UBERTI'S RUSSIAN TOP BREAK

One of the most DISTINCTIVE LOOKING REVOLVERS of the 19th CENTURY!

THE DECADE FOLLOWING THE CIVIL WAR BROUGHT hard times to most American gun makers. The military market was virtually non-existent, and the civilian market was awash with inexpensive, military surplus firearms. Smith & Wesson's only ace in the hole was the Rollin-White patent, which allowed them to produce revolvers with bored through cylinders for metallic cartridges while their competitors at Colt and Remington were still producing cap and ball sixguns.

Throughout the Civil War, Smith & Wesson had produced a line of pocket pistols chambered for .22 and .32 rimfire cartridges. Despite the puny rounds, the guns sold well, and in 1870 S&W unveiled its long anticipated No. 3 revolver chambered in the more potent .44 American centerfire and in the .44 Henry rimfire cartridges.

These guns were a modest success in America, but they attracted the attention of both the United States army and the Russian military. Besides the self-contained cartridges, the S&W's top break design, with its simultaneous ejection of fired rounds and ease of reloading, was appreciated by cavalrymen.

Though the U.S. Army only ordered a small number of pistols for field trials, the Russians went all in. Over the course of seven years, they ordered over 131,000 No. 3 revolvers from the company. In contrast, Colt only sold 37,003 Single Action Army revolvers to the U.S. Army, from the first purchase in 1873 until the final army buy in 1891. So this was a huge account for Smith & Wesson.

The Russians wanted some changes to S&W's American No. 3, and, with a sugar daddy like that, S&W wasn't about to say no. The first change the Russians wanted was to the cartridge. The original No.3 fired an outside-lubricated, heel-based bullet. This was typical of early cartridge designs. The Russians wanted a .44 caliber cartridge with an inside-lubricated bullet, which is the way all modern centerfire cartridges are made. This was a great choice by the Russians, and over time, it served as the basis for the modern .44 Special and .44 Mag family of cartridges.

Smith & Wesson made 20,000 of the American-style No.3 revolvers for Russia before the Russians asked for more changes. And these changes resulted in the classic S&W Russian revolver profile that most of us recognize. The two most obvious changes were the spur on the trigger guard and the humph on the grip frame.

No one seems to know why the Russians wanted the trigger guard spur. Theories abound. They run the gamut from postulating that it was a hook to keep the gun from falling through the Cossacks' waist sashes, to a place, other...
The Russian Army insisted on adding a hump to the No. 3 grip frame to position the hand consistently from shot to shot.

The S&W's Top Break Design, with its simultaneous ejection of fired rounds and ease of reloading, was appreciated by CAVALRYMEN.

Gun Details
I had a meeting with the folks at Uberti USA when my eye fell on a beautiful revolver. It was a nickel-plated Russian Top Break with faux ivory grips. I was consumed with gun lust, and cut a deal on the spot to get a test and evaluation model to play with. In short order it was in my hands.

I seem to be attracted lately to nickel-plated S&W's. Last year I got an Uberti nickel-plated, pearl-gripped Schofield revolver to test, and that gun found a permanent place in my collection. Earlier this year I decided to get a Nickel-plated, S&W Frontier Double Action revolver. So, it is not hard to believe that this Russian Top Break made a favorable impression when I pulled it from the box.

The Russian is a big gun, but, like all Russian guns, it is very sleek looking. As the name implies, this is a hinged, top-break design.

Brownells screwdriver set to find the appropriate, very thin, but long bit to get the screw started without marring it. Now it goes in and out easily by hand.

This is a recurring theme on all Uberti guns. It is a real challenge to get the screws moving the first time, and even with proper screwdrivers, the soft screw heads are easily marred. Uberti needs to invest in some torque wrenches for the staff.

All the major parts of the Russian Top Break are beautifully nickel-plated, but the screws are finished in a bright blue, that
The Russian Break Top was tested with both .45 Colt and .45 Schofield ammunition from Black Hills.

