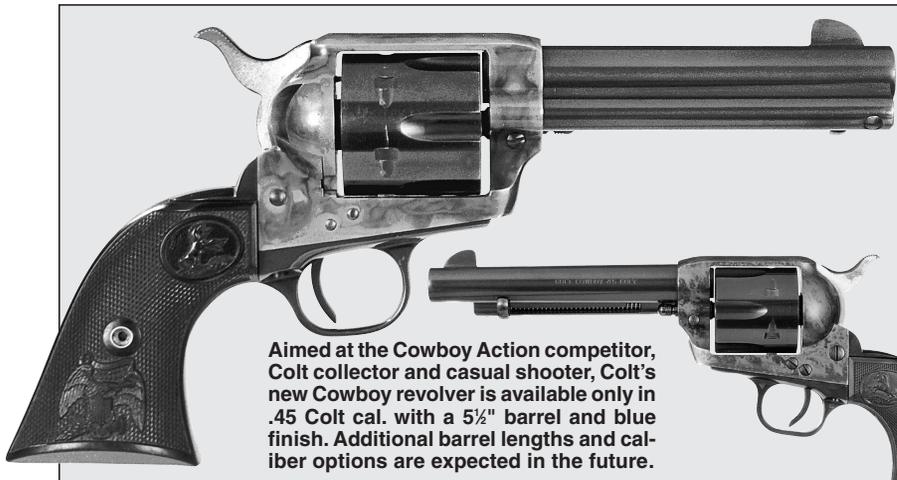


# DOPE BAG

The *American Rifleman* has used the phrase "Dope Bag" at least since 1921, when Col. Townsend Whelen first titled his column with it. Even then, it had been in use for years, referring to a sack used by target shooters to hold ammunition and accessories on the firing line. "Sight dope" also was a traditional marksman's term for sight adjustment information, while judging wind speed and direction was called "doping the wind."

CAUTION: Technical data and information contained herein are intended to provide information based on the limited experience of individuals under specific conditions and circumstances. They do not detail the comprehensive training procedures, techniques and safety precautions absolutely necessary to properly carry on similar activity. Read the notice and disclaimer on the contents page. Always consult comprehensive reference manuals and bulletins for details of proper training requirements, procedures, techniques and safety precautions before attempting any similar activity.

## COLT COWBOY REVOLVER



Aimed at the Cowboy Action competitor, Colt collector and casual shooter, Colt's new Cowboy revolver is available only in .45 Colt cal. with a 5 1/2" barrel and blue finish. Additional barrel lengths and caliber options are expected in the future.



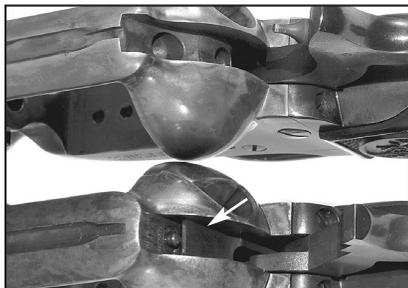
Although similar in size and appearance, cylinders of the Cowboy (r.) and SAA are not interchangeable because the cam surfaces on the cylinders are different. Note also the difference in the length of the base pins.

Comparing a Colt Cowboy side-by-side with an SAA, minor differences in design begin to emerge. For example, the high-polish blue on the Peacemaker's barrel, ejector shroud, cylinder and grip frame has been replaced with a medium-polish blue on the Cowboy. Another change is in the Cowboy's hammer, which is smaller than that of the SAA with a slightly different shape and horizontal grooves cut into the spur instead of the cross hatching of the Peacemaker. The black plastic grip panels of the Cowboy share the rampant Colt logo with the SAA, but lack the U.S. seal and motto. At this time, the Cowboy is offered only in .45 Colt cal. with a 5 1/2" barrel and a blue finish while the SAA is offered in .44-40 Win. or .45 Colt with a 4 1/4" or 5 1/2" barrel and choice of blue or nickel finishes.

Now in its 126th year, the Colt Single Action Army (SAA) remains an icon to American shooters. Due in no small part to its reputation as "the gun that won the West," the popularity of the SAA "Peacemaker" continues to amaze its fans—including the manufacturer—and confound its critics. Yet, even a seminal design like the SAA can be improved to bring it up to modern expectations. And, this is exactly what Colt has done. For the collector, Cowboy Action competitor and casual shooter, Colt

has introduced a new model of the Single Action Army revolver called the Colt Cowboy. The classic SAA remains in production at Colt as well.

Essentially, the new Colt Cowboy revolver is a Single Action Army with an investment cast, steel receiver, a slightly more utilitarian finish and a transfer bar safety system. These changes enable Colt to offer the new Cowboy model at a suggested retail price about half that of the standard SAA Peacemaker. From any distance, it is difficult to distinguish a Cowboy from an SAA because Colt has gone to great lengths to preserve the style, balance, handling and flavor of the classic Peacemaker. For example, cocking the Cowboy model produces three distinct clicks in similar manner to the salutary four clicks of the Peacemaker; the half-cock loading position of the hammers remains the same. Other common features include barrel length, caliber, sights, grip shape, cylinder size and fluting, flat mainspring and frame shape. Both models have the time-honored, case-hardened finish on the frame.



