



## North American Arms "Companion" *The World's Smallest Cap and Ball Mini Revolver*

by George Layman

Throughout the 19th Century, small framed, light caliber repeating revolvers were considered as additional life insurance when all else failed, and today, a thoroughly modern recreation of a time tested design that was popularized in the blackpowder era is quickly gaining its niche among caplock afficianandos.



The tiny "long rifle" model genuinely qualifies as a true palm pistol that can be hidden almost anywhere.

After Sam Colt patented his first repeating revolver design in the late 1830's, the age of the multi-shot handgun was soon to overcome its single-shot predecessors. With the expiration of Colt patents, an onslaught of new inventors would bring about an entire fresh crop of repeating pistols which in due time made the percussion era one of the liveliest periods of firearms design in U.S. history. Between 1847 and 1869 at least over two dozen different manufacturers had introduced their own repeating revolvers which were revolutionizing an industry and many times were hoping to gain the interest of obtaining a military contract.

Either model of the Companion comes equipped with all accessories required for shooting minus powder and percussion caps. A detailed set of instructions are included as well.



With the civilian market having become a prime mainstay of multi-shot firearms due to the expansion Westward, these new adventures clammed for the best in self-protection and often chose a variety of ordnance for their individual arsenals. As well as taking on shoulder arms and heavy caliber sidearms, small pocket-sized back-up pistols were also a necessity for many. As a result, numerous manufactures such as Bacon Arms Co. and a score of other firms introduced a wide selection of small-caliber repeating wheelguns. Calibers of these compact little pieces ranged from .22 up to .36 on the average, and as intended, were useful only for close quarters. As today's blackpowder boom continues to mushroom, the demand for high quality arms of all variations has expanded as well. Since the introduction of cap and ball reproduction revolvers in the 1960's, few of the super small frame mini-revolvers have been introduced, and those that have been, are long discontinued.

Since the 1980's, North American Arms has offered their excellent line of stainless steel mini-revolvers which were primarily chambered for calibers from .22 short up to the high velocity .22 magnum rimfire. These derringer size revolvers from NAA have become standard for self-defense for those who have required the ultimate in concealment

and reliability, and are sold with an extensive line of accessories as well. Engineered by the legendary firearms designer Dick Casull (well known for his super .454 Casull single-action), it seems that the entire line of North American Arms had expanded even further for 1996. At the January Shot Show this year, NAA introduced a pair of their mini-wheelguns for the blackpowder shooter that have quickly become well received.

The new Companion "Long Rifle" size and "Magnum" size five-shot cap and ball revolvers are a pair of mini percussion revolvers that in this writer's opinion, are the smoothest, most precisely manufactured little gems ever machined out of surgical quality stainless steel.



Machined from surgical quality stainless steel, the North American Companion offers a floating firing pin by which eliminates actual contact of the hammer to the percussion cap. Take down for cleaning is a snap.

As with their products in the past, North American Arms has incorporated several areas of innovative modern technology that combine a taste of both the old and new, but the 19th Century styling still remains an integral point cosmetically. These single-action, spurtrigger caplock revolvers from NAA are pleasantly constructed for trouble free maintenance, and are ingeniously simple in their overall operation. This shooter having been so impressed with both the

Long Rifle model and the Magnum version, as well, opted for one of each, and both variants, though constructed identically, differ in specifications. The companion LR has an overall length of 4-5/16" as compared to the Companion Magnum with its 5-7/16" o/a length. The Companion breaks down into three components for loading and must be disassembled to accomplish this. No tools are required for takedown...simply depress the spring loaded cylinder pin plunger while the hammer is at half cock, and the cylinder rolls gently to the right and out of the frame. These compac five-shooters have counter sunk nipples at the rear of each chamber, and the #11 percussion caps remain in their own channel without the usual malady of having spent caps fall into the guts of the action and plugging up the lock work after firing. For removal of nipples during cleaning, the rear of each nipple channel is hexagonal by which a tiny Allen wrench is supplied with each NAA Companion to facilitate this for post-firing maintenance.



Especially handy is the double jointed loading tool which snugly seats the tiny .22 caliber conical projectile in each chamber with a minimum of leverage. As with all cap & ball revolvers, Crisco or similar grease must be placed over loaded chambers prior to firing to prevent multiple flash overs.

