Smith & Wesson Model 41 Target Pistol

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NRA Technical Staff

At the end of World War II there were rumors that Smith & Wesson was about to enter a new field by bringing out a .22 cal. automatic target pistol.

For about half a century after Smith & Wesson entered the arms business, the firm made only revolvers. They entered the single-shot target pistol field with their Model 1891 built on the frame of a single-action .38 cal. pocket revolver. In one form, this gun was furnished in a cased set containing the revolver and a single-shot barrel. By removing the hinge screw, the revolver barrel and cylinder could be removed, and the single-shot barrel substituted. The barrel length was optional, as was the caliber. The single-shot barrel could be had in .22, .32, or .38 cal., and in 6", 8", or 10" lengths. This gun has been referred to as the First Model.

In 1906 the revolver and single-shot combination was discontinued, and was succeeded by the Second Model, which was similar except that it was made in .22 cal. and 10" barrel length only.

Right-side view of the Smith & Wesson Model 41 automatic target pistol chambered for the .22 long rifle cartridge only. With muzzle brake in place, the Model 41 is 12" long overall and weighs 42½ ozs. with empty magazine and ⅜-oz. aluminum counterweight in recess in barrel

Left-side view of S&W Model 41 with 3 steel counterweights in place. These counterweights, available at extra cost, are locked in place by Allen head cap screws and permit precise adjustment of center of gravity. There is an index mark near muzzle of gun, and uppermost weight is marked with graduations .05" apart at upper edge and graduations ½" apart at lower edge. Middle weight has an index mark at upper edge. There is no provision for shifting the bottom counterweight

The Perfected Model

The third, or Perfected Model, appeared in 1909. This was a .22 with 10" barrel and sight radius, built on a double-action revolver frame. Though the double-action feature was useless on a single-barrel target pistol, and some users of the new gun spoke in nostalgic terms of the old single-action Model 1891, the new gun was nevertheless highly successful. I still own one of these fine guns which I used when I was shooting as a member of the Springfield Revolver Club in the early 1920's. In the first big meet in which I used this gun, I won 2 matches, placed second in 2, and third in another.

The Perfected Model was discontinued in 1923, to make way for a new single-shot target pistol which was designed from the ground up instead of being built on a revolver frame as its predecessors had been. This was the S&W Straight Line Target Pistol. It had a 10" barrel, 9¼" sight radius, and was made in .22 long rifle cal. only. This single-shot pistol was shaped like an automatic, and had the grip well ahead of the rear end of the barrel. This gun, though it embodied many features asked for by target shooters, never did become popular. It had good inherent accuracy when shot from a machine rest, but did not produce the scores in matches that the old Perfected Model and the Model 1891 did.

The reason for this failure has never been satisfactorily explained, but my own experience with this gun makes me think it was mostly a matter of balance. The gun is quite muzzle light, and the grip is near the center of balance. It seemed hard to hold steady on the target.

This matter of balance may be clarified if the reader will consider how it feels to swing an ax when chopping wood; then try to imagine how an ax would feel if you grasped it by the heavy end, or head, and tried to strike a blow with the light end. The balance is all wrong.

