

COMBAT CARBINES: THE .223 GETS TOUGH

EN  
GUNS  
MAGAZINE

# GUNS

MAGAZINE

FINEST IN THE FIREARMS FIELD

JULY 1998

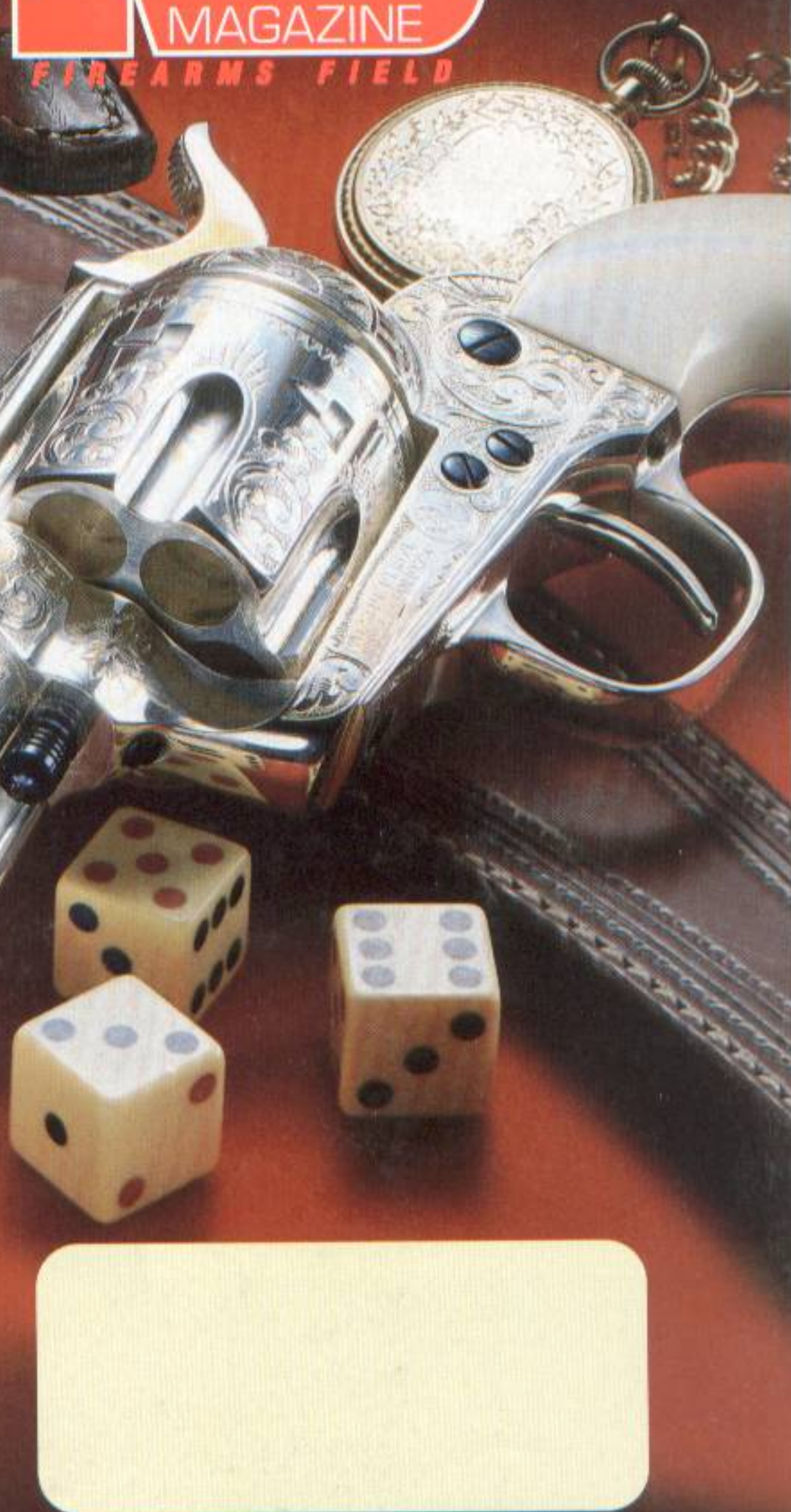
\$3.95

\$4.95  
IN CANADA &  
OUTSIDE U.S.

