

GUNS & AMMO

GUN LAWS OF ALL STATES
2000 ANNUAL

SPECIAL REPORT:

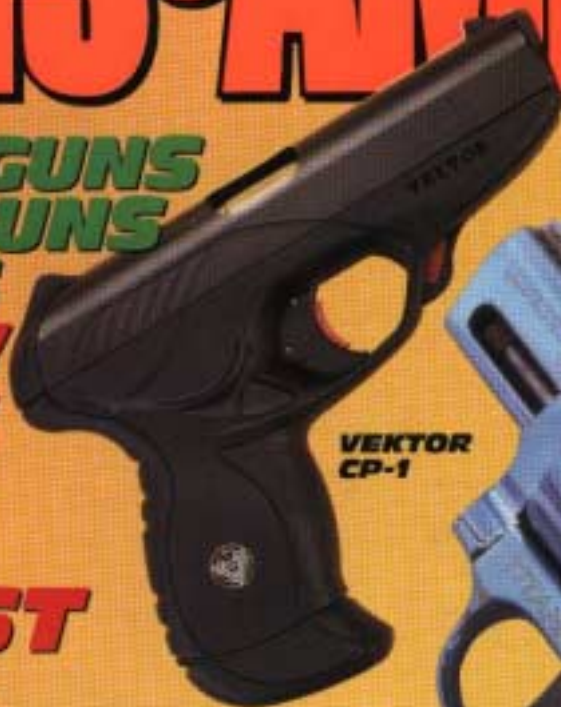
GUNS & AMMO

150

HANDGUNS
SHOTGUNS
RIFLES

ALL NEW BUYER'S GUIDE

GREATEST GUNS OF THE 20TH CENTURY



VEKTOR CP-1



TAURUS 455 TI



1911A1 GOVT. MODEL



U.S.A. \$6.99
CANADA \$8.99

DISPLAY UNTIL

13

JANUARY 17, 2000

- Plus:**
- WORLD'S SMALLEST PISTOL**
 - HOT-ROD M-1 CARBINES**
 - PRECISION POLICE RIFLES**
 - HANDGUNS AT THE MILLENNIUM**

A PETERSEN PUBLICATION

They don't make 'em like they used to." It seems like that complaint could cover a whole slew of things that we use every day, from cars to clothes to the incredible shrinking candy bar. Maybe we should look on the sunny side—if today's product doesn't seem half as good as it used to, at least we get to pay twice as much for it, right? For instance, how much did you shell

out for the chunk of Detroit Iron or Tokyo Tin that's sitting in your garage compared with your '67 Mustang? And how does the new ride stack up with the old one for quality and performance?

I found myself thinking about these things as I researched the past and present of the High Standard Manufacturing Company, and I came up with some interesting results. Always happy to put off writing, I had

turned to the catalog section of the 1984 *Guns & Ammo Annual* to see what High Standard was selling its pistols for in their final year.

But, naturally, I had to stop and check out all the other 1984 offerings, and soon I found myself gripped by nostalgia for those ancient times, when "space-age technology" was less important to gunmaking than craftsmanship, and you could buy a Heckler & Koch P7 for \$630 (sigh!).

The Pistols That Wouldn't Die

From left: an early High Standard Model B with its original box, a fine old GB, a modern Supermatic Trophy with fluted barrel, Olympic model in .22 Short and a Victor with target grips. Note the difference in grip frames between early and newer versions.



Finally, I reached the High Standards. There it was, the High Standard Victor, still widely regarded as one of the best target .22s ever produced. It had sold for \$415 in 1984, and a quick comparison told me that price-wise this put it pretty much at the top of its class among American target autos, since the Browning Challenger III was selling for \$239.95 and the classic Smith & Wesson 41 was selling for \$390.

By now I was scratching my head. If the Smith 41 had almost doubled in price by 1998 (which it has, like a lot

of other pistols, including the P7), then the reborn Victor should be selling for somewhere in the \$800-plus area, right? But when I checked the 1998 catalog, the price for the Victor was much less. Was there a misprint? I decided to nip over to High Standard Manufacturing Co.'s Web site (<http://www.highstandard.com/>) to double-check. But there it was again: \$502 for the Victor with the 4.5-inch barrel and \$558 for the one with the 5.5-inch barrel.

I was impressed. Not only was the Houston High Standard breaking the

nism with the engine so that the pilot could fire on an enemy without shredding his own prop.

