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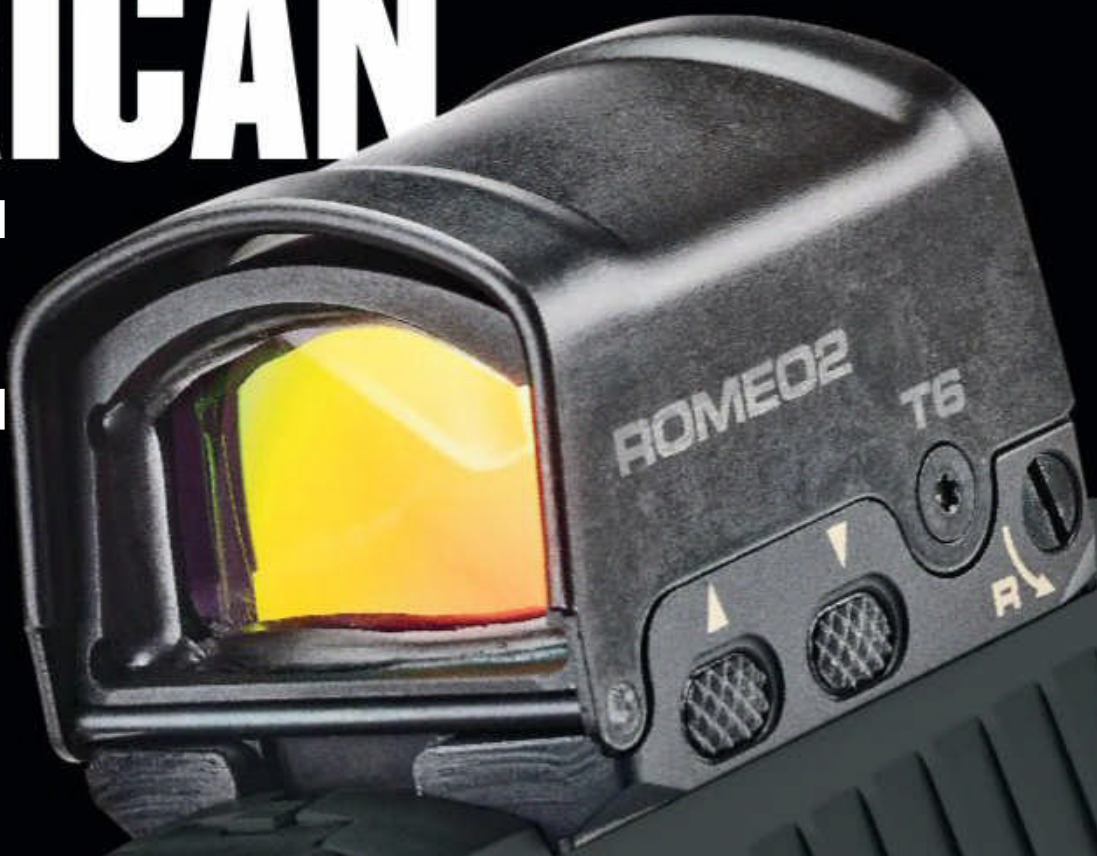
GUNS & AMMO

DECEMBER 2020

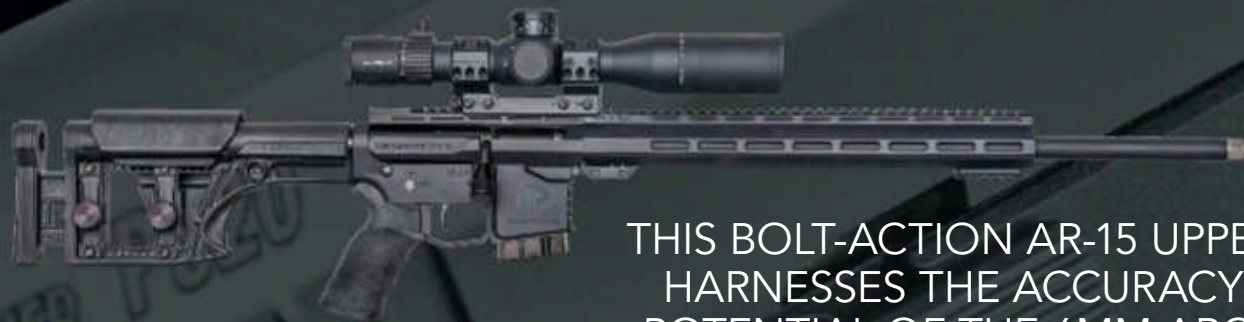
FIRST LOOK!

AMERICAN MADE

SIG ROMEO2:
A SEQUEL THAT'S
BIGGER AND
BETTER. P. 40



UINTAH PRECISION



THIS BOLT-ACTION AR-15 UPPER
HARNESSSES THE ACCURACY
POTENTIAL OF THE 6MM ARC.

P. 30



**2020
GUNS & AMMO
OF THE YEAR
AWARDS**

P. 56



P. 27
BECKSTRAND:
Shooting in
Hornady's PRS
match.



P. 17
POOLE:
Avient:
Innovative
thermoplastics.



P. 96
WOOD:
3 Guns I wish
we reviewed
in 2020.



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BY ERIC R. POOLE

40

A HANDGUN SIGHT THAT CONVERTS FROM AN OPEN-EMITTER TO A CLOSED-EMITTER RED DOT.

SIG SAUER ROMEO2



Guns & Ammo's subscriber cover features a new bolt-action AR-15 upper that extracts the long-range accuracy potential from Hornady's 6mm ARC. p. 30

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

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NOT ANOTHER AR

Utah Precision's UP-15 in 6mm ARC is the bolt-action rifle you didn't see coming.

BY TOM BECKSTRAND

46

LAST LINE: THE TRIARI

Named for Rome's warrior elite, Kimber's latest Micro 9 offers today's defenders an option that's ready and able to answer the call.

BY JOE KURTENBACH

56

2020 GUNS & AMMO OF THE YEAR

The best of what's new and innovative or 2020.

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74

COMBAT ELITE

An introduction to three distinct two-tone Model 1911s from Colt.

BY KEITH WOOD

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PHOTO: MARK FINGAR

7MM REM. MAG., PLEASE

I am an avid reader of your magazine and have two rifles in 7mm Remington Magnum, which I enjoy shooting very much. My T/C Compass is very accurate, and I've been shooting paper at 100 yards without a problem. However, I don't see much information or specifications for this cartridge. I would also like to see some range and field data on the 7mm Rem. Mag.'s long-range hunting capabilities. Maybe you could print an article on this topic.

Donald Schalk
Elgin, Illinois

SAVAGE OWNER'S MANUAL?

I just finished the January 2020 issue of Guns & Ammo. I must offer that I was most moved with Craig Boddington's historical Savage article "1894" because it mentioned the Model 340. About 10 years ago, after my father passed, I inherited the Model 340D in .222 Remington with a 2.5X Bushnell scope. I had thought about letting it go, but decided that I would keep and shoot it for sentimental reasons. I remember my father purchasing it in 1967 in Escanaba, Michi-

gan, at a hardware store. We could shoot centerfire in the U.P., but in 1969, we moved to lower Michigan, which rendered the firearm illegal for hunting. So, it remained in the closet. In January 2018, I wrote Savage Arms to try and obtain an owner's manual. They replied and offered, "If you are looking for a manual that tells you how to assemble and disassemble older Savage, Stevens or Fox firearms, these are no longer offered or in print." Do you know where I could find the information above? After reading this article, I

was pleased that I decided not to let this rifle go.

Chris Straka
Lawton, Michigan

MISSING BALLARDS

Col. Boddington's "Sesquicentennial" in the October 2020 issue of Guns & Ammo marking Marlin's 150th Anniversary was an excellent article. It was informative and interesting, but I'm baffled that there was nary a peep about the many exceptional Ballard rifles made by Marlin. This was a very bizarre omission. The higher-grade Ballards are at the historical pinnacle of American rifle building, certainly of Marlin's. Perhaps there is something I don't understand?

Anonymous
Dunsmuir, California

JAPANESE RIFLES

I read with interest Garry James' article "Prevalence in the Pacific" in the July 2020 issue. James detailed the Arisaka Type 99 and mentioned the manufacturer's earlier Type 38 rifles used throughout the Second World War. G&A's next month contained an identification of a reader's "Unusual Arisaka Marking," and the September issue featured a reader letter about the Type 99. These reminded me of the experiences of two Marine Corps veterans

NOVEMBER '18

The subscriber cover saw the introduction of the Aimpoint ACRO P-1. The ACRO was the first closed-emitter red dot sight developed for use on pistols. Being a closed system, the sight's casing protects electronics from shock, debris and moisture that would interrupt the LED projection or distort sight picture.



I knew. First, a Louisiana native, age 17, was a Marine on Guadalcanal between 1942 and '43. He had been shot by a Japanese soldier armed with either a Type 38 or Type 99 and earned a Purple Heart. A combination of unspeakable Japanese brutality, the horrible conditions and his wound instilled an inconsolable and lasting hatred for both the Japanese and the small-caliber Arisaka rifles. He wrestled with the hurt for the rest of his life. The second connection was my Uncle John. His Marine anti-aircraft battalion went ashore on Funafuti Atoll on October 2, 1942, with two infantry compa-

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nies from 3rd Marines, a group of U.S. Navy Seabees and a detachment from Navy Scouting Squadron 65. After he landed, he was detailed to “mop up” the enemy forces. I recall seeing two small black-and-white photographs of several Japanese soldiers they encountered. In one or both images, Arisaka rifles were lying beside the corpses. After G&A’s recent article and mentions, I decided to add a Type 38 and a Type 99 to my collection as salutes to my former acquaintance and relative. Thank you. These writeups have made the past come alive.

John T. Stemple
Winter Haven, Florida

PRIMITIVE HUNTING

I don’t subscribe, but a friend gives me this magazine. I agree with Dennis Vance’s letter in the September issue, “You Sick People” — to a point. What’s happened to hunting with a muzzleloader? Hunting is a complete disgrace these days. Consider the plastic stocks, the powder, copper bullets and telescopic sights. All we now have is a single-shot rifle season! There is nothing primitive about hunting with a modern muzzleloader, and yet some want to brag about getting a deer with one! Here in Virginia, there are two muzzleloading seasons. I would like to see at least one become a primitive season.

Clyde Perdue
Blacksburg, Virginia

SOLVING PROBLEMS

In Guns & Ammo’s August issue, Dick Koch wrote that he doesn’t believe any lawful firearms owner would have a problem with registering the heart of any weapon. I respectfully disagree. There are tens of millions of us in this country. History has always shown us that registration leads to confiscation. And gun confiscation always leads to increased tyranny. If Mr. Koch is serious about wanting to stop potential mass shootings, he should work towards the elimination of gun-free zones where almost all such crimes occur.

Eric John Bailey
Olympia, Washington

KEEP IT UP!

As I read and hear about all the naïve gun haters, I have to fight back the water works. They are ignorant to the facts about guns and why they are free in this country. My relatives gave themselves to fight evil, and it’s because the Second Amendment is the most important of the Constitutional amendments. Tyranny is at our door. Such ignorance is being perpetuated by the lack of American history taught in schools. My family came to America on the Mayflower, while others were already here. We need to protect what we have because when the Boomers are gone, the anti-gun agenda will come like a thief in the night. So, keep it up Guns & Ammo! The only way to stop mass shootings is to stop making ignorant children. Thank you Beckstrand, Wood, Poole, Stafford, SGM Lamb, Nance, Emary, James and staff.

Michael Cumston
Priest River, Idaho

WHERE’S THE .38?

For us older readers, please write a column on the .38 Special. I would like to see it rated as a defensive round and read comments on today’s handguns available for the .38 Special, especially those offered by Smith & Wesson, Colt and Ruger. Why did the .38 die seemingly overnight? You do your work, and I’ll do mine. You write, and I’ll keep reading. At 84, I have been a subscriber for many years and plan to be for many more.

J. S. Knoerzer
Marshall, Texas

I AM SICK

Dennis Vance’s “You Sick People” letter in the September issue needs to be answered. The 2nd Amendment is not about hunting, unless your definition of “hunting” includes “all enemies, foreign and domestic.” Mr. Vance is correct that I am “sick.” I am sick of the attacks on our gun rights from both the Left and the “only for hunting” snobs on the right who claim to be “pro-gun.” As my old Navy chief used to say, “That is not acceptable!” Stop the attacks and

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read history. Mr. Vance, I suggest you start with "The Federalist Papers."
 Perry Galloway
 Bowie, Texas

INFRINGEMENT

Gentlemen, with regards to Keith Wood's article, "2020 Best States for Concealed Carry" in the September issue, it made me depressed to see how the U.S. Constitution is being violated. The 2nd Amendment is being distinctly worded, saying "The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." Wake up America and stand up for your rights!
 Jim Schaefer
 Parker, Arizona

NO MORE .32?

I recently purchased a new Charter Arms Professional revolver, a seven-shooter. At the time, I also purchased two boxes of .32 H&R Magnum for my new gun and 100 rounds of .32 S&W Long. It's a good thing I did, too. Since then, I cannot find any .32 Magnum ammo in my area. I can understand the current shortages of 9mm, .380 ACP and .45 ACP, but what's with the sold-out .32 calibers? I hope that .32 Magnum ammo won't be relegated to being no longer available. It is a fine little round. What might your input be on this situation?
 Frankie Richeson
 Englewood, Tennessee

Due to the national social and political climate, as well as the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe that your local sources are simply out of stock. It is not that ammunition manufacturers are intending to cease production of .32-caliber loads, but their efforts are working to meet the constant demand for more popular rounds such as 9mm and 5.56 NATO/.223 Remington, for example. When life in America returns to normal, and tensions ease, you will eventually see ammunition manufacturers setting up to load for more variety and stores restocking their shelves. Until then, .32-caliber ammunition will be harder to find. — E. Poole

SACRED STONE OF THE SOUTHWEST IS ON THE BRINK OF EXTINCTION



Centuries ago, Persians, Tibetans and Mayans considered turquoise a gemstone of the heavens, believing the striking blue stones were sacred pieces of sky. Today, the rarest and most valuable turquoise is found in the American Southwest— but the future of the blue beauty is unclear.

On a recent trip to Tucson, we spoke with fourth generation turquoise traders who explained that less than five percent of turquoise mined worldwide can be set into jewelry and only about twenty mines in the Southwest supply gem-quality turquoise. Once a thriving industry, many Southwest mines have run dry and are now closed.

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ERIC R. POOLE

 @GUNSANDAMMOMAG

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

ON JULY 1, 2020, it was announced that PolyOne would change its name to Avient, a new word for a new kind of specialty materials company. Who are they? Besides developing and manufacturing thermoplastics that are widely used by the automotive, aircraft and marine industries, Avient's polymers are also found in such benign products as flexible toothbrushes, waterproof boots, solar panels, and even casings on X-ray machines! You may not have realized that one company was behind so many everyday items, and it's likely that you were not aware that Avient also supports the firearm and outdoor industries.

Located in Avon Lake, Ohio, Avient has a "challenge accepted" approach to developing next-generation materials. Avient creates sustainable material solutions for their customers, which include manufacturers within the firearm industry. Challenges, therefore, become new opportunities.

Do you shoot a firearm equipped with a recoil pad? There's a good chance that Avient formulated the polymers used in it to absorb and disperse a gunshot's energy. Have you noticed that many colored polymer stocks don't fade overtime as they use to? That's another credit to Avient. Avient acquired Clariant's Masterbatch division on the same day as their name change, which merged Clariant MB and PolyOne Color and Additives into one business. Combined, this merger made Avient the leader of color and additive technologies. Where innovative manufacturers don't have access or can't afford to invest in their own polymer engineering, many turn to Avient to make ideas reality and reduce the risk of wasting money on failed experiments and prototypes.

In recent years, there has been a lot of interest in incorporating polymer components in ammunition manufacture. That's no small feat considering the temperatures, pressures and environmental influences a cartridge is subject to. Jack W. Roske filed a patent for a plastic case joined with a metal cup back in 1950, and there were other pioneers to lighten cases and make them disposable, but the


process wasn't practical or scalable until the scientists and engineers working at Avient developed special polymer composites up to the task. As a result of Avient's efforts, polymer-case offerings are rapidly expanding and new benefits are being exploited. For instance, polymer cases cause less friction during extraction, reduce wear and keep chambers cooler. Cases are lightweight, can also be made biodegradable, and unlike metal cartridges they can't be reloaded and reused by enemy combatants who may scavenge them from the battlefield.

As an industry insider, I've been following Avient's efforts to develop polymers to support the demand for a polymer-case cartridge. The former PolyCase turned to PolyOne to develop the polymer-copper matrix used in Inceptor Ammunition's ARX bullet.

The U.S. Army's Next-Generation Squad Weapon (NGSW) is a systems program, meaning that the contract will include a rifle, machine gun, suppressor and optic, as well as specialized ammunition. That system is based around a futuristic 6.8mm cartridge, which will likely feature a polymer case. Of the brands who submitted bids to support NGSW, True Velocity and Winchester use uniquely formulated polymers that were manufactured, molded and shipped by Avient.

Other companies are also exploring polymer-case cartridge technology developed in partnership with Avient.

In the next year, you'll see major brands unveiling low-cost ammunition for 5.56 NATO featuring Avient's polymers in their cases, for example.

Though Avient may not be a household name among firearm enthusiasts, it is nonetheless a major force that is shaping the future of outdoor products. The company employs more than 100 scientists, mechanical and chemical engineers, and has manufacturing facilities and commercial associates in 45 countries. Avient's global reach is unmatched in their category. You may not be familiar with the brand, but Avient is likely the biggest company behind the products you enjoy the most. 



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“It’s a tough call, but as the Colt has always felt better in my hand, I believe that’s the one I’d opt for.”



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IDENTIFICATION & VALUES



UNKNOWN EUROPEAN FOLDING-TRIGGER REVOLVER

RELIC REVOLVER

Q: I was reading the latest issue that described a Colt Frontier Single Action Army; interesting history. I decided to see if you can help solve a mystery. My dad has this pistol and never told us about it or where it came from. The only discernible marking was the “497” on the cylinder. I’m sure there’s no market value, but I would be very interested in any factual information.

L.L.

