

TINKERING TOOLS

Make your cowboy experience that much more enjoyable!

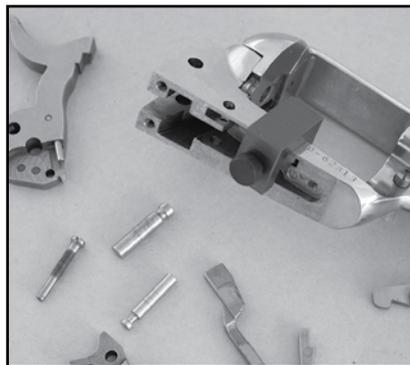
BY TODD G. LOFGREN

I don't know how many of you out there are "shade-tree" gunsmiths like me, but I find part of the enjoyment of firearms ownership to include tinkering with the guns I own. As far as Cowboy guns go, one of the most popular model handguns in use in this sport has to be the single-action revolvers from Ruger, be it Blackhawk or Vaquero.

With the introduction of the New Model Blackhawk in 1973, which incorporates Ruger's transfer bar safety system, the loading gate was redesigned so that now, when opened, it freed the cylinder so it could be rotated for loading and unloading. Eliminated were the loading and safety notches from the New Model's hammer, which had to be fully forward for the gate to be opened. With this redesign came new parts incorporated into this mechanism's design, one of which Ruger named the "Gate Detent Spring." If you've ever disassembled a New Model Ruger or Vaquero down to its frame, then you're undoubtedly familiar with this part. Reassembly requires that the Gate Detent Spring be properly repositioned, held in place and depressed with the tip of a punch or other such tool so the Trigger Pivot Pin can be inserted through the frame, over the top of the end of the depressed Gate Detent Spring and through the cylinder latch assembly and trigger that have to be properly aligned to accept the trigger pivot pin. All this requires great manual dexterity, infinite patience, and a third hand—if you have one.

West Fargo

The manual dexterity and patience is up to you, but thanks to gunsmith Wes Flowers (aka West Fargo) that needed third hand is available in the form of a nifty little tool he invented called the "Gate Detent Spring 3rd Hand." Machined from aluminum bar stock, the "3rd Hand" fastens over the top of the cylinder window and holds the gate detent spring in place and properly



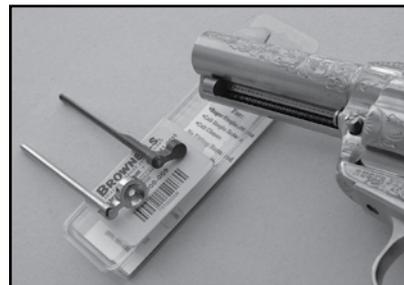
The "3rd Hand" from Wes Flowers is designed to hold the Gate Detent Spring in place, under tension, leaving you two hands for parts alignment and Trigger Pivot Pin installation on your Ruger single-actions.

depressed, leaving your two hands to manage parts placement and pin insertion without too much additional difficulty. Priced at \$18 and available directly from Wes, if you only use it one time the frustration you will eliminate is well worth its price. From "short stroke" action jobs, to custom tools and parts, to putting back the "clicks" in your clickless New Model Rugers, see all that Wes has to offer by calling 520-826-0012 or visiting cas-town.com/westfargogunsmith.

Brownells

While we're on the subject of Ruger single-actions, depending on which model Ruger you own, the ejector rod assembly it came with can have either a small, circular button or a pretty much equally small but a little easier-to-operate, crescent-shaped button. My current brace of Cowboy pistols is a pair of 50th Anniversary Ruger .357 Mag Flattops that, like the originals they emulate, came equipped with ejector rods equipped with the small (about 1/4-inch in diameter) round buttons. Now, for the casual plinker or hunter who carries his Blackhawk a lot more than he shoots it, these small

buttons work just fine. But, to the Cowboy Shooter who loads and unloads his pistols many times during practice and at matches, a bigger, easier, and faster-to-operate and more comfortable-on-the-digits button of greater size makes much more sense. Mine now wear bull's-eye ejector rods made by MK Technologies and obtained through the Brownells catalog. Available in either blue or stainless steel, these rods come with a button a full one-half inch in diameter, with a dished face providing positive and comfortable finger purchase for that quick, positive and painless reload. Reminiscent of the "Bull's-Eye" rods found on early Colt SAAs, these easier-to-operate "ejectors" are a drop-in fit on your



The replacement Bull's-Eye ejector rods available from Brownells are an easy, drop-in replacement for the small, button-headed rods often found on Ruger (and other model) single-actions and provide for a more comfortable and quicker reload.

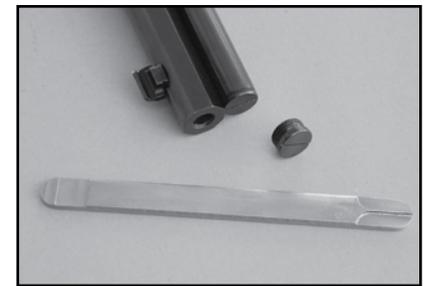
Rugers, Colts or Colt clones (regardless of barrel length) and retail from Brownells for \$38.28 in either blue or stainless. For these and all your gun and gunsmithing needs, visit their website brownells.com or request one of their catalogs at 800-741-0015—it's a gun-lover's wish book.

UniqueTek

Here's another handy tool from UniqueTek that every Cowboy Shooter should have in his trusty toolkit. It's a wrench



designed specifically to remove the magazine tube end caps from early original or replica Model 1866 or 1873 Winchesters. It was just last match that one of our shooters stuck a bulged cartridge halfway into the chamber of his 73 replica, requiring partial rifle disassembly to extricate it. Part of that disassembly involved the removal of the innards and extra rounds contained in the rifle's magazine tube. Unlike the magazine caps found on later Winchester rifles that are held in place with a small transversing plug screw, the end caps on early 66s and 73s, and replicas thereof, are threaded and screwed directly into the end of the maga-



The End Cap Mag Tube wrench from UniqueTek allows easy, no-mar removal of the mag end caps from early original and most replica Winchester Models 66 and 73.

zine tube, requiring a rather odd-sized and thin-bladed screwdriver to remove. Designed by gunsmith Glenn Stolle of Arizona, who specializes in Cowboy guns, the 66/73 end-cap wrench is specifically designed to fit that long, thin, screwdriver slot found on both early original and replica 66 and 73 Winchesters. It has two blades, one at each end oriented 90 degrees to each other, so the end-cap slot can be engaged regardless of its orientation. The blades are a full half-inch long to engage the cap across its full width and gauged to fit most end-slot sizes, as some variance in slot widths may be encountered. Fabricated of stainless steel, the blades have a square profile so they won't slip out of the slot, and the wrench measures 6 inches in length providing plenty of leverage for the most recalcitrant of caps. I tried this wrench on my two Uberti 73 replicas and it fit perfectly in their slots and made mag-cap removal a snap. Priced at \$14.95, see this and the other products designed specifically for the needs of the shooter at uniquetek.com or call 855-507-0866. 🍌