



by **RAYMOND CARANTA**

THE GUNS OF EUROPE

KORTH

Workmanship supreme!

FEW AMERICAN READERS are acquainted with this German company from Ratzeburg, a charming town located on an island in the Schaale River, about 12 miles from Lu beck. However, Ratzeburg is where some of the finest European handguns have been carefully handcrafted since 1964.

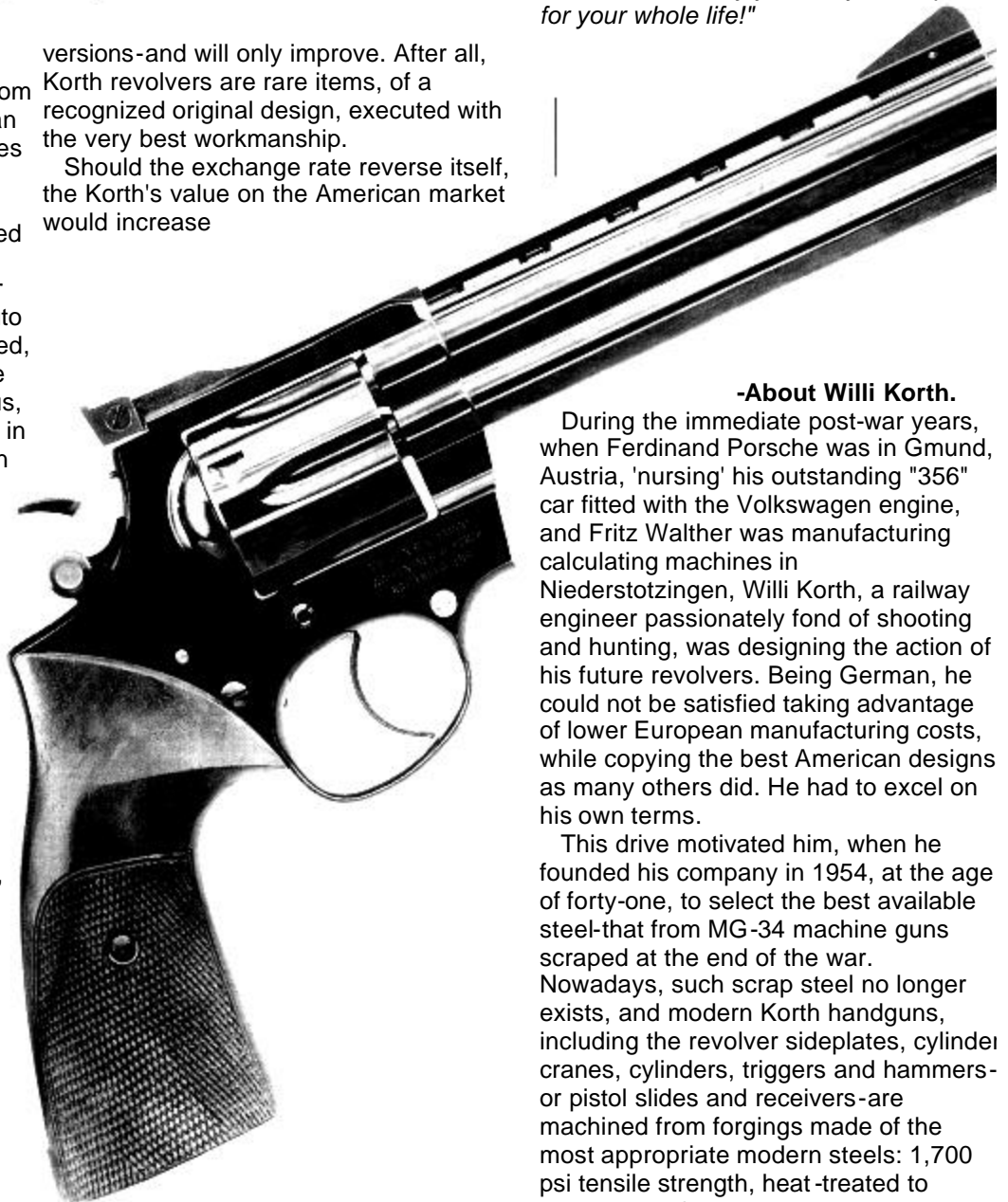
While famous among Europeans for their high quality, Korth revolvers and semi-auto of American shooters. Production is limited, and the cost is extremely high, due to the many hours of skilled labor required. Thus, most of us admire the samples displayed in catalogs, at international gun shows, or in the windows of the most famous arms retailers-but only a happy few actually own and shoot them.

