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NOVEMBER, 1967

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THE COVER: Still one of the world's most popular handguns, the Luger captures the imagination of virtually everyone who comes in contact with it — whether they like firearms or not. Though it has not been manufactured since World War II, it's a handgun very much in demand and the rarer models are bringing top prices among collectors and gun connoisseurs. 4 x 5 Ektachrome transparency by Robert D'Olivo.

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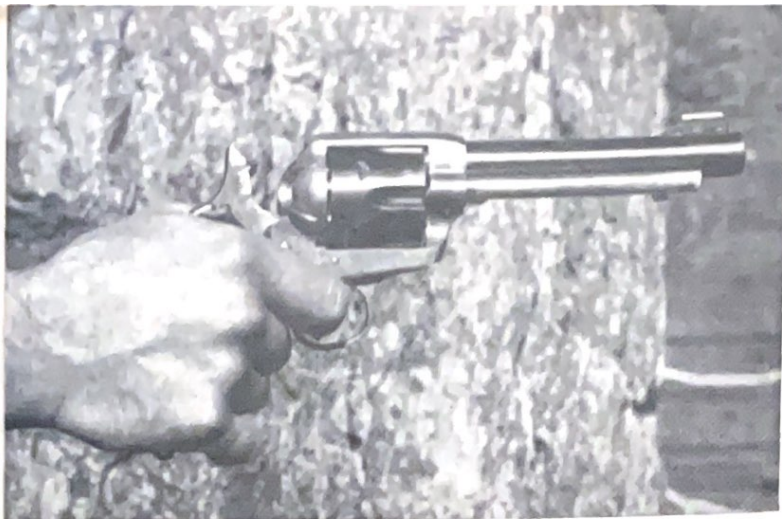
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GLAMOUR

WHAT MAGIC SYNDROME POSSES? IS YOURS

Although Colt considered discontinuing the Peacemaker before World War II, its popularity has continued to grow along with television and movie westerns.



The Broom-handle Mauser of 1896 was the first heavy-duty auto pistol — 7.63mm — to prove reliable in combat. Young Winston Churchill carried it in the famous cavalry charge at Omdurman and later wrote "the pistol was the best thing in the world."

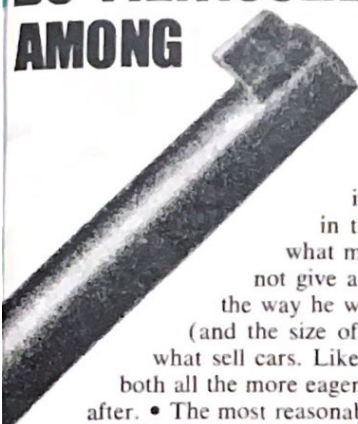
Whether used with one hand or two, whether "as issued" or customized, the .45 auto projects an image that is ruthless, heavy-handed yet dependable under almost any condition. To many it is an "ugly" beauty.

The Maxim togglelock is a magnificent piece of engineering. However by design it denudes itself to the elements. Sand, mud, powder residue or even dust can be enough to cause a malfunction.

GUNS & AMMO

GUNS THAT NEVER DIE!

DO PARTICULAR LUGERS, MAUSERS AND COLTS EACH AMONG THOSE MENTIONED BY JEFF COOPER?



Does it matter what a gun *looks* like? That is the question. In an age of technology, it is perhaps natural for people to desire beauty in their machines, but it's not easy to agree about what makes a machine beautiful. In theory one should not give a hoot what his car looks like, as long as it goes the way he wants it to, but Detroit will tell you that "looks" (and the size of the monthly payment, *not* the full price) are what sell cars. Like justice, "styling" is indefinable, yet we pursue both all the more eagerly for lack of any real knowledge of what we're after. • The most reasonable attitude is probably that "form follows function." If an instrument does its job perfectly it is beautiful. "Handsome is as handsome does," and all that. It's not always possible to make this stick, however, for while it is true that most efficient gadgets are indeed very handsome, there is a human tendency to think conventionally in this



