GUN Digest
THE MAGAZINE
10 FOR ALL TIME!
PHILLIP PETERSON
Vz-52 Rifle was Uniquely Czech
Lee-Enfield 'Jungle Carbine' Still Popular
Revealing Origins of the 'Cigarette Gun'
French Service Revolvers Were Advanced
S&W Model 1940 Light Rifle a True Classic
DAN SHIDELER
Original Papoose is One Great Gun
Cabanas P-21 Remains a Footnote
Speedmaster Remains a Delight
M66 Supersingle Still a Shooter
Remington Model 673 is Funky but Collectible
by Dan Shideler and
Phillip Peterson
Dan Shideler and Phillip Peterson paint
a unique picture of gun history with their
stories of popular guns and duds, industry
trends and tribulations, the high-quality and
the has-been. You don't know the details of
our past until you've read this collection.

Vz-52 Rifle was Uniquely Czech

CZECHOSLOVAKIA WAS AN INNOVATOR IN POST-WORLD WAR II ARMS. THE UNIQUE VZ-52 SEMIAUTOMATIC RIFLE MAKES A FINE COLLECTIBLE.

Czechoslovakia has one of the most innovative arms industries in the world. Since the early 20th century, Czech arms designers have come up with many unique and ground-breaking designs. Although some were copies of other nations' weaponry — such as the Mauser M 1898 bolt-action rifles — many other designs are uniquely Czech.

One of the more interesting post-World War II guns from Czechoslovakia is the Vz-52 semiautomatic rifle.

Ammunition and Then a Gun

After World War II, as Czechoslovakia came under communist rule, its army began work on a new type of cartridge for rifles and machine guns. The Czech government did not standardize ammunition with its Russian allies until the 1960s, so it was free to develop separate munitions and weapons. Czech designers came up with the 7.62x45 mm cartridge before they had a rifle to use it. The 7.62x45 mm is an intermediate rifle cartridge, and its ballistics are nearly identical to the Soviet 7.62x39 mm.

In 1947, Czech designers set out to create a rifle that fired the new ammunition. The finished product was adopted in 1952. To the untrained eye, the rifle looks like it is related to the Soviet SKS. Closer inspection reveals nothing could be farther from the truth. Disassembly shows a design that borrows features from American and German rifles used in World War II. The trigger group is similar to the American M-1 Garand, including the safety lever and trigger-guard take-down apparatus.

To remove the hand guard, press a spring catch on both sides of the forestock. This reveals the gas system, which consists of an annular piston around the barrel, much like the German MKb 42(W). The piston drives an operating rod that's a C-shaped piece of stamped steel. The operating rod propels two small steel pins on a separate carrier, which impart motion to the bolt carrier on firing. The bolt is a tipping design — as in the Tokarev, FN-49 and SKS — but differs in that it locks with four lugs in the front of the receiver rather than the rear, as in the other rifles.

The box magazine is a detachable 10-round unit, and there is a bolt hold-open after the last round is fired. The sights are basic, much like those on Mauser bolt-action rifles. The rear sight is graduated to 900 meters. There's a heavy forend cap under the barrel that secures the barrel to the stock and also serves as the base for the bayonet. The bayonet folds and locks along the right side of the rifle, flush with the stock via an inletted portion of the right forearm.

Usage

Production began in 1952. The Czech word for model is *vzor*, which explains the origin of the name Vz-52. The first 5,000 rifles were made by Povážské strojárn Povážská Bystrica, but because of production delays and quality problems, manufacturing was taken over by eská Zbrojovka, better known as CZ.

The rifle was issued to Czech forces until 1957, when the Soviets insisted Czechoslovakia standardize its ammunition with that used by other Warsaw Pact nations. The chambering was changed to 7.62x39 mm, and production continued briefly as the Vz-52/57. The 52/57 required no major alterations except for the different chamber length and a slightly altered magazine.

In 1958, Czechoslovakia adopted the Vz-58 select fire rifle as its main battle rifle. The 58 outwardly resembles an AK-47 but is, of course, a different rifle. The model 52s and 52/57s were sold or given to several third-world nations eager to get more modern rifles than pre-World War II bolt-actions. Vz-52s have seen combat use in many world conflicts since the 1960s. Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada, Syria and Egypt have put the rifles to "good" use.

Once a rare sight in American collections, the Vz-52 has been fairly common in the United States since the mid-1990s. Several thousand were imported from the Middle East or South America by Century Arms. Most were well-used. In fact, so many had cracked or damaged stocks that Century had some of the stocks coated with a black epoxy to hold them together and make them appear less beaten up. Also, many were missing the easily removed hand guard. These were sold for as little as $39 for a while, but there are no extra hand guards available. There were even a few Vz-52s brought home by U.S. soldiers who served in Grenada.

A complete Vz-52 will bring $250 to $400 today. The black-epoxied examples bring less. The main interest is among collectors. Very few plinkers will buy a 52 if they know about the ammunition situation. The Vz-52/57 will bring at least twice as much as the 52 because ammunition is easy find.

Ammunition?

Ammunition has always been the main problem American shooters have with the Vz-52. Czechoslovakia was the only nation making guns chambering this cartridge. Further, only the Vz-52 and a belt-fed machine gun —also called the Model 52 — used it. So after the Czechs adopted the 7.62x39 mm, there was little reason to continue production of the 7.62x45 mm.

A bunch came into the United States with the rifles, but little has turned up since. The current price for surplus 7.62x45 mm is about 50 cents or more per round — not a cheap plinking round compared to the 7.62x39 mm. All the surplus ammunition has corrosive primers, and the rifle must be thoroughly cleaned after firing. I have seen several Vz-52s that were ruined — the bore a rusted hole, and the gas system seized — because they were not cleaned.

Finally, some U.S. companies made a chamber insert that would allow use of 7.62x39 mm ammunition in a Vz-52's 7.62x45 mm chamber. This was simply a piece of round steel that filled in the extra 6 mm gap in the length of the chamber. These inserts are not very reliable unless they're installed with a permanent nonheat-sensitive locking compound. They have a nasty tendency to stick to a fired case and fly out during extraction. Then, the next cartridge fired can rupture, damaging the rifle and maybe the shooter.

Be careful, and stick with the ammo for which your gun was made.

— Phillip Peterson is a full-time gun dealer from Indiana.

BY PHILLIP PETERSON

Lee-Enfield 'Jungle Carbine' Still Popular

THE LEE-ENFIELD RIFLE NO. 5 MK WAS A HIT WITH TROOPS BECAUSE IT WAS SHORTER AND LIGHTER THAN OTHER MODELS. IT REMAINS POPULAR TODAY.

The English Lee-Enfield series of rifles dates to the 1880s, when American inventor James Paris Lee took a design that had failed to catch much attention in the United States to Great Britain.

The British took to the design and were soon cranking out thousands of rifles that used Lee's action design married to the .303 British cartridge and a 10-round magazine. Design work was done at the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield, so the rifle has forever been linked with that name.

The history of the design and use of each Enfield model would require more room than I have in this column, so I'll discuss one of the final variations of the Enfield series: the No. 5 Mk1.

Jungle Carbine Origins

The Lee-Enfield Rifle No. 5 Mk 1 is usually known to collectors and noncollectors as a "Jungle Carbine," though that was just a nickname and never official terminology.

In late 1942, the British Infantry Weapons Development committee began researching a shorter, lighter version of the standard-issue rifle, the No. 4 Mk. 1. It was mainly intended for use in the far East, where jungle fighting in difficult terrain had exposed the full-size SMLE and No. 4 rifles as too large and heavy.

Through much of 1943, various design features were submitted, and the final result was the carbine we know today. During its design stage, the rifle was called a No. 4 lightened rifle. On March 21, 1944, the final design of the new rifle was approved. On Sept. 12, 1944, the name of the model was officially changed to Rifle No. 5 Mk 1.

The No. 5 Mk 1 rifle has several unique features.

The action is the same as the No. 4 but has been lightened by removing steel in some areas. Also, the 20.5-inch barrel includes a pinned-on flash eliminator. In addition, the buttstock has a rubber recoil pad, and the rear sight is graduated to 800 yards rather than the 1,300-yard sight on No. 4 rifles.

Production of the new rifle began at the Royal Ordnance Factories at Fazakerly and BSA Shirley. Although several thousand No. 5s were made before World War II ended in August 1945, the design did not see a lot of combat during the war.

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Post-War History

Production of the No. 5 continued after the war. The rifle was popular with troops because it was shorter and lighter than other models.

There were, however, continuing complaints that the rifle could not shoot with consistent accuracy. Ordnance officials called this problem "wandering zero." It seems rifles calibrated at the arsenal or in the field would shoot acceptably for a while but then become increasingly inaccurate. Officials made several attempts to determine if the problem stemmed from a design defect, but they never settled on one cause.

Apparently, a significant factor in the lack of accuracy was the flash hider. During tests, rifles without flash hiders held accuracy for more shots. However, that was just one contributing factor, not the cause. Other potential culprits included the length of the forestock, lightning cuts on the receiver and barrel and methods of holding the barreled action in the wood.

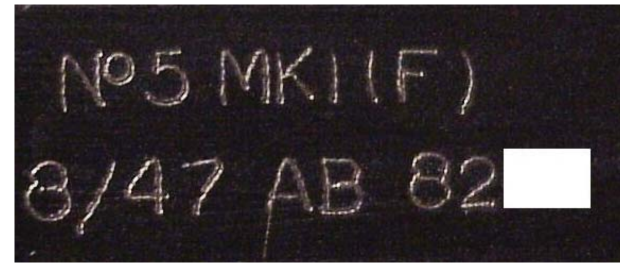
Ultimately, officials did nothing to fix the problem, and they declared the No. 5 rifle obsolete in July 1947. Production wound down by late 1947, with the final rifles assembled at Fazakerly in December.

