The M1 Garand Buyer's Guide
Part 2

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I almost wanted to title this "Buying a Used Gun," it would seem to be an oxymoron to use such terminology given that military production stopped over 40 years ago and pretty much all the military rifles are used. However, the concept of used could use some clarification.

Most all of these military rifles have gone through a re-arsenal process, and probably more than once. This is not to mention use and abuse in the hands of potentially hundreds of troops in who knows how many countries. They are all basically used, and not in the configuration in which they left the factory. The big question is, "How used is used?" Is it safe to shoot, and will it shoot? Although the following discussion assumes that we are talking about a military surplus rifle, most of the concepts would apply to all Garand models including the commercial aftermarket variety.

VALUE

OK, you are determined that you need a legendary M1 Garand and are on a quest to find one. Let's go ahead and jump right into the hardest question, which is, "What are these things worth?" The simple and truthful answer is, "Whatever someone is willing to write a good check for." With that said, I think the market for this "...greatest battle implement ever devised" (George S. Patton), falls into two distinct categories: collectors and shooters. Now, while there are some common areas between these two, generally you will find those who primarily want to own one for the historic nature of the rifle, and others who respect the history but just want one that shoots half-way decent. Value varies accordingly. The upper end of value is going to be for a "war" vintage rifle, usually WWII, but occasionally a Korean War vet will be on the high end. These rifles are going to have a high percentage, if not 100%, of the correct parts, including a stock that would be correct for the serial number.

The serial number is where it starts. Very good records were kept throughout the military production run of the Garand, particularly during WWII. Records are complete enough that, with the serial number, one can narrow down the production date to month and year. With that information, married with production numbers and approximate dates of production for the remainder of the parts necessary to build a rifle, you can determine if a particular rifle you are looking at has all the correct parts for the month and year that the receiver was made. Note; during WWII, barrel production was ahead of receiver production, thus it would be common to have a barrel dated 1-3 months before the production date of the receiver. If you had a Springfield rifle with a receiver date of 10-43 a correct barrel date would most likely be 9-43 or 8-43. This would be true for Springfield manufactured rifles, Winchester did not date their barrels, but did have stampings that changed between early and late war.

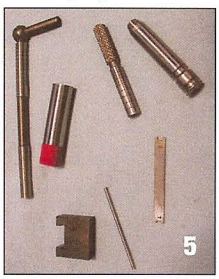
Speaking of Springfield and Winchester, these were the only two manufacturers of rifles during WWII, with Springfield making far more than Winchester, making Winchester more expensive to the collector. Post WWII, going into the Korean War and post-war, Springfield, Harrington & Richardson, and International Harvester made rifles. Note – the Springfield Armory that manufactured these rifles is not the same one that is presently making firearms. A Garand with a serial number in the high 6 million range or higher is most likely not a GI rifle. Also of note is the fact that Beretta also made Garands for the Italian government, Lithgow for the Australians, and you might even find some Scandinavian made guns around. Needless to say, who made it makes a difference in value.

If you had a correctly matched GI receiver, barrel, op rod, and all other parts including the properly cartouched original stock, you are looking at a price range of $1,200.00 to $1,800.00 as of mid-2010.

Once you have all the correct parts, the value would change according to the condition of the individual parts, the finish, the condition of the rifle in general and the condition of the barrel.

On the other end of the spectrum are the shooters. Most of these folks want to know what month/year the receiver was made, most want a WWII model, but again some won't care. The big thing is they want a functional Garand that they can take to the range and impress the kids and neighbors. Matching of parts is not critical, to the point that post WWII parts on a WWII receiver is not an issue, as long as it shoots decent. For this kind of rifle you are looking at a price range of $650.00 to $750.00. As a greater number of parts are assembled that match the receiver the higher the value goes to fill in the range between $750.00 and $1,200.00. Also in this middle range of values is the rifle that has a mix of parts relative to the receiver number but has a new barrel installed and properly headspaced. Again values depend on how complete the rifle is in the "correctness" of the parts. The right buyer is willing to pay a premium for an "all correct" rifle with a new barrel that he/she can feel confident about shooting on a regular basis, perhaps in competition.

Inspection gauges and tools



PARTS INSPECTION

In addition to the correct parts going into the correct receiver/rifle, there is a concern for the safety and functionality of the parts. Ideally you would be able to field strip a rifle that you were considering purchasing at the local gun show,

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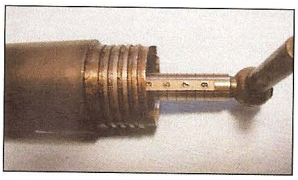
pawn shop, or used gun store. However, that is not always possible. You may have only limited permission to inspect the rifle. My best advice is that if you can't at least take the gun down to the tripper housing assembly and barrel/receiver assembly; don't buy it, especially if there is any little voice saying "be careful."

