry handles and integral backpack straps are versatile when you're schlepping a carry-on *and* a rifle case out to the East Bumfrey rental car lot.

**MSRP: \$130**  
511Tactical.com



## KOR CASES 3S

Imagine the impossible dream of always having a perfect foam cushion for your precious firearms during travel, regardless of what the *gun du jour* happens to be. The dream is now reality with KOR case inserts.

At most basic, a KOR insert is a tough nylon bag filled with foam beads. You place it inside your gun case, lay your gun and accessories on the pad, attach the hand vacuum pump and something magic happens — the foam compacts around the contents and makes a perfect form-fitting, tough-yet-yielding protective insert. Whether you're packing a lever-action, a tactical rifle, bunches of handguns or anything else, everything in the case is perfectly protected against bumps and baggage maulers.

Even better, when the next trip beckons you to release the vacuum, the foam breathes a sigh of relief and relaxes into an amorphous form for you to repeat the process of making a whole new custom case insert — OCD shooters unite!

**MSRP: \$265**  
KORCases.com



# RIGHTS & PRIVILEGES

## AVOID THE 'TRAINING REQUIREMENT' TRAP

Dave Workman

The past couple of years have seen anti-gun state lawmakers and governors picking up on a new and deceptive ploy to discourage gun ownership. Their goal is to make it much more difficult to exercise a constitutionally-protected and enumerated right.

### IT'S A RIGHT

It's the "proof-of-training requirement" being added onto legislation in several places, almost always accompanied by what sounds like a perfectly reasonable and logical explanation: "You need driver's education to get a license to drive."

There are two things fundamentally wrong with this argument. First, it's a prelude to requiring a license to own a gun, and second, it creates the impression among too many gullible middle-of-the-road voters that a citizen should jump through such a hoop in order to enjoy his or her right to keep and bear arms.

Translation: Once again, this scheme equates the right to gun ownership with a government-regulated privilege. You will hear this more and more from politicians (those normally with a "D" beside their names) who want it to sound "reasonable" — as in "reasonable gun safety laws" — but it is not reasonable at all. In practical terms, it's an infringement, and arguing otherwise suggests the proponent needs a refresher course in American Government and plain English.

Compare it to the popular demand for a 10-round limit on magazines for rifles and semi-automatic pistols. Nobody really remembers who cooked that one up, or how the proponents arrived at this arbitrary number, but for many years, the 10-round cartridge limit has become the magic number.

The magazine limit is another one of these reasonable-sounding restrictions until the gun prohibition crowd can come up with something

else. "Nobody needs 20 rounds to hunt deer," they will declare without anyone challenging them by observing: "The Second Amendment is not now, nor was it ever, about deer hunting." You certainly don't hear the hosts of Sunday morning news and commentary programs asking about this, either because they also believe the 10-round nonsense or because they're just plain stupid. There are strong arguments favoring both possibilities!

But the 10-round argument falls apart when one reminds people about Elliot Rodger.

### EVIL BUT LEGAL

Rodger was the 22-year-old Californian who went on a rampage because he couldn't score a girlfriend and a meaningful relationship. He killed six people on the night of May 23, 2014 before taking his own life.

Some gun control proponents have altered the facts to suggest he shot all his victims, but that's simply not true. He murdered the first three by stabbing and slashing them in his apartment, then started driving around near the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara. He shot one other male and two females, struck others with his car and wounded several more victims.

Here's the kicker: He did all of this with three legally purchased handguns (one GLOCK and two SIG SAUERS) — all of which included California's waiting period and background check — and California-compliant 10-round magazines. So much for the argument 10-rounders somehow lower the carnage. It does clearly demonstrate the fallacy of mandating such limits and the foolishness of people who think this is a good idea. Most of

these people have never owned guns, or even fired a gun, yet they assume the authority for dictating gun policy to the rest of us.

This does not deter the true believers behind magazine limits, and remember, they're the same people now demanding proof-of-training in order to purchase a firearm, which brings us around to another sticking point. This one invariably separates good intentions from bad ones.

