

ALTHOUGH DECLARED obsolete by German Ordnance, and rarely are target matches of any class won with it, the Luger remains an object of intense interest. Mention the Luger and most men's eyes light up, and—"Do you have one? Do you want to sell it?" are typical questions. Disregarding the gun collector's market, concerned primarily with variations in models throughout the years and historical connotations, what is there about the Luger that continues to command the interest of shooters? Well, it is fine appearing, neither too big nor too small, of just the right weight, obviously well made with

closely fitted parts, solid, precise and durable are words that come to mind. Neither are there shaky slide, loose springs or bucket-of-bolts rattles. It is chambered for a load (9mm Parabellum-Luger) that has world-wide popularity for military, police and sporting use, a load that is again neither too big nor too small but just right. Its splendid graceful, sloping grip makes it handle well (it points like "pointing your finger") and its general appearance is handsome and impressive. It is one of the most popular and talked about guns ever made.

So much for eye appeal, workmanship

and generalities—what about performance? The first disappointment in shooting the Luger will be its lack of reliable functioning. All those precisely made parts cannot atone for a poor feed system, and a worse ejection system. Finally, its complex action of delicately balanced cams, springs and lever arms requires near perfect ammunition. These factors were reported on in greater detail in the 20th edition of the GUN DIGEST.

As for accuracy, again we have the strange anomaly of seeming precision design and manufacture but dubious performance on the target range. I had an



Fig. 1. The best of the Lugers—one of the last made by Mauser. A P-08 in 9mm caliber, 4" barrel, code marked "S42," date of manufacture 1941.

# The Best of the Military Lugers

The author feels that the most desirable Luger-Parabellums were made between 1934 and 1942—with some exceptions. Here's how he rates them, what to look for when buying one and how to make one shoot better.

by ROBERT A. BURMEISTER

American Eagle 7.65mm caliber Luger that grouped well and recently I acquired an "S42" 9mm Luger that shoots 2" groups at 20 yards using an arm rest. On the other hand I've shot Lugers that were, some of them, good for only 4" at 20 yards.

There is no question but that the Luger is a basically accurate pistol and, under certain conditions, can produce excellent results. It has a well-designed, well-made, solidly mounted barrel and a solid, tight fitting breech—yet there are three big handicaps: the sights are poor and difficult to adjust; the trigger pull varies from bad to fair, and even new commercial ammunition is apparently not up to 88 Special or

45 ACP target ammunition standards. When I get an arm-rest 2" group at 20 yards with the Luger, I am doing so in spite of those three factors.

Carrying a Luger brings up another basic disadvantage—you need a second thumb to get the safety off. I can see why German Ordnance declared it obsolete. The Luger is much slower in getting off the first shot than its successor, the Walther P38 or the excellent Smith & Wesson M39-2.

Still, such negative comments rarely discourage the man who wants one. He'll likely say "I still want one. Which is the best? How do you tell a good Luger?"

The problem of selecting a "good" Luger is not easy. New Lugers of original design—having the short-recoil toggle breech mechanism suitable for the 7.65mm Luger and 9mm Luger—were unobtainable until recently. Now the Mauser-made Luger (or Parabellum) of Swiss pattern is offered, but all other short-recoil type Lugers around are second hand. And it's been that way for a long time. My own experience with Lugers has involved several dozen, 7.65mm and 9mm, with barrel lengths of 3", 4", 4½", 6" and 8", yet none were new. I've never shot a new Luger.

How then to select one? As in all dealings for a used item the best rule is *cautat*



numbered so profusely and it has a grip safety. The recoil spring is of flat-leaf type, replaced in later models with a coil spring. The right toggle is fitted with a lock which makes it necessary to pull the toggles straight back about 3/16" before they may be lifted up. Toggles on guns without the lock may be lifted up without initial backward travel. Workmanship on this gun is the finest I've ever seen, comparing favorably with Parker or Purdey shotguns. It is unbelievably smooth working—"velvety" is a good adjective. Fit and finish inside and out are of the best quality. Yet this type should not be chosen by the interested shooter. The 7.65mm cartridge is not desirable, the recoil spring is hard to replace and is susceptible to breakage, but of principal concern is the fact that this gun is 70 years old. That makes all the springs suspect and the steel of doubtful quality.

### Customized Luger

Fig. 3 shows what can be done to make a target pistol out of a mine-run military Luger. A custom built 6" barrel has been installed by John Dewey. This barrel measures 0.579" at the muzzle and 0.632" one-half inch in front of receiver. The added weight improves the balance considerably. The front sight is a Patridge-type 1/8" blade on a ramp silver soldered to a flat milled on the barrel. The rear sight is a 1/8" Micro adjustable for windage and elevation. It is silver soldered to the rear link, the old rear sight ground away. Trigger pull has been reduced to 4.0 pounds. While this pull is a big improvement over the 7 to 9 pound trigger pulls usually found on Lugers, it is still somewhat spongy, doesn't compare to the crisp letoff of a Colt Gold Cup 45 or the Smith & Wesson M52 automatic. Table I shows how this rebarreled Luger compares to the standard military issue of fig. 1 and the 1900 commercial model of fig. 2.