Let us start with the scenario that all you can do is hold the rifle without taking anything apart. The first thing I would look at is the bolt and the bolt recesses in the receiver. Do they look worn, nicked, overly rounded; does the bolt slip out of its grooves? Look at the bolt face; is it pitted, is there a primer ring around the firing pin hole from the use of corrosive primers, does the firing pin hole look out of round? If you have a firing pin gauge you might be able to do a quick check even with the bolt assembled and in the rifle. A new, stripped, bolt is going to cost you another $65.00. Next look at the breech end of the barrel, does it look beat up or nicked? How do the feed ramps look, are they in the six o'clock position?

If you have a throat gauge and permission to use it, insert it into the breech and check throat erosion; anything less than six is still in military spec. Look at the muzzle end of the barrel, how does the crown look? A bore light down the barrel is very useful.



Throat erosion gauge

Muzzle wear gauge

If you have a muzzle wear gauge (and permission), check the muzzle wear, anything less than 4 is within military spec. Although I like to check throat erosion and muzzle wear, these are not necessarily definitive measurements. I have worked on and shot many a rifle that had a muzzle reading of four or greater that shot very well, and I have had throat erosion measurements that were less than three that would not headspace. So, as Ken Brooks would say, "be aware". A new barrel without fitting is going to add $250.00+. My personal feeling is that for a rifle that I can't take apart, I want a muzzle and throat reading of three or less for a mid range price rifle that I intend to shoot a lot. Check the rear sights, unlock the windage and elevation knobs (with permission); do you hear and feel a click when moving elevation and windage knobs? If not, the serrations on the receiver and/or sight may be worn and can easily slip or be difficult to set.

If I can start taking parts off the rifle, the first part off is the gas plug. With a No Go gas plug gauge you can quickly find out if the gas tube is shot. If it is, you can bet that there are probably some cycling issues. A replacement used gas tube is going to cost around $85.00. If you can take the gun down to the trigger assembly and receiver/barrel assembly, check to see how tight the trigger assembly locks up with the stock. Tight is good, loose is not.

Op rod gauge

Check out the trigger assembly, you will be able to see trigger, sear, hammer, and safety. Check out functioning and visually check out critical engagement points for wear or breakage. Most of these parts are inexpensive so, if they need replacement, they won't cost you much. If you can break it down further and take the op rod off, check to see if the tip is in good condition and gauge it with an op rod gauge. If this is out of spec it is another cycling problem and another $125.00 part. Note; op rods are supposed to have a slight bend in them, don't try to straighten them out. Finally, if you can take out the bolt and slide a good known stripped bolt and No Go gauge into the breech, you will have some idea of headspace. I would not use the Field gauge to check unless I was willing to deal with a barrel/receiver that was not going to be shot much – a little scary using a Field gauge. At this point you can check firing pin protrusion with the proper gauge. Last part off, if allowed, would be the gas tube. With it off you can check the gas outlet hole on the barrel for corrosion, oversize, or out of round. Again, if there are any issues with this area it could affect cycling. Check the splines that hold the tube to the barrel, if it was real easy to take off they are too worn and would need to be peened.

It should not take more than 15 minutes to do a complete inspection, assuming you know what you are looking for, have the tools, and know how to field strip the rifle.

While you are putting the rifle back together check out the stock. See any cracks or repairs? It is hard to find cracks and problem wood when the stock is old and beat up. How do the swivels and butt plate look? Does the receiver overhang the stock or fit reasonably well on the stock? Note; the lower forearm covering the op rod is supposed to be loose, real tight is bad.

I realize that the average guy going to a gun show is not going to have the tools or perhaps even be able to field strip the rifle, even if they had permission. For those of you who can (or are willing to learn), these are things to look for. So, find a friend who does, or get the AGI video on the Garand. Ask the seller if he knows how the barrel or the gas tube gauges, ask if he will take it apart and show you. If he can't or won't, that tells you something – buyer beware. When I sell a Garand I have already gone through it and replaced anything that needed replacing. I am always happy to field strip the rifle for a potential buyer. I know what I am selling and can back it up.

These old guns seem to be gaining in popularity as a younger generation, fueled, in my opinion, by video games depicting these rifles, continues to expand. If you are going to invest in an M1 Garand for $750.00 to $1,200.00, resist the "gotta have it," and make sure you understand what you are buying, it can get more expensive than you thought to safely shoot it. ◆