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# American RIFLEMAN

MAUSER'S LATEST PISTOL:  
IS IT  
THEIR LAST?





# Commemoratives, variations and are all leading to increased interest

THE phenomenal rise in the value of Luger pistols beginning in the late 50s and early 60s led the American International Armament Company (Interarms) to make a sales survey in the United States and Europe to determine the possibility of marketing a newly manufactured Luger pistol.

That survey, conducted in 1963, indicated that a substantial market existed, and Interarms then began a search for a manufacturing concern which would be both willing and able to initiate production of a new model Luger. After much research and cost analysis, only two firms appeared to be capable of producing such a pistol: Mauser-Werke of West Germany, which had produced both commercial and military Lugers prior to 1943, and the Eidgenossische Waffenfabrik at Bern, Switzerland. The Swiss armed forces were the first to employ the Luger — even before the Germans — and the Bern Factory had turned out both military and commercial versions.

Samuel Cummings of Interarms approached both firms with the proposal, and each began feasibility studies. After careful examination of costs, Interarms chose the proposed Mauser Parabellum over the potentially more expensive Swiss gun and awarded a contract for 100,000 pistols, to be delivered over a seven-year period.

As Mauser delved further into the project, they realized that an exact copy of the Pistole 08 was impractical from a cost standpoint, even though they had the original P.08 charts which had been hidden from French occupation forces following World War II. Accordingly, they contacted Waffenfabrik Bern and purchased the complete Swiss production package for \$50,000. Mauser then invested an additional \$750,000 for machinery and other start-up costs. Pilot models appeared in late 1968 and early 1969, while full production commenced in early 1970.

As can be imagined, the first Mausers closely resembled the much-simplified Swiss pistol, rather than the Lugers that Mauser had made previously. The simplifications included a straight front grip-strap, lack of knurling on the metal parts and shortened dismantling catches, manual safety levers and triggers. The protective ridge above the sear was eliminated and the side-plate rib was left the same overall height as the plate itself. The internal receiver stop was made square, rather than given a rounded rear side. And, finally, the receiver front was machined to give a circular stepped appearance. Prototype and very early



Just like it was, way back when.... A worker in the Mauser shipping room packages Parabellum pistols for overseas customers.

guns were virtually identical to the Swiss M29, the only difference other than markings being that the grip safety was shorter.

Mauser utilized steel forgings in the construction of all major parts, except the side-plate, locking bolt, trigger, safety lever and firing pin for which they used steel investment castings. The grip safety is formed from heavy-duty sheet steel. It wraps around the metal frame, thus preventing foreign objects from being lodged in the protruding grip safety plate as sometimes happened on the original Luger pistols fitted with a grip safety.

The finish applied to these guns was initially advertised as "MAUSER BLUE." It consists of a highly polished, bright bluing applied by the hot dip (salts) process. Although this finish is not up to the superb quality of the Pre-World War II Luger rust bluing, it is nonetheless excellent by modern standards. The trigger, safety lever, locking bolt and magazine release are heat-treated to the attractive straw color traditionally associated with the Luger pistol.

One improvement incorporated by Mauser was the inclusion of two metal pins in each grip at the point where the raised interior wood rib meets the forward edge of the grip strap. This solved one of the Luger's chronic problems — that of loose grips resulting from worn or chipped wooden ribs. An unfortunate side effect of this change is that the grips were made somewhat wider and more squared than

the normal Luger in order to be able to accept the pins. This decidedly and adversely affected the "feel" of the pistol. The grips on these early guns had the same smooth border associated with the Swiss M29.

The early Mauser Parabellum retained all of the distinctive M29 features, but alterations were quickly made to the basic design, even as production commenced. These changes included checkering the thumbpieces of the magazine release, disassembly catch, safety lever and toggle grips. The original receiver was soon replaced by a standard angular German type, and the grips lost their plain borders. In spite of the changes, these guns still bear more resemblance to the Swiss pistol than to the more familiar German Pistole 08. Most early production guns were imported by Interarms.