The No. 5 Mk 1 jungle carbine shown here was made in 1947 and shows no signs of use. Current prices for a mint-condition 1947 carbine range from $400 to $700.

According to *The Lee-Enfield Story*, there were about 250,000 No. 5 Mk 1 Rifles produced. That figure is not absolute, as there was some overlap and discrepancies in factory serial number records.

As they were removed from British service, some No. 5s were given or sold to other nations. Throughout the 1950s, many were sold on the surplus arms market and ended up in the United States. Most came in before 1968. Some were imported in unissued condition. The 1947-dated No. 5 I used for this column shows no signs of use.

The going price for a minty jungle carbine usually runs $400 to $700 if the rifle has matching numbers.



No. 5s with World War II dates of 1944 or 1945 will command higher prices than 1946- or 1947-dated guns.

There have been a few small lots of No. 5 Mk 1 carbines imported during the past decade. Many came from Malaysia and show signs of being used in a wet climate, such as water stains on the wood, rotted rubber recoil pads, and moderate rust and pitting on steel edges where they touch wood. These sell for $200 to $350.

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Modern Copies

In the 1980s and 1990s, many thousand SMLE No. 1 Mk III and No. 4 Mk 1 rifles were imported. Because there is a limited but growing market for the old battle rifles, importers were left with more guns than they wanted. Navy Arms and other companies began converting rifles into reproduction jungle carbines or similar models. The most common example is a jungle carbine made from a SMLE No. 1 Mk III. The manufacturer shortens the barrel and installs a reproduction flash hider/front sight. Some have the recoil pad added. Others retain the original metal buttplate. These are available in .303 British or .308.

The easiest way to identify a modified rifles is by the position of the rear sight. The SMLE rear sight is atop the barrel. The rear sight on a No. 5 Mk 1 is a peep sight atop the receiver above the bolt handle.

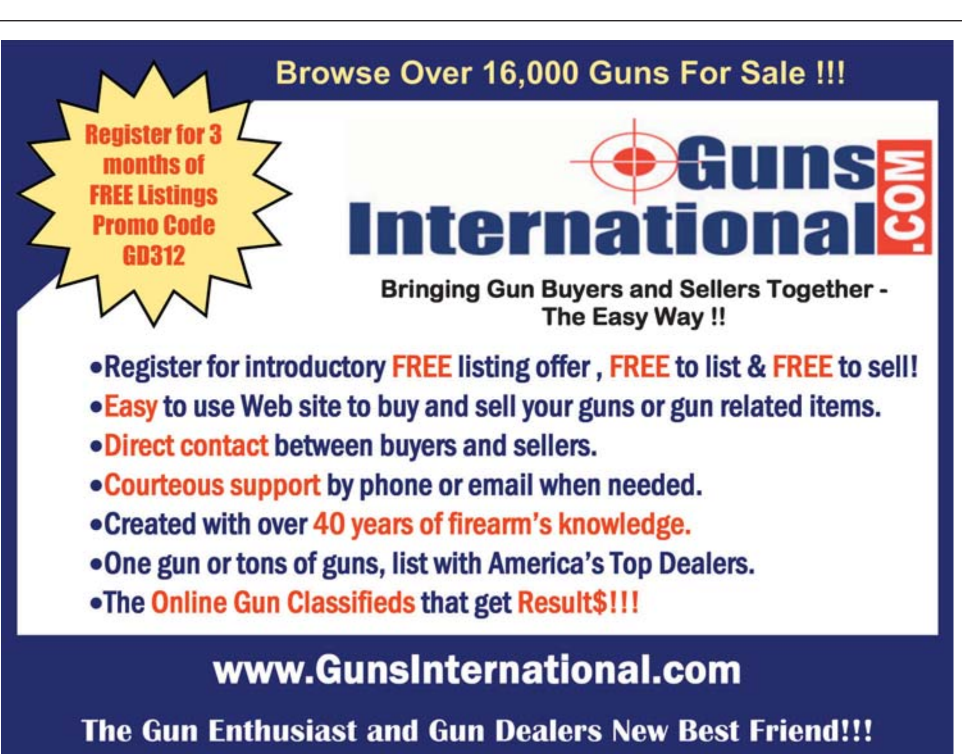
It's difficult to distinguish close copies of No. 5 carbines made from No. 4 rifles. I can't label these guns as fake jungle carbines. Firms that offer these rifles make no attempt to cover the nature of these guns. They are simply taking a slow-selling model and changing it to another variation. These non-original carbines sell for $200 to $300.

I guess it's a testament to the popularity of the jungle carbine that copies sell as well as originals.

— Phillip Peterson is a full-time gun dealer from Indiana.

COMING IN THE APRIL 28TH, 2008, ISSUE

Scott Wagner brings you up to date on the latest and greatest introductions in the black-rifle market. Also, columnist Dan Shideler examines the case of the curious Cabana P21 pistol.



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Revealing Origins of the 'Cigarette Gun'

AFTER WORLD WAR II, GERMAN GUILD GUNSMITHS MADE CUSTOM-ORDER RIFLES TO TRADE WITH AMERICAN SOLDIERS. THE AUTHOR RECENTLY FOUND ONE.

This column begins like most of my gun stories — at a gun show. Big surprise, huh? Most of the guns I write about were acquired at gun shows. Don't believe folks who tell you shows are a waste of time. I can almost always leave a show with a couple of interesting items, purchased for a fraction of their true value.

This small Saturday-only show in Nappanee, Ind. is sponsored twice a year by a local club, but it's one of the most popular shows in the state. Its tables are always sold out, and the aisles are packed with hopeful shoppers soon after opening.

As I was weaving between slow-moving patrons, I overheard a table holder describing a rifle on a display rack. The customer said, "Those Germans could build nice guns." Then he put the rifle back and moved on. I picked up the rifle and saw what he meant. It was a Mauser Model 1898 sporting rifle chambered in 8 mm Mauser. It had set triggers and was set up to take a claw-mount scope. As I looked at the gun, the seller told me it included the original scope, which is unusual. Many European sporting guns end up without the removable scope or metallic sights with which they came.

The seller handed me an ancient-looking scope made by Oigee in Berlin, Germany. It was a 3X and had a three post cross-hair. After locking the scope in its mount on the rifle, I asked the seller his price. We agreed on a figure, and I was the new owner of the rifle.

The gun was built on a Mauser Model 1898 action. The 24-inch barrel was tapered round with a raised solid rib. A rear sight featured one fixed and folding blade. Claw-mount scope bases had been installed on the receiver. The handmade walnut stock had a cheek rest on the left side. Everything seemed to be well made, but the rifle had no engraving or gold inlay that would be found on a higher-grade gun. There were no markings on it; no maker's name, caliber designation or serial number — not even a proofmark. By law, any firearm barrel made in Germany had to be proof fired with a cartridge loaded with extra powder to prove it was safe. That was

A custom Mauser with no proofmarks or other markings is likely a "cigarette" gun made on the black market immediately after World War II in occupied Germany.

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done at a proof house, and the barrel was then stamped with a mark indicating the caliber and proof load used.

The seller told me the gun was an 8x57 mm Mauser, which I confirmed by checking it with 8 mm headspace gauges. The bolt closed on the "go" gauge and did not close on a "no-go" gauge.

The scope was made by Oigee, which manufactured scopes in Berlin in the pre-World War I era. According to *Old Rifle Scopes* by Nick Stroebel (published by Gun Digest books), Oigee scopes were used on Imperial German World War I Gew-98 Mauser sniper rifles. That dated the scope to the pre-World War I vintage, so I assumed the gun was made before World War I.

I had what I thought was a "guild rifle," as it's called in the firearms trade. A good-sized book could be written about European gunmaking and its associated gunsmith guilds. As was explained to me the next week at another gun show by an expert in such firearms, European gunmakers and gunsmiths formed guilds as early as the 1600s. They were unions formed to ensure that any products or work offered by guild members would be of good quality. Master gunsmiths trained new gunsmiths in an apprentice system, in which a trainee might work under a master's guidance for several years before being admitted to the guild.

As they learned their craft, trainees built rifles the guild sold to gun retailers. Those could be of nearly any configuration. While they were being trained, each trainee probably displayed special talents in certain areas, so several trainees would contribute to one project. One guy did stock work, another made and installed barrels, and another might have polished and blued the steel. The finished products were often sold without markings to indicate who made it or its caliber chambering. That's where many of the unmarked mystery guns you see came from. Many were brought to America after World War II by returning servicemen.

It turned out my rifle was actually a variant of a guild gun called a "cigarette rifle."

I was in for another history lesson. At the end of World War II, Germany was in ruin. Most arms factories had been bombed to rubble, and there had been almost no civilian arms production since the 1930s. Guild gunsmiths had been working to make weapons for military use. After the war, those gunsmiths were among the millions of unemployed Germans starving in bombed-out cities. With no local market for sporting guns, those guys did what they could to survive. The U.S. troops that occupied much of Germany had items civilians wanted, including cigarettes, rations, chocolate and other typical black-market barter items. Some GI's would barter such items to get a rifle or shotgun custom built by local craftsmen.

Those transactions were outside the normal channels of legal commerce. At that time, there was little legal arms trade in Germany. Those gunsmiths would build a rifle to order, but it would have no proofmarks because there was no proof house to certify the gun as safe. The builder would not stamp his name on any gun because he did not want to get noticed by officials. The results were well-made firearms without markings.

The gentleman who explained that showed me a gun — similar to mine — that had been built from an original World War II Mauser 98K sniper rifle. He had acquired it from a veteran several years earlier. The vet said he had bartered 14 packs of cigarettes to have a sporting rifle made from the ugly sniper rifle he'd found. Too bad he chose that gun. An original World War II sniper rifle would currently bring $5,000 to $25,000. His cigarette rifle would bring about $1,200, mostly for the military-marked scope.

