

LUGER Facts

Answering
The 10 Most
Commonly Asked
Questions
About
The Luger Pistol

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photo by R. Kielkowicz

Over the years, most collectors of Luger Pistols are asked repeatedly the same questions by those seeking information about the weapon. This pamphlet is an attempt to list the questions most commonly asked, and give a brief answer to each.

1. Was Georg Luger a citizen of the United States?

Mr. Luger, the inventor of the pistol that bears his name, was born in Austria, in 1848 and died in Berlin, in 1923. His designs of the Pistole Parabellum, as it was originally known, incorporated many features of the Borchart pistol, which is called by some "The Father of all Lugers". At the time of his invention, Mr. Luger was in the employ of Deutsche Waffen und Munitionsfabriken, of Berlin Germany (DWM). Georg Luger visited our country on a number of occasions, but never became a citizen.

2. Over what period of time were Lugers made?

The first Luger was placed on the market in 1900, and several million Lugers later official production ended in 1942. At that time it was replaced by the Germany military with the Walther P-38. Lugers were built in Germany after 1942. However, it is believed that they were, for the most part, assembled from previously manufactured parts.

3. Who were the various manufacturers of Lugers?

DWM (Deutsch Waffen und Munitionsfabriken) of Berlin. The first manufacturer of the weapon. 1900 to approximately 1930.

ERFURT (Royal Arsenal of Erfurt, Germany). 1910 to 1918, with some rebuilding work done after the war. This arsenal was similar to our Springfield Arsenal, in that it was government owned and operated.

VICKERS LTD. (Vickers-Armstrong, Limited). This English firm made some 10,000 Lugers under contract for the Dutch. Circa 1917.

SIMSON & CO. (Suhl, Germany). Makers of Lugers throughout the 1920's and early 1930's. Much of their early work was the rebuilding of wartime production for reissue to the 100,000 man army allowed Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. Later they manufactured Lugers for military and some commercial sales.

WAFFENFABRIKEN BERN (Bern, Switzerland). Lugers made by this firm were basically two models. The 1906/24 made in the early 1920's and the 1929 Bern. The latter contains so many design changes that some say that it looks as much like a Japanese Nambu as it does a Luger.

MAUSER (Oberndorf, Germany). About 1930, this great German arms maker acquired DWM and built Lugers up to the end of official production in 1942. Mauser Lugers are identified by either the maker's name on the toggle or one of the following code marks in the same location. S/42, 42 or byf. NOTE: Some very early Mausers bear the letters DWM and must be identified by other means, such as proof marks.

KRIEGHOFF (Hienrich Krieghoff Waffenfabrick, Suhl, Germany). In 1935 this famous German firm entered the Luger field, making the weapon for the Luftwaffe, and a small number for the commercial market. As one might expect, their Lugers were of excellent quality. However, comparatively speaking, production quantities were far less than those of other major manufacturers. For that reason Krieghoff Lugers are considered to be a good item for the collector.

SPANDAU A German Arsenal, similar in structure to Erfart, did manufacture some Lugers. For many years nothing was known about their role in the Luger story, and for that matter very little has been documented as yet. However, several pieces have been discovered and are known to be genuine Spandau Lugers. All known examples carry the date 1918 on the chamber. Probably less than 100 made, thus a very rare Luger.

NOTE: Beware of fakes.

4. What were the different calibers in which Lugers were made?

The first was 7.65mm (30 Luger), then came the most common of all, 9mm. Probably a half dozen or so were made in 45 ACP and even less in 32 ACP and 380 cal. A few have been found in 8mm Nambu, but are thought to be reworks, not factory original. Note: Recent research indicates that the Japanese did not use, or allow to be used their crest, the Chrysanthemum, as a chamber mark on any handguns. Therefore, it follows that Lugers bearing this mark must be less than factory original. This information courtesy "Japanese Military Collector Quarterly".

5. In what barrel lengths were Lugers made?

The common lengths are: 3-5/8, 4, 4-3/4, 6, 8 and 11-3/4 inches. In the 1920's some Lugers were made with barrels ranging all the way up to 24 inches.

