

*Wild West Gunmen Were Not So Hot*

dered instantly unconscious, and plugs the sixth and last—the real villain of the piece—plumb through the heart.

Glorifiers of our Men of the Draw, real and fictional, never feel they have done their hammer man justice until they have permitted him to perform half a dozen ballistically impossible gun stunts. Billy the Kid, First Gun Hand of New Mexico during the early '80s, whiled away many happy hours on the trail, it seems, by nonchalantly barking each fence post as he galloped past. Of course the chronicler blissfully ignored the fact that there were no fence posts along the trails in Lincoln County sixty years back. (N.B.: And damned few today!) Wes Hardin, Texas's brightest contribution to that shining galaxy of powder-burning immortals, used to draw his twin .41's, and fanning both simultaneously, ignite a dozen matches with as many bullets. This remarkable feat of gunning legerdemain has probably impressed me more deeply than any other, for the clever Mr. Hardin undoubtedly must have fanned the hammers with his teeth. Contemporary experts, as well as the less dexterous modern gun handlers, have found it necessary to hold the sixgun in one hand and fan the hammer with the other. Wes Hardin's scribe disdained to have his stalwart stoop to such petty conventionalities.

Clay Allison, dapper gambler and killer extraordinary, used to toss up the five of diamonds, thumb out a machine-gunlike burst of shots—and the pasteboard would float to earth, a ragged tear where each spot had been. Ben Thompson, Abilene gun wolf, with more notches on his old hawleg than teeth in a buzz saw, shot a fellow's boot heels off while forcing him to dance, blasted the buttons off his pants, and laughed uproariously when the poor dude's breeches fell about his knees. Later Ben, who, if we may place any credence in his chroniclers, had a most subtle sense of humor, neatly clipped the ash from the Abilene mayor's cigar as he stood drinking in the Longhorn Saloon. When the mayor turned to protest, Ben upped his Old Convincer and bored a perfectly round hole in Hizzoner's ear exactly 45/100 of an inch in diameter.

Ah, but Wild Bill Hickok was the gunman extraordinary! Wild Bill, leadslinger without parallel. Wizard of the draw. Straight-shooting, fast-shooting Abilene marshal. Verily, the super triggerman in a day when there were only two classes of Westerners—the quick and the dead. Wild Bill, bless 'im, was colorful copy for ten million words of paperback fiction. Hickok has accomplished more with his magical sixes than Thor with his hammer, Zeus with his thunderbolts, and Darryl Zanuck with his entire corps of movie rewrite men.

To quote from Alsike's "Life of Wild Bill Hickok" ". . . he (Bill, of course) strode out of the Longhorn and noting that the street was filled with Texas men, all of whom were avowed enemies, Wild Bill thought to impress these fierce cowboys of the Texas pampas with his six-shooter skill. Forthwith he drew his long-barreled, cap-and-ball weapons and firing both revolvers so fast there was a steady stream of fire at the muzzles and the shots sounded so close together the reports could not be counted, emptied both weapons. His target was a sign hanging in front of the town's only blacksmith shop. 'Jim Cooley, Blacksmith' read the board above the swinging doors of the farrier's place. Wild Bill had fired his guns at the 'oo' in the name 'Cooley.' On inspection each 'o' was found to contain six bullet holes. Afterward, spectators paced the distance and found that it measured 187 long steps."

At 200 yards the modern .45 Colt bullet drops eleven feet. At 187 yards, or paces, as stepped by the witnesses of Hickok's little shooting lesson, the bullets would probably drop only about nine and one-half feet. So, you may see that while Wild William had been handed down to us as a pistoleer of remarkable versatility he was also an engineer of no mean accomplishment. On that memorable