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# The Guns Of Peacemaker Specialists

BY DENIS PRISBREY


**T**he 1873 Colt Peacemaker—there's no more recognized handgun in the history of handguns. Though that fact has as much to do with nearly a hundred years of celluloid film distribution as anything else, the Colt Peacemaker has worked its way steadily onward from its inception, through the westward migrations of a violent period in the late 1800s, to modern times where the pistol has achieved deserved status as a cultural icon, a classic firearms design, and an enduring symbol of a bygone era.

All of which, as Eddie Janis of Peacemaker Specialists puts it, is curious in view of the fact that "The gun does nothing well." Back to that in a minute.

The Peacemaker, Single Action Army, or Model P as it's currently designated by Colt, was an evolutionary step in a long line of Colt handguns, tracing its roots back to Samuel Colt's first US revolver patent granted in 1836. In March of that year, the state of New Jersey chartered Colt's first company, the Patent Arms Manufacturing Company with headquarters in the factory town of Paterson. Initially a relatively small-framed five-shot revolver of .28 caliber, the first Paterson "repeating pistols," as Colt himself referred to them, went through a number of variations







On new Colt SAA, Peacemaker Specialists installs 1st generation back strap/trigger guard/hammer; performs Gunslinger action job; applies Helfricht engraving, adds "C" coverage by Bernie Wolfe and silver plate; adds fireblue screws; fit with elephant ivory stocks.



## Parts For The Peacemaker

**B**ecause of a notable lack of new factory parts for first and second generation Colt Single Action Armys, Peacemaker Specialists is now providing brand new replacement parts made to specific tolerances and packaged under the Peacemaker Specialists own brand name. These parts are made of a high quality cold finish steel known as C12L14, which is both easy to fit to an individual pistol and very durable. The company offers most of the parts in either nickel or blue finish.

Many of the early Single Action Army internal parts were generation specific, which are frequently hard to find or fabricate for doing restorations or repair work. Gunsmiths now have a source for ready-made screws, springs, hands, cylinder base pins, firing pins, and so on that makes these jobs much easier.

Also noting that even some current minor third generation parts can be hard to obtain from the factory on occasion, Peacemaker Specialists offers replacements for them too.

Eddie Janis has extensive experience with both auto racing engines and IPSC shooting, and with that background he says his intention is to make every part the best it can be for its intended function. If you're a gunsmith, or a do-it-yourselfer with a Single Action Army, you might want to take a look at these. If nothing else, it never hurts to have a few spare replacement screws on hand, and the company will even sell you a correctly ground screwdriver to help you avoid the need for more replacement screws.



which included rifle versions, but despite Sam Colt's very aggressive promotional activities the guns were not a commercial success, and the company folded in 1842. Colt didn't have a genuine success on his hands in the firearms field until another Samuel, Captain Samuel Hamilton Walker of the Texas Rangers, persuaded him to produce a massive revolver, later named in Walker's honor, for the Mexican War. With Walker's backing, the concept of the gun was sufficient to obtain an Ordnance Department order for 1,000 .44 caliber percussion Walkers, which enabled Colt to start up a new company in Hartford in 1847, and Colt handguns thus began a distinguished American military tradition.

When the Peacemaker came along in 1873, after a number of very successful percussion revolvers such as the 1851 Navy and the 1860 Army, it wasn't the first Colt revolver to chamber the new self-contained metallic cartridges, but it probably did more to advance the widespread use of the emerging ammunition technology

than any other handgun design. Colt (the company) put out slightly over 46,000 pistols converted from percussion to metallic cartridge from the late 1860s to the late 1870s, and was still doing the conversions even after the short-lived Open Top Frontier .44 rimfire model in 1872, and the introduction of the Single Action Army .45 centerfire in 1873, rendered them obsolete. Factory conversions of percussion designs allowed the company to use up excess parts inventories, which otherwise would have been expensive scrap, while going through the startup phase on the newer model. The Open Top .44 was really nothing more than a bridge design which was good enough to impress US Ordnance officials with the potential of a new cartridge-firing revolver for military service,

but it wasn't adopted, and only 7,000 of the rimfire revolvers were made. The improved Single Action Army, with solid frame and permanently attached barrel, was accepted immediately, and the SAA went on to earn a permanent place of honor in firearms history.

## My Peacemaker

I have on my desk as this is written, my one and only genuine Colt Peacemaker. It was acquired during a project written up for a magazine article a couple years ago, and I was quite happy to finally get one after a lifetime of wishing for it. As it now sits, however, it is not the same gun, and if I hadn't checked the serial number when it came back from an out of town trip recently, I wouldn't believe it was my Colt at all.

