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HANDGUNS (ISSN # 1068-2635), FEBRUARY/MARCH 2025, VOLUME 39
NUMBER 1. Published bimonthly by OUTDOOR SPORTSMAN GROUP®, 1040
6th Ave., 17th Floor, New York, NY 10018. Periodical postage paid at New York,
NY, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address change
(Form 3579) to Handguns, P.O. Box 37539, Boone, IA 50037-0539. Return
undeliverable Canadian addresses to: 500 R. 46 East, Clifton, NJ 07011.
Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 41405030.

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515-237-3699.

Subscription rate for one year is \$23.94 (U.S., APO, FPO, and U.S. possessions).
Canada add \$13 (U.S. funds) per year, includes sales tax and GST. Foreign add
\$15 (U.S. funds) per year.

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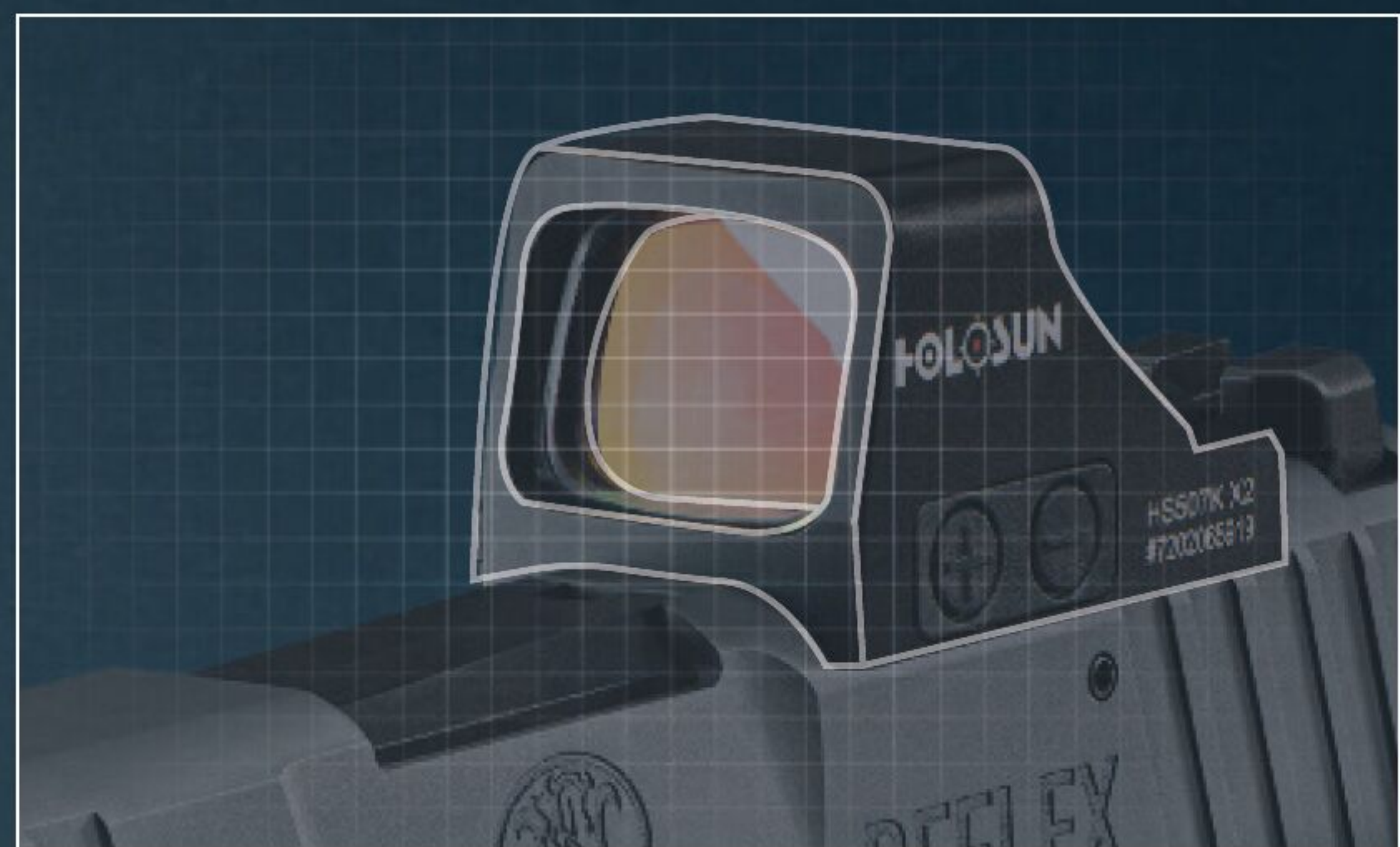
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More .44?

You ran an article on the .44 Special in your August/September 2024 issue. Did you ever consider doing an article on the .44 caliber itself? In my opinion it may be the most versatile handgun cartridge ever made. The available bullet weights in .44 go from 125 grains all the way up to 355. The usable velocities go from 400 fps gallery loads to 1,950-plus fps hunting loads. I am not aware of any other pistol or rifle cartridge that has so many bullet weights or applications available in factory guns with factory ammo. I think a well-researched article on the .44 cartridge might be interesting and different for your readers.

MARC RICHMAN, TEXAS

Pistol Legend Ed Brown Passes

If you've been reading this magazine for any period of time, you're familiar with the Ed Brown name. The man himself passed on September 15, 2024 at the age of 77.

A machinist, CNC programmer and CAD/CAM designer by trade, he started the enterprise that would become Ed Brown Products as a part-time gunsmith in 1968. Over time he developed into a much sought-after custom pistolsmith, but increasingly unhappy with the quality of the parts he had to work with, Ed quit his day job to start a business producing top-quality 1911 parts. The company took off, and in time Ed moved away from gunsmithing to focus on parts manufacturing.

Ed Brown Products was incorporated in 1992, still focused on 1911 parts, and by 1998 the company was producing every major 1911 component. So it only made sense to move into the enterprise that most of us know today: building some of the finest 1911s you will ever shoot.

Ed was a serious combat pistol competitor, at one time one of the best in the world. He also earned the prestigious Pistolsmith of the Year award, which is bestowed by the American Pistolsmiths Guild, in 1991. Ed retired in 2010, turning the business over to his family.



Upcoming 'Handguns' TV Episodes

The pages of the magazine come to life each week on Sportsman Channel. Hosts Rich Nance, Scott Rupp and Brad Fitzpatrick showcase new guns and cover topics from defensive techniques to plinking. It's a half-hour of shooting you won't want to miss. The show airs each Thursday at 10:30 p.m. Eastern, plus additional showings. Consult your local listings. Here's what's coming up.

Dec. 5—Top Handgun Hacks	Dec. 19—Keys to Better Shooting
Dec. 12—Features That Matter	Dec. 26—Close-Quarter Skills

Remember, you can also catch past seasons of "Handguns"—as well as a ton of other shooting, hunting and fishing shows—via the My Outdoor TV app. Visit MyOutdoorTV.com to start your free trial.

This isn't necessarily handgun-related, but **SIG SAUER'S** opening of a new 210,000 square-foot facility in Jacksonville, Arkansas, is big news. The expansion will support the U.S. Army's Next Generation Squad Weapons and their 6.8 Hybrid ammo. The \$225 million investment is expected to yield more than 675 jobs.



COMING NEXT ISSUE



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SPRINGING INTO ACTION

AN INEXPENSIVE SPRING KIT FROM WILSON CAN IMPROVE YOUR RUGER.

By Brad Fitzpatrick

BILL RUGER WAS INDEED A BRILLIANT gun designer, but Bill Wilson is equally adept at helping fine-tune and improve upon existing firearms. Wilson is known for producing superb custom 1911 pistols, and he was also an outstanding competition shooter. What fewer people may know about Wilson, though, is he is an ardent handgun hunter, having hunted big game around the world with a wheelgun. Wilson wasn't satisfied with factory guns and components, so he began offering his own spring upgrades for revolvers like the Super Redhawk.

The term "reduced power" may not appeal to every .44 Magnum

owner, but Wilson Combat's custom spring kit with reduced-power springs might be just the thing you need to smooth out the rough edges on your Ruger Super Redhawk. This is an affordable and worthwhile upgrade, and it's simple enough that you don't need to be a gunsmith to do the job.

The double-action Super Redhawk is relatively simple to disassemble. Like the GP100 and SP101, it uses separate hammer and trigger return springs, both of which are easy to replace.

Wilson Combat's spring kit for the Ruger Super Redhawk comes with three rebound hammer springs—

nine, 10 and 12 pounds—and 10- and 12-pound trigger springs. These are considerably lighter than the standard Ruger springs, which are rated at 14 pounds for the hammer spring and 15 pounds for the trigger spring. The Wilson Combat coil springs are made from durable high tensile steel that should provide years of service.

Super Redhawk trigger pulls can be super heavy. The double-action pull on mine with factory springs measured 12.3 pounds on average for double action and 5.9 pounds for single action. The revolver itself was capable of excellent accuracy, but only when it was in a locked

rest where the heavy trigger pull couldn't move the gun off target.

I had previously replaced the Ruger factory springs in my SP101 with Wolff springs, and the process of changing springs on the Super Redhawk was very similar because the two revolvers share some architecture and design elements. The first step was to make certain the Super Redhawk was unloaded and to remove the grips. After doing so, the hammer spring is immediately visible.

To remove it you must compress the spring on the hammer strut and elevate the "seat" at the bottom of the strut. When you press up on the seat and compress the hammer spring, a round hole in the strut becomes visible. Insert the pin that is included with the revolver to maintain spring compression or, if you've lost that part, wire or a small-diameter punch will work.

From there you'll need to depress the revolver's trigger guard latch that extends through a hole in the grip peg. This compresses the trigger return spring, and the entire trigger guard and trigger assembly rotates downward and free of the revolver.

To access the trigger return spring you'll need to compress the trigger guard latch and remove the small pin that holds the latch in place. This might be the most difficult part of the process and the step that prompts the most cursing. The retaining pin is very small, and you need to be sure that once it falls free it ends up somewhere you can retrieve it.

Once the pin is out, slowly release pressure on the trigger guard latch to prevent the stored energy of the trigger spring launching it like a missile across the room. You should also be aware that pulling



▲ The trigger return spring is behind the trigger and is secured inside the trigger housing. The 15-pound factory trigger is below while the replacement 10-pound Wilson Combat trigger is above. Note the tiny spring retaining pin.

the trigger while it's removed will release the pawl, pawl spring and plunger and transfer bar. So don't do that unless you want to add some time to your spring replacement job and do more cursing.

After you've replaced the springs and reassembled the revolver, you'll immediately notice a difference when dry firing. With the lightest Wilson Combat springs in place, double-action trigger weight on my gun was reduced to 8.5 pounds, and the single-action weight was 3.5 pounds. That's far better than what I got with the factory springs in place.

But before you fall in love with this new, lighter trigger pull, you need to make certain that the trigger/hammer spring combination in place will reliably ignite primers in the ammunition you plan to use. If not, you'll need to either switch primers, switch loads or switch trigger spring weights.

There were no issues with either the Hornady Handgun Hunter or Fiocchi Hyperformance Hunting Handgun, both of which managed groups around an inch at 50 yards with the Ruger. That's certainly



▲ The 14-pound factory spring (l.) was replaced with the Wilson Combat 10-pound spring (r.). To the left is the strut, and below is the strut seat that holds the spring.

good enough for hunting, but that type of accuracy is much easier to achieve when you're shooting a gun with a manageable trigger.

In addition to handgun hunters and those who carry a revolver for bear defense, I think swapping to Wilson Combat springs makes sense for anyone who owns a Ruger SP101, GP100 or Super Redhawk. It's not a difficult upgrade, and you don't have to be a mechanical engineer to complete the project.

What's the price for this custom-tuned trigger setup? Just \$10. This might be the best value available for any handgun.

QUICK SHOT | BY J. SCOTT RUPP

WALTHER PPK/S .32 ACP

VENERABLE. ICONIC. TIMELESS. THOSE words are apt descriptions of the Walther *Polizei Pistole Kriminal* or PPK. Developed more than 75 years ago, it's often credited as being the first true concealed-carry pistol. And it's famous as the choice of legendary fictitious spy James Bond.

The PPK has been been available in .380 along with a .22 version, but with the reintroduction of the .32 chambering, it's now even more Bondian. (He transitioned from a Beretta .25 to the PPK in .32 ACP beginning with 1958's "Dr. No.")

The PPK/s—the "S" for Sport—has a slightly longer grip for better control. It's a double-action/single-action semiauto, and this particular model is all stainless steel with black grips.

I'd fired the .380 PPK/s before, and while I enjoyed it, the .32 is way more shootable. Fifteen-yard accuracy was good, as you can see in the chart, and hits came easy in short-range drills.

I won't lie to you, though. The double-action pull is stout. It maxes out my Lyman gauge, but I'd say it's in the 15-pound neighborhood. However, the single-action pull is sweet, averaging two pounds, 11 ounces. It took me a box or two to get used to the double-to-single transition, but once I got the hang of it, things went smoothly.

You also have to get used to its safety/decocker. It's Safe in the down position. To place it on Fire, rotate the lever up, revealing a red mark. Moving the safety from Fire to Safe decocks the action.

For defensive use I'd simply carry it with the hammer down and safety off. You're unlikely to fire it ac-



A The terrific PPK/s is now available in .32 ACP—James Bond's caliber—and it's a handy, shootable CCW pistol that's as stylish a gun as you could want.

cidentally with that double-action pull. There's also no slide-lock lever. To lock the action back you need to insert an empty mag. No big deal.

Sights are minimal—a fixed rear notch and front blade, both with a single red dot—but fine for close range. The flat slide top is engraved with a cool wavy pattern to stop glare. The gun comes with a flush-fit mag and one with a finger extension.

In my opinion, if you've been a fan of the PPK design but have never forked over the money, this is the one you've been waiting for.

WALTHER ARMS PPK/S

TYPE: DA/SA semiauto
CALIBER: .22 LR, .32 ACP (tested), .380 ACP
CAPACITY: 8+1
BARREL: 3.3 in.
OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 6.1/4.3/1.0 in.
WEIGHT: 19 oz.
CONSTRUCTION: stainless steel
GRIPS: checkered black polymer
TRIGGER: D/A pull not measured; SA pull, 2 lb. 11 oz.
SIGHTS: fixed
SAFETIES: manual/decocker
PRICE: \$969
MANUFACTURER: Walther, WALTHERARMS.COM

ACCURACY RESULTS | WALTHER ARMS PPK/S

.32 ACP	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense	60	923	18	1.4
Fiocchi SJHP	60	966	24	1.9
Remington UMC FMJ	71	889	19	1.4
Federal American Eagle FMJ	71	811	26	1.6

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 15 yards from a Ransom Multi Cal Steady Rest with iron sights. Velocities are averages of 15 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a ProChrono DLX. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; SJHP, semi-jacketed hollowpoint

OLD SCHOOL | BY BOB CAMPBELL

SMITH & WESSON MODEL 18

A FAVORITE REVOLVER FROM SMITH &

Wesson's glory days is the Model 18 .22. This is a four-inch rimfire revolver intended as an understudy to the Model 15 .38 Special Combat Masterpiece. It must be noted that while every cop of my generation called the Model 18 "the .22 caliber Combat Masterpiece," this was slang and not an official designation.

Introduced in 1949, the Model 18 is based on the K-frame size. The K or medium frame is among the most popular handguns of all time, with millions manufactured. Originally produced in .38 Smith & Wesson Special, the K frame was later offered in rimfire calibers including the .22 Long Rifle and .22 Magnum.

It took several decades before the K frame was offered in .22 rimfire, and the first .22 K frames had six-inch barrels. Some shooters wanted a four-inch barrel, though, because by 1949 the great majority of holster guns on police belts had four-inch barrels.

The Model 18 covered all the bases: a super-smooth double-action trigger; a crisp single-action trigger; excellent adjustable sights; target grips; and a ramp front sight more suited to holster wear than the sharp-profile target sight of revolvers with six-inch barrels.

These revolvers feature recessed chambers in a six-shot cylinder to ensure safety in case of a case head rupture. Whether necessary or not, this feature is nice to have. The barrel is pinned in place. The "pinned-and-recessed" collector market usually refers to centerfire revolvers, but the Model 18 is certainly a pinned-and-recessed revolver.



▲ The Model 18, sometimes referred to as the .22 Combat Masterpiece, is a K-frame revolver that, while hard to find, is a worthy add to a collection—whether as a true collector gun or a shooter-grade revolver.

The Model 18 is well suited to some types of competition and small game hunting, but according to Smith & Wesson sales figures it was never as popular as wheelguns with six-inch barrels, and folks don't like to pay top price for .22s. The Model 18 cost just as much to manufacture as the centerfire guns and came with an equal price tag. The Model 18 "Combat Masterpiece" .22 was discontinued in 1986.

My history with the Model 18 .22 began in 1979. When obtaining a degree in criminal justice we had a course of fire using the Model 18. The revolver in the accompanying photograph was coined in 1981. It features the typical Micro Click sights and nicely checkered wooden stocks.

The stocks have seen much use, and the ejector rod exhibits considerable finish wear. A few dings are

found on the cylinder, and the cylinder face shows wear. The chambers are clean; thankfully the previous owner didn't dry-fire the gun.

I found the wide trigger not the best for rapid double-action fire. In single action I could group five shots into 1.5 inches at 15 yards. Some high velocity 40-grain loads were a bit more accurate, producing 1.25-inch groups.

The Model 18 is a classic in every sense—not rare but uncommon—and good for daily use. I purchased the gun for \$700. Revolvers a little nicer cost more. A specimen approaching 90 percent finish with the original box will command \$1,000.

Parts supply is not an issue, and replacement stocks and sight assemblies—both factory and aftermarket—are plentiful. There's no reason at all not to purchase a shooter-grade Model 18.

MIDWAY USA COMPETITION RANGE BAG

WHETHER YOU USE IT FOR COMPETI-

tion or not, this range bag delivers the goods. Made of a tough PVC-coated material, the Competition Range Bag (\$40, MIDWAYUSA.COM) is constructed with heavy-duty zippers and reinforced stitching. All the pockets are lined with closed-cell foam to protect your gear.

The main compartment is 17x10x9 inches with internal dividers. These dividers run laterally inside the bag. I haven't been shooting competition lately, so I've used this as a range bag, and the lateral dividers make it handier for storing my notebook, smaller targets and supplies like target pasters, staples and staple gun—with plenty of room left over for eyes and ears.

