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**Ultimate Personal Gun-
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CYLINDER & SLIDE RETRO .45 ACP

A pure 1911 the way John M. Browning had originally designed it!

By Rob Garrett

As with many of the readers, guns have played an important part of my life's journey. One of my sentimental favorites is a Smith & Wesson nickel-finished Model 36 I bought in 1978 shortly after I entered law enforcement. I wore the little Chief as an on-duty back-up gun and an off-duty carry every day for almost 15 years. I also carried it

during my wedding, in the delivery room as both my children were born and many other special occasions. When my son recently got married, it was only appropriate that he wear it at his wedding. This is the way traditions are born and how many of us mark milestones.

Four years ago, I was preparing to turn 50 and was debating how to celebrate the momentous occasion. I wanted to build or customize something special to commemorate the passing of half a century. I

briefly considered having the Chief's Special engraved but could not bring myself to strip the beautiful original factory nickel. I had several 1911s in the safe but nothing really fit the bill.

After consulting with a couple of close friends, I decided I wanted a 1911 barbecue gun. Given what the pistol would commemorate, the only fitting project was to build a retro 1911, not an A1 but the original as J.M.B. (John Moses Browning) first designed it. I called my good friend



Brass flies at the range as the 1911 was broken in. The striking blue, ivory grips and engraving continue to attract attention.

This classic 1911 was assembled by Bill Laughridge of C&S, engraved by Tim Adlam, finished by Paul Lippold of Ron's Gun Shop, and wears Nutmeg Sport's ivory grips.

and fellow antique, Bill Laughridge at Cylinder & Slide and convinced him to sign on to the project. Laughridge not only agreed to build the 1911 but he also offered some sound advice.

Caspian Frame & Slide

I considered basing my gun on one of the new production Colt World War I 1911 replicas. However, when I looked at what they were selling for, I realized that the project would quickly exceed my

budget. Looking for other options, I called Laughridge who suggested using a Caspian Arms 1911 frame and slide.

Caspian Arms has established a reputation as a leader in 1911 components and is proud to be able to say that they are truly made in the USA. Their forged frames and cast slides are domestically produced then machined to their final form in Caspian's shop. What I didn't know, until talking to Laughridge was that Caspian manufactures their frames and

slides in the classic 1911 configuration.

The great thing about going straight to the manufacturer is that you have a variety of options. While the standard finish of Caspian's Classic receiver is stainless, I chose carbon steel because I wanted a traditional blued finish. When ordering a frame, the customer has the option to request a custom serial number. I couldn't turn that down and ordered my frame with my initials, my birth year, and the letter "L." Laughridge requested that I order a

bald slide with no sight cuts. Once again, this was easy when starting with new parts from the original manufacturer.

C&S Custom Parts

Having the frame and slide taken care of, the next task was to gather the rest of the parts. I rummaged through my parts bin and pulled out a few items. I then called a couple of friends and explained what I was building, and why. They were kind enough to dig around in their junk and make some donations to the cause. In about two weeks, I had an original hammer, trigger, thumb safety, grip safety, magazine release, mainspring housing and slide stop.

The one part I could not scrape up was an original rear sight, so let me take time to give the appropriate credit. The rear sight, even though it looks perfect, is not original. Laughridge took a standard 1911A1 rear sight, hand cut and shaped it to the original shape. This was a true labor of love that I really appreciated. I chose a match-grade stainless barrel from Bar Sto that I had delivered straight to C&S. I shipped all the parts I had come up with to C&S where they started building the gun in the white. While this was being done, I had to decide on the engraving and finishing that would come later.

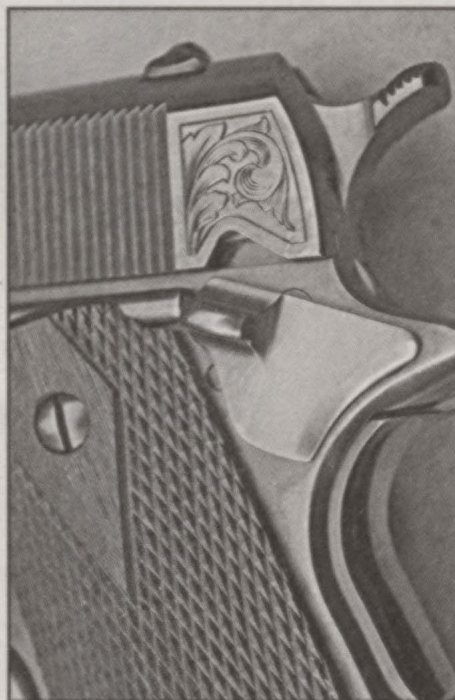
Adlam Engraving

Engraving is a very personal decision that is influenced by personal tastes and preferences. This part of the project brought its own issues with deciding on how much coverage, the particular style to be used, and what engraver to use. I looked at a lot of books and hundreds of engraved pistols on the web. I quickly found that it was easy to find lots of samples that I didn't like. However, finding something I wanted on my own pistol was significantly harder.

