

News guns of the old west

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Remember those childhood games of cowboys and Indians, *er*, Native Americans, and the way you used to rip off a strip of roll caps with your trusty six-shooter? Maybe it was movie cowboy Hopalong Cassidy blasting what seemed like a dozen shots from his six-shooter and leveling saloon loads of bad guys that spawned a secret longing to someday own a real six-gun. You were not alone. Interest in six-guns has long been part of an ongoing nostalgia attached to the early American West. That interest spiked in the 1950s when living rooms across America were trampled in a stampede of TV Westerns such as *Gun-smoke*, *Have Gun-Will Travel* and *Maverick*.

Today, the single-action (you have to cock the hammer for each shot) six-gun is really smokin, triggered in large part by the fairly new sport of cowboy action shooting (*Slingin' Lead*, April 1998, page 76). In this sport for grown-ups, players don period costumes, and fire away at metal silhouettes using period, or period replica, six-shooters. It's rapid

fire against the clock.

With many original guns from the mid-1800s tucked away in collectors' vaults, and the ones being traded fetching stratospheric prices, a six-gun replica industry has emerged, primarily in Italy, to fill the demand. Looking almost identical to the originals, many of these knockoffs feel and shoot just like the genuine article. The imports are made by Uberti and Armi San Marco, bear Italian proof marks, and are marketed by various firearms importers including Cimarron and Traditions.

Original six-guns had no safety, but they were very safe - if you took one important precaution. You loaded five rounds into the cylinder and carried the gun with the hammer down over the empty chamber. There was no way the gun could go off without first cocking the hammer. Gunslingers in the Old West used to take advantage of the empty chamber by stuffing it with a rolledup \$5 bill. That way, if they came out second best in a duel, the dough could be used for a decent burial.