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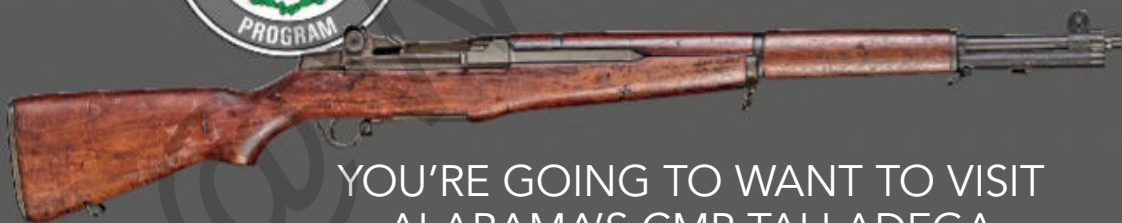
COLT BRINGS BACK
THE .44 MAGNUM
SNAKE GUN. IS IT BETTER
THAN THE ORIGINAL? **P. 42**

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ROAD TRIP



YOU'RE GOING TO WANT TO VISIT
ALABAMA'S CMP TALLADEGA
MARKSMANSHIP PARK. **P. 104**



P. 25
BECKSTRAND
Aimpoint
launches the
ACRO P-2 and
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EMARY
Do you need
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rifle barrel?
Let's take a
look inside.



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JAMES
Standard Arms
Model G: A dual-
action pump/
semiauto worth
remembering.





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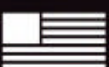
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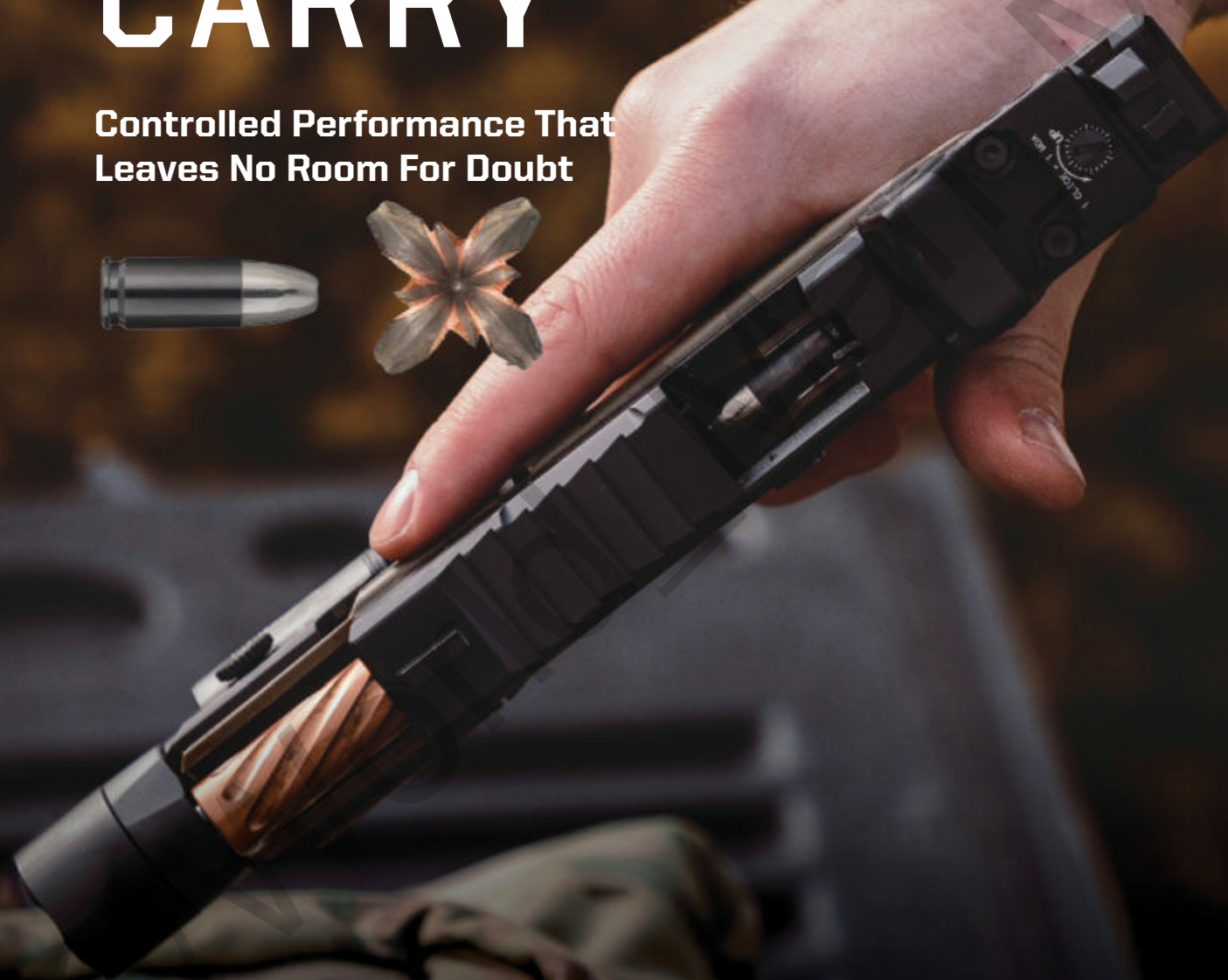
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Guns & Ammo's subscriber cover features the ACRO P-2, an updated variant of Aimpoint's industry first, closed-emitter red-dot sight for pistols. **p. 25**

COLT REINTRODUCES
THE ANACONDA REVOLVER
AND IMPROVES ITS HISTORY.

GOING FULL CIRCLE

BY ERIC R. POOLE

COVER PHOTOS AND ABOVE PHOTO: MARK FINGAR

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Barrels and stocks are just the start for this multifunctional platform.

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Standard Arms' Model G sporting repeater offered the shooter a choice: semiauto or slide-action operation.

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BLACKPOWDER REVOLVER CLARIFICATION

I have been shooting blackpowder guns since the mid-1970s. I have owned four rifles and two revolvers, an 1858 Remington and 1860 Colt made in Italy by Pietta. In Dave Emary's April 2021 feature, he said that he could carry these revolvers with all six chambers loaded on half-cock. Both of mine have notches between the gaps to lower the hammer on. That seems to be the safest way to carry these to me.

Dudley Keeton

Florence, Alabama

I would like to thank several readers who wrote in to further educate us on the features of cap-and-ball revolvers that truly allow for the safest way to carry blackpowder handguns fully loaded.

— D. Emary

BLACK GUNS, NOT JUNK

Contrary to a letter from Ron King in the May issue, I enjoy reading about most guns — maybe not blackpowder — including those that are black. Many are very accurate, such as the one that my daughter used to hit a prairie dog at 330 yards. It's unfortunate that some people have an attitude, which I had 35 years ago. I thought (stupidly) then that if we just got rid of AR-15s, the anti-gunners would leave our other guns alone. That thinking is wrong. The anti-

gunners won't stop. Those politicians and their backers want our country to be ruled, not governed. They fear that an armed citizenry cannot be ruled.

Floyd Morgan

Devil's Tower, Wyoming

ANOTHER YEAR, PLEASE

I've read many comments in the "Blowback" section with subscribers threatening not to renew because they feel the content does not meet their interests. Be it reviews of expensive glass, stocks with more adjustments than a corset, or the never-ending conga line of plastic "Wonder Nines," I am tired of reading articles on subjects I'm not interested in. Then I remember some 35 years ago, I was the guy irritated by the lack of articles on Colt's AR-15 and Springfield's version of the FN FAL. Magazines

back then featured an endless parade of beautiful, wood-stocked bolt-action rifles. I know that Guns & Ammo can only report on what is being produced, but I decided to reenlist anyway. Besides, I really look forward to reading Garry James and Keith Wood.

Mr. James recent article on "The First SMLE" in the May issue was outstanding and made me thankful I renewed my subscription.

James Chisholm

Email

BE READY

SGM Kyle Lamb's article in the May 2021 issue on deciding either to remove your seatbelt first or pull your gun first in the event of an encounter was interesting. I had a dangerous experience under different circumstances. I live in Alaska, about 16 miles out of town. As my wife and I hiked in the woods, I had a .44 Magnum handgun with me. I looked up and a moose calf crossed in front of me at about 20 feet. Then its mother appeared behind the calf. She saw me and advanced, and here's where "being ready" wasn't the case. I backed up and tried to retrieve

NOVEMBER '91

The .44-caliber Colt Anaconda was announced in 1990, but production was limited until 1991. Wiley Clapp reviewed the first test sample sent to Guns & Ammo and demonstrated that it was not only powerful but "super accurate."



the .44 from my shoulder holster, which was under my left side. It tangled up in my sweatshirt and I couldn't get the gun to present it. Fortunately, mama moose accepted my distance and did not stomp me. Moose kill or injure people here in Alaska occasionally. I now carry the gun in a hip holster, and if I'm wearing a coat or sweatshirt, I place it between the pistol grip and my waist to expose the grip. Like SGM Lamb wrote, "Make the decision before the threat appears."

Gerald Johnson

Alaska

IN SEARCH OF ...

I am looking for a heat shield for a Mossberg 500 in 20 gauge. Is there such an item? I've seen ads for universal heat shields, but I would appreciate your insight if such a thing exists.

Tom Underhill

Email

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— Linda Powell,
Director of Media Relations,
Mossberg



REMEMBER VAL

Dave Emary's feature "Cap & Ball Revolvers" described the availability and sources of reproductions. He should have given some credit to Val Forgett Jr., who was the father of blackpowder replicas in this country.

Paul Berardi
Scottsdale, Arizona

The late Val Forgett Jr. certainly deserves credit. In 1956, he founded the Navy Arms Company (navyarms.com) and designed more than 100 different replica firearms. He was president of the National Firearms Museum and Chairman of the U.S. International Muzzle Loading Team, leading the U.S. to five consecutive World Championships. Forgett was also a big-game hunter who was recognized by Safari Club International (SCI) as the first person in more than 100 years to take all "Big Five" game species of Africa including lion, leopard, elephant, rhinoceros and Cape buffalo — with a muzzleloading rifle. He passed away in 2002. — Eds

ORIGINAL INTENT

I'm a longtime NRA member, and have been very encouraging of others joining. With the recent developments, I have to agree with Tom Pera's letter calling for the NRA to get out of New York, fire LaPierre and get transparent on spending. Let's get back to the purpose of the NRA.

Bill Shahan
Abilene, Texas

DATE CHECK

In the May 2021 issue, Jeremy Stafford wrote in his column, "Trickle Down," that the Glock 17 arrived in the U.S. in 1988. Actually, he is at least two years off because I bought my G17 9mm from Franklin's Guns in Athens, Georgia, for \$350 — new — in 1986. I still have it.

George West
Madison, Georgia

The first Glock pistols were indeed imported to the U.S. in January 1986. Those were the so-called "pencil-barrel" models. We think that the year "1988" found in my column was a typo. Good catch!

— J. Stafford

STILL HUNTING

Mr. Poole, first I must compliment you on a fine magazine that covers so many aspects of the shooting community. To comment on your editorial in the March issue, "Ethical Shots," regarding the topic of very long shots on animals, my thought is that such shots might be bragged about, but they have nothing to do with hunting. When hunting was the primary means of providing food for oneself and family, the hunter could not have imagined taking game at extreme distances. Their existence depended on skills that defined "hunting," not long-range marksmanship. I realize that technology is what makes seemingly impossible shots possible, and if the same circumstances existed in the past, those hunters taking game to live would have no doubt employed these tools. However, even then, the skill of



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Our Aussie friend would approve of our rendition of his "knife." Forged of high grade 420 surgical stainless steel, this knife is an impressive 16" from pommel to point. And, the blade is full tang, meaning it runs the entirety of the knife, even though part of it is under wraps in the natural bone and wood handle. We found full tang, stainless steel blades with bone handles in excess of \$2,000. Well, that won't cut it around here.

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— H., Arvada, CO

hunting would not apply; it would be more correct to describing the kill as "necessary." Today, these long shots are neither "necessary" nor "hunting." What pride could be gained when describing an elk or deer being taken at 500-plus yards?

Bill Schroeder
Hillsboro, Illinois

ETHICAL HUNTING

Apparently, Mr. Cotter, who wrote the letter "On Hunting" in the May issue, does not hunt. That is his choice, and I respect that. In return, due respect needs to be given to Americans who choose to hunt, trap and fish. Of course, they kill animals. The fact is that a certain percentage of those game with regulated hunting seasons have to be killed every year to maintain a healthy, sustainable population within their environment. What better way to accomplish this than have ethical sportsmen harvest a renewable resource while enjoying a healthy, natural source of food and fur? The purchase of licenses and permits provide more than \$1 billion annually that cannot be used for any purpose other than wildlife conservation, habitat and management. This is a benefit to both game and non-game species. I don't believe that any group or organization does as much to benefit wildlife in this country as the sportsmen who ethically participate in these vital activities.

Ed Breuer
Glen Haven, Wisconsin

IT'S A COLT, OR IS IT?

As an old law dog who started a long career first carrying a revolver, I was interested in Jeremy Stafford's May column, "Trickle Down." But I did notice one error. The caption under the photo of an LAPD officer holding a revolver in the classic bullseye stance suggested that it was a 6-inch S&W Model 10. Even with these retired eyes, I noticed that it was a Colt Officer Model Match. The front sight and top of the grip gave it away.

