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2024
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OF THE YEAR
AWARDS

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The subscriber cover features the Umarex Complete NCR Nitro Air, a .22-caliber PCP rifle powered by disposable nitrogen cylinders. **P. 62**



BY JAMES TARR

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THE CZ P-09 C
NOCTURNE IS
A MIX OF THE
OLD AND NEW.

HAMMER TIME

COVER PHOTOS: MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ AND MARK FINGAR; ABOVE PHOTO: MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ

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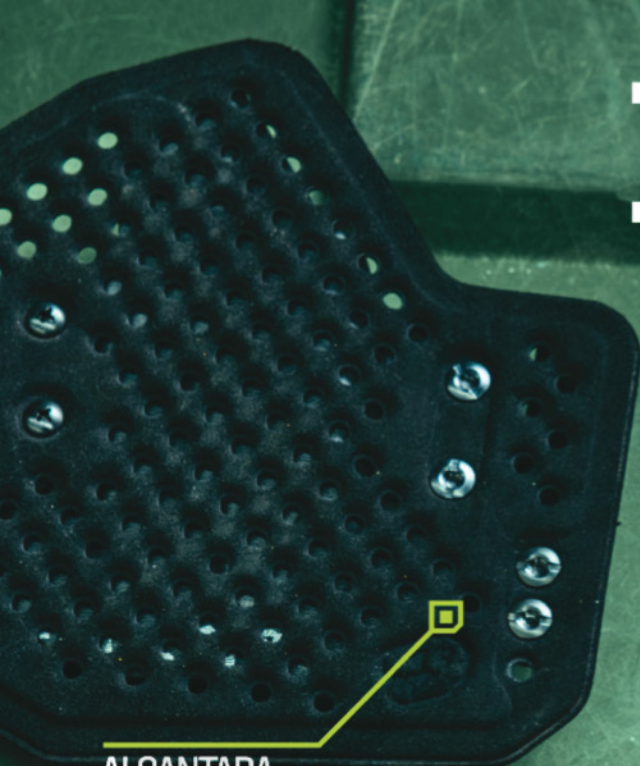
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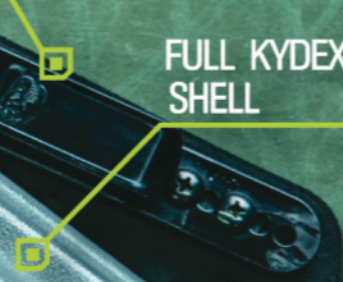
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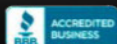
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**WOOD VS. PLASTIC**

Being 77 years old, I know I am an outdated human and generally do not keep with society. I own several nice walnut-stocked rifles: Ruger M77 in .220 Swift; Ruger No. 1 in .300 H&H; custom 7x61mm S&H with a AAA Claro walnut stock that I made; and a dozen others with wood stocks. Some are really nice; others are fairly plain. All look better than the plastic-stocked rifles. I know plastic-stocked rifles are less expensive to make, and I guess they sell better than the old-fashion ones. How did we, years ago, ever hit anything without an adjustable this or that? I know plastic is more durable, and generally more stable than wood, but does no company care about appearances anymore? A nice wood stock can be made almost weatherproof with a little effort. None of mine have warped or swollen. I would like to congratulate riflemakers for their work with plastic. I suggest Guns & Ammo create an "Ugliest Rifle of the Year Award."

John Frazar
Jasper, Alabama

10 IS PERFECT

Good read, Mr. Tarr. Thanks for not regurgitating the same recycled information about the 10mm in your April 2024 column, "The Perfect Ten." That 20 years of downtime for the 10 was the best, making it the best-kept secret for its Power Factor and capacity. At first, ammunition was limited and expensive. After a while, I was able to snatch up all the ammo still on shelves at excellent prices. I follow everything "10mm," as much as possible. Everyone is catching on to it, but there are too many ammo manufacturers wussing down the power factor.

Pete Perez
Email

M1A1 MEMORIES

It was good to read Dave Emary's article "Borne of the Clouds" in the August 2024 issue of Guns & Ammo featuring the M1A1 Carbine. My father, Chuck Murray, was a tail gunner in a B-29 during World War II, the "Phoney Express." I have vivid memories of him cussing every single time he heard someone

mention the M1A1 Carbine. He always said that he couldn't hit anything with it and wished he had an M1 instead. Hopefully, Inland Manufacturing figured out the accuracy issue as mentioned in the article. He has been gone for more than a decade, but I swear I could hear him cussing out the little carbine as I read the article.

Bob Murray
Lompoc, California

TRIPOD SHOOTING

A lot of guys are using tripods when shooting wild hogs with thermal optics at night. An article about tripods and swivel heads should interest many folks, I imagine. I have hogs on my ranch and enjoy shooting them.

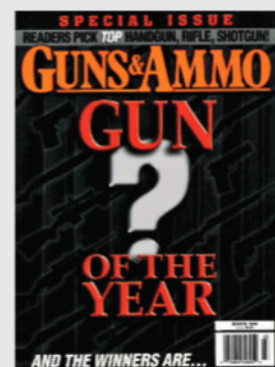
Lu McLeod
Ocala, Florida

POWDER STORES

In the August 2024 issue of Guns & Ammo, Keith Wood authored a timely and relevant piece on gunpowder shortages, price increases, and a good explanation as to why. A bit bothersome was the response by a reader from Pennsylvania published in the October issue's "Reader Blowback." He accused Wood of encouraging "hoarding" and advised readers to "buy no more than they need," whatever that is supposed to be. There is no assurance there will ever be a glut of gunpowder. Not only are we faced with endless wars, but there is no indication that inflation of commodities will end.

MARCH '99

Editors invited readers to vote and select the "Gun of the Year" in August 1998. Winners were announced seven issues later. Marlin's Guide Gun in .45-70 earned top honors, while the Steyr Scout was named "Rifle of the Year"; Taurus Raging Bull, "Handgun of the Year"; and Remington Model 870 Express Super Magnum was "Shotgun of the Year."



My point is to buy what you need for the future. Powder is neither getting cheaper or easier to find. If properly stored in sealed containers and in a climate-controlled environment, it can last decades. I opened a sealed 8-pound container of IMR-4198 purchased in September 1995. I inspected it and loaded a half-dozen rounds for my .30-30 T/C pistol. When chronographed, the numbers matched the historical data in my notebooks with a deviation of 10 feet per second (fps). I then loaded 100 cartridges and killed two deer in South Georgia. My point is simple: Purchase what you estimate you need, and understand that when properly stored powder doesn't have an expiration date.

David Sikorsky
Savannah, Georgia



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Michael Mackay
Mulvane, Kansas

MAGNUM CRAZE

As usual, I enjoyed Craig Boddington's two excellent articles on magnum cartridge history ("Too Many, Too Fast," September 2024; "Not Too Many, Not Too Fast," October 2024). Since 1964, I have bagged many deer and an elk with the popular Model 700 Remington in 7mm Remington

Magnum. I was surprised when I didn't read it mentioned in Part 1 or 2. Was it also derived from the .300 H&H Magnum? (I also used that round in the 1950s.) The Remington 7mm magnum caliber rifle is still in production. I would like to read another article on these two great cartridges. Keep up the good work, G&A!
Gary Bingham
Blue Ridge, Georgia

M48, JUST RIGHT

I opened my October issue, and my eyes caught Dave Emary's "punching" of Mitchell's Mauser project. It was interesting and informative, but biased considering my experience. I purchased "Collector Grade" M48s in the late 1990s or early 2000s. All things

considered, I couldn't be happier with them. The guns were made in Zastava, Yugoslavia, on German tooling and bear the King's seal and crown. For \$307, all the serial numbers were intact and matched on the bolt, barrel, stock and floor plate. The bayonet didn't match, though. The bore was shiny, and the gun performs perfectly. It's my go-to deer rifle. These are not infamous!

George Miller
Franklin County, Missouri

"Most of the M48s were intact because they were imported that way. Not so with the K98s, so Mitchell's Mausers cleaned the parts and remarked them so they would match."

— D. Emary

FIRST GUN

My dad bought me a Marlin bolt-action .22 when I was in the second grade. He paid a whopping \$17 for it! I couldn't even pull back the safety to fire without his help. I still have this rifle and I am 67 years old. Thanks for the memories.

Chuck Barron
Email

LET THERE BE LIGHT!

I very much enjoyed the review of the Smith & Wesson Bodyguard 2.0 (October, 2024). I believe that S&W would have a real gold mine with this new pistol, but it doesn't have a rail under the barrel to mount a light or laser sight. This is a serious oversight. Too bad they missed this feature



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because if there was a rail, the Bodyguard 2.0 would be on my hip tomorrow!
Mike Beals
Tomahawk, Wisconsin

NEW-GUN AVAILABILITY

Just finished reading the Proofhouse on the Taurus 692 Executive Grade (September 2024). It's a little out of my price range, but something to consider down the road. Do companies build up an inventory before releasing a new product? I've been looking for a Model 692 with a 3-inch ported barrel and can't seem to find one. I'm also looking for a Walther PD380. I see that Smith & Wesson has an improved Bodyguard 2.0 in .380, which looks like a nice

little carry gun. I know that guessing public demand is not a science, but I would think they'd have some idea as to the number of units they expect to sell and build accordingly. I'll keep looking.

Kurt Hopkins
Weeki Wachee, Florida

"We can't disclose exact numbers, but Taurus does have pre-launch inventory. With Executive Grade models, those are handbuilt so volume will always be lower than production guns. The Model 692 became the fastest-selling Executive Grade to date. There is a lot of excitement for it, even more than we anticipated."

— C. Giddings, Taurus

"Yes. Every company treats

new product launches in their own way. Many firearms companies launch products at large industry shows even if they don't have inventory on hand in order to gain the broadest reach and news coverage. In those cases, it may take several months for inventory to be delivered to retailers where consumers can finally purchase them. We generally try not to launch a major product until we have inventory in the channel so customers can access them sooner. Regarding forecasting, there is a lot of time and energy spent on working that out. We knew the Bodyguard would be successful, but it has exceeded our expectations."

— A. Gore,
Smith & Wesson

"Achieving a flawless product launch with sufficient inventory to meet demand is always the goal, but it is a challenging process. I feel like companies actually achieve this about 10 percent of the time. It's tough. Most companies do have inventory to ship at launch, but the amount they want or need, it's all based on production timing. We do build an inventory before each release. The science is the want, which is affected by what you actually get. We follow the same schedule, imported or not. In the beginning, we consider the timeline for ATF and German approvals. When we set a launch date, we correlate those times."

— C. Osborn,
Walther Arms 



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Stoeger celebrates 100 years.



ERIC R. POOLE

 @GUNSANDAMMOMAG

COMMENDABLE

A. F. STOEGER, an Austrian-born sporting goods dealer in New York, was appointed as the sole agent for Deutsche Waffen-und Munitionsfabriken (DWM) in 1922. On March 7, 1922, Stoeger placed an order for 2,500 Lugers and asked DWM to stamp "A.F. Stoeger Inc, New York" on commercial-numbered receivers. He imported and sold German-made factory Luger pistols at a wholesale price of \$15 each. The 1920/23 Stoeger American Eagle Lugers were offered in 7.65mm or 9mm calibers, with barrels spanning 3½ inches to 24 inches in length. Though longer-barrel models possess a higher value, a 98-percent Stoeger American Eagle will command between \$6,000 and \$7,500 in 2024.

The first price list is believed to have been published by A. F. Stoeger on September 1, 1923. The advertisement indicated that Stoeger was the "[sole] authorized importer for the United States and Canada of the genuine Mauser and Luger Arms and Ammunition." Also listed for sale was Stoegerol, a solvent developed by Stoeger to lubricate and dissolve nitro powder. One could also purchase German-made Anson & Deeley double-barrel shotguns, as well as Luger holsters, cartridge belts, field binoculars, compasses and telescopes. The business was successful, and the first numbered Stoeger catalog appeared in 1925.

Through the Great Depression, the Stoeger catalog expanded to include commercial offerings from Colt, Mauser, Smith & Wesson, Walther and Webley. Available by mail order were hunting rifles from Mannlicher-Schoenauer, Mauser, Mossberg, Remington, Savage, Stevens, and Winchester. Shotguns were also sold through Stoeger including those from A. H. Fox, Greener, Ithaca, Iver Johnson, Parker, Remington, L. C. Smith, and Winchester. The company grew so large and fast that it opened a retail store at 507 5th Avenue in New York.

World War II threatened Stoeger because arms and ammunition were in limited supply due to the war effort. A. F. Stoeger adapted to the situation by expanding the business to include the sale of goods ranging from smok-

ing pipes to skis, to chess and backgammon sets, for example. After World War II, Stoeger sold firearms and ammunition with great success. In 1948, the catalog was 544 pages and became "The Shooter's Bible." It eventually included editorial features authored by outdoor writers such as Jack O'Connor, Tom McNally, and George Nonte.

Stoeger was purchased by SAKO in the 1990s, primarily for its firearm import and distribution assets. In 2000, Beretta Holding S.p.A., the Italian group that owns venerable firearm brands such as Beretta, Benelli, Franchi, and Uberti, acquired SAKO — and Stoeger. Now a division of Benelli USA, Stoeger Industries continues to thrive with its lines of affordable pistols, shotguns and airguns.

To honor its 100th anniversary and legacy, Stoeger developed the Model 3000 Signature semiautomatic shotgun. Featuring a 12-gauge, 3-inch chamber, the 100th Anniversary Edition blends classic styling and contemporary functionality. The receiver is satin-finished nickel and displays fleur-de-lis engraving in the spirit of bespoke shotguns, which is set apart by the polished blue 28-inch barrel with a stepped rib and fiber-optic bead. Controls feature a black-accent finish. Most distinctive is the satin walnut furniture. The forend is slim with expansive finger grooves and texture, which is complemented by the textured stock and rubber butt pad. Drop and cast shims are provided to personalize fitment, and IC, M, and XFT choke tubes are included. In keeping with Stoeger's reputation for offering high-value propositions, the Model 3000 Signature is offered with a manufacturer-suggested retail price (MSRP) of \$799. It's an affordable tribute to a brand with staying power. 



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WALTHER MODEL PPK COMMERCIAL, .32 ACP, 80%: \$1,050

WORLD WAR II-ERA WALTHER PPK?

Q: Here are pictures of a Walther PPK pistol supposedly liberated from a German officer in World War II. Any ideas on its authenticity or value?

L. S.
Email

A: It appears to be a very decent Walther PPK with the “Eagle N” proofmark used in Germany from 1939 to 1945. I see no military marks or Waffenamts on the piece, so it is likely commercial. This does not preclude it from having been used by a German military officer who could have purchased it privately. The military-style holster would lend some credence to this possibility. Condition looks to be around 80 percent. As such, with the holster and spare magazine, it’s worth in the \$950 to \$1,100 range.

REMINGTON 870

Q: A few years ago, I bought a Remington 870 from a local gun shop for my 18th birthday. With the exception of occasional double feeds, it has functioned flawlessly in my care. Lately, I’ve regained interest in this shotgun, and I’m deciding to bite the bullet and customize it. The newfound attention

to this shotgun of mine has led me to wonder more about the nature of this shotgun. According to my research, it was manufactured in August 1990 with the left-hand barrel code “WK 91”. Additionally, I’ve ascertained that it is a 3-inch magnum variant by the suffix of the serial number A003XXXM. This all makes sense to me. My

main question is to the nature of the trim level of the shotgun. The receiver is marked with an Express roll stamp, but it also has “LPD” marked, indicating that it was owned by a local police department. To me, this explains the wear on the gun, mainly in the shell retainers and the finish. The firearm, however, has an aluminum trigger housing and what I believe is a non-MIM extractor. Upon purchase, it was completely stock with the exception of the factory furniture being changed for polymer. Was

this a police-trim shotgun that wasn’t roll-marked with any indicator that it is a magnum or a Police variant? Or is it simply an off-the-shelf Express-model shotgun that was made in a time before my own when quality control was still a thing? I have no intention of selling the shotgun. Rather, I intend to use it as a home-defense item. Therefore, its value matters little to me. I would like to know a little more about the story of my beloved scattergun.

G. G.
Kansas City, Missouri

AUCTION BLOCK

A truly exceptional Winchester Model 42 in .410, engraved by Winston Churchill, realized an impressive \$22,500 in an August 12, 2024, Sportsman’s Legacy sale. Completed in 1972 and consigned by the original owner, this tasteful piece has a 28-inch solid-rib barrel with fixed SK, double ivory beads and a 3-inch chamber. The engraving was commissioned by one of Churchill’s friends and best customers for his wife. The receiver right is graced with a gold relief woodcock in flight against a mountain backdrop. The left receiver highlights a gold-relief grouse rocketing through the timber. Each scene is surrounded by an intricate field of leafy vine, this in turn triple-edge-bordered with fine lines. The grip cap showcases a bobwhite rising from a complex cluster of flora. Both bolt and lifter are jeweled. While unattributed, the stock is likely the work of Churchill, as well. Fashioned from AAA-grade walnut with grain so dark that it borders on sinister, the fore wears a wrap of fine checkering accented with intersecting ribbons and a single delicate fleur. The bore is strong and bright. Mechanics are smooth and tight. Metal and wood finish easily exceeds 98 percent. For more information about this and future sales, visit Sportsman’s Legacy at sportsmanslegacy.com.



A: Model 870s are just not my thing, so I queried Dwight Van Brunt of Sportsman's Legacy for his thoughts on your piece. Here they are: "I am a 50-plus-year user of 870s, and I think quite highly of them. Had they not begun in the shadow of the great Model 12, I suspect they would be regarded as the greatest 'shell shucker' of all time. One even stands watch at the bedside to this day. On hunting trips, it rides along to address the occasional opportunity for pheasant or grouse. The 870-receiver designation 'M' indeed indicates 'magnum.' That said, barrels are often mixed and matched, especially over time. As I recall, the Express trigger-guard was originally alloy before the accountants willed it polymer. Cop guns are all about the 'go' rather than the 'show.' It could well have seen aftermarket parts added, so there really is no way to answer the specific parts questions with certainty. The general answer is that it was likely a repur-

posed, off-the-shelf Express model that has a great deal of life remaining."

FRANK WESSON RIFLE SPECS

Q: I'm helping out with an estate. There is a Frank Wesson two-trigger rifle, Type 1, with the Kittredge marking. It's in good condition with a patina finish, but is missing the front sling swivel. The barrel is decent and rifling has minor corrosion. It should be a .44 rimfire, right? On slugging the barrel, the lands and grooves measure .410 and .417. Do you have any thoughts on this?

**P. H.
Email**

A: The Kittredge markings lead me to believe you have a Frank Wesson First Type Military Carbine variant. If the buttstock is round on the bottom, it's military. If it's flat, it's civilian. A number of these were sold by dealer Benjamin Kittredge & Co. to various states for troops during the Civil War. The caliber is likely .44 rim-

fire. Double-trigger Frank Wessons were made from 1859 to 1888 in five variants involving sporting and military models. Calibers ranged from .22 to .44. In the condition you describe — a photo would have helped considerably in my evaluation — on the conservative side I'd price it in the \$1,450 to \$2,250 range, depending upon finish and functionality.

.32 S&W ID

Q: Having read your column for a long time, I finally have a question to ask you. I have this pistol that was given to my grandfather by a patient's wife who did not want it around after her husband's passing. Caliber is .32 S&W; serial number 1204XX. Bluing is turning brown in places; it would probably be 98 percent otherwise. Markings on top of barrel read, upper line, "SMITH & WESSON SPRINGFIELD MASS U.S.A."; lower line, "PAT'D MAY 11.1880. JAN.5.1882 APRIL 9.1889". I suspect the box it's in may be original, but it has no label to confirm. The model and possible value would be appreciated. I'm not planning to sell, just curious.

**T. G.
Email**

A: You have a Smith & Wesson .32 Double Action Fourth Model. These nice little revolvers were manufactured from 1883 to 1909. Some 239,600 were built during that period. Barrel lengths ranged from 3 to 10 inches, with some of the longer ones being quite scarce. Blue and nickel

were the usual finishes. Grips were normally of hard rubber. Your five-shooter is a fairly common variant and, based on the condition apparent in your photos, it's worth in the \$275 to \$300 range. The box doesn't look original to me. It should have some label matching it to the gun.

EARLY COLT FRONTIER SCOUT

Q: I have a Colt Frontier Scout .22 that I bought new in 1970 in Alabama. I would like to know a bit more about it. The serial number is 243XXXXF. It appears to have an aluminum receiver with fixed sights and a 4¾-inch barrel. For insurance purposes, I'm assuming the value is around \$700. I'd also like to know the date of manufacture, and anything else you'd care to add. I haven't shot this little gun a lot, but it is a joy to shoot.

**D. M.
Email**

A: I hold something of a fondness for the Colt Frontier Scout, as an early Scout was the first revolver I ever owned. The Frontier Scout was manufactured between 1958 and 1970 with the early batches having "Q" or "F" suffixes in the serial numbers. Your particular piece was made at the end of the run in 1970. Originally chambered for .22 LR, a .22 WMR version was offered beginning in 1960. Barrel lengths were 4¾ inches or 9½ inches (i.e., Buntline). An alloy frame was standard. Other variants such as models with "K" or "P" suffixes offered features such as nickel plat-

"PLANET OF THE APES" CARBINE

In the 1968 film "Planet of the Apes," and its 1970 sequel, "Beneath the Planet of the Apes," gorilla soldiers were armed with retro-futuristic modified M1 Carbines fabricated from wood and metal. As in most action films, dummy, non-firing replicas of the live guns were used. They were fabricated both for economy's sake and to be employed where guns had to be dropped, roughly handled, or carried in the background by non-principle actors. Today, like many bits of iconic movie memorabilia, dummy guns are becoming consistently more valuable and desirable, as well as being more easily transferred to film enthusiasts who are more interested in simply having a piece of movie history than an actual working firearm. (From the collection of the late Joseph Musso, courtesy of the National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, Virginia.)



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ing or “Staglite” grips. The Colt Peacemaker .22 Scout with a case-hardened steel frame and interchangeable .22 LR/.22 WMR cylinders were made between 1970 and 1977. A New Frontier Scout with flat topstrap was offered between 1970 and 1977. It was reintroduced in 1982 only to be discontinued some four years later. The final incarnation had a crossbolt safety. Your gun appears to be in fine shape and has a spare cylinder, so I’d say your \$700 evaluation is just about right. I might even be tempted to add another C-note since it is very clean and shows little use.



LUGER MAG MARKS

Q: In the “Gun Room” column of the April 2024 issue of Guns & Ammo, you referenced a Luger with the markings “byf” and “41”. My Luger has these markings, though on the magazine the markings are different. Could you shed some light on the markings on my magazine? I thoroughly enjoy your column each month, as I do the entire publication.