Email

A: Well, that old fellow has seen better times, but it certainly exudes a lot of character. From what I can make out beneath the pitting and rust, it is a European folding-trigger double-action revolver circa 1890 to 1930, or so. I found several similar to yours in the 1932 German “WUM” catalog. Some had safety levers, others did not. Names ranged from “Constabulary” through “Police” to “Bulldog.” From its look, I’m going to guess your gun is most likely German, but it could also be Belgian or even Spanish. Without view-

ing the the proofmarks, it is difficult to be positive.

WESTERN FIELD 12 GAUGE

Q: A friend asked if I could find any info on his Western Field/Montgomery Ward 12-gauge shotgun as to manufacture and age? No photos were provided, only a “M550ABD” stamp and H27XXXX serial number.

E.M.

Email

A: Your friend’s Western Field M550ABD 12-gauge was manufactured by Mossberg for Montgomery Ward,

probably in the 1970s. It’s basically a version of Mossberg’s popular and highly reliable Model 500 pump gun that has been manufactured in a large number of variations from 1960 to date. Currently more than 10 million have been produced. Value on your friend’s piece (it’s undoubtedly a no-frills field model) is between \$175 and \$225.

BEST REVOLVER FOR THE PHILIPPINES

Q: I know that this not the usual question that you get, but I have always had this interest in big-bore revolvers of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. I was wondering, if you were a young Army officer in the late 1890s and you received orders to transfer to the Philippines, and you did not trust the issued Colt M1892 New Army and

Navy .38, what American-made revolver would you take instead?

D.P.

Phoenix, AZ

A: The Colt Model 1892 New Army and Navy would certainly be down at the bottom of the list. The .38 Colt chambering was just so-so and the gun’s action was prone to going out of order. Of the big-bore American revolvers of the period, the Colt Model 1878 DA also had some questionable mechanics, and the Merwin Hulbert was not really all that handy to operate in a pinch. To my mind, the best Yankee sixguns at the time were the Colt Single Action Army and the Smith & Wesson American or Russian. The S&Ws were robust, chambered decent calibers and had the advantage of simul-

THE AUCTION BLOCK

Deer Gun

A rare and desirable Vietnam War-era Deer gun realized a respectable \$8,820, including premiums, at the August 13, 2020, Morphy Auctions sale. Manufactured by American Machine and Foundry Company in 1964, this single-shot 9mm pistol was designed to be dropped to South Vietnamese guerillas. Some 1,000 were manufactured, though their existence has been denied by the CIA. Apparently, they were never delivered as intended. Most were reported destroyed and only a few remain. For more information about this and future sales, contact Morphy Auctions at 877-968-8880 or visit morphyauctions.com.



taneous ejection. The SAA was simple, rugged and was available in the most powerful military revolver round of the period, the .45 Colt. It's a tough call, but as the Colt has always felt better in my hand, I believe that's the one I'd opt for. Plus, being less complicated than the S&Ws, it would be easier to deal with in the field should it need to be repaired. My barrel length of choice would most likely be 5½ inches, though if I could only get a 4¾ or 7½ inch, I wouldn't gripe too much.

RARE ITHACA/ COLT 1911A1?

Q: I have what I believe to be a somewhat rare Ithaca M1911A1. A gun aficionado buddy of mine told me that this 1911 was one of a few that was produced in mid-1943 with a Colt-supplied slide. The story goes that Ithaca ran short of parts and Colt furnished the necessary parts needed to keep production moving along. According to my friend, they didn't make many of these with the Colt furnished parts. The gun, as you can see, is in excellent condition



ITHACA/COLT MISMATCHED M1911A1, .45 ACP

with what I believe is an original holster. Its serial number is 1,263,XXX, which is stamped "FJA" below the takedown lever. It has "P" stamped near the magazine release and a "P" stamped on the slide forward of the rear sight. It has an "O" stamped on the right side triggerguard and a large bodied cross on the left-side triggerguard. It has a lightly stamped cartouche below the slide and aft of the right grip. The barrel has an "F" stamped on the right-side lug, and a "P" stamped on the left-side lug. The magazine is stamped with an "S" on the front lip of the baseplate and "CS" on the bottom. And of course, the slide has all the Colt



nomenclature with the rampant horse in the middle. Any help with identification and value would be much appreciated.

**R.C.
Brownsville, Oregon**

A: In late 1942 and early 1943, to boost production, Ithaca bought about 2,200 M1911A1 slides and 7,000 frames from Colt. Neither were marked by Colt. It sounds to me like you simply have a composite of two guns, which is not uncommon with these. Sometimes during repair or cleaning, parts would get mixed and matched. The serial number of your pistol is in the proper Ithaca range for 1943. As well, Ithaca obtained 6,200 surplus receivers from Springfield

Armory. These had been gathered by the Ordnance Salvage Board in the 1920s.

S&W .300 WIN. MAG.

Q: Please find the pictures of my .300 Win. Mag. I came across this rifle earlier this year and I've had a heck of a time trying to find information on it. I took it to a local gun collector and he informed me that it's a very rare rifle. Could you please tell me more about it and what, if anything, it's worth? Thank you for any information you can provide.

**J.R.
Email**

A: Your Smith & Wesson Model A in .300 Win. Mag. was manufactured for S&W by Husqvarna in Sweden sometime between 1969 and 1972. The Model A was offered in a number of popular calibers from .22-250 Rem. all the way up to 7mm Rem. Mag. and .300 Win. Mag. The photos you sent indicate the rifle is in at least 95 percent condition. According to the Forty-First Edition Blue Book of Gun Values (bluebookofgun-values.com), it is worth \$425. Not a bad rifle for the money!

MARLIN 1891 .22 RF

Q: I would like any information you could give me about this Marlin .22 lever-action rifle. The serial number is 72XXX. A letter from the Cody Museum said it was shipped July 6, 1892. How many of these side-loaders were manufactured after the first 5,000 that were made in 1891?

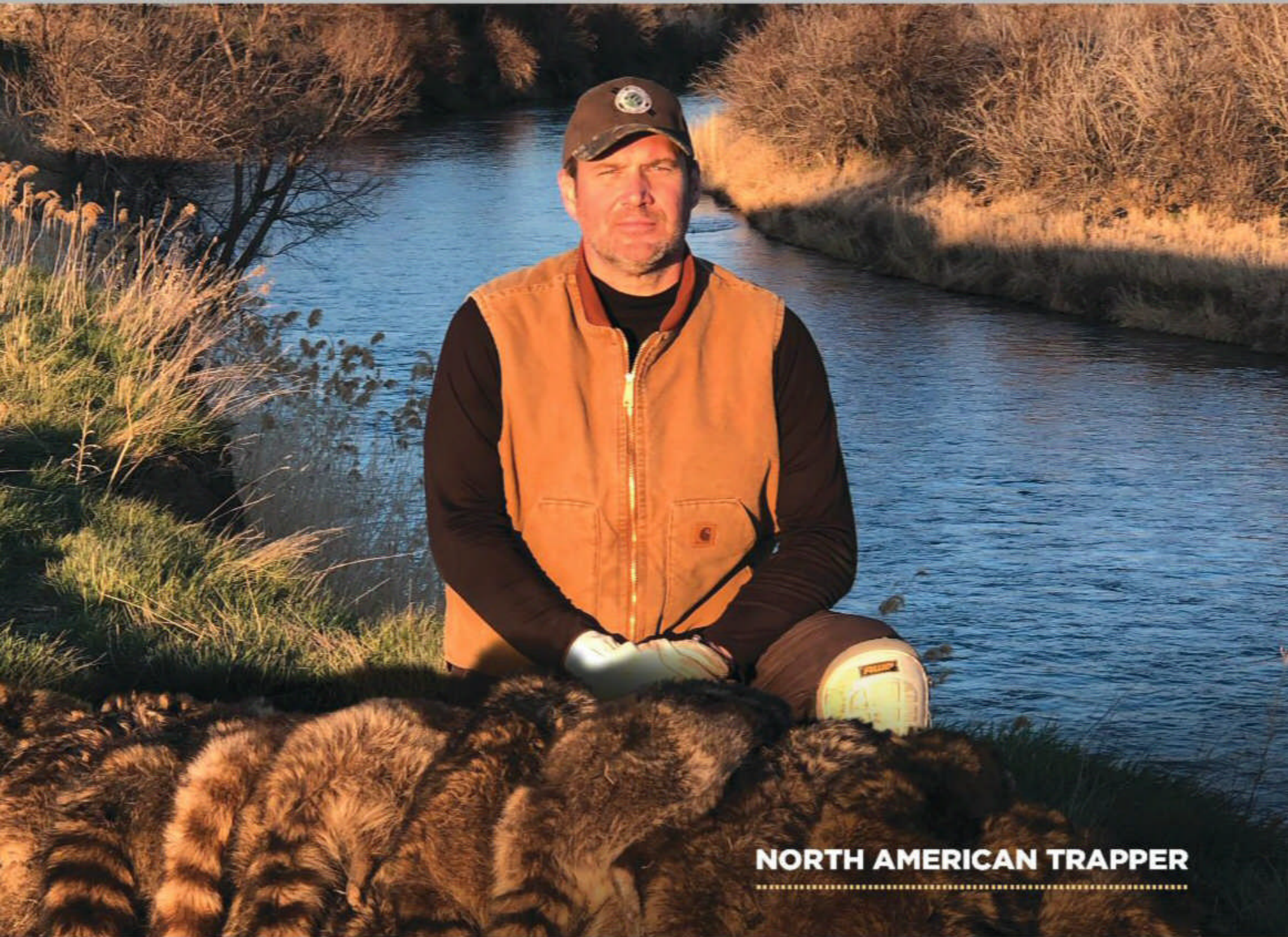
**A.W.
Email**

HOLLYWOOD HARDWARE

Paramount "Potato Digger"

When the United States entered World War I, film director and patriot Cecil B. DeMille organized the Paramount Home Guard to train and equip actors, stage hands and crews to help deal with the national emergency. Uniforms were supplied by Paramount's costume department and arms were supplied by James S. Stembridge, founder of Stembridge Gun Rentals. One of the pieces fielded by the Guard was this Colt Model 1895 "Potato Digger" machine gun in .30-40 Krag. Though outmoded by 1917, the belt-fed "Potato Digger" provided practice and familiarity with autos to the tyro Hollywood warriors. Courtesy of Cinema Weaponry and the National Firearms Museum.





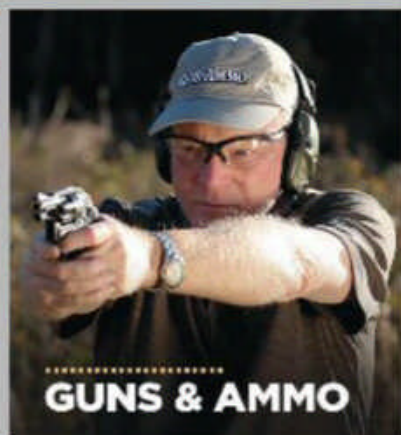
NORTH AMERICAN TRAPPER



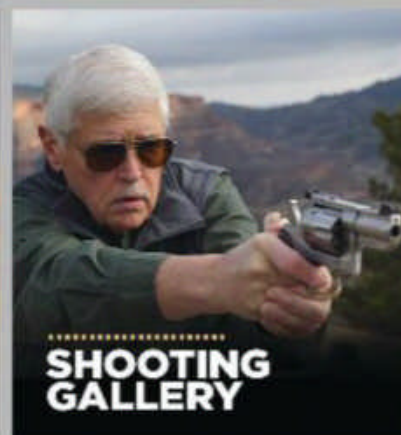
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SCHEDULE SUBJECT TO CHANGE

SPORTSMAN

A: Approximately 18,650 Marlin Model 1891 lever guns were manufactured from 1891 to 1897. The serial numbers ranged from about 37,500 to 118,000. By using a bit of arithmetic, it appears that 13,650 (give-or-take a few) would have been made after the first 5,000.

SNUBBY COLT CONVERSION

Q: I have an old Colt, probably a conversion of some type. Its serial number, 36XX, is marked on the bottom of the frame at the heel, again on the brass frame just in front of the triggerguard, on the main frame where it joins the barrel, on the bottom of the barrel frame, and lastly on the cylinder just under the "U.S. Patent" stamp.

The triggerguard and heel plate are made of brass. On the left side of the frame is stamped "36 cal" but it's actually a .38 rim-fire. There's an old stage-coach engraving on the cylinder. On the left side there are two patent markings: "Pat. July 25, 1871", and "Pat. July 2, 1872". The top of the barrel reads "Colts PT. F.A. Mfg. Co." followed by "Hartford, CT. USA". The wood grips have three notches on the left side and two on the right. The barrel is 3½ inches long. Can you help identify this old gun? My dad got it many years ago. He passed away in 2004 but was always curious about this revolver.

M.Z
Email



COLT POCKET NAVY, .38 RIMFIRE, 10%: \$850

A: You have a conversion of a Colt Pocket Navy revolver. The Pocket Navy was introduced as a percussion arm in 1863, and made probably into the early 1870s. They were converted to handle self-contained cartridges beginning in 1873 and were available in several barrel lengths. The 3½-inch round barrel was the most common. Its dates of production lasted until around

1880. Some were converted from earlier pistols while others were manufactured as original cartridge arms at the factory. Some 10,000 3½-inch versions were produced. Caliber was .38 Rim-fire and .38 Centerfire. From the photos, it appears your gun is a complete, no-finish gun in fair condition. As such it's worth in the \$750 to \$900 range, assuming it is operable.



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Due to the volume of requests each month, personal replies are not possible. The most interesting or unusual queries are answered in Guns & Ammo magazine.

**WINCHESTER
MODEL 53 AGE?**

Q: Could you please let me know when this Winchester Model 53 (caliber .32-20, serial number 963XXX) was made? I inherited it from my father several years ago. The action is smooth as oiled glass and far superior to my Model 94, which was made around 1972.

**S.W.
Virginia**

A: The Model 53 Winchester lever-action was manufactured from 1924 to 1932 as an attempt to update the Model 1892. Some 24,916 were built. Calibers were .25-20, .32-20 and .44-40, with the latter being the scarcest and most desirable. Your particular gun was made in 1926. Model


53s were serial numbered in the Model 1892 range.

**HAUCK'S SPORTER
MAUSER 98**

Q: My father has decided to pass his guns on to me. He likes (as do I) old firearms. He bought a rifle from my mother's uncle in 1982 who had it given to him in 1955 by his brother, my grandfather. My father was told it was made by Remington, so he just assumed it was made of extra military parts at Remington after World War I. Please correct me if I'm wrong; this is a Mauser action and not an Enfield. My mother remembers driving to Arlington, Vermont, with her dad to pick up the rifle in the mid-1930s. Any information you could give as to who built the gun

would be appreciated. I am assuming "W.J. HAUCK", as that's the name on the receiver.

**W.D.
Email**

A: Your dad's rifle is a custom sporter built on a World War I-vintage military Mauser Gewehr 98 action. Workmanship looks decent, though it's difficult to tell exactly when it was put together. I would think the 1930s is a good guess. Wilbur Hauck was a respected Arlington, Vermont, gunsmith who operated his business for several decades. He is undoubtedly the one who created your gun. Hauck patented a single-shot rifle action in the 1950s that was highly regarded, too. 



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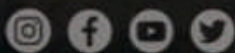
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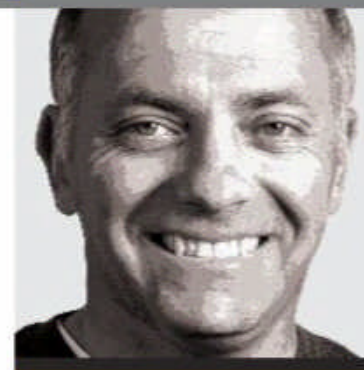
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TOM BECKSTRAND

SHOOTING COMPETITIONS

NOBODY WANTS TO SUCK. Get a bunch of guys together for a friendly shooting match and, sooner or later, it'll get serious. I've never known a guy to give even a friendly competition his half-effort.

The best way for all of us to get better as riflemen is to compete with others. I learned this lesson while I was in the military. When I was on the combat pistol team at West Point, the matches we attended were against other service academies, and the sport was still new. While the competition was serious for us, it was a far cry from what occurred at the national level. Still, competition helped me identify areas where my shooting needed improvement.

My next foray into competitive shooting occurred when I was a sniper team leader in 3rd Special Forces Group. My teammate, Tung Nguyen, encouraged me to accompany him to the Army Small Arms championship where we shot the long-range event. Tung won and helped re-ignite my love for competitive shooting.

I finally found the shooting competitions I most enjoy when I attended my first Precision Rifle Series (PRS) match in 2013. It was a match held in New Mexico and some of the guys I had never met before the match are still good friends to this day.

As I checked in to the match, I figured I would do well. I assumed that because I was a former sniper team leader and a Green Beret that I would finish in the top 20 percent, even though I was new to this type of competition. It sounds ridiculous writing it now, but I certainly underestimated the abilities of my fellow competitors.

This match is where I learned my most valuable shooting lesson, and one that continues to serve me well to this day. I got crushed, and it was by a bunch of guys who had never served in the military or law enforcement. I learned I had no idea how much I didn't know until I saw scores of riflemen perform at a level I had never witnessed until then.

It's easy to dismiss an event like that as "just a competition," or, as I've heard many in military and law enforcement circles say, "it's different when the targets shoot back." Those are both rationalizations that prevent the rifleman from ever progressing past his current proficiency level.



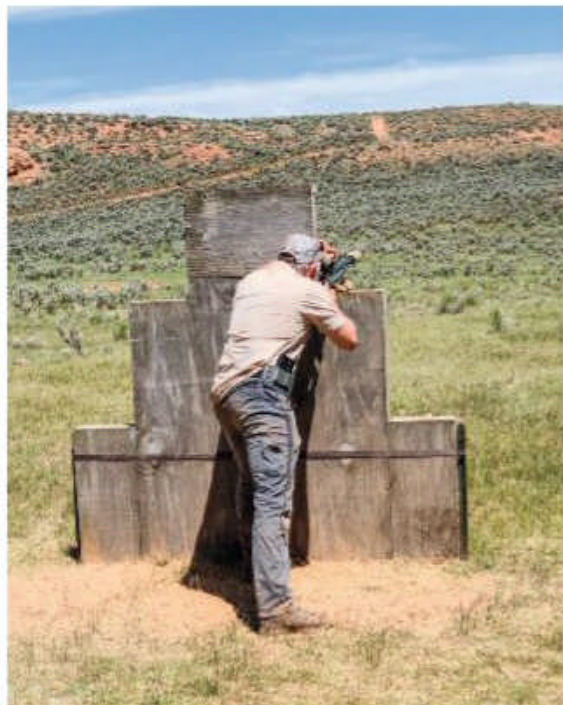
One of my favorite inspirational quotes is a little harsh, but it reads: "Don't be upset by the results you didn't get with the work you didn't do." I didn't get upset with my comparatively poor performance,

because it provided me with the beginnings of an education on what was possible with a rifle. Having my eyes opened was a gift for which I was thankful.

