

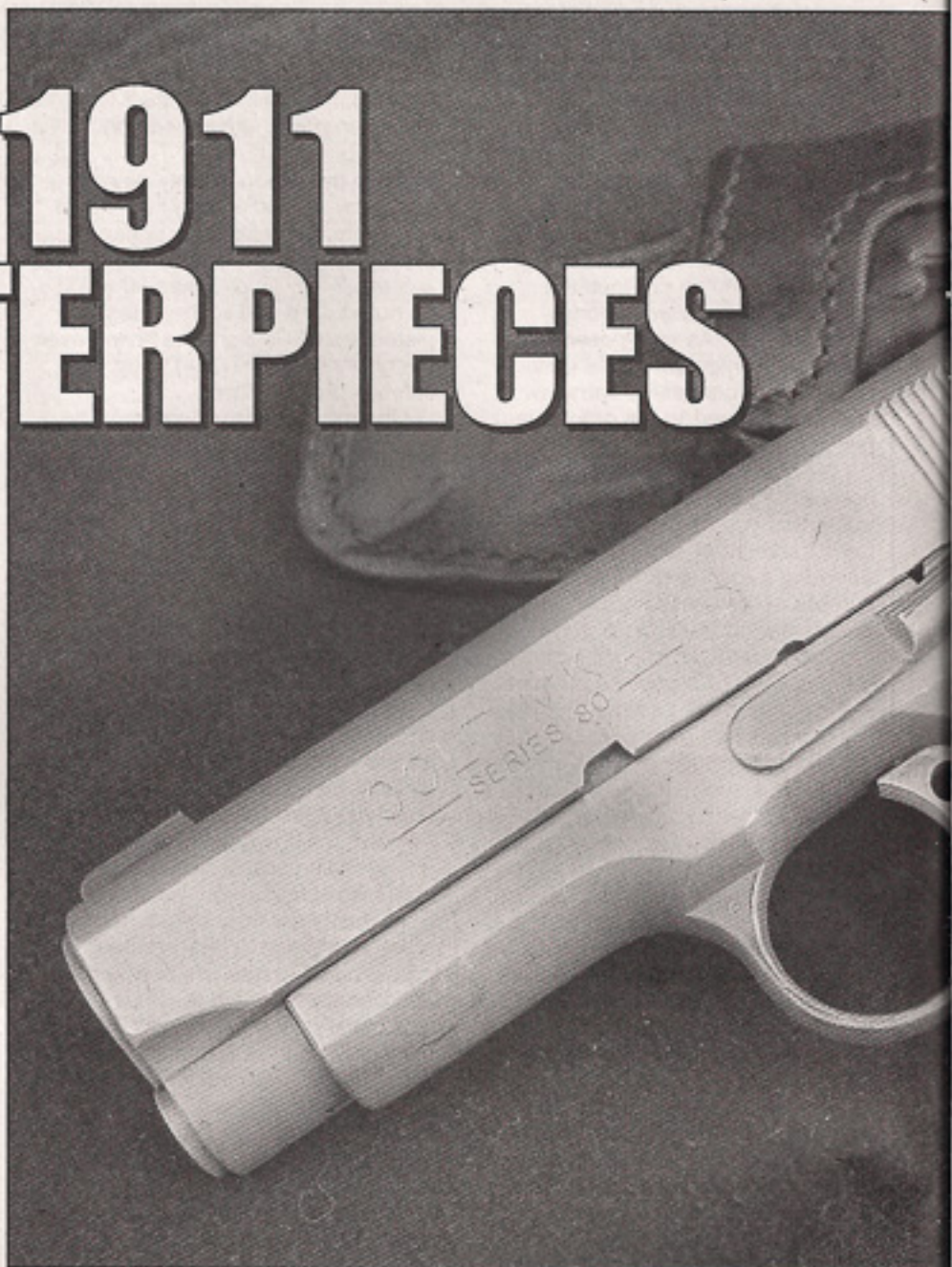
MINI-1911 MASTERPIECES

**A Colt Officer's
gets reborn into
100% reliability!**

By Dale Chaptico

Talking to myself, as I am apt to do on the range, I said, "That's weird. The gun used to work all the time. Getting some jams. Must be the ammo." So I placed the Colt Officer's Model, a short barreled 1911 .45ACP off-duty pistol, out of service and didn't carry it until I could ensure that it was working 100%. The next agency qualification day I used some different ammo. "Damn! The gun still don't work reliably! I guess I need some new magazines. These are the ones that came with the gun and are probably tired." That weekend I went to the Hemet, California, firing range, armed with new magazine springs and followers in my stubby magazines, some full-size magazines that worked fine in my full-size Colt 1911, and fired all of the different types of .45ACP duty ammo allowed by agency policy. None of them made the gun run 100%. I went to Bob Perkins, who ran Bob's Cop Shop in San Bernardino, and told him my tale of woe. He cut down a Colt Delta Elite guide rod, put in a new recoil spring, and told me to go try it again. This trip to the range made the gun run better for a while, but after a short period of time the pistol was again unreliable.

Now, Bob Perkins is a master machinist and a fine gunsmith in his own right, and he currently makes parts on contract as proprietary for some of the best smiths in the world, and his parts are likely unknowingly being carried in the guns of many of those who read this magazine. Bob told me that the gun would have to be torn down, the parts measured, and replaced and fitted as needed, but at the very least I needed to have a



Colt Officer's Model, Colt
handcuffs, Spyderco/Frank
Guntling knife.



