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Cylinder & Slide Safety Fast Shooting Kit

Although it is generally recognized that carrying an M1911 Government Model pistol with a round in the chamber, the hammer cocked and the thumb safety engaged allows the fastest and most accurate defensive shooting, many law enforcement agencies and armed citizens are leery of carrying a gun in "condition one" or "cocked and locked" mode.

An alternative is available with the Safety Fast Shooting (SFS) Kit marketed by Cylinder & Slide (C&S) of Fremont, Neb., which is well known for its custom handguns and aftermarket handgun parts.

Produced by R.D.I.H. of Belgium, the SFS has a replacement safety plunger spring, an ambidextrous extended cocking lever that replaces the stock thumb safety, replacement Series 80 upper and lower levers and a special hammer assembly. Also included is a new mainspring, although an unmodified factory mainspring can be used.

The heart of the system is the hammer assembly, which consists of a part called the hammer ring that contains the hammer hooks and is connected by the hammer strut to the mainspring, and a part called the hammer, which incorporates the hammer spur. Both parts rotate somewhat independently around the hammer pin axis, and are connected via interlocking lugs. Also linked to the hammer is the thumb safety-like cocking lever. Sandwiched between the hammer and hammer ring is a circular spring that tensions the hammer rearward.

To use the kit after it is installed, first retract and release the slide to load a live round in the chamber. That cocks the hammer assembly: The hooks on the hammer ring engage the sear, and the spur of the hammer is tensioned rearward in the familiar position by the aforementioned circular spring. To put the pistol into the SFS mode, push the cocked hammer forward; it will move nearly to the normal "hammer down" position. That action also lifts the cocking lever into the thumb safety notch in the slide.

To fire the gun, simply thumb the cocking lever down. That action automatically flips the spur of the hammer to its cocked position. Pulling the trigger causes the sear to release the hooks on the hammer ring and allows the ring to rotate forward under mainspring tension. The hammer, which is connected to the hammer ring by interlocking lugs, also rotates forward, striking the firing pin and igniting the cartridge primer.

The kit also incorporates a small, flat drop safety mounted on the hammer ring, and that rests between the hammer and frame when the hammer is pushed forward. That prevents an inadvertent discharge even if the gun is dropped hammer-down.

We installed SFS Kits in both a Springfield Champion in .45 ACP and a Colt Delta Elite in 10 mm Auto. Installation closely follows the instruction sheet, and involves little more than replacing the stock components with the corresponding components from the kit. Neither the kits nor the frames require modification for proper functioning though dimensional variations among various M1911 frames may rarely require slight modification.

During more than 200 repeated cycles of drawing and firing from the SFS mode, both kits worked flawlessly, and the replacement Series 80 levers worked properly in the Series 80 Colt Delta Elite in which they were installed.

Criticisms of the SFS Kit are minor. Some may find the radical shape of the hammer spur to be off-putting; we'd suggest a more traditional round spur, as well as a steel right-side cocking lever.

Available from: Cylinder & Slide, Inc. (Dept. AR), 245 East 4th St., Fremont, NE 68025; (402) 721-427; www.cylinder-slide.com. Suggested retail price: $170 (blued), $180 (stainless).

The kit has a replacement safety plunger spring, an ambidextrous cocking lever (replacing the stock safety), a new mainspring, replacement Series 80 upper and lower levers and a special hammer unit.

Pushing the hammer forward (above) causes the SFS's cocking lever to rise into the thumb safety notch in the slide. To fire the gun, simply thumb the cocking lever downward. That flips the hammer back to the cocked position, allowing firing with a pull of the trigger.