

FIREARMS

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PART 7

WEBLEY & SCOTT AUTOMATIC PISTOLS

During their brief and unsuccessful flirtation with the heavy and over-powerful 'Mars' automatic pistol in 1899, Webleys set about designing their own, and the first experimental model appeared in 1903. This was for .455 calibre, and progressive refinement continued for the next six years.

Sadly, the purity of line and balance of the revolver appearance deserted the designers of the automatics, whose outline was always angular, square and almost ugly. They have never been very successful, although they shoot well. One trouble which is often quoted, is their liability to jam when dirty and dusty, and it is true that the action is a title complicated and finely made.

.32 AUTOMATIC PISTOL MODEL, 1906

This blow-back operated pistol was first offered on the market in 1906, and was still being sold in 1904. It was first adopted by the Metropolitan Police in 1911, after having been in use with them for the previous five years. Legend has it that the famous Siege of Sidney Street inspired the Police to discard their revolvers and take to automatics, although revolvers continued in police service until the present day.

Throughout the existence of this pistol, it underwent several changes, none of them fundamental, and all intended to simplify manufacture or assist in use. The most obvious change concerns the safety, which on the first models was a catch on the left side of the external hammer.

By pressing the catch down when the hammer was at half-cock, it was locked and the pistol could be carried without danger.

On the later versions, the catch was positioned on the left of the frame above the grip, where it could be worked with the right thumb. This later safety also locked the breech slide.

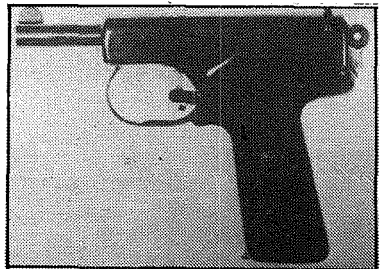
Barrel length was 3½ inches, the magazine held eight rounds and it was chambered for .32, 7-65 and .38, all rimless cartridges. A feature of all these small Webley automatic pistols was that the spring-steel trigger guard was used to lock the barrel to the body by means of two lugs on the front leg of the guard.

.25 EXTERNAL HAMMER MODEL, 1906

This was very much a scale-down .32 automatic, in fact one is tempted to describe it as a cut-down .32, so much does it outwardly resemble the larger pistol. The market for these small calibre pistols was very crowded, and immensely competitive, so that it was imperative to keep costs down to a minimum.

The mechanism is the simplest possible, with the main spring contained within the slide, and the operation being by simple blow-back. The magazine held six rounds, and a grip safety was fitted just below the trigger guard.

This tiny pistol was remarkably ugly, being only 4¾ inches long and 3 inches deep. The barrel was 2 inch. It is difficult to hold in a large hand, and obviously sights would be of no value at all, though some specimens had a miniscule foresight on the front



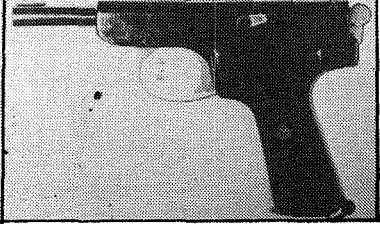
Webley .32 1906. Late model with frame mounted safety.



Webley 7-65mm 1906. First model.



Webley .25 Hammerless 1909.



Webley 9mm. model 1909. First version with manual safety.

of the slide. The company's records show that this pistol remained in production until 1940.

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.25 HAMMERLESS

MODEL 1909

The hammerless model was a refinement of the 1906 model, and was one ounce lighter, making it the smallest Webley handgun ever made. Its external dimensions were unaltered from the hammer model, and the construction used as many similar parts as possible.

In fact it is scarcely hammerless at all, since the hammer was simply put inside the body, and operated in the same way as with the other weapon. Rather surprisingly in view of the cut-throat competition in the very small pistol market at the time, Harrington and Richardson in the United States produced the design under their own name, and with very minor differences.

9mm MODEL 1909

This pistol was designed in response to a specification laid down by European customers who did not require the large .455 cartridge in the 1906 experimental models. The change to 9mm brought about other alterations to the mechanism, and the barrel was located by a lug machined from the top of the trigger guard, not unlike the system used in the .25 pistols. A grip safety was fitted into the heel of the butt, which worked by pushing the sear forward when it was squeezed.

