

CLASSIC TEST

COLT .25 Pocket Hammerless

**Great Design,
Coupled With
High Quality,
Made This One
of the Top
Hideout Guns
of the 1920s
and '30s.**

By Garry James

Over the years, I've tested just about every new (and old) pocket pistol that's come down the pike...including some pretty exotic European examples, and I still think the one to beat was John Browning's .25 ACP Hammerless Colt effort of 1908.

It was among the smallest of Browning's pistol designs...sort of an abbreviated version of his classic Model 1903 .32 Pocket Model.

During the '20s and '30s, the Colt Pocket Hammerless was a popular hideout gun with gangsters and law enforcement alike. It had a 33-year lifespan. Gun and accessories from author's collection.



Photos by Lynn Pedigo



The recoil spring is not so stout as to prevent chambering a round easily. The gun is small, but can be manipulated by anyone with average-sized hands.



Despite its diminutive size, the Colt Pocket Model Hammerless fits the hand well. Recoil was virtually nonexistent, and functioning was perfect.

Actually, the Colt "Vest Pocket" as it has come to be called, had its antecedents in Belgium, where it was initially introduced in 1906 and manufactured by Fabrique Nationale. It became an instant hit, and as the "Model 1906 Baby Browning" (the latter name was eventually applied to a 1920 incarnation of the gun that dispensed with the grip safety, among other things) was produced in great numbers for some 40 years.

In 1908 Colt decided that this would be a good item to make for sale in the U.S., and it produced the gun under license. Like the European piece, it had a grip safety, safety catch on the rear, left side of the frame, 2-inch barrel, and six-round magazine. As well, beginning at serial number 141,000, the gun had a magazine safety, whereby when the mag was removed from the gun, a disconnect broke all contact between the trigger and the sear.

Functioning of the gun was assiduously described in the original

instructions thusly: "The action of this pistol is automatic, except that the trigger must be pulled to fire each shot (continued discharge will not result from one pull of the trigger), the cartridges being supplied from a detachable magazine inserted in the handle of the first cartridge into the chamber. On pulling the trigger the cartridge is fired, the empty shell ejected and a new cartridge loaded into the chamber, all these operations taking place automatically without any manipulation of the arm. This automatic operation is effected by recoil of the moving parts and as a consequence, the recoil being thus utilized, it is absorbed so that it has no disturbing effect. The first shot can be discharged more quickly than from any other arm, as this pistol can be carried with perfect safety while the hammer is at full cock."

The finish of the standard pistol was blue with a case-hardened trigger and grip safety. Grips were initially of checkered hard rubber embellished with



Measuring but 4½ inches overall, the "Vest Pocket" was easy to conceal, and with its grip safety, safety catch and (above serial number 141,000) magazine safety, thought to be virtually foolproof. The author still recommends that such guns not be carried chambered, cocked and locked. Companion cartridges are .25 and .45 ACP.

the Colt name and rampant colt motif and later of checkered walnut with inset Colt escutcheons.

Overall the diminutive pistol measured only 4½ inches and hefted a comfortable 13 ounces... just about the right size to slip in a gent's vest pocket, hence the gun's "vest pocket" nickname. Of course, there were fancy, embellished versions with nickel-plating, engraving, pearl or ivory grips, inlay, etc. In fact it became a popular carry gun with Prohibition-era gangsters, who were willing to trade on the anemic .25 ACP ballistics for the element of surprise. As well as civilian use, the little Vest Pocket was also drafted into the service during World War II where, in parkerized guise, they were issued in limited numbers to the OSS and other specialized units.

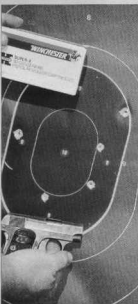
The pistol fieldstrips easily... pretty much in the same manner as its bigger brother. First remove the magazine and ensure the gun is unloaded, then withdraw the slide about ¼ inch, grasp the barrel by the serrations on the muzzle and turn it clockwise about one-quarter turn until the lugs at the rear of the barrel disengage from the slots in the frame. The slide may now be withdrawn forward off the frame and the recoil spring/rod and barrel removed from the front of the slide and the firing pin, mainspring and mainspring guide from the rear.

Our evaluation Pocket Model Hammerless was a good-condition (about 80 percent) example made in 1914. It was a standard blued model with hard-rubber grips, no magazine



To fieldstrip the Colt Pocket Hammerless, first remove the magazine and ensure the gun is unloaded (1). Now, withdraw the slide about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and rotate the barrel one-quarter turn clockwise (2). Move the slide forward off the frame (3). Remove the recoil spring and guide (4) and barrel (5). Extract the firing pin, mainspring and mainspring guide from rear of slide (6).

safety and the original magazine. The trigger was measured at a crisp 5 pounds. We took the sprout to the Petersen Ranch in Lake Los Angeles, California, along with a good supply of Winchester 45-grain Expanding Point .25s. First groups were essayed offhand at a "combat" range of 7 yards, where the little spud, as expected, dropped all six of its rounds in the black. This exercise was repeated to monotony, so for the heck of it, we bench-rested it and took a few shots at 25 yards. Lo and behold, groups stayed regularly within 5 inches at point of aim... all the more remarkable when one realizes that the teeny front blade and skimpy rear-notch sights are really not adequate for any kind of target work. In some 50 rounds, we had nary a failure to feed or eject. Based upon the above performance, if the caliber wasn't so anemic, I would seriously consider this as a handy carry gun. As it is, the Vest Pocket can at least be respected as a well-crafted, exquisitely designed classic that it is.



Our test gun turned in amazing 25-yard groups for a .25 auto with 2-inch barrel. All spreads ran about 5 inches to point of aim. Ammo used was Winchester 45-grain Expanding Point.



The Pocket Hammerless' safety/slide stop is sited on the rear, left of the frame. Because of the gun's size, it takes a bit of fiddling to get it into the proper position to employ it.