You won't find much reference material on guild guns or cigarette rifles. They have been on the fringe of collector interest for years, and there's too much variety in the types you encounter. Still, the guns usually have a high price tag because they are aesthetically pleasing examples of European gunmaking. In a world of plastic-stocked sheet-metal firearms, any handmade rifle looks nice to folks who appreciate craftsmanship. My guess is that on today's market, an unmarked cigarette rifle would sell for $400 to $1,000. Add up to $800 if it includes a period scope. An identical guild gun that was proofmarked and had a retailer's name on the barrel would easily sell in the $2,000 range.

— Phillip Peterson is a full-time gun dealer from Indiana.

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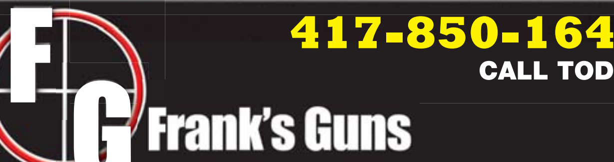

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French Service Revolvers Were Advanced

THE FRENCH MLE 1873 AND MLE 1892 SERVICE REVOLVERS WERE MORE ADVANCED THAN OTHER ARMS OF THEIR ERAS.

Here's the unique feature of the French Mle 1892 revolver: its swing-out cylinder.

Collectors eagerly seek many revolutionary French firearm designs.

The Lebel Mle 1886 bolt-action rifle is a prime example. This was the first military rifle that used ammunition loaded with smokeless powder.

(**Editor's note:** In a departure from accepted style, Peterson is using the French title *Mle* instead of the word model. It fits better in a column describing French firearms.)

A couple of other French firearms from the second part of the 19th century come to mind: the Mle 1873 revolver, chambered in the 11 mm ordnance cartridge, and Mle 1892 revolver, chambered for the 8 mm ordnance round. Each was more advanced than other arms of that era.

The Mle 1873

The Mle 1873 is a large-frame double-action. It's sometimes called a *Chamelot Delvigne*, named for the inventor of the mechanism. It has a solid frame, which added strength to the design.

You loaded the gun by lowering the gate on the right side of the frame and inserting rounds straight into the six chambers. Unloading was a somewhat time- and labor-intensive process, similar to that of the Colt Single Action. An ejector rod was stored in a tube on the right side of the barrel. Each chamber had to be aligned with the rod, and the case was pushed out to the rear, which took a while. Obviously, a quick reload was not a primary concern for arms designers in the 1870s.

The 11 mm French ordnance cartridge is a black-powder round firing a 180-grain lead bullet at about 700 feet per second. The cartridge resembles the 455 Webley.

From 1873 to 1886, about 350,000 Mle 1873s were made. All examples I've seen were made at the St. Etienne arsenal, the primary French arms factory of the era. They were shipped from the factory in the white. No blue or other finish was applied. This model was one of the first military weapons with the last two digits of the serial number stamped on almost every part large enough for it to fit.

The Mle 1874 made for the French Navy is identical to the Mle 1873, except it has a fluted cylinder. It was made in much smaller quantities than the 1873; about 36,000.

The Mle 1873 remained in French colonial and reserve service for many years after it was replaced by the Mle 1892. In fact, there were so many around during the Nazi occupation that French resistance forces used them. A common — although somewhat risky — practice was to slightly enlarge the chambers so they could accept the .45 automatic ammunition used in Colt 1911-A1 pistols and Thompson submachine guns.

Many Mle 1873 revolvers were imported to the United States during the 1950s and 1960s. There were enough that until recently, they had very little collector demand. As with most other military firearms, the demand and price in the collector market has increased considerably the past few years.

The current price for an excellent specimen with matching numbers will be $300 to $600. An Mle 1874 would probably bring $500 to $800.

Here's a final bit of trivia about the Mle 1873: Brendan Frasier carried a pair of them in shoulder holsters for the movies *The Mummy* and *The Mummy Returns*. These are excellent films if you like to see lots of vintage military weaponry.

The Mle 1892

The replacement for the Mle 1873 appeared in 1892. It was chambered for the 8 mm ordnance cartridge. The official designation was *Revolver d'ordnance Modele 1892*. It was designed by a French military commission, whose chairman was Nicholas Lebel, designer of the Mle 1886 rifle that bears his name. Many American collectors erroneously refer to the Mle 1892 as a "Lebel" revolver, although that name was never used officially by the French.

The Mle 1892s were also produced at St. Etienne, from 1892 to 1924, with more than 300,000 built. They were shipped with a deep blue finish. Several parts — including the hammer and trigger — are a golden straw color from heat treatment.

The Mle 1892 was a decent revolver that was wholly unremarkable — except for one feature: It had a swing-out cylinder with a spring-loaded ejector. The system is quite similar to that on modern revolvers made by Ruger, Smith & Wesson and others. It was the first military-issued revolver with that feature. All you had to do was flip down the loading gate on the right side and push the cylinder open. Then, you could empty and reload the gun in seconds, compared to the two minutes or more it took to empty and reload the Mle 1873.

It's too bad the cartridge the French used was hardly worthy of such a technological improvement. The French 8 mm ordnance cartridge was one of the most underpowered military cartridges ever selected for main-line use. The bullet weighs a whopping 100 grains, and it was propelled at a mind-numbing velocity of 625 feet per second. I have fired a few dozen rounds of this, and the experience is best described as "pop ... smack," with the impact of the projectile coming seconds after the weapon is fired.

Conclusion

The Mle 1892 was the primary French handgun in the trenches of World War I. Of course, there were still many Mle 1873s in use. Apparently, the French military doctrine of that era did not place much importance in service handguns.

The revolvers remained in some use until after World War II. Sadly, even the Mle 1935 semiautomatic pistols that replaced these revolvers were underpowered.

The Mle 1892 revolver is a bit more common in the United States than the Mle 1873. Many are found in excellent condition, and the going price for one is $200 to $450.

— Phillip Peterson is a full-time gun dealer from Indiana.

S&W Model 1940 Light Rifle a True Classic

SMITH & WESSON'S LITTLE-KNOWN MODEL 1940 LIGHT RIFLE WAS PART OF THE LAST GENERATION OF MILITARY ARMS THAT DIDN'T USE MASS-PRODUCED PARTS.

Ever hear of the Smith & Wesson 9 mm rifle made for the British before World War II? Probably not.

Unless you're a student of World War II firearms or Smith & Wesson history, this unique gun is pretty much unknown among American gun owners.

The first time I saw a picture of a Smith & Wesson Model 1940 Light Rifle, I was probably in Mr. Vardeman's fifth-period math class, turning the pages of *Small Arms of the World*. I spent a lot of my high-school time reading stuff that interested me and not studying class materials. That encyclopedia of the world's military firearms was a favorite during those years. I'm sure my test scores would have been higher had I not discovered this extensive volume on the local library shelves. At any rate, I thought the gun looked cool. The large magazine housing made the gun look like it should take a full-size rifle cartridge, but it was only a 9 mm.

About a decade later, I was set up at a gun show in Penn Run, Pa., and saw one on Navy Arms' tables. Neat gun, I thought. But the $2,200 price put it well out of my range at the time.

Since then, I had not given the model much thought, until a local S&W collector asked me if I might be interested in seeing a pair of the scare rifles. Of course, I always like to see unusual firearms and learn a bit of their history.

What Is It?

In early 1939, Smith & Wesson was suffering from slow sales, which had plagued them throughout the Great Depression. Much of the American economy was still struggling, but England had placed some large firearm orders as it built up its arsenals in anticipation of the war about to erupt through Europe. When the English government commissioned S&W to design a new type of rifle, the company was eager for the business. The fact that S&W was a revolver manufacturer did not matter. Business was business. The British had decided they needed a semiautomatic rifle chambered in the 9 mm Parabellum cartridge. To speed up the design and manufacturing, the Britons advanced S&W $1 million for the project.

The company assigned design and production responsibilities to plant superintendent E.S. Pomeroy. Despite his unfamiliarity with long-gun design and production, Pomeroy had a prototype ready by June 1939. After approving the design, the British named the new 9 mm semiautomatic the Model 1940 Light Rifle, Mark I.

The gun is an example of the last generation of military arms that did not use mass-produced stamped parts. It was a finely made rifle with a polished deep-blue finish, the same found on S&W revolvers of the time. So much machined steel was used in its construction that this "light" rifle weighed almost 9 pounds — almost as heavy as a bolt-action Enfield rifle. It has a short 9.75-inch fluted barrel, which did not help reduce the weight much. The stock is made of black plastic.

The most visual feature is the rifle's large magazine housing. This makes it seem that the gun should be chambered for a much longer cartridge. In fact, the magazine housing actually accepts a conventional two-column box magazine that holds 20 rounds of 9 mm ammunition. The front of the housing is open, and the magazine tilts in from the front. The rest of the housing is actually a protected ejection chute. Fired brass is ejected downward through the chute and drops in a pile at your feet.

Operating System

The Model 1940 uses a unique system of operation — one that's far more complicated than necessary for the 9 mm cartridge.

At first glance, your might assume it fires from an open bolt, as most submachine guns of the era did. In a traditional open-bolt sub-gun, the bolt, containing a fixed firing pin, is held to the rear. The breech appears to be open, because you can see the chamber and top of the magazine. When the trigger is pulled, the mainspring pushes the bolt forward, stripping the top cartridge from the magazine and pushing it into the chamber. When the cartridge is fully chambered, it stops. However, the momentum of the bolt forces the fixed firing pin to strike the primer and fire the round. Breech pressure pushes the bolt and empty case to the rear. The case is ejected, and another is stripped from the magazine and fired. The process continues until the trigger is released, and the sear holds the bolt to the rear, ready to fire again. In many automatic designs, a disconnector is added to the trigger/sear mechanism to allow optional semiautomatic operation.

