The Colt 1911 Rail Gun
by Walther

Right- and left-hand views of the Rail Gun.

by Geoff Smith

After a continuous century of production, there can be little doubt that the Colt 1911 is the world's most successful self-loading handgun design. And although John Browning's original was chambered for his .45 ACP round, the design remains in production by countless manufacturers in a variety of different cartridges.

Colt currently offers a .45-calibre Rail Gun, which is externally similar to the one under review here and which was offered primarily to enable the attachment of 'tactical' accessories such as lights or laser sights. The model reviewed herein is a full-sized single-action copy, but is chambered in the .22 rimfire calibre.

The pistol comes in a blow-moulded box, which features not only the Colt logo rather prominently, but also a label that says 'Walther'. I'm not sure about the corporate arrangements between Colt and Walther, but there must have been some form of legal agreement made to enable a quintessentially American brand to appear on a German-made gun. The gun itself bears German proof marks, Colt logos and the words 'Made by Carl Walther, Germany', as well as 'US Importer Umarex USA, Fort Smith/AR'. The associated advertising material about this

The field-stripping routine.

handgun says it features a computer-numerical-control-machined aluminium slide, and field-strips like the original.

For review purposes, the distributor Frontier Arms also supplied a diminutive Walther P22 laser sight, designed to click directly onto the Picatinny rail on the underside of the pistol frame just forward of the triggerguard without any further mounts or screws. The fully adjustable laser sight weighs a tiny 43g with its two SR44 silver-oxide button cells installed, and shines a very bright red (635nm) beam, which is mostly visible outdoors during the day (but only with difficulty in very bright light).

Upon first picking up the gun, it certainly feels like the original, but for its slightly lighter weight. Unloaded, this model weighs 953g, as compared with the approximate 1100g of the original 1911A. The face-on view, of course, exposes the .22-calibre muzzle, which looks 'too small', but apart from that, it closely resembles its century-old ancestor, at least from the outside.

When we look inside, however, things are quite different. As is typical for most .22 rimfire self-loaders, this pistol does not have the locked breech of its centrefire ancestor, but employs a simple blow-back action. For this reason, the barrel is fixed to the die-cast alloy frame, and while field-stripping, remains virtually the same as for the original Model 1911s. Indeed, the slide >

Long-time Colt enthusiast Rodney Hunt was rapt - "Gotta get one!"

The left rear of the slide features the Colt logo.

The muzzle showing the barrel bushing and recoil spring plug.

must be slipped forwards to remove it from both the barrel and frame (rather than slipping from the frame with the barrel remaining inside).

Field-stripping involves removing the magazine and after ensuring the pistol has nothing in the chamber, the recoil spring plug is pushed inwards and the barrel bushing is rotated clockwise (viewed from behind) to release the recoil spring plug and spring (carefully, as it is under tension and will fly out). The barrel bushing is then withdrawn, and the slide is pushed back until its notch aligns with the bump on the upper side of the slide stop lever. The slide stop lever is then pulled out and the slide can be slid, lifted and pushed forwards over the barrel and from the frame. Finally, the die-cast alloy recoil spring guide is withdrawn from under the barrel. This is all the dismantling required to enable cleaning and regular maintenance.

The barrel

The inner workings of this handgun, not surprisingly, are reminiscent of the Walther SP22 (reviewed in Issue 7 of *Australian & New Zealand Handgun*). In particular, the 125mm barrel is a composite assembly, consisting of an inner liner and an outer barrel sleeve. The breech end of the liner attaches to a steel block, which has the extractor slot and feed ramp milled into its rear surface. This pushes forwards through the high section of the frame immediately above the triggerguard and is locked into place by the outer barrel sleeve, which, in turn, is fixed by a threaded collar about the muzzle. Effectively, the inner liner is stretched, while the outer sleeve is compressed.

The push-pull effect of this is to give the rather skinny, 12mm-diameter barrel assembly greater rigidity than perhaps would otherwise be the case. The combined barrel wall thickness of 3.2mm is certainly at the thinner end of rimfire barrels in my experience. There are six lands and grooves and the rifling appears to be regularly cut, as opposed to some of the more modern polygonal forms.

The barrel is composed of an inner lining and outer sleeve tightened into the frame by the locking collar at the muzzle.