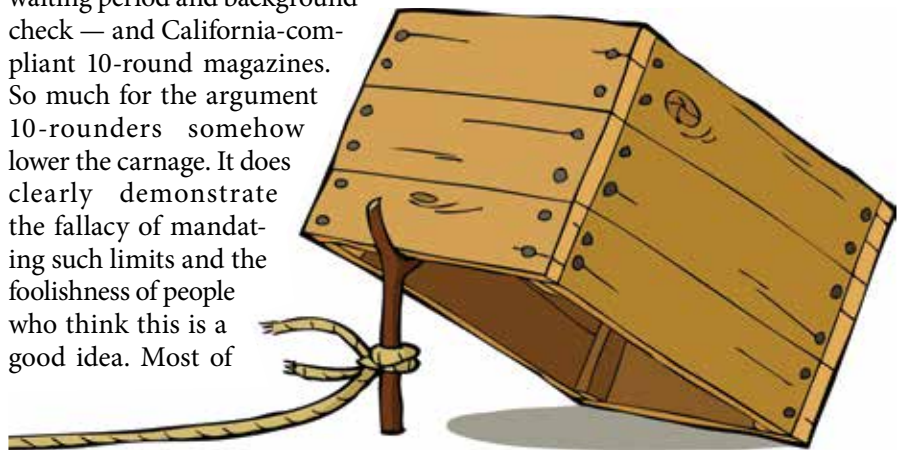
Who determines what sort of training is required, and who will be certified to provide it? Will your state recognize a course taught at, say, Gunsite or Thunder Ranch? Can you qualify by just completing a home firearms safety course taught by NRA-certified instructors?

Here's a dilemma for the certified instructor: You teach the course, but when's the last time you took the course? Proposals I've seen carry no exemption for instructors, which seems asinine at best.

### MANDATORY VS. VOLUNTARY

Here's where the debate gets sticky unless you keep your wits and are prepared. Nobody I know in the firearms community disdains competent instruction.

But there is a vast difference between taking a training course voluntarily and being required by the state to do so in order to buy a



firearm. We're not talking about training to qualify for a carry license, only to purchase a gun. Once such training is required, the right to keep and bear arms becomes a government-regulated privilege and we all know how government will take an inch and then incrementally take the whole mile.

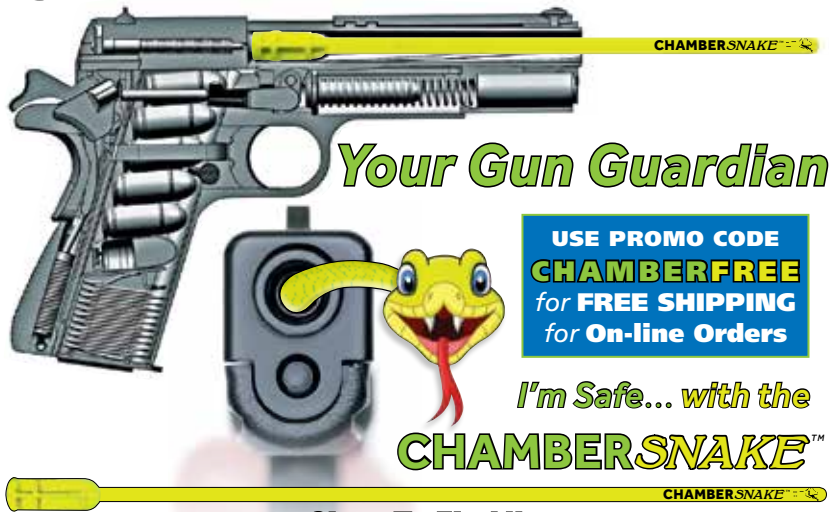
This is where defending the Second Amendment begins. If you are currently represented in Congress or the State Legislature by someone who supports the training requirement, you can contact your representative and try to educate him or her, or you can simply vote them out of office. Of course, voting them out isn't that simple. You've got to recruit a good candidate to challenge the incumbent, or run yourself, and you must be electable; that is, have a well-rounded campaign platform covering such things as education, taxes, inflation, the environment and transportation. Anyone who runs as a "gun rights" candidate will likely have an expensive and failed campaign.

And you must be committed. Case in point: Colorado Congresswoman Lauren Boebert, representing her state's 3rd Congressional District. Her critics say a lot of things but I was able to interview her three years ago after being elected the first time and her campaign was textbook.

She traveled around the huge Third District, attending functions, knocking on doors, meeting people and listening to them while talking about her plans and hopes. Absolutely, Boebert was strong on the Second Amendment, but she was hardly one-dimensional. She was an accomplished small business owner and she understood the people in the district she hoped to represent. Suffice to say, "She was from around here." Take this for what it's worth. Find such a candidate, or be such a candidate.

