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OCTOBER 2020

FIRST LOOK  
**MARLIN  
DARK SERIES  
MODEL 1894**

NOW IN  
**.357 MAG  
AND  
.44 MAG!** P.50

**+**  
CELEBRATING

# MARLIN'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY



**BODDINGTON REVISITS  
THE BRAND AND UNVEILS  
WHAT'S NEW.** P.40



**P. 19  
STAFFORD**  
There is no such thing as a "weak hand."



**P. 32  
LAMB**  
Is the Ruger 57 practical for self-defense?



**P. 80  
WOOD**  
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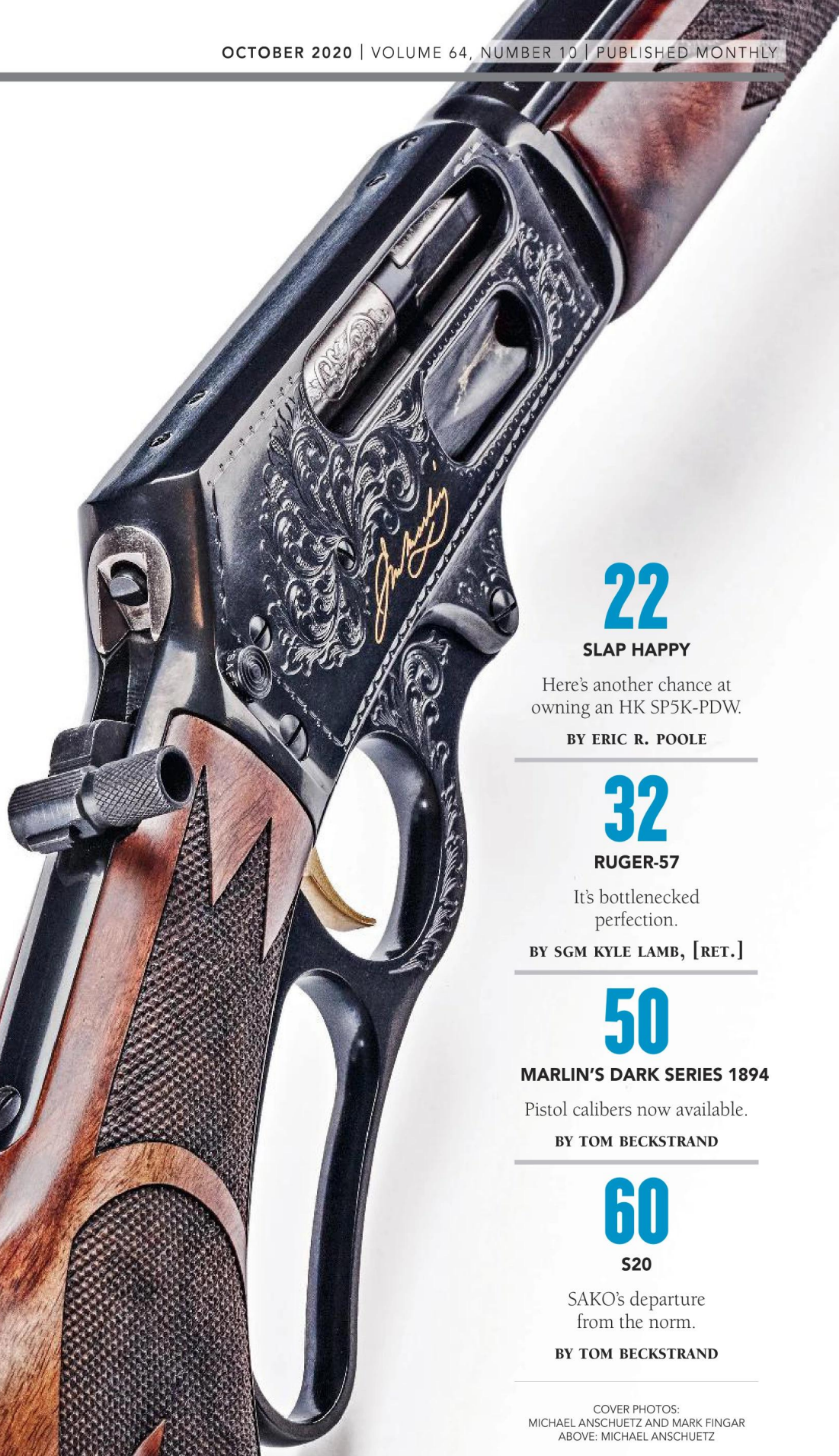
BY CRAIG BODDINGTON

# 40

**SESQUICENTENNIAL  
CELEBRATING  
150 YEARS OF  
MARLIN FIREARMS.**



Guns & Ammo's subscriber cover features the new HK SP5K-PDW pistol in 9mm. It faithfully continues the legacy of the short MP5s. **p. 22**



## 22

**SLAP HAPPY**

Here's another chance at owning an HK SP5K-PDW.

BY ERIC R. POOLE

## 32

**RUGER-57**

It's bottlenecked perfection.

BY SGM KYLE LAMB, [RET.]

## 50

**MARLIN'S DARK SERIES 1894**

Pistol calibers now available.

BY TOM BECKSTRAND

## 60

**S20**

SAKO's departure from the norm.

BY TOM BECKSTRAND

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ABOVE: MICHAEL ANSCHUETZ

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## RUGER'S FIRST LOOK

The September 2020 issue of Guns & Ammo featured an article authored by Eric Poole entitled "The Sweet Spot," detailing Hornady's exciting new 6mm ARC Cartridge. The article describes "...a new Ruger AR-556" chambered in 6mm ARC. The rifle that was tested was indeed "new." In fact, it was one of the first prototypes of an AR-556 chambered in this new caliber that Ruger made, and was shipped to G&A to assist in the evaluation of the new cartridge in an AR-style platform. We at Ruger still have to work hard to prove out accuracy, reliability, and durability to our usual standards before we release an AR-556 chambered in 6mm ARC to full production and for sale to our customers. These are typically exhaustive processes, and they have been made more challenging as we face unprecedented demand for just about all our products, especially our popular Ruger AR-556 chambered in 5.56 NATO. While bringing new products to market is a fundamental part of our business, we think we will serve our customers better in the short term by maximizing our daily output as best we can.

The 6mm ARC shows amazing potential as a highly versatile cartridge. It fits into compact and lightweight guns (yes, we are working on prototypes across a variety of platforms), it shows fantastic accuracy potential, and it maintains supersonic velocities to over 1,000 yards. We are very fortunate to be on the forefront of this new cartridge with the good folks at Hornady, and thankful to Guns & Ammo for the mention of our rifle, even if it was a bit premature. When we announce our rifle (or rifles) chambered in 6mm ARC for sale, you will know that we have fully vetted the design and our manufacturing processes, and we are building and

shipping them daily. Keep an eye on [ruger.com](http://ruger.com) or sign up for email alerts through the link on our homepage to stay informed about all new Ruger firearms.

**Mark Gurney**  
Director of Product Management, Ruger Firearms

## ARTICLE REQUEST

As an avid reader of your magazine, would you be so kind as to develop and publish an article concerning the effect heat has on metallic cartridges? For example, explain what happens when ammo is left in the summer sun. This topic would benefit us all who enjoy shooting.  
**Jim Schaefer**  
Parker, Arizona

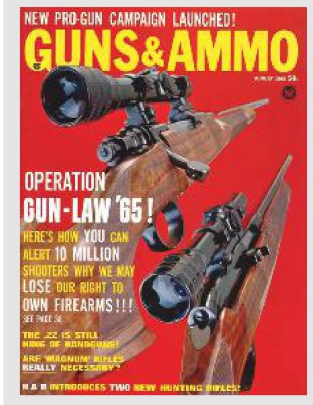
## CARTRIDGE MARKS

I was trying to decide between purchasing a Bad Rock or a Christensen Arms MPR but I chose the latter because of its light weight, and after reading Tom Beckstrand's review of it in the June 2020 issue. I ordered the rifle in .300 PRC, but the stock covers up the caliber marking. I have a real problem with my choice because no one knows what cartridge this rifle chambers except me. Additionally, the magazine is stamped "300 RUM"! If a new owner were to get this rifle, that person might think that the rifle is chambered .300 Remington Ultra Mag. without knowing it actually shoots shorter .300 PRC. The magazine needs .300 RUM marked out and .300 PRC inscribed on it, and somewhere ".300 PRC" should be apparent on the rifle. I am writing for advice on what to do.  
**Von Schafer**  
Humphrey, Nebraska

*Christensen Arms engraves the caliber on the underside of the barrel behind the muzzlebrake. It should be visible with the handguard in place. If the rifle in your situation is not like this, we'd reach out to Christensen Arms' customer service ([christensenarms.com](http://christensenarms.com), 888-517-8855). The magazine is an AICS long-action*

## AUGUST '65

Senate Bill 1592 in 1965 was a failed effort to amend the Federal Firearms Act of 1938, one of two bills introduced by then-Sen. Thomas Dodd (D-CT). However, these bills paved the way for the passage of the Gun Control Act of 1968. "The Dodd bill will help stamp out crime," newspapers read, but as Guns & Ammo warned, the aim was to increase federal regulatory powers to control all firearms within the U.S.



*magnum pattern compatible with .300 PRC and .300 RUM. No company currently offers a .300 PRC-specific magazine. If you want to mark the magazine for .300 PRC, I've had success with taking firearm parts to local trophy shops for engraving.*  
— E. Poole

## ACCURACY VS. PRECISION

While reading the "Hand-gunning" column of the August 2020 issue, I had to disagree with Jeremy Stafford's explanation of the difference between the terms "accuracy" and "precision." I agree that "accuracy" refers to the closeness of a measured value to a known





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*Citori CX*

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standard," however, the "precision" measurement comes into play when the accuracy of an instrument can perform with consistent repeatability. The smaller the variation in accuracy, the more precise the firearm or instrument. Placement on a target makes no matter. That's a sight issue. Keep up your exceptional work Mr. Stafford and thank you for your military service.

Aldi Caban  
Edgefield, South Carolina

**HANDGUN RELOADS**

Given the scarcity and price increases of 9mm ammo, I've been thinking about getting into reloading. It was with great interest that I read Dave Emary's "Bullet Board" column on handgun reloads in the August 2020.

While Mr. Emary got into some of the savings on a cost per round for components, his calculations were made on the top of already having reloading equipment for making rifle cartridges. Might I suggest a piece on the basics involving how to get into handgun reloading from scratch? Is there a basic checklist with approximate costs that a beginner could work from? That might be easier than getting into a lengthy discussion or argument with the old hands at a gun club.

Ed Arzouian  
Lanesboro, Pennsylvania

*There's never a bad time to start reloading, but let me refer you to the article I wrote, "Step-By-Step Approach," on this topic*

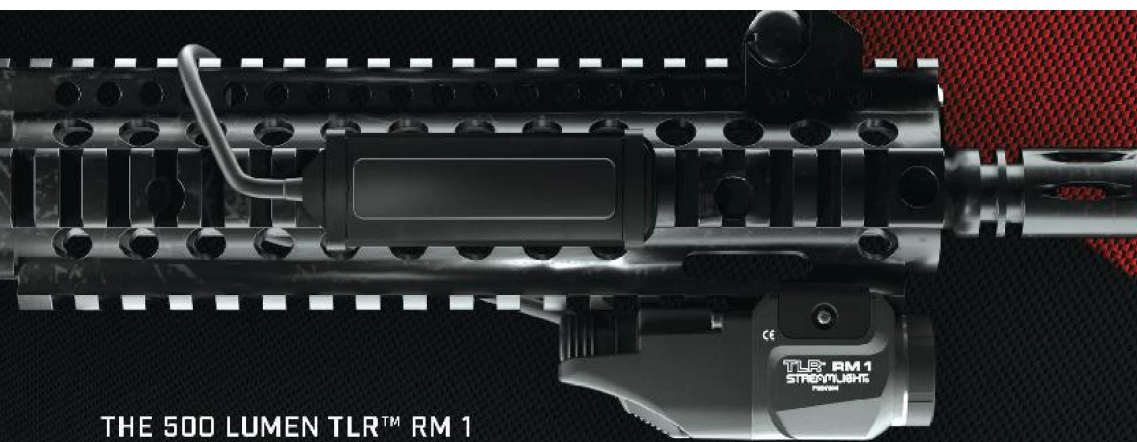
*that was published in my October 2018 "Bullet Board" column. Though it isn't a checklist, it does mention the costs of several products. Given the timeliness of this request, we will republish this article on gunsandammo.com for everyone's reference. Additionally, let me recommend that you get a reloading manual, read it and do what it says before you start reloading. There is an upfront investment initially, but as you add equipment and experience you will be able to create your own ammunition at significant cost savings.*

— D. Emary

**MORE SURPLUS, PLEASE!**

I very much enjoyed the

"Surplus Guns" backpage by Keith Wood in the August 2020 issue. I would like to see this become a regular feature with a brief review and history of a rifle or pistol each month. As Mr. Wood recounted, I well-remembered the barrels of surplus rifles and displays of pistols in hardware stores where each could be bought for \$20 in the 1950s. Adjusted for inflation, I suppose that number is now \$200. I regret not buying an FN-49 in .30-'06 years ago, which was advertised for \$100 in the mid-'60s. Inflation would make that price about \$800 in today's money. As Mr. Wood said, "now" is always a good time to purchase surplus firearms. Ron Geppert  
Mankato, Minnesota 🇺🇸



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## Joe Kurtenbach joins Guns & Ammo.



ERIC R. POOLE

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# THE STAR SYSTEM

**BACK IN THE DAY**, Founding Publisher Robert “Pete” Petersen was known for going after popular editors and writers with other magazines. “He believed in the Star System,” Senior Field Editor Craig Boddington recalled. “He also believed that he could make his own stars, elevating Elmer Keith for example. The headline on the November 1961 cover announced, “Elmer Keith Joins G&A Staff!” Keith wrote for many different publications, but as Guns & Ammo became successful, Petersen wanted Keith’s association exclusive to the brand.

When starting G&A in 1958, Petersen secured well-known authors such as P.O. Ackley and Jeff Cooper, among others. Arguably the biggest name in firearms at the time was Col. Townsend Whelen, who contributed until his death in 1961.


In the early ‘70s, it was rumored that Jack O’Connor was planning to retire from Outdoor Life, so Petersen and G&A’s next publisher, Tom Siatos, flew out to Idaho in time for the first issue of Petersen’s Hunting in November 1973. They made O’Connor an offer he couldn’t refuse, and named him as the magazine’s executive editor. What’s interesting about that issue is that G&A’s Elmer Keith was also assigned a story, and no one told him that O’Connor was going to be contributing as well. Keith hated O’Connor, though O’Connor didn’t seem to care. That was the only instance where Keith’s and O’Connor’s bylines appeared in the same magazine. Keith never wrote for Hunting again.

During the late ‘70s, Bill Jordan wrote for G&A but was lured away to Shooting Times in the ‘80s. Conversely, Bob Milek, a known writer for Shooting Times was hired by G&A. Petersen grew to love Milek so much that he sent

a private jet to Wyoming to take Milek back and forth to California for cancer treatments before Milek lost his fight in 1993. Petersen sold his magazine empire in 1996.