G. S.
Email

A: I checked with a couple of Luger pros, and

the answer is that the top number is a serial number that at one time would likely have matched the pistol with which it was issued. The “y” indicates there were other guns with the same serial, this being a qualifying prefix. The “655” is the Wehrmacht unit to which the piece was issued.

IS IT A REAL SMITH & WESSON?

Q: A Smith & Wesson that’s not a Smith & Wesson? Garry, your column is always the first thing I read when I get my copy of G&A. Finally, I have one to send you. I won this gun on gunbroker.com as a Victory model Smith & Wesson. Shame on me! I collect and gunsmith Smith & Wesson revolvers. I missed two things: There is no Smith & Wesson emblem on either side of the pistol. Second miss: Only one line of text is on the right side, “Made in USA”. I got this one as a gunsmith special, as the cylinder didn’t turn with a trigger pull. I only paid \$180 for it, so I don’t mind that it isn’t a Smith & Wesson. It didn’t snap until I pulled the side plate off. The sear on the hammer is very different than Smith & Wesson’s. The rebound slide doesn’t have a pin to operate the hammer block. As a matter of fact, the hammer block is mounted to the side plate and operated by a ramp on the back of the hand. The hand was not under tension, thus creating the problem with the cylinder not turning. I pulled the trigger out and there is no pin for the typical spring for the hand like on a Smith &

Wesson. Instead, inside the trigger is a spring-loaded bar. All I had to do was get that lever on the right side of the hand pin, and the problem was solved. It has the typical British import marks under the barrel. “3½ Ton”, the crown over “BNP”, and so on. It also has the crown over “BNP” behind each flute on the cylinder, so I am sure that it is a British Import. Thus it may be obvious that it is not a Smith & Wesson. What do I have here?

J. J. T.
New Mexico

A: According to Rick Nahas, co-author of “Standard Catalog of Smith & Wesson,” “It’s a mid-World War II Victory model with a strange barrel from another gun. Prior to World War II, these only had a one-line address. The slide hammer bar did not come along until mid-war, so one will not see the sliding bar and the trigger return pin on the spring housing. It has later jewellery on the hammer and trigger, also called “engine turning.” It’s a real S&W, but the barrel is wrong. The trademark was not on all guns in that time.”

RUGER DEERSTALKER

Q: I obtained this rifle about 20 years ago as a big brother to the first ever gun I bought in 1975, a Ruger 10/22. I am very fond of this carbine style. Hopefully, you can manipulate the pictures, but I apologize for my limited ability in that regard. Upon purchasing, I performed a total

takedown to clean and inspect it. I was amazed at how good it looked. The bluing, stock, and the bore are really good. FYI: I won’t ever tackle that main spring again; what a chore that was! I know, or have heard, that these were made in a limited number, initially because of a controversy regarding the “Deerstalker” moniker. This early number (3XX) may have some additional value. What can you tell me about the history and value?

C. T.
Pflugerville, Texas

A: The handy little .44 Magnum Deerstalker semiauto carbine was introduced by Sturm, Ruger & Co. in 1959, and was manufactured until 1985. There were several variations, including commemoratives, etc. Yours appears to be a standard carbine. It’s a very early example, and does have some collector appeal as it was manufactured before the 1962 Ithaca “Deerstalker” lawsuit. The three-digit serial number of your gun increases its desirability. On the other hand, it appears that the gun has been embellished with an aftermarket rear sight, and an extended rubber recoil pad, thus diminishing its appeal. Assuming these can be removed and/or replaced with proper original-style components, and that no structural or cosmetic damage has been done to the rifle, it would help restore some of its value and appeal. A clean, unaltered early Deerstalker can easily bring close to a couple of grand. 📷

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The 5.7x28mm is surging in popularity.



JAMES TARR

FIVE-SEVEN FEST

AFTER LANGUISHING AS A WEIRD, niche cartridge, interest in the 5.7x28mm has seemingly exploded in the last five years. Unlike the 10mm, though, for which renewed interest seemed to appear for no traceable reason, the 5.7 revival is easily explained.

Since the introduction by FN in 1990 — and until 2020 — there were just two factory platforms chambering in the 5.7: FN P90 PDW for which the cartridge was designed (and the PS90 semiautomatic carbine in commercial form), as well as the FN Five-seveN pistol. The P90/PS90 and Five-seveN pistol were considered expensive, and the ammunition, which was made exclusively for FN by Fiocchi, was expensive and hard to find.

Then, FN's patents expired. In December 2019, Ruger introduced the Ruger-5.7 (\$899, ruger.com) pistol at almost half the cost of FN Five-seveN (\$1,409, fnamerica.com). Surprising to many, the Ruger-5.7 was a hit. Since then, Smith & Wesson released its M&P 5.7 (\$699, smith-wesson.com); KelTec the P50 that feeds P90-type 50-round magazines (\$795, keltecweapons.com); Palmetto State Armory PSA 5.7 Rock (\$499, palmettostatearmory.com); and TISAS the Turkish-made PX-5.7 (\$300, tisasarms.com). I've also heard that Taurus will be introducing a 5.7-chambered pistol soon.

On the ammo side, the 5.7x28mm cartridge was SAAMI approved on July 11, 2024. In addition to Fiocchi and FN ammunition, even Federal, Hornady and Speer are offering loads for it. It's finally a mainstream cartridge.

On May 7, 2024 — "5/7," get it? — I attended "5.7 Fest" hosted by Gun Talk and Range Ready Studios in Louisiana. It was a two-day event where gunwriters gathered with various manufacturers to talk about all things 5.7x28mm, past, present, and future. It was educational, and I left with a lot of new information. First, let's revisit history for readers who may be new to this little bottlenecked cartridge.

The FN 5.7x28mm was designed for the select-fire FN

P90 Personal Defense Weapon (PDW). The specs for the cartridge called for a round that could penetrate a ballistic helmet at 200 meters while fitting into a gun smaller and lighter than a standard rifle. The 5.7x28mm SS190 cartridge was capable of defeating armor, but since it was "armor piercing," it was not available commercially. Other sporting full-metal-jacket (FMJ), polymer tipped, and jacketed-hollowpoint (JHP) loads followed in 2000.

Out of the P90's 10.4-inch barrel, most 5.7 loads will do more than 2,200 feet per second (fps). Current offerings feature bullets from 35 to 62 grains. Except for the subsonic rounds, most cartridges travel 1,600 to 1,800 fps out of pistol-length barrels.

In appearance, the bottlenecked 5.7 looks like a baby rifle cartridge, which is basically what it is. Because

it has almost no taper, the cartridge body needs to be lubricated during the manufacturing process. This was the reason why many ammunition makers were slow to invest in the cartridge, aside from the fact that there were only a few guns chambered for it.

While long, the cartridge cases are skinny, which means magazine capacities for 5.7mm pistols start at 20 and go up from there. Capacity is a big selling point. While it is loud, one of the reasons the 5.7 has been popular in pistols is due to the lack of felt recoil. It has less recoil than a 9mm, and is controllable. The main reasons the 5.7 isn't more popular as a carry cartridge is due to the fact that the pistols and frames have to be sizable to accommodate the length of the cartridge and SAAMI's maximum average pressure of 48,500 psi. Several companies are working on smaller versions of a 5.7 pistol, but the long, high-pressure cartridge is problematic when used in short barrels.

On the long-gun side, Ruger offers its LC Carbine chambered in 5.7 (\$1,009, ruger.com), and there are several AR-based pistols, rifles, and conversion kits. At the 2024 NRA Annual Meetings, an FN rep told me it was thinking about offering semiauto short-barreled-rifle (SBR) versions



The 5.7x28mm offers low recoil and fast follow-up shots. Tarr tested the TISAS PX-5.7, and the muzzle remained flat through rapid fire.

of the PS90 with the 10.4-inch barrel due to the short wait times in the ATF approving SBRs. (I told FN to stop thinking about it and do it!) Having twice watched all 17 seasons of "Stargate SG-1," "Stargate: Atlantis," and "Stargate Universe," where the P90 is so heavily featured it could be considered a co-star, I'd buy one! (Don't judge me, please.)

While I can't speak to the specific reason behind the interest in the 5.7 from the U.S. Secret Service, I know why American police departments were initially drawn to it: The common commercial, non-armor piercing loads, don't penetrate barriers well. The small, light 35- to 40-grain JHPs hit plywood or drywall and fragment. Police departments that answer a lot of calls inside apartment buildings liked the fact that the 5.7mm bullets produced less overpenetration risk than traditional handgun bullets.

Ammo was once rare and expensive, and only made by Fiocchi for FN. The 5.7x28mm round is now more widely available, and much of it was developed for personal defense. Hornady offers a 40-grain V-Max Black and a 40-grain Critical Defense load. Speer engineered a 40-grain Gold Dot load. For those who train a lot, American Eagle



The bottlenecked 5.7x28 cartridge is slender. Mag capacities are often at least 20.

sells affordable FMJ bulk packs featuring a 40-grain bullet. At the event in Louisiana, Fiocchi representatives discussed its new 400-round combo and value packs that combine 300 rounds of 40-grain FMJ for practice with 100 rounds of either 40-grain JHPs or 62-grain subsonic rounds.

At 5.7 Fest, there were product presentations from Burris, EOTech, Fiocchi, Hornady, Meprolight, Ruger, Silencer Central, Smith & Wesson,

Steiner, The Kinetic Group (i.e., Federal and Speer), and TISAS. In addition to shooting a lot of 5.7x28mm through various platforms, we witnessed a ballistic gel test of various 5.7 loads. We also watched a decibel meter test illustrating the efficacy of the Silencer Central Banish 22 silencer on various 5.7 firearms, shooting both super- and subsonic ammunition. Fiocchi's 62-grain subsonic FMJ load was "Hollywood quiet," as some like to say, producing just 122 decibels (dB).

Gel tests of 5.7 ammunition were interesting, and I walked away from the event with a new opinion: The 5.7x28mm isn't a bad choice for personal defense, as long as you understand its limitations.

I know a few people who actually carry pistols chambered

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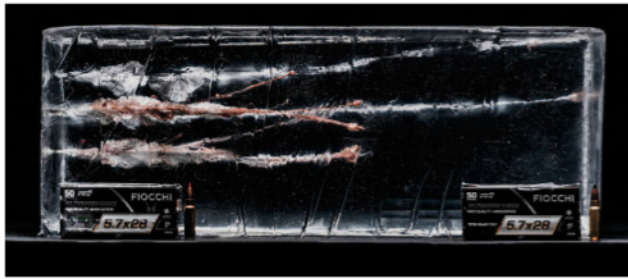
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in 5.7; I was ambivalent. After 5.7 Fest, I understand the choice. Bullets wound two ways: With permanent wound cavities and with hydrostatic shock, a product of velocity upon impact. Generally, a defensive bullet needs an impact velocity of more than 2,000 fps to produce traumatic hydrostatic shock, which typically means you need to carry a rifle. Out of a pistol, the 5.7mm bullet lives in that nebulous gray area between the two. The bullets speed downrange at near-rifle velocities, and the speed seems to offset the small size and weight of the projectile.

While there haven't been a lot of shootings involving the 5.7x28mm — there have been some — it seems to perform as well as standard pistol-caliber hollowpoints on the street. A representative from the U.S. Concealed Carry Association (USCCA, uscca.deltadefense.com) attended the event. He stated the organization was currently defending a member who'd used a 5.7 pistol in a shooting. After two shots were placed center mass, the threat stopped, dropped, and died.

Gel testing using Clear Ballistics blocks is not quite FBI



At 5.7 Fest, various 5.7x28mm loads were fired in Clear Ballistics synthetic gel. Most of the defensive loads, including Fiocchi's Hyperformance 40-grain tipped hollowpoint, penetrated at least 12 inches.

spec, but it is close. I saw excellent results. Generally, 5.7mm JHPs will penetrate 12-plus inches in bare gel or gel covered with FBI-spec "heavy clothing." The velocity seemed to guarantee expansion or fragmentation.

What 5.7x28mm isn't good at is penetrating barriers, which is why some law enforcement agencies

choose it for certain roles: Indoor security and around crowds, for example. The light, fast bullets go through clothing fine, but they usually break apart against drywall or auto glass, and they have a much lower chance of passing through a person. This makes it a reasonable, rational caliber choice for the concealed carry piece of a private citizen who is far more likely to get into a face-to-face confrontation. Let's not forget: 5.7 pistols, while large, offer generous magazine capacities and relatively low recoil.

Even though the cartridge was introduced almost 35 years ago, it's only been during the last five years that we've seen a lot of exciting opportunities with the 5.7x28mm. From what I learned at 5.7 Fest, I expect we'll see even more in the coming years. 



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Steiner H6Xi 2-12x42mm



TOM BECKSTRAND

A PREMIUM HUNTER

AMERICA IS A NATION of riflemen, and I'm proud to see that tradition continue. The competitive shooting world has been thriving for more than a decade, and the hunting community has experienced the same. There has been a massive influx of riflshooters spending their hard-earned money to purchase good equipment. Manufacturers have noticed and are working overtime to turn out new and better products.

One scope in the "new and better" category that recently caught my attention is the Steiner H6Xi 2-12x42mm. It is what I'd call a "medium-powered variable," but it's built to rigid standards for premium hunting performance. After looking through one and handling it for a spell, I decided I needed to visit the factory and see how it was made. The only way to learn what makes any scope unique is to visit its manufacturing facility, talk to the engineers who designed it, and watch how the pieces come together. Doing so has allowed me a more thorough understanding of what's going on inside the maintube.

Steiner is a strong German name, and the company headquarters is in Germany. However, the H6Xi is built in Greely, Colorado. I figured as much because hunting scopes built in Germany tend to have European reticles with limited appeal for most American shooters. The H6Xi has American details throughout.

The first indicator that this is an American scope is the first focal plane (FFP) reticle. The sample I tested was mil-based. Steiner calls it the "STR-MIL," for "Steiner Tree Reticle-MIL." It has a horizontal crosshair with a dot at the center, and it subtends in .2-mil increments. The vertical stadia have a simple descending tree down the lower half of the reticle, subtending again in .2-mil increments. The STR-MIL reticle is useful for holdovers, and subtension marks remain accurate at any magnification thanks to the FFP reticle.

However, having such a wide magnification range means the reticle looks great in the top half of the magnification, but it could become hard to see in the magnification's lower half. Steiner's solution to that potential problem is addressed in two parts. The first is that only the center of the reticle has the fine subtension and descending tree

for holdovers. It is clearly visible in the top half of magnification. As the magnification lowers, the tree shrinks and heavy stadia lines along the vertical and horizontal axis come into view. These stadia lines make fast aiming at 2X possible, for times when a critter jumps out at 50 yards and presents only seconds to make an accurate shot.

Steiner's second part of the solution is as brilliant as it is simple. The engineers designed the illumination system to focus a specific color of light on just the center of the reticle to make it truly "daylight bright." This gives the hunter a blood-red glowing triangle as an aiming point at low power. It is wonderfully effective, even in bright daylight. Most scopes in this price range with illuminated reticles just have a red light-emitting diode (LED) powered by a CR2032 battery. This type of system can wash the entire reticle in red light, and about 10

to 20 percent is reflected back to the shooter's eye. This system isn't powerful enough to be visible in bright daylight. By using the LED's housing like a flashlight's reflector, Steiner directs the beam only at the reticle's center where more of it impacts the reflective material and moves towards the shooter's eye.

While focusing the beam is certainly beneficial in making the reticle visible, Steiner also chose a color that offered the best contrast. The red-orange LED is usually the brightest, but contrast is what the eye sees best. The H6Xi's illumination system uses a blood-red LED for this reason.

Getting the magnification range, reticle, and illumination system right and working together for the optimal hunting solution is no small feat, but image quality is still king. Steiner uses a three-lens objective lens group with all three lenses made from extra low dispersion glass. Two lenses are ground and permanently mated together — a cemented doublet — with a third single lens, all assembled in the objective lens group. The lens group plays the largest role in the scope's image quality because it takes the incoming image and focuses all the light into a single focal plane that the rest of the scope manipulates. Since incoming light has different wavelengths based on the light's color, and wavelength determines focal length,





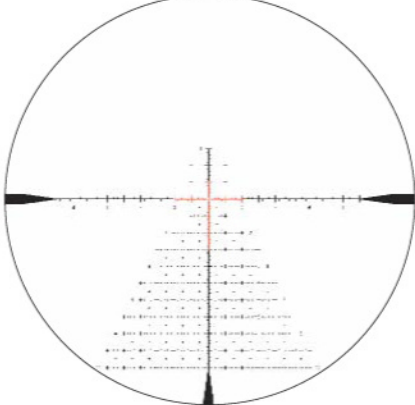
Remove the elevation cap and replace after sighting in to set the zero stop.



Each H6Xi has two possible turret configurations: The exposed elevation turret (above, left) was designed for use when frequently dialing corrections. The interior turret (above, middle and right) illustrate an interior turret that offers elevation corrections, but is capped until dialing is needed.



Machined aluminum throw levers clamp over the magnification ring, giving some extra leverage for fast adjustments.



The Steiner STR-MIL reticle appears as a duplex crosshair in low magnification with an illuminated center. When zoomed in, fine .2-mil increments increase precision.



The locking diopter ring is knurled and prevents unintended reticle-focus adjustments.

getting them corralled into a single focal plane is an engineering challenge. Spending money and using extra low dispersion glass is the time-tested and most effective solution, so that's what Steiner did. The result is excellent resolution with no chromatic aberration. Chromatic aberration is the odd colors that appear around high-contrast edges in the scope's field of view. Aberration fatigues the eye when viewed for prolonged time periods.

Getting all of the above done was a challenge, but doing it in a large and heavy scope would have defeated Steiner's primary objective of creating an ideal mid-powered optic for hunters. Steiner kept the weight down to a svelte 23 ounces, and the length to a short 11.8 inches. Its light weight comes partially from using a 42mm objective lens. Objective lens groups are the heaviest group in any scope, so going with 42mm was a great decision. The maintube diameter is 30mm, also wise when trying to keep weight down



The reticle is powered by a common CR2032 battery. It is accessed by removing the reticle illumination cap.

because it reduces the diameter of every other lens in the optic when compared to 34mm maintubes. The 30mm tube keeps weight to a minimum, but it does carry the slight penalty of reducing the scope's adjustment range to about 21 mils, or 70 minutes of angle (MOA). Still, this is plenty of adjustment to get a rifle chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor out to beyond 1,100 yards, a distance that I'd never hunt at but might ring some steel for fun. While the 2X to 12X magnification range is meant to be great for hunting, this is still a scope that allows for some fun at the range.

Walking through the factory gave me an appreciation for Steiner's commitment to building premium products in the United States. The maintubes are machined in Colorado from a

single piece of billet aluminum, and most of the internals are made there as well. Only the glass lenses are made elsewhere, and those must pass stringent quality assurance standards before being put into a scope. All assembly and testing occur in Colorado.

The H6Xi is a premium scope built for premium rifles. I'd expect to see these more atop a high-end, adjustable hunting rifle rather than a more affordable Mossberg Patriot or Ruger American, for example. Whether or not the H6Xi is a good fit for you, it does represent the latest in scope technology that's intended for hunters. 

STEINER 2-12X42MM H6XI	
POWER	2X-12X
OBJECTIVE	42mm
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.1 mil per click (21 mils)
WINDAGE	.1 mil per click (21 mils)
RETICLE	STR-MIL
LENGTH	11.8 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 7.2 oz.
EYE RELIEF	3.52 in.
MSRP	\$2,184
MANUFACTURER	Steiner, 888-550-6255, steiner-optics.com

GUNS & AMMO TV

BE INSIGHTFUL

Wednesday Night at the Range features an A-list of shooting stars, including Joe Mantegna, Eric Poole, John Scoutten, Mark Keefe, Michael Bane and Rossi Morreale. Plus, Terry Schappert and Larry Zanoff team up to recreate famous action scenes from the movies and TV on *Hollywood Weapons*.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT
AT THE RANGE
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Outdoor



GO TITANIUM

AS IT RELATES to the physics of suppression, internal volume matters. Suppressor manufacturers face the perennial challenge of balancing size, weight and noise reduction.

Silencer Central Director of Engineering Lukas VanLaecken's proudest achievements in suppressor design are the Banish Backcountry and Banish Speed K, two cans that prioritize small size over absolute sound suppression.

As the name suggests, the Backcountry was designed for lightweight hunting.

The Speed K, on the other hand, was built to be as small as possible while capable of withstanding high-volume abuse.

"The idea for the Speed K came from the law enforcement community," said VanLaecken. "Working alongside Federal Ammunition, we met with SWAT teams, highway patrol, and various police departments from all over the country. We took their input and designed the Speed K. The design intent was to create a suppressor that allows for maneuverability and minimizes blowback while also being hearing-safe. The Speed K is a short and maneuverable suppressor for taming AR platforms with barrels as short as 10½ inches."

The Speed K is only 4 inches in length yet 2 inches in diameter, maximizing internal volume. This unique suppressor is 3D-printed from Inconel, a nickel-chromium superalloy used in extreme environments. As a suppressor material, Inconel has just one drawback: It's heavy.

Silencer Central recently unveiled an upgrade that offers all the benefits of the Speed K, but in a lighter package: Banish Speed K Ti. According to VanLaecken, the only difference is the material.

"Besides the metal, the Speed Ks are identical in design," said VanLaecken. "The advantage to Inconel is durability. During testing, we put more than 20,000 rounds through the Speed K and, internally, it looked new. The advantage of titanium is its weight. Whereas the Inconel Speed K weighs 14.1 ounces, our titanium version weighs just 8.6 ounces. That may not sound like much, but when it's hanging on the end of a rifle, a reduction of 5.5 ounces is noticeable."

Besides an increase in cost — \$1,399 versus \$1,199 — there aren't any drawbacks.

"The only concern with titanium as a suppressor material is temperature," said VanLaecken. "To prevent internal erosion, the can shouldn't get above 750 degrees. Is that an issue for most shooters? No. To achieve that temperature, you need to fire three magazines — about 90 rounds — as fast as you can pull the trigger."

The Speed K Ti uses standard HUB mounts. Pressure-wise, it can handle anything from rimfires to the large centerfires including the .22 Creedmoor. Because of its small size, the Speed K's blast chamber has a series of fins.

"In a small suppressor, everything matters," said VanLaecken. "The fins create six individual chambers that cause gas to flow in

all directions, which aids in turbulence and helps sound reduction."

The final two baffles of the Speed K are ported. In terms of sound suppression, the ports don't help, but they minimize gas blowback, which is critical for the AR-pattern firearms the Speed K was designed for.

"Gas in a shooter's face is never healthy," said VanLaecken. "The more you shoot, the more this matters. Porting in the final baffles allows some of the pressure to escape by using the controlled-flow technology design. During testing, other suppressors on the market increase backpressure in an AR by 20 to 40 percent. That's substantial. In comparison, the Speed K showed just a 5-percent increase in backpressure."

