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**THE ASTRAS 400 AND 300,
AND, THE STARS 1920, 1921, 1922 AND 1931 PISTOLS**



Eight shot, 9mm Largo caliber, ASTRA 400 pistol; 150 mm barrel, SN 17,671, marked: ESPERANZA Y UNCETA / GUERNICA / ESPAÑA / PISTOLA DE 9 mm / MODELO 1921, logo "ASTRA EU" (Esperanza y Unceta 1921-26)

As the Army became interested in a more modern pistol to replace the Bergmann and the Campo Giro, trials were announced for May of 1919 and April of 1920 but there were no participants; A third set of trials, set by Royal Order of February, 9, 1921, resulted in the adoption of the pistol presented by Esperanza y Unceta under the ASTRA trademark and "400" model designation, on September, 26 of the same year, with the following announcements:

"1st The "ASTRA" pistol is declared as regulation with the denomination of Astra Pistol model of 1921"

"2nd In the future all pistols built for or procured by, the Estate, for issue to the Army will be of the above named "Astra" model.

"3rd The Bergmann and Campo Giro model pistols will be considered to be obsolescent, although their use will continue until the present stocks are completely exhausted".

In the wording of the 1st point, it was not taken into consideration that ASTRA was a commercial trademark registered by Esperanza y Unceta and that it was used in several different models, while the 2nd point ended all acquisition by the Army, of the 9 mm Largo STAR pistol adopted by the Guardia Civil on November, 30, 1920.

The first point was corrected a few days later by Royal Order of October 6, that modified the denomination to "Model of 1921 9 mm Pistol", same as the one presented by Esperanza y Unceta under the ASTRA trademark; At that time the only 9 mm Largo ASTRA pistol made by Esperanza y Unceta was the ASTRA 400, but in 1923 the ASTRA 300, in 7,65 mm and 9 mm Corto calibers made its appearance, and now there were two ASTRA pistols in "9 mm caliber".



Navy Model of 1921, eight shot, 9 mm “Largo” caliber, pistol; SN 17, 671, marked: ESPERANZA Y UNCETA / GUERNICA / ESPAÑA / PISTOLA DE 9 mm / MODELO 1921, logo “ASTRA E.U.” (Esperanza y Unceta 1921-26). (Photo H. J. Meruelo)

After its adoption by the Army, the Model of 1921 pistol was adopted in 1922 by the Cuerpo de Carabineros (Border Guards) and the Prison Corps (Department of Corrections), in 1930 by the Vigilance and Security Corp of the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco, and in 1931 by the Military Aviation; The Navy adopted a variant of the Model 1921 which had a magazine release system similar to that of the ASTRA 300, which “Unceta y C^a” advertised as the “Only model approved for Chiefs and Officers of the Navy”, something which I have not been able to document; I was told by an Artillery officer who had close relations to the firm that the R.O of adoption of the Model 1921 only stated “9 mm caliber” without specifying if 9 mm Largo or Corto, which allowed the Chiefs and Officers of the Navy and other Corps to use the ASTRA 300 as the “regulation” sidearm, as it was smaller and of more comfortable wear.



Left: ASTRA 300 SN 628383, cal. 9 mm Corto pistol, marked: UNCETA Y COMPAÑIA S.A. GUERNICA ESPAÑA, logo ASTRA U.C. Right: ASTRA 300 advertisement

The ASTRA 400 and 300 pistols, inspired in the Campo Giro, had details patented by both, Pedro Careaga Garagarza, and by Juan Esperanza Salvador; I already commented on Careaga in the Eibar “Browning’s” chapter; Juan Esperanza was Pedro Unceta’s partner in the firm “Esperanza y Unceta” until 1925, when he went on his own as “Esperanza y C^a”, while “Esperanza y Unceta”, still directed by Rufino Unceta, was

restructured as “Unceta y C^a” who continued to own the ASTRA trademark and continued the manufacture of the 400 and 300 models until 1945 and 1947 respectively.



