

Jurek Pistols – The Legend Lives On

Words and Pictures by Anthony Morgan



NOT SO MANY years ago, there was an almost mandatory prerequisite for novices entering the world of target shooting, and that was to join one of the many old established smallbore rifle and pistol clubs and spend the next couple of years grappling with the frustrations of 'Club Pistol'. In these more enlightened times when any newcomer to the sport can choose to shoot such exotic disciplines as Practical Pistol, the humble .22 precision competition seems almost boring. However, it still remains one of the most popular (if only numerically) disciplines in the country and is probably the best way of learning the rudiments of pistol shooting as well as fine tuning already acquired skills.

The course of fire is 3 x 10 rounds at 20 yds and/or 50 m, with 6 minutes allowed per card. The event was undoubtedly designed around the single shot .22 pistol which reigned supreme at the turn of the century and of which there must still be thousands in use in clubs up and down the country. Nowadays, you are more likely to be wedged in between a Smith model 41 and a Walther GSP on most ranges, but it's a fair bet that somewhere along the line there will be at least one Webley single

shot. They are not in production today but the nostalgia surrounding them will ensure that what numbers are left, will be with us for many years. Surprising though it may seem, there is a contemporary .22 single shot club pistol currently in production in the UK, and it is possible to trace tenuous links back to the Webley.

An Enigmatic Gunmaker

The gun in question is not only a credit to its maker but it acts also as a monument to one of the most enigmatic British gunsmiths of the 20th century, one Dr Marion Karol Jurek. His fertile mind produced designs encompassing many various types of weapon, but he is most widely known for his single shot .22 pistol. Although his output was small, they often appear for sale and now are becoming very collectable. During his retirement years after his dispute with the Inland Revenue, which effectively stopped his trading, he passed on the patterns to his friend Ron May, now director of May of London. May's, who pride themselves as being one of the two remaining gunmakers left in the UK (the other is Berdan Britarms), will build to order a Jurek from

scratch, to match almost exactly an original.

Had Dr Jurek been alive today, he would have certainly had no cause for complaint regarding the quality of these replicas. Indeed, a Jurek owner who examined the May pistol commented that the workmanship was better, though when we showed the gun to Mr William Becket, who worked in Jurek's Bradford Street workshop from the early 1960s, he thought that 'The Doc' would never have entertained the chrome plated slide!

Jurek obtained his doctorate in chemical engineering at Krakow University in Poland, but his interests were varied and he acquired considerable skill as a mechanical engineer. Prior to his flight to England ahead of the occupying German troops in the early 1940s, he worked as Research Manager at the Wytworni Ammunition Factory in Warsaw. Joining the Polish troops in Scotland, he became Workshop Officer of the 16 Polish Armoured Brigade Workshop, where, in 1942 he designed a SL carbine and later converted it to fully automatic. A few years later he developed his second SMG which was well received but was not adopted by the Ordnance Board. After the war he joined Webley and took with

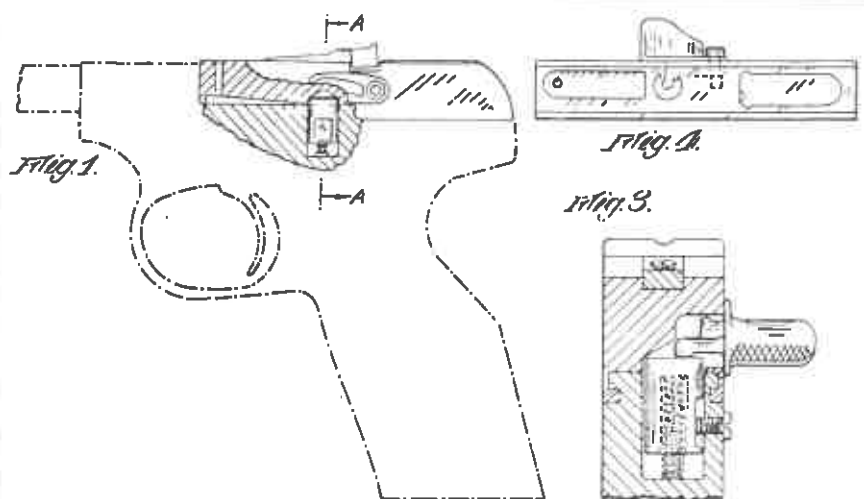
him the basics of an automatic pistol to rival the Browning Hi-Power. The pistol followed the lines of a P38 but had a parallel twin link system used to lock the barrel. The suggestions made by the BAOR throughout the trials pushed the design and performance of the pistol to near perfection, whereupon the Hi-Power was suddenly adopted and all further work on the Jurek/Webley pistol came to a sudden halt.