All North American Arms Companion revolvers come equipped with a container of fifty .22 caliber, 30 grain conical lead bullets, a powder charge measure, bullet seater, leather clip type holster, and a zipper fastened gun rug which is lockable. A real advance in the technology of these 20th Century "repeating derringers", is the free floating firing pin. Though the hammer never actually contacts the nipple upon firing, the detailed instruction manual included with the Companion states specifically that after firing 15 shots, both the firing pin and the cylinder pin should be cleaned and lubricated to loosen fouling especially when using blackpowder. The inclusion of the double-jointed loading tool provided with

the Companion is a bonus in itself. As most of us who are involved with small cap and ball revolvers well know, firmly seating a .22 caliber projectile in a tiny cylinder without additional leverage can be a tricky undertaking. The NAA bullet seater has hollow stud at the top which seats on the nose of the projectile while the flat base rests against the bottom of the cylinder.

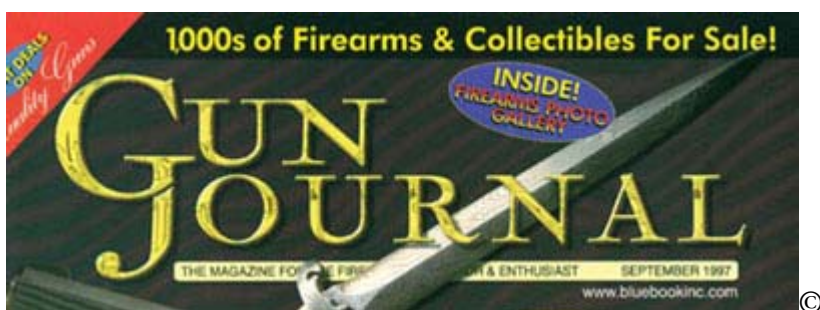
The North American Arms manual emphasizes that the loading of each chamber MUST be accomplished prior to capping the nipple...a basic rule that nevertheless should always be remembered! With the Companion LR and the Magnum version having a difference in cylinder lengths, NAA recommends that the former be charged with 2.5 grains of FFFFg and the latter to be loaded with no more than 4 grains of FFFFg or the Pyrodex equivalent. As both variations of the Companion have only a blade front sight, accuracy, is of course, intended for very close ranges and at twenty-feet the author found rapid fire shooting to print a six inch spread on a medium size combat silhouette target. Never forget, however, that though a 30 grain bullet in .22 caliber propelled by 4 grains of blackpowder is not considered a full power load by any means, it can be a lethal dose of energy well over 50 yards or more!

During his shooting evaluation of both the Magnum and Long Rifle Companion mini-revolvers, the author consulted with blackpowder buffs who are pre-1840 "rondyvoovers" and "cowboy action shooters", and both groups of these old timely reenactors readily agreed that NAA's cap and ball mini-wheelguns are definitely a requirement for those in need of a good repeating pocket smokepole! Since the Companion is manufactured entirely of stainless steel with the exception of its laminated grips and carbon steel nipples, cleaning up after shooting is a snap and a good scrubbing with hot soap and water, blackpowder solvents or the author's own remedy of using isopropyl alcohol is all that's required. Having already fired over 150 shots in both my own Long Rifle and Magnum models of the Companion, it's easy to see why North American Arms are able to offer a lifetime warranty on their fine products.

Cowboy action shooters are among the fans of the North American Arms Companion as they make great little "back-up" guns. Old West buff, Jeffrey Hill of New Hampshire sports one of each in both hands.

Keep in mind, however, that those who would be interested in one of their .22 rimfire cartridge models would do well to check out their latest catalog which lists over a dozen different variants, including a well-stocked selection of holsters, custom carry grips, and other merchandise. For a full color edition of their latest promotional literature, write to:

North American Arms  
2150 South 950 East  
Provo, Utah 84606-6285  
801-374-9990



Story and Photos used by permission.  
As published in the September, 1997 issue of Gun Journal  
- "The magazine for the firearms collector & enthusiast"  
©Blue Book Publications, Inc.  
<http://www.bluebookinc.com>

---