I was only 34 when this organization took another chance and made me G&A’s 14th editor. Seven years later, I’ve matured personally and professionally, but I’m proud of what’s been accomplished as we grow G&A in new directions. I participate in the decision making of every asset — print, digital and TV — but none of the growth would be possible were it not for the stars surrounding me. Art Director Michael Ulrich designs each issue, while Digital Editor Shelby Laramore Scepanski maintains gunsandammo.com and has refreshed Guns & Ammo’s YouTube efforts. Behind the scenes, Connie Mendoza continues to serve as production director; she’s been with G&A since 1997. Coordinating Producer Jeff Murray and Director David Foster are improving Guns & Ammo TV, and the MyOutdoorTV (MOTV) app continues to broaden our audience with additional streaming services. I doubt Mr. Petersen could have imagined

how far the brand would come in 62 years.

We still believe in Petersen’s Star System, which is evidenced by the recent addition of Joe Kurtenbach to Guns & Ammo’s editorial staff from NRA Publication’s American Rifleman. It’s a big win for us as this former U.S. Army Cavalry Scout and Psy Ops Specialist joins the ranks of our former veterans, and brings with him an English and Management degree from Virginia Tech. You’ll see him contributing to all areas of the Guns & Ammo brand and enhancing our digital content. His is a name worth following, and I have a good feeling about his future. 



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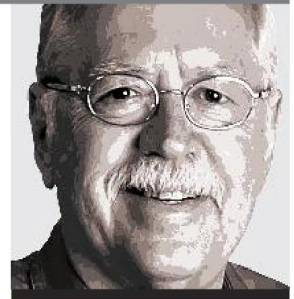
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## IDENTIFICATION & VALUES



GARRY JAMES

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COLT OFFICER'S MODEL TARGET, .38 SPL., 60%: \$400

### COLT OFFICER'S MODEL TARGET

**Q:** A few years ago, I bought a Colt from an older friend who needed a little cash. I thought the gun needed repair as it would only operate in single action, only the cylinder would move in double action. I bought the gun anyway with the thought of repairing it. I later read an article about Colt building these for competition. On the ranges where these guns were used, they were referred to as a “cheater” gun. I would like to know if this was a factory feature or a clone, and if there is any real value. It was in his family since the 1930s. On the barrel: “COLT'S MFG CO HARTFORD. CT. U.S.A./OFFICERS MODEL TARGET/ 38 SPECIAL CTG.” Serial number on the frame is “752XXX”. Serial number on the cylinder carrier is “752XXX” with an added “25” below the serial number. Under the left stock there is a “u IF.” Located by the base of the mainspring there is a large “J” near the bottom left and a “33” is at the center, bottom.

On the bottom of the grip, between the stocks, there is stamped “P A 497”. The gun has a 6-inch barrel with an excellent bore in the 95 percent, or better, range. Finish is 75 to 80 percent.

Triggerpull on single action only is 2 pounds, 11 ounces, and very smooth. The firing pin is on the hammer, and the screw heads are very good. The rear sight is adjustable for windage only. The front-sight blade is elevation adjustable.

**B.G.**

**Email**

**A:** Some 15,000 Colt Officer's Model Target revolvers were manufactured from 1904 to 1949. Calibers offered were .32 Colt Police Positive,

.32 Short and Long Colt, .32-20, .32 Sharp Shoulder, .38 Long Colt, .38 Colt Special, .38 S&W Special, and .38 smoothbore. Barrel

lengths ran from 4 inches to 7½ inches with 6-inch being among the most common. Serial numbers were in sequence of those of the Colt Army Special from 1904 to 1929 and with the Official Police from 1927 to 1949. Your particular example was built in 1949. The Officer's Model Target is a good-shooting revolver. I would suggest taking it to a smith conversant with older Colt double-actions and having it repaired. In working condition, in the shape you describe, it's worth is in the \$475 to \$550 range.

### COLT SAA VS. SPRINGFIELD “TRAPDOOR” AMMO

**Q:** You might be the right guy to ask being a blue steel-and-walnut histo-

rian. I've been following your writing for years, or decades. The Colt SAA .45 and Trapdoor Springfield .45-70 both came out in 1873. Were Colt and Springfield aware of each other's work? Why did the U.S. Army allow different bore sizes? It would have been easy to make a .452-bore standard and the .45 Colt cartridge fit in the .45-70 chamber as an emergency reduced load.

**B.G.**

**Winnemucca, Nevada**

**A:** The Colt SAA revolver and Springfield “Trapdoor” rifles and carbine, while both in .45 caliber, followed entirely different evolutions, as did their cartridges. Ordnance types were familiar with both arms, but to my

### THE AUCTION BLOCK

A beautiful Winchester Model 70 in .30-'06 Springfield stocked by Master Gunsmith George Hoenig realized a comfortable \$4,000 at a June 16, 2020, Sportsman's Legacy sale. Custom made for the late Tom Siatos, former editor and later publisher of Guns & Ammo, the rifle is based on a refined barreled action made in 1941. The metal has a superb rust blue finish and remains almost entirely original, the exception being a careful rounding of the bottom metal to blend with the contour of the stock. The metal grip cap is engraved “G. HOENIG BOISE ID”. The stock is shaped from an elegant blank of AAA-grade English walnut to the contour of a proper mountain rifle. The open grip, at least for an American custom rifle, was ahead of its time. Additional features include fine checkering, an English cheek with softened edge and a leather-wrapped recoil pad. For more information about this and other sales, contact Sportsman's Legacy at 406-212-0344 or visit sportsmanslegacy.com.





COLT 1851 NAVY, ENGRAVED, .36 CAL., 30%: \$4,500

knowledge there was never any thought given to using a .45 Colt as an “emergency” load in the rifle. The arms simply had different purposes and there would be little advantage in the interchangeability of ammo.

**STEVENS .30-30 BOLT-ACTION**

**Q:** I have a question related to a .30-30 Stevens rifle. The marking on it just shows as a “25A”, not a “325A”, so I am not sure

what I have. When my father passed, he left it to me. He bought it at a pawn store some 50 years ago for \$50. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

**J.L.**

**Email**

**A:** From the photos you sent, both configuration and markings indicate you have a Stevens Model 340, which evolved from the Savage/ Stevens Model 325. The 325 was only made from 1947 to

1950, and had a distinctive butterknife-style bolt-handle. Model 340s had a more usual style with a round knob. The 340 was manufactured from 1950 to 1985 in .22 Hornet, .222 Remington and .30-30 Winchester. It came in a standard version with plain stock and a 340-S De-Luxe with checkered stock, Savage No. 175 peep sight, hooded front sight and sling swivels. I believe the small “25A” stamping on the barrel is some sort of assembly number or proof. Your rifle appears to be a standard grade in nice shape. I’d value it at around \$275 to \$350.

**ENGRAVED '51 COLT NAVY**

**Q:** I have an 1851 Navy Colt revolver in .36 caliber

that was carried by my father’s great-great-uncle during the Civil War. The story goes that he used it to defend himself when a Confederate sniper had him in his sights. My father went back to the Iowa farm in 1957 for his father’s funeral and found some family kids playing in the dirt with this gun. I will never sell it, but I would like to have an idea of its value. The mechanism no longer functions.

**D.H.**

**Email**

**A:** At one time, that was a spectacular Colt 1851 Navy revolver. We can tell it was factory engraved and stocked with ivory because of the “IE” initials beneath the serial number. The number, 45XXX, places the



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gun's date of manufacture at 1857, plenty of time for it to have seen use in the Civil War, though it strikes me as curious such an elegant piece would have been used in combat, especially as ivory grips can be a bit fragile. Still, stranger things have happened and there are some embellished handguns, as well as rifles, that are verified as having seen military use during the conflict. In good shape, the piece would be worth serious money. However, the lack of finish along with some pitting and a few dents and nicks, these issues definitely detract from its desirability. On the other hand, the fact it is factory engraved and the checkered ivory grips are very, very nice help boost its worth.

I'd value your '51 between \$4,000 and \$5,000. I'd also admonish you to get it back in working order. The mechanism is relatively simple and unless there is something drastically wrong that I can't see from your photos, it shouldn't present too much of a problem to repair.

**COLT FRONTIER SAA WORTH?**

**Q:** My partner owns a Colt Frontier six-shooter, serial number 180XXX, that he picked up in Colorado, perhaps 20 years ago. He has no interest in shooting it and has offered it to me. I would like to pay him a fair price and hope that you can give us a rough estimate on its value. Everything seems functional; the cylinder lock-up is tight. I think that



COLT SAA (MFG. 1898), 25%: \$3,000

everything is original. The barrel has some corrosion, but some of the lands and grooves remain. The serial numbers match except on the loading gate. I worry that the finish is almost too good, perhaps indicating it has been re-blued. Is it safe to shoot? Any background that you can offer is welcome.

**J.C.M.**  
Columbia, Tennessee

**A:** Your friend's Colt Single Action Army (SAA) revolver was manufactured in 1898. The serial numbers are correct, the non-matching number on the inside of the loading gate being an assembly number. From what I can see of you photos, the revolver has definitely been reblued, though markings seem reasonably sharp. Grips appear to be original and, as you say, the



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bore is a bit rough. I'd place the condition of the piece at around 20 to 30 percent. "The Forty-First Edition Blue Book of Gun Values" (bluebookofgunvalues.com) lists an early smokeless powder SAA, such as this one, at between \$2,800 and \$3,100. As far as shootability goes, I can't determine that from pictures. You'll have to take the piece to a gunsmith for a going-over.

small revisions have been made internally, but the basic design is intact.) Could you please estimate a value for this piece? We have no intention of selling, but it's difficult to negotiate a reasonable value for transfer within the family when no one agrees on its worth.  
**J.S.**  
**Email**

**A:** From what I can see in your photos, it appears as though you have a very nice condition military-issue Colt 1911 with the correct two-tone magazine. I checked the serial number and, indeed, it



COLT MODEL 1911, .45 ACP, 98%: \$4,250

**COLT 1911 MILITARY**

**Q:** This pistol was issued to my grandfather in World War I. He was a medic who used this gun very little, if at all. Checking the serial number on the Colt website shows it was manufactured in 1918. It is astounding to me that the original design was so good that this 100-year-old firearm is still produced today virtually unchanged. (I understand

was manufactured in 1918. Assuming the finish is original — which it appears to be — I'd estimate the condition to be at least 95 percent, perhaps closer to 98 percent. Its worth is between \$3,500 and \$4,750.

**SGT. YORK'S .45?**

**Q:** My friend inherited an old Colt revolver and was told by his father that it belonged to Sgt. Alvin



COLT MODEL 1909 NEW SERVICE, .45 COLT, 30%: \$700

York. Can you verify?  
**B.D.**  
**Email**

**A:** The photos you sent me of the supposed Sergeant Alvin York revolver are of a reblued Colt Model 1909 New Service revolver. The scratched markings on the inside of the grips ("ALVIN YORK/PALL MALL TENN.") are intriguing, but really don't indicate too much without added provenance. I once had a Belgian pinfire revolver brought to me with the initials "BTK" scratched on the inside of the grips, the owner insisting it was "Billy the Kid's." During World War I, it is verified that Sgt. York carried a 1911 Government Model; I've personally seen his diary affirming this. Colt Model 1917 New Service revolvers were issued to U.S. troops in World War I, but they were chambered for .45 ACP. The 1909 New Service handled a variant of the earlier, rimmed .45 Colt and was issued on a limited basis to the U.S. Army, Navy and Marines prior to the Great War, seeing use primarily in the Philippines.

**MERIDEN REVOLVER**

**Q:** I'm sending pictures of my old pocket pistol I

believe to be from Meriden Arms of Connecticut. I found this gun more than 40 years ago when doing demolition and just recently looked into its history. Thank you and keep up the great work.

**B.C.**  
**Email**

**A:** The Meriden Fire Arms Company produced large numbers of small .32 and .38 double-action revolvers from just after the turn of the 20th century up until around the end of World War I. The company had its antecedents in the Andrew Fyrberg Co., whose manufacturing facilities were purchased by Sears, Roebuck & Co. The revolvers were top-break, with or without exposed hammers. Engraving was common and finishes were commonly blue or nickel-plate. The company also made revolvers for others who used proprietary names. As well, Meriden manufactured inexpensive shotguns and pump .22 rifles around the same time. Your little revolver is a typical example of the company's wares. I must say, it appears to be in pretty good shape considering how you found it. **G&A**

**HOLLYWOOD HARDWARE**

**Wooden Flintlock O/U Prop Rifle, "Unconquered" (1947)**

In the 1947 Cecil B. DeMille film "Unconquered," star Gary Cooper played a colonial Virginia militia officer and carried a splendid original circa-1760 flintlock over/under rifle made by John George Flittner of Carlsruhe, Germany. This fine piece was also notably brandished by Dewey Martin portraying a frontiersman in the 1952 movie, "The Big Sky." Needless to say, such an early and valuable arm had to be carefully handled, so a wooden mockup (shown below) was made that could be used when it was necessary to treat the piece a bit more harshly. Also seen in "The Big Sky," "The Buccaneer" (1958) and other films, originally this prop emulated the Flittner rifle closely, but was later modified and lost one of its barrels and one of its locks during the process. (Courtesy of the National Firearms Museum, Fairfax, Virginia.)



"UNCONQUERED" PROP RIFLE, 1947



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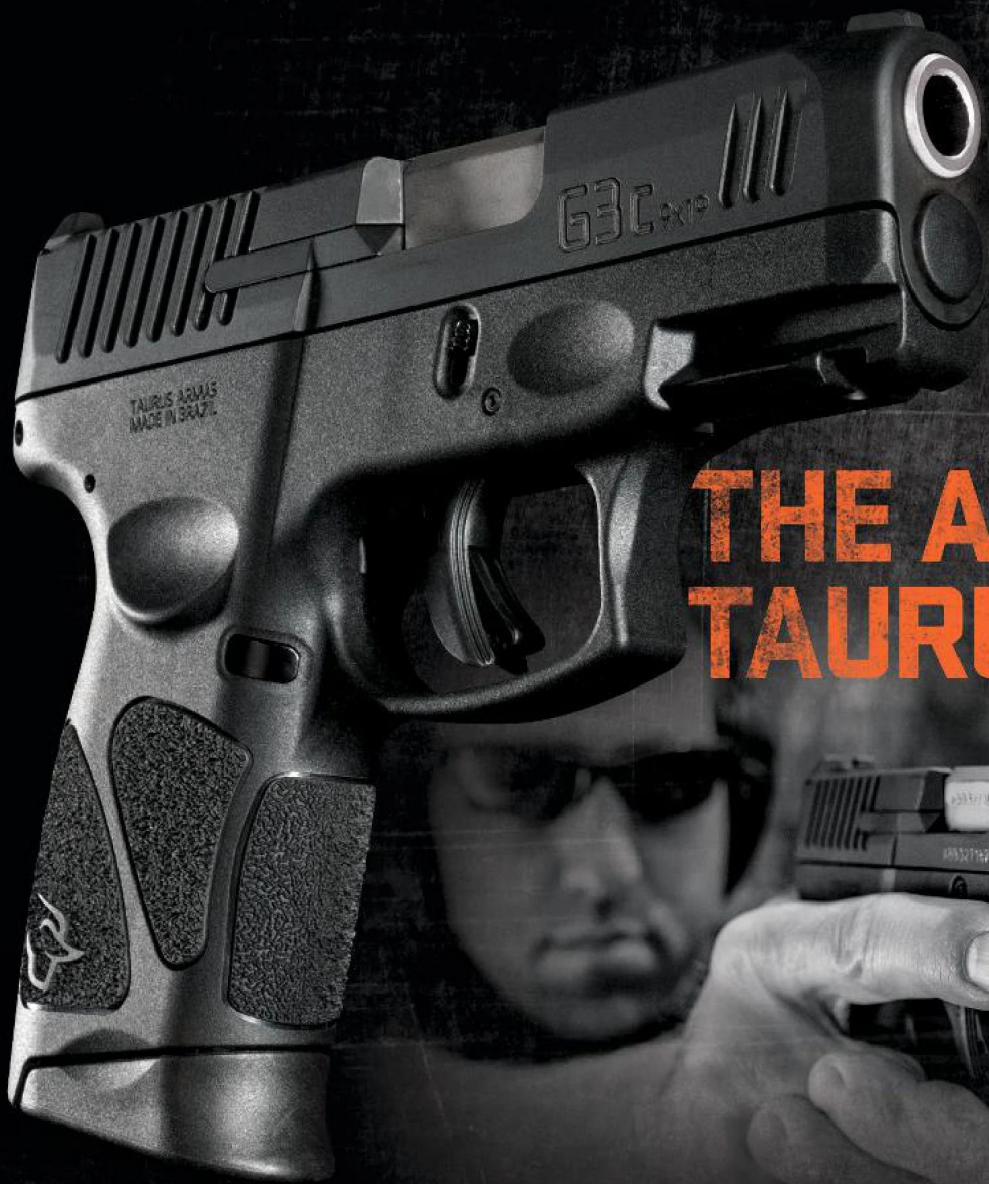
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JEREMY STAFFORD

## THE SUPPORT SIDE

**I REMEMBER HEARING THE PHRASE,** “You don’t have a weak hand.” As a young firearms instructor, I thought that I’d be repeating it to small-statured people in uniform. I never thought I’d have to tell it to myself. You often hear about support-side training, but how many of us have really trained diligently with the support hand? I did, but only on occasion.

