DOUG AND HIS BARRELS

OLD-SCHOOL ACCURACY

Gun Digest

WE KNOW GUNS SO [illegible] UNS THE MAGAZINE

MARCH 2026, VOLUME 43 · ISSUE 03

CARRY GUN BULLET SETBACK

IS IT HAPPENING TO YOU?

AMERICAN GUN CULTURE

HOW'D WE GET HERE?

THE YOST EFFECT

MAKING A 1911 A LITTLE BIT BETTER

GEAR TO GET

HOT FROM SHOT SHOW

WAR GUNS GONE MAINSTREAM

BROTHERS IN ARMS

JERICHO 941

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WOOD IS BACK

As I type this, SHOT Show 2026 is about a week in the rearview. And, as I always do, I conduct a bit of a post-mortem debriefing with a notepad to download my takeaways, meeting notes and overall thoughts on trends and observations.

This year, the first line of my self-interview reads exactly this:

Wood. Is. Back.

Of course, wood never really went anywhere, but it definitely fell out of vogue for quite some time. For the past 10 years or so, many of the new products at SHOT were black and polymer. And if a product had metal parts, they were black, too. Now, Glocks still—and likely forever will—look like Glock. And poly carry pistols aren't going anywhere, either.

But if wood makes sense on a given gun … well, those skews are once again becoming available like it's the first time anyone ever thought about using tree parts to build a rifle stock. Go figure (see what I did there?).

Of course, companies like Boyds have near-forever made fantastic aftermarket wood and laminate gunstocks, but it sure is nice to have the off-the-shelf option to once again buy a barreled action nestled in beautiful walnut. Or maple.

Regardless of all that, it's about time. And, this growing trend plays right into the hand of the March edition of this magazine, dubbed the "custom and collectible" issue for good reason.

Oh, guess what? It's funny how many of those custom and collectible guns feature high-quality wood stocks or grips.

I guess some of us have known all along. **GDTM**



GunDigest

5583 W. Waterford Ln., Suite D
Appleton, WI 54913
Phone: (920) 471-4522 • FAX: (920) 471-0031

GunDigest.com
E-mail us: info@gundigest.com

CARIBOU MEDIA GROUP PUBLISHER
JIM SCHLENDER

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
LUKE HARTLE

MANAGING EDITOR
LAURA PELTAKIAN

ONLINE EDITOR
ELWOOD SHELTON

BOOKS EDITOR
COREY GRAFF

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GENE COO

ART DIRECTOR
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COLUMNISTS
RICHARD MANN, PHIL MASSARO, ALEX OOLEY, PATRICK SWEENEY

ADVERTISING SALES

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
RYAN FARNER
(760) 809-8729
rfarner@recoilweb.com

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
ALEX OSTROWSKI
(920) 212-5677
alex@gundigest.com

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
DAVID FIGG
(813) 418-1060
dfigg@recoilweb.com

SENIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
LORI MCDANIEL
(715) 498-3768
lori@gundigest.com

ADVERTISING ASSISTANT
CHING CORNFORTH

GUN DIGEST MEDIA, LLC

GM/PUBLISHER
GLEN CASTLE

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE
JENNIFER SEXSTONE

NETWORK MANAGER
LUKE HARTLE

NEWSSTAND SALES
NPS MEDIA GROUP
lmasaoay@npsmediagroup.com

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THESE THINGS SLAP



CENTURY ARMS

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.17 Remington Fireball

Another brainchild of P.O. Ackley.



HISTORICAL NOTES

One of many wildcats dreamed up by P.O. Ackley through the years was the .17/221 Fireball, which is the .221 Remington Fireball case necked down for bullets measuring .172-inch in diameter. When Las Vegas gunsmith Vern O'Brien started building custom rifles around the small Sako L461 action, he obtained permission from Ackley to chamber them for the .17/221 but decided to rename it the .17 Mach IV. O'Brien offered the same chambering in custom single-shot pistols built on the XP-100 action, but called it the .17 Mach III, due to lower velocities from their shorter barrels.

As is commonly seen in more than one wildcat, dimensions can vary slightly among makers of chamber reamers, which means that even though at first glance the .17 Remington Fireball appears to be the old .17 Mach IV with a different name, a closer inspection may reveal minor dimensional differences. For this reason, Remington discourages the firing of .17 Fireball ammunition in rifles chambered to .17 Mach IV and vice versa.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Even though case dimensions of the .17 Fireball can differ a bit from those of the .17 Mach IV, the two cartridges are virtually identical in powder capacity and for this reason their velocity potential is the same. Capable of accelerating a 20-grain bullet along at over 4,000 fps, the trajectory of the .17 Fireball is quite flat, and mild recoil makes the little cartridge lots of fun to shoot.

Contrary to what has been written about the .17 Mach IV in the past and will likely be written about the .17 Fireball in the future, neither cartridge is capable of matching the velocities of the .17 Remington, which is on a modified version of the more capacious .223 Remington case. It has also been written that bullet jacket fouling builds up more rapidly in a rifle chambered for the .17 Remington, but the original author of *Cartridges of the World* found this to be untrue when the three cartridges are used in barrels having bores of equal quality and smoothness. **GDTM**

.17 REMINGTON FIREBALL LOADING DATA AND FACTORY BALLISTICS

BULLET (GRAINS/TYPE)	POWDER	GRAINS	VELOCITY	ENERGY	SOURCE
20 Hornady V-Max	H4198	17.3	4,037	722	Hodgdon
20 Hornady V-Max	H335	20.5	4,027	719	Hodgdon
25 Hornady HP	Benchmark	19.0	3,745	778	Hodgdon
25 Hornady HP	IMR-4198	16.2	3,692	756	Hodgdon
30 Berger HP	H322	18.0	3,533	831	Hodgdon
30 Berger HP	Benchmark	18.7	3,569	848	Hodgdon
20 AccuTip-V	FL	FL	4,250	802	Remington
25 HP	FL	FL	3,850	823	Remington



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EVERYDAY BULLETS & BLADES

Bullet setback is more common than you think. And it's dangerous.



When it comes to everyday carry, most of the discussion swirls around guns, holsters, ammunition and training. Sometimes we get so caught up with these topics that we overlook the little things, and as it has often been said, the devil is in the details.

Here are some EDC considerations concerning ammunition, along with an introduction to a knife that's just too good not to mention.

CARRY AMMO REPLACEMENT

Police departments usually mandate the replacement of carry/duty ammo at least once per year. Some do it twice a year, each time they qualify. This is a great time to replace carry/duty ammo because it can shoot during qualification, providing another opportunity to verify the reliability of that ammo with duty handguns.

You should be doing something similar.

Ammunition is very resilient and can last for decades if stored and cared for properly. When I was working the street, an elderly lady gave me a 1911 magazine loaded with .45 Auto ammo she'd found in a dresser drawer. She said her deceased husband had brought it back from World War II. I took it to the range and shot it, and it worked just fine, so why all the fuss about replacing carry ammo?

Over time, especially with exposure to wide temperature swings, gun lubrication and even perspiration, brass cartridge cases can corrode and that corrosion can impact reliability. (This is one reason most carry loads utilize nickel-plated cases.) Also, moisture and sweat could *possibly* cause primer and powder degradation.

For less than $100, you can replace all your carry ammo at least once each year and find a little peace of mind. However, you might need to replace your carry ammo more frequently if you unload your defensive pistol often.

BULLET SETBACK

When a cartridge is chambered in a pistol, the force of the bullet impacting the feed ramp can sometimes push the bullet deeper into the case. This is called bullet setback, and it can be dangerous.

In the mid 1990s, when the .40 S&W was becoming the law enforcement cartridge of choice, there were a rash of incidents where Glock pistols went *kablooey* during firearms qualification. It was discovered that those officers had been unloading their pistols at the end of each shift and then rechambering the same cartridge before the next shift. This created bullet setback, which substantially raised pressure. It's estimated that 0.10 inch of bullet setback in the .40 Smith & Wesson can cause pressures to double.



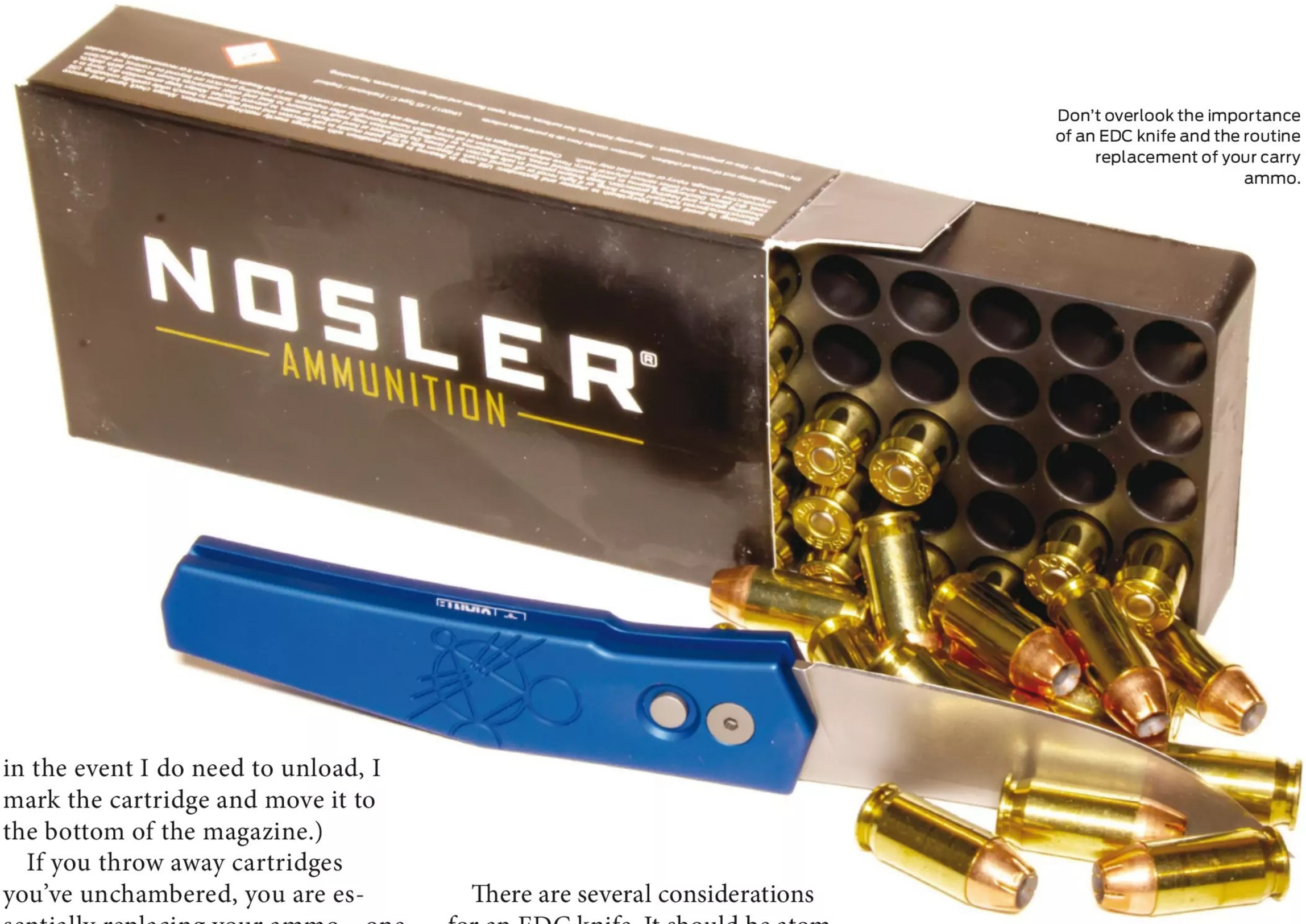
In the 1990s, bullet setback in the .40 S&W cartridge was common due to repetitive chambering. Bullet setback has clearly occurred in the .40 S&W cartridge on the right.

To avoid this, some shooters will move the round they take out of the chamber to the bottom of the magazine. It's rare that a single chambering can cause bullet setback with high-quality ammo, but for those unloading and reloading all the time, that round at the bottom of the magazine will eventually make it to the top and be rechambered again.

You could mark each unchambered cartridge with a permanent marker so you'll know when it resurfaces, or you could just toss it and replace it with a new one. (My carry guns remain loaded all the time, and



The Giant Mouse ACE Elmer is a great self-defense knife for everyday carry.



Don't overlook the importance of an EDC knife and the routine replacement of your carry ammo.

in the event I do need to unload, I mark the cartridge and move it to the bottom of the magazine.)

If you throw away cartridges you've unchambered, you are essentially replacing your ammo—one round at a time, so annual or semi-annual ammo replacement is not necessary. The downside is that you do not get to shoot that ammo. If you mark each round when you unchamber it, eventually you'll have marked all the ammo in your gun and extra magazines. Then, you can shoot it up—checking for reliability—and replace it. Most modern ammo is resilient enough to be chambered in a pistol twice without experiencing bullet setback.

ELMER

No, this column is not about knives; it's about defensive handguns. But a knife should be a part of your everyday carry just as much as a handgun, because you could end up in a hand-to-hand self-defense situation where you've lost your gun or your gun doesn't work. (Maybe it stopped working because of corroded ammo or bullet setback.)

There are several considerations for an EDC knife. It should be atom-splitting sharp, light, compact and unobtrusive to carry, and it should either be a fixed blade or a folder that you can open to a lock with one hand.

I rely on other Giant Mouse blades for hunting, general-purpose cutting and survival/bushcraft-type chores, so I was excited to see their newest new EDC knife. It's built for Giant Mouse by ProTech, and like all the Giant Mouse ACE series knives, it's made with premium materials. It's called the "Elmer," and while this might seem like an odd name for a knife, it won't be after you hear the story.

The genesis of this knife is a man named Elmer. Elmer served in the 36th Texas Infantry Division during WWII. He survived five major invasions, beginning in the desert chasing Rommel and ending up in Berlin rubble. He returned home and carried on, the way so many like him did. This knife is cool and confident, and more deliberate than decorative, and it honors a great American.

The Elmer is an automatic knife with a single push button for opening and unlocking. It has a CPM MagnaCut stonewashed and slightly upswept 3.2-inch blade that's 0.107-inch thick and has a Rockwell hardness of 62. The handles are either blue or black aluminum with a milled titanium pocket clip for right side, tip-up carry, and it weighs 3.2 ounces. The action is fast, the lockup is positive, and out of the box you can shave with it.

