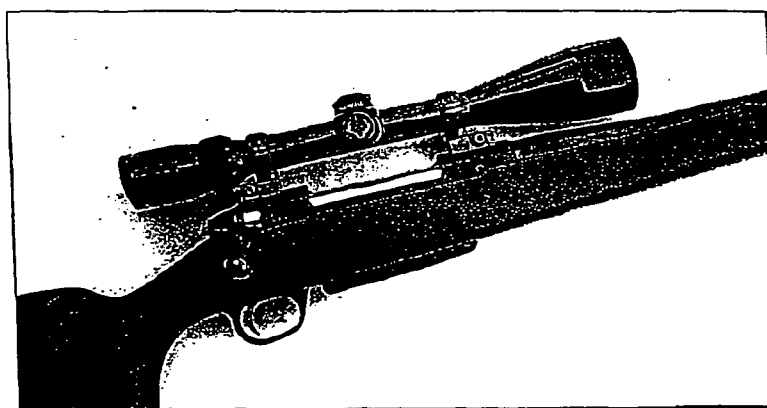
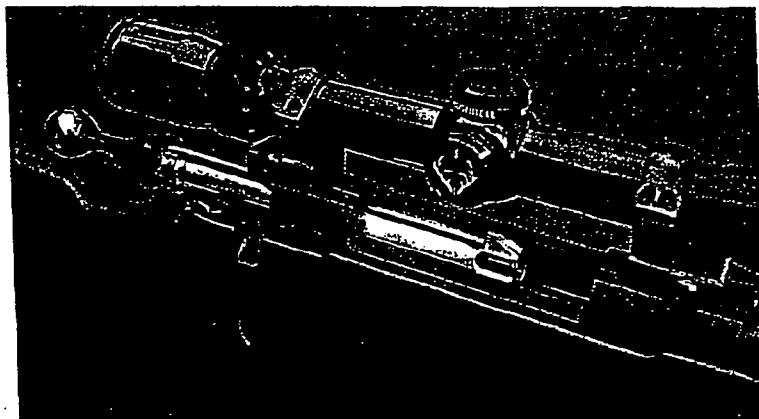


By Jon Sundra

**O**f all the European manufacturers of sporting rifles, none has maintained as consistent a presence here in the American market as Sako. Since first brought to these shores by Firearms International in 1949, these sturdy rifles crafted in Riihimäki, Finland, have enjoyed a justly-earned reputation for being well-designed, accurate, and utterly reliable.

It could also be said that the Sako name has always carried a certain measure of snob appeal, but it's the good kind that has more to do with the excellence of the product rather than cost. Though Sakos have never been inexpensive, they have never been out of reach of the serious hunter and shooter, either. Bottom line: the guy who totes a Sako ain't necessarily well-heeled and he generally knows something about rifles.

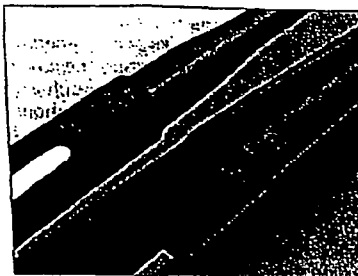
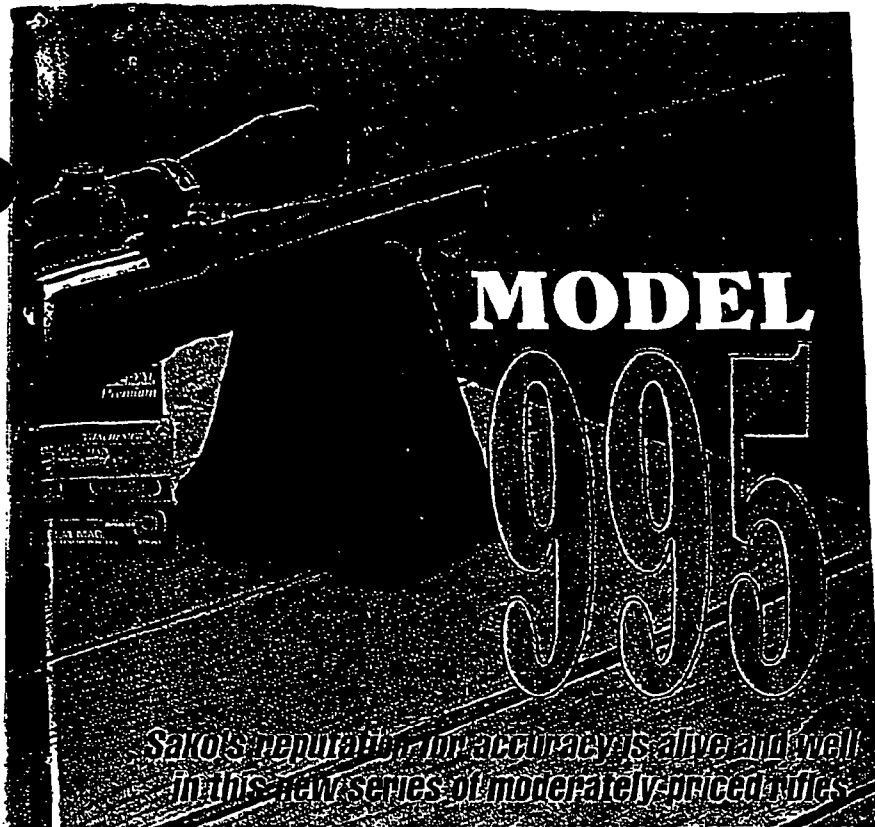
Anyway, the Sako line has been imported these past 16 years by Stoeger, the *Shooters Bible* folks who also import Llama handguns from Spain and IGA shotguns from Brazil. Since adding the A1 long/magnum action in 1961 to the then-existing .223-sized A1 and the medium-length AII, the Sako line has been remarkably stable design-wise; only revisions



