



# Personal Artifacts

## Excellence For The Sake of Excellence.

Roy Huntington

Photos by Ichiro Nagata

*A*merican Handgunner has built a reputation for bringing you the finest custom handgun work available in the world. Each time, the work is presented in unparalleled clarity and we do it for an important reason. Just as we devour photos of the Rolls Royce few of us will ever park in our own driveway, so it goes with the custom gun — as art. The intoxicating appeal of beholding the best remains irresistible, and we are all drawn again and again to drink at the fountain of perfection.

Which is why we find ourselves here — now — admiring the work from Bowen's shop. There's a distinctive nobility to these fine, almost precious examples of the gunmaker's art. "Personal artifacts," Hamilton Bowen calls them. It could be that there are no limits to the abilities of craftsmen, as their juxtaposition of steel and flesh continues to be pushed to the limits of tool steel and creativity. If the work from Bowen's shop is any indication, we may be right. Yet, it's reassuring to think that somewhere, in a small workroom, a craftsman quietly polishes, reaching for yet another level of perfection. We hope so. Indeed, it may be in the backroom at Hamilton's shop.

Not encumbered by limits, Bowen Classic Arms Corporation continues to create and innovate, to blend materials, push machine and hand tool limits and

the limits of imagination. Walt Disney called it "Imagineering," and look what that brought us.

Founded in 1980, BCA was one of the originals to explore distinct and unusual possibilities in that rarified air surrounding no-limits custom revolvers. Dedicated to the Colt, Ruger and Smith & Wesson, BCA uses the factory guns only as a blank page to build upon. Their diverse, sophisticated, yet sublimely engineered concepts are molded together to sire a final result that truly is far greater than the sum of the often simple parts involved.

From the elegance of a well-tuned action on a factory big-bore revolver to the creation of a one-of-a-kind presentation piece, every modification in-between is possible. Custom chamberings, from the .218 Bee to the .50 Action Express, can be crafted into a form that will please





the most discriminating owner.

This uncompromising commitment to supply precisely what a customer's needs may dictate is done with a level of diversity and sophistication that has earned BCA an international reputation. It may be said, without hesitation, the Bowen shop is arguably in the top handful of custom gunmakers in the world — old-world British gunmakers, included. In short, if you want something special, BCA can deliver the goods. And usually exceed your expectations in the process.

