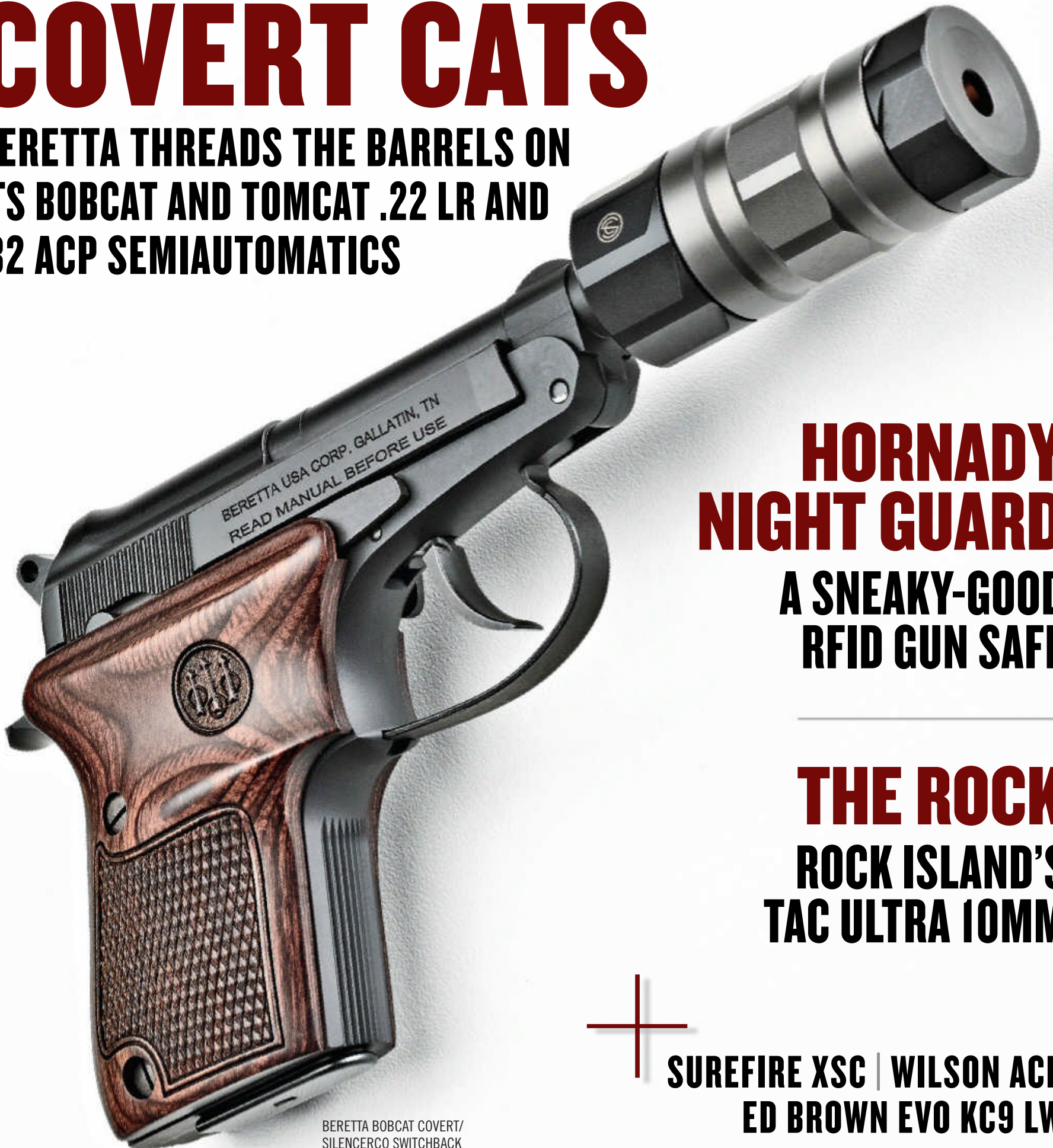


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**Compare and Contrast**

I owe our readers and Lohman Manufacturing an apology for how the lead photograph accompanying Brad Fitzpatrick’s article on the Lohman Ymir looked in the December/January 2021 issue. We adjust all images to account for how they will print on our paper stock. In this case, a Photo-shop error caused Brad’s original image (above) to reproduce with twice the contrast it should’ve had, and somehow we didn’t catch it before it went to press. The Ymir truly is a gorgeous gun, and we failed to show it off properly. For that I apologize.—*J. Scott Rupp, editor*

**Reading Is Fundamental**

I really appreciated James Tarr’s article on KelTec’s PMR30. One fairly important addition to the article’s information would be to thoroughly read the manual about suggested ammunition. KelTec specifically recommends 40-grain bullets—or, I assume, heavier—no matter who manufactures them. It is my understanding that this is to help the slide to function properly for ejecting the spent round. With the 32-grain bullets, one will probably waste time trying to figure out what is “wrong” with their otherwise beautiful piece of machinery. I noticed Mr. Tarr used 30-, 40- and 45-grain bullet weights, without any problems reported. I assume the PMR30 performed well with all these. Keep up the great work.

GREG MARKS, WEST VIRGINIA

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We posted the image above on our Facebook page and asked folks whether they were fans of muzzle porting or not. Here’s a sampling of the responses.

“On the heavier calibers, maybe. But I’ve seen ported .22 and 9mm. I don’t understand the need for it.”—Bob

“Large revolvers it’s nice for a quick follow-up shot.”—Joshua

“I have been Magna-porting my firearms for many years.”—Gordy

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Navy Petty Officer Ryan Dickinson photo



**Coast Guard Goes Glock**

While other services are adopting variants of the SIG Sauer P320, the Coast Guard went a different route. It recently selected the Glock 19 Gen5 MOS as its standard service pistol.



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2020

<<< Scott, Kourtney and Rich take a look at the complexities of handgun operation as well as new handguns designed for easy handling—plus techniques and features that can make pistols easier to work.



DECEMBER  
**17th**  
2020

<<< Rich and Scott showcase a number of guns that might be worthwhile to have in an emergency situation. Scott runs a swing drill that can help shooters with target acquisition, and Rich shows how to disengage from a threat to gain the advantage.



DECEMBER  
**24th**  
2020

<<< Rich, Kourtney and Scott examine more guns that have gained a significant place in firearms lore. Kourtney runs the F.A.S.T. drill that will help any shooter hone his or her skills, and Rich goes over the importance of trigger control.

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# HANDGUN FIT SOLUTIONS

IN ORDER TO HIT, IT'S GOTTA FIT. HERE ARE SOME OPTIONS TO EXPLORE.

By J. Scott Rupp

**ONE OF HANDGUNNING'S MOST CRUCIAL** aspects, and most mysterious, is fit. A gun that doesn't fit you well is more difficult to shoot accurately. Many people go by "feel." You pick up a gun and it just feels right. I've certainly seen that play out countless times at the counter of my local gun shop, with customers commenting on how one gun feels better to them than another. And in my own case, I've developed a fondness for Walther pistols because I think they just feel better to me.

A lot of factors go into fit: grip angle, grip girth, grip shape and even the presence and configuration of finger grooves. For instance, some

people like Glocks because the grip angle suits them. Some people don't like Glocks and gravitate toward pistols like Smith & Wesson's M&P that have a more 1911-like grip angle.

Feel is not the same as fit. If your hands can't properly wrap around the gun, it doesn't fit. More importantly, I think, is if you can't easily place your trigger finger to the first joint squarely on the face of the trigger, the gun doesn't fit. Even if you think it feels good.

Unfortunately you really can't get a clear picture of how well a gun fits you until you actually shoot it, which is why if you don't have experience with a particular handgun model,

it's a great idea to find a gun shop with a range and rental pistols. But what about a gun you already own? While you can't change grip angle, there are several things you can try.

Most polymer-frame pistols available today come with interchangeable backstraps. But too many people, myself included, make assumptions that may or may not be correct.

For instance, I have medium-size hands by most hand-measurement standards, even medium-large by some. I own two pistols with interchangeable backstraps: a Walther PPQ M2 and a Smith & Wesson M&P9 Compact. They both





came with the medium backstrap installed, and I just went with that because, hey, I have medium hands.

Because these guns are in my safe, both see a lot of screen time on our “Handguns & Defensive Weapons” show, and in my attempts to improve my marksmanship and thereby not embarrass myself on TV, I train with them a lot. As I started to keep notes on performance on various drills, I discovered I shot the Smith measurably better than the Walther—although I always thought it was the other way around.

When I took a hard look at both guns, I realized that my reach to the trigger was better with the Smith—my finger curling around the trigger naturally rather than being off to one side as it tended to do with the Walther. The solution was simple: change the Walther backstrap to the small size.

The moral? The size labels on interchangeable backstraps are just that, labels. You need to shoot them to find the right size. And don’t assume just because you use one size of backstrap on a particular gun that the same size works for all makes and models.

On certain guns you can change the entire grip. My competition gun

◀ (Opp. page) Changing to the small backstrap on his Walther PPQ allowed Rupp a better reach to the trigger. ▶ Similarly, switching to a grip with a straight backstrap and thinner sides made his Q5 Match SF a better fit. ▲ Last but not least, a Nighthawk short trigger improved his 1911 shooting.

is a Walther PPQ Q5 Match Steel Frame, which has a hump on the backstrap—a hallmark of the PPQ family of guns.

I thought I was getting a decent finger position on the Q5 Match’s trigger, but the more I dry-fired it while working on my draw, the more I began to notice my trigger-finger placement was inconsistent.

My solution was an aftermarket set of grips: Lok Grips Bogies/Thin I bought for a little over \$100. The new grips not only eliminated the backstrap hump but also were thinner. That fixed the inconsistency with my trigger-finger placement, and my Steel Challenge scores improved immediately.

Changing the trigger may help as well. Right now one of the big trends in polymer-frame striker-fired guns is a straight as opposed to a curved trigger, which can make it easier to pull the trigger straight to the rear. I’ve not experimented with this yet, but what I have tried is replacing a stock 1911 trigger with a short one.

If I simply pick up a 1911 and place my finger on the trigger,

reach is not a problem. But when I get a proper high firing grip with my thumb riding the manual safety, my trigger finger tends to contact the trigger at a slight angle. One of the great things about the 1911 is its straight trigger travel, and you’re not going to gain this advantage if your finger is exerting any kind of lateral pressure on the trigger.

Nighthawk was kind enough to send me one of its aftermarket short triggers, which I installed on my Nighthawk Talon. (And FYI, installing a 1911 trigger is not difficult. If you don’t know how to disassemble and reassemble a 1911 to the point you can replace the trigger, it’s really something worth teaching yourself.)

The stock trigger measures 2.30 inches; the short trigger measures 2.07 inches. The difference it made in my shooting was dramatic. With my finger able to achieve a proper trigger press, my plate-rack times and my non A-zone hits on paper targets during various drills both dropped significantly. I’m in the process of switching all my 1911s to short triggers as a result. ○



SHORT SHOT | BY J. SCOTT RUPP

# RUGER LCP II .22 LR

## CARRYING A .22 FOR SELF-DEFENSE

is not for everyone, but enough people go this route that Ruger made the decision to chamber its LCP II in .22 Long Rifle. This version, which carries a \$349 suggested retail price, also adds a new feature: Ruger's Lite Rack system.

Lite Rack sports a new serration pattern at the front and rear of the slide, as well as "cocking ears" at the back of the slide for a better grip. And because the gun is hammer-fired and not striker-fired, it uses a lighter recoil spring as well.

Ruger has added a manual safety to the LCP II .22. Unlike typical thumb safeties, you push forward on this one for Fire. After working with it for a bit I found it to be fairly instinctive and simple to operate. The LCP II .22 also has a magazine disconnect safety.

The Lite Rack version retains the LCP II's Secure Action fire-control system, with a shorter trigger travel and reset. There's a lot of take-up, but the pull itself is short. Pull weight on my sample averaged six pounds, nine ounces.

At 5.2 inches long, 0.8 inch wide and weighing a mere 11.2 ounces, it is the perfect size for a pocket gun, and Ruger supplies a pocket holster with the pistol. The frame is glass-reinforced nylon. The stippling on the side panels and grip is just aggressive enough to prevent the gun from shifting in your hand.

The front and rear sights are machined into the slide and feature serrated faces. The rear sight notch is generous enough to make it fast to acquire but not so wide you'll have a hard time centering the front sight in it.

The pistol ships with three



**▲ Ruger's LCP II in .22 LR ships with three mags, loader and pocket holster. ▶ The Lite Rack system includes improved serrations and cocking ears at the back of the slide. Push forward on the safety for Fire.**

10-round magazines. My only gripe here is that the feed lips have sharp edges, particularly at the front. Ruger does include a loader with the gun, which should help. The magazine's base pad is extended just enough to permit you to get two fingers on the gun, and this extension allowed Ruger to fit an extra round into the mag. The magazine does provide last-round hold-open.

Between the small grip and the small magazine release, I found it difficult to drop the magazine cleanly



without shifting the pistol considerably from a firing grip, but that's common on such tiny guns.

