

# FIREARMS NEWS<sup>®</sup>

GUN SALES, REVIEWS & 2A INFORMATION / AUGUST 2026



## DAVID FORTIER REVIEWS **RUGER'S NEW HARRIER**

AN AR-15-TYPE RIFLE  
FOR LEAN TIMES!

SMITH & WESSON'S  
**940-3  
9MM  
REVOLVER**

**THE RPK  
AND RPK-74**  
LIGHT MACHINE GUNS

**WILSON  
COMBAT'S  
BULWARK  
PISTOL**

- **CARRYING CONCEALED**  
THE '80s RULES  
FOR CARRY—  
HOW HAVE  
THEY HELD UP?
- **MUSINGS  
FROM THE  
AMMO  
BUNKER**  
6X35MM  
TSWG
- **IN HUSHED TONES**  
THUNDER BEAST  
ARMS SPIRO  
SUPPRESSOR
- **RELOADING**  
SUPER-SOFTY  
9MM LOAD
- **NFA COLLECTING**  
THE M-11/9  
SUBMACHINE GUN
- **THE WAR GUNS**  
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JOHNSON LIGHT  
MACHINE GUN
- **NEWSSTAND**  
IMPORTANT  
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- **PRODUCT SHOWCASE**  
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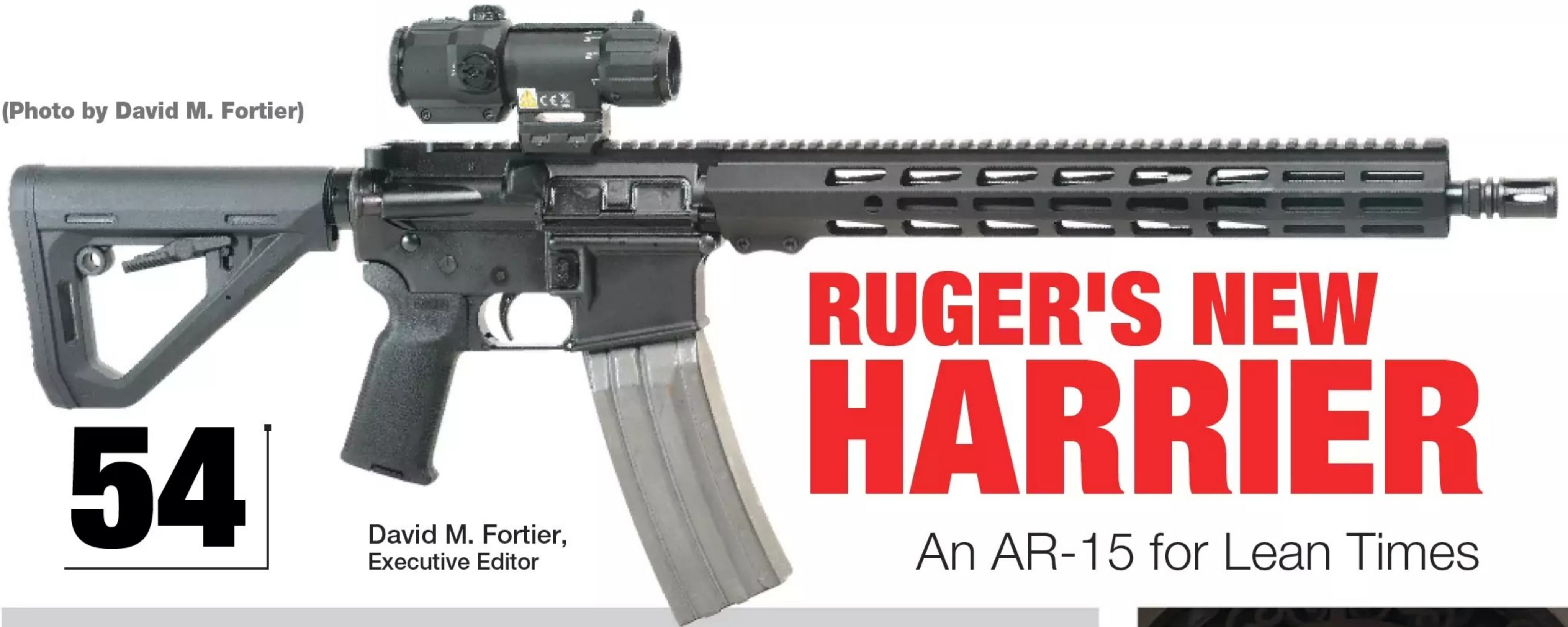
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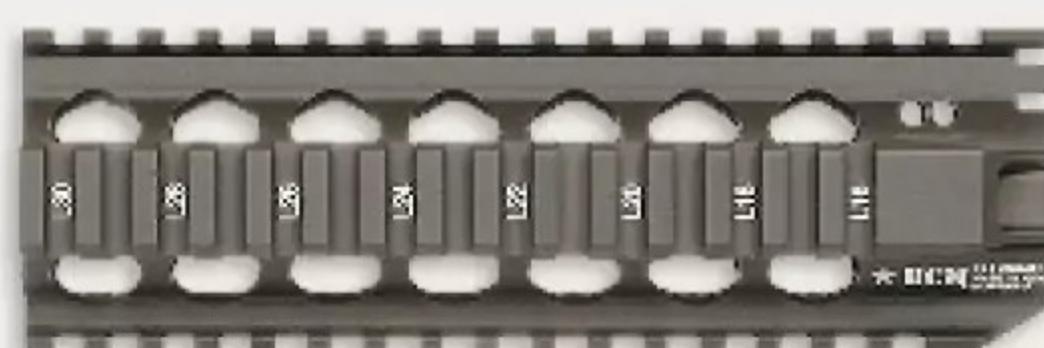
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# ATF DIRECTOR CEKADA'S CONCERN FOR ADAMIAK MISSES LARGER POINT

If Cekada Is as Pro-2A as He Says He Is, Then He Needs to Focus on the Intent of That Amendment for This Case.

By David Codrea, Politics Field Editor

**“ATF** Director Rob Cekada recently acknowledged that the 20-year prison sentence brought by charges his agency presented to the U.S. Department of Justice against Patrick Tate Adamiak was far longer than anything he had ever seen,” Lee “The Gun Writer” Williams writes for the Second Amendment Foundation’s “Investigative Journalism Project. Williams has been a prolific chronicler of the case, having filed over 40 stories to date on Adamiak’s ordeal, one that began with a confidential informant working with ATF to work off charges of his own.

firearms under an expansive interpretation of the statute.”

“Joe Biden’s ATF lied about what their confidential informant had purchased from Adamiak,” Williams notes. “They lied again to obtain a search warrant of Adamiak’s property. They found nothing illegal while executing their search warrant, so they lied yet again about the legal items they found in order to obtain a conviction.”

That was the Biden administration. We are now well into the Trump administration and until Cekada was directly asked about the case prompting a for-the-record response, there’s



(BreizhAtao/Shutterstock)

“Cekada promised neither he nor the ATF will be ‘offended by the outcome of the courts,’ because he wants to make sure that Adamiak was ‘appropriately sentenced,’” Williams recounted.

That’s mighty big of him. However, Second Amendment advocates should be offended by such a presumptuous response.

The fact of the matter is, as Williams documents, “Adamiak did nothing wrong. He broke no laws or ATF regulations.” And even if he

**“Joe Biden’s ATF lied about what their confidential informant had purchased from Adamiak,” Williams notes.**

“Adamiak is a former U.S. Navy sailor who served honorably for over a decade and had no prior criminal history. He was sentenced to 20 years’ imprisonment for alleged violations of the National Firearms Act based on the possession of nonfunctional, cut-up, destroyed relics,” NRA-ILA wrote in its announcement that it was joining SAF and others in an amicus brief asking the Supreme Court to hear his case. “The items had been rendered inoperable or were incomplete parts that could not fire, yet prosecutors treated them as fully functional regulated

been no movement on the part of the administration to make good on the Second Amendment promises that got the president elected.

For his part, as he revealed in a Cam & Company interview, Cekada seemed to buy into the charges (“ATF folks have told me they were not properly demilled and ultimately very easily were assembled to fall into what the law would call a machinegun”) and focused instead on the length of Adamiak’s sentence, noting dangerous criminals deliberately flouting the law had received much lighter sentences.

had, an honest reading of the Second Amendment with Founding intent would show the only ones doing anything wrong are government usurpers.

—  
*David Codrea is the winner of multiple journalist awards for investigating/defending the RKBA and a long-time gun owner rights advocate who defiantly challenges the folly of citizen disarmament. In addition to being a regular featured contributor for Firearms News, he blogs at “The War on Guns: Notes from the Resistance,” and posts on Twitter: @dcodrea and Facebook. **FN***

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# VIRGINIA PROSECUTORS REFUSING TO ENFORCE “ASSAULT WEAPONS” BAN

## Will This Provide a Template for DOJ to Follow?

By David Codrea,  
Politics Field Editor

**“A** growing number of Virginia prosecutors and sheriffs are publicly signaling they do not plan to enforce or prosecute certain violations under the commonwealth’s new assault firearms restrictions before the law takes effect July 1,” the Center Square reports. “The expanding list of statements follows earlier opposition from several commonwealth’s attorneys after Gov. Abigail Spanberger signed Senate Bill 749 and House Bill 217 in May.”

That would be the new “law” that, per the governor’s press release, “prohibit[s] the future sale of assault firearms and the possession of a magazine which has a capacity of more than 15 rounds.” And while “firearms bought or owned before July 1, 2026” are supposedly “grandfathered,” there’s nothing that stops any government that thinks it can get away with this from coming back for more. Noting that Spanberger added the obligatory “I support the Second Amendment BUT” into her announcement, expect that they will the moment they think the time is right.

Tellingly, Spanberger signaled she knew the bill wouldn’t pass legal muster with her statement admission, “While the General Assembly chose not to adopt my amendment that specifically carves out certain firearms frequently used for hunting, I will work with the patrons to clarify this language.”



(Ketanof/Shutterstock)

“The governor’s acknowledgment that the law covers common hunting models will likely be cited in Second Amendment challenges,” Constitutional law scholar Jonathan Turley writes. “If the law is not amended, she could prove the main witness against her own signed legislation.” (That can be useful as long as we don’t forget that the Second Amendment isn’t about hunting and relying on what’s “in common use” has, can, and will be used to deny past,

current, and future arms which are not commercially popular.)

One of the early voices refusing to enforce the ban (Virginia Citizens Defense League has comprised a list of 13 prosecutors to date) is Marine veteran and commonwealth attorney for Spotsylvania County Ryan Mehaffey, who flat-out refused to enforce the ban and sent a letter to the sheriff declaring the ban is “unconstitutional and cannot be lawfully enforced.”



Second Amendment activists, including members of the Virginia Citizens Defense League, protest gun ban proposals back in 2020 in Richmond, Virginia. (ButtermilkgirlVirginia/Shutterstock)





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That's consistent with the 1803 case of *Marbury v. Madison*, where Chief Justice John Marshall declared "[a] Law repugnant to the Constitution is void."

The ban "is striking at the core of the militia system that existed in Virginia," Mehaffey informed Fox News, showing he is one of the few public officials who "gets it," or is at least willing to publicly acknowledge that reality. "Our founders were careful to make sure when they drafted our founding document, that the ultimate right of the people was preserved to defend themselves and to defend their community. So, the linchpin of the constitutional analysis is going to be does this instrument have some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a regulated militia."

"Prosecutors in Virginia swear an oath to the United States Constitution — the supreme law of the land — and also to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Virginia," attorney and Second Amendment commentator Mark W. Smith writes, corroborating Mehaffey's right to refuse. "A statute that violates either one is verboten, and prosecutors may not enforce it. Doing so would be in violation of the oath every prosecutor takes."

"Banning the purchase and transfer of firearms necessarily implicates the

text of the Second Amendment, because acquiring a gun is the prerequisite to keeping or bearing one," Smith elaborates. "Once the plain text is implicated, the burden shifts — entirely — to the government."

"Virginia Criminal Code is also on the side of the prosecutors," Smith adds. "Virginia's statutes empower criminal prosecutors with the prosecutorial discretion to refuse to commence or even walk away from a criminal prosecution."

Such discretion is something the federal government could better apply. Case in point: "Republicans in Congress failed gun owners by failing to fully repeal the NFA [National Firearms Act] in the One Big Beautiful Bill," Gun Owners of America notified followers on X.

"Don't like bad gun laws? Tell Congress!" Department of Justice Civil Rights Division Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon replied (significantly, on her personal, rather than official X account). In addition to being reminiscent of Pontius Pilate washing his hands to absolve himself of consequential responsibility, that ignores the reality that without an unchallengeable political majority supporting the Second Amendment, a right delayed will forever be a right denied.

Add to that continue prosecutions of gun owners to enforce clear infringements on the Second Amendment and it is way past time the "pro-gun" DOJ started showing a lot more "discretion," and follow the lead of principled prosecutors like Mehaffey by explaining why they're refusing and instructing enforcers to stand down.

Even if it gets Third World immigrant gun-grabbers, intent on turning the Founder's Republic into the hell-holes they escaped from, mad at them:

"Virginia state Sen. Saddam Azlan Salim (D) is telling prosecutors who say they will not enforce his 'assault weapons' ban to quit 'tough guy posturing.'"

What he seems blissfully ignorant of in his tyrannical threat is that tough guys don't posture.

—

*David Codrea is the winner of multiple journalist awards for investigating/defending the RKBA and a long-time gun owner rights advocate who defiantly challenges the folly of citizen disarmament. In addition to being a regular featured contributor for Firearms News, he blogs at "The War on Guns: Notes from the Resistance," and posts on Twitter: @dcodrea and Facebook. **FN***

## HEARING SCHEDULED FOR MILITIA-BASED CHALLENGE TO VA 'ASSAULT WEAPON' BAN

### More Complaints About the Law Being Unconstitutional Are Piling Up

By David Codrea, Gun Politics Field Editor

**W**hile four other challenges to Virginia's "assault weapon" and magazine ban are on hold pending a decision

by a three-judge panel on whether they should be consolidated, another complaint is still "scheduled to be argued on June 17th,



(zmotions/Shutterstock)

[Cont. to page 90]



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Tarr's carry gun for most of the nineties was this Springfield Armory 1911. It broke two of the "80s carry gun rules"—it was highly customized, and had a trigger pull under 4 lbs. (Photos by Andy Grossman)



# THE '80s RULES FOR CARRY— HOW HAVE THEY HELD UP?

## **T**hese four statements:

1. Don't modify your carry gun,
2. Don't carry a gun with a trigger pull under four pounds,
3. Don't carry handloaded ammo for self-defense, and
4. Carry any caliber you want, as long as it starts with a "4,"

were endlessly debated in gun magazines, gun stores, and at shooting ranges all through the 1980s and for years if not decades after. Some people considered them near-gospel statements of fact, others were not so convinced. Let's look at them with modern eyes. Please keep in mind that

I'm not a lawyer and don't play one on TV, I'm just a former cop and have a lot of practical experience in this area, combined with common sense.

**1. Don't modify your carry gun.** Back in the eighties, factory guns weren't built to be altered by the consumer. You could replace the grips, but even something as simple as switching out the sights was an ordeal. So, if you carried a "customized" pistol, that was (supposedly) a sign to an antagonistic prosecutor (if you got into a shooting) that you were someone who'd just been itching to shoot someone. I didn't agree with that defensive mindset then, and today...the world of firearms is completely different.

Modern pistols are designed to be adaptable, upgradeable, personalized

by the consumer. The market has demanded it, and manufacturers have answered. Replacement parts are everywhere, and it generally is quick and easy to swap out sights, grips, and springs. Replace standard barrels with ported or extended threaded models. The current hotness is chassis construction, where the "frame" is in fact just a grip module, and you can buy replacements from the factory that are different sizes, colors, textures, etc. People are also attaching red dots and white lights to carry guns, which is technically "modifying" that gun. As long as you're not slapping a Punisher skull on your gat or etching "Kill 'Em All" on the slide (both of which could signal intent), I don't see a problem.



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**A four-pound trigger pull in the '80s was deemed to be the minimum acceptable for carry, but is the four-pound pull on this Glock really safer than the 3¼-pound pull of the 1911, when the 1911 has two mechanical safeties that have to be disengaged before it can fire? (Photo by James Tarr)**

**2. Don't carry a gun with a trigger pull under four pounds.** There's two parts to this—first, back in the day, factory trigger pulls sucked, and no factory gun had a pull under four pounds, so if yours did, you'd had work done to it and see #1 above. Second, a pull under four pounds could, theoretically, be argued to be a “hair trigger” by an aggressive prosecutor, indicating either lack of safety and/or aggressive intent.

Modern trigger pulls, across the board, have gotten better—lighter, smoother, shorter. Several of the pistols I've reviewed in the past six months have had, from the factory, 3.75-pound trigger pulls. They are not inherently unsafe. If you haven't mastered “keep your finger off the trigger until the sights are on the target,” it's you that's unsafe.

The biggest proponent of the “four-pound” rule for trigger pulls back in the day rarely talked about mechanical safety, his (nearly) sole concern was how that light trigger would (again) be viewed by a possibly antagonistic prosecutor. My perspective has always been this—I want the trigger pull on my carry gun to be as short, light, and crisp as possible, to improve my shooting and thus my chances of surviving a violent encounter. If I survive, I'll spend my day in court. And, at the end of the day, what's important is whether or not the bullets you fired went where you wanted them to. Heavy trigger pulls impede this. Jeff Cooper him-

self stated “three pounds, crisp, is the word” when talking about the proper trigger pull on a carried 1911 for someone who knows what they're doing.

I will say that a 1911 has a thumb and grip safety, both of which have to be manually deactivated before the gun will fire. Most modern striker-fired pistols only have a safety lever on the trigger, and if something gets wedged into the trigger guard during reholstering...well, in that case a heavy trigger pull will be an additional margin of safety. If you're carrying appendix, with that muzzle wedged into your junk drawer....

**3. Don't carry handloaded ammo for self-defense.** People thought about doing this back in the eighties because all factory ammo performed so poorly. They were experimenting with different bullets and velocities to get better terminal performance. That's exactly how Cor-Bon Ammunition got its start. The people who were against handloaded ammo weren't concerned with its terminal performance, but rather how its mere presence in your carry gun would (again—I know, right?) signal murderous intent to a prosecutor. Luckily, this is completely unnecessary today, and that brings us to...

**4. Carry any caliber you want, as long as it starts with “4.”** I call these



**Back in the day, whether or not your hollow point expanded was a definite “maybe”, so the rule was bigger (at least a .4 of an inch) was always better, and the 10mm was designed to be the ultimate defensive cartridge. (Photo by James Tarr)**



**People were wanting to handload carry ammo in the '80s simply because factory hollow points lacked performance. That is no longer the case. (Photo by James Tarr)**

“The Caliber Wars,” and the debates led to endless “9mm vs. .45 ACP,” then “9mm vs. 40 S&W vs. .45 ACP” articles in gun magazines, with the occasional mention of the 10mm. The truth was hollow point performance in the eighties sucked, they couldn't be guaranteed to expand (or 9mms even penetrate cars), so the answer was bigger heavier bullets. The .45 ACP was a bit much for most people...and so the .40 S&W became the new hotness. It was a compromise in every way, but it did what it was supposed to do. However, because of the 1986 Miami shootout, the FBI developed their Ammunition Testing Protocol, and things have never been the same.

Ammo makers have improved their design and manufacturing processes so much they can program how much JHPs will expand, and how deep they'll penetrate, out of various-length barrels, through clothing, auto glass or car doors, drywall, etc. Performance isn't just consistent, it's almost guaranteed. Real-world shooting results have shown that, today, there is no statistical difference in terminal performance between 9mm, .40 S&W, and .45 ACP, which is why almost all law enforcement agencies and private citizens have switched to 9mm. You'll still likely need more than one hit (because handguns still suck at stopping people, at least compared to shotguns or rifles, all they do is poke holes), but with a 9mm you've got less recoil and more rounds in the gun to get the job done. **FN**



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**KAC's 6x35mm PDW faded away into the history books, but was its 6x35mm TSWG cartridge the best of the PDW rounds? (Photo by David M. Fortier)**

# 6X35MM TSWG:

## THE BEST OF THE PDW CARTRIDGES?

Is the Best PDW Cartridge One You Never Heard of?

**W**hile there are a number to choose from, which is the best of the Personal Defense Weapon (PDW) cartridges? Might it be FNH's 5.7x28mm introduced with the P90? Or perhaps HK's 4.6x30mm developed for the MP7? Colt's still-born 5.56x30mm MARS? What about the World War II-vintage .30 Carbine? While each of these has its merits, I lean toward the little-known 6x35mm TSWG (Technical Support Working Group) cartridge developed by Knight's Armament Company, or KAC as they are commonly known.

Why would I select an obscure cartridge that failed to win a government contract and faded into history? To answer that question, let's examine this interesting 6mm and its intended purpose. Like a number of innovative designs, the 6x35mm TSWG is based on the .221 Remington Fireball cartridge introduced in 1963. The 6x35mm TSWG is a compact rimless bottleneck cartridge noticeably shorter than a 5.56x45mm NATO round. It features a case length of 35mm, and it has a rim diameter of 0.378 inch and a base diameter of 0.376 inch.

The Hornady factory ammunition I had the opportunity to test fire featured a 0.243-inch diameter 65-grain hollow point bullet. This had a cannelure for reliable operation in fully automatic weapons. The projectile measured approximately 0.913 inch long and had a boat-tail to enhance its exterior ballistics. The open-tip design was intended to improve terminal performance. Propellant consisted of a charge of extruded smokeless powder. Beneath this was a standard non-corrosive boxer-type small rifle primer.





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**Knight's 6x35mm TSWG with its peers: (L to R) 5.56x45mm, 5.45x39mm, 6x35 TSWG, 65-grain 6mm HP projectile, 5.7x28mm, and 9x19mm. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**

This cartridge was optimized for barrels measuring eight to 10 inches in length. Fired from the 10-inch barrel of KAC's PDW, the 65-grain load produced 2,425 fps and generated approximately 831 ft-lbs. of energy. It was also capable of penetrating soft body armor at 300 meters. While realistic PDW engagements are generally far closer, the cartridge delivered energy comparable to a 62-grain M855 fired from a 10.3-inch Mk18. In practical terms, the 6x35mm TSWG put a slightly larger and heavier projectile on target at similar velocities.

It's important to understand the 6x35mm TSWG was never intended to replace general-purpose infantry cartridges like the 5.56x45mm NATO, 5.45x39mm or 7.62x39mm. Instead, it was designed as a better solution for ultra-compact PDWs, bridging the gap between conventional rifles and pistol-caliber submachine guns. It is its ability to bridge this gap which I find very appealing.

The challenge facing designers of the time was that existing PDW options all involved compromise. Traditional 9mm Parabellum submachine guns were compact and controllable, but struggled against

modern body armor and offered limited range. This shortcoming led to the development of specialized PDW cartridges like FN's 5.7x28mm and HK's 4.6x30mm.

Both were designed to defeat soft body armor while maintaining a lightweight, compact weapon system. The FN P90 and HK MP7 attracted considerable interest from military and law enforcement organizations around the world. However, both relied on lightweight, small-diameter projectiles traveling at high velocity. While this provided armor penetration, questions persisted regarding terminal performance.

At the opposite end of the spectrum sat the 5.56x45mm NATO. It performed exceptionally well from standard-length barrels, but shortening the platform to true PDW dimensions increased blast, flash and noise while reducing velocity. The resulting weapons remained effective, but they were operating outside the conditions for which the cartridge had been designed.

This left a gap in the market. Military planners wanted a weapon smaller than a conventional carbine but more capable than a pistol-caliber



**Despite its light 4.3-pound weight the author found KAC's PDW pleasant to fire and easy to control on semi and full-automatic. (Photo by Dillard "CJ" Johnson)**





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\*Velocities are subject to change based upon barrel length. Refer to Fiocchiusa for additional SBR velocity information.



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**KAC's 6x35mm TSWG cartridge was designed to perform well from eight and 10-inch barrels reducing muzzle flash, blast and noise compared to a short barrel 5.56x45mm. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**

submachine gun. They wanted armor penetration comparable to emerging PDW systems along with improved

platforms. On paper, at least, it appeared to offer the best attributes of both worlds.

**Rather than shortening a conventional rifle cartridge, they designed a new round optimized from the outset for barrels as short as eight inches.**

terminal performance and a cartridge optimized specifically for short barrels.

That is where the 6x35mm TSWG becomes particularly interesting. Rather than relying on extreme velocity, Knight's Armament selected a larger-diameter 65-grain projectile capable of delivering greater mass and frontal area on target. Rather than shortening a conventional rifle cartridge, they designed a new round optimized from the outset for barrels as short as eight inches.

In many respects, the 6x35mm TSWG occupied the middle ground between existing solutions. It promised better terminal performance than the 5.7x28mm and 4.6x30mm while avoiding the excessive blast and flash generated by ultra-short 5.56x45mm

Unlike a 5.56x45mm M855 ball round, the 6x35mm TSWG does not exhibit the substantial muzzle blast, flash and sound signature associated with short-barreled AR-15s. Because the cartridge was designed around a 10-inch barrel, propellant is largely consumed before the bullet exits the muzzle. The result is a comparatively mild firing signature, even during fully automatic fire, making it more pleasant to shoot and reducing disruption to nearby personnel.

My thoughts? I like the concept of a modern Personal Defense Weapon that's accurate, easy to control on full auto, has a relatively flat trajectory, and a mild sound/flash signature. Knight's Armament Company's 6x35mm TSWG cartridge provides all this. During testing at Knight's facility in Titusville,

Florida I found their compact PDW very easy to hit with on semi-automatic and quite controllable on full automatic. The KAC PDW handles well, and with its mild recoil impulse and good trigger it is very easy to take rapid aimed shots on semi-automatic.

The recoil impulse of the cartridge combined with the characteristics of the firearm also makes it very controllable on full automatic. Even while dumping entire magazines in one long burst it was relatively simple to keep rounds on target at practical distances despite the weapon's light 4.5-pound weight. Best of all, unlike a M16 shorty or AKS-74U, there was no blinding muzzle flash, deafening report or horrendous over pressure wave. You pressed the trigger, the gun rattled away and rounds impacted the target. Simple and effective.

At the time of its introduction, the 6x35mm TSWG appeared to be a logical solution to the PDW conundrum, especially when paired with KAC's ultra-compact 4.3-pound

carbine. At first glance, the weapon resembles a scaled-down AR-15 with a side-folding stock. A closer look reveals a noticeably smaller receiver and magazine, resulting in a lighter, handier package.

In many respects, the concept was ahead of its time. Rather than forcing a conventional rifle cartridge into an extremely short barrel, KAC designed a cartridge specifically optimized for the role. The result was a compact weapon with low flash, reduced blast and respectable terminal performance. It is perhaps best compared to another interesting but ultimately unsuccessful PDW cartridge, Colt's 5.56x30mm MARS. I would love to see the 6x35mm TSWG cartridge make a come-back, but I do not see that happening in the near future. **FN**





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**W**e all know that starting new shooters with a .22LR is best and proper, but sooner or later you're going to have to promote them to centerfire. Then what? How about reloading for that? And specifically, the softest, easiest-to-control, and lowest-cost reload you can generate? That one is easy; I have just the ticket. Well, in 9mm, anyway. And since it seems we're now in a 9mm world, this will work.

First, the bullet. I use a Blue Bullets 125-grain round nose (RN). However, the load I developed will work with just about any lead, coated or plated 125-grain RN. I just happened to work this load up when I had a big stash of Blue Bullets and wanted to switch from cast bullets.

The primer choice doesn't matter, they all will work. As long as they are small pistol and not magnums, and certainly not rifle primers, you just use whatever you could score at the best price. There are times and loads when primers matter, but this is not one of them.

For brass cases, again, whatever. My home gun club has the range dirt we stand on coated in 9mm brass. The rules say to pick it up, but many do not, so if you want free brass, it's there for the picking-up. Using mixed brass instead of "all the same" does bring a certain small loss of accuracy, but the amount matters only to Bullseye shooters and USPSA Grand Masters. For practice, or teaching new

**The 9mm super-softy load delivers excellent accuracy both in a Springfield Armory Garrison, and a ferociously expensive custom 1911. (Patrick Sweeney)**

shooters, the difference matters not at all.

Lastly, powder. For this load I settled on Vihtavuori N330. It is a fast-to-medium burning rate powder, it meters well, and the powder charge is small enough to make it economical to use. Some pistols hate a combo of very-fast powders and lead or coated bullets. None, so far, have hated N330. The weight of the powder charge? 3.6 grains. A pound of powder theoretically gets you 1,944 loaded rounds.

The overall length (OAL) is essentially the same as that of many 115-, 124-, or 125-grain round-nosed 9mm factory loadings, which is 1.128 inches. I wasn't trying to improve on those, just duplicate them, or close-enough, to make the loaded cartridge work in any 9mm firearm I might use it in. There is no absolute standard for overall length for the 9mm, as long as it is not so long it binds in the magazine, or wedges in the chamber lead. The minor differences in OAL listed below reflect more where the bullet seating die contacts the bullet ogive when seating it than anything else.