This is an important lesson and one that I encourage all rifle shooters to learn, and learning it sooner is better than later. The best way to do this is to attend either a PRS or National Rifle League (NRL) match. These matches occur at the national level and draw talented shooters into a public event, shooters that would otherwise be invisible.

I had the opportunity to attend the 2020 Hornady Precision Rifle Challenge in Evanston, Wyoming. It reminded me of the first PRS match I attended several years ago. The difference this time was that I knew my lack of preparation was going to hurt me, so I went to the match to shake out some new gear and reconnect with old friends. I shot in the Production class and finished in the top half, but it was still one of my worst performances. However, pain is a wonderful instructor and painful lessons are most easily remembered. So, I thought I'd pass on a few lessons I learned, or re-learned, during the course of that match.

The more familiar a rifleman is with his rifle, the better he will perform with it, but simply possessing the rifle for a long time is no guarantee of strong performance. I attended this match with a new rifle that I borrowed just for the event, and it had an adjustable trigger that I set as light as I dared. By about stage three of the match, I realized that I had gone too light. Cycling the bolt quickly

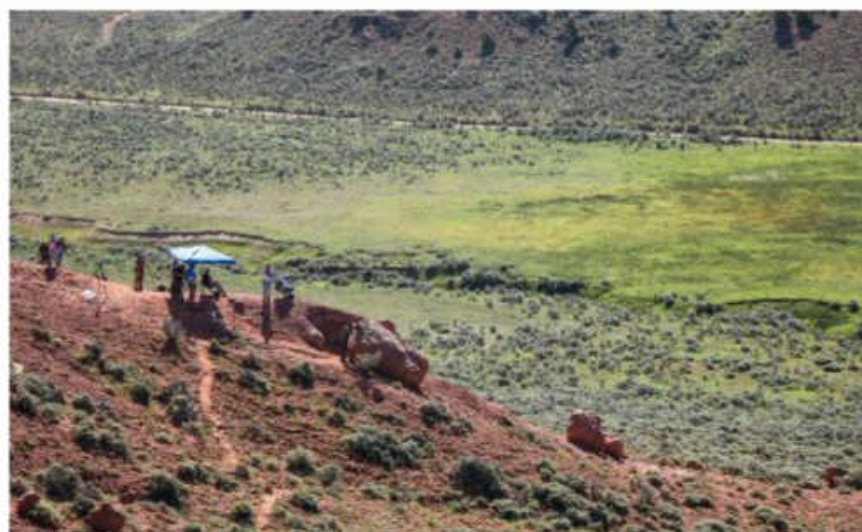


would cause the sear to slip off the cocking piece, forcing me to lift the bolt handle a second time before I could fire the rifle. This is one of the reasons many “adjustable” triggers on factory guns aren’t really adjustable. Many of us want them as light as possible, but when a shooter tunes the trigger down too much, he often wants to blame it on the manufacturer. Most gunmakers don’t want the grief.

Rifle and optic issues are rare at the range, but common at PRS matches. If you’ve heard someone state, “my rifle shoots just as well as that really expensive rifle,” it’s a good indicator of someone who doesn’t know what they don’t know. There’s a big difference between a rifle that can shoot a few tiny groups at the range and one that can do it all day, for a couple days straight, in whatever conditions mother nature serves up. Watching even high-dollar rifles and optics struggle under match-shooting conditions is a great way to identify what expenses are worth the money.

PRS matches like the Hornady Precision Rifle Challenge are the best way to gain an education on how to shoot in the field. Lying in the prone or shooting from a bench is certainly convenient, but prone is rare on a hunt and I’ve never shot a game animal from a shooting bench. Both shooting positions are also rare in combat.

Both hunting and combat require the shooter to develop the best shooting position he can with whatever is immediately available. A PRS match allows the shooter to practice under stressful conditions and, more importantly, watch others do the same. Watching how the best shooters in the country quickly get stable and get hits on target is a real-time demonstration of what works in that scenario. Over time, the new shooter learns to identify and apply




the same principles.

For example, I was on a bear hunt in Alaska recently when an opportunity for a shot presented itself. I was on one riverbank and the grizzly was 410 yards away on a gravel bar. I could almost hear the start buzzer sound in my head as I leapt into action.

I grabbed a set of shooting sticks that were

lying nearby and borrowed another hunter’s backpack. I sat on a steep hillside, put the forend on the shooting sticks, leaned back against the hill and stuffed the backpack under the stock’s toe. This was one of the most stable shooting positions I’ve ever had on a hunt and it was almost identical to many positions I’ve created at PRS matches over the years. Those matches are where I learned to build positions this way.

Spending the time and effort to get to a match is the surest and fastest way to improve with a rifle. Know ahead of time that there’s a very high probability of being beaten by most of the competitors. However, if a guy watches and learns from those competitors, he’ll come away a better rifleman for it. 

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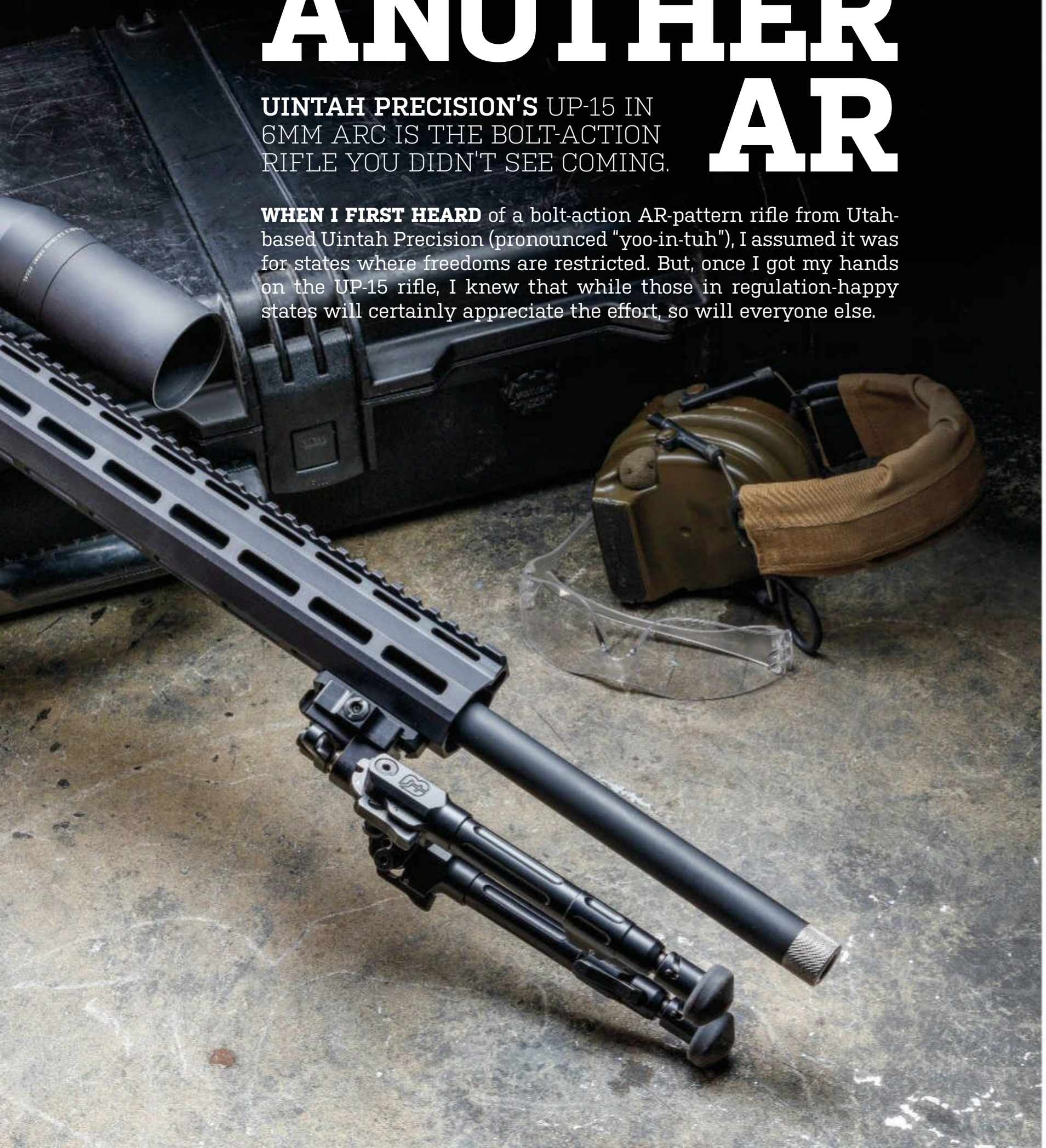


NOT ANOTHER AR

BY TOM BECKSTRAND
PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR

UINTAH PRECISION'S UP-15 IN 6MM ARC IS THE BOLT-ACTION RIFLE YOU DIDN'T SEE COMING.

WHEN I FIRST HEARD of a bolt-action AR-pattern rifle from Utah-based Uintah Precision (pronounced "yoo-in-tuh"), I assumed it was for states where freedoms are restricted. But, once I got my hands on the UP-15 rifle, I knew that while those in regulation-happy states will certainly appreciate the effort, so will everyone else.





Despite its AR-15-inspired parts and appearance, the UP-15 offers the upgrades and components sought by precision-rifle competitors, including an adjustable stock and premium barrel.

UINTAH PRECISION UP-15

TYPE	Bolt action
CARTRIDGE	6mm ARC (tested)
CAPACITY	5 rds. or 10 rds.
BARREL	22 in., 1:7.5-in. twist
OVERALL LENGTH	40.5 in. to 41.5 in.
WEIGHT	7 lbs., 8 oz.
STOCK	Luth-AR MBA-1
GRIPS	Ergo Deluxe
LENGTH OF PULL	13.5 in. to 14.5 in.
FINISH	Anodized (aluminum)
TRIGGER	Velocity Triggers, 3 lbs.
SIGHTS	None
MSRP	\$1,675
MANUFACTURER	Uintah Precision, 435-738-2422, uintahprecision.com



AR Ergonomics Precision bolt-action rifles are hot right now with the explosion of the Precision Rifle Series (PRS) and the National Rifle League (NRL). One of the trends moving into the bolt-gun world is the presence of AR-15 ergonomics. With Barrett's win as the Special Operations Command's (SOCOM) Mk 22 Advanced Sniper Rifle (ASR), SIG Sauer's launch of the long-awaited Cross (\$1,779), and The Fix by Q (\$3,299), AR ergonomics on precision rifles are becoming more popular.

The reason for this trend is obvious: generations of riflemen have been trained with and are familiar with the AR-15. It makes it much easier to transition back and forth between semi-automatic and bolt-action rifles if controls such as the magazine release and safety are in the same place. The UP-15 tested here

also pairs well with anyone invested in standard AR-15-pattern rifles. Not only are the ergonomics the same, but many of the parts are as well.

The UP-15 is a complete rifle that uses a standard AR-15 lower. This makes it simple for anyone looking to experiment because they can purchase just the upper receiver, designated "UPR15" (\$1,088), and then drop it on their rifle. For reference, while the UPR15 pairs with any standard AR-15 lower and magazine, the company's UPR10 (\$1,875) functions with any DPMS-pattern AR-10 lower and magazine. Quality magazines are plentiful and low-cost for both types of rifles. When purchased as a complete rifle, the UP-15 uses almost all of the same small parts as would be found in a generic AR-15 lower parts



On closer inspection, the bolt handle and the receiver's raceway cuts give away the fact that the UP-15 is no ordinary semiauto. Uintah Precision also offers bolt-action UPR15 upper receivers.

kit. The only caution here is that some aftermarket triggers will work, and some won't.

Bolt Details One of the first things I noticed about the UP-15 is the bolt. Removing the bolt is a simple process of sliding the takedown pin out of the way, lifting the upper receiver away from the lower receiver, and then pulling the bolt out the back.

There are a total of 10 parts to the bolt (that's counting every pin, detent and spring), and anyone with a hammer and a pin punch can completely disassemble it in about two minutes. The easy maintenance of the UP-15's bolt is a refreshing feature in the increasingly complex world. Most bolt-action rifles will have twice that number of parts in the bolt, and you'll need a toolbox and customer support on speed dial for complete disassembly and reassembly assistance. The older I get, the less I like having to find help to work on my rifles. I'd prefer to fix the problem myself and not deal with the inconvenience of tracking down a gunsmith, and then waiting to get my rifle back. The UP-15 will appeal to anyone who shares this sentiment.

When I spoke to Jason Baker, Uintah Precision's rifle program manager, he revealed that the bolt is made from one piece of 4140 steel that only sees a machine fixture one time. In one fell swoop, 22 tools make all the cuts to produce a finished bolt. This is some manufacturing wizardry that results in highly consistent bolts.



The bolt is a three-lug design with a hook extractor and plunger-style ejector (below). Very tight manufacturing tolerances mean bolts are virtually interchangeable in Uintah Precision rifles.

Baker said, "Each of our bolts stays within a .001-inch tolerance. You can pull one bolt out of our 6.5 Creedmoor rifle and stick it in a .308 Winchester rifle and fire it without concern."

Tight tolerances are the key to the Uintah Precision bolts, and the company's ability to hold consistent tolerances also allows customers the option of ordering a spare bolt through the mail without worrying whether or not it will fit or change the rifle's headspace. It won't.

The UP-15 has a three-lug bolt with 60 degrees of lift, which places the bottom lug at the 6-o'clock position when the action is open. That lug location means the bottom lug is what engages rounds feeding from the double-stack magazine. This design gives lots of lug-to-cartridge engagement, meaning the odds of the bolt ever slipping up and over a round during feeding are almost zero. No two-lug action, and very few three-lug actions, can make the same claim.

The UP-15 bolt has no firing-pin spring since it uses an AR-15 lower receiver and an AR-15 trigger. Guns & Ammo's test rifle featured a 3-pound curved unit from Velocity Precision Engineering (\$150, velocitytriggers.com). This means there is no resistance when lifting the bolt after firing the rifle. There is, however, some resistance when pulling the bolt rearward since that motion cocks the hammer. Having no resistance when opening the bolt makes it possible to work the bolt quickly without disturbing the shooting position.





Standard chamberings are .223 Wylde, .224 Valkyrie, 6.5 Grendel and .300 Blackout, but additional barrel options, including 6mm ARC (tested) with a 1:7.5-inch twist are also available.



The UP-15's straight-contour barrel has a .810-inch diameter and a recessed crown. The muzzle is threaded for a suppressor or brake, and includes a knurled thread protector.



The Luth-AR adjustable buttstock facilitates comb height and length-of-pull fitment. It also includes ports for attaching a sling and a hook for engaging the support hand or a rear-bag rest.



Both the upper and lower receivers are machined from U.S.-sourced 6061 aluminum. The UP-15 has a slightly flared magwell and an integral, skeletonized triggerguard.

The best way to think of the UP-15 is as a custom-grade barreled action attached to an AR-15 lower receiver. However, it has the added benefit of being easy to maintain and utilizes easily sourced parts from a robust aftermarket built around the AR-15.

That barrel, though ... The barrel Uintah Precision puts on the UP-15 comes from Preferred Barrel Blanks (preferredbarrelblanks.com), also a Utah manufacturer.

These are button-rifled barrels made from 416R stainless steel, and they can be chambered for any cartridge that fires out of an AR-15 and uses a standard bolt face. Preferred Barrel Blanks is one of a handful of barrel manufacturers that source their steel only from the United States. Additionally, the company is very aggressive in its quality control procedures. They test not only for the straightness of the steel, but also its metallurgy and purity. Once Preferred Barrel Blanks find steel they like,



Disassembly follows the familiar two-pin procedure of most AR-style platforms. From the factory, the UP-15 comes with Velocity Precision Engineering's Curved Classic AR Trigger.

they buy large quantities of it and match the tooling to the steel. Each barrel is also stress relieved after the rifling has been applied, a process that more persnickety manufacturers swear by.

Once Uintah Precision gets the barrel blanks from Preferred Barrel Blanks, they cut the contour, chamber and crown. The standard contour Uintah puts on their barrel is a .810-inch straight contour that holds diameter all the way to the muzzle. The accuracy achieved by G&A's sample rifle was very good, proving the .810-inch straight contour offers an ideal blend of light weight and consistent precision. The best five-shot groups for two loads measured right around the .6-inch mark with the average best group across three loads measuring near .7 inch. Considering factory ammunition and a brand-new barrel, I think that's excellent. I'd expect the group sizes to shrink .1- to .2-inch after a couple hundred rounds pass through the bore.

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IT'S NEVER TOO LATE
FOR A COMEBACK

LONGMIRE

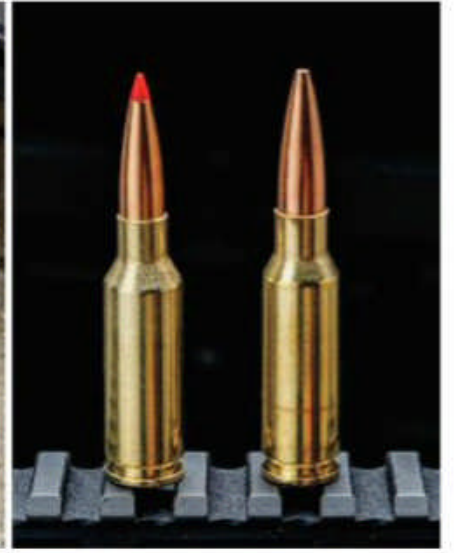


MONDAYS 9^P ET


Outdoor



A 15-inch forend surrounds the test rifle's 22-inch barrel, providing M-Lok slots on the bottom and sides for attaching bipods and accessories, as well as a full-length rail for mounting optics.



Uintah's UP-15 rifles ship with a 10-round magazine from either Magpul or Alexander Arms, depending on chambering. For the 6mm ARC, Alexander Arms' Grendel-pattern mag was included.

