

COWBOY SHOOTOUT COMPETITION!

**PREMIER
ISSUE!**

Combat Handguns Presents

GUINS

OF THE OLD WEST

No. 13

AMERICA'S FASTEST GROWING GUNSPORT

What You Need To Know:

- How To Get Started
- Guns Of Cowboy Champs
- Shooting The "Oldies"
- Tips & Strategies
- Rimfire Replicas



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Gun That Won The West!
COLT SAA .44-40



Gun Tests:

Colt Single Action Army .44-40
Custom Ruger Bisley .45 Colt
Heritage Rough Rider .22LR
Henry .22 Lever Action
Custom Colt SAA .357 Magnum
Browning Model 92 .44/.357 Magnum



Printed in U.S.A.

2 Pair to Draw to

Getting an edge on the competition requires a common cartridge, lighter bullets, and a smaller caliber.

BY TODD LOFGREN



When I began competing in cowboy action shooting several years ago, I did so with a third generation Colt Single Action Army in .44 Special that I happened to own at the time. Although this short-barreled Colt had shot fine in .44 Special, because I had a cute little Winchester 92 Carbine in .44-40, I had a second cylinder fitted to my Colt enabling me to use the same fodder in both arms. This combination worked out fine for a while, but it didn't take me long to realize that because of the evolution of cowboy course designs I needed a second pistol with which to compete.

Not being totally enamored with the .44-40 round due to its inherent reloading difficulties (i.e., thin, delicate brass and attendant dimensional problems), I soon acquired a second Colt SAA, but this time obtained it in its formidable .45 Colt chambering.

Actually, that's not quite true now that I think about it. As I recall, when I purchased the second Colt it was actually a second generation NRA Commemorative piece with a 7-1/2-inch barrel chambered in .357 Magnum. There were a couple of reasons I purchased this particular pistol. Firstly, there came a time in the State of California when a law was





Author is extremely pleased with way two pair of pistols turned out, and he still uses both regularly. However, if he were shooting to win, he'd strap on the lighter recolling, shiny pair of Colts in .357 Magnum, top, in preference to those in .45 Colt, bottom.

“Needless to say, I found juggling three very similar-looking rounds quite frustrating. Through very deliberate and conscious efforts on my part I made it through that match.”



The author's brace of .357 Colts housed in holsters made for him some years ago by Bud Polan, a holster maker from Susanville, CA. The matching belt came by way of David E. Nitzel of Dave's Hide-Out, whose home is in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

implemented that said that the sale of guns between private parties had to be accomplished through a licensed dealer. No more unpapered private-party sales. However, when this law was first drafted it exempted those arms that were deemed curios and relics by the Federal Government, whether they be handgun, rifle or shotgun. This meant that any commemorative pistol or revolver designated as a curio or relic could

still be readily bought and sold between private parties without the attendant necessity of documenting those transactions and essentially registering that handgun with the government. No registration—no waiting period.

Until California plugged that hole in their law, dealings in commemorative short guns in California was brisk. Let's face it, there are still people today who prefer to buy unregistered or undocumented arms out of the fear that one day the government will come knocking. Let's hope those fears are unfounded.

Anyway, the primary reason I bought this commemorative Colt was because it was (at the time) much cheaper than anything else available from Colt, be it first, second or third generation.

