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# GUNS&AMMO **HANDGUNS** CONTENTS

JUNE/JULY 2025 | VOLUME 39, NUMBER 3 | PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY | [www.handguns.com](http://www.handguns.com)

## FEATURES

### 22 DOUBLING DOWN

By KEITH WOOD

Kimber wasn't first in the double-stack 1911 game, but its new 2K11 proves to be well worth the wait.

### 28 CONCEALED-CARRY PRODIGY

By RICHARD NANCE

Springfield shrinks its excellent double-stack 1911 for practical and concealable firepower.

### 34 BEGINNER'S LUCK

By J. SCOTT RUPP

The new Taurus GX2 is unapologetically a beginner's gun, but it's an excellent, shootable carry gun that anyone can appreciate.

### 40 DUAL THREAT

By KEITH WOOD

The Kobra Carry Dual Caliber from Ed Brown combines the best of two worlds—a Commander frame with uppers in .45 ACP and 9mm.

### 46 BRINGING THE HEAT

By BRAD FITZPATRICK

With the Fire Hawk, Nighthawk Custom has created a compensated 1911 that shoots well and doesn't look ungainly.

### 52 MOVE IT!

By RICHARD NANCE

Mobility can be key to surviving a gunfight. Here are the key things you need to know.



## DEPARTMENTS

### 6 FRONT FOCUS

### 8 SPEEDLOADS

- Handgun terminology
- Stoeger Luger .22
- Great new gear

### 18 ESSENTIALS

BRAD FITZPATRICK

Nanuk's pistol case is ideal for the traveling shooter.

### 14 EN GARDE

RICHARD NANCE

Consistency is the key to successful concealed carry.

## FIRING LINE REPORTS

### 58 S&W SHIELD PLUS CARRY COMP

By BRAD FITZPATRICK

### 62 COLT VIPER

By J. SCOTT RUPP





10

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**Bob CAMPBELL, Jeff JOHN, Stan TRZONIEC, Keith WOOD**

PRODUCTION MANAGER

**Elizabeth CAREY**

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

**Ashley HONEA**

## ENDEMIC AD SALES

SENIOR VP, ENDEMIC SALES  
**Michael SAVINO** MICHAEL.SAVINO@OUTDOORSRG.COM

NATIONAL ENDEMIC SALES  
**Jim McCONVILLE** (440) 791-7017

WESTERN REGION  
**Hutch LOONEY** hutch@hlooney.com

EAST COAST REGION  
**Pat BENTZEL** (717) 695-8095

## NATIONAL AD SALES

SENIOR DIRECTOR NON-ENDEMIC SALES  
**Kevin DONLEY** KEVIN.DONLEY@OUTDOORSRG.COM

NATIONAL ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE  
**Carl BENSON** CARL.BENSON@OUTDOORSRG.COM

DIRECT RESPONSE ADVERTISING/NON-ENDEMIC  
**Anthony SMYTH** (914) 409-4202

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## Calling All Oddballs

Recently we received a letter from a reader looking for information on the .22 Jet. Our published sources found no mention of it, and an internet search turned up scant info that couldn't even agree on what bullet diameter it used, which was what prompted the reader's question.

That got us to thinking about all the oddball calibers chambered in handguns over the years. A lot of them were in the old Contender platform, but there were some obscure ones in revolvers and even semiautos. What offbeat cartridges have you shot—or maybe are currently shooting? Let us know at [HANDGUNS@OUTDOORSG.COM](mailto:HANDGUNS@OUTDOORSG.COM).

## More Revolvers, Please

I wish you had more articles about revolvers. I would like an article about the S&W Model 627.

MIKE DENTON

*Ah, we get this one a lot. We love revolvers, too, and we're always chasing down the latest models. We've got a review of the new Colt Viper in this issue, and right now we're trying to get test samples of the no-lock S&Ws, plus the company's new .32 H&R Magnums. I have the new Taurus 650 and 850 here now and will be reviewing them in an upcoming issue. As for the Model 627, we did cover it years ago, and there haven't been any new models offered for a while. Maybe we'll revisit it at some point.—Scott*

## Top IDPA Guns—2024 Nationals

The International Defensive Pistol Association held its national championships last summer at the CMP range in Talladega, Alabama, and the group recently published survey results of the pistols used at the match. "Other" led the field at 33 percent, but **GLOCK** was second at 18 percent, followed by **CZ** at 10 percent. **SIG SAUER** garnered nine percent, with **CANIK** and **SMITH & WESSON** tied at eight percent. **WILSON COMBAT**, **SPRINGFIELD ARMORY** and **STI** all finished at five percent.



## 'Handguns' TV Now Airing On Outdoor Channel

The popular "Handguns" television show, now in its 11th season, will be broadcast on Outdoor Channel in addition to Sportsman Channel beginning this year. The show will air every Wednesday at 9:30 p.m. Eastern, with additional airings throughout the week. Consult your local listings.

Remember, you can also catch past seasons of "Handguns"—as well as a ton of other shooting, hunting and fishing shows—via the My Outdoor TV app. Visit [MyOUTDOORTV.COM](http://MyOUTDOORTV.COM) to start your free trial.

**STREAMLIGHT'S** ProTac HL-X handheld light has been chosen as the issue flashlight for students at the FBI's Firearms Training Unit at the agency's academy. The multi-fuel light delivers up to 1,000 lumens and 27,000 candela with a 330-meter beam distance.



Law enforcement agencies in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland and Finland will be using **SPEER'S** 124-grain Gold Dot 9mm load as part of a seven-year contract renewal.

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# COMING TO TERMS

## EXPLAINING SOME JARGON COMMONLY USED IN GUN REVIEWS.

By J. Scott Rupp

**AT HANDGUNS WE TRY TO MAKE EVERY** article easily understood by everyone—whether you're a beginner or advanced—but having jargon creep into reviews is unavoidable. Here are some often-used terms that can help some of you make better sense of the articles you read in this and other gun magazines.

**1911:** A single-action semiautomatic pistol designed by John Browning in 1911. Long a military sidearm, it has maintained a loyal following among shooters due to its ergonomics, dependability and trigger pull.

**Backstrap:** The rear of a handgun's grip or frame. Many polymer-frame pistols today feature interchangeable backstraps to easily modify fit.

**Break:** When referring to a trigger pull, the point at which the hammer or firing pin is released to strike the cartridge's primer.

**Checkering:** A type of texturing with intersecting lines, usually expressed in lines per inch. The more lines per inch, the finer the checkering.

**Commander 1911:** A 1911 with a barrel in the 4.25-inch range.

**Compensator:** Integral machining or added muzzle device that redirects firing gases in order to reduce felt recoil and muzzle rise.

**Co-witness:** The ability (or lack thereof) to see an iron-sight picture through the window of a reflex sight—enabling the handgun's open sights to be used if a reflex sight fails or becomes unusable.

**Creep:** Movement in a trigger after the full pull resistance is encountered but before the hammer or firing pin releases. Less creep is better.

**Dehorn:** Removing sharp edges on pistols for improved carrying

and handling qualities. Also called “melting.”

**DLC:** Diamond-like carbon. A very hard finish applied to firearms that also has extremely low friction. It's highly resistant to wear and self-lubricating.

**Double action/single action:** In a revolver, the double-action pull cocks and releases the hammer; in single action the hammer is cocked manually. With a semiauto, the double-action pull also cocks and releases the hammer, but the cycling action of the slide cocks the hammer so the next shot is single action. In both cases, the double-action pull is long and heavy while the single-action pull is shorter and lighter.

**EDM:** Not electronic dance music but rather electrical discharge machining. The method produces parts with extremely tight tolerances.

**Fiber optic:** A type of sight in-



corporating a light-transmitting plastic rod that's highly visible in the presence of ambient light.

**Footprint:** This refers to the interface between a reflex sight and a slide cut or adapter plate that allows such a sight to be mounted on a handgun. Sights from different makers may share the same footprint.

**Frontstrap:** The forward part of the frame, where the fingers of the non-shooting hand curl around to grip the gun. Can be smooth or textured.

**G10:** A popular type of grip-panel material made of fiberglass laminate that's durable and can be made in a variety of textures and colors.

**Government 1911:** A 1911 with the original-length five-inch barrel.

**HRT:** Design characteristics originally sought by the FBI's elite Hostage Rescue Team in its search for a duty pistol. These are sometimes incorporated into high-end production or custom pistols.

**Lowered and/or flared:** An ejection port that provides extra clearance for spent brass to exit the gun, improving reliability.

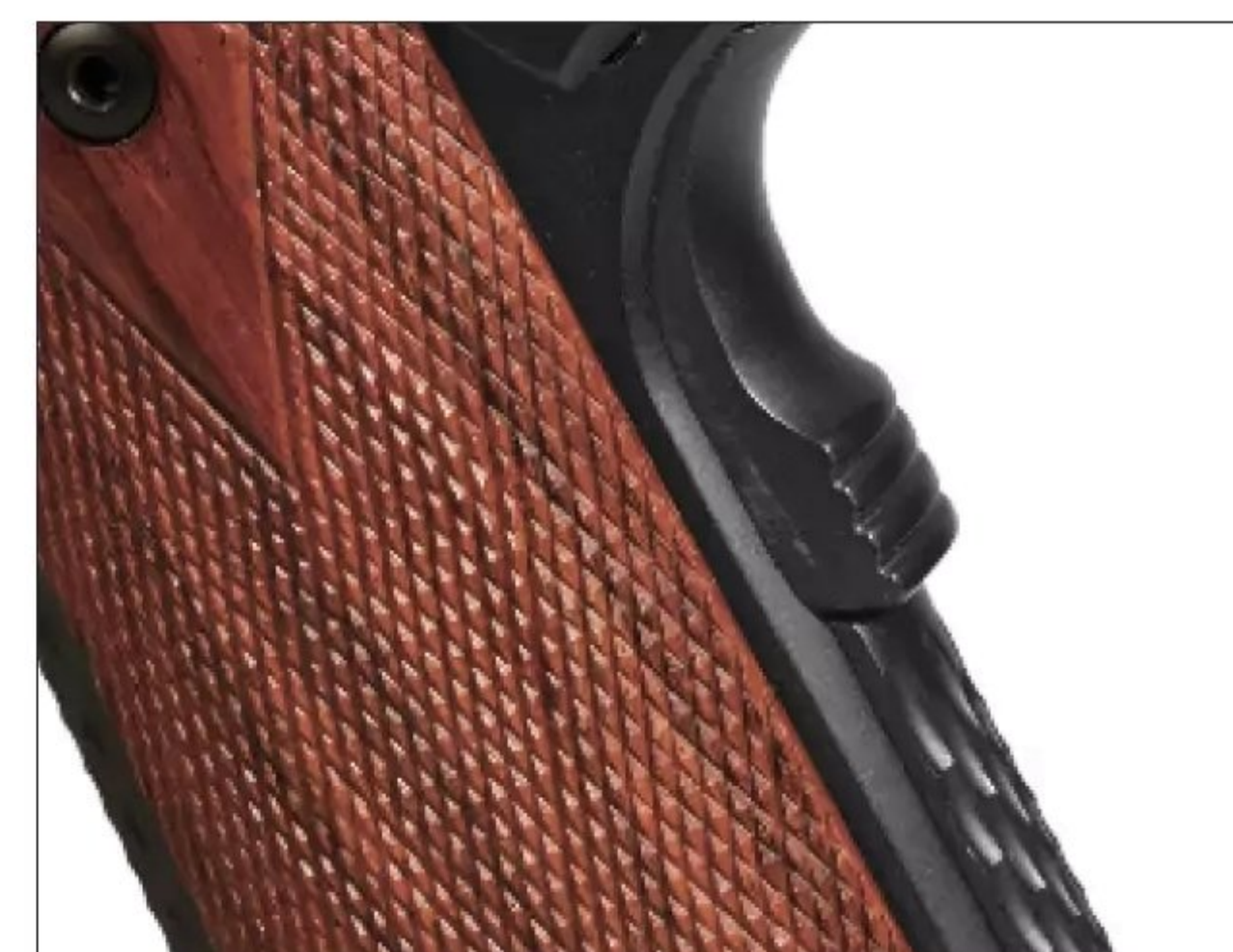
**Mainspring housing:** A part on the rear of a 1911 frame, below the grip safety, incorporating a spring vital to the gun's function.

**Memory bump:** A protuberance on a 1911 grip safety that makes it easier to deactivate the safety.

**MIM:** Metal injection molding. An inexpensive way to produce firearm parts—inexpensive because it's a one-step process requiring no extra finishing

**Nitride:** A nitrogen-based metal finish chosen for its toughness and corrosion resistance.

**Novak style:** The Novak Sight Co. designed the LoMount, a low-profile sight that's a top choice for



**▲ With a double-action/single-action semiauto like the CZ-75 (l.), the double-action first pull cocks the hammer and fires the gun; the cycling slide then cocks the gun for a single-action pull on the next shot. A memory bump on a 1911 grip safety like on this Ed Brown (r.)—makes it easier to deactivate.**

defensive uses. Some gun makers use actual Novak sights; some use facsimiles, hence “Novak style.”

**Offhand:** The hand playing a support role and doesn't fire the handgun. Also referred to as “weak” hand. When used as one word, “offhand,” it refers to shooting from the standing position.

**Officer's 1911:** A short 1911, with a barrel length around 3.5 inches.

**Overtravel:** Trigger movement that occurs after the hammer or firing pin has been released. Some pistols can be adjusted to reduce or eliminate this; some have molded-in stops to halt that movement.

**Polymer pistol:** A semiautomatic built on a polymer frame.

**PVD:** Physical vapor deposition forms a thin film of a metal finish via a vacuum process. Titanium nitride is commonly used.

**Red dot:** See “Reflex sight.”

**Reflex sight:** Often referred to as a “red dot,” this refers to a type of sight in which focused light is projected onto a lens—creating a red or green dot that's visible to the shooter and simplifies aiming.

**Reset:** The point at which the trigger, on its travel to return to its forward-most position, is again ready to fire. Shorter resets can make for faster follow-up shots.

**Serration:** A saw-like or toothed

pattern machined into parts to impart a non-slip surface.

**Stacking:** A point in a double-action revolver trigger pull where the resistance increases. Usually occurs to some degree; less is better.

**Stippling:** While stippling is strictly speaking a repeating series of dots, the term has become interchangeable with “texturing.” Both can indicate a pattern or series of patterns molded into a pistol's grip to improve control.

**Striker-fired:** A cartridge's primer is struck by a spring-driven firing pin instead of a hammer. The spring is pre-loaded when the slide cycles, reducing the amount of force necessary to pull the trigger.

**Take-up:** When referring to trigger pull, the amount of slack that has to be “taken up” before encountering the full resistance of the trigger pull.

**Topstrap:** The top portion of a revolver frame above the cylinder.

**Three-dot:** A sighting arrangement that pairs two dots on either side of a rear sight's notch with a single dot on the front sight. The dots can be white or colored/luminescent paint, fiber optic, tritium or some combination thereof.

**Tritium:** A radioactive element that glows in the dark and is often used in night sights.



OLD SCHOOL | BY BOB CAMPBELL

# STOEGER LUGER .22

## AS A TEEN I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO

fire many of the newest handguns that my father had purchased, and a piece I remember well was the Stoeger Luger .22 semiautomatic. It was traded off long ago, but recently I was able to obtain an original example in decent condition.

The Stoeger Luger is an American-made .22 styled after the original German Luger. During the time period the Stoeger was introduced, a similar pistol was imported by Erma, but they are not the same gun.

Stoeger owned rights to the Luger name in America and introduced its .22 pistol in 1969. It is a straight blowback with a nicely designed toggle that recoils with the bolt. While the P 08 9mm actually uses the toggle for locking and unlocking, the Stoeger Luger .22 uses a heavy bolt, and its sheet-metal toggle is for looks. And it looks pretty good.