Dr Jurek suffered fools badly and it was his disappointment in the quality of the Webley management at that time, and his lack of interest in the mass production of firearms, that instigated the formation of his own workshop, originally at St Mary's Row, Birmingham. Here, he began production of his .22 target pistol designated the 'Popular', which resembled the Webley single shot in that the breech was accessed by tilting the barrel downwards. The barrel is unlocked by retracting a knob on either side of the frame (depending on whether the gun was made for the left or right hand), which released a bolt from a lug on the underside of the chamber. The barrel would then tip forward and a stirrup shaped extractor levered out the empty case.

First Jurek Pistols

These break-action pistols were Jurek's first design, and each possessed a certain unique charm since he insisted on an individually made grip, custom fitted to the purchaser's hand measurements. Specific barrel lengths could be ordered, and as each gun bore the obvious marks of being hand built (one 'Popular' model was known to retain the blue paint mark under the grips, where a hack-saw blade had skidded across the metal!), it would be virtually impossible to find two identical weapons. Jurek was interested mainly in accuracy, and the odd tool mark here and there didn't upset him too much. His background as a chemist enabled him to experiment with various metal finishing formulae, so that many of his early pistols have a striking hue to their surfaces. The break action was not confined to .22 rimfire, but was also available as a .22/.38 combo, having an interchangeable barrel. This hybrid was designated the Model S and most illustrations of these show a short barrel and sight extension to the rear. All in all, Jurek made 186 break-action .22's and 13 Model S.

In 1955 Jurek applied for a patent headed 'Improvements relating to Pistols and the like'. Date of complete filing was October 6, 1956, the contents of which described the locking of his new design of slide action single shot pistol. In essence, it set out the operation of a vertically sprung locking bolt riding in a recess in the frame. The sliding breech carrying the firing pin ran on top of this bolt and was locked into battery when the bolt engaged a socket on the underside of the slide. The slide was released by a lever arranged at



Previous page: Dr. Marlon Jurek at his Bradford Street workshop, displaying a left and right hander.

This page, top: The May-Jurek slide showing the film which unlocks the slide when depressed. The rearsight is fully adjustable but rides rather high according to modern trends.

Centre: Dr. Jurek's patent drawings filed in 1956 showing the basis of his spring locking bolt system.

Above: A close up of the breech, opened by a pull on the knurled button on the side plate. The extractor mechanism can clearly be seen, it does only what its name suggests, it does not eject. Note the rather enviable number-123.



Left: A typical break-barrel model 'Popular', the owner of this gun felt the need for a trigger shoe.

Below: The May-Jurek adjustable trigger can be locked at varying distances along a milled groove to accommodate different hand sizes.

the side and having a lateral extension projecting through the slide into the socket. Depressing the lever lowered the bolt allowing the slide to be pulled back, giving access to the chamber. The arrangement is both simple and effective and says a lot about Jurek's uncluttered thinking.

Considering he was rather *passé* as far as cosmetics were concerned, he was extremely single-minded about the tolerances where good engineering mattered. Contrary to popular opinion, he was not so pedantic as to want to make every single piece of his pistols with his own hands. Mr Beckett remembers working on numerous slides for Dr Jurek, carrying out all the milling operations. He recalls with some degree of pride that the 'Doc' insisted on no more than two thousandths of an inch variance on the measurements of the slide, and the same on the guide rails of the frame. At the very worst, therefore, the most that the fit could be out would be four thou'. The unwillingness to accept less than the best that he could possibly achieve also included Jurek's barrels. Mr Beckett once watched Dr Jurek work on a barrel for over a week. On his testing range at Bradford

Street, Jurek put hundreds of rounds down the barrel in an effort to cure a single flyer which kept occurring at regular intervals. He would take it away and lap it down then test it again. Days passed with the same testing and lapping procedures yielding the same unaccountable flyer. Then, after all those hours of care and attention, Jurek simply unscrewed the barrel from the test bench, threw it in the bin and proceeded to make a new one.

Sadly, Dr Jurek suffered a severe stroke towards the end of 1981, from which he never recovered. We are left to wonder what might have evolved had not bureaucracy and ill health put an end to his engineering days. Had it not been for his good friend Mr Ron May, the Jurek pistol might have become a museum piece. As it is, the design is as alive as it ever was and in some ways, is looking a lot healthier.

The May-Jurek

The May-Jurek follows the pattern of the sliding breech model and in true tradition is hand made to order. To be truthful, May's pistol is better made than any original Jurek yet seen. Those who knew

and worked with the 'Doc' all agree that finesse was a word that could neither be attributed to his character nor his work. There is no denying that his guns could perform admirably, but the general finish left a lot to be desired. Earlier May pistols were left in the black, but recently they have teamed up with Britarms who have carried out some satin chrome plate work on the frame. Presumably, if you wanted as near to the real thing as possible, you could dispense with the plating, but it does add to the overall look of the gun and in my view, is a very pleasing addition.

