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GUNS

OF THE OLD WEST

No. 16

Cowboy Action Shooting

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- How To Get Started
- Newest Guns & Gear
- Upcoming Events

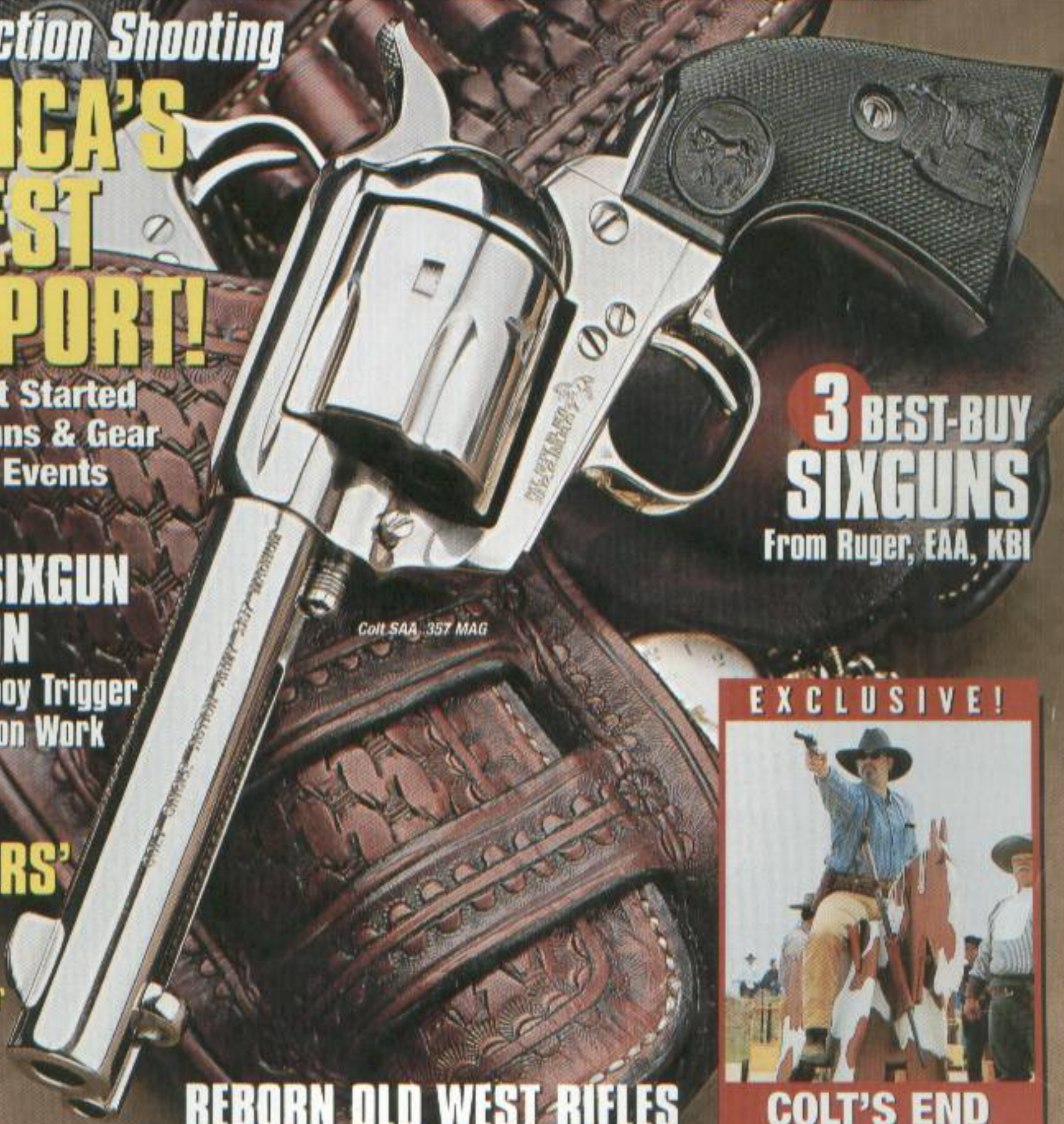
On The Cover

CUSTOM SIXGUN PERFECTION

- Ultimate Cowboy Trigger
- Complete Action Work

ROY ROGERS' HOLSTERS

From John Bianchi
Frontier Gunleather



Colt S&W .357 MAG

3 BEST-BUY SIXGUNS

From Ruger, EAA, KBI

EXCLUSIVE!