But this blade is better suited to tendon cutting or bicep-splitting action, and in a pinch, it'll peel an apple or pick a splinter, too. It rides comfortably in your pocket and is lightning fast to deploy. If you want one, you best make your move now: The Giant Mouse ACE Elmer is a limited edition and retails for $365.

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LOCK, STOCK AND THE BARREL

How American gun culture began as a civic duty.

American gun culture is often portrayed as a modern invention, an outgrowth of industrial manufacturing, clever marketing or frontier mythology. According to this view, firearms were rare in early America, ownership was limited, and widespread civilian gun use emerged only after the Civil War.

That story is neat. It is also wrong.

The historical record tells a far different story, one in which firearms were not merely common, but expected; not reluctantly tolerated but legally required. In early America, gun ownership was not a lifestyle choice or political statement. It was a civic duty.

Few works document this reality more thoroughly than *Lock, Stock, and Barrel: The Origins of American Gun Culture* by Clayton Cramer, which draws directly from colonial statutes, travel accounts and original source material. The picture that emerges is unmistakable: American gun culture did not have to be invented. It arose naturally from the conditions of colonial life.

THE MYTH OF RARE GUNS

The idea that early Americans lived largely unarmed gained traction in the late 20th century through revisionist scholarship that claimed firearms were scarce and tightly regulated. Those claims did not survive scrutiny. Key works were exposed as deeply flawed and sometimes fraudulent. Yet, the narrative persisted in more subtle forms.

The appeal of that narrative is understandable. If guns were rare and socially disfavored in early America, modern gun control appears less like innovation

"Even age restrictions cut the opposite way of modern law. Teenagers, often as young as 15, were legally required to possess arms for militia duty. There were no colonial prohibitions on youth ownership. Responsibility, not restriction, was the governing principle."

and more like restoration. But history does not cooperate.

WHEN GUN OWNERSHIP WAS MANDATORY

Colonial lawmakers did not fear an armed population. They feared an *un-armed* one.

In 1619, Virginia enacted one of its earliest statutes requiring men "fitting to bear arms" to bring firearms, swords and ammunition to church. Worship was not exempt from danger, and preparedness was considered essential, even in the pews.

South Carolina and Georgia followed similar paths. By the mid-18th century, South Carolina required every white male to attend church armed, with churchwardens tasked with inspecting weapons and ammunition. These laws were enforced, not symbolic.

Maryland went further. In 1641, settlers seeking title to land were required to possess a "serviceable fixed gun," along with powder and lead. Firearms were not just tools of defense; they were prerequisites for full participation in colonial society.

These statutes reflect a worldview fundamentally different from our own. Arms were not viewed as threats to public safety. They were seen as safeguards of it.

GUNS BEYOND THE MILITIA

Modern discussions often attempt to confine early firearm ownership to militia service, suggesting that guns were collective instruments rather than personal tools. But militia laws assumed private ownership. Individuals were expected to supply their own arms, maintain them and keep them ready.

Firearms lived in homes, traveled on roads, guarded farms and protected families. The same musket that might be inspected at muster was used to hunt, defend property and respond to emergencies. There was no sharp divide between "military" and "civilian" arms.

Even age restrictions cut the opposite way of modern law. Teenagers, often as young as 15, were legally required to possess arms for militia duty. There were no colonial prohibitions on youth ownership. Responsibility, not restriction, was the governing principle.

GUNS, TRAVEL AND EVERYDAY LIFE

Firearms were not confined to moments of crisis or formal militia service. They were integrated into the routines of everyday life. Colonial laws frequently required travelers to be armed, recognizing that roads were dangerous and law enforcement sparse or nonexistent. In some colonies, individuals traveling alone were prohibited from doing so unless armed, while groups were expected to ensure that all members carried weapons sufficient for collective defense.

Hunting further reinforced firearm ownership and proficiency. Game was abundant, markets were limited, and refrigeration nonexistent. A firearm was often the difference between sustenance and hunger. Accounts from travelers and settlers routinely describe the ease with which food could be obtained through hunting, precisely because firearms were so widely owned and competently used.

Even indentured servitude did not break this expectation. In several colonies, masters were legally required to provide firearms to servants upon completion of their term, ensuring they could fulfill militia obligations and provide for themselves as free men. The right—and responsibility—to be armed was not reserved for an elite class. It was part of becoming a full participant in civic life.

These practices underscore a critical point often missed in modern debates: Firearms were not exceptional objects requiring justification. They were assumed necessities, woven into the fabric of work, travel, worship and community defense.

PISTOLS, REPEATERS AND REALITY

Another common myth holds that early Americans owned only long-guns and had little interest in pistols until manufacturers like Colt created demand through advertising. The record again says otherwise.

Newspaper advertisements for pistols appeared in American cities as early as the 1720s. Gunsmiths routinely made and sold handguns throughout the colonies. Repeating firearms (pepperboxes and other multi-shot designs) existed well before the 19th century.

Samuel Colt did not invent America's interest in handguns. He met a market that already existed.

CULTURE BY NECESSITY

Gun culture in America was not born in boardrooms or advertising campaigns. It emerged from necessity. Colonial life was dangerous, unpredictable and decentralized. Survival required competence, preparedness and self-reliance.

Firearms were part of that equation, not as talismans, but as tools. The law reflected that reality, reinforcing ownership rather than restricting it.

Understanding this history does not require romanticizing the past. It requires honesty about it. **GDTM**

About the Author

Alex Ooley is an affiliate attorney with the Armed Citizen's Legal Defense Network. The views and opinions expressed in this article are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Network. This article is for informational purposes only and should not be considered legal advice. For specific legal guidance regarding your situation, please consult with a qualified attorney.

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FROM ALL SIDES

An ambi safety can dramatically improve the function of your AR-15.

The problem with most AR-15 ambidextrous safeties is the tiny little screws holding them together. The even tinier Allen wrenches meant to tighten them are one moment's oversight from bending to uselessness.

On a personal note, the wings of ambi safeties tend to be too big for me, and the offside one interferes with my trigger finger. But that's my problem. Yours, and ours, is assemblage. Well, Aero has solved the problem.



The wings have clearance holes on the front so you can disassemble the Aero Pro safety if you need or want to.



The Aero Precision ambi selector is easy to install and clever as all get-out.

The M4E1 Pro ambi safety selector kit comes with the center shaft, which is cut to work as a safety, two wings, and the spring and plunger to work them.

Now, if your rifle already has a safety on it, the spring and plunger are both superfluous. But they'll be handy as spares.

The neat trick to the Aero approach is that the wings are both separate parts from the shaft. The center shaft is cut for clearance and to block the trigger when on "safe," so you'll have to pay attention when you install it. However, the shaft also has square bosses on the ends. These fit into the recesses in the wings.

And the real trick? There are captured, spring-loaded plungers in the shaft on the ends in those bosses. So, once you have figured out which side is up, press one wing over the boss, use a small-tipped tool to depress the plunger and snap the wing onto the shaft.

Yes, it's that easy. Press the assemblage into the receiver (with the correct parts assemblage of trigger, disconnector and hammer already there) and press the existing frame-installed plunger down for clearance. (If you're building from parts, the frame spring and plunger go in just before the pistol grip goes on.)

Once the one-wing-and-shaft assemblage is in place, press the other wing over the boss and use your sharp-pointed tool to depress the plunger. Once it snaps in place … well, you're done.

No more fiddly little Allen-socket screws of minuscule thread size to fuss over. If you ever want to disassemble it, use a small press pin to depress the plunger. Yes, Aero thought of that and the hole for the plunger goes through the wing, so you have access.

You have your choice of black, OD Green, or Kodiak brown so you can mix or match your new ambi safety to your AR-15 lower or next build project.

Now, some might object that $65 is a bit much for a safety selector, and if you don't need an ambi, that's probably correct. After all, you can buy a plain-Jane GI one for, what, $8 plus shipping?

But if you need an ambi, or you feel the need for an ambi, you might as well make life (installation life that is) easier. **GDTM**

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DEALER PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

SHOT GLASS

ZeroTech's compact Thrive HD 1-4 Prism might just be the best bargain of the year for an everyday carbine optic.

Sitting atop this well-used AR, the Thrive HD 1-4 seems right at home as a jack-of-all-trades optic.

Think of it as a variable-power ACOG. Taking up about as much space as a TA31, ZeroTech's newest model gives users a true 1x bottom end, with just enough magnification to consistently hit torso-sized targets out to 600 yards in field conditions. Best of all, it does it at a very affordable price.

Optics are one of the few areas of the gun space where we've seen steady, consistent improvements in the past couple of decades, to the point where if you showed someone from the mid aughties what they could have for their (Biden-flation adjusted) money, they'd shake their head in disbelief. LPVOs are prevalent on general-purpose carbines, and for lots of good reasons—there's a model for every budget, and with 10x magnification now available on Chinese-made scopes for less than a grand, you'd be entirely justified by asking why make the seemingly retrograde step of choosing a 1-4 instead.

If you've ever tried to use a cheap 1-10 at low light and in a less-than-perfect setup, you're probably a couple of sentences ahead right now. Although glass quality and lens coatings have come a long way, there's still a significant performance gap between those used in high-dollar rigs, and those in bargain-priced optics. It's like expecting AMG

Buttons on left side adjust reticle illumination and allow for toggling between red and green.



SPECIFICATIONS

Manufacturer: ZeroTech

Model: Thrive HD 1-4x24 Prism

Length: 6 inches

Weight: 19 ounces

Click Value: 0.5 MOA

Field of View: 131 / 31 feet at 100 yards

MSRP: $600

URL: zerotechoptics.com



performance from a Kia—yes, both will get you around town, but there's a reason one costs more than the other for four wheels and a couple of seats.

At 10x, the eyebox becomes so tight that unless you're bang-on in terms of cheek weld and head alignment, it's much more time-consuming to line up, especially compared to a medium-powered optic at the same magnification. It's less noticeable at lower magnifications due to the larger exit pupil, but it's our contention that most folks use the throw lever on an LPVO as a switch—it's either at 1x, or they turn it all the way up. If, like Nigel Tufnel's amp, it went to 11, that would be peachy, too.

We've come to appreciate the Thrive HD 1-4 in the weeks we've played with it. Glass quality is very good, delivering crisp, edge-to-edge images across the magnification range. The unfortunately named RAP-R reticle offers enough information to make fast hits close in at 1x. Dialing up the magnification, it was relatively simple to connect at distance in breezy conditions, and once you figure out your holds, it can be used out to the effective range of 5.56. We found that with a 50-yard zero, the lowest stadia line corresponds to POA/POI at 500 yards, sending M193 from a 16-inch barrel.

We're kinda glad that the manufacturer didn't endow this optic with a BDC reticle, as they're usually calibrated for one specific ammo and barrel length—most commonly M855 analogues paired with a 16-inch tube. When you get to shooting 77-grain OTMs from a 12.5, then things don't line up too well. But by using a ballistic app to choose an appropriate zero distance, you can align the hashmarks with known distances and then verify in the field.

Where this scope really shines is on short, barreled carbines, with limited rail space. Most times, with an LPVO and rail-mounted laser, there's no room to add a clip-on thermal or I2 device, so if you want to make best use of your setup at night, other compromises must be made. Speaking of compromises, the scope could use a little more eye relief. We had to set up in the rearmost slot on our 1919 rail, which means there's no room for a set of backup iron sights. You could solve this problem with an offset red dot, but if you'd prefer the low-tech solution for a secondary aiming system, you're SOL.

Unlike most LPVOs, this one has the zoom ring at the front of the optic.

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Our Thrive HD was packed very neatly in its padded shipping box and arrived with two different clamps for its integral mount. At first, we just slapped it on an AR and headed to the range, where we quickly became frustrated due to the locking lever partially blocking access to the carbine's charging handle. About to write the optic off due to its incompatibility with America's favorite rifle, we noticed a second clamp lurking in a corner, which reversed the locking lever and cured the problem. Eureka!

At 19 ounces, the scope's weight is in line with LPVOs, and you won't have to source a set of rings or cantilever mount, as scope body and mounting system are integral, machined from a single forging. There are pluses and minuses for everything of course, and while this increases rigidity and reduces failure points, it also limits adaptability—if you want an extra-tall mount for use with NVGs, then this probably isn't going to be your first choice.

If you have vision problems such as astigmatism, red dots are usually a no-go. With its crisp, etched reticle, ZeroTech's baby can be used by everyone, and when your battery eventually fails, the black reticle's still there. So long as you have power, you can choose between red and green illumination, but be warned, despite this being a second focal plane scope, it's not daylight bright. At 1x, its field of view is enormous and outclasses most other LPVOs, even our beloved Kahles and Zeiss 1-6 models.

We're pretty impressed with the feature set ZeroTech have managed to cram into the Thrive HD 1-4 Prism. The more we use it, the more it grows on us, and the combination of image quality, seemingly bombproof construction and small footprint is very appealing, particularly on our 12.5-inch barreled work guns, which seem to get used for just about everything these days. If you're in the market for a versatile carbine optic, we believe it's worthy of a look. **GDTM**



Overall footprint is very ACOG-ish, and weight is about the same.

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01 KelTec PR-3AT

If nothing else, KelTec sure keeps things interesting. Case in point, the new PR-3AT. This .380 ACP pocket pistol is tiny, super lightweight and fed via stripper clip like the company's previous PR-5.7 design. Its lack of a removable magazine combined with its rotary barrel system and polymer frame results in a weight of less than 10 ounces when unloaded. Capacity is 10+1 for the short-gripped variant and 13+1 for the version with a longer grip. The larger model is available with a factory-installed Viridian RFX1 green dot sight, too. As far as deep concealment pistols and backup guns go, this might be the best new option on the market.

MSRP: $400

02 Rise Armament Rev 535 Trigger

Everyone enjoys an upgraded trigger in their AR, but few enjoy the installation process of hammering pins. With Rise Armament's new Rev 535, improving your rifle's bang switch has literally never been easier. The company's calling it a "slide-and-snap AR trigger", as it features built-in spring-loaded pins and requires no tools to install. You simply depress the pins by hand, drop it into your receiver and basically wiggle it into place until the pins lock into their respective holes. At SHOT, we saw people do it in literal seconds. Once installed, the single-stage Rev 535 trigger provides a crisp 3- to 3.5-pound break, and the blade face is rapidly interchangeable too, letting you swap between flat and curved on the fly (both are included). It even comes in different colors.

