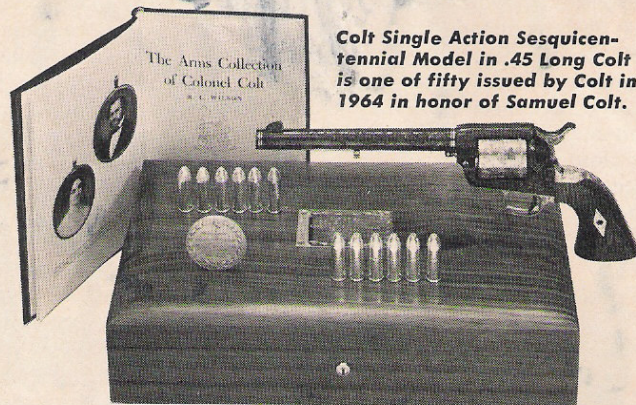


PART I OF III



Colt Single Action Sesquicentennial Model in .45 Long Colt is one of fifty issued by Colt in 1964 in honor of Samuel Colt.

THE



The "Pony Express" .22 caliber single action was made in limited numbers by a midwest firm and today they are rare.



One of the many guns the Spanish have copied is the Colt 1873. This copy is in .44-40, 4-inch barrel and wood grips.



This is a single action many never think of, a Remington New Model 1874 in .44 caliber with a 5 1/2-inch barrel.

Starting back in 1836, Col. Sam Colt designed better even than he knew when he produced the Patterson Colt, then the Walker, next the Dragoons and later the 1851 Navy, 1860 .44 Army and the many smaller models, ending with the old Peacemaker .45. These guns and the later Rugers are the best pointing of any handguns ever made. They are better for hitting in hip shooting, shooting after dark or any instinctive fast work with a sixgun, due to the shape and angle of their grip to frame and barrel.

No gun is any faster to draw and hit with for the first shot than the Colt and Ruger single actions. For me, at least, they are the fastest of all guns for quick draw out of a holster or from a belt clip for the first shot. These guns point naturally if the eyes are focused on the target and enough practice has been employed. One soon learns to throw a slug anywhere he wants it at close range.

The single action can be fired effectively with more parts removed than any other sixgun. It is the favorite where gunsmiths are fewest. As long as you have a hammer and main spring, hand and hand spring and a bolt and bolt half of that spring you can fire a single-action Colt effectively.

John Newman, noted exhibition shooter, had two .45 Colt single actions converted to pocket-size slip-hammer guns, without even including triggers in the mechanism. His mainsprings were made up from two opposing corset springs. He removed the regular hammer spurs, replacing them with short, stubby slip spurs. He did very effective work with his .45 Colts so worked over. He carried the two .45 2-inch barrel slip guns in his front pants pockets. When expecting trouble, he usually had one hand in a pocket, holding one of these stubby .45s. No smart hold-up artists wanted anything to do with him. He could make three hits on a can tossed up in the air with one of those stubby .45s.

No other gun is quite as reliable, day in and day out and year after year, as a properly remodeled .45 slip-hammer single action.

I played with slip guns for a couple of years and then found out it required a hard grip and that you could not do good shooting with both trigger gun and slip guns. So, with a great many guns to test, I finally dropped the use of the slip gun. You could get off accurate shots with it once the proper grip was mastered, the same as the trigger gun. Still, the two types of gun and technique did not mix.

When the internal parts of a single-action Colt are properly polished and worked over, it is a very reliable gun and seldom, if ever, gets out of order. I have covered this work in many articles. The stud that actuates the bolt should be ground down flat on the hammer until just enough is left to catch the bolt arm and thus avoid excessive

Beginning a three-part series on single actions, double actions and automatics by possibly the world's greatest practical expert on handguns...

