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Beretta's Cool Cats

Keith Wood's "Two Cool Cats" article in the February/March issue gave some really good details on the beautiful and elegant diminutive autos as well as the usual excellent photos I've come to expect in *Handguns*. I liked the history related to the development of the Bobcat and Tomcat. However, I have to admit some surprise of the article's subtitle calling the pistol pair "CCW semiautos"! Calling them fun little plinkers, yes. Expressing their size convenience to shove in a pocket, you bet. But to label them as a CCW pistol, hardly. With their almost nonexistent sights, sight radius and magazine release location, not to mention their anemic caliber, these pistols are anything but CCW/defensive handguns. However, they would certainly serve as a last resort, being better than no firearm at all. And Keith does mention the validity in using either of the "cats" as a deep concealment backup handgun!

GREG MARKS, WEST VIRGINIA

Basic Bond

With regard to "Two Cool Cats" and the James Bond reference, Keith Wood needs to reread *Casino Royale*. In chapter eight it says "He then took from under his shirts in another drawer a very flat .25 Beretta automatic with a skeleton grip..." Perhaps Keith was thinking of the .32 caliber Walther PPK, which Bond got in a later book.

JEFFREY FEICHT

You're right. Bond primarily used a Beretta .25 through the first five books, switching to a Walther .32 (against his wishes) as one of his main guns in Dr. No. I should've caught that.—Scott

INDUSTRY NEWS



Night Sights

XS Sights is changing the name of its RAM sights (reviewed in our October/November issue) to R3D due to a trademark dispute. The sights themselves have not changed, and the company recently added a suppressor-height model for Glocks.



Wilson Combat is expanding its Berryville, Arkansas, plant by 16,000 square feet—a gain of about 20 percent. The expansion will house new automated machining and grinding centers to enhance parts production.

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6 Top Home Defense Revolvers

HANDGUNS.COM | ARTICLES YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED



KORTH NXR



HORNADY SUBSONIC



Here's what a few fans think about the military's switch to the SIG P320/M17 (the P320/M18 shown here is profiled elsewhere in the issue).

"A metal framed, hammer fired weapon is a better sidearm for the military. The M9 served me well. That said, I really enjoy my personal M18."—Allan

"Not a great choice. Would prefer the .45."—Joshua

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▲ (L.-r.) .22 Long Rifle, .22 Magnum, .380 Auto, 9mm Luger, .40 Smith & Wesson, 10mm Auto, .45 ACP

PISTOL AMMO PRIMER

A QUICK LOOK AT WHICH SEMIAUTOMATIC CARTRIDGES MIGHT BE FOR YOU.

By J. Scott Rupp

DISCUSSIONS ABOUT HANDGUN CARTRIDGES can be confusing if you're relatively new to defensive handgunning. Let's start with one basic fact: Pistol rounds are rarely decisive threat-stoppers. None of them truly possesses the energy to overwhelm and shut down an attacker's vital functions quickly with a single shot every single time, with the exception of the so-called "T-box" head shot. That's why defensive training drills focus on delivering multiple well-placed hits to incapacitate an assailant as rapidly as possible.

However, with the proper bullet, the more powerful the round the more likely your hits will have the desired effect—through tissue destruction, wound cavity and other factors. The trick then is to select

a cartridge—and gun and specific load—that works best for you, and it's a trade-off between the power of the round and how well you are able to shoot it. A larger, stronger, experienced shooter can handle a more powerful cartridge than a smaller, weaker, inexperienced shooter.

Except for the .22 Long Rifle and 10mm Auto, I used Hornady Critical Defense for the muzzle energy figures in an effort to make this as apples to apples as possible. The 10mm energy figure is from Hornady Critical Duty. The .22 LR is CCI Mini Mag, the energy figure calculated off velocities recorded out of a short-barreled pistol I recently tested.

The Relative Recoil Factor data are from Bob Forker's *Ammo & Ballistics* 6th edition. Available only for

the centerfire cartridges, the factors are calculated based on momentum of gas and bullet for a typical loading. These figures don't account for gun weight or design, which play a huge role in felt recoil, but they provide some frame of reference.

.22 LONG RIFLE

Energy: 64 ft.-lbs. (36-grain bullet)

The .22 is decidedly not the best choice for defense, but many people use it because recoil is almost nonexistent, and the guns in which it is chambered are usually easy to operate—and can be made really small for carry and concealability.

However, the typically short barrels mean you won't be getting the most velocity out of a round that's already underpowered, and the light,

soft bullets may not penetrate or cause much damage if they do. But there are plenty of stories out there of people successfully defending themselves with a .22, and like they say, any gun is better than no gun at all if you find yourself fighting for your life.

.22 MAGNUM

Energy: 100 ft.-lbs. (45-grain bullet)

A step up, but it's still a rimfire cartridge lacking in true power. Hornady's Critical Defense load features a 45-grain FTX bullet that's intended specifically for defense, but Winchester has discontinued its 40-grain Defender and Speer its 40-grain Gold Dot.

What you're left with are bullets that suffer from the same relatively fragile construction and lack of real destructive power as the .22 Long Rifle. But especially in a semiautomatic—available from a couple companies—the light recoil of the .22 Magnum means you can deliver lots of rounds in a hurry.

.380 AUTO

Energy: 200 ft.-lbs. (90-grain bullet)

Recoil Factor: 0.41

Here's your baseline centerfire pistol defense cartridge. It has the same bullet diameter as the 9mm Luger but is less powerful due to its shorter case. The .380 has been around for well over a century, and today it's popular for concealed carry because it can be chambered in small pistols that are still manageable for many people.

Pistols chambered in .380 tend to be easier to operate as well because their springs and slides don't need to be as heavy. A few companies even design .380s with this aspect in mind. Between its ease of use and its light recoil, the .380 can be a great choice for those of lesser experience and lower strength—as

well as for anyone looking for a small, light but still relatively effective concealed-carry gun.

9MM LUGER

Energy: 332 ft.-lbs. (115-grain bullet)

Recoil Factor: 0.65

Also known as the 9mm Parabelum, this is today's gold standard for defense. It is the issue sidearm for many militaries—including ours—as well as for law enforcement agencies around the globe. While modern developments in bullet technology have improved the efficacy of all the centerfire cartridges here, the 9mm has probably benefited the most.

The 9mm provides an adequate level of energy, good capacity and a level of recoil most folks can handle even in small guns. Every defensive semiauto out there is chambered to it, and ammunition choices are incredibly varied, with all manner of bullet weights and styles.

.40 SMITH & WESSON

Energy: 506 ft.-lbs. (165-grain bullet)

Recoil Factor: 0.74

This cartridge was the result of the FBI's search for better stopping power than the 9mm provided. Initially the bureau chose the 10mm Auto, but it proved too difficult to shoot. Eventually, a shorter, tamer version of the 10mm, the .40 S&W, was adopted by the FBI and, subsequently, many law enforcement agencies. However, even the .40 proved to be too much for many officers, and today the FBI has gone back to the 9mm.

But other levels of law enforcement still use the .40 because its combination of velocity, energy and bullet diameter have proven effective. Some shooters will find the .40's sharp recoil to be difficult to handle, but for those who can shoot it, the .40 S&W is an effective

defense cartridge. While the .40 isn't as popular as it once was, gun and ammo choices are still decent due to law enforcement use.

10MM AUTO

Energy: 523 ft.-lbs. (175-grain bullet)

Recoil Factor: 0.96

Our most powerful common cartridge designed specifically for semiautomatics, the 10mm Auto is enjoying a surge in popularity. Pistols in 10mm are increasingly seen in grizzly country—formerly the domain of magnum revolvers—because of their power, capacity and the ability to deliver rounds quickly. It does generate a lot of recoil, but in the larger pistols it's typically found in, the 10mm is controllable for experienced shooters.

Gun options are increasing. Ammo choices aren't as numerous as for other pistol cartridges, and they're often more expensive, but this may change in time if the round's popularity surge continues.

.45 ACP

Energy: 411 ft.-lbs. (185-grain bullet)

Recoil Factor: 0.93

For eons John Browning's .45 ACP was the defensive cartridge against which all others were judged here in the U.S. The .45 ACP gets the job done through bullet weight and frontal diameter. It's no shrinking violet in terms of recoil, and it's not very controllable in a super-small pistol, but in full-size guns and even many compacts, shooters with some experience won't have a problem handling the .45 ACP.

The cartridge is chambered in a wide array of pistol types. There's a terrific selection of ammunition, and as is the case with the 9mm, you can get everything from inexpensive training loads to high-end defensive stuff—including low-recoil offerings.

SHORT SHOT | BY J. SCOTT RUPP

SIG P320-M18

I WAS WORKING MY FIRST JOB OUT OF

school at *American Rifleman* when the military adopted Beretta's double action/single action Model 92 as the M9. I remember there was much hand-wringing at the time due to the move to the 9mm cartridge and some early structural problems with the Beretta.

More than 30 years later the military went looking for a new sidearm under its Modular Handgun System program, and the winner was SIG's striker-fired P320. I'm not saying there was no handwringing, but the pistol's reception seemed much warmer.

The military designations are M17 for the full-size gun and M18 for the compact, and SIG is now selling P320-M17 and P320-M18 civilian versions. The only outward differences between the military and civilian guns are the controls, which are black on the civilian version and tan on the military one.

Unlike the standard P320, the P320-18 is 9mm only. Because of a few design tweaks to the slide and other components, it can't be reconfigured to .357 SIG or .40 S&W.

The P320-M18's stainless steel slide is treated to a coyote-tan PVD finish, and it's a slightly different hue than the tan of the frame. It's a nice, almost two-tone look, and I like the black controls. While the 17-round version has an ambidextrous thumb safety, the 10-round version I tested has no thumb safety.

The barrel is 3.9 inches long, and the gun comes with a medium "carry-length" grip module. Weight is 28.1 ounces. The top of the slide is cut for the SIG Romeo 1 Pro red dot, and the iron sights are SIG's excel-



A The SIG P320-M18's modular design allows grip frames and barrel lengths to be changed, and the pistol comes optics ready.

lent SIGlite tritium night sights. Angled, flat-bottom serrations front and back provide a secure grip on the slide.

Accuracy results are shown in the accompanying table. Note that I didn't test any of the lighter common bullet weights, which might shoot better.

Other than my SIG P365, which I love, most SIGs don't fit me well, and I didn't feel I shot the M18 all that great during various drills. Mostly I thought the muzzle flip was a bit much, and I really had to work to get



the sights back on target quickly.

However, the gun has a great trigger and good sights, and it was completely reliable during testing. The pistol will appeal not just to P320 fans wanting to have a gun like the military's but also to shooters looking for a dependable, versatile carry or home defense gun.

ACCURACY RESULTS | SIG P320-M18

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Federal Deep JHP	135	1,008	17	3.2
Hornady Subsonic XTP	147	952	11	3.1

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from an MTM Case-Gard pistol rest. Velocities are averages of 15 shots measured on a Pro Chrono chronograph 10 feet from the muzzle. Abbreviation: JHP, jacketed hollowpoint


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OLD SCHOOL | BY BOB CAMPBELL

CHARTER ARMS UNDERCOVER

IT MAY SEEM OUT OF LINE TO HONOR A

budget revolver with the term “classic,” but the Charter Arms Undercover has earned it. This .38 Special was the first of many Charter Arms revolvers and remains in my opinion the most useful. The Undercover was introduced at a time when good handguns of any type were difficult to come by. During the Vietnam War both Colt and Smith & Wesson revolvers were in short supply, but Iver Johnson, Harrington & Richardson and various imported revolvers were cheap and available.

The introduction of the Charter Arms Undercover in 1964 brought another type of revolver into the market—a good quality revolver offered at a good price, thanks to modern production techniques that allowed advances in safety with less expensive manufacture.

The most obvious difference between the Charter Arms and other revolvers was the lack of a sideplate. This wasn't a new idea, but it was seldom seen in quality American revolvers. The frame is steel, but the surrounding grip frame and trigger guard are aluminum. The leaf-spring mainspring typical of revolvers of the day was replaced by a more durable coil spring.

Internal parts relied more on precision manufacture than hand fitting during assembly, saving many hours of hand work. Screws and pins were used more than hand fitting. The Undercover featured a floating firing pin while most revolvers used a hammer-mounted firing pin. The new action featured a short hammer throw, and Charter Arms claimed advances in accuracy and velocity



▲ The Charter Arms Undercover was a well designed revolver that offered good value for the money, an uncommon combination at the time.

with its eight-groove rifling.

Charter Arms did not use a plunger under the barrel to lock the ejector rod. This left the gun with a single-point lockup in the rear, which some writers of the day criticized. Charter Arms claimed the ejector rod housing offered a further lockup.

The cylinder could be released by pulling the ejector rod forward. It isn't unusual to see the cylinder latch removed—shooters relying on the ejector rod to open the cylinder—because the latch sometimes bites the thumb.

The version shown was built sometime around 1988, midway through the gun's production. It is nearly identical to the originals with its blue finish and walnut grips. A lot of the Charter Arms wheelguns today are stainless steel with oversize rubber grips.

The forward assembly pin on my Undercover occasionally works

loose during a long firing session. I simply press it back in, and it will stay put for dozens of rounds. This won't happen with all Charter revolvers, but it isn't rare and generally occurs over a long period of time.

The Undercover will fit many holsters designed for Smith & Wesson J frames. It is fast to deploy, and the sights are broad and easily acquired as fixed sights go. The action isn't the smoothest of revolver actions, but neither is it rough. The trigger throw and hammer arc are shorter than on some other double-action/single-action revolvers.

The Charter Arms Undercover .38 Special has been overshadowed in some ways by the Bulldog, Pathfinder and Magnum Pugs, but it's my favorite. When called upon it will do its business as well as any snubnose .38 Special. The Undercover is a classic revolver, a gun that's not a collectible but still belongs in any collection.