The manufacturer's designation assigned to this first Mauser Parabellum model is 29/70. The first portion of the designation indicates the original pistol to which it is most similar and the second portion indicates the date of general introduction, i.e. the Swiss Model 1929 and the year 1970. In the U.S. it is generally known as the "Swiss Model."

These pistols were offered in both .30 Luger and 9 mm Luger cal. Those chambered for the .30 Luger round were available with a 6" barrel, and those in 9 mm Luger were available with either 4" or 6" barrels. It is interesting to note that Mauser made free use of the word "Luger" in stamping ammunition types on the guns but was prohibited from actually labeling the pistols as Lugers. A.F. Stoeger owns the copyright on the name "Luger," and has since 1923 when they were importing Lugers from Germany. The guns made for Interarms have the Mauser banner and "Original" struck into the front toggle link and "Mauser Parabellum/9 mm (or .30) Luger" on the left frame side. About halfway through the Swiss model production, the side-plate markings were deleted. The reason was purely economical. Pistols imported by Interarms were marked "Interarms/Alexandria, Virginia" on the right front side of the receiver, together with the Interarms trademark. Additionally, above the chambers of these pistols appears the eagle from the Great Seal of the United States as originally used on the 1900 Model, American Eagle Luger. All early pistols had their safety area marked "SAFE" and their extractors marked "LOADED." Later these markings were switched to the respective German equivalents: "GESICHERT" and "GE-LADEN."

scarcity  
in the ...

# Postwar Parabellums

BY FRANCIS C. ALLAN



The sales of the Swiss Model proved somewhat disappointing, and this was attributed to two causes. The first was that the price had risen from a projected retail price of \$160, to an actual retail price of \$260, in 1971. The second, and perhaps more important reason, was the 29/70 simply did not look or feel like a true Luger to those American consumers who constituted the Mauser Parabellum's principal market. This latter problem can be traced to the 29/70's direct ancestor, the Swiss M29, which has been accused of having the same faults.

Nothing could be done about the cost

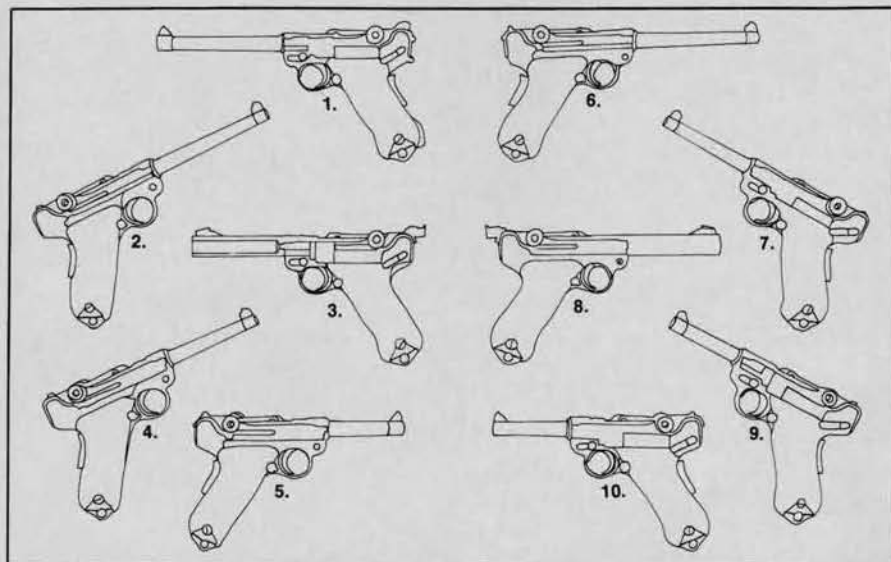
that had not already been done, but the possibility of giving the pistol a German facelift was examined and eventually led to the second model of the Mauser Parabellum, the 06/73. This numerical designation is derived from the pistol's overall resemblance to the various Luger models of 1906 and the year of introduction, 1973. Actually, the pistol could be obtained as early as the close of 1971, but it was not very widely distributed until early 1973. It is possible that Mauser did not intend to release the 06/73 until all the 29/70s in inventory were sold, but changed its mind when sales of the

earlier model continued to fall short of expectations.