Despite the similarities, the Speed K Ti is slightly quieter

than the Inconel version — almost 1 decibel quieter. Inconel and titanium have different densities and metal properties. The Banish Speed K pales in comparison to other suppressors if maximum sound suppression is the goal.

"The Speed K Ti cuts noise to a hearing-safe level," said VanLaecken. "It prioritizes small size, low weight, and reduced backpressure. The Banish Speed K Ti is hard to beat."  — D. Faubion



SILENCER CENTRAL BANISH SPEED K TI

CALIBER	.223/5.56mm
DIAMETER	2 in.
LENGTH	4 in.
WEIGHT	8.6 oz. (w/o HUB mount)
MATERIAL	Titanium
MOUNT	HUB
FINISH	Cerakote, black
MSRP	\$1,399
MANUFACTURER	Silencer Central, 866-891-4494, silencercentral.com

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2024 GUNS & AMMO OF THE YEAR

*The best of what's new
and innovative for 2024.*

GUNS & AMMO EDITORS, contributors and staff have determined the firearms industry's award recipients for 2024. G&A evaluated the merits of every new product during the course of in-house testing and evaluations, and through field reports and information gathered while attending firearm industry events. Nominations and voting were conducted at the conclusion of the annual Outdoor Sportsman Group (OSG) Roundtable in Grand Junction, Colorado. Only products made commercially available since the fourth quarter of 2023 — and were not considered for last year's awards — qualified for consideration.

G&A acquired several samples of each nominated product throughout 2024 to achieve a representative evaluation. Products that warranted any doubt in reliability or durability were struck from the list of candidates. All-new designs, as well as those having the most potential to benefit the broadest range of readers, were given additional merit when scored. To decide split decisions between comparable products, the more affordable option was favored during the voting process. New for 2024 is the creation of the "Air Gun" category.

The winner of each category was determined by popular vote, but nominated products had to meet three criteria: First, the product must have been new and available for purchase in 2024. A line extension of an existing product did not earn full points as another possessing innovative features and engineering. Second, the product must have demonstrated quality and reliability to a degree that met or exceeded its design objectives. Lastly, the winner offered the greatest availability and interest to the largest audience. G&A's staff awarded these points after surveying in-store availability and confirming retail pricing to ensure that new products exist for sale and provide great value.

Voting concluded on September 1, 2024. Congratulations to the winners.

To maintain the credibility of the Guns & Ammo of the Year awards, no manufacturers, advertisers or sales representatives were consulted or involved with the selection process. What follows is the ultimate list of 2024's best new products.





BURRIS FASTFIRE C, 6 MOA: \$276



BURRIS BTH35 V3,
THERMAL:
\$2,160

BURRIS BTC35 V3,
THERMAL:
\$3,000



BURRIS SIGNATURE HD
SPOTTING SCOPE,
20-60X85MM:
\$2,040

BURRIS BTS35 V3,
THERMAL:
\$3,000



INNOVATOR OF THE YEAR

BURRIS introduced several new optics and technologies for release in 2024. These include the Eliminator 6, Signature HD spotting scope, Veracity PH, FastFire C, and three thermals, the BTH35 v3, BTS35 v3 and BTC35 v3. These products represent an achievement in each respective category, but the collection accentuates the advancements made by Burris and its investment toward the betterment of our optical future.

The Eliminator 6 packages ranging capability, environmental monitoring, and ballistics technology into a single scope with excellent optics. To use the Eliminator 6, simply range the target, hold the illuminated aiming point on the target and press the trigger. Previous generations of the Eliminator have been groundbreaking, but the Eliminator 6 incorporates the latest tech packaged in a traditional-looking scope suited for most rifles.

The Signature HD Spotting Scope features a 20X to 60X magnification range with an 85mm objective. High Definition (HD) lenses are apochromatic, meaning they are free of chromatic and spherical aberrations. The result is a sharp image with high color accuracy. There is no detectible color fringing from edge to edge.

Veracity PH is a riflescope that combines simple aiming concepts with technology on

a 5X zoom range for accuracy from close- to long-range targets. Working in conjunction with an advanced elevation turret, the unit features a heads-up display (HUD) to offer the shooter the ability to dial distance, windage hold value, correct for cant. Shooters can also use the BurrisConnect app to create and upload a ballistic profile and tune environmental factors.

The FastFire C is Burris' latest red-dot optic that was designed to support sub-compact and micro-compact pistols. It weighs less than 1 ounce and features "Always On" technology with a 25,000-hour runtime. It's powered by a CR2032 battery and is low profile while also mounting with a lower-third co-witness when using standard sights.

Burris has also introduced three high-resolution thermals: One handheld (BTH35 v3), a second that is a dedicated scope to be mounted on a rifle (BTS35 v3), and a third clip-on unit that can function either as a hand-held thermal or as an imager that can be mounted ahead of an optic, changing the host optic into a variable power thermal (BTC35 v3).

Each of these products qualifies for an individual award, but the collection bestows greater honor to the brand. In 2024, Burris reached the zenith of optical innovation. ■ — E. Poole

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Burris, burrisoptics.com



SMITH & WESSON BODYGUARD 2.0	
TYPE	Recoil operated, striker fired, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	.380 ACP
CAPACITY	10+1 rds., 12+1 rds.
BARREL	2.75 in., stainless steel
LENGTH	5.6 in.
HEIGHT	4.1 in. (w/ magazine)
WIDTH	.75 in.
WEIGHT	11.4 oz. (tested w/ empty magazine)
FRAME	Polymer, textured
FINISH	Armornite (stainless steel)
SIGHTS	TruGlo Day/Night (front), serrated notch (rear)
TRIGGER	4 lbs, 4 oz. (tested)
SAFETY	Trigger safety lever, firing pin block; thumb safety (optional)
MSRP	\$449
MANUFACTURER	Smith & Wesson, 800-331-0852, smith-wesson.com

HANDGUN OF THE YEAR
SMITH & WESSON BODYGUARD 2.0

was revamped and made distinctive. The Bodyguard 2.0 in .380 ACP was an unexpected entry in 2024. Excitement grew as Guns & Ammo’s staff began receiving samples and testing the little gun. Then, it was as if no one could stop raving about it. Pictures do not accurately describe the Bodyguard 2.0. It has the proportions of a compact or even full-size pistol, but it is truly small enough to fit into a pocket.

Everything about the Bodyguard 2.0 works. Aesthetically, it looks great. It also functions and is ergonomic. The iron sights might be “Best in Class,” as some say. The trigger pull might be, too. The trigger pull on our samples averaged a spectacular 4¼ pounds. When a great trigger and a set of sights work as these do, you have a pocket gun that will ring steel at 50 yards.



The Bodyguard 2.0 is a striker-fired .380 with a polymer frame and a stainless-steel barrel and slide protected by Smith & Wesson’s Armornite finish. It sports a 2¾-inch barrel and fits 10 rounds in the flush magazine, and 12 in the extended. It only weighs 11.4 ounces with the flush magazine inserted. It’s just three-quarters of an inch thick, and sports a highly visible orange day/night front sight. The Bodyguard 2.0 is an eligible carry pistol for most shooters that’s priced competitively. If it becomes the standard in .380 autos, well, you heard it here first. — J. Tarr



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RIFLE OF THE YEAR

WILSON COMBAT NULA MODEL 20/MODEL 20S was based on Melvin Forbes’ New Ultra Light Arms (NULA), which Wilson Combat acquired in June 2022. Forbes passed away on June 5, 2024, at age 77. Guns & Ammo immediately began pursuing Wilson’s NULA Model 20 and Model 20S Mini Action rifles. “I won’t have them ready for the fall,” Wilson said in 2022. “It’ll be hunting season next year before they’re ready.” True to his word, Wilson had rifles ready for sale in the fall of 2023. Guns & Ammo first reviewed the NULA Model 20 for the January 2024 issue.

Rifle aficionados are familiar with Forbes’ Ultra-Light Arms and NULA rifles. There were few produced because the shop was always small, despite high demand. When the industry learned that Wilson Combat acquired NULA, a sigh of relief was heard from heaven. Wilson Combat has a robust manufacturing operation, and Wilson refuses to make anything less than exquisite. Our hope was that Wilson would stay true to Forbes’ design while making them in enough quantities to satisfy the demand. A year after these rifles became available, we were thrilled to report that the new NULA rifles from Wilson Combat are more than what we hoped they would be. Wilson has taken the design, leveraged modern manufacturing techniques, and cre-

ated a distinctive rifle that complements Wilson Combat’s reputation for accuracy, quality, and reliability.

Though the NULA design was improved, the receiver is still a scaled-down version of the Model 700 pattern, reduced in weight from the typical 35 ounces to just 20 ounces; it is where this rifle gets its name. The receiver is machined from 4140 bar stock, featuring a recoil lug sandwiched between the barrel and receiver. Barrel lengths depend on chambering, but span 16¼ inches and 22

inches. The Model 20 is offered in .243 Winchester, 6.5 Creedmoor, 7mm-08 Remington, .308 Winchester, and .358 Winchester. The Model 20S Mini Action calibers include .223 Wylde, .300 HAM’R, .300 Blackout and .350 Legend. Wilson Combat makes its barrels in-house, and no Wilson Combat rifle tested by G&A has ever failed to meet the sub-MOA guarantee.

Wilson Combat’s NULA Model 20 and Model 20S earned Guns & Ammo’s 2024 Rifle of the Year honors because it successfully preserved the icon’s lineage, staying true to Forbes’ original intent, but with enhancements that make its availability to the masses possible. These rifles are now supported by a company that refuses to compromise quality for profit. It’s a huge win for the rifle-shooting community. ■

— T. Beckstrand

WILSON COMBAT NULA MODEL 20	
TYPE	Bolt action
CARTRIDGE	.308 Win. (tested)
CAPACITY	4+1 rds.
BARREL	20 in., 1:10-in. twist, threaded muzzle, 416R stainless steel, LW profile
OVERALL LENGTH	39.75 inches
WEIGHT	5 lbs., 4 oz. (tested)
STOCK	Carbon fiber
LENGTH OF PULL	13.5 in.
FINISH	Cerakote (stainless steel), Kodiak Rogue camouflage (carbon-fiber stock)
TRIGGER	Timney Elite Hunter; 2 lbs., 2 oz. (tested)
SIGHTS	None
SAFETY	Two-position lever
MSRP	\$3,295
MANUFACTURER	Wilson Combat, 800-955-4856, wilsoncombat.com

PHOTO: MARK FINGAR



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NEW 5.7x28 AMMO

Going to the shooting range just got easier with your favorite 5.7x28mm pistol or carbine! The newest extension in the popular FIOCCHI Range Dynamics line is now available in a bulk pack. This 5.7 cartridge is a 40 grain, full metal jacket projectile and bundled in a 150 round package. Another in a line of 5.7x28mm ammunition unmatched in the industry!

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SHOTGUN OF THE YEAR

BROWNING A5 20 GA. was based on the 1898 John Browning design that was patented in 1900. The Auto-5 was the first mass-produced semiautomatic shogun, and it was in continuous production for nearly 100 years. Its distinctive high rear receiver earned it the nickname “Humpback,” and it became the second best-selling autoloading shotgun in history.

In 2014, Browning Arms released the A5. It is mechanically different than the Auto-5, largely due to the Kinematic Drive System. The A5 uses kinetic energy to power the recoil-operated system, providing reliable operation despite the differences in loads for 2¾- and 3-inch chambers.

The new-for-2024 A5 20 gauge is an innovative approach to the design. Rather than taking a 12-gauge A5 and rebarreling it for 20-gauge ammunition, Browning engineered a smaller frame, which made it slimmer and more than a pound lighter than the 12-gauge model. The effort resulted in superb balance that feels light in the hand, swings quickly, and promotes follow-through. The humpback receiver profile helps the eyes sight down the rib along the sight plane for natural sight alignment with the fiber-optic bead and target.

Controls are familiar, and the trigger group — with Browning’s gold trigger — is easily removed for cleaning. The safety is a reversible crossbolt-style button behind the trigger, while ahead of the triggerguard is the bolt latch. The bolt latch locks the bolt to the rear when the magazine is unloaded and

releases a shell from the magazine when the bolt is closed for fast loading. The oversized shape and location make using the latch convenient. Inside the A5 is the patented feeding system that sends the first shell loaded directly into the chamber. The term “speed loading” is historically attributed to the Browning Auto-5, however, it was the invention of Val Browning, John’s son, which was patented in 1952. Not only is the A5 fast to load, but it can be unloaded quickly without needing to cycle each shell through the chamber.

The overall fit and finish of the new A5 20 gauge is excellent. Aluminum parts, such as the receiver, have a high-gloss anodized finish that complements the high-gloss walnut stock and blued steel barrel. The bolt, bolt slide, shell carrier, bolt-release button and cocking

handle wear a nickel Teflon coating for additional protection. Inside the barrel, the chamber and bore are chrome, which resists corrosion and makes the bore easier to clean.

At the range and in the field, the Browning A5 20 gauge proved accurate, reliable, and intuitive to shoot well. Felt recoil was light and dull. The barrel combines Vector Pro forcing cone lengthening, back-bore technology, and Invector-DS interchangeable chokes to put more pellets in each pattern. Twenty-gauge ammunition is performing as 12-gauge loads used to. For its smaller frame, iconic humpback-shaped receiver, and 20-gauge performance, the A5 was easily the best shotgun in 2024. ■

— E. Poole

BROWNING A5	
TYPE	Recoil operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	20 ga.
CAPACITY	4 shells (2¾ in.)
BARREL	26 in. or 28 in. (3-in.)
OVERALL LENGTH	47.25 in (26-in. bbl.); 49.25 (28-in. bbl.)
WEIGHT	5 lbs., 10 oz.
STOCK	Walnut, Grade I, gloss
LENGTH OF PULL	14.25 in.
FINISH	Anodized (aluminum); high gloss blue (steel)
SIGHTS	Fiber-optic bead (front)
SAFETY	Enlarged, reversible button
MSRP	\$1,980
IMPORTER	Browning, 800-333-3288, browning.com

PHOTO: MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ

1911

OPTICS READY



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AMMO OF THE YEAR

HORNADY 22 ARC & ELD-VT exists because Hornady wanted to offer .22-250 performance in a cartridge that would work in an AR-15. It successfully pulled off the .22 Advanced Rifle Cartridge (ARC) by pairing Very Low Drag (VLD) bullets with high ballistic coefficients (BC), and installing them in a case that accepts as much powder as possible behind the bullet. While the .22 ARC was designed to work in an AR-15, it is equally at home in a bolt-action rifle.

While the .22 ARC shares the same 6 PPC parent case as the 6 ARC, it is not just a necked-down version of it. The .22 ARC uses .22-caliber VLD bullets that are shorter than its 6mm counterparts, so the .22 ARC case is slightly longer and has more powder volume. That powder volume — when paired with a VLD bullet — means the .22 ARC has less wind drift than a .22-250 at 200 yards. Elevation drop is almost identical at 375 yards, and the ARC has less drop at 500 yards and beyond. All of this exists in a case that uses significantly less powder and is much easier on the barrel than the .22-250.

The 62-grain ELD-VT is the other half of Guns & Ammo's 2024 Ammunition of the Year award because it was no less deserving. The ELD-VT line offers bullets that are longer with better ballistic coefficients than the weight would indicate. These are lead-core projectiles

with copper jackets, but there is a large air cavity in the nose. The air cavity keeps weight down while allowing Hornady to create a long aerodynamic ogive that slips through the air. The ELD-VT family of bullets are so long and aerodynamic that they pair best with cartridges designed for VLD bullets.

The .22 ARC brings the latest in cartridge design to the .22-caliber world by maximizing velocity and pairing it with high-BC bullets. Since this cartridge has a maximum overall length and case diameter capable of working in an AR-15, it still offers mild recoil and great barrel life. Combining the .22 ARC cartridge with the ELD-VT makes a combination that has proven great for all types of shooting, from ringing steel to blasting coyotes. Few cartridge and bullet combinations have offered this much versatility. ■



— *T. Beckstrand*

PERFORMANCE

.22 ARC	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Handload 80-gr. ELD-X	3,039	16	7.5	.37	.52
Hornady 88-gr. ELD-M	2,775	54	22.3	.49	.71
Hornady 62-gr. ELD-VT	3,266	32	14.3	.61	.7
Hornady 75-gr. ELD-M	3,034	35	15.3	.64	.83

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups from 100 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots measured with a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Hornady, hornady.com

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OPTIC OF THE YEAR

LEUPOLD MARK 4HD RIFLESOPES won Guns & Ammo's 2024 Optic of the Year honors because Leupold found a way to merge superior optical performance with most of the features used in the Mark 5HD series — G&A's 2023 Optic of the Year. The Mark 4HD riflescopes include 1-4.5x24mm, 2.5-10x42mm, 4.5-18x52mm, 6-24x52mm, and 8-32x56mm. These scopes are packaged for several hundred dollars less than competitively configured optics from other brands. Almost all models of these scopes feature first focal plane (FFP) reticles, have a side-focus adjustment, a 34mm maintube, and are offered in the reticles we know and love. G&A expects the Mark 4HD series will soak up a significant portion of market share because the performance offered far exceeds the price they command. Prices start at \$1,000 for the 1-4.5X and 2.5-10X models and top out at \$1,600 for the 4.5-18X and 8-32X models with side focus.

The idea for the Mark 4HD came from Leupold employees listening to customers they encountered while at shooting matches and trade shows. It was said that many potential customers couldn't afford the Mark 5HD, or they wanted a VX-5 with an FFP reticle. Engineers went to work to create a scope line that offered Mark 5HD performance at a

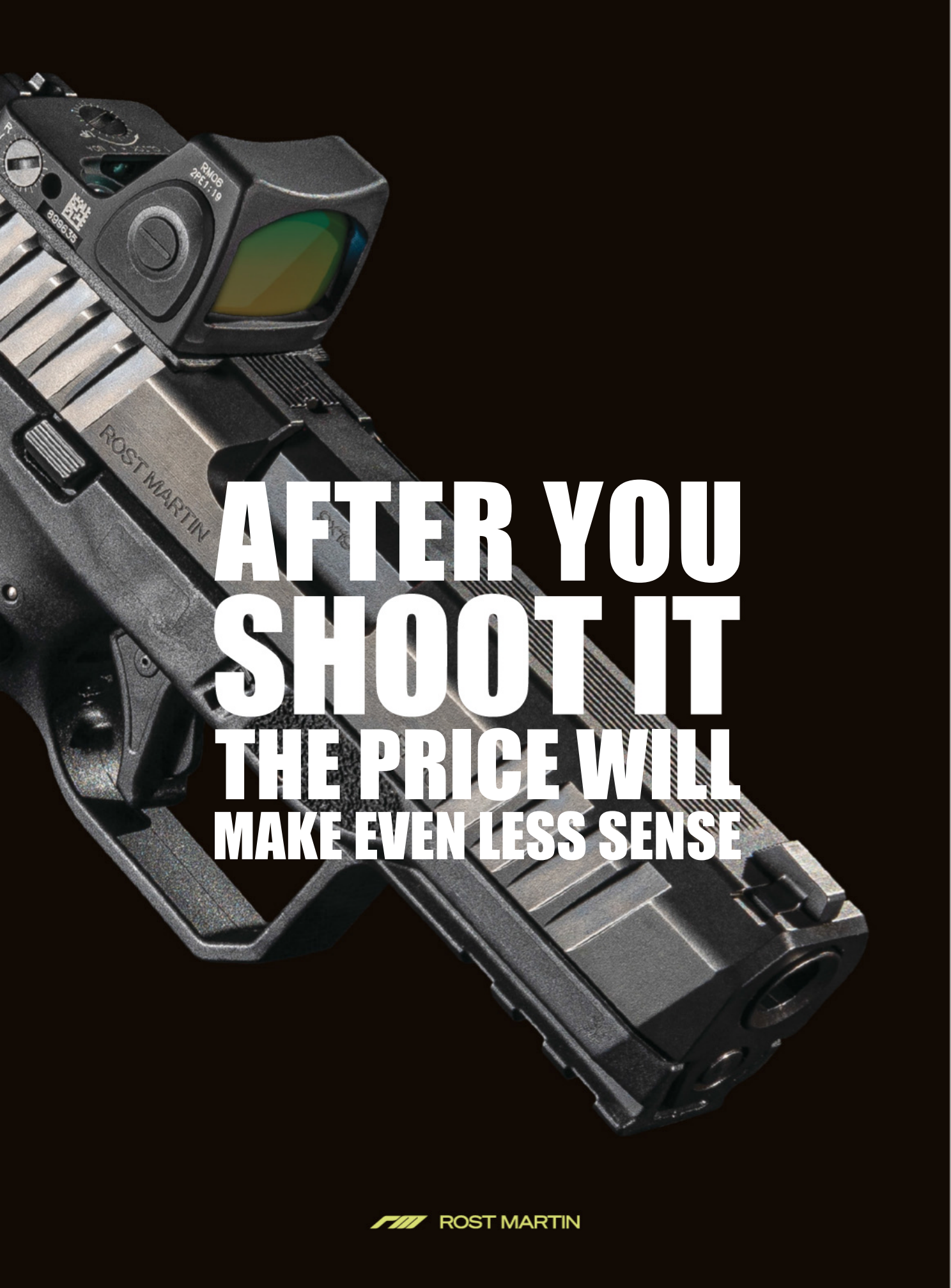
less expensive price. The Mark 4HD is that solution. It's a huge win for the customer, but it will certainly cut into the success of the Mark 5HD.

We all know that nobody gets something for nothing. There are some differences between the Mark 4HD and Mark 5HD scope lines that need to be highlighted. The Mark 4HD scopes have 4X erector assemblies, as compared to the 5X erector assemblies used in the Mark 5HD. This means the customer has to be willing to have a scope that is a 4.5-18X versus a 3.6-18X. Also, Mark 4HD scopes are longer than the Mark 5HD counterparts. These sacrifices in length and magnification range resulted in significant savings that most of us can accept.

Leupold is capable of offering a product like the Mark 4HD because it is unique among scope manufacturers. In the case of the Mark 4HD, everything was designed, made and assembled in the U.S., and the company leadership was willing to compete with its own more expensive Mark 5HD line to benefit the consumer. The combination of corporate attitude and these products is unusual and

worth rewarding, which is why the Mark 4HD series was named Guns & Ammo's 2024 Optic of the Year. ■ — *T. Beckstrand*

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Leupold, leupold.com



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HOLSTER OF THE YEAR

N8 TACTICAL MULTIFLEX proved to be different than holsters that claim to be “universal” or “multi-fit,” which are often discarded in a storage tub of forgotten leather and kydex. The N8 Tactical MultiFlex holster is compatible with a long list of firearm makes and models, and the same holster can be used interchangeably with different guns. Further, the MultiFlex can be tailored for ride height on a belt, cant and retention.