The exterior front outer pocket runs the length of the bag and has eight loops for magazine storage. One area where this bag really delivers is the rear and side zippered pockets. Too often these sorts of exterior pockets are afterthoughts, but not here.

The two rear ones are half the width of the bag and just as tall, while one of the side pockets is the full width and height. The remaining side pocket is a bit smaller—to make room for the handy water bottle pouch.

This smaller pocket still has sufficient room for a few cleaning sup-



▲ The range bag is roomy, with a large 17x10-inch main compartment, and comes with a removable, padded shoulder strap. ▼ The front pocket has loops for eight mags, and the outer zippered pockets offer tons of storage space.



plies, while I haven't even begun to fill the other three exterior pockets.

The bag comes with a padded shoulder strap with metal hardware. The strap is adjustable, and the pad is non-slip on one side.



I've been using the Competition Range Bag regularly for about a month now, and I just love how much space and flexibility it offers. It's available in black, olive drab and coyote.—*J. Scott Rupp*



GOT THE MISSING-ISSUE BLUES?

We get a fair number of requests for old articles and issues. If you're in the Apple universe, there's an app that allows you to purchase issues as far back as 2014. Search for Handguns Magazine; developer will be listed as Outdoor Sportsman Group. Each issue costs \$4 to \$5; not every issue in those years is available. If you're looking for a particular article but don't know which issue it was in, email HANDGUNS@OUTDOORSG.COM and we'll do our best to identify when a particular piece might have appeared. (We can't help you with really old stuff.) Then if it's available you can order that issue through the app.





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Superior performance, perfect balance – Smith & Wesson Bodyguard 2.0.



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GUNS & GEAR | BY J. SCOTT RUPP



< FN MANUAL SAFETY REFLEX

FN America has added new versions of the Reflex—its 2023 entry into the micro-compact 9mm pistol market—equipped with an ambidextrous manual safety. The new guns will be available in both the MRD red-dot-ready model as well as the standard Reflex in both black and flat dark earth finishes. The Reflex has a 3.3-inch barrel, an overall length of 6.2 inches and a weight of just 18.5 ounces. Sights are three-dot, with a day/night front with an orange ring surrounding a tritium insert. Magazine capacities are 10, 11 or 15 rounds.

{ \$599 (Reflex), \$659 (Reflex MRD); FNAMERICA.COM }

> SUREFIRE STILETTO PRO II

Dual outputs delivering 1,500 lumens and a 35,000-candela hybrid beam on the high setting allow the Stiletto Pro II to punch deep into the darkness for long-distance illumination. It also offers 500-lumen medium and 25-lumen low settings. It's a flat style, so its Melonite-coated aluminum body fits nicely into a pocket, and the reversible heavy-duty pocket clip keeps it securely attached—either bezel up or bezel down. It features a rechargeable lithium polymer battery and includes a USB-C charger.

{ \$379, SUREFIRE.COM }



< ED BROWN HEX HEAD MAGAZINE CATCH LOCK

Anytime you can replace a slotted-head part with a hex-head part, you should do it. And that's especially true for people who do a lot of assembly/disassembly on their 1911s. The hex-head magazine catch lock from Ed Brown Products not only looks custom-gun good, it also eliminates the potential for unsightly screw bugging or slip scratches. It comes with the proper size wrench and installs in seconds. Available in blue or stainless.

{ \$5, EDBROWN.COM }



< TETRA GUN OBEX PRIME LIGHT GUN GREASE

This grade 1 grease is fluoropolymer-based, and it penetrates and coats gun parts to create a barrier to fouling and reduce friction and wear. Tetra Gun told me you can use this grease anywhere you would apply gun oil, and the formulation means you can go longer between applications. Obex Prime comes in a one-ounce tube.

{ \$15, TETRAGUNDIRECT.COM }

> VENTURE GEAR TACTICAL VGTG20 MEDIUM-DUTY GLOVES

Breathable and moisture wicking, these are great gloves for range days as well as concealed carry. The synthetic leather palm will provide a great grip on your handgun, and the gloves are machine washable and touchscreen compatible. The thumb is reinforced for long life, and the cuffs feature carrier loops. Available in coyote brown and black in sizes small, medium, large, extra-large and 2X.

{ \$19, available at various internet outlets }



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GET ON THE STICK

NIGHTSTICK'S WEAPON LIGHTS ARE DURABLE, AFFORDABLE OPTIONS.

HUMANS RELY HEAVILY ON OUR SENSE of sight to navigate the world, and it is our reliance on vision that makes adding a light to your firearm such a smart decision. Texas-based Nightstick (NIGHTSTICK.COM) offers a full range of lights that blend threat-stopping illumination with long battery life and simple operation. The company's pistol-mounted lights are available with outputs ranging from 150 to 1,200 lumens, and some models have green lasers.

Nightstick's trim, affordable TSM-11W 150-lumen light is one of my favorite lights for my Glock G43X, but I had not previously had an opportunity to test Nightstick's larger duty/home-defense lights until the company sent its TWM-30-T and TCM-10 for review.

The TWM-30-T (\$218) features a "turbo" beam with 900 lumens, 66,000 candela, and a listed beam distance of 514 meters. The more compact TCM-10 (\$211) produces 650 lumens, 4,612 candela and offers a beam distance of 136 meters.

Lumens are a measure of the total output of light while candela measures the beam width. To help better understand the concept let's assume you have two lights, which produce 300 lumens each.

If light A has a lower candela—say 3,000—those 300 lumens will spread out widely so a broad area will be visible at close range. If light B has the same 300 lumens and 70,000 candela, the beam will be much more focused, effectively illuminating objects that are farther away without the same close-range "flooding" effect experienced



A The Nightstick TWM-30-T (l.) and TCM-10 (r.) offer long run times and are easy to mount on most pistols. The TWM-30-T is more for a duty light while the TCM-10 is more suited for concealed carry or home-defense.

with a light that features lower candela.

This is why the TWM-30-T offers about 1.5 times the number of lumens as the TCM-10 but has a beam distance that is 3.8 times greater than the TCM-10. During testing, the TWM-30-T's high candela allowed for a focused beam of light that extended much farther, but despite the TCM-10's lower lumen output, its modest candela figures create a wide beam that illuminates a broader area up close.

Aside from their illumination characteristics, these lights share many design elements. Both weapon lights are constructed of 6061-T6 aluminum and both are serialized. They feature LED illumination and are powered by lithium CR123 batteries: two batteries for the 30, one for the 10.

NIGHTSTICK WEAPON LIGHTS		
	TCM-10	TWM-30-T
LIGHT SOURCE	LED	LED
LUMENS	650	900
CANDELA	4,612	66,000
BEAM (ft.)	446	1,686
LENGTH (in.)	2.5	3.5
HEIGHT/WIDTH (in.)	1.2/1.2	1.5/1.5
WEIGHT (oz.)	2.5	4.5
BATTERY	CR123	CR123
RUN TIME (hr.)	2.0	1.75
CONTROL	ambi paddle	ambi paddle
STROBE	yes	yes
LOCKOUT	yes	yes
PRICE	\$211	\$218

The TCM-10 and TWM-30-T are drop-test rated to two meters and are backed by Nightstick's limited lifetime warranty. They offer easy ambidextrous switch activation and offer a programmable strobe func-

tion. The TCM-10 has a battery run time of two hours, which is similar to the TWM-30-T's 1.75 hours.

The TWM-30-T is designed to be more of a duty light; it features an IP-67 dust/waterproof rating compared to the TCM-10's IP-X7 waterproof rating.

The TWM-30-T is larger and heavier than the TCM-10. Whereas the TWM-30-T is 3.5 inches long and 1.5 inches wide and deep, the TCM-10 is just 2.5 inches long, 1.1 inches wide and 1.2 inches deep.

The TWM-30-T weighs 4.5 ounces while the TCM-10 adds just 2.5 ounces to the pistol.

The TCM-10 is also designed so the battery compartment is accessed by unscrewing the bezel at the front of the light. The larger TWM-30-T requires removing the light from the pistol to access the battery compartment.

The TCM-10 comes with five polymer rail inserts for mounting on your firearm as well as two spare Allen screws and a 1.5mm Allen wrench. The beefier TWM-30-T includes four metal cross-rail inserts, two cross-rail mounting cap screws and an Allen wrench.

I tested the TCM-10 first, attaching it to a Shadow Systems M920 FS pistol. As I said, the battery is located behind the bezel. The component parts are good, with relatively fine threads on the bezel.

Performance was excellent, and the low candela/wide beam design makes this light a solid choice for self-defense at closer to moderate ranges. For most shooters it will provide everything that they need, and with a two-hour run time you can expect many months of intermittent use before you need to swap batteries.

I let the TCM-10's battery run for the full two hours in 30-minute



▲ The TWM-30-T (l.) and TCM-10 (r.) feature rear-mounted paddles that can be activated from either the left or right side. ▼ The 30 comes with four metal mounting rails while the 10 offers five polymer rail inserts.



intervals, and the light lasted the full advertised time—although by the end the light had dimmed substantially.

The TWM-30-T light cruised by the 1:45 mark, although the light was pretty well spent and lost most of its juice—although it still lit up a 15- by 16-foot room sufficiently. While it's more duty-oriented, the TWM-30-T has its place even if you aren't a law enforcement professional. It would be a great option for the hunter or hiker who lives in bear country and needs a high-candela light with a long beam to scope out their surroundings.

Both lights survived 100 rounds in the On position without issue. I like the activation button positioning because the levers rest on both sides of the front of the trigger guard and are easily accessible.

The lights warm quickly when left on, but that's not unique to Nightstick products. That's why there's a locking option that prevents accidentally powering on the

light. There were no burning smells when the light was left on, either. I experienced that once with an affordable weapon light, and it's not the most comforting feeling.

Despite their modest price point, the TWM-30-T and TCM-10 functioned impressively in the test, and I wouldn't hesitate to run either light on a carry or duty handgun. As far as holster fitments go, Crossbreed, Safariland, Alien Gear, Craft Holsters and others offer fit options for pistols equipped with Nightstick lights. Obviously, the more common pistols will offer a broader range of holster choices.

I don't think the Nightsticks are as feature-rich as some of their established competition, but they both worked well. I think it's sensible to add a light to your carry or home-defense gun since bad things often happen after dark, and these lights will illuminate a large, completely dark room with the gun held in a Low Ready position. Both are solid options to improve your odds. ●

FIXING IT FAST

PISTOL MALFUNCTION CLEARING MADE SIMPLE.

THROUGH THE FOGGED PLASTIC MASK,

I saw the assailant charging with a knife held overhead. As I back-pedaled to create distance, I raised my pistol and pressed the trigger. This action produced only a click. Without missing a beat, I tapped the bottom of the magazine, racked the slide, and pressed the trigger again...and again. This time, my rounds found their mark, painting the assailant's upper chest blue.

Although this was only a scenario at the Simunition instructor course I was attending, it proved that my prior training was on point. I didn't stare at my pistol to determine if the problem was due to a failure to feed, a failure to fire, a failure to extract or a failure to eject. I didn't care because contrary to what's commonly taught, none of that matters.

I teach only two pistol malfunction clearance techniques: immediate action and remedial action. If the former doesn't solve the problem, transition to the latter. If neither works, your gun is probably broken, and it's time to see how good of a hammer it makes—or start running.

Immediate action is often referred to by its more descriptive name; tap, rack, assess. This simple procedure will remedy all but one type of malfunction.

As the name implies, the first step in the process is to tap the bottom of the magazine to ensure it's fully seated. The magazine may stay contained in the magazine well even when not fully seated, causing you to think everything is okay until you press the trigger.

Then two things can happen. If



▲ Clearing the two types of malfunction has to be second nature because in an actual self-defense encounter, there won't be time to think.

your pistol has a magazine disconnect, nothing will happen. Otherwise, the chambered round will fire but subsequent rounds will not. The magazine may drop from the gun after the first round is fired.

If the magazine isn't fully seated, no amount of racking the slide will fix the problem. When you hear a click instead of a bang, tap the bottom of the magazine with the heel of your hand. I find this easier when I tilt the magazine well toward my non-shooting hand. And despite the term "tap," feel free to slam that magazine into the gun. Just don't waste valuable time doing this more than once.

After tapping the magazine, it's time to rack the slide. This should extract and eject an unfired round or a spent casing, clearing a path for the live round atop the magazine to feed into the chamber.

There are two schools of thought

when it comes to racking the slide. One commonly taught method has you reach over the top and grasp the slide. While this is a viable option, it relies on pinching the slide between your fingertips and the heel of your hand. When you grip this way, your thumb is uninvolved.

I prefer to rotate the pistol so that the slide faces my non-shooting hand. This makes it easier to grip with the thumb pointed forward. Including your thumb makes for a stronger, more coordinated grip with which to rack the slide. In either case, pull the slide fully rearward before releasing it.

The final step in the process involves assessing the situation as you reacquire a two-handed shooting grip and prepare to fire. Note the word "prepare." Firing must not be automatic. Each press of the trigger must be in response to an imminent deadly threat.

To assess, you need to be looking at your adversary—not at your pistol. As such, the malfunction clearance itself must become second nature.

I mentioned there's one type of pistol malfunction that immediate action won't fix, and that's the double feed. Essentially, you have two rounds trying to enter the chamber at the same time. If immediate action fails, go straight to remedial action.

The fastest way to perform remedial action is to first press the magazine release and strip the magazine from the pistol. However, this can be surprisingly difficult depending on the strength of the magazine spring and whether the magazine has a lip or whether the pistol's grip has a cutout to enable you to achieve a solid grasp of the magazine.

If you can't strip the magazine from the pistol, you'll need to first lock the slide to the rear by applying upward pressure on the slide stop with your thumb while racking the slide rearward. With the magazine spring tension lessened, you should be able to remove the magazine normally.

Once the magazine is removed, cycle the slide three times—or until you see something eject from the chamber. Why three times? Because once or twice may not be enough, and if three cycles doesn't clear the chamber, additional cycles probably won't either.

Keeping hold of the slide between cycling is more efficient than releasing it each time. Just be sure not to stifle the rearward or forward movement of the slide. With the pistol cleared, you have another decision to make.

You could either lock the slide to the rear, insert a magazine and send the slide forward to chamber a round, or you could insert a



▲ Racking the slide should clear any obstruction to the chamber so the next round can enter.

magazine with the slide forward and cycle the slide to chamber a round. If you have a spare magazine, use it instead of the magazine you stripped from the pistol, which may have caused the malfunction in the first place.

To attain proficiency and determine what works best with your pistol, train with inert dummy rounds in an environment that's free of live ammunition and where the muzzle is always pointed in a safe direction.

Economy of motion is the goal. When you rack the slide, don't allow your hand to separate too far from the gun because doing so just means it has to travel that much farther to reestablish your grip.

Keep your gun at chest level or higher, with your head up. Clear the malfunction with the gun close to your body, where you're more dexterous.

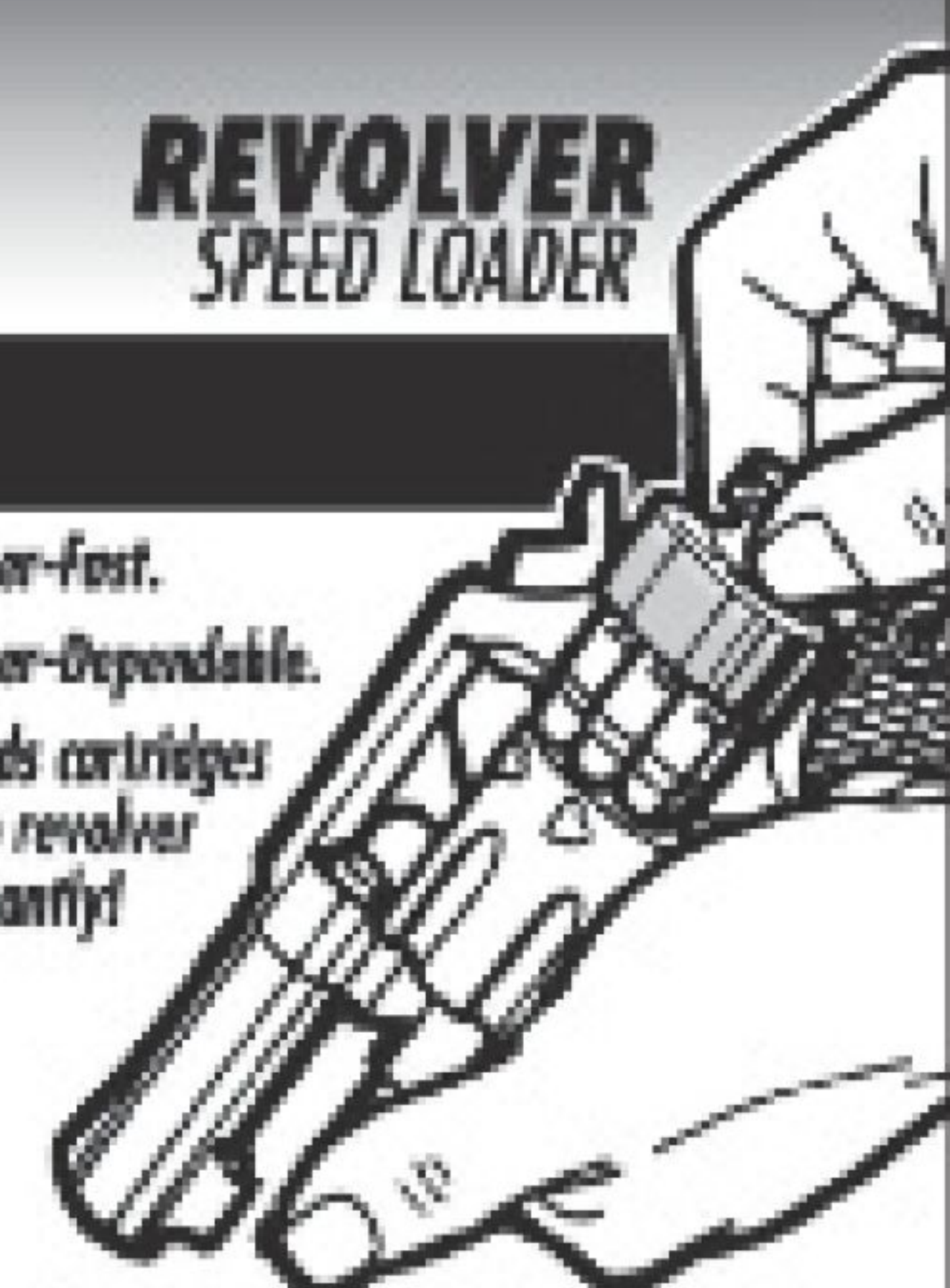
Once you've gotten the hang of it, head to the range and have a friend discreetly load some dummy rounds into your live-fire magazines. Work through the malfunctions as they occur, using the immediate action clearing procedure. Of course, you can stage double feeds with dummy rounds as well.