- The investment.

Nevertheless, perhaps it is time for the American handgunner to invest in such pieces of art, as the U.S. dollar has recently gained ground, compared to European currencies. As a matter of fact, while the dollar was the equivalent of .76 Euro ca. 1995, now it is the Euro that is equivalent to .85 dollar approximately (in June 2001) a 60 percent variance in six years! What was very expensive-just a few years ago- is now a bargain... If today's currency exchange is clearly favorable to American handgunners considering the basic models, it is even better for the engraved and gold-inlaid

versions-and will only improve. After all, Korth revolvers are rare items, of a recognized original design, executed with the very best workmanship.

Should the exchange rate reverse itself, the Korth's value on the American market would increase



-About Willi Korth.

During the immediate post-war years, when Ferdinand Porsche was in Gmund, Austria, 'nursing' his outstanding "356" car fitted with the Volkswagen engine, and Fritz Walther was manufacturing calculating machines in Niederstotzingen, Willi Korth, a railway engineer passionately fond of shooting and hunting, was designing the action of his future revolvers. Being German, he could not be satisfied taking advantage of lower European manufacturing costs, while copying the best American designs as many others did. He had to excel on his own terms.

This drive motivated him, when he founded his company in 1954, at the age of forty-one, to select the best available steel-that from MG-34 machine guns scraped at the end of the war. Nowadays, such scrap steel no longer exists, and modern Korth handguns, including the revolver sideplates, cylinder cranes, cylinders, triggers and hammers-or pistol slides and receivers-are machined from forgings made of the most appropriate modern steels: 1,700 psi tensile strength, heat-treated to Rockwell 58C.

The Allied forces occupied post-war Germany, and the manufacture of bullet-firing firearms was prohibited.

accordingly, and its owner would have the added pleasure of having paid substantially less for his specimen. Of course, as far as target shooting is concerned, a 'perfect' score is the same, whether made by the cheapest South American or the most expensive German revolver.

However, in the latter case, we are dealing with a fine weapon, intended for a true connoisseur looking for absolute perfection-and willing to pay for it-much the same as the person who purchases an Aston-Martin "DB7", Lotus "Esprit" or Lamborghini "Diablo" coupe...

In this vein, while visiting an Italian friend in Turin many years ago, I was surprised to see a brand new Ferrari "Daytona" in the courtyard, and the red nose of an older model "365" protruding from an open door. After congratulating him for owning such exceptional cars, I asked if he would dispose of the oldest.

He answered, " *Well, Raymond, it is already a pity that such mechanical wonders are purchased with money...*

Therefore, when you are lucky enough to have one, it is only your duty to keep her for your whole life!"

Willi Korth started his business, in a modest Ratzburg cellar, by producing alarm revolvers he had designed in 1953. This enabled him to profit from the design of his basic action and to develop the strict quality standards, which would later be applied to his conventional revolvers. The German



Willi Korth (July 11, 1913 - October 10, 1982), the founder of the company, was a talented gunmaker who launched the German revolver revival.

alarm revolver market being particularly price-sensitive, Willi Korth was nevertheless able to compete, thanks to his innovative ideas, without diminishing the final product quality. These first Korth alarm revolvers fired gas cartridges, which used German cases and a specific mixture developed by the small company. Korth produced 20,000 of these alarm revolvers in the ten years from 1954 to 1964. Their success was such, notwithstanding a high price (for the time) of 90 DM, that the inventor was soon obliged to abandon his cellar!