For those who prefer a change from the standard, Uintah Precision does custom barrels for only a slight increase in cost. If, for example, a customer wanted a 6mm ARC with a 26-inch barrel, a faster twist rate and a heavy .9-inch straight contour, they would only be charged an extra \$107 for the changes. Uintah Precision can do any barrel length from 27 inches on down to as short as a person wants, and it can do .75-, .81- and .9-inch straight contours. This is a great way to experiment with new cartridges and twist rates without going broke. All barrels are finished with an 11-degree target crown at the muzzle, too.

A sensible selection when ... Bolt-action AR-pattern rifles are becoming increasingly numerous. One reason is the familiarity most newer shooters already have with the AR-15. Another is the easy maintenance a bolt-action AR offers. Spend five minutes on YouTube and a guy can swap out an AR trigger, an important consideration since the trigger is the first component on any rifle to fail. The UP-15 has the precision of a high-quality traditional bolt-action rifle, but pairs it with the simplicity of an AR-15.

The final reason the UP-15 appeals to me is its modularity. My dream UP-15 would be this 6mm ARC rifle with a LAW



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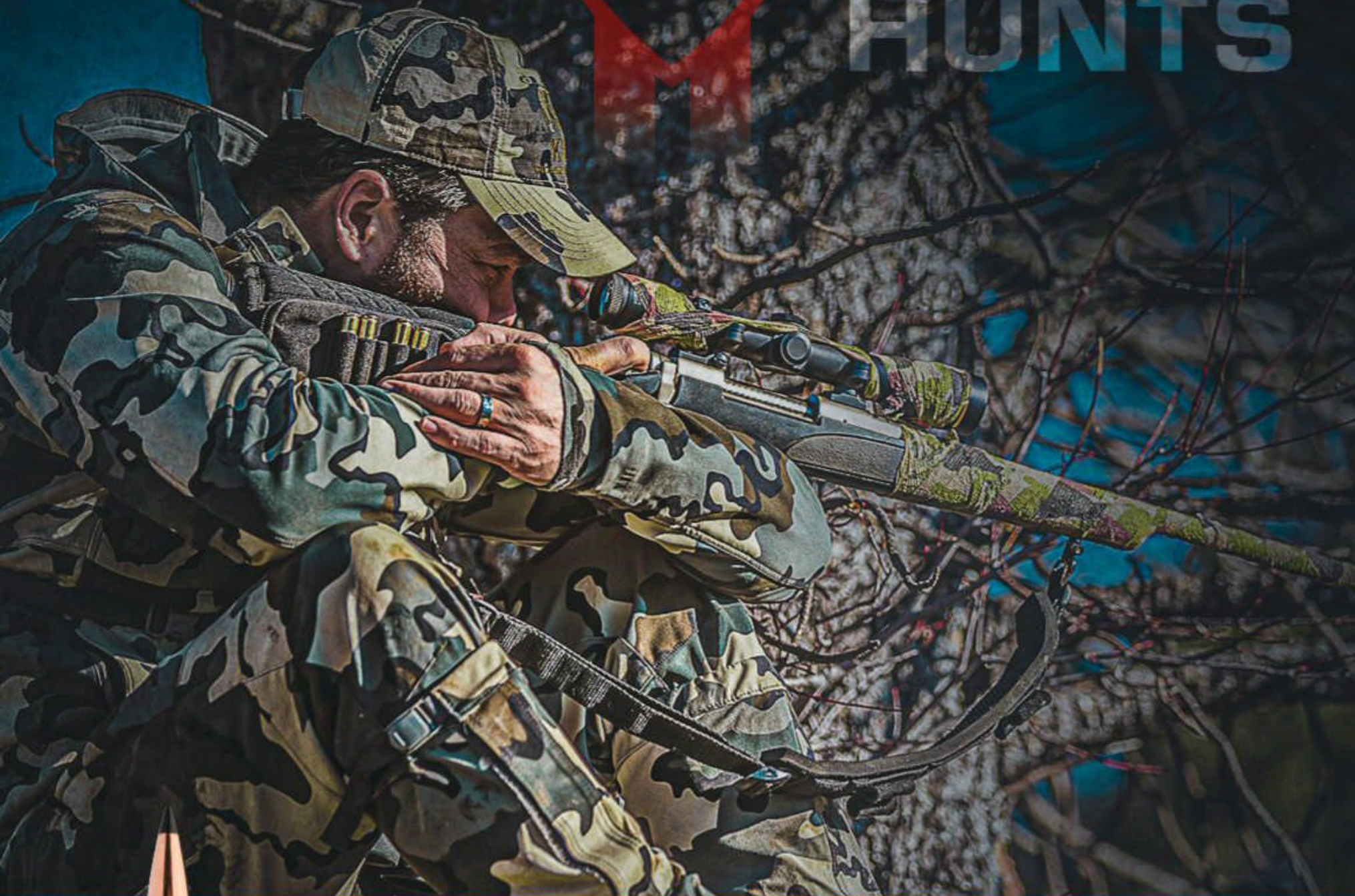


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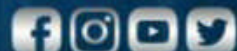
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Tactical folding stock adapter. This combination would offer supreme portability thanks to the folding stock, in addition to all of the benefits listed above. Since the rifle only weighs 7½ pounds, it would pack and travel well.

Should the owner want a different handguard, any forend that attaches to an AR-15 upper receiver would fit this rifle. Configurations that would prove popular would be a 9-inch barreled bolt-action AR pistol chambered in .300 Blackout. Once outfitted with a suppressor, there would be no more quiet way to deliver subsonic rounds

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VELOCITY (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Hornady Match 108-gr. ELD-M	2,734	21	8.3	.66	.8
Hornady Match 105-gr. BTHP	2,717	41	15.7	.68	.86
Hor. Prec. Hunt. 103-gr. ELD-X	2,780	25	10.5	.95	1.07

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups at 100 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots across a LabRadar chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle.

on target. A large part of the noise an AR generates from firing comes from the ejection port when the bolt cycles. The UP-15 stays closed until pressure exits the muzzle and suppressor. Add a folding stock and the whole package would fit inside a backpack.

The UP-15 is unique, but it has a number of features. It is not a traditionalist's rifle, but it makes a fine choice for anyone that really likes AR-15s and want bolt-action precision. This is the only rifle that I've found that blends the best of both platforms, and does so at a competitive price. **G&A**

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A HANDGUN SIGHT THAT CONVERTS FROM AN OPEN-EMITTER TO A CLOSED-EMITTER RED DOT.

SIG SAUER ROMEO2

BY ERIC R. POOLE | PHOTOS BY MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ

“IT’S BUILT IN AMERICA.” That’s one of the takeaways that SIG Sauer wants us to understand about the new Romeo2 red-dot optic, and that statement was emphasized during an interview with Andy York, president of the Electro-Optics Division at SIG Sauer. “In fact, they are made in Oregon,” he specified.

Many optics are made overseas, which is a subject that is becoming important for concerned Americans who want this country to support U.S. job growth and become less dependent on other countries. In terms of optics, many intended for the commercial market come from Asia and feature pirated intellectual properties, as well. The reason? Cost. Some manufacturers can produce all-American optics, but the price of a scope jumps from \$500 to \$3,000 with other aspects being equal. It’s that dramatic. The only customer that doesn’t hesitate to pay the higher price is the U.S. government who even passed the Berry Amendment in 1952 to require the Department of Defense (DOD) to give preference in procurement to domestically produced or manufactured products. However, exception and exclusion laws have also passed since to ensure sufficient quantity could be delivered without delayed production.

With factories in Arkansas, Oregon and New Hampshire, SIG Sauer can design and produce every part of any product

in the U.S., and it’s moving in that direction with the Romeo2. Nothing on the Romeo2 is sourced from China. Some small components such as resistors on circuit boards have to come from overseas, but SIG Sauer is stocking up on those specific components so production would safely continue if the U.S. found itself in another crisis. With those few parts in hand, SIG Sauer can even make the small circuit boards for its optics.

Meet Romeo. The Romeo2 is SIG Sauer’s greatest red dot to date. Designed for use on pistols, it can be installed as an open-emitter, half- or a fully-sealed closed-emitter red-dot sight. The half and fully-sealed configurations are protected by steel shrouds. In the open-emitter configuration, the sight looks similar to the Romeo1 with a larger window, similar weight plus a few new tricks. With the steel half-shroud installed, the durability and protection is increased with the LED emitter exposed. Until now, the first and only closed-emitter sight for a pistol was the Swedish-made Aimpoint ACRO (\$599). The Romeo2 includes an optional steel shroud and lens that encloses the emitter to prevent dust, moisture and debris from interfering with the emitter’s operation or collecting on the back of the lens when holstered. When completely shrouded, it’s also tougher against

Despite the Romeo2 (near right) being larger, the Romeo2 and Romeo1 (far right) feature mounting holes and illumination adjustment buttons in the same location. The windage screw on the Romeo2 has moved to the left side of the housing to accommodate the push-button ejection of the Romeo2's new battery tray.



extreme impacts. It can endure the slide recoil velocities of a 10mm, and offers maximum water resistance and protection from foreign objects. It is the first red-dot optic to offer these protections in user-convertible configurations.

Phase 3 “When we started this division 6 years ago, we partnered with some of the Tier 1 suppliers I had worked with in the past,” York said. “Let’s call that ‘Phase 1.’ Then the LE and military division of SIG Sauer wanted us to ruggedize the optics so they could submit a complete system for bid on military contracts. At that time, we were still using an international supply chain. That was Phase 2. If you sit there with a clean sheet of paper, ruggedize an optic from the ground up, that’s what the Romeo2 is. It’s Phase 3.”

When SIG Sauer was developing the U.S. Army’s M17/M18 standard-issue pistol contract winner, there was no SIG Sauer E-Optic division. So, when the government wanted the slide to be machined to accept a red-dot sight, SIG went with Leupold’s DeltaPoint Pro footprint.

“I didn’t have an optic that I felt comfortable having a soldier fight with,” York recalled. “The Romeo2 is now that sight.”

The Romeo2’s footprint remains the same, but features a pair of indentations for pistols and adapter plates that have bosses at the rear.

The Romeo2 has been repeatedly dropped from

SIG SAUER ROMEO2	
MAGNIFICATION	1X
RETICLE	3 MOA or 6 MOA red dot
LENGTH	1.83 in.
WIDTH	1.31 in.
HEIGHT	1.24 in.
WEIGHT	2.1 oz.
MATERIALS	Aluminum, glass, steel
FINISH	Matte black
ADJUSTMENT RANGE	.6 in. at 100 yds. (1 click)
MSRP	\$780
MANUFACTURER	SIG Sauer, 603-610-3000, sigsauer.com

10 feet on concrete, tortured, and the sight still works. Third-party lab testing showed that the Romeo2 will withstand all of the military’s requirements. It’s now believed that a 10mm round’s recoil impulse is harder on a slide-mounted optic than .40 S&W, so SIG Sauer tested it further with thousands of rounds and experienced no failures.

Innovative Features One issue with red-dot sights on handguns has always been with changing the battery. With the Trijicon RMR (\$699), for example, you have to remove the optic to access

the CR2032 battery, which means re-zeroing once installed. The ACRO’s CR1225 battery is easy to change, but hard to buy. Plus, the CR1225 has one-fifth the power capacity of the



The Romeo1 (left) was an affordable breakthrough to advance the use of red-dot sights on pistols. The Romeo2 (left, bottom) shares the same footprint, but offers a larger window, unprecedented modularity, next-gen tech and toughness for armed professionals and citizens.

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In addition to a steel half-shroud (above), the Romeo2 includes a fully-enclosed steel shroud that covers a sealed polycarbonate rear window (above middle). It is easily installed by hooking and camming the shroud to the front of the sight, and is secured by a pair of T6 Torx screws.

CR2032. At a usable illumination setting, you have to change batteries more frequently than advertised. That said, law enforcement and military servicemen tend to change batteries more often than a manufacturer recommends anyway. In fact, some police officers I've interviewed indicate they change batteries once a week to be certain their electronics never go down on duty. To make battery changes quick and easy, SIG Sauer cleverly designed a button at the rear of the Romeo2. Press it to unlatch the spring-loaded battery tray to change the CR2032 battery without having to remove the sight and rezero.

On a medium brightness setting, the advanced circuitry manages a 20,000-plus-hour life for those not religious about changing batteries. That many hours translates to a little more than 2 years of constant on, but the Romeo2 carries over SIG Sauer's Motion Activated Illumination, also referred to as "MOTAC." MOTAC has proven to increase practical battery life by shutting down the system when not in use. It instantly powers on illumination of the sight when it senses motion, and the red-dot reticle remains on for 2 minutes after idle.

New to the Romeo2 is "Magnitac." A magnet activates this feature and turns on the red dot instantly. This technology is designed to work in conjunction with special holsters which have a magnet built into the holster's material. SIG Sauer is actively working with a number of holster makers to exploit this innovation, and they're doing it royalty free. Worth noting, the Romeo2 will come with a protective cover that shrouds the optic. The rubber cover will have a magnet to utilize Magnitac and guard battery life when the optic or pistol is stored.




The Romeo2 features a spring-loaded, O-ring sealed battery tray that is release by a button at the right-rear of the sight. The sight is powered by a CR2032 battery.

The Romeo0 and Romeo1 feature an aspherical lens made of polymer. They are clear, lightweight and help to keep cost down, but the Romeo2 features a glass-molded aspherical lens. Unlike complaints about other mini red dots where the clear part of the lens may be a circle in the center of the window, or the outer edge appears magnified, the Romeo2 was engineered differently so that the entire lens is clear, scratch resistant and void of distortion.

Look under the front of lens and you'll notice a U-shaped pocket. This pocket was designed to accept a clever blast shield made of plastic. Two will be included, but none were available for this review. Developed in response to the gas that comes out the loaded-chamber indicator (LCI) behind the ejection port, this shield protects the Romeo2's lens from the carbon film that dulls image quality. The Army wanted the M17 to have an LCI, and a little bit of gas escapes out of that. LCIs are an exhaust pipe that sits in front of the lens. After firing a magazine or two, you can wipe any red-dot sight and see the difference.

The integrated rear sight is low and easily cowitnesses with standard iron sights unlike many others. It's finely serrated at the rear and given two black dimples that flank the notch, which can be painted if you prefer a three-dot iron sight setup. Further, this rear sight encloses the clearly marked sight adjustments. The Romeo2 will be available with either a 3- or 6- MOA dot at 12 daylight and three night vision brightness settings.

Many shooters will purchase the more affordable Romeo1 (\$330), but the Romeo2 exists for those wanting the most advanced, adaptable and rugged option currently available. 



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Jack and His 10/22® Carbine

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LAST LINE: THE TRIARI

BY JOE KURTENBACH
PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR

NAMED FOR ROME'S WARRIOR ELITE, **KIMBER'S** LATEST MICRO 9 OFFERS TODAY'S DEFENDERS A FIREARM THAT IS READY AND ABLE TO ANSWER THE CALL.





A bushingless design, the Kimber Triari is disassembled by simply removing the slide stop pin. Note the barrel's integral feed ramp and the kidney-shape cutout that replaces the 1911's swinging link.

IN THE MILITARY SYSTEM

of the ancient Roman republic, citizen-soldiers comprising the infantry corps were divided into three lines, the *triplex acies*, based on their experience and the quality of their equipment. The *hastati* of the first rank were generally the youngest soldiers, strong and eager but lacking in experience. *Principes* formed the second line, and these were men in their prime, well-equipped with some experience, and they could be relied upon to shoulder the weight of combat and campaign. Finally, the last line was comprised of the *triarii*. Well-versed in war and utilizing the best in arms and armor, the *triarii* served as a strategic reserve and were relied upon to stand firm if the first lines faltered. In recounting desperate military struggles, the Roman historian Livy left us the phrase, “*Rem ad triarios redisse*,” which translates “going to the *triarii*,” and speaks to the decisive nature of calling in the elite last line.

Few monikers are more fitting than Kimber's Micro 9 Triari. It is a pistol designed for that last desperate action, a final

KIMBER MICRO 9 TRIARI

TYPE	Recoil operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	9mm
CAPACITY	7+1 rds.
BARREL	3.15 in.
OVERALL LENGTH	6.1 in.
WIDTH	1.08 in.
HEIGHT	4.6 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 1.5 oz.
FINISH	Kimpro II, black (aluminum); black oxide (stainless steel)
SIGHTS	Red fiber-optic post (front); green fiber optic, U-notch (rear)
TRIGGER	6 lbs., 5 oz. (tested)
MSRP	\$788
MANUFACTURER	Kimber Mfg. Inc., 888-243-4522, kimberamerica.com

option to be relied on when other safeguards have failed. Fittingly, it is also equipped with high-quality components and purpose-driven features that, above all else, are suited to the task of self-protection.

Formation Originally released in 2017, with line extensions in each year since, the hammer-fired, 9mm Micro 9 has been a popular and successful series for Kimber. Notably, its achievement extends beyond units sold, since it also played an important role in righting the ship for Kimber subcompacts after the lackluster performance of the striker-fired Solo. In fact, with-

out the Micro 9, Kimber probably could not have launched its newest striker-based platform, the EVO SP, which has garnered acclaim from Guns & Ammo and the public, although that's a story for another time.

Returning to the subject at hand, the Micro 9 Triari is immediately identifiable as a scaled-down version of the Model 1911, though not without notable operational differences. It is a single-action, recoil-operated semiauto with a hammer and a



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Despite the reduced size of the Micro 9 platform, the Triari's controls feel full-size and facilitate smooth operation. In particular, the safety flicks off with positive, but not undue, force, and the slide stop has enough ledge to serve as an effective slide release.

Fiber-optic pipes provide a two-tone sight picture where the red front dot nests between two green dots at the rear.

manual thumb safety on the left side of the frame intended to facilitate Condition One, cocked-and-locked carry. The barrel is a 3.15-inch stainless steel pipe with left-hand rifling at a rate of one twist in 16 inches. The barrel includes an integral feed ramp and, rather than the swinging link of the 1911, features a cam lug with a kidney-shaped cutout to initiate the barrel tilt required during the loading cycle.

In terms of dimensions, the Triari with an empty magazine stands 4.6 inches tall, has an overall length of 6.1 inches, and weighs 1 pound, 1½ ounces. The magazine is a stainless steel, single-column detachable box with an extended polymer base pad. The extension not only allows the magazine to hold seven rounds of 9mm — one more than the Micro 9's closest competitors — it also provides enough real estate for shooters to achieve a full firing grip.