Until this invention, machine guns had to be mounted on a biplane's upper wing, forcing the pilot into risky contortions whenever he wanted to fire the weapon. Swebilius beat the problem by inventing a device that interrupted the machine gun whenever the prop was in front of the muzzle. This permitted mounting the gun on the engine cowling directly in front of the pilot and opened the door to dog-fighting exploits that required ever faster and more maneuverable planes and ever-more-accurate and lethal airborne firepower. Like a lot of wartime inventions, the synchronized machine gun made ripples that spread far beyond its original purpose.

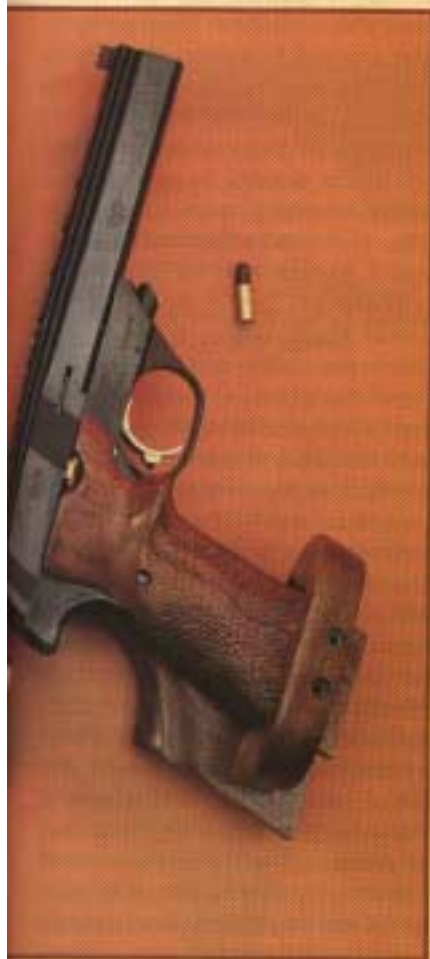
In 1926, Swebilius and a pal from Marlin formed a little company of their own as a sideline. Specializing in the manufacture of deep hole drills for the automotive and firearms industries, it was called the High Standard Manufacturing Co., and its work was good enough to keep its 5 employees busy even as the U.S. sank into the depths of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Finally, in 1932, Swebilius and his partner bought out the bankrupt Hartford Arms and Equipment Co. and—reworking a Hartford Arms .22 semi-auto to create the High Standard Model B—opened a new chapter in U.S. gunmaking history.

Under the eagle eye of Carl Swebilius, the machine work, fit and finish of even the humblest High Standard was far beyond what we've come to expect in the 1990s, but the grip on the early semi-autos left the average shooter with his pinkie dangling off the bottom of the gun. And High Standard's responsiveness to shooters' demands was already well marked in these early years, enough so that a new pistol with a longer, more hand-filling grip, its bottom parallel to the line of the barrel instead of angled to 45°, was introduced as the Model A in 1938.

As small a change as it may seem, the longer grip really made a hit with shooters. According to Charles Petty, the dean of High Standard collectors

BORN IN 1932 AND BURIED IN 1984, THE GREAT HIGH STANDARD TARGET PISTOLS ARE BACK AGAIN AND READY TO SET NEW RECORDS.

BY DENNIS O'FLAHERTY



"costs twice as much" clause of the "they don't make 'em like they used to" rule, but after putting a couple of hundred rounds through one of the new Victors I happened to know that it could compete toe-to-toe with its 1984 cousin. In fact, in some important ways it's a better gun than the old ones. But before we examine the Houston pistols, let's take a look at the Connecticut classics.

Like a lot of American success stories, High Standard's begins at Ellis Island. In 1906, to be exact, when a gifted young Swede named Carl Gustave Swebilius came to the U.S. to live with a sister who had settled in New Haven and went to work for Marlin Firearms.

Swebilius proved to be a gifted gunsmith. When the First World War broke out, he was put in charge of experimental work at Marlin and given the job of adapting the .30-caliber Browning machine gun for aerial use. Amazingly, he managed to cut the weight by 50 percent without sacrificing the weapon's effectiveness. However, his biggest achievement changed the course of combat flying: synchronizing the firing mecha-

HIGH STANDARD

and historians, High Standard's move was an unwelcome surprise to the marketing people at Colt (whose .22 semi-autos had the same Short grip as the Model B), and they quickly came up with a new "Match Target" model of their Target Woodsman, this one with the famous "elephant-ear" walnut grips that covered the 45" grip bottom and extended the grip length substantially.