6. What countries used the Luger as a military hand weapon?

Many tested the Luger including the United States, but Switzerland was the first to adopt the gun, doing so in 1901. Germany adopted it for the Navy in 1906 and for the military in 1908; thus the German designation P.08. Brazil, Portugal, The Netherlands and Bulgaria, used the Luger along with Russia and several other countries on a limited basis. It should be noted that Lugers have been sold commercially throughout the world. Note: In late October, 1901 the United States took delivery of 1000 American Eagles in cal. 7.65mm for testing in the field. Shortly thereafter we returned 50 of these test pieces to the DWM factory in exchange for the same number in cal. 9mm. The latter is known today to collectors as the 1902 Cartridge Counter. None of the test Lugers were found acceptable to our ordnance department, whereupon those considered still serviceable were sold at public auction. There are less than 50 1900 Test Eagles known today, and very, very few Cartridge Counters.

7. How many different kinds of Lugers are there?

Collectors categorize Lugers as Commercials, Contracts, Militaries, Prototypes and Reworks. There are well over 300 variations of the gun known, and as interest mushrooms and students of the Luger become more knowledgeable, the list continues to grow. At this point it is questionable if anybody knows how many variations of the Luger exist.

8. What determines the value of a Luger?

It's the old story of supply and demand. The demand is increasing at a rapid rate while the supply of top quality pieces is on the decline. The variation is most important. However, it seems that condition is the key factor. Collectors don't want junk even if it is a very rare piece of junk. Therefore, excellent to mint matching Lugers are the best, regardless of the variation. Collectors agree that one can't go wrong buying mint Lugers.

9. I have a Luger at home, what is it worth?

This is the most frequently asked question of all. It is like saying that you have a car for sale, what is it worth? Obviously an answer can't be given without first knowing what kind of car or Luger you have, and without seeing the piece. Don't put a dealer or collector on the spot with this question. Instead, show him the gun so that he can give you an intelligent answer. Remember, Luger values range all the way from next to nothing for junk, to thousands of dollars for the rarest mint models.

10. Where can I get — Top quality Lugers for a collection; books on Lugers; Luger parts?

Always start with your local gun shops, all of them. Get to know all the dealers in your area. Don't exclude one shop because you don't like the owner, or because he never has any Lugers. The dealer you cross off your list may have a fine Luger hidden away or get one in, and you would feel rather foolish if you missed getting it because you gave up too soon. If you can't find what you seek locally, try one of the following:

Collection quality Lugers.

R. E. Shattuck, 6661 Castle Dr.,
Birmingham, Mich.

Prairie Enterprises, Box 4103,
Montgomery, Alabama

The above put out lists regularly and are most reliable.

Books on Lugers.

The Luger Pistol (Pistole Parabellum)
by Fred A. Datig,
Borden Publishing Co.

Luger Variations
by Harry E. Jones,
Published by the author

Lugers At Random
by Charles Kenyon, Jr.,
Handgun Press.

U. S. Test Trials/1900 Luger
by Michael Reese,
Coventry Publishing Co., Ltd.

Luger Parts

Harold Bruffett,
1 Church Street.,
Crosswell, Michigan

Note: The Shotgun News is a fine publication listing ads for Lugers, books and parts.

Special Note: In closing, a few words should be devoted to the subject of "fakes". Not the fake that attempts to change a common Luger into a rare variation, but the far more prevalent fake which includes rebluing, renumbering or re-anything. Matching numbers are important to the collector, and parts renumbering is a fairly simple procedure. The proper method of rebluing early Lugers is comparatively expensive, while the later Mauser finish is easier and cheaper. Nevertheless, it is unlikely you will find extensive professional rework on a lower priced Luger. Keep in mind that any work performed on a piece outside the factory, for the most part, should not be classified as original. The vast majority of dealers and collectors are honest men and should be consulted if you have any doubts concerning a particular Luger. Lastly, have a little faith. Don't expect every Luger to be a fake. In total, the percentage is exceedingly small.

The author of this pamphlet is a collector of Lugers dating from 1900 to the mid 1920's, and is interested in buying Lugers of all kinds.

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