Using available accessories, the MultiFlex can be configured for inside-the-waistband (IWB) or outside-the-waistband (OWB) carry by attaching belt clips or loops, respectively. An OWB paddle is an option, too.

The MultiFlex is offered in two sizes: Full and Compact. The holster accommodates more than 275 pistol models. Guns & Ammo staff reviewed both and adapted several firearms



to test fitment during our evaluation. The MultiFlex holster performed well in G&A's draw-to-fire test, providing a clean draw even from concealment. It rated high among other IWB holsters tested, also.

The N8 Tactical MultiFlex offered a secure fit, proved adaptable, and was easy to wear. Not only would this holster support daily carry, but it would also work with new and unusual pistols that lack strong aftermarket support. Given the range of configurations, optional accessories and accommodation of so many makes and models, the N8 Tactical MultiFlex soundly earned G&A's 2024 Holster of the Year honors. ■

— J. Kurtenbach

FOR MORE INFORMATION
N8 Tactical, n8.crossbreedholsters.com

PHOTO: JOE KURTENBACH

TECHNOLOGY OF THE YEAR

GARMIN XERO C1 PRO CHRONOGRAPH

Occasionally, a product comes along that truly makes life easier. If you're a reloader, competitive shooter, or even a gunwriter in need of ballistic data, the Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph is one such product. Measuring only 5½ inches across and weighing just 5.7 ounces, the Xero C1 Pro easily fits in a cargo pocket. Attach the supplied mini tripod and you're ready for the range.

The Xero C1 Pro relies on Doppler radar to obtain speed data from 100 feet per second (fps) to 5,000 fps. Velocity, extreme spread (ES), standard deviation (SD), and kinetic energy data are calculated. This information helps with load development, determining bullet trajectory, and power factor (PF) for competition.

The push-button-operated Xero C1 Pro is as easy to use as it is to transport. First, point the unit toward the target. Then,



FOR MORE INFORMATION
Garmin, garmin.com

turn it on and select “NEW SESSION”. Choose the appropriate session type, i.e., rifle, shotgun, or pistol. For rifles and shotguns, place the unit 5 to 15 inches to either side and behind the muzzle. With a handgun, you can shoot directly over the unit. It's as simple as that.

The Xero C1 Pro displays data in real-time on the Xero C1 Pro's 240x320-pixel monochromatic screen, which is visible even in direct sunlight. An internal, rechargeable lithium-ion battery powers the unit for 2,000 shots or up to 6 hours. The memory will save up to 50 100-shot sessions. Additional data can be stored with the free ShotView app on a smart device, which also supports notetaking.

It's so good that it's even being used by ammo manufacturers. ■

— R. Nance

PHOTO: YAMIL R. SUEDE

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RED DOT OF THE YEAR

VORTEX DEFENDER SERIES features three new red-dot optics designed for use on pistols in 2024. The Defender XL, which has the largest window measuring 1-inch wide by .9 inch; the Defender ST, measuring .9 inch by .8 inch; and the Defender CCW, the smallest red-dot with a window measuring .8 inch by .65 inches. While those models sound like they are not that different in size, each offers a significant difference when mounted on a pistol.

Vortex won Guns & Ammo's 2024 Red Dot of the Year award because the three models in the Defender Series effectively cover all types of handguns and applications. They are also highly durable and well-priced. Reliability tests proved them to be flawless.

Part of the reason the Defender Series optics are so durable is that the housings are made from 7075 T6 aluminum, the toughest material available for this application. The Defender Series was made to survive the blunt force that can come from being mounted to a pistol slide.



These red dots are fully featured and use glass lenses with coatings to prevent scratching. The glass gives the dot sharp, clearly defined edges that enable precision shooting when needed.

The Defender has an auto shut-off, so after a set time of no motion the optic turns off to preserve battery life. Picking it up immediately turns it back on to the last illumination setting. Vortex was also thoughtful enough to include numerous mounting plates and screw types with each red dot. This means you don't get soaked in accessories just to get your pistol ready for the range.

Intuitive controls, clear glass, rugged durability, versatile mounting, fine adjustments; these are qualities only found in Guns & Ammo's 2024 Red Dot of the Year. ■

— T. Beckstrand

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Vortex Optics, vortexoptics.com



AIR GUN OF THE YEAR

STOEGER XM1 SCOUT PCP marks the first Air Gun of the Year award for Guns & Ammo. Air guns have been an important step for many young shooters. These are often the first gun type that inspires us to become lifelong firearms enthusiasts. Today's air guns are as diverse as firearms, and are offered in small to large calibers. Besides target shooting, air guns are popular for pest control, squirrel and rabbit hunting, as well as hunting hogs and big game.

The Italian-designed Stoeger XM1 Scout pre-charged (PCP) air gun was selected by Guns & Ammo's staff for its performance and affordability during the 2024 Roundtable. When we tested the .25-caliber model on paper at 100 yards and then out to 150 yards against steel, its power and precision won over the most ardent riflshooters.

The notable features of the XM1 Scout

are an 18-inch barrel, metal receiver with integral optic rail, rotary magazine, and adjustable synthetic stock. This side-lever action air gun is powered by a 200cc reservoir with a 3,000-psi maximum fill. Its air system is regulated and delivers a consistent psi behind each pellet. The pressure is regulated to deliver around 2,030 psi for each shot. Depending on the bullet grain, a .22-caliber pellet was clocked downrange range to near 1,000 feet per second (fps). The benefits of regulated air guns are velocities with low extreme spreads and standard deviations.

The stock's ergonomics reveal its Italian roots. The swooping groove of the forend and the spacer-adjustable length of pull is reminiscent of a shotgun. The cheekpiece height offers 1.2 inches of total adjustment, too. Textures cover the bottom of the forearm and encircle the grip for high traction on an otherwise slick stock. Other thoughtful features include pistol grip inserts to increase palm swell, and rail attachments for the forend tip. The XM1 Scout PCP is what you would want a multi-purpose air gun to

be. It is a quality build, affordable, and easy to shoot precisely. ■

— A. Rico

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Stoeger Ind., stoegerindustries.com

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SUPPRESSOR OF THE YEAR

SILENCER CENTRAL BANISH SPEED K Ti proved once again that Silencer Central knows its users. Evidence: Banish Speed K Ti. The Inconel-made Banish Speed K was designed to be the go-to solution for law enforcement and military professionals seeking a compact suppressor with reasonable sound reduction for teams working in closed environments. While Inconel is a premium solution for the extreme heat and abuse experienced during full-auto operation, it is a relatively heavy material resulting in a 14.1-ounce suppressor. The new-for-2024 Banish Speed K Ti is made of 100 percent titanium, weighing only 8.6 ounces. It is a civilian-friendly version of the Banish Speed K, and is perfect for hunting, plinking and competition. With an overall length of 4 inches, the Banish Speed K is the shortest 5.56mm suppressor on the market. Silencer Central focused on making the Banish Speed K as short as possible while mitigating backpressures and still ensuring that it is hearing-safe. With a published sound reduction of 20.6 decibels, it's amazingly quiet for such a small package.

The benefits of a short suppressor in the civilian market are tremendous. Hunters enjoy greater mobility in and out of vehicles, and especially while trudging through heavy brush. Competitors will see value when navigating through obstacles under the clock. Knocking a suppressor on a barrier can change the point of impact, and of course, a shorty looks cool. The noticeably large 2-inch diameter may appear bulky, but it was a necessary design element to increase the internal volume to a level that is hearing-safe. Going from a

standard 1½-inch diameter to 2 inches provided about 30 percent more volume in a 4-inch design.

The Banish Speed K Ti is a 3D-printed titanium design, allowing for complex flow-through geometry that would be impossible to machine traditionally. In cross-section, users would see a blast baffle, four vented baffles, and a vented endcap. The blast baffle has a stepped face with six longitudinal fins designed to slow down and direct pressures and gasses down the length of the suppressor — and not back into the shooter's face. The vented baffles are designed to direct pressures forward and out through the four holes

on the endcap. The rear of each Speed K Ti is machined in 1.375x24 HUB threading, so users can mount any HUB accessory shorter than 1.25 inches. Each Speed K is delivered with a titanium ½x28-direct-thread adapter. The entire suppressor is finished in a durable black Cerakote. ■

— M. Fingar



FOR MORE INFORMATION
Silencer Central, silencercentral.com

PHOTO: MARK FINGAR

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HAMMER TIME

THE CZ P-09 C NOCTURNE IS A MIX OF THE OLD AND NEW.

BY JAMES TARR

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ

THINGS GO IN AND OUT of fashion all the time, sometimes for good reasons, and sometimes for no reason at all. Striker-fired pistols have been the dominant form of handgun in the U.S. for at least 20 years, replacing the double-action/single-action (DA/SA) semiautomatics that were everywhere in the 1980s and '90s. However, DA/SA pistols are now coming back in demand as younger shooters discover older designs. CZ's timing with the introduction of its updated hammer-fired DA/SA P-07 and P-09 pistols is perfect.

Previously, CZ offered the compact P-07 and full-size P-09 models. They have been replaced with the P-09 C (compact) Nocturne and the P-09 F (full-size) Nocturne. It is unusual in the firearms world to see new hammer-fired DA/SA pistols with polymer frames. I think they've always been great, and maybe the updated models will get them the attention they deserve. The P-09 C was sent to Guns & Ammo for review, which is likely to be the more popular of the two variants. It's big enough to be a duty pistol, but small enough to carry concealed.

The P-09 C Nocturne has roughly the same specs as the P-07 Duty that it's replacing, including a 3.74-inch barrel and a 15-plus-one capacity of 9mm. The P-09 F stretches the barrel to 4.53 inches and the frame to accommodate a longer 19-round magazine. With an empty magazine inserted, the P-09 C Nocturne weighed 26.1 ounces and measured 7.3-inches long, 5½-inches tall — if you include the steel lanyard loop. It measured 1.4-inches wide at the bilateral decocker. Previous models of these pistols were also offered in .40 S&W, but the P-09 C Nocturne is only available in 9mm. I don't know that any manufacturer is offering new pistols chambered in .40 S&W.



The P-09 C Nocturne represents the first major upgrade suite CZ has made to the platform. The most notable additions are the optic-ready slide and enhanced grip texture.



It's always somebody's first day, so let me explain a few things: DA/SA means you can fire the first shot in double action, i.e., pulling the trigger to cock and then release the hammer. The cycling slide cocks the hammer, and subsequent shots are single action, where the hammer starts cocked and the trigger pull is shorter and lighter. From the factory, the P-09 Nocturne comes equipped with a frame-mounted decocker. Work the lever and the hammer drops to what I like to call a "quarter-cock," moving it from SA to DA mode. CZ also ships the pistol with replacement levers so you can swap the decocker with a manual safety, thus, theoretically, enabling this pistol to be carried "cocked-and-locked" with the hammer back and safety engaged. More on this further on.

THEN VERSUS NOW

The P-07 was first introduced in 2009, and the full-size P-09 was introduced a few years later. The two pistols have seen a few minor upgrades through the years, but this is the first major overhaul CZ has given them. Oh, and I asked about the name. CZ went with "Nocturne" because it sounds cool, which is always important; also, because it fits with previous names. (CZ Shadow pistols have been very successful.)

CZ P-09 C NOCTURNE	
TYPE	DA/SA semiautomatic (decocker convertible)
CARTRIDGE	9mm
CAPACITY	15+1 rds.
BARREL	3.74 in., carbon steel
OVERALL LENGTH	7.3 in.
HEIGHT	5.5 in.
WIDTH	1.4 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 10.1 oz. (tested)
FINISH	Nitride (steel)
SIGHTS	Steel, 3 dot, photo luminescent
SAFETY	Firing pin block, manual safety or decocker
TRIGGER	11 lbs., 8 oz. (DA), 5 lbs. (SA) (tested)
ACCESSORIES	Two 15-round magazines, three backstraps, snap caps, manual safety, cable lock, lockable hard case
MSRP	\$549
IMPORTER	CZ-USA, 800-955-4486, cz-usa.com

If you're familiar, you'll see the P-09 C Nocturne looks quite a bit like the P-07 Duty. The biggest external changes are an optics-ready slide and increased texturing on the grip. In addition, the forward cocking serrations have been improved and expanded, the slide release slightly enlarged, and there's a loaded chamber indicator on the extractor. The contour of the decocker and safety have also changed slightly. The sights are slightly higher profile, too.

The P-09 Nocturne features the same cold-hammer-forged barrel, the same Omega trigger system, and the same frame construction — fiberglass-reinforced polymer, with replaceable backstraps. The new guns will work with

the existing P-07/P-09 magazines, however, the new Nocturne magazines will not work in the older guns due to changes in the baseplates.

SLIDE DETAILS

The sights on the Nocturne pistols are a bit taller. They are steel, with a big U-notch in the rear, and offer a three-dot sight picture featuring green photo-



A Shield RMSc and Holosun K footprint was used for the P-09 C Nocturne slide. A Vortex Defender CCW was mounted for testing.



Dovetailed steel sights feature photoluminescent inserts to provide a three-dot post-notch arrangement.



luminescent paint. If you take the pistol from direct sunlight into a dim room, or hit them briefly with a flashlight, the dots glow green for a few minutes — and are surprisingly bright. While not as high-tech as true tritium-insert night sights, photo-luminescent paint is a great compromise that helps keep the price down.

The slide is cut for direct mounting of optics with the Shield RMSc/Holosun K footprints. Between the direct-mounting option, and the slightly taller sights, you will be able to see your sights through the optic window. If you choose to run the iron sights, the slide cover plate is steel and not polymer, which I like. The slide has a nitride finish for corrosion resistance.

The slide serrations are angled and flat-bottomed. At the front they wrap around the top of the slide, which is new. If the slide looks short (height-wise), that's because the slide of the Nocturne rides inside the frame, as on the original CZ 75 rather than on the outside, as is common with other pistols. This gives you a little less real estate to grip, so improved serrations are a good idea.

If you look on the external extractor on the right side of the slide, at the rear you'll see a silver dot; that's the tip of a stainless-steel post that sticks out when a round is chambered, acting as a loaded chamber indicator.

FRAME DETAILS

At the front of the frame is a rail with one slot available for mounting a light. The triggerguard has always been large on these pistols, and the square front also features a hook.



Small, medium, and large backstraps are provided with the P-09 C Nocturne. They do not change the grip's volume in the hand, but they do adjust grip angle.

For the Nocturne, the frame texturing has been improved and expanded. It is a little more aggressive, and it extends further up on the frame. One of the complaints I had about the original P-07 and P-09 was a lack of texture; that's no longer an issue. You can also find patches of texturing above the front of the triggerguard even, on both sides where it's meant to support the thumb of your support hand.

The magazine release is steel and rectangular,

and nearly flush with the side of the frame; you'll have no problems using it. The pistol has interchangeable backstraps, and three are provided with the gun, sizes small, medium, and large. The small backstrap was installed on Guns & Ammo's pistol when it arrived. The medium and large pieces are not that much bigger. While they add a bit of size, they also slightly change the grip angle.

There's a steel lanyard loop at the bottom of the grip. Magazines are steel, too, with numbered index holes at the rear. There's a slight angle cut at the base of the grip, and the basepads are angled to make stripping out stuck magazines a little bit easier.

The trigger is steel with a wide smooth face and a

gently curving length. Some people think that gunwriter test samples are hand-picked. The truth is most gun companies are too big and too compartmentalized to do this, even if they wanted to. Perfect example: This gun. The Nocturne uses CZ's established Omega trigger system, and every other CZ I've tested with it has had a double-action pull of about 9 pounds and a single-action pull of, at, or less than 4 pounds. The DA pull on the P-09



The slide cut is low enough that the sights can be used through the optic's window.



Disassembly for cleaning or maintenance is similar to recoil operated, striker-fired pistols, but the rails on the inside of the frame require a little extra finesse when removing the slide assembly. Magazine capacity for the P-09 C Nocturne 9mm is 15 rounds, but 10-round magazines are available for restricted areas.



C Nocturne was smooth and non-stacking, but it topped out at 11½-pounds. The single action pull, after a bit of takeup, measured 5 pounds.

The single-sided slide stop is steel, and big enough to use as a slide release. The decocker lever is polymer, and the front of it — around which your thumb will hook — is slightly wider. It's not great, but it's better than the original design and is completely usable under normal conditions. After all, you won't be decocking your gun until after the problem has been solved. Now we get to the optional safety lever that CZ provides with these pistols, if you would rather swap out the decocker.

I found an article I authored more than a decade ago on the original P-07. Here is what I wrote: "The manual safety was so flat that it was hard to work holding the pistol at any angle, and nearly impossible to get on and off using your thumb with a firing grip on the pistol." Guess what hasn't changed in a substantive way with the P-09 Nocturne? You got it.

The only reason to swap out the decocker for the safety is to carry this pistol cocked-and-locked, but for that you need a manual safety lever large enough to work with your thumb as part of the drawstroke (as with any modern 1911). That's not what CZ gave us. Instead, the optional safety is no wider than the decocker. The safety is almost unusable for a carry gun. I understand an engineer's desire to keep the surface of a pistol smooth

and snag free, but some things — specifically manual safeties — need to stick out. If you decide to change it, you'll find a short section in the owner's manual that was clearly translated into English — most likely from Czech. The process is simple, at least when switching from decocker to safety. Once the slide assembly was off the gun, it took a minute and didn't require tools. Going the other way, there was a small captured spring held in place by the decocker. Getting that back in place was a bit of a pain.

Being able to also safely carry and use the P-09 cocked-and-locked, in single action, would make it a stand-out. I can only hope that some enterprising company will make a thumb safety for it with an appropriately sized and shaped lever. Until then, consider the Nocturne solely a DA/SA decocker; in that role it shines.

A brief comment about trigger systems: People tend to like striker-fired pistols because the trigger pull is the same every time. They have drawbacks, including the fact that a



The trigger is curved and smooth, featuring the same Omega SA/DA mechanism as on original P-07/P-09 models. The front of the triggerguard is textured, and the rear has a high-grip undercut.

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A bilateral decocker is standard on the P-09 C Nocturne, resetting a cocked hammer from SA to DA. CZ provides a bilateral manual safety lever so that the P-09 C can be carried "cocked and locked," at the ready without fear of an accidental discharge.



When lowered, a decocked hammer rests at a "quarter cock" position. It can be manually cocked or fired in double action.



A rail slot accepts lights and lasers, but accessories will cover the serial number plate. A 650-lumen Nightstick TCM-10 was used during testing. **\$135**

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Hornady Custom 124-gr. XTP	1,064	28	14	2.2	3
Speer Gold Dot +P 124-gr. JHP	1,201	25	11	2.6	3.3
Federal PD HST 147-gr. JHP	934	33	17	2.7	3.7
Magtech 115-gr. Steel Case FMJ	1,107	32	19	2.7	3.8

Notes: Accuracy is the average of four, five-shot groups at 25 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured with an Oehler Model 35P chronograph set at 12 feet in front of the muzzle.

shorter, lighter trigger pull, combined with no external safety, usually other than the lever on the trigger, means that anytime something gets wedged in the triggerguard during reholstering, an accidental discharge is possible. The long, heavy, first trigger pull on a DA/SA pistol is insurance against that. Once the first shot is fired, subsequent follow-up shots are produced by single-action trigger pulls. The P-09's is superior to what is found in most striker-fired guns. I've argued in the past that DA/SA guns

are a better choice than striker-fired guns for many people. With renewed interest in these, maybe that will start to resonate.

AT THE RANGE

The P-09 C Nocturne was a lot of

fun. It is a mid-sized pistol chambered in 9mm, so it can be shot all day without the feeling of abuse. It's based on a proven 15-year-old design. I noted that none of the updates were meant to improve reliability; the P-07/P-09 models have always been regarded for reliability.

The decocker doesn't lower the hammer all the way, shortening the DA trigger pull slightly, so getting fast A-zone hits on a USPSA target at 7 yards was easy once I got used to

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Rating of A+



Longer 19-round magazines were developed for the P-09 F Nocturne. They are not compatible with older models. According to CZ, older P-07/P-09 mags function reliably in the new Nocturnes.

the gun. When it comes to shooting pistols, everyone is a little different, from stance to grip to hand size. I found the P-09 C Nocturne pointed very naturally for me. The grip is a bit thinner than that of a Glock 17/19, helping people with smaller hands and short fingers reach the trigger easier for that first double-action shot.

If you're open-minded to look at something other than a striker-fired pistol for a carry gun, the updated and upgraded CZ P-09 C Nocturne gives a person everything needed from a modern, hard-use defensive 9mm pistol at a competitive price. 



CZ provides a dummy round with replaceable green rubber primers to allow users to dryfire the handgun without damaging the hammer and firing pin. CZ does not recommend dryfiring the P-09 without it.

GENERATION

MEETS

INNOVATION



MB47



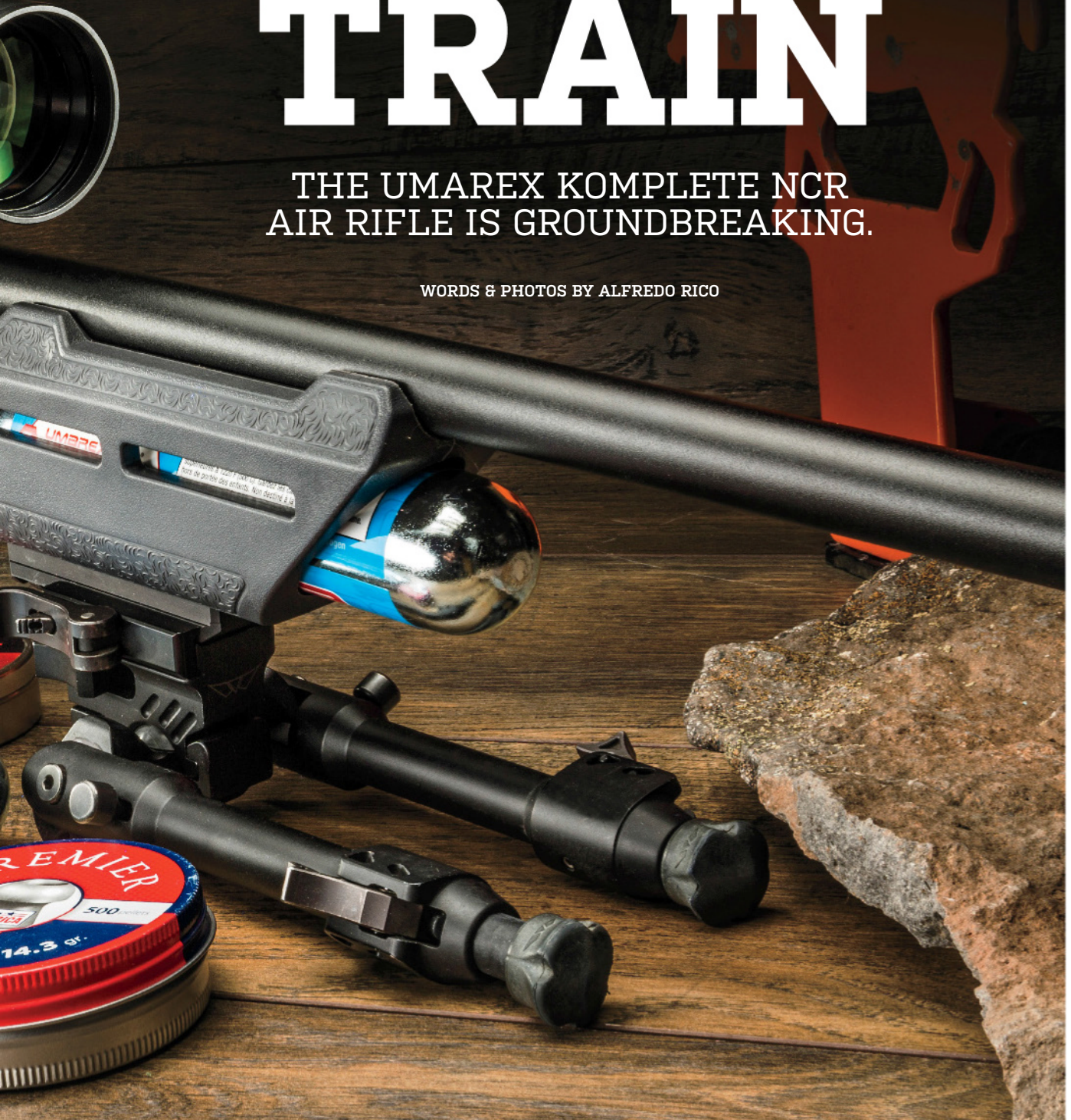
CENTURY ARMS



PCP TRAIN

THE UMAREX KOMplete NCR
AIR RIFLE IS GROUNDBREAKING.