In one of the books I came across the work of Tim Adlam and remembered that I had met Adlam at a show. I called Adlam and explained the project and he agreed to send me some sketches. He seemed



The coverage of engraving was limited to enhance, but not overpower the graceful lines of the 1911. Caspian Arms offers custom serial numbers for an additional charge.



The author worked with engraver Tim Adlam to come up with an appropriate pattern that was open and balanced for the pistol. The thumb safety is original.

to have a clear understanding of what I was trying to create and we settled on an open scroll design and the right amount of coverage that was within the budget. I was amazed that when I received the rough sketches, it was exactly what I had in mind for the 1911.

Once C&S finished the basic fitting, the slide and frame were shipped off for engraving. Adlam is both good and popular, so I had to wait several months for him to get to my job. The engraving was perfect, the pattern was proportional to the location on the pistol and the execution was everything I could have asked for. I must admit that it looked a little sparse when viewed on a stripped frame and bare slide but I knew the project was incomplete. I shipped the frame and slide to C&S where they were mated up with the rest of the parts for final fitting before being blued.

Ron's Gun Shop Bluing

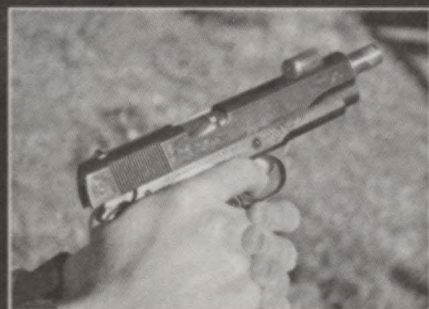
Those who have seen the original Colt 1911s can appreciate the bluing that was unique to Colt in the early days. A little research found that Paul Lippold of Ron's Gun Shop specializes in both restoration and bluing of all antique and classic firearms, as well as custom gun bluing and case coloring for modern arms. When I learned that Lippold did the bluing for the Colt Custom shop and used Colt's original carbonia bluing, I knew I had found the right place.

The box of parts was shipped from Laughridge's shop to Lippold's business. I was back to waiting. For those needing restoration work, Lippold can re-mark patent dates, proof marks and caliber markings. Finally, I got a call from Laughridge that everything was back from bluing and he would try to get back on it "as soon as he could." More waiting.

A month or two later, Laughridge called and said there was a problem. The finish on the slide stop, thumb safety and grip



The birthday pistol was not intended to be a safe queen. On the range, it ran as a custom 1911 should and handled extremely well. For an everyday duty gun, the original 1911 sights are a challenge. However, to have anything other than a "hump and a bump" on this pistol was not an option.





The front sides of the slide received a French border and scrollwork.



The French border was extended to the cocking serrations. A small scroll was engraved, just forward of the slide stop to give overall balance. Adlam signed his name on the left side of the slide.

safety did not match the frame and slide. A call to Lippold and I learned that after the bluing process, the color of parts can change. The parts were returned so they could be stripped and re-blued. This was more delay but I wanted it to be right and so did Lippold. When they were returned to C&S, the color was perfect and all of the parts match perfectly. Now, everything was gathered together at C&S for final assembly and fitting.

Final Assembly

Every so often I would call and remind Laughridge of the project. "I think I have a box of scrap parts around here somewhere with your name on it," he said. What can you say about a friend like that? Finally, in August of 2008, a full 4 years after starting the project, I received a call from Laughridge informing me my BBQ gun was finished and he would ship it the next day. He said he was not going to shoot it. His final comment was "it all came together okay" but there was some comment about "the scratching on the slide and the tacky serial number." That's Bill!

When the pistol arrived, it was packaged in one of Laughridge's cardboard reproduction boxes and wrapped in anti-corrosion paper. Inside was an envelope with a shot group where Laughridge had put five of six rounds into a 1-inch group at 15 yards. While this may not sound like much, remember, the sights are no more than a hump and a bump and Laughridge

isn't as young as he used to be. I knew he couldn't let it out of his shop without being the first to dirty it up.

What I unwrapped from the paper was exactly what I had envisioned over 4 years ago. To say it was beautiful doesn't do it justice. No beavertail grip safety, no ambidextrous safety, no speed trigger or hammer, just pure 1911 the way that Browning had designed it. The carbonia bluing seemed to radiate the 100 years of history. As I examined each part, I wondered where some of the parts had been originally.

The elegant hammer with its short-checked spur and the long smooth trigger tied all the parts and history together. The slide to frame fit was silky smooth and the installation of the BarSto barrel was match grade. Perhaps the most elegant single part on the entire pistol was Laughridge's hand-shaped rear sight. Laughridge sent the gun with a set of walnut double diamond checkered grips.