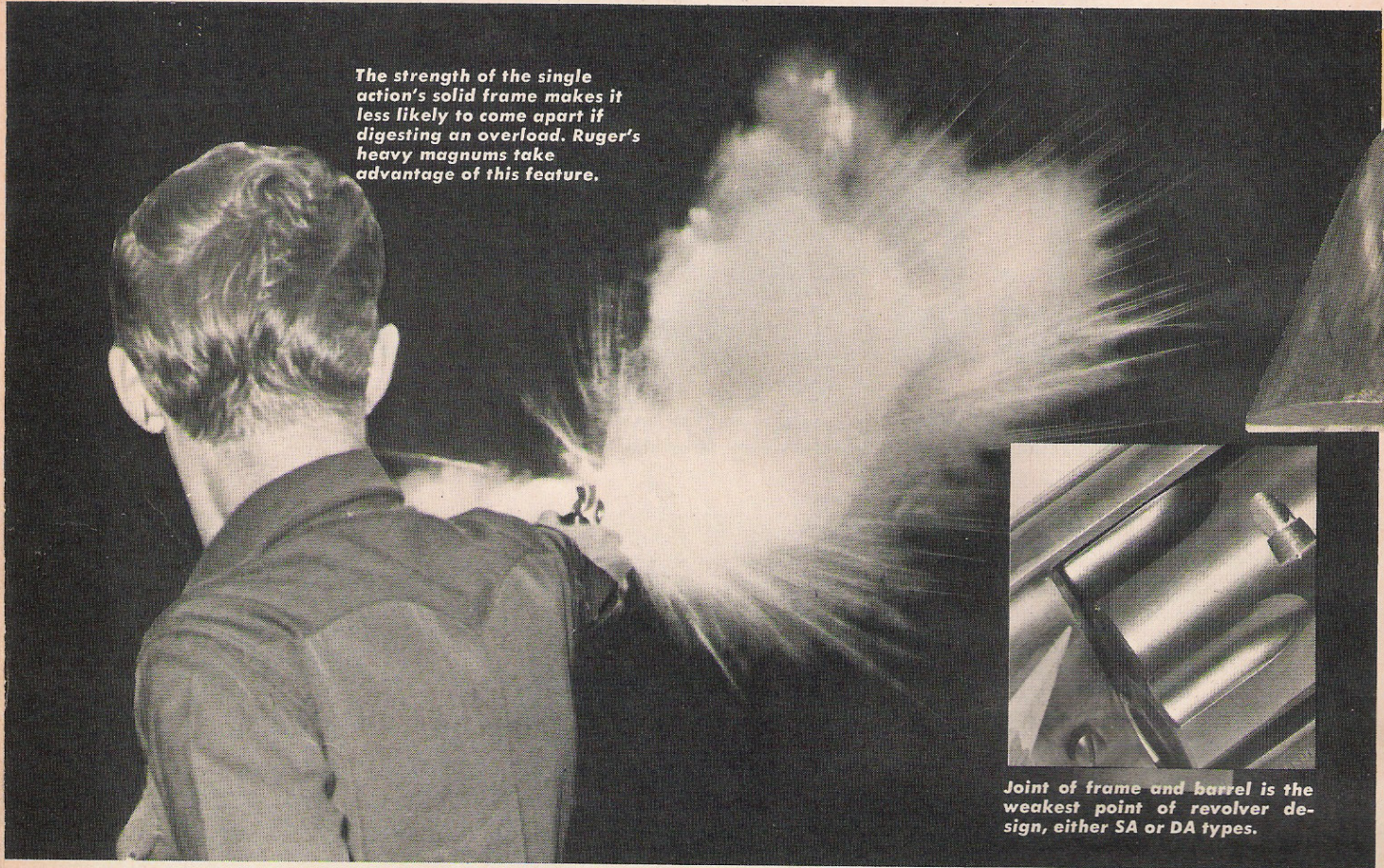
SINGLE ACTION!

by Elmer Keith Shooting Editor



THE SINGLE ACTION!

The strength of the single action's solid frame makes it less likely to come apart if digesting an overload. Ruger's heavy magnums take advantage of this feature.



Joint of frame and barrel is the weakest point of revolver design, either SA or DA types.

springing of the arms to cam over this stud. The bolt arms should be tapered to prevent fracture and the trigger and bolt spring should also be tapered toward their tips. Then, the cut between the two limbs should be rounded to prevent breakage.

With the fine Ruger single actions nothing of this sort is necessary. Years ago, R.F. Sedgley of Philadelphia and Herb Bradley, late of Salmon, Idaho, fitted coil springs throughout in SA Colts. They were then almost unbreakable and very reliable.

