Cap & Ball

GUNS & GEAR

Revolvers & Conversions Put To The Test

Conversions, Open Tops, and some Conclusions

Part 3c

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Conclusions Open for Discussions

Superiority of the Colt system: Our tests indicate Open Top clones of Colt revolvers with their big grooved arbors holding a generous load of lube are the more reliable revolvers for the sport. They proved to be less sensitive to blackpowder fouling compared to solid frame revolvers of the Remington style with their skinny cylinder pin and narrow flat that holds much less of the lube. This is particularly true when the Uberti Colt conversions and Open Tops with their gas rings as extra protection of the arbor are entered into the equation.

For painless shooting fun, pards and pardettes with a knack for Remington percussion revolvers and conversions made from C&B pistols should have small hands.

Models available from the replica industry: Clones of Colt and Remington Army caliber percussion revolvers are the two proven models for Cowboy Action Shooting™ in the 1870 or Frontiersman category. They are available from a couple of existing Italian makers in various levels of mechanical fit. Pre-owned models from a defunct Belgian and Spanish maker respectively can be considered because of their inherent accuracy and harder steel used for their construction.

Current offerings of the industry comprise an interesting range of big bore versions of Colt and Remington conversions at reasonable prices. It is our considered opinion, however, that four models are missing that offer features of particular interest to today's shooters in the game. These four conversions are currently only available from a few conversion artists as custom guns … at a price. IMHO the industry may want to consider making the following conversions:

- **Richards Conversion of the Colt 1860 Army:** elegant conversion with the highly visible rear sight on top of the conversion ring. This variant is regularly available from a number of American and European gunsmiths using percussion revolver clones as base guns.
- **Long Cylinder Conversion of the Colt 1860 Army:** economy version of the Colt Open Top sans loading gate and ejector, but dovetailed rear sight on top of the barrel. The originals of this very basic conversion are said to having been made using original Colt parts in Mexico. For the industry, a modern version should be low cost in the making, but even one custom made by a gunsmith should not cost an arm and a leg.
- **Early Field Conversion of the Remington New Model 1863 Army:** remember Clint Eastwood in PALE RIDER? That's the one, again a pistol without loading gate or ejector.
- **Factory Conversion of the Remington New Model 1863 Army:** without loading gate or conversion ring, but back plate and ejector. The cost of making any of the two Remington conversions should be below the ones currently available from Italy.

Custom conversions of three of the four revolvers suggested were entered in the test. Hopefully a scout from the industry reads our article and convinces his masters to tool up for making them?!

No Thuer conversions for the game: after some discussion we did not enter a pair of newly made Colt Thuer frontloading conversions in the test. We found them not reliable enough to compete successfully against both breech loading conversions and C&B revolvers. In addition, we wished to enter only such conversions that can safely handle blackpowder AND smokeless cartridges.

Success factors: Soot Lords and Ladies have learnt to use the "right" lube and apply the "right" lubing procedures, to prevent or delay blackpowder fouling taking its toll on the functioning of their percussion revolvers. When it comes to shooting conversions or Open Tops, this subject is often neglected when the Cowboy Action Shooting™ match calls for blackpowder rounds. For less stress during the match, we suggest generous application of lube to the arbors or cylinder pins of the PC designed conversion clones without gas ring, plus the application of a "seal" of the chambers over the bullets with a sticky lube like HP .357, unless you load these with specially designed blackpowder bullets with wide lube ring filled with a suitable lube or a lube pill. This adds to the lubrication of the forefront of the cylinder as well as to the arbor or cylinder pin.

Chamber sealing with HP .357 provides additional lubing

Nominal calibers, loads, and ammo: We were surprised when our test showed the measured rifling groove diameters with properly adjusted chamber mouth diameters in front stuffers or bullet diameters in breechloaders affect velocity and MOI more than the size of the cylinder gap. We also noted a remarkably wide range of measurements of the nominal calibers – chamber mouth and rifling groove diameter – in conversions and Open Tops. This finding might inspire reloaders to develop their own lighter, but factor compatible loads, after they take measurements of their pair of revolvers.

Modifications and Tuning: Cowboys and cowgirls experienced in the game prefer their grip panels oiled because they offer a more positive hold than varnished panels. Some contestants push this a bit further and have their grips checkered, or the grip panel on the side of the shooting hand sculpted. Now you can cock your pistol easier without altering the hold.

Without tuning, you will not make it to the top! Professionally tuned revolvers – no matter the maker – can be cocked faster, provide for a crisp trigger pull, have reproducible POIs, but above all will function more reliably than the not tuned variants, which is what counts in this game. In this respect percussion revolvers and conversions are no different from any other gun in Cowboy Action, which pleases the gunsmiths specialized in tuning cowboy guns.

Significance: The number of pistols in the test is not sufficient for statistically significant conclusions. However, our approach to standardize procedures and loads should add new insight, provide for challenging discussions and might help you pards and pardettes with your decision for a new pair of percussion revolvers, conversions, or Open Tops!

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April 1, 2012