The majority of these pistols featured a 4.5-inch barrel. A very few were manufactured with a 5.5-inch barrel, but I have seen only one. Barrels are steel with a good-looking blue finish.

The frame is aluminum, with a grip angle close to the original Luger. The anodizing in used examples seems to have held up well. The pistol features the stylized Stoeger emblem on the receiver and a nicely cut “Luger” inside a wreath motif on the receiver. Plain wood grips are nicely fitted and stained.

Based on legend and references, Stoeger made a Luger with a left-hand safety. While the safety is marked “F” and “S” for Fire and Safe on both sides, mine is a right-hand safety version with a standard push-button magazine release. The



▲ The Stoeger Luger .22 is an aluminum-frame pistol adorned with wood grips. ▼ The sheet-metal toggle is well made and well finished.

trigger action isn't bad at all, breaking at four pounds on my used gun.

Magazines are metal types and seem to have held up well over the years. Occasionally spare magazines are seen at a fair price on eBay or GunBroker. Oddly enough my example features a magazine with a loading button to depress the follower on the right side of the magazine instead of the usual left. I cannot recall how the original was set up, but I think I would have noticed this.

By 1979 sales were low, and the original was discontinued. Reports of a steel-frame version being manufactured until 1985 persist. Stoeger doesn't have records, and I have never seen even an image of a steel-frame gun or a similarly rumored target version.

My pistol looks nice, but the safety lever doesn't function. While the Stoeger Luger has had a bad reputation in terms of reliability, mine ran through several magazines without a hitch. It is fun to watch that



toggle move quickly as you empty a 10-round magazine. I fired 150 cartridges without cleaning or lubricating the pistol.

Accuracy is pretty fair. It isn't a Ruger Standard Model, but it isn't a dog either. I would not purchase the gun as a shooter or for small game hunting; there are better and less expensive modern guns.

My sample was purchased for \$200. I spotted one at Guns America for \$395 as of this writing. I've seen others for just a little more with an original box and used examples in good condition for \$250. The Stoeger .22 Luger is a fun piece and affordable collectible, and a pleasant diversion as a plinker.



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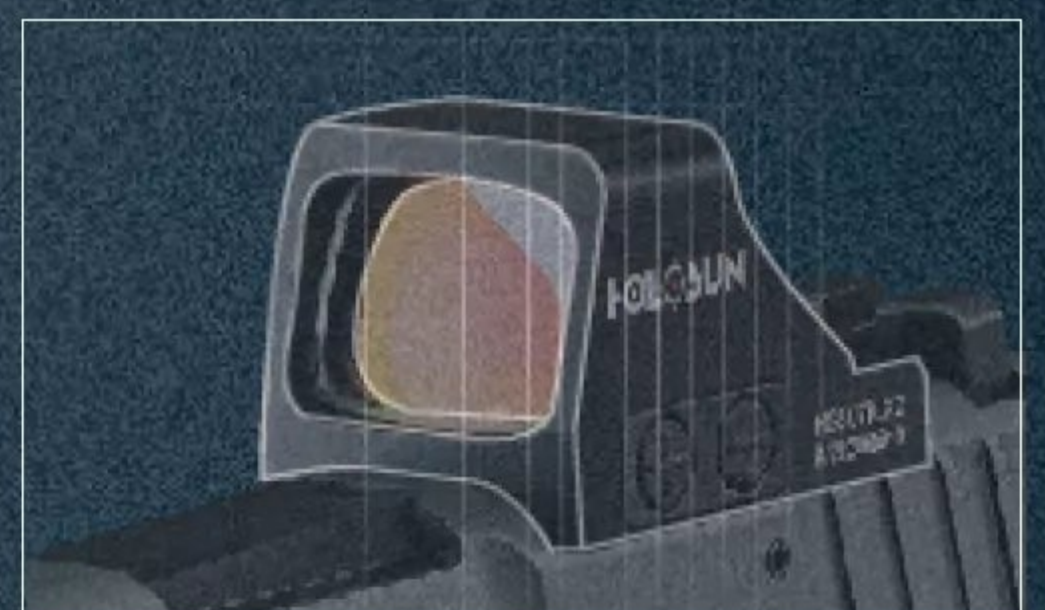
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[FNAMERICA.COM](http://FNAMERICA.COM)



## GUNS & GEAR | BY J. SCOTT RUPP



### < STOEGER STR-9 THINLINE

The Thinline may not be available right when you read this, but it will be very soon. When it does hit the shelves, you'll find a slender version of the micro-compact STR-9MC, albeit with a longer grip and magazine extensions for better handling and more accurate shooting. It's still only an inch wide, and it features compensator cuts on the slide and tritium night sights. The gun ships with 14- and 16-round magazine, with three 10-rounders in restrictive states.

{ \$529, [STOEGERINDUSTRIES.COM](http://STOEGERINDUSTRIES.COM) }



### > C&G COVERT S&W BODYGUARD 2.0 HOLSTERS

The new Coverts include inside-the-waistband (shown with Alpha upgrade) and outside-the-waistband models. The IWB is a minimalist holster with a built-in concealment wedge, and it features adjustable retention. The Alpha upgrade brings spring-steel clips and a concealment wing. The OWB has a built-in Kickramp and is customizable for cant and retention. Belt loops are 1.75 inches. Covert holsters are built from cutting-edge 3D scanning and CAD modeling, and their tolerance is just 0.003 inch for a perfect fit. Custom colors available.

{ Starting at \$70, [CANDGHOLSTERS.COM](http://CANDGHOLSTERS.COM) }



### < FEDERAL HST .44 MAGNUM

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{ \$56, [FEDERALPREMIUM.COM](http://FEDERALPREMIUM.COM) }

### > STREAMLIGHT STINGER 2020 S PIGGYBACK

More a work light than a defensive tool, the 2020 S has a head-mounted switch that offers different intensity modes, with a max output of 2,000 lumens. It's powered by a protected lithium-ion rechargeable battery pack and can be charged inside the light with existing Stinger chargers or via a PiggyBack charger that juices up both the flashlight and an extra battery. The light has 25,000 candela for a 315-meter beam distance on max power. Run times range from two hours to 24 hours, depending on intensity. The light is 7.7 inches long and weighs 12 ounces.

{ \$230-\$333, [STREAMLIGHT.COM](http://STREAMLIGHT.COM) }



### > MAGSMITH PISTOL MAG LOADER

This new loader can load up to 18 rounds instantly, making quick work of the toughest mag springs. Rounds are placed on a tray and then pushed down into the magazine, kind of like a stripper clip except that the device employs a handgrip pusher that capitalizes on hand and arm strength instead of fingers and thumbs. It's 9mm only and is magazine specific, a list that includes Beretta, Taurus, Glock (115-grain ammo only), HK and various SIG magazines.

{ \$60, [MAGSMITH.COM](http://MAGSMITH.COM) }







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# CONSISTENCY IS KING

## CARRYING THE SAME WAY ALL THE TIME IS THE WAY TO GO.

### AS GOOD GUYS AND GALS, WE DON'T GET

to choose the time or place we may be forced to protect ourselves or someone else. That's the bad guy's prerogative. He gets a head start and usually has at least a hasty plan of attack. By carrying a concealed handgun consistently, you can mitigate the bad guy's advantage and tilt the odds of winning in your favor.

Of course, the defensive use of a handgun is predicated on the fact that you have one with you. Since bad guys aren't confined to the bad side of town, you should carry whenever it's legal to do so. But having a gun is only one aspect of concealed carry consistency. To the extent possible, you should carry the same gun in the same holster, worn in the same location, with the same type of cover garment.

If you own only one handgun, that's obviously what you'll be carrying. If you own more than one gun, resist the urge to develop a concealed-carry rotation. That's not to say you can't wear a smaller gun in warm weather and a larger one in cold weather.

That makes sense. A bigger gun tends to be easier to shoot and have a higher capacity, but it's harder to conceal. Conversely, a smaller gun is likely harder to shoot and holds fewer rounds but will be easier to conceal and more comfortable to wear.

Also, when you're switching carry guns only a couple times a year, you should be familiar enough with both guns to get by. Maybe you opt for the snubnose revolver during warm weather, when your cover garment is only a T-shirt. Then, when the weather cools, heavier clothing will



Alfredo Rico photo

**▲ Sticking with the same gun, holster and carry style helps assure you will be able to perform under duress.**

allow you to easily to conceal a bigger gun.

The real problem arises when you're one of those people who carries a different gun every day of the week. You may be tempted to carry a double-action snubbie one day and a 1911 the next, but swapping between handguns with dramatically different functionality, ergonomics and calibers is ill-advised. In a defensive situation, the last thing you need to be thinking about is how to disengage the safety of your pistol, the nuances of the trigger, or whether you're expecting to see a red dot or align iron sights when you drive the gun to the target.

Even if you always carry the same gun, you could run into trouble if you frequently swap holsters. Imagine trying to draw your gun in response to an imminent threat only to realize the holster you put on this morning has a retention device. As you're tugging frantically on your gun, what do you think the bad guy's doing?

There's also a big difference between carrying outside the waistband (OWB) and inside the waistband (IWB). OWB is more comfortable for most people to wear because it keeps the grip of your gun away from your body. For the same reason, a gun worn OWB is easier to draw. Of course, with the gun worn farther from the body, an OWB carried handgun is harder to conceal than one worn IWB.

IWB carry keeps your gun close to your body for better concealment. Since the bottom portion of the holster is tucked into your pants, IWB also enables you to wear a shorter cover garment. On the flip side, IWB tends to be less comfortable, as the gun is pressed against your body. It's also more difficult to draw because there's less room for your thumb to wrap around the grip.

Where you wear your holstered gun matters too. Even if you carry the same gun and holster combination, moving your rig around





The acquisition, ownership, possession and use of firearms are heavily regulated. Some models may not be legally available in your state or locale. Whatever your purpose for lawfully acquiring a firearm – know the law, get trained and shoot safely.

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← introduces another variable. You might think you're too smart to forget where your gun is worn, but under duress you'll likely revert to reaching for where your gun is usually carried rather than where it's currently positioned.

As a cop, I remember having switched to an external ballistic vest carrier, which enabled me to store more of my equipment across my torso as opposed to on my duty belt. The first few times I reached for an item on my duty belt that was now carried on my vest carrier were nearly panic inducing.

Even though I'd practiced drawing handcuffs, a Taser, pepper spray and magazines from my vest carrier prior to hitting the streets, there was still a period where under a little stress, my hand reached for where an item

used to be worn instead of where it was at the time.

My sidearm was always worn in the three o'clock position on my duty belt, but imagine reaching for your gun on your hip and it not being there. This may be something you're able to recover from, but it may also give the threat a head start you can't overcome. Carrying on your hip one day and in the appendix position the next is asking for trouble.

Even something as seemingly innocuous as the type of garment you wear to conceal your gun matters. What you carry and where it's worn are key factors in determining the best garment to conceal it.

If you opt for appendix carry, your holster and garment selection is a no-brainer. You'll be carrying IWB with a closed-front garment like a T-

shirt or a buttoned or zipped shirt or jacket. Here your off hand normally lifts the garment to draw your gun. For OWB carry on or behind the hip, an open-front garment like an unbuttoned shirt or unzipped jacket is easier to draw from because your dominant hand merely sweeps the garment back before gripping the gun.

You can easily see where consistency would come into play here. Not only are the positions not the same, clearing the cover garment and the draw process are entirely different.

It's fine to experiment with different guns, holsters and concealment methods, but once you decide on a combination you like, stick to it. Should you need to draw your gun in a defensive situation, that familiarity will serve you well. 



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# POLAR-BEAR TOUGH

**NANUK'S 909 PISTOL CASE ENSURES YOUR GUN CAN SURVIVE THE WORST.**

**I TRAVEL WITH HANDGUNS FREQUENTLY,** so having a reliable locking pistol case is a necessity. During the past decade I've used multiple cases, but the Nanuk 909 (\$87) has become my favorite. Its durable design stands up to abuse, yet it's not as heavy or burdensome as competing cases.

The Nanuk cases have an NK-7 resin outer shell. NK-7 is a polypropylene with special additives that was designed specifically for Nanuk cases, and it provides extreme durability with minimal mass. It's also resistant to shifts in temperature, which makes the Nanuk 909 suitable for work in cold environments.

The 909 case features multi-level polyurethane foam, and it's customizable so you can make the most of the interior space and get a perfect fit for your handgun, even if it wears an optic or a light.

Many cases simply "sandwich" the gun between two layers of foam and rely on friction to hold it in position, but case manufacturers who expose their products to serious abuse like long drops onto hard surfaces have told me that friction simply isn't enough. My 909 has clearly taken a beating at the hands of baggage handlers, but the guns never shifted.

Latches are another important feature. Nanuk uses PowerClaw latches that seal the case to ensure moisture won't seep in. These over-size nylon "claws" bite forcefully on both halves of the case, and the integrated slide lock ensures the case will not open if dropped. Pressing the latch buttons releases the slide locks.

Each Nanuk 909 is equipped with an automatic pressure release



**A** Nanuk cases are waterproof, dustproof and impact resistant, and they're among the most durable on the market. **V** The PowerClaw nylon latches are secure, and the heavy-duty, beveled locking tab resists damage.

system. Pressure changes create a vacuum that seals watertight gun cases closed, but the Nanuk's valve allows the case to be opened when pressures would have sealed other waterproof cases.

Nanuk's pressure release system is designed so air can travel through the system but water cannot. The design is so effective that Nanuk cases are often used as dive cases by photographers. Most gun owners don't need a case that remains waterproof while diving, but it's safe to say your guns won't get wet if they're locked in a Nanuk 909. It's even buoyant to 12.9 pounds.

Locking tabs are critically important, too, and minor differences in manufacturing can have a major impact. On cheap locking tabs you can often twist the lock with enough force to damage or even break the locking points. The Nanuk 909 has a



minimum of a quarter-inch of NK-7 resin shell surrounding the locking tab, so try as you might—and I have—you cannot damage the lock tabs.

The tabs are also beveled. When locks are twisted and rotated during transit, the force of the lock against the locking tab can damage the tab. The Nanuk's beveled tabs are immune to such abuse.

Gun case handles should be comfortable and durable, and the Nanuk's handle is both. The soft-touch grip surface makes the case



comfortable to carry, and it also folds flat against the body of the case. That's key because handles take a real beating if they don't fold flat against the case.

The handle of the Nanuk 909 is very dense and durable. At its narrowest point it measures just under an inch wide, pretty sturdy for a case that only weighs just over two pounds empty.

The exterior of the Nanuk 909 measures 12.6x9x4.4 inches. The interior measures 11.4x7 inches, providing 4.8 liters of space for storing a full-size pistol and at least one magazine. With a bit of geometric wizardry you can store a couple magazines and even a box of ammunition in many instances.

I customized my Nanuk 909 to fit

my Glock G43. The interior foam is quite dense and not as easy to customize as cheaper pick-and-pluck interiors. I found it was easiest to outline the gun and use a knife to carefully cut around the exterior dimensions. I also cut out spaces for the magazine and ammo box. The entire customization process took less than 20 minutes.

The Nanuk has an IPX7 waterproof rating, and to test it I left it in the water for 15 minutes, and not only was the interior dry but the case floated. Since there's no exterior metal on the Nanuk, I simply wiped it down and went on to the next test. For that I dropped the case on gravel from three feet, and aside from a few minor scratches, everything inside was good.

I like that the case has no hard corners to catch, only rounded edges. The hinges are durable, and the handle is easy to grasp and tucks neatly out of place. The PowerClaw latches lock up firmly, and despite traveling with this case on multiple occasions, the padlock tabs are still holding up well.

