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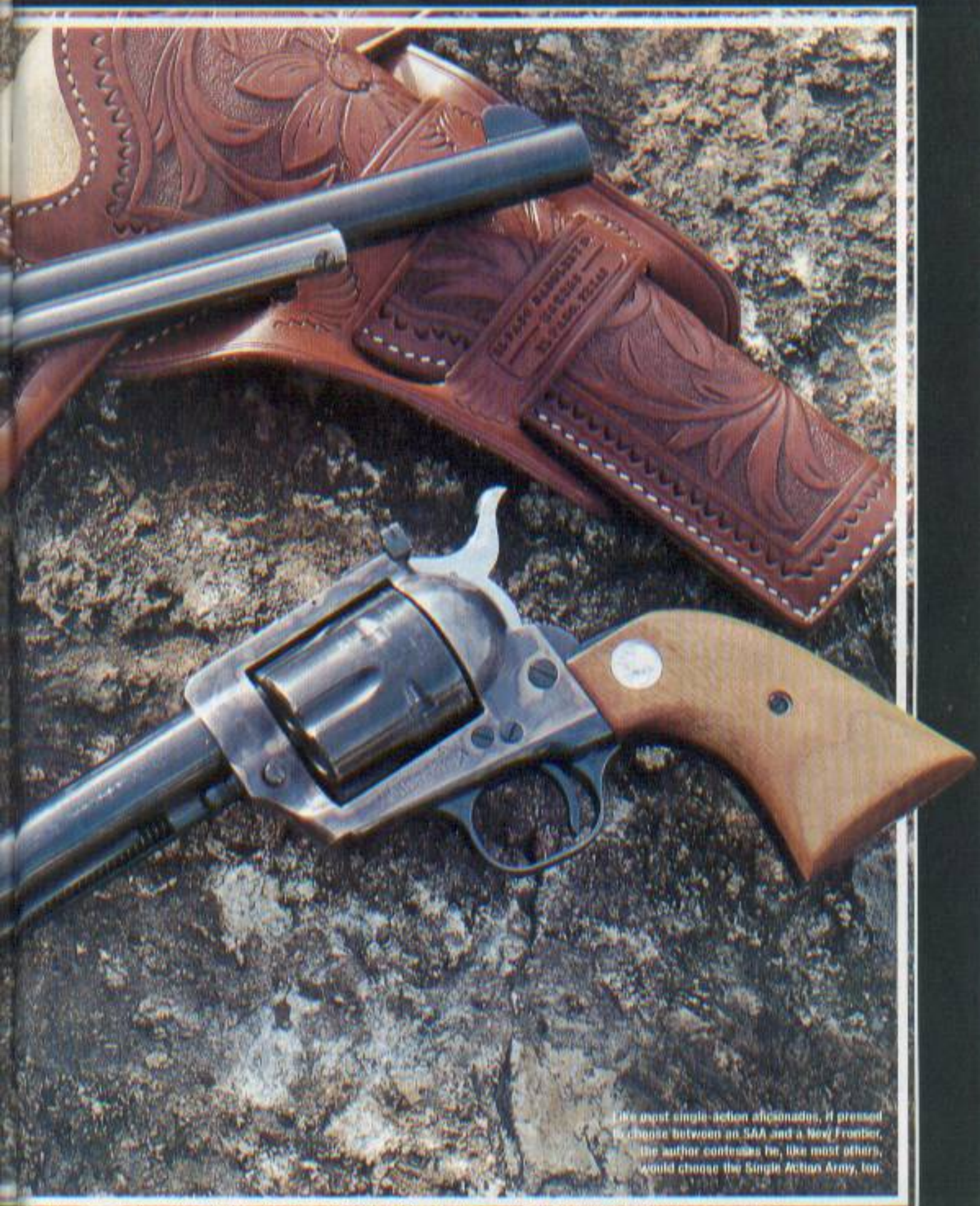
A better shootin' sixgun, it just can't get SAA respect

BY TODD LOFGREN

Although I'm sure most of you have heard the phrase "redheaded stepchild" before and have some kind of inkling of what it means, many would be hard pressed to actually define it. I know I was when Eddie Janis of Peacemaker Specialists suggested it in conjunction with the Colt New Frontier. I thought the expression rather catchy and grasped the significance of it right away but wasn't quite sure why. A little bit of research (actually, quite a bit of research but with little success) resulted in the following definition or explanation of the term "redheaded stepchild." The implication seems to be that a redheaded stepchild, or someone saddled with that title, would describe a person or thing that doesn't get the same attention, care, or admiration as those of a similar but obviously different ilk.