Today, a half-century later, Korth products are no longer produced in a cellar, but in a modern factory. All revolver components are individually hand-finished by a highly qualified staff, resulting in exceptionally close parts tolerances, a prime requisite for precision revolving firearms. Currently, 30 percent of Korth revolver manufacturing operations are carried out on machine tools and the remaining 70 percent is accomplished by manual operations, involving component shaping and fitting, quality control and final assembly.

- The German sporting revolvers.

Following relaxation of the German law and opening of the international market, a niche appeared for German sporting revolvers.

Through the 'Fifties, Europe was dominated by the semi-auto pistol and, in her shooting ranges, was ruled by the I.S.U. regulations. Lugers, chambered for the 7.65mm and 9mm cartridges and featuring skillfully reworked triggers with crisp let-offs, were mostly used for the popular "Sport Handgun" event.

The softening of European customs regulations Ca. 1960 permitted new generations of shooters to discover the virtues of the American 38 Special cartridge. We were soon flooded with Colt and Smith & Wesson revolvers, significantly more reliable than our old Luger pistols, and with much better triggers.

It was time for the leaders of the new German sporting arms industry to act.

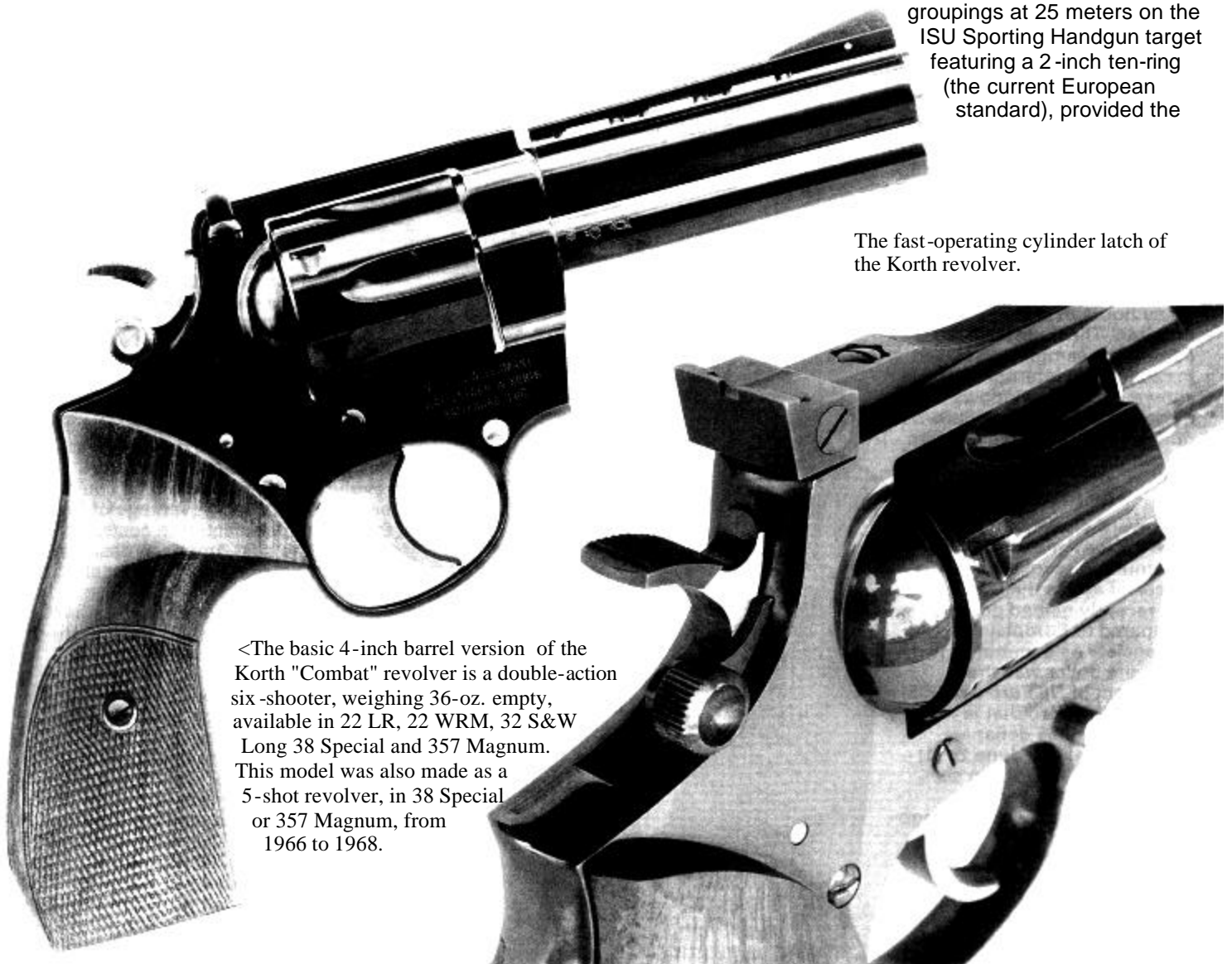
Among them, Hermann Weihrauch, was able to establish himself with his economical, but sturdy and accurate, Arminius revolvers. Willi Korth, on the other hand, reached the pinnacle of sporting revolver technology in 1964 both for the quality of materials and for superior workmanship.