MSRP: $280

03 Falco Leather Wallet Pocket Holster

Pocket carry isn't the best way to tote around a handgun, but sometimes convenience trumps factors like draw speed. For times when you need to quickly throw some defense in your pocket before heading out the door, Falco's new leather wallet pocket holster looks like a very nice option. It's designed to create the outline of a wallet while stowed, so even if someone looks below your belt, they'll be none the wiser that you're packing. The holsters are available in a huge variety of different pistol makes and model fitments and are handmade with full-grain Italian leather.

MSRP: $80

GEAR TO GET



01



02



03



04 Springfield SA-35 Polished Blued Finish

Springfield's SA-35 is an excellent take on the iconic Browning Hi-Power, but if there was one aspect of the original version worth complaining about, it was its matte blue finish. Thankfully, that's no longer a problem as the company has just launched a version featuring an absolutely gorgeous polished blue finish. The cherry on top of this aesthetic upgrade is a set of darker checkered walnut grips to complement the deep bluing. It's otherwise the same old reliable SA-35, even down to its price tag.

MSRP: $800

05 Ruger Harrier Rifles

Ruger has completely overhauled its AR-15 offerings with the Harrier line. Featuring two models, both chambered for 5.56 NATO, the company says the new rifles are being manufactured with a major focus on improved fit, function and features. Made in Ruger's newly acquired factory in Hebron, Kentucky, the two Harrier variants are very similar but differ in a few key ways. Namely, Model 28600 has a mid-length gas system, a Magpul stock and grip, and an M-Lok handguard with a full-length STANAG top rail, while Model 28601 features a carbine-length gas system, an A2 grip, M4-style carbine stock and a lighter handguard with no full-length top rail. Both models utilize the same 16.1-inch nitrided barrel with a 1:8 twist and ship with A2 flash hiders.

MSRP: Model 28600 $750; Model 28601 $700

06 Lyman Sonicore Suppressors

Lyman entering the suppressor game wasn't an expected move, but a welcome one. With the tax stamp fee for suppressors now being $0, what the market was in dire need of was a line of cans that prioritized value, and that's exactly what Lyman's new Sonicore line is giving us. Featuring 10 different models, all are priced below $300. Available models currently include the Skarv 22, Valor 9, Rekkr Direct Thread (.223 and .30), Rekkr Overbarrel (.223 and .30), Paradox Direct Thread (.223 and .30) and Paradox Overbarrel (.223 and .30). The .22 and 9mm Sonicore suppressors are made entirely of 6026-T9 aluminum, making them incredibly lightweight, while the .223 and .30-caliber models utilize a mix of 303 stainless steel for durability and 6026-T9 aluminum to help keep them lightweight as well.

MSRP: $200 to $300, model dependent

07 Ambient Arms Suppressors

We don't throw this term around lightly, but Ambient Arms' new EXO suppressors may really be a game changer. The company calls the heart of the new cans the Ambient Intake System, and it results in significantly cooler operating temperatures by using intake ports and "strategic low-pressure zones" that draw cool air inside during firing. Ambient Arms says the new system didn't require any compromise with other aspects of the EXO suppressors either, as they still do a great job of reducing report, muzzle flash and even back pressure. Ambient Arms' lineup currently includes two sizes of 5.56 EXO models and the Stratos .22 that's rated from .22 LR up to 5.7x28mm.

MSRP: EXO 5.56, $1,350 // EXO 5.56i Mini, $1,400 // Stratos .22, $500



» 05



« 04



« 07

» 06



A TOUCH OF NOSTALGIA

The life and times of the M14.

Retro has been all the rage in recent years, and the interest level in guns from the Cold War era has skyrocketed. Ignoring the nuclear reality of the geopolitical situation during the time period, the guns in question have become something of a cozy nostalgic experience against the constant barrage of bad international news and rampant domestic consumerism in the industry today.

Simpler times, if you will.

The past few years have seen a growing appreciation for the early War on Terror era and its various attempts to adapt Cold War systems to the needs of the time, among them the venerable M14. We look at the state of the rifle today and what might be to come for the legendary rifle.

THE BEST RIFLE FOR A WAR ALREADY FOUGHT

There are certainly quite a few opinions surrounding the M14 and its merits. It has been accused of being too large, too powerful, not powerful enough, both very accurate and not able to hit the broad side of a barn, the shortest-lived service rifle and yet the one that kept coming back when the going got rough.

It seems like everyone has an opinion of this rifle, but the only true tragedy is that the gun didn't come sooner. We could have had a rifle very similar to the M14 as early as the 1920s, but the government was hilariously concerned about soldiers losing magazines and wasting ammo, a thing that went so far as to be mockingly chalked up to as British custom (the SMLE had detachable magazines and a 10-round capacity).

For no reason that made sense, the U.S. government was deeply concerned with this and had been for decades, going so far as to put magazine cutoffs on the 1903 Springfield and doubting the need for stripper clip-fed bolt guns with the choice of the Krag rifle in the 1890s.

The experiences gained in World War II and Korea birthed the M14, and I stand by the fact that it would have been a great rifle for those conflicts … had it existed. For the naysayers, note that the Germans and Russians already had various attempts at a detachable-magazine, full-power semi-auto or select-fire rifles that were developed actively in the war. The issues they encountered with the G43 and SVT40 (updated SVT 38) made them generally subpar, especially to the American M1 Garand.

Not only could they simply not make enough of these rifles; the ones that were produced were often of poor quality and the reception, especially of the later war G43's and the SVT series in general for both accuracy and durability. The concept was solid, the execution not so much.

The desire to have this type of rifle was present in the American mind but unrealized in practice, and thankfully the M1 Garand was proven to be superior to Axis rifles in all ways except the issue of a detachable magazine. It should be noted that the Axis powers and Russia tried to issue autoloading rifles, but they failed due to wartime stress. There were, of course, attempts to remedy this issue with the M1, but the war ended before any serious progress had been made. The M1's lack of detachable magazine was notable, and it was, to many firearms experts, already obsolete during its production run.

THE (UNWITTING) RIFLE OF THE FUTURE

The American side of things had been slowly working on a general program for rifle improvement for some time, but there was a good deal of bureaucratic uncertainty involved and many competing ideas leading to a foot-dragging between various factions and their ideas of what was needed in service rifles.

After WWI, experiences gained led to a search for a self-loading rifle. This led to famous designs like the Pedersen rifle and the Garand, and it included a heavy debate on the merits of "small bore" rifles, namely chambered for .276 Pedersen. Of note is that most other world powers were capable of delivering on a detachable magazine semi-automatic rifle, while America wasted time much in the same way that they resisted bolt actions and stripper clip-fed rifles in the pre-WWI era.

This amorphous program was referred to as the U.S. Light Rifle Program and led to many, many designs, both failed and successful. The general goal of the post-WWII program was to find a successor to the M1 Garand, and that is exactly what happened, just not in the most direct way. The program was lengthy, and there were many facets covered in both rifle and cartridge design.

The M14 came to us as the result of this program; however, the rifle did attempt to do a lot. In utilizing a compacted Garand-style action combined with a cartridge that was for all purposes very close in ballistic performance to .30-06 in the M1, the M14 was a guaranteed performer in terms of power. Making it select fire and including magazines with capacity equal to the BAR (Browning automatic rifle) checked those boxes, making it able to provide squad support. Its overall size and weight made it easy to carry and point. On paper it was a great rifle, and in practice it was, too—but not in every role the military needed it for.

Like many jack-of-all-trade concepts, it was a compromise on several points, namely its powerful 7.62 NATO chambering and difficult handling in full-auto.





World militaries at this time had only tinkered with what we call intermediate calibers, and the Western powers didn't understand them well, comparing them to sub-machine guns in most period literature. A big culprit was the German STG44, what would be known as the granddaddy of assault rifles, of course chambered in the 8mm Kurz, an intermediate rifle round. The rifle was also referred to as the MP44, as in machine pistol.

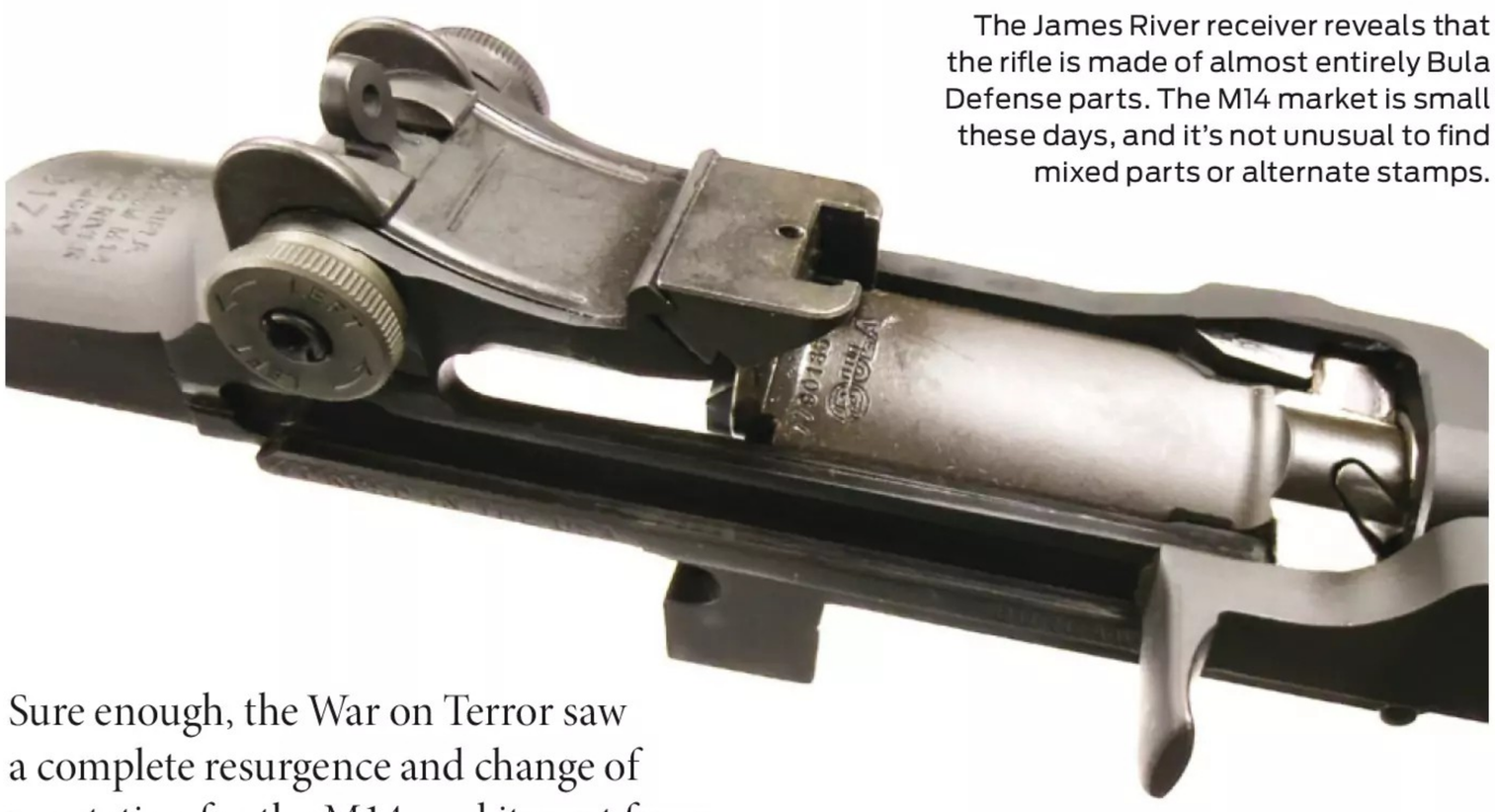
What should be understood about the M14 and 7.62 NATO was that it was considered "normal" for the time, and the intermediate calibers like the USSR's 7.62x39mm were effectively laughed at; the American mind was fixed on traditional rifles and long ranges. Intermediate cartridges were not taken seriously until they were encountered head-on.

The idea that American and NATO forces had for their 7.62x51mm rifles was solid, but ultimately it would result in a back-and-forth with Eastern Bloc powers, resulting in the small-bore race in the 1960s. The 5.56 NATO eventually inspired the USSR to start looking for smaller and lighter options, and here we are today.

But, for the M14, going small had its hidden advantages. As wars changed and the demands of battle proved too much on the 5.56 NATO, the M14 was called back into service time and again.



The M14 was designed to be able to use stripper clips to load a magazine, just like a Mauser.



The James River receiver reveals that the rifle is made of almost entirely Bula Defense parts. The M14 market is small these days, and it's not unusual to find mixed parts or alternate stamps.

Sure enough, the War on Terror saw a complete resurgence and change of reputation for the M14, and it went from something of a pariah to a saving grace. Today, it's held in high esteem thanks to its evolution into the storied EBR, and it's now enjoying a resurgence in media and video games, with just a touch of nostalgia.

THE M14 TODAY

So, there has to be a point made here that the civilian M14 and military M14 are not exactly the same rifle, despite accepting most of the same accessories. You can think of it the same way as any semi-auto "version" of a full-auto capable military weapon.

The simple reason this happens is because there is a wide commercial demand for these types of guns out of a simple desire for identical cosmetics. People love them, and they are fun. While nobody is going to say that a BAR or Tommy gun is going to be a great modern option, they will always turn more heads at the range than another AR. And, even at that, the retro AR options are always a bit more fun if you ask me.

The civilian M14 doesn't have a specific designation, and the M1A moniker belongs only to Springfield Armory. Calling a civilian semi-auto M14 an M1A is wrong unless it was specifically made by Springfield, the company that is responsible for bringing the original rifle to market in the 1970s after the government restricted the sale of converted military receivers to the public. Unfortunately for enthusiasts, the original receivers are machine guns and far harder



If you want a good look at the M14 accessory market today, well, this is most of it. There has been a decline in accessories for years now, but you can still readily find scope mounts, scout mounts and specialty parts like Fulton Armory adjustable gas blocks and suppressor mounts.

to get, especially for people wanting to shoot at the time. That said, if you are into it, transferable select-fire originals are still around and don't command outrageous prices compared to many legal machine guns.