Okay, now the caveats and what to be aware of. This load is super-soft in recoil, because it is not trying to break the sound barrier. Depending on what firearm you use, it might only be going 850 fps. Out of a Springfield Armory Garrison 4.25-inch barrel, it barely does that. Out of my super-accurate test 1911, with its 5.5-inch barrel, it sometimes breaks 900 fps. The pressure-test barrel was even slower. The load has proven utterly reliable in my hands, but I am an odd case. Something about my grip makes pistols that short stroke in other



**There's no rocket science here, the idea was to duplicate the overall length of a factory 125-grain round, and that was all. (Patrick Sweeney)**



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RELOADING



The charge of 3.6 grains of Vihtavouri N330 works pretty much regardless of what 125-grain 9mm bullet you use. Here, a Blue Bullet loaded round flanks a Blue Bullet, a Berry's plated hollow point, and a hard-cast 125-grain round nose. (Patrick Sweeney)



Even out of a carbine, the softy load is going to be too weak to knock bowling pins down. (Patrick Sweeney)

shooters hands, still work for me. If you find that in your hands this load won't always cycle, no problem, up the charge a bit. A tenth or two more powder should do the trick. At 3.8 grains it will work for everyone, but you will "only" get 1,842 rounds out of a pound of powder.

Now, the matter of bullets again. In previous columns I've shown that swapping one brand or type of bullet for another can make the chamber pressure change enough to make the resulting load exceed the pressure limits for the 9mm Parabellum. (And it can happen in other cartridges as well.) We have little worry here, as the original load; 125-grain RN Blue Bullets and 3.6 grains of VV-330, generated a miniscule 16,630 PSI. Let's say switching to a plated 125-grain bullet ups that by 10%. It might, it might not.) So, what if it does? I did that with a batch of Berry's 124-plated hollow points. We're still talking only 18,290 PSI. Plus, let's say your pistol won't cycle at 3.6 grains,

and you have to up the powder charge, adding another 10% to the pressure. Quick math: that makes it 19,960 PSI. We're still only just past the halfway point of the allowable pressure for the 9mm Parabellum. This load just doesn't care.

The benefits just keep adding-on. With a miserly 3.6 grains of powders, the muzzle blast is not going to be ferocious. Hand a new shooter your 9mm loaded with your every-day carry load, that being a hot or +P 9mm load, and it will be a contest between the muzzle blast or the recoil to see which wins at dampening their enthusiasm. At that low chamber pressure, resizing your brass will be less work than with the hot load.

Now, this load won't work for pistol competition. None of the variations tested made Minor for IDPA or USPSA competition. These loads are also way too weak to be suitable

for bowling pins, even with a velocity boost from a carbine barrel. They are soft practice rounds only.

For the effort of making a "low-performance" load you get an inexpensive, easy-to-reload, low-recoil and not unduly noisy loading with which to teach a new shooter, or to have fun during your own practice. Yes, practicing with something equivalent to your every-day carry load is a good thing, but you don't have to spend all of your range time with it. Have some fun while you're at it and stretch your budget. Speaking of which, I just did a quick search, and you can load 1,000 rounds of this, with found brass, for something like \$180. That's \$100 per thousand rounds less than factory brass-case 9mm. **FN**

| PRESSURE BARREL RESULTS:                                                             |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 125-grain round nose Blue Bullet, 3.6 grains VV N330, Winchester primer, 1.128" OAL: |  |
| - 16,630 PSI Average Pressure                                                        |  |
| - 3,500 PSI extreme spread                                                           |  |
| - 831 fps                                                                            |  |
| - 65 fps extreme spread                                                              |  |

| SOURCES                                                    |
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| Berry's Manufacturing, Inc.: BerrysMfg.com, (800) 269-7373 |
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| 125 LRN                                                                                           | 1.135                | 847            | 4.25                | 106          |
| 125 LRN                                                                                           | 1.135                | 878            | 5.5                 | 110          |
| 125 Blue Bullet                                                                                   | 1.128                | 841            | 4.25                | 105          |
| 125 Blue Bullet                                                                                   | 1.128                | 883            | 5.5                 | 111          |
| 125 Berry's plated HP                                                                             | 1.11                 | 893            | 4.35                | 112          |
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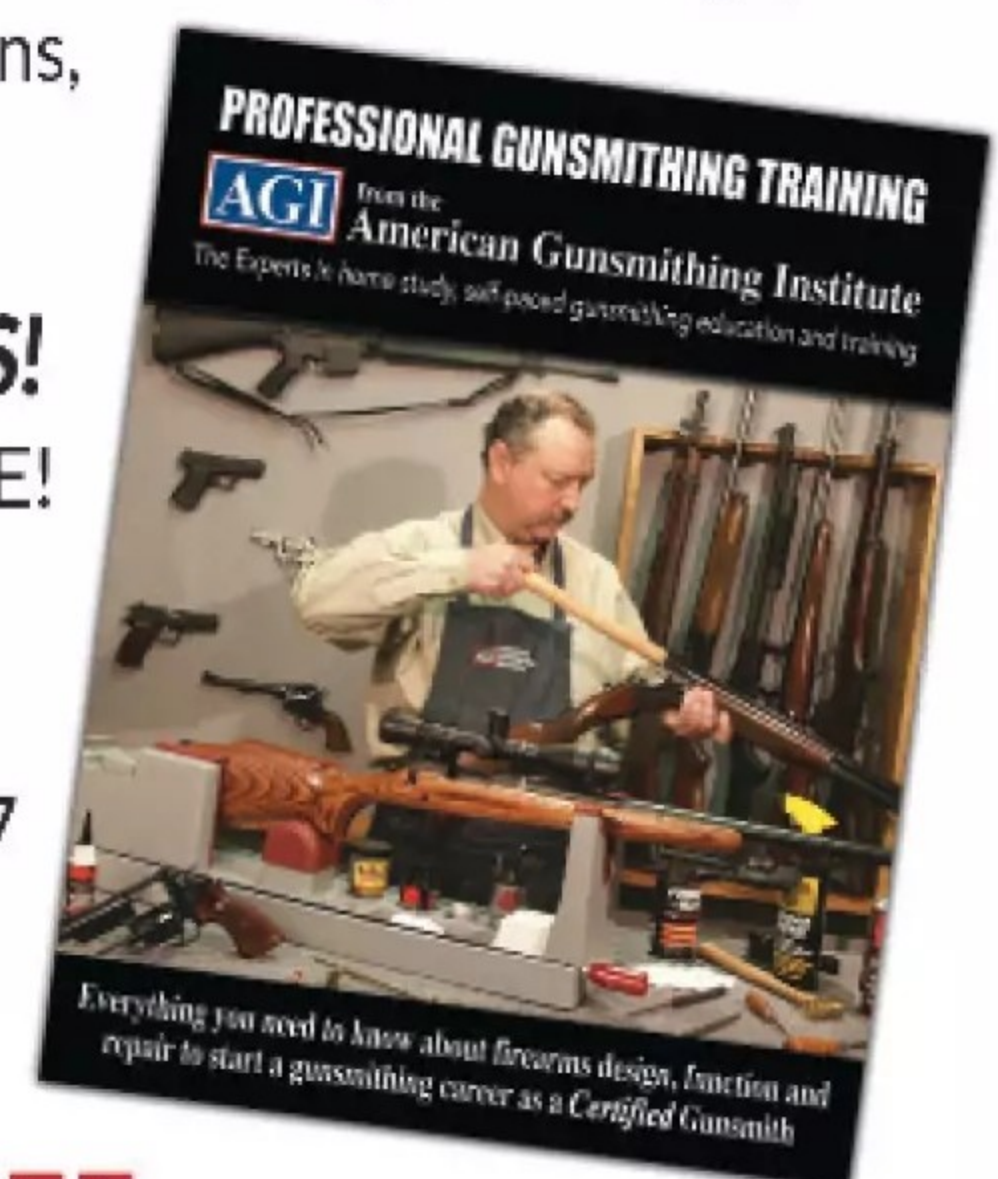
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# THUNDER BEAST ARMS SPIRO



## Maxed-Out Techno Gear!

Once finished, the Spiro is given a matte black CeraKote finish, which if you use it hard will probably get burned off by your second or third replacement barrel. (Patrick Sweeney)

I love each opportunity at the SHOT Show to sit and talk with Zak Smith, because I get to not only learn about the latest from Thunder Beast Arms, but I can talk techno talk without having to slow down or translate to standard English. Charts, mathematics, dynamic gas flow, all at a “normal” rate of discussion. (No offense meant to the other suppressor makers, but they rarely let the “boffins” out of the factory for SHOT.)

So, it was with great glee we went over the new Thunder Beast Spiro. The plan was, when coming out with a new and improved suppressor, to make it more durable than an anvil, reduce backpressure like nobody’s business, and do it at an affordable price and size. The end result? All I can say is, “*Got it in one, Mr. Garibaldi.*” [Warning: sci-fi series reference.]



You can see the additive-manufacturing hallmarks on the entrance cone of the blast baffle on the Spiro. (Patrick Sweeney)

The new Spiro is all that and more, because there’s also one rated for the 6mm ARC. (I guess I’m going to have to keep a rifle in that on hand, for future testing.) The one sent is the 5.56 version, made to HUB mounting. You can also have yours in direct-thread.

The Spiro is additive manufactured out of Haynes 282, one of the previously exotic alloys that only mechanical engineers knew about, but now all suppressor owners are becoming familiar with. It is basically nickel, with alloying components of chromium, cobalt and molybdenum, and traces of other exotics. It has, at most, 1.5 percent Iron in it, so you can’t call it steel, ferrous or anything of the like. What Haynes 282 provides is off-the-chart stress resistance, strain resistance and tensile strength. Just what you want for a hard-use suppressor. All this coated in black CeraKote before it arrives in your hands.



The exit port is flanked by the low back-pressure flow ports on the perimeter. (Patrick Sweeney)

Thunder Beast Arms built it to stand up to stress and hard use. The other full-auto rated Thunder Beast Arms suppressors are guaranteed to 10 cycles of the SOCOM/SURG test, with barrel down to 10.5 inches. They subjected R&D Spiro models, and then the final production model, to the full 20 SOCOM/SURG cycle testing with an eight-inch barrel. That is, eight magazines at a pre-determined firing rate, then allowed to cool and then repeated another 19 times. How hard is this test? The M4/MK18 being used as a host has to be cleaned and inspected after each cycle just to keep functioning, and it is not uncommon for the host carbine to require replacement before the test is concluded.

Now, everyone is hot on low backpressure, which is a good thing. Thunder Beast, however (Zak being the lead here) wasn’t satisfied with a “shoot it and report on face-gas” approach, so they developed a method of measuring pressure and charting it right at the case mouth, at a high piezo cyclic rate, to see what was going on. To quote a different sci-fi person; “*Fascinating.*” And they used that to tune the Spiro for lowest backpressure.

So, it was no great surprise when I found the Spiro to be pleasant to shoot in testing, and relatively soft on the ears. The data shows it to be down below the threshold of “hearing safe,” but that is just a threshold. Me, I don’t do a lot of suppressed shooting without



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It took three years of development and \$26 million in advanced Swiss-built watch-making machinery to create the *Magnificat II*. When we took the watch to renowned watchmaker and watch historian George Thomas, he disassembled it and studied the escapement, balance wheel and the rotor. He remarked on the detailed guilloché face, gilt winding crown, and the crocodile-embossed leather band. He was intrigued by the three interior dials for day, date, and 24-hour moon phases. He estimated that this fine timepiece would cost over \$2,500. We all smiled and told him that the Stauer price was less than \$100. A truly magnificent watch at a truly magnificent price!

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Usually, at this point in time of ejection, there’s a puff of gas around the ejection port. Not with the Spiro there isn’t. (Patrick Sweeney)

hearing protection just because I put thousands of rounds a year downrange suppressed, and it adds up. If you were going to use the Spiro for hunting (as opposed to pest control, like a prairie dog town) I’d say you’d be fine. I did my long-term test of checking for zero-shift and found none. I don’t expect to ever see a shift, but it is something I’ve done and will continue to do.

The Spiro is just under six inches long and adds just over five inches to your overall length. Therefore, putting the Spiro on an SBR means you are not longer than a standard carbine. If you are running a real shortie, for example a MK18-length, you will be an inch shorter than a standard carbine.

You’re probably wondering what the shortcomings are, because everything has some. Well, I hate to tell you they are few, and not much. For barrel-length restrictions, you will find no 5.7x28 or 4.6x30 barrel is too short. If you are running a .223, 5.56 or a 5.45 Russian, then you can’t go shorter than eight inches. (That’s too short for

my tastes, anyway, so no problem.) If you plan on putting your Spiro on a .22 ARC, .224 Valkyrie or 6mm ARC (in the 6mm version) then 12.5 inches is your minimum. For those who just have to test limits, putting the Spiro on a .22-250, .22 Creedmoor, .243 Win or 6mm Creedmoor or 6GT means nothing shorter than eighteen inches. (Again, the bigger ones only with the 6mm Spiro)

In all of these, the Spiro is full-auto rated with no firing rate limits. However, Thunder Beast Arms does suggest that if you are going to run your Spiro in hard-use conditions, then you really should be using Loctite 272 both on the Spiro-to-HUB threads, and the HUB-to-barrel threads. Of course, use an alignment gauge before heading off to heinously use your Spiro. Thunder Beast makes seriously proper gear, but they cannot be responsible for repairing damage created by bone-headed behavior or decisions.



Two empties in the air, and still no gas in the face. Spiro for the score. (Patrick Sweeney)



There was no shift in point of impact, this at 100 yards. Nor was there expected to be a shift, but we’ve got to check. (Patrick Sweeney)

Oh, and not only are there 5.56 and 6mm versions, but Thunder Beast Arms plans to expand the Spiro line to other calibers in due time, they just can’t make everything all at once. In case you were curious, the name comes from Latin, “to breathe,” and Thunder Beast Arms says the proper pronunciation is “spear-o.”

However you pronounce it, for the list price of \$995, for a hard-use suppressor made out of exotic alloys that will outlast not just your current AR-15, but every barrel you’ll ever install in it, Thunder Beast Arms has a winner. **FN**

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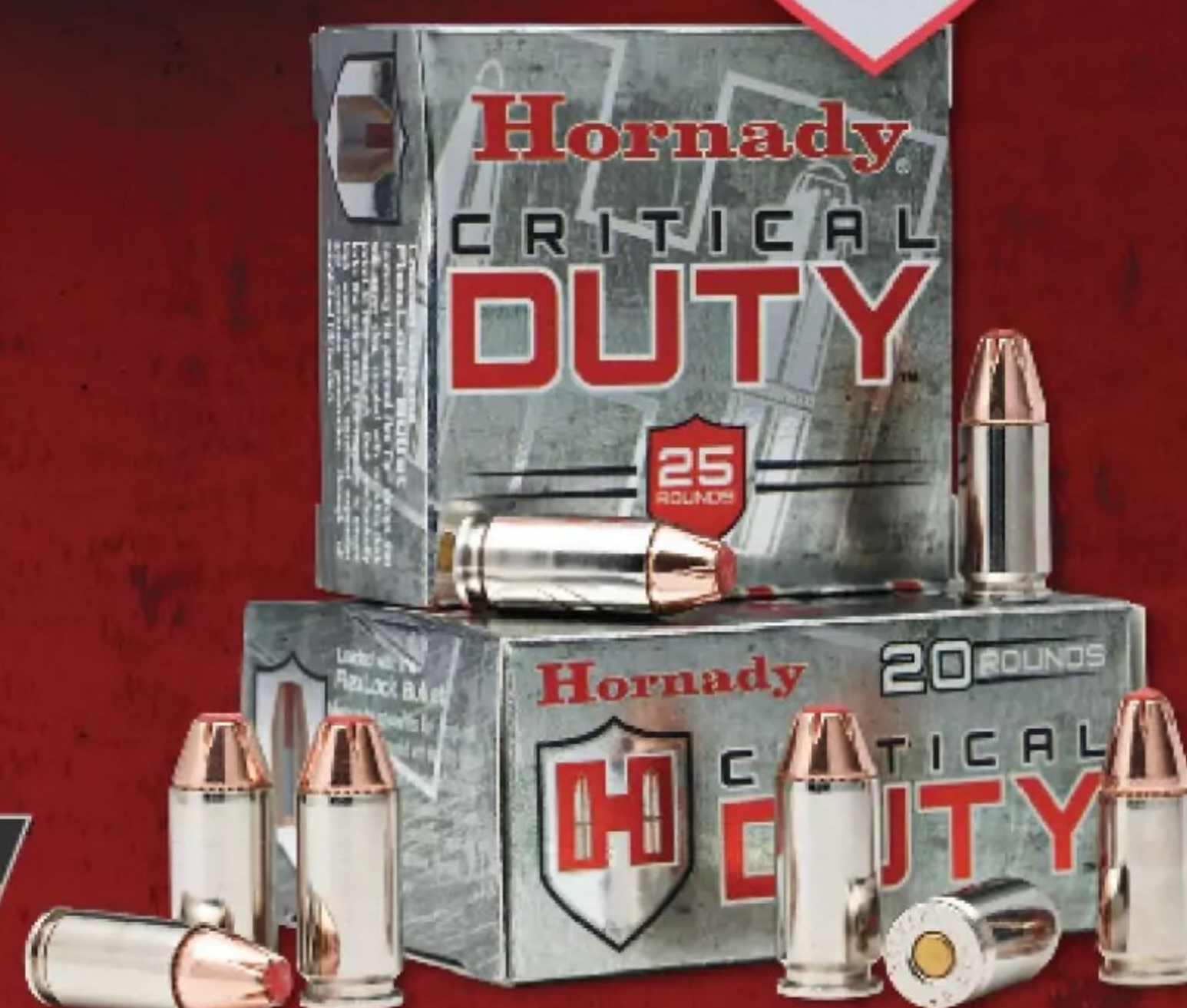
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# THE M-11/9:

## America's Most Versatile Submachine Gun

In the uniquely curious world of American transferable automatic weapons, timing really is everything. These guns were first regulated in 1934. Importing for civilian sales was halted in 1968. New production was outlawed for civilian consumption on May 19, 1986. The 52 years between the first regulation and the last saw the manufacture of most of the transferable weapons that remain available to civilian shooters today.

Initial purchase price has absolutely nothing to do with intrinsic worth. When you land a collectible machine gun you are buying the registration paper as much as the physical weapon

► **The SWD M-11/9 is the gateway drug for many a burgeoning machine gun enthusiast. The full auto M-11/9 is crazy expensive, but most everything else is worse. (Will Dabbs)**

itself. An M3 Grease Gun that cost Uncle Sam \$18 back in 1944 will set you back \$35,000 today. That's because there are so few of them left. It's all just economics.

The "MAC" series of pistol-caliber submachine guns will never be anybody's first choice for a general-purpose utility weapon. They are blocky, utilitarian, and ridiculously hyperactive. That makes control of the

factory versions a bit of a challenge. However, M-10s and M-11s were in domestic mass production in the critical days before the 1986 machine gun ban. They were therefore available in quantity at a time when folks were clamoring for machine guns and inflation began to take the teeth out of the unconstitutional transfer tax. For this reason, MACs are the gateway drug for neophyte machine gun owners just dipping their toes into this rarefied world even today.

### Particulars

The original M-10 and M-11 SMGs were produced from 1970 until 1975. RPB Industries resurrected the guns out of the ashes of the Military Armament Corporation bankruptcy soon thereafter. SWD Inc. picked up where they left off in April of 1982. SWD's primary consumer product was the subsequent M-11/9.

SWD offered the M-11/9 in both a semi-auto pistol form as well as a registered selective-fire submachine gun. When word got out that the machine gun ban was coming, SWD frantically registered as many machine



**With the exception of the .380 ACP-chambered M-11, original Military Armament Corporation (MAC) M-10 submachine guns were typically fat and heavy with the .45 ACP version being the biggest. (Will Dabbs)**



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◀ The SWD M-11/9 semi-auto pistol (bottom) was more popular than the registered SMG by at least an order of magnitude. (Will Dabbs)



If you look closely, you can see the scant discoloration just behind the selector on the left. This means that this gun was most likely converted from a semiauto pistol prior to the 1986 machine gun ban. (Will Dabbs)

gun frames as they could before the deadline. Swapping over semi-auto frames to the full-auto sort involved, among a few other things, welding over a hole and some refinishing. If you look closely, you can often see a slight discoloration to the Parkerizing where these holes were filled.

The M-11/9 SMG was intended to rectify the shortcomings of the 9mm M-10, specifically that it was too heavy and ran too fast. The expensive and rare Walther MPL magazines used in the original 9mm M-10 were also an issue. The overall weight was subsequently trimmed down from 6.26 to 3.7 pounds. This was done by taking the small and light-weight .380-chambered M-11 SMG design and extending the receiver so it could handle the pressures and length of a 9mm cartridge. While the .380-chambered M-11 had a rate of fire per minute (rpm) of around 1,500, production M-11/9 SMGs still ran at about 1,200 or so—no real change from the 9mm M-10. A new magazine



A couple of pages from the 1988 Cobray, Inc. catalog featuring M-11/9 SMGs for sale. (Vincent L. DeNiro collection)



◀ The SWD M-11/9 SMG (or pistol) came with a magazine loading tool, a cleaning rod, a forward hand strap, and a single Zytel magazine. (Will Dabbs)

▲ With the stock deployed, the M-11/9 remains fairly spindly. However, this stock is nonetheless still better than nothing. (Will Dabbs)





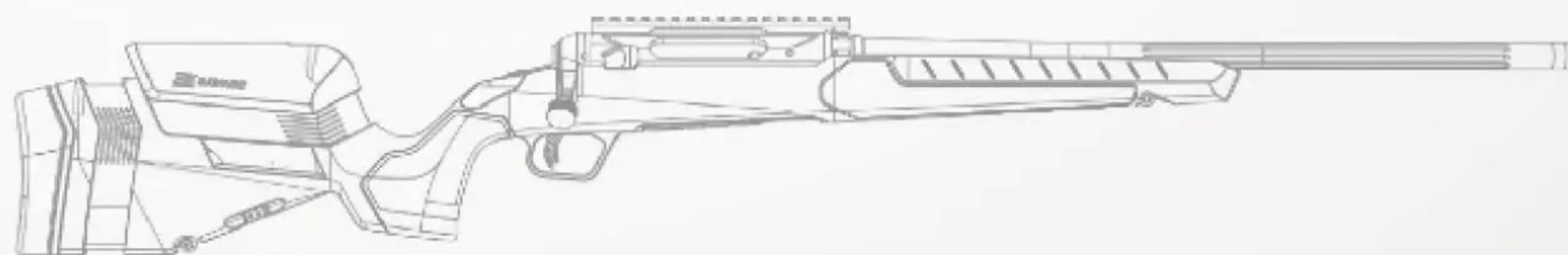
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**It takes a bit of attention to keep the full-auto M-11/9 shooting straight. (Will Dabbs)**

was designed and manufactured using Zytel, a type of polymer.

The stock was also redesigned from the other two models as a loop was added to prevent slippage on the shoulder as well as acting as a way to pull the stock open quickly. This was done by eliminating a second set of milled channels on the stock rails so that it could be deployed without having to first push the stock-release button. Another channel was also

eliminated so that the buttstock portion could be folded downward without have to squeeze its rails.

### Trigger Time

The charging handle on the M-11/9 is much shorter and subsequently tougher to grasp than the previous sort. A kind of spinning disk. The spindly folding stock is better than nothing and slightly improved over the original. A little spare tab makes it useful either fully or partially deployed. The Zytel magazines are

bulkier than the steel originals and not as long-lived. The double-stack, single-feed design makes loading more difficult than it really should be. However, my gun has been thoroughly reliable despite its obvious age.

Shooting a factory M-11/9 is not fundamentally dissimilar to the same chore with the older fat MACs. The gun runs so fast that attention must be paid lest it get away from you. Of particular note is the disposition of the support hand. Let that slide just a wee bit forward and you might get defingered for your trouble—one reason that many MAC owners discard the front strap and hanger as accidents did happen. A low cost and “cool” accessory for all of the “MAC” SMGs was the slotted barrel extension, which would screw on just like a silencer. These make the gun much safer to shoot and will keep your support hand from getting burned, unlike a suppressor.

Running a MAC of any sort for the first time is invariably a rush. A 9mm RPB M10 was one of my first two transferable machine guns back in 1987 before they got just stupid expensive. However, the stubby



**At across-the-room distances, I landed all twenty rounds from a single continuous burst on the paper. (Will Dabbs)**



**A pair of the Editor-in-Chief's M-11/9s. One has a Cobray-branded, slotted-barrel extension and Shockwave 50-round steel magazine. The other sports a compact 12-round Zytel magazine, which is convenient when using the DeSantis M-11 leather shoulder holster from the early 1980s (long discontinued). Notice the grommet on the rear of the receiver, which is used to snap onto this holster. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**



# VP9A1



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**An interesting “MAC” series and M-11/9 accessory for both the sub-machine guns and pistols, during the 1980s, was this nylon drop-leg holster. (Vincent L. DeNiro)**

dimensions and agitated comportment conspire to knock the sheen off of that in fairly short order. Once I could afford something slower, it seemed the old MAC got left in the gun box more often than not. The flower of American gun-bodging prowess got busy rectifying that.

### Transformations

Due to the fact that tens of thousands of M-11/9 SMGs and pistols were produced, there were, and are, tons of accessories for them from dozens of companies. Amongst a variety of companies offering gimmicks and widgets all designed to make mad MACs mellower, one company rules them all. That is Lage Manufacturing (MAX-11.com).

Lage is still thriving today. There have been a variety of slow-fire conversions over the decades, but Lage sets the standard. Triggers, grips, buttstocks, and buffers occupy their expansive product catalog. Their real forte, however, is drop-in aftermarket uppers.

Lage uppers will transform the basic M-11/9 selective fire lower receiver into some of the most fascinating things. Most of their uppers are badly backordered. The MAX-31 upper (originally designed by Stoney Creek)



**The MAX-11 upper from Lage Manufacturing revolutionizes the performance of the M-11/9 SMG. (Will Dabbs)**



**A Lage upper like this one will reliably bring out the best in a gun like the M-11/9. (Will Dabbs)**

drops in place and accepts 71-round Suomi drums and stick mags. The MAX-31C is the same thing slightly shorter. The Versa-11 has a modular magwell up front and can be configured to accept Suomi drums, Glock mags, Evo Scorpion boxes, and others. The MAX-11/15 even adapts the M-11/9 lower into a selective fire 5.56mm assault rifle.

The standard MAX-11 comes in several different versions and has undergone considerable mechanical evolution over time. The K-model is shorter and makes for a more compact package. They all include rail space for grips, optics, and accessories. The common theme is that these uppers slow the rate of fire down to around 650 rpm. In so doing, the M-11/9 becomes a poor man's Uzi.

Well, that's not exactly true. Anyone who can afford any transferable machine gun these days is legit well-off. However, a Lage-equipped M-11/9 still comes in several grand less than a comparable Uzi conversion.

I had access to a low-mileage transferable M-11/9, a Lage MAX-11 MK 2 drop-in upper, and a handful of Shockwave ZMAG aftermarket steel magazines. These new-made boxes are currently for sale at around \$42 from the company website.

The Lage upper offers plenty of space to grip the gun and runs at an idyllic 670 rpm. Lage's Variable Buffer System lets you tweak that from 600 to 750 rpm. The left-sided charging handle is easily accessed, and the muzzle sports standard 1/2x28 threads for a suppressor.





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▲ The Lagre MAX-31 adapts the registered M-11/9 lower assembly to run 71-round Suomi drum mags. (Morphy Auctions)



▲ Lagre uppers are self-contained drop-in units. Just add a registered M-11/9 submachine gun frame and go.(Morphy Auctions)

With a rigid stock, the MAX-11 Mk 2-equipped M-11/9 is every bit the gun an Uzi is. Accurate, controllable, reliable, and fun, this compact beast holds its own with any comparable factory piece. Replace those sketchy Zytel mags with the modern steel Shockwave sort, and you have a cutting edge CQB tool.

Prices

Prior to the 1986 ban, M-11/9 submachine guns were occasionally offered on special to Class 3 dealers for \$165. That would be about \$530 today. After the ban, SWD folded and morphed into a company called Cobray (the name coined by Mitch Werbell who was the inventor of the M-10 and M-11 SMGS. The name comes from combining the words cobra and moray eel.) Cobray sold much of the remaining inventory and prices for a new M-11/9 SMG were as low as \$350 a year after the ban. Later, another company called JLM were selling them at \$480 apiece—two or more went for \$460 each. Make that



► Lagre aftermarket parts make the humble M-11/9 into something altogether more desirable, like an Uzi. (Will Dabbs)

half a dozen and the individual price dropped to \$440. By 1998, new-in-box M-11/9s were bringing \$600. In 2002, that was \$2,000. By 2006, that same gun could be had for \$3,400. Nowadays, it takes about \$13,000 to get into the game with a nice M-11/9.

The M-11/9 is an objectively ugly firearm. However, it was available in quantity in time to be generously represented in the finite pool of transferable full autos. This, combined with some extraordinarily well-engineered aftermarket upgrades, make the M-11/9 a great choice for both shooters and collectors today. **FN**

| TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS SWD M-11/9 |                                                        |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Caliber:                            | 9mm                                                    |
| Action:                             | Unlocked Blowback                                      |
| Overall Length:                     | 11.75 in. (stock collapsed), 20.9 in. (stock extended) |
| Barrel Length:                      | 5.75 in.                                               |
| Weight:                             | 3.75 lbs.                                              |
| Rate of Fire:                       | 1,200 rpm                                              |
| Feed System:                        | 12- or 32-round Zytel magazine (other types available) |
| Sights:                             | Fixed blade front, fixed peep rear                     |
| Current Market Price:               | \$13,000+                                              |



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# THE MODEL 1941 JOHNSON LIGHT MACHINE GUN

**M**elvin Maynard Johnson, Jr. (1909–1970) became fascinated with guns in his youth and in his teens wrote a number of articles on firearm design. He attended Harvard University, graduating with a law degree in 1934. However, a legal career held little attraction for him especially after, as a lieutenant in the USMC Reserve, he attended the Marine Corps Weapons School in Quantico, Virginia.

