URING THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE TV western, one of the most intriguing heroes on the little screen was Paladin. Each week, during its 225-episode run from 1957 to 1963, the storyline centered on a cultured gentleman of apparent leisure who resided at the opulent Carlton Hotel enjoying the opera, fine brandy, fine dining, and fine ladies, among other sophisticated attractions San Francisco had to offer, and who financed that lifestyle by taking occasional "out-of-towners" as a mercenary for hire. A highly educated former Army officer and West Point graduate, unlike other hired guns, Paladin’s jobs tended to favor those who were wronged and had no other alternative than to bring in outside help. Paladin was just as likely to take a large fee from those who could afford it as he was to take a small fee, or disregard one entirely, from those who couldn’t, and he also wasn’t averse to switching sides entirely when facts and sympathies changed on his arrival.

Richard Boone was 40 years old when he brought his craggy looks, gravelly voice, 1950’s mustache, and wry delivery to the role of Paladin, and past experiences as a professional boxer and oil field roustabout gave Boone credibility in the character.
Three distinctive features common to an 1876 Colt are the large bird’s-eye ejector head, the large knight, and Paladin’s iconic that generations of audiences recognized. Boone was also credited with wartime naval service on board the USS Enterprise (bombed), the USS Intrepid (torpedoed), and the USS Hancock (Kamikaze attack) — the actor didn’t have his “hooks” to stand out among the icons from that era today.

Paladin spoke about his “perfectly balanced” hogleg on occasion, mostly to a villain of the week, and it was described at various times as being a “hand-made Hamilton” with a “one-ounce trigger” and a unique rifled barrel for superior accuracy (implying other handguns didn’t have rifling, apparently). In reality, “the gun” was actually four, more or less standard Colts, a one-ounce trigger would have been extremely hazardous (to Paladin and anybody else in the near vicinity), and rifling was widespread in handguns long before Paladin’s time.

Paladin Colt .45

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Load</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo Bore 200 Gold Dot JHP</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo Bore 225 Keith Lead SWC</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winchester 250 Lead Flat Nose</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMC 250 Lead Flat Point</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Hills 250 Round Nose Flat Point</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Boone was credited with wartime naval service on board the USS Enterprise (bombed), the USS Intrepid (torpedoed), and the USS Hancock (Kamikaze attack) — the actor didn’t have to imagine VIOLENCE and DEATH, he was well able to draw on the real thing in giving Paladin his steel core.
The Peacemaker came with Colt’s black- powder grips to match up with an older pistol. While the grips were totally wrong for the era, and that was at the top of the “To Do” list. While neither Eddie nor I had much business knowing what the replacement cylinder and barrel were, or why they were done. How much did the package go for? A cool $57,875.

**Gun Details**

A little beyond budgetary limits for most of us, but if you shoot the show like I do, and want your own “Paladin” Colt, it can be arranged. Still not exactly cheap, but far more affordable and one you don’t have to leave in a safe deposit box under heavy guard. Eddie Janis at Peacemaker Specialists runs one of the top classic Colt Peacemaker shops in the world. He also stocks new and old for restoration and custom work, and was the obvious choice when I decided it was time to build my own Paladin Colt. The project started off with a brand new 7.5-inch .45 Colt Peacemaker ordered from Colt and built on a period-correct black powder frame with the cylinder base pin retaining screw in the front as the army pistols had, as opposed to the later post-1896 transverse spring-loaded retaining pin. Two other factory nod to the earlier guns were the correct three-line date-stamp patenting on the left side of the frame used from 1877-1890 (regular Colt production Peacemakers nowadays generally use two-line patent stamp), and the earlier bull’s-eye ejector rod head supplied on non-military Colts from 1877-1881 and military Colts from 1873-1885. From there, Eddie’s magic was needed to bring the big .45 more into line with Peacan’s gun. The Peacemaker came with Colt’s black-checkered pony and eagle plastic grips, and Colt’s high-polish bluing on the barrel, cylinder, grip frame, and ejector rod and housing. I prefer the more matte gray rust bluing that Peacemaker Specialists provides because I think it just looks “right” and ages better, and that was at the top of the “To Do” list.

The grips were totally wrong for the era, and were replaced by a set of perfectly fitted and more authentic oil-finished one-piece walnut grips to match up with an older pistol. While the grips were being fitted, Eddie also beveled heel and toe at the bottom corners of the gripframe, and blended them and the wood into an oval on the bottom that was factory standard until about 1900. Before the bluing was done, the “Colt Single Action Army 45” marking on the left side of the barrel added to Colt production long after 1876 was carefully removed, the cylinder front was beveled as the original cylinders were and the flutes were re-configured to duplicate those of an 1876 pistol, and the front of the ejector housing was also beveled for authenticity. The factory casehardened frame colors were bright and left alone, but the hammer spur checkering was changed by hand to a more appropriate bordered pattern and the entire hammer was casehardened leaving color coverage that matched both the early Peacemakers in style and the frame colors perfectly. Other subtle touches included fire-bluing all screws, the trigger, and the cylinder pin.

Inside, Eddie did his top-of-the-line Gunslinger action job which involves polishing and fitting every part inside the frame, refitting the cylinder bushing, and left the big Colt with a perfectly timed action, a hammer light enough to be cocked by my little finger, and a 2.25-pound trigger on my RCBS scale. Not quite the one-owner of a hand-made Hamilton, but crisp without creep or overtravel, I think Paladin could have squeaked by with it.