In the actual case of a stepchild, it is implied that a redheaded one might be the subject





If he used single-action aficionados, it pressed to choose between an SAA and a New Frontier, the author confesses he, like most others, would choose the Single Action Army, top.

ALL ABOUT COLT'S NEW FRONTIER

of more abuse than other siblings because the hair is an obvious reminder to the step-parent that the child is not his/hers. Being somewhat familiar with the Colt New Frontier and its history, describing it as Colt's redheaded stepchild seemed quite apropos.

New Frontier Origins

Introduced in 1961, the Colt New Frontier was essentially nothing more than a flat-topped Single Action Army equipped with a fully adjustable rear sight that was mated to a rather high but appropriately ramped and serrated front sight. The rear sight assembly, made for Colt by Accro, was set into a milled channel in the New Frontier's top strap and held in place by a horizontal cross pin. Standard barrel lengths for the Second Generation New Frontiers (those produced from 1961 through 1974) were cut at 5.5 and 7.5 inches with a small number having been made wearing tubes of 4.75 and 12 inches. These



Author's first New Frontier is this 4.75" 3rd Generation .44-40 with extra fitted cylinder in .44 Special. Holster is older Lawrence 120B that rides upon Bianchi cartridge belt.

long and short variations were very limited in production and are rarely encountered outside established collections today. The Second Generation New Frontier was offered in four different chamberings, those being the .38 Special, .44 Special, .357 Magnum, and the .45 Colt. Mainframes were color casehardened, while barrels,

cylinders, screws, back straps, triggers, and triggerguards were finished in Colt's highly polished "Royal Blue." Research revealed that no nickel-plated Second Generation New Frontiers were ever produced. Grips were of two-piece walnut wearing silver medallions.

The New Frontier, its name originating from the phrase coined by John F. Kennedy in his 1960 acceptance speech, was given its own serial number range beginning with number 3000NE. Production continued until 1974 with the last Second Generation New Frontier being shipped in July of 1973. Roughly 4,163 Second Generation New Frontiers were produced. Although the .45 Colt is the most predominant caliber encountered when dealing with the Single Action Army, there were actually more .357 Magnum Second Generation New Frontiers produced, both in 5.5 and 7.5-inch barrel lengths, than there were .45's. The rarest Second Generation New Frontier? That would be a 7.5-incher chambered for the .38 Special cartridge, of which only 10 were produced. Next in line in rarity would be the 5.5-inch .38 Special. There were 39 of those made. Most guns sported 7.5-inch barrels and these accounted for 59 percent of the Second Generation guns produced. The 5.5-inch guns comprised 35 percent of the total production, while just about four percent wore the short 4.75-inch tube.

Like the rest of the Single Action series, the New Frontier ceased production in 1974 but was again reintroduced after 1976 when the Third Generation series of Single Actions were offered.

Sharing all of the changes of the Single Action Army, like its new one-piece cylin-

PERFORMANCE:

Colt New Frontier .44 4.75"

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
.44 SPECIAL		
3-D Blue 200 RN Cowboy	710	3.01
Winchester 240 RNFP Cowboy	674	3.72
.44-40		
Hornady 205 FP Frontier Load	735	3.75

Butler weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second (fps) by PACT chronograph, and accuracy in inches for average group size from 25 yards.

PERFORMANCE:

Colt New Frontier .45 Colt 4.75"

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
Winchester 250 LFN Cowboy	621	2.50
Black Hills 250 RNFP	710	4.15

Butler weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second (fps) by PACT chronograph, and accuracy in inches for average group size from 25 yards.