- The Korth revolvers design.

Theoretically, any fixed-barrel revolver properly installed in an appropriate holding fixture securely mounted on a sturdy bench is able, with good

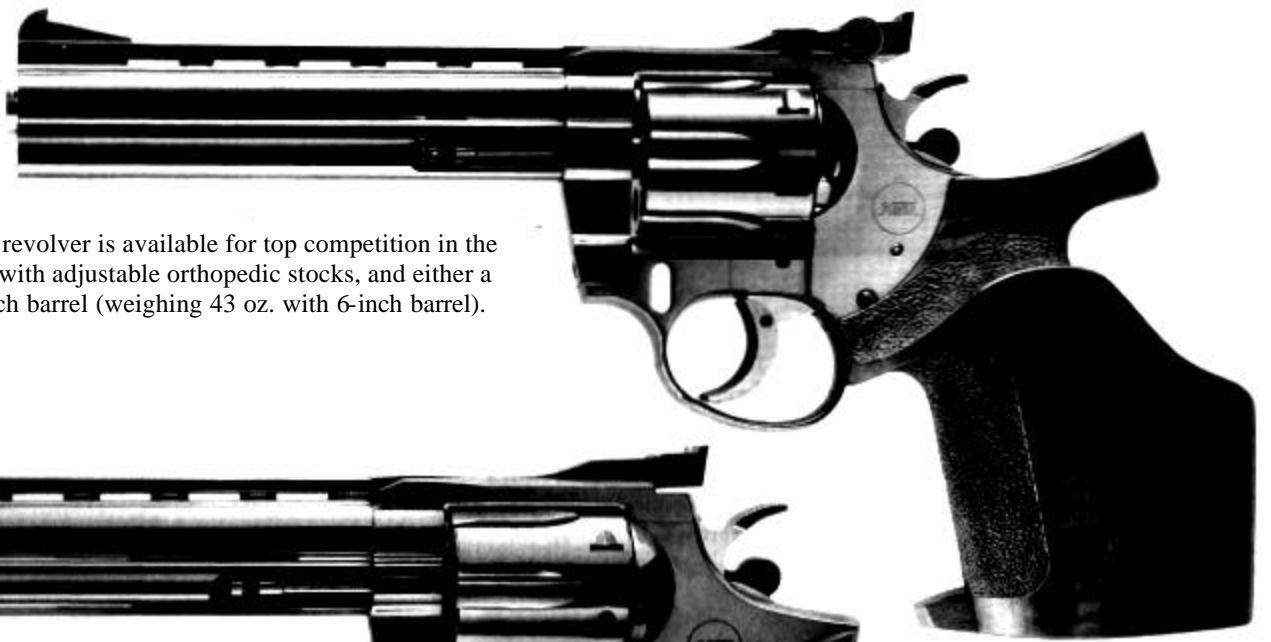
ammunition, to make 100/ 100 groupings at 25 meters on the ISU Sporting Handgun target featuring a 2-inch ten-ring (the current European standard), provided the

The fast-operating cylinder latch of the Korth revolver.