Sights

The pistol's sights are held to the slide by way of conventional dovetails and feature socket-headed grub screws, which, when loosened, provide for windage adjustment. There is no adjustment for elevation, although during field tests using high-velocity ammunition, the pistol shot close to the point of aim at 10m, and a 6 o'clock hold at 25m put the bullets into the centre of a standard target. The sight radius is 165mm and the rear-sight features two white dots that line up nicely with the one at the rear of the fore-sight.

Laser sights are quite a novelty to this reviewer. But certainly in subdued light, such as on an overcast day, the red dot on the Walther P22 sight is visible on targets even at 25m, so one could theoretically shoot 'from the hip' by placing the red dot onto the target. In practice, of course, the red dot shows very clearly how hard it is to hold your aim on the 10-ring using any of the offhand holds. It is, as Frontier Arms' Chris Papps says, a very effective training aid.

Slide, grip and magazine

When first reading of the precision CNC-machined aluminium slide, I was apprehensive

A right-side view with the magazine removed.

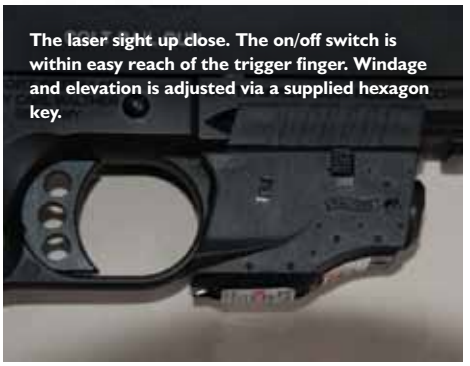
about wear and tear. However, this was allayed as soon as I looked closely at the pistol and discovered that the working areas of the slide (particularly the breech block) is actually a steel insert. At the rear of the slide is a transverse roll pin, which, according to the exploded diagram, locks the steel breech block, firing pin and several springs into the slide itself.

As with the original 1911 model, there is a grip safety, which prevents the hammer from being released unless the grip is being held. There is also a safety catch at the rear left side of the frame in the conventional position, which, when operated, locks the hammer.

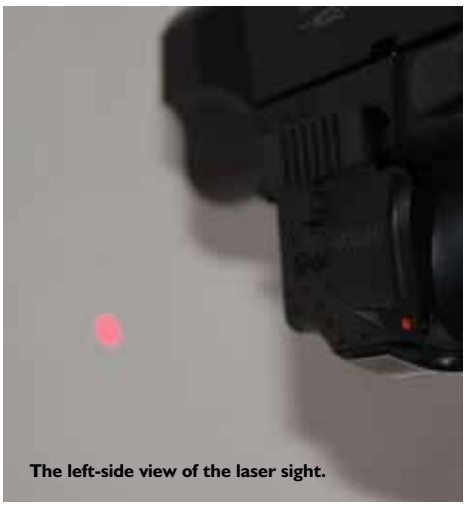
The alloy trigger has three almost vertical 4.9mm ventilation holes and operates the sear by way of a stirrup-shaped link that surrounds the magazine well, much like the original. Trigger pull was measured at 5lb 13oz average (25.9 Newtons) and is a highlight in my opinion, having virtually no creep. The hammer, which has straight serrations and features an elongated 'skeleton' hole, is made from steel, as is the slide stop.

The 10-round magazine is made from pressed stainless and has a polymer base and

A front-on view. The laser sight has the usual warnings about eye safety.



The laser sight up close. The on/off switch is within easy reach of the trigger finger. Windage and elevation is adjusted via a supplied hexagon key.



The left-side view of the laser sight.

An instant after firing - the pistol is shrouded in smoke and the red LED is just visible.

The laser sight in its package.


Empties are ejected up and back.