Officer's Model before being customized by Cylinder & Slide. Note stock hammer, MGW (Maryland Gun Works) fixed rear sight, stock front sight, and "shallow" aftermarket beavertail grip safety.

Officer's Model with Davidson's MonkeyGrips.

bushing fitted and maybe some other work. Being that I was a rookie at the time, being paid just under the California poverty level and could not afford to pay for extensive professional repairs, I was forced to just stuff the gun into the safe at the office, and carry a Colt Agent D-frame for off-duty and backup. At this time, I became a dedicated Glockophile, exchanging aesthetics and tradition for utter reliability.

Some 16 years later, I pulled out the old Officer's Model for practice to use at a local IDPA Backup Gun (BuG) match. Now the gun didn't work 50% of the time. Out comes my GLOCK 30—that always works 100%—and the Officer's Model (OM) went back into my safe.

The stock OM given to me by K.C. Schlotterbeck was a blued, 80's vintage Officer's Model that has never

been worked on by anyone, professional or novice. K.C. told me that the gun tends to not feed the last round, which can be an indicator of worn magazine springs. He was right, as I found the gun to do the exact same thing. However, the gun shot very well, and to point-of-aim. The gun had the original stocks on it, rubber slabs with molded checkering, which does very little to help you hang on to the little hand-cannon during firing.

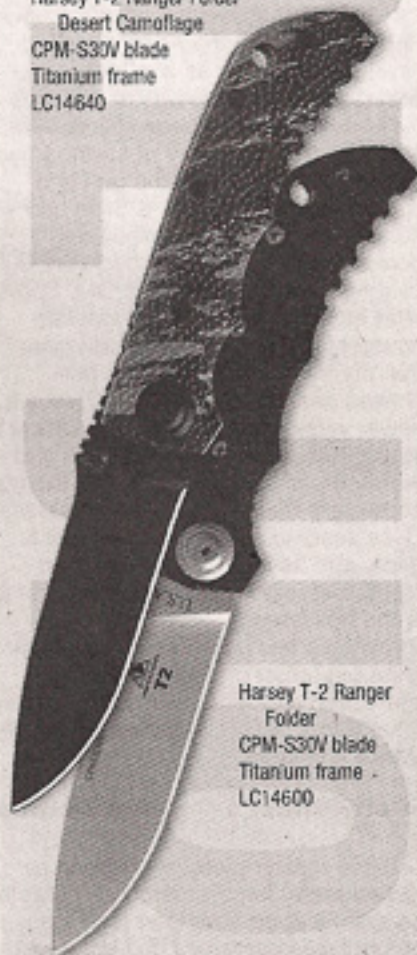
Enter Cylinder & Slide

While at an instructor's school in Fort Benning, Georgia, I spent some range time with my friend and fellow writer Rob Garrett. Rob pulled out several fine 1911s, one of which was an Adventurer, an abbreviated 1911 custom pistol made by Bill Laughridge of Cylinder & Slide. I eyed the gun, as