In addition to custom built Luger barrels there are several sources of imported barrels. These are usually offered in 4", 6" and 8" lengths. No front sights are furnished; the original front sight must be reinstalled on the new barrel (a dovetailed slot is provided for this purpose). The rear sight on the link can be opened up to a 1/8" square notch and then used with the standard pyramidal front sight. This is better than the original front sight combination but not as good as when both front and rear are of the square post Pat-

ridge type. Neither Patridge nor bead sights are commercially available for the standard Luger front sight dovetailed slot; they have to be custom made.

Improvement of the Luger's trigger pull is a difficult job, even for a competent gunsmith, because of the many moving parts and engaging surfaces in the trigger assembly. If your Luger's trigger pull is tolerable, say between 5 and 7 pounds, I'd leave it alone.

Summarizing, then—the best Lugers, in the writer's opinion, are those of the most recent manufacture. Commercial models are often choice specimens but are apt to be very old, therefore of questionable metal quality. Customizing is a good way to improve a Luger, for a longer barrel can be installed, the trigger pull improved somewhat, and the inadequate military issue sights can be replaced with modern adjustable 1/8" Patridge sights. ●

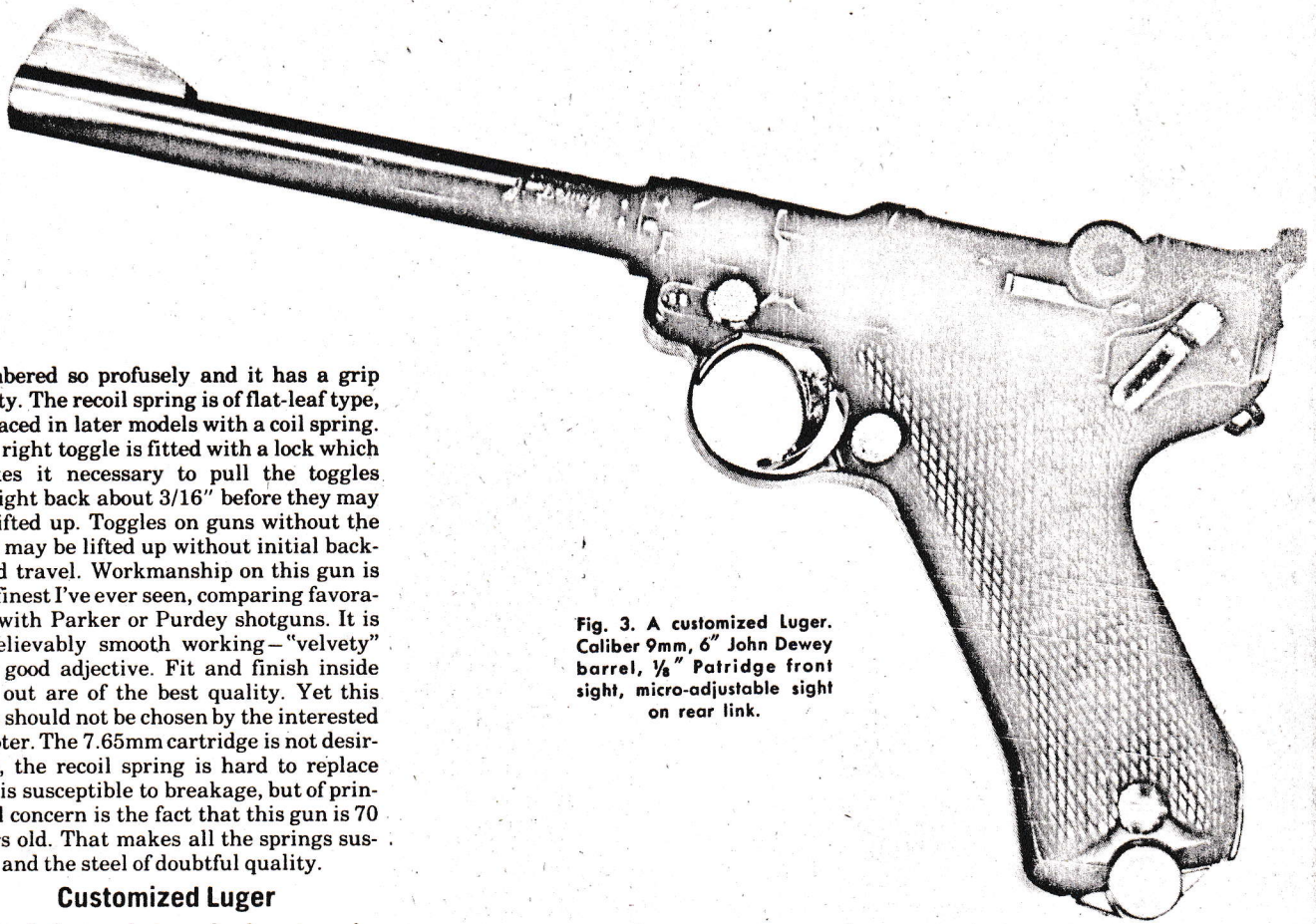


Fig. 3. A customized Luger. Caliber 9mm, 6" John Dewey barrel, 1/8" Patridge front sight, micro-adjustable sight on rear link.

Table I  
Comparison of Lugers

	"42" Luger Fig. 1	1900 Luger Fig. 2	Rebb'ld Luger Fig. 3
Caliber		7.65mm P	9mm P
Weight	1.99 lbs.	1.97 lbs.	2.16 lbs.
Barrel length	4"	4 3/4"	6"
Length over-all	8 3/4"	9 3/4"	10 3/4"
Front sight height above center line of bore	5/8"	3/8"	7/8"
Sight radius	7 7/8"	8 1/2"	10 1/4"
Trigger pull	7.0 lbs.	5.9 lbs.	4.0 lbs.



emptor—"let the buyer beware." The buyer should first assess the source. I have found the best Lugers are those that can be traced directly to the German military. The poorest are those that have been through a multitude of hands, finally winding up in some sport shop.