matter, and to equate what is beautiful with what is customary. Radical designs are often aesthetically rejected at first because they are unfamiliar, only to be accepted later because they work better. The whole matter of taste and fashion is pretty involved, but the fact is that it *does* affect people, often in ways that they themselves deplore. • Take the matter of pistols. One might assume that here, if anywhere, appearance should be subordinate to efficiency. In some cases it is, but certainly not in every one. A number of "classic" handguns have been long superseded by more efficient designs, but remain perennially popular and still highly saleable — and not just with collectors. • The oldest of the classic handguns is certainly the Colt Single Action Army pistol of 1873. The whole Colt line of heavy-duty, front-feeding revolvers, from the "Texas Arm" to the 1860 Army, were noble weapons — but you don't find people carrying them for self-defense today, and you *do* find Peacemakers on active duty. Colt thought to discontinue this thoroughly obsolete sidearm before World War II, only to find that the market for it had increased rather than declined. Rivals jumped into the breach at once, notably Ruger, who retained the configuration while improving the action, and Colt is now still turning out the weapon at what I can only consider a ridiculous price. Various cheap imitations, of recent manufacture, can also be had, and today the Peacemaker is going strong in calibers from .22 rimfire to .454. There was even one recently custom-made for the .45-70 cartridge — surely one of the more curious examples of America's "economy of abundance." • What shall we make of the Peacemaker? It may be true that it was the best weapon of its day — though this will get you arguments from specialists — but that day was past before World War I. The fact is that it was never really a very good gun, in spite of certain conspicuous virtues. It was compact for its power, it was a fine man-stopper, and it was available at a time when nothing better had appeared, and that's really all you can praise it for.

GLAMOUR GUNS THAT NEVER DIE

While its frame was rugged, its action was fragile. Its reliability factor, so often extolled, is in reality just average. Its butt design makes a uniform grip problematical, its ignition system is ponderous and slow, its practical accuracy is only fair, it is deficient in safety factors, it is nearly impossible to fire fast and accurately at the same time, and it is murderously slow to reload. It is, today, a fourth-rate target arm, a third-rate defensive arm, and a second-rate sporting arm; yet people go right on buying it. The reasons are stylistic and nostalgic. The Peacemaker looks "western" and that's enough.

The tradition of the American West is a cultural treasure of the modern world, certainly not unique to the U.S. The western story, the western novel, and the western movie have an indestructible fascination, not just here but everywhere from Reykjavik to Rangoon. The reasons for this make a good topic for discussion, but whatever they are the "western" looms in a great many minds whenever handguns are



Oldest of the classic "glamour guns" is certainly the Calt Single Action Army of 1873. Nostalgia has created a demand for these guns in calibers from .22 to .45.



From the 1911 combat version to the factory accurized National Match, the .45 auto commands one of the leading positions on the list of never-to-die "glamour guns."

With over 100 known variations, including this very rare Model 1915 Artillery, the everlasting Luger possesses enough character extensions to please everyone.

mentioned. And the Peacemaker is indispensable to the medium. The western has dropped the handlebar mustache which was the uniform of the period, and acquired the Hollywood holster which was first conceived shortly after World War II, but it is permanently and happily married to the Single Action Army revolver. I am told that there are more pistol affrays in Los Angeles in any given month than occurred in the whole history of Tombstone, but western fiction, in combination with the dreamily unrealistic nature of conventional modern pistol competition, has made gunfighting and the Peacemaker synonymous in the popular mind, regardless of the facts. In the western legend, the Peacemaker is amoral, and used indiscriminately by both the good guys and the bad guys. In advertising jargon, the "image" it projects is neither virtuous nor depraved, but rather honest, self-reliant, manly, and clean-cut. It is purchased today because of this image and not because it is a truly serviceable sidearm.

The next real classic that comes to mind is the Broom-handle Mauser auto of 1896. (The Military Mauser 7.63mm pistol is commonly called the Broom-handle in the U.S. for

the very good reason that its "handle" is much like that of a broom.) This weapon is no longer manufactured even in replica, but it has a unique place in handgun history and its renown is world-wide. It was the first heavy-duty auto pistol to prove reliable, and it was "blooded" by young Winston Churchill in the famous cavalry charge at Omdurman on September 2, 1898. Churchill was plagued from youth by a bad right shoulder, dislocated while boarding a ship in a heavy sea, and was thus able to obtain permission to carry the new and radical Mauser into action in place of the regulation sword. In a letter to his mother two days after the battle he wrote, "I fired ten shots with my pistol — all necessary — and just got to the end of it as we cleared the crush. I never felt the slightest nervousness and felt as cool as I do now. I pulled up and reloaded within 30 yards of their mass and then trotted after my troop who were then about 100 yards away. I am sorry to say I shot five men for certain and two doubtful. The pistol was the best thing in the world!"*

The Broom-handle was never the official sidearm of any major power, but it was privately purchased by the junior officers of most European armies. Its strong points, apart from the very high reliability factor which made its reputation, were excellent mechanical design, fine workmanship, unusually high velocity (1400 fps) which provided good stopping power if bone were hit, a high rate of sustained fire obtained by means of a double-column box magazine loaded from a stripper clip, and its detachable shoulder stock which enabled even a bad shot to hit with it if you gave him a little time to get ready. Against it were its bulk, clumsiness, and impossible grip. In a sense it isn't really a pistol — it's a collapsible carbine.