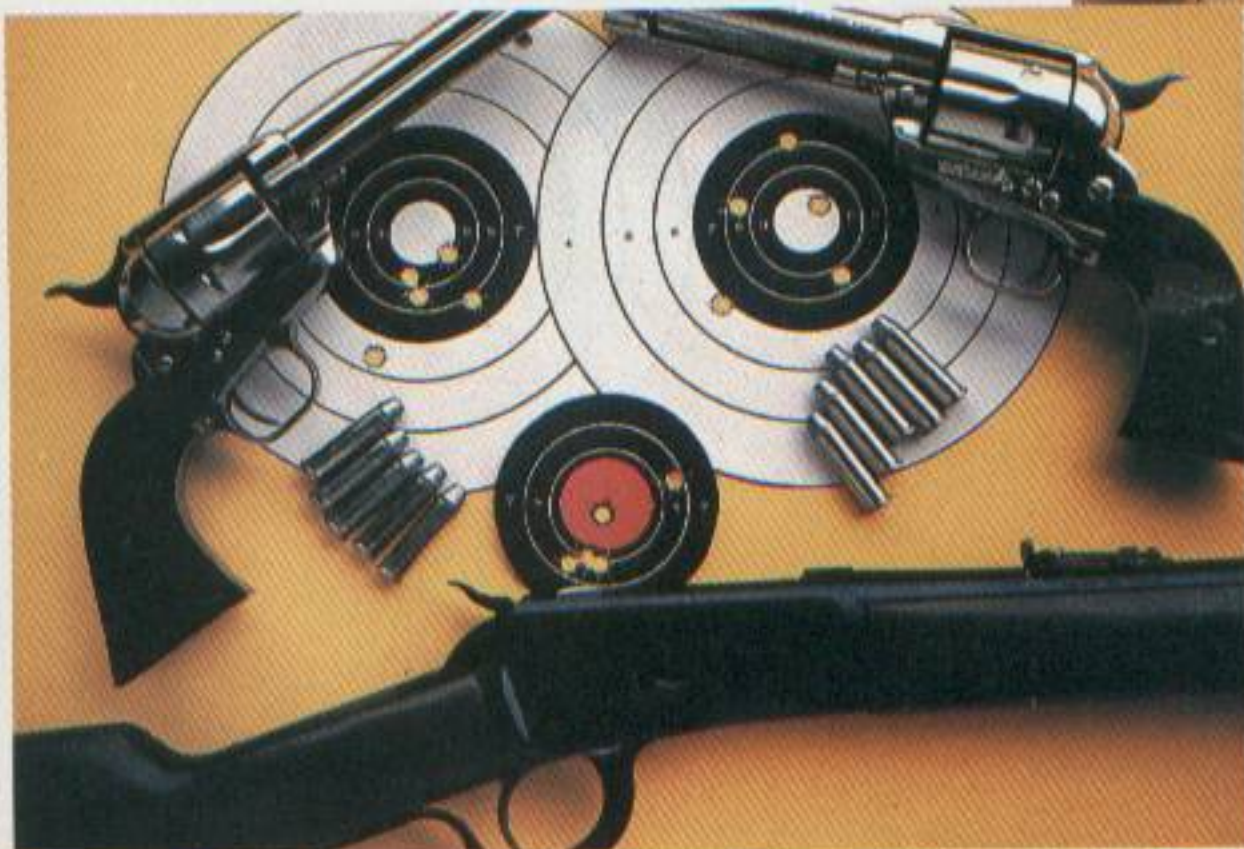
Off came the 7-1/2-inch tube to be replaced with the much preferable (to me, anyway) 4-3/4-inch version

in .45 Colt. Contact with John A. Kopec of Kopec Enterprises in Whitmore, California, resulted in the acquisition of a rechambered second generation cylinder (these NRA commemoratives were among the last of the second generation guns produced by Colt) with tight cylinder throats and a beveled leading edge reminiscent of those cylinders found on SAs produced in the 1870s. As I recall, it was Kopec who installed my barrel and fitted it with the rechambered cylinder.

It was also around this time period that



The author started his cowboy shooting endeavors using a SAA in .44-40, one in .45 Colt and a Browning 92 in .44 Magnum. Keeping those three very similar-looking rounds (pictured) in their respective firearms required extreme care and caution, eventually leading the author to a consolidation of calibers.



Through some judicious load development the author was able to get all three guns to shoot the same cast bullet—a 125-grain TCBB design from the Oregon Trail Bullet Company over 3.6 grains of Alliant's Red Dot powder—to the same point-of-aim. Pistol groups were fired at 20 yards while the center rifle target was fired with the Browning 92 at 35 yards.

a Browning Model 92, an excellent reproduction of the famous Winchester Model 1892 made for Browning in Japan, found its way into my possession. Browning produced this most excellent little carbine from the late 1970s (I believe) until its discontinuance in 1986, in two chamberings: the .357 Magnum and the .44 Magnum. Mine was a .44.

I remember going to my first two-day cowboy match equipped with a .44-40 Colt on my left hip, a .45 Colt on my right, and a lever gun in .44 Magnum. You don't realize how similar these rounds are to each other until you get them all together. Stuffing a .45 Colt into a .44-40 chamber is

virtually impossible, but the reverse ain't so. A .44 Magnum round (essentially loaded way down to nothing more than .44 Special ballistics) will chamber and fire in a .45 Colt cylinder; however, not with a great deal of accuracy, and the fired brass comes out truly unique looking. I just knew that if I inadvertently slipped a .45 Colt through the loading gate on my .44 rifle the resultant jam when that round tried to enter that smaller chamber would be disastrous to my score.

Needless to say, I found juggling three very similar-looking rounds quite frustrating. Through very deliberate and conscious efforts on my part I made it through that match without any mishaps...unless you call that one ill-shaped .44 Magnum case I found amongst my empties a mishap. You know, I didn't have a clue when that occurred. I'm sure it must have been one of those "rare" misses I had that day, what with a .429 bullet bouncing its way down a .452 bore.

