

# Beretta Automatic Pistols

The Collector's and Shooter's  
Comprehensive Guide



J. B. Wood

# Beretta Automatic Pistols

## The Collector's and Shooter's Comprehensive Guide

By J. B. Wood

Until today, there has been no definitive English-language book on the world-famous Beretta automatic pistols. But shooters, collectors, military historians, and pistol buffs of all varieties can now breathe easily. J. B. Wood has done the job that Beretta fanatics have long been hoping and waiting for.

It would be hard to imagine anybody better qualified than Wood to write this book. Not only does he have a fine sense of firearms history but he also has superb sources and a wealth of experience and training in the practical aspects of firearms design, gunsmithing, and gun care.

To tell in words and photographs the story of what makes Berettas so special, Wood goes all the way back to the beginning—1915—and carries through in chronological order right up till today and with an eye to the future.

As he talks about each Beretta gun in turn, Wood gets into the background of what was happening militarily at that time in the world. He talks about designers—usually brilliant, often eccentric, and always interesting.

Since Wood's own background spans the world of firearms from blackpowder shooting to design work on firearms of the future, he has an eye trained for important detail. He goes into the fine points of exactly what makes each gun different from its ancestors and why some models were more successful than others.

If the name Beretta perks up your interest, join J. B. Wood for a tour you'll never forget and to which you'll return time after time for a refresher.

*(Continued on back flap)*



# Beretta Automatic Pistols

Automatic Pistols

The Complete Illustrated Owners

Compendium

J. B. Wood

Author of "The Complete Illustrated Owners Compendium of Automatic Pistols"

Stackpole Books

Beretta  
Automatic Pistols

*The Collector's and Shooter's  
Comprehensive Guide*

J. B. Wood

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*To the memory of  
Pietro Beretta and Tullio Marengoni.*



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## Preface

It was almost inevitable that I would write a book on Beretta automatic pistols. Thirty years ago, there was an occasion when I traded an almost-new Walther PPK for a Beretta Model 1934. By today's standards, that was a rather uneven exchange. I still have that pistol. Later, when I began to write for firearms publications, I described the Model 1934 as an example of perfect handgun engineering. I commented that in a single-action, medium frame automatic you could make something *different*, but you would never make anything *better*. Even though recent years have brought us a number of sophisticated designs, my early opinion is unchanged.

During the past 20 years, I have covered practically all of the Beretta self-loaders — especially the later models — in magazine articles. When I was evaluating a new model, I always had to lay on an extra measure of objectivity. Even then, my high regard for the pistols of Armi Beretta was probably evident. It is not good form, they say, for a writer to quote himself, but there is one line I have often used that definitely applies to Beretta pistols: "I have great respect for things that work."

Up to now, there have been only two books that contained specific data on Beretta automatic pistols: a large, bilingual volume (published in

1980) by Mario Morin and Robert Held, titled simply *Beretta*, and an 80-page paperback by Ugo Menchini, titled *Le Pistole Beretta—1915/1974*. Unfortunately, it was printed only in Italian. I hope this book will help fill the information gap.

The Beretta pistols in this book are presented in chronological order, and the information given on each is both historical and mechanical. The history will be of interest primarily to collectors, and the mechanical details to shooters.

As for collector variations, every effort has been made to list or illustrate as many as possible. Inevitably, there will be some that will turn up after this book is published. I would be very interested in hearing from readers who may have found something I have never seen, so it may be included in any future editions. In its coverage of regular production pieces, this book is complete—up to 1985. By the time you read this, there may well be another new model from the spotless workshops of Gardone. But, I had to draw the line somewhere, or the book would never have been written.

J. B. Wood  
Raintree House  
Corydon, Kentucky  
December 1984

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W. Paul Torrington, Steve Robbins, Cliff Belcher, Chick Evans, Al Baker, R. A. Steindler, Joel Glovsky, Carlo Peroni, Peter Dale, Robert Bonaventure, Warren Barron, David Adams, Bonnie Shaffer, Birger Boggild, Joseph J. Schroeder, A. J. R. Cormack, and Michael Schmidt.

A special thanks to Ugo Gussalli Beretta, and the staff of the Beretta Archives.



# Introduction

On the slides of early Beretta automatic pistols, part of the marking is *Casa Fondata nel 1680* (House Founded in 1680)—but the Beretta family was active in the manufacture of firearms even earlier. There are records from the mid-1400s showing production of various firearms components in the valley of the Trompia River, and it would certainly not be bending the facts to suggest that there were makers named Beretta in that time. Recent discoveries in the Venetian State Archives have placed the actual date of the first Beretta firearm at around 1530. The Morin/Held book, *Beretta*, mentioned in the Preface, gives a detailed account of the early manufacture, for readers who are interested in this basic history.

For our purposes, however, it is best to pick up the story with Pietro Antonio Beretta, in the early 1800s. He began the expansion of the family-owned factory to bring it into step with the change from the small workshop arrangement that was prevalent at the time to full industrialization. His son, Giuseppe Antonio, carried on this trend, making the firm known internationally. At his death in 1903, his son, Pietro Beretta, became the head of the company. Young Pietro—he was 33 at the time—immediately made two astute and important moves.



**The Glisenti Model 1910 pistol, left side.**

Even before his succession to the leadership of the firm, Pietro Beretta had been traveling through Europe, studying firearms manufacturing methods in other countries. The old methods — the hand-made parts, with the entire gun being made by one artisan — had given way to modern mass production. In 1903, Pietro Beretta began the major transition of the company into the huge complex that now exists in Gardone. It is notable that he managed to accomplish this growth without sacrificing the well-known quality of Beretta arms.



**The Glisenti Model 1910 pistol, right side.**



The Glisenti Model 1910 pistol, partially field-stripped. It was a handsome and well-balanced pistol, but the design was weak and complicated.

During the first 10 years of this century, military and police forces in Europe were beginning to change from the revolver to the automatic pistol. With this note, we arrive at young Beretta's other wise move: He engaged the services of Tullio Marengoni as his chief designer. Since it occurred in about the same time period, a brief background of a non-Beretta pistol is appropriate here: Before Beretta, in automatic pistol reference, there was the Glisenti.

Some writers—including myself—have previously attributed the design of the Glisenti pistol to two Swiss engineers living in Belgium, Paul Hausler and Pierre Roch. While their design is similar to the Glisenti, later research established that the designer of the Glisenti was Bethel Abiel Revelli. One important point is the similarity of the locking system to the one used in the Revelli machine gun.

The Glisenti had an external similarity to the Luger, but was entirely different internally. The pistol was made by Siderurgica Glisenti from 1902 to 1907, and from 1908 to around 1925 by *Metallurgica Bresciana gia Tempini*. In 1910, the pistol was adopted as an officer sidearm by the Italian Army. The Glisenti had several weaknesses. By 1914, Italian ordnance people sought a replacement, and Beretta and Marengoni were prepared.



# 1

## Model 1915 Pistol

By 1910, the year in which the Glisenti pistol was adopted as a standard military sidearm by the Italian government, Tullio Marengoni was at work on the design that was to become the first Beretta self-loader.

The relationship of the barrel and recoil spring and certain other parts showed some Browning and Mauser influence, but there were many points that had the stamp of Marengoni's genius.

In an era when automatic pistols in general tended to be complicated and often unreliable, the new Beretta was a masterpiece of good mechanical design. It emerged as the Model 1915, and was soon adopted for military use. The "Model" designation was not used by the factory until much later. I use it only because it is a popular collector's term.

The Beretta of 1915 was produced in two principal chamberings, and there were differences in size and mechanical features in the two calibers. In some reference books, there are mentions of the Model 1915 in caliber 9mm Corto (.380 Auto), but I have never seen any proof that the pistol was made in this chambering. In the research and development period of any pistol, experimental pieces are often made in odd calibers. If the 9mm Corto version of the Model 1915 exists, I believe it was one of these.



The Beretta Model 1915 pistol in 9mm Glisenti chambering, serial number 689. The trigger-block manual safety is shown in the on-safe position. (Beretta Archives)

The regular production chamberings of the Model 1915 were 9mm Glisenti and 7.65mm Browning. Dimensionally, the 9mm Glisenti was almost identical to the 9mm Parabellum (Luger) round, and used the same truncated-cone bullet as the early German cartridge. The powder charge, however, was much lighter. The Glisenti pistol, in which the round was first used, was not a strong design. Its odd locking system would not have survived repeated firing with full-power 9mm Luger loads. The Beretta pistol was chambered for the Glisenti cartridge because of its status as an official Italian military round.

The Model 1915 was a straight blow-back pistol, with no locking system. With the light Glisenti cartridge, a relatively heavy slide was sufficient to keep the breech from opening during the instant of high chamber pressure. As the slide began to move, the combined tension of the recoil spring and the hammer spring controlled its speed. When it reached full travel, a heavy buffer spring at the end of the recoil spring tunnel cushioned the frame impact. It was a good, solid system, and was quite adequate as long as only Glisenti-level loads were used.

Unfortunately, the pistol would also chamber regular 9mm Parabellum rounds, and the cumulative effect of using those in quantity was inevitably damaging. I have examined one Model 1915 that had been fired extensively

with Luger rounds, and the effect of the excessive recoil was that the rounds in the magazine impacted against the unsupported top, denting the magazine in that area. This was severe enough that the magazine could not be easily extracted. This may have been a good thing, as it prevented further firing. Cracking of the slide or frame may have been next.

I have fired the Model 1915, but only with specially made light loads that were actually a little below the level of the original Glisenti rounds. It is not unpleasant to shoot, and for a military pistol of its time it had good accuracy. The sighting arrangement was usual for a European handgun of that era, with a tapered-post front sight and a V-notch rear sight. The rear sight is dovetail mounted, and can be drifted laterally for any needed adjustment. The front sight is integral with the barrel.

The upper front of the slide shows a hint of the shape now recognized as the "Beretta look," exposing the forward portion of the barrel. In the Model 1915, the cutaway effect is not full-length, and there is a separate ejection port on top. The extractor is centrally mounted, a pivoting type, powered by a separate coil spring in a vertical well. An extension on the underside of the extractor retains the firing pin and its return spring. Inside the slide, at the lower rear of the breech block section, a concave ramp matches the rounded front of the internal hammer, and reduces friction in cocking during the recoil movement of the slide.



The same Model 1915 pistol in an oblique view, showing the rear manual safety. It is in the off-safe position. (Beretta Archives)

The recoil spring and its guide are a self-contained unit, ingeniously designed and dismountable without tools. The guide rod has an open slot at its center. A collar and a flat "key" retain the spring on the rod. The massive buffer spring is retained in the frame recess by a small vertical screw. The grips are normally of wood, usually European walnut, and are retained by undercut tabs at the top and a single screw on each side, near the lower edges. A fixed lanyard loop is located at the lower rear corner of the left grip panel, with that grip cut away for clearance.

The regular issue grips on the military contract pistols are diamond-checked over their entire surfaces, with a narrow plain border on the edge curves. An illustration in the Beretta catalogue of 1917 shows a commercial version of the Model 1915 with a grip panel having a wider plain border, and a plain pointed intrusion into the checkering above the screw. This illustration has two other differences from the usual pistol: It shows a flat checkered end on the safety lever, and the front of the trigger guard is convex, rather than vertical. Since this is an artist's rendering and not a photo, it is possible that it does not depict an actual gun.

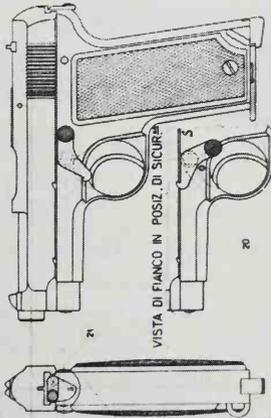
There is the possibility that even though this illustration appeared midway in the production of the pistol, it may have shown an early prototype gun. There is some disagreement among collectors on whether the Model 1915 was actually offered commercially, for sale to civilians. One authority flatly states that the entire production was contracted for official use. On the other hand, the gun was definitely advertised for private sale. My personal opinion is based on the relatively small number of Model 1915 pistols made, and the fact that during its entire production time a war was taking place. There may have been a few non-military sales, but only a few.

The Model 1915 was the only Beretta to have straight-up barrel removal. With the combination safety lever and slide latch in the "on-safe" position, locking the slide open, the barrel is simply lifted out upward. The barrel is retained by a semi-circular cut in a vertical round post that extends downward at its rear, the safety crosspiece turning into the cut. It was not a bad system, and I have never seen an instance of breakage in that area. But, Pietro Beretta and Tullio Marengoni were not satisfied with it. In the next model, the system was changed.

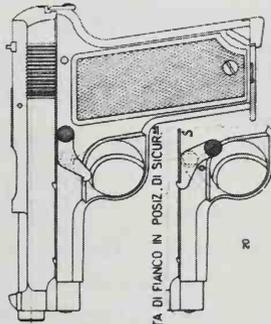
There are two manual safety levers on the Model 1915. The combination lever on the left side, which doubles as a slide latch and takedown release, blocks movement of the trigger when the knurled knob is pushed downward and forward. This makes the off-safe movement of the lever upward and toward the rear, an awkward motion for the thumb. When the lever is in off-safe position, its forward beak protrudes below the frame edge. The protrusion is not far enough to bother a bare trigger finger, but

Pistola Automatica Mod. 915 calibro 9

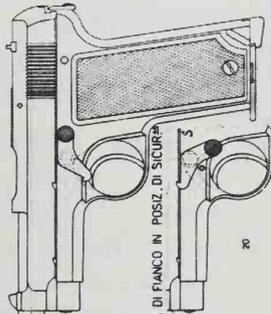
VISTA POSTERIORE  
IN POSIZIONE DI SICUREZZA



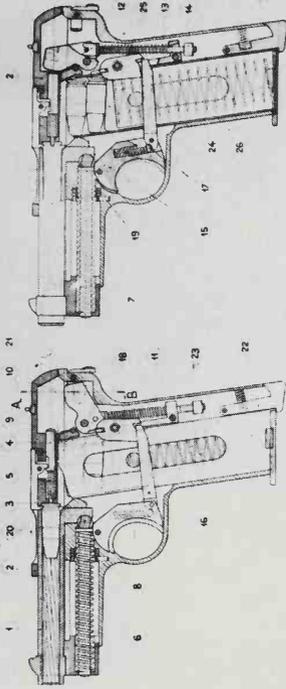
VISTA DI FIANCO



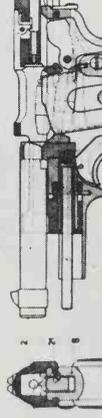
VISTA DI FIANCO IN POSIZ. DI SICUREZZA



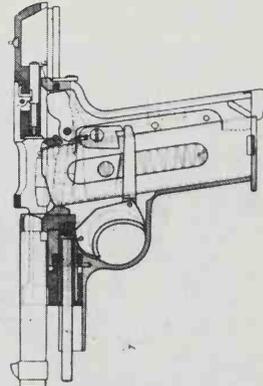
SEZIONI LONGITUDINALI DEL MECCANISMO DI CARICAMENTO E SPARO - ARMA CARICA -  
PRONTA PER LO SPARO PERCUSSIONE DELLA CARTUCCIA



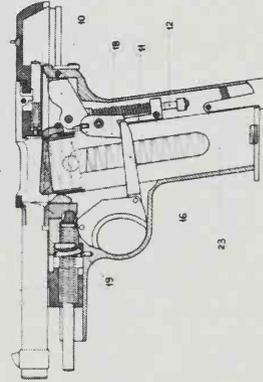
SEZIONE A-B  
IN POSIZ. DI SICUREZZA



POSIZIONE DI MASSIMO RINCULO



CULATTA-OTTURATORE APERTA CON AVVISO DI CARICATORE VUOTO



VISTA DI SOPRA



LEGGENDA

1. LANCIA OTTURATORE
2. ESTRATTORE CON MOLLA
3. PERCUSSIONE
4. MOLLA AVANZAMENTO DI PERCUSSIONE
5. MOLLA RITORNO DI PERCUSSIONE
6. Molla della molla di ricambio
7. ALBERO DELLA Molla DI RICAMBIO
8. CARICATORE
9. CILINDRO
10. CANNE
11. SELETTORIO
12. BREVETTO
13. BREVETTO A FROCHETTA DEL CANNE
14. ANNO REGOLATORE DELLA MOLLA DEL CANNE
15. CARICATORE
16. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO DELLA Molla DI PERCUSSIONE
17. MOLLA AMMORTIZZATRICE NEL RINCULO
18. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO
19. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO
20. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO
21. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO
22. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO
23. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO
24. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO
25. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO
26. MOLLA DI RICAMBIO



A later Model 1915 9mm pistol, serial number 4012, shown with the manual safety in off-safe position. (Author's Collection)



Model 1915 9mm pistol number 4012, right side. (Author's Collection)



**Model 1915 9mm pistol number 4012, field-stripped. Note the single mounting post at the rear of the barrel, and the captive recoil spring unit. The magazine shown, with separate counter-openings, is different from those usually found in this model.**

if gloves are worn, inadvertent application of the safety could occur. This was another item that was changed on the next model.

The other safety on the Model 1915, found only on the 9mm version, is of excellent design. Located on the upper rear of the frame, just below the slide, it acts directly on the internal hammer. When the hammer is cocked, moving the little lever up to horizontal position rolls part of its internal pivot-shaft into a recess on the right side of the hammer. An efficient system.

If the lever happens to be in on-safe position when the slide is retracted, cocking the hammer, a camming notch at the right-rear on the hammer flips the safety to off-safe. The entire mechanism is beautifully engineered, and the downward off-safe movement is convenient for the thumb. One authority states that this rear safety was an optional or occa-



The hammer-blocking rear safety of the 9mm version is shown in the on-safe position.

sional feature, but I have never seen a 9mm Model 1915 without it, and it is shown in *all* photos and illustrations of the pistol.

The most brilliantly conceived item in Marengoni's design is the firing mechanism. The sear is long, heavy, and L-shaped, and is pivoted at its lower corner. The hammer spring rests on the short arm of the sear, where a hole allows passage of the hammer strut. Thus, one spring supplies tension to both the hammer and sear. The long arm of the sear extends upward to contact the sear step on the hammer, and an extension on its left side engages a recess at the top of a pivoting plate, the sear lever. This lever, retained by a pivot-screw on the left side of the frame, is rotated by the trigger bar. The spring-tensioned trigger bar is a slip-off type, cammed out of engagement by a lobe on the lever. With this system, there is no need for a separate disconnecter. This beautifully simple arrangement was used on Beretta pistols for nearly 50 years, the only addition being a positive disconnecter.

Nearly all magazines supplied with the Model 1915 had the large oblong side openings that became familiarly associated with Beretta magazines over the years. I say "nearly all," because my own Model 1915 has a magazine, unquestionably original, that has six large counterholes in each side. Otherwise, it is a classic Model 1915 magazine. It has the ingenious lifting lock-piece above the center of the flat floorplate, and the serrations on each side of the floorplate at the front. In all these pistols I have examined, I have never seen another magazine of this type. A "commercial," or "civilian," magazine? Perhaps. Or, as a certain marking on my gun might indicate, a different magazine for police use?

On the left slide flat, the regular-production Model 1915 is marked: "PIETRO BERETTA - BRESCIA - CASA FONDATA NEL 1680". Below

that, in slightly larger letters and numerals: "CAL. 9M—BREVETTO 1915". On the left side of the frame is a large "S" that is exposed when the safety is in the on-safe position. The full serial number is stamped horizontally on the side of the frame at the left-upper rear, and on the left side of the barrel underlug. It appears vertically on the left rear of the slide, just to the rear of the slide serrations. Magazines are normally unmarked and unnumbered. On the right side of the frame, at the upper rear, a small oval is found on all government contract pieces, containing the letters "RE" or, less commonly, "RP". The "RE" stands for "*Regio Esercito*" (Royal Army). The "RP" marking, which appears on my own Model 1915, may stand for *Regio Polizia* (Royal Police), but this has not been absolutely determined.

Turning to the 7.65mm (.32 Auto) version of the Model 1915, we find a single line marking on the left slide flat: "PIETRO BERETTA—BRESCIA—CAL. 7<sup>65</sup>—BREVETTO—1915". Serial number placement is the same as on the 9mm version, and the safety marking is also the same. As on the 9mm, police and military markings are on the right side of the frame at the upper-rear. One 7.65mm Model 1915 has been seen with "PS" in the oval, and I have been told that this marking signifies *Pubblica Sicurezza* (Public Security). The "RE" marking is used for Army pieces, as on the 9mm.

In size, the 7.65mm pistol is scaled to its caliber, being appreciably smaller in all dimensions than the 9mm pistol.

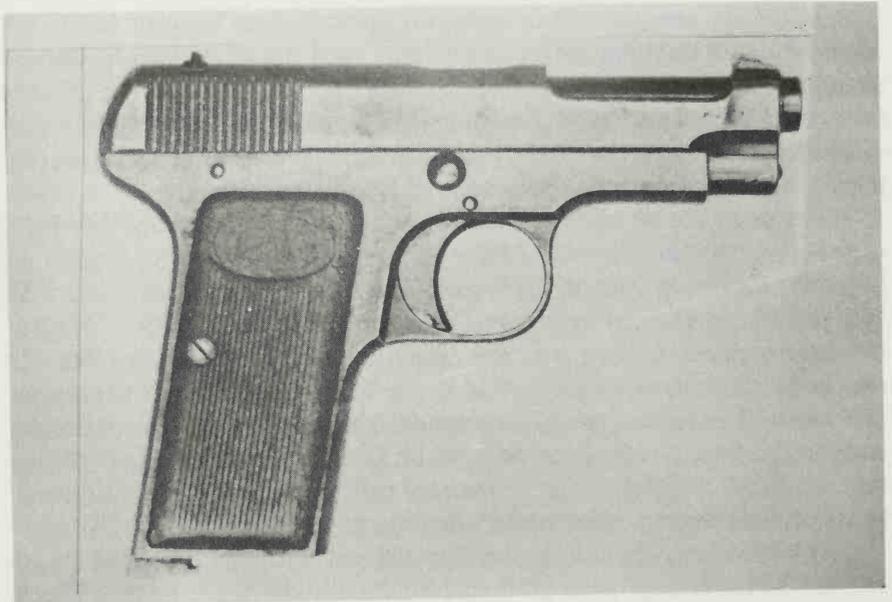
There are also two mechanical differences. The 7.65mm lacks the separate hammer-block safety at the rear, and does not have a frame-mounted ejector. To perform this latter function, there is a vertical projection at the rear of the frame, which is struck by the head of the firing pin when the slide completes its full rear travel. This impact kicks the firing pin forward, and its point becomes, in effect, the ejector.

The grips are of wood, with an oval at the top containing the "PB" monogram of Pietro Beretta. Below the oval are 24 vertical lines, extending to the lower edge. As on the 9mm grips, the edge-curves are plain. The grip panels are retained by separate screws on each side. On the 7.65mm, these are located midway, near the rear edge. In relation to the other dimensions, the grip frame of the 7.65mm is shorter, which limits the magazine capacity to seven rounds. The standard magazine is similar to the one used in the 9mm, with open sides and a flat floorplate. In the 7.65mm version, the floorplate is locked by a central "button," a system that has since been copied by many other manufacturers.

When writing about any of the earlier automatics, and trying to ascertain the number of guns produced, one method often used is to check the span of serial numbers that have been observed. The catch here is that



The Beretta Model 1915 pistol, 7.65mm version, left side, serial number 63866. (A. J. R. Cormack)



Beretta Model 1915 7.65mm pistol number 63866, right side. Note that the magazine is missing from the gun shown. (A. J. R. Cormack)

after a writer has published figures based on serial numbers that he and other writers and collectors have seen, another gun will turn up having a number beyond the ones listed.