COLT'S END of TRAIL '99

REBORN OLD WEST RIFLES Two Single-Shot Sharpshooters

Gun Tests

- RUGER VAQUERO .38SPL ■ REMINGTON #1 ROLLING BLOCK .45-70
- KBI LIBERTY/EAA BOUNTY HUNTER .45 COLT ■ EAA COACH GUN 12GA



The Perfect COWBOY PISTOL

Custom touches match your gun to your shooting style—let's get the details!



A

Most every gun today is in need of or will lend itself to some sort of customizing, modifying, or just some simple smoothing and polishing that will make it work better. With that premise in mind,

let's discuss what can be done to make your Cowboy pistols shoot better.

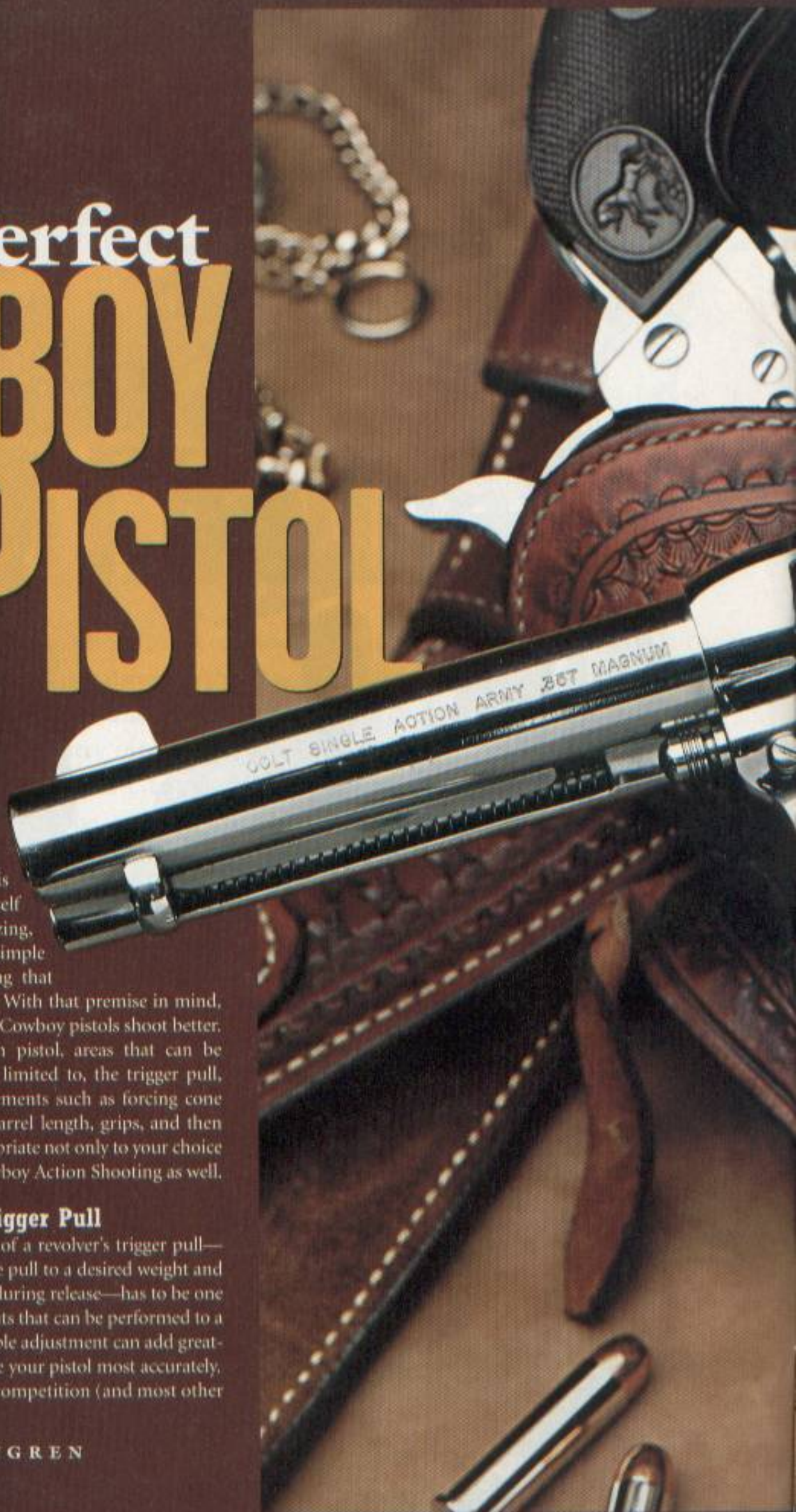
In discussing the Cowboy competition pistol, areas that can be addressed include, but are not necessarily limited to, the trigger pull, action work, sighting in, accuracy enhancements such as forcing cone work or custom bored cylinders, caliber, barrel length, grips, and then there's the selection of a load appropriate not only to your choice of pistol but to the game of Cowboy Action Shooting as well.