Despite the competition from arms giant Colt, total production of the 1930s High Standard pistols approached the 100,000 mark. But with High Standard, as with the majority of U.S. industrial firms, it took World War II to really kick production into high gear. In fact, even before Pearl Harbor the British Purchasing Commission brought High Standard its first big war order: 12,000 Browning .50-caliber machine guns for the RAF to be delivered yesterday. All Swebilius' talents as a gun-maker and CEO came to bear on the problem, and the guns were delivered in record time.

A separate company, the High Standard Manufacturing Corp., was spun off to make the machine guns, and by the end of the war it had produced more than 228,000 of them. Meanwhile, the pistol company—High Standard Manufacturing Co.—was the sole producer of .22-caliber pistols for the U.S. services during the war.

In the spring of 1940, the first of the exposed-hammer High Standard pistols appeared in answer to the demand for a pistol with a feel more like the military Colt .45. The design was a hit both with the Government, which bought 44,000 USA-HDs (produced with fixed sights and a Parkerized finish) during the war, and civilian shooters, who bought another 150,000 of the HD Military model (which had adjustable sights and a blued finish) in the postwar '40s.

In addition, High Standard produced another HD version that has been the subject of gun-collector whispers for years, the USA-HD MS, the MS standing for "Military



This is a pair of HS Model As—the first long-grip models—one with a 4-inch barrel and another with a 6-inch barrel. Both of these early pistols sport the rare 1B type takedown.

Silencer." One of these (USA-HD MS s/n 120046) gained international notoriety when Francis Gary Powers' U2 was shot down by the Russians; Col. Powers' silenced High Standard ended up in the KGB's museum in Lubyanka Square, Moscow, where it is still on view today. According to Alan Aronstein, who heads High Standard's successor company, the Houston High Standard Mfg. Co., 332 of these sound-suppressed pistols remain in government inventory, and a number of them have been rebuilt and refurbished in Houston for U.S. special warfare units.

But even while fixed-barrel HDs were pouring off the High Standard assembly lines, the company was already experimenting with interchangeable barrels, and in 1949 a classic pistol concept was born with High Standard's G series. As you can see from the accompanying photographs, the first design incorporated a lever located in the front of the frame that could be depressed to release the barrel unit, which was mounted on a heavy and beautifully machined lug that slid into matching grooves in the frame.

The lever-action takedown and later modifications capitalized on the fact that the physics of action and reaction make the barrel seat more and more firmly the more you fire it. This means that accuracy isn't lost no matter how many times you take the barrel off to interchange it with a different one or to clean it from the

breech end—the best way to protect your pistol's rifling, and very hard to do with a fixed barrel.

But the complex machine work required by the dovetail design was bad for the company's bottom line, and designers were encouraged to come up with a way to keep the idea of interchangeability but make it less expensive to produce. There are those who say that Swebilius, who died in the year before the appearance of the G series, would never have compromised a great design to cut costs, that he would always have preferred making 6 superb pistols to 60 very good ones. But while it's true that Swebilius was a perfectionist, he was also a businessman, and in any event the overall quality of the High Standard pistols was so high that the search for more cost-effective designs had no negative impact during the peak years from the 1950s to the mid-'70s.

In fact, each new design simplification was accompanied by big improvements in the pistols, like the push-button takedown introduced with the first of High Standard's numbered series, the 101, in 1954. While the barrel lug and the frame were still joined by dovetails, production costs were shaved by getting rid of the lever release and a hooded breech that mated with a recess on the face of the slide. But if the pistol cost less to produce, the top-of-the-line 101 Supermatic, with its ported 6-inch barrel and detachable barrel weights, was still the finest U.S. target pistol of

its day. In fact, the 101 shown in our pictures, with adjustable target grips by master gripmaker Randall Fung (<http://jnb.com/~funggrip/>), can still blow away an X-ring at 50 yards without half trying, and its deep "Supermatic-blue" finish still gets mistaken for rebluing.

