

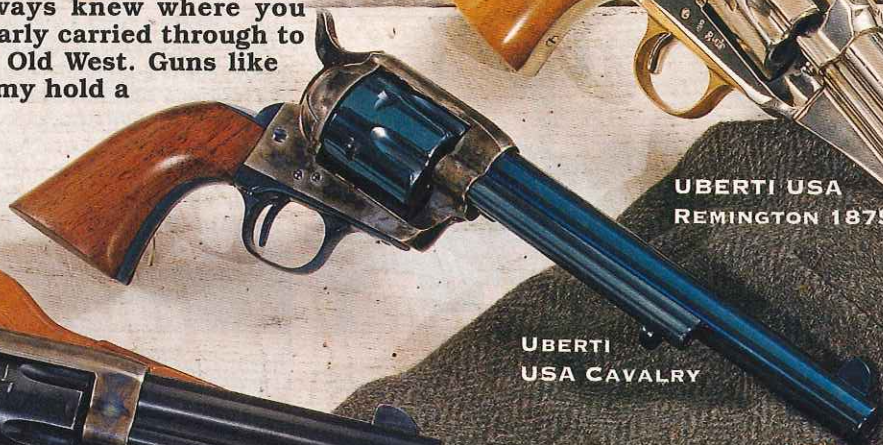
# NEW SIXG OF THE OLD WE

COWBOY HANDGUNS—IN PARTICULAR THE COLT SINGLE ACTION ARMY—HAVE ALWAYS BEEN POPULAR WITH AMERICAN SHOOTERS. IF YOU WANT TO SHOOT A NEWLY-MANUFACTURED “OLD WEST” SIXGUN, THERE ARE MORE OPTIONS TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE.

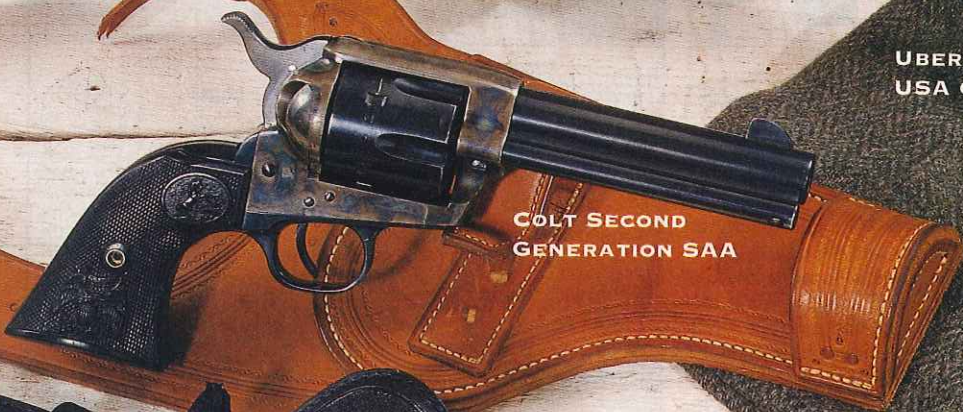
**A**mericans love cowboy guns. Maybe it's that they are a tangible tie to our rich Western heritage—a simpler time when you always knew where you stood. That affinity is clearly carried through to the shootin' irons of the Old West. Guns like the Colt Single Action Army hold a