Like a lot of other people, I grew up admiring the Peacemaker from childhood, and when I was finally able to afford one, I was delighted. However, here come the "buts." After the shooting and the writing for the project was done, I put the Colt in the vault and it sat there. And sat there. And sat there. The more I looked at the gun, things about it started to nibble away at the enjoyment of owning it. The Colt as it came from the factory just wasn't what I thought it should be. The basic gun was there, but the action was rough, headspacing was within specs but the cylinder had some annoying end shake, the Colt Single Action Army .45 lettering on the barrel was stamped in so hard that the die had raised edges around the letters, the black synthet-



The Colt Peacemaker remains one of the most instantly recognizable in the world, and one of the most coveted by generations who grew up watching it in the hands of their heroes on the big screen. Shown here with this hand-tooled Duke holster on a #2 Texas belt by El Paso Saddlery.



ic eagle grips were very secure in the hand but felt just a bit oversized, and the Colt Royal Blue finish was very nice but looked a little... too nice. It was a sad state of affairs. I'm not a collector, I expect to use my guns, and all these minor annoyances added up to the point where I wasn't particularly interested in taking it out and shooting it. And that bothered me. And bothered me. And...well, you know.

So, I finally did something about it.

## Peacemaker Specialists

There are a number of specialists in the firearms field. Some claim to be, others are the real thing, and Eddie Janis is for real.

You've probably seen his work written up before, so had I, but I'd never had any reason to talk to Eddie personally until the situation with my Colt got to the point where it was either do something with it to make it a happy gun for me, or let it go, and I didn't want to let it go. I am excessively glad that I called Eddie up one day and discussed the matter with him, because my Colt is now a very happy gun for me.

Eddie heads up Peacemaker Specialists, and he's a very amiable guy to talk to. We probably spent about a half hour on the phone the first time while I told him what I had and he made a few suggestions. A week later I got the official Peacemaker Specialists parts and service list in the mail, and I can tell you that if you're a Single Action Army owner, or plan to be, this little 20-page booklet should be on your



In the Before photo at left the Colt Model P as it came from the factory complete with Royal Blue Finish, black synthetic eagle grips, and rough internal action. The After photo below shows a dark silvery rust blue, color casing on the hammer, beveled cylinder front, a re-contoured front sight blade, and one-piece style oil finished walnut grips.

required reading list. Much, much better than the Sears wishbook. The list of parts and repairs for all three generations of Peacemakers is extensive, the restoration work Eddie does on older Colts is impressive, and the custom work Eddie can do on a current Model P is incredible. It was not easy deciding what to have him do with my SAA. Actually, it wasn't easy deciding what not to have him do. After going through the booklet several times, calling Eddie back, and working up a list based on what I thought I wanted and what he thought I ought to have, we agreed on a plan, and I shipped my Colt off to Whitmore in the People's Republic of California.

## What Was Done

The first item on the list was an action job. Eddie offers two grades here, the basic Saddle Tramp package which deburrs all internal parts and replaces the heavy factory springs with custom made lightweight springs; and the deluxe Gunslinger package which includes the above plus lighter tension on the hammer, cylinder, and loading gate, along with hand honing on the contact surfaces of all the action parts. My Colt was given the Gunslinger treatment, and it's even better than Eddie says it is. If you're in the mood to have anything at all done to your Model P, a Peacemaker Specialists action job is the place to start. Go the extra \$50 for the Gunslinger package, you won't believe how light and smooth your Colt's action

can be, and you won't regret the money.

From there, we decided the Cowboy Shooters 1880's Package for third generation Colts sounded good. This one involves beveling the front outside edge of the cylinder to match early production guns, recontouring the front sight to the appropriate profile, beveling the front edge of the ejector rod housing, color casing the hammer, and rust bluing all major parts except the case hardened frame. As it came from the factory, the hammer top, front, and rear were a high polish blue with the hammer sides left white. Eddie color cased the entire hammer and it now has more vivid coloring than the frame. He offered to "dull it down" to match, I told him no thanks. The rust bluing, by the way, gives a very dark silvery gray finish which makes the whole pistol look more like a working gun than a fancy collector piece. The 1880's Package also includes re-marking the lettering on the barrel to the original style; since the front sight had been carefully filed down and bent very slightly to the right to bring the point of impact in line with the point of aim during the initial project with the gun (common to many of the Peacemakers), Eddie decided to re-barrel it rather than re-mark the lettering and mess with installing a new front sight. After it was re-contoured, the sight blade



After spending two years sitting in the vault, the author's Colt is now exactly as it should be for him, and it'll be seeing a lot of daylight. From a basic working gun like this one, to a fancy showpiece, Peacemaker Specialists can rebuild or restore your Single Action Army to fit your own individual needs.

on the replacement factory barrel is shorter front to rear, and the top of the blade is correctly arched and squared off across the top to give a clear sight picture. The rear sight notch, by the way, on current production guns is a squared-at-the-bottom U shape instead of the original narrow V, and that notch combines well with the squared-off front post to provide a great improvement over the originals. No, I wouldn't have a first generation pistol altered to this configuration, but I don't mind the fact that this one is set up to let me shoot it better. The lettering on the new barrel was much better struck than on my original, we suspected the first one may have been a "Monday" barrel.