Also in keeping with tradition, our loan gun from May's, came equipped with a magnificently carved, three piece, adjustable anatomical grip. Though it must fit somebody's hand, we were unable to find anybody who felt completely at ease with it. There is no criticism intended, the wood is beautifully fashioned and would normally be sculptured to fit the grip of any would-be purchaser.

Keen eyed students of the Jurek pistol may notice the unusual profile of the grip. The front strap has acquired some waisting at the point where it meets the trigger guard, permitting the middle finger to wrap right around the grip. The result, though subtle, is quite different to the normal straight strap grip usually found on Jurek guns.

Under the wood there lies a surprise for those conditioned to expect a magazine well or a thumping great main spring. The whole area of grip is nothing less than a profile cut slab of $\frac{3}{8}$ inch steel plate, the mass of which is relieved by a honeycomb of drill holes. Most of the gun's 1200 g mass is appropriated to this area and successfully puts the centre of gravity into the palm of the hand. The largest of the holes at the top of the grip houses a threaded bolt bearing on to the sear spring. The bolt can be rotated so as to effect the trigger weight from about 2 lbs up to a total lock up. The lockwork is, of course, strictly single action, the serrated hammer being thumb cocked. By necessity, the hammer dips from full cock, to a point well below the guide rails, so enabling the slide to be removed rearward during stripping.

As described in his patent, the slide is locked by a vertical bolt. To depress this bolt there is a tiny hole drilled through from the top of the slide through which a small rod may be pushed. The slide has to be in the open position first, so as to align the guide hole. The bolt is then pressed

down and the slide removed from the rear. The underside of the slide has the milled groove, cut deeper at the front end, in which the bolt rides. The groove stops short of the front face so that the slide doesn't fall off the end of the rails during normal shooting procedures. The delta shaped fin on the side of the slide is depressed and pulled back to open the breech. This has the effect of pushing the bolt down from the recess to slip into the groove. To close the slide, it is simply pushed forward. Care should be taken while this is accomplished, because there is no safety mechanism designed into the lockwork. It is important therefore, that there is no contact with the trigger until the chambered round is ready to be fired.

Trigger Mechanism

Considering that the single shot pistol is one of the least complicated ways of delivering a piece of lead from point A to point B, the Jurek has as many adjustable trigger controls as you could wish for. Already discussed is the sear spring adjustment, but accessible with the slide removed is a sear engagement lock screw. This is a small grub screw which alters the amount of creep available to the trigger. Turned from one extreme to the other, the trigger pull alters from an extremely lumpy $\frac{1}{4}$ inch creep to a point where the sear refuses to engage. Somewhere in between is the setting for an enviably crisp break.

The trigger itself is linked to the sear by a bar running along the left hand side of the frame. It is protected by a long narrow covering plate secured by countersunk screws at either end. This sear bar joins the base of the trigger block which pivots about its fulcrum. The portion of this block which is exposed to a $\frac{3}{4}$ inch 'T' section groove enabling the trigger proper to be locked in any position along the section. This adjustment caters for every conceivable size of hand and is an excellent feature. The satin chromed trigger is $\frac{5}{16}$ inch wide with longitudinal ribs on the finger face. There is another adjustment for backlash accessed by a tiny hole at the base of the chamber. Properly set up, the single action trigger is as good as you could wish for, having an absence of slack, creep or backlash.

Dr Jurek acquired a large quantity of .303 rifle barrel which he used almost exclusively on his pistols, sleeved down to .22. Whether it was the fact that he believed this to be the optimum route to accuracy, or that he got a really good deal on the .303 barrel and had to use it somehow, is not really known. The fact is that the system worked and is still in use in the May-Jurek. George Hollingdale, the man at May's responsible for building their Jurek, now uses Anschutz barrel inside a tapered sleeve, and considers that the Anschutz is just about the best barrel lining around today. The only problem he was having with regard to the barrel was



the barrel chambering. Apparently, commercially available reamers were just not up to producing the result demanded by Mr Hollingdale. However, he now makes his own tools enabling a no compromise situation to exist in his finished product.