The S&W Straight Line Pistol was

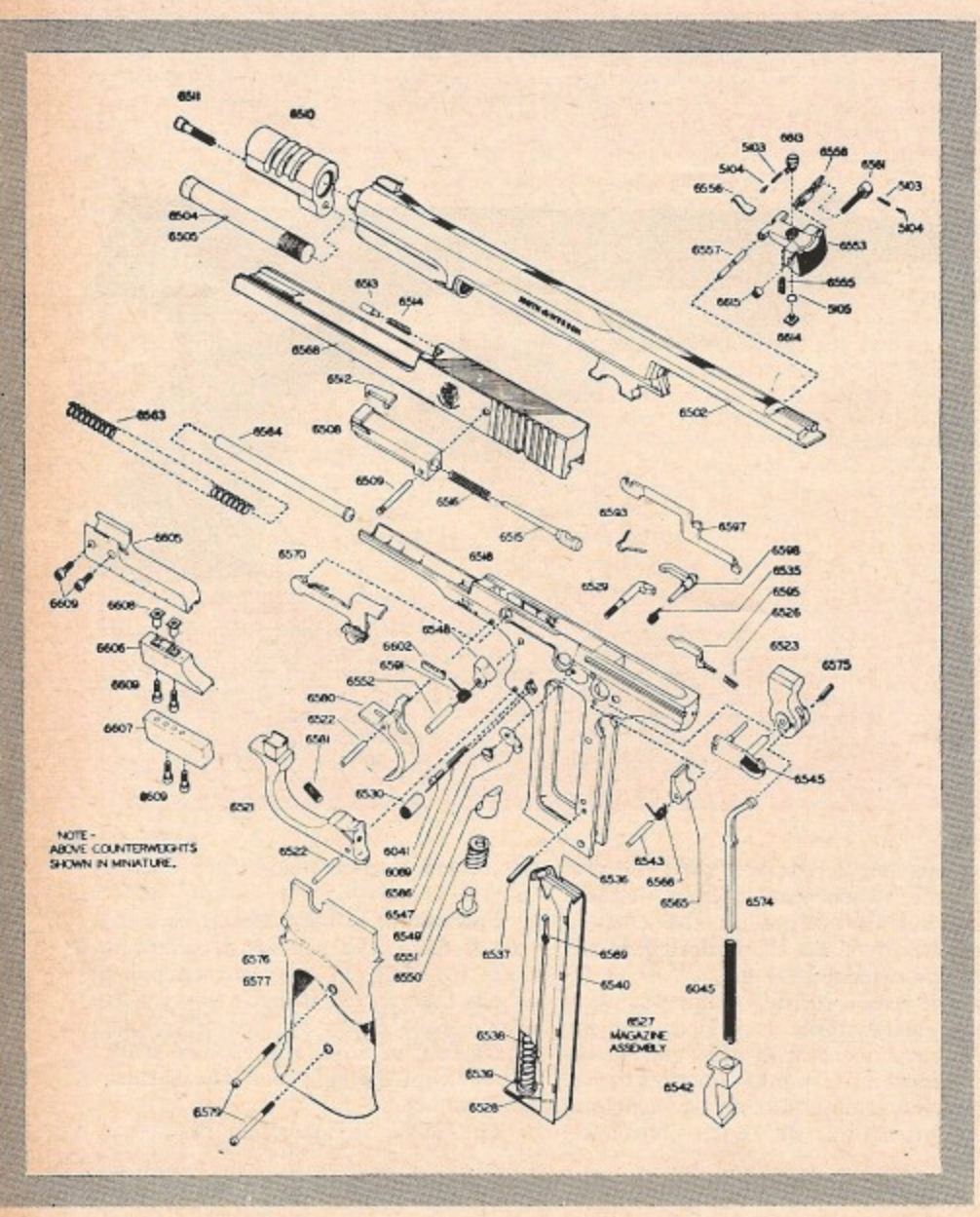
discontinued about 1936, and from that time until 1957 there was no .22 target pistol made by S&W.

The new Model 41 is not only a target pistol, but it is also an automatic, and that, too, is a field in which S&W has not been too active. Revolvers have always been their specialty, and still are, but they made a pocket automatic briefly, starting in 1913 with their .35 cal. built on Clements' patents purchased by S&W in Europe. As this gun used a special cartridge, it did not last long, and was superseded in 1924 by the .32 cal., a very similar gun using the standard and popular .32 ACP cartridge. It was discontinued in 1937.