Never popular in the U.S., the Broom-handle, nonethe-

less, occupies a definite place in our fiction — a place due entirely to its appearance, which is wild. I remember seeing a Fu Manchu movie as a child. What did the insidious doctor brandish at his discomfited adversaries? A Broom-handle Mauser, naturally. I was enchanted. It looked so *otherwise*. When the James Bond series overflowed a third of a century later, what did the psychopathic assassin Nash use in *From Russia With Love*? a Broom-handle Mauser, naturally. When just last summer the latest Sinatra thriller, *The Naked Runner* featured a sort of hoked-up "death kit," the box included the usual silencer, a detachable scope, various lethal-looking accessories — and a good old Broom-handle Mauser from

*Credit: Winston S. Churchill, by Randolph Churchill, *Volume I, Youth*, (Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1966), page 400.

1896! The silencer would have some problems with that supersonic load, but who cares about that? Technology has produced more deadly sidearms, but none that look so much the part. For this reason the Broom-handle is never used by the good guys — it's strictly a villain's weapon. Its projected image is complex, exotic, and *evil*.

Which brings us to the Luger. Ah, the Luger. Here's another old-timer that still lives by its looks, which are gorgeous. As an efficient fighting tool the Luger has some rather severe limitations, but it is so handsome that many of its fans do their utmost to deny its obvious obsolescence. Perhaps a dozen correspondents have actually asked me where they could get a Luger to take to Vietnam. A .22 auto pistol is now made in West Germany to look almost exactly like this 1900 design, and at least one U.S. gunsmith specializes in converting genuine Lugers, at great trouble and expense, to .45 caliber.

The Luger does in fact have a number of fine qualities apart from its facade. It is, in good examples, beautifully made and finished. It can be quite accurate. It has the strongest action ever used in a repeating pistol — the barrel blows before the breech can. And it feels good in the hand — quite unlike the Broom-handle. It is the original home of the 9mm Parabellum cartridge, as good a middle-caliber load as there is today, and probably the world's most popular.

Against it are extreme sensitivity to ammunition type, very high vulnerability to foreign matter, a basically unsound trigger action, and a safety that cannot be operated by the shooter's hand in firing position.

The "average" Luger cannot be counted on to feed reliably. I say this advisedly after quite a lot of observation of the problem. If you happen to have a Luger that always

works, treasure it. It is exceptional. And don't change your brand of ammunition. That Maxim toggle-lock is a magnificent piece of engineering, but it calls for exactly the right forces in order to function. Variations in powder charge, bullet shape, case diameter, or even the type of lubricant in the action, seem to unbalance its equations. Of the dozen or so individual examples I have fired over the past decade, only one could be counted on for a full magazine without a jam. This was a small-bore (7.65mm) version, which does not count.

The Luger action is practically naked to the elements. Those beautiful articular parts will not tolerate sand, mud, powder residue, or even much dust. A pine-needle or a cactus thorn will simply stop the action. We all like to keep our weapons immaculate, but sometimes we can't. The Luger is sort of over-civilized in this respect. "Off-the-pavement" it sulks.

The Luger trigger is an engineering catastrophe. It works through enough angles to delight a politician. This may not be a drawback in coarse work, but it definitely hampers the delicate kind of shooting the Luger seems intended for, where its velocity, intrinsic accuracy, and precise machining might matter. Unlike some other kinds of trigger actions, which can respond to customizing, the Luger trigger defies the gunsmith. I once tried one that I thought was good, but I was much younger then.

The Luger safety, of course, is out. Like the horrible Japanese #14, it should really be operated with the other hand. Cocked-and-locked with a Luger is no quicker than unloaded. The weapon was obviously designed by people who felt that plenty of time is available in emergencies. Some-

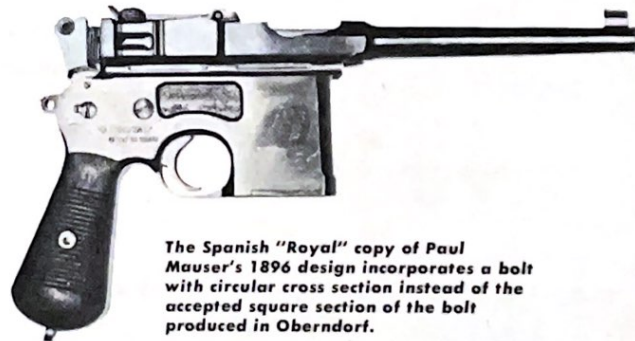
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Above: Despite its lack of target accuracy the Broom-handled Military Mauser was purchased by junior officers of most European armies in 7.63mm, 9mm Mauser and 9mm Parabellum.

Right: The 1911 and 1911A1 lend themselves to customizing touches. Here for example is a Commercial model dressed up with adjustable target sights and a "Commander" hammer.

