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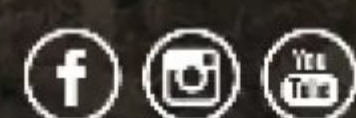
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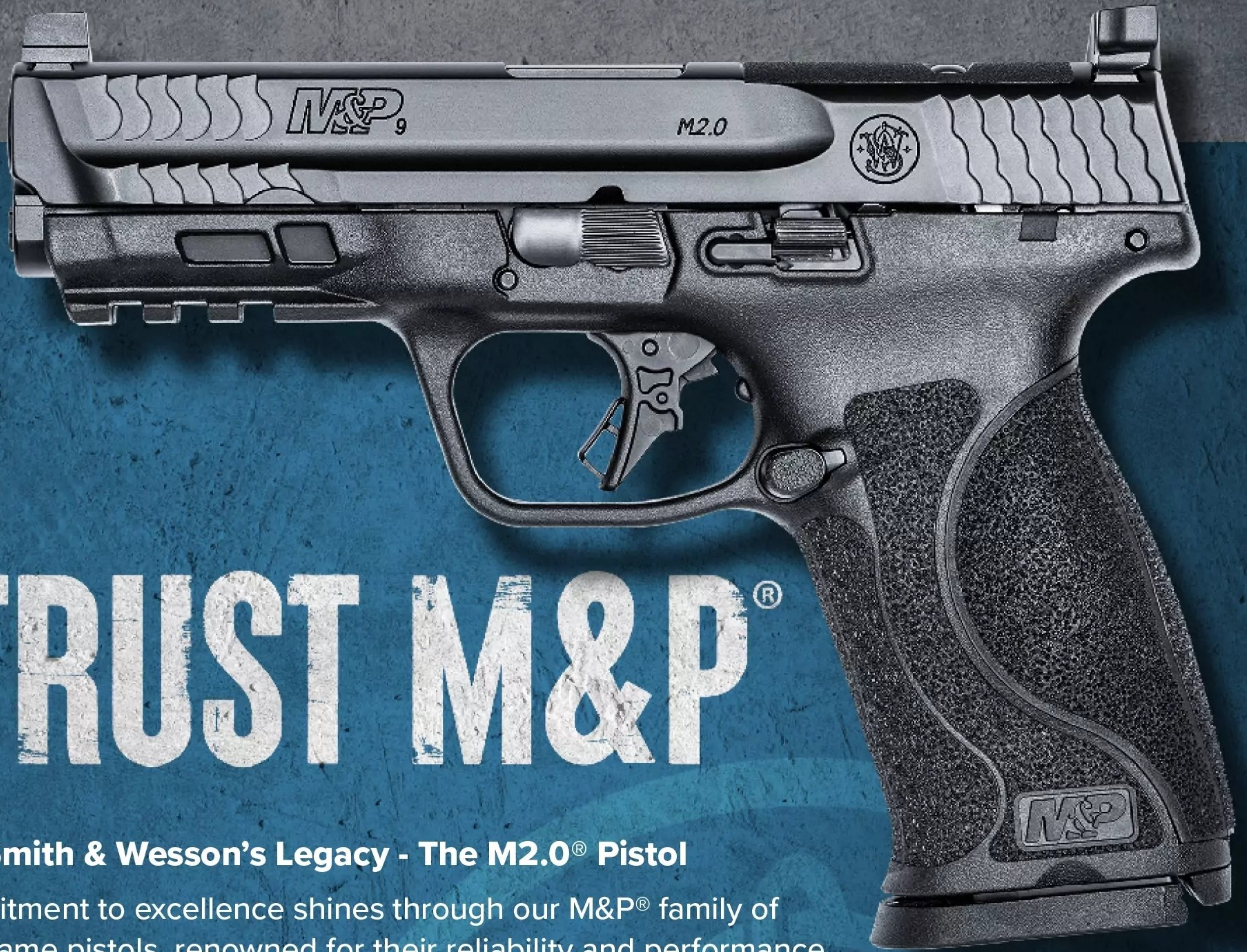
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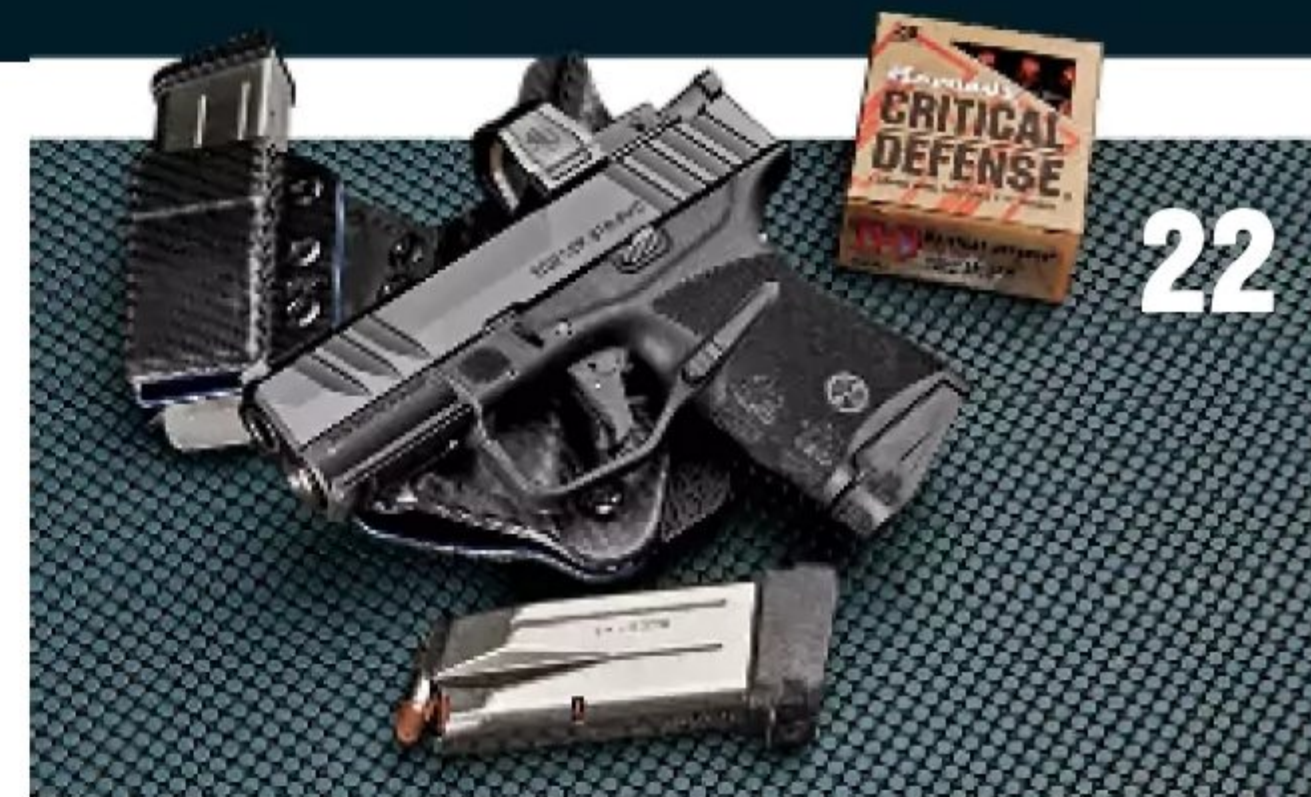
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Snake Button

I thoroughly enjoyed the article, “The Snake Killer” in the October/November 2023 issue. Please refer to the photograph that is on page 46. Near the bottom, right corner of the frame’s cylinder window, a lever of some kind can be seen. What function does it serve? Brad Fitzpatrick did not discuss this feature in an otherwise excellent article. Also, for a revolver having a base price of \$3,699, I was disappointed in the accuracy results. Then I realized that defense-type ammunition was used for testing purposes. Too bad that some match-grade cartridges were not fired.

PAUL WISNIEWSKI

He did describe the cylinder assembly removal catch, but you saw it only from the left side. The button to release the cylinder is on the right side. Don’t have that view, but you can see it on the Nighthawk website.

Size Matters

I’ve been reading firearms magazines for more years than I care to admit, and my biggest complaint is, What are small, medium and/or large hands? Small hands to Wilt Chamberlain are different than small hands to Mickey Rooney. I recently read an article by Richard Nance where he said he has large hands and wears XL gloves. That makes perfect sense to me, and for the first time I now know what he means by large hands.

WILLIAM FALLON

Wheelgun Fan

Thank you for running more articles featuring revolvers. Upon leaving the U.S. Air Force, my last assignment included a Reserve Air Wing of refueling aircraft. I applied to try out for their SAC pistol team, shooting S&W six-inch K-38s in .38 Special and micro-adjustable sights. The armorers made the actions work very smoothly with little stacking.

RAWDON LOWE



Two Big Anniversaries

Hornady and Ruger—two leaders in the firearms industry—are celebrating 75 years in business. Ruger, founded by Bill Ruger, got its start building handguns with the Luger-like Standard .22 semiautomatic. From its small beginnings, the company now has facilities in New Hampshire, Arizona and North Carolina. Hornady was founded by Joyce Hornady, and while it started out as a rifle bullet manufacturer, its groundbreaking handgun ammo offerings—in particular Critical Defense and Critical Duty—have been widely embraced. Based in Grand Island, Nebraska, its facility has grown exponentially over the years.

Happy 200, Texas Rangers!

Davidson’s has come out with an exclusive Smith & Wesson Model 20 to honor the 200th birthday of the renowned Texas Rangers. Production is limited to 250 guns. The custom N-frame .357 revolver is engraved “One Riot,



One Ranger” on the backstrap and sports Goncalo Alves stocks. It’s priced at \$2,950. Visit GALLERYOFGUNS.COM if you’re interested.

Industry Notes

At press time, we learned that Gaston **GLOCK**, founder of the firearms company that bears his name, has died at the age of 94. His introduction of the Glock pistol in 1985 irrevocably changed the handgun industry.

The Miami-Dade Police Department recently awarded a contract to **SPEER** to supply it with the company’s Law Enforcement 124-grain Gold Dot +P load, which leaves the muzzle at 1,220 fps and is designed for optimum performance through a variety of barriers.

If you’ve ever been to a class at **GUNSITE ACADEMY**, you know you simply have to stop in the pro shop, and now you can do it from the comfort of your own home. Its newly redesigned website, GUNSITESTORE.COM, offers gear, apparel, guns (sales have to go through an FFL, of course) and more.

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HELP IS OUT THERE

THE GUN INDUSTRY HAS RESOURCES TO ASSIST THOSE IN CRISIS.

By Diana Rupp

“HOW ARE YOU DOING? YOU HAVEN’T been yourself lately. Can we talk about what’s going on?”

Let’s face it: that’s the kind of awkward conversation most of us would prefer to avoid having. But an initiative by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) is working to help gun owners understand that reaching out this way to someone who is having a hard time could save a life.

Suicides make up more than half of all firearm fatalities in the United States. The problem is especially acute among current and former military members. A 2021 Depart-

ment of Defense report found that 70 percent of suicides among service members are enacted with a firearm, as are 60 percent of suicides among service member spouses.

In an effort to reduce these grim statistics, NSSF partnered with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the nation’s largest suicide-prevention organization, to work with gun manufacturers, retailers, ranges and individuals to educate gun owners and their families.

“Our role is that of the ‘trusted messenger,’” explained Bill Brassard, NSSF’s point person for the

Suicide Prevention Program. “We recognized the high percentage of gun deaths by suicide, but it took a while to find the right group to partner with. At the same time, AFSP was looking for a partner who could carry its message to gun owners.”

The direct result of the NSSF/AFSP partnership was the development of an education toolkit consisting of posters, cards and displays for gun stores and shooting ranges, as well as a take-home brochure for customers, encouraging people to “Have a Brave Conversation.”

Demand for these materials is high. Last year, about 2,600 toolkits

were shipped to retailers, law enforcement agencies and others. In 2023, NSSF followed up these efforts by launching a new website, [BRAVECONVERSATION.ORG](https://braveconversation.org), a suicide-prevention educational tool.

“We use the NSSF materials, and they are very helpful,” said Jacquelyn Clark, owner of Bristlecone Shooting Center in Lakewood, Colorado.

“They are two-pronged. There are materials that help us train staff on what to look for and how to respond to a person in crisis, and there are customer-facing materials, including a flyer we make available when people sign in to shoot. NSSF is a trusted resource within the firearms community, and when the message comes from someone they trust, people are open to hearing it.”

The materials emphasize several important aspects of suicide prevention, including how to recognize warning signs and how to start a conversation with the person at risk. They also bust myths about suicide.

For example, asking a person directly if they are thinking about suicide does not put them at greater risk; it’s just the opposite. The materials emphasize that millions of Americans struggle with their mental health at some time during their lives, and during difficult times, there are steps that can be taken—without compromising anyone’s right to own firearms—to prevent a tragedy.

The NSSF/AFSP suicide-prevention training paid off last spring when a customer entered Austin Harlan’s The Range in Yakima, Washington. Harlan’s employees knew immediately that something wasn’t right.

“He was sending up red



Reaching Out Can Help Save a Life

SUICIDE IS A LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH, AND IT'S PREVENTABLE

By keeping secure firearm storage in mind, you can help reduce the number of suicides involving firearms.

LEARN THE RISK FACTORS AND WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

If you are worried about a friend or family member, trust your gut and don't wait for them to reach out.

LET THEM KNOW YOU CARE

Ask them directly about suicide and encourage them to seek help. Talking about suicidal thoughts and showing concern will not put someone at greater risk.

IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT A LOVED ONE

Always store firearms securely and consider temporary off-site storage for firearms when not in use.

IF YOU'RE GOING THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME

If lawful where you live, consider giving the firearms and gun lock keys to a trusted family member or friend.

DID YOU KNOW?

Firearms are used in 50% of all suicides in the United States.

▲ NSSF and AFSP distribute educational resources like this graphic to help gun owners and their families understand risk factors and warning signs related to suicide, learn where to find help and encourage secure storage.

WALK THE TALK AMERICA

Walk the Talk America (WTTA) is an organization dedicated to bridging the gap between mental health and responsible gun ownership. By forging alliances between the leaders of the firearms and mental health communities, WTTA is taking a two-pronged approach to reducing suicides by firearm: helping improve the quality and availability of mental health resources to gun owners, and educating mental health professionals about gun culture.

WTTA was founded in 2018 by Michael Sodini, owner of Eagle Imports, following a chance conversation with a woman who, after hearing him mention the mental health crisis as a factor in school shootings, asked him what the gun industry was doing to help solve the problem. When Sodini realized that some gun owners forgo mental health services for fear of losing their firearm rights,

and many mental health practitioners lack the knowledge to properly serve them, the idea for WTTA was born.