With this in mind, let's check the numbers observed for the Model 1915, the 9mm version first:

627      689      761      1863      4012      4183      5096      15555

One writer previously estimated production of the 9mm Model 1915 at around 10,000 pieces. If we assume that the single five-digit example was not a "fluke," this would seem to set the total production at around 16,000 pieces. The absence of any observed pistols between numbers 5096 and 15555, leaves this figure in question.

The 7.65mm version seems to have been produced in larger quantities, even allowing for the possibility that the numbering was likely begun at a pre-set higher figure, rather than number 1, or possibly number 100, as in the 9mm. The observed numbers in the 7.65mm are:

15649      16958      36617      62367      62866

I think it is quite likely that numbering of the 7.65mm began at around 15,000. Assuming that numbering went just beyond the highest number seen, this would indicate a total figure of around 50,000 pieces. Adding this to the 9mm figure, the approximate total production of the Model 1915, in both chamberings, would be around 66,000 pieces.

For its time, the Beretta Model 1915 was a remarkable achievement. Its sturdiness and simplicity were in marked contrast to contemporary designs. The production time of the Model 1915 ran from that year to the end of 1919, but there may have been sales from stock on hand after that date.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 1915, 9mm Glisenti**

Weight:                    34.12 ounces  
Length:                    6.57 inches  
Barrel length:            3.74 inches  
Magazine capacity:      8 rounds

### **Model 1915, 7.65mm**

Weight:                    21.35 ounces  
Length:                    5.86 inches  
Barrel length:            3.34 inches  
Magazine capacity:      7 rounds

---

## 2

# Model 1915/19 Pistol

Although it seemed to have adequate strength, Pietro Beretta and Tullio Marengoni were not entirely satisfied with the round-post barrel mounting system of the 1915 pistols. On February 10th, 1919, patent number 172302 covered a new barrel mounting arrangement. Along with this, there were several other changes, creating a new model. It was called, at the time, the "1915-1919", and much later was designated the Model 1922.

The new barrel mount consisted of a T-slot in the frame, with a corresponding heavy lug on the underside of the barrel at the rear. The combination safety lever and slide latch still served as the takedown key. When turned to the on-safe position, locking the slide open, a flat on the cross-shaft of the latch cleared a semi-circular recess in the barrel lug. The barrel could then be slid straight rearward, then lifted at the rear and removed.

For this takedown method, it was necessary to have full-length exposure of the barrel on top, eliminating the separate ejection port. This long, wide opening was not only an aid to flawless ejection of fired cases, it also created the familiar "Beretta look," a slide shape that has been carried through to currently made Beretta pistols. For the first time, the slide



**The Model 1915/19 pistol, left side. (Beretta Archives)**

was bridged at top front, and the front sight was integral with the slide, not the barrel.

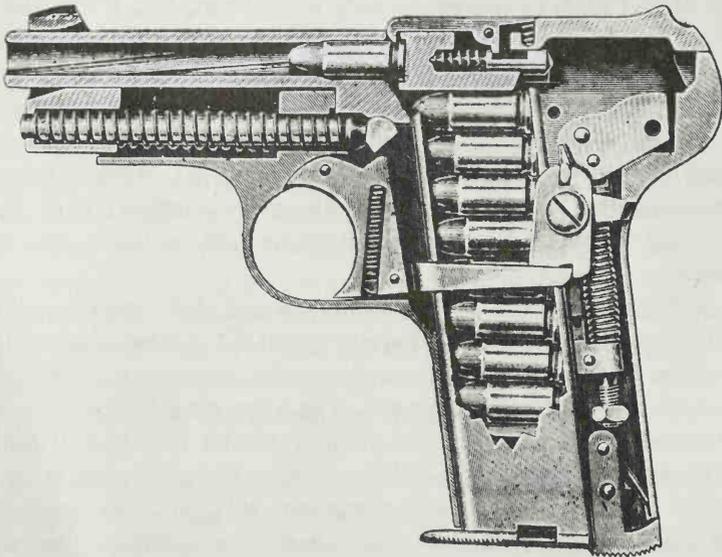
The Model 1915/19 was made only in 7.65mm, and it had the same firing-pin-as-ejector arrangement as the 7.65mm Model 1915 pistol. It also had the same slip-off trigger bar, with no separate disconnecter. The safety was entirely redesigned, eliminating the “hook-arm” and the rather awkward rear-upward off-safe movement. The new safety lever had the slide-latch beak integral with its serrated button, and the off-safe movement was downward and toward the rear. Both safety positions were marked, with “F” and “S”. The letters alternately covered by the button of the safety lever.

In addition to the new barrel mounting and slide configuration, the Model 1915/19 had several other Beretta “firsts.” The now-familiar finger-rest extension on the magazine floorplate appeared on this model, as well as the use of pressed-steel grip panels. The grips were of the same design as the wooden ones used on the 7.65mm Model 1915 pistol, but were formed from sheet steel. It is unclear whether the steel grips were in response to a shortage of wood in the postwar years, but they were unquestionably easier to make, once the machinery was in place. The pressed-steel grips were subsequently used on two other pistols, the 6.35mm Model 1919, and the 9mm Model 1923.

As mentioned in regard to the Model 1915 pistols, the Model 1915/19 was not officially called a “model” until later, when it was assigned the Model 1922 designation. As in the previous chapter, I have referred to it here as the Model 1915/19 because of common usage among collectors. The pistol was produced primarily for military and police use, and was issued to Army, Navy, and Air Force units. It was marked accordingly, with “RE”, “RM” (Regio Marina), and “RA” (Regio Aeronautica).

There was also some police use, as several of these pistols have been seen with the “PS” marking. Between 1920 and 1930 it was offered in Beretta catalogues, and there were some commercial sales. The slide marking was “PISTOLA AUT.—BERETTA 7<sup>65</sup> BREV.—1915-1919”. The serial number was now on the right side, horizontally, just forward of the slide serrations, and on the frame just above the trigger.

Through the three pistols covered so far, numbering was apparently semi-consecutive, with the next pistol picking up the count more or less at the end of the previous one. One writer, Ugo Menchini, estimates that the total for the three pistols was “probably” around 600,000 pieces. Since he did his treatise on Beretta guns in Italy, and was in direct touch with the factory, I hesitate to question his figures, but something does not seem right. The four Model 1915/19 pistols that I can personally verify are numbered as follows:



A sectioned view of the Model 1915/19 pistol. (Beretta Archives)

202575    218702    224605    228877

This model is not frequently encountered in the U.S., and the number sold during the great pre-1968 military surplus days was not large. All numbers seen on the next model begin at 30,000, and on the following model at 40,000. This would seem to indicate that an arbitrary starting figure was chosen. In my opinion, the large total mentioned is somewhat high.

I believe the numbering of the Model 1915/19 began at 200,000, and I doubt that it reached 300,000. I would say that production probably totalled around 60 or 70 thousand pieces. Now that I've said that, someone is sure to come up with one that is well outside these figures. Anything is possible. After all, I have never seen a commercial type, without military or police markings.

Very early Model 1915/19 pistols have been seen with the flat-floor-plate magazine of the previous model, and with an angular magazine catch. Most pistols of this model, however, will have the finger-extension magazine, and a rounded catch. The grip frame of the Model 1915/19 is slightly longer than that of the previous 7.65mm pistol, and the magazine capacity is increased by one, to eight rounds.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 1915/19, 7.65mm**

Weight:	21.7 ounces
Length:	5.90 inches
Barrel length:	3.34 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

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# 3

## Model 1919/318/418 Pistols

The first three Beretta pistols ranged in size from large-frame to medium-frame, and none could be considered a true pocket pistol, unless you had very large pockets. In the postwar year, the company gave attention to the success of Belgium's Fabrique Nationale in producing a small pistol designed by John Moses Browning, chambered for his new 6.35mm (.25 Auto) cartridge. The result was the Beretta Model 1919. Because this pistol had such a long production run, with several changes and model designations along the way, I will briefly depart from the chronological pattern, and cover its entire span in this chapter.

There are two principal differences between the Model 1919 and the previous pistols. The most notable is its true hammerless design. The other pistols had pivoting internal hammers, while the Model 1919 has a cylindrical striker, positioned in a lengthwise tunnel in the slide. In design, the striker is similar to the one used in the 1906 FN pistol, a hollow cylinder with an integral firing pin point at the front, and a small underlug at the rear to contact the sear. A short spring guide is surrounded by the rear coils of the striker spring, and there is a fixed base for this assembly at the upper rear of the frame.



**This early Model 1919 pistol has the grip safety, but was made before the addition of the disconnecter on the trigger bar. (Beretta Archives)**

Early Model 1919 pistols have the slip-off trigger bar of the larger pistols, the grips are of wood, and the pattern is the same as on earlier 7.65mm pistols. The tip of the trigger bar directly contacts an extension of the sear, pivoting it downward and toward the rear. The earliest guns have only the manual safety lever. Later, in 1926, this pistol marked the first—and only—use by Beretta of a grip safety. This took the form of a rather ungraceful hump, located high on the backstrap of the frame. The manual safety lever is identical to the one on the Model 1915/19 pistol, in both operation and takedown sequence.

In the 1926 revision of the Model 1919, other changes were made. An upward extension was added to the trigger bar, bearing in a recess on the left under-edge of the slide, a true mechanical disconnecter. During a transition design period, a few pistols were made with a forward lobe-extension on the sear, to push down and disengage the trigger bar as the sear pivoted. This system was soon abandoned, in favor of the true disconnecter.

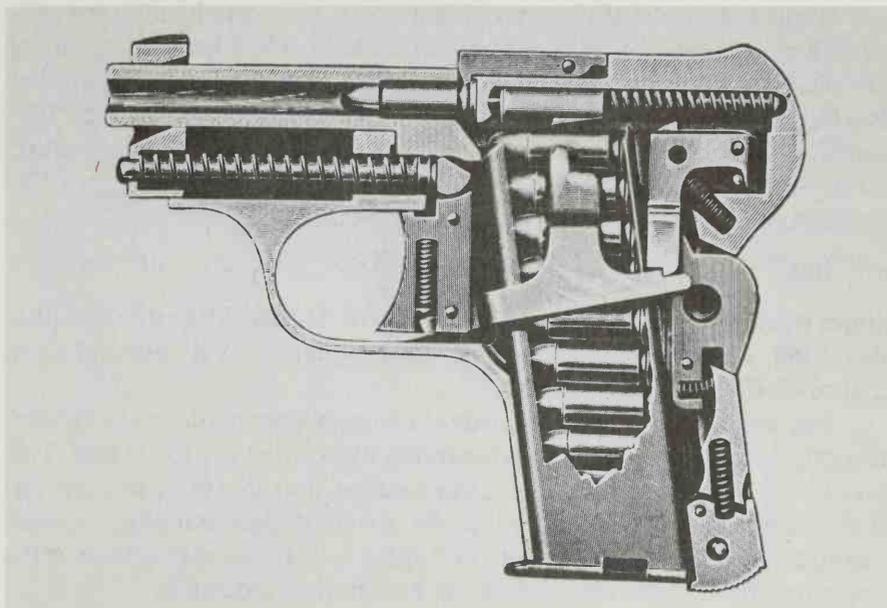
The wooden grips were not used for long. Most examples of the Model 1919 will be found with grips of pressed sheet steel, as described in the preceding chapter. Toward the end of production of the true Model 1919, in the early 1930s, the grips were changed to the familiar steel-backed



A later Model 1919 pistol. Note the formed clearance recess at the top of the grip for the disconnector arm. (Beretta Archives)



This pistol, dated 1935, is now referred to as the Model 318. It has the 1934 changes, the reshaped grip frame and the striker indicator. (Beretta Archives)



A sectioned view of a true Model 1919. Note that the grip frame is straight, and that the striker has no external indicator. (Beretta Archives)

Bakelite, as seen on the well-known Model 1934 pistol. These have a plain edge and a rough center panel, with the PB monogram in a circle at the lower-center. The steel backing curls around the edges at the top and on the sides, making grip panels that are resistant to damage.

The magazines are of the classic Beretta open-side construction, with a flat floorplate. On the early guns, the floorplate and its removal system are identical with the one used on the first 9mm and 7.65mm pistols. Later guns have the centerbutton floorplate release. Because of the pistol's role as a pocket piece for personal protection, there was no reason to consider using the finger extension floorplate. Capacity of the Model 1919 magazine is eight rounds.

On the left slide flat, the Model 1919 has a one-line marking: "PIS-TOLA AUT. — BERETTA — 6.35 BREV. 1919". The safety positions are marked with "F" and "S", as on the 7.65mm Model 1915/19. Italy joined the International Proof Commission in 1920, and on October 16th, 1924, proof-testing of all guns produced in Italy became compulsory. All Beretta pistols made after that date, that were processed through regular channels, will have proof marks. Externally, on the Model 1919, these marks will normally be found on the left slide flat at the rear, just behind the grasping serrations, and on the frame just below.

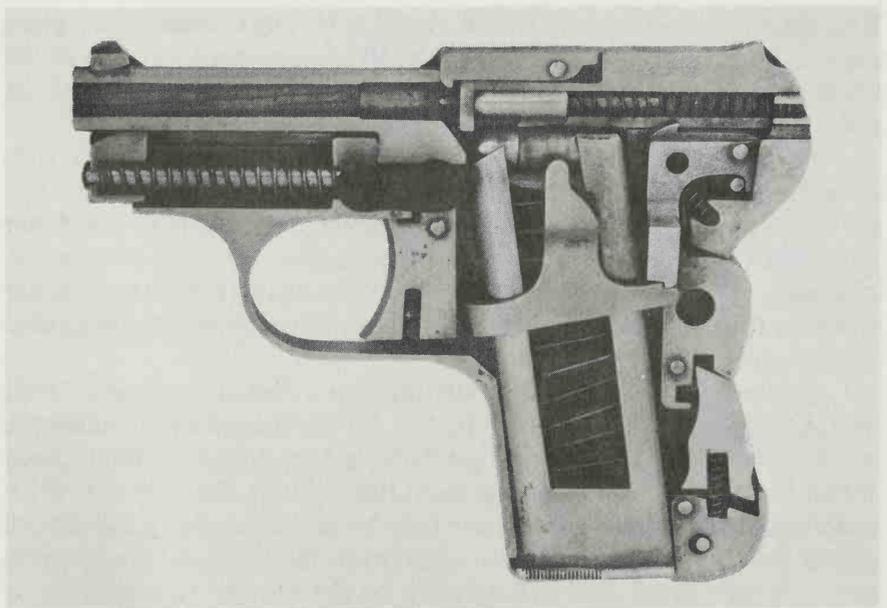
While the Model 1919 may well have seen some use by military officers, there was no official government purchase, and I have no report of this pistol with military markings. It is likely that there was some police use, but so far I have no valid report of a Model 1919 with "PS" or "RP" marks. The sale of this pistol was primarily on the commercial market. Serial numbering began at 100,000. In the original configuration of this model, the following numbers have been observed:

100222    131798    132490    171184    171640    179095

I have neither seen nor had a report of a true Model 1919 with a number above 180,000. My estimate of the total production in its original form is around 80,000 pieces.

Beginning in 1934, two important changes were made in the design. The grip frame shape was altered, curving outward at the lower rear. This gave the pistol a more streamlined appearance, and also improved the feel in the hand. Another change was in the striker design. An integral guide was added, its rear tip protruding through a hole in the spring base at the rear when the striker was cocked, as an external indicator.

At the time these changes were beginning, the numbering was apparently re-started at 600,000. There were a few transition-pieces. I have seen



A Model 318 pistol, factory sectioned. Note the reshaped grip frame, and the indicator on the striker. (Beretta Archives)



A Model 418 pistol, showing the changes of 1947. The principal changes were in the grips, magazine floorplate, and the shape of the grip safety. (Beretta Archives)

one, proof-dated 1934, that has the straight grip frame of the 1919, steel-backed Bakelite grips, and the indicator-type striker. The serial number of that pistol is 601287. Other numbers observed include:

602456      606460      622297      637801      650905

The last number above is the highest I have noted for this model. The twelve years of its production included World War Two, when there was emphasis on military pieces, so an estimate of around 55,000 for the total seems about right. Early pistols have the one-line slide marking of the Model 1919; but by 1939 (perhaps earlier), this had been changed to a two-line stamping: "P. BERETTA CAL. 6<sup>35</sup> BREVETTATA", and "GARDONE V. T. 1939-XVII".

The date was changed in each year of manufacture. The Roman numeral following the date signifies the corresponding year of the Fascist regime, counting from its start in 1922. This, too, was changed with each year. The serial number location remained the same, on the right slide flat, just forward of the serrations, and on the right side of the frame, above the trigger opening.

At the time of its manufacture, this pistol had no official factory designation, being considered as simply an extension of the Model 1919.



A Model 418 pistol, proof-dated 1955, serial number 98224A. Note that the steel-backed plastic grip was sometimes used, as late as 1955.



A late Model 418 pistol, number 40567C, proof-dated 1958. Note the all-plastic grip with the three-arrow trademark, and the "Panther" designation on the grip.

To call it "Model 1934" or "Model 1935" would have been confusing, as there were other pistols in the line already so named. In a retrospective designation, it is now called the Model 318. After the end of World War Two, the year and Fascist date were dropped from the slide marking. Still in two lines, the postwar marking was: "P. BERETTA—CAL. 6<sup>35</sup>—BREVET.", and "GARDONE V. T. (ITALIA)".

The year 1947 saw the final change in the 6.35mm *Pistola da Tasca* (Pocket Pistol). The design alterations were minimal. The principal change was in the external shape of the grip safety piece, from the original "hump" to a curve that matched the contour of the frame backstrap. At first, the steel-backed plastic grips were used, but by around 1952 the grip panels were made entirely of plastic, with a new Beretta trademark near the top: three horizontally-arranged circles bearing vertical arrows, and the full name, Beretta, across their centers. Another change was in the slide serrations, from vertical to slight slant.

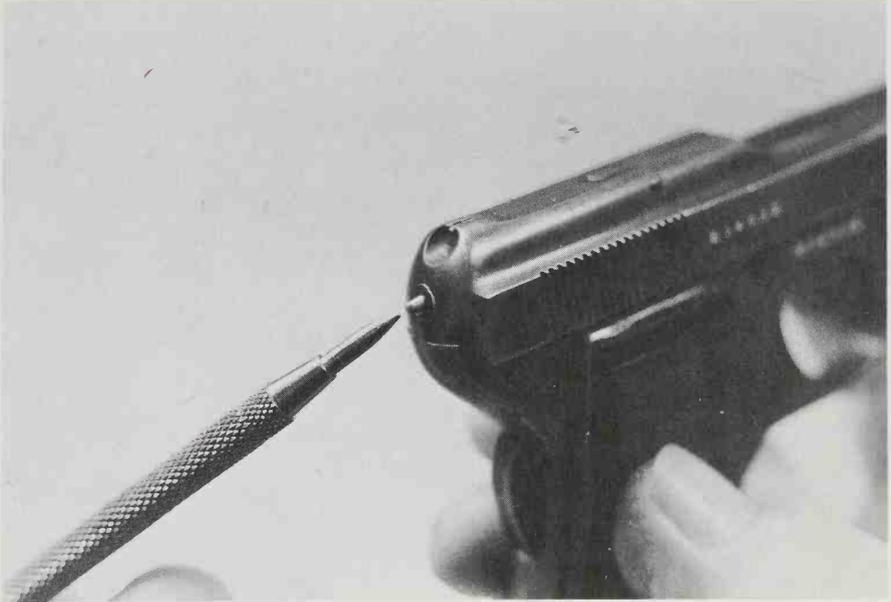
This pistol was designated the Model 418, but the slide marking was the same as the one used on the late Model 318 pistols. Early guns exported to English-speaking countries also had "Made in Italy" stamped on the left side of the frame, just above the trigger opening.

When marketed in the United States, the Model 418 was given two trade names. One was *Bantam*. Although nicely alliterative with Beretta, this name may have suffered, in some circles, from a "chicken" connotation. It was soon dropped. Another name that appeared on some grip panels was *Panther*. This one coincided with the then-used trade names for the .32 and .380 pistols, the *Puma* and the *Cougar*. In those days, the importer for Beretta in the United States was the J. L. Galef Company of New York City.

Serial numbering of the Model 418 really "started over." The first pistol of the revised model was stamped "00001A." By 1953, the slide marking was changed again to a single line: "P. BERETTA—CAL 6.35—GARDONE V. T.". On the left side flat, and on the right, "Made in Italy". There were two principal numbering groups, designated by "A" and "C" suffixes. Presumably, after the "A" group ran to the end of five figures, or "99999A," the numbering began again at "00001C." Here are some representative Model 418 serial numbers:

32715A	44689A	46446A	68480A	79564A
80958A	07443C	08276C	39641C	

The earliest pistol in this list is proof-dated 1949, and the last, number 39641C, is proof-dated 1958, probably very near the end of production. There were two other special versions of the pistol, a chrome-engraved treatment called the Model 420, and a "deluxe" pistol, the Model 421. The



The striker indicator, added in 1934, is shown in the cocked position, protruding slightly from the spring base at the rear of the slide.



One of the last of the "hump" grip-safety pistols. Note that it is proof-dated 1947, the year in which this feature was changed.



This pistol, number 654652, is unusual in several ways. Proof-dated 1947, it is a late Model 318. A previous owner threaded the barrel at the muzzle for installation of a silencer. One wonders about the clandestine activities in which it may have been involved.

Model 421 was finely engraved, gold-plated, and had metal-backed grip panels of genuine tortoise-shell. It came in a leather-covered, velvet-lined case, with a spare magazine and cleaning rod. It is possible that the Model 420 and Model 421 were in a separate numbering group (perhaps the missing B suffix?), but this has not been verified. Total production of the Model 418 was at least 140,000 pieces.

The Model 418 also entered the realm of fiction, in Ian Fleming's *From Russia With Love*, starring James Bond. According to the story, Bond was issued a Walther PPK, and the reason given was that his .25 Beretta had jammed during a previous dire encounter. With a Beretta, this could happen only in fiction. In the time frame of the book, the pistol depicted must have been the Model 418, the final version of a design that had lasted for 39 years.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### Model 1919, 6.35mm

Weight:	13.65 ounces
Length:	4.48 inches
Barrel length:	2.36 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

### Model 318, 6.35mm

Weight:	14.87 ounces
Length:	4.52 inches
Barrel length:	2.36 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

### Model 418, 6.35mm

Weight:	11.72 ounces (with alloy frame) 14.87 ounces (with steel frame)
Length:	4.56 inches
Barrel length:	2.36 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

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# 4

## Model 1923 Pistol

After a brief digression in the preceding chapter to cover the entire production span of the .25 caliber hammerless pistol, we now return to chronological order, with the 9mm Model 1923.

This was the first Beretta pistol to have the word “model” before the date officially and it often is erroneously called the “1915-1919-Model 1923” by some collectors and writers, because of the slide marking. On the left slide flat, it is marked “PISTOLA – BERETTA – 9<sup>M</sup> BREV. 1915-1919-M<sup>O</sup> 1923”. The “BREV.” is “*Brevetatta*” (“Patent”), and the first two dates indicate that the pistol contains elements of the patents of those years.

The Model 1923 was intended to be a pistol for military use, and so was chambered for the then-official Italian military round, the 9mm Glisenti, discussed in Chapter 1. Like the Model 1915 pistol in this caliber, the Model 1923 has a fairly heavy slide and a strong recoil spring. It also has a buffer in the rear of the spring tunnel in the frame, but in this case, it is a solid fiber piece, rather than a separate spring. I have fired the Model 1923 with reduced-load 9mm Parabellum rounds, and found the system to be adequate. Full-power 9mm P. loads, however, probably would damage the gun.



