

BEST DEFENSE LOADS FOR THE .45 ACP

COMPLETE BOOK
OF THE

45

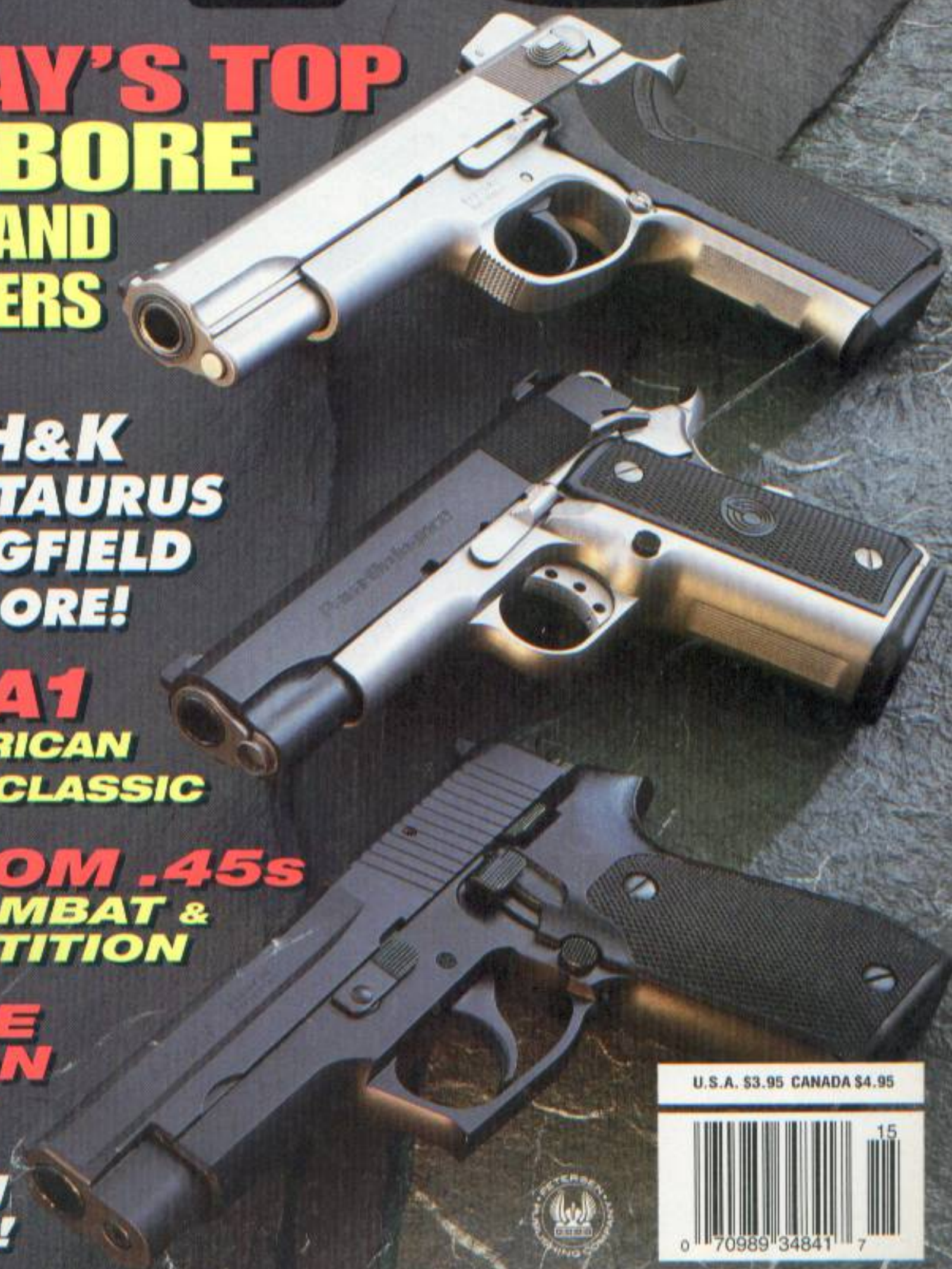
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zines carried pages of ads for Western-style holsters and split-second timers. But time was taking its toll on some of the machinery used to make the famous six-gun. In the mid-1970s, production was temporarily halted while manufacturing processes were updated.