Origin of Model 41

The bearing that this has on the matter of the new S&W Model 41 will be seen from an account given to me by C. R. Hellstrom, president of Smith & Wesson, concerning the origin of the

Top rear view of S&W Model 41. Front and rear sights are mounted on one piece of metal, the surface of which has ¼" strip of dull-finished serrated grooving extending from rear sight to front sight to eliminate reflections



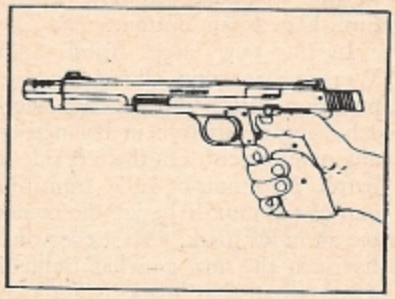
SMITH & WESSON .22 AUTOMATIC PISTOL

PARTS LEGEND

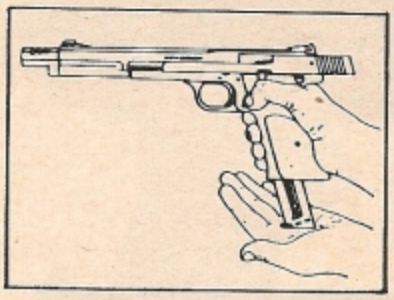
No.	Name
6502	Barrel
6504	Barrel weight (light)
6505	Barrel weight (heavy)
6508	Bolt
6509	Bolt pin
6510	Muzzle brake
6511	Muzzle brake screw
6605	Counterweight upper section
6606	Counterweight middle section
6607	Counterweight lower section
6608	Counterweight nut
6609	Counterweight screw
6512	Extractor
6513	Extractor plunger
6514	Extractor spring
6515	Firing pin
6516	Firing pin spring
6518	Frame
6521	Guard
6522	Guard pin
6523	Hammer
6595	Indicator
6526	Indicator spring
6527	Magazine assembly
6528	Magazine buttplate
6536	Magazine follower
6589	Magazine pin
6538	Magazine spring
6539	Magazine spring plunger
6540	Magazine tube
6529	Magazine catch
6530	Magazine catch nut
6041	Magazine catch plunger
6069	Magazine catch spring
6598	Magazine disconnector assembly
6535	Magazine disconnector spring
6045	Mainspring
6542	Mainspring retainer
6537	Mainspring retainer pin
6545	Manual safety assembly
6547	Manual safety spring plate
6586	Manual safety spring plate screw
6548	Pawl
6549	Pawl cam
6550	Pawl cam plunger
6551	Pawl cam spring
6552	Pawl pin
6591	Pawl & trigger spring
6553	Rear sight
6613	Rear sight elevating nut
5104	Rear sight elevating nut plunger
5103	Rear sight elevating nut plunger spring
6555	Rear sight elevating spring
6614	Rear sight elevating stud
6556	Rear sight pivot clip
6557	Rear sight pivot pin
6558	Rear sight slide
5105	Rear sight spring clip
6615	Rear sight windage nut
6561	Rear sight windage screw
5104	Rear sight windage screw plunger
5103	Rear sight windage screw plunger spring
6563	Recoil spring
6564	Recoil spring guide
6565	Sear
6543	Sear pin
6566	Sear spring
6568	Slide
6570	Slide stop (& ejector) assembly
6574	Stirrup
6575	Stirrup pin
6576	Stock—left w/escutcheon
6577	Stock—right w/escutcheon nut
6579	Stock screw
6580	Trigger
6597	Trigger bar
6593	Trigger bar spring
6522	Trigger pin
6602	Trigger pull adjusting lever
6581	Trigger stop screw

FIELD STRIPPING

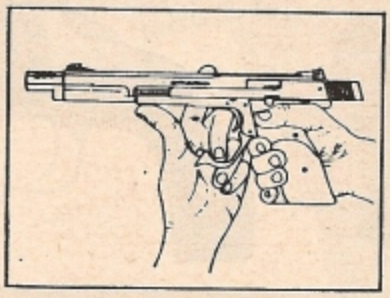
This constitutes adequate field stripping for normal cleaning purposes. Reverse above procedure to reassemble. Note: After reassembling slide assembly to frame, lock slide to its rearward or open position by holding back while you press upwards on the slide stop thumbpiece. This will facilitate reinstallation of the barrel assembly