Just remember, if you hear a click when you're expecting a bang, immediate action. If that doesn't work, remedial action. It really is that simple.

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IF YOU SIMPLY CAN'T GET ENOUGH GUNS and shooting, the My Outdoor TV (MOTV) app is a resource like no other, a curated treasure trove of firearms- and outdoor-oriented television shows and videos.

For example, MOTV offers nine seasons—102 episodes—of “Handguns” (formerly “Handguns & Defensive Weapons”) alone. The show focuses primarily on personal protection and includes plenty of recreational shooting activities such as plinking and action-shooting competitions.

It features reviews of the latest firearms, ammunition and shooting accessories, as well as advice on marksmanship, gun handling, self-defense techniques and a host of

other handgun-related topics.

But wait, there's more! There are 10-plus seasons of the popular “Guns & Ammo” television shows, encompassing more than 200 episodes available on the app. You can also check out past episodes of shows like “Gun Stories,” “The Gunfather,” “Hollywood Weapons” and “Shootout Lane.”

In addition to the HD episodes, there are short-form videos encompassing how-to instructional and gun history topics you can watch anytime, anywhere.

I think *Handguns* readers will really appreciate MOTV's short-form HD videos covering a wide variety of self-defense topics. These videos are perfect for sharing with family mem-

bers to reinforce the finer points of keeping yourself safe. Like the show episodes, the videos are true HD quality for the ultimate viewing experience.

And if your tastes run to the wider outdoor world—including hunting and fishing—there are a ton of shows and additional content covering these.

In addition to streaming video, you can take this content with you, downloading content for later viewing when you're without internet access.

MOTV is available on the Web, as well as Apple and Android platforms. Interested? Simply go to MyOUTDOORTV.COM and subscribe today. Monthly subscriptions are \$10, and you can get a year for \$99.





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SIG SAUER



THE ECHELON MARCHES ON

BY J. SCOTT RUPP



SPRINGFIELD WASTES NO TIME IN TURNING OUT A COMPACT VERSION OF ITS STRIKER-FIRED FLAGSHIP. MEET THE ECHELON 4.0C.

The folks at Springfield Armory are good at a lot of things. Resting on their laurels is not one of them.

In the space of about two years, the company has introduced the double-stack Prodigy, refreshed the well-respected TRP, developed the AOS sight system for 1911s and, oh yeah, reimagined its polymer-frame striker-fired pistol with the Echelon. And that's just on the handgun side of the business. Trying to keep up with them is enough to give a magazine editor fits.

One of the things Springfield is good at—aside from designing solid, dependable firearms—is building out a product line, and that's what it has done with the new Echelon 4.0C. If you're keeping score at home, the original Echelon was just called the Echelon. With the introduction of the Echelon 4.0C comes a new naming convention: a number corresponding to barrel length and a letter for size. So the Echelon 4.0C is a four-inch compact while the original model is now the Echelon 4.5FS, a 4.5-inch full size pistol.

Built in Croatia, the Echelon 4.0C retains all the features of the initial Echelon in a slightly smaller package. The Echelon is a modular design, one that has the company's Central Operating Group or COG at its heart. The modularity offers the option of swapping out grip modules. While the 4.5FS ships standard with the medium grip module, the 4.0C comes with the small one.

These sizes are relative to model—as in there are small, medium and large for the 4.0C and small, medium and large for the 4.5FS. That's because the grip length on the 4.0C is shorter than on the 4.5FS due to differing magazine lengths. The 4.0C's height is 5.125 inches compared to the 5.4 inches on the 4.5FS with flush-fit mags.

For the shooter, the small module on the 4.0C is small where it counts, and that's how it fits in the hand. Measured above the inter- ➔

THE ECHELON MARCHES ON

← changeable backstrap, front to back the 4.0C's grip is 0.2 inch smaller than the 4.5FS's. Side to side it's 0.1 inch thinner.

The grip itself features Springfield's Adaptive Grip Texture. The company describes this as smooth to the touch until pressure is applied, at which point an underlying, more aggressive texture beneath the surface provides additional traction for good control. I initially thought this was just marketing hype, but the more I shot the Echelon, the more convinced I became that there's something to it.

The texturing is applied without interruption completely around the grip, including on the three interchangeable backstraps that come with the pistol. Additional texturing is provided above a ridge molded behind the trigger guard, as well as on indexing spots along the front sides of the frame. Springfield has even textured areas on the front and bottom of the trigger guard.

The frame has a beveled magazine well, and there's also an indented contour at the bottom of the grip that, combined with textured sections on the magazine base pad,

allows you to get really good finger/thumb purchase on a magazine that might be stubborn about ejecting.

At press time, there were no immediate plans to offer a thumb safety on the 4.0C, so the control layout couldn't be simpler. The slide-lock levers are ambidextrous, as are the oval magazine releases.

The takedown lever serves a dual purpose. Aside from the disassembly operation, it's also textured and has a small shelf molded into it. You might not notice this simply by looking at the gun, but if you put your thumb on it in a firing grip you'll feel the shelf right away.

This feature has been likened to a so-called gas pedal. A Gas Pedal is actually a trademarked aftermarket part sold by GoGun USA. That company's device has a more pronounced dish shape, and it's designed to work with what GoGun calls its opposable grip concept—in which the shooter applies forward, squeezing-type pressure to the Gas Pedal.

Springfield's takedown lever is not that because there's nothing to put forward pressure against. However, it's a terrific landing spot for your support-hand thumb, and it allows you to apply some downward pressure to help keep the muzzle flat during firing. To me, though, the primary benefit is the consistency of thumb placement it promotes.

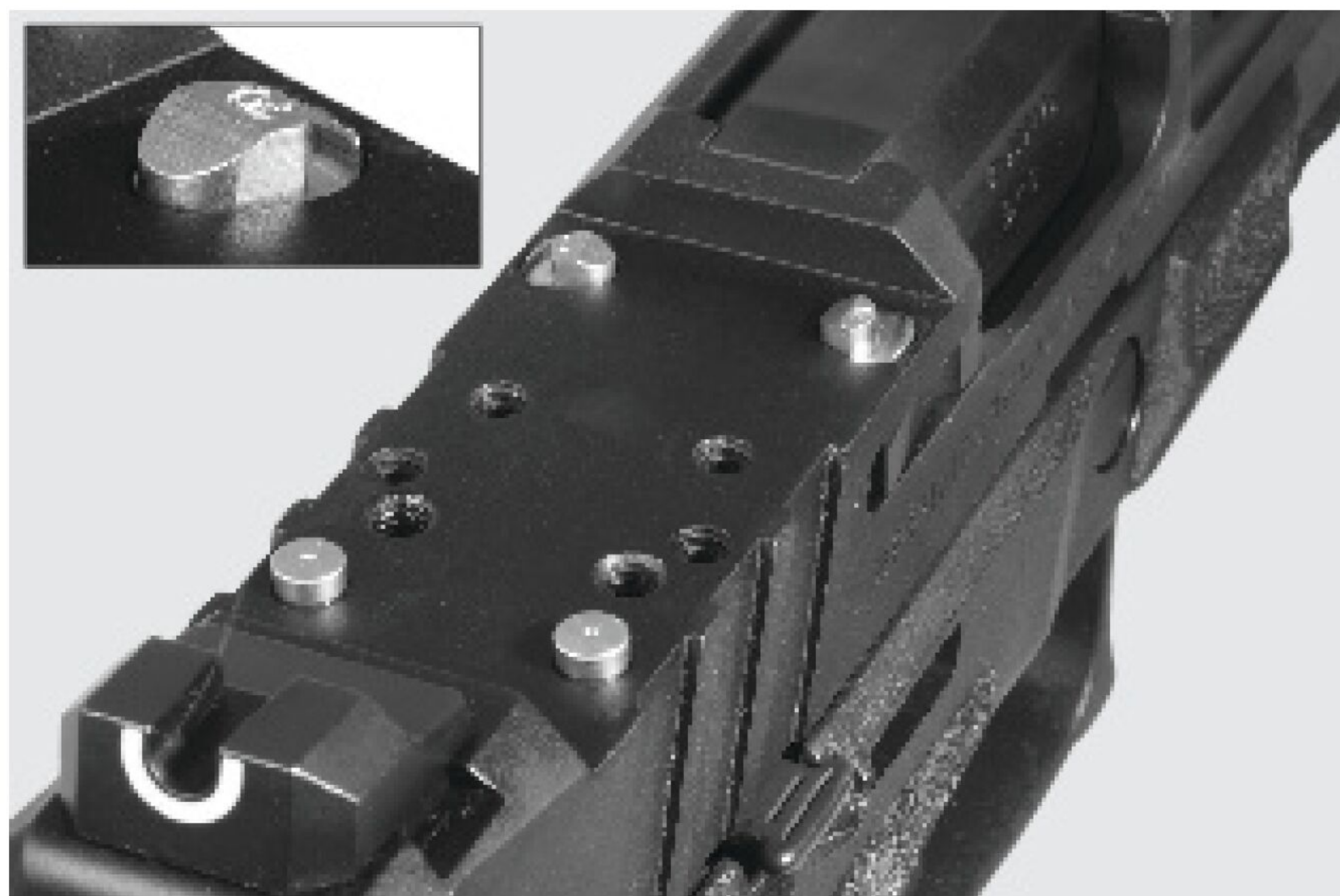
It's not a control, but the Echelon's external extractor has a small raised ridge at the front. When the gun is unloaded, the ridge is flush with the slide; when there's a round chambered, the bump sticks up to the point you can feel it and, to a lesser extent, see it.

To go with the shorter four-inch barrel, the 4.0C's forward accessory rail has three slots instead of the four found on the 4.5FS. However, it still has plenty of real estate for mounting lights and lasers.

Up top you'll find a Melonite-finished, billet-machined steel slide. The front of the slide is trenched,



▲ The slide flares at the rear to provide extra gripping surface, and the ridge behind the magazine release along with the small shelf at the bottom of the takedown lever promote a consistent grip.



▲ The VLS's pin system allows a direct mount of more than 30 red dots. The angled front pin design (inset) dramatically reduces potential zero shifts.

with four aggressive serrations within the trench. This trench makes the forward part of the slide easier to grasp even if your hand should slip off the serrations during a press check.

The rear of the slide has three equally aggressive serrations, and the slide also flares at the very back, forming two cocking “ears.” This flaring has become a popular feature because it really does improve your ability to rack the slide.

The sights are Springfield’s excellent U-notch Tactical Rack rear paired with a tritium/luminescent front. But the big deal with the Echelon is the Variable Interface System or VIS you’ll find beneath the slide cover plate.

The VIS allows you to direct mount more than 30 red dots via a system of pins. A direct mount allows a sight to sit lower on the slide than when the sight is attached via adapter plates. The lower a sight sits in relation to the bore, the easier it is to pick up the dot, and the less you have to worry about point-of-impact variations at distances other than where the optic is zeroed.

The pin system is easy to set up for the three most popular mounting footprints that the majority of today’s red dots use: Trijicon RMR, Leupold DeltaPoint Pro and Shield RMS/SMS.

The Echelon 4.0C comes with pin set No. 1 (Trijicon RMR) installed; when you remove the cover plate, be sure to look for pins that might have stayed within the plate. Sets No. 2 and 3 are in well-marked plastic bags, as are various screw kits. The Echelon manual includes a handy chart that lists which pin sets and screw sets go with which sights, and also which sights use their own OEM screws for mounting.

Not too long ago I was on a teleconference with the Springfield staff, and they talked about the VIS. During the development process, designers discovered how much movement is present in traditional

sight-mounting systems—a “tolerance slop” of up to 26 m.o.a., which translates to just over six inches at 25 yards. Traditional systems, they said, are particularly vulnerable to being struck from the side and shifting position.

That doesn’t happen with the VIS, thanks to the self-locking, angled pins at the front. As a sight is tightened, these pins cam over and engage the sidewalls in the hole surfaces of an optic, reducing potential change from that whopping 26 m.o.a. to just one m.o.a., which is insignificant at typical handgun distances.

As I mentioned earlier, the Echelon 4.0C incorporates the COG chassis, a self-contained, serialized unit made of stainless steel. It is interchangeable with the original full-size, the 4.0C and any future Echelons.

While I didn’t do the swap between the Echelon 4.5FS I bought last year and this new 4.0C sample, I have removed and reinstalled the COGs, just to do it. The manual’s directions on this operation are pretty good, but there are a few tricks that will make life easier should you need or want to do this. I freely admit resorting to YouTube (thanks, XD Man) to figure out how to get the

takedown pin back in and properly positioned. But have no fear: With a little study and patience, anyone can do it.

While I’m on the topic of changing components, I also swapped out the medium backstrap that came with the 4.0C with the provided small size. Two quick notes. Springfield expressly instructs you not to change the backstraps with the slide on the pistol, so remove the slide first. Then reach inside the mag well and push in on the square →

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY ECHELON 4.0C

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto centerfire

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 15+1 (as tested; other capacities available); 2 mags supplied

BARREL: 4 in., hammer forged, Melonite finish

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.25/5.1/1.3 in.

WEIGHT: 24 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: Melonite-finished steel slide; polymer grip module w/interchangeable backstraps

SIGHTS: Tactical Rack U-notch rear, luminescent/tritium front

TRIGGER: 4 lb. pull (measured)

SAFETY: trigger

PRICE: \$679 (as tested)

MANUFACTURER: Springfield Armory,

SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM



▲ In addition to the front serrations, there’s a trench that provides additional traction for press checks. The frame has textured indexing pads on both sides, and the trigger guard is textured on the front and bottom. →

THE ECHELON MARCHES ON

← projection about midway up the back of the well to slide off the backstrap.

When installing the new backstrap, I found that the square projection does not automatically snap back into place. However, there’s a cavity in the backstrap into which you can insert a tool—a small flat-blade screwdriver works nicely—and gently push on the projection until you hear it click into position.

Okay, back to the fire-control system. On the teleconference I referenced, Springfield told us the Echelon’s initial launch was delayed three times because the trigger wasn’t up to par. The delays paid off because the Echelons now have really good triggers.

In addition to a great pull—which on this sample averaged right at four pounds with a nice, short reset—the straight trigger employs a floating second sear that Springfield says dramatically reduces drop-fire potential.

For range testing I mounted a Vortex Defender-ST on the pistol.

Bench accuracy at 25 yards was good with just about everything—and great in the case of Federal Punch, as you can see in the accompanying chart. After that I threw a bunch of different types of ammo into a can and loaded up magazines for both my 4.5FS and the 4.0C sample to run a series of El Presidente drills to see how the smaller gun compared.

Quite well, as it turns out. I was actually a shade faster and more accurate with the 4.0C, which I attribute to the smaller grip. I have medium-size hands, but I often find that cheating toward smaller grips works best for me.

In fact, after this exercise I decided to buy a small grip module for my 4.5FS. These modules are available at the Springfield Armory web store and other internet sources for around \$60, and aftermarket options are starting to show up as well. For example, Icarus Precision and Sharps Brothers are producing aluminum modules for the Echelon, although they’re pretty dear at north of \$300.

Size considerations aside, the Echelon’s grip has a lot going for it. The molded ridge behind the magazine release is perfectly designed, and my shooting-hand thumb rested there automatically. The little shelf on the takedown lever provided an ideal landing zone for my support-hand thumb, too. The combination of these two features promoted a consistent grip, which is crucial to handgun accuracy.

The undercut behind the trigger guard and the well-proportioned beavertail allowed me to get a nice, high grip for excellent control. Earlier I mentioned the Adaptive Grip Technology. The texturing does seem on the tame side in casual handling, but when the rubber meets the road and you’re crushing the grip as you should, there’s plenty of bite.

I often struggle with achieving fast, smooth reloads, but the Echelon 4.0C gave me some of the best reload times I’ve had with any pistol. I did have to shift the pistol a tiny bit to hit the magazine release, but a lot less than I have to do on other pistols. The magazine well has a good-size maw, and the bevel really helps funnel in the next mag.

All my testing was conducted with the Vortex red dot because I already have a ton of experience with Springfield’s Tactical Rack rear/day-night front sight setup. I think it’s the fastest defensive iron-sight system going.

One of the criticisms of the traditional white three-dot sight is that the rear dots fight for your attention when you’re trying to focus on the front dot. The Tactical Rack’s U-notch rear has a white outline that not only doesn’t compete because it’s a different shape than the front dot, I find it speeds up sight alignment. And if you are running a red dot, this sight system is high enough to co-witness.

While I ran drills from an outside-the-waistband holster designed for the 4.5FS, I carried the 4.0C in a Safariland Incog X inside-the- →



▲ The Echelon has a modular design, and its stainless steel Central Operating Group is serialized and can be swapped between models.

ACCURACY RESULTS SPRINGFIELD ARMORY ECHELON 4.0C				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Lehigh Defense XD	90	1,306	14	2.4
Fiocchi Hyperformance/Hornady XTP	115	1,198	17	2.0
Hornady Critical Defense	115	1,136	19	2.2
Magtech FMJ	115	1,165	21	2.3
Federal Punch	124	1,141	13	1.7

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a Ransom Multi Cal Steady Rest with a Vortex Defender-ST red dot. Velocities are averages of 15 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a ProChrono DLX. Abbreviation: FMJ, full metal jacket



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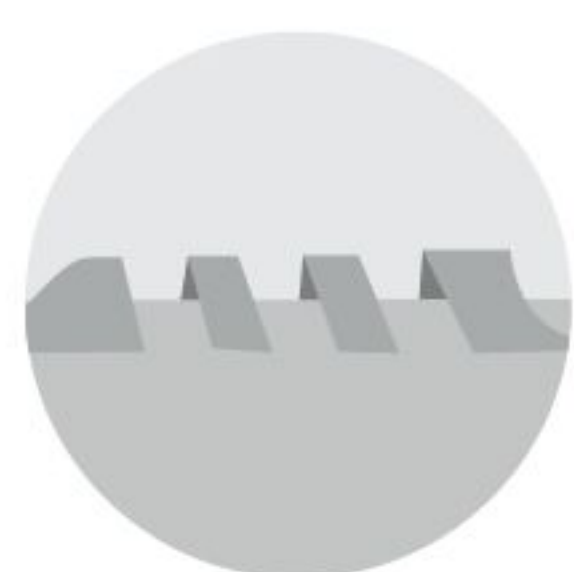
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THE ECHELON MARCHES ON

← waistband holster. While the 4.0C is a fairly light gun at 24 ounces, I'm short waisted and a little thick around the middle, and IWB carry wasn't all that comfortable.