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< SPRINGFIELD XD-S MOD.2 OSP

Springfield's excellent single-stack 9mm is now optics ready, and one version of the gun comes with a Crimson Trace red dot. The pistol sports a 3.3-inch barrel and is only 0.9 inch wide and 4.4 inches tall with the flush-fit seven-round magazine installed. With that mag in place, weight is just 21.5 ounces. The extended magazine is a nine-rounder. Both the barrel and slide are Melonite-finished steel, and the black polymer frame has an enhanced grip texture over the original XD-S.

{ \$549 (w/sight), \$425 (no sight); [SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM](http://springfield-armory.com) }

> KORTH SPEEDLOADERS

Available through Nighthawk Custom, these brand-new Korth speedloaders are available for a variety of revolvers. The magnums are stainless steel; the 9mm is aluminum. The .44 Magnum six-shot fits Korth NXR; S&W 29, 69 and 629; Ruger Redhawk and Super Redhawk; and Colt Anaconda. The .357 Magnum is available as a six-shot (Korth six-shots; S&W 586, 686, 581 and 68; Ruger GP100; and Colt Python) or an eight-shot (Korth NXS and NXA; S&W 327, 627 and R8; and several Ruger Redhawks). The 9mm fits the Korth Mongoose and S&W L frames.

{ \$50, [NIGHTHAWKCUSTOM.COM](http://nighthawkcustom.com) }





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< DESANTIS INSIDE HEAT TB

The Inside Heat, a precisely molded inside-the-waistband leather holster, now comes with a thumb-break option. The holster's mouth is reinforced to ease holstering, and the powder-coated spring clip keeps the gun secure. Fitments include various Glocks, Smith & Wesson's Shield and Shield 2.0, several SIGs and the Kimber Micro.

{ \$60, DESANTISHOLSTER.COM }

> AMMO ARMOR

Made of military-grade plastic, the Ammo Armor and Ammo Klip are now available for several Glocks, the M&P Shield EZ models and the Springfield XD-S. The Ammo Armor covers your magazines to protect them, and by adding a steel clip they become a mag pouch. The Ammo Klip comes with a self-contained tool to adjust the clip to meet your needs.

{ \$10 (Ammo Armor), \$25 (Ammo Klip); AMMOARMOR.COM }



< FEDERAL DEEP .38 +P, .380 AUTO

The Deep line moves into the smaller calibers, promising consistent penetration beyond the 12-inch FBI minimum in bare gel and through heavy clothing. Deep bullets feature a center-post design for dependable expansion even through typical barriers, and the ammo will perform reliably through any barrel length. Propellants are specially formulated, and the primers are sealed. The .380 has a 99-grain bullet at 1,000 fps; the .38 +P has a 130-grain bullet at 900 fps.

{ \$26 (.380), \$32 (.38 +P) per 20; FEDERALPREMIUM.COM }

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ART OF THE DRAW

GOOD SHOOTING WON'T COUNT IF YOUR GUN DOESN'T GET INTO PLAY.

DURING AN ARMED ENCOUNTER, BEING

able to shoot accurately is a potentially life-saving skill, but the defensive handgunner understands there's more to winning a gunfight than shooting ability. In any armed self-defense system, drawing the weapon is inherently important.

If you're aware of your surroundings, you may be able to draw preemptively, but if you're caught off guard, you'll need to draw post-haste. Despite this fact, many who carry a handgun for self-defense neglect the art of drawing it, potentially at their own peril.

The Japanese martial art Iaido is based on the ability to perceive danger and efficiently draw a long sword or katana from its scabbard to deliver a precise cut. The emphasis in Iaido is not on dueling but rather on drawing the sword and cutting down the enemy. This is analogous to drawing your gun and hitting the target with your first shot.

Samurai didn't walk around with a katana in hand, just as you don't walk around with a gun in yours. Therefore, your ability to quickly draw in response to a threat is paramount. If you are attentive, you may spot potential danger before it spots you. This could give you the time and distance to formulate and execute an appropriate response.

Say you're in the mini mart while the clerk is being robbed at gunpoint. In this case, covertly drawing your gun and using cover/concealment as you monitor the situation may be apropos. If, on the other hand, an assailant was to charge you with a large knife, drawing, moving and—depending on his actions—shooting him may be warranted.



Alfredo Rico

▲ When you begin working on your draw, using an inert training gun is a good idea. Once you're comfortable, move to practicing with an unloaded gun.

Of course, even the most attentive of us can be distracted. As much as we'd like to keep our head on a swivel 24/7, that's simply not realistic. As such, we must be able to prevail even when we are taken by surprise. That's where practicing your draw can pay huge dividends.

The beginning Iaido student doesn't train with a razor-sharp blade, using a wooden sword instead. If you're a beginning shooter, your initial draw practice should be with an inert training gun. This enables you to hone your skills in a safe and controlled setting. Once you are familiar with the mechanics of the draw, step up to an unloaded firearm. Check and double-check that it's unloaded and don't have any live ammo in your practice area.

Concentrate on every movement, from clearing your concealing garment to returning your gun to the holster and each critical step in between. Use your smartphone

to record your draw, which will provide valuable feedback. Practice slowly at first, being mindful of each movement. The goal is to feel what it's like to execute each component.

Here's how to break down the draw so you can master one component at a time before ultimately putting each component together for a smooth and efficient draw. The components will vary to some degree depending on your mode of carry. For simplicity, we'll address a gun worn on or behind the dominant hip covered by an open garment like an unzipped jacket or unbuttoned shirt.

A concealed-carry draw starts with clearing the concealing garment. As your dominant hand reaches for the opening in your garment, your off hand comes to your chest to await the drawn pistol.

Curl the fingers of your dominant hand to hook the split in the garment and pull it aside just enough to

expose the grip of your handgun.

Then, while keeping your dominant hand in contact with your body, roll it over and drive the web of your hand as high onto the backstrap as possible. Your middle finger should index against the bottom of the trigger guard and then wrap around the grip along with your ring and little fingers.

Now lift the gun straight up from the holster, raising your elbow as high as is possible without contorting your body. From there, either drop your elbow or flex your wrist to level the muzzle to the threat. Your dominant thumb is flagged, making room for your offhand thumb and palm on the grip.

As you join your offhand to the grip, cant your wrist forward, with your thumb pointing at the target. Wrap the fingers of your offhand around the fingers of your dominant hand. This provides 360-degree inward pressure on the gun for optimal control.

Drive the gun toward the target in a controlled manner, recognizing that you can shoot at any point between when the muzzle is oriented to the threat and full extension of your arms. Speaking of which; don't extend your arms to the degree that your elbows are locked. Keeping a slight bend in your elbows will mitigate recoil by soaking up some of it before it reaches the shoulder, thereby eliminating unnecessary muzzle flip.

When it comes to drawing your handgun, good enough isn't good enough. Take a page from the Iaido playbook and practice until your draw is smooth, efficient and, consequently, fast. Then add movement to get out of the direct line between you and your attacker, get to cover or just to make you a harder target as you draw. If faced with a sudden deadly threat, you'll be glad you did.

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NO GLANCING BLOW

INTRODUCING FIOCCHI'S NEW BLUE GUARDIAN REDUCED RICOCHET.

FIOCCHI'S BLUE GUARDIAN REDUCED

Ricochet hollowpoint ammo is heading to your gun store shelves. This new offering is designed to be safe for indoor shooting in more ways than one. The projectiles are lead-free, as are the primers, and depending on where you shoot, this can meet range requirements in place at some indoor facilities.

These Reduced Ricochet bullets are a powdered mix of copper and tin that is then heat-treated in a proprietary process, similar to what is seen with frangible/training ammunition. However these bullets have a hollowpoint design and are meant to perform well in defensive use, whereas dedicated frangible ammunition is solely intended for target shooting.

Currently, Blue Guardian Reduced Ricochet ammunition is offered in the four most common pistol calibers. You have your choice of a 75-grain .380, 100-grain 9mm, 125-grain .40 S&W and 155-grain .45 ACP. Like solid copper bullets, these lead-free bullets are lighter than comparatively sized traditional jacketed lead-core bullets. The 100-grain 9mm Reduced Ricochet bullet is about the same size as a traditional 124-grain lead core bullet.

Fiocchi sent me a sample of their 9mm Blue Guardian Reduced Ricochet ammunition. My plan was not just to chronograph it but also gel test it and devise some way to measure its advertised reduction in ricochets upon impacting hard surfaces.

This 100-grain load is advertised at 1,280 fps. For testing I used a SIG P320 Compact, which sports a 3.9-inch barrel. Out of the SIG this



A Blue Guardian Reduced Ricochet uses a lead-free bullet and a lead-free primer, but it's not just for range practice. It's also a great defensive option thanks to its hollowpoint design.

ammo did 1,239 fps, and felt recoil was a little soft compared to standard 9mm ammo.

For gel testing I used Clear Ballistics blocks, which are more convenient than FBI spec gelatin but are actually made of polymer. Extensive testing has shown the Clear Ballistics blocks are not quite as dense as true FBI blocks, so you'll generally see a bit deeper bullet penetration and slightly less expansion than you would with FBI blocks.

Ballistic block test results were fascinating, and I did them twice—once with bare blocks, once with blocks covered by the FBI's "heavy clothing" barrier. "Fascinating" means I got interesting and unexpected results, but don't think that's a bad thing, because it wasn't. I fired half a dozen rounds into the blocks, just to see if the results of my first round were typical, and they were. In fact, the gel test results were boringly consistent.

During bare block testing, almost immediately upon impact with the

block the front hollowpoint section of the bullet fragmented, with the base continuing straight on.

The fragments veered off from the base and penetrated between four and eight inches, with about a six-inch wide spread, while the bases penetrated between 16.5 and 17.5 inches. Recovered weight of the bases averaged 60 grains. The fragments big enough for me to recover from the block weighed between one and six grains.

The hollowpoint didn't expand but rather fractured, and the fragments all had sharp edges. Some of the fragments were decidedly pointed. The bullet bases were stubby little cylinders. Basically, the bullets provided immediate, almost explosive fragmentation with deep penetration, which is exactly what you want in a defensive handgun round.

When shooting a block covered with the FBI "heavy clothing" barrier—denim over sweatshirt over T-shirt over undershirt—the results were nearly identical to the bare →

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← block tests. The bullet started fragmenting between one and two inches into the block instead of immediately, but that was the only substantive difference.

In order to test the reduced-ricochet aspect of the ammo, first I stood cardboard IDPA targets up to either side of a full-size Pepper Popper steel target and shot the steel from straight on. I didn't just put one target to either side but stacked three to test penetration.

Upon impact the entire Reduced Ricochet bullet, including the base, turned granular, everything from powder on up to tiny fragments. A few of the larger fragments penetrated the first cardboard target and went into the second, but none of the fragments penetrated into the third cardboard target.

I then replaced the targets with one of the ballistics blocks and repeated the test. The "dust" didn't do more than discolor the surface of the block. What few larger fragments there were—tiny bits perhaps half the diameter of a pencil lead—penetrated from one-half to three-quarters inch. Remember, this is at a distance of six inches from the impact site.

For comparison, I then repeated this test using a traditional jacketed lead bullet, in this case the Hornady Critical Duty 135-grain +P load. For this I went with five targets per side in order to catch what I expected.

The test of jacketed lead ammo produced dozens of large fragments flying off the steel that penetrated all five cardboard targets I had and kept on going. When I set up the ballistic block next to the steel, the traditional jacketed lead bullet sent more than 10 fragments two inches into the block.

Curious to see if a more oblique angle would produce different results, I moved to the side and shot



▲ When fired into bare synthetic gel blocks, the Reduced Ricochet bullets produced fragments that quickly veered off from the base while the base penetrated deeply.

the Fiocchi ammo into the steel at a 60-degree angle instead of 90 degrees. This is probably the greatest angle you'd ever be shooting at steel, which should always be shot straight-on if possible.

When fired at an angle into the steel I got some larger fragments, but these were still much smaller than from a jacketed lead bullet. And while most of the bullet ended up as dust on the surface of the block, those four or so tiny fragments—the heaviest less than half a grain in weight—did penetrate the block almost an inch. However, due to their size and weight they would lose speed quickly, and I doubt that they would even penetrate the skin of someone standing six or more feet away.

What It Means


Testing showed me this ammo performs similarly to frangible ammo on steel. The bullet turns to dust or fine grains, a clear difference when compared to a standard bullet. When shot through barriers not quite as hard as steel, like drywall or plywood, bullets like this don't turn into powder, but they immediately break apart into small fragments.

