

Charles E. Petty

I am not exactly a stranger to the world of high-end 1911s, but this one made me stop and stare. Love at first sight isn't just limited to girls and boys . . . it happens with guns too.

What struck me most was the simplicity of the Turnbull Commander Heritage. There are no frills, *gee-gaws* or eyewash that do nothing for the gun aside from driving up the cost. This is a prime example of understated elegance. There is a term, usually reserved for British Best sidelock doubles, that fits perfectly here: "Funeral Grade." This term is applied to perfectly finished, black guns with little or no embellishment. A British-trained 'smith told me about these, saying they were very difficult to finish because of the long, flat surfaces.

Aside from the fact that the Commander Heritage is gorgeous, my gunsmith training took over for a



TURNBULL COMMANDER HERITAGE

Testing a New 1911 .45 ACP



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The Commander Heritage features classic Turnbull detail, including flawless front strap and stock checkering, color case work and fit, finish and function.

TURNBULL

Turnbull has recreated the two-tone magazine – once a signature of older Colts – without using cyanide. The stock has been removed just to show the range of case colors.



thorough examination. There is no lateral or vertical movement of the slide. Pressing down on the chamber does not move the barrel. A bushing wrench is helpful but the barrel bushing moves easily enough. The barrel has a .5-inch

segment that is 0.005 inch larger, which allows a better fit.

The most important elements in the accuracy equation involve the fit of the barrel at three points: the bushing, the hood (headspace extension) and, most importantly,

the bottom barrel lugs. These ride on the slide stop pin and keep the barrel locked with the slide for the time it takes for the bullet to get out of the barrel. Modern manufacturing has worked wonders for 1911 barrels and slides. Tolerances have been reduced to the point that much of the fitting needed for good accuracy is done before the shooter buys the pistol.

Turnbull's barrel is a semi-drop-in style made to his specifications. Examination of the barrel shows evidence of light, precise fitting of the barrel hood with no gaps. For me the fitting of the bottom lugs was the most challenging part of an accuracy job, where one misguided swipe of the file could put you back at square one. With the Commander Heritage assembled it was impossible to feel any movement by pushing down on the barrel, and after shooting more than 500 rounds, there was light burnishing of the lugs.

Once upon a time the only source



The Turnbull Restoration logo is on the slide where the Rampant Colt logo used to be, and the "DMT" inspector's mark is just in front of the grip panel.

for 1911 parts was Colt, but largely due the growing popularity of practical shooting sports, a market and demand for parts was created and grew rapidly. Today it is virtually impossible to say who made what unless it is clearly marked. Detail stripping revealed an assortment of well-made, unmarked parts. The barrel mates nicely with the headspace cut in the slide.

When the pistol arrived, my first observation was an exceptional slide/frame fit with no wobble in any direction. The raw forging for the frame is purchased and finished by Turnbull, with special care in the case hardening process to avoid warping from the heat. The bar stock slide is finished in-house as well, and it bears the last four digits of the serial number. My suspicion is that Turnbull has an assortment of partially finished frames and slides, and by trial and error picks the pair that will give the best end result.

The front strap is checkered in



A LabRadar chronograph was used to measure muzzle velocity when testing the Commander Heritage .45 ACP.

two steps. First the pattern is laid out by machine but then finished entirely by hand. It has all the standard amenities such as checkering, a beavertail grip safety and extended thumb safety. The sights look like common tactical types, but they are fully adjustable Ken-sight night sights with a bar-dot

pattern with two small bars on the rear and a single, larger insert on the front. Turnbull has reproduced the two-tone magazines – which were a signature of early Colt pistols – but without the toxic cyanide process of the originals.

Then I tried the trigger. I *always* complain about triggers . . . until



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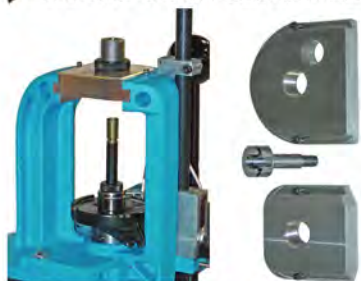
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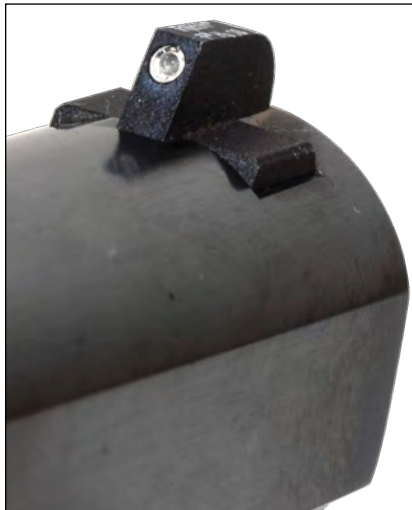
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The front sight has a larger element to focus attention where it should be.

The rear sight is adjustable for windage and elevation, and two small tritium capsules form the rear part of the bar-dot night sights.