The LCP II .22 was accurate for such a small gun, and I found it easy to hit with in drills. Thanks to Lite Rack I think anyone will be able to operate this pistol with ease, and with its decent sights and light recoil, they'll be able to shoot it well, too. 🎯

## ACCURACY RESULTS | RUGER LCP II

.22 Long Rifle	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
SK Semi Auto Rifle LRN	40	759	23	1.4
Remington Golden Bullet HP	36	859	47	1.2
Fiocchi LRN	40	837	14	1.7
CCI Mini Mag LRN	40	892	25	1.7

**Notes:** Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 15 yards from an MTM Case-Gard pistol rest. Velocities are averages of 20 shots measured on a Pro Chrono chronograph 10 feet from the muzzle. Abbreviation: HP, hollowpoint; LRN, lead roundnose



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# SUREFIRE XSC

## MICRO-COMPACT 9MMS ARE THE HOT

thing in the handgun market right now, and accessory companies certainly didn't miss the memo. For two years Surefire has been working on a weapon light that would fit these handy pistols. The result of its efforts is the XSC (\$329), which measures less than two inches long and weighs just 1.7 ounces.

"The micro-compact handgun market has been expanding in a big way due to the amount of capability these handguns give you in such a small package," said Surefire's Andrew Wright. "Now the XSC completes the package, giving you almost a full-sized capability in a concealed package. The small form factor gives customers no excuse to not carry a weapon light with them and be prepared for any scenario."

He said the big hurdle was coming up with a way to power a light so small and still generate enough lumens for it to be effective. Engineers were also tasked to come up with a battery that was removable without having to take the light off the gun and one that would fit flush with the body of the light.

They achieved it with the B12 rechargeable lithium battery. Run time is 30 minutes, which I confirmed with a stopwatch. The battery has an LED "fuel gauge" on the side. It doesn't function while the light is on the gun, but if you remove the battery—a quick, tool-less operation—a button on the underside activates the gauge. The gauge also lights up when you're charging the battery so you can monitor progress.

Charge time from exhausted to full was two hours. It's a "smart" charger that knows when to stop sending juice, so leaving the battery



▲ Surefire's new XSC is designed for today's popular micro-compacts. Its low-mount switch is easy to reach and can be activated for momentary or constant-on. ▶ The unit comes with a mini USB charger, and the battery has a fuel gauge on the side.

on the charger for extensive periods will not shorten its overall life.

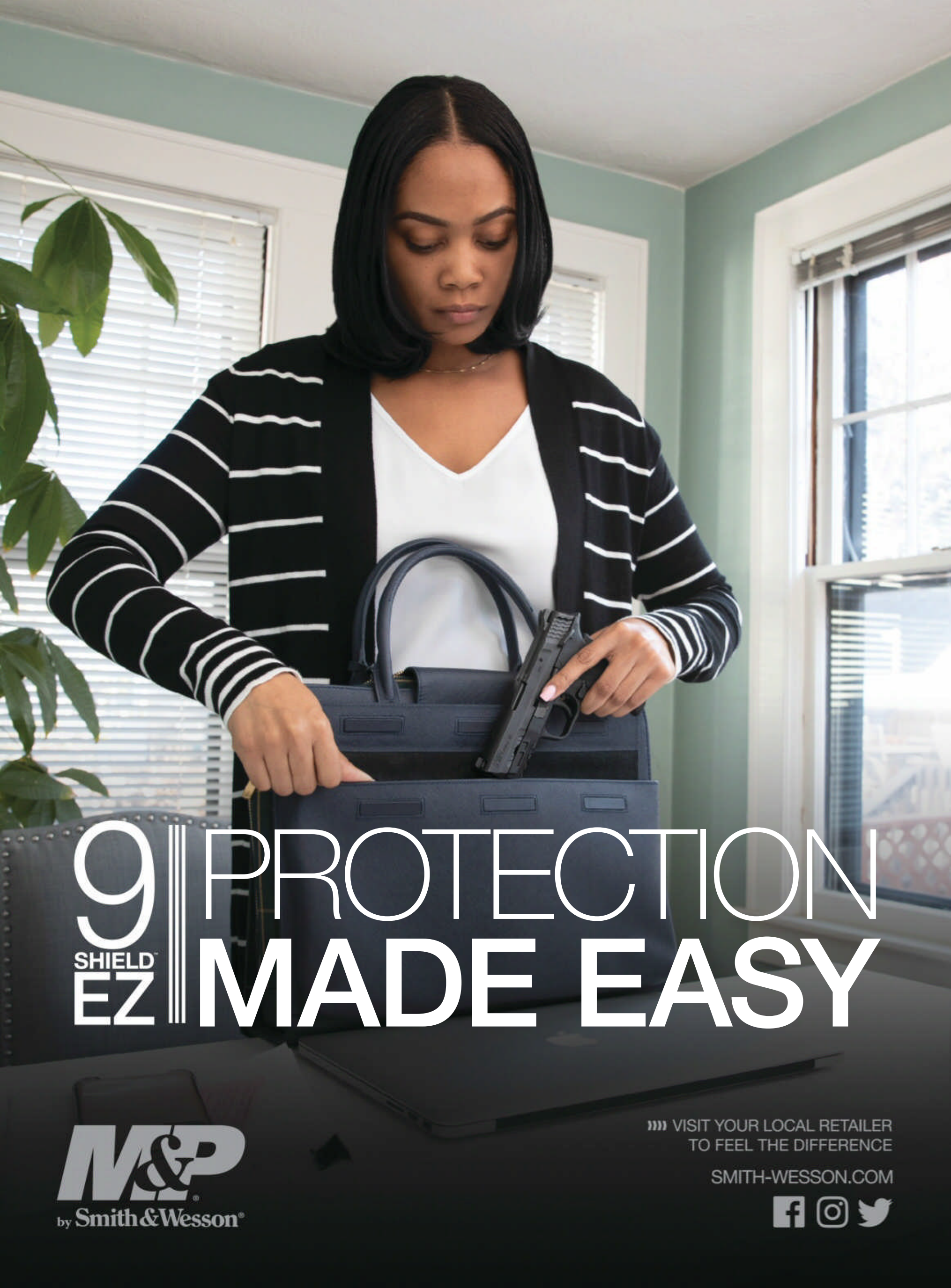
The light itself works great. The switches are nicely located for easy operation: tap for constant-on, push and hold then let off for momentary.

I spent a lot of time working with the XSC, and I think the beam is ideal. It's 350 lumens and has a concentrated center, but the spill-over light casts a wide illuminated area, making it useful in most any concealed-carry or home-defense scenario.



Because of variances in gun-rail dimensions, the XSC is gun-specific. It's currently available for the Springfield Hellcat, SIG P365 and Glock 43X/48. It comes with a charging cradle/USB cord and one battery. Spare B12s will soon be available from Surefire for \$35.—JSR





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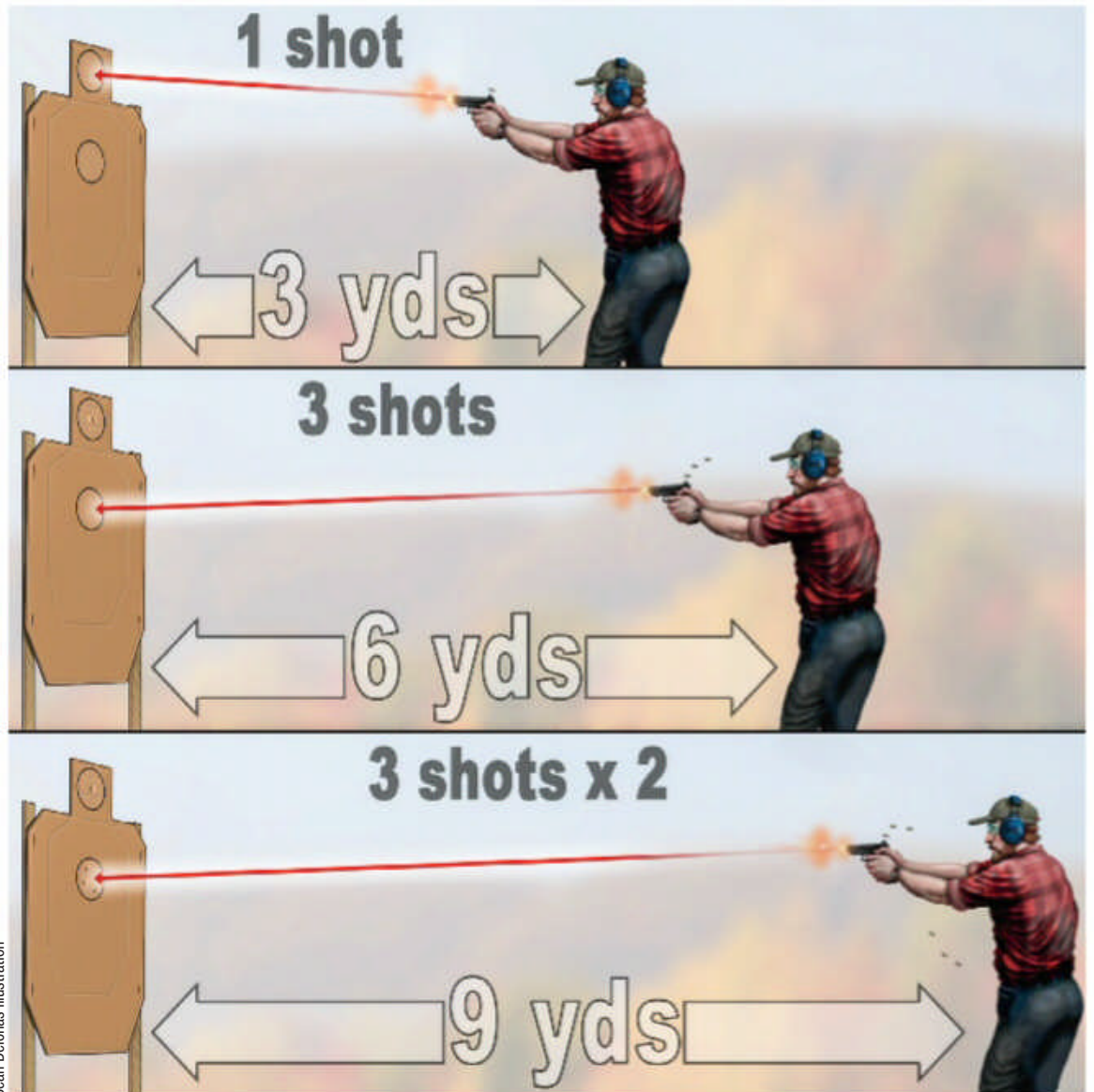
## HANDGUNS | SPEEDLOADS

RULE 4

BE SURE OF YOUR TARGET  
AND WHAT'S BEYOND IT

SKILLS DRILLS | BY JACK STRAW

# 10-SHOT WARM-UP DRILL




Sean Delonas Illustration

**ATHLETES ALWAYS WARM UP BEFORE** a workout or game, and shooters should do the same. This simple drill comes from Ken Hackathorn, and it preps your mind and body for whatever training you have planned for that day's session.

**GEAR** Concealment garment, holster, shot timer or someone to give you a start signal. Revolver shooters will need loose rounds or a speed strip to top off during the drill.

**DRILL** Target is a USPSA type, although since you'll be drawing four-inch circles for the head and chest, you could use just a backer. Ideally, this is done from the holster. If you're able to draw at your facility, do so from concealment. At three

yards, draw and fire one shot into the head. Move back to six yards; draw and shoot three rounds into the chest. Move back to nine yards; draw and shoot three rounds into the chest again. Do this twice for a total of 10 shots.

**GOALS** This is a warm-up drill. Treat it as such. It's a time to concentrate on fundamentals and to really focus on technique. Don't dawdle, but shoot only as fast as you can hit those four-inch circles. Concentrate on a smooth, clean draw. Punch out, get a clear sight picture—laser focus to the front sight—and execute a proper trigger press with good follow-through. This drill isn't hard, but you can get a lot out of it. 





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# HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

## HORNADY'S NIGHT GUARD IS A SECURE AND INCONSPICUOUS GUN SAFE.

### AS I WRITE THIS WE ARE DEEP INTO

2020, an undeniably crazy year by any standard, and all that craziness has sent a huge number of people into their local gun stores to buy the most effective means of self-defense currently available to human beings. Gun sales in 2020 smashed all previous records, and according to the NRA, 40 percent of those sales were to first-time gun owners, roughly 5 million new gun owners in just a six-month time period. That is unprecedented.

Most of those guns sold were handguns. Upon returning home, those first-time gun owners will then, hopefully, be asking themselves the same question that almost every first-time gun owner does: Where do I keep it? This question is not easily answered. Most of those first-time gun buyers are buying a firearm for the purpose of self-defense and may have untrained people or children in the house. In such a situation, you want to be able to store your firearm safely and securely, but in such a way that you can access it quickly.

Luckily, there are all sorts of products on the market to help you do just that, and one of them is the Hornady Night Guard, the newest offering in its Rapid safe line.

The Night Guard is a quick-access safe specifically meant to store a handgun. It is an unassuming rectangular steel box, larger than a hardcover book but smaller than a briefcase, with a black powder coat. While it would fit in a vehicle or a closet, the Night Guard is specifically meant for use atop a night stand/bedside table or even a kitchen counter. As my contact at Hornady



**A** The Hornady Night Guard is designed to sit on a nightstand and not look like a safe. It fits one handgun and has a working clock. USB ports at the back allow you to charge your phone or other devices.

told me, “The goal was to offer a low-profile safe that fits on a nightstand and doesn’t immediately look like a safe.”