WORDS & PHOTOS BY ALFREDO RICO





I AM ALWAYS SKEPTICAL when a company touts a new product as “groundbreaking.” Often, changes are small and incremental to an existing design. Few products chart a new path, and even fewer make it easier to use. However, the Umarex Complete NCR has done just that. It is the first pre-charged pneumatic (PCP) airgun to break the platform’s reliance on an external air-filling station. Instead, it utilizes NitroAir, a disposable, high-pressure cartridge that can be bought at an airgun supply store. Out of the box, the Complete NCR pellet rifle is ready to shoot.

ABOUT PCP AIRGUNS

At the 2024 Outdoor Sportsman’s Group (OSG) Roundtable, many of my colleagues shot a PCP airgun past 100 yards for the first time. It was easy to get excited about the platform’s power and reach. I have been shooting PCP airguns for years, so I wasn’t surprised at the performance. PCP airguns outpower most break-barrel, variable pump, and carbon-dioxide (CO₂) airguns. They are more than just plinkers or pest control tools, too. They are offered in calibers from .177 to .50, and are used for hunting, precision shooting competitions, and even Olympic shooting sports. PCP airguns get air from an on-board, high-pressure reservoir. To fill them typically requires buying a high-pressure handpump, compressor,

and/or charging tank.

THE NITROGEN REVOLUTION

The extra cost of the high-pressure equipment has been a barrier to the popularity of the PCP platform. Umarex set out to change this and developed the NitroAir nitrogen cartridge. NitroAir is a small, high-pressure, pre-filled cartridge. It is ready to use out of the box, and is recyclable. Once NitroAir proved itself, Umarex decided to build a rifle around it. The “NCR” in the name is an abbreviation for “Nitrogen Cartridge Rifle”.

The cartridge is filled with nitrogen instead of compressed air, hence “Nitro” in the “NitroAir” name. Using nitrogen is not new, though. PCP enthusiasts prefer it for its temperature stability. Velocities remain steady whether it is 30- or 90-degrees Fahrenheit. Nitrogen molecules are larger than oxygen, which helps minimize leaks. Nitrogen also improves O-ring life. The downside to nitrogen for PCP reservoirs is that it is hard to find a source to fill an airgun or charging tank.

The NitroAir cartridge is not like a CO₂ cartridge. CO₂ cartridges are pressurized to around 800 psi. CO₂ cartridges are temperature sensitive, that is to say, velocity fluctuates as the temperature changes. Another characteristic of CO₂ cartridges is that if you lay down a long string of shots, the

UMAREX COMPLETE NCR	
TYPE	Side-lever action repeater
CALIBER	.177 or .22 (tested)
CAPACITY	10 rds.
BARREL	23.6 in., steel
OVERALL LENGTH	41.5 in.
WEIGHT	5 lbs.
TRIGGER	1 lb., 2 oz. (tested)
SAFETY	Push button
SIGHTS	None; 4x32mm scope
STOCK	Synthetic
POWER SOURCE	NitroAir N ₂ Cartridge
MSRP	\$200
MANUFACTURER	Umarex USA, 479-646-4210, umarexusa.com



Each NitroAir tank has an average capacity of 50 shots. Taking a few canisters to the range supports a day's worth of shooting.



The trigger pull was tested at a crisp 1 pound, 2 ounces. The lack of recoil and the light trigger revealed its accuracy potential.



The spring-loaded charging lever is used to chamber a new pellet between shots.



A fixed cheekpad positions the eye level with most standard scope heights. Under the stock is a cut for shooting on sandbags.

cartridge cools drastically, which decreases velocity.

NitroAir contains 32 grams of nitrogen in a 3,600-psi pressurized cartridge. Comparing equal grainweight pellets, the PCP velocity will be double what a CO₂ cartridge can produce. The pressure is on par with standard PCP rifles, so power is not sacrificed for convenience. The cartridge weighs 12 ounces and is 8 inches long, making it a portable air source.

A cartridge will power about 50 shots with a .22-caliber 14-grain pellet. Grab two or three cartridges for an outing and you'll have 100 to 150 shots. Since it is made of steel, once the cartridge is spent, just toss it in the recycle bin.

NITROGEN VS. COMPRESSED AIR COSTS

PCP reservoirs are pressurized to around 3,000 psi and require a high-pressure air source. The most economical



An integral sound moderator is at the end of the barrel. It lessens the noise created by escaping air behind each pellet.

source is a handpump, which can cost north of \$100. It may be all you need for a PCP airgun with a small cylinder. These have a downside though: Filling the last 1,000 psi of a 3,000 psi cylinder will have you breathing hard! If you shoot a lot, you'll tire of this quickly and buy a compressor.

Opting for a high-pressure compressor is where the costs become significant. There are two

types of compressors: Portable and full-size. Portable compressors start around \$400 and can cost as much as \$1,000. Umarex sells the portable ReadyAir Airgun Compressor for \$700. These types of compressors are fan-cooled and best suited for filling small cylinders. Full-size compressors include a liquid cooling system and can handle filling small cylinders to large charging tanks. They cost \$1,000 and more. The upside to buying a compressor



The Komplete NCR preferred certain pellets during testing. G&A recommends JSB Match, Umarex and Crosman Premier.

is that you incur the cost once. In contrast, a 2-pack of NitroAir costs \$25.

THE RIFLE

Aside from the convenience of the nitrogen cartridge, there's a lot to like about the Komplete NCR. It's affordable, has a well-designed stock, shoots lights out, and its air pressure is regulated.

With a \$200 retail price, it is one of the most affordable PCP rifles on the market. The package includes a NitroAir cartridge and Axeon 4x32mm scope with rings. The Komplete NCR has an overall length of 41½ inches with a 14-inch fixed length of pull. It is not a youth-sized stock. The barrel has a 1-in-18-inch twist and is 23.6 inches long. An integrated polymer sound moderator is affixed to the muzzle. The rifle is offered in .177 and .22 caliber. With the cartridge installed, it weighs 5 pounds, 13 ounces. Guns & Ammo received the .22-caliber model without scope for review.

Since I spend a lot of time behind precision rifles, I like that the stock resembles a precision rifle, and not something out of a sci-fi movie. The buttstock, high comb, vertical grip, and flat, wide forend are common precision rifle stock features. These help a shooter shoot a rifle precisely. The buttstock allows the shooter to stabilize and control the height of the buttstock with the support hand and a support bag. The comb offers a large area for a shooter to center their eye behind a scope. The vertical grip positions the trigger finger at a natural 90-degree angle for a straight-back trigger press. A wide, flat handguard aids stability on a tree, rock, or fence post. It includes M-Lok slots at 3, 6, and 9 o'clock for mounting a bipod, light, or other accessories.

The handguard serves as the cartridge housing, too.

The Komplete NCR is a side-lever-action repeater. The receiver is metal with a polymer overmold, making the Picatinny rail polymer, too. On a pricier airgun, this would concern me, but for an entry-level PCP it is acceptable. Recoil is minute, so the rings mount are secure enough. The Komplete NCR receiver holds a 10-round rotary magazine. Two magazines are included with the rifle, and the trigger's travel is adjustable.

REGULATED & UNREGULATED

Another feature that makes the Komplete NCR a great deal and excellent shooter is that it utilizes a regulated air system. Regulated airguns release the same amount of air pressure to the pellet for highly consistent velocities. It achieves

this by pre-staging air in a small chamber. In the case of the Umarex Komplete NCR PCP rifle, a fresh cartridge starts with 3,600 psi and banks 1,800 psi into the chamber. Each shot receives the same amount of pressure until the cartridge pressure drops below 1,800 psi. If you were to chart the velocities from a regulated airgun, the line would be mostly flat and then drop off sharply at the end.

With a non-regulated PCP airgun, there is no pre-staged air. The air that hits the pellet comes directly from the reservoir. As the reservoir's pressure decreases, velocity

fluctuates. When you chart a non-regulated airgun's velocity, it is more of an arc that drastically falls off at the end.

AT THE RANGE

I have reviewed several Umarex airguns, and I was excited to test the Komplete NCR. Umarex has a talent for designing well-shooting airguns, no matter the price point.

Setting up the rifle was simple. A push on the handguard tabs released the cartridge cover. I spun the cartridge hand tight and then replaced the handguard. For an optic, I mounted a Vortex Venom 3-15x44mm (\$650, vortex-optics.com), one of my favorite front focal plane (FFP) budget scopes. This is another advantage of a PCP rifle versus a break-barrel of variable pump: You can outfit it with a regular riflescope and not one specifically designed for airguns. I added a small M-Lok rail to the handguard and attached a Warne Skyline Precision bipod. To stabilize the buttstock, I tossed a rear support bag under the stock.

Preparing for the range was gratifying. I placed the NitroAir cartridges and pellets in a small range bag and



Two 10-round rotary mags are included with the Komplete NCR. Five magazines can be used per tank. Extras are sold separately.

MAGIC?



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 **CALDWELL**



The Komplete NCR makes for a great introductory setup for shooters looking to explore the world of airguns.



was ready to go. For my other PCP rifles, I first fire up my high-pressure compressor, top off the airgun's reservoir and then fill a 6.8-liter carbon-fiber charging tank. The charging tank is the size of a scuba tank, and it serves as a portable filling station at the range. It was nice having one less thing to load and carry.

I first shot the rifle from the bench to get an idea about its accuracy potential. I expected the polymer stock to flex, and I was right. With the rifle firmly planted on the bipod, and some pressure on the buttstock, the stock pivots on the single receiver screw and can move around. The solution was to soften the pressure I put on the stock. Making a fuss about the flexing stock is like complaining that a fast-food burger doesn't taste like steak, though.

The trigger was good. It has a lengthy travel, but fired consistently after just 1 pound, 2 ounces. I left the travel in its original setting. The tight group on paper told me this rifle is a shooter.

Like any firearm, you have to shoot a variety of ammo to find what the rifle likes best. I gathered six different pellets with different shapes and weights, from 14 grains to 18.67 grains. Velocities varied from 900 feet per second (fps) for the 14-grain pellets to 812 fps for the 18.67 grainer. Energy in foot-pounds ranged from 25 to 28. I eliminated two of the pellets because they shot poorly. One group was a 1.65-inch horizontal string. By the time I started the accuracy test, I only had two cartridges left for testing. I didn't want to waste time testing pellets that shot poorly.

The JSB Match Exact Jumbo Express 14.35-grain pellet performed the best, driving a .17-inch five-shot group at 25 yards. Its average group size was .43 inch. The JSB Match Exact Jumbo Heavy 18.13- and Umarex Brimstone

PERFORMANCE

PELLET	VEL. (FPS)	ENERGY (FT.-LBS.)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
JSB Match Diabolo 14.3 gr.	904	26	9	9	.17	.43
JSB Match Diabolo 18.13 gr.	830	28	30	12	.38	.48
Umarex Brimstone 18.67 gr.	830	28	21	13	.42	.6
Crosman Premier 14.3-gr. HP	902	26	20	8	.67	.85

Notes: Accuracy is the average four, five-shot groups at 25 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured using an Oehler Model 35P chronograph set at 12 feet in front of the muzzle.

18.67-grainers were the next best.

I kept track of velocity with a chronograph to see how many consistent shots the Komplete NCR would produce. With 55 shots down the barrel, the velocity averaged 904 fps with the JSB Diabolo Express 14.3-grain pellet. At shot

56, each pull of the trigger dropped the velocity 5 to 9 fps. On paper, the decline was obvious. Each hole was lower than the previous one, indicating that it was time to switch out the cartridge.

I bled the remaining air using the degassing screw before installing a fresh cartridge. The rifle remained easy and fun to shoot. With the right pellet, this is a very precise shooting PCP airgun. I continued accuracy testing, and before I knew it I was halfway through the fourth NitroAir cartridge.

I then shot the Komplete NCR standing unsupported. The rifle is well-balanced and shouldered nicely. The cocking lever felt smooth, and the magazine was easy to feed and swap out. The moderator toned down the *pop* of the blast well, and it sounded quieter than a roofing nail gun.

PARTING SHOT

The Komplete NCR is the perfect airgun for airgun or firearms shooters who are PCP curious. The NitroAir rifle is ready-to-go out of the box like a break-barrel, variable pump, or CO₂, but with much more power. Its \$200 retail price is close to that of mid-priced break-barrels, and is at the low end of PCP rifles. With the right pellet, this is a precise and smooth shooting rifle. As the model's name suggests, the Komplete NCR has it all: Price, performance, convenience. Until now, affordability and convenience have not been synonymous with PCP systems. **GA**



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SUPER HORNET

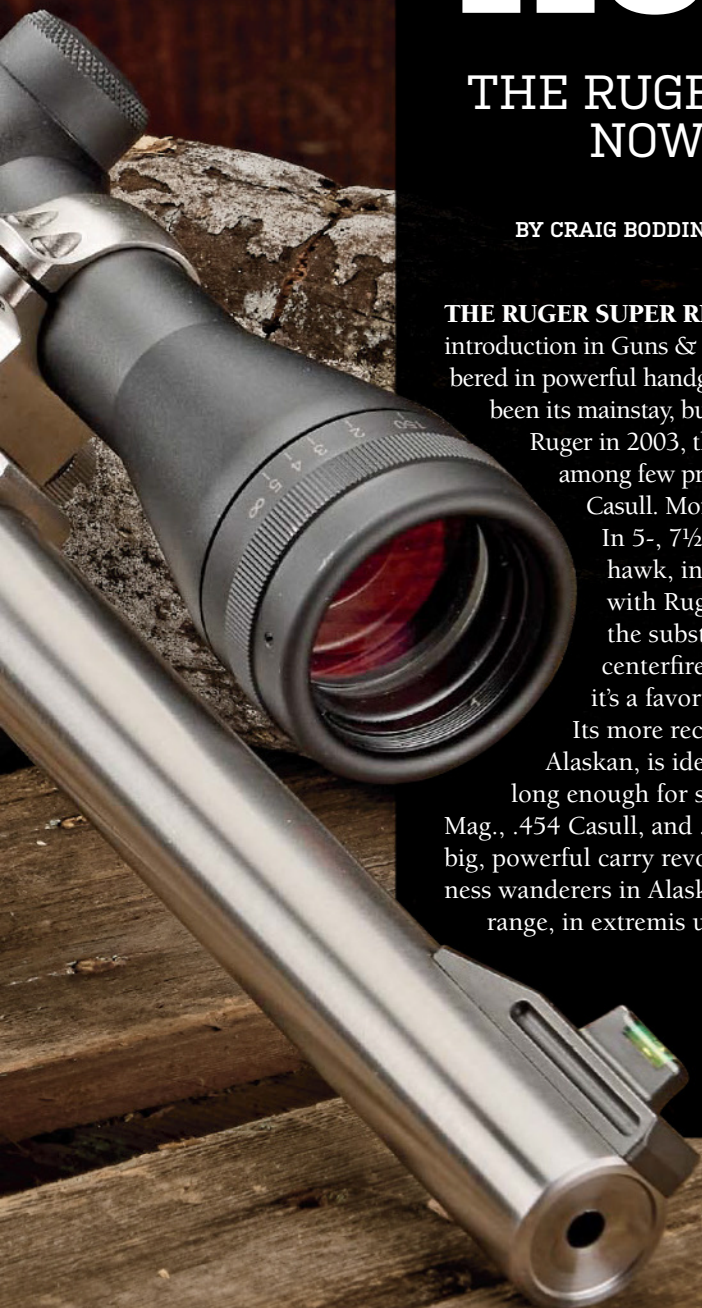
THE RUGER SUPER REDHAWK,
NOW IN .22 HORNET.

BY CRAIG BODDINGTON | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ANCSHUETZ

THE RUGER SUPER REDHAWK IS A BIG, burly revolver. Since its introduction in Guns & Ammo's November 1979 issue, it's been chambered in powerful handgun cartridges. The .44 Remington Magnum has been its mainstay, but it was also the launching platform for the .480 Ruger in 2003, the first cartridge to bear the Ruger name. It's also among few production revolvers to be chambered to the .454 Casull. More recently, it's been chambered to 10mm Auto.

In 5-, 7½-, and 9½-inch barrels, the standard Super Redhawk, in stainless steel only since 1992, comes supplied with Ruger detachable scope rings, bases dovetailed into the substantial frame, much like generations of Ruger centerfire rifles. In powerful cartridges and optic-ready, it's a favorite among serious handgun hunters.

Its more recent (and snubbier) sibling, the Super Redhawk Alaskan, is identical. Except, with a 2½-inch barrel, it's not long enough for scope mounting. Currently offered in .44 Rem. Mag., .454 Casull, and .480 Ruger, the Alaskan lives up to its name: A big, powerful carry revolver, designed for (and popular with) wilderness wanderers in Alaska and the northern Rockies. Intended for short range, in extremis use in big bear (or bad guy) country.





RUGER SUPER REDHAWK	
TYPE	Revolver, double action/ single action
CARTRIDGE	.22 Hornet
CAPACITY	8 rds.
BARREL	9.5 in., 1:9-in. twist
LENGTH	15.25 in.
WEIGHT	4 lbs., 2 oz.
GRIP	Hogue Tamer Monogrip
FRAME	Super Redhawk, stainless steel
TRIGGER	3 lbs., 8 oz. (SA), 10 lbs., 8 oz. (DA)
SIGHTS	HiViz fiber optic (front), U-Notch, adj. (rear)
MSRP	\$1,499
MANUFACTURER	Sturm, Ruger & Company, 336-949-5200, ruger.com

At 45 years of production, the newest member of the family, the Super Redhawk in .22 Hornet is a departure from the norm. The .22 Hornet is neither large nor powerful. In fact, the .22 Hornet is the mildest of our .22 centerfires. This is not meant unkindly. I love the .22 Hornet, in part, because Dad loved his .22 Hornet. It was his favorite varmint cartridge. I also love the Hornet on its own merit. With its diminutive and archaically tapered, rimmed case, the little .22 Hornet is faster and more accurate than it has any right to be.

When a new firearm or cartridge comes out, I have a bad habit of asking myself, “What’s it for?” I feel it’s bad because no one should care what I think. Also, with a chronic imagination deficit, I often guess wrong. When the .17 HMR first came out, I questioned it because I couldn’t imagine what it was for. Hundreds of millions of rounds later we know, don’t we? I wasn’t the only curmudgeon in the closet. Steve Hornady himself resisted taking on the .17 HMR project because, like me after the fact, he didn’t envision its utility.

I received the Ruger Super Redhawk .22 Hornet in mid-summer 2024 at the Kansas farm while I was on the tractor trying to beat food plots into submission in 100-degree heat. It wasn’t the ideal time to get the creative juices flowing. It is a gorgeous revolver, magnificently machined, and I love the clever eight-shot cylinder. But, in .22 Hornet? What’s the point of a big revolver using this round? My Kansas neighbors, all gun folks, joined me in asking the same question: “What’s it for?”

IT’S ONLY ACCURATE.

Wasn’t it Col. Townsend Whelen who wrote, “Only accurate rifles are interesting?” It’s a good sentiment, unless you’re defending yourself against grizzlies. The first thing that strikes you about any Super Redhawk is, “This is a big revolver!” In the 1840s, the massive Walker Colt was judged too large and heavy for general use. Heavily loaded, it was probably the most powerful handgun until the introduction of the .44 Rem. Mag.

in 1956. At 66 ounces (sans scope), the Super Redhawk in .22 Hornet is almost heavier than the Colt Walker. Also, it’s heavier than other Super Redhawks chambered to big cartridges. Obviously, the cylinder and barrel are mostly steel and not much hole.

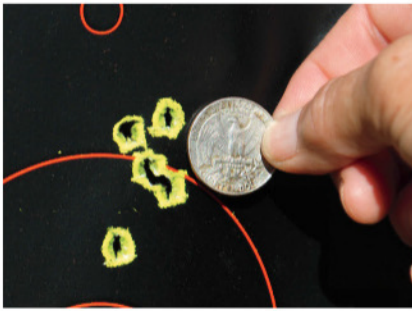
Long Eye Relief (LER) handgun scopes aren’t as common as they once were. I’ll apologize right now that the scope I used on the revolver doesn’t match the Burris 3-12x32mm

handgun scope in this article’s studio photos. Photographer Mike Anschuetz had to borrow that Burris, which is still a great name in LER handgun scopes. The scope I mounted to the Super Redhawk Hornet, was an older Leupold VX-3 2.5-8x32mm handgun scope. The scope and steel Ruger mounts brought the weight to nearly 5½ pounds, a lot of handgun. Forget shooting it offhand.

Although none of us could immediately figure an ideal mission for this big revolver, my



Initial zeroing was done over sandbags, starting close. A big revolver such as the Super Redhawk produces almost no recoil in .22 Hornet.



The first five-shot group at 50 yards with Hornady 35-grain V-Max was almost the size of a quarter — except for one flyer.

Kansas neighbors were curious and insisted on coming along to shoot it. That's a good sign. Curiosity killed the cat — and makes sales happen.