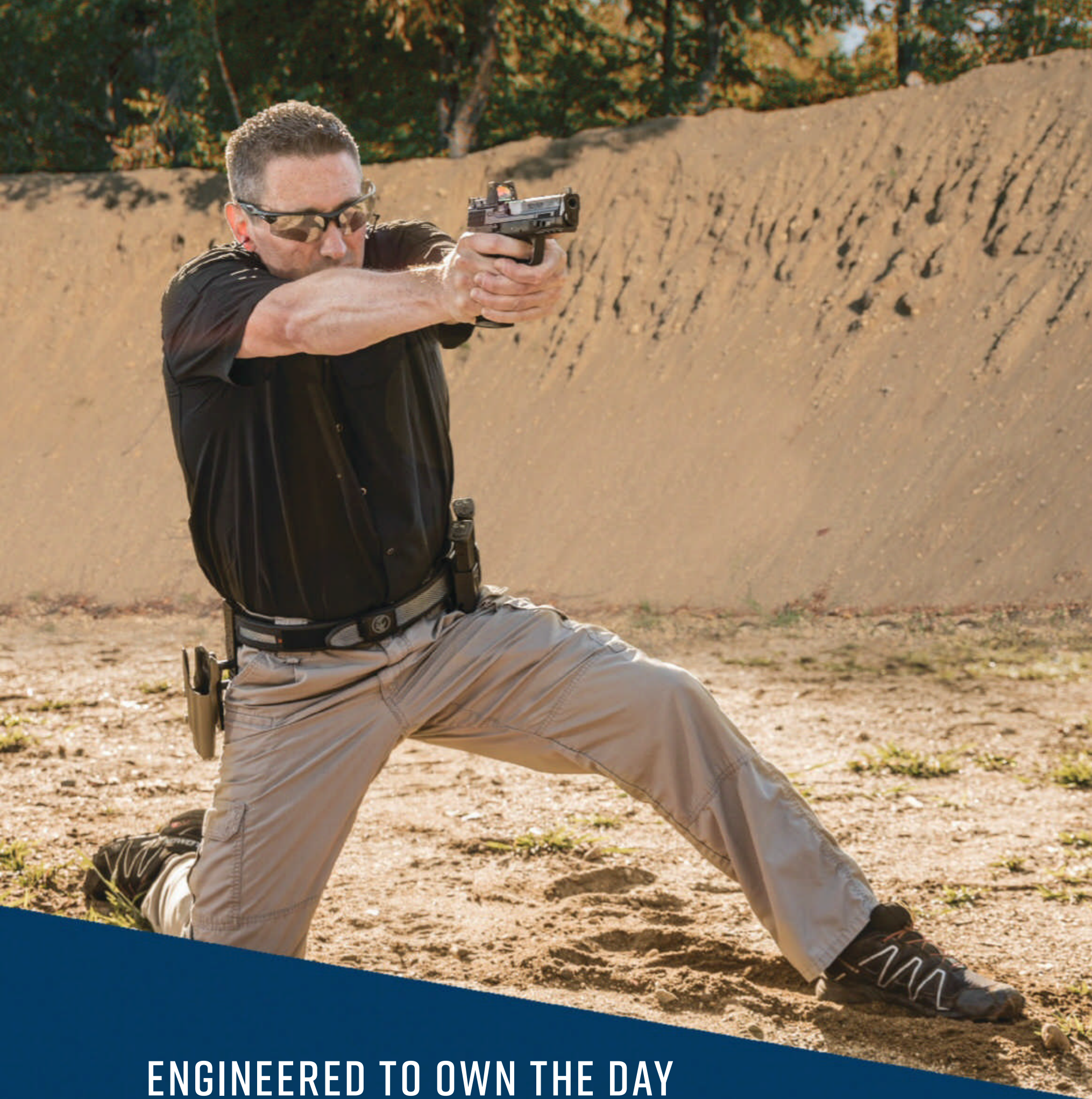
Gel testing showed me this ammo will perform as well or better than

traditional hollowpoints when you don't have to shoot through an intermediate barrier to reach the bad guy, but that was no surprise. I learned some years ago that our Special Forces troops were using frangible rifle ammo against bad guys in certain circumstances—on board ships, for instance. In these cases the internal terminal effects were often similar to what happens when you hit a prairie dog with a .22-250 and a thin-jacketed varmint bullet.

When you're talking ricochets in defensive ammunition the immediate assumption is that they're bad. However, stuff does sometimes happen, and documented hit percentages in defensive shooting situations, whether law enforcement or private citizen, are rarely above 30 percent.

So a better name for this ammo might be "reduced penetration." A traditional pistol bullet will go through drywall, plywood, 2x4s—basically, just about everything a house or apartment is made of—without even slowing down. These bullets will not, while still performing admirably on bad guys.

Blue Guardian Reduced Ricochet ammunition comes in 20-round boxes, and depending on caliber the suggested retail prices run between \$18 for 9mm and \$24 for .45 ACP. 



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SCCY'S THE LIMIT

BY JAMES TARR

THE NEW CPX-3RD IS WELL BUILT AND DEPENDABLE—AND COMES WITH A RED DOT FOR ABOUT \$300.

SCCY (pronounced “sky”) is a small firearms company in Daytona Beach, Florida. You might not have heard of it or its pistols, but the company has carved out quite a niche for itself producing inexpensive handguns with premium materials and impressive production value. It makes only one design of pistol, but that design comes in various flavors. One of the newest is the CPX-3RD, a 10-shot .380 that comes from the factory with a Crimson Trace subminiature red dot.

SCCY pistols are all intended for the concealed-carry market. They sport polymer frames and stainless steel slides and barrels and, except for one model, have double-action-only trigger systems. There are other inexpensive guns on the market, but what sets SCCY pistols apart in a crowded marketplace is what you get for this low price.

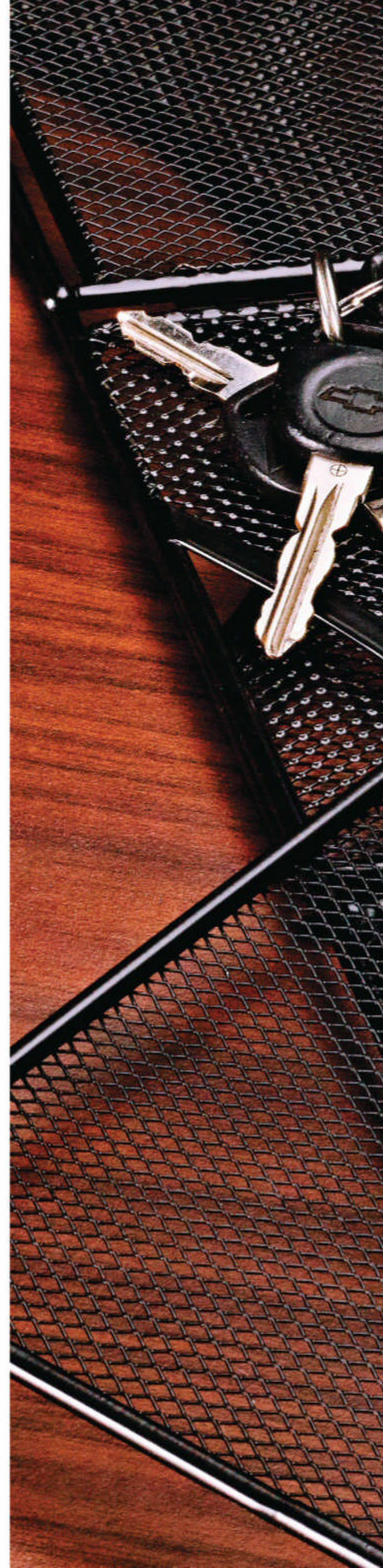
With every SCCY pistol you get a stainless steel slide machined from bar stock, stainless steel barrel, and two or three magazines with both flush and extended base

pads. This red dot-equipped model has a suggested retail price of just \$339, which means you’ll see it on sale for under \$300. SCCY can do this because it makes almost every part in the gun in-house. Let’s dive into the details.

As I mentioned, this is the CPX-3RD, a 10+1-shot .380 ACP with a 3.1-inch barrel. Overall it is 5.6 inches long and 5.5 inches tall with the extended finger-hook magazine base pad in place. It is 1.2 inches wide at the slide-lock lever, although except for that protruding slide stop, the rest of the pistol is just an inch thick, with absolutely no sharp edges except for the slide serrations. There is no manual safety, but if you want one, SCCY sells the same gun with a safety as the CPX-4RD.

With the Crimson Trace optic aboard and an empty magazine in place, the pistol weighs 16.5 ounces according to my scale.

The stainless steel slide has a nitride finish, and it rides on an anodized 7075 T6 aluminum frame inside the polymer grip. The frame is visible at the rear of the pistol, and it’s there you’ll see →





THE SCCY'S THE LIMIT

← the serial number etched. The aluminum frame is easily removable if you pop out a few pins, but SCCY does not recommend this because it's not required for cleaning. This modular design helps keep the manufacturing costs down.

At the rear of the slide is a slot for the hammer, and as you pull the trigger you can see it moving

back and forth. The hammer does not have a spur, and at no time during the trigger pull does it extend beyond the back of the slide. Even if it did, you can't cock the hammer as there's no notch in it in order to do that. In other words, it is a true double-action-only trigger system.

I have a lot of trigger time behind SCCY pistols, and the DAO trigger pulls are extremely

smooth. The trigger itself is polymer, with a smooth flat face that is easy on your finger. Trigger pull is smooth and uniform all the way through, and on my sample it weighed 7.75 pounds, which is pretty typical.

The tip of the trigger has to swing through an inch of travel before firing, just about to the frame, and you'll have to release the trigger all the way back to the starting position to get it to reset.

You'll be hard-pressed to fire this gun as fast as a traditional semiauto due to the length of the trigger pull, but the long trigger pull also acts as a kind of safety on a pistol that doesn't have an external manual safety. In that way it very much reminds me of the original Ruger LCP and every double-action revolver.

SCCY's guns are sized just as big as they need to be to hold 10 rounds in the magazine, which is the capacity of every pistol it makes, regardless of caliber. As I wrote earlier, there are no sharp edges on this pistol; every corner is rounded.

The polymer magazine release button protrudes only as far as it needs to. The slide-lock lever, on the other hand, seems rather big for the pistol. I'm surprised SCCY didn't go with an internal slide stop to keep from "ruining" the smooth lines of this pistol, but then again, some people want the full range of functional controls on their pistols, no matter their size.

After over a decade of daily carry of a 1911, I shoot everything, for good or bad, with a thumb-high hold. I feel it gives me better control over the pistol while shooting, but it also can lead to problems. In this case, my thumb rests on top of the slide stop, so the slide of the CPX-3RD doesn't lock back for me unless I adjust my grip.

As this is a somewhat small gun, depending on your grip, you might have the same issue. It's a good →



▲ Tarr thought the slide-lock lever was a little large in light of the pistol's slim lines. "Roebuck Quad-Lock" refers to the multiple contact points on the barrel.



▲ The Crimson Trace CTS-1500 red dot has a notch built into the sight body to use in conjunction with the front sight in case the sight goes down.

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THE SCCY'S THE LIMIT

← reminder that everyone needs to put sufficient rounds downrange through their carry gun in practice so there are no surprises when things get serious.

“ROEBUCK QUAD-LOCK” is emblazoned on the left side of the slide. This feature is named after SCCY founder and CEO Joe Roebuck, and it’s a design that puts four points of contact on the barrel to improve accuracy: in two places underneath the muzzle where it mates with the slide; at the top rear of the barrel where it fits to the breech face; and at the link underneath the barrel where it snugs to the disassembly pin.

It was Roebuck, a former tool and die maker, who in 1998 looked at pistols on the market and realized he could make a \$200 pistol with the performance of a \$500 gun if he did all the work under his own roof,

using the latest manufacturing tools and technology.

I’ve been to the SCCY plant in Florida. It is wall to wall with CNC machines and other computer-aided manufacturing tools, and the company uses them as efficiently as possible. For example, 24 slides are machined simultaneously.

As time has passed, the company has brought more and more work in-house, and SCCY is now also making its own magazines. The magazines come from the factory with the extended finger-hook base pads in place, and with one of those mags in the gun, I can get my whole hand on the pistol. This definitely aids control while shooting.

The magazine’s flush base pads shave about a third of an inch off the grippable length of the gun. With a flush base pad, half of my pinkie hangs off the bottom of the

gun—but the pistol is of course a bit more concealable.

The grip frame is Zytel polymer with finger grooves, and this frame is also made in-house on SCCY’s injection-molding machines. SCCY is a big fan of color. While this pistol is all black, it sells replacement grip modules for just \$39 each.

CPX-3 grip modules are currently available in black, flat dark earth, pink, purple, SCCY blue and sniper gray. SCCY recommends the grip modules should be changed only by qualified gunsmiths.

This pistol has an internal inertial firing pin safety. Still, some people just don’t feel comfortable unless their pistol has a manual safety, so all SCCY pistols are available with or without a manual safety.

While these manual safeties do work, for me they are placed in exactly the wrong spot and jab me in the thumb knuckle with every shot. However, you might have a different hand size or shoot with a different grip, so the placement of the safety may not be a problem for you.

When in doubt, head to your local gun store and get your hand on whichever model you’re interested in buying. If anything pokes your hand when you’re just holding it, that gun will not be pleasant to shoot.

Traditionally, SCCY pistols have plastic three-dot sights. This pistol does incorporate the front sight, but the rear sight has been removed to make room for the Crimson Trace CTS-1500 optic. Crimson Trace calls it a “sub-miniature optic,” and it is sized to fit on small pistols meant for concealed carry. It appears this optic currently is exclusive to SCCY pistols. The slide is machined specifically for this optic, and the red dot mounts directly to it.

The CTS-1500 has a polymer body but a glass lens. It has a five-m.o.a. red dot and is powered →



▲ Each pistol comes with several magazines, and for each magazine there are flush and extended baseplates, so you can customize it to your carry style.

ACCURACY RESULTS SCCY CPX-3RD				
.380 Auto	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Black Hills HoneyBadger	60	1,044	21	3.8
Winchester Silvertip JHP	85	907	13	3.1
Hornady Critical Defense JHP	90	868	18	3.4
Armscor FMJ	95	857	22	4.5
Federal Micro HST	99	843	15	3.7

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



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THE SCCY'S THE LIMIT

← by one lithium CR2032 battery, which is provided. Elevation and windage adjustments are done by tiny screws on the sides of the optic body, and a hex wrench to do that is included with the optic.

The dot on the CTS-1500 automatically adjusts brightness according to ambient lighting. It also has an auto-off feature that activates when the sight hasn't been moved for a time. A rubber cover is included, and SCCY recommends you put it over the optic when storing the pistol in order to extend battery life.

You have to remove the optic from the slide to swap out the battery, but I don't see a problem with that. With all of those battery-saving features, SCCY says battery life on this optic is 20,000 hours.