One of the major differences between the Colt Cowboy and the classic SAA revolver is the addition of a transfer bar safety system on the Cowboy (arrow). With this system, the Cowboy can be carried safely with a cartridge in the chamber beneath the hammer while the original Colt SAA cannot.

### ACCURACY RESULTS

.45 Colt Cartridge	Vel. @15'	Smallest (f.p.s.)	Largest (ins.)	Average (ins.)
Winchester No. X45CP 255-gr. LRN	694 Avg. 14 Sd	2.42	3.72	3.11
PMC No. 45LA 255-gr. LRN	617 Avg. 22 Sd	3.24	4.18	3.57
Black Hills No. BH45C250 250-gr. LRN	668 Avg. 19 Sd	2.83	3.98	3.31
Average Extreme Spread				3.33

Five consecutive five-shot groups from 25 yds. fired from Ransom Rest. Abbreviations: Sd (standard deviation), LRN (lead round nose).

## COLT COWBOY

**MANUFACTURER:** Colt's Mfg. Co., Inc.  
(Dept. AR), P.O. Box 1868, Hartford,  
CT 06144, (800) 962-COLT  
**MECHANISM TYPE:** single-action revolver  
**CALIBER:** .45 Colt  
**OVERALL LENGTH:** 10<sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>"  
**BARREL LENGTH:** 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"  
**WEIGHT:** 38<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> ozs.  
**WIDTH:** 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"  
**HEIGHT:** 5<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"  
**STOCKS:** two-piece, checkered, black  
plastic with Colt logo  
**CYLINDER CAPACITY:** six  
**RIFLING:** six-groove, LH twist  
**TRIGGER:** single-stage, 4-lb. pull  
**SIGHTS:** blade front, fixed square notch  
rear cut into topstrap  
**ACCESSORIES:** foam-lined, plastic  
carry case  
**SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE:** \$600

While the base pin diameter of the Cowboy is identical to the SAA, the Cowboy's base pin is shorter and equipped with a spring-loaded plunger on the tip. Also, the removable base pin bushing inside the cylinder of First and Second Model SAA revolvers is fixed on the Cowboy.

Of course, incorporation of a transfer bar safety system in the Cowboy requires a number of changes in the frame and fire control mechanism. For example, the Cowboy hammer lacks the firing pin of the Peacemaker hammer and the hand that rotates the cylinder is different as are other small parts required by the transfer bar safety. Gone also on the Cowboy is the firing pin bushing found on the rear face of the SAA frame. Measuring the frames of the two revolvers revealed they are approximately the same

length and height but differ slightly in width—the Cowboy's topstrap measures .730" while that of the SAA is .710".

While the addition of a transfer bar safety system may not seem like a big change, in fact, this represents a major improvement that cures a longstanding concern of the SAA—carrying the gun with the hammer down on a loaded chamber. The classic Peacemaker revolver is dangerous to carry in this condition because its hammer-mounted firing pin allows energy from a blow, even accidental, to be transferred directly to the primer, possibly causing a discharge.

With its transfer bar safety system, the Colt Cowboy effectively prevents accidental blows to the hammer from being directly transferred to the primer. If the trigger is not pulled, the transfer bar is not deployed and the hammer cannot reach the firing pin, which is now located in the frame. As a result, the Cowboy is safe to carry with its cylinder fully loaded while the Peacemaker is not. Colt has integrated the transfer bar safety system into the classic SAA design without destroying the styling, handling or operation. For all practical purposes, the transfer bar safety remains transparent to the user and observer.

Many parts of the Colt Cowboy, such as the barrel, ejector assembly, grip frame and trigger, are interchangeable with the SAA. Parts that are not interchangeable include the frame, cylinder, hammer, fire control parts and grip panels. The Peacemaker has remained successful in part because of its simplicity and low number of parts. With the Cowboy model, Colt has tried to maintain these characteristics by adding only the parts necessary for the transfer bar safety system.

Firing the Cowboy proved that the handling, balance and flavor of the Peacemaker have been successfully preserved. Unless they counted the number of clicks when cocking the hammer, shooters could not distinguish one model from the other. For Cowboy Action competition, this will be welcome news. Customers need not worry about workmanship and fit of the Cowboy—the example we tested was judged excellent on both counts.

Like the Peacemaker, the sights on the Colt Cowboy are calibrated for 255-gr. lead, round-nose ammunition at a catalog muzzle velocity of 860 f.p.s. Loads with lighter bullets and/or higher velocities may not shoot to the same point of aim. As the sights of the Cowboy are not easily adjustable, this must be considered if the use of such loads is anticipated.

No doubt Colt has a winner in the Cowboy. We look forward to it being offered in other calibers, such as .44-40 Win., and with other barrel lengths.

NRD



The cylinder hand (arrow) on the Colt Cowboy (l.) is different from that of the SAA. Note also that the new Cowboy lacks the firing pin bushing on the recoil plate.