This is a safe intended to hide in plain sight, as it is designed to look like an unobtrusive radio/alarm clock, with a red LED clock display behind the tempered glass front panel and a fake speaker beside that. I had a Bose radio alarm clock for years, and the appearance of the Night Guard is similar.

There is nothing about it that automatically shouts: “Safe!” When at rest, the only thing illuminated on the front of the unit is the time. The clock is functional on the Night Guard, and you can adjust the brightness of the display or shut it off entirely. It is just a clock, though; there is no alarm function or radio.

The drawer takes up the entire interior of the safe, and the clock display and fake speaker are mounted

to the front of it. You can find “Hornady” embossed on the front of the fake speaker, and even though you have to be in a well-lit room to see it, I still wish they’d kept the name off of it for total anonymity. Not all bad guys are uninformed.

The interior of the safe drawer is 9.5 inches wide, six inches front to back, and two inches deep, making it spacious enough to accept a full-size pistol. A five-inch Government model 1911 with a mag well fits into the drawer with no problem. Two inches is enough depth for the cylinder of a revolver. No, a Desert Eagle will not fit into the drawer.

The drawer is lined with a rubber tray you can actually remove if you ever need to clean it. It has a non-skid interior. The safe itself sits on four non-marring rubber feet.

The Night Guard can be opened in several ways. There is a programmable digital keypad on the





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## HANDGUNS | ESSENTIALS

← front, just to the left of the clock readout, into which you punch the four- to six-digit code of your choice. The keypad is dark and invisible until you touch it with your finger. Punching in the code is not fast, but as long as you can remember the code, you'll always be able to open the safe that way. You can control whether the keypad beeps when you enter the code or is silent so the only sound is the mechanical ratchet as the drawer pops out. It is not loud.

There is a barrel lock at the rear of the unit that uses a cylindrical key. Two keys are provided with the safe, and I recommend putting them somewhere separate from the safe. Also, remember where you put them. I speak from experience.

The Night Guard, like many of Hornady's small security safes, uses RFID technology. Hornady provides two stickers, one key fob and one wristband, all with RFID chips. Once the safe is programmed, all you have to do is place the RFID chip at the front of the unit and the spring-assisted drawer slides open on its robust hardware.

Hornady recommends placing an RFID sticker on the back of your phone case, as everyone seems to carry their phone with them everywhere. That makes even more sense with the Night Guard.

To make the unit multi-functional, there is one USB A and one USB C charging port at the rear of the safe, so you can charge your phone or any other small electronics right from the safe itself. Having that RFID sticker on the back of your phone as you charge it atop the unit means you have a quick and simple way to open the safe at hand.

One interesting note: If you have any other Hornady RFID-operated security products, you can program all of them to open with the same RFID chip.

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# Bad to the Bone


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The safe, at 16 pounds empty, is surprisingly heavy for its size. It is made of steel, but that body of the safe is heavy in part so it can act as a counterweight. When the drawer slides out with a handgun in it, you don't want the safe bouncing or tilting forward. It is meant to sit on a hard surface. If you placed the Night Guard on carpet the drawer would probably brush against the carpet and not open all the way.

The "speaker" is actually the front of the battery compartment, and it is held in place by magnets. The safe takes four AAA batteries, and battery life is listed as approximately one year. You can check battery life at any time by pressing the "H" button on the front of the unit. That battery power is mostly meant as backup, and most people will keep their Night Guard plugged in.

If "hiding in plain sight" isn't enough security for you, Hornady provides several ways for you to secure the Night Guard. It comes with a 1,500-pound-rated cable that connects to the rear of the safe so you can strap it to something large, heavy or immovable. There are also four holes in the bottom of the unit so you can hard-mount it to a surface if desired.

My children are now giants who tower over me, but I've got a two-year-old grandson who comes to visit regularly, so now we've had to start kid-proofing the house all over again. Leaving a loaded gun where a kid can access it is about as smart as letting them play with an open bottle of bleach. An unobtrusive quick-access safe like the Night Guard seems to be the best solution to this problem, and it works no matter the age of your visitors.

The Night Guard, like all of Hornady's security products, comes with a one-year limited warranty and has a suggested retail price of \$293. 

If you're on the hunt for a knife that combines impeccable craftsmanship with a sense of wonder, the **\$79 Huntsman Blade** is the trophy you're looking for.

The blade is full tang, meaning it doesn't stop at the handle but extends to the length of the grip for the ultimate in strength. The blade is made from 420 surgical steel, famed for its sharpness and its resistance to corrosion.

The handle is made from genuine natural bone, and features decorative wood spacers and a hand-carved motif of two overlapping feathers—a reminder for you to respect and connect with the natural world.

This fusion of substance and style can garner a high price tag out in the marketplace. In fact, we found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here. We have mastered the hunt for the best deal, and in turn pass the spoils on to our customers.

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**Rating of A+**



# THE AIRSOFT ADVANTAGE

## HOW A FAKE GUN CAN PREPARE YOU FOR THE REAL THING.

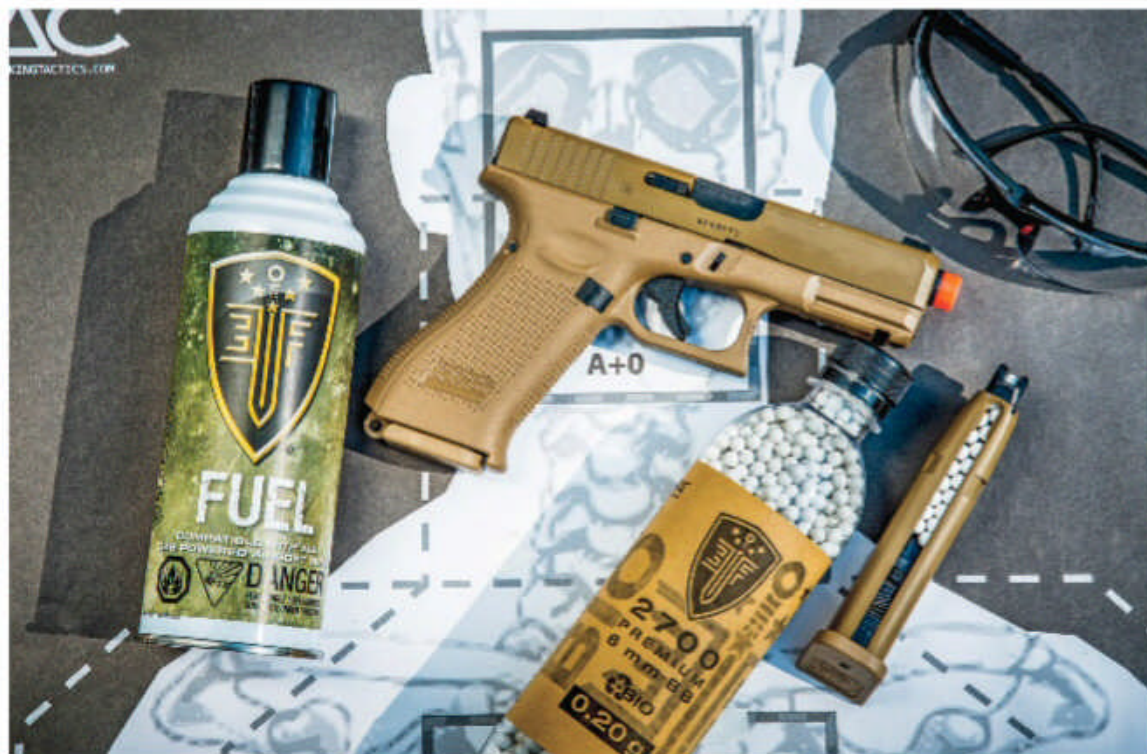
**ONCE DISMISSED AS MERE CHILD'S PLAY,** airsoft is now widely considered a legitimate, if not critical, component of defensive firearms training. Recently, the police department I work for, like many others, made the switch to airsoft from another, more expensive, complex and malfunction-prone force-on-force training option. Whether learning gun safety, working on the fundamentals of marksmanship, practicing advanced shooting skills or engaging in force-on-force training, airsoft can give you a tremendous advantage.

An airsoft gun has moving parts that function nearly identically to the real gun they are designed around. Magazines can be inserted and ejected, the slide reciprocates, the trigger can be pressed and reset.

In many cases, you can purchase officially licensed airsoft guns that are even stamped with the manufacturer's logo, as is the case with my Glock 17. The only indicator that it's not a real Glock is the bright orange protruding barrel, which is indicative of airsoft guns.

As a firearms instructor, I can think of no better way to teach safe gun handling and basic pistol operation than to train with an airsoft version of the real pistol a new shooter will be using. The authentic look, feel and functionality of a quality airsoft gun will enable the newbie to gain confidence, without risk of serious injury or property damage. Once the new shooter has demonstrated a firm grasp of gun safety and basic operations like loading and unloading, it's time to get to the fun stuff.

Since a quality airsoft gun will have the same dimensions as the real pistol it replicates, the airsoft



**A** You can get into airsoft for \$200 to \$300, and the training benefits—from shooting fundamentals to force-on-force—are tremendous.

gun should fit in a holster designed for the actual pistol. This means the new shooter can practice drawing and holstering without risk of injury. Draws can therefore be practiced virtually anywhere. (However, since an airsoft gun is difficult to distinguish from a real gun, don't display it in public.)

Of course, airsoft is a great way to improve your aim. Achieving proper sight alignment and sight picture is crucial to accurate shooting. Sure, you could practice these skills with a confirmed unloaded real pistol, but with airsoft you get feedback in the form of a 6mm plastic BB impacting the target.

As far as targets go, something as simple as a tin can will work. If you want something a little more sophisticated, you can easily construct targets with wooden stands and cardboard backers, or, if you're so inclined, you can purchase steel targets that are calibrated for airsoft.

Add a timer to the mix to really amp things up. What better way to keep develop and maintain your shooting skills?

Some skills that may be required of you in an armed encounter are extremely difficult to train. For instance, let's say you want to practice drawing your pistol while seated in your vehicle. An airsoft gun enables you to develop this rather complex skill in the comfort and safety of your driveway, backyard or garage.

Maybe you want to practice drawing your pistol with your non-dominant hand. Again, you can figure out how to best accomplish this using an airsoft gun. Perform several repetitions so that when you transition to your real pistol, the seemingly complicated task is rather easy.

Of course, if you and a friend each have an airsoft gun you can engage in the often humbling but always exciting world of force-on-force training. For this, you'll need, at mini-



mum, eye protection. I'd recommend donning a full-face shield and that you cover any exposed skin. Airsoft hurts, especially at close range.

Mistaking a real gun for an airsoft gun could have tragic and irreversible consequences. Before engaging in force-on-force training, it is absolutely critical that all live weapons are removed from the training environment.

Ideally, force-on-force training should have a "safety officer" who's also wearing protective gear but is not participating in the scenario. His or her sole function is to ensure the safety of the participants and immediately stop the scenario at the first sign of danger.

The more realistic the scenario, the better it will prepare you for a real armed encounter. For example, if you create a scenario where there is simulated cover, you are able to reinforce the importance of using cover via the "pain penalty" associated with getting shot by an airsoft BB.

Expect to spend \$200 to \$300 on a quality airsoft gun, BBs and either green gas or CO<sub>2</sub> cartridges, depending on how your airsoft gun is configured.

While eye protection is sufficient for solo airsoft training, as I mentioned you'll want a full-face mask for force-on-force training. This may seem like a lot to spend, but it's an extremely economical alternative to live fire, and the benefits you'll surely reap from airsoft training are priceless.

Airsoft training is affordable and convenient, and ammunition is readily available. It's an excellent way to supplement your live-fire training. However, airsoft can't realistically represent recoil, so it's not the best barometer for ensuring you have a proper shooting grip or that you are capable of making fast and accurate follow-up shots.

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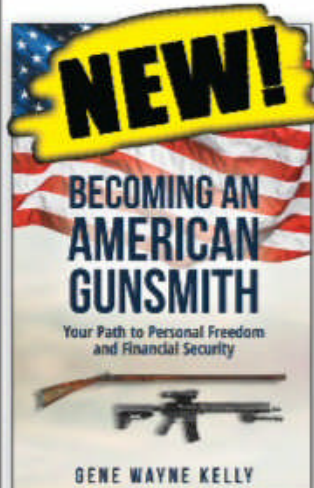
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# TWO COOL CATS

BY KEITH WOOD

**BERETTA'S DIMINUTIVE 21A BOBCAT AND 3032 TOMCAT COVERTS ARE EASY-SHOOTING CCW SEMIAUTOS.**

**A**lthough Beretta has existed as a company for nearly 500 years, many American handgunners were unfamiliar with the firm until the U.S. military adopted the Model 92S in 1984. The 92S, adopted as the M9, was far from the company's first effort in the semiautomatic market, though, with designs going back to 1915. →





## TWO COOL CATS

← Like many European pistols, most of Beretta's creations over the years have been far more compact and concealable than the Model 92. Today, the smallest handguns in the company's catalog are the 21A Bobcat and the 3032 Tomcat. These micro-compact handguns have been market staples for years, but last year they were introduced for the first time with factory-threaded barrels. Suppressor owners and secret agents rejoice!