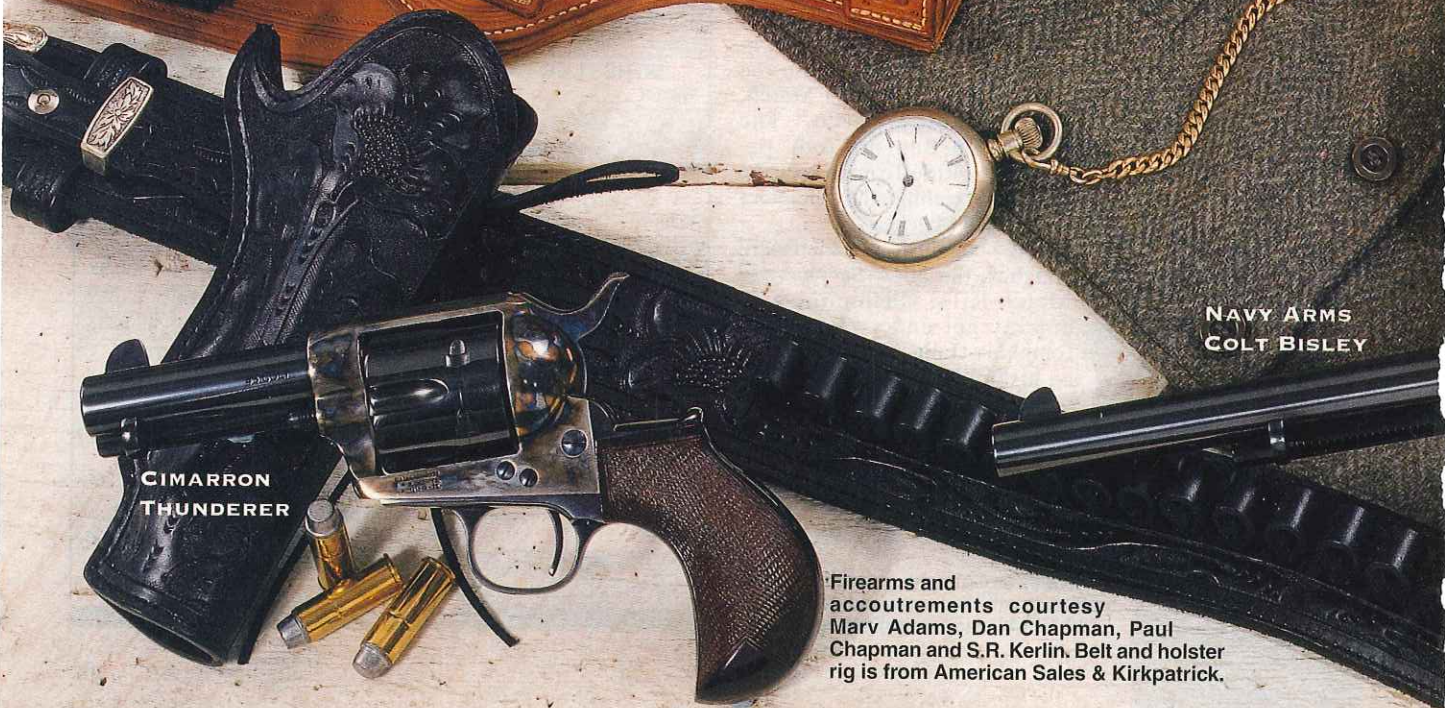
UBERTI USA  
REMINGTON 1875



UBERTI  
USA CAVALRY



COLT SECOND  
GENERATION SAA



NAVY ARMS  
COLT BISLEY

CIMARRON  
THUNDERER

Firearms and accoutrements courtesy Marv Adams, Dan Chapman, Paul Chapman and S.R. Kerlin. Belt and holster rig is from American Sales & Kirkpatrick.



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BY PHILIP SCHREIER



RUGER VAQUERO

NAVY ARMS SCHOFIELD

CIMARRON ARTILLERY

Photo by Taimadge G. Rutledge





In addition to plain-jane working guns, Single Action Army variants may be had in high-grades and with engraving, such as with this U.S. Patent Fire-Arms Mfg. gun.

special place in hearts, minds and dreams. And, for shooting and collecting, I'd be hard pressed to come up with a more popular handgun.

While Old West sixguns have always had a lot of appeal, these guns got yet another boost from a relatively-new shooting sport—Cowboy Action shooting. This shooting game—less than 10 years old—is steeped in the history and lore of the Old West, and it was out of love and fondness for this bye-gone era of cowboys and outlaws that prompted the founders of the sport to organize and create a hobby that today numbers more than 20,000 active members.