Guns are big investments, and you want a case that will protect them when you travel. That's why after a couple years of use I thought the Nanuk would be the ideal firearm accessory to evaluate in this column. Hopefully I'll never find my gun case floating along a river, but if I do at least my firearm will be dry. The Nanuk 909 isn't cheap, but it's money well spent if you travel with your handguns. 



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

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

other handgun-related topics.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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







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# DOUBLING DOWN

**RENOWNED 1911 MAKER KIMBER INTRODUCES ITS FIRST DOUBLE-STACK VERSION, THE 2K11.**

**BY KEITH WOOD**





**T**he year is 2025 but, based on the handgun market, we may want to call it 2011. It seems that everyone is making their own version of the 2011, also known as the double-stack 1911. Kimber, one of the best-known names in the 1911 world, took its time to engineer its own high-capacity 2011-style pistol. The new 2K11 is evidence that rushing to be the first to market isn't always the best plan. This well-executed handgun is evidence of a well-crafted mix of design, engineering, machining and assembly.

The Kimber 2K11 is offered in two primary versions: the optics-ready 2K11 (OR) and the optics-ready and tricked-out 2K11 Target (OR). Each of the 2K11 models is available in both .45 ACP and 9mm Luger. I tested the 2K11 (OR) chambered in .45. The 2K11 is built using the basic design concepts associated with the 2011 handguns but with several very well-thought-out and specific tweaks.

The heart of the 2K11 is a sub-frame, fully CNC machined from stainless steel. This frame is the serialized part and houses all the fire-control parts. Below the frame is the grip module which, instead of being molded from polymer, is machined from aluminum. The steel frame is coated with diamond-like carbon (DLC) while the aluminum components are Type III hard-coat anodized. Both are matte black.

Kimber's designers are not afraid to create intricate lines to show off the company's fabrication prowess, and the 2K11 is no exception. The machining on the frame is impressive. The dust cover, which is built with an integral accessory rail, tapers forward so the forward edge blends seamlessly with the end mill saddle cut on the slide.

The slide stop sits inside a pocket that is cut into the frame, and there is an HRT cut on the opposite side where the slide stop pin is exposed. The tail end of the frame is cut for a high-swept beavertail grip →

Michael Anschuetz photo



DOUBLING DOWN

← safety with a large memory bump that ensures a shooter’s grip will easily disengage it.

The aluminum grip module, which includes the trigger guard, is machined with bordered grip surfaces. The sides and frontstrap are seamlessly checkered with flat-topped diamonds that don’t bite the hand or cut your clothing.

The backstrap, which includes both the mainspring housing and the surfaces surrounding it, is also cut with the same pattern.

As with any double-stack of this type, the grip circumference on the 2K11 is relatively large, so the gripping surface becomes very important when it comes to controlling recoil—especially in the .45

ACP chambering. The textures of the 2K11 grips do a great job in that respect.

The magazine well is beveled to allow mags to slide in easily, and it’s free of sharp edges or other snag points. For the Target model, Kimber enlisted the help of custom pistolsmith Stan Chen to take things a step further.

Chen is one of the most sought-after and talented men in the 1911 trade, and his parts are well-known for their performance. Chen designed a magazine well specifically for the 2K11, matching the overall style and aesthetics of the pistol and drastically increasing the size of the opening.

The good news for those purchasing the non-Target model is that Kimber plans to offer the Chen-designed extended mag well as an accessory you can install yourself on the standard (OR).

Let’s be honest: The reason that companies such as Kimber are still producing handguns based on a 114-year-old pistol is because of the trigger. Try as they might, few designers have come up with a fire-control mechanism that is more shootable than that of the 1911. The trigger is why we are here.

The trigger on the 2K11 did not disappoint. Kimber used a smooth-face flat aluminum trigger that is skeletonized with cuts that suggest the letter K. The trigger on my sample gun broke cleanly and consistently at 2.75 pounds. The reset was short and tactile. This was one of the best factory handgun triggers I’ve tested in recent memory.

The slide stop on the 2K11 is a standard 1911 style with a checkered pad and a tasteful bevel around the body. The ambidextrous manual safety levers are extended and easily manipulated without adding significant width. The cut-away hammer has a flat spur that is checkered. The magazine catch is extended but not obscenely large and is also checkered.



**A** The extended ambi safety levers are easily manipulated without adding significant width. The smooth-face flat aluminum trigger is one of the best factory handgun triggers Wood has ever tested.



**A** The optic-ready 2K11 uses an adapter plate (l., not included) to mount a red-dot sight, and plates are available from Kimber. The rear sight is part of the slide cover plate (r.) and is not adjustable.

| ACCURACY RESULTS   KIMBER 2K11 |                     |                       |                 |                  |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| .45 ACP                        | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Muzzle Velocity (fps) | Std. Dev. (fps) | Avg. Group (in.) |
| Hornady American Gunner JHP    | 185                 | 775                   | 8               | 2.4              |
| Federal Punch JHP              | 230                 | 849                   | 12              | 2.2              |
| American Eagle TSJ             | 230                 | 775                   | 10              | 3.2              |

**Notes:** Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups fired at 25 yards with iron sights from a Target Shooting Inc. Model 1500 rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots using a Garmin Xero C1. Abbreviations: JHP, jacketed hollow-point; TSJ, total synthetic jacket



Like the sub-frame, the slide is machined on site from a stainless steel bullet. This is one of the areas where the machinists really showed off their skill. The slide is tri-topped, but those cuts are beveled once more, creating six different planes across the top radius.

There are front and rear cocking surfaces that, instead of being simply serrated, feature intricate machine cuts. Visually, these cuts remind me of the cocking surfaces on the classic SIS 1911s Kimber produced during the early 2000s but with a geometric flair.

The ejection port is generously cut and flared. After putting several boxes of ammo through the 2K11 there were no brass marks on the finish, which means that cases have ejected cleanly without contacting the outside of the slide. The gun features an external extractor and a frame-mounted ejector.

This model is equipped with iron sights and is also provisioned for the mounting of an optic. The front sight, made for Kimber by Dallas-based Tag Precision, uses a green fiber-optic insert. My pistol also shipped with a kit that included an extra green fiber-optic tube along with orange, red and black options, as well as the tool to change out the insert.

The rear sight is a U-shaped notch and has a serrated black face. It is not adjustable, as it's part of the cover plate, which you remove in order to mount an optic. The Target model has an adjustable rear sight.

Adapter plates are available for each of the common optic footprints. Kimber supplied my test sample with a plate intended for the Trijicon RMR/SRO. Four Torx fasteners secure a C&H Precision mounting plate to the slide, and the sight itself is then secured to the plate.

It's worth noting that the sight isn't simply screwed into threaded holes on the plate; T-nuts are used to sandwich the plate between the sight and the nuts. This is a far more



**▲ The ejection port is generously cut and flared, and it shows off the fluted exterior of the barrel's chamber. The slide stop hole is treated to an HRT cut on the right side.**



**▲ Twisting the full-length, two-piece guide rod locks it in a compressed position for easy removal. The barrel's enlarged muzzle diameter locks into the slide recess without a bushing.**

secure system than I've seen on some optic mounts.

While my test gun came with an optic plate, it is my understanding that optic-ready guns do not include this plate. These can be purchased on Kimber's website for the RMR, Shield RMSc, Leupold DeltaPoint Pro, Aimpoint Acro and Holosun 509T sight footprints. The plates retail for \$70. Plates do not include a rear sight, so once you go to the adapter plate, you have no iron-sight backup.

I did not have a Trijicon sight

readily available during my time with the 2K11, so I did not mount an optic, instead relying on the iron sights for the range work.

The five-inch stainless steel barrel locks into the front of the slide without using a bushing. Instead of a tapered bull profile, the lockup is achieved by a forward section with a larger diameter. That section is slightly offset to allow the slide to function when the barrel unlocks. The beveled crown looks cool and keeps the 5R rifling out of harm's way.



## DOUBLING DOWN

← At the breech end, the barrel is ramped and fully supported. The feed ramp is polished mirror smooth for reliable feeding. The outside of the chamber section of the barrel is fluted for visual appeal, and the hood is notched to provide a visual loaded-chamber indicator. The barrel is finished with a high polish and coated with a coyote brown PVD finish.

The recoil system employs a twist on the traditional full-length guide rod. Instead of two rods threaded together, this tool-less setup is pretty ingenious. With the slide pressed to the rear, the exposed guide rod is rotated 180 degrees counterclockwise. This action cams the rod over, capturing the 16-pound flat-wire recoil spring and locking the assembly so it can be removed from the rear once the slide is off the frame. The system is super simple and works as advertised.

The 2K11 uses 2011-style magazines manufactured by Check-Mate Magazines in Thomasville, Georgia. These hardened steel mags with aluminum base pads are extremely well-made and should stand up to hard use.

Three 13-round magazines are included with the 2K11; additional magazines are available from Kimber for \$60. These magazines extend 0.85 inch beyond the frame when locked into place. The 9mm version ships with one flush-fit 17-round mag and two extended 20-round versions.

Overall, the fit and finish of the 2K11 are very nice. The lines of the gun are clean and crisp, but aside from the front sight there are no sharp edges, so running the gun doesn't require any first aid.

Most of the gun wears a matte or satin finish, but the flats of the slide are polished. Unlike coatings such as Cerakote, DLC and PVD finishes don't hide any flaws, which means that the folks at the Kimber facility in Alabama are taking care of the small details.

### KIMBER 2K11

**TYPE:** double-stack 1911

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

**CAPACITY:** 13+1

**BARREL:** 5 in. stainless, coyote brown PVD finish

**OAL/WIDTH/HEIGHT:** 8.6/1.4/5.7 in.

**WEIGHT:** 2 lb., 8.1 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** stainless steel slide, stainless steel sub-frame, aluminum grip frame

**GRIPS:** textured aluminum

**SIGHTS:** serrated steel rear, fiber-optic front; slide cut for optics adapter plates (sold separately)

**TRIGGER:** 2.75 lb. pull (measured)

**SAFETIES:** ambidextrous thumb, beavertail grip

**PRICE:** \$2,125

**MANUFACTURER:** Kimber Mfg.,

[KIMBERAMERICA.COM](http://KIMBERAMERICA.COM)

You can fondle a gun only for so long, and then it's time to shoot. My first double-stack .45 was a Para-Ordnance P14, and let's just say that this design has come a long way in three decades.

I started out with American Eagle's 230-grain total synthetic jacket because it would give me the best odds in terms of reliability since the gun was brand new. The 2K11 gobbled it up without a hiccup and with average accuracy at 25 yards. One thing I did notice was the handgun's tendency to shoot low and slightly left at that distance. No big deal if an optic is mounted, but with fixed irons, trading out the front sight might be in order.

I then switched to hollowpoints, which can be finicky in terms of feeding. Both Hornady's American Gunner XTP and Federal's Punch—two loads with different hollowpoint shapes—delivered good accuracy and fed flawlessly. Accuracy results are shown in the accompanying chart.

There are a ton of double-stack 1911s out there, but most of them are chambered in 9mm. A shooter can get pretty sloppy when it comes to controlling recoil with a heavily built 9mm, but shooting a .45 forces good habits. Recoil was evident but



**A** The .45 version ships with three 13-round U.S.-made magazines from Check-Mate. They fed flawlessly.

manageable with the duty loads and, since the 2K11 has a greater frame circumference than a 1911, it took a deliberate grip to keep it under control.

In my opinion, Kimber got it right on the 2K11. This handgun was designed, engineered and built with careful attention to detail. From the ingenious guide rod to the nifty slide cuts, and from the excellent trigger to the flawless DLC finish, this gun is well-executed. This is an accurate, reliable and well-built pistol that I predict will see much success in competitions and elsewhere.





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# CONCEALED-CARRY PRODIGY

BY RICHARD NANCE | PHOTOS BY YAMIL SUED

WITH THE 3.5 COMPACT,  
SPRINGFIELD SHRINKS ITS  
DOUBLE-STACK 1911 FOR  
BETTER CONCEALMENT.





**C**ompanies like Springfield Armory began manufacturing 1911s in 9mm several years ago, the advantage being that they could be made smaller than the .45 ACP versions but with higher capacity. But even 9mm-chambered 1911s lack the capacity of many 9mm striker-fired pistols. Fortunately, a pistol like the double-stack 1911 DS Prodigy, which Springfield Armory introduced in 2022, affords you the best of both worlds: 1911 ergonomics with a capacity that's

on par with double-stack, striker-fired pistols.

Capitalizing on the success of its 1911 DS Prodigy line, Springfield just launched two compact versions, one with a 4.25-inch barrel and one with a 3.5-inch barrel. These new pistols sport all the features that made the Prodigy a hit, but they are lighter and smaller, making them even better suited for concealed carry.

"The new Prodigy Compact adds a whole new facet to the 1911 DS line. With their compact dimen-

sions and billet machined 7075-T6 aluminum frames, these lightweight and handy 9mm pistols are ideal for everyday carry," said Springfield Armory media relations manager Mike Humphries.

I recently evaluated the 1911 DS Prodigy 3.5 Compact AOS. Its shortened grip and slide reminded me of the nursery rhyme about the little teapot: short and stout. That's not to say the Prodigy Compact is ugly. In fact, aside from being smaller, it's virtually identical in appearance to the full-size Prodigy and is a very aesthetically pleasing pistol.

The 1911 DS Prodigy 3.5 Compact AOS is seven inches long and 5.1 inches tall. Weighing 25.5 ounces, it's about seven ounces—almost half a pound—lighter than the original full-size Prodigy. All Prodigy pistols are the same width, about 1.4 inches across the ambidextrous thumb safety.

Dimensions aside, the 3.5 Compact sports a few new design features, including a shortened beavertail, recontoured hammer and a two-slot accessory rail instead of the Prodigy's single-slot rail. With its shorter slide, the number of front slide serrations has been reduced from four to three.

The Prodigy 3.5 Compact's shortened grip still accommodated my little finger. The undercut trigger guard and the lip at the base of the frontstrap promote a secure hold that mitigates muzzle flip and contributes to the pistol's controllability.

The 3.5 Compact ships with two 15-round magazines. Higher capacity magazines are available on the Springfield Armory store. Just keep in mind that an extended magazine defeats the purpose of having a compact grip that's easier to conceal.

Like the original Prodigy, the 3.5 Compact's frame is constructed of billet 7075-T6 hard-coat anodized aluminum with a black



CONCEALED-CARRY PRODIGY

← Cerakote finish and polymer grips. Moderate texturing that wraps fully around the grip helps keep the pistol from slipping in your hands without creating discomfort. There’s even a bit of texturing on the front of the rectangular trigger guard for those who prefer to wrap the index finger of their non-shooting hand around it.

The area behind the trigger guard is smooth, providing a natural index for your middle finger. The trigger guard is big enough to accommodate a gloved finger. The bottom of the trigger guard is gently scalloped to help lock in place the middle finger of your shooting hand and the index finger of your support hand.



**A** The gun’s controls will be familiar to any 1911 shooter. Compared to the original full-size Prodigy, the 3.5 Compact’s beavertail is shorter, and the hammer has been recontoured for better concealment.



**A** The AOS optics cut facilitates the mounting of many popular optics, and a plate on the Docter footprint is provided with the gun.

| ACCURACY RESULTS   SPRINGFIELD 1911 DS PRODIGY 3.5 COMPACT AOS |                     |                       |                 |                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 9mm Luger                                                      | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Muzzle Velocity (fps) | Std. Dev. (fps) | Avg. Group (in.) |
| Black Hills EXP JHP                                            | 115                 | 1,190                 | 6               | 1.1              |
| Hornady XTP                                                    | 124                 | 1,173                 | 11              | 1.2              |
| Wilson Combat Reman. HBFN                                      | 135                 | 922                   | 9               | 1.2              |

**Notes:** Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups from a Caldwell Handy Rest NXT with a Leupold DeltaPoint Pro red dot. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded with a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph. Abbreviations: HBFN, hollow-base flatnose; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; Reman., remanufactured

The Prodigy 3.5 Compact’s match-grade bull barrel features an 11-degree crown and is forged stainless steel, finished in black DLC. The forged carbon steel slide wears a black Cerakote finish and is optics ready thanks to the Agency Optic System (AOS), which was developed in collaboration with Agency Arms.