S&W designers threw out the book when coming up with the Model 1940. When ready to fire, the bolt is held back as in an open-bolt design. But instead of the fixed firing pin, the Model 1940 had a complicated striker mechanism. Contained within the bolt is a movable firing pin and pivoting hammer. The other end of the hammer rests at the bottom of a slot in the bolt. When the trigger is pulled, the bolt slams forward, stripping a round from the magazine. When the cartridge is pushed all the way into the chamber, the other end of the hammer hits a fixed rod extending rearward from the breech. This makes the hammer strike the firing pin, firing the gun. A disconnector trips the sear, and the bolt is held back, ready for the next shot. The trigger must be released and pulled for each shot. The gun is made for semiautomatic operation only.

According to Smith & Wesson factory records, only 1,010 Model 1940 rifles were shipped to England — including just 200 Mark II variations. The English were never confident in the guns, and most stayed in storage until after World War II.

While examining the Model 1940, I noticed there's no access to the chamber area. If there was a stoppage or jam during firing, you were supposed to pull the bolt back and forth until the problem cartridge dropped down the ejection chute. There's no way to visibly inspect the problem without removing the magazine and turning the rifle upside down.

Production and Use

The first small group of about 800 production rifles was shipped to the British in late 1940. Testing was commenced at the Enfield Arsenal. There were immediate problems with the guns. The rifles failed to pass a 5,000-round function test. It seems the engineers at S&W had designed the rifle using American 9 mm ammunition, which develops less chamber pressure than English and European military-made 9 mm. Therefore, the 1940s suffered numerous parts breakages. The English demanded the design be reworked to eliminate the problems.

During a 1970s cleanup at the Smith & Wesson plant, 137 Model 1940 Mark I and 80 Mark II rifles were discovered, still in their original crates. They were sold to an arms dealer, who subsequently offered them at $2,500 apiece.

S&W engineers set about modifying the design. The improved rifle is known as a Mark II. The only notable change was to the safety. In the Mark I, the safety was a large lever on the right side of the trigger guard. It could easily be bumped into the fire position. The Mark II safety is a rotating sleeve around the receiver, between the trigger and magazine housing. When rotated to the "safe" position, it blocked bolt movement and locked the trigger. It also supposedly added a bit of strength to the receiver. The improved Mark II was submitted to the British, but the modifications did little to improve the rifle's dismal performance on the 5,000-round tests. By then, British officials had lost faith in the project and demanded their $1 million back.

It seemed for a time the fiasco might drive S&W into bankruptcy. The Wesson family put new management in charge of the company, and a deal was negotiated with the British. The Britons would receive full credit toward the purchase of other S&W products. The country was desperate for arms at the time, and S&W was happy to fill those orders. Britain mostly received military- and police-type Victory-model revolvers chambered in the English 38/200 round, instead of the usual .38 Special. By the time the deal was completed, the United States had entered the war, and S&W suddenly had orders for more guns than it could produce. The unfortunate Model 1940 episode quickly faded into history and was mostly forgotten.

According to S&W factory records, only 1,010 Model 1940s were shipped to England. Just 200 were of the Mark II variation. The English were never confident in those rifles, and most stayed in storage until after the war. All but five were destroyed by the English, and none ever made it to the surplus market. The five surviving Model 1940s are in various arms museums in England.

During a 1970s cleanup at the S&W plant, 137 Mark I and 80 Mark II Model 1940 rifles were discovered, still in their original crates. These were sold to an arms dealer, who subsequently offered them at $2,500 each. An S&W factory letter describing this rifle was found posted on line. This was my primary reference for this article. It includes a disclaimer stating the guns were sold as "collector items" only and are not considered safe to fire.

The two rifles I examined for this column were from that small lot. The 217 rifles discovered are the only Model 1940s that will ever be available on the U.S. market. There's not even an entry for the Model 1940 light rifle in *Standard Catalog of Firearms* or *Blue Book of Gun Values*. This model is truly an almost-forgotten piece of American arms-production history.

Despite the Model 1940's 9.75-inch barrel, it has been exempted as a curio and relic from the National Firearms Act minimum 16-inch barrel regulations by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. That means the Model 1940 can be bought and sold without any National Firearms Act restrictions.

Impressive Collector Value?

The only price range I can find for this model is from *Standard Catalog of S&W* from Gun Digest Books. The recently released third edition lists the Mark 1 or Mark II version of the Model 1940 Light Rifle at $3,000 to $4,500. I was a bit surprised with that somewhat low value. Nowadays, a simple STEN submachine gun assembled with a non-original receiver tube will run about $5,000.

That is sad. A stamped steel gun made, by the millions, and that cost about $12 new is worth more than a machined steel piece of American gunmaking history.

— Phillip Peterson is a full-time gun dealer from Indiana.

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Original Papoose is One Great Gun

DAN SHIDELER IS A MARLIN .22 MAN, AND THE MODEL THAT TICKLES HIM THE MOST IS THE ORIGINAL 70P PAPOOSE TAKE-DOWN RIFLE.

The original wooden-stocked Papoose came complete with a magazine and spanner, ready for assembly.

Breathes there anyone with soul so dead that he doesn't enjoy a good Marlin .22 semiauto?

I didn't think so. Twenty years or so ago, Marlin's advertising liked to state that the company's Model 60 .22 was the best-selling .22 autoloader in history. I didn't doubt it for a minute. The Model 60 was such a clean, simple, hot-damn little rifle that it was difficult to imagine that anything could ever displace it. If you consider the Model 99 of 1961 to be the first Model 60 — even though it wasn't called the Model 60 yet — it's easy to believe that for a good, long while, the Marlin Model 60 outsold every other .22 semiauto.

Then, dagnabbit, Bill Ruger came along in 1964 and upset the apple cart with his 10/22, which went on to become the most popular .22 autoloader of all time. I have nothing but admiration for the 10/22, but I'm sure some of you will understand me when I say that deep down, I'm a Marlin .22 man. And the Marlin .22 that tickles me the most is the original Marlin Model 70P Papoose takedown rifle.

Origins of a Classic

The Papoose has its roots in Marlin's Model 99, a tube-fed autoloader that made its debut in 1961. The Model 99 was an enormous improvement from its immediate predecessor, the Model 89. The Model 89 featured a machined-steel tubular receiver along the lines of Remington's Model 550, and it weighed in at a relatively hefty 6 pounds. Its successor, the Model 99, used a stylishly streamlined alloy receiver to achieve a weigh of just 5 pounds, a reduction of almost 17 percent from the Model 89. And more than that, the Model 99 just looked modern. What more could a child want?

In no time, Marlin had blown out the Model 99 clan to include a nearly overwhelming variety of tube- and magazine-fed .22 autoloaders: the models 99C, 99DL, 99G, 989, 989M2, 990, 990L, 95, 49, 49DL and on and on — not to mention their counterparts in the economy-grade Glenfield line. These guns had minor cosmetic and functional differences, but they were built on the durn-near-foolproof Model 99 chassis. I've owned a boatload of these little rifles, and they've all been utterly reliable and more accurate than I can hold. For example, I had a first-year Marlin 989 .22 semiauto — a cute little M-1 Carbine lookalike — that I topped with a cheap 4X scope. I could hit golf balls with it regularly at 100 yards when I got the elevation dialed in. That is no exaggeration. And as Jim Schlender and a dozen others will be only too happy to tell you, I am a lousy shot.

In 1967, Marlin renamed the Model 99 the Model 60. (The magazine-fed version of the tube-fed Model 60 was named the Model 70. Same gun, different feed system.) Strictly speaking, this is the gun Marlin promoted as the best-selling .22 semiauto of all time. For the next 19 years, Marlin kept on grinding out the Model 60 to the delight of children and non-children everywhere.

Then, in 1986, a wonderful thing happened: Somebody at Marlin looked down and noticed that the Model 60's Spartan simplicity lent itself to a takedown design. Well, why not? Armalite had introduced its AR-7 takedown semiauto .22 way back in 1964, and maybe it was time for Marlin to offer its own takedown autoloader. All you'd have to do would be to split the Model 60's breech right at the head of the chamber, thread the receiver, and put some sort of retaining gizmo on the barrel assembly. Voila and bingo! The Model 60P Papoose was on its way.

"Papoose?" Yes, Papoose. I suppose the name stems from the fact that you could sling the little Model 60's carrying case over your back and tote it around somewhat in the manner of an American Indian mother carrying her child. Frankly, I'm surprised the PC crowd didn't sue Marlin for using the word in this context. Maybe they did. If so, Marlin stood firm, which gives me just another reason for liking the Model 70P — I mean the Papoose.