The changes that were made gave the 06/73 the appearance of the Pistolet 08, and it understandably became known as the P. 08 Model in the U.S. The changes included swelling the lower portion of the front gripstrap, lowering the side-plate rib to approximately three-quarters of its original height, enlarging the take-down lever button and changing the manual safety from a checkered button to a ribbed rectangle. The trigger was given a full curl (three-quarter circle) design. In order to provide the desired feel to the pistol, the grip forward edges were more rounded. Since this resulted in making the grips thinner, it became impossible to seat the grip pins. To achieve the same desired effect, a raised pin was placed in the middle crossmember of the frame and a corresponding hole provided in the interior of the grips. Mauser had at last succeeded in making their Parabellum look and feel like a Luger.

In addition to the two standard models already noted, several variations, prototypes, and commemorative pistols have been made. One variation of the standard Swiss Model resulted from the production changeover from the 29/70 to the 06/73. Many parts unique to the Swiss Model were in inventory at the time it was phased-out, and, although most could be completed and sold as spares for the Swiss Model pistols, 65 frames were on hand, which, it was felt, should be utilized. They were completed using whatever Swiss Model parts were still available and substituting P. 08 Model parts where necessary and possible. All 65 guns received 5" .30 cal. barrels and were imported by Interarms.

In 1973, after experimenting with



Ten of the 20 or more production variations and commemorative Parabellum pistols made by Mauser from 1970 to date are pictured on the following pages. Shown (not in order of manufacture) are: 1. The German Navy Commemorative, 9 mm, 6" barrel; 2. A Swiss 29/70, 6" barrel, .30 cal.; 3. A .30 cal. Target Model P.08; 4. A 5" .30 cal. Swiss Model, made up of both 29/70 and P.08 parts; 5. A 9 mm Swiss Model 4" barrel; 6. A 6" barrel, .30 cal. P.08; 7. One of 250 .30 cal. Bulgarian Commemoratives; 8. The 9 mm Target Model; 9. A standard P.08 9 mm 4" barrel; 10. A Russian Commemorative in 9 mm.











Shown here is the first photograph of what may well be the last P.08—Mauser's Parabellum Carbine. A limited number of the 11.8" barreled carbines, with their detachable shoulder stocks, will be made at Mauser's Oberndorf/Nekar plant in 1980 and 1981. No further manufacture of Mauser Parabellum pistols is contemplated. Interarms will import a portion of the yet-to-be-determined total quantity for sale in the United States, and has promised their first available specimen to the *American Rifleman* for product evaluation and test firing.

various sighting arrangements, Mauser released a target model on special order only. These pistols are fitted with distinctive micrometer sights and heavy 5" barrels. The grip safety was eliminated and special attention was paid to the selection and fitting of parts to achieve generally smoother functioning. It was available either in .30 or 9 mm cal., and only 10 examples each have reached the U.S.

Mauser produced many prototype pistols while experimenting with the basic design. With an eye on the public's interest in Georg Luger's personal "baby" Luger, the experimental shop at Mauser produced two seven-shot, 2.9" barreled prototypes. One has a shortened Swiss Model frame and the other has a shortened P. 08 Model frame. Also, a single standard P. 08 Model frame was constructed with a 2.9" barrel. No production of these interesting pistols was undertaken.

The most interesting prototype is undoubtedly the single .45 ACP specimen, made in 1973. The pistol is entirely different from the .45 cal. test Lugers made for the 1907 U.S. Army handgun trials. The massive nature of the gun is its most distinguishing feature. It is fitted with a thick, 5" barrel and a straight grip strap. The awkward appearance and feel prevented the pistol from entering general production.

Mauser produced a special series of the P. 08 Model for Signor Renato Gamba, whose shotguns are marketed by Mauser in Europe. The guns have etched over the chamber an "eagle-RG" monogram associated with Sig. Gamba's products and "Mauser P. 08 4" Seri Speciale Renato Gamba" along the right receiver frame rail.

