

Uberti's Competition Six Shooters: A Pair of 1873 El Patron Revolvers

By the *Guns and Shooting Online Staff*

Being single action revolver fans, when Uberti (www.uberti.com) announced a hand-tuned version of their 1873 SAA Cattleman revolver named the El Patron ("the boss"), we were definitely interested. This replica of Colt's classic Peacemaker features easy-view sights for faster target acquisition, fully checkered walnut grips and Wolfe (made in USA) springs for a lighter, smoother action. Each El Patron is tested and certified for flawless fit and function. It is no secret that Uberti's excellent 1873 SAA replica revolvers are the basis for many custom tuned Cowboy Action competition guns, so it makes sense for Uberti to cut out the intermediary and offer their own factory tuned 1873; hence, the El Patron models that are the subject of this review.

There are six El Patron variations, varying in barrel length (4-3/4" or 5-1/2"), finish (color case-hardened/blued or bright stainless steel) and caliber (.45 Colt or .357 Magnum). For this review, we requested a stainless steel .45 Colt and a color cased/blued .357 Magnum, both with 5-1/2" barrels. Our intention was to see what differences, if any, the differing calibers, steels and workmanship would make in the performance of the two revolvers.



Stainless steel Uberti 1873 El Patron (4.75" barrel). Illustration courtesy of A. Uberti S.R.L.

When our El Patron duo arrived, it was immediately obvious that we had struck single action gold. Both the stainless .45 and the blued/color cased .357 were impeccably fitted and the hand checkered walnut grips are beautiful. We could detect no external difference in the quality of the workmanship.



Uberti 1873 El Patron with blued/colorcased finish (4.75" barrel). Illustration courtesy of A. Uberti S.R.L.

Except for the modern steels, these revolvers are traditional single actions and work just like a Colt Single Action Army (SAA) or Peacemaker. There are quarter (safety), half (loading) and full cock hammer notches. Loading, unloading, shooting, cleaning and all other operations are performed as with a Peacemaker. Most of the parts are, in fact, interchangeable with an original, pre-war Colt and the Uberti is dimensionally identical with a period Colt. This extends to the shape and size of the two-piece grip frame. The Ubertis are even marked with serial and bin numbers, like early Colts, and the 1871 and 1872 patent dates on the left side of the frame.

The .357 is finished in the manner of a pre-WW II Peacemaker. The frame and hammer are color casehardened, while the barrel, ejector, cylinder, grip frame and screws are polished and deeply blued. It looks exactly like a new pre-war Colt. The stainless steel .45 wears a polished silver finish, but it is not quite as highly polished as, say, a Colt Ultimate Python or a nickel plated Peacemaker.

Both Ubertis have one-piece grips unmarred by screws, like the grips of 19th Century Colts. Also like early Colts, there is no medallion in the grips. These walnut grips are almost completely covered by hand checkering, as was once available from the Colt factory at extra cost. The checkering is quite fine and therefore easier on the hand than coarse checkering. On the other hand, the edges of the trigger guards were machined flat and the resultant corners are too sharp for comfort. These should have been rounded before the trigger guard/front strap was polished and finished.

We had forgotten how light and slim an 1873 Colt feels, compared to the Ruger Blackhawks that we usually shoot. The gun balances better and is more comfortable in the hand. Colt, and in this case Uberti, really got the feel and handling right with the Model 1873. (It is also easier to twirl, should the compulsion to do so overcome you.) On the subject of handling, the .45 Uberti is noticeably lighter than the .357 Uberti. This is due to the larger holes bored in the barrel and cylinder chambers. Externally, the guns are the same size and dimension.

The trigger pulls of our pair of Ubertis measured 1-7/8 pounds on our RCBS trigger pull scale, with noticeable smooth creep before let off. The trigger pulls are virtually identical. These are very light triggers by any standard! They are great for competition, target shooting or hunting and shooters accustomed to the heavy triggers of most modern revolvers and (especially) autoloading pistols will be shocked and awed. For comparison, the trigger of our second generation Colt SAA New Frontier (a target model) releases at a hair under three pounds and that gun was returned to Colt after it was purchased to have its action smoothed.

Functionally, the timing of both guns is perfect and there is no evidence of locking bolt drag on the cylinders. When the hammer is cocked and dropped, the cylinders are tight and there is practically no play. There is, in fact, a hair less cylinder play than found in our reference Colt SAA.