Finally, a slightly revamped "third-generation" SAA rolled off the assembly line. Gone was the separate cylinder-pin bushing and the old-style threaded barrel. Some purists were incensed, and I can still remember a gun dealer in Southern California selling off all of his third-generation guns at \$345 apiece (less than his cost at the time), saying they weren't the same as the old Colts.

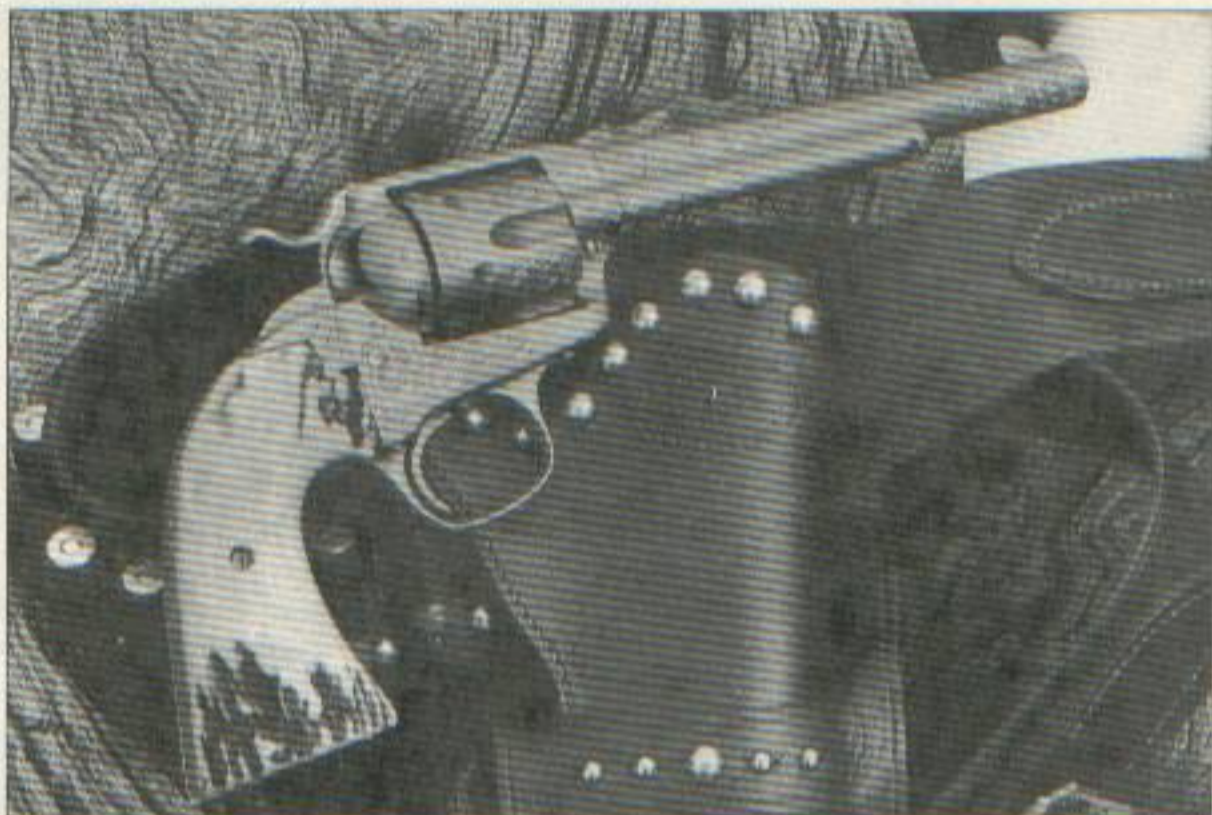
Boy, how I wish I had bought them all at that price! In 1981, it was announced that, due to the high cost of manufacturing (the intricacies of the Model P's 19th-century internal action still required hand-fitted parts), the Colt SAA would no longer be made. Fortunately, continued demand kept it alive.

Finally, just a few years ago, the Colt Peacemaker was relegated to the Colt Custom Shop as a special-order gun. Yet, it is still cataloged. However, some newer manufacturing techniques have been put into place, and these guns are what I refer to as "fourth-generation" Colts.