## TRADITIONS LIGHTNING



The Traditions Lightning has features including a fluted, stainless steel barrel and removable muzzle brake that help set it apart from similar guns from other makers. Many variants of this gun are available to suit just about any budget, need or desire.

**B**OLT-ACTION muzzleloading rifles are now commonplace in many product lines. As this market gets ever more crowded, manufacturers have begun to include options and design features that make their guns stand out from all the rest. Tradition's Lightning is one such rifle. It has many desirable features found on other makes

such as a solid aluminum ramrod, interchangeable breech plugs for No. 11 percussion caps or musket caps and high-visibility fiber-optic sights. What sets this line of rifles apart, however, is the option of a fluted, stainless steel barrel and a removable muzzle brake the maker claims is engineered to reduce felt recoil by as much as 40 percent.

We recently received a Traditions Lightning bolt-action muzzleloader with these two features for test and evaluation. Its barrel is 24" long, and the 4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>-oz. muzzle brake adds another 2<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>" to overall length. A blued barrel with muzzle brake is also available, as well as standard-contour blued or stainless barrels without the brake. All

# DOPE BAG

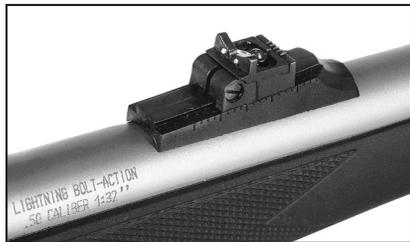
barrels are 24" with a 1:32" rate of twist rifling for stabilizing sabot or conical bullets. A slower, 1:48" twist is also available in .54-cal. barrels.

The brake consists of a cylindrical, stainless steel unit that threads onto the muzzle by hand. For those times when the brake is not used, Traditions has provided a knurled, screw-on cap to protect the threads. Thirty .17" diameter holes drilled at a right angle to the bore around the circumference of the brake provide ample venting of gases to effect recoil reduction.

Synthetic stocks are de rigueur on most muzzleloaders of this type and Tradition's Lightning is no exception. Our sample's black synthetic stock had molded-in checkering of 16 lines per inch on the pistol grip and fore-end, a black plastic pistol grip cap and 1/2"-thick, solid, black rubber recoil pad. Quick-detachable, steel sling swivel studs are standard, and the buttstock has a modest cheek piece. Its profile is svelte—so much so that were it not for the solid construction it would be spindly.

Synthetic stocks for this model can also be had with a camouflage finish including Advantage and Break-up. For those who prefer wood, Traditions also offers walnut-finished hardwood or laminated stocks.

Like the famous '96 Swedish Mauser, the Traditions Lightning cocks on closing the



Sights utilize fiber optics for increased visibility and are adjustable for windage and elevation. The rear has a square plastic unit with an integral semi-buckhorn blade and "U" notch with two green fiber optic dots.

## ACCURACY RESULTS

.50 cal.	Vel. @ 15'	Smallest	Largest	Average
	(f.p.s.)	(ins.)	(ins.)	(ins.)
Speer 300-gr. JSP 100 grs.* Clean Shot CCI Musket Caps	1530 Avg. 17 Sd	3.44	4.94	4.51
Trad. 275-gr. PTBT 95 grs. Goex FFg CCI No. 11 percussion cap	1325 Avg. 45 Sd	2.60	3.50	3.16
Trad. 265-gr. SSHPBT Three Pyrodex Pellets CCI Musket Caps	1870 Avg. 41 Sd	2.84	3.78	3.33
Average Extreme Spread				3.66

Five consecutive five-shot groups at 100 yds., fired from sandbags. \* by volume. Abbreviations: Sd (standard deviation), JSP (jacketed soft-point), PTBT (Penetrator Tip boattail), SSHPBT (semi-spitzer hollow-point boattail)

bolt. This feature adds a margin of safety in that the striker is retracted from the nipple, yet remains uncocked for loading or priming.

Stainless Lightning rifles have the bolt handle brazed onto the bolt body while chrome-moly guns have welded-on bolt handles. As an assembly, the bolt is relatively simple. A single set screw at the rear of the cocking piece keeps the assembly together, and the striker is easily turned out for cleaning using a washer or coin.



The brake consists of a cylindrical, stainless steel unit that threads onto the muzzle by hand. Traditions has provided a knurled, screw-on cap to protect the threads when the brake is not being used.

Further contributing to safety is the automatic safety that is applied when the bolt is operated. The button is on the right side of the action in Remington Model 700 fashion with its position indicated by an "F" or "S" engraved in the action. When in the "safe" position, a small tab on the safety lever pivots between the trigger proper and the trigger housing to block trigger movement.

Sights utilize fiber optics for increased visibility and are fully adjustable for windage and elevation. The rear sight consists of a black plastic ramp and square unit fastened to the barrel with two screws. A dovetail runs the length of the top of this ramp on which rides a square, black plastic unit with integral blade. The blade is semi-buckhorn with a "U" notch, augmented by glowing, green, fiber-optic dots on either side of the notch. Graduation marks on the ramp unit are convenient reference marks for adjustment, but do not correspond with

any particular amount of change in point of impact. Both windage and elevation adjustments are made by loosening the respective retaining screw, sliding the sight in the desired direction and re-tightening the retaining screw to secure the sight in its new position.

