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Combat Handguns® Presents #48 SPRING 2006

GUNSTM

OF THE OLD WEST

THE GUNS OF GUS McCREA

- Uberti 1860 Army .44
- Taylor's Walker .45
- Uberti Henry .45

Clint Eastwood's
PALE RIDER
KIRST-STRITE
REMINGTON .44

Uberti USA Henry .45

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Taylor's Walker .44/.45 ★ Uberti Henry .45LC

Ruger New Vaquero .357 Mag ★ Taylor's 1892 Takedown .44-40
Kirst-Strite Pale Rider Remington .44 ★ Pietta's Colt 1851 Navy .44



A FEW FAVORITE

BY TODD LOFGREN

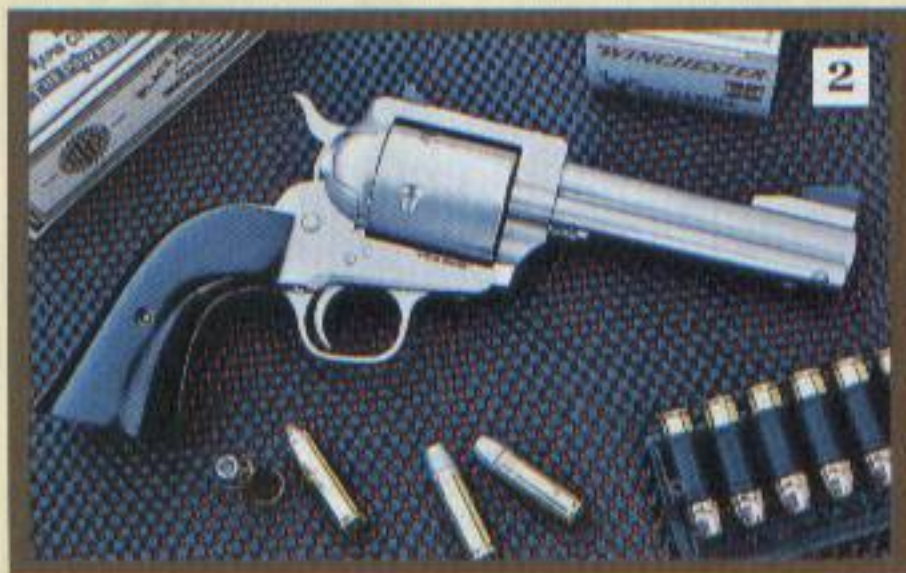
**Some are customized,
some engraved, but all are
straight CAS shooters!**

I'VE PROBABLY LOADED AS MANY, if not more, .45 Colt rounds than any other caliber. In my youth it would have been the .38 Special that got most of my attention, as my dad and I had several handguns in that caliber. As the official bullet caster for our group, many a wheel weight got transformed into a .38 caliber semi-wadcutter for launching from our short guns.