Of the first-generation guns, there are two subcategories: black-powder frame (with serial numbers below 165,000 and a screw in the front of the frame to hold the cylinder base pin) and those post-1896



Many SAAs have interesting pedigrees. A factory letter on most Colt pistols can be obtained for \$45 per letter by writing to Colt Historical Dept., Dept. G&A, P.O. Box 1868, Hartford, CT 06144.



A Bisley target model of the SAA was produced from 1894 to 1915 and featured swept-under grips and a lowered hammer spur. This version exhibits aftermarket engraving by Jim Riggs of Boerne, Texas, and a beautiful set of stag grips by Eagle Grips.

guns with a "smokeless-powder frame," which feature a spring-loaded crosspin in the frame to release the cylinder base pin.

Second-generation guns have an "SA" after their serial numbers, while third-gen-

Unlike so many other historical firearms, the end of the frontier did not spell the end of the Single Action Army.

eration Peacemakers have the "SA" in front of their serial numbers. The fourth-generation Colts have an "S" in front of the serial number and an "A" at the end of it.

As far as collectability is concerned, prewar Colts are the most coveted. After all, these are the guns that most likely saw action on the Western frontier, even if the factory letter states they were shipped to New York! No matter, they were around when there was still gunsmoke in the air and horses were the main mode of transportation.

The postwar Peacemakers are an interesting study in psychology. Up until recently, second-generation guns were pretty much ignored by the collecting fraternity. But now, with the growth of cowboy action shooting and the proliferation on the market of so many third-generation Colts that investors had been squirreling away, these second-generation Colts are rapidly climbing in value, mainly because their internal mechanisms are identical to the prewar sixguns. Indeed, I have seen some minty second-

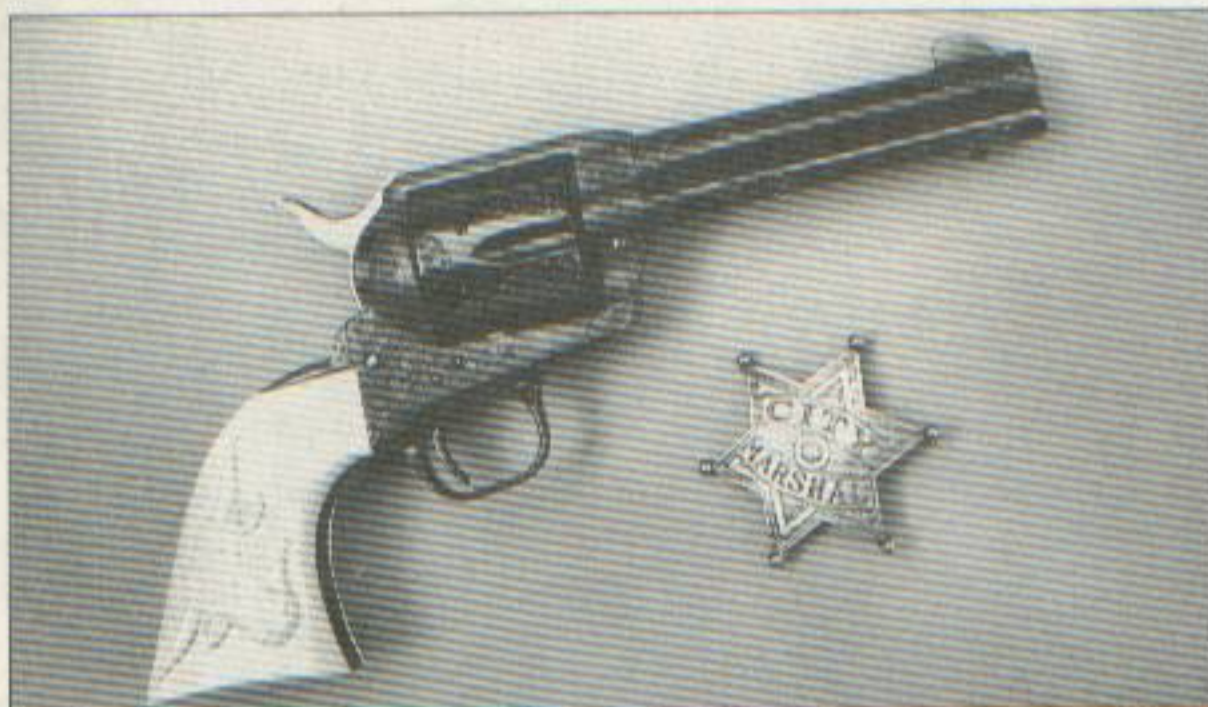
generation guns fetch more at a gun show than a used first-generation (especially if it has its original 1950s black, white and red "stagecoach" box). However, third-generation Colts are hardly cheap, as most of them sell, mint in the box, for an average of \$1,000—slightly more if they are nicked. The same is true for fourth-generation Peacemakers.