This sudden surge of interest in the trappings and equipment of more than a century ago has created a boom in new shooting hardware and a desire for the participants to express a bit of individuality by carrying and shooting something unique. Even more so, it has also spurred a newfound interest in Old West handguns among those who like to own, shoot and collect single-actions who never intend to go to a Single Action

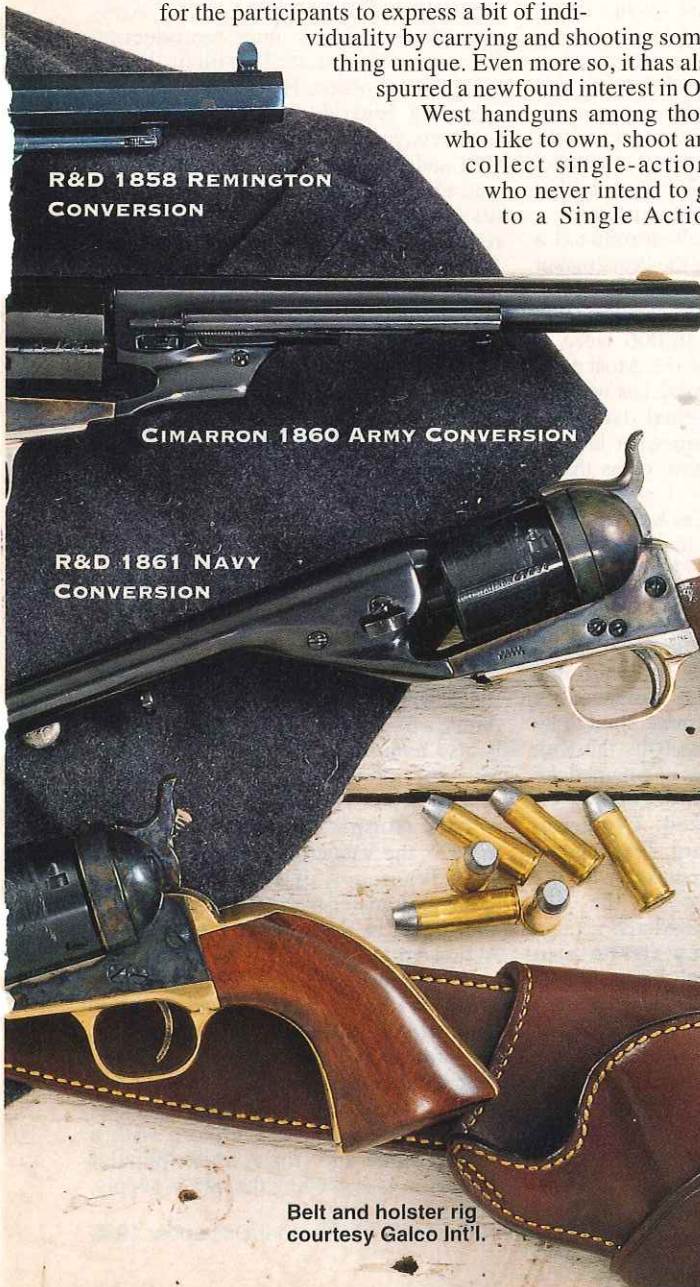
everyone else on the firing line. Here are some of the more interesting sixguns of the Old West that are making a big splash on the Cowboy Action shooting circuit and in gunshops all across the country.

### Shooting Society match.

Today, the reproduction firearms market is alive and well with the re-issue of some classic arms as well as the introduction of some curious and lesser known wheelguns that are finding favor with those who want something just a little bit different from



The Ruger Vaquero is a thoroughly modern single-action with classic looks. It features a transfer-bar safety system.



R&D 1858 REMINGTON CONVERSION

CIMARRON 1860 ARMY CONVERSION

R&D 1861 NAVY CONVERSION

Belt and holster rig courtesy Galco Int'l.

