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2024

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MAGNUM
RESEARCH
1911G



DE1911GSS

TOTAL VALUE: \$1,152



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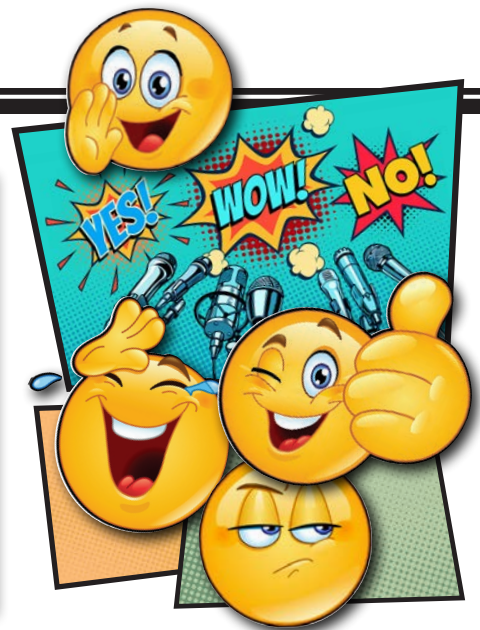


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MORE



The acquisition, ownership, possession and use of firearms are heavily regulated. Some models may not be legally available in your state or locale. Whatever your purpose for lawfully acquiring a firearm – know the law, get trained and shoot safely.





HATERS GONNA HATE, HATE, HATE ...

I've had red dots for decades (since they first came out), and not one of them is accurate enough for hunting. Within 10 yards, I do not require any sights, and yet that is the maximum range. Red dot sights suck — give it a rest. I have three different models and will never, under any circumstance, purchase another.

This BS about them being tricky to use is also not true. They work just fine and are quite intuitive — though they also are an overpriced POS.

Pushing them such as you do is a real disservice to your readers. Anybody who needs one of them to shoot does not deserve to even own a gun.

JustMe Tanks

Handloading

Lindsey, I haven't read much of your work, but was fascinated by your article on the 40 S&W.

I've been kind of a .40 nut over the years, and after adding semi-auto pistols to replace SA revolvers, of course, I gave the .40 a try. Three different 1911s, many bullet types, one of every powder in the reasonable

range. Plated, jacketed, cast/lubed and powder coated. But I never got a .40 to shoot as well as a .45. Now, admittedly, I did not have any custom pistols for it, but then, I don't for my .45s either.

I finally did the deed and chucked the caliber from the gun safe and reloading room and took up with the ever-popular 9x18.

Accurate right out of the chute and not fussy about bullet type. It uses less powder, bullets are cheaper, and if the SHTF a good 9mm will be easier to find feed for.

Your experience seems to be markedly different, and that's a good thing. I liked the ballistics of the .40. I guess it's like cars; some folks won't own a Dodge (or Chevy, or Ford) while their neighbor loves it!



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Look forward to more of your articles, well written and comprehensive!

Regards,
Paul

Condolences

Please extend my most sincere condolences on the loss of Mike Venturino. He will be sorely missed. Please reach out to Yvonne, the most phenomenal photographer.

Kindest regards,
Dan Bellinotti

I'll be damned! First, the Duke and now Mark. Two pretty damn good, if not iconic, firearms writers gone too soon. I enjoyed both of those guys' articles anytime I came across them. Very informative and interesting reads. They lived the good life and will be missed.

Aaron Wilson

We have received countless emails regarding the losses of both Mike "Duke" Venturino and Mark Hampton. Sadly, we don't have room to publish them all, so I picked just a couple to be representative. I know the families really appreciate the sentiment. Both of these fine gentlemen will be sorely missed. There are two very large voids in the handgunning world. —TM

Nine Toes

Tom, most people are sheep ("Defensive Mindset," AmericanHandgunner.com). Some are wolves. A very few are guard dogs. Sheep are stupid and untrainable. Also, they are the largest voting block.

I turn 81 next month. Have adopted do not give a sh&t profile. No matter who wins the election, the losing side will take to the streets. SHTF. I would like to see that. Perhaps participate!

Nine-toed Ted

Lights! Action!

I just read your article on "Less-Offensive EDC Tools" from the most recent Personal Defense email y'all sent out. I thought it was well done, and I agree with your reasoning. A student of mine successfully used a flashlight to escape from a group of predators; use of a flashlight can also help you avoid being selected as a victim; even smaller flashlights can be used as an impact weapon.

I have a student at the range where I work who is from China. She is a Ph.D student in sociology at a local university, and she first came to me for some private instruction on how to shoot a handgun. She was a very quick study — possibly because she plays piano and golf, both at a high level. The former gives her independent control

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SPEAK OUT

of her fingers and the latter good hand-eye coordination, so she was shooting impressive groups in a very short time.

She was going to go home to China for the summer, and she asked my advice on what defensive tools she could use while there. I suggested a bright flashlight of the type in your article. When I saw her next after her return to school, she said that my advice likely saved her life. One night, she was being followed by three guys, and when they closed the distance to her, she shined the 1,500-lumen beam in their faces, which disoriented them enough that she was able to run off down a side street. I know of several other folks who have used flashlights in a similar fashion.

One other benefit to using a flashlight regularly is that it shows potential predators that you may not be the best person to victimize. The late Dr. William Aprill studied criminal behavior, and he pointed out that anything that we can do to send out signals to those types to "pick someone else" will reduce the likelihood of us becoming a victim. Just using a light when walking in public to illuminate dark areas shows you are aware and paying attention, not stuck in an unaware and unprepared state of (un)consciousness.

Most modern lights also make pretty good impact tools should there end up being a fight. The Mini Maglite was originally developed to be a more socially acceptable version of the Kubotan, and of course, many "tactical" lights have crenulated bezels to enhance striking performance.

Take care and best regards,
Tom Beaty

Old School Adjustment

If almost any Colt SSAs and clones shoot to the left (and sometimes high and to the left) right out of the box, why isn't this corrected before the gun leaves the factory?

My SAA clone shot high and to the left, right out of the box. I sent it back to the distributor to have the point of aim "adjusted." It still shot to the left, so I applied the "Duke solution" with a pair of pliers. Now it shoots where it looks, and, yup, there are plier marks on the front sight, but I don't care; it is not a Colt.

Chuck Naretto

.41 Magnum

One of my favorite guns to shoot and reload for is the .41 Mag. I prefer to load as a .41 Special as I am over 70, and the magnum recoil is no fun. I am trying

to understand why this round never took hold; it shoots flatter than the .44 Magnum and has a similar punch.

By the way, .41 Special is hard to come by, so I have been working up reloads for that round. Of course, new brass is impossible to find. I have found AA#5 gave me 1,000 fps from a variety of bullet weights. That's not bad to shoot from a Redhawk with a 4" barrel. I am working on V320 for 41 Special loads.

Of course, for home defense, I have commercial .44 Special, which I hoard.

Thanks for a good magazine. Yours and GUNS are now my only two gun mags.

R.J. Nice

My Dog Ate It!

My three-month-old Catahoula/Border Collie mix is absolutely infatuated with chewing up paper. Yesterday, I left my newly purchased issue of the July/Aug issue of your magazine open to John Taffin's article by my bedside, thinking I would read it that evening. I am a long time fan of the 44 and Taffin's writing on the subject.

The last paragraph of the first page of that article, page 54, is partly eaten. Barfolomew indicated that it was delicious, but I sure wish I knew what it said!

David Kachel

Don't show this to your dog. It's time he understands the consequences of his actions! —TM

(Last bit of page 54 ...)



As a bullet caster, I have a great advantage, namely being able to custom tailor bullet diameters to fit each particular sixgun. There is a lot of variation found in the chamber throats of both .45 Colt and .44 Special sixguns. Applying a pin gauge to the .45 New Frontier gave me a uniform reading of 0.455" for all six chambers. I keep a generous supply of reloads on hand with both 0.452" and 0.454" diameter bullets, so for the most part, I chose the latter.

However, I was pleasantly surprised to find the smaller bullets also shot well, as did factory-loaded ammunition.

A New Generation

The New Frontier had been gone for 30 years. At a meeting with Colt Officials in the early 1990s, we were told ...

It's A Small World

While walking the aisles of a gun show in early October of 1983, something caught my attention. It was a .32-20 WCF Colt Army Special.

According to the factory letter, it was manufactured in February of 1923. Throughout the many years, it has resided in my safe and only occasionally taken out and shot. The gun shot okay, but not spectacularly — about 2.5 to 3" at 25 yards. Last year, in July of 2023, I put the gun up for sale at a local pawnshop, being the victim of wanting money to purchase a coin. Imagine my surprise when, in February of this year, at the same pawnshop, there, lying on display, was my previously owned Colt Army Special! I immediately repurchased this gun and will never again part with it.

Ken Winchell

Snubbie Ammo?

I live in rural Mississippi and carry an older (at least 50 years old) S&W model 36 snub nose when I jog in the country due to its size and the fact I shoot it fairly well. I don't handload. What would you recommend as a defensive round for two-legged predators? Thanks for any help you can give.

Bob Tibbs

So many good choices! As a different take, under the "shot placement counts" theory, I'd be sure to test a few options to figure out what shoots well to point of aim

from your gun. I'm sure other readers will be happy to weigh in so I'll forward responses your way. —TM

Auto Rim

I just read the .45 ACP/.45 Auto Rim article (May/June 2024) and want to add one bit of info. John (familiarity assumed as we're chronological peers) mentioned a Christy cylinder for his Colt SAA that works with both ACP and Auto Rim cartridges. I had (unfortunately, past tense) a local gunsmith I talked into making a reamer that would counterbore an ACP cylinder to accept an Auto Rim cartridge and headspace both cartridges properly. He gave the treatment to my Uberti Cattleman cylinder as well as my Ruger Blackhawk cylinder. They work perfectly, as planned.

I acquired a Freedom Arms .454 Casull with a .45 ACP cylinder and requested the same treatment, and was told he's retired, it's too much trouble to set up, go away, and he refused to sell me his reamer. As you doubtless know, some gunsmiths can peg the cantankerous meter like it's part of their DNA. I contacted Freedom Arms, and they don't want to play either.

So, it's possible, and it's not terribly difficult, and the results are worth it. It

all depends on that elusive reamer. If I must, I will commission a reamer with an appropriate pilot and find an idle machinist to do this job; when I do, I will advise the world so we can keep said machinist busy. Duke Venturino has praised the .45 Auto Rim as one of the great advances of the 20th century, up there with bottled beer and sliced bread. I concur.

Jerry Wright

Clough Time

This guy is great! Friends, as a sometimes "gun riter" myself, I must express my appreciation for the talents of Mr. Clough.

His recent article, "Pragmatic Anachronism," was informative, stylish and clever. The observations and wisdom manifested his experience but the quotable humor found me laughing out loud.

I envy his abilities and will be looking forward to his next article.

Keep 'em in the black,
Fred Capobianco

CZ

I just finished reading "A Little Off The Top" by Jeremy Clough. It really brought me back to the first handgun I purchased. It was in the mid-1980s.

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SPEAK OUT

I could not afford the 1911, which was my first choice. At a show, I ran across an Inglis Hi-Power, and I thought that would be the one, but kept walking and looking.

I then ran across an unfamiliar pistol, but it just reached out to me and said buy me. It had a military look to it, a Parkerized finish. It had a great feel in my hand. It had two double-stack magazines with it. The price was right. The *pièce de résistance* was it said Springfield Armory, Geneseo, IL. Yes, my first pistol was a Springfield Armory P9C

Basically a CZ 75 compact. Oh, how I wish Springfield Armory would have kept this in their stable of pistols. Could you imagine how much faster CZs would have caught on? My friend who was with me ridiculed me for not buying the established Hi-Power choice. I just shrugged it off and figured this would just be a learning experience. Needless to say, that little compact shot everything that it was fed and shot it well. I remember sending it in for warranty work because I ran across a certain ammo that was very accurate, but I had to strike it twice with the firing pin

to get it to fire. Oops, I later found out this ammo was Egyptian 9mm machine gun ammunition. It had hard military primers. Live and learn.

Since the purchase, I feel like I've been watching the world around me play catch-up with the CZ-75 and other similar clones. I've had numerous people at the range come up to me and say, "Hey look at this new pistol." I look and commend them on an excellent choice. Then I may add, in a non-pompous way, I bought one of these back in the 1980s. They promptly tell me, "No way, they didn't exist back then." Or something similar.

Again, thanks for the article. It brought back memories.

Yours truly,
Joe

come to the conclusion that shooters no longer want anything but 9mm, or worse, that we should not have anything other than 9mm? (And perhaps the occasional .45?) I would really like to have one of these new compacts, but how difficult can it be to chamber it in .40 S&W, considering that they have already done it?

Just fantasizing about a return to multiple-caliber choices. I know it won't be likely to happen.

David Kachel

Well, you can blame the magazines all you want, but the fact remains manufacturers invest lots of money to make products people want to buy, else they go out of business. It is, in fact, that simple. Sorry, no conspiracy here. —TM

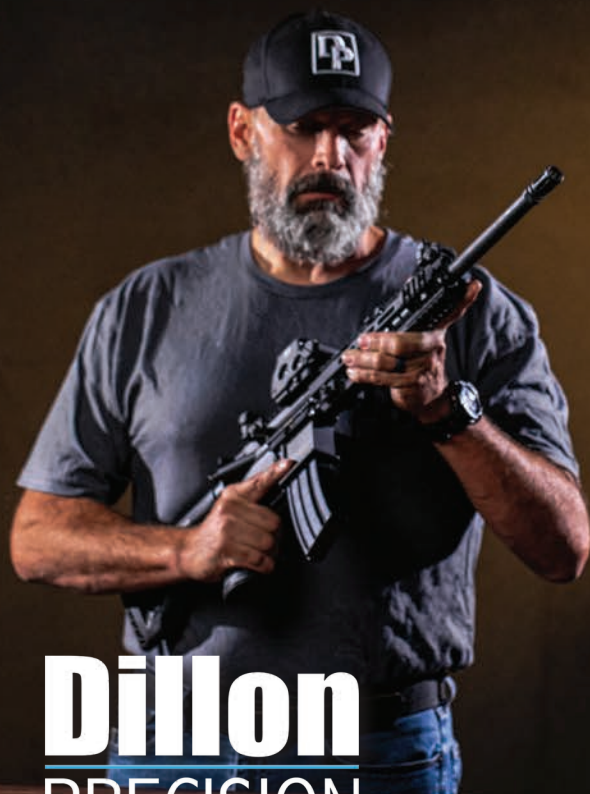
Tired Of 9mm

I bought a copy of the July/August 2024 issue off the newsstand today. One of the reasons I seldom buy gun magazines anymore is the "religion" recently adopted by gun manufacturers and gun writers, preaching that the holy caliber is 9mm and we shall have no other caliber before it.

Specifically, what set me off today was the article on the compact pistol from CZ. How have manufacturers

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TOM MCHALE

VANTAGEPOINT

RIP MARK HAMPTON

If you're a regular reader of *American Handgunner*, you've seen Mark Hampton's *Handgun Hunting* column grace these pages and those of *GUNS Magazine* for years — nearly two decades. Arguably one of the world's most experienced handgun hunters, Mark literally traveled the world — frequently — in support of his craft. During the years I've been around, I can't tell you how many times I've received word from Mark to the effect of, "Hey, I'm headed to Africa for a hunt; I'll be sure to get the next column to you

early!" The words he shared with us here were, quite literally, harvested directly from the field. Having completed somewhere over 30 African hunts, it's tough to argue with the voice of experience. Add to Mark's resume writing and publishing several books, numerous SCI records and plenty of handgun competition victories, and one begins to get a taste of his knowledge and skill.

Mark passed away from natural causes while on a hunt in Tanzania. While there's never much solace in a loss



like this, perhaps there's a slight bit of comfort in Mark's passing doing what he loved so much — hunting.

Mark's last column, published in this issue, is about having the proper respect for life. Somehow, that seems a fitting way to remember a man of such accomplishment who never failed to surprise with his humility and gentlemanly demeanor. We'll miss him.

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY AOS

Like the internet, red dot sights on pistols might just catch on one day ...

New from Springfield Armory is not a new red dot-ready pistol, but a whopping dozen of them spanning three different 1911 product families.

New AOS models, created in conjunction with Agency Arms Optics, are available in the Operator, Ronin and Emissary families. Initially, the optics-ready pistols will be available in 9mm and .45 ACP chamberings.

To see how the system works, I got my hands on an Operator AOS with a 4.25" barrel chambered in 9mm. The pistol ships with a cover plate over the new optics cut fit with a windage-adjustable rear sight and Tritium-equipped front sight.

The new plate system is a bit different. Optics-specific plates include an integral rear sight and are made with different thicknesses to ensure the iron sight system co-witnesses with the red dot sight. This is an important point — the adapter plates don't just hold the optic on the side; they account for proper window height so your irons are visible in the lower area of the sight window. I mounted a new Trijicon RMR HD using the proper plate (shown in the photo here) and found the iron sights co-witnesses in the bottom 10 percent of the Trijicon's window. Of course, the stock iron sights, primarily the front one, are sized accordingly. On the Operator here, I'd say the front sight height is somewhere between standard and what we'd call suppressor height.

As the plates are expensive, considering the integral rear sight, AOS pistols will not ship with a collection of unnecessary plates. You'll get a certificate with the pistol to order the plate you need for \$49 — about half the normal price of a plate. For more info: SpringfieldArmory.com



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We're pleased to offer a new video series (also available in audio Podcast form if you prefer) titled *American Handgunner Insider*. In these short, sweet and to-the-point episodes, we'll keep you up to date on new products and trends in the handgunning world. Be sure to enjoy the lively discussion in the comments section!

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AN APPRENTICE LEARNS THE RUGER WAY

The president of the Louis & Clark Rifle & Pistol Club was yawning in front of the television, about ready for bed, when the phone rang. “I’m a gun writer, doing an article on the 75th anniversary of the Ruger .22 pistol. Is there someone at your club who might give me some interesting quotes?”

“Why, that’s easy,” replies the president. “Be at the club tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. and meet the Senior Member. Don’t be put off by his gruff demeanor; he’s really a big cuddly bear. You might bring him his favorite coffee, a chocolate caramel macchiato with sprinkles, whipped cream, double sugar and triple soy milk. Ignore his dog; he likes that. What publication are you with?”

“Well, none. I’m a freelancer trying to get started.”

“Ah, an AGW — aspiring gun writer. I can assure you the Senior Member will be most impressed.” His wife, who had overheard, said, “That was kind of mean.” But she had to stifle a giggle. “Who are you messing with, the Senior Member or the AGW?” “Bit of both, actually.”

Promptly at 1 p.m. the next day, the AGW had the Senior Member pointed out to him. He didn’t look at all cuddly, quite the opposite, in fact. The AGW marched bravely up, set a coffee cup on the side table, and said, “How do you do, sir? I was hoping you might give me a few moments to talk about ...”

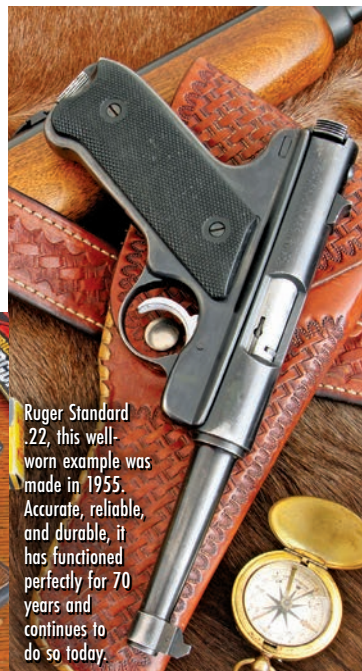
“About the Ruger .22 pistol, I was advised of your interest by the club president this morning.” He pried the lid off the coffee cup and managed to conceal his horror at the sugary concoction. “May I ask, did the president suggest this coffee?”

“Yes indeed,” replied the AGW. “I wanted to be sure to get what you liked. And he told me you don’t like your dog getting treats.”

“Oh, did he? I am reminded of the old saying: Revenge is a dish best eaten cold. You probably aren’t aware the president sent you to play in traffic. He knows I don’t have a high opinion of gun writers, with the notable exceptions of John Taffin and Mike Venturino. Your good intentions absolve you. To quote Arthur Conan Doyle, “You have done something to mitigate my feelings for the loathsome profession to which you unhappily belong.”

“Thank you. I think. Does that mean you’ll help me? Aren’t you going to drink the coffee?”

“I’ll save it for later. And yes, I will help you. Write this down or start your infernal sound recorder.”



Ruger Standard .22, this well-worn example was made in 1955. Accurate, reliable, and durable, it has functioned perfectly for 70 years and continues to do so today.

“The Ruger .22 pistol is one of the great firearm designs. Its success laid the foundation for the Ruger company of today. Bill Ruger was brilliant, and his brilliance had two components. One was as a designer. He knew manufacturing had to change in response to the increasing scarcity and cost of skilled hand work. Like the Remington 721/722 rifles of the era, the receiver of his firearm was a simple steel tube with a bolt traveling in the tube, and the remaining components — barrel, magazine, firing assembly, grip frame — attached to the receiver. This made manufacturing faster and cheaper.

“The second brilliant thing Ruger did was setting a price point below that of the competition. Have you read *The Spirit of Enterprise* by George Gilder? You should. It’s about some of the great entrepreneurs, J.R. Simplot, Henry Ford and Soichiro Honda, their incredible work ethic and willingness to take risks. A key element is this: Lower your price and capture the market. As production grows, cost per unit decreases, and the market expands. Ruger didn’t just take market share from Colt and High Standard; he created a market where none had existed before.

“Price wouldn’t have mattered if the pistol was a piece of junk, but it most emphatically was not. The Ruger Standard was durable, reliable, and accurate, with attractive lines and a decent polish and finish. Moreover, the Ruger company backed their product unequivocally. Shooters talk, on the range and around campfires. Word of mouth beats advertising, endorsements, and gun magazine articles.”

