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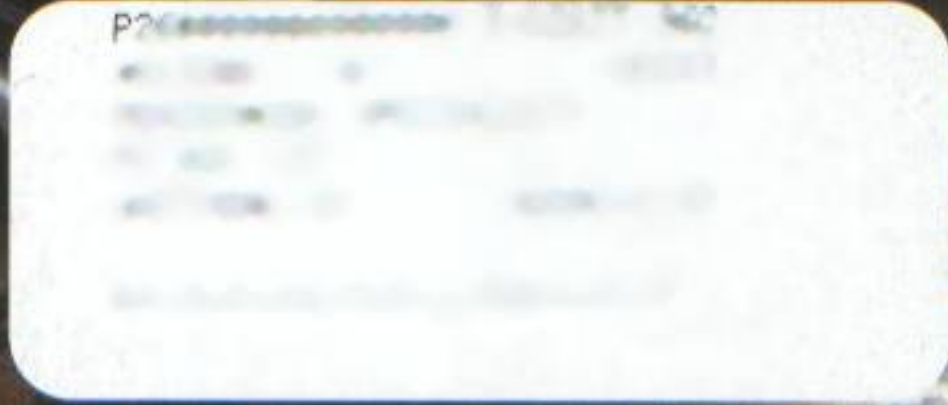
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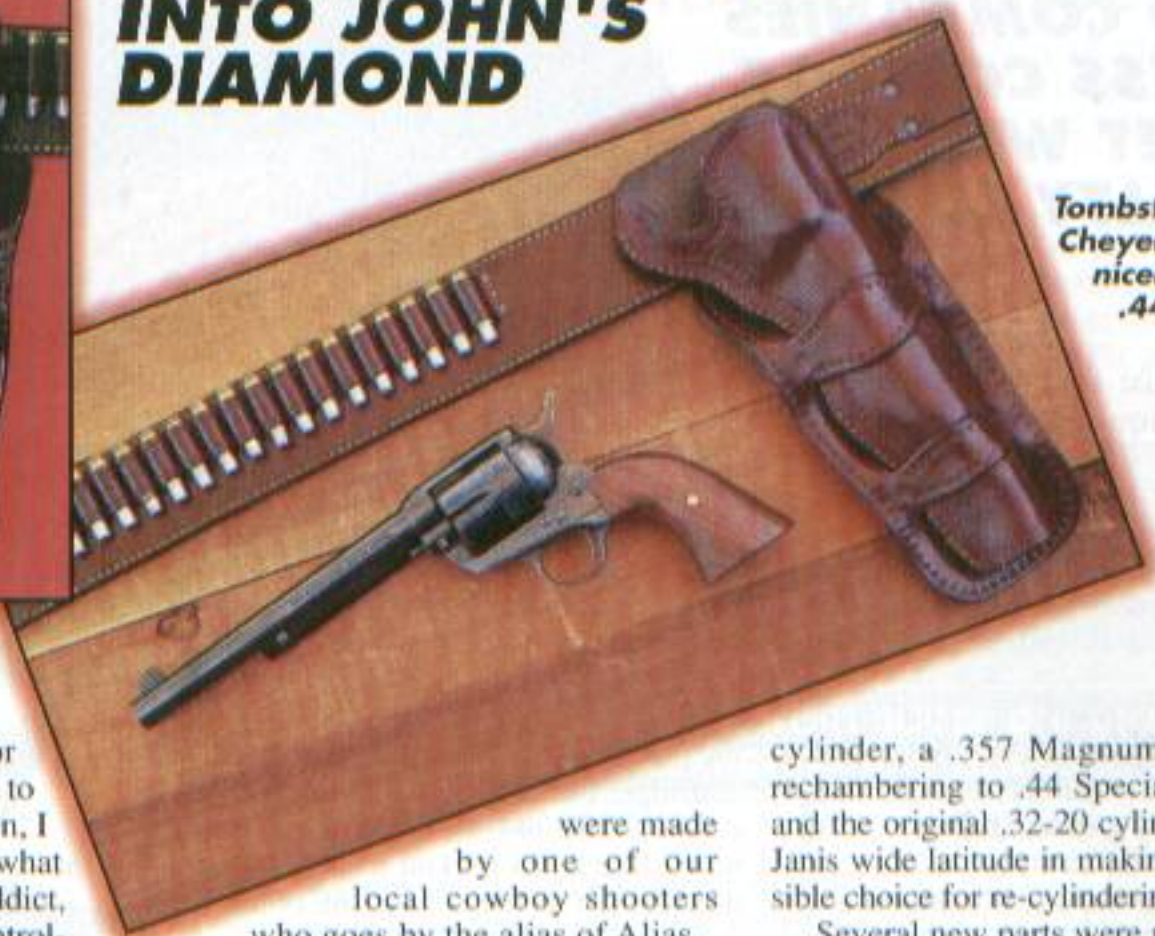
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WORLD

GUN SHOP'S LUMP OF COAL TURNS INTO JOHN'S DIAMOND



Tombstone Leather's Cheyenne rig mates nicely with John's .44 Special Colt.

They say confession is good for the soul. As one who prefers to keep his soul in good condition, I must admit to a real flaw in what little character I may have. I am an addict, afflicted with a serious, almost uncontrollable craving. You see, I have this passion for single-action sixguns that must regularly be fulfilled.

The Jones is never fully satisfied, but a good fix from time to time keeps me on an even keel. So when the phone rang that afternoon, I was elated to hear the words "Colt Single-Action."

Along with those three magic words guaranteed to lift the most despairing mood, my good friends at Shapel's, the local gun shop, passed on the information that a fellow was in the shop with a Colt for sale. That, along with the phrase "at a good price," got my attention very quickly.

