

Apache Fireball

Apache Fireball Air Pistol

By John Groenewold

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The Apache air pistol is one of the most collectable American air pistols. It was only produced for a short time in the late nineteen forties and total production was very small.



The gun was produced in .25 and .175 caliber and had an eight shot force fed magazine which was located on the right side of the receiver. The gun had to be pumped up for each shot so it was not a true repeater. It came with a black finish (although a few were made with chrome plated receivers), walnut grips, adjustable rear sight, and non-adjustable trigger. The logo appears on the aluminum compression tube front plug, although some were produced without any markings. The stamping on the test gun read BURNHAMS & ASSOC., PASADENA 2, CAL. U.S.A. FIREBALL. The guns were not stamped with the caliber or a serial number.

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The receiver/grip frame was die cast in zinc alloy. This consisted of the receiver itself, magazine housing, and rear insert. The pump lever was also die cast of zinc alloy. The grips were of American Black Walnut with straight V groove checkering running the length of the grip. The V grooves had a spacing of sixteen lines per inch. The barrel and front sight were made of brass and soldered together. The bass barrel was rifled and secured inside the receiver with a set screw. Neither, the front of the barrel nor the front sight was attached to the compression tube. The resulting lack of support for the barrel and compression tube caused the gun to be very fragile. The compression tube was thin seamless brass tubing, flared at the rear to keep it in the receiver housing. This flared lip was also the mating surface for the rear tube gasket between the tube and valve body.

The pump gasket was cup shaped leather (with a brass spreader) of the same size as the Benjamin 130 series pistols, therefore, Benjamin pump gaskets can be used to repair the Fireball pump. Since the tubing used to make the compression tube as so thin, (only .032 of an inch wall thickness on the test gun) the hole for the pump pivot pin often became out of

round and enlarged. When this occurred usually the tube had to be replaced because any repairs would be very weak and obvious.

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Screws on the several new models examined by the author were a mixture of chrome plated and blued; slotted and hex-socket head.

The valve body was brass. The front and rear compression tube gaskets were made of paper, therefore, porous, and if allowed to dry out the gun would not hold air very long. The check valve seal and exhaust valve seals are very similar to Benjamin seals and these parts can be used to repair the valve if a lathe is available to modify them. The exhaust valve body, compression valve body, compression tube, and two paper seals are sandwiched between a shoulder on the front inside of the receiver and the rear valve body nut. This is an

exceptionally large number of parts to be used to form four air seals when compared to modern pneumatic valve mechanisms.

These guns came packed in wooden boxes which were made (or sold) by National Cart Corporation, 330 South Fair Oaks Avenue, Pasadena 2, California; and affiliate of Burnham and Associates. It appears that those pistols associated with Burnham and Associates were called "Fireball" and those associated with National Cart Corporation were referred to as "Apache". The illustrated company fliers are dated 1948. The .25 caliber lead ball ammo came in tubes of 100, and the .175 caliber steel BB ammo came in the same tubes but contained 200. Both came in cartons of 6 tubes. There was also a carton for 12 tubes. The ammo was in red and black tubes with metal end caps. The logo, etcetera is on a round white paper disc pressed into the top of the tube. The .25 caliber ammo was actually number 3 buckshot with an average diameter of .244 inches and an average weight of 23 grains. The quality of the shot was rather poor.