Peacemaker Specialists catalogs a variety of grip materials for the Model P, ranging from simple walnut through ivory polymer to pearlite, hard rubber, stag, rosewood, buffalo bone, and genuine ivory and pearl. I wanted a working Colt, and asked Eddie to install a set of plain oil finished one-piece style walnut grips. You've probably seen ads for custom grips for the SAAs which state you have to send your pistol in for correct fitting. This is not just a bid to squeeze more money out of you; because of the way they're made, there can be a marked variation in grip frame dimensions between even current Colt thumb-busters, much less those made in other decades, and if you want an absolute correct fit, each grip has to be mated to the frame it's going on. Mine are well fitted, smaller in circumference than the ones which came on the pistol, and feel much better in the hand. They are also slightly rough in texture, which I prefer over the varnished types.

Those were the major changes; while he had the gun Eddie also refitted the cylinder to remove the annoying endshake rattle, cut the forcing cone to 11 degrees for better accuracy with lead bullets (which is mostly what this gun will be used with), and as an extra finishing touch, did a beautiful job of fire bluing on the trigger, cylinder pin latch, and visible screws. After all that, the pistol was sighted in with the Black Hills .45 Colt ammunition that Eddie uses as his standard sighting load, unless the customer specifies something different.



The factory black eagle grips are perfectly functional, but some of us just prefer the look and feel of plain old hardworking no-nonsense oiled walnut. These, along with more exotic grip materials also offered, have to be fitted to each individual Colt, and they are very well done.



It's small and subtle, but rounding off the front edge of the ejector rod tube adds a bit of streamlining to the rounded lines of the old thumbbuster, and was probably originally intended to help slip the gun back into the holster a little smoother.

## Ready To Go

As Eddie will tell you, the old thumbbuster is hopelessly obsolete, does nothing well, and has been left in the dust a long, long time ago on the evolutionary road of firearms development. It's slow to load, slow to unload, neither one of the most

accurate handguns in the world nor one of the most durable. Its initial appeal was due to the fact that it was one of the best around for a number of years after its introduction, but its appeal today is based more on what it has done than what it does now. Outdated or not, though, the Colt Peacemaker is also one of the most coveted handguns among those of us who grew up watching them in the hands of our heroes on the screen, and I consider myself very

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

### Peacemaker Specialists

Box 157, Dept CAS  
Whitmore, California 96096  
530-472-3438

### Colt's Manufacturing

PO Box 1868, Dept CAS  
Hartford, CT 06144  
800-962-COLT

### El Paso Saddlery

PO Box 27194, Dept CAS  
El Paso, TX 79926  
915-544-2233



fortunate not only to have one, but one which has been worked on by the best. The old thumbbaster is far from dead, showing up regularly in holsters at Cowboy Action Shooting events, and even still rides the back country here and there with those who find five powerful .45 Colt rounds to be enough and don't feel much need for a speed reload. I understand the collectability factor, but anyone who owns one or more Peacemakers without ever shooting one is missing 90% of the fun, in my opinion. These guns were originally made to be used, and used hard, and even though current production Model Ps are intended more for the collector market than the shooter market, and some minor changes have been made to facilitate production, they are still fully functional descendants of the most popular gun carried in the Old West, made here in America by the company who made them all along, and if you can afford to acquire a new one, there's no good reason on this earth not to take it out and enjoy shooting it.

All things considered, my Colt is not a



The hammer came with both sides left in the white on author's SAA. While it was at Peacemaker Specialists, Eddie Janis removed the factory bluing and color cased the entire hammer, including the firing pin.

fancy looker. I could have gone for silver plating and ivory grips, but that would have put me right back to where I started—with a gun that just didn't look or feel

like it wanted to leave the house. I don't knock silver and ivory, incidentally, and Eddie can return your Peacemaker as a work of fine art if that's what you want him to do. My Colt is now ready to hit the trail, with subtle custom touches that may not be immediately visible to the eye, but which change it from a pistol I didn't want to take out of the vault into a pistol I don't want to put back in the vault.

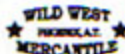
If you have an old parts gun you'd like to restore to shooting condition, a tired Peacemaker that needs a little tightening up around the edges, a pistol that should be re-chambered for a caliber that works better for you, a current model you want customized into your own very personal shooting iron, or any combination of the above, I can think of no better place to send it than Peacemaker Specialists, and I can't imagine anybody being disappointed with the results.

No, I'm not biased, just one very satisfied customer. Drop Eddie a line, attached to a \$4 bill for his catalog, and open up a new experience for yourself. ■

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