The front sight is also a ramped, black plastic unit fastened to the barrel with a screw, but has serrations across the face of the ramp to reduce glare. A clear plastic housing dovetailed into the ramp retains the round, orange, fiber-optic front sight element.

## TRADITIONS

**MANUFACTURER:** Traditions (Dept. AR), P.O. Box 776, Old Saybrook, CT 06475, (860) 388-4656

**CALIBER:** .50 (tested), .54

**ACTION TYPE:** cock-on-closing, bolt-action, percussion-fired muzzleloader

**RECEIVER:** stainless steel (tested), chrome moly

**FINISH:** natural satin stainless steel (tested), gloss blue

**OVERALL LENGTH:** 42½" (without) brake  
**BARREL:** 24", heavy contour, fluted stainless steel with muzzle brake (tested) or without; 24", heavy contour blued with or without muzzle brake

**RIFLING:** conventional, eight-groove, button (blued), cut (stainless), 1:32" RH twist (tested), 1:48" (.54-cal.) RH twist

**WEIGHT:** 8 lbs.

**SIGHTS:** fully adjustable, semi-buckhorn rear with "U" notch and green fiber-optic dots; ramped front with orange fiber-optic element

**TRIGGER:** adjustable, single-stage, 4½-lb. pull

**STOCK:** walnut-stained select hardwood, brown laminate (no checkering), synthetic black or camouflage; length of pull, 14"; drop at heel, 1¾"; drop at comb, 1½"

**ACCESSORIES:** musket cap nipple, No. 11 percussion cap nipple, take-down tools, muzzle cap (rifles with muzzle brake only)

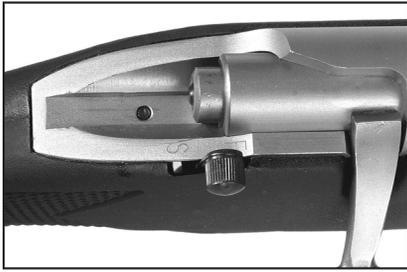
**SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE:** \$219-\$376

Since scopes are used more often than not on a muzzleloader of this type, the action is drilled and tapped for Remington Model 788 bases. We used mounts and rings from S&K to hold a Tasco 3-9x40 mm scope and fired the Traditions Lightning for accuracy at 100 yds. Only sabot bullets were used to take full advantage of the fast rate of twist, and we used loads that included Pyrodex Pellets, Goex blackpowder and Clean Shot blackpowder replacement. The results of this testing are summarized in the accompanying table.

Our testing also corresponded with the opening of Virginia's muzzleloader season, so we took the Traditions Lightning deer hunting. Long guns like the Traditions Lightning are often carried afield cradled in the crook of the arm. The hunt revealed that



The bolt is a relatively simple assembly. A single set screw in the cocking piece keeps the assembly together. After its removal, the gun's striker is easily turned out from the front using a washer or coin as a tool.



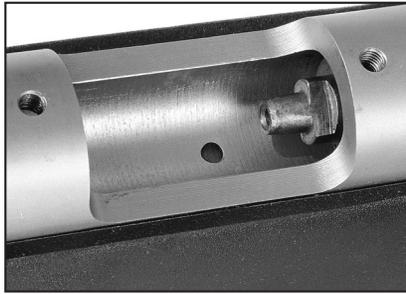
Further contributing to safety is the automatic safety that is applied when the bolt is operated. The safety button is fashioned after the Remington Model 700, with its position indicated by an engraved "F" or "S".

carrying the gun as such gradually pushes the bolt handle up. If not checked regularly, the bolt handle will reach a point where it pops up and jumps back, making a lot of noise.

Our test shooting revealed a number of strong points in favor of this rifle, as well as some that need more consideration. The fluted barrel does a good job of keeping the overall weight of the gun to a manageable level while increasing barrel stiffness. Stock proportions make this gun very pointable, and the recoil pad absorbs much of the recoil. The muzzle brake did seem to reduce felt recoil, though 40 percent may be a stretch. The holes in the brake make loading loose powder troublesome but not impossible, and the gun was considerably more accurate

(about 46 percent) without the brake installed. A very positive aspect of the muzzle brake, however, is that it serves the same function as a false muzzle in that it helps line up the bullet for straight starting into the muzzle. Velocity was also different when using the muzzle brake. When shooting Clean Shot powder, velocities with the brake were about 30 f.p.s. faster. Conversely, when using the brake with the blackpowder loads, velocities averaged 56 f.p.s. slower.

The bolt handle is well-positioned, being easy to grasp, but not so far out as to interfere with the scope. We would have liked to see more attention given to attaching the bolt, though, as there was a notice-



The Lightning employs a "switch nipple" system, so the gun can use either No. 11 caps or musket caps. We tried both in our test and found velocity with musket caps was up to 50 f.p.s. lower than with No. 11s.

able gap on three sides of the root in which fouling will become trapped.