Toward One Common Cartridge

That did it. I had to reduce the number of different rounds I was dealing with. I managed to secure a second NRA Commemorative Colt on which to build my second pistol. By this time, John Kopec had sold his Colt parts and services business to one Eddie Janis who renamed it "Peacemaker Specialists." Eddie has carried on in fine tradition and Peacemaker Specialists continues to offer a complete line of genuine Colt parts for all generations of Colts, plus complete restoration services, rebarreling, caliber changes, action jobs and the like. If you need something for, or done to, your Colt Peace-

maker, then Peacemaker Specialists is the place to find or get it. Contact Eddie by phone at (530) 472-3438, or write to him at Peacemaker Specialists, P.O. Box 157, Dept. CH, Whitmore, California, 96096. His catalog of parts and services is available for \$3.

Anyway, I had Eddie rebarrel and recylinder my second Colt to match my first one. A 4-3/4-inch .45 Colt barrel was installed along with a beveled cylinder to match the configuration of the other gun. Matching one-piece checkered rosewood grips completed the pair.

I slicked up the actions on these two SAs by lightening springs and adjusting sear angles. I originally set them up with very light mainsprings, but decided that the light mainsprings resulted in a much too slow hammer fall and later went back to heavier springs to increase hammer speed.

Not knowing any better at the time, I sighted these Colts to shoot a reload consisting of 8 grains of Unique powder sparked by a Winchester primer pushing a home cast 255-grain bullet of conventional .45 Colt profile that I had cast from a Lyman mold No. 454190.

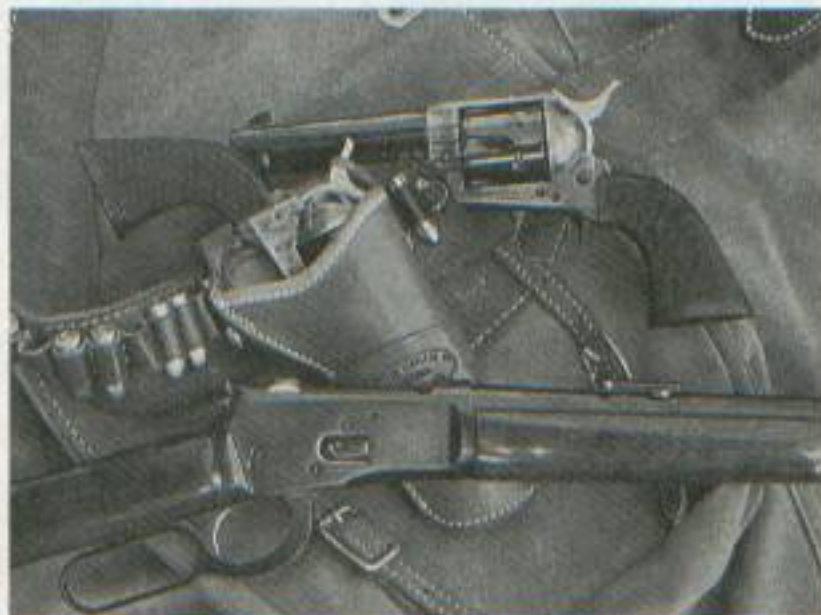
Adjusting Fixed Sights

I know what some of you are thinking. How did he sight in those fixed-sighted Colts? Well, there are several ways to make a fixed-sighted revolver shoot more where it looks. If your particular pistol shoots low, for instance, you can file down the front sight to bring up its point of impact. This must be done very judiciously, as this metal comes off much more easily than it can be put back on and it doesn't take much metal removal to make a major shift out at 20 to 25 yards.

If your particular piece shoots high, you can shift its point of impact at the target by reducing the weight of your projectile; that is, try some 200-grain bullets instead of those of 255 grains. Lighter bullets will shoot lower,

particularly in wheelguns, due to their reduced recoil and barrel time (that is the time it takes the bullet to exit the barrel in relation to how far the barrel has risen due to recoil).

If your SA is shooting low and you can safely increase your bullet weight, this too can raise its point of impact. If your hogleg shoots left or right, you can adjust for



Completion of a second like Colt in .45 caliber, with both pistols sporting checkered one-piece rosewood grips, helped alleviate the author's potential ammo mix-ups.

windage by slightly turning the barrel in the frame, thus moving the front sight. To move the bullet strike or point of impact, say, to the left you must unscrew the barrel slightly, thus moving the front sight to the right and vice versa for the opposite direction.

Lighter Bullets

Top dogs in this sport have always been experimenting with ways to increase their speed. Those sticking with their big bore single actions started gravitating towards lighter projectiles with bullets as light as 155 grains in their .45 Colts, as opposed to the .45 Colt's normal bullet weight of 255 to 260 grains. This greatly reduced recoil but often caused major shifts in point-of-aim/point-of-impact, many pistols now shooting inches below where they formerly shot.