The internals of the military M14 are different from the commercial guns, but the actual differences are not all that cosmetically significant. More people have seen and handled the commercial rifles at this point so the selector switch cutout isn't a missed detail. Hardcore military clone builders can get their hands on a dummy switch and a corresponding stock pretty easily. The M14 today is somewhat unsupported by the aftermarket, and this has left a large gap after years of popularity decline.

WHERE DID THE M14 MARKET GO?

So what happened to the M14 after all these years, and what is the deal with the surge in interest for it? The direct answer is that it simply lost relevance, as modern, AR-based designs filled in military roles and the stopgap measures eventually stopped appearing in the media. The M110 family started replacing the M14 EBR variants fairly early on, despite the incredible popularity of the latter in War on Terror media.

The classic 2000s-era guns we know and love were, for the most part, short-lived. The M4, M16A2 and A4 rifles that featured heavily were phased out for a variety of newer variants that were more easily able to accept the ever-changing accessories being used. Rail systems became popular, as did lights and lasers. The demands placed on rifles like the M14 proved too high for the old warhorses, and, despite being praised as reliable and universally loved for their aesthetic quality, they couldn't keep up.



The M14 and M1, field-stripped. The two rifles disassemble the same to this point, but afterward special tools are required.

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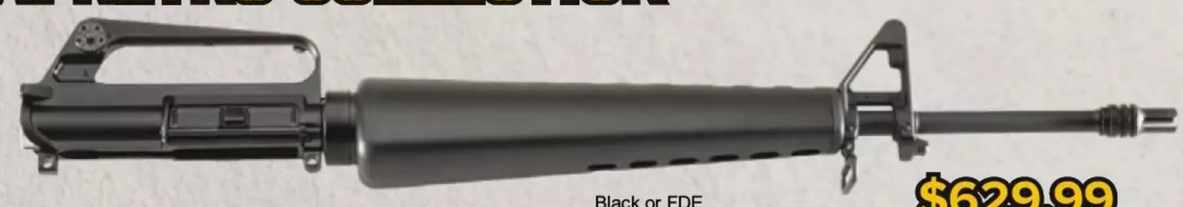
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These are all commercial rifles, but their namesakes all served together in various conflicts through the '60s and '70s. Top down: Brownells M16A1, James River M14 and brand-new CMP M1 rifle. These three represent a progression of small arms ideology.

The civilian side of things saw the market dry up considerably, as military demand dwindled. And, having lived through it, the M14 peaked commercially around 2010, where it then sharply dropped off. Political trends in the country were gravitating toward support of the AR-15, which was the target of the Obama administration, but by his re-election in 2012, the entire 2A community was firmly behind preventing limits on the AR, the zombie thing was trending (just a reminder we did do this), and the M14 simply dropped off in popularity. The AR was truly the new big deal, and that trend has lasted to the point that the M14 market virtually went extinct.

This isn't to say the M14 ceased to exist. The rifle remained popular in match shooting and some long-range events until it was also pushed out by the growing popularity of sports like PRS. It simply couldn't adapt to the demands of changing rules, gear and advanced cartridges. However, these days the mood has changed, and the M14 is again being looked at, as things grow uncertain in the world and consumers burn out on modern guns. The retro wave has lasted far longer than anyone could guess.

THE STATE OF THE M14

Today, companies are still making parts and accessories for the M14, but they are decidedly few in number. The main companies making this type of rifle are Springfield Armory, Fulton Armory, Bula Defense and LRB. There used to be quite a few more, including Chinese Norinco versions, but they have not been available in some time. Of note is that there are more companies making the M14; the James River rifle featured here has a Bula manufactured receiver.

Stocks are available, but, again, few in quantity, as production never really ramped up after the drop off. Wood stocks can be had fairly easily as well as synthetic. Companies like Boyds make them, but you'll need to be familiar with a bit of hand-fitting in some cases. Surplus stocks and a variety of fiberglass versions can be found on the surplus market as well. Forums and gun shows are a good way to source truly retro parts if you're going for a certain look.

US Tactical Supply is currently releasing new production versions of the classic EBR chassis, but again, these are not exactly drop-in. You'll need to be familiar with working on the M14's barrel and gas system or get it sent off to be professionally installed. As with many of these older guns, they were not designed with modularity or easy servicing in mind. If you want it done right, you might not be able to do it yourself.

Barrels and small parts are a mixed bag. There's still a good amount of like-new surplus floating around in terms of period-correct parts. Companies like Criterion make a number of barrels appropriate for the M14, but installation is a more professional endeavor. Headspacing is best left to a custom shop, as it's a complicated procedure unlike the easy install on AR rifles or modern pre-fit bolt guns. Many of the quality barrels are chrome lined, and companies like Fulton Armory are experts at their installation, for which you can't use a chamber reamer. The barrels must be intricately timed and headspaced to the receiver and the bolt. Suffice to say, it needs to be done right.

Optical mounts and the like are still widely available, and you can have your choice of receiver-mounted versions or scout style, like those from Ulitmak. I have had success with both of these, but again it should be noted that these are truly not the same as installation of parts on an AR. Installing an M14 receiver optic mount is a bit of a pain and, while not exactly 10/10 difficult, it does require know-how.

You might be sensing a trend here that these rifles aren't exactly easy to work on. **GDTM**



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THE BARRELS OF DOUG

Each Douglas Barrel is honed with more than 75 years of handcrafted precision.

When I began wildcatting the 2Fity-Hillbilly cartridge—now the .25 Creedmoor—a decade ago, I had two rifles made up for it. The second rifle was a Remington Model Seven with a 1:8 twist barrel, and when Hornady introduced the .25 Creedmoor, I was excited to finally have factory ammo for my rifle. Unfortunately, Hornady's factory ammo is loaded with bullets that require a 1:7.5-inch twist, and the ammo did not shoot well in my rifle.

So, I was left with a dilemma: Do I keep handloading for my rifle … or rebarrel it?

I'd ordered my 1:8 twist 0.25-caliber barrel from Douglas Barrels in Charleston, West Virginia, and my personal gunsmith Jerry Dove at Dove's Custom Guns installed it on my Model Seven. With my handloads, that rifle shot very well. I used it to take a big nine-point whitetail in Nebraska and several other deer. Since I already have a brand-new Christensen Arms Ridgeline FFT rifle in .25 Creedmoor—with the correctly twisted barrel—I didn't see much sense in refinishing my Model Seven into another .25 Creedmoor. Instead, I sent the rifle to Douglas Barrels for the installation of a different barrel in a different caliber and chambering.

A LEGACY BARREL MAKER

When I was much younger, I was heavily involved with traditional muzzleloading rifles, and back then you could not be around muzzleloading rifle enthusiasts without them talking about Douglas Barrels. When I first learned about Melvin Forbes and his tack driving featherlight New Ultra Light Arms rifles, I found out he used Douglas Barrels exclusively. That's the barrel Melvin put on my first NULA rifle, which was chambered in .35 Remington.

Douglas Barrels has a stellar barrel-making reputation that began in 1948 when a hobbyist gunsmith named G.R. Douglas founded the company. By 1954, Douglas was fully committed to fabricating premium, "ultra-rifled" custom gun barrels. Douglas pioneered a unique push-button rifling approach, where a handmade carbide button is



Travis Beasly talks Richard Mann (left) through the barrel-making process at Douglas Barrels.

pressed through a barrel hydraulically, and using a gear-driven process, the button displaces instead of subtracts metal to form cleaner rifling than is achievable with the cut rifling practices. The company has occupied the same building since inception.

Douglas Barrels has a long history of supplying winning shooters, long-range professional marksmen, and the U.S. Military with ultra-rifled barrels that have delivered results. The walls at Douglas Barrels are covered with awards of the unrivaled success their barrels have achieved. Also, Douglas Barrels is the only gun barrel manufacturer to have had a barrel on the surface of the moon during the Apollo missions—and the rifle Bradley Cooper's character used in *American Sniper* was fitted with a Douglas Barrel.

Aside from their unique 75-year technique of gear-driven push-button barrel rifling, some other things set Douglas Barrels apart. Unlike some of the big-name barrel makers you read about in all the gun magazines and see splashed all over social media, Douglas does very little advertising, and they have not engaged in big market-





Everything at Douglas Barrels, from the barrels they turn out to the tools they use to make them, comes from within their own shop and is tried to absolute precision.

When it comes to modern barrel making, machines and automation play a part, but there are some things humans need to do with their hands if you want a high-quality barrel.



Hand tools are part of the process at Douglas Barrels because—though they use some automation—their craft is tied to humans with unparalleled barrel making skill.

ing campaigns. They've never needed either to get business—the word of mouth of satisfied customers has and always will be the best marketing available. This allows them to offer their services at very competitive prices.

The other difference is experience: Not only does Douglas still use the same techniques and even the same machines they built their reputation on, but the experience of their technicians is unrivaled in the barrel-making industry. They have an average time in service of about 20 years. Travis Asbury—the plant manager at Douglas Barrels—has been with the company for 2 decades. Asbury's father worked for Douglas Barrels, and Asbury's first visit to the company was on his way home from the hospital the day he was born.

Unquestionably, when it comes to precision barrel making, there are mechanical tolerances that must be maintained, but Asbury and some of the other long-term Douglas employees also have that "feel" for what's right and what's not. It's a skill that can only come from crafting, looking at and gauging thousands of barrels by hand and by eye, for many years.



When I was visiting Douglas, Asbury tossed a newly bored barrel on the rack where a light could shine through it, and he told me to look through the bore and see what I thought. I did, and the barrel looked damn good to me. Asbury said, "Let me see." In a matter of seconds, Asbury said, "I'm glad you don't work here. That barrel is sh*t. It will never leave this factory."

Two years ago, Rodney Chiodo and a couple of his close friends purchased Douglas Barrels. Chiodo is a businessman from Pennsylvania, but more importantly, Chiodo is a hunter, shooter and handloader. Just a few minutes after I met Chiodo, we were talking about the different ballistic advantages of various cartridges, handloading techniques and about the deer we did and didn't kill last season. Years back, Chiodo had purchased a barrel from Douglas, and he'd driven down from Pennsylvania to pick it up. He became enthralled with

the company, the employees, and the character of both. When the opportunity to purchase Douglas Barrels presented itself, Chiodo was all over it like a rut-crazed buck on a hot doe.

The new ownership is committed to maintaining the high standards Douglas Barrels is known for, but also in helping Douglas step into the future. They've made substantial investments in new machinery, rededicated the company to maintaining their industry-leading four-week delivery times, created an all-new customer-friendly website to make online barrel ordering easier and hired a new metallurgist. Douglas Barrels now implements MET (Metal Enhancement Technology) and a new lapping-type process for all their barrels. During my visit, it was refreshing to see that this legacy company will continue to deliver even better barrels as they approach 100 years of business.



PROOF IN PRECISION

But, back to my rifle. As mentioned, one advantage with Douglas Barrels is that they will not only make you a barrel in the caliber you want, at the length and contour you want, and with the twist rate you want, but they will also install that barrel on your action and chamber it for whatever cartridge makes your heart go pitter-patter. Douglas has a large catalog of carrel contours, but one of the coolest machines they have is a barrel contour duplicator. This allows Douglas to match the contour of the barrel they make you to the barrel they're replacing on your rifle.

With my rifle, I made it rather easy for them: The first Douglas barrel I ever owned was the 0.35-caliber barrel on



Douglas Barrels sources the best chrome molly and stainless-steel that is available worldwide for the barrels they craft.

Master barrel maker Travis Asbury scrutinizing a finished barrel after air gauging at Douglas Barrels.

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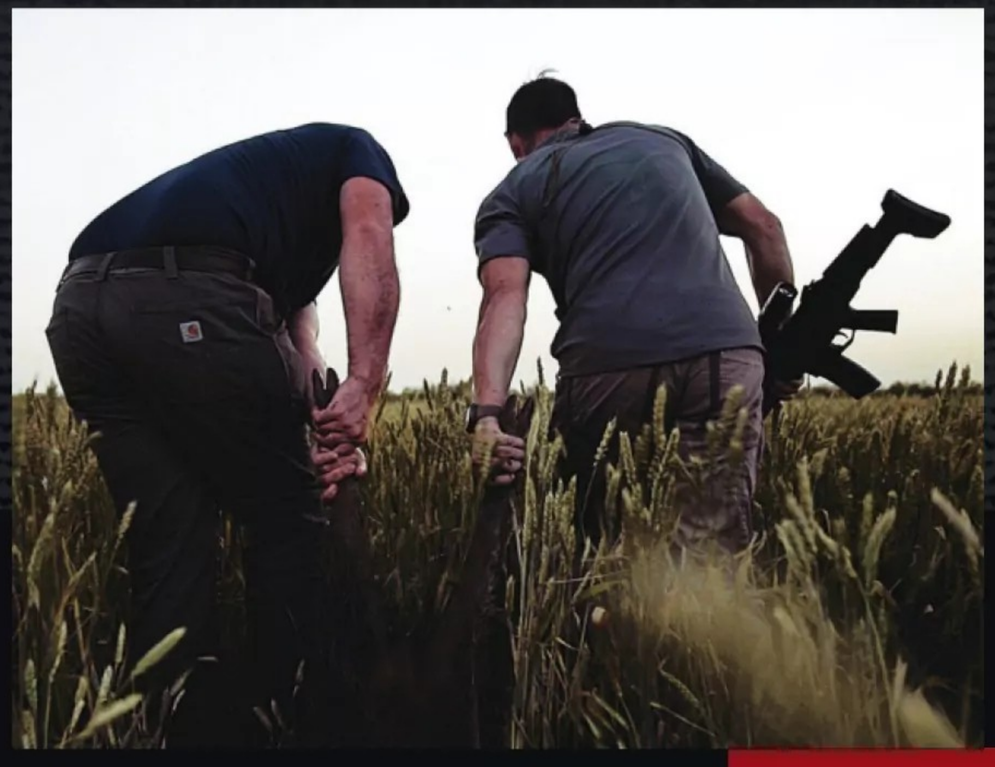
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The author with his rebarreled Remington Model Seven (center) with Travis Beasley (left) and Travis Asbury (right) of Douglas Barrels.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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my NULA rifle in .35 Remington, so I specified a 0.35-caliber barrel with a standard Remington contour and a 1:12 twist rate, chambered in .35 Remington. The common twist rate for a .35 Remington is 1:16, but I wanted to specifically shoot the Tipped Controlled Chaos bullets from Lehigh Defense, and Mike Cyrus of Lehigh Defense suggested the 1:12 twist rate.

