

## 25 of the Best Handguns Ever

We take a walk through history and highlight some of the greatest revolvers, pistols, and sidearms of all time



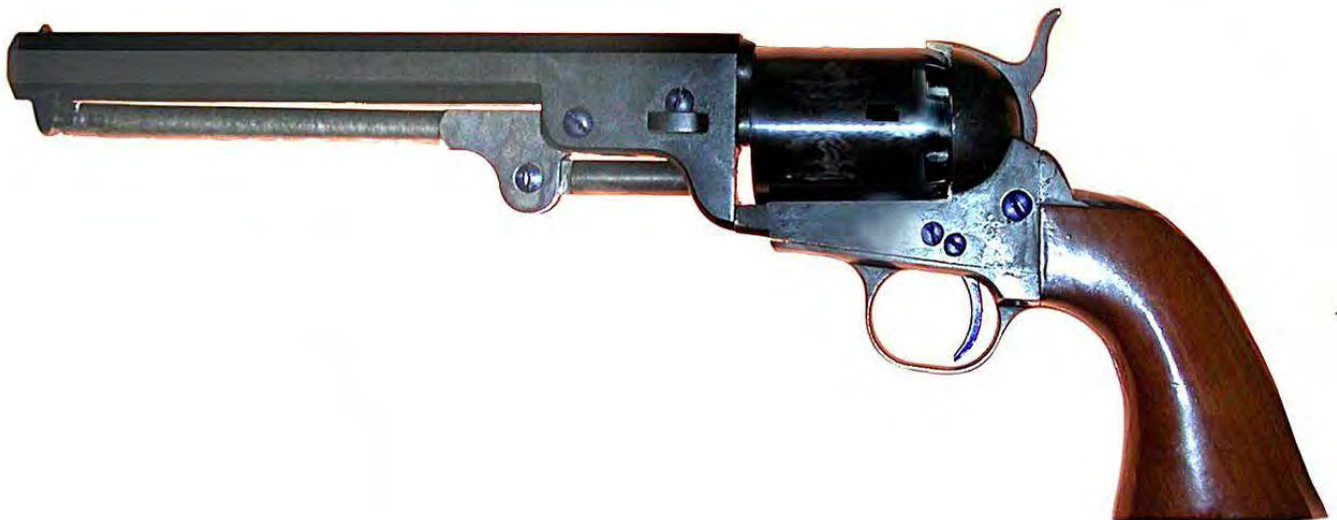
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*[Colt](#), [Glock](#), [S&W](#), [Browning](#)... There is no shortage of iconic names associated with handguns. From classic cavalry sidearms of the 1800s to today's remarkably accurate semi-automatic pistols, handguns have been a constant source for innovation and ingenuity. And that's what inspired us to go back in time and highlight 25 of the most ground-breaking handguns, pistols, and revolvers in history—starting all the way back in 1850 when Colt released a game-changer that would go on to catch the eyes of soldiers and gunslingers alike. Many of the guns in this list are no longer available, but the impact and influence they had on handgun design will live on forever. Now, onto the list.*

### 1) Colt 1851 Navy Revolver (1850)

The Colt 1851 Navy Revolver [Wiki Commons](#)



In production from 1850 until 1873, the Colt Navy Revolver changed warfare and the world. Much lighter than the Colt Dragoon of 1847 and originally designated the “Ranger,” the Colt Navy was adored by cavalry soldiers, partisan ruffians, and gunslingers like Jesse James and Wild Bill Hickock. The revolver remained popular long after the introduction of the modern self-contained cartridge. The Colt Navy is a legendary sidearm and could be considered the first true fighting handgun.