For my body type I think an outside-the-waistband holster would be the way to go, and I anticipate a lot of different holsters will soon be ready for the 4.0C. Mike Humphries at Springfield told me DeSantis, CrossBreed, BlackPoint and others should have holsters by the time you read this.

The model I tested came with two 15-round magazines. It's also available with two 10-rounders for more-restrictive states. The standard kit is a 15 and an extended 18.

While I love the Tactical Rack/day-night sights, Springfield is seeing an increased demand for three-dot tritium sights, so that's an option on the 4.0C as well. There's also a version with a threaded barrel.

Springfield has high expecta-



▲ At 24 ounces and just 7.25 inches long, the 4.0C would be a candidate for inside-the-waistband holsters like this Safariland Incog X, although outside-the-waistband carry might be more comfy for some body types.

tions for the 4.0C, and the company thinks sales will exceed those of the original. I agree with that prediction because this gun is suitable for duty, concealed carry and home defense. The size and weight are right in the sweet spot, and the gun

is accurate and easy to shoot, as well as being 100 percent reliable. The swappable COG aspect aside, the gun is so easy to configure for hand size and sight-system choice it will appeal to anyone who's looking for an all-around defensive pistol. ●



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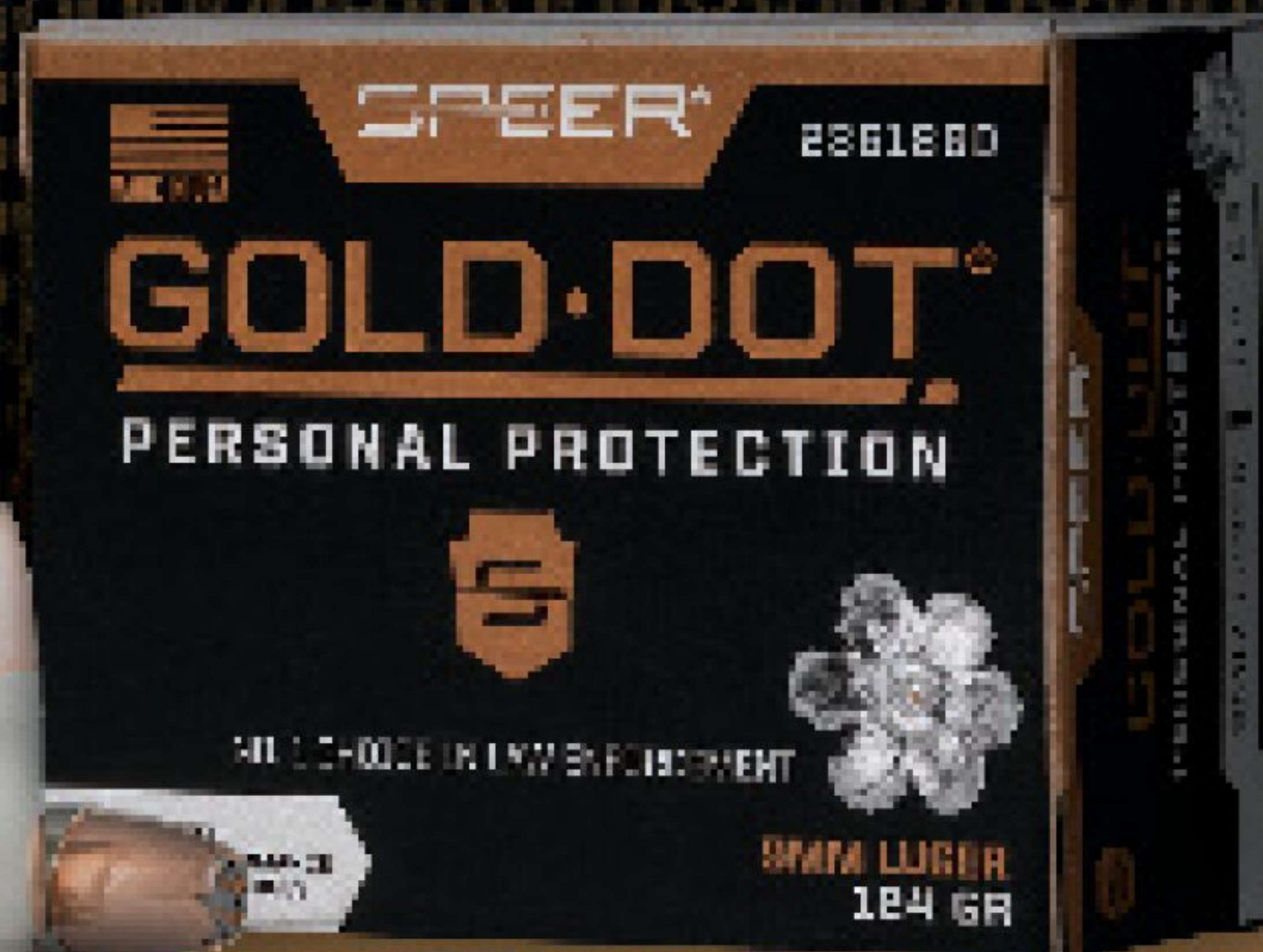
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NIGHT MOVES

BY BRAD FITZPATRICK



CZ UPDATES THE P-09 WITH THE NEW NOCTURNE, BRINGING IMPROVEMENTS THAT MAKE THE GUN A BETTER DEFENSIVE DA/SA PISTOL.

Ever since Gaston Glock introduced his polymer-frame striker-fired pistol to the United States in the mid-1980s, handgun designs have progressively moved away from double-action/single-action semiauto pistols. Today, the vast majority of semiauto 9mm guns on dealers' shelves are striker-fired, but this doesn't necessarily mean there isn't a place for DA/SA 9mm pistols.

At least that's what CZ is betting. The company recently unveiled the Nocturne series of semiauto DA/SA pistols, which are updated versions of its P-09/P-07 pistols. The new Nocturne guns are available in two versions. There's the C (compact) model with a 3.74-inch barrel and 15-round capacity as well as an F (full size) pistol with a 4.53-inch barrel and a whopping 19-round capacity. Both are priced at \$549.

I tested the F model. My scale put its unloaded weight at 30.4 ounces, slightly more than the 29.2 ounces listed on the CZ website. Listed height is 5.9 inches—measured from the top of the sights to the base of the magazine—and overall length is 8.2 inches. Width across the controls is 1.5 inches.

Many of the features found on the original P-07/P-09 guns remain on the new Nocturne series. For starters, both have fiberglass-reinforced polymer frames with three interchangeable backstrap inserts for improved fit and control. Barrels are cold-hammer-forged steel, and the steel slides are cut for optics.

The guns ship with an ambidextrous decocker installed; pressing it lowers the hammer to the safety notch. CZ also supplies a manual safety, and you can replace the decocker with this safety without tools. The manual safety is reversible for lefties, and when it's engaged the sear is blocked and the slide locked.

There's a firing-pin block



NIGHT MOVES

← safety as well. The big exterior extractor also incorporates a small loaded-chamber indicator you can see and feel.

The Nocturne features CZ's DA/SA Omega trigger system. It's a different design than what you'll find on guns like its CZ Shadow, but the setup is not bad and works well with the DA/SA design.

The first trigger pull has substantial weight and a noticeable wall, but on average the trigger broke at just under 11 pounds in double-ac-

tion mode. The single-action break averaged four pounds.

While it's relatively smooth for a DA/SA, there's a lot of uptake and travel in double action. There's still considerable travel in single action, but the break weight is so light you can shoot this gun very accurately. Reset is short for a DA/SA pistol.

The big difference between the Nocturne and its predecessors centers around ergonomics. The grip texturing has been changed—

for the better. The old P-09 had textured panels on the sides of the grip and boxy industrial-looking texturing on the frontstrap. The new gun features more texturing that extends farther around the grip itself so the majority of the grip is covered.

Theoretically this will offer better comfort and control, but the Nocturne definitely looks more modern and less dated. The new pistol still features the slab-sided grip frame, so if you like the rounded contours of most 1911 grips, you may not appreciate the feel.

There's a lanyard anchor hook on the base of the grip, and three backstrap inserts are included. But because the pin that must be removed to swap them also secures the mainspring plug and the compressed mainspring, the owner's manual recommends having a gunsmith swap backstraps.

The Nocturne's front slide serrations have also been improved over the first-gen P-09 pistols. The original P-09 had industrial-looking front serrations that seemed to be a design afterthought. The new Nocturnes have far more aggressive serrations that wrap around the top of the slide.

That's more than just a cos-



▲ The CZ's controls are easy to use and much improved over earlier models. The slide stop and decocker are wider at the top and offer better purchase.



▲ The P-09 Nocturne comes right- or left-hand ready with an ambidextrous decocker. The decocker can also be switched to a manual safety without special tools.

CZ P-09 NOCTURNE F

TYPE: DA/SA semiauto centerfire

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 19+1; 2 mags supplied

BARREL: 4.53 in.; cold hammer forged, 1:16 twist

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 8.2/5.9/1.5 in.

WEIGHT: 30.4 oz. (as measured)

CONSTRUCTION: black nitride slide, fiberglass-reinforced polymer frame

TRIGGER: DA pull, 11 lb.; SA pull, 4 lb. (measured)

SIGHTS: luminescent green three-dot; drift-adjustable rear; slide cut for Holosun K/ Shield RMS footprint

PRICE: \$549

MANUFACTURER: CZ, CZ-USA.COM

metic upgrade, too; it's a practical improvement that makes this gun appreciably better. Ever try to do an overhand, thumbs-down press check on an original P-09 with the hammer down? You needed every ounce of purchase available to you, and the original serrations just didn't cut it. The new design makes it much easier to operate the pistol effectively and safely.

The sights are also upgraded compared to the original P-09/P-07 pistols, but they aren't perfect. The front and rear are dovetailed, and both sights are sturdy. The rear sight is drift adjustable and offers plenty of vertical surface area for

cycling the gun one-handed.

The green three-dot sight layout isn't bad, but this gun would be better served with night sights. Sure, that would up the \$549 price point, but I think the only thing missing to make the Nocturne a real duty-worthy pistol is tritium lamps in the sights.

Of course, you aren't stuck with just the irons. CZ has made it simple to mount Holosun K/Shield RMS footprint sights to the gun after removing the cover plate. A word of warning: The cover plate screws are held in place with locking compound, and those on the two test pistols were extremely tight.

Take your time when you remove them.

Like the P-09/07 guns and the CZ 75 before them, the P-09 Nocturne features a black nitride steel slide that rides inside the frame rails instead of outside like a 1911 slide. The CZ's inside-the-rails slide design is purportedly more accurate because it offers better support, and guns like the CZ 75 and the SIG Sauer P210 (another inside-the-rails pistol) have great reputations for accuracy.

The downside of the design, many claim, is the limited slide real estate available for operating the gun. The average 1911 slide sits about an inch above the frame while the Nocturne's slide projects about 0.7 inch. The average new shooter likely won't realize a difference between the two, but the experienced shooter might notice.

The slide stop and decocker designs have been changed, too. The original slide stop featured two horizontal lines, but the new design is wider at the top and, quite frankly, an improvement. The decocker has also been redesigned to be easier to access and operate. There's also a bit of frame texturing up front that serves as an index point for your non-shooting thumb.

Now, we come to capacity. The P-09 Nocturne F model I tested holds 19 rounds in the metal magazine. The magazine design is quite good—although you'd better have some serious thumb strength to cram number 19 inside the mag. Magazines fall free of the gun at the press of the release button.

There's a slight indent on the bottom of the grip frame that matches a flare on the base plate of the magazine, and this offers good purchase should you need to manually strip a mag.

The original P-09 was an accurate gun, and the Nocturne hasn't lost a step. Groups at 25 yards routinely went under two inches, fired single action with a Holosun red →



▲ The DA/SA Omega trigger system has a heavy double-action pull of about 11 pounds, but the single-action pull is a more manageable four pounds.



▲ The CZ design puts the pistol's slide rails inside the frame, which reduces bore height and can improve accuracy, although it presents less real estate to grab hold of.

NIGHT MOVES

← dot installed. Results are shown in the accompanying chart.

The pistol was equally exceptional off the bench. At 10 yards off-hand the Nocturne produced very good groups, and I would certainly classify this as better-than-average accuracy.

I used a red-dot sight for the bulk of the testing, but I also took shots with the iron sights and found that they were very close to spot-on. There was a windage adjustment required, but that’s easily handled. If you want to change elevation, though, you’ll need to swap the front sights.

The new decocker design works great. I remember the old P-09 and P-07 well, and I thought their controls could use a bit more real estate, especially if you were in a dangerous situation. CZ got the message, and the slide stop/de-

cocker are well-designed yet still sit close enough to the pistol to prevent snagging.

I’ve often lamented about the teeny controls placed on modern carry guns, and to my mind the Nocturne pistols have the answer—especially in stressful situations. But you don’t have to be in a life-or-death situation to appreciate the simplicity of the design. If you elect to shoot a few IDPA matches, you’ll appreciate never having to search for your controls.

I did shoot some slow-fire drills in double action. The trigger has a long travel and plenty of weight, but it’s fairly predictable. And with the hammer cocked the gun is, naturally, much easier to control. While the single-action trigger travel is quite long, it’s manageable.

The P-09 Nocturne is a flat-shooting pistol that stays put during

rapid firing. Its well-proportioned grip promotes a high handhold, and the gun’s just-right weight and balance make this a smooth shooter. It’s a gun that begs to be shot quickly, and it’s far easier to control than the micro 9mms.

With Fiocchi’s 147-grain Range Dynamics load clocking in under 1,000 fps, you can absolutely rip with this gun, and, very importantly, there were no feeding, extraction or ejection issues. The internals are clean and free of marks, and the feed ramp is properly angled and smooth.

The CZ Nocturne F’s size makes it big for a carry pistol, but it’s not so large that it’s impossible to carry. Nor is this gun too heavy. Thirty ounces unloaded is only slightly heavier than many polymer-frame carry guns, and you simply can’t beat the standard 19-round capacity. Plus, it’s nice to have the manual safety/decocker option. Of course, if you’re willing to trade less surface area for reduced size there’s also the compact version.

The polymer frame features a three-slot rail on the dust cover, which allows you to install a variety of lights and other accessories. I mounted a Nightstick TWM-30-T weapon light on the pistol, and with the activation paddles extending just past the front of the trigger guard I still had plenty of room to access the trigger. Couple the ability of mounting a light with the Nocturne’s prodigious magazine capacity, and you have the recipe for a nightstand home-defense gun—especially with a red-dot sight in place.

I’d forgotten just how much fun a good DA/SA pistol is to shoot, but the CZ P-09 Nocturne F reminded me that there’s still a place for these pistols. I remember the P-09 and P-07 well, and I liked them both. This gun is, quite frankly, a bit better. And with a suggested retail price of \$549, I must say it’s also a good bargain.



▲ Three backstraps are included, but because you must remove the mainspring and mainspring plug to swap them, the manual suggests you have a gunsmith do the job.

ACCURACY RESULTS CZ P-09 NOCTURNE F				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	115	1,156	10	2.0
Hornady American Gunner JHP	115	1,153	12	2.5
Federal Hydra-Shok Deep JHP	135	1,019	12	1.9
Fiocchi Range Dynamics FMJ	147	987	14	2.3
Speer Gold Dot G2	147	1,031	12	2.5

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded on a LabRadar at the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint



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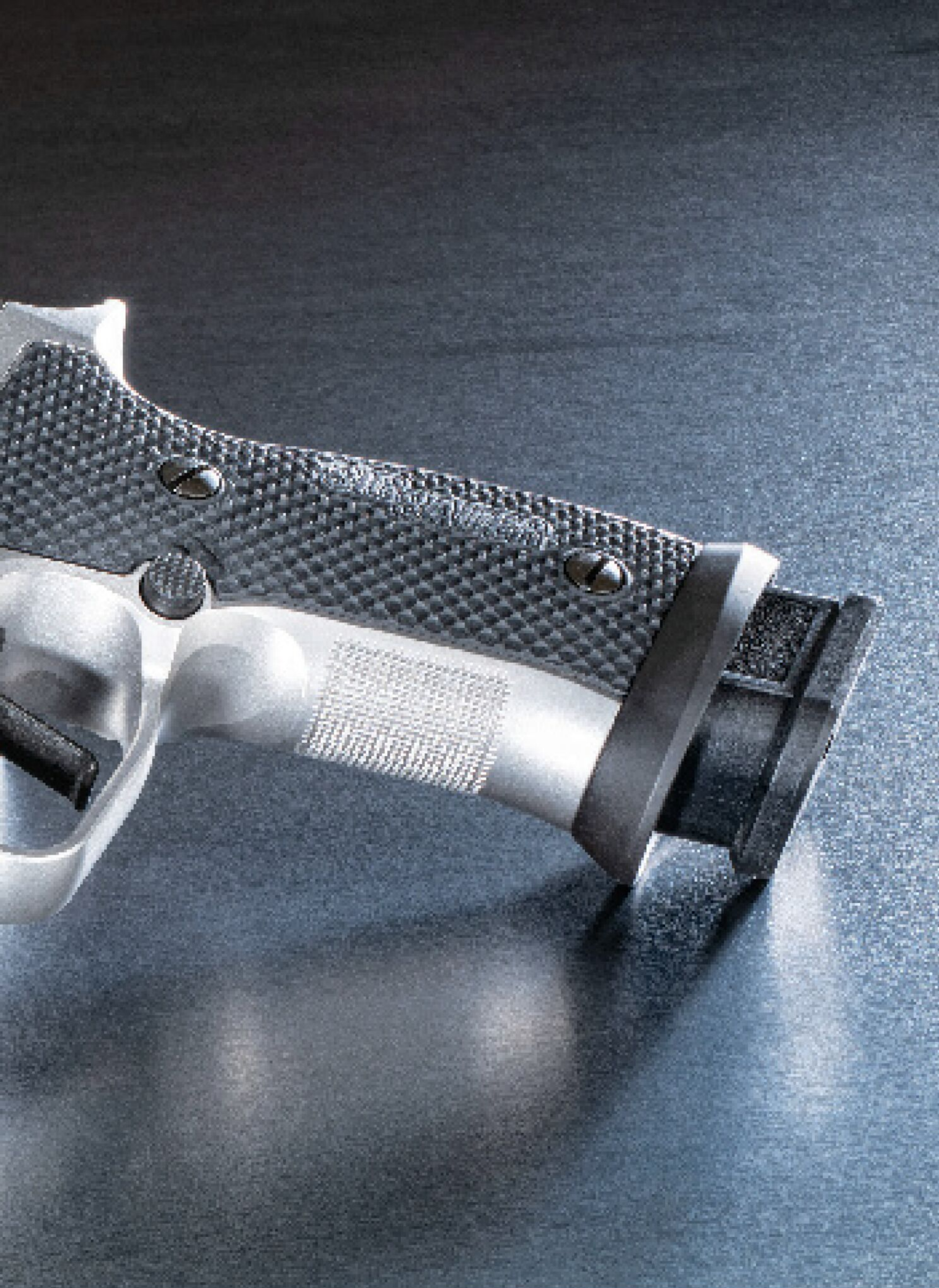
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HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP

BY RICHARD NANCE | PHOTOS BY YAMIL SUED

**SIG SAUER'S P320-XFIVE SXG WAS BUILT FOR
WINNING MATCHES.**



If you were designing the ultimate competition pistol, it would make sense to elicit feedback from one of the best pistol shooters in the world, and that's just what SIG Sauer did. Designed with input from Team SIG captain Max Michel, the new P320-XFive SXG represents the highest evolution of the P320 platform. It's also the heaviest.