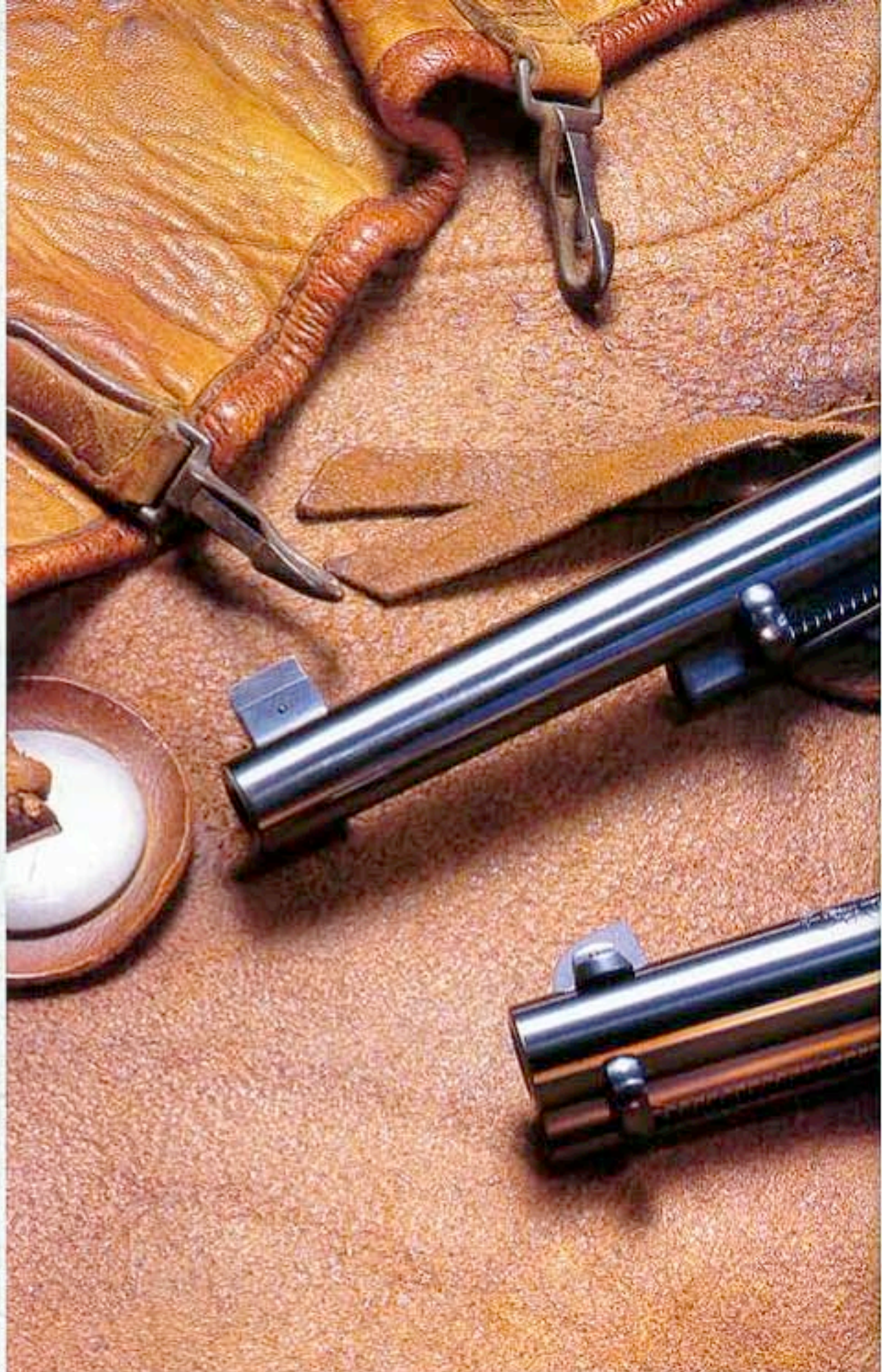
Not surprisingly, this kind of work requires degrees of skill not commonly encountered behind the gunsmithing counter at the local shop. Believing nothing can be accomplished without careful, attentive handwork, the craftsmen at BCA will not rush. Their special-order revolvers are limited to a few pieces yearly and there is, simply, no pressure to clear the bench for the next order. If you want the best, you have to wait, and understand the why's behind the need to wait. When you ask for complicated machine work, Damascus barrels and a final creation that would qualify for an English "Best Quality" rating by stuffy fellows in tweed suits — it takes time. Be patient and you will be rewarded. Just look.

It's not always inexpensive, either. But, everyone should have at least one exactly, perfect thing. Not almost right, not pretty close, but precisely perfect. F.H. Royce, whose name you might recognize, said, "The quality remains, long after the price is forgotten." Quality is enduring. Lasting. Quality makes you feel good. When you thumb the hammer back on a big bore BCA custom revolver, you smile. Think of the Rolls Royce Silver Ghost with a million miles on the clock and still running. You almost can't hear it when it idles. "Small things make perfection, but perfection is no small thing." Royce understood. And so does Hamilton.

### **The Finest Guns**

Hamilton believes the Colt Single Action revolver is the definitive revolver. BCA understands the place the beloved revolver holds in the hearts of American shooters and can connect, in a singular manner, with those who adhere to the same axiom. Their modifications can, as it says in their catalog: "... revive a measure of the grace and glory possessed by the lovely pre-war guns." How could one resist?