It took major surgery on my primary side shoulder to get my mind right about the subject. After the doctor looked at the MRI, he sent me home from police work. I knew things were bad. “You’re not going to work until I fix the shoulder,” he said. “It’s a mess, and it’s gotten worse in the last six months. If we don’t fix it now, it will never be right.” It was time to take medical advice seriously.

The first thing that I was determined to figure out was how I was going to carry and shoot while recovering. In fact, I chose my favorite snub nose: the Smith & Wesson M&P340 capable of shooting .357 Magnum loads. As many know, if there is a cartridge malfunction, simply press the trigger again and move on to the next round.

Unlike a semiauto, there are no malfunction-clearance drills to practice, and no reloading, though I’d only have five rounds. If I had to use it, I better make sure every round counts.

The second consideration was how to carry the gun. I didn’t want to overthink the solution, so I stuck with an inside-the-waistband (IWB) holster that I generally wear in the appendix position. It’s designed to be worn strongside or crossdraw, so I ordered a left-hand version.

Because I don’t normally work on my draw from the left side, I started with dry practice from the holster, unconcealed. I did this in front of a mirror because it helps to make sure that my draw stroke was as efficient as possible. Honestly, it was not pretty. I was all over the place with my movements. My head and torso didn’t listen to the instructions from my brain.

I didn’t go on the timer, but I’m positive my inefficiency was costing at least a half a second. I slowed down and watched myself carefully, and gradually increased speed until I was eventually content with the results.

Mechanics complete, I added a cover garment. Cover garments are a pain to begin with, but clearing a cover garment with the support hand and then drawing with that same hand takes awkward to a new level. I usually don’t get down on myself, but this part of the exercise was humbling. What ended up working best was to drop the hand below the hem of the shirt and rip upwards, hooking the garment with my thumb. Once my hand cleared the butt of the revolver, I’d change direction and drive the hand back down onto the butt of the revolver to obtain a firing grip before reversing direction again to draw the gun. It is definitely not the prettiest draw, but it’s consistent and works with cover garments I’ve tried since. Once I had the technique figured out, I had to slow down, but soon I was able to start pushing my speed while keeping the draw efficient and smooth. When you’re training for speed, there’s no substitute for speed. Smooth is not fast.

Fast is fast. Within a couple of days, I was ready to take my dry practice to the range and go live.

When most folks work on support-side shooting, it’s from a ready position, or an exaggerated mirror image of their primary side stance. I’ve even seen instructors advocate a dueling-type stance when shooting support-side only. All of that overthinking goes out the window when you find yourself in a fight and you have to draw with the support-side hand. Stay in your primary stance and don’t switch your feet; you’re going to have to move. You’ll want to keep your feet in a familiar stance in order to move effectively.

At the range, I started my drills at 3 yards from the target. It was simple enough; I would draw and fire one shot at an NRA B8 bullseye. That’s it, draw and shoot one shot. I did that for about 20 minutes and came to a conclusion: Shooting +P ammunition from





an ultralight gun using only the support hand is not fun. When shooting with both hands, felt recoil is distributed differently, so while the support hand doesn't reduce recoil by half, it does moderate it somewhat. I missed the second hand. With recoil, my accuracy suffered.

I returned home with bruised ego and sore hand before heading back to the drawing board. I practiced diligently with my SIRT pistol so that I could continue to work the muscles in my hand, running the trigger while keeping a sight picture. My favorite drill with the SIRT is to aim at a calendar on the wall about 3 yards away and give each square two presses, working left to right and then down one and right to left.

During my range visit, I started with the same drill at 5 yards using standard-pressure Hornady American Gunner 125-grain XTP load. Speed and accuracy were where they needed to be, so I started working multiple shots; not a

true accelerated pair, but fast enough so that I was pushing some outside of the bull.

When you speed up with one-handed shooting, there are some stance modifications that help. By shifting the weight in your rear foot to the ball and slightly elevating the heel, it will move your center of gravity a bit forward, which allows you to acquire the sights and get that second shot off faster. Unlike shooting with the primary side only, I also benefited from canting the revolver slightly inboard. It was canted no more than 20 degrees, and it made a difference in recoil control.

Post-surgery, my first trip to the range went as well as I could hope. The bulky sling on my primary side made for interesting range theatrics, but because of the work that I put in prior to the surgery, I was able to perform on demand. There are no shortcuts when shooting with the support side, you just have put the work in. **GA**

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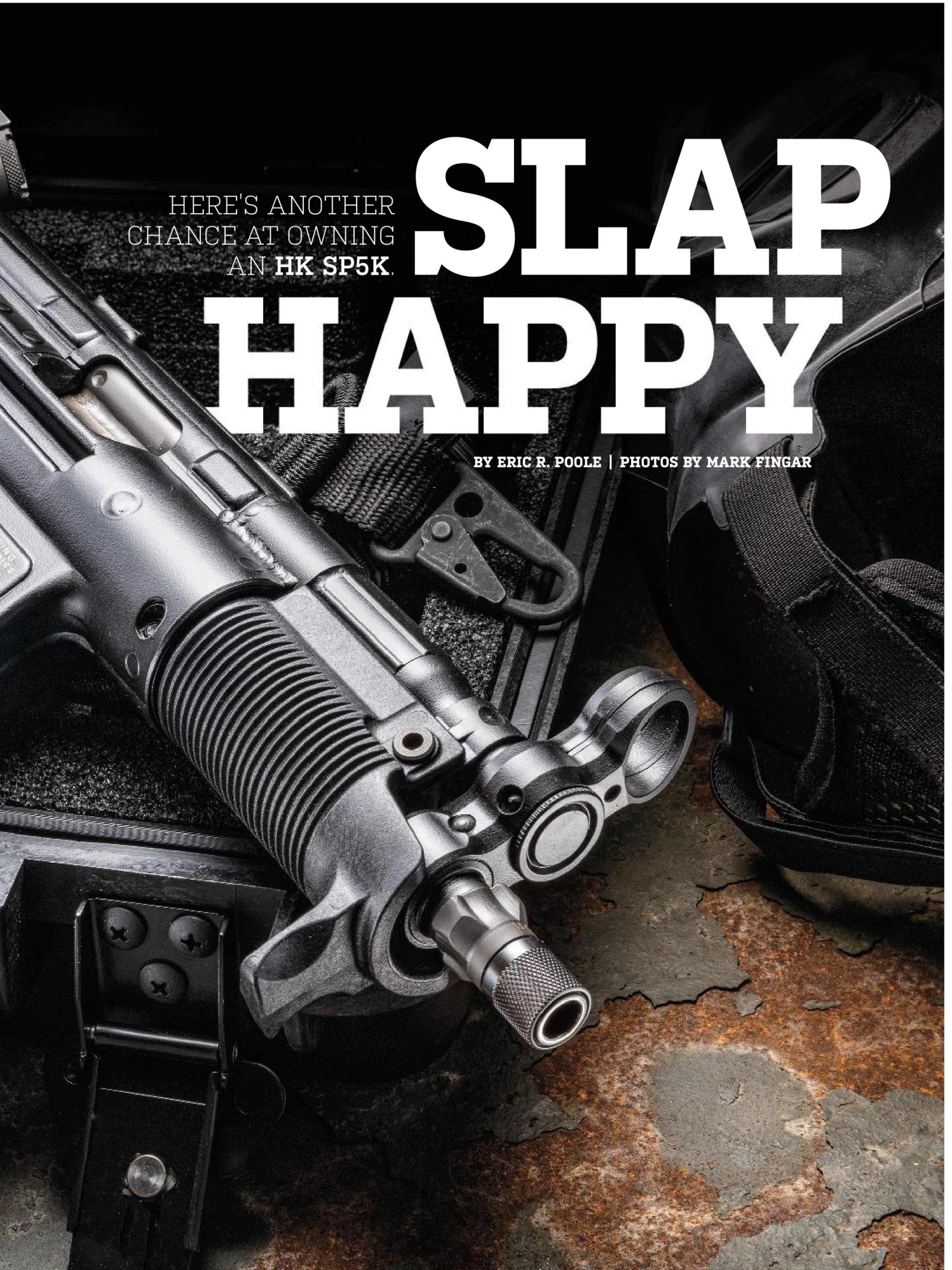




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AN **HK SP5K**.

# SLAP HAPPY

BY ERIC R. POOLE | PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR





“SOMETHING IS ONLY WORTH what someone is willing to pay for it,” Dad used to say. Twenty-seven-hundred dollars is steep money for any pistol, albeit on the low end for some Model 1911s. But the HK SP5K-PDW is not the typical handgun. As a pistol for home defense, a truck (or trunk) gun, or an everyday carry backpack gun, a shortened MP5 variant is more useful in these roles than you might expect.

The new SP5K-PDW is based on the storied MP5 introduced in 1976. Specifically, it’s inspired by the select-fire MP5K, but is most closely related to a shortened semiautomatic HK94 prototype that was revealed as the “P94” at the 1988 SHOT Show. Once the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) authorized its importation, the production model was renamed “SP89” for the year it was approved. It was only offered for a few years before it was eventually restricted. For more of the historical lineage, allow me to refer you to [gunsandammo.com](http://gunsandammo.com) where the first look at the SP5K published in the October 2017 issue will be reposted.

Supply never met demand for the SP5K. Heckler & Koch GmbH factory in Germany operates at full production capacity to keep up with orders for small arms, but every once in a while product managers seize the opportunity to manufacture limited-run line extensions of legacy products such as the SP5K in 2017. Though retail pricing was set at \$2,700, some 1,000 SP5Ks imported to the U.S. were immediately sold, and the few offered today at online gun auctions command more than \$4,000.

#### HK SP5K-PDW

**Type:** Roller-delayed blowback, semiautomatic

**Cartridge:** 9mm

**Capacity:** 10+1, 15+1, or 30+1 rds.

**Barrel:** 4.53 in.

**Overall Length:** 13.12 in.

**Weight:** 4 lbs., 3.2 oz.

**Stock:** None; backplate w/ sling

**Grip:** Polymer

**Finish:** Black

**Trigger:** 7 lbs., 5 oz. (tested)

**Sights:** Post (front); quad notch, rotating drum (rear)

**Safety:** Selector lever, ambidextrous

**MSRP:** \$2,700

**Manufacturer:** Heckler & Koch, 706-568-1906, [hk-usa.com](http://hk-usa.com)

**The Acronyms** “MP” in MP5 stands for *maschinenpistole*, and “SP” *sportpistole* signifies semiautomatic models. The SP5K is only available with (and will only accept) the semiauto trigger group, but that hasn’t detracted from its real-world capability. The “K” designation is from the German word for short — *kurz*. The MP5K and SP5K embodies this translation with a shorter barrel and receiver. Regardless of size, all SP5 and MP5 models share the same HK roller-delayed blowback operating system, which became legendary for its accuracy and smooth-functioning reliability.

The suffix “PDW” is a popular acronym for “Personal Defense Weapon,” and it certainly applies here. Given the 13.8-inch overall length, acceptance of avail-

able 30-round magazines, and ability to sling it up or conceal-carry it in a backpack, make it aptly qualified for the label.

**The Differences** There are a number of changes and additions worth noting between the SP5K released three years ago and the new SP5K-PDW. First, the SP5K-PDW does not come with a factory-installed optic rail as the SP5K did. It’s an unfortunate change because G&A’s sample shot amazingly well when equipped with an Aimpoint T-2 red dot. Of course, there are aftermarket mounts available, but HK-marked parts are preferred among enthusiasts. Sometimes the HK rail mounts appear for sale, but they cost \$400 and sell out quickly.

The SP5K-PDW sports a traditional paddle magazine release in addition to the right-hand magazine release button. The paddle



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New to the SP5K series is a paddle magazine release lever that works in addition to the existing right-side release button.

was absent on SP5K a few years ago, which MP5 fans noticed. It's intuitive to grab an empty magazine and hit the paddle with your thumb before pulling and changing out mags. The purists are now rejoicing for this addition. Paired with the fun-to-slap charging handle, the shooter gets more of the MP5K experience when working the controls of the SP5K-PDW.

The barrel of the SP5K-PDW is also new. The SP5K featured a 4.53-inch barrel that couldn't be threaded or suppressed, and was equipped with a protective plastic handguard that extended beyond the muzzle. Molded with a handstop, the ribbed handguard was similar to the one that appeared on the HK P94, so there was a historical precedent for it. The SP5K-PDW, however, features a so-called "Navy"-style barrel measuring 5.83 inches, and is given an old-school three-lug (aka, "tri-lug") quick-detach suppressor adapter that's been threaded and capped with a removable thread protector. Talk with someone who has shot a suppressed MP5, MP5K or MP5SD, and ask if that wasn't the most fun they've ever had shooting a gun. (It was for me.)

Besides the aforementioned features, the SP5K-PDW is identical to the SP5K.

**Function & Reliability** I was one of a few HK-trained armorers as a U.S. Marine and later went back to HK for



Pull the handle and lift to lock the bolt to the rear. The bolt handle can be slapped to send the bolt forward into battery.



The SP5K-PDW features a 5.83-inch barrel chambered for 9mm. It is complete with a three-lug, threaded suppressor adapter.



Inside the trigger housing is a 9mm semiautomatic-only trigger pack that cannot be converted to automatic or burst modes.

training while working at Blackwater USA. Marines with Special Operations Command (MARSOC), Force Reconnaissance and Military Police Special Reaction Teams (SRT) occasionally used specialized variations including suppressed models. I can attest to the reliability of the MP5 and MP5K. It was rare to see either come into the armory for repair, but when it happened it was usually due to neglect. Besides changing out a few trigger assemblies, I only recall replacing the roller cam retainer plates (and cams) once after a set of plates split in two for a lack of lubrication and maintenance. I can't imagine someone abusing a gun the way those guys did. As a civilian, you should never experience malfunctioning issues with an HK SP5K due to its design.