Preceding the P320-XFive SXG was the P320 TXG, which featured a tungsten-infused polymer grip, and the aluminum-frame AXG. Both are heavier than the standard, polymer-frame P320. But compared to the P320-XFive SXG—SXG for stainless

steel X grip—those P320 models are lightweights.

Tipping the scales at just over three pounds, the steel-frame P320-XFive SXG is certainly a heavy-weight 9mm. I knew the gun would be heavy, but when I picked it up the first time, I was still surprised. I wasn't alone. Everyone I've seen pick up the P320-XFive SXG for the first time has had the same response: "Whoa!" While extra weight isn't ideal for concealed carry, a heavy pistol offers some distinct advantages to the competitive shooter.

A heavy pistol produces less felt recoil, which not only makes it more comfortable to shoot but also

enables you to shoot faster. Weight minimizes muzzle flip, so there's less wasted time waiting for the sights to settle. This translates to enhanced speed and accuracy, the combination needed to excel in competition.

Less recoil also means you're less likely to flinch while pressing the trigger. Flinching in anticipation of recoil is one of the most common shooting errors, and it can ruin a shot that was perfectly aligned. The P320-XFive SXG is so soft shooting that you can focus on pressing the trigger smoothly to the rear without having to worry about recoil.

Like the stainless steel grip module—which has a full-length, single-slot accessory rail—and the stainless steel slide, the five-inch carbon steel bull barrel adds weight. Specifically, that barrel adds weight to the front of the pistol, which further mitigates muzzle flip. A bull barrel can also improve accuracy by adding rigidity and reducing heat.

My inaugural run confirmed that recoil was negligible and that the P320-XFive SXG was, indeed, flat shooting. While I'm not a competition shooter, I was able to clean plate racks faster with this gun than with any other pistol I can recall. This prompted a colleague to quip, "Who are you and what have you done with Rich?" Not cool.

Despite its weight, the P320-XFive SXG's ergonomic design gives it a well-balanced feel. Like those on most modern pistols, the trigger guard is undercut. This provides as high a perch as possible for your middle finger and helps ensure a comfortable and consistent grip. The gun's magazine well cradles your little finger.

Combined, these features act like the hilt and pommel of a sword, helping you to wield the pistol more dexterously. Checkering along the frontstrap provides traction to keep the grip from sliding in your hand.

The P320-XFive SXG's black G10 grip panels by Lok Grips can be swapped out, but I'm not sure →

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMP

← why you would change them. The aggressively textured panels give you a solid grip even when it's raining or when the heat of competition has your palms sweating.

The black backstrap features a palm swell and extended beavertail which, like the undercut trigger guard, promote a high hold for maximum recoil control. The Lok Grips backstrap shares the same texture as the grip panels. Overall, the characteristics of the P320-XFive SXG's grip provide a comfortable interface between you and the pistol.

On a pistol designed for competition, you want controls that are easy to reach and intuitive to operate. Despite the P320-XFive SXG's 21+1 capacity, in a match you'll eventually need to reload. That's where the

round, knurled magazine release comes in handy. It's easily accessible and when pressed, it reliably ejects the magazine from the pistol.

Sometimes, magazines—especially empty ones—won't fall from a pistol's magazine well because there isn't enough weight to overcome the friction between the magazine and the well. The P320-XFive SXG's three steel magazines are slick and heavy enough to fall free from the pistol every time, and they're extended so they protrude below the magazine well—making them easier to seat than if they were flush. They are also easier to remove.

The extension, along with texturing on the sides of the base plate, gives you something to grab hold of should you need to strip the

magazine from the pistol, either to conduct a speed reload or to rectify a double feed. The oversize magazine well makes for more efficient loading by helping to funnel the magazine into the gun.

The ambidextrous slide stop is easy to reach and big enough to manipulate easily without interfering with your grip. While some advocate using the slide stop only to lock the slide open, it's faster to depress the slide stop than rack the slide to chamber a round. And in competition, speed rules—especially when reloading.

The P320-XFive SXG has a green fiber-optic front sight imbedded in a black serrated post. Fiber-optic sights harness ambient light and transform it into an illuminated dot, and they've long been favorites of competitive shooters.

The P320-XFive SXG's adjustable rear sight is integral to the slide plate. The notch-style sight is black and serrated on its face, with nothing to distract you from the front sight.

The optic-ready slide is cut for the Leupold DeltaPoint Pro footprint, which SIG refers to simply as the Pro footprint. With the slide plate removed, you can mount an optic like the Romeo3 Max Pro directly to the slide. A direct mount is not only →



▲ The undercut trigger guard and extended beavertail encourage a proper high hold, and the magazine release is extended for easy operation.



▲ The flat-face SIG Blade trigger breaks at 90 degrees. The trigger on the test gun had a pull of 2.5 pounds on average.

SIG SAUER P320-XFIVE SXG

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto centerfire

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 21+1, 10+1 (state compliant version); 3 mags supplied

BARREL: 5 in., carbon steel, bull profile

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 8.5/5.8/1.6 in.

WEIGHT: 49.8 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: stainless steel frame, bead-blasted stainless steel slide

GRIPS: Lok Grips G10 panels

SIGHTS: adjustable rear, fiber-optic front; DeltaPoint Pro optic cut

TRIGGER: flat-face SIG Blade; 2.5 lb. pull (measured)

SAFETIES: internal

PRICE: \$1,799

MANUFACTURER: Sig Sauer, SIGSAUER.COM



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← more secure than using a mounting plate, but it also allows the optic to sit lower for more instinctive aim-



▲ Aggressive G10 grip panels provide optimal control, and the extended mags and mag well funnel make for sure, fast reloads.

ing—and it minimizes height-over-bore issues. It will co-witness with suppressor-height iron sights.

The Romeo3 Max Pro (\$699) has a large, 31mm aspheric glass window with a thin aircraft grade aluminum housing for a superior field of view. It's available with either a three or an eight m.o.a. dot. I used the three m.o.a. dot, which is a little more difficult to acquire but provides a more precise aiming point. Fifteen brightness settings ensure you can have just the right dot brightness for any given situation.

The P320-XFive SXG has a good trigger, and it's called the SIG Blade. It's still a flat-face trigger that breaks at 90 degrees, but it's thinner and wider than its predecessors. While four pounds is widely regarded as the standard trigger pull weight for carry guns, competition pistols tend to have lighter triggers for better accuracy. The trigger on my test gun broke crisply at 2.5 pounds, according to a Lyman digital pull gauge. It actually didn't feel quite that light,

but it was certainly light compared to most pistols.

Trigger reset is easy to discern with an audible but more importantly, a tactile indicator. You can feel it reset. And since the reset is short, you'll be able to press the trigger again faster.

Another reason the P320-XFive SXG is easy to shoot is the 1911-style recoil spring system. You can stick with the installed 12-pound recoil spring, or you could swap it out for the 14- or 16-pound springs that come with the pistol. The different springs allow you to tailor the pistol for your specific competition load so it's completely reliable.

For accuracy testing, I used the 12-pound spring. As expected, the P320-XFive SXG was plenty accurate, with average group size ranging from just over an inch to just over two inches.

On a competition pistol, you want the weight in the grip and barrel—not the slide. Wide lightening cuts atop the slide reduce reciprocating mass, which makes the slide cycle faster while mitigating the recoil impulse. With the P320-XFive SXG, recoil is practically nonexistent.

The combination of ergonomics, weight, trigger and optic made the P320-XFive SXG a cinch to shoot both from a bench and offhand at speed, which is where it really shines. At 15 yards, I was able to shoot tight groups on steel and in the A zone of a USPSA target about as fast as I could press the trigger. Photographer Yamil Sued achieved similar results, producing a rapid-fire ragged-hole group at 10 yards.

The P320-XFive SXG won't transform you into a seven-time world speed shooting champion like Max Michel, but if you have a firm grasp of marksmanship fundamentals, it can help you become a faster and more accurate shooter. If I was going to enter the competition shooting arena, the P320-XFive SXG would be at the top of my list. It may be the ultimate heavy metal competition pistol.



▲ The slide is cut for optics on the DeltaPoint Pro footprint, allowing direct mounting of sights like the Romeo3 Max Pro.

ACCURACY RESULTS SIG SAUER P320-XFIVE SXG				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	124	1,176	8	1.1
Black Hills JHP + P	124	1,166	21	1.8
Wilson Combat Reman. HBFN	135	957	8	2.1

Notes: Accuracy results are the averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from Caldwell Handy Rest NXT. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded on a Garmin Xero C1 chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle. Abbreviations: HBFN, hollow-base flatnose; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; Reman., remanufactured



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ARY STEP IN STRIKER-FIRED
PISTOL DESIGN.**

There's no shortage of striker-fired 9mm pistols on the market, and Kimber knows that. But while most pistol companies have manufactured pistols that closely mimic other guns in this segment, Kimber has pushed the design limits with its Mako pistol, and this year the company is adding a whole new element to its striker-fired pistol design: carbon.

Kimber senior product manager Carlos Martinez told me the new Carbon Compact pistols feature a grip made from 22 percent carbon fiber. By infusing carbon fiber into the frame of the new Carbon Compact Mako, Kimber says it can increase the tensile strength of the frame to 60,000 psi, which is roughly twice the tensile strength of most polymer frames.

This increase is due to the incredibly high strength-to-weight ratio of carbon fiber and places it in the same category as some types of steel. Essentially, the Carbon Compact's frame is similar in weight to a polymer frame yet as strong as a steel frame.

There are currently four new Carbon Compact models available, and they include the OR (Optic Ready) and OI (Optic Installed) versions as well as OR and OI TFS (Threaded For Suppression) models. The gun I had for testing was the tricked-out TFS OI model, which features a threaded barrel and a pre-installed optic. OI Carbon Compact guns come with a factory-installed Holosun 407K optic, and the OR guns will accept red dots with the popular Holosun K/Shield RMRSc footprint.

If you've seen photos of the new Carbon Compact pistols and swear they're larger than the original R7 Mako, you are correct. The standard R7 Mako has either a non-threaded 3.37-inch barrel or a threaded 3.92-inch barrel on TFS models. The new Carbon Compacts feature 3.92-inch non-threaded or 4.42-inch threaded barrels. →

CUTTING-EDGE CARBON

← All Mako barrels are made from stainless steel and have a 1:10 left-hand twist. The threaded models feature 1/2x28 threads, which I verified using an adapter. That means the TFS models will accept a wide variety of 9mm muzzle devices.

With the added barrel length, the new Carbon Compact guns weigh more than the original R7 Mako pistols—about five ounces comparing the standard R7 Mako and the Carbon Compact. The Carbon Compact TFS OI model I

tested, which has an even longer barrel, weighs 25.8 ounces.

These pistols are also extremely thin. The Carbon Compacts are just 1.2 inches at the widest point, and they sport a streamlined appearance with minimized controls.

With its 4.42-inch barrel, the Kimber Carbon Compact TFS OI measures 7.6 inches long. Height is 5.8 inches from the top of the sight to the base of the mag well, and models without an optic measure about five inches top to bottom.

One thing Kimber has done exceptionally well with all R7 Mako guns is to keep the edges of the gun clean and clutter-free without shrinking the controls so much that they're inadequate. The slide stop is long enough that it's functional, yet it rides close to the gun and rests in a molded cutout in the frame that prevents snagging. The magazine release, too, sits in a molded depression in the grip and won't hang up.

There's also good news for lefties. Both the slide stop and mag release are completely ambidextrous, so there's no need to swap the controls from the left side of the gun to the right.

Besides its nifty carbon fiber-infused design, the grip also has some other cool features. The micro-texturing is very good and is neither abrasive nor irrelevant. The texturing wraps around the entire grip area, including the frontstrap and backstrap.

Four interchangeable modular backstraps are included. The smallest size is installed at the factory, and swapping out the backstraps is a simple process. However, there's a very small spring that places downward pressure on the vertical pin in the grip. That spring is easy to lose if you aren't paying attention, so be careful.

The gun has a flared magazine well that rests on the base of the hand and makes it quick and simple to conduct fast reloads. The pistol ships with two 15-round metal magazines except in restrictive states. Martinez told me he is currently working on both a three-round extension for the existing magazines as well as an 18-round mag that will be available through the company's website.

Normally a pistol's beavertail and trigger undercut don't get called out specifically, but the Kimber's combination of an aggressive beavertail and deep undercut allows for excellent control of the gun. The design allows your hand to lock securely onto the pistol for a firm hold and complete control.

The design is such that you can actually hold the gun with just the middle finger and thumb of your shooting hand and fire relatively accurate shots. It's not something I would do often—muzzle rise is understandably more pronounced—but the point is the gun's grip design offers good control and comfort.

The micro-texturing along the serialized frame extends to the front and bottom of the oversize, squared-off trigger guard.

I think the verdict is still out on “gas pedals,” but what the Kimber

KIMBER MAKO CARBON COMPACT TFS OI

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto centerfire

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 15+1; 2 mags supplied

BARREL: 4.42 in.

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.6/5.8 (w/optic)/1.2 in

WEIGHT: 25.8 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: FNC-finished steel slide, carbon fiber reinforced polymer frame

TRIGGER: 5 lb., 3 oz. pull (measured)

SIGHTS: TruGlo Tritium Pro night; Holosun 407K red dot (as tested)

PRICE: \$1,080 (as tested)

MANUFACTURER: Kimber Manufacturing, KIMBERAMERICA.COM



▲ The controls are minimal and easy to operate, and they're tucked away so they won't snag. The significant undercut behind the trigger guard and the generous beavertail offer great control.

offers—a molded depression on the front of the frame with texturing and just enough horizontal purchase to help level the muzzle—is a good compromise that won’t offend either those who love or hate the gas-pedal design. The Kimber is equipped with a three-slot Picatinny rail on the frame for lights and lasers.

The trigger is a bladed flat-face design, and the trigger blade serves as one of the Kimber’s passive safeties, along with a striker block. There is no option for a manual safety at this time.

Carbon Compact triggers have a listed break weight of five to 6.75 pounds, and the model I got broke consistently at five pounds, three ounces.

The trigger pull is unique. Most striker-fired guns have a long, light uptake that ends with a “wall” right before the trigger break. The Kimber has a short take-up, a longer wall where more weight is required and a relatively clean break. This didn’t seem to affect accuracy, but it’s certainly a different feel.

Kimber Carbon Compact pistols come with stainless steel slides and barrels protected by a ferritic nitro-carburizing (FNC) matte black finish.

I’m a big fan of the FNC finish, which I have found to be durable and resistant to corrosion. I had the Remington RM380 I carry while trail running treated with an FNC finish several years ago and have not had any issues despite six years of weekly exposure to moisture and sweat, so it’s a safe bet the Kimber’s finish will stand up well to daily carry.

The FNC process alters the surface structure of the metal, increasing lubricity, which makes the gun more resistant to stoppages from being too dry. Martinez told me that during testing they ran the pistols in very high heat for extended periods without any problems. The FNC finish isn’t

prone to flaking or cracking, unlike some other surface finishes.

The slide features front and rear slide serrations, and all four Carbon Compact pistols have slides that are cut for micro red-dot optics. Perhaps the most distinct feature of R7 Mako pistols is the reduced ejection port. Whereas most striker-fired pistols feature an open-top slide, the Kimber’s slide features a solid, closed design.

Initially there were concerns that the design would impact reliability, but I have never experienced this. What I have experienced is that the cases never flip up into the shooter’s face and, perhaps more importantly, the front of the optic is never clouded with debris.

In addition to the optics cut, the Kimber Compact Carry features three-dot TruGlo Tritium Pro night sights. The front sight has a bright outer ring, and the rear sight fea-

tures white circles surrounding the tritium vials. The sights co-witness with the optic.

Accuracy was good both on and off the bench. At 25 yards from a fixed rest, the Kimber managed to produce a handful of five-shot groups under two inches, and averages for three loads were right around the two-inch mark. That’s about a half-inch better than I got when testing the original R7 Mako a couple years ago, so the extra inch of barrel length does indeed improve accuracy.

Off the bench this gun is a smooth shooter. The added weight and barrel length compared to the original gun, combined with the improved grip geometry, help control muzzle rise. Despite the slide stop being small and tucked so tightly against the side of the gun, I never missed the slide stop during reloads, and the mag well offers



▲ The full-length top adds rigidity, and it also makes certain that ejected brass doesn’t strike the shooter. The design also helps keep the window of the optic clean.