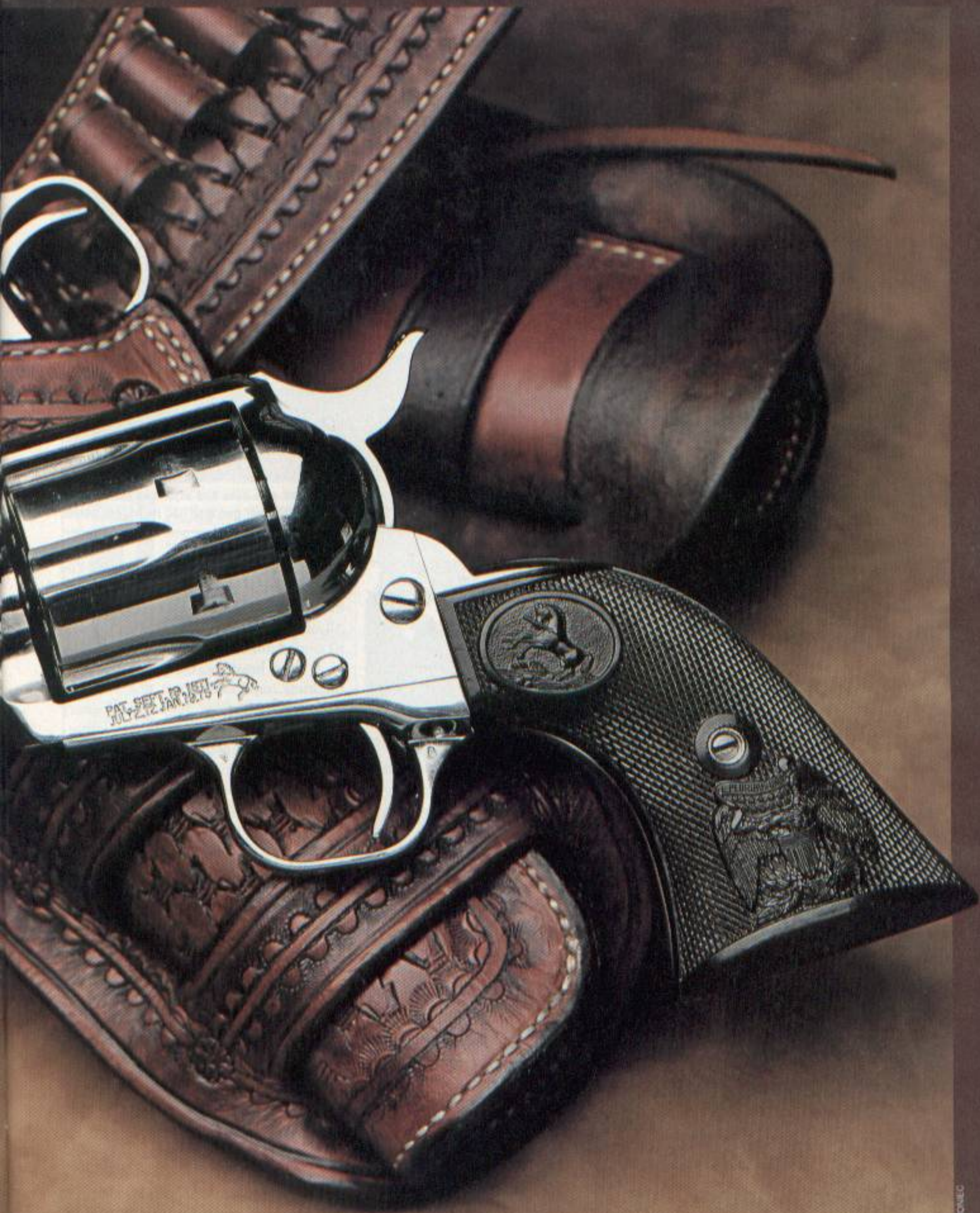
The Trigger Pull

Adjustment of a revolver's trigger pull—meaning to set the pull to a desired weight and remove any creep felt during release—has to be one of the most important enhancements that can be performed to a competition firearm. This one simple adjustment can add greatly to your ability to control and fire your pistol most accurately.

All the single-actions I use in competition (and most other

BY TODD LOFGREN





ETAN THRONIC

THE PERFECT COWBOY PISTOL

guns I own, for that matter) have had their triggers improved from what they were when they left the factory. This is not meant to be an indictment of modern gun makers, but just a simple truth—that is, almost all factory handgun triggers are heavier than they need to be and can benefit from a trigger job.