Douglas Barrels' master gunsmith, Travis Beasley, made the barrel, installed, crowned and chambered it, and like with all the barrels Douglas makes, it was air-gauge tested and—most importantly—it held up to the eyeball scrutiny of Asbury.

Cyrus picked the re-barreled rifle up for me, and while he had it, he worked up some handloads for the Lehigh Defense 180-grain Tipped Controlled Chaos bullet. After he dropped the rifle off, I tested it with those loads and two factory loads, including a hardcast load from Buffalo Bore. The handloads shot great, but the real surprise was Federal's factory 200-grain load that averaged almost three-quarters of an inch. I think G.R. Douglas, Chiodo and even Asbury—with his keen barrel-peering eyes—would have been proud of how it performed. I sure was.

SHOOTING RESULTS: REMINGTON MODEL SEVEN W/18.5-INCH, 1:12 TWIST, DOUGLAS BARREL

LOAD	MV	ME	SD	PRECISION
180-grain Lehigh Defense TCC	2,375	2,255	11.1	11.1
200-grain Federal Soft Point	1,936	1,664	31.9	0.79
230-grain Buffalo Bore "Heavy" Hardcast	2,063	2,175	22.5	1.24

Notes: Muzzle velocities are the average of nine shots measured with a Garmin XERO C1 chronograph. Precision is the average of three, three-shot groups.



Handloads with the 180-grain Lehigh Defense Tipped Controlled Chaos bullets delivered consistent sub-inch groups.

In today's world, you'd not expect a custom-crafted rifle barrel installed and chambered on your action at the cost of less than $700—all finished up in less than four weeks—to deliver dime-spitting accuracy. But the guys at Douglas didn't think it was a big deal at all. Hell, they've been making barrels that shoot like this and doing the same thing for a long, long time. **GDTM**

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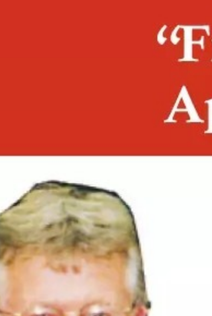

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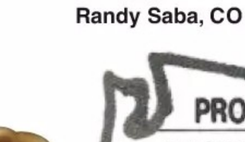

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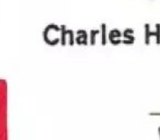
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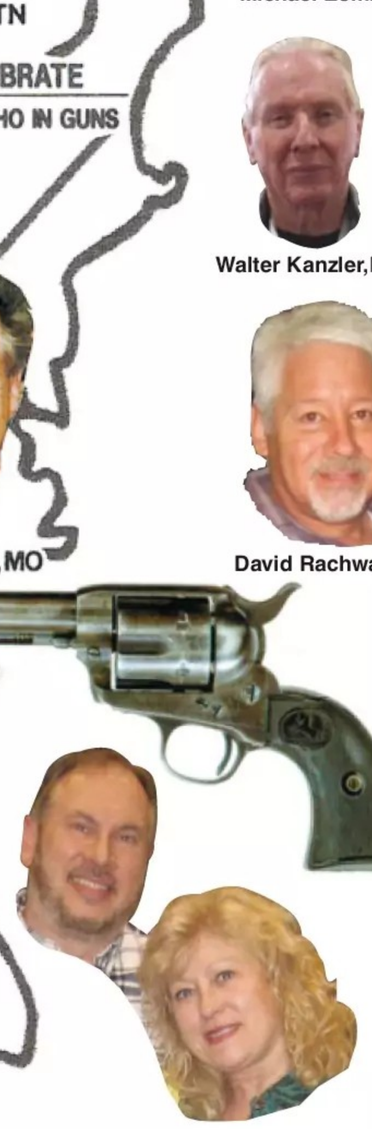
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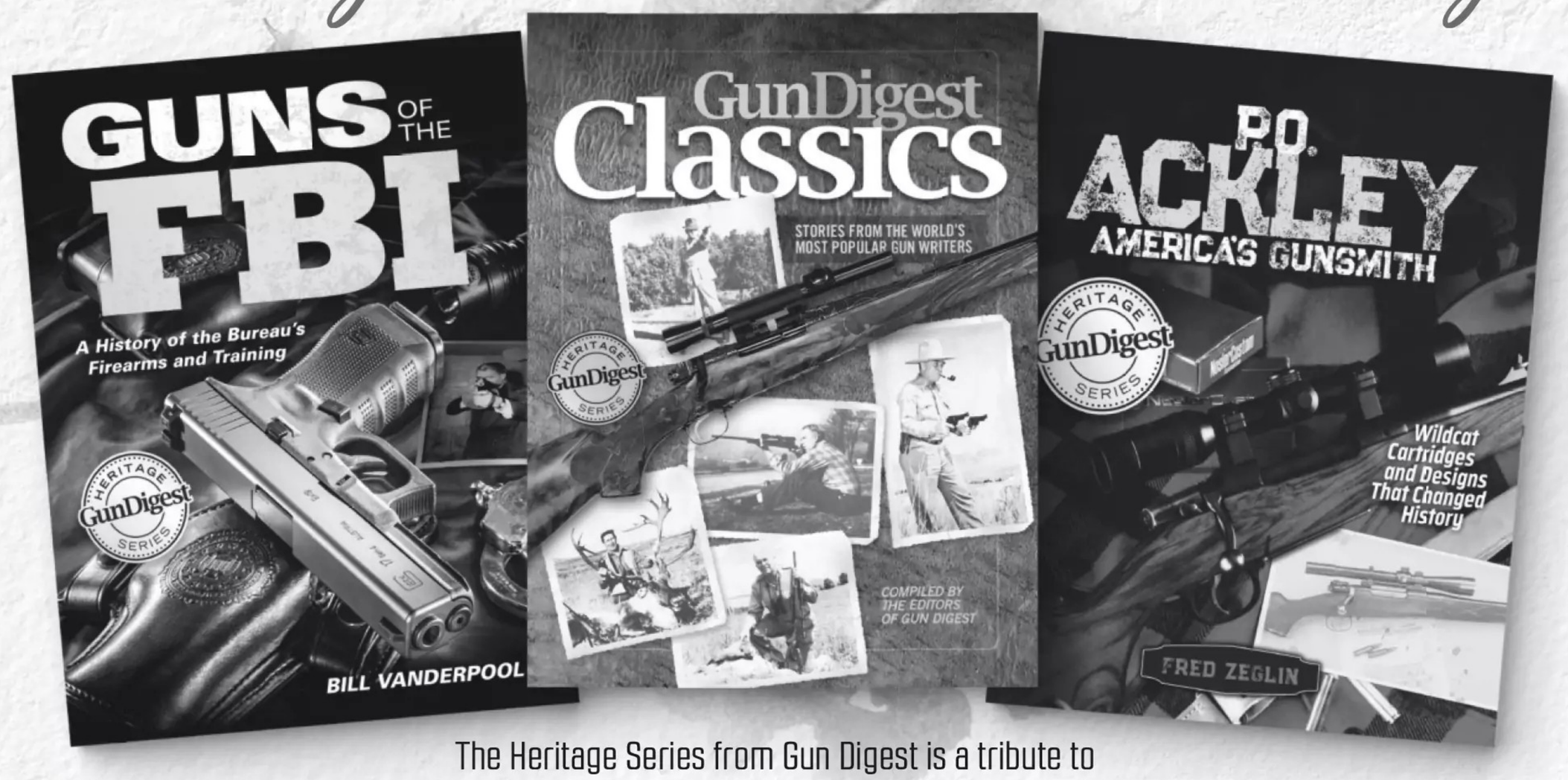
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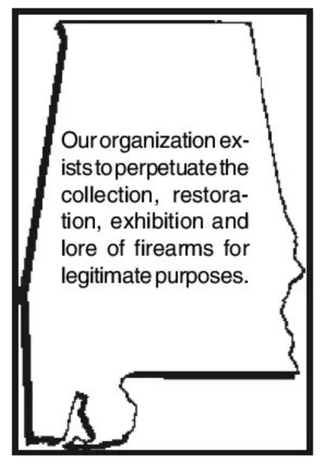
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6-F Browning .22 LR "Nomad Model" Belgian Made Auto Pistol 4 ½" barrel with mint bore, 99% original bright blue finish, blade front and target style fully adjustable rear sights, mint checkered black plastic wrap around, Browning logo grips with flared bottom, comes with (1) 10 shot original magazine, made in 1968 with perfect function and comes in original logo zipper pouch (C&R) $635

7-F Charter Arms .32 H&R Magnum "Professional Model" Double / single Action Revolver 3" ribbed barrel with mint bore, 99%+ original "Black Nitride" finish, fixed sights with green "Hi Viz" front, 7 shot swing out cylinder, mint smooth dark Walnut finger groove, round butt grips, looks and functions as new in original black plastic case with all paper $485

8-F Charter Arms .38 Special "Off Duty Model" Double / Single Action Revolver 1 7/8" barrel with mint bore, 98% original blue on barrel, cylinder, hammer, trigger and straps, alloy frame has 98%+ finish with a purplish tinge, 5 shot cylinder, factory "bobbed" hammer, minty checkered hardwood round butt grips with silver medallions, works fine both single and double action $305

9-F Colt .22 LR "Officers Model 3rd Issue" Target Revolver 6" barrel with mint bore, 98% original bright blue with fire blue on back of hammer, trigger and screw heads, (with bright sides on hammer) minty checkered Walnut service style grips with silver Colt medallions with both panels stamp numbered to frame and crane, excellent timing and lockup, made in 1930 (first year for .22LR) and looks super, collector quality (C&R) $985

10-F Colt .22 LR "Police Positive Target" Revolver 6" barrel with mint bore, 90% original blue thinning and graying but no pitting, adjustable bead front and adjustable "U" notch rear sights, nice fire blue, very good service style checkered Walnut grips with silver Colt medallions, nice function, made in 1924, 2nd issue "C" model (C&R) $495

11-F Colt 32/20 / .32 W.C.F. Police Positive Special Double / Single Action Revolver 4" barrel with mint bore, fixed sights, 99% original bright blue and fire blue on screw heads and back of hammer, mint checkered hard rubber Colt logo grips with large "C" around escutcheon, works perfectly and looks unfired, "1905" last patent date on top of barrel, a 1st issue Police Positive Special in near new collector quality condition (C&R) $895

12-F Colt .38 Special "Officers Model Match 5th Issue" Target Revolver 6" barrel with mirror bright bore, 99% original bright and fire blue with just a hint of a drag line on cylinder, 1/8" pinned on blade front sight and "Accro" fully adjustable target rear sight, large wide spur target hammer, serrated backstrap and trigger, mint original large checkered Walnut target grips with silver Colt medallions, super smooth action with wonderful trigger, timing and lockup , these were the last and best old style "Officers Models" made and this one is near new, made in 1966 in the "Official Police" serial number range, collector quality (C&R) $1750

13-F Colt .38 Special "Agent" 2nd Issue Double / Single Action Revolver 2" barrel with mint bore, fixed sights, 99% original matte black finish, mint smooth Walnut "wrap under" square butt grips with gold Colt medallions, looks and functions as new, collector quality $785

14-F Colt .45 Long Colt "New Service" Double / Single Action Revolver 4 ½" barrel with excellent bright bore, fixed sights, 98% of a good looking early refinish blue with markings visible but pretty much washed out, very good checkered hard rubber "Colt" logo original grips with some very minor edge chipping, lanyard at butt, excellent function, early model with flat cylinder latch, made in 1907 and uncommon in short barrel variation (C&R) $865

15-F CZ .32 ACP "Model VZOR 70" Czech Military Auto Pistol 3 5/8" barrel with excellent bore, fixed sights, 98% original blue, minty checkered and serrated black plastic "CZ" logo grips, "Century Arms" import marked, excellent function with (1) 8 shot finger rest bottom blued magazine, excellent function, near new overall $395

16-F CZ .45 ACP "Model CZ97-B" Single / Double Action Auto Pistol 4 7/8" barrel with mint bore, 98%+ original matte blue/black finish, (3) white dot sights, mint checkered wood grips, all matching, as new in original black plastic case with (2) 10 round magazines, manufactured 1998 ..... $795

17-F Hammerli .22 LR "Lenzberg Made" Swiss Old Model Single Shot Free Pistol 11.3" barrel with mint bore, 90% original blue with fading and graying on round barrel, "Martini" type lever action with set trigger lever on left side, factory ramp blade front and elaborate fully adjustable rear sights, fully adjustable trigger, fancy contoured Walnut grips are coated in some sort of epoxy black finish which has chipped off or worn away showing badly chipped edges and some repaired sections, forend is plain varnished Walnut, excellent function and fabulous trigger pull, grips make this gun look terrible but still works fine (C&R) $465

18-F Harrington & Richardson .32 ACP 1st Variation "H&R Self Loading" Hammerless Auto Pistol 3 ½" barrel with good strong but lightly pitted bore, fixed sights, 95%+ nice high polish blue spoiled by a patch of pitting on left front edge of slide with a little carry over to right side of slide, very good H&R logo checkered hard rubber grips with a small chipout at locating pin on bottom of left panel, some spotty pitting on original magazine (C&R $425

19-F Harrington & Richardson .22 LR "Model 950" Double / Single Action "Western Style" Revolver 5 ½" barrel with mint bore, fixed sights, 9 shot cylinder, 99 ½% original matte nickel finish, mint (2) piece smooth Walnut grips, excellent function, as new in original box $385

20-F Harrington & Richardson .22 LR "Sportsman 999" 2nd Variation Large Frame Top Break 9 Shot Revolver 6"ovoid barrel with mint bore, 98% original bright blue, all matching numbers, 2nd variation guns have adjustable front sights, windage adjustable target style square notch rear sights and frame mounted firing pins, long pivoting lever cylinder release, mint checkered Walnut (sides and back), target grips, finger rest trigger-guard and "Rice" bird's head frame, rarely seen in mint condition but this one looks and functions as new, collector quality "D" prefix serial number, made in 1933 (C&R) $625

21-F High Standard .22 LR "Model HD Military" Auto Pistol 6 ¾" heavy barrel with mint bore, 98% original bright blue with one small spot of scratching on right rear of frame, blade front and fully adjustable square notch rear, excellent full checkered Walnut grips with a couple small chipouts on right upper panel, minty (2) tone unmarked bottom release magazine, made in 1948, comes with an instruction sheet on how to adjust rear sight, excellent function, super trigger (C&R) $580