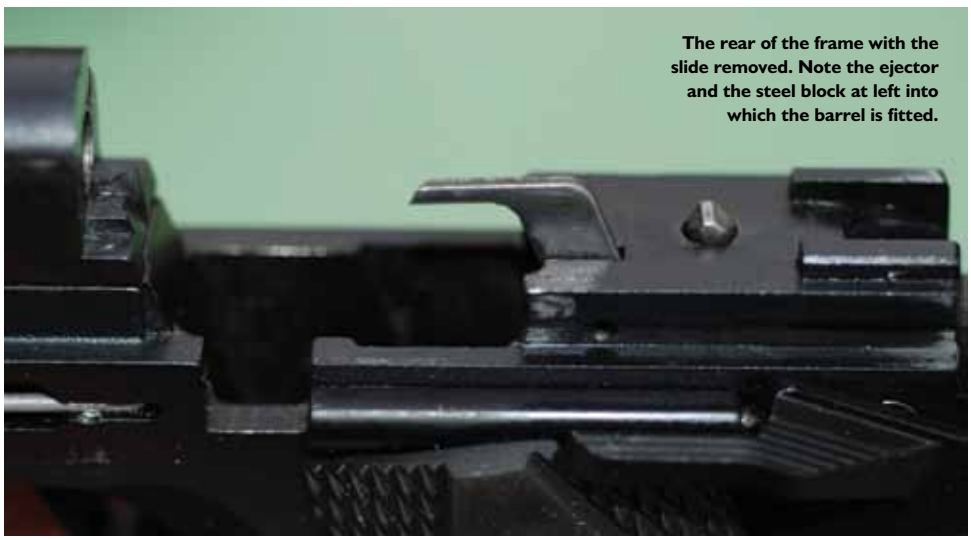
follower and a steel thumb button on the left side to aid with loading. It is of 'keyhole' configuration and has a compression coil spring in the circular front section.

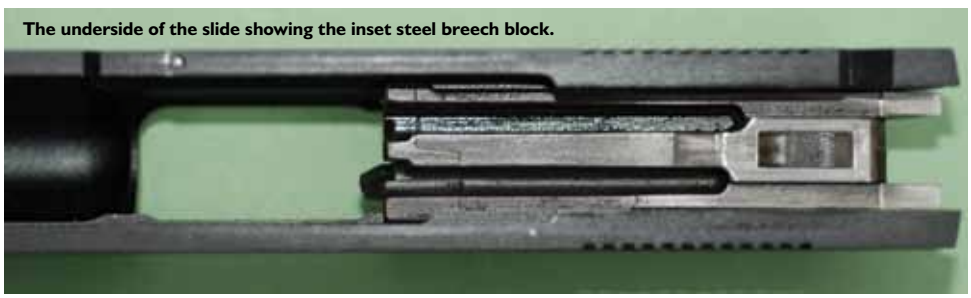
Testing

Initial tests revealed a minor problem, in that the pistol is extremely fussy about certain brands of ammunition, especially in the lower velocity ranges. In particular, it disliked SK Standard Plus, refusing to cycle and holding onto the fired case very firmly. However, once I had established which brands it didn't like, there were virtually no more problems and the gun was deemed to be great fun to shoot and acceptably accurate. I found that Winchester's Bushman and Power-Point ammo performed very well, as did Remington's Target ammo.

Winchester's Winner and T22, as well as Lapua Super Club ammo all frequently failed to eject, and while SK Pistol Match and Geco Pistol Match ammo generally performed okay and were quite accurate, there were occasional failures to cycle properly with these. CCI Standard Velocity ammo also cycled adequately and gave several surprisingly good groups.

Overall, rested groups of five shots from all of the brands that worked flawlessly typically ranged between 60 and 100mm at 25m, although several groups with Remington ammo were down to around 25 to 30mm. The pistol was also tested by a number of experienced shooters whose reactions were very encouraging, with several saying they wanted one for themselves!


The rear of the frame with the slide removed. Note the ejector and the steel block at left into which the barrel is fitted.


The underside of the slide showing the inset steel breech block.

Summary

At the time of writing, Walther's Colt 1911 Rail Gun retailed for around $795, while the Walther P22 laser sight is a further $175 or so. The pistol offers shooters reasonable value in a firearm of great nostalgic shape, appearance and feel, which will serve them well in a good variety of matches. The addition of the laser sight adds a dimension of novelty and perhaps utility, especially in indoor ranges, where there may be lower lighting levels than out in the bright outdoors.

For more information, visit your local gunshop or www.frontierarms.com.au ∎

Specifications

Manufacturer: Walther
Model: Colt 1911 Rail Gun
Distributor: Frontier Arms
Calibre: .22
Barrel Length: 125mm
Overall Length: 220mm
Height: 135mm
Weight: 953g bare
Magazine Capacity: 10
Action: Single
Sights: Adjustable for windage only
RRP: $795