The Triari's aluminum frame and stainless steel slide both feature corrosion- and wear-resistant black finishes. They also incorporate full-diameter texturing to improve purchase and aid manipulation. A geometric pattern is cut into the slide, fore and aft, in lieu of traditional cocking serrations, and the pattern is repeated in the Micarta stocks and mainspring housing. It's a smart design that precludes some of the snagging issues associated with forward cocking cuts and aggressive checkering patterns. The frontstrap wears smaller hexagonal dimples that are similarly subtle, but provide a sure anchor for two of the shooting hand's support fingers.

Sights are a dual-color, fiber-optic arrangement, with a red



Removing the slide reveals the hook-shaped ejector that punches out spent brass during cycling. In reassembly, the author noted that it had to be manually depressed as the slide is returned.



Although capacity is always a compromise with small guns, seven-plus-one rounds of 9mm is a reasonable loadout. The extended base pad helps to facilitate a full firing grip.

pipe in front and two green fibers at the rear. All the sights are encased in robust steel housings, and the rear unit features a flat forward edge to aid in one-hand operation. Extra pipes are included with the gun and are easy to install if (or when) necessary.

Finally, in terms of controls, the Triari's single-action trigger exhibited an average pull weight of 6 pounds, 5 ounces. Despite having a straight trigger bar similar to a 1911,

the Micro 9's trigger pad does hinge slightly before moving rearward, which results in a little take up before a clean break. There is no overtravel, and reset is short, tactile and audible. Present on the left side only are a slide stop, checkered magazine release and a small manual thumb safety. Additional safety

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ACTUAL SIZE



The Triari's slide and stocks feature a geometric texturing pattern that is both distinctive and effective. The frontstrap, too, offers improved purchase by way of small, hexagonal dimples.

features include the internal disconnect and firing pin block, as well as a safety notch in the hammer.

As the Micro 9 is a bushingless design, disassembly is somewhat simplified. With an unloaded gun, the slide is pulled rearward to align its disassembly notch with the tab on the slide stop. Once aligned, the slide-stop pin can be pressed out, and the slide assembly can be pulled forward off of the frame. From there, the recoil spring and barrel can be removed from the slide. Reassembly is the reverse, but, mind the frame-mounted ejector which must be depressed as the slide is mated to the frame.

Maneuvers Testing of the Triari included both accuracy work as well as practical shooting drills to evaluate its mechanical



Fitting in the palm of the hand, the Micro 9 Triari can also be pocket carried. Its thin profile and snag-free beveling facilitates smooth presentations.

function and its utility as a defensive firearm for concealed carry. If I'm honest, my expectations at the bench were limited. To my mind, the Triari had an uphill battle when engaging 25-yard targets: Small grip; short barrel; short sight radius; and

larger, defense-style sights. I was shocked (and delighted) when the little pistol began printing beautiful groups at that distance. While individual five-shot groups ranged in size from 1.14 inches to 3.56 inches, the five-shot averages for two of the loads — Hornady's Critical Defense 115-grain FTX and Winchester's Defend 147-grain JHP — measured less than 2 inches, and Federal's Punch 124-grain JHP was close behind with a 2.24-inch average. Only one group measured larger than 3 inches, and the average of all 15 five-shot groups was just 2.06 inches. These would be excellent results from a tuned full-size pistol, and are remarkable from a subcompact with iron sights. On this count, the Triari answered the call and accorded itself with distinction.

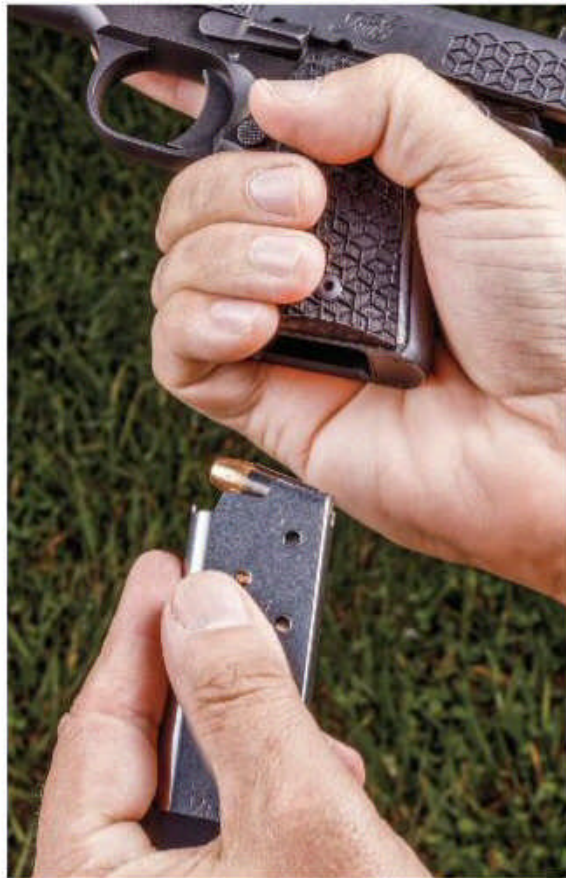
With benchwork complete, my next priorities were to test

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reliability and utility. In addition to the previously mentioned ammunition, I also had on hand various and sundry leftovers from previous tests, everything from ball ammo to various hollow points. I find it useful to test firearms, especially defensive pistols, with a variety of loads in order to detect any preferences or problems with regard to the gun's ability to feed, fire and eject. The Triari digested everything I had on hand; it is not a picky eater.

I also conducted a number of defensive shooting drills and came away with some observations that are worth sharing. Starting with draw, using a soft-leather pocket holster, I found the Triari was ideal for this method of concealed carry. Its thin, snag-free design and dehorned edges allowed for a surprisingly fast and smooth presentation. Once the gun was pivoted toward the target, the thumb safety could be disengaged with positive pressure, resulting in an audible click. I found the safety to be secure, ergonomically designed and quick to deactivate; the lever never felt too small. Reactivating was a bit trickier, but for defensive use, the former operation is far more critical than the latter.

Punching the gun out, I was able to find and maintain a high, thumbs-forward grip despite the Triari's reduced dimensions. And, although I typically prefer a plain black rear sight with a bright front, the red and green fiber-optic dots were fast and easy to pick up. Despite being a three-dot array, they did not feel busy or crowded in the way that some white-dot arrangements do. The contrasting colors work. I was also concerned that the sights were a touch too wide for targets beyond 10 or 15 yards, but the accuracy results clearly say otherwise.


Perhaps the most surprising characteristic of the Triari was its mild recoil. In operation it feels like a bigger gun, cycles

smoothly with minimal muzzle rise, and proves that even in subcompact platforms, all-metal guns hold an advantage in recoil mitigation over polymer-frame pistols. Micro 9s are rated for use with +P ammunition, and I included some in my testing without issue. It's worth mentioning, though, the owner's guide

states that a steady diet of +P could increase wear.

The last item I wanted to touch on was reloads. Empty magazines drop free without issue, but during drills I found that they occasionally get hung up on the shooting hand and require a little help to fully evacuate the frame.

I've found this to be a common occurrence with small guns. The slide stop lever, which seems to be a full-size component, offers ample engagement surface, and I had no issues releasing the slide on a fresh magazine using this method.

Triumph In an age of micro-compact, double-stack, polymer-frame pistols, it is easy to dismiss the utility of an all-metal hammer gun that bears resemblance to a century-old platform. I know I did. Those guns have their advantages, but there is simply no replicating the polished feel and rhythmic cycle of guns like the Model 1911 or the new Micro 9 Triari. That rhythm is an advantage. Like a drummer marking time on the parade field, it is constant, reliable, and a foundation on which speed and precision can be built. Despite the size and weight limitations imposed by the realities of everyday concealed carry, Kimber still managed to incorporate good sights, a clean trigger and proven ergonomics into the Triari, and it gives no quarter when considering its accuracy and shootability. Intended to be a constant companion and protector, the Micro 9 Triari stands ready should awareness and avoidance fail. 

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Federal Punch 124-gr. JHP	1,020	31	10	1.63	2.24
Hornady Critical Def. 115-gr. FTX	1,034	25	9	1.14	1.94
Winchester Defend 147-gr. JHP	890	55	18	1.18	1.99

Notes: Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured by a Caldwell Ballistic Precision G2 chronograph at 15 feet. Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups fired from 25 yards on a bag rest.

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2020
 GUNS & AMMO
 OF THE YEAR

*The best of what's new
 and innovative for 2020.*

GUNS & AMMO EDITORS, contributors and staff are set to declare the firearms industry's award recipients for 2020. New for this year's event are categories for technology and holsters. Only products made commercially available since the fourth quarter of 2019 (and were not considered for last year's awards) qualified for nomination. Products were evaluated and discussed by G&A's staff through the COVID-19 pandemic, while several editors and contributors managed to attend events held around the world during the last 12 months.

Nominees' products that were deemed to be all-new designs, as well as those possessing the greatest potential impact to the greatest number of readers were given additional merit when scored. When having to decide between two otherwise equally important new products, the more affordable choice broke the ties in our voting. G&A acquired several samples of each nominee throughout 2020 to achieve a representative evaluation. Products that caused doubt in reliability or durability were eliminated from the list of candidates.

The winner for each category emerged from a point system once three criteria were met: First, the product must have been new and available for purchase in 2020. A line extension of an existing product didn't earn as many points as one possessing innovative features and engineering. Second, it must have demonstrated quality and reliability to a degree that met or exceeded its design objective. Lastly, the winner offered the greatest appeal to the largest audience. G&A's staff awarded points after surveying in-store availability and confirming retail pricing to ensure the product exists and offers great value.

To protect the credibility of the Guns & Ammo of the Year awards, no manufacturers, advertisers or sales representatives were informed during the selection process. What follows is the ultimate list of 2020's best new products.



HANDGUN OF THE YEAR

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY HELLCAT appeared in Guns & Ammo's December 2019 issue, and arrived at dealers shortly after Guns & Ammo's "First Look" digital preview on September 25, 2019, at gunsandammo.com. At that time, the Hellcat was ineligible for consideration due to its limited availability. After 12 months on the market, the Hellcat has proved itself accurate, reliable, versatile — and extremely popular.

The Hellcat was the first so-called stack-and-a-half carry pistol to offer both a Standard model and an Optical Sight Pistol (OSP) option capable of accepting a micro red dot sight. Many have argued that the Hellcat put Shield Sights on the map, making "RMSc" a familiar acronym among gun owners. Though it is known that the Hellcat OSP accepted other miniature red dots such as JPoint's Micro Reflex and SIG Sauer's Romeo0, the gun's enthusiastic following pushed Trijicon to develop and announce the RMRcc, which appeared first on Guns & Ammo's website and social media pages on August 31, 2020. (And there are other mini red-dot sight options on their way, too.)

The successful launch and positive reception of the Hellcat immediately spawned aftermarket support. Besides holsters, we saw unprecedented product offerings ranging from a selection of Apex Tactical's Action Enhancement Triggers to dedicated laser sights and lights from Crimson Trace and SureFire.

Springfield Armory smartly decided to include both an 11-round magazine and a 13-round magazine to one-up its chief rival, the SIG Sauer P365. Aftermarket companies including Hyve Technologies have added to that capacity by developing plus-one and plus-three baseplates that take the capacity of a 13 rounder to either 14 or 15 rounds.

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY HELLCAT

TYPE	Recoil operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	9mm
CAPACITY	11+1 rds.; 13+1 rds.
BARREL LENGTH	2.99 in.
OVERALL LENGTH	6 in.
HEIGHT	4.2 in.
WIDTH	.88 in.
WEIGHT	1 lbs., 2.2 oz.
FINISH	Melonite (steel)
TRIGGER	5 lbs., 7.7 oz. (tested)
SIGHTS	Ameriglo Pro-Glo (front); U-notch (rear); removable optic plate (OSP)
SAFETY	Trigger lever; striker block
MSRP	\$569 (Standard); \$599 (OSP)
MANUFACTURER	Springfield Armory, 309-944-5631, springfield-armory.com

In the last year, Springfield Armory has continued to expand the Hellcat family by offering a Desert FDE-colored option that contrasts the black, Melonite-coated hammer-forged barrel and controls. The frame is molded in the Desert FDE polymer while the slide is given a rugged Cerakote finish for an attractive combination. We're sure that this isn't the last model to come from Springfield Armory wearing the Hellcat moniker.

During Guns & Ammo's year-long evaluation of the Hellcat, we have sourced five Standard and OSP models for extensive testing. These pistols shoot less-than-2-inch groups from a fixed rest at 25 yards with quality ammunition. Though we have shot thousands of rounds through our samples, we were impressed to learn of Paul Carlson, owner of Safety Solutions Academy, who pushed Hellcat serial number AT234795 to 20,000 rounds with support from Federal who supplied the 124-grain full-metal-jacket (FMJ) ammunition. Every round was captured on camera and can be seen at thearmorylife.com.

It will be difficult to argue against the Springfield Armory Hellcat and Hellcat OSP deserving this year's Handgun of the Year honors. With or without a red dot, it continues to offer great capacity, dependability and value for those who carry. ■

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BENELLI LUPO	
TYPE	Bolt action, alloy chassis
CARTRIDGE	.270 Win., .30-'06 Springfield (tested), .300 Win. Mag. (tested)
CAPACITY	5 rds (.270/.30-'06); 4 rds. (.300 WM)
BARREL	Cold hammer forged, Crio treated; 22 in., 1:10-in. twist (.270 Win.) 22 in., 1:11-in. twist (.30-'06 Sprgfld.) 24 in., 1:11-in. twist (.300 WM)
OVERALL LENGTH	44.625 in. to 46.625 in.
WEIGHT	7 lbs., 4 oz. (tested)
STOCK	Benelli Progressive Comfort; Combtech combs; length-of-pull shims
TRIGGER	2 lbs., 12 oz., adj.; trigger spacers
FINISH	Blued (steel); anodized (aluminum)
MSRP	\$1,699
MANUFACTURER	Benelli, 800-264-4962, benelliusa.com

RIFLE OF THE YEAR

BENELLI LUPO isn't another new rifle based on the Mauser 98, Model 70 or Model 700 platform, but it is Benelli's first bolt-action. The Lupo, Italian for "wolf," is a fresh approach to the bolt-action rifle designed around an alloy chassis and motivated by accuracy, artistic styling and proven felt-recoil-reduction systems to deliver impressive performance.

Guns & Ammo was on the scene for the unveiling of the Lupo in Italy during late-October 2019. There, Editor Eric Poole demonstrated its accuracy potential by shooting a number of sub-half-inch groups for an audience from 100 yards. There, they toured Benelli's factory in the historic town of Urbino where they observed Italian Renaissance artist Raphael's birthplace. Above Benelli's state-of-the-art factory remains the Academy of Fine Arts Urbino within the city's towering walls where several students shared their studies with the Lupo's designers to shape a functional masterpiece.

The Lupo also benefited from the proven experience gleaned from Benelli's hard-use shotguns such as the Super Black Eagle III. For having a chassis-based platform, Benelli was able to design a shim-and-spacer system for the Lupo that's familiar to serious shotgunners who need to adjust drop, cast and trigger reach. The trigger is yet another aspect that can be adjusted for preference; it can be tuned between 2.2 and 4.4 pounds. Better fit translates to better control and increased accuracy.

The rifle also carries over the Progressive Comfort system and Combtech cheek pad, which was another modified element proven with Benelli shotguns. Inside the Progressive Comfort module are interlacing fingers of proprietary synthetics that flex

and absorb recoil. Regardless of caliber, charge of powder or weight of the projectile, felt recoil feels the same from one shot to the next. As a result, there is more control of the muzzle.

Protecting the face from the uncomfortable vibrations of felt recoil, Benelli incorporated the Combtech cheek pad to reduce facial impact. Combtech is another system borrowed from Benelli's hard-working shotguns. Raised and extra-high Combtech cheekpieces are optionally available to adjust height for use with high-mounted scopes.

The sculpted bolt sports three large locking lugs for a fast cycling 60-degree throw to drive cartridges positioned behind the chamber for direct feeding into the chamber. The handle is uniquely shaped to encourage quick action without interference with the ocular lens housing of large-bodied scopes. The barrel is threaded for muzzle devices and suppressors, free floating and Crio treated to ensure its consistent performance.

Built for comfort, the Lupo's balance is perfectly centered in the hand at the magazine, while Benelli's Airtouch Grip surface provides a tactile and comfortable grip to hold firm.

The Lupo possesses so many innovative features that, for its price, earns it high value. No other new production rifle offered this level of performance and personalization. ■

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SHOTGUN OF THE YEAR

SAVAGE RENEGAUGE elevated the brand to a higher level in 2020, and proved that it's not just a company that makes rifles. Especially looking to attract turkey hunters and waterfowlers, Savage Arms challenged its engineers to design a reliable operating system that would feed 2¾- and 3-inch loads. The result was the Dual Regulating Inline Valve (DRIV) system, which is a short-stroke piston system having two regulating valves on either side of the barrel where excess gas is vented through radial ports.

To keep the Renegaug at the chief engineer's mandated 8 pounds, the barrel was fluted to shave ounces. Uncommon on shotguns headed to the hunting fields, the cuts give the Renegaug some unique styling. Notably, the barrel was also created from solid bar stock, then drilled, reamed and polished. It's a slow and expensive way to manufacture a barrel, but in the case of the Renegaug, it proved effective and accurate. Rather than chroming the bore, Savage also made the decision to Melonite the barrel, which has similar corrosion resistance but doesn't affect the inside bore diameter.

The bolt and carrier are chromed, however, and have been interlocked and welded to one piece. Owners that have to maintain two-piece bolt systems will rejoice when it's time to clean and assemble the gun. Like the barrel, the carrier is also fluted, and the rotary bolt head features two lugs and a large hook extractor for reliable evacuation of empty shells.

Not uncommon, the receiver is aluminum, and features contours that make it easy to reach the controls, especially those around the triggerguard. The controls, to include the knurled charging handle, bolt release, shell stop and crossbolt safety, are large and effortless to activate with gloved hands.