The Model 1923 pistol, left side. This gun has the short pressed-steel grip panels, but no provision for stock attachment.



The Model 1923 pistol, right side. This is serial number 302766, a commercial gun, with no military markings.



**The Model 1923 pistol, field-stripped.**

The Model 1923 was the first Beretta pistol to have an external hammer, a ring-type, with the pivot set fairly far inward, giving the hammer a near-vertical movement. The slide design is the same, but heavier, as that used on the 1915/19 (1922) pistol; with the external hammer it makes this gun the first to have the complete “Beretta look” now so familiar.

The T-slot barrel mounting is the same as the one used on the previous model, and the takedown sequence is identical. The extractor and ejector are still centrally located, and a lobe on the extractor pivot retains the firing pin, as in previous models. The hammer has only two positions: fully cocked, and fully down. The firing pin is an inertia type, allowing safe hammer-down carrying with a loaded chamber.

The recoil spring is not a captive unit, as in the Model 1915, but consists of a separate spring and a solid rod with a heavy collar at the rear, and a smaller tip that protrudes to bear on the safety crosspiece. The safety arrangement is the most convenient to operate of all those found on pre-World War Two Beretta pistols. The on-safe position is upward toward the rear, horizontal, and the off-safe movement is a very short arc downward and forward. The stamped letters F and S are alternately covered by the lever, which has a horizontally serrated button.

On most Model 1923 pistols, the grips are of pressed steel, as previ-

ously described, with the PB monogram in an oval at the top. They are unusual in that they cover only the central portion of the grip frame. The top edges of the panels are  $\frac{5}{32}$ " below the lower edges of the slide. At the bottom, they are  $\frac{5}{16}$ " away from the frame edge. There was a purpose for the lower space. The Model 1923 was available with a holster/shoulder stock combination, and the stock attachment was a loop that encircled the lower end of the grip frame. The space below the grip panels gave clearance for this.

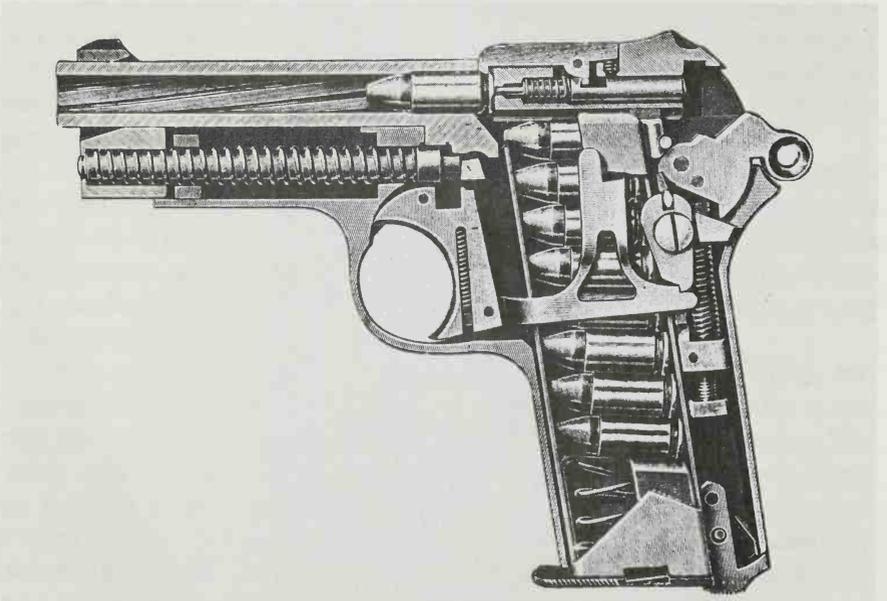
I have never examined a holster/shoulder stock unit for the Model 1923. They were made in even smaller quantities than the pistol. From the one photograph I have seen, along with a catalogue drawing (Circa 1924-1937), the securing device appears to be a push-button that controls



A comparison of the slide top of the Model 1923 pistol (left) and the Model 1915.



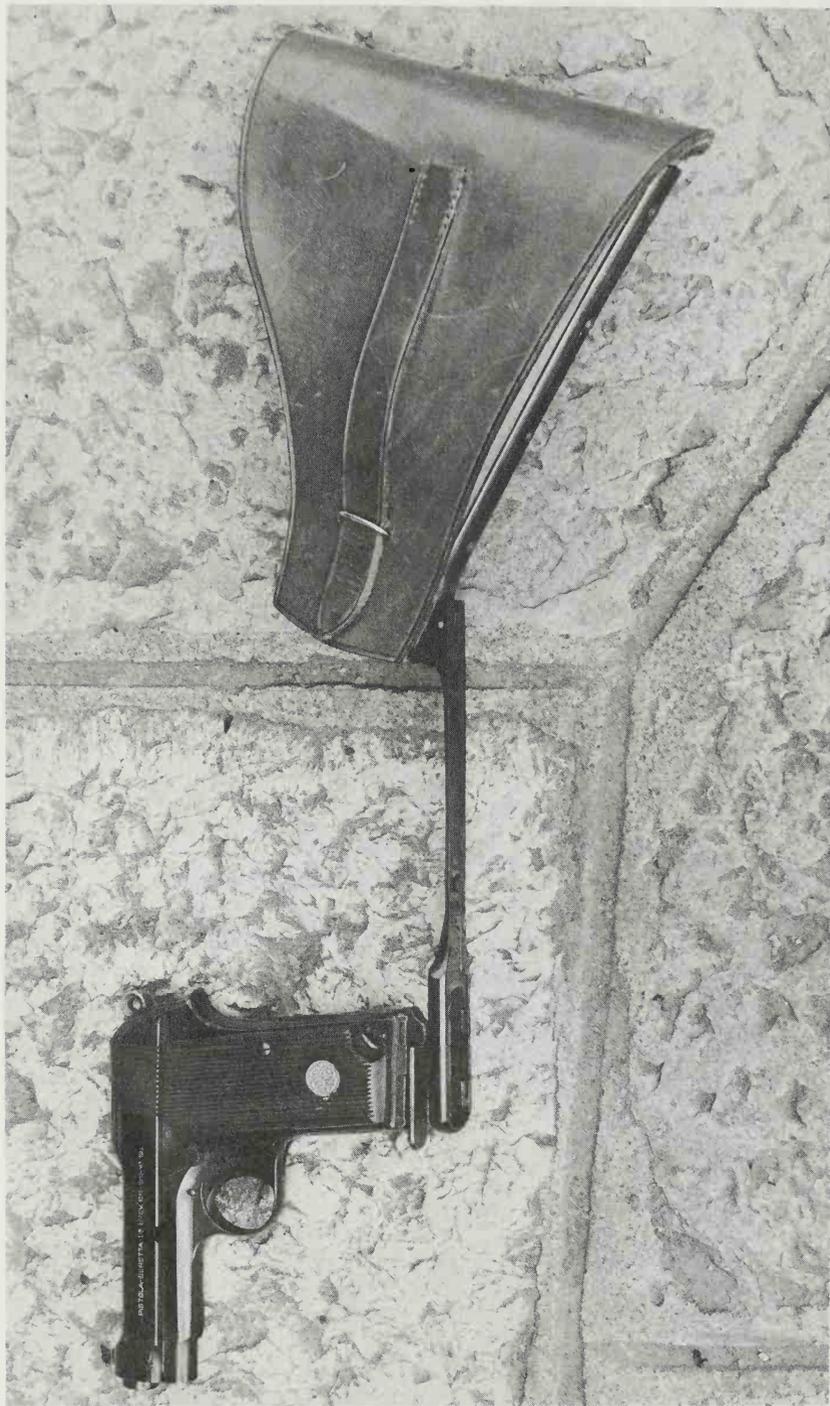
A comparison in size of the Model 1923 and Model 1934 pistols.



A factory sectioned view (drawing) of the Model 1923 pistol. Nearly all its internal design features were used in the 1931-1934 pistols. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 1923 pistol with the shoulder-stock holster attached. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 1923 with the shoulder-stock holster, showing the holster detached. When not in use, the stock-arm folded to lie along the spine of the holster. (Beretta Archives)

a flanged plate. The flanges enter slots on the sides, at the lower rear of the backstrap. I have examined six Model 1923 pistols, and none had the slots.

In the photo and drawing mentioned, the stock piece is a slim steel bar that extends from the spine of a full flap holster, the extension being about 6¼" from the end of the holster. The bar extension is hinged to fold against the front of the holster when not in use. In 1935, the Italian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry purchased 250 Model 1923 pistols that were equipped with the stock/holster, at 145 lire each.

In addition to the usually seen pressed-steel grips, three other types have been noted. On a chrome-engraved presentation piece, the grip panels are of smooth dark wood, with a round PB monogram in silver, centrally located in the lower half of each panel. These grips extend somewhat nearer to the slide and lower frame edge than the steel ones, but there are still spaces at each end. This grip has also been seen on at least one standard blued commercial pistol.

Another wooden grip with the round silver PB medallion is shown on the gun in the photo of the stock/holster unit. These panels have vertical grooving, and the top edge reaches the edge of the slide. At the



**A Model 1923 commercial pistol with grips of smooth burl walnut bearing a silver "PB" medallion. (Beretta Archives)**



**A Model 23 pistol with wooden grips having vertical striations and a silver PB medallion. Note the stock attachment grooving at the lower edge of the grip frame. (Beretta Archives)**

bottom, they extend to the lower terminus of the lanyard loop—the same as the steel grips—allowing space for the stock frame.

An identical grip style, but extending all the way to the frame lower edge, is found on guns supplied on contract to the Argentine Provincial Police. The quantity involved in this contract was 600 pistols, supplied in 1933–1934. One example seen has the usual Beretta marking, centered on the left slide flat, and above this, in a single line, is: “POLICIA DE LA PROVINCIA DE BUENOS AIRES”. On this pistol, and on one other commercial version seen, there is a round recess filled with red enamel beside the F marking on the frame, which is exposed when the safety lever is moved to the off-safe position.

Other important contracts included 4,000 Model 23 pistols sold to the government of Bulgaria in 1926, and 3,000 pistols purchased by the Italian Royal Army in 1936, at a price of 90 lire each. This latter purchase is odd, in view of the fact that at that time, the Army had already contracted for 150,000 of the new Model 1934 pistol.

Another interesting piece of Model 23 lore is the possibility that a few may have been modified for full-auto firing. In a factory letter dated June 25, 1935, sent to the Prefect of Police in Sarentino, Bolzano



COMISARIA DE LA PROVINCIA DE BUENOS AIRES  
PISTOLA-BERETTA-03 PRESV 516-10-0-40 1923

This Model 1923 pistol was supplied on contract to the Provincial Police of Buenos Aires, Argentina. (Beretta Archives)

Province, a Beretta representative says, in part, “. . . we no longer make machine pistols, and we have none on hand. Manufacture of these was discontinued because this type of pistol did not give the results we had hoped for.” I have never seen a full-auto version of the Model 1923, nor even a picture of one, so we can only speculate on its mechanical details.

One would assume that any machine pistol versions must have been fitted with extended magazines of larger capacity, as full-auto firing would have exhausted the standard eight-round magazine in one “zip.” The Model 1923 magazine is identical with the standard open-sided type used in the 9mm Model 1915 pistol. In fact, they are interchangeable. There is a slight difference in the shape of the follower: the Model 1923 version has a wider flat on top and no ejector notch at the rear. A simple bevel replaces the notch.

Production of the Model 1923 began that year, and probably ended by 1928. As previously noted, sales continued until 1936. In addition to the various government purchases mentioned, there were some pistols sold commercially. My own Model 1923 — number 302766 — has only the early Italian proof, on the left rear flat of the frame. The ones purchased by the Italian Army have an additional RE marking in the same area. I have seen neither examples nor pictures of the Bulgarian variation, so I cannot report its markings here. It is quite possible that those pistols may have been marked with the Bulgarian coat-of-arms (as were the Lugers they purchased earlier), or with Cyrillic letters denoting the safety positions, but this is speculation.

Serial numbering of the Model 1923 was in a separate bloc, beginning at 300,000. The full number was located on the right slide flat, just forward of the serrations, and on the right side of the frame, just above the trigger. The last four digits of the number also appear on the right rear edge of the barrel, just above the mounting lug. This is a pattern that was repeated on subsequent models. Here are some of the observed serial numbers:

300239      301862      302766      305543

The two earlier-numbered pistols have the Army “RE” marking, while the two later pistols do not. Apparently, the Army pistols were not a consecutively numbered bloc. Otherwise, my commercial number 302766 would have been within the 3,000 purchased. Adding the Italian Army and Forestry purchase, and the Bulgarian and Argentine contracts, we arrive at a figure of 7,850 pistols. Allowing for a few commercial sales, I would estimate the total production at around 8,000 pieces.

The Model 1923 used design concepts that were to be a pattern for several models that followed, as Signor Marengoni and Signor Pietro

Beretta edged toward their goal of the “ultimate Beretta pistol,” a goal that many feel was attained with the Model 1934. Before that, there were two interim designs. We will examine those in the next chapter.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### Model 1923, 9mm Glisenti

Weight:	35.8 ounces
Length:	6.29 inches
Barrel length:	3.81 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

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# 5

## **Model 1931, Model 1932 Pistols**

Around 1930, Beretta and Marengoni had an excellent idea: Why not use the external-hammer design concept of the Model 1923 in a smaller pistol, chambered for the 7.65mm Browning cartridge? It was done, and the Model 1931 was born.

Aside from the change in size and cartridge, there were a few other differences. With the relatively low pressure of the .32 Auto round, the fiber buffer was unnecessary, and was eliminated. The space within the trigger guard, which was limited on the Model 1923 and Model 1915 pistols, was increased. Another change was more subtle. The slide serrations were made slightly concave, rather than being straight cuts, as on previous pistols.

A more obvious change was the safety arc. The movement from “safe” to “fire” position was a full 180 degrees, making the operation less handy than the excellent short swing of the Model 1923. It is possible that this feature was added to satisfy military requirements. On the other hand, there is a valid argument for mechanical improvement, as the full swing allows a stronger internal arrangement for the dual role of trigger blocking and barrel retention. On early Model 1931 pistols, the raised button



The Model 1931 pistol, as supplied to the Italian Navy. Note the smooth walnut grip panels bearing the "RM" and anchor medallion. (Beretta Archives)

at the end of the safety lever had its domed surface cut with concentric circles. The later guns have horizontal serrations. With the lever in on-safe position, an "S" on the frame is exposed. In the off-safe position, a recessed red dot and an "F" are uncovered.

Nearly all the production of the Model 1931 was for the Italian Navy, and the grip panels seen on most examples reflect this. They are of smooth-finished walnut, and in the center of the lower half is set a silver-colored metal medallion. It consists of a circle containing an anchor, flanked by the letters "R" and "M", denoting the *Regio Marina*, or Royal Navy. On early guns, the grip panels are short at the top, a full quarter-inch from the slide edge. This was probably to allow clearance for the arc of the safety. Later pistols have full-length panels, with the top front corner of the left one cut out for the safety.

There were a few commercial sales of the Model 1931, but the number must have been small. I have never seen an example, nor even an illustration of one. In his book, Ugo Menchini comments that the only difference is in the grips, with the civilian version having panels of steel-backed plastic, similar to those later used on the Model 1934. A good case could also be made for plain walnut grips having the Beretta "PB" monogram in place of the Navy symbol. A commercial Model 1932 seen in photos has grips of that type.

The eight-round magazine of the Model 1931 has the standard open sides, and the floorplate is flat, secured by an internal lockplate with a central button. Since the grip angle is unchanged, this magazine may be identical to the one supplied with the Model 1915/19 pistol, and it is probably interchangeable. The strong machined follower holds the slide open after the last round is fired, as with earlier models. As in the Model 1923, the hammer has only two positions, fully cocked and fully down. The original firing pin (beware of replacements) is an inertia type, which allows safe carrying with the chamber loaded and the hammer down.

On the left slide flat, the Model 1931 is marked: "PISTOLA BERETTA 7<sup>65</sup> BREV. 1915-1919 M<sup>O</sup> 1931". The Navy pistol on my desk, from which this was taken, also has some other cryptic markings, and it has an absence of some marks it should have. On the left rear of the frame, just behind the top of the left grip panel, is an oval containing the letters "BF". Just below this, there is an incomplete, lightly-stamped circle containing a shield that is equally bisected by a vertical and a horizontal line. The pistol has *none* of the standard proof marks of its time period. The shield-in-a-circle is found on other 1931-1932 pistols, and it may well be the Navy acceptance mark. If so, this would explain the absence of other proofs. I won't even speculate on the definition of the BF mark. Perhaps some reader who was in Italy during that time can supply an answer.

Among the few Model 1931 pistols I have examined, the frames were not marked with an oval and the "RM" designation. But I will not say it was never done. It may be that the special grip panels, with their large medallion, constituted sufficient identification to satisfy the Italian Navy, but grips can be changed, and not marking the frame seems to be contrary to military logic. On the other hand, since virtually all of the Model 1931 production was military, perhaps the gun itself was enough identification. If a civilian had one, and could not prove it was a commercial purchase, he was in big trouble.

The Model 1931 may have been used, in small numbers, by other Italian military and official agencies. There are reports of use by the Air Force and the National Road Militia, but no quantities are mentioned. There is one reference to a letter from Beretta to the Ministry of Aeronautics, which offered 5,300 "Beretta 7.65mm cal. Navy-type pistols for non-commissioned officers." This was in 1935, after production of the Model 1931 was ended. There is no record of any actual purchase by the Air Force, and no "RA"-marked 1931 pistols have been observed. But, it is possible that some were used by the *Regio Aeronautica*.

If any pistols were marked for use by the Road Militia, there is no certainty of the marking. In translation, "Road Police" would be *Polizia Stradale*, and this would abbreviate as "PS". Could it be that this is the



Another typical Model 1931 pistol, serial number 404925. (Author's Collection)



The rare Model 1932 pistol in 7.65mm chambering. The Navy emblem on the grip may indicate this was a test pistol. (Beretta Archives)



A commercial Model 1932 pistol (or an experimental gun) in 9mm Corto (.380 Auto) chambering. (Beretta Archives)



Another pistol of Model 1932 configuration, with wooden grips and the Navy medallion. Note that the slide is marked "M<sup>o</sup> 1931". (Photos courtesy of Joel Glovsky and Joseph Schroeder)

real definition of the “PS” mark, rather than *Pubblica Sicurezza*? I have found that in the realm of European police and military markings, anything is possible.

Edging even closer to the ideal of the Model 1934, Beretta made a few important changes in the basic 1931 design, and named the resulting pistol the Model 1932. Its actual differences from the Model 1934 were only the slide markings and the grip panels. The main external change from the 1931 design was a swelling of the grip frame at its lower-rear, a change that vastly improved the handling qualities. The finger extension magazine floorplate was used, and the grips were of plain wood, as on the 1931, but shaped to match the new contour of the grip frame.

The Model 1932 is quite rare, perhaps the rarest of the regular production guns, so I will comment here on only two examples. On both, the slide markings are the same as on the Model 1931, except for the caliber in one case, and ending in “M<sup>Q</sup> 1932”. A commercial version in 9mm Corto (.380 Auto) has grips of smooth walnut, bearing the “PB” monogram in silver at lower-center. At least a few—perhaps only test pieces—were supplied to the Italian Navy. The other example is in 7.65mm, with less fancy wood grips that have the anchor-RM medallion. This one, serial number 407554, also has the shield-in-a-circle mark that is on my own Model 1931, mentioned earlier.

Serial numbering of the Model 1932 was apparently a continuation of the Model 1931 numbers. One numbered example that I can verify is the pistol noted in the previous paragraph, number 407554. Another is number 406940, which is in the collection of a friend. It also has the wood

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 1931, 7.65mm**

Weight:	22.7 ounces
Length:	5.90 inches
Barrel length:	3.34 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

### **Model 1932, 7.65mm and 9mm Corto**

Weight:	26.2 ounces
Length:	5.90 inches
Barrel length:	3.46 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds (7.65mm) 7 rounds (9mm Corto)

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grips with the Navy medallion, and is marked "M<sup>Q</sup> 1931". From the span of these two serial numbers, it would appear that the total production of the Model 1932 was probably around one thousand pieces. It is a very rare Beretta.

Returning to the true Model 1931, the numbering began at 400,000. As noted previously, number 400938 has a concentric-ring safety button and short grips. My own Model 1931 pistol, number 404925, has horizontal serrations on the safety button and full-length grips. Based on the known serial numbers, and the starting point of the following model, I would estimate that the total production of the Model 1931 was around 6,500 pieces.

# 6

## **Model 1934, Model 1935 Pistols**

By 1934, the Italian government had decided to find a single replacement for all of the various pistols then in use, and the cartridge was to be the 9mm Corto, the round we now call the .380 Auto.

As noted in the previous chapter, Beretta had already made experimental Model 1932 pistols in this chambering. So, with scarcely any change in the design other than steel-backed plastic grip panels, they created the Model 1934. It was entered in the military ordnance tests at the Artillery School at Civitavecchia, with 25 prototypes submitted. To anyone knowing Beretta pistols, the fact that these guns performed perfectly will come as no surprise.

In July of 1934, the military ordered 650 Model 1934 pistols for further field testing, but the order was immediately rescinded. It seems that some official of the Government Arsenal at Terni, perhaps because of professional jealousy, insisted that any pistol being considered must have "a special safety working on the firing pin." Apparently, someone there had examined a Walther, and was impressed. The Walther PP had, in fact, been briefly considered as a replacement arm. But, it was never officially tested.



**One of the specially-modified test pistols submitted to the Italian government trials, early in 1935. Note the Walther-style firing pin block safety. (Beretta Archives)**

A small number of Model 1934 pistols—perhaps as few as 10—were modified to include a Walther-style firing pin block safety on the slide. But Pietro Beretta was not pleased with it. He informed the War Ministry that the addition of this device would raise the price of each pistol by 10 lire. He also complained about the size of the initial order, and the fact that the Model 1934 was still considered to be “experimental” by the military ordnance people. Meanwhile, the man who proposed the firing pin safety died, and the safety was not mentioned again. With this sore point out of the way, Beretta agreed to furnish the 650 test pistols.

Finally, the testing was completed, and a momentous day arrived. On August 2, 1935, a telegram from the War Ministry confirmed an order for 150,000 Model 1934 pistols, making it officially the standard sidearm of the Italian Army.

With today’s military thinking geared to the large-frame pistol in 9mm Parabellum, this selection of a medium-frame .380 automatic may seem strange. In Europe, however, issue sidearms of that time and earlier had often been in chamberings as small as 7.65mm (.32 Auto). There is another point to consider: The 9mm Corto (“short” in Italian) has always been loaded rather heavier in Europe, its ballistic performance often approaching the lower edge of loadings for the Parabellum round.

Even after production of the Model 1934 was well underway, there apparently was still some experimentation. In 1936, a few pistols were made having five deep external rings cut into the barrel. I have observed only one example, number 514244. From its appearance, no lightening of the slide or frame was tried. Lightening of the slide would have been unlikely, as its weight was carefully engineered for the 9mm Corto round. The barrel cuts resulted in a weight reduction of only about one ounce, so the *Tipo Alleggerita* was never made in the regular production. The number of pistols having this feature is unknown.

The Model 1934 contained all the best elements of Marengoni design that had appeared in the previous models. Among these were the unique interconnected sear and hammer spring, and the flat pivoting sear lever. It was a strong and reliable system. Externally, the pistol had the open-top slide that made it instantly recognizable as a Beretta. This was also a factor in its reliability. With an ejection port this large, and vertical ejection, the chances of any exiting case jamming were remote.