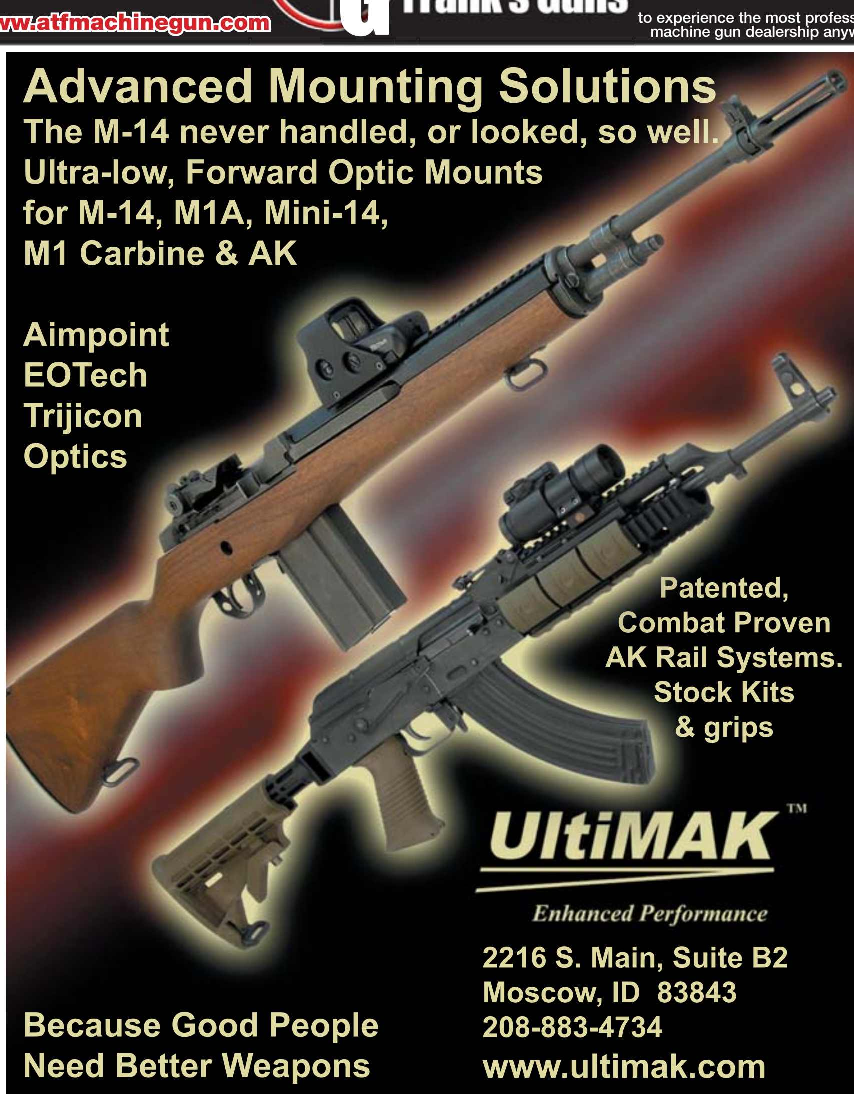
Favorable Impressions

The Papoose made quite a splash when it debuted in 1986. Layne Simpson, writing in the 41st edition of *Gun Digest*, was enamored of the little rifle:

"The new Model 70P Papoose," Simpson said, "is a 7-shot takedown version of Marlin's best selling Model 70 autoloader. Its 16$^{1}/_{2}$-inch barrel is detached by turning a threaded sleeve at the action face. It weighs a mere 3$^{1}/_{2}$ pounds. Standard equipment includes a 4X scope and padded case, the latter with built-in flotation cells in case the gun falls overboard. Considering its low price, I expect this little takedown rifle will sell like syrup at a pancake show."

Simpson wasn't kidding about the price. In 1987, the Papoose had a suggested retail price of only $135.95, "with 4X scope, mounts and case." That

Here's the Marlin Papoose in its padded case. Like Ivory soap, it floats!



bit about the scope is a little confusing to me. Of the three new-in-box Papooses I have owned, none came with a scope. By 1990 or so, Marlin was no longer advertising the scope, but if the 1980s-vintage Papooses came with scopes, I got gypped!

There's something top-secret-sounding about the padded case's "flotation cells." You and I might call them cellular polymer inserts or, more simply, just sewn-in pieces of foam rubber. They make the bright red nylon case buoyant, but be aware that the case's zipper isn't necessarily watertight.

The Papoose came with the case, the spanner, an owner's manual, a seven-shot blued or nickel (depending on vintage) magazine, and maybe the scope and mounts — although as I've said, I've never seen a new-in-box one with the scope. It was a nice little package, notwithstanding the Papoose's "walnut-finished hardwood stock," which no one could ever mistake for walnut.

Assembling the Papoose was so simple that even a child could do it. In fact, I've seen a child do it. Just pop the barrel into the receiver (it goes in only one way, guided by the extractor cut in the chamber) and tighten the sleeve. Marlin supplied a spanner wrench for that purpose, but in my experience, if you tighten the sleeve with your hand and stop just short of the white-knuckle point, you'll do fine. Then pop in the loaded magazine, cycle the bolt handle, and you're in business.

How accurate is the Papoose? With its barrel and chamber supported only by that threaded sleeve, you'd think accuracy would be terrible. You'd be wrong. The Papoose shoots quite well enough for its purposes, being on a par with most other Marlin .22 semiauto plinkers. If you're not getting 2-inch groups with your Papoose at 50 yards with iron sights, you'd better tighten that barrel sleeve some more or consider buying a scope.

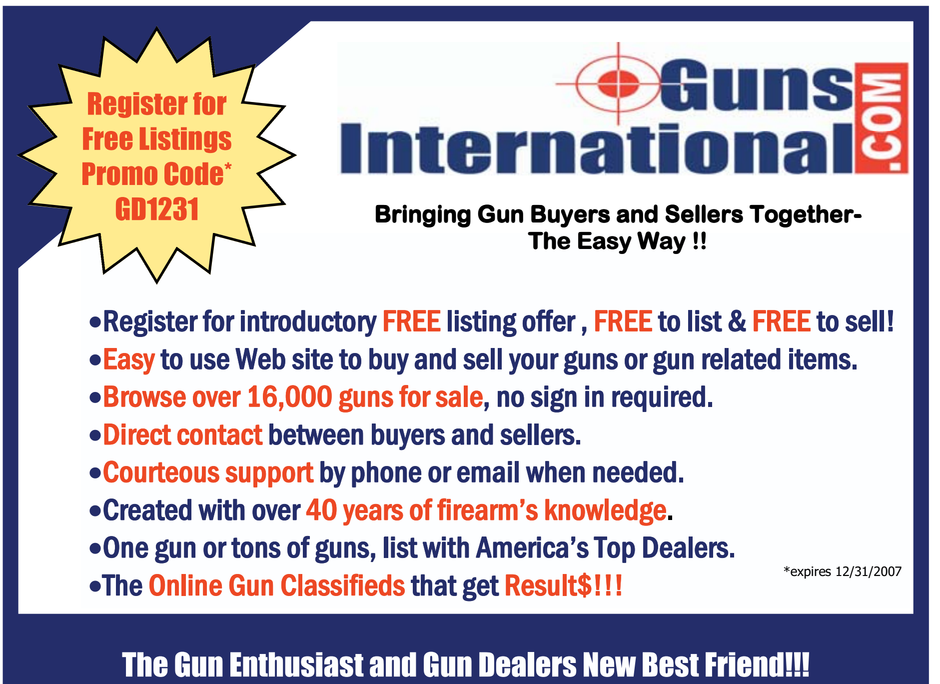
In 1993 or so, Marlin morphed the Papoose into the updated Model 70PSS Papoose. The Model 70PSS had a synthetic stock with swivel studs, a manual bolt hold-open, an upgraded rear sight, a hooded front sight, a stainless barrel and nickeled trim. Those last touches no doubt enhanced the Papoose's water resistance, but they detracted from the original Papoose's endearingly dopey appearance. The nylon case was also changed from red to blue as part of the gun's overall facelift.

Still There

I keep my latest Model 70P Papoose cased in the trunk of my car and sprayed liberally with water-displacing aerosol lubricant. So far, it's never let me down. It still has its inspection stickers on the butt, duly signed and executed by a Marlin technician named Eric.

Eric, if you're reading this, congratulations on building a fine rifle. And could you check and see whatever happened to my three scopes?

— Dan Shideler is a life-long fan of firearms who edits books about guns for F+W Publications.



Cabanas P-21 Remains a Footnote

IF YOU ENCOUNTER A CABANAS P-21 PISTOL, YOU'VE FOUND AN ODD DUCK INDEED. IT USED .22 BLANK LOADS TO SHOOT BREECH-LOADED LEAD BBS OR PELLETS.

Some time ago in these pages, I wrote about the unlikeliest of modern firearms: the Mexican .17-caliber, blank-propelled Cabanas rifles. As you might recall, these wacky little oddballs fire .177-inch lead balls via a .22 Short blank cartridge.

At the risk of getting a big head, I suppose I'm now the Cabanas king of northern Indiana. Not only do I own three Cabanas rifles, but I have recently added a Cabanas Model P-21 pistol to my collection.

Jealous? Of course you are.

An Odd Duck

For those who came in late, Cabanas blank guns — if you want to call them guns — were made by Industrias Cabanas, S.A., of Aguilas, Mexico, from about 1949 to 1989. They weren't cartridge-firing guns, at least in the strictest sense. They used .22 blank loads to shoot breech-loaded lead BBs or pellets, though the latter were not recommended by the manufacturer. The idea behind the Cabanas guns was to skirt Mexico's notoriously strict firearms ownership laws, which prohibited most conventional firearms, and give shooters a legal gun that actually went "bang."

According to the letter of the law, the AFT and BATFE, or whatever they're calling themselves these days, consider Cabanas guns to be firearms. So do dealers from whom I've bought them. They have all insisted on transfer paperwork, and that's just jake with me. However, it lessens the chances of getting an affirmative response if you ask whether owning a Cabanas is really worth the trouble.

If you actually encounter a Cabanas gun, it'll probably be a rifle, such as a Pony, Mini or perhaps Leyre or Lazer. These guns were imported into the United States by the now-defunct Mandall's Shooting Supplies of Scottsdale, Ariz., and are single-shots. But if you encounter the Cabanas P-21 pistol, you've found an odd duck indeed.

Make and Operation

The P-21 (at least I assume that's the model designation; that's what the box says) is a single-shot bolt-action "gun" with a 10-inch barrel. It looks like a ray gun of some sort and bears a faint general resemblance to late-run Remington XP-100 pistols. The finish on the barrel and receiver is a semi-gloss black enamel. Ditto for the stock. This finish, which appears to have been dipped, obscures the species and grain and whatever wood the stock is composed of. I suppose it's Mexican mystery wood or recycled pallet material or something.

The stock, however, isn't a total loss. It's actually rather comfortable. It has a palm swell, groove for the trigger finger and thumbrest. This adds up to a rather long-barreled pistol that balances just ahead of the leading edge of the trigger guard. It's very steady and easy to hold on target.

Here's a little slice of Mexico: the Cabanas P-21 .22 blank-and-shot pistol.