SAVAGE RENEGAUGE	
TYPE	Gas operated, semiautomatic
GAUGE	12
CAPACITY	4 rds.
OVERALL LENGTH	49½ in.
BARREL LENGTH	28 in.
WEIGHT	8 lbs.
LENGTH OF PULL	14¼ in.
DROP AT HEEL	2 in.
TRIGGER	4 lbs., 12 oz. (tested)
ACCESSORIES	Hard case; shim and spacer kit; three recoil pads and butt spacers; Full (.695 in.); Modified (.705 in.); Improved Cylinder (.715 in.) chokes; key lock; ear plugs
MSRP	\$1,550
MANUFACTURER	Savage Arms, 413-568-7001, savagearms.com

Underneath the receiver is the loading port for putting shells into the magazine tube. Unlike many guns, there's plenty of room to load the Renegaug without fear of cutting your thumb. The surfaces around the port are smooth and flat, which was helpful when loading fast was necessary to keep up with the action. The red follower was also beneficial in alerting the shooter when it was time to refill the tube.

The stock was well thought out with palm swells on both sides of the grip, and interchangeable recoil pads and cheek-pieces to adjust fit, length of pull and comb height. The padding's rubber material is soft on the top, rigid on the sides and very comfortable against the shoulder. For most hunters, these features offer enough customization, but shims and spacers to adjust cast and length of pull are also included.

During Guns & Ammo's evaluation, we determined that Savage Arms succeeded in producing a shotgun that yields exceptional accuracy and mild recoil. The weight certainly helps to absorb some of the recoil, but the innovative DRIV system does most of the work. Dressed in black or popular hard-use camouflage coverings, the Renegaug is an American-made gun that still offers value in line with foreign competitors. ■

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AMMO OF THE YEAR

HORNADY 6MM ARC was introduced by Guns & Ammo's Rifles & Optics Editor Tom Beckstrand on June 3, 2020, at gunsandammo.com and Guns & Ammo's YouTube page. The name "ARC" stands for "Advanced Rifle Cartridge," and it was adopted by an undisclosed Special Operations unit prior to its public reveal, only the second time a new cartridge's announcement was preceded by the military's adoption. (The first was Hornady's .300 PRC in 2018.) The 6mm ARC is that unit's replacement for the 7.62 NATO in combat operations. As we have seen, Hornady has become the U.S. government's trusted go-to company for developing innovative solutions for unique missions. The new 6mm ARC is such an example.

Military and long-range AR-15 enthusiasts have explored 7.62 NATO-footprint platforms to improve on the range and 500- to 600-meter effectiveness of the 5.56 NATO cartridge. Some have employed new rifle designs, while others tried new cartridges. AR-10-pattern rifles have enjoyed relative interest for the last 15 years for this reason, but others have instead modified the AR-15 action to fire more powerful cartridges. The 6mm ARC is on the latter path, which keeps host guns and ammunition supplies lighter, more economical and easier to standardize for manufacturing, procurement, logistics and use.

The 6mm ARC offers shooters many advantages. To start, the 6mm ARC is better suited than most 6mm and 6.5mm cartridges to optimize very low-drag (VLD) projectiles that improve stability and range. Plus, the barrel life for a 6mm ARC chamber is similar to one in 7.62 NATO because it's burning

less powder. Downrange, the 6mm ARC carries enough velocity and energy to be effective beyond 1,000 yards, and that's really the point for those interested. (We've tested it to 1,200 yards, which is amazing for any AR-15-pattern rifle or caliber.)

Though somewhat similar wildcat cartridges have existed in competition circles going back to the early 1970s, dimensions vary. With the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers' Institute (SAAMI) approving the 6mm ARC on January 20, 2020, dimensions for the cartridge are standardized, meaning that they will be consistent among ammunition manufacturers. For this reason, the 6mm ARC is safe, affordable and more practical to obtain as pre-packaged ammo or to handload.

Due to the 6mm ARC's overall length (OAL) of 2.260 inches, the cartridge does not exceed the OAL limitations of an AR-15 magazine, even when loaded with heavier and longer 108-grain and 110-grain bullets. This has always been a design challenge for many new rounds. And for sportsman, the 6mm ARC meets the minimum 6mm bullet-diameter requirements enforced by several states for deer hunting.

The 6mm ARC holds a lot of promise. The list of companies chambering the 6mm ARC continues to grow as ammunition and barrels become more available. Unexpectedly, we've already seen several bolt-action rifles being developed by various manufacturers to chamber the 6mm ARC. Just you wait and see. ■

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OPTIC OF THE YEAR

NIGHTFORCE NX8 is a new line of scopes that borrows lessons learned from the company's NXS scopes, which has served military marksman for 20 years as well as serious long-range shooters for just as long. The NXS solidified Nightforce Optics' reputation as an uncompromising premium scope company, which kept its innovative products priced out of reach for the majority of shooters. About a year ago, Nightforce rolled out the NX8 family to offer a more affordable mid-priced scope than it had before. It started with a 1-8x24mm, but by August 2019 Nightforce had announced two new additions, a 2.5-20x50mm and a 4-32x50mm.

Despite borrowing the NXS' legacy for durability and easy of use in adverse climates, the NX8 actually offers better image quality than the NXS. The NX8 lenses benefit from new lens composition and coatings. Nightforce incorporated the same extra-low dispersion (ED) glass found in the company's ATACR line, but they developed the rest of the scope in a way to keep costs below that of the ATACR, which ranges \$3,100 to \$4,600.

Summarizing the NX8, Rifle & Optics Editor Tom Beckstrand said in his review, "There are few guarantees in the world of riflescopes, but one guarantee is that there is no such thing as a cheap, lightweight, extremely durable, short, high-magnification scope with a large objective lens. Only when you're willing to spend more than \$1,500 and carry a 20-ounce-plus scope does the above combination become possible." Beckstrand concluded, "[The NX8] represents excellent value for the performance and features that come with the purchase price."

At the expense of a small weight penalty, Nightforce added an additional lens in the objective lens group. Adding that extra lens also corrected typical degradations that happen when an optics company shortens a scope. To protect its glass, Night-

force set the lenses in a bedding compound to prevent movement under impact, and strengthened the maintube by machining it about three times as thick as other brands' standard maintube. This thickness protects the NX8 from damage caused by rough handling or over-tightened rings. When you know this and then see a YouTube video of a Nightforce employee hammering a nail into a tree stump before installing it to a rifle and successfully shooting an exploding target, it's easy to understand how this additional weight benefits these scopes.

During Guns & Ammo's year-long evaluation of the NX8 line, we found excellent accuracy with turret adjustments and the zero stop. We appreciated the illuminated first-focal-plane (F1) reticles. The reticles' subtensions were correct at every power. On August 5, 2020, Nightforce launched its second focal plane (F2) extension to the NX8. The F2 scopes are ideal for hunters and shooters who prefer the reticle to stay consistent in size throughout the magnification range. Either way, the Nightforce NX8 family is an investment in your shooting that can take a rifle's long-range performance to a new level. ■

NIGHTFORCE NX8	
FIRST FOCAL	1-8x24mm; 2.5-20x50mm; 4-32x50mm
SECOND FOCAL	2.5-20x50mm; 4-32x50mm
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.25 MOA or .1 MRAD per click
WINDAGE	.25 MOA or .1 MRAD per click
RETICLE	FC-MIL/MOA (1-8X); Mil-CF2, MOAR-CF2
LENGTH	8.7 in. (1-8X); 12 in. (2.5-20X); 13.5 in. (4-32X)
WEIGHT	17 oz. (1-8X); 28.6 oz. (2.5-20X); 28.9 oz. (4-32X)
EYE RELIEF	3.5 in. to 3.7 in.
MSRP	\$1,750 to \$2,100
MANUFACTURER	Nightforce Optics, 208-476-9814, nightforceoptics.com

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SUPPRESSOR OF THE YEAR

SILENCERCO OMEGA 36M is a two-piece modular design with a completely welded core. The rear core contains Cobalt 6 and Inconel baffles to provide extreme wear resistance under high heat and heavy fire. The front core features a new light-weight 17-4 baffle design that saves weight while still offering high wear resistance against high temperatures and sustained durations of fire. The outer tube and lock ring is made of titanium. Not only does the lock ring prevent the tube from loosening, it reduces weight when compared to products using other materials. The Omega 36M is finished with a black Cera-kote for as much durability as a finish can offer a hot can.

The Omega 36M is a centerfire suppressor rated to support minimum-length 10-inch barrels for 5.56 NATO/.223 Remington chambers, 16-inch barrels for 7.62 NATO/.308 Winchester and 20-inch barrels for .300 Winchester Magnum and .338 Lapua Magnum. The same suppressor can also go from use on magnum rifles to 9mm pistols or sub-guns. The Omega 36M is compatible with all of SilencerCo's Charlie and ASR accessories, as well as direct-thread barrels and the 9mm three-lug mount.

For its length, which ranges 5.1 inches to 7.6 inches for maximum sound reduction, and its weight, spanning 9.2 ounces to 16½ ounces, this suppressor maximizes flexibility across multiple platforms like no other introduced since.

The Omega 36M has a 1.57-inch diameter, so suppressor-



height sights are usually required for use on handguns with threaded barrels, but the Omega 36M yields an average of 128.9 decibels (and up depending on the cartridge) at the muzzle when in use. The trade-off is worth it.

For its \$1,187 suggested retail, the Omega 36M scored high for its performance on the range across multiple platforms, and for the modularity. Guns & Ammo's reviewers noted that they were able to easily adapt its length for each host firearm. The bottom line is that the Omega 36M is 2020's most versatile, multi-caliber suppressor that's rated for full-auto use. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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INNOVATION OF THE YEAR

FEDERAL FIRESTICK has the potential to revolutionize the world's oldest long gun: the muzzleloader. Arguably, not since Tony Knight revealed the MK-85 in-line muzzleloader in 1985 has there been as significant of a development among those who hunt with blackpowder as this.

The FireStick encapsulates the propellant charge, which is inserted from the breech and requires the shooter to insert a 209 shotgun primer (not included). Of course, the bullet still has to be loaded from the muzzle. For centuries, shooters and firearm manufacturers have worked to develop clever ways to keep blackpowder dry. With this, the powder charge stays dry because the FireStick is impervious to moisture.

Federal Ammunition loads Firesticks with Hodgdon's clean-burning Triple Eight powder in two pre-loaded charge levels: 100 or 120 grains, one colored red, the other orange. Tight tolerances ensure a consistent burn and the FireStick can also be removed quickly, simply and safely if it has to be pulled out from the action. There's no need to fire the rifle to unload it.

FireSticks are sold in 10-count packs for \$27, and to benefit from this innovative development, you'll need two additional things: a 209 shotgun primer, and a Traditions NitroFire rifle. Though we expect additional muzzleloading firearms to follow



from other brands, Traditions and Federal Ammunition partnered to carefully develop a successful pairing.

The NitroFire is a .50-caliber muzzleloader with a 26-inch barrel and Traditions' Elite XT trigger system. The NitroFire's action can be opened with the crossbolt safety engaged, which allows the shooter to safely load or unload and view the chamber. The NitroFire starts at \$549. More information on the rifle can be found at traditionsfirearms.com. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Federal Ammunition, 800-831-8100, federalpremium.com

PHOTOS: MARK FINGAR


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GUN TECH OF THE YEAR

LOCKDOWN PUCK is a \$110 security monitoring device that sends notifications and provides control of your valuables through the Lockdown Logic App. Using the free app, you can check temperature and humidity around the Puck, set minimum and maximum thresholds, as well as alarms to notify you of environmental changes or movement.

G&A's staff initially evaluated the Puck on our gun safes, which indicated when the door was opened or closed. However, when considering that it can be mounted using the supplied screw-to-almost anything bracket, integrated magnet or gravity, it became quickly apparent that the Puck is just as useful in securing vaults, doors, vehicles and so on. One editor learned that the Puck could be placed within luggage and be notified if his bags were being tampered with in a hotel room.

At the touch of a button, the Puck guards anything that matters to you. It features built-in Wi-Fi that instantly communicates through the Lockdown Logic App. It can also be connected to other smart home and Lockdown devices to keep valuables safe and secure. The Puck comes with a 9-foot Micro



USB power cord, a magnetic door sensor, a mounting bracket and hardware, and four AA batteries for backup if the cord is disconnected. The App can be used with multiple Pucks and devices for individual status checks, arming and disarming. You can also customize notifications, so you're never left unaware. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Lockdown, 800-451-6797, lockdown.com

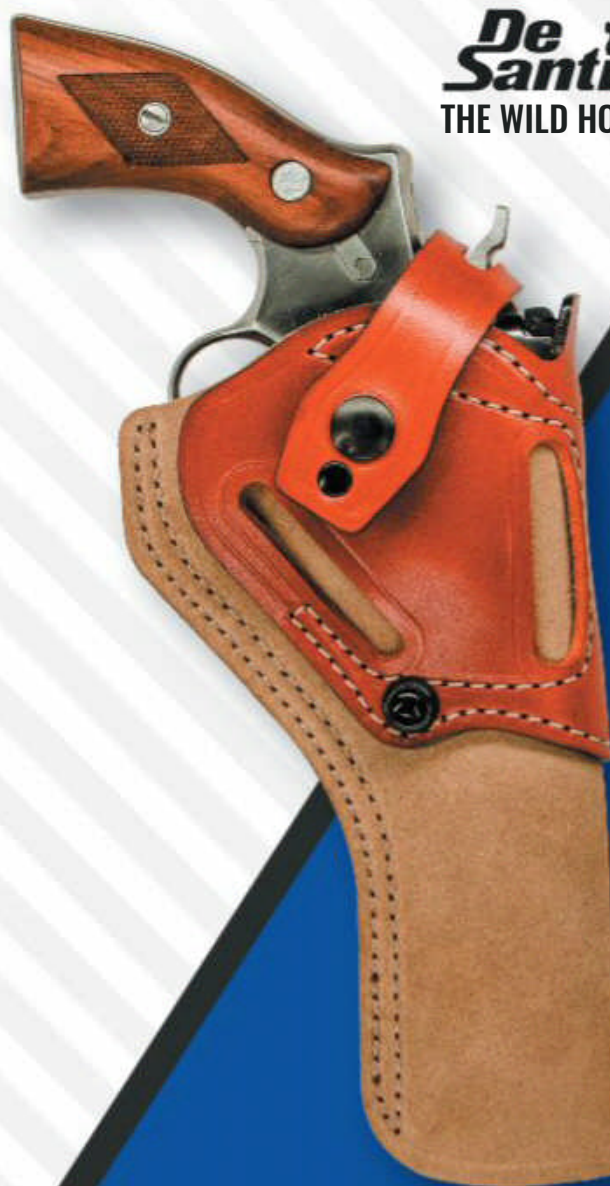
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HOLSTER OF THE YEAR

1791 GUNLEATHER ULTRA CUSTOM is an effective and fun way to concealed carry. Within the cowhide is a moldable technology called “Memory-Lok.” When properly heated to around 175 degrees, the Ultra Custom becomes soft and pliable. With an appropriate-sized handgun inserted, you can form the leather around the gun’s contours and indentations for a tight fit. A beveled-point tool is provided to better shape the holster around the gun. As the leather cools, the Memory-Lok hardens to a Kydex-like rigidity, and holds the shape for a flawless fit. If you need to change pistols to another of a similar size, simply reheat the material, insert a new gun and remold it. 1791 Gunleather offers the Ultra Custom Concealment Holster in six sizes to accept almost any model of carry pistol.

The process of molding and remolding the Ultra Custom holsters was unexpectedly fun. Editors used a culinary sous vide water bath, vacuum-sealed the holster in a plastic bag and warmed it to 175 degrees — exactly. This procedure produced the best results, which were safer, cleaner and more consistent than trying to heat the holster in an oven. (Don’t heat the gun.)



The Ultra Custom proved exceptional as an inside-the-waistband (IWB) concealment holster and was worn for nearly 3 months during its review. It’s adjustable for cant and grips the gun tightly inside a belt. Draw times from concealment that produced an A-zone hit at 7 yards averaged only 1.4 seconds. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION

1791 Gunleather, 800-407-1791, 1791gunleather.com

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COMBAT ELITE

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THREE DISTINCT
TWO-TONE MODEL
1911s FROM COLT.

BY KEITH WOOD | PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR







COLT COMBAT ELITE GOVERNMENT	
TYPE	Recoil operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	9mm
CAPACITY	9+1 rds.
OVERALL LENGTH	8.5 in.
HEIGHT	5.75 in.
WEIGHT	2 lbs., 9.6 oz.
MATERIAL	Stainless steel
GRIP	Colt G-10 panels
TRIGGER	4 lbs., 13 oz.
SAFETY	Frame-mounted, ambi manual lever; beavertail grip safety; firing pin block
FINISH	TT Elite; black Ionbond, brushed stainless-steel flats
SIGHTS	Novak LoMount, three-dot tritium
MSRP	\$1,399
MANUFACTURER	Colt's Manufacturing Company, LLC, 800-962-2658, colt.com



THERE ARE NO SHORTAGE OF M1911 MAKERS but, for more than a century, Colt has been the standard by which other companies' products are compared. Colt isn't resting on its history, though. The epochal Hartford, Connecticut firm's offerings continues to evolve to meet the needs of shooters. Colt's current catalog of Model 1911s is arguably the most diverse ever with 57 different variations available. Among those options is the Combat Elite line of handguns. The Combat Elite series offers Government-, Commander- and Defender-size 1911s designed with defensive carry in mind. These all-steel handguns possess all of the features one expects of a quality, modern 1911, and G&A tested examples in every size.

There was a time that serious shooters had to send off a 1911 to custom shops that specialized in hand-fit tuning.

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COLT COMBAT ELITE GOVERNMENT

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Wilson Combat 115-gr. XTP JHP	1,283	58	19	1.74	1.78
Colt National Match 124-gr. FMJ	1,179	73	23.9	2.5	3.17
Fed. Premium Syntech 147-gr. FMJ	1,080	58	17.3	1.43	1.7

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups from a sandbag rest at 25 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots recorded by an Oehler Model 35P chronograph.