All Prodigy pistols come with an AOS optics plate on the Docter footprint, which accommodates sights from Docter/Noblex as well the Springfield Hex Dragonfly, Vortex Viper, Burris FastFire 2 and 4, and others.

Additional plates for Trijicon RMR, Shield RMSc, Leupold DeltaPoint Pro, Aimpoint Acro and Holosun are available at Springfield’s web store for \$129.

Each billet-steel plate has an integral rear sight. The AOS system facilitates mounting the optic low enough for the sights to co-witness with most optics, affording you a backup sighting system should the optic fail. If red dots aren’t your thing, the black serrated U-notch rear sight and tritium front sight surrounded by a white circle will suffice.

Controls will be familiar to any 1911 shooter. The grip safety features a prominent memory bump that enables you to deactivate the safety merely by establishing a proper firing grip. The ambidextrous, extended thumb safety clicks on and off with a swipe of your thumb. Sweep the safety up to engage and down to disengage.

Although lefties will appreciate this ambidextrous safety, it’s not just for them. If a right-handed shooter were to sustain an injury to their dominant hand, having the safety accessible to the left thumb is advantageous.

The slide stop on the left side of the frame is slightly recessed. It’s easy to get to without being in the way. Horizontal serrations provide traction for your thumb. The round



magazine release button's vertical serrations accomplish the same task.

The Prodigy 3.5 Compact's curved, skeletonized trigger is adjustable for overtravel. The trigger pull on my test sample measured three pounds, according to my Lyman electronic digital trigger pull gauge. While that is on the light side, I typically obtain lighter pull weights than manufacturers advertise. In any case, the trigger is just what you'd expect on a top-quality 1911.

For testing, Springfield loaned me the plate for a Leupold Delta-Point Pro red dot. I performed the accuracy test from the bench at 15 yards, with bullet weights ranging from 115 to 135 grains. Of the 12 five-shot groups, all but two measured less than 1.5 inches.

I couldn't shoot any groups that were less than inch, but most were just over an inch, with the overall average group being 1.2 inches. This degree of accuracy was due largely to that smooth, clean-breaking trigger.

Confident in the Prodigy Compact's accuracy, I decided to shoot it faster and closer to the target from standing. The pistol was very controllable, enabling me to fire with both speed and precision. The trigger's take-up and a short, discernible reset contribute to the pistol's controllability.

A defensive pistol must run reliably. Small 1911s chambered in 9mm can be finicky, but Springfield cracked that code way back in 2007 with the introduction of its single-stack 9mm Enhanced Micro Pistol. So it was no surprise that the Prodigy 3.5 Compact ran without a hitch.

Despite a tight slide-to-frame fit, the Prodigy 3.5 Compact cycles smoothly. This, combined with its bull barrel, aluminum frame and 9mm chambering make recoil easy to tame. Once you establish your grip, the pistol stays put. Sure, the muzzle will rise but the sights—or,



▲ Lefties—and righties who find it necessary to shoot with the off hand—will appreciate the 3.5 Compact's extended ambidextrous thumb safety.



▲ The grip is stippled around its circumference, except for the area behind the trigger guard, for great indexing. The magazine base plates are designed to make it easy to seat a mag or strip it.

in this case, the dot—will settle predictably. Since you don't have to adjust your grip or hunt for the sights after each shot, you can shoot faster and more accurately.

The slightly beveled magazine well helps funnel magazines into the pistol efficiently. Since the magazine base plate protrudes slightly from the magazine well, it was easy to ensure the magazine was fully seated. Cutouts on either side of the base plate give you something to grab hold of to strip the maga-

## SPRINGFIELD ARMORY 1911 DS PRODIGY 3.5 COMPACT AOS

**TYPE:** double-stack 1911

**CALIBER:** 9mm Luger

**CAPACITY:** 15 (as tested); 2 mags supplied

**BARREL:** 3.5 in. bull; match-grade forged stainless steel; black DLC finish

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 7/5.1/1.5 in.

**WEIGHT:** 25.5 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** black Cerakote-finished forged carbon steel slide; black Cerakote-finished billet 7075-T6 hard-coat anodized aluminum frame; polymer grips

**SIGHTS:** tritium front, black serrated rear; AOS optics cut, Docter footprint plate supplied

**TRIGGER:** 3 lb. pull (measured)

**SAFETIES:** grip, ambidextrous thumb

**PRICE:** \$1,549

**MANUFACTURER:** Springfield Armory,  
SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM

zine from the pistol if pressing the magazine release doesn't get the job done.

The Prodigy 3.5 Compact feels good in the hands. This can be attributed to both ergonomics and execution. It's well balanced, points naturally and is devoid of any sharp edges that might abrade your skin or, worse, snag a garment when drawing from concealment.

Despite its double-stack circumference, the grip will be easy for most shooters to get their



## CONCEALED-CARRY PRODIGY

← hands around. The recontoured hammer and shortened beavertail make the Prodigy 3.5 Compact easier to conceal, without detracting from its shootability.

Disassembling the pistol is made easier thanks to the captured guide rod, which holds the recoil spring in place, essentially making it a single unit. The captured guide rod also reduces the chance of the recoil spring binding up during operation, which could lead to a malfunction.

If you like double-stack 1911s but don't want to feel like you're concealing a boat anchor on your hip, the Prodigy 3.5 Compact may be just what you're looking for. With a 15+1 capacity, all the right contours and a trigger that makes getting accurate hits on target about as easy as it gets, this pistol is a perfect option for concealed carry. Even better, it won't break the bank the way some double-stack 1911s can.

If you're looking for holsters, CrossBreed has two different models for the 3.5 Compact: one inside-the-waistband model and one convertible inside-the-waistband/outside-the-waistband model. These are for sale on the Springfield web store and of course from CrossBreed. Knowing how popular Springfield pistols are with holster makers, I'm sure more rigs are soon to follow.

The Prodigy 3.5 Compact is equal parts easy to carry and fun to shoot. Since many pistols are configured to accept only optics with a particular footprint, being able to mount a variety of optics with the AOS system is another selling point. Being able to easily slap a light, laser or combo unit on the pistol's accessory rail is icing on the cake.

The 1911 DS Prodigy 3.5 Compact AOS provides the original purchaser with a lifetime warranty



**A** The bull barrel has an 11-degree crown, and front slide serrations provide traction for press checks. The frame sports a two-slot accessory rail.

that protects against defects and even includes free shipping and handling for claims. That's peace of mind above and beyond that which comes from knowing you have an accurate, reliable double-stack 1911 by your side. **O**

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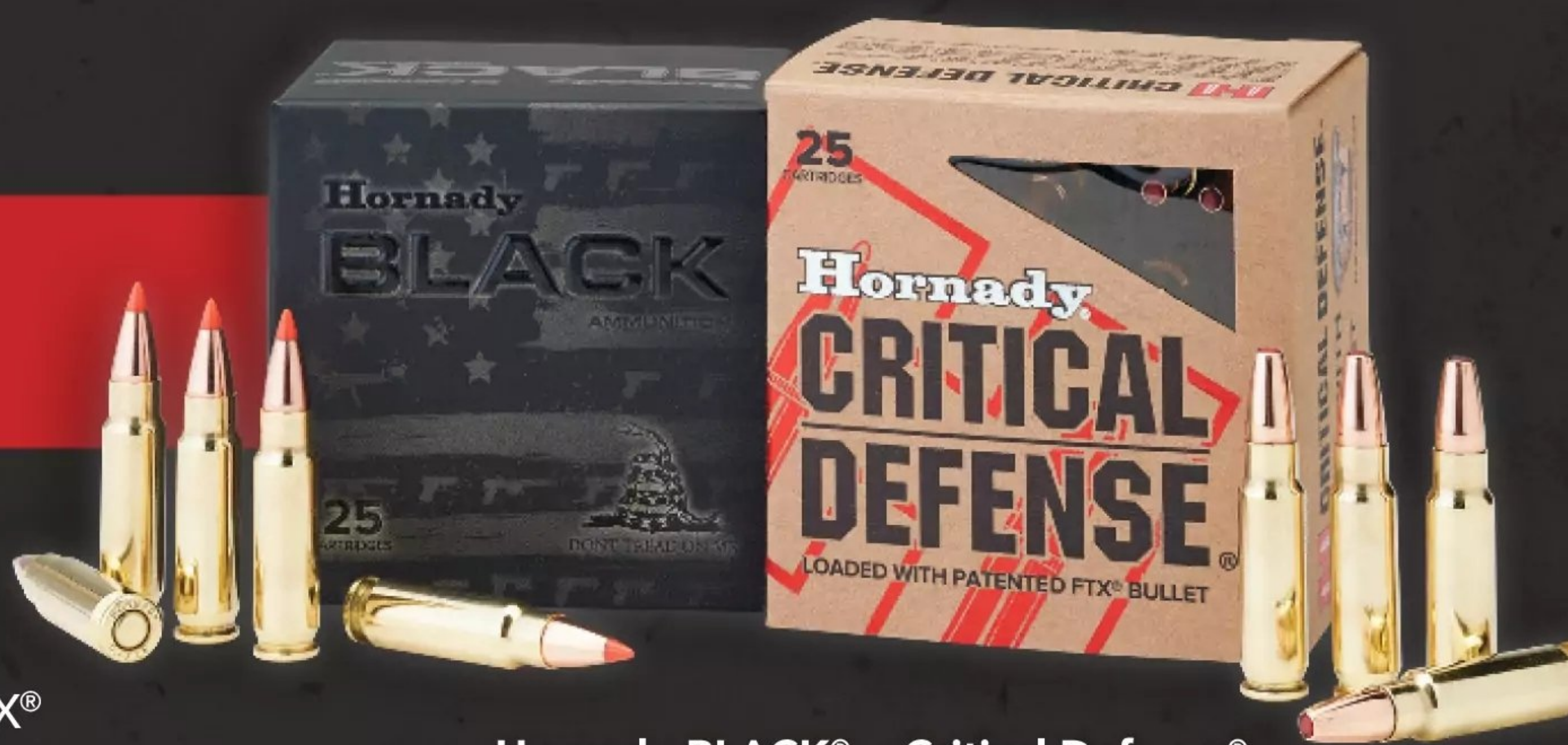
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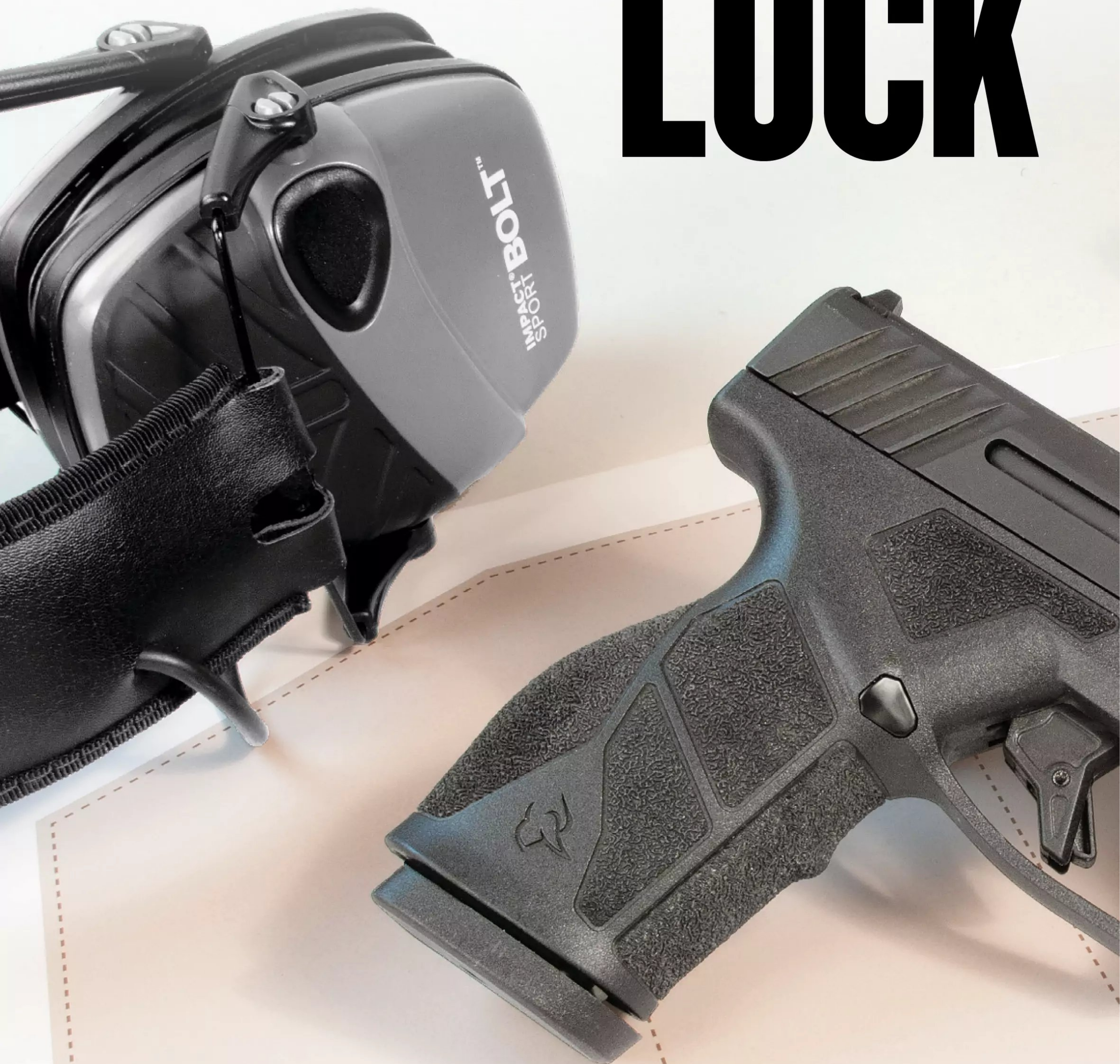
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# BEGINNER'S LUCK

BY J. SCOTT RUPP





# TAURUS'S AFFORDABLE NEW GX2 IS THE COMPACT 9MM NEW SHOOTERS HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR.



Over the past few years, Taurus has proved that it not only builds top-quality guns but comes up with designs that make sense for defensive handgunners. I've been particularly impressed with the G3 family of 9mms, as well as the GX4, and now Taurus has introduced the GX2—a gun aimed straight at beginning shooters.

A member of the GX family as opposed to the G2 family, this is unapologetically an entry-level compact pistol with a suggested retail price of \$310. A cursory internet search showed the street price to be in the \$250 neighborhood, and you'd be tempted to think a gun this inexpensive would be a waste of time. I can assure you that, in this case, inexpensive doesn't equate to cheap.

With its 3.4-inch barrel, 6.2-inch overall length, a height of 4.9 inches and a weight of just under 20 ounces, the GX2 is in the sweet spot for a carry gun—compact and light but large enough to be controllable. Width across the slide at the single-side thumb safety is 1.2 inches, so it's nice and slim as well.

The slide features a matte black, corrosion-resistant finish. Angled, nicely sharp serrations on the front and rear make it easy to manipulate the slide even if you're wearing gloves or your hands are slippery. The front of the slide is beveled for easy holstering, and a notch in the barrel hood lets you look into the chamber to determine the gun's condition.

The sights are nothing fancy, but Taurus doesn't skimp by going the polymer route. The front and rear are both steel, and they're on the "industry standard" (read, Glock) pattern, so there's no shortage of aftermarket options.