“Today, the Ruger .22 pistol is a better buy than ever. In 1950, it took 80 to 100% of an average week’s wages to buy a Ruger Standard. Today, it takes less than 50%. Prior to the Ruger, the most successful .22 semiauto was the Colt Woodsman, with about 690,000 made from 1915 to 1977. The Ruger has been in production for 75 years and counting. Sales reached 1 million in 1979. The Mark II series sold 3 million. Total production today must be approaching 5 million. Oh darn, look what I’ve done; I accidentally knocked my coffee off the table.”

“Thank you, Old One,” the AGW said. “If I may, I’ll bring you another tomorrow.”

“You may. Black. No milk, no sugar, no nothing except black coffee. And a biscuit for the pup.”





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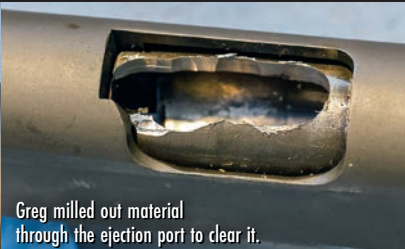


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WHEN IN DOUBT— CHECK IT OUT

About twice a year, I get a customer who complains their semi-auto pistol is "locked up" or a revolver has a barrel obstruction. Most often, this is associated with handloads or budget factory ammo. The jam usually is just after a light recoil, a round that did not eject from the gun or a feeling of, "It felt weird." The shooter hand racks the slide and then the trouble starts.

Squib loads (loads with little or no powder) have plagued shooters forever. Most often, the light load fails to get the bullet out of the barrel, and

the second round fired after it creates enough pressure to "bulge" and sometimes split the barrel.

In my latest case, the gun was a numbers matching WWII Colt 1911 used by the owner's father. The bulge occurred in the chamber area locking the slide up solid. First, I did a complete exam of the gun, seeing what damage may have been done to the slide and frame. Most times, I can get the slide to move with a few whacks of a leather mallet. Not this time. To separate the slide from the frame, I cut the slide stop pin, allowing the slide

to come off. Now I could see the issue clearly. The barrel was now too fat to slip out of the slide.

The slide which was serialized to the frame was my main concern, I had to be very careful. After thinking about it overnight, I decided to cut material from the barrel chamber area through the ejection port with my mill. Hopefully this would allow the chamber area to squeeze out the slide tunnel. I cut a lot of material away with a $\frac{3}{8}$ " end-mill, being careful not to touch the slide. Next, I used a brass drift and hammer to tap the barrel out, hitting the lower feet. The barrel reluctantly gave up and came out. The slide was fine, ready for a new period correct barrel. If you ever have a "weird recoil or what feels like a weak round," please take the time to check the barrel safely for an obstruction.

RETIREMENT

Pachmayr is a name that still evokes the golden era of innovation in the pistolsmithing world. One of the last pistolsmiths from the famed Pachmayr shop, Mike LaRocca, has decided to retire after 42 years. Mike started with Pachmayr right out of gunsmithing school, taking a job as one of six pistolsmiths in Los Angeles. Frank Pachmayr took Mike under his wing, and after a year and a half, Mike was lead pistolsmith in a shop with a four-year backlog. Mike brought a more systematic approach to the shop and started to make the backlog manageable.

All the while, he was working on innovations for what would become the "Combat Special." LaRocca took a lot of the ideas from Frank Pachmayr and turned them into reality for the shop. LaRocca eventually moved back east to start up his own shop, finding the cost of living a little better than downtown Los Angeles. For the next 30-plus years, he worked in his shop on the third floor of an old mill building in downtown Worcester,

Mass. During that time, he used the expertise and confidence he learned from Pachmayr to tune pistols and shotguns, many of which won major matches like the Bianchi Cup, and he continued to innovate. He also kept the "Pachmayr Combat Special and Signature Series" 1911 pistols running for clients after the closing of Pachmayr. Mike plans on doing some fishing in retirement and some traveling with his wife Cathy.

THE VERSATILE S&W REAR SIGHT

The Smith and Wesson revolver sight has been used for years as a custom install on many pistols like the 1911, Browning Hi-Power, Ruger revolvers and many more. I think it works because it's small and sits low on a handgun — great for carrying. It's also one of the more difficult sights to properly install. A lot of people credit Armand Swenson for using it first on a 1911, but it goes back farther than him. Swenson did make the modification popular as his guns got attention in many firearm publications.

It takes nerve to install the sight since many of the milling operations require very small cutters that have a tendency to break during the process. The factory sight did have a flaw. When used on a semi-auto like the .45 1911, the small screw that held the long front tang in the slide used to sheer off under recoil, Swenson came up with adding a steel stud into the sight tang, which eliminated breakage. As an added feature, he would stamp the owner's initial into the stud. It's a great sight on so many platforms.





NIGHT FISION SENTINEL Improved Shotgun Sights

A Classic Idea Brought Into The 21st Century

Erick Gelhaus

Shotgun sights? Oh boy, I have been through the whole gamut of versions over the years. Bead on a barrel, ramped bead, buckhorn, and rifle sights, several flavors of ghost rings, modified ghost rings, optics — and pistol sights. Oddly enough, one of my Holy Grail guns from decades back has pistol sights on it.

MAN WITH A PLAN

Enter some guy by the name of Steve Fisher. He was previously with MagPul Dynamics and currently runs Sentinel Concepts. Years ago he was doing a range day, which started with a lot of pistol work. Later, he switched to a shotgun and realized this particular gun visually aligned the sights roughly in the same place as the handgun he had been using.

Pistol sights give the shooter a sight picture nearly everyone is familiar with, unlike ghost ring sights (too much information) or rifle sights (anemic). Steve wanted speed in-close and precision with slugs at a distance, about 75 yards realistically. Pistol sights seemed like the perfect solution.

BETTER VISIBILITY

Steve knew years ago we had such shotgun sights. Remember the grail gun I mentioned, the H&K 121M1? It came with pistol-like sights! Early Beretta Model 1201 shotguns (no, not a typo, not the 1301) had pistol-like sights as well.

It took about a decade to bring this idea to fruition but Steve finally got in contact with Night Fision, a Michigan-based sight company.

Their products come out of the same clean room used by Cammenga Inc., the world's largest manufacturer of military compasses and maker of the U.S. Military's lensatic compass with tritium inserts. While the Night Fision name is perceived as relatively new, it is just the public face as the company has been doing tritium insertion for others for years after spending time developing and honing their process to high levels. Night

Fision uses a very high-grade tritium source from Switzerland and throughout the manufacturing process, the company adheres to Nuclear Regulatory Commission processes and standards.

EXCELLENCE IN MANUFACTURING

To get a brighter image, Night Fision developed a now-patented dome for their vial. This dome sits at the end of every tube and gives the vials a much sharper appearance. Unlike vials with flat, smaller, or lower-grade glass, the dome prevents visual haziness. Additionally, with a larger vial, they can use 30% more tritium for a crisper image.

Everything they learned from previous design efforts has carried over to their Sentinel Sights, resulting in the familiar sight picture Fisher was looking for.

Design-wise, the Sentinel Sights are closest to Night Fision's Stealth line. The front and rear sights are beveled with high lines per inch (LPI) serrations to mitigate glare and front sight blades have either a yellow or orange sleeve around the tritium vial. For those buying rear sights with tritium, those come with black sleeves.

Neither Fisher nor anyone else involved was looking for something sexy. They weren't trying to change the world. They just wanted a better sight that was more visible to the shooter — they clearly succeeded with Night Fision Sentinel Sights.



Close-up of what Night Fision rear sights look like. You'll see a shorter version on your shotgun.



A 25-yard standing off-hand group made with with Sentinel sights.

STAYING ON TOP OF RED DOT PISTOL SIGHT ISSUES



Author demonstrates bridge index with SRO-sighted Langdon Beretta LIT. Jaw is in contact with the upper arm.



"Vulturizing down" finds that red dot that was hiding high out of view. It keys in with the natural fight or flight response.

Carry optics are the new hotness in American police service pistols but they do have shortcomings and possible trouble spots.

I've seen batteries fail, zero get lost, and even sights falling off pistols. I've also seen users who have something in common with cats: They just can't seem to "catch the red dot." Carry optics are still in their adolescence: They can be problematic, and they can challenge you.

MECHANICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When Jeff Chudwin speaks, gun-savvy cops listen. His resume encompasses many years as a prosecutor, chief of police, and firearms instructor. He recently had this to share:

"We are in the 'Wild West' of pistol optics. We are now doing a 'Duty Handgun Optics Armorer's' class. Mount of the optic is the focus. Why? In the past year, 30 to 50% of our student officers arrive carrying a pistol dot optic. Of those in use, 50–100% failed in some fashion during the classes. Loose screws, broken screws, wrong screws, etc. McMaster Carr in Illinois carries steel alloy screws that are the best American-made quality we have found. We now check every firearm before we move to the range.

"Trust no one to mount your optics unless you can verify the competency of that person doing the work. If you are using the handgun for defense of life purposes, know that the screws are quality, the VibraTite VC-3 or Locktite is used, and all surfaces are properly cleaned before application. We seldom see this done.

"A solid foundation of knowledge is required to get and keep all in correct working order. We gain that knowledge in this case by running a constant science experiment on the range as hundreds of pistols and tens of thousands of rounds are in regularly in play," Chudwin concludes.

Personally, I would also recommend a closed emitter design for heavy-duty use like police work and a direct mount that doesn't require a plate. Insist on backup

iron sights. Make sure your officers can, in fact, see the dot: Lt. Wayne Musgrove of the Suwannee County (FL) Sheriff's Department got green dot Holosuns for all his deputies' new FN 509 service pistols in part because one or more of them were color blind and couldn't distinguish red dots. And, particularly in four-season climates, make sure de-fogger is applied regularly! The Cat Crap brand works well.

TRAINING

There's a learning curve with this technology. Make sure enough time and reps are invested; finding the dot is tougher for some than others. Some RDO instructors consider the following to be heresy, but I can only say, "Try it, and if it works, use it."

THE PRESS-OUT DRAW

Defined by the late Todd Louis Green, the press-out draw path looks like a capital letter "L" tipped over 90°. The short leg of the L is the initial rock and lock with muzzle on target and gun tight to the body like a retention technique, while the long part of the L is the extension toward the threat. This allows the sight to come to the eye sooner and more time to catch the aiming index. This draw also keeps the gun from hitting obstructions while seated and aids retention.

THE BRIDGE INDEX

Optical dot sights work great on long guns because the shooter has the initial indices of the shoulder mount and a cheek

weld when coming on target fast. With the gun arm locked, have the student find a spot where their jaw or cheek mates with the bicep of the gun arm when the pistol is perfectly on target. Coming up to that felt index of face and arm can speed the acquisition of the aiming dot or, for that matter, iron sights. The arm has to be fully extended for this to work.

THE VULTURE TECHNIQUE

The head coming forward and down when shooting a handgun is derided by many as "derp" and "tactical turtle," but it has its strong points. With red dot pistol optics, when your officers can't find the dot, you've already discovered that it's hiding "upward," and the officer has to lower the muzzle slightly to see the dot. Have them bring their head forward and down like Snoopy pretending to be a vulture on top of his doghouse. Voila: They'll find the dot that was hiding from them at 12 o'clock. This also puts them in the natural posture (head forward and down, ahead of shoulders, body weight forward) of fight or flight response as defined by Dr. Walter Cannon at Harvard Medical School more than a hundred years ago.

Finally, seek top training. When the department I retired from went to red dot sights on their duty pistols, they were delighted with the training they got from SIG Academy. I hear great things about the relevant training offered by our own Erick Gelhaus at CougarMountainSolutions.com. Chudwin teaches cops only at NEMRT.com.





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PROPER FIELD PHOTOS

During the course of the year, I look at a lot of hunting photos from friends, in magazines, and on social media. Some are really good, others — not so much. Now, I'm not a professional photographer by any means. I never took a photography class and am not an expert on anything. I do, however, enjoy and appreciate quality hunting photos. A great photo shows respect and honor to the animal and preserves treasured memories for years to come. Here are a few basic guidelines I try to follow.

BEFORE THE PHOTO

First, before taking any photos, make certain the gun is unloaded. Safe gun handling does not end when the tag is punched. I prefer taking hero shots before field dressing if possible. Tuck the front and back legs underneath the animal. Remove the tongue or slip it back in the mouth out of sight. Normally I carry a pack of wet wipes and a paper towel or two and remove any blood from the lips or elsewhere. You may be sharing these photos with friends and family but also non-hunters as well.

Being ultimately familiar with your camera or smartphone helps. Most cameras and smartphones have more functions than I can manipulate. In most situations, the sun should be behind the camera. The best time to

take a quality photo is shortly after sunrise or just before sunset. A cloudy or overcast day is also good. When the sun is bright and directly overhead, it's a good idea to utilize the flash in order to take away those dark shadows.

For general purposes, the hunter should be positioned behind the animal. Sitting on top of the game is not cool or respectful. There will be some circumstances where the hunter can sit by the side of the animal. The empty gun should always be pointed in a safe direction, never at yourself or anyone else. I have found the camera situated level with the animal or slightly below makes a nice photo. Standing up and shooting downward is not usually favorable. Fill the frame with the subject — hunter and

animal. It's not ideal to see the animal and hunter appear like they're 50 yards away, and you can barely determine who or what is pictured. A little background in the photo is fine as it shows the landscape and habitat.

When possible, I like to position the horns or antlers with the sky as the background. This provides a clear view of the antlers. Having a background too busy with brush or anything else can detract from the headgear.

USE THE TECH

Back in the day, I shot a lot of black-and-white photos for magazines. Many times, I would use color slides as well. You never knew for certain what images you had until you returned home and had the film processed. Well, those days are long gone. Shoot a lot of photos. You can always go back and see what you like and don't like, then delete. Shoot from different angles, move the horns or antlers slightly and take more pictures. When you get home and put them on a big screen, you will hopefully have one or two that really stand out.

If you hunt solo, no problem, use the self-timer. When I'm hunting alone, I normally carry a small, lightweight tripod in my backpack. It has come in mighty handy at times. Without a tripod, you can use a flat rock or perhaps a log, whatever is available to keep the camera level and steady. The self-timer is also good for getting all of your hunting companions in the photo. You won't regret



A self-timer was utilized to get everyone associated with the hunt in the picture.



When the sky is the background, antlers or horns are clearly represented. The antlers of this axis deer show up well against the backdrop of the sky.



It's a great idea to get family and friends in the photo. Mark and Karen are positioned at the side of this monster cape buffalo with a bit of background showing.

taking field shots of hunting adventures with your family or good friends. Down the road, you can always look back and reflect on that special occasion.

At this stage of my life, quality photos are of utmost importance during my hunts. I no longer do any taxidermy work, so photos are precious reminders of a memorable experience. Not everybody will come and see my trophy room, but I can share photos with my friends, family, and everyone on social media platforms. I won't be able to take taxidermy mounts to the nursing home, but I can show those old geezers a thing or two from my photos!

Another factor I must consider — magazine editors do not have a sense of humor when it comes to crappy photos. They demand, and rightfully so, quality photos for publication. The magazine you are now reading is a prime example of a publication with a long-standing reputation for featuring high-quality photos.

Whether you're a professional photographer or just a normal guy like me, quality photos never go out of style.





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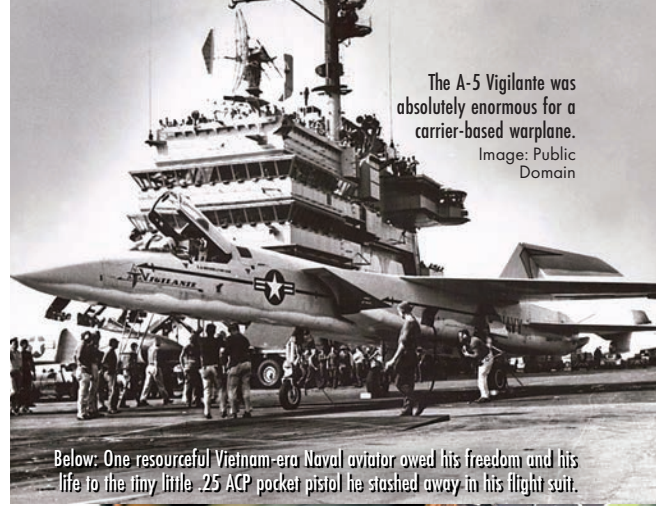
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Lt(jg) Pendergast punched out of his jet armed with a standard-issue .38 revolver like this one and a tiny little .25 ACP pocket pistol.



The A-5 Vigilante was absolutely enormous for a carrier-based warplane.
Image: Public Domain

Below: One resourceful Vietnam-era Naval aviator owed his freedom and his life to the tiny little .25 ACP pocket pistol he stashed away in his flight suit.

THE TINY LITTLE .25 ACP GOES TO WAR

John Moses Browning was the most gifted gun designer in human history. He went to his grave in 1926 at age 71 with some 128 patents to his name. Browning designed the M1911 pistol, the Auto-5 shotgun, half a dozen lever-action Winchester rifles, seven familiar cartridges, and every rifle-caliber automatic weapon commonly used by American forces during WWII.

Among those groundbreaking contrivances, we find a most curious little cartridge. Browning's .25 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol) round was a semi-rimmed, straight-walled centerfire pistol cartridge introduced in 1905. The .25 ACP typically pushed an adorable quarter-inch, 50-grain full metal jacket bullet to a paltry 760 feet per second.

The .25 ACP seems like a bad joke. I have seen a handful of folks shot with these little mouse pistols, and most fared pretty well. One drunk guy honestly hadn't realized he was shot until he got an X-ray. The .25 ACP was clearly designed for portability rather than down-range thump. One might be forgiven for believing such a Lilliputian handgun cartridge is tactically worthless. However, a Naval officer named Lt(jg) Frank Pendergast likely disagrees. He is the only American aviator to have been shot down over North Vietnam and captured, who subsequently escaped. That was thanks to his tiny little .25 ACP pocket pistol.

Background

Lt. Pendergast was the reconnaissance/attack navigator (RAN) onboard an RA-5C Vigilante jet operating off of the USS Kitty Hawk on March 9, 1967. The Vigilante was enormous for a carrier-based aircraft. Originally designed as a nuclear-capable bomber, the Vigilante

was a whopping 76 feet long and weighed 63,085 lbs. fully loaded. While the Vigilante was somewhat underwhelming as a bomber, it rendered superlative service as a reconnaissance platform. Equipped with high-tech classified cameras, the Vigilante excelled at gathering intelligence to plan bombing raids and making post-strike bomb damage assessments.

The typical flight profile put the aircraft flying between 3,000 and 5,000 feet, some two to three miles offset from the target. On this day, however, the weather was bad. Pendergast and his pilot, Cdr. Charles Putnam, made their run near Long Chau at 350 feet and less than a quarter mile from the beach. This put the big recon plane well within small arms range.

NVA troops on the ground sprayed the massive jet with small arms fire, setting the plane on fire and rendering it uncontrollable. Cdr. Putnam initiated the ejection sequence and was never heard from again. Lt(jg) Pendergast came down safely in waist-deep water amidst both the surf and some seriously tooled-up NVA soldiers.

Things Get Real

Pendergast carried a standard-issue .38-caliber revolver loaded with half a dozen tracer rounds. These he salvaged off into the air to alert nearby friendly aircraft to his location. Then the NVA were upon him, liberating his now-empty revolver and frog-marching him at gunpoint back up the beach.

In response to the tracer fire, escorting F-4 Phantoms raked the beach with their onboard weapons, even going so far as to fire their Sparrow air-to-air missiles toward ground targets of opportunity. Two nearby USAF A-1 Skyraiders then showed up and began chewing the countryside to pieces with 20mm

cannon fire. Each time the Skyraiders made a pass, the NVA troops ducked into the surf to avoid the two big flying gun trucks. Pendergast soon found himself alone with two captors, each of whom carried an AK-47 assault rifle.

Though Lt(jg) Pendergast was now bereft of his revolver, he was not technically unarmed. He still carried a microscopic .25 ACP pistol in the pocket of his flight suit. The next time the two NVA soldiers ducked under the water, he fished the tiny little gun out and had it ready. The first Vietnamese soldier then pointed his own .38 revolver at him and squeezed the trigger only to realize that the gun was empty. In response, Pendergast shot the man between the eyes at contact range with his .25.

The Navy officer then smacked the second soldier over the head and threw his AK away in the surf before racing up onto a nearby sandbar. A Navy SH-3 rescue helicopter then appeared overhead and did a quick pedal turn to allow its door gunners to sterilize the area around the downed aviator. Half an hour later, Pendergast was back safely aboard the Kitty Hawk, alive solely because of his tiny little .25 ACP pocket gun.

A reader who flew with these guys put me onto this fascinating story. You know who you are, and I am sincerely grateful. He said that after they got back to their home station, there were no .25-caliber pocket pistols to be had at gun shops for a 100-mile radius around their base. Apparently, old John Moses Browning knew what he was doing after all.



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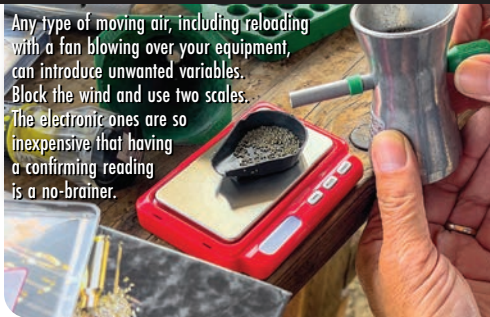


Brilliant Aiming Solutions[™]

HANDLOADING

LINDSEY BERTOMEN

Any type of moving air, including reloading with a fan blowing over your equipment, can introduce unwanted variables. Block the wind and use two scales. The electronic ones are so inexpensive that having a confirming reading is a no-brainer.



A hand priming tool is perfect for range use. Keep it directed away from your face!

