

Timeless Classic

Derek Landers takes a look at the Uberti 1873 Colt Revolver



The cylinder rear shows the rotation steps and the safety notches for the firing pin



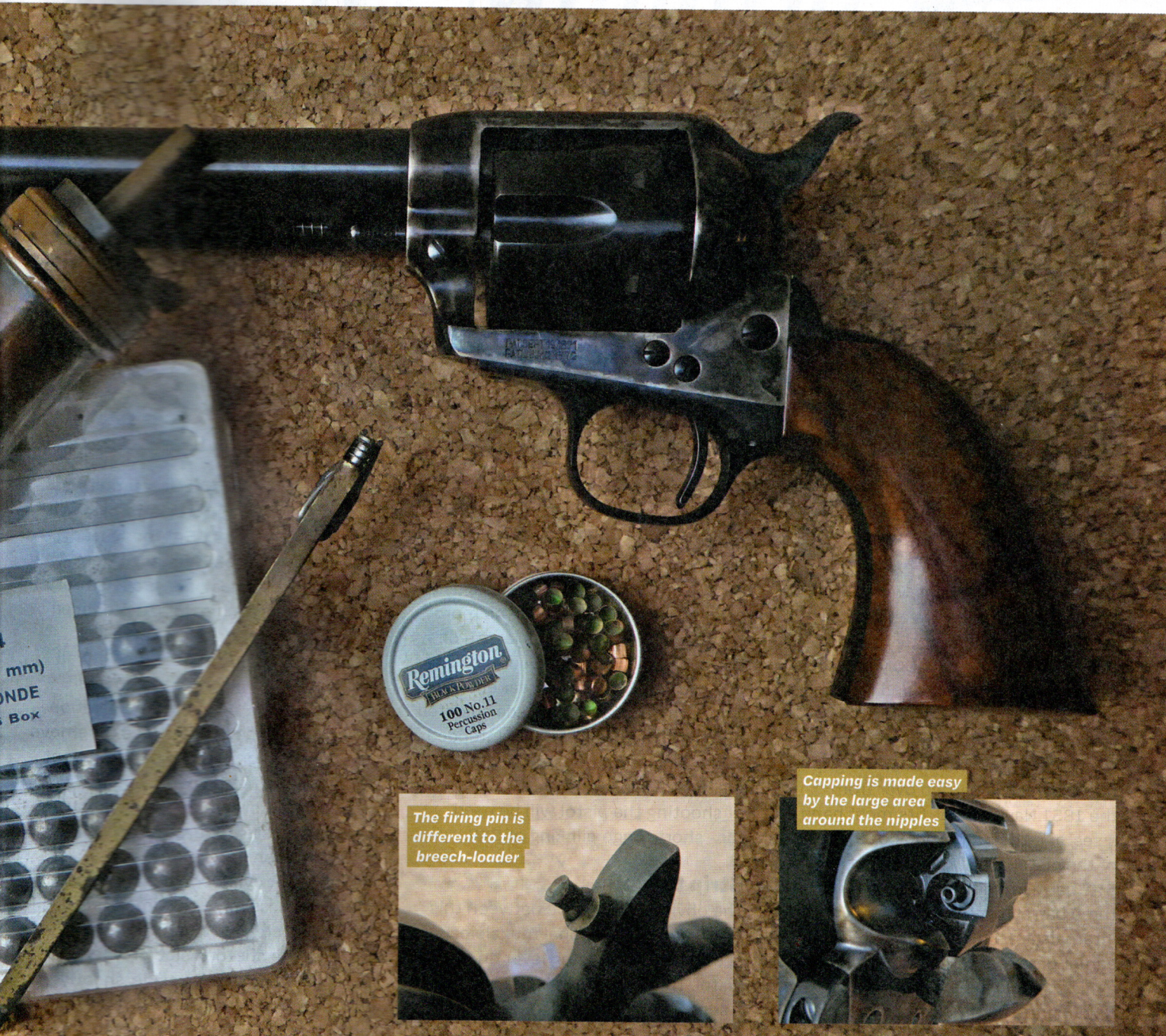
Close to one million examples of Sam Colt's various percussion revolvers were produced between 1836 and 1873, all of which used the 'open top' layout, with the major components being held together by a seemingly weak design employing a small wedge as a securing device. Nevertheless, the guns proved their worth not only on the Western frontier but in the hands of the Union army during the Civil War and afterwards.

It was not until 1873, when the Army was looking to standardise their small arms in .45 calibre breech loaders, that Colt introduced their first full-size revolver with a solid frame. It was designated The Single Action

Army (Colt never called this revolver the Peacemaker) and it was an instant hit, not only with the military (it was the standard cavalry sidearm for almost two decades) but again with everyone looking to arm themselves, for whatever reason, with a reliable and hard-hitting handgun. By the time production of the 'first generation' of the SAA ended in 1940, almost 358,000 examples had left the factory in around 30 different calibres. At this time, partly due to dwindling sales and the attraction of double-action revolvers, Colt saw this revolver as being obsolete and it was discontinued from the catalogue. The popularity of Westerns, both in the cinema and on TV, coupled

with the launch of a centrefire single-action revolver by Ruger, prompted the revolver's re-introduction in 1955, and it has continued to this day, with a short break in the 1970s for re-tooling.

It is possible that the British government can be deemed to have been indirectly involved in the design of the percussion version of this firearm icon. The breech-loading SAA, both original Colt versions and the European reproductions, had proved extremely popular with shooters on both sides of the Atlantic, particularly among those involved in the growing sport of Cowboy Action Shooting (CAS). When cartridge handguns were banned in the UK, many shooters



The firing pin is different to the breech-loader

Capping is made easy by the large area around the nipples

chose to give up their hobby rather than use muzzleloaders, the latter being perceived as dirty and unreliable. It did not take too long for the Italian manufacturers to come up with a percussion example of one of their bestsellers to fill the void, and while the new models did not bring a return to shooting for the majority of those who had left, they have become popular among muzzleloading shooters.

