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Taffin TESTS

By John Taffin



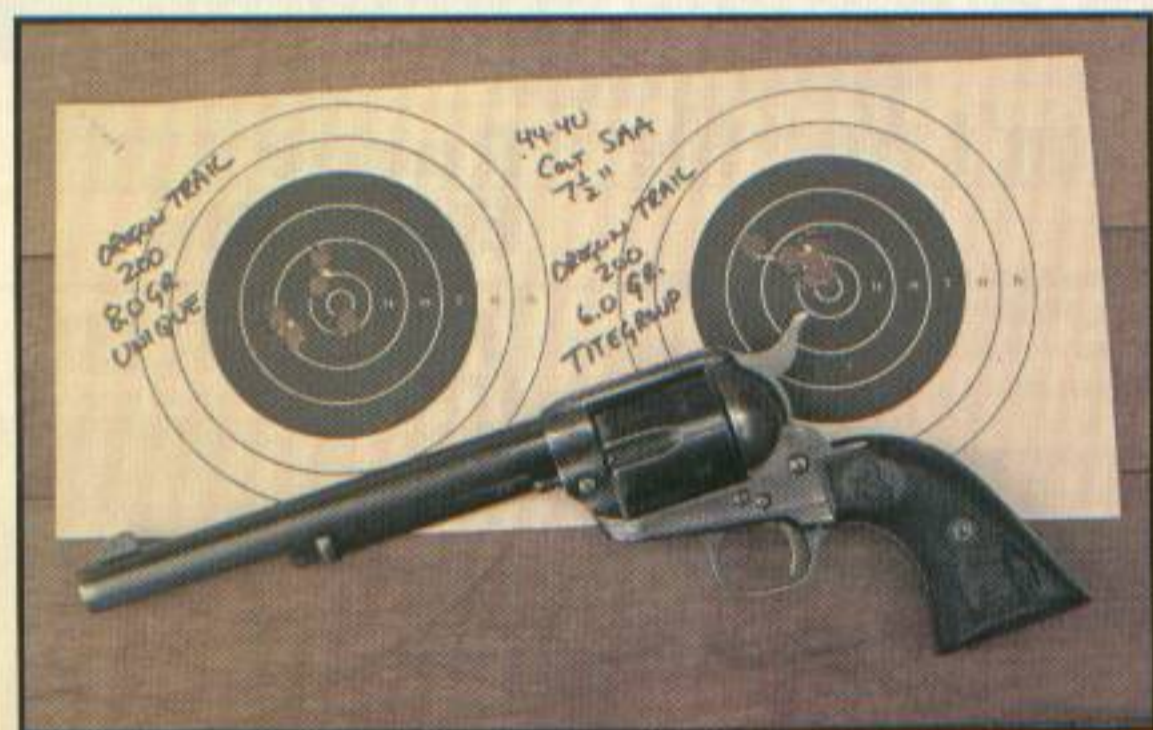
TAFFIN

GETS

TAKEN

(If It Seems Too Good

To Be True, It Is)



What looked to be a gun show bargain, a third generation SAA for \$650, turned out to be an expensive mistake.



I should have known better. The gray in my beard didn't get there overnight. I earned it. Been there. Done that. Seen that. Yes, I should have known better.

But, I had been cowboy shooting all day in the cold and wet. I was tired, and in a hurry. My blackpowder sixguns, levergun and shotgun from the cowboy shooting match needed to be cleaned and the gun show was in its last hour when I arrived.

Up and down the aisles I went looking for that all-elusive "bargain" that all show attendees are hoping to find. If there were any to start with, they should have all been gone. I know that. Now.

I moved quickly, knowing that time was at a premium. Another mistake. About halfway through the show I spotted it—a Colt SAA.

The price tag was low, too low, but I picked it up anyway. Attached to the \$650 tag was a Third Generation 7½" .44-40. The barrel and cylinder looked new, but the grip frame had mismatched numbers and the mainframe had some pitting and had obviously been re-finished.

"Yeah, it got wet and we had to re-blue the frame and replace the barrel and cylinder," said the merchant manning the table.

Alarm bells should have gone off right there, but I was tired and I really wanted a bargain. Boy did I get one. No problem. I was looking for a shooter, not a museum piece. The action felt good and smooth. The check was written and I headed home. Little did I know what awaited me.

First things first. The blackpowder guns were cleaned, oiled and stored away. A hot shower refreshed me and got me ready for a relaxing evening enjoying my new treasure. The shower must have also cleared up my eyes as I began noticing

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things I hadn't spotted before.