Within a few moments I was at the gun shop that has proved to be a gold mine of sorts for uncovering so many great sixguns and leverguns in the past. As I looked at the sixgun being offered for sale, I saw more than what was in my hands. I looked forward to what it could be.

The old Colt was a 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " SAA with a barrel marked .32 W.C.F. It had obviously been reblued somewhere along the line after first being buffed improperly like so many old guns are. Perfect it may not have been, but the price was right. Exceptionally so for a pre-War Colt.

A deal was struck and I now had a poorly refinished Colt complete with a pitted barrel. The one great redeeming feature, other than its affordable price, was an exceptional pair of walnut stocks. I was to learn later that the grips

were made by one of our local cowboy shooters who goes by the alias of Alias.

A look through the records of Colt serial numbers revealed that this particular sixgun was manufactured in 1907. That quickly got my attention. This is the same year that Smith & Wesson brought forth the first great N-frame double-action, the New Century or Triple Lock, chambered in a brand new cartridge that would serve as *the* sixgun cartridge for serious use for over 30 years and eventually spawn the .44 Magnum. That cartridge was, of course, the .44 Special.

With the Colt bearing a serial number that put it in the company of the first .44 Special, it seemed natural, almost omenlike, that this sixgun would become a .44 Special.

I had been saving a new Second Generation 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " .44 Special barrel for years and it now seemed the time had arrived for building that special single-action. The very first Colt was a .44 with a 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ " barrel with the caliber being changed to .45 at the request of a major purchaser of the new Colts, the U.S. Army.

A call went off to Eddie Janis at Peacemaker Specialists to discuss the project. In the past I had handled several sixguns worked over by Janis and had also had him perform one of his action jobs on a Third Generation in .44-40. He not only smoothed out the 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ " Colt considerably, but also he tweaked the barrel to line up the sights for point-of-aim.

As we discussed the project, I decided to send along a less than perfect .44 Special

cylinder, a .357 Magnum cylinder, for rechambering to .44 Special if necessary, and the original .32-20 cylinder, all to give Janis wide latitude in making the best possible choice for re-cylindering the old Colt.

Several new parts were required: a new cylinder pin and bushing, a new main-spring, a few screws and an ejector rod and spring. The parts were joined by the new .44 Special barrel. Janis swapped me a .44 Special cylinder that he had on hand for my .357 cylinder, plus a few dollars.

Now came the major part of the work. The new cylinder and barrel were installed with minimum barrel clearance and the forcing cone cut to 11°. An oversize cylinder bolt removed all play in the cylinder.

Over nearly a century of use, both the trigger and hammer notches had worn considerably and these were both welded up and re-cut. In the process, the action was tuned, the trigger pull set at 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. and all internal parts totally smoothed and deburred in what Janis calls his "Saddle Tramp Package." This was to be an everyday working gun so I did not opt for what Janis calls his "Gunfighter Package" with lighter springs and hand-honed action.

First Generation Colts, those made from 1873 to 1941, generally have parts that interchange with Second Generation Colts made from 1956 to 1974.

Third Generations, made from 1976 to the present, with several interruptions, have different barrel threads, hands and cylinder ratchets and bushings. Parts may interchange but pre-war rear sight notches, being of the very narrow V-shape, do not mate up well with the thicker front sights on Second Generation barrels. Janis addressed this by milling out the rear sight

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THE SIXGUNNER

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to give a clear and square sight picture.

When the work was all finished, the original plan called for Peacemaker Specialists to return the .44 for test-firing before refinishing to a case colored frame and hammer with the rest of the sixgun blued. Before this was done we wanted mainly to make sure the windage was correct or, more specifically, to see if the sights matched up with my eyes and hold.

To facilitate his sighting in of the .44 Special, I had supplied Janis with samples of my intended load for this sixgun, namely the NEI 260 gr. Keith hardcast bullet over 7.5 grs. of Unique. This load clocks out at 950 to 1,000 fps from a 7½" barrel.

When the 7½" .44 Special arrived back home, I was more than pleasantly surprised with its looks. The new barrel and cylinder matched very well with the old reblued frame giving it a certain amount of character, and the walnut stocks just seemed to belong on a 7½" Colt .44 Special. Someday it may be refinished. For now, it suits me just fine.

A 7½" single action is just about my favorite sixgun when it comes to balance and easy shooting qualities and this example is no exception. The action is smooth, there is no looseness, the trigger pull is clean and crisp, the sights are almost right on for my eyes, shooting 1" low and 1" left with the above mentioned load when shooting indoors in artificial light.

Winter is quickly settling in so I will not touch it until spring when I will sit down at a bench and make sure it really needs to be turned in slightly. After that, it will be a simple matter to file the top of the front sight to bring the elevation up.

Peacemaker Specialists is a true specialty shop in that they work only on Colt single-actions, including the Bisley Models of the First Generation and the New Frontiers of the Second and Third Generations. They can handle practically anything from the simplest parts request to a total action job, to remarking the barrel and beveling the face of the cylinder to making a new Colt look 100 years old, to total rebuilding. I recommend them highly.

For less than the cost of a new Third Generation, which, by the way, cannot be had in .44 Special, I now have a "new" Colt that is built as well as any Single Action Army can be.

One might ask if my addiction is now calmed down for awhile. I'm afraid not. I just swapped another Colt from a reader. It too will go off to Peacemaker Specialists, but that's another story.



Readers can reach Peacemaker Specialists at P.O. Box 157, Dept. AH, Whitmore CA 96096; phone: (916) 472-3438.