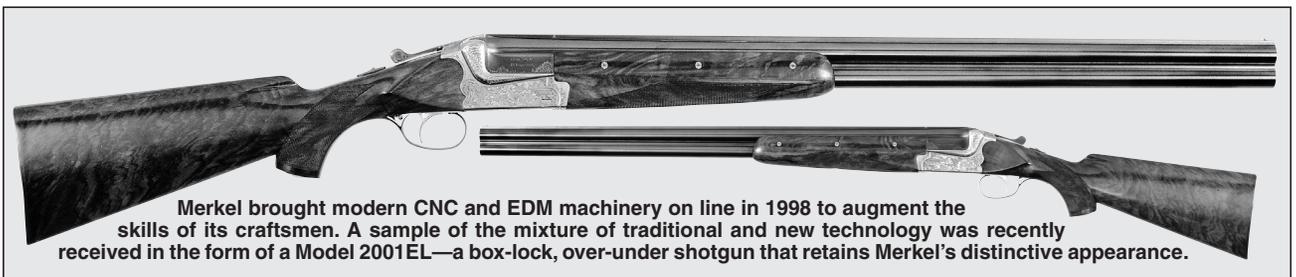
The knurled cap is a nice feature to dress up and protect the muzzle when the brake is not attached, but the brake was taken into consideration when sizing the ramrod, which protrudes 2" past the muzzle when the brake is removed. We'd rather have a ramrod too long than too short, but Traditions offers a rod of the appropriate length should a Lightning owner decide to omit the brake.

Musket caps are not as readily available as standard No. 11 percussion caps, so the inclusion of both No. 11 and musket cap nipples with the gun was welcome. While we chose to use the musket cap nipple for most of our shooting, we used the No. 11 caps with blackpowder to make sure the "switch nipple" system worked, which it did. We also tested whether there was any notable ballistic difference in using musket caps or percussion caps with the same load. Surprisingly, velocity with musket caps was as much as 50 f.p.s. less than the identical load ignited by No. 11 percussion caps.

Traditions' Lightning bolt-action muzzleloader is available in 12 variations to suit just about any budget, need or desire. The gun we tested was rugged, accurate and well-made for the most part. Shooters looking for contemporary styling in a blackpowder rifle will want to add the Lightning to their list of candidates.

NRB

## MERKEL 2001EL



Merkel brought modern CNC and EDM machinery on line in 1998 to augment the skills of its craftsmen. A sample of the mixture of traditional and new technology was recently received in the form of a Model 2001EL—a box-lock, over-under shotgun that retains Merkel's distinctive appearance.

FOR decades, Merkel's catalogs proudly stated that its shotgun actions were made the same as they were in the 1920s. That changed in 1998 when Merkel brought modern CNC and EDM machinery on line to augment the skills of its craftsmen that have evolved through generations of making exceptional side-by-sides, over-unders and combination guns.

A sample of this mixture of traditional and new technologies was recently received in the form of a Model 2001EL—a modified Anson & Deeley-type box-lock, over-under shotgun with a Kersten crossbolt that retains Merkel's distinctive outside appear-

ance. Externally, there is no evidence to suggest that hand fitting and finishing have been abandoned for the sake of modernization.

Three grades are offered: the minimally engraved standard 2000EL; the heavily engraved mid-range 2001EL (tested); and the high-grade 2002EL with fully engraved false sideplates. Our sample 2001EL was stocked with dark, nicely figured walnut, hand-checked in a double-bordered point pattern of 24 lines per inch on the pistol grip and fore-end. We noted several overruns covered by the border, places where the checkering came up short and some flat points. The fore-end is the



Wood-to-metal fit on our sample was excellent—a testament to the inletting skill of the stockmaker considering the difficulty of mating the action to the buttstock.

# DOPE BAG

traditional Suhl, three-piece style, the bottom of which is secured by a Deeley-type latch and covers only part of the bottom barrel. Two top side panels are attached through the side ribs with three engraved screws. The seam between the panels and the bottom wood is hardly noticeable and nicely obscured with parallel lines. A careful examination of the three parts suggests that they were not cut from the same piece of wood, though the difference between them is barely perceptible. As a whole, the fore-end provides plenty of room for large-handed shooters, while retaining a svelte profile.

Wood-to-metal fit on our sample was excellent—a testament to the inletting skill of the stockmaker when considering the difficult radiuses and points where the action mates with the buttstock. Both the grip plate and the butt plate are black plastic with no hangovers or gaps.



Lockup remains the Kersten crossbolt system, which is a modification of the Greener crossbolt lock. Square lugs with centrally located round holes extend back from the top of the over barrel into corresponding cuts in the gun's standing breech.