Lindsey mounted a Lee Reloader Press on a piece of plywood. He uses trigger clamps to attach it to the shooting bench or tailgate. Although Lindsey generally sizes the cases before heading out to the range, this setup is perfectly capable of sizing .45 Colt brass.



RELOADING...

When I test loads, there are two methods I use to find the ideal combinations. I either use the ladder method or I actually reload on the range.

ON THE RANGE

THE LADDER METHOD

The ladder method begins with the best estimate of the load, beginning on the bottom end of the load chart. The reloader loads sample cartridges in groups, usually five or six at a time. In each group, the load is increased incrementally. On the range, the groups are tested, one group at a time, beginning with the lightest load.

Keep the test groups small. When I test a revolver load, I use groups of six for a six-shot revolver. I save the little shipping bags from small parts and repurpose them for loads. I write the load

info on the bag with a Sharpie and put the spent brass in it for later inspection.

It takes a little common sense to decide how large of an increment to increase the load, but it depends a lot on how much margin there is in the load tables and how accurately one can measure and trickle a particular type of powder.

For example, let's say you are testing some .380 loads, and you are using Nosler 115-grain bullets, Nosler load data and Unique powder. On their data, the minimum load is 2.3 grains, and the maximum load is 3.3 grains. I use a Hornady Lock-N-Load scale

for my quick check measurements. It is accurate to a 10th of a grain, so changing the loads among test groups in 0.1 grain increments does not make sense. Changing the increments to 0.5 grains doesn't either since there is only a grain difference in the range for this powder. I generally use 10 to 15% increments for each group.

When testing loads, only change one factor. That is, if you are testing the amount of powder for a new load, don't switch primers or case OAL in mid-stream. Use the OVAT (one variable at a time) method.

If a load you are testing is not the one, don't keep shooting it. Use your bullet puller and move on.

LOADING BENCH TO GO

Yes, I bring a portable press and the rest of my reloading kit to the range. I use a lightweight Lee Reloader Press for field use. I mounted the press on a section of plywood long and wide enough to provide an area for clamping. I affix my press to the range bench or my tailgate with several trigger clamps.

The press doesn't need to do any resizing — you can do all that at home in advance. All of the other reloading operations can be done on-site.

I use a Frankford Arsenal Hand Primer for priming. I like this kit because it naturally requires the user to hold the case mouth away from the face in use.

I use a powder trickler and two scales. The powder measure stage is where the operation becomes dicey. First, my bigger, more stable electronic scales use AC power. Although I have an emergency power system, I'm always concerned about introducing static electricity into the mix. I have learned that static is often the enemy of accurate measure.

The other factor is moving air. Even a five mph wind is enough to throw the loads off. One day I was reloading on the range and later found my scales had fluctuated three grains. Air moving across a surface causes lift. Most of the time we notice, but this can be subtle. It will generally cause a platform scale to weigh light and a balance scale, the kind with a rounded cup for the powder, to weigh heavy. This is an application of Bernoulli's Principle.

I use two battery-powered scales, or a balance mechanical scale, like an RCBS 505 and an electronic scale. I block the wind carefully, even on a calm day.

RCBS ships an attachment with their Uniflow Powder Measure that allows the measure to be mounted to the press, using a die to secure it. It is a flat piece of metal with holes machined to securely mount the powder measure. This is the easiest tool for having a powder measure on the range. I mount this to either the plywood base or the press itself.

Which is better, ladder loading or reloading on the range? They both have their place. The former allows the shooter to quickly test rounds that are already loaded, and the latter allows for making quick adjustments and backing up the data with more shooting. There's nothing wrong with a combination of both.





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Will Dabbs graciously offered to write this honorary Shooting Iron story in memory of the late Mike "Duke" Venturino. As long-time readers will know, Duke was passionate about this particular slice of history and a visit to the site was arguably one of his life's most impactful field trips. Rest in peace, Duke. —TM

GEORGE ARMSTRONG CUSTER AND THE BATTLE OF THE GREASY GRASS

History is a filter through which humanity is sifted. Practitioners of the art relate events of import as cleanly as they are able yet habitually leave a bit of themselves in the telling. I do this inadvertently myself. The end result is invariably tainted.

The real problem is that we are not ourselves unbiased consumers of history. We tend to view historical figures in a binary light. Mother Theresa and Teddy Roosevelt were pretty good. Adolf Hitler and Jeffrey Dahmer, not so much. Reality, however, is seldom quite so tidy.

Paul's letter to the Romans claims that all have sinned. That's not just a good idea; that's the law. In the real world, Mother Theresa quite likely struggled with covetousness, while Hitler undoubtedly loved his dog. Life can be cluttered at times.

In the person of George Armstrong Custer, we see a man who defies ready characterization. Your typical 7th-grade history student might observe that his flowing gold locks and carefully crafted public persona spoke of vanity, while his legendary overconfidence on the battlefield ultimately cost him dearly. Reality was more nuanced.

Smarter folks than I have already spilt rivers of ink on the Battle of the Little Bighorn. My goal is not to reinvent the wheel. I shall rather endeavor to offer some intimate insights that might flesh out the tale a bit. Custer, Benteen, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, et al. were simply human. Each man had strengths and flaws, all of which synergistically culminated in some 31 dead native Americans, 268 cavalry KIA, and a sea change in the horrific centuries-long war against the American Indians.



George Custer was a flamboyant combat leader whose ignominious gory demise overshadowed his legitimately extensive battlefield accomplishments.

DETAILS

History tells us that Custer was perhaps a bit dim. However, the record does not really bear that out. Custer graduated 34th out of 108 in his West Point class. He was promoted to Brigadier General at age 23. I wouldn't trust today's typical 23-year-old American male unsupervised with glue paste, much less the command of a brigade of infantry in combat. However, Custer led his merry mob of Michigan men into battle at Gettysburg mere days after they met, defeating J. E. B. Stuart at East

Cavalry Field. In the annals of military accomplishment, beating J. E. B. Stuart was no mean feat.

Custer served with distinction through the Overland Campaign and bested Jubal Early at Cedar Creek. He watched Lee sign the instrument of surrender at Appomattox. With this epic bloodletting finally cauterized, Custer took a practical demotion from Major General to Lieutenant Colonel and headed west to fight Indians.

For George Custer, war was a family affair. Counted among his troops were two of his brothers, a brother-in-law and a nephew. The entire Custer mob present for the festivities at Little Bighorn subsequently met Jesus face-to-face alongside five of the 7th Cavalry's 12 companies.

Part of Custer's subsequent legend came not from

the man but rather from his energetic widow. Americans are a proud people, and we do not well tolerate the unfettered slaughter of our troops in battle. The public demanded a villain, and Custer's name came up in conversation. However, George's widow Libbie invested the next 60 years tirelessly advocating for her dead husband's awesomeness. Some of that actually took.

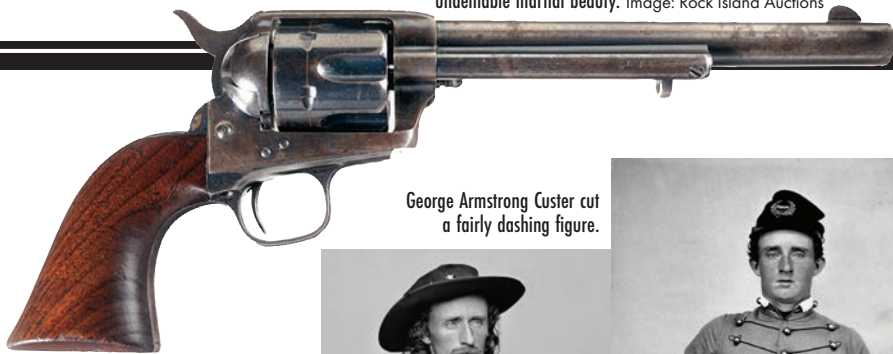
THE FIGHT

We know it as The Battle of the Little Bighorn or, more colloquially, Custer's Last Stand. The Americans on the other side called it the Battle of the Greasy Grass. In one corner, you had the combined forces of the Northern Cheyenne, Arapaho, and the Lakota Sioux, numbering between 1,100 and 2,500 armed military-age males. Opposing them were roughly 700 cavalrymen and sympathetic Indian scouts. Archaeological evidence has demonstrated that no one on either side was really in tip-top physical con-



Libbie and George Custer relaxing in their home. It is insightful that his walls are adorned with a large photo of himself and he has an extensive collection of firearms within easy reach in the corner.

The 1873 Colt Single Action Army Cavalry Model was a thing of undeniable martial beauty. Image: Rock Island Auctions



George Armstrong Custer cut a fairly dashing figure.



Contrary to myth, Cadet Custer actually did quite well at West Point. His classmates called him Autie.

dition. Life on the plains was hard on one and all.

Briefly, Custer split his forces based upon inadequate intelligence that woefully underestimated the number, quality, and cohesion of his enemy. Indian warriors subsequently overwhelmed and annihilated the Army troops. The details of Custer's last moments are little more than conjecture, as none of his comrades survived. He was found shot through the chest and head. Some have postulated that he might have done part of that himself to avoid capture. However, he was right-handed, and the head wound was administered from the left.

THE GUNS

For gun nerds such as ourselves, one firearm is inextricably linked to the Battle of the Little Bighorn. That is the 7.5" Model 1873 Single Action Army. Most of Custer's Cav troopers packed these magnificent Colt wheelguns alongside Springfield trapdoor carbines. Custer himself was rumored to have wielded a .50-caliber Remington sporting rifle to complement a brace of privately purchased revolvers. These guns were most likely double-action .442-caliber British Webleys with white grips of some flavor. The details have been lost in the seas of time.

Colonel Sam Colt purportedly had the idea after being inspired by the captain on the oceangoing brig Corvo when he was but a lad. He crafted a wooden model during that very voyage that even-

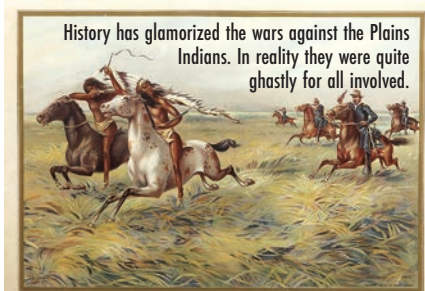
tually evolved into the most beautiful handgun ever crafted by mankind. The .45LC 1873 cavalry model sported a distinctive 7.5" barrel. Running a vintage example today is akin to the French kissing an angel.

RUMINATIONS

Word monkeys like me typically specialize to a degree. My particular niche is WWII machine guns. Everything else can potentially be a bit of a rough fit. As an example, I have only shot beyond a kilometer three times. I enjoyed the experience but did not set any records. In this case, the recognized master of this genre was the legendary Duke Venturino. I penned this piece in tribute to him.

To turn a tired phrase, Duke had forgotten more about the Colt Single Action Army and the Battle of the Greasy Grass than I will ever know. His passing leaves a void in these hallowed pages that will never be adequately filled. His body of entertaining scholarship in the field of classic wheelguns is peerless.

You read a guy's work long enough, and you start to feel like you know him. You catch oblique references to his family, gun collection and proclivities that all synergistically paint a picture of a man's character. That's the nature of the craft. For his part, Duke Venturino was a genuinely nice guy, admired and respected by one and all. Though I never had the privilege of getting to know him well, I certainly admired his work. Consider this piece on Custer, the Little Bighorn and the classic single-action Colt revolver my eulogy to him. Happy trails, brother.



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THE WEIRD SQUEEZE-COCK HK P7

WILL DABBS, MD

Even for an old gray-headed guy like me with diagnosable maturity issues, the HK P7 adds a touch of class to any ballistic engagement.

A good action movie stands or falls on its villain. Think Darth Vader, Hannibal Lecter, or Heath Ledger's Joker. Alan Rickman's Hans Gruber was legit perfect in *Die Hard*. Gruber commanded the bloodthirsty team of Eurotrash thieves who took over the Nakitomi Building on Christmas Eve, precipitating a veritable storm of gunplay, suspense, and witty dialogue that defined the classic seasonal action

film. Gruber demonstrates wit, intellect, refinement, and cunning as he deftly navigates the narrative, never once losing his dark-hearted charm. *Die Hard* is my favorite Christmas movie.

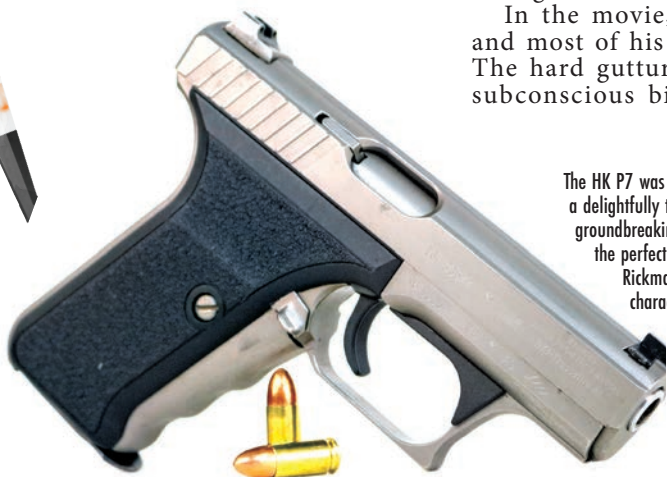
Alan Rickman died in 2016. A classically trained Shakespearean actor renowned for his refined diction and broad dramatic range, Rickman trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and toured with the Royal Shakespeare Company. *Die Hard* was his big-screen debut.

In the movie, Rickman's Gruber and most of his team are Germans. The hard guttural language ignites subconscious biases in the viewer

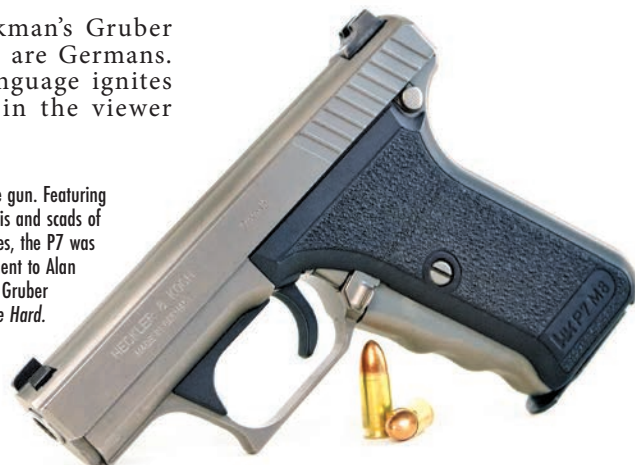
dating back to the Second World War. *Die Hard* reminded the movie-going public why the Krauts make the world's best bad guys.

Gruber & His Guns

Die Hard is a gun movie, and there is plenty of exotic iron to go around. However, the movie's producers needed something special for Hans Gruber. A villain of such exceptional breeding demanded a bespoke combat



The HK P7 was a strange gun. Featuring a delightfully thin chassis and scads of groundbreaking features, the P7 was the perfect complement to Alan Rickman's Hans Gruber character in *Die Hard*.



pistol befitting a man of his status and station. The end result was an HK P7M13 equipped with a removable sound suppressor.

Die Hard, like most classic movies, was based on a pretty decent book. In 1979, a former private investigator named Roderick Thorp published an action thriller novel titled *Nothing Lasts Forever*. This was a sequel to his previous 1966 work *The Detective*. In *Nothing Lasts Forever*, the villain is a man named Anton "Little Tony the Red" Gruber. He was armed with an unnamed Walther pistol, presumably a PPK. Though the PPK was obviously cool enough to equip Ian Fleming's 007, the HK P7 was a huge improvement in this case. It was the optimized European villain's gun.

The P7

Back in 1979, Heckler and Koch marketed the P7 with the tagline, "Why the P7 is the Most Expensive Handgun in the World." That's fairly bold. You've got to be pretty confident in your position in the market to brag about how much your ridiculously high-end gun costs.

Featuring a radical gas-retarded blowback action and a unique squeeze-cocking mechanism, the P7 was purported to be the combat pistol for the gunman of distinction. The gun came in either 8- or 13-round versions and was produced in 9mm, .40 S&W, .22 LR, .32 ACP, and .380 ACP with either black or nickel finishes. The chamber was fluted like that of the MP5 submachine gun.

The P7 featured polygonal rifling and fixed sights. The chassis was trim and packable, and the execution was, as expected, flawless. However, it was the weird squeeze-cocking action that really set the gun apart.

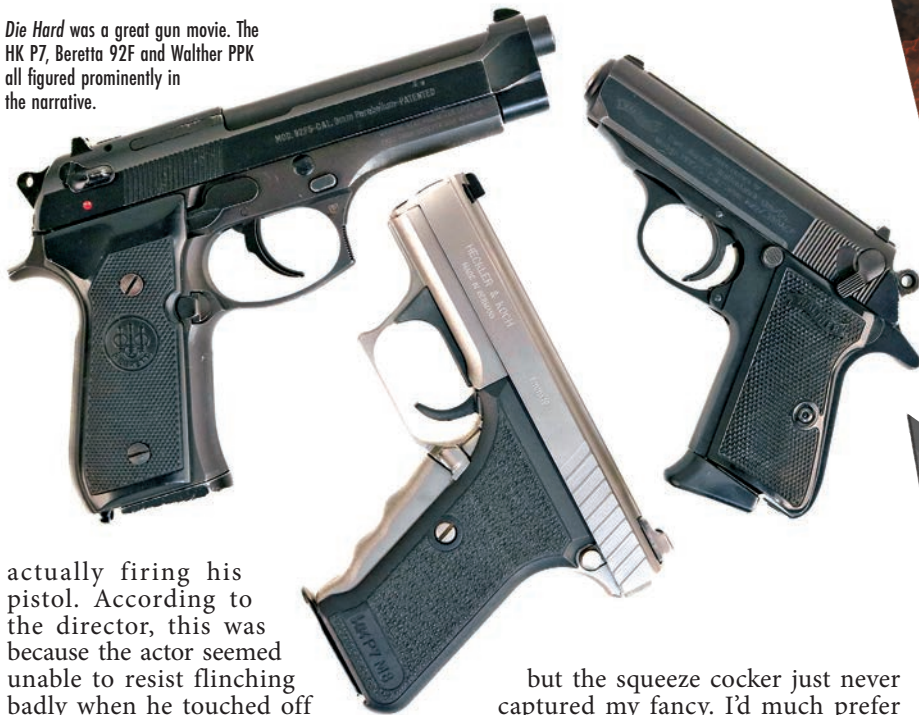
When riding about in a holster, the P7 was completely inert. Upon presentation, pressure on the front strap of the grip compressed the striker. Relaxing pressure on the front strap automatically rendered the gun safe. With the grip compressed, the trigger was unusually crisp and smooth. However, managing that exotic squeeze-cocking mechanism was an acquired taste.

Big Screen Details

Like many to most stylized, sound-suppressed Hollywood weapons, the example used in the film was threaded inside the barrel so as to avoid the aesthetic baggage of an extended, threaded tube. When deftly wielded alongside Gruber's high-brow dialogue, that P7 formed an integral part of his cultured yet heartless persona. The synergistic combination worked beautifully.

The suppressor on Gruber's P7 was a fake made up specifically for the film. If you look closely, Rickman is not shown

Die Hard was a great gun movie. The HK P7, Beretta 92F and Walther PPK all figured prominently in the narrative.



actually firing his pistol. According to the director, this was because the actor seemed unable to resist flinching badly when he touched off a blank round. He did fine in the movie with his MP5. I doubt it made quite so much noise. Given that the man came of age in England, he obviously had very little experience with firearms.

One of the most compelling scenes in the film is when Gruber falls to his death while holding John McLane's wife Holly hostage. The look of shock and surprise on Rickman's face seems quite sincere as the fall unfolds in slow motion. This was because the director dropped him unexpectedly without calling "action." Despite being rigged with wires so he wouldn't die, the discomfiture on Rickman's face was genuine.

Squeeze ... And Shoot

Running the HK P7 is actually quite the unique experience. Squeezing the action requires a bit more intentionality than I had anticipated. However, once you compress the squeeze cocker, the mechanism seems to find its level. You can even relax your grip on the lever to a degree.

Fully releasing pressure on the cocking lever safes the gun, but it makes an audible snap. I had read about these guns my entire adult life. Actually shooting one was not much like what I had anticipated.

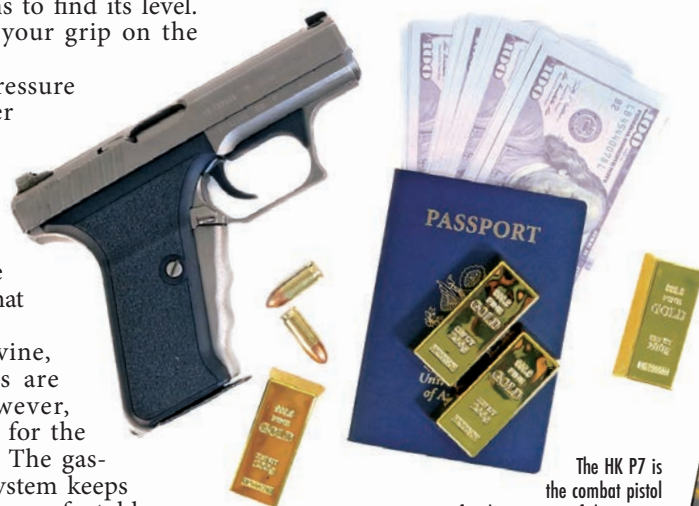
The trigger is divine, and the ergonomics are well-reasoned. However, I did not much care for the weird action myself. The gas-retarded operating system keeps things compact and comfortable,

but the squeeze cocker just never captured my fancy. I'd much prefer a Canik, GLOCK, Springfield Armory Echelon, or a Shadow Systems gun, should I ever need to use it for real.

Apparently, the rest of the world felt the same way. The German Polizei purportedly liked theirs. However, the combination of the atypical operating system and the gun's rarefied price doomed the P7 from the outset.