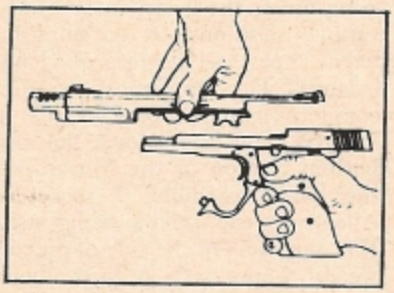
a) Lock slide back



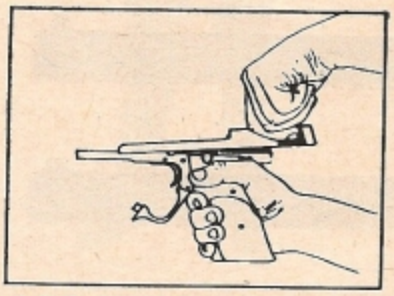
b) Remove magazine



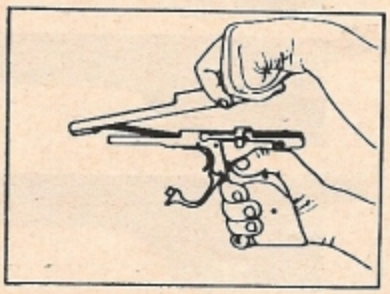
c) Pull trigger guard down. Hold gun in position shown, so that barrel assembly will not fall off



d) Lift off barrel assembly



e) Pull slide back and raise slightly



f) Move slide assembly forward to complete disengagement

new gun. He said that when he took over the management of Smith & Wesson in 1940, he made a survey of all the company's old model guns with a view to scrapping those tools and designs that had become obsolete. Among their old toolings he found those of the .35 cal. automatic pistol mentioned above. It occurred to him that S&W might again want to put out an automatic pistol, and that this particular design would lend itself well to a .22 target gun. They then set out to design such a gun, and made up a pilot model which was shown to a few selected pistol shots at Camp Perry in 1941, where small-bore and pistol competitions were held that year, the last matches held until after World War II. Quite probably this is the reason for the designation Model 41 on the new gun, as 1941 seems to have been the year of its birth.

The pressure of war production caused the company to drop this project for the duration, but after things had quieted down it was revived, and the gun was ready to be put into production early in 1950. I first saw the Model 41 at the National Mid-Winter Pistol Matches at Tampa that year, when Mr. Hellstrom showed it to me and allowed me to shoot it on a secluded part of the range. It was, however, not being shown to more than a very few persons at that time.

The plans that had been made to get this gun into production in 1950 again had to be shelved, this time because of the outbreak of the war in Korea, and no more was heard of it until March 1957, when Mr. Hellstrom again showed the gun at the Tampa matches. This time there was no secrecy surrounding it. The new Model 41 automatic was out on the bench with the rest of the S&W display, and all comers were allowed to handle and try the gun freely. We were told that production would start in the summer, and that guns would be in production in quantity before the end of the year. As of December 1957, guns are being produced in quantity, but the volume of back orders is also quite large.

The new pistol, made for the .22 long rifle cartridge only, is a sleek and rangy-looking job, whose appearance tells at a glance that it is intended primarily for target work. It is 12" long overall with the muzzle brake in place. The sight radius is 9-5/16", and the rear sight is fully adjustable, with micrometer click adjustments, for both elevation and windage. Each click of the elevation screw moves the point of impact ⅜" on the target at 50 yds., while each click of the windage screw is worth ¼" at the same distance. Figures for the shorter ranges are in proportion.

A feature of this gun which is intended to appeal to the precision target pistol shot is the fact that both front and rear sights are mounted on the same piece of metal—the irregular rectangularly-shaped piece in which the barrel is formed. In the nomenclature list furnished by S&W, this part is called the barrel, but in the S&W instruction sheet it is also referred to as the barrel assembly.