Although I experimented with lighter bullets, I eventually found I could reduce the recoil of my guns somewhat and still have them print fairly close to where they did with hotter loads by reducing my powder charge from 8 grains of Alliant's Unique to 7.2 grains, or as an alternate to 5.6 grains of Red Dot powder from the same company.

So for a couple of years I shot the two



After "sighting in," both of the author's .45s were able to produce well-centered groups utilizing the same home-brewed reloads. The targets pictured here were fired by the author off the bench at 20 yards. Getting both of your pistols to print to the same point-of-aim using the same load is one of the keys to cowboy action shooting.

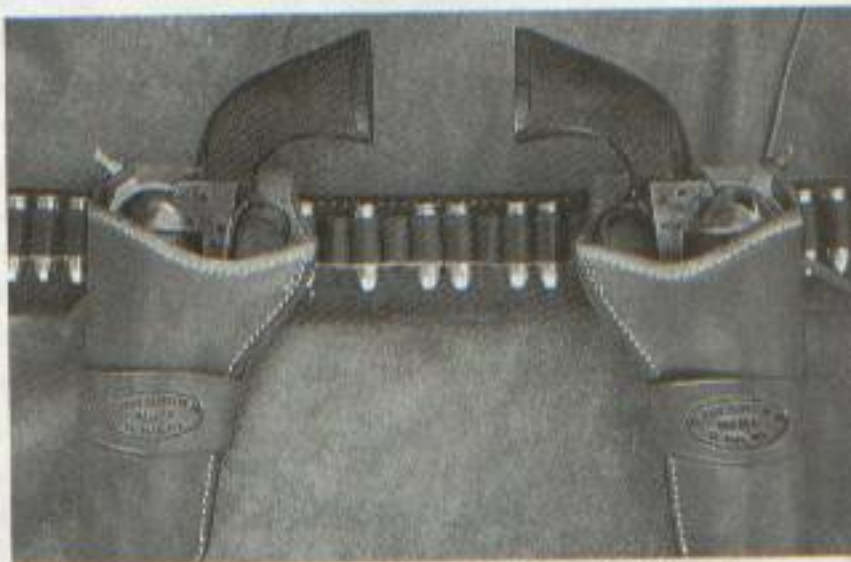
.45 Colts together with the Browning 92 in .44 Magnum. To make things easier to keep track of I reloaded the .45 Colt loads in brass cases and the reduced .44 Magnum loads in nickel cases purchased through Midway. Thus, at a glance I could tell the .44s from the .45s. I entertained the thought of having my Browning .44 Magnum rebarreled to .45 Colt, but in checking with a couple of sources found this conversion much too costly. Besides, my little Browning carbine shot right nicely with a 240-grain lead bullet originally home cast but later purchased from the Oregon Trail Bullet Company out of Baker City, Oregon. This bullet loaded over 8 grains of Unique, ignited by a Winchester large pistol primer, put up in those shiny nickel cases by Midway tended to produce nice, tight little groups all the way out to 75 yards.

Reduced Recoil Smaller Calibers

The desire for reduced recoil (and to some extent reduced muzzle blast) began leading many cowboy competitors to smaller calibers. Initially, the .32-20 round got a lot of attention. The .32-20 could be loaded with projectiles in the 100- to 115-grain range and if velocities were kept low this was a light recoiling combination, indeed.

Another .32 caliber, the .32 H&R Magnum, also got some attention in this effort to reduce recoil and therefore increase speed. The little six-guns in .32 H&R Mag that Ruger brought out on their Single Six frame were the hot ticket for a while, but drew a lot of heat for their

"gaminess," a trait frowned upon by cowboy action shooting founding fathers. I heard of one instance where a major cowboy shooting event was won by a pistolier using two of the Rugers loaded with cartridges put up in .32 S&W short cases, a round that will chamber and fire in a .32 H&R Magnum cylinder, much like a .38 Special can be fired in a piece chambered



The author's pair of .45s are shown here housed in their El Paso Saddlery "Duke" holsters riding on a roughout money belt from the same maker.

for the .357 Magnum. Since the majority of targets used in cowboy action shooting are metal and must only be hit (as opposed to being knocked down or somehow displaced), this .32 S&W short shooter merely pinged his way into the Winner's Circle.

I knew my solution to increased shooting speed rested with reduced recoil, but not wanting to be considered too controversial, I elected to pursue new pistols chambered in .357 Magnum.

A trade with a fellow cowboy shooter found me in possession of a like-new nickel-plated third generation Colt SAA chambered in .357 Magnum. This particular

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■ Guns & Gear

"POP'S COLT"

The ultimate cowboy action sixgun? Let's get the details!

By Todd Lofgren



I inherited my love of guns from my father.