Denouement

The P7 was produced from 1979 through 2008. Vintage examples nowadays bring truly astronomical prices. I haunted GunBroker for a couple of months, seeking this one. I would have preferred the M13, but the M8 was all my budget would bear, particularly with the nickel finish. Regardless, the lofty purchase price was a small sacrifice to pack heat like the exceptional thief Hans Gruber.



The HK P7 is the combat pistol for the gunman of distinction.

TAYLOR'S CATTLEMAN OLD MODEL .44-40

JEREMY D. CLOUGH



If you want to get back to where it all began, the Taylor's Cattleman Old Model is a faithful reproduction of the earliest Peacemakers. Well crafted and reasonably priced, it shares all the virtues — and vices — from the early gunfighting days. The rig is from Frontier Gunleather.

GENESIS

Sometimes, going back to the beginning helps flesh out where you are. This is as true of defensive pistolcraft as anything else, which is still a relatively recent discipline. For example, the point-shooting/combative/threat-focused guys look backward to Col. Rex Applegate. He, in turn, studied Wild Bill Hickok while developing the OSS shooting curriculum. Thus, in my own quest to go back to first things,

I found myself in Arizona shooting a 5x5 drill at Gunsite with a single-action .44-40 under the watchful eye of Range-master and End of Trail champion Lew Gosnell. Oh, and it was snowing.

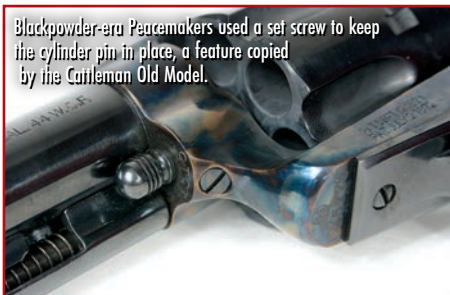
I've been spoiled by really good single actions, as have all of us who arrived after the transfer bar safety. I've never had to deal with "load-one-skip-one" sixguns that are really five shooters because they're unsafe to have a cartridge beneath the hammer.

My Rugers are plenty strong, and have smooth actions and good sights (usually by Hamilton Bowen) that make them as easy to shoot well as any big bore sixgun is. What they are not is an accurate picture of what the earliest fighting revolvers were like.

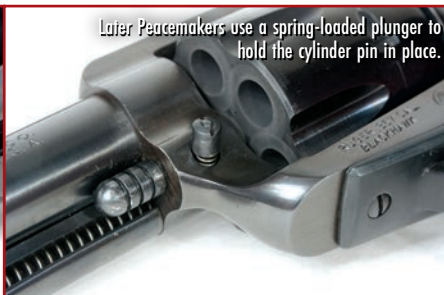
The 1st Gunfighter's Gun

Technically, the cap'n'ball 1851 Navy is the first gunfighter's gun, but the Peacemaker is really where the West came of age. Since original Colts cost more than my car and, being iron, aren't the safest to shoot, I turned to Taylor's Firearms to get as close as reasonable to an early Peacemaker. But first, a bit about the Colt it's based on. The 1873, aka Single Action Army, or better yet, "Peacemaker," is a gun that has long needed no introduction, but after long enough, perhaps it does again.

Colt lagged behind S&W in the revolver game because they let former



Blackpowder-era Peacemakers used a set screw to keep the cylinder pin in place, a feature copied by the Cattleman Old Model.



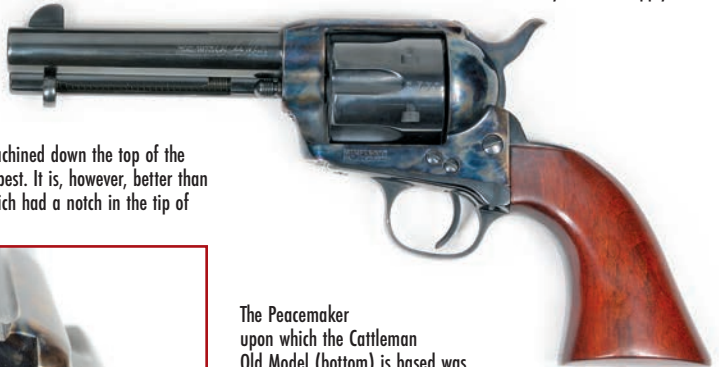
Later Peacemakers use a spring-loaded plunger to hold the cylinder pin in place.



Jeremy shot about 300 rounds through the Cattleman, including loaded ammo from Black Hills and handloads assembled from brass provided by Starline and bullets sent by Hunters Supply.

Early single-action lockwork allowed the firing pin to rest on the primer of the cartridge directly beneath it, a characteristic shared by the Cattleman Old Model, making it a five-shooter.

Rear sights consist of a trough machined down the top of the receiver, which is rudimentary at best. It is, however, better than the Peacemaker's predecessor, which had a notch in the tip of the hammer for a rear sight.



The Peacemaker upon which the Cattleman Old Model (bottom) is based was a natural evolution of the converted open top 1860s (middle) with the addition of the fixed top strap and screw-in barrel of the Remington 1858 (top). All three shown here are from Taylor's: The '60 has a Kirst Konverter and ejector rod installed.



employee Rollin White escape, with his patent for a bored-through cylinder sidelining them for years from making a cartridge gun. In the meantime, gunsmiths (including the stray Colt engineer or two) created various cartridge conversions to update the massive flood of nearly a half-million or so black powder Colts washing around after the Civil War. Once White's patent expired, they basically applied the same principles to create the 1872, a transitional gun that looks a lot like an open-topped Peacemaker. It was chambered in the .44 Rimfire used in Henry rifles because there was also quite a bit of that in the post-war detritus and because it made sense to have both guns chambered in the same caliber. This theme reappeared with the 1873 Winchester and the Peacemaker that appeared in the same year, though it took about four years before it was offered in the same .44-40 caliber as the popular Winchester levergun.

The Peacemaker debuted in .45 Colt, with the solid top strap and screwed-in barrel of the Remington 1858 in place of the arbor-and-key arrangement of the earlier Colts. Instead of taking the barrel off to remove the cylinder, the base pin around it revolved and could be pulled forward, allowing the cylinder to roll out to the side. Later Colts (and virtually all subsequent single actions) use a spring-loaded plunger to hold the base pin in, but the earliest Colts, called "black powder" guns

because the cartridges they fired were not yet loaded with smokeless powder, use a simple set screw.

Cattleman Old Model

As does the Taylor's Cattleman Old Model, which is also equipped with the early, round "bullseye" ejector rod. A favorite of the late Mike Venturino, the bullseye design is much easier on the fingers than the later tab and teardrop styles. Made to Taylor's specifications by Uberti, the Old Model also has a tapered front sight and the original-style lockwork. As referenced earlier in this article, early Colts allowed the firing pin to rest on the primer of the cartridge beneath the hammer, which is extremely dangerous. A half-cock notch was intended to keep the hammer safely back but is fragile enough to break if the gun is dropped. Hence the practice of loading one cartridge, skipping

one, then loading four and cocking the hammer to lower it safely on an empty chamber. Ruger's transfer bar safety eliminated this issue on modern six-guns, but on an early gun, it's the only safe way — and that includes the Cattleman Old Model. The grips are wood and one-piece style, the action makes an appropriate number of clicks, and while the trigger had some roughness in it at first, with use, it smoothed out to a very pleasant 2 lbs., 9.9 oz. as measured by my Lyman scale.

Leather

For leather, I went to Frontier Gunleather. John Bianchi was a long-time aficionado of the West whose personal collection formed a major part of the Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage. After retiring from the modern holster company that bears his name,



The back of Frontier Gunleather's Tilghman holster features a cleat that helps hold it in place on the cartridge belt, so it doesn't come with the gun when you draw.



This Bill Tilghman rig by master craftsman Matt Whitaker was beautifully made to fit the Cattleman's black powder-style frame, and even fully loaded with cartridges, is quite comfortable.



Although originally chambered in the still-formidable .45 Colt, the Peacemaker was quickly offered in .44-40, allowing it to pair with Winchester's 1873 levergun in the same caliber so a frontiersman need only carry one caliber. This takedown '73 is finished by Tyler Gun Works.

Below: The Peacemaker wasn't the first gunfighter's gun — that title goes to Colt's .36 caliber 1851 Navy. It is, however, the defining pistol of the Old West era during which defensive pistolcraft really had its genesis.

he founded Frontier to make hand-crafted Western-style leather gear, later turning it over to master craftsman Matt Whitaker, who's been with the company since 2000.

I ordered the Bill Tilghman rig, named after the famed lawman whose career began in Dodge City in the 1870s and continued in Oklahoma, where he became known as one of the "Three Guardsmen," who tirelessly pursued the Daltons, Doolins and other famed badmen of the era until they were captured or killed. Tilghman served until 1924 when he was killed in the line of duty at 70 years old. By a dirty cop, no less.

This was my first real exposure to Whitaker's work, and now I want an excuse to buy more. It isn't one of his more exotic carved rigs, but the design and craftsmanship are simply superb, from the careful chamfering to the way the stitching blends seamlessly into the border grooves on the chape. It's solidly built enough to support the weight of the gun and loaded cartridge loops without being unnecessarily heavy and carried comfortably all day long.

Range Trials

Part of the reason I ordered a .44-40 instead of .45 is that I was scheduled


to attend a meeting of the Gunsite Irregulars, a shooting event for which I needed a revolver and lever gun in the same caliber, and I already had a .44 caliber Winchester. I had some Black Hills 200-grain cowboy ammo on hand, as well as components provided by Starline Brass and Hunters Supply, who had sent cast lead bullets in 160, 200- and 240-grain weights. While modern .44-40s are made from the same barrel stock as the larger .44 Special and Magnums, traditionally, the .44-40 is loaded with a smaller bullet such as the 0.427" slugs from Hunters Supply.

The standard load fires a 200-grain around 1,000 fps from a handgun, but I went with lighter loads using Titegroup, Unique and 231, and shot around 300 rounds total. The 160s were quite soft shooting out of the 2-lb., 5-oz. revolver, probably trundling out of the bore in the 800 fps range, but hit about 10" low at 25 yards. My 200s went 8" low and the 240s, 6". And herein lies a lesson. The rudimentary sights on early sixguns seldom sent the bullet where indicated, and part of the sixgun craft is developing

a specific load that will hit to point of aim with each individual gun. The late (and it hurts to have to type that) Mike Venturino has an excellent description of the process in his book on shooting Colt single actions, and I'll be working on that with this gun, as I'd rather do that than file the front sight.

I struggled shooting 25-yard groups and couldn't seem to do better than 4" but did much better at 7, putting five rounds into about 0.57" from standing. Do the math, and the gun shoots twice as well at 25 yards as I did that day.

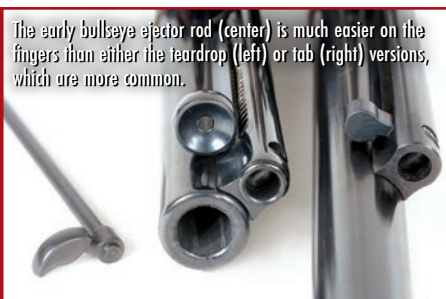
I'd like to blame the snow, but that was a different day. And as much as I would like to have descended from the high desert with earth-shattering revelations learned, I haven't yet distilled the experience into principles I haven't written about before.

But I did learn this: I really like the challenge. And we've got it 

For more info: FrontierGunleather.com, Hunters-Supply.com, KirstKonverter.com, StarlineBrass.com, TaylorsFirearms.com.



Early sights were tall but narrow and tapered. They also usually had to be filed or bent or some such to align with the point of impact.



The early bullseye ejector rod (center) is much easier on the fingers than either the teardrop (left) or tab (right) versions, which are more common.

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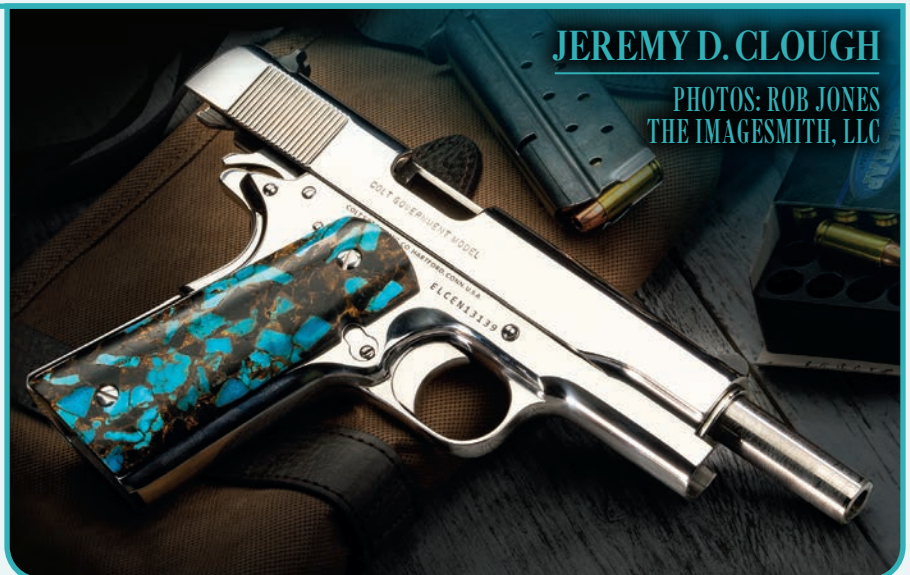
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SANTA FE STONENWORKS' AND COLT'S BRIGHT STAINLESS .38 SUPER

The components that make something a luxury item — leather seats, granite countertops, fine wood paneling, diamonds, a million-dollar view — almost invariably are not man-made. There's a whole theology that explores the significance of lovely things in nature as evidence there is something greater than us, and there is a unique sense of awe brought on by encountering stunning beauty concealed in places it was never seen for thousands of years. Anyone who's been to the bottom of the sea under a scuba tank knows the feeling, as do those who explore caves.

This sense of wonder must have been felt by whoever first stumbled across the turquoise in Kingman, Arizona, where it's been mined for the better part of a couple thousand years. Within recent memory, stone hammers and other equipment have been found in at least one long-forgotten tunnel. Ranging in color from green to pale, then darker blue depending on where on the mountain it came from, Kingman turquoise, dating to 200 AD, has been found as far away as Mexico City, where it likely arrived via trade



JEREMY D. CLOUGH

PHOTOS: ROB JONES
THE IMAGESMITH, LLC

routes. How it wound up on this pair of pistol grips is a different story.

Stone Heritage

In that abrupt era when America was passing from the cheerful seeming naïveté of the '60s to the much harder-edged '70s (courtesy of the bloodletting at Altamont, among other things),

Bill Wirtle began a journey of self-discovery that took him to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he found himself making jewelry from raw materials. Although college educated, a bigger deal then than now, and formerly employed by IBM, working with stone, with his hands, was a bit of a family tradition. His grandfather and great

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grandfather were part of a stonecutting family from Bohemia and Czechoslovakia, where “Wirtle” was the name of the logo for the stonecutter’s guild.

Unfortunately, the jewelry market in Santa Fe was crowded, and rather than try to elbow his way in, Wirtle made his own way by using jewelry techniques to make non-jewelry items. Letter openers, gearshift knobs, bolo ties — anything that could be made more attractive while remaining functional. This includes knives, which Wirtle learned how to re-handle, creating stunningly beautiful knives offered by Camillus, Spyderco and others.

Forty-six years later, the day-to-day of Santa Fe Stoneworks is largely in the hands of his children, Myles and Anna, who were born in the same room of the house where the business began. At 81, Bill Wirtle still describes the joy of watching what the grinding and polishing process reveals as a dull surface suddenly becomes a beautiful piece of jewelry. It is, he quickly points out, not as easy as it looks. There’s not a lot of give with rocks, so there’s no squeezing inlay pieces together and hoping for the best. Parts must be precisely ground to fit together, and once fit, the different materials vary widely in hardness, which makes it very difficult to keep a consistent surface when grinding them to shape. Turquoise, for example, is so soft the vast majority of it has to be stabilized before it can withstand shaping, lest it disintegrate into a pretty, expensive powder. The lessons learned in handling knives, however, can be applied to pistol grips as well — only 1911s for now, but stay tuned.

Grips From Nature

Wooly mammoth, dinosaur bone, ironwood, semiprecious stones of all kinds, carbon fiber, Fordite (a fascinating, Damascus-like pattern created by layers of paint overspray in automotive plants) ... each have their beauty and working characteristics. For this article, I chose to focus on a pair made of turquoise and obsidian.

Turquoise, we’ve talked about, but obsidian is a different beast entirely. When molten volcanic rock cools slowly, it can produce quartz crystals. Cooled suddenly, it becomes obsidian. Essentially glass (it’s translucent), it breaks in predictable patterns to create wickedly sharp edges, making it an

early material of choice for weapons — arrowheads, knives, spear points and other tools. This includes primitive surgical tools, a role it still fills, as some surgeons believe an obsidian scalpel cuts cleaner and heals faster than steel. Impressive and significant to weapons evolution, but you obviously can’t make grips out of it — not by itself.

But it can be combined with other natural stones into a hybrid material. The process, which was perfected by Colbaugh Processing, who has the rights to the Kingman turquoise mine, compresses the stones and injects a liquid bronze material that fills the empty voids, creating a gleaming, vein-like appearance.

Polished

Something that pretty belongs on an equally impressive gun — in this case, Colt’s bright stainless .38 Super. Polishing, too, is less about just the pretty than what it represents. In this case, skill. The Colt factory is the only place I know that has a sign hanging from the ceiling honoring its polishers.

This focus is not new: In 1855, the Dickens-run magazine *Household Words* talked about the polisher in Colt’s London plant submitting to regular eye injuries from “red-hot particles of emery” thrown off by the wheel rather than wear protective glasses, likely because it would have limited his ability to see his work. In 1912, the Ordnance Office promptly asked Colt to tone down the shine on its newly adopted 1911 pistol before it got somebody killed, to which Springfield Armory responded drily, “it is believed that a more dull finish can be provided.” As of 1936, even experienced polishers hired by Colt were



required to go through a training school. That may sound a bit much if you haven't tried it yourself, but like jewelry making, there's a lot more to it than appearances suggest.

It takes a skilled craftsman 40 hours to fully hand polish a firearm, working through multiple grits of abrasive, from 400 to 600, 800, 1,000, 1,500, and in some cases to 3,000, carefully removing the scratches from each prior grit before moving to the next. You also have to keep the rounds round and the flats dead flat, without a wandering line where they meet, which is very difficult, even with the part stable on a bench. Now imagine freehanding it on a wheel since a manufacturer doesn't have the time to rub on every pistol for a week. Traditionally, Colts were polished on a large wooden wheel covered in leather to which the abrasive was applied. The wheel was then trued and used by exactly one person. That's been updated, but it requires no less skill to use a modern Baldor.

Knifemaker Bob Engnath called the buffing wheel a killing machine, and he wasn't wrong. Gunsmiths love the Dremel because even its tiny wheel is so hard to use well that people frequently damage their guns and have to bring them in for expensive repairs. On a big wheel, a twist or roll in the wrong direction wrenches the part from your hand and launches it across the room, not to mention the various skid marks, divots

and wavy lines a mistake leaves, even when the wheel doesn't take it away from you. Voila, you've scrapped a thousand-dollar gun.

That's why there's a sign.

Accessories To Match


Understated but elegant is hard to pull off a shelf, so I reached out to my friend Andy Kitner of the Revelation Leather Company for a holster to complement the Colt/Santa Fe combination. I've been test-driving an early version of Andy's innovative design that uses keepers instead of belt slots and found it very comfortable and easy to conceal. Silver-colored keepers and a stingray accent panel give just enough extra pop to stand out without being over the top.

A gun is, of course, a functional item: One can fairly ask about the durability of bolting a piece of rock — lovely rock but still rock — to a centerfire handgun and blasting away. "We aim to be functional beauty," Anna told me, and Santa Fe Stoneworks backs it up with a lifetime warranty. Of 25–35,000 knives produced every year, only a percent or so come in for repair, which is free of charge. By the way, knives are offered in the same materials as grips, which makes for a stunning pair.

DoubleTap provides its +P National Match ammo and at 300 rounds in, so far, so good. Colt wisely used blued sights (the only thing on the gun that isn't polished stainless) so you can see

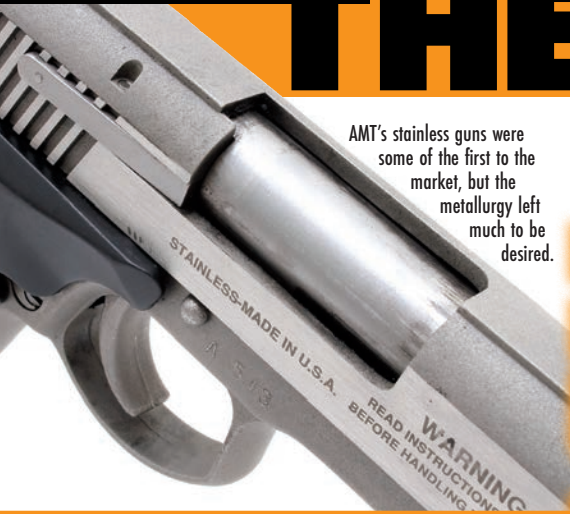


them. The combination of polished front strap and smooth grips is slicker than my heavily textured carry gun, but not so much so you can't hang on to it, especially in an easy-recoiling .38 Super. The grips are backed with G10, making them a bit thicker than usual, and due to the hardness of the material, you'll want to check the grip screws after shooting (a copper insert is in the works that would eliminate that).

In the words of Butch Cassidy,  a small price to pay for beauty.