ACCURACY RESULTS KIMBER MAKO CARBON COMPACT TFS OI				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	115	1,186	9	1.8
Hornady American Gunner JHP	115	1,188	13	2.1
Fiocchi Range Dynamics FMJ	115	1,176	22	2.5
Federal Hydra-Shok Deep JHP	135	1,033	10	2.2
Federal Syntech Action Pistol TSJ	150	954	14	2.2

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded on a LabRadar at the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; TSJ, total synthetic jacket

CUTTING-EDGE CARBON

← a tactile reference for conducting speed reloads.

Companies such as Walther and Springfield get a lot of love for their ergonomics and grip designs, but the Kimber is also very comfortable to shoot. Martinez told me the deep undercut on the trigger guard was one of his first additions to the Carbon Compact design, and it was a good one.

The pseudo-gas pedal is also a nice feature that’s there for those who like it and will go unnoticed by those who don’t. The mag well is well-positioned, but the 15-round magazines don’t extend past it, so a sticky magazine can require some maneuvering to clear the well. However, the mag well is easy to remove if you don’t like it.

I was still getting used to the trigger at the end of the test, but even though it’s slightly different than standard-issue striker-fired pistol triggers, its break weight and



▲ The pistol has a removable magazine well. While it helps make reloads fast and easy, 15-round mags don’t extend past the well, so a sticky mag can be tough to remove.

feel are quite good. The overall layout of the gun is excellent, and it feels trim without being too thin.

The slide serrations aren’t quite

as aggressive as I’d like. While they work fine, press checks would be simpler if the serrations were a bit higher, and the added dimen- →

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CUTTING-EDGE CARBON

← sion would break up the otherwise boxy slide.

The gun cycles smoothly, and there were no issues with reliability. I liked the way this gun felt when I began shooting, and I liked it even more when I finished.

There are a lot of striker-fired semiautos, but the Carbon Compact deserves attention even in this crowded field. With a suggested retail price of more than a grand, the TFS OI Carbon Compact is not cheap, but when you consider that the pistol has a threaded barrel and comes with an optic, that's not out of line. The Carbon Compact OR, which doesn't include an optic, retails for \$735.

For decades Kimber has been a 1911 brand, but the Carbon Compact family of pistols paves the way for Kimber to earn top billing for its striker-fired guns. It seems carbon was the one element that was missing from the original Mako. ○



▲ The Mako Carbon Compact is slightly larger than the original R7 Mako, making it nice to shoot but not much harder to conceal.

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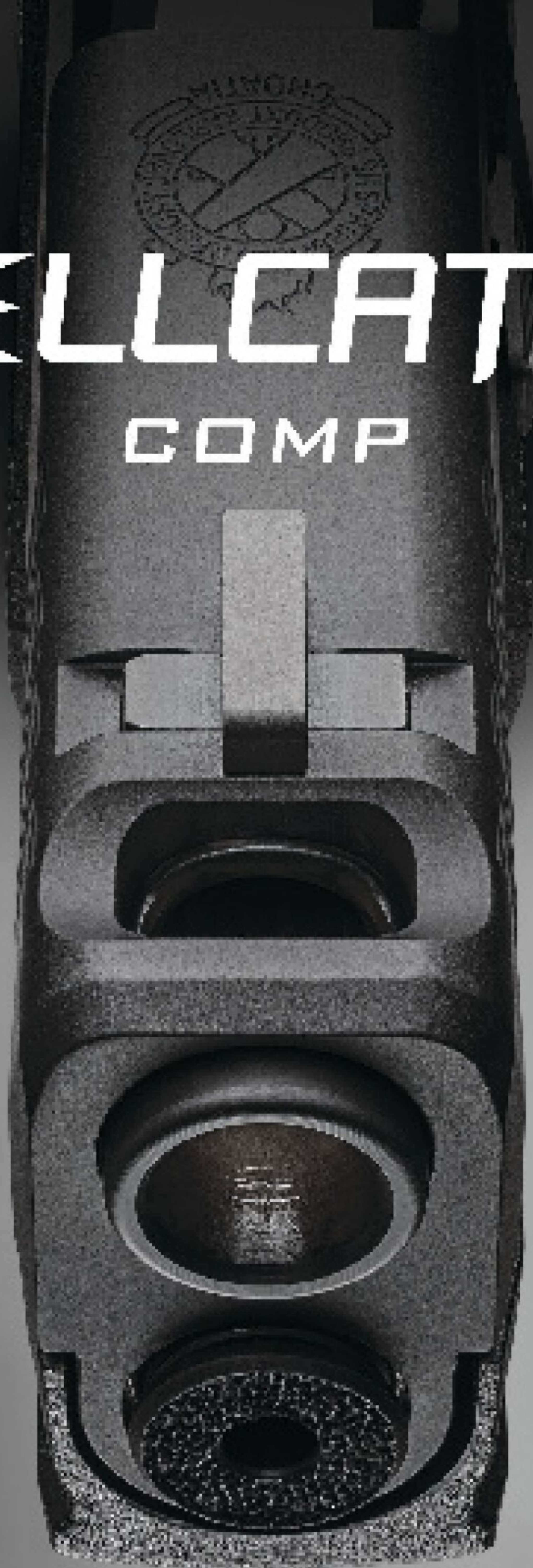
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BODYGUARD REDUX

BY J. SCOTT RUPP



**SMITH & WESSON'S MICRO
.380 GETS A MAJOR MAKE-
OVER, AND THE RESULT IS A
MUCH BETTER CARRY GUN.**

Not long after I received a sample of the Smith & Wesson Bodyguard 2.0 last year, I was reading an article in a gun-industry trade publication discussing prevailing handgun sales trends. The piece was commenting on the flat sales many gun shops were experiencing, but it singled out a few pistols that were bucking the trend. One shop cited Smith & Wesson's .380-chambered Bodyguard 2.0, and now that I've had a chance to shoot and carry this gun, I can see why.

The original Bodyguard has been with us for about a decade now, so a refresh was inevitable. But even Smith & Wesson didn't expect the path it would take.

As Smith & Wesson's Vince Perreault explained, in 2021 the company was doing an insight survey on its hardcore consumers. While the survey focused on duty guns, it unearthed the fact that this target audience all carried micro-compacts as well.

The revelation led the company to embark on a whole new study, and the resulting feedback from this particular group of shooters found the original Bodyguard lacking—to put it mildly: The trigger sucked; it didn't hold enough rounds; the ergonomics were poor; it was no fun to shoot.

As this feedback was coming in, Smith & Wesson was only a couple months out from launching an upgraded Bodyguard—a gun that would not have addressed the aforementioned complaints. So planners scrapped the design, went back to the drawing board and spent two years developing what we now have as the Bodyguard 2.0.

With this background, you're expecting some big changes, right? The 2.0 has them, starting with the fire-control system. The original was an internal hammer-fired gun; the 2.0 is striker-fired.

“The striker-fired design gives a shorter and more crisp trigger pull when compared to the



BODYGUARD REDUX

← original Bodyguard,” Perreault explained. “It also gives the consumer a level of familiarity if they’re coming from a striker-fired pistol as their main handgun. We wanted to try to come as close as possible on feel when transitioning to the small Bodyguard 2.0.”

The trigger is the current flat style, with a thin safety blade in the face. I went back and looked at our reviews of the original Bodyguard. That gun had a trigger pull approaching 10 pounds. On my 2.0 sample, the pull averaged three pounds, 11 ounces—a significant improvement. There’s a short take-up followed by a crisp, creep-free break. Reset is nice and

short. It’s a bit on the faint side but easy enough to discern.

Capacity takes a huge jump with the Bodyguard 2.0, from six rounds of .380 to 10 rounds with the flush-fit magazine and 12 with the extended mag. This is thanks to a double-to-single, bottleneck-style magazine instead of the old single-stack mag.

Okay, so far two concerns addressed. Ergonomics? I don’t have an original with which to compare the 2.0, but right off the bat I will tell you the new slide serrations on the 2.0’s Armornite-finished stainless steel slide are terrific.

They’re roughly oblong and slightly angled, and they’re nice

and sharp. Just as importantly, the serrations continue across a bevel transition between the slide’s sides and its top. No matter how you grab the slide, you’re going to get a solid purchase for either racking or doing a press check.

The grip underwent major changes, too. The original Bodyguard had a 15-degree grip angle, but designers changed the 2.0’s angle to 18 degrees, the same as the company’s larger M&P pistols. There’s a healthy undercut behind the trigger guard for a high hold, and the 2.0 also boasts a much more generous beavertail at the back of the frame. Last, the old finger groove is gone.

The texturing is executed in a dual pattern. The sides next to your skin are lightly textured, while the frontstrap and backstrap are more aggressive. So-called indexing pads are commonplace today, and the Bodyguard 2.0 has two textured areas just above the front of the trigger guard to give the shooter a reference spot for the support-hand thumb and an indexed trigger finger.

One thing that hasn’t changed is the micro footprint, although the 2.0 is slightly longer than the original at 5.5 inches long, thanks to the larger beavertail. The barrel is still 2.75 inches long, and it’s Armornite-finished stainless steel.



A The 2.0 has a significant undercut behind the trigger guard and a more pronounced beavertail, both of which contribute to excellent control. The pistol is available with or without a manual safety.



A The slide serrations extend across the transition bevel to the top of the slide for excellent purchase. The day/night front sight sports a big orange dot surrounding a tritium vial.

SMITH & WESSON BODYGUARD 2.0 TS

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto centerfire

CALIBER: .380 ACP

CAPACITY: 10-, 12-round mags supplied; 10-rounders for restrictive states

BARREL: 2.75 in. Armornite-finished stainless steel

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 5.5/4.0/0.9 in.

WEIGHT: 9.8 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: Armornite-finished stainless steel slide, polymer frame

SIGHTS: U-notch rear, Bright Dot day/night front

TRIGGER: 3 lb., 11 oz. pull (measured)

SAFETY: trigger, thumb

PRICE: \$449

MANUFACTURER: Smith & Wesson,

SMITH-WESSON.COM

Gun height is four inches. Width across the slide at the safeties is only 7/8 inch. The grip is just 0.9 inch wide; front to back at its widest point it's 1.8 inches. Reach to the trigger is about 2.5 inches.

Unloaded weight is an ultralight 9.8 ounces. You'd be hard-pressed to find a centerfire semiauto that weighs less. Of the major makes, Ruger's LCP and KelTec's P-3AT—both .380s—come in at 9.6 and 8.3 ounces, respectively, and KelTec's .32-chambered P32 weighs just seven ounces.

Interestingly, even though the footprint is basically the same as its predecessor, the 2.0 is about 20 percent lighter. Perreault said designers achieved this by simplifying the design and also by drawing inspiration from the company's Shield Plus micro 9mm.

Even though the Bodyguard 2.0 is a small gun intended for use at close

range, Smith & Wesson didn't skimp on the sights. The rear is a broad, 0.19-inch U-notch, and it's serrated on its rear face to defeat glare. It's set in a dovetail. Smith calls its front sight the Bright Dot. It features an orange dot surrounding a tritium insert for day/night capability, and it, too, is set in a dovetail.

The Bodyguard 2.0 is available with or without a manual thumb safety, as the TS and NTS models, respectively. My sample was the TS. The safety is ambidextrous and while quite small has a texture that's coarser than anything on the grip, which is a good thing. It clicks up for Safe, down for Fire, and the movement is positive and crisp. A notch in the barrel hood allows you to judge the condition of the chamber.

The slide stop is serrated, and on this new sample it was quite stiff. The magazine release is a textured

oval. It's not protected by any kind of molded fence save a small ridge behind it, and it actually protrudes above the side of the grip. I think it's great, and I'll get into that more when I discuss the gun's performance. The release is easily reversible for lefties, to go along with the ambidextrous safety.

The Bodyguard 2.0 shot well from the bench at 15 yards, as you can see in the accompanying chart. It didn't care for the Lehigh Defense XD load, either in accuracy or function. There were a couple failures to chamber with this ammo, both in initial loading and during cycling. This is most likely due to the Lehigh's aggressive X-shape bullet nose not playing nicely with the 2.0's small feed ramp.

Everything else functioned 100 percent. In addition to the ammo I shot from the bench, I ran drills with a discontinued Remington load along with the rest of the test ammunition, except the Lehigh.

At seven yards I did Failure to Stop, double Failure to Stop and X drills, as well as one-handed shooting with dominant and support hand only. I drew the gun from two different DeSantis inside-the-waistband holsters: Inside Heat and Slim-Tuk. The Bodyguard 2.0 came through with flying colors. It's easy to achieve a good initial grip, even with the pistol tight against the body, and that promotes solid first-round hits.

The gun has a great balance between size and power, and it's easy to control with a firm hold, even one-handed. It points really well for such a small pistol, thanks in no small part to that 18-degree grip angle. I've been shooting an M&P compact for years, so the Bodyguard 2.0 was familiar and comfortable to me. Further, even with the flush-fit 10-rounder I could get about three-quarters of my little finger on the gun, and that certainly contributed to the control.

I particularly like the sights. The U-notch rear is fairly wide, and at least for me it provided just the right amount of space around the front



▲ The U-notch rear sight has a serrated face, and it's fairly wide—producing a sight picture that's fast to acquire while still providing good accuracy.

ACCURACY RESULTS SMITH & WESSON BODYGUARD 2.0				
.380 ACP	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Lehigh Defense XD	68	1,000	23	2.5
Federal Punch	85	885	12	1.5
Fiocchi Defense Dynamics/Hornady XTP	90	900	15	1.5
Hornady Critical Defense	90	873	19	1.7

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 15 yards from a Ransom Multi Cal Steady Rest. Velocities are averages of 15 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a ProChrono DLX.

BODYGUARD REDUX

← sight. That was true whether I was breaking quick double-taps, transitioning between targets or bearing down to make a precise head shot. In dry-firing in reduced light I found the orange dot on the front sight fast to acquire as well.

Reloads were a mixed bag, and they pointed up one issue I have with the Bodyguard 2.0. I'd noticed from the bench that occasionally the slide would fail to lock back after the last shot with the extended magazine I used for the entire accuracy test. The same issue occurred with the 10-rounder used for the majority of the drills.

Turns out it wasn't due to the magazines at all but to my thumb putting downward pressure on the slide-lock lever. This was easily proven by shooting support-hand only, where my thumb was on the opposite side of the lever. The slide locked back every time.

This was a bit surprising because

the lever was stiff, as I mentioned earlier. However, it has a slight shelf at the top, and my thumb was resting so firmly on this shelf that it was pushing the lever down and preventing the slide from locking back every time.

I realize Smith & Wesson's designers had to walk a fine line between a control that won't snag and one that's still easy to operate. Bottom line, though, is the issue I experienced is a function of hand size, thumb length and shooting style, and it won't be a problem for everyone.

The magazine release was fantastic. I didn't even need to shift the gun in my hand to activate it. All the reloading exercises I did started with the 10-round magazine, recharging the gun with the 12-rounder out of my pocket. The 10-round mag dropped free and easy every time. One caution I'll add here is that slamming an extended magazine into a gun with a short grip such as this

one can pinch the living hell out of the meat of your palm. You'll do that only once before figuring out that you need to be mindful of it.

Overall this is one of most shootable super-small guns I've ever worked with. Years ago I bought a SIG P365, the original micro-compact 9mm, because it carried well and was, at least for me, easy to shoot accurately. The Bodyguard 2.0 is even smaller and lighter, and I found it just as easy to hit with.

It's also easy to operate. My wife sometimes struggles with semiauto slides, so I asked her to judge the 2.0. She had no issues racking the slide and said she found it easier to work than her current carry pistol, also a SIG P365. She only dry-fired the gun but commented on how much she liked the trigger, although she wondered how easy it would be to deactivate the safety under stress.

As you would imagine, the Bodyguard 2.0 conceals like a dream. I

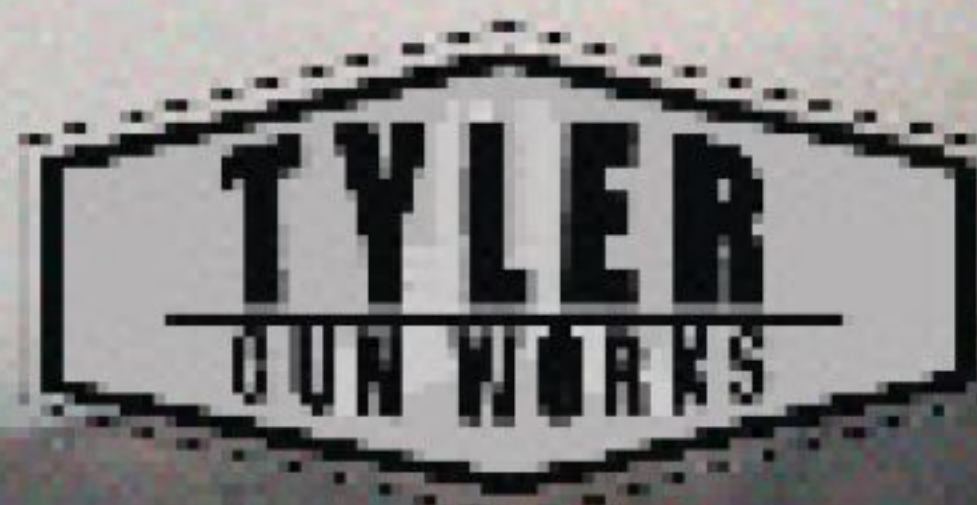
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carried it in the aforementioned DeSantis holsters for several days (in the end I preferred the leather Inside Heat). The 2.0 is incredibly comfortable and so light you hardly notice it. All body types are different, and everyone has a favorite carry style, but for me it fit perfectly carried in the four o'clock position. I'd imagine those who prefer appendix carry will find this gun works for them really well.

Is it a pocket gun? You bet. Not to make this all about DeSantis, but I've long been a fan of its Nemesis pocket holster that I use with my S&W J-frame snubie. After I was done testing the Bodyguard 2.0, I discovered that DeSantis had updated the Nemesis with the Super Fly. The 2.0 was one of the fitments, so I bought one.

I won't go into detail other than to say the Nemesis has a removable outer flap to further disguise a gun's outline. The Bodyguard 2.0/Super



▲ The 2.0 carried great for Rupp in a DeSantis Inside Heat IWB holster (r.) and that company's Super Fly pocket holster. The gun comes with a flush-fit 10-round magazine and an extended 12-rounder.