No relative sight movement

The fact that both sights are mounted on one piece of metal completely eliminates any chance of relative movement between the 2 sights due to the action of the mechanism, which is always a possibility when the front sight is mounted on the barrel and the rear sight on the separate breechblock.

The sights are of the Patridge type, with the front sight ⅛" wide and undercut at the rear to avoid light reflections and give a clear-cut black surface. The blade of the rear sight has a wide rectangular notch, and is slanted back at the same angle as the rear surface of the front sight, and for the same purpose. These sights are effective and pleasant to use. The large size makes them clear and easy to see, and the dull matte surface positioned at the proper slant to avoid any light reflection to the rear gives an impression of black velvet which is easy on the eyes and definitely helps scores.

To minimize further any chance of bothersome light reflections, the back end of the rear sight block is serrated

Combination revolver & single-shot target pistol unit as S&W originally offered it. It consisted of the .38 cal. single-action revolver, Model 1891; 3 single-shot barrel assemblies chambered for .22 long rifle, .32 S&W, and .38 S&W respectively, plus a pair of oversized target stocks

and the rear surface of the slide and frame and the top of the barrel are given a dull matte sand-blast finish which is very restful to the eyes. The top of the barrel is ornamented by a ¼"-wide strip of dull-finished serrated grooving extending from the rear sight to the front sight that gives the effect of a matte rib. The front surface of the trigger and the front strap of the grip are also grooved. The remaining metal parts are polished smooth and given the beautiful S&W "High Bright" blued finish. The stock is of walnut, checkered both on sides and back, with a thumb shelf on the left and a shelf for the trigger finger on the right. The overall effect is rich and handsome.

Specifications give the barrel length as 7⅜"; this includes the chamber, which is just a bit over ¾" long (.78" in 3 samples we measured) leaving the actual rifled bore 6⅝" long or perhaps a couple of hundredths more. Rifling is 6 lands and grooves of approximately equal width, with a right twist of 1 turn in 16⅜".

Ten-shot magazine

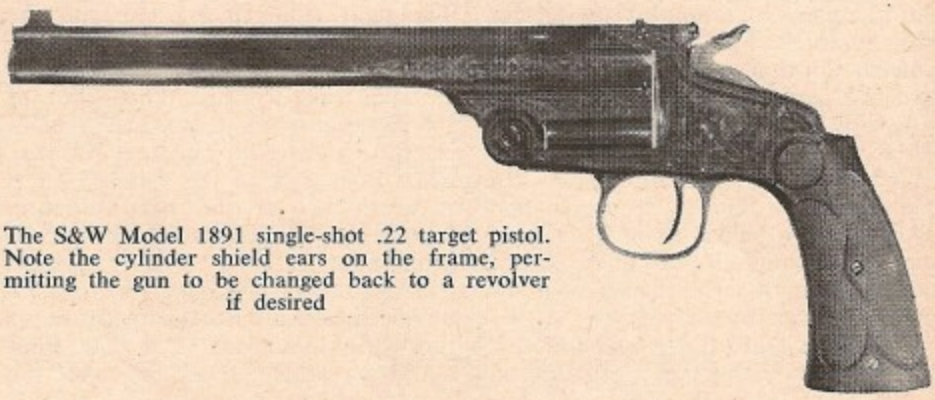
The magazine holds 10 rounds and is ejected by pressing a button on the left side just behind the trigger guard. There is a magazine safety to prevent the gun being fired unless the magazine is in place, the idea being to prevent accidents caused by people thinking they have unloaded the gun when they have merely removed the magazine and have left a cartridge in the chamber. There is also a thumb safety on the left side near the rear end of the frame, and there is an automatic slide stop to hold the breech open after the last cartridge is fired. The slide stop has a thumb release on the left side just forward of the thumb safety.