## GAMBLER'S 45 CLASSIC SIXGUN

ROLLING  
THUNDER  
*Mobile Defensive*  
Tactics

FRONTIER  
SHOOT-OUT





# The Six Of Diamonds

## *A Gambler's Pistol*

THIS CUSTOM COLT RECAPTURES THE DAYS WHEN  
PASTEBOARD PIRATES AND HIGH-ROLLING GUNSLINGERS  
RULED THE WESTERN BOOMTOWNS.

*by Roy Huntington*

*photos by Ichiro Nagata*

In the quest for excellence, a judge's subjective opinion enters the fray. That lifetime spent observing the subtleties of fit, that meshes various, sundry parts into a thing of beauty, builds collectively, feeding the muse until a decision is made. "Yes," you say, "that is perfect."

At that particular moment in your life, a particular combination of colors, line and function, fills a void labeled "excellence." For some it's a Ferrari, a restored Sopwith Camel or a Mahogany Chris Craft. For Eddie Janis, excellence is silver plated and engraved, bears the rampant Colt emblem.

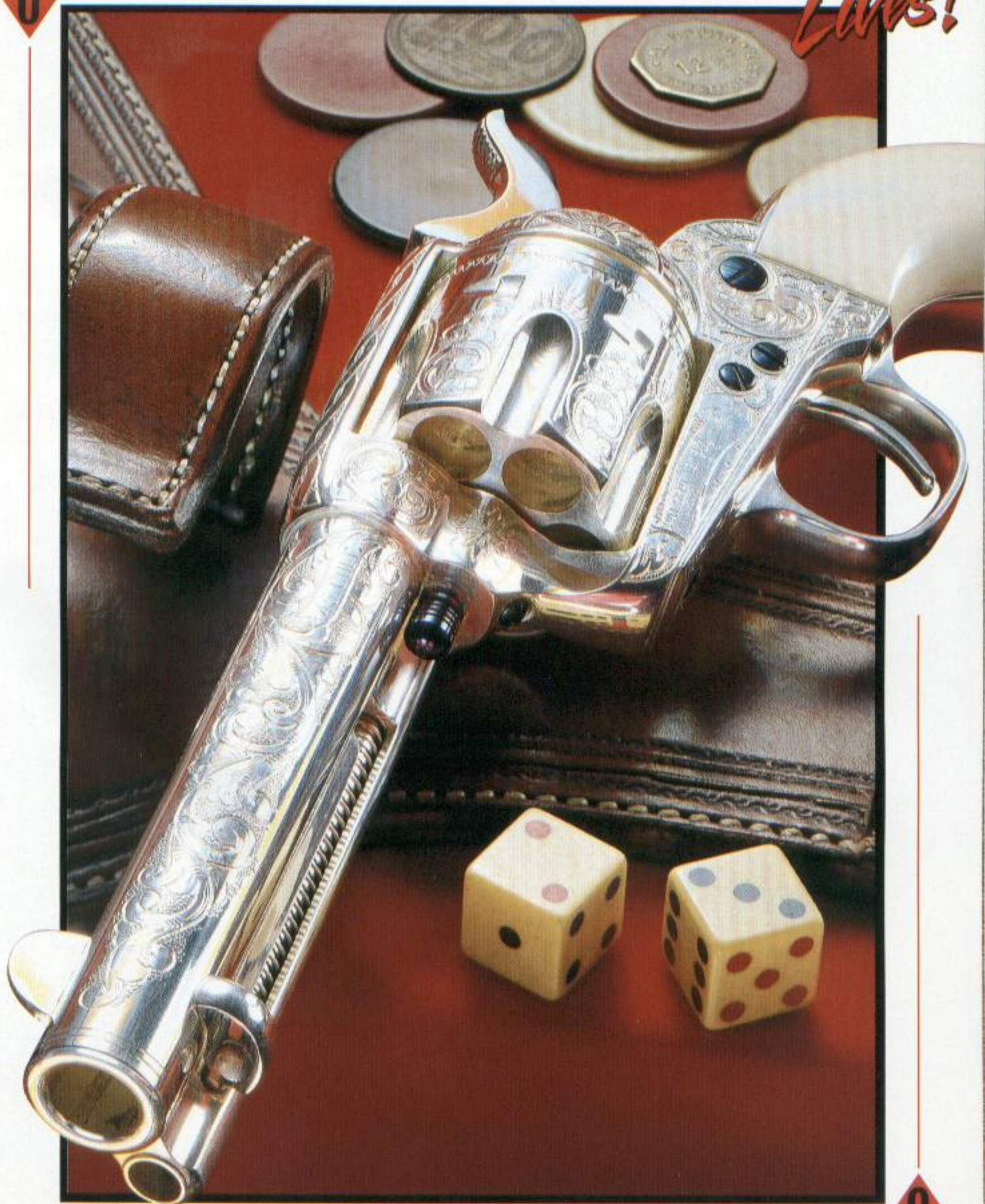
"I wanted to take the best of all three generations (of Colt Single Action revolvers), the parts I felt epitomized the pinnacle of design, form and function, and combine them to make what I feel is the ultimate shooter's Colt," said Janis.