And that's good, because the P-21 is intended as a target pistol. Its receiver is grooved for a scope mount, and its front sight is hooded. Both are features you might find desirable in a target pistol. The rear sight, though, is adjustable only for elevation. That's a pity, because my P-21 shoots consistently left of the point of aim. There's nothing I can do about it except apply some Kentucky windage and try to hold my mouth right when shooting.

The manual of arms for the P-21

pistol is pretty much the same as for the various Cabanas rifles: Pull back on the bolt lever. This simultaneously exposes the chamber and cams the manual safety upward into the "on" position. Tilt the pistol's muzzle downward. Insert a .177-inch lead ball into the chamber, making sure it falls through the chamber and seats against the .177-inch leade. Insert a .22 Short blank into the chamber, pressing it as firmly as possible against the breech. Push the bolt handle home. Disengage the safety by flipping in downward. Squeeze the trigger, and fire the ball. Pull back on the bolt to open the action. Pull back on the ribbed extractor collar surrounding the barrel to extract the fired case.

Messing Around at the Range

Reading back through that paragraph, I realize that I've omitted an optional step that follows the squeezing of the trigger. That step is: Say "Oh, %?$#!" because you didn't hit what you were aiming at. Alas, the P-21 (mine, anyway) seems to be only a little more accurate than my Cabanas rifles with Gamo .177-inch lead round balls. My first shot pierced the "P" in a Pepsi can at 25 feet. My second shot perforated its base. My third, fourth and fifth shots apparently flew into some sort of Einsteinian black hole or time warp, because they disappeared without a trace. I guess the first rule when shooting the P-21 is to make your first shot count.

I gave the gun every chance I could with the .177-inch balls, and then I got naughty and did something the manufacturer says you should never do: I loaded the pistol with a Beeman Crow Magnum skirted pellet. (If you shoot a skirted pellet in a Cabanas, there's some risk of its thin skirt detaching and lodging in the barrel. Not good.) Lo and behold, I actually got a 2.5-inch group at 25 feet. No keyholes, either — just perfectly satisfying little .177-inch cookie-cutter holes in the aluminum. If I were to continue to shoot the skirted pellets — and I might — I suppose the thing to do is to chase the bore with a cleaning rod after every shot. (Note: Never use steel BBs or anything other than lead in a Cabanas. If a steel BB lodges in the bore somehow on shot No. 1, shot No. 2 might cook your goose.)

The P-21's trigger is adjustable for pull and length of travel. To adjust the trigger — if you really believe it necessary to do so — simply remove the screw that holds the receiver assembly to the stock. Right there is the trigger-adjustment piece, a ribbed cylindrical affair. Turning the cylinder clockwise decreases travel and increases pull; turning it counterclockwise does the opposite.

As I've said, I got my best results shooting the P-21 with Beeman skirted pellets. Normal-length .22 blank loads (such as CCI) were too tight a fit in the chamber, however, so I used the miniature .22 "acorn" blanks available from Lion Country. These crimped little copper-colored boogers are just about the cutest things I've ever seen. They give a most satisfying crack, not a pop. My post-mortems on various beverage cans indicate that they propel a pellet with some authority — certainly enough to make a chipmunk or starling regret doing whatever it was that made him a target.

One precautionary word on shooting all Cabanas guns, not just the P-21. Several manufacturers still make .22 blank shells loaded with black powder. These work just fine in the Cabanas guns, provided they fit the chamber, but they make necessary a rather messy cleanup afterward. A rifled bore caked with black powder residue and put in storage will soon become a smoothbore. Use smokeless blanks, and save yourself some trouble.

Final Analysis

So is there any practical application for the Cabanas P-21 pistol? Nope, none whatsoever.

I assume the P-21 was discontinued along with its rifle-size Cabanas brethren in 1989, and nobody seems to have given a damn. Frankly, there are scads of top-quality air pistols that will shoot rings around the P-21, and buying one of them doesn't involve federal transfer paperwork. (Not yet, anyway.)

All things said, the Cabanas P-21 pistol is just a footnote in the long history of firearms. An interesting footnote, perhaps, but a footnote all the same.

— Dan Shideler is a life-long fan of firearms who edits books about guns for F+W Publications.

Speedmaster Remains a Delight

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE TO HAVE A .22 THAT SHOT ALL OF YOUR AMMO — SHORTS, LONGS AND LONG RIFLE? WELL, THE AUTHOR DOES. IT'S THE REMINGTON 552 SPEEDMASTER, ONE OF THE GREATEST .22s EVER MADE.

I type the same way I play piano — badly, and with two fingers. But today, I'm using only one finger to type this because my left hand is holding a palmful of .22 Shorts.

There's something about a .22 Short that just makes me giggle. How tiny it is, how oddly proportioned, like a miniature howitzer shell. And when I see one with a hollow point — that dinky little hollow point that couldn't possibly expand unless it hit the grille of a '55 Buick Roadmaster — well, I just lose all my composure and practically wet myself.

I love the .22 Short — and the Long, and the Long Rifle. Nowadays, the high-performance .22 and .17 rimfires get all the attention, but there was a time, laddie, when there were only three rimfires worth mentioning: the .22 Short, .22 Long and .22 Long Rifle. Remember when every .22 bolt-action, pump or lever gun was marked on its barrel ".22 S — L — LR"? I wonder how many children today wouldn't even know what the S and L stood for.

In my day, sonny, you could walk into a Guarantee Auto hardware store with a $5 bill and come out with enough .22 Shorts or Longs to keep a child occupied for a month. You'd buy the Long Rifles for serious work like rabbit hunting, but for perforating cans, the Shorts and Longs did just fine. As a matter of fact, the high-velocity Shorts didn't do a half-bad job on rabbits, either. You bought Longs if they were on sale, but that was about it.

During the past 35 years, I've accumulated several coffee cans of mixed .22 rimfire ammunition: Shorts (thousands of them), Longs (just a few of those), Long Rifles, birdshot, Kleanbore, Wildcat, C-I-L, Peters, Stingers, Mohawk, Yellow Jackets —you name it. Wouldn't it be nice to have a rifle — a semiauto, maybe — that would shoot all of it?

Well, I do. It's a Remington 552 Speedmaster, one of the greatest .22s ever made.

Origins

In the pantheon of great .22 semiautos, the Remington 552 Speedmaster is up there with the Marlin Model 60 and Ruger 10/22. Yet the 552 has a singular advantage over the Marlin and the Ruger: It'll gobble up Shorts, Longs and Long Rifles with nary a hiccup. To me, with my considerable inventory of oddball .22 rimfire ammunition, this is a very big deal.

The Model 552 Speedmaster was introduced in 1957, which means it will celebrate its Golden Anniversary in 2007. It took the place of the Model 550 in Remington's lineup, though the competing models were produced simultaneously for a time. (According to Remington, the Model 550-1 was made until 1970, though I certainly don't remember seeing any of them new on dealers' shelves as late as that.)

Introduced in 1941, the Model 550 was the first American semiauto to fire .22 Shorts, Longs and Long Rifles interchangeably. It did this through a floating-chamber design that has been attributed to Marsh "Carbine" Williams. In Williams' design, the 550's chamber contained a floating front end that allowed lower-powered cartridges to amplify their back-thrust against the bolt face and thus cycle the action.

If there was ever a practical problem with the Model 550, I have yet to read about it or experience it. The only deficiencies of the 550 were that it was relatively expensive to manufacture, and it looked a little clunky, as many '50s-vintage .22 rifles did. When Remington introduced the Model 552 Speedmaster in 1957, however, it solved both problems simultaneously, producing a rifle that still looks great and performs perfectly 50 years later.

The Model 552 dispensed with its predecessor's floating chamber design in favor of a lightweight, buffered bolt that a .22 Short would cycle and a .22 Long Rifle wouldn't batter to pieces. Shorts, Longs, Long Rifles — as Henry Stebbins says of the Model 552 in *Rifles: A Modern Encyclopedia*, "You can mix 'em up, but you can't screw 'em up."

Shooting the Classic

My 1970s-vintage Speedmaster will shoot any combination of .22 S, L or LR you can dump into it, but apparently the earliest models were a bit glitchy in this respect. Writing in the 1958 *Gun Digest*, a noticeably cranky Bob Wallack gave the Model 552 a mixed review after he loaded its magazine with alternating Short, Long and Long Rifle cartridges:

"Functionally the gun is excellent in all respects," Wallack wrote. "[But] in my first try, I found that the 552 does not handle mixed ammunition 100 percent. In fact, I got a couple of jams by trying the stunt ... . Remington should stop the publicity about this feature."

Maybe Wallack got a bad one, or maybe Remington didn't have all the bugs ironed out of its first-run guns. All I can say is my two Model 552s have flawlessly digested any mix of ammo I could fit into their tubular magazines, with the exception of .22 CB and BB caps and Aguila's primer-only .22 Colibri squirters. These subloads can be fired in the 552, of course, but you have to operate the bolt handle manually, and that gives iffy ejection results.

Speaking of ejection, there's no mistaking the 552 for anything else because of the shell deflector on the right side of the receiver. Some might think it's ugly, but there's no question it performs its job admirably. Fired shell cases fly well in front of the shooter and generally land in a

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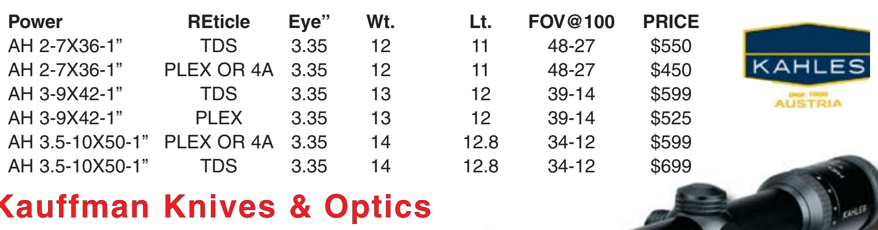

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.22 Short, Long or Long Rifle, the Model 552 will gobble them up and beg for more. However, its bolt handle is on the left side of the receiver. Watch your thumb!

tidy pile. I don't think the deflector is ugly, any more than I think the beauty mark on Elizabeth Taylor's cheek is ugly. (If you don't know what I'm talking about, watch *Cleopatra* sometime. Wow.)