Mike Snyder
New Albany, Indiana

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MARKET VALUE

DAD USED TO SAY, "Something's only worth what someone's willing to pay for it." I've spent my life struggling to argue with his statement because I tend to be sentimental. What I own is always worth more to me than what I've wanted to accept in exchange. That said, I love finding deals.

I surveyed the wares at a recent gun show. The vendors were fewer than in years past, but there was a record number of attendees. Many sellers had raised prices to make more money than what guns and ammo typically sell for. This was especially so with firearms having collector interest.

A table displaying some 20 Colt Single Action Army revolvers didn't have one marked for less than \$2,500. And if there was a factory letter with it — which most on the table had — prices started at \$4,500 and ranged to \$20,000!

Another vendor was selling M1 Carbines and parts. You see, I'm in the market for a historically correct shooter. I carefully looked over a National Postal Meter M1 Carbine first, which isn't a common brand. My smile turned into a frown after flipping the tag. "\$3,500," it read. Confused, I set it down and shuffled through the standing crowd to look at an Inland M1. \$2,900? *What's going on here?* I thought. The "42nd Edition Blue Book of Gun Values" list these at \$1,950 for the National Postal Meter model in 98 percent condition — which it was not — and \$1,675 for the Inland!

A Winchester Model 1873 made in 1889 in .38-40 tempted me for \$1,695, which seemed fair, but at that moment my enthusiasm was soured. Leaving a gun show empty-handed is never fun. Now I wish that I had pulled the trigger on that '73.


Even though I opined that the show's prices for firearms, ammunition and optics were too high, there were plenty of people who felt differently. I witnessed stacks of greenbacks changing hands. This is how one seller justified his pricing on boxes of 9mm: "Someone in this building will pay a dollar a round."

On March 26, I attended a virtual auction of guns from Ted Nugent's collection. I knew he was a proponent of the 10mm and Smith & Wesson revolvers, so I wasn't going to miss it. Handgun Editor Jeremy Stafford previewed the Lots during a video exclusive that was posted a day prior at gunsandammo.com. Stafford's interview with Nugent revealed several interesting backstories, so I registered to bid.

For hours, gun after gun exceeded auction estimates. Romanian WASR AK-style rifles that were left-over gifts to the crew of his 2012 tour sold from \$4,000 to \$5,000 each. A cased Smith & Wesson Model 629 presented to Nugent by the band KISS after a tour sold for \$8,000. Another concert gift, a custom-engraved Browning Hi-Power with pearl grips, brought \$16,000. (The estimate was \$2,000 to \$3,500.) Sale prices were unbelievable.

Among the winners, however, was Derek Sevcik, executive vice president and group publisher for the Outdoor Sportsman Group. He placed several bids and scored a nicked Smith & Wesson Model 629 with

8 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch barrel.

At \$2,250, I thought that he paid too much, but now that I've thought about it, I realize that I was wrong. He paid exactly what it was worth. 

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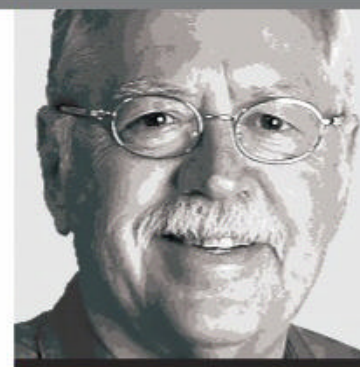
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Q: I've had this pistol hanging on the wall in my man cave for many years, and I've never thought to ask you. So here it is, I know nothing about it. I got it years ago from a friend who'd accompany me to the Great Western Gun Show in Los Angeles. (If you know about it, you're as old as I am.) Then I hung it on the wall. I just took it down to take pictures and wipe off years of dust! Any info as to its collectability, age, origin etc., and an estimate of value if my heirs decide to sell it, would be greatly appreciated.

J.K.

San Diego, California

A: I truly miss the old Great Western Gun Show. It had several miles of tables and uncounted wonders. Unfortunately it was closed at the Pomona Fairgrounds in California in 1999 after a wrangle with the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Your "wonder" is a U.S. Model 1813 flintlock pistol manufactured by Simeon North of Middletown, Connecticut. At some time in its history, it was converted to percussion fire using a so-called "drum"-style arrangement, which was not an uncommon occurrence. Almost 20,000

of these hefty .54-caliber pistols were made between 1817 and 1820.

Even converted, your pistol still has collector interest, but it would have more value if it was still in its original flintlock configuration. Though missing the ramrod and band wedge, and suffering a bit of chipping of the stock in front of the barrel band, it appears to be in decent condition. The market on this sort of piece is a bit soft right now. I'd think your pistol is worth in the \$2,500 to \$2,750 range, assuming it functions and the bore is OK.

UNUSUAL S&W?

Q: I have been unable to identify my Smith & Wesson .38 Special. It was passed down to me from my grandfather. The markings are: Butt (bottom), underside of barrel, and rear of cylinder: "683XXX" (serial number); "Z", a symbol that looks like a fan with several blades missing; on the right side of the barrel "38 767 3.5 TONS, 38 S&W CTG."; "98917" on the inside cylinder hinge; "Smith & Wesson" on the barrel's left side; S&W trademark on the frame's right side. Note there are three screws on the side plate and one

larger screw just in front of the hammer. I would be interested in the model number, frame nomenclature, and approximate value. The gun is functional and fires properly.

B.M.

Email

A: From what I can see, it looks like you have an early Smith & Wesson British Service revolver, which was basically a variant of the .38 Military & Police, 1905, 4th change. Barrel lengths were 4, 5 and 6 inches. The British proofmarks on the barrel and lanyard ring, as well as the .38 S&W caliber, which was interchange-

AUCTION BLOCK

A superb condition Colt Python Ten Pointer realized an impressive \$10,000 at a March 10, 2021, sale by Sportsman's Legacy. This new-condition .357 Magnum revolver is one of a limited edition of 250 offered in 1989. Finished in Colt's Royal Blue, it has an 8-inch barrel; red-ramp front sight; adjustable rear sight with white outline; Burris 3X long-eye-relief scope; and Pachmayr grips. It is accompanied by its original black briefcase-style hard case, cardboard box, and all original paperwork from Colt, Burris and Pachmayr. This elegant revolver has never been fired since factory proof testing. For more information about this and future sales, visit Sportsman's Legacy at sportsmanslegacy.com.



able with the Brit .38/200 service round, lead me to believe it had martial use. Blued finish on early guns was not uncommon. It was a square-butt K frame. Condition of your revolver appears to be around 70 percent. As such, according to the "Forty-First Edition Blue Book of Gun Values" it's worth \$375.

BACON REVOLVER

Q: I have a pistol that was handed down to me by my uncle. It was originally owned by my great grandfather who lived in central Georgia and worked as a blacksmith. The maker is "BACON", and a Google search showed the company manufactured a number of arms in the mid-to-late 1800s. The condition seems to be typical of wear and age. My family has always owned items to use and not for show. It is a .31-caliber ball-and-cap, and there is a "92" number under the grips.

My uncle was, perhaps, the last person to actually fire it when he was a kid. I



have attached a picture of my great grandfather on the far left standing next to a woman who I believe was his sister. It shows her holding a revolver that I think may be the same pistol. I am curious to find out everything I can about this revolver, and was hopeful you might share what you may know. Value is not my objective; I doubt it will ever be sold.

T.A.

Email

A: A moderate number of .31-caliber percussion pocket revolvers were made by the Bacon Manufacturing Company of Norwich, Connecticut, between 1858 and 1867. While about 1,400 were sold with "BACON"



BACON EXCELSIOR, FIRST MODEL, .31 CAL.

markings, they were also offered with the names of other dealers. Yours is a First Model, also known as the "Excelsior." It has an engraved cylinder scene, a feature that was lacking on the Second Model. Barrel lengths were 4, 5, and 6 inches. Both round and octagonal barrels were used, the former being the most common.

COLT BB SERIES

Q: Years back, I purchased a Colt Government Model 1911 in .45 ACP. The serial number is preceded by a "BB". I have done some research on the gun, including contacting Colt. I am including the correspondence with Colt and references from the "Blue Book of Gun Values" and "Hallock's .45 Auto Handbook." Do you have any additional information on the gun or its potential value? The gun is in near-mint condition, and it has the original box.

T.S.

Email

A: You've already done a considerable amount of homework on your Model 1911 pistol, and there's not much I can add. For the benefit of my readers, I'll reiterate some of what you already know. The "BB" series, which had those

initials preceding the guns' serial numbers, was manufactured between 1968 and '69. It is considered to be a transitional model between the earlier Model 1911 commercials and the Series 70. Value on your piece — with the box — would be in the \$3,000 to \$3,250 range if it is in 98 percent condition.

PORTUGUESE LUGER

Q: I've enjoyed your Guns & Ammo articles and would like to know more about my 7.65mm Luger's value based on the coat of arms and condition. The serial number is 35XX and finish is about 85 percent. All parts are original with matching numbers. The bore is in excellent condition, too.

W.C.

Email

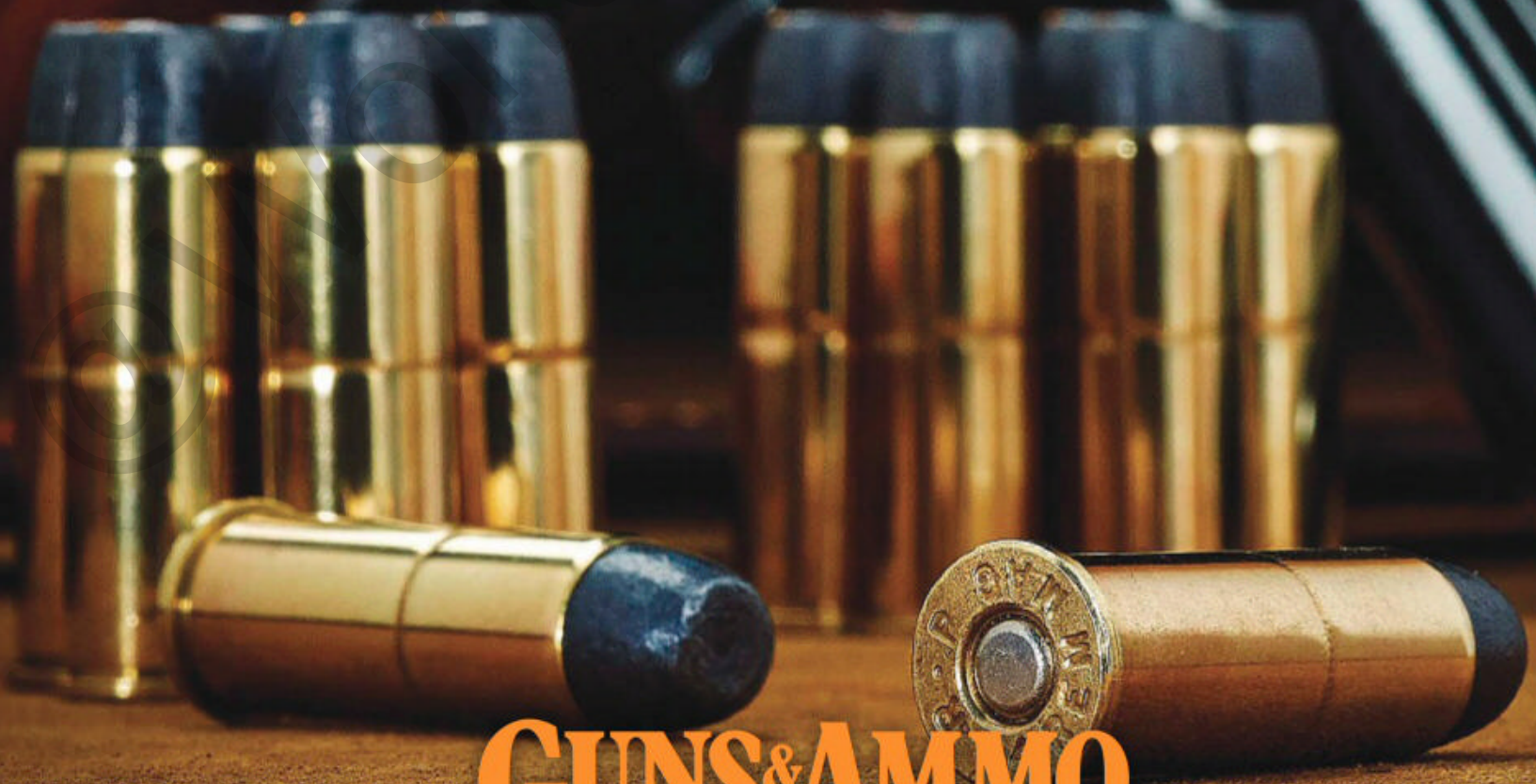
A: The "crown/M/2" receiver marking on your pistol indicates that it is a 1906 Portuguese Army contract Luger, the "M/2" being the royal cypher of King Manuel II. Some 5,000 of these pistols were manufactured by Deutsche Waffen und Munitionsfabriken (DWM). According to the "Forty-First Edition Blue Book of Gun Values" (bluebookofgunvalues.com), a 1906 Portuguese Luger in 85 percent condition is worth \$2,250.

HOLLYWOOD HARDWARE

Director John Milius' 1984 film "Red Dawn," which featured a group of American high school students heroically resisting an invasion of the U.S. by Soviet, Cuban and Nicaraguan forces. Through the years, it has achieved cult-classic status. As might be expected from a firearms enthusiast as Milius, the movie is full of interesting firearms, including this Steyr Maadi AKM rifle. At the time the picture was shot, not too many real Kalashnikovs were available, so Stenbridge Gun Rentals provided 20 AKMs as stand-ins, including this particular rifle, which has been modified for blank-firing. Everything worked successfully because "Red Dawn" became the 20th highest grossing film of 1984. On loan from Doug Wicklund. Photo courtesy of the National Firearms Museum.



