Launching a .223 projectile via a Sabot, it's easy to see why the .223 Timbs feeds so smoothly.

A CUSTOMIZED CZ52 TO CZECH OUT

FAST, CHEAP AND EASY – IS THIS A PISTOL WE'RE TALKING ABOUT?

DAVID M. FORTIER

The unfortunate reality, for most of us anyway, is that we probably won't be owning too many $2,000 pistols. It's not bad. It's not good. It just is. Even so, that doesn't mean we working stiffs can't enjoy a tastefully modified and unique piece of our own. There are a lot of well made, yet inexpensive, handguns out there that, with some subtle massaging, shine up like a new penny. Oh yeah, you can do it without busting the bank as well.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not trashing $2,000 custom guns — and who wouldn't like to own one of those beautifully handcrafted pieces that look so good in a two page spread? But if you're like me, toward the end of the article about that fancy gun, you start to suffer from sticker shock. Enter the CZ52. First-aid for sticker shock.

Ugly Can Be Good

Until recently, CZs were standard issue for the Czechoslovakian Army. However, with the breakup of the country and the adoption of the CZ82 in 9mm, these older 7.62x25mm service pistols have shown up on the surplus market. Actually it would be more appropriate to say they were dumped on the surplus market. You can usually buy one of these little jewels with a spare magazine, holster and cleaning rod for less than $175. Owning a genuine shooting-iron doesn't get much cheaper than that these days.

Okay it's cheap, but what exactly is it? The CZ52 is a short-roller-locked design built at Uhersky Brod in Moldavia. This unique pistol was designed by Jan Kratochvil and Presne Strojirentsvi and if you can say that three times you're a better man than I am. Intended for use by the Czechoslovakian Army, prototypes and test weapons were originally made in double action and 9x19 configurations.

However, when the pistol was adopted in May of 1952, the final configuration was as a single action, chambered for the M48 7.62x25mm cartridge. A full-size

Adopted by the Czech Army in 1952, approximately 200,000 of these pistols were produced before production ceased in 1954.

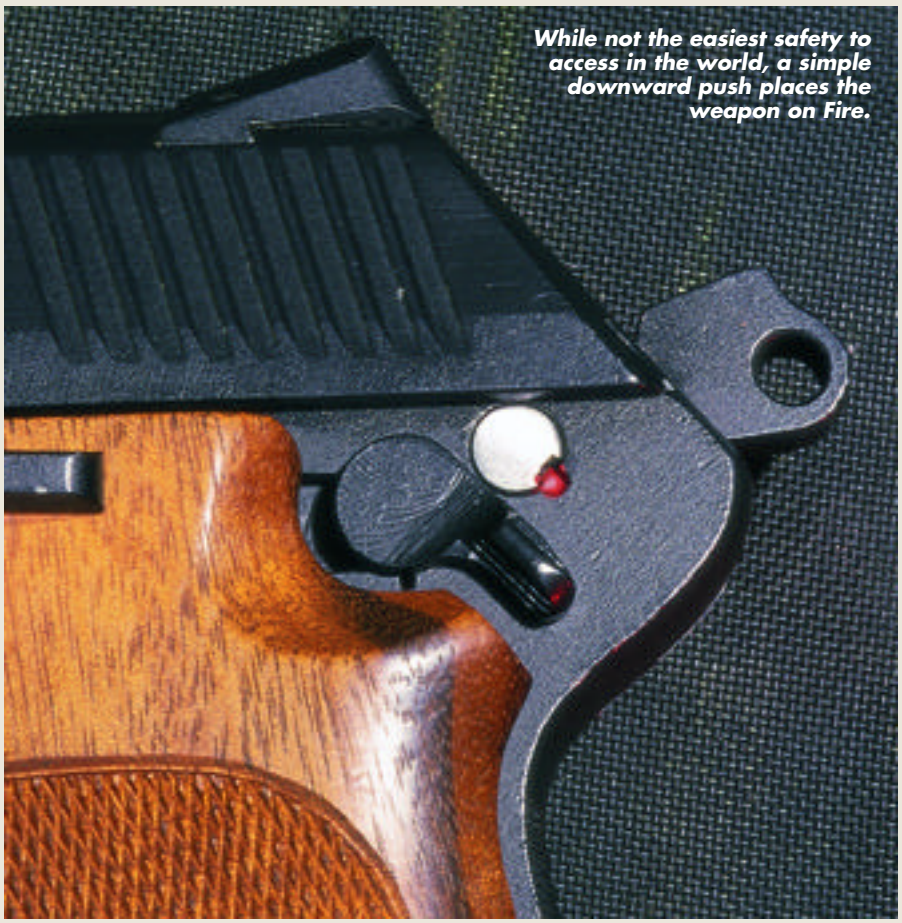
service pistol, its roller lock-up is very similar to the German MG42 GPMG. From 1952 until production ceased in 1954, approximately 200,000 of these pistols were manufactured.