The 101 series also introduced a whole family of .22s descending from the top-end Supermatic, a High Standard feature that persists to the present. Side by side with the Supermatic at the top end was the Olympic in .22 Short, designed to compete in the rapid-fire section of the Olympics and other International competitions. In these matches, the shooter fires 5-shot strings as fast as possible at 5 targets that turn to face

Still, it's the .22 LR pistols that have always been High Standard's bread and butter, and the rest of the 101 series was designed to appeal to a broad spectrum of .22 shooters. The next step down in price was the Field King 101, which kept enough of the basic features of the Supermatic to give the buyer a highly accurate pistol but cut extras (no barrel weights, plainer finish, etc.) enough for good savings. After the Field King came the Sport King, with minimal features (e.g., fixed sights and no automatic slide lock), the lightweight Flite-King in .22 Short and, at the bottom of the price scale, the Duramatic Plinker, a bare-bones pistol best known for its hideous triggerguard. The Duramatic had a screw-type takedown and an

features. The major change was the end of the dovetailed barrel-to-frame join and its replacement with the one that is still being used on the Houston pistols: a mushroom-headed stud located on the underside of the barrel about a half-inch forward of the breech. The barrel is still released by a push button, but a bigger and easier-to-use one, and the stud is retained by spring-loaded jaws in the frame. It isn't elegant, but it works and it's simple; as High Standard historian Tom Dance remarks, "In engineering, simple is good."

As if to make up for saving money on the takedown, all kinds of improvements were introduced. The adjustable rear sight was made easier to use and mounted on the barrel to keep the zero from changing as the slide slammed home. Adjustments for trigger pull and backlash were added. Eight-inch and 10-inch barrels were introduced into the lineup and grooved for a set of sliding, backward-raked weights that gave the 102 a distinctive "space-gun" look. Finally, the ported-barrel approach was replaced by a detachable ported stabilizer that was slipped over the muzzle and secured by a couple of set screws. As you can see from our photos, a full-dress High Standard "space gun" of the early '60s looked pretty startling; but once the scores started coming in, the carping stopped.

The last major structural change after the introduction of the mushroom-stud barrel lug came in 1965, with the switch to the "military grip" frame that is still in production in Houston today. Once again, the move was a combination of financial calculation and response to shooter pressure, sparked by the growing popularity of the Smith & Wesson Model 41.

Introduced in 1957, the fine target .22 from S&W was eating a growing chunk out of High Standard's massive lead in "line counts" of the .22 pistols used in the National Matches at Camp Perry: down from 90 percent High Standard in 1960 to 60 percent by 1964. This may seem a bit puzzling to anybody who has ever bench-rested a '60s High Standard and seen it turning out one-ragged-hole groups at 50



The Model 104 Trophy was the first High Standard to have a trigger-stop screw. These two represent a couple of different options—a 6-inch fluted barrel and a 5-inch bull barrel.

the line simultaneously, and recoil and muzzle flip need to be near zero to eliminate recovery time. High Standard worked for years to develop a successful Olympic pistol for little financial return, the one high point of its efforts being the gold-medal win (with an Olympic 102) by U.S. Marine Captain Bill McMillan at the Rome Olympics in 1960. But even though the Olympic model was never a big money-maker, the tradition of Olympic R&D continues at the Houston High Standard Co., where Alan Aronstein has managed to make the pistol virtually recoilless, attracting the interest of the NRA's Handicapped Shooters' Program.

optional 4½-inch or 6-inch barrel, but the pistol's frame was different from the other pistols, and its barrels don't interchange with theirs. Ugly as it was, the Duramatic looked downright kissable to the bean-counters, since Sears marketed it as a J. C. Higgins model and it sold more than any other High Standard semi-auto except the Sport King: 203,000 pistols between 1951 and 1984, compared with 96,000 top-of-the-line Supermatics and Trophys.

The 101 Supermatic series ended in 1957 when High Standard introduced the 102 Series, once again introducing cost-cutting approaches at the same time as innovative design

HIGH STANDARD

yards, but the big appeal of the new S&W wasn't some impossible increase in accuracy, it was the M1911 A1-style grip. In a full-scale NRA match, bull's-eye competitors fire 270 shots in 3 90-shot events: one with the .22, one with "centerfire" and one with the .45. Years ago, competitors started firing the centerfire portion with the .45 as well, just to make life easier, and the majority of them were delighted to see a .22 with the same grip style, convinced that it led to a stronger and more uniform hold across all 3 portions of the match.