Fly was perfectly disguised carried in the front pocket of a pair of cargo-type pants, with and without the outer flap. The draw was smooth and easy. The outer flap was a little much for a jeans front pocket, but when I took it off, the Bodyguard 2.0 fit easily with just the holster itself. And, again, the draw was great.

I think Smith & Wesson has hit a home run with the new Bodyguard

2.0. Yes, the .380 is not the equal of the 9mm or larger calibers in terms of stopping a threat. But shot placement is more important than power, and I think many shooters will find, as I did, that the Bodyguard 2.0 is incredibly easy to shoot accurately at practical self-defense distances. And its dimensions and light weight mean you'll love carrying this gun all day, every day.



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RUGER SR1911 LIGHTWEIGHT

RUGER HAS MADE ITS SR1911 SERIES OF pistols for nearly a quarter-century now, and it has grown into a complete line with Government, Commander, Officer's, Target and Competition models. One of the newer offerings is the Lightweight, a Government model available in .45 ACP and 9mm Luger.

My sample is the 9mm version, a 9+1 pistol weighing just 32.2 ounces courtesy of an aluminum frame. The slide is stainless steel with a low-glare finish. It has chevron-shape slide serrations on the rear only. They're fairly aggressive and offer a good grip.

Sights are Novak—not "Novak-style" but actual Novak combat-style three-dots set in dovetails. The rear is drift

adjustable, with a set screw to keep it from moving during recoil or handling.

Controls include an extended single-side thumb safety and an oversize grip safety with a grooved memory bump. The serrated magazine release is extended, too, and the plunger tube is integral with the black anodized frame—not staked—so it will never come loose.

The trigger is a curved, three-hole aluminum job, and it breaks consistently at three pounds, seven ounces on average with just a hint of creep.

The SR1911 Lightweight has a super-fast lock time thanks to a skeletonized hammer as well as a light titanium firing pin. This pin, combined with a heavier

RUGER SR1911 LIGHTWEIGHT

TYPE: 1911

CALIBER: 9mm (tested), .45 ACP

CAPACITY: 9+1

BARREL: 5 in.

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 8.7/5.5/1.3 in.

WEIGHT: 32.2 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: low-glare stainless steel slide, black anodized aluminum frame

GRIPS: black/gray G10

SIGHTS: Novak 3-dot

SAFETIES: extended single-side thumb, memory-bump grip

PRICE: \$799

MANUFACTURER: RUGER, RUGER.COM

firing-pin spring, allows the gun to be totally safe(r) without having to resort

to the oft-maligned Series 80 trigger system.

The flat mainspring housing is nicely checkered at 25 l.p.i. while the front-strap is smooth. Grips are G10. They have a black/gray zigzag pattern and are held in place by twin T10 Torx screws. Naturally, as with any 1911 the grip panels are replaceable if you want something different. Not sure why you'd want to; the black/gray grips against the jet black frame—with contrasting slide and trigger—look terrific.

I've been to Ruger's Prescott, Arizona, plant where the SR1911 is built, and it's an impressive high-tech facility. All the pistols built there come out of CNC-controlled machines, and the SR1911 Lightweight shows that off in spades, with good slide-to-frame fit. You can feel a tiny bit of side-to-side movement when you torque the slide with your hand while holding the grip firmly, but that's not a bad thing when you're looking for reliability right out of the box. Super-tight guns can require a break-in period, but this one didn't. It functioned perfectly from the get-go.

The fire-control system is your traditional Browning short-recoil setup with barrel bushing, and the stainless steel barrel features a polished titanium feed ramp. The ejection port is oversize to ensure cases clear the gun every time. An inspection port cut into the barrel hood allows you to see if there's a round in the chamber—in good light, at least. The gun uses the traditional internal extractor.

Twenty-five yard bench accuracy was solid, as you can see in the accompanying chart. At least that's about as well as I can shoot with combat-style iron sights at that distance.

Practical accuracy was what you would expect from a Government 1911 9mm, even a lightweight one. In a word, terrific. It's such a great-handling gun, and a 1911 as well-built as the SR1911 Lightweight is a joy to shoot. I wouldn't have minded if the G10 grips were

ACCURACY RESULTS RUGER SR1911 LIGHTWEIGHT				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	115	1,170	12	2.4
Nosler ASP JHP	115	1,118	16	2.4
Federal Punch JHP	124	1,119	13	1.6
Fiocchi Defense Dynamics JHP	147	972	15	2.3

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a Ransom Multi Cal Steady Rest with iron sights. Velocities are averages of 15 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a ProChrono DLX. Abbreviation: JHP, jacketed hollowpoint



▲ The SR1911 Lightweight has an anodized aluminum frame and features an extended single-side thumb safety and magazine release.

relieved to make it easier to reach the magazine release, but since that part is extended it wasn't hard to activate.

Feeding and ejection were 100 percent, both in my testing and on the set of "Handguns" TV. The only issue I encountered was that one of the two magazines—which are stainless steel with eight witness holes—wouldn't always lock back the slide when empty. Not every time, but often enough that I marked it.

As much as I'm a traditionalist when it comes to firearms, I've come to favor the 9mm chambering over the .45 ACP in the 1911. That's especially true when it comes to aluminum-frame guns. I'm not particularly recoil-sensitive, but I'm not totally immune either, and I shoot the 9mms better when it comes to the lightweight models.

It seems a lot of folks feel the same way, which explains the 9mm's growing popularity in the 1911 platform. And if you take a well-built, svelte 1911 like the SR1911 Lightweight and pair it with this cartridge, you've got a gun that's good for just about anything. I've never



▲ The sights are Novak three-dots and have a low profile so they won't snag. The skeletonized hammer is left in the white on the sides and finished black on the top.



▲ The grips are G10, and the flat mainspring housing is checkered at 25 l.p.i. Both contribute to the gun's great handling.

carried a full-size, all-steel Government because I find them too heavy, but at just a tad over 30 ounces this one would be easy to carry—either concealed or as a trail/work companion. For those well-versed in the 1911's manual of arms, it would also be an excellent home-defense gun because it's so shootable—and affordable. 



TAURUS 327 DEFENDER T.O.R.O.

TAURUS HAS AN EXTENSIVE LINE OF

small-frame revolvers, and one of its latest additions is the 327 Defender T.O.R.O. The 327 Defender itself has been in the line for a couple years; what's new is the Taurus Optics Ready Option, or T.O.R.O. aspect.

The 327 Defender T.O.R.O. has a three-inch barrel—which is what puts it in the company's Defender family—an overall length of 7.5 inches and a weight of 23.5 ounces. Width across the cylinder is 1.4 inches.

You may or may not be familiar with the .327 Federal Magnum. Federal introduced it 16 years ago to provide nearly .357 Magnum-level performance without all that recoil. It's based on the .32 H&R Magnum case, and revolvers chambered to .327 Federal can safely fire the H&R round as well as .32 S&W.

Nominal ballistics for the .327 Federal have an 85-grain bullet exiting the muzzle at 1,400 fps for 370 ft.-lbs. of energy, which isn't all that close to the .357 Magnum. However, Federal's 104-grain HST .327 load is running at 1,500 fps for 520 ft.-lbs. That's pretty near a 125-grain .357 Magnum's 575 ft.-lbs. and certainly beats the pants off the .38 Special and 9mm Luger.

Back to the gun. The barrel, frame and cylinder are stainless steel with an all-business matte black finish. This revolver got treated pretty hard because we had it on all our "Handguns" TV shoots, in addition to multiple range trips on my part. The finish came through fine, with a just a few well-earned scuffs.

Sights include a day/night front from AmeriGlo featuring a tritium lamp surrounded by a bright orange circle. It's

TAURUS USA

327 DEFENDER T.O.R.O.

TYPE: double-action-only centerfire revolver

CALIBER: .327 Federal Magnum

CAPACITY: 6

BARREL: 3 in. matte black stainless

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.5/4.8/1.4 (in.)

WEIGHT: 23.5 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: matte black stainless steel cylinder, frame

GRIPS: Hogue pebbled rubber w/finger grooves

SIGHTS: gutter rear, day/night front; optic-ready topstrap on Holosun footprint

TRIGGER: double action only; 10 lb. 7 oz. pull (measured)

SAFETY: transfer bar

PRICE: \$554

MANUFACTURER: Taurus, TAURUSUSA.COM

pinned, and a ramped, plain black front sight is also provided.

The rear sight is a gutter milled into the topstrap. But of course this is →

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5

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HANDGUNS | FIRING LINE REPORT

← a T.O.R.O., and the topstrap is also drilled and tapped to accept an optic plate on the Holosun footprint. It attaches via two provided M4x0.7 screws with T15 Torx heads. Apply Loctite, tighten to 18 inch-pounds and allow to cure for 24 hours. The sight attachment posts are threaded M3x0.5.

The trigger pull is decent: 10 pounds, seven ounces on average with minimal stacking. Timing on the cylinder was good; only faint drag marks showed between the cylinder notches. The cylinder latch is dished and serrated for sure operation.

Grips are from Hogue. They're smooth front and back, pebbled on the sides, and feature fairly deep finger grooves. There's an alternate, shorter wraparound grip provided as well, with serrated sides, finger grooves and a thumb shelf. It should provide better concealment,

ACCURACY RESULTS | TAURUS 327 DEFENDER T.O.R.O.

.327 Federal Magnum	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	80	1,279	19	0.9
Federal American Eagle JSP	85	1,198	17	1.6
Federal American Eagle JSP	100	1,271	16	1.4
Federal HST	104	1,279	24	1.2

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 15 yards from a Ransom Multi Cal Steady Rest with a Holosun 507K green-dot sight. Velocities are averages of 15 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a ProChrono DLX. Abbreviation: JSP, jacketed softpoint

although not as much grip real estate. The provided roll pin seemed overly large for the hole in the frame, and I didn't want to force it, so I can't comment on shootability.

For accuracy testing I installed a Holosun 507K with a green dot. Normally I do revolver bench testing in single action, but that wasn't an option here. However, I was able to figure out where a good staging point was in the double-action

pull, and accuracy didn't suffer one bit. In fact, this gun was able to outshoot an 856 Defender T.O.R.O. I tested last year, a gun with the exact same reflex sight and fired in single action.

Now, I'm not going to blow smoke here and tell you this gun is as easy to shoot as a .38 Special. It's not. While it doesn't recoil nearly as much as a .357 either, there is considerable muzzle blast. That's thanks to a SAAMI maxi-

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mum average pressure of 45,000 psi. Compare that to the 35,000 psi of the .357 Magnum and 17,000 psi for the .38 or 20,000 for .38 +P.

However, in practical shooting it's pretty darn easy to hit with. The gun is well balanced thanks to its full-underlug three-inch barrel, and the Hogue grips take care of what recoil there is. Blast aside, there's not a lot of muzzle rise, so fast, accurate follow-ups are easily accomplished.

As I mentioned, the trigger is good. I'd say it's nearly on par with my double-action-only S&W 640 Pro, which has a tuned trigger. And while the Taurus's bobbed hammer isn't going to be a big benefit in terms of a no-snap draw when you have an optic installed, it's ideal if you're going the irons route.

Overall I think this revolver makes a great deal of sense for those who want



▲ The .327 Federal Magnum (c.) is considerably more powerful than the .38 Special (l.) and can be on par with the .357 Magnum (r.). Guns chambered for the .327 H&R and .32 S&W.

Goldilocks performance out of a carry revolver. You get terminal performance that's light years beyond the .38, in a gun that's a lot more shootable than one firing full-boat .357 Magnums. The ability to add a dot sight—or stick with the capable, rock-solid rear notch and day/night front—is icing on the cake.



▲ T.O.R.O. revolvers feature a plate that attaches to the topstrap for mounting a reflex sight. The front sight on this model is an orange day/night.



▲ Unlike other models in the Defender line, the 327 T.O.R.O. has a bobbed hammer, so it's double action only.

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Yamil Sued photo

STOEGER STR-9 COMBAT X

ON THE HEELS OF THEIR SUCCESSFUL STR-9 pistol series comes Stoeger's STR-9 Combat X. The Combat X is designed to pass the most stringent military and law enforcement testing protocols. Although clearly belonging to the STR-9 family, the Combat X has several upgrades that make it the most robust, feature rich STR-9 to date.

Like all STR-9 models, the Combat X is a polymer-frame, striker-fired 9mm pistol. But having been developed for NATO tenders, the Combat X is beefed up internally. In addition, it boasts improved ergonomics for optimal comfort and control when firing.

The STR-9 Combat X is a full-size pistol, with an overall length of 7.46 inches.

It measures 5.5 inches from the bottom of the magazine well to the top of the rear sight. The beveled magazine well is 1.5 inches wide, while the slide is just an inch wide. It weighs 27 ounces with an unloaded magazine.

The STR-9 Combat X features a 4.3-inch cold-hammer-forged, nitride-hardened steel barrel. Nitriding is a heat-treating process, a type of case hardening, and it hardens the outer layer of steel by adding nitrogen to the surface. Nitride-treated steel handles forces like those that are part and parcel of gunfire better than through-hardened steel. Nitriding also provides excellent corrosion resistance. The same process is applied to the STR-9 Combat

STOEGER STR-9 COMBAT X

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto centerfire

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 20+1, 10+1 (state compliant); 3 mags supplied

BARREL: 4.3 in., cold-hammer-forged nitride-hardened steel

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.46/5.50/1.18 in.

WEIGHT: 27 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: matte black nitride-hardened steel slide, polymer frame

TRIGGER: 5 lb. pull (measured)

SIGHTS: three-dot fiber optic; slide cut for optics

SAFETY: Trigger blade

PRICE: \$599

MANUFACTURER: Stoeger,
STOEGERINDUSTRIES.COM

X's slide. The construction is such that Stoeger says the gun is designed to fire 10,000 continuous rounds.

The slide has front and rear serrations to provide a solid purchase →



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← for racking or checking the chamber. The slide is cut for an optic, and the four included mounting plates accommodate most popular red-dot footprints.

The three-dot iron sights consist of a drift-adjustable rear and a green fiber-optic front. Because the optic cut is rather shallow, the sights won't co-witness with most red-dot sights.

The frame's high beavertail and undercut trigger guard, combined with its low bore axis, reduce muzzle flip for faster, more accurate follow-up shots. Three interchangeable backstrap options enable you to tailor the grip to your hand. Dual stippling patterns provide a non-slip gripping surface.

Unlike previous STR-9 models, the Combat X's frontstrap is devoid of finger grooves. Recessed sections on either side of the frame provide a physical index for your trigger finger and support-hand thumb.

An oversize magazine well funnels magazines into the pistol for smooth and efficient reloads. Lefties, or anyone shooting the pistol left-handed, will appreciate the oversize, ambidextrous slide stop and reversible magazine release button. The STR-9 Combat X ships with three 20-round magazines or three 10-round magazines for capacity-restricted states.

The frame on the Combat X is longer than that of its predecessors. And its locking block is longer and wider. Upgraded from previous models, the locking block and slide rails are a single unit, adding structural integrity to support the longer frame. When you look at the internals of the STR-9 Combat X compared to the STR-9 Combat, the difference is clear. However, like the STR-9S Combat the Combat X's frame features a three-slot accessory rail that accommodates a wide array of lights, lasers or combinations thereof.

There is no manual safety, but like many striker-fired pistols, the STR-9 Combat X has a trigger-blade safety. Stoeger lists the trigger pull weight

ACCURACY RESULTS | STOEGER STR-9 COMBAT X

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Fiocchi Range Dynamics FMJ	115	1,155	11	1.9
Federal HST JHP	124	1,154	6	1.9
Wilson Combat Reman. HBFN	135	942	7	2.0

Notes: Accuracy results are the averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a Ransom Multi Cal Steady Rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded from a Garmin Xero C1 chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; HBFN, hollow-base flatnose; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; Reman., remanufactured



The STR-9 Combat X lacks a thumb safety, but there is a trigger-blade safety. The high beavertail and undercut trigger guard provide great control.

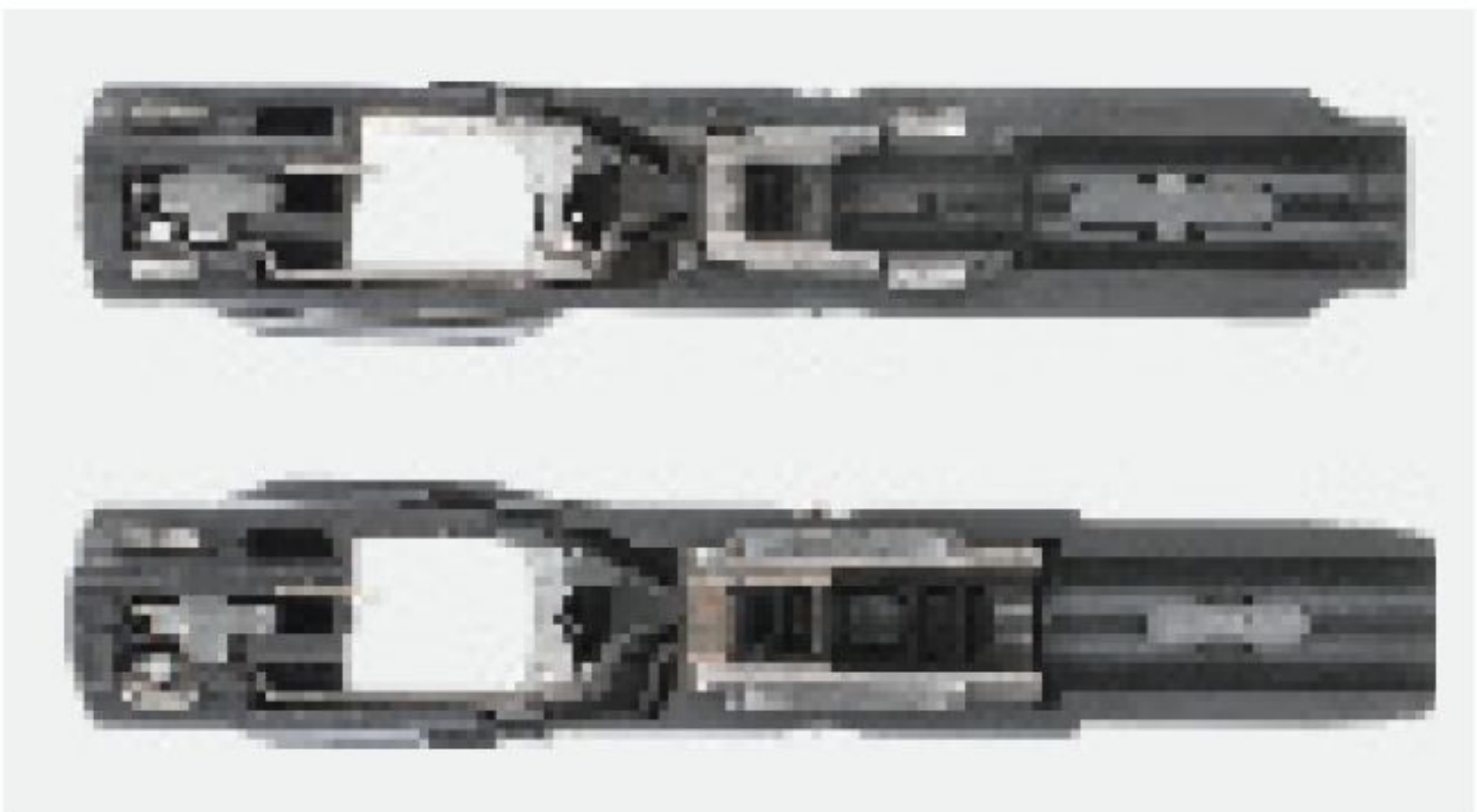
between 5.5 and 6.5 pounds, and the trigger on my test gun broke cleanly at five pounds. Reset was short and easily discernible. A loaded-chamber indicator on the top pops up when a round is chambered for a visual and tactile reference.