As it comes from the factory the gun is fitted with a muzzle brake as standard equipment. This is made of aluminum alloy, and weighs about ½ oz. It fits over a portion of the barrel of reduced diameter which extends ⅜" forward of the main portion. The muzzle brake is held in place by a screw which fits a threaded hole in a cylindrical counterweight, which in turn screws into a recess beneath the forward portion of the barrel. The aluminum counterweight is ⅜" in diameter and 2-11/16" long, and weighs ⅜ oz. A steel counterweight weighing about 1½ ozs. is furnished as an option.

In this new target pistol, Smith & Wesson has gone all-out to give the precision pistol shooter full scope in achieving a variation in balance to suit any requirement. On the left side of the barrel, 26.6 mm. or 1.05" from the rear end of the muzzle brake, the owner will see an index mark. (Most everyone who has seen the new gun has immediately asked what that mark is for.) As an option at about $15 extra cost, a complicated but highly efficient set of counterweights can be obtained to be hung under the barrel in any one of 3 various positions to accomplish different types and degrees of change of balance. The uppermost of these 3 counterweight sections weighs about 7¼ ozs., and clamps over the rounded bottom portion of the forward end of the barrel assembly, 2 socket-headed Allen-type cap screws being used for this purpose. On the side of the counterweight upper section, just above the 2 screws, is a series of 13 graduations, each .05" apart, which mate with the index mark above mentioned. This permits the counterweight upper section to be shifted .6" forward or back, and provides a means of recording the position used.

On the bottom of this top weight there is a groove which permits mounting the counterweight middle section of about 4¼ ozs. On the top edge of the counterweight middle section is an index mark, and mating with it is a series of 6 marks each ½" apart at the bottom edge of the counterweight upper section. On the bottom of the middle weight is mounted the counterweight lower section of about 4 ozs., but there is no provision for shifting its position with regard to the one directly above it. Both middle and lower counterweight sections are held on by Allen head cap screws reached through holes in the bottom of the counterweight lower section.

Thus, by adding pieces or taking them away, the user can avail himself of various combinations of weights up



The S&W Model 1891 single-shot .22 target pistol. Note the cylinder shield ears on the frame, permitting the gun to be changed back to a revolver if desired

General Hatcher with his S&W Perfected Model pistol

The .35 cal. S&W automatic pistol

to a pound, and he can shift them to place the center of gravity further toward the muzzle or back toward the grip. If the user likes a gun that balances like the old Straight Line, near the rear end, he can shift the weights back. If he finds, as many do, that better results are obtained with the weights out nearer the muzzle, it is only the work of an instant to place them there and lock them in place with the Allen wrench. The socket-headed cap screws are size 10 with 32 threads per inch, and the wrenches used with them are 5/32" across flats.

The trigger is ⅜" wide, and is grooved to prevent slippage of the trigger finger. It is provided with an adjustable stop to take up any excess motion as the trigger lets go. This is in the form of a hexagonal socket-type set screw, No. 6 size with 32 threads to the inch, and ⅜" long, screwed into the trigger guard just behind the point of the trigger. The fact that the trigger guard hinges down to dismount the pistol makes it easy to get at this screw for any necessary adjustments. The screw takes an Allen-type wrench measuring 1/16" across flats.

The trigger pull on the 3 guns we have tested ran about 2¾ to 3 lbs. On the first gun we received, a pre-production sample, the trigger pull was excellent, but on the next gun, an actual production-line job, there was a slight creep in the trigger. The third sample, also from the production line, had a good crisp pull.

A somewhat unusual item on this gun, as far as .22 target pistols are concerned, is the indicator to show when the gun is cocked. This is a small pin that protrudes to the rear through the frame just above the crotch of the shooter's hand. When the hammer is down, this pin recedes into the frame out of sight, but when the gun is cocked the pin protrudes about 1/16".