The pistol itself is 8.25 inches long and tips the scales at 2.1 pounds. Barrel length is 4.71" and the beast is fed from 8 round box magazines. The weapon's controls are pretty straight forward, being intended for conscripts and people who might otherwise be inclined to be elsewhere.

On the pistol's butt is a European-style heel magazine release which not everyone likes (including me) and on the right side of the frame is a three position manual safety. Pushing the safety all the way up safely drops a cocked hammer. Pushing the safety to the middle position

From left to right: .45 ACP, 9x19, 9x18, .223 Timbs with 55 gr FMJ, .223 Timbs with 55 gr SP, MagSafe Defender, 85 grain FMJ load. Both the .223 Timbs and MagSafe Defender hotrod this already quick-stepping cartridge.

In place of the rear sight Richard mounted a Novak. In addition he stippled the backstrap for a secure hold.



While not the easiest safety to access in the world, a simple downward push places the weapon on Fire.

places the weapon on safe and all the way down is fire. Since this is a single action, if the hammer is decocked via the safety, it must be thumbcocked in order to fire. While the slide locks back on the last shot there is no external slide release. The slide must be manually retracted and released like a Walther PP series. All in all it's a basic 1950's vintage service pistol. Think anything Russian from the same era and you'll get the idea.

A Tiny Tornado

What most will find appealing about this Model A Ford of pistols is the cartridge it fires. The Czechoslovakian M48 round is dimensionally identical to the older Soviet 7.62x25 Type P pistol cartridge. But the Czech loading blows the doors off of the old Soviet round. The Soviet load pushes a .30 caliber 85 grain FMJ slug at a leisurely (?) 1,400 fps while the Czech load busts barriers at about the 1,600 fps mark. Whoa.

This is a substantial increase in velocity in an already fast cartridge. While people will always argue the virtues of fat bullets at low velocities or smaller bullets at high velocities, the Soviet 7.62x25 has proven itself in combat. This point was driven home during a recent trip I made to Russia. While I was test firing a Bizon 2 submachinegun in Izhevsk, the designer mentioned it was available in 7.62x25 as well as 9x17, 9x18, and 9x19.

Interested in why it was chambered for a cartridge replaced in Russian service in the 1950s, he smiled and replied, "Penetration!" Da, Komrade. With the 9x18 PM Makarov now being replaced in Russian service, I found it interesting to learn from my friend Mikhail Dragunov that the Russians seriously considered returning to the 7.62x25. With the wide-spread use of flak jackets and body armor on the modern battlefield, they came very close to re-adopting this old vest-buster. After all, hits stopped by a vest don't count.

To the recreational shooter the 7.62x25 has other virtues. Top of the list is the fact surplus 7.62x25 ammunition is currently very inexpensive. The surplus loads available are corrosive, Berdan primed, and drive 85 grain FMJ slugs between 1,300 and 1,550 fps. Consider it good, fun, blasting ammunition. However the cartridge is far from being relegated to a surplus-only deal. Sellier&Bellot and Winchester both offer FMJ loads in this caliber.

In addition, MagSafe offers a blisteringly-hot frangible load for self-defense. Their "Defender" load consists of a 52 grain projectile filled with birdshot driven at a claimed velocity of 2,120 fps. I would expect this to be extremely effective on a target. Let me know if you ever find out.

Even Faster

While working on this article, I came across a cartridge called the .223 Timbs. This round consists of a 7.62x25 case loaded with a sabot and a .223 diameter projectile. The load was conceived by Joseph Timbs as a simple way to drive a small diameter projectile at high velocity from a conventional handgun. Joseph shared his idea with Pete Cardona, of Quality Cartridge, who did the

actual work of developing it. A short time later I got wind of the project and, interested in the possibilities, contacted Pete. Still in the developmental process, Pete was kind enough to bring me into the loop and to provide quantities of ammunition for testing.