Competition enhancements not found on ordinary Colt SAA revolvers, standard Uberti 1873 SA revolvers, or other clones include a wider rear sight notch, taller front sight and numbered cylinder chambers. The wider rear sight notch allows quicker target acquisition and is certainly worthwhile to all shooters, not just SASS competitors. The tall front sight can be filed-down to zero the revolver with the chosen load. (Lowering the front sight raises the point of bullet impact.) Internally, the El Patron's lighter Wolfe springs and hand tuned action make it faster and smoother than ordinary single action revolvers. We judge the El Patron's higher price to be fully justified by its enhanced performance.

A couple of lawyer-inspired "safety" additions to the Ubertis are worth mentioning. The first is a cylinder (base) pin with two locating notches. The first notch locates the pin at the proper depth for normal functioning (shooting). The second notch allows the base pin to seat so deeply that it protrudes from the back of the frame and blocks the hammer/firing pin from hitting the cartridge in the chamber, thus rendering the revolver useless. The hammer must be in the quarter cock or "safety" notch position when this feature is used.

We consider this a worthless and potentially dangerous modification. Verify that the cylinder pin is in the correct operating position (first notch) when replacing the cylinder or you could get a click when you expect a bang. This would not be funny if a two or four-legged predator were attacking you! We found that the cylinder pin from our second generation Colt SAA fit the Uberti perfectly and, of course, it only has one latching notch. If you want to avoid the possibility of getting the cylinder pin in the wrong position, you can replace it with a Colt part.

The other, more innocuous, safety modification was present in the blued, but not the stainless, gun. This is a small part in the face of the hammer below the firing pin called a "hammer safety bar." It protrudes a short distance from the face of the hammer *only* when the hammer is in the quarter cock position. It is retracted when the hammer is cocked, half cocked or fully down. Its purpose is to block the hammer/firing pin from hitting the primer of a chambered cartridge should the hammer be struck so hard that it is forced from the safety notch. This safety feature requires no action on the part of the shooter, it automatically comes into play when the hammer is placed in the quarter cock notch and retracts when the hammer is cocked or lowered. While unnecessary if the revolver is carried with an empty chamber under the hammer, the standard procedure with Peacemakers and other single action revolvers for some 137 years, this feature does no harm and allows safer fully loaded carry under high threat or competition conditions.

Here are the basic specifications for the Uberti El Patron revolvers with 5-1/2" barrels. Where our blued .357 and stainless .45 test guns differ, the specification for the .45 is in (parenthesis).

- Item number: 345072 (345077)
- Caliber: .357 Magnum (.45 Colt)
- Barrel length: 5.5"
- Rifling: 6 grooves, right hand twist
- Cylinder capacity: 6 cartridges
- Metal Finish: Blued with color case-hardened frame (Polished stainless steel)
- Grips: 1-piece checkered walnut
- Sights: Fixed ; wide, easy to view rear, blade front
- Trigger pull: 1.875 lbs. (2.0 lbs.)
- Overall length: 11"
- Height: 5"
- Width: 1.676" at cylinder
- Weight: 2 lbs. 9 oz. (2 lbs. 4.8 oz.)
- 2010 MSRP: \$589 (\$729)

Physically, our two El Patron revolvers proved to be remarkably similar, despite the different steels used in their construction. In terms of subjective feel, except for the difference in weight, they are the same. This speaks well for Uberti's quality control.

Naturally, we were anxious to shoot these deluxe SA revolvers, so as soon as our scheduling permitted we escaped to the range. We conducted our range session with the El Patrons at the Izaak Walton outdoor gun range south of Eugene, Oregon. This facility offers covered bench rests and target stands at 25, 50, 100 and 200 yards. The April weather in Western Oregon provided partly cloudy skies and a high temperature of about 53-degrees Fahrenheit with a persistent, gusty wind. For the purposes of this review, all shooting for record was done at 25 yards. We fired 5-shot groups from a Pistol Perch rest at 25 yard slow fire targets. The cylinder chambers of both revolvers were loaded at random, so all chambers were used in the course of our shooting.