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EARLY AFGHAN RIFLE

Q: I was given this rifle by a friend. I cannot find any info on it. It has an eight-sided, seven-grooved barrel. The lion is holding a crown and, as you can see, it has what looks like a crown above a "3". Any help of its origins would be appreciated.

C.F.

Email

A: This is a fairly easy one. The curved shape of the stock, narrow butt and embossed brass decoration indicate you have a longarm of Afghan origin, probably made during the early 19th century, which, not uncommonly, has been fitted with a British East India Company military musket lock. Though the rifle is percus-

sion, it appears the lock was originally flintlock. The "crown 3" is a Company "viewer's" (inspector's) mark. These crowned numerals were used by the EIC between 1783 and 1836. Hope this helps you out!

PHILIPPINE Krag CARBINE?

Q: I've done my best to identify this rifle, but perhaps you can. I bought it in 1965. I assumed it was a Model 1898 .30-40 Krag all these years until I recently checked its serial number.

It's an 1899 Carbine number! Indeed, it's stamped Model 1899 on the receiver, and the cartouche on the stock is dated 1901. Could this be one of the 3,000 or so converted for the Philippine Constabulary, which was established in 1901 after the Philippine-American War? It's in 95 percent condition with a shiny bore, all-original parts and is an excellent shooter. What do I have here? Approximate value?

J.N.

Email

A: I will admit your rifle is something of an anomaly, but from the photos it is definitely of the standard rifle configuration — not the shorter Philippine Constabulary type. The serial number places its date of manufacture at 1900, which coincides with the 1901-date stock inspector's stamp. The sight is the 1901 pattern, as well. Other than the date — which should be 1898 — it appears to be a straight rifle. It could be a rebuild of some sort, but given the serial number



KRAG-JORGENSEN U.S. MODEL OF 1898, .30-40 Krag, 95%: \$1,000

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and stock date, that seems rather unlikely. Value's tough to tell. I'll go with a standard 1898 price until we find out more. If it's in 95 percent shape, the value would be \$1,000.

HEIRLOOM NAMBU

Q: My wife's uncle died last week and left us all of his guns. I had inventoried his stash and knew what he had. When we emptied the house, I found what I think is a Nambu Model 14, serial number 46XXX. I think the firearm was made in 1938. The gun appears to be in rough shape, but I think I can clean it up a little. The holster appears to be beyond repair. When I was going through the pockets on the holster I found a letter dated "29

November, 1943." It lists a captain assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 147th Infantry, as bringing the gun into the country in accordance with "WD Memo No. W570-3-451". If you could tell me a little about the gun's history, and possibly a value, I would greatly appreciate it. T.S.


Email

A: It is definitely a Type 14 Nambu. The Type 14, so named because it was adopted in 14th year of the reign of the Emperor Taisho (1925), was manufactured at several sites until 1945. It was made in large numbers, and variations abound. Quality on these 8mm pistols declined considerably as World War II neared its



NAMBU TYPE 14, 8MM NAMBU, 60%: \$385

end. The "13.4" indicates the year and month "April 1938," as per the Showa Emperor's reign designation of its manufacture. The serial number range at the Nagoya Factory for that time was 46376 to 47938. As you mention, condition could be considerably better. In its current shape, and assuming it works

and the bore is at least halfway decent, I'd value it at around \$350 to \$425, if it cleans up decently. The holster, unfortunately, has little value on its own, but as having originally accompanied the pistol it certainly adds interest to the piece. The bring-back papers also add some collector interest. 

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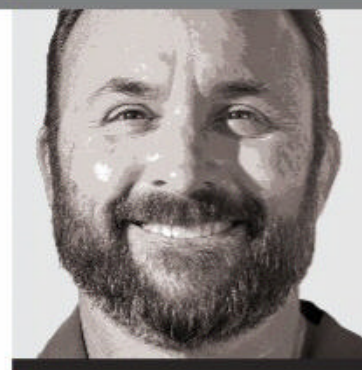


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*Considered nearly obsolete, can
.40 S&W make a comeback?*



JEREMY STAFFORD

FOREVER .40

FOLLOWING THE 1986 Miami-Dade Shootout, the FBI sought an improved round for its agents in the form of the 10mm, which quickly evolved to the .40 S&W in 1990. The FBI had worked with Smith & Wesson and Winchester ammunition to develop the .40 S&W, which was meant to be a slightly reduced-pressure version of the 10mm Auto. FBI ballisticians had fallen in love with the 10mm after tests revealed that a 180-grain bullet pushed to 850 to 950 feet-per-second (fps) resulted in the terminal ballistics they desired without the attendant felt recoil of the typical 10mm load featuring a 180-grain projectile moving between 1,100 fps and as much as 1,300 fps! Smith & Wesson's engineers figured out that by cutting down the 10mm case from .992 inch to .850 inch, they were able to eliminate all of the dead-air space while still delivering the FBI's preferred ballistics.

The resulting cartridge permitted S&W to use their existing 9mm pistol frames versus the larger .45-caliber frames, and allowed S&W to develop guns that could carry more rounds through the use of modified double-stack magazines. During the "Wonder Nine" wars of the late 1980s, capacity was considered key, so use of a single-stack magazine would have hamstrung the .40 S&W out of the gate. Despite S&W spearheading development of the .40, the Glock models 22 and 23 arrived ahead of the S&W Model 4006. In fact, Glock managed to beat S&W by several months in 1990. As the round matured and was adopted by numerous law enforcement departments, firearm manufacturers jumped on board. Just about every maker offered a .40 by 1993.

The "duty" pedigree of the .40 also influenced the competition world. The .40 could easily make Major and still be shot in a relatively large-capacity pistol when compared to the 9mm. While it took a little while to supplant the 9mm in duty holsters, the lure of a round that could "hit like a .45" and "carry like a 9" became too strong. For a brief period in the late 1990s, the .40 was king.

Then something happened. A clamor for more police

transparency led departments to track details about officer-involved shootings. With the boom in data collection, a fact jumped out that was void of hyperbole: The difference in effectiveness between the major service and duty cartridges was miniscule. When analyzing similar mid-thoracic hits, the 9mm, .357 SIG, .40 S&W, 10mm and .45 ACP all produced about the same real-life results. The myth of the "One-Shot-Stop" caliber was dispelled. Short of a cranio-ocular cavity hit, most bad guys had to be struck at least two times before their aggressive, dangerous actions were stopped. If two hits of 9mm is going to yield the same results as two hits with either a .40 or .45, why bother issuing handguns chambered for the bigger calibers?

As a result of this understanding, many departments transitioned back to the 9mm. The

supposed nail in the coffin for the .40

came in 2015 when the FBI concluded a study showing that modern 9mm defensive loads were effective for defensive use.

They transitioned agents to the Glock 17M/19M in 9mm loaded with Hornady's Critical Duty

9mm +P 135-grain

The .40 S&W came about as a reduced-size and -recoil version of 10mm.

FlexLock (hornady.com), after more than 20 years of issuing the .40. That said, many in law enforcement are still issued a .40-caliber pistol with either the 155- or 180-grain jacketed hollowpoint (JHP) from Black Hills Ammunition (blackhills.com); Federal Premium 165- or 180-grain Tactical HST (le.vistaoutdoor.com); the bonded 165- or 180-grain Speer Gold Dot (speer.com); or Winchester's Ranger T-Series (winchesterle.com).

Project Guns In the spirit of American writer Mark Twain, the report of the .40's death has been exaggerated. With the abandonment of the .40 by a growing list of agencies,





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a glut of quality service pistols chambered in .40 continue to enter the market at reasonable prices. One thing gun people love more than a good firearm is a great deal. The Glock 22 and Smith & Wesson M&P40 qualify because they typically sell for less than \$400, and the SIG Sauer P226 or P229 variants appear for around \$450.

The .40 has an incredible amount of utility for the individual shooter. Converting the Glock and M&P from .40 to 9mm is straightforward, and I've seen many of these guns get this treatment. Certain guns can even be converted to shoot .357 SIG, if that interests you. The bottom line is that a pistol chambered for .40 is flexible for customization. Even leaving it chambered in .40 S&W isn't a bad idea. For a low-recoil option that's great for blasting steel, take a look at Federal's Syntech Action Pistol (federalpremium.com), which sends a 205-grain bullet out of the muzzle at 850 feet per second (fps). In contrast, Buffalo Bore (buffalobore.com) offers a 155-grain +P load that screams at 1,300 fps out of the muzzle, but be sure that you're using an aftermarket barrel in a Glock if you're shooting this load. Glock pistols are likely the only .40-caliber handguns offered in the U.S. that do not feature fully supported chambers.

The latest chapter in the .40's life might be the most interesting. When COVID-19 struck, most 9mm pistols and ammunition disappeared. For new gun owners, or those looking to bolster their options for training or defense, .40-caliber pistols and ammunition were available long after the 9mm and .45-caliber options were gone. A pistol's best ability is its availability, and the .40 is definitely still available. At the time of this writing, I can still go to my local gun store and find a decent selection of .40 S&W, both ball ammo and defensive loads — and sometimes cheaper than 9mm!

While the .40 is far from dead, it does have some issues. If the vast majority of your experience is shooting 9mm guns, you'll feel that the .40 definitely produces more recoil. It's not prohibitive for most shooters, but it bears mentioning. Recoil control is not something you can train away with dry-

Existing double-stack magazines and pistol frames used by "Wonder Nines" like the Glock 17 were easily modified for use with the .40 S&W cartridge, as illustrated by the Glock 22.




The resurgence of 9mm in law enforcement has resulted in a buyers market for police trade-in .40s. These would be excellent and affordable project pistols.

practice; you're going to have to put in live-fire work before relying on it for self-defense.

The .40's recoil also produces an increase in wear with any pistol. While you don't need to stress about the care and maintenance of a retired duty pistol, they do rate routine examination for signs of unusual wear and over pressure. Take note of bulged cases and flattened primers. With .40-caliber guns, ignoring routine inspections and spring replacement cycles is not a good idea. Smith & Wesson, for example, recommends that the recoil spring assembly be replaced in duty guns between 5,000 and 10,000 cycles, and not to exceed 20,000 rounds. These guns may still function properly, but the performance decreases and reliability would be in question. The reliability of a pistol intended for duty or defense is not something to gamble with.

In the 30 years of shooting .40-caliber pistols, I've observed inconsistent results in accuracy. Just because a particular load shot well in one gun, never meant that it would shoot well in another. If you want to maximize your .40's accuracy potential, be prepared to experiment.

I predict that the .40 S&W will remain a viable option for years to come. In fact, as I finish writing this column, I am now convinced of my mistake in not acting on this sooner. It's time to pick up a .40 for myself. You know, just in case. 



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Aimpoint ACRO P-2 Aimpoint CompM5b



TOM BECKSTRAND

EVEN BETTER

RED DOT SIGHTS are trending because they are easy to use, fast and accurate. They have the added benefit of being friendly on aging eyes that might struggle to focus on a tiny front sight post. Combine these attributes with long battery life and rugged construction and it is no surprise why miniature optical sights are so popular.

Invented in 1974, the Aimpoint Electronic was the first electronic red-dot sight, and the company continues to lead this segment. My first exposure to Aimpoint products was as a young infantry officer in the 82nd Airborne Division. My issued M4 was equipped with an Aimpoint M68 CCO, the U.S. Army's nomenclature for the CompM2. I beat the hell out of that sight on an almost daily basis. My abuse didn't occur deliberately, it's just that airborne infantry is a contact sport.

I gained additional experience while carrying a similar M68 to Afghanistan and Iraq as a team leader with 3rd Special Forces Group. During those years and deployments, I never saw a single failure with any Aimpoint product. That's a big statement because my company in the 82nd had more than 100 units. The teams I was with in 3rd Group, while small, fired a large quantity of rounds.

I recently spoke to Aimpoint's Technical Support Manager John Enloe about the company's history with the military. With more than 1 million M68CCO sights sold to the U.S. military since 1997, there has been a great deal of experience gained during the last 24 years. Enloe recalled that, when he first came to work for Aimpoint, most of the repair work done to any M68 was performed to the illumination switch knobs.

"I'd get batches in from the Ranger Battalions that we'd repair or replace," said Enloe. "We learned a lot in the early years."

As Aimpoint made those repairs, they were learning a lot about what components fail and quickly made changes to their manufacturing processes to improve their products. Enloe added, "It wasn't long before we were not

receiving any M68CCO sights for repair. Units needing repair just kind of dried up, aside from the occasional job where somebody ran over one with a truck."

Aimpoint's new-for-2021 Advanced Combat Reflex Optic (ACRO) P-2 and CompM5b are examples of two products that leverage lessons learned. While durability is a prime consideration for any Aimpoint optic, the company's electro-optical engineers work continuously to improve efficiency and capability.