<The basic 4-inch barrel version of the Korth "Combat" revolver is a double-action six-shooter, weighing 36-oz. empty, available in 22 LR, 22 WRM, 32 S&W Long 38 Special and 357 Magnum. This model was also made as a 5-shot revolver, in 38 Special or 357 Magnum, from 1966 to 1968.

The Korth "Target" revolver is available for top competition in the same chamberings, with adjustable orthopedic stocks, and either a 5 1/4-inch or a 6-inch barrel (weighing 43 oz. with 6-inch barrel).



A 6-inch barrel Korth "Sport" revolver (left side) chambered in .357 Magnum, with an interchangeable 9mm Luger cylinder made until recently.

revolver is fitted with a properly bored and rifled barrel.

However, the matter becomes more complicated, when considering the cylinder fitting, boring and concentricity thus requiring top-quality steels perfectly heat-treated, precisely machined and meticulously hand fitted quality available only from the leading international arms specialists.

When such criteria are extended to a thirty-round course of fire, as is the case under the ISU "Slow Fire" regulation, one can easily imagine the quality level required! Moreover, the one-hand, extended-arm shooting position regulation requires perfect single-action let-offs, attainable only by custom gunsmithing.

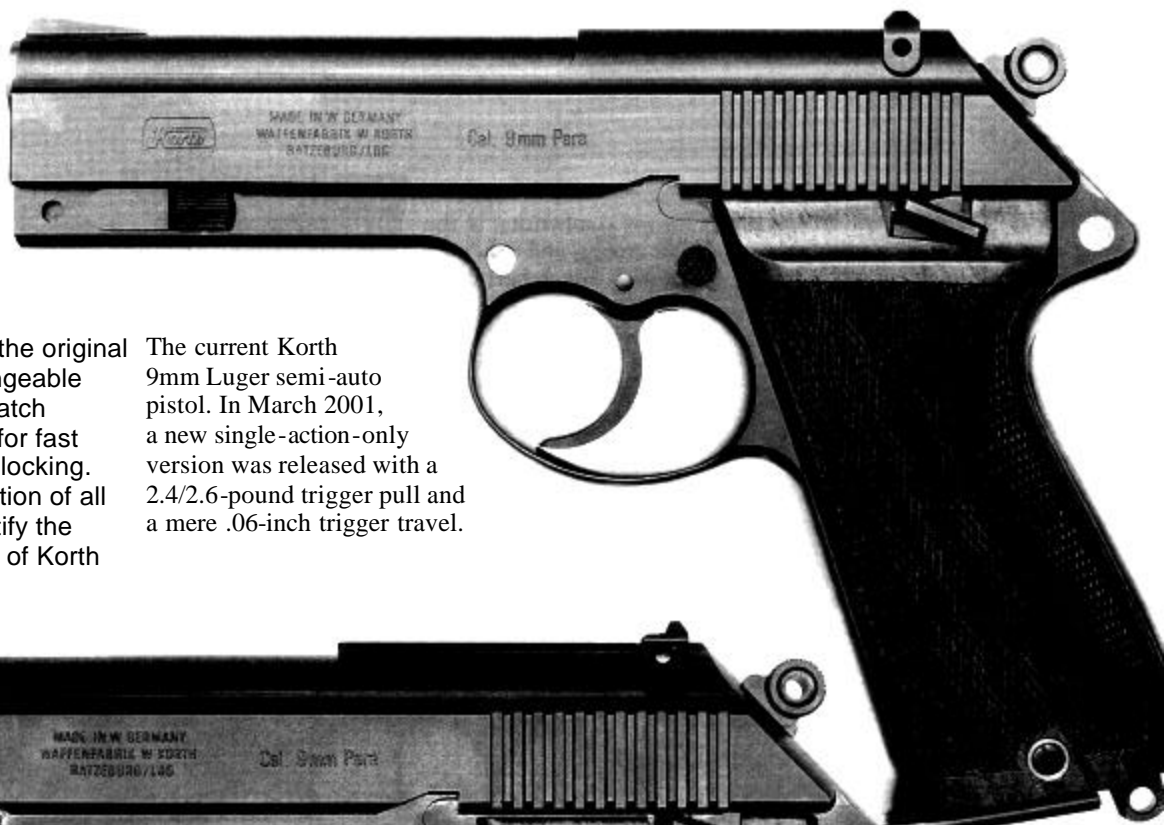
For double-action revolvers, such as those made by Korth, the action must be powerful, but soft and smooth, with a short DA-cocking cycle absolutely free of vibration when the hammer breaks, to prevent flinching in rapid fire. Then, handling qualities and balance must be considered, together with reliability and ease of cartridge case extraction, indicative of the uniform quality and interior finish of all chambers. Finally, the purist will not be satisfied with a poorly finished exterior or marred, poorly fitted parts.