In the post-WWI years, the US Army began development a semi-automatic rifle and in 1936 they announced the adoption of John Garand's U.S. Rifle, Caliber .30, M1. As with most new designs, it was plagued with a series of teething problems the most notable being the gas operating system and poor accuracy.

Lt. Johnson was one of the USMC observers assigned to Springfield Armory during the latter stages of the M1's development, and was part of the team assigned the task of evaluating the M1 for the Corps. After testing the Garand, he reported that it possessed inherent design flaws and could not be efficiently mass produced. Johnson decided that he could design a weapon superior to the M1—and set about doing so.

As was mentioned above, the gas operating system of the early Garand was plagued with problems. For this reason, Johnson felt that a recoil operated system would provide several advantages:

1. Simpler construction with fewer parts.
2. More reliable as operation did not depend upon gas pressure and fine tolerances.
3. Easier to clean and maintain.



**Two members of the Devil's Brigade examining a Johnson M1941 light machine gun. (Photo provided by James Walters)**

In 1936, Johnson had a prototype rifle tested by the USMC. The design was based upon a tubular receiver with an integral, perforated barrel jacket that acted as a bearing sleeve for the barrel, mounted the barrel return spring in addition to serving as a handguard. The bolt featured a separate, rotating head with seven lugs that locked into the rear of the barrel extension. Cartridges were held in a simple box magazine.

The recoil operation system was much simpler than the Garand. Upon firing,

the barrel and bolt recoiled, locked together, traveling rearward whereupon a lug on top of the bolt struck an angled surface in the top of the receiver which rotated the bolt, releasing it from the barrel extension. A spring then returned the barrel to the forward position while the bolt continued to the rear, extracting and ejecting the spent cartridge case and cocking the hammer. The recoil spring then drove the bolt forward, where it picked up and chambered the next round from the magazine as it went into battery.

In 1937, Johnson arranged for the Marlin Firearms Company to produce a number of rifles and the following year demonstrated these for the U.S. Army. Tested alongside the Garand the Johnson's performance was generally favorable although the army felt that several improvements were called for and Johnson began work upon their suggestions.

One of the more vocal complaints against the M1 was that its clip loaded magazine did not allow a soldier to recharge a partially empty weapon. To overcome this objection, Johnson replaced his rifle's box magazine with a ten-round, rotary



**A Johnson M1941 Light Machine Gun. Note the high front sight, short wooden forearm and the safety/selector lever. (Morphy Auctions)**



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## THE WAR GUNS



**In this left-hand view of the M1941 Light Machine Gun, you see the curved, 20-round magazine, perforated barrel jacket, wooden buttstock and rear sight folded down. (Morphy Auctions)**



**Right hand view of the receiver shows the charger guides on the magazine, and the safety lever. (Morphy Auctions)**



**Visible here are the magazine well and the fire selector switch. (Morphy Auctions)**

magazine located below the receiver and to insure feeding reliability, the feed lips were part of the receiver, not the magazine itself. It was loaded through an opening on the right side with five round chargers or loose rounds and could be “topped off” at any time without having to open the rifle’s bolt. Johnson also redesigned the bolt to use eight locking lugs and included a latch that allowed the barrel to be removed quickly.

In 1939, the improved rifle successfully completed a 6,000-round endurance test with only a few minor stoppages. However, the Army concluded that “... in spite of its alleged mechanical and manufacturing advantages, it did not warrant further consideration as a replacement for the M1 rifle.”

With Army rejection final, Johnson hoped to interest the USMC in his rifle. Due to its recurring problems, the Marines had refused to adopt the M1 and were still using the M1903 rifle. In November 1940, a series of trials were held where the M1, the Johnson and a

prototype rifle from Winchester were all evaluated. The Marines found none of the rifles sufficiently superior and rejected them all.

Johnson set up the firm of Johnson Automatics Manufacturing Company in Cranston, Rhode Island and set about attempting to interest foreign governments in his Johnson Semi-Automatic Rifle Model of 1941.

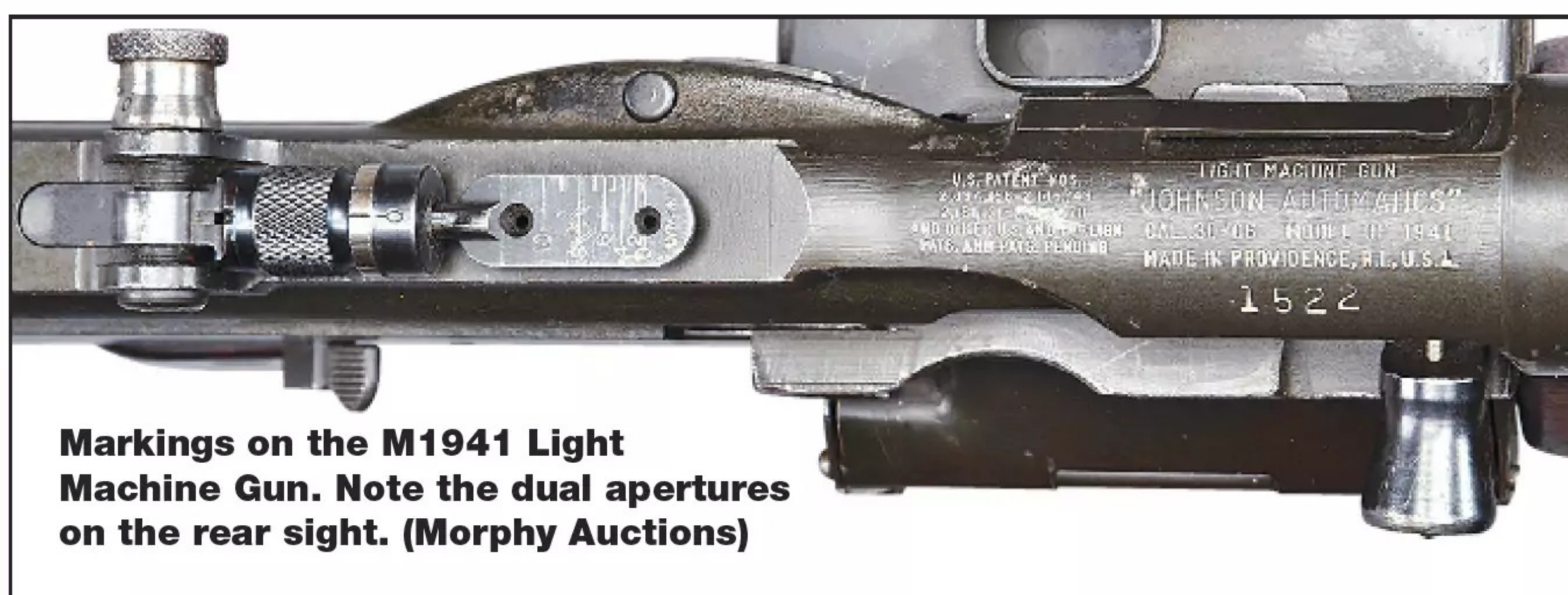
With the entry of the U.S. into WWII, the American government encouraged Johnson to seek foreign orders. While the Netherlands had been occupied by German forces in 1940,

the Koninklijk Nederlands-Indische Leger (Royal Dutch East Indies Army or KNIL) needed weapons to resist the expected Japanese attack.

The Dutch placed an order for 60,000 rifles known as the Johnson Zelf Lading Geweer M.1941. Less than half of the order had been delivered before the East Indies fell in 1942.<sup>1</sup>

At this time the USMC agreed to adopt the M1 but the Corps’ decision to create airborne units gave the Johnson rifle a second lease on life.

It was decided to equip the Marine 1st Parachute Battalion (the Paramarines)





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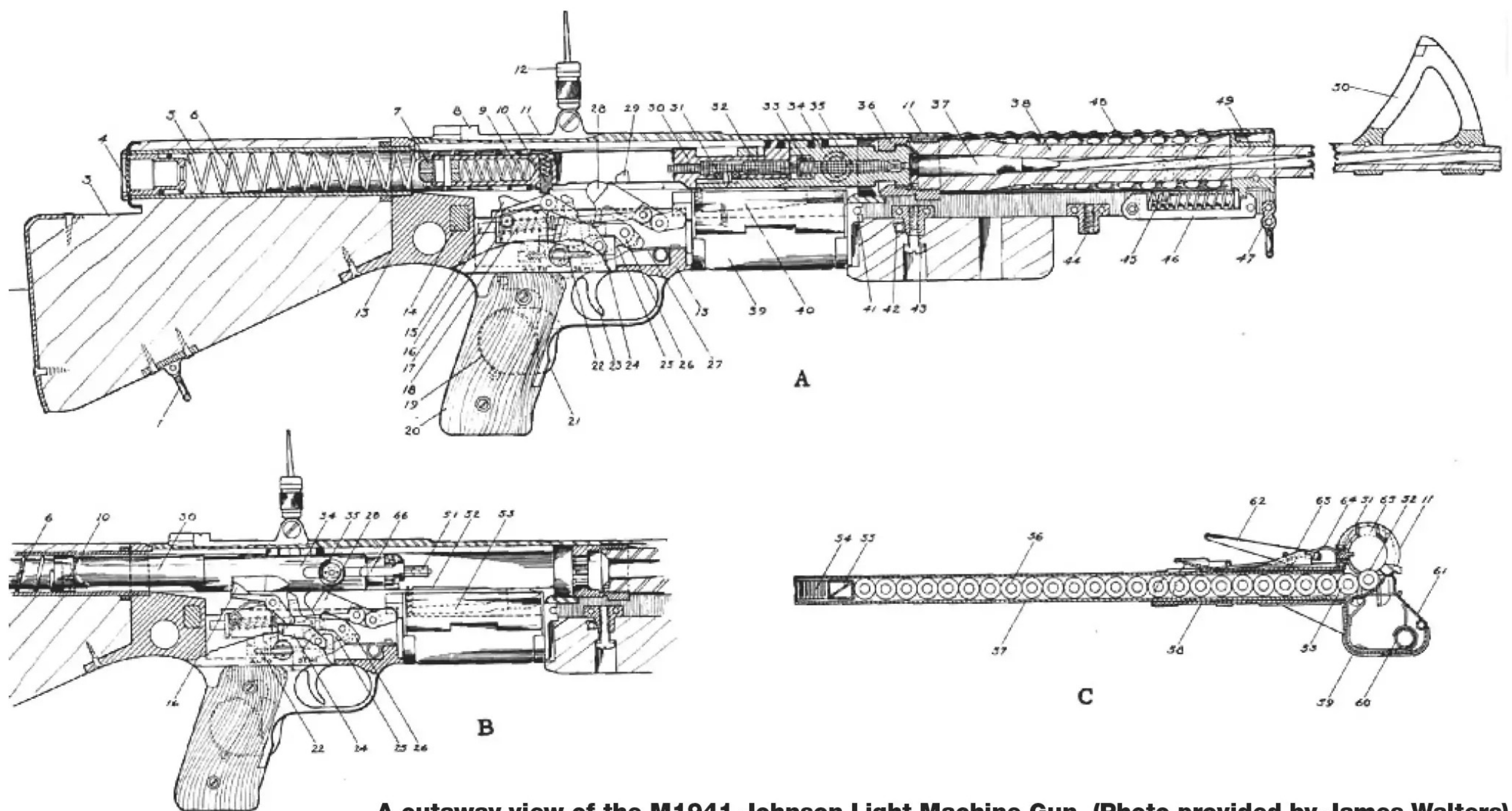
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**A cutaway view of the M1941 Johnson Light Machine Gun. (Photo provided by James Walters)**

with the Johnson primarily because it was felt that the detachable barrel would provide a more compact weapon for the Marine to carry with him during the jump. The Paramarines received their M1941s in time to use them in the Solomon Islands campaign. Additional numbers of Model 1941s were issued to the famed Raider Battalion.

Reports from the field were less than enthusiastic and numerous complaints were voiced about the difficulty of reloading the magazine with chargers and how easily the exposed barrel was damaged. According to R.G. Rosenquist, curator of the U.S. Marine Raider Museum, “I know of no combat Marine that developed any

great love for...the Johnson.”

That same year, the Johnson Light Machine Gun Model of 1941 was introduced. It was based upon the same tubular receiver with removable barrel as the rifle and featured an oddly shaped, straight-line stock to tame recoil and muzzle flip which necessitated raised sights. The front blade was mounted on a curved bracket near the muzzle while the rear sight was a finely adjustable, fold-down unit with dual apertures. A folding bipod was attached to the perforated barrel jacket in front of an abbreviated handguard.

It was fed from a 20 -round, single column, box magazine that was fitted into the left side of the weapon and utilized the rotary magazine. Additional rounds could be inserted into the feeding gate on the right-hand side of the magazine housing, increasing total capacity to 25 rounds. With an unloaded weight of only 12.25 pounds, the Model 1941 Light Machine Gun was almost eight pounds lighter than the M1918A2 Browning Automatic Rifle.

The Model 1941 Light Machine Gun was a selective-fire weapon which fired semi-auto from a closed bolt; to improve cooling, it fired full-auto



**USMC Paramarines armed with M1941 Johnson LMGs. (Photos provided by James Walters)**





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**Melvin Johnson demonstrating his M1941 light machine gun. (Photo provided by James Walters)**



**Like the Johnson rifle the LMG's magazine could be loaded with five round chargers. (Photo provided by James Walters)**

from an open bolt. In addition, the rate of full-auto fire could be adjusted from 300 to 900 rounds per minute.

The Dutch contract included a number of light machine guns, and they were also tested by the Army and USMC, the latter purchasing some of them for the Paramarines and Raider units. The Army obtained a quantity of Model 1941 LMGs for the joint U.S./Canadian First Special Service Force, and these were used in combat in Italy.<sup>2</sup>

Bruce Canfield states that the Marines' opinion of Johnson's Light machine gun, affectionately known as the "Johnny Gun," differed greatly from that of his rifle. A USMC report on weapons used in the fighting on New Georgia states that "...men now armed with them wouldn't trade them for any other."<sup>3</sup>

Production of both Johnson rifles and LMGs ceased in 1944 after approximately 70,000 had been manufactured. The Dutch order accounted

for the majority of these while the U.S. government ended up buying relatively few. Reportedly, late in WWII, some rifles and LMGs were supplied to the Free French colonial units and Nationalist Chinese forces.<sup>4</sup>

After production of both the Model 1941 weapons ceased, Johnson continued to refine his light machine gun and in 1943 an improved version was tested at Aberdeen Proving Ground. The following year the company unveiled the Johnson Light Machine Gun Model of 1944 which included a number of modifications including a gas-boosted hybrid recoil operating system, an improved feed mechanism and barrel latch, a folding monopod, tubular, plastic buttstock and had a higher rate of fire.<sup>5</sup> After trials at

Quantico, it was recommended that the USMC adopt it to replace the BAR, but this decision was overruled as it was impractical during war time.<sup>6</sup> With the post-war world market awash in cheap surplus arms and no U.S. or foreign government orders forthcoming, Johnson Automatics closed in 1950.

The new state of Israel expressed interest in a light machine gun based upon the Johnson Light Machine Gun Model of 1944. Designed with the input of Carl Ekdahl, a former Johnson employee, it was known as the "Dror" and approximately 4,000 guns, in both .303 British and 7.92x57, were built between 1951 and 1952 and saw use in the early Arab-Israeli conflicts.<sup>7</sup>



**Members of the Devils Brigade in Italy armed with M1941 Johnson light machine guns. (Photo provided by James Walters)**



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The Johnson M1944 Light Machine gun featured an improved feed mechanism and barrel latch in addition to a folding monopod and a tubular, plastic buttstock. Note the spare barrels. (Rock Island Auction Co.)

The Dutch navy and KNIL continued to use Johnson rifles and LMGs in the post war years, primarily during fighting against Indonesian nationalist guerillas in the Dutch East Indies. After Indonesia gained its independence in 1949, they made use of the limited number of Johnson rifle and LMGs they had captured from the KNIL or which had been turned over by departing Dutch forces.

Numbers of Johnson light machine guns were used by the Philippine Constabulary during the fighting against the Communist led Hukbalahap Rebellion (1945–1954). Some were also fielded by the Philippine Expeditionary Force in Korea (1950–1955).<sup>8</sup>

Reportedly, a small number of Johnson rifles and LMGs turned up in the hands of Chinese communist

forces during the Korean conflict. Likewise, the ever rifle hungry governments and anti-government forces of Latin America purchased Johnson rifles and LMGs on the post-war surplus market. Numbers of Johnson rifles and LMGs were smuggled into Cuba for use by the revolutionary forces of Fidel Castro. Some were also used by anti-Castro forces during the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion in the 1960s. This would appear to be the final combat use of these interesting, but ill-timed, weapons.

Johnson’s rifle and LMG were fascinating military weapons. I think the two major hurdles they never managed to overcome were their rather “modernistic” appearance and

the old N.I.H. (Not Invented Here) syndrome. **FN**

1 The remaining rifles were stored in RI while others were sent to Australia to equip KNIL units that escaped from the Japanese.  
2 Better known as the “Devil’s Brigade.”  
3 [www.americanriflemans.org/content/the-model-of-1941-johnson-light-machine-gun/](http://www.americanriflemans.org/content/the-model-of-1941-johnson-light-machine-gun/)  
4 According to Bruce Canfield some of the LMGs provided to the French were M1944s.  
5 It is sometimes referred to as the M1944E1 or M1945.  
6 [www.forgottenweapons.com/ria-m1944e1m1945-johnson-light-machine-gun/](http://www.forgottenweapons.com/ria-m1944e1m1945-johnson-light-machine-gun/)  
7 [www.forgottenweapons.com/light-machine-guns/dror/](http://www.forgottenweapons.com/light-machine-guns/dror/)  
8 [www.warhistoryonline.com/guns/m1941-johnson-light-machine-gun.html](http://www.warhistoryonline.com/guns/m1941-johnson-light-machine-gun.html)



The Israeli-made Dror light machine gun was based upon the M1944 Johnson. (Morphy Auctions)

| SPECIFICATIONS            |                                                                              |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| JOHNSON LIGHT MACHINE GUN |                                                                              |
| MODEL OF 1941             |                                                                              |
| Caliber:                  | .30 M2                                                                       |
| Overall Length:           | 42 in.                                                                       |
| Barrel Length:            | 22 in.                                                                       |
| Weight:                   | 12.25 lbs.                                                                   |
| Magazine:                 | 20-round single-column box magazine                                          |
| Sights:                   | Front: Blade<br>Rear: Aperture adj. from 100 to 1,000 meters and for windage |
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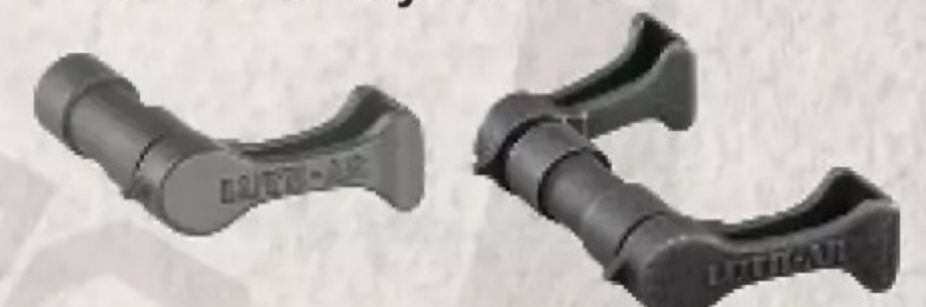
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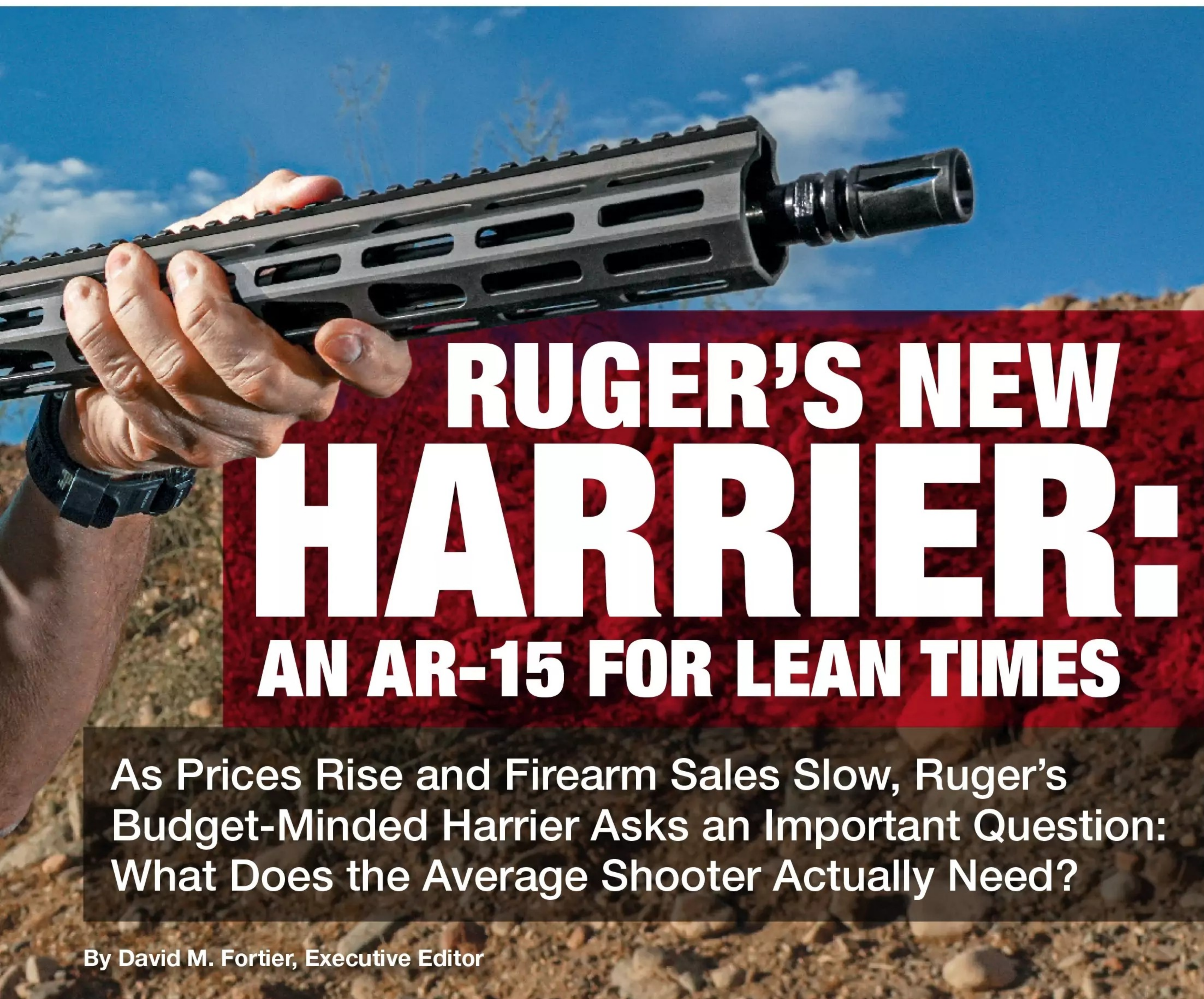
**A**R-15s have become much harder to sell. That statement would have sounded ridiculous just a few years ago. During the pandemic, civil unrest, political uncertainty, and recurring gun-control scares drove unprecedented demand for modern sporting rifles. Manufacturers couldn't build them fast enough. Dealers struggled to keep inventory on shelves. Consumers who had never owned a firearm before were suddenly buying rifles, magazines, and ammunition by the case.

Today, the market looks very different. The panic buying has largely subsided. Most enthusiasts who wanted an AR-15 already own one, and many own several. At the same time, Americans are facing economic pressures that simply didn't exist a decade ago. Food costs have climbed dramatically. Housing prices and rent continue to strain household budgets. Vehicle prices remain stubbornly high. Insurance costs have increased. Even a simple trip to the gas station reminds consumers that disposable income is not what it once was.

All of this matters because firearms compete for the same dollars required to pay mortgages, buy groceries, and keep vehicles on the road. That reality has created a difficult environment for manufacturers. Shooters still want quality rifles, but many are looking much harder at value. Features are important, but so is affordability. Fancy marketing language matters less when buyers are carefully considering every purchase.

It is into this environment that Ruger has introduced the Harrier. At first glance, the Harrier might appear to be just another AR-15 entering an already crowded market. Look closer, though, and it becomes apparent Ruger is attempting something very specific. Rather than building another premium-priced rifle loaded with niche features, the company appears focused on providing a practical modern sporting rifle at a price point many shooters can realistically afford. The question is whether they succeeded.





# RUGER'S NEW HARRIER: AN AR-15 FOR LEAN TIMES

As Prices Rise and Firearm Sales Slow, Ruger's Budget-Minded Harrier Asks an Important Question: What Does the Average Shooter Actually Need?

By David M. Fortier, Executive Editor

## ■ Kentucky Heritage

The Harrier is produced in Hebron, Kentucky and is the first all-knew firearm Ruger has produced at this facility since acquiring it—its machines and workforce from Anderson manufacturing in 2025. According to Ruger President and CEO Todd Seyfert, “This move reinforces Ruger’s position as a leader in the industry, and reiterates my focus on continued growth, even as others scale back.”

It should be noted the Harrier series replaces Ruger’s AR-556, which displaced their older piston-driven SR-556. Following in the footsteps of the AR-556, the Harrier is a straight-forward traditional direct-impingement design.

While Ruger is launching their new Harrier series with two models, they plan to expand the line as they go forward. Their initial models are both chambered for 5.6x45mm NATO and quite similar. The model I am reviewing here is the Harrier Model 28600 which features a mid-length gas system, a full-length free-floating M-LOK rail, and is equipped with

a Magpul pistol grip and buttstock. MRSP on this model is \$749. The similar Model 28601 features a carbine-length gas system, an A2 grip, M4-style adjustable stock, and a shorter M-LOK rail. It has an MSRP of \$699. I would expect the actual street price to be less for both models.

## ■ First Impressions

The Harrier follows the familiar AR-15 formula, but it immediately feels like a rifle designed around practical use rather than marketing trends. There are no gimmicks here. Instead, Ruger has concentrated on features modern shooters actually want while avoiding unnecessary gizmos. The rifle arrives configured in a manner most enthusiasts would likely choose if assembling a carbine themselves.

Its appearance is clean and contemporary without being flashy. Controls are familiar and intuitive. The rifle balances well in the hands and presents itself well rather than as a simple range toy. While countless AR-pattern



## RUGER'S NEW HARRIER: AN AR-15 FOR LEAN TIMES



**Ruger's new Harrier rifle comes at a time when more Americans are facing economic pressure, and so is priced accordingly. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**

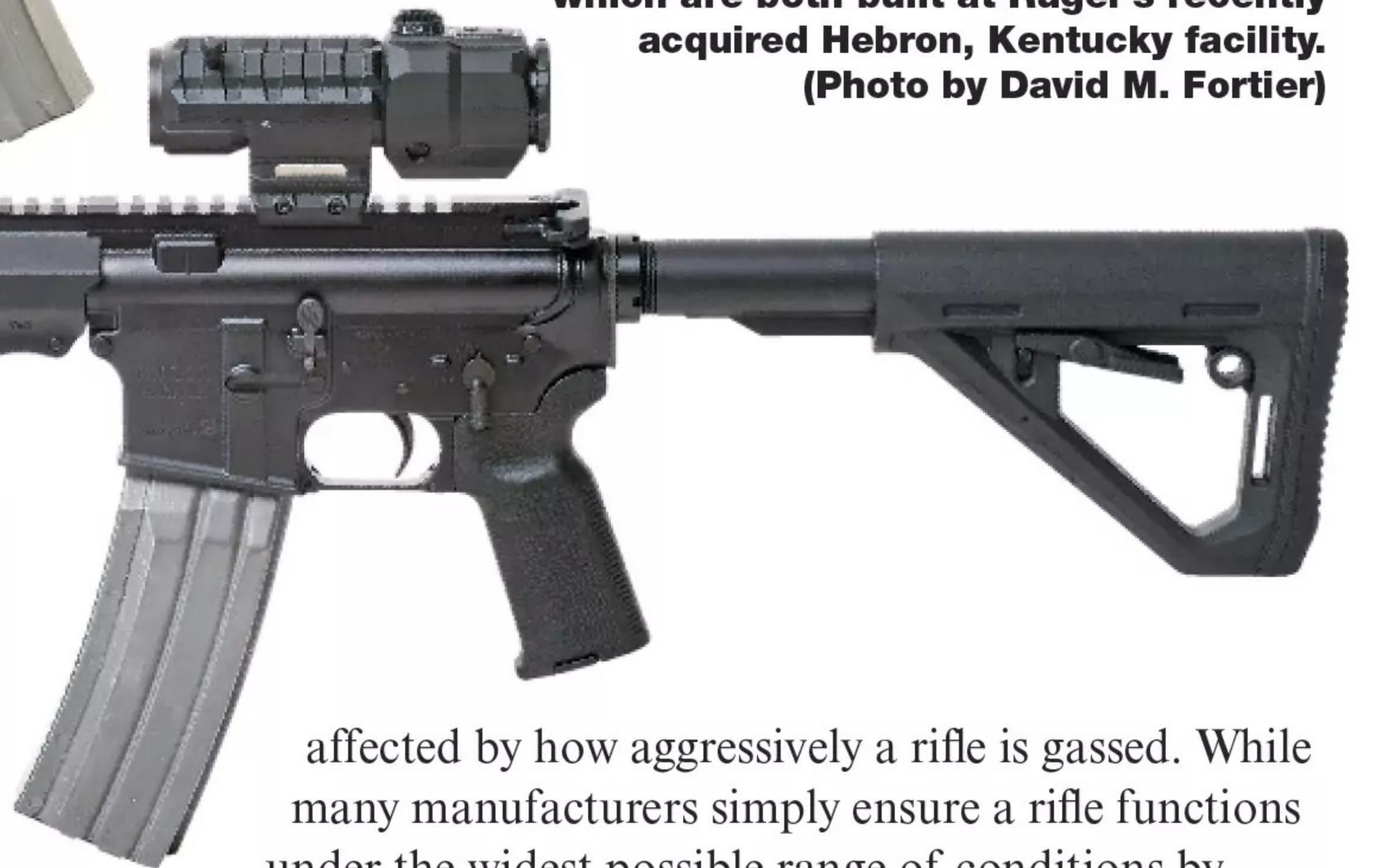
rifles exist today, one of the challenges facing manufacturers is finding a meaningful way to distinguish their product from the competition. The Harrier attempts to do so through a combination of modern features, practical configuration and pricing.