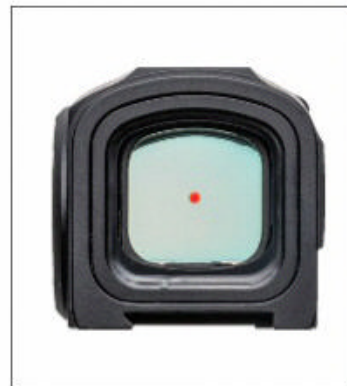


ACRO P-2 The new ACRO P-2 received several updates for 2021. The newest ACRO sight utilizes a CR2032 battery instead of the smaller CR1225 battery used in the ACRO P-1, which was introduced in Guns & Ammo's November 2018 issue. The ACRO P-1 was Aimpoint's first foray into the pistol red-dot sight market, and the closed-emitter construction was an industry first for handguns. Being a fully enclosed sight, no foreign debris can get into the sight to obstruct the emitter and render the optic useless. In contrast, most red-dot sights developed for pistols use an exposed "open" emitter, which helps to keep them compact and lightweight, but the open design also leaves the optic vulnerable to moisture and debris interfering with the light-emitting diode (LED) that projects the red dot on the rear of the lens.

The market welcomed the ACRO, but several large U.S. agencies required longer battery life at brighter settings. The original ACRO P-1's CR1225 battery would run the sight for a little more than 1 year on setting 6, but battery life was reduced to less than one month if left powered on in positions 7 to 10.

Aimpoint listened to its customers and developed the ACRO P-2 to run on the larger and higher CR2032 battery, which is found in just about every local market. The battery was also moved to the same side as the adjustment switch to prevent the shooter from unintentionally changing intensity setting while manipulating the pistol slide. Keep in mind that the minute a battery is made it begins to die.

The ACRO P-2 uses a CR2032 battery that extends the ACRO's battery life at higher settings. To its advantage, the P-2 does not have to be removed to replace the battery. You don't have to re-zero after a battery change like a number of other red-dot sights.



The P-2's viewing window and dimensions are unchanged. The tube effect helps to find the dot faster.



The P-2's footprint matches the P-1's. Unlike optics that attach by screws to the slide or adapter plate, the ACRO features a claw mount and recoil lug.



The CompM5b has the same window size as a Micro T-1, T-2, and other CompM5 optics. To adjust the dot's intensity, simply adjust the dial below and left of the window. A dot indicates the setting for quick reference.



The "b" in "CompM5b" stands for "ballistic," which means that the turrets are removeable and can be replaced with custom turrets that are ballistically matched to the shooter's preferred load. This feature offers the user instant access to holds at five different distances.

The internal chemical reaction that produces electricity starts and doesn't stop until the battery is dead. The term is called "battery bleed." Where the ACRO P-1 had a battery life of 1½ years at setting 6, the ACRO P-2 can run off of the CR2032's battery bleed rate at the same setting. That P-2 is so efficient that the battery thinks it's sitting on a shelf instead of powering the sight. In this case, an unused battery sitting on the shelf will last as long as one powering the ACRO P-2 at setting 6.

What hasn't changed between the ACRO P-1 and P-2 is the footprint. Any mount that works on the P-1 will also work for the P-2. The ACRO uses a recoil lug and claw mount to attach — not just hard-to-find screws as other red-dot sights sometimes require. The ACRO doesn't have any issues with galling or shearing screws as a result of recoil. The ACRO P-1 is a great red dot, but the P-2 greatly improves on the original design.

CompM5b Aimpoint's second introduction for 2021 is the CompM5b, and that "b" stands for "ballistic." The standard CompM5 sight was one of my favorite optics. It has the 7075-aluminum housing found only on the CompM series and ACRO models. The outer housing is tough and



All CompM5 models, including the latest "b" variant, operate using a single AAA battery. Each battery can last years if left on.



The CompM5b is available with Aimpoint's quick-detach (QD) LRP mount that quickly secures the optic to any Picatinny rail. This mount not only works with CompM5 models, but also with the Micro series.

won't deform. CompM5 optics are also powered by the common AAA battery, so replacement batteries are easy to source and they last a long time. Aimpoint tested the CompM5b on one AAA battery, and it is projected to last 5 years at setting 7, or 1 year at setting 8.

The bigger story with the CompM5b is the exposed elevation and windage turrets. These are not just for adjusting the zero on the sight. They are now true ballistic compensation turrets that allow a shooter to adjust their point of impact for

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The CompM5b is optimized for use with an Aimpoint magnifier, but I was recently reminded that it's possible to shoot effectively out to 300 yards with just a non-magnified red dot. I recently attended the Special Forces Charitable Trust event at Fort Bragg where celebrities and Green Berets competed as teams against each other in a shooting competition. One stage had E- and F-type military silhouette targets set up at 100-, 200- and 300-yard increments. There were movers at 100 and 300 yards, also. Competitors only used issued rifles, so I spent some time shooting an Aimpoint Micro T-2 out to 300 yards. I hit my targets, to include the 300-yard mover that measures 12-inches wide by 40-inches tall! (It was moving at about 5 miles per hour, too.) My hold at 300

AIMPOINT COMPM5b		AIMPOINT ACRO P-2	
MAGNIFICATION	1X	MAGNIFICATION	1X
RETICLE	Red dot, 2 MOA	RETICLE	Red dot, 3.5 MOA
APERTURE	.71 in.	APERTURE	.63 in. x .63 in.
DIMENSIONS (L, W, H)	3.3 in. x 1.9 in. x 1.9 in.	DIMENSIONS (L, W, H)	1.9 in. x 1.3 in. x 1.2 in.
BATTERY	AAA (1.5 V) alkaline LR03	BATTERY	CR2032 (3V) lithium
BATTERY LIFE	5 years (setting 7)	BATTERY LIFE	5 years (setting 6)
WEIGHT	6.3 oz.	WEIGHT	2.1 oz.
SETTINGS	10; 1-4 NV, 5-10 daylight	SETTINGS	10; 1-4 NV, 5-10 daylight
ADJUSTMENTS	1 click = .36 in. @ 100 yds.	ADJUSTMENTS	1 click = .7 in. @ 100 yds.
MSRP	\$1,124	MSRP	\$599
MANUFACTURER	Aimpoint, aimpoint.us	MANUFACTURER	Aimpoint, aimpoint.us

yards with a red dot zeroed at 100 yards was just over the top of the target's head, and about 2 feet in front of the mover. If I had the CompM5b, it would have been so much easier to just dial my corrections and hold directly on the target. A bit of advice should you want to do the same: Turn the dot's brightness down to where it's just barely visible against the target. The brighter a dot gets, the bigger it is, and the harder it becomes to use with precision.

Aimpoint continues to refine their products and the ACRO P-2 and CompM5b are two examples. Both benefit from decades of development and field use and offer enhanced capabilities to fit the need of any shooter. 



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Do you need to *break in a barrel?* Really?



DAVE EMERY

BARREL CARE

THERE ARE AS MANY OPINIONS about breaking in (or not breaking in) barrels, and how to clean barrels, as there are shooters. There are few absolutes in these areas. Generally, if something works for you, and you are happy with the results, stick with it! However, I'd like to offer some of my practices and experience on the subject of barrel maintenance.

I've worked in or run a ballistics laboratory for 25 years. In that time, I broke in and have cleaned thousands of pressure and accuracy barrels, as well as firearms. What follows is a summary of my findings and what I've learned works well. Actual data on anything to do with barrel maintenance is like looking for the Fountain of Youth, which is to say that it is mostly based on opinion or claims made to try and sell you something.

Barrel Break-In You could write a book on all the opinions about breaking in a barrel. I've heard everything from "there is no need to break in a barrel" to elaborate procedures that approach a surgical operation. The premise of barrel break-in is that there are sharp edges, small burrs or rough spots in the barrel left from the manufacturing operations. These have to be removed or smoothed out before a barrel can shoot consistently, and minimize powder and copper fouling. If you don't break in the barrel properly, it can initially get heavy copper deposits that will be difficult to remove later. Based on my experience, this is largely true. It comes down to how the barrel was manufactured. Barrels are made by several techniques, which provide widely different qualities of finish and rifling smoothness. Mass-produced barrels usually receive no post rifling lapping, or smoothing, and tend to have lots of machine marks. Bores exhibiting chattering from worn or misaligned reamers and broaches can be a bit rough. Most custom barrel makers these days take the time to carefully inspect their products to ensure few, if any, machine marks exist in the barrel, and then lead lap the bore to polish and smooth out the rifling.

All of the pressure and accuracy test barrels I've used

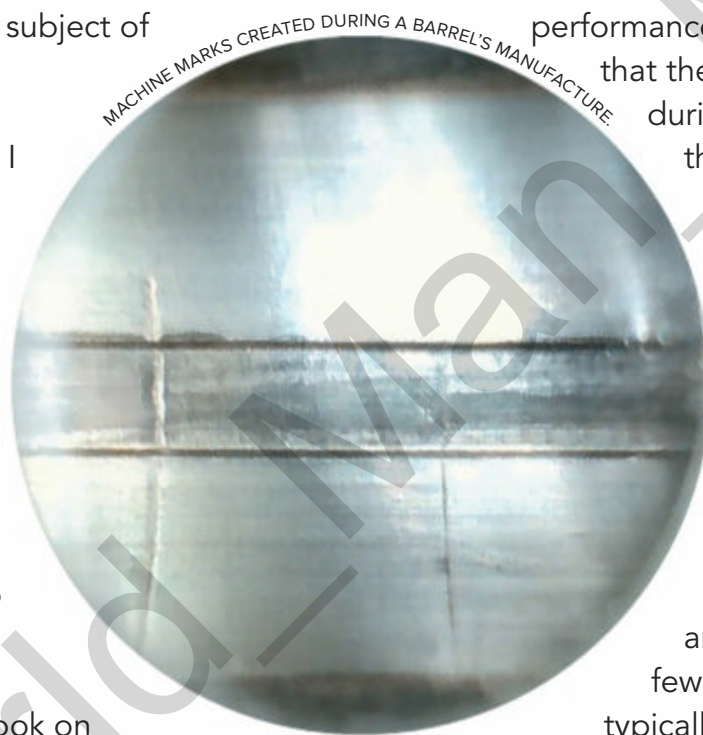
in the lab were lead lapped. The rifling in the barrel had been smoothed, but the chamber and rifling's throat cut by the reamer were not polished and deburred. Most barrel break-ins I did on our pressure and accuracy test barrels were monitored from the initial break-in to observe how performance changed. I can say with certainty that the performance of a barrel changes during an initial number of firings, and the amount of fouling decreases as the barrel is fired.

The break-in procedure I always used was fire one round and clean, two rounds and clean, three rounds and clean, and so on, until I had fired 20 rounds.

I always put the pressure transducers in the pressure-test barrels during break-in, and then I monitored the change in pressure and velocity as I fired them. With

few exceptions, the pressure changed typically between 3,000 pounds per square inch (psi) and 7,000 psi. The velocity ranged from 20 feet per second (fps) to 50 fps from the initial firing to when the barrel stopped changing. These numbers varied, depending on the chambering and caliber of the cartridge. Accuracy barrels progressively shot to a more consistent point of impact as they were broken in. The copper fouling in the barrel progressively decreased as the barrel was broken in. With high-quality lapped barrels, usually the change in performance was done in the first 10 to 15 rounds. With mass-produced barrels generally exhibiting a lower-quality surface finish, the break-in could take between 100 and 200 rounds.

The bottom line is that a barrel and its performance change during the initial firings. The number of rounds it takes to get a rifle barrel to settle in varies depending on the quality of the finish of the rifling. A high-quality, smooth barrel will probably take some 10 to 20 rounds to settle in. A low-cost, mass-produced barrel could take upwards of several hundred rounds to break in. If you don't clean the bore frequently during this initial period, especially the first five to 10 rounds, you'll leave a lot of copper in the barrel that will require work to get out later.



Barrel Cleaning The whole point of cleaning your barrel is to prevent the excessive build up of copper deposits and powder fouling in the barrel. If this fouling is allowed to accumulate and is not cleaned out, it will eventually affect the pressure, velocity and accuracy of the barrel. Cleaning at regular intervals will prevent heavy buildup of fouling and make it much easier to remove the fouling that is in the barrel.

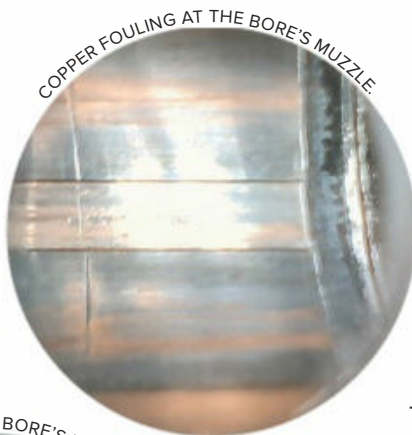
There are several rules of thumb that apply to barrel fouling. As I already described, the surface finish and smoothness of rifling plays the biggest role in how a barrel will foul. Rub a bullet with a piece of glass, or conversely a file, and you'll see a big difference in the amount of copper left behind. Bullet velocity plays a big role in fouling, too. The higher the velocity, more copper is going to be scrubbed off. The hardness of the bullet is a factor, also. The less give the bullet has, the more copper it will leave behind. A thin-jacketed lead-core bullet will leave less copper behind than a solid-copper bullet or a hard-core armor-piercing bullet with a copper jacket.

I have always found carbon fouling to be the most difficult thing to remove in a barrel. It usually appears the worst in the throat and then steadily decreases as you inspect towards the muzzle. I have never found a chemical cleaner than will really get the carbon fouling out of the grooves. (If a reader is aware of a product, please write gaeditor@outdoorsg.com and let us know what you use.)