The goal of Joseph and Pete was to drive a .223 projectile at very high velocity from a handgun. As a simple way of testing their ideas they decided to do it via a sabot from a 7.62x25 case. However, during the early stages of development Pete ran into the problem of a lack of case capacity due to the sabot intruding quite deeply into the case. This of course had a detrimental effect on velocity.

In order for the pistol to cycle and for the projectile to be going fast enough to stabilize, they had to attain a certain velocity level. He played with a lot of powder combinations trying to get the load to reach this level. His objective was for the loads to run reliably through a bone-stock CZ52 using the factory recoil spring.

The rounds themselves are quite impressive looking. A small bottle-necked case mated to a gray sabot and diminutive projectile. Anyone who has been interested in the possibilities presented by the 5.7 FN round, .224 BOZ, 7.82x24 Leitner-Wise or the like will smile at the Timbs. The idea is a simple one. A small, reliably feeding bottle-necked cartridge that drives a .223 projectile at high velocity and has little recoil is very appealing. With some pre-production .223 Timbs test ammo in hand I was about to find out if the idea actually had any merit.

The Gun

SOG International Inc. is just one of many companies currently offering these pistols at very attractive prices. However, I was looking for a little more than just an "as-issued" pistol to enjoy. Let's face it, most older military pistols don't have the best sights or triggers in the world. The problem was finding someone who not only did good work but actually knew his way around a CZ52. I found who I was looking for in Richard Parker.

Rich is a down to earth guy who loves both shooting and working on firearms. A gunsmith and Class "A" Toolmaker, he has specialized in ComBloc weapons for some 20 years. I originally got to know Rich while researching dedicated Soviet sniper loads for the SVD Dragunov. Knowing the quality of work he was capable of doing, I discussed my ideas of customizing a CZ52 with him.

"Dave, let me send you a pistol and you can decide what you'd like done to yours," was all he said. A few days later a box arrived with a tastefully customized CZ52 in it. Nothing fancy reared its head, just well thought out modifications designed to improve the shootability of the pistol. Handsome is as handsome does.

In place of the original military sights were a Novak rear and dovetailed front that looked as if they were

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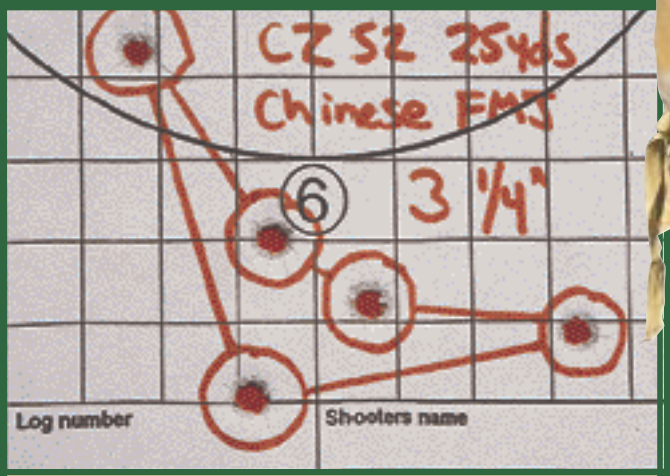
Accuracy of the test pistol was surprisingly good as this 25 yard group shot with inexpensive surplus ball attests.



ACCURACY AND VELOCITY CHART

LOAD	VELOCITY	ACCURACY
1963 CHINESE 85 GR. FMJ	1,532	3.3"
SELLIER&BELLOT 85 GR. FMJ	1,535	4.2"
WINCHESTER 85 GR. FMJ	1,541	4.5"
MAGSAFE 52 GR. DEFENDER	2,234	4.0"
.223 TIMBS 55 GR. SP	1,852	2.84"

VELOCITIES RECORDED 12 FEET FROM THE MUZZLE WITH AN OEHLER 35P AT AN AMBIENT TEMPERATURE OF 40 DEGREES F. GROUPS ARE AN AVERAGE OF FOUR, FIVE SHOT GROUPS FIRED OFF OF SANDBAGS AT 25 YARDS.