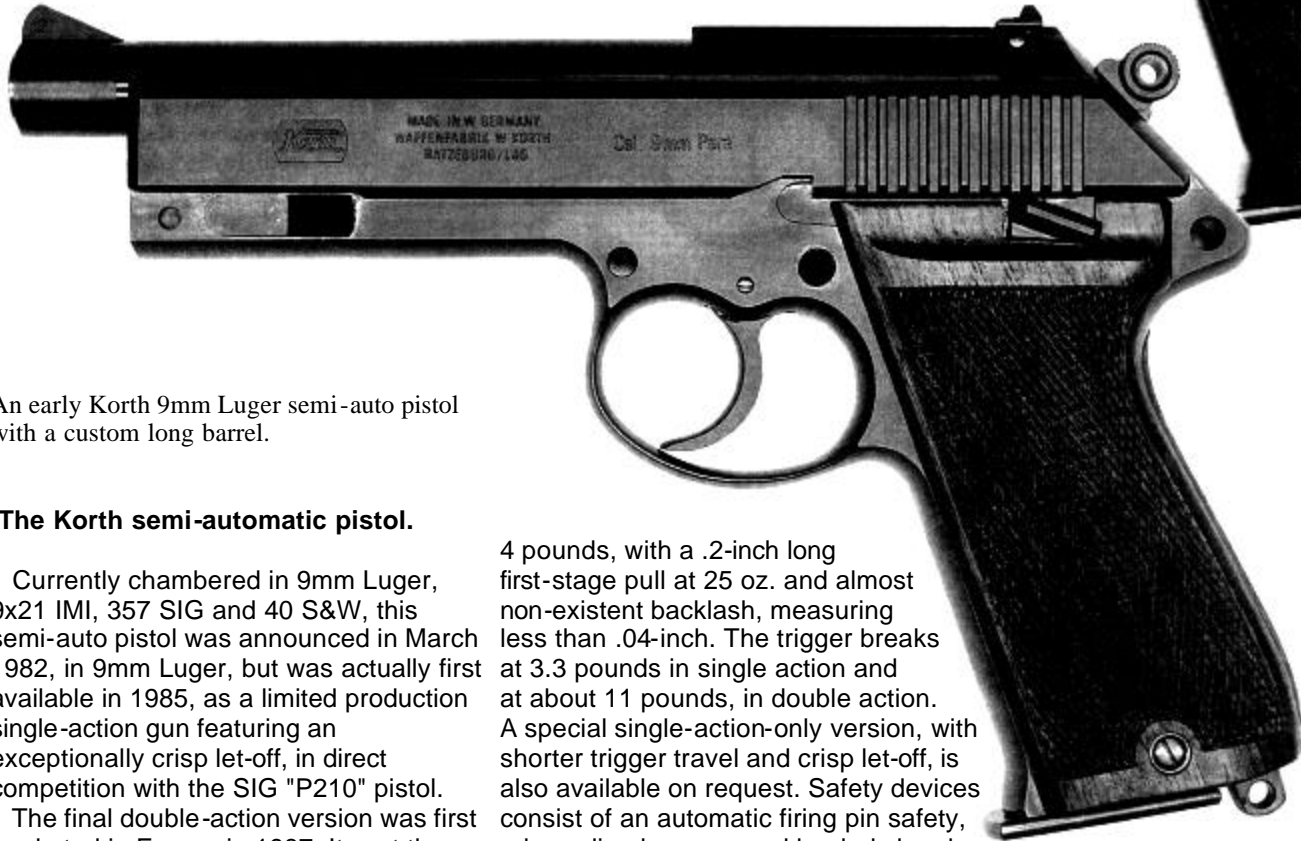
Revolver components ready for assembly.