The STR-9 Combat X was a pleasure to shoot. Recoil was minimal and easily controlled. I conducted accuracy testing from a bench rest at 25 yards using an AmeriGlo Haven optic. The three loads ranged from 115 to 135 grains, and the gun consistently produced two-inch five-shot groups. A quick note on ammo: Stoeger doesn't say not to use +P or +P+ but does indicate that extensive use of these hotter loads can decrease component part service life.

Accuracy testing is important, but how well a pistol handles offhand in close quarters is what really matters for defensive purposes. I ran several magazines through the Combat X, delivering rapid, accurate hits at seven yards without issue. In terms of accuracy, shootability and reliability, the pistol



The STR-9 Combat X slide is cut for optics and uses adapter plates for mounting. The sights are three-dot fiber optic; they're not tall enough to co-witness with a red dot.



The STR-9 Combat X (bottom) has beefed-up internals compared to the STR-9 Combat, with a longer and wider locking block.

outperformed many semiautos costing three times as much.

The STR-9 Combat X is certainly concealable, but the oversize magazine well and extended magazine will tend to print through a light cover garment. I can see carrying it on or just behind the hip in an outside-the-waistband holster with a substantial cover garment. It would also make an excellent home-defense gun.

If you're a fan of Stoeger's STR-9 family of pistols—and you should be—you're bound to love the Combat X. It's a beefed-up, ambidextrous upgrade that's both reliable and user-friendly. With a price tag of \$599, it's also easy on the wallet.

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DICKINSON ARMS ADAM 1911 BLACK

DEDICATED HANDGUN SHOOTERS MAY NOT immediately recognize the Dickinson name, but the brand has been importing elegant Turkish shotguns for some time. I was understandably a bit surprised when I learned that Dickinson's most noteworthy new product for 2024 was a handgun. Its new Adam series guns are Turkish-made 1911 pistols chambered in both 9mm and .45 ACP.

Adding a 1911 to its lineup is an effective way for Dickinson, which is based in Moorpark, California, to expand its U.S. audience. But there are certain expectations when you build a 1911 handgun. This is, after all, a John Browning original design and a pistol that has served as the sidearm of

soldiers in several major American conflicts. If you build a good 1911 you'll get a tip of the hat from American shooters and will be welcomed into the fold. Screw it up and you'll never stand on solid footing with many shooters.

The slide, frame and barrel are all forged from steel, and Dickinson has its barrels deep-hole drilled for concentricity. Barrels are button rifled and feature a 1:16 twist.

The new Adam guns come in a variety of colors and styles ranging from mild to wild. The more sedate Black model I tested comes with a blued finish on the barrel, slide and component parts, and these are paired with checkered wood grips with gold medal-

DICKINSON ARMS ADAM 1911 BLACK

TYPE: 1911

CALIBER: 9mm Luger, .45 ACP (tested)

CAPACITY: 8+1; 1 mag supplied

BARREL: 5 in. forged, button rifled

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 8.5/5.5/1.5 in.

WEIGHT: 38.9 oz. (measured)

CONSTRUCTION: blued forged steel slide and frame

GRIPS: checkered walnut w/gold medallions

TRIGGER: Series 70, 4.5 lb. pull (measured)

SIGHTS: drift-adjustable shielded black rear, gold-bead front

PRICE: \$699

MANUFACTURER: Balistik Savunma, Istanbul, Turkey

IMPORTER: Dickinson Arms, DICKINSONARMS.COM

lions. There's also a Rainbow version with white grips and a multi-color finish that changes color depending upon the angle of the light, and a Fireball model with a case-hardened blued finish.

My 1911 Black sample was chambered in .45 ACP, and it came with a single eight-round magazine. The gun weighed 38.9 ounces on my scale. The rear sight is adjustable and shielded, and it features a basic square notch. The front gold-bead sight is pinned.

A stylized "BS"—for Balistik Savunma, the Istanbul-based company that manufactures these pistols—is engraved on the rear of the slide on both sides and on the gold grip medallions.

Despite its basic color scheme, the Dickinson Adam Black .45 has some interesting touches. This variant is the S, and its front and rear slide serrations have an S shape. The B model has standard serrations while the M features a cross-hatch pattern.

The wood grips on the S sport a diamond checkering pattern on the front and a micro-texturing look on the rear. There's no texturing on the frontstrap.

The ambidextrous safety is a nice touch, and the grip safety features a memory bump and extended beavertail. The pistol uses the standard Browning barrel bushing system.

The pistol proved to be reliable and accurate, which are the No. 1 and No. 2 questions that interest most shooters. While slide-to-frame fit is average and the laser etching elements look a bit cheap, it's hard to argue with zero failures and accuracy in the 2.2- to 2.7-inch range at 25 yards.

The sights are functional but nothing fancy, and it was easy to lose track of the bead front sight in the midmorning sun. That would be one upgrade I would make, along with the grips. They're fine, but the dual design doesn't speak to me. Thankfully, there are scads of 1911 aftermarket parts out there, so you can upgrade as you see fit. The guts of this pistol all work fine, which is what

ACCURACY RESULTS DICKINSON ARMS ADAM 1911 BLACK				
.45 ACP	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady XTP JHP	200	909	8	2.2
Wilson Combat HAP JHP	200	888	8	2.4
Fiocchi Defense Dynamics JHP	200	879	16	2.7
Federal Punch JHP	230	877	13	2.7
Speer Gold Dot G2 + P	230	920	12	2.5

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded on a LabRadar at the muzzle. Abbreviations: JHP, jacketed hollowpoint



The pistol features the standard 1911 control layout, and the thumb safety is ambidextrous. This is the S model, so named for its S-shaped slide serrations.



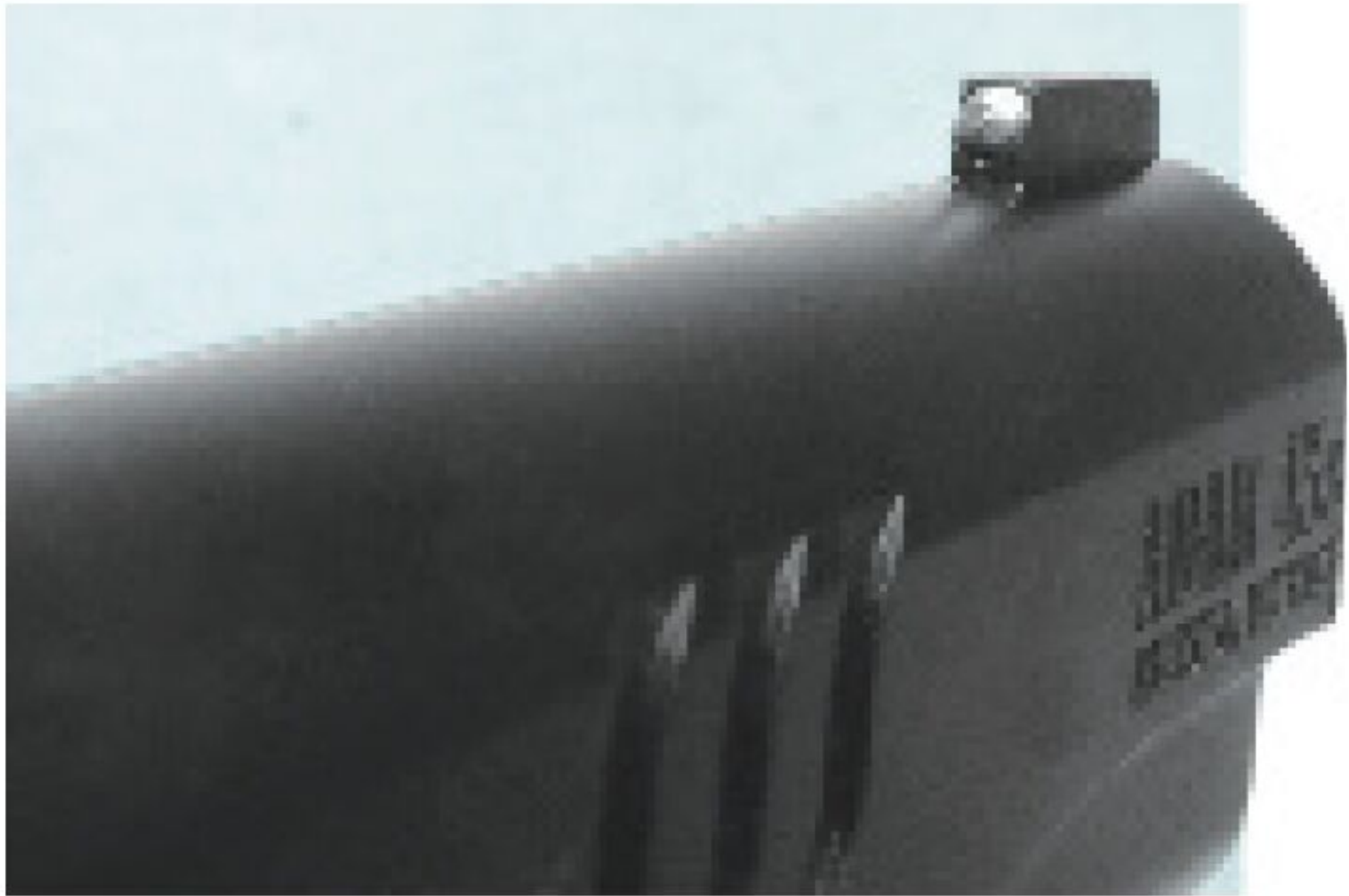
The gold medallions on the walnut grips are engraved with "BS" for Balistik Savunma, the Turkish manufacturer. The texturing on the rear resembles a micro carry gun's, while the front features more traditional diamond checkering.

you should ask of a 1911 in this price range. There were zero failures to feed or eject, and while you won't mistake the trigger for something like a Nighthawk or Wilson Combat, it's serviceable and works fine. Break weight for the 70-series trigger over 10 pulls was 4.6 pounds, and there's a bit of grit and take-up.

After testing the Adam pistol on the bench I ran some drills with the gun, and it performed well.

The Dickinson comes in a hard plastic case without lock tabs. Three bore brushes, a dual-sided general purpose brush, a cleaning cloth and bushing wrench are included (no more excuses not to clean your gun with this one) as well as a bushing wrench. The base model I tested carries a suggested retail price of \$699, which is on par with guns like the Tisas 1911 Duty Enhanced 45 (\$709) and the Rock Island Armory Standard FS 2-Tone .45 ACP (\$659).

The Adam 1911 Black might go un-



The gold bead front sight gives the pistol a classic look. It functions well in most light conditions, but it can be lost when you're looking toward the sun.

noticed—especially if it's cased next to the company's attention-grabbing Fireball and Rainbow models—but it's a fine working gun that makes a great entry-level 1911. For all those who complain that you can't find a solid 1911 for under a grand, this gun is certainly worth a look. It isn't particularly fancy, and I would change some of the styling, but it shoots accurately and goes bang when you pull the trigger.



KORTH SUPER SPORT GTA

MENTION THE NAME KORTH TO ANY DEDICATED handgunner and watch his or eyes light up because they are likely thinking of someday owning this finely tuned, well-made precision revolver. While I may never own one, it was a pleasure to just hold and review a Korth Super Sport GTA—a gun I have seen under glass at gun shops and at shows.

Korth was established in Lollar, Germany, in 1954 by Willi Korth, who had a strong desire to manufacture the finest revolver in the world. Today the guns are made available to the U.S. market courtesy of Nighthawk Custom.

The Super Sport GTA .357 is built from parts machined from billet steel that are then mated to a six-inch hammer-forged barrel. The finished product is flawless in execution, no machining marks or unsightly gaps anywhere. The sideplate is fitted with hardly a separating line

between the plate and frame. Those components are finished in a satin DLC. Contrasting the assembly is one of four custom colors—green, blue, red or blue—on the skeletonized barrel shroud. The hand-filling, laminated target grips are colored to match the shroud.

The shroud has a ventilated rib up top and a Picatinny rail below. The muzzle is target crowned, and the front sight is adjustable. It rotates to various widths and can also be moved up and down in four heights to adjust for elevation—all courtesy of a dial just behind the sight. The sight is protected from glare via removable wings.

The topstrap features a Picatinny rail section for mounting an optic. The rear sight is adjustable for windage and elevation, but Korth takes things one step further: The rear blade width can be adjusted via a thumbscrew on the left side.

Loading is accomplished by moving the new-style lever on the left side of the hammer forward to open the cylinder. The movement is short and fast to do.

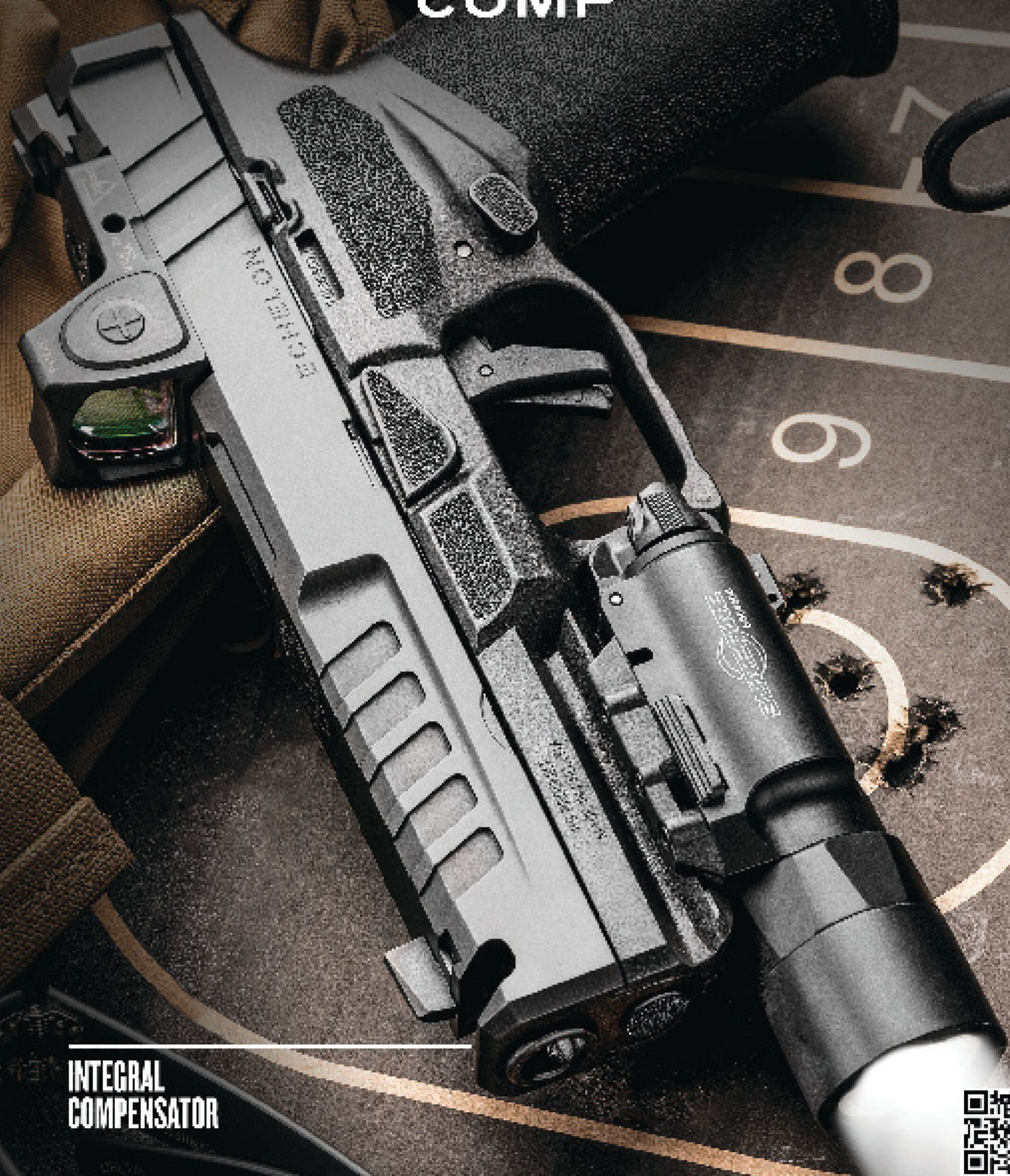
Cylinder timing is so good the bolt never leaves a drag mark on the periphery of the cylinder while it's rotating. Extra cylinders are available in 9mm Luger. Simply open the cylinder, and then press in on the release button on the right side of the frame, allowing the cylinder and crane to slide out of the gun.

It took a long time to finally get a Korth gun in my hands, but the feeling is very rewarding. To me this is a work of art in the handgun world, and it commands a premium price of \$6,199.

If you really demand a gun of this caliber (no pun) for yourself, save your dollar bills and go for it. Owning and shooting it will be a lifetime experience. 

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