PERFORMANCE:

Colt New Frontier .45 Colt 7.5"

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
Winchester 250 LFN Cowboy	695	2.20
Black Hills 250 RNFP	714	2.20

Butler weight measured in grains, velocity in feet per second (fps) by PACT chronograph, and accuracy in inches for average group size from 25 yards.

der with pressed-in bushing, a new style ratchet pad and hand, and a change in barrel threads, the New Frontier was again offered with 4.75, 5.5, and 7.5-inch barrels. Frames continued to be color casehardened with the rest of the gun finished in Royal Blue. Colt's Royal Blue finish was arrived at by polishing components to a very high gloss before bluing and more than a few sharp edges were lost (especially on Third Generation guns) from overzealous polishing by less than adequately skilled workers. It is not unknown to those familiar with Colt SAA's, be they smooth topped or adjustably sighted, that many a nice gun was cobbled up during this phase of manufacture. It is especially hard to find a Third Generation New Frontier whose once-nicely squared and serrated front sight wasn't polished into a

"The New Frontier, its name originating from the phrase coined by John F. Kennedy in his 1960 acceptance speech, was given its own serial number range beginning with number 3000NF."

rounded, glaring blob during its prep for bluing.

Calibers offered with the reintroduction of the New Frontier (often referred to as the New Model New Frontier) included the .45 Colt, .357 Magnum, .44 Special, and .44-40. For the first time the New Frontier was offered in a full nickel finish with some 509 revolvers being produced between 1981 and 1984. All nickelled New Frontiers had 7.5-inch barrels and were chambered in .357.

Of the approximately 14,274 New Frontiers produced between 1978 and 1985 when it was dropped from the Colt line, most were long barreled .45 Colts, there being 7,407 of this model produced. The next most prodigious model was also a 7.5-inch barreled revolver, but this one chambered the .44 Special round. The rarest regular production New Frontier was the 5.5-inch barreled .45 Colt, of which there were 57 produced. That is,

Upcoming Single Action Shooting Events

June 2004

June 18th - 20th: Circle K Regulators hosts Huluva Rukus - the SASS New York State Championship. Friday: 10 Side Events, Welcome Buffet. Saturday: 6 Main Stages, Indoor Banquet & Entertainment. Sunday: 4 Main Stages, Team Shoot, Awards Ceremony. Limited to first 200 shooters. For more information call 518-877-7834 or visit www.helugarukus.com.

August 2004

Aug.: 5 - 8: Rocky Mountain Regional Raid, 10 Main Stages, Awards Banquet, Formal Costume Contest, Casino Night, Sporting Costumes, Juniors shoot FREE. For Main Match info contact Steve "Bat Masterson" Fowler at 303-745-2529 or batfowler@aol.com. For vendor information contact Lee "Cutter Schofield" Wilson at 303-463-8131 or Cutter@territorialtrader.com. For sponsor information contact Jane "Aspen Filly" Nelson-Rud at 303-434-1204 or jfantom@aol.com.

September 2004

Sept. 3 - 5: Shootout at Three Rivers at the San Juan Wildlife Federation Range, Farmington, NM. 10 Stage Main Match, Pot Shoots, Side Matches. Saturday night dinner. Vendors welcome. Free dry camping on range. Entry deadline August 21. For more information call 505-325-2167 or visit www.sjwf.org.

Sept. 17 - 19: Purgatory in the Pines. First SASS New Jersey Championship hosted by the Jackson Hole Gang at Central Jersey Rifle & Pistol Club. 10 Main Stages. Side Matches Friday. Limited to first 160 shooters. For more information contact Flat Iron Frank at 609-693-6120 or e-mail Flat-Iron-Frank@comcast.net.

Sept. 30 - Oct. 3: Mason-Dixon Stampede. 2004 Northeast Regional. 10 Stage Main Match, Cannon & Gatlin Gun Demonstrations, Saturday Night Banquet & Dance, Top Gun Shoot-Off, Side Matches, Three Stage Blast, Val Sr. Challenge, Displays from the National Firearms Museum. For more information visit <http://www.tcandsc.org>.

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"With the ability to fire either the .44 Special or .44-40 round with a simple switch of its cylinder, this New Frontier proved to be a reliable and versatile carry piece."



Author's last acquired New Frontier is 7.5" 2nd Generation .45 Colt. Carved holster is from El Paso Saddlery.

unless you consider the few "full blued" revolvers produced, of which there were sixty 7.5-inchers in .45 Colt and twenty-five 7.5-inchers in .44 Special made. The rarest Third Generation New Frontier would be the Model P-4870UB which was a 7.5-inch "full blued" .45 Colt sporting an "unfluted" cylinder. Only one of this model is believed to have been made.