Nutmeg Ivory Grips

While they were okay, I always wanted ivory stocks. While there are a lot of folks doing ivory these days, I called Nutmeg Sports. In 1969, Jim Alaimo returned home from Vietnam and found a job at Colt's manufacturing plant. He worked his way through the plant and in 1990 was promoted to the Superintendent of the Custom Shop. Changes at the plant led Alaimo to leave Colt in 1993 and open Nutmeg.

What was Colt's loss was a gain for the rest of us. Alaimo not only has some of the finest ivory stocks available but also offers a full range of services for Colt Single Action Armies. He maintains a close relationship with several engravers and refinishers, and can put together a complete restoration project.

I called Alaimo and requested a set of smooth 1911 ivory stocks with some character. A week later, I received some of



A custom pistol deserves the proper leather. John Bianchi's Frontier Gunleather provided an El Paso rig for the article. The El Paso is styled after the 1911 rigs worn by the Texas Rangers and Border Patrol from the 1920s through the 1950s.



Nutmeg Sports provided the handsome ivory grips for the project. The fit and finish were exceptional and provided the final touch to the pistol.

the prettiest ivory that I have seen in many years. Fit and finish was exceptional and the grain was absolutely exquisite.

Retro Holster

A retro pistol needs some retro leather and since this was a special pistol, not just any leather would do. John Bianchi was my first call. Bianchi has been making holsters for over 50 years. As a California cop, he started making holsters in his garage in 1958. This hobby grew to a full-fledged business in 1960 and by 1968 Bianchi Holster Company was born.

Bianchi now runs Frontier Gunleather and specializes in custom western leather. Many of his holsters are exact reproductions from the old west. Each rig is cut, stitched and wet molded to the specific pistol. The combination of premium cowhide and hand-rubbed finish make each Frontier rig a true work of art.

I contacted Frontier and requested an El Paso holster, magazine pouch and gun belt. The El Paso is styled after the 1911 rigs worn by the Texas Rangers and Border Patrol from the 1920s through the 1950s. It is a high ride, open top holster that

features a Mexican loop design with an exposed trigger. Bianchi offers a matching 2-inch tapered belt and magazine pouch. I would have liked to order the holster with custom border stamping but the short timeline mandated a plain rig.

Being a custom leather shop, Frontier offers a variety of options from hand carving and border stamping to sterling silver buckles and engraved sterling conchos. Placing the 1911 into the El Paso rig reminded me of some of the old photographs I remembered seeing of Rangers riding the Texas/Mexico border. The two just seemed to go together.

Range Time

The only thing left was a range trip. Several people could not believe that I was going to shoot my custom built, engraved 1911 with ivory stocks. They were even more incredulous when I told them that I planned to carry it on special occasions. At the range the 1911 ran like a top.

Even with the smaller ejection port, it was 100 percent reliable with ball ammo and Remington's 230-grain Golden Saber. Despite using an original trigger, Laughridge was able to get the trigger pull down to an even 4 pounds with very little overtravel. Every aspect of the pistol displays a sense of history and character.

To see the completion of a project like this brings a great deal of satisfaction. I could have found a stock pistol, had it engraved and that would have been okay. However, by starting from the ground up, this pistol has taken on a special meaning. Knowing that it contains many original parts that were donated by several friends gives the pistol a warmth and personality. In addition, when you work with great folks like Tim Adlam, John Bianchi, Ron Lippold and Gary Smith, you come away with new friends. I also owe my good friend, Bill Laughridge, a debt of gratitude for helping bring a dream become reality.

In the end, I have a great pistol that will be a family heirloom for years to come. It will be carried at special events and shot on a regular basis. If the bluing becomes a little worn due to holster wear, or it picks up a scratch or ding so be it. Even pretty pistols were meant to be carried and shot—including this one!

SPECIFICATIONS:

CYLINDER & SLIDE RETRO 1911

Caliber:	.45ACP
Barrel:	5 inches (match-grade Bar Sto)
OA Length:	8.5 inches
Weight:	42 ounces
Sights:	Laughridge's hand-shaped rear
Grips:	Nutmeg ivory
Action:	SA
Finish:	Carbonia blue
Capacity:	7-shot mag
Price:	Call For Pricing

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Cylinder & Slide
800-448-1713; cylinder-slide.com

Caspian Arms
802-472-6454; caspianarms.com

Frontier Gunleather
877-877-4704; frontiergunleather.com

Nutmeg Stocks
860-872-7373; nutmegsports.com

Ron's Gun Shop Restorations
920-688-2857; ronsgunshop.com

Tim Adlam Engraving
920-235-4589; adlamengraving.com