My earliest memories of my Dad and his guns stem from the mid-1950s. It was during these years that Pop acquired a Smith & Wesson 6-inch Highway Patrolman .357 Magnum which, as I recall, he equipped with oversized imitation stag grips made by Fritz. This he carried in a very handsome buscadero rig replete with cartridge loops that went all around the belt. His next handgun was one of Bill Ruger's then new Blackhawk revolvers, also in .357 Magnum. This was a 4-5/8-inch early model, now known as the "Flattop," sporting black hard rubber grips. Again, he had a custom black "cowboy rig" built in which to carry this modern western-style revolver. Many years have passed since Pop started his modest collection of guns, but it wasn't until 1992 in his 73rd year that Pop bought his first real Colt Single Action.

"One Real Colt"

I remember Pop saying one day that he wanted to own one real Colt Single Action

Pop atop his trusty steed at one of our local Cowboy matches. It was his love of this game that generated his desire to own his first "real" Colt.



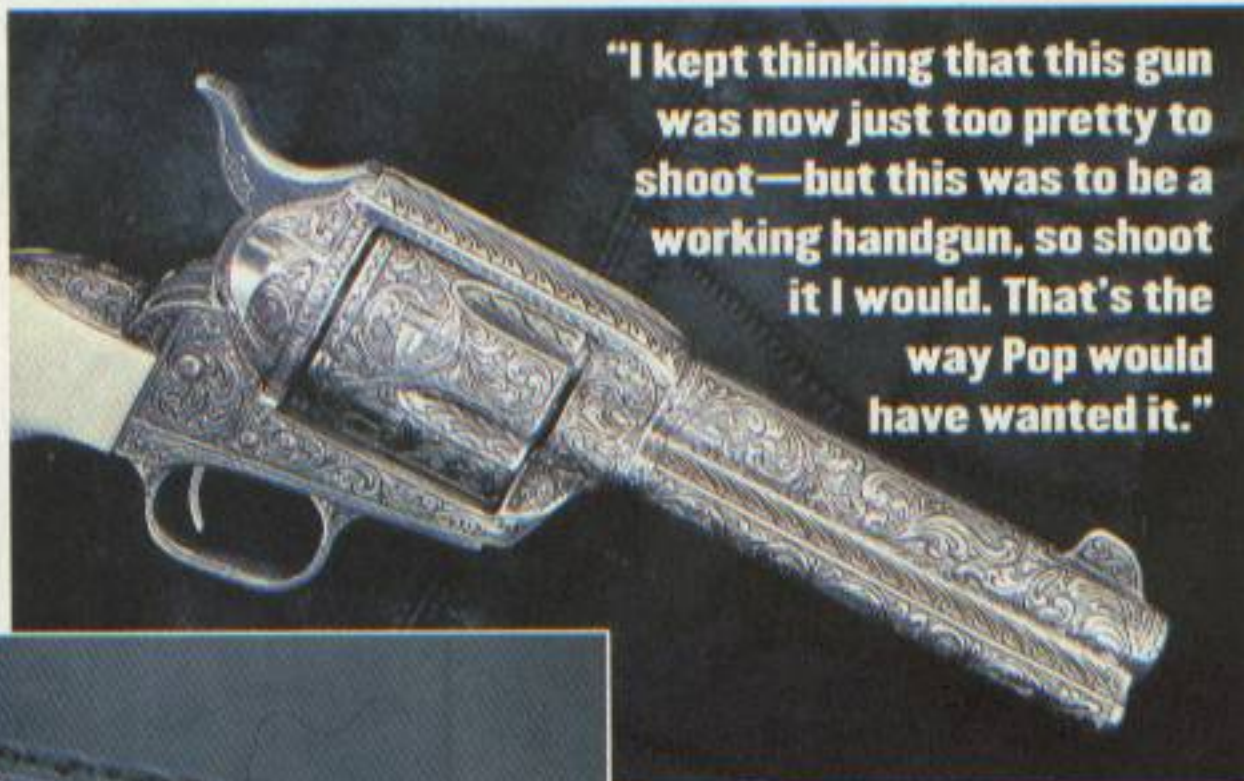


Pap's Colt as it looked when Pap took possession of it in December, 1992. Originally a 7-1/2-inch barreled .357 Magnum, it had been fitted with a short .45 Colt barrel and the cylinder was rebores to accept the much larger .45 round.

before he died. I'm sure this was provoked by the fact that he and I were then involved with cowboy action shooting—a shooting sport that just screamed for the ownership of genuine Colt pistols.

Up until he obtained his first "bona fide" Model P, he had been shooting a Dakota single action which—as most if not all of you readers know—is a close copy of a Colt Peacemaker. Close—but still a copy.

I think I helped Dad make his choice to buy a Colt, as I had managed to acquire several of my own Colts that I was using in my cowboy shooting pursuits. When Pop



"I kept thinking that this gun was now just too pretty to shoot—but this was to be a working handgun, so shoot it I would. That's the way Pop would have wanted it."