Even by today's standards, the handling qualities of the Model 1934 are superb. Short, solid, and relatively heavy, it is also trim and flat. Its external hammer and inertial firing pin allow safe chamber-loaded carry-



An experimental attempt at lightening the pistol by cutting wide annular grooves in the barrel. This was called the *Tipo Alleggerita* by the factory, and was never produced in any large quantity. (Beretta Archives)



A typical Model 1934, serial number 780000, dated 1939. (Author's Collection)

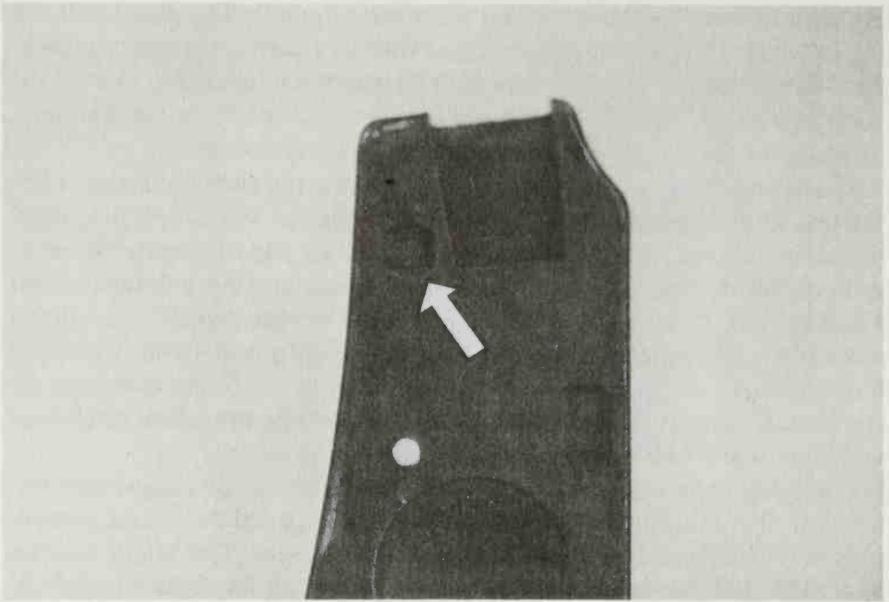
ing with the hammer down (if all parts are original). The pistol still has the 180-degree trigger-block safety, but with its external hammer the awkward safety need not be used except in its takedown functions. One of the additions before full production began was an extra step on the hammer, to catch on the sear if the thumb slipped during cocking.

The Model 1934 has been criticized because the slide hold-open after the last shot depends on the squared back edge of the heavy, machined magazine follower. As the magazine is withdrawn, the slide snaps forward, as in earlier models. Thus, the hold-open is only an empty-indicator, not a loading aid. It has also been noted by some writers that because of this arrangement, magazine removal with the slide open is difficult. I suppose it might be, for those with very weak hands. But, the finger extension on the magazine floorplate gives good leverage, and the magazine catch is of generous size and well-serrated.

In this, as in other design points, Beretta opted for rugged simplicity. A tricky hold-open loading aid would have added parts and complication. This concept is evident throughout the pistol. The safety doubles as a slide latch for takedown, the recoil spring and its guide supply tension to the safety lever, and so on. My early assessment still applies. In



The flat sear lever of the Model 1934 is retained by a hexagon head screw (arrow) that must not be turned down tightly. Snugging the screw will bind the sear lever.



In the steel backing of the left grip panel, a hexagonal opening (arrow) keeps the sear lever screw in adjustment.

a single-action pistol of this size and caliber, you could design something different, but never anything better.

Typical slide markings of the Model 1934 are in two lines on the left side: "P. BERETTA—CAL. 9 CORTO—M<sup>Q</sup> 1934—BREVETTATO", and "GARDONE V. T.", followed by the date. This was given first in figures, then in Roman numerals, the latter denoting the year of the Fascist calendar, from year "one" in 1922. My own Model 1934, for example, is dated "1939—XVII". The safety lever positions are marked with "S" and "F", and there is a recessed red-filled dot by the "F". On the left rear frame flat, just behind the top of the left grip panel, most Model 1934 pistols will have the crowned "RE" stamping, for *Regio Esercito* (Royal Army).

On the right side, in the same rear area, my pistol has a crown over "FAG", and below the letters is "39", for 1939. Since the military pistols of this period all seem to lack the regular Italian commercial proofs, this is probably a military test and acceptance mark. The full serial number is on the right slide flat, just forward of the serrations, and it is repeated on the frame, above the trigger. In smaller numerals, the last five digits of the number are stamped on the right side of the barrel underlug. There are often assorted small numbers, letters, and marks on the bottom of the grip frame, beside the magazine catch. These are only in-factory assembly and inspection marks.



The 180-degree safety of the Model 1934 is shown in the on-safe and off-safe positions. In the former mode, the safety lever is also the takedown latch.



This late-style grip probably was not used as early as the date on this Model 1934 (1941) indicates. Perhaps it was an experimental version tried on an existing pistol. (Beretta Archives)

Serial numbering of the Model 1934 in 9mm Corto chambering began at 500,000. By 1942, it was near one million in numbering. Here are some representative numbers and dates:

524494 (1936)	535012 (1936)	595602 (1937)
614244 (1936)	( <i>Tipo Alleggerita</i> )	631479 (1937)
640800 (1937)	641640 (1937)	720734 (1938)
742977 (1939)	780000 (1939)	821456 (1940)
831716 (1940)	844024 (1940)	889838 (1941)
891842 (1941)	914004 (1941)	930630 (1941)
953386 (1942)	961464 (1942)	979567 (1942)
983853 (1942)	990749 (1942)	998956 (1942)

Sometime in 1941, the Beretta factory made an unknown quantity of Model 1934 pistols on contract for the government of Rumania. These were marked on the slide "P. BERETTA - CAL. 9 SCURT - M<sup>O</sup> 1934 - BREVET.", using the Rumanian word for "short" rather than the Italian *corto*. My research has recorded only three serial numbers, all dated 1941: 02147, 08991, and 20830. This was a separate numbering sequence. Assuming that the numbering was entirely consecutive, with no gaps, it would appear that the Rumanian contract total was around 20,000 pistols.

A standard Model 1934 pistol has been observed with Finnish markings. This pistol, dated 1942, is #925997. On the left side of the frame, just forward of the safety lever, it is marked "SkY 0324", the prefix standing for *Suojeluskunta Yliesikunta* (General Headquarters, Finnish Defense Corps).

Occurring in the normal serial numbering range, this may have been a "lot purchase," rather than a contract order. Finland also used the Italian Terni carbine on this basis.

There were other special order pieces with separate numbering. Two of these, both dated 1942, have an "F" prefix: F-63599 and F-67413. One odd piece is recorded with a "G" prefix, G-33595. This one has no markings on the slide, no date or proofs, but it has a flying eagle on the left rear frame flat. This symbol normally indicates Air Force use, but there is no "RA" or "AM" mark, and the caliber is wrong. Above the trigger on the right side of the frame, it is marked "CAL. 9". Other oddities include some pistols with a four-digit numbering sequence, with a twin-letter suffix. Two examples are number 3662-AA, dated 1943, and number 4996-BB, dated 1944. All these odd numbers could have been small contract orders, or special test pieces.

While the Italian Army adopted the 9mm Corto round in 1935, the Navy and Air Force retained the 7.65mm (.32 Auto) as their official car-



A typical wartime Model 1934, dated 1942. The serial number is 998956. (Beretta Archives)



A typical Model 1935 pistol in 7.65mm chambering, from early 1944 production. It is unusual because it lacks the Fascist date in the slide marking, and bears a Swiss acceptance mark. (Author's Collection)

tridge. Pistols of 1934 pattern were made for them in this chambering, and the earliest ones were marked "M<sup>Q</sup> 1934".

Later, perhaps in recognition of slight dimensional and weight differences, and for easier military identification, the 7.65mm version was designated Model 1935.

Pre-war and early wartime guns had the full slide marking, as on the 9mm Corto version, with the only difference being the caliber designation. Late wartime pistols often lacked the slide markings, and were roughly finished.

Service branch marking was on the left rear flat of the frame, behind the top of the left grip panel. I have seen only one Navy-marked Model 1935, and it had the RM stamping and the wooden grip panels bearing the RM-anchor medallion, as on the Model 1931-32 pistols.

Model 1935 pistols with Air Force markings are more frequently seen; these are usually marked with a flying eagle and the "RA" stamping, for *Regio Aeronautica*. Another marking "AM", for *Aeronautica Militare*, has been reported, but not confirmed. One pistol seen, #420881 (1936), has the flying eagle and a circled MR marking; this acronym is so far unexplained.

Serial numbering of the Model 1935 was a continuation of the Model 1931-32 pistols, beginning at around 415,000 and continuing to around 640,000. Taking this span, we arrive at an approximate total of 225,000 Model 1935 pistols, produced from 1936 through 1944. Here are some representative serial numbers and dates:

416944 (1936)	418009 (1936)	420881 (1936)
468964 (1941)	497011 (1943)	526309 (1944)
536692 (1944)	550483 (1944)	555005 (1944)
559296 (1944)	563639 (1944)	566605 (1944)
570694 (1944)	573499 (1944)	613303 (undated)
631418 (undated)		

On the last two pistols listed — numbers 613303 and 631418 — the only markings are the serial number (on the frame only), and "CAL. 7<sup>65</sup>" below the number, above the front terminus of the trigger guard on the right side of the frame. The finish is rough on these late wartime pieces, all made in 1944.

Soon after the end of the war, Beretta made arrangements with a well-known and respected New York firm, J. L. Galef & Son, for the importation of several Beretta guns into the United States.

The Model 1934 pistol in .380 chambering was marketed as the *Cougar*, and the .32 caliber Model 1935 was called the *Puma*. These were trade names only, and did not appear in the slide markings.

The left slide flat of the .32 was now marked in a single line: "PIETRO BERETTA – GARDONE V. T. CAL. 7<sup>65</sup> – PAT."

The .380 version had two lines: "P. BERETTA – CAL. 9 CORTO M<sup>o</sup> 1934 BREVETTATO", and "GARDONE V. T.". During this same period, the factory began to refer to the pistols as Model 934 and Model 935, dropping the "1" of the model year.

On the earliest pistols of this postwar group, the grip panels were the familiar steel-backed plastic, and the lanyard loop was still present on the left-rear corner of the grip frame. Later pistols had plastic grips without the steel backing, and these followed the contour of the grip-frame edges. The lanyard loop was eliminated. The new grip panels had moulded checkering. Near the top they carried a new Beretta symbol: three circles crossed by three vertical arrows. Still later, the grips had a rectangle at the top with the name "BERETTA" inside.

Serial numbering of the postwar .32 version was apparently a continuation of the pre-war and wartime sequence. Here are some examples and dates:

768414 (1951)	767055 (1951)	802635 (1952)
824439 (1952)	830395 (1953)	836351 (1953)
876250 (1955)	879262 (1956)	889816 (1956)



An early postwar version of the Model 1935, in 7.65mm (.32 Auto). The grips bear the three-arrow trademark. (Beretta Archives)



A postwar Model 1934 pistol in 9mm Corto (.380 Auto), dated 1967 on the slide. The pistol is shown partially disassembled. (Beretta Archives)

The post-war .32 seems to have been supplied in greater quantity than the .380. I have no serial number examples of the latter. With the wartime numbering nearing the one million mark, it may be that a new numbering sequence was adopted, perhaps with a letter prefix or suffix.

By 1958, when the Model 1934 and Model 1935 pistols were discon-

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### Model 1934, 9mm Corto

Weight:	26.2 ounces
Length:	5.90 inches
Barrel length:	3.46 inches
Magazine capacity:	7 rounds

### Model 1935, 7.65mm

Weight:	25.5 ounces
Length:	5.80 inches
Barrel length:	3.34 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

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tinued, at least 500,000 had been made in .380, and somewhat more, at least 600,000, in .32 chambering.

Although the official Italian military sidearm is now the Beretta Model 1951, in 9mm Parabellum chambering, there are still numbers of Model 1934 and Model 1935 pistols in use by some police and government agencies.

In addition to worldwide commercial sales, Beretta Model 1934 and Model 1935 pistols had wide distribution as war trophies, especially after World War Two. By some unknown and circuitous route, one Model 1935 pistol was taken to India where, on January 30, 1948, it was used by a fanatic to end the life of Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Mahatma. Earlier, during the Spanish Civil War, many Beretta pistols travelled to Spain, via the Italian Brigade. In many smaller countries and former colonies, the Model 1934 and Model 1935 pistols are still in use.

# 7

## Model 948, Model 949 Pistols

In 1948, Armi Beretta began work on the design of a .22 rimfire version of the basic Model 1934 pistol. The earliest prototypes of his .22 Long Rifle gun were slightly altered pistols of original 1934 pattern, the only changes being those necessary to accommodate the .22 rimfire cartridge.

It was my good fortune to have one of these prototypes to examine. Number 000596 is owned by my good friend Chick Evans. His pistol is proof-dated 1949, and its steel frame appears to be a standard 1934 type, complete with the lanyard loop on the left side at the lower-rear.

The grips are of the contoured all-plastic type, with "BERETTA" in a rectangle at the top. The left one is relieved to clear the lanyard loop. The safety positions are marked with a circled "S" and "F", and the latter has a circular recess beside it that is filled with red enamel.

The firing pin is a full-reach type, offset to the right in the slide. The top-mounted extractor and central ejector are positioned the same as in the centerfire pistol, but the extractor has one difference. Its recess in the barrel is bevelled, and when the slide is closed, the extractor is cammed slightly upward. The ejector has more height.

At the muzzle, the diameter of the barrel is reduced in its last quarter



An early prototype of the Model 948, a slightly altered Model 1934, serial number 000596.



**On this prototype pistol, the lanyard loop is still present, and the grip is relieved to clear it.**



**The extractor recess in the barrel of this prototype is bevelled, elevating the extractor slightly when the slide is closed.**



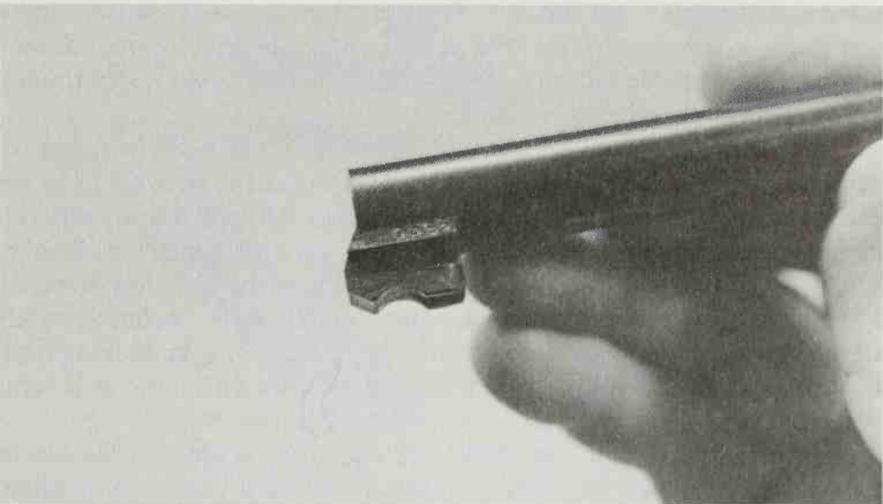
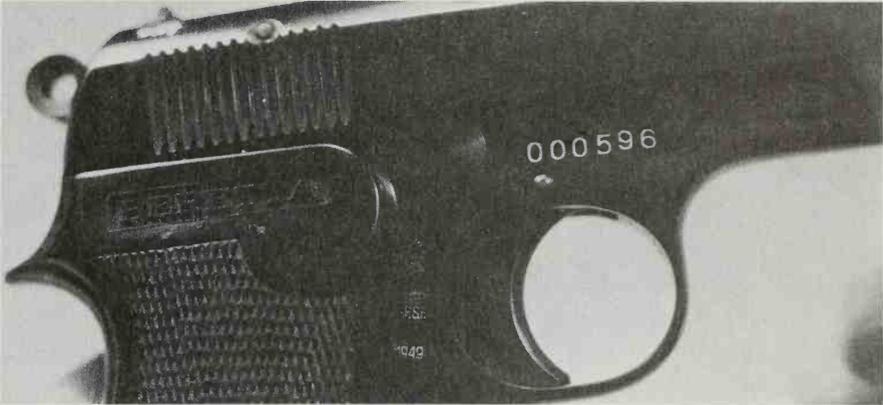
The protruding portion of the barrel at the muzzle is reduced to almost the same diameter as the later regular production barrels.

inch, the portion that protrudes from the front of the slide, from .552" to .475". There is no mechanical reason for this, so I assume that this was done only for cosmetic reasons.

The reduced portion of the barrel has almost the same diameter as the entire barrel used in the later regular-production pistols. Other than this point, the other dimensions of #000596 are the same as those of a standard Model 1934 pistol. The hammer has a safety step, and the other features of the internal mechanism are the same as the centerfire. A lighter recoil spring is used.

The prototype pistol is marked on the left slide flat in two lines: "AUT 22 LONG RIFLE" and "P. BERETTA — Gardone V. T.". The serial number — 000596 — appears on the right side of the frame above the trigger guard, and it is not repeated on the right slide flat. Normal Italian proofs are on the right side of the frame, to the rear of the trigger. The last four digits of the serial number are on the right side of the barrel underlug, and on the underside of the slide near the front. I will hazard a guess that the numbering of this early .22 version began at 000500, and that perhaps a hundred of these "converted 1934s" were made as a market test.

While the design of the .22 pistol was begun in 1948, and the designation was "Model 948," the actual production of the final pattern prob-



A close-up view of the markings on the prototype pistol. Note that the proof date is 1949. The last four digits of the serial number appear on the side of the barrel.



The prototype (below, left) compared with a regular-production Model 948 pistol.

ably did not get under way until sometime in 1950. The earliest proof-date I have seen on a true Model 948 pistol is 1951.

As finally made, the Model 948 had the same length and height as the Model 1934, but the barrel and slide were slimmer. A typical open-sided Beretta magazine was used, with a “keyhole” cross-section and a coil spring in the rounded forward portion. After the first two rounds were loaded, the open sides allowed the follower to be depressed with a thumbnail, a definite loading convenience.

For some unknown reason, the Model 948 was made without the safety step on the hammer that was a feature of the Model 1934 and the .22 prototype. Since the pistol had a non-inertia full-reach firing pin, this meant that the only really safe methods for carry were with the chamber empty, or with the hammer cocked and the trigger-block safety engaged. I soon modified the hammer of my own Model 948 to include a safety step. Because I carried it as a snake-deterrent on camping and hiking trips, I wanted the chamber loaded. This alteration is not difficult, but it is the sort of thing that is best left to a competent gunsmith.

As originally made, the Model 948 stayed fairly close to the Model 1934 dimensions. This included the length of the barrel which, in standard form, was  $3\frac{3}{8}$  inches. With an alloy frame, the pistol weighed only 480 grams, a little less than 17 ounces. The frame was anodized in a blue-

black color, to match the blued steel of the other parts. As illustrated in Beretta catalogs of the time, the Model 948 had full-contour plastic grips with checkering and the triple-arrow trademark near the top. The slide marking was in a single line: "P. BERETTA – Gardone V. T. Cal. 22LR – Mod. 948".

Soon after the .22 Model 948 became a successful market item, Beretta offered another version, the "*Modello 948 bis a due canne*" (meaning "with two barrels"). In this pistol, the front sight was mounted on the barrel itself, and the slide bridge at the front was slotted to clear the sight during disassembly and reassembly. In addition to the regular length barrel, the pistol was supplied with a longer one (150mm or 6 inches). With this barrel installed, the gun crossed over from a "plinking" pistol to the casual target class. It gained some accuracy from the increased sight radius and added front weight. But its sights were nonadjustable.

By this time, the slide markings had gone to a two-line form, and this pattern remained during the production of the pistol. On the left slide flat was "P. BERETTA – Gardone V. T. – Cal. 22 L. R.", and below this, "MOD. 948". Proof marks and date were on the left side of the frame, just above the front base of the trigger guard. On the right slide flat was "MADE IN ITALY". The serial number appeared on the right side of the



A standard Model 948 pistol, field-stripped.



The Model 948 *bis a due canne* shows the two barrel lengths provided. (Beretta Archives)



An early version of the Model 949 pistol, in .22 Short chambering. (Beretta Archives)

frame above the trigger opening. The last four digits were on the right under-edge of the slide near the muzzle, and on the right side of the barrel base. The grips were contoured plastic, diamond-checked, with wide borders and a hint of a thumbrest. The name "BERETTA" appeared in a long rectangle at the top. The area of the lanyard loop was covered by the grip.

As marketed by the J. L. Galef company in the United States, the Model 948 was called the "Plinker," and also the "Featherweight." In its regular production form, the gun was made for about eight years, from late 1949 or early 1950 until 1958. As previously noted, prototype serial numbering probably began at 000500. Regular production numbering could have started at 000600. But it is possible that it was jumped to 001000. I have not seen a true Model 948 that was numbered below the latter figure.

By 1953—the proof date on my own Model 948—the numbering had reached 029522, and that number on my pistol has an N suffix, the meaning unknown. At this point, the total number of pistols produced each year was about 9,500. By the time the Model 948 was retired in 1958, the total production was probably around 76,000. Not all were sold in the United States. Those that are here are highly desired by both shooters and collectors. The Model 948 is not often seen these days.

In the same time period as the development of the Model 948, Armi Beretta was also working on other .22 rimfire designs. One of these was a true target pistol in .22 Short chambering, designated the Model 949. It was also called the *Tipo Olimpionico*, and in the regular production version it was also available in .22 Long Rifle chambering.

The first experimental versions of the pistol were close to the Model 948 pattern, with the addition of a longer barrel and other target-type features. The rear sight was laterally adjustable and the vertically adjustable front sight was mounted on a muzzle brake that had two large top openings. A removable weight was hung below the barrel, and the front slide bridge was eliminated.

The upper rear tang of the frame was extended, and target grips with a prominent thumb-rest were added, along with a free-hanging target trigger. In the final production version, these features were included, along with a few minor changes. The frame extension in front of the guard was removed, to contour the front edge of the frame to the same level as the barrel weight. The muzzle-brake openings were also slightly modified. On both the experimental and the final production versions, the safety was the 180-degree trigger-block type.

Slide markings of the Model 949 were in two lines on the left slide flat: "PISTOLA AUT. 22 CORTO TIPO OLYMPIONICO", and "PIETRO



Pistola Olimpionica mod. 949 cal. .22 Short  
Pistolet Olympique mod. 949 cal. .22 Short  
Olympic Pistol, mod. 949, .22 Short

The regular-production *Tipo Olimpionico* Model 949 pistol. (Beretta Archives)

BERETTA GARDONE V. T. ITALIA". On the gun in Long Rifle chambering, the "22 CORTO" marking was changed to "22 L. R.". The serial numbering was in the usual locations, on the right side of the slide and frame. The Model 949 was not made in large quantity. Serial numbering began with "1," and the only numbers I have seen are 7 and 230. I doubt that the total production exceeded 500 pieces. In a gun built especially for formal target competition, such low production figures are not unusual.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 948, .22 Long Rifle**

Weight:	16.8 ounces
Length:	5.90 inches
Barrel length:	3.34 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds*

### **Model 949, .22 Short and .22 Long Rifle**

Weight:	37.6 ounces
Length:	12.5 inches
Barrel length:	8.7 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

\*The magazine of my own Model 948, and all others I have seen, will comfortably hold nine rounds.