Well, with that weight, it didn't kick. Shooting off both pistol rests and sandbags, I tried desperately to get a proper photograph of the gun in recoil. The .22 Hornet doesn't have much recoil to begin with. When properly rested, there was almost no movement as it fired.

In order to mount the scope, I needed to drop the rear sight almost all the way down to clear the ocular bell. Any .22 Hornet firearm deserves an optical sight. It's not like you can boresight a revolver, so we started on big paper up close. We were a long way out of zero, but the scope responded well. It didn't take many shots to get it zeroed at 50 yards. Then we had some fun.

Not trying to shoot groups, just getting the feel of a different concept: A tiny cartridge in a huge revolver. It seemed like it wanted to shoot. It had no problem hitting small steel spinners at 25 and 50 yards, then at 100. My last five shots with Hornady 35-grain V-Max seemed to group close to an inch at 50 yards. Later, this would prove consistent. My friend, Steve Trainer, Vietnam veteran and retired Wichita police officer stole the show by ringing a steel coyote at 200 yards — six out of six! Accurate firearms — both rifles and handguns — are interesting. This one showed promise.

In .22 Hornet, the Super Redhawk, like any other handgun, could serve for home or personal protection, but not proof against big bruins. Other than fun — which is a valid reason for a firearm's existence — the Super Redhawk .22



With a scope mounted, the Super Redhawk in .22 Hornet weighed nearly 5½ pounds, a large handgun. The cylinder and barrel are mostly steel with a small bore. The .22 Hornet weighs several ounces more than the Super Redhawk chambered in larger calibers.



The cylinder and barrel are incredibly stout. The smooth cylinder accommodates eight rounds of .22 Hornet. To swing out the triple-locking cylinder, simply press the cylinder release button.



A legacy round, the .22 Hornet hasn't seen many changes since its inception, but still has excellent performance as a small game round.



A HiViz fiber-optic front post and adjustable U-notch rear sight are adequate. For precise shooting irons sights are preferred by many versus optics.

Hornet's most obvious reason for existence is for small game and varmints. To be viable in that arena, "minute of squirrel" or "minute of prairie dog" accuracy is essential.

AT THE RANGE

I have experience with big revolvers and specialty pistols in various chamberings. With good extended eye-relief optics, short, stiff barrels are amazingly accurate. However, this was my first experience with a big revolver in a high-velocity

varmint cartridge. Unusually, I had no idea what to expect. Zeroing done, the next step was to start again on a cooler morning, chronograph ammo, and see what happened.

The .22 Hornet has been around since 1930. It was not the first smokeless .22 centerfire. That honor goes to 1912's .22 Savage High-Power. With 70-grain bullet, the Savage cartridge was envisioned for big-game. The Hornet was thus our first dedicated smokeless varmint cartridge. In a time when big game was scarce but small game and pests were plentiful, it became popular. Long eclipsed by much faster .22 centerfires, the Hornet retains a loyal following. In rifles, it is accurate, with mild report and no recoil, effective to at least 200 yards. This is more than twice the reasonable range of the .22 LR, and far beyond the reach of .22 WMR. Of course, all of that is in closed-breech rifles.



The Ruger Super Redhawk features a spur hammer and a transfer-bar mechanism that provides added security against an accidental discharge.



The smooth, curved trigger produced a 3½-pound trigger pull for single-action operation, and a 10½-pound double-action trigger pull.



Integral mounts are machined to the steel topstrap. Ruger's proprietary scope rings are included to mount an extended eye relief scope.



Ruger equips standard Super Redhawk revolvers of all calibers with Hogue's Tamer Monogrip. A recoil cushion is designed into the grip and is positioned under the web of the hand.

The original .22 Hornet load used a 45-grain bullet at 2,700 feet per second (fps). In recent years, lighter 35-grain bullets at about 3,000 fps have become more popular. However, it's not like the .223 Remington in popularity. For this article, I obtained American Eagle 35-grain Tipped Varmint, Hornady Varmint Express 35-grain V-Max, Remington Premier 35-grain AccuTip-V, and Remington 45-grain soft point. The Federal and both Remington loads were packed 50 per box, while Hornady's load came in a square 25-round pack.

Long before I started shooting groups, two observations were noted. Trainer called my attention to the forward surface of the cylinder. The blast marks around each chamber exit were small, round, concentric and uniform. This suggested excellent manufacturing with tight tolerances and a small cylinder gap. Second, it is a revolver, and there is a cylinder gap.



The cold-hammer-forged barrel features a recessed 11-degree target crown to protect the rifling near the muzzle. The twist rate is 1-in-9 inches.

No matter how much we harp on eye and ear protection, lapses do occur. Do not shoot this revolver without eye and ear protection! It's certainly no worse than a big magnum revolver, but you may feel hot debris on hands and face with each shot. In part, this is because the .22 Hornet, although old, is a rifle cartridge loaded to higher pressure than most handgun cartridges. The SAAMI spec for .22 Hornet is 44,000 psi. By comparison, the .44 Rem. Mag. spec is 36,000 psi. In the world of revolver cartridges, only the .454 Casull, .480 Ruger, and .460 and .500 S&W

Magnums are specified at higher pressures than the .22 Hornet. (Those require eye and ear protection, as well.)

I shot all four mentioned loads for accuracy, and over the chronograph. That's 20 five-shot groups, 100 shots as good as I could hold them. Folks, if you don't have much experience with long-eye-relief scopes, that's hard work.

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SUREFIRE.





The blue-color internal recoil cushion is visible on the Hogue Tamer Monogrip with the grip removed from the Super Redhawk. So is the coil-type hammer spring.



The cylinder locks to the Super Redhawk frame at three locations: At the front of the frame, rear, and bottom for more positive alignment and security.



The thick topstrap of the frame supports loads such as the .454 Casull and .480 Ruger in the Super Redhawk. Though a small caliber, the .22 Hornet is a cartridge producing up to 44,000 psi.



The Super Redhawk was designed to accept handgun scopes featuring extended eye relief. A contemporary red dot on an optic rail would suffice for target shooting and hunting, too.

By their nature, long eye relief scopes have a small field of view. The more magnification, the smaller. To keep the groups as tight as possible, I shot with the scope all the way up to 8X. Even with almost no recoil and a steady rest, I had to relocate the target for each shot. It's more difficult and took longer than shooting groups with a scoped rifle or a handgun with iron sights or a red dot.

Still, the Super Redhawk Hornet was a joy to shoot. There was no recoil, little blast, and the crisp, clean 3½-pound single-action trigger helped immensely. The best accuracy with G&A's test gun was with Hornady Varmint

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Hornady Varmint Express 35-gr. V-Max	2,252	35	18	.97	1.67
Federal American Eagle 35-gr. Tipped	2,278	201	84	1.19	1.74
Remington Premier Accutip 35-gr. Accutip-V	2,346	289	92	1.53	1.99
Remington 45-gr. Pointed Soft Point	2,057	130	47	1.73	2.49
Notes: Accuracy is five, five-shot groups at 50 yards fired from a sandbag rest using a discontinued Leupold VX-3 2.5-8x32mm handgun scope. Velocity is the average of five shots measured by a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph placed at muzzle.					

Express, 35-grain V-Max, averaging 1.67 inches for five groups. The American Eagle 35-grain Tipped Varmint load followed at 1.74 inches. Then, it was the Remington Premier 35-grain AccuTip-V load averaging 1.99 inches.

I regret that I had just one 45-grain load to try because it appeared this revolver preferred the lighter bullets. The Remington 45-grain PSP load had the “worst” accuracy, averaging 2.49 inches. I put “worst” in quotes because I’ll take sub-2½-inch 50-yard groups from a revolver all day long. That’s minute of prairie dog.

Although a long-eye-relief scope is more difficult to

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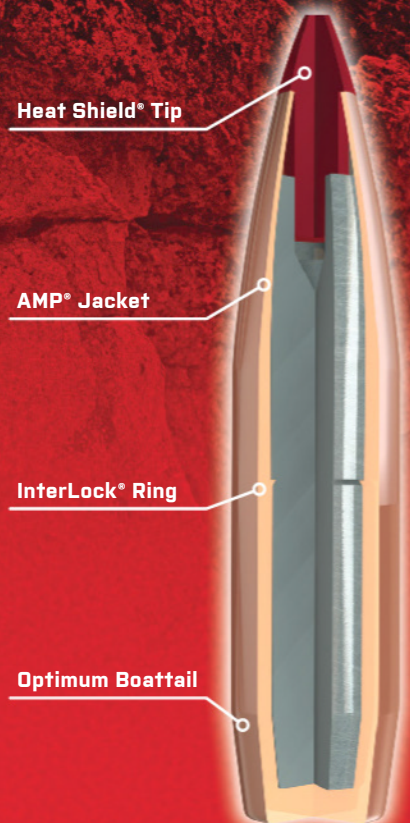
Simply stated, the ballistically advanced ELD-X® bullet is built to punch tags, not just paper. It starts with the Heat Shield® tip, designed to resist the aerodynamic heating that deforms conventional polymer tips. Add in its secant ogive profile, AMP® jacket and optimized boattail, and you've got a bullet engineered to penetrate deep, expand reliably and fly true at all practical ranges.

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78 G&A | DECEMBER 2024 | SUPER HORNET



shoot, and a handgun more difficult to stabilize, there's no limit on range. Combining my abilities with the fact that the subject gun is a revolver, and not a bolt-action or single-shot pistol, I chose to shoot groups "for score" at 50 yards. I shot a few 100-yard groups, just to see progression. With the Hornady load averaging just more than 1½ inches at 50 yards, 100-yard groups ran just more than 3 inches, exactly what one might expect.

Although testing was done in high midsummer temperatures, I was surprised at how slowly the Super Redhawk heated up. Lots of steel surrounds the chambers and barrel channel. Despite the Hornet's high velocity (compared to most handgun cartridges), no cooling-off periods were needed. Like all revolvers, gunk and residue accumulates. I needed to clean it frequently. My standard protocol when testing for accuracy is to clean it thoroughly between each

load, as in every 25 shots. This proved adequate. So far I've put in excess of 200 rounds through the revolver, all functioning trouble-free.

Over the chronograph, Hornady's Varmint Express load was amazing. Extreme spread (ES) of just 35 fps, standard deviation (SD) at a low and admirable 18. The other three loads had ES in the triple digits and high SDs. No wonder the Hornady load was the most accurate! In fairness, all loads were rifle ammo, not specifically developed for short-barrel use. Propellants intended for 22-inch barrels are unlikely to burn efficiently in less than half the barrel length. Also, since the .22 Hornet is the oldest .22 center-fire still loaded — and not the most popular — I suspect little recent load development. The disparity between the Hornady load's average group size, and especially its lower ES and SD, and the other loads, suggests that, at some point recently, Hornady's ballisticians



The small, concentric powder burns on the forward face of the eight-shot cylinder indicate that Ruger kept close manufacturing tolerances and a tight cylinder gap.



Although there is no muzzle rise during recoil, sharp, hot gas will escape through the cylinder gap. It was enough to cut the author's sandbag and make a mess.

might have taken a fresh look at the .22 Hornet.

THE LONG & SHORT

Although new to me, a .22 Hornet handgun is not new. Magnum Research and Taurus have made .22 Hornet revolvers, and it's been chambered to various single-shot and bolt-action specialty pistols.

With less muzzle jump and less barrel heat than faster .22 centerfires, the great old Hornet has always been a favorite prairie dog cartridge. No, it doesn't have the range of its faster cousins, but in an accurate rifle it's deadly well beyond 200 yards. In my estimation, the coyote is one of the toughest pound-for-pound animals. Unless very close and with perfect shot placement, the .17 HMR isn't enough gun, and the .22 WMR is questionable. The .22 Hornet is plenty for coyotes. It's awesome for bobcats, too, producing much less pelt damage than faster centerfires.

Other than javelinas, North America doesn't have much "small big game." G&A's founder Robert E. "Pete" Petersen always took a .22 Hornet on safaris in Africa, using it for small predators, tiny antelopes, and up to impala and reedbuck. I borrowed that page from Pete. On smaller animals, the Hornet is marvelous. It's deadly and efficient. Purists hate this, but several states allow rifles and handguns for wild turkey. Turkeys are tough, but not when stung by a Hornet. Just pick your shot, avoid the breast, and little meat will be lost.

Anything that can be done with a .22 Hornet rifle can also be done with a .22 Hornet handgun. So, that's what it's for. Just keep ranges within the accuracy the platform offers. The Ruger Super Redhawk Hornet isn't a 200-yard prairie dog gun, but out to 100 yards it's perfect. Let me add one more caution: Since all existing .22 Hornet factory loads were developed for rifle-length barrels, in the Super Redhawk's 9½-inch barrel, velocity loss was severe. The accompanying chart shows velocity figures over my chronograph. I have no idea what any of these loads clock in a 22- or 24-inch rifle barrel. I do know the Super Redhawk Hornet velocities showed a loss, across the board, of between 633 and 818 fps from factory velocity specs, or about 25 percent.

So, in a handgun barrel, the .22 Hornet is not as powerful a cartridge as it is in a rifle. This is not the train smash it sounds. The .22 Hornet's closest competitor in versatility and utility is probably the .22 WMR. The .22 Magnum's bullet weights and velocities vary widely. Worst-case comparisons suggest that a .22 Hornet in a 9½-inch revolver is still several hundred fps faster than a .22 WMR shot from a rifle. The .22 Hornet shoots flatter and carries more energy than the .22 WMR. So, keep your ranges short and go have fun. That's what the Ruger Super Redhawk in .22 Hornet is really all about. 

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Seeing beyond



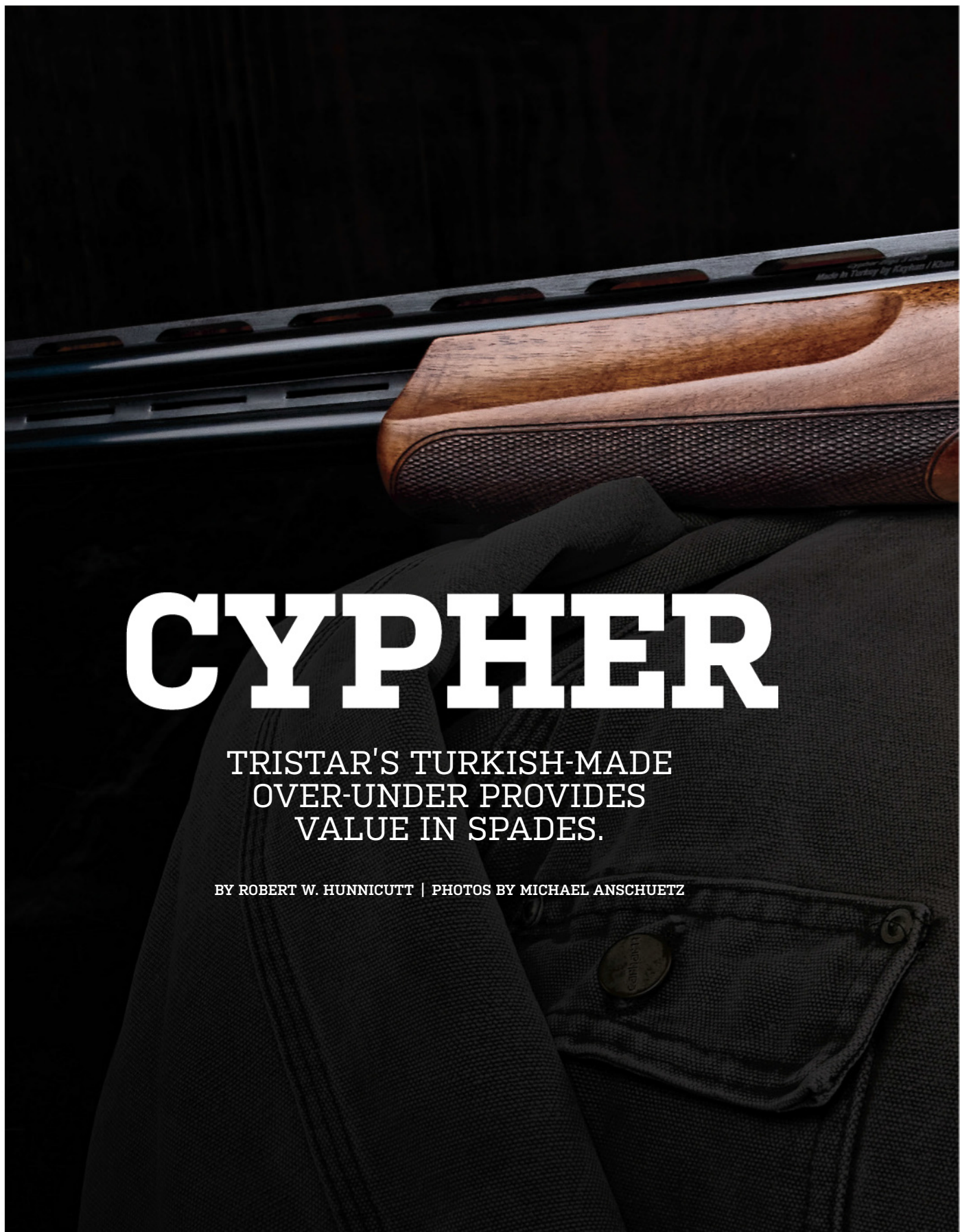
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CYPHER

TRISTAR'S TURKISH-MADE
OVER-UNDER PROVIDES
VALUE IN SPADES.

BY ROBERT W. HUNNICUTT | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ



Spending a fun-filled fall day shooting birds in the morning and sporting clays in the afternoon? The TriStar Cypher will satisfy both requirements.

The Cypher is the top-level over-under shotgun from TriStar. It is made by Khan Arms in Turkey. At less than \$1,000 retail, it offers unusual value and an attractive design.



FIREARMS IMPORTING is not a game for the weak of heart or thin of wallet. Currency fluctuations can make a finely calibrated sales plan no more than a pipe dream. Foreign policy gyrations, whether on the U.S. end or in the country of manufacture, can make goods that were perfectly fine one day verboten the next. Customs regulations mean that nameless bureaucrats can make interpretations that keep vital merchandise locked in some bonded warehouse for months.

Ghassan “Gus” Bader has been navigating that life for more than four decades, and is really quite good at it. I first got to know him in the 1980s while he operated American Arms, an importer primarily focused on Spanish shotguns.

Bader was one of the first to discern the potential of Turkey as an arms manufacturer. (Sorry President Erdoğan, good luck getting Americans to spell it “Türkiye.”) Now, of course, the NATO member dominates the low and moderately priced civilian gun market, putting the smaller Italian and Spanish makers in the shade.

We’ve all heard of Turkish drones, due to the Ukraine War, and Turkish manufacturer Repkon is providing the machinery for the U.S. Army’s new plant for 155mm artillery shells in Mesquite, Texas. The largest Turkish manufacturers, including Hatsan and Sarsilmaz, are 100-percent competitive when it comes to up-to-date manu-

TRISTAR CYPHER	
TYPE	Over-under shotgun
GAUGE	20, 3-inch (tested); 12, 28, .410
BARREL	28 in., carbon steel
OVERALL LENGTH	46 in.
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 5 oz. (tested)
STOCK	Turkish walnut, deluxe, oil finished
LENGTH OF PULL	14¼ in.
DROP AT HEEL	2¼ in.
DROP AT COMB	1½ in.
FINISH	Blued (steel)
TRIGGER	4 lbs., 8 oz. (tested)
SIGHTS	Fiber optic
SAFETY	Selector switch, tang
ACCESSORIES	Cylinder bore (.629-in.), Improved Cylinder (.622-in.), Modified (.612-in.), Improved Modified (.604-in.) and Full (.598-in.), tube case and key
MSRP	\$960
MANUFACTURER	Khan Arms, Istanbul, Turkey
IMPORTER	TriStar Arms, tristararms.com

facturing facilities. TriStar imports a range of 1911-style pistols in 9mm, .38 Super and .45 ACP, but is primarily notable for a very complete line of sporting and defensive shotguns. These include over-under and side-by-side doubles, autoloaders, pumps, single-barrel trap guns and even a .410 based on the Winchester Model 94 lever gun. These are available in finishes ranging from camouflage to quite shiny, and there’s a compact line for younger or smaller shooters.

The over-under ranges start with the Setter, which economizes on wood quality and has extractors rather than ejectors, but still provides a full five-piece choke tube set, fiber-optic sight and ventilated side ribs. Retail is \$655 for 12- and 20-gauges, and \$685 for 28-gauge and .410.

Next in line is the Trinity II, which gives you a higher grade of Turkish walnut and gold-colored decoration for \$855 for the 12 and 20, and \$870 for the small-bores. You can specify the Trinity II LT, which gives you an aluminum frame for no extra charge. This gets the weight of the 20-gauge below 6 pounds.

Next is the subject of this month’s examination, the Cypher. This takes the walnut up another notch and incorporates decorative panels that endlessly repeat the name Cypher in tiny letters. These are both attractive and useful, as you can press them into service



The semi-gloss black finish of the trigger assembly contrasts effectively with the Cypher’s silver receiver finish. Trigger pulls were identical for both barrels, testing at 4½ pounds.



A well-figured grade of Turkish walnut is the headline feature of the Cypher. Referred to as "Deluxe," it combines with a subtly decorated frame for a modern interpretation of the double gun.



The slim walnut forend has a Deeley-style catch. There's a decorative outline on the frame bottom that mimics the trigger plate of older over-under shotguns.

as an emergency nail file.

Prices for the Cypher line are \$960 for the larger gauges and \$975 for the smallbores. You can specify the Cypher X if you want the lightweight aluminum treatment. There's a Cypher SP, which is a dedicated sporting clay gun that adds an adjustable cheekpiece for \$1,025.

A Superposed shotgun for less than \$1,000 is a pretty impressive achievement. My first over-under was a Browning Citori, which was thought of as an economical shotgun when I paid \$666 for one in 1978. That's more than \$2,500 in today's money, and while I'd hardly equate the two guns, it demonstrates that these are the good old days



The Cypher's manual safety switch is a Beretta-style selector that determines which barrel fires first and then ejects its empty cartridge case.

for gun values.

The Cypher frame is finished in matte silver with the TriStar logo on three sides. There's an etched line on the underside that echoes the trigger plate of a Browning shotgun, but it's strictly decorative; the frame bottom is solid. The top lever, trigger, triggerguard and safety button are finished in a semi-gloss black that contrasts nicely with the frame color.

Looking inside the frame with barrels removed shows an action familiar from many, many moderately priced Italian and Turkish over-unders. A bolt at the bottom of the standing breech engages a bite in the bottom of the



Cocking rods pass down the inside center of the frame. They recock the hammers after firing and control the ejectors, which are held back by catches in the steel monobloc.



The monobloc is engine-turned for a more luxurious appearance. The bores are chrome-plated for corrosion resistance. It's chambered for 2¾- and 3-inch loads.



monobloc. At the left of the bolt is the catch that holds the top lever open.