22-F High Standard .22 LR "Model HD Military" Auto Pistol 6 ¾" heavy barrel with mint bore, 98% original blue, target style sights, some pitting on front and back straps, very good full checkered Walnut grips with a small crack on bottom on right grip, some light dents under safety lever, excellent function, made in 1946 and comes with an instruction sheet on how to adjust rear sight, (C&R) $525

23-F High Standard .22 LR "Model S-101 Supermatic" Target Auto Pistol 6 ¾" barrel with mint bore, factory integral (2) slot muzzle break, 98%+ original blue, blade front and fully adjustable target rear sights, filler strip under barrel is missing and no barrel weights, grooved front and back straps plus grooved trigger, mint original checkered brown plastic thumbrest grips, push button barrel release, super trigger pull, 10 round cadmium plated magazine marked, "Hi Standard", collector quality, this one will out shoot most low or middle priced pistols today for less money, made in 1957 (C&R) $595

24-F High Standard .22 LR "Model 104 Series Supermatic Citation" Target Auto Pistol 5 ½" barrel with mint bore, bull barrel with target style crown, (2) factory side notches cut for stabilizer, drilled, tapped and plugged for weights (no accessories included), minty checkered Walnut thumbrest grips with gold logo medallions, excellent full blue 10 shot magazine, case colored serrated trigger with adjusting screw, serrated front and back straps, push button barrel release, super trigger pull, collector quality, made in 1962 (C&R) $695

25-F High Standard .22 LR "Model 107 Military Supermatic Citation" Target Auto Pistol 5 ½" bull barrel with mint bore, 1/8" blade front and fully adjustable "bridge type" target rear sights, barrel has target crown, (2) factory cuts for muzzle brake and factory drilled and tapped holes on bottom for accessory weights (none supplied), color case hardened serrated trigger and clip release, red plastic bottom 10 round magazine, mint full checkered Walnut grips, push button release barrel, collector quality, made in 1969 (C&R) $695

26-F High Standard .22 Winchester Magnum "Model DM101" Derringer Pistol 3 ½" barrel with mint bores, fixed sights, 97% original blue, factory smooth white imitation Ivory grips, excellent function, made in 1971 (C&R) $395

27-F Llama .22 LR "Model XV" Pocket Auto Pistol 3 ½" barrel with mint bore, 99 ½% original bright blue, vent rib on slide with blade front and windage adjustable rear sights, grip safety, loaded chamber indicator, (7) shot mint original blue magazine, mint checkered black plastic thumbrest grips with Llama logos, as new in original flip top plastic case with matching label, original manual and new spare firing pin sharp looker, excellent function, collector quality $495

28-F Rossi .22 LR "Model 518" Single / Double Action Stainless Revolver 4" heavy rib barrel with mint bore, all bright stainless construction showing near perfect finish, pinned on orange insert blade front and fully adjustable target style white outline rear sights, mint factory checkered black rubber wrap around, finger groove grips with Rossi medallions, perfect function and nice quality $335

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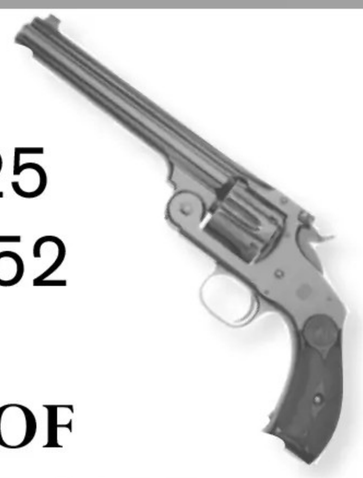


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UNDERSTATED HIPOWER

Enacting the Yost effect.



I've had a nodding acquaintance with Ted Yost for a bunch of years now. I first met him when I attended one of the Gunsite Alumni Shoots, known in the fraternity as GAS. While there, I took advantage and took photos of Ted and his operation, since he was at that time the resident gunsmith at Gunsite. I also happened to win a GSP as the prize for winning the shoot-off, which GSP Ted had built. (Ted, it has since been modified and isn't like you built it. Sorry about that.)

That article gave me entrée to editors and led directly to my starting with *Gun Digest* books. Thanks, Ted.

A few years back, one of the other Gunsite alumni had a firearm in excess of his needs. It was a Browning HiPower, in .40S&W, one that Ted had customized. I was deep into a HiPower period then—and I had to have it—and the offer was for a very fair (perhaps even bargain) price.

So, I bought it.

THE FAVORED FORTY

When the .40 S&W hit the market in 1990, it was an immediate hit. Everyone who built a self-loading pistol had to have something in the lineup in .40 caliber … or risk being left behind. The first iterations of .40-caliber pistols were simply 9mms with a different breechface, barrel chamber and bore, and magazine.

And they were not entirely satisfactory. Well, the 1911-based ones were, but those who favored the 1911 stuck with a .45-caliber, except for the competition shooters, who would sell their souls for one more round in a magazine.

The "9 converted to a 40" models were quickly changed, and changed again and again, until they became properly-built-for-.40 pistols—except for Glock, where Gaston had the good luck to have built a pistol portly enough that changing it to .40 from 9mm wasn't a big deal.

FN—thorough engineering prowess has always been their strength—did not have the same model evolution. They did that in the workshops and test ranges. What they found was horrifying. OK, the classic BHP, or HiPower, is a steel frame where more than 80 percent of the steel is machined away from the forging.

Another gun writer described it once as being made from the "best grade of Velveeta-class steel," and he wasn't far off. It didn't need exotic alloys or high-strength steels; it worked and worked for a lifetime in 9mm.

But chambered in .40, the test guns died a quick and ugly death. Barrels, slides and frames all expired in different ways and at different round-count intervals, but they all died. So, the engineers rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

The 40 BHP differs from the 9mm in three major ways, besides the breechface and bore. First, the .40-caliber barrel has three locking lugs instead of

two. This spreads out the case-thrust load over 50 percent more steel. The slide is heavier, even though it's the same length as the 9mm. This, combined with a heavier recoil spring, reduced slide velocity, which was just killing slides and frames. And, lastly, the frames were made of steel castings.

How does this help? Simple: The raw casting can be just a few thousandths oversized in the areas that need precision fitting. With the machining greatly reduced, FN could cast the 40 frames out of a much stronger alloy—an alloy that didn't even need heat-treatment to make it strong.

One thing they did was keep the magazine dimensions, so they could use the same un-killable frames in 9mm. This had the unfortunate consequence of reducing the 40 BHP magazine capacity to 10 rounds. What made it not such a big deal was that, at that time, there was a new law—the Assault Weapon Ban of 1994—which prohibited manufacture of new magazines greater than 10 rounds. So, if you liked the HiPower but were stuck with only 10 rounds, you'd likely opt for a 40 rather than a 9.

YOST-ING THE HIPOWER

So, this particular 40 made by FN in 1993 (an early 40 then) and imported to the United States, Ted built as an SRT model, and it's so marked on the slide, and the frame has Yost Custom on the dust cover.

The slide has a Novak-dovetail rear sight, but with the front face of the rear sight cut bluff, so you could use it as a cocking surface if you needed to do one-handed manipulations. The front blade has, as is Ted's custom, a gold line up the middle, with the blade and the gold serrated.

On the length in-between the sights, Ted serrated the slide. Right-hand side of the 40 slides don't give you a clue as to the added steel, but the left side does. FN kept the slide-stop lever dimensions, and this meant they had to machine a slight recess on the left side for clearance of the slide-stop lever boss. The 40 slide has the same external extractor that FN switched all BHP production to around 1962.

On the frame, Ted went and stippled the frontstrap all the way up to the high-cut trigger guard. On the backstrap, he stippled it slightly lower than that, but plenty high enough to give you a good grip. This he calls his Sharkskin stippling, and it's an apt description. The grips appear to be Spegels, with the sexy contours and hand-filling checkering that anyone who has ever picked up a properly stocked HiPower falls in love with.

The bottom of the frame gives the origin away. The cast frames have the bottom of the frame, at the back of the





The Yost BHP, in its FN case from the factory, with all the extras.

magazine well, serrated in the direction of the bore axis. Apparently, there were still very few 40s built on forged frames, but only a few. The magwell opening has a small but definite bevel cut by Ted—it aids fast reloads.

The magazines for the 40s, while the same dimensions as the 9s, only held 10 rounds. So, the 40s gained the addition of a spring-lever to assist magazine ejection when you want the empty gone. This tends to rub the cast-frame serrations, but that's life.

The BHP is notorious for biting the hand who shoots it. My first experience with a BHP was that of blood freely running down my hand from where the hammer had bit me. Ted sculpted the hammer so it can't reach your hand, even if the web of your hand rides up over the tang … as mine does. A small thing, but it matters to some of us.

Another thing he did was to upgrade the safety. The original thumb safety was designed at a time when it was common to carry a pistol with the hammer down on an empty chamber.



The Sharkskin stippling Yost applies to the front and backstraps.

The backstrap gets the Sharkskin treatment, and it makes hanging on to the brisk 40 a lot easier.

The thicker slide of the 40 had to be machined with a slight step to clear the standard slide stop lever boss.





So, the thumb safety was an accessory not a vital implement. Frankly, the originals were and are miserable to try to use in Condition One.

Many have tried to improve the safety, and some came close. Ted is one of the few who made it something you could actually use. If you're familiar with the 1911, then the Yost BHP safety is a known quantity. And if your only experience with HiPowers is the old safety, you will be amazed.

And, lastly, Ted worked on the trigger. The original magazine disconnecter? Gone. The new firing pin safety, there since the MKIII, is still there, but you won't notice it. The trigger is not competition light, and I suspect that the more-violent cycling of the BHP is part of that. But it is clean and crisp, even if it is 4¼ pounds.

You'll also likely notice that the recoil spring is much stouter than it is on a 9mm. It has to be, as the 40 is stronger, even if it isn't a .45.

One thing Ted didn't change is the barrel. It's the factory original, with the serial number matching the frame, and I suspect that it wasn't accidental. FN

YOST 40 +

The 40 was going to be the one ring to rule them all, even if it wasn't going to bring them all in the darkness and bind them. It would be nearly a .45, with nearly the magazine capacity of the 9mm, and it would do your taxes, slice your bread and wash your car.

Well, not all that, but it was going to be epic.

And then reality set in.

First, the 40 was hard on the first pistols made for it. And then, once the pistols were beefed up, we found that it was hard on a lot of shooters. The standard load, a 180-grainer at 950 fps, wasn't too bad. But in the interests of getting even closer to the .45 in performance, we started seeing 165-grain bullets at almost 1,100 fps.

And the 180-grain bullet moving at 950 fps wasn't kidding around, either. It turned out that the less-dedicated, the smaller-handed shooters—the people who didn't really want to be shooting guns anyway—found it really tough to shoot. For police departments, that meant more time and ammo to get them "qualified."

Basically, the 40 over-promised and under-delivered.

But competition shooters loved it anyway. They could shoot Major and use a magazine that held more rounds than anything in .45 could.

The real-world results were muddy at best. While the math and the physics tell us that the 40 was better than the 9mm, not all users agreed.

The reign of the 40 lasted not quite 35 years. Once word got out that the FBI was going back to the 9mm, departments across the country followed suit. Now, you are hard-pressed to find a new 40 being made, and used ones languish in gun shop display cases, if they make it there at all.

Millions were made, and they will last, and your grandkids will still see .40 ammo in gun shops (assuming there are gun shops then), but it's being replaced by the 9mm.

And, yes, you can convert your BHP in 40 to 9mm. Just ring up Bar-Sto barrels and they can set you up. Oh, and buy 9mm magazines, too.

The BHP benefits from a de-horning, but the hammer needs more to keep it from biting the hand that feeds it.

makes good barrels, and this one is no exception.

When I first acquired it, I had this notion of scoring a 9mm conversion barrel from Bar-Sto (yes, they make such a thing, and it works just fine) and swapping the Yost 40 to 9mm. But it was just too good-looking to put buckets of 9mm ammo through it, and besides, I had a box-stock 40 that I could do the same thing to if I ever wanted to. (Which I eventually did, and that is another BHP story.)

AND SHE SHOOTS!

I did test-fire it and found it to be superbly accurate. And that leads me to the accuracy testing I did in the oddest way.

I was, at the time, regularly assisting teaching LE Patrol Rifle classes. The three-day classes had the last day at a National Guard base, and the five-day armorer's class spent the last two days of each class at the NG base. Once the students had passed the qual course, we split them up into groups, and they all had a chance to get runs in on the Army computer course, with knock-down targets out to 300 meters.



The 40 BHP mags only hold 10 rounds, and there's a spring to make ejection brisker.

The head instructor, who had written the course syllabus, made it mandatory for all instructors to shoot the qualifying course for score, on the record, in each class. It didn't take long before we were all posting perfect scores. Then, we used whatever rifle we thought was interesting to try. AK? Sure. M1A? You bet. FAL? Of course.



The top of the slide is serrated from the rear sight to the front. And the front blade has a gold insert.

All passing.

Then, we started shooting the rifle qual course with handguns. That took a while, but we managed to pass.

Someone had the idea of trying them on the 300-meter course. That one is 20 targets rising up to be hit and fall down, from 50 to 300 meters. A passing score in the Army is 12 out of 20. One day, word came back that the lead instructor just shot a passing score. Oh, and did I mention this was not shooting from the foxhole? This was done standing.

Well, I had to give it a try. As it happened, the only suitable pistol I had along that day was the Ted Yost BHP in 40. (Yes, I had shot a passing score on the qual course with it an hour earlier.) So, I stood there and proceeded to shoot a 14. When the lead instructor heard that, he had to stay up until he shot a 15. (Yes, we are a competitive group.)

So, there it is: a Ted Yost custom 40 BHP that practically fell into my lap from a fellow Gunsite grad and with which I have shot a passing score on the Army rifle qualification course. Standing. The late Walter Brennan had a role in a TV show called *The Guns of Will Sonnet*. One line that his character used more than once was: "It's not bragging if you can do it."

I'm not bragging … much. **GDTM**

The rear sight, with the front face contoured to make it possible for one-hand slide manipulation, if the occasion warrants it.


PYTHON .357
.357 MAGNUM CTG.
SMITH & WESSON

OLD GUNFIGHTER'S PISTOL

Addressing the downsides of a revolver.