In 1967, Beretta introduced the Model 20, an innovative and incredibly compact handgun chambered in .25 Auto. Thanks to the Gun Control

Act of 1968 and the subsequent importation ban of numerous handgun designs, the Model 20 was never widely adopted by American shooters. Still, its fundamental design offered some real appeal.

The Model 20 was built with an open slide and blowback operation, and its most notable feature was a tip-up barrel that allowed users to load a cartridge into the chamber without racking the slide. That might not seem like a big deal unless you are someone with diminished physical capacity or strength, and the Model 20's loading arrangement offered these people a real solution.

In order to better compete in the North American market and produce pistols for the U.S. military, Beretta built a manufacturing facility in Maryland, and Beretta USA was born. This U.S. presence exempted the company from the "sporting purpose" importation requirements and once again allowed the company to sell its compact handguns stateside.

In 1984, the company released the Model 21A. It's a handgun similar in design to the Model 20, but in addition to the .25 Auto option, it's also chambered in the more useful and available .22 Long Rifle cartridge. Like the Model 20, the blowback-operated 21A maintains the unique tip-up barrel arrangement. The tiny 21A became popular with those seeking ultimate concealment, whether as a primary or backup handgun. When nothing but the most compact handguns would do, the Model 21A was an easy answer.

That was 1984, when concealed carry wasn't as widely available to citizens as it would be a decade later, and in 1996, Beretta introduced the Model 3032 Tomcat, a slightly larger handgun chambered in the more potent .32 Auto cartridge.

Though the open slide is distinctly Beretta and may appear similar to the Model 92, these subcompacts →



▲ Both the 21A Bobcat Covert (top) and 3032 Tomcat Covert are highly concealable and nearly identical in size.



▲ The unique tip-up barrel allows the tiny Berettas to be loaded and unloaded without racking the slide.

### BERETTA 21A BOBCAT COVERT (3032 TOMCAT COVERT)

**TYPE:** DA/SA semiautomatic

**CALIBER:** .22 LR (.32 Auto)

**CAPACITY:** 7+1

**BARREL:** 2.9 in.

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 4.9/3.7/1.1 in.

**WEIGHT:** 11.8 oz. (14.5 oz.)

**CONSTRUCTION:** aluminum frame, steel slide and barrel

**GRIPS:** laminated walnut

**SIGHTS:** integral front and rear (dovetailed rear, integral front)

**SAFETIES:** manual thumb, inertia-type firing pin

**TRIGGER PULL:** 6.25 lb. single action; 10 lb. (12.25 lb.) double action

**PRICE:** to be determined; see website

**MANUFACTURER:** Beretta, BERETTAUSA.COM



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## TWO COOL CATS

← are a different animal. Both the 21A and the 3032 are simple blowback handguns. There is no extractor on either pistol, and they rely on the blowback pressure and a fixed ejector to clear spent brass. There is also no recoil spring in the traditional sense. The slide moves rearward against two spring-loaded levers that protrude upward from the frame and return it to battery.

These guns are double action/single action, so they can be fired with the external hammers cocked or uncocked. A manual thumb safety on the left side of the frame allows for cocked-and-locked carry. This is particularly attractive for individuals who would physically struggle with the longer and heavier double-action trigger pull. There is no decocking lever on either handgun.

Frames are machined from aluminum alloy, and the slides are machined from cold drawn steel. The barrels are made from steel forgings. The steel parts are finished in Beretta's own Bruniton finish, which is an epoxy applied over Parkerizing. Frames are anodized black for a per-

fect match. A flat dark earth version of both Covert pistols is also available, with flat dark earth Cerakote applied to the steel parts and a flat dark earth anodized frame.

Neither pistol incorporates a slide stop, and the slide does not lock back on an empty chamber. Where the slide stop would reside on most semiautomatic handguns, we find the lever that actuates the tip-up barrel. Articulating the lever releases the barrel under spring tension and exposes the rear of the chamber.

A loaded round can be inserted into the chamber and a loaded magazine seated, allowing the user to load the gun without ever racking the slide. This also allows users to safely decock the pistols by raising the barrel and subsequently lowering the hammer.

When we think about trigger pulls, we must put these handguns in the proper context. These are defensive guns designed for close-range use. The double-action trigger pulls on these guns are long and relatively heavy: 10 pounds on the 21A and 12 pounds on the 3032. This ensures a

very deliberate decision to fire the handguns and is actually listed as a safety feature in the instruction manuals of both guns.

The single-action pulls were an identical 6.25 pounds on both test samples I received. If someone lacks the hand strength for the double-action pull, carrying these pistols cocked and locked is a solution. Both double- and single-action triggers exhibited perceptible creep, but again, these aren't target guns.

Both the 3032 and 21A use single-stack magazines that have a capacity of seven rounds. The magazine release is a round steel button that is recessed into the laminated walnut grip panel on the left side of the frame. The position is such that the fastest way to release a magazine is using the thumb of the left hand. Otherwise, actuating the release requires significantly shifting the right-hand grip.

The sights on both the Bobcat and Tomcat are fixed. The plain black front sights on both pistols are machined integrally to the barrels. On the Bobcat, the rear sight is part of the slide itself, but on the slightly larger Tomcat, the rear sight is secured using a dovetail. The sights on both guns are very small and designed to be resistant to snagging.

Mounting a suppressor on either pistol obscures the target from the sight plane. The sights can still be used to align the handgun, but a full sight/target picture is impossible. This is a common issue with many suppressed handguns.

Both the 21A Bobcat and 3032 Tomcat were successful handguns for many years, but to many of us, something was missing. In Ian Fleming's first 007 novel, *Casino Royale*, the hero carries a Beretta Model 418 in .32 ACP with a silencer attached. In the theme of that earlier gun, these slick little Beretta pistols screamed "James Bond," tuxedo and all. But lacking threads with which to mount a suppressor, they couldn't complete the secret agent package. That →



◀ The frame-mounted magazine release is recessed into the walnut grip panel, and the recess is such that using your non-firing hand is the best way to operate it.





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← all changed in 2020 with the release of the Covert models.

Both handguns are equipped with factory-threaded barrels designed to accept suppressors. The barrels on both handguns are threaded 1/2x28, one of the more common patterns for rimfire and centerfire

handgun suppressors—like the Silencerco Switchback you see on the lead photograph for this article as well as the cover.

It goes without saying that one cannot use a suppressor designed for a .22 on a .32, even though the thread pattern is the same. Suppressors for a .32 are extremely rare in the United States, so a small 9mm suppressor is the way to go on the 3032. Knurled thread protectors cover the threads when not in use.

Because the barrels on both models are short, just under two inches, we performed our accuracy testing at 15 yards. Despite relatively heavy triggers and tiny sights, both guns were plenty accurate for their intended use. More importantly, both handguns were reliable with most ammunition tested.

Our only 21A malfunctions occurred with Norma's Match .22 ammunition, which is designed to operate at target (usually subsonic) velocity. Since the 21A is a blowback

handgun, a certain power level is necessary to make the gun cycle. I was curious whether subsonic loads would work with a suppressor attached, theory being that the device would create more back pressure on the slide. Using this ammo, I function-tested the 21A with a Silencer-Co Warlock II suppressor attached and found that it cycled normally. Unless you're using a suppressor, stick to high-velocity loads.

On the 3032, some of the PPU Defense Line jacketed hollowpoint rounds hung up inside the magazine, restricting the travel of the follower. This dimensional incompatibility appeared to result from the bullet's ogive dragging on the inside of the magazine and was not an issue with the other two loads we used.

With our formal accuracy testing complete, it was time for more practical use. Concealable, yes, but shootable? One of my favorite defensive handgun targets is a half-size IPSC steel target made by MGM. The

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humanoid plate measures almost 15 inches high and nine inches wide, so it is less forgiving than a full-size silhouette. I ran magazine after magazine through the Bobcat and the Tomcat at distances from seven to 10 yards. I was shooting fast and never missed with either handgun. That's pretty impressive pocket pistol performance, if you ask me.

Recoil was minimal with both handguns, with the 21A being ideal for the recoil-shyest among us. Though the grip sizes on both guns are identical, the slides differ in terms of width, which makes them handle slightly differently. I actually preferred shooting the 3032, probably because it's a little beefier and therefore a few ounces heavier.

Disassembly is surprisingly simple on both models. Push the barrel-release latch forward, tipping the barrel to its upward position. With the hammer cocked, retract the slide slightly. Pull upward and forward on the slide until it clears the frame

## ACCURACY RESULTS | BERETTA BOBCAT, TOMCAT COVERT


Gun/Cartridge	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
<b>21A BOBCAT/.22 LR</b>				
Winchester Super-X RNC	40	906	55	1.6
Norma USA Match-22 LRN	40	681	43	1.9
CCI Blaser LRN	40	791	109	2.0
<b>3032 TOMCAT/.32 ACP</b>				
PMC Bronze JHP	60	828	51	1.4
PPU Defense JPH	71	872	28	2.0
Norma Range & Training FMJ	73	817	27	2.6

**Notes:** Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups fired at 15 yards from a Target Shooting Inc. Model 1500 rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots using a LabRadar Doppler Chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; LRN, lead round nose; RNC, roundnose copper-plated

rails, which allows it to be removed. The grip panels are secured using two standard slotted screws, removal of which exposes the frame underneath. No further disassembly is recommended by the manufacturer.

Carrying a full-size or even a subcompact handgun for defensive use isn't for everyone. A functional pocket gun is better than no gun at all, and these two Tennessee-built examples from Beretta are quality-

built handguns.

For those with certain physical disabilities, the 21A and 3032 may be the only semiauto options on the market. For the rest of us, either handgun is a solid choice for deep concealment or as a backup pistol. The ability to mount a suppressor onto these guns puts them into the "fun gun" category, opening up their utility to an entirely different segment of the shooting public. 







# BASIC

# BLACK

**BY BRAD FITZPATRICK**





## WILSON COMBAT'S NEW ACP COMPACT 1911 MAY NOT BE ORNATE, BUT IT'S FAR FROM ORDINARY.

**Y**ou'd be hard-pressed to find a gun shooters like to dress up more than the 1911. From hammer spurs to beavertails, grip panels to trigger profiles, there's not another handgun in the world that has been as thoroughly tricked-out as John Browning's 1911.

Customizing 1911s has become big business, and there's no bigger name in the 1911 game than Bill Wilson. Bill's custom pistols are striking examples of mechanical artwork, and Wilson Combat guns look as good as they shoot. What's more, Wilson's custom shop has the capacity to build just about any 1911 your heart desires. Want a .38 Super with a Commander slide and orange grips? I have no idea why you would, but Bill would probably make one for you.

The newest gun in Wilson's catalog is decidedly more subdued than some of the high-grade guns the company normally offers. Known as the American Combat Pistol, or ACP, these new 1911s don't offer a lot of frills or adornments for a custom gun. The color scheme is pure black. The slide cuts and grip pattern comprise simple, straight, parallel lines, and the mainspring housing and frontstrap bear the same minimalist machining.

At first glance this looks like the most basic 1911 that ever rolled out of Berryville, Arkansas. And that's the point. This is the distillation of the modern 1911 combat pistol, a gun with clean lines and a clear purpose: to provide superb mechanical reliability and outstanding accuracy at a price point that's well below what guns of this caliber normally cost.

"The ACP is designed to offer shooters everything that's necessary on a 1911 without the frills," says Bill Wilson. "Functionally, these guns have everything you need without a lot of cosmetic upgrades."

Make no mistake, the ACP is still very much a Wilson Combat gun through and through, and as such it's got a long list of premium components. Available in Full-Size (five-inch), Commander (4.25-inch) and Compact (four-inch) versions in .45 Auto or 9mm, the ACP comes with Wilson's newest forged carbon steel slide and matching carbon steel frame.

The carbon steel is phosphate Parkerized and then receives a black Armor-Tuff finish. Armor-Tuff offers a durable, non-reflective exterior finish that is incredibly durable. Wilson says the finish has been subjected to more than 3,000 hours of salt spray testing without corrosion, which means ACP pistols will hold up well against sweat and moisture exposure while carrying. The Armor-Tuff exterior also offers increased lubricity to the metal and gives it a smooth, stylish look.

Not surprisingly, the ACP is built with high-end components throughout, including Wilson's High-Grip Bullet Proof beavertail grip safety, Tactical Bullet Proof thumb safety and Bullet Proof magazine release. All ACP pistols come equipped with Wilson's own Battlesight rear sight and a red fiber-optic front sight. The Full-Size and Commander ACP pistols come with match-grade barrels and bushings while the Compact version I tested comes with a match-grade cone barrel that is flush cut.

Magazine capacity for the Full-Size ACP is eight rounds in .45 ACP and 10 rounds in 9mm. The Compact version holds seven rounds in .45 ACP and eight



## BASIC BLACK

← rounds in 9mm, and a beveled mag well helps speed up your tactical reloads.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature on this otherwise subdued 1911 is the grip design. Wilson calls the design Eagle Claw, which I assume pays homage to the deep, parallel cuts in the mainspring housing and frontstrap and black G10 grips that look as though they might have been carved out by the talons of a bird of prey. That same Eagle Claw design also appears on the rear cocking serrations.