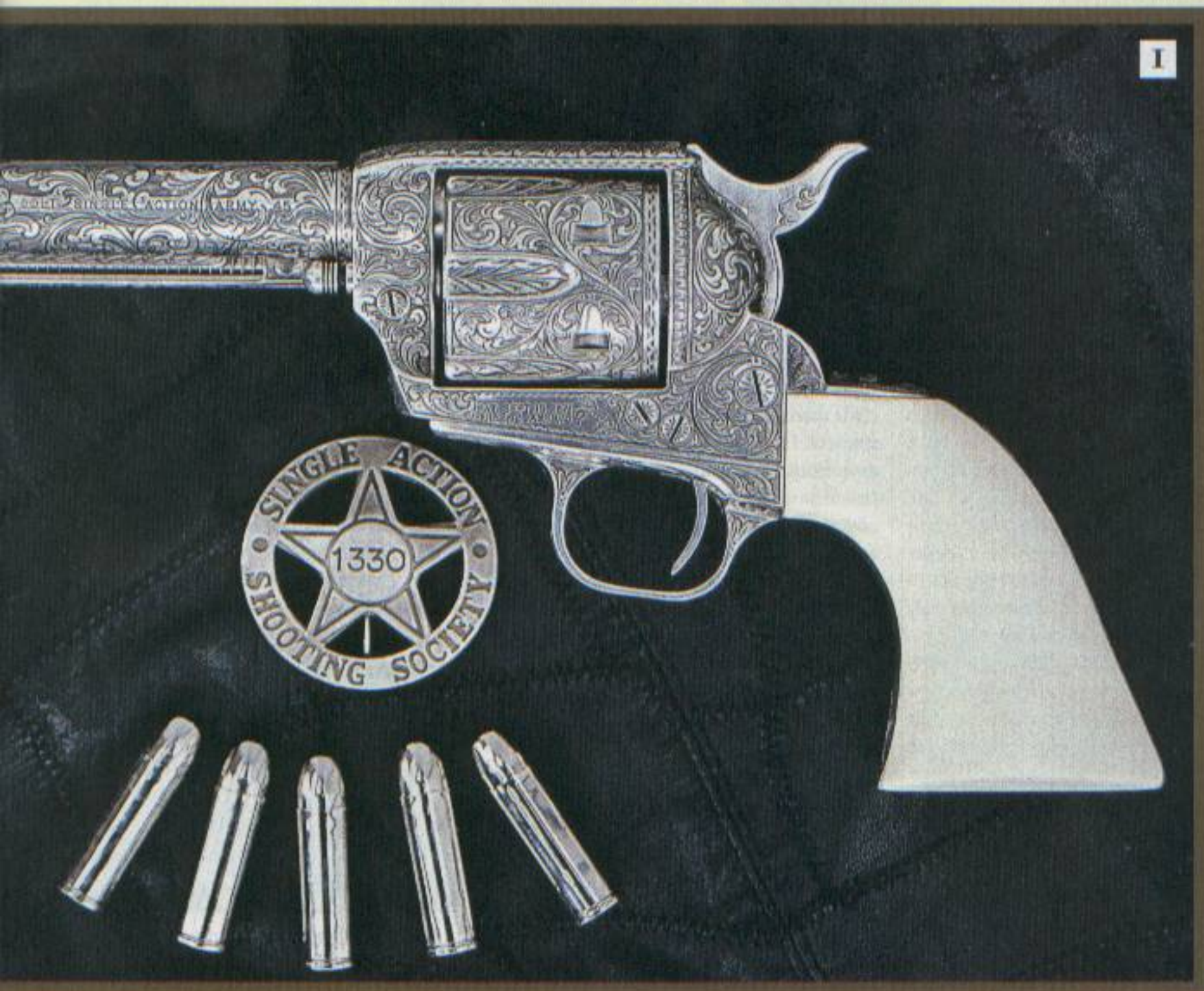
When I got interested in IPSC, before the discovery of the .38 Super as the most preferred cartridge for this game, the .45ACP was the round of choice and I can't begin to tell you how many of those short, fat cases I've reloaded.

When I later became involved in Cowboy Action Shooting, the .45 Colt seemed the appropriate choice, and my Dillon 550 saw to it that a ready supply of cartridges were at hand. From that first pair of custom Colts to my first Freedom Arms hand cannon, the number of guns chambered for the venerable old .45 Colt that I own has grown

1) The ultimate "barbeque gun" is Pop's Colt, adorned with exquisite, full-coverage engraving, ivory grips and silver plate. 2) The most precisely built .45 author owns is this 4-3/4-inch Freedom Arms Model 83. 3) A rebored cylinder and a new barrel turned a circa 1971 NRA Commemorative into the author's most-favored .45 caliber Cowboy competition pistol. 4) Gary Reeder transformed a standard stainless Ruger Blackhawk into this accurate Bisley-gripped 5-shooter. 5) Although purchased with a rebarreling project in mind, this very early 2nd Generation Colt New Frontier proved so accurate that, up until now, the author has resisted its conversion.



