

Derek Landers takes a look
at a Uberti Winchester
1873 Trapper

Western Legend

I can think of several films that have been named after a firearm, mostly Westerns. In 1950, Randolph Scott starred in 'Colt .45', a tale of a travelling salesman who has his two sample revolvers stolen. The problem here was that the guns used were Colt .44 calibre muzzle-loading Dragoon models! Two years later, Gary Cooper told the story of the 'Springfield Rifle' in the film of the same name, but the one which will likely come to everyone's mind is James Stewart's "Winchester '73".

All these films were made before the Italian manufacturers began churning out copies, so originals were used in each case. In the Stewart movie, the deluxe rifle was an actual Winchester One of One Thousand model borrowed from a museum. Today, of course, everyone can own one of these Western legends in the form of an Italian reproduction.

A winner – but not for the Army
Winchester launched its new rifle in early 1873, but due to problems with

the manufacture of its new centrefire cartridge, only 18 guns were shipped in the first year. Once the teething troubles were sorted, the gun became an instant success with the public, but Oliver Winchester could not interest the government. In fact, the US Army didn't buy any Winchester lever guns, despite what the movies tell us.

The Model 1873 used the same internals as its predecessor, the .44 rimfire Model 1866, this time clothed in an iron frame – later changed to steel – rather than brass. To take advantage of the new cartridge case being reusable, Winchester sold a complete reloading set for \$5.

Initially offered only in .44 Winchester Centrefire (aka .44-40), which accounted for some 80% of the total production, the selection was later expanded with .38-40 and .32-20, as well as .22 rimfire.

The new gun was offered as standard as a 20" round barrel carbine, a 24" round or octagonal rifle, and a 30" round barrel musket. Only the rifles had

the distinctive crescent butt plate, with carbines and muskets being less curved. A new addition to all versions was the provision of a sliding dust cover over the top ejection port. The metal finish was as we have here on this Uberti, but case-hardened receivers were not unusual, with the wood being oil-finished or, less commonly, varnished. Winchester offered a list of optional features such as fancy wood, a barrel length and/or magazine tube of your choice, set trigger, a choice of sights, and deluxe models with chequering on the woodwork and bespoke engraving.

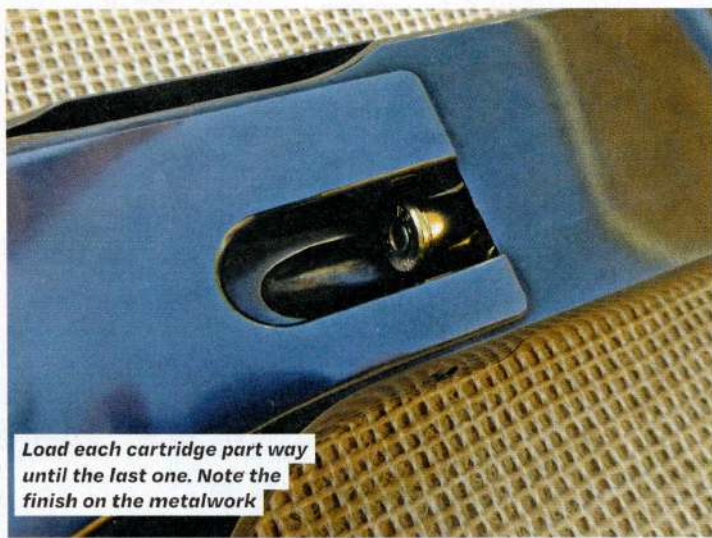
The guns were test-fired at the factory, with those that performed exceptionally well being designated as the One of One Thousand models as mentioned above. They were given extra finish and set triggers. Initially seen by Winchester as a good publicity exercise, the idea was dropped in 1877 as the public began to wonder if the standard models were of inferior quality. When, after 46 years, production of the model ceased in



Action open showing the bolt pushing the hammer back and the carrier block raised



Rear sight in the lower position



Load each cartridge part way until the last one. Note the finish on the metalwork



The front sight is part of the barrel band

1919, over 720,000 examples had left the factory, with only 136 making this exclusive group. Several of those guns have yet to surface on the market.

Take your pick

While today's Model 1873 from Uberti does not offer the variety available from the early Winchesters, there is still a decent choice for those who choose this model. There are 14 variations in the Henry Krank catalogue, each available in several calibres, and the Uberti website shows several engraving styles and finishes for those who need a bit more bling.