Let's talk about the Model 552's bolt handle for a minute. When I took my latest 552 out for a test-drive, I unthinkingly adopted an elbow-on-hip, cradle-the-receiver schuetzen posture to see how I could do offhand at 50 yards. At the first shot, that little bolt handle, which is mounted on the left side of the receiver, came racing back fast enough to remove a sizeable chunk of the pad of my left thumb — I mean a chunk big enough to bait a trotline. That meant no hitch-hiking for a while, but I decided not to hold it against the rifle. (My thumb, that is.)

The Model 552 is no target gun. Its barrel is rifled for the standard 36- or 40-grain .22 Long Rifle load, and some 552s are capable of 1.5-inch 50-yard groups with such ammunition. But load up a tubeful of Shorts, and the situation changes. The Short's 29-grain bullet is way overstabilized by the 552's rifling, and 50-yard groups open up considerably. For serious target shooters, this is a real deal-killer, but for guys like me, it's copacetic. If the Lord had wanted us to risk everything on one shot, He wouldn't have given us 20-round tubular magazines.

Paying for Style

In 1957, the Model 552 Speedmaster had a suggested retail price of $52.25. That made the 552 a fairly expensive .22. The comparable Savage Model 6 retailed for $42.75, the Stevens Model 87 for $37.95 and the Mossberg 98 for $43.95. But the Browning .22 Autoloading Rifle carried a sticker price of $69.50, and Winchester's legendary Model 63 sold for a whopping $79.45. (Who thought up those prices, anyway? $79.45?)

Today, a new Model 552 will set you back about $400, which is definitely on the salty side. But if $200 of that is for the basic gun, the other $200 has got to be for style. In my opinion, the 552 Speedmaster looks every bit as good today as it did in 1957. As I've suggested, I might be the only person on the planet who shoots .22 Shorts anymore, and when I want to plink tin cans by the caseload, there's nothing like a Model 552 and a few boxes of Shorts to land me smack-dab on Cloud 9.

According to Remington, the Model 552 was made in two grades: the 552A Standard and 552BDL. The BDL had fancier wood, nicer checkering and a somewhat finer finish. Three variations were cataloged: the .22 Short-only 552GS Gallery Special, the 552C Carbine and the 552 150th Anniversary Edition. All are considered collectible, at least as far as Model 552s go. Me, I'd love to have one of each.

If you run across a Model 552 at a good price, my advice is to buy it. You probably won't regret it, and you might just rediscover how much fun the .22 Short can be.

— Dan Shideler is a firearms books editor from Indiana.

M66 Supersingle Still a Shooter

SERIOUS SHOTGUNNERS MIGHT DISMISS ITHACA'S MODEL 66 AS A CHILD'S GUN OR WORSE, BUT THE UGLY LITTLE SPUD — WITH ITS LEVER HANGING BENEATH ITS BLOCKY RECEIVER AND ODDLY WESTERN-STYLE STRAIGHT STOCK — CAN SHOOT.

To borrow a line from the old *Lone Ranger* radio show, return with me now to those thrilling days of yesteryear, when I used to hunt groundhogs on the old Erie-Lackawanna railroad embankment heading west out of Fort Wayne toward Huntington, Ind.

My perennial hunting buddy, my brother Dave, and I had honed our groundhog hunting to the level of a science but one with the delicacy of a fine art. We'd walk the tracks, scoping out the grades, washouts, gullies and irrigation ditches for the telltale yellow splashes of sand and clay that told us a groundhog had set up housekeeping nearby.

Dave would then produce a dog whistle from his pocket and give it a loud, piercing blow. As brilliant clouds of indigo buntings rose from the scrub brush, more often than not, a hog would poke his head out of his hole, as if to ask, "Who in the hell is making so much racket?" Then we'd let him have it.

Even today, I grin when I read of varminters picking off groundhogs with carefully placed shots at 300 yards. In our railroad days, Dave and I harvested bushels of them with distinctly nonvarmint guns such as a Colt Model 1927 .45 Auto, an H&R Model 922 .22 revolver and a Marlin 336C in .35 Remington. Thanks to that $2 dog whistle, most of our shots were less than 35 yards.

I particularly remember one unfortunate dirtpiggy that had the bad judgment to pop out of its hole on the dried clay bank of an irrigation ditch barely 25 yards away from Dave and me. I raised my shotgun to my shoulder and sent a 3-inch magnum charge of No. 4 lead shot right at his head. The shot patterned perfectly and sent up a round, absolutely symmetrical puff of clay dust positioned like a halo around the groundhog's head. Lights out, piggy!

That was the most entertaining gunshot I've ever taken. Even now, 30 years later, the memory of that dust cloud splashing up around that groundhog's head — as round and even as a smoke ring blown from my pipe — never fails to make me smile. My hair could be on fire, and I could have a hornet up my nose, but the recollection of that perfect groundhog, that perfect pattern, would still make me grin.

This Ithaca M66 Super Single in .410 is ugly as sin, but what a shooter!

I wish I still had the shotgun I was toting that day. It was a 12-gauge Ithaca Model 66 Supersingle. Most serious shotgunners would dismiss the Model 66 as a child's gun or worse, but this child has taken a lot of rabbits, one or two grouse and, yes, even plenty of groundhogs with the old M66.

Those Were the Days

As I write this, I have a .410 Model 66 propped up in a corner of my office. It's an ugly little spud — with its lever hanging beneath its blocky receiver and oddly Western-style straight stock — but the little gun can shoot. I will bet you a case of Leinenkugel's Honey Weiss that I can take a Brenneke rifled slug load, pop it into the Model 66, and hit a can of pork and beans with it two times out of three at 35 yards, using only the brass bead front sight. Did I say a case? Hell, let's go two cases.

As shotguns go, the Ithaca M66 is an example of a type that isn't exactly flourishing anymore: the single-barrel, break-open beginner's gun. Yes, I know H&R, Baikal and Rossi still make such shotguns, God bless 'em, but part of me still longs for the day when the local K-Mart stocked Savage 94s, Winchester 37As and Ithaca Model 66s. Those were the days.

The Ithaca M66 is about as simple as you could get: It has a lock, stock and barrel, and that's about it. With its painted aluminum receiver and matte barrel, it's a utility gun and not a showpiece. In fact, I can strike an Ohio Blue Tip match on the barrel of my .410 M66. Its finish is that raw.

The M66 has no positive safety; just a rebounding hammer. To load it, you flip the lever downward, and the barrel drops, exposing the chamber. You insert the shell, snap the barrel shut and keep your thumb on the hammer in case something runs out or flies up in front of you. If it does, you cock the hammer and squeeze 'er off. If you can't make the shot, you very carefully lower the hammer and hope for better luck next time.

The stock on the M66 has what's called "impressed checkering." Note: That's "impressed," not "impressive." But it does the job and keeps the gun from squirming out of your hands on rainy days. And the M66 is one gun you don't mind taking out on a rainy day.

The M66 was offered in .410, 20 gauge and 12 gauge, all with 3-inch chambers. Most of the M66s I find floating around are choked full, but many of the 12s and 20s have modified chokes.

But Who Made It?

Ithaca's "ugly gun" was manufactured from about 1963 to 1978, and there's something of a mystery attached to it. Evidence suggests that Ithaca might not have manufactured the Model 66 but merely assembled it from parts supplied by Agawam Arms of Agawam, Mass. This seems believable enough to me. I can't imagine that Ithaca would have tooled up to build an aluminum-receiver beginner's single-shot. If Ithaca wanted an entry into the beginner's market, it would only make sense to go out-of-house to buy a complete gun, or the parts to build a complete gun, from a third-party vendor. And I believe that Agawam Arms was that vendor. Or maybe Ithaca

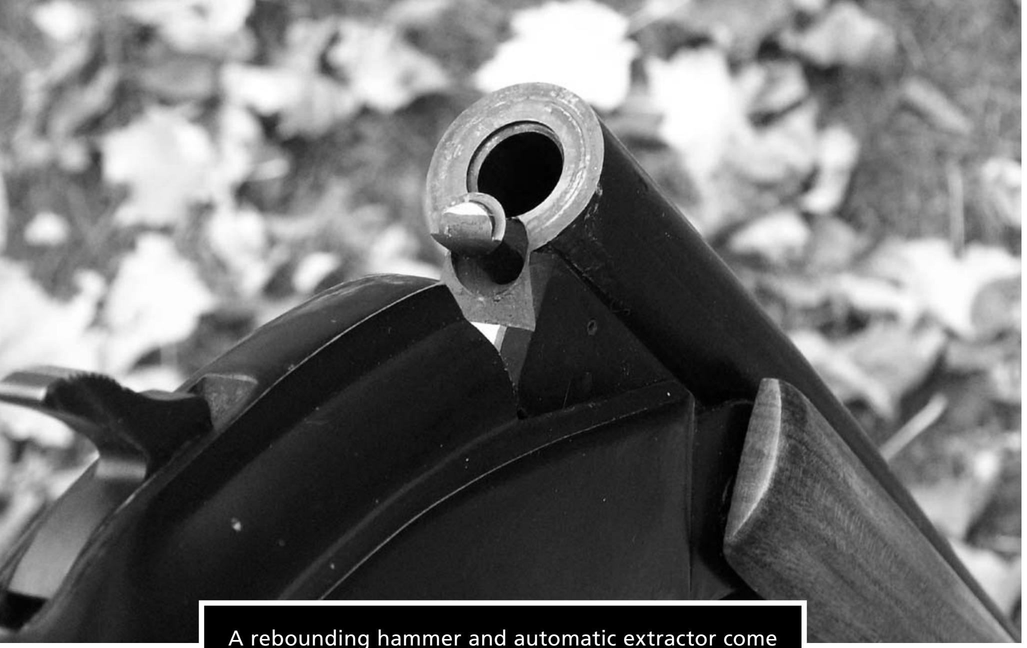
built it after all! More research is needed on this point, and I'd welcome any reader input.

