The Colt Python Revolver

amazing accuracy. Colt cylinders rotate clockwise, with the action’s hand serving to press the cylinder into the frame rather than out of it. The hand also keeps rotational pressure on the cylinder at the moment of firing, keeping it solidly in place. Small details perhaps, but they were contributory to consistent performance. The extra weight of the heavy barrel with its rib and ejector rod shroud made for a very steady hold on target, and the Python began accumulating more than its share of trophies on the bullseye target circuit.

This medium-frame revolver also showed some advantages in reduced size compared to S&W’s large-frame .357s, and it began to find a following among hunters, police, and citizens looking for a top-drawer defense revolver. Catering to these latter two markets, Colt brought out a variation with a four-inch barrel, unofficially named the Police Python. The main drawback seen with the revolver was that it was very expensive to manufacture with all the hand labor lavished on it. Its resultant high price dragged it down on the police market. Notwithstanding this, many cops frugally saved their pennies to get one of these Colt masterpieces and became the envy of their peers.

Later, Colt introduced some options on the Python. 2-1/2” and 8” barrels were offered, and a few were equipped with non-standard 3” barrels. The early 2-1/2” guns had shortened stocks like the Official Police models to better suit them for concealment use. A very few .38 Special-only models were made with 8” barrels. Nickel plating was offered as an option, with the same careful polishing as that employed on the Royal Blue guns. These really sparkled. A 4” nickel Python is illustrated for this article. It was manufactured in 1981 and is maintained in excellent condition with its original box and papers. In the 1980s, a satin nickel finish (“Royal Coltguard”) was offered for a brief period, until stainless steel Pythons came on line. Stainless Pythons were made in both brushed and highly polished (Python Elite) versions. Also in the ’80s “Hunter” Pythons with 8” barrels, rubber grips and scopes appeared, as did “Silhouette” models, which were almost identical. With ever-increasing costs of labor-intensive manufacture and declining revolver sales against the popular and cheaper semiautomatic pistols, the Python was finally officially laid to rest by Colt in 1999. The Colt Custom Shop continued to turn out a few Pythons until 2003, but even that production has now ceased.

Over the years, high Python quality had not always been constant, probably due to new people coming in and the steep learning curve for the hand labor needed to produce the gun. Some examples have therefore not lived up to the name and mystique of the original revolvers. Extensive hard use of the closely fitted Python invariably demands a re-tuning by someone knowledgeable, and gunsmiths familiar with the old V-spring action are getting less common to find. The Colt Python has sadly had its day. Good surviving specimens made in the heyday of top Colt quality are getting harder to find on the used gun market, and so prices on fine used Pythons are now escalating rapidly. Lucky are those that have one or more of these truly classic handguns. Pythons have now come right up there as status symbols equal to Rolex watches and fine luxury automobiles!