Even though the barrel was definitely brand new and Colt manufactured, the cylinder wasn't quite right. The backstrap had a notch at the bottom for a shoulder stock, while the trigger guard had a very early serial number from the 1870s. The mainframe somehow seemed thinner. Turned out it was.

Figuring the innards could probably stand being cleaned up, I dismantled my "treasure." No wonder it seemed smooth. Both the bolt spring and hand spring were handmade out of a piece of lightweight metal and would last just about long enough to operate the action a few times. They were discarded. The cylinder was Italian, not Colt, and both the hand and bolt were on their last legs.

Monday morning found me at Shapel's looking for Colt parts. Fortunately they had a new .44-40 Colt cylinder, plus all the springs, the bolt and the hand that I needed to fix my now-tarnished treasure. Might as well replace all the screws also since I had gone this far.

By now Peacemaker Specialists was open and I put in a call to Eddie Janis. I wanted to simply holler "Help," but instead showed some of the restraint I should have exercised at the gun show and patiently explained what I had. No problem, says Eddie, just send it down and we will put in the new parts and cylinder and give it a Saddle Tramp action job. Oh, Ed, the hammer notches are also just about gone so they will need to be welded up and re-cut. No problem.

The .44 sixgun and parts were on their way to Peacemaker Specialists within a few minutes after hanging up the phone. A few days later Eddie calls back to inform me that my problems are not quite at an end. Can't weld up the notches on the hammer as someone has already tried that and botched the job. You will need to replace the hammer.

By now the cash register is ringing with resounding regularity. I decide that since I am in this far I might as well go all the way. "All right, Eddie, let's do this right. Find me a replacement Colt back strap and trigger guard also," I instruct.

Now if you have been paying attention, the only thing left of my "bargain" Colt is the mainframe, barrel and ejector rod housing. The grips, while being original hard rubber Colts, were cut down to fit the slightly smaller grip frame that had been attached, so they also would have to be replaced to fit the new grip frame that Janis had polished to mated perfection with the main frame.

The frame was definitely thinner as someone had polished it to get out some of the pits. I opted for Peacemaker Specialists antique look. Instead of a blued and case colored new sixgun, I would have a

brownish-looking "old" sixgun that would actually be brand new on the inside and function as perfectly as a Colt can operate.

One more call came forth before the project was finished. "Sorry, John, but the ejector rod housing doesn't fit properly and will have to be replaced," said my gunsmith, who was quickly becoming my banker.

Now I am down to a S650 mainframe and barrel. Somewhere there has to be a silver lining in this cloud! I found it when Eddie sent the sixgun back for test firing before he re-finished it. It shot wonderfully well. Windage was perfect and it placed 200 gr. .44 bullets in a tight little circle. At least it would shoot.


Before sending it back, I found a pair of Third Generation eagle grips in my parts box, attached them so they could be polished to the new grip frame and sent everything back for the final step.

Within a few weeks I had my sixgun back and it is a dandy. It looks like a 125-year-old sixgun that has seen use, but not abuse. When viewed in the sunlight, the barrel and cylinder are very brown, not blue, and now the minor pits in the mainframe no longer look out of place.

This sixgun was carried in leather on a daily basis as its owner went about business on horseback in all types of weather. Or so it looks. Function is perfect as expected when Janis does a re-building project and action job. But something was still wrong.

The grips! Brand new grips on a 125-year-old sixgun just don't look right at all. They should be aged also. This could easily be accomplished by sanding them, taking off the high spots and rounding off the horse and eagle emblem, perhaps smoothing out the checkering. But how?

The answer was found in a piece of mesh screen used to sand dry wall. It is pliable, can be cut into small pieces and did a perfect job of adding years to the new grips. They even feel old with all the sharp edges gone.

The final result is a Colt SAA with a most desirable 7½" barrel and with the great chambering of the frontier, the .44 Winchester Center Fire (.44 WCF). It is a perfect sixgun for cowboy shooting—actually much more suited to the shooting sport that celebrates the frontier than any new sixgun. If only it could talk, it looks as if it could tell tales of cattle drives, cow towns, campfires, shootouts— and gullible gunwriters.

Readers can reach Peacemaker Specialists at P.O. Box 157, Dept. AH, Whitmore, CA 96096; phone: (916) 472-3438. Send 'em \$5 for a catalog of parts and services.

The guy that sold me the gun? You don't want to know how to reach him! I don't get mad and I don't get even. Life is too short for that. At least for something of this minor magnitude. However, if you are ever at the Fort Boise Gun Show, I will be most happy to point him out to you. He has no idea how much business he is going to lose over this.