### ■ Features and Construction

The Harrier is built around a 16.1-inch Government profile, six-groove, button-rifled barrel with a one turn in eight-inches right-hand twist and a nitride finish. I like this, and while people may argue 14.5 VS 16 inches when it comes to barrel lengths, 16 inches remains my favorite and I know I am not alone here. I also prefer 1:8-inch rifling twist barrels, due to their ability to shoot well with a wide range of projectiles. I used this twist with excellent success competing in NRA High Power, and like it. The barrel profile selection provides a balance of weight, durability and fast handling in a manner appropriate for a general-purpose carbine.

The muzzle features standard  $\frac{1}{2}$ x28 threads and comes with a traditional A2 compensating flash hider installed. The A2 flash suppressor has two great attributes, it's very economical and it works fairly well. That said it is also very easy to replace if you prefer something else.

Ruger chose to use the popular mid-length gas system, which I also prefer over a traditional carbine length. Proper gas system tuning is one of the most important yet often overlooked elements of AR-15 design. Reliability, recoil impulse, component wear, and suppressor compatibility are all



**The Harrier is being launched with two basic models, which are both built at Ruger's recently acquired Hebron, Kentucky facility. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**

affected by how aggressively a rifle is gassed. While many manufacturers simply ensure a rifle functions under the widest possible range of conditions by over-gassing the system, doing so can create unnecessary recoil and accelerate wear. Ruger's approach appears focused on maintaining reliable operation without making the rifle unpleasant to shoot. A low-profile gas block is installed using two set screws.

Surrounding the barrel is a slim 15-inch free-floating handguard with a MIL-STD M1913 rail at 12 o'clock and M-LOK slots at the 3, 6 and 9 o'clock positions. There are additional slots around the circumference at the front of the handguard for additional flexibility when mounting accessories. Quick-detach (QD) sling sockets are provided at the rear of the rail at 3 and 9 o'clock.

The Harrier utilizes a free-floating M-LOK handguard which eliminates contact between the barrel and handguard. Thus, the accuracy potential is improved while simultaneously providing a lightweight and versatile mounting platform for accessories. The handguard offers ample space for mounting white lights, lasers, bipods, slings, and other accessories.

Upper and lower receivers are forged from 7075 aluminum alloy and feature a Type III hard coat finish for durability and corrosion resistance. These two pieces are traditional



**The Harrier Model 28600 features a mid-length gas system, a 15-inch free-floating M-LOK rail, and a 16.1-inch barrel. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**





**Upper and lower receivers are forged from 7075 aluminum alloy and feature a Type III hard coat finish for durability and corrosion resistance. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**

looking in appearance but if you look inside you will notice a tension screw in the lower receiver which can be adjusted to eliminate play between the receivers. The upper receiver features a forward assist, dust cover and brass deflector.

Inside the upper receiver rides a bolt carrier group with a nitride finish. Ruger markets it as having a staked gas key and my example was properly staked. During my examination, I noted the Harrier's castle nut is also properly staked. In my opinion, every AR-15 should have a properly staked gas key and castle nut. Beyond this, Ruger is pretty mum on their bolt carrier's specifications. A standard GI-style charging handle is fitted.

The controls are familiar and straightforward. Shooters transitioning from other AR-pattern rifles will immediately feel at home. This is important because one of the AR-15's greatest strengths has always been its standardized manual of arms. The safety selector has a familiar 90-degree rotation. The trigger is a single-stage design Ruger refers to as "Mil Spec" and it featured a pull weight of approximately six pounds. The trigger pull is nothing to write home about, but it is serviceable enough. Inside the receiver extension is a carbine weight buffer.

The lower receiver is fitted with a Magpul MOE-K2 pistol grip. This has a 17-degree grip angle which is a bit more vertical than a traditional A2 grip. Ruger fits this model of the Harrier with a Magpul Dual Tensioning (DT) Carbine Stock. This is adjustable, and wobble is eliminated by the auto-engaging friction lock providing tension on the buffer tube. It is fitted with a non-slip butt pad, rotation-limiting quick-detach (QD) swivel mount and a 1.25-inch sling loop.

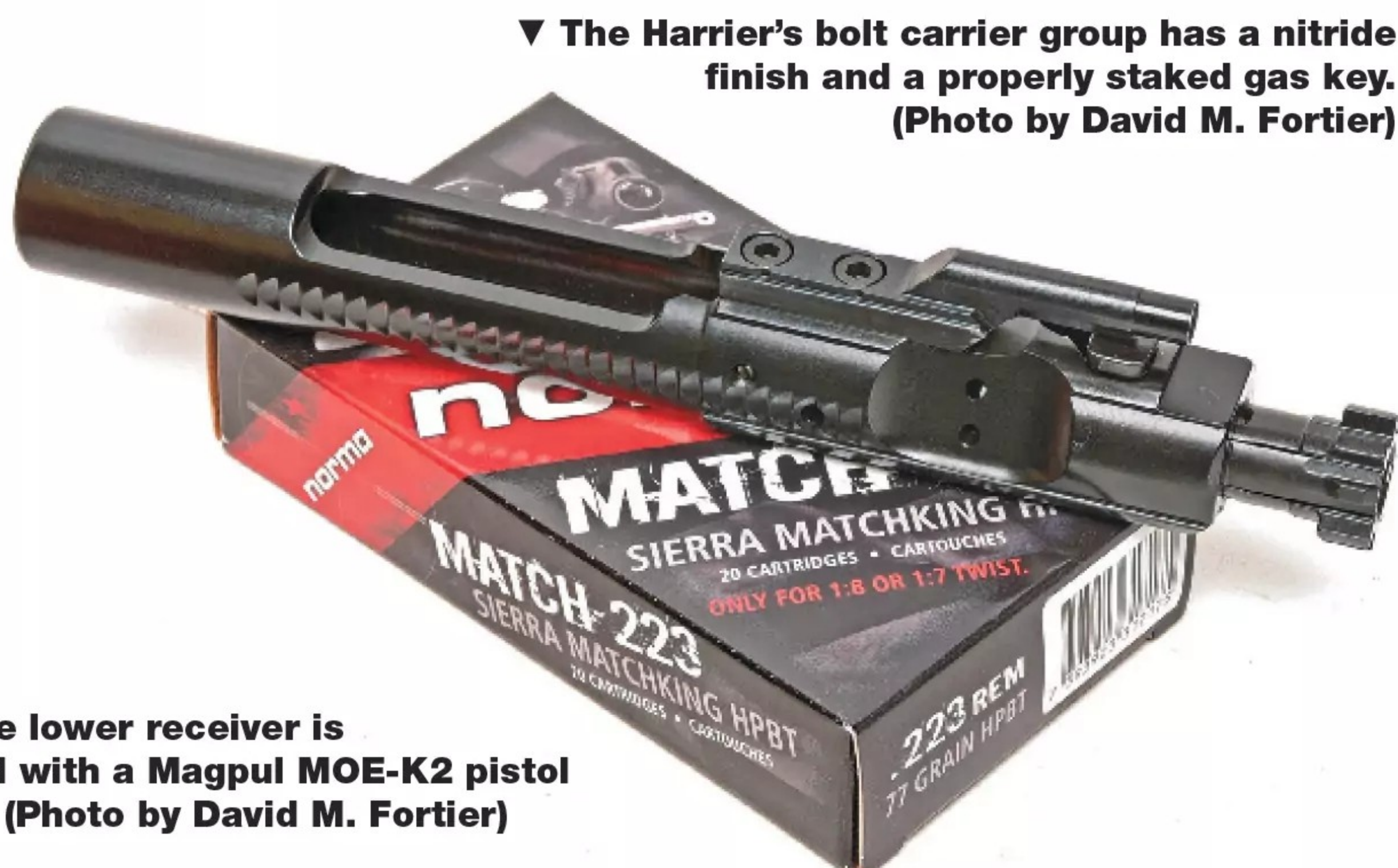
The stock and grip configuration provide a comfortable interface between shooter and rifle. While personal preferences vary widely, the factory setup should satisfy the majority of users while remaining easily replaceable for those who prefer alternative options. Overall, the Harrier gives the impression of a rifle built by people who understand what blue collar consumers actually use rather than what looks impressive on Instagram.

### ■ Designed for the Real World

One issue with many modern AR reviews is that they focus almost entirely on specifications while ignoring actual use. Most rifles spend their lives performing fairly ordinary tasks. They ride in pickup trucks. They accompany hunters into the

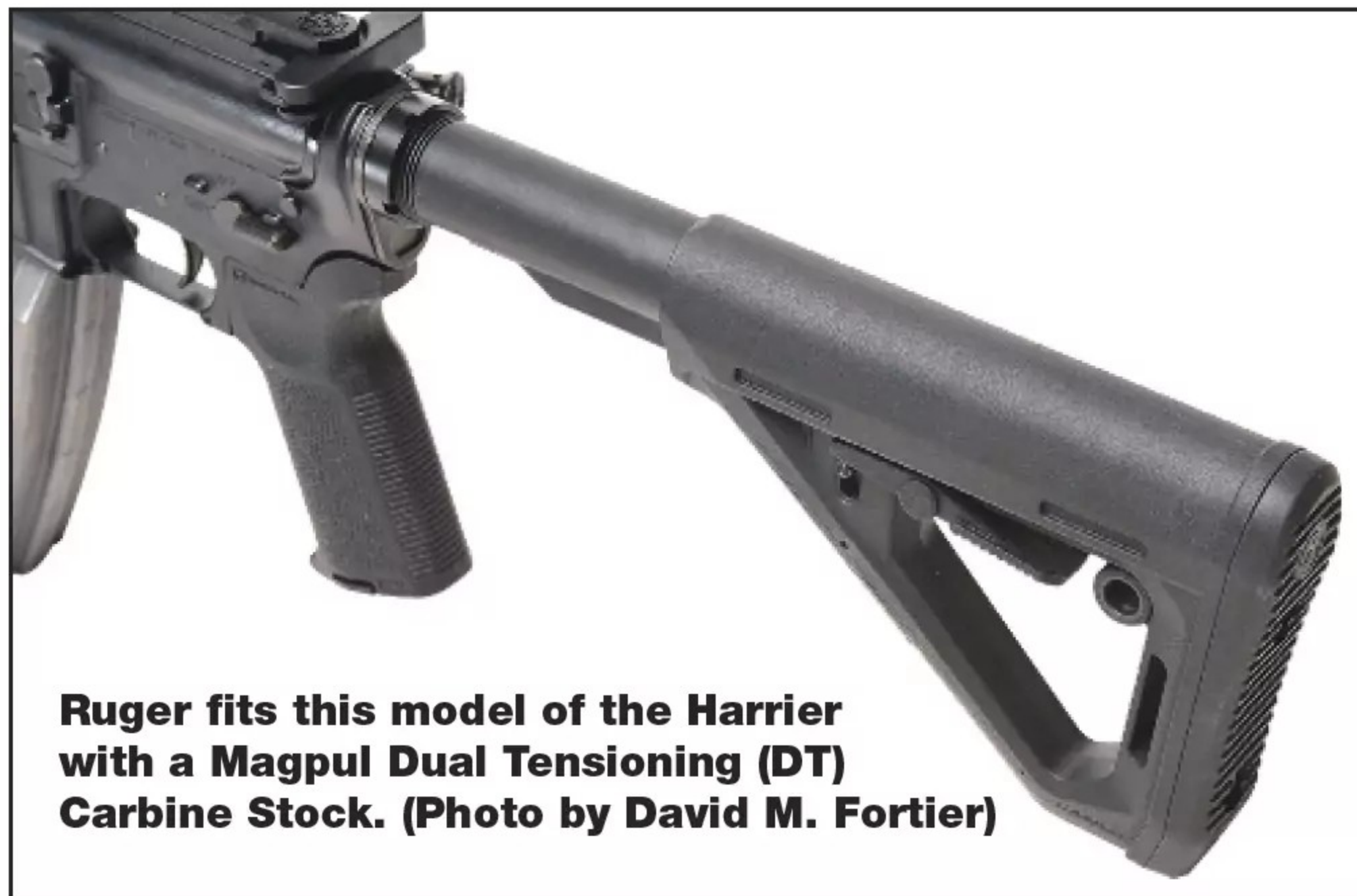


**◀ The lower receiver is fitted with a Magpul MOE-K2 pistol grip. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**



**▼ The Harrier's bolt carrier group has a nitride finish and a properly staked gas key. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**





**Ruger fits this model of the Harrier with a Magpul Dual Tensioning (DT) Carbine Stock. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**



**The compact Strikon VMP is a prismatic rifle scope with magnification running from 1x to 4x. It features a second focal plane reticle illuminated by a fiber-wire battery powered system. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**



**While the Ruger Harrier does not come with sights, the MIL STD 1913 rail on its receiver makes mounting optics easy. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**

field. They serve as home-defense carbines. They are used in training classes and informal range sessions. Some see competition use, but the vast majority does not spend their lives chasing tenths of a second on a timer. Shocking I know.

For those applications, reliability and handling often matter more than ultimate precision. A rifle capable of producing tiny groups from a bench is impressive. A rifle capable of producing practical hits quickly under field conditions is useful. The two are not always the same.

The Harrier appears designed with practical utility in mind. Rather than emphasizing a single role, it seeks to provide versatility. That is a characteristic I generally appreciate. I agree with Heinlein's quote, "Specialization is for insects."

### ■ Why This Rifle Matters

The Harrier enters a market fundamentally different from the one that existed even five years ago. For much of the AR-15's modern history, manufacturers competed by adding features. Longer lists of specifications became selling points. Ambidextrous controls, exotic coatings, new calibers, proprietary components, and increasingly specialized configurations became common. Every year seemed to bring another rifle advertised as "more tactical" than the one before it.

Many of these features offer legitimate benefits. Others exist primarily because manufacturers need a way to distinguish products that are otherwise very similar. The problem is that every added feature increases cost.

Today's firearms market is no longer being driven by panic buying or unprecedented demand. The extraordinary sales surge that accompanied political uncertainty, civil unrest and the pandemic years has largely passed. Most enthusiasts who wanted an AR-15 already own one. Many own several. The challenge facing manufacturers today is convincing consumers that they need another rifle.

At the same time, economic realities are impossible to ignore. Food prices remain elevated. Housing costs and rents continue to strain household budgets. Vehicle prices, insurance rates and utility bills have all climbed. Ammunition is significantly more expensive than it was a decade ago, and even accessories, optics and magazines represent a greater investment than they once did.

For many shooters, discretionary income is simply not what it used to be. That changes buying habits. Consumers who may have once stretched their budget for a premium rifle loaded with every conceivable feature are increasingly asking a different question: What do I actually need? Rather than chasing specifications on a sales sheet, many buyers are looking for practical performance, reliability, and value. They want a rifle that works, a rifle they can trust, and a rifle that leaves enough money in the budget for ammunition, optics and training.

That is where the Harrier becomes particularly interesting. Rather than attempting to compete in the crowded premium-rifle market, Ruger appears to have recognized that many shooters are looking for something more practical. Instead of offering a rifle loaded with features, the company has focused on providing what most shooters actually want while keeping the overall package affordable.

There is a certain honesty to that approach. The Harrier is not marketed as a precision rifle, a competition rifle or a special operations clone. It is simply a modern sporting rifle intended to perform a wide variety of tasks well. In many respects, that mirrors the original appeal of the AR-15 platform itself. The AR became America's most popular rifle not because it excelled at one specific role, but because it was adaptable enough to perform many different roles competently.

For first-time buyers, that matters. A dependable rifle at a realistic price point is often far more attractive than a





**Three .223 Rem loads ranging in weight from 55 to 77 grains were utilized during testing. (Photo by David M. Fortier)**

premium rifle costing hundreds or even thousands more. For experienced shooters, it matters as well. Not every rifle purchase needs to be a flagship model. Sometimes the goal is simply acquiring a reliable, well-equipped carbine that can serve as a training rifle, truck gun, ranch rifle or general-purpose firearm without straining the household budget.

There is also another factor worth considering. In a mature market, value often becomes more important than innovation. The AR-15 platform is no longer new. Most meaningful improvements have already been made. The question today is less about reinventing the rifle and more about refining it while maintaining affordability.

Viewed through that lens, the Harrier may actually be arriving at the right time. It reflects an understanding that many consumers are prioritizing practical value over marketing hype. In an industry that often focuses on the newest and most expensive products, there remains a large audience for a rifle that simply delivers solid performance at a price the ordinary shooter can justify.

That audience may ultimately determine whether the Harrier succeeds, but Ruger appears to understand something important: in today's market, affordability is not a compromise. For many consumers, it is a feature.

### ■ Handling Characteristics

One of the Harrier's strongest attributes is its overall handling. Weighing in at just 6.8 pounds, and measuring just 32.5 inches with the stock collapsed, makes the Harrier quite convenient. The rifle feels lively without becoming excessively light. It balances well and transitions naturally between targets. This is something difficult to quantify on paper. Weight specifications tell only part of the story. How a rifle carries, points and balances often matters more than a simple number listed in a catalog. Of course, adding accessories and an optic will increase weight and can change how the basic rifle feels, but Ruger provides a good starting point.

The Harrier's dimensions make it suitable for a wide variety of applications including recreational shooting, training, competition, home defense and general-purpose use. Shooters familiar with AR-platform rifles will immediately appreciate its straightforward nature. Nothing feels unusual or experimental. Everything simply works.

### ■ Range Performance

To see how Ruger's new Harrier performs, I mounted a Sightmark Strikon VMP 1-4x scope, gathered some



**The Harrier makes for a good general purpose rifle. (Photo by Rachel Fortier)**

ammunition and hit the range. The compact Strikon VMP is a prismatic rifle scope with magnification running from 1x to 4x. It features a second focal plane reticle illuminated by a fiber-wire battery powered system. It was my first time using the Strikon VMP and price wise it is a good match to the Harrier as it has an MSRP of \$449.97.

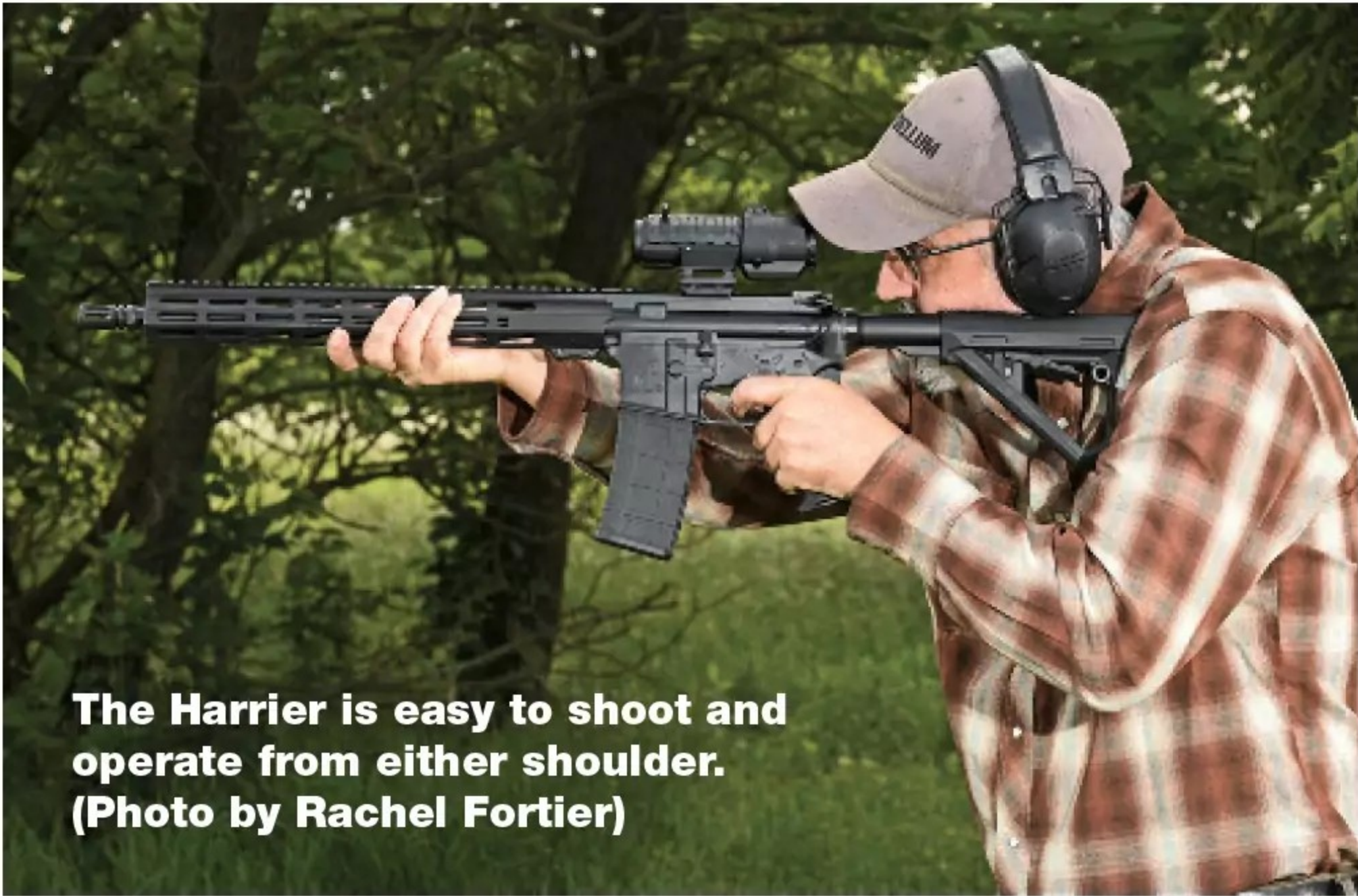
Test ammunition consisted of three .223 Remington pressure loads running in weight from 55 to 77 grains from Black Hills Ammunition, Federal and Norma. I started off with a quick function check and zeroing, then fired a bit offhand and kneeling to get a feel for the Harrier. I experienced no issues, so began accuracy testing from the bench. Getting to work I fired four five-shot groups from a rest at 100 yards with each load.

While the trigger is a bit gritty, it is consistent and manageable. Once I got used to it, I had no problems with it, and the reset is precise. Time spent on the bench with the Harrier revealed nothing extraordinary. It fed, fired, extracted, and ejected reliably. Accuracy was good, consistent, and about

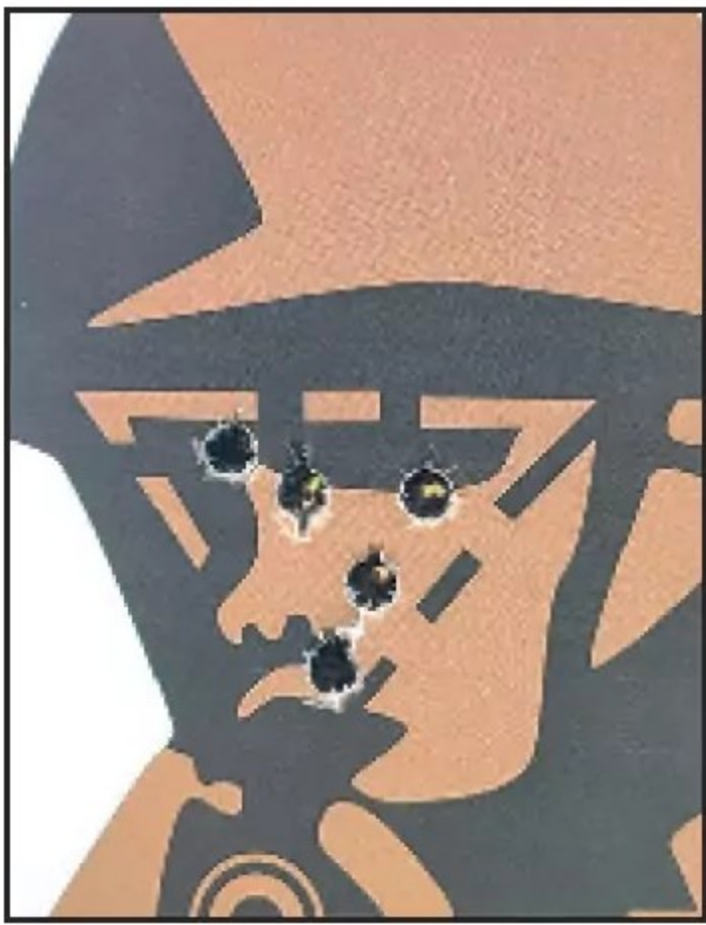


**The Ruger's 16.1-inch barrel is a good length for general use providing both good velocity and quick handling. (Photo by Rachel Fortier)**





The Harrier is easy to shoot and operate from either shoulder. (Photo by Rachel Fortier)



This five-shot 100-yard group measures 1.3 inches and was fired using Black Hills 55-grain TSX load. (Photo by David M. Fortier)



This five-shot 100-yard groups measures 1.3 inches and was fired using Federal’s Fusion 62-grain load. (Photo by David M. Fortier)



Here is a nice 100-yard group with one flier bringing it out to 1.4 inches. (Photo by David M. Fortier)

▲ The Sightmark Strikon VMP 1-4x scope performed well with its daylight bright illuminated reticle and 1-4x magnification. (Photo by Rachel Fortier)

what I expected. The Harrier gave a solid performance across the board at 100 yards and you will find the results in the accompanying accuracy chart. Magazines inserted easily, the bolt cycled smoothly and rounds chambered with no issues. Empty magazines dropped free with the push of a button. Recoil was mild and it proved to be a pleasant rifle to shoot. I noted during testing that ejection was directly to 3 o’clock with all three loads, and the pattern was very consistent.

Moving from the bench, I ran the Harrier through some drills firing offhand and kneeling on paper and steel plates.

The Harrier did everything I asked of it. During this portion of testing, I went back and forth running the Sightmark optic on 1x and 4x. I found the pistol grip and stock comfortable; I like the non-slip rubber buttpad to keep the butt where I put it rather than sliding around.

Going prone, I had no difficulty making 30 hits in a row on a full-sized steel silhouette at 280 yards. Did the Ruger Harrier do anything extraordinary during testing? Nope. But it went bang every time I pulled the trigger, and it shot well. What more do you want from an economical 16-inch AR-15? If I

were to change it in some manner I would upgrade the trigger, but that’s it. You could try an H1 buffer in it for fun, but the gas system seems very well-balanced with the .223 Rem loads I tried. I guess one thing I did notice is just how much fun a plain old 16-inch AR-15 like this can be on the range. The Harrier may be boring compared to some fancy boutique ARs, but boring is often seriously underrated.

■ The Bigger Picture

One of the most interesting aspects of the Harrier has little to do with the rifle itself. Instead, it reflects where the firearms market currently stands. The era of panic buying appears largely behind us. Manufacturers can no longer rely on fear-driven sales. Consumers are becoming more selective. They are asking harder questions about value, practicality and long-term usefulness. The result is a much more competitive marketplace than existed just a few years ago.

For much of the past decade, companies could successfully market rifles based on novelty, premium features or perceived exclusivity. Today, many buyers are less interested in owning the latest thing and more interested in obtaining the most value for their money. That shift has forced manufacturers to adapt.