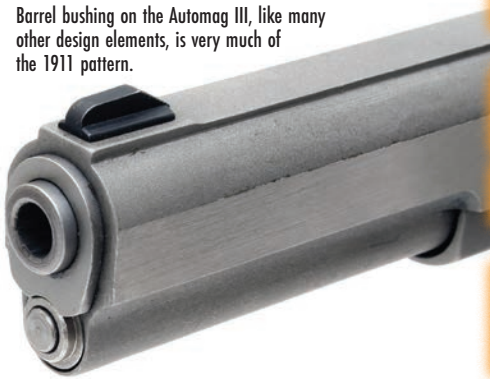
For more info: SantaFeStoneworks.com, Colt.com, TheRevelationLeatherCompany@gmail.com, DoubletapAmmo.com.

BLAST FROM THE PAST



AMT's stainless guns were some of the first to the market, but the metallurgy left much to be desired.

Barrel bushing on the Automag III, like many other design elements, is very much of the 1911 pattern.



"AMT" guns were produced under a number of different companies. Almost too many to keep track of!



THE AUTOMAG III



Slow-mo still from a range session: Shooting the Automag III is quite the experience!

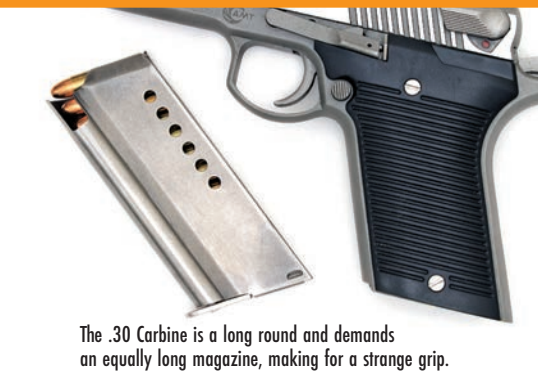
Certain periods of firearm design are especially enchanting to handgunners. Many of us drool over the guns that defined the American West, including S&W "Schofield" top-breaks and Colt's famous 1873 Single Action Army. Similarly, there is no shortage of those who collect arms from the first two World Wars, and GI-style 1911s still tug at the

heartstrings of many. Then, there's the postwar period — again, golden ages for Colt and Smith and Wesson and for recreational shooting in general.

There are even those who believe the times in which we live are the best we've ever had as shooters! It's an opinion many come by quite honestly: Manufacturers are working tirelessly to give marksmen of all stripes designs that are more accurate and

more reliable than ever before, and the various entertainment and competition ecosystems that comprise gun culture are quite healthy. A collection of modern handguns might consist of nothing but polymer-framed, striker-fired designs, and though some of us might jokingly refer to these guns as "combat Tupperware" from time to time, such guns are beloved by their many owners.

Who cares about "needs?"
The "want" part is what
matters here.



The .30 Carbine is a long round and demands an equally long magazine, making for a strange grip.



If you can make peace with the muzzle blast, most Automag IIIs are good shooters and capable of stacking rounds, as this 7-yard group attests. They all should have gone through that one hole.

For me, one period of handgunning seems particularly maligned, however. It even tends to be unsung among our own pages! Roughly, we could call it the later "cold war" period of firearms, stretching from about the mid-'70s through the mid-1990s. It was a time when autoloaders were honestly competing with revolvers for market share and police contracts, and — with all credit due to the pioneering work of Gaston Glock — handguns were still primarily a "real steel" affair.

I'd argue this was also a period when the gun industry was less dominated by MBAs, shareholder demands, and assiduous focus testing and market research. Many companies developed oddball designs (and many went under) in the pursuit of carving out a new niche. Not coincidentally, it was a big era for magnum handgunning, as companies continued to throw new firearms and cartridges out there in an effort to see what would stick.

The Automag III is very much a product of its time: a big-ass, goofy rod of a gun that certainly wasn't perfect but nevertheless remained an object of

my desire. After finally adding one to my collection, let me tell you: This thing turns heads in 2024 just as well as it did over 30 years ago.

A Little History

One can't talk about the AMT Corporation (Arcadia Machine and Tool) without mentioning Harry Sanford. I never met Harry, but the stories about him are the stuff of legend: The heart of the company was a huge dude — physically and in character — who had a powerful handshake and was never afraid to take a risk.

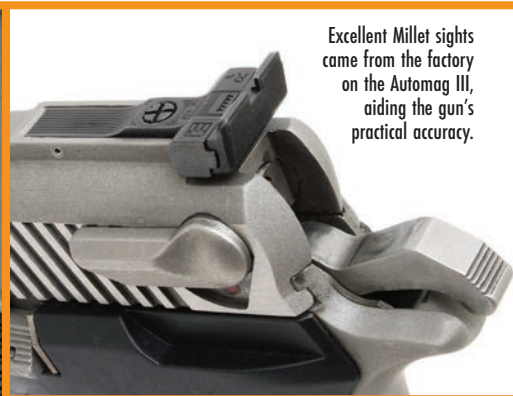
In the early 1970s, Sanford and a designer by the name of Max Gera noticed that the world lacked an auto-

loading handgun in .44 Magnum, and so they set out to make one — losing money, incidentally, on each hand-built gun that left their factory.

Few can keep track of the complete history of AMT as it shuffled through a number of names, locations, and corporate entities, including TDE, OMC, IAI, Galena Industries, and back again to AMT. The companies' constant financial troubles were certainly not helped by Sanford's decision to produce unlicensed copies of both Ruger's 10/22 and its "Mark" line of .22 handguns (both, curiously, called the AMT Lightning), requiring what I can only imagine was a princely sum to settle Ruger's very legitimate lawsuit.



Rig +P is formulated to protect against stainless steel galling. As such, it's a good choice for AMT pistols.



Excellent Millet sights came from the factory on the Automag III, aiding the gun's practical accuracy.



The Automag III safety is a simple, hammer-block type better suited for range shenanigans than hunting or serious defensive use.



The grip as seen from the bottom: It's quite the stretched oval.

The world, however, certainly knows a few of the products that AMT produced along the way. The .44 Magnum autoloader I mentioned before? That was, of course, the very first "Auto Mag," made famous by the Dirty Harry movie *Sudden Impact*. You might also recognize an AMT product on the cover of *The Terminator*. In Arnold's hand is a laser-sighted, 7" AMT Hardballer.

Say what you will about Sanford and his horse sense as a businessman, but he certainly knew cool, and he had no qualms about repeatedly bringing cool guns to the market.

Of Its Time And Place

The Automag III is equal parts remarkable and challenging — an AMT design in a nutshell. On one hand, the gun was eminently practical: There was still a lot of surplus .30 Carbine floating around in the early 1990s, and the company designed a niche handgun to gobble up that supply. As far as I know, it's one of only two autoloading pistols built for the .30 Carbine, and the other (the Kimball automatic) is, at best, a footnote in firearms history.

Additionally, AMT didn't need to reinvent the proverbial wheel. The gun operates and takes down mostly like a 1911, barring a few quirks, so cleaning and basic maintenance has a very familiar "manual of arms," so to speak. The barrel bushing, in particular, is nearly identical to the type found on John Browning's most famous pistol.

At the same time, just about any sensible person might look at the .30 carbine round and ask, "Isn't this round a little long to stuff into an autoloader? Wouldn't the magazines be really odd-looking?" And the answer to those questions is a resounding yes!

Make no mistake: The Automag III is weird and ungainly. It kind of feels like holding one of those big "universal" TV remotes in your hand lengthwise. As a small-handed guy, the pad of my index finger just manages to reach the trigger. Ergonomically, it is decidedly not great.

I'd be remiss not to mention the Automag III shares many hallmarks of AMT's execution and build quality overall. Plagued throughout its production history by financial woes, the company used some inferior stain-

less steel compounds as a means of keeping already excessive production costs in check. Their guns — including the Automag III — had a reputation of galling if not properly lubricated. What's galling, you ask? A phenomenon whereby two flat metal surfaces can tear away at one another through excessive friction, especially when rubbing together at high speeds. Yikes.

While I suspect I got one of the better ones, my Automag III works most of the time, with a preference for the hotter-loaded American Eagle and "blue box" Federal JSPs. My friend Jeff Bregman, owner and gunsmith at American Gun Works, suggested I pick up a tube of Rig +P, a lubricant specifically formulated to protect against galling on stainless machinery. Thus far, my Automag III seems to run well with it applied.

Lots to Love

All of that out of the way? This gun is an absolute kick in the pants. Although I have a few doubts about the long-term hardiness of the pistol (a reason I have quite a few spare parts for it), it's remarkably usable from the shooter's perspective. The trigger is a crisp 3.5 lbs. right on the dot, and the Millet adjustable sights are quite clean and positive — more than a foot of sight radius is a nice plus, too. Perhaps not inconsequentially, the gun is superbly accurate in my hands.

Of course, the real reason for owning an Automag III is the experience of shooting it. Touch off a round, and you'll be treated to a two-foot plume of fire thrown from the front end. It makes a tremendous BOOM, and I guarantee shooters will crane their necks from the surrounding bays to figure out what the hell you're running. Unquestionably louder than any of my .44 Magnums, it sounds like God himself is shouting at you.

Remember how I mentioned the gun was designed to eat mil-spec .30 Carbine ammo? Well, that same ammo normally has about 16" of barrel to work with when shot out of your standard M1 Carbine. As a result, a lot of that slow-burning powder isn't fully ignited when it exits only 7" of tube. The Automag III has a long barrel, but it's not rifle long. Such explains the pyrotechnics.

But to paraphrase my friend Sam, those ballistic qualities give you all of the magnum fun with none of the consequences. The flash is blinding. The boom is deafening, sure. Each trigger pull makes you feel like you're discharging absolute power. And yet, the felt recoil is decidedly gentle: a tad less than a full-sized 1911 running the standard 230-grain "hardball" load. The gun is almost entirely bark on the shooter's end with hardly any bite. It is a phenomenon that must be experienced to be believed.

Do note, however, that even out of the Automag III's barrel, those .30 caliber pills are hustling along at a velocity of about 1,700 fps. The platform will ring steel with clear authority, and empty cases are expelled from the chamber with vigor upon recoil. It's not just a big show: There's performance here as well.

Is It In Your Future?

Do you expect faultless reliability when it comes to your handguns? Do you want your pistol to feel like an extension of your hand? Do you want a gun chambered for an economical round with a good supply of aftermarket parts and gunsmith support? If so, the Automag III is decidedly not the gun for you.

Just about all .30 Carbine loads are "mil-spec," with 110-grain bullets and a similar powder charge. As such, the Automag III isn't picky with respect to brand.



Now, if you do want to pull a trigger and hear a gigantic boom, and if you embrace the ear-to-ear grins that are part and parcel of magnum handgunnery, the Automag III becomes far more appealing.

Prices are steadily creeping up, especially as guys like me are absolutely willing to overpay for this alluring, odd-ball gun that's long been off the market. Given the Automag III's build quality, some have opined it isn't a gun worth more than \$1,000. It's a fair take. All the same, I paid a considerable amount more than that to source mine. The simple

truth is people become aware of this gun and want it. Furthermore, those who do find working, honest examples seldom get rid of them. I sure don't plan to part with mine.

Likely, you'll drool over the retro-cool pictures of this thing, much as I did for the better part of 20 years. Heck, if you're like me, you just might find yourself silly enough to give in to the pressures of owning one of the weirdest and wildest designs of the '90s. Buying an Automag III wasn't the most sensible decision I've ever made, but it sure has led to a lot of fun!



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THE STEYR M9-A2 MF

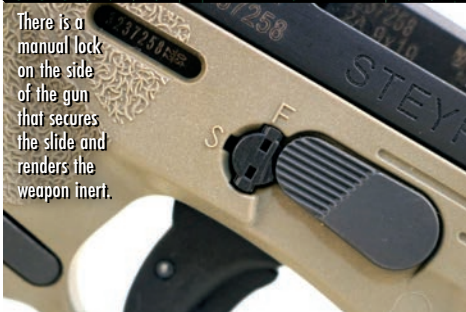
WILL DABBS, MD

The Steyr M9-A2 MF is a shockingly advanced, modern, polymer-framed, striker-fired combat pistol.



THE OTHER PLASTIC AUSTRIAN PISTOL

There is a manual lock on the side of the gun that secures the slide and renders the weapon inert.



The obligatory trigger safety is wide and comfortable.



One of several radically revolutionary aspects of this design is its weird trapezoidal sights. They're weird, but they're a good sort of weird.



The Steyr M9-A2 MF is the latest iteration of one of the most advanced polymer-framed combat handguns in the world. Sporting innovative design, peerless reliability, and flawless execution, the M9-A2 MF is a simply magnificent piece of iron. It may be the best tactical pistol you've potentially never heard of. There are some fascinating reasons for that.

Foundations

Not meaning to disparage the dead, but everyone I ever knew who actually met Gaston Glock said he was not a very

nice person. An engineering savant and a truly exceptional businessman, Herr Glock was, lamentably, not the most personable lad. However, that guy could build a proper gun.

Glock's company originally produced stuff like machine gun links and combat knives for the Austrian armed forces. Along the way, he began dabbling in the burgeoning field of high-strength, injection-molded polymers. The story goes that Gaston was wandering the halls of some government building and overheard a conversation between two Austrian Army officers discussing the program to replace their aging WWII-vintage P38 pistols. His

curiosity piqued, Glock researched the parameters of the solicitation and set out to learn about handguns.

Apparently, Glock wasn't really a gun guy, but he was way smart. He purchased examples of all the major combat pistols of the era and tore them down to pins and springs to learn their mechanical secrets. He also interviewed folks who were really into guns to ascertain what the ideal combat pistol should look

like. At the end of the day, however, he came to the table with a blank sheet of paper. In so doing, he captured lightning in a bottle.

The resulting GLOCK 17 was so named as it was Glock's 17th patent. Featuring a radically advanced striker-fired trigger system and utterly utilitarian lines, the GLOCK pistol was the Kalashnikov of the combat handgun world. That thing will shoot underwater or in outer space. You just can't kill it.

Those early GLOCKS only had 34 parts. They were also cheap to make en masse. The square slides were cut from forged stock, and the injection molded frames could be churned out for pennies once the expensive molds were perfected.

Inspiration

The HK VP70 actually pioneered the striker-fired, polymer-framed handgun. However, the trigger sucked so bad that this revolutionary gun crashed and burned commercially. The VP70 saw service on the big screen as the standard issue pistol for the U.S. Colonial Marines in the epic sci-fi opus *Aliens*, but nobody else wanted them. Glock's pistol fixed all that.

No kidding. Gaston did quite well for himself. I was heading into the SHOT Show via an Uber one year with the rest of the peons and passed by the airport. There was a big white corporate jet with "GLOCK" stenciled across the tail parked next to the fence. For a time, 65% of the cops in America packed GLOCKS. Thugs love them, as do countless hundreds of thousands of law-abiding American shooters. The GLOCK is the combat pistol of the modern age.

The Interloper

Steyr had to market their gun in the shadow of all that. Both companies hailed from Austria, and everybody everywhere already spoke GLOCK. Steyr cemented its reputation arming the Nazis during WWII, and the AUG is a household name. However, they

At 12 meters from a simple rest, the Steyr M9-A2 MF groups just fine.



had a long row to hoe to break into the modern combat pistol market.

Steyr's effort was the M9. Introduced in 1999, the M9 sports an aggressively raked GLOCK-style grip-to-frame angle, a steel 17-round box magazine, and scads of innovative bells and whistles. The gun has evolved through four generations as well as both compact and long-slide versions. Steyr has offered the pistol in 9mm, .40 S&W and .357 SIG, though the .357 SIG and .40 S&W versions have apparently been discontinued.

There is some common DNA to all these guns. For starters, the M designation comes from the gun's weirdly unique sighting system. They describe it as a trapezoid. The front sight is a white triangle, while the rear is a pair of angled lines that run parallel to the edges of the triangle. If you squint just so and use a little imagination, the end result looks a bit like an "M," hence the name. The end result is easily acquired and no-snap.

The gun has scads of safety systems. There is the obligatory tab safety in the

trigger face. However, unlike that of a GLOCK, this tab is wide, flat, and comfortable. Pressing that button automatically deactivates both the internal firing pin and drop safeties. First-generation guns all came with a separate manual safety, but this was offered solely as an option for subsequent variants.

There is a key lock safety that deactivates the gun and locks the slide. In civilian examples, there is a special key that ships with the weapon. Cop versions used a standard handcuff key, which was cool. Use it if you want; don't if you don't. The option is there.

The chamber is fully supported, and there are three different loaded chamber indicators. The state of the gun can be assessed by sight or by feel in any condition. The takedown drill is unique but easily mastered. Like the GLOCK, the trigger must be pressed to strip the gun.

Steyr describes the trigger as a double action-only Trigger Reset System with a

The older .40-caliber long-slide version on the left is now out of production. However, the design of the Steyr M9-A2 MF still represents the state of the art.



Note: The Steyr M9-A2 MF's interchangeable grip panels let you configure the gun's personality to fit yours.

pre-set mechanism. I can't tell its personality much apart from other striker-fired designs. However, trigger travel is just stupid short at around 4mm, and the pull weight is slightly north of 5 lbs.

The Latest & Greatest

Steyr introduced the fourth-generation M9-A2 MF in 2019. The pistol is offered in long, medium, and compact sizes. It reflects the current state of the art in modern service handguns.

The original designers of the M9, Friedrich Aigner and Wilhelm Bubits, actually secured the first patent for a modular handgun. While SIG has built a veritable empire around the concept, Steyr was the first. However, prior to the fourth-generation guns, the M9's fire control module was not removable. The frame itself yet remains the serialized part.


The latest M9 variants include a full-length Picatinny rail and interchangeable grip panels. I made mine a bit fatter

on the right and thinner on the left. That is what best accommodates my big monkey mitts.

Trigger Time

The M9-A2 MF offers about the lowest bore axis of any conventional combat pistol. Recoil is readily managed, and follow-up shots are both fast and precise. The short trigger reset lends itself to rapid fire if that's your thing.

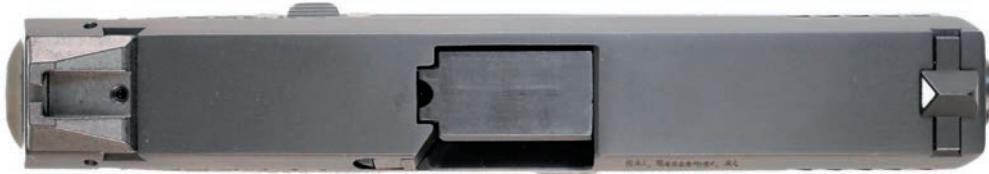
The weird sights are an acquired taste, but I like them. The gun fits me nicely and shoots both straight and well. An aggressively flared magwell and optimized controls make magazine changes lightning fast. This really is a superlative combat pistol.

I bought my M9-A2 MF on sale through Palmetto State Armory at a great price. If you haven't signed up for the PSA weekly sales emails, you are leaving some superb deals on the table. The Steyr M9-A2 MF looks like a sci-fi prop and runs like a scalded ape. When compared to its more popular cousin, it is arguably the better gun. 

For more info: Steyr-Arms.com



More views of the unique trapezoidal sights.



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KERSHAW TURNS 50!

PAT COVERT
PHOTOS: ROB JONES
THE IMAGESMITH, LLC

THIS KNIFE MANUFACTURER ENDURES BY KEEPING IT FRESH

Livewire

Iridium

Kershaw Knives turns 50 years old in 2024; their success is due in large part to their ability to adapt to a changing knife industry. The company started up at a time when traditional pocket knives and fixed blades ruled the day, but that business model got turned on its head in the early 1990s when the

first Gulf War in Iraq reared its ugly head. Within just a few years, traditional knives became an afterthought, giving way to the modern tactical knife movement. As traditional knives fell to the wayside, Kershaw took the bull by the horns, collaborated with top cutting-edge custom knifemakers, and expanded the company into the modern, innovative knife giant it is today. Pushing the envelope has become a hallmark of Kershaw Knives. In 1998, the company introduced Speedsafe (assisted opening) technology on its Ken Onion Random Task model, and it won *BLADE Magazine's* American Made Knife of the Year award. Hesitant at first, within a few years, virtually all the major folding knife manufacturers had climbed aboard the train and assisted openers remain popular to this day.

Innovative Reputation

The Kershaw Leek is a prime example of the company's groundbreaking approach to knife design. Designed by Ken Onion, the Leek hit the market in 2003 and never left. Onion incorporated his assisted opening mechanism along with his clean styling, and it was an instant success. Some believe the secret to the Leek's rapid success was its compact size at a time when most tactical designs

Leek



Iridium (Detail)



Radar

tended to be much larger. The Leek's compact dimensions, 7.0" overall and 4.0" closed, made it perfect for everyday carry with its reversible pocket clip — the ideal "dress tactical" for the day. The Leek has been issued in over 40 iterations since it hit the market. The one pictured here has an orange-anodized aluminum handle with a flipper-fired 3.0" Sandvik 14C28N (Swedish) stainless steel Modified Drop Point blade in a matte bead-blasted finish. The Leek is, in a nutshell, a legend.

Controlled sensory overload best describes our next folder — the Kershaw Iridium tactical EDC. Visually, the Iridium's 3.4" saber-ground Spear Point blade is an exercise in clean styling with an attitude. Time-proven D2 steel does the slicing and dicing honors. The folders' 4.5" deep gray anodized aluminum frame, once again cleanly styled, houses cutting edge technology. The blade rolls out via thumb studs on a smooth-as-glass KVT ball-bearing pivot and locks up tight as a drum with Kershaw's ambidextrous crossbar DuraLock. The *coup de grace* is the Iridium's copper anodized combo lanyard loop/backspacer adding a bit of unexpected spot color.

The Radar is a discreet EDC for those who prefer stealth in their carry. This all-steel sleekster wears Kershaw's BlackWash (black oxide) finish on its 2.9" blade and 3.8" frame. The 8Cr13Mov stainless steel blade is a deep hollow-ground Drop Point, saber-ground at the spine with jimping at the base for enhanced purchase. The blade rolls out in a flash via a flipper tab attached to the company's assisted opening torsion bar. The rear handle slab has a frame-lock mechanism for sturdy lock-up, and the user has the option of mounting the pocket clip tip-up or tip-down, front or back. If you like choices in your carry, the Radar is your knife.