And, keep your eyes and ears open in the process because at some point, guns and the Second Amendment will come up. When it does, be prepared to explain the difference between Rights and Privileges — and never get them confused. **GUNS**

**CHAMBERSNAKE™.COM**

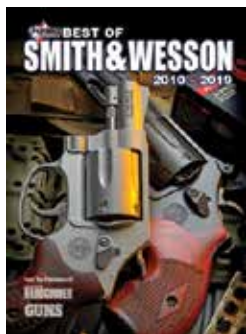


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## RUGER GP-100 WITH RED HAWK SIGHTS D&L SPORTS

Like all D&L sights, the *Ruger GP-100 With Red Hawk Sights* are precision machined from a solid block of steel. They don't break and lose zero. Ruger sights are available for the GP100, Redhawk, Bisley Flat Top but not for the Blackhawk. MSRP: \$95 for rear sights plus \$45 for U-notch cut and refinish; Front GP100 dove-tail/plunger retained sights are \$45 for black serrated ramp. For more info: (928) 636-1726, DLSports.com

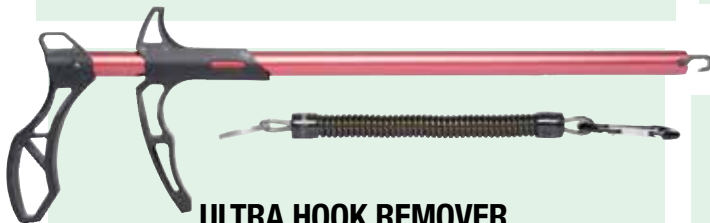
## SIG P320 OWB HOLSTER BRAVO CONCEALMENT

The *SIG P320 OWB Holster* is actually Bravo Concealment's Adaptive gun holster that has been around for almost 10 years! It is one of the most comfortable and concealable OWB holsters on the market. Add Bravo's famous pancake wings for a closer fit to the body with an adjustable ride height and cant. MSRP: \$40.99. For more info: (956) 783-7682, BravoConcealment.com



## TREMOR TELUM TACTICAL

The *Tremor* from Telum Tactical is for high-end knife users. It is equipped with a side safety with the ability to lock the knife in an open or closed position. With an OAL of 8", this pocket-worthy knife has a closed length of 4.5". Its 3.5" S3SV blade with a full hollow grind is satin-finished. MSRP: \$189.99. For more info: (844) 471-4868, TelumTactical.com



## ULTRA HOOK REMOVER EGO FISHING

EGO's *Ultra Hook Remover* is designed for removing hooks deep from the throats of game fish. It has a two-finger pinching mechanism grip that extends and retracts a non-corrosive J-shaped hook grabber for easy and safe hook removal from thrashing game fish in or out of a landing net. Made of non-corrosive metal components. MSRP: \$15.99. For more info: (800) 698-6841, EGOFishing.com



## BLACK VIDUA ALTOR CORP.

The *Black Vidua* from Altor Corp. is a special restricted version of the Altor pistol, a unique single-shot weapon with just six parts. All the metal parts are stainless steel and the polymer parts are Nylon 6. The *Black Vidua* has a threaded barrel treated with Black Nitride, making it even more corrosion resistant than the original stainless-steel barrel. When fitted with a suppressor, it is the quietest covert weapon! It has no parts to rack or rotate so the gun itself is completely silent. MSRP: \$179. For more info: (602) 441-4077, AltorCorp.com

## 3DHV VICTORY ARCHERY

High velocity, precision and durability come together in Victory Archery's *3DHV*, one of the lightest and fastest target arrows. Constructed of high modulus 100% carbon fiber, the small-diameter arrows deliver maximum speed and accuracy with less wind deflection. They're available in spines ranging from 300-800 and are finished with Victory's ICE Nano Ceramic Coating. MSRP: 159.99 (Elite); \$139.99 (Gamer); \$119.99 (Sport Series). For more info: (866) 934-6565, VictoryArchery.com

## PATHFINDER 30 MAMMOTH COOLERS

Lightweight yet durable, Mammoth's *Pathfinder 30* is the cooler for any outdoor adventure. Featuring high-density nylon with thick TPU laminated material, the cooler resists punctures and tears. Its antimicrobial liner resists mold and mildew while thick foam insulation ensures 1 to 2+ days of ice retention. The 30-quart soft cooler has a carrying capacity of 24 cans. MSRP: \$199.99. For more info: (855) 594-6159, MammothCooler.com



## WHAT THE FLOCK PACK THE GRIND OUTDOORS

The Grind launches the *What The Flock Pack* for turkey hunters who rely on a lifelike decoy setup. The pack includes three decoys as well as a decoy bag that doubles as a mini blind and fits up to three standard decoys. Includes the Reaper