Missed opportunity

Apart from the cylinder and the firing pin, this revolver is essentially identical to its breech-loading brother. The loading gate in the frame is retained but placing a percussion cap on the

nipple does not have quite the same feel as loading those .45 calibre metallic cartridges. The central/pointed firing pin used on the cartridge models is swapped for a larger oval one with a larger nose that is slightly offset to strike the percussion cap on the nipple, which itself is not quite central to the chamber axis. The rear of the cylinder has safety notches cut between each nipple recess to accommodate this firing pin when the hammer is at rest, locking the cylinder and enabling the pistol to be carried safely, where the situation allows, with six loaded chambers. The spring-loaded ejector rod and its housing have been retained but serve no purpose

other than to keep the pistol looking as close as possible to the original.

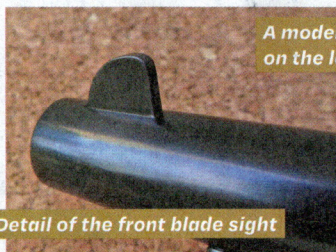
When the pistol is at rest, it is obvious that it is a muzzleloader, as the rear of the cylinder periphery has cutouts in which the nipples can be seen. A short while ago (see Gun Mart April 2020), I came across an Armi San Marco muzzle-loading version of the SAA, albeit in an unoriginal .36 calibre, which used shotgun primers for ignition, a central pointed firing pin, and a cylinder without the cut-outs at the rear. I feel that Uberti, and Pietta, could have made a pistol that was much more attractive to prospective buyers had they gone



Rear sight cut into the frame



The ejector setup is redundant but looks right



A modern QR code on the loading gate



Detail of the front blade sight



The optional loading tool

down this route. Doubtless, they have their reason why they did not.

Pretty efficient

The Colt SAA revolver is, without doubt, an icon among firearms and is still produced today in exactly the same form as it was almost 150 years ago, a testament to its design and function. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. There is just something that feels right about it as soon as you pick it up. The grip frame, which is carried over from the 1851 Navy model, fits most hand sizes, and the proportions of the rest of the pistol are almost perfect in this 5½" barrel model, my favourite of the three barrel lengths available. Also, the internals are almost identical to the earlier percussion Colts, making repairs a fairly simple job for most people. Cocking the hammer results in four distinct clicks, which Colt aficionados will tell you represents C-O-L-T.

There are some very nice case colours (chemically produced today) on many of these reproduction guns, and this one is particularly pleasing to my eye, with a mixture of blues, greys, and tans. The frame and the hammer are coloured, while the rest of the metalwork is gloss black. The fit of the parts is very good, and all edges are well-defined. A nice touch on the left side of the frame is the inclusion of a two-line Colt patent marking, showing the dates of patents applied to this model. The top line covers the system for rotating the cylinder, while the bottom one is for the method of attaching the ejector tube to the barrel.

The one-piece walnut grip has the usual Uberti colour and gloss,

with the left side showing a nice bit of grain in the wood. The wood fits the two-piece grip frame very well, with only very minor overlaps.

The sights are about as basic as you can get, with the rear being no more than a groove running the length of the top of the frame and culminating in a square notch at the rear end. The front is a quarter circle blade soldered onto the barrel. While never intended as a precision/target set-up, the sights are nevertheless adequate for the type of shooting the pistol will be used for - short-range plinking or CAS.

Strip to load

The obvious difference between this revolver and traditional muzzleloaders is the lack of a loading lever on the pistol. This necessitates the use of a separate tool that requires the cylinder to be removed from the gun for reloading. There is not much appreciable variance in the time taken to load the cylinder this way, but unless you are handy in the workshop, there is an extra cost to purchase such a tool.

Place the hammer on half-cock, depress the spring-loaded cross latch on the front of the frame, slide out the arbour, open the loading gate, and the cylinder can be removed from the right side of the frame. Follow the above steps in reverse to place the loaded cylinder back into the frame. With the loading gate open, there is a fairly large aperture around the nipples making cap placement by hand easier, while the cut-outs on the cylinder periphery enable the use of a capper.

Lock-up on this example was extremely tight, with no movement at

all in the cylinder. The trigger pull was not too bad but could be improved with a little polishing. A .454" round lead ball, backed with 25-grains of Henry Krank fine black powder, proved a very satisfactory combination. It produced manageable recoil and printed a little high and left at 25m. As with all percussion revolvers, black powder fouling begins to hinder the operation after a while, but as you need to remove the cylinder for reloading, it is prudent to give the affected parts a quick wipeover before re-assembly. If you are using the pistol for CAS competitions, you may wish to purchase an aftermarket cylinder which is proofed for smokeless powder, eliminating the above step. Be aware, this will necessitate another 'slot' on your FAC.

Loading procedure aside, shooting this pistol is just as satisfying as its breech-loading cousin, and it was nice to feel the old hog-leg once again.

When cleaning the revolver, it is prudent to remove the trigger guard and clean the area around the cylinder locking bolt, and the spring. You will be surprised where black powder residue can reach, and that spring has been known to perish. With this in mind, you might want to have a spare spring in your kit.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Name: Uberti 1873 Colt Revolver

Calibre: .44

Barrel Length: 5½"

Overall Length: 11"

Weight: 2lbs 7oz

Price: £465.00 (guide)

Contact: Henry Krank - www.henrykrank.com