Pop's Colt • Ruger Blackhawk • 2nd Generation Colt New Frontier



considerably, but I do have several that easily rank among my favorites.

Colt Commemoratives

My first matched pair of competitive Cowboy pistols was built on NRA Commemorative Colt Single Actions circa 1971. Now Colt Single Actions have never been cheap, but there was a time a number of years ago when one could pick up Second Generation Colts that were built as NRA Commemoratives, and these could usually be purchased at a price well below what standard SAAs were commanding. My first NRA Commemorative started out as a 7-1/2-inch barreled .357 Magnum that I had rebarreled and recylindereed by John Kopec of Kopec Enterprises. John fitted a new 4-3/4-inch Second Generation Colt barrel to my NRA frame along with a new cylinder he made from a .357 Magnum cylinder rebored to .45 Colt with tight chamber throats for greater potential accuracy with cast bullets. This cylinder had a heavily beveled front edge reminiscent of the Colts of the 1870s and proved not only very attractive but easy on its holster.

John later sold his gunsmithing and parts business to Eddie Janis, who named his new business Peacemaker Specialists. It was Eddie who later gave my NRA gun its action job and one-piece checkered rosewood grips. This particular Single Action has always proven to be reliable and accurate with just about anything I've put through it. It especially liked some homecast 255-grain RNFPs from a Lyman No. 454190 mold pushed by 8 grains of Alliant's Unique Powder. If I did my part, five of these slugs would often form one ragged hole at 25 yards right where that Colt's sights looked.

Packed in a custom holster rig by Walter Ostin, if forced to rid myself of all my Colt Single Actions except one (heaven forbid!), this is the one I'd keep (except for Pop's Colt, but I'll explain that later).

As a holster mate, I assembled a second Colt starting with another NRA Commemorative, a new barrel and rebored cylinder, but it just never measured up to that first special Colt.

Freedom Arms Field Grade

I found my favorite Casull in the newspaper. It started out as a Field Grade 7-1/2-inch chambered for the powerful .454 Casull cartridge (it will also shoot the .45 Colt round so it qualifies here as a favorite .45). Not long after purchasing it, I sent it back to Freedom



A high-ride, crossdraw belt holster from Freedom Arms is the preferred mode of carry for this powerful pistol.

something milder is needed, anything put up in a .45 Colt case can be fired in the Casull.

To carry this big boy in the field, I found a little high-ride, crossdraw number from Freedom Arms to be just the ticket. Designed to ride upon a heavy-duty 1-1/2 or 1-3/4-inch pants belt, this unlined scabbard rides in the crossdraw position with a 25-degree cant so it's out of the way of a shoulder-slung rifle, yet instantly available. Made from heavyweight premium grade vegetable-tanned leather, this holster is tightly stitched, well finished and is a secure fit to this big-bored blaster.

Arms and had them shorten its barrel to a more carryable 4-3/4 inches. While they had it, I also requested that they fit it with a set of their durable and attractive handles in black micarta. I find the finish on this Field Grade gun much to my liking. Its stainless exterior has a satiny bead-blasted look, and I actually prefer this to the higher polished finish found on their Premier guns.

The guns from Freedom Arms are the most precisely fitted and timed guns I've ever handled. They lock up like the proverbial "bank vault" with absolutely no side-to-side or end-to-end movement. The barrel/cylinder gap on my short-barreled Field Grade measures an incredibly tight 0.0015 of an inch, and its factory trigger releases at a crisp, respectable 3-1/4 pounds.

This .454 came wearing a very rugged, adjustable rear sight assembly coupled with a blued and serrated front blade that's removable via a setscrew located in the front of its ramp. This allows for easy interchanging of different height blades to match the intensity of the load being fired. This pistol has proven extremely accurate with everything I've put through it, but I must admit that it prefers jacketed slugs over lead ones.

