

# Model 1908 Pocket Automatic

length, less than an inch in width, and had a two-inch barrel. It was easily one of the most compact firearms available.

In the 1916-1917 period, a magazine safety was added to the Model 1908 around serial number 141,000. It was designed by Colt engineer George Tansley. This device served to disable the gun by disconnecting the trigger from the sear when the magazine was removed. Tansley obtained a patent for the magazine safety on July 31, 1917, and this patent date was added to others on the right side of the slide at about serial number 284,000.



"The 'vest pocket' pistol came from a time when citizens commonly wanted to be discretely armed."

The Model 1908 could be purchased with either Colt's highly polished Royal Blue finish, or one could get a nicked version. Gold plating and a variety of engraving services were also offered. The blued guns featured a contrasting mottled case-hardened finish on the trigger, manual safety and grip safety. These were very attractive little guns, with much attention devoted to proper fitting as well as finish. The opinion of many was that they outclassed their FN cousins handily. Several different versions of grips were offered over time. The earliest grips were made of hard rubber and were checkered, with the world COLT in a banner on

top. The "rampant colt" logo was superimposed on a large elongated stylized letter "C". The second version was similar, but with the rampant colt showing no "C" beneath it. The pistol illustrated has grips of this type; it was manufactured in 1919 and has a serial number in the 220,000 range. It's in excellent shape for being over 90 years old, so I suspect it was probably kept in a dresser drawer for most of the time since it was made. In the 1920s, checkered walnut wood grips were introduced featuring a Colt medallion near the top. Special order grips were available in mother of pearl and ivory, with Colt medallions or custom carving as options. Aftermarket grips were also widely available. In the course of the gun's manufacture, minor changes were made to some parts. The Model 1908 was discontinued in 1948 (with only one gun being made in that year). Approximately 409,000 were manufactured over 40 years, with interruption only during the WWII years of 1942-1945. The final serial number was 420,705, with some serial number blocs not being used. The little guns were sold in brown cardboard boxes with a hangtag, an instruction sheet, a cleaning brush, and a green brochure on the Tansley magazine safety (starting about a year after that feature was introduced). Early boxes, often numbered to the gun, carried a label saying "COLT AUTOMATIC PISTOL" over "RIMLESS .25 SMOKELESS." These boxes and accessories are highly valued when present with a gun.

Colt again marketed a .25 automatic pistol in 1958, known as the "Junior Colt." This was made for Colt in Spain by Unceta & Cie. The Gun Control Act of 1968 stopped importation of this small gun. Accordingly, in 1970 a similar one was made in the U.S. by another manufacturer for Colt and was called the Colt Automatic Caliber .25. These pistols both had external hammers and had no grip safeties. The latter pistol was finally dropped from the Colt line in 1975.

The Model 1908 vest pocket pistol came from a time when citizens commonly wanted to be discretely armed. Previous to the introduction of this gun, responsibly armed people either used Remington's .41 rimfire double derringer or any of a variety of small revolvers in .32 or .38 caliber. Colt's new pistol gave them a very compact, concealable, reliable and exquisitely manufactured alternative which was wildly popular in its day for both men and women. Law officers also routinely carried them as backup guns. Although the efficacy of the .25 auto cartridge can be debated, the quality of these tiny guns cannot be. They were, and in many cases still are, jewels of the gunmaking art. They are definitely classics in anyone's book, and are ardently sought after by collectors as values continue to escalate.