When a barrel obviously has black deposits in the grooves, the only thing I've found that can get it out is a paste such as J-B Bore Cleaning Compound (brownells.com), or a very fine polishing compound such as 800- to 1200-grit lapping compound on a tight-fitting patch; then scrub the barrel. Be careful with the lapping compound though and don't overdo it; you could start to scrub the throat out of the barrel, especially with a smaller bore such as .17 or .22 caliber.



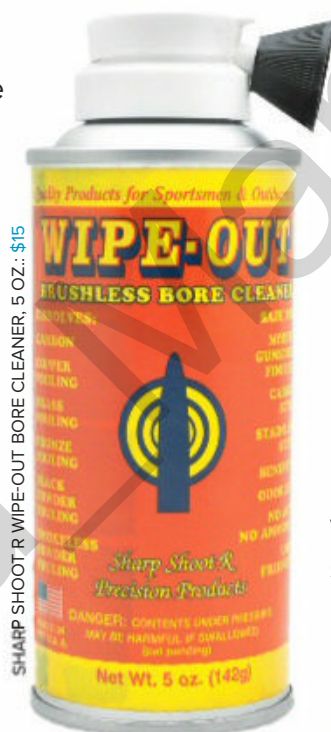
COPPER FOULING IN THE GROOVES OF A BORE'S RIFLING.



COPPER FOULING AT THE BORE'S MUZZLE.



WEAR-IN LEAD OF A BORE'S RIFLING.



SHARP SHOOT-R WIPE-OUT BORE CLEANER, 5 OZ.: \$15

TESLONG NTG100 FLEXIBLE BORESCOPE: \$46



HEAT-CHECKING IN THE THROAT OF A BARREL.

Regular cleaning will help you to keep up with the carbon fouling and not let it get to the point where you have to scrub the barrel with lapping compound. The smaller the bore, and the slower the powder speed, the more rapidly the carbon fouling will build up. Large-case .22 through 6.5mm calibers seem to be the worst for carbon fouling.

There are many cleaners out there that will get the job done for removing most of the powder fouling and copper. I have tried most of them. The cleaners I've settled on are the foaming spray cleaners. They completely fill the bore and cling to the bore for a long period of time. This is not an endorsement, but I use SharpShoot-R Wipe-out spray cleaner (sharpshootr.com). There are few products I have used that remove copper faster than Wipe-out (other than ammonia-based products). Another advantage of Wipe-out is that it does not require brushing the bore. If you have heavy copper buildup, an ammonia-based product such as Sweet's 7.62 bore cleaner (midwayusa.com) is one of the best. I have often used Sweet's 7.62 to get copper out of old military rifles that were never cleaned with a copper solvent. It removes copper quickly, but be careful with any ammonia-based product. Don't let them sit in the barrel for more than about an hour.

Depending on the steel of your barrel, ammonia-based products can etch the surface of the bore if left

long term. I would also encourage you to purchase a plastic-coated, one-piece cleaning rod that is the right size for the bore of your gun, along with a correctly sized jag for patches. The one-piece plastic-coated rod will prevent damage to the lead of the rifle or crown of the barrel. Do not use a multi-piece cleaning rod. The joints will eventually

damage the rifling.

With smallbore rifles, particularly of .17 caliber, don't use a wire brush much either. These brushes have stiff bristles that will wear out the throat's rifling quickly because .17-caliber bores have small lands. Allow me to offer an experience to back this up: When bullet and ammunition production was first started on the .17 HMR, we at Hornady religiously brushed the accuracy barrels after every test. On the first batch of accuracy barrels, we only got about 1,500 rounds out of them before we started to see the accuracy fall off. When we borescoped them, we discovered that we had brushed the rifling out of the first inch or so of the barrel. After that, we just used a copper solvent and no brushing. The accuracy life of the barrels went up to about 7,500 rounds.


Lastly, if you brush your bore, never use stainless-steel brushes. They will scratch your barrel's bore.

Borescopes All the in-bore images in this article were taken with a borescope. You will find nothing else that lets you see what's really going on in your barrel like a borescope. Rifling wear, heat checking in the throat, carbon or copper fouling and machining marks can all be seen in stark detail. I'm going to push borescopes here because the borelights that are used frequently in gun shops to show you the bore's condition can make a really lousy

barrel look good. A bore that looks good with a bore light can look much worse with a borescope.

You don't have to spend the price of a nice rifle to get a borescope that will yield good images. The recent proliferation of USB borescopes in the \$65 to \$130 range provide very good images. All the borescope images in this article were taken with a NTG Rifle Borescope (teslong.com). Lyman offers its Borecam Pro Wireless that sends images to your cell phone (\$355, lymanproducts.com). I have used a Lyman Borecam for about five years, and it has proven to be a great value. The pinnacle of borescopes is the Hawk-eye Rigid, which starts at \$1,445 (gradientlens.com). Prices vary depending on the length of the borescope and the optional accessories desired. If you are into collecting old firearms, like I am, a borescope will save you from making expensive mistakes.

One last observation: Many of you have heard about the "clean, cold-bore shot," and it usually doesn't go where we want. In my experience that is absolutely true; I verified this phenomenon for myself. Therefore, I usually fire two or three fouling shots in a clean bore to help it settle in before I ever do any serious shooting.

I recommend that you consider a bore cleaning every 100 rounds. Doing so will prevent heavy fouling build-up, which can be hard to get out. This will help to maintain your rifle's consistent performance and accuracy. 

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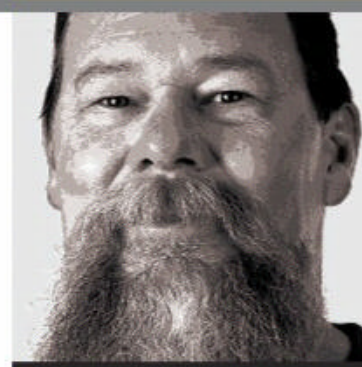
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Are red dots on pistols here to stay, or not?



SGM KYLE LAMB [RET.]

VIKINGTACTICS.COM

DEBRIEFS & HOTWASHES

QUESTIONING THE VALIDITY of the miniature red-dot sight on sidearms is sometimes a touchy subject. To further address the question, I think we must be open to discuss the good, the bad and the ugly realities of living with a pistol having a red-dot sight mounted. The pros and cons are mostly fact, but strong opinions are unavoidable.

I've trained thousands of military personnel, law officers, federal agents and law-abiding citizens. My opinions are derived from these experiences. Some of my real-life data comes from my experiences, some has been passed on to me from other trainers or students in the form of lessons learned; we don't need to repeat others' mistakes.

Can you shoot more accurately with a red dot on your pistol?

This is an easy question to confirm: Absolutely. With very little work, most shooters will quickly pass their old capabilities when accuracy is the standard. I don't recall a single instance on the range when the red dot mounted on a pistol caused the shooter to decrease their accuracy. Yes, if accuracy is key, the red dot will easily help you to become a better marksman.

Can you shoot as quickly with a red dot on a pistol?

Accuracy versus speed; here is where I get a little opinionated. I believe that at distances around 10 to 12 yards and closer, I can acquire a pistol's iron sights faster than a red dot. There are additional factors, however, such as co-witness of the sights. We'll consider this further during several of the follow-on questions.

Can you train to be as fast with the red dot at close range? I believe you can. But speed is affected by other

conditions, like if you need to shoot with one hand, or if you are cross dominant; I will touch on this later.

I believe that your speed on targets beyond 15 yards will increase, or be maintained at the very least when a red dot is added to the mix. Your accuracy will also improve, so dots should be a win-win at extended distances.

Does a red dot increase your effective range?

So, you are more accurate but a little slower when engaging targets up close. Accuracy is enhanced when distance is increased. Many VTAC students don't have the confidence to shoot accurately at 50 yards — that is until they pick up a red-dot-equipped pistol. Then, 50 yards is like child's play. Shooting at targets out to 100 yards may be somewhat trying, but it can be done more effectively with the red dot.

Are we justified in shooting threats at 100 yards? Some folks in gun-fights have been, and even if you aren't, training at extended distances will help to build your confidence across the board. Shoot at 50 yards and then step up to shoot a plate rack at 25 yards; it's a piece of cake.

How does the red dot help or hinder those with fading eyesight?

If you are 21 with great eyes, you can skip this section. If you are a bit longer in the tooth, you may see more benefit in a red-dot-sighted pistol. If you wear reading glasses, you will absolutely fall in love with the benefits of a red dot. When you look at a target, just raise the pistol and the dot magically appears over the target. Simply squeeze the trigger and hit the point where the dot was zeroed. Even for those without vision issues, a red dot will help with seeing your sight.



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The Leupold DP-Pro (\$400) can accept Leupold's CQ DeltaPoint Pro iron sight (\$100), which can be co-witnessed to the red dot. A taller front sight may be required.



Many popular handguns such as the SIG Sauer P365 need mill work to accept a sight such as the Shield RMSc (\$416). This slide was modified by Parker Mountain Machine.

Do you need to have iron sights on a red dot pistol as a backup?

When Leupold developed the DeltaPoint Pro for a specialized U.S. Army unit, they were tasked with integrating back-up iron sights (BUIS). Leupold looked at the requirement and integrated a rear sight slot in its DP-Pro. This allowed the user to attach a suppressor height front sight to co-witness with the dot. If you plan to carry a dot pistol for defense, I believe that a good set of BUIS are a must.

Are there benefits to having co-witnessed sights when shooting with a red dot?

Many iron sights are hard to find through the small window of the red dot sight. If you can place sights where they are easily visible without searching, you will find the red dot faster. They shouldn't impede the use of the red dot, but enhance it. I have a set of Viking Tactics sights on my SIG Sauer P365 mounted in conjunction with a Shield RMSc (\$416, shieldpsd.com). Parker Mountain Machine (parkermountainmachine.com) cut the flat for the Shield to allow true co-witnessing with my VTAC sights. PMM's service made it easy to acquire the dot because the sights come into view. The red dot sight appears naturally without me having to cant the pistol and search for it.

Are there any maintenance issues with the red dot on the pistol?

If you happen to know the state of the union regarding maintenance in the civilian world, it is pretty good. In the military, gear gets worn out from too much cleaning! In law enforcement, many officers only shoot their pistols when required to qualify. If you are a civilian gun enthusiast, it's possible that you shoot more than your local police, and you may shoot better than they do. If you are that policeman that doesn't fit into the crowd because you are always shooting and cleaning, practicing and repeating, disregard. I am referring to the average police officer or deputy.

If you carry a pistol with iron sights, there really isn't too much maintenance — even if you carry every day and only shoot once a year. An occasional removal of the fuzz from the ejection port, or crumbs from the muzzle will get you through. After much testing, I believe that no amount



The author had Parker Mountain Machine modify the slide of a P365 to accept a set of VTAC iron sights for SIG pistols (\$175, vikingtactics.com). The sights now align, or "co-witness," with the red dot after zeroing.

NO EXCUSE.



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When using an optic-sighted pistol, and going from a cool environment to a hot and humid environment, condensation will occur. Condensation can even obstruct iron-sight alignment.

of navel lint in the gun will cause a malfunction anyway. However, the red dot does require limited maintenance. First, fresh batteries now and then. You will also need to make sure that you haven't lost any screws and that the optic isn't loose. Lastly, be sure the sight is zeroed routinely.

What is the weight limit for a pistol-mounted red dot?

If you are from the same camp as me, you prefer all of your gear to be of the lightweight variety. I have ditched most of my old hunting gear because of this. On the topic of carry pistols (or even duty pistols) you will have to carry this sight on top of your gun day in and day out. Are the benefits of accuracy and speed really worth the weight? Another point to consider is the additional weight of attaching a red-dot sight, mounting plate and taller sights for co-witnessing.

Can the weather affect electronic sights on pistols? Are closed-emitter sights better for use in humid, cold, hot and muggy environments.

If you plan to use a red-dot sight on a pistol, it behooves all of us to get out and train with it. We should also be training in the same adverse weather conditions that could be experienced in your environment. If you live in south Georgia, for example, and enjoy the air conditioning set cold enough to allow for the hanging of beef, you may encounter issues with your sight fogging up when you step outside into the sauna that is Georgia's heat. And it's not only the electronic sight that can be affected. At Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where I worked for years, there were many nights spent waiting for the fog to clear from

the lenses of my optics. A red-dot sight isn't any different.

If you happen to live in an area with more than the normal amount of rainfall, the mini red dot might be a hinderance to your performance, as well. Most small red dots feature an open-emitter electronic sight, which is just asking for trouble when the rain starts. You should be able to continue to use the sight, but if rain finds its way past the sight's sealant, you might be out of luck.

Water submersion?

This might be a touchy subject, but most open emitter sights won't last during prolonged water submersion. The only compact pistol sight that I have found to date that will endure the life of a U.S. Navy SEAL are the Aimpoint ACRO and the Leupold DeltaPoint Micro.



The Leupold DeltaPoint Micro is a low-profile design that mounts at the same height as factory sights to co-witness with the red dot. The closed emitter is sealed, meaning that it's waterproof. \$400

How easily can you acquire your sights when shooting support-hand only? Under a vehicle? Right-handed and left-eyed? Around or through barricades?


The last point I would like to make is the ability to easily, quickly and repeatedly engage targets from obscure positions. Don't think flat footed on

the range, put yourself in the worst scenario. Say you're under a car with two flat tires, and against an enemy that hasn't decided to quit. You have to shoot with one hand and the opposite eye. This is difficult with iron sights and becomes even more trying with the red dot.

Try shooting through a VTAC barricade with a target at 3 to 5 yards. What's the outcome while using a shot timer?