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pretty as it was, with hesitation. Rob confidently said, "Go ahead and shoot it until it doesn't work. I have lots of ammo. Hope you brought lunch." Then he just smiled at me with a mischievous smile that can only be displayed by those from the deep south, when they know they are about to win a sure bet. I shot the Adventurer at 5 yards. Then I shot it at 7 yards. Then 15. Then 25. My friend and fellow instructor Shane McClain shot it. After the end of the second case of ammo that we fed that and the other two guns Rob brought out, the Adventurer fed flawlessly and was as accurate at social distances as it was at 50 yards.

"Hey Rob, let me clean this gun for you." That was my way of saying I had to look at the inside of the gun and figure out what Cylinder & Slide had done. After seeing it up close and personal, I had made my decision: Bill Laughridge was getting my OM. Shortly after returning to El Paso, I was at another local IDPA match and I saw that my friend Rip Raatz had purchased a new Colt Defender. This is a newer version based upon the Officer's Model with an even shorter slide and barrel. Rip shot two stages and the gun hopelessly bound up on him. I told him I was sending mine off to Cylinder & Slide, and he gave me his gun and magazines, and asked me to include it in the box when I went to ship. I scrawled a few notations on the back of an old target or something, giving instruction as to the very least I wanted done to my OM. Rip's note said simply: "Make it reliable."

Colt Officer's Custom Details

Since master pistolsmiths tend to have a pretty long turnaround, I was in no rush. A short time later (and long before I was expecting it), I got a call from Fremont, Nebraska, telling me to send them a check, that my gun would be coming back to me in a week or so. I happily gave them my credit card number and a week later my gun showed up. I impatiently opened the box, and found what I recognized as my old OM, but there were some very noticeable differences. This is what I found.

That all of the edges had been radiused, but not to the point where they looked "melted." This radiusing of the sharp edges precludes abrading or sticking to clothing when carried, as well as saving my hands from donating



Two 5-round groups, 20 yards, offhand, Remington 230gr FMJ practice loads.



Officer's Model with full-length guide rod.



Note muzzle of barrel and fitted bushing.

blood when aggressively handling the gun. There was a perfectly installed set of Novak low-mount sights affixed to the gun with both the front and back of the slide dovetailed for their respective part of the sight system. The included test target reflected that the gun shot to within 1.5 inches at 25 yards with a note saying that the front sight is installed oversize, then milled down to point-of-aim for that particular gun. I saw that there was a full-length guide rod in the gun, but I did not field strip it yet, as I was on my way to the range!

On the range I stuffed the two original magazines with some Federal

230-grain ball ammo, as well as the extra two magazines C&S had provided. It was immediately apparent that the two original magazines had new followers, and as I loaded them, I found that there were new springs also installed that displayed considerably more authority than the originals. The extra two magazines that were included were set up the same way. I shot the first four magazines into the target at 5, 7, 15, and 25 yards, and the gun ran perfectly! I then loaded the original magazines again to capacity, as well as six full-size magazines of various manufacture from Wilson and McCormick 8-rounders to old, rusted, surplus GI magazines. Ten magazines, loaded to capacity with all of their fodder, gobbled up in the little gun without a hitch! Oh happy day! I then fed the gun a hodgepodge of various ammo, including Remington Golden Sabers, Winchester Silvertips, both old and new profile Federal Hydra-Shoks, and even some of my own practice reloads, which are considerably slower than any factory offering. The gun ran like a champ, and I noticed negligible difference in the point-of-impact with any of them at short distances, in slow or rapid-fire drills.

Colt Defender's Custom Details

A few weeks later, my friend Rip got his Defender back from C&S. I then contacted another friend who had a bone stock Officer's Model, and borrowed the two guns to do the comparison for this article. First, I found that the Defender is shorter in slide length than the two OMs. It also has an alloy frame, as it is obviously



Officer's Model, Bulman FDS holster, Larry Davidson's "Horned Lizard" pattern grips.



Closeup of MonkeyGrips "Horned Lizard" pattern detail.