The rear of the optic body has a notch that is designed to be used as a rear sight. It is not a deep notch, and only the top half of the front sight can be seen through it, but I like that you have an option just in case your battery dies at an inopportune time. Getting those sights more or less aligned is also a quicker way to make your dot appear in the window during your presentation.

As I mentioned, the dot on the CTS-1500 is five m.o.a., which means it covers a five-inch circle on a target 100 yards away. In comparison, the front sights of most pistols are 15 to 20 m.o.a. wide.

Due to the wide grip, the CPX-3RD is too big to be a traditional pocket pistol. While I suppose you could stuff this pistol into a cargo pocket, I don't recommend doing that unless you slide it inside a pocket holster first. Although the trigger pull is long and not light, you want to cover that trigger guard.

Small handguns are often hard to shoot accurately because of their short sight radius, which is the distance between the front and rear sights. Sight radius is no longer an issue with a red dot. The main



▲ Every edge and corner on the CPX-3RD is rounded to make it more comfortable for concealed carry.

impediment to shooting this pistol accurately is the long trigger pull, but I found I could stage the trigger at the rear of travel, right before it broke, to wring the utmost accuracy out of it.

This is a soft-shooting gun, and with its modest recoil, the only thing that will slow you down is the length of the trigger pull. You can shoot it as fast as you can pull the trigger and not worry about recoil overpowering your grip.

Most .380s on the market are reduced in size to make them as small as possible. As a result, they're not that pleasant to shoot. The CPX-3RD is large enough for most people to get their whole hand on the grip, and thanks to this you'll be able to shoot it quite well for a .380 ACP.

Some .380s barely have sights, but with this pistol equipped with a red dot, I was popping steel plates at 10 yards with ease and punching out the center of an IDPA target at 15 yards offhand rapid-fire. Try that with a pocket .380! With the pistol's gentle recoil, your finger will get tired of the long trigger pull before your hand gets sore from shooting.

Is the Crimson Trace CTS-1500

SCCY CPX-3RD

TYPE: double-action-only semiauto

CALIBER: .380 ACP

CAPACITY: 10+1

BARREL: 3.1 in. stainless steel

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 5.6/5.5/1.2 in.

WEIGHT: 16.5 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: nitride-finished stainless steel slide, Zytel polymer frame

SIGHTS: white-dot front, Crimson Trace CTS-1500 red dot w/notch

TRIGGER: DAO, 7.75 lb. pull (measured)

PRICE: \$339

MANUFACTURER: SCCY Industries,

SCCY.COM

built as tough as other red dots on the market? It is far less expensive, but if you're the kind of shooter who heads out to the range only a few times a year, I don't know that you'll notice a difference in performance or durability.

The optic worked perfectly for me throughout my testing, and Crimson Trace is one of the most well-respected pistol laser manufacturers in the world. If you've always liked the idea of a carry pistol with a red dot sight but just haven't had the cash, the CPX-3RD gives you the option of owning one at less than half the price of the competition. ●



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BABY BOOMER

BY BRAD FITZPATRICK

THE MAGNUM RESEARCH BABY EAGLE III IS A STURDY ALL-STEEL GUN THAT'S ONE OF THE SMOOTHEST SHOOTING 9MMS AVAILABLE TODAY.



Magnum Research fans get to welcome a new member to the family with the arrival of the Baby Eagle III semiauto pistol. The new Baby Eagle III is available with either a steel or a polymer frame in various configurations and calibers, all of which are manufactured by Israel Weapons Industries (IWI).

The Baby Eagle III will appeal to fans of single-action/double-action semiautos because it offers a robust design and excellent build quality, but it's worth noting that the Baby Eagle shares little more than a name and passing resemblance with the larger Desert Eagle guns in its family.

In fact, the Baby Eagle III's design is closer to the CZ 75 than the larger semiautos from Magnum Research. Like the CZ 75, the Baby Eagle III has a slide that rides inside the frame rail instead of outside the frame like a Colt 1911. Firearms with slides that ride inside the frame rails have a reputation for accuracy, and the design allows the slide to be slightly thinner than the more familiar outside-the-frame design.

Magnum Research offers its steel-frame Baby Eagle III pistols in both Full Size and Semi-Compact versions. The Full Size steel-frame pistol is available in 9mm, .40 S&W and .45 ACP and comes with a 4.43-inch barrel. The Semi-Compact is available in all three calibers and comes with a 3.85-inch barrel. Magnum Research is also importing a polymer-frame Baby Eagle III that's available in both barrel lengths in either 9mm or .40 S&W.

The pistol I tested was the Full Size steel-frame 9mm, which comes with double-stack metal magazines that hold either 10 or 15 rounds. The magazines feature bright red followers and fit easily into the Baby Eagle III's large mag well.

The grip itself is rather austere with vertical serrations on the frontstrap. A polymer grip cover offers texturing on the backstrap but nothing on the sides except a Magnum Research logo and a subtle thumb rest. The new, thinner Bay Eagle grip measures 1.2 inches wide on the sides and 1.3 inches across the thumb rests, which is on par with other double-stack 9mm pistols.

The Baby Eagle III offers a straight, elongated beaver-tail and a large, teardrop-shaped ambidextrous decocker lever. The slide itself is beveled to reduce weight and improve concealability (and, very likely, to mimic the larger Desert Eagle guns), and the carbon-steel frame and slide come with a matte black oxide finish that reduces glare and stands up well to abuse.

These guns also feature a large externally mounted extractor, reversible magazine release button and a four-slot accessory rail under the barrel. The trigger guard is enlarged to give better access to the trigger when wearing gloves.

The Baby Eagle III's 4.43-inch stainless steel match barrel fits precisely in the frame without a visible gap between the slide and barrel. The tight slide/barrel fit is one of the factors that makes these guns so accurate. The three-white-dot combat sights are dovetailed into the slide. The angled design of the rear sight helps control glare, and the rear sight can be adjusted for windage.

When pressed downward, the Baby Eagle III's decocker safely releases the hammer and deactivates the trigger. When it is pressed forward and up, the pistol is ready to fire. It's quite different from the control layout most American shooters are familiar with, but with a bit of practice the design becomes natural—just ask any longtime Beretta 92 shooter.

The ambidextrous decocker and reversible maga- ➔

BABY BOOMER

← zine release mean the Baby Eagle III works well for left-handed shooters. The large slide stop is easy to reach and easy to manipulate, and I'm glad Magnum Research hasn't shrunk the stop to vestigial proportions like some other gun companies have. The slide-lock lever is easy to access and doesn't require Herculean force to depress. The mag release button is well positioned, easy to access when you need it and tucked out of the way when you don't.

Like other DA/SA guns, the Baby Eagle III offers a heavy double-action trigger pull just under 12 pounds followed by a lighter 4.9-pound single-action trigger pull, as measured on an RCBS gauge. For a DA/

SA pistol the Baby Eagle III has a clean, smooth trigger that is predictable and manageable. The metal trigger itself has a wide, comfortable face that makes it easy to manage when firing in DA mode.

The exposed hammer has both half- and full-cock positions, and by pulling the trigger back partially, the hammer can be placed in the half-cock position without touching it. The decocker drops the hammer from either the half- or full-cock positions when engaged.

In a market overflowing with polymer-frame, striker-fired guns, the sturdy Baby Eagle III is something of an anomaly. The steel frame adds weight to the gun, which tips

the scales at 38 ounces—or roughly the equivalent of a Government-size 1911. Similarly, the extra barrel length gives the pistol an overall length of eight inches. Height is 5.4 inches. That makes the Baby Desert Eagle III as tall and nearly as long as a full-size 1911. Slide width is 1.3 inches, also similar to a 1911

The Baby Eagle III is anything but pint-size, which may seem odd in a world where smaller, lighter 9mms grab headlines. The Baby Eagle is bigger than most competitors, but as a result it's also more comfortable to shoot—especially if you have big hands.

Disassembling the Baby Eagle III is fast and straightforward. Simply remove the magazine of an unloaded gun and cock the hammer. From there, retract the slide slightly until the two round index markers on the left side of the frame and slide align. It doesn't take much—the slide only has to be pulled back about a quarter-inch—and when the dots align you simply push the slide stop pin out of the gun from the right side, removing the slide stop and allowing the slide to move forward.

From there the barrel and spring assembly can be removed for maintenance or cleaning. It's a fast and easy takedown design that even a novice shooter can master in short →



▲ The Baby Eagle III's control layout is quite simple. There's a large slide-lock lever, a decocker and a reversible magazine release button.



▲ The Baby Eagle III doesn't come with a lot of fancy grip texturing. Instead, the side of the polymer grips features an eagle logo and a small thumb rest.

MAGNUM RESEARCH BABY EAGLE III

TYPE: DA/SA semiauto

CALIBER: 9mm (tested), .40 S&W, .45 ACP

CAPACITY: 10-, 15-round magazines supplied

BARREL: 4.43 in.

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 8.0/5.4/1.3 in.

WEIGHT: 38 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: matte black oxide slide and frame (as tested)

GRIPS: polymer

TRIGGER: 4.9 lb. single-action pull; 11.9 lb. double-action pull (measured)

SIGHTS: three white-dot; drift adjustable rear

PRICE: \$691

MANUFACTURER: Magnum Research, Inc., MAGNUMRESEARCH.COM

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BABY BOOMER

← order. Reassembly is straightforward and uncomplicated.

Unpretentious and unadorned, the Baby Eagle III is a robust workhorse of a pistol. Thanks to its slide cuts and geometry, it bears a passing resemblance to its larger Desert Eagle kinfolk, but the Baby Eagle stands on the merits of its own design without the need to impress by impersonating its outsized relatives.

The suggested retail price is \$691 for either the Full Size or Semi-Compact Baby Desert Eagle, which is \$9 less than the similar CZ 75 SP-01. Magnum Research has a long list of accessories available for the Baby Eagle III, including spare magazines, holsters and a wraparound grip that offers more texturing than the standard grip design. The company even offers inside-the-waistband holsters, so if you don't mind the Baby Eagle's size and weight, you can employ it as your everyday carry pistol.

Speaking of which, most 9mm pistols I test are compact, striker-fired, polymer-frame pistols designed

for concealed carry. The Magnum Research was a departure from that familiar design, and the first thing I noticed when shooting the Baby Eagle III is just how manageable this gun is. The hefty steel frame and slide do a great job mitigating recoil, and it's very easy to deliver fast and accurate shots with this gun.

Some shooters think DA/SA pistols aren't a good option for new shooters because they are more complicated than striker-fired guns, but I disagree. The Baby Eagle III offers a long sight radius, mild recoil, and a light, crisp single-action trigger. What's more, when the shooter engages the decocker and the trigger disconnects, the gun won't fire unless the trigger is pulled in double action.

Spending so much range time behind striker-fired guns required me to refresh myself on the DA/SA design. I suffered from poor accuracy on my second shot when firing offhand because my mind wasn't prepared to transition from double-action to single-action firing.

But once you're in the DA/SA groove, everything comes together, and this gun shines. The initial trigger pull is smooth but manageable, and you can half-cock the gun and rest if you find the long, heavy, double-action trigger pull a burden. Subsequent shots will be fast and accurate.

I appreciated the trigger's wide face, which is very controllable, and there's none of that mushiness you sometimes encounter with triggers on striker guns. My only complaint is I wish the trigger guard offered a more pronounced undercut where it meets the frame.

The Baby Eagle III managed excellent 25-yard groups that averaged between 1.80 and 2.50 inches for five shots from a fixed rest. The sights are relatively coarse—they're designed for combat and not bullseye shooting—but they work just fine. The rear sight is concave to prevent glare washing out the sight on sunny days, and the design is effective. With an unloaded gun I did the 360-degree turn under a full sun and never lost track of the sight.

Reliability was excellent, and the Baby Eagle III fed, fired, extracted and ejected every cartridge without hesitation.

This gun is much more fun to shoot offhand than really small, really light 9mm pistols. Unlike smaller guns that leave you searching for the sights, the steady Baby Eagle III keeps urging the shooter to step on the gas. If you want to shoot accurately and quickly—and who doesn't?—this gun is a great option.

Whether or not you elect to carry this gun and whether you choose an outside-the-waistband or inside-the-waistband holster is largely a matter of taste. The good news is that the Baby Eagle III is very close in size and weight to a full-size 1911. How you feel about carrying the 1911 is probably how you'll feel about the Baby Eagle III.

I made a few notes regarding specific features of the gun. First, the po-



▲ The Baby Eagle III's two-dot rear combat sight is concave to help reduce glare. The hammer has a half-cock position in addition to full cock.

ACCURACY RESULTS MAGNUM RESEARCH BABY EAGLE III				
9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
SIG Sauer FMJ	115	1,265	14	2.49
Remington Golden Saber BJHP	124	1,210	14	2.22
Hornady Critical Duty FlexLock	135	1,043	9	1.96
Winchester Defender	147	988	15	1.81
Federal Syntech Training Match	147	1,036	8	2.42

Notes: Accuracy results are averages of four five-shot-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded on a LabRadar doppler radar placed at the muzzle. Abbreviations: BJHP, bonded jacketed hollow-point; FMJ, full metal jacket

sitioning of the decocker and the lack of front slide serrations makes racking the slide different than other guns. There isn't a lot of real estate on the rear portion of the slide that isn't taken up by the decocking lever. It's not a problem per se, but you will have to readjust how you operate the slide—like learning to step around the hitch on your pickup truck or a piece of furniture in your home.

Second, I recommend paying close attention to the relative position of the decocking lever and your fingers. When the lever is pressed down to the decock position, it rides along the side of the frame and can, if you aren't paying attention, capture a chunk of flesh as it moves. Trust me, that's not an experience you'll like—and you will remember it.