Janis, who has devoted years to the Colt Single Action and no other hand-

Although not an authentic period reproduction, this Janis Colt was created to capture the prosperous spirit of those gamblers who flocked to the frontier boomtowns.



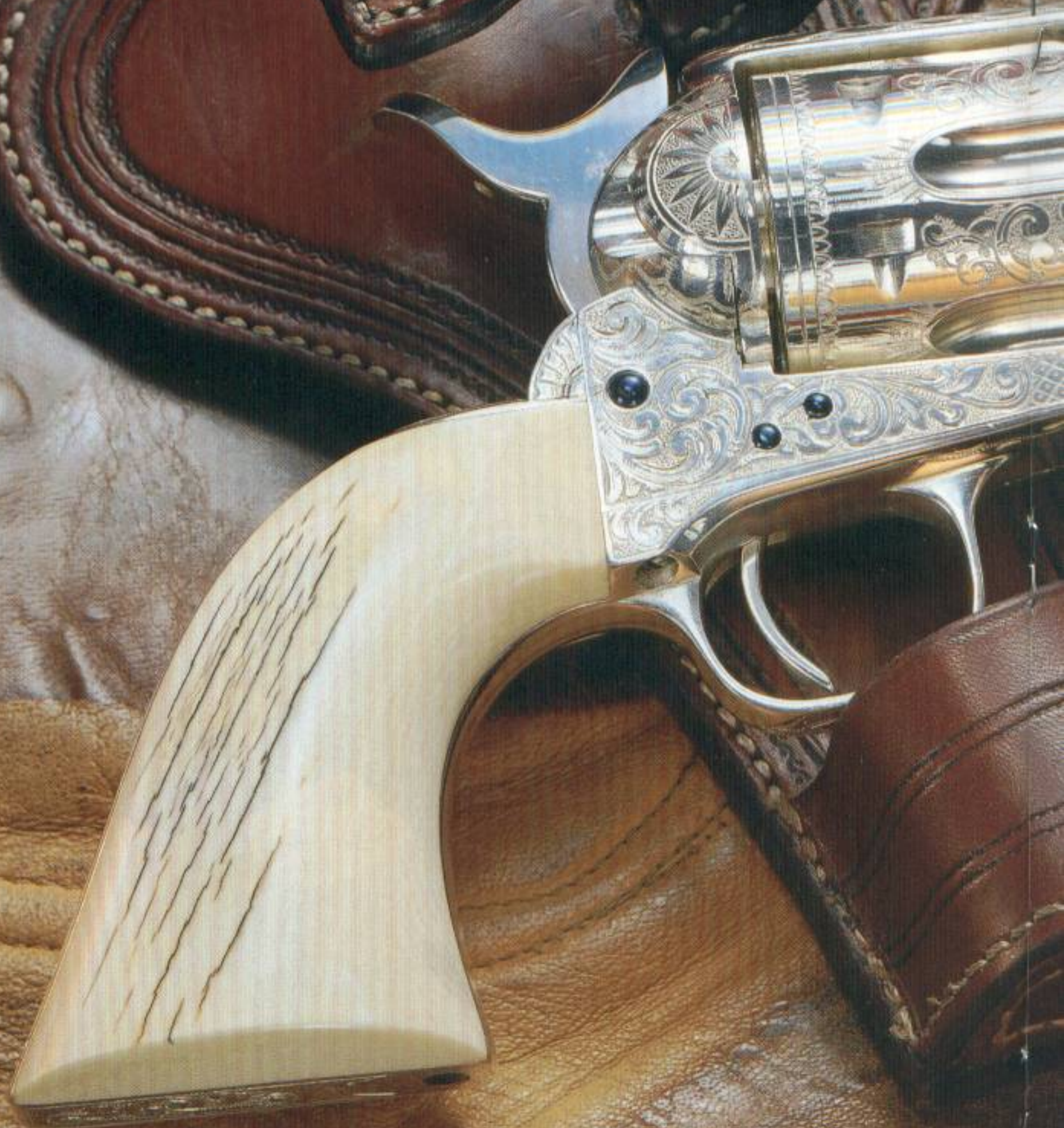






# The Six Of Diamonds

*Janis Custom Gold*







**GUNS**  
MAGAZINE



gun, came to this realization of a dream by a long and circuitous route. His admiration of the work of other gunsmiths, the likes of Hamilton Bowen, kept his attention to detail busy.

### Putting The Action In Cowboy Action

While Janis has always concentrated on the function, the "action," if you will, of a Colt, Bowen's ability to properly "finish" a handgun was interesting, appealing and satisfying. The "period" on a completed project, as it were.

While knowing he could properly build the *action* of his dream gun, Janis wondered if he could live up to his own expectations concerning the artistic side. Could he create perfection on the outside, as he does on the inside?

In order to answer this question to his own satisfaction, Janis decided to put his skills to the test of building a complete gun to capture the spirit of the Old Western gambler. As he told me, "I wanted to challenge myself to make the best, out of a mis-match of parts, while calling upon all of my abilities." Success must be sweet, indeed.

Most anyone can take a gun and have it engraved and plated. All you've got then is an engraved and plated gun which is worth exactly as much as the cost of the gun, engraving and plating.

Factory engraving is something else entirely. There is an "added-value" automatically calculated with factory work enhancing value and appeal. Eddie didn't just want to take a factory gun and make it pretty. He wanted to create something new from something old; a gun that would match a factory vintage Colt in aesthetics, beauty, value and desirability.

Or maybe be even better.

### The Spirit Of The West Reborn

A rare Colt frame found its way into the shop at Peacemaker Specialists several years ago. This unique find began life as a limited production blackpowder frame made by Colt in 1984. While hav-

ing the lines of an early model frame, it was proofed for smokeless powder. It is technically a Third Generation, blackpowder frame that was only available on a strictly custom basis. It represented the first time Colt offered a blackpowder frame this century.

Once he had the frame, Janis took over a year to mull over what was next. Patience is rewarded and after much soul searching, it was decided to build the ultimate shooter on this unusual frame.

Janis had always admired the blackpowder frame for its classic styling but hated the mess (could this be heresy?) of blackpowder. At last, though, he had the chance to build a dream gun on a blackpowder frame, but without worrying about blowing things up and the dreaded blackpowder clean-up chore.