Another view of the engraving on Pop's Colt. Note the depth and virtual 100 percent coverage.



A close-up shot of Finley's engraving. The author was completely satisfied with the job done by this talented engraver.

told me he wanted me to find him a good, short-barreled Single Action Army, I naturally turned to fellow cowboy competitor and shooting buddy Eddie Janis, Proprietor and Gunsmith of Peacemaker Specialists located in Whitmore, California. Eddie specializes in Colt Single Actions and his services range from genuine Colt parts through complete Colt overhauls and restorations.

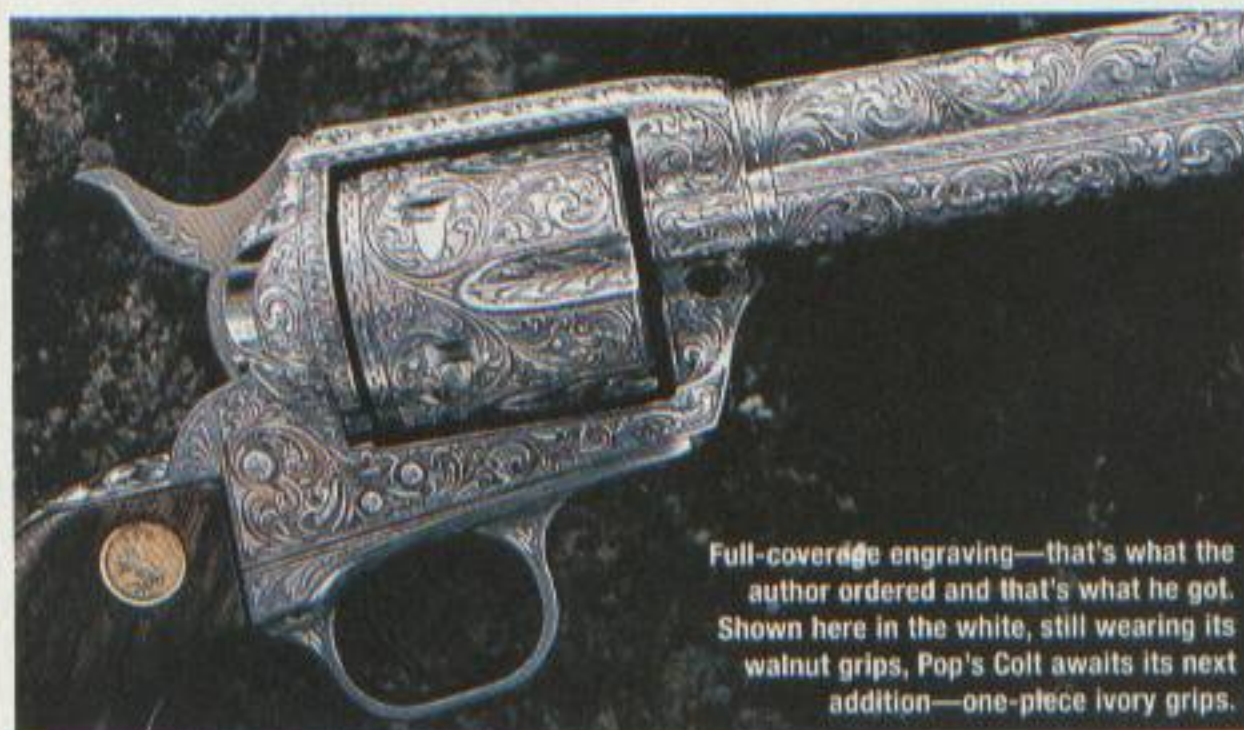
I contacted Eddie and he told me he had a Colt Single Action in .357 Magnum with a 7-1/2-inch barrel, which could be used to build Pop's Colt. Pop wanted his Colt in traditional .45 caliber, and he wanted it with Colt's abbreviated 4-3/4-inch barrel length. No problem—a barrel swap was easy. Pull off the 7-1/2-inch .357 barrel and screw in the shorter one of .45

caliber. For a couple of reasons it was decided to rebores the Colt's original cylinder, opening it up from .357 to .45 Colt, a popular service offered by Peacemaker Specialists. Doing it this way permitted

retention of the cylinder originally fitted to this gun but, more importantly, also enhanced accuracy as Eddie rebores his cylinders with cylinder throats, or mouths, much tighter than those produced by Colt. This, my friends, results in much tighter groups when using lead bullets cast and sized the same or as close as possible to throat diameter.

