



HANDGUNNER

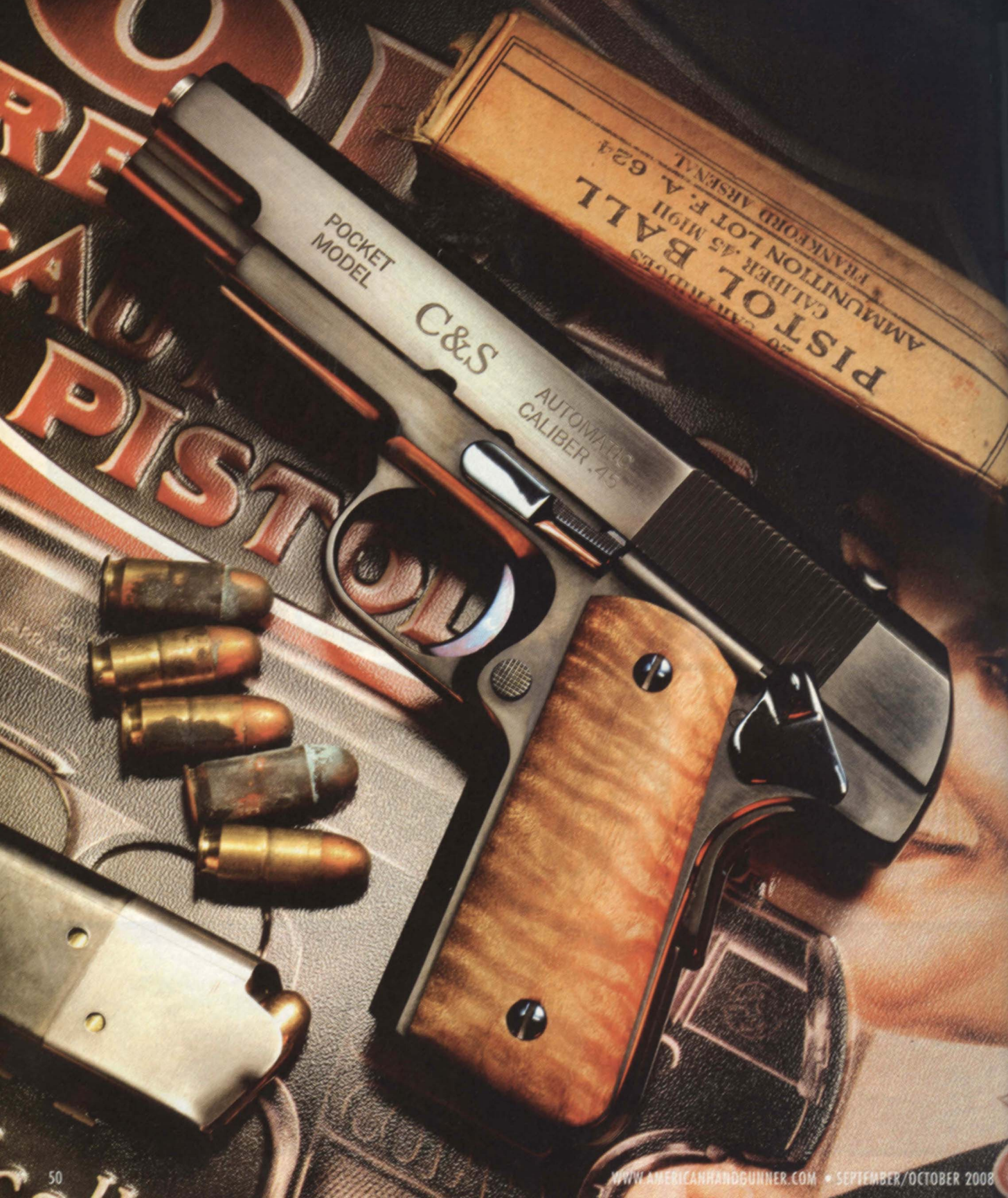
AMERICAN

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2008

HANDGUNNER



CYLINDER & SLIDE'S



ACP 45 1903

WHAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN

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PHOTOS: ICHIRO NAGATA

It was just before the SHOT Show when Bill Laughridge phoned me. "Hey, Your Editorship, or whatever they call you, stop by the booth at SHOT. I've got something very cool to show you." When Bill says he's got something "very cool" to show you, you listen.