You might think that one sport wouldn't be enough to make a gun company retool its production line, but despite the fact that NRA Conventional Pistol or "Bullseye" handgun competition has never been heavily publicized, it has been enormously popular in the United States ever since the end of World War II. Even today, after more than 3 decades of anti-gun activism, there are over 42,000 NRA-classified competitors and thousands more who compete unofficially (for an introduction, check out <http://www.bullseyepistol.com/>). In fact, the claims of other pistol disciplines to have fielded the most competitors or fired the most rounds at their annual championships can't stand up to a reality check against

when they saw those line-count percentages starting to drop. Finally, they turned the problem over to their design engineer, Dick Baker, whose first step was to trace out the silhouette of an M1911 A1 and superimpose it over a model 104, which was the current series in 1964. Before they were through, Baker and his team managed to design a frame that would shift the grip angle by 5° (the slant grip is 32° from the vertical, whereas the military grip is 27° from the vertical) while still permitting the use of many of the 104's parts without change or with nothing more than a slight "massage."

Finally, in May of 1965, the first military Trophys became available with a second major change that can still be found on the Houston High Standards: the adjustable rear sight was moved off the barrels and mounted on a bridge over the slide. This saved having to put rear sights on every barrel at the same time that it lengthened the sight radius. The new pistols of the 106 series (there is no 105) were as accurate as ever, and the military grip was an instant hit—the line count at Camp Perry and other U.S. bull's-eye competitions began to

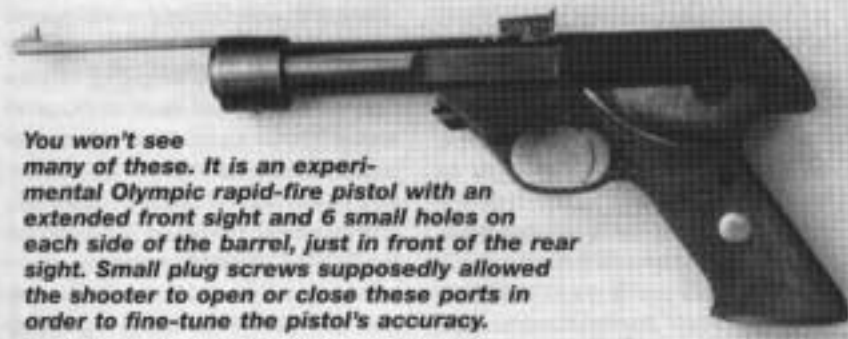


Inspired by High Standard's Bob Shea, Lou Lombardi of Falcon Machining "ultraprojects" the HS Victor model.

the handwriting was already on the wall as the anti-gun movement gained momentum. In 1968, the Gun Control Act went into force, and immediately there was a sharp cut-back in gun sales by mass merchandisers like Sears and Montgomery Ward. This was catastrophic for High Standard, amounting to the loss of 50 to 60 percent of their sales virtually overnight. From 1968 on, the company was forced to try one expedient after another to preserve its earlier profitability, but despite individual successes, nothing could turn the tide. Even the introduction in 1974 of The Victor—a superbly accurate flat-barreled pistol with its sights mounted on a Bo-Mar-like rib—wasn't enough to keep High Standard from having to sell the old Hamden factory in 1976 and move to a rented—and under-equipped—facility in East Hartford, Connecticut.

This gloomy chapter had a few high points, like the introduction of the legendary 10X custom High Standards. But in 1984, High Standard, its investors and its bankers all agreed the end had come. The factory closed its doors for the last time, the company's assets were sold and the High Standard .22-caliber semi-auto was history. Between 1932 and 1984 over a million of these fine pistols had come out of High Standard's Connecticut factories, but that was all she wrote. RIP High Standard.

Or so it seemed. The fact is, the technical drawings, much of the tooling and the know-how of numerous



You won't see many of these. It is an experimental Olympic rapid-fire pistol with an extended front sight and 6 small holes on each side of the barrel, just in front of the rear sight. Small plug screws supposedly allowed the shooter to open or close these ports in order to fine-tune the pistol's accuracy.

the National Matches at Camp Perry, where in 1997, 800-plus individual competitors sent well over 300,000 rounds of centerfire and rimfire down-range before the last firing line was secured.

You can guess how the powers that be at High Standard must have felt

swing back in High Standard's favor, and the pistols of the 106 series sold better than any of their predecessors (68,000, with the 102's 49,000 being the closest runner-up).