## MERKEL 2001EL

**MANUFACTURER:** Suhler Jagd-und Sportwaffen GmbH, SchutzenstraBe 26, Postfach 130, 98527 Suhl, Germany  
**IMPORTER:** GSI, Inc. (Dept. AR), P.O. Box 129, 108 Morrow Ave., Trussville, AL 35173, (205) 655-8299  
**GAUGE:** 12 (tested), 20, 28  
**CHAMBER LENGTH:** 3" (28-ga. 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ ")  
**ACTION TYPE:** Modified Anson & Deeley box-lock over-under  
**RECEIVER:** satin grayed steel  
**OVERALL LENGTH:** 44 $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
**WEIGHT:** 7 lbs.  
**BARREL:** 12-ga., 28" (tested), 30"; 20- and 28-ga., 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ "  
**CHOKE SYSTEM:** fixed, full/modified, modified/improved cylinder, others on request  
**FINISH:** high-polish blued barrels, silver-gray action  
**TRIGGER:** mechanical, single, selective, 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ -lb. pull over barrel, 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ -lb. pull under barrel  
**STOCK:** satin oil-finished luxus grade walnut: length of pull, 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; drop at heel, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ "; drop at comb, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
**ACCESSORIES:** trigger length of pull adjustment wrench  
**SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE:** 2000EL, \$5195; 2001EL, \$6495; 2002EL, \$9995

In-house engravers are the pride of Merkel and our sample Model 2001EL demonstrates why. Both sides of the silver-grayed receiver are attractively engraved with game scenes while its bottom is scroll-engraved in a pattern that borders the entire action and covers the bolsters. All screw heads are engraved and tastefully timed.

Blued barrels are joined by the demi-block system in which each cold-hammer-forged barrel has a solid, forged breech section. The breech section of the over barrel is shaped like an inverted U, with the lower barrel mechanically fitting into a squared recess in its bottom. Ostensibly, this arrangement makes it possible to locate the barrels more positively before they are finally soldered together. Side and top ribs are solid, though the top is grooved to reduce glare and has a single, brass front bead. A ventilated rib is optional, though there may be an additional charge.



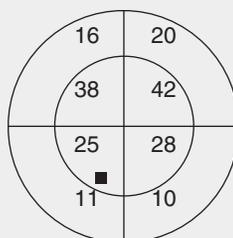
Small slotted screws are incorporated into the fore-end iron to disable the ejector sears. Rotating the screws 90 degrees converts the automatic ejectors to extractors.

Lockup remains the Kersten crossbolt system, which is a modification of the Greener crossbolt lock, and is well-known for its strength. Square lugs with centrally located round holes extend back from the top of the over barrel into corresponding cuts in the standing breech. A thick crossbolt in the left side of the receiver passes through the holes to lock the action. Though lumps are apparent on the bottom of the block, they are not part of the lockup.

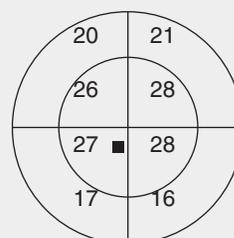
An interesting new feature is found at the ejectors. When a barrel is fired, its respective trip rod bears against a sear in the fore-end. The sear holds the ejector until the barrels are lowered, then releases the ejector to throw the shell. This is little changed from the earlier Merkel design. New, however, are small slotted screws incorporated into the fore-end sears. Turning these screws 90 degrees part-

## MERKEL 2001EL

AVERAGE OF 10 PATTERNS AT 40 YDS.



Full Choke



Modified Choke

■ =Point of Hold

Federal Premium Magnum 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ "-1 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.-No. 6 lead

Average Pellet count—253

Measured Velocity @3-ft.—1389 f.p.s.

Remaining energy per pellet @40 yds.—3.04 ft.-lbs.

Total Hits	190 (75%)	Total Hits	173 (68%)
21.2" Inner Circle	133 (53%)	21.2" Inner Circle	109 (43%)
30" Outer Ring	57 (22%)	30" Outer Ring	74 (29%)

ly disables the sears to convert the Model 2001EL from ejectors to extractors.

Past Merkel over-unders used the "Blitz" box-lock action that had most of its parts mounted on the trigger plate. Removal was tricky at best and revealed a collection of tiny screws, leaf springs and oddly shaped parts. With capitalism came the need to produce shotguns more economically. While CNC and EDM machinery made it easier and less expensive to produce precise parts, the greatest savings realized came with the switch to a modified Anson & Deeley box-lock action.

This much-simplified system uses coil springs instead of leaf springs. Hammers, sears and cocking levers fit in slots in the frame and are pivoted on pins or screws rather than being attached to the trigger plate. Cocking indicators found on other Merkel shotguns have also been eliminated from this model.

Traditional double triggers are cataloged, but our sample came with a single, selective, mechanical trigger. To select which barrel to fire first, Merkel has provided a new lever housed in the split in the rear of the triggerguard. This is a noticeable change from the bar parallel with the trigger often found on Merkel shotguns. The new selector seemed a lot less obtrusive to



The Merkel 2001EL's fore-end is the traditional Suhl three-piece style, the bottom of which is secured by a Deeley-type latch and covers only part of the gun's bottom barrel.

us, and was easy to use. Pivoting it to the right selects the under barrel to fire first.

Another nice feature is the trigger that is adjustable for length of pull over a 1/4" range. While 1/4" is insufficient to adjust the fit between a small-framed female and a burly football player, it is enough to provide that "just right" fit for the average-sized shooter. Adjustment is by turning out completely the small Allen head screw from the face of the trigger blade using the supplied wrench, repositioning the trigger over one of three screw holes, then replacing the screw.