When the gun is closed, the engine-turned monobloc presses down on this part, unlatching the top lever. As you can imagine, you insert a finger and press down on it while holding the top lever to the right to let the lever close for casing the shotgun.

The cocking levers pass down the bottom center of the frame. After firing, they are returned by a cam in the forend iron and recock the hammers.

Since shotguns in this class are intended as much for sporting clays shooting as for hunting, the safety is manual. This is appropriate in a competition where the safety is never used. In the hunting field, you'll need to remember to reset it after firing.

Barrels are selected Beretta style, with a sliding tab in the

safety button moved left or right to select the barrel to fire first. Sliding it to the right selects the bottom barrel, and most shooters will leave it there 99.9-percent of the time.

The single trigger is mechanical, meaning it can be fired twice whether the first shell goes off or not. This once was the province of competition guns, but has become so universal that it's hard to remember a time when inertia triggers were the rule.

Ejection is selected by a cocking rod moving forward and pushing up on a lock piece in the monobloc that holds the ejector in place until the barrels are fully lowered. At that point, it is pulled out of engagement with the ejector, allowing the latter to spring rearward, ejecting the empty.

The Cypher is fitted with 28-inch barrels, and that's the only length available. If you insist on something longer for sporting competition, you'll have to step up to the SP version, which comes with 30-inch barrels.

The upper barrel is 3-inch chambered and topped with a 7mm straight-sided ventilated rib. Some might find this a bit skinny on a 12-gauge, but it's perfect for a 20 or 28. At the muzzle is a 2mm red fiber-optic front bead.

This I found easily visi-

ble without the shouty aspect of large green fiber-optics, which are more appropriate for a defensive shotgun. Side ribs are ventilated; some like that and some abhor it.

The chrome-lined barrels measured .624 inch inside diameter. The Cypher comes with a full set of five choke tubes: Cylinder bore (.629 inch), Improved Cylinder (.622 inch), Modified (.612 inch), Improved Modified (.604



The forend and stock are checkered at 16 lines-per-inch (lpi), a measure that combines good looks and grip. The barrels are fitted with ventilated side ribs.

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inch) and Full (.598 inch).

The tubes are 3 inches long, have a conical-parallel interior profile and are threaded to the Beretta Mobilchoke standard, where the threads are at the muzzle. The availability of tubes in this style is almost infinite, should the five supplied not get it done for you.

Tubes have a knurled section that extends three-quarters of an inch from the muzzle to allow easy removal. If they're too hot or too tight, a supplied key helps apply the required torque. The notches for this are covered, helping to keep the tubes from cutting up the inside of your case.

As you'd expect on a Turkish gun, the stock is of Turkish walnut, here with a semi-gloss finish. The buttstock has a 1-inch black rubber recoil pad, and both buttstock and forend have 16 lines-per-inch checkering in a bordered point pattern. This is a measure that should provide



A significant value proposition is that the Cypher includes a full set of five extended choke tubes, ranging from Cylinder to Full. They are knurled for easy finger removal and tightening.

enough grip in all but the sweatiest conditions.

It used to be that when you wrote up a modestly priced double gun, you could count on widely disparate trigger pulls, barrels that shot to different impact points or comically erratic ejection.

That made for more reporting fun, but the fun seems generally to be over these days. Double guns like the Cypher most often come out of the box with no interesting defects to report at all. Bad news for

us, good news for the consumer.

I've shot plenty of Blasers, Krieghoffs and Perazzis, and the triggers were more rifle-like than the Cypher's, but it provided pulls that were smooth, consistent and more than adequate for anything short of your state trap championship. You certainly will be at no disadvantage when topping off a morning of preserve birds with a round of five-stand.

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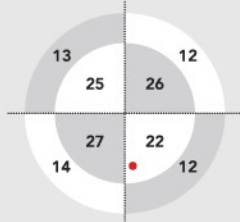
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PERFORMANCE

FEDERAL TOP GUN STEEL
TG251 7 7/8-1210-7
AVERAGE PELLET COUNT: 339
AVERAGE OF 10 SHOTS AT 40 YARDS

IMPROVED CYLINDER TUBE

● = POINT OF AIM



21¼-IN. INNER CIRCLE	100	(29%)
30-IN. OUTER CIRCLE	39	(12%)
TOTAL HITS	139	(41%)



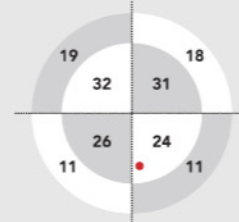
A 1-inch black rubber recoil pad nicely coordinates with the dark walnut buttstock. It did not interfere with shouldering the Cypher during the mount.

PERFORMANCE

FEDERAL TOP GUN STEEL
TG251 7 7/8-1210-7
AVERAGE PELLET COUNT: 339
AVERAGE OF 10 SHOTS AT 40 YARDS

MODIFIED TUBE

● = POINT OF AIM



21¼-IN. INNER CIRCLE	113	(34%)
30-IN. OUTER CIRCLE	59	(17%)
TOTAL HITS	172	(51%)

We patterned the Cypher with Federal's Top Gun steel load in No. 7. As you'd expect, recoil was a little stiffer given the fact that the wad is effectively a plastic bucket with no cushion section. That said, it was not unpleasant. It will get the job done at the increasing number of preserves and sporting layouts that are adjacent to wetlands and require non-toxic shot. If you suspected that patterns might be tighter with steel, that was not the case here.

I passed the Cypher around to bystanders, and all were able to connect with clays immediately. Earlier Turkish shotguns often had an odd, uncomfortable grip angle, but the Cypher's is perfectly conventional, which is a pleasure.

If you're looking for your first over-under, the Cypher definitely rates a look. If you already have one or several, it's still worth examining as a backup gun. The value proposition for this stackbarrel is ironclad. **GA**

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AN OLD FRIEND

REMEMBERING A COMBAT TOUR THROUGH
PIONEER ARMS' HELLPUP AK PISTOL.

BY TOM BECKSTRAND | PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR





MY FIRST extended shooting experience with the AK-47 occurred in Afghanistan in 2003. The Taliban had a lot of them, but so did the militia that were assigned to our Special Forces A-Team. Every American on the team was issued an M4 carbine, but I took an interest in the AK because just about everyone else in the country was shooting it.

Soldiers on the battlefield were allowed to pick up and use weapons they found, and it didn't take long before I had my own AK that I could use. Our firebase had a 100-yard range attached to it, so I spent slow days at the range working on my proficiency with both the M4 and the AK. What I learned would shape what rifle I carried and when. It wasn't until the next deployment to the same firebase in '04 that I started carrying an AK regularly outside the wire.

The M4 that Uncle Sam issued me had the 14½-inch barrel and a carbine-length gas system with a fixed front sight post. The suppressor was from Knight's Armament, and it attached to the flash hider of the M4. If I zeroed my rifle without the suppressor, it would induce a 6-inch point of impact shift when attached. I quickly realized that I needed to leave the suppressor attached all the time, every day, so that I could hit whatever I was shooting at. Also, most of our activity was at night, which is when I need as much signature reduction as possible so that anyone shooting at me would have difficulty locating my position. The problem with the suppressor was its inclusion added a ton of weight, and about 7 inches in length to the gun. The M4 carried like a Kentucky long rifle, especially when getting in and out of the truck. I decided

PIONEER ARMS HELLPUP	
TYPE	Gas-piston operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	7.62x39mm
CAPACITY	30+1 rds.
BARREL	11 in.; 1:9-in. twist
LENGTH	21.85 in.
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 6 oz.
GRIP	Polymer, textured
FINISH	Phosphate (steel)
SIGHTS	Adjustable, post/notch
SAFETY	Two-position selector
MSRP	\$600
MANUFACTURER	Pioneer Arms, 386-290-0379, pioneerarmsus.com

the M4 would be my nighttime gun and that I should look elsewhere for a daytime gun.

The solution I landed on was to use a battlefield-recovered AK-47, which was sent down to Kandahar for modification into what we called a "Krink." The AK was a late-1950s-vintage, milled-receiver AK-47. The barrel was shortened, and a side-folding stock was attached. Folding the stock, combined with the 10-inch barrel, allowed the little rifle to ride comfortably in my lap when moving around the country during the daytime. It was also easy to get into operation since it was always in my hands. All I had to do was hop out of the truck and lock the stock in the open position before I started shooting. I carried that rifle for the last few months of my 2004 deployment to Afghanistan.

I've always thought highly of that compact rifle, and I still miss it. It was a handy little thing that proved wonderfully lethal out to about 150 yards. I'm sure it would have worked further than that, but that was the longest range at which

we hit the enemy. That rifle was also popular with our militia. I think they liked the idea of an American carrying the same rifle they were.



While early AKs were built from milled steel blocks, the AKM switched the platform to stamped and folded steel around a trunnion. The Hellpup is based on the AKM design.

MEET THE HELLPUP
The AK pistol I acquired for this evaluation is remarkably similar to what I carried some 20 years ago in Afghanistan. It is made by Pioneer Arms and goes by the name of "Hellpup." These guns are made in Radom, Poland, a location known for making military



Short AK pistols have the front sight assembly pressed against the gas block. At the rear is a sliding ladder-style sight that can be adjusted from point-blank to an optimistic 1,000 meters.

and AK-pattern firearms. Radom, and the government factory located there, built some of the highest-quality AKs ever made during the Cold War. However, the conclusion of the Cold War, and the drop in demand, meant that the government factory closed and was later relocated.

However, an enterprising individual bought the engineering drawings, some of the buildings, and many of the machines from the old factory before it moved. He then hired several key employees and put AKs back in production at the original factory using the same drawings and machines. That's who makes the Pioneer Arms guns today.

Prior to the Radom facility linking up with the U.S. sister company of Pioneer Arms, business with a different American distributor focused solely on low-cost guns. That distributor put lots of pressure on Radom to build them. Radom went to the engineers and asked if there was a way to keep the same performance and durability while lowering manufacturing costs. Engineers came back with the solution to make the receiver's trunnion out of casting to create significant savings. Radom hired a British manufacturing and engineering firm to



The safety selector can be engaged up to "S", preventing the bolt from cycling (top) or down to "F" for semiautomatic fire (middle). It is also notched to capture the bolt handle (bottom).



The bolt carrier supports the rotating bolt assembly, which contains the large extractor and firing pin.

create the casting process, and Radom incorporated it into the manufacturing process. Just like other forms of material handling, following a good process creates a good result. Radom has one of the best casting processes. It heats the dies to 5,000 degrees before pouring in order to ensure no cracks or voids form in the steel. The result was a good cast trunnion that is used to build the 7.62x39mm guns. Maximum SAAMI chamber pressure for this cartridge is 45,000 pounds per square inch (psi). Cast trunnions have proven to work indefinitely at that pressure.

However, the customer base spoke out against the cast trunnion and voiced concerns about long-term durability. Pioneer Arms listened. In 2023, Pioneer Arms stopped putting cast trunnions in every 7.62x39mm rifle and pistol. All centerfire rifles and pistols now use forged trunnions exclusively,



Being an AK-type pistol, the Hellpup lacks a fixed or folding stock. It can be slung using a fixed attachment point at the front of the handguard and a rear QD sling swivel.

putting to bed any concerns about long-term durability.

I was pleasantly surprised when I laid eyes on the Hellpup and removed it from the packaging. It was beautifully finished and had a much better trigger than anything I experienced when in the military. The Hellpup is made from all new-manufacture parts and, because of its size, can be imported as-manufactured in Poland. Most AK-pattern firearms require final assembly with some American-made parts due to 922R-compliance regulations.

The Hellpup is a commercial AKM, meaning it follows the Kalashnikov design update from 1959. This moved receiver production from milled blocks of steel to 1mm-thick



An optic-mounting point is riveted to the left side of the stamped and folded receiver. Aftermarket optic rails and scope mounts are available.

stamped steel that was folded into the final shape. Guns got a lot lighter and easier to produce when this design change was implemented. While everyone loves the workmanship milled steel represents, it adds a lot of unnecessary weight and expense. I saw no difference in reliability between vintage AK47s and the AKM during my time overseas.

The Hellpup comes with iron sights and a side receiver rail for mounting optics. The receiver mount is a big deal because it makes sensible optic mounting a real possibility.

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Mounting an optic on an AK-pattern firearm is usually a struggle. The receiver cover lifts off the top, so attaching anything to it is doomed to never hold zero. Other mounting options include removing the rear sight and direct-mounting a plate, or installing a section of rail and attaching the optic to that. It can be a good solution, but it raises the optic high above the stock, so good head-to-stock contact isn't possible. The final solution is removing the top handguard

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Wolf 123-gr. FMJ	2,982	86.3	27.4	2.1	2.4
American Eagle 124-gr. FMJ	2,709	39.5	12.7	2.2	2.6
Hornady Black 123-gr. SST	2,760	54.8	18.2	2.2	2.9

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups at 100 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots measured with a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph.

and fixing a rail to it. This puts the optic right above the hottest part of the gun, which can cook electronic sights if the gun is shot a lot. Pioneer Arms puts the side-mounted rail in place, allowing the shooter to mount the optic low above the receiver cover. It still requires the optic to be removed to access the receiver's internals, but there are some elegant and efficient aftermarket solutions. If you plan on shooting past 100 yards with any AK-pattern rifle, a good optic-

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mounting solution is paramount. The Hellpup comes with it already installed.

Spending some time with the Hellpup at the range reminded me why I enjoyed my Afghan travel companion, my daytime go-to gun all those years ago. Even though the barrel on the Hellpup measures a short 11 inches, muzzle blast isn't horrible as it is when a shooter fires an 11-inch Black Rifle in 5.56 NATO. One reason the 7.62x39mm is a good choice is the low chamber pressure: 45,000 psi versus 62,000 psi produced by the 5.56 NATO cartridge. It makes for a much lower projectile exit pressure, and

that translates into significantly less muzzleblast. There is still a fireball, though. The Hellpup's trigger is also much better than the AKs I encountered overseas. The test pistol's trigger let the hammer go consistently after just a hair beyond 4 pounds, and it was smooth and grit-free. It made accuracy testing the Hellpup at 50 yards a joy.

Defensive firearms can be a complicated subject. Twenty years ago, I faced a tactical problem as a soldier that required some creativity to find a solution. The solution for me was a highly portable firearm with great lethality and pleasant table manners. It's now available from Pioneer Arms for several hundred dollars. Not only is the price attractive, it is of a higher quality and has a better trigger and optic-mounting solution than what I dreamed up. However, I did bet my life on that old rifle a few times, and I would be comfortable doing the same with the Hellpup. 



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7mm-08 Remington	162 gr.	SST	2512
.308 Winchester	165 gr.	SST	2645
.30-06 Springfield	165 gr.	SST	2749

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HEAVY METAL

SIG SAUER ANNOUNCED a number of new versions of its flagship P320 pistol. The P320-XFIVE SXG is a dedicated competition version of the striker-fired 9mm. Guns & Ammo staff first shot the P320-XFIVE SXG at an event in New Hampshire where SIG Sauer revealed more than 20 new products. SIG Sauer Team Captain Max Michel was available to walk G&A through the features of the new pistols, including the P320-XFIVE SXG. When production samples became available, one was sent to G&A for evaluation.

The P320-XFIVE SXG is an all-stainless-steel version of the striker-fired P320. It has a 5-inch barrel and several unique features. It is chambered in 9mm and is provided with three, 21-round magazines.

SIG Sauer has made XFIVE pistols for years, and they've always been competition-oriented pistols. They used to be produced by SIG Sauer's Custom Shop

in Germany, and were originally based on P220 and P226 models. The first XFIVE built on the P320 pistol was introduced in 2017, but it was only offered with a polymer grip module. SIG Sauer also introduced a heavy tungsten-infused polymer grip module (TXG) and an aluminum grip module (AXG) for the chassis pistol. For 2024, the P320 was given a steel X-grip module, the SXG.





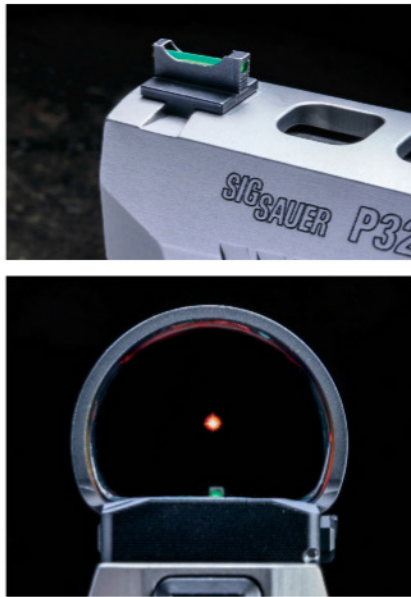
The Fire Control Unit (FCU) is an assembly on a serialized stainless-steel chassis, which is considered to be the “firearm.” Attached to the P320-XFIVE SXG FCU is a steel, flat-face trigger with subtle finger hook. Trigger weight was tested at 4¼ pounds.

SIG SAUER P320-XFIVE SXG

TYPE	Recoil operated, striker fired, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	9mm
CAPACITY	21+1 rds.
BARREL	5 in., carbon steel
LENGTH	8.5 in.
HEIGHT	6.5 in. (with magazine inserted)
WIDTH	1.6 in.
WEIGHT	3 lbs., 1.8 oz. (with empty magazine inserted)
SLIDE	Stainless steel
FRAME	SXG, X-Grip module, stainless steel, G10 grips
SIGHTS	Post front with fiber optic insert, fully adjustable rear notch removable for red dot
TRIGGER	4 lbs., 4 oz. (tested)
SAFETY	Striker safety
MSRP	\$1,799
ACCESSORIES	Three, 21-rd. magazines
MANUFACTURER	SIG Sauer, 603-610-3000, sigsauer.com



Slide cuts enhance the aesthetics of the P320-XFIVE SXG and reduce mass, keeping slide weight similar to a standard P320.



Sighting is accomplished with either the green fiber-optic front sight and adjustable rear on the cover plate, or with an optic.



Three recoil springs — 12, 14 and 16 pounds — are included to enhance reliability and manage recoil from different loads.

The P320 is a chassis gun, meaning that it has no “frame” per se, just an internal Fire Control Unit (FCU), and a grip module. The serialized part is the stainless-steel chassis that organizes the trigger, slide lock, sear, pins and springs. It is easily removable from the grip module.

In SIG Sauer’s nomenclature, the “S” stands for “steel.” “G” in “SXG” stands for the “grip” module. As for the “X?” It has nothing to do with this model being an X-Five. The original P320 and P365 models had almost vertical grip angles. It wasn’t long before SIG Sauer offered “X”-grip modules for the P320 to provide a more angled grip alternative. It was so successful that almost every P320 and P365 manufactured today — apart from the military M17 and M18 models — feature X-grips. The grip angle is close to that of a Model 1911.

It isn’t just the increased angle of the X-grip that is functional, it is the undercut below the triggerguard and at the rear of the frame, which also has a high-grip beavertail. A shooter’s hand is positioned about an eighth of an inch higher on the P320-XFIVE SXG than a standard P320. That slight difference results in less felt recoil and less muzzle rise, which is important to a competition shooter.

As an all-steel pistol, the P320-XFIVE SXG weighs 49.8 ounces with an empty magazine inserted. For comparison, the polymer-framed P320-XFIVE weighs 35.5 ounces. The all-metal pistol weighs nearly a pound more than the polymer version. The P320-XFIVE SXG measures

8½ inches in length, 6½ inches in height with a magazine inserted, and 1.6 inches wide. Although the width is at the steel magazine well, this pistol is 1.3 inches thick at the grips.

The original, full-size P320 had a 4.7-inch barrel. With the P320-XFIVE SXG, the barrel is an even 5 inches, and given a thicker bull-barrel profile and target crown. The extra barrel length adds weight and provides shooters with a little extra velocity, important if you’re worried about your ammo making minimum power factor. Plus, the additional slide length translates into a longer sight radius to help with accuracy. When you’re pushing the edge at a match, every advantage helps.

Every veteran competition shooter has learned that more reciprocating weight equals more felt recoil and



Fieldstripping includes removal of the serialized FCU, which contains the trigger, slide-lock lever and sear assembly. The P320 remains the easiest chassis system to remove from a grip module.



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To remove the slide assembly from the grip module and FCU, first rotate the takedown lever down.



The steel blade trigger is flat-faced with a subtle finger hook at the bottom. Note the triggerguard undercut, enabling a high grip.



muzzle rise, which is why there are cutouts atop the P320-XFIVE's slide. While it is .3-inch longer than a standard P320, the slides actually weigh the same.

The front sight is steel and has a green fiber-optic insert, which is dovetailed into place. The rear sight is adjustable and made of steel, and it's integral to the slide's cover plate. The P320-XFIVE SXG comes optic-ready with the slide cut to fit optics using a DeltaPoint Pro footprint.

G&A's sample was supplied with the SIG Sauer ROMEO3 Max (\$700, [sigsauer.com](https://www.sigsauer.com)), which, along with this pistol, was designed with input from Max Michel. It's available with a 3- or 6-MOA dot. G&A tested the latter.

Both the slide and the SXG grip module are machined from stainless steel and given a matte bead blast finish. The barrel is carbon steel and given a nitride finish. The slide features serrations at the front and back, angled and flat-bottomed.



Texture on the P320-XFIVE SXG is comprehensive with LOK grips panels, backstrap, and machine checkering on the frontstrap. A high grip is possible due to the beavertail, triggerguard undercut, and magazine funnel.

WHY SO HEAVY?

Why a shooter would want more weight in a competition pistol might seem obvious to many, but a quick explanation is in order. Action pistol competition is all about points per second, so a pistol needs to allow you to shoot as fast and accurately as possible. A heavier gun softens recoil and reduces muzzle rise. Handguns will cycle before you can ready your finger to press the trigger a second time, but less muzzle

rise means less disturbance to your sight picture, meaning you can get back on target quicker. This is especially important if you're running a red-dot optic; less muzzle rise means less time that the red dot is out of the window. Features that would not be desirable in a carry gun — extra length and weight — are exactly what a competitive shooter wants on the P320-XFIVE SXG.

As part of its competition lineage, the team at G&A immediately noticed that the P320-XFIVE SXG has a



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noticeably lighter-than-average recoil spring. This pistol uses a 1911 spring system, so when you want or need to change the recoil spring, any spring meant for a full-size, 5-inch 1911 will fit the XFIVE. Honestly, it's a big deal. Veteran competition shooters know that light recoil springs are what you want in a competition gun. First, the ammunition used in action pistol matches — whether USPSA, IPSC or IDPA — is as light as possible while still meeting the declared Power Factor. You want the gun to reliably cycle light ammunition. Beyond that, competitors have learned that lighter recoil springs keep the muzzle flatter during recoil. Lighter recoil springs equal less muzzle bounce.