Viewed through that lens, the Harrier begins to make a great deal of sense. Ruger has built much of its reputation

| RUGER HARRIER RIFLE<br>ACCURACY AND VELOCITY CHART                                                                                                                                                               |                   |                       |                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Load                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Velocity<br>(fps) | Standard<br>Deviation | Average<br>(in.) |
| Black Hills Ammunition<br>55-grain TSX                                                                                                                                                                           | 2,997             | 48.3                  | 1.7              |
| Fusion 62-grain MSR                                                                                                                                                                                              | 2,784             | 28.4                  | 1.5              |
| Norma 77-grain<br>HPBT Match                                                                                                                                                                                     | 2,454             | 16.6                  | 1.5              |
| Groups are an average of four 5-shot groups fired from a rest at 100 yards. Velocity measured with a LabRadar Doppler radar chronograph at an ambient temperature of 75 degrees F at 1,030 feet above Sea Level. |                   |                       |                  |



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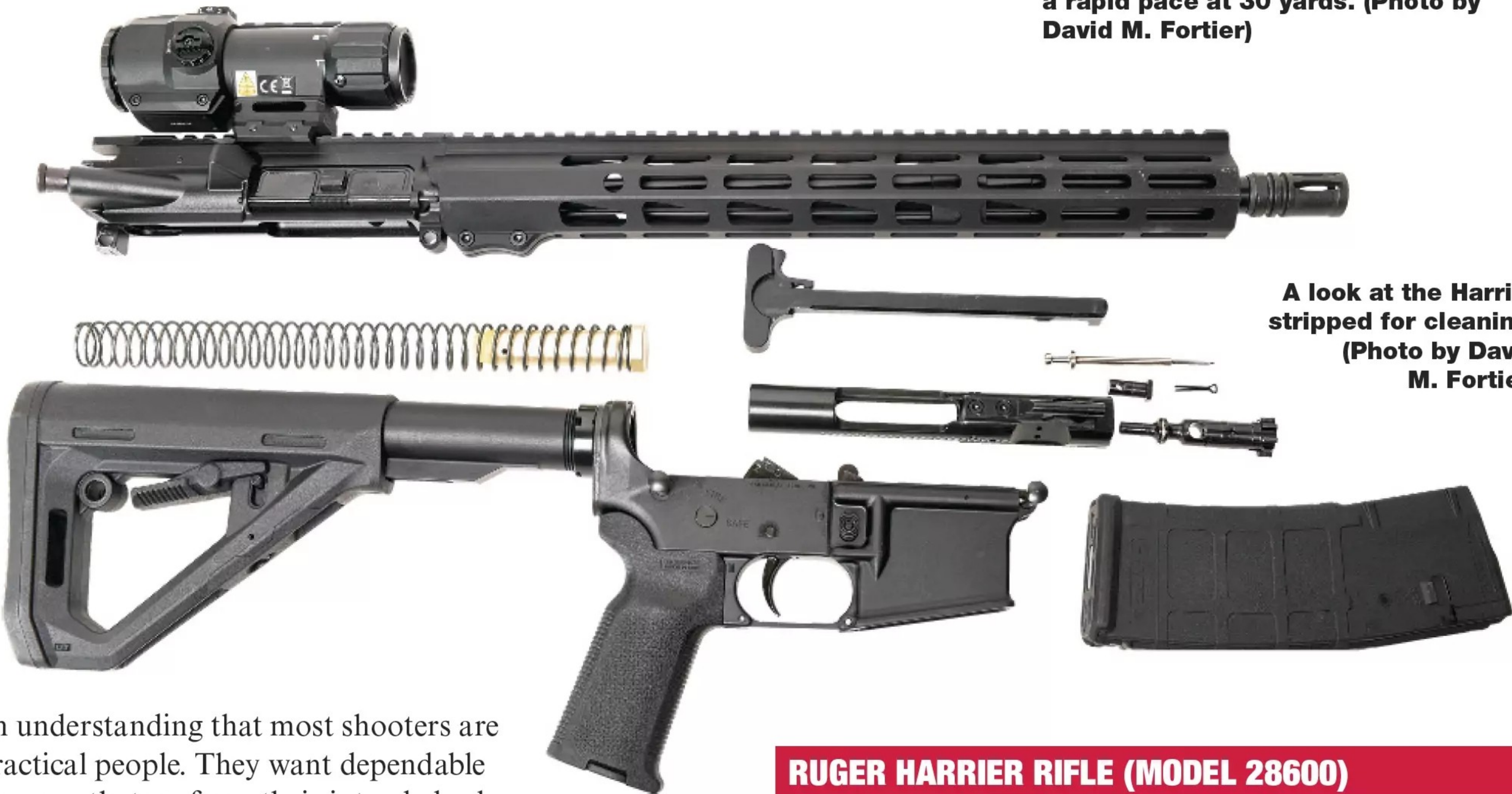
RUGER’S NEW HARRIER: AN AR-15 FOR LEAN TIMES



The Harrier fed, fired, extracted, and ejected reliably. Accuracy was good, consistent and about what Fortier expected. (Photo by Sean Utley)



Here are five rounds fired offhand at a rapid pace at 30 yards. (Photo by David M. Fortier)



A look at the Harrier stripped for cleaning. (Photo by David M. Fortier)

on understanding that most shooters are practical people. They want dependable firearms that perform their intended role without unnecessary complication or expense. The company has repeatedly found success by identifying products that offer solid value rather than chasing every trend that sweeps through the industry.

At the same time, the Ruger Harrier needs to prove durable, reliable and trouble-free over the long haul. The quality control needs to be consistent, day in and day out. The build quality must be good and the materials used must prove durable. Basically, Ruger’s Harrier needs to earn a reputation for being an economical, but dependable, rifle over the long haul. One rifle in the hands of one writer cannot test that, it is something which will be learned in the months ahead as shooters spend time with the Harrier and share their thoughts. With that said, I enjoyed my time with the Ruger Harrier, once again it proved that a simple 16-inch 5.56x45mm AR-15 can provide a lot of enjoyment on the range. **FN**

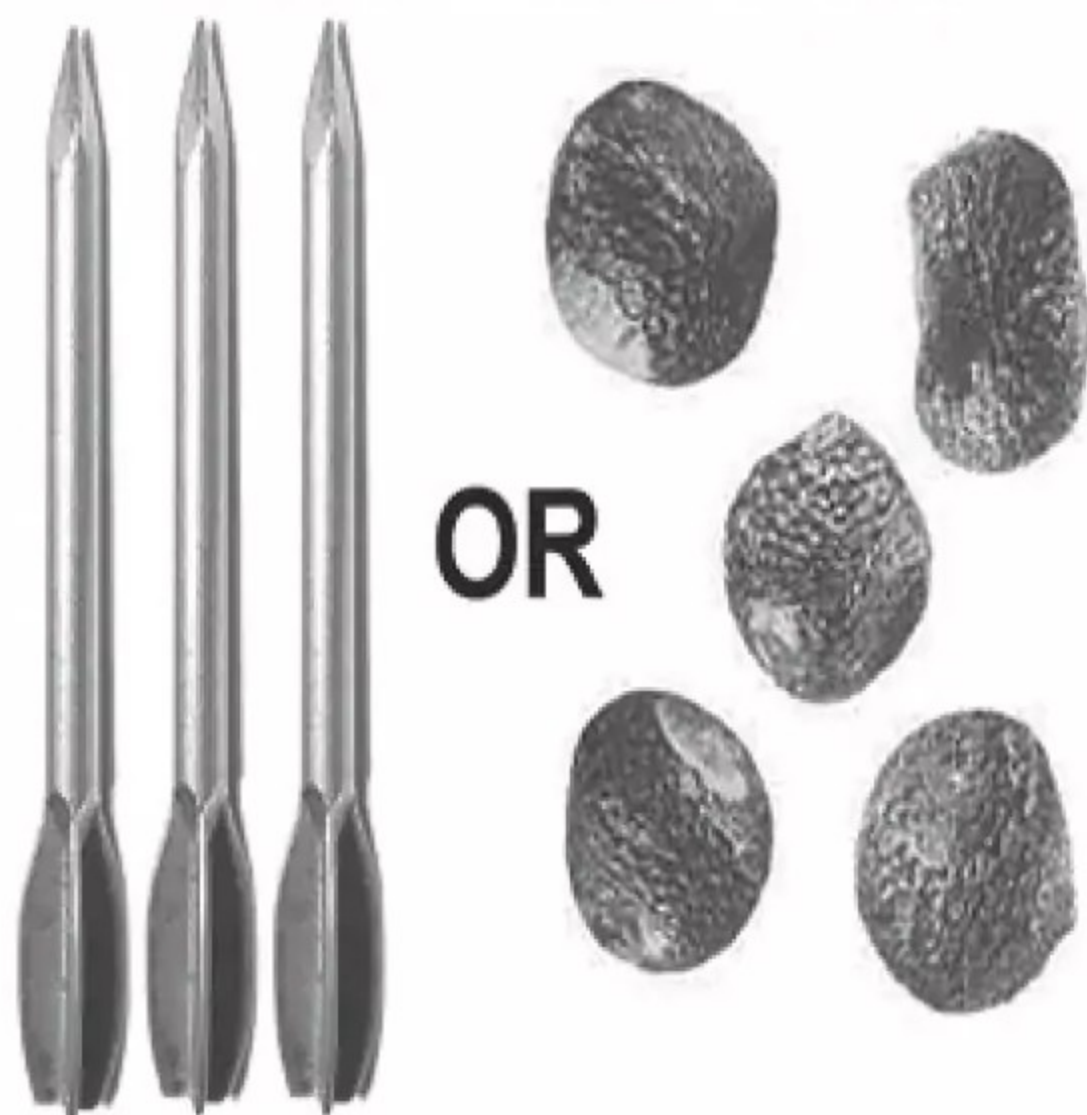
| RUGER HARRIER RIFLE (MODEL 28600) |                                                  |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Type:                             | Direct impingement, gas operated, semi-automatic |
| Cartridge:                        | 5.56x45mm NATO                                   |
| Capacity:                         | 30+1 (any AR-15-type magazine)                   |
| Barrel:                           | 16.1 in., button rifled, 1:8-in. twist           |
| Length:                           | 35.87 in.                                        |
| Weight:                           | 6 lbs., 12 oz. (tested)                          |
| Finish:                           | Nitride (steel), hardcoat anodized (aluminum)    |
| Stock:                            | Magpul DT Carbine                                |
| Grip:                             | Magpul MOE-K2                                    |
| Trigger:                          | 6 lbs. (tested)                                  |
| Sights:                           | None                                             |
| Safety:                           | Selector lever, two-position                     |
| MSRP:                             | \$749                                            |
| Contact:                          | (336-) 949-5200, Ruger.com                       |



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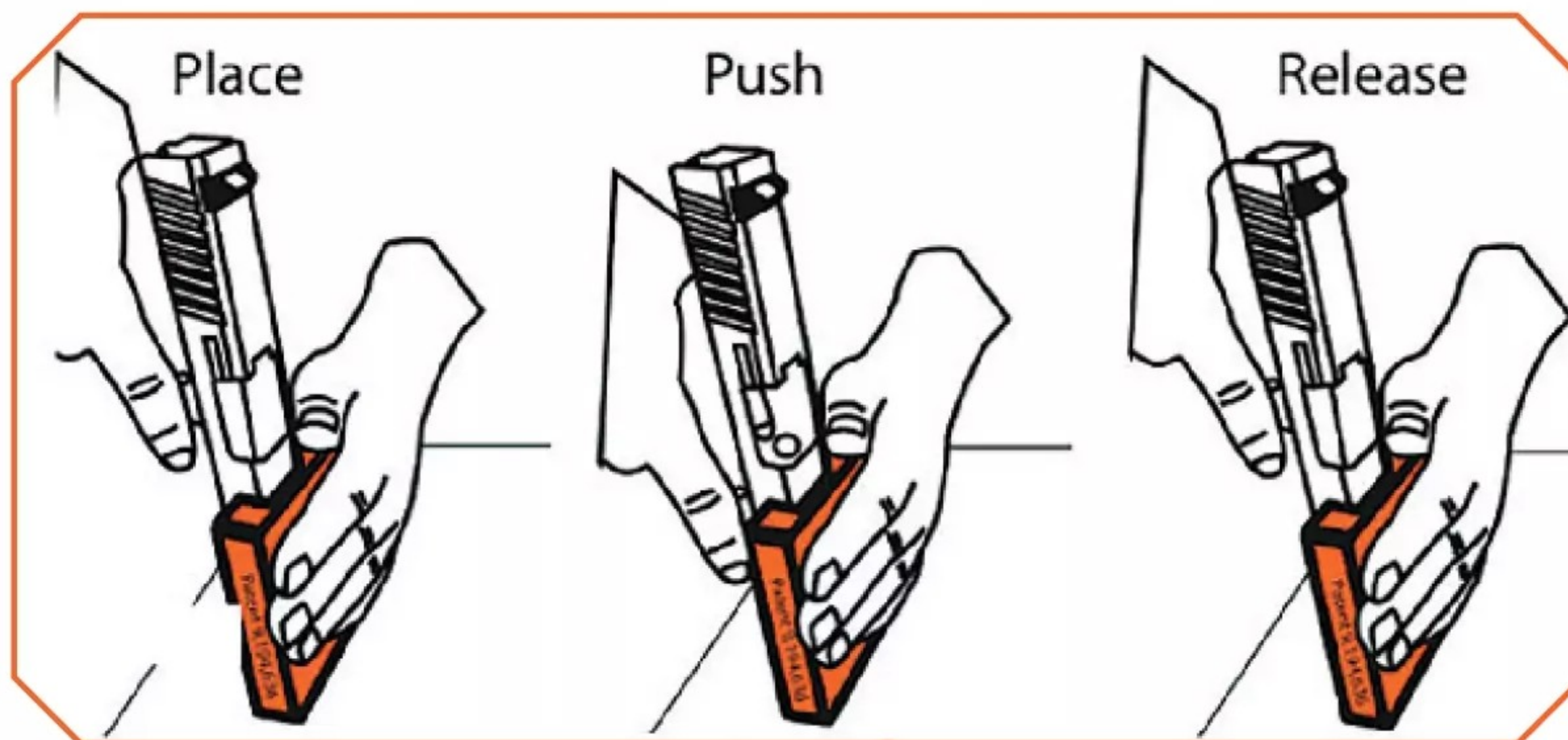
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Yes, a compact handgun will have some recoil. As the writer Heinlein once remarked, “There ain’t no such thing as a free lunch.” (Patrick Sweeney)

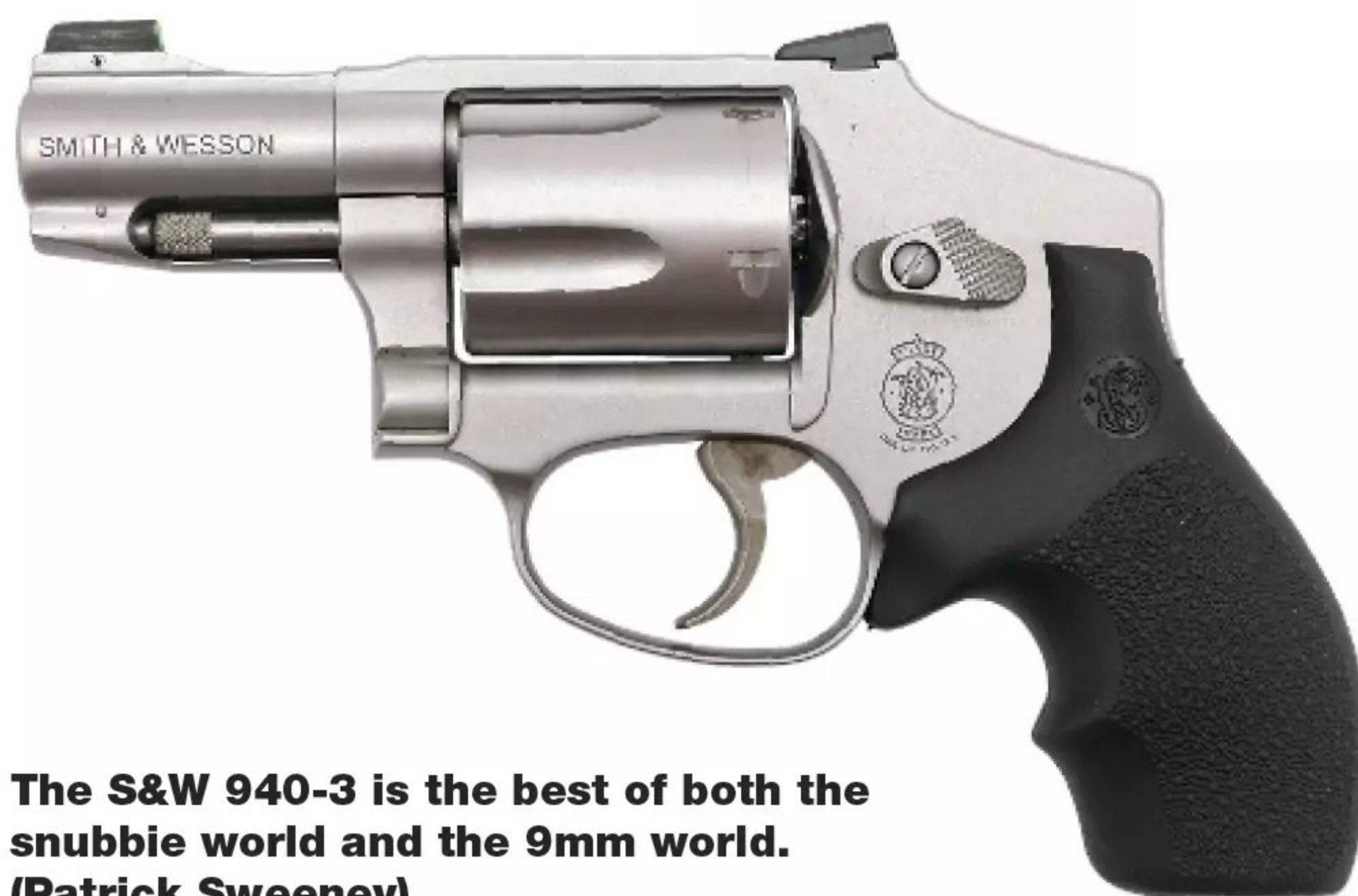
# SMITH & WESSON’S 940-3 9MM REVOLVER

## Yes, a 9mm Revolver!

By Patrick Sweeney

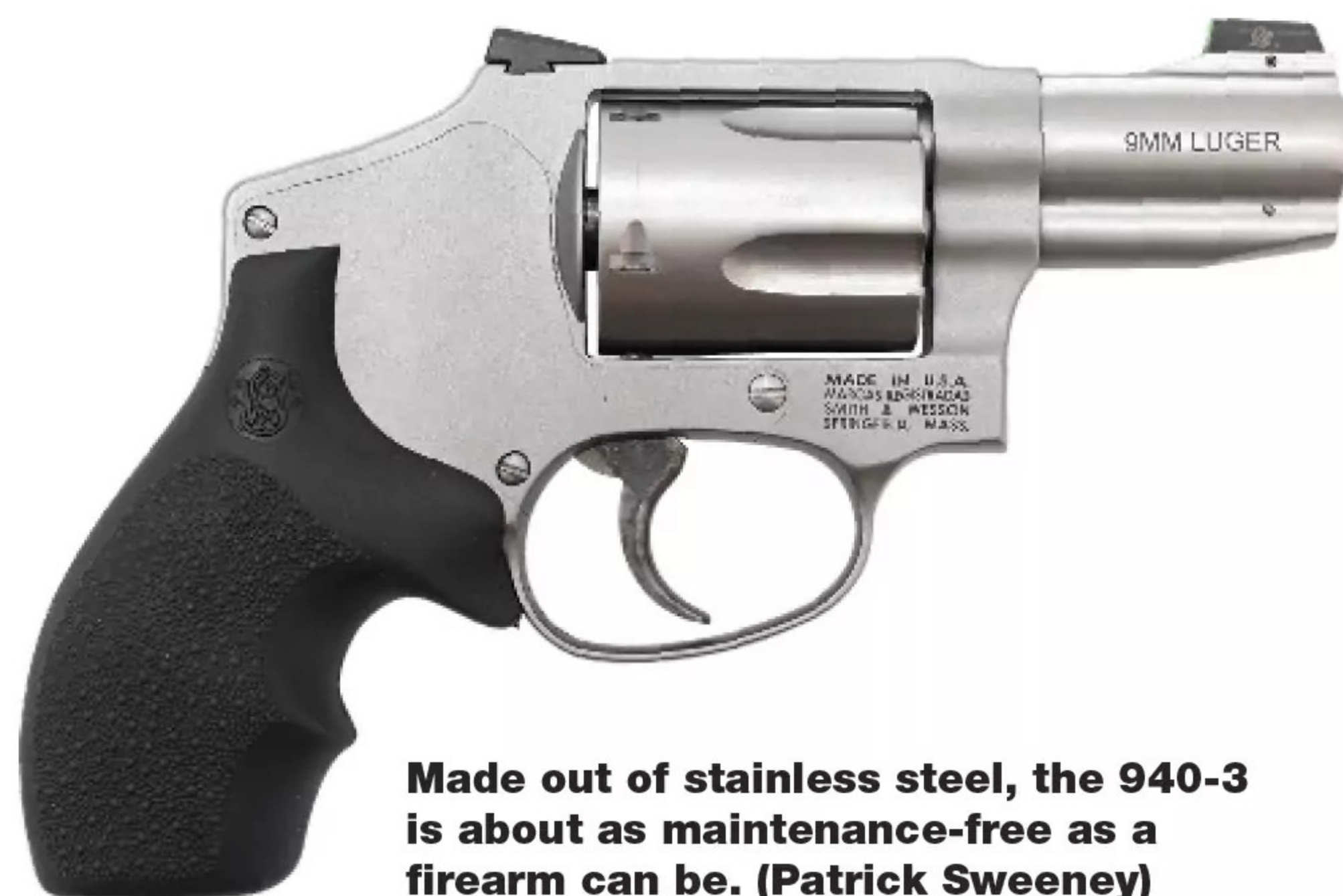
**I**t is a 9mm Parabellum world. That means even revolvers have to adapt. In the case of the Smith & Wesson J-frame, that isn’t a big deal, they’ve done it before. This time around S&W has taken advantage of the knowledge of previous 9mm revolvers they have made and produced a winner. (Not that the earlier ones were losers, but they came out when the world had not changed over to 9mm, and that didn’t help.)

The J-frame is the five-shot epitome of the “snubbie” or snub-nosed revolver. You can’t make a usable revolver that is smaller, even if you cut down on the rounds it held. Plus, if you made the cylinder large enough to hold six rounds, the entire package becomes enough larger that you lose the elegance and compactness of the J-frame. So, five it is.



**The S&W 940-3 is the best of both the snubbie world and the 9mm world. (Patrick Sweeney)**





**Made out of stainless steel, the 940-3 is about as maintenance-free as a firearm can be. (Patrick Sweeney)**

The 940-3 is made as a double-action-only revolver. There is no exposed hammer. That means there's no way to thumb-cock it, and no point in machining a single-action notch in the internal hammer, so S&W doesn't. You will have to learn double-action shooting in order to use the 940-3, but that is not the burden some seem to think it is. The big advantage

of the sealed frame is twofold: it means lint and gunk have less opportunity to enter the action. Also, there's no hammer to get caught on clothing on the draw. There's a third, not as well-known or taken advantage of aspect as well. That one is the larger rise to the backstrap lets those of us who choke up on a wheelgun grip like there's no tomorrow have even more real estate to claim. Getting my hand up high on a regular revolver usually means I have to stop when the hammer starts hitting the web of my hand. On this one, that's not going to be a problem.

S&W has also updated the 940-3 by leaving off the external lock. No more is there an opening on the side for lint entry, and no concern over a malfunctioning "safety device" that might be a hindrance to use in an emergency. Kudos, S&W.

One detail of a revolver chambered in 9mm Parabellum that you and the manufacturer have to deal with is the rim, or lack of one. The extractor star of a revolver lifts the cases out of the chambers by pressing on the rim, a rim that protrudes past the diameter of the case head.



**Five rounds in the cylinder, because having fewer doesn't make it any smaller, and making it six shots makes it too big. (Patrick Sweeney)**

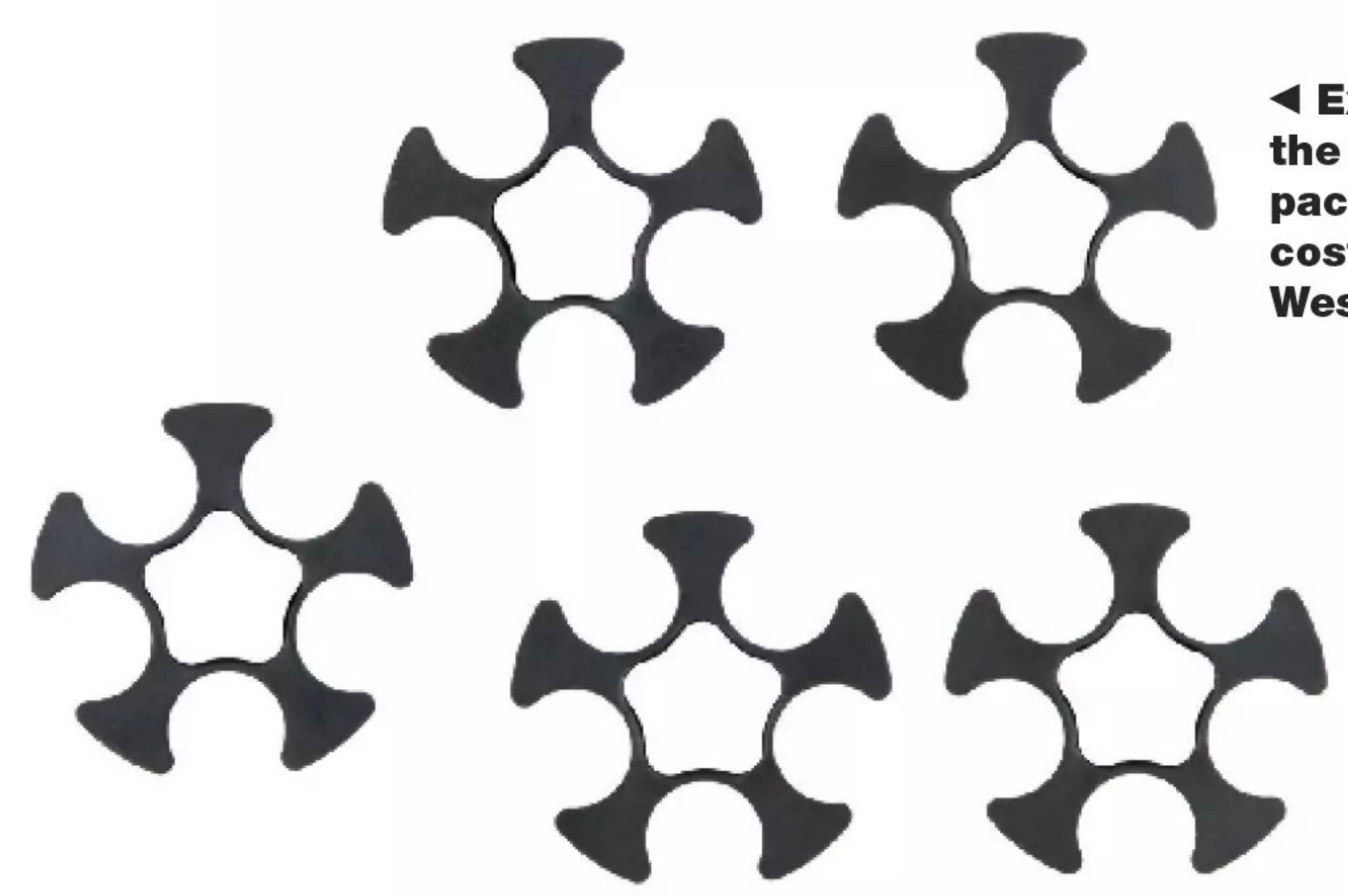


**The 940-3 lacks the external "safety" lock, and in order to use it with 9mm ammo you'll need to use the included moonclips. (Patrick Sweeney)**



**Pockets aren't holsters, get a holster to put the 940-3 into inside the pocket. (Patrick Sweeney)**



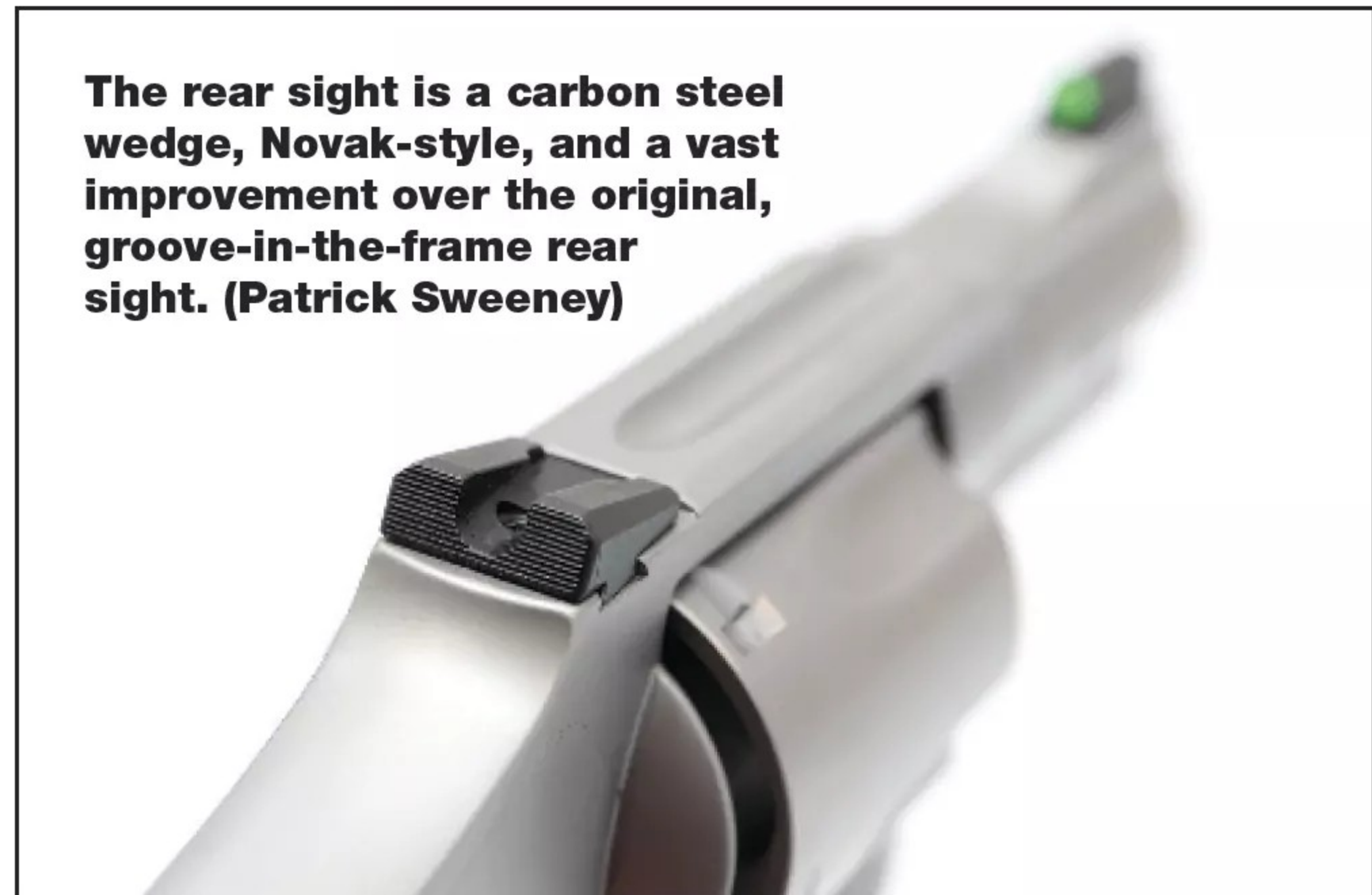


◀ Extra moon clips for the 940-3 come in packages of five and cost \$22. (Smith & Wesson photo)

The 9mm rim is flush with the case head. No rim, no rim press, no extraction. This requires a “moon clip” and in the instance here, it is a “full moon clip.” The stamped-steel moon clip allows each round to snap into the clip by means of the extractor groove of the 9mm case, and each of the five rounds clip into the stamped spring steel moon clip in turn. Then the entire package, clip and all, goes into the cylinder. When you press on the ejector rod, the extractor star lifts the package by pressing on the moon clip, not the (here, non-existent) case rim, lifting all five out at the same time.