Maintaining any member of the MP5 family is fun, too. With a gun safely cleared of ammunition, the SP5K-PDW disassembles by pushing two pins at the rear and removing the backplate. One pin secures the backplate to the upper receiver, while the lower pin secures the bottom of the backplate to the polymer trigger housing and through the bottom of the steel receiver. With the backplate



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The SP5K-PDW is easily fieldstripped after removing three push-pins, two at the rear and one securing the handguard.

removed, the bolt, carrier, guiderod and spring assemblies can be withdrawn. The trigger housing is pivoted down and pulled away for removal, also. You can brush and lubricate the trigger's components from the top, but I do not recommend attempting to disassemble the trigger assembly further without training.

The handguard is secured to the front of the receiver by a single pin. Once the pin is removed, it pivots down and comes off by pulling it forward. No further disassembly is required for access to ensure proper care.



The make, model and serial-number markings are on top of the upper receiver, which would be hidden under an optic mount.

**At The Range** Like the MP5's reputation, the SP5K-PDW is more accurate than you'd expect. Despite its short barrel, this pistol had no issues grouping under 2 inches at 25 yards from a benchrest. Using the provided single-point sling, you could slowly do this freehand, as well. It's hard to believe, but the SP5K-PDW is more accurate than most 9mm-chambered AR-type carbines and pistols we've tested — and it fed every type of ammo including heavyweight suppressed loads. ARs are pickier about the ammo you feed them. We never experienced

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SIG Sauer Elite 124-gr. V-Crown JHP	1,221	43	15.4	1.13	1.44
Horn. Amer. Gunner 115-gr. XTP	1,194	25	9.4	1.16	1.88
Federal Prem. HST (LE) 124-gr. JHP	1,226	47	19.5	1.34	1.76

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups shot on a pistol rest from 25 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots recorded by a LabRadar chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle.

a malfunction with the SP5K-PDW. It was no surprise, really.

I personally own an SP5 with 8.86-inch barrel that's closer to the original MP5 design with standard forend. With the SP5's longer barrel, there was only a gain of 50 feet per second (fps) velocity with supersonic loads and 5 fps with subsonic ammo. Ballistically, you're not losing much carrying a K model. Shooting the same loads between the SP5 and the SP5K-PDW, accuracy was identical. The tall, shrouded post front sight paired with the rotating drum rear sight is easy to align sharply and arguably the easiest iron sight pairing to shoot accurately with. For self-defense use, I'm not convinced a red dot is necessary.

(A note to HK purists, the U-notch drum on the HK SP5K-PDW is an HK part and not the same as the diopter-style drum on the HK94, MP5K PDW or MP5K-N.)

I confess, I am an HK fanboy. My dark secret is the obscene amount of money I've spent on HK products, often at times when I couldn't afford them. I'm about to do it again. I used my editorial powers and assigned this new-gun review to myself, just as I did once three years ago before purchasing the last SP5K we reviewed. I could argue "it's a perk of the job," but my motives are admittedly selfish. Please don't hold it against me. If you get a chance to shoot one, you'd become a fanboy too. 



The adjustable rear drum sight features four progressively wider notches. Sights were zeroed in a machine rest at 25 meters. One-quarter turn equals .55 inch at 25m.



The SP5K-PDW is provided with an excellent, custom-fitted, HK-branded hardcase. Two magazines, a sight tool and single-point sling are included.





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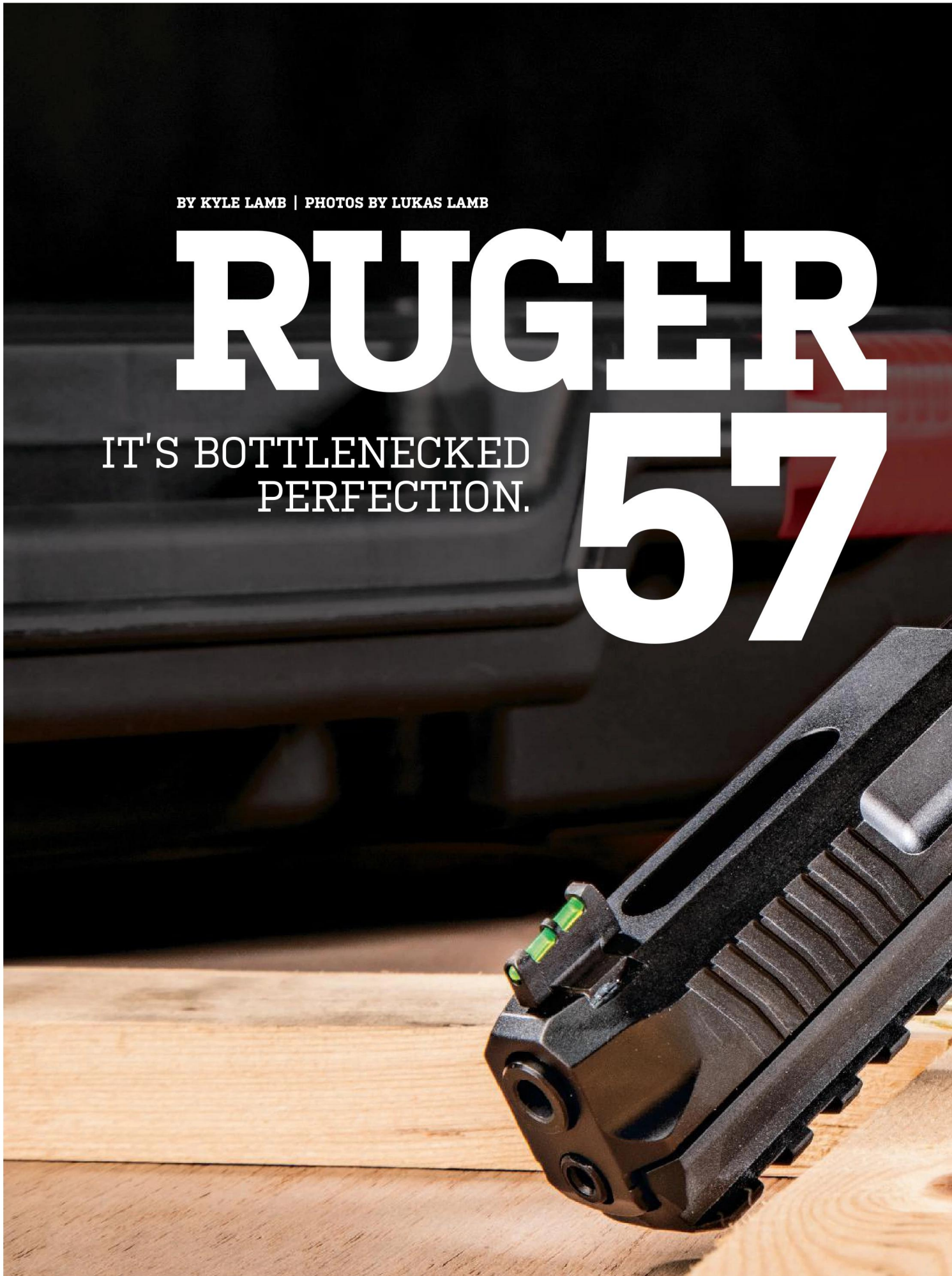


BY KYLE LAMB | PHOTOS BY LUKAS LAMB

# RUGGER

IT'S BOTTLENECKED  
PERFECTION.

# 57







### Ruger 57

**Type:** Delayed blowback, hammer fired, semiautomatic

**Cartridge:** 5.7x28mm

**Capacity:** 20+1 rds.

**Barrel:** 4.94 in., 1:9-in. twist

**Overall Length:** 8.65 in.

**Weight:** 1 lb., 8.5 oz.

**Grip:** Glass-filled nylon, textured

**Finish:** Black nitride (steel)

**Trigger:** 4 lbs., 5 oz.

**Sights:** Fiber optic (front); adjustable notch (rear)

**Safety:** Firing pin block; trigger lever; thumb lever

**MSRP:** \$799

**Manufacturer:** Ruger, 336-949-5200, ruger.com

**I HEARD THE HYPE.** Another company offering a new product chambering the 5.7x28mm. There hasn't been a lot; the FN Five-seveN, FN P90/PS90, and a few brands better known for making AR-15s. FN's pistol, introduced in 1998, is often what we think back to when the cartridge is mentioned, but here comes Ruger with a new handgun that no one asked for.

The patent for the Five-seveN pistol was submitted in 1993, three years after the FN P90 submachine gun and 5.7mm cartridge were introduced. However, the Five-seveN pistol was delayed internationally until 2000. Commercially, the U.S. market didn't receive the semiautomatic PS90 and Five-seveN until 2004, and by then a number of police agencies and special forces units in other parts of the world were already using variants of them.

Early loads of the 5.7mm round quickly put the cartridge and the partnership between FN and Federal, the exclusive distributor of FN's private-labeled ammunition, in the media's crosshairs after the Brady Campaign noticed certain rounds could penetrate Level IIA Kevlar vests. Since, FN only offers 5.7 sporting rounds that won't pierce armor to civilians such as the SS197R, a conventional jacketed lead-

core projectile with polymer tip. Two separate attempts by the Brady Campaign to ban the guns through Congress failed.

I can imagine that Ruger has a new-product-launch calendar on the wall that they don't tell anyone about. Shortly after FN's patent on the Five-seveN pistol expired, Ruger released its "57" pistol. To me, it looked average in pictures, but when it arrived at the local gun shop, I was surprised at how large the pistol is. I have large hands and it is a handful. It measures 8¾ inches front to rear and 5½ inches from top to bottom. Even for its size, the Ruger-57 is relatively light. It weighs in at 1 pound, 13 ounces, when given a loaded 20-round magazine.

Someone who has shot a pistol (including the FN Five-seveN) obviously

had input on the controls of the new Ruger-57. I was glad to see that when handling the Ruger. Another exciting observation when I removed the 57 from its black box was that there were two 20-round magazines inside. Pretty cool, but I had to think back and remember that the Five-seveN also included an extra 20 rounder. Regardless, 20 rounds trumps 15, 17 rounds, or whatever, so if not having to reload as often is a consideration of yours in planning your self-defense strategy or time at the range, the Ruger-57 has that going for it. (Ruger's mags are also made of steel and drop free on release.)



**Control Freak** On the outside of the Ruger-57, you will find the usual. Ruger's safe-minded Secure-Action fire-control system features a protected internal hammer resulting in a short-stroke, double-action trigger.

NO FALL SPORTS? SAYS WHO?

# POINTER

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Internally, the Ruger-57 was designed with a hammer-fired action having a manual thumb safety that operates as a Model 1911's. Flip up (above, left) to engage the safety, and depress to fire.



Controls of the Ruger-57 are intuitively located. The slide-release lever is fenced in by the molded frame, while the takedown lever is low-profile. Other controls are pronounced for easy reach.

Ambidextrous, extended thumb safety levers are on both sides of the Ruger-57, and it operates as most thumb safeties on a Model 1911. (Up is safe, and down is fire.) As with most 1911s, the safety lever also interrupts the slide and prevents the shooter from pulling the slide to the rear with the safety engaged. I like this feature given that many of us have become used to shooting 1911-type actions.

Speaking of 1911s, the original FN Five-seveN offered familiar handling thanks to sharing an 18-degree grip angle with "Old Slabslides," and the trait is carried over in the Ruger-57. There isn't a grip safety, thank goodness, but there is a trigger safety as you would see on many polymer-framed guns these days. The slide-release lever (or slide lock depending on what service school you went to), is also in the right place to allow the shooter to use with their thumb on the safety without interfering with the locking of the slide on the last round in the magazine.

I mentioned that the grip is rather large, measuring a touch



Don't call it plastic! Ruger indicates the grip frame is molded using a proprietary "glass-filled nylon" for increased strength and rigidity. The grip is evenly covered by a rough-textured surface.

over 2 inches front to rear, but the texture on all sides of the grip makes the pistol very controllable. This texture also makes the lower receiver pretty sexy, if you are into beauty.

The front of the triggerguard has a hook at the bottom edge, not really there to serve a purpose in my opinion, but some may like the aesthetics. There is also a full-length rail on the bottom of the dustcover, which is a nice effect for those who would like to add any-size pistol light or laser on the market.

The through-hardened, billet-steel slide assembly is also very slick. The slide is drilled and tapped for easy mounting of optics with separately available optic adapter plates, which can be purchased at [shopruger.com](http://shopruger.com).



The slide wears front serrations and a rail that will accept longer lights and lasers. The fiber-optic sight is drift adjustable.

When you first see the Ruger-57, some might think it was based on a large 1911, but once the takedown lever is pushed out and flipped clockwise, the guts tell a different story. The black-nitride-coated barrel looks dainty, but it's an alloy steel. When you factor in that it only has to surround a 5.7mm bullet, it is plenty beefy. The barrel doesn't tilt, and the slide is lightened with an elongated window cut lengthwise behind the front sight. This may offend some of the internet's tacticians, but I thought the lighter-weight slide was functional and attractive. The slide also sports front and rear cocking serrations as well as bull-nose scallops

at the front edge of the slide.

Inside of the trigger mechanism, I found an extremely small hammer that slaps a lightweight firing pin. The sear is neutrally balanced while possessing significant engagement and strong spring tension. This pistol looks and feels much more like a striker gun, but the hammer inside does cock and lock. There's a hammer catch to help prevent the hammer from contacting



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The rear sight is adjustable for windage and elevation, but it requires a thin-bladed flat-head screwdriver tip.



the firing pin unless the trigger is pulled. When you use the trigger, it doesn't cock and fire as you might expect. It's ready to go more like a single-action pistol that's already in the fire position, which helps to explain its decent trigger feel.

To take the pistol apart, start by locking the slide to the rear and depressing the button on the right side of the gun, opposite the takedown lever, until it clicks. Ruger recommends using the basepad of the magazine as a tool for this step. Having released the takedown lever on the left side of the gun, it can now be rotated 90 degrees, clockwise. Next, the slide can be released and eased forward until the rear of the slide is off and just forward of the rear rails. At this point, the slide can be lifted up and off of the frame, and the captured spring assembly and barrel can be removed. The process is safe, requiring no trigger pulls, and reassembly is accomplished by reversing the steps.

I expected that I'd be comparing this pistol to a rimfire auto, but there isn't any relation. The first few rounds from the Ruger-57 told a story of a speed demon that launches Hornady's 40-grain V-Max rounds at an average of 1,725 feet-per-second (fps). This is no .22 LR.

As I gathered bullet speeds for this report, I started to shoot groups on bullseyes. The pistol wasn't as accurate as I anticipated, but in the end the accuracy was sufficient with both loads on hand averaging very near 2 inches at 25 yards. The FN-labeled 40-grainers with blue-tipped Hornady V-Max projectiles edged the new Federal 40-grain full metal jacket (FMJ) load in accuracy. The FN load simply added 100 fps with speeds averaging 1,725 fps. (I can't wait for Speer's Gold Dot.)

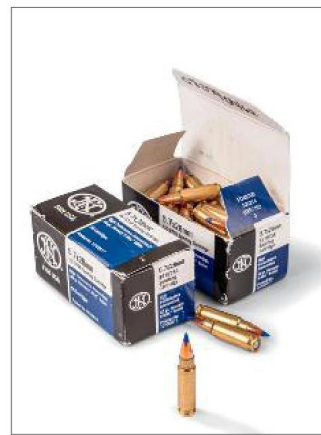
The sights on the Ruger-57 are fully adjustable at the rear. The front sight is a green fiber optic. I really liked the sights, but the green fiber is rather large for a pistol if you intend to shoot it for accuracy. The rear is serrated, and the front is quick to see.