## 2) Colt Single Action Army (1873)

The Colt Single Action Army Colt



Likely the most iconic handgun in existence, the Colt Single Action Army gained fame in the holsters of Roosevelt's Rough Riders and won the West in the hands of men like Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson. General George Patton also carried an 1873 Colt Single Action Army, which should be all the endorsement a pistol needs to achieve fabled status. Known as the Peacemaker, the gun would've cost you about \$17 in the 1870s. Today, you'll pay 100 times that for a current production 1873 and as much as 500 times the original price for a first-generation specimen in good condition.

### 3) Smith & Wesson Model 10 (1899)

The S&W Model 10 By Olegvolk/Wiki Commons



Also known as the Military & Police or Victory Model, this fixed-sight, double-action revolver has been offered with barrel lengths ranging from 2 to 6 inches, and it is estimated that more than six million Model 10s have been manufactured. The revolver saw service in both World Wars and was chambered in .38 Long Colt, .38 S&W, and .38 Special. Thousands of policemen have walked their beats with a Model 10 at their sides. In 1974, S&W introduced a heavy-barrel version chambered for the .357 Magnum known as the Model 13.

#### 4) Luger (1902)

The Luger Pistol By Luger/Wiki Commons



The Pistole Parabellum—also known as the Luger—was offered in a variety of configurations from 1898 until 1948. It is the pistol that made the 9mm Parabellum/Luger/9x19mm cartridge famous, and now the most popular pistol cartridge in the world. The Luger was used by the German Army in World War I and II and has, in a way, become a symbol of Nazi Germany. Because of this, it was a longtime favorite handgun for Hollywood villains. The Luger and its unique operating system essentially died at the end of WWII, but by then, it had already made history.



## 5) Colt (1911)

The Colt 1911Colt



Created by John Browning—arguably the greatest firearm designer of all time—this pistol served the American military from 1911 until 1990 and is still in the holsters of some soldiers today. The 1911 helped win two World Wars and may be the most copied handgun ever. Lt. Col. Jeff Cooper referred to it as the “Yankee Fist,” and today, the 1911 is more popular than ever before. It dominates the custom handgun market and is offered in multiple configurations by many manufacturers.

## 6) Colt Woodsman (1915)

The Colt Woodsman By Bardbom/Wiki Commons



Another great John Browning design, the Colt Woodsman was manufactured in various forms from 1915 until 1977. It was the first successful semi-automatic, rimfire pistol and is considered by many to be the quintessential .22 LR handgun. The Woodsman became very popular with small game hunters, trappers, hikers, and outdoorsmen, and it remains very popular with collectors, with some variations selling for as much as \$4,000.



## 7) Colt Detective Special (1927)

The Colt Detective Special [Wiki Commons](#)



This six-shot, steel-framed, two-inch-barreled, double-action revolver was instantly appealing to those looking for a pocket-pistol that could be easily concealed. It was one of the first of what would soon be called “snub-nose” revolvers and offered in .32 New Police, .38 New Police, and .38 Special. The latter chambering did indeed become popular with plain-clothes detectives and other lawmen who worked the desk and undercover jobs.

## 8) Smith & Wesson K22 (1931)

The S&W K22S&W



You would never think that a high-quality, double-action revolver (with a six-inch barrel and Circassian walnut grips) chambered for the .22 Long Rifle, could have been a success—especially considering that it was introduced during the depression. But between 1931 and 1939, Smith & Wesson sold more than 17,000 K22s. With a crisp, single-action trigger pull and a guarantee to shoot within 1.5 inches at 50 yards, this gun became an instant classic and was the forerunner to a long line of .22 rimfire revolvers from Smith & Wesson.



## 9) Walther PPK (1931)

The Walther PPKWalther



The [Walther](#) PPK (Polizeipistole Kriminalmodell or Police Pistol Detective Model) is a blow-back, semi-auto with an exposed hammer and a traditional double-action trigger. It has been offered in a wide variety of configurations and has been chambered for several cartridges; most notably the .380 ACP or 9mm Kurtz. The pistol reached meteoric fame as the sidearm of the fictional special agent, James Bond, and will forever be known as 007's pistol. Compact but heavy, the steel-framed PPK is a great personal sidearm, and they are now manufactured in Fort Smith, Arkansas.