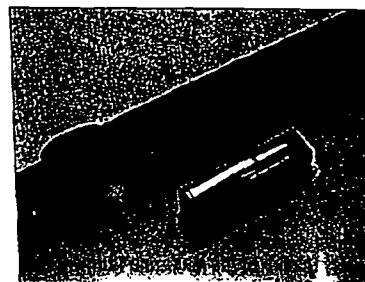
Left: With the Bushnell Trophy 2.5-10X scope aboard in Sako's unique gimbal-type mounts, the rifle as tested weighed in at nine pounds, six ounces. Note the bolt stop/release button that is visible just forward of the bolt handle. This location on the right side of the action is unusual.

Above: The locking lug visible in the port at the 12 o'clock position is unusual. Most three-lug designs have a 10-2-6 o'clock orientation.

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Recoil is transmitted to the stock in a sort of reverse arrangement. A steel lug is imbedded into the stock and juts up to engage a slot milled into the floor of the receiver ring. Below, the release button for the 995's magazine is located in front of the box.



to the cocking piece shroud and striker assembly have been made in the interim.

But with the only constant in this universe being change, seems the folks in Riihimäki felt the time had come for something new. Surely much of that decision was prompted by economics. While the A-series guns are not dated design-wise, they are in respect to the manufacturing processes required to make them. Enter the new M995 (or TRG-S, take your pick), a rifle that takes advan-

tage of state-of-the-art design and production techniques which will allow it to compete in a lower price range.

I hadn't a clue as to what to expect. A call from Stoeger's President, Brian Herrick, had told me only that there was a new Sako and asked if I'd like to see one, so it was a surprise right up to the time I opened the box.

The first and most obvious thing that registers upon seeing the 995 for the first time is its black synthetic stock. Sako chose to go with the Monte Carlo style which is more pop-

ular in Europe these days than here. Between the butt and the rubber recoil pad are fiber spacers so the length-of-pull can be adjusted; however, it's a feature that requires an interruption in the smooth culmination of the toe line giving the appearance of a competition or sniper rifle. Indeed, the promo literature stresses the fact that the 995's lineage is closely tied to Sako's TRG-21 Sniper Rifle, an association I'd rather not see made for a sporting arm, but apparently the folks at Stoeger think it's a plus.

The stock is ambidextrous in that there's no cheekpiece. There's a slight palm swell on both sides of the grip which makes it quite a handful for a small paw like mine but not to where I couldn't live with it.

Still casually inspecting the 995, one notices the trigger guard/floor-plate frame appears to carry a bead-blast matte finish and has a truncated, angular outline rather than the slender, rounded tenons found on the bottom metal of a Mauser, Model 70, Ruger 77, et al.

