

Ahern Under the Gun: The Century Color

By Jerry Ahern, Photos by Sharon Ahern

There have always been odd-looking handguns, of course, and a great many of these have proven to be excellent firearms. One handgun I've recently been examining is certain to make the "Odd" list for looks. Fortunately, it's also a good shooter; so, its unusual looks notwithstanding, I'd recommend the pistol as a fun shooter and for some practical applications, as well. I'm referring to the Century International Arms (www.centuryarms.com) Colefire Magnum Semi-Auto Pistol in 7.62 x 25mm, otherwise known as 7.62 Tokarev.

The 7.62 x 25mm Soviet Tokarev cartridge, as many readers know, is all but dimensionally identical to the 7.63 x 25mm Mauser cartridge, famed in the C-96 Broomhandle and the slightly smaller Bolo Mauser pistols, the name "Bolo" deriving from the popularity of these more concealable Mausers among the Bolsheviki – the early Russian Communists.

As the popular wisdom goes, the Mauser cartridge can be fired safely in a properly functioning Tokarev pistol, but the Tokarev ammunition – hotter – shouldn't be considered safe in the Mausers. The Tokarev cartridge, of course, owes its design to the Mauser cartridge. I have some experience with Bolo Mausers and, one of these days, intend to find a nice condition C-96. I already have the ammunition and the stripper clips. Tokarev ammunition that is packaged in strippers can be a great source for stripper clips to use in a Mauser, original Mauser stripper clips sometimes difficult to find.

But, I had no experience with the Tokarev ammo – aside from scavenging clips for a Bolo 20 years ago and subsequently giving away the ammunition. I now have experience – limited, granted – with the 7.62 x 25mm Tokarev cartridge, because I have experience firing that "odd" looking pistol I mentioned. The Colefire Magnum's name may sound odd, too. How is it a magnum?

Before there were magnums, the C-96 Mauser's 7.63mm cartridge, at around 1400 feet per second, was looked at quite seriously as a high-velocity cartridge and, in terms of velocity and foot pounds of energy, is quite comparable to some .357 Magnum loadings. Bullets are smaller in weight, of

course, and loaded ammunition is always found as featuring full metal case construction.

The name aside, what about the Colefire Magnum's looks? Picture a British Sterling submachinegun, or the Century International Arms Sterling Type I Semi-Auto Rifle, a civilian legal, semi-auto only version of the original British military and police weapon. The Colefire Magnum uses basically the same receiver, only shorter. It can even be had in 9 x 19mm, like the Sterling Semi-Auto Rifle. And, the rifle can now be had in 7.62 x 25mm Tokarev.

Confused yet?

In 7.62 x 25mm Tokarev, the Colefire Magnum is paired with a modified magazine with 25-round capacity. The cap on the rear of the receiver is fitted with a sling swivel for a single point sling and that might be advisable with this pistol. Empty weight is 4-3/4 pounds and length overall is 13-1/4".

My son-in-law, Danny Akers, and I got together with our mutual friend, Bradley Fielding, and each of us did some shooting with the pistol. Spare magazines at this point in time are not easily had and we had some difficulty with the front of the magazine body. Talented guy that he is, Danny affected a fix on the spot. The magazines, by the way, are marked 7.62 x 25, so that no mistake can be made with Sterling/Sten magazines in 9mm.

Tokarev ammunition is known for comparatively bright muzzle flash and solid recoil. Because of weather conditions that day – hot, sunny and miserable – none of us remarked about muzzle flash. Perceived recoil was dampened to virtually zip by the pistol's weight. The 4-1/2" barrel and very basic but easily used peep rear sight and shielded post front sight made for accurate shooting two-hand unsupported, at about 30 feet. That rear sight can be flipped for larger or smaller apertures and the front sight would be adjustable.

All jokes about the Colefire Magnum's looks aside, it is rather imposing in appearance. With the magazine feeding from the side, just as in the classic British submachineguns, and a black finish, the pistol looks peculiar, but good. The angle of the grip is excellent for natural pointing and allows the weapon to sit very well in the hand, weight distributed more evenly than if the pistol grip were further rearward. Inspired by a military weapon, it is



Above left: The semi-auto Sterling, at right the Colefire Magnum pistol. Note the similarities of design. Right: Ahern taking aim with a conventional two-hand hold.