At all other times, the sear could not engage with the trigger. The grip safety, and the hammer, were contained in a supplementary frame hinged to the main frame, and so permitting the movement of the sear. It was ingenious, but expensive to machine.

The barrel was 5 inches long, and the magazine held eight Browning Long cartridges. There was a holding-open device when the magazine was empty.

Although this pistol did not gain a European contract, it was adopted by the South African Police in 1920, and it remained in production until 1930.

.38 HIGH VELOCITY HAMMERLESS MODELS 1910 & 1913

These two .38 automatics were not a commercial success, but are included because they represent a step in the Webley design progression. They were intended for military use in Britain and abroad, and the calibre was chosen in difference to a specification which called for a lighter cartridge than the .455 round. The 1910 model can be described as a smaller version of the .455 automatic, having a five inch barrel, an eight round magazine and a lower overall weight.

The ammunition it was designed to take was the .38 Colt A.C.P., which identically was used in the .38 Webley-Fosbery, which was in production at the same time.

The mechanism was exactly the same in design as for the .455 model and the only obvious external difference is in the fact that the .38 had a concealed hammer.

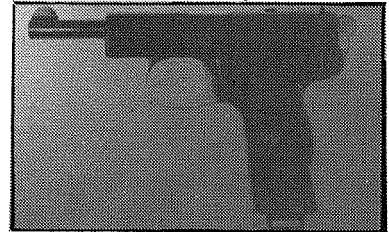
The 1913 model was very similar, and both models were fitted with long wooden grips running from the slide down to the bottom of the butt. On a few pistols, these grips are chequered, but the majority are smooth.

.455 PISTOL, SELF-LOADING MARK 1, 1912

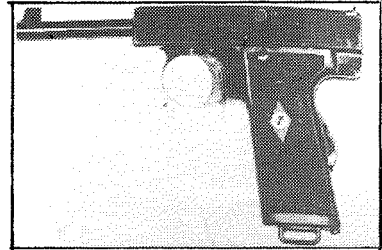
Steady progress in designing has resulted in a satisfactory large calibre automatic pistol by 1906. This way a heavy and substantial weapon, generously proportioned in all directions, and weighing forty ounces. In 1909, it was being described as the Navy Model, although the Royal Navy did not officially adopt it until May 1913, and it was issued on a wide scale to Naval and Royal Marine units throughout the First World War.

The operation was by recoil, the barrel being locked to the slide by a lug on the barrel engaging with a recess in the top of the slide, the barrel being forced upwards by two cam-ways. Unlocking was accomplished by a reversal of this process assisted by a spring.

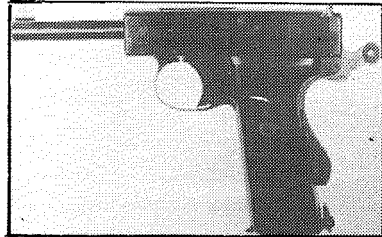
A grip safety was fitted, similar



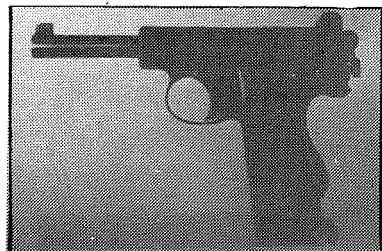
Webley 9mm. (BI) 1909 with grip safety.



Webley & Scott .38 high velocity Hammerless model 1910.



Webley No. 1 Mk. 1 1913.



Webley & Scott .455 Mk. 1 No. 2.

in its action to that on the 9mm model of 1909, and the hammer was external. The long butt held a 7-shot magazine, and was covered by wooden grips chequered all over.

The foresight was a substantial blade brazed to the muzzle, and the backsight was slotted on the rear of the slide. A round lanyard ring was fitted to the heel of the butt.

The whole effect is of a solid, dependable and rugged weapon of considerable strength. It is all the more surprising therefore, to hear the complaints of the users that it jammed easily when dirty.

TO BE CONTINUED

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