Note beavertail metal work & fitting.

designed to be carried more than shot, which I found to be very true when shooting, because the gun has considerably more "bash factor" than the two steel guns, but not oppressively so.

At the next month's match, I saw that Rip's Defender had also returned from Fremont. The Defender looked on the outside exactly as it did before it left, but closer examination reflected that C&S had installed a new recoil system. This is a two-part system and looked an awful lot like the Seecamp setup. When I made some calls, I found out that I was right, C&S uses this setup under license. C&S had also rebuilt the magazines of the stubby Colt. The Defender was not only shorter in barrel and slide length than

the OM's, but it was also a lightweight model. I shot the gun and found that the combination of slick wooden grips and an alloy frame made the gun really hard to keep in one place in my lower primate-sized hands. It was clearly evident to me that this Defender is one of those guns that should be carried much and shot little. Rip shot the gun that day, and several days afterward. Needless to say, the gun ran flawlessly until "round number 490." (Yes, Rip was keeping track!) At this time there was a problem where a piece of the recoil system came apart, rendering the gun inoperable. Rip sent the gun back the next Monday and within ten days he had the gun back in his hands, fully repaired and ready to go, free of charge. I relay this to the reader solely to emphasize that Bill Laughridge definitely stands behind his work. The happy ending to that story is that the gun has exceeded its subsequent 500-round reliability test, and according to Rip, is serving its intended purpose well.

The intended purpose of these little guns is as defensive arms. Despite the fact that normally I am a Glockophile, when I do use and shoot a slab-sided gun I prefer an all-steel model as opposed to the other materials frequently found on defensive 1911s today. This preference is not steeped in tradition and lore, which I think has no place in selecting a fighting gun, but is because I find all-steel 1911s to be easier for me to control in rapid fire. I know we can change recoil springs and make ammo changes, but across the board I still like steel. When shooting the OM, I appreciated the heft of the steel that helped dissipate the recoil, and made the gun more pleasant to put through its paces. What came back to haunt me was something that troubled me on both of the other two little

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pistols: the grips. The grips on my OM were rubber Pachmayr "wrap-arounds." These rubber grips have always been on the gun since my ownership, and do little to keep the gun solidly mated to my normally sweaty firing grip. So I was doing some research recently and found that custom knifemaker Larry Davidson was making 1911 grips that he calls "MonkeyGrips." Well, the name alone piqued my interest, so I gave him a call. A few days later my new grips arrived, and I slapped them on the abbreviated gun and haven't looked back. The grips are made of G-10, and just like many of the scales he makes for his custom knives, Larry actually machines these grips to fit the gun, as well as machining the different grip surfaces on the exterior. This gives the grips exceptional "gription" that helps control muzzle flip. (I am one of those people who really like the grip area of a gun to bite into my hands when shooting, like aggressive checkering, stippling, coarse skateboard tape, etc., so these grips really made me smile.) The deep, sharp pattern on the grips I have are called "Horned Lizard." Larry also has patterns called "Warthog," "4x4" and "Wyrn." The grips have a very attractive gray/blue hue to them, and I found them to not only be striking on the stainless steel of the gun, but they also work well with blue jeans if you are a slave to fashion...

Shooting Impressions

Okay, how accurate should these little guns be? When I shot the C&S Adventurer in Georgia, I was able to keep the holes in a decent "combat" offhand group on a silhouette target at ranges out to 50 yards, operator error notwithstanding. My Colt OM had never really impressed me as a "tack-driver" in years past, however I found that since its return from C&S the gun was printing groups that were surprisingly smaller than those I remember it being able to do. I contacted the folks at Midway Shooter's Supply and got some Birchwood & Casey "Dirty Bird" bull's-eye targets. These targets appear to be plain black bull's eyes until you shoot them, whereupon they "splatter" around the hole, making it much easier to see and making it easy to visualize their name. As the picture reflects, the 20-yard group fired by the author from the C&S repaired OM was more than acceptable for a combat gun. Yes, the



Three Colt Belly Guns, clockwise from top left, Stainless Colt Officer's Model (subject gun) Colt Defender, Stock Blued Officer's Model.

gun had the barrel fitted to a new bushing which was also milled and mated into the slide, a new barrel link, fitted locking lugs, Novak fixed sights, new recoil system, re-built magazines, chamber throated and ramp re-cut to the proper angle and polished for smooth feeding. The more I looked at the inside of the gun, the more I realized what was done to it. There was nothing else really spectacular done to the gun as a stand-alone repair, but cumulatively the little touches and attention to detail added up to one fine shooting package.