Some house specialties include reproductions of the elegant Flat Top Target and the traditional — yet innovative — lightweight guns of the 1930s. Of course, great work requires great guns to begin with. Hamilton's shop will only work on genuine Colt or USPPFA revolvers fitted with hammers, triggers and other components of domestic manufacture. It's not being



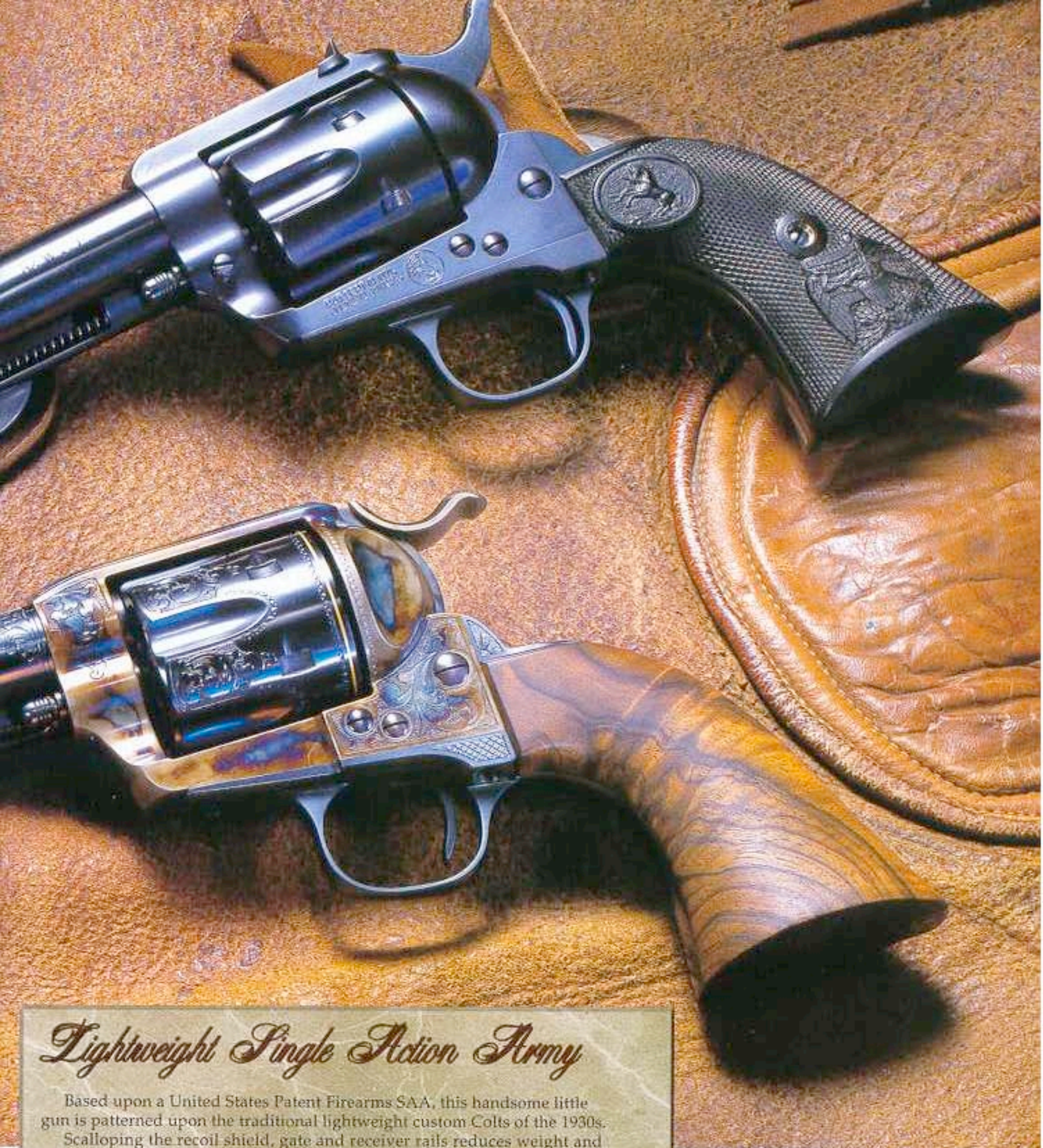
## *Flat-Top Target Colt*

The Flat-top Target revolver is one of the most handsome single action revolvers Colt ever produced. Fewer than a thousand were made and most of those were delivered before WWI. The survivors are rare and valuable — seldom seen and shot even less.