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# 8

## Model 950 Series Pistols

The smallest of the Beretta pistols borrowed a major design feature from three earlier guns—the French Le Francais, the Spanish Jo Lo Ar, and the Austrian 1909 Steyr. The feature was a barrel that could be released by a side lever to tip upward at the rear, exposing the chamber for loading and easy cleaning. This made the pistol especially convenient for anyone with weak hands, who might have difficulty in cycling the slide against the tension of the recoil spring. With the little Beretta, a loaded magazine can be inserted, and the last round simply dropped into the chamber.

The pistol, available in 6.35mm (.25 Auto) and in .22 Short chamberings, was first designated Model 950. In its earliest form, the pistol had twin torsion-type recoil springs, located inside the grip panels on each side of the frame. The springs were the round-wire type, with the heavier springs of the .25 version cut flat over their entire length. The lighter .22 springs were flat only in the upper half of their forward arms. The true Model 950 was not made for long. The twin recoil springs were soon replaced by a single combination torsion spring, centrally mounted on a pin behind the trigger. The short center loop of the spring tensioned the barrel latch, and twin arms extended to the rear, then upward to contact



A factory drawing of the original Model 950 pistol, shown with the barrel open. (Beretta Archives)



The open barrel of the 950-series pistols allows easy loading of the last round.



A factory cutaway of the Model 950 in .25 caliber. Note the recoil spring arrangement. (Beretta Archives)



A factory cutaway of a .25 caliber Model 950B pistol. Note the different recoil spring system. (Beretta Archives)

notches in the lower edge of the slide. The springs for the .25 and .22 versions differed only in their diameter and strength.

In regular production, the .25 was now designated Model 950B, and the .22, Model 950CC. There was also another version of the .22, the Model 950CC Special. It had a longer (95mm or 3.74 inches) barrel. The only safety provided was a deep-first-notch on the external hammer that kept the hammer face out of contact with the head of the firing pin. If the pistol was carried with the chamber loaded, use of the safety notch was mandatory, as the firing pin was a full-reach non-inertia type. The magazine catch was a cross-bolt type, located on the left side in the lower rear area of the grip panel. On the earliest guns, the catch button was checkered.

The early Model 950 pistols lacked the heavy "wings" on each side of the barrel at the muzzle that were added on the Model 950B. Two early slide markings have been observed: one a single line, "P. BERETTA — CAL. 6.35 — BREV. 950", the other — on a pistol proof-dated 1950 — in three lines, "P. BERETTA — CAL. 6<sup>35</sup> — BREVET.", "GARDONE V. T. (ITALIA)" and "1950". This pistol has grips with the name "BERETTA" placed in an irregular oblong at the top, and a round, silver "PB" medalion in the lower checkered area. The magazine catch button was flat and checkered. The forward edges of the slide were square and unbevelled.

By 1953, when the new small pistols began to be generally available in the United States the "CC" suffix on the .22 Short version no longer was being used. Both the rimfire and the centerfire had slide markings that were the same, except for the caliber designation. On the .22, it was "BERETTA — MOD. 950B — CAL. 22 SHORT", and the last part of the .25 marking was "CAL. 6.35". At some point, the magazine catch button was changed from a flat checkered form to one that was domed and polished.

For the American market, the .22 was called the "Minx" and the .25 the "Jetfire." The plastic grips had a large circle near the top with the three arrows, three small circles, and the name "BERETTA" below them, following the curve of the circle rim. Lower on the checkered grip, a smaller circle carried the designations ".22 SHORT" and "MINX". A similar grip was used on the centerfire model with the small lower circle bearing ".25" and "JETFIRE". During this period (Circa 1954), the retail price of the 950B in .25 Auto was \$40. The .22 Short was slightly higher — \$42.95. The added amount for the .22 Minx reflected the extra work involved in manufacturing the rimfire firing pin, and the .22 magazine.

One other mechanical feature of the Model 950 and its later variations should be noted. The pistol has a conventional fixed ejector mounted on the frame, but there is no extractor. Both the .25 Auto and the .22



A factory drawing of the Model 950CC Special pistol. (Beretta Archives)



A mid-production example of the long-barreled version. Note that it is marked "Mod. 950B". "TIPO FLOBERT" is marked on the right side.



An early production Model 950, shown with the barrel open. Note the square front edges of the slide. (Beretta Archives)



A .22 Model 950B, as made for the American market prior to 1968. Note the "Minx" marking on the grip, and the flat checkered magazine catch button. (Beretta Archives)



**A Model 950B in .25 Auto chambering, late production. Note the smooth magazine catch button. (Beretta Archives)**

Shorts have minimal obturation when fired, and the chamber adhesion factor of these rounds is so small that it can be ignored. On firing, the empty cartridge case simply blows out of the chamber, its head supported by the breech face of the slide, until its rim encounters the ejector. This system works perfectly. I carried and used a .22 Model 950B for several years as a camping gun, and in firing several thousand rounds, I did not experience a single malfunction.

With the quality control of modern .25 and .22 cartridges, a misfire is highly unlikely. If one should occur in the small Beretta, the lack of an extractor is no problem. If the barrel latch is tripped and the barrel is allowed to spring upward, a chambered loaded round will be thrown out. Or, if the barrel is restrained on opening, the round can be easily shaken out into the palm of the hand. In normal unloading, the latter method should be used. If the pistol is being used for self-defense, the first method will instantly clear the chamber, and the slide can then be quickly cycled to chamber a fresh round.

During its period of manufacture, the Model 950B was also produced in a Beretta facility in Brazil, and some of these pistols were imported into the United States. The full address of the Beretta factory in South America was Beretta S. A., Av. da V. Manzini 450, Santo Amaro/Sao Paulo, Brazil.



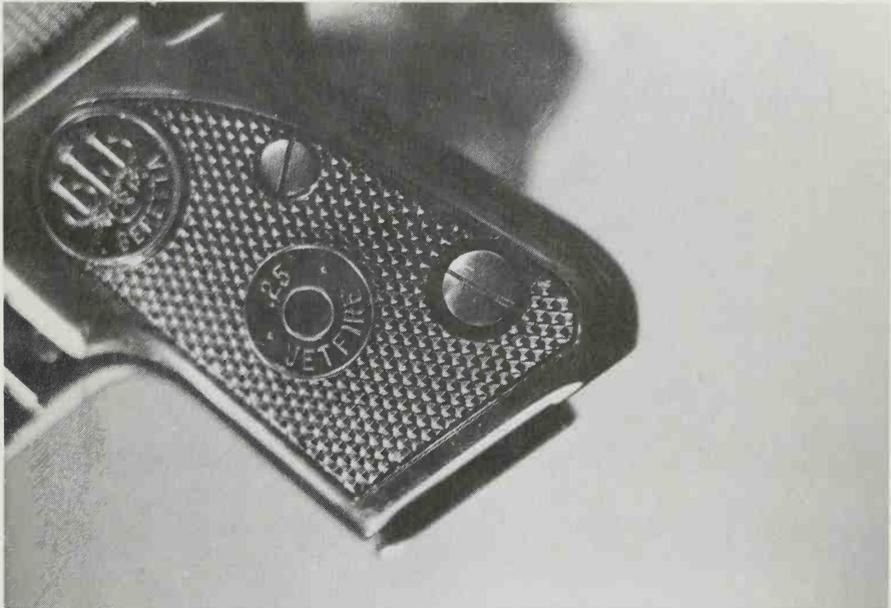
An early Model 950BS pistol in .25 caliber. Note the odd slide marking, “.25 GA.”. (Beretta Archives)



An early U.S.-made production Model 950BS in .25 Auto. The right slide marking lists the maker as Firearms International Industries. (Author's Collection)



The same Model 950BS with the barrel open. Note the "FII" mark on the barrel underlug.

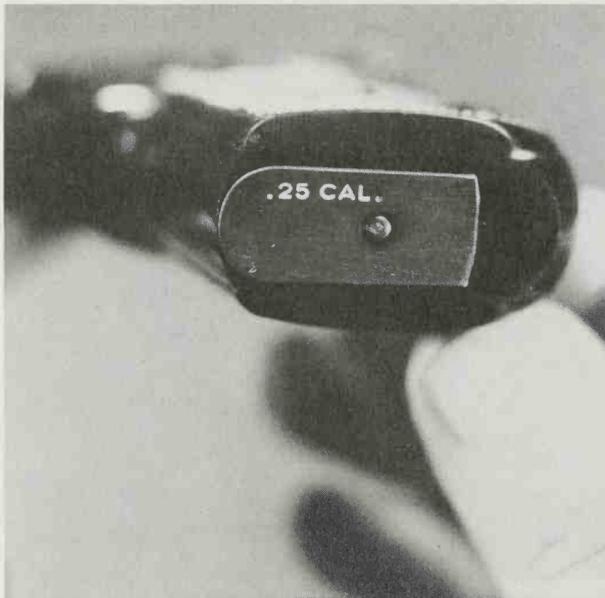


Current production (U.S.) guns retain the Jetfire and Minx names. The magazine catch button is smooth, uncheckered.

The Brazilian-made Model 950B was produced with Beretta tooling and under Beretta supervision. These guns were identical in every way to those made in Italy, including the markings on the left slide flat. On the right side of the slide, they were marked "MADE IN BRAZIL".

Along with several other fine European pistols, the Model 950B was caught in 1968 by the new U.S. importation restrictions, and was banned because of its small size. For about 10 years, none of these excellent little guns came to America. Then, in 1978, the J. L. Galef company and Beretta arranged for production of the small Beretta at the Firearms International factory in Accokeek, Maryland, a facility that later became Beretta U.S.A., Incorporated. By the time this occurred, two important changes had been added to the pistols. The firing pin was now an inertia type, allowing safe hammer-down carrying with the chamber loaded, and there was now a manual sear-block safety, located at the top rear corner of the left grip panel.

The new American-made pistols were designated Model 950BS, the added "S" obviously a reference to the manual safety. On the left slide flat, the marking on the .22 version was "BERETTA - Mod. 950BS - .22 Short". The .25 marking was the same, except for the cartridge designation, which was ".25 Cal.". On the right slide flat, early pistols were marked "MADE IN USA BY F. I. IND. ACKK, MD.". This latter mark-



Unlike the Italian-marked .22 magazine, the U.S.-made *Jetfire* is marked ".25 CAL.".



An early production (U.S.) model .22 *Minx*, which also shows Firearms International markings. Both the *Jetfire* and the *Minx* are now marked "MADE BERETTA USA CORP., ACKK, MD." on the right side of the slide. (Author's Collection)

ing was soon changed to "MADE BERETTA USA CORP., ACKK, MD.". The serial number now appeared on the left side of the frame near the front. (The earlier 950B pistols were numbered on the right side of the frame above the trigger opening, and the right slide flat was marked "MADE IN ITALY".) Tooling and supervision for the production of the Model 950BS in the Maryland facility was supplied by the Beretta factory, and the quality and features of the pistols are the same as those made in Italy.

The Model 950BS pistols retained the trade names and grip styles of the earlier guns, with the .22 Short version still known as the Minx, and the .25 Auto as the Jetfire. Both pistols are still in production at the time this is written, so discussion of serial numbers would have little significance.

The pre-1968 pistols are easily identified by their Italian proof marks and the absence of a manual safety. It may be of interest to note that all the .22 magazines I have seen are marked on the left side, near the rear edge, "P. B. CAL. 22 SHORT MADE IN ITALY", while the magazine in my .25 pistol is marked on the floorplate ".25 CAL.", and bears no "Made in Italy" stamping.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 950B, 950BS, 6.35mm (.25 Auto)**

Weight:	10 ounces
Length:	4.5 inches
Barrel length:	2.4 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

### **Model 950CC, 950BS, .22 Short**

Weight:	11 ounces
Length:	4.5 inches
Barrel length:	2.4 inches
Magazine capacity:	6 rounds

### **Model 950CC Special, .22 Short**

Weight:	11½ ounces
Length:	5.9 inches
Barrel length:	3.7 inches
Magazine capacity:	6 rounds

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# 9

## Model 951, Model 952 Pistols

As early as 1938, Tullio Marengoni and the Beretta design department were experimenting with a larger pistol, chambered for the “9mm Lungo” (“9mm Long”) cartridge—in other words, the 9mm Luger or Parabellum round.

Two or three prototypes were made in this chambering, and one is shown here. Its slide marking was in two lines: “P. BERETTA—CAL. 9m/m LUNGO—MOD. 1938 BREVETTATO”, and “GARDONE V. T.—ITALIA”. This pistol was essentially an enlarged 1934-pattern gun, and was a simple blow-back, with no locking mechanism. It relied on a heavy slide and a strong recoil spring to contain the pressures of the Parabellum round.

It worked perfectly, but it was unpleasant to shoot, having a considerable amount of felt recoil. This project was set aside during World War Two. After the war, in the busy design period that produced the pistols described in the two preceding chapters, Signor Marengoni resumed work on the large pistol. An early prototype was much like the “Model 1938,” having a top-mounted extractor and a 1934-pattern safety lever. The only notable change was the magazine catch, now a cross-bolt push-button,



The first experimental pistol in 9mm Parabellum chambering, marked "MOD. 1938". (Beretta Archives)



The initial post-war prototype in 9mm Parabellum. Except for the magazine catch, it is still an enlarged 1934-pattern gun. (Beretta Archives)

located in the lower-rear area of the left grip panel. The slide marking on this gun was in two lines: "P. BERETTA CAL. 9 MOD. 1950 PATENT", and "GARDONE V. T. ITALIA". The locking system, if any, is unknown.

The first actual prototype of the pistol that became the Model 951 (1951) had a classic Browning-type locking system, *con canna oscillante*, "with swinging barrel." The barrel moved a short distance with the slide, then was cammed downward to unlock. Just forward of the trigger pivot on the left side of the frame there was a takedown latch, which allowed the barrel and slide unit to be run forward off the frame. The extractor was moved to the right side of the slide. The safety was a trigger-block type, located just behind the trigger in a position that many modern pistols use for the magazine catch. The slide markings on this gun were the same as on the previously described prototype.

The final prototype, which had the slide markings of the other two guns, had the same external characteristics. The takedown lever now had a curved arrow on the frame, and the word "SMONTAGGIO" ("dismantle"). The safety button by the trigger had an "S" just above it. Internally, this one was quite different. Its locking system was of modified Walther P-38 pattern, with a swinging block under the barrel that locked into recesses on each side within the slide. This was the system that was finally used in the Model 951.

In the actual production model, there were several other improvements. The takedown lever was moved to the right side of the pistol, and alignment with a slide recess was necessary before it could be turned. The cross-bolt push-button safety was located in the top rear of the grip panels, and it directly blocked the sear when pushed to the left. An external automatic slide latch was positioned at the top front of the left grip panel. The barrel and slide were longer than those of the prototypes, giving the gun a superb balance in the hand. The grip panels, made of a high-quality microcell plastic, were similar to those of the Walther P-38, meeting at the rear to form the backstrap.

Slide markings of the Model 951 have remained fairly constant during its period of manufacture. On the left slide flat, in two lines, is "P. BERETTA—CAL. 9m/m MOD. 1951—PATENT", and "GARDONE V. T. —ITALIA". On the right side of the frame, just forward of the takedown lever, the word "SMONTAGGIO" is curved upward, followed by a short arrow. The serial number is on the right slide flat and on the right side of the frame above the trigger. The last four digits of the number appear on the left side of the front barrel underlug.

Proofmarks are on the left side of the frame, just to the rear of the left grip. Early pistols, prior to 1954, were marked with the proof date in



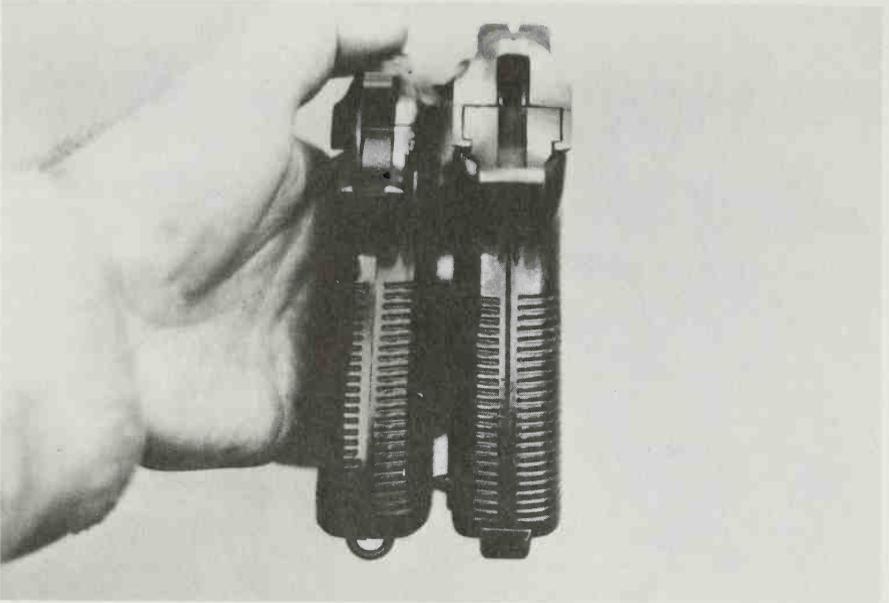
The second prototype had a Browning-style falling-barrel locking system. (Beretta Archives)



The final prototype before the production model of the 951 pistol. Note the cross-bolt safety behind the trigger. (Beretta Archives)



**A factory cutaway of the basic Model 951 pistol, showing all of the mechanical improvements. (Beretta Archives)**



A comparison of the grip design of the Model 951 (left) and the Walther P-38. The locking system is also similar.



The Model 951 in its final form. This was the pattern of the commercial, Italian military, and Israeli pistols. (Beretta Archives)



A typical commercial Model 951 pistol, serial number 22939. (Author's Collection)

regular numbers. Later guns were date-coded with Roman numerals, with "X" being 1954, and, the progression following to later dates. My own Model 1951—number 22939—is proof-dated "XXII", which indicates 1966. In the late 1970s, the Italian Proof House changed to a two-letter date code, which is still in use. (See Appendix.)

When the design of the 9mm pistol was finalized in 1951, the gun was not immediately put into full production. A test run was made with frames of *Ergal*, a tough aluminum alloy, in an attempt at weight reduction. With the light alloy frame, the Model 951 weighed only 25.4 ounces, and this was an advantage from a carrying standpoint. In all, about one hundred of the alloy-frame pistols were made, and some of that number were purchased by the government of Colombia.

The alloy-frame version did not have the fine balance of the steel frame, and there were other problems. It was finally decided to make the



The commercial "Brigadier", as marketed in the United States. Shown are the original box, factory test target, spare magazine, and Proof House tag. (Author's Collection)



The Egyptian contract version of the Model 951. Note the differences from the standard pistol. (A. J. R. Cormack)

regular production pistol in steel frame only, with a total weight of 31.4 ounces. In this form, the Model 951 began full production in 1956. It was adopted by the Italian Army and Navy, and by the military services of Egypt, Israel, and Nigeria.

The earliest production versions of the Model 951 had a frame and slide that were about one-quarter-inch shorter than the ones in later use, and the forward end of the 4½-inch barrel protruded more, about one-half inch. This feature was present on the pistols made for the government of Egypt.

There were also other differences in the Egyptian model. The magazine catch was a lower-rear type, made of formed strap steel, and the left grip had a slot in its lower rear edge for the protrusion of a lanyard loop. The grips had an irregularly-shaped checkered area at the center, containing the arrows-and-circles Beretta trademark near the top. In the back-strap area, the meeting grip panels formed a straight line, instead of the curve of the regular Model 951. The grips were retained with two screws on each side.

The finish of the Egyptian version was either a matte blue or a phosphate-type surface, and on one observed gun the left slide markings were in two lines: "MODELLO 1951E CAL. 9mm PARA", and "P. BERETTA 1956". To the rear of this, near the slide serrations, was an Egyptian crest. The serial number appeared in the usual positions on the right side of the slide and frame, and the number had an "E" prefix on the gun seen. The Egyptian pistols were numbered in a separate series, with four-digit numbers and alphabetical prefix letters. The total number of the Egyptian contract has not been made public, but if the prefix letters began with "A", at least 50,000 were made.

In 1957, in cooperation with Egyptian small arms authorities, Beretta produced a target version of the Model 951, called the "Berhama". This pistol had a longer barrel—148mm, or 5¾ inches—with a high ramp-type front sight. The target style rear sight was fully adjustable. The oversize walnut grips had a prominent thumbrest and flared lower edges. The slide marking was in two lines: "P. BERETTA GARDONE V. T. Cal. 9 Para", and "MOD. 51/57 EM BERHAMA". I have no exact production figures for the *Berhama*, but the quantity was probably not large.

After the initial contract order for Egypt was completed, Beretta licensed the Maadi company of Helwan to produce a copy of the Model 951 in Egypt, to supply any additional pistols needed by the Egyptian Army or Police. These guns, while lacking the meticulous fit and finish of genuine Beretta pistols, are well-made and reliable. On one example observed, the left slide marking is "HELWAN CAL. 9m/m" and "U. A. R." to the left, a factory or military symbol at the center, and a repetition in



The Berhama, the Egyptian target version of the Model 951. (Beretta Archives)

Arabic on the right. It is interesting to note that this pistol is not of the Egyptian contract pattern, but matches the standard Model 951.

Recently, the Maadi company has offered an export version of its Model 951 copy for sale in the United States. The initial importation was handled by Steyr-Daimler-Puch of America, Incorporated. Like the one described, this gun is an exact copy of the Model 951. On my own commercial Helwan pistol, the left slide marking is in three lines, near the front edge of the flat: "HELWAN AUTOMATIC PISTOL", "CALIBER 9mm PARABELLUM", and "MAADI CO. MADE IN EGYPT". On the right slide flat, in the same location, it is apparently repeated in Arabic. Also, on the right, the serial #S0252 is just forward of the slide serrations, followed by "STEYR, SECAUCUS N. J." (Note: the Steyr importation office has since moved.) The serial number is repeated on the right side of the frame above the trigger, and the last three digits of the number appear on the right side of the front barrel underlug.

As far as I can determine, the Israeli contract pistols are of standard Model 951 pattern. Getting back to the original Italian-made pistols, the adoption of the 9mm Parabellum cartridge and the Model 951 as Italian military guns created a problem for sport shooters in Italy. They are forbidden to own pistols in any military caliber and would have been denied access to the fine-shooting Model 951. Armi Beretta solved this easily, by creating the Model 952, chambered for the 7.65mm Parabellum cartridge, known in the United States as the .30 Luger. This required a difference in only one part, the barrel (the bottlenecked .30 Luger round has the same overall dimensions as the 9mm Parabellum).

I have seen two examples of the Model 952; one was marked "Mod. 1951". This was a pistol proof-dated "XIX" (1963); the slide marking was "P. BERETTA — Cal. 7.65 Mod. 1951 — PARA", and "GARDONE V. T. — ITALIA". It was of standard Model 951 pattern, differing only in the chambering. Production of the Model 952 began in 1963, and the numbering was in a separate sequence, from 1001 to 2933.

The other gun was, in appearance, a Berhama, but with slightly different sights and a much nicer walnut thumbrest grip with checkering. This was the Model 952 Special, the target version of the pistol that first was produced in 1971. It was marked "BERETTA — Cal. 7.65 Mod. 1952 — PARA", and "GARDONE V. T. — ITALIA". These two versions were intended primarily for the Italian market, but were also sold in other countries that had restrictions on private ownership of military caliber handguns, France, for example. A .22 Long Rifle conversion unit was also made for the Model 952 Special.