Then, another year was spent deciding on other equally important things like barrel length, caliber, finish, grips and other labor-of-love specifics.

### Playing The Numbers

The gun started going together mechanically before the cosmetics were a concern. Since the frame was in-hand, something was needed to hold it and Eddie decided a First Generation back-strap and trigger guard was in order.

An interesting aside is that as generations progressed, the grip shape got slightly larger. Hence, a First Generation is smaller than a Second, which in turn, is smaller than a Third. Which, of course means, a Second or Third Generation back strap and trigger guard can fit on a First Generation frame, but not vice versa. This slightly smaller grip contributes subtly to the "feel" of the gun and can make a serious difference to a connoisseur.

To keep the tradition alive an early model hammer was in order. Since 11 different styles of hammers evolved over the generations, it takes a sharp eye to pick them out and know which one is right and, just as importantly, which one is wrong.

The beauty of this project was that there was nothing wrong with anything, it was all in one man's perception. So, a circa 1873-1874 hammer was found. The long, coarse knurling with a flowing border looked just "right." Later vintages have short, coarse knurling and a different shape, firing pin style and correspondingly different all-important "feel." To those who don't know and would like to, the early hammers had solid, cone shaped firing pins, followed by concave models and then today's floating pins.

### Place Your Bets

The Third Generation frame (albeit in blackpowder design) had 24 threads per inch to seat the barrel. This ruled out old-time barrels and Janis had to search out a .45 Colt barrel from the post-1976 era.

Of course, this meant another problem because the post 1976 barrel was clearly marked "Colt Single Action Army .45" instead of the more traditional and eye pleasing ".45 Colt" of the original. All to be dealt with later.

Soon a 7½" .45 Colt barrel; of satisfactory condition found its way into the shop. Janis cut everything off that didn't look like a 4¾" barrel, on went a proper front sight and off came the modern markings, courtesy of a superior polishing job.

It pays to know someone with the ability to roll-mark a barrel and soon the proper ".45 Colt" and vintage two-line address was at home on the short barrel. Things were coming together nicely now and it was starting to look like a gun.