But despite the fact that another decade of high-quality production remained ahead at the Hamden plant,

engineers and gunsmiths had survived the end of the company and were just waiting to be put to work. And the reputation of High Standard wasn't going to fade in a few months or even a few years. There were thousands of shooters who had missed out on their first High Standard for some reason or who wanted another one, and the collector market couldn't meet the demand—as the Ventura, California, Pistol Rangemaster told me when I was testing the Houston .22s, he'd been trying to get a High Standard for years, but every time he heard about one, it had been sold before he got to it.

In the late '80s, a brisk trade in counterfeit "collectible" High Standards sprang up on a piecework level (check with an expert before you shell out big bucks for that rare "slant-grip Victor"), but it wasn't until the '90s that a serious attempt to revive the High Standard target pistols was made, this time by Mitchell Arms. Unfortunately, nobody seemed to have realized that the rights to the High Standard target pistol line and trademark, as well as the actual company name, had been purchased in 1984 by Gordon Elliot, a longtime High Standard executive.

As problems began to arise, some of Mitchell's suppliers turned for advice to Alan Aronstein, who had been one of High Standard's top 10 distributors in the old days and who was now in the machine tool business. Alan's years of dealing with High Standard led him to Gordon Elliot, and with the help of Elliot, Ron Stillwell (the former President of Colt Firearms and an old friend of Aronstein's) and a number of outside investors, the original High Standard Mfg. Co. was reborn in Houston, Texas, with the specific purpose of re-issuing the classic target pistols.

The first of the new line of official High Standards shipped in March,

1994, but it would be several years before the fireworks around the Mitchell Arms effort stopped sparking. At one point, in fact, the hapless buyer could look in gun catalogs and see 4 separate companies offering what looked like High Standard pistols—the official High Standard in Houston, Mitchell Arms with its Victor II Stainless series, Stoeger Arms with its Pro Series 95 and Fort Worth Arms with its HS Series Matchmaster. The whole business was finally resolved by a lawsuit that recognized the Houston company's right to High Standard's "trade dress" (the distinctive look of the various pistols), and a series of settlements recognized Houston's right to pick up the reins that High Standard had laid down in 1984.

Unfortunately, this period left the High Standard name a little muddled in shooters' and dealers' minds, since some of the "off-brand" pistols were far enough below par that curses can still be heard when non-Connecticut High Standards are mentioned. However, I expect this will change as more and more shooters discover the quality of the Houston pistols. Not only are they being carefully made according to the old Connecticut standards, but, more important, the company is ready to back its work all the way—always the dividing line between a "brand-X" effort and the real thing. Houston gunsmiths will work on any gun made by High Standard between 1932 and 1984,

and any gun that has come off the Houston production line, and they'll stick with it until the customer is happy. As for the imitations, sorry, but they just don't want to get involved.

Taking a look at the pistols currently on offer from High Standard Manufacturing Co. (check out www.highstandard.com), we can see that they have revived all the old favorites, including the 10X (although this is a "waiting-list" item). At the top of the line are the Victor, with a choice of 4½-inch and 5½-inch barrels, and the Supermatic Trophy, with a standard 5½-inch bull barrel and the 7½-inch bull barrel as a special-order option. Just as in the old days, the Citation is available as a less-expensive version of the Trophy, and the Tournament is the next one down the line, still based on the Trophy but with enough fewer options for an entry-level price.

For those who have special competition interests, High Standard is offering the Supermatic Citation MS (for Metallic Silhouette), which sports a non-glare, ultra-accurate 10-inch barrel that's drilled and tapped for the new High Standard Universal Scope Mount, as well as the Olympic Rapid Fire, Alan Aronstein's favorite design project.

But if, like me, you enjoy the low-recoil .22 Short cartridge without being quite up for the wraparound grips and fancy compensator of the Rapid Fire model, the Olympic Military is the plainclothes version



The Olympic target version of the pistol came in various barrel lengths with adjustable barrel weights to suit the individual shooter. These rare early models are marked "Olympic Citation," whereas the "Citation" was dropped from the designation on later models. All of these are chambered for the .22 Short cartridge.

HIGH STANDARD

and more fun than any barrel of monkeys. Its aluminum slide has been gold-anodized to a Rockwell hardness greater than steel, which means it will digest everything from CB Shorts to high-velocity Shorts that are too powerful for the softer metal of the old aluminum slides. In fact, I had so much fun ringing a 50-yard silhouette-pig swinger burning CCI full-power Shorts that I had shot 100 of them before I realized it. The next time I went to the range I took a brick.