Compared To SAA

Although the New frontier was a much superior arm over the fixed-sighted SAA (due to the fact that it provided a much superior sight picture that could be dialed in for just about any and every loading desired), it was never as accepted or as sought after as was its cousin, the Single Action Army, hence its being tagged as Colt's "redheaded stepchild." Only just recently have the values for mint condition New Frontiers come close to those of their fixed-sighted stablemates. For the longest time, New Frontiers could be had for hundreds less than similar Colts sans sights. I think this was due to several reasons. First

and foremost, Americans just love the Single Action Army. Roy carried one and so did Hoppy. Wild Bill Elliot wore two, butta forward, and you never saw John Wayne in a Cowboy movie without one. It's what we baby boomers grew up on. The Single Action Army is steeped in our history.

The U.S. Cavalry adopted it in 1873 and it continued to be a firearm favored by lawmen and the lawless alike well into the 20th century. The American gun-buying public has never readily accepted changes to this revered historical pistol, and the New Frontier is a classic example of this unwillingness to accept change.

To a lesser degree, but still a factor in the New Frontier's less than sterling acceptance, was the fact that manufacturers like Ruger were building similar firearms that were not only more robust and reliable but could be had for less money. If you wanted to buy a gun that evoked American history, sought after by collectors, and stood to

appreciate in value, you bought a Colt SAA. If you wanted a rugged revolver with which to hunt, plink, or roam the hills, you bought a more modern Ruger Blackhawk and paid less for it to boot. The Ruger was good to go from its box, but if you really wanted that SAA or New Frontier to perform as good as it could, a lot of gunsmithing was needed.

Not a Cowboy movie was made that didn't feature the Colt SAA, but how many movies can you name where a Colt New Frontier was used? There's only one that I've ever seen and that was the 1996 film *Love Seat*. In this well-spun murder mystery, a sadistic Texas sheriff, Charlie Wade, played by Kris Kristofferson, a "bribe and bullets kind of sheriff," wielded a 7.5-inch New Frontier that he carried in a brown Buscadero rig with cartridges lining the belt. In a couple of scenes, the unmistakable outline of the New Frontier can be seen as Sheriff Wade misuses the power he possesses. The only irony here is that Sheriff Wade was supposedly killed in 1957, a full four-plus years before Colt developed this model of pistol. So much for cinematic accuracy, but I still liked this movie and recommend it.

Although I've always loved and coveted the Single Action Army, I've been more than frustrated trying to get most of them to shoot. It is a rare SAA that will shoot where you point it without some form of filing, bending, turning, or tweaking. And since I much prefer guns that shoot where I point them, a New Frontier would seem to be the logical choice were I faced with choosing between it and an SAA. I now



His second New Frontier is this 3rd Generation .45 Colt wearing "Ultra Ivory" handles from Eagle Grips. Holster rig is from El Paso Saddlery.

4 NEW COWBOY RIGS

(continued from page 44)

have three New Frontiers in my collection along with several extensively worked-over SAAs. If pushed to choose between them, I'm afraid the SAA would get the nod. Why? I guess 'cause I grew up on Gene, Roy and Hoppy, too. As Eddie Janis put it, "You don't buy a Colt Single Action for what it can do—you buy it for what it is."

My First New Frontier

I bought my first New Frontier quite a few years ago. It was a used Third Generation .45 Colt wearing the most common for its generation 7.5-inch barrel. Preferring my packing guns to wear shorter tubes, I immediately began searching for a replacement 4.75-inch barrel to install on my new prize. It seems that Colt must have used up all of its spare parts before discontinuing the New Frontier in 1985 because a 4.75-inch .45 Colt barrel was nowhere to be found. I did manage to come up with a 4.75-inch New Frontier barrel in .44-40 and I had this fitted to my Colt along with cylinders in .44-40 and .44 Special. With its springs lightened, its barrel/cylinder gap set at .005 of an inch, and its trigger pull re-cut to a crisp, clean-breaking 2.15 pounds, this New Frontier proved to be a delightful packing pistol. The replacement barrel I secured for my new short-barreled .44 had, much to my good fortune, a very squared-up and nicely serrated front sight that had somehow escaped mutilation. With the ability to fire either the .44 Special or .44-40 round with a simple switch of its cylinder, this New Frontier proved to be a reliable and versatile carry piece.


