Walther has a coil mainspring, while the Mak uses a leaf spring. The trigger and sear mechanisms are quite different. The Mak magazine catch is on the heel of the butt, rather than a push-button behind the trigger. This was due to Russian experience during WWII, when Tokarev pistols with the push-button mag release sometimes dumped their magazines in combat. The Mak ejector was simpler. It doubled as the rear end of the slide stop (the PP pistols had no manual slide stop). Confusing to most PP, PPK and P.38 users, the Mak safety works in the opposite direction, being safe when up, rather than down. This takes some getting used to.

The takedown procedure is similar to the Walther PP, utilizing a pull-down trigger guard to initiate the process. Production-wise, in addition to using fewer parts, most of the Mak parts could be quickly stamped from sheet metal rather than being machined. This became advantageous for mass production, as the Russians not only had to supply their troops, but also most of the Warsaw Pact nations of that era. The 9mm Makarov cartridge used in the pistol is unique, and is not interchangeable in any way with .380 ACP or any other 9mm round. The safety puts a lug in front of the firing pin and also locks the trigger, hammer and slide. The 3.63" barrel is chrome plated on the inside to help against corrosion. The Mak is fairly light and compact. Its magazine holds eight rounds, so with one in the chamber, it’s a nine-rounder. External finish is blue, although some matte-nickel-finish specimens have been observed.

PM pistols have been made at various arsenals in Russia. The pistol illustrated was manufactured at the Tula Arsenal in 1987. Most Russian imports I’ve seen have had adjustable rear sights to meet U.S. import criteria, but this one is as issued with a fixed rear sight. East German-manufactured pistols (Pistole M) have very high quality and finish and many have been imported as surplus. The Chinese make the Mak as the Type 59, and most have been manufactured by Norinco. A limited number have been imported. These are comparatively crude in finish. The Bulgarian-made pistols are designated as PMs, and most are very finely crafted and finished. Again, only limited numbers were imported.

I have examined specimens from each country, and will have to say that I like the East German versions best from the standpoint of workmanship and finish. Most of the East German guns do show signs of extensive use, however. A number of imported Makarovs were converted to caliber .380 ACP via a barrel change in order to use a cartridge more readily available in the U.S.

The availability of Makarov pistols has pretty much dried up in the U.S., as imports have either ceased or have been severely restricted. Don’t ask me why. In the 1990s they were quite available, but I haven’t seen but a few Maks at gun shows in recent years. Therefore, values have escalated on those that show up from time to time. Makarovs are innovative handguns and genuine relics of the Cold War. The design criteria of power, reliability, compactness, accuracy, simplicity and economy of manufacture were all met handily. The Mak was a milestone design that was distributed in large numbers worldwide. It’s a genuine classic.