I may have a problem because this pistol speaks "hunting" to me. The Ruger-57 would be medicine for arma-

**PERFORMANCE**

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Federal American Eagle 40-gr. FMJ	1,620	44	13	1.62	2.27
FNH SS197SR 40-gr. V-Max	1,725	35	12	1.66	1.94

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups from a benchrest at 25 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots measured with a Oehler Model 35P chronograph placed 7 feet in front of the muzzle.



dillos, badgers and ground hogs. The FN load with the Hornady V-Max bullet traveling at 1,725 fps would simply devastate them.

If you are considering this pistol for self-defense, I'd say that it is a home run in the

shootability category. With minimal recoil (less than most 9mm pistols) and great capacity, the Ruger-57 could be a great choice for those reasons. Penetration against two-legged threats may be an issue given the small 40-grain bullets, but 20 rounds of 5.7mm could change the course of violence against you.

The Ruger-57 retails for \$799, which may seem steep for a pistol to many, but keep in mind that before it hit the market, the FN Five-seveN it rivals was near \$1,400 at the counter. Today, the Five-seveN has been given a price adjustment, but owning that version will still set you back \$1,199. The Ruger-57 is well worth \$800 in my mind, and it's backed by Ruger. I look forward to sticking a small red dot on one and seeing how well it would shoot with a finer, crisper aiming point.

Ruger just made another highly desirable firearm for those of us who love to shoot. A Ruger-57 is a must; I don't know why, but I gotta have one. It's fun, easy to shoot and offers performance of the 5.7mm. Stand back and watch this. **GA**

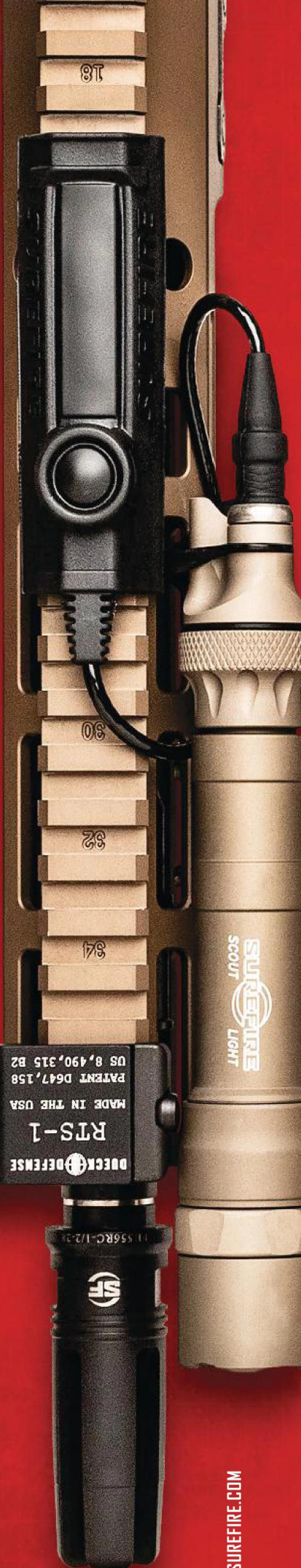
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# SESQUI



Marking its 150th anniversary, Marlin is offering Limited Editions: Model 444 in .444 Marlin (\$1,899); a Model 60 in .22 LR (\$399); and ammo with special headstamps and packaging, including loads in .30-30, .35 Rem., .444 Marlin, .45-70 Gov't and .22 LR (\$13.87-\$49.99) for 2020 only.

# CENTENNIAL

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF MARLIN FIREARMS.

BY CRAIG BODDINGTON

AT A QUICK GLANCE, it's easy to mischaracterize Marlin as the "lever-action" company. Marlin has been in the lever-action business since 1881 and, over time, became the world's largest producer of lever-action firearms. In fact, Marlin's 30-millionth lever gun was made in 2008, and there have been many more since.

Marlin's lever-actions are important, but they are only a partial picture of Marlin's heritage. In 150 years of continuous production, Marlin has manufactured nearly every type of firearm. Since 1891, Marlin has been a major producer of .22 rimfire rifles, including more than 10 million Model 60 semiautos and more than 2 million Model 39As. Thanks in large part to this success, there were times when Marlin could lay claim as "the world's largest producer of sporting rifles."

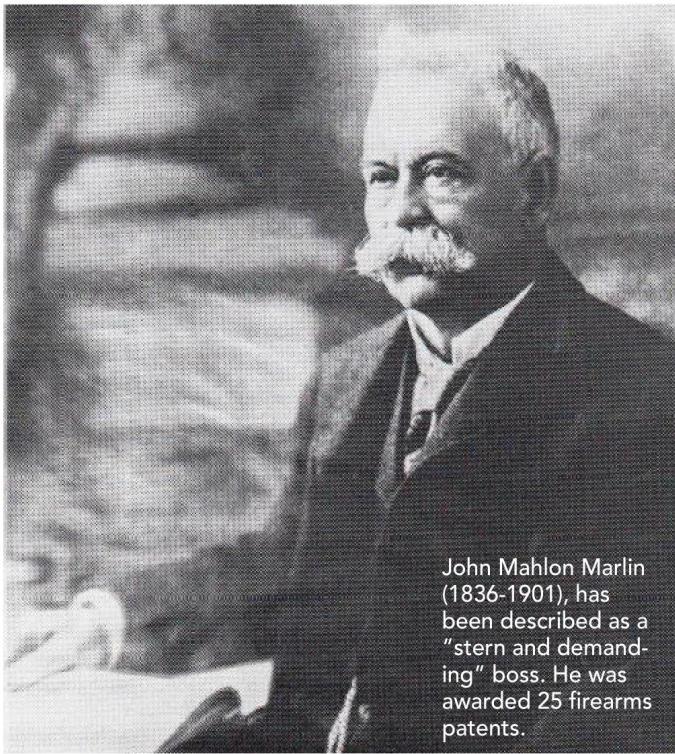
**John M. Marlin,  
Pistol Maker** John Mahlon Marlin (1836-1901) was born in Hartford

County, Connecticut, apprenticing to the American Machine Works in 1854 at age 18. His next decade is unclear, but he spent time working as a machinist and toolmaker for Colt in Hartford. What is clear, as detailed by Col. William Brophy in his standard reference, "Marlin Firearms — A History Of The Guns And The Company That Made Them" (Stackpole Books, 1989), is Marlin's listing in New Haven's city directory. From 1863 to 1867, it reads: "John M. Marlin — pistol maker!"

John Marlin's first products were small, single-shot pocket pistols, often referred to a "derringers," an irre-

versible corruption of Philadelphia gunmaker Henry Deringer. Production started in 1863 with what Marlin collectors now refer to as "1st Model." This pre-dates Marlin's "official" 1870 beginning. In 1868 to '69, he was again in Hartford, perhaps raising capital and working on his first patent, issued April 5, 1870, for an ejector system for the small single-shot pistols with swing-out barrel. New Haven's 1870 directory again lists Marlin as "pistol maker." From 1871, his New Haven listing is elevated to "manufacturer of firearms" and, in 1875, to "pistol manufacturer."

John Marlin made five models of single-shot derringers through 1881 with total production at about 17,000. In the style of the times, successive models had whimsical names: OK, Victor, Never Miss, and Stonewall. Starting in 1870, Marlin also manufactured solid-frame .22 Short pocket revolvers, adding a tip-up barrel revolver in 1872. These "Standard" revolvers, in several models and multiple versions, were similar to the early Smith & Wesson pocket revolvers, which were protected by the Rollin White patent until it expired in 1869. The lineage of these small pocket revolvers runs from S&W to Manhattan Firearms Company, and then to American Standard Tool Company, which dissolved in 1873. The Marlin revolvers included mechanical improvements and are distinctive with a birds-head grip, and are consistently marked "J. M. MARLIN NEW HAVEN, CT." All were single-action-only and primarily rimfire, cham-



John Mahlon Marlin (1836-1901), has been described as a "stern and demanding" boss. He was awarded 25 firearms patents.

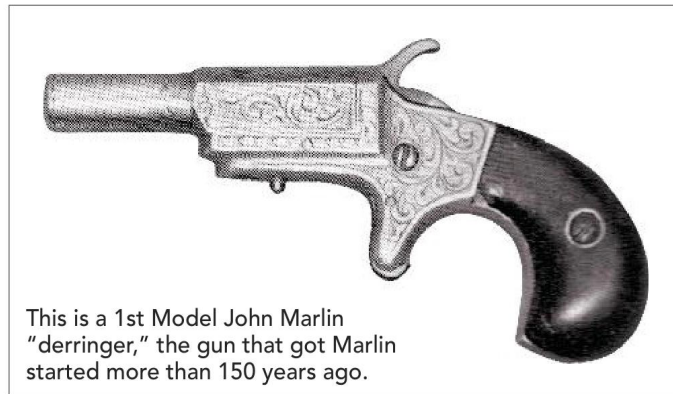


This display shows 95 different variations of Marlin pocket pistols and revolvers. From left, single-shot derringers; the first Marlin revolvers, Never Miss and Joker; the next three panels show Standard rimfire revolvers; and the next panel is the .38 Standard of 1878; the last panel is the 1887 double-action revolver. Only one known variation is missing: an engraved XXXStandard. Only two are known, one of which is in the Cody Firearm Museum. (Photo courtesy Rick Regnier)

bered variously to .22, .30, and .32 Short and Long cartridges, with no triggerguard. The first centerfire was the .38 Standard 1878, manufactured from 1878 to 1887 and chambered to .38 S&W.

The Marlin top-break double-action revolver was introduced in 1887, first as a five-shot .38 S&W and then .32 S&W (1888). By this time, both S&W and Colt were knee-deep in double-action revolvers. The Marlin is most similar to the S&W, but was protected by three 1887 John Marlin patents: A cylinder-locking mechanism, a cylinder-retaining catch, and an extractor mechanism. The second variation (from 1888) replaces Marlin's extractor with D. H. Rice's extractor, patented in 1888 and assigned to the Marlin Fire Arms Company. Previous handguns were roll-marked "J.M. MARLIN", while the double-actions were roll-marked "MARLIN FIRE ARMS COMPANY" or, in grip logos, "MFAC." Produced until 1899, the double-actions were the last Marlin handguns to date.

Rick Regnier, of the Marlin Firearm Collectors Association (MFCA, marlin-collectors.com), tells us there were 96 distinct variations. The MFCA is an active group, and provided invaluable assistance in

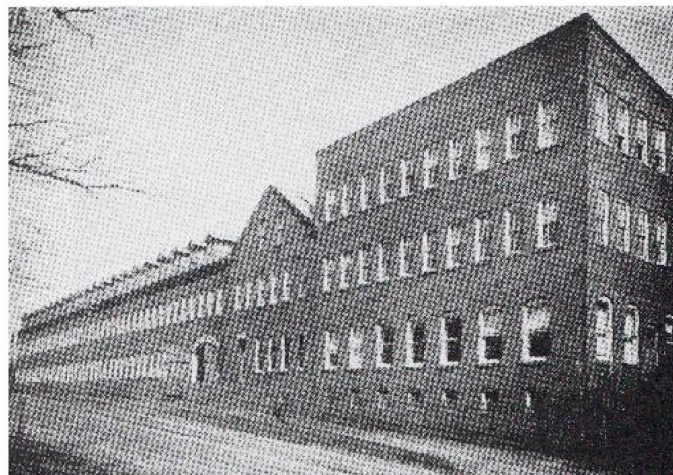


This is a 1st Model John Marlin "derringer," the gun that got Marlin started more than 150 years ago.

developing this article. Few of us think of Marlin as a handgun manufacturer, but total production exceeded 100,000!

**Into Lever Actions** In the 1870s, Oliver Winchester was doing well with lever-action rifles. Marlin lived in Winchester's shadow for decades, but it's a fact of history that Oliver Winchester was a busi-

nessman, not a gun guy. A partial secret to Winchester's success was B. Tyler Henry, a great gun guy who brought us the Henry, the improved Winchester 1866, and the successful Winchester 1873. John Marlin was a gun guy, too. He acquired and hired a lot of talent, and had a role in the design and manufacturing of all 19th-century Marlin firearms.



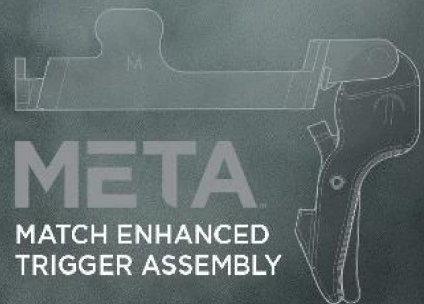
The earliest known photo of the Marlin plant in New Haven, Connecticut, circa 1909.

In the 1870s, Marlin developed tool-room prototypes of both centerfire and .22 lever-actions. The Model 1881 centerfire was the first production rifle, incorporating patents of Andrew Burgess, H.F. Wheeler, E.A.F. Toepperwein — and John M. Marlin. Side-loading and top-eject, the 1881 Marlin was the first repeating rifle capable of housing the big .45-70 Government cartridge. Of necessity, it was a large, heavy rifle, initially with a 28-inch

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The 2-millionth Marlin Model 39A was engraved by Alvin White and presented to the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) for auction to raise funds for shooting education. (Photos courtesy Morphy Auctions)

An ornate Model 1895 .45-70 was produced in 1995 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Marlin's Model 1895. This one was presented to the NSSF for the 1995 SHOT Show auction. Engraving was by Bottega C. Giovanelli. (Photos courtesy Morphy Auctions)

octagon barrel. The under-barrel tubular magazine held 10 cartridges, contributing considerably to overall weight.

With about 20,000 produced through 1903, the 1881 began Marlin's long tradition of big, powerful lever-action rifles. The 1881 Marlin was probably a superior rifle to Winchester's big Model 1876 Centennial, which was also not a huge seller.

Marlin's Model 1888 was also a side-loading, top-eject lever-action. Designed by Lewis L. Hepburn, it was a smaller and much lighter rifle chambered to .32-20 Win., .38-40 Win., and .44-40 Win. Production was limited because the 1888 was quickly replaced by the Model 1889. Also designed by Hepburn, the Model 1889 included then-new features that became hallmarks of Marlin lever-actions such as the solid, flat-topped receiver and side ejection. The 1889 was chambered to the same cartridges as the 1888, with .25-20 Win. added later. Production continued until 1903 with 55,000 produced.

Then Marlin's lever-action history becomes complicated as the 1891, 1892, 1893, 1894 and 1895 were introduced in quick succession. Both the Marlin 1891 and 1892 were primarily .22 rimfires, but were also chambered to .32 rimfire. Uniquely, the firing pin could be switched to centerfire (the firing pin was supplied), so .32 Short and Long could be used.

Another Hepburn design, the Marlin Model 1893 was essentially an improvement of his 1889, with different bolt lock-up and a two-piece firing pin. It has a longer action, introduced in blackpowder



Cape buffalo have been taken by Marlin levers including this bull by a Marlin Custom Shop Model 1895 in .45-70.

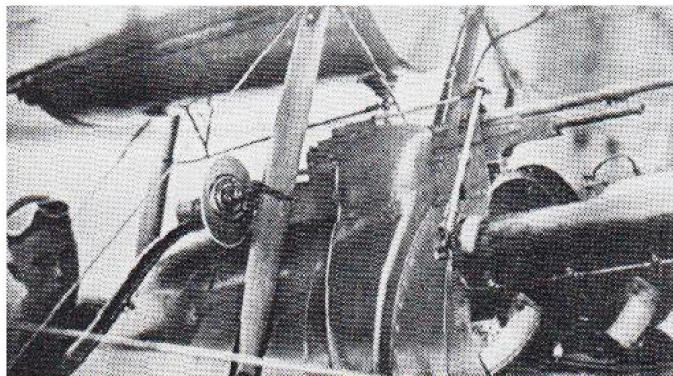


The popularity of the big-bore lever action, often called the "guide gun," has made the M1895 and M444 more popular than ever before.