The Eagle Claw texturing on the grip panels keeps the gun firmly planted in the hand. What's more, it isn't as aggressive as some other texturing patterns, so you won't need to wear gloves while shooting. The Eagle Claw design isn't as ornate as some of Wilson's other patterns, but

it's a functional addition that adds to the ACP's less-is-more persona. The ACP's grips also feature a black Wilson Combat medallion.

The ACP Compact pistol I tested was chambered in 9mm. With its four-inch barrel the ACP Compact has an overall length of just 7.6 inches, and it has a height of 4.75 inches. At 1.3 inches wide and weighing 42 ounces fully loaded, the ACP Compact 9mm makes a suitable carry gun for anyone who doesn't mind the added weight of an all-steel pistol.

The ACP pistols were designed to offer custom gun features without the traditional custom gun price, but you can still select different finishes, sights and grips. The overall design of the gun will remain largely unchanged, though. It's also a gun that should be available in many of

the larger gun stores, if you want a brand-new Wilson pistol without the wait. Suggested retail for all three sizes in .45 is \$2,495, with the 9mm models commanding an additional \$100.

Austere though they may be by Wilson Combat standards, the ACP pistols are built to the company's exacting specifications. Prior to his career as a gun maker, Bill Wilson was trained to build and repair high-end watches—Rolexes, Vacherons, Hublots and the like—and he brought all the mechanical and machining skills required to repair extremely expensive timepieces to 1911 production.

Wilson Combat pistols are refined, with tight, smooth actions that can only be achieved with superb machining. The fit and finish on the gun are far superior to some other custom 1911s that cost a grand more. The slide movement is ball-bearing smooth, and mechanical operation is flawless. The safety lever clicks between the Safe and Fire positions with a positive snap, and the muzzle-to-slide fit is outstanding. The Armor-Tuff finish is, of course, beautifully done.

The ACP's trigger features a medium pad and breaks between 3.5 and 4.5 pounds, and it was 3.7 pounds on my test pistol. It's not skeletonized, and it has the same matte black look as the rest of the gun. →



▲ The ACP guns come with Wilson's Bullet Proof components, which are far better than what you'll find on most production 1911 pistols.



▲ The rear Battlesight is taller than most sights, and it provides a clearer sight picture with better contrast. The ledge is deep and aggressive for easier one-hand racking.

### WILSON COMBAT ACP COMPACT

TYPE: 1911

CALIBER: 9mm (tested), .45 ACP

CAPACITY: 8+1

BARREL: 4 in.

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.6/4.8/1.3 in.

WEIGHT: 37 oz.

FINISH: Armor-Tuff

TRIGGER: 3.7 lb. pull (measured)

GRIPS: Wilson Combat G10 Eagle Claw

SIGHTS: Wilson Battlesight rear, red fiber-optic front

PRICE: \$2,595

MANUFACTURER: Wilson Combat, WILSON

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\* Available in Gen 2 - ELMS Gen3 available Winter 2020

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## BASIC BLACK

← Adding a Battlesight certainly makes this gun more appealing, especially for anyone who actually plans to carry it on a daily basis. The compact rear blade offers 40-lpi checkering and a 0.145-inch-wide, deep U-notch that's easy to see in most light conditions. The pronounced shelf on the front of the rear sight is sturdy enough for one-handed racking, and the sight is dovetailed into the slide and held in place with two heavy-duty setscrews. The front sight is fiber-optic red and easy to see, making it ideal for flash sighting at close quarters or in low light.

Like any good 1911 pistol, the ACP balances beautifully in the shooter's hand. Grip angle is ideal for accurate shooting and recoil management, and the Eagle Claw grip design offers

plenty of purchase so you can obtain a secure hold on the gun. While I love the look of mirror-smooth grips on a 1911, smooth grips aren't as easy to securely grasp as those with more aggressive texturing like the G10s on the Wilson ACP Compact.

The beavertail is wide enough to be quite comfortable, and it promotes a high hold on the gun that helps mitigate muzzle rise—which, in turn, allows faster aimed follow-up shots. I carried the ACP for about a week, and it is compact enough that it doesn't print under light clothing. With a light IWB holster and a sturdy belt, I could wear the gun completely hidden under a light T-shirt. Plus, the gun is tough enough to withstand constant exposure to corrosive perspirations without eroding the finish. The ACP's smooth lines and contoured sights make it fast and easy to draw.

I fed the ACP a mixed diet of self-defense loads that included two of Wilson's own 9mm loads (see sidebar). There were no issues with feeding, extraction, ejection or anything else—as you would expect from a semi-custom gun like the ACP.

Wilson promises one-inch groups at 25 yards from the Full-Size and Commander ACP guns and 1.5 inches at that same distance with the Compact version. The latter is probably less a limitation of the gun than the shooter,

and in the right hands and with the right load, the Compact version will shoot closer to an inch for five shots with the right ammo.

The trigger on the test gun was superb, which helps further improve accuracy. There's a bit of take-up before the shot. With a bit of practice, you quickly learn to draw out the take-up and once the trigger comes tight just about a pound of additional pressure drops the hammer. Recoil from the ACP is quite manageable thanks to the steel slide and frame and far less jarring than the pushback generated by light polymer-frame 9mms.

Once the accuracy testing was complete, I set out two paper torso targets and a pair of steel plates to do more dynamic testing. The sight setup worked well, and I liked how well the fiber-optic front sight picks up available light and how the concave design of the Battlesight offered a clear picture in bright sunlight.

Fans of the 1911 will notice the Battlesight also seems a bit taller than other sights, and that's true. Wilson adds about 0.03 inch to the height of the rear sight, and that small change in sight height makes the Battlesight more user-friendly and provides a clearer sight picture with better contrast. The ledge on the rear sight is deep and aggressive, so you can rack the gun single-handedly without fuss. →

## WILSON COMBAT AMMUNITION

**B**ill Wilson isn't content to feed his high-end handguns just any ammunition, so Wilson Combat is now offering its own line of branded ammunition developed for improved performance in its firearms. Available directly through the company's website, Wilson Combat offers match and hunting ammunition for almost any rifle or handgun that it produces.

For the ACP test, Bill sent along 100 rounds of his Bill Wilson Signature Match 9mm, which pushes a 115-grain Hornady HAP bullet at around 1,125 fps. Wilson also sent along his Wilson TAC-XP 115-grain +P ammo, which makes 1,060 fps. Both loads are built with premium components, and both are optimized for four-inch barrels. Performance from both was outstanding, and velocities were very uniform, but if these loads don't work for you, Wilson offers more than a dozen other 9mm offerings.

If you're going to buy one of the best 1911s on the market, you might as well load up on the best ammo, right? The Signature Match load carries a suggested retail price of \$65 per 100, while the TAC-XP load has a suggested retail of \$40 per 20. For more info, visit the Wilson Combat website.—BF



▲ The ACP Compact's four-inch match-grade cone barrel is flush cut and doesn't require a bushing. The front sight is a red fiber optic.





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## BASIC BLACK

← The ACP's aggressive grip texturing is functional, but you don't feel as though you've grabbed hold of a freshly sharpened cheese grater. I do wish the slide cuts were a bit more aggressive, but that's one of the few negatives I can find with this gun.

The black color scheme is, depending on your tastes, either understated or underwhelming. Some people who spend \$2,500 want everyone to know they spent that kind of money as soon as the pistol comes into view. If bling is your thing, the ACP isn't what you're searching for.

When I do a gun test I ask myself two questions at the end of the evaluation. How well does this gun stack-up against similarly priced competition? And if I was in the market for a gun like this, would the test model be my first choice?

To the former question, I'd say that the ACP is really in a price class by itself because it costs slightly more than most production 1911s—although it's a step above them in

## ACCURACY RESULTS | WILSON COMBAT ACP COMPACT

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Wilson Combat Signature Match HAP*	115	1,124	8	1.21
Wilson Combat TAC-XP + P*	115	1,089	15	1.35
Hornady Critical Defense	115	1,103	17	1.67
Federal Syntech Training Match	124	1,158	9	1.84
Federal Hydra-Shok Deep	135	1,015	10	1.46


**Notes:** (\*Optimized for four-inch barrels; see sidebar.) Accuracy results are average of four five-shot-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded on a Shooting Chrony digital chronograph placed 10 feet from the muzzle.

quality—and costs less than a from-the-ground-up custom 1911 build and that you simply won't find a better gun than this for less money. To the latter, I'd respond I'd happily spend \$2,500 for a gun like the ACP Compact because I know I could carry it every day for a lifetime and still hand something of value down to my children.

Bill Wilson set out to build a 1911 with everything you need and nothing you don't. The ACP is the product of that mission. What the ACP lacks in sex appeal, it more than makes up for in build quality. If you've always



**▲ The trim ACP Compact is easy to carry. The Armor-Tuff finish stands up well to perspiration and moisture.**

wanted a Wilson Combat gun but never thought you could afford one, this pistol might make you finally pull the trigger. 

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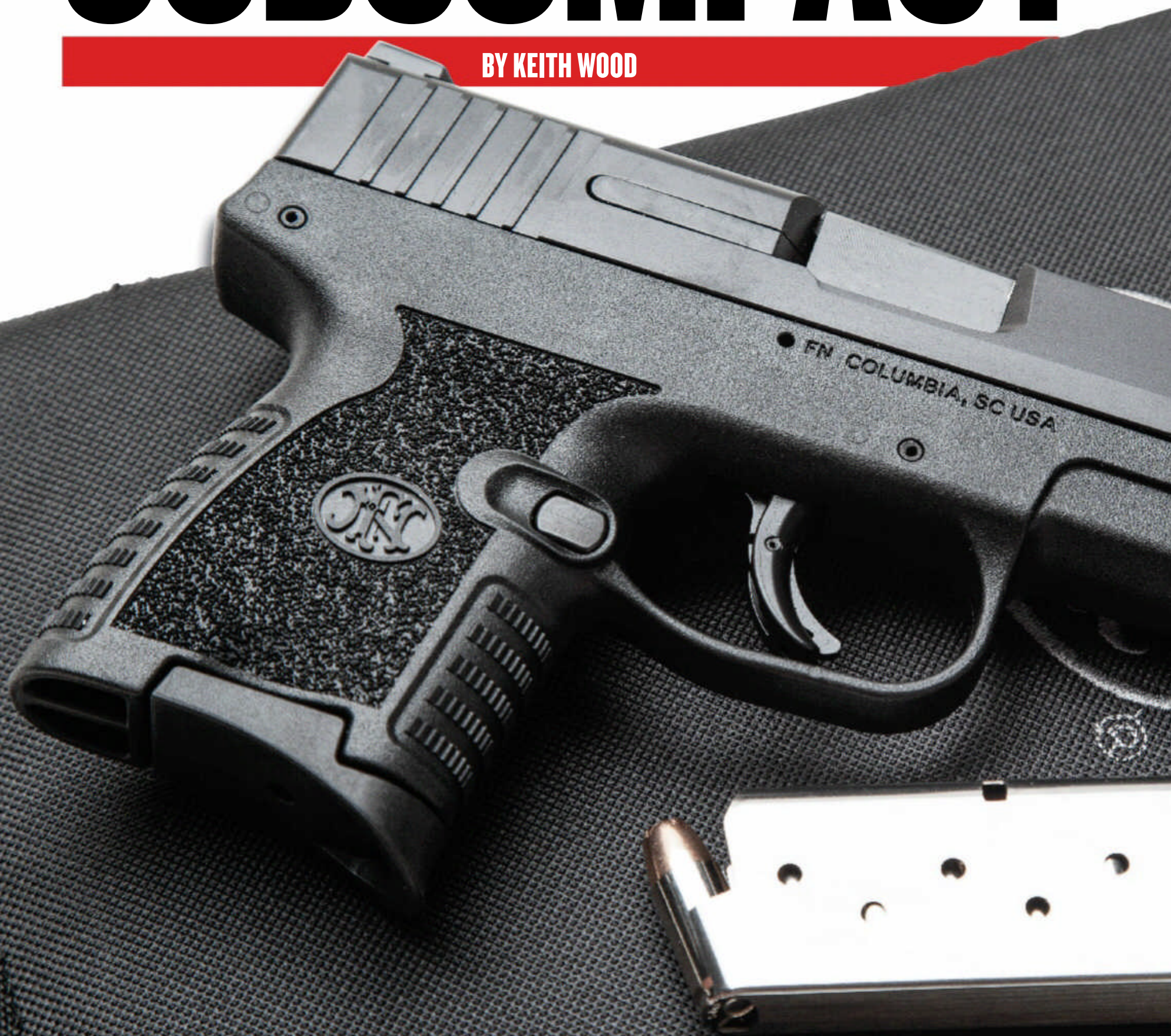
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# FN GOES SUBCOMPACT

BY KEITH WOOD







**THE NEW 503 IS  
THE COMPANY'S  
TAKE ON A POPULAR  
HANDGUN SIZE.**

**D**uring my three decades as a shooter, handgun trends have changed considerably. The passage of so-called “shall-issue” concealed-carry laws in most states has legalized the practice of carrying a concealed firearm for ordinary citizens. The 1970s and ’80s brought us large double-stack handguns with lots of firepower that became extremely popular. Folks learned quickly, though, that many of these large, heavy wonder-nines were unsuitable for everyday carry. On the other hand, existing compact handguns such as five-shot revolvers and .380 ACPs weren’t necessarily ideal for defensive use.

