



REALITYCHECK™

Clint Smith

FIRST-PERSON
THOUGHTS ON
SURVIVING IN
THE REAL WORLD



The final result — the old girl better than ever.



A classic slide found for a classic pistol.

RESURRECTION

A COMMANDER RETURNS TO LIFE

by I forgot who. I shot the pistol as a competitor in 1979 and 1980 in the I.P.S.C. National Championships, and I carried it on- and off-duty as a cop. I had it at Gunsite as a student, later as an instructor, and even later on as the Operations Officer, all with Cooper. The Colt Engraving Shop engraved my initials on the dust cover when I was a student at Colt Armorer's school in 1976. I have broken two slides, with cracks through the ejection port area all the way to the rail slots. I ripped the lugs free from the original barrel. The frame has cracked, and it has a relief hole in place in the frame. I can remember two-barrel bushings broken and I cannot remember the number of slide locks and ejectors I have replaced.

But most importantly the pistol has only broken down one time in 39 years when it seemed sort of important. I was real young then, and it was, in the end, just a goofy competition thing. Today that incident means nothing to me. The little four-digit pistol has been rock-solid, and I can only poorly guess at the number of rounds I've fired through it. I pulled it down not long ago to carry for a social function, because the pistol still "functions" perfectly, and I remembered back to how it looked when I got it off the shelf at the gun store. Remembering the spring of 1970 when the big Hemi's of the Plymouth Road Runners ruled, and recalling the original appearance of that clean 1911 coming off Dillon's gun store shelf into my hand, I knew just the guy to redo this old pistol — just one more time.

I have a few guns that are special, above the others I own. The few guns I own now basically all are something I want — or need — by fit or function. The S&W engraved guns I own, all factory lettered, and the ones cut by Tony Miele are extra special, as he is my friend. My dad's service revolver (previously featured on the pages of *Handgunner* and carried by him as a police officer for 25 years) is special. I'm sure you understand.

My first pistol, purchased in 1970, was a like-new .45 Colt 1911 Lightweight Commander, manufactured by Colt in 1949. It's special because it's the year of my birth — and my first pistol as well. The Commander has gone through a lot of changes, while I did the same in my careers, and otherwise over the years.

The lightweight was my off-duty carry gun when I started a law enforcement career in 1973, when 1911s (in fact, all auto pistols) were not widely accepted. At one time or another the lightweight pistol has had an Austin Behlert grip safety, sights by MMC and then new sights by Robbie Barrkman, a Swenson thumb safety and the front strap was checkered sort of crooked,

Back To Life

The big thing was a correctly marked slide that Jason, after a "story of its own," got from a guy in the mid-west. In my opinion the slick part is the fact he took the crooked checkering off the front strap of the aluminum-framed lightweight Commander and did so perfectly — think about it. The new smooth frame looks and feels like the original grip of the pistol. After that he detailed the frame and slide, cleaned up the magazine well ramps, and placed a very clean lanyard loop ring built into the mainspring housing on the pistol.

The retro stuff fitted to the pistol is very functional, yet still adds clean and cool looking detail. The grip safety, the Yost-designed rear sight, the front ramp sight with gold inlaid vertical bar, the whole package is, well, perfect for me. After that, the "kid" just bulletproofed the pistol with solid new parts, and a new Kart barrel, and of course — as it should be no other way — finished off with a set of ivory stocks. Jason's work shows he is truly a master in his world. I'm grateful he builds guns for me.

Jason brought the gun back from the old guy rest home and placed it into a position it knows well from being there over many years of practice. It sets, as I write this, in an IWB holster from Five Shot Leather, loaded with Corbon DPX .45 caliber loads.

All we need now is another 39 years together and then I'll have the "kid" rebuild it again.



The "original" as rebuilt many times, complete with cracked frame and fussed-with slide. Could Jason repair the damage?

THE KID

Yeah, he is a kid, but a damn smart one. Jason Burton (who I fondly call "kid") and I have known each other for many years as a student/teacher, as a gun builder in the truest sense, and a friend. Jason builds pistols, with 1911s being a favorite, and a dash of Brownie's Hi-Power thrown in for good measure. Several years ago he moved from the rain of the northwest and is now settled with his bride in Tempe, Arizona, where he works with master craftsman Ted Yost at Heirloom Precision.

When it came time to rebuild the old gun it was an easy selection, as Jason just built me a stunning 1911 last year, which is a personal favorite under the category of "damn serious pistol." Since even in retirement the little gun has always been a serious tool, I could serve it no better than having it redone by one of the best guys.