.32-40 and .38-55 Win., but was also stronger and suitable for smokeless powder, with .30-30 Win. and .32 Win. Special (WS) added later. The Model 1893 was, and is, Marlin's longest-running and best-selling lever-action rifle with five model changes to date: M93 (1905); M1936 (1936); M36 (1937); and M336 (1948). Changes were primarily cosmetic until the 336, which replaced the traditional Marlin square bolt with the round bolt found on today's Models 336, 444 (1965), and 1895 (1972). In a base model, the Model 336 was also marketed from 1964 to 1983 under the Glenfield name as M36 (1964) and M30 (1966). When the Glenfield line was discontinued in 1984, Marlin continued to market a no-frills 336 as the M30AS.

Variations are seemingly endless with chamberings including .219 Zipper, .35 Rem., .356 Win. (.307 Win. was also catalogued but never produced), .44 Rem. Mag., .444 Marlin, .45-70, .450 Marlin and, more recently, .308 and .338 Marlin Express. More than 3.5 million have been manufactured, making the Marlin 336 the world's second-most popular sporting rifle (after the Winchester Model 1894).

Marlin's Model 1894 was a return to, and improvement



A Marlin aircraft machine gun was mounted to fire between the blades of a spinning propeller. Marlin was one of the largest producers of automatic small arms used in World War I.

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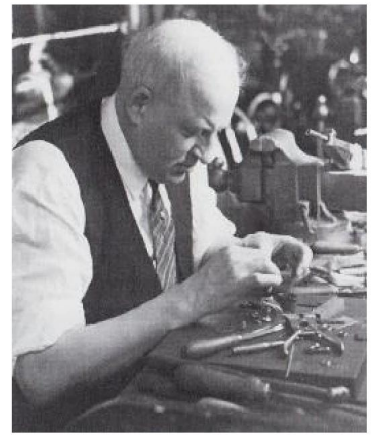
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over, the short-action Models 1888 and 1889, and chambered to the same “pistol cartridges.” The M1894 remains in production today with relatively few changes. In addition to .25-20, .32-20, .38-40, and .44-40, the M1894 has been chambered to the .22 WMR (rimfire), .218 Bee, .357 Magnum, .45 Colt, and .44 Magnum.

The original Model 1895 is essentially the same action as the M1893, but upsized for larger cartridges. It was probably manufactured until 1915, with a lightweight version catalogued through 1917. Chamberings included .38-56, .40-65 (.40-60 Marlin), .40-82, .45-70, and .45-90. Like the M1893, it was suitable for smokeless powder, with .33 Win. added in 1912. In 1972, Marlin proudly borrowed the 1895 model designation when they brought out the New Model 1895, using an upsized version of the round-bolt M336 action. The original M1895 didn't sell much better than the large-action 1881, but the .45-70 refuses to die. In recent years, largely sparked by the “guide gun” concept, big-bore lever actions earned a new lease on life. Marlin catalogues an array of M1895 rifles, from traditional with walnut, blued steel and octagon barrels to modern with laminate, synthetic, stainless steel and Cerakote. They have also brought back the M444 in the powerful .444 Marlin, choosing it for one of their embellished 150th Anniversary limited editions.

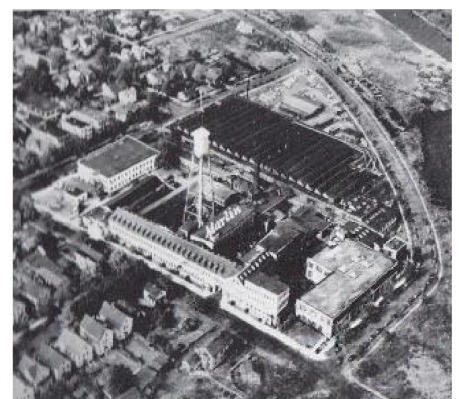
**.22s, Shotguns & More** Marlin's first .22, the M1891, primarily a Hepburn design, was offered in side-loading and tube-loading, with the magazine patented by John Marlin. Called the “Safety Repeating Rifle,” the M1891 had a lever-activated safety that created some play in the trigger. Many shooters didn't like it. Even so, the 1891 was successful, and even used by Annie Oakley for exhibition shooting. The 1891 Marlin was the first repeater to accept .22 Short, Long, Long Rifle and .22 shot cartridges, which Oakley no doubt used to shatter her glass balls.

Although designated M1892, the M1891's successor didn't appear until 1896. It was essentially identical, side-eject and solid top, but with a different trigger system that precluded firing unless the lever was fully closed, a feature continued on the M39 and 39A. The M1897 was almost identical to the M1892, except it added a takedown feature that had become popular on centerfire lever-actions. Operated by a large knurled screw on the right side of the receiver, this feature continued to the 39 and 39A. The M1897 was discontinued in 1915 because of World War I production. In 1922, the newly formed Marlin Firearms Corporation catalogued the M39 lever-action .22, essentially identical to the M1897, but modified in 1932 to accept high-velocity .22 Long Rifle. In 1939, the designation was changed to 39A, which would become another of Marlin's million-sellers. Although not yet back in production, my friends at Marlin assure us that we'll see the Model 39A again.



Carl Gustaf “Gus” Swebilius (1879–1948) was Marlin's chief engineer and designer from 1914 through the Twenties. Some 36 of his firearms patents were assigned to Marlin.

The Marlin plant in New Haven, Connecticut, as it was seen from an aircraft during World War II.

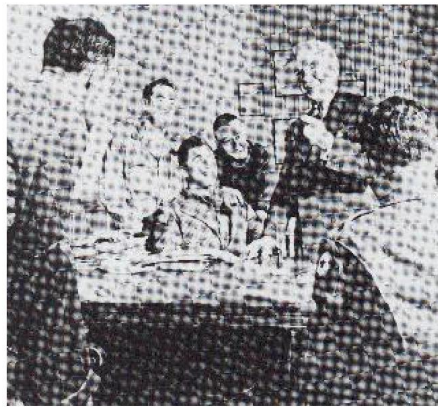




Marlin's Levermatic series, a modern design with a very short lever throw, arrived in 1955. Offered in both tubular magazine and clip-fed versions, the rimfire Levermatics were Models 56 and 57, with the centerfire M62 introduced in 1962. The M62 was a fast, accurate little rifle in search of a good cartridge. It was initially chambered to the short-lived .256 Win. Mag., with a .30 Carbine version added in 1962.

Starting in 1930, Marlin manufactured a series of semiautomatic .22s, sound rifles all, but none were winners. In 1959, they found success with a semi-auto .22 designed by Marlin engineer Ewald Nichol. Introduced as the Model 99, Nichol's action has been offered in numerous configurations and model designations (99C, 989, 990, 995, 65, 70, 75), but since 1960 it has been best-known — and is still manufactured — as the M60, probably the world's second-best-selling .22 (following Bill Ruger's 10/22). The Model 60 was chosen, along with the M444, to celebrate Marlin's 150th anniversary.

From 1906 to 1932, Marlin produced a series of slide-action rifles, including both rimfire and centerfire models. They got in the bolt-action business in 1935. Although



Frank Kenna Sr. (1874-1947), discusses with war veterans ideas of starting their own businesses. Frank Kenna led Marlin from 1926 until 1947, and two more generations of Kennas would lead Marlin for the next 60 years.

perhaps best-known for their rugged, accurate rimfires, they have also produced several centerfire models, plus a bolt-action shotgun in several versions, as well as a slug gun and a 10 gauge. Starting in 1898, Marlin was also a major producer of slide-action shotguns, including early exposed-hammer designs and hammerless pump guns later. Between 1937 and 1963, they also produced about 34,000 M90 over/under shotguns in numerous configurations. Much less known is that in 1935 Marlin purchased Hunter Arms Company that manufactured the L.C. Smith side-by-side shotguns, one of very few American sidelock shotguns. Marlin reorganized

L.C. Smith Gun Company as a subsidiary, manufacturing at the old Fulton, New York, plant from 1945 to 1949, and produced a some 58,000 shotguns! Operations ceased when part of the floor of the factory collapsed, fortunately in the middle of the night. Parts and machinery were salvaged and moved to Marlin's New Haven plant. Under Frank Kenna Jr.'s leadership, Marlin brought the L.C. Smith sidelock back. Between 1968 and 1971, nearly 2,000 were produced, but continuing production was not cost-effective.



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**The War Effort** In April 1915, with World War I just six months old, Marlin was approached on a contract for 100,000 7x57 Mauser rifles. Marlin President Mahlon Marlin demurred, believing such an order was too large to deliver in a timely manner. But Marlin would not stay out of the war. In December 1915, the Marlin Fire Arms Company was acquired by a syndicate and the Marlin Arms Corporation was formed, with the name soon changed to Marlin-Rockwell. Marlin was headed by Albert Rockwell from 1915 to 1920.

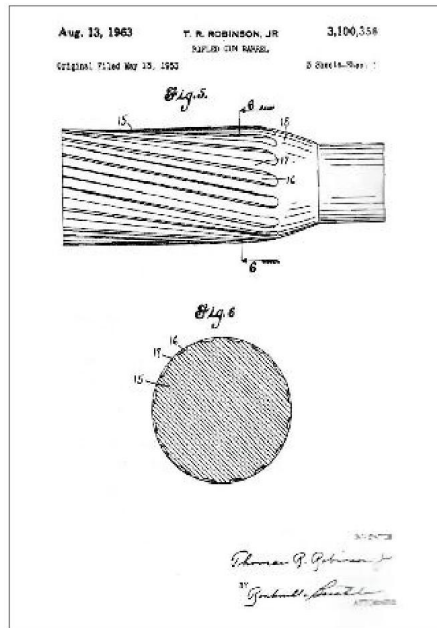
Part of the arrangement was an initial contract to produce 12,000 1914 Colt machine guns. The so-called “potato digger” was significantly improved into the 1917 Marlin-Rockwell machine gun. Marlin became one of the largest producers of machine guns, making both Colt and Browning 1918 guns for aircraft use. In 1918, they received a contract for 20,000 Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR), delivering 16,000 by the end of the war. During World War I, Marlin-Rockwell produced more than 60,000 machine guns and Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR).

During World War II, virtually all

manufacturing facilities focused on the war effort. Marlin manufactured about 15,000 United Defense M42 sub-machine guns, but the majority of the wartime manufacture was parts. Hundreds of thousands of stocks, handguards, and barrels for

the M1 carbine, barrel assemblies for the Garand, and various parts for both aircraft and small arms were made. During the Korean War, Marlin tooled up again, producing Garand and carbine parts, and thousands of barrels for the M3 sub-machine gun. Many World War II parts are not marked as made by Marlin, but carbine barrels and all barrels made during the Korean era are stamped “MARLIN”.

**Legacy** Between 1870 and 1889, Marlin was awarded 25 firearms-related patents, but Marlin also recognized talent. Firearms designer Andrew Burgess did work for Colt, Winchester, and Whitney, but fully 12 of his patents were used in early Marlin lever-actions. Lewis Hepburn was both an inventor and a champion long-range competitor. He came to Marlin from Remington in 1886, and during his 30 years with Marlin was awarded 26



The patent drawing for Marlin's Micro-Groove rifling, awarded to T.R. Robinson in 1953.

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patents. Carl Gustav “Gus” Swebilius followed Hepburn as Marlin’s chief engineer and designer, serving both Marlin and Marlin-Rockwell from 1914 until 1929, during which he was awarded 36 patents assigned to Marlin. In 1926, Swebilius formed the High Standard Manufacturing Company, turning to manufacturing High Standard pistols in 1931.

After his father’s death, Mahlon H. Marlin assumed the reins of the company as president and treasurer, working with his brother John H. Marlin, who served as vice president and secretary, continuing business as usual until World War I intervened. Albert Rockwell led Marlin well during the war, but after the war there were tough times. John Moran led the Marlin Firearms Corporation in 1921, but it failed a year later. Frank Kenna Sr. formed a new Marlin Firearms Company in 1926. A shrewd businessman and great leader, Kenna (Sr.) led Marlin through the depression and World War II, and his legacy remains indelibly etched on Marlin to this day. His eldest son, Roger T. Kenna, took the reins following his father’s death in 1947. It was during Roger Kenna’s presidency, in 1953, that Marlin’s unique Micro-Groove rifling was patented and adopted across Marlin rifles.

Roger Kenna died at just 49, in 1959, but was succeeded by his younger brother, Frank Kenna Jr. Frank Kenna Jr. would lead Marlin for the next 35 years, but that was hardly the end of the Kenna dynasty. In 1995, Frank Kenna Jr. became chairman of Marlin, and Roger Kenna’s son, Stephen assumed the presidency. In 1999, Frank Kenna Jr. retired. His son, Frank Kenna III became chairman, and remained in that post until Marlin’s sale to Remington in 2007.

It must be admitted that Marlin had challenges following its acquisition by Remington, in large part resulting from closure of plants in Gardner, Massachusetts, and North Haven, Connecticut, and movement to Remington facilities in Kentucky, North Carolina, and New York. Today, the picture isn’t all roses, but Marlin’s signature lever-actions are making a significant comeback in popularity. From rifles I’ve seen, that “stern and demanding” John Mahlon Marlin would be pleased. **GA**

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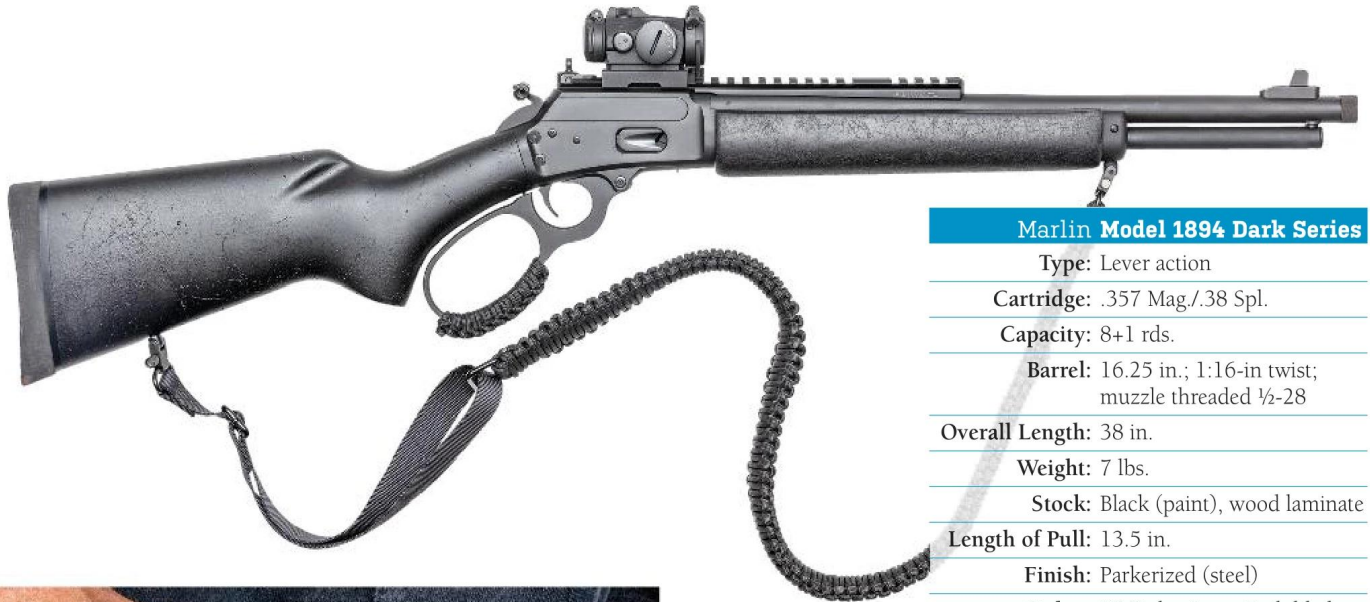
# MARLIN'S DARK

BY TOM BECKSTRAND | PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR

# SERIES 1894

PISTOL CALIBERS  
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#### Marlin Model 1894 Dark Series

Type:	Lever action
Cartridge:	.357 Mag./ .38 Spl.
Capacity:	8+1 rds.
Barrel:	16.25 in.; 1:16-in twist; muzzle threaded 1/2-28
Overall Length:	38 in.
Weight:	7 lbs.
Stock:	Black (paint), wood laminate
Length of Pull:	13.5 in.
Finish:	Parkerized (steel)
Sights:	XS Sights Lever Rail; blade (front), ghost ring (rear)
Safety:	Two position, crossbolt
MSRP:	\$1,099
Manufacturer:	Marlin, 800-544-8892, marlinfirearms.com



Marlin's solid-top, side-eject 1894 Dark comes optics ready and offers eight-plus-one capacity for .357 Magnum chambering.

lengths. Marlin rifles have this ability thanks to the design of the cartridge carrier.