Overall, I was greatly impressed with Magnum Research's new 9mm and happy to see the Baby Eagle name continue forward. There's nothing fancy about this gun, and it's not the lightest or the newest design



Shooters will find the Baby Eagle III way more manageable to shoot than most of today's 9mms. You can deliver its rounds on target in a hurry.

to hit the marketplace. However, the Magnum Research Baby Desert Eagle III is a pistol that's ready to be worked hard, a gun forged in battle and built for the long haul.

It may never challenge the Glock 17 or SIG P320 in overall sales,

but fans of the Baby Desert Eagle know that doesn't matter. They like this gun's all-steel construction, they like the simplicity of the DA/SA design, and they like the Baby Eagle's workmanlike attitude. Odds are you will, too.

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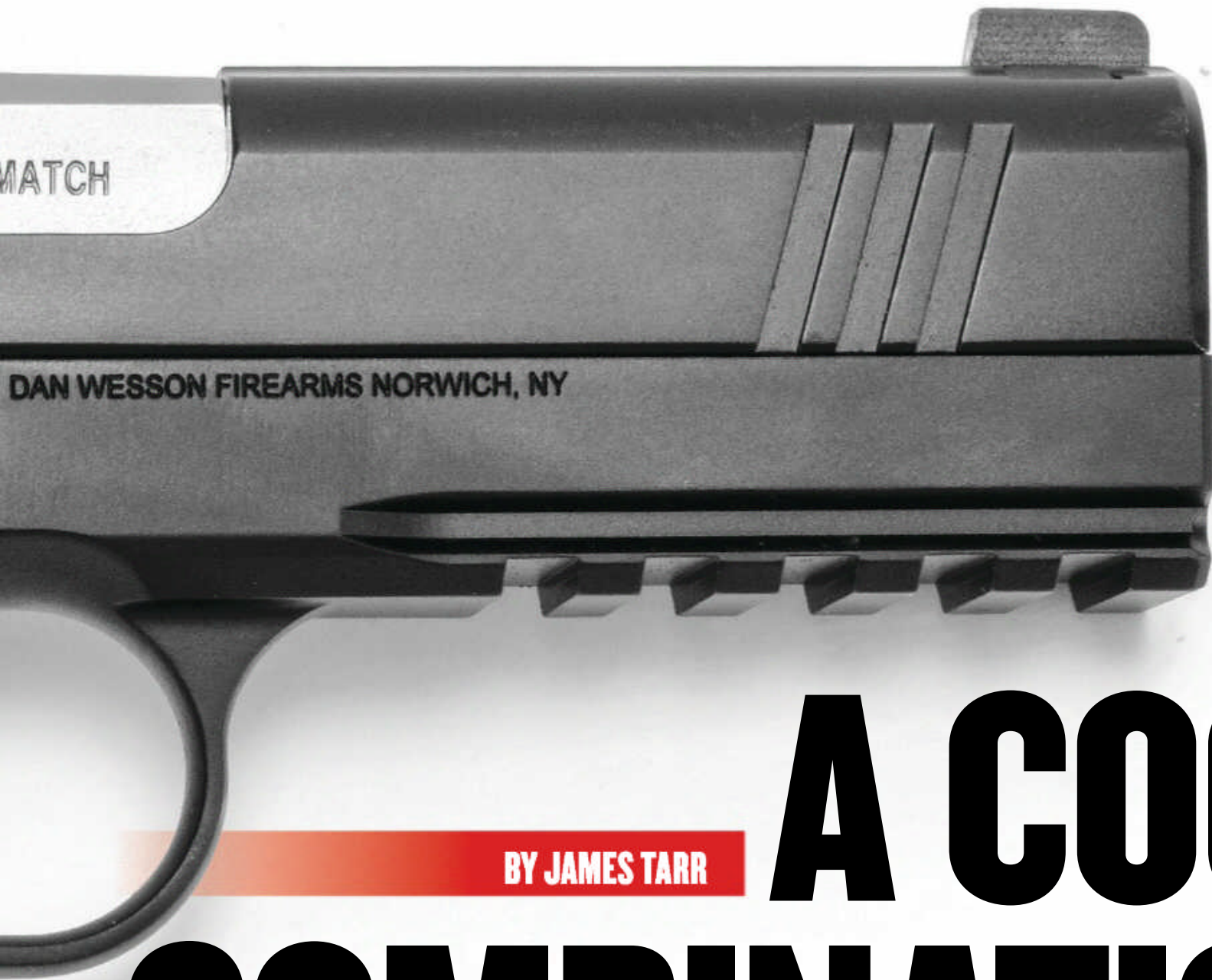
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If you don't know, Dan Wesson, which is known for its 1911s, is part of CZ USA. The new DWX pistol combines the legendary reliability and ergonomics of the CZ 75 with the trigger system of the 1911, which has what many people consider to be the best handgun trigger pull in the world. And the DWX is truly a combination of both designs; many parts on this handgun are interchangeable with both the standard CZ 75 and a 1911.

Currently, there are two models



BY JAMES TARR

A COOL COMBINATION

THE DAN WESSON DWX COMPACT IS PART CZ 75, PART 1911 AND IS THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS.

of the DWX: the standard DWX and the DWX Compact. All are made in the Dan Wesson facility in Norwich, New York. The full-size DWX has a five-inch barrel, is fed by CZ P-09 magazines and is offered in 9mm or .40 S&W. It is a big, all-steel gun, and with an unloaded weight of more than 43 ounces, it seems built to be a competition handgun.

The DWX Compact, on the other hand, has an aluminum frame and sports a four-inch barrel. It seems purpose-built for concealed carry.

There are two versions of the Compact: one with a frame rail for mounting a light/laser and one without. I secured a railed sample of this pistol to test, as I am sure it's bound to be the most popular of all the DWX offerings.

My digital scale put the weight of this pretty piece at just 27.8 ounces with an empty magazine in place—almost an ounce lighter than the official specs and nearly as light as some similar size polymer-frame 9mm pistols. The DWX Compact is

offered only in 9mm. It is fed by CZ 75 Compact magazines and has a 15+1 capacity.

The slide has a unique profile, much more 1911 than CZ 75. Unlike the original 1911, this gun is built around the smaller 9mm cartridge, which means that while the 0.9-inch slide is the same width as a standard .45 ACP 1911, it is not as tall. Bore height off the hand is the same as a standard CZ 75, which means it is quite low. This is important because, all things being equal, the lower →

A COOL COMBINATION

← the bore height, the less muzzle rise while shooting.

A 1911's slide rides outside the frame rails, and the barrel has both a bushing and a swinging link. With a CZ 75 the slide rides inside the frame, and the bushing-less barrel locks up with the breech without the use of a link. With the DWX, you get a combination of the two. The slide rides outside the rails like a 1911, but it uses a bushing-less barrel with a CZ 75 style lock-up. The fully ramped barrel is unique to the DWX.

The top of the slide is flat, with a serrated rib. The front sight is an AmeriGlo day/night model that

features a bright lime-green circle around a tritium insert. The lime green is photoluminescent paint, which means if you go from a brightly lit area to a dim one or shine the beam of a flashlight on your front sight for a few seconds, the ring will glow brightly for a few minutes.

The fixed rear sight is a Henning Group Battlehook. This plain black sight has a serrated face and a U-shaped notch. It also has a vertical face so you can rack the pistol one-handed on any hard surface.

Slide-to-frame fit is nicely snug. The four-inch stainless steel barrel has an aggressive crown, and you'll

see "MATCH" on the side of the chamber. You see "match" marked on barrels these days quite often, but in many cases the word has no real meaning.

In this case the "match" designation is no lie. The barrel, like the barrels on most Dan Wesson 1911s, appears to have undergone final hand-fitting. The barrel-to-slide fit is so snug that the slide won't go all the way forward into battery if you gently ease the slide forward. This is the mark of a tightly fit gun. There is a full-length steel recoil spring guide rod, with a non-captured recoil spring.

Both the frame and the slide have a matte black anodized finish. The humpbacked frame doesn't just vaguely resemble that of a CZ 75, it has the same external dimensions. If you don't like the color or texture of the provided grips, CZ 75 Compact grips will fit.

The pistol is fed by standard CZ 75 Compact magazines, which means not only are they plentiful, but also are inexpensive. You can also find all sorts of CZ 75 accessories that will fit the DWX, from extended base pads to magazine wells.

The serial number on the right side of the frame above the grip isn't actually on the frame. The aluminum grip module is attached to an internal aluminum chassis that has rails on which the slide rides. The chassis is the serialized part. While Dan →



▲ The controls of the DWX Compact are pure 1911—and that includes the trigger, which is composed of Dan Wesson 1911 parts. Unlike a 1911, though, there is no grip safety.



▲ The DWX Compact's humpback grip has the same dimensions as the CZ 75. The frag-type pattern on the frame and grips is unusual, but Tarr says it does work.

DAN WESSON DWX COMPACT

TYPE: single-action semiauto

CALIBER: 9mm

CAPACITY: 15

BARREL: 4.0 in. stainless steel

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.47/5.21/1.24 in.

WEIGHT: 27.8 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: aluminum frame, steel slide

SIGHTS: AmeriGlo day/night front, Henning Group Battlehook rear

TRIGGER PULL: 4.5 lb. pull (measured)

SAFETY: manual thumb

PRICE: \$1,799

MANUFACTURER: Dan Wesson, CZ-USA.COM



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← Wesson currently doesn't have any different pattern grip modules available—the company is running just as fast as it can simply keeping up with current demand—it could be a possibility down the road.

No bigger 1911 fan than Jeff Cooper wrote glowing things about the CZ 75, for two reasons: One, models with a manual safety can be carried cocked-and-locked; and two, the humpbacked grip is very ergonomic and has the same grip angle as the 1911.

Cooper did not have large hands, and unlike a lot of high-capacity

“wonder-nines” of the Cold War era, the CZ 75 does not have a thick frame. With its thin grip panels you'll find the DWX Compact grip as narrow as most modern polymer-framed 9mms. Further, the single-action trigger provides a much shorter reach than the double-action first shot of a traditional CZ 75.

The grip panels are aluminum, and both they and the frontstrap

and mainspring housing sport a Ned Christiansen-style “frag” pattern that vaguely resembles the outside of a World War II-era fragmentation grenade.

The DWX is like the CZ 75 in that it doesn't have a grip safety. The beavertail is a bit reduced in profile when compared to a modern 1911, presumably so it will be a little easier to conceal.

The magazine well is nicely beveled. Two 15-round magazines are supplied with the pistol. A quick clarifying word on the magazines. The CZ 75 Compact magazine works with both 9mm and .40 S&W CZs. Therefore, you'll see “.40” marked on the left side of the magazine tube, with numbered index holes for that caliber. And on the right side you'll see “9mm” with index holes for that caliber.

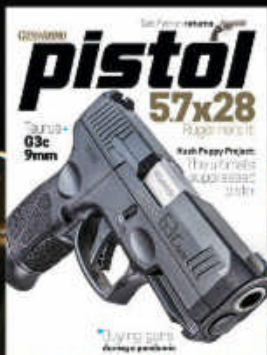
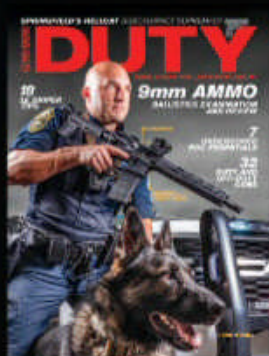
Now let's get to the truly 1911 part of this pistol: the trigger group. This isn't just a “1911-style” trigger. The



A The slide rides outside the rails like a 1911, but it uses a bushing-less barrel with a CZ 75 style lock-up. Tarr's test sample was the railed model.

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sear, disconnecter, hammer assembly, firing pin, firing pin spring, sear spring and hammer spring are all Dan Wesson 1911 components. The trigger itself is a flat-faced, skeletonized 1911-style trigger with arms expanded to fit around the double-column magazine. The trigger bow itself is anodized red. This works well on the full-size DWX, as that gun comes with red grips, but I'm not so sure I like the color on this otherwise all-black gun. However, it does draw the eye, which I'm guessing is the point.

While there is no trigger pull specified on the website, my source at Dan Wesson told me they expect trigger pulls on the DWX Compact to run between 3.5 and 4.5 pounds. Trigger pull on my sample came in at a crisp 4.5 pounds, with just a bit of take-up and an extremely short reset.

The 1911 trigger group has been around for over a century. If you feel the need to tweak your trigger, as

ACCURACY RESULTS | DAN WESSON DWX COMPACT

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Wilson Combat XTP +P	115	1,204	9	2.3
Black Hills FMJ	115	1,121	10	3.1
Hornady American Gunner XTP	124	1,054	12	2.0
Winchester Silvertip JHP	147	955	18	2.8

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

Dan Wesson notes on its website, "...many standard 1911 parts enable gunsmiths and competitive shooters to tune the X just the way they like it."

The 1911 trigger group means a 1911-style thumb safety. This is a single-sided safety, and while it is larger than those safeties found on original GI 1911s—I'll call it a minimally extended safety—I still wish it was bigger, like the model on the full-size DWX. That said, the thumb safety had very positive clicks up and down, and my thumb never slipped off it, not even when shooting outdoors in

December with hands halfway numb.

Modern 1911s have been hugely modified from the original GI guns to improve both ergonomics and reliability. The CZ 75 has seen a huge resurgence in recent years, mostly driven by competition shooters. The biggest drawback to the traditional CZ design has always been the long/heavy double-action trigger pull, but reliability has never been an issue. During testing of this pistol, I put a variety of ammo through it, both full metal jackets and hollowpoints of varying weights and profiles. Reliability was 100 percent.