The short-barrelled model that we have here is finished to Uberti's usual high standards, with a deep black to most of the metal parts, the exceptions being the lever, hammer, and trigger, which have a case-coloured finish. A peculiarity I have noticed previously on this model is that the side plates on the receiver have a better gloss than the rest of the metalwork. The walnut stock is plain, while the forend is a little

more figured, with both having the usual Uberti gloss finish. The fit to the metal is very good, with only very minor raised edges in a couple of places.

The details

The rear sight is a tip-up ladder rather than the semi-buckhorn normally found on 1873 rifles. The ladder is marked 2 to 9 (100 yard increments) and the sliding elevator has a v-notch, as does the blade when the ladder is down. Around the top of the ladder is marked '1873' and there is a small screw, the purpose of which is to prevent the elevator from coming off the top of the ladder. The sight base is dovetailed into the barrel allowing windage adjustment. The front blade sight is integral with the front barrel band, with no provision for alteration, other than the use of a file! The top tang, with a neat, original style marking, is not drilled for the addition of a tang sight.

Like its predecessor, the 1873 is a top eject (so no provision for fitting a scope), but unlike the 1866, this

model has a dust cover to keep foreign matter from entering the mechanism. Not too much of a problem on today's shooting ranges, but it would have been advantageous when travelling on horseback 150 years ago. The cover opens when you drop the lever, but it must be pushed back manually when shooting is finished. There is a catch at the rear of the lever to keep it locked in place, but I noticed from Uberti's instructions that they advise opening this catch when the gun is not in use. Another improvement over the 1866 was the addition of a trigger block safety, fitted on all but the earliest few hundred guns produced. Unless the lever is gripped right up to the stock, the trigger cannot be pulled.

The relatively short tube magazine has a capacity of eight rounds, just about enough for most Cowboy Action Shooting stages. The front cap on the magazine is screwed into place, and should you need to remove it for any reason, keep hold of it while you unscrew it. Failure to do so will

A handy package. Note the furniture



see it shoot off into the distance when the pressure on the spring is released. Ask me how I know!

Small but versatile

The .357 magnum must be one of the most popular calibres in lever guns. One reason is probably its ability to also handle .38 special ammunition. Some indoor ranges will have muzzle energy limits that preclude the use of top-end magnum loads, so it is handy to be able to load ammunition that suits all situations. The Trapper will happily shoot both calibres without a problem, but for those who just want a lighter load, this model is available in .38 special calibre.

As with all of the Winchester 'toggle link' rifles, it is sensitive to a cartridge that is too long, which may prevent the lever from operating correctly. Fortunately, the Model 1873 has a built-in cartridge overall length gauge. Open the lever, turn the gun upside down, and you will see the brass elevator has been raised. Drop your cartridge into the slot, and if it does not fit, it is too long.

With an overall length of 35.5", and weighing a shade under 7 lbs, the Trapper will be a very handy rifle for CAS events where targets are spread out a little. The action is extremely smooth, and with moderate loads, the recoil is minimal. Whether or not this is due to the short barrel I cannot say, but I found the sight picture very good in both artificial and natural light.

At 25 yards, from a bench, using reloads (4.5-grains of Unique behind a 158-grain RNFP bullet), I could get down to 2" or so for a 5-shot group. Outdoors at 100 yards, with a 158-grain FMJ bullet backed by 12-grains of Alliant 2400, that opened



The Trapper handles both .38 SPL and .357 MAG

up to around 7". Not spectacular results but more than adequate for CAS stages where time is a little more important than bullseye accuracy. The trigger pull is reasonably light and smooth, and there is a screw in the bottom tang that allows you to alter the tension on the mainspring for some adjustment. This is a capable little rifle that will provide hours of entertainment whether you are shooting competitions or just plinking for fun.

Over the years I have come across one or two examples of this model that have a rather stiff loading gate, or spring cover as it is sometimes called. Combined with a sharp edge on the side plate, this can invariably cause a nipped finger as you load the cartridges. To minimise the risk, it is prudent to leave the head of each cartridge part way out and push it



The rear sight elevated. Note the screw at the top which retains the elevator

in with the next one, with the last round being the only one that you push all the way in. If you still get the problem, use a length of 8mm dowel to push the last one in.

The Henry Krank website shows this model with a case-coloured finish and buckhorn rear sight, so if you are interested in the Trapper, then you should contact them to see what the options are.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

- Name:** Uberti 1873 Trapper
- Calibre:** .357 Magnum
- Barrel Length:** 16"+
- Overall Length:** 35.5"
- Weight:** <7 lbs
- Length of Pull:** 13.5"
- Price:** £1193.00 (guide)
- Contact:** Henry Krank - www.henrykrank.com