As the ranks of concealed-carry permit holders grew, so did the hunger for a better handgun solution. Though it took many years, that demand for lightweight, compact and concealable yet reasonably powerful handguns has led the way for a more recent trend: the single-stack 9mm subcompact. Among the guns in that category is the FN 503, a polymer-framed handgun built with concealment in mind.

Fabrique National is a relative newcomer to the modern subcompact 9mm scene, but this isn’t the firm’s first single-stack handgun. Though there were several models, the FN 1910, designed more than a century ago and chambered in .380 and .32 ACP, was arguably the most successful.

The company itself is more than 130 years old and has produced some of the most influential firearm designs in history. FN developed the groundbreaking P35 Hi Power 9mm, produced the legendary FAL battle rifle and has provided small arms and crew-served weapons to the U.S. military for many years.

Based in McLean, Virginia, and with a manufacturing facility in Columbia, South Carolina, FN America produces a variety of firearms for the domestic civilian, law enforcement and military markets. Though the company has an international reach, the 503 is built right here in the USA.

FN America offers numerous handgun variants, but the 503 is the smallest and most concealable of the lot, making it an attractive choice for concealed carry. Much of the 503’s design heritage evolved from the earlier FN 509, a handgun designed to compete in the U.S. military’s handgun trials five years ago.

The 509 is available in full-size/tactical, midsize and compact formats, with dimensional decreases along the way. Even the most compact of these handguns are double-stack designs, though, so the 503 is 0.25 inch narrower, 4.5 ounces lighter and 0.9 inch shorter than anything in the 509 series. Like all of the 509s on the market, all 503s are chambered in 9mm Luger only.

The 503 is a chassis gun, meaning the polymer grip frame is just that: a grip that can be replaced without serial number problems. Pre- →



## FN GOES SUBCOMPACT

← sumably, this paves the way for OEM and aftermarket grip alternatives to suit different hand sizes.

The standard grip is comfortable and well designed, though the configuration puts the bore axis at a higher level than some of the 503's competitors. Stippled panels on the sides of the grip offer good purchase, as does the pattern that is molded into the front and rear surfaces of the frame. The exterior of the pistol is devoid of any unnecessary sharp edges, which is a good thing on a carry gun.

The 503 ships with two stainless steel and polymer magazines; one holds six rounds while the other holds eight. With the more compact six-round magazine inserted, the shooter's little finger rides below the grip.

The larger magazine uses a more generous base pad and allows for a full-fingered grip on the pistol. Clearing malfunctions can sometimes mean forcibly stripping the magazine out of a handgun, and the grip frame and base pad design on

the 503 offer a positive surface to pull on if the need arises.

There is no manual safety on the 503, although there are numerous passive-systems included in the handgun's design. A striker-block ensures the striker's nose does not cross the plane of the breech face unless the trigger is pulled, effectively preventing the gun from discharging if dropped. The trigger disconnect prevents the trigger bar from contacting the sear if the slide is not into battery. More on that later.

Finally, a trigger safety prevents rearward travel of the trigger unless the center blade is depressed. It probably goes without saying that with all of these features in place I would not hesitate to carry this—or any other modern striker-fired handgun—in a secure holster with a round in the chamber. The 503 will fire without a magazine, another plus in the defensive-use column.

Since there is no safety lever, the controls on the 503 are simple and minimal. There is an all-metal trigger, a reversible magazine release and a slide stop. Both the mag release and slide stop were easy to reach and operate without shifting my grip.

The trigger on my sample broke at 5.25 pounds with a longish pull, which I don't mind on a handgun with no manual safety, as it →



▲ The controls on the FN 503 consist of a slide stop and magazine catch. Both were easy to reach and simple to operate.



▲ A six-round magazine fits nearly flush with the frame while the larger eight-round magazine allows for a full-fingered grip.

### FN AMERICA 503

**TYPE:** striker-fired semiautomatic

**CALIBER:** 9mm Luger

**CAPACITY:** 6-, 8-round magazines supplied

**BARREL:** 3.1 in.

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 5.9/4.5/1.1 in.

**WEIGHT:** 21 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** black polymer frame, black-nitride metal components

**GRIPS:** chassis-style polymer grip module

**SIGHTS:** 3-dot drift-adjustable steel

**SAFETIES:** striker block, trigger disconnect, trigger lever

**TRIGGER:** 5.25 lb.

**PRICE:** \$549

**MANUFACTURER:** FN America,

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## FN GOES SUBCOMPACT

← provides an extra margin of conscious action to fire. The reset is longer than one would expect and takes a little getting used to if you're accustomed to something shorter. That said, I never missed a reset while shooting the 503.

The metal components of the 503, including the slide, are ferritic nitro-carburized, a finishing process better known as black nitriding. The finish is hard, durable and very resistant to corrosion.

The steel sights are dovetailed into the slide and use the same dovetail dimensions as the 509 series of handguns. The non-illuminated three-dot sights are visible, rugged, snag-resistant and are drift-adjustable for windage. A half-moon relief cut is milled into the rear of the barrel hood, acting as a visual loaded-chamber indicator.

An external extractor is pinned into the slide and is actuated with a coil-spring imbedded within. This is one of the notable carryovers from the 509 series of pistols.

Internally, the 503 mirrors most common striker-fired designs. It uses a Browning tilt-barrel locking system, which has proven itself as reliable, durable and safe. The 1:10 twist bar-

rel is ramped, and the chamber is fully supported.

A dual captive-spring recoil spring system, similar to that of other subcompacts on the market, rides on a full-length steel guide rod. Recoil was mild, likely due to this spring design. The metal chassis that is the core of the handgun provides a rigid surface for the integral frame rails.

In theory, the 503 can be field-stripped without tools, though a small punch makes the task far easier. To take down the unloaded pistol, the slide is retracted until the half-moon notch on the slide is aligned with the slide stop. The slide stop can then be pulled, pried or pushed outward—the latter requires a small punch that can be fed through a hole on the right side of the frame.

With the slide stop removed, the trigger is pulled to allow the slide to come forward and away from the frame. Reassembly would be simple but for a pesky spring leg that protrudes behind the slide stop opening. I found that twisting the stop as it's inserted solves this problem.

I tested the 503 with a wide variety of defensive and full-metal-jacket factory loads ranging in bullet weight from Super Vel's speedy 90-grain

solid copper hollowpoint to Hornady's 147-grain Subsonic XTP.

Accuracy testing was conducted from a rock-steady benchrest that has proven capable of producing excellent accuracy. My results at 15 yards are available in the accompanying table and were about what one would expect of a subcompact pistol with a short sight radius. Most notable is the consistency of the accuracy; this handgun seemed to shoot all brands and loads into similar-size groups.

I experienced one persistent malfunction with the test sample, one that concerned me. During my third magazine through the gun, I experienced a "dead trigger." I quickly determined the slide had failed to return to battery, stopping a fraction of an inch from its home. Since the gun was not in battery, the trigger disconnect feature did its job.

Assuming that this hiccup was part of breaking-in a brand-new gun, I bumped the back of the slide with my palm and continued shooting. Unfortunately, the problem worsened as testing progressed and did not appear to be ammunition or magazine-dependent. By the end of the test, I was manually returning the slide to battery after every shot—the gun effectively working like a single-action revolver.

At first, I was unable to diagnose or correct the malfunction. The gun was relatively clean and well lubricated, and all of the ammunition was from factory sources. I paid careful attention to ensure my hands and the rest were not interrupting the slide's travel in any way.

Back at my shop, I stripped the 503 down and gave it a close inspection. With the barrel removed, I dropped several loaded rounds into the chamber and they slid in with no resistance.

After fiddling with the pistol for several minutes, I decided the recoil spring mechanism could interrupt the slide if the guide rod was not properly seated to the barrel



▲ The three-dot sights are steel, and a half-moon shaped opening on the barrel hood serves as a loaded-chamber indicator.

### ACCURACY RESULTS | FN 503

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Winchester USA Ready FMJ	115	1,077	20	2.4
Super Vel +P SCHK	115	1,109	15	2.5
Wilson Combat HP +P JHP	124	1,019	17	2.0
SIG Elite Performance FMJ	124	1,059	9	2.1
Hornady Subsonic XTP JHP	147	866	10	2.3

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups fired at 25 yards from a Target Shooting Inc. Model 1500 rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots using a LabRadar Doppler chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; HP, High Performance; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint; SCHK, solid copper hollowpoint



lug. Hoping I'd found the culprit, I cleaned and lubricated the gun and reassembled it carefully.

Back on the range, I put several magazines of Winchester and SIG full-metal-jacket ammunition with zero malfunctions. I've not heard or read of this problem on other 503s, so it is possible that we just drew the short straw with this individual gun. A colleague of mine tested another 503, and his was 100 percent reliable. This is a great example of why any handgun, regardless of the reputation of the brand or model, should be tested extensively before being carried for defensive use.

Once the gun was assembled correctly, round after round went into a steel target at 15 yards, and I was finally able to appreciate its handling qualities. The sights were well zeroed out to 25 yards, which was the farthest distance that we tested the 503.

For a subcompact, I would rank the sights as above average in terms

of my ability to acquire a fast and reasonably precise sight picture. The trigger had some rolling creep that didn't seem to hamper performance, a common thread among many guns in this category.


As mentioned, recoil was relatively soft with all of the ammunition used. I found the 503 to be easy to shoot and simple to operate. Early reliability issues aside, I would not hesitate to carry this handgun for defensive use.

I had emailed the folks at FN to let them know I was having some problems. The response was admirable and immediate. In a period of days I had a shipping label emailed to me so I could return the pistol for one of the company's engineers to inspect.

According to the company, this was the first such complaint that they'd heard of on this model handgun. They offered to send a replacement 503 immediately as well, but since I'd already addressed the problem I

declined. From a customer service standpoint, I would give FN high marks.

Overall, the 503 is a well-thought-out handgun design, one that fits nicely in the growing subcompact 9mm niche. It would be easy to dismiss the 503 as yet another polymer-framed striker-fired subcompact carry gun, but I don't think that does the gun justice.

Though no single feature on this handgun jumped out at me, I enjoyed my time with it and shot it well. Fans of FN's larger handguns looking for a subcompact choice will no doubt be attracted to the 503, as will any customer looking for a solid carry gun in this category. 

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The Radom Vis-35 (top) is a highly sought-after collectible, while nearly 2 million Tokarev TT-33 pistols were produced over its history.







# WORLD WAR II SMACKDOWN

BY PAYTON MILLER

**BROWNING, LUGER AND WALTHER DESIGNS GET ALL THE LOVE, BUT THE TOKAREV AND RADOM WERE SOLID BATTLE PISTOLS AS WELL.**

As Jeff Cooper once said, “Pistols may not win wars, but they do save the lives of men who fight them.” And if you ask a history-minded handgunner to name his or her top picks for “best” World War II military pistol, chances are the 1911, P08 Luger, Walther P38 and Browning Hi Power would make the cut. But in the 1930s, a pair of Browning-influenced single-action autos—Poland’s Radom Vis-35 and the Soviet Union’s TT-33 Tokarev—put in their appearances. They should certainly be included in the conversation.

Both the Radom Vis-35 and the Tokarev TT-33 share a common trio of features: a spur-style hammer similar to that of the Colt Commander, a thumb-friendly magazine release button at the rear of the trigger guard instead of the old European heel-release catch and a lanyard ring. The lanyard ring may seem a bit quaint these days, but in the mid-1930s cavalry was by no means an obsolete affectation. And if you’re on horseback, you need a means to ensure you don’t drop your pistol while riding.

The TT-33—with its lack of a safety (in its original non-import trim) and somewhat rudimentary appearance—may not look like it belongs in the top echelon of World War II service pistols,

but looks can be deceiving. The grip angle may resemble a T-square at first glance, but it only seems so in comparison to the Radom’s, which is wider fore and aft and benefits from a slight hump at the rear.

The TT-33 is chambered for the 7.62x25 Tokarev, the hottest of the .30 caliber bottleneck cartridges. Its performance surpasses the 7.65 Luger (introduced 1898) and 7.63 Mauser (introduced 1896). Both the Luger and the Mauser rounds feature a 0.309-inch bullet while the Tokarev’s bullet is 0.308 inch.

The Russians were fond of both the C96 Broomhandle Mauser and its 7.63x25 cartridge and used them extensively in both World War I and the Russian Civil War. When the TT-30/TT-33 was introduced, the Soviets jacked up the pressure level, and the 7.62x25 Tokarev was the result.

It was—and is—a barnburner. You do not want to shoot the Tokarev round in a prized C96, but the TT-33 will easily digest the 7.63x25 Mauser round, although a slightly reduced level of snappiness may be apparent. I’ve found the velocity difference in most samples of both loads to be about 100 fps or so in favor of the Tokarev round, although I’d guess this gap would probably be →



## WORLD WAR II SMACKDOWN

← narrower had I access to a C96 with its extra inch of barrel length over the TT-33.