Other distinctive features which register the first few moments you're holding this rifle are the detachable box magazine which protrudes from the belly of the stock about 3/8", and a bolt handle that juts out from the stock at an angle that's a mere 30-

degrees below the horizontal. It looks unusual because we're accustomed to seeing bolt handles hugging the stock more closely—some too much so. Operating this action from the shoulder should be a snap, I thought, as I raised the gun. You just can't miss that bolt knob sticking way out there. It's a great feature to have on a dangerous game rifle.

From what can be seen of the

receiver from the outside it looks to be a flat-sided forging carrying the same tapered dovetail scope-mounting system found on the existing A-series.

Upon opening the action the following observations registered: A short, 60-degree handle lift indicating a three lug (or multiples thereof as on a Weatherby Mark V), locking arrangement. Upon pulling the bolt rearward a locking lug appears in the

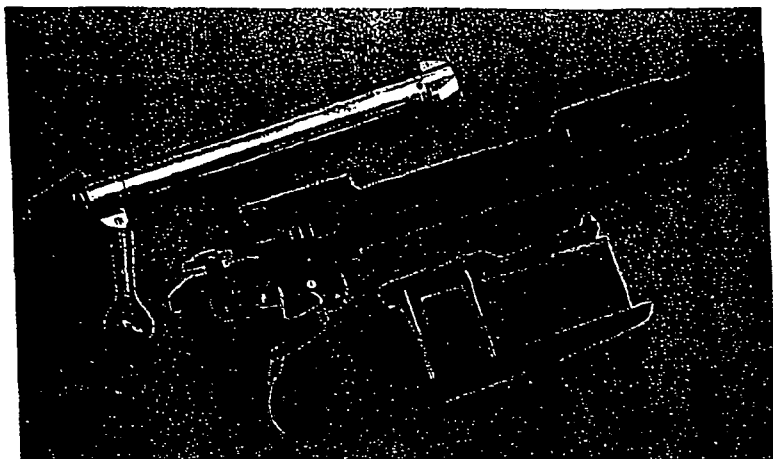
loading port at the 12 o'clock position; this is unusual. Other three-lug actions like the Weatherby and Browning A-Bolt have their lugs oriented in the 10, 2 and 6 o'clock positions when unlocked. That being the case, the rear edge of the bottom lug would drag and catch the case mouth and belt of the uppermost cartridge in the magazine below.

Weatherby solves the problem using the "fat bolt" system whereby a larger-than-normal bolt body is of reduced diameter at the head so that the locking lugs "left behind" as it were, after machining away surrounding steel, do not protrude beyond the bolt body diameter.

With their A-Bolt, Browning uses a "cartridge depressor" which is a non-rotating rib that rides on the bolt like a Mauser extractor, but in the 6 o'clock position where it's oriented behind the bottom lug, thus preventing the top round in the magazine from rising into the lug's plane of movement.

The Weatherby and Browning approaches represent two ways to solve the problem. Another is found on the 995. When unlocked, the lugs are in the 12, 4 and 8 o'clock positions, so there's no lug at the bottom to interfere with the top round in the box.

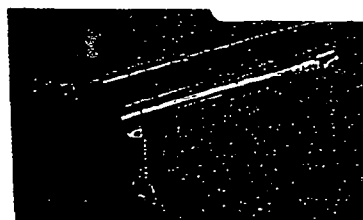
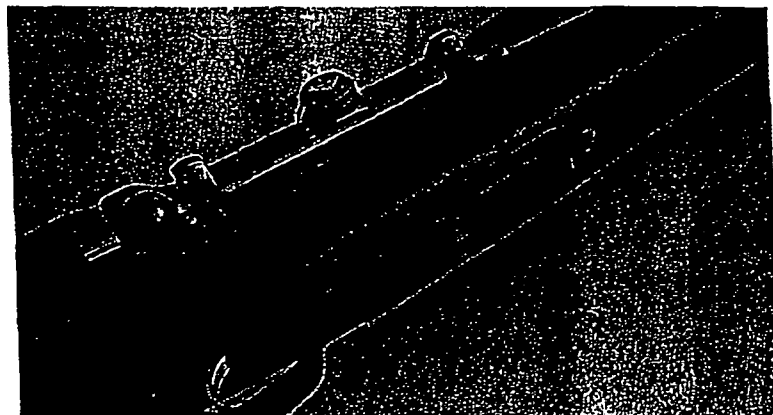
As the bolt is pulled further back



Sundra found that the operation of the bolt was very smooth and effortless. It is also quiet, thanks to the magazine follower that doesn't come in contact with the bolt.