The Western lawman. Cop movies set in the 1970s and '80s. Detective pulp novels with dames and private investigators. Wyatt Earp. Roger Murtaugh getting too old for this sh*t. All these share two common traits: unironic mustaches and deadly wheel guns. But there's more to the revolver than history, pop culture, and a throwback to ancient days.

There are people in the gun world who wonder why this far into the 21st century anyone would choose a revolver over a modern semi-auto pistol. Well, we're glad you asked. We're reminded of the late Pat Rogers and his old axiom: "The mission drives the gear train." In short, for some people, and some situations, the revolver can be the dreaded "just as good as," or an even better.

While it is true that the modern



The gunfight a cop has is often very different than the one a concealed carrier has in the streets—and even then the wheel gun usually holds enough.

tary-grade semi-auto service pistol has replaced the revolver for hard use in defensive carry, police and military service, this in no way means the revolver isn't a capable handgun for defensive and sport use.

To start, let's address what's often perceived as an issue when revolvers are considered for defensive carry use: the deadly duo of low ammunition capacity and slow reload speed.

AMMUNITION CAPACITY

This is actually a non-issue for the concealed carry paradigm. We can learn quite a bit by examining what has happened in real-world incidents. To borrow a line from Tom Givens, when speaking of experiences from his students who've actually been in defensive shootings: "three shots in 3 seconds at 3 feet" is still what a typical defensive shooting looks like.

It's here that it's worthy to note Givens is also famous for saying, "The primary cause of needing to reload is missing."

To pursue this idea further, we draw on the research of friend and mentor Keith Jones. Jones is a Vietnam combat vet, nearly 40-year police officer, multiple gunfight winner, very competent researcher and gun guy. Back in the days when coppers only carried revolvers, Jones looked at the experiences of the officers in his area. He found that in 199 incidents, from 1970 through 1988, there was only one (!) instance where the officer had to reload to prevail in the fight.

Everything else was settled with the five or six rounds available in the wheel gun.

The patrol officer shootout is often a very different fight than we see in the concealed carry/defensive pistol realm; suspects fight more aggressively to avoid arrest, multiple suspects are more likely to be involved, and there's a duty to pursue. Yet in these 199 incidents, the revolver clearly had enough capacity to get the job done.

Claude Werner, a gifted instructor,





noted researcher and generally the smartest guy in the room tells us the average number of shots fired in the defensive gunfight is 1.43.

RELIABILITY

An underappreciated advantage of the revolver is the rate of malfunctions that occur in real-world fights. Although the military-grade semi-auto service pistol is clearly more tolerant of abuse and hard service than the revolver, all semi-auto pistols are subject to malfunction when the shooter uses a weak grip, is floating the gun one-handed, if the ammunition is underpowered and if the pistol is poorly lubed and/or full of dust bunnies.

While the “six for sure” mantra of revolver proponents is a myth, it’s a fact the revolver is vastly more tolerant of a poor grip and garbage ammunition.

Even though yours truly started in the defensive handgun world in the days when cops carried by-God-steel-framed-revolvers and leather gear, uses for the wheel gun nowadays include backup gun/lightweight carry gun, hunting/“kit gun,” general fun shooting and training gun.

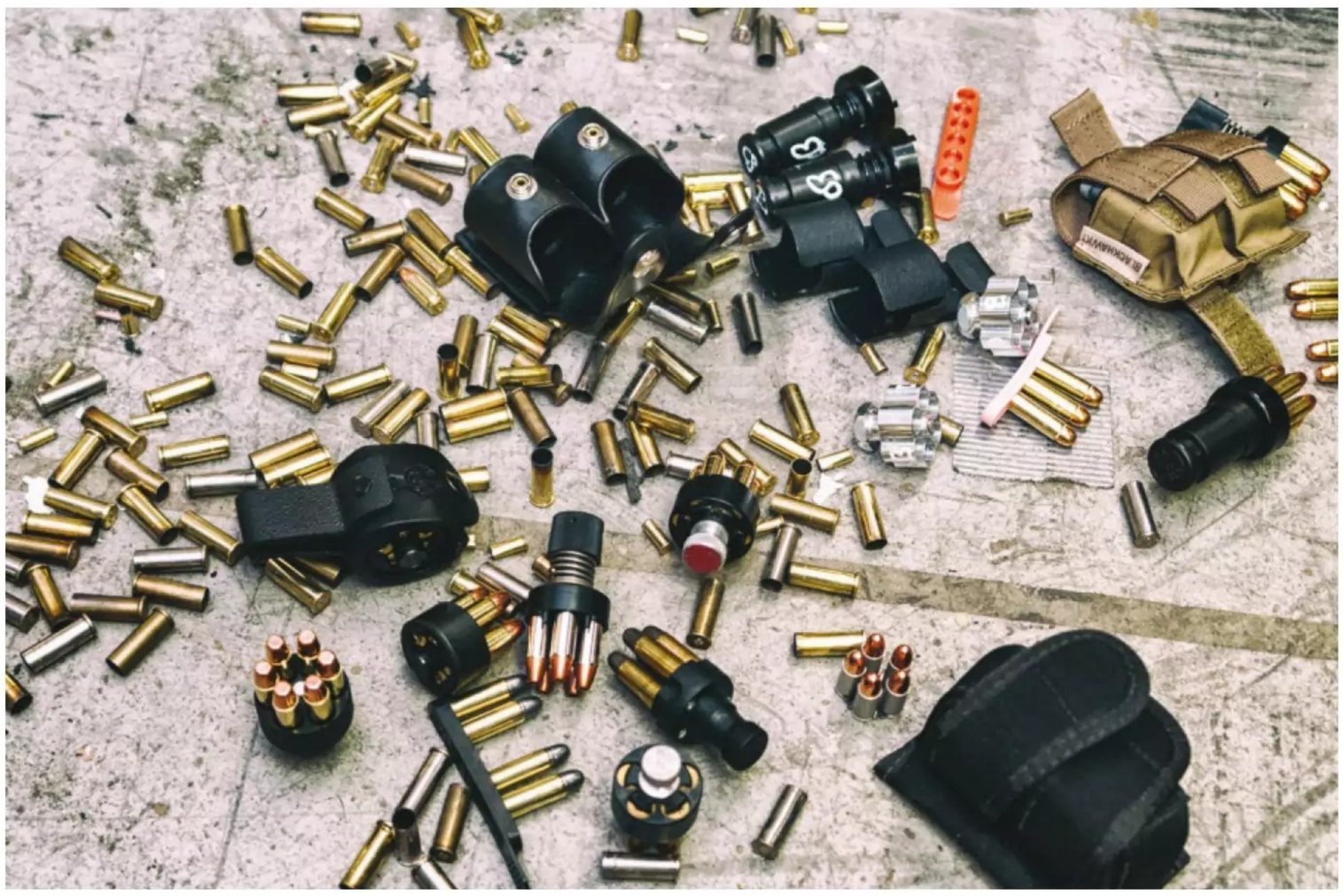
Being an old cop, using the snubby as a backup gun was a natural thing. Over the years we have tried several semi-auto backup guns but have repeatedly come back to the snub due to some very concrete advantages that this platform gives versus the semi-auto pistol.

An airweight snub, such as an S&W 642 or a Ruger LCR, generally carries on an ankle or in a pocket better than any semi-auto pistol. It also draws more cleanly and consistently when pushing speed. The snub can be reliably fired with hard muzzle contact, clothing interference or even through a pocket. The shape of a snubby often makes it conceal better than a similarly sized semi-auto, and this shape also makes it easier to get a shooting grip on the gun when carried in deep concealment.

In extensive testing, shooting and training with various pocket pistols over the years, not one can equal the reliability of an S&W or Ruger snub. The perceived advantages of higher capacity and faster reload speed are siren songs, but the .38 snub still wins the reliability game—along with the aforementioned cleaner draw and speed to a first-shot hit.

ACCURACY

It’s boringly common to find service-grade revolvers in .38 Special and .357 Magnum capable of 1- to 1½-inch groups off of a rest at the 25-yard line.



There are a number of methods and accessories and doodads for revolver reloads that have been developed over the years, and most of them work well if you put in the work yourself.

The same cannot be said of service pistols. Groups as small as 6 inches at 100 yards with a 4- or 6-inch .357 Magnum revolver, fired in single action, from a rollover prone isn't terribly difficult.

This level of accuracy starts to shade into carbine territory. For this reason, the midsized .357 Magnum revolver, such as an old Ruger Security Six or S&W model 66 or 681, can easily be a "go to the woods" gun.

EASE OF TRAINING

An advantage of the double-action revolver over many of the modern striker-fired pistols so popular now is the revolver is easier to use for dry-fire practice and for "ball and dummy" training at the range.

The DA revolver can be dry-fired repeatedly without the need to reset the trigger, and when used in specific drills, the ball and dummy exercise can be done without the need to buy or load dummy rounds into the gun. Dry practice is typically underappreciated as a skill builder, but it's critical to the development of trigger control. Trigger control is the toughest pistol skill to learn, and the most easily perishable when neglected.

The revolver has a simpler manual of arms and it's impossible to "forget" that one has a round in the chamber after the magazine is removed, which can be a real advantage to the novice shooter.

While the snubby as a defensive firearm is often thought of as an "expert's gun," that idiom hasn't panned with either officers or students.

Here's a recent personal example: A gentleman decided he wanted to buy a defensive firearm but had no idea where to start. At the range he was able to handle and fire several semi-auto pistols and revolvers. He preferred the simplicity of the revolver and eventually bought a Ruger LCR in .38 Special. In follow-up sessions at the range, he went from having never fired a gun in his life to being able to keep 100 percent of his shots in the "down 0" zone of an IDPA target out to 10 yards.

He achieved this level of marksmanship in less than 100 rounds fired in conjunction with approximately four hours of practice.

VERSATILITY

Revolvers still maintain a significant edge over semi-auto pistols for large game hunting or large animal defense. While big-assed semi-auto pistols such as the Desert Eagle exist, they're far from being handy, easy to carry or quick into action. They look cool in movies though. Service-sized pistols such as the Glock 20 in 10mm simply pale in available power level when compared to even middle-of-the-road loadings for the .44 Magnum. Said .44 Mag is itself easily outclassed by things like a heavy-loaded .45 Colt, .454 Casull, and more. While you can hot rod a semi-auto, it can also bring its own issues such as stoppages due to excessive slide velocity.

A 4-inch .357 Mag has the ability to safely fire any .38 Special or .357 Magnum ammunition that will chamber in the gun. This includes defensive carry with JHPs, snake and rodent whacking with shot loads, plinking and small game with wadcutters, predator control with lightweight hollow points, deer hunting with heavier versions of the same and bear protection with high-penetration ammo.

For just plain fun that translates well to serious purposes, it's hard to beat live fire with a good .22 revolver. For this reason, some favorite handguns are .22 wheel guns. Though we'd be hard pressed to pick a favorite, the Ruger LCR in .22 LR and the S&W 317 and 43c are currently seeing the most use for training and plinking. Each of these guns displays a high level of accuracy, with near zero recoil. Each is capable of reliably firing .22 CB, short, long, and long rifle ammunition, in either standard or high velocity loadings—not possible with a semi-auto pistol.

BUT WHAT ABOUT RELOAD SPEED?

To address the persistent issue of the worry about the need to reload in a defensive shooting scenario, note that revolver science has been well developed over the past 100-plus years.

For the snubs, ensure the chamber edges are chamfered or otherwise smoothed to avoid catching the bullets during the reload. This simple step in prepping the defensive revolver for carry is similar to making sure your semi-auto pistol has a flared magwell or mag funnel for speed reloading. In the revolver, it pays off in dividends.

For concealed carry, a Bianchi Speed Strip makes for a small package. Instead of completely filling these up, having four rounds instead of five or six significantly reduces your time to target.

Getting that last round or two in the cylinder takes more time than the previous four. It may sound strange but do it on the shot clock for yourself.

If you can get away with a larger footprint, Jetloaders or Safariland Comp speedloaders can give you a reload of under 5 seconds with practice. USPSA reload speed this isn't, but it's certainly better than fumbling with loose rounds.

There's also an old-school copper skill of reloading two with eyes down range, in case you need to close the cylinder and engage an aggressive bad guy (a hard won lesson from the Newhall fight ...).

CARRY THE DAMN THING

It's no small comfort that research has yet to find a case where a police officer was able to access a backup gun and didn't survive the fight. The lesson here for cops is this: Carry a backup gun and quit worrying about things like magazine or ammo interchangeability with your primary pistol.

This same lesson translates to the concealed-carry world. "What gun?" and "How many rounds on board?" are vastly secondary to the ability of the carrier to have the gun with them at all times. And the ability to draw quickly from concealment. And place one to three effective hits on target at a car length or less.

If you can't find an instructor who can teach you these skills, seek out a crusty old cop; he'll know what to do. **GDTM**

From silver to black, irons to optics, 9mm to magnums—the 21st century still has a ton of revolvers around. Try one out.

CUSTOM & ENGRAVED GUNS



American firearms have woven themselves into the national tapestry since European settlers found their way to the East Coast of America hundreds of years ago. Many setting foot on new soil brought their trade knowledge with them: furniture makers, metal and woodworkers, all eager to begin carving out a life in their new country. While some immigrants hung out their shingle as a continuation of their livelihoods in Europe, many found work in the fledgling American firearms industry, bringing generational skills and knowledge to the embryonic trade. Furniture makers became stockbuilders, machinists barrelmakers, even farm equipment manufacturers set their sights on fulfilling their new country's burgeoning need for firearms.

And America's gun trade hasn't looked back since, building on and improving traditional methods to become a bastion of firearm manufacturing efficiency. While the benefits of mass-producing guns can't be argued with, there is a select group of artisans who still prefer to build firearms one at a time. They can be found not on a stool in an assembly line or a lengthy corporate roster, but laboring over a multitude of their own machines and tooling, creating all or part of a custom gun for a discriminating client. A custom or bespoke gun is handmade to the customer's specifications and highlights numerous talents of the builder or builders and incorporates several trade disciplines, including custom stock or grips, barrel, metalwork and engraving to name a few. When done by a skilled hand, the firearm will exceed expectations and not feel like adding another piece of steel to the gun safe but more like welcoming a new member of the family.

THE ACGG IS BORN

In the interest of expanding and passing on the custom gun trade in the U.S., the American Custom Gunmakers Guild (ACGG) was founded. Several people from the industry began sharing booth space at an NRA show in the early 1980s, hosting gunmakers to meet with prospective clients and others interested

in the trade. In 1983, recognizing the benefits of banding together, a small group of forward-thinking individuals each pitched in $100 and formed the first iteration of the Guild as a corporation in Texas; the inaugural show was held shortly thereafter.