## 10) Browning Hi-Power (1935)

The Browning Hi-Power [Wiki Commons](#)



In its prototype form—as designed by John Browning—the Browning Hi-Power was a striker-fired 9mm pistol with a double-stack magazine, link-less barrel, and a pivoting, revolver-like trigger. Sounds like a Glock, right? In its final form, the handgun became a single-action, hammer-fired pistol, and would ultimately be used by more military units than any other handgun. The Browning Hi-Power was the first wonder-nine, and it laid the foundation for modern defensive handgun design as we know it today.

## 11) Ruger Standard Model (1949)

The Ruger Standard ModelRuger



The Ruger Standard Model was the beginning of a company known as Sturm, Ruger & Co.—which, by the way, was founded with a \$50,000 investment. The design is unique in that the pistol's slide is internal, and the current model remains very similar to the original. The gun is now in its fourth iteration, and there have been more than two dozen variations of this handgun. An outstanding pistol for the new shooter, small-game hunter, or outdoorsman, today the Standard MK IV, which is much easier to field-strip than the original, retails for more than ten times the original price.

## 12) Smith & Wesson Model 36 (1950)

The S&W Model 36S&W



Introduced at the 1950 International Association of Chiefs of Police convention, the S&W Model 36 would ultimately be known as the “Chief’s Special.” This name came about, rather uniquely, through a vote held at the convention. The gun was an immediate success and was originally available with either a blued or nickel finish. This five-round, double-action revolver has served law-enforcement officers well as a duty gun for detectives and administrators, and as an ankle or back-up gun for patrol officers. It is still being manufactured and retails for \$749.



### 13) Ruger Single Six (1953)

The Ruger Single Six [Flickr/Stephen Z](#)



The 1950s were the heyday of the television western. Shows like *Gunsmoke* pulled the little bit of cowboy that was in all of us to the surface, and the world was ripe for a .22 LR single-action revolver that hearkened to the Old West. During its 66-year history, the Ruger Single Six has been chambered for the .22 LR, .22 Magnum, .17 HMR, and even the .32 H&R Magnum. With barrel lengths ranging from 4  $\frac{5}{8}$  to 9  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches, the Single Six became one of the best-selling firearms Ruger ever produced. Great for new shooters and hunters, this gun is still in production with the option of 6-, 7-, 9-, and 10-shot cylinders. Prices start at about \$600.

## 14) Colt Python (1955)

The Colt Python Wiki Commons



The Colt Python has a reputation for a smooth trigger pull, tight lock-up, and accuracy. It is described by many as the finest production double-action revolver ever made. Immortalized in a two-tone format by Robert Blake in the movie, *Electra Glide in Blue*, the Python was adopted by several state highway patrol departments and might be the Rolls Royce of revolvers. Discontinued in 2005, used examples in good condition command outlandish prices, sometimes fetching more than \$10,000.

## 15) Smith & Wesson Model 39 (1955)

The S&W Model 39 [Wiki Commons](#)



This pistol has the distinction of being the first U.S. designed/manufactured double-action, semi-automatic pistol marketed in the United States. The Model 39 was chambered for 9mm Luger and was designed by S&W at the request of the Army to be an American equivalent to the Walther P38. The de-cocker and 8-round, single-stack magazine were like those on the P38, but it had a locking mechanism similar to the Browning Hi-Power. The Model 39's true contribution was that after adoption by the Illinois State Police in 1967, it set the stage for a switch to semi-automatic handguns by American law enforcement. It also served as the forerunner to the higher-capacity Model 59—and many aluminum- and steel-framed S&W pistols—that so many police agencies would fall in love with.