Conclusion

I have a love-hate relationship with red dots on pistols. I love them when they work, and when I am shooting for accuracy. I love them when the batteries are charged, and it isn't raining. Still, I prefer iron sights when targets are close and require one-hand or opposite-eye engagements.

Are they here to stay? No doubt about it, yes. That doesn't mean we shouldn't acknowledge their shortcomings. Most issues are mitigated by two things: Training and maintenance. If you don't have time for one, you might want to stick with using iron sights on your pistol. 

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A hand holding a silver revolver against a blue sky with clouds. The revolver is a Smith & Wesson Model 60, a .38 S&W caliber revolver. The hand is holding the revolver in a ready position, with the thumb on the hammer and the index finger on the trigger. The background is a clear blue sky with scattered white clouds.

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GOING FULL CIRCLE

BY ERIC R. POOLE | PHOTOS MARK FINGAR





The Anaconda features a wide hammer spur, which is convenient for manual cocking, single-action use.

SNAKE GUNS ARE HOT. The original Anaconda, Boa, Diamond-back, Cobra, King Cobra, Python and Viper continue to command record prices among collectors while firearm enthusiasts anxiously wait for Colt to rerelease another one of its “Seven Serpents.” For 2021, it’s the Anaconda.

“The Anaconda is a legendary piece of the Snake Gun series and fills a unique space in the revolver market,” said Justin Baldini, product director at Colt. “Our team was dedicated to making this revival worthy of the Colt name while serving the needs of today’s gun owner.”

The Anaconda is a six-round, stainless-steel forged frame, double-action revolver chambered in .44 Magnum. If you’re unfamiliar with the .44 Mag., the Anaconda will also safely shoot the .44 S&W Special and .44 S&W Russian cartridges for less felt recoil and a more pleasant experience. Though not as powerful as the .44 Mag., a .44 S&W Special round loaded with a 200-plus-grain hollowpoint bullet is a capable defensive load, too.

The original Anaconda was primarily designed by the late Colt engineer Paul LaViolette Jr., a U.S. Navy veteran of World War II who also worked for Springfield Armory and High Standard before joining Colt. His contributions to the Ana-

COLT ANACONDA	
TYPE	Revolver, double action
CARTRIDGE	.44 Mag.
CAPACITY	6 rds.
BARREL	6 in. (tested) or 8 in.; 1:20-in. twist
OVERALL LENGTH	13 in.
HEIGHT	7.25 in.
WIDTH	2.75 in.
WEIGHT	3 lbs., 5 oz.
FINISH	Semi-bright (stainless steel)
GRIP	Hogue Monogrip (soft rubber)
TRIGGER	5 lbs., 12 oz. (SA); 10 lbs., 2 oz. (DA)
SIGHTS	Orange ramp (front); target notch, adj. (rear); optic rail (optional)
MSRP	\$1,499
MANUFACTURER	Colt's Manufacturing Co., 860-244-1360, colt.com

conda can be traced back to 1966 when LaViolette was part of a team that developed the Colt Trooper MK III. The team also included legendary firearm engineers Richard Baker, Henry Into and Karl Lewis.

The Family Tree In its 1969 debut, the MK III Trooper addressed Colt’s rising labor costs by incorporating investment-cast parts, a design strategy that was commercially successful for Ruger. Hence, the MK III featured no parts interchangeability with older models. The MK III also sported a new transfer-bar safety system and stainless-steel coil springs. The transfer

bar meant that the revolver couldn’t fire without a stroke of the trigger, but the coil mainspring meant that the trigger’s pull weight could “stack” as the spring was compressed.

The MK III series was discontinued in 1983 and replaced by the MK V series, which was based on the then-new “V” frame. When it was time to design the Anaconda, LaViolette started with the larger King Cobra, which was introduced in 1986, and a member of the MK V family.

Despite its similar appearance and feature set, the new 2021 Anaconda took a very different design path. Unlike LaViolette’s original, the 2021 Anaconda is based on an



The new Anaconda is equipped with Hogue grips. These grips are interchangeable with those made for the Colt Python.



The trigger is consistent due to the leaf-spring-powered design. The stroke is smoother and cleaner than the original.

oversized version of the 2020 Python action. The primary designer of the 2021 Anaconda was Kevin Langevin, vice president of new product development. Langevin is an engineer with almost 30 years of combined experience working at FN Manufacturing, U.S. Repeating Arms and SIG Sauer. He came to Colt in January 2007 ready to continue Colt's history. With a fresh approach to reviving the Anaconda, Langevin "bulked-up" (Colt's words) the 2020 Python's frame for added strength, and then incorporated forged and computer-machined pieces in lieu of cast parts.

"The new Anaconda was built on all the knowledge that we learned from the new Python, and it's basically a larger Python," Langevin said. "It has a little bit longer rotation of the hammer, and it has a wide trigger pad."

This also means that the new Anaconda continues the recently introduced King Cobra's and Python's leaf-spring action for a better experience on the trigger. Instead of a coil spring, the new Anaconda now has what's described as a "Linear Leaf spring, version 2" (LL2), which means that there's no more stacking.

"The leaf spring gives you a more consistent trigger through the pull," Langevin noted. "It gives a smoother, more consistent trigger pull. We have one gun that has 14,000 rounds fired through it, and another that has 70,000 cycles. We know that this gun is stronger and superior."

Hand Work On a Lyman Digital Trigger Pull Gauge, the 2021 Anaconda produced a single-action pull of 5 pounds, 12 ounces, and a double-action pull measuring 10 pounds, 2 ounces. The so-called "wall" was predictable enough that I was also able to measure an average 9 pounds, 5 ounces, that's



The new Anaconda maintains the original's styling. It continues the distinctive barrel rib designers borrowed from the Python.

required before hitting it. While target shooting, if you can anticipate where this wall is, a little less than a pound of pressure is all that's required to overcome it and fire the revolver. This is great for bullseye targets or bowling pin shooting where strings of timed and rapid fire would require the use of its double-action trigger. G&A Executive Editor Joe Kurtenbach quipped, "The fact that it's double-action trigger can even be measured on a trigger gauge

proves it's a good one." He's right, a fair few double actions exceed the Lyman's typical 12- to 13-pound gauge limit.

The original Anaconda featured checker-molded Pachmayr grips complete with a Colt medallion on both sides. The 2021 Anaconda now wears Hogue's soft-rubber Monogrip. On the right grip panel, there's a subdued Colt logo, which seems unusually discreet for the brand. I love the palm swell and deep finger grooves for placement, but the backstrap was left exposed unlike the old grips. This isn't going to be an issue for most shooters, and it wasn't for us until it was time to test the Anaconda with high-velocity loads such as Remington's spicy 180-grain UMC jacketed soft point. Labrador clocked this round racing downrange at an average of 1,755 feet-per-



The ramped front sight features an orange insert, which is aligned within the rear sight's adjustable notch.



second — almost twice as fast as the .44 S&W Specials! While shooting groups for accuracy, these high-velocity Magnums imparted a noticeable bruise in my palm after a couple of cylinders.

A recommendation to Colt and Hogue: Design a Monogrip that completely wraps the frame of the Anaconda with recoil-absorbing material, and don't be shy about adding a more conspicuous Colt logo or snake.

The Anaconda doesn't come with a second set of wood stocks, but there is good news: The grip frame is the same as the Python's. Any set of grips made for the Python will fit on the Anaconda.

Barrel & Sights During the years of production, from 1990 to 2006, the Anaconda was offered with barrel lengths spanning 4 and 8 inches. The Anaconda's barrel was given the Python's signature vent rib, a feature visibly recognizable to enthusiasts. So, it makes sense that the Python's vent rib was carried to the 2021 Anaconda's full-lug barrel. For now, the Anaconda will be offered in 6- or 8-inch lengths only. (My fingers are crossed for the revival of a 4-inch carry model or one in .45 Colt. Am I alone?)

The front sight is a familiar orange ramp. It can be changed by using a small Allen wrench to loosen a screw at the front. The rear sight is target quality with a black notch that's precisely adjustable for elevation and windage. This sight pairing is similar to the old Colt's, but different in the details.

Back in the day, barrels could accept a rib-mount system for attaching a Weaver-style rail. As the .44 Magnum is a proven big-game cartridge, it was common to attach a scope such as a fixed 2.5X or 4X, or a low-power variable featuring extended eye relief. Few companies offer a handgun-specific scope today, but Leupold still sells a fixed FX-II 4x28mm (\$450, leupold.com) and a VX-3 2.5-8x32mm (\$650), both with duplex reticles.

I have used scoped revolvers with great results on white-



The rear target sight can be removed, along with the topstrap's two thread-protector screws to install an optic-mounting rail.

tails since I started handgun hunting in 1997. However, hunting with a scoped wheel gun requires intentional effort to quickly align the scope and eliminate scope shadow. Though scopes can extend one's range with a hunting handgun to as much as 250 yards, I've found it best to

keep shots within 50 yards. To eliminate one item from the list of things that can go wrong, be sure that you don't leave a variable-power scope dialed up after zeroing. If you forget and find yourself aiming in on an animal at close range, you may only see hair, if anything at all. If you have it set right and zeroed to the load, a scope can improve your precision.

Almost as often, I've hunted with revolvers using an electronic red-dot sight. These optics have become small and lightweight, which makes the handgun easier to wield and less bulky. Ahead of the Anaconda's rear sight on the topstrap are tapped and threaded screws to install Colt's optional Picatinny rail. With this mount, the Aimpoint's dot measured 1.75 inches above the bore's centerline, which is lower in profile than mounting a scope in low-height rings.

A go-to for handgun hunting needs to be Aimpoint's Micro H-2 with a 2-MOA dot. Available with larger dot sizes, my eyes prefer the sharpness of the 2-MOA model, and I can perceptibly increase the size by quickly rotating the intensity wheel to adjust for light conditions. Plus, being that the H-2 is also a closed-emitter sight, it's impervious to weather. The list of things to like about adding a red dot is long, but the Micro H-2 features easy-to-zero turrets, is intuitive to adjust the dot's intensity on demand, uses a common CR2032 battery and weighs only 6.7 ounces. Eye relief issues are non-existent with a red dot, so you don't have to fight scope shadow like you do with a handgun scope. If you like the idea of having magnification available, there is enough space on Colt rail to pair the Micro H-2 with a folding 3X magnifier.

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Modern handgun hunting means that optics are smaller, lighter and easier to install and zero. Red-dot sights are not dependant on setting eye relief either, which can be a chore with scopes.



At The Range In the November 1991 issue of *Guns & Ammo*, Handgun Editor Wiley Clapp labeled the original Anaconda as “super-accurate.” From 25 yards and secured in a Ransom Rest, Clapp reported a number of groups measuring less than 1 inch! The largest average fired by Clapp was 1.89 inches.

I set out to the range with a selection of loads of various grain weights. I zeroed G&A’s 6-inch-barreled 2021 Anaconda with .44 S&W Special, a 200-grain load from CCI Blazer. Though it was the most affordable box of ammo in the lot, this was also the most enjoyable round to fire. Shooting .44 Specials in the Anaconda was akin to plinking with a non-+P .38 Special in a .357 Mag. We even managed a couple of sub-1-inch groups, just like Mr. Clapp! I can’t recommend this load enough.

We also tested Hornady’s new Handgun Hunter load for the .44 featuring a 200-grain MonoFlex bullet. Especially designed for hunting, this is a copper-alloy bullet with its hollowpoint filled by an elastomer material that helps the bullet expand quickly. Expansion is excellent at all ranges at lethal

velocities, and it maintains 95 percent weight retention on average. After examining my first whitetail killed with one last fall, Hornady’s Handgun Hunter has become a favorite of mine.

I also evaluated the Anaconda with 210-grain Winchester Silvertips and Magtech’s 240-grain flat-nose FMJ. These loads still performed respectably and demonstrated moderate recoil. For a sample of hot stuff, I selected a box of Remington

UMC’s 180-grain flat-nose soft point. Whereas most 210- to 240-grain loads will exhibit 1,300 feet-per-second velocities out of the Anaconda’s muzzle, the Remington UMC’s load recorded an average of 1,755 fps. Flames appeared with each shot and the concussion could be felt by those within 10 feet. If I were using the Anaconda against dangerous game, this is the load I’d take afield. Despite the high velocity, it was accurate, too.

For accuracy testing, I benched the Anaconda at 25 yards. Like all Colt revolvers, the six-round cylinder rotates clockwise. I marked the most consistent cylinder with a Sharpie and exclusively fired five-shot groups from each load through it. A couple of groups measured 1 inch, but the Anaconda averaged 1½- to 1¾-inch for five shots. Though this is almost an entirely new design, the 2021 Anaconda lives up to its 30-year-old reputation.

When the moniker was announced in 1990, the Anaconda was regarded by the gun industry’s media as being “late to market.” This was true given the fact that the Smith & Wesson Model 629 (1978), Ruger Redhawk (1979) and Dan Wesson Model 44 (1980) were introduced a decade

prior. That said, the Anaconda did precede the introduction of the Taurus Raging Bull, which was launched in 1997.

Today, the Anaconda’s competition as a stainless double-action revolver includes the Ruger Redhawk (\$1,079), S&W Model 629 (\$949) and two Taurus models: Taurus 44 (\$661) and Raging Hunter (\$938). At 53 ounces, the Anaconda is the same weight as it was in 1990. The Model 629 with 6-inch barrel weighs less at 45 ounces, while 6-inch-barreled Ruger Redhawk weighs a comparable 54 ounces, as does the Taurus 44 with 6½-inch barrel at 52 ounces.