This particular Flat-top is a modern recreation made from a Colt New Frontier model. The receiver was welded and re-machined to match the original contours and new sights were fabricated as part of the package. The custom cylinder and barrel are for the wonderful .32-20 cartridge — a favorite at Bowen Classic Arms.

Prior to final finishing, the exterior was hand-filed and detailed, then polished and burnished. Genuine Colt hard rubber grips are carefully fitted to the frame. Like the standard catalog Target models, this recreation is all carbona blue, except for the trigger screws and pins, which are nitre blued.





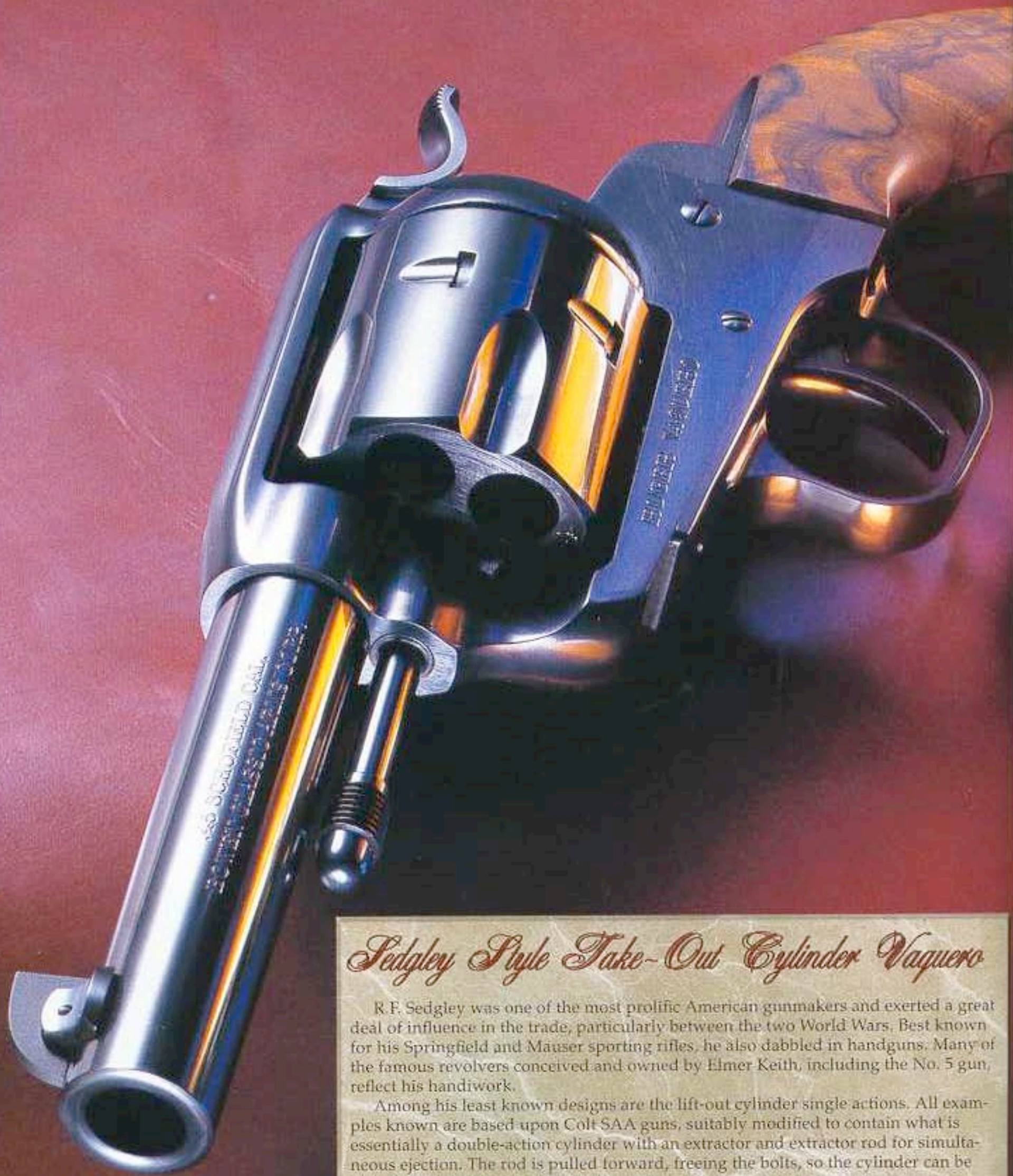
## *Lightweight Single Action Army*

Based upon a United States Patent Firearms SAA, this handsome little gun is patterned upon the traditional lightweight custom Colts of the 1930s.