One experiment with the Model 951 was a machine-pistol concept, the Model 951A, also called the Model 951R. A longer barrel and a heavier



The commercial Egyptian Helwan pistol, as marketed in the United States by Steyr. (Author's Collection)



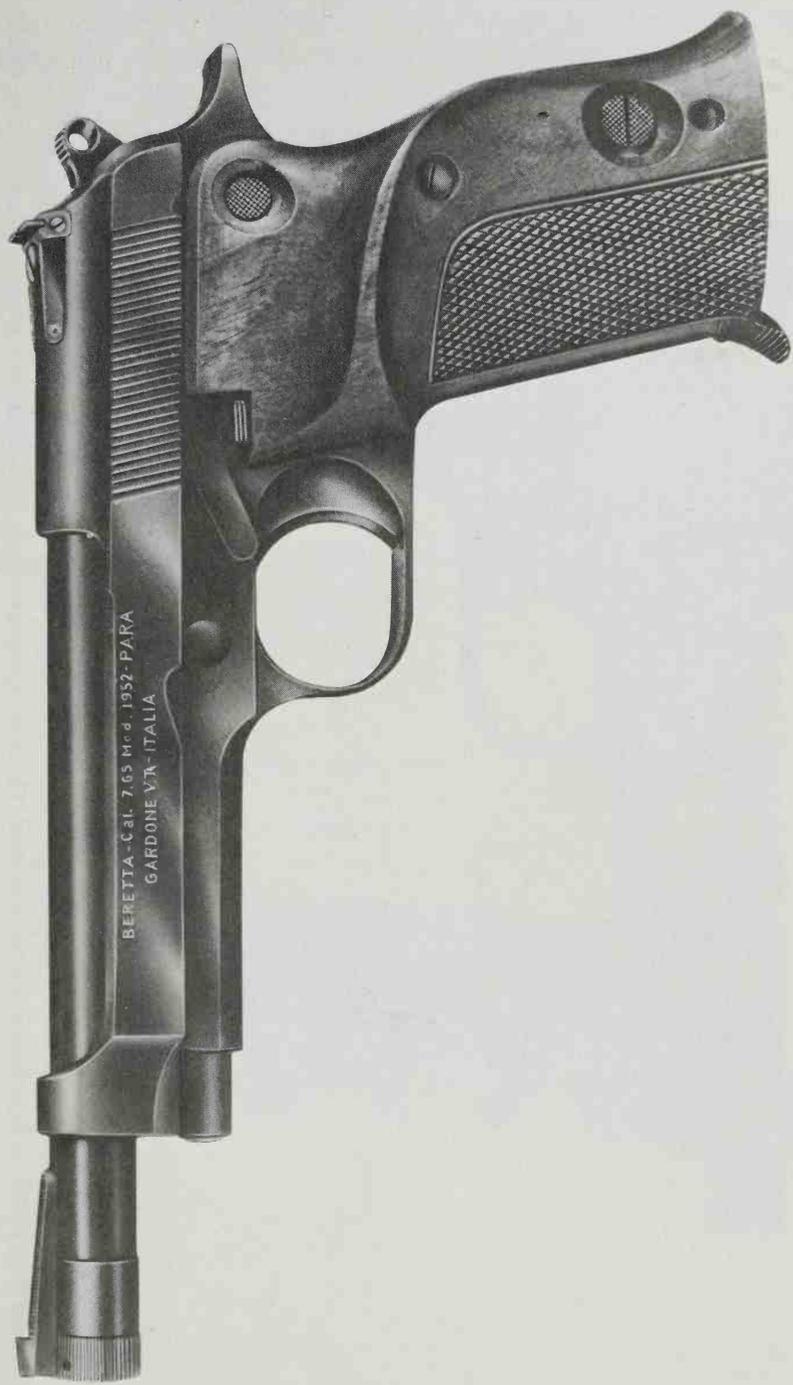
The Model 952 pistol, in 7.65mm Parabellum chambering. Note that this one is marked "Mod. 1951". (Beretta Archives)

slide and hammer were added, and the frame was extended at the front to mount a folding handgrip. On the right side, at the top front of the grip panel, a selector lever was moved upward to an "AUT" marking for full-auto firing, and downward to an "SEM" marking for semi-auto. In one example seen, the added slide weight was achieved by means of extra side bars that were attached to a regular slide with two large screws.

This variation used special magazines of 10- and 15-round capacity. Reportedly, the Model 951A (or, 951R) was supplied in small quantity to the *Carabinieri*, and was not sold commercially. The cyclic rate was around 750 rounds per minute, and it was kept relatively low by a retarding device at the rear beneath the left edge of the slide. Its fire was still too rapid for a pistol of this weight. The left slide markings were "MODELLO 1951 CAL. 9mm", and "P. BERETTA".

The U.S. commercial version of the Model 951 was marketed as the "Brigadier". In this form, it made an appearance in the world of popular fiction. In the capable hands of Don Pendelton's Mafia-fighting hero Mack Bolan — the "Executioner" — the "Beretta Belle" — figured in the demise of numerous enemies of civilized society.

Pietro Beretta's long and productive life ended on May 1, 1957. On December 31 of the same year, Tullio Marengoni, designer of a long line of fine Beretta pistols, also died. He held the high Italian honorary title



The Model 952 Special, the Italian target version, in 7.65mm Parabellum. Compare the features with the 9mm Berhama. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 951A (951R), an experimental selective-fire pistol. The front handgrip could be folded to the rear when not in use. (Beretta Archives)

*Maestro del Lavoro*, conferred on those who have distinguished themselves in the field of engineering. It was well-deserved for all his accomplishments, especially for the Model 951—his final design.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 951, 9mm Parabellum**

Weight: 31.4 ounces  
Length: 8 inches  
Barrel length: 4.52 inches  
Magazine capacity: 8 rounds

### **Model 952, 7.65mm Parabellum**

Weight: 32.2 ounces  
(Other data same as Model 951.)

### **Model 952 Special, 7.65mm Parabellum**

Weight: 33.6 ounces  
Length: 9.76 inches  
Barrel length: 5.9 inches  
Magazine capacity: 8 rounds

### **Model 951A (951R), 9mm Parabellum**

Weight: 47.6 ounces  
Length: 8.5 inches  
Barrel length: 4.9 inches  
Magazine capacity: 10 and 15 rounds

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# 10

## Model 70 Series Pistols

In 1958, a complete redesign of the medium-frame Beretta pistols was put into production. Here ended the Model 934, Model 935, Model 948, and Model 949, replaced by guns that would be known as the "70 Series." Externally, the basic "Beretta look" was retained, but the front of the trigger guard now had a graceful sweep up to the frame. The grips were changed to the type used on the Model 951, meeting at the rear to form the backstrap, and the shape was improved. Other features of the Model 951 were also used on the early versions, including the cross-bolt sear-block safety and the push-button magazine catch. An automatic external slide latch was also added.

The first of the guns designated Model 70 was the 7.65mm (.32 Auto) version, called the "New Puma" in the U.S. market, and so marked on the grips. Internally, there were several major changes. The barrel mounting rails were made longer for added strength and stability. The firing mechanism was changed to the Model 951 pattern, with direct sear and trigger bar contact and a separate disconnecter.

The quick-takedown lever on the right side of the frame was also used in the Model 70 design. The pistol was in production for only a short time



Pistola mod. 70 cal. 7,65  
Pistolet mod. 70 cal. 7,65  
Mod. 70 Pistol, 7,65 cal.

The Model 70 pistol, in 7.65mm (.32 Auto) chambering. The early version had the cross-bolt, push-button safety and pedal type slide latch of the Model 951. (Beretta Archives)



A typical U.S. import Model 70. Note the "New Puma" marking on the grip.



A factory drawing of the Model 70 in .22 Long Rifle chambering. (Beretta Archives)



The slide markings on this pistol are "FALCON Cal. 32" and "MADE IN ITALY". The pistol bears regular Italian proof marks and a 1972 date, and the serial number is F 0003. The upper angles of the slide are flat planes, and the rear top of the slide has lengthwise grooving. This is a prototype designed for the SPESCO Corporation of Atlanta, Georgia, which had a falcon head as a trademark. The design is similar to the Model 70 pistol, and prototypes were also made in .22 caliber. This pistol was never made in regular production. (Photos courtesy of Joel Glovsky and Joseph Schroeder)

before an additional change was made. The cross-bolt push-button safety was phased out, and a lever-type safety, still a sear-block, was located in the same area.

This safety change also occurred in the other 70-Series pistols, models 71 through 76. The Model 71 was the .22 Long Rifle version, and in appearance and features it was identical to the Model 70. Like the .32, it had a magazine capacity of eight rounds. The Model 71 was marketed in the U.S. as the "Jaguar". The Model 72 was essentially the same as the Model 71, but was supplied with two interchangeable barrels, the extra one having a length of 150mm (5.9 inches). The Model 73 was the same pistol with the long barrel only, and with both front and rear sights mounted on the barrel. The grip frame was longer, and the magazine capacity was 10 rounds.

In the target pistol area, the Model 74 was similar to the Model 73, but the barrel-mounted rear sight was fully adjustable, both vertically and horizontally. The Model 75 was the same as the Model 72, but with the long barrel only. Beretta's first serious .22 target pistol was the Model 76. The frame and slide were similar to these units on the other 70-Series pistols, but an extended and weighted barrel assembly was added. Its upper section extended back over the top of the slide and carried a well-designed and fully-adjustable rear sight. The Model 76 was, and is, comparatively low-priced for a true target pistol, and is popular with target shooters. It was marketed in the U.S. under the name "Sable".

During a brief period in the late 1960s, several of the pistols described were model-numbered in a separate 100-Series designation on the U.S. market. Following enactment of the federal firearms law of 1968, with its strange "importation criteria," a version of the 7.65mm Model 70 was offered with the longer barrel and grip frame of the .22 pistols, and with adjustable sights. It was called the Model 100, and was marked on the right slide flat "P. B. — MOD. 100 — MADE IN ITALY". This pistol was not made in large quantity.

The 100-Series designations were applied to several other Beretta pistols of that period. The Model 101 was the Model 71, and the Model 102 was the Model 76, also known as the "New Sable." In the same group was the Model 951, which was very briefly called the Model 104. While the other pistols were actually marked for a short time with the 100-Series designations, I have not seen a Model 951 marked "Model 104." I do have an owner's manual, printed in Brescia in 1969, which refers to the pistol as Model 104, with no mention of its Model 951 designation.

All of the 100-Series references were soon dropped, and the model designations returned to their original form. In the last half of the 1970s, a magazine safety was added to the 70-Series design, an automatic internal



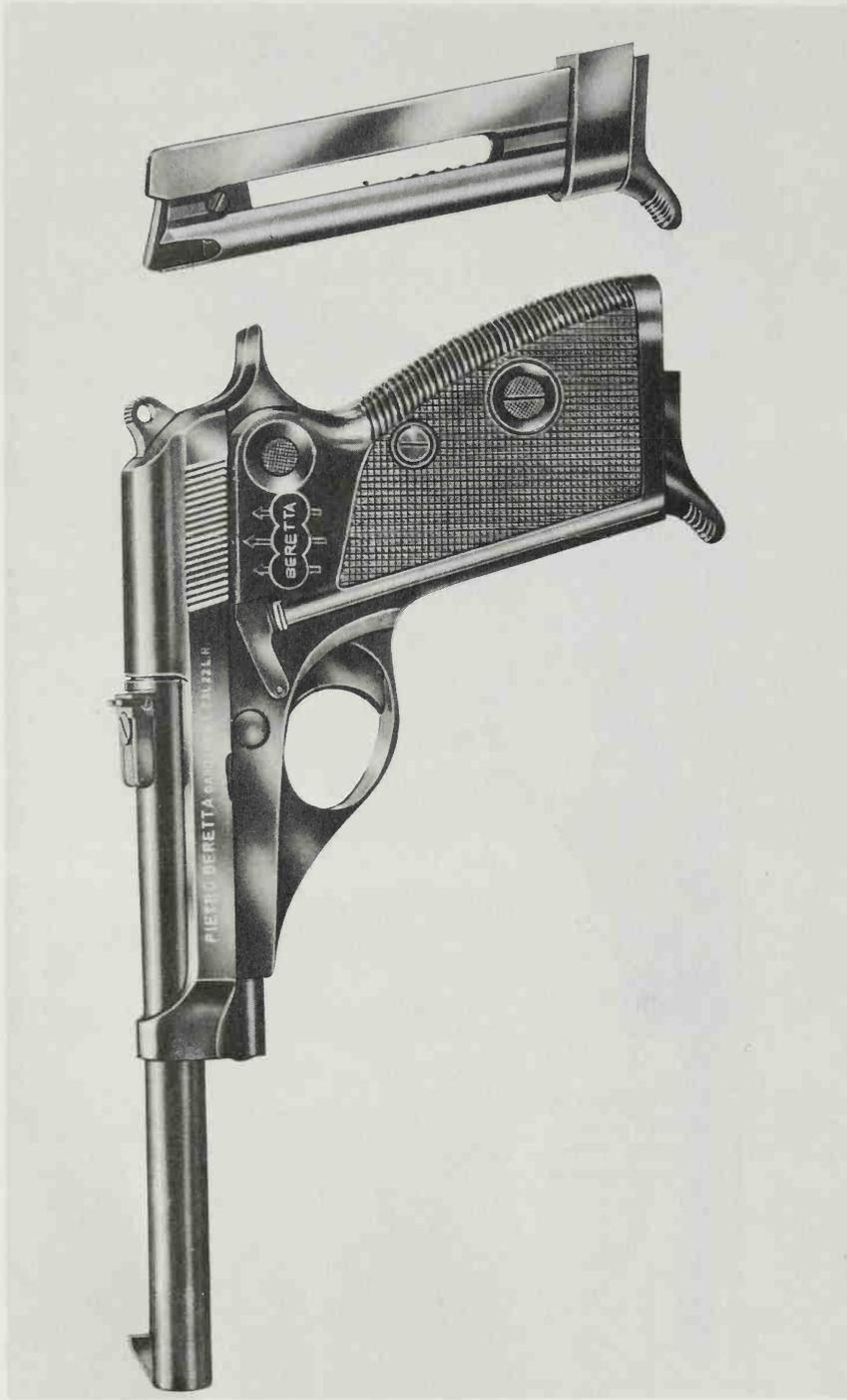
The early Model 72 pistol, shown in a factory drawing with the long barrel installed. The standard-length barrel is shown below. (Beretta Archives)



An early Model 72 pistol, serial number F29664, with the long barrel installed. Also shown field-stripped.



The early Model 73 pistol. Note the fixed sight on the barrel over the chamber. (Beretta Archives)



A factory drawing of the early Model 74 pistol, shown with the extended 10-shot magazine. The rear sight is fully adjustable. (Beretta Archives)



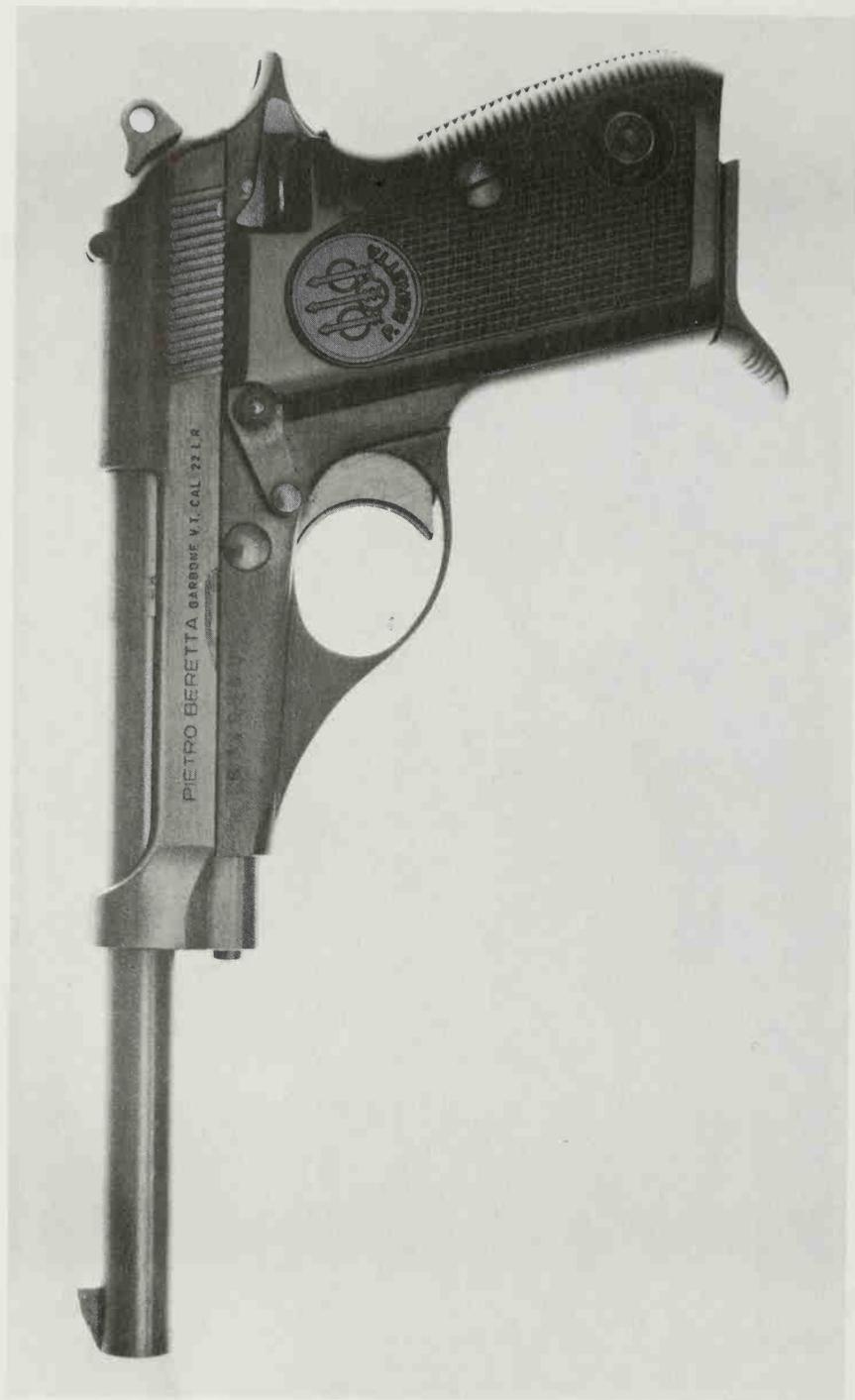
The late Model 72 pistol, shown in a factory drawing with the extra short barrel below. Note the changed safety and slide latch. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 73 in late form. (Beretta Archives)



The late Model 74, essentially the same as the early version, but with a different safety and slide latch. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 75 pistol in late form. Note the non-screw-type magazine catch button. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 76 "Sable" pistol, shown in its early and late versions. The early gun has the plastic grips, and the later one would be termed a "76W." (Beretta Archives)



The Model 70S pistol in 7.65mm (.32 Auto) chambering. (Beretta Archives)



A deluxe nickerled and engraved version of the Model 70S in 7.65mm (.32 Auto). (Beretta Archives)



The Model 70S pistol in 9mm Corto (.380 Auto) chambering, as currently offered on the U.S. market. The .22 Long Rifle version of the same pistol has an adjustable rear sight. (Beretta Archives)

device that prevented firing when the magazine was out of the pistol. This new version was designated the Model 70S. At about the same time, the pistol was offered in 9mm Corto (.380 Auto) *per mercati esteri*—for export only. The Model 70S designation is now applied to both the .22 and .380 pistols that are currently imported, and the 71 through 75 numbers no longer are used. The Model 76 target pistol retains this designation, with the addition of a “P” suffix for plastic grips, and a “W” for wood.

The presently imported Model 70S pistol in .380 chambering has fixed sights, although the rear sight is dovetail-mounted and can be drifted for horizontal adjustment, if needed. The .22 Long Rifle version is identical in all other features, but it has a fully-adjustable rear sight. Plastic grips with a thumb-rest on the left panel are standard. The slide marking on the left side is “PIETRO BERETTA Gardone V. T. Made in Italy”, and on the right is the model designation and caliber.

There have been some variations in the markings. A .380 pistol has been observed with “PIETRO BERETTA—Gardone V. T. Cal. 380” on the left side of the slide, and below the caliber marking, “Made In Italy”. The right-side marking of this pistol is not known. The new grips have

a circle surrounding the magazine catch button that displays the words "BERETTA" and "MADE IN ITALY". On all current Beretta pistols, the serial number is on the left side of the frame, near its forward edge.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 70, 7.65mm (.32 Auto)**

Weight:	23.3 ounces (steel frame) 18.4 ounces (alloy frame)
Length:	6.5 inches
Barrel length:	3.5 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

### **Model 71, .22 Long Rifle**

Weight:	17 ounces
(Other data as for Model 70.)	

### **Model 72, .22 Long Rifle**

Weight:	19 ounces
Length:	8.8 inches (with 5.9 inch barrel)

### **Model 74, .22 Long Rifle**

Weight:	20 ounces
Length:	9.2 inches
Barrel length:	5.9 inches
Magazine capacity:	10 rounds

### **Model 76, .22 Long Rifle**

Weight:	33 ounces
Length:	8.8 inches
Barrel length:	5.9 inches
Magazine capacity:	10 rounds

### **Model 100, 7.65mm (.32 Auto)**

Weight:	35 ounces
(Other data as for Model 74.)	

### **Model 70S, 9mm Corto (.380 Auto)**

Weight:	23 ounces
Length:	6.5 inches
Barrel length:	3.5 inches
Magazine capacity:	7 rounds

**Model 70S, .22 Long Rifle**

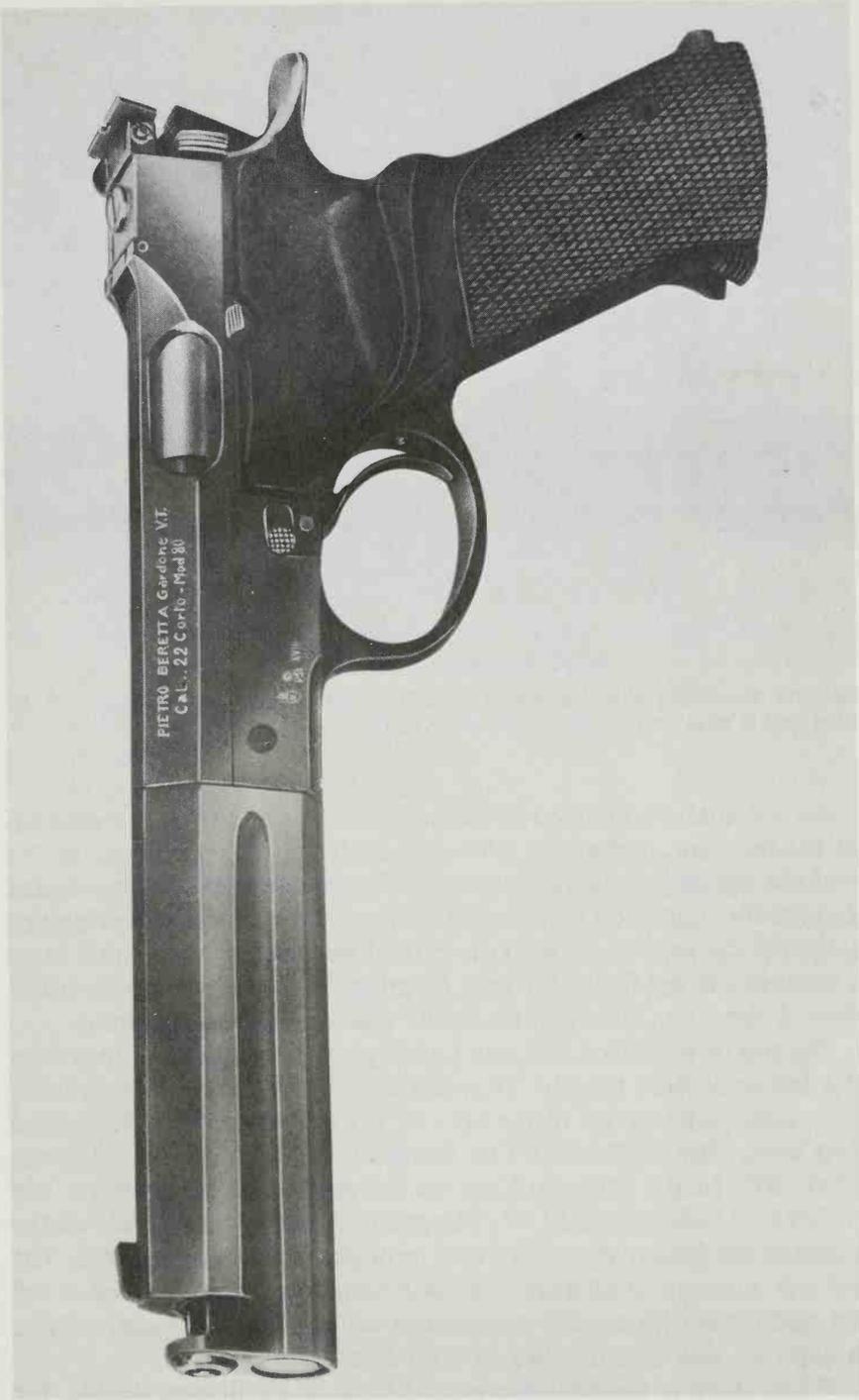
Weight:	18 ounces
Length:	6.5 inches
Barrel length:	3.5 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

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## Model 80 Pistol

The Model 76 was — and still is — an excellent target pistol. In the specialized game of rapid fire competition, however, there are certain requirements it did not have. A pistol for this purpose should have a particular hang and balance, and should be designed entirely around the light-recoiling .22 Short cartridge. In 1972, Beretta introduced a pistol that had these characteristics, and more — the Model 80. Mechanically, it was a departure from all previous Beretta designs. Instead of a conventional slide, the Model 80 had a cylindrical internal bolt having a short travel, just enough to clear the tiny .22 Short cartridge.