Now, you can use the 940-3 without the moon clips. Just as you can with a properly-made revolver chambered in some other pistol cartridge, like the .45ACP or 10mm, but they won’t be lifted by the extractor star, and you’ll likely have to use a stick or ballpoint pen to press them out. So, use the moon clips.

As an aside, when I got the assignment, and requested one of the 940-3s from my contact at S&W, I suggested that they send me more than just the three moon clips that come in the box with the 940-3. I was going to have to do my chrono and accuracy work and try and have some fun testing the 940-3. Doing that with just three moon clips was going to be....less fun. I don’t know what happened in-between my request and the arrival of the 940-3.



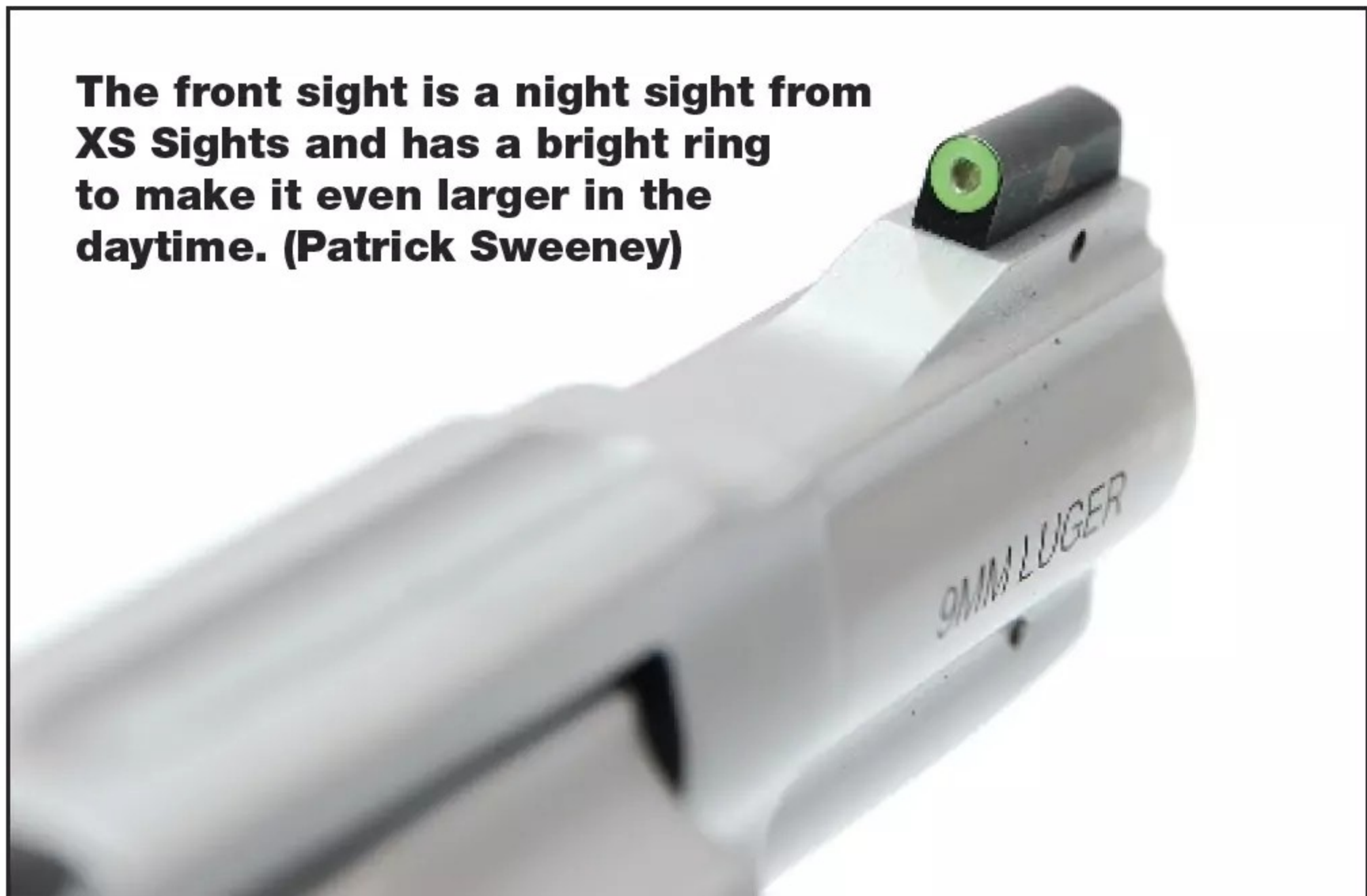
The rear sight is a carbon steel wedge, Novak-style, and a vast improvement over the original, groove-in-the-frame rear sight. (Patrick Sweeney)



The barrel on the 940-3 is a smidge longer than other J frames and has a slightly larger underlug. (Patrick Sweeney)

Extra moon clips for the 940-3 come in packages of five, and right after the arrival of the box holding the 940-3, another box dropped on my doorstep, a box that held ten packages of five moon clips each. Yes, fifty moon clips. Okay, that’s a bit much even by gun writer standards.

The original J frame was the Chiefs Special, making its debut at the IACP (International Chiefs of Police) convention in 1950, in blue steel. The stainless version came along in 1965, still with an external hammer. The internal hammer version, the Centennial, debuted in 1952, blued steel, and it wasn’t until 1990 that the hammerless version came made in stainless steel. In much of that time, the biggest caliber the



The front sight is a night sight from XS Sights and has a bright ring to make it even larger in the daytime. (Patrick Sweeney)





◀ **The Hogue Overmolded grip is soft enough to work and shaped to be comfortable and easy to shoot. (Patrick Sweeney)**

▶ **The grips are shaped to clear the moon-clips on loading or unloading and note that there is no external lock. (Patrick Sweeney)**



▶ **The grip does not cover the backstrap. Doing that would make the 940-3 larger, and you don't buy a J frame to make it larger. (Patrick Sweeney)**



J-frame was made in was .38 Special (we'll overlook the .357 Magnum version in deference to keeping our wrists and elbows from rightfully complaining), but there were 9mm variants along the way.

The 940-3 barrel is a bit longer than the usual S&W snubbie, making my digital calipers work out to 2.18 inches. This is a solid barrel, not a two-piece one, as some models of the S&W line now have. Also, the shroud enclosing the ejector rod is longer and wider going forward than on other J-frames. If you are looking at a holster that is a closely molded shell, you'll want to make sure the holster maker knows it will fit a 940-3 and its underlug.

The sights on the original Chiefs Special were a plain blade and a notch in the rear of the frame. S&W jumped fully into the 21st century with the 940-3, where the front sight is a white-bordered night sight with a tritium cell from XS Sights (XSSights.com). The rear sight is a modified Novak-shaped pyramid with a u-shaped notch, a much better system for a rear sight than a notch machined into the frame itself. If you had to you could adjust the windage on the 940-3 by pushing the rear sight to one side or the other.

The grip are Hogue OverMolded boot grips of synthetic material, and soft enough to dampen recoil without being so soft and "grabby" that they would cause problems carrying concealed. The grip shape is round-butt, because, well, that's the best shape both for concealment and for shooting. Some might favor the square-butt grip shape for shooting, but I've generally found the round ones better. The 940-3 is crafted out of stainless steel and given a brushed finish before leaving the factory.

As much as I am a revolver purist, and not entirely a 9mm convert, I have to acknowledge that the J frame is probably better suited to the 9mm than it is to the .38 Special. I know, heresy,

but stick with me. The J frame in .38 Special has two details that hobble performance. One is the chamber pressure, and the other is the starting point of the bullet itself. The 9mm runs (in standard pressure loadings) with a maximum of 35,000 PSI (pounds per square inch). The 9mm+P maxes out at 38,500. .38 Special has a max of 17,000 PSI, and the .38 Special+P is only 20,000 PSI. Higher pressure, yes, does mean more recoil, but it also means higher muzzle velocity. The second one is subtler but still matters. The shorter 9mm cartridge means the bullet has, in effect, a longer barrel than the .38 Special. From the initial combustion to muzzle exit, the expanding gases have more time to transfer their energy to the bullet. Combine those and you get useful velocities



**Disassembly is easy. Unscrew the one screw on the right side, below the frame opening. Then you can pull the cylinder and crane forward off of the frame. (Patrick Sweeney)**





**Casually standing with hands in pockets, it is easy to have a handgun handy if it is a 940-3. (Patrick Sweeney)**

out of a J frame in 9mm, more so than what a .38 Special would deliver, and if you really feel the need for more, then the 940-3 is rated for +P ammunition.

In testing, the 940-3 confirmed my belief that the J-frame is the firearms package that delivers the most bang for the smallest cargo load. That is, you can't get a higher ratio of performance than the J-frame, and the 9mm



**The Black Point kydex holster for belt wear is slick, comfortable and easy to keep concealed. (Patrick Sweeney)**



**The Crossbreed pocket holster is a simple (but effective) leather holster with a clever adhesive-and-Velcro attachment system. (Patrick Sweeney)**

► **The holster sticks to the Velcro, and the Velcro has an adhesive back that sticks to the inside of a pocket. (Patrick Sweeney)**



chambering just makes the ratio even better. The beauty of a double-action revolver is that trigger practice is cheap, as in it costs you nothing but time and effort. Unloaded (double-check to be sure) dry-fire practice in the basement or wherever is time well-spent. Load up dummy rounds with no primers in them, and practice speedy reloads.

Disassembly is a snap. The one screw that is directly below the cylinder on the left side? Yes, that one. That's the disassembly screw. Remove it and you can slide the crane and cylinder off of the frame. That's it. You really don't need to do more, unless you really feel the need to delve into the anatomy of a double-action-only (DAO) revolver. So, scrub off the powder residues, reassemble and tighten that screw back in place and you're done.

For daily carry, the 940-3 is the epitome of the "pocket gun". Except, even pockets need holsters. Crossbreed Holsters ([CrossbreedHolsters.com](http://CrossbreedHolsters.com)) makes an interesting holster for the 940-3 that goes into your pocket. It has a Velcro slab that itself has an adhesive backer. Stuff the 940-3 into the holster and pocket it. Once you figure out just where in that pocket you want it to be, pull the holster and 940-3 out. Peel off the paper and then carefully adhere the holster to the inside of the pocket.

Carrying a snubbie in a pocket without a holster is asking for trouble. In the wintertime, a 940-3 in a Crossbreed holster in the pocket of your winter coat can be quite comforting. If you are going belt carry, then BlackPoint makes a kydex and leather holster that snugs the 940-3 right up to your side and keeps it secure.

Accuracy-wise, the more time you have spent on dry-firing, the better your groups will be. Also, snubbies



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SMITH & WESSON'S 940-3 9MM REVOLVER



Hornady Critical Duty shot very well. (Patrick Sweeney)



This particular 940-3 really likes the Black Hills Honey Badger, but all firearms have preferences, so test yours with a variety to find what it likes. (Patrick Sweeney)



Double action shooting takes some practice and paying attention, but once you learn it, it can be quite accurate. As demonstrated here with the 940-3. (Patrick Sweeney)

seem to be a bit more particular about what they “like” and “dislike” than other firearms. It is worth your time to try various loads to see if there’s something yours favors. In this particular instance, the 940-3 sent to me was very favorable towards Black Hills Honey Badger. And while it isn’t possible to do a real head-to-head velocity test, .38 Special to 9mm, I found that the 9mm loadings with comparable bullet weights were 100 fps or more faster than the .38s have been in tests in the past. 100 fps is not nothing, and if you can get it, you should.

| SOURCES                                                     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Black Hills Ammunition: Black-Hills.com, (605) 348-5150     |
| BlackPoint Tactical: BlackPointTactical.com                 |
| Crossbreed Holsters: CrossbreedHolsters.com, (888) 732-5011 |
| Federal: FederalPremium.com, (800) 831-8100                 |
| Fiocchi USA: FiocchiUSA.com, (417) 725-4118                 |
| Hornady Manufacturing: Hornady.com, (800) 338-3220          |
| XS Sights: XSSights.com, (888) 744-4880                     |

| SMITH & WESSON M940-3 9MM REVOLVER<br>CHRONOGRAPH AND ACCURACY DATA                                                                                                                |                            |                |      |      |                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|------|------|----------------------------|
| Ammunition                                                                                                                                                                         | Bullet Weight (gr.) & Type | Velocity (fps) | ES   | SD   | Accuracy (in.) Avg. & Best |
| Black Hills Honey Badger                                                                                                                                                           | 100 Copper                 | 1,226          | 47.2 | 16.8 | 2.5 / 2.1                  |
| Fiocchi CovertX                                                                                                                                                                    | 124 JHP                    | 1,047          | 12.5 | 4.5  | 2.7 / 2.4                  |
| Hornady Critical Duty                                                                                                                                                              | 135 Flex                   | 922            | 21.4 | 9.5  | 2.6 / 2.2                  |
| Federal Personal Defense                                                                                                                                                           | 147 Hydra-Shok             | 856            | 26.5 | 9.1  | 2.6 / 2.3                  |
| Accuracy results the average of four, five-shot groups at 15 yards off a Champion shooting rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots measured on a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph. |                            |                |      |      |                            |

As a main gun for daily carry, or a backup for those who like to walk out of the house with two or more firearms on their person, the S&W 940-3 should be on the top of your list to handle and test the next time you go visit your local gun shop. **FN**

| SPECIFICATIONS<br>SMITH & WESSON M940-3 9MM REVOLVER |                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Type:                                                | Hammer-fired double-action only revolver |
| Caliber:                                             | 9mm Parabellum                           |
| Capacity:                                            | 5                                        |
| Barrel:                                              | 2.18 in.                                 |
| Overall Length:                                      | 6.63 in.                                 |
| Height:                                              | 4.38 in.                                 |
| Width:                                               | 1.31 in.                                 |
| Weight:                                              | 23 oz.                                   |
| Finish:                                              | Matte stainless                          |
| Grips:                                               | Synthetic boot grip                      |
| Sights:                                              | Night sight front, notch rear            |
| Trigger:                                             | 8 lbs., 7 oz.                            |
| MSRP:                                                | \$899                                    |
| Contact:                                             | Smith-Wesson.com, (800) 331-0852         |



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| <b>How far off are you effective with your rifle? Redcoat Target Set (100 targets)</b> .....     | <b>\$19</b>                      |
| <b>The "Quick 'n Dirty" (QD) AQT (equals 50 AQTs!)</b> .....                                     | <b>Qty of 50 \$20, 5/\$82</b>    |
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| <b><del>US GI mint issued M1 Garand 8rd clips, Quantity of 10—</del></b> .....                   | <b><del>\$50 SOLD OUT!</del></b> |
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(Photo by Leroy Thompson)

# THE RPK (RUCHNOY PULEMYOT KALASHNIKOVA) AND RPK-74

## AK-47-Based Light Machine Guns

By Leroy Thompson

**T**o some extent, the RPK could equate to the United States' BAR, in that it is an overgrown rifle that functions as a light machine gun. Mikhail Kalashnikov developed the RPK in the early 1960s as a companion light machine gun for his AK-47 rifle. It was intended as

a replacement for the belt-fed RPD machine gun. Anyone familiar with the AK-47 can pick up an RPK and immediately know how to operate it, as the selector lever, cocking handle, and other features remain the same. Speaking of "picking up," the RPK is also lighter and handier than the





RPD, which it replaced. And, as its manual of arms is the same as that of an AK-47, it is more “soldier proof” for the typical infantryman.

However, there are differences that make the RPK more effective in the support role. To make the RPK sturdier, its receiver is of 1.5mm sheet steel, while the PKM’s receiver is of 1mm stamped steel. It has a barrel that is longer (23.2 inches versus 16.3 inches) and thicker than that of the AK-47. This allows for more sustained fire, though the barrel will still overheat more quickly than with most GPMGs. A reinforced barrel trunnion also helps combat overheating. Unlike the AK-47, the RPK does not have a bayonet lug. A bipod is mounted near the muzzle, which is threaded to take various devices. Though not obvious at first glance, the RPK has a slightly longer receiver, which was designed to lower cyclic rate. The rear sight is adjustable for elevation and graduated for 100 to 1,000 meters. Its recoil spring assembly is a modified from the AKM variant. Readily noticeable is the butt stock, which is similar to that of the RPD and allows comfortable use when firing prone. Some parts are interchangeable with the AKM, but many are not.

The 7.62x39-chambered RPK will take standard AK-47 magazines, but to allow it to function in the LMG role, either a 40-round box magazine or a 75-round drum magazine is normally used. Unless the RPK is emplaced with the bipod raised, however, it is hard to fire the RPK prone with the 40-round magazine. As good as belt-fed machine guns are for more sustained fire, they also overheat faster, require time to thread a new belt, and require some effort to pick up and move to a new firing position. Actually, the need to change magazine or drum more often allows for some cooling of the RPK. Based on the highly reliable AK-47, the RPK keeps laying down fire and is light enough that the gunner can pick it up and quickly carry it to a new firing position, possibly even engaging with it from the shoulder while on the move. Or, if there’s time for movement, the RPK may be slung over the shoulder. For use by airborne troops or Spetsnaz, the RPKS with a folding stock was developed.

The RPK-74 was introduced as its designation suggests in 1974 along with the AK-74 rifle—both are in 5.45x39mm caliber. Although the RPK-74 will take standard AK-74





**The RPK is, in simple terms, an oversized AK-47. (IWM)**



**◀ A Ukrainian soldier firing an RPK; Ukrainian forces are still equipped with a large number of Soviet weapons. (U.S. Army)**

magazines, it is most often used with a 45-round box magazine. The RPKS-74 is the folding stock version. Updates to the RPK-74 include the RPK-74M, which uses synthetic stock, hand guard, gas tube cover, and pistol grip. This version has a stock that is shaped similarly to the RPK-

74, but is side folding like the RPKS-74. The RPK-74M also has the



**◀ The RPK has a reinforced barrel trunnion to handle the longer bursts likely to be fired from it. (Leroy Thompson)**



**A longer barrel on the RPK improves ballistics of the 7.62x39mm cartridge; the folding bipod gives more stability when firing prone. (Leroy Thompson)**

side, mounting rail for optics. There are various designations for these models fitted with night vision scopes (all having an “N” designation), including: RPKN, RPKSN, RPK-74N, and RPKS-74N. Among the scopes fitted are the 1PN51 and 1PN58.

Issuance of the RPK in the Soviet Army was normally one to each eight-man infantry/motorized infantry section. As stated in U.S. FM100-2-3 from 1991, issuance of machineguns in a Soviet Motorized Rifle Regiment of 2,523 troops was 102 RPK-74 LMGs and 27 PKM GPMGs. Issue of the RPK-74 was broken down with 81 to the three Motorized Rifle Battalions, 18 to the Howitzer Battalion, and 3 to the Reconnaissance Company. (See attached for full Table of Organization and Equipment/TO&E.)

As with other Soviet era weapons, the RPK was issued widely among Warsaw Pact and client states armies. Among the more than 50 users of the RPK and RPK-74 Bulgaria, Iraq, North Korea, Romania,



**The RPD’s stock is well designed for placement of the support hand when firing from the prone position. (Leroy Thompson)**





**Thompson firing an RPK-74 from the kneeling position using a rise to allow use of the 45-round magazine without it dragging. (Leroy Thompson)**



**The RPK or, in this case, the RPK-74 is light enough to be quickly picked up and allows the gunner to advance at the same speed as infantry armed with AK-74 rifles. (Leroy Thompson)**



**The 75-drum, here in use with the RPK used for testing in this article, allows the gunner to get low when firing prone. (Leroy Thompson)**



**Close-up of the RPK's forearm and 75-round drum. (Leroy Thompson)**

Serbia/Yugoslavia, and East Germany manufactured their own versions. Some of these copies of the RPK have some slight differences. The Serbian Zastava M72, for example, uses a standard AK type butt stock and has cooling fins on a portion of the barrel, the Chinese version does also. Finland developed the Valmet M78 version of the RPK. In recent times, U.S. troops became familiar with the RPK in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In looking at a list of users of the RPK, it is interesting to note that various small countries with small armies and limited budgets have chosen the RPK/RPK-74 as a cost-effective squad automatic weapon. Of course, these are normally countries that have used the AK-47/74 as their standard rifle. For example, the island nation Republic of Cape Verde off the west coast of Africa, which has 1,200 personnel in its Coast Guard and National Guard and a





◀ A Russian training poster for the RPK-74M. (Leroy Thompson collection)



▲ 1PN58 Night Vision Optic sometimes used on the RPK. (Leroy Thompson collection)



An RPK mounting the 1P29 optic. (Royal Armouries)

military budget of \$11.2 million, issues the RPK. Among smaller countries that use a version of the RPK, Fiji is interesting. Though Fiji has traditionally had close ties with the UK and the USA and uses the M4 as its standard issue infantry weapon, it has still purchased AK-101 and RPK-201 weapons, which is based upon the AK-101 rifle. Wherever the AK-47 has been issued, especially in Africa, the RPK also has normally been employed. Once again, ammunition compatibility, and a high degree of “soldier proofing” through only using one basic weapon system have made the RPK a sound choice. Cost has often been minimal as well, as the AK-47 and RPK have often been acquired as surplus or aid from former ComBloc countries.

China’s Type 74 LMG, intended to replace the Type 56 (RPD), on first look resembles the RPK, but has many unique design features. In any case, the design was not widely issued in the PLA, reportedly due to inaccuracy. As a companion to the Type 81 assault rifle, which resembled the AKM, the PLA also adopted the Type 81 LMG, which resembles the RPK. Both weapons differed internally from the Russian weapons. The PLA currently uses the QJS-161

LMG, which weighs only 11 pounds. However, China has produced the Type 81 LMG for export. The Chinese Type WQ 112 also appears to owe a debt to the RPK. Both the Type 81 and the WQ 112 incorporate carrying handles, which make them even more portable for advancing with infantry troops. The WQ 112 appears designed for export sales along with the Chinese WQ 313 and WQ 314A assault rifles.

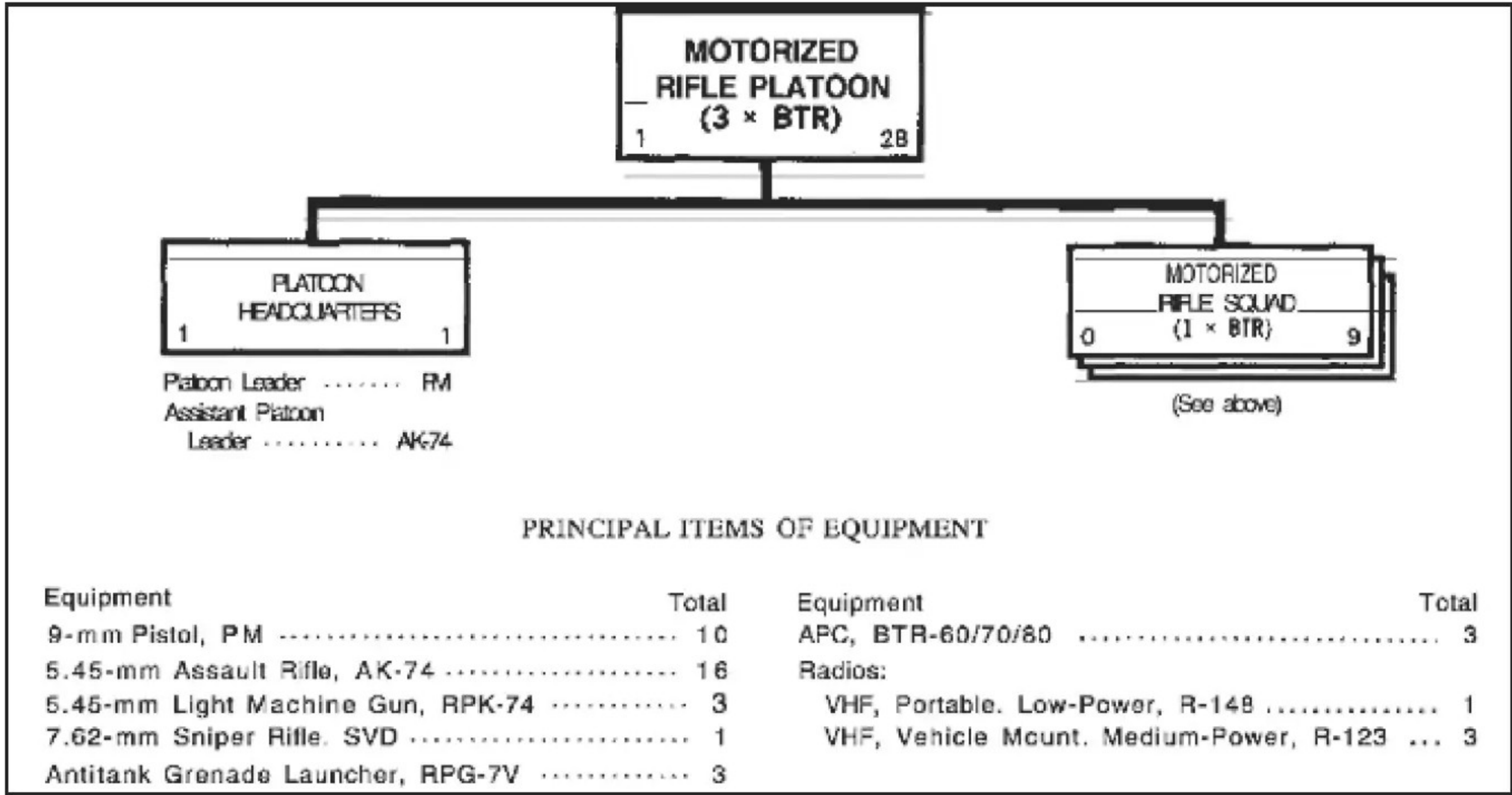
I’ve done a reasonable amount to shooting with the RPK and the RPK-74. I guess I’d call it a “good news/bad news” LMG. The good news is it’s handy and easy to move and quickly emplace. It’s light enough that short bursts can be fired offhand at ranges to 50 to 100 yards relatively accurately, yet it is heavy enough to dampen recoil and muzzle rise. Actually, since the RPK/RPK-74 may be fired on semi-auto and has relatively good sights, if firing at only one or two exposed enemy at longer ranges, single well-placed shots may be more effective.

I’m sure there are more experienced users of the RPK than I who can fire it even more accurately offhand. The bad news is that it will overheat quickly and cannot be



| MOTORIZED RIFLE<br>REGIMENT (BTR). MRD                       |                            |                                  |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             |       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
|                                                              | REGIMENTAL<br>HEADQUARTERS | 3 - MOTORIZED<br>RIFLE BATTALION | TANK<br>BATTALION | HOWITZER<br>BATTALION | AIR DEFENSE MISSILE AND<br>ARTILLERY BATTERY | ANTITANK<br>MISSILE BATTERY | RECONNAISSANCE<br>COMPANY | ENGINEER<br>COMPANY | SIGNAL<br>COMPANY | CHEMICAL PROTECTION<br>PLATOON | MATERIAL SUPPORT<br>COMPANY | MAINTENANCE<br>COMPANY | REGIMENTAL<br>MEDICAL POINT | TOTAL |
| PERSONNEL                                                    | 65                         | 1,575                            | 165               | 240                   | 60                                           | 40                          | 55                        | 60                  | 50                | 24                             | 90                          | 65                     | 34                          | 2,523 |
| TANKS                                                        |                            |                                  |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             |       |
| Medium Tank, T-64/72/80                                      |                            |                                  | 40                |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 40    |
| WEAPONS                                                      |                            |                                  |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             |       |
| 122-mm Howitzer D-30                                         |                            |                                  |                   | 18                    |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 18    |
| 120-mm Mortar, M1943/M-120<br>or 82-mm Automatic Mortar, 2B9 |                            | 24                               |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 24    |
| SAM, SA-9/GASKIN TEL or<br>SA-13/GOPHER TELAR **             |                            |                                  |                   |                       | 4                                            |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 4     |
| SPAA Gun, ZSU-23-4 or 2S6                                    |                            |                                  |                   |                       | 4                                            |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 4     |
| SAM, SA-7/GRAIL or<br>SA-14/GREMLIN or SA-16                 | 3                          | 27                               |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 30    |
| ATGM Launcher Vehicle (BRDM-2),<br>AT-3/5                    |                            |                                  |                   |                       |                                              | 9                           |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 9     |
| ATGM Manpack Console, AT-3/4                                 |                            | 12                               |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 12    |
| ATGM Manpack Launcher, AT-7                                  |                            | 27                               |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 27    |
| 73-mm Recoilless Gun, SPG-9                                  |                            | 6                                |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 6     |
| ATGL, RPG-7V                                                 |                            | 111                              | 2                 | 18                    |                                              | 9                           | 4                         | 4                   |                   |                                |                             | 4                      |                             | 152   |
| 30-mm Automatic Grenade<br>Launcher, AGS-17                  |                            | 18                               |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 18    |
| 5.45-mm LMG, RPK-74                                          |                            | 81                               |                   | 18                    |                                              | 3                           |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 102   |
| 7.62-mm GPMG, PKM                                            |                            | 27                               |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 27    |
| ACV/AICV/APC/ASC                                             |                            |                                  |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             |       |
| ACV, BMP/BRDM/BTR                                            |                            | 9                                | 2                 |                       | 3                                            | 4                           |                           |                     | 3                 |                                |                             |                        |                             | 21    |
| ACV, BRM-1*                                                  |                            |                                  |                   |                       |                                              | 1                           |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 1     |
| APC, BTR-60/70/80                                            | 2                          | 141                              |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           | 3                   |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 146   |
| APC, BTR-60PA (FAC)                                          | 1                          |                                  |                   |                       |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 1     |
| MRP, PRP-3 (BMP M1975) ***                                   |                            |                                  |                   | 1                     |                                              |                             |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 1     |
| ASC, BRDM-2                                                  |                            |                                  |                   |                       |                                              | 4                           |                           |                     |                   |                                |                             |                        |                             | 4     |

Soviet Motorized Rifle Regiment TO&E showing issuance of 102 RPK74s.  
(Leroy Thompson collection)



TO&E for a Soviet Motorized Rifle Platoon showing issuance of three RPK-74s.  
(Leroy Thompson collection)

used effectively for continuous fire. Its closed bolt design means that the cooling bonus of the open bolt design is lost. However, continuous fire is not the RPK/RPK-74's mission. It is a Light Machine Gun (LMG) that can still cover AK47/AK-74 armed squad mates as they advance, then be picked up to advance with them.