But short of going with night sights, I love the Taurus setup as is. The drift-adjustable rear is plain black and serrated on its face; it's paired with a white-dot front. The sight picture they create has no rear dots to distract you from a →



## BEGINNER'S LUCK

← good front-sight focus, and the relationship between front and rear provides an ideal amount of light on either side of the front sight—fast to acquire but not so much room that accurate shot placement is a struggle.

The slide is not cut for optics, which is what you would expect for a beginner or entry-level pistol. Judging by other Taurus models, this decision chops a good \$30 or \$40 off

the price tag, and if you fall into the beginner camp, a lot of folks—including me—still recommend iron sights when you're starting out.

As I mentioned, the GX2 sports a thumb safety. That's the right call on an entry-level/beginner's defensive semiauto, as many new shooters simply feel more comfortable having a safety. The GX2 incorporates a trigger-blade safety as well.

This safety is not very wide, but it

is long enough to provide good leverage. I found it easy to move to the Fire position, although it was stiff enough that I couldn't move it from Fire to Safe easily with my firing-hand thumb unless I shifted my grip significantly.

The slide-stop lever is likewise small and unobtrusive, but it's well shaped and serrated so it is possible to use it as a slide release if that's your preferred procedure.

There's a wee bit of molding behind the serrated, triangular magazine release to prevent accidental operation. I could easily press the release without shifting my firing grip, which is something I can't do with a lot of guns.

In what I think is a good move, the GX2 has a rotating takedown lever. This is in contrast to the takedown screw on the GX4 or the transverse bar on the G3 guns. Right out of the box this lever did require a significant amount of force to move it into the down position, but it became easier with use.

After removing the magazine and ensuring the gun is unloaded, let the slide go forward before attempting to rotate the lever; make sure the lever is as far forward as it will go. Then, with the muzzle pointed in a safe direction, the manual directs you to pull the trigger to remove the slide. I found it easier to pull the trigger before rotating the lever.



▲ The gun has a single-side thumb safety in addition to a trigger-blade safety. Unlike other G-series guns, it has a rotating takedown lever for simple fieldstripping.



▲ The GX2 incorporates a three-slot Picatinny rail for adding a light or laser. The matte black slide is beveled at the front for easy holstering and has front and rear serrations.

### TAURUS GX2

**TYPE:** striker-fired semiauto centerfire

**CALIBER:** 9mm Luger

**CAPACITY:** 13; 2 magazines supplied

**BARREL:** 3.38 in. stainless steel

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 6.2/4.9/1.2 in.

**WEIGHT:** 19 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** matte black alloy steel slide, polymer frame

**SIGHTS:** plain black drift-adjustable rear, white-dot front

**TRIGGER:** 5.5 lb. pull (measured)

**SAFETIES:** single-side thumb, trigger blade

**PRICE:** \$310

**MANUFACTURER:** Taurus, [TAURUSUSA.COM](http://TAURUSUSA.COM)



Inside you'll find the stainless Sharpshooter barrel and a two-piece recoil spring. The spring is captured, with a plastic fitting at the back that butts against the barrel lug. After cleaning the barrel, bolt face and extractor hook, Taurus recommends lubricating the frame rails and the barrel lockup points.

The GX2 trigger is nicely done. It has a flat face, with a bit of a dogleg. Unlike the long take-up of the G3s, the GX2 has a more normal amount of take-up followed by a relatively creep-free 5.5-pound break on average. It's got a crisp reset as well—short, tactile and audible. In short, it's a perfectly fine defensive trigger.

The GX2's frame and grip are very well done. The GX2 has a three-slot accessory rail out front, making it easy to add a light, laser or combo unit. The frame also includes textured indexing spots on the left and right, something Taurus has paid attention to with its recent semiauto models.

While the GX2 lacks interchangeable backstraps, as someone with medium-size hands I found the grip to be just right. It features textured panels in all the right places, and unlike any other G-series pistol, it has an indexing “bump” on the frontstrap that, at least for me, is a big help in achieving a consistent grip.

Further, the grip is long enough that I can get all three fingers on it. The base of the grip flares slightly, which I find really comfortable and believe it provides a bit of additional control. And speaking of control, the undercut behind the squared-off trigger guard promotes a high handhold.

The GX2 comes with two 13-round magazines with flat base pads, bright yellow followers and fully numbered witness holes. Neither the magazine well nor the base pads have the cut-outs for stripping a stubborn mag that you'll find on other G-series guns, but here the grip terminates completely above the magazine—no polymer overhangs—so the base pads are easy to grasp.



**▲ While the GX2 lacks interchangeable backstraps, many shooters will find the grip just right, and the bump on the frontstrap provides an excellent indexing spot.**



**▲ Both the front and rear sights are steel and set in dovetails on the industry standard pattern. The plain black serrated rear won't snag on the draw and provides a great sight picture.**

Shooting the gun revealed a few things. One, it's accurate, as you can see in the accompanying chart. The Fiocchi load was not only the best shooting load, it was also the most consistent—no super big groups, no super small groups, just solid across the board. That's something I love to see in any handgun. Federal's Punch

was no slouch in that department, either. None of the loads shot poorly, and even the light-bullet HoneyBadger—which not all guns like—performed decently.

Two, the GX2 is completely reliable. There were zero failures to feed, to fully lock up, to eject, nothing. And that's with bullet weights →



BEGINNER'S LUCK

← spanning the 9mm spectrum, 100 to 147, and including HoneyBadger's fluted solid-copper bullet, Hornady's polymer-tipped FTX and two different hollowpoint designs. A good 200 rounds right out of the box without a hiccup.

Three, it's really shootable for a small, light gun. I ran Bill (six shots at speed) and X (head/body target transitions) drills at 10 yards, and the GX2 was accurate and fast to get back on target. Handling was great, and as I mentioned before, I liked the bump on the frontstrap as an indexing spot. The texturing on the grip is just right and provides a solid hold without being abrasive.

Operating the controls and conducting reloads depended a good bit on whether I was wearing gloves or not. It was a frosty 15 degrees the morning I tested the GX2, so mostly it was with gloves on. I couldn't get a good feel for the safety on the draw,

and during reloads the magazine tended to get trapped by the gloves. That's not a function of the magazine base pad design but rather the grip length, and with gloves it's just that the grip doesn't extend far enough to dodge the glove material.

Without gloves it was a different story for the most part. Mags dropped free without issue, and they were easy to seat, so reloads were fast and sure.

Earlier I wrote that I could place the safety on Fire easily, but that was not the case on the draw. I had to cheat a little bit on the initial grip in order to consistently deactivate the safety when punching the gun toward the target.

Shooters with longer thumbs or slightly larger hands won't have this problem, and in the end I just shot the pistol with the safety off. Not being a fan of safeties on striker-fired guns in the first place, especially

those with trigger safeties like this one, I was totally okay with it.

One thing I will note for shooters who haven't spent a ton of time stuffing rounds into pistol magazines. The GX2's mags are on the stiff side, and if you've got strength issues or are suffering from arthritis or a similar problem, do yourself a favor and pick up a magazine loader. Frankly I'm using these more and more anyway as I get older and more prone to aches and pains, especially on cold days.

I didn't carry the GX2 extensively, but what time I did spend with it showed it to be a fine companion. The GX2 does not fit Taurus G3 or GX4 holsters, but it did fit an outside-the-waistband rig I had for a Springfield XD. Mission First Tactical offers a convertible appendix inside-the-waistband/outside-the waistband holster for the GX2, and of course you could always go with CrossBreed's excellent MultiFlex. I think the small size of this adjustable and convertible holster would make it a great choice.

However, I don't expect it will be long before GX2 holsters will be widely available because I think this gun is going to sell like hotcakes. It's got everything you could want in a defensive gun: a just-right size for concealed carry or home defense; 100 percent reliability; decent accuracy; a rail for lights and lasers; and of course that sweet price.

Plus it comes with two magazines, and if you've looked at prices for good metal mags like these, you know they aren't cheap. The ability to upgrade to night sights with the wide availability of aftermarket options is another bonus, even though I find the stock sights to be perfectly fine for most purposes.

If you're on the prowl for your first defensive pistol, I don't think you can go wrong with the GX2—especially if you're on the fence about what you want and would like to get in the game without a big investment. But really anyone in the market for a gun in this size class will find it a great choice.



▲ Even though the GX2 is an inexpensive gun, Taurus provides two quality 13-round magazines with the pistol.

| ACCURACY RESULTS   TAURUS GX2 |                     |                       |                 |                  |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 9mm Luger                     | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Muzzle Velocity (fps) | Std. Dev. (fps) | Avg. Group (in.) |
| Black Hills HoneyBadger FSC   | 100                 | 1,122                 | 11              | 2.3              |
| Hornady Critical Defense FTX  | 115                 | 1,009                 | 13              | 2.2              |
| Federal Punch JHP             | 124                 | 1,103                 | 16              | 1.9              |
| Fiocchi Defense Dynamics JHP  | 147                 | 911                   | 11              | 1.4              |

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



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# DUAL THREAT

**ED BROWN PAIRS TWO EXCELLENT DESIGNS TO  
CREATE THE KOBRA CARRY DUAL CALIBER PISTOL.**

**BY KEITH WOOD**





**T**he 9mm vs. .45 debate is the most tired one in the handgun world. Which is superior? Both certainly have their merits. The 9mm offers low recoil, has a greater magazine capacity and feeds and extracts well thanks to its significant body taper. The .45 has more bullet mass, greater frontal area and arguably better terminal performance. It's difficult to pick a winner but, with the release of the Kobra Carry Dual Caliber 1911, you

don't have to. This compact handgun from Ed Brown allows shooters to swap chamberings, and their virtues, in seconds.

The late Ed Brown was a legend in the 1911 community. He was the first person I met at my very first SHOT Show way back in 2003. He was a gentleman, and he is missed by many. His contributions to the handgun world—the Bobtail cut and Kobra Carry, which celebrates its 25th anniversary, being two of the most notable—were significant

and often imitated. Brown's legacy lives on in his company, which is still a family-run operation.

The Kobra Carry Dual Caliber melds together two of the company's flagship products: the Kobra Carry and the EVO series. The Kobra Carry, which will be familiar to many readers, is an enhanced compact 1911 that mostly sticks →



## DUAL THREAT

← to traditional functional elements such as the internal extractor, recoil assembly and barrel bushing. The EVO was created from the ground up as a 9mm and takes a more modern approach, including a bull barrel and external extractor.

Both slides work with the same frame, meaning that changing chamberings is as simple as swapping slide assemblies. That frame is Commander-length stainless steel, and it has the distinctive Bobtail cut—a signature Ed Brown feature that makes the gun more concealable.

As the Kobra name indicates, the frontstrap is milled with the company's exclusive Snakeskin pattern, which provides a functional gripping surface as well as an aesthetic touch. The flat section

of the mainspring housing has the same treatment. The high-cut frame allows for a full grip on the pistol, and that purchase is enhanced by the Kobra cuts and the checkered G10 grip panels.

In a world where many 1911 parts are metal-injection molded, Ed Brown's parts are fully machined in-house from bar stock. This adds significant cost but demonstrates a commitment to quality and longevity as opposed to meeting a price point. The company provides a limited lifetime warranty on its firearms to back up this commitment to quality construction.

The rear of the frame is cut with a .250-inch radius to allow for the use of Ed Brown's Memory Groove grip safety. This grip safety is easily engaged regardless of how the

shooter grips the gun, and protects the hands from hammer bite. The manual safety is strong side only with an extended lever, and the company's .145-inch-wide carry profile. The lever is easy to actuate without being overly big.

The slide stop is fairly standard, with an HRT cut on the opposite side of the frame so the stop's recessed pin sits flush. The magazine catch is checkered. The gun features a three-hole aluminum trigger, along with a Delta-style hammer.

The EDM-cut trigger components provide smooth and precise surfaces for an excellent trigger pull. The trigger on our sample broke at a very shootable 4.5 pounds with no apparent creep. This is the kind of fantastic trigger pull that has kept the 1911 relevant for so many decades.

The .45 ACP slide is built on the Kobra Carry pattern and matches the satin stainless steel finish of the frame. The .45 uses a 4.25-inch, Commander-length barrel. The round-top slide's rear cocking cuts use the same Snakeskin pattern as



▲ The frame is satin-finished stainless steel, and the controls are machined from bar stock. The .45 slide shown here features Snakeskin rear slide serrations.



▲ The 9mm EVO slide (top) has a radiused top and is a quarter-inch shorter than the round-top .45 slide and is also marginally narrower, thanks to the smaller cartridge geometry.

### ED BROWN PRODUCTS KOBRA CARRY DUAL CALIBER

**TYPE:** 1911

**CALIBER:** 9mm Luger/.45 ACP

**CAPACITY:** 2 mags supplied—9-round 9mm, 8-round .45

**BARREL:** 4 in. (9mm), 4.25 in. (.45)

**WEIGHT:** 36-37 oz.

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 7.6/5.9/1.3 (9mm); 7.8/5.4/1.3 (.45)

**CONSTRUCTION:** stainless steel Bobtail frame; stainless steel slide—satin finish (.45), black G4 finish (9mm)

**GRIPS:** checkered G10

**TRIGGER:** 4.5 lb. pull (measured)

**SIGHTS:** black front, Holosun SCS-320-GR (9mm, as tested); HD XR night sight, black rear (.45 ACP)

**SAFETIES:** single-side manual thumb, beavertail grip

**PRICE:** \$4,995

**MANUFACTURER:** Ed Brown Products;  
EDBROWN.COM



the frame. The bottom of the slide is machine-beveled to eliminate the sharp edge, and that tasteful bevel is matched on the leading edges of the slide as well as on the frame's dust cover. The ejection port is lowered and flared back to facilitate the flawless ejection of spent cases.

The iron sights are dovetailed into the slide. The rear sight is a black drift-adjustable Novak style with a square notch. The front sight is a highly visible HD XR with an orange doughnut surrounding a small tritium lamp. Pairing a black rear with the HD front is one of my favorite combinations on a carry gun.

The EVO was built around the 9mm and specifically designed to make the 1911 more cost effective and reliable on a production basis. The EVO 9mm slide on the Dual Caliber is functionally and stylistically different from the Kobra Carry but still looks good on the frame.

The black polymer Gen 4 finish applied over the stainless steel slide gives the gun a two-tone look reminiscent of old race guns like the Pachmayr Combat Special. Because I was influenced heavily by the custom handguns of the 1980s as a kid, I'm a big fan of this color scheme.

While the Kobra Carry slide has a fairly traditional profile, the EVO is more modern. Instead of a radiused top it uses a series of flats. The cocking serrations are angled cuts with shorter lines toward the muzzle.

The EVO 9mm slide is both shorter and narrower than the Commander-length .45 slide. The barrel is four inches instead of 4.25 inches, and the slide is 0.06 inch slimmer. Not only does this make the pistol slightly more concealable, I think that it actually improves function.

Sometimes 9mm 1911s, even Commander-length guns, struggle to perform with anything but full-power ammo with bullets on the heavier end of the spectrum. This smaller, lighter slide is better tuned to the power level of most 9mm Luger ammo.