Holsters

When preparing to put a carry gun into service, I look at it as a "system" rather than a gun alone. The gun, ammo, how it is carried, the time of year, etc., are all part of that system. When discussing my preference for steel 1911s as opposed to polymer or other lightweight materials, I often get the argument that alloy-framed guns are easier to carry. I carry a gun every day as a function of my job, and I have never really noticed the weight of a gun because I have always understood a basic premise: The carry-ability of a handgun is more a function of the right holster, belt and attire than the girth or weight of the gun. If you buy a \$10 Gun Show Special nylon holster, then expect to get \$10 worth of performance from it and don't be disappointed. However, if you are serious about carrying a sidearm, you need to select from a quality maker to suit your individual style and be purpose driven.

My old carry holster for this gun got remanded to the use and custody of my brother a few years back, so I needed some new leather. As is my custom when getting a new gun, I contacted my old friend Lou Alessi and told him my situation. Lou, being the

gentleman that he is, said "Give Josh Bulman a call. His work is really outstanding and you two need to get to know each other anyway." I contacted Josh and a few days later the package came from Bulman Gunleather. I found inside the box the holster model Josh calls his "FDS" (Forward Drop Scabbard) Model. This style of holster is equally as well suited for range use or concealed carry; what is almost universally recognized as the standard model by which all combat/carry holsters have been judged. This holster shares many facets of what is frequently referred to as a "Bruce Nelson #1 Professional." The basics of this rig are that the holster pouch is made of one piece of leather, with a belt tunnel for securing the belt forward, and a loop that pulls the back of the holster tight to the body. This positions the holster on the hip for aggressive drawing, while still allowing for comfort and concealment.

Well, Lou was right, Josh's work is superb! Detail on my unit counted 6 to 7 stitches per inch, with the leather evenly dyed a solid brown. The reinforcing band around the mouth to precipitate one-handed holstering was perfectly fitted to the holster body, and the boning was exceptional. I was once told that a well-boned holster should look like gun it is intended to carry. This holster certainly fits this bill! The holster is made so that it does not collapse, a mandate for anyone who is serious about carrying a handgun. When I put the gun in the holster, the gun actually made an audible pop, not unlike a kydex holster. Josh actually imprinted strategically placed dimples in the holster so that the gun solidly locks into the rig without the need for a manual retention device, such as a thumb-break or strap. The edges are burnished perfectly, the rake of the gun is as it should be, and the holster is

undercut on the rear to get a full firing grip without the hand bumping into unneeded leather, and the front is relieved in what is commonly called a "speed cut" to necessitate expeditious presentations for those unexpected social engagements. The Bulman Gunleather rig is as good as any leather holster I have ever seen, and I have seen more than my fair share.

Final Notes

When talking to Bill Laughridge, one realizes that he has that uncommon knowledge for which many people strive. Bill told me that the shorter stroke and sharper recoil impulses of the abbreviated 1911's makes for a combination of totally different dynamics, requiring special attention that few people really understand completely. Bill told me that the first thing one needs to understand is that chopped 1911s need stouter recoil springs, as well as stouter magazine springs. He said that the recoil springs should be replaced every 500 to 1200 rounds, on the average. The stiffer magazine springs help hold the ammo in place until the bolt catches the top one on its path to feeding and chambering. Bill believes that the Officer's Models magazines, despite what some manufacturers provide, should use 6-round magazines only, and all the magazines that came back with my gun held exactly that many, and no more. This subject gun didn't work before, and it works now. I am certainly not competent enough to argue, so my gun will stay configured as Bill Laughridge suggests. Now, I have a new appreciation for my Officer's Model, and I admit that shooting it when it works is a lot more pleasurable and confidence inspiring than doing incessant malfunction drills. ■

For more information, contact:

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