Through the long history of the Luger, the pistol's numerous manufacturers have produced factory cutaway or sectionalized guns, the purpose of which was to instruct military ordnance and training personnel in the mechanical functioning of the gun or for salesmen to utilize as a visual aid in their sales presentations. It was natural, for the latter reason, that Interarms requested approximately a hundred of these skeletonized Parabellums from Mauser. The guns are marked "Interarms / Alexandria, Virginia" on the right

receiver side, but no eagle is etched over the partially cutaway chamber nor are the guns proofed. They were sold fitted with either 4" or 6" barrels, and they reached numerous retailers throughout the U.S.

Mauser also took a page from the Colt handbook and realized that a large profit margin existed in producing limited production commemorative pieces. Adhering to the basic P. 08 Model, they offered a Swiss Commemorative in late 1976 which celebrated the 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Luger by the Swiss government in 1900. The pistol differs from the standard P. 08 Model only in that a 4¾", .30 cal. barrel was fitted, the Swiss Cross with Sunburst is etched over the chamber and "75 Jahre, /Parabellum-Pistole/ 1900-1975" is engraved in gold on the left frame side above the grip. Only 250 Swiss Commemoratives were produced and none was imported into the U.S. The pistols came in fitted walnut cases containing the spare magazine, cleaning brush, cleaning rod and take-down tool. In 1977, following the issuance of the successful Swiss Commemorative, Mauser quickly announced that it would offer Bulgarian and Russian Commemoratives. The Bulgarian has a 4¾", .30 cal. barrel and, for the first time from

Mauser, dished toggles. The chamber is marked with the Bulgarian royal crest and the front toggle link has the well-known DWM scroll marking engraved in cartouche. The safety and extractor are marked in Bulgarian. The left frame side has "75 Jahre Parabellum-Pistole/ Königreich Bulgarien" engraved in gold. The Russian Commemorative has a 4", 9 mm barrel and the traditional crossed Nagant rifles over the camber. The left side of the frame is marked "70 Jahre / Parabellum - Pistole / Kaiserreich Russland." The extractor is marked with the Russian word for "loaded" while the safety is marked, like the original, in Bulgarian Cyrillic letters. The Bulgarian and the Russian Commemoratives are provided with fitted walnut cases with all the usual accessories. Only 250 of each version have been produced. Interarms, continuing to act as the exclusive Mauser handgun distributor for the U.S. and Canada, received approximately one-half of the total production.

In early 1979 Mauser released their most ambitious commemorative — the Naval Model. The pistol is fitted with a 6", 9 mm barrel, special adjustable rear sight similar to the one on its namesake, a lanyard loop and stock lug. The left frame side has "75 Jahre/Parabellum-Pistole/ Kaiserliche Marine" engraved in gold. The guns come in fitted leather attache cases containing the take-down tool, cleaning rod, spare magazine and a copy of John Walter's excellent book *Luger*. Again Interarms has received only a small number — 10 — of the total production of 250.

There are two basic proof marking patterns encountered on production guns. Early guns received only the Mauser house proof known as the FBM banner proof. The name is derived from the placement of the letters FBM in a banner similar to that used on the Mauser trademark. This proof indicates that the pistol was assembled at the Mauser factory in Bavaria. (FBM = Fabrikanten Bayern Mauser). It can be found on the barrel top, frame rail and on the slide stop.

The second type of proofing came into general use in 1973, replacing the FBM Banner proof. It consists of the new Eagle/Nitro (actually Eagle/Normal)



To add another classy touch to the product, Mauser packed some Parabellums, along with accessories, in simulated walnut cases.

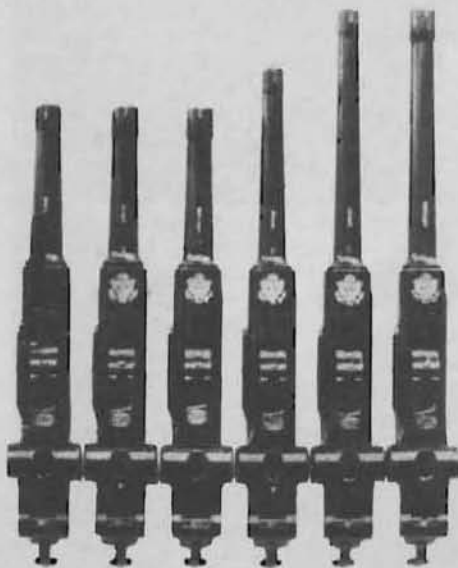
proof on the barrel, left receiver, rear toggle link and together with a dated Ulm proof on the frame rail. The original Eagle/Nitro proof first appeared in the late 1800s on guns capable of handling the increased pressures of smokeless powder. The Ulm District Proofhouse mark is designed to appear like a stag's antler, and is usually preceded by two digits indicating the year of application. In the case of the Naval Commemorative, the alpha characters "H1" precede the Ulm proof. These letters indicate that the pistols were assembled in 1978.