Although I normally shoot this New Frontier with handloads tailored especially for it, I fired it for this review with factory ammo from Hornady, Winchester and 3-D Blue.

My Second New Frontier

Still wanting a short-barreled New Frontier chambered in .45 Colt, when another long-barreled example crossed my path at a reasonable price, I purchased it. It, too, was a Third Generation pistol and a renewed search for a 4.75-inch barrel of appropriate lineage again proved fruitless. Oh, I finally actually heard of an available replacement barrel but by the time the news got to me it had already been promised to another writer for a similar project. Then

(continued on next page)

move the billet to increase belt size. For maximum long life, this moveable billet is fully lined. The belt has a row of 3/8 inch dome headed nickel-plated studs along each edge.

The single loop holster is fully lined with an open bottom and full skirt. The top lip of the pouch is turned out to ease holstering of the sixgun, in this case one of my Colt SA Armies. A hammer spur thong is included if one should need the extra security. The pouch is secured to the skirt by a single large oval loop, which attaches to the skirt with a single screw fastener. An unusual feature is a flap of leather, riveted to the face of the skirt where it's hidden by the pouch, which forms a tight firing belt loop so that the holster does not slip around on the belt. The holster rides at a very slight FBL (gun butt tipped forward) rake. The holster pouch, loop and full skirt are bordered by nickel spots that match those on the gunbelt. The entire Sheridan rig is finished in an attractive reddish brown. Though this is the first example I have seen of Tim Star's leatherwork, it is well designed and well executed by a top craftsman. 

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(continued from previous page)

"This revolver is impeccably tuned and timed, and everything rotates and stops at the same time for that bank vault door precision feel."



The "Last Frontier" is a rebuilt pistol by Eddie Janis, featuring many refinements not readily apparent. Custom features like genuine ivory stocks, a re-drilled light-throated cylinder, a color casehardened hammer and an Elliason rear sight assembly are but a few of the enhancements.

opportunity knocked. While slumming at Larry Mear's Gunsmithing one day, I spied a Third Generation New Frontier in Larry's shop in need of some major attention. It seems that its owner had managed to stick several .45 caliber lead slugs about 3.5 inches down its 7.5-inch tube. A slight bulge quite visible just behind this New Frontier's front sight betrayed their presence. Larry had managed to round up a replacement barrel of the same length and intended to re-barrel it when time permitted. "See if he'll sell me the plugged one," I asked Larry to relay to the New Frontier's owner. The price, as I recall, was a mere 20 bucks and, as far as Larry and I could tell, no damage had been sustained in the first 4.75 or so inches of it. Larry cut and crowned the barrel at 4.75 inches and Dave Carpenter, the in-house jeweler at Olde West Gun & Loan, did an excellent job of re-brazing the New Frontier's original front sight where it should be on the shortened tube. Since the front sight from the damaged barrel had the oft-encountered remnants of poor initial polishing, I spent an evening squaring it up prior to re-bluing. While I was at it, the top barrel mark-

ings were removed, as they were partially covered by the replacement front sight, since these markings are spread out over a longer area on the longer barrels.

After re-bluing, Larry screwed the new shortened tube to my New Frontier, setting its barrel/cylinder gap at .003 of an inch. Some smoothing of its innards and a spring set from Peacemaker Specialists brought this New Frontier's trigger down to a very respectable two pounds. During a grip review sometime back, I had Eagle Grips fit a set of their "Ultra Ivory" synthetic grips to the straps from this revolver and it continues to wear these handles today. With carefully assembled hand loads, this pistol can produce 25-yard groups under two inches. For this article, I fired it with factory "cowboy" loads from both Winchester and Black Hills.

My Last New Frontier

Content with my two Third Generation New Frontiers, it was only a chance encounter with a party selling a few "Colt" barrels that put me on the lookout for a third pistol. Although this individual didn't have

the particular SAA barrel I was looking for, he did have several 4.75-inch Second Generation New Frontier barrels still in their original wrappers. Although I should have bought them all, I asked him to pick out the one with the best front sight and send it to me. Not too long after that, I located an early long-barreled New Frontier at Olde West and soon made it my own.