The Marlin cartridge carrier works by allowing one cartridge to exit the tubular magazine and land on the carrier before blocking the next cartridge in the magazine. As long as the variations in cartridge length are reasonable, the carrier doesn't care if the cartridge it's loading is a .38 Special or a .357 Magnum.

Winchester lever guns cannot make this same claim, and it's because of the cartridge carrier design.

The Model 1894 Dark Series rifle seen here is chambered for .38 Special/.357 Magnum, and it fed both reliably during Guns & Ammo's testing. This rifle also comes chambered in .44 Magnum/.44 Special, and other 1894 rifles I've tested in that chambering were equally reliable.

The Model 1894 rifles made today retain the square bolt they had when they entered production more than 130 years ago. The square bolt of the 1894 came from its parent, the Model 1893. The Model 1893 had a longer receiver than the 1894, and was chambered in rifle cartridges that were popular at the time. The Model 1894 was nothing more than a miniaturized version of the Model 1893, a concept that Winchester used with much success in the Model 1886 and Model 1892.

However, when Marlin designed the Model 1894, they included a feature that made it a better rifle than what was offered by the competition: a two-piece firing pin. The two-piece firing pin requires the action to be completely closed before the two pieces align and firing the rifle is possible. This prevents out-of-battery fire, which could happen with a lever gun if the person shooting it isn't paying attention.

**LEVER GUNS** used to be a traditional affair with blued steel and walnut stocks being the norm. However, a few years ago Marlin updated their lever-actions with a "Dark" theme, which is now being copied by Henry and Rossi. Marlin's rifles have a non-standard appearance that includes black-painted and textured stocks, optic-mounting rails atop the receiver, and muzzles threaded to accept suppressors.

Some initially tagged these black guns as a fad, but many consumers saw them as highly useful rifles that were legal to own in places where AR-15s were not. Since the first guns were Marlin's Model 1895s and 336s chambered in .45-70 Government and .30-30 Winchester, they were obviously better suited for hunting than defense. However, the new Model 1894 Dark Series carbine is an ideal defensive firearm that is also a ton of fun to shoot.

**The Marlin Difference** Back in 1889, Marlin bucked the top-eject trend set by Browning-designed Winchester lever-guns, and decided to run with a side-eject action — a decision that still pays dividends today, especially when it comes to mounting optics. Another endearing feature of Marlin lever-actions is their ability to reliably load and cycle cartridges of different





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A cross-bolt safety pairs with the two-piece firing pin for peace of mind.



Marlin's Dark Series feature enlarged lever loops, as well as a paracord wrap and sling.



Tall sights and threaded muzzles are standard factory features.

Marlin engineers accomplished this design by using a locking block that contains the rifle's pressure and pushes the firing pin into alignment only when the action is fully closed. If the locking block isn't completely seated in the receiver, the firing pin doesn't line up and dropping the hammer yields a "click" instead of a bang.

Not only is the Model 1894 one of the safest lever-actions available, it is also one of the strongest. The massive locking block in the rifle has a lot of engagement surface inside the receiver and it handles high pressures well. As a testament, Hornady launched a new cartridge with Marlin in 2007 with the goal of getting .308 Winchester performance out of a .30-caliber lever gun. The cartridge Hornady designed for Marlin was the .308 Marlin Express. It was loaded to much higher chamber pressures than what was normally found in a lever-action rifle, and it did an admirable job of competing with the .308 Winchester. I spoke with Dave Emary, Hornady's lead ballistician at the time, and the guy who was leading the charge with the .308 Marlin Express. Emary spoke highly of the Marlin lever-action receiver and, based on his data, I'd feel confident feeding this 1894 a steady diet of ammunition loaded to 40,000 psi without much worry. However, owners should always follow the manufacturer's guidance.

The reasons the Marlin action is so strong is partly due to the locking block engagement with the receiver, but also due to the forging process Marlin uses during manufacture. Marlin uses a



XS Sights' Lever Rail comes pre-installed, and it provides ample room for mounting a reflex sight or magnified optic.

forged receiver in every Model 1894 because the process creates strength advantages that are difficult to replicate.

Forging a receiver aids in creating uniform structural integrity. Smashing the steel between two forging dies eliminates air bubbles (or voids) in the receiver. Left uncorrected, voids become the origin for cracks, so their elimination is vital for strength. Secondly, the forging process compresses the steel

and makes it denser. When combined with the void elimination, the increased density makes it much harder for any cracks to form. For all of these reasons, Marlin receivers are well-equipped to handle high pressure.

**Going Dark** While the heart and soul of this rifle is all Model 1894, there are some highly useful features Marlin includes that are unique to the Dark Series. The first is a threaded muzzle that allows for attaching muzzle devices and suppressors.

Lever-action rifles are ideal candidates for suppressors because the action remains closed until pressure inside the bore drops to zero. Unlike semiautomatic rifles that push hot gas (and noise) out the ejection port when suppressed, lever-action

rifles see the full sound reduction benefits of a suppressor. This means the owner of such a rifle has the benefit of maximum signature reduction in a handy package that is capable of rapid fire.

I've always thought that a suppressed lever-action rifle would make a handy self-defense tool, especially in areas where AR-15s aren't



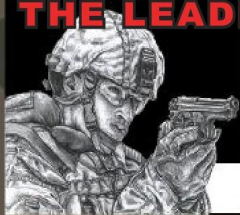
For the iron-sight inclined, XS Sights' tall front white-striped blade and adjustable ghost ring rear are a proven pair.



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allowed. Also, some just don't like AR-15s and are more enthusiastic about levers. For them, a suppressed lever-action rifle offers high capacity and short re-engagement times in a highly portable package when equipped with a 16-inch barrel. This Dark Series Model 1894 is the ideal representation of the rifle described above.

The Marlin Dark Series rifles have barrels that are threaded properly to accept muzzle devices and direct-thread suppressors. It's not always as easy as just taking a rifle to a gunsmith and having him put some threads on the muzzle. The barrel has to have a heavy enough contour to leave a flat surface, or shoulder, against which the muzzle device or suppressor can index. If not fully supported, the suppressor or muzzle device may thread unevenly as it climbs onto the barrel's shoulder, and may result in a bullet impacting the suppressor or muzzle device as it leaves the barrel. Marlin worked all that out prior to finalizing each Dark model's design, so every barrel comes ready to reliably accept a suppressor, as well as the included knurled



Lever-actions remain a favorite among American riflemen, and the Dark Series updates the platform for modern pursuits.

thread-protecting cap.

In addition to getting the barrel contour right, Marlin surveyed the aftermarket to offer a modern sighting system. They found XS Sights Lever Rail as a kit retailing for \$180 on [xssights.com](http://xssights.com). It includes an integrated ghost ring aperture rear sight, and a narrow front blade with white stripe for aiming. The front has some extra height in order to work with the taller rear sight. The extra sight height

also allows the irons to be used with most suppressors, so any optic or red dot mounted to the rail will always have back-up iron sights present.

There are a couple caveats to the iron sights, though. The first is that the rear aperture necessitates scope rings taller than 1¼ inches. When I tried to mount a Bushnell 4.5-18x44 LRTS in 1¼-inch-high rings, the scope's ocular housing hit the rear

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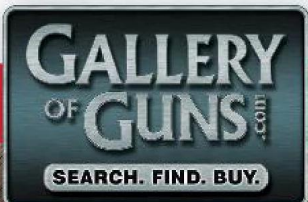
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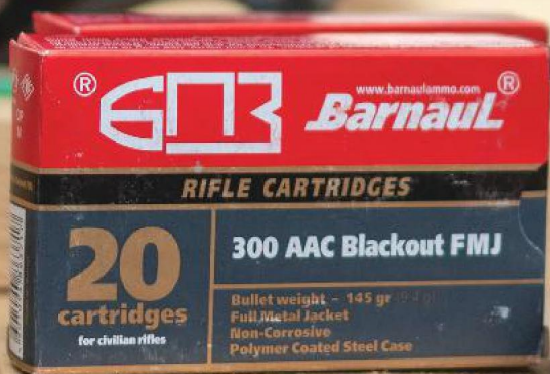


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sight. While it's a simple matter to get taller rings, doing so places the scope so high that the shooter's cheek will be above the stock's comb and the shooter will have no solid contact between his cheek and the stock. While the optics rail atop the receiver looks promising and offers no end to the sight mounting options, it works best with a red dot mounted as low as possible. I used an Aimpoint T2 in a low Larue mount, and that is a good solution for this rifle. The red dot allows for fast and precise shooting while keeping the shooter's head anchored firmly to the stock where it belongs. Those desiring to use a magnified optic will need to use a stock pack that pads the comb.

Shooting .38 Special out of the rifle produced minimal muzzle blast and almost no recoil. The .357 Magnum rounds were a little spicier, but far from punishing. I did see a significant difference in accuracy between .357 Magnum ammunition



**PERFORMANCE**

LOAD	VELOCITY (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
SIG Sauer 125-gr. JHP (.357)	1,692	45	17.8	.94	1.17
Hornady 125-gr. XTP (.357)	1,709	31	11.6	1.11	1.29
Hornady 110-gr. FTX (.38)	1,263	20	10.3	2.06	2.77

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups at 50 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots recorded by LabRadar placed adjacent to the muzzle.

and the .38 Special cartridges, with the magnums being a lot more accurate. Any rifleman looking for a centerfire levergun with readily available and inexpensive ammunition will be well-served by the Model 1894 Dark Series. Likewise, riflemen looking for a fast-handling legal-almost-everywhere defensive firearm would also be wise to check one out. **G&A**



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# S20

SAKO'S DEPARTURE  
FROM THE NORM.

BY TOM BECKSTRAND  
PHOTOS BY MARK FINGAR

**THEY MAKE EXCELLENT RIFLES** in Finland, and have for a very long time. *Suojeluskuntain Ase- ja Konepaja Oy* (SAKO) started making rifles in 1921 for the Finnish Civil Guard and has evolved as a manufacturer of bolt-action rifles used by the world.

SAKO's military rifles have been forced to evolve fairly rapidly to keep up with various solicitation efforts around the world. We've seen the SAKO TRG morph from a sniper rifle to a modular, multi-caliber rifle with an adjustable and folding stock.

However, SAKO's sporting rifles have remained relatively traditional since the 1950s, until now. The company's new S20 is a departure from the company's typical offerings, and with change comes a whole lot of options for the consumer.







The S20 uses a three-lug bolt. Both the ejector and extractor are ideally located to keep fired brass away from the windage turret.



The barreled action attaches to an aluminum spine. There is a steel recoil lug embedded just forward of the magazine well.

**A Blending of Bolts** Beretta owns both SAKO and Tikka, two Finnish manufacturers of bolt-action rifles. Since both companies fall under the same ownership, it's not surprising the S20 has elements of both companies in its design.

The S20 will come in only one action length, but the rifle will be chambered in several cartridges, from .243 Winchester up to .300 Winchester Magnum. Traditionally, SAKO has manufactured a handful of action lengths that are specific to the cartridge — a short-action for the .243 Win. and a long-action for the .300 Win. Mag., in this example. But, in the case of the S20, SAKO has dispensed with that complexity in order to save the customer money, and instead taken a page from the Tikka playbook. Tikka has been making high-quality actions for years, and they are all the same length. Tikka controls how much the bolt travels by putting different bolt stops in the short-action and long-action models. While the bolt in a Tikka rifle chambered in .243 Win. will exhibit the usual short-action travel, the physical dimensions of the action are in line with traditional long-action designs.

SAKO has done the same thing with the S20. All physical action dimensions will remain constant (long-action), even when the rifle comes chambered in a short-action cartridge. Standardizing this component has reduced manufacturing costs, and the savings are passed on to us.

Lest the reader think the S20 is just a re-branded Tikka, that is not the case. The newborn S20 also shares the influence from the vaunted SAKO TRG 22/42 family, one of the most accurate and venerated sniper rifles to see service. It's been employed by various militaries around the world.

Prior to the S20, the TRG was the only SAKO rifle that had a barreled action bolted to an aluminum spine, to which the forend and buttstock are also attached. The S20, like the TRG,



The five- and 10-round magazines have the same external dimensions, regardless of the cartridges contained inside.



Two barrel contours are available, including a lightweight fluted contour (above) and a heavier unfluted contour.

uses three action screws to attach the rifle to the aluminum spine. One screw at either end of the action, like just about every other rifle, and then a third behind the opening for the magazine port.

By using the same action screw arrangement, SAKO is leveraging its expertise. The engineering that made the TRG successful is here, and it is commercially accessible in the S20. This is a big deal for potential customers

because it is the first time the technology and testing has been made available in a sporting or competition rifle. Not only that, SAKO also managed to cut the price in half when comparing the TRG to the S20.

Another shared feature between the TRG and the S20 is the recoil lug. In place of a traditional recoil lug that protrudes from the action, the S20 uses a steel insert in the aluminum spine. The steel insert is embedded in the aluminum spine and, when the barreled action drops into the spine, the steel insert protrudes up into a recess within the S20 action.





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The precision-rifle forend is longer and flat on the bottom. The hunter forend is round and more comfortable in the hand.



The thumbhole stock portrays the S20's European hunting roots, while the precision rifle buttstock has a flat toe and vertical grip.

An improvement the S20 was given over the venerable TRG is an integral scope rail. The Picatinny section of rail is machined directly into the top of the receiver, doing away with those pesky dovetailed rails normally found on SAKO and Tikka rifles. (I know there are some fantastic mounts that attach directly to the dovetail cuts on top of the receiver, but the Picatinny rail offers us more flexibility in both mounts and rings.)

The issue with bolting a rail to any receiver is that they occa-

sionally work loose, especially if the screws attaching the rail weren't cleaned and dressed in Loctite before installation. The fact that the S20 has the rail integral to the receiver means it will never come loose and the owner never has to worry about it. Thank you, SAKO, for including this feature on the S20.