The two Colt Single Actions I currently compete with are Third Generation models and are chambered for the .357 Magnum cartridge. The weight of the trigger pulls on these two are both set at 2 lbs. It is immensely important to me that they both have the same (or as close as possible) pull weight so both revolvers feel and perform exactly alike and each releases its hammer with the same amount of applied trigger pressure.

I also measured the pull weights on two other pairs of revolvers I occasionally compete with. These are a pair of Second Generation Colts in .45 Colt and a pair of Navy



These two nickel Colts have matching 2-lb. trigger pulls. Both also have had extensive action work to make them buttery smooth and reliable. The Browning B-92 lever gun also had its trigger tuned.



Note Colt patent dates on the frame, left, and the model/cartridge designation on the barrel, right.



The trigger pulls on the author's Cowboy competition pistols have all been adjusted.

Arms Schofield revolvers, also in .45. The Colt triggers measured 3 and 3-1/4 lbs. and the Schofields weighed 2-3/8 and 2-1/2 lbs. All, of course, have been worked on and didn't come from the factory that way.

A clean breaking, creep-free release is the most important aspect of the trigger pull, with the applied poundage necessary to affect that release secondary in importance. For most competitors pull weights should be set somewhere around three to five pounds. As long as the pull is crisp (no creep), a 3- to 5-lb. pull should be fine and still be safe and controllable.

Let's face it, the level of experience among Cowboy Action shooters ranges from the relatively uninitiated to the hardcore, frustrated IPSC shooter who has fired literally thousands and thousands of rounds from a light triggered handgun. The ultra light pull on one's custom Government Model race gun is not going to react or feel the same as a like-weighted trigger pull on one's Single Action Army. The reason for this is because of its design—the Single Action has more weight up and over your trigger finger, and your trigger finger actually has to do some of the work of holding the pistol up. This phenomenon gives one a little less control of the trigger on your SAA, and because of that fact the acceptable weights between these two gun designs are not necessarily comparable. I guess what I'm saying here is

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“Although a good gun mechanic can give your Cowboy guns a nice trigger pull without performing any further work, it’s the additional attention to the innards of your pistol that can give it that buttery smooth feel one has to have experienced to understand and appreciate.”



Eddie Janis stones the internal surfaces of a Colt frame during an action job.

that just because a 1-3/4 lb. pull is safe and controllable on your IPSC race gun doesn't mean that's the appropriate weight for your Single Action as well. A lot more mechanics go into the firing of your hog leg than are required on your race gun, as the Cowboy gun requires much more manual manipulation to operate and control. So, go for a nice, clean-breaking trigger and stay away from the ultra-light releases. Again, a pull weight of anywhere from 3 to 5 lbs. should work out fine for most Cowboy enthusiasts.

On one occasion I found it necessary to increase the pull weight on a newly acquired Single Action that had been previously "tuned" when I found its trigger too hard to control as the temperature dropped and my hands became insensitive due to the cold experienced at one of our winter Cowboy matches. Its trigger (originally set at way less than 2 lbs.) felt absolutely wonderful when just standing still on a warm day pointing at stationary targets. But when this light trigger pull was coupled with the action and

chaos of a Cowboy match and cold weather, it was much too sensitive. An alteration to its sear angle resolved this revolver's problem.

Action Work

Although a good gun mechanic can give your Cowboy guns a nice trigger pull without performing any further work, it's the additional attention to the innards of your pistol that can give it that buttery smooth feel one has to have experienced to understand and appreciate.

The majority of today's guns can all benefit from some judicious hand fitting and smoothing up. Because time is money and hand labor in this country is so costly, the guns of today (especially in the area of Cowboy guns) can be rougher than ever. Because of this, they are often "oversprung," that is they are equipped with heavier than necessary springs to ensure that they will overcome the increased friction caused by their rough and/or ill-fitting

parts. A revolver that has been judiciously polished and smoothed out when coupled with properly dimensioned and timed parts will function quite properly under much less spring effort. This is the essence of "action work."

I spoke with Single Action Pistolsmith Eddie Janis of Peacemaker Specialists located at P.O. Box 157, Dept. CAS, Whitmore, California, 96096, Ph: (530) 472-3438 about action work, and he advised that when performing an action job on a customer's Colt he addresses three major areas: (1) internal



Pistol disassembly is required so all parts and surfaces can be examined, polished, refitted, or replaced as needed.

roughness, (2) the dimension and refitting of all moving parts, and (3) the springs. Starting with the frame, Eddie polishes or stones all the appropriate internal areas without changing any critical tolerances. Next, all internal parts are then examined, polished as appropriate, and properly refitted. Eddie advised that new parts are often required, as originals were often undersized or initially improperly fitted. With the friction levels now reduced, Eddie installs newly manufactured lighter springs enabling a much softer feel while still retaining ultimate reliability. Without the attention to the polishing and fitting of the parts, reliability with the lighter springs would be questionable.