Right, the 995's receiver is a straight cylinder lacking even a protruding recoil lug. Note the absence of a bolt stop/release at the usual position on the left side of the receiver bridge.



The bolt can be disassembled in a matter of seconds and without tools. Lightweight striker assembly aids lock time. Note the tapered locking lugs. Left, what looks like a separate, Mauser-type bottom unit is pure illusion. It's integral with the stock, including the guard bow.

you notice that that top locking lug which is fully visible in the port is not only tapered towards the nose of the bolt, but its sides are also tapered giving them a pyramidal appearance. Withdrawing the bolt yet further you can't help but notice how quiet, smooth and effortless it moves and the almost total lack of axial "slop," even when the bolt is against its stop. Part of that smooth, quiet operation is attributable to a magazine follower that does not contact the bolt as it the case with most other bolt actions.

Yet more observations one notes on cursory inspection is that there's no bolt stop/release in the usual position at the left side of the bridge; it's on the *right* side just in front of the handle. Very unusual. That noted, I pressed the release and withdrew the bolt from the receiver.

Looking at the bolt face one sees that Sako has abandoned the fixed, Mauser-type ejector and gone to the plunger style. It's ironic that with U.S. Repeating Arms/Winchester and Ruger both going to a fixed ejector with their Super Grade/Featherweight Classic and Model 77 Mark II, respectively, the company that's had it for the last 30 years has gone to the plunger. Go figure!

What has been retained from the A-series is the extractor; it appears to

be identical, meaning it's the same strong, reliable unit that many custom gunsmiths see fit to use in converting Remington 700s.

Suspecting that the bolt, now removed, might work like the "old" Sako, I held the body firmly with one hand and rotated the shroud clockwise. After about a 30-degree rotation the shroud popped rearward free of its keyway.



New Sako gimbal-type rings are ingenious in that they automatically compensate for minor misalignment of the rings as well as protect the scope finish.

You know, there are some manufacturers who make a point of how easy it is to disassemble their bolts, but in truth none is faster or easier than the Sako, old or new. Literally, the bolt can be stripped in three seconds and reassembled in another three.

The lock time has been improved,

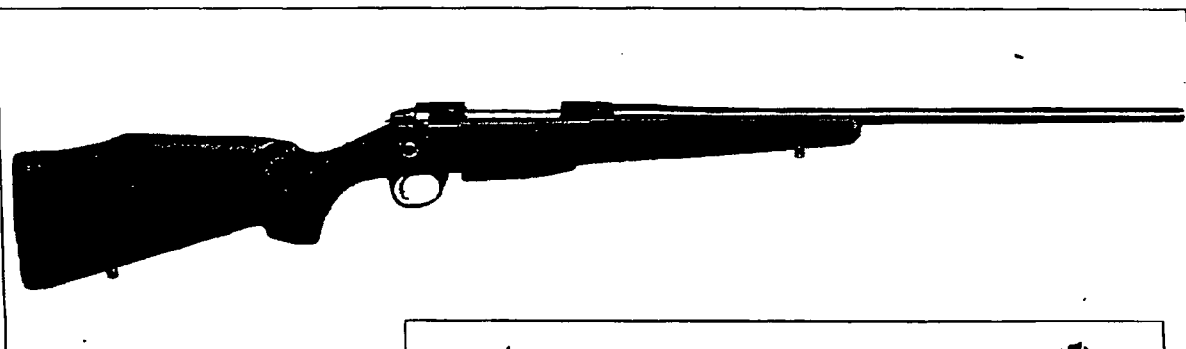
as evidenced by a shorter firing pin fall that measures only .250". The A-series has a pin fall of about .340". Also contributing to a faster lock time is a lighter striker assembly.

Mating the barreled action to the stock are three machine screws in the usual position—fore and aft of the guard bow, and one up on the forward tenon in front of the magazine.