The ACGG quickly found its footing and has continued to expand over the years, becoming the preeminent organization for American custom gunmakers. The members help and learn from each other while becoming masters of the craft, driving up the bar for custom gun work across the nation. The Guild website reads:

The mission of the ACGG is manifold. As an entity, the ACGG will strive to function as a venue for the exchange of ideas concerning the craft and promote public awareness of custom gunmakers and their craft. While promoting the betterment of custom gunmaking, we establish standards of excellence within the field of custom gunmaking and ethical guidelines to benefit those who create and use custom guns. ACGG nurtures and develops the next generation of custom gunmakers. ACGG follows through on its pledge by working with gunsmithing schools across the country, having professional members give guest lectures and presentations throughout the year to students new to the trade.

The vision of the ACGG is to be the preeminent entity in the United States for custom sporting firearms knowledge, skill, craftsmanship and artisanship. The ACGG aims to be the go-to organization for those seeking knowledge of custom sporting firearms or wishing to have a custom sporting firearm crafted.

With this in mind, the Guild created an ethics board that ensures a potential client's investment will be protected by holding member's work to the standard its become known for; if there's ever a concern, a buyer can contact the board for remediation.

The Guild has two categories of membership: Associate and Professional. According to the Guild: *Accomplished gunmakers are few and far between. But you'll find most of them*

A Holland-Woodward Falling Block chambered in 375 H&H Flanged Magnum; action restoration, integral barrel rib, sights and furniture by Glenn Fewless, stocked by Lee Helgeland, engraved by Chris Rossiter—all ACGG professional members. Photo: Mattew Horninger at Black Diamond Gunworks



Remington rolling block chambered in 40-65, octagon bridge, custom sporting triggerguard and MVA mid-range sight. Barrel polished and profiled with Rigby flats by Morris Melani of Alaska Arms, LLC, a Guild professional member. Photo: Matthew Horninger at Black Diamond Gunworks

are members of ACGG. And they're all ready to pass on the craft and keep this fine art alive. You are invited to join as an associate and enjoy the fellowship of others who appreciate firearms crafted by hand from exquisite wood and fine metal with intricate design and attention to every detail. As an associate member, you will be part of a unique association that helps ensure that the art of combining wood and metal into collectible and usable firearms continues. We invite anyone who appreciates this work to join as an associate. Associate members can join online at ACGG.org for a modest yearly fee.

Professional members must be an associate for a minimum of one year and submit samples of their work to be voted on by other professional members at one of the shows attended by a quorum of members. *Professional members are craftspersons who actively work in the custom gunmaking trade and are willing to pass on their knowledge and experience to associate members eager to learn this unique craft.* Both memberships receive access to the quarterly publication of the Guild, *Gunmaker*. Edited by Dave Norin, a Guild professional member, it's brimming with how-to articles, current and past projects of members, and other useful information for those interested in the custom gun trade.



Recognizing that custom gunbuilding doesn't neatly fall under one umbrella, the Guild has a variety of categories for members to join in. Trades represented and able to test for professional membership are: stockmaker, barrelmaker, pistolsmith, metalsmith, metal finisher, engraver, checkering specialist, toolmaker and casemaker. All of the requirements for work to be tested can be found on the ACGG site. Once accepted at the professional level, the member will enjoy the benefits of having their work featured on Guild social media if desired, access to Guild forums, as well as discounts at certain industry sites and businesses. For those who have questions about the membership process, the ACGG has several points of contact to help facilitate, all found on the website.

As a new addition to the *Gun Digest*, this series will focus on a different ACGG category each year, giving an introductory look into what it takes to master the art of custom gunmaking. This year's focus is stockmaking; let's pull back the curtain on this Old World craft and dive in.

Colt 1911 chambered in 38 Super and nitre-blued by Ted Yost, engraved and French grayed by Melissa McMinn, charcoal blued by Doug Turnbull; all ACGG professional members. Photo: Matthew Horninger at Black Diamond Gunworks



A Springfield 1903 G&H Classic Sporter chambered in 30-'06, stock and metalwork by Tyrell Christensen, engraving by Chris Rossiter, both Guild professional members.

STOCKMAKING

Inherent in the process of stocking a custom firearm is a tremendous amount of artistic freedom. From wood selection to laying out stock lines and choosing a checkering pattern and finish, the stock is the equivalent of a race car chassis, steering wheel, and accelerator. One must only sit behind the wheel to get a sense of the balance and artistry of a top-tier performance machine.

Dennis Earl Smith, aka "The Stock Doctor," and arguably one of this country's most talented gunmakers, put it succinctly, "You build the gun to the shooter." Length of pull, pitch, cast and toe measurements are planned for, documented and laid out well before any chips are made. The result born, after weeks or months of labor and numerous steps documented below, is a firearm that points instinctively like an extension of the body and can raise goosebumps with its accoutrements.

A complete, finished project can be nothing short of awe-inspiring, but what goes into the creation of such snappy, well-appointed firearms? The first step in crafting a one-of-a-kind gun begins when a job is commissioned and wood is chosen for the upcoming project.

WOOD SELECTION

While there may seem to be innumerable options when one starts looking for a stock blank for a project, most custom firearms are stocked in some type of walnut. Sharon Dressel of Yakima, Washington—a Guild professional member and purveyor of gunstock blanks—was kind enough to tour the



author through her inventory and point out different characteristics of the wood gunmakers look for and why. Perusing row upon row of blanks, Dressel would occasionally pull a piece out and, with a practiced eye, point out characteristics she'd been describing like the sought-after fiddleback, crotch feather and marble cake pieces, referring to different grain structure in the wood.

According to Dressel, a specific stock blank is chosen for various reasons. These can include: type of wood (there is a plethora of walnut types, each with their own characteristics, with four varieties: California English, Turkish Circassian, Bastogne, and Black being widely used for stockmaking), uniformity of grain structure (for even workability throughout the inletting and shaping process), whether the blank is slab, quarter, or rift sawn (referring to how the grain is presented in the blank), as well as any "figure," meaning visually obvious wood characteristics that add to the wood's appeal. Moisture content and how the blank was dried and aged also play a role as improperly dried wood has ruined more than one stock job. With an appropriate blank chosen for the project, it's time to move on to the layout.

STOCK LAYOUT

Layout refers to taking an individual shooter's measurements and transferring that information into stock dimensions complementing the shooter's form, style and body type. When fitted correctly, a custom gun won't feel forced when mounted, it will feel like it's going home, and the difference in performance and handling can be quite astounding.

Numerous books have been written on gun measurements, as well as the "how" and "why" for arriving at said measurements for a project. Michael Yardley's *Gunfitting* is an excellent resource and starting point to help understand the intricacies that go into measuring a stock for a specific shooter. When practical, stockmakers start with a pattern stock first, observing the client's shooting style, and make fine adjustments before beginning the build on a fine piece of wood.

Once the rough measurements are taken, it's time to build a roadmap of sorts to avoid project creep. The stockmaker will trace the top metal onto a piece of graph or butcher paper, then begin to draw the stock profile onto the corresponding metal tracing. Once roughed in, they'll ensure all the dimensions are correct for the length of pull, cast, toe, pitch, etc. Now, with a life-size drawing, they design and sketch the stock details, paying attention to how the metal and wood lines correspond with each other. Drawing complete, the tracing is cut out and transferred to the stock blank with a pencil, making sure the figure and grain flow in the blank corresponds to the location of the tracing. With the wood marked, a saw is used to cut around the border leaving the material slightly proud of the lines.

INLETTING

Now that the extra material is removed, the centerline of the bore measurement and the trigger location are marked, to be used to verify dimensions recorded on the tracing. With the initial measurements done, the buttplate is laid out and marked with the corresponding pitch, cast and toe measurements. The grip and forend cap locations will be located and marked as well if the project requires it. Next, the top and bottom metal can be set by carefully using scrapers, chisels, gouges and other handtools to bring them into the wood. Inletting black [ink] is brushed on the metal surface that contacts the wood to be removed, a black transfer on the wood indicates a high spot to be brought down. Although a painstaking and tedious process, the receiver and barrel should seat with nominal, uniform tolerances—measured in thousandths of an inch—throughout when finished.

SHAPING

The metal is set in the stock and all

Layout is of utmost importance from beginning to end to hold lines and measurements as the stock is shaped. Photo: Jeff Tapp



measurements are verified. Now it's time to start bringing the comb, forend and wrist lines that were sketched on the tracing into the stock and merging them into one piece of art. Flow lines drawn in grease pencil help to keep uniformity and prevent too much material from being removed as areas are blended together by chisel and plane.

SANDING

Rough sanding incorporates rougher grit sandpaper (150-280) and must be done carefully to not roll or dull edges that were cut in the shaping process. With care, this step will remove the final, thick layer of wood needing to be sanded, with each finer grit removing the previous round's deepest mark. Whiskering between sanding takes place until the maker is satisfied with the result.

Whiskering is accomplished when warm water is rubbed onto a stock by rag or hand, then allowed to dry, raising the worked, broken wood fibers to be sanded off; it can take numerous times between sandings before all of the damaged grain is raised and sanded smooth to the touch.

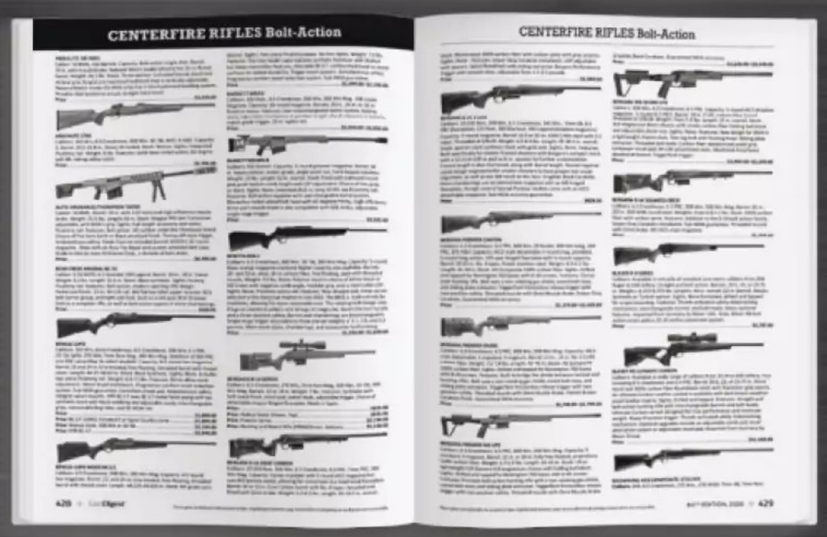
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Finish sanding is next. Progressively finer sandpaper (320-2000) allows the sander to finish prep their work for sealing and finishing while removing very little material from the stock.

FINISHING

While wood can be cut and transformed into beautiful, purposeful material for stockmakers, it doesn't lose its proclivity for gaining and losing moisture throughout its life cycle from tree to blank to stock, thus, it requires a suitable finish for the environments it will be exposed to.

Personal preference dictates a choice between an "in the wood" or "on the wood" finish, although hand-rubbed oil-urethane finishes rule the day when it comes to the custom gun world. An "in the wood" finish is applied over many days and many coats, allowing time for the finish to soak into the wood fibers before another coat is applied. These are generally considered complete after the stock absorbs less than a drop or two per coat when rubbed into the wood, indicating the pores are full of oil. A coat of wax can be applied at this point to add an additional layer of protection. An "on the wood" finish is as the name suggests, layered on the exterior of the stock with minimal absorption yet generally faster drying times and higher luster. All finishes, like automotive paint, will need to be touched up and taken care of occasionally to get the long-lasting protection desired for a custom gun.



Sanding and finishing is the final step before checkering. Photo: Jeff Tapp

Checkering is an art unto itself and takes tens of hours to complete on a custom job. Photo: Jeff Tapp



CHECKERING

Checkering, at its most rudimentary, is a tactile way to better grip a firearm; at its finest, it's exquisite art mixed with functional beauty. It's also the last step in the custom stock but it can ruin it just as surely as the first. Given that, many custom gunmakers prefer to send their work to checkering specialists who can adorn the newly crafted stock appropriately. Those who do their own choose from two options: hand or power checkering. The hand checkering method uses a series of tools to lay out lines per inch (lpi) and diamond ratio of the checkering; when satisfied, the artisan traces a pattern onto the stock before cutting several "master lines" to help guide the layout. Power checkering is laid out the same way but instead of scratching in lines one or two at a time by hand, checkerers hold a tool reminiscent of a dentist's drill, with a choice of different power options and a small wheel that cuts the lines as it rides over the workpiece. Custom checkering jobs, depending on their incorporated features, can take tens of hours to complete correctly and, conversely, are ruined in one careless slip of a tool.

After passing through the stockmaker's hands, a custom gun is well on its way with a major component complete. Before the project is done, it will pass across more artisans' benches: a barrelmaker will carefully turn a piece of metal stock into a one-of-a-kind tube, a metalsmith will use contours and lines to seamlessly join barrel and receiver together, adding custom touches to triggers, scope rings and more. The metal must then be finished, with a variety of choices and processes, the builder is only hindered by their imagination. While some gunmakers prefer to keep most or all of the building process in-house, the American Custom Gunmakers Guild has categories for vetted, professional members that are experts in their chosen fields and often collaborate on projects together.

CONCLUSION

A custom gun, whether it be a shotgun, pistol or rifle, hearkens back to early America and the craftspeople who had a hand in helping a young country find her feet. The many disciplines it takes to craft a firearm are being honed, nurtured and passed on in a host of shops across America as gunmakers live out the ACGG words: *Accomplished gunmakers are few and far between. But you'll find most of them are members of ACGG. And they're all ready to pass on the craft and keep this fine art alive.*

If you're interested in learning more about the custom gun world or in joining the American Custom Gunmakers Guild, check out ACGG.org for more information.

While recognizing there are many ways to skin the proverbial cat, this article strives to highlight general workflow ideas provided by Guild members and the author's research. It features "building from the blank" and not semi-inletted or duplicated stocks, although the process is similar. **GDTM**



This article is an excerpt from *Gun Digest 2026*, the world's greatest gun book. To get your hands on a copy, go to **GunDigestStore.com** and search "GD2026."

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