Mausers utilizes a serial numbering system unlike any previously employed on Luger pistols. Standard production models chambered for the 9 mm round are prefixed "11" and the first number used was 11.001001. Those in .30 cal. are prefixed "10," the sequence beginning at number 10.001001. The serial number series was not affected by the change-over from the Swiss Model to the P. 08 Model, and there is no duplication of serial numbers. The full serial numbers are stamped in the right frame trigger well and on the right receiver above the extractor. Most guns have the last three digits of the serial number roughly etched on the underside of the rear toggle link.

Several exceptions to the normal serial numbering practice exist. Each commemorative series pistol received a serial number indicating its place in the limited production run. For example: "001 von 250" for the first gun in the limited series of 250. Another deviation is the Renato Gamba Special series of pistols. The serial numbers used consist of four numeric digits preceded by the letters "R.G." The full serial number appears in cartouche in

the usual locations. The manufacturing run for the Renato Gamba Specials was initially expected to be a thousand units but was finally restricted to 200 pistols. A thousand frames were already serialized before the decision to restrict the size of the run was made, however, and these were returned to the regular production line. At least 100, equipped with 4" .30 cal. barrels, were imported by Interarms, having been marked in their usual manner.

Prototype pistols were either unserialized or had unique serial number blocks assigned. Serial number 10.0012 for example is part of a pre-production batch of Swiss Models proofed in 1969.



Interarms imported guns in 9 mm and .30 Cal. with 4-, 5-, or 6-in. barrels. All but their cutaway (l.) bore the 1900 American eagle.

The 29/70 baby model prototype has the serial number 10.000001.

At first glance the cutaway pistols appear not to have received serial numbers. Only after dismantling can the serial number be noted, roughly etched on the insides of the grips, side-plate and on the underside of the receiver and rear toggle link. This number also appears on the rear side of the special magazine.

In 1961 while doing research in Germany for the revised edition of his book *The Luger Pistol*, Fred Datig visited the Mauser factory at Oberndorf where he discussed the possibility of resuming production of this famous design. The managing director of Mauser-Werke informed him that any proposed plan of "... retooling and producing ... (a Luger) ... which would have to compete on today's market with less complicated and certainly less expensive pistols would warrant ... immediate rejection." Apparently the increasing value of the Luger as a collector's item, together with the previously noted survey taken by Interarms, was sufficient to change the opinion of the Mauser hierarchy. Hindsight tells us that this was probably not a wise decision from a financial viewpoint, for even while the production of the P. 08 Model was beginning, Mauser and Interarms were questioning the financial advisability of continuing large scale production and advertised the P. 08 version as being a limited production model. No exact figures have been released to indicate how limited the manufacturing run was, but regular production ceased in late 1975. At that time approximately 30,000 pistols out of the initial order for 100,000 had been delivered. In January, 1976, Interarms announced the cancellation of its original contract with Mauser. The fact was, that rising manufacturing costs, coupled with an increasingly unfavorable exchange rate between West Germany and the U.S., had forced the pistol out of the competitive market.

Although the successful commemorative pistols will undoubtedly continue to be produced in limited numbers, it is highly unlikely that large-scale production of the Mauser Parabellum pistol will ever be resumed. The account of the production of the Mauser Parabellum provides the final chapter in the fascinating history of the Luger Pistol.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Mausers latest Parabellum recreates the 1904 German Navy Luger. Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the adoption of the Navy model, each of the 250 pistols bears a gold inlaid legend and special serial number. Each comes in its own leather attache case.