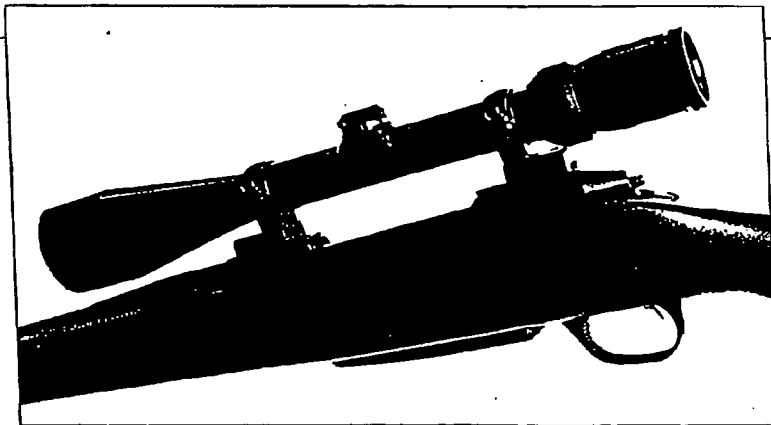
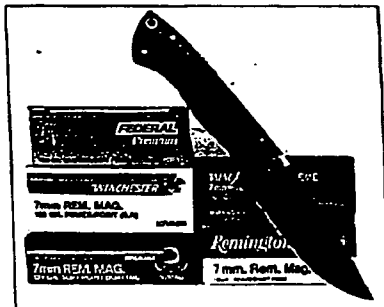
The release button for said magazine is at the front of the box; depressing it with the tip of the forefinger drops it into your hand. Turning out the three guard screws to free the barreled action from the stock reveals yet more surprises.

The receiver is cylindrical—like a Remington 700, but the flats milled into the sides give a different impression. Instead of the recoil lug being part of the receiver projecting downward to engage an abutment shoulder as is customary, the 995 has a steel lug imbedded into the stock that juts upward to engage a slot milled into the floor of the receiver ring.

The trigger housing is an impressive piece of work; it's a solid chunk of steel milled out to accommodate the trigger, sear and safety mechanism. The pull is adjustable for tension to a minimum of three pounds. In fact, the trigger broke precisely at three pounds for each of the ten times



Except for the protruding magazine the 995 is a very clean design. Out of the box our 7mm Rem. Magnum test gun weighed 7 lbs., 13. ounces. Below, factory loads tested ranged from 139 to 160 grains.



Ring span on the M995 receiver is 5 1/4", which is long enough to handle .375 H&H-length cartridges. That's too long for many scopes. Extension rings are forthcoming.



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## SAKO MODEL 995

I put a scale to it. Not only was it extremely consistent, it had no discernible creep.

It's one of the best triggers I've come across on a production rifle. The two-position side safety blocks trigger movement when engaged and also locks the action.

Going to the bottom metal, I tugged at the guard bow. It wouldn't

budge. A closer look revealed that, what on cursory examination looked like a bead-blasted Mauser-type trigger guard unit was actually an integral part of the stock itself, right down to the guard bow! By recessing the surface of the TG/magazine frame a few thousandths below the level of the stock and routing a very thin, shallow line around the periphery to simulate a seam line, those clever Finns have pulled off the illusion of there being a separate bottom metal unit.

More important than the illusion, however, is the fact that the designers have reduced by half any potential

bedding problems. Because the tolerances in injection-molded stocks can be held to precise dimensions, the inletted surfaces for the barreled action could almost pass for being individually glass bedded.

That, coupled with having eliminated entirely any possible bedding problems between a bottom metal and the separate inletted surfaces needed to accommodate it, greatly simplify the 995's bedding dynamics as well as ensuring about as high a level of consistency from rifle to rifle as can be

accomplished on a production scale.

You can tell how precise the bedding is when you reassemble this rifle. Once the guard screws start to snug up,

you can't get another one-eighth turn out of them before they're tight, indicating nothing's bending, nothing's binding, nothing's compressing. The barrel, by the way, is fully floated.

To go along with this new Sako is an equally new scope mount system that is fully as innovative as the rifle itself. Think I'm overstating the case? Consider: inside each ring is a nylon-like collar which has a split in it allowing it to spread and snap around the body of the scope. Now that in itself, even though it's unique, isn't that ingenious. I mean, all that inger collar would accomplish is to eliminate marring of the scope.

No sir, what makes these rings so innovative is that the inner ring can yaw relative to the scope's optical axis. By rounding the outer surface of the inner nylon sleeve and dishing out the matching inside surface of the steel rings, the sleeves can rotate as if on gimbals to relieve any bending and torque forces caused by misaligned rings.

Truth is that it's a rare and purely coincidental occurrence when the front and rear ring on any rifle are perfectly aligned and the scope free of stress. It's an ingenious system and fully compatible with the A-series guns.