In his excellent book *Testing the War Weapons: Rifles and Light mMachine Guns from Around the World*, my friend and author Tim Mullin points out that as the RPK does fire from a closed bolt, there may be a chance, even if slight, of a cook-off after sustained firing. Therefore, in a lull after continuous firing, he recommends removing the magazine or drum, or at least dropping it slightly, then clearing the round from the chamber. The magazine or drum may then be pushed back into place to ready the weapon for engagement.

The best feed-device for the RPK or RPK-74 is the drum magazine, which allows the RPK gunner to fire from the prone position more comfortably. If using the extended box magazine, I found it best to assume a cover position that places the shooter behind a rise so that the magazine does not touch the ground. Another option would be to deploy the RPK/RPK-74's bipod by placing it on a ledge or windowsill to accomplish the same dynamic. While prone, changing the 40- or 45-round magazine will entail canting the MG sideways to remove or insert the magazine. Not only does the RPK drum allow the gunner to take a lower prone position, but, as it does not use linked cartridges, it doesn't rattle as much as the RPD. Of course, the extra 35 rounds of 7.62x39 are a big plus.



Finnish M78 version of the RPK.  
(Courtesy of Rock Island Auction Service)





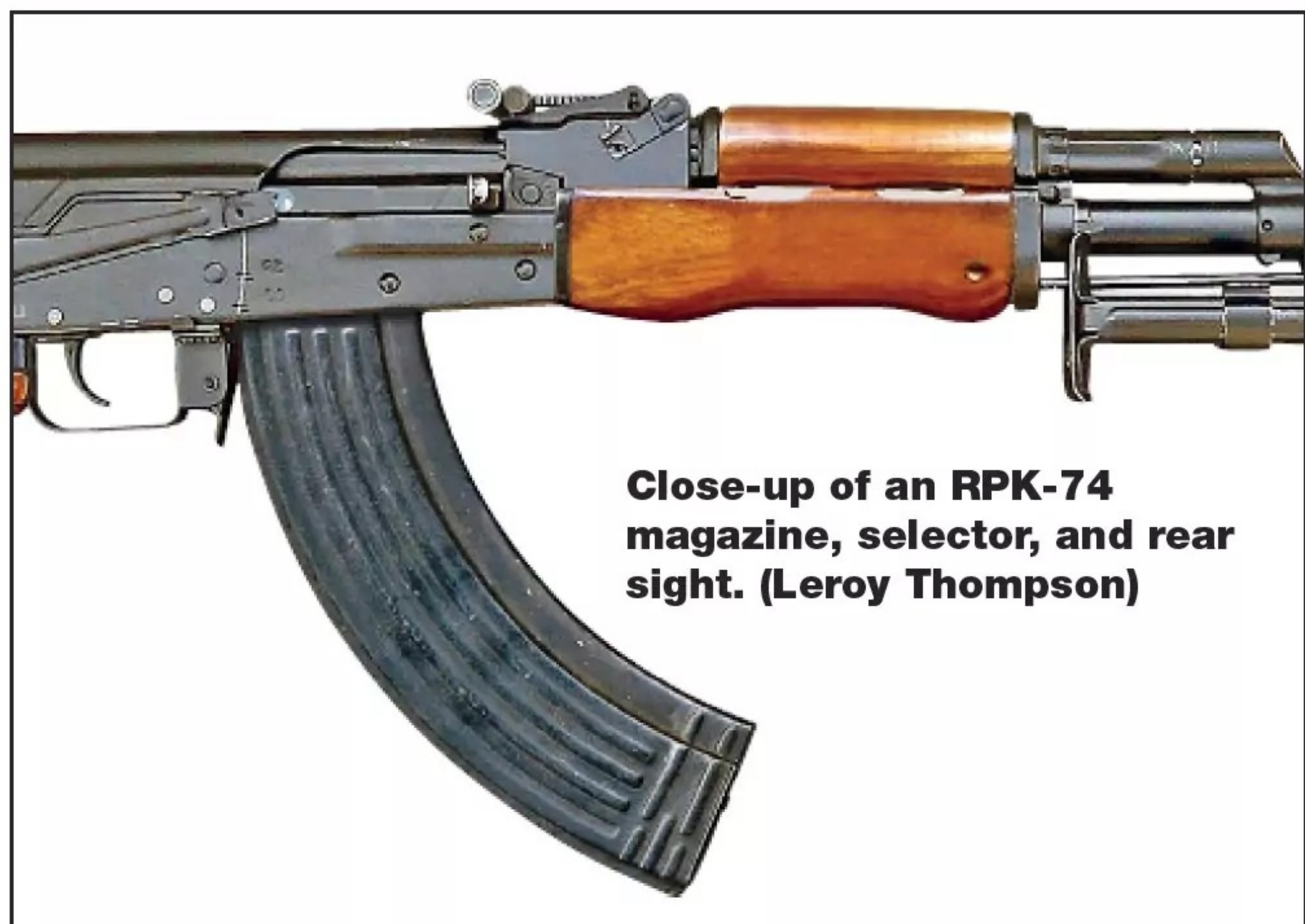
**Thompson firing a burst from the RPK offhand; note that because the selector switch was jarring from full to semi-auto mode, he has his trigger finger on the selector and is using his middle finger on the trigger. (Leroy Thompson)**



**Close-up of the RPK-74's barrel and bipod. (Leroy Thompson)**

Another advantage of the RPK/RPK-74 is that troops trained on the AK74/AK-74 will already be familiar with the controls of the MG and can take over if the RPK gunner goes down.

As I mentioned earlier, I have fired both the RPK and RPK-74 quite a bit in the past. For this article, though, I did



**Close-up of an RPK-74 magazine, selector, and rear sight. (Leroy Thompson)**



**Kyiv, Ukraine, Feb. 27, 2022. A Ukrainian fighter in the Territorial Defense Battalion with his RPK-74. (Drop of Light/Shutterstock)**



**30-round AK-74 and 45-round RPK-74 magazines. (Leroy Thompson)**



**The RPK/RPK-74's butt stock is well designed for firing prone from the bipod. (Leroy Thompson)**





◀ Thompson firing the RPK offhand; note that because the selector was loose, he is using his trigger finger on the selector in the full auto position and his middle finger on the trigger. (Leroy Thompson)



◀ Thompson firing the RPK prone with the 75-round drum magazine. (Leroy Thompson)



► Two bursts offhand with the RPK at 100 yards. (Leroy Thompson)

all of my shooting with a 7.62x39mm RPK. As I have found previously, the RPK's stock is well-designed for shooting prone, allowing the support hand to be used to pull it against the shoulder. I only encountered one problem with firing the

RPK we used. The selector switch was worn enough that when I would place it on "full auto" (in the middle position) vibration when firing would cause it to jump to the single-shot (bottom) position. A fix was easy, however; I found that I could place my trigger finger on the selector switch to hold it in position and operate the trigger with my middle finger.

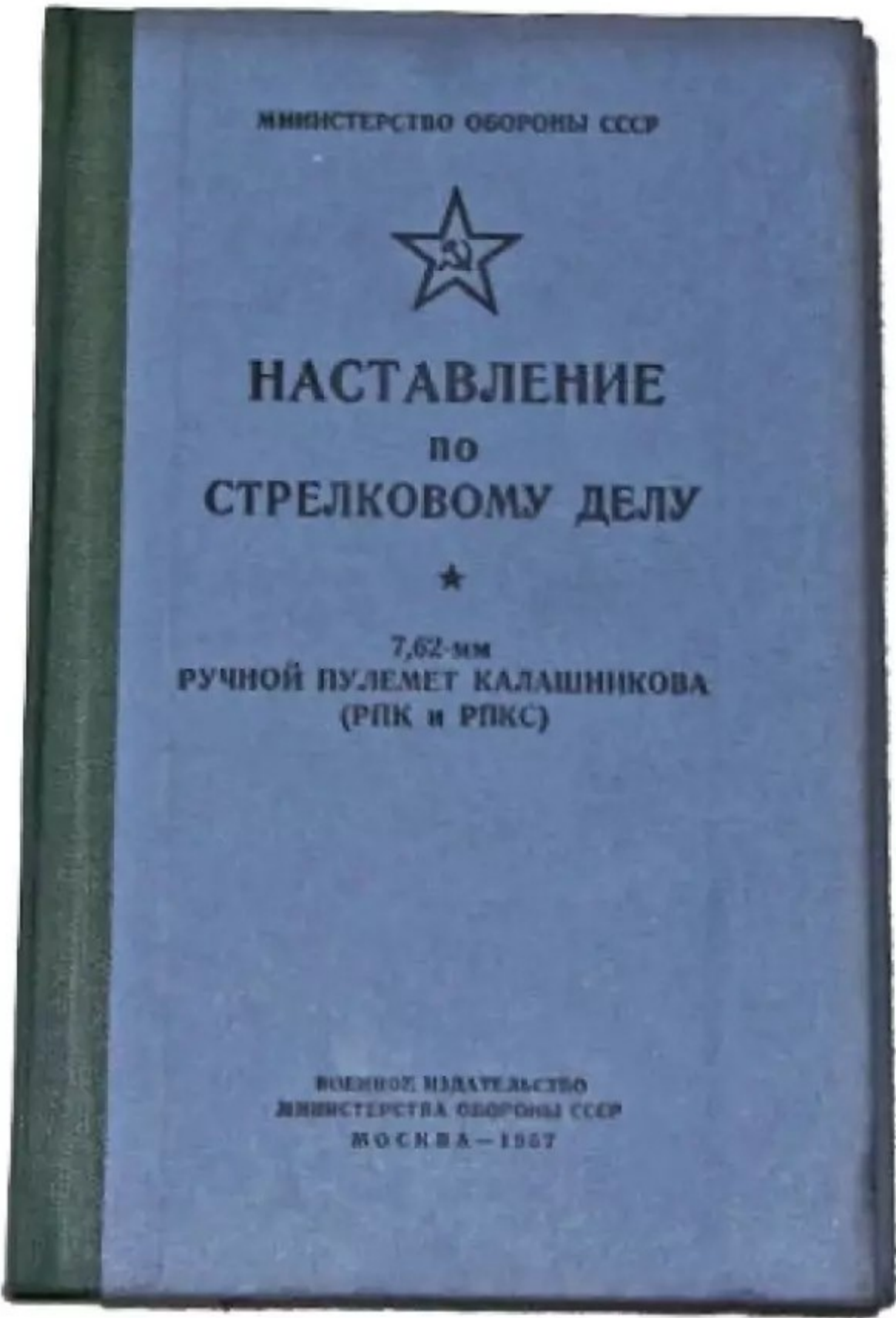


Close-up of the RPK-74's rear sight. (Leroy Thompson)



► Thompson firing the RPK-74 offhand. (Leroy Thompson)





◀ A Russian RPK manual. (Leroy Thompson collection)



▶ The RPK-74's selector and mag release. (Leroy Thompson)



Century Arms (CenturyArms.com) manufactures its version of the RPK in the form of the Romanian-based AES 10B2 rifle. Look for a review of this firearm by Editor-in-Chief Vincent DeNiro later this year. (Century Arms photo)

Other than that glitch, the RPK we were shooting was reliable and allowed accurate bursts at 100 and 200 yards.

I fired both 40-round box and 75-round drum magazines prone at 100 and 200 yards at various targets including hanging plates and paper silhouettes and had good accuracy. I also fired offhand at 100 yards at a silhouette target. Firing three to five-round bursts I put enough hits on “him” that he would have been *hors de combat*.

The question that has arisen in my mind every time I’ve fired a version of the RPK is: how effective is it, really? It’s just an overgrown AK-47 or AK-74. Its longer barrel and, better stock for firing prone, and bipod do allow better accuracy, and, its 75-round drum does allow more sustained fire than the assault rifle. The longer barrel may gain it 100–200 meters more in effective range. I guess I would conclude that lacking a PKM or other GPMG, it gives the infantry section/squad a little more fire support, especially if the gunner advances with the attacking troops.

From the standpoint of shooting the RPK/RPK-74, I will state that I would choose to hump and shoot the RPK any day over the G3 rifle fired on full auto—any day, any week, any month!!! **FN**

| RPK SPECIFICATIONS    |                                                        |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Action:               | Closed-rotating bolt, gas-operated                     |
| Caliber:              | 7.62x39mm                                              |
| Overall Length:       | 40.9 in.                                               |
| Barrel Length:        | 23.2 in.                                               |
| Weight:               | 10.6 lbs.                                              |
| Feed Device:          | 30- or 40-round curved box magazine, 75-round drum     |
| Sights:               | Rear: Sliding tangent with notch, Front: Shrouded post |
| Cyclic Rate:          | 600 RPM                                                |
| RPK-74 SPECIFICATIONS |                                                        |
| Action:               | Closed-rotating bolt, gas-operated                     |
| Caliber:              | 5.45x39mm                                              |
| Overall Length:       | 41.75 in.                                              |
| Barrel Length:        | 24.52 in.                                              |
| Weight:               | 10.2 lbs.                                              |
| Feed Device:          | 30- or 45-round curved box magazine                    |
| Sights:               | Rear: Sliding tangent with notch, Front: Shrouded post |
| Cyclic Rate:          | 650 RPM                                                |





Actual Size  
38.1 mm

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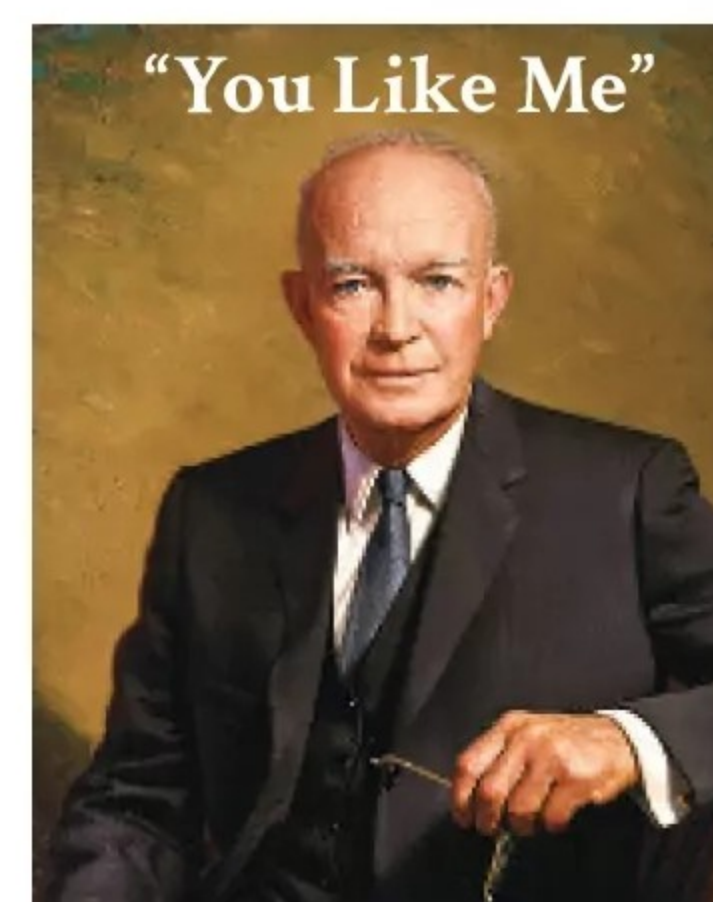
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**The Bulwark is the first production—rather than custom/hand-built—handgun to come out of Wilson Combat. And it's full of surprises. (Photo by Andy Grossman)**

# WILSON COMBAT'S BULWARK PISTOL

## A Collection of Firsts By James Tarr

**W**ilson Combat just introduced the Bulwark, and it's getting a lot of attention. This is a brand-new pistol meant for CCW and duty use, and something completely different for Wilson—it's a modular gun built around a chassis, with all the modern features you want and/or need, and priced significantly lower than you might expect for something with "WILSON COMBAT" etched on the side of the slide, because it is a high-end production gun, rather than a hand-built custom piece.

Wilson Combat has plans to offer different sizes and models of the Bulwark, including a 3.6-inch version. However, initially, they started with the size they felt would be most popular, much like they did the EDC X9, Wilson's previous original pistol design.

The Bulwark is a 9mm with a 4.0-inch barrel and a 15+1 capacity. In silhouette, it is roughly reminiscent of a Glock

17/19, but this is not another Glock clone, it's not a striker-fired pistol at all. The Bulwark uses a single-action-only operating system with an internal hammer—so you actually get a quality trigger pull—and you won't find any polymer on this gun; the grip module is machined aluminum.

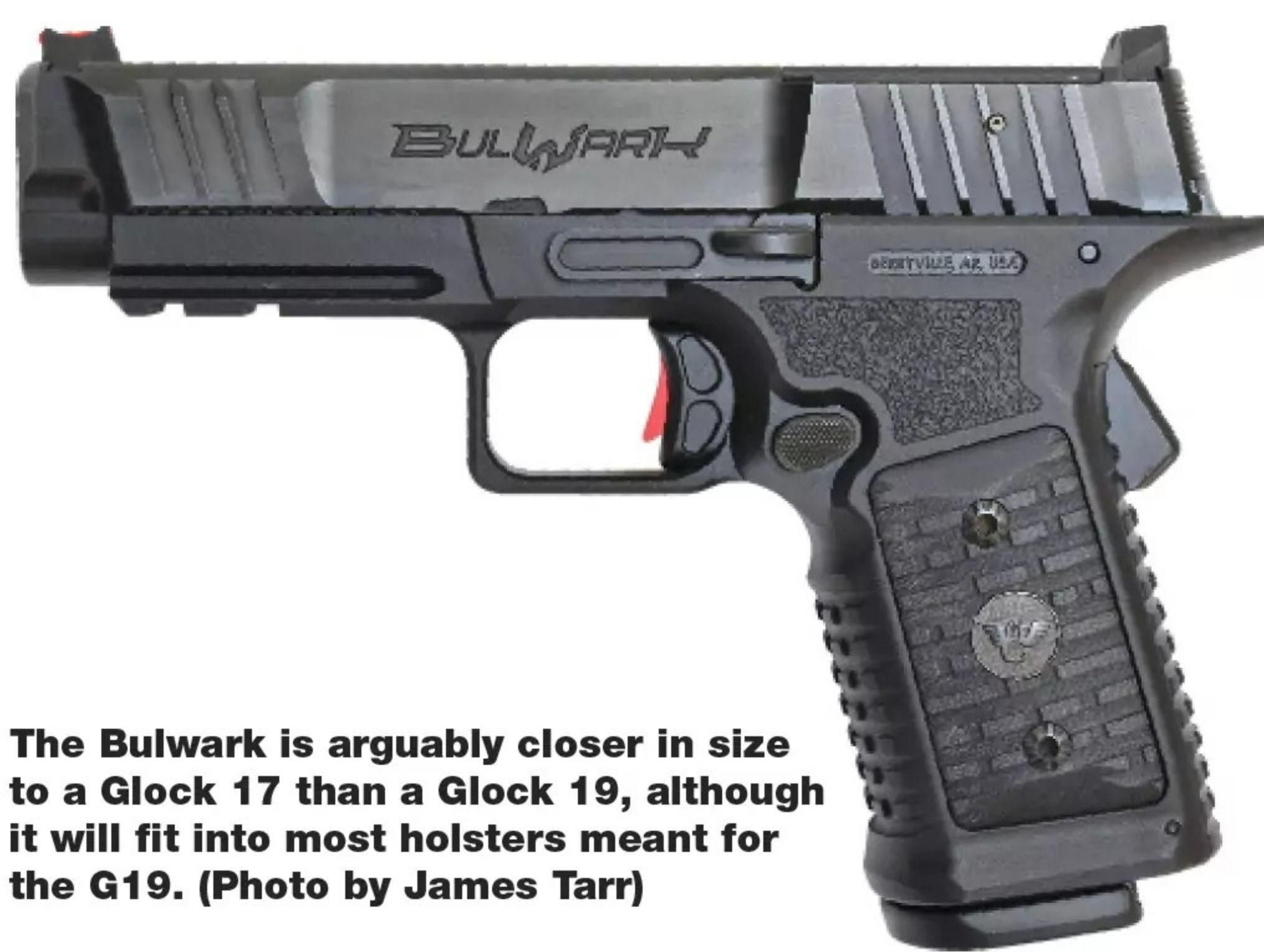
Overall, this pistol is 7.5 inches long, 5.6 inches tall with a magazine in place, and 1.39 inches thick at the grip panels. With an empty magazine in place, it weighed 33.2 ounces according to my scale. In length/height, that puts it between the G17 and G19, while being heavier.

One huge advantage of striker-fired pistols that people don't talk about, or don't understand, is the design allows for a very low bore. That low bore equates to less muzzle rise while shooting. An internal hammer allows the same thing and bore height off the hand with the Bulwark is the same as a Glock 17/19 or, in fact, a tiny hair less. Between





**The Bulwark is an aluminum-framed 9mm meant to give shooters that which they've been begging for decades, "a Glock 19 with a 1911 trigger." Sort of. (Photo by James Tarr)**



**The Bulwark is arguably closer in size to a Glock 17 than a Glock 19, although it will fit into most holsters meant for the G19. (Photo by James Tarr)**



**The Bulwark isn't a striker-fired pistol, but rather a semi-auto-only, with an internal hammer. The hammer, red, can be seen cocked and then released. (Photo by James Tarr)**

that and its all-metal, heavier weight than a polymer-framed gun, I expected it to be very controllable.

I want to repeat; this is not a striker-fired gun. For decades people have been wanting a gun company to produce "a Glock 19 with a 1911 trigger," and the Bulwark is the closest thing I've yet seen. To do that, Wilson Combat went with an internal hammer-fired design, as you simply can't get a 1911-quality trigger pull with a striker-fired gun. *"It's just an enclosed-hammer 1911 as far as the trigger mechanism is concerned,"* as Bill Wilson explained. The Bulwark's trigger doesn't pivot, it slides back, like a 1911, and the biggest difference you'll see is the red safety lever on the trigger. Both the lever and the trigger are aluminum.

The specs call for a 3.75- to 4.25-pound trigger pull. Trigger pull on my sample was 3.75 pounds, and crisp. After a very short take up, there was a crisp break, and no overtravel that I could discern. It is a high quality 1911-type trigger pull not just in form but in function. However, with a 1911 you've got manual safeties that help guard against accidental and negligent discharges with that short/light trigger pull.

The Bulwark wasn't just designed for concealed carry but, as Bill Wilson says, "a hard-use service pistol." To that end, it has four safety systems: 1. The grip safety blocks the sear when not depressed. 2. The grip safety blocks the back of the trigger bow when not depressed. 3. There is a firing pin block (which is moved up and out of the way

► **When the hammer is cocked, you can see it through the slot at the rear of the gun. It is visible in most lighting conditions. (Photo by James Tarr)**



when you depress the grip safety) 4. The safety lever on the trigger, which locks into the frame when not depressed.

The slide, barrel, and chassis are all stainless steel. The slide and chassis have been given a nitride finish. Interestingly, the breech block is a separate piece from the slide, hardened for extended durability.

The flat-topped slide has been serrated, and what you see here are the standard Wilson Combat Battlesights—a steel front, with a fiber optic insert, and a plain black rear with a U-shaped notch. Tritium night sights will be an available option. Forward of the rear sight is a steel cover plate.

The rear of the slide is widened slightly to support the integral optics base. The top of the slide is basically the same width as a Trijicon RMR. Remove the cover plate which holds the rear sight, and you'll see the slide is machined to accept Wilson's Combat Pin system. This uses various small stainless-steel pin sets which, when inserted, allow you to direct-mount various optics to the slide. Three pin sets are provided with the pistol, and in color coded bags—red for optics using the Trijicon RMR





**The Bulwark has the low bore of a striker-fired pistol, but with an aluminum frame it weighs more, so it was very controllable. (Photo by Andy Grossman)**

footprint, blue for those using the Leupold DeltaPoint Pro, and green for those using the RMSc footprint. The pistol ships with the wrenches and tools you'll need to take off the cover plate and install optics.

The slide sports very aggressive serrations front and back. The serrations are flat-bottomed and angled, and the serrated areas are wider than the rest of the slide.

The rear of the slide is rounded, and horizontally serrated. There is a rectangular gap between the slide and the top of the grip module, just above the modest beavertail, and through it you can see when the hammer is cocked. The hammer is colored, and if you can see red right there you know the hammer is cocked. Just to reiterate, just like a 1911, this is a single-action-only operating system, with no restrike or decock capability. The Bulwark uses an external, spring-tensioned extractor. There is a cutout in the barrel hood which serves as a loaded chamber indicator.

Slide-to-barrel-to frame fit was good, as good or better than you'd find with most striker-fired guns. The Bulwark isn't as tight as a traditional Wilson Combat 1911, but then it's not priced like one either. The Bulwark is Wilson Combat's first try at a "production" handgun using precision manufacturing and high-quality production. They are not assembled and hand-fit one at a time (like their 1911s and EDC X9s) by gunsmiths, they are relying on their machine shops to produce near-perfect parts that are then assembled. Parts are interchangeable between Bulwarks as they are not polished and filed to fit. Bill Wilson said the Bulwark is, "*Not as accurate as an X9, but more than accurate enough for a service pistol.*"

The stainless-steel slide rides on a stainless-steel fire control unit that includes the trigger assembly and the frame rails. Both slide and the fire-control unit/FCU have a black nitride coating. In the Bulwark there are no castings, no

► Tarr doesn't like the looks of the grip safety, but didn't notice it while shooting, and it works. It engages safeties that allow for a shorter, lighter, and crisper trigger pull than you'd otherwise get. (Photo by James Tarr)



**The top of the slide is flattened and serrated. The serrated sections on the side of the slide are wider as well. (Photo by James Tarr)**



**Three pin sets for direct mounting of optics are provided with the pistol, and in color coded bags—red for optics using the Trijicon RMR footprint, blue for the Leupold DeltaPoint Pro, and green for the RMSc footprint. (Photo by James Tarr)**

MIM, every single steel component of the gun is machined from solid bar stock. The nitrided stainless steel chassis inside the grip module is held in place by the slide stop and a pin at the rear of the grip. There's no need to pull it out for standard cleaning/fieldstripping.

The grip module is anodized aluminum with G10 grip panels. The grip angle is closer to that of a 1911 than a Glock. I found it to be quite chunky in the hand, noticeably girthier than a Glock 17/19. The Bulwark has a short trigger, so trigger reach won't be much of an issue unless you have very small hands, but still, I hope that at some point Wilson Combat offers flat G10 grip panels for this gun to slim the grip down. It is, as my sons would say, a chonky boy. Thin





◀ The Bulwark magazine (right) uses the same body and follower as Wilson's EDC X9 magazine (left), but it has a different magazine release notch. (Photo by James Tarr)



The grip module and panels sport Wilson's "brick" texturing, which is raised rectangular sections that provide a lot of traction but also increase the girth. (Photo by James Tarr)

grips, maybe different color options. Thin black ones with a gold WC medallion would probably be a hit...

At the front of the grip module, you'll find a two-slot MIL STD M1913 "Picatinny" rail for mounting a light. At the bottom of the grip module is a somewhat sizeable integral magazine well. It's not any wider than the grips—all that volume is internal.

Both the grip module and the grip panels sport Wilson's "brick" pattern for texturing. This is horizontally oriented rectangles with aggressive edges that grab your hand and fingers very well. They're all over the front strap and back of the grip module. Above the grip panels, on either side, you'll find sections of very minor texturing that work more for decoration than they do traction. Above that, you'll see cutouts in the aluminum grip module just below the slide—on the right side, the serial number is visible on the fire control unit. On the left, "BERRYVILLE, AR, USA."

The trigger guard is square, and at the rear it is undercut. The steel magazine release is a teardrop-shaped button with fine checkering. It is reversible, for left-handers. The slide release has a small but very effective shelf. At the rear of the grip module is the grip safety which, when fully depressed, does not sit flush with the frame.