I've chronographed several 7.62x25 loads out of the Tokarev, ranging from Norinco, Winchester, Sellier & Bellot and Wolf (the lone jacketed hollowpoint in the mix). The fastest I found out of the TT-33's 4.6-inch barrel was the Sellier & Bellot stuff, leading the pack at over 1,550 fps with the Winchester very close behind. Since many 7.62x25 ammo manufacturers claim velocities in the mid-1,600s, I'd assume they're getting the numbers from pressure barrels longer than that of the TT-33.

Although the TT-33's immediate progenitor, the TT-30, was designed by Fedor Tokarev in 1930, it employs John Browning's short-recoil 1911 system. The end result is a pistol that's robust and easy to maintain. But it has a couple of simplified tweaks, the most notable of which is the modular hammer/sear fire-control unit, which is removable from the pistol in its entirety and also includes the machined magazine feed lips.

My particular shooting specimen was of 1953 Romanian manufacture and includes the rather unfortunate add-on thumb safety required for U.S. importation.

Originals relied solely on a hammer safety notch—or upon the willingness of the owner to carry the gun with an empty chamber. The T-33's firing pin is non-inertial, and loaded-chamber carry is not recommended.

Poland's Vis-35 is commonly referred to as the "Radom." That's the city where the *Fabryka Broni* ("arms factory") is located and accounts for the "FB" on the plastic grip panels.

Over the years, the Radom has become a highly sought-after collectible, and prices for a good one have risen to the point where you get a half-dozen or more TT-33s for the price of a nice Vis-35. I recently checked Gunbroker and saw several specimens commanding starting bids in the four-figure range.

The Radom Vis-35 I had on hand—courtesy of my shooting buddy Doug Fee—was of late 1943 manufacture. When the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, they knew a good thing when they saw it and kept the factory cranking out pistols for their own troops, oftentimes by brutal methods of persuasion.

The *Waffenamt*-stamped specimens found particular favor with German parachute units. The fact that there was 9mm Luger cartridge commonality between German P38 and P08 pistols and MP38/40 submachine guns must've sealed the deal.

It's a second-variation gun, not an original prewar specimen, and made when the factory was under German control. It has several excellent features: a grip safety and the Browning-style slide stop combined with a takedown lever to lock the action open for disassembly.

It also has two items that were rather unconventional in a military pistol for the time: namely a full-length, telescoping guide rod and a decocker. The decocker of the Vis-35 was included during the final stages of the prewar design/ →



▲ The grip of the Tokarev TT-33 (r.) may seem less pointable than that of the more hand-filling Radom Vis-35, but the actual grip angles are within a half-degree of one another.

### ACCURACY RESULTS

Gun, Cartridge	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
<b>TOKAREV TT-33 7.62X25</b>			
Norinco FMJ	85	1,462	3.0
S&B FMJ	85	1,561	3.3
Wolf JHP	85	1,323	2.3
Win. FMJ	85	1,530	2.8
<b>RADOM VIS-35 9MM LUGER</b>			
Winchester FMJ	115	1,262	2.5
SIG JHP	124	1,150	3.0
CCI FMJ FN	147	938	3.8

Notes: Accuracy results are the averages of three "best four out of five-shot" groups at 25 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocities are averages of five shots with a Shooting Chrony set 10 feet from the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; FN, flatnose



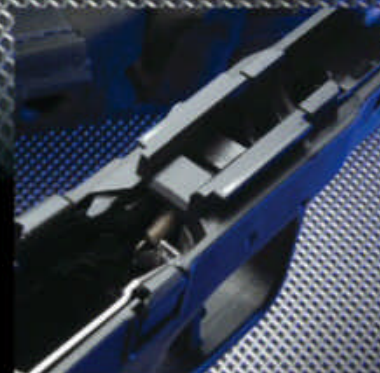
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## WORLD WAR II SMACKDOWN

← approval process at the behest of the Polish cavalry because they wanted a means to decock a pistol quickly and safely while on horseback.

At first glance—or rather grab—the Radom would appear to have it all over the TT-33. It handles and feels like a single-stack Browning Hi Power, and why not? Weight and dimensions between both guns are close to identical.

Despite the fact the Radom is a single stack, it has a similar grip angle to the Browning and a nice trigger. It breaks at a reasonably crisp three pounds as opposed to a grittier and creepier four pounds-plus for the Tokarev. And it's chambered in 9mm Luger, still coin of the realm for current military pistols.

It's a great sidearm, no question. And unlike the Hi Power, it has no magazine disconnect safety feature. Even in the wartime trim of my particular specimen, the fit, finish, ergonomics and all that good gun-crank bait is remarkable for a

service pistol of its generation. It seems, well, European and civilized.

However, as rudimentary and, well, clunky as the TT-33 might seem, it's got attributes beyond the sizzling ballistics afforded by its 7.62x25 cartridge. Like most no-frills Soviet weaponry of that era, the thing works and works well. If it didn't, the Reds wouldn't have waited till the mid-1950s to retire it in favor of the more ballistically sedate double-action 9x18 Makarov.

Postwar TT-33s were made by virtually every country in the Soviet sphere of influence. When production ended in 1955, a whopping 1.7 million TT-33s had been built.

The Vis-35 isn't even close, with something in excess of 360,000 units produced by the time production ceased in 1945. Ironically, it was replaced by the TT-33, which the Polish military was obliged to use as members of the Warsaw Pact.

One thing about the TT-33 I appreciated is that the rear sight is of a higher profile than that of the

Radom, which makes it more amenable to aging eyes. But both guns were at, or close to, on the money at 25 yards with anything close to approximating a service load, which was a pleasant surprise.

In terms of group size, the TT-33 turned in its best results with 85-grain Wolf ammo, which produced consistent 2.25-inch groups at 25 yards. Each five-shot cluster featured three-shot "sub-clusters" at around an inch. It's worth noting that the Wolf stuff was well under what you'd expect from the 7.62x25 at 1,323 fps. But on the plus side, it is a jacketed hollowpoint—the only one I was able to dig up for the TT-33.

The Vis-35 liked Winchester-Western 115-grain full metal jackets, which delivered only slightly less impressive clusters at 2.5 inches and an average velocity of 1,262 fps.

This is pretty good performance from both guns—the TT-33 benefiting from easier-to-acquire sights, the Vis-35 from a cleaner trigger.



▲ The Radom Vis-35 featured a decocking lever, which was unusual for a military pistol of that era. Final versions dispensed with the takedown latch (rearmost control on this sample).



▲ The bottlenecked 7.62x25 beats the 9mm Luger in terms of raw speed, but of course the 9mm went on to become practically the world military standard.

### TALE OF THE TAPE

Gun	Cartridge	Capacity	Weight (oz.)	Barrel Length (in.)	Overall Length (in.)
TT-33	7.62x25	8	30.1	4.6	7.6
Vis-35	9mm Luger	8	33.5	4.7	8.0



Neither gave any problems with full metal jacket ammo, and the TT-33 registered only one failure to feed with a Wolf jacketed hollowpoint.

Three of us had the opportunity to shoot both guns side by side. My two shooting partners preferred the Vis-35 in terms of shootability. Both guys, as you might guess, are confirmed devotees of the two great Browning pistol platforms: the 1911 and Hi Power.

Me? I went for the TT-33. But in all honesty, I confess I was probably as much enamored of that flat-shooting .30 caliber cartridge as I was with the gun itself. For busting clay birds on a 100-yard berm, the "Toke" is pretty tough to beat.

At any rate, both guns are real sleepers and were pretty impressive all around. I've seen current service autos that wouldn't do as well. The track record of both pistols in the greatest conflict in human history speaks for itself.



▲ The TT-33 has a modular, removable hammer/sear fire-control unit. This sample includes a manual safety mandated by import rules.



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## KELTEC P17

### THIS YEAR KELTEC TURNS 30 YEARS OLD.

The Cocoa, Florida, company founded by George Kellgren in 1991 has grown to become one of the largest handgun manufacturers in the world. One of its latest pistols, the P17, hews to the firm's aim of delivering innovative, practical and affordable firearms.

A blowback-operated .22 Long Rifle, the P17 is made in the USA and has features that make it a handy and fun-shooting pistol with a suggested retail of \$199. It sports a polymer frame and a minimalist slide that combine to keep weight at a svelte 13 ounces with an empty 16-round magazine. Three polymer magazines come with the gun.

The 3.8-inch barrel is fixed within the frame and surrounded by the recoil spring. It has a barrel nut and is threaded 1/2x28 for a suppressor or other muzzle device. The gun ships with a thread adapter for a muzzle device, along with

a tool for removing the barrel nut and installing the adapter.

The P17 uses a reciprocating slide instead of a reciprocating bolt inside a fixed receiver. The slide top is a 0.125-inch-thick strip of steel, and at the front a green fiber-optic front sight is screwed into the slide with a pair of small Allen screws. At the rear of the slide is a polymer cover with flat-bottom serrations. The rear sight is adjustable for elevation and windage and features a generous notch.

Controls include an ambidextrous thumb safety and an ambidextrous magazine release. The latter is a paddle located on either side of the bottom of the trigger guard. Simply push down to drop the magazine. Moving the thumb safety down to the Fire position reveals a large red dot. The slide-lock lever is on the small side, but unless you habitually use this lever as a slide release and plan

### KELTEC P17

**TYPE:** blowback-operated semiautomatic rimfire

**CALIBER:** .22 LR

**CAPACITY:** 16+1

**BARREL:** 3.8 in., threaded 1/2x28; muzzle device adapter included

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 6.7/5.3/1.2 in.

**WEIGHT:** 13 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** steel slide, polymer frame

**TRIGGER:** 2 lb., 7 oz. pull (measured)

**SIGHTS:** adjustable rear, fiber-optic front

**SAFETY:** ambidextrous thumb

**PRICE:** \$199

**MANUFACTURER:** KelTec, [KELTECWEAPONS.COM](http://KELTECWEAPONS.COM)

to do a lot of slide-lock reloads, I don't see it as an issue.

The grip portion of the frame has raised blocks for a sure grip, and a small ridge extends behind the magazine re-



lease and helps locate the trigger finger for depressing the release. The grip is comfortably thin at 0.9 inch wide, and front to back it's a tad over two inches. At the front of the frame you'll find a three-slot accessory rail.

The P17 is a hammer-fired gun, and it has a decent trigger pull. There's a fairly long, smooth take-up before encountering resistance, followed by a bit of creep but then a surprisingly crisp break at just two pounds, seven ounces on average.

To disassemble, drop the magazine, ensure the gun is unloaded and press down on the takedown lever (KelTec calls it the "buffer") located on the frame just above the trigger guard. Draw the slide back and lift up to free it.

To reassemble, push down the buffer, position the hole in the front of the slide so it clears the barrel nut and then draw the slide back. When the bolt clears the rail guides in the frame, press down slightly to seat and allow the slide to move forward.

The pistol is a joy to shoot, and it proved capable of good accuracy as you can see in the accompanying table. I fired about 150 rounds in all and experienced only two malfunctions: one failure of the slide to lock back on the final round and one failure to extract. Those occurred during bench testing.

Other than that, it ran like a champ and wasn't fussy about what it liked to shoot. The grip felt really good in my hands, and I loved the sights and the trigger. While it's light and has a relatively high bore axis, muzzle jump was minimal.

Off the bench I found I could get thumb-size groups shooting deliberately at the seven-yard line. I also ran a few drills from 10 yards and closer, and I discovered you can shoot really fast and accurate with this gun—in case you were wondering about its defensive potential.

Some might complain about the ambidextrous paddle release, but I've always been rather a fan of this design. Unlike the American-style button release, by using my trigger finger I can drop the



▲ The gun has a thin metal slide with a polymer cover at the rear. It comes with a muzzle device adapter and a tool for installing a device.



▲ The P17's controls include an ambidextrous thumb safety and ambidextrous paddle magazine release. The trigger broke at less than three pounds.



▲ The barrel is threaded 1/2x28 and has a barrel nut installed. The front sight is a green fiber optic, and there's a three-slot accessory rail in the frame.

## ACCURACY RESULTS | KELTEC P17

.22 Long Rifle	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Remington Golden Bullet	36	918	43	1.3
Fiocchi LRN	40	901	12	1.1
CCI Mini Mag	40	959	19	1.2
SK Semi Auto Rifle	40	836	23	1.3

**Notes:** Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 15 yards from an MTM Case-Gard pistol rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a Pro Chrono chronograph.

mag without shifting the gun in my hand.

If I have one criticism of the gun, it would be all the visible screws that hold the frame halves together. It just looks so industrial. But that's a small gripe for sure. In the end, I think this is an excellent pistol—and not just “for the money.”

It's light, accurate, reliable, super fun to shoot and has great features like an accessory rail, adjustable fiber-optic sights and a threaded barrel. Add to that its outstanding 16+1 capacity and you have a .22 pistol suitable for about anything you'd want a .22 semiautomatic for. ○





## ROCK ISLAND ARMORY TAC ULTRA FS 10MM

**ARMSCOR IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S** largest manufacturers of 1911 handguns. This Philippine company was founded in 1905 and actually predates the John Browning-designed pistol that made the company famous here in the U.S. Rock Island Armory, an affiliate of Armscor, currently offers a wide array of 1911 pistols, including the 10mm TAC Ultra FS.