For our test shooting, we had four popular priced factory loads in .38 Special and .357 Magnum to use in the blued El Patron. These included Remington/UMC brand .38 Special with 130 grain Metal Case (FMJ) bullets, Winchester/USA .38 Special with 125 grain Jacketed Soft Point bullets, Remington/UMC .357 Magnum with 125 grain Jacketed Soft Point bullets and Federal/American Eagle .357 Magnum with 158 grain JSP bullets. Unfortunately, factory loads in .45 Colt are both very expensive and hard to find in our area due to the Obama Administration inspired ammunition shortage, so we relied primarily on reloads for the stainless El Patron. The sole factory load available was an Ultra Max Cowboy load using a 255 grain LFN bullet at around 750 fps. The reloads used a Speer 200 grain Jacketed Hollow Point bullet in front of 8.8 grains of Green Dot powder (MV 991 fps), a Laser Cast 200 grain Lead Round Nose bullet in front of 9.5 grains of Unique powder (MV 931 fps) and a 250 grain Laser Cast bullet in front of 10.7 grains of HS6 powder for a MV of 900 fps. The latter duplicated the ballistics of black powder .45 Colt loads and can be regarded as a maximum load. These reloads are all within the allowable SAAMI maximum average pressure of 14,000 psi for the .45 Colt cartridge.

Guns and Shooting Online staff members Chuck Hawks and Jim Fleck, both experienced handgunners, did the test shooting for record. Here are the results of our range session, starting with the blued El Patron .357 Magnum:

- Win./USA .38 Spec. 125 gr. JSP - smallest group 2-1/4"; largest group 2-5/8"; mean average group = 2.4"
- Rem./UMC .38 Spec. 130 gr. MC - smallest group 1-1/2"; largest group 3-1/2"; mean average group = 2.5"
- Rem./UMC .357 Mag. 125 gr. JSP - smallest group 1-1/16"; largest group 3"; mean average group = 2"
- Federal/Am. Eagle .357 Mag. 158 gr. JSP - smallest group 1-5/8"; largest group 2"; mean average group = 1.8"

Here are the group sizes from the stainless steel El Patron .45 Colt:

- Reload, Speer 200 gr. JHP w/8.8 gr. Green Dot - smallest group 2"; largest group 3-5/8"; mean average group = 2.8"
- Reload, Laser Cast 200 gr. LRN w/9.5 gr. Unique - smallest group 2-7/8"; largest group 4-1/8"; mean average group = 3.5"
- Reload, Laser Cast 250 gr. LRN w/10.7 gr. HS6 - smallest group 2-3/8"; largest group 3-3/8"; mean average group = 2.9"
- Ultra Max factory load, 255 gr. LFN - smallest group 1-1/2"; largest group 4"; mean average group = 2.8"

Called flyers were eliminated from the group sizes for the sensible reason that if we muff a shot, it is not the gun's fault. This time out, Chuck shot the smallest individual group, using the .357 revolver. To no one's surprise, the .357 El Patron proved more accurate than the .45 El Patron. We have yet to see a firearm of any type chambered for .45 Colt out shoot a similar firearm chambered for .357 Magnum.

During our shooting trials, both shooters praised the El Patrons' smooth action and light trigger pull. They definitely make accurate shooting easier. Standard pressure .38 Special loads are known for their moderate recoil and are fun to shoot in the ergonomic .357 El Patron. The full power .357 Magnum loads, however, were unpleasant in this revolver, particularly the 158 grain bullet. Unfortunately, this load shot to point of aim with the gun's fixed sights. We will be filing down the front sight to zero this revolver with .38 Special loads at 25 yards.

Shooting the stainless steel .45 El Patron was very similar to shooting the .357 blued version. The heavier the load, the less fun it is to shoot, but the closer it hit to the point of aim of the gun's fixed sights. The recoil of the 250 grain bullet at 900 fps was distinctly unpleasant, but it hit only about an inch below the point of aim. The sights on both of these El Patron revolvers are evidently set for full power (maximum) loads using heavy bullets. Both front sights will require filing to raise the point of impact of the low power loads for which these relatively lightweight revolvers are best adapted.

Our consensus by the end of this review was that the refined Uberti El Patron revolvers make the other Peacemaker SA type revolvers with which we are familiar seem a little crude by comparison. Cowboy Action shooters are going to love this new Uberti model, but so are general recreational shooters. If you care enough to shoot the best, make it an El Patron. We were very impressed with the fit, feel and performance of our El Patron revolvers. Remember, the El Patron is only one of the many Uberti 1873 Cattleman models and there are something like 13 *others* from which to choose! (Anyone interested in an 1873 "Callahan" Target Model .44 Magnum, for example?) See your local Uberti retailer for details.