So I listened. He saw me walk up to his booth and pulled the trigger on that big, mustache-laden grin he can grin and reached into his display case, pulling out a blue beauty of an auto. A new 1911? Some re-vamped beast now turned into a beauty?

But I distinctly recall thinking: "But wait ... something's not right." And something was indeed wrong. The contours were all, well, wrong. The front half looked fine, sort of. Like a 1911, but still, not quite right. But the back half, well, something was terribly amiss.

"Bill," I said, "what have you done to a perfectly good gun?"

"Lots," he said. Grin. "Look," he said as he reached into his display case again, taking a minty Colt 1903 .380 out and holding the two in-hand, like bookends that weren't.

Have you ever had one of those moments when you get one of those old *Looney Tunes* screens at the end of a cartoon that twist down like the aperture of an ancient single lens reflex camera? It hurricanes down into a tiny point of light in the center, like a peep sight, and just in that sight, was whatever had your attention a half-second prior to the "I think I'm going to black out" moment? This was one of those times.

In Bill's left hand was an obvious Colt .380, slim, trim and as appealing as ever. Fine. In his right hand sat another 1903 auto, but ... how do I say this? But bigger? That somehow doesn't do it

justice. It was as if it had starred in one of the *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* movies as a prop looking all out of proportion, even in Bill's manly hand.

I cleared my eyes, leaned on the counter and said what had to be said — and what Bill had been waiting months for me to ask. I hate that when that happens.

"Okay, tell me about it, and by the way — how the hell did you do it?"

But Why?

"I've always admired Colt's .25, .32s and .380 pocket models," said Bill, holding up the one in his right





hand. "Their lines are impeccable, their proportions so right — with no sharp edges — and they are, simply put, the original pocket pistols and show a kind of grace we don't often see in today's guns."

Grin.

"In those days," Bill went on, "gentlemen wore vests that would easily hold the .25, and jackets were normally worn that would easily hold the .32 and the .380. Automobiles were just becoming popular and the full-length dusters men wore were perfect for pocket pistols."

I couldn't fault Bill's logic, and told him as much.

"The streets and roadways of America were the domain of the highwayman — just as they are today — and anyone could fall prey to an armed robber," Bill opined.

"In fact, he went on, "gentlemen of

the day felt it was their obligation to protect their loved ones they traveled with, and were disinclined to easily give up their hard-earned money to those miscreants," Bill concluded.

"But why," he wondered aloud, as if I were not even there, his feet planted firmly on the soapbox, "why were these elegant guns never up-sized to handle the .45 ACP, the ultimate self-defense round then, and today?" I thought long and hard, but couldn't drum-up a good answer, so asked the obvious.

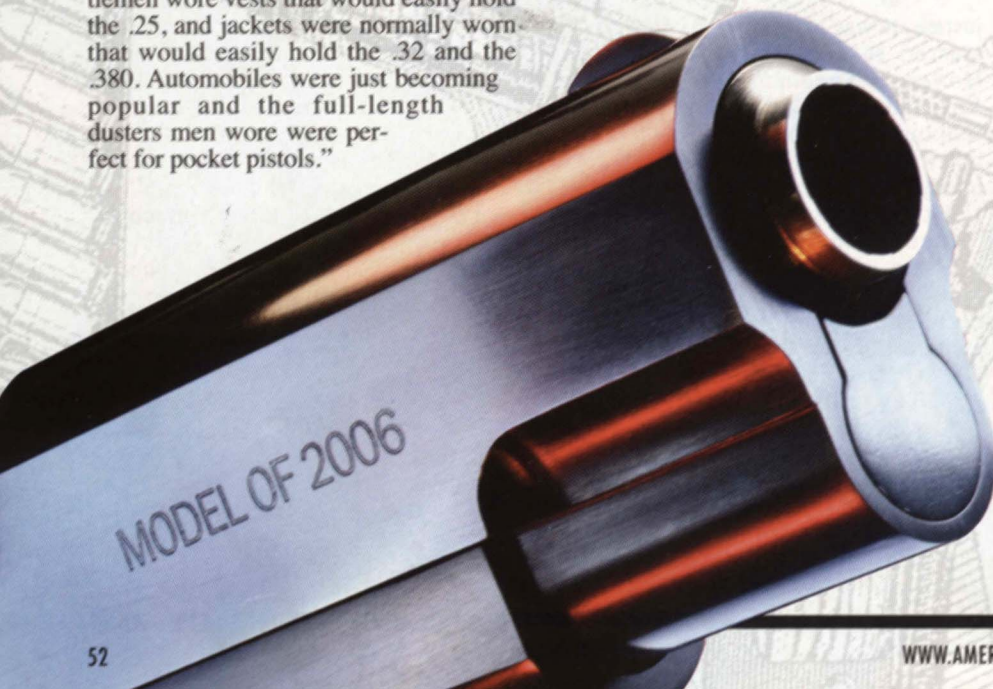
"Why not, Bill?"