As Datig, Jones and Kenyon point out in their excellent books\* on the Luger, there have been a number of Luger manufacturers. However, the best maker, in my opinion, is the most recent of them—the Mauser factory. Such Lugers are marked "42," "S42" or "byf" on the middle of the top of the forward toggle joint link. Dated from 1934 to 1942, these Lugers were made of the best alloy steels available, using highly advanced metallurgical processes. They were made to precise and practical tolerances, had the finest heat treatment of critical parts, and generally had the benefit of several decades of manufacturing history. Their exterior finish is good but not equal to that of most Smith & Wessons and Colts, and better than most military type handguns made by these two firms.

### Mauser 42 Luger

Fig. 1 is a fine example of a "42" Luger made in 1941. A 9mm military issue, the frame under the left toggle is marked "PO8," the date abbreviated over the rear end of the barrel. On some Lugers the date is not abbreviated, but in any case the date digits should not be confused with the various parts numbers. The part numbers appear as follows: The serial number (9621) of the gun in fig. 1 is shown on the frame in front and on the left side of the receiver. The last two digits of the serial number (21) also appear on the locking bolt (ahead of the trigger), on the trigger plate (above the trigger), on the rear of the rear link of toggle joint, on the trigger under the trigger plate, on the trigger bar, on the rear of the forward toggle joint link, on top of the hold-open latch, on the connecting pin between rear link and receiver, on top of ejector, and on the forward part of the safety bar. Thus 12 parts are numbered. Lugers such as this one (if dated between 1934 and 1942) are the best available, I believe; they are the ultimate in Luger design, materials and workmanship.

A commercial issue pistol made in 1900 is shown in fig. 2. It has a 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " barrel and is in 7.65mm caliber. It differs from later military models in that its parts are not

\*Luger Pistol, by F. A. Datig, Alhambra, Ca., 1962  
Lugers at Random, by Chas. Kenyon, Jr., Chicago, Ill., 1970  
Luger Variations, by H. E. Jones, Torrance, Ca. 1967