You'll have no problems gripping the slide with all of the raised and textured areas. (Photo by Andy Grossman)



The Bulwark uses an external spring-powered extractor. The Bulwark logo is on the slide just forward of the ejection port. (Photo by James Tarr)

I don't like the look of the grip safety at all, and didn't like the way it felt against my palm when I was handling the gun, but when I was shooting, I didn't notice it, and that's really the only important thing. Well, one of two important things—the second being is that I never had a problem disengaging the grip safety while shooting.

Depending on the size/shape of your hand, a not-so-small number of people (myself included) often have problems fully depressing the grip safety on a 1911 when running it with the proper thumb-high hold. That doesn't seem like it will be an issue with the Bulwark.

The Bulwark uses the same magazine body/follower as the EDC X9 (which is a version of the Walther PPQ/PDP magazine) but with a different mag catch cutout, so the two aren't interchangeable. Two 15-round magazines are supplied with the pistol, and 10-rounders are available if you live in a "commie state," as Bill Wilson describes them.

Inside the slide, things are different, and unexpected. There is a locking block on the underside of the barrel that interfaces with a cam underneath it, that is part of the recoil spring assembly. I've seen vaguely similar concepts, but nothing exactly like this. For disassembly, after ensuring it is unloaded, back the slide up so that the disassembly notch in





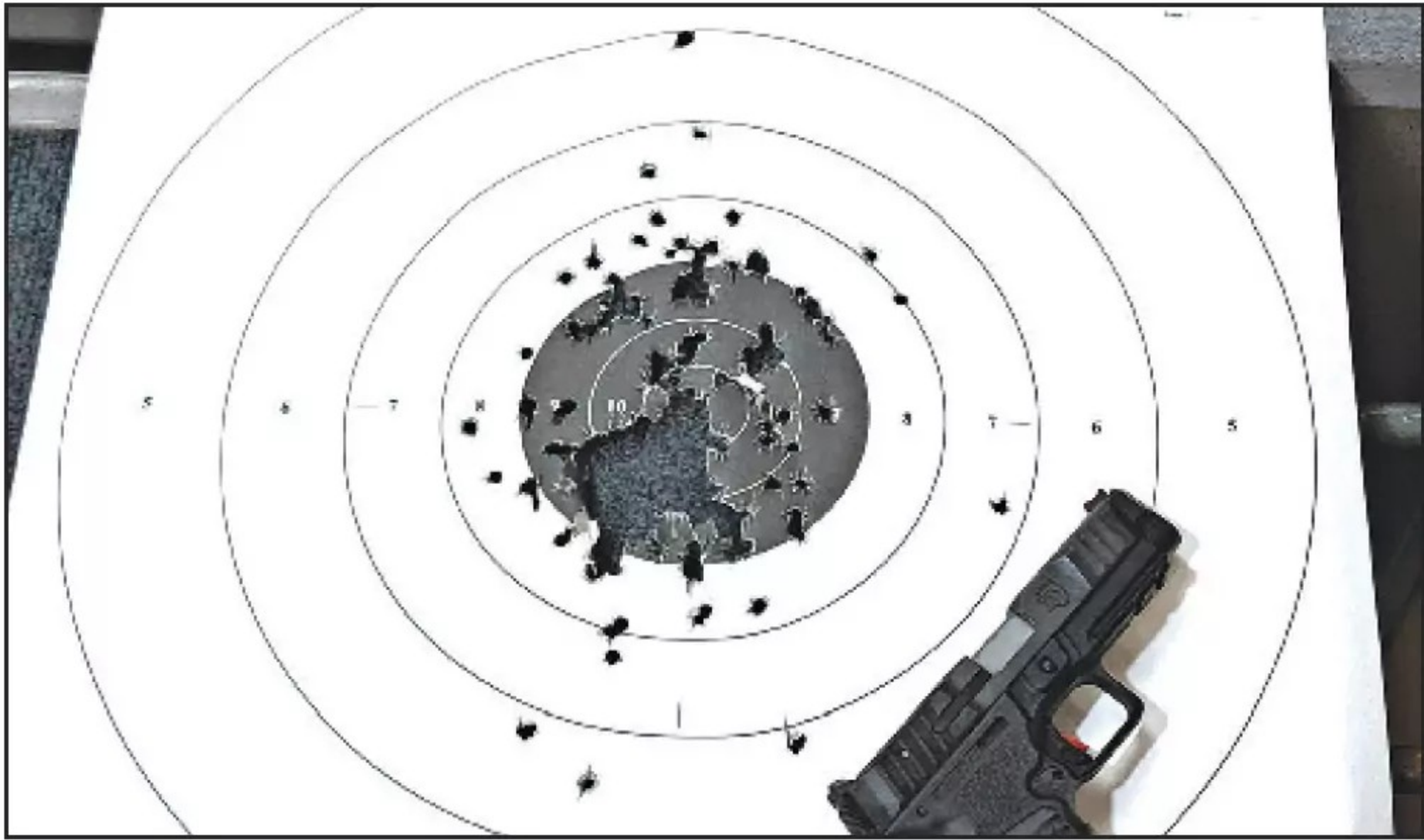
During his first trip to the range Tarr put eight different kinds of ammunition through the gun (more than you see here), six of them JHPs, to test reliability. It ran them all flawlessly. (Photo by James Tarr)

the slide, which is small and hard to see, is at the slide stop. Push the slide stop out. Then you can pull the slide assembly off the front of the gun, but I would recommend wrapping your hand around the underside of the slide as it comes off, so you don't have parts dropping out on you—the recoil spring assembly, spring plug, etc. You don't need any tools to take the Bulwark apart, although when the pistol is new you might want a punch to get the slide release started.

For reassembly, it's best if you put the slide together upside-down, so all the parts stay in place, and slide the frame/grip on it that way. This will definitely seem familiar to old-school 1911 owners. The Bulwark uses a flat-wire recoil spring, and a full-length steel guide rod.

Wilson was smart, the Bulwark is designed to fit into many Glock 19-pattern holsters. I tried it in a few I had on hand, and they fit with either a tiny bit of wiggle or none at all.

The Bulwark was designed for durability, safety, and simplicity. Bill Wilson said it's the better choice for carry in a dusty environment than a 1911, because it's more enclosed. This pistol was in development for a long time, and the original idea involved a polymer frame. The aluminum frame provided them more options.



Tarr burned 100 rounds or so doing speed drills at five yards, getting a feel for the gun. He pulled a few high and low, getting used to the bounce, but you'll notice there were none pulled to either side. That's because of the short and crisp trigger pull. (Photo by James Tarr)



The best group was this, using Hornady's American Gunner 115-grain JHP load. Mostly the pistol averaged two- to three-inch groups. (Photo by James Tarr)

Wilson Combat tested guns to 25,000 rounds with no issues, and Bill Wilson expects they should last to 100,000 rounds. They actually tested them with no lube as well, 5,000 rounds no lube, no problem—but there's no reason for *you* to do that. Properly lubricate your pistols, they'll run better and last longer.

On my initial trip to the range, I put about eight different types of ammo through the pistol, six of them hollow points, just to check reliability. While running speed drills on a target five yards away, to check controllability. The Bulwark didn't have a single problem. And I shot it beside my current carry gun, a longslide lightly-customized Glock 34. The Bulwark had slightly less muzzle rise than the G34, which makes sense—it has the same bore height over hand, and weighs more.

| WILSON COMBAT BULWARK PISTOL                                                                                                                                                              |                     |                |    |    |                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|----|----|-------------------------------|
| Load                                                                                                                                                                                      | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Velocity (fps) | ES | SD | Best Group / Avg. Group (in.) |
| Lehigh Defense XD                                                                                                                                                                         | 90                  | 1,320          | 35 | 11 | 2.4 / 3.0                     |
| Hornady Am. Gunner XTP                                                                                                                                                                    | 115                 | 1,112          | 30 | 9  | 1.6 / 2.6                     |
| Lehigh Defense Low Recoil                                                                                                                                                                 | 115                 | 1,088          | 33 | 10 | 2.5 / 2.9                     |
| Black Hills FMJ                                                                                                                                                                           | 115                 | 1,109          | 42 | 17 | 2.8 / 3.6                     |
| Wilson Combat HBFN Reman                                                                                                                                                                  | 135                 | 943            | 50 | 21 | 2.1 / 2.7                     |
| Accuracy results are the averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a sand-bag rest. Velocities are averages of ten shots measured with a Garmin Xero C1 12 feet from the muzzle. |                     |                |    |    |                               |





◀ **The Bulwark was a lot of fun to shoot. Here it is in full recoil. It had slightly less muzzle rise than Tarr's tricked out competition longslide G34. (Photo by Andy Grossman)**

of the slide is radiused for exactly this reason, so it doesn't slice up the web of your hand.

Overall, I think this is a solid design, that provided perfect performance. I do think the grip needs to be thinner—either with flat grip panels, or a grip module reduced in circumference, or both. That “brick” texturing works but adds thickness all around. Most people won't have trouble reaching the trigger, but, still, the rounder a grip, the less naturally it points. Designers need to find the ergonomic sweet spot between

uncomfortably flat and so round with your eyes closed you can't tell which direction the muzzle is pointed. I think the Bulwark could do with some more flatness, but your experience, as they say, may vary.

The grip safety (or some sort of manual safety) is pretty much a necessity, if you're going to be equipping a pistol with a trigger pull this short/light/crisp. Heavier/longer trigger pulls themselves are an insurance policy against negligent discharges, at the cost of shootability. The Bulwark's grip safety acts like that insurance policy without affecting the trigger pull and should be welcomed by anyone planning to carry this gun stuffed down the front

The trigger on the Bulwark made it easy to hit what I was aiming at and allowed for very quick follow-up shots; faster than with my competition/carry Glock—even though the weight of the pulls was similar, the trigger pull on the Bulwark is much shorter, with a shorter reset. The Bulwark had a sharper recoil impulse than the Glock, but I attribute that to the metal frame. Polymer frames flex under recoil, absorbing a little bit of energy. The Bulwark provided a sharper recoil, but it felt shorter, and quicker.

I will say that the very front of the slide stop probably should be radiused. While it is curved, there is an actual corner there, and that sharp corner was biting into the back of my support thumb with every shot when it was pressed against the frame. This won't happen to everyone, but I won't be the only person it happens to. The bottom



**The serial number can be seen on the nitrided stainless steel chassis inside the aluminum grip module. The texturing on the grip module above the panel looks nice but doesn't really provide any grip. (Photo by James Tarr)**



**The Bulwark uses a unique lockup designed specifically for it. Note the scallop cuts on the frame rails, meant to collect dirt so the slide can run dirty longer. (Photo by James Tarr)**





At \$1,899 the Bulwark isn’t inexpensive...but it is compared to the other hand-built pistols Wilson offers. (Photo by Andy Grossman)



The Bulwark is built to fit into most holsters for the Glock 19. Tarr tried it in a few, and found there was a tiny bit of wiggle in some of the polymer ones (Safariland IncogX on the left, Gravity in the center), but none at all in leather holsters (that’s a Galco Avenger on the right). (Photo by James Tarr)

of their pants—just don’t push on that grip safety when you’re seating the pistol in your appendix holster.

As a general rule, I don’t talk about the appearance of guns I review. There are photos—you can look at them and decide whether you like the looks of a gun, or not, but I feel I should address it with the Bulwark, as a lot of people are responding negatively to its appearance. So let me just say this, about that—when it was introduced, the Glock was maligned for its ugly appearance. It is still ugly.

| WILSON COMBAT BULWARK PISTOL |                                                                                           |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Type:                        | Single action semi-auto                                                                   |
| Caliber:                     | 9mm                                                                                       |
| Capacity:                    | 15+1                                                                                      |
| Barrel Length:               | 4.0 in.                                                                                   |
| Overall Length:              | 7.5 in.                                                                                   |
| Height:                      | 5.6 in. (with provided magazine)                                                          |
| Width:                       | 1.39 in.                                                                                  |
| Weight:                      | 33.2 oz. (unloaded, with magazine)                                                        |
| Slide Material:              | Stainless steel                                                                           |
| Finish:                      | Black nitride                                                                             |
| Grip Module:                 | Aluminum                                                                                  |
| Finish:                      | Anodized                                                                                  |
| Grips:                       | G10                                                                                       |
| Safeties:                    | Grip safety which blocks the trigger and the sear, trigger lever safety, firing pin block |
| Sights:                      | Wilson Combat Battlesight, fiber optic front, notch rear, optics ready                    |
| Trigger:                     | 3.75–4.25 lbs. (3.75 lbs. as tested)                                                      |
| Accessories:                 | Two 15-round magazines, pin set for optics, extra fiber optic rod, cable lock, soft case  |
| MSRP:                        | \$1,899.00                                                                                |
| Contact:                     | (800) 955-4856, WilsonCombat.com                                                          |

However, it has endured because of how it shoots. So, the real beauty of the Bulwark is not in its looks, but rather its performance. Whether you love the looks of the Bulwark or hate it, this is a gun that *shoots* beautifully. **FN**



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**A couple attends a Second Amendment rally in Wytheville, VA on January 19th, 2020. (LisaCarter/Shutterstock)**

an exclusive AmmoLand report documents.

The complaint, *Curtis v. Katz*, filed in the Circuit Court of the County of Spotsylvania, asks for declaratory judgment and injunctive relief against SB 749 / HB 217 because the “ban provisions of the Act violate the militia clause of Article I, Section 13 of the Constitution of Virginia.” As noted in the Statement of Facts, “The weapons banned by the act are the arms of the citizen militia.”

Named defendants are Superintendent of the Virginia State Police, Col. Jeffrey S. Katz; Spotsylvania County Commonwealths Attorney G. Ryan Mehaffey; and Spotsylvania County Sheriff Roger L. Harris.

The Counsel of Record for the complaint is Kenneth T. Cuccinelli, who, per a biography posted by The Federalist Society “has been a trial and appellate litigator, including constitutional law, for over 25 years. Additionally, Mr. Cuccinelli served in state government in the Virginia State Senate from 2002–2010, and as Virginia’s Attorney General from 2010–2014... Mr. Cuccinelli also served in the federal government, first as the Acting Director of United States Citizenship & Immigration Services, and then as the Acting Deputy Secretary for the Department of Homeland Security.”

Plaintiffs in the case are “Dustin R. Curtis, individually and in his capacity as a member of the Virginia Unorganized Militia; W. Michael Wood, individually and in his capacity as a member of the Virginia Unorganized Militia; Blaustein & Reich, Inc, d/b/a Bob’s Gun Shop a Virginia stock company and licensed firearms dealer; and Daniel Hinkson, individually and as sole owner of Be Ready Enterprises, LLC.”

“Plaintiffs challenge these prohibitions solely under the militia clause of Article I, Section 13 of the Constitution of Virginia. They do not rest their case on the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution, nor on the individual right to keep and bear arms also embodied in Article I, Section 13,” the complaint declares. “Their argument is simpler and more fundamental: the militia clause guarantees the existence of a ‘well regulated militia, composed of the body of the people, trained to arms.’”

“The General Assembly cannot, consistent with that guarantee, prohibit the body of the people from acquiring the very weapons with which they must be prepared to serve as that militia,” the complaint contends.

While Mehaffey was named in the complaint because he is the

Commonwealth’s Attorney of Spotsylvania County, as *Firearms News* has reported, he is one of the Virginia prosecutors who has declared that he will not enforce the ban. And as such, Mehaffey has, per Cuccinelli, “filed a blockbuster brief in our case arguing that WE should get our preliminary injunction. It’s a good piece of work and a very pleasant surprise.”

It is a good piece of work, although his contention that a sawed off shotgun is not protected because it does not have some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well regulated militia” is historically arguable and as has been argued in previous *Firearms News* articles, limiting small arms to those that “are lawfully in common use today” leaves the door open to uphold current bans on arms not in common use and on new arms developments reserved for the standing army.

As things stand, the hearing will either take place on June 17, or it will be called off like the other complaints. This column will follow up as appropriate.

David Codrea is the winner of multiple journalist awards for investigating/defending the RKBA and a long-time gun owner rights advocate who defiantly challenges the folly of citizen disarmament. In addition to being a regular featured contributor for *Firearms News*, he blogs at “*The War on Guns: Notes from the Resistance*,” and posts on Twitter: @dcodrea and Facebook.

**EDITOR’S NOTE:** As this issue was going to press, on June 25th, a preliminary injunction was issued barring the July, 1st ban from going into effect. This court action can be extended until sometime in December. *Firearms News* will be following this issue closely so be sure to check our website at *Firearms News.com*, or our Facebook page, regularly for updates. **FN**



# ATF DIRECTOR ROBERT CEKADA GETS SOFTBALL TREATMENT ON PISTOL BRACES FROM COLION NOIR

Beware of the Self-Serving, for They Come in Sheep's Clothing.

By Darwin Nercesian,  
News Field Editor

**T**he newly crowned director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) recently sat down with Colion Noir for a YouTube interview entitled “The ATF Director Just Said What Gun Owners Have Been Waiting To Hear.” Aside from being the gentlest of softball interviews, the video raises questions, including whether it really was what we’ve been waiting to hear, and if so, how have gun owners allowed themselves to be brainwashed into thinking that such a compromised approach to the Second Amendment is something to celebrate?

Many “conservatives” revere any Trump administration policy as if Moses himself had carried it down from Mount Sinai. My perspective is that of a Constitutional Constructionist, meaning I advocate limiting government power to the literal, expressed, and narrow definitions of the text, exactly as it is written. Any doctrine subject to broad interpretation and whimsical fantasy is destined to be abused by those in power. The Second Amendment is a perfect example of such abuse and a tyrannical government’s strategy to rule by means of “What are you going to do about it?”



(Shutterstock AI)

A highly contentious topic of concern among gun owners is the ATF’s flip-flopping position on pistol stabilizing braces, which the agency’s Firearms Technology Branch (FTB) interpreted in 2012 as compliant and not subject to the National Firearms Act (NFA).

“Based on our evaluation, FTB finds that the submitted forearm brace, when attached to a firearm, does not convert that weapon to be fired from the shoulder and would not alter the classification of a pistol or other firearm. While a firearm so equipped would still be regulated by the Gun Control Act, 18 U.S.C. § 921(a)(3), such a firearm would not be subject to NFA controls.”

Under the Biden administration’s efforts to pervert the meaning of anything to support its agenda, that position took a dramatic U-turn, turning pistol brace-equipped guns

into NFA-regulated firearms and law-abiding Americans into criminals overnight. This ebb has not flowed with the Trump administration, even though the President promised he would tear up the Biden-era Pistol Brace Rule in his first week, or first day in office.

“The so-called pistol brace rule, which orders law-abiding citizens to register or surrender guns with certain equipment. You know that. Many of you are forced to do it... Under a Trump administration, all of those Biden disasters get ripped up and torn out my first week, but maybe my first day in office, okay? Maybe my first,” said Trump in a 2023 speech.

I wrote about this in my recent article, *Biden... Excuse Me, I Mean Trump Administration Coming After Pistol Braces... Again*, warning the community that even though the Rule had been vacated by U.S. District



Judge Reed O'Connor and heavily reinforced by the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, stating the ATF had violated the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) by reclassifying braced pistols as short-barreled rifles (SBRs), the agency intended to enforce its content regardless of any legal outcome.

"Plaintiffs also make much of the fact that defendants continue to enforce the NFA's and the GCA's regulation of short-barreled rifles against some brace-equipped pistols, even though the Rule has been universally vacated. However, that should come as no surprise, as that is consistent with how defendants have always explained how things work if a court vacated the Rule or enjoined its enforcement," according to the DOJ.

added charge when someone falls under the radar of law enforcement for other circumstances, promising that the agency would not take part in hunting down gun owners simply for using braces. If you believe that, I have some oceanfront Ohio real estate available at a smoking deal!

"If you have a rifle, and your rifle has an overall length that's under 26 inches and under... for example, 15.9 inches... and it's designed to be shouldered, you're technically having a short-barreled rifle... ATF is not pursuing America's gun owners who are attaching a stabilizing brace and shouldering a rifle that may or may not be a short-barreled rifle... if you run afoul with local law enforcement or federal agents, for example, you bring yourself on the radar for something else and they end up

not pursue it nor tell you whether it is or is not until you've been entrapped. What about finding yourself "on the radar" of local and federal law enforcement? How often are those circumstances brought about by accident or false pretense, and how might this apply to constructive intent, in which regulatory bodies have historically argued that possession of spare parts that could be assembled into a short-barreled firearm or silencer implied an intent to build one, even if the parts were not actively assembled. This is a concerning proposition considering many gun owners maintain an exhaustive spare parts inventory built over years of shooting and collecting. Americans could easily be subject to charges for possession of an unregistered SBR even if they do

## Let's evaluate the ATF Director's integrity by looking at his comments regarding a federal firearms registry, **which is both unconstitutional and prohibited by federal law.**

This stance, however, did not stop firearms advocacy groups from sharing the stage with Cekada and their applause at a late April press conference, where 34 new Rules were cleverly framed as an effort to ease burdens on firearms dealers and restore the agency's commitment to the Second Amendment. But the ruse was not that clever, as I began pointing out its duplicity in my articles, *ATF's New Era of Reform... Repealing the Pistol Brace Rule and Why It Means Nothing* and *ATF's New Era of Reform... Easing the NFA Transport Burden*.

In his interview with Noir, Cekada made it clear that firearms equipped with pistol stabilizing braces measuring under 26 inches in overall length or with barrels less than 16 inches in length would be considered SBRs on a case-by-case basis. He explained, however, that enforcement of such matters would be carried out as an

executing a search warrant at your house, it is possible that your firearm is sent to ATF for classification and they would review each firearm, case-by-case basis, and say it is or it isn't based on what the law defines, and you could be in a position that a U.S. Attorney's office will say, 'Hey, we want to charge this person.' Now I think that every U.S. Attorney's office, just like ATF, we have a capacity on how many cases we could bring on, hence why we don't have our agents working on that, right? We're working on people that are actually using firearms to commit violent crimes, not America's gun owners that are enjoying shooting a firearm equipped with a brace that is considered, technically, a short-barreled rifle," Cekada said.

Read that quote as many times as you must to understand that Cekada is saying your braced firearm may or may not be an SBR, but the ATF will

not effectively have one and are not a violent felon.

Cekada also states that the driving force behind the ATF looking the other way is the agency's "capacity" to bring charges, rather than an official position, a circumstance that can change without any requirement to inform the public, at the whim of a motivated agent, or in the event the agency decides to act punitively in a particular case. Yes, that happens. Let it sink in and ask yourself how comfortable this makes you feel.

Consider programs like the NRA-endorsed 1997 Project Exile, where the state of Virginia mandated that firearms found in any state or local crime must be submitted with the police report to the ATF to verify if federal violations had taken place. Shifting prosecution of these cases to the federal government opened the doors to mandatory minimum



sentences, denial of bail, and incarceration in federal prisons far from local communities. In addition, many local cases are dismissed before seeing the inside of a courtroom, but what happens with those ATF submissions? If you think they will consequently be thrown out, I refer you to that ocean-front property. How are we feeling about rolling the legal dice now on Cekada's word?

American gun owners, with 94% already in digital format. This is gun owner registration, pure and simple. It's a violation of federal law," said Pratt.

That's not where the registry game of liar, liar ends, unfortunately. How can a gun owner be charged with possession of an unregistered short-barreled firearm, silencer, or even machine gun if there is no

pret the Second Amendment as meaning ordinary citizens should not be allowed to own firearms at all, epitomizing the nonsense that can be applied when nuancing clearly written text, and I'm not playing that game.

Speaking of text, I did not hear either Director Cekada or Colion Noir discuss the issue of Constitutionality, even though

## **The ATF admitted to amassing nearly one billion records of American gun owners, with 94% already in digital format. This is gun owner registration, pure and simple. It's a violation of federal law," said Pratt.**

Let's evaluate the ATF Director's integrity by looking at his comments regarding a federal firearms registry, which is both unconstitutional and prohibited by federal law.

"There's a lot of misnomers out there about a registry. There is no registry. I know that there's stories about that every day, and people want to get everyone upset about that, and that's, it's just not true," Cekada says.

registry to register them to? Say that five times fast. The NFA itself is an admitted firearm registry, and so is a searchable electronic records database of 4473 forms—it's very easy to determine which 4473s were used to purchase semi-auto AR pistols or any other semi-auto handgun that would be a contender for a pistol brace. The mere fact that Cekada would be so brazenly dishonest while Noir simply

Cekada's position requires him to pledge an oath to support and defend the Constitution. That omission alone makes everyone here suspect. Cekada had no problem, however, pointing out that he is simply following orders from Congress. First of all, he is not. The ATF has an established and sordid history of legislating from a regulatory position,

## **What remains is to decide where you really stand. Do you support the Constitution as it is written, or do you support something else?**

I wrote about a recent Senate Homeland Security Committee hearing in my article, *Massie Puts on Second Amendment Clinic During Homeland Security Hearing*, in which Eric Pratt, senior vice president of Gun Owners of America (GOA), testified and brought receipts which prove Cekada has his proverbial pants on fire.

"In 2021, GOA exposed that the Biden administration had accumulated 54-million-gun owner records in a single year. Now, Representative Michael Cloud and 51 colleagues demanded answers from the ATF, and what they received was shocking. The ATF admitted to amassing nearly one billion records of

nods away without objection offends the Second Amendment, the Constitution, and the intelligence of the American public. How are we feeling about Cekada's trustworthiness now? Are you willing to bet your life or freedom on it? And I'm not even going to get into how you can be charged with an unregistered SBR under "constructive possession"—that is a legal issue for another article.

What remains is to decide where you really stand. Do you support the Constitution as it is written, or do you support something else? If it seems like I am making it a black-and-white issue, it's because I am. I've seen those on the left inter-

incidentally, another violation of our Constitution. Second, history is rife with bad actors and delinquents who were "just following orders" to the detriment of the people. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. – Matthew 7:15.

—

*Darwin Nercesian is a long-time gun rights advocate and shooter of targets far, far away. As a News Field Editor at Firearms News, Darwin writes about the Second Amendment, firearms, and related gear. Follow him on Instagram, X, and YouTube @DTOE\_Official. FN*



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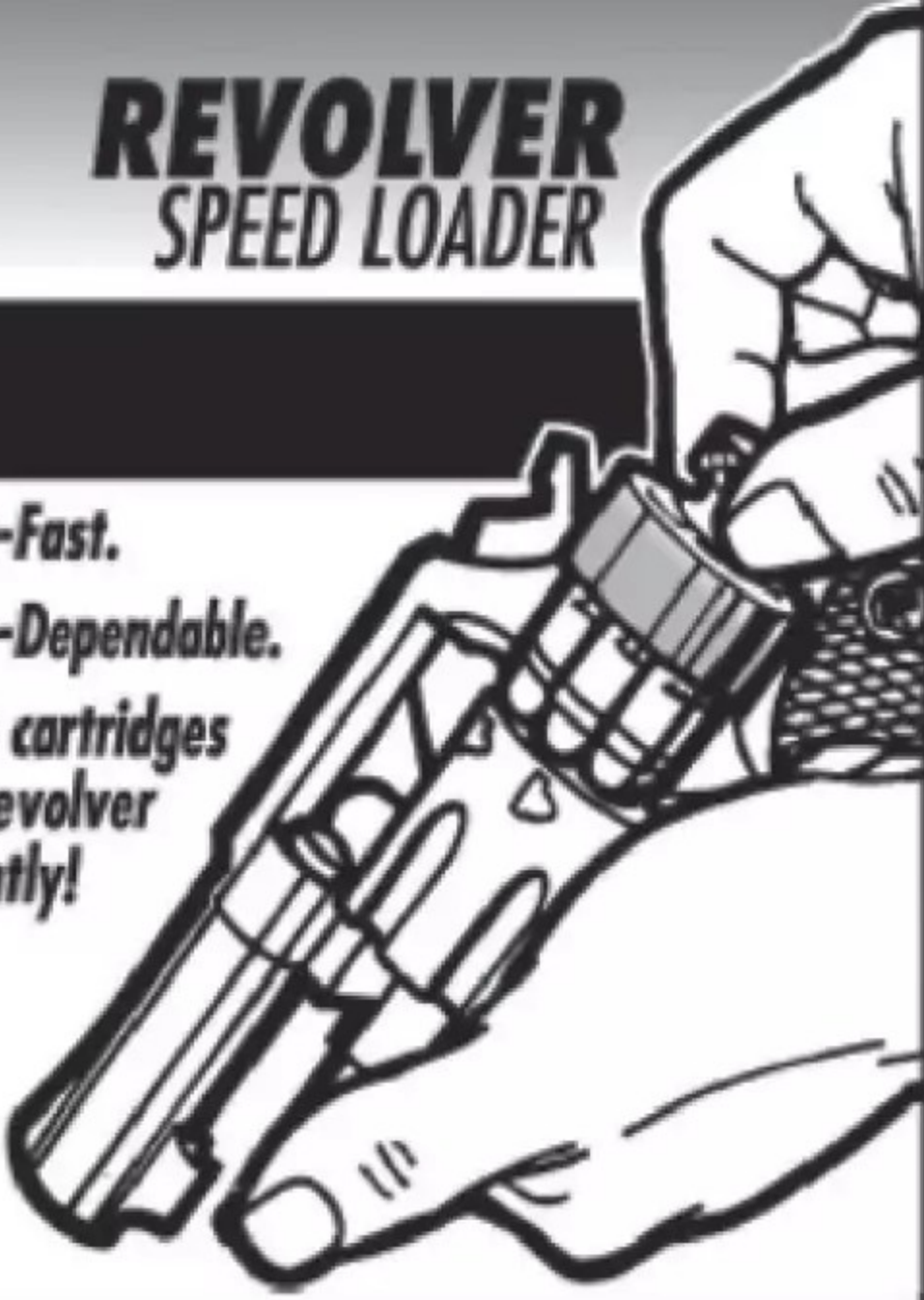
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