Scalloping the recoil shield, gate and receiver rails reduces weight and adds distinction. The 4" barrel is fitted with a Colt-style dovetail front sight and a classic Bisley hammer spur adds to the fast handling and overall appeal.

As a final touch to the metalwork, all exterior surfaces were detailed and polished by hand, preparatory to burnishing and bluing. The one-piece French walnut grips are by Roy Fishpaw. Dan Love executed the simple, but decidedly elegant engraving and gold work. The superlative color casehardening and carbona bluing are by Turnbull Restorations. All in all an extremely scrumptious revolver and certainly worthy of qualifying as "one perfect thing."





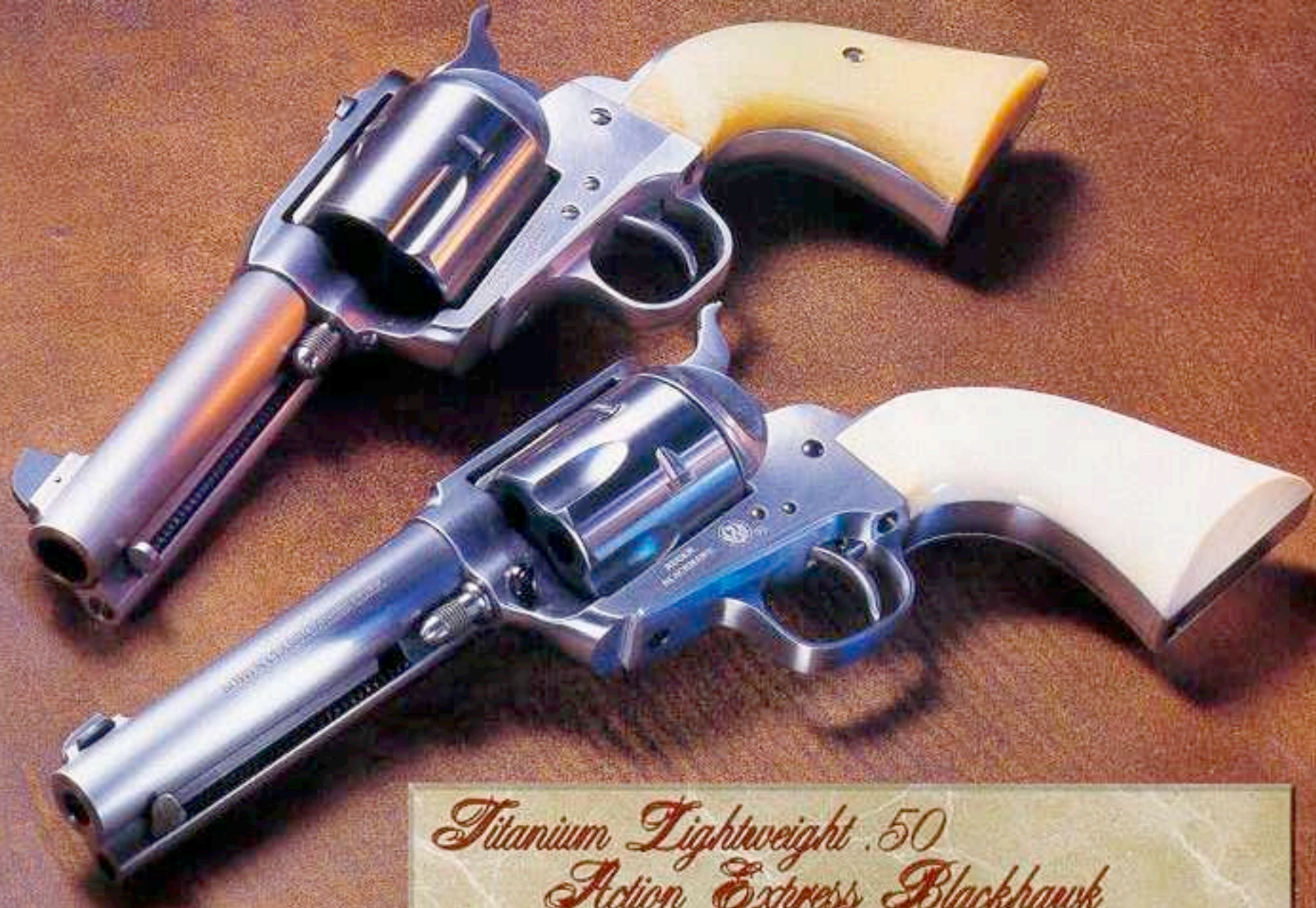
### *Sedgley Style Take-Out Cylinder Vaquero*