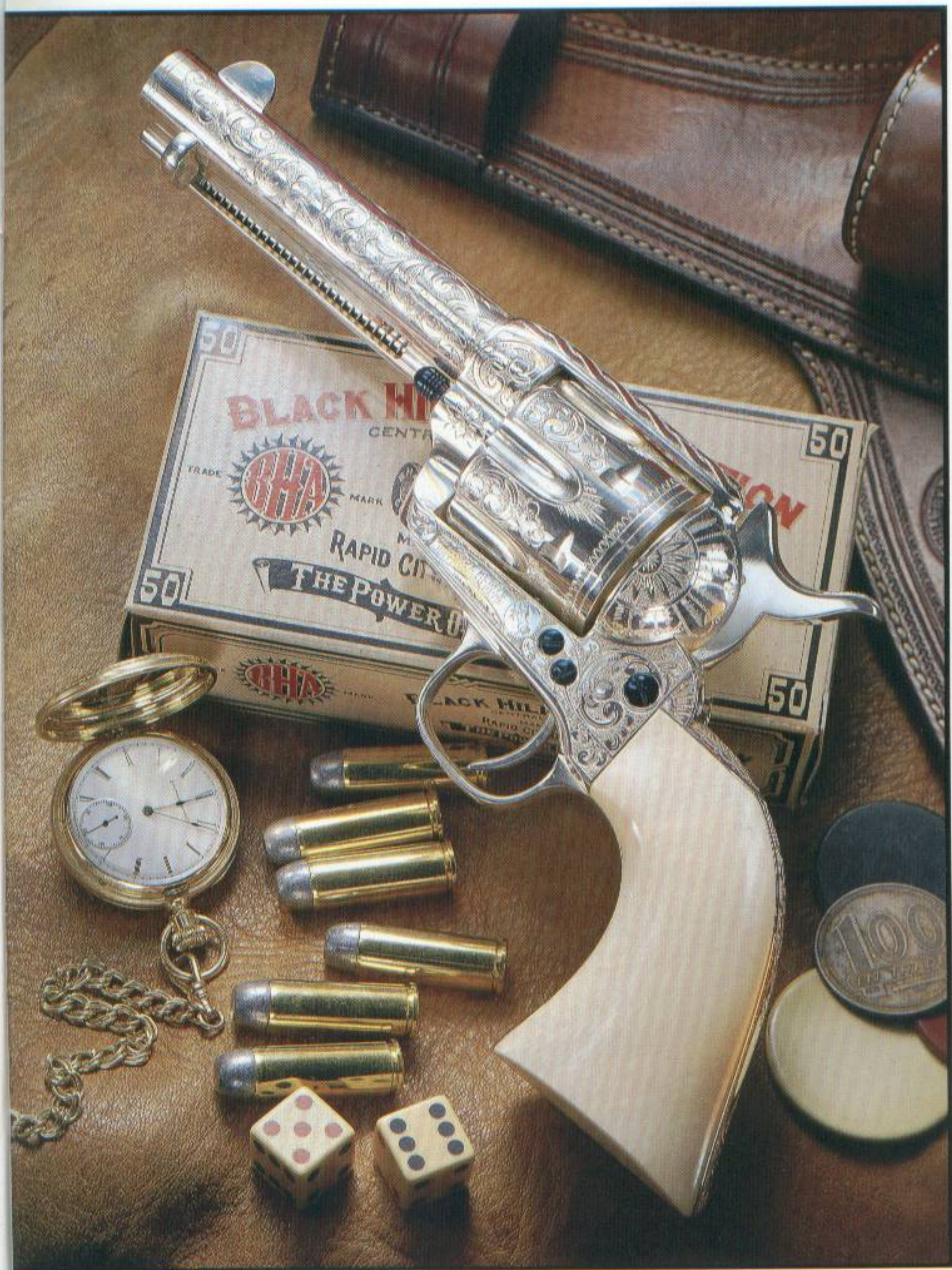
With the option of using any of the three generations of cylinders still open, it was decided a Second Generation was best. This gave the gun another dose of "modern steel" but with classic styling. The Second Generation cylinder also has the full-length bushing, as opposed to the Third Generation "pressed-in" one.

Then a problem was encountered. The flutes were wrong and had to be re-cut and the proper style of "blackpowder" bevel put on the front edges of the cylinder. This all being done, remember, on a cylinder that was made of Colt "machine gun steel," as they used to say in their advertisements.