Takedown is simple

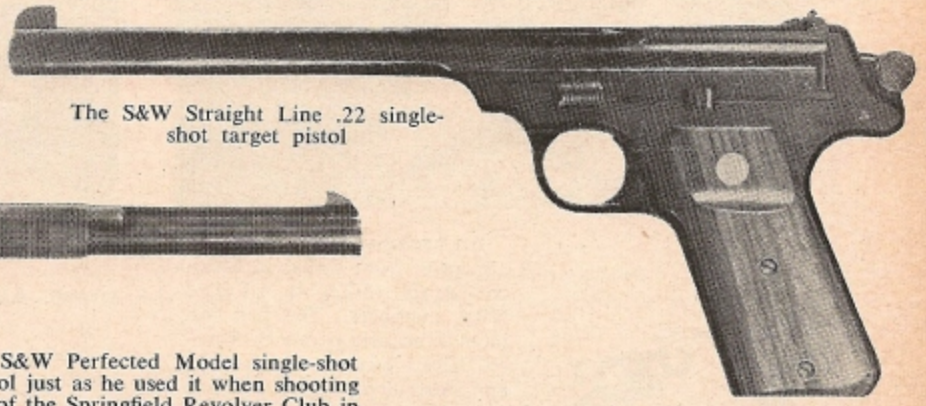
An attractive feature is the simplicity of the takedown. To remove the barrel for cleaning, simply draw the slide back until it is held by the slide stop, then pull the trigger guard down as far as it will go and lift off the barrel assembly. This is all that is necessary for ordinary cleaning, but if it is desired to remove the slide it is easily accomplished. First remove the magazine, then pull the slide back as far as it will go, lift the rear end, and move the slide forward to disengage it from the frame. This will be made clear by referring to the illustrations.

Various members of The Rifleman Staff have done extensive test shooting with the 3 samples of this gun that we have had available. Functioning has been flawless. So far, no malfunctions whatever have been encountered. Ejection is slightly forward and downward to the right for noninterference with the shooter on the next firing point. The accuracy has been excellent, and the gun seems particularly easy to get good groups with. A common comment has been 'it shoots like a rifle'.

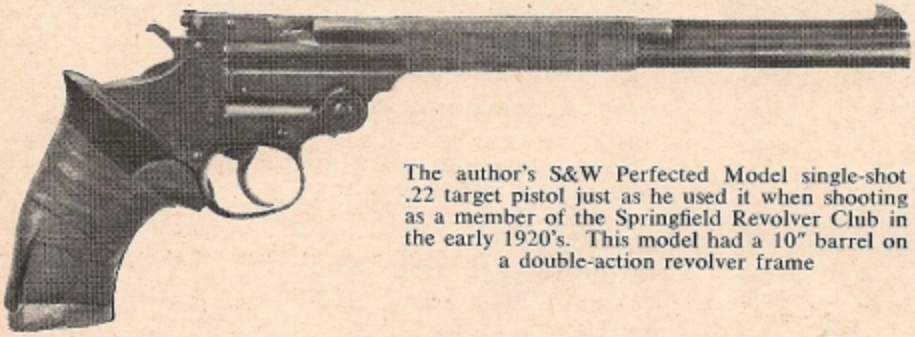
The people at S&W tell us that every one of these guns is fired from a machine rest before acceptance, and that all guns so far produced have shot into a space no larger than the 10-ring of the Standard American target at 50 yds. However, most guns are said to do even better than that, and half-inch groups at 50 yds. from the machine rest are said to be frequent.

We are looking forward to observing the actual performance of this great new target pistol on the range during the coming year. We do not believe it will disappoint its admirers.

The gun, with muzzle brake attached and with empty magazine, weighs 42½ ozs. It sells for $110. ■



The S&W Straight Line .22 single-shot target pistol



The author's S&W Perfected Model single-shot .22 target pistol just as he used it when shooting as a member of the Springfield Revolver Club in the early 1920's. This model had a 10" barrel on a double-action revolver frame