The organization is addressing the issue head-on, providing a variety of resources to gun owners, including a directory of mental health service providers, anonymous online mental health screenings and educational resources. WTTA offers mental health providers a free course and continuing education credits to help them learn about gun culture and suicide prevention.

Walk the Talk America's corporate partners include Ruger, Armscor USA, Hornady, Hi-Point, Bersa, NSSF, the National Association of Sporting Goods Wholesalers, the U.S. Concealed Carry Association and many other influential names in the gun industry. Learn more at WALKTHETALKAMERICA.ORG. —DR

← flags,” Harlan said. The man, as it turned out, was in the middle of a suicidal crisis. Because they knew the signs to watch for, Harlan and his team were able to intervene and prevent a tragedy. “We leaned back on the protocol that we learned from NSSF and AFSP and all of our training,” Harlan said.

NSSF’s initiative also emphasizes the importance of safe storage of firearms in the home and, if necessary and legal, moving them temporarily to a secure location off-site.

“This creates time and distance. When a person is in crisis, it allows time for the crisis to pass,” said Brassard.

He added that another pervasive myth surrounding suicide is that if someone is thwarted in a suicide attempt, they will just try again later.

But research shows that in most cases, suicidal crises are short-lived, and for that reason, having temporary off-site firearms storage options available is important.

Clark’s Bristlecone Shooting Center is a leader in the safe storage effort, offering a program called VetStore, funded by a grant from the Veterans Administration (VA), that provides a menu of free and low-cost safe storage options for gun owners, particularly veterans.

Options include trigger and cable locks, handgun lock boxes, and long-gun safes available for free or a small donation. There are also on-site storage options, including self-service lockers and a free gunsmith cleaning service that includes a 30-day hold.

“I would love to see more stores

offer temporary storage services,” said Clark. “Many retailers have concerns about space and liability, but we have helped to create a blueprint that other stores can follow.”

She says Bristlecone’s safe-storage services are useful to a wide range of people, not only those going through a hard time but also those traveling for an extended time or who have relatives or kids visiting their homes and want to put their guns out of reach.

“It provides a clear benefit to the community, and it’s good for business as well,” Clark said.

The NSSF’s efforts are running in parallel to several other suicide-prevention and safe-storage initiatives started by gun owners and retailers, including Walk the Talk America (see sidebar), the Gun Shop

**“THEY NEVER
SETTLE FOR
NORMAL”**
GUNS AMERICA DIGEST



Project, the Armory Project and Hold My Guns.

“The gun industry has come a long way in the last 10 years in terms of being proactive and willing to talk about this issue,” Clark said.

Gun makers are enthusiastically supporting NSSF’s suicide-prevention efforts, according to Brassard. Several are using the messaging and graphics supplied by NSSF in their websites, e-newsletters and social media to broaden the reach of these initiatives. NSSF and VA have co-hosted an annual suicide prevention roundtable for the gun industry for the past two years.

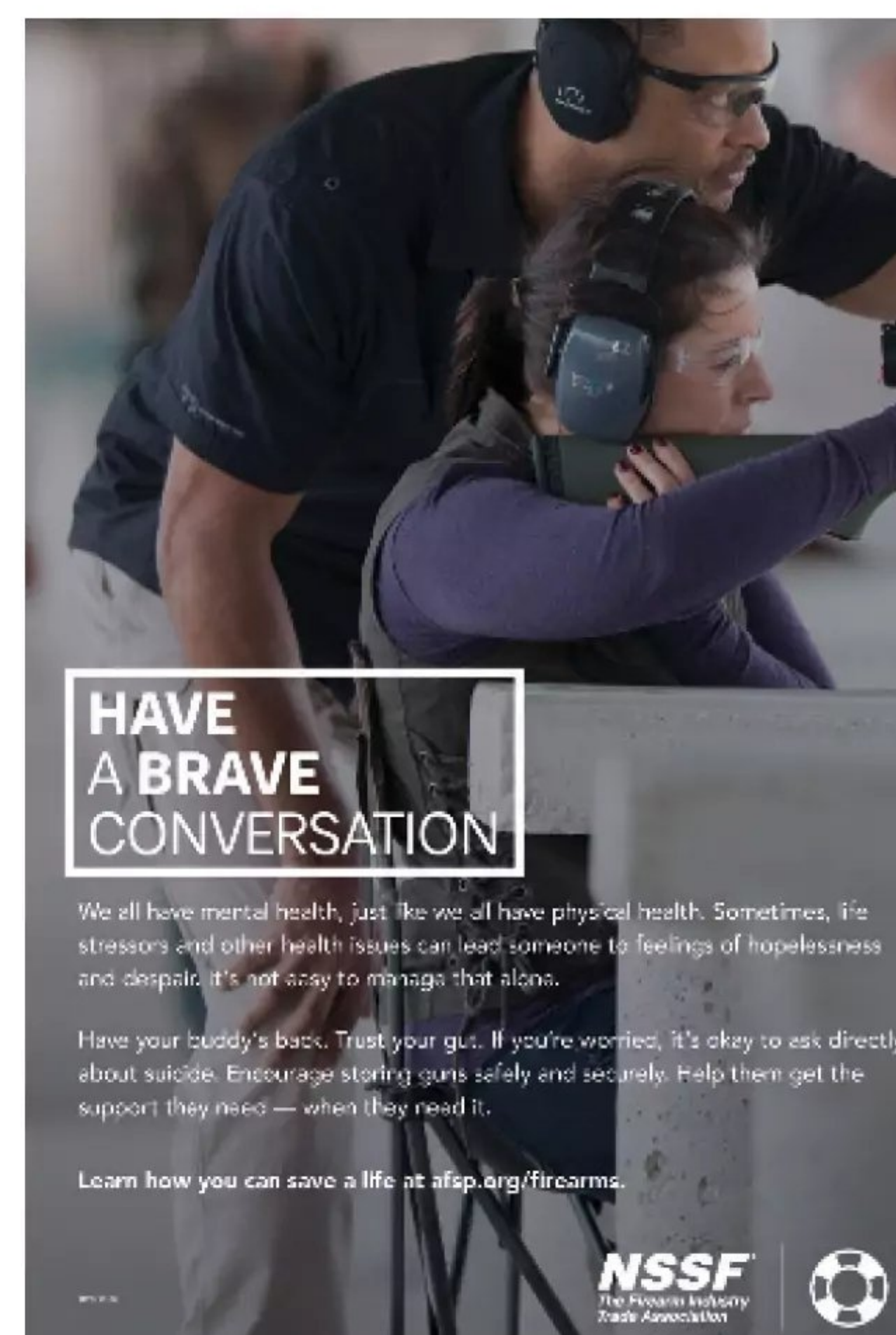
“Companies like Ruger, Beretta, SIG, Bass Pro Shops, Sportsman’s Warehouse and GunBroker all came to learn more about suicide prevention,” Brassard said. “The

industry has been incredibly supportive.”

As for the success of the initiative, he concedes it’s difficult to know how well prevention efforts are working. “If it doesn’t happen, it’s not reported,” Brassard said. “However, we are measuring our success by the demand for our materials, and demand continues to rise.

“Suicide numbers are still high nationwide, but the conversation is changing around talking about mental health—it’s okay to talk about it now,” he said.

“Everybody recognizes that while we must always respect our Second Amendment rights, guns should not be in the hands of someone with suicidal thoughts. Through education and awareness in the gun community, we can save lives.”



NSSF provides firearms retailers and shooting ranges with a suicide prevention toolkit that contains items for display.



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OLD SCHOOL | BY BOB CAMPBELL

PARA CCW LDA

IT IS INTERESTING THAT SEVERAL

makers invented mechanisms as an alternative to the 1911 pistol's cocked-and-locked carry. I find this odd because the 1911's legendary trigger pull and safety features are part of the appeal. Just the same, one of these—Para Ordnance's Light Double Action—was well designed.

Part of the problem the 1911 faced in uniformed police work was public perception of a cocked hammer as being reckless and dangerous. The LDA's double-action trigger was designed to usher the 1911 into police service. However, the LDA could not compete with striker-fired pistols, and I am unaware of any agency adopting the Para Ordnance.

Perhaps I should back up just a bit, in case you haven't heard of Para Ordnance. It was originally a Canadian manufacturer that established a U.S. subsidiary—Para USA—in 2009. In 2012, it was acquired by the same firm that owned Remington, and within a few years Para was absorbed by Remington and ceased to be a separate brand.

Para produced double-stack and single-stack 1911 handguns as well as the LDA, the first double-action 1911. The LDA trigger, designed by company co-founder Ted Szabo, employs an internal hammer that is cocked by racking the slide, while a spring-loaded external hammer is operated by the trigger.

As the trigger breaks and the slide recoils, the external hammer returns to the down position for every shot—making the pistol double-action only. The trigger is an odd blend of smooth single action and striker-fired and not quite either.



A The Para LDA CCW was a double-action 1911. Para had hoped the LDA design would catch on with police forces, but that failed to happen.

Recently I ran across a Para CCW .45 LDA at a pawn shop. It's a stainless steel pistol with a Commander-length slide, 4.25-inch barrel and Officer's frame height. The pistol was in the original box and included an eight-track tape with shooting tips from the great Todd Jarrett.

The Para went begging at \$400. This was more than a fair price. I don't usually recommend old steel for personal defense, but this 25-year-old handgun is reliable.

The grip safety is bobbed, and its spurless hammer lies flat. Hammer bite isn't possible, but the sharp edges of the frame are noticeable. The wood grips are slim-line panels, and they're nicely checkered and of good quality.

The pistol disassembles as easily as any 1911 with a full-length guide rod. The CCW features the Series 80 firing pin safety. The barrel is a ramped design, and fitting is snug.

The three-dot sights are an excellent design with a serrated rear. The ejection port is nicely scalloped. The pistol accepts standard 1911 Officer's model magazines. Trigger compression is a smooth five pounds, one ounce.

Benchrest groups averaged two inches at 15 yards. The LDA CCW proved fast on target, and the pistol handles well in rapid fire on man-size targets—comparable to even the best single-action 1911s.

Seldom do you run across such a well-preserved pistol from even 20 years ago. If you can find one, prices for the LDA CCW run \$600 to \$1,000, and outfits like Sarco and Numrich still sell at least some parts for some LDA models.

The Para LDA is an interesting part of the 1911 history. I would not hesitate to carry this pistol today, even with modern firearms in the safe.

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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-

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THE BALLISTIC ADVANTAGE

BARRELS THAT CAN SPICE UP AND IMPROVE GLOCK PERFORMANCE.

GASTON GLOCK'S POLYMER-FRAME

pistols were met with skepticism when they were introduced to the U.S. market in 1988, but 35 years later these Austrian autoloaders have created a huge and thriving market for striker-fired, polymer-frame pistols. But no matter how popular polymer guns become, this will always be the market that Glock built.

Not surprisingly, that success led to lots of aftermarket options. Orlando-based Ballistic Advantage (BALLISTICADVANTAGE.COM) is one of the companies offering aftermarket barrels for Glock guns, but are these aftermarket barrels from Ballistic Advantage—which cost about a third of the gun's original price tag—worth the money?

First, let's focus on the features that set the Ballistic Advantage barrel apart from the Glock factory barrel. Glock barrels are made from carbon steel while the Ballistic Advantage barrels are made from 416R stainless steel.

Without getting too deep into the tech details, carbon steel has a high carbon content and sheds heat more quickly than stainless. Carbon steel is also cheaper than stainless and purportedly has a longer usable life.

416R stainless steel is not as brittle as standard 416 steel and thus works better at a broader range of temperatures. It's more resistant to corrosion than carbon steel, but neither steel is completely resistant to corrosion without some type of treatment. The major advantage of 416R, though, is that it allows for high-definition machining and very precise rifling.



▲ Ballistic Advantage barrels are fluted and made from 416R stainless steel. They shoot accurately and make a great upgrade to your Glock pistol that anyone can install.

The Ballistic Advantage Premium Glock barrels feature button rifling as opposed to Glock's traditional polygonal rifling—although for its Gen 5 pistols Glock changed the recipe on the rifling, switching to a Marksman barrel with a hybrid blend of polygonal and traditional rifling.

The button-rifled Ballistic Advantage barrel has traditional lands and grooves with sharp cuts and precise machining. The Ballistic Advantage barrel keeps bore deviation below 0.0001 inch, which is better than factory barrel specifications, and the barrel is honed, lapped and tumbled to guarantee it is free of imperfections that might impact accuracy. In many ways, the Ballistic Advantage barrel is more similar to a precision rifle barrel than a pistol barrel.

Glock barrels have come with multiple treatments and coatings, the newest being the nDLC finish on the Gen 5 guns. Ballistic Advantage

barrels offer an optional quench-polish-quench, which is the same process that is used for Tenifer/Melonite applications. QPQ is a specialized form of nitrocarburizing in which the metal is nitrocarburized, polished and then post-oxidized resulting in a surface treatment to the metal that makes the metal tough, corrosion-resistant and increases lubricity.

Ballistic Advantage also sells PVD-coated barrels. PVD, or physical vapor deposition, applies a thin layer of metal—various types are used—to the top layer of the metal part being treated. The surface material is vaporized in a vacuum and applied to the surface on a molecular level, creating an ultra-thin, durable coating.

Ballistic Advantage has multiple PVD and QPQ color options available including light gray, iridescent, gold, copper and, of course, basic black.

All Ballistic Advantage Glock

barrels are built with SAAMI-spec chambers, and the hood has been chamfered on three sides to ensure fast, smooth return to battery. The muzzle is threaded 1/2x28 to accept a variety of muzzle devices, and a standard thread cap with O-rings is supplied. Additional O-rings and thread protectors—standard or Skull Crusher versions—are available on the company’s website.

There are also three fluting options: no fluting, spiral fluting or Bomber-style fluting. The latter is Ballistic Advantage’s own design, a series of dots and straight lines. Ballistic Advantage currently offers these barrels for Glock G17, G19 and G26 9mm pistols, but you can expect additional options in the future. Prices range from \$145 to \$215 depending upon pistol model, color and finish.

Standard thread protectors carry a price tag of \$20 while the Skull Crusher thread protectors cost \$30. The Skull Crusher’s primary function is to cover the threads, as you’d expect, but it also serves as an impact weapon for hand-to-hand combat if an attacker should reach you. Mostly, it looks stylish.