Quarter Body Strutter with a detachable full fan, the Lay Down Hen that's in a realistic breeding position and the Relaxed Feeding Hen whose posture simulates movement. The decoys are constructed of a durable EVA material with a heat-treated, textured paint for realism. MSRP: \$229.96 for the entire set. For more info: (844) 471-4868, TheGrindOutdoors.com



## STANDARD DOT NIGHT SIGHTS XS SIGHTS

Owners of Taurus 856 and 605 revolvers who want to improve their shooting performance can upgrade to XS Sights' *Standard Dot Night Sights*. Designed for personal defense, Standard Dot sights feature a tritium powered front sight surrounded by a photo-luminescent orange or green Glow Dot to absorb ambient light and glow in low light to provide dual illumination. The high visibility sight aids faster and more accurate target acquisition, especially for those with aging eyes or deteriorating vision. MSRP: \$73. For more info: (888) 744-4880, XSSights.com

## RAPID FORCE DUTY HOLSTER ALIEN GEAR HOLSTERS

Alien Gear Holsters introduces the *Rapid Force Duty Holster* for Compact P320. It is designed to fit SIG SAUER's full-size, compact and X-Frame P320, with or without a light. These ambidextrous holsters are offered with a basketweave or matte exterior finish. The holsters are also designed to secure the P320 pistol again, with or without a light. MSRP: \$157.80. For more info: (208) 215-2046, AlienGearHolsters.com



## FLEX G-36 SPYPOINT

The *FLEX G-36* from SPYPOINT builds on the FLEX platform and will join the FLEX-S to offer a complete family of high-performance, feature-rich cellular trail cameras to suit any type of hunter. Improvements on the FLEX G-36 is the increase in photo resolution from 33MP to 36MP, improved battery life and optimized connectivity. The FLEX G-36 is still capable of taking and transmitting 1080p video with sound. MSRP: \$119.99. For more info: (888) 779-7646, SPYPOINT.com



## BEAR EDGE 61123 BEAR & SON CUTLERY

Bear & Son Cutlery expands their butterfly line with the new *Galaxy Series*. These new *balisong*-style knives are built with premium craftsmanship and feature unique, multi-colored metallic finish handles. The Galaxy Series includes 10 models — trainers, drop points, clip points, tanto and armor-piercing shapes. The 5" butterfly knives are offered in stainless steel, 1095 Carbon and Damascus. The tang pin construction on these knives delivers smooth, "no-slop" deployment and a matching T-latch keeps the handles secure while closed. MSRP: About \$68 for the trainer. For more info: (256) 435-2227, BearAndSonCutlery.com

## MULTI-MOUNT PLATFORM MISSION FIRST TACTICAL

Mission First Tactical's (MFT) *Multi-Mount Platform* gives easy and quick access to your essential equipment where you need them most. Ideal for mounting holsters, multi-tools, comms, flashlights, knives, tourniquets and more, it comes with a choice of 3M adhesive or a hook backer for use with a loop. Attaches to almost any surface such as a car console, bedside nightstand and more. The Multi-Mount is robust and can hold a full-size handgun and holster. MSRP: \$24.99. For more info: (267) 704-0001, MissionFirstTactical.com



## X-TERRA PRO MINELAB

Use the *X-TERRA PRO* for treasure hunting! Durable, lightweight and waterproof, it is priced to be a gateway into the sport. This metal detector offers modern technology in a durable, waterproof and affordable package. Easily operated, it has preset search modes that operate on frequencies best suited for parks, fields, beaches and the like. MSRP: \$269.99. For more info: Minelab@Minelab.com.au, Minelab.com



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## SHADOW SYSTEMS **DR920**

Designed with officers and service members in mind, the full-sized Shadow Cam *DR920* is a duty-ready pistol. Its frame features interchangeable back straps to allow shooters to adjust the grip angle to fit their natural point of aim. The extended beavertail and aggressive trigger guard undercut provide unmatched recoil control, allowing quick, accurate follow-up shots. The frame's wrap-around grip texture is aggressive enough to keep the gun firmly in the shooter's hand without being uncomfortable for daily wear. The camouflage-covered slide of the *DR920* is designed for manipulation under stress. It has directional serrations in the front and rear as well as topside, and a thinned profile at grasping locations. The match-grade barrel is conventionally rifled, spiral-fluted and threaded. The drop-safe, flat-faced aluminum trigger has a 4.5 to 5.0 lb. trigger pull and a crisp, tactile reset. This model comes with Shadow Systems' patented optics cut. Shooters can mount a mini red dot optic of their choosing. The optic cut on the *DR920* can accommodate most major

brands of RDS optics directly mounted to the slide, without plates or adapters.