The Anaconda may have appeared too late to benefit from the craze for handgun hunting through the 1980s, but the time is ripe for a comeback. 

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
.44 S&W SPECIAL					
CCI Blazer 200-gr. GDHP	992	45	15	1.0	2.1
.44 MAGNUM					
Hornady Handgun Hunter 200-gr. MonoFlex	1,437	35	14	1.32	1.84
Magtech 240-gr SJSP	1,357	30	13.5	1.2	2.38
Remington UMC 180-gr. JSP FN	1,755	33	15.9	1.65	2.4
Winchester Silvertip 210-gr. JHP	1,328	70	28.9	2.35	2.6

Notes: Accuracy is the average of five, five-shot groups fired from a bench at 25 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots recorded by a Labradar chronograph placed adjacent to the muzzle.

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SIG SAUER MCX VIRTUS: **MODULARITY MASTERED**

BARRELS AND STOCKS ARE JUST THE START
FOR THIS MULTIFUNCTIONAL PLATFORM.

BY JOE KURTENBACH | PHOTOS MARK FINGAR





PHOTOS: RICHARD KING

AS USUAL, it starts with the operators, guys at the tip of the spear whose job it is to run toward the fire. Not only are they the ones who put it on the line to protect our freedoms and the interests of our country, there is also no group better equipped to render judgement about what gear works at the pointy end of warfighting.

Troops and first responders also have specialized needs, and a lot of the development seen in firearms, medical supplies and other gear is the result of their experiences and desire for the best kit possible. Their needs and desires sometimes evolve into a formal request for proposal (RFP), an invitation from the military to manufacturers asking for a solution. Without getting deep into the machinations of government-funded procurement processes, an RFP will often contain guidelines and parameters — some generalized, some specific — that competing entrants must adhere to. Once the submissions are in, products are thoroughly tested and analyzed, often sent back for some refinement. Ultimately a winner emerges and is awarded a contract for production. At least, that is how it is supposed to work.

Gun enthusiasts have also seen widely advertised RFPs fizzle out before they can cross the finish line. Some will recall the 2013

One advantage of the Virtus' modular design is its ability to be packaged with a variety of interchangeable components. This provides shooters with flexibility in a portable, ready-to-go package.

Individual Carbine's (IC) premature demise, for example. Recent military RFPs include the U.S. Army's Modular Handgun System (MHS) trials, which did go the distance and was won by SIG Sauer in January 2017 with its M17 and M18 variants of the P320 pistol.

Another competition that sees SIG Sauer among the leading contenders is the U.S. Army's ongoing Next Generation Squad Weapon (NGSW) program, which seeks a new rifle (NGSW-R) and automatic rifle (NGSW-AR). These will chamber an exclusive 6.8mm cartridge designed to improve the firepower of small maneuver elements on the battlefield.

On a smaller scale, elite and specialized units such as the U.S. Army's Special Forces and U.S. Navy's SEAL teams also issue RFPs and award contracts for purpose-built hardware. It is from those requests that SIG Sauer's MCX Virtus

was derived in 2015. However, rather than being developed for a narrowly defined need, the MCX Virtus became a user-configurable platform adaptable to meet nearly every small-arms need of serious trigger pullers. It remains a one-stop-shop for a vast array of mission sets.

The Meaning of "Modular" The key to the MCX Virtus design is its





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Although countless custom setups are possible, as demonstrated here, Virtus starts out in one of three basic configurations: Patrol, SBR or Pistol. The main differences are barrel and handguard lengths, as well as buttstock options. Sights, suppressors, and other accessories are sold separately.

have been purchased by special operations groups worldwide. The kits can be tailored depending on the receiving unit's preference. The kit I saw, for example, had a handful of 5.56mm and .300 BLK barrels of multiple lengths with extra handguards to match included along with stock options, both side-folders and telescoping units, and a variety of reflex sights, magnified optics, and suppressors. In the kit was even an MCX Rattler's upper assembly, and everything was secured and organized in a single Pelican case.

These kits demonstrate how the MCX Virtus can be transformed from a scoped, 16-inch-barreled marksman's rifle to a concealable personal defense weapon (PDW) in just minutes. And you can't forget the range of configurations in between. Whether the mission is a sniper's overwatch, an entry team's CQB operation, or a plainclothes protective detail, one MCX Virtus receiver can answer the call.

Another important feature that makes the arrangement possible is the short-stroke piston system in the MCX. Most Black Rifle enthusiasts are familiar with Eugene Stoner's direct impingement (DI) gas system seen in many AR-15s. SIG Sauer's approach did away the gas

tube and the bolt assembly's gas key and incorporated a valve to regulate the gas bled from the barrel to actuate a piston and operating rod, which is linked to the bolt assembly. Dual recoil springs run nearly the length of the upper receiver, above the operating assembly, which eliminates the need for a traditional buffer-tube assembly shrouded by a stock. Benefits of SIG Sauer's approach to the MCX design included the ability to tune the gun's operation by way of a two-position gas valve. It's not a major concern with 5.56 ammunition, but an

configurability. Think of the MCX like a ballistic Erector set. It features different parts and pieces that can be swapped in and latched on to change the profile and capabilities of the whole. From handguards to pistol grips and buttstocks to barrels, the MCX Virtus was also designed for multi-caliber use by means of interchangeable barrel assemblies in 5.56 NATO and .300 Blackout.

The most illustrative display of the MCX Virtus' utility was the development of so-called "assaulter's kits," which

SIG SAUER MCX VIRTUS PATROL	
TYPE	Gas-piston operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	5.56 NATO
CAPACITY	30 rds.
BARREL	16 in., 1:7-in. twist; cold-hammer forged
OVERALL LENGTH	35.5 in. (stock extended)
WEIGHT	7 lbs., 14 oz.
STOCK	Telescoping, folding
LENGTH OF PULL	13 in. (stock extended)
FINISH	Cerakote
SIGHTS	None
SAFETY	Two-position selector
MSRP	\$2,200
MANUFACTURER	SIG Sauer, sigsauer.com



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Operation of the MCX is different than typical AR-style autoloaders. The bolt is pushed rearward by an operating rod, and is returned forward under the power of dual recoil springs positioned above the bolt assembly.



Besides the trigger, the MCX's controls include a radial selector, magazine release, and bolt lock/release. The levers mirror standard AR controls in both function and position, except that both the magazine release and selector are ambidextrous.

adjustable gas system is incredibly handy for ensuring reliable cycling with the wide assortment of sub- and supersonic .300 BLK ammo, and the addition of suppressors. Losing the buffer extension also opened the door to more stock options such as side-folders without losing the ability to cycle the gun. SIG Sauer's engineers even thought to incorporate a rail interface at the rear of the lower receiver for attaching stocks or arm braces for popular pistol variants.

Commercial Configurations There has been a lot said about the MCX Virtus' special-operations origins, but semi-automatic versions have been commercially available since 2015. At this writing, SIG Sauer offers three variants of Virtus: Patrol (\$2,200), SBR (Short-Barreled Rifle, \$2,430) and Pistol (\$2,430). The Patrol comes standard in 5.56 NATO with a 16-inch barrel rifled at a twist rate of 1:7 inches. SBR variants can be had from the factory in either 5.56 or .300 BLK. In the former chambering, the gun will wear an 11½-inch, 1:7-twist barrel, but is available with a 9- or 5½-inch barrel in .300 rifled at 1:5 inches.

Remember, though, the SBRs are subject to NFA regulation and require additional ATF paperwork and the payment of a tax stamp. Finally, the pistol, too, comes in either 5.56 or



A two-position valve above the barrel allows users to adjust the amount of gas used to power the piston and cycle the action. This can enhance reliability across a range of loads and when a suppressor is used.



The receiver's rail interface allows for the attachment of a variety of stocks, including side folders, because the MCX does not use a buffer-tube extension.

.300, with an 11½- or 9-inch barrel, respectively. Pistol models come with a folding PCB arm brace instead of a stock, but all models mentioned are powered by the same short-stroke piston system, and all the barrels are cold-hammer forged, which have proven durable and consistent.

Are all these modular parts available to law-abiding citizens? A quick perusal of SIG Sauer's online parts store (sigsauer.com) illustrates that all the configurability offered to those in uniform is also available

to us. There are more than a dozen handguards in different lengths and colors, caliber conversion kits for 5.56 NATO and .300 BLK, as well as complete upper receivers. There are even barrels, stocks, arm braces, and the Rattler conversion kit for putting together the most compact Virtus possible.

And it's important not forget that SIG Sauer's optic company offers a complementary suite of models to extract the most out of any caliber or configuration (sigoptics.com). In fact, SIG Sauer recently won a U.S. Army contract with its Tango6T 1-6X low-power variable optic (LPVO).

There is some assembly required, but building your Virtus anyway you like is part of the fun with this platform. One



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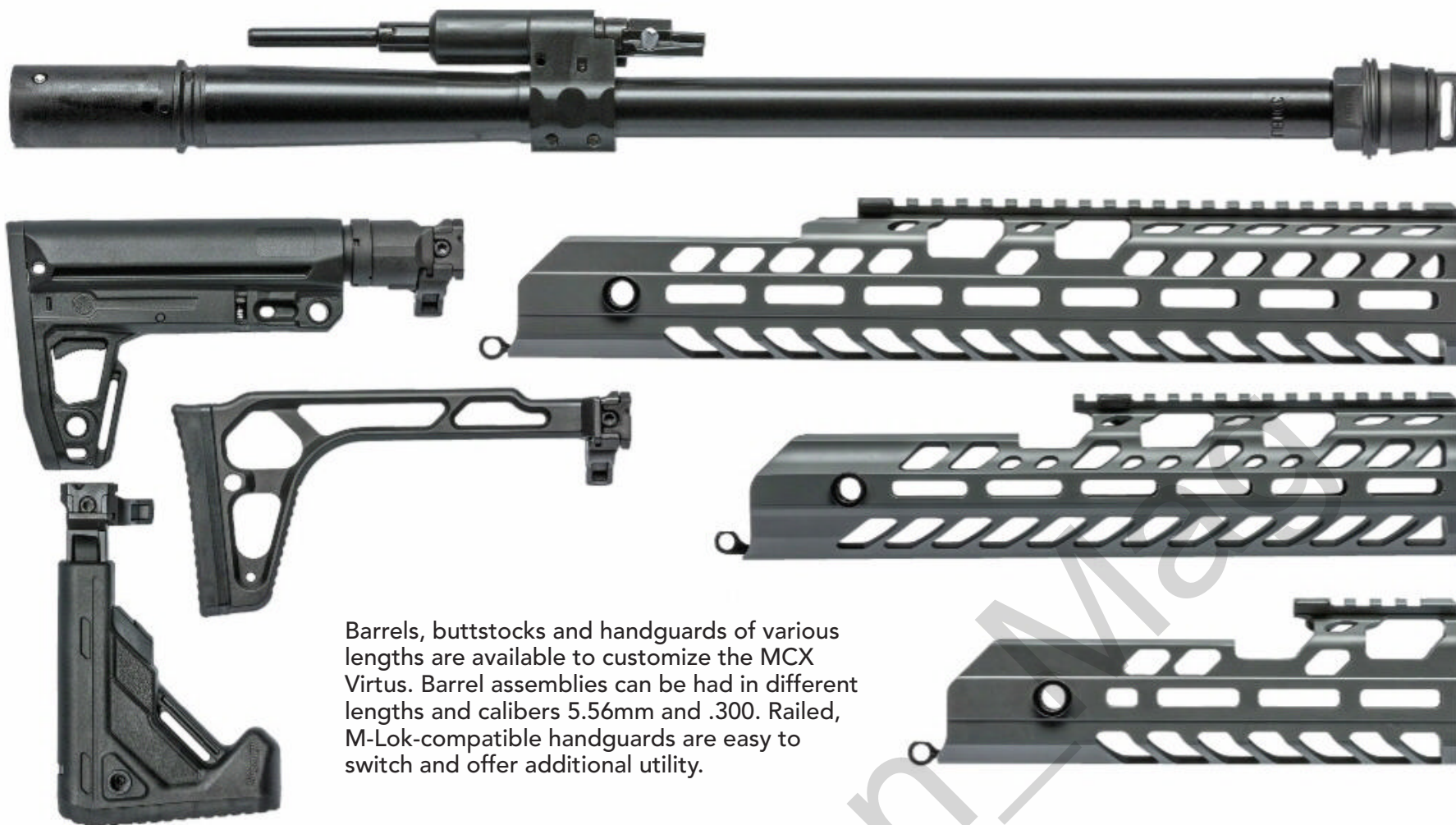
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Barrels, buttstocks and handguards of various lengths are available to customize the MCX Virtus. Barrel assemblies can be had in different lengths and calibers 5.56mm and .300. Railed, M-Lok-compatible handguards are easy to switch and offer additional utility.

caveat, though, and it's an important one: Mind your barrel lengths and stocks! If you buy a Virtus Patrol, for example, it needs to stay a "rifle" in the eyes of the law. The same rule applies to SBR and Pistol models. Any category changes, if not completed through the proper legal process, could land the unknowing gun tinkerer in hot water.



PHOTO: RICHARD KING

Virtus' modular design is the gun's banner feature, but cold-hammer forged barrels help the MCX Virtus become an accurate autoloader.

BLK carbine and gave it a reflex sight. Then, it was back out for some shorter-distance drills and a culmination exercise in the Academy's urban CQB simulator, which focused on target identification, fast shooting and transitioning through multiple targets.


