Savage Pocket Pistols

rib on the barrel to a position where the slide could open. Later guns had two lugs/ribs. In theory, the rotation of the bullet through the barrel counteracted this movement until the bullet had left the barrel, but in reality, the breech had begun to separate from the barrel a bit before the bullet was completely expelled. However, the system worked well enough. The guns had an external “cocking lever” directly connected to the floating firing pin. It looked like an external hammer and operated the same way. The cocking lever and the firing pin were part of the breechblock, which also contained the extractor. The double-stack magazine allowed increased capacity in a standard-length grip frame. The Savage pistols, beginning with the military .45 version, were among the first to use this two-column concept which became much more common in later years.

The normal finish for these pistols was bright blue, although some matte blue guns were also produced. A black paint finish was used for a short time. Factory optional finishes were nickel, silver, and gold plating. The first pistols had steel grips; these were soon replaced by black hard rubber. Over the years, some of these grips have turned brown due to sunlight and/or oxidation. Additional options included mother of pearl, pearl inlay, and (usually smooth) walnut or cherry wood. Colt began offering “hammerless” (actually internally hammered) grip-safety pocket automatics in 1903, and these became quite popular. Seeing this trend, Savage developed their improved Model 1915. On this pistol, the cocking lever was completely shrouded and a grip safety was integrated into the backstrap. A hold-open feature kept the breech open after firing the last round from the magazine. This pistol was initially offered in .380 caliber in February 1915. In April of that year a .32 version appeared. The company advertised these pistols as having five safety features: the grip safety, the lack of an external hammer that might catch in a pocket, a manual safety, a loaded cartridge indicator, and the hold-open device. The life of the Model 1915 was cut short by Savage’s wartime efforts, which included manufacturing Lewis machine guns. Production of it lasted only three years, ending in 1917. That makes these particular pistols valuable collector’s items today. The .32 pistol illustrated here is one of these, and was manufactured in 1915.

In 1918, competition from Remington’s ergonomic Model 51 pocket pistol caused some re-thinking at Savage and a redesign of the original Model 1907. The Model 1917 pocket pistol appeared in 1920, first in .380 and then in .32. The major change from the Model 1907 was that the backstrap angled more sharply away from the gun, resulting in a wider, flared look. This made the pistol slightly heavier than the Model 1907, 22 vs. 21 ounces. It’s debatable if this change resulted in a more naturally pointing pistol, but that was the objective. Production of the Model 1917 ceased in 1926, although some pistols were sold as late as 1929. The era of the Savage pocket pistols came to an end with over 273,000 having been made. There were 209,801 Model 1907s in .32 caliber, and 9,849 in .380. For the Model 1915, 6,502 were made in .32, and 3,900 in .380. The Model 1917 saw 29,072 produced in .32, and 14,225 in .380. Savage pocket pistols were well made of high quality materials, carefully fitted, and functioned reliably. Specimens in good condition are sought-after classics, and some – such as the Model 1915 with its short production run – are bringing high prices on the collector market today.