Not much information exists on Agawam Arms. We know the company marketed single-shot shotguns and a rifle under its own name from 1968 to 1971. The rifle, a Martini-action .22, eventually morphed into the Ithaca Model 49 Saddle Gun. The shotgun, however, was apparently offered first — not to Ithaca but to Winchester.

Wildwood Inc., a gun shop in China Village, Maine, recently posted on the GunsAmerica Web site a prototype shotgun described thus:

"Agawam Arms 12GA single lever action single shot 12GA prototype tested by Winchester for possible production, stamped X-2 by Winchester, letter of authenticity from Ed Ulrich, retired Winchester Custom Shop."

The photo accompanying the listing shows a gun that looks suspiciously like an Ithaca M66. Ultimately, Winchester opted not to produce the prototype gun, choosing instead to procure a simplified version of its old Model 37 single-shot shotgun from Cooey Arms of Coburg, Ontario, later a division of Winchester.



A rebounding hammer and automatic extractor come standard in the M66. Note the barrel wall thickness in this .410.

The Cooey gun would later be marketed in America as the Winchester Model 37A or Model 840.

The Ithaca Model 66 came in four basic flavors: the 12- or 20-gauge or .410 Standard Model, with a plain stock and 24-inch bead-sighted barrel; the Youth Model, which was offered in 20 gauge and .410 only, and sported a shortened stock with a recoil pad; the Vent Rib Model, which was similar to the Standard Model but had a vent rib on its barrel; and the 20-gauge Model 66 Buck Buster, which featured a 22-inch smoothbore barrel with rifled sights.

I've had two Buck Busters, and each was very accurate with Foster and Brenneke slugs. I theorize that Ithaca gave Buck Buster barrels the same treatment they gave to its Model 37 Deerslayer barrels, which was a very thorough polishing. At any rate, M66 Buck Busters are not to be trifled with, especially if you're brown, hairy and have antlers growing out of your head.

What They're Worth

Values for the M66 family run from about $150 to as high as $300 for examples in excellent condition. I know I'd pay that much for a really nice Buck Buster, and I'd kinda like to have a Vent Rib model, too.

If Ithaca can supply the kid's gun, I can still supply the kid!

— Dan Shideler is a firearms books editor from Indiana.

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 | BY DAN SHIDELER

Too Funky But Perhaps Collectible

THE REMINGTON MODEL 673 GUIDE RIFLE WAS THE "MEANEST, TOUGHEST, RIP-SNORTIN'-EST, EDWARD-EVERETT-HORTON-EST" VARIATION OF THE MODEL SEVEN REMINGTON PRODUCED.

Some time ago in these pages, I made a few predictions about which of today's currently produced guns stood a decent chance of becoming collectibles. One of the guns that appeared in my crystal ball was Remington's Model 673 Guide Rifle. At the time, I hazarded the guess that the Model 673 wouldn't remain in production very long.

And guess what? I was right! (According to my wife, this was the first documented instance in which I have been right about anything.) The Model 673 bit the dust in 2006. I suppose I'm sad to see it fade so swiftly from Remington's lineup, though I'm not surprised. Like the gun it mimicked in styling, the Remington Model 600 Magnum Carbine of 1965, it was just too funky to last.

Meanest and Toughest

For those of you who came in late, the Remington Model 673 Guide Rifle was, to paraphrase Yosemite Sam, "the meanest, toughest, rip-snortin'-est, Edward-Everett-Horton-est" variation of the compact Model Seven that Remington ever produced. Introduced in 2003, it was an aggressively retro-styled bolt-action rifle chambered in several fire-breathing short-magnum cartridges. The Model 673 debuted in .350 Remington Magnum and .300 Short-Action Ultra Mag. in 2003. In 2004, it was chambered for the 6.5 Remington Magnum and .308 Winchester.

Now I've fired a couple of Model Sevens in .308 Winchester and .260 Remington, and the recoil was noticeable but not severe for a $6^1/_2$-pound rifle. But stick a .350 Remington Magnum or .300 SAUM cartridge in a Model 673, and it's a different picture entirely. True, the Model 673 has a few touches that increase its weight compared to that of the original Model 600 Magnum Carbine — such as a full-length steel vent rib and a laminated stock — but it still barely tips the scales at $7^1/_4$ pounds. It's not a heavy gun, certainly, but one you might consider on the skinny side for a couple of hellbent-for-leather cartridges that approximate the ballistics of the .35 Whelen and .300 Winchester Magnum, respectively.

I suppose it's a good thing I wasn't in a position to shoot the original Remington Model 600 Magnum Carbine in 1965. In fact, I don't think I would handle it very well even today. The original Model 600 Magnum Carbine had an 18-inch barrel and weighed only 6.2 pounds, compared to the Model 673's 22-inch barrel and 7.25 pounds. Shooting an original Model 600 Carbine must have been like stuffing an M-80 in a piece of cast-iron gas pipe, lighting it and holding it up to your head. So the Model 673 is probably pretty tame compared to the original flame-throwing Model 600 Magnum Carbine.

Or maybe I'm just a wimp. Writing about the new Model 600 .350 carbine in the 1967 edition of *Gun Digest*, author Bob Hagel didn't even mention its recoil or blast. He praised the gun to the skies, saying, "There is little doubt that this cartridge and carbine will be popular, especially among hunters who hunt in the brush. It is adequate for the heaviest American game and should make an ideal rifle-cartridge combination for life insurance on the salmon streams of Alaska's brown bear country."

Alas, it was not to be. The Model 600 Magnum Carbine hit the canvas after only three years —which, in an ironic twist of fate, is how long the Model 673 Guide Rifle lasted.

Part of the Boom

When I first heard of the Model 673's demise, I went out and bought one chambered in .350. Why? First reason: I might not live to see it, but I'm still confident the rifle will become a collectible, especially in the old .350 and 6.5 mm chamberings. Second reason: I had about 130 original .350 Magnum factory loads sitting around with nothing to shoot them in. Third reason: I'm fascinated with the "guide gun" mini-boom that peaked in the past few years.

That last reason is important to me. I've spent 20 years in corporate marketing and advertising, and I view modern firearms marketing trends in a spirit of professional interest. It might be a new camo pattern, champagne bottle-shaped ultra magnum, titanium alloy, retro revival — whatever. I'm endlessly interested in these latest-and-greatest fads that sweep the industry every other year and then fade away into nothingness. The guide-rifle fad was one of them.

I suppose it started with Marlin's Model 1895GS Guide Gun around 1998. This was a stainless 18-inch-barreled lever action chambered for the .45-70. The 1895GS had a ported barrel, which was fine for shooting the old fuddy-duddy 405-grain .45-70 load. When you slipped something like a Garrett Cartridges .45-70 Hammerhead into the 1895GS, however, things started to get loopy. I remember sighting in my ported 1895GS and wondering whether I would accidentally set my sandbags on fire.

That experience got me thinking: How many professional guides are there in the world, anyway? How big of a market can there be for a "guide gun"? Not much, probably. Naturally, most guide guns are sold to nonguides — in other words, people who don't really need them. There's nothing wrong with that. After all, there's a big difference between "need" and "want." But it's precisely these flash-in-the-pan mini-booms that create collectible firearms. (Remember those two casualties of the mini-boom in long-range handgunning 40-some years ago: the .256 Ruger Hawkeye and Smith & Wesson's Model 53 in .22 Remington Jet? Both are hot collectibles today.)

Guide-Gun Performance

So here I sit, as far from being a professional guide as anyone could possibly get, with a new Model 673 Guide Rifle in .350 Remington Magnum resting in my gun rack. Because I believe all guns, collectible or not, are made to be fired, I recently loaded up some .357-inch, 160-grain hollow-point loads to see how much of a mess I could make out of 5-gallon contractor's paint cans filled with water. The answer: plenty.

There's something thrilling about seeing a paint can lid rise 20 feet into the air, borne aloft by a mushroom cloud of water vapor. Accuracy with the 160-grain loads was only so-so — about 2.5 inches at 75 yards — probably because the short bullet was overstabilized by the gun's rifling. With my factory 200-grain stuff, old as it is, the 673 will almost cut cloverleafs at 75 yards.

I'm aware there are now more custom bullets available for the .350 than there were 40 years ago, and I wouldn't mind noodling around with something on the order of a 225-grain soft-point if I were hunting elk or really big woodchucks. But the .350's stubby case doesn't cotton to long bullets, and the old 250-grain factory load is probably the most the case can take and still feed reliably.

The Model 673 differs from the original Model 600 Magnum Carbine in a few noticeable ways. It doesn't have that funky dogleg bolt handle; the vent rib on

the barrel is steel, not nylon (the better to act as a heat sink during extended shooting sessions, I suppose); and perhaps most importantly, its stock has very little drop. It's a rifle that's made for a high scope mount unless you're built like the Hunchback of Notre Dame, and your head is between your shoulder blades, or your scope has a pretty small bell. Scopes with large bells might bump heads with the rear sight mounted on the barrel rib.

I've just done a price check on Model 673 Guide Rifles. At the moment, they can be had new in the box in the mid-$500 range in your choice of 6.5 mm, .308, .300 SAUM or .350. It might take me a while, but sooner or later, I suppose I'll just have to have one of each.

And why not? Like I said, there's a big difference between "need" and "want."

— Dan Shideler is a life-long fan of firearms who edits books about guns for F+W Publications.