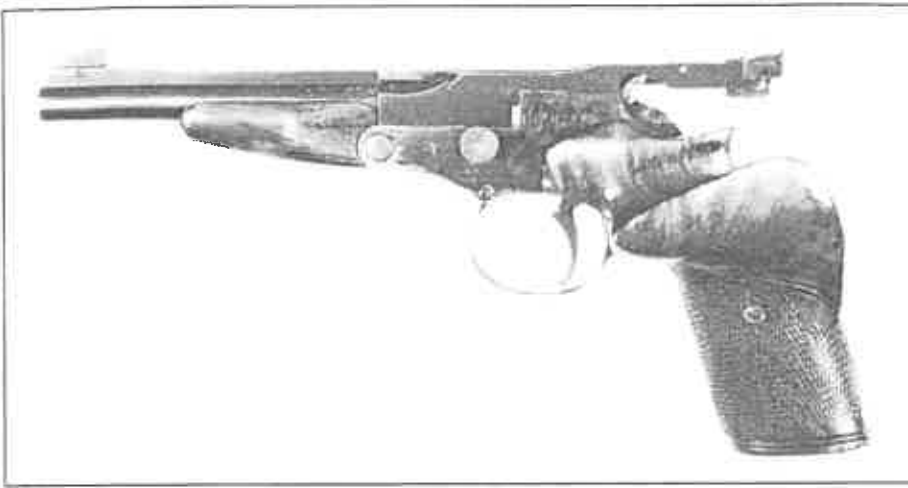
May's Jurek pistols are not available off the shelf, they are strictly hand built to order, and will not be released without Mr Ron May's personal 'thumbs up'. He tests each pistol himself using an optical sight temporarily clamped to the barrel, firing from a bench rest. Unless he can produce single hole groups at 20 yards, the pistol goes back to Mr Hollingdale for reworking.

Dr Jurek was himself an excellent target shooter, representing England on several occasions. However, according to one colleague who had the (mis)fortune to compete with him, it was a harrowing experience. He spent the majority of the practice detail in meticulous preparation, using his stopwatch to fine tune his last shot to coincide precisely with 'time up'. Subsequent details followed the same pattern, Dr Jurek having complete disregard for the impatient muttering circu-

Top: The May-Jurek with the Britarms satin chrome frame, and matt blacked barrel and slide. The anatomical grip is made from the customer's hand print.

Above: The May-Jurek with the wood removed. The diagonal threaded bolt just under the receiver adjusts the trigger pressure. The sear bar can be seen with its cover removed and the underside of the slide shows the bolt recess. The bolt, the heart of the locking mechanism, stands vertically from the top of the slide.

lating amongst the rest of the competitors, who, in common with most shooters, had finished the details with plenty of time to spare. Jurek was a man who cared little for what people thought of him, had the strength of mind to do things the way he wanted to, and the results and innovation to back up his attitude. All of which is a precursor to the fact that our scores with the Jurek pistol wouldn't exactly set the world on fire. Undoubtedly the gun will perform, but like the good Doctor, it takes some getting used to.



A short barrelled model 'Popular' with extended rearsight. (Courtesy Weller & Duffly).

A Shooting Experience

First excuse is the grip, superbly fashioned but unsuited to the hands of those who tried it for Target Gun. Second is the 8½ inch tapered barrel. Those handgunners who were weaned on Webley single shots will remember how that front sight danced around alarmingly until months of practice gradually tamed it. The Jurek

does the same, and is testament to the fact that it is a mistake to get too conditioned to (relatively) short barrelled semi-autos with plenty of weight at the muzzle. The bore line is rather higher than modern design would dictate, but then it isn't meant to be a modern gun, so that is no criticism, it's just that by the time you get to the sights, shooting the Jurek is unlike shooting any other pistol currently in use on the club scene.

The sights themselves are more than adequate, click adjustable with blade interchangeability at the rear, and a slightly undercut front blade locked into a

2½ inch ramp on the front. Our scores, with various brands of ammunition eventually rose to the low 90s at 20 yards on the PS2 target, but that is of mere academic interest since more time would eventually bring tighter groups. One practical annoyance was the fact that the extractor failed to do its job, leaving brass removal to the thumb nail. One practical pleasure is the dry fire capability. This is nothing more than a plastic plug placed in the chamber which prevents the slide from fully closing. In this state the hammer can be cocked and fired to fall on the base of the slide, without actually touching the free-floating striker. Like a lot of things about this gun, simple but effective.

The Jurek pistol is an enigma of modern times and will continue to prove itself in top flight competition for many years to come. Unfortunately, as production runs go, there were a mere handful ever built. May's of London have seen to it that Dr Jurek's memory lives on, by producing a superb hand built replica at a cost within the reach of the proletariat. Their gun is not an exact copy in the sense that might be evoked by the word replica, it is a finely engineered pistol within the spirit of Jurek's aspirations. It will become a cherished weapon for those who want something out of the ordinary, or who have been unable to acquire an original Jurek. □

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