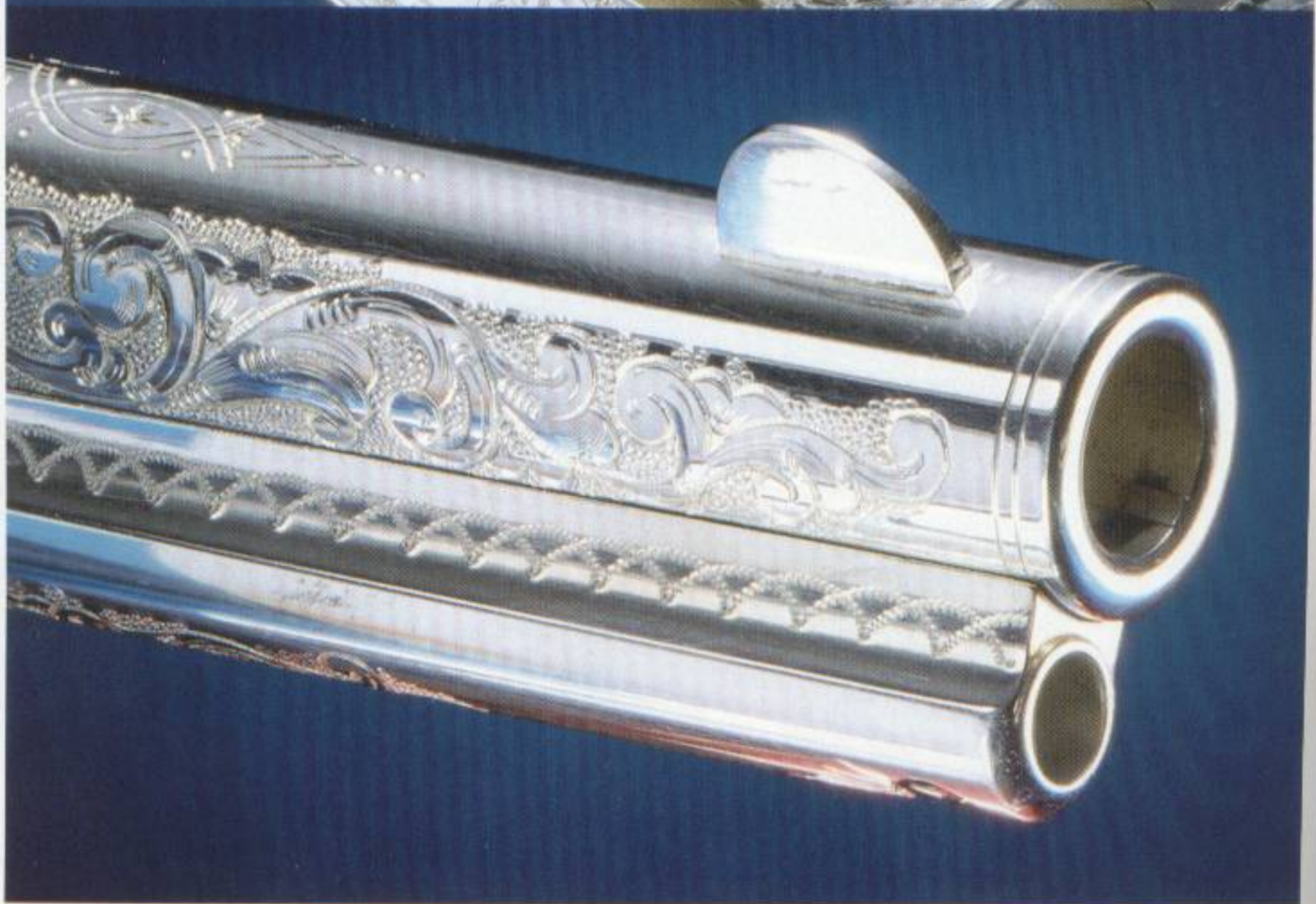
While a labor of love, truthfully, it was still labor and much more was yet to be done. The cylinder began life as a .357 Mag. and was dutifully re-chambered to .45 Colt with custom reamers which yielded a .452" chamber throat. This would mate perfectly with the .451" bore of the barrel and accuracy would be assured — he hoped.

A stylish gentleman of the Old West might have worn just such a sixgun at the faro table in the Old Western towns of Tombstone or Bodie.













*Facing page, top to bottom, the timeless engraving of Bernie Wolfe carries the eye across the carefully cut flutes and graceful curves of this classic Colt. Although made primarily of Third Generation parts, the ejector rod housing and front sight have been reshaped to conform to vintage Colt design. This page, left to right, the "bark" pattern ivory from the outside of the tusks gives color and texture to these stocks. Vibrant fire blued screws set off the classic engraving and subtle mating of ivory and steel.*

### House Rules

But wait, in order for the ejector rod housing to fit the contour of the Third Generation barrel, it had to be a Third Generation housing. All was not well, as nothing "looked" right.

The front of the housing had to be beveled and an early style ejector rod head was mated carefully into place. This particular one was oval, which is vintage in its own right, but modern enough to be compatible with some of today's holsters. The older bullseye-style often interferes when unholstering in a hurry.

Details are important, and a special ejector rod was made in the full round shape of original guns. This style was abandoned years ago by Colt to expedite production.