Ruger went Colt, Sedgley and Bradley one better by designing one of the most foolproof single actions ever produced. It will stand more snapping, more abuse and more heavy loads than any other sixgun ever produced. It is today our finest single action. I watched a Ruger Single Six on an electric machine that cocked and snapped that little gun continuously through six days and nights of an NRA Convention and it was still in good shooting order at the end of that period.

When fitted with proper target sights like the late Dragoon Ruger .44 Magnum and the Combination .22 LR and

.22 Magnum, these guns are usually just as accurate as any other pistol.

I worked with Bill Ruger in the design of these fine guns and they have won most quick-draw contests. Further, the Dragoon Ruger .44 Magnum will take more heavy hand loads by actual test than any sixgun made and still be in accurate, and perfect working order. Properly tuned up, a good single action with target sights in .44 Special, .41 Magnum or .44 Magnum is just as accurate as any other gun made in cylinder persuasion.

So much for the attributes of the single actions, now let us look at their faults. With all the old Colts having the firing pin integral with the hammer and even the later separate firing pins first brought out by Herb Bradley and later by Ruger, only five cartridges could be carried in the gun safely unless you used one of Captain Hardy's holsters. Captain Hardy designed a small strip of leather just the width of the hammer, sewed to the top front of his open top holster and with a hole in it for the firing pin of the SA Colt to rest in. With this rig you could carry six rounds in the chambers safely, as you simply let

the hammer down with its firing pin through the hole in this narrow strap.

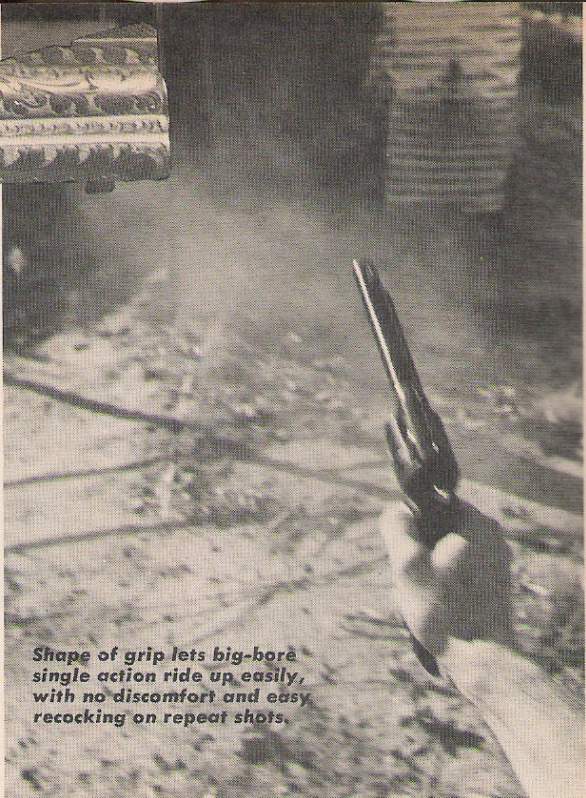
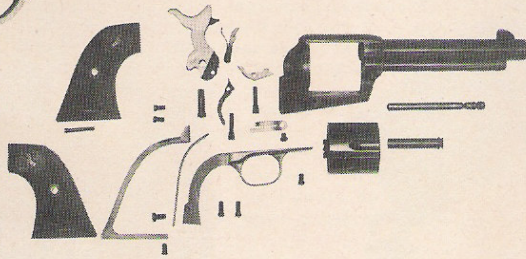
It was and is a better system than any thong over the top of the hammer spur as the gun has to be partly cocked to clear the holster. I still have one of the rigs Captain Hardy made for me many years ago. I have known several men who carried six rounds in their Colt single actions and when they hung a heavy stirrup up on the saddle horn to cinch their horses, the damn stirrup slipped and came down on the hammer spur of their guns, shooting them through the leg.

The single action is slow to unload the empties and slow to reload as compared with a modern double-action gun or the fast clip-loading of an automatic. Just the same, I saw Thell Reed do a mighty fast job of unloading empties and refilling his .45 single-action Colts. The single action is fast enough for any repeat shots with heavy cartridges. You cock the gun as it raises in your hand in recoil and with any practice at all, the gun recoils and throws the hammer spur right under your thumb.