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← The big lime green dot on the front sight was easy to track in rapid fire, as was the large front sight post itself. I like the sights Dan Wesson chose for this pistol, and I think they are a great choice for a gun meant for self-defense. At the range I spent time knocking down steel as well as perforating cardboard targets and found the pistol very controllable and fun to shoot.

While, stylistically, I don't really care for the grenade-shaped texturing on the frame or grip panels, I have to admit it works just fine. The harder you grip the gun the more the texturing digs into your flesh. I thought the pistol pointed naturally, but that was completely expected considering both the 1911 and CZ 75 are ergonomic pistols and seem to point well for just about everyone.

I was curious to see how the DWX Compact would perform in speed drills compared to my Glock 19, the carry gun against which I judge all others. The G19 is just about the same size as the DWX Compact and has the same capacity. The Glock weighs a few ounces less, but it has a slightly lower bore, so on paper at least the two would be similar.

Shooting the two guns side by side, I wasn't surprised to find the DWX had a bit less muzzle rise. Also, even with the same trigger pull weight, there is no comparison between a 1911 trigger pull and anything else, so I was able to shoot the DWX more quickly and more accurately. The recoil impulse back into my hand was a little bit sharper with the DWX Compact because of the metal frame versus the flexing polymer frame of the G19.

Curious, I then pitted the DWX Compact against the Glock 34 I've had on my hip for most of the last 15 years. This tweaked competition 9mm still weighs less than the Dan Wesson but has a longer sight radius. Muzzle rise between the two guns was identical, and with the crisper trigger pull of the DWX Compact, I



▲ The flat-topped slide has a serrated rib, and the sights are about as good as they get for defensive use: an AmeriGlo day/night front sight combined with a Henning Battlehook rear sight.

was able to run it just as fast as I was the G34, a gun with which I am far more familiar.

After ten minutes behind the DWX Compact, I found that firing at a rate of three rounds per second I could easily keep all of my hits inside the center eight-inch circle of an IDPA target 12 yards away. This means to me that the DWX Compact is a killer of a carry gun, and the all-steel five-inch DWX, which weighs a full pound more, will be a literal lead faucet and likely to tear up the competition shooting circuit.

Dan Wesson has been working with holster makers, and by the time you read this, there should be offerings from Blade-Tech, Red Hill Tactical, Long's Shadow Holsters, GX Products and Crossbreed, among others.

The DWX Compact is not an inexpensive pistol at \$1,800, but it costs a lot less than Wilson Combat's EDC X9—a compact 1911-style carry pistol with nearly identical specs. While I like trigger and the looks of the \$2,900 Wilson better, I actually prefer the sights and grip frame of the DWX Compact.

I first laid hands on a working prototype of the DWX Compact in August 2019. It has taken Dan Wesson longer than it expected to get this pistol into production, but it is everything that prototype promised and, in fact, that you would hope for or expect from a pistol meant to provide the best features of two iconic and historic pistol designs.

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TOUCH OF GRAY

BY J. SCOTT RUPP

RUGER'S AMERICAN COMPACT CERAKOTE GRAY IN .45 IS A SOLID ALL-AROUND GUN WITH PLENTY OF PUNCH.

Time flies. It's hard to believe the Ruger American is five years old, and you can be forgiven if you've kinda forgotten about this model as Ruger and other companies have been concentrating on smaller and smaller, lighter and lighter guns designed primarily for concealed carry. But there's still room in this world for guns that are bigger than the palm of your hand and pack a serious punch.

While it's called a Compact thanks to its 3.75-inch barrel, the Ruger American Compact .45 ACP in Cerakote Gray will not be mistaken for, say, a SIG P365 or a Springfield Hellcat. The gun is close to eight inches long overall, and weight is 29 ounces. And that's totally fine, as this gun is definitely suitable for carry, as well as an excellent choice for home defense—a solid all-around gun for those who prefer the power of the .45.

Plus, it's not black. Like many of you, I own a number of semiautos that aren't 1911s, and nearly every one of them is black on black. Nothing wrong with that, but it gets boring. The new Cerakote Gray finish on the American Compact looks great while still maintaining the pistol's all-business appearance and providing top-notch corrosion resistance.

Other than this finish, the design remains the same. The American was intended as a duty gun from the get-go, a category missing from the company's lineup at the time. Initially, it was intended the gun was to take part in the military's Modular Handgun System trials, which SIG eventually won with its P320/M17, but in the end Ruger decided not to pursue it.

But the effort did produce the duty pistol Ruger was lacking. The American features a robust chassis with no-nonsense

TOUCH OF GRAY

← rails on which the stainless steel slide rides. Unlike some competing designs, the gun is not truly modular—as in you won't be changing the entire grip/frame on the American. However, the pistol ships with interchangeable grip modules to change the girth of the grip as well as the reach to the trigger. These are black, as are the controls, and add a nice contrast to the gray frame and slide.

The American Compact ships with a medium and a large module—only the 9mm Americans include a small module—and the medium comes installed on the gun. The grip circumference, measured near the base, is 5.75 inches with the medium module installed and 6¹/₈ inches with the large size in place. Trigger reach

difference between the two is about a quarter-inch.

To swap them out, use the supplied Torx wrench to turn the locking cam one-quarter turn. Then pull down on the module to remove it. Ruger's instructions caution not to overtighten the screw during installation.

When you open the box, you'll see a yellow plastic block has been placed in the large module, and you should keep the block inserted into whichever module is not in use so it doesn't get damaged.

The grip modules have diamond-shaped projections at the back but are essentially smooth on the sides. The frontstrap stippling/checkering is made up of vertical rows of small diamonds on either side of two rows

of what could best be described as tiny up/down arrows. It's not the most aggressive design in the world. The front of the glass-filled nylon frame sports a three-slot Picatinny rail for attaching lights and lasers.

The American features both ambidextrous slide-lock levers and magazine releases and, in the case of my sample, ambidextrous thumb safeties. The gun is also available in a Pro version without the thumb safety.

A large takedown lever is located on the left side. The American doesn't require you to pull the trigger in order to fieldstrip the gun. Simply ensure the pistol is unloaded, lock back the slide and swing the takedown lever until it clicks into the full six o'clock position. There's a bit of resistance right at the end, and while you shouldn't force it, you may have to grunt just a little.

Remove the slide. Withdraw the captured recoil spring/guide rod assembly and remove the barrel. That's it, and Ruger doesn't want you messing with any of the other internals—even though it does provide an exploded view of the pistol's parts, including the fire-control insert.

The manual notes that this insert is black-nitrided, and several other parts are nickel/Teflon coated, so they don't need to be serviced or lubricated. Ruger says the only lubrication necessary is a drop of oil or a smidgen of grease on the slide cuts, the top of the inside of the slide and around barrel hole in the slide. Oh, and the manual also says to be sure to clean out underneath the beefy external extractor claw.

Sights are authentic Novak Lo-Mount three-dot. They're steel and no-snag, and both front and rear are set into dovetails.

The rear slide serrations aren't deep, but there are plenty of them, and they have additional, subtle serrations on the raised portions. They cover a lot of real estate and offer a good purchase, which is important on a gun with strong recoil →



▲ The American Compact is available with or without a thumb safety; all controls are ambidextrous. Rupp wished the magazine release was bigger.



▲ The Novak rugged LoMount sights are no-snag, and the rear features a generous notch. Slide serrations are on the rear only, but they're well designed.

RUGER AMERICAN COMPACT

TYPE: striker-fired semiautomatic

CALIBER: 9mm, .45 ACP (tested)

CAPACITY: 7+1; 3 magazines supplied

BARREL: 3.75 in.

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 7.3/4.7/1.1 in.

WEIGHT: 29 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: Cerakote Gray glass-filled nylon frame w/interchangeable L, M grip modules; Cerakote Gray stainless steel slide

TRIGGER: 6 lb., 12 oz. pull (measured)

SIGHTS: Novak LoMount 3-dot

SAFETY: integral trigger, sear block, ambidextrous manual thumb (as tested)

PRICE: \$579

MANUFACTURER: Ruger, RUGER.COM

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TOUCH OF GRAY

← springs; you need a good grip to cycle the slide. There are no serrations on the front. I don't find this a big hindrance, although some die-hard press-checkers may disagree.

The trigger on my sample broke at six pounds, 12 ounces on average. It's heavy, but it's fairly consistent, and an overtravel stop is molded into the trigger guard. It's got a fairly long quarter-inch take-up and then a bit of a spongy pull. If this sounds like a dig, it's really not. If you press the trigger as you would in a defensive or training drill situation—as opposed to some writer dude sitting at his desk and slowly milking it—you're not going to find it lacking at all.

In addition to the integrated trigger safety, the American also has an automatic sear block safety but, thankfully, no magazine disconnect. Unlike similar designs, the cut in the barrel hood—the “inspection port,” as Ruger calls it—is big enough to see whether there's a round in the chamber in all but low-light conditions.

The gun ships with three (yes!) seven-round nickel/Teflon-coated

stainless steel magazines. One of the magazines has a finger-hook base; the other two bases are flat. Ruger also supplies two additional finger-hook bases so you can convert the two flat-base mags if you want. I don't have big hands, and I didn't need the finger hook to get all my fingers on the grip, but for some people the finger-hook bases will be the way to go.

The gun shot decent from the bench, as you can see in the accompanying accuracy chart. I managed single groups as small as 1.1 inches with both the Hornady and Fiocchi loads. I couldn't repeat the little groups with any consistency, but it does show the pistol has more accuracy potential than I could get out of it from the bench—freely admitting I'm not a good pistol bench shooter.

While the American shot the Fiocchi jacketed hollowpoint well in terms of accuracy, it didn't want to feed them consistently, with rounds frequently hanging up on the feed ramp.

This gun had seen action last year on the set of “Handguns & Defensive

Weapons,” and one of our cast members had a couple malfunctions early on during filming. But once she bore down on the gun she had no other issues.

I bring this up to point out that limp-wristing any semiauto—especially a new gun with strong springs—can cause problems, so before you go blaming gun or ammo for any problems you might experience, make sure you're locked in.

During my testing, aside from the issues with the Fiocchi hollowpoints, there were no malfunctions either from the bench or practical shooting.

I ran several Failure to Stop drills (two shots to the body, one to the head on a USPSA target), and the Ruger acquitted itself very well, in part because of the sights. They're really easy to pick up, and the generous notch on the rear sight leaves plenty of room on either side of the front blade, which I like for defensive-type shooting. The benefits of this sight setup proved even handier when shooting on the move, with the pistol bouncing around.

For a relatively small gun with a .45's recoil, muzzle flip wasn't bad. In fact it was a lot less than I expected during movement drills, where you don't have as much control because your feet aren't planted and your body isn't nearly the stable platform it is when firing from a static, square-to-the-target position.

Ruger says the gun's barrel cam extends the recoil duration, spreading out the force to reduce felt recoil. I'm not mechanically inclined at all, so I'll take the company at its word. I will say that I shot the American .45 alongside a compact semiauto 9mm and thought the .45 was equal to that particular 9mm in terms of controllability.

The American's beavertail did beat up my thumb a little. Not abrading it, but I began to feel it bruising the base knuckle about halfway through shooting nearly 100 rounds from the bench. I segued into drills right after that, so I continued to notice it. →



▲ The interchangeable grip modules change grip circumference and trigger reach and change out via a single cam screw. They're not particularly aggressive.

ACCURACY RESULTS RUGER AMERICAN COMPACT				
.45 ACP	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Federal Low Recoil	165	964	17	3.0
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	185	905	10	2.8
Fiocchi JHP	200	846	8	2.6
Federal Punch	230	777	10	2.8

Notes: Accuracy results are the averages of four five-shot groups at 25 yards from an MTM Case-Gard pistol rest. Velocities are averages of 15 shots recorded 10 feet from the muzzle with a Pro Chrono chronograph.

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TOUCH OF GRAY



A The American Compact comes with three Teflon/nickel-coated stainless steel magazines and two extra finger-hook extensions. The medium grip module comes installed; the other size is large.

← This could be due to my grip, which is going to be different for everyone. Here I might've benefited from a small backstrap, but as noted the American .45s don't come with that size.

I can't say I'm a fan of the magazine release. I wish it was larger because in shoot/move drills I also incorporated reloads and found myself fumbling to hit and depress the button fully. Certainly some of this would be alleviated with dry-fire and live-fire reloading practice, but I think the pistol would be improved with a bigger button.

I'm a sling-shotter when it comes to getting the gun back into battery on a slide-lock reload, but I did work with the slide-lock lever and found it functions well as a slide release, too. And for you lefties, you'll appreciate the fact that the right-side lever is the same size as the left-side one, so it's truly ambidextrous.


The ambi safety is a good one. While it's not super-positive, it's easy to move into the Fire and Safe positions. Even when firing with just my off hand, I found I could engage and disengage the safety with my left thumb, which is less coordinated and weaker than my firing-hand thumb.

When he reviewed the original American in *Handguns*, writer James Tarr took the gun to task a little bit for the lack of aggressiveness in the grip. I didn't really find that to be

a huge problem. Yes, depending on how I was shooting, the gun did shift a bit, but it wasn't bad. However, I think Tarr is right that more grippiness would be appreciated by most shooters.

I carried the American Compact in a Fobus medium inside-the-waist-band holster. This pistol has the same size footprint as my Smith & Wesson M&P Compact 9mm, and while neither is a micro/subcompact, they conceal easily enough. The American weighs a full six ounces more than my Smith, but I didn't mind the weight—although at no point did I carry the gun for an entire day. It draws nicely and comes on target quickly from concealment.

For years the great debate was 9mm versus .45 as to which is the more effective defensive round, and for all intents and purposes, that battle has been decided in favor of the 9mm. I get it. The 9 is easier to shoot, holds more rounds, and today's ammunition makes it as effective as a handgun can be at stopping a threat.