"Hell, I don't know, but I figured on fixing that problem," he said, looking at me like I had just asked an absurd question — which I might have.

How The Hell

Bill stepped down from the soap box and we chatted for a long time about the how's and the why's behind this miracle of machine work I held gingerly.

Bill said he had been thinking about the design of the 1911 for more years than he could remember, which is a lot of years. He blended his knowledge of the 1911 with his knowledge of the inner-workings of the 1903 and realized they were, essentially, the same,





with much in common. The real problem was making a slide and frame of a 1911 that would both conceal the hammer, yet retain the proper proportions yielding the grace and dignity of the smaller sibling. But he was at an impasse, unable to imagine the frame and slide concept in the flesh.

Bill began to experiment with small 1911-style pistols, like his Adventurer Model, and always wanted that size

gun in the 1903 design. One day when he was doing some quality control checks on C&S's Carry Commander — he realized something.

"I suddenly thought about that Pocket Model proportion problem and realized the Commander slide on the Officers ACP-sized frame was just about right," explained Bill. "But making that slide and frame conceal the hammer just seemed out of the question."

Bill drummed-up a slide/frame combo from Caspian but, like before, just couldn't put the "figger" on it and tossed the two parts in a desk-top box. There they lingered for a couple of years while Bill fed his muse. Actually, Bill said, "I'll be damned if I could figure out how to make it work during that time." So much for feeding some muse.

Continued on page 95



C&S'S .45 ACP

Continued from page 53

He thought about cutting and welding, but was concerned about warping slides and frames. Besides, the final result simply wouldn't blue right and would show odd colors due to the differing steel and hardening. And, like they say, "Then a miracle occurred."

Well, sort of a miracle.

A Miracle, Sort Of

"One day, out of the blue, I up and asked Chris Hagemann, who has been with me for over 20 years, to silver solder a part for me. Chris is the best silver-solderer on the planet and it had dawned on me if I machined the parts to fit as seamlessly as possible, silver solder would work," enthused Bill.

Grin.

Bill machined the slide and frame extensions slightly over-sized and created a stepped joint on the slide to withstand the force of recoil, and added a butt joint on the frame. Chris silver-soldered his way into 1903 history and without any fanfare, Bill finally had the raw material to finish his dream pistol.

"You can't even see the joint unless you look real careful," said Bill. "But that sort of adds to the magic of it all, to see that kind of silver solder work!"

Yup. We'd agree. Well done, Chris.

Bill spent another 110 hours finishing up the fit and finish on the project to meet his high standards. But as Bill said, "Hey, who's counting?"

The final result? Well, you see it here. It teases the eye, and no matter how many times you see it, you keep thinking, "Wait, that can't be. No, really, that doesn't exist. That can't happen, no way, no how, I'm dreaming and I'll wake up soon."

But actually it is real, and it did happen, and you can see it right here, and, well, you're actually awake more than likely. I held it, snicked the slide once when Bill was distracted by Ms. Suzi, and even pulled the trigger (sorry Bill), and it's as smooth and nifty as the original. Well, as an original 1903, if they had made them in .45 ACP. Which they didn't, of course — but should have.

But now they do — or at least Bill does. If you want one, you'll have to talk to Bill. Have your Platinum Diamond-Zirconium American Express card handy if you plan on giving him an order for one. Oh, and be sitting down when you ask how much. No, really.



If you have to have one (and maybe you do) you can reach Bill at: Cylinder & Slide Shop, (402) 721-4277, www.cylinder-slide.com.