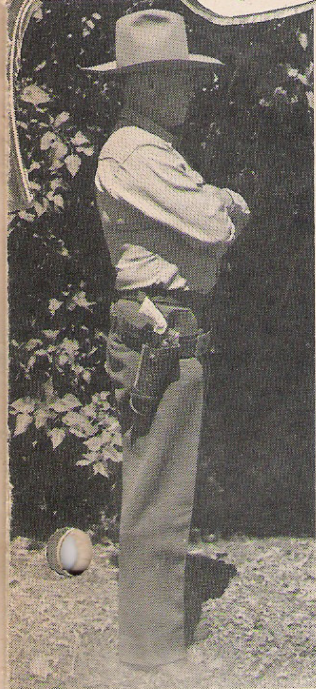
I don't go with this old saw that you have to hit with a lot of fast, small-



Fancy guns like this engraved Ruger .357 Blackhawk still have all the plain virtues of simple, sturdy single-action mechanisms, like its forerunner, the Colt SA Army, below.

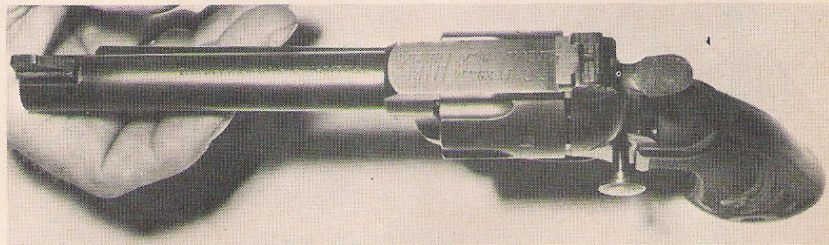


Shape of grip lets big-bore single action ride up easily, with no discomfort and easy recocking on repeat shots.



Keith's sizeable collection of single actions includes some he has owned since WWI era.

Flat-top Colt long-range single-action with its 3-leaf rear sight, was made for Keith by Colt before WWII, still is very accurate.



caliber bullets. Connect properly with one heavy slug and the job is done. I do not care for any gun that requires three or four fast hits to accomplish the purpose of one heavy slug.

The single action has the most comfortable grip of any handgun for use with heavy loads, as the sloping grip simply rolls up in the crotch of the hand, thus cushioning recoil and placing the hammer spur right under the thumb for the next shot. The solid frame of the single action will take more abuse and heavy loads than will any swing-cylinder sixgun.

The weakest part of a sixgun for handling pressures is the rear end of the barrel cone where it projects through the frame and the next is the cylinder walls themselves, necessarily rather thin. The Ruger Dragoon, however, with its unfluted heavy cylinder is adequate for any permissible heavy load in .44 Magnum. The Ruger also has very little of the thin rear end of barrel projecting through frame which was a weakness of the old Colts.

I wore a Colt single action with the same regularity as my pants for 30 years and slept with it inside my sleep-

ing bag in bear country and it never let me down.

Back in the late Twenties, Harold Croft and I designed many improvements for the Colt single action. These included a flat-top extended-frame de-



Keith and exhibition shooter, Thell Reed, easily bridge the generation gap with interest in and ability with SA's.

sign with a better base-pin catch, target sights and lightened hammer, as well as an improved main spring. These fine guns were and are just as accurate as any sixgun ever made. Later, Bill Ruger

adopted most of their improvements along with his greatly improved and unbreakable action parts.

In the late 1880s Colt brought out a fine flat-top target SA Army and also a flat-top Target Bisley. I never had any use for the Bisley because it pointed too low for any fast work, but they did have a superbly shaped hammer and a wide trigger. Recently, Colt has again brought out a fine flat-top target SA Army, the finest gun Colt ever produced in a sixgun, to my notion, and greatly in demand today. The frame, however, is too small and light for the .44 Magnum and the .44 Special with heavy loads or the .45 Colt is its limit.

Ruger, in his Dragoon, has produced a fine gun. Stronger in every way, with nearly unbreakable parts and capable of handling the .44 Magnum full loads longer without breakage or repairs than any other sixgun. He also adopted most of our early improvements and we added some more, including the Colt Dragoon grip. Today, the Ruger Dragoon and the late flat-top single-action Colts are our finest single-action revolvers. Next month we will take up the double action.