Variations of standard barrel lengths are also an interesting collecting phenomenon. For many years, a third-generation, 12-inch Buntline Special would sell for less than a 7½-inch-barreled, third-generation SA—same gun, just a different barrel length. And while third-generation Buntlines are not in as great demand as the shorter barrel lengths, the same gun in a second-generation configuration can often fetch \$1,600 or more, depending on condition.

Sheriff's Models are another interest-



Reloading can result in even greater accuracy for both old and new Colts. Special low-recoil black-powder loads can also be worked up for Cowboy Action Shooting activities.



The century-old tradition of engraved Colt SAAs is kept alive today by the Colt Custom Shop. This superbly executed third-generation gun was done by John Adams of the Colt shop. The carved one-piece steerhead ivory grips were created by Eagle Grips.



A comparison between a fourth-generation SAA (top) and a first-generation gun (bottom).

ing area of study. First-generation factory-original guns with less than standard barrel lengths can command thousands of dollars, but third-generation Sheriff's Models often languish on seller's tables at gun shows. Why? Is it simply because they were made in this century and not the last? But back in 1961, Centennial Arms Corporation commissioned Colt to produce 500 second-generation Sheriff's Models, which sold for \$139.95 at the time. Today, these guns fetch figures well into the four-digit price range. Is it because they are no longer being made? Neither are the third-generation Colts. Perhaps their time is coming.

Although I own a number of first-, second- and third-generation Peacemakers

that I shoot regularly, I decided to see what the currently made guns were like. Consequently, I dug deep into my pockets and purchased a nicked fourth-generation Colt SAA in .45 caliber and with a 4½-inch barrel. Although this gun had an excellent external finish, as far as fit and polish were concerned, the internal mechanism left something to be desired. The hammer pull was rough, and the trigger broke at seven pounds, hardly conducive to good shooting.

Fortunately, there is a remedy. I sent the gun to one of the best Colt SAA doctors in the country, Eddie Janis of Peacemaker Specialists (Dept. G&A, P.O. Box 157, Whitmore, CA 96096). Eddie slicked up the action, polished all inter-



An early black-powder frame SAA (top), which used a screw to hold the cylinder base pin, and a post-1896 "smokeless" frame (bottom), which features a spring-loaded cross pin.

nal parts, installed his own custom-made hammer, hand and bolt springs and adjusted the trigger to break crisply at my prescribed three pounds of pull. I also had him turn the barrel a half degree to the left so the windage would be right on target. The result of this mastery is that five shots from the same gun, using Winchester, Federal and Remington ammunition, went from a four-inch spread to a two-inch group.

I was so impressed with Eddie's work, I sent him a first-generation .45 of mine that was shooting erratically. One of the main problems with these prewar guns is that the barrels are bored to .454, whereas the postwar SAs are bored to .452—just enough difference to make the older guns not quite compatible with today's factory ammo.

Handloading is normally the only course to take. But I wanted to shoot factory ammo in this gun if at all possible. Eddie recut the forcing cone at the breech end of the barrel to a 11° angle, installed a new bushing and turned the barrel back to alleviate all cylinder play. I doubt if this gun shot as well when it originally came from the factory back in 1907. I am now busting dirt clods with it at 25 yards. If you want to bring your new or old Colt to peak shootability, send \$2 to Peacemaker Specialists for their latest booklet of services.

Even though the current Colt catalog warns potential purchasers of the Model P that loading, cocking and firing the famed Peacemaker will detract from its value, it still remains the most popular, collectable and shootable sixgun on the market. Although Tombstone is called the town "too tough to die," perhaps that same sobriquet should be applied to the Colt .45—a gun and a cartridge that have become as legendary as the West itself.