Although I'm into big bores, I'm not into big pain, so my reloads for my Casull tend to run to the more sedate. With loads it likes, groups of 1- to 1-1/2 inches at 25 yards for 5 shots are pretty easy to attain. While testing this and a couple other .454s, I stumbled on a factory loading for this chambering that I really liked. Winchester wisely decided to release a mid-level loading for the .454 that's all I really care to shoot. From my Casull, this 250-grain, jacketed loading (product No. X454C3) produced velocities averaging just over 1300 feet per second (fps). This turned out to be a nice, user-friendly round when fired out of this 49-ounce revolver. And, if

Pop's Colt

Although a shooter all of his life, it wasn't until 1992 at the age of 73 that my father bought his first genuine Colt Single Action Army. I remember Pop saying one day he wanted to own one real Colt Peacemaker before he died. I'm sure that this had been



There's nothing better than a pretty Colt.

provoked by the fact that he and I were involved with Cowboy Action Shooting, a sport that just cried out for the ownership of genuine Colt pistols. When Pop told me he wanted me to find him a good, short-barreled Colt, I naturally turned to fellow Cowboy shooter and shooting buddy, Eddie Janis.

Starting with a long-barreled, 3rd Generation SAA in .357 that Eddie had on hand, a barrel swap and cylinder rebore to .45 caliber soon transformed it into the short-barreled .45 that Pop wanted. Reboring the .357 cylinder allowed not only the retention of this gun's original cylinder during conversion, but also increased its accuracy potential, as Eddie rebore his cylinders with throats much tighter than those produced by Colt. Pop also requested that Eddie change the hard rubber grips this circa 1979 Colt

came wearing with ones of wood, another service offered by Peacemaker Specialists.

December of 1992, Pop took possession of his Colt. He wasn't to own it long, as on June 1st, 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.

One day, while looking over this gun, I noticed signs that Pop had performed some "shade tree" gunsmithing on it during the short time he owned it. The initial thing I saw was some scratches on its upper grip strap that look to have been caused by using an inappropriately sized screwdriver during removal. Removal of the grip strap revealed that Pop, in an apparent attempt to ease up its trigger pull, had placed a metal washer behind this Colt's mainspring in what must have been 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 I decided to finish what Pop had started. I would turn Pop's Colt into something extra special, a tribute, if you will, to the greatest father a kid ever 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 done. Full coverage engraving, ivory grips and silver plate. Yep, that's what I wanted. Full coverage engraving, ivory grips and silver plating!

Selecting an engraver was easy: I chose Clint Finley, whose work in steel is true artistry. All I told Finley when I delivered Pop's Colt to him was that I wanted everything engraved...everything. We looked at several books of engraving to ensure that my somewhat brief description of what I wanted, and Finley's understanding of it were one and the same. He didn't disappoint. Heavily

influenced by the likes of Cuno A. Helfricht and L. D. Nimschke, Finley's engraving is deep, bold and flawlessly executed. It turned out just as I had envisioned it.

For its handles I managed to secure two slabs of ivory perfectly matched for grain and color, and these I entrusted to Finley to shape, fit and finish on the Colt. Of one-piece design, again Finley's work was without fault. Silver plating and a later action job by Peacemaker Specialists completed Pop's Colt.

