

# The Mauser C96 "Broom Handle" Pistol

By [David Tong](#)



Mauser Broom Handle "Red 9" model with shoulder stock and a stripper clip of ammo.  
Photo courtesy of Wikipedia.

The clumsy and ungainly 1896 pistol design from the famous rifle makers of Oberndorf, Germany, gained its nickname from the shape of its handle, which resembled the end of a broomstick. As a late-Nineteenth Century design, in the days before metal pressings, castings, or molded plastic, arms makers made weapons crafted out of steel forgings and then a time intensive process of mill work removed metal until the mechanism and shape of the arm appeared. Such was the case with the broom handle. Similar to its rifle brethren, the magazine box was fixed and machined into the receiver frame. The pistol was stripper-clip fed from six round or ten round clips via the clip charger guides on the upper receiver.

After removing the magazine's floorplate, spring and follower, the trigger group has a spring-loaded catch at its rear that retains it and the upper receiver to the frame. Depress the catch and the upper assembly can be removed from the frame. After removal, the trigger group can be removed from the upper receiver by simply pulling it downward.

The upper receiver group consists of the receiver with integral barrel, a straight-line reciprocating bolt, that bolt cross-bolt lock, front fixed inverted-"V" sight and either a simple fixed V-notch or sliding tangent rear sight. The latter was usually adjustable between 50-1,000 yards!

Turning out the protruding striker (firing pin), which is retained by a small tab in the bolt body, allows its withdrawal; also the recoil spring. Once the recoil spring has been

removed, the cross bolt, located beneath the rear sight, is removed by pulling from the receiver's right (from top) side and the bolt can be removed for cleaning. Cleaning of the barrel from the chamber end is now easy.

The pistol is unique in that the only screw on the weapon is the one holding the two stock panels onto the frame. Most of the rest of the parts are mechanically interlocked and require only hand pressure to disassemble for routine maintenance. It is a clever, but extraordinarily complex, design that was difficult to mass-produce.

In original condition, the springs including the leaf type extractor, the rotating thumb safety catch, the rear sight slide and its catch and the w-type magazine spring were heat-blued finished to proper temper and color. The upper and lower receivers were rust blued, with the interior of both left in the white. The trigger group housing was also left in the white, as well as the hammer, sear and other smaller parts.

The history of the '96 pistol is nearly as colorful as its unique exterior shape. It was among the first truly functional semi-automatic pistols and worked well in adverse conditions. It was widely used during Imperial Germany's colonial conquests in Africa, China, and Asia. The Mauser brothers were among the first multi-national arms and munitions sales organizations. The pistols were purchased by the Persians (now Iran), Nationalist Chinese, Russians (primarily Bolsheviks-Soviets) and, surprisingly, by British cavalry and infantry officers, who were expected to provide their own sidearms.

Perhaps the most famous of those cavalry officers was Winston Churchill, who used his pistol to good effect in Omdurman in 1898, also known as the "Mahdist war," and later as a war correspondent in Southern Africa during the Second Boer War. I do not remember his exact statement, but it went something like this: "I'm sorry to say that I had to shoot several of them (enemy ground troops). That pistol was the best thing in the world."

The Chinese Nationalists hired many former German NCO's during the inter-war period to train their army and the Chinese purchased many Mauser pistols for their officer corps. In addition, the Spanish arms maker Astra built simplified clones of the Mauser in the 1930's and 1940's for export sales to China. This is the reason why most of the recent importation of these guns has been from China. They were in limited service by both police and army units there until 1949, when the Communists took over the

country. The surviving Mauser pistols were stored for several decades, before finally being sold as surplus and imported into the U.S. in the 1980's and early 1990's.

There are a plethora of Mauser pistol variations, including the sights, barrel lengths, calibers, magazine lengths, machining on the lower receiver or its absence (known as "flat sides"), grip frame size and shape. In addition, there were user requirements as well as peculiar country of export requirements. The best known version would be the standard 5.5" barreled, caliber 7.63X25mm, ten shot integral magazine, 1912 Commercial, which was used as a substitute standard during WWI. All these pistols had a slot on the rear of the grip frame for the then standard shoulder stock/holster. This was carried by means of a leather strap system on one's hip and allowed for more accurate shooting.

Other fairly well remembered versions include the Prussian-contract WWI "Red 9," which was chambered in 9mm Luger cartridge, had a distinctive large numeral 9 cut into both stock panels and filled with red paint. The 1932 Schnellfeuer was a full-auto variant with a detachable sheet metal magazine that held 20 rounds. There rare sporting carbines, similar to the Luger Carbine, with checkered walnut forends and detachable butts. These were usually sold in a wooden, felt lined case with spares, tools, and ammo.

One somewhat lesser known copy was the Shanxi Type 17 Nationalist Chinese version chambered in .45 ACP. Due to the fat .45 cartridge, this version was substantially larger than the .30 Mauser or 9mm Luger caliber pistols and its integral magazine protruded well beyond the bottom of the trigger guard. It is said that some 8,500 were built, to be able to utilize the same ammunition as the Thompson submachine gun the U.S. provided with Lend Lease. I remember being offered one of these pistols, with a near-mint barrel, for about \$800 some years back. Now I wonder why I didn't buy the thing.

My only experience shooting a broom handle took place over 30 years ago. One of my best friends in high school had one that his grandfather reportedly captured from its owner during WWI. It sat in a glass display case on his bedroom wall for years, until we decided to find some ammo and shoot it. I remember the fine, flat shooting, .30 Mauser round, the minimal recoil and the superior relative accuracy compared to the Walther P-38 I then owned.

The .30 Mauser (7.63x25mm) was, and remains, a very high velocity pistol cartridge. It launched an 86 grain FMJ bullet at the then sensational velocity of 1410 fps and 375 ft. lbs. of energy.

In 1930, the Soviets copied the cartridge, and renamed it the 7.62x25mm Tokarev, after the designer of their service pistol. Although the cartridges look identical, never fire 7.62 Tokarev ammo in a Mauser pistol. Known more for its penetrative abilities than its stopping power, these Tokarev pistols were reportedly used more as badges of rank and for executing political prisoners than as combat arms.

I would have no reservations about shooting an original Mauser pistol in good condition, if all the parts matched. However, some of the recent imports have been assembled from random parts without much care. These must be carefully examined by someone familiar with Mauser pistols before firing. Much like the early “parallel ruler” type Browning/Colt pistols, the cross bolt in the upper receiver is the only thing that retains the rearward travel of the bolt. If it is not a precision fit in the receiver’s hole, or its heat treatment is not up to par, that bolt could end up in your forehead!

As the first production semi-automatic pistol that worked reliably, strange as it looks, the Broom Handle Mauser is a milestone in design. It served for decades, before becoming an evolutionary dead-end when simpler, cheaper and easier to manufacture Browning type actions became the norm.