Pioneering gunsmiths such as Armand Swenson pushed John Browning's design toward perfection, and manufacturers slowly took notice. The new Combat Elite pistols are built with many of those evolutionary enhancements included. For example, the high undercut frames' front-strap and mainspring housings are machine checked at 25 lines-per-inch for a pos-

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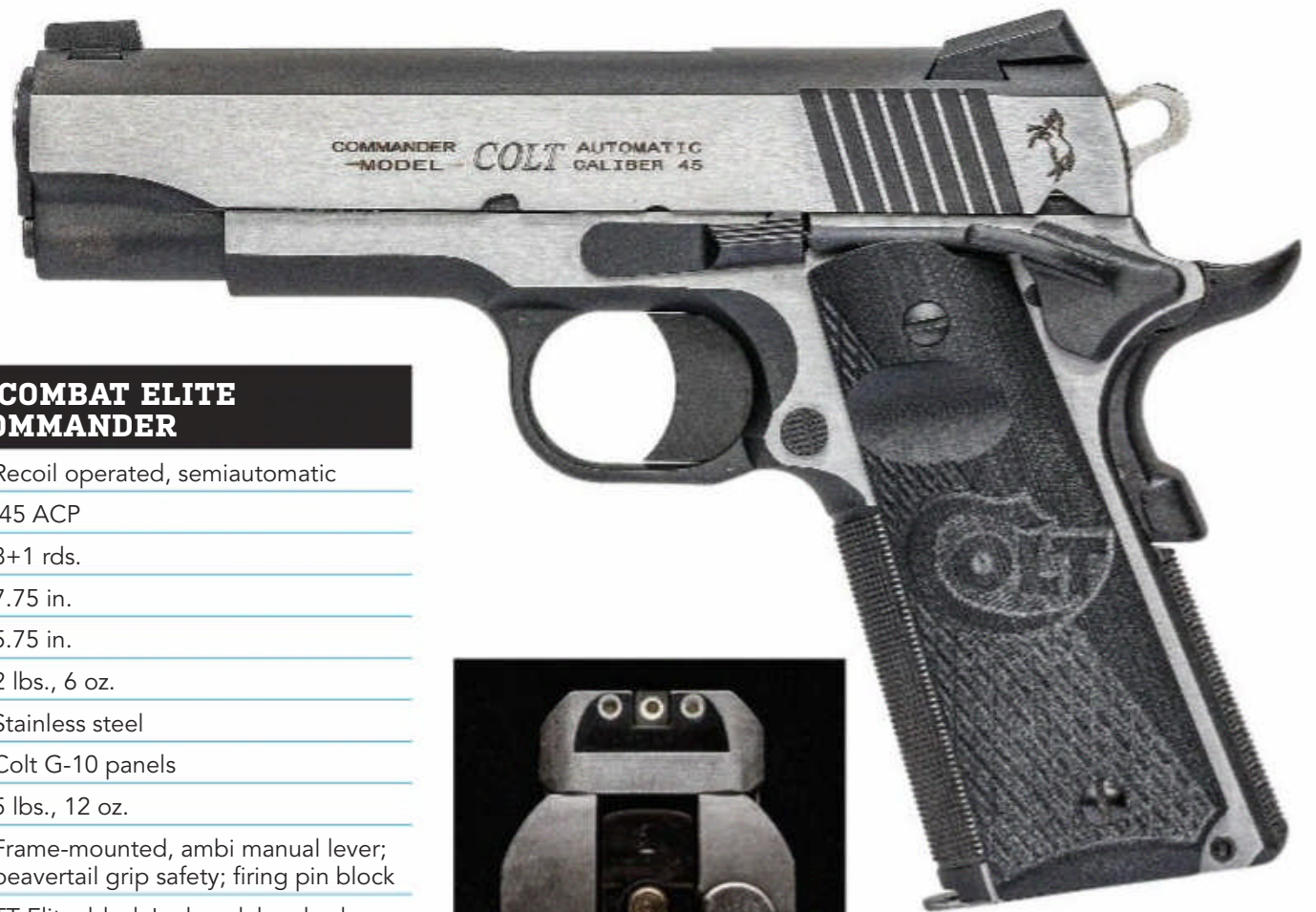

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COLT COMBAT ELITE COMMANDER	
TYPE	Recoil operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	.45 ACP
CAPACITY	8+1 rds.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.75 in.
HEIGHT	5.75 in.
WEIGHT	2 lbs., 6 oz.
MATERIAL	Stainless steel
GRIP	Colt G-10 panels
TRIGGER	5 lbs., 12 oz.
SAFETY	Frame-mounted, ambi manual lever; beavertail grip safety; firing pin block
FINISH	TT Elite; black Ionbond, brushed stainless-steel flats
SIGHTS	Novak LoMount, three-dot tritium
MSRP	\$1,399
MANUFACTURER	Colt's Manufacturing Company, LLC, 800-962-2658, colt.com



itive but minimally-abrasive grip. All three guns are fit with extended, ambidextrous thumb safeties, and the grip safeties are of the protective beavertail style. Each Combat Elite model is fit with Novak's LoMount tritium night sights, which are dovetailed into the slide and drift-adjustable for windage. Ejection ports are lowered and flared to help facilitate reliable function.

Aesthetically, all three guns in the Combat Elite series are constructed with the same basic design elements. Each model is built from stainless steel and then finished in a matte-black Ionbond. Ionbond is a Physical Vapor Deposition (PVD) coating that is regarded for its wear and friction resistance. Unlike other

COLT COMBAT ELITE COMMANDER

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Fed. Premium Syntech 230-gr. FMJ	761	58	16.4	1.69	2.35
Hornady Amer. Gun. 185-gr. XTP JHP	933	34	13.1	1.47	2.4
Colt National Match 230-gr. FMJ	731	22	7	3.08	3.11

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups from a sandbag rest at 25 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots recorded by an Oehler Model 35P chronograph.

finishes on the market, Ionbond is also incredibly thin, so it is suited for guns built with tight clearances. Once finished, the flats of the frame, slide and hammer are sanded, which reveals the stainless steel grains underneath and

creates a two-tone look. The internal working surfaces of the guns remain coated, which is a good thing.

All of the Combat Elite models wear angled rear cocking serrations, which were first seen on National Match guns in the 1960s. All three come with black G-10 grips that are half-textured and scalloped to create a thumbrest on the left panel.

Colt incorporated the Series 80 safety mechanism, which has appeared in most of Colt's 1911s since the early 1980s.

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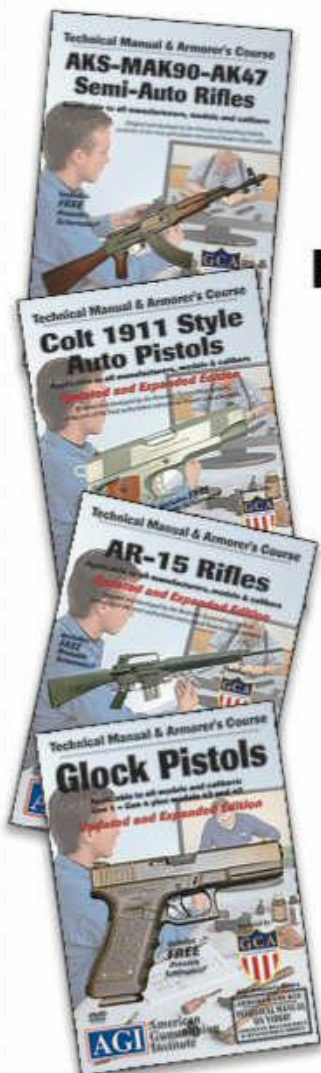
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COLT COMBAT ELITE DEFENDER	
TYPE	Recoil operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	9mm
CAPACITY	8+1 rds.
OVERALL LENGTH	6.75 in.
HEIGHT	5.25 in.
WEIGHT	2 lbs., 2.4 oz.
MATERIAL	Stainless steel
GRIP	Colt G-10 panels
TRIGGER	4 lbs., 6 oz.
SAFETY	Frame-mounted, ambi manual lever; beavertail grip safety; firing pin block
FINISH	TT Elite; black Ionbond, brushed stainless-steel flats
SIGHTS	Novak LoMount, three-dot tritium
MSRP	\$1,399
MANUFACTURER	Colt's Manufacturing Company, LLC, 800-962-2658, colt.com



There are two main elements of the Series 80 guns relevant to shooters. The first is a half-cock notch that allows the user to lower the hammer without firing the pistol inadvertently. The trigger is pulled and then released while the hammer is lowered manually. The hammer comes to rest a fraction of an inch from the firing-pin stop and, when the trigger is pulled a second time, the hammer falls to rest. Series 80 guns also use a firing-

pin block in the slide as an additional safety measure if the gun were dropped. Though Series 80 pistols are often maligned for their creepy triggers due to the safety levers and plunger, I don't feel there is much of a practical difference on Colt's stock guns.

Combat Elite Government This is a full-size Model 1911 with a 5-inch barrel. It's available in either .45 ACP or 9mm. I tested



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the latter. Nine-millimeter 1911s have become quite popular in recent years due to their lighter recoil and less-expensive ammunition. However, before you reject the notion of a 1911

COLT COMBAT ELITE DEFENDER

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Wilson Combat 115-gr. XTP JHP	1,135	40	12.6	2	2.19
Colt Defense 124-gr. JHP	1,170	87	27.3	3.65	4.19
Fed. Premium Syntech 147-gr. FMJ	976	60	19.3	2.83	3.57

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups from a sandbag rest at 25 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots recorded by an Oehler Model 35P chronograph.

not chambered for .45 ACP, remember that Colt introduced the .38 Super in the 1930s, and 9mm 1911s have been extant since 1949. Although many probably aren't looking for an all-steel, full-size, single-stack 9mm for everyday carry, the Combat Elite is nonetheless well-equipped for the job. I wouldn't hesitate to carry it as a primary handgun, but it would also make for a great practice pistol before wearing a full-size 1911 in .45 ACP.

Though I've seen many 1911s deviate from some of the traditional design elements, the Combat Elite Government is built the way Browning intended it. The 5-inch National Match barrel uses two locking upper lugs and is not integrally ramped,

instead relying on the original feeding arrangement that combines a ramped frame and a generous radius at the rear of the chamber. The extractor is internal, and the ejector is fixed. The only real twist is a dual recoil spring arrangement that reduces felt recoil and extends spring life. This feature appears on both the 9mm and .45 ACP versions.

The high undercut below the trigger-guard on the Combat Elite Government allows for a high grip on the gun. Combined with the stainless steel construction, dual springs and 9mm chambering, it was extremely controllable and pleasant to shoot. The trigger measured consistently at just under 5 pounds with only the slightest hint of creep. The sights were excellent; highly-visible and not prone to snagging on clothing or slicing skin. Like all good 1911s, this was an incredibly shootable handgun. I experienced only one malfunction: a failure to feed from slide lock with Federal Premium's Syntech FMJ ammunition early in the evaluation. With two of the three loads tested, particularly the Wilson Combat 115-gr. XTP, accuracy was very good. Magazine capacity is 9-plus-1 rounds.

Combat Elite Commander Colt first produced the aluminum-frame Com-

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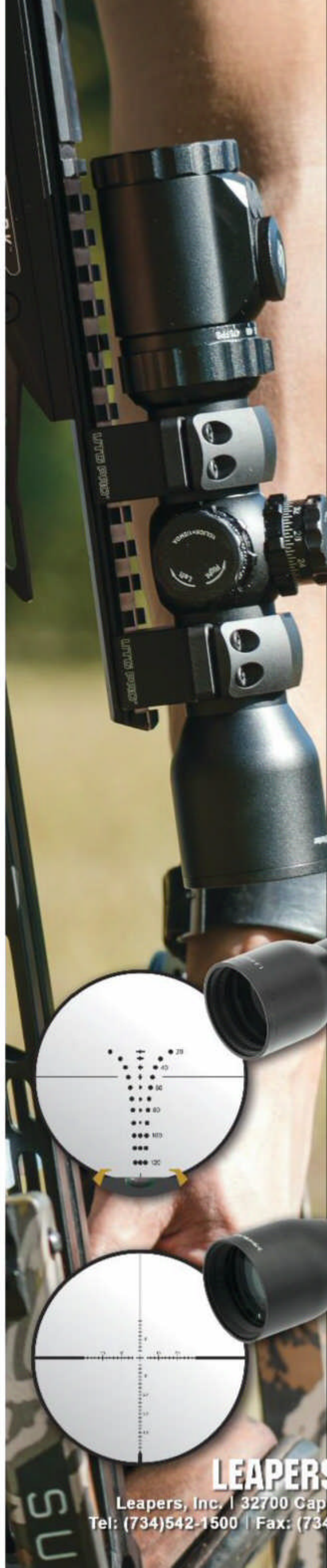


mander back in 1950. They combined a full-size grip with a more-concealable 4.25-inch barrel. The all-steel Combat Commander has been around since 1970 and has long been a favorite of mine. G&A's Combat Elite Commander came chambered in .45 ACP, and is virtually identical to the Government Model except for its shorter barrel and slide.

I've shot my share of Commander-length 1911s and own a couple, but this was the first I've used with dual recoil springs. The reduction in recoil was significant. I'm not going to say that it was like shooting a 9mm, but it was close. Overall, it left me impressed and proved to be 100 percent reliable with each of the three loads that I used during my testing. This was the Goldilocks gun for me: not too big, not too small. It's just right. Though the trigger on the Commander measured slightly heavier than on the Government, it was cleaner with no discernable creep in contrast.

Combat Elite Defender The smallest pistol in the Combat Elite trio is the Defender, which is a half-inch shorter than the old Colt Officer's ACP. It is available in both .45 ACP and 9mm, and I tested the latter. With a 3-inch barrel and a grip that is a half-inch shorter than the Government or Commander models, the Defender is more easily concealed. Despite the shorter frame, there is still sufficient room for a full grip, though you do lose one round of magazine capacity. It offers eight-plus-one rounds of 9mm and seven-plus-one in .45. The mainspring housing is also grooved instead of checkered due to its polymer construction.

The Defender shares identical controls



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with its big brothers, making it an ideal carry pistol for those who are accustomed to shooting 1911s. Though it is quite similar from the shooter's perspective, the Defender is a different animal than the larger models, mechanically-speaking. For starters, the Defender uses a cone-shaped barrel that eliminates the traditional bushing at the muzzle. The Defender also uses a dual recoil spring with a two-piece full-length guiderod. It is a similar setup to the recoil spring arrangement found on newer-model Glocks, and it does a nice job of mitigating recoil. The front of the Defender's slide has been side-milled with an angular cut, giving it a different profile than the other two pistols in the series, also.


Though the Defender in .45 ACP is probably a handful to shoot, the 9mm version was very controllable. I did experience a few reliability issues, the majority of which appeared to be ammo-related. Colt's Defense ammunition (made by DoubleTap) uses a jacketed hollowpoint bullet, the shape of which must be incompatible with the Defender's feed ramp profile. The first round in each magazine would hang up and fail to feed. I also experienced several instances where the case failed to extract with this ammo, creating a double feed. Each time, the case had to be removed using a rod. Sticky cases are indicator of high pressures expanding the brass excessively. I do not believe that the gun was at fault since it performed well with other loads. Be sure that your gun



functions with your ammunition before you carry it.

Though both the Government and Commander Elites exhibited excellent fit and finish, the Defender was a bit on the loose side. There was some minor slide rattle, and noticeable barrel squat. Barrel squat is the result of the barrel's bottom lugs having excessive clearance from the slide stop. Colt National Match barrels, which are standard on both the Government and Commander Combat Elites, have oversized lower lugs that eliminate this play. The problem with barrel squat is that it can cause vertical stringing, which is exactly what I encountered with the Defender on paper. An oversized slide stop, available from various parts sources, might cure this ailment.

I bought my first new Colt 1911, a Series 80 Gold Cup, some 25 years ago, and I have watched the company's quality steadily improve since the '90s. Colt's investment in modern machining centers, combined with decades of institutional knowledge have the company building some of its best pistols ever. The Combat Elite series is a classic example of an attractive, functional and well-built line of handguns.

For a company that has been making the Model 1911 this long, it might be tempting to remain stationary. Thankfully, that is not the case. The Combat Elite series respects the proud lineage of Colt's 1911 pistols, but does so with tasteful touches that keep the platform relevant in today's competitive market. 

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Rock Island Armory VRPA40 12 ga.



Despite the affordable retail price, the VRPA40 is a well-equipped pump action. The barrel sports a red fiber-optic rod up front and interchangeable choke tubes.



Great for defense or high-volume competition shooting, the VRPA40 incorporates an adjustable rear ghost-ring aperture sight behind a rail for mounting optics.



As on most pump guns, the trigger assembly can be removed for maintenance. Note, however, the absence of a shell carrier and the presence of a polymer magazine well and mag release button.

ROCK SLIDE

ROCK ISLAND ARMORY'S VR LINE redefined semiauto shotgun design, and this year the company is adding a pump-action variant to the family. Known as the "VRPA40," Rock Island's slide-action scattergun also breaks new ground by offering shooters a magazine-fed pump shotgun at a very affordable price point.

It's remarkable how little pump shotguns have changed since the 1880s, and a defining characteristic of pump guns since their earliest days is a tubular magazine under the barrel. Tube magazines offer a convenient solution for ammo storage, but they are slower to reload than firearms with removable magazines. A few years ago, Remington and Mossberg addressed this concern with the launch of the box-magazine-fed Model 870 and Model 590, respectively.

That may not seem like a dramatic change of course, but it represented the first major departure from a traditional pump-action shotgun design in more than a century.

Rock Island's VRPA40 is the latest box-magazine-fed pump gun, but it's priced considerably lower than either the Remington or the Mossberg. The Remington 870 DM (Detachable Magazine) carries a starting MSRP of \$529, while the Mossberg 590M Mag-Fed has a retail price of \$721. Rock Island Armory's VRPA40 is only \$399.

For that money, you'd expect the VRPA40 to be a stripped-down gun with few accessories, but that's not the case. In place of a traditional bead front sight, the VRPA40 comes with a fiber optic front and an adjustable ghost ring rear sight with protective shields flanking the aperture. The rear sight is attached to an eight-slot top rail that offers roughly 3½-inches of mounting space for attaching a reflex sight, too. There's also an 11-inch vented aluminum heat shield mounted over the top of the barrel.

ROCK ISLAND ARMORY VRPA40

TYPE	Pump action
GAUGE	12
CHAMBER	3 in.
CAPACITY	5+1 rds. (nine- and 19-round magazines are optional)
WEIGHT	7 lbs., 6 oz. (unloaded, 5-round magazine inserted)
OVERALL LENGTH	41 in.
BARREL LENGTH	20 in.
LENGTH OF PULL	14.25 in.
SIGHTS	Adjustable aperture (rear); fiber optic (front)
STOCK	Black synthetic
FINISH	Anodized black
ACCESSORIES	Cylinder, Modified and Full chokes
MSRP	\$399
MANUFACTURER	Armcor USA/Rock Island Armory, 775-537-1444, armcor.com



The box-fed VRPA40 doesn't need its lower tube for ammo storage, but it still guides the sliding forend. A knurled magazine cap aids disassembly, and the shotgun features a forward sling mount.