I tested the Ballistic Advantage G19 barrel with QPQ black surface treatment, spiral fluting and a Skull Crusher thread protector (total price, \$225) against the standard factory pipe in my Gen 3 G19 9mm. I fired three five-shot groups with three different loads from each barrel at distances of 10, 15 and 20 yards offhand then tested all three loads from the bench at 25 yards with both barrels with all three loads, making notes on velocity, accuracy and reliability.

Velocity figures didn’t vary much between the two barrels. The Ballistic Advantage barrel was faster with two of the three test loads, but



▲ Ballistic Advantage barrels (bottom) have the benefit of barrel threading, which factory Glock barrels lack. Standard and Skull Crusher (shown) thread protectors are available.

COMPARISON BALLISTIC ADVANTAGE VS GLOCK					
Load	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Best 10 Yd. Accuracy	Best 15 Yd. Accuracy	Best 20 Yd. Accuracy	Best 25 Yd. Accuracy
Federal Hydra-Shok Deep	135	BA	BA	BA	BA
Hornady Critical Defense	115	BA	BA	BA	Glock
Nosler ASP	124	Glock	Glock	BA	BA

Notes: Accuracy results are based on averages of three five-shot groups. The 10-, 15- and 20-yard results were from offhand, the 25-yard result from a fixed rest. Abbreviation: BA, Ballistic Advantage

Federal’s Hydra-Shok Deep ammunition was slower in the Ballistic Advantage barrel than the factory Glock pipe. Standard deviations were within one digit across the board.

Reliability with both barrels was perfect, and there were no failures or issues with any loads tested. The Ballistic Advantage barrel does have a slightly different ramp machining profile than the Glock, but both work beautifully and are polished smooth.

What is the takeaway? The Ballistic Advantage barrel offers slightly better accuracy than the standard barrel. It’s also threaded and allows you to easily mount a muzzle device. But the biggest reason to buy a BA

barrel? They look good. The thread protectors—particularly the Skull Crusher—are eye-catching, the QPQ finish is excellent, and you can choose spiral fluting or Bomber fluting as well as the color for your barrel. And if you’re able to fieldstrip your Glock for cleaning you have all the mechanical skills required for the change-out.

To me, a little better accuracy and a lot better looks are valid reasons to buy a new barrel. Plus, who doesn’t like to upgrade their gear from time to time?

If you’ve got a Glock 9mm pistol sitting at home and think it needs a performance and aesthetic boost, Ballistic Advantage should be your first call.

THE TARGETING QUESTION

DO YOU KNOW WHERE TO AIM AND WHY?

HANDGUNS AREN'T THE DEATH RAYS

they are often portrayed as in the movies. Most handgun wounds are survivable. Regardless of caliber, a bullet fired from a handgun is unlikely to cause an immediate physiological stoppage. Of course, the number of hits and where they impact are significant factors in stopping a deadly threat. As such, targeting is of the utmost importance to the defensive handgunner.

When I was a rookie cop in the late 1990s, we were taught to aim for center mass, depicted on our B-27 qualification target as an oval X-ring in the middle of the torso. The rationale was that by aiming for the center of the target, an officer had the widest margin for error. It made sense to me at the time.

The problem with targeting the center of the torso is that bullet impacts to this region can't be relied upon to stop a committed assailant quickly enough. Even what may eventually be a fatal wound could grant the attacker time to injure you, or worse.

A more sensible target would be the upper chest or thoracic cavity, which is big enough to provide a relatively high hit probability and houses vital organs like the heart, lungs and trachea. The combination of size and anatomical significance makes the thoracic cavity the primary target for defending oneself with a handgun.

It's important to realize even hits to the thoracic cavity may not immediately stop an attacker. Body armor, drug influence, sheer determination or a combination



A Handgun rounds rarely incapacitate immediately, but knowing which areas are best to concentrate on can help you prevail in a deadly encounter.

thereof may require transitioning to a secondary target like the head or the pelvic girdle. This concept is the premise of the “failure drill” commonly included in law enforcement and defensive handgun training. Typically, the drill involves firing two rounds to the chest followed by one round to the head or pelvis, although in practicality there is no way to know how many rounds it will take to stop the threat.

The head is the highest value target. A bullet impacting the T-zone, which is represented by the eyes and nose, is likely to take the attacker immediately out of the fight.

Whether or not the attacker dies is not for you to worry about. The goal is simply to stop the deadly threat as quickly as possible. The T-zone is the most likely target to make that happen. That said, any solid bullet impact to the head may well end the fight.

The reason the head shouldn't be your primary target is that it's much smaller and more mobile than

the chest, which makes it harder to hit. Not only will missing the target fail to stop the imminent deadly threat you're facing, but it may also endanger innocent bystanders. As a law-abiding citizen, you are accountable for every round that leaves the muzzle of your gun.

In close quarters, targeting the head makes sense because its proximity makes it easier to hit. However, if the attacker is too close, targeting the head could leave you vulnerable to being disarmed because with your gun at eye level it would be well within the attacker's reach.

So targeting the head initially should be reserved for situations where the attacker is outside of double arm's length but not so far away you're likely to miss. In most cases, the head should be considered a secondary target, after hits to the chest fail to stop the threat.

Another secondary target is the pelvis, which isn't as likely to immediately incapacitate as

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← the head or chest but is still viable. There are those who believe a handgun round that impacts this bony ring-like structure will result in a “mobility kill,” but that’s not necessarily the case for a couple reasons.

First, unless you’re sporting X-ray vision goggles, it would be impossible to see the pelvis, much less hit it. You could aim in its general vicinity, but registering a hit on the actual pelvis would require a degree of luck.

Second, if a bullet were to hit the pelvis, it’s more likely to pass cleanly through the bone than to break the pelvic structure and prevent the attacker from bearing weight. Even if this were to occur, the fact that the assailant is down doesn’t mean he’s out of the fight.

The pelvis is a target of opportunity. It’s bigger than the head and less mobile, meaning it’s easier to hit. Rounds fired at the pelvis will have a much lower trajectory than those fired at the head, which may pose less of a hazard to bystanders.

In extreme close-quarters confrontations, when you must use your off hand to fight the assailant, the pelvis may be the only practical target. To raise the pistol higher would invite a disarm attempt and risk shooting your off hand.

To mitigate these risks, employ a retention shooting position as follows. With the wrist of your shooting hand locked and your thumb flagged as though you’re hitching a ride, draw your elbow up and back as much as possible

without having to contort. Your thumb should index against your chest.

Not only does this shooting position make it hard for the attacker to reach your gun, but it also provides a relatively safe shooting lane toward the pelvic region, assuming you’re square to the threat. After targeting the pelvis, you could disengage and create distance as you drive the gun out and aim for the chest or head, if warranted.

Stopping a deadly threat with a handgun is largely a matter of your bullets hitting vital areas of the attacker’s anatomy. While being shot anywhere could have a telling effect on the outcome, placing your shots to the upper chest, head or pelvis is the surest way to stop the threat. 🔴

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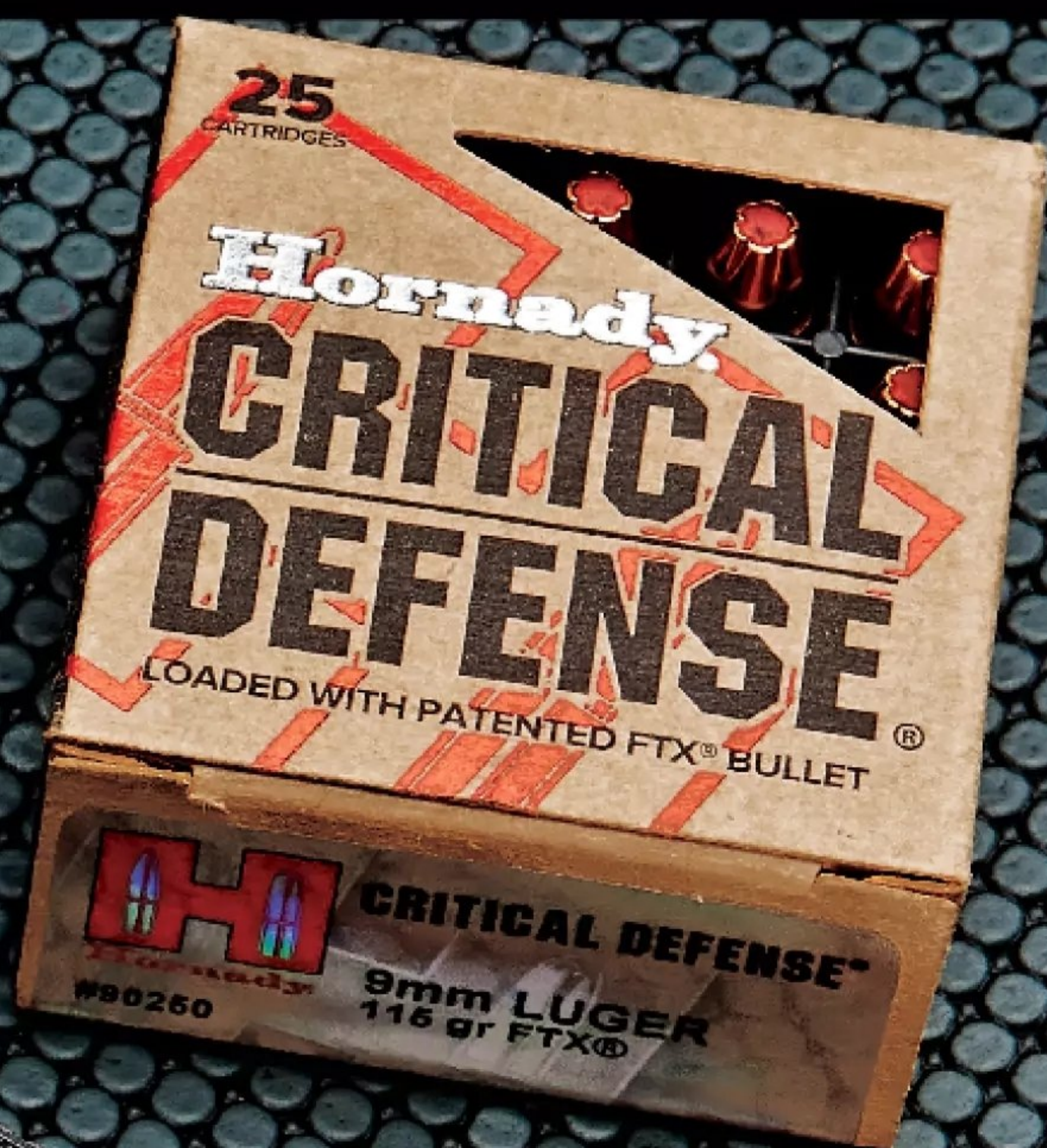
SINCE 1977

SMALL WORLD

BY BRAD FITZPATRICK



WITH THE STR-9MC, STOEGER'S STR-9 PISTOL GETS TRIMMED DOWN TO COMPETE IN THE MICRO- COMPACT MARKET.



If you poured a drink for every polymer-frame 9mm pistol on the market, your liver would be burned up in short order. More than any other segment, the polymer-frame striker-fired pistol market is overrun with models, and standing out in this crowded field requires something special. Stoeger has indeed managed to produce something unique among striker-fired 9mm carry guns, though: a micro-compact pistol that comes with all the features most shooters want for a price that starts below \$400. Known as the STR-9MC, it's one of the best values in carry guns today.

The STR-9 family of pistols is not new. The original STR-9 arrived in 2019, and since that time Stoeger has played with the frame and slide sizes and added features to specific models. The new STR-9MC is totally different. Rather than being a compact version of the original gun, this pistol utilizes a unique frame and slide that have been slimmed down to compete in the micro-compact field. That means it's going up against the Springfield Hellcats and the Taurus GX4s of the world. How does the Stoeger match up against each of them?

Let's start by comparing sizes and capacities, which are often the primary factors driving carry gun purchases. The Stoeger STR-9MC comes with a 3.3-inch 1:10 twist barrel and that gives this gun an overall length of 6.1 inches.

That's very close to the Taurus GX4's 3.1-inch barrel and 6.1-inch overall length, and both guns weigh around 18.5 ounces unloaded. The Springfield has a three-inch barrel, measures six inches long and weighs a couple tenths of an ounce less than the Stoeger or Taurus.

All three guns are barely over an inch wide at the controls and at or just below an inch wide at the grip. The Stoeger measures 4.4 inches tall from the slide to the base of the 13-round magazine while the

SMALL WORLD

← Taurus measures the same. The Springfield is 0.1 inch taller with its 13-round mag.

Clearly these guns are very close to the same size, so if you're comfortable carrying one, you can carry them all. The Stoeger comes with an extended 13-round magazine, a flush-fit 11-round magazine and

an 11-round magazine with a pinky extension. The optics-ready GX4 T.O.R.O. and Hellcat OSP also come with 11- and 13-round magazines.

Stoeger has always been known as a value leader, offering solid guns at modest price points. Indeed, the Stoeger STR-9MC base model has the lowest suggested retail price

of any of these guns at \$399, but its slide is not cut for red dots. There is an upgraded version of the STR-9MC that comes with three magazines, a slide that's cut for optics and tritium night sights for \$479, which is \$30 more than the Taurus. However, the \$449 Taurus GX4 doesn't include night sights and comes with just two magazines. The Springfield Hellcat OSP is the most expensive of the bunch at \$633.

The STR-9MC is unique within the Stoeger pistol family, but it shares many features with its larger cousins. The slide has a black nitride finish that penetrates the surface layer of metal and effectively protects against corrosion.

There are angular front and rear slide serrations—although they aren't the same aggressive serrations you'll find on other STR-9 pistols with larger slides—and the edges of the slide have been beveled to cut weight and improve styling. There's a beefy externally mounted extractor that takes a hefty bite on the rim of the case to guarantee reliable cycling.

On the upgraded, optics-ready model the slide is designed to accommodate the wide range of RMSc footprint miniature reflex sights on the market, so finding an optic for this pistol is no problem.



▲ The STR-9MC's controls are few and simple to operate. The stippling on the frame and the undercut behind the trigger guard provide a solid grip.



▲ The STR-9MC has a unique slide and frame within the STR-9 family that give it an overall width of right around an inch.

STOEGER
STR-9MC

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 11- and 13-round mags included

BARREL: 3.3 in., 1:10 twist

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 6.1/4.4/1.1 in. (flush-fit mag)

WEIGHT: 22 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: black-nitride steel slide, polymer frame

TRIGGER: 6 lb. pull (measured)

SIGHTS: adjustable notch rear, tritium dot front; slide cut for optics (as tested)

SAFETIES: trigger, striker

PRICE: \$479 (as tested)

MANUFACTURER: Stoeger, STOEGERINDUSTRIES.COM

It's standard operating procedure for handgun manufacturers to overlook the quality of iron sights on their optics-ready pistols. Thankfully, Stoeger doesn't subscribe to the notion that iron sights on an optics-ready gun are a "break glass during emergency" type of sighting system that should be used only if the red-dot battery dies or the optic is damaged.