Outside The Box

Not surprisingly, when state laws banning automatic knives were being repealed around a decade ago, Ker-

shaw jumped in feet first. Their Launch series, now up to 20 OTS (Out The Side) models, has been a huge success. Now, they've taken it one step farther.

Enter the Livewire, Kershaw's first OTF (Out The Front) auto. Made in collaboration with custom knifemaker Matt Diskin, the design team at Kershaw pulled out the stops. The 3.3" Stonewashed Spear Point blade is Crucible Industries' CPM MagnaCut stainless — the hottest steel on the planet right now. The Livewire is also offered in a BlackWash finish, and an optional Japanese Tanto version is available as well. The blade fires by a side-mounted, ambidextrous, double-action thumb slide. The Livewire's stylish 4.8" milled aluminum handle is available in blue, light gray, or black anodized finishes. A tip-down pocket clip is included, and the weight is 3.06 oz.

Fixed blades have always been a part of the Kershaw line, and their Deschutes Skinner and Caper duo share the company's knack for innovative design. These knives feature D2 Steel — a favorite among many hunters due to its sheer toughness and ability to hold an edge. The handles are grippy, rubberized Olive Green Polypropylene with checkering molded in for enhanced purchase. The Caper, featured here, is 7.0" overall with a low-angled 3.30" Clip Point blade sporting a Stonewash finish. Both the Deschutes Skinner and Caper include sheaths comprising a black glass-filled nylon main housing with a nylon belt loop and handle strap.

The old adage "No risk, no reward" was never more true than with Kershaw Knives. When the company first produced assisted opening folders, any number of



Deschutes Caper

things could have gone haywire — not the least their being banned. Instead, they started a knife revolution. More recently, they've carved out a huge chunk of the Automatic market. The knife manufacturer has done an admirable job of keeping their knife designs — fixed blades and folders — fresh and innovative. As they enter a new decade, Kershaw Knives is perfectly staged for a future of many more.



For more info: Kershaw.kaiusa.com



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SCAN TO ENTER



The gun of the month for this issue of *American Handgunner* is the DE1911GSS by Magnum Research. The .45 ACP single action pistol has a stainless steel match 5.0" barrel.

It ships with two 8-round magazines and an extended base pad for positive insertion. Built with high-quality steel and finished in matte stainless, the DE1911GSS features a skeletonized hammer, extended magazine release, extended safety, extended beavertail grip safety, crisp skeletonized trigger, stainless steel guide rod, lowered and flared ejection port, and G10 grips. The grip and aluminum main-spring housing are checkered. Novak-style sights are standard. Its precision craftsmanship offers exceptional value, accuracy and reliability.

Keep your eyes fixed on the prize! You just might win the DE1911GSS — but only if you join! Go to AmericanHandgunner.com/giveaways or mail a postcard. —Jazz Jimenez

1911G STAINLESS DE1911GSS PISTOL

MANUFACTURER: MAGNUM RESEARCH
MAGNUMRESEARCH.COM, (218) 746-4597
CALIBER: .45 ACP; CAPACITY: 8
BARREL LENGTH: 5", OAL: 8.63"
WEIGHT: 36.2 OZ.
VALUE: \$1,152

TOTAL VALUE: \$1,152

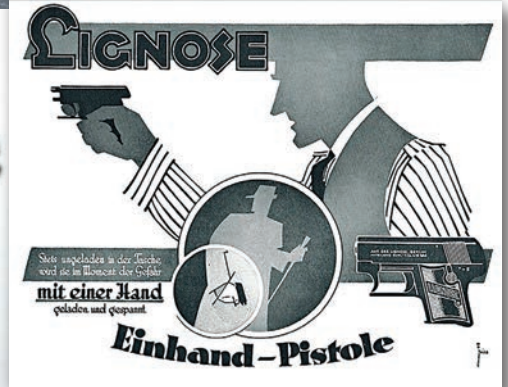
EINHAND

THE ONE-HANDED AUTOLOADING PISTOL

Operating the cocking piece to cock the hammer and chamber a cartridge.



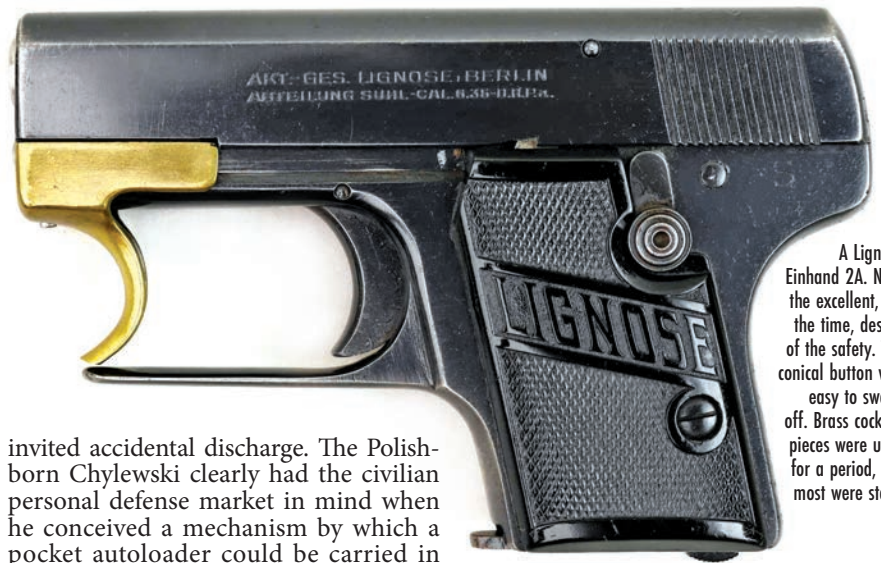
A rare SIG-made model. They proved too easy to accidentally fire when drawing back the cocking piece.



This 1920s ad for the successful Lignose version of the Einhand gives you an idea of how they saw their clientele and how the pistol would be carried.

This is a story about the practical genius of Witold Chylewski, who patented a fully workable solution to the pocket auto-loading pistol's most obvious weakness in contrast to the pocket double action revolver when used as a personal defense weapon. Chylewski was awarded the first of two patents for his invention in 1914, on the eve of World War I. By this time, autoloaders had already usurped the revolver in a military role in the United States, Germany, Austria and Belgium. They were also winning a growing share of the police market outside America. Worldwide, civilian purchasers with a little more money to spend were buying small autoloading pocket pistols and even smaller vest pocket pistols for personal protection.

Autoloading pistols were attractive then for the same reason they are now. Compared to revolvers, they were slimmer and thus easier to carry and conceal. They generally offered more fire-power and faster reloading than the typical five or six-shot revolver and required less skill than double-action revolvers to shoot well rapidly. The major strike against them, particularly when used in the civilian, concealed carry, role, was that they didn't have the revolver's combination of safety and instant readiness. To equal the revolver's level of readiness, the autoloader would have to be carried with a round chambered, hammer or striker cocked, and the safety off, which



A Lignose Einhand 2A. Note the excellent, for the time, design of the safety. The conical button was easy to sweep off. Brass cocking pieces were used for a period, but most were steel.

invited accidental discharge. The Polish-born Chylewski clearly had the civilian personal defense market in mind when he conceived a mechanism by which a pocket autoloader could be carried in complete safety with an empty chamber and then loaded and cocked with one hand in an instant. It could even be done inside your pocket.

Auto Readiness

To achieve this, Chylewski turned the front of the triggerguard into a sliding cocking piece curved like a trigger so it could be easily operated by the index finger. The cocking piece was moved forward and backward along rails milled into the frame. It operated in one of two ways. The simple version of the triggerguard cocking piece described in his first patent engaged cutouts on the bottom of the slide to push it back

the distance needed to cock the pistol's concealed hammer and strip a .25 ACP cartridge from the magazine. Releasing finger pressure on the cocking piece allowed the recoil spring to drive the slide forward, along with the cocking piece, while chambering a round. The index finger then moved inside the triggerguard to depress the trigger and begin firing the pistol as a normal, single-action autoloader.

By comparison, his more complex cocking piece design patented in 1915 automatically released the slide once it moved rearward far enough to cock the hammer and strip a cartridge from

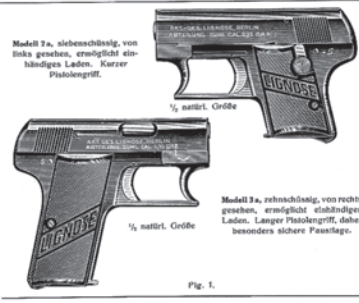
This page from the instruction manual illustrates the Lignose 2A and 3A. The smaller gun had a six-round magazine, and the larger gun had a nine-round magazine.

Die Lignose-Einhand-Pistole.

Die Lignose-Einhand-Pistole Kal. 6,35 D. R. P. 370274 stellt auf dem Gebiet der Selbstlade-pistolen einen Fortschritt von einschneidender Bedeutung dar.

Das Zurückziehen eines sog. Spanngriffes (Fig. 4), der vor dem Abzug gelagert ist, ermöglicht das Laden, Spannen und damit Schussfertigmachen dieser Waffe mit einer Hand auf solche einfache Weise, daß dieses selbst in der Rocktasche völlig unbemerkt vom Gegner (Fig. 5) geschehen kann.

Der Träger einer Lignose-Einhand braucht daher seine Waffe nicht mehr geladen und gespannt in der Tasche bei sich zu führen. Er ist dadurch frei von dem beunruhigenden Gefühl, das eine geladene und gespannte (wenn auch gesicherte) Waffe dicht am eigenen Körper hervorruft. Das Schussfertigmachen kann im letzten Augenblick in »verdächtigen Momenten« mit einer



The last place you would expect to see the Einhand concept applied ... a full-size 9mm pistol like the Chinese P77B.



the magazine. At that point, with the pistol loaded and cocked, the cocking piece could be released to return to its original position, or the shooter could depress it farther rearward into contact with the trigger immediately behind it to fire the pistol. This mechanism minimized the possibility of inducing jams through errors in the physical manipulation of the cocking piece. We all know how easy it is to induce a failure-to-feed malfunction when you don't allow a slide to close with the full force of the recoil spring. In addition, the keep-pulling-to-fire feature really put the autoloader on the same footing as a revolver for the speed of the first shot. One might argue it made the autoloader panic-proof, too.

Setting Up

Chylewski had high hopes for his invention. At the end of World War I, he found a partner in the *Societe Industrielle Suisse* (SIG) in Neuhausen, Switzerland, who paid him for the rights to his second patent to build the *Chylewski Selbstlade Pistole* (Chylewski Self-loading Pistol) and to be its sole distributor in all markets except North and South America, which Chylewski withheld for himself. The Chylewski patent pistol was SIG's second handgun project in 25 years, which suggests they had pretty high expectations for it. It was not to be.

SIG made around 1,000 pistols from 1921 to 1922 but decided to drop the project because of a problem they discovered. In the process of withdrawing the cocking piece to make the gun ready to fire, it was distressingly easy for the cocking piece to hit the actual trigger unintentionally and fire the pistol. Imagine the liability lawsuit potential. SIG deactivated the finger cocking feature on their pistols and ceased production.

Chylewski parted ways with SIG with control of his patent rights and, I expect,

some valuable lessons learned. The first company to actually have success building pistols off Chylewski's patents used the first simpler and safer version. Exactly when the respected firm of Theodor Bergmann Waffenfabrik in Suhl, Germany, obtained the patent rights from Chylewski is a bit murky, but they had an ideal platform for it in their Browning Model 1903 inspired vest pocket, .25 ACP, six-shot magazine Model 2 and nine-shot magazine Model 3 pistols. When adapted to the Chylewski patent, they were renamed the Model 2A and Model 3A. In 1921, they were being advertised for sale as the Bergmann Einhand Pistole (Bergmann One-hand Pistol). In 1922, Bergmann was bought out by Lignose A.G. in Berlin, who continued to make the Model 2A and 3A. Initially Lignose marketed the pistols under the more prestigious Bergmann brand but eventually sold them under their own name and filed a final patent on their refined Einhand design in 1924.

Production History

Though the Lignose Einhand pistols were advertised through the 1930s, researchers believe actual production may have ceased in 1928. There is evidence to suggest the total production of Bergmann and Lignose Einhand pistols was between 40,000 and 50,000. From 1921 through 1928, Colt produced about 86,500 Model 1908 .25 ACP vest pocket autoloaders, and if you look at the production up through 1939, the number goes up to 127,500 guns. Compared to that, the Einhand doesn't look like a smashing commercial success, but I can think of at least three mitigating factors



The Czech Praga Model 1921 could be operated with one hand but required good dexterity.

to consider. First, after World War I, Germany's economy collapsed with hyperinflation and went into a severe depression, shrinking its domestic market. Second, the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929 plunged industrial economies worldwide into a depression that lasted almost a decade, decimating the export market. Finally, I have to wonder how heavily the actions of the post-war Inter-Allied Military Control Commission weighed on the minds of German gunmakers in the 1920s. Deutsche Werke, a consortium of formally state-owned arsenals, produced around 400,000 Ortgies autoloading pistols in the four years following the armistice. That got the attention of the commission, who ordered them to get completely out of the business of making guns by the spring of 1922. In what can only be seen as punishment, the commission also ordered the disposal of their inventory, which they were forced to do at less than their manufacturing cost. To say the least, the post-war German business climate wasn't ideal for gunmakers.

Too Complex?

As clever and efficient as the Einhand pistols were, I've wondered why they weren't widely copied. Initially, I think part of the explanation may be that Chylewski and Lignose maintained good oversight over their patents. We know Chylewski registered his in Austria, Germany, Britain and the United States at least. The latter was awarded in 1917

The Bergmann and Lignose pistols were hammer fired and often equipped with a cocked hammer indicator pin that protruded from the rear of the frame.



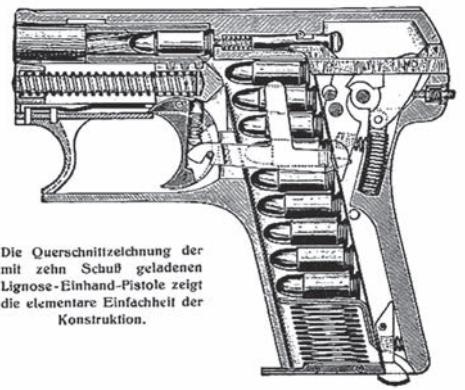
A pair of Model 3A pistols, one bearing Bergmann grips and other Lignose grips. The pistols were in production for about a year when Lignose bought out Bergmann and took over their operations.



Manufacturing quality was quite high. Note the tight fit between parts.



The box artwork for the short-lived SIG-made Chylewski Self-Loading Pistol.



Die Querschnittszeichnung der mit zehn Schuß geladenen Lignose-Einhand-Pistole zeigt die elementare Einfachheit der Konstruktion.



which would have provided him exclusivity of use into 1934. The final Einhand patent by Lignose protected their successful design through the 1930s in Germany.

From World War I through the beginning of WWII, arguably the heyday of the vest pocket autoloader, potential copycats might have shown restraint for fear of infringement lawsuits, but that doesn't explain why the Einhand feature wasn't picked up after the war, especially on inexpensive import pocket .25 ACP autos and their post-Gun Control Act of 1968 domestically assembled kin. I suspect that it came down to the additional cost. Perhaps a higher level of quality control was needed to make the post-war guns reliable enough to benefit from the feature. The Einhands were built at a time when skilled workers made guns, hand-fitting, polishing and adjusting every one as they deemed necessary to ensure a high-quality finished product that could smoothly chamber a cartridge without the full inertia of a spring-driven slide. Quality comes at a price, and it looks to me like manufacturers of post-WWII pocket autoloaders believed low cost was more important to consumers than fine workmanship and materials. That being said, I might still install an Einhand cocking lever on my Italian Titan .25 ACP just to see how much work it really takes to make it function.

The utility of the Chylewski patents was also limited because it didn't scale

well. It was best suited to tiny, simple blowback operated, .25 ACP caliber guns. Larger caliber blowbacks required heavier recoil springs and, thus, more finger strength to pull back the cocking piece. Longer cartridges required greater rearward movement of the trigger guard cocking piece for chambering, which required greater finger reach.

Alternatives


While the Einhand was the most elegant approach to safe carry with an empty chamber and one-handed operation, it wasn't the only game in town at the time. In Spain, the JO-LO-AR autoloaders accomplished this by the addition of a simple, fold-down, metal finger lever attached to the slide. The index and middle fingers of the shooting hand extended forward and drew back the slide by the vertical lever while the remaining three fingers anchored the pistol in the hand. One model was adopted by the Peruvian mounted policemen who wanted an autoloader they could operate with one hand while the other held the reins.

The Czech Praga Model 1921 was also capable of one-handed operation but depended far too much on manual dexterity. The slide of this vest-pocket .25 ACP had a carve-out above the muzzle to allow the shooter to draw it back to cock and chamber a round by reaching over the top of the pistol with the index finger.

Fritz Walther's perfection of the single action/double action (SA/DA) firing mechanism in the Walther PP created a

whole new class of autoloader in 1929, which was just as safe as the Einhand but faster to operate since it required only one finger movement to fire instead of two. Curiously, Hecker & Koch revisited parts of the Einhand concept in their squeeze-cocker H&K P7 pistols made from 1979 to 2008. These were single-action pistols designed to be carried uncocked with a round in the chamber. Depressing the front of the grip frame, which took place naturally when grasping the pistol, cocked the pistol. Unlike SA/DA autoloaders, which have a long, heavy initial trigger pull for the first double-action shot, every shot fired from the P7 benefited from the same short, light, single-action trigger pull.

The largest application of the Einhand concept is the P-77 pistol introduced in the People's Republic of China around 1981 for military and police use and very likely still in use today. Essentially a pocket .32 autoloader (7.62x17mm), it has the automatic slide release function of Chylewski's second patent as built by SIG, but without the dangerous keep-pulling-to-fire feature. The P77B is the most unlikely application of the Einhand concept. It is a full-size, 9x19mm pistol, which was briefly imported into the United States, with a cocking piece triggerguard feature similar to the Lignose patent. The finger strength to draw back the slide is reduced by the pistol's gas retarded blowback system of operation that doesn't require heavy recoil springs.

The lesson here ... never  say never.

LESSONS FROM GUNFIGHTER BUD BALLEW

SITUATION: A fast hand with a sixgun teaches us survival lessons right up to the moment of his own death.

LESSON: Get the first solid hit. Get something between you and incoming fire. And don't believe your own publicity and get in over your head.

According to one source, "The Dust Bowl era of Oklahoma was still very much the Wild West, and Bud Ballew was its most controversial and effective deputy sheriff. He spent a decade chasing criminals, making daily appearances in newspapers, and proving his determination and finesse with a revolver. Bud Ballew participated in more gun battles than Wyatt Earp and killed more men than Billy the Kid." (1) Another writer tells us, "Though not as well-known as other Oklahoma lawmen, such as Heck Thomas or Bill Tilghman, Bud Ballew was just as respected as both a gunfighter and lawman." (2)

Ballew was only 14 years old in 1890 when he left his native Texas and made his way to Oklahoma, settling in Ardmore. Smart and industrious, he soon had his own ranch and some oil leases. Perhaps to scratch an itch for adventure, he accepted when Carter County Sheriff Buck Garrett asked him to become a deputy circa 1913–1914. It was a tough area and the new deputy would soon get an initiation into the scary world of police use of deadly force.

First Gunfight

The town of Wirt in Carter County, also known as Ragtown, was particularly violent. One day, walking foot patrol Ballew saw customers rushing headlong out of a restaurant and, drawing one of the two Colt .45 revolvers he then carried, moved cautiously forward. He found an armed robbery in progress, and one perpetrator, Pete Bynum, 29, ambushed him. A bullet creased Ballew's abdomen, and he rapidly returned fire, putting a mortally wounded Bynum down for the count. Unfortunately, one of the rookie deputy's bullets — a miss or a pass-through, we don't know which — pierced a wall and struck an unseen bystander in the abdomen. Tragically, that wound also proved fatal.

His next shooting took place in 1916. One Arch Campbell, an ex-cop in a personal downward spiral, was terrorizing a barber shop with his revolver. When Ballew and other deputies responded, Campbell opened fire on them, and one of his bullets hit Ballew in the left shoulder and went through the left lung and out his right side. Undaunted, the wounded deputy joined his two brother officers in generating a hail of return fire that killed Campbell. Ballew fully recovered.

Later in the year, Ballew showed early signs of poor anger management when he slapped a judge around on a public street, which cost him his badge for a while. Reinstated, he was assigned to shut down an illegal business belonging to one Steve Talkington, who was out on bond awaiting trial on a murder charge. The angry Talkington yelled to one of his employees, "Get my other gun!" and then turned on Ballew with a semiautomatic pistol in his hand. The deputy's last two incidents had painfully taught him not to be the last to fire, and he pumped four .45 slugs into Talkington before the latter could shoot. The man collapsed, dying, his spinal cord cut in half: All of Ballew's bullets had struck home.

1918 found Ballew up against one Rufus Highnote who, nearing 60 years of age, claimed to be something of a freelance crime-fighter and bounty hunter who had killed 20 men. At one point, he was, in fact, a Deputy U.S. Marshal. Highnote was reported to have terrorized at least three citizens at gunpoint, and the sheriff sent Ballew to relieve him of badge and gun. Biographer Elmer McInnes tells us what happened next:

Continued on next page



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“Highnote suddenly spun around, with his left hand drawing a revolver from one of his two holsters strapped around his waist. Alertly, Ballew crowded close to Highnote, grabbing the man’s wrist just as he pulled the trigger. The shot whizzed past Ballew’s head. Ballew swiftly drew his own revolver as Highnote came up with another cocked .45 in his right hand. Ballew’s gun came into play first as he pumped three bullets into Highnote’s body. The doomed man was dead before he hit the ground. W.A. Richards, one of the first men on the scene following the shooting, reported seeing three revolvers on the dead man.