I would have ordinarily just gone ahead and re-barreled this pistol, but I found myself at the range with it one day and it shot so well in its original configuration, I've resisted its modification. Not pristine by any means, having obviously been used by its former owner, a check of its serial number revealed it to be within the first 80 New Frontiers ever produced. Its action is crisp, its front sight is square, and it just shows the extra attention that went into the fit and finish of this era of pistol. A feeler gauge revealed its barrel/cylinder gap to have been factory set at .006 of an inch and its trigger released at a clean-breaking three pounds.

Timing on this 41-plus-year-old pistol was perfect with its bolt hitting perfectly in the bolt stop approach. Even after all this time and with the countless number of rounds that had undoubtedly been put through it, there was no cylinder dragline present. The only sign that something may have been worked on was that the cross pin holding the firing pin in place looked like it had been removed and replaced, indicating that at some point a new firing pin had probably been installed.

The Last Frontier

Coincidentally, the final New Frontier reviewed for this article has been given the name "The Last Frontier" by its maker. Starting with a Second Generation New Frontier, Eddie Janis of Peacemaker Specialists performed his magic on this pistol and transformed it into what has to be one of the most magnificent of the breed. Starting with a long-barreled pistol, Eddie installed a new 4.75-inch barrel in .45 Colt, re-cutting its forcing cone to 11 degrees and setting its



barrel/cylinder gap at a tight .003 of an inch. Prior to installing the new barrel, Eddie stoned the front sight's surfaces perfectly square, narrowing the blade to 0.110 of an inch and re-serrating it to mate up perfectly with the notch in the revolver's new rear sight assembly. The original Accro rear sight has been replaced with a more precise assembly from Elliason, having its corners rounded and the rear of the blade serrated.

Eddie next installed a new Second Generation .357 Magnum cylinder that had been re-chambered in .45 Colt with tight throats cut at 0.452 of an inch for best accuracy with cast bullets. The front of the cylinder was given a heavy bevel and cylinder flutes were re-cut 1880's style. The cylinder was precisely fitted to the cylinder window, utilizing a new bushing and an oversize bolt resulting in the elimination of practically all cylinder movement both fore and aft, and side-to-side. The hammer on the Last Frontier was color case-hardened reminiscent of first Generation Colts and matches the finish on the Second Generation frame perfectly.

Eddie then lightly beveled the heel and toe of the grip on the Last Frontier and performed similar work on the front of the ejector tube to ease reholstering. Inside the Last Frontier, Eddie installed one of his adjustable hammer stops that prevents the hammer and hand overtravel when cocking. This revolver is impeccably tuned and timed, and everything rotates and stops at the same time for that bank vault door precision feel. Eddie performed one of his "Gunslinger" action jobs on this Colt, giving it a buttery feel you have to experience to appreciate. In Eddie's own words: "Our priority in doing an action job is not to make the gun feel smooth and light but rather to build a gun that is totally reliable by eliminating wear and parts breakage. By accomplishing this goal, the byproduct is having a pistol that feels like it's running on ball bearings but locks up like a bank vault." The stocks on Eddie's Last Frontier are one-piece elephant ivory, showing just a hint of enamel and these are precisely fit on the Colt's frame. They are simply gorgeous.

Lastly, Eddie installed "fire blue" screws throughout, along with a like-fin-

ished trigger and base pin latch. The Last Frontier is truly one magnificent revolver. Unfired since its final assembly, I didn't get to shoot Eddie's creation but he assured me it shot very well before final finishing. I believe him.

Final Notes

So there you have it, four examples of Colt's redheaded stepchild—the New Frontier. Shunned for many years as inferior to the 5AA, only now is this model pistol starting to become more appreciated. And this is, I guess, as it should be, as it is everything an SAA is and then some. ☐

For more information contact:

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Although not particularly more accurate than any other Colt single-action, the New Frontier is unique in that its point of impact can be adjusted to put its big slugs where the revolver is pointed. Even with this huge advantage, most "gun people" prefer the fixed-sighted SSA to the New Frontier.