The long barrel had a large top vent at the muzzle, an efficient brake that reduced muzzle jump. The barrel was entirely enclosed in a sleeve that included a counter-weight. This assembly was also tightly joined to the upper receiver, an arrangement that allowed both sights to be mounted on a non-moving surface. The sight system was fully adjustable. The trigger had both weight of pull and over-travel adjustments, and could be set as light as seven ounces. The angle of the grip frame was an excellent 32 degrees, and the checkered walnut grips were contoured for the trigger finger, the thumb, and the heel of the hand. A long upper tang protected the hand from the external hammer.



The Beretta Model 80 pistol was designed for rapid fire target competition, and was made only for the .22 Short Cartridge. (Beretta Archives)



In this view, the Model 80 is shown with the bolt locked in open position. Note that the ejection port is open on both sides. (Beretta Archives)

An automatic hold-open device caught the bolt in the open position after the last shot, and a bolt release was conveniently positioned at the top of the left grip panel. A lever-type trigger-block safety was situated just above the trigger, on the left side. Pushing out a single spring-retained cross-pin in the receiver allowed the entire barrel and bolt assembly to be run forward off the frame for easy cleaning. The hammer was designed to have a short arc. This fast lock-time was an accuracy advantage.

The top of the barrel and bolt housing was flat, and the upper sides had a flat slant from the top. The ejection port was open to both sides. On the slant just forward of the port on the left, the pistol was marked in two lines, "PIETRO BERETTA Gardone V. T.", and "Cal. 22 Corto - Mod. 80". In the same position on the right side, the marking was "PATENT MADE IN ITALY". The proof marks and date were on the left side of the frame, above the front terminus of the trigger guard. The pistol was supplied in an attractive leatherette carrying case lined in red cloth, and came with a spare magazine, a wrench for the counter-weight, cleaning rod, two wire brushes, and an oiler.

While there is considerable hand-fitting in all Beretta pistols, the

target-grade Model 80 was almost entirely hand-built; only 1,100 were manufactured. The serial numbering was in a separate series. Production ceased in February, 1974. I can only speculate on the reasons for its discontinuance, as it was a superb target pistol. Perhaps no world class shooter could be persuaded to abandon his Hämmerli and win matches with the Beretta. Or, it could simply be that the substantial price of this hand-built pistol was a little too much for the market at that time. In deciding to drop a gun from the line, any manufacturer will base the decision on sales. It may well be that not enough Model 80s were sold to warrant the considerable cost and shop time necessary to continue producing it.

Whatever the reasons, from the standpoint of the Beretta collector, the Model 80 is one of the rarest of the breed. Mechanically, it is one of the most fascinating of Beretta pistols. With the growing number of shooters who are becoming interested in the serious target game, it could be that at some time in the future the basic design of the Model 80 might be resurrected. If this happens, it will require no "updating," for it was far ahead of its time.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 80, .22 Short**

Weight:	37 ounces
Length:	12 inches
Barrel length:	6.7 inches
Magazine capacity:	6 rounds

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# 12

## Model 90 Pistol

During the first 50 years of pistol production, all Beretta automatics shared one general design feature: A single action trigger system.

Meanwhile, in the rest of the firearms world, the revolver-style, double-action firing system had gradually become practically a standard in modern automatic pistols. In the pocket pistols, double-action began on a small scale with Alois Tomiska and the "Little Tom" .25 and .32 automatics, followed in 1929 by the Walther PP and PPK. Soon after this came Juan Esperanza's short-lived Ecia, and the neat Le Français pistols, the last two named being hammerless double-action-only designs. Larger caliber double-action guns came a little later, with the 9mm Walther P-38 and, after World War Two, the Smith & Wesson Model 39.

In the late 1960s, the people at Beretta decided that the time had come to produce a double-action pistol. Prototypes were made early in 1968, and production began in October of that year. The pistol was called the Model 90, and it was chambered only for the 7.65mm (.32 Auto) cartridge. The design was primarily by Dino Boglioli, but I have also seen references to Vittorio Valle in connection with the Model 90. Signor Valle, formerly of the Venice Naval Arsenal, joined the Beretta design department in 1962.



This early factory drawing of the Model 90 pistol shows some slight differences from the actual production gun, especially in the contour of the rear of the slide. (Beretta Archives)

The Model 90 was a drastic departure from traditional Beretta design concepts, and it was also notable for being made in Italy, but not in Gardone. The entire production took place at the *Armi Roma*, a new Beretta facility on the *Via Prenestina* in Rome.

Instead of the familiar Beretta silhouette, the Model 90 had sweeping modern lines and a fully enclosed barrel. The slide had a conventional ejection port on the right side, and the recoil spring encircled the barrel. The top of the slide had a wide and finely grooved sighting rib. The slide and the trigger guard were beautifully sculptured; overall, the Model 90 was a handsome pistol. The grips were of black microcell plastic, meeting to form the backstrap at the rear. In the lower checkered portion, a circle contained a representation of an ancient Roman helmet, with "P. BERETTA" above it, and "ARMI-ROMA" below. The left grip had a prominent thumb-rest, a questionable feature on a medium frame, personal defense pistol, but one that gave it extra points for U.S. importation.

There were many innovations in the design. The shrouded hammer was of the rebound type, its resting position secured by a deep safety shelf and a wide and heavy sear. The manual safety was a lever on the left side at the rear, its cross-shaft notched to engage a lug on the underside of the hammer spur. When the hammer was cocked and the safety engaged, the notch rolled into the lug to directly secure the hammer. With the hammer at rest, the safety prevented full hammer travel. The magazine catch was a push-button type, located on the left side of the frame at the rear base of the trigger guard.

The magazine floor-plate had a short cross-grooved finger rest, and the lower frame at the rear was contoured to meet the back of the floor-plate, to prevent snagging. The frame was of aluminum alloy, anodized black. All other parts were steel, and the trigger was finished in satin chrome. The barrel was made of stainless steel, one of the early uses of this material in pistols. The takedown system was a clever piece of engineering. The takedown latch was positioned at the front of the frame, its serrated wings being covered when the slide was closed. With the safety lever in on-safe position, the slide was locked, open or closed.

The pistol was marked on the left slide flat "P. BERETTA—Armi Roma—Cal. 7.65", and on the right side of the slide, "MOD 90—MADE IN ITALY". The serial number was on the left side of the frame, just forward of the top front corner of the grip panel. Below the number was "BR", for "Beretta Roma." This marking was repeated on the left side of the barrel flange, and on the underside of the slide at the front. Proof marks and the date—in Roman numeral code—were on the right side of the frame at the rear. The magazine was marked on the left side at its rear edge "PB CAL. 7.65 MADE IN ITALY". My early Model 90 pistol, num-



**An early Model 90 pistol, left side. (Author's Collection)**



**The same pistol, right side. (Author's Collection)**



The Model 90 pistol, field-stripped. In later versions, an external slide latch was added. (Author's Collection)

ber 04389, is also marked on the left side of the frame, just above the trigger, "BERBEN N. Y. N. Y.". This marking on Beretta pistols is a reference to the corporation that handles the actual importation of the guns from Italy.

In the United States, many firearms authorities have long advised that the minimum effective cartridge for a self defense pistol is the .380 Automatic. If the Model 90 had been made in this chambering, it would have given some stiff competition to the Walther and several other medium frame double-action pistols of its time period. Since it was made only in .32 Auto, it did not sell as well as expected in the American market. During its period of manufacture, Beretta added an external slide latch to the design of the Model 90, but the chambering remained the same, and this improvement did not increase its acceptance by U.S. purchasers. Production ceased in March, 1982, and Beretta USA recently disposed of its remaining stock of the pistol, selling the last lot to a wholesale distributor. The total quantity produced was 22,000.

In the early 1970s, when I covered the Model 90 in a magazine article, I asked Beretta whether there was a possibility that the pistol might be made in .380. I was told that there were no plans to do this. At the same time, they hinted that the reason for the negative answer was a new double-action pistol, then in the prototype stage, that would be available in both .32 and .380 chambering. Nearly five years passed before this one was introduced, but it was definitely worth waiting for.

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### SPECIFICATIONS

#### Model 90, 7.65mm (.32 Auto)

Weight:	19.5 ounces
Length:	6.7 inches
Barrel length:	3.6 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

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## **Model 81, Model 84 Series Pistols**

The new medium-frame double-action pistols were introduced in 1975, and the two calibers were designated with separate model numbers. The Model 81 was in 7.65mm (.32 Auto), and the .380 version was called the Model 84. Considering their experience with the .32 caliber Model 90, American readers might wonder why Beretta would bother making a model in .32 Auto. In Europe, 7.65mm is considered quite adequate as a personal defense caliber, and it has even seen quite a lot of police use. So, the Model 81 was made principally for the European market. In the United States, the .380 Model 84 is the version most purchased.

Except for the caliber and the magazine capacity, the Model 81 and Model 84 are identical. Both have a double row, stagger-type magazine, and the Model 84 has a magazine capacity of 13 rounds.

In most of the pistols made in these two calibers, the slightly smaller diameter of the .32 cartridge allowed one more round of magazine capacity in the smaller caliber. Thus, you would expect that the Model 81 would have a magazine capacity of 14 rounds, but this is not the case. For some strange reason, the magazine of the Model 81 has deep side impressions that restrict its capacity to 12 rounds, one less than the Model 84. The



The Model 81 pistol, 7.65mm (.32 Auto), in its early form. The sectioned magazine shown with it was made for illustration purposes only. Production magazines had a single counter hole at the 12-round level. (Beretta)



An early Model 84 pistol, 9mm Corto (.380 Auto), shown with a factory cutaway magazine. (Beretta Archives)

only mechanical factor I can think of in this connection is that the .380 is a true "rimless" cartridge, while the .32 Auto is a semi-rim. Perhaps it was a question of feeding reliability.

The Model 81/84 pistols have the streamlined trigger guard of the Model 90, but the slide design is a return to the familiar Beretta configuration. The takedown is ultra-simple, with a lever on the right side of the frame that is released to turn by a spring-powered button on the left side. When the lever is turned downward, the slide, barrel, and recoil spring assembly can be run forward off the frame. When a cartridge is in the chamber, the extractor protrudes slightly and exposes a red-enamelled recess on its top, which acts as a loaded indicator. An automatic external slide latch holds the slide open after the last shot, and the latch pedal is generously proportioned and easy to operate.

With these pistols, Beretta became one of the first major manufacturers to accommodate shooters who are left-handed (about 15 percent). The sear-block safety has twin levers, and is easily operated from either side of the frame. The magazine release is also ambidextrous, but in this case a reversal and reinstallation is required. All magazines are double-slotted, and will work with the catch in either right or left installation. The trigger is vertically grooved, but not too deeply, and a small protrusion on its back surface limits overtravel.

On the earliest Model 81 and Model 84 pistols, the grips were of smooth walnut, and an automatic magazine safety was standard equipment. The front and backstrap of the grip frame were smooth. The markings on my own Model 84, a very early gun, are as follows: "PIETRO BERETTA Gardone V. T. CAL. 9 Short", and below the caliber marking, "MADE IN ITALY"—on the right side of the slide, "BERBEN CORPORATION N. Y. — N. Y.", and "PATENTED"—on the right side of the frame, just to the rear of the trigger pivot, "PB". The serial number appears on the left side of the frame, near the front. "PB" also is on the left side of the barrel base, and the proof marks and date are on the right side of the forward base of the trigger guard. The magazine is marked on the left side at its rear edge, "PB CAL 9 SHORT MADE IN ITALY".

No discussion of the Model 81 and Model 84 pistols would be complete without mentioning a variation that might be called "Beretta's Browning." In 1978, Browning Arms of America introduced a pistol named the "BDA .380 Auto." An extensively modified version of the Model 84, this pistol was made for Browning by Beretta. The slide is a fully enclosed type, and at the rear it carries an ambidextrous firing pin block safety. When applied, the safety also draws the firing pin slightly forward into its tunnel, and at the end of its arc the safety trips the sear and drops



The author's Model 84 pistol, an early U.S. import example. The serial number is B00377Y.



The Browning BDA-380 pistol, made in Italy by Beretta for FN in Belgium. It is essentially a modified form of the Beretta Model 84. (Author's Collection)

the hammer. In addition to this, there is an automatic internal hammer-block safety that is cleared only when the trigger is fully to the rear.

The hammer has a revolver-style long spur. The smooth walnut grips have a medallion with a "B" monogram, and the left slide flat is marked "BROWNING ARMS COMPANY", and "MORGAN UTAH MONTREAL PQ". The frame is marked on the left side near its front edge "BDA-380", followed by the serial number. On the barrel, in the ejection port, is "CAL. 9 Short", and below this, "380 Auto". The right slide flat has an oval containing the Beretta "PB" monogram, and "MADE IN ITALY". Instead of the single counter-hole of the early Model 84 magazine, the one in the Browning has three holes in its rear surface, and they are numbered "4", "8", and "13". The floorplate of the magazine is marked "CAL. 9 Short/380 Auto".

Meanwhile, back in Belgium, the *Fabrique Nationale* has offered essentially the same pistol—with different markings—as the FN Model 140. It is available in both 7.65mm (.32 Auto) and .380 Auto. For those who may wonder why Beretta would manufacture this special version of the pistols for Browning and FN, it should be noted that *Fabrique Nationale* owns a sizeable amount of Beretta stock.

Getting back to the true Beretta Model 81 and Model 84 pistols, two new versions were added recently, and their principal difference was a single-row magazine. The .32 pistol was designated Model 82, and the .380 Model 85. The single-row magazines reduce the capacities to nine rounds in the .32 and eight in the .380, but they also allow a somewhat thinner grip frame, enhancing the concealability. A further width reduction was made possible with the option of plastic grip panels, which can be made a little thinner than the walnut type. The other difference of the Model 82 and Model 85 is that the magazine release is not reversible.

As noted in the introduction, the true date of the beginning of Beretta was earlier than previously believed. Still, for many years, 1680 was the year cited by the company as its official founding date. In 1980, Beretta produced a special Tercentennial version of the Model 84, with engraving, gold inlay, and a special presentation case. The hammer and trigger were gold plated, and the grips had a gold commemorative medallion. This was a limited edition of only 300, one for each year of Beretta's history. Of that number, only 100 were available on the American market. The Tercentennial model was numbered in a separate sequence. The slide markings were engraved, not stamped. On the right side the pistols for the American market were inscribed "Berben Corp. N. Y.—N. Y. Cal. 380 Pat. Mod. 84 D. B. Tercentennial".

Another deluxe version was offered, with engraving, but without the gold inlay and the special Tercentennial markings. This was the Model



The 7.65mm Model 82 has a straight-line magazine with a capacity of nine rounds. It has less width than the Model 81, and the magazine release is not reversible. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 85 in .380 Auto. The one shown is a late Model 85BB, in nickel finish. The straight-line magazine holds eight rounds. (Beretta Archives)



The richly engraved Tercentennial model was made in a limited edition of only 300, one for each year of Beretta's history. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 81W-EL (shown) and the Model 84W-EL had less extensive engraving. The left grip panel had an inset silver plate for the owner's initials. (Beretta)



The current versions of the Model 81BB and Model 84BB have an automatic internal firing pin block safety. (Beretta)

84W-EL; instead of the medallion, its left grip had an oblong silver plate that could be engraved with the initials of the owner. There was also a .32 version, the Model 81W-EL. These, too, were a limited production item, though not restricted to the low figure of the Tercentennial. Both these guns had a substantially higher price than the standard Model 84, but from the moment they were made, they were collector pieces.

Within the last two years, Beretta has made some modifications in the basic design of all four pistols, and the model markings now have a "BB" suffix. Externally, the front and back of the grip frame now have vertical grooving. Nickel plating is an alternate finish. As in the Browning/FN version, the magazine now has three counter-holes in its rear surface, numbered "4," "8," and "13" in the Model 84BB. Internally, the magazine safety is now an optional feature. An automatic firing pin block safety prevents any movement of the firing pin, and it is cleared only when the trigger has reached full rearward travel.

The last described feature is the reason for the delay in the American importation of the excellent Model 87. This is essentially the same pistol as the Model 82 and Model 85, but it is chambered for the .22 Long Rifle cartridge, and has a single row, 10-round magazine. The location of its



This is the original version of the Model 87, in .22 Long Rifle chambering. With the firing pin block safety added, it will be sold in the United States as the Model 87BB. (Beretta)

rimfire firing pin made incorporation of the automatic firing pin block safety an interesting design problem, and the first "few hundred" Model 87 pistols were made without this feature. The problem has been solved, and the new Model 87BB is expected to be available in the U.S. soon.

Markings on the currently made pistols are the same on all models, with the exception of the model and caliber designations. These appear on the left side of the frame, just below the slide edge at the front, and the model marking may be preceded by a catalogue number. For example, the Model 81BB is marked "CAT. 4—MOD. 81BB—CAL. 7.65". The caliber now also appears on the barrel, just forward of the extractor recess, and the magazine is caliber-marked on the left side at its rear edge. On the left side of the slide, the marking is "PIETRO BERETTA GARDONE V. T.—MADE IN ITALY". On the right side of the slide, just forward of the serrations, is an oval with the "PB" monogram, and the word "PATENTED".

## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 81, 7.65mm (.32 Auto)**

Weight:	23.5 ounces
Length:	6.8 inches
Barrel length:	3.82 inches
Magazine capacity:	12 rounds

### **Model 84, 9mm Corto (.380 Auto)**

Weight:	22.5 ounces
Length:	6.8 inches
Barrel length:	3.82 inches
Magazine capacity:	13 rounds

### **Model 85BB, .380 Auto**

Weight:	17 ounces
Length:	6.8 inches
Barrel length:	3.82 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

### **Model 87, .22 Long Rifle**

Weight:	20 ounces
Length:	6.8 inches
Barrel length:	3.82 inches
Magazine capacity:	10 rounds

Presumably, in the blank space forward of this, pistols for the American market will have the "BERBEN N. Y.—N. Y." marking. The letters "PB" appear on the right side of the frame to the rear of the trigger pivot, and the serial number is on the right side above the front base of the trigger guard. On the smooth walnut grips, the left panel has a gold-colored round medallion containing the oval-bordered "PB" monogram. The right grip has a medallion of the same shape and size, but this one has the three arrows and three circles trademark. It would be difficult to imagine any further modifications of these superb pistols, as their present design seems to be the ultimate medium-frame automatic.

## Model 92 Series Pistols

In the same time period as the development of the Model 81 and Model 84 pistols, the Beretta design department was working on a larger double-action pistol in 9mm Parabellum (9mm Luger) chambering. It emerged in 1976 as the Model 92. Its locking system was the same swinging block used in the Model 951, and the magazine catch was in the same location, on the left side in the lower rear area of the grip panel. The takedown latch was on the left side of the frame, just forward of the trigger. Except for these three points, the operational features were similar to those of the Model 81 and Model 84. The lever-type safety, mounted on the left side of the frame at the rear, was not ambidextrous. As in the smaller pistols, the safety blocked the sear when applied. Plastic grips with a checkered center panel and no trademark were standard, and smooth walnut grips were an option at a slight increase in price.

The early Model 92 was marked on the left forward flat of the slide "PIETRO BERETTA GARDONE V. T.", and rearward of this, on the next "step" of the slide, "CAL. 9 Parabellum". The serial number appeared on the left side of the frame below the forward slide marking. On the right side of the slide, the marking was in two lines: "P. B. — Mod. 92 — MADE



A typical early Model 92 pistol. The one shown has wood grip panels. The magazine at right is a factory cutaway, for illustration purposes only. (Beretta Archives)



An early U.S.-import Model 92. This one has plastic grip panels, and it is proof-dated 1981. Note the "step" in the slide on this pistol and the one in the preceding illustration.

IN ITALY”, and “PATENTED”. Pistols that were imported for the American market had the “BERBEN CORPORATION N. Y. — N. Y.” marking added, on the rear “stepped” area of the slide, just forward of the serrations. The slide with the “step” on the sides did not last long in the production. Guns numbered A011495Z and B00151Z have it, but I have not been able to ascertain the exact point in time or numbering when the slide was changed.

A Model 92 at hand, number B18051Z, has a slide with flat sides, and no step. Its left side marking is in a continuous single line, “PIETRO BERETTA GARDONE V. T. CAL. 9 Parabellum”. On the right side, also in a single line, is “BERBEN CORPORATION N. Y. — N. Y. — PB — MOD. 92 — MADE IN ITALY — PATENTED”. The magazine has three counter-holes in its rear surface, marked “5,” “10,” and “15,” and its left side is marked at the rear edge “PB CAL. 9 PARA MADE IN ITALY”. The grips are smooth walnut on this example, but the plastic panels were standard. These two original versions, the true Model 92, were made for a relatively short time. Production began in May, 1976, and ended in February, 1983. The total production was 52,000. The Model 92 was discontinued to make way for an identical pistol with a different safety system.

For those who preferred the frame-mounted sear-block safety of the original Model 92, there is good news. The basic Model 92 design lives on, in Brazil. Forjas Taurus, S. A., Av. Victor Manzini 450, Sao Paulo, Brazil CEP 04745, uses Beretta-made machinery to produce two slightly-modified versions of the Model 92. The PT-92 is a close copy, the only difference being a concave trigger guard front. In a two-hand hold, many combat-style shooters hook the index finger of the supporting hand around the front of the guard, and this feature is for them. The front and rear of the grip frame have deep vertical grooving, and the grips are of smooth Brazilian walnut.