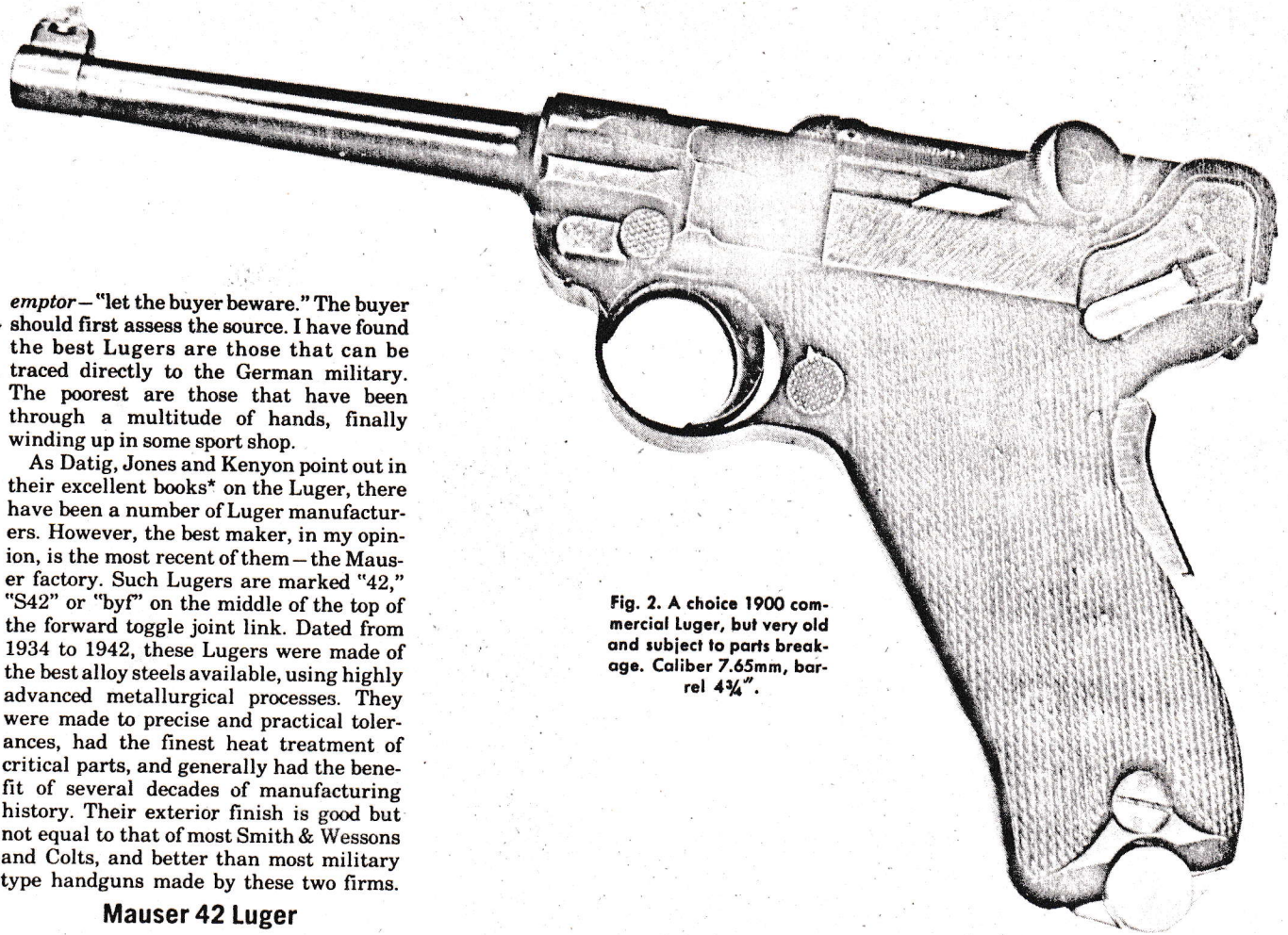


Fig. 2. A choice 1900 commercial Luger, but very old and subject to parts breakage. Caliber 7.65mm, barrel 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".

### Tips on Buying a Used Luger

**Date:** Best guns are dated 1934 through 1942. Usually only the last two digits of date appear on top of rear end of barrel.

**Code name:** Best guns are marked on top "42" or "S42" or "byf." Some excellent commercial guns were made in this WW II period but are quite rare.

**Bluing:** Must be original. Slight holster wear is a good sign. If the gun has been reblued there may be questions about its history—it may have been damaged through faulty assembly, parts worn and replaced improperly, etc.

**Barrel:** Clean with solvent before examining. Lands should be clean, sharp and free from pits.

**Parts:** Last two digits of serial number should appear on various parts (see text). If mixed numbers occur gun needs careful checking for it is a repaired gun. Disassemble and reassemble—all parts should fit snugly and yet can be inserted without force.

**Firing pin and mainspring:** Test by cocking pistol, then insert flat-ended wood pencil in bore, muzzle pointing up. Be sure pencil does not rest on extractor but is all the way home on breech. Pull trigger. Pencil should come flying out if firing pin and spring are OK.

**Trigger pull:** Should be at least 5.0 pounds. If less chances are someone worked on it. This in turn means that considerable checking is now needed because these trigger parts are easily damaged.

**Functioning:** Check functioning by loading magazine with 5 cartridges. Work through action by hand. Feed, extraction and ejection should be smartly executed. Repeat by test firing if possible.

**Economics:** If gun is in good shape except for pitted barrel it may be a good buy—depending on price! Same for faulty magazine. New barrels and magazines can be bought but damaged receivers, frames, links, trigger plates, etc., are hard to find, to replace, repair or adjust.