### THE SINGLE-ACTIONS

**COLT MODEL 1873 SINGLE ACTION ARMY:** They say you can't improve upon perfection, and I believe it. Case in point—few guns have ever fit my hand and felt as natural as does the 1873 Colt Single Action Army (SAA) revolver, a.k.a. the Peacemaker. My Colt Peacemaker's 4 3/4" barrel in .45 Colt seems to be a flawless extension of not only my arm, but my mind as well, when shooting. If any one handgun evokes images of the Old West, it's the Single Action Army.

For those of you who want a classic Colt Single Action Army there are a number of avenues to choose from. Nothing beats the real thing, of course, and, if you want a single-action bearing the Colt name and can afford the \$900 price tag on a new Third Generation Single Action Army, you would be making a sound buy. Recently, Colt announced the introduction of the Colt Cowboy .45 Single Action. This revolver is the standard Single Action Army of old with a few new twists. The gun is produced through the investment casting process (commonly used in Sturm, Ruger & Co. guns) and has a transfer-bar safety that prevents



# NEW SIXGUNS OF THE OLD WEST

the hammer from hitting the firing pin unless the trigger is pulled. Available initially in .45 Colt and only with a 5½" barrel, this revolver is considerably less expensive—about \$600—than the standard Third Generation Single Action Army available only from the Colt Custom Shop.

Speaking of transfer bars, most of the single-actions out there don't have them—the Ruger Vaquero and Colt Cowboy being the most noteworthy exceptions. Most of the single-actions out there have a hammer-mounted firing pin, so if you do have an old Single Action Army or a reproduction of one, only load five rounds in the cylinder



**Conversions of the '51 Navy, such as this .38 Spl. by Traditions, generally employ an ejector rod on the right side of the revolver.**

and let the hammer rest on the empty chamber. Follow this simple rule and you may well make it to the other side with the same ten toes that God gave you to start with.

For shooters not interested in paying the full-freight that comes with the Colt-made guns, Traditions, Uberti USA, Dixie, IAR, EMF, Cimarron, Navy Arms Co., American Arms, American Frontier Firearms Mfg. and U.S. Patent Fire-Arms Mfg. and others all make wonderfully detailed replicas of the Single Action Army, often for a fraction of the cost of an actual Colt or with options and configurations not available from Colt. These replicas are made with such accuracy that many of their parts interchange with some Colt originals.

All the above-mentioned importers offer variations of the famed Colt 1873 Peacemaker. The majority of these single-



**The S&W Schofield is a top-break that ejects all six cartridges cases at once when opened.**



**The new Colt Cowboy revolver is a less-expensive version of Colt's venerable SAA in .45 Colt that employs a transfer-bar safety.**

actions are made by either A. Uberti or Armi San Marco in Italy. Each importer contracts separately with the Italian companies to produce revolvers to its specifications. Some companies assemble and finish the revolvers here in the states and some sell the guns just as they were made in Italy with no modifications. Cost will also vary depending on the finish and grips that you choose. Peacemakers can come in a myriad of barrel lengths and calibers. Retail is generally between \$350 and \$450. Additional charges for a nickel finish, special stocks and other features are to be expected.

**COLT BISLEYS:** Colt introduced a modified target version of the Peacemaker in 1894 and today it is known as the Bisley Model, after the famous target range in Surry, England. Only 46,000 were made between 1894 and 1913. Most of the importers carry this model as well, however, I think its original date of introduction, 1894, is somewhat later than what most of us think of as the heyday of the cowboy.

**THUNDERER SINGLE ACTIONS:** I like to think of this as the best little gun that never was. In 1877 Colt introduced its first double-action revolver. The nifty little double-action was only available in .38 or .41 cal. and was essentially a scaled down Peacemaker frame with double-action inner works and a bird's head-shaped grip frame. Said to be a favorite of the notorious Billy the Kid, the new double-action was nicknamed the Lightning or Thunderer, depending on which caliber you used. Cimarron Firearms of Fredericksburg, Texas, introduced a full-frame Peacemaker with the distinctive grip style of the old Lightning—called the Thunderer.

