

# guns review

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# GUN REVIEW

## COLT'S .45 OFFICER'S ACP



Colt's Officer's ACP Model.

**ANY BETTING MAN** might safely lay a few pounds on the fact that the Colt .45 Auto, in its various guises, will be around for many years to come. It may well be that the M1911 is to be replaced as the sidearm of the US Forces. It may equally well be that the single column magazine and single action trigger are outdated. The design could be called venerable if not downright old-fashioned. Despite all that, the Colt Auto is immensely popular, particularly amongst practical pistol competitors. It also has its faithful following amongst those who *must* use a pistol for serious protection work. There are many in those categories who find it impossible to accept the modern theories which "prove" that cartridges like the 9 mm. para (itself no newcomer) as effective as the .45. They tend to ignore the computer predictions and mathematical formulae of the more recent gurus and rely on the Thompson-La Garde tests of the theories of General Hatcher. The 45ACP is far from dead and we dare say that in another fifty years it will still have a following.

New models in Colt's line were announced before the final result of the US Army's pistol tests was known but it had been quite certain for some years that the .45 would go. Colt's cannot therefore have relied on further Government contracts for the basic model as the basis for their new guns. These pistols are designed for the wider market and show the confidence which Colt's have in that market.

The Colt Officer's .45ACP is obviously a derivative of the M1911 via the Mark IV Series 80 Commander. This smaller model

has been missing from the Colt's line-up for long enough to allow other makers to take advantage of the gap. However, that gap is now filled from the factory.

The standard M1911 weighs 2 lb. 7 oz., is 8½ in. long and 5½ in. high. The Commander, which was introduced in 1949, had an aluminium frame. The length was cut by ¾ in. and the weight by ¾ lb. A steel framed Combat Commander later brought the weight back up to 2¼ lb. Colt's, it seems, were satisfied that they offered a wide enough range. The shooters thought otherwise and demand has caused this latest extension to the line. The Officers ACP turned our scale at 2 lb. 1 oz. It is only 5 in. from the bottom of the frame to the top of the backsight and a fraction over 7 in. from the muzzle to the back of the "horn" above the grip. Size and weight are thus considerably reduced.

The reduced height has cut the magazine capacity from seven to six. Standard Colt's magazines work perfectly well but stick out from the bottom of the frame slightly. Although the grip is shortened, most shooters will find that it still accommodates all their fingers, though those with the largest hands may find the little finger unseated. The backstrap ends within the palm but is perfectly comfortable.

The reduction in length has necessitated changes in the recoil spring. A shortened spring surrounds a smaller inner spring which is wound in the reverse direction. The recoil spring guide has been slightly modified to accept this twin spring system. The ¾ in. barrel is very noticeably belled at the muzzle where it seats into



The Officer's ACP — left side. Note the extended horn above the grip and the large style safety release. Slide release on the barrel retaining latch and the magazine release are both standard size.

the barrel bushing. The bushing does not have the longitudinal splits and spring tension of the Commander, but is shorter and solid. The usual swinging link secures the barrel to its locking pin and the usual lugs lock the breech when seated in their recesses in the upper part of the slide.

The backstrap of the Officer's ACP lacks the "hump" of the M1911A1, reverting instead to the flat spring housing of the original M1911. The backstrap is deeply serrated and the grip at that point is comfortable and controlled. The grip safety has the usual horn to prevent the web of the hand being caught by the hammer. In this case, however, the horn is considerably extended.

The usual Colt's safeties are fitted. The grip safety is present and works freely. The side safety is of the fuller size used in the Commander rather than the small M1911 style. A firing pinlock is also incorporated. A spring loaded plunger runs through the breech block in the slide, locking the firing pin until the trigger is pulled, when a release catch pushes the plunger clear.

The makers suggest field stripping with a screwdriver. First depress the recoil spring plug and turn the barrel bushing about 1/4 turn before pulling it out forward. Using a screwdriver, push the spring plug in about one inch and turn it half a turn. The plug can then be allowed to come forward out of the frame, but being kept firmly under control. The springs can then be removed. The slide can then be pushed back until the rear of the barrel retaining catch is level with a notch in the left of the slide. The catch is then pushed out from the right. The slide and barrel will then slip off the front of the frame.

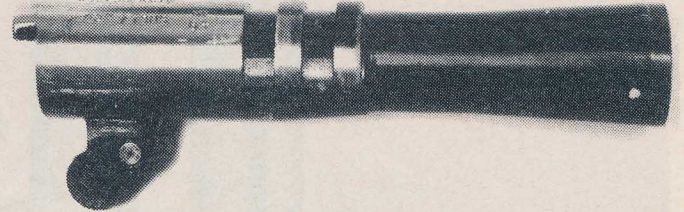
That is the maker's way and the proper way. Field stripping without a screwdriver is also possible. If the slide is pushed back until the notch in the slide lines up with the rear of the barrel retaining catch and is carefully held there, the catch can be slipped out. The slide can then be gently eased forward, off the frame,



The Officer's ACP field stripped. Note the double recoil spring.



The right side of the gun.



The belled muzzle of the short barrel is very distinctive.

bringing the barrel, springs and other parts with it. It is important that, as the slide begins to clear the frame, the spring is held in place underneath. If it is not held it will bend and then spring out flinging the guide into some dark and inaccessible corner. Once the slide is off, the springs can be taken out and then the spring plug and barrel bushing are easily removed.

The sights on the Officer's ACP are a little better than those on the Commander and much better than those on the M1911. A wide square foresight fits with a wide square notch in the rearsight to give a standard Partridge sight picture which is bold enough for fast use yet suitable for precise shooting. In bad light a three dot system is available. A single white dot is applied to the foresight, level with dots on each side of the rearsight notch. When all three white dots are aligned, the gun is aimed. Both sights are capable of adjustment by drifting in their dovetails.

Finish on the gun was very good throughout. Our gun was in matte black. This is non-reflective and has a deep colouring. The gun is also available in nickel.

The trigger pull on our test gun was very sharp and clean but it was very heavy. Our tester showed eight pounds which is about three pounds too much for the single action pull of an auto. The hard pull was not noticeable in "practical" style shooting but it was very noticeable in slow fire target work.

We tested the gun with four different commercial loads and two different handloads, the latter having been prepared by two serious competitive practical shooters. We did not experience a single failure to feed, misfire or other malfunction during our tests. Our grouping suffered rather badly because of the trigger. Even from a rested position the best we could do at 20 yards was just under four inches. In unsupported two handed shooting, our groups were just about as good! We do not doubt that the precision groups could be much better after some adjustment of the trigger weight.

The pistol handled very well in practical style shooting and was very pleasant to shoot in all matches. The small grip caused no discomfort and no loss of control. The pistol points well and can be aimed quickly.

The Officer's ACP offers Commander performance in a much smaller package. It is a very reliable gun which is pleasant to use and very well suited to practical style matches as well as general practice. Colt's firearms are imported by Viking Arms Ltd, Summerbridge, Harrogate HG3 4BW. The Officer's ACP will retail at about £560, though prices of all American guns tend to fluctuate considerably.