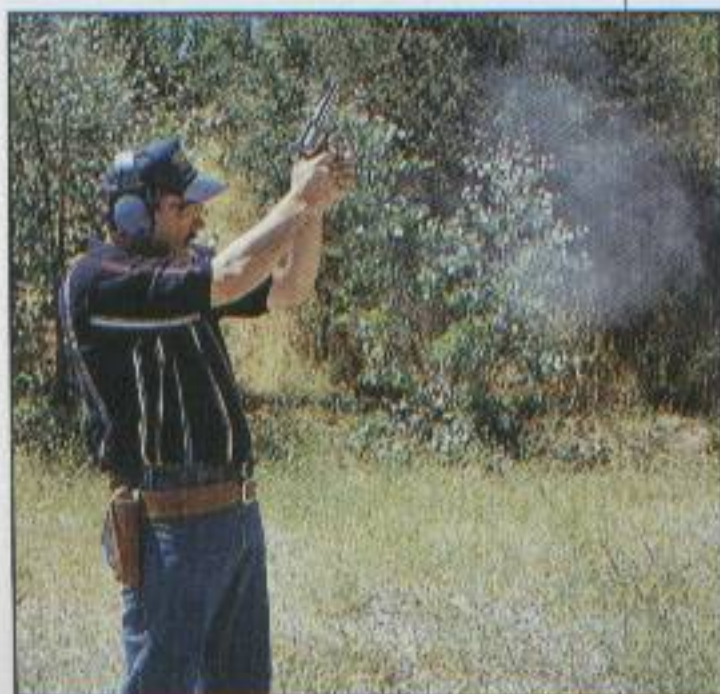
For a holster befitting Pop's Colt, I obtained what El Paso Saddlery now calls their Spaghetti Western rig. This black rig is reminiscent of the rigs seen in the spaghetti Westerns of the '60s. It features a 2-1/4-inch fancy-stitched, lined belt with 12 cartridge loops centered in the back. The holster is metal-lined and sits on the belt with a slight rearward cant. A single silver concho adorns the holster, while the belt wears a silver overlaid buckle set also from this El Paso holster maker. This is one well-constructed holster rig that I'm sure even Eastwood would have been pleased with.

As I sat in front of the TV that first night fondling the now-completed Colt, 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.

Reeder Ruger

If you're at all into custom sixguns, then you've undoubtedly heard of Gary Reeder Custom Guns. Gary has been turning out custom single-actions (and other custom guns) for well over 26 years. His half or full-page ads routinely feature a different custom revolver (or semi-auto, or rifle) with a great many of his custom wheelguns built on the virtually indestructible Ruger Blackhawk. That was how my next favorite .45 started out.

A review of a stainless 7-1/2-inch .45 Colt New Model Blackhawk some years past left me sufficiently impressed with how it had performed and shot that I bought it. Not long after its purchase, Reeder put out an ad for his "Montana Hunter," a 4-5/8-inch super-strong five-shooter capable of digesting .45 Colt rounds in the +P range. I was



When stoked up with top end loads, the Reeder Ruger, shown here in fired recoil, packs a powerful wallop.

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hooked, so off went the Ruger to Reeder.

Gary replaced the 7-1/2-inch tube on the Ruger with a barrel from Douglas trimmed off at 4-5/8 inches, and given a "deep-dished" recessed crown. Mounted atop this new barrel was a stainless front sight base complete with a blued serrated ramp that's removable via an Allen-head screw set in its face. This front sight paired up perfectly with Ruger's adjustable rear sight assembly. Cut into the barrel on either side of this front sight were the trapezoidal ports one readily identifies as Mag-Na-Porting.

Gary replaced the Ruger's 6-shot fluted

cylinder with one he crafted from 17-4 stainless steel left unfluted and drilled with only 5 holes. Wall thicknesses between chambers in this cylinder rivaled those found on my Casull. Barrel/cylinder gap measured a nice, close 0.004 of an inch, and the cylinder now rotated freely both clockwise and counterclockwise for easy loading and unloading. This new cylinder is held in place by an oversized cylinder pin from Belt Mountain, complete with an oversized knurled head and locking screw to ensure that it remains in place during recoil.

Although originally completed using the standard grip frame of the Blackhawk,

I later had Gary install a stainless Bisley grip frame (with companion Bisley hammer and trigger) subtly reshaped by Gary into what he calls his "Gunfighter" design. To this frame Gary fitted a set of black micarta handles that virtually melt into the metal with no discernable juncture detectable. The Montana Hunter's hammer, trigger, crosspins, and a few other small parts have been highly polished and contrast very nicely with a soft, satiny-appearing exterior that Gary calls "Vapor-Honed," which he applied to the rest of the pistol.