**REMINGTON MODELS 1875S AND 1890:** Remington's large-frame Model 1875 Single Action Army was a fierce competitor of the original Peacemaker and Italian-made reproductions remain so in the modern day as well. The original 1875 was made from 1875 until 1899 with a six-shot fluted cylinder, a 7½" or 5¾" barrel and is distinguished by the web under its ejector. The Model 1890 Single Action—

also reproduced in Italy—has a Colt-like ejector housing without the web and is generally sold under the "Outlaw" name.

**S&W MODEL 1875 SCHOFIELD:** Val Forgett of Navy Arms was the first to introduce reproduction firearms in the late 1950s with his line of Civil War revolvers. He eventually started carrying reproductions of cartridge revolvers, and today handles a full line of Colt and Remington models. In 1996 he was again "the first with the finest" when his two-year, joint project with Uberti resulted in the reintroduction of the Smith & Wesson Schofield revolver. The big top-break Smith is offered in .45 Colt or .44-40 Win. with a 7" barrel and is called the



**The conversions usually add a new recoil shield (arrow) in addition to a new cylinder.**

U.S. Cavalry Model. Schofields feature simultaneous ejection, and in addition to the 7"-barreled model adopted by the Army, a 5"-barreled "Wells Fargo" Model is also now available. After Navy Arms' introduction of the gun, several other importers now catalog them as well.

**THE RUGER VAQUERO:** Introduced in 1993, the Vaquero features all the classic advantages of a modern Ruger revolver; transfer-bar safety, reliability, fit and finish, in the style of a Colt Single Action Army. Available in 4", 5½" and 7½" barrel lengths and chambered in .357 Mag, .44-40 WCF, .44 Mag and .45 Colt this versatile and affordable revolver is a favorite among casual shooters as well as in the cowboy action circles with nearly 200,000 manufactured to date. In 1997, Ruger introduced the Vaquero with a Bisley frame and, for a while, popular demand was exceeding the rate of supply.



## THE CONVERSIONS

For a long time those with a desire to shoot post-Civil War revolvers had only limited and expensive outlets. Colt Peacemakers and reproductions were all that was available for the longest time. Yet, historically, there was a great demand for cartridge firing revolvers in the eight years between the end of the Civil War in 1865 and the introduction of the Peacemaker in 1873. Answering that demand in the late 1860s were a number of factory and non-factory conversions of Civil War cap-and-ball revolvers. Today, a number of manufacturers are producing newly manufactured conversions of the old cap-and-ball conversions that will surely turn a few heads.

**R&D'S REMINGTON 1858 NEW MODEL ARMY CONVERSION:** Some of the earliest work in conversions was done on Remington-Rider and New Model Pocket revolvers. Ken Howell of R&D Guns in Beloit, Wisconsin, has produced a conversion that quickly became a favorite of mine. R&D's product is a two-piece cylinder with a back plate that has six floating firing pins. Originally based on two British patents by Adams and Tranter in the 1860s, this unit allows an existing 1858 New Model cap-and-ball revolver to become a six-shot .45 Colt. Although the mechanics of rolling the cylinder in and out of the frame every time you reload can at times be a bit frustrating, the beauty and accuracy of this revolver leaves little else to be desired. Howell insists this unit only be used in steel-framed revolvers, the brass frame replicas are not only historically inaccurate but cannot handle the higher pressures of the .45 Colt load. He also suggests that only .45 Colt ammunition rated as "Cowboy Loads" or blackpowder loads be used in his guns. The retail price on the unit alone is \$225.

**THE COLT CONVERSIONS:** When the War Between the States ended in 1865, S&W was the only American firm producing revolvers that accepted metallic cartridges due to its licensing arrangement on Rollin White's bored-through cylinder patent. Colt could not produce a revolver cylinder that accepted metallic cartridges from the back of the cylinder until designs by Charles B. Richards and William Mason were adopted once the White patent expired in 1869. Tens of thousands of percussion 1851, 1860 and 1861 Colt revolvers were converted, both by the fac-



tory and by local blacksmiths, for use by those who needed the gun and the more practical metallic cartridge.