One other feature of the original Paladin Colt remains obscure. Publicity photos I was able to turn up during research showed what appeared to be a lowered front sight blade with a straight ramp angling down forward from the top to the muzzle. Instead of the gun showing heighting sights for that blade, and it wasn’t possible to get a clear idea of exactly how much it had been altered beyond the ramping. On the TV gun, one possible explanation for why it was done was that the lowered height and forward ramp angle might have been to suggest to viewers an alteration to facilitate a professional gunslinger’s ability to draw and re-holster in a hurry. In the real world, it would have shot high. On a prop blankenshooter in the hands of a certified celluloid hero, blade height doesn’t matter, but unlike Paladin’s Colt mine will be used with live ammo and it needs to hit where it’s pointed. Since that blade is really the primary distinguishing feature that sets his Colt apart from most other standard long-barreled Colts, I wanted the blade on mine to show a forward ramp without actually lowering it. After some long-distance discussion and mailing a drawing of exactly what I decided on, we compromised on a minor re-profiling leaving the factory blade height intact. I also couldn’t bring myself to lose those beautiful case colors in re-bluing the frame to match the TV gun colors.

There are other differences, too. The fitting pin on an 1876 Colt would have been a fixed cone shape, later changed to a fixed concave shape, and finally to the modern floating concave pins used today. With each firing pin change, the hole through the recoil plate (AKA firing pin bushing) in the frame grew smaller. While the current concave thresher isn’t period correct, swapping it out for a proper conical would have meant altering or replacing the pressed-in recoil plate too, and that’s something you don’t mess with. So, we stayed with the modern pin.

Although the change in profile is minor, front blade shows a more ramped angle than a standard factory blade to suggest Paladin’s more drastic alteration.

The custom Peacemaker evokes a double dose of both the Old West of TELEVISION HISTORY and the REAL HISTORY of the Old West. It is a genuine Colt, after all.

Paladin’s Colt would also have had its serial numbers repeated on major components such as the frame and gripframe, but neither Eddie nor I remembered to list that in the pack-
age till after the Peacemaker came back home. The ability is there; Eddie can match and stamp ‘em if you want. The one-piece grips are actually three-pieces. Originals were hogged out of a single piece of walnut, a relatively expensive process today; and the same no-screw result obtains from two panels securely glued to an internal and invisible wood spacer block that takes the place of screws in holding them together. The wood finish also fudges a bit; wood grips were standard on the early Colts, but the military’s were oiled and civil-
ian grips were varnished. Varnish is sticky, flakes, and goes ugly over time, so these are actually Army grips on a civilian pistol, but still closer than the “Hamil-tor’s” two-piece setup. And, the sights themselves are the current modern varia-
tion with a very slightly tapered and square-topolated in front of a wide and square-bottomed U-shaped rear notch. Originals were narrower, more tapered and less visible at both ends.

So, while the end result is neither an exact copy of an 1876 Peacemaker nor an exact copy of Paladin’s TV gun, it splits the difference quite well. The classic profile’s very dose, the gun looks great, feels very comfortable in the hand (that heel & toe beveling and the oval contouring are great touches), the action’s slick, the sights are far better than a period piece, and the custom Peacemaker evokes a double dose of both the Old West of television history and the real history of the Old West. It is a genuine Colt, after all.

Bonhams & Butterfields understandably respects the confidentiality of the buyer, but did contact seller James Mahoney for me about the circumstances that led to his father’s possession. According to his recollec-
tion, Jack Mahoney and Richard Boone met in filming Away All Boats in 1956 and developed a long friendship that resulted in Boone later giving Mahoney the Colt and leather, which eventually passed to James. Altogether, the description and condition of the “composite” auction gun, McGaughy’s memories, and Mahoney’s letter of prov-
eance make a pretty good case for the authenticity of the auctioned Colt as being one of the “A” guns actually used in Have Gun Will Travel. Without being able to exam-
ina that Colt, unfortunately there’s no way of knowing what the replacement cylinder and barrel were, or why they were done.

Nothing fancy for the Paladin Colt, just plain oiled walnut one-piece style grips (1), and a period correct heeltone gripframe level (2) and blended oval bottom (3).

**Final Notes**

As good as today’s 3rd Generation Model PPs are right out of the Hartford box, the touch of a master gunsmith who knows them takes the old thumbtuber to new levels that have to be experienced to be appreciated. For roughly $54,875 less than the auction price of Boone’s Colt, you can buy a brand new Peacemaker and send it off to Eddie to be transformed into your very own “vintage” Paladin gun. From that perspective, a $9,000 project suddenly seems a lot more reasonable, and with Peacemaker Specialists’ turnaround time, you’ll have any-
where from 6 to 12 months to save up your pocket change to pay for it.

Does it shoot? You betcha… all the test rounds that included three mild .22 LR-action lead loads as well as Buffalo Bore’s stiff-but-safe-in-
modern-single-action loads and jacketed loads for high performance field use shot to varying elevations, so you’ll need to match the gun to your preferred load, but that’s one of the joys of owning a genuine Peacemaker. Give Eddie a call at 805-238-9100 or take a gander at his website at peacemaker specialists.com and tell him I sent you.

Many thanks to Eddie Janis for his collabora-
tion and work on this project, to James Ferrell at Bonhams & Butterfields for his patience and efforts in providing auction information, and to Wayne McGaughy for his recollections of the “Paladin Colts.”