But deep down in my heart of hearts, if you air-dropped me into a defensive situation where I had to halt an attack quickly with a pistol, I'd still pick the .45. With the American Compact you get a relatively compact gun that's easy to shoot, easy to hit with and offers that extra bit of power many people want—whether for carry or for home defense. 

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RELOADING GUIDE 2021

BY J. SCOTT RUPP

HANDLOADING HAS NEVER BEEN MORE POPULAR. HERE ARE SOME NEW PRODUCTS TO CHECK OUT.

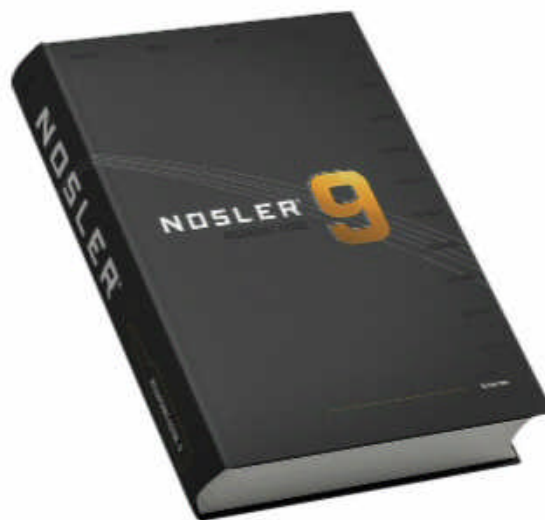
As I was putting this together in late fall/early winter, I witnessed something I can't recall ever seeing before. Sure, we've been through times when you couldn't get, say, primers or maybe cases, but shelves emptied of all powder, primer, bullets, presses and everything else? Wow. Suffice to say, the current climate has spurred a lot of folks to take up handloading or upgrade what they already had and get busy cranking out rounds. That means a couple of things in terms of this roundup. One, there's not a ton of new product out there. Why? Because the folks who make tools and components are just trying to keep up with demand for their current lineups. Two, don't cuss me out if you can't find all of this stuff on gun store shelves or online right away. This too shall pass.



Hornady M2 Digital Bench Scale

Accurate to 0.1 grain, the M2 has level feet and a bubble level to ensure you get that kind of accuracy. A large LCD display is backlit for easy reading, and it comes with a plastic windscreen to eliminate errors due to air currents. Capacity is 1,500 grains, and there's onboard storage for the calibration weights.

\$224, HORNADY.COM



Nosler Reloading Guide No. 9

The latest guide from Nosler features load data for 101 rifle and handgun cartridges with hundreds of new powder additions throughout. The manual is current with every handgun bullet that Nosler offers through 2020 from 9mm up to .45 caliber. Each cartridge section starts out with a short article from some of the leading gun writers in the country, and upfront you'll find a section on tips and techniques.

\$25, NOSLER.COM



RCBS 1500 Pocket Scale

The company describes this small scale as rugged, and it promises 0.1-grain accuracy and a 1,500-grain capacity. Powered by two included AAA batteries, it features an easy-to-read display. Comes with a check weight and powder pan, and it's covered by a one-year warranty.

\$36, RCBS.COM



RCBS Reloading Kits

Looking to get into this rewarding (and sometimes necessary) hobby? RCBS is offering four upgraded reloading kits that will start you off on the right foot and save you money over buying all the components separately. Common items to all include a press, Speer manual, funnel, deburring tool, loading block, spray lube and more. The Explorer Reloading Kit 2 and Partner Reloading Kit 2 come with Reloader Special 5 press and now include the new 1,500-grain digital scale, and the Partner 2 includes the Uniflow III powder measure. The Rebel Plus and Rebel Master kits feature the new Rebel press, as well as the Uniflow III. Prices for all kits vary based on the number of tools and accessories provided.

\$275–\$650, RCBS.COM



RCBS Rebel Press

The new Rebel is a simple single-stage press, but that doesn't mean it doesn't incorporate some cool new features. Its handle is ambidextrous, and its spent primer system allows primers to go directly into a trash can. The extra-wide base provides stability, and while it's not a big deal for handgun cartridge reloading, it features the tallest opening of any RCBS single stage—which would come in handy if you also load some of today's long rifle cartridges. A Zerk fitting makes quick work of lubrication.

\$260, RCBS.COM

Lee Ram Swage

Make quick work of military or "range" brass that feature crimped primers. The Ram Swage works on all single-stage presses with 7/8x14 threads that accept universal press shell holders. It has spring-assisted case extraction, and an all-steel case guide ensures cases will be centered on the push rod. It's a shell holder-less design and will work on any size primer pocket.

\$50, LEEPRECISION.COM



2021 Hodgdon Annual Manual

Always excited to get a new Annual Manual from Hodgdon because it encompasses so many key powders, such as Hodgdon, IMR and Winchester. It's not bullet specific, so it's a great way to start loading for a cartridge or find a new recipe for a round you're already loading. There are more than 5,000 rifle and pistol cartridge loads—including new data for 33 cartridges—in the manual's 168 pages. Available at newsstands or at the company's website.

\$13, HODGDON.COM



RCBS Case Prep Center

This do-it-all unit runs off a 24-volt motor that provides nine inch-pounds of torque for fast, easy case preparation processes. The six-station unit has micrometer adjustment for quick setup and precise cuts, and it includes Large and Small primer pocket brushes, chamfer and debur tools and an alignment gauge.

\$528, RCBS.COM

RELOADING 2021



Lyman Pro Series Dies

While they'll work on single-stage, turret and progressive presses, these new dies are optimized for the company's Mark 7 and other automated presses. Available for .380, 9mm, .38 Super, .40 S&W/10mm and .45 ACP, they're made of stainless steel and have highly polished carbide rings for wear resistance and reduced sizing force. The sizing dies have a spring-loaded decap system to ensure primers are kicked out of the pockets. Pistol sets include a flare die, and the micrometer seating die provides precision. Each set comes with a taper crimp die to remove case-mouth flare and ensure solid bullet retention.

\$250, LYMANPRODUCTS.COM



Lee Automatic Case Primer

The ACP automates priming thanks to a system that doesn't require shell holders. Cases are guided into position via a "finger guide," and consistent seating depth is made possible by Lee's new dead-length priming device. The process is effortless due to the ACP's powerful linkage. If you really want to speed things up, add the universal case feeder or case collator and a folding priming tray—all of which are sold separately. The stand on which the ACP is shown in the accompanying photo is also sold separately.

\$120, LEEPRECISION.COM



RCBS Uniflow III Measure

The big thing with this volumetric measure is it employs a single metering screw, which allows handloaders to use just one rotor and metering cylinder when loading either handgun or rifle cartridges. The Uniflow III can throw charges as small as 0.5 grain up to 120 grains, and it will hold up to one pound of extruded powder or a half-pound of flake powder. Accuracy is enhanced by the anti-static hopper.

\$108, RCBS.COM

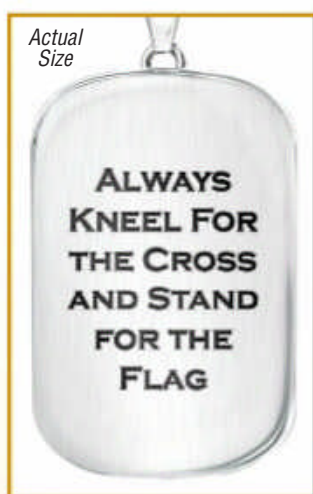
Hornady G3-1500 Scale

I've worked with both previous generations of this scale, and I've used them a lot because they're really handy—quick to calibrate and fast and simple to use, with a small footprint that won't hog bench space. The new third generation has a 1,500-grain max capacity; a large, backlit digital screen; and onboard storage for the calibration weight. Protection is provided by a hinged, clear plastic lid.

\$70, HORNADY.COM



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01-27719-001-E50051



SMITH & WESSON M&P9 M2.0 4-INCH COMPACT OR

THE NEWEST BRANCH ON SMITH & WESSON'S ever-growing M&P family tree is the M&P9 M2.0 Compact four-inch OR. OR stands for Optics Ready, and this gun sports a milled slide that allows shooters to mount their favorite reflex optic. Smith & Wesson includes seven plates for mounting most popular red dot pistol sights.

"The use of optics has become increasingly popular as handgun owners look for ways to enhance their accuracy and shooting experience," says Vince Perreault, Smith & Wesson's brand marketing manager. "To meet the demands of our consumers, the M&P9 M2.0 Compact is now able to accept many popular slide-mounted optics, straight from the factory."

The gun's four-inch barrel is housed in a slide that measures 1.1 inches wide. Overall length is 7.3 inches, which is

slightly shorter than a Glock 19. From the top of its sights to the base pad of the magazine, the new M&P9 measures 5.1 inches, which is comparable to the Glock. The M&P has an unloaded weight of 27 ounces, and its beveled slide makes the gun less likely to print.

Smith & Wesson M&P pistols feature a Zytel polymer frame with an extended stainless steel chassis. Both the barrel and slide are made from stainless steel, and both are treated with an Armornite salt bath nitride treatment that improves the strength and corrosion protection of the metal. Practically speaking, the M&P9 2.0 Compact OR is capable of withstanding exposure to moisture and perspiration that occurs when a firearm is carried daily.

The M2.0's slide cuts vary slightly from the original model, and this gun comes with aggressive fish scale texturing at the

SMITH & WESSON M&P9 M2.0 4-INCH COMPACT OR

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 15

BARREL: 4 in.

OAL/WIDTH: 7.3/1.1 in.

HEIGHT: 5.1 in.; 5.9 in. w/Trijicon RMRcc

WEIGHT: 27 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: Armornite-finished stainless steel slide; polymer frame w/interchangeable grips

TRIGGER: 5.5 lb.

SIGHTS: co-witness-height white three-dot

PRICE: \$616

MANUFACTURER: Smith & Wesson,

SMITH-WESSON.COM

front and the rear of the slide. Also new on the M2.0 guns is a revised grip texturing that provides a secure hold on the



▲ The control layout, great trigger and grip stippling remain the same as the M2.0 Compact, but the ability to mount a red dot like this Trijicon RMRcc adds a new dimension.

gun and a lighter, smoother trigger than the previous-generation model.

One thing that hasn't changed much over the M&P9's lifespan is the control layout. There's a reversible push-button magazine release and an ambidextrous slide stop as well as a rotating takedown lever that makes M&P guns easy to clean and maintain. The recoil spring features a flat coil design, and there's a three-slot rail under the barrel should you elect to mount a light, laser or light/laser on your gun. The M&P9 Compact OR also features extended three-white-dot sights dovetailed into the slide that will co-witness with your reflex sight.

Suggested retail price is \$616, and the gun comes with a number of extras, including a second 15-round magazine, a total of four backstrap inserts, base plates and two magazine sleeves for firing 17-round magazines.

While it's not super-small, it's still easy to conceal when worn inside the waistband, and it offers plenty of grip space and handles recoil well—thanks in part to the low bore axis and 18-degree grip angle.

The M2.0 trigger is excellent. The trigger pull averaged 5.5 pounds when measured on a Wheeler gauge. Take-up is smooth, and the wide, smooth trigger face is easy to manage. Instead of a bladed trigger, the Smith & Wesson's trigger is divided into two pieces, and the lower portion pivots. I like this cleaner

ACCURACY RESULTS | SMITH & WESSON M&P9 M2.0 4-INCH COMPACT OR

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Black Hills HoneyBadger + P	100	1,242	20	2.4
Hornady Critical Defense Lite FTX	100	1,111	18	2.7
Federal Punch	124	1,129	15	1.9
Speer Gold Dot G2 Carry Gun	135	1,127	17	1.8
Federal Syntech Training Match	147	977	9	2.5

Notes: Accuracy results are the averages of four five-shot-shot groups at 25 yards from a fixed rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots recorded on a LabRadar doppler radar placed at the muzzle.



▲ This five-shot, 1.05-inch cluster with Speer's new Gold Dot G2 Carry Gun load shows the pistol's accuracy potential. It also handles great thanks to its low bore axis and grip angle.

S&W design better than a bladed style.

I mounted Trijicon's new RMRcc red dot on the M&P9. This compact optic doesn't impede draw, and the overall height of the gun increases by just about 0.75 inch, making this the ideal carry gun setup for those who prefer a reflex sight. Accuracy was excellent, with the best five-shot group of the day measuring just 1.05 inches at 25 yards.

Off the bench the combination of the pistol's low bore axis; smooth, short-reset trigger; excellent ergonomics; and the red dot optic made it easy to control and shoot quickly. Smith & Wesson has spent a decade perfecting the M&P9 pistols, and it should come as no surprise that there were no feeding issues throughout the 200-round test.

The rotating takedown lever makes field stripping the S&W M&P9 fast and simple, even for new shooters. Unlike other pistols that require knocking a pin free to remove interchangeable backstraps, the Smith & Wesson only requires that you turn the frame tool—which



▲ The pistol's three-dot iron sights are tall enough to co-witness with a red dot, and the gun comes with seven plates to accommodate a wide range of sights.

extends below the base of the grip with the magazine removed—90 degrees and pull it free from the gun.

Finding the right base and screws to match your optic is easy, too, and there's a detailed chart in the rear of the manual to help you match the correct base plate to your optic.

The striker-fired 9mm semiauto market is saturated, but there are a few guns that are standouts in this overcrowded field. Smith & Wesson's M&P9 M2.0 Compact OR is one of them. This versatile gun shoots like a full-size pistol and carries like a compact while offering the option to mount a reflex optic. If you're considering a new red-dot-ready gun for daily carry, this M&P9 needs to be on your short list.



SPRINGFIELD ARMORY XD-M ELITE 3.8 COMPACT

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY'S XD-M ELITE

3.8 Compact offers a smaller, handier pistol with the styling and ergonomics exemplified in the full-size Elite series pistols that include the Precision, OSP, 4.5 and the 3.8, the Compact's long-grip 20-shot cousin.