And I should mention here that apart from the Victor, whose traditional sight rib is now grooved to take any standard 1-inch rings, all the remaining High Standard barrels have been drilled and tapped to accept their Universal Scope Mount. As in Connecticut days, High Standard listens to shooters' demands, and red dot sights are big with handgunners these days: even tradition-minded NRA Bullseye Pistol competitors have been moving toward sights like the 1-inch Ultra Dot, shown in the accompanying photos. In fact, in 1998, an all-civilian Team Ultra Dot achieved the unprecedented feat of taking the .45 pistol team trophy away from Army shooters at Camp Perry.

But if High Standard makes every effort to keep up with the latest in the shooting world, it's also making sure

to maintain its vital links with the past. As Alan Aronstein pointed out to me, the Houston pistols are made not only with the old know-how, but with parts from High Standard's old vendors. The people who make their springs, for instance, have been supplying them since 1932. And the company that makes internal parts like hammer struts and firing pins has been making them for High Standard since the '50s, as have the people who make the rear sight blades and the ones who make the magazine followers and the adjustments screws for the rear sights and a whole host of other small but essential parts. Most important, the superb High Standard barrels are still being made by Wilson Arms, whose CEO, George Wilson III, is the grandson of the second employee ever hired by High Standard, back in 1926.

In one key respect, however, the high quality of the Houston pistols results from a break with the past. The original frames of the target pistols were made from forgings, and as any High Standard aficionado can tell you, they are prone to cracking. Houston has switched to making the frames from precision investment castings, using a high-tensile-strength steel that's a company secret. The result, as Alan Aronstein says, is a frame you'll never crack. Not only that, if you happen to have one of the old High Standards with a cracked frame, Houston has a program where you

can send the pistol in and have the cracked frame replaced with a new one for \$156, plus \$45 for labor and \$9 for shipping and insurance.

Magazines, on the other hand, are made as nearly as possible exactly the way they used to be, including heat-treating. Even so, magazines are one thing that shooters of both the old and the new High Standards mutter about—complaining, trading tuning secrets or just plain cussing at them. The reason is simple: High Standards have no feed ramp! Basically, this is a very big plus, since feed ramps tend to deform the nose of a bullet as it chambers. But it does create a problem: As Aronstein points out, it's a little like threading a needle by throwing the thread at the hole. So a High Standard's magazine does all the work of positioning the bullet before the slide slams it home, and sometimes it needs a little help. Fortunately, the company will tune as many magazines as you like to your pistol for \$10 shipping and handling, insisting only that you include enough of your favorite ammo to let them do the job right. If you're more adventurous, their web site at www.highstandard.com has a page devoted to home tuning tips for your magazines.

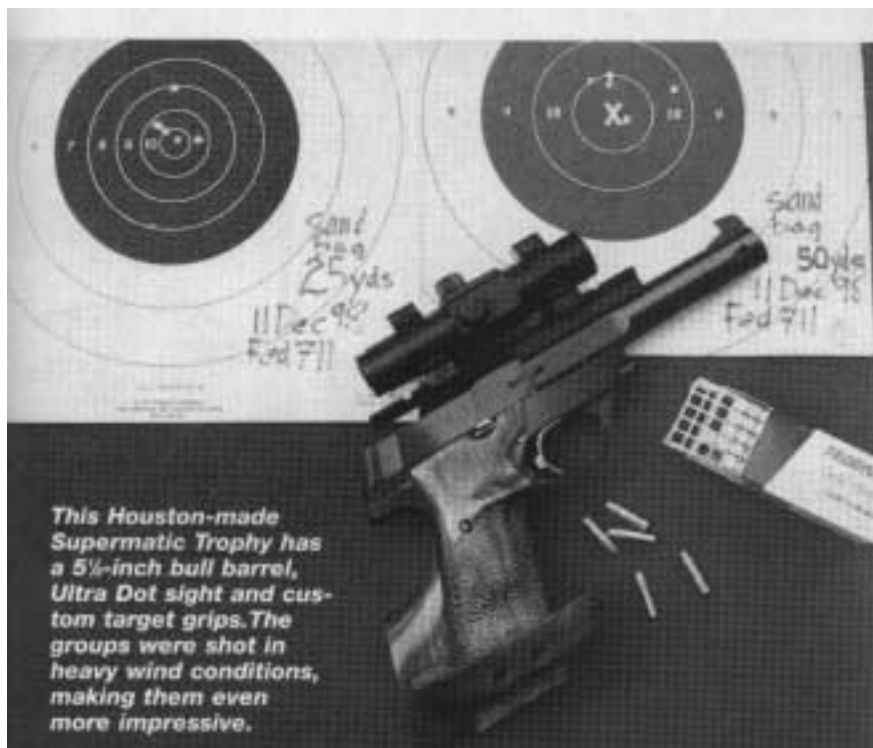
The proof of all this effort lies, of course, with the shooters, and the payoff has increased slowly and steadily since 1993, when Aronstein and Ron Stillwell visited Camp Perry just to walk around and see how High Standard was doing. The answer was not too well. Since 1984, shooters had moved on to guns they could get serviced, especially the Smith & Wesson Model 41. In 1994, Aronstein went back with Bob Shea and two