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factory original. I noticed a custom-built extended slide release to speed reloads. For a positive hold, the front strap was hi-cut and both the front and backstrap nicely stippled. The feed ramp was polished and a simple action job was done and a stop added to the trigger to eliminate over-travel.

To spruce the pistol up a bit, a set of Hogue checkered hardwood grips were added. In keeping with the pistol's inexpensive nature it was finished in a simple yet functional matte black Teflon. The result was a pistol substantially more pleasing to the eye and much easier to shoot.

To see just what the CZ52 was capable of I trundled it out to my range for testing. I was interested in evaluating it for both intrinsic and practical accuracy, reliability, handling, controllability and muzzle flash/blast signature.

To test for intrinsic accuracy, it was shot off sandbags at 25 yards. Four consecutive five shot groups were fired and recorded. Loads used during testing consisted of some 1963 vintage Chinese surplus 85 grain FMJ's, Sellier&Bellot's 85 grain FMJ and Winchester's newly introduced 85 grain FMJ. In addition I also tried MagSafe's 52 grain Defender frangible load. Lastly, I included a pre-production .223 Timbs load utilizing a 55 grain SP. This, I felt, would give a good cross section of loads from cheap surplus to pricey specialty loads.

Great Balls O' Fire

Touching a round off I quickly became aware this pistol had punch. All the ball loads averaged over 1,500 fps and that's stepping-out in anyone's book. These loads all exhibited noticeable muzzle flash and blast and could have seared the steaks for dinner had I brought them along. Maybe next time.

Switching to the MagSafes only increased the crescendo. But there was a reason — they averaged a blistering 2,234 fps. One actually clocked 2,299 fps, which is chasing 7.62x39 territory. This was a little too much of a good thing though and the pressure was high enough to blow the primer out and rupture the case around the neck. Switching to the .223 Timbs, velocity (along with pressures) dropped back to more sensible levels. This load averaged 1,852 fps with a high of 1,945 fps.

Accuracy from this relatively stock pistol varied from service-grade to pretty good depending upon the load. Of the three ball loads tested, the cheap Chinese surplus actually shot the best averaging 3.3" at 25 yards. MagSafe's Defender load averaged a respectable 4" — but the surprise came when shooting

the .223 Timbs. This load actually averaged 2.84" groups at 25 yards. Best of all, they shot to the same point of impact as the ball loads.

This pistol was never meant to be fired from the bench, so we moved to some rapid offhand work. Here I used the CZ52 in a number of drills engaging multiple targets from two yards out to a squinty-eyed 100. This is where I got to really know this Czech pistol. During these drills I greatly appreciated the vastly improved sights and the addition of a slide release.

One actually clocked 2,299 fps, which is chasing 7.62x39 territory.

The front sight was the perfect width for rapidly engaging silhouettes and nestled nicely in the Novak rear. I also came to appreciate the stippling. This pistol has some noticeable jump with ball ammunition and recoil with the .223 Timbs load was noticeably more controllable, allowing for much faster follow-up shots. The trigger was fairly light and broke crisply aiding quick and accurate shooting. Hits all the way out to 100 yards were fairly easy to make. Reliability throughout testing was flawless and the all-important fun factor was extremely high.

All Is Not Sugar

Negatives? Well the pistol design is by no means perfect. In the hand the grip shape feels somewhat like a Walther P-38, which is not a good thing in my book. The CZ naturally pointed very low because of that. The heel mag release got a "no" vote, but that's just my own opinion. Also, on a couple of occasions, my thumb knocked the safety off "Fire" under recoil. This brought shooting to a sudden halt until the safety was again disengaged. However I readily admit this could be labeled as shooter error. As much as I hate to admit it.

While $150 to $175 doesn't generally fetch much today, it will get you a CZ52. A unique design that's inexpensive to shoot, a CZ52 can provide an awful lot of fun without busting the bank. Plus, if you so choose, you can even have one customized to suit your individual desires. While maybe not as glamorous as a tricked-out M1911, the Parker-modified CZ52 proved eminently reliable and accurate. Plus, it provided loads of shooting fun while looking good. And we all know that looking good while shooting is at least as important as having fun, eh?

For more information, contact Parker Arms and Toolworks (Fine Gunsmithing On CZ52's And Other Weapons) at (215) 541-1099; Quality Cartridge (.223 Timbs Ammunition) at (301) 373-3719.