**The trigger is used to adjust length of pull over a range of 1/4". Using an Allen wrench, turn out the retaining screw, reposition the trigger over one of the three screw holes, and turn the screw into the respective hole.**



**Barrel joining is by the demi-block system in which each has a solid, forged breech section. The over barrel's breech is shaped like an inverted U, with the lower barrel fitting into a squared recess in its bottom.**

A manual safety is in the top tang. Pressing the button forward allows the gun to be fired, while pressing it rearward exposes the letter "S" and locks the trigger.

The Merkel 2001EL was patterned at 40 yds. with 1 1/8 oz. No. 6 Federal Premium Magnum shotshells. The results are summarized in the accompanying table. Our sample had a fixed full choke in the over barrel while the under barrel was choked modified. Patterning was unusually tight, though we experienced the same result with Merks that have been previously tested here. Modified and improved cylinder chokes are also available, and other chokes

can be had by special request, so a prospective buyer may want to consider a more open choke than they're used to.

Use of the Kersten crossbolt results in an action with extra width and height. Despite the additional metal, the Merkel 2001EL is a lively gun and well-balanced. Many who handled the test sample remarked how easily it came to the shoulder and how well it pointed.

An unusual observation with respect to the mechanical trigger was noted while testing the gun. If the crossbolt did not fully seat, the second sear would not always trip. Nor would it trip if the gun was fired nearly straight up as encountered in some Sporting Clays stations. Neither problem occurs if the top lever is manually indexed to the left with slight pressure to ensure the crossbolt is fully seated when the action is closed. This information is detailed in the owner's manual, though indexing should not be necessary once the crossbolt wears in.

Merkel, then, has stuck its toe in the waters of modern manufacturing without abandoning the skill and craftsmanship that made it famous. As an example of Merkel's progress, the Model 2001EL exhibits excellent handling qualities, with aesthetically pleasing style and detail. 

## ROCK RIVER BULLSEYE WC



**Rock River Arms' new, M1911-A1, Bullseye Wadcutter match pistol incorporates numerous advanced technical features with a high order of fit and finish. Out of the box, this pistol is capable of firing possible scores in every appropriate stage of National Match competition.**

**R**OCK RIVER ARMS' new Bullseye Wadcutter target pistol is not just another M1911A1 clone. Rather, it is a specialized target pistol combining numerous and proven, technical features to enhance accuracy for bullseye competition.

While Rock River let form follow function, it did not neglect fit and finish—everyone who picked up the Bullseye Wadcutter pistol remarked favorably on the understated quality of the high-polish blue and the obvious attention to fit and finish.

Although Rock River Arms is a new com-



**Since most bullseye competitors prefer optical sights, the Rock River Bullseye Wadcutter comes equipped with a Clark rail mount on the slide and no metal sights.**

pany, founders Mark and Chuck Larson bring more than 34 years of industry experience to the company from ArmaLite, Springfield Armory and Les Baer Custom. Their goal was to offer superior-quality competition pistols and parts at reasonable prices—the right combination for high perceived value. Building on their expertise with the classic M1911A1 pistol, Rock River Arms began by offering seven different models of this icon suitable for nearly all types of competition—Bullseye Wadcutter, Basic Limited Match, Limited Match, Standard Match, National Match Hardball, Ultimate Match Achiever and Match Master Steel. Surely, there is a model for every need and pocketbook. We received an example of the Bullseye Wadcutter model for testing.

# DOPE BAG

Beginning with 4140 chrome-moly steel forgings, Rock River Arms manufactures its own frames and slides to national match tolerances with modern CNC machinery. Frames are heat-treated to a hardness of Rockwell C40 and slides to Rockwell C24-28. Exterior flats of all Rock River frames are surface-ground, radii are bead-blasted and the firing pin retainer slot tightened. Firing pin and sear holes of Rock River slides are drilled then reamed to exact tolerances to eliminate slide wobble and to keep trigger pull crisp and constant. As a result, Rock River slides fit Rock River frames with up to 10 bearing surfaces for maximum accuracy. All Rock River pistols are made with these frames and slides.

The Bullseye Wadcutter pistol's frame features 30 line-per-inch checkering on the front strap and flat mainspring housing, and the magazine well is beveled. There is a comfortable, beavertail grip safety with a raised pad on the lower surface. Other nice touch-



All Rock River frames are machined to tight match tolerances from 4140 steel forgings. The feed ramp (above) is polished and our sample pistol fed and functioned flawlessly with semi-wadcutter ammunition.