Turnbull Commander Heritage Specifications

Mechanism type: Locked breech

Finish: color case-hardened frame, polished blue slide

Caliber: .45 ACP

Overall length: 8 inches

Barrel length: 4.25 inches

Weight: 36 ounces

Magazine capacity: 7

Trigger: SA, 3.5 pounds

Sights: Adjustable, bar-dot night sights

Grips: walnut

Price: Available on request

Contact information:

www.turnbullrestoration.com

now. It is a creepless, glass-rod breaking, consistent 3.5 pounds. Now *that's* a trigger job. When I later had the time to detail strip the pistol, I saw why. When the sear and hammer pins are removed, they usually fall out, but these did not. They fit so well that it took a gentle punch to push them out. If the sear and hammer cannot wobble, that's a good thing.

Any time a shooter embarks on testing a new gun he/she is faced with a nearly bottomless pit of decisions. That is especially true when handloads are intended to be used. Each element in the equation is a variable, and there simply is no way to study them all. So the first step was to eliminate less common bullet weights and styles. That left me with three weights: 185, 200 and 230 grains in jacketed hollowpoints, and one 200-grain lead semiwadcutter as a common plinking load. Brass and primers are also variables, but in most cases not big factors, with the exception of maximum loads, where it is prudent to follow the components used in the data source.

By far the most difficult decision handloaders must make is the powder/bullet pairing. At this point experience is the best teacher, and a Ransom Rest the judge and jury. As a bullseye shooter, the factory 185-grain JSWC load was my accuracy standard but times have changed, and

the decline in military shooting caused Remington and Winchester to abandon target loads, and Federal only makes limited runs. Most civilian shooters now use hand-

Turnbull Commander Heritage .45 ACP Handloads

bullet (grains)	powder	charge (grains)	overall loaded length (inches)	velocity (fps)	extreme spread (fps)	25-yard 5-shot group average (inches)
185 Nosler JHP	W-231	5.7	1.210	826	47	2.65
	AutoComp	6.5		844	76	1.59
	CFE Pistol	6.3		845	49	1.90
	Titegroup	4.8		820	71	1.85
200 Sierra JHP	W-231	5.2	1.210	733	49	2.65
	AutoComp	6.6		839	67	2.23
	CFE Pistol	6.5		838	59	1.98
	Titegroup	4.5		745	57	1.92
200 LSWC	W-231	5.0	1.250	796	41	2.27
	AutoComp	6.0		864	115	2.24
	CFE Pistol	6.0		855	67	2.40
	Titegroup	4.0		752	45	1.95
230 Hornady HAP	W-231	5.0	1.250	722	48	2.16
	AutoComp	6.3		824	53	1.91
	CFE Pistol	5.6		746	51	2.65
	Titegroup	4.5		784	39	1.75
Factory loads						
185 Federal Gold Medal JSWC				783	30	2.35
200 SIG JHP				911	53	2.17
230 Black Hills JHP				848	30	2.09
Notes: All handloads were shot using Federal brass with Federal Large Pistol primers. Velocities are the average of 15 shots measured with a LabRadar chronograph.						
<i>Be Alert – Publisher cannot accept responsibility for errors in published load data. Listed loads are only valid in the test firearms used. Reduce initial powder charge by 10 percent and work up while watching for pressure signs.</i>						

loads, and 185-grain JHPs from Nosler and Hornady are very popular, followed by cast bullets.

Before the .38 Super took over the International Practical Shooting Confederation (IPSC) world, the virtual standard was the Hensley & Gibbs No. 68 .45 200-grain LSWC bullet, because it is heavy enough to make major power factors at reasonable velocities. The final candidate was the 230-grain ball load at 825 fps (hardball) required for anyone seeking the coveted Distinguished Pistol Shot Medal before the military switched to the NATO 9mm.

With any new pistol, testing begins with simple function shooting. There always seems to be a bunch of miscellaneous ammunition lying around, consisting of leftovers from previous efforts. They are an anonymous assortment of factory and handloads with bullets of every weight, type and shape. The Commander Heritage digested 50 of those without a hiccup.

Accuracy testing was next, fol-

lowing a pattern of 185-, 200- and 230-grain factory loads. Three, five-shot groups were fired at 25 yards from a benchrest, and velocities were recorded with a LabRadar chronograph.

Next came handloads. The loads used were chosen based on past experience with a group of powders that have performed well in the .45 ACP.

Whenever I look at accuracy data like this, my focus is finding the smallest and largest group, in this case 1.37 and 2.82 inches, respectively, but as I studied the table another thought appeared. Instead, I began to think about how similar they are. There are no shining stars or obviously awful loads. Within any group of five-shot strings, there could be well over an inch difference between the smallest and largest strings. It happens more often than most handloaders think. The bottom line here is that the accuracy of this Turnbull Commander Heritage is equal to, or better than, production guns that are not hard-fitted. ●

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