R.F. Sedgley was one of the most prolific American gunmakers and exerted a great deal of influence in the trade, particularly between the two World Wars. Best known for his Springfield and Mauser sporting rifles, he also dabbled in handguns. Many of the famous revolvers conceived and owned by Elmer Keith, including the No. 5 gun, reflect his handiwork.

Among his least known designs are the lift-out cylinder single actions. All examples known are based upon Colt SAA guns, suitably modified to contain what is essentially a double-action cylinder with an extractor and extractor rod for simultaneous ejection. The rod is pulled forward, freeing the bolts, so the cylinder can be removed through the loading gate.

Bowen Classic Arms has recreated a modern version of the Sedgley design, based upon the Ruger Vaquero. This particular specimen is done-up in the classic lightweight style, complete with a 4" barrel, Colt-pattern dovetail front sight, scalloped receiver and a Bisley hammer. The two-piece grip frame assembly is fitted with a spectacular set of one-piece French walnut grips from Roy Fishpaw. Chambered for the .45 Schofield, the gun has two fitted cylinders. There is a lanyard ring tucked away right where it belongs too. It's okay to smile.





## *Titanium Lightweight .50 Action Express Blackhawk*

Not all single action revolvers are low-tech, 19th century relics. This one-of-a-kind Ruger is entirely at ease in the 21st century.

Starting with a New Model Blackhawk, the top strap is welded and re-contoured to the elegant Single-Six style. The receiver recoil shield and loading gate are also scalloped to reduce weight even further. Serious weight reduction, however, results from the use of lightweight materials. Low stress parts, such as the grip frame and ejector housing, are stock aluminum components. But who would have thought?

The barrel, cylinder, base pin and screws are all machined from tough 6AL4V titanium alloy. The front sight base and the hidden ejector housing recoil lug are machined integral to the barrel for maximum strength.

Roy Fishpaw crafted the Dall sheep ram's horn grips — a material both light enough and tough enough (and handsome enough) as befits the application.

The compact .50 Action Express revolver weighs but 26 ounces — about one third the weight of a .50 Desert Eagle autoloader. Recoil is not, as BCA says, "For the squeamish." And, of course, you'd shoot it. We would.

## *Best-Quality .32-20 Old Model Ruger*

Among the finest single action revolvers ever produced by Bowen Classic Arms, this best-quality Ruger "Old Model" is chambered for the .32-20 and features a tremendous amount of detail metalwork.

The top strap is welded and machined in the Smith & Wesson revolver style. The result, we're sure you agree, is particularly handsome on a single action revolver. To reduce weight and to add distinction, the recoil shield and loading gate are scalloped. Two-piece grip frame parts are modified and installed with care and attention. The barrel is heavily tapered to further reduce weight and is fitted with a dovetail front sight set in an integral base.

A contoured, regulated screw retains the ejector housing. Mechanical details include tuning and a line-bored custom cylinder with flutes and black powder chamfering.

The exterior metal is completely detailed and blue-printed and is left in-the-white. All screws are regulated and nitre blued. Paul Persinger produced the exquisite one-piece ivory grips. Living proof, in full-color, that excellence is in the details.

high-brow, just honest.