At this point all that remained was to mount a scope using those neat new rings, and do some shooting. For the glass I chose one of Bushnell's new Trophy series in a 2.5-10X45. This particular scope is quite handsome, what with its deeply fluted but otherwise smooth power ring the front of which is contoured to match a tapered collar that blends into the scope body. Reticle focus is of the European style, i.e., a half-turn of the ocular rim in either direction runs the whole range of adjustment. The rim of the ocular is cushioned in case one unconsciously sneaks up on the

To go along with this new  
Sako is a scope mount  
system as innovative as  
the rifle itself.

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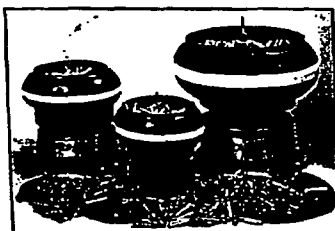
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scope's three-inch eye relief.

On hand ammo-wise, were the following brands and loadings: Winchester Supreme 139 and 160-grain Silvertip boattails; Winchester 150-grain Power Point; Federal Premium 150-grain boattails, and Remington's 140-grain PSP.

In examining the 995 there were many surprises. Shooting the 995 there were none. Sako has always had a rep for fine out-of-the-box accuracy and I've played around with enough of them to know that first hand.

One of the reasons for that reputation is that Sako has never been one for thin, whippy barrels. Our 7mm Mag test gun wore a 24 1/2-inch spout that miked .630" at the muzzle— not objectionably heavy yet stout enough for steady holding.

The following is a summary of three, five-shot groups fired with each of the five factory loads:

	GROUP SIZE		
	Smallest	Largest	Average
Supreme 139	1-5/8"	2-3/8"	1-7/8"
Remington 140	1/5/8"	2-1/8"	1-3/4"
Premium 150	1-1/8"	1-7/8"	1-3/8"
Winchester 150	2-1/8"	3-1/4"	2-3/4"
Supreme 160	7/8"	1-3/8"	1-1/8"

In summing up, I'd have to say that Sako has come up with a fine rifle here. The gun functioned beautifully but the ejection could have been a little more spirited. The safety works like butter, silently and with a soft yet positive feel.


I'd like to see the sheet stock used in the magazine a little heavier gauge; it's too easy to bend as it is. I'd also love to see this gun in the same McMillan-made classic stock they used to use on the Fiberclass and on which I have a custom 7mm JRS built, but that's a subjective call. What isn't subjective is that the 995, or TRG-S, is a well-designed, well-made rifle that's fully deserving of the Sako name. And that's saying something.

Stoeger's Brian Herrick assures me that this model will not replace the A-series, but I question how long Sako will continue to produce three totally different lines of bolt action rifles. When I say "three" I'm alluding to the Tikka, a rifle that's as innovative and unconventional as the 995 in that its bolt rides inside a polymer sleeve that is also being made in the Sako factory. Ah well, time will tell.

In the meantime, the 995 is available in only one standard caliber, .270 Win., and three magnums: 7mm Remington, .300 Winchester and .375 H&H. Surely others will soon follow. The .270 retails for \$699, the magnums for \$734. For more information write Stoeger Industries, 55 Ruta Court, So. Hackensack, N.J. 07606.



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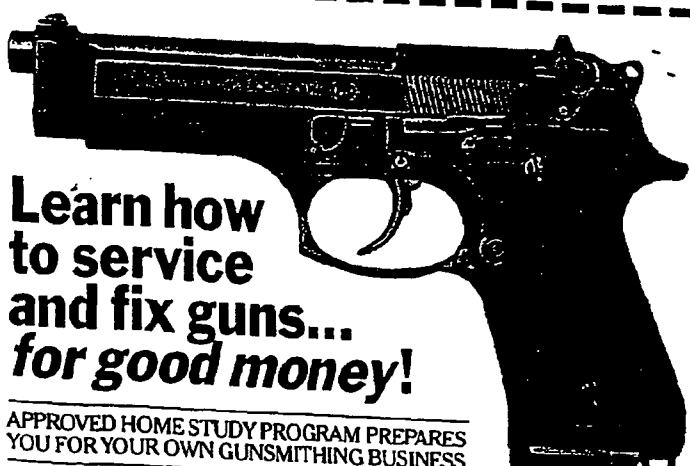
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