The rear sight consists of a couple of narrow posts machined on the cylinder latch.

The action is opened by pulling up on the cylinder latch on the topstrap of the frame.

After 50 rounds of black powder ammo the Uberti Russian was Schmidtly, but the cylinder wasn’t binding.

Uberti’s Russian, should have an ejector housing more akin to the length of the Blue Russian revolver on top. Instead its housing is the length of the S&W New Model No. 3 at the bottom.

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really pops against the mirror-like nickel. The hammer pin and the hinge screw are not blued. They are nickel-plated. If I could change anything on this revolver, it would be to blue those two parts. They would make a striking contrast against the nickel of the frame and barrel.

The grips are poly-ivory, which is to say, "polymer." But I have to admit that these are among the finest faux-ivory grips I’ve ever seen. The problem with imitation ivory is that it lacks the grain pattern of real ivory, which after all is a tooth. But the grips on the Russian Top Break do have a delicate grain pattern that is realistic looking. They really complement the nickel-plated stigam.

There is one historical inaccuracy on the Russian that surprised me. All the other Uberti Russians I’ve fired had the correct length ejector housing, which is about 3 inches long, measured from the cylinder face. This Russian has a 2-inch long ejector housing, exactly like an S&W New Model No. 3.

Shooting Impressions

But, that small issue aside, this is a great revolver and lots of fun to shoot, though, if I was buying this gun I’d get the trigger lightened. The trigger on mine breaks at seven pounds, six ounces. That would be heavy for a Glock. It needs to be quite a bit less on a single-action revolver. But, despite the heavy trigger, I was able to shoot the Russian accurately.

I tested the Russian with Black Hills ammo in both .45 Colt and .45 Schofield calibers, as well as with my own black powder handloads. It shot well with everything into a two-inch circle. With these Black Hill cowboy action shooting loads velocity is only 799 feet per second and recoil is moderate, so I was actually able to shoot one-inch diameter groups when I concentrated.

Black Hills Schofield ammunition was even more mild mannered. The 230-grain Schofield slugs only moved down range at 679 fps. Recoil was gentle, but despite that fact, I couldn’t shoot them as well as I shot the .45 Colt loads. With the Schofield ammo my best group was three inches from 15 yards. My worst group was four inches, and a five-shot group averaged 3.5 inches in diameter.

I enjoyed shooting my black powder handloads in the Russian, but with 255-grain slugs moving at an average velocity of 801 fps, the Russian’s grip design really transmitted the recoil. Unlike with a Colt SAA, there is no roll to the recoil with a Russian top break. That hump in the grip assembly helps drive the force of the recoil straight back into your hand. It isn’t uncomfortable, but you know you’re shooting a powerful round. Despite that, accuracy was more than acceptable. I was able to shoot two and three inch groups from the 15-yard line, with the average being 2.25 inches.

Though the Russian proved it can group, the groups weren’t hitting at my point of aim. This gun shot consistently 2.5 to 3 inches to the left with all the ammunition I tested. Because the barrel is machined integral to the upper frame, this can’t be corrected by simply turning the barrel, as you would with a Colt SAA. The fix for this is to gently bend the sight to the left. But I certainly wasn’t going to do that on a test gun. So, during informal plinking sessions at two-line bottles, I had to use quite a bit of Kentucky windage to get hits. But, once I had the gun doped out, I had no trouble making the bullets go where I needed them to go.

Final Notes

A good gun is incomplete without a good holster. To my delight, I discovered that my Schofield holster fit the Russian model just fine. So I was able to use my El Paso Saddlery Jesse James rig. This is a beautiful, fully-carved 1870s style belt and holster set made for Smith & Wesson No. 3 revolvers. The 5-inch wide money belt and holsters are carved with a vine pattern in a style known as tear away. This is just the rig to complement a nickel-plated Russian.