The TAC Ultra FS 10mm is one of the most affordable 10mm 1911s available, but like other Rock Island pistols, it offers features similar to more expensive guns. Both the frame and slide are made from 4140 ordnance steel, and the TAC Ultra FS comes with a full-size dust cover with an accessory rail. The frame and slide have a matte black Parkerized finish that contrasts nicely with the gun's black-and-white G10 grips.

The pistol has a full-length guide rod and supported five-inch, bushing-less, six-groove barrel with a 1:16 twist. The eight-round metal magazine sports a rubber base pad, and the trigger on the test gun broke at an average weight of 5.75 pounds on a Wheeler gauge. The trigger and hammer are skeletonized, and the checkering on the G10 grips and mainspring housing offer a secure hold on this gun when firing full-power loads.

Its square notch rear sight has two white dots and is fully adjustable. A screw on the top of the sight controls elevation while one on the right rear portion of the sight adjusts for windage. The front sight is dovetailed into the slide and comes with a red fiber-optic rod.

There are slide serrations fore and aft, the thumb safety is ambidextrous,

### ROCK ISLAND ARMORY TAC ULTRA FS 10MM

**TYPE:** 1911  
**CALIBER:** 10mm Auto  
**CAPACITY:** 8+1  
**BARREL:** 5.0 in.  
**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 8.75/5.5/1.3 in.  
**WEIGHT:** 46.8 oz.  
**GRIPS:** black/white G10  
**FINISH:** Parkerized  
**TRIGGER:** 5.75 lb. pull (measured)  
**SIGHTS:** white dot adjustable rear, fiber-optic front  
**PRICE:** \$806  
**MANUFACTURER:** Rock Island Armory,  
 ARMSCOR.COM

and the mag well is beveled for faster, surer reloads. The full-size Rock Island Armory TAC Ultra FS 10mm is 8.75 inches long, 1.30 inches wide across the controls and 5.5 inches



high, which is on par with most full-size 1911s. Unloaded weight is just below 47 ounces. Suggested retail price is \$806, which is considerably cheaper than its competitors.

Rock Island's hand-fitting process results in a factory pistol that operates smoothly right out of the box. Slide-to-frame fit was relatively tight, and despite a few minor machining marks and this gun's no-nonsense, workaday exterior, there's little to differentiate the Rock Island from more expensive 10mm 1911s.

It delivered excellent accuracy. I was looking for group sizes between two and 2.5 inches, but the TAC Ultra FS beat that. In fact, one group fired with SIG Sauer's V-Crown ammunition went 1.28 inches for five shots. Three of the five loads tested averaged under two inches, which places the TAC Ultra FS among the more accurate factory 10mm 1911s I've shot.

The TAC Ultra FS's white dot/fiber-optic layout is functional and well-thought-out, allowing the shooter to make quick adjustments in the field without any special tools. The 10mm has a reputation for being abusive, but this 47-ounce pistol is manageable even with relatively hot loads.

Reliability was superb. The TAC Ultra FS fed smoothly and extracted and ejected every load without issue. The only problem was a single hard primer that simply wouldn't pop, but that wasn't the fault of the gun.

That's the type of reliability you want when you're staking your life on a pistol to protect you from a dangerous predator, which is exactly what I was counting on the TAC Ultra FS to do when I carried it to Alaska's Arctic as a backup gun while hunting caribou and grizzly. We didn't always have our rifles close at hand, and that's when I relied on the TAC Ultra FS to serve as my backup bear protection—while fishing, cutting up caribou meat or glassing, it was often simpler to carry

## ACCURACY RESULTS | ROCK ISLAND ARMORY TAC ULTRA FS 10MM

10mm Auto	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	175	1,096	11	1.8
SIG Sauer V-Crown	180	1,179	11	1.6
Federal Hydra-Shok JSP	180	1,005	9	1.8
Hornady XTP	180	1,202	13	2.0
Armscor FMJ	180	1,188	16	2.3

**Notes:** Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded on a Shooting Chrony digital chronograph placed 10 feet from the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; JSP, jacketed softpoint



**▲ The TAC Ultra FS is built of 4140 ordnance steel that is given a Parkerized finish, which stood up just fine to 10 wet days in the Alaskan wilderness.**

the Rock Island 10mm in a Gunfighters Inc. Kenai Chest Holster. That kept the TAC Ultra FS close at hand at all times.

The TAC Ultra FS was exposed to the miserable wet and cold conditions that are as much a part of hunting in Alaska as the mosquitoes. It rained nearly every day, and the pistol was perpetually wet. I'd coated it with a thin layer of oil before the hunt, and at the end of six days there was no sign of wear or corrosion on the outside or inside of the gun. What's more, the TAC Ultra FS's trim profile allowed it to sit close to my chest and remain out of the way, and that bright fiber-optic front sight was easily visible in the murky near-dark hours between two and four a.m. at the top of the world.

There's little doubt that the 10mm is making a resurgence, and I noticed most of the hunters I saw in Alaska actually carried 10s for backup on bears. The TAC Ultra FS from Rock Is-



**▲ The adjustable rear has two white dots, and the front is a red fiber optic. Fitzpatrick appreciated this system, especially at night in the Arctic.**



**▲ The pistol is a great shooter, as this five-shot, 1.28-inch group with SIG's 180 grain V-Crown 10mm ammo illustrates.**

land is solid choice for anyone looking to buy their first or 15th 10mm. Accurate, durable, reliable, and affordable, the TAC Ultra FS earns high praise for offering superb performance and excellent build quality at a price you can afford.

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## ED BROWN EVO KC9 LW

### IF YOU HAD ASKED PEOPLE LIVING IN 1930

what kind of technology they'd see in the year 2020, the first thing you'd hear is "flying cars." Once you explained them, these folks would also likely believe microwaves, the internet and smartphones. You know what they wouldn't believe? That the most popular American pistol design in the year 2020 would still be the 1911.

The Ed Brown KC9 LW is perhaps the best example of how the design has evolved and improved in the last 110 years while still remaining a true 1911. Unlike the original all-steel full-size 1911, the KC9 LW is optimized for concealed carry.

This 9+1 capacity 9mm 1911 sports a four-inch barrel, a slide that has been thinned for weight reduction and concealability, night sights and a light-

weight aluminum Bobtail frame. The pistol weighs just 27 ounces.

Instead of manufacturing them one at a time to order, Ed Brown Products is producing them in small custom batches and offering only a fixed configuration. That enables the company to sell the KC9 LW for \$2,295, a third less than what the firm charges for its custom 1911s.

The four-inch match-grade Ed Brown bull barrel is stainless steel with fluting. It has a very aggressively angled crown cut. Unlike most 9mm 1911 barrels these days, it is not ramped, but that did not affect reliability or feeding at all.

That fat barrel sits inside a slide that has been thinned to 0.86 inch. Most full-size 1911 slides run about 0.91 inch. That 0.05 inch may not seem like much, but you can see it and feel it. The slide

### ED BROWN EVO KC9 LW

**TYPE:** 1911

**CALIBER:** 9mm

**CAPACITY:** 9+1

**BARREL LENGTH:** 4 in.

**OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH:** 7.5/5.4/1.2 in.

**WEIGHT:** 27 oz.

**CONSTRUCTION:** carbon steel slide, aluminum alloy frame

**SIGHTS:** Trijicon HD front, Tactical Edge rear

**GRIPS:** black G10

**TRIGGER:** 4.25 lb. pull (measured)

**SAFETIES:** grip, thumb

**PRICE:** \$2,295

**MANUFACTURER:** Ed Brown Products,  
EdBrown.com

does not have a round top, but several angled flats shave weight and add style. The front and rear cocking serrations are both angled forward and in at →



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← the top. The KC9 has a larger pivoting external extractor.

Atop the slide you'll see a Trijicon HD front sight that has a bright orange ring around a tritium insert that provides good visibility no matter the lighting conditions. The rear sight is one of Ed Brown's Tactical Edge models, just slightly reduced in size to fit the narrowed slide. This rear sight has a vertical forward face that allows the slide to be racked one-handed on a hard surface. The notch in the rear sight is U-shaped, and the face of the sight is plain black and serrated.

The extended aluminum three-hole trigger has become standard on most modern 1911s, and the trigger group on the KC9 LW provided a crisp 4.25-pound trigger pull.

The thumb safety is single-sided and extended. The beavertail is a design that Ed Brown, in my opinion, not just

invented but perfected. The magazine release is checkered but not extended since it's on a gun built to be flat and concealable. To complement the flat profile, the gun wears slender black G10 grips with a ribbed horizontal texturing that is very effective.

Both the frontstrap and mainspring housing offer Ed Brown's Snakeskin treatment. This texturing looks just like snake scales, and just like snake scales it is directional. Run your finger up the gun, front or back, and the Snakeskin is smooth. Run your finger down and you will find there are edges that dig into your finger just a bit. The Snakeskin on the mainspring housing is sharper than on the frontstrap, and I wish the frontstrap texturing was that aggressive.

The Bobtail frame is a neat modification to the 1911 design that has appeared only recently. The bottom rear corner of the frame is the part of



▲ The Tactical Edge rear sight has a vertical face in front so you can rack the pistol one-handed. The cocking serrations angle forward and in at the top.

the gun that prints against a covering garment, right? The Bobtail cuts off that back corner, making the pistol significantly more concealable. It slightly changes the angle the pistol sits in your hand, making it a tad more vertical, but most people won't even notice or care.

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Two nine-round stainless steel magazines made by Ed Brown are provided. They have non-tilt followers and a spacer at the back to position the 9mm rounds properly for feeding into the chamber. You'll also get several polymer base pads and the screws to attach them to the magazines if you so desire. While these extended base pads will protect the mags if you drop them, their real purpose is to ensure positive seating of the magazine during a mag change, as the unmodified magazine sits totally flush with the bottom of the frame.

Shooting the pistol was just a joy. I used it to run a plate rack over and over and practice double-taps on silhouettes. Recoil was controllable, and the pistol ate every kind of jacketed hollow-point round I fed it—which is what you should expect of a 1911 from a custom house as storied as Ed Brown.



▲ The Snakeskin serrations on the mainspring and fronstrap help anchor the gun in your hand, and the Bobtail cut makes the gun more concealable.



▲ The bull barrel is fluted, and the slide is just a tad slimmer than a normal 1911, two of the tweaks to make the gun lighter and/or easier to conceal.

## ACCURACY RESULTS | ED BROWN KC9 LW

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Black Hills TAC-XP +P	115	1,146	11	2.4
Federal Train & Protect JHP	115	1,139	24	2.8
Hornady American Gunner +P	124	1,123	9	2.1
SIG Elite FMJ	124	1,130	15	2.7

Notes: Accuracy results are the averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots measured with an Oehler Model 35P 12 feet from the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; JHP,



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# STANDARD COLT BIRD'S HEAD

**IF YOU TOOK A POLL RIGHT NOW, I'D** bet the Colt Single Action Army would top the list of favorite guns in America. Likely this stems from the older generation of enthusiasts who watched the Westerns on television in the late 1940s and '50s starring Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and others. As a result, as kids we all wanted one of those gussied-up, chrome-plated SAA lookalike cap guns under the Christmas tree.

Standard Manufacturing is offering a special-order, custom gun—the Colt Bird's Head—that shows off a unique, historic SAA feature. The bird's head was originally designed in 1850 for the Colt Derringers, and in 1877 it was incorporated into a line of full-frame revolvers simply called "Bird's Head Colts."

The Standard Bird's Head is a top-quality gun using only the finest in materials and workmanship, and this is reflected in its \$2,999 price

tag. The overall fit and finish is perfect in every way, from the bluing to the indexed screws around the gun. If you run your finger along the line that separates the trigger guard or the loading gate from the frame, you don't even know the line is there. It is perfectly balanced just like in the days of old, when it made a great concealment gun for gamblers or the local barkeep.


The gun is made from solid 4140 steel, and there are no cast or metal injection parts. I've visited the plant, and precision machinery is used throughout. Following the original Colt, various parts from this gun will fit older Colts, and there's no safety lever, mechanism or transfer bar. Follow the old rule of load one, skip one, then load four.

The bluing is bone and charcoal color case-hardening and is rich and colorful, with a gloss finish. The cylinder, barrel, ejector, grip frame

and even both ends of the screws that run through the frame have been polished to the point they look like blue chrome.

The spurred hammer is wide and checkered and fits into the recess of the frame with precision. Typical of the Colt, you aim through a gutter on the topstrap. Trigger pull on my sample ran three pounds on the nose with just a little slack before the sear let go.

The faux ivory grips add elegance. As I mentioned, there is no discernible line between the grips and the grip frame except at the top where it is a little proud. The grips are handmade, and if you look closely, there is a small defect as might be found on real ivory.

Currently, the Colt Bird's Head revolver is available with a 3.75-inch barrel in calibers to include the .45 Colt and the .44-40 Winchester, and it weighs 35 ounces. 



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