Originally, the smaller, contoured rods were used on smaller calibers because it was easier to get them into the chambers. In the 1980s, to save costs, Colt decided there was no need for the round rod and stopped producing it entirely. The end of an era for Colt, but little things in life count, and so did this ejector rod.

### Know When To Hold Them

Things were getting close now and it was hard not to hurry. Janis put over 30 hours of hand labor stoning to get rid of the sorry Third Generation polish job. It was important everything that was supposed to be flat, really was.

Work went faster now. The barrel forcing cone was cut to 11 degrees for accuracy and the cylinder gap was carefully set at .002". That, my friends is two thousandths of an inch on a Colt Single Action. Pick up an average Colt and it hovers around six to eight thousandths, if it hovers at all. Two thousandths is what Freedom Arms .454 Casulls are held to, if you get my drift in the quality department.

Fire-blued screws and base pin went into place as the action was worked. Starting with over-sized parts, including the bolt, bushing and base pin, Janis built what is easily qualified as the ultimate "Gunslinger Action" for the revolver.

Janis is known for this work but, like the rest of the gun, it was carried to perfection and just perhaps, a bit beyond. It feels like it runs on ball

bearings but locks up like the quiet, authoritative snick of the closing of a two-ton bank vault door. Honest.

With the gun in the white, but mechanically ready to go, Janis took his creation to the range on his property. Sighting and zeroing was accomplished with the front sight contoured to be exactly, perfectly, absolutely dead on with his favorite Black Hills load. Now the beauty could bite, too.

### The Polish Of A Gambler

Janis knew Bernie Wolfe would handle the engraving. What else could this gun have but the best? Why break the chain of uncompromising quality and search for excellence at this point?

Wolfe is one of the last vintage, master engravers in the country. He specializes in turn-of-the-century style engraving. If you want a mirror, vintage Colt from the turn of the century, he's the man.

For this gun Janis chose a combination of three patterns by Cuno Helfricht from the book of Colt engraving and turned Wolfe loose. When Wolfe was

*continued on page 68*



## **SIX OF DIAMONDS**

*continued from page 51*


finished, the Colt had full coverage engraving, all done with a hammer and chisel. This gave it a deep, three dimensional life, with light, thin lines competing with bold, deep cuts, challenging the eye to keep up.

As a meandering river in a far away valley causes the eye to follow its course, this chiseled art of Bernie Wolfe tugs the eye over the gun's surface, valleys and curves. It's an "E" coupon ride for those who take the time to *see*, rather than just look.

But there's something more here. The luster of silver quietly beckons. Unlike nickel, silver has a soft glow that enhances rather than hides engraving. Nickel flattens. Silver celebrates. Nickel is cold, unfeeling. Silver catches and returns warmth and color from the atmosphere around it, taking as much from its surroundings as it gives back.

Pearl? No thank you. The stocks are made of legal elephant ivory showing the bark from the outside of the tusk. Like the rest of the gun, it's just a bit different; it draws the eye, keeps your interest and, just as importantly, feels damn good in the hand. There was a reason they did it like this 100 years ago.

Janis' gun is an exemplary showcase of this custom gunsmith's art; this ability to improve and enhance a factory piece in ways hardly thought possible. In many ways, it's actually harder to build a gun like this than if you just built the parts outright. Building from scratch, you could make them correct from the beginning, without having to wonder, create, imagine and coax recalcitrant parts together.

Janis said, "My ultimate satisfaction of doing the job is the final product." Some people only dream.  Eddie Janis made his happen.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

#### **Eddie Janis**

Peacemaker Specialists  
P.O. Box 157  
Whitmore, CA 96096  
530-472-3438  
Catalog \$3.00

*Shoulder Holster by:*

#### **Walter Ostin**

"Custom Gun Leather"  
1260 Fisher Rd.  
RR2

Cobble Hill, B.C. V0R1L0  
Phone: 250-743-9015

#### **Bernie Wolfe**

249 Stern Drive  
El Paso, Texas, 79932  
Engraving/Plating