

Cap & Ball



REVOLVERS & CONVERSIONS PUT TO THE TEST

Conversions, Open Tops, and some Conclusions

Part 3a

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Big bore percussion revolvers, their conversions and the Colt Open Tops tamed the American West, not the Colt Single Action Armies, which came too late. In their 1870 class—equivalent to the SASS Frontiersman category—German cowboys and cowgirls prefer clones of the venerable Colt 1860 and Remington 1863. When it comes to newly fabricated conversions we note an emerging interest for currently available models of the

replica industry but a few variants are missing for demanding competitors.

Our findings might help Wild West aficionados to select their new pair of conversion or Open Top match pistols. Which revolver models were to be entered in the test was based on these assumptions:

- Most shooters in the market for conversions will pick guns available from reputed makers of the industry. The variants currently offered cover a basic range of newly made, solidly manufactured models of the Colt Open Top, factory and

field conversions of Colt and Remington, plus fun pistols like offsprings of the silver screen.

- When you compete with cap and ball (C&B) revolvers in a BDS sanctioned match you do not have to meet a power factor. But with breechloaders you have to be in the MIP 112,5 bracket. Since we are in this launch phase for the new “1875 Conversions Class” sponsored by the Hesse State division of the BDS, the current objective is to get maximum awareness and to foster interest for this type of revolver. To make entering this class easy, no MIP is defined yet. Once the 1875 class is up and running, ammo delivering a minimum MIP is likely to be required in the future. This is in line with the Spirit of the Game. The MIP will probably be the same 112,5 like in the 1880 and 1890 class.

The charm of conversions: If you want a conversion with PC dimensions, currently the only way available is having one made by a conversion artist because he will be using a percussion revolver as the base gun. Apart from being a technical gem, this new C&B pistol turned breech loader of yours will comprise the constructive weaknesses of this 19th century

technology—which represents the particular charm of this type of revolvers to the authors.

Smokeless is easy: All breech loaders in the test were 100% reliable with nitro and able of more than sufficient accuracy for Cowboy Action Shooting™ purposes.

Torture test blackpowder ammo? The only true powder separates the men from the boys. We had our first “drop-outs” from MoS2 lubing when we attempted to fire blackpowder rounds quickly through a given revolver. It is our considered opinion MoS2 can be used for conversions if loaded with smokeless rounds only, but should not be used with blackpowder cartridges; see notes above under C&B revolvers. Once the limited use of MoS2 was established, this “new to us” finding was considered in the further testing.

Conversions disabled by MoS2 lubrication during our first blackpowder series, namely Centaure Mumme Colt Army Long Cylinder Conversion #120X9, Uberti Mumme Remington New Model Army Conversion #242X9, and Uberti Colt Army Richards-Mason Conversion #X027X1 were granted a re-start. Before this they were completely disassembled, all MoS2 residue removed, then assembled, and lubed with a blackpowder compatible lube based on vaseline (HP .357).

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Italian platform strategy: On the other hand, cylinder diameters and height of the frames of conversions from the Italian replica industry are bigger, fatter than the same parts of the respective percussion guns. They are beefed-up to accommodate six round cylinders for cartridges bigger and stronger than the historically correct .38 and .44 calibers. A few aesthetics might feel offended by this move. There is an important feature on their Colt conversions, however, that gets them light years ahead of period correct conversions in the function department. What is this? Italian Colt type conversions feature a gas ring as an integrated part at the fore-end of their cylinders. This gas ring protects this critical area from blackpowder fouling once a blackpowder compatible lube is applied. This not PC approach keeps your conversion going day after day without cleaning or further lubrication. Yesteryear only the Colt Open Tops had cylinders with these gas rings. But, at the dismay of a few purists, the Italians installed, such cylinders also in their Richards Transitional (Uberti) or Richards-Mason (Uberti) conversions. This feature keeps the pardes and pardettes in the game who compete with such conversions loaded with blackpowder rounds.

stages, apply new lube to the cylinder pin, or add a few drops of Ballistol or a spray shot of WD-40 to the fore-front of the cylinder to make sure that moving parts maintain their movability.

Safety first and how to avoid stress at the loading table: We conversion aficionados know our revolvers inside out. But, it is unlikely your range officer at the next match shares the deep knowledge about these somewhat exotic pistols. We suggest, therefore, you introduce your prized irons and their "finesses" to the loading table RO. Why's that?

A few conversions are a bit tricky. They were designed with an almost non-existing gap between conversion ring and breech end of the cylinder, or an integral lip as part of the conversion ring that covers this gap. Add recessed chambers to this construction and you know what we are driving at. To visually check safe loading of five rounds only and the hammer on the empty chamber is a challenge for the loading table RO on such revolvers. Hence, it might be useful if you and your loading table RO count the five rounds to be loaded together and load the piece with him closely supervising, ensuring the hammer eventually rests on that empty chamber.



Recesses for the cartridge rims of Uberti Remington conversion (left) and "flat" breech side of chamber of Uberti Colt conversion (right)

However, most conversions and all Open Tops feature a wide gap between conversion ring, back plate or recoil shield, and cylinder. The visual check on these revolvers is a simple affair like on clones of the Colt SAAs and Ruger Vaqueros.

• Revolvers with narrow gap between conversion ring and cylinder: Uberti Remington New Model 1863 Army and Navy, custom Remington conversions with wide conversion ring, custom Colt Army Richards conversion (R1)



Hammer resting on an empty chamber? Difficult to see on Uberti Remington (top), but no issue with Uberti Colt Navy-conversion (bottom)

• Revolver with wide gap between conversion ring/back plate/recoil shield: Armi San Marco Colt Army Richards (R1), Uberti Colt Army Richards Transitional (R2) and Richards-Mason, Uberti Colt Navy Richards-Mason, Uberti Man-with-no-Name conversion, Uberti Colt Open Top; custom Colt Army Long Cylinder and Remington New Model Army "factory" conversion

Weak main spring: Exchanging the original heavy main spring for a lighter one might be useful in custom conversions of percussion revolvers, but check the brand of your primers for positive ignition.

Actual testing to be presented next month ...

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.38er Colt Navy conversion cylinder (left) with Remington Navy conversion cylinder without gas ring (right). The gas ring on the Colt protects the arbor from fouling

Historical correctness: Modern custom conversions of the Colt Army 1860 or the Remington New Model 1863 Army and the Remington conversions of the industry are not equipped with this type of cylinder as protection against blackpowder fouling. Even with the right lube, these models are sensitive to blackpowder fouling like your C&B revolver. You are well advised to wipe off the crud from the cylinder between

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