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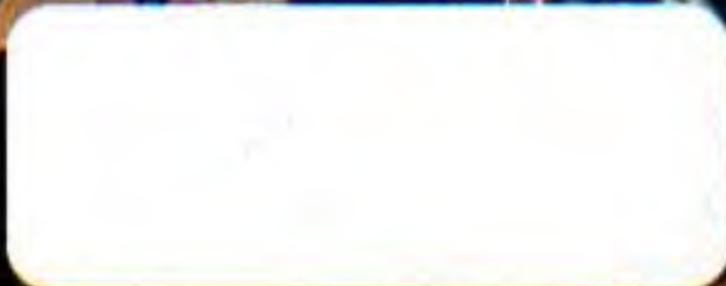
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PISTOLSMITHING

Alex Hamilton

**THE INSIDE
SCOOP ON
PISTOLSMITHING
TECHNIQUES**

RUSTY COLTS

Since the advent of Cowboy Action shooting more and more Colt Single Action Army (SAA) revolvers are showing up in gunsmith's shops. In fact, old single actions are beginning to come out of closets, attic chests, and grandpa's house faster than any other time — many of them holding significant historical importance. Shooters are taking these fine old guns out to the range for a shot or two just to try to absorb a little of the gun's history. The temptation is great, but *don't do it!* If these old fight-equalizers could talk they would tell some exciting stories, but you don't want to tell the story about the time you lost your trigger finger when Grandpa's Peacemaker blew up.

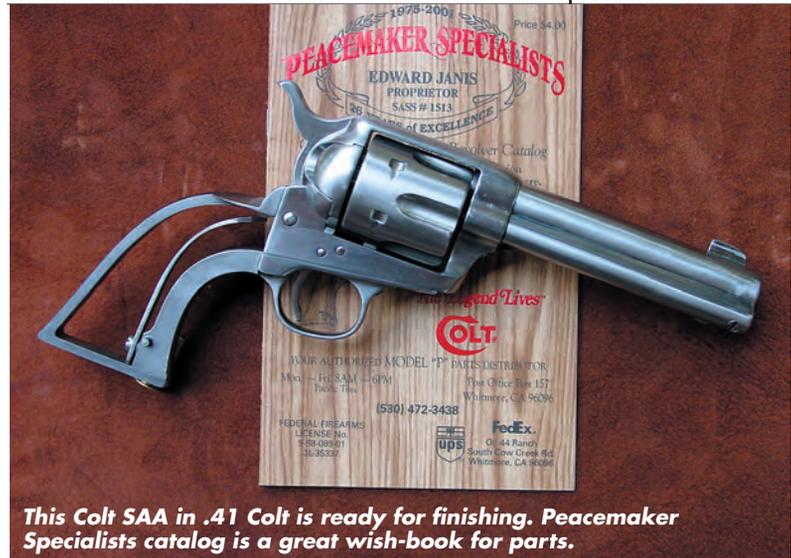
Just shooting an old Colt with modern, jacketed ammunition could completely ruin a piece of historical importance or an old family heirloom. Even though the SAA is a very simple design with few moving parts as compared to a Colt Government Model, almost 100% of the old Colts coming into my shop have multiple problems needing the attention of an experienced, competent pistolsmith. A "quick fix" for over 100 years of use will not get it running. If you can think of a quick fix, don't try it. And, a word of advice to all gunsmiths out there: Regardless of cost, fix it the right way or you will find yourself in swirling deep water. If you can't determine the cause of the problem by

Fix-it List

If you have an old first, second or even third generation Colt here are a few things you can do to achieve your own cursory inspection. If you have a first generation Colt, especially an older model, you can complete your inspection pretty quick by looking at the condition of the outside surface. If it is rusted to the point where there are pits in the cylinder and other parts, you can brush it up a little with oiled "0000" steel wool. Then, get it to a competent single action gunsmith like Larry Crow of Competitive Edge (www.competitiveedgegunworks.com) or Hamilton Bowen at Bowen Classic Arms (www.bowenclassicarms.com) for evaluation and restoration. The rust on these single actions is more than likely still alive, so brushing some of the heavy oxidation off the surface and applying lubricating oil will help stop further growth.

A note here about oil — be sure you use an oil that says, "lubricating oil" on the label and not "penetrating oil." Penetrating oil contains low viscosity solvents such as alcohol and others designed to carry the oil solution into tiny cracks and crevices to help soften live rust and assist disassembly of locked-up threads. When the solvent evaporates, it leaves some oil, but takes most of it with it, leaving little behind to halt oxidation.

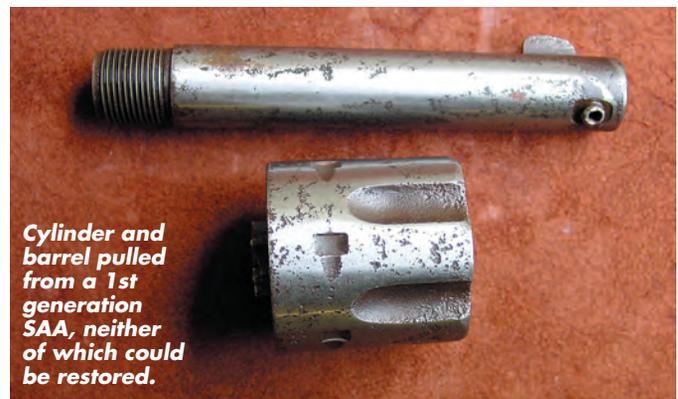
Continuing your check, simply hold the old Colt tightly in one hand and the cylinder between your thumb and other fingers and move the cylinder forward and back. If there is perceptible longitudinal play where you can see daylight between the cylinder bushing and the front inside of the frame you will need a new oversize bushing to remove this, "endfloat." If it can move the cylinder up and down on the base pin you have excessive cylinder wobble and should not attempt to fire the gun under any circumstances. If there is any movement in the cylinder when it is locked up with the hammer cocked, it's too loose to properly line up with the barrel you have a dangerous condition set up, which will end in serious damage to the handgun and you if you shoot it.



This Colt SAA in .41 Colt is ready for finishing. Peacemaker Specialists catalog is a great wish-book for parts.

just hearing and seeing the symptoms, do not attempt to fix it by trial and error — you will be sorry!

The main areas of inspection with the old Colt single actions will be the firing pin, recoil plate, chambers, throats, forcing cone, internal barrel condition, crown and cylinder throat lineup with the barrel. Critical parts to be inspected internally are the hammer notches, hand and spring assembly, bolt, trigger, trigger/bolt spring and loading gate spring and detent.



Cylinder and barrel pulled from a 1st generation SAA, neither of which could be restored.

Gunsmith Tip

For over a hundred years shooters have been adding a shim between the bottom of the Colt mainspring and the front, inside grip frame in order to reduce the pressure of the spring on the hammer and lighten the trigger pull. In a short period of time the leather or other soft material compresses and the mainspring becomes loose. Instead of using leather you can use a split washer and get the same effect permanently. Keep in mind this old spacer trick does not really have anywhere near the effect of a good action job by an experienced gunsmith like Larry Crow or Hamilton Bowen.