The magazine system is new for the S20; it doesn't take any of the old SAKO magazines, nor any of the Tikka magazines. The new magazine system looks like an evolution of what both

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The adjustable trigger presented no detectable creep during testing. It adjusts from 2 to 4 pounds in pull weight.

SAKO and Tikka have learned from in the past. I wouldn't be surprised if we see this magazine system on more rifles going forward. No one invests in the molds required to make these magazines for a single rifle.

The S20 magazine system is comprised of five- and 10-round injection-molded polymer magazines. Like previous Tikka offerings, the magazines all have the same external dimensions. Magazines for short-action cartridges have a molded internal block set in place to occupy the additional space afforded by the long-action-compatible magazine bodies. As long as the magazines match the bolt throw allowed by the bolt stop, it'll be easy for SAKO to chamber the S20 in just about any cartridge.

The cartridge family that benefits most from the SAKO S20 magazine is the short magnum. The S20 comes chambered in 6.5 PRC, a cartridge that has a maximum

## SAKO S20

Type: Bolt action

Cartridge: 6.5 Creedmoor (tested)

Capacity: 5 rds. or 10 rds.

Barrel: 24 in., 1:8-in. twist

Overall Length: 45.13 in.

Weight: 8 lbs., 4 oz.

Stock: Injection-molded polymer skins over aluminum chassis

Grips: Thumbhole and vertical options available

Length of Pull: 13.5 in.; adj. w/ inserts

Finish: Cerakote

Trigger: 2 lbs. to 4 lbs., adj.

Sights: None

MSRP: \$1,598

Manufacturer: SAKO, 301-283-2191, sako.fi

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**PERFORMANCE**

6.5 Creedmoor	VELOCITY (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVERAGE GROUP (IN.)
Hornady Match 147-gr. ELD-M	2,666	32	12.8	.58	.71
Winchester Match 140-gr. BTHP	2,735	43	17.7	.63	.78
SIG Sauer Match 140-gr. OTM	2,652	37	16.4	.61	.84

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

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loaded length of about 2.955 inches.

For comparison purposes, the industry-standard detachable box magazine, the AICS pattern, allows for 2.96 overall length. This means there is no such thing as seating a bullet long to keep it from consuming powder capacity in the case. Since the 6.5 PRC was designed to keep the 140-grain ELD-M bullet's bearing surface above the case's neck/shoulder junction, heavier bullets sit further inside the case and consume powder capacity.

The S20 magazine allows the shooter to keep any and all bullet weights for the 6.5 PRC above the neck-shoulder junction, leaving more room for propellant. Although the S20 isn't chambered in 7mm Remington Short Action Ultra Magnum, this is the only rifle from a major manufacturer that has a detachable box magazine capable of feeding heavy 7mm bullets without having to seat them deep in the case. (Too bad the S20 will likely never be chambered in that cartridge. It would only require a barrel change from a 6.5 PRC, though.)

**Dual Personalities** One of the characteristics of the S20 that makes it appealing is its ability to switch back and forth from hunting rifle to precision rifle. SAKO accomplished this by utilizing a buttstock attachment system very similar to what's found on the SAKO TRG. Loosen a couple screws and the buttstock slides right off the back of the rifle. SAKO had the presence of mind to make two buttstock types available: one for precision and target rifle shooters, and the other a thumbhole stock for outdoor sportsmen.

I suspect most S20 owners will either buy the hunting rifle



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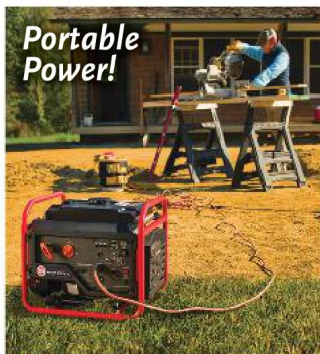


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for hunting or the precision rifle for competition or to ding steel far away. I'm not sure how many S20 customers will buy both buttstock assemblies and forend types for a single rifle, but every customer has that option.

Like the buttstock assemblies, SAKO has a couple different forend types for the S20. Swapping forends is a more involved affair, and I'd recommend reading the manual before grabbing some Allen wrenches and removing screws. The process isn't complicated, it just isn't intuitive without the manual. A couple minutes is all it takes to exchange forends.

What will determine the rifle's primary role is the barrel length and contour selected at purchase. The barrel is not interchangeable, unlike the rest of the rifle. The barrel is classic hammer-forged SAKO, my all-time favorite manufacturer of hammer-forged barrels. I've had the opportunity over the years to evaluate a fair number of SAKO rifles and they are always accurate.

The trigger on the S20 is excellent. It adjusts from 2 pounds up to 4 pounds, and has no discernable creep. It's a great trigger on any rifle, but it's unusually shooter-friendly on such a factory rifle.

SAKO rifles have always shot well for me, and the S20 in 6.5 Creedmoor was no different. I tested it with match ammunition and had a best five-shot group at 100 yards measure .58-inch with the Hornady 147-grain ELD-M. I had a three-shot group of the same load go into a single .33-inch hole at 100 yards, as well. The attached table provides additional information generated during testing.

There are some unique features on the SAKO S20 that will likely resonate with consumers, but I find the design similarities between the S20 and the SAKO TRG the most compelling argument for the new rifle. The TRG is one of the most iconic sniper rifles to ever serve, and the S20 is a modular, sporterized version of it. The action is very similar, and the way the action attaches to the aluminum sub-chassis is nearly identical, not to mention that the barrels for both are made on the same machines. Any hardcore TRG fan will likely be hunting with the S20 this fall. **GA**





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## ACCURACY MADE EASY

**THE "EZ9"** first appeared on the cover of *Guns & Ammo's* February 2020 issue and has since become a top seller for Smith & Wesson with a retail price of \$479. It's a single-stack 9mm with a capacity of eight-plus-one rounds.

Before S&W introduced the M&P380 Shield EZ in 2018, there were not a lot of options for gun owners wanting a semiautomatic pistol that was easy to rack and easy to load. In fact, we only know of the Walther CCP that first appeared on the cover of *Guns & Ammo's* November 2014 cover, which offers comparable dexterity requirements, ergonomics and capacity, and currently has an MSRP of \$469. (Ironically, Walther introduced a .380 ACP-chambered variant in 2019 to take the CCP platform into S&W's territory.)

Regardless of caliber, the Shield EZ series is, for lack of a better description, easy to rack, easy to load and easy to shoot. It's an excellent pistol for young shooters and the elderly, or those with grip-strength challenges, but its popularity is also being attributed to the fact that the general population simply likes how it feels. As it turns out, many of us don't want to risk fumbling with a gun while trying to shoot it.

It didn't take long for the custom-shop 'smiths at the Performance Center (PC) to pull a few samples from the production line to tweak on.

**What's New?** At first glance, people will see that the PC M&P9 Shield EZ is available with gold, black or silver parts to include the barrel, trigger and grip safety, but that's not what's truly worth noting. Look past the color and you'll see that the trigger is new with a flat face and three holes; it will conjure memories of Model 1911s used in competition with Videki-style triggers installed. The serrated flat face offers a great platform that makes this feel more like a competition pistol than the standard model.

The barrel on the PC version of the M&P9 Shield

EZ is also ported to mitigate muzzle rise. The result is a flat-shooting pistol and easy-to-manage recoil control. The ported slide also enhances the pistol's appearance of high-end custom pistols such as those coming from ZEV and Ed Brown. (Those "in the know," however, will remember that the Performance Center has been offering ported slides long before it was trendy. Don't forget the Performance Center SW1911.)

Most of all, the Performance Center is known for tuning actions. After all, making good guns shoot great is how Smith & Wesson's custom shop came into existence. The round PC logo has become a recognizable hallmark for one-off accuracy and performance.

Seeing the PC M&P9 Shield EZ's accuracy is first achieved by properly aligning the Hi-Viz Litewave H3 tritium-powered Litepipe front and rear sights. The sights' steel housings fully encapsulate the fiber-optic rods that produce bright green dots for the shooter. Even as light conditions change, the benefit of a fiber optic sight is that the intensity appears to perfectly adjust with the ambient light source. In the absence of light, the tritium vial within illuminates the fiber-optic glow. Regardless of surrounding light, you're always staring at the same sight size and configuration. (We all know consistency is great for accuracy.)





#### Smith & Wesson M&P9 Shield EZ

Type: Internal hammer fired, recoil operated, semiautomatic

Cartridge: 9mm

Capacity: 8+1 rds.

Barrel Length: 3.83 in.

Overall Length: 7 in.

Height: 4.85 in.

Weight: 1 lbs., 7.2 oz.

Materials: Stainless steel (slide and barrel); polymer (frame)

Finish: Armornite, black; titanium nitride (gold); polished (stainless steel)

Grip: M2.0 textured polymer, 18-deg. angle

Trigger: 4 lbs. (tested)

Sights: Hi-Viz Litewave H3 tritium/Litepipe, three-dot, drift adj.

Safety: Manual thumb lever (optional)

MSRP: \$588

Manufacturer: Smith & Wesson, 800-331-0852, smith-wesson.com

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The PC M&P9 Shield EZ is offered with three color accent configurations: black, silver (above) and gold.

Triggers also affect a person's ability to shoot any pistol accurately, and it's not just the weight of the pull stroke. The PC M&P9 Shield EZ features a worked-over trigger that operates a low, frame-mounted internal hammer system, which is one trick engineers developed to achieve the gun's easy-to-rack slide. Once the hammer falls, the back of the trigger hits an overtravel stop molded into the frame of the pistol to eliminate the squishy feeling that other polymer-framed guns are known for. Combined with the flat face, the trigger feels great through 3½ to 4 pounds of pressure. At the range, the combination of the Performance Center-tuned action, ported barrel, sights, flat trigger and ergonomics rewarded us with a couple of near-1½-inch groups using 124-grain ammunition. The average five-shot group measured around 3 inches from a bench at 25 yards. Shooting standing unsupported from 15 to 25 yards, experienced shooters will find that the PC version of the Shield EZ is a 2- to 3-inch gun all day.

The barrel is the last piece of the accuracy puzzle. It measures 3.83 inches, is made of stainless steel and given an Armornite finish (like the slide) when ordered in black. (The gold model features a titanium-coated finish while the silver



The ported barrel reduces muzzle rise over standard models, and required its length to extend just beyond the slide. Recoil management is easier when compared to the base-model M&P9 Shield EZ.

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stainless barrel is natural and polished.) The barrel is a bit longer to accommodate the single port. The standard M&P9 Shield EZ has a slightly shorter 3.67-inch barrel. Despite the tighter barrel fit, the slide doesn't feel like it's dragging on the barrel, a side-effect we experienced when racking the Walther CCP.

Besides the low-mounted internal hammer, light-weight slide and recoil spring assembly, the pistol can be manipulated and controlled with confidence thanks to the M2.0 texturing surrounding the thin-feeling grip (a trait of the original Shield), the serrated controls, and scales that appear at the front and rear touchpoints on the slide. And we can't forget to call out the little wings at the back of the slide. Those wings are pronounced for shooters who like to rack the slide with their hand over the top, or to pinch and pull it as if it were a sling shot. All of these details add up to justify the name "EZ."

**Worth Mentioning** The PC M&P9 Shield EZ arrives in a blue cardboard box marked "Performance Center by Smith & Wesson." The box is reminiscent of the classic blue boxes a Smith & Wesson handgun would come with new, which makes us realize that the brand hasn't lost sight of its heritage. However, the PC-branded cleaning kit, in its semi-rigid carry case, was never offered in those older boxes. The collapsible cleaning rod with rotating T-handle is a

**PERFORMANCE**

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
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Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups from a sandbag rest from 25 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots recorded by an Oehler Model 35P chronograph set 7 feet in front of the muzzle.

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nice touch, and there are bronze bore brushes, nylon jags and slotted tips to clean any handgun in .22 caliber to .45, so the cleaning kit is really a welcome bonus.

Inside the box are two eight-round stainless-steel magazines that are also "easy." With two tabs to assist the user in pulling down the follower, little effort is required to load the mags to full capacity. Though some would prefer a pistol capable of holding more rounds, doing so would have made the magazine more difficult to load because there would be additional magazine spring tension to overcome. That's just not what this model pistol is all about, and for a similarly sized handgun that holds more rounds, you'd be directed to consider the M&P9 Compact with 4-inch barrel and 15-plus-one round capacity.

Rather, the M&P9 Shield EZ has its place among Smith & Wesson's long list of products and storied legacy. It's expanded participation in shooting to the broadest audience and offers an affordable, reliable and accurate solution for those once challenged physically by the prospect of manipulating or carrying a semiautomatic. The Performance Center made another great gun even better. **GA**



The Performance Center gave its M&P9 Shield EZ a set of Hi-Viz's Litewave H3 tritium/Litepipe sights. Backed up by tritium for use in complete darkness, the fiber-optic rods are protected by a dovetailed steel post and rear notch housings.



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## GHOST GUNS

**IF ANTI-GUNNERS HAVE A TALENT**, it is devising clever names for what they wish to ban. The terms become buzz words in the media in an attempt to scare the general public into agreeing that such guns should be removed from the market. Consider "assault weapons," "cop-killer bullets" and "Saturday Night Specials," for example. Each of these targeted categories resulted in bans under state or federal law. The latest term is "ghost guns." Also referred to as "untraceable firearms," states have already made moves to ban home-made firearms.

Federal law allows individuals who can otherwise legally possess firearms to manufacture guns for their own individual use. In recent years, we have seen the widespread availability of so-called "80 percent" receivers. These are partially machined components that allow endusers the opportunity to complete the process of manufacturing their own firearms. Despite being characterized by The Trace ([thetrace.org](http://thetrace.org)) as requiring "a little elbow grease," machining the final 20 percent of a firearm receiver is more difficult than it sounds and requires specialized equipment and fixtures to complete. Like most of you, I am a believer in law and order. If an individual is finishing receivers for profit without a license, they are already breaking the law.

Several states including California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Washington have passed laws regulating or banning the practice of making one's own firearm. Bills have been filed in both houses of the U.S. Congress to do the same. The gun control section on former Vice President Joe Biden's website lists "stopping ghost guns" as a priority of his administration, if he is elected. There is also legislation pending that would prohibit the sale of the CNC and milling machines used to finish 80 percent

receivers such as the Ghost Gunner series from Defense Distributed (\$2,100, [ghostgunner.net](http://ghostgunner.net)). That's right, now the government aims to ban the tools that could be used to make a gun. The state of New Jersey has even filed lawsuits against companies marketing 80 percent receivers.

Anti-gun advocates will tell you that ghost guns have been used in numerous high-profile crimes, including a handful of cases in California.

When I investigated those cases, though, media reports suggested that the receivers may have been obtained "illegally," meaning they were not made by the shooters. By obtaining these receivers, these criminals were already breaking the law. Even if they made them at home, they still violated the Gun Control Act of 1968 if they weren't otherwise qualified to buy a gun.

If prohibited possessors are using this method to circumvent the law, those persons should be prosecuted. Period. That

doesn't seem to be a priority of those who are anti-gun, as evidenced by the precipitous drop in federal gun prosecutions during the Obama Administration. To restate the record, prosecutions rose 23 percent after President Trump took office and were at a 20-year high in 2019.

The real issue is fear. The antis hate the idea of you owning a firearm that they don't know about and can't regulate. What they don't know about, they cannot confiscate. If you think that no administration in the U.S. would ever come for your guns, you're being naïve.

I don't own an unserialized firearm, but I support the right of law-abiding citizens to build and possess them. If they commit a crime with them, jail time is deserved. If not, the government should leave these Americans and their property well enough alone. **GA**



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