**A** The Kobra Carry incorporates the trademark Ed Brown Bobtail frame/ mainspring housing to minimize the pistol's footprint while concealed.

| ACCURACY RESULTS   ED BROWN KOBRA CARRY DUAL CALIBER |                     |                       |                 |                  |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Cartridge                                            | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Muzzle Velocity (fps) | Std. Dev. (fps) | Avg. Group (in.) |
| <b>9MM LUGER</b>                                     |                     |                       |                 |                  |
| Blazer FMJ                                           | 115                 | 1,117                 | 11              | 2.9              |
| Federal Punch JHP                                    | 124                 | 1,155                 | 7               | 1.9              |
| Hornady Critical Defense FTX                         | 115                 | 1,142                 | 12              | 2.4              |
| <b>.45 ACP</b>                                       |                     |                       |                 |                  |
| Hornady American Gunner XTP JHP                      | 185                 | 977                   | 10              | 2.4              |
| Federal Punch JHP                                    | 230                 | 811                   | 14              | 2.0              |
| American Eagle TSJ                                   | 230                 | 759                   | 10              | 3.0              |

**Notes:** Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups fired at 25 yards from a Target Shooting, Inc. Model 1500 rest. Iron sights on the .45, Holosun SCS-320 on the 9mm. Velocities are averages of 10 shots measured on a Garmin Xero CL. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; TSJ, total synthetic jacket

The size is not the only departure. The EVO slide uses a fluted bull barrel that eliminates the need for a bushing—as well as the time it takes to properly fit one by hand. The barrel locks up via a single top lug instead of the two lugs used on the .45. The crown is tapered back to the face of the slide.

Another meaningful difference is the external extractor. While an internal extractor often requires hand-tuning to work as it should, the milled 17-4 stainless steel unit on the EVO is a drop-in component. Under the hood, the EVO uses a one-piece recoil spring guide rod and a flat-wire recoil spring.

The front sight on my EVO was a

plain black blade, but these sights are held in place by a TP6 Torx screw, so they can be easily removed without fiddling with a dovetail. Ed Brown offers several front sight options, including the HD XR night sight.

My EVO came with a Holosun SCS-320-GR optic installed directly to the slide. This optic allows the user to select between a two m.o.a. green dot, a green dot inside a larger circle or a circle with no center dot. Although there is no rear sight to co-witness, the front sight is visible through the sight window. If the sight ceased to function, the combination of the front sight and optic frame could be used as sort →



## DUAL THREAT

← of a ghost ring arrangement at close range.

The fit and finish on the Kobra Carry Dual Caliber was befitting a gun at this price point. The edges were tastefully beveled, eliminating every exposed sharp surface with the exception of the front sight. The stainless steel was blasted to an even satin sheen, and the black Gen 4 finish was expertly applied.

Shooting the Kobra Carry in either chambering was pleasurable. I'm partial to iron sights, so I

felt most at home using the .45 ACP slide, but the reduced recoil of the EVO upper was certainly pleasant.

When it comes to shooting groups from the bench, a slide-mounted optic will spoil you. With quality sights—and here I'm referring to both the irons and the optic—a great trigger and well-executed gripping surfaces, this was a shootable pistol in either configuration.

Swapping over to 9mm is as simple as dropping the magazine, pulling the slide back to align the half-moon notch with the slide stop and removing the stop from the frame. Capture the recoil spring and the slide comes off the frame. Install the EVO slide as you normally would. The slide stop has a small bevel on the inside where it interfaces with the spring-loaded plunger. This bevel makes it easy to insert the stop into the frame without creating an "idiot scratch."

Ed Brown shipped the pistol with a separate ejector and slide stop that were designed to be used with the EVO slide. While changing slide stops is quick and simple, swapping ejectors requires removing a roll pin that transects the frame. Performing this correctly requires a roll pin punch and a small hammer, and takes about a minute.

Out of a combination of curiosity and laziness, I tried using the 9mm

slide with the .45 ejector and slide stop. Guess what? It worked just fine. I can't say I recommend this practice, but in my experience you can get away with it in a pinch.

On the subject of reliability, the Kobra Carry Dual Caliber did very well. In all my testing—with six different loads in two different chamberings—there was only one malfunction. It happened with the .45 ACP slide installed when one of the Federal Punch 230-grain jacketed hollowpoints failed to feed fully into the chamber. I cleared the malfunction easily and encountered no further problems.

Accuracy ranged from average to great in both chamberings. In both cases, the Federal Punch ammunition was the most accurate, as you can see in the accompanying chart.

Why would anyone want a handgun with two slide assemblies? I can think of several reasons. Let's say you want to carry a .45 for self-defense but want to practice with a less expensive cartridge with lower recoil. Check.

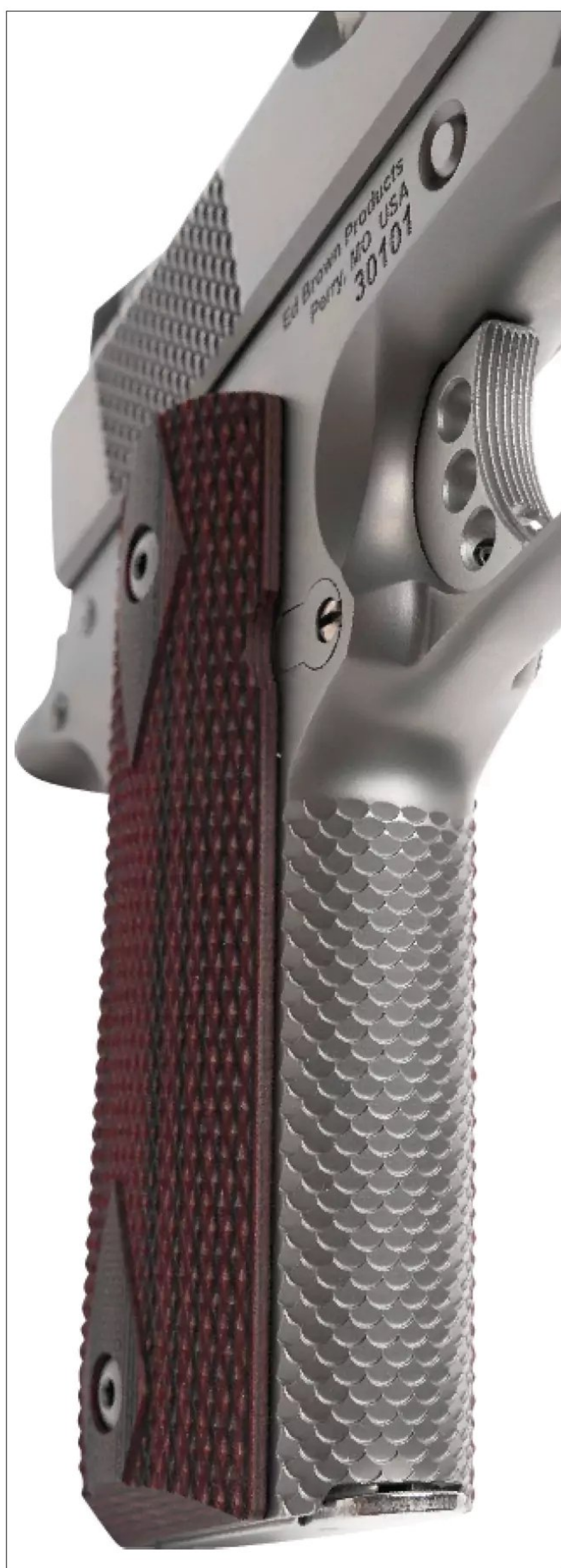
How about shooters who are making the transition between iron sights and optics but haven't committed 100 percent? Check.

What about those living in jurisdictions that require red tape for purchasing another pistol, or require residents to commit to a single handgun for concealed carry? Got you covered.

With either top end, the shooter has the benefit of the same grip, an identical trigger pull and the same manual-of-arms.

Ed Brown Products has always been on the cutting edge of 1911 design and production. The Kobra Carry Dual Caliber pays tribute to the company's late founder with one of the company's most identifiable handguns, but with the added benefit of the newer EVO series.

This is a viable self-defense handgun in either configuration that offers a versatility that no single chambering can possibly match. 🔴



▲ The pistol's frontstrap is textured with the Snakeskin pattern that helped make the Kobra Carry such a recognizable handgun.



▲ The .45 (l.) has a traditional barrel bushing and recoil system, while the 9mm (r.) uses a bull barrel and a one-piece guide rod with a flat-wire spring.



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# BRINGING THE HEAT

**NIGHTHAWK'S FIRE HAWK IS A CUSTOM-CRAFTED 1911 WITH A COMP THAT TAKES THE BITE OUT OF HARD-RECOILING LOADS.**

**BY BRAD FITZPATRICK**





**T**here's no shortage of custom 1911 builders out there, but when you list the very best in the business, Nighthawk Custom in Berryville, Arkansas, is always on the list—and with good reason. “One Gun, One Gunsmith” is more than a catchy slogan; it's an ethos that describes the attention Nighthawk pours into every pistol that leaves its doors, including the new Fire Hawk.

The Fire Hawk offers a long list of

noteworthy features, but I suppose the most obvious is the single-port compensator at the muzzle. Compensators are more popular than ever, and while most of them work well, you'd hardly call them works of art. The Fire Hawk is different. It's clear that the goal of this pistol was to gain the benefits of reduced recoil and faster follow-ups without sacrificing the gun's clean lines.

The seam between the slide and compensator is hard to find unless

you look closely. At first glance you'd likely suspect that the compensator port is machined directly into the slide, but you'd be wrong. This is as seamless a mating of two pieces of metal as you'll find on any gun.

Best of all, the compensator offers real-world benefits without having to sacrifice looks. If ever you wanted a compensated 1911 but wanted to preserve the sleek lines of the original design, the Fire Hawk is what you're after.

Because of the compensator's design, the Fire Hawk pistol looks like a standard five-inch 1911 pistol. The bull barrel itself is only 4.25 inches, but with the compensator the gun fits in standard five-inch 1911 holsters. And if you're shopping for a custom 1911 there's a good chance you already own a such a holster.

Although the Fire Hawk measures close to a Government 1911 in overall length at 8.47 inches, the Fire Hawk utilizes a mechanical design that is far removed from John Browning's original concept. For starters, it uses a Commander-length spring that has been adjusted to accommodate the reduced weight of the slide. There's no barrel bushing. In its place there's a match-grade bull barrel with a full-length stainless steel guide rod and a reverse plug.

The overall concept may seem similar to compensated race guns of the past, but the Fire Hawk is, in my view, a far more sophisticated tool. I grew up in the 1980s and the era of “pin guns” designed for bowling pin shoots. I remember the first 1911 pin gun I saw because I couldn't help but think the extended compensator fouled up the pistol's profile. It was like a bad nose job.

As I said, the Fire Hawk doesn't suffer the same aesthetic problem, but the concept remains the same: using escaping gases to prevent muzzle rise. However, the Fire Hawk attacks the issues of recoil and muzzle rise on multiple fronts.

First, by reducing the mass at →



## BRINGING THE HEAT

← the top of the muzzle/compensator and adding a bull barrel, the Fire Hawk biases weight low at the front so gravity also counteracts recoil and muzzle rise.

Second, despite looking like a Government 1911, the Nighthawk's shortened slide length reduces reciprocating mass and helps further tame recoil. Overall weight of the 10mm Fire Hawk I tested was 43 ounces, a bit heavier than a standard Government 1911 .45, and that contributes to recoil reduction as well.

The Fire Hawk has a long list of special features in addition to the compensator. The Fire Hawk's frame is made from forged steel, and the slide and frame are hand-fitted for incredibly precise operation. The standard gun has slide serrations

on the rear only and a black nitride finish. But this is Nighthawk Custom, so you can add front serrations or choose from a few different finishes at extra cost.

The barrel is made from polished stainless steel, which contrasts nicely with the black frame and slide. Grips are black RailScales Ascend machined G10.

Both the frontstrap and main-spring housing feature checkering, and the Ultra Hi-Cut frontstrap with beveling allows for a high grip on the pistol and even better control. The extended beavertail grip safety is nicely upswept.

The gunsmith who builds each Fire Hawk pistol gets to know his gun personally, performing duties that include hand-fitting the barrel

and blending the mag well and grip safety, hand-fitting the firing pin stop, beveling the gun's edges and polishing the ignition components.

Other small upgrades you might not notice include the French border, serrations on the rear of the slide and a beveled and recessed slide stop. That's the magic of owning a Nighthawk Custom 1911, though. You'll notice something new on your pistol almost every day. You also get a feel and function that can't be replicated by machines, no matter how tight the tolerances.

The Fire Hawk incorporates a curved trigger that is factory set between 3.5 and 3.75 pounds. My test sample's trigger broke at the high end of that range on average. There's very light, smooth take-up, and the trigger break could be the envy of many production target rifles. This is among the best triggers you'll pull in a 1911, smooth as only a custom tuned trigger can be.

The test pistol came with a Heinie Black Slant Pro square notch rear sight and a 14-karat gold bead front sight that is dovetailed into the compensator, a sight combination I believe is superb. Rear sights with dots were all the rage for a long while, but the pendulum seems to have swung in the pistol market, and



**A** The Nighthawk features premium controls that are hand-fitted by a single gunsmith who oversees the gun's build from start to finish.



**A** The single-port compensator is expertly machined, and the 14-karat gold bead front sight is a nice custom touch.

### NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM FIRE HAWK

**TYPE:** 1911

**CALIBER:** 9mm, 10mm Auto (tested),  
.45 ACP

**CAPACITY:** 9; two mags supplied

**BARREL:** 4.25 in. stainless, bull, throated

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 8.5/5.6/1.3 in.

**WEIGHT:** 43 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** black nitride-finished  
steel frame and slide; slide w/single-port  
compensator

**GRIPS:** Black RailScales Ascend G10

**TRIGGER:** 3.75 lb. pull (measured)

**SIGHTS:** Heinie Black Slant Pro rear, 14-karat  
gold bead front

**PRICE:** \$4,799 base; \$4,899 (as tested in  
10mm)

**MANUFACTURER:** Nighthawk Custom,  
NIGHTHAWKCUSTOM.COM



all-black rear sights are becoming more popular.

A night front sight with tritium and/or fiber optic would have worked on this gun but, functional as those are, I don't think they can ever look as good as the gold bead. Besides, when you pay close to \$4,800 for a custom 1911—or even more than that, depending upon how many boxes you check on the Nighthawk order form—you don't want it to have the same front sight as the guy who bought a factory 1911.

If you're interested in Nighthawk's IOS (Interchangeable Optic System), you won't find it stock on the Fire Hawk. But of course you can custom order it for about a \$350 upgrade.

Each Fire Hawk ships with two metal magazines that have bumpers. Nighthawk's website claims an eight-round capacity, but the 10mm mags included with my sample held nine rounds.

Over the years I've tested probably a half-dozen Nighthawk guns and shot perhaps a dozen more, and I've had zero malfunctions. Shocking as it may seem, that's not always the case with custom 1911s. Nighthawk knows that no one who buys one of its guns wants too-tight chambers or unreliable slide operation, and the company makes sure its guns don't leave the factory without being thoroughly vetted. Details like a finely polished feed ramp and a gunsmith tuned and

polished extractor see to it that the Fire Hawk won't fail.

Any custom 1911 pistol should be accurate, and the Fire Hawk 10mm proved to be capable of delivering very good groups at 25 yards from the bench, even without the aid of a red-dot sight. What impressed me most was not the group sizes—although they were very good with several loads—but rather the consistency with which the Nighthawk produced groups under 2.5 inches.

Sure, any semiauto will produce the occasional sub-two-inch five-shot cluster from the bench at 25 yards. But those guns will also routinely produce three- and even four-inch groups, whereas the Nighthawk routinely produced groups at or just over two inches, with a few groups as small as 1.75 inches.

The Fire Hawk is without a doubt the fastest, smoothest and flattest-shooting 10mm semiauto I've ever

fired. Its combination of a functional compensator, nose-forward balance, slide design and overall weight tame the 10mm cartridge effectively. There's substantial muzzle blast, but the actual recoil force is quite manageable.

It's difficult to truly appreciate how much recoil the Fire Hawk absorbs until you shoot it side by side with a standard five-inch 1911 in 10mm. I did just that, loading the same ammunition into both the Fire Hawk and my Rock Island TAC Ultra FS 10mm and firing them in succession. The guns have similar overall weights and lengths, but the Nighthawk produces appreciably less recoil.