## 16) Ruger Blackhawk (1955)

The Ruger BlackhawkRuger



Following on the heels of the Single Six, Ruger's next logical step was to design a more powerful single-action revolver. They decided on the Blackhawk and originally produced the revolver in .38 Special/.357 Magnum. It has since been chambered in a wide assortment of cartridges. In several cases, Blackhawks were called "convertibles" and sold with two cylinders, such as .45 ACP and .45 LC. The fixed-sight Vaquero version, offered in 1993, took sales to the stratosphere thanks to the popularity of cowboy-action shooting at the time. It has been produced in a stunning array of variations and is still available today for less than \$700. The Ruger Blackhawk has become one of the most successful American made firearms.



## 17) Remington XP 100 (1961)

The Remington XP 100 [Wiki Commons](#)



An oddity for sure, the Remington XP 100 is a bolt action pistol intended for hunting and silhouette shooting. It also has the unique distinction of being the forerunner to a rifle—Remington's Model 600. The XP 100's centrally-located grip allowed the long-barreled handgun to balance well, and until the introduction of the Thompson/Center Contender, it was the most popular handgun for target shooters and handgun hunters. The XP 100 was chambered for a variety of cartridges including the .308 Winchester and .35 Remington. The gun was discontinued in 1998, but it might have been ahead of its time considering that in 2019, Remington introduced a similar handgun called the 700 CP.

## 18) Thompson/Center Contender (1967)

The T/C Contender Thompson/Center



This single-shot, break-open handgun became very popular because owners could buy additional barrels chambered for a wide array of cartridges—from .22 LR up to .45-70. The Contender has a great reputation for accuracy, and it essentially brought about the end of Remington's XP 100. Like with the XP 100, the Contender evolved into a rifle, and with the addition of longer barrels and buttstocks, shooters had a great deal of versatility. The Contender and the newer Encore are still sold as a kind of build-your-own system.

## 19) Beretta 92 (1975)

The Beretta 92Beretta



The Beretta 92 has a distinctive look because the slide does not completely enclose the barrel. The pistol has a slide-mounted safety/de-cocker and a long, often described as “tedious,” trigger pull. None the less, in 1985, the U.S. Army adopted the Beretta M9 as the standard sidearm, and then the complaining began. This was partly because it was chambered for 9mm Luger instead of .45 ACP, and also because it was not American made. However, the Beretta M9 proved reliable, and due to U.S. military use, its popularity skyrocketed.

## 20) CZ 75 (1975)

The CZ 75CZ USA



Though widely distributed, this Czechoslovakian-made pistol was not sold in that country until it was a decade old. Now it is the standard sidearm of the Czech Police. Similar to the Browning Hi-Power in that it uses a link-less, locked-breach barrel, the [CZ 75](#) differs in that it is a double-action. Unlike most semi-automatic pistols, the slide rails on the CZ 75 ride on the inside of the grip frame. CZ 75s have a great reputation for reliability and accuracy, and there is a wide range of variants now offered with retail prices starting at about \$600.



## 21) Smith & Wesson Model 686 (1980)

The S&W Model 686S&W



Smith & Wesson's Model 686 is one of the most successful revolvers ever created. There are more than a dozen variants with barrel lengths ranging from 2.5 to 6 inches, and at one time, the 4-inch version was one of the most prolific sidearms for law enforcement. At 48 ounces, it's heavy enough to dampen .357 Magnum recoil, and these revolvers have an uncanny record of reliability and accuracy.

## 22) Glock 17 (1982)

The Glock 17Glock



The Glock 17 was the first of an extensive line of polymer handguns to be offered by the Austrian manufacturer. Now in its fifth generation, the Glock 17 has become one of the most recognized pistols in the world, and today a Glock, in some form or another, likely fills the holsters of more policemen than any other handgun. Essentially the design is nothing more than a modification of the 1935 Browning Hi-Power, and the 17, like all Glocks, has a fine reputation for reliability and durability. Because of their performance for the price, Glocks are one of the widest distributed handguns in the world.