Bowen's "Light Weight Long Hunter" is based upon the standard Blackhawk or Vaquero model, but any similarity stops there. After custom sights and other touches, the gun is lightened with a tapered barrel, scalloped recoil shield, loading gate and fluted cylinder. A fitted-aluminum ejector housing and grip frame round out the package. The result is a handsome, compact revolver, available in .41 or .44 Magnum, .45 Colt, .50 Special and .50 Action Express. This hand-held delight is intended for pilots, fishermen and travelers who might face the big bears — or worse. However, as the BCA catalog warns, in typical understated Bowen manner: "Please note: this is not a gun for the uninitiated. Recoil is vicious with full power loadings." Hamilton has a sense of humor.

Double actions are not relegated to the dark corners of the shop and worked on in secret lest the single action crowd discover a traitor in their midst. Feeling the Smith & Wesson is among the finest revolvers ever made, Hamilton's shop offers a range of options to whet the appetite of even the most discriminating





## M1917 Redhawk

Patterned after the U.S. martial revolvers of WWI, this Redhawk sports a S&W M&P-style fixed sight top strap and round, non-ribbed barrel. The dovetailed front sight is windage adjustable and a lanyard ring is fitted in keeping with the service nature of the gun.

The fluted, five shot cylinder is chambered for the .50 Action Express cartridge. The rimless round is retained, appropriately enough, in classic moon clips, as were the .45 ACP rounds used in the original S&W and Colt revolvers. Of course, the .50 speaks with an authority the original .45 might only have wished for.

Hand finishing and Roy Fishpaw checkered French walnut grips add a touch of commercial refinement — the dessert, if you would, on this spectacular feast of handgunning delight.

You might call it art — that functions. We hope you enjoy it.


handgun aficionado. Caliber conversions — like a .38 Special Heavy Duty gently massaged into a .45 Colt — gives an inkling of what the imagination might conjure. Remember, these fellows do this better than virtually anyone alive. If you can think it, they can probably do it. And, perhaps more importantly, they *want* to do it.

The big Ruger Redhawk series serves as prime fodder for a host of delectable ideas. The .50 Action Express "Alpine" Redhawk is a simple, no-nonsense kind of a gun, sure to dishearten the spirit of any bear foolish enough to approach a likely looking fisherman or hunter in a mistaken quest for dinner. Still, it would be an interesting few moments we think.