The TOPS Knives Steel Eagle 105C is a fixed blade with an OAL of 10.50". Its 5.13" blade is made of 1095 RC 56-58 steel with Black Traction Coating. The handle is Black Linen Micarta. It comes with a black Kydex sheath and a rotating spring steel sheath clip. The Steel Eagle 105 knife models were not made to look pretty nor to be safe queens, they were made to be used. According to TOPS Knives, "as soon as you pick one up, the desire to use the knife will be almost overwhelming."

Streamlight's *ProTac 1L-1AA* produces up to 350 lumens on high for up to 1.5 hours. The dual-fuel, compact flashlight is made of anodized aluminum and is waterproof to one meter for 30 minutes. It comes with a nylon holster, a CR123A lithium battery and one AA alkaline battery.

The Shadow Systems *DR920* pistol, a TOPS knife and a Streamlight flashlight are at stake in this giveaway. Join for a chance to win at [GUNSMagazine.com/giveaways](http://GUNSMagazine.com/giveaways). Or send a post card. —Jazz Jimenez

**GUNS**

### **PROTAC 1L-1AA**

**Manufacturer:** Streamlight  
(800) 523-7488  
[Streamlight.com](http://Streamlight.com)  
**Value:** \$45





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## SHADOW SYSTEMS DR920

**Manufacturer:** Shadow Systems  
ShadowSystemsCorp.com  
(469) 458-6808  
**Caliber:** 9mm,  
**Capacity:** 17+1;  
**Barrel Length:** 5"  
(threaded),  
**OAL:** 7<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>", 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>";  
**Weight:** 22.4 oz.  
**Value:** \$1,305.29

## STEEL EAGLE 105C

**Manufacturer:** TOPS Knives  
(208) 542-0113  
TOPSKnives.com  
**Value:** \$190

# MAXIMIZING YOUR RUGER/MARLIN 336!

## HOW TO IMPROVE ON 'GREAT'

Jeff "Tank" Hoover

Who says lever guns have lost their usefulness in today's world of semi-auto shooters? Not Me! Especially when fitted with accessories from Skinner Sights and Simply Rugged. Lever guns are loved for their handiness. Always have been. Slim and trim, these flat-sided shooters allow for fast follow-up shots.

Plus, they're fun to shoot — it's part of their charm. And, their All-American looks are innocuous. Your neighbors are less likely to dial 911 when you're toting a "cowboy" gun or something looking like their grandfather carried it while checking the back forty.

### RUGER MARLIN

Yup! Ruger has done it again! Besides pushing out the model 1895 in three different styles, they've released the model 336 in .30-30. As American as the .30-30 is, it's a controversial cartridge. Some believe it woefully underpowered, while many know it to be a great cartridge capable of serving most needs.

Ruger is doing a wonderful job with the Marlin line. I have several New Haven Marlins and nostalgia aside,

the Ruger Marlins are more accurate, smoother from the box, while having a great wood to metal fit. Ruger's engineers know what it takes to make accurate rifles and have passed this knowledge onto the Marlin line.

Differences from the New Haven rifles are cosmetic, including having a red bullseye replacing the trademark black/white bullseye, the Marlin rider logo on grip cap, and of course, the location where it was made — Mayodan, NC — stamped on the barrel.

A .30-30 lever gun is handy indeed, and well-versed riflemen can handle business with a bare-bones gun. But what fun is that? It makes sense to make your gun more versatile. You know, helping you in a slew of different scenarios. You've heard of bugout bags, how about a bugout rifle? Just grab it and go, ready for any situation requiring your undivided attention.