The P320-XFIVE SXG includes a 12-pound recoil spring installed, but two additional recoil springs are provided,



Three, 21-round magazines are supplied with the P320-XFIVE SXG, each having an textured basepad that extends beyond the bottom of the magwell for confident speed reloads.



a 14-pounder and a 16-pounder that's marked red. You can tune this gun to your ammo and your shooting or grip style. A 16-pound recoil would be considered factory standard for a full-size 9mm.

The SXG grip module features an accessory rail with one slot, allowing you to mount a light if you desire. The rail also adds non-reciprocating weight out near the muzzle, which can also reduce felt recoil.

TOUCHPOINTS

The P320-XFIVE SXG sports the standard P320 controls, including a bilateral slide-stop lever where both levers properly work as a slide release. The takedown lever on the left side is flat and low profile. The magazine release is steel and checkered, and it does not stick out further than the grips. Due to the size and profile of the grip, most

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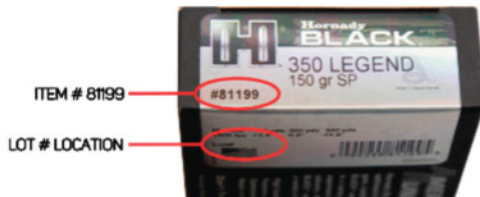
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PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG GROUP (IN)
Hornady 147-gr. FMJ*	892	20	10	1.7	2
Winchester 3-Gun 147-gr. FMJ	946	25	16	1.8	2.3
SIG Sauer Elite 115-gr. FMJ	1,233	23	11	2.1	2.6
Black Hills 115-gr. FMJ	1,149	26	20	2.5	3
Federal Syntech 150-gr. PRN	876	37	27	2.5	3.2

Notes: *Handload with 3.2 grains Titegroup. Accuracy is the average of four, five-shot groups at 25 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured with an Oehler Model 35P chronograph set at 12 feet in front of the muzzle.

people shouldn't need to shift their firing grip to use the magazine release.

The G10 grips on this pistol are great. These thin, low-profile grip panels are made by LOK Grips for SIG Sauer. They are G10 and have aggressive texturing. The back-strap under the web of your hand matches the grip panels. On the front of the grip module, there is a small section of checkering in the stainless steel. Between the weight of the gun and the aggressiveness of the grip, the P320-XFIVE SXG will not shift in your hands when shooting.

Inside the triggerguard there is SIG Sauer's new blade trigger. It is steel and black, with a wide flat face. It fires close to 90 degrees. G&A's sample had a long rolling break, with a total pull weight of 4¼ pounds. Honestly, it doesn't rise to the level of a true competition-grade trigger, but it is far better than a standard P320 trigger. It is a reminder that the P320-XFIVE SXG is not a custom gun. Rather, it is a factory gun with some unique features that make better suited for competition. The steel magazine well provided a generous opening and a smooth surface to guide mags in with speed. It is removable, if you prefer.

At the range, the P320-XFIVE SXG proved reliable and more than accurate enough for competition. We did some shooting with the optic, but accuracy testing with the standard sights. The narrow front sight was about 8-MOA wide, whereas most front sights are 12- to 15-MOA wide.

It is a big, heavy gun, so recoil was as soft as one would expect — especially with a dedicated USPSA 9mm handload. SIG Sauer's Team Captain Max Michel and other competitors have been winning local, state, and national matches with various models of the P320 for years. That trend is sure to continue with the P320-XFIVE SXG.

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Bravo Company Recce-18 MCMR Precision 5.56 NATO

SHOT FIDELITY

BRAVO COMPANY MANUFACTURING (BCM) has long built high-quality AR-15s and M4-style firearms. BCM is led by U.S. Marine Paul Buffoni, who founded the business building AR-pattern rifles that adhered to U.S. military technical specifications, but it wasn't long before he improved on those designs and created faithful tributes to models such as the Mk 12 series and Recce. BCM's approach is "brilliance in the basics."

Guns & Ammo tested an ideal representation of an AR-15 developed for general use and precision shooting. It sports quality components with thoughtful details included. For example, the 18-inch, 410 stainless-steel, medium-contour barrel has a rifle-length gas system, which maximizes velocity potential from the 5.56 NATO round. The long gas system is easy on the rifle's internals and produces the least amount of felt recoil. The upper and lower receivers are machined from aluminum forgings, 7075-T6, which are then Type III hardcoat anodized. The receivers mirror the classic mil-spec design, while components such as the MCMR handguard are more functional and can better accommodate a shooter's needs.

BRAVO COMPANY MFG. RECCE-18 MCMR PRECISION

TYPE	Direct impingement, gas operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	5.56 NATO
CAPACITY	20 or 30 rds.
BARREL	18 in., 1:8-in. twist, stainless steel
LENGTH	34.25 in. (collapsed), 37.25-in. (extended)
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 14 oz.
STOCK	BCM Mod 1 SOPMOD Compartment
GRIP	BCM Gunfighter
LENGTH OF PULL	11.1 in. (collapsed), 14.1 in. (extended)
FINISH	Type III hardcoat anodized (aluminum)
SIGHTS	None
SAFETY	Two-position selector
MSRP	\$1,980
MANUFACTURER	Bravo Company Mfg., 877-272-8626, bravocompanymfg.com



The MCMR forend maintains the BCM handguard mounting system, which indexes and secures the handguard to the barrel nut using a steel screw and opposing set screw to prevent loosening. Two tabs on the handguard also index the handguard to the upper receiver and prevent rotation that could lead to misalignment of the top rails.



The BCM Mod 1 stock is a wide-body version of the SOPMOD featuring storage. To access the rear storage compartment, use a tool such as a punch or bullet tip to press a crossbolt-style pin. Multiple ambidextrous sling mounting options are also included.



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The lower receiver includes a mil-spec 7075-T6 receiver extension, BCM QD end plate and castle nut. The QD end plate features a socket for a sling with a quick-disconnect swivel.

THE FURNITURE

The newest components on the Recce-18 MCMR Precision are the handguard and the adjustable stock, both designed and made by BCM. The stock is the Mod 1-SOPMOD-Compartment, and it is one the most useful stock designs available. It fits both standard AR-15 and longer AR-10 receiver extensions. Sling attachments include quick-detach (QD) sockets on both sides of the stock, as well as on the receiver end plate. The location allows for sling use while shooting off either shoulder. The QD sockets are high near the extension, so the sling won't choke the shooter when slung for the right shoulder and then transitioned to the left. There is also a slot near

the stock's comb that allows the sling to be threaded through for simplified sling attachment.

The storage in the Mod-1-SOPMOD-Compartment stock — along with the storage available in the BCM Gunfighter grip — can be useful for keeping a spare battery, bolt, or other small items handy. The extra storage of the stock is located in a shape that fixes many gripes with the SOPMOD stock. The military's SOPMOD stock has a toe that comes to a point. Seen from the side, the stock (just forward of the butt pad) has a toe that is shallow and pointed. Toes such as on the SOPMOD don't ride a rear support bag well, so it's harder to coax the best accuracy from the rifle. This isn't a concern when the AR is



The polymer BCM triggerguard is enlarged to accept gloved fingers, and has no sharp edges. The BCM PNT trigger and hammer are nickel finished with Teflon particles embedded.



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The free-floating 18-inch barrel is chambered for 5.56 NATO and features a 1-in-8-inch twist and M4 feed ramps. It's machined from 410 stainless steel, and given a medium contour and Mod 2 flash hider.



The BCM Asymmetric MK2 charging handle has a large, single-sided latch. The design features exhaust channels that divert gas away from the shooter's face.



The BCM Mod 1 grip fills the gap between the lower receiver and frontstrap. It features a straight, checkered frontstrap with finger stop, and reduced angle that improves comfort during prone use.



The BCM lower receiver is machined from a 7075-T6 aluminum forging that is Type III hardcoat anodized. The bolt catch lever, safety selector and trigger are all placed in their familiar locations.

meant for fast shooting at close range, but stocks like the SOPMOD are not ideal for use on precision rifles. The Mod 1-SOPMOD-Compartment stock has a wider toe to create a storage compartment. Accessing the compartment is done by pushing a captured pin laterally. The buttpad is hinged. The compartment is large enough to accept cleaning gear, spare parts, a small rag or tools, or a couple of fun-size bags of M&Ms critical for maintaining morale on a hard range day. The flat spot on the toe measures about 1½ inches long, making it an almost perfect support point for a rear bag.

BCM also included the Vehicle-Borne Operational Sling Tab, a small protrusion forward of the toe. The tab allows the shooter to S-roll the sling and secure it in place with a rubber band, painter's tape, or a Velcro strap. This keeps



Carpenter 158 steel is used to make BCM's bolt carrier group, which is also chrome-lined. The bolt carrier group is also magnetic particle inspected (MPI) per USGI specifications for quality control.

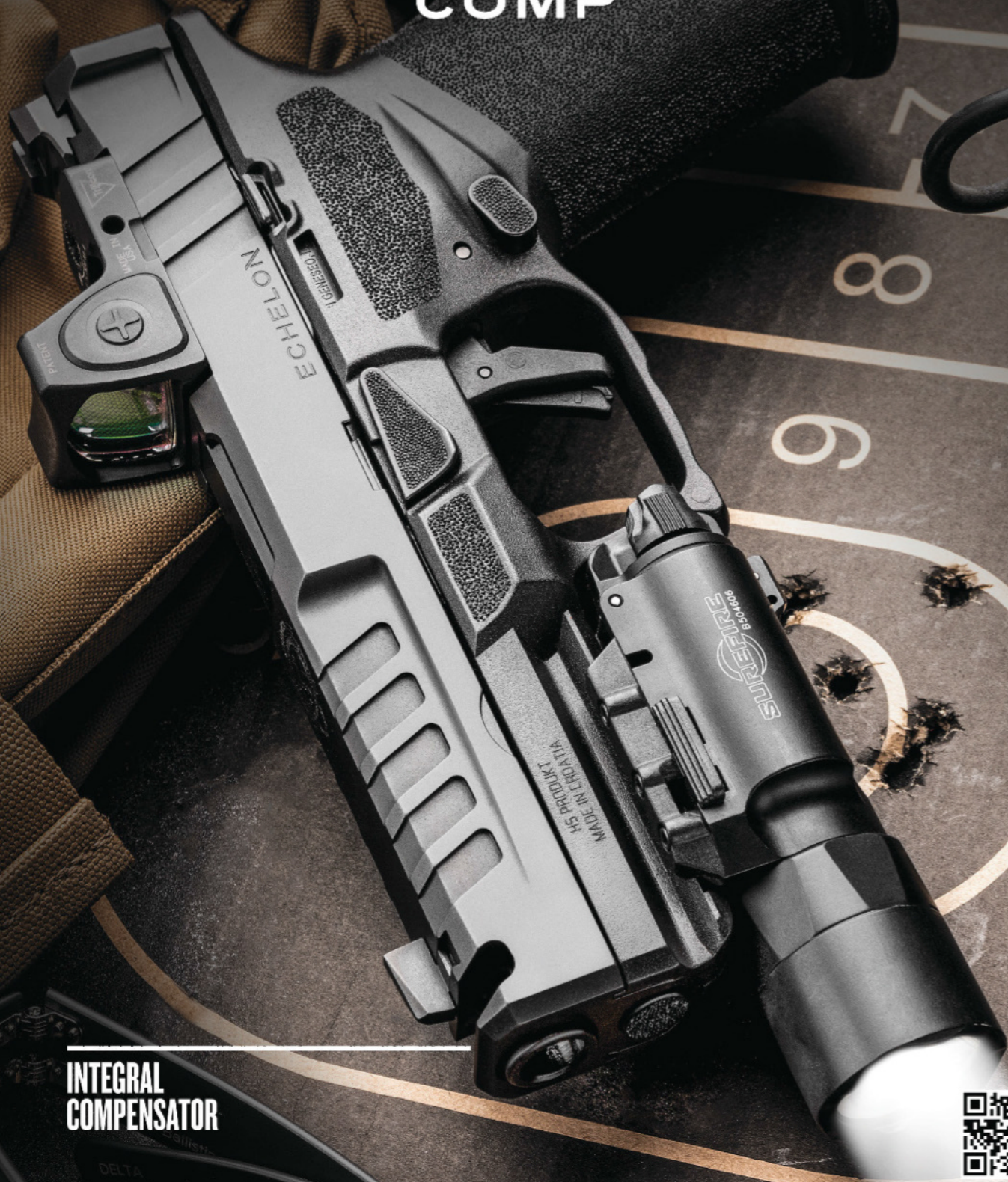
the sling out of the way when the rifle is stowed for travel, but allows the shooter to grab the sling and rip it away for rapid deployment. It's a small but useful detail, and one of the many tricks troops learned during the War on Terror.

The handguard is the BCM MCMR-15 with an M-Lok-compatible modular rail. The handguard utilizes the mounting system from the KMR handguard. Most

AR handguards slip over the barrel nut and have screws that provide tension at the bottom of the handguard, just forward of the upper receiver. The issue with that arrangement is the barrel nut is the first component to get hot because it surrounds the barrels chamber. The barrel gets hot and the heat moves from the barrel nut to the handguard where it attaches. Once the handguard gets hot and starts to expand, the tension provided by the screws is

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diminished. The handguard won't rattle apart, but it can move around, causing a wandering zero for laser aiming devices or alignment issues for night vision devices mounted on the handguard.

The solution BCM crafted for the KMR was to use a steel barrel nut that is more resistant to thermal expansion and locating the crossbolts that attach the handguard to the barrel nut to the area between the barrel nut and the rail that runs along the top of the handguard. The folded material that creates the rail is where expansion occurs when the handguard heats. Putting the crossbolts between the handguard and the rail limits the amount of movement created by thermal expansion and helps immobilize the handguard. All of this especially matters if a shooter needs to mount a laser aiming device to the handguard.

AT THE RANGE

There were high hopes for the Recce-18 MCMR Precision when it was time for range testing. The BCM PNT trigger assembly features a standard semiautomatic trigger and hammer given a polished nickel finish that's embedded with Teflon particles to reduce friction of the interface. BCM uses investment casting to make these triggers and hammers, not the metal injection molding more commonly found in rifle of dubious provenance. The sear engagement surfaces are ground and hand polished for increased smoothness and reduced friction. The disconnecter is stamped from 1070 steel and ground to a precise size. The effort provides a clean reset. The result is a trigger that allowed more accuracy than

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Federal GMM 69-gr. OTM	2,709	39.5	12.7	.38	.62
Black Hills 77-gr. SMK	2,760	54.8	18.2	.66	.79
Hornady TAP 55-gr. PT	2,982	86.3	27.4	.81	.93

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups at 100 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots measured with a Garmin Xero C1 Pro.

anticipated. The trigger pull was smooth and light enough that the crosshairs didn't move off the point of aim when shooting groups.

The smallest group during testing came with 69-grain Federal Gold Medal Match (GMM), producing a diminutive .38-inch five-shot group. It was much smaller than expected of an AR, especially one without a match trigger.

A lot of the Recce-18 MCMR Precision rifle's accuracy comes from its barrel. Not surprisingly, it has an 18-inch, button-rifled barrel with a 1-in-8-inch twist rate. It is made from 410 stainless steel and has a mid-weight contour to complement the rifle-length gas system. It is fitted with BCM's flash hider. The combination results in a soft-

shooting AR that'll put most five-shot groups of match ammunition into about .8 inches at 100 yards. It's a great barrel for anyone wanting a precision AR for ringing steel, punching small holes in paper, or blasting coyotes and vermin.

BCM also includes a handful of features on just about all of their rifles that make using with them a little more pleasant. For example, the MK2 charging handle is BCM's own creation. It has a large fence that sits immediately behind the upper receiver and blowing into the shooter's eyes; this is especially important when shooting suppressed. At the bottom of the rifle is a polymer triggerguard that fills the gap between the lower receiver and the grip's frontstrap. It makes long-range sessions more comfortable for the firing hand.

Cosmetically, BCM creates a great product. On inspection, we found no parting lines or forging marks anywhere

on the receivers. Most AR-15's have a seam near the trigger, but only smooth, evenly anodized surfaces covered the Recce-18.

G&A's range time with the Recce-18 MCMR Precision proved that BCM makes reliable, smoothly operating rifles. Carbiners with shorter barrels are the order of the day for close-range work and self-defense, but the Recce-18 MCMR Precision is ideal for all other rifle tasks. Most importantly, it produced a fun day at the range ringing steel, impressing friends, and shooting out bullseyes.

Perhaps you could buy a sling, mount a quality scope, set up a tripod and shooting saddle, and invest in a few spare magazines and match ammo. As it ships, though, the Recce-18 is a high-value performer that requires no functional upgrades. 





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TERMS & CONDITIONS

ON JULY 16, 2024, retired English teacher Greg Kinman announced that "Hickok45," his wildly successful firearms YouTube channel, was experiencing some challenges. Thanks to Google's retroactive "terms of service" change, the majority of his videos were declared in violation of the site's community guidelines. Not only would his ability to monetize these videos be restricted, but his channel could be taken down permanently.

Historically, the firearms guidelines on YouTube restricted content that involved modifying firearms to bypass safeties, instructions on how to build a firearm, and generally anything else you would find within "The Anarchist's Cookbook." In recent years, however, the restrictions have grown tighter, most notably banning any videos that are intended to advertise or sell firearms and related accessories. Further, any livestreams that contain a person holding a firearm, loaded or otherwise, are forbidden. It was the ban on advertising that threatened Mr. Kinman's channel. Simply putting a link to a manufacturer's website in the video description was enough to retroactively put them in violation of the rule. Luckily, the Hickok45 channel



HICKOK45

Greg Kinman, also known as "Hickok45," is a YouTube creator who enjoys plinking steel, shooting up watermelons, and demonstrating firearm safety on his backyard range. Consider giving his videos a watch!

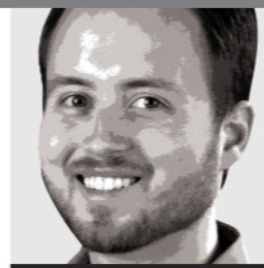
was able to negotiate for its videos to be reinstated if they removed the sponsorship links.

As a private entity, Google is considered within its rights to ban content they don't want on its platform. While firearm content hasn't been completely banned on YouTube, the presence of videos featuring firearms is not welcome. Many have said the writing is on the wall. Prominent YouTube gun channels have sought alternate forms of revenue, whether it be through crowdfunding, selling merchandise, or producing content on firearms-oriented streaming and video platforms. For aspiring content creators though, the prospect does not

look positive. Only well-established channels and creators maintaining a large enough audience can afford to seek greener pastures.

Though Guns & Ammo does have a modest YouTube channel, it is only beholden to the brand's audience and Outdoor Sportsman Group (OSG). We create videos for gunsandammo.com and MyOutdoorTV (MOTV) streaming service, which contains the complete catalog of Guns & Ammo media, as well as content made by publications including Peterson's Hunting, Shooting Times, Firearms News, Rifle-Shooter, Handguns, and more. We're always improving the experience, most recently making a video section on gunsandammo.com for a smoother user experience that lets us navigate to a topic quickly.

Know of any channels or creators that provide solid firearm-related content? Email us at gaeditor@outdoorsg.com for recommendations.



ANTONIO ACITELLI

TOP COMMENTS

In response to the October 2024 "Connect" column, titled "Looking Back":

This column inspired me to consult my bookshelf to retrieve my signed copy of Col. Charles Askin's "Unrepentant Sinner" (1985). Askins is certainly one of the better writers of that era. This "old stud" as his autograph described me, will be rereading his work. While in my library, I also retrieved H. W. McBride's "A Rifleman Went to War" (1935). McBride is not anywhere as prolific as Askins, but his is a fascinating read just the same. I read each of these books long ago, so I was not as familiar with the firearms that they described. My upcoming refresher should be quite fruitful.

— Kevin B., Hampshire, Illinois

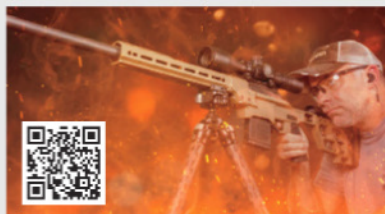
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KEITH WOOD

Judge the actions of politicians, not their words.

IN NAME ONLY

VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS is a Bay Area liberal who spent part of her childhood in Canada. Though she has boasted about being a “gun owner,” it shouldn’t shock anyone that she’s not exactly a great supporter of the Second Amendment. Her running mate, Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, has a different story. As a native Nebraskan who served in the National Guard, he plays the part of the “aw-shucks” rural everyman when it comes to gun rights.

“Look, I know guns,” Walz said. “I’m a veteran. I’m a hunter. I was a better shot than most Republicans in Congress, and I have the trophies to prove it. But I’m also a dad. I believe in the Second Amendment, but I also believe that our first responsibility is to keep our kids safe.”

Allow me to translate: “My guns are fine, but I get to decide whether yours are.” In my opinion, that makes him an elitist. Personally, I’ll take an anti-gun true believer over a person who claims to be one of us and then votes otherwise.

When Walz was elected to Congress, he did so with NRA’s endorsement. In 2016, I included him in gunsandammo.com’s list of “Top 20 Politicians for Gun Owners” as an example of one of the few Democrats continuing to support gun rights in Washington D.C. Since then, though, he has changed his position.

Walz’s opinion on gun control turned after the Parkland High School shooting in 2018. Now, he is in favor of banning so-called “assault weapons,” and he has signed numerous anti-gun measures into law. In 2023, Governor Walz signed a bill creating a “Red Flag” program and mandatory background checks on transfers of handguns, as well as many semiautomatic long guns. This year, he

signed legislation banning certain trigger devices.

We can all agree that reducing violence is a noble public policy goal. Given Minnesota’s response to the riots during the summer of 2020, though, it is hard to argue that Governor Walz’s priority is law and order. A police station and 1,000 businesses were burned to the ground while Walz “failed to act,” according to a Minnesota

Senate Committee report issued in October 2020. So much for a commitment to public safety.

No matter how much Governor Walz touts his personal gun ownership or time afield as a hunter, he has demonstrated through his words and actions that he is willing to support additional restrictions on the rights of gun owners.

I’m not writing this column to tell readers how to vote, however, on the issue

of gun control, the contest is undeniable. Then-President Trump appointed U.S. Supreme Court Justices who have fundamentally changed the Court’s view of the Second Amendment. With those acts alone, he influenced the effectiveness of gun-control efforts for a generation.

If the Harris-Walz ticket is successful in November 2024, the best that gun owners can hope for is that the Republicans manage to take control of the U.S. Senate or maintain the majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. A Democrat trifecta would be a disaster for gun rights. Though it is possible that a new anti-gun law could be struck down by the Supreme Court, the process to undo a gun ban could take years.

When it comes to elections, it’s important to judge candidates on the issues and their record, not whether they speak our language. Don’t be fooled by a politician wearing a camouflage hat and toting a shotgun. 



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