The Basic Colt Model P

The gun Eddie had was a third generation Model P that had been manufactured in 1979. Except for a couple of blemishes on its case hardening, it was mint. The 4-3/4-inch .45 Colt barrel was screwed on so its front sight was standing straight up and



Full-coverage engraving—that's what the author ordered and that's what he got. Shown here in the white, still wearing its walnut grips, Pop's Colt awaits its next addition—one-piece ivory grips.

down and the .357 Magnum cylinder was rechambered to Pop's requested .45 Colt caliber. Pop also requested that the hard rubber grips be replaced with ones of wood, and this too was accomplished at Peacemaker Specialists.

Shooting Impressions

I remember shooting Pop's Colt before he took possession of it and found that it was capable of producing some pretty small groups at 20 to 25 yards, albeit not to point of aim. Groups obtained when firing my home-brewed load of a hard cast Lyman 454190 weighing in at around 255

the Paynes Creek area located northeast of Red Bluff, CA, to shoot a local cowboy match. By now, Pop had purchased a second strong-side holster from El Paso Saddlery to match his existing "Duke" rig, enabling him to carry his new Colt sort of crossdraw, while his old trusty Dakota rode strong side. As I recall this match, Pop had some real trouble hitting things with his new Colt, which was resoundly outshot by his Dakota. Pop called me a week or so later and said he was ready for me to "sight in" his Colt.

There was a cowboy match scheduled for the third week in June, so Pop and I agreed that we'd sight in his Colt when he



Silver-plated pistol, buckle, concho and bullets, Pop's Colt will be treasured by the author until it's passed on to the next Lofgren.



Any cowboy action shooter would be proud to own and shoot Pop's Colt. Rest assured, it will not be locked away in a gun safe or displayed in some fancy glass-fronted, walnut case. Pop's Colt was destined to be used, and used it will be.

grains over 8 grains of Unique sparked by either a Federal or Winchester large pistol primer, although clustering into pleasing 1-1/2 to 2-inch groups, were hitting a full five inches low and a tad left. Pop said not to fool with it until he had a chance to try it out. I remember him saying that he "liked to hold a lot of front sight" and thought that this might be just the ticket the way it was.

In December of 1992, Pop took possession of his Colt.

Since Pop and I lived a couple hundred miles apart, it was a couple of months before we were able to get together again in

came up a couple of days before the match. We never got to do this, as on June 1, 1993, just 23 days prior to his 74th birthday Pop suddenly and unexpectedly passed away.

As was Dad's wish, I inherited all of his guns and among them was his Colt Model P, Serial No. SA14063. One day while looking over this gun I noticed signs that Pop had performed some "shade tree" gunsmithing to it during the short time he owned it. The first thing I noticed was the screwdriver scratches on the upper grip strap caused by using an inappropriately sized screwdriver to remove the grip frame screws. Removal of the grip strap revealed that Pop—in an apparent attempt to ease up the trigger pull—had placed a metal washer behind the mainspring. I guess this was his version of the old trick of placing a pad of leather behind the mainspring to

lighten spring pressure and hammer fall. It was then and there that I decided to complete Pop's Colt.

First, I pulled it apart and slicked up its action by lightening the mainspring, bolt/trigger spring and hand spring and changed the sear angle ever so slightly to eliminate all the creep from its trigger pull. When finished, Pop's Colt sported a much softer 2-1/2-pound creep-free pull.

The next step involved getting the gun to shoot where it pointed. Because this particular SA shot so low, I decided to first file down and reshape the front sight to bring up its point of impact. With this accomplished, a slight adjustment for windage completed the sight in. With my cast bullet over 8 grains of Unique, Pop's Colt now shot to point of aim at 25 yards.

"What now?" was my next thought. I already had several Colts paired up for cowboy action shooting and wasn't quite sure where Pop's Colt would fit in. Then it dawned on me—this Colt was now slicked up and accurate, so why not gussy it up as a lasting tribute to the greatest father a kid could ever have had? Besides, of all the guns I owned, I wanted one special one to pass on to my own son, Chad, when my shooting days were over.

Full coverage engraving, ivory grips and silver plate. Yep—that's what I wanted. Full coverage engraving, ivory grips and silver plating!

The Engraving

It just so happened that Redding, CA, was home to one damn fine gun engraver. Almost weekly I would see varying examples of his work prominently displayed in the showcases at Olde West Gun & Loan, Redding, California's best place to buy a gun. Clint Finley is his name.

Clint Finley, Engraver

Clint Finley has been engraving guns on and off for nigh on 27 years. He is a charter member of the Firearms Engravers Guild of America, Inc., and has been classified by a panel of Guild engravers as a "professional engraver," the highest status recognized by the Guild.

Finley is a self-taught engraver who started with hammer and chisel. This he pursued for his first 10 years of engraving, eventually moving on to a Graver Meister (a pneumatic vacuum-powered engraver) then and currently to the use of a Graver Max air-powered tool. Finley estimates that 99 percent of his work is done with the Graver Max, but he sometimes still uses the hammer and chisel when working on certain types of firearms or attempting a certain type of design.