**Top view of Skinner Sights "Bear Buster" front sight and Olight mounted on the 336.**

### EXTRA AMMO/ BETTER SIGHTS

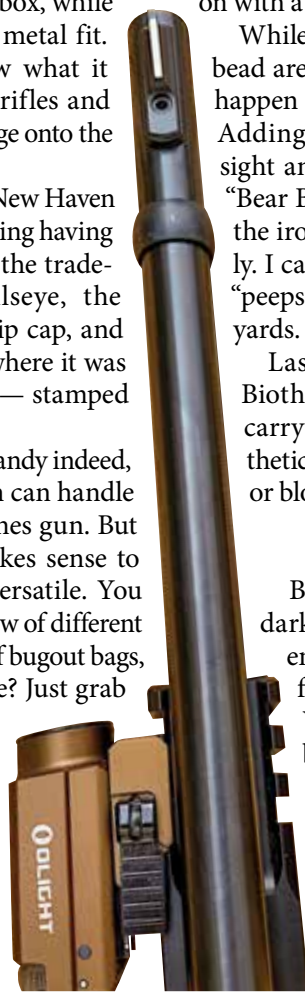
Of course, you'll want extra ammo should the need arise. Rob Leahy of Simply Rugged makes a rugged butt-cuff holding six extra rounds of ammo. It's well designed and looks good too, made from top-grain steer hide. It straps on with a leather lace for a snug fit.

While buckhorn sights with brass bead are traditionally "cool," things happen to our eyes as we get older. Adding a Skinner Sights "peep" sight and my favorite, white-lined "Bear Buster" front sight improves the iron sighted option immensely. I can almost shoot as well with "peeps" as with a scope out to 100 yards. They plain just work!

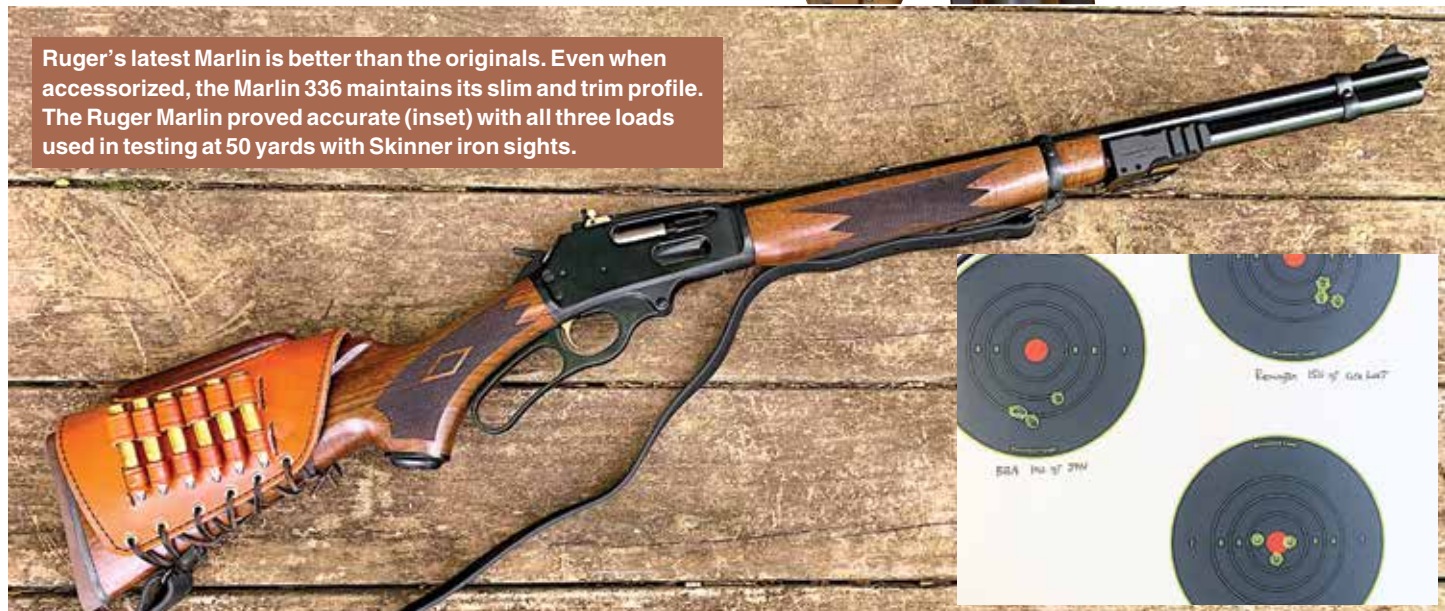
Lastly, I attached a Skinner Biothane Super Sling to make carrying my carbine easier. Synthetic, they don't absorb moisture or blood.

### LIGHT/LASER SHOW

Bad things happen in the dark. Miscreants feel emboldened from the lack of light, feeling invisible/invincible. When hearing something go bump in the night, don't root around your "junk drawer" searching for a flashlight. Pick up your handy .30-30 Marlin carbine, the one with the mounted light! Lightly touching the



Ruger's latest Marlin is better than the originals. Even when accessorized, the Marlin 336 maintains its slim and trim profile. The Ruger Marlin proved accurate (inset) with all three loads used in testing at 50 yards with Skinner iron sights.



button provides a burst of light, flicking it “on” provides a constant beam, your choice.