Left: STAR 1920 9 mm Largo pistol, SN 2519, marked: BONIFACIO ECHEVERRIA – EIBAR ESPAÑA followed by the bursting STAR logo and “STAR” CAL 9 m/m 38; It also bears the Guardia Civil’s entwined GC under crown emblem on the frame and on the matching number magazine; Right: STAR M 1920 advertisement. Notice the earlier M1914 type of safety. (Photos H. J. Meruelo)

As far as the Colt 1911 inspired, 9 mm Largo STAR pistol, its acquisition by the Guardia Civil was due to the insistence of its Director, Lieutenant General Zubia, in proceeding immediately to the adoption of an automatic pistol model without waiting for the results of any Army trials, as those of 1919 and 1920 had already failed, and the “sindicalista” pistols (used by strikers, anarchists, rioters and other troublemakers) were far superior to the “Smith” Model 1884 regulation revolvers still in use by the Guardia.

As the Ministry of War, which was responsible for the armaments used by the Guardia Civil, could not acquire any model not officially approved, a purchase by bidding, financed by the Ministry of the Interior was resorted to, and on November, 4, 1920, a purchase of 9,017 automatic pistols for officers and enlisted men, was authorized, and the “Military Model” STAR offered by Bonifacio Echeverria was selected as the Model 1920, with a safety similar to that on the Mod.1914 STAR, followed shortly thereafter by the Model 1921, more similar to the Colt 1911 with both thumb and grip, safeties.



Left: STAR M 1921 9 mm Largo pistol, SN 5625, marked: BONIFACIO ECHEVERRIA – EIBAR ESPAÑA followed by the bursting STAR logo and “STAR” CAL 9 m/m 38; and preceded by the Guardia Civil emblem on the left frame and on the matching number magazine; Right: STAR M1921 advertisement. Notice the thumb and grip safeties similar to the M1911 Colt. (Photos H. J. Meruelo)

Because of the second point mentioned in the official adoption of the “Model 1921 9 mm Pistol”, for the Army and Navy, it was necessary to add: “the adoption as regulation (sidearm) for the exclusive use of officers and enlisted men of the Guardia Civil, of the 9mm Largo caliber “Star” pistol, with the understanding that all matters regarding its issuing, refurbishing and spare parts, are the sole responsibility of this Corp”, by R.O of October, 5, 1922.

We must point out that in the above adoption there was no official model designation for the weapon, as there were two models in service simultaneously, the Models of 1920 and 1921, both publicized by Bonifacio Echeverria as “Adopted by our Government for the Guardia Civil”; A third model then followed after the Model of 1921, differing from it by the lack of the grip safety, named by Bonifacio Echeverria the, “STAR 1922 Military Model” and proclaimed as being “Declared as regulation for the Institute of the Guardia Civil, by R.O of October , 5, 1922 (D.O n° 226)(and) of great usefulness for all armed corps”



Left: STAR M 1922 9 mm Largo pistol, SN 24862, marked: BONIFACIO ECHEVERRIA – EIBAR (ESPAÑA) followed by the bursting STAR logo and “STAR” CAL 9 m/m 38; preceded by the Guardia Civil emblem on the frame and on the matching number magazine; Right: STAR M1922 advertisement. Notice that only the thumb safety remains, the grip safety having been eliminated. (Photo H. J. Meruelo)



Left: STAR M1931 9 mm Largo pistol, SN 166806, marked: Bursting STAR logo followed by STAR AUTOMATIC PISTOL CAL 9 m/m 38; and BONIFACIO ECHEVERRIA – EIBAR – ESPAÑA. This specimen is a commercial Model A; Right: STAR M1922 advertisement. Notice similarity to the Colt M 1911 A1. (Photo H. J. Meruelo)

After the acquisition of the first 9,017 9 mm Largo Star pistols, an amount that was insufficient for the needs of the Guardia Civil, other orders followed, amounting to a total of 31,883 units, including the “Military Model of 1931”, up until October, 18, 1935, as certified by the Colonel Chief of the Military Secretariat of the Inspectorate of the Guardia Civil.