Fully engraved, one-piece ivories and silver plate; Pop's Colt is complete. Pop's Colt shown with five appropriately silver-plated bullets and Pop's SASS badge #1330. Pop's handle was "Old Hopalong."

"I remember Pop saying one day that he wanted to own one real Colt Single Action before he died."

All I told Finley when delivering Pop's Colt to him was I wanted everything engraved, everything—and I didn't want a straight line amongst it—everything should be flowing. We looked at several books of engraving to ensure that my somewhat inept description of what I wanted and Finley's understanding of it were one and the same, and I periodically checked back with Clint to kibitz as his work progressed.

In late June of 1997 Clint called to say he was putting the finishing touches on the Colt, and arrangements were made for me to pick it up a day or two later.

Absolutely gorgeous!!—that's what came to mind when I first saw Clint's work—absolutely gorgeous!!

It was just like I had envisioned it, only better. Clint had really outdone himself with his work on Pop's Colt. He had taken me literally when I told him I wanted everything engraved. The coverage was—well—extensive.

Clint put in about 65 hours working his magic on Pop's Colt, describing the style he employed as "American." Clint said his style was heavily influenced by the likes of Cuno A. Helfricht, a late 19th century factory Colt engraver, and L.D. Nimschke, a sub-contract engraver for Colt, Smith & Wesson and others from 1850 through 1900.

I was anxious to see if Clint's removal and replacement of the Colt's barrel during engraving had affected the previous sight

work I had performed on it. I had also heard that the removal of metal during the engraving process could also have an effect on how the gun might now shoot.

It looked almost too pretty to shoot, but this was to be a working pistol I reminded myself—one to be carried, admired and shot. So off to the range I went.

More Shooting Impressions

As it turned out, there had been nothing to worry about. The Colt shot just as well after engraving as it had before I delivered it to Clint. Several 5-shot groups fired off the sandbags at 20 yards showed me that there had been no shift in point of impact, and groups were still as uniform and centered as they were before. Groups size ran from about 1-1/2 inches to 2-1/2 inches, impacting the target at or slightly above my 6 o'clock hold on the black.

About The Grips

Okay—now for the grips. As it turned out, Finley not only engraves but he can also make grips. I had managed to secure two slabs of ivory, perfectly matched for grain and color, which would make the perfect set of one-piece stocks for the Colt, and these I entrusted to Finley to shape, fit and finish.

In September of 1997, Clint called to tell me he had finished the grips. Now, grip making is not something that Clint partic-

Although influenced heavily by the works of L.D. Nimschke and others, Finley has developed a similar but unique style of scroll execution that he hopes will someday be recognized for its own characteristics. This style he refers to as "American."

Finley, like most artists, can make just about anything that he sets his mind to. Knives, he's made them. Holsters—yeah, he can make them, too—all carved (leather engraved, if you will) and accented with silver-buckles and conchos that he's cast and engraves himself.

In fact, Clint's considering offering complete Western packages in the future consisting of one or a pair of engraved single actions fitted with one-piece ivory or other handle material holstered in his handcrafted leather, paired with a bone-handled or ivory-stocked Bowie knife of his (or customer's) design. This package could also include an engraved Winchester 73 or 92 if that were the customer's wish. All this by one creator—that would be a package to own.

Right now Finley's turnaround time and prices are what I consider mighty reasonable. But these, like all things, are subject to change. So if you've got a shootin' iron that's just crying out to be engraved or the idea of one of his future Western packages strikes your fancy, you might consider giving Clint a call. He can be reached at (530) 246-1437, but don't be surprised if his phone is busy when you call. Good things don't go unnoticed for long.

ularly wants to do but, as far as I'm concerned, he's damn good at it. Actually, when I asked him about it, Clint said he didn't mind building grips for a gun he was engraving (a great time to have that done, by the way), but he really didn't want to just build grips. If it was part of a package deal including his engraving—okay—but he considered the grip building an adjunct to his engraving, not a primary service he offers.

One piece and expertly fitted to its frame, these ivories really enhanced the appearance of Pop's Colt.

Pop's Colt was nearing completion. All that remained was the plating. I had decided early on that I wanted this gun plated in silver. I have other Colts in nickel, but this pistol cried out for silver plating. Not as durable as nickel plating—nonetheless—silver it had to be.

The Plating

Getting this pistol silver plated turned out to be a little more problematic than I anticipated. I had perused several gun magazines and the Gunsmith Services section of the Gun List looking for silver platers but, as most of them were located states away, I didn't find one that fit my purpose. You see, the UPS strike had just recently settled and, although those brown panel trucks were now making their

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