More noticeable than that is the speed with which you can get back on target with the Fire Hawk as compared to a standard 1911 10mm. As 10mms go, the Nighthawk is a real pussycat, and I'll bet the 9mm version is a dream to shoot. ➡



**▲ The RailScale Ascend black G10 grips feature aggressive texturing, while the frontstrap and mainspring housing receive fine checkering.**



**▲ The bull barrel profile looks cool, but it's also functional because it adds weight where it counts.**

| ACCURACY RESULTS   NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM FIRE HAWK |                     |                       |                 |                  |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 10mm Auto                                     | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Muzzle Velocity (fps) | Std. Dev. (fps) | Avg. Group (in.) |
| Lehigh XD                                     | 115                 | 1,625                 | 17              | 2.8              |
| Remington Golden Saber BJHP                   | 180                 | 1,069                 | 14              | 1.8              |
| Blazer FMJ                                    | 180                 | 1,128                 | 12              | 2.3              |
| SIG Sauer V-Crown JHP                         | 180                 | 1,144                 | 15              | 2.3              |
| Speer Gold Dot JHP                            | 200                 | 1,012                 | 14              | 2.2              |

**Notes:** Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups fired at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocities are 10-shot averages recorded on a Caldwell VelociRadar at the muzzle. Abbreviations: BJHP, brass-jacketed hollowpoint; FMJ, full metal jacket; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint



## BRINGING THE HEAT

← Because it approximates standard 1911 Government weight and dimensions, the Fire Hawk shouldn't be completely left out of consideration for daily carry. I know people who carry a full-size 1911 every day, and with 10mm loads designed for personal defense you could certainly make the case that this gun offers more energy and greater capacity than a full-size 1911 in .45.

This pistol is even more attractive to the growing numbers of backcountry anglers, hunters and hikers who carry a 10mm pistol to settle issues with bears. Despite its lofty price tag and premium touches, the Fire Hawk is a tough pistol with a rugged finish, good sights and the level of reliability required of a backcountry bear-defense handgun.

Sure, there are lighter polymer-frame striker-fired 10mm pistols with double-digit magazine capacity, but let's consider the realities of a bear charge. A 30-yard charge lasts



▲ The blacked-out Heinie night sight has enough of a "ledge" to cycle the gun one-handed if need be. Nighthawk's IOS red-dot system can be added for additional cost.

perhaps three seconds. There's a much better possibility that you can fire one or even two more aimed shots with a gun like the Fire Hawk in that space of time than you might be able to with a light polymer-frame 10mm—increasing the chances of stopping the charge.

Since Nighthawk offers all sorts of optional upgrades for your custom Fire Hawk, I tried to decide what I would change. I'd probably change

out the grips. They're functional, but I prefer something with smaller texturing in a color that doesn't blend so much with the rest of the gun.

I'd go with the durable DLC finish option, and I'd certainly add the IOS system. These changes would put the gun over the \$5,000 mark, but if you're already considering spending in the mid four figures for a pistol, this is a Nighthawk "Custom" after all.



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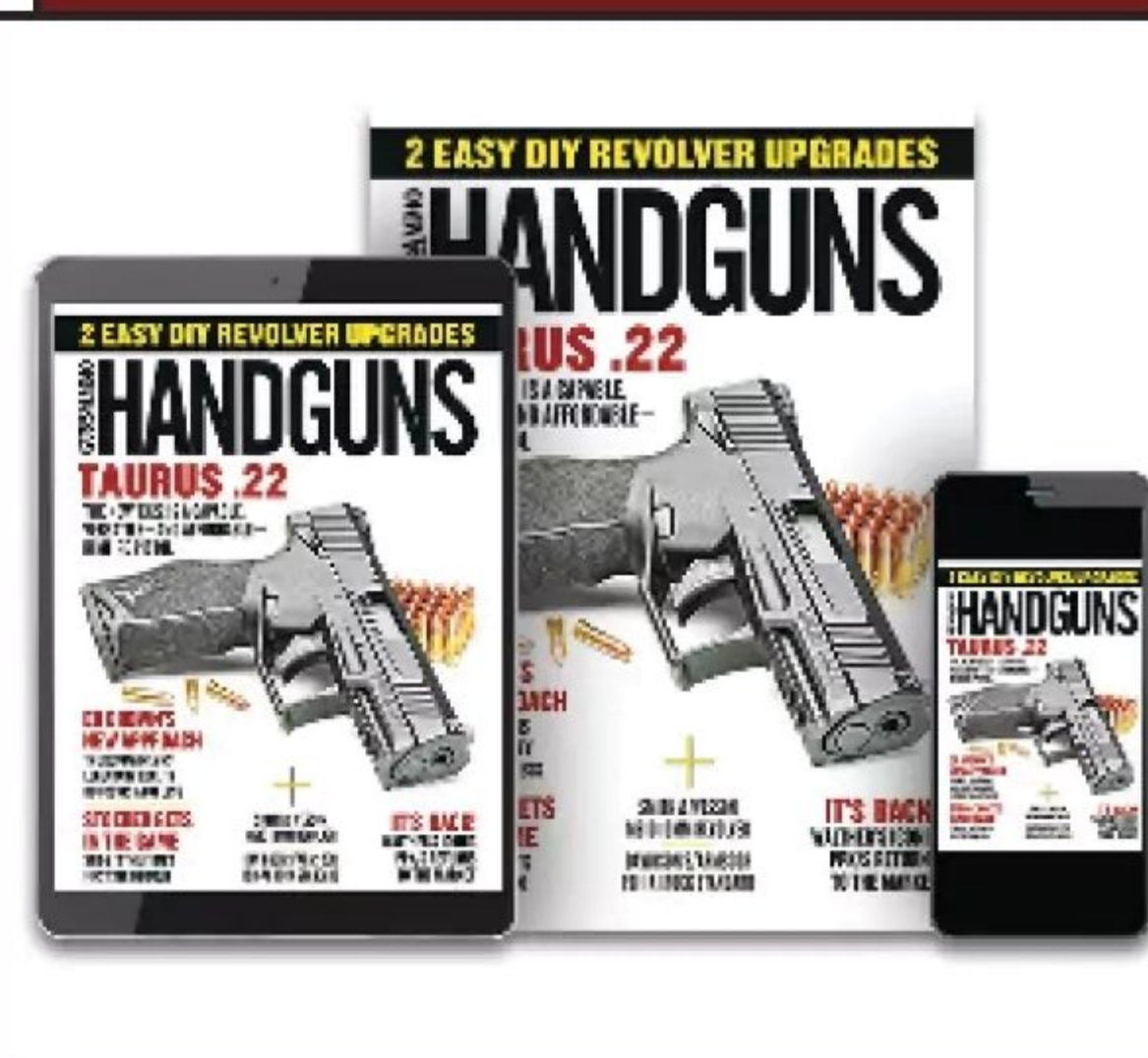
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# MOVE IT!

**IN A GUNFIGHT, YOUR MOBILITY COULD SAVE THE DAY.**

**BY RICHARD NANCE**







**A** boxer's success is largely dependent on his movement. Sure, punching, parrying and myriad other skills are important, but without fluid footwork to augment those abilities, the boxer becomes one-dimensional. The flat-footed pugilist makes an easy target and poses little threat to an experienced opponent who uses movement both to avoid being hit and to place himself in bargain position to land a powerful punch to the unprotected head or body.

Movement is equally important to the defensive handgunner. Whether the threat is a gloved fist or a bullet, a moving target is harder to hit. If shots ring out while you're unarmed or when your gun is holstered, moving is probably your best option.

While movement of any kind is better than standing still, not all movement is equally beneficial. Let's take a look at different types of movement and how proficiency in each can help tilt the odds in your favor.

Running is the fastest way to propel ourselves from point A to point B under our own power. Therefore, it's the best way to put distance between you and an assailant. But since running directly away doesn't require a gunman to change his aim, it's probably the least helpful direction for you to run. It isn't much harder for the bad guy to shoot you at 10 yards than it is for him to hit you at five, and so on.

By running away at approximately a 45-degree angle, you can distance yourself from the gunman just as quickly while simultaneously presenting less of a target and forcing the gunman to track you with his muzzle. These factors increase your odds of escaping without being shot—or at least without sustaining a fatal wound.

I've been taught that staying low and running in a zigzag pattern will make you a harder target. While this may be true, it's equally

true that while you're running for your life, your fine motor skills are bound to deteriorate. As you try to change direction in mid-sprint, there's a fair chance you'll fall, which could leave you even more vulnerable. Also, zigzagging doesn't put distance between you and the threat as quickly as running straight away or at a 45-degree angle.

Of course, if there is an object nearby that's capable of stopping a bullet, that's a smart place to head. This exemplifies what renowned handgun instructor Dave Spaulding calls moving with purpose. This concept is in stark contrast to the shooter on the range taking a sidestep or two while drawing his or her gun, reloading or clearing a malfunction—which may well be all you can do due to firing-range restrictions.

Lateral movement can work, but it needs to be dynamic so the assailant is forced to reorient himself to you and redirect his attack. Taking a step or two in either direction isn't fooling anybody. It just makes it harder for you to perform the task at hand.

Dynamic lateral movement can get you to cover, get you offline of an attack or create an opportunity to draw your gun. It's meant for close quarters, where your goal is to stay square to the threat so you are in the best position to fight. If the assailant is beyond about five yards, running is probably the best option, even if you're wearing a gun.

Dynamic lateral movement as taught by Spaulding isn't merely a concept but rather an actual technique. It starts with maintaining an athletic stance, with your knees slightly bent, with your gun-side leg to the rear. You should feel the balls of your feet in contact with the ground, with your heels lightly planted or even slightly raised.

Rather than favoring one side or the other, your stance should enable you to move quickly in any →



## MOVE IT!

← direction. Think of a shortstop in baseball, who must be prepared to move right, left, forward or backward to make the play when the ball is hit in his direction.

If you are moving right, your left foot initiates the movement by pushing off the ground as you take an exaggerated step to the right with your right leg. Then your left leg follows. Rather than crossing your feet, think of your left foot replacing your right foot, then take another step with your right leg to reestablish your shooting stance.

An additional step or two in this manner should get you off the “X” and buy you time to draw. But how you stop your lateral movement is as

important as how you start it. I’ve seen students fall over as they try to stop. To avoid this, think of reaching out with your leading leg at the last step and using it as a brake to help stop your momentum. Ideally, you should end up in a balanced stance, with your gun on target and ready to fire. As with any athletic endeavor, this takes practice.

Your feet should glide above the ground. Don’t hop. Doing so slows you down and makes it harder for you to draw. When you hop, your balance also suffers.

Lateral movement is a great way to traverse several feet left or right, but if you need to move farther, your best bet is to turn your lower

body in the direction you want to go, while rotating your upper body like a turret to face the threat.

When moving in this manner, you’ll find it much easier to orient to the threat when you’re heading toward your gun side. When you move in the other direction, you’ll probably feel more bound up.

You might find bending your knees a little more will make it easier to engage targets when moving to your non-gun side. This technique was taught to me by Special Forces veteran and Viking Tactics president Kyle Lamb, and I find it helpful.

When faced with an armed assailant in close quarters, closing distance may seem counterintuitive, but sometimes it’s the right move. For instance, when an assailant reaches for a weapon within or just outside arm’s length, moving toward him may enable you to foul his draw. From there, moving to the outside, then shoving or striking him should enable you to draw your own gun.

If an assailant closes in to grab you, extending your off hand toward his face and moving to your gun side could halt his movement and enable you to circle him while drawing your gun. Continuing to move around the assailant could provide a favorable position, where you are facing his side or even his back. From there, he’d have to reorient to face you. Meanwhile, you’re prepared to fire immediately if warranted.

Moving backward is an instinctive way to create distance from an adversary, but if he’s armed with a firearm, it’s like running directly away from him. He doesn’t have to track you as he would if you moved laterally or at an angle.

Backing up is also slower than turning and running, so you’ll be in harm’s way even longer. But the real danger of backpedaling is that, even when you’re facing an attacker armed with a contact-distance weapon like a box cutter or a pipe



**A** When running with a gun, release your grip with your non-shooting hand and be cognizant of the direction of the muzzle.



wrench, he can move forward faster than you can move backward.

If you try to move backward quickly more than a few steps, there's also a good chance you'll fall on your butt or flat on your back. That's because we are designed to walk forward, and it's harder to maintain your balance walking backward.

From the ground, your mobility is severely limited, and you are susceptible to bullets that skip off the ground. And whether you're seated or supine, those rounds are likely to traverse your body lengthwise, which will likely produce devastating wounds.

Moving backward to create space can work, but it should be used minimally. When doing so, keep your body weight centered over your toes and lead with your toes as you step. This helps maintain balance and enables you to feel any obstacle such as a curb or a large rock behind you that might otherwise cause you to trip.

Any discussion of movement in armed conflict begs the question of whether it's better to shoot on the move or to stop moving to shoot. The correct decision is situationally dependent. Shooting on the move makes you more difficult to hit, but it's also more difficult to shoot accurately while moving.

In the case of moving from one position of cover to another, shooting on the move requires that you move more slowly than if you were running. This leaves you exposed to incoming fire longer. On the plus side, when you shoot on the move, your rounds fired at the assailant may stop him or at least give him something to think about other than shooting you.

You'll never shoot as well while moving as you could while standing still. The faster you move, the more your gun and subsequently your sights will move. When you accept that your sights will move and become comfortable enough to trust the wobble, you can get sufficiently



**A** When moving more than a few feet, walk in the direction you want to go and turn at the waist to orient your upper body to the threat.

accurate hits while moving at a moderate pace.

If you move too quickly, accuracy suffers, as does your ability to process information. If you're actually running, don't try to shoot. You are accountable for each round you fire and must realize innocent bystanders may move into your line of fire.

That's not to say you can't have your gun in hand while running. In fact, doing so saves time so that when you stop, there's minimal lag time before you're able to make a shot. Run to where you're going, then stop, plant your feet and shoot from a stable platform.

If you haven't practiced running with your gun in hand, you should.

As with developing any new skill with a handgun, an inert training gun is a good way to start.

One thing you'll notice is that it's easier to run with the gun held in only your dominant hand. Doing so allows your non-dominant arm to swing naturally, but you need to be mindful of where your muzzle is pointing.

When you're running, taking larger strides increases the likelihood of the muzzle crossing your legs. That's why it's important to keep your finger not just off the trigger but indexed on the frame of the gun, well outside the trigger guard.