The two springs that are replaced in the

Colt are the mainspring (powers the hammer) and the bolt spring (powers the bolt and trigger). Eddie has two different spring weights manufactured to his specification and they come in "light" and "extra light" offerings. With the other internal work performed, Eddie advised that the original stock (read that heavy) springs could be retained if one wanted the more traditional Colt feel with its loud, audible clicks during cycling, coupled with a heavy hammer fall.

In times past, original springs were ground to reduce their tension, however this often resulted in a change to their temper and it was extremely difficult to get two springs ground identically when attempting to match up a pair of guns. The availability of newly manufactured "light" springs allows for easier trigger pull matching of paired pistols, and should a spring ever break, replacement with a new like spring should be all that is necessary to restore the revolver's original feel and function.

One caution here. Just buying a set of lighter springs and installing them yourself does not make an "action job." Without the other internal attention (i.e., polishing, fitting, adjusting sear angles, etc.) this often results in an improperly functioning and perhaps unsafe handgun. I've found that installing lighter springs on a Colt with an already crisp but somewhat heavy feeling trigger will often result in a too-light release and that "creep" will suddenly be



Cowboy competitor "J. J. Sooner" shooting his slicked-up Colt SAA. A good trigger job, coupled with action work, makes the Cowboy pistol not only easier to shoot but a joy to own.

introduced. In most cases the replacement of the stock springs with lighter ones will require, at a minimum, some adjustment to the sear angle (a task best left to the professional gunsmith).

The last thing to be addressed in an action job is the timing, or in this case the re-timing of the gun so that everything works in perfect time and harmony. When a perfectly timed Colt is brought to full cock, the bolt should release at the appropriate instant when it strikes the cylinder

in the bolt-cut approach where it was intended to, not before, which results in the bolt eventually wearing a ring (and sometimes a groove) around the cylinder. Also, the bolt itself should enter the cylinder notch and lock the cylinder in place the same time that the hammer reaches full cock. Proper timing of your revolver ensures proper wear and functioning.

A couple of other areas that may be part of a smith's "action job" include the modification of the revolver's locking bolt to eliminate possible cylinder skipping and the recutting of the barrel's forcing cone to enhance accuracy.

Final Notes

A simple trigger job on your hog leg (remember, this involves setting the pull to a desired weight by adjustment of the sear angle and engagement and the elimination of all creep in the pull) from a pistolsmith schooled in this endeavor will probably run you around \$50 to \$60, should no parts need replacing. An "action job" (polishing, refitting, retiming, lighter springs, etc.) can run anywhere from \$85 to \$200 per pistol. This is because of the amount of hand work involved. This might sound like a lot, but should you be fortunate enough to handle and fire a pistol reworked by a true Single Action specialist, and you are one who tends to appreciate things like this, then I'm sure you will, like me, feel that this is money well spent. ■

Gunsmiths tuning SA revolvers include:

Cylinder & Slide

245 E. 4th St. Dept. CAS,
Fremont, NE 68025;
800-448-1713.

Wilson Combat

2234 CR 719-50, Dept. CAS,
Berryville, AR 72616;
800-955-4856.

Scott, McDougall & Associates

7950 Redwood Dr. Dept. CAS,
Cotati, CA 94931
707-795-BANG.

Actions By "T"

16315 Redwood Forest Ct.,
Dept. CAS, Sugarland, TX
77478; 281-277-4008.

Peacemaker Specialists

PO Box 157, Dept. CAS,
Whitmore, CA 96096;
530-472-3438.

Bowen Classic Arms

PO Box 67, Dept. CAS,
Louisville, TN 37777
423-984-3583.

James & Gun

5130 N. 19th Ave., Dept. CAS,
Phoenix, AZ 85015
602-547-1942.

Gun Craft

2403 21st Ave. SE, Dept. CAS,
Ruskin, FL 33570;
813-645-3828.

Lee's Gunsmithing

2777 Orange-Olive Rd.,
Dept. CAS, Orange, CA
92865; 714-921-9030.

Oglesby & Oglesby Gunmakers

744 W. Andrew Rd., Dept. CAS,
Springfield, IL 62707; 217-
487-7100.