In fact, the Stoeger sights on the test gun, which was the upgraded night sight model, are quite good, looking as though they belong on a target pistol and not a micro-compact. The front and rear are both steel and are both dovetailed into the slide. The rear sight is drift- and elevation-adjustable using a small

flathead screwdriver. The rear face of the square notch back sight is black and serrated to cut glare, and a small ledge allows the shooter to operate the gun's slide with one hand, using the sight as an anchor point.

The front tritium dot sight is easy to see in light or dark conditions. Both sights are relatively tall and should co-witness with most red-dot sights that have an average deck height.

The black polymer frame features an accessory rail under the barrel and two recessed, textured finger pads above the trigger guard. Three different texturing patterns wrap around the grip. There's traditional square-cut texturing on the

backstrap, coarse micro-texturing in the molded finger grooves on the frontstrap and fine micro-texturing on the sides of the grip.

A substantial undercut at the rear of the trigger guard offers a secure hold on the gun. The finger grooves lock the hand in place, and the texturing extends down onto the front of the extended magazines. Grip angle is comfortable, and the beavertail is sufficient to eliminate the risk of slide bite.

The controls are minimal. There's a slide stop that's large enough to operate but not so big it extends much beyond the frame. A lateral takedown pin extends from both sides of the frame, and the oval magazine release fits flush with a molded ridge on the grip that prevents accidentally releasing the mag.

There's no manual safety, but the STR-9MC does have passive trigger and striker safeties as well as a cutout in the chamber that serves as a viewing port to determine whether a round is chambered.

For testing purposes I mounted a SIG RomeoZero Elite optic on the pistol and tested it from the bench and offhand. The grip ergonomics are good, and the micro-texturing is aggressive enough to maintain a secure hold on the gun when firing. The grip feels a bit more squared-off than the those on the Springfield Hellcat and the Taurus GX4, but it's hardly blocky.

The flush-fit magazine leaves the grip too short for those with large hands to plant their pinky on the gun, but both the extended 11-round mag and the 13-rounder allow plenty of space for a full handhold on the pistol.

The trigger broke at an average of six pounds for 10 shots using an RCBS gauge. The trigger has considerable takeup and isn't as smooth as some competitors, but the break is clean and the reset is short with an audible and tactile click. It's certainly on par with other guns in



▲ The blacked-out notch rear sight is drift- and elevation-adjustable, and it has a ledge for one-hand slide manipulation. The sights are tall enough to co-witness with most mini red dots.

ACCURACY RESULTS STOEGER STR-9MC				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Lehigh XD	90	1,243	15	3.6
Fiocchi FMJ	115	1,037	22	2.9
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	115	1,083	13	3.4
Federal Syntech Training Match	147	954	6	3.0
Federal HST JHP	147	966	7	3.3

Notes: Accuracy results are average of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded on a Garmin Xero C1 Pro Chronograph at the muzzle. Abbreviations: JHP, jacketed hollowpoint

SMALL WORLD

← this class and will likely smooth out over time.

Accuracy from 25 yards was average for guns of this size when fired from a rest. A few five-shot groups squeaked in under three inches, but most were in the three- to 3.5-inch range. That's suitable for micro-compact self-defense applications, which are generally restricted to shots under 25 feet. Standing at that distance and slow-firing offhand, I found the Stoeger was capable of keeping shots inside the vital area of a torso target, so this gun is certainly accurate enough for self-defense.

Of equal or perhaps greater importance is the Stoeger's impressive reliability. Despite firing a variety of different ammunition, I had no issues with feeding, extraction or ejection of spent cartridges. The slide locked open after the last shot in each magazine, which allows for efficient mag changes. This should come as little

surprise since the other Stoeger STR-9 pistols have similarly solid reputations for reliable function. The latest micro-compact version lives up to those same high standards.

Many shooters, particularly new shooters, find that the smallest concealed-carry guns are hard to manage at the range and anything but enjoyable to shoot. The STR-9MC, however, feels and performs more like a full-size pistol, and recoil is manageable thanks to the excellent grip design and the relatively low bore axis. There's ample room on the frame for a thumbs-forward grip and the pistol's size makes it suitable for shooters with big mitts.

When the testing was complete, I reviewed my notes and found that the word that appeared most often was "consistent." I believe that's an accurate description of the Stoeger STR-9MC: It's a consistent performer. Its small size makes the Stoeger simple to conceal and carry, and it



A The optics-ready version of the STR-9MC ships with both flush-fit and extended 11-round magazines as well as an extended 13-round magazine.

offers better sights and more magazines than competing guns.

Stoeger continues the tradition it began with its shotguns of offering affordable semiautos that perform well under the toughest conditions. And while the STR-9MC doesn't dominate in any one category—except perhaps value—it does everything well and offers reliable performance. What more could you ask of a carry gun at any price?

A dark, atmospheric background image for a Black Hills Ammunition advertisement. It features a large, stylized, metallic-looking text "MASS PRODUCTION" that is partially obscured by a dense, dark forest scene. The text is reflected in a body of water in the foreground. In the bottom right corner, there is a white box with text. At the bottom center, there is a circular logo for Black Hills Ammunition. At the bottom, there is a line of text with a phone number and a website URL, followed by social media icons for Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube.

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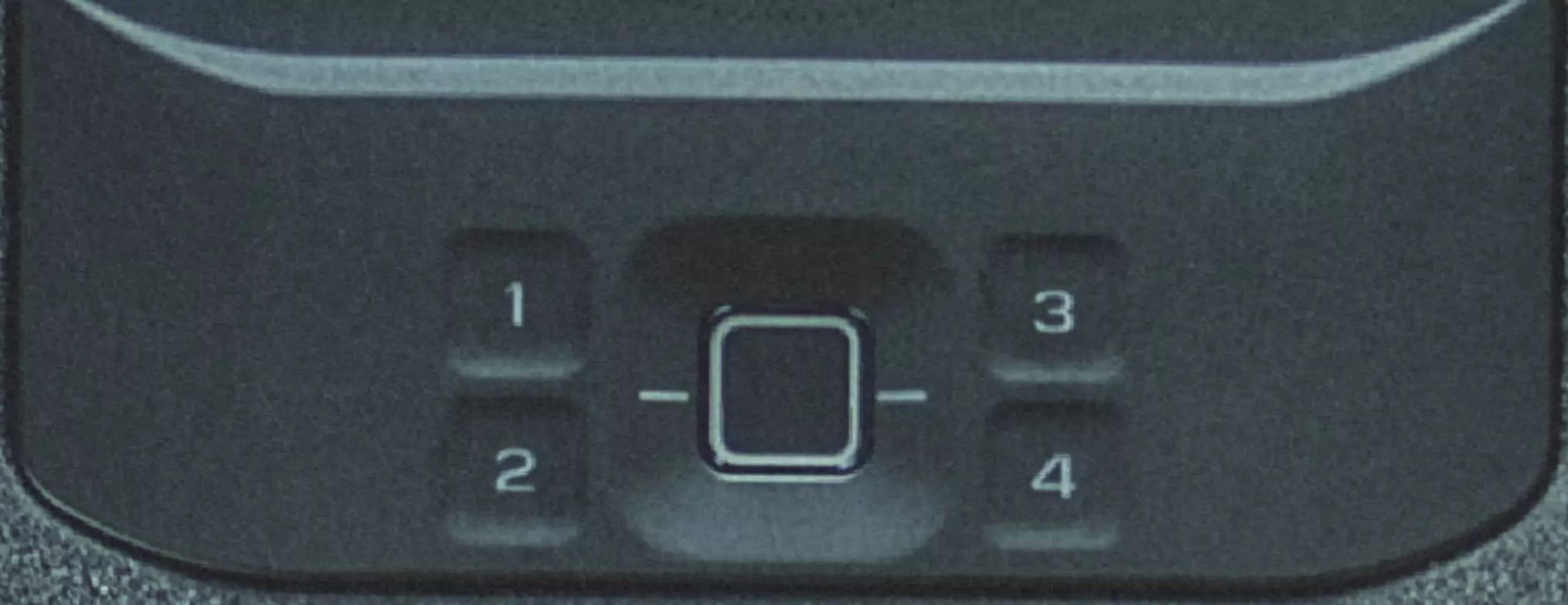


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TOTAL CLASSIC

BY KEITH WOOD



THE NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM NHC CLASSIC IS ONE WRITER'S DREAM GUN.



There are a host of companies out there producing custom 1911s, and that list seems to be growing by the day. Some of these firms are

exceptional while others should probably take up another vocation. Among the shops producing high-quality work at a reasonable volume is Nighthawk Custom.

A true custom shop, Nighthawk produces its own custom creations in-house but will also perform work on customer-supplied handguns. Its NHC Classic is a prime example of the quality the firm is capable of, combining the latest in machining techniques with old-fashioned gun-making skill. I'm such a fan of this handgun that the example featured here is my personal gun, bought and paid for.

I've long been a fan of custom 1911s, but until a few years ago, I knew the Nighthawk brand only by reputation. When I finally got the chance to review one of its pistols, I was blown away by the high-quality fit and finish. Several reviews later, I consider myself a fan of the brand. I sent a Browning Hi Power to the company's Berryville, Arkansas, custom shop for a makeover a few years ago and, once again, I was extremely impressed with the work.

I decided that I could go no longer without owning one of Nighthawk's 1911s, but the options were nearly overwhelming. Although I can appreciate some of the firm's more modern designs for what they are, at the end of the day I am a fan of its more traditional handguns. When I laid eyes on the company's NHC Classic, I knew I'd found my choice.

The NHC Classic began as Nighthawk Custom gunsmith Allen Wyatt's submission for entry into the prestigious American Pistolsmiths Guild, which recently merged with the American Custom Gunmakers Guild. In order to be considered for APG membership, gunsmiths

TOTAL CLASSIC

← must build a complete handgun that is then inspected by experts to determine whether the gunsmith in question has the requisite skills required for entry.

Submissions are judged on various criteria, including trigger fitting and tuning, slide and frame fitting, match barrel fitting and installation, fit and function of accessories,

miscellaneous modifications and finishing. Wyatt’s design passed muster.

The NHC Classic is available in a handful of basic configurations and with a choice of options. In terms of chamberings, it is offered in .45 ACP and 9mm Luger, with .38 Super and 10mm Auto a \$100 upgrade. It can even be ordered in a double-stack configuration, a \$650 option.

I decided on a single-stack, Commander-length 9mm with a blended magazine well upgrade and a black DLC finish. Despite being a firm that employs numerous craftsmen, Nighthawk Custom is known for its “one gun, one gunsmith” policy. My NHC Classic was built by Troy Huber.

When Huber began his work on this handgun, he started with a stainless steel frame and a slide, machined with undersize tolerances so they needed to be hand-fitted in order to function. After fitting and polishing the frame and slide to a silky-smooth relationship, he systematically executed the remainder of the project.

The attention to detail evident on this gun is significant: Every sharp edge is tastefully broken, every radius perfectly maintained. There’s no movement between the parts un-



▲ Wood opted for a black DLC finish, and the slide stop features an HRT cut. The trigger is machined from solid aluminum and is custom tuned.



▲ An oversize Nighthawk Custom Falcon mag well was installed, and the frame was contoured to match the bevel.

NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM
NHC CLASSIC

TYPE: 1911

CALIBER: .38 Super, 9mm Luger (tested), .45 ACP, 10mm

CAPACITY: 10+1

BARREL: 4.25 in.

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.9/5.5/1.4 in.

WEIGHT: 2 lb. 4 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: black DLC-finished stainless steel slide and frame

GRIPS: cocobolo half-smooth panels

SIGHTS: gold dot front, Heinie Ledge rear

SAFETIES: single-side thumb, grip w/memory bump

TRIGGER: 3 lb. 8 oz. pull (measured)

PRICE: \$4,399 (as tested)

MANUFACTURER: Nighthawk Custom, NIGHTHAWKCUSTOM.COM

less by design—no wobble, no rattle, only precision.

Though this NHC Classic uses a 4.25-inch, Commander-length barrel, the handgun was built so the slide cycles with the same stroke as a full-size Government model. This system seems to be more forgiving when it comes to reliability, with the gun cycling as Mr. Browning designed it.

A tweak on the original design is the use of the ramped and fully supported barrel, which is a better match for the 9mm chambering. The barrel's feed ramp on my NHC Classic was polished to a mirror-like finish to aid feeding. To further improve reliability, there is an extended ejector and a hand-tuned internal extractor.

The frontstrap of the frame was flawlessly checkered at 25 lines per

inch, as was the mainspring housing. The mainspring housing is a one-piece Falcon unit that includes an extended magazine well with a unique round-butt transition between the vertical and horizontal planes of the part. The inside of the well is blended into the frame, ensuring a fast snag-free magazine insertion under stress.

The beavertail grip safety sweeps high and is blended almost seamlessly with the frame's radius. A memory bump ensures that the safety is disengaged even when the shooter doesn't have a perfect grip on the handgun.

My NHC Classic has an extended strong-side manual safety that strikes an ideal balance between speed and concealability. The rounded slide stop is slightly ex-

tended as well and is cut flush with the frame and radiused on the right-hand side with what is commonly called an "HRT" cut.

The magazine release is extended but not radically oversize and is checkered. The trigger pad is medium-length and machined from solid aluminum. Thanks to hand-polished ignition components, the trigger pull is exceptional in a way that only a 1911 can be, breaking cleanly and repeatedly like the proverbial glass rod right at 3.5 pounds. Like nearly every part on this handgun, the delta-style hammer is machined from bar stock—no MIM or cast components need apply.

The slant-grooved slide is heavily beveled on the bottom edge and is cut with a French border at the top end of the flat. This treatment, pioneered by the late Armand Swenson, is one of those touches that makes a custom 1911 special.

The top of the slide is milled flat and is cut with a five-line arrowhead pattern with a deep border on each side. The ball end mill cut radius at the front end of the slide flows perfectly to the transition with the frame. The rear of the slide is serrated.

Huber hand-fitted the 4.25-inch match grade barrel, which locks up perfectly. The exterior of the chamber section of the barrel is fluted, which, like the ball end mill cuts on the slide, adds a modern flair to an otherwise traditional-looking handgun. The muzzle is cut flush with the barrel bushing and is deeply crowned. The recoil spring plug is smooth rather than textured, which makes for a clean look.