With detachable magazines capable of holding 19 shells, fast, high-volume shooting becomes part of the VRPA40's appeal. Fittingly, the shotgun's barrel is equipped with a ventilated heat shield.

In many regards, the VRPA40 follows the typical pump-gun design formula. The 7075 T6 aluminum receiver houses a 3-inch chamber and an ejection port on the right side. The polymer slide handle is attached to twin action bars instead of the single action bar found on early pump shotguns. The VRPA40's slide handle rides on an under-barrel tube just like traditional pump actions, however.

Removing the trigger group is fast and easy thanks to a single cross pin that is countersunk into the left side of the receiver. Simply push the pin through the receiver and the trigger assembly and magazine housing will drop free.

Made in Turkey, VRPA40 shotguns come with 20-inch smoothbore steel barrels with interchangeable choke tubes. Three choke tubes are included — Cylinder, Modified, and Full — and the constriction can be determined by looking at the notches in the muzzle portion of the tube: five notches indicate Cylinder constriction, three for Modified, one for Full. And the barrel is held in place by a knurled forend cap with a sling stud. There's a corresponding rear sling stud in the polymer buttstock.

The VRPA40's bolt has a single, spring-operated extractor mounted on the right side of the bolt body. There's a channel in the bolt that allows an ejector mounted to the left side of the receiver to knock

extracted shells free from the action. Because it is magazine fed, the VRPA40 lacks the carrier traditionally found on tube-fed pumps, and the follower of the magazine tilts slightly upward at the front to ensure that shells, which are picked up by the forward stroke of the bolt, chamber smoothly in the gun. The magazine itself is made from metal and has a broad baseplate that makes it easy to grasp and remove quickly, and it can protect the magazine should it be dropped to the ground during a reload. The magazine housing is also made of polymer, and is part of the trigger assembly. Unlike some mag-fed pumps, it doesn't look like a bolted-on afterthought. Rather, it fits nicely with the profile of the gun.

If you are used to standard pump-gun controls, the VRPA40 may initially baffle you. Instinct tells you to reach toward the front (as on a Remington) or rear (as with a Mossberg or Winchester) of the triggerguard to release the bolt. Instead, the bolt release is located on the right side of the receiver just below the ejection point at the junction of the receiver and the magazine housing. It's shaped like an oversized slide stop on a pistol and works in the same manner. It requires a downward push to open the VRPA40's action. Magazine releases aren't standard equipment on most pumps, but Rock Island Armory placed

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The detachable magazines hold more rounds and offer faster reloads than traditional tubes. Rock Island Armory offers five-, nine- and 19-round boxes for its VR family of shotguns.



the mag release on the right side of the gun just ahead of the triggerguard.

The layout may take some getting used to for pump shotgun fans, but AR shooters will love the design of the mag release; it looks, feels and functions like the controls on your AR-15 rifle. The magazine release is large and easy to find, and the aluminum box magazine falls free from the gun for faster reloads.

The polymer forearm measures 7½-inches long, roughly 1½-inches wide and comes with aggressive, rearward-angled cuts for a positive grip. The buttstock is polymer with a widened comb and a generous ventilated recoil pad that is slightly curved to rest comfortably on the shoulder. It's effective at absorbing recoil. That extra padding is especially beneficial when firing heavy loads because the VRPA40 weighs just 6.9 pounds without the magazine. Add a full five-round mag and the weight jumps to just more than 8 pounds. Length of pull is roughly 14.25 inches and

overall length measured 41 inches. That makes the VRPA40 slightly longer and heavier than other defensive long-guns such as Mossberg's MVP Scout rifle at 6¾ pounds and 37½ inches, and Ruger's AR-556 at 6½ pounds and 35½ inches with the stock extended. The advantage of the VRPA40, by comparison, is load versatility and price.

As you read this, don't forget the VRPA40's price compared to other guns. Some new shotguns don't offer much in the way of accessories, but the VRPA40 utilizes the same magazine as Rock Island's VR60 and VR80 shotguns, so there are 9 and 19 shot options immediately available. The accessory rail on top will also accept most popular optics.

On the Range Smoothbore slug guns aren't particularly known for accuracy, but the VRPA40 performed well off the bench at 50 yards. Firing three different reduced-recoil slugs by Fiocchi, Remington and Hornady, the VRPA40 produced

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Controls include a magazine release that is similar in design, and location, to the button on AR-pattern rifles. The bolt release is less familiar, and is also located on the right side of the receiver.



The gun's bolt uses a single extractor that proved capable and reliable even under the stress of fast-paced courses of fire and a long day at the range firing a mixed bag of 12-gauge ammunition.

three-shot groups ranging from 1.61 inches to just larger than 4 inches at that distance.

Guns & Ammo's staff shot everything from light and affordable #8 target loads to slugs and buckshot through the VRPA40. We were surprised by how comfortable the gun was to shoot. The front of the mag well is concave and offers a hold point for the support hand when firing off sandbags. The widened comb helped distribute recoil. If you've shot slug guns from a bench, you know that sight-in sessions with slugs can be a brutal affair. With the three slug loads tested, however, the VRPA40 was actually pleasant! Even small-statured shooters were able to handle the



Three choke tubes were included with the VRPA40: Cylinder, Modified and Full. Notches — five, three and one, respectively — on the top lip of the tubes identify the different constrictions.

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recoil from (light) slugs in this gun.

After accuracy testing, Guns & Ammo's staff headed to the patterning boards with a box of high-brass upland ammo. We set up a sheet at 40 yards and used Federal's high-velocity Wing-Shok #6 paired with a Modified choke and fired at a central aiming point. We then repeated the process four more times to determine the VRPA40's point of aim (POA) versus point of impact (POI). On average, the VRPA40 put 91 #6 pellets in a 21-inch-diameter circle at 40 yards, and 157 pellets in a 30-inch circle. Based on the average pellet count for a 1½-ounce load of #6 shot (225 pellets), roughly 70 percent of the original shot payload struck within the 30-inch circle. The VRPA40's out-of-the-box point of impact was slightly low and left, but the advantage of adjustable sights is that POI can be corrected by the shooter. The average maximum pellet-to-pellet spread with a modified choke at 40 yards measured just more than 42 inches. With the Cylinder choke in place, maximum pellet spread with the Federal #6 load exceeded the size of the paper at 48 inches. With the Full choke in place, maximum spread was just more than 37 inches, and when we overlaid a cut-out of a turkey head on the target, 26 pellets were in the vital zone. Hence, the VRPA40 is a suitable gobbler gun as well as a home defense or one part of a competitive 3-Gun rig.

After pattern testing was complete, we moved on to the timed portion of Guns & Ammo's test. For that, we set up 10 clay targets on a bank; five on the left side and five on the right. Using #8 target loads, the object was to see how quickly we could break the five clays on the left bank, perform a magazine change, and shoot five targets on the right bank. Gunwriter Brad Fitzpatrick's fastest time to break all 10 clays (with a magazine change in the middle) was 12.3 seconds. His average run time of 14.1 seconds was for three rounds. When he transitioned to low-recoil slugs, the average time jumped to just more than 15 seconds for the same course of fire.

Everything changed when Fitzpat-



The VRPA40 makes use of a polymer buttstock with a traditional sporting profile. The stock is capped by a generous recoil pad, which is always appreciated on a 12-gauge shotgun.

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rick switched to the 19-round detachable box magazine. Eliminating the need for a mag change dropped his average 10-shot time to 8.2 seconds. Worth noting, the 20-inch, 19-round magazine turned the 8-pound VRPA40 into one that weighs nearly 11 pounds. It's not the most nimble setup, but recoil was virtually nil. Plus, you'll shoot it empty before your arms grow tired.

Despite the gun's ability to chamber 3-inch shells, the 19-round magazine only accepts 2¾-inch shells. However, that's not really a bad thing. Firing 20, 3-inch, 12-gauge magnum rounds without stopping would be sadistic regardless of gun weight.

Overall, we were quite impressed by the VRPA40's performance. Reliability was very good, and some concerns that the single extractor might be a problem when firing so many rounds quickly were unfounded. This gun runs. Except for one instance when there was a double feed while firing Remington's low-recoil slugs, there were no issues with cycling or firing.

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	BULLET WEIGHT (OZ.)	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Fiocchi Exacta Aero-Slug 2¾ in.	1	1,088	74	23	1.61	2.28
Horn. Amer. Gun. Reduced Recoil Slug 2¾ in.	1	1,227	34	12	2.2	2.49
Remington Managed Recoil Slugger 2¾ in.	1	1,132	91	27	2.86	3.34

Notes: Accuracy results are average of three, three-shot groups at 50 yards from a fixed rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots recorded by a Shooting Chrony digital chronograph placed 10 feet in front of the muzzle.

The overall quality of the components is great for this price point. Other than a few soldering marks where the lug meets the barrel, finish was excellent, too.

Many shotguns, particularly hunting and clay target guns, are nose-heavy. This added weight at the front of the gun helps smooth out a shooter's swing, and it's a byproduct of the pump gun's tubular magazine. By moving the weight of the loaded shells to the middle,



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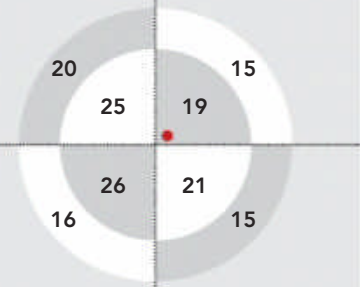
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PERFORMANCE

FEDERAL WING SHOK 1 1/8 oz. #6
AVERAGE PELLET COUNT: 225
AVERAGE OF 10 SHOTS AT 40 YARDS

MODIFIED CHOKE


● = POINT OF AIM



21 1/4-IN. INNER CIRCLE: 91 (40%)
30-IN. OUTER CIRCLE: 66 (30%)
TOTAL HITS: 157 (70%)

the VRPA40 balances between the hands, which is better for a defensive shotgun. This balance allows for faster target transitions and quicker target acquisition. Unless you're planning to use the VRPA40 to shoot doves, you'll appreciate how this gun handles.

The VRPA40's controls took some getting used to, but after our range sessions, we grew accustomed to the layout and could run the gun smoothly. All four magazines tested — the two five rounders, the nine-round mag and 19 rounder — performed well. They all secured in place with an audible *click*. Our one complaint about the magazine is that the rim of the shell being loaded has a tendency to hang up on the forward portion of the brass on the shell below it. The remedy is to press down on the loaded shell and slip the next one fully into position before releasing spring tension, which isn't always convenient. Still, the magazines worked without issue and stood up to mistreatment.

Anyone who appreciates the simplicity and low cost of ownership of a pump gun should consider Rock Island's shotguns. It's impossible to find a magazine-fed shotgun that can compete with the price of the VRPA40. It's fun to shoot and well-suited for defense, hunting and competition. Rock Island Armory's VRPA40 is poised to make waves in the magazine-fed shotgun market, and we predict that it will. 



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ITEM 56862 ITEM 64520

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ITEM 63135/61451 shown 81761510 LIMIT 4 - Exp. 12/18/20*

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Compare to Husky 300816 \$159

ITEM 56269/64294 shown 81761596 LIMIT 1 - Exp. 12/18/20*

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\$199.99 ~~\$239.99~~

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ITEM 64031, 64722, 64030, 64721, 64061, 64720, 56429

81762041 LIMIT 1 - Exp. 12/18/20*

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6.5 HP (212 cc) OHV Horizontal Shaft Gas Engine

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Compare to Honda GX200UT20X2 \$329.99

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ITEM 69727/68121 CALIFORNIA ONLY

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KEITH WOOD

Looking back at missed opportunities.

WHAT A YEAR IT'S BEEN


TO SAY THAT 2020 has been “interesting” is an understatement. The firearms industry was not immune to forces of the global COVID-19 pandemic and, within weeks of the new product announcements at January’s SHOT Show, some areas in manufacturing came to a halt. An unprecedented demand for anything related to personal defense was brought on by civil unrest, and now the stress surrounding the presidential election has resulted in a perfect storm of product scarcity. Because of these events, and the space constraints of a print magazine, *Guns & Ammo* didn’t get to test every new firearm worthy of being reviewed. Therefore, these are the dreamguns I would have liked to evaluate in 2020, but never got the chance to. None of these are inexpensive but, hey, it’s a wish list.

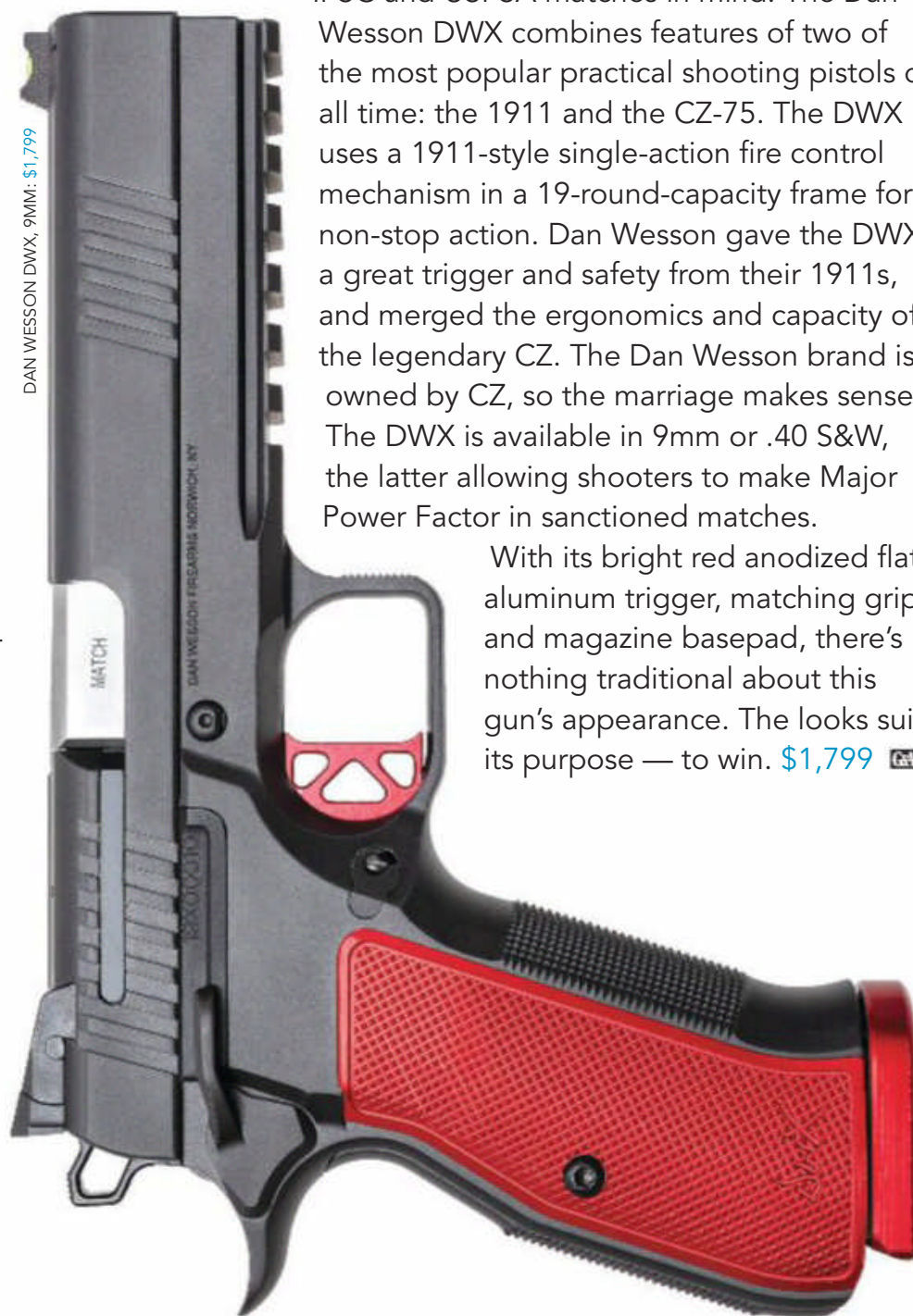
Cabot Guns Nero (cabotgun.com) Cabot is known for producing some of the most interesting and expensive 1911s. These are works of art including one-off guns made of meteorites, stunning Damascus and grips made from desert glass. The Nero, however, is a less exotic example that’s more appropriate for everyday carry. This is the company’s first gun specifically designed for shooters who like to train. Full-size and Commander-length pistols are available, and the components are machined and precision ground in-house from stainless steel billets finished in a black Diamond-Like Coating (DLC). The Nero includes a flat trigger, an elective integrated frame rail and a unique ejector that is machined in place. The only part on this pistol that isn’t black is the red fiber-optic front sight. Accuracy is guaranteed to be 1½ inches at 25 yards, or 1-inch with an upgrade. **\$4,500**

Korth NXS 8-Shot .357 Magnum (nighthawkcustom.com) As I’m passionate for revolvers, I would have loved to give this eight-gun a workout. Korth revolvers are considered the finest made, and Nighthawk Custom’s reputation for custom handguns speaks for itself. Stainless-steel machined parts are hand-fit by a single gunsmith in

Germany, and each Korth revolver is inspected and tested by Nighthawk before it ships. The NXS embodies words like “precision fit,” “smooth trigger” and “outstanding accuracy.” Walnut grips, a black DLC finish and a one-of-a-kind machined barrel shroud combine modern and traditional elements to make a bold statement. Though these guns don’t have the usual classic looks, I would love the opportunity to get to know one. **\$5,299**

Dan Wesson DWX (danwessonfirearms.com) My last wish could be a racegun. The DWX was designed with IPSC and USPSA matches in mind. The Dan Wesson DWX combines features of two of the most popular practical shooting pistols of all time: the 1911 and the CZ-75. The DWX uses a 1911-style single-action fire control mechanism in a 19-round-capacity frame for non-stop action. Dan Wesson gave the DWX a great trigger and safety from their 1911s, and merged the ergonomics and capacity of the legendary CZ. The Dan Wesson brand is owned by CZ, so the marriage makes sense. The DWX is available in 9mm or .40 S&W, the latter allowing shooters to make Major Power Factor in sanctioned matches.

With its bright red anodized flat aluminum trigger, matching grips and magazine basepad, there’s nothing traditional about this gun’s appearance. The looks suit its purpose — to win. **\$1,799** 





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