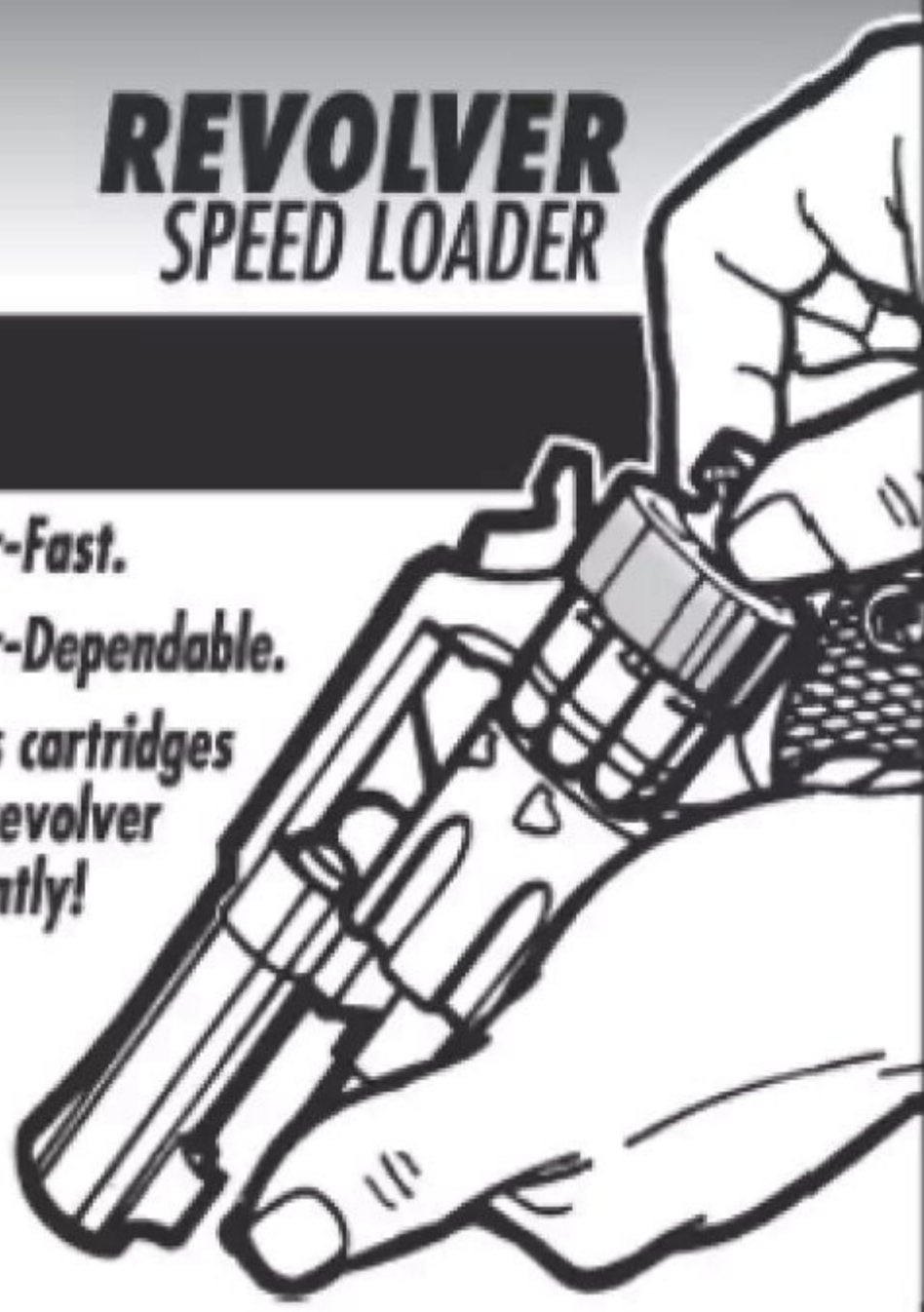
When running with your gun, keep the gun oriented in the di- ➔





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## MOVE IT!

← rection of the threat, or at least orient the muzzle so it isn't pointed at anyone other than the assailant—including yourself. If an innocent party wanders into your line of fire, divert the muzzle.

Of course, physical limitations including a preexisting or a recently sustained injury may limit your mobility. In such a case, feigning cooperation until you can covertly draw your gun may be your best bet. If your mobility is limited, awareness of potential threats and recognition of nearby objects that could be used as cover are paramount.

When most of us practice shooting, it's from a stationary position. That's a great way to hone marksmanship fundamentals, but if you need to use your gun in defense

of your life or someone else's, you should expect things to get chaotic. The more well-versed you are at handling your gun while moving, the better off you'll be.

Whether dodging fists or bullets, movement makes you harder to hit. It's perhaps the most underrated skill for the defensive handgunner. Moving can buy you time and cause the assailant to play catch-up. This is much more advantageous than making your stand while standing still.

Consider how movement might help you in a self-defense situation, and incorporate various types of movement into your training regimen. If you don't, you may find yourself flat-footed when the bullets are flying or woefully unprepared when your or someone else's life is on the line. 



 When stopping your dynamic lateral movement, think of your outside foot as a brake. If you're not careful, momentum will cause you to lose your balance.





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## SMITH & WESSON PERFORMANCE CENTER M&P9 SHIELD PLUS CARRY COMP

### THE SMITH & WESSON M&P9 TURNS 20

years old in 2025, but today's M&P9s are very different than the originals—Smith & Wesson has done an excellent job of refining these guns over the years. The new Smith & Wesson Performance Center M&P9 Shield Plus Carry Comp is a perfect example of this evolution.

Like other Shield Plus pistols, this one offers double-digit magazine capacities. Each Shield Plus Carry Comp comes with a flush-fit 10-round magazine, an extended 13-round magazine and an extended 15-rounder.

As the name suggests, the Shield Plus Carry Comp comes with a compensator, making it the smallest member of Smith & Wesson's Carry Comp family. Known as the Power Port, this compensator is designed to help direct gases upward from the muzzle, reducing muzzle rise and allowing for faster follow-up shots.

The slide is made from stainless steel

with a black Armornite finish, and it features the company's ClearSight Cut. Smith & Wesson angled the slide just behind the chamber so gases and debris escaping the action do not fog your optic with a layer of grime that can obscure your view—or even damage your optic's lens.

Night sights are standard, an adjustable black notch rear paired with a tritium fiber-optic front. The slide is cut to accept Shield RMsC-footprint optics. Smith & Wesson has also added more aggressive front and rear texturing that extends to the top of the slide.

As a Performance Center gun, the Shield Plus Carry Comp comes with flat-face trigger and a Performance Center-tuned action. Like other Smith & Wesson pistols, this one's trigger features a blade safety, and there's minimal take-up before a wall and a clean break. The trigger broke at an average of five pounds,

### SMITH & WESSON PERFORMANCE CENTER M&P9 SHIELD PLUS CARRY COMP

**TYPE:** striker-fired semiauto

**CALIBER:** 9mm Luger

**CAPACITY:** 10, 13, 15-round mags supplied

**BARREL:** 4 in., Armornite finish, Power Port compensator

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 7.0/4.6 (flush-fit mag)/1.1 in.

**WEIGHT:** 17.9 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** Armornite-finished stainless steel slide, textured polymer frame

**TRIGGER:** 5.1 lb. pull (measured)

**SIGHTS:** black notch rear, tritium fiber-optic front; slide cut for optics on RMsC footprint

**PRICE:** \$649

**MANUFACTURER:** Smith & Wesson,

SMITH-WESSON.COM

two ounces for 10 pulls. These guns also ship with a Performance Center cleaning kit that includes assorted jags, brushes, rods and cleaning patches.

The polymer grip features an 18-de-



gree grip angle and modern wraparound micro-texturing. No backstrap inserts are included, but the grip is comfortable and promotes a high hold. The Shield Plus Carry Comp's control layout is similar to other Smith & Wesson M&P9 pistols, in that it has a reversible oval magazine release on the left side of the grip and a slide stop and rotating takedown lever.

For the range evaluation I mounted a Burris FastFire C, and kudos to Burris for including—and labeling—a variety of screws to fit multiple pistols. With the optic in place the pistol measured 5.2 inches high with the flush-fit magazine installed.

The manageable height and the Shield Plus Carry Comp's narrow width make it easy to conceal, and I could carry it in either the appendix or the three o'clock position. The added length of the compensator is inconsequential for most carry applications.

ACCURACY RESULTS | SMITH & WESSON  
PERFORMANCE CENTER M&P9 SHIELD PLUS CARRY COMP

| 9mm Luger                    | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Muzzle Velocity (fps) | Std. Dev. (fps) | Avg. Group (in.) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Hornady Critical Defense FTX | 115                 | 1,087                 | 7               | 2.0              |
| Hornady American Gunner JHP  | 115                 | 1,143                 | 11              | 2.4              |
| Federal Hydra-Shok Deep      | 135                 | 986                   | 14              | 2.6              |
| Speer Gold Dot G2 JHP        | 147                 | 926                   | 9               | 2.2              |
| Fiocchi FMJ                  | 147                 | 888                   | 14              | 2.3              |

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest with a Burris FastFire C. Velocities are 10-shot averages from a Caldwell VelociRadar. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint

Every shooter will appreciate that this pistol ships with three different magazines, allowing owners to adjust capacity and grip length as needed. The flush-fit 10-round magazine offers just enough grip for a three-finger hold, but those with larger hands might find their pinky floating in space. That's no problem since the 13-round magazine offers just a bit more real estate.

If you've got really big mitts the



The Carry Comp features a Power Port compensator that redirects gases upward to help keep the muzzle level for faster follow-ups.

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## HANDGUNS | FIRING LINE REPORT

← 15-round magazine might be necessary, but with that magazine in place this gun shoots like a compact pistol instead of a micro compact.

This was my second opportunity to shoot the Shield Plus Carry Comp—the first was at the new S&W headquarters in Tennessee—and both times I've tried to determine how impactful the Power Port compensator is. Shooting the gun side by side with an unported Shield Plus Carry Comp demonstrated that the port does, in fact, do its job.

This is a light gun at just 17.9 ounces unloaded, so it has the potential to be snappy with hot loads. However, this compensated version of the Shield Plus is more fun to shoot, especially for extended periods. Just don't forget hearing protection.

Accuracy was very good for a micro-compact pistol. As you can see in the accompanying chart, average at 25 yards



▲ The Shield Plus Carry Comp's controls mirror those on other M&P9 guns. The slide is cut for optics on the RMSc footprint.



▲ While it makes the gun carry more like a compact than a micro, the 15-round magazine provides a ton of grip real estate and great capacity.

hovered around the 2.5-inch mark, with some dropping under two inches. One five-shot group with Hornady's Critical Defense ammunition managed to dip under 1.5 inches.

Smith & Wesson has done an excellent job with most design details on this pistol. The grip angle is great, and the aggressive texturing makes press checks much simpler.

I do wish the company would enhance the slide-stop button, which I believe to be slightly undersize. But otherwise the Shield Plus Carry Comp is a solid, smooth-shooting pistol that offers a lot of thoughtful features and great ergonomics. It's more expensive than many other carry guns, but it's so refined and well-built that I believe it warrants the price tag.

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## COLT VIPER

### USUALLY WHEN A COMPANY RESURRECTS

a model from its past, that gun was popular the first time around or has some kind of special hold on shooters. The Colt Viper would seem to fall into neither of those categories.

The original was produced only in 1977, and only 4,000 were made. R.L. Wilson's authoritative *Colt: An American Legend* has but a single Viper photograph and no background on its design and history. But with the current demand for defensive revolvers, the timing of this .357 Magnum double-action/single-action reintroduction couldn't be better.

The six-shot Viper is available with a 4.25- or three-inch barrel; I borrowed the latter. In this configuration the gun is 8.25 inches long, with a weight of 27 ounces. Height is five inches. While these dimensions are bigger than, say,

a two-inch snubnie in the S&W J-frame class, it's perfectly suited for carry and quite shootable—even with .357 Magnum loads.

The Viper is forged from stainless steel and features a bright polished finish. The barrel is one piece, with a solid rib up top and a two-thirds-length ejector shroud below. "Colt Viper" and the caliber designation are engraved on the left side of the barrel, with "Colt's Mfg. Hartford, CT USA" on the right.

The muzzle sports a recessed crown, and above the muzzle you'll find a 4-40 set screw that holds the black serrated front sight in place. If you want to replace the sight, insert a 0.050-inch Allen wrench to loosen the screw. The rear sight is a gutter-length notch machined into the frame's topstrap.

The Viper is built on the King Cobra frame, and my sample actually came

### COLT VIPER

**TYPE:** double-action/single-action revolver

**CALIBER:** .357 Magnum

**CAPACITY:** 6

**BARREL:** 3 in. (as tested) one-piece stainless steel

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 8.25/5.0/1.4 in.

**WEIGHT:** 27 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** polished stainless steel frame

**GRIPS:** checkered wood

**TRIGGER:** DA pull 7 lb., 10 oz.; SA pull 2 lb., 8 oz.

**SIGHTS:** gutter rear, serrated black ramped blade front

**SAFETY:** transfer bar

**PRICE:** \$999

**MANUFACTURER:** Colt, COLT.COM

with a King Cobra owner's manual. The famous rampant colt symbol is found on the frame just below the cylinder release. That part is Colt's pull-style "chess pawn" release, and the head of the pawn is serrated for sure purchase. It operates easily. →





A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a black handgun. The person has extensive tattoos on their forearms and is wearing a grey, textured sweater and a smartwatch on their left wrist. The background is dark and out of focus.

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← The six-shot cylinder is fluted. Timing of the cylinder stop was flawless. After 100 or so rounds through the gun, the cylinder showed zero drag marks. Cylinder end shake after firing those rounds, including a couple boxes of .357s, was .0045 inch. Those who geek out over such things might consider this on the high side, but it certainly didn't show up in performance.

The trigger is grooved and sits inside an enlarged trigger guard. It had an excellent pull: seven pounds, 10 ounces in double action and two pounds, eight ounces in single action. The weight was very consistent from pull to pull, with the double action exhibiting a normal amount of stacking toward the end.

The hammer is serrated, and the fire-control mechanism incorporates a transfer-bar safety. Transfer bars prevent the hammer from striking the firing pin unless the trigger is pulled. This is the lone mechanical safety on the revolver.

Last but certainly not least, the Viper features a pair of checkered wood grips that complement the stainless steel perfectly.

The Viper not only looks good, it shoots good, too. The 15-yard accuracy results may not blow you away, but I think they're great considering the rudimentary sighting setup.

Since this is a fixed-sight gun, the points of impact are worth mentioning. The Fiocchi was an inch or so high, Hornady Critical Defense two to three inches low. The Remington Golden Saber +P and Hornady .357 loads were basically right on.

The Viper's balance is spot-on, too, and with lighter loads like Critical Defense it was a puppy dog. It's easy to shoot with +Ps, my defensive go-to for guns in this class, and in drills even .357s were totally manageable.

While the sights are fine, if this revolver were my primary defensive tool, I might opt for one of the many high-

ACCURACY RESULTS | COLT VIPER

| Cartridge                      | Bullet Weight (gr.) | Muzzle Velocity (fps) | Std. Dev. (fps) | Avg. Group (in.) |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| <b>.38 SPECIAL</b>             |                     |                       |                 |                  |
| Hornady Critical Defense FTX   | 110                 | 943                   | 15              | 2.0              |
| Remington Golden Saber BJHP +P | 125                 | 967                   | 22              | 1.8              |
| Fiocchi JHP                    | 158                 | 926                   | 15              | 1.7              |
| <b>.357 MAGNUM</b>             |                     |                       |                 |                  |
| Hornady Critical Duty MonoFlex | 135                 | 1,261                 | 17              | 1.8              |

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



▲ The Viper is built of forged stainless steel and has Colt's pull-style "chess pawn" cylinder release. The trigger guard is enlarged, and the wood grips nicely complement the polished finish.

visibility aftermarket front sights that are available to fit the Viper.

My one complaint is that, for me, the enlarged trigger guard doesn't leave enough room between it and the middle knuckle of my firing hand—resulting in getting rapped repeatedly until I started cheating my grip. Comparing it to my current-manufacture Colt Python, with the Viper my knuckle is practically resting against the guard while the Python gives me a full quarter-inch of clearance.

However, like so many things in handgunning, it comes down to hand/finger size versus grip size and shape. Fortunately, this particular issue will reveal itself the moment you pick up the revolver at your friendly neighborhood gunshop. If your natural grip doesn't play well with the Viper, it may not be the best choice for you.



▲ The three-inch barrel has a solid top rib and a two-thirds ejector shroud. The muzzle features a recessed crown, and a 4-40 Allen set screw allows the front sight to be replaced.



▲ The Viper is a six-shot revolver with a nice balance that makes shooting loads from standard .38s to .38 +Ps a breeze. Even .357 Magnums are quite manageable.

But if it does work out, you'll find the Viper an excellent choice as a defensive carry or home-defense gun. It's a gorgeous revolver with great handling and a terrific trigger, plus you get the cachet that comes with owning a Colt. ●





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