The sights on the NHC Classic are right in my wheelhouse, combining a gold bead front with a Heinie Ledge rear. The rear sight has a serrated blade and a square notch, which I prefer over the increasingly popular U-shape. The fact that the 40-lines-per-inch serrations on the sight match those on the rear of the slide makes for a nice touch. My ex- ➔



▲ The top of the slide is milled flat and cut with a bordered arrow pattern. The front sight is a gold bead on a steel blade.

ACCURACY RESULTS NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM NHC CLASSIC				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Norma MHP	108	1,113	148	1.5
Hornady American Gunner XTP	115	1,126	19	1.0
Federal Punch JHP	124	1,151	16	1.2

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups fired at 25 yards from a Target Shooting Inc. Model 1500 rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots using a LabRadar Doppler Chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle. Abbreviation: JHP, jacketed hollowpoint

TOTAL CLASSIC

← ample shot perfectly to the point of aim at 25 yards, but the rear sight is drift-adjustable if needed.

With the exception of the sights and the grip panels, the NHC Classic is constructed completely from stainless steel. While this material has its advantages, I was looking for something a little different.

When I learned that this handgun was available in a black diamond-like carbon finish, I was in. Unlike some of the painted-like finishes out there, DLC is incredibly thin and allows the hand-polishing of the steel substrate to show through. This finish provides the corrosion resistance and lubricity of a modern finish with the appearance of traditional bluing.

The other custom touch I requested on my NHC Classic was limited engraving. I wanted the gun to look as clean as possible, so the only markings on my gun's slide are Nighthawk's "moon hawk" logos, visible behind the cocking serrations on both sides. The handgun shipped with a pair of Nighthawk Custom's own grips, but I traded those out for a pair of smooth custom walnut burl panels, just to make it my own.

The NHC came in a high-quality zippered range bag with closed-cell foam cutouts for the pistol and two magazines. Two 10-round magazines shipped with the gun—along with a barrel bushing wrench, a test target, an inspection sheet and other paperwork.

I tested the NHC Classic with three types of factory ammunition, including two defensive loads. Recoil was extremely mild, as one would expect with an all-steel 9mm.

From time to time, I test a handgun when I'm the accuracy limitation. This was one of those guns. Several 25-yard groups measured under one inch—when I managed to stay out of the way. With such an incredible trigger, shooting the handgun from the bench was a pleasure.

During accuracy testing I experienced a handful of situations



▲ The rear sight is a Heinie Ledge, and the glare-reducing serrations on its face are matched by serrations on the rear of the slide.

where the slide did not go all the way into battery, resulting in a failure to fire. In my experience, this is to be expected on a brand-new, hand-fitted custom 1911, and the situation often alleviates itself after a few magazines.

Nighthawk Custom does not have an official break-in period and, without hesitation, offered to send a prepaid shipping label to return the gun for inspection. But I declined. I am confident that a few more rounds through the gun will resolve this. If not, I know the company will stand behind its work.

Once the gun is broken in, my plan is to carry it on special occasions when polymer just won't do. Sure, this handgun is heavier than newer designs on the market, holds fewer rounds and costs far more. That's not the point.

For me, guns do more than just go bang. Like a classic hot rod or a Swiss watch, this creation from Nighthawk Custom gets the job done in style. And when it comes down to

it, I shoot NHC Classic quite well.

I've ordered my share of custom firearms over the years and, oftentimes receiving the gun can create feelings of regret. Sometimes that feeling comes from the quality not being what you expected while on other occasions, I find myself wishing I had specified something slightly different on the order.

This was not one of those situations. I wouldn't change a thing on this handgun and, for once, I can say I don't have to return it at the conclusion of my testing.

Nighthawk Custom continues to be a top-tier player in the custom handgun world, combining the skill of a one-man operation with the scale and capability of a larger manufacturer. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend the company to anyone looking to have a custom pistol built from the ground up, or to have an existing handgun tweaked to perfection. Now that this NHC Classic is in my safe, I need to decide what to order next.

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KIMBER DOUBLES DOWN

BY J. SCOTT RUPP





THE NEW KDS9C IS A GREAT HANDLING DOUBLE-STACK 15+1 CARRY GUN FOR SINGLE-ACTION FANS.

Kimber is synonymous with the 1911 platform, and in recent years it has also developed small 1911-like semiautos, namely the

Micro and Micro 9 series. With the new KDS9c, the company is going in a slightly different direction. A medium-size gun designed for concealed carry, it's a double-stack 9mm single-action semiauto with a 15+1 capacity—with 18-round high-cap mags coming soon.

“Kimber has ventured into the high-capacity market before it became a mainstay in the early 2000s with the Kimber Ten. However, market conditions didn't favor the design at that time,” said Kimber's director of marketing Everett Deger.

“Fast forward another 10 years, and Kimber's introduction of an alloy-frame high-capacity concealed-carry pistol is the first step toward brand reinvention for the 21st century—and a younger market segment that favors the elements of a 1911 with modern-day capacity.”

To keep the gun light—it's only 25.3 ounces with empty mag—the alloy Deger refers to is 7075 aluminum. This particular alloy is known for strength, toughness and corrosion and fatigue resistance. These traits are why it's a top choice for airplane components, and it makes the KDS9c a strong gun that's a lot nicer to carry than if the frame were steel.

The stainless steel slide essentially has a tri-top configuration—side flats giving way to angled flats above, terminating in a serrated, flat top—although there's also a narrow, smooth, beveled transition from the side flats to the angled flats.

This transition briefly interrupts the excellent serrations, which are nicely cut at a slight angle and reverse direction above to create an arrow effect. In other words, there's a lot going on aesthetically, but functionally it works great— ➔

KIMBER DOUBLES DOWN

← providing excellent purchase for slide cycling and press checks.

The ejection port is large, ensuring spent cases are going to clear every time. Reliability is enhanced by an external extractor, which is not something you find on most 1911s or similarly designed single-action semiautos.

The slide is cut for optics, and the gun ships with a cover plate. Kimber sells an adjustable sight optics plate kit on its website store for \$119 that includes an adapter plate cut for the Shield RMSc/Holosun K footprint. The plate kit comes with an adjustable rear sight and

a tall fiber-optic front sight for co-witnessing with a red dot.

The KDS9c's stock front sight is a standard-height green fiber optic set in a dovetail. The stock rear sight on the KDS9c is adjustable for windage and elevation, and it's serrated on its face for glare prevention.

To remove the sight and the optics plate, fieldstrip the pistol. At the rear underside of the slide you'll see two Torx screws, but you'll also notice you can't access them without removing the firing pin stop, pin and spring.

If you've ever fully disassembled

a 1911, you already pretty much know how to do this. If you haven't, the instructions in the KDS9c owner's manual cover the simple process well. Kimber supplies a Torx wrench for unscrewing the sight.

The 4.1-inch stainless steel, ramped barrel is a thing of beauty, with flutes in the chamber area, the midsection and forward at the bull muzzle. It's also tapered, running from 0.55 inch in diameter immediately forward of the chamber to 0.70 at the muzzle, and the business end sports a deep 20-degree crown.

As mentioned, the frame is aluminum, and on this example it's finished in silver KimPro; an all-black version is also available. The frame features a generous beavertail at the back and an undercut behind the trigger guard, both of which provide good control.

The frontstrap and arched main-spring housing are cross-hatched, as are the gray/black G10 grips. Don't like them? Kimber sells grip panels for the KDS9c in dark red/black, olive drab/black and black.

The panels are held in place by stainless 5/64 hex screws. The manual stresses that when you change these panels it's important to →



▲ Controls include a single-side thumb safety and an oblong mag release, both of which are easy to operate.



▲ The tri-top slide has excellent serrations, and the fluted, deeply crowned barrel and rakish cut on the front of the slide give it a cool look.

KIMBER KDS9C

TYPE: single-action semiauto

CALIBER: 9mm

CAPACITY: two 15-round magazines supplied; 10-round also available

BARREL: 4.1 in. fluted, bull-style

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.8/5.4/1.3 (at grip) in.

WEIGHT: 25.3 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: silver KimPro-finished stainless steel slide and 7075 aluminum frame (as tested)

GRIPS: gray/black G10

TRIGGER: 2-hole; 3 lb. pull (measured)

SIGHTS: fully adjustable rear, green fiber-optic front; optics plate cover (no mounting plates supplied)

SAFETIES: single-side thumb, hammer notch

PRICE: \$1,495

MANUFACTURER: Kimber, KIMBERAMERICA.COM



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← toe in the front of the grip panels first rather than trying to press them straight onto the frame.

I wrote “arched mainspring” above, but really the whole grip portion of the frame is curved at the back. The frontstrap also flares ever so slightly at the base, right where your little finger rests. I like this because it enables you to put solid pinky pressure here, which can help keep the muzzle down. The frame extends slightly below the beveled magazine well, so the 15-round magazine with its polymer base pad fits flush.

“Kimber Troy AL USA,” along with the serial number, are engraved on the right side of the dust cover—just in case you forgot that Alabama is where Kimber calls home these days.

The slide stop pin hole on the

right side is countersunk, and the pin sits nearly flush along the frame. It’s a good look, and the countersink makes it easy to push the pin for fieldstripping.

Here’s the part of a single-action auto review where I would usually write “controls are your standard 1911,” but they’re not. First and foremost, there’s no grip safety. While not common in the 1911 world, this omission is becoming less unusual, and in fact Kimber has already done it with the Micro pistols.

While not overly wide, the single-side manual safety is extended and serrated for ease of use. The right side of the gun has a cut for an ambi safety, and Deger says an ambidextrous safety will be available about the time you read this—as will a frame rail for mounting accessories like lights and lasers.



A The slide is cut for optics, and an adapter for the RMSc/Holosun-K footprint is sold separately for mounting a red dot.



A The bull barrel is fluted, and while that’s mostly for aesthetics, the gun proved 100 percent reliable through 200 rounds with a wide variety of ammo.

Additional safety features include a safety notch in the hammer. It's not to be used as a safety per se but will stop the hammer from striking the firing pin unless the trigger has been pressed.

The magazine release is a little different than your standard 1911 round button. The KDS9c's is oblong and checkered, and it's reversible. The process for this is fully explained in the manual, and the wrench for doing so is provided.

The skeletonized hammer is brightly finished on the sides and black on the top, a nice-looking combo. The trigger is a two-hole style and slightly curved, with an overtravel adjustment screw in its serrated face. Average break weight on my sample was right at three pounds, with just a touch of creep.

Disassembly of the KDS9c is straightforward and similar to the procedure for a standard 1911. Eject the magazine, ensure the chamber is empty, then retract the slide until the slide stop is aligned with the small semicircular cut in the slide. Push out the slide stop pin, and guide the slide forward off the frame—with your fingers capturing the recoil spring as you do so.

Remove the recoil guide and spring, along with the recoil plug. Then swing the barrel link forward and withdraw the barrel forward through the muzzle end of the slide. Reassemble in reverse order.

The KDS9c operates with a 16.9-pound recoil spring, and Kimber recommends the spring should be replaced after 5,000 rounds—which is why it's always a good idea to keep track of how many rounds you've put through a gun.

The company also advises the mainspring and firing pin spring should be replaced at the same 5,000-round interval. The manual advises that these latter parts should be replaced at the factory.

The magazines are a proprietary design employing a rocket-wire spring and polymer follower. →



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KIMBER DOUBLES DOWN

← Pistols ship with two 15-rounders, and for those who live in restrictive states, a version with 10-round mags is available. Deger didn't say when the 18s would be offered, but I expect it will be soon.

The KDS9c shot fine from the bench. The ammo I had on hand was mostly on the lighter end, and while the best-shooting load was Federal's 124-grain HST, the pistol also tested well with the two lightest loads. *(Ed. note: If you're not up to speed on the Lehigh XD and Black Hills Honey Badger all-copper bullets, Brad Fitzpatrick discussed them in the August/September 2023 "Essentials" column, and you can find this article on our website.)*

Reliability was 100 percent. In addition to the loads I shot for accuracy, I took a bunch of partial boxes—varying weights, velocity levels and bullet styles—to the range to run drills. The Kimber had zero

problems feeding or ejecting any of them.

The only issue that occurred in testing involved the fiber-optic front sight. I noticed while dry-firing the gun prior to the range trip that the green fiber-optic rod seemed to have a small flaw in it. Lo and behold, on the third shot from the bench the rod departed for places unknown. These rods are easily replaced, and Kimber supplies two spare 0.06-inch green rods as well as a red one with the gun—along with instructions on how to replace them.

Through my dry-firing work, I found that the grip is a bit too large for me, despite the slim G10 grips. I like to be able to get my index finger's distal joint on or very close to the trigger face, but in the case of the Kimber I could only get the pad of my finger on it when I gripped the gun the way I grip a 1911—with my thumb riding the safety.

I measured the KDS9c's grip and compared it to my Springfield Ronin 9mm 1911. The difference in width wasn't that much, only about 0.2 inch, but apparently it's enough to pose a slight fitting problem for my medium-size hands. With 1911s I solve this problem by going to a short trigger, but the Kimber doesn't use a standard 1911 trigger, so that's not an option.

The concern here is that pressing the trigger with the tip of the index finger can throw shots to the left for a right-handed shooter like myself, but in this case it didn't affect my ability to hit targets in a series of drills fired at 10 yards. The KDS9c points really well, and for

me it excelled in target-transition exercises.

The safety works with just the right amount of tension, and I like the serrated flat top on the hammer. It makes cocking easier, and this hammer operates with less tension than most of my 1911s. Further, the large oblong safety enabled me to drop mags without having to shift my grip more than just a tad.

The gun is controllable too, as I discovered in rapid-fire drills. That was something I wondered about, as the checkering on the frontstrap and mainspring housing isn't aggressive, and the grip panels, while checkered, are fairly smooth.

I tested the gun—both the accuracy work and the drills—on a day when the temperature never reached the freezing mark, and I found that wearing a pair of medium-weight neoprene gloves did cause the gun to shift in my hand. Control was fine without gloves, but I'd still like the checkering to be a little more aggressive.

Shooting the gun in such cold weather, which already makes one's bare hands hurt, did reveal one other criticism. The rear sight has some sharp edges and corners, and by the end of the session this started to bother me a little when racking the slide.

But that's a minor thing. I really think the KDS9c hits the sweet spot. It's a good-looking midsize gun that carries really nicely, handles great and offers increased capacity over single-action semiautos like the 1911—while retaining a lot of the desirable traits of the latter, like the straight-back trigger pull.

It's not inexpensive at \$1,500, but it sits right there with the Springfield double-stack Prodigy 1911, and it's less than half the price of a gun like Wilson Combat's EDC X9 double-stack single action.