A compact "Combat" Korth 3-inch barrel revolver, made in 1976

Besides these basic considerations, let us mention the exceptional smoothness of the Korth revolvers in double action, their adjustable let-offs with over-travel stop, the telescopic mainsprings, similar to the "MP-38 submachine gun recoil spring, the original indexing of the easily-interchangeable cylinders, the special cylinder latch design-parallel to the hammer for fast opening-and their axial double locking. It is the well-executed combination of all these design elements that justify the cost... and explain the success of Korth revolvers for some forty years.



The current Korth 9mm Luger semi-auto pistol. In March 2001, a new single-action-only version was released with a 2.4/2.6-pound trigger pull and a mere .06-inch trigger travel.



An early Korth 9mm Luger semi-auto pistol with a custom long barrel.

-The Korth semi-automatic pistol.

Currently chambered in 9mm Luger, 9x21 IMI, 357 SIG and 40 S&W, this semi-auto pistol was announced in March 1982, in 9mm Luger, but was actually first available in 1985, as a limited production single-action gun featuring an exceptionally crisp let-off, in direct competition with the SIG "P210" pistol.

The final double-action version was first marketed in France in 1987. It cost then, in my country, the equivalent of \$3,400! This first batch was numbered from 1 to 100. Nowadays, production samples of this pistol cost, in the United States, from \$4,900 to \$5,500, according to the finish selected.

As with the Korth revolvers, this axial short-recoil semi-automatic pistol (typically German!) is a mechanical perfection, without 'play' between the barrel and the receiver (even without recoil spring tension), to the pivoting trigger. The slide is very smooth to operate, with minimal operating 'play.' Bearing and external surfaces are highly polished, with perfect edges.

The single-action pull of the sample we fire-tested in 1987 was very clean, at

4 pounds, with a .2-inch long first-stage pull at 25 oz. and almost non-existent backlash, measuring less than .04-inch. The trigger breaks at 3.3 pounds in single action and at about 11 pounds, in double action. A special single-action-only version, with shorter trigger travel and crisp let-off, is also available on request. Safety devices consist of an automatic firing pin safety, rebounding hammer and loaded chamber indicator. A thumb-operated safety is optional. The sturdy swiveling barrel lock is located under the barrel, near the muzzle.

- Korth Germany GmbH, today.

Recently (April, 2000) the Korth company was purchased by Freylinger & Co., gunsmiths in Leverage, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, who have infused new blood in the undertaking and are developing its activities.

As an early initiative, Korth Company GmbH has created, for the millennium, a limited batch of ten commemorative "Combat" 357 Magnum 4-inch barrel revolvers,

designated "Anno Domini 2000" and numbered from 2000-1 to 2000-10.

These richly finished revolvers are treated with gold-tone PVD plasma coating (like spacecraft), deeply engraved, and decorated with thorns. Grips are made of exquisite ambonia wood.

Willi Korth is no more, but his works endure!

KORTH GERMANY GmbH
 Robert Bosch Strasse, 11
 D-23909
 RATZEBURG, Germany
 www.korthwaffen.de
 Fax: (04.541).84.05.35