### Never Too Much

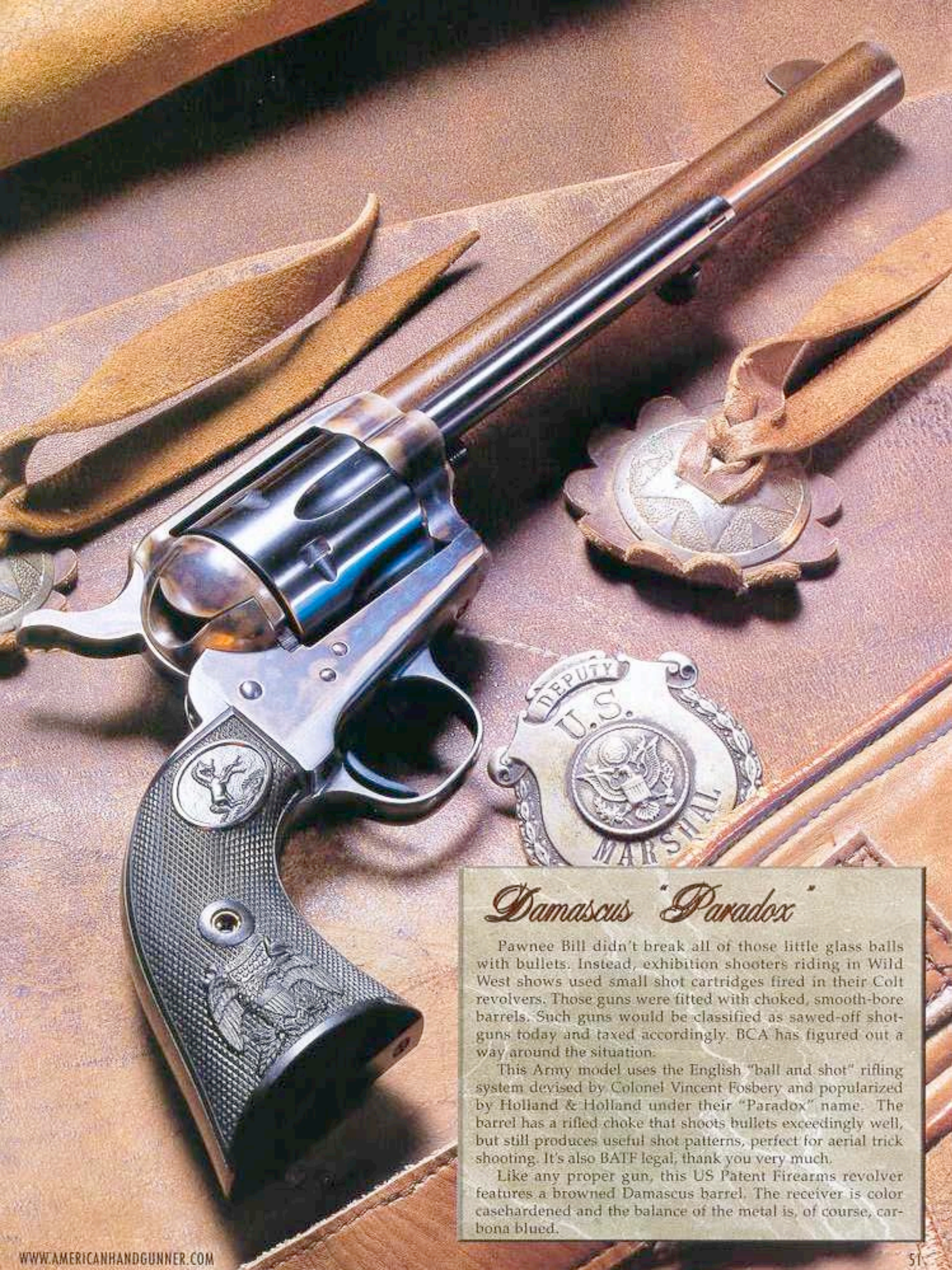
There is so much more. But perhaps, as is commonly known, and too-oft repeated — a photo is worth many thou-

sands of words. But this is one time when the maxim may most apply Hamilton might have said it best as he gazed at this round-up: "None of these necessarily reflect rocket science, but all of these guns are pretty nifty pieces — not your every day run-of-the-mill fare, I dare say."

Perhaps the "Understatement of the Year" award should go to Hamilton? 

BCA offers a "collectible" catalog that basically serves as a "mini-version" of Hamilton Bowen's new book: *The Custom Revolver*. Both are available from BCA. The catalog costs \$5 and the book \$39.95 (plus shipping). Both are worth the money involved. For more information, contact Bowen Classic Arms, PO Box 67, Louisville, TN 37777; phone: (865) 984-3583; [bcacorp@rcs.net](mailto:bcacorp@rcs.net) [www.bowenclassicarms.com](http://www.bowenclassicarms.com)





## *Damascus "Paradox"*

Pawnee Bill didn't break all of those little glass balls with bullets. Instead, exhibition shooters riding in Wild West shows used small shot cartridges fired in their Colt revolvers. Those guns were fitted with choked, smooth-bore barrels. Such guns would be classified as sawed-off shotguns today and taxed accordingly. BCA has figured out a way around the situation.

This Army model uses the English "ball and shot" rifling system devised by Colonel Vincent Fosbery and popularized by Holland & Holland under their "Paradox" name. The barrel has a rifled choke that shoots bullets exceedingly well, but still produces useful shot patterns, perfect for aerial trick shooting. It's also BATF legal, thank you very much.

Like any proper gun, this US Patent Firearms revolver features a browned Damascus barrel. The receiver is color casehardened and the balance of the metal is, of course, carbona blued.