All the safety features designed by Ruger remain in place on this Reeder Custom, so it's perfectly safe to carry with all five of its chambers loaded. Its single-action trigger released at a measured 2-1/4 pounds with just the tiniest hint of creep present. It's about as good as can be attained on a pistol using a transfer bar system.

I've shot this pistol with loads ranging from mild to horrendous. It's a very accurate pistol with most loadings grouping from 1 to 2 inches at the 25-yard mark. At the horrendous end of the spectrum, some "special" loads put together by Tim Sundles of the Buffalo Bore Ammunition Company (known for their high-quality custom big-bore ammunition) pushed a 325-grain cast LBT bullet from the short tube of the Reeder Ruger to over 1400 fps. This was a definite "sit-up-and-take-notice" loading.

To complement and carry the Reeder custom, I contacted Ryan McNellis at El Paso Saddlery and ordered one of their M1920 "Threeperson's" holsters and had it paired to one of their "Texas" 2-1/4-inch wide cartridge belts equipped with fifteen .45 caliber loops centered in the back. To make this rig a little extra special, I had it constructed with "rough-out" leather with the billets, loops and retaining straps finished smooth-side out. The workmanship on this rig is absolutely first rate and a worthy complement to the Reeder pistol.

Early New Frontier

Although I wasn't really looking for another one, when I stumbled across the "slightly worn" long-barreled Colt New Frontier at Olde West Gun & Loan, I bought it. My two other New Frontiers were 3rd Generation guns, but this one was one of the more finely assembled 2nd Generation models. Its 7-1/2-inch tube had a little blue wear and, unfortunately, just a little freckling (make that light pitting) right at its muzzle. These

For more information contact:



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(Right) To pack this and a like .45 for Cowboy Action Shooting, the author favors this custom rig built by holster maker Walt Ostin of Custom Gun Leather. (Below) A custom roughout Threeperson's rig from El Paso Saddlery is the perfect packing rig for this custom revolver.



were the only signs of neglect present, as the rest of this pistol showed only minimal wear. My original thought had been to pick up this pistol for an eventual rebarreling project, as I had sometime back managed to secure a brand new 4-3/4-inch appropriately bored barrel. Shooting it as originally configured has, so far, prevented me from doing this.

A check of its serial number revealed that this particular New Frontier, Serial No. 3080NF, was one of the first 80 guns of this model ever produced, as Colt had started numbering the new model number at 3000NF.

Timing on this over-45-year-old pistol is still perfect with its bolt hitting perfectly in its bolt stop approaches. After all these years and untold number of rounds fired through


it, there is still no cylinder dragline present, attesting to the precision of its original assembly. A feeler gauge measured its barrel/cylinder gap at 0.006 of an inch, and its trigger still releases at a clean-breaking 3 pounds.

Like other Colts of this era, its flats are flat, bevels are beveled, round where it's supposed to be round, and square where it's supposed to be square. Its grips fit the straps perfectly, the front sight is square and precise, and screw holes are round and not wallowed out like those found on later production guns. And it shoots.

Were it not for the fact that this elder single-action likes to put all of its slugs really close together, I probably would have rebarreled it. But it's hard for me to "mess"

with something that's so good as it is. So, for now, it will remain as issued.

I must admit that I've never actually carried this gun in a holster and never sought out a dedicated rig for it, but there is one holster that I own that would be the perfect companion for it. It's an out-of-production Cyclone Model 111 made by Bianchi. Mine is an earlier version cut only for crossdraw wear (my preference when carrying a companion pistol while hunting), but current versions made by Bianchi today have belt slots designed so that it may be worn as either a crossdraw or strong-sided rig. Bianchi used to make this model holster for a variety of single-actions, but no longer does and there are no current Model 111s being made for single-actions today. Pity. I think there are a lot of single-action owners out there that would like to own a good, rugged, secure, out-of-the-way holster for their thumb-busters. Are you listening, Bianchi?

Well, those are my six best-liked .45s. They are all well made, powerful, and best of all, accurate. What more could you ask of a favorite .45? 

STEP BACK IN TIME . . .



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