The new belt-size Elite 3.8 Compact offers 14+1 rounds in a dependable, easy-shooting, short-frame platform not to be confused with ultra-concealable, high-capacity pistols like Springfield's 11+1 Hellcat. Yet this bigger 27-ounce pistol is perfectly sized and balanced for home defense, will still fit under a jacket for concealed carry and fits even large hands comfortably.

The Elite-series slides are sculpted along the top, reducing the annoying boxiness many polymer pistols exhibit, and generously sized slide serrations on either side of the ejection port give good

purchase for charging and clearing.

After some 20 years on the market, testing an XD is like shaking hands with an old friend. The ergonomics were carefully laid out way back then and have only gotten better in feel with upgrades in grip texture and slide serration design.

Mechanics have improved, too, and the new Match Enhanced Trigger Assembly (META) has a flat-face trigger with integral overtravel stop. The new trigger pulls straight back with a pull length of a half-inch and breaks a hair before the overtravel stop hits the frame. Reset was unnoticeable under recoil. The trigger pull is a pleasing 4.75 pounds.

Other key features include a hammer-forged match barrel, forged-steel slide, and left- and right-side magazine and slide releases. The mag release is easy

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY XD-M ELITE 3.8 COMPACT

TYPE: striker-fired semiauto

CALIBER: 9mm Luger

CAPACITY: 14+1

BARREL: 3.8 in.

OAL/HEIGHT/WIDTH: 6.9/4.6/1.2 in.

WEIGHT: 27.4 oz.

CONSTRUCTION: Melonite-finished carbon-steel slide, polymer frame

SIGHTS: fixed; red fiber-optic front, white outline U-notch rear

TRIGGER: META, 4.75 lb. pull (measured)

SAFETY: internal firing pin block, trigger lever, grip

PRICE: \$559

MANUFACTURER: Springfield Armory,

SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM

to reach; its button is shielded and stiff to prevent inadvertent mag drops. When pressed, empty mags rocket out for fast, fumble-free mag changes. →

BEWARE of Joe Biden's Coming Socialism . . .

Blockbuster Book Reveals Details of Creeping Socialism and the Democrats' Radical Agenda!

Joe Biden and Democrats ran for office on the most radical platform ever concocted by their national party.

They want to fundamentally change America with massive tax increases on working Americans and businesses.

But the people behind Biden are fiercely backing a radical agenda, warns Cheryl Chumley, the author of the new book ***Socialists Don't Sleep: Christians Must Rise or America Will Fall.***

Throw out the words “liberal” and “left-leaning” and even “progressive” — many Democrats today are openly embracing socialism.

Think Kamala Harris. Bernie Sanders. Elizabeth Warren. Nancy Pelosi.

Chumley says radical left socialists are now swarming the United States, plotting to crush the patriotic, freedom-loving, and moral ideals we cherish.

They want to force-feed an ideology so extremely liberal that our nation will never be the same again.

“Top Conservatives Are Raving!

MIKE HUCKABEE says : “One of those timely books that just points out the roots of what's gone wrong in America, how we can get our country back on track.”

PHIL ROBERTSON, star of TV's *Duck Dynasty* and *New York Times* bestselling author, raves: “*Socialists Don't Sleep* exposes the flawed thinking of the socialist left.”

MICHAEL SAVAGE, host of *The Savage Nation*, says: “As Cheryl Chumley points out in *Socialists Don't Sleep*, ‘we can't root out socialism unless we first address the real problems.’”

They want to destroy not only the pillars of our free enterprise system — but our religious and educational and cultural institutions.

How did this happen?

In ***Socialists Don't Sleep***, Chumley shows how the far left took over the Democratic Party using sly means, pretending to be progressives, social justice warriors, and populists who care for the working class.

But just like the climate change treaty and NAFTA, their plan CAN be stopped.

Chumley's new book details the sneaky and underhanded ways the secular left has pressed socialism into American politics and life:

- How and why Americans have forgotten their roots, and how this can be reversed. (pg. 1)
- Why former President Obama is pushing a nationwide coronavirus surveillance system. (pg. 15)
- How Democrats and left-leaning activists are disguising their socialist goals to fool you. (pg. 23)
- Pope Francis' secret role working with U.S. socialists to undermine our economy. (pg. 88)
- Busting the myth that socialists care about the youth of America. (pg. 95)
- Why our nation is ceding the Constitution to technology. (pg. 151)
- Dangerous facial recognition: the new system is being used by cities all over the U.S. to

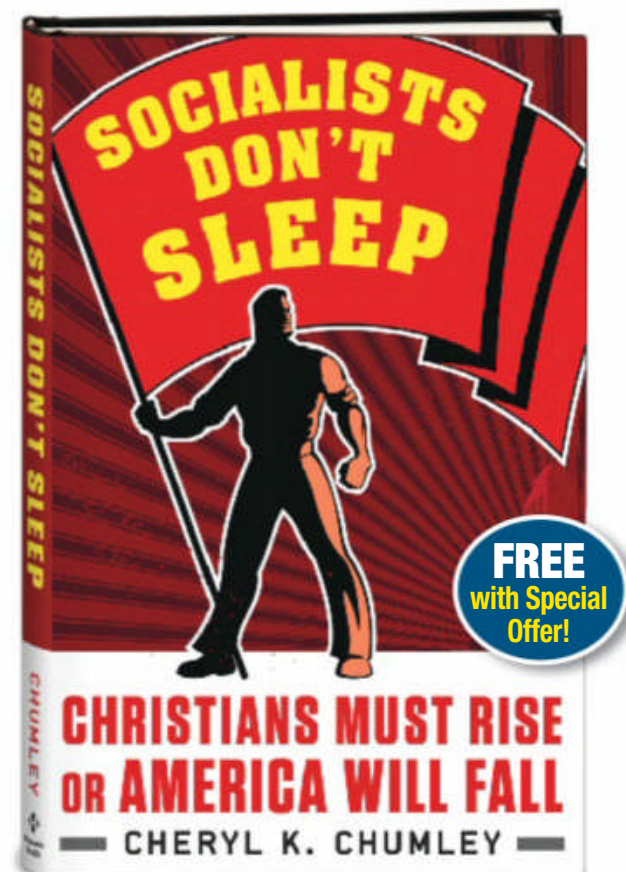
track you. (pg. 158)

- Face masks have nothing to do with stopping the virus, it's about control! (pg. 202)
- Facebook, Twitter targeted Trump, now they're targeting you. (pg. 219)

If you love America you owe it to yourself to read this book.

Chumley says, “We need real solutions. We need for Christians and those of faith to grow bolder, louder, and more organized in their appeals on America's behalf.”

Get your **FREE** copy of ***Socialists Don't Sleep: Christians Must Rise or America Will Fall*** with this special offer and help start making these vital changes today!



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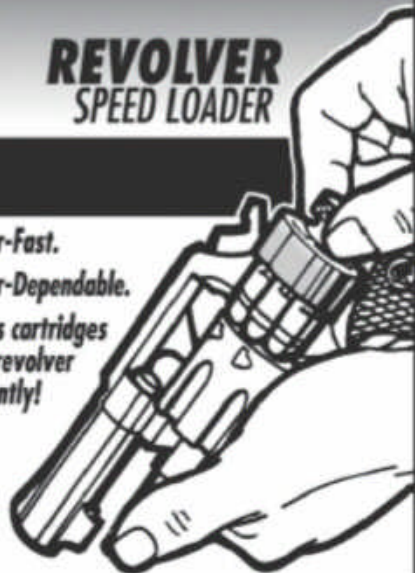
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HANDGUNS | FIRING LINE REPORT

← The slide-lock lever is equally easy to reach and works great as a release. Press straight down and the slide flies home. Interchangeable backstraps help adjust trigger reach. The mag well funnel is removable, but I'd leave it alone. It helped keep my pinky from being pinched by the floorplate when running home fresh mags.

The 3.8 Compact's safeties include an internal firing-pin block, trigger lever and an unobtrusive grip safety. Above the grip safety in the middle of the slide is a cocking indicator that protrudes enough to be felt with the thumb or seen. The center-mounted extractor rises above the slide as a visual and tactile indicator of a loaded chamber, although I wouldn't bet my life on either of these features.

Speaking of safety, the modern XD-M pistols, including this Elite, can be disassembled without pulling the trigger. Withdraw the magazine, lock back the slide and raise the takedown lever on the left side of the frame just above the trigger guard. Hold the slide securely, trip the slide lock lever and ease the slide off the frame to the front. The recoil spring is captured on its rod. Lift it off, pull the barrel out from the bottom and you're ready to clean. Reassemble in reverse. Easy.

The sights consist of a fiber-optic light pipe in the front and a U-notch rear with a white outline. A conventional sight picture putting the flat top of the front sight level with the top of the rear gave me the best accuracy. The sights are easy to pick up and fast to put into action.



▲ The XD-M Elite 3.8 Compact's takedown lever doesn't require pulling the trigger, and the flat-faced META trigger was excellent. The slide-lock lever and mag release are ambidextrous.

The 14-round magazines are difficult to load, something not uncommon in smaller semiautos. I had great difficulty loading past five rounds. I wondered if it was me, so I had a farmer friend—a guy with strong hands—try them, and he had difficulty as well.

The Elite's mag spring is definitely heavy. Such a heavy spring ensures complete reliability, and there were no malfunctions of any nature from the get-go. When inserting a fully charged magazine with the slide down, the magazine base needed a solid rap to fully seat. That's the best reason to leave the extended mag bases on, but two thinner, flush-fitting mag bases are provided.

All delivered acceptable accuracy at 25 yards, as you can see in the accompanying chart. Federal 147-grain was the softest shooting but shot to the left. So did the Fiocchi full metal jacket, which also shot high. Black Hills 124-grain

ACCURACY RESULTS | SPRINGFIELD XD-M ELITE 3.8 COMPACT

9mm Luger	Bullet Weight (gr.)	Muzzle Velocity (fps)	Std. Dev. (fps)	Avg. Group (in.)
Hornady Critical Defense FTX	115	1,099	11	2.9
Speer LE Gold Dot HP	115	1,205	16	3.9
Fiocchi FMJ	123	1,252	17	3.8
Black Hills JHP	124	1,190	8	2.8
Federal Premium Hydra-Shok JHP	147	964	14	3.4

Notes: Accuracy results are the averages of four four-shot groups at 25 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocities are averages of 10 shots measured with a Competition Electronics Pro Chrono set 10 feet from muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ, full metal jacket; HP, hollowpoint; JHP, jacketed hollowpoint



A The U-notch rear sight has a wide, white outline for a fast, accurate sight picture. A cocking indicator protrudes from the center of the slide.



A A generous, flared mag well ensures fumble-free magazine changes and also helps ensure the mag doesn't pinch the flesh of even large hands during reloads.

jacketed hollowpoints, Hornady 115-grain FTX and Speer LE 115-grain Gold Dot all shot right over the front sight and were dead-on for windage.

Black Hills won the accuracy crown, closely followed by the Hornady FTX. Either would be my choice in this gun. Both loads ranked high in controllability, and the Black Hills delivered high velocity and had the lowest standard deviation of the loads tested.

Springfield's XD-M Elite 3.8 Compact is a sturdy, utterly reliable self-defense pistol. Fully loaded with a spare mag puts 28+1 rounds between you and a threat with a pistol comfortable in the hand, easy to control, yet still concealable. The Elite is another winner in the XD-M line.



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WILSON 92G BRIGADIER TACTICAL

BILL WILSON OF WILSON COMBAT FAME is a serious collector of the Beretta Model 92G SD, a specially made piece for the Army Special Forces. That gun became hard to acquire—and very expensive, harboring a magic not associated with other Beretta Model 92s.

So Wilson decided to take some of his favorite Beretta 92 characteristics and incorporate them into the 92G Brigadier Tactical. The “Brigadier” comes from an improved slide and lockup that originated with the 96 Brigadier. The “G” refers to the ambidextrous decocking lever found on the 92G. I have one of the original Beretta 92s and can readily see and feel the difference in the Wilson gun, especially the lockup.

Wilson has changed the rectangular look of the trigger guard from the M9A1 style to the rounder 92A1 guard, and it’s easy to reach the trigger even with heavy winter

gloves on. The gun comes with all-steel controls. The Elite II hammer is skeletonized and outfitted with a “D” type hammer spring, which lightens both single- and double-action trigger pulls.

The slide-lock lever is extended, and the ambidextrous safety is fitted to the rear slide—where you’ll also find the Wilson Arms logo. The lanyard loop and pin are aluminum, and enhanced checkering has been employed on both the frontstrap and backstrap. G10 Dirty Olive grips complete with the Wilson Combat logo ensure a solid grip.


The magazine release is oversize, and three 15-round Beretta sand-resistant magazines are included.

The slide has been completely dehorned and tightened to the frame as snugly as possible, but not so tight it would interfere with reliability.

Topside, the Trijicon tritium front sight is machined and dovetailed

into the slide instead of being an integral part of the gun as stock Beretta’s. Wilson’s U-notch battle rear sight is adjustable for windage only and is secured in place with an Allen screw on top.

The black-finished stainless steel Elite II barrel has a recessed crown and is 4.7 inches long. The guide rod is a fluted model from Wilson. A two-inch Picatinny rail for a flashlight or laser is machined into the underside of the frame. Topping it off, the gun has special serial numbers beginning with “WC.”

The gun weighs 43 ounces with a full magazine, and it balances well in the hand. I am a big fan of the arched mainspring housing, and with the additional checkering, it makes the gun a pleasure to hold and shoot. Speaking of which, if you’re so inclined, the gun is approved for IDPA Stock Service Pistol and USPSA Production divisions. 



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