Beauty that's more than skin deep—a 1954 Supermatic with 6½-inch ported barrel, 3- and 2-ounce barrel weights and Claro walnut custom target grips.



High Standard's first Olympic model in .22 Short had an aluminum slide—one of the first American pistols to use this material. Only 1200 were made between 1948 and 1950.



This Houston-made Supermatic Trophy has a 5½-inch bull barrel, Ultra Dot sight and custom target grips. The groups were shot in heavy wind conditions, making them even more impressive.

other gunsmiths and set up on Commercial Row with an announcement that they'd fix any High Standard you wanted to bring in. They got a lot of exposure and made a whole lot of guns shoot again, and when they came back in 1995, High Standards were showing up on the line in force. In 1996, they could see the gap really starting to widen between the High Standards and the Smiths, despite the fact that the Army and the Marine Corps were issuing the Model 41 to their shooters.

That year, the percentage of Houston pistols among the High Standards on the line was still small, but in 1997, there were more High Standards on the line than Smiths, and for the first time the Houston pistols were starting to catch up to the Connecticut ones. Finally, in 1998, there were more Houston High Standards than Connecticut ones, and the two together had more representation on the line than Smith and Hammerli put together.

As you can imagine, that put orders on the books and a smile on the Houston people's faces. But as far as Alan Aronstein is concerned, it's still the feedback from the

individual shooters that can really make his day. Like the letter he proudly displays from Darius Young, one of America's most illustrious competitors in Bullseye Pistol, Free Pistol and Air Pistol, the oldest member of the 1992 U.S. Olympic shooting team and winner of so many honors that it takes several columns of print to list them all. A couple of years ago, Young bought a Houston Victor at Camp Perry and was so amazed to see his new \$500 pistol outshoot his big-bucks Hämmerli 208S at 50 yards that he had to write Aronstein and tell him about it.

And then there's Laura Young, an outstanding shooter, who is expected by many to be a member of the U.S. Olympic Shooting Team at Sydney in the year 2000. Laura bought a Houston Victor at Camp Perry 4 years

Here are the two most common types of HS takedown mechanisms. The top pistol, made in 1948, has the lever and dovetail type, whereas the 1998 Houston-made pistol shows the current mushroom-stun-and-push-button arrangement.



ago and started experimenting with it, tweaking it constantly, and sending it and her shooting log back to Houston for adjustments. As she told me on the phone, she was amazed at the Houston gunsmiths' patience and their success in getting the gun just the way she wanted it. Just to show it wasn't all in vain, at the 1997 Camp Perry matches Laura became the 19th female to earn the Distinguished Pistol Shot Badge at the National Matches since they began in 1891, and she made the President's 100 on the same day.

But the people in Houston are just as happy to hear from the youth teams they sponsor for the 4H or the service teams that are shooting High Standards again, or even the Saturday paper-punchers who send in a one-ragged-hole target and a thank-you note. And just to keep them humble, there are always the infuriated critics, like the one who ended up flying to Houston with his pistol at Aronstein's expense to find out why the empties kept stovepiping. Actually, they were banging against the screws on his scope mount and bouncing back into the pistol, so this critic ended up going home happy. But there are always a few who stay mad, and they're a salutary reminder of the fact that High Standard and high expectations go pretty much hand in hand. And why not? To paraphrase the late, great Col. Townsend Whelen, "Only accurate pistols are interesting." And on that scale of reckoning, High Standards are about as interesting as a pistol can get. ■