The other Brazilian version, the Taurus PT-99, has a higher front sight blade, and the rear sight is fully adjustable. In addition to blued steel parts and black anodizing on the alloy frame, the Taurus is also available in a combination of a polished alloy frame and satin nickel on the slide and barrel, with the other steel parts blued. The U.S. importer for these pistols is Taurus International, 4563 SW 71st Avenue, Miami, Florida 33155.

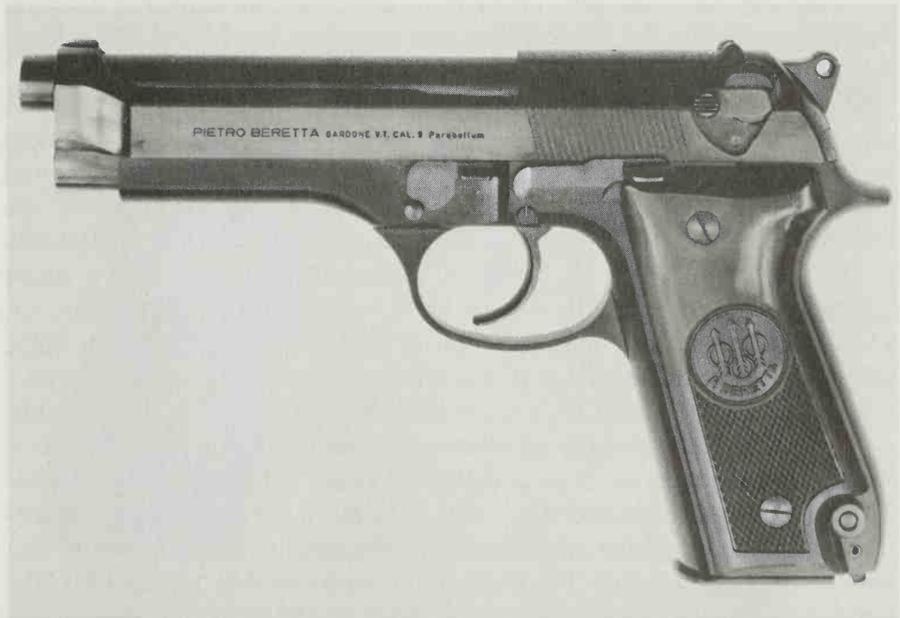
The Taurus pistol is marked on the left slide flat “TAURUS PT-99 9mm Para” (or, “PT-92”), followed by the Taurus trademark. On the right side of the slide, just forward of the serrations, in two lines, is “TAURUS INT MFG.”, and “MIAMI FLA”. Further forward, in a single line, is “MADE IN BRAZIL”. The serial number appears on the left forward side of the frame. The barrel is marked “PT” on the left side of its forward underlug. The magazine has three counter-holes in its rear surface, num-



A later Model 92, with walnut grip panels. Note the flat slide, with no side steps.



The Taurus Model PT-92 pistol, made in Brazil. The only real difference is the trigger guard. (Taurus International)



An early Model 92S pistol. The frame-mounted searblock safety was changed to a slide-mounted firing pin block. (Beretta Archives)

bered "5," "10," and "15," and it is marked on the left side at its rear edge "CAL. 9 PARA MADE IN BRAZIL".

I have experimentally switched parts between Taurus and genuine Beretta pistols. They fit and functioned, but I can't say that this would be true in all cases. The Brazilian pistols are nicely made, with more precise fit and better finish than the Egyptian version of the Model 951. The importer has confidence in their quality, offering free repair of any breakage for the life of the gun. My own PT-99 has always performed admirably.

Around 1978, Beretta made a single alteration to the basic Model 92 design, and created the Model 92S. The searblock safety was removed from the frame, and was replaced by a slide-mounted firing pin block safety of particularly outstanding design. The firing pin was in two parts, with a short section contained in the safety crosspiece. When the safety was turned down to the on-safe position, the short section of firing pin was rotated from horizontal to vertical, taking it entirely away from the hammer face.

The safety also performed two other functions. In the last fraction of its arc, it tripped the sear to drop the hammer, and also depressed the disconnecter to disengage the trigger bar from the sear. Many shooters of the Model 92S—including myself—have altered the safety system to cancel these last two functions, to allow the pistol to be "dry-fired" without stressing the firing pin. This can be done without affecting its other operations. Except for the different safety system, the Model 92S is identical in all other respects to the late Model 92.

Typical Model 92S markings are the same as the Model 92 on the left side of the slide. On the right side of the slide, my own Model 92S is marked in two lines "PB—MOD. 92S—MADE in ITALY—PATENTED", and "BERBEN CORPORATION N. Y.—N. Y.". The serial number is on the left forward flat of the frame, and the magazine is marked on the left side at the rear edge "PB CAL 9 PARA". The magazine back has a single counter-hole near the right edge at the 15-round level, with no number. The plastic grips have checkered areas in the lower half, and a large circle at the top of the checkered portion contains the arrows-and-circles trademark above "P. BERETTA". Smooth walnut grips were also available.

In 1979, when the U.S. government began testing in search of a new 9mm military sidearm, Beretta entered a pistol called the Model 92S-1. This was a modified Model 92S. One of the main alterations was a repositioning of the magazine release to the front edge of the grip at the rear base of the trigger guard. The magazine release could be reversed for left-handed operation. A safety lever was added on the right side, making the safety system ambidextrous, and vertical grooving was added on the front and back of the grip frame. An automatic internal firing pin block pre-



A U.S.-import Model 92S pistol, showing the added markings on the right side of the slide.



**The Model 92SB pistol. (Beretta Archives)**



**The Model 92SB Compact, First Series, shown with the plastic grips. (Beretta Archives)**



**The Model 92SB Compact, First Series, with walnut grip panels. (Beretta Archives)**

vented firing pin movement until the trigger was at the end of its rearward travel. The front sight had a recessed white dot, and there was a white rectangle below the rear sight notch. All these features were designed to meet or exceed the specifications required by the military test agency. No selection was made after the first series of tests, but the Model 92S-1 was among the three pistols that completed the rigorous procedures.

Two years later, in 1981, Beretta used all of the design points of the experimental Model 92S-1 to create a new commercial pistol, which was named the Model 92SB. In addition to the features described above, the checkered area of the plastic grips was increased to cover most of the grip, with the same trademark circle at the center. The round serrated button on the end of the safety lever was changed to a pedal shape. The Model 92SB is definitely a state-of-the-art pistol, and it is under consideration by several official agencies for adoption as a standard sidearm. In the area of law enforcement, the Model 92SB is the pistol used by the Connecticut State Police.

In the same year, 1981, Beretta introduced a version of the Model 92SB with a shorter slide, barrel, and grip frame. This was the Model 92SB Compact. It has all the features of the Model 92SB, except for the magazine capacity. The shorter grip frame reduces the magazine capacity to 13 rounds, still an adequate number for most serious situations.



**The Model 92SB Compact, an early First Series U.S. import pistol. Note that the walnut grips lack the trademark medallions. (Author's Collection)**

The Model 92SBC was made in two versions that the factory calls "first series" and "second series," with small but definite differences. The first series pistols were, except for their reduced size, practically identical with the Model 92SB.

The second series guns have a grip frame with somewhat more slant at the rear, and the lower front strap of the grip frame is curved slightly forward. The magazine floorplate is thicker at the front, with a more pronounced finger rest extension. The trigger has less curve, and there is an overtravel stop added to its rear surface. I have no exact numbers regarding the end of the first series and the beginning of the second, but one late first series pistol (my own) is numbered B63651Z, and a second series pistol shown here is number B83633Z, so one can get a general idea from this.

Among the photographs supplied by the factory I found yet another version of the Model 92SBC, this one cryptically identified "Type M." The pistol shown has all of the modifications of a second series gun, with two additional variations. The slide latch is different, and appears to have a more prominent operating pedal. The magazine release button is low-profile, and seems to be similar to the one used on the smaller Model 82 and Model 85 pistols, non-reversible. This, and the fact that the frame of



The Model 92SB Compact, Second Series. Note the differences in the shape of the grip frame, the magazine floorplate, and the over-travel stop on the trigger. (Beretta)



**The Model 92SB Compact, "Type M." (Beretta)**

this gun is not widened from the trigger rearward, would seem to indicate that the "Type M" has a single column magazine. If so, then this gun is a thinner, more concealable version of the Model 92SBC, with a smaller magazine capacity.

For the sport shooter in Italy, and for others who like the performance of the 7.65mm Parabellum cartridge, Beretta has produced the basic Model 92SBC design in this chambering. This one has also been made in two versions. The gun essentially the same as a first series Model 92SBC is called the Model 98SBC. Another version, that appears to be the same as the "Type M", except for the 7.65mm Parabellum chambering, is listed as the Model 99SBC. In the photos I have seen, both have serial numbers with an "A" prefix and an "X" suffix, while the 9mm versions have a "B" and "Z" in those positions. The Model 98SBC also has a caliber marking, "CAL. 7.65 PARA", on the left side of the barrel at the rear.

My Model 92SBC is marked on the left side of the slide "PIETRO BERETTA GARDONE V. T. - MADE IN ITALY", followed by the oval "PB" trademark. The serial number is on the left side of the frame near the front. On the right side of the slide, in two lines, is "MOD. 92SB COMPACT - CAL 9 Parabellum - PATENTED", and "BERBEN CORPORATION N. Y. - N. Y.". The left side of the forward barrel underlug is marked "PB", and the last three digits of the serial number are on the



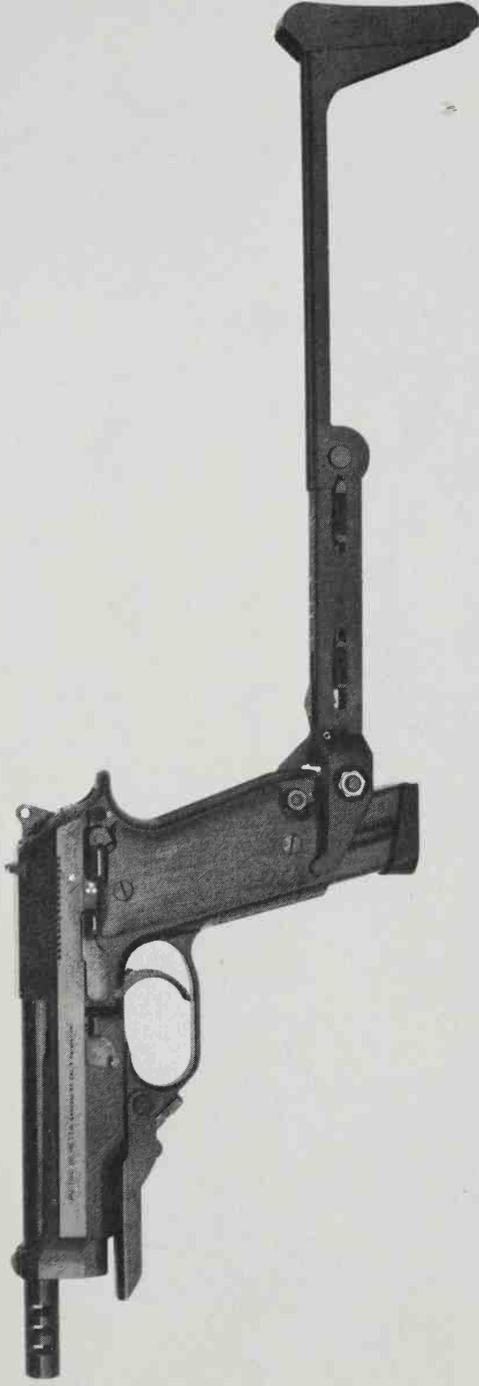
The Model 98SB Compact, chambered for the 7.65mm Parabellum cartridge. (Beretta)



The Model 99SB Compact, the 7.65mm Parabellum version of the "Type M." (Beretta)



The Model 93R, First Series. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 93R, First Series, shown with the shoulder stock attached. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 93R pistol, Second Series, currently in production. Note the relocated magazine release. The fire selector is shown in the semi-auto setting. (Beretta)



The Model 93R pistol, Second Series, shown with the shoulder stock detached. The fire selector is shown here in position for three-round bursts, and the forward handgrip is lowered.

underside of the breech block area in the slide. The magazine has three counter-holes in its rear surface, numbered "5," "10," and "13". The left side of the magazine at the rear edge is marked "PB CAL 9 PARA MADE IN ITALY". The grips on my pistol are walnut with hand-checkering at the center.

Along with the development of the Model 92-Series pistols, Beretta engineers were also working on a modern version of the machine pistol concept, one that would not suffer from the control difficulty of earlier guns of this type. With the Model 93R, they succeeded. Instead of the usual full-auto or semi-auto choice, the Model 93R has a lever on the left side above the grip that can be set for three-shot bursts.

In the raised position, the lever aligns with a single white dot on the slide, and the function is semi-auto, with one shot for each pull of the trigger. When the lever is down, aligned with a triangle of three white dots on the frame, the pistol delivers three-round bursts. (The "R" in the model designation stands for *Raffica*, which translates as "bursts.") This short-

## SPECIFICATIONS

### Model 92, 9mm Parabellum

Weight:	33.5 ounces
Length:	8.5 inches
Barrel length:	4.9 inches
Magazine capacity:	15 rounds

### Model 92S, 9mm Parabellum

### Model 92SB, 9mm Parabellum

Weight:	34.5 ounces
(Other data same as Model 92.)	

### Model 92SBC, 9mm Parabellum

Weight:	31 ounces
Length:	7.8 inches
Barrel length:	4.3 inches
Magazine capacity:	13 rounds

### Model 93R, 9mm Parabellum

Weight:	41.3 ounces	Stock:	9.5 ounces
Length:	9.5 inches	Length:	14.4 inches
Barrel length:	6.1 inches	Folded:	7.6 inches
Magazine capacity:	20 rounds		

duration, full-auto operation makes the pistol more controllable. It also has other features which help in that area. The front of the frame has a fold-down handgrip that extends at just the right angle to reduce muzzle whip. There is also a detachable folding shoulder stock that can be used as a stabilizing device during burst firing.

The barrel is extended beyond the front of the slide, and it has three rectangular vents on each side. The trigger guard space is increased lengthwise, and during burst firing the thumb of the hand on the front grip is hooked into the front of the trigger guard. The safety lever is located just to the rear of the fire selector, and pivots on the same axis. The off-safe movement is upward, and a red dot is exposed. The standard magazine holds 20 rounds, and has counter-holes in its back surface at five-round intervals. The grip panels are smooth walnut.

Early versions of the Model 93R had the magazine release in the same location as on the Model 92 and Model 92S pistols. In the current production, the magazine release is in the Model 92SB location, at the rear base of the trigger guard. Except for the model designation, markings on the Model 93R are the same as on the other pistols in this series. Use of the Model 93R will be primarily in the military and law enforcement areas. In the United States, its burst-fire capability will require BATF registration and a \$200 tax payment, and this will limit commercial sales. Aside: Don Pendelton, mentioned in Chapter IX, has updated the armament of his fictional hero in recent books. Mack Bolan now uses a Model 93R.

# 15

## Model 20, Model 21A Pistols

Applying the double-action trigger system to the basic Model 950 design was done “early on,” as the British say. But, this pistol was not to be available in America until some years later, because of our strange importation laws.

The first gun of this type was in 6.35mm (.25 Auto) chambering. It was designated the Model 20. A factory illustration of one of the prototype pistols would seem to indicate that the earliest experiments were with the standard Model 950 frame. On the gun shown, there is a solid external backstrap with a pronounced curve at its lower rear. The grip panels are walnut, and the left one has a shield-shaped inset at upper center with the arrows-and-circles trademark.

A factory drawing of pistol number 00892 is closer to the actual production form. The grip panels are checkered plastic, and they meet at the rear to form the backstrap. At lower rear, the grip shape is more “pointed” than rounded. A circle at upper center on each side contains the arrows and circles trademark, and “P. BERETTA”. On the left side of the slide, the marking on the original Italian version was “P. BERETTA—Mod. 20—Cal. 6.35”. The tip-up barrel of the Model 950 Series was used, and



An early prototype of the Model 20 pistol. The frame apparently was converted from a standard 950 Series type. (Beretta Archives)



A factory drawing of pistol number 00892, showing the final form of the Model 20 that was put into regular production. The slide marking differs from the one used on the U.S.-made version. (Beretta Archives)



The Model 20 retained the tip-up barrel feature of the 950 Series pistols.



The double-action trigger uses an external drawbar, located on the right side of the frame.



The recoil spring system of the Model 20 uses the same principle as the 950 Series pistols, but the mechanical application is entirely different.



An early production U.S.-made Model 20. Note the slide marking, and the concentric ring magazine release button. (Author's Collection)



The right side of a U.S.-production Model 20, showing the slide marking. (Author's Collection)



The prototype of the Model 21 pistol, in .22 Long Rifle chambering. (Beretta)

the double-action trigger linkage was accomplished with an external drawbar on the right side of the frame.

Instead of the torsion type wire spring of the Model 950, the Model 20 has a system that is better and stronger. Heavy pivoting arms on each side contact the slide, and lobes on each arm rest on nearly vertical coil springs that are in tubular housings attached to the frame. The manual safety can be put in on-safe position with the hammer either fully down or cocked, and the firing pin is an inertia type. The Model 20 is a superbly engineered little pistol, and it was well received in Europe and other parts of the world. Unfortunately, its small size prohibited its importation into the United States after its introduction.

After production of the Model 950BS pistol was well under way at the Beretta facility in Maryland, someone wisely decided that the Model 20 should be made here. Production began at Accokeek in 1983, and the only difference I can detect between this gun and the original Italian version is the magazine release button. It is checkered and screw-slotted on the originals, and has concentric rings on the U.S.-made pistol. The slide markings are different. The U.S. pistols are marked on the left side of the slide "BERETTA—Mod. 20— .25 Cal." On the right side of the slide is "MADE BERETTA USA CORP., ACKK, MD.". The serial number is on the left side of the frame near the front.



**A comparison of the U.S.-made Model 20 and the Model 21A pistols. (Author's Collection)**

In January of 1984, I examined the prototype of a small double-action pistol that was similar to the Model 20, and chambered for the .22 Long Rifle cartridge. It was tentatively designated "Model 21," and the gun differed in some details from the Model 20. The grip frame was slightly longer, with an external backstrap that had a moderate incurve at lower rear. The smooth walnut grip panels were retained by two screws on each side, above and below the magazine catch button. The manual safety had the same operation as on the Model 20, but in this case it also blocked the slide when in on-safe position. The slide of the prototype was unmarked, and in the serial number location was "BAS00000 U".

By mid-1984, when this pistol was in production, it had the designation "Model 21A." The "A" suffix does not indicate any significant design change from the prototype, it's just there in case some future innovation might create a "Model 21B." Except for the markings, the production Model 21A pistol is exactly the same as the prototype described. The smooth walnut grips have round gold-metal insets at lower center on each side, the left one containing the "PB" monogram, and the right one the arrows/circles trademark. The right side of the slide has the same marking as the Model 20. On the left side of the slide, the marking begins with the oval "PB" trademark, then "MOD. 21A - .22LR MADE IN USA".

The magazine of my Model 20 has "Made in Italy" markings, while the .22LR magazine for my Model 21A has no markings. This would seem to indicate that the .22 magazines are being made at the factory in Accokeek. As the Maryland facility grows, it is likely that in the future there will be other components — perhaps even complete guns — made there, rather than imported from the main factory in Italy.

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## SPECIFICATIONS

### **Model 20, 6.35mm (.25 Auto)**

Weight:	11 ounces
Length:	4.5 inches
Barrel length:	2.4 inches
Magazine capacity:	8 rounds

### **Model 21A, .22 Long Rifle**

Weight:	12.3 ounces
Length:	4.9 inches
Barrel length:	2.5 inches
Magazine capacity:	7 rounds

---

## Afterword

Research and development are continuous at Armi Beretta, and any book on Beretta pistols will, by the time it is published, miss the guns that are in the experimental stage, and even some that are in finished form and about to be introduced.

An example of the latter is the Model 86, which is, at the time this is written, being examined for U.S importation. Essentially, the Model 86 is a .380 Auto much like the Model 84 or Model 85, but with the tip-up barrel feature of the small pistols. For those who have difficulty in retracting an auto pistol slide because of a weakness or ailment, this will be an excellent feature.

Another new pistol is the Model 92SB-F. It has a squared and serrated trigger guard front, and a matte finish. The magazine floorplate is thicker and heavier, and the trigger has vertical serrations. The lanyard loop has been relocated. The tops of the grips have been reshaped for easier access to the safety levers. Finally, the grip screw slots have been widened, to allow the use of a standard screwdriver, rather than requiring one with a knife-thin blade. This new version of the Model 92SB is sure to be of interest to combat-style shooters, law enforcement people and the military.

In regard to the military, the United States Army announced on January 14, 1985 that the Beretta Model 92SB-F had been chosen as the standard U.S. Military sidearm for the Army and all other services. A five-year contract calls for 315,930 pistols. During the first year, 52,930 pistols will be made in Italy. In the second year, 65,750 guns will be assembled in the U.S., from parts made in Italy. The final three years will see full mobilization of the Beretta USA facility, and the remaining number will be entirely made in Maryland.

A final note: no writer of a book of this type can be sure he has found every variation of each model. Inevitably, when a book is published that attempts to cover all the pistols of a particular manufacturer, several readers will contact the author and describe pistols that do not fit into any of the categories in the book. I would be pleased to hear from anyone who has a Beretta pistol not mentioned or shown here, and I will try to include such guns in any future editions.



**The Beretta Model 92SB-F is the new U.S. Military pistol. It will also be available commercially.**

# Appendix

Now, some notes on Italian proof-dating.

Before 1954, the year of proofing was indicated in Arabic numerals. Beginning in that year, the dating was designated by a code of Roman numerals, as:

X	= 1954	XXI	= 1965
XI	= 1955	XXII	= 1966
XII	= 1956	XXIII	= 1967
XIII	= 1957	XXIV	= 1968
XIV	= 1958	XXV	= 1969
XV	= 1959	XXVI	= 1970
XVI	= 1960	XX7	= 1971
XVII	= 1961	XX8	= 1972
XVIII	= 1962	XX9	= 1973
XIX	= 1963	XXX	= 1974
XX	= 1964		

Beginning in 1975, a new dating code was established. The new stamp of the proof house was a rectangle containing two letters to indicate the year, as:

AA	= 1975	AH	= 1981
AB	= 1976	AI	= 1982
AC	= 1977	AL	= 1983
AD	= 1978	AM	= 1984
AE	= 1979	AN	= 1985
AF	= 1980		



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(Continued from front flap)



Author photo by Mike Schmidt

**J. B. WOOD** is internationally recognized as an authority on automatic pistols and other self-loading actions. He has been a gunsmith since 1948, and since 1962 he has had more than 450 articles published in major firearms periodicals. Gunsmithing editor for *Shooting Times* magazine, Wood is also a contributing editor for *Gun Digest*, *Guns Illustrated*, *Gun World*, and *Combat Handguns*. The author does re-design and design work for several firearms manufacturers in the U.S. and Europe. Wood has written nine other books, including **TROUBLESHOOTING YOUR HANDGUN** and **GUNSMITHING: THE TRICKS OF THE TRADE**. The author testifies as an expert witness in court cases involving firearms. He and his family live in Kentucky.

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Jacket front shows the Beretta Model 1951, last design of the great Tullio Marengoni. *Photo by J. B. Wood.*

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- The Model 1919 (M318, M418)
- The Model 1923
- The Model 1931, 1932
- The Model 1934, 1935
- The Model 948, 949
- The Model 950, 950B, 950BS
- The Model 951, 952
- The Model 70 Series and Model 100
- The Model 80
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