1919 brought what may have been the most controversial shooting of Ballew’s career. One Dow Braziel, a former bootlegger who had managed to become a deputy U.S. Marshal, was a skilled gunman who had killed at least one adversary in a face-to-face quick-draw contest. He had orchestrated a raid that went badly and resulted in the death of a young policeman Ballew had liked, and for that reason, among others, he and Braziel hated each other. On the day in question, Ballew entered a restaurant of which Braziel was part owner, accompanied by Chief of Police Lesley

Segler. As they came through the door, Braziel fired two shots at them, one of which grazed the chief. Ballew drew and emptied his revolver into Braziel, who fell dead. Reporters noted a 100% hit ratio: six hits for six shots, according to some reports, and five out of five, according to others. Given Ballew’s preference for the Colt single action, normally carried with an empty chamber, the latter seems more likely. It was the third time he had shot a man who carried, or formerly carried, a badge.

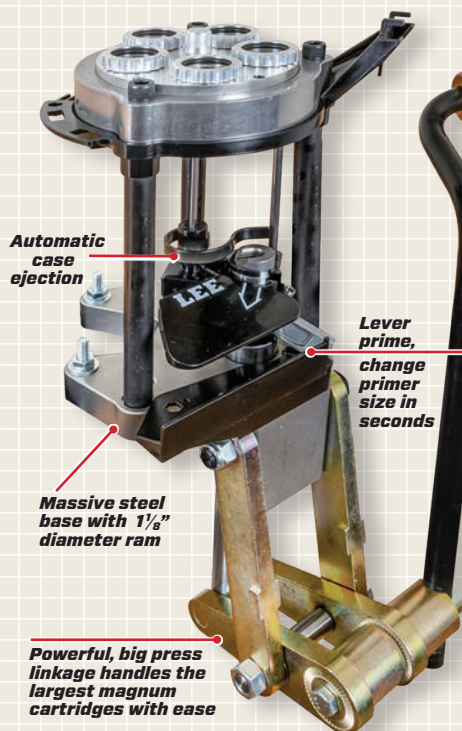
That same year, Ballew went up against a tough little armed robbery suspect named Rusty Mills. Sheriff Garrett had pulled over an automobile containing Mills and his partner in crime, Charles Thomas. Thomas jumped Garrett, each of those two going for his own gun and simultaneously grabbing the other man’s weapon. They went to the ground, struggling. Mills drew a semi-automatic pistol and circled around them, trying to get an angle to shoot the sheriff without hitting his partner, just as Ballew pulled up in his own vehicle behind them. Mills turned toward Ballew and fired two shots at him.

Mills missed.

Ballew didn’t. He fired a single shot from his revolver, striking Mills in the brain and killing him instantly. He then rushed forward to end the chief’s deadly struggle with Thomas, who by now had

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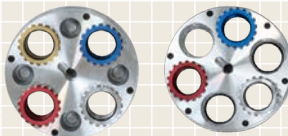
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fired four shots, all amazingly missing the sheriff, who shouted at Ballew to shoot.

The deputy obliged. He carefully put a .45 slug into Thomas' face, smashing the outlaw's jaw. Thomas rolled off the sheriff and fired twice from his downed position; both Garrett and Ballew opened up on him, nailing the would-be cop-killer to the ground and stopping when he dropped his gun. Though riddled with police bullets, Thomas survived to face trial.

1919 was a gunsmoke year for Ballew, including his final fatal shooting. A man named Johnnie Pierce had shot a local lawman named Jake Williams and, before long was captured by Oklahoma City police. Ballew and a still-recovering Williams were sent by train to extradite him. At a stop, Pierce broke and ran. Ballew and William both opened fire, and the running man was brought down by a bullet through the neck that proved fatal.

The Last Gunfight

The toughness of Sheriff Garrett and of Ballew, now his chief deputy, was admired by some but hated by others, and after heated legal debate, both were suddenly, unceremoniously dismissed from their law enforcement duties in 1921.

In a subsequent meeting that devolved from the ouster, someone pulled a gun and started firing, resulting in a hellacious shootout. Struck multiple times in the chest and saved by his concealed steel vest, Ballew returned fire and shot two of his antagonists. Several men were wounded in the melee, but none were killed, though Ballew caught two bullets in the thigh.

Even prior to these events, booze had gotten to Ballew, who was known to get drunk and ride his horse through town, shooting into the sky. After the ouster, his alcohol-fueled behavior became worse, setting the stage for the end of his story.

The Curtain Falls

May of 1922 saw Bud Ballew on a bender of epic proportions in Wichita Falls, Texas. Reports came into the local police of Ballew, sticking his gun in people's faces, firing his .45 into the ceiling of one establishment, and generally terrorizing the community. According to witnesses, when one acquaintance asked him how he was doing, he yelled back, "All right, Clancy, but I'm awful drunk."

Though reluctant to jack up a legendary lawman, Police Chief J.W. McCormick knew by this point that he had to do something. Reinforced by two of his men, one of them Chief of Detectives Jack Miller, McCormick formulated a plan. As the chief walked directly toward the drunken ex-cop, each of the others would surreptitiously approach him from 90° angles, ready to grab his arms.

Elmer McInnes relates the event.

"Bud, you're under arrest. Give me your gun," the police chief commanded. At this point, Ballew froze. 'Put up your

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hands, and I'll get it myself,' McCormick said while Miller reached in to find Ballew's revolver.

"According to the later testimony of McCormick and Miller, at this point, Ballew turned halfway around. 'Oh no, buddy, you've got the wrong man this time,' a smiling Ballew snarled. 'You're out of luck.' At this time, Ballew reached to his side in an apparent attempt to draw his revolver.

"McCormick either had his S&W .38 in his hand or made a quick draw that beat Ballew. At any rate, before Ballew managed to draw his pistol, McCormick began firing at him. Miller jumped back, his right hand powder-burned by one

of the chief's shots as he reached for Ballew's gun. Two bullets slammed into Ballew's chest just above the heart. One shot exited out his back while the other deflected off a rib and lodged just under the skin behind his left shoulder.

"According to McCormick, when Ballew remained on his feet, the thought flashed through the police chief's mind that his opponent might have been wearing a bullet-proof vest. Aiming the revolver at Ballew's head, McCormick squeezed the trigger again. The slug entered the right corner of Ballew's mouth, plowed through his skull and smashed its way out behind his left ear. Though Ballew neglected to don

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his 'steel vest' this time, the shot to the head made that a moot point. As the fatally wounded man finally began to topple to the floor, McCormick fired two more shots at him. These two bullets struck Ballew high up on the left side and emerged from his chest. Bud Ballew fell to the floor beside a domino table, a dead man at the age of 44. Not only had he failed to fire a shot, he had not even drawn his gun."

On May 16, 1922, a headline in the *New York Times* announced, "POLICE CHIEF KILLS EIGHT NOTCH GUN MAN: Wichita Falls, Texas, May 5: Former Deputy Sheriff Bud Ballew, noted for numerous gunfights in his career as a peace officer and wounded on one or two occasions, was shot and killed today when the police visited Domino Parlor, where a disturbance had been reported." The body was flown back to Ardmore — a highly unusual way to transport corpses at that time — and it was reported that thousands of Oklahomans passed Ballew's coffin to pay their respects.

The Guns Of Bud Ballew

His biographers wrote, "In many ways, Bud Ballew was a man of his time. He had grown up on the cattle

ranges of Texas during the 1880s and '90s when cowboys still rode the backcountry with loaded revolvers on their hips and loaded Winchesters in their scabbards. Throughout his law enforcement career in Carter County, Ballew would favor the Colt .45 rather than the new automatic pistols, which were considered the height of firearms technology." While Colt .45 double actions had been around for some time in various forms, it is believed that Ballew's choice was the classic Peacemaker of 1873, the Single Action Army.

The time came when Ballew acquired a double action S&W Hand Ejector in .44 Special, and from then on, he often packed that gun in blue steel with jugged bone stocks. At least one of his Single Actions was a fancy sample, engraved and "silver mounted." In his early days, he walked patrol in the Ardmore area of Oklahoma with two SAAs, one on each hip. At the time of his death, he was wearing the fancy Colt on one side and the S&W .44 on the other.

Guns didn't constitute this lawman's only fancy taste. He was noted for almost always wearing a large diamond tie-tack. He apparently also indulged himself in some practices that we would consider "Hollywood" today. McInnes reported that Ballew's favorite fancy Colt carried six notches

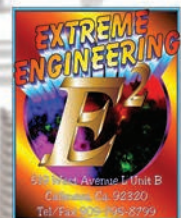
carved in the stocks. Moreover, he cites a contemporary story to the effect that Ballew may have been the only Western lawman who actually "fanned" the hammer of his single-action Colt with his support hand while holding the trigger back with his gun hand. We might wish to take the latter with a grain or more of salt: While that could be consistent with the errant shot that killed an innocent bystander in his first gunfight, it is not at all consistent with the rescue shot to the head he fired into the man who was entangled with his mentor and best friend, Sheriff Garrett.

About that steel vest: Ballew acquired it after his first shooting. Body armor was nothing new: In the 19th Century, the Western hitman Jim "Killer" Miller was known to wear one that saved his life more than once, and it was widely believed that the same was true of Wyatt Earp. Still, Ballew qualifies as an early adopter: He convinced the Sheriff to buy one for each deputy, and the city police bought into the deal, perhaps the first law enforcement agencies to ever buy armor for all their rank-and-file lawmen. He may have preferred revolvers over autos, but he was a forward thinker in other ways. In 1921, Ballew took a flight in a then relatively new airplane and on landing,



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pronounced it “something the officers need in helping them with their work.” Forward thinking, yes?

Lessons

The one who scores the first telling hit is usually on track to win the gunfight. After his first couple of incidents, Ballew seems to have learned this lesson.

A skilled shooter can make do with a low-capacity handgun ... at least sometimes. Ballew wisely made a point of always carrying two revolvers and apparently never needed more than one. However, relatively few Good Guys and Gals are as famously skilled in defensive shooting as Bud Ballew.

When in harm's way, it is wise to be armored. The primitive vests of that time were uncomfortable and hard to conceal from an opponent. Today's are much more comfortable and discreetly concealable. Had the fast-handed Ballew been wearing one on his last day on earth, he might have been able to survive the encounter that killed him.

Expect to be harshly judged and even lied about after a shooting. Ballew faced various hassles but was never found legally culpable for any of his shootings. He went through one trial in which the jury found him Not Guilty after only 39 minutes of deliberation. His principal biographer, Elmer McInnes, considers him guilty of murder in the death of Pierce because the latter was an unarmed fleeing felon. Actually, in that time and place — and in many jurisdictions until the restrictions of the Supreme Court of the United States in their *Tennessee v. Garner* decision in 1985 — it was not unusual for police to use deadly force to stop fleeing felons. Pierce's death might well have been justifiable even under *Garner* since Pierce was known to be a violent man whose continued freedom was likely to be a clear and present danger to innocent people.

At least, no one can claim Ballew was a racist. Pierce, an African-American, appears to have been the only non-white man Ballew ever shot. The Ku Klux Klan was at the height of its power in Oklahoma at that time — as evidenced by the contemptible Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 — and Ballew and his sheriff were bitter enemies of the KKK. The latter returned the hatred, and the Klan was very influential in the ouster of Sheriff Garrett and Chief Deputy Ballew.

There was also controversy after Ballew was killed by Chief McCormick. Former sheriff Garrett, Ballew's mentor and best friend, loudly proclaimed that his former chief deputy had been shot in the back and with at least two different guns. The latter claim came about because the doctor who did the autopsy said one bullet was larger than the others. This grew from the fact that the doc had not removed the projectile for evidence, as would be standard pro-

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tolcol in modern times, but merely noted that the primitive X-ray of the time appeared to show one bullet larger than the others. The bullets that entered the side and out the chest as he was falling may indeed have entered behind the lateral midline when the “shootee's” body turned rapidly while the shooter was still firing before the shooter could see that the man was going down.

One strong lesson is don't come across as a badass. In his definitive biography, author McInnes quotes multiple people who believe that Ballew's ego became so invested in his tough gunfighter image that it ruled his behavior. On his last day alive, Ballew

learned that people you've made afraid of you are much more likely to kill you than they otherwise would be.

If you can't hold your liquor, don't carry a gun. Forgive my language, but some people should wear warning T-shirts that say “Instant Asshole, Just Add Alcohol.” It was his boozed-up bullying, more than anything else, that led to his life ending at age 45.



(1) *McInnes, Elmer and McInnes, Loretta Ritchie*, Bud Ballew: Legendary Oklahoma Lawman, *TwoDot Books*, 2008. (2) *From legendsofamerica.com*, Bud Ballew - Gunfighter & Lawman of Oklahoma.

GUN RIGHTS

Alan Korwin



GOVERNMENT RULERS AND CONSTITUTIONAL CARRY

Some firearms trainers make me sick. I'm not talking about the good ones who train countless citizens or even ones who are awful, and we all know there are some out there. Like the ones who brag they've been certified for 40 years, and never got a stitch of training since then. You know the type.

Just like doctors, the firearms community has some people who need a whack upside the head. We have doctors out there who prescribe pills because the drug companies tell them to, not because the meds are needed. We have people going to doctors because Big Pharma is advertising, asking them to prescribe drugs that can do all sorts of harm because there might be some marginal benefit. That is just bass backwards. But the doctors comply, to the tune of billions of dollars. There's a word for that. It's perverse.

A Sad Business Model

We see some of the same in firearms training. Some trainers are training solely because the government forces people to take prescribed classes, to get carry permission slips. It's not that the classes are good or bad or might teach some of what needs to be known. It's because people's rights are denied by the same government that then requires the class, and the wallet cards. And these trainers, loyal to a fault, line up at the government feed trough to chow down on the required meals. A high school diploma ought to require one credit in marksmanship. Now, there's a righteous requirement.

Are you the type of sycophant ward of the nanny state, incapable of running a business unless the state requires people to take your program under penalty of arrest? You're running an "education program" that teaches what your master says to teach instead of real firearms training. Don't get me wrong. The government CCW leash got a lot of

people armed and in police criminal databases for safekeeping.

Are you an American, free-thinking, independent business leader driven by profit motive, self-interest, personal initiative and free-market capitalism? You've trained earnestly for long, hard hours until you excel at your craft — and you want the public educated.

"Just like doctors, the firearms community has some people who need a whack upside the head."

Could you sell the goods you have and the talent you have, to people who can freely buy your goods? Can you step out from under the state or federal feed bag, and instead of depending on government handouts and coercive support, convince people to get your training because it's good for them, will help them survive, will prepare them for emergencies, will make you look good and honored, make them solid citizens? This is good. Americans commend this.


Earn It

If you want to cry about inept inability to independently run classes, go tell your mama. If you want to step up to the plate and make an adult of yourself, show your stuff, do good, and be what Americans ought to be, then go out there and sell to the half of the public that has guns instead of the few percent willing to bow and scrape for voluntary taxation, expiration dates and official government-approved "carry cards." We knew, when discreet carry started, that some gun bubbas would become the "state training industry," dependent on government handouts, mandates and threats, coercive compulsory classes,

and could never do the work on their own. Your countrymen are ashamed of you. Leave the practice, be productive or apply for a salary somewhere, be a wage slave. The savvy, market-oriented, independently motivated, self-reliant business people will rake in the money you deem too difficult to independently earn. Earn. Now, there's a word you should ponder.

I've been saying training opportunities will blossom once Americans' Second Amendment rights are restored, and the market becomes 50% of the public, the armed half, instead of the small percent the CCW government-enabled market focuses upon.

Constitutional Carry, real freedom, can't get support from people who need the government leash. They effectively bleed out the support we need for true freedom to carry, for easy opt-in licensed permission. Real constitutional 2A only gets support from folks who understand what 2A is really about. The front end of the gun is where freedom comes from, not bowing to the dictates of the boss.

When my state, Arizona, was on the verge of obtaining this grand prize, no-papers carry and throwing off shackles of "civilized" oppression, we weren't even sure what to call it. At the time, in 1994, people called it Vermont Carry, because Vermont never had bans, the only such state. Alaska got there next, but Alaska Carry made even less sense than Vermont Carry. So we invented the term Constitutional Carry the night before the law took effect, and the rest is history. Be part of history and teach Americans to carry and shoot safely because it's right, not because it's required. 

Award-winning author Alan Korwin has written 14 books, 10 of them on gun law, and has advocated for gun rights for nearly three decades. His next book is Why Science May Be Wrong. See his work or reach him at GunLaws.com.

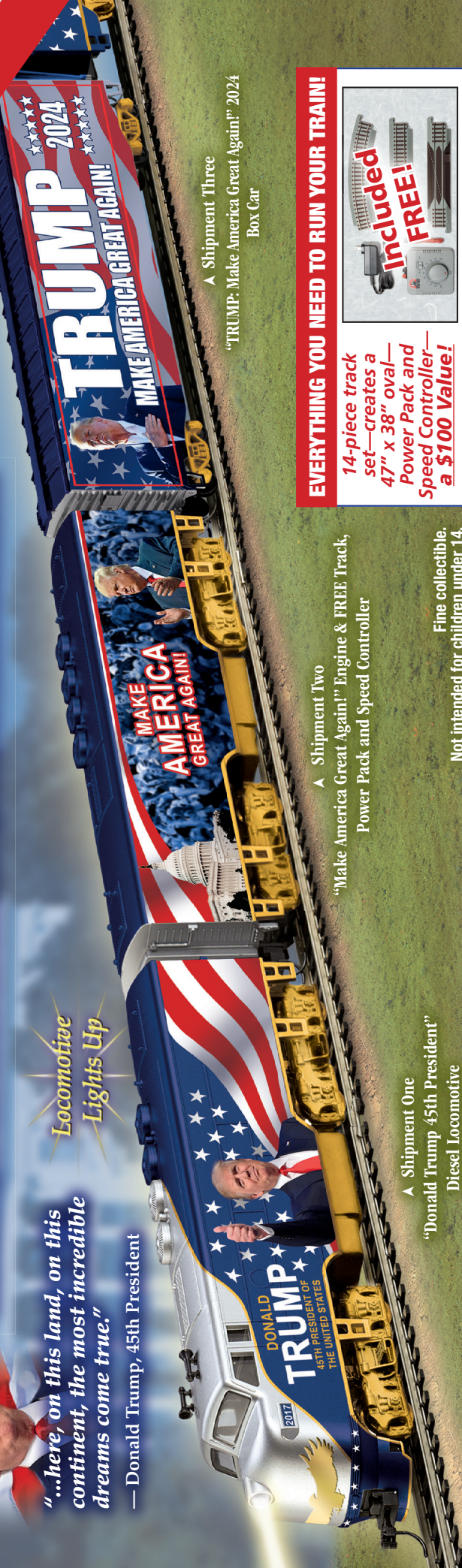
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XS Sights has recently released an update to their classic “big dot” series of sights. The new DXT2 Pro Series models offer a tougher and more corrosion-resistant black nitride finish, which will not only match a lot of pistols’ slide surface but provide superior corrosion resistance over the years.

The new models also feature a more durable Tritium lamp and are offered with a green glow dot surrounding the tritium center.

As for the perpetual “big dot sights aren’t precise” myth, check out a recent episode of American Handgunner Insider on Youtube at our @FMGPubs channel where I test the precision of traditional notch and post sights against that of the big dots. You might be surprised at the results.

The new sights retail for \$153.99 and are initially available for a variety of GLOCK models. Expect more to follow soon. XSSights.com

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For gun owners, it may represent the solution to finding that holster to fit their specific combination of handgun, light or laser. We all know how hard it is for holster makers to design, produce and stock millions of variants to cover all the possible combinations.

The model shown here is for GLOCK pistols, and we’ll continue to run it through the wringer so we can report back down the road. FalcoHolsters.com



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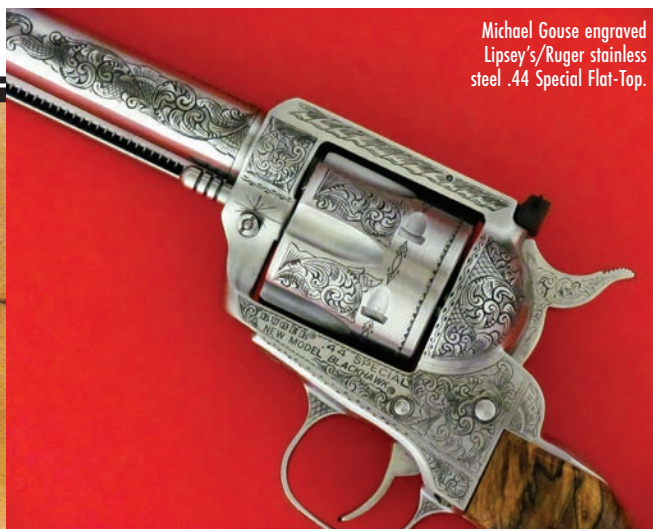


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THE ERA OF THE .44 PART 1: RUGER FLAT-TOPS

In 1955 Ruger introduced their first centerfire single action sixgun, the .357 Magnum Blackhawk. This Colt-size single action, just as with the 1953 Single-Six .22, was powered by coil springs and also had a grip frame identical in size and feel to the legendary Colt Single Action. Bill Ruger flat-topped the frame of the Blackhawk and added excellent adjustable sights. At the time, the .357 Magnum was the most powerful cartridge available and the Blackhawk quickly became a favorite with shooters and outdoorsmen.

