

The name's Bond...

Robert Morgan take a look at a Holts Auctioneers lot known as the Gyrojet pistol, it fires self-propelled rocket projectiles and was the actual pistol used in a James Bond film

Working for an auction house that specialises in weaponry means that I am fortunate in getting to handle many items that most people only dream of owning. Sometimes they are incredibly rare, possibly even unique. Others may be of considerable value. However, it is always the provenance of an item that inspires me the most.



The producers gave the pistol to Sean Connery as a gift after filming finished

Featured here is an item that ticks all of the above boxes. Some reading this may even recognise it, but I am afraid not many are allowed to own it. Known as the Gyrojet pistol, it fires self-propelled rocket projectiles as opposed to conventional bullets. Furthermore, if that wasn't enough, this one is the actual pistol used by Sean Connery in the James Bond feature "You Only Live Twice".



The pistol is housed in a special case with dummy ammunition

Concept

The concept of the Gyrojet was the brainchild of two Americans, Robert Mainhardt and Art Biehl, who around 1962 combined to form the company MB Associates (MBA). Various calibres and types of arms were envisaged including pistols, carbines and even an assault rifle for the military. However, rejection by the military on grounds of accuracy and reliability meant only pistols and a handful of carbines were produced. In an attempt to increase accuracy, Mainhardt enlisted the help of his friend Nick Minchakievich from California who worked for the U.S. Airforce. Minchakievich initially made retractable fins for the rocket ammunition but this proved way too costly. He then designed four diagonally bored holes at the rear of the projectile which not only stabilised the rocket but caused it to spin in flight, increasing accuracy considerably. The "microjet" was born.

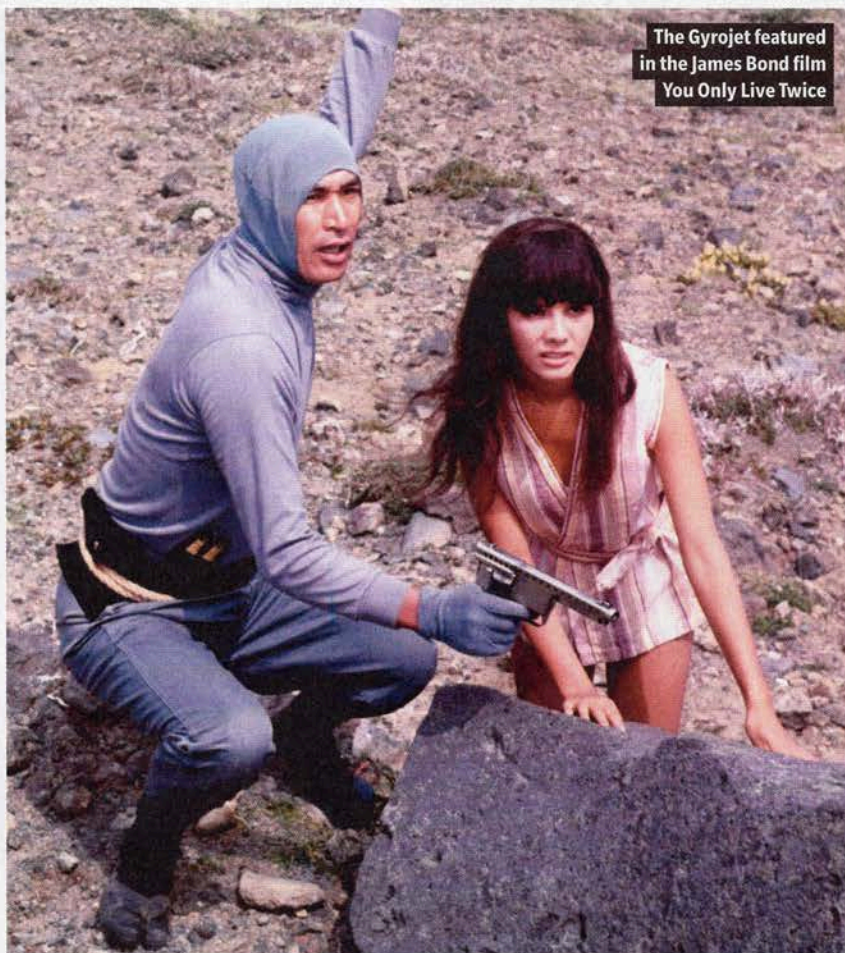
The inherent difference between a bullet and a rocket is that a conventional bullet reaches its maximum velocity whilst still in the barrel (creating large pressures and causing significant wear in the process). A rocket on the other hand continues to accelerate until all its fuel is expended, and only needs a comparatively lightweight tube to guide it as pressures generated are insignificant, certainly when compared to barrel proof pressures. The Gyrojet microjet projectile reaches maximum velocity of about 1,250fps at around 60ft from the muzzle (a burn time of approximately

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1/10th of a second). Experts suggest that at point blank range, the microjet would actually bounce off most targets, but that is not something I'd wish to put to the test!

Film future

Despite having twice the kinetic energy of the conventional .45 ACP round, the military remained unimpressed. Desperate for sales, Mainhardt approached Gene Roddenberry who was in the process of filming the TV series Star Trek. Roddenberry loved the Gyrojet, but despite its futuristic styling he really wanted a ray-gun rather than a pistol that simply fired "rockets". The makers of James Bond came to the rescue



The Gyrojet featured in the James Bond film *You Only Live Twice*

in 1967 by including it in the film "You Only Live Twice", but it was not enough to save the project and by the mid-1970s the guns went out of production. The producers gave this gun featured to Sean Connery after filming finished as a gift; in those days only the ammunition was controlled in any

The United States of America, 1959", and "In Recognition of His Pioneering Research in Rocket Propulsion".

According to adverts for the Gyrojet in the 1968 American publication the "Shooter's Bible", the Presentation Model is listed as follows: "Each Presentation Model is certified by the manufacturer to be one of the first thousand rocket handguns ever made. Each pistol is engraved and serially numbered, mounted in an attractive walnut case with 10 dummy rockets and a bronze medal honoring rocket pioneer Robert H Goddard."

In 1968 it carried a list price of \$250 (standard price at the time was \$175 for the antique nickel version). Nowadays, even an inert round of ammunition for the Gyrojet carries a price-tag of around £100, and with only about 1,000 pistols produced in total, the "presentation" example is a rare beast indeed even without the James Bond connection! Sadly, current UK law classifies the Gyrojet as a Section 5 (1) (ae) weapon, sharing its classification with exocet missiles and the like, meaning UK collectors will only ever get to see one in books or museum collections. ■

way, the pistol merely being a "tube". The pistol is actually what MBA described as its "Presentation Model" and was supplied with black pearlescent (plastic!) grips, an "antique" nickel finish and was housed in a special case with dummy ammunition and a limited edition die-struck bronze medallion – one side having a bust circled by "Robert Hutchings Goddard 1882 - 1945" and signed by "Evon Hebel", the reverse struck with a depiction of a rocket apparatus entitled "First Rocket March 16 1926" with the motto: "The Dream of Yesterday is the Hope of Today and the Reality of Tomorrow", circled by "In Honor of Robert H. Goddard By Act of Congress of