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The Spanish "Royal" copy of Paul Mauser's 1896 design incorporates a bolt with circular cross section instead of the accepted square section of the bolt produced in Oberndorf.



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GLAMOUR GUNS

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times it is. Not usually. So here again we have a classic which lives by its image rather than its utility.

Next on the list is the 1911 Colt. This is a true classic, but essentially different from the previous examples in that it is definitely *not* obsolete. A man doesn't have to like the looks of the .45 auto—indeed this comes hard to many—but it doesn't count on its looks. It works, and thus needs no "mystique." Yet it does project an image. The majority of examples are army issue, and a good half of those in service were built before their shooters were born. Their general effect is one of grizzled, cynical, pragmatism. The finish may be "Antique Parkerized," the workmanship may be well down to wartime standards of carelessness, and long years of hard use may have rounded off all sharp edges and opened out the joints, but the character of the piece remains one of ruthless, heavy-handed, dependable power.

There is no need to extol or decry the 1911, it speaks for itself. Customized, it will shoot into four minutes. As issued, it will deck a man as far away as you can hold. It is more compact than other weapons of its power, and more powerful than others of its bulk. It will take a man out of the fight with one round in 19 cases out of 20, it will go in one side of an automobile and out the other. It can sustain action almost without breaking rhythm as long as you can supply its neat, flat magazines, and it will keep on shooting under conditions that would discourage a bulldozer. Its drawbacks are that it's a bit large for handbag use, its safety is inaccessible to a southpaw, and it's ugly.

Ugliness is the issue in this discussion. Those of us who have tried 'em all and discovered by painstaking trial and error that the Colt .45 auto is *it*, tend to lose sight of the aesthetic consensus. We love the 1911 dearly and for us it can't be ugly. We are on a reverse course from that of other classicists, since they hold that their favorites must be efficient because they are beautiful, while we maintain that ours is beautiful because it's efficient. The best we can do in any emotional disputation arising from this difference in viewpoint is to admit that each man has a right to be peculiar in his own way.

To complete the pattern, however, we should note that the image of the .45 auto comes through as coarse, brutal and deadly.

There is some question as to whether the modern American double-action revolver, as typified by the Colt Official Police and the Smith & Wesson M. & P., may properly be called a classic. Undistinguished both in appearance and

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NOVEMBER 1967

efficiency, it nonetheless, stands in the public mind as the upholder of law and order. No matter how often it may be used by criminals, it is emotionally on the side of the good guys. If you see a hood using one you rather assume that he jumped a cop and took away his gun.

The double-action type loses image, or cultural identity, by being too diverse. It's a far cry from the humble Chief's Special to the lordly .44 Magnum, but as the intermediate versions grade into each other across the spectrum, a distinct visual effect is hard to identify. By association, however, the double-action revolver means "police" to most of us, just as the .45 auto says "soldier," the pocket auto says "crook," and the Peacemaker says "cowboy." By extension the Broom-handle Mauser says "fiend," and the Luger says - well, perhaps, "gentleman." All such notions are, of course, completely unrelated to the merits of the weapon in actual use, and need not be based upon reality.

Images may be projected by all sorts of handguns, but as one's knowledge of the subject grows the effect lessens. Basically the classic image, like MacNamara's Band, is more effective "the farther back you stand." It's amusing, however, for those who know a little more about guns than the average film producer, to play the "image game" with less classical models. For instance:

The 2", Double-action, .38 Special "Snubby" - tough, honest, unpretentious. The Walther PPK - advanced, intellectual, dainty. The Smith & Wesson M39 - efficient, unsentimental,

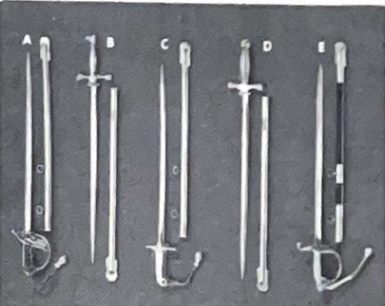
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**Roger Barlow reviews
THE WORLD OF .22's**

modern. The Derringer - small, stupid, dangerous. The 8 3/8" Smith & Wesson .44 Magnum - aristocratic, conservative, elegant - and so on.

I am well aware that this essay is quite subjective in its outlook. Admitting this, I do not apologize for it. Obviously the specifications and ballistics of any weapon can be looked up in the tables, and if one wants to study comparative performance he can draw his conclusions from current records of competition. The fact remains that a whole lot of shooters are not as interested in the measurable merits of a gun as they are in their subjective reaction to it. So I have presented the foregoing as one man's opinion only. If yours differs, more power to you, but let's keep it clean.

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