As Deger mentioned at the top of this article, Kimber is looking to reinvent itself as a brand. It's off to a good start with the KDS9c.



▲ The grip features thin G10 panels. Rupp felt the checkering on the frontstrap and mainspring housing could be more aggressive.

ACCURACY RESULTS KIMBER KDS9C				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Lehigh Defense XD	90	1,265	10	2.5
Black Hills Honey Badger	100	1,183	16	2.4
Magtech FMJ	115	1,161	21	3.0
Hornady Critical Defense	115	1,116	9	3.3
Federal HST	124	1,128	9	2.3

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

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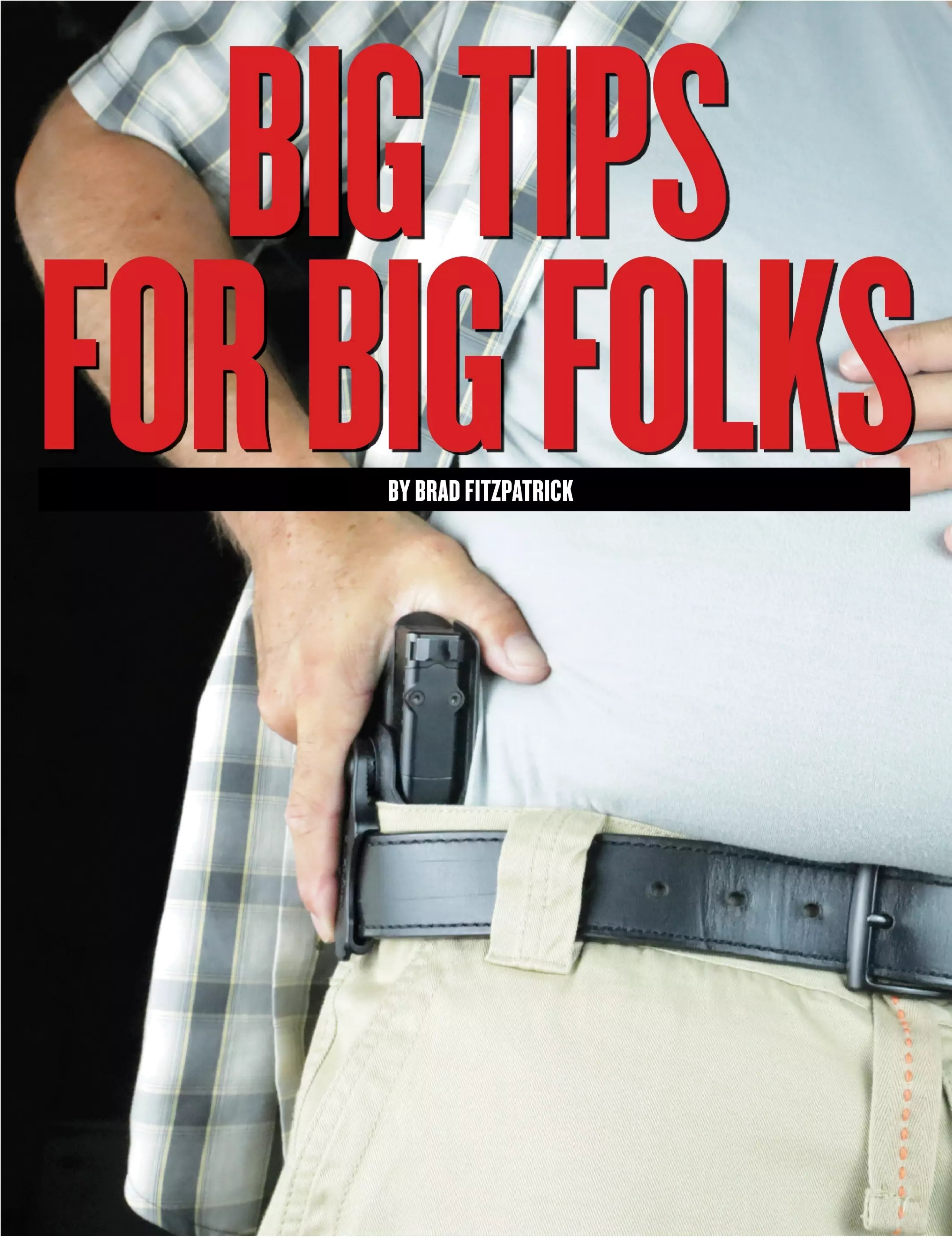
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BIG TIPS FOR BIG FOLKS

BY BRAD FITZPATRICK

CONCEALED CARRY CAN BE TOUGH FOR LARGE PEOPLE. HERE'S SOME EXPERT ADVICE THAT CAN HELP.

Back in my high school days I was desperately trying to gain weight, but 25 years and 50 pounds later I'm doing just the opposite. As we age, our metabolism inevitably slows, and body type and genetics predispose many people to carrying more weight regardless of their exercise or diet routines. We often hear that those extra pounds can cause complications, but one aspect of being a large individual that is seldom addressed is how to carry a concealed firearm comfortably.

Extra body mass can make it difficult to access a holster from some traditional carry positions, and nobody wants to carry a firearm that's perpetually poking or jabbing them. The result, almost inevitably, is that people who carry a few extra pounds end up not carrying a gun.

I spoke to holster and belt manufacturers as well as a top trainer about the complications of carrying a concealed handgun if you're a large person. They were kind enough to provide some practical, effective methods to carry and operate your firearm regardless of body type.

The keys to comfortable daily carry are holster design and position. Most of the experts with whom I spoke about the topic agreed on one point: Ditch appendix carry if you're a larger person.

"Larger individuals may struggle with carrying options in front of their body," said Nathan Engelking of CrossBreed Holsters. →

BIG TIPS FOR BIG FOLKS

← Galco's Mike Barham put it more bluntly, saying a big belly makes appendix carry "hideously uncomfortable." While appendix carry is popular today, anyone who

is carrying a bit of extra weight in their stomach area would probably agree with Barham.

That's why many of the experts suggested strong-side hip carry,

either inside the waistband or outside the waistband. Engelking suggested IWB holsters like the CrossBreed SuperTuck and MiniTuck, in part because these holsters come with leather backers that help spread the weight of the firearm over a larger area to reduce pinching. Holsters like these two models also come with adjustable clips that allow for cant and ride height adjustment which, according to Engelking, may also help larger people access their handguns more easily.

Chad DeSantis of DeSantis Gunhide also recommended very thin holsters like the company's Slim-Tuk because they can be worn at various positions around the belt line, and the thin profile prevents having to buy larger pants specifically to accommodate concealed-carry holsters.

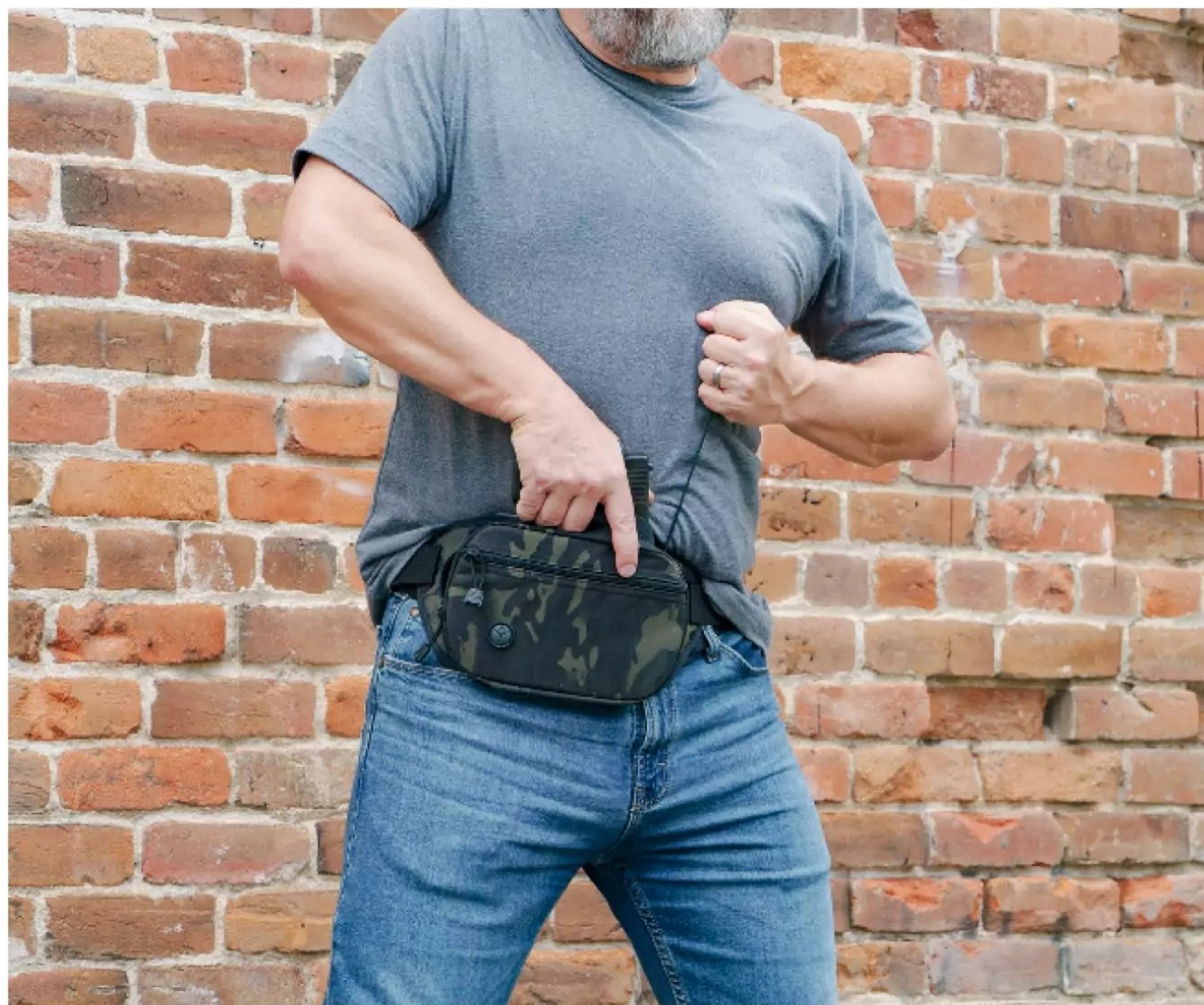
Several holster experts also suggested OWB carry. While OWB carry is certainly more comfortable for large people, it also makes it more difficult to conceal a firearm. But Safariland's David Higginbotham says the advantages of OWB carry are many, and that concealing an OWB holster isn't that difficult under most circumstances.

"Carrying a gun while you're carrying some extra baggage around the middle can be a challenge," says Higginbotham. "I'm larger than most—6'4" and 260. Micro-compacts in hip-hugging leather holsters may seem like an odd combination, but it is the most comfortable way to carry and a great way to easily conceal a gun. Think about what you wear, though, as you'll need the tail of a jacket or a shirt."

Higginbotham also points out that shooters need to test the holster at the range before they start carrying daily. He says OWB holsters may not work for those who wear their pants high, and that people with a belly but thin →



A Strong-side, outside-the-waistband carry gets the nod from most of our experts. The behind-the-hip position may work better for some people.



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BIG TIPS FOR BIG FOLKS

← legs and a small butt may find that the weight of a pistol or small revolver on the hip is enough to pull down their pants.

Interestingly, Higginbotham is the one expert I talked to who said he does carry appendix style.

“IWB for those who have to shop at the big and tall shops will still work,” says Higginbotham. “Despite having a bit more around the middle than I should, I still carry appendix. I’ve had good results with these and other IWB designs. I’ll admit to having some difficulty getting into a car seat. Smaller guns are always easier to work with.”

Barham suggests a single OWB holster position for large individuals: strong side behind hip. He recommends finding holsters with forward molding, which was invented by Galco founder Richard Gallagher as an improvement over traditional pancake holster designs.

Forward-molded holsters have a smoother, curved surface on the rear of the holster than traditional pancake holsters. This makes it easier to secure the holster on a belt and helps tilt the rear of the handgun closer to the body.

There are two advantages to such designs for large shooters: First, the belt doesn’t have to be cinched as tightly to secure the firearm; and second, the holster rides more comfortably against the body. Galco’s Concealable 2.0, Fletch and Corvus designs are examples of forward-molded holsters.

Don’t limit yourself to traditional OWB holsters that attach to the belt, though.

“I also really like our paddle holsters like the D94 Cazzuto since it is a little bit farther away from the body,” says DeSantis. Paddle holsters offer more room on the waistline, he says, and that translates to added comfort.

Vince “Vinnie” Morgan, a firearms instructor at Gunsite Academy who served as a law enforcement officer for 29 years—including 23

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Many of the principles that apply to choosing the right carry clothing are universal, but there are some important considerations for larger folks who want to carry concealed. First, choose a garment that breaks up the body’s outline to reduce printing. Generally speaking, patterned shirts do this the best, and irregular patterns such as floral or Hawaiian prints are most effective.

“Plaids are good. Light colors are more complicated,” says David Higginbotham. “Hawaiian prints are solid. Camo is good. And that’s what this is: camo. In this respect it is camo that is designed to hide what’s beneath.”

If you’re a larger person, you need to select a garment that effectively covers the portion of the body where you will be carrying the firearm. For example, if you opt to carry in the appendix position but carry your weight in your belly, you’ll need a garment with extra fabric in that area such as a hooded sweatshirt.

“I’m a massive fan of short-sleeved, button-up shirts,” Higginbotham says. “Hawaiian shirts work. Cuban wedding shirts. Bowling shirts. Even the plain old Dickies work shirt.”

I prefer an undershirt when carrying, simply to have another light, breathable layer between my belly and the firearm to increase comfort. I don’t look for tactical undershirts but rather dress undershirts that are extra tall or have a long hem. This isn’t because I need the extra length but because a longer hem stays tucked in more easily.

Pants, of course, are another consideration. When I was thin it wasn’t absolutely necessary to move up one pants size to add space, but now when I wear the same pants size I normally do, my handgun digs into my side simply because I have love handles that limit the amount of space available for the grip of a firearm. Moving up a size or choosing pants with a stretch waistband is a comfortable solution to this problem. Perhaps most importantly, you need a good belt, one that is stiff enough to provide support for your firearm and keep your pants up.

“Have a good belt, and, no, you cannot get these at Walmart,” says Vinnie Morgan. “It must be a belt designed for gun carry. I currently use the Kore Essentials belts; they are very stiff and will ratchet without trying to make it to the next hole like on a regular-type belt. Gun belts should be double lined and double stitched and must support the weight of the gun and holster combination.”