Whether wanting laser or light, the Olight BALDR gives you the option. Skinner Sights’ Andy Larsson designed the mounting bracket that clamps around your magazine tube and is secured with two Allen screws.

The Olight BALDR spring-loaded clamp allows for easy secure mounting and removal. The bracket and light only add a few ounces of weight to your gun.

**AMMO**

Nothing is more traditional in my neck of the woods than Remington Core Lokt ammo. For soft-skinned critters, they are an excellent option. For testing, I used an old box of 150-grain round-nosed soft-points. At 50 yards, three shots went into 0.65”.

For a more modern ammo, I turned to Buffalo Bore. First was a 150-grain all copper Barnes bullet. Three shots at 50 yards went just under an inch at 0.9” and



**The Skinner peep sight provides accurate shooting for older eyes and is adjustable for both windage and elevation.**

velocity is 2,350 FPS. Lastly, it’s an interesting load Tim Sundles developed using a 190-grain Jacketed Flat Nose (JFN) bullet listed at 2,100 fps. Sundles states residents of Alaska are his best customers for this heavy-duty load. The Marlin put three shots in an inch at 50 yards.

All groups were shot using Skinner Sights Peep sight and Bear Buster front. A sandbag rest was used for the forearm of the gun.

**IMPROVED PERFORMANCE**

It’s easy improving shooting performance with these add-ons. Simply Rugged provides a stylish way to carry

more ammo, while Skinner “peeps” keep your carbine slim and trim. The Olight BALDR allows you to light things up with laser, or light.

Good ammo is a must for performance. Old standbys like Remington Core Lokts, or custom ammo from Buffalo Bore will also pave the way for the type of performance you’re looking for. Ruger continues to knock it out of the park with their latest rendition of Marlin lever guns.

**GUNS**

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**WWW.CIMARRON-FIREARMS.COM**      **FREDERICKSBURG, TX**      **1877-SIXGUN1**

## GUNS INSIDER

continued from page 66

A truce was immediately declared and a war crime tribunal impaneled in their living room. I wasn't allowed back on the farm for two weeks.

### AMMO SELECTION

In the process of launching countless tons of clods, we learned the immutable concepts of range, flight time, lead and drop. In fact, most of us could have written a book on the ballistics of loam had we been more studious.

Proper shape and mass is an essential part of the clod selection process and it is very surprising the otherwise-thorough Hatcher didn't include any thoughts on the subject in his books. I'll try to help remedy this inexplicable knowledge gap for any of today's unreconstructed youth who might find themselves out in a field, forced to recreate without benefit of a coach, trainer, cheerleaders, screaming parents or other nut jobs.

Clods form in a variety of circumstances but some of the best are found in the aforementioned cornfield as a result of plowing activities. In a proper clod-field, you'll find all sizes from the smallest — useful for tormenting younger siblings — to giant wads you can barely lift. These are nearly impossible to throw but are perfect for breaking and smashing things, though it's usually things you're not supposed to be breaking and smashing.

The key factor in determining the ballistic coefficient of a dirt clod is moisture content. The driest clods, baked in the summer sun until they're hard as a billiard ball, hold together well through launching and flight but tend to be the most dangerous when impacting the skull of a younger sibling. They also are responsible for the nice big puff of "smoke" when they hit something you weren't supposed to be breaking or smashing.

For actual clod fights, a moister clod was better. This mitigated the terminal ballistics enough so no one went home

with a bloody nose, thereby inviting yet another tedious parental interrogation. A sopping-wet clod made you filthy and was difficult to launch but made up for it by dramatically marking the target whether it was building or buddy. It could also be counted on for making a wonderful deep "thwock" noise upon impact. This was especially satisfying on the side of barns, though area farmers didn't seem to see it this way.

Alas, nowadays I'll bet no more than a handful of dirt clods are launched in the U.S. in the course of an average week — and more's the pity. With free unlimited ammo and targets, and no registration or waiting periods, the basic dirt clod was probably more responsible for teaching generations about basic external ballistics than all the dads, uncles, grandads, basic training, 4-H Shooting Sports and Boy Scout archery competitions combined.

In fact, descriptions of my own shooting prowess frequently include the term "clod" — but only in the nicest of ways.