In his 1955 book, *Sixguns*, Elmer Keith introduced the .357 Magnum Blackhawk and also said: "... the .357 Ruger is one honey of a gun and amply heavy for the .357 and .44 Special ..." The .357 Magnum was the most powerful factory-loaded cartridge available. However, handloaders had been shooting 250–260 grain hard-cast bullets in the .44 Special at 1,100–1,200 fps for nearly 30 years. It was almost a fore-

gone conclusion the Blackhawk would soon be chambered in .44 Special. However, Bobby Burns proved once again to be correct, and the best-laid plans of mice and men went awry.

While Ruger was working on the .357 Magnum Blackhawk, S&W and Remington were secretly experimenting with what would soon become the .44 Magnum. The first of the .44 Magnums from S&W were released from the factory in December 1955. By early spring, Ruger was re-chambering the .357 Blackhawk to three prototype .44 Magnums. Upon further testing one of these let go so the engineers at Ruger increased the size of the frame and cylinder; the .44 Magnum Ruger Blackhawk was born and the .44 Special chambered in a .357 Blackhawk-sized single action was forgotten.

Flat-Top Three-Screw

Ruger would produce a .44 Magnum Blackhawk, now known to collectors and shooters alike as the

Flat-Top Three-Screw Model, from 1956 to 1962, when it was removed from production. In 1959 it was "improved" as the Super Blackhawk. The barrel length of the original was increased from 6½ to 7½", the rear sight received protective ears machined into the frame, the cylinder was unfluted, and the grip frame was changed from an aluminum Colt-sized affair to an all-steel grip frame patterned after the Colt 1848 Dragoon complete with square back trigger guard. In 1972, as with all other Ruger Blackhawks, the Super was further modernized with what is now known as the New Model action, complete with a transfer bar allowing it to be safely carried with six rounds instead of the old traditional way of always having the hammer resting on an empty chamber.

At first, I did not care that much for the New Model action — it just did not feel right to me. Over the years, I have come to realize this was a very smart move on Ruger's part, preventing who knows how many negligent discharges. However, there are any number of gunsmiths who can smooth it up beautifully plus, I have

A half-century separates this Three-Screw Ruger .44 Magnum Super Blackhawk from the 50th Anniversary Model.



Ruger .44 Special New Models with longer barrels installed and warning labels polished off.

One of the best-looking sixguns offered by Gary Reeder is his .44 Special Flat-Top El Diablo.



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to admit I like the idea of being able to carry a sixgun as a real sixgun and not a five-gun.

Ruger has introduced 50th Year Anniversary versions of the .357 Blackhawk, 2005; .44 Blackhawk, 2006; and .44 Super Blackhawk, 2009. I, of course, had to have all three. I have had several of the .357s converted to .44 Special and just received a new Model .357 Blackhawk, a special 10" Commemorative from the Ruger Collectors Association. While I left my Anniversary Super Blackhawk strictly as issued, I had to do the same thing to the New Model .44 Magnum Blackhawk as I did to one of the originals more than 50 years ago; the barrel was cut to 4¾" using an old

original Flat-Top .44 Magnum barrel turning it into a prime candidate for the title of Perfect Packin' Pistol.

Factory .44s

Of course, the big news for me was to finally see a factory-produced Ruger .44 Special Blackhawk. This finally came about 53 years later, with the offering of two .44 Special New Model Flat-Top Blackhawks by Lipsey's. Those first two were offered in barrel lengths of 4½" and 5½", and of course, after waiting so long, I had to have one of each. These proved to be excellent sixguns, well-timed, tightly fitted, and with uniform chamber throats of 0.431", making them perfect for shooting .44 Specials. Not

only had Lipsey's done what Ruger had never accomplished, but their action even spurred Ruger to finally catalog .44 Specials. And in 2009, Ruger made these two sixguns standard production items.

Special Specials ...

In late 2009, I received three of the Ruger .44 Special Blackhawks, and since I already had two Lipsey's .44 Specials, I decided to do something really special with these Specials. First, I contacted my friend Gary Reeder to see if he had a 7½" or 10½" take-off barrel from a Ruger Super Blackhawk. He had both and sent them up to me. I had my local gunsmith, Tom Cripe at Buckhorn, polish the warning labels off both of these barrels

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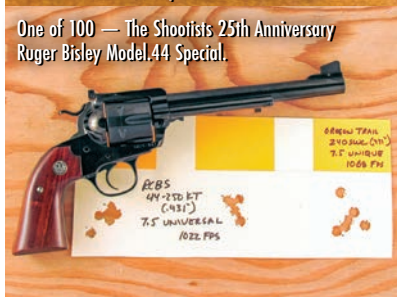
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These two Ruger .44 Special New Model Flat-Top Blackhawks were re-barreled to 7 1/2" and 10 1/2" by Tom Cripe at Buckhorn Gun and re-finished by Reeder Custom Guns.



One of 100 — The Shootists 25th Anniversary Ruger Bisley Model .44 Special.

and fit them to two of the Ruger .44 Specials. The next step was to shoot them and see if they were going to be everything I wanted, and when this proved out both sixguns were sent to Gary Reeder to be personalized with "John Taffin The Sixgunner" on the barrels and refinished. No one is any better at bluing sixguns than Gary, and both of my new Long Range Rugers turned out beautiful, but I didn't stop there.

What about that third .44 Special Ruger New Model? It also went to Reeder Custom Guns to be turned into what Gary calls his El Diablo package. The grip frame was slightly round butted and fitted with Corian Ivory grips, the original barrel was given a deep dish crown, an interchangeable front sight system was fashioned, sights were changed to a gold bead front, and an express rear, gold embellishments were added along with "El Diablo," and the whole thing was also beautifully re-blued. The result is one devil of a great sixgun. For my personal use, I had to make a change; I simply do not shoot express sights as well as



It shoots even as good as it looks: the Michael Gouse engraved Ruger .44 Special.

I do standard sights, so both the front and rear sights were changed to adhere to my personal idiosyncrasies.

More Lipsey's

Meanwhile, back at Lipsey's, more great .44 Special things were happening. To follow up on their two original .44 Specials, Lipsey's offered the same barrel lengths in a Bisley Model. The organization I started 25 years ago, The Shootists, was looking for a suitable 25th Anniversary sixgun and working with Ruger and Lipsey's, the committee came up with a 7 1/2" Bisley Model .44 Special. These are all appropriately marked as 25th Anniversary sixguns and also finished in bright blue. Only 100 of these were made and only went to members of The Shootists. Mine has proven to be an excellent shooting sixgun.

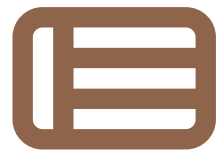
In 2010, Lipsey's went stainless steel .44 Special. The first offering was a 4 5/8" Flat-Top Blackhawk. Just as with all of their other .44 Specials, this is built on the original .357 Blackhawk-sized frame also with the original-sized XR3 grip frame. I was so smitten with the first one to come into Buckhorn I grabbed it before they had it completely unpacked. And then, without even shooting it, I sent it up to Michael Gouse in Montana to be C-engraved. It turned out beautifully. To make it even more of a special Special, it shoots as well as it looks with one-hole groups using the Lyman/Thompson #429215GC bullet at 1,085 fps. Even with the stainless-steel Blackhawk, Lipsey's did not just sit back but also offered the New Vaquero in the stainless steel .44 Specials in both a standard 4 5/8" version as well as a 3 1/2" Sheriff Models, as we shall see in a future story. It took more than half a century, but at last, Ruger was building .44 Specials. Sometimes, progress is not all that bad.

For info: Ruger.com, ReederCustomGuns.com, GouseFreelanceFirearmsEngraving.com

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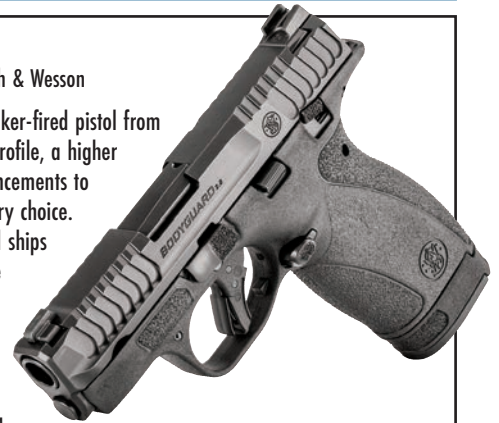
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BODYGUARD 2.0 Smith & Wesson

Bodyguard 2.0 is a micro-sized striker-fired pistol from Smith & Wesson. It boasts a new profile, a higher capacity and includes design enhancements to make it the ultimate concealed carry choice. Chambered in .380 Auto, the pistol ships with a flush fit 10-round magazine and an extended 12-round magazine. The Bodyguard 2.0 has an overall height of 4", a width just under 1" and weighs 9.8 oz. unloaded. It also includes a striker-fired design and new flat-face trigger for more accurate shots. The pistol ships with a black u-notch rear sight and a bright tritium-insert front sight. MSRP: \$449. For more info: (800) 331-0852, Smith-Wesson.com



PROTAC 2AA-X USB Streamlight Inc.



The ProTac 2AA-X USB from Streamlight is a rechargeable version of its popular ProTac 2AA flashlight and features multi-fuel capability with USB or disposable battery options while delivering 550 lumens. The push-button tail switch permits one-handed operation of the light's momentary, variable intensity or strobe modes. Its TEN-TAP programmable switch allows for user selection of one of three different programs: high/strobe/low (factory default), high only or low/high. It weighs 3.5 oz. and is 6" long. Available in black or Coyote, the ProTac 2AA-X USB ships with a holster, rechargeable lithium polymer battery pack and a USB-C charge cord. For more info: (800) 523-7488, Streamlight.com

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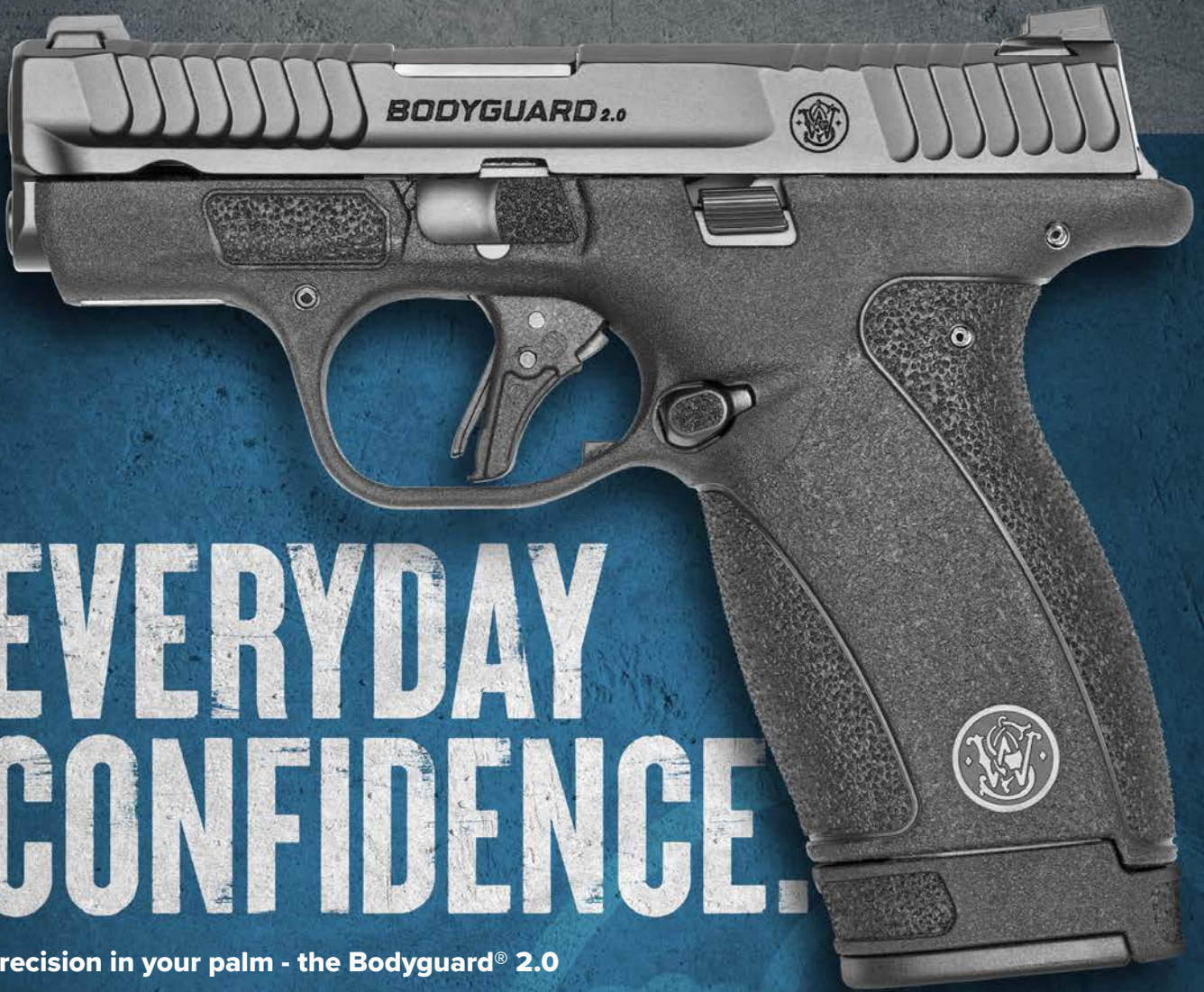
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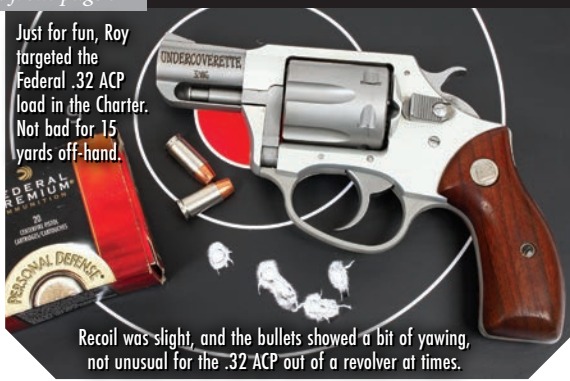
weight to the S&W's 16.8 oz. on my postal scale. The DA action on the Charter is "roughish," but I also noticed it smoothed out quite a bit after 200 or so rounds and some judicious dry-firing. I took off the rubber grips that came on the Charter and substituted some slimmed-down stock wood grips I had. The light recoil allows that slim grip and the package contributes to easy pocket carry. I've tried similar grips on lightweight .38s and the web of your hand does get bitten. So the advantage goes to the .32 Mag there.

Shooting

I targeted the Black Hills ammo and a few rounds of Federal .32 ACP just for fun. Many .32/.327 guns will shoot the .32 ACP fine because the .32 case has a slight rim. In our case, the S&W wouldn't fire the .32 ACP (light primer strikes), but the Charter shot them fine. I measured and the Charter firing pin did extend about 0.015" farther than the S&W's.

Firing off-hand at 15 yards and shooting carefully in DA mode, the guns grouped satisfyingly well. The Charter shot about 2" low and an inch right, with groups hovering in the 1.5" to 1.75" range. It's not uncommon for the fixed sights of small-frame revolvers not to align with the point of aim so you really do need to check that carefully. For defensive shooting at toe-to-toe distances, this doesn't matter at all, though.

The S&W delivered essentially identical groups but was well-centered and just a bit low. I suspect changing loads for either gun could get them zeroed more precisely if you needed that. Just for fun, I targeted the Charter with the Federal .32 ACP and although it shot about 3" low, the group was just fine at about 1.75" or so.



Just for fun, Roy targeted the Federal .32 ACP load in the Charter. Not bad for 15 yards off-hand.

Recoil was slight, and the bullets showed a bit of yawing, not unusual for the .32 ACP out of a revolver at times.

The Charter wears factory grips Roy slimmed down, making it great for pocket carry. Charter offers the bigger rubber grips, and the last is an after-market model.



Velocities averaged in the 940 fps range for both guns, with the Black Hills 85-grain JHP; 640 fps with the Federal .32 ACP 65-grain Hydra-Shok; 655 fps with new Remington 98-grain .32 S&W Long loads; an old box of Remington .32 S&W delivered a surprising 638 fps (unknown bullet weight), and an old box of "Geco" 100-grain full target wad-cutter .32 S&W Long trundled along at 525 fps. The moral here is there are a lot of .32 caliber loads you can shoot in these guns and that's both practical — and fun. I'm thinking loading a full wad-cutter at about 900 fps would be pretty darn good.

So?

Well, they're both solid little guns. The S&W is loaded with features and shows excellent build quality. You couldn't go wrong. The Charter is a good value, but you do compromise on some of the details. The sights on the S&W are clearly much better with that Big Dot Tritium up front, but the irons on the Charter are adequate for the job.

I'm going to keep the Charter though. I intend to do an action job, bob the hammer, melt the edges some, cut a new muzzle chamfer and forcing cone and install a dovetail front sight and zero it. I mean ... why not? I'll report back on that soon.

For more info: Lipseys.com; Smith-Wesson.com; CharterFirearms.com; Black-Hills.com; BarrantiLeather.com



The S&W offers the ability to wear countless grip options.

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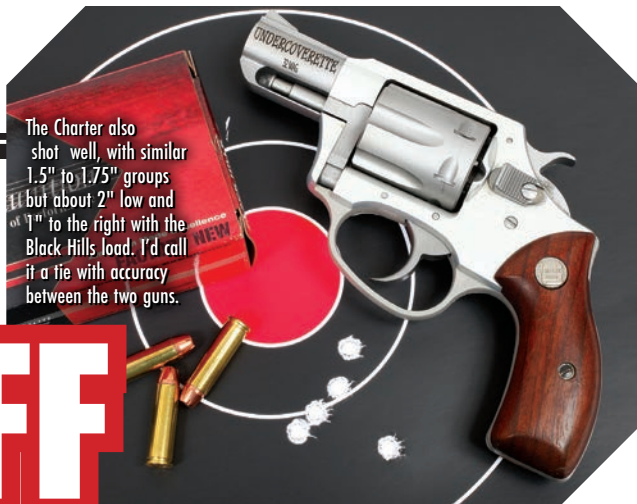




ROY HUNTINGTON

THE INSIDER™

.32 H&R MAG SHOOT-OFF S&W VS. CHARTER ARMS



The Charter also shot well, with similar 1.5" to 1.75" groups but about 2" low and 1" to the right with the Black Hills load. I'd call it a tie with accuracy between the two guns.

Most .32 Mag. or .327 Federal can handle multiple .32 loads. L-R: .32 ACP, .32 S&W Long wadcutter, .32 S&W, .32 S&W Long and the Black Hills .32 H&R Mag load with an 85-grain JHP.

I'm glad to see the .32 H&R Magnum has been developing a significant following these days after languishing in the shadow of the .327 Federal for decades. I think, like the .357 fired in a small-frame revolver, even the .327 Federal can be a handful. From what I can see, people buy a J-Frame in .327, shoot it a few times, then promptly put it away or load it with .32 H&R magnums.

The .327 hovers in the 45,000 PSI range, whereas the .32 Mag. is a more manageable 21,000 PSI. When a .327 goes off, all that fire, brimstone and recoil energy has to go someplace. Have you ever fired a .357 in a small, lightweight revolver? Yikes. Yet, ballistic gel testing shows both the .32 Mag. and the .38 can deliver deep penetration and do it with much less fuss. What's not to like?

Lipseys (a distributor in the industry) and S&W recently showed their savvy market knowledge with the introduction of their "Ultimate Carry J-Frame" in .38 Special and — wait for it — .32 H&R Magnum. To sweeten the deal, not only is the .32 Mag. controllable, accurate and easy to shoot, it manages to cram an "extra" round into that cylinder, allowing a tiny J-Frame to carry six .32s rather



Small frame revolvers are easily carried in pocket holsters and in this nifty paddle, both from Barranti Leather.



than five .38s. So we have similar performance between the two cartridges and identical guns, both loaded with features. So why not choose the extra capacity and lower recoil of the .32? Indeed, why not?

Ultimate Options

After an exhaustive consulting process with a list of people who know revolvers — and small-frame guns in particular — Lipsey's introduced a gun with a long list of engineering features. Among the upgrades are better XS sights, "High Horn" VZ grips, better action parts, an enclosed ejector rod, cham-

fered charge holes, "no lock" airweight aluminum frame and other touches. It's essentially a custom J-Frame but offered as a "factory" gun due to this collaboration between Lipsey's and S&W. I've had the .32 version now for some time, and after about 300 rounds through it, I have an opinion or three.

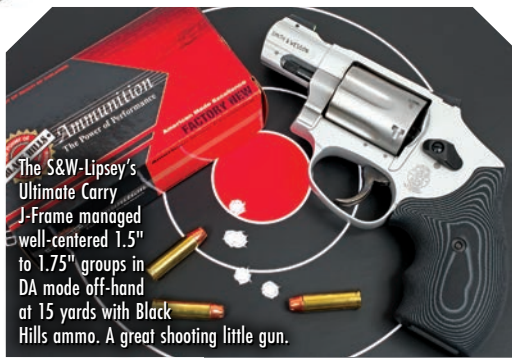
The gun is accurate, has been 100% reliable, is very comfortable to shoot with the Black Hills .32 H&R Magnum ammo I've been using, has a very manageable light recoil, and everything is as you'd wish for in a \$750 gun like this. I'd consider it a "turn-key" carry gun for me. I think this model should appeal to recoil shy or smaller-statured shooters, many women and even macho fellows who understand having an "extra" round makes sense. Go ahead, admit it.

Charter Arms

To balance things, I got a Charter Arms "Undercoverette" in .32 Magnum. At \$410 it's a bit more than half as much as the S&W and shows it with some tool marks and a slightly gritty action. But you get what you pay for, and I was curious to see just how different the two guns were. At a tad more than 13 oz., the Charter is a feather-



Note the bold XS sights on the S&W and fuller grip profile in the web of the hand.



The S&W-Lipseys Ultimate Carry J-Frame managed well-centered 1.5" to 1.75" groups in DA mode off-hand at 15 yards with Black Hills ammo. A great shooting little gun.

Continued on page 72

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