### 23) Ruger Single Seven (2014)

The Ruger Single SevenRuger



In 2014, Ruger took their iconic Single Six revolver and chambered it for the .327 Federal Magnum. They also drilled seven holes instead of six into the cylinder. Offered in three barrel lengths—4  $\frac{5}{8}$ , 5  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and 7 inches—this revolver became an instant hit because it finally housed the potent .327 in a handgun fitting of its service. With the ability to also chamber and fire .32 ACP, .32 Short, .32 Long, and .32 H&R Magnum ammunition, Ruger essentially created the ultimate trail/camp gun. Single Sevens are only available through Lipsey's for \$652.

## 24) Sig Sauer P320 (2014)

The Sig Sauer P320Sig Sauer



Other than its really nice trigger, there's nothing really ground-breaking about the design of the [Sig Sauer P320](#). You could say it is just another polymer-framed, striker-fired, double-stack, 9mm handgun. However, in 2018, the P320 was selected as the standard issue sidearm of the United States Army and named the M17. That alone qualifies it as one of the greatest handguns of all time. Sig Sauer offers a wide array of P320 variants to include a civilian version of the M17, which sells for an affordable \$768.



## 25) Wilson Combat EDC X9 (2017)

The Wilson Combat EDC X9



It could be argued that the three best modern fighting pistols are the 1911, Browning Hi-Power, and Glock 17. What if you could combine the best features of all three of those pistols? Well, that's exactly what [Wilson Combat](#) did. The EDC X9 operates like a 1911, has the ultra-comfortable grip of a Hi-Power, and the capacity and size of a Glock 17. Available with or without an accessory rail, the EDC X9 is quite possibly the best fighting pistol ever made—and at \$2,895, it's priced accordingly.

## 5 Honorable Mentions

### Remington Model 1875 (1875)



When folks think of cowboy guns, it's most often the Colt Peacemaker that comes to mind. However, there was another single-action revolver that, while not as famous, was just as reliable. Remington's 1875 became a cherished sidearm of many western lawmen and villains. It was also the handgun of choice for Frederick Russel Burnham, an American who served as the Chief of Scouts for the British Army in South Africa during the Boer War, and who was also the inspiration for the worldwide Boy Scout movement founded by Robert Baden Powell.

## Walther P38 (1938)



This was the service pistol of the Wehrmacht—the unified armed forces of Nazi German—at the beginning of World War II. Though not as famous in pop culture as the German Luger (1902), the P38 was a cherished battlefield prize for American soldiers. It was the first locked-breach pistol to use a double/single-action trigger. A testament to its design is that it's been used in a number of military conflicts even as recent as 2017.

## Ruger LCR (2009)



In 1982, Glock revolutionized the semi-automatic handgun with the polymer frame. Some liked it, some loved it, and some still hate it. The same could probably be said for Ruger's LCR. As the first successful revolver with a polymer frame—grip and trigger housing—it weighs 50 percent less than the Ruger SP 101, which is Ruger's other compact revolver. The LCR is also affordable and available in .22 LR, .22 WMR, .327 Federal Magnum, .38 Special, 9mm, and .357 Magnum, with or without a hammer.



## S&W Shield (2012)



The Shield is a compact, semi-automatic pistol in Smith & Wesson's M&P Line. It has the distinction of being one of the most comfortable-to-hold and -shoot sub-compact semi-auto handguns ever—even today eight years after its introduction. It is available in 9mm and 40 S&W, and a 45 ACP version—that's slightly larger—is also available.

## SIG P365 (2017)



Introduced to great fanfare, the Sig Sauer P365 lived up to expectations. This is a micro-compact, polymer framed, striker fired semi-automatic, specifically designed from the ground up for every day—365 days a year—carry. Unlike many 9mm semi-automatics this small, the P365 utilizes a double-stacked magazine giving it a 10-round capacity. Twelve- and 15-round magazines are also available, and this pistol will handle +P ammunition.