## BULLSEYE WC

**MANUFACTURER:** Rock River Arms Inc. (Dept. AR), 101 Noble St., Cleveland, IL 61241, (309) 792-5780  
**CALIBER:** .45 ACP (wadcutter only)  
**ACTION TYPE:** short-recoil-operated, semi-automatic pistol  
**CONSTRUCTION:** forged steel billet frame and slide  
**MAGAZINE:** seven-round, single-column, blued steel with bumper base  
**BARREL:** 5", throated, Kart National Match  
**RIFLING:** conventional, six-groove, RH twist  
**SIGHTS:** .850" diameter Clark slide-mounted scope rail, no metal sights  
**FINISH:** high-polish blue with matte scope rail  
**OVERALL LENGTH:** 8 7/8"  
**WIDTH:** 1 3/8"  
**HEIGHT:** 5 1/2"  
**WEIGHT EMPTY:** 43 ozs.  
**TRIGGER:** single-stage, aluminum speed trigger, 3 1/2 lb. pull  
**GRIPS:** rosewood with cut diamond pattern checkering and high-gloss finish  
**SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE:** \$1,215 (2 1/2" accuracy guarantee), \$1,315 (1 1/2" accuracy guarantee)

es include a checkered slide stop lever and a polished feed ramp. The Bullseye Wadcutter's slide has grip serrations on both the front and rear of each side of the slide. The ejection port has been flared and lowered, the extractor tuned and polished and the ejector extended. Of course the pistol is equipped with a National Match barrel bushing and a two-piece, metal recoil spring guide with a built-in buffer.

A skeletonized, Commander-style hammer and an aluminum speed trigger work with a match sear to provide a crisp, constant 3 1/2-lb. trigger pull. As today's bullseye competitors prefer optical sights, no metal sights are fitted to the Rock River Bullseye Wadcutter pistol. Rather a Clark slide-mounted scope rail is fitted, enabling the user to mount an optical sight directly on the slide. The sight adds weight to the slide and reciprocates with it, which allows a modestly rated recoil spring of 11, 12 or 13 lbs. to be used.

Our test pistol was equipped with an 11 lb. spring. Rock River uses throated, Kart National Match barrels in the Bullseye Wadcutter model. The consistent quality of these barrels has made them a popular choice among target shooters, so why change a good thing?

All the greatest features are of no avail unless they are tuned to work together in harmony. Rock River does just this to each of its guns. Trained personnel carefully test and adjust every gun before shipment. For the Bullseye Wadcutter model, this enables Rock River to guarantee five-shot groups averaging a 2 1/2" extreme spread at 50 yds. using Federal Gold Medal .45 ACP 185-gr. FMJ-SWC match ammunition. For an additional \$100 cost, the pistol will be tuned to guarantee 1 1/2" average groups at the same distance. To back this up, Rock River offers a one-year warranty on parts and labor for all its pistols.

We approached testing the Rock River Bullseye Wadcutter pistol with mixed feelings. While we had confidence the pistol would perform as advertised, we had doubts that the optical sight mounted on the slide would stand up to the reciprocation for long. We also wondered how the extra weight of the sight, 6 1/2 oz., would affect reliability of operation. As testing proceeded, we found our fears groundless. The Ultra Dot 30 mm diameter sight took the reciprocation in stride and the additional weight of the unit had no effect on operational reliability. And, yes, accuracy was excellent, as is shown in the accompanying table. We fired only factory 185-gr. and 200-gr. semi-wadcutter ammunition in this gun as it was not designed for 230-gr. hardball loads. Out of the box, this pistol proved capable of firing

## ACCURACY RESULTS

.45 ACP Cartridge	Vel. @15' (f.p.s.)	Smallest (ins.)	Largest (ins.)	Average (ins.)
Federal No. GM45B 185-gr. FMJ-SWC	771 Avg. 9 Sd	1.04	1.29	1.16
PMC No. 45C 200-gr. FMJ-SWC	888 Avg. 11 Sd	1.21	1.66	1.49
Average Extreme Spread				1.32
Five consecutive five-shot groups at 50 yds. from a Ransom Rest. Abbreviations: Sd (standard deviation), FMJ (full metal jacket), SWC (semi-wadcutter)				

possibles in all appropriate stages of National Match competition.

Handling of the Bullseye Wadcutter pistol was judged slightly better than many other match-conditioned M1911-A1 pistols. Especially noteworthy was the raised pad on the lower part of the grip safety, which felt just right while easing operation of the safety. High marks were also given to the trigger operation, which was crisp and remained constant throughout the test. Another feature shooters singled out for praise was the checkering on the frontstrap and mainspring housing, which provided excellent finger purchase without producing a harsh or abrasive feel.

With the optical sight installed, the pistol balanced well, but felt top-heavy. While keen competitors will probably never notice this, casual target shooters used to metal sights



A Kart National Match barrel, a Rock River national match barrel bushing and a two-piece recoil spring guide with integral buffer are mated to the Rock River's forged steel, CNC-machined slide unit.

will find this takes some getting used to. We found it quite acceptable after firing approximately 100 rounds to get the feel of it. The additional weight of the sight unit on the slide also substantially reduced perceived recoil. Throughout our tests, the Bullseye Wadcutter pistol operated flawlessly.

For 1999, Rock River new product plans call for the addition of stainless steel frame models, Commander-length-slide models and 6"-slide models.

Combining the features and quality of this pistol with the company's 2 1/2" accuracy guarantee, one-year warranty and reasonable suggested retail price results in a gun of high perceived value. Strong orders back this up. In this, Rock River Arms has achieved its goal.