**GUNS**

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# GUNS INSIDER NOV 2023

## WHAT IS THE BC OF DIRT? HATCHER'S NOTEBOOK, WEIRDLY REVISED EDITION

### Brent T. Wheat

If you're into classic gun literature, you undoubtedly own a copy of *Hatcher's Notebook*, a 1949 tome by Julian S. Hatcher, the then-Chief of the Small Arms Division of the United States Army Ordnance Department. It is still available today and widely considered a "standard reference book for shooters, gunsmiths, ballisticians, historians, hunters" and various other reprobates.

#### ACTS OF WAR

Back when I was a kid, before Ballistic Coefficient (BC) had been discovered by anyone aside from Hatcher and his odd social circle, the only ballistics term we knew was "Kentucky Windage." The only reason we knew the idiom was because Fess Parker, playing Daniel Boone on the Sunday night "Disneyland" program, had mentioned it several times.

The next day, all the guys were casually throwing it around as we committed our usual atrocities on the playground. Since we now had a cool shooting term to use, we applied it to everything. Baseballs at Little League needed more "Caintuck" and any other projectile falling short of the mark likewise was admonished.

We lived right on the outskirts of a small town and a cornfield lay just across the fence behind our neighborhood. This was our wilderness, a couple of hundred acres of rutted rows, which served myriad functions to bored 6th graders, who were essentially allowed to go feral during the summer months. In this field, constantly reenacting WWII battles — Vietnam was still hot and not especially romantic at the time — we schlepped along in our army-surplus

steel pot helmet liners, rotten web gear and empty bayonet scabbards.

We were totally un-armed because our parents weren't stupid. Our BB guns were off limits for "playing army" because everyone knew allowing a group of mischievous young boys to pack any type of heat during such activities was guaranteed to end with someone "getting their eye put out."

This was the favorite and only warning our parents ever gave before turning us loose on the countryside. No matter if you were fishing the creek, playing war or simply riding your bike, our various parents and grandparents seemed to constantly fret about the prospect of someone coming home with only one eyeball. Personally, I always thought it would be cool to see an eye dangling out of the skull, swinging gently in the summer breeze on the attached nerve — so long as it wasn't me.

I'm sure eye injuries happened but to this day, all of my boyhood chums retain binocular vision. They've got some really interesting scars, but their eyeballs are mostly intact. This is somewhat surprising considering our weapon of choice during the various expeditionary maneuvers was the humble dirt clod.

#### THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Nowadays I'm pretty sure any kid slinging a congealed wad of soil, especially at another human, would immediately be sent to a psychiatrist, anti-violence therapist and perhaps a gender-neutral arts program to help channel their latent aggression into free-form pottery. Back in my day, the dirt clod was a normal part of every mid-western child's life. In fact, you could consider it the Colt .45 of the kid set.

A dirt clod is a true all-purpose weapon — it can be a rifle bullet, a handgun projectile, a shot column, a grenade or even an artillery shell. I'm surprised the U.S. Military hasn't investigated such a thing. Imagine the possibilities of limitless ammo of every type, at least so long as you were fighting in a chisel-plowed field.

When we were playing war, a daily occurrence in summer, whizzing a smallish wad of dirt at the enemy would sting but no real harm occurred so long as nobody's eye got in the way. In fact, those of us who sported real GI-surplus holsters (sans 1911) were known to carry around holstered clods in case The Enemy made a sneak attack on our position inside the overgrown fencerow.

If you were really in deep trouble and about to be overrun, you screamed for a hand grenade, which were bigger, dryer clods. The manual of arms was simple: Feign biting the pin with your teeth just like Sgt. Rock Gonad in our comic books, then heave the deadly package toward the enemy position in a rainbow arc. If you ended up with mud in your mouth, you were overly enthusiastic with the biting part. If you hit something, or Heaven-forbid, someone, the resulting explosion of dirt and bits of gravel nicely mimicked a cloud of shrapnel.

There were other uses for clods aside from wargames. They were perfect for target practice. Most of the time an old wooden fencepost served as the bull's eye, though we tried to find other things such as lost hubcaps, field rocks, discarded bottles and even plastic airplane models we had grown tired of. If we were feeling especially full of ourselves, a passing crow or sparrow would be the point of aim.

As far as I know, none of the local fauna ever suffered a direct hit, though once I nearly scored a 10x on the mom of one my buddies. She came around the corner of the barn to investigate our ongoing barbarisms just as I whizzed a clod her direction, thinking it was my friend in a flanking attack. The dirt detonated dramatically right next to her on the corner of the building.

*continued on page 65*



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