**CIMARRON'S CONVERTED 1851 NAVY & 1860 ARMY REVOLVERS:** Mike Harvey of Cimarron F.A. Co. in Fredericksburg, Texas, supplied two exquisite Colt first model Richards conversions for evaluation. These guns are made new from whole cloth by Armi San Marco in Italy and accept blackpowder and modern smokeless cartridges. The 1851 Navy was originally manufactured by Colt in .36 cal. from 1851 until 1873. The Cimarron Richards '51 Navy model is chambered in .38 Spl., .38 Colt and .44 Colt allowing the sport



and competition shooter great latitude in available ammunition—though only lower pressure loads should be used. The 1860 Army has always been my favorite percussion revolver and Cimarron's Richards model in .44 Colt is a delight. All the positive attributes of a beautifully-styled revolver with the ease of cartridge loading. Black Hills is manufacturing .44 Colt (as well as .38 Colt, .44 Russian and .45 Schofield) so those of us that are reloading challenged can obtain factory ammunition at an affordable price. Out of the box, these two revolvers had the smoothest action of any that I tested. Shooting a Richards or Richards-Mason conversion is a trick because of the poor sight acquisition that is inherent with the revolver. There is a 1861 Navy-Richards available as well. All three models are available in .38 Colt, .38 Spl. and .44 Colt.

**TRADITIONS COLT 1851 NAVY RICHARDS:** Traditions of Old Saybrook, Connecticut, also produces an 1851 Navy Richards conversion in .38 Spl. As with the Cimarron '51, this gun is manufactured by Armi San Marco, but finished and fitted here. It is nice to handle this gun and not have numerous Italian proof marks visible at every flat surface of the gun. The case hardening, the luster of the blued barrel and cylinder, as well as the fit of the stocks will make this gun a handsome addition to your wheel gun inventory. In addition to the '51,

**Most Old West style single-actions have hammer mounted firing pins and no transfer-bar safeties. They should always be carried hammer-down on an empty chamber.**

Traditions also does an 1860 Army and a 1861 Navy, all with 7/8" barrels and all in .38 Spl. All are priced at \$365.

**THE R&D GUNS COLT 1861 NAVY RICHARDS-MASON:** The 1861 Navy that I tested in .38 Colt was a real treat to shoot and handle. Because Howell's guns are made one by one, there is just that extra attention to detail. This '61 Navy has a front blade sight that is dove-tailed to the barrel so that it could drift back and forth, just like some converted originals. He does all his own casehardening and stamping,

R&D's '58 Remington conversion is a two-piece unit that has six individual firing pins. The cylinder must be removed to reload.



so you will find only finishes and marks that were original to these guns a century ago. The cost for an R&D '61 Navy in .38 Colt as described above is about \$629. In addition to the previously mentioned 1858 Remington and 1861 Navy, R&D also does copies of the 1860 Army in both Richards and

Richards-Mason conversions as well as the Colt 1872 Open-top revolver in .38 Colt or .44 Colt.

Whether you have joined the sport of cowboy action shooting or you just like to shoot or collect historic guns, the period between 1865 and 1900 was the time of this country's greatest growth and expansion. Some would argue that the revolver reached the pinnacle of perfection during that time period, and when I shoot some of these reproductions and evaluate them against some of my "modern" guns, I tend to agree.

NRD

### SOURCES:

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- Navy Arms Co.** (Dept. AR), 689 Bergen Blvd., Ridgely, NJ 07657
- R&D Guns** (Dept. AR), RR 1 Box 283, Beloit, WI 53511
- Sturm, Ruger, & Co.** (Dept. AR), 283 Lacey Place, Southport, CT 06940
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- Uberti USA, Inc.** (Dept. AR), P.O. Box 509, Lakeville, CT 06039
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