CrossBreed, DeSantis, Galco and Safariland all offer suitable gun belts as well.—BF



CrossBreed’s belt extender allows for some extra room and additional comfort. The company’s N8 Tactical brand also offers the cut-to-fit BioFlex belt that is available in waist sizes up to 70 inches.

years with SWAT—says strong-side OWB carry is his favorite option as well.

“I have been carrying a handgun daily for the past 40 some odd years. While I have not always been a robust 275 pounds, I have always been a large guy with no [butt] to hold my pants up,” says Morgan.

“I prefer outside-the-waistband, strong-side holsters. I have found that appendix carry does not work for me and is very uncomfortable when I sit in a vehicle. I carried

strong side for the entirety of my career, and that is what I go to in stressful situations,” he said.

While all these experts largely agree that strong-side OWB is one of the better options, it’s not the only one. Barham also suggests considering less conventional carry methods.

“A slightly offbeat choice is a waistpack,” says Barham. “Worn off the centerline of the body, toward the strong hip and out from under the belly, a FasTrax PAC can →

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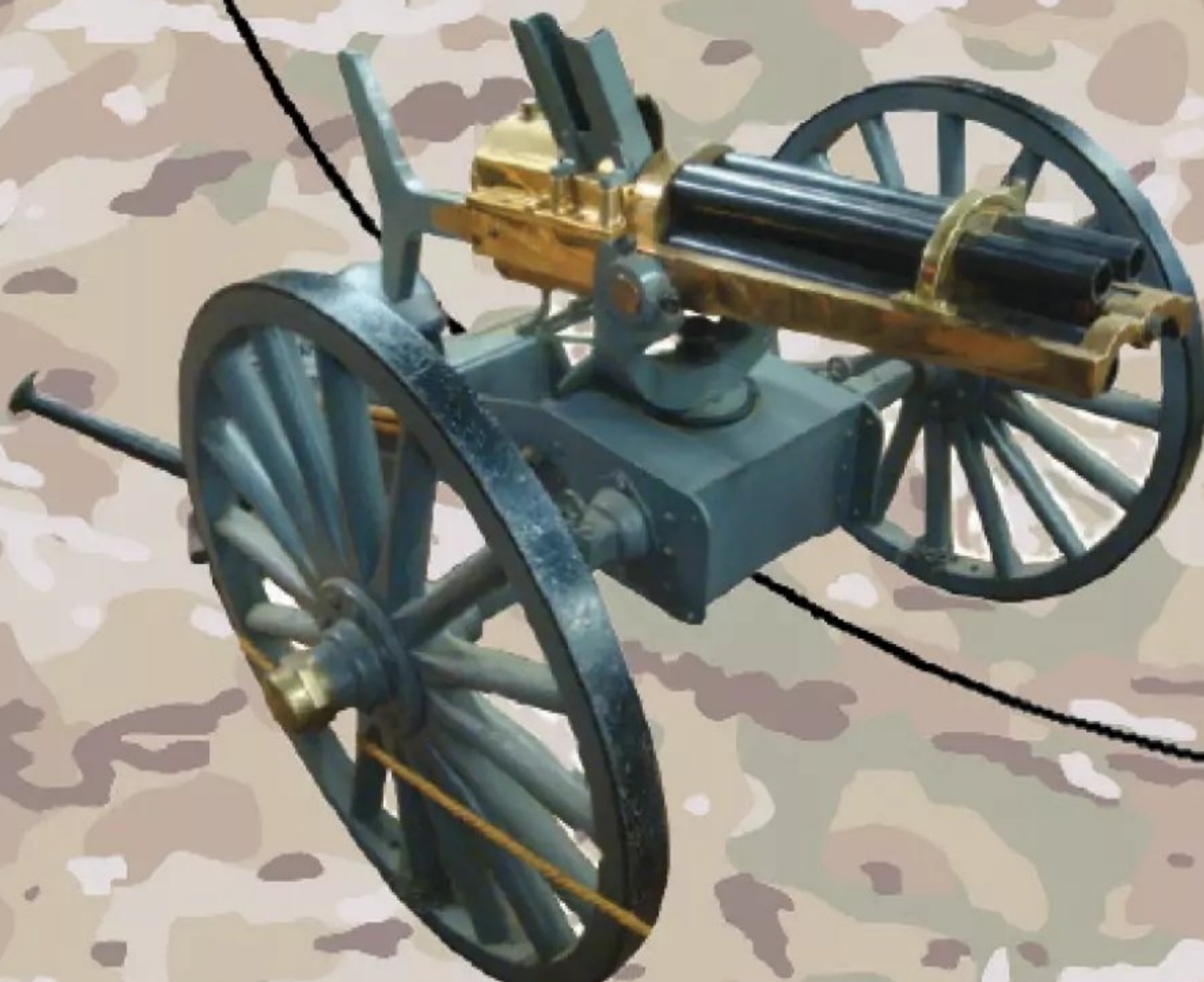


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SCAN ME



BIG TIPS FOR BIG FOLKS

← work well, especially in combination with the optional waist strap extender.”

Barham also says pocket holsters can work well for some larger individuals. He says this option is limited based on the size of the pocket, the holster and the gun. He also said that while most people carry their firearm in a front pocket holster, some obese folks find that a rear pocket holster is actually a more comfortable option.

While shoulder holsters were very popular years ago—particularly with undercover law enforcement agents wearing suit coats—they don’t receive a lot of interest from many concealed-carry experts these days. But Barham says they can sometimes be the right option.

“Horizontal shoulder holsters can be a great concealment option for larger people, assuming they have the arm length and shoulder flexibility to reach across their →



A A shoulder holster is a great option for larger individuals, especially when it makes sense to wear a cover garment.

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BIG TIPS FOR BIG FOLKS

← body,” Barham says. “We make an extra-large harness to accommodate very big people. Large or thick people have an easier time hiding shoulder holsters than anyone else.”

One carry position that several experts specifically mentioned as a bad option for large people is ankle.

“While I do on occasion wear a Smith & Wesson .38 Bodyguard in an ankle holster, I have found it very cumbersome to get to, and I either lower myself down or have an unbalanced platform to draw the weapon,” Morgan says. “That’s a no-go for me.”

Barham echoes those thoughts.

“Ankle holsters seldom work well for seriously overweight or obese folks,” he says. “Reaching the ankle is tough with a big belly.”

What about off-body carry? A split decision here.

“The final option I would suggest is off-body carry,” Higginbotham. “I spend a lot of time hiking

and have a shoulder bag that is purpose-built to carry a handgun. This style of carry has its own challenges—namely making sure the bag is securely in your control at all times—but it works well, no matter what your body type.”

Morgan is less of a fan. “While I don’t have to worry about keeping my pants up, I do have to worry about not having the weapon readily available and possibly even walking off and forgetting about it because [off-body carry] isn’t a part of my daily routine,” he says.

One last, important consideration: practice. Once you find a comfortable carry style, can you draw the gun efficiently? You can work on this at home through dry-firing. Try your setup from a standing position and also from sitting.

“Look at BB and airsoft simulacrum from companies like Umarex,” says Higginbotham. “They make one-to-one copies that are

excellent options for building actual trigger time into everyday-carry practice. Once you get confident with your body mechanics, move to the range. Begin again with dry-fire exercises. Then run live-fire practice slowed way down.

“This is important for everyone who is learning to carry concealed, or learning a new concealed-carry platform, but it is imperative for those of us who may face additional encumbrances from our extra mass,” he says.

Carrying concealed when you are a larger person comes with a unique set of challenges, but that doesn’t mean you can’t comfortably carry a gun and access it quickly. You need to find what works for you, which may mean you’ll try holsters that don’t work. Keep experimenting.

Hopefully these tips will help you find the right method for you, and when you do you’ll be able to carry every day without discomfort. 



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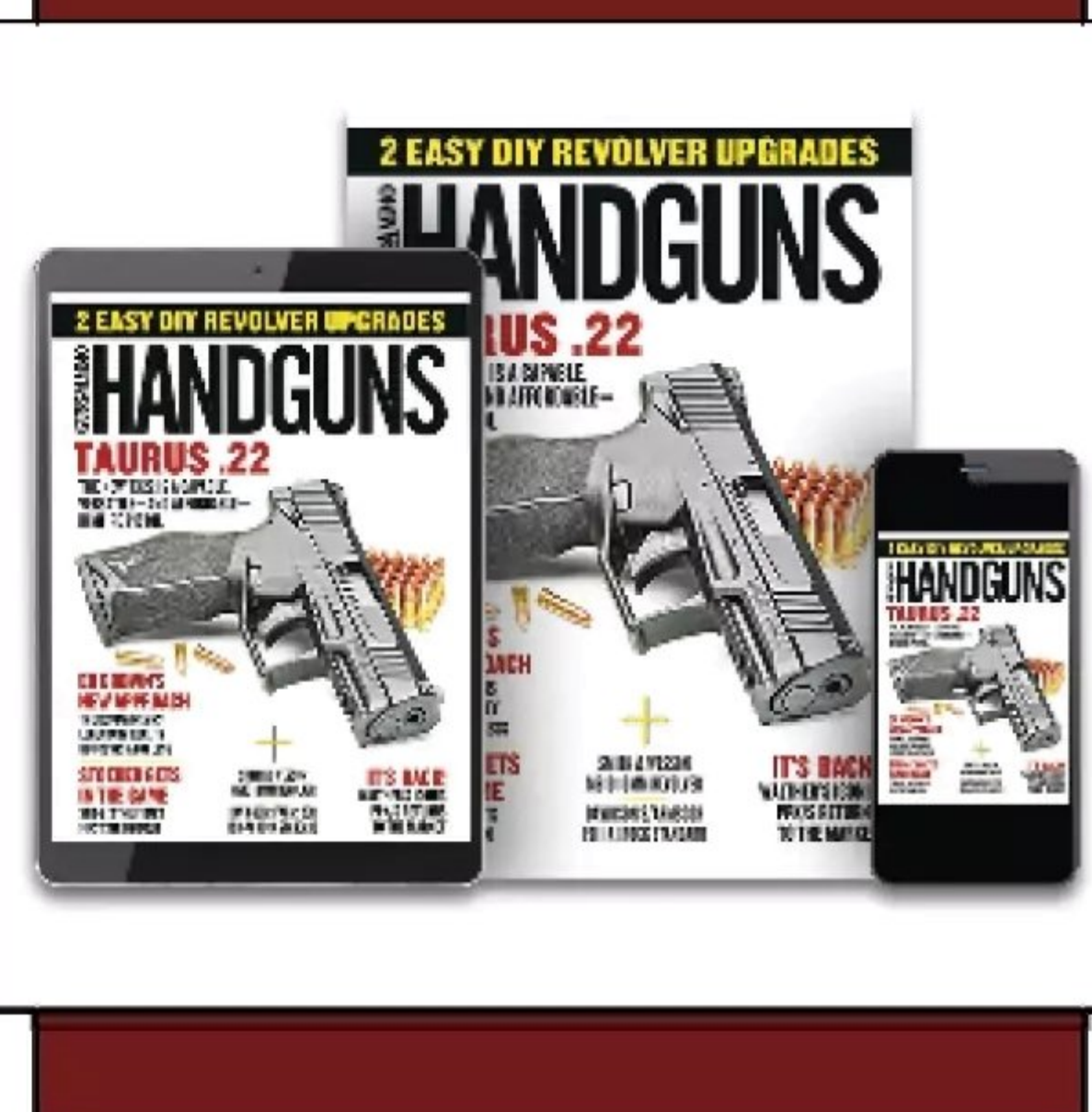
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A UNIQUE TAURUS

BY RICHARD NANCE | PHOTOS BY YAMIL SUED

**THE TS9 IS A POLYMER-FRAME
STRIKER-FIRED 9MM WITH SOME
TRICKS UP ITS SLEEVE.**

Taurus's TS9 is new to the American market, but it's no rookie. The peculiar, duty-size, striker-fired 9mm was released in 2018 after having passed the rigorous NATO pistol proof tests. Since then, it's seen action with elite Brazilian military and law enforcement units and has even been adopted by the Philippine National Police. Thanks to a government contract overproduction, the TS9 is available on the U.S. commercial market, but only for a limited time.

Striker-fired polymer-frame pistols have long been the choice of military, law enforcement and private citizens looking for an affordable, reliable fighting handgun. Most are so similar that they are difficult to tell apart without close inspection. Although the TS9 may resemble other pistols in its class, it has several notable features that separate it from the pack. But before we delve into the details, let's take a look at the basics.

The TS9 weighs 29.2 ounces. With its four-inch barrel, it has an overall length of 7.25 inches. It's 5.6 inches tall and 1.3 inches wide. The grip houses a 17-round magazine and comes with three additional interchangeable backstraps, so the TS9 can be tailored to fit the shooter's hand.

These backstraps—along with an undercut trigger guard, upswept grip with slight beavertail, shallow finger grooves along the frontstrap and textured panels surrounding the grip—make the TS9 comfortable to hold and controllable to shoot.

A three-slot Picatinny rail enables you to mount a light or light/laser unit. However, since the TS9 is not a new pistol—only new to the U.S. market—its alloy steel slide is not cut for an optic. Instead, you'll be relying on the steel three-dot white sights, which are drift adjustable. Tritium night sights are an optional upgrade. →

A UNIQUE TAURUS

← Front and rear slide serrations provide a non-slip grip surface for racking the slide or checking the chamber. The TS9 also has a loaded-chamber indicator located atop the slide. A metal rod protrudes slightly above the slide to provide visual and tactile confirmation that a round is chambered. When the chamber is empty, the loaded-chamber indicator is slightly recessed.

This is just one of the TS9's many distinctive design elements.

The TS9's ambidextrous slide stop should fall within easy reach of your thumb, whether you're right- or left-handed. Not only is the stop easy to push up after pulling the slide to the rear to lock it in place, it's big enough to use as a slide release to send the slide forward and chamber a round. Similarly,

the ambidextrous magazine release can be pressed with either thumb, making the TS9 easier to run one-handed, should injury or other circumstance relegate you to doing so.

The TS9's trigger features a blade-style safety. The blade must be depressed for the trigger to move rearward to fire the pistol. This doesn't require any extra steps to fire the pistol, but it renders it drop safe. The rear of the trigger is notched.

A flip-up, ambidextrous manual safety is integral to the trigger guard. It's a feature attributed to Austrian firearms designer Wilhelm Bubits, who worked for Glock and Caracal, and whose influence can be seen in pistols from Kimber and Steyr, among others. In the up position, the safety is on, and the trigger cannot be pulled to the rear. Unfortunately, the safety on my sample gun didn't work. It would not budge from the down/Fire position.

Another Bubits characteristic is the enclosed slide, which Taurus refers to as its anti-dust system. Unlike most modern pistols, where the ejection port extends over the top of the slide, the TS9's ejection port is completely contained on the right side.

This, combined with the fully enclosed rear slide plate, leaves few entry points for debris to enter →



▲ The TS9 has a unique safety in the trigger guard, and the takedown lever is also in the guard. The upswept backstrap and undercut trigger guard facilitate a proper grip.



▲ While the slide isn't cut for a red dot, there's an accessory rail in the frame for a light or laser. The sights are steel three-dots set in dovetails.

TAURUS TS9

TYPE: striker-fired semiautomatic

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: two 17-round mags supplied

BARREL: 4 in.

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.25/5.6/1.3 in.

WEIGHT: 29.2 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: alloy steel slide, polymer frame

SIGHTS: steel white 3-dot, drift adjustable

SAFETIES: trigger safety

TRIGGER: 3.2 lb. pull (measured)

PRICE: \$500

MANUFACTURER: Taurus, TAURUSUSA.COM

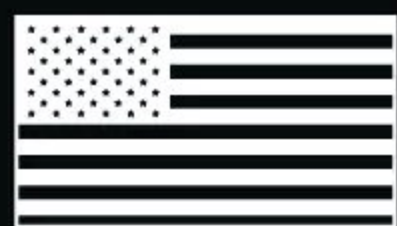


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A UNIQUE TAURUS

← the TS9, making it less prone to malfunction.

The narrower ejection port had no ill effect on performance, as I fired about 200 rounds through the TS9 without a single malfunction. I think this feature is a nice touch, especially for cops or soldiers operating in harsh environments where dirt and debris could wreak havoc on a pistol.

But Bubits’s real claim to fame is his action, which locks at the rear of the barrel as opposed to farther forward as on virtually all other semiautomatic pistols. The Taurus TS9’s rear barrel lockup results in considerably less barrel tilt than most pistols. This is apparent when you lock the TS9 slide to the rear and place it alongside another striker-fired polymer pistol.

Minimal barrel tilt translates to less felt recoil. It also means the TS9 can function reliably with a shorter feed ramp. The TS9 barrel sits lower, creating a lower bore axis, which reduces muzzle flip. Less

muzzle flip equates to faster, more accurate follow-up shots.

The TS9 has an unconventional takedown process. After removing the magazine from the pistol and ensuring there is no round in the chamber, send the slide forward. Push on the flush-fit disassembly latch, located on the inner front portion of the trigger guard.

Then press the trigger and pull the slide slightly rearward. Now the slide will come forward and lift off the frame. Remove the captured dual recoil spring and barrel to fieldstrip. Reassemble in reverse order.

The TS9 felt good in my hand, and the standard grip fit me well. Even the finger grooves naturally aligned as my fingers wrapped around the grip.

The length of the grip allowed me to get my whole hand on the gun, which is important for mitigating recoil. I could easily reach the magazine release and slide catch without having to compromise my grip. The

scalloped magazine base provides a solid gripping surface should you need to strip the magazine from the well, as would be the case when clearing a double feed.

There is a groove above the trigger guard on either side of the frame, presumably to serve as a physical index for the thumb of your support hand and the index finger of your shooting hand when it’s not on the trigger. While I am a big supporter of features that promote indexing, these grooves were too far back on the pistol for my hands.

The flat-face trigger had the expected take-up before reaching a noticeable wall. The break was clean for a striker-fired pistol. The average trigger pull weight over 10 pulls with my Lyman digital trigger pull gauge was 3.2 pounds. Trigger reset was rather long but easily discernible.

Recoil seemed negligible, even for a full-size 9mm polymer-frame pistol. This is likely attributable to the reduced barrel tilt resulting from the Bubits-style action.

After a few shots at seven yards to get a feel for the TS9, I conducted the accuracy portion of the test. Admittedly, it’s getting more difficult to focus on the front sight in indoor ranges due to the combination of reduced light and aging eyes. But since mounting an optic to the TS9 wasn’t an option, I braved on.

Results are shown in the accompanying table. While I got a few great single groups—a 1.6-inch with the Black Hills and a 1.7 with Federal Syntech Range—the most consistent was probably the Federal HST.

Overall, accuracy wasn’t bad for a \$500 fighting pistol. That said, you might wonder why not go with Taurus’s flagship model G3, which is a more affordable option. The standard G3 (\$340) is similar in length and width to the TS9 but a little shorter.

The TS9 has a less pronounced grip angle, and the TS9’s beaver- →



▲ The Bubits-style action locks at the rear of the barrel, resulting in less barrel tilt than standard designs as well as a lower bore axis.

ACCURACY RESULTS TAURUS TS9				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Federal Syntech Range JFN	115	1,102	42	2.3
Black Hills JHP + P	124	1,143	5	3.4
Federal HST JHP	124	1,143	12	3.8

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four, five-shot groups at 25 yards from a Ransom Multi Cal Steady Rest. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded on a LabRadar chronograph adjacent to the muzzle. Abbreviations: JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; JFN, jacketed flatnose

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← tail, undercut trigger guard and backstrap options give it an edge over the G3 from a comfort standpoint.

The G3's magazine and slide catch are not ambidextrous like the TS9's. The TS9 and the G3 have markedly different actions, and the G3 offers a second-strike capability, which the TS9 doesn't.

In its favor, the TS9 was fun to shoot. The gun functioned smoothly and ran flawlessly. Despite its unusual design, I found the pistol intuitive to operate, with one exception.

While the flip-up safety on my sample didn't work and I can't vouch for its ease of use, it seems cumbersome. Fortunately it can be left off if you don't want to bother with it, and having carried pistols without manual safeties for so long, I wouldn't use it even if it was an option.

Being fully ambidextrous is a huge selling point for a fighting

In its favor, the TS9 was fun to shoot. The gun functioned smoothly and ran flawlessly.

pistol. Not only can an ambi pistol accommodate both right- and left-handed shooters, but it is also much easier to shoot with your off hand, should your dominant hand or arm become injured.

Having four backstrap options is also advantageous, as this allows a shooter to get a customized grip without having to permanently modify the pistol. Unfortunately, the fact that the slide isn't cut for optics will undoubtedly be a sticking point for some would-be buyers.

Ergonomics, functionality and performance make the TS9 a viable

defensive pistol. Cost makes it a palatable one. It ships with two 17-round magazines. The matte black model has a suggested retail price of \$500, and the gray and flat dark earth models cost a dollar more. Street prices will be lower, and you could put the money saved toward tritium night sights or a light or light/laser unit.

There's a reason the Philippine National Police and elite Brazilian military and police units rely on the Taurus TS9. It's loaded with features to enhance reliability and shootability. It fills the hand, providing a full firing grip for optimal control. The Bubits-style action results in less felt recoil.

If you're looking for an oddly cool polymer-frame striker-fired 9mm, consider the TS9. It is a refreshing offering from Taurus, but with limited U.S. availability, your window of opportunity to purchase a TS9 may be fleeting. 



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SPRINGFIELD HELLCAT PRO OSP THREADED

SPRINGFIELD'S HELLCAT MICRO-COMPACT

pistol has become one of the most popular options for concealed carry because of its feature list and build quality, and because it combines a small footprint with double-digit cartridge capacity. However, there were those who felt the gun was too much—or perhaps too little—of a good thing and wanted a slightly larger grip and longer barrel without sacrificing too much of the original design's concealability.

To accommodate those who wanted to see the original Hellcat's dimensions increased slightly, Springfield offered up the Hellcat Pro, which features a longer barrel and a longer grip with more rounds in the magazine, and now the company is offering the Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded, which adds even more versatility.

The Hellcat Pro boasts a 3.7-inch barrel and, with its flush-fit 15-round magazine, measures 4.8 inches tall while the new OSP Threaded version of the Hellcat Pro comes with a 4.4-inch

forged steel 1/2x28 threaded barrel with a 1:10 twist and Springfield's Optical Sight Pistol slide cuts, which accommodate popular Shield RMSc footprint optics. A flush-fit 15-rounder and an extended 17-round mag ship with the gun. Color options include black and flat dark earth.

Many of the features that made the original Hellcat one of the most awarded handguns of all time can be found on the new OSP Threaded version as well. The new pistol has the same Adaptive Grip Texturing found on other Hellcat models, which is micro-texturing that wraps completely around the grip. That same texturing extends along the thumb and finger grooves behind the trigger, to the finger pads above the trigger guard, and onto the magazine extension on the 17-round mag.

The pistol is also equipped with a luminescent tritium front sight and tactical rack U-notch rear, which is my favorite layout of any production carry pistol on the market. The iron sights will co-wit-

SPRINGFIELD HELLCAT PRO OSP THREADED

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 15, 17

BARREL: 4.4 in., threaded 1/2x28, Melonite finish, 1:10 twist

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.2/4.8/1.0 in. (flush-fit magazine)

WEIGHT: 22 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: FDE Cerakote-finished steel slide (as tested), polymer grips

TRIGGER: 6 lb., 2 oz. pull (measured)

SIGHTS: luminescent tritium front, U-ring tactical rear; slide cut for optics

PRICE: \$710 (as tested)

MANUFACTURER: Springfield Armory, springfield-armory.com

ness with most red-dot sights designed for micro-compact guns.

Hellcat OSP slides are machined from billet steel. Black pistols feature a Melonite nitride finish on the metal, while the flat dark earth model I tested has a Cerakote surface treatment. The

frames of both guns are color matched and feature accessory rails for mounting lights and lasers.

Controls are few and simple to operate. There's a slide stop on the left side of the gun and an oval reversible magazine release. A rotating takedown lever makes it simple to disassemble the gun safely. The test pistol didn't have a manual safety, but it does have a bladed trigger safety and a firing pin block safety. These passive safeties ensure the gun can't fire until the trigger is pulled rearward. The Hellcat Pro lacks the grip safety found on Springfield's XD.

Springfield's grip is well designed, and that geometry combined with the added grip length makes this gun very easy to shoot accurately. It feels more like a full-size double-stack pistol than a carry gun in the hand, and the accuracy figures more closely mimic those of other full-size premium factory guns.

With a Holosun 407K X2 sight in place, the Springfield managed groups as small as 1.9 inches, with several groups in the two- to 2.5-inch range. That's better than the three- to four-inch five-shot groups I get with most iron-sighted carry pistols. There was even one group that clustered four shots in 0.82 inch, but the fifth round opened the group up to about two inches.

Mechanically, the Springfield worked well except for the slide's reluctance to lock back after the last round was fired. But extraction, ejection, feeding and chambering were fine. The metal mags are well-built and drop free of the gun.

The Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded is far more comfortable to shoot than true micro-compacts, and the controls are large and easy to operate. Trigger pull averaged six pounds, two ounces.

Micro-compact carry pistols are quite popular, but recently there has been a growing trend toward increasing the size of micro-compacts to create carry guns that are more manageable and enjoyable to shoot. That describes the Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded, as



▲ The Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded comes with a flush-fit 15-round magazine and a class-leading extended 17-round magazine.



▲ The Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded lacks a manual thumb safety. The magazine release is reversible, and the slide stop is large enough for easy operation.



▲ The 1/2x28 muzzle threading makes adding muzzle devices easy and generally does not require an adapter.

ACCURACY RESULTS SPRINGFIELD HELLCAT PRO OSP THREADED				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	115	1,175	10	2.5
Nosler ASP JHP	115	1,133	11	2.9
Fiocchi FMJ	115	1,174	24	3.3
Magtech FMJ	124	1,171	28	3.0
Federal Hydra-Shok Deep JHP	135	1,047	9	2.2

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups fired at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocity figures are 10-shot averages recorded on a Garmin Xero C1 Pro Chronograph at the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint

well as the SIG P365 XL and Taurus GX4XL. Comparing these three, only the Springfield has a threaded barrel, and it offers the most capacity thanks to that 17-rounder. The Springfield is a few hundredths of an inch slimmer than the other pistols and a little bit longer. It also weighs two ounces more than the other two. Price-wise, at \$667 for the black model it's the most expensive of the lot.

If you want the smallest, lightest

carry gun available then stick to the true micro-compacts like the original Hellcat. If, however, you want a gun that is pleasant to shoot and offers the capacity of a traditional full-size double-stack 9mm yet is easier to conceal, the Springfield is a solid choice. No matter which Hellcat you prefer, you'll likely be satisfied, and these guns are among the best options for concealed carry available today.



RUGER NEW MODEL BEARCAT

AT ONE TIME, ALL I HAD IN MY HUNTING battery was a Marlin Model 39 lever action. Thinking of how nice it would be to have a companion revolver chambered in the same .22 Long Rifle for small game, I walked out of the gunshop some \$55 lighter with a Ruger Bearcat under my arm.

Compared to other single-action revolvers on the market today, the Bearcat is small in stature, but boy is it long on history. The original gun was based on the classic Remington revolvers of the mid-19th century. Introduced in 1958, it was touted as the perfect companion to hunters, hikers and campers wanting a small, handy “kit” or trail gun.

It sported a solid alloy frame, plastic grips, a square-notch rear sight and Patridge front sight. It was equipped with music wire coil springs, a roll-engraved non-fluted cylinder and a brass-finished trigger guard.

The next version in 1971 was the Super Bearcat, an all-steel gun. This was followed in 1993 by the New Model Bearcat. The revolver featured rosewood grips with the famed Ruger medallion inletted at the top of each panel, and the transfer-bar safety made its debut.

From here, there were minor modifications. There was a version with a blue-finished, anodized trigger guard and ejector housing. There was a stainless model, as well as a 50th anniversary gun with special engravings and adjustable sights.

Today, in conjunction with distributor Lipsey’s, there are six models to choose from—including the Bearcat Shopkeeper with a rounded butt, and models in both blued or stainless steel with or without adjustable sights. All feature the traditional four-inch barrel.

The stainless sample shown here

is well made with a finished patina that is smooth and free of any polishing marks, especially around the tight places on the frame, barrel juncture or the hinged loading gate.

Although the gun is a somewhat miniaturized version of the famed Single Action Army revolvers, it is still large enough to be comfortable in the hands of any shooter.

Reaching for the hammer is convenient, and the loading gate was handy to load or unload the gun—although .22 Shorts can present a bit of a challenge. Other than that, pull the hammer back to half-cock, open the gate and listen to the crisp sound of the cylinder as you rotate it. Trigger pull averaged around three pounds with just a hint of creep.

In short, I was pleased all around with the Ruger Bearcat and look forward to renewing my relationship with this gun.



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