I also got to complete a "Jungle Run" with targets ranging from spitting distance to around 200

The Virtus in Action A few years back, I had the opportunity to spend two days training with the MCX Virtus at the SIG Sauer Academy (sigsaueracademy.com) in Epping, New Hampshire, which is not far from SIG Sauer's Newton headquarters and manufacturing operations. That event opened my eyes to the concept of versatility through modularity. Training iterations were intentionally varied to showcase the capability of the MCX Virtus platform.

On the first day, I set up the Virtus as a suppressed 5.56-chambered carbine with a red dot and magnifier to take on drills appropriate for a patrol or general-purpose rifle. Later, I swapped the optics for a variable-power riflescope and experienced the accuracy of the MCX's cold-hammer forged barrels against targets a few hundred yards out.

On Day 2, things got quiet and then very loud. Back in the classroom, I rebuilt my Virtus into a suppressed .300

yards. The key to the exercise was making fast movements between firing positions, but applying calm, deliberate shooting techniques to ensure good hits. For fun the instructors brought out a select-fire MCX Rattler. In .300 BLK, that little PDW is a dream. The Rattler is portable, concealable, controllable, and easy to suppress. In 5.56, though, the Rattler is a firebreather! You can't reliably suppress a 5½-inch 5.56 autoloader, and the concussion from shooting from inside and around vehicles during testing was the inspiration for its name — it rattled some teeth!

The MCX Virtus is a modular masterpiece bolstered by a core operating system that's capable of reliable function across an unprecedented range. The Virtus runs without missing a beat. Whatever your shooting needs, from range work to personal defense and professional use, SIG Sauer's mission-configurable MCX Virtus has everyone covered. 



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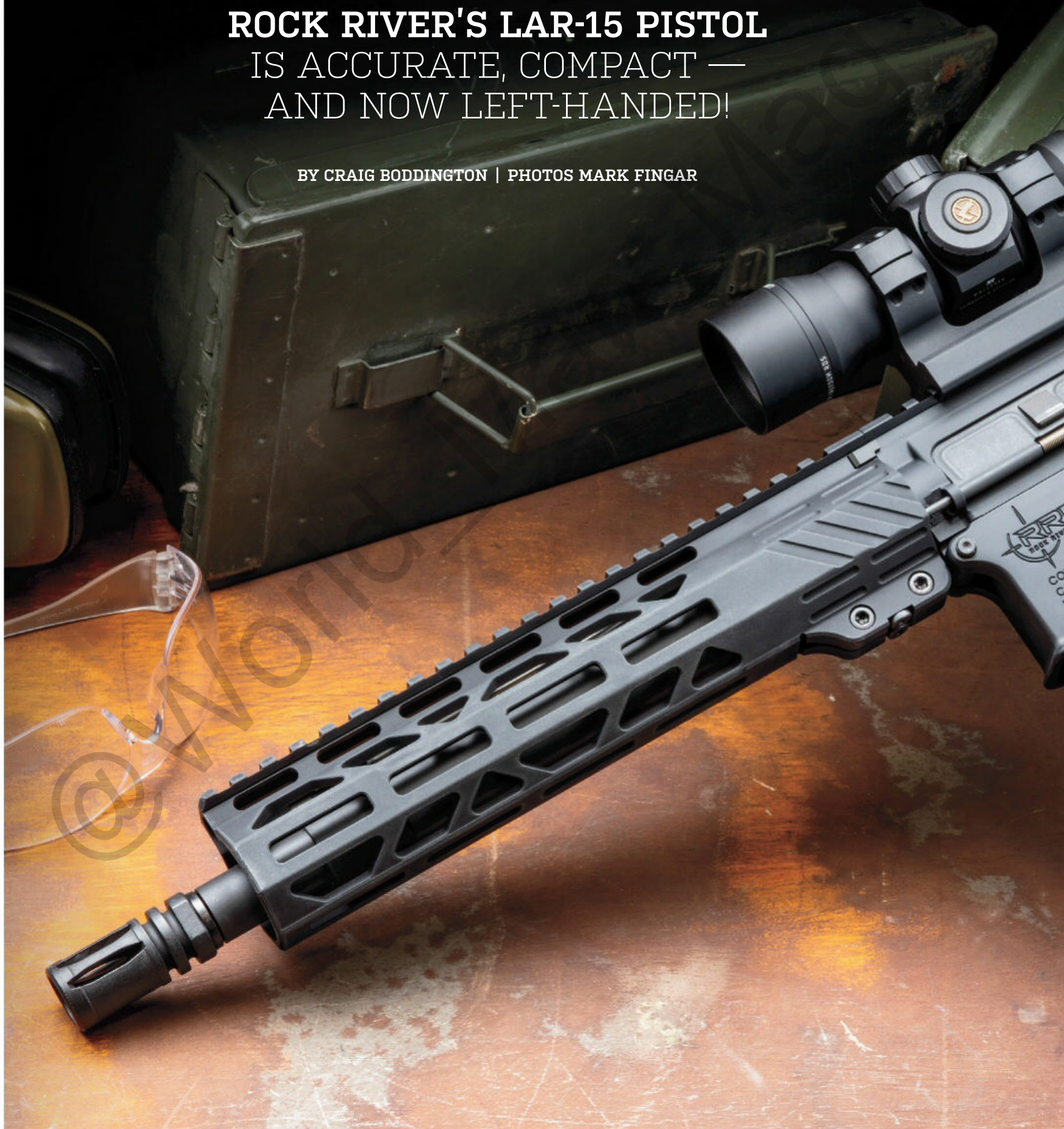
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BY CRAIG BODDINGTON | PHOTOS MARK FINGAR



ATTRACT



Leupold's new Freedom RDS Black, i.e., "red-dot sight," is shown on Rock River's LAR-15LH pistol. The Freedom RDS is a fixed, 1X sight that includes a dual-ring, 34mm cantilever mount. \$300



ROCK RIVER'S TIME-PROVEN LAR-15 platform is unquestionably reliable. It shoots straight, and is the cat's pajamas to accessorize. What's not to like? Almost nothing.

Exception: The AR-15, although not especially heavy, is a bulky firearm — even in carbine form with the stock collapsed. Hence, we have the AR pistol. Essentially, the action is the same, but AR pistols feature a handgun-length barrel. In pistol form, such a firearm is capable of one- or two-hand operation, typically with a padded buffer tube or compact arm brace for stabilization.

Neither accuracy nor velocity match what you can wring out of a full-size platform at distance, but the AR pistol is handier for carry in vehicles, boats or backpacks. Due to the cartridge, they can offer significantly more capability than the typical pistol-caliber handgun.

The AR pistol is not a short-barreled rifle (SBR). It is manufactured and sold as a handgun, which means that it has to have a barrel measuring less than 16 inches. To be classified as a handgun, it cannot have a traditional stock or a vertical

ROCK RIVER LAR-15LH PISTOL	
TYPE	Direct impingement, gas operated, rotating bolt, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	5.56mm NATO
CAPACITY	30 rds.
BARREL	10.5 in.; 1:9-in. twist
OVERALL LENGTH	29.25 in.
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 5 oz.
ARM BRACE	SB Tactical SBA3
PISTOL GRIP	RRA/Hogue soft over-molded rubber
HANDGUARD	RRA Lightweight, pistol length, M-LOK
FINISH	Hardcoat anodized (aluminum)
TRIGGER	3 lbs., single stage
SIGHTS	None
MSRP	\$1,045
MANUFACTURER	Rock River Arms; rockriverarms.com; 866-980-7625



Uniquely, Rock River's LEF-T series feature mirror-image controls. This enables a left-handed shooter to operate the selector lever with the thumb of the shooting hand, just as right-handers have done since the AR-15 was introduced.

handgrip on the forend, but it can have the clever arm brace for one-handed use. Although short and targeted by controversy, it was still legal to accurately fire from the shoulder at the time of this article's writing. (The Biden Administration seeks to ban stabilizing arm braces.)

Pistols accepting AR-15 magazines go back to the Bushmaster Arm Pistol, which was in production from 1972 to 1988. Olympic Arms continued this legacy with its OA-93, OA-96 and OA-98 models. After the 2004 sunset of the Assault Weapons Ban, AR pistols developed rapidly and have become popular. Rock River Arms offers its version with a twist near and dear to my heart: the new LAR-15 pistol is available in both right- and left-hand configurations.

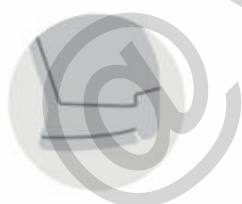
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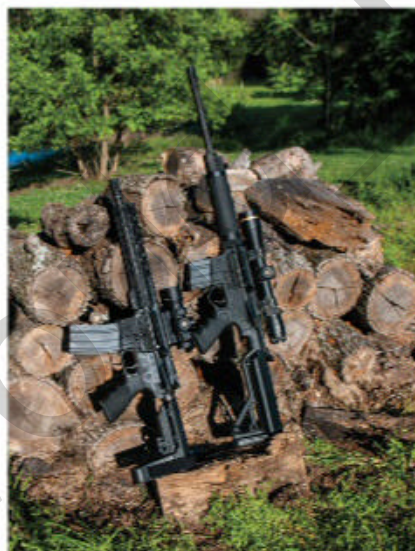




Left-eject ARs are uncommon; there are only a handful sold across the market. You, undoubtedly of the oppressive right-hand majority might say, “What’s the deal? Operation is ambidextrous!” Obviously, you’ve never fired a right-hand-eject AR from your left shoulder and had red-hot brass cascade down your shirt collar. From a safety standpoint, lefties are better off with left-hand actions because, in case of a catastrophic failure, hot gases and shrapnel are directed away from your face.

Interestingly, most “south-paw” ARs are left-hand eject, but not mirror-image because the safety and bolt release remain on the left side. There are two schools of thought on this: Left-hand eject solves both the safety and hot brass issue, but controls remain in the familiar position. Uniquely, Rock River’s LEF-T LAR-15s, both rifles and pistols, are true left-hand ARs. The safety is on the right, accessible by the thumb of the left (shooting) hand, the bolt catch is on the right, and charging handle release is left-hand. The magazine release is ambidextrous, too.

Most lefties have not seen these features together. They can take a bit of getting used to, but you’re gonna like them! When I took the LAR-15LH out of the factory hard case, all of this



Rock River’s LEF-T LAR pistol, shown next to its big brother, a full-size Rock River left-hand LAR-15. The pistol is new; the rifle (not a current configuration) has been a handy, “go-to” ranch rifle.



SB Tactical’s SBA3 Arm Brace clamps over the shooting forearm and is tightened with a Velcro strap. It offered support and stability for a variety of one- and two-handed shooting positions.

was quite familiar: A lefty Rock River AR in 5.56mm has long been my “ranch rifle” on the Kansas farm. When I’m there, it stays handy. It has accounted for several whitetails, and I’ve taken it on several prairie dog shoots.

That Rock River left-handed AR is a known commodity to me. It produces sub-MOA groups on command. Unknown, however, was how the new pistol version would stack up against its big brother for only having a 10½-inch barrel. The short answer was extremely well!

We must be reasonable though. Any AR pistol with a short barrel is not a full-length AR. Let’s examine its sights, functioning, accuracy, velocity and, finally, handling.

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Boddington's Kansas neighbor, a federal law enforcement officer, took an impromptu rest to support and shoulder-fire Rock River's LAR-15LH pistol. Although totally left-handed, this is the first left-handed AR pistol she'd seen — and she liked it!

Sighting In The Rock River LAR-15LH pistol was supplied without sights, but it does have a Picatinny rail that continues along the top of the 9¼-inch, mid-length aluminum handguard. The free-float handguard is M-Lok compatible, so it can be accessorized in the same way as a full-size AR-15. The top rail allows the full range of sights, including flip-up sights, red dots and magnified scopes. With the arm brace supported for shoulder-firing, conventional riflescopes can also be accommodated — just ensure plenty of eye relief!

Decisions on configuration depend on your purposes and needs for employment. With a short barrel and arm brace, I figure the LAR-15 pistol is primarily a close- to medium-range platform. I used this opportunity to evaluate Leupold's new Freedom RDS (\$300, leupold.com). This affordable sight has no magnification, a 1-MOA red dot, and eight illumination settings. It has unlimited eye relief, which is critical for using in the LAR-15 pistol in handgun-type firing positions.

I put the RDS well forward on the rail with Leupold's supplied cantilever mount. Unlike many red dots, the Freedom has precise quarter-MOA adjustments. This made it easy to get the LAR-15 pistol zeroed at 50 yards, and my Kansas neighbors had fun ringing steel out to 200 yards afterward.

Out of curiosity, and to satisfy G&A's 100-yard-group protocol, I cheated! For shooting groups, I switched out the RDS for the Leupold VX-6 2-12x42mm that's been residing on another Rock River LAR-15 rifle.

At The Range I suppose I've put at least 2,000 rounds through that Rock River rifle. I can't say that I've never had a stoppage, but it has been absolutely reliable. We put at least 300 rounds through the new LAR-15LH pistol, and there was never a single jam. Ammunition was largely odds and ends, from 40 to 70 grains, with never a stutter or a hiccup when fed from a variety of commercial and GI-style 20- and 30-round magazines.

The action is still akin to a standard AR-15: direct-



The muzzle of the LAR-15LH is threaded ½-28 and given an A2-style flash hider/compensator. This style of muzzle device doesn't feature ports at the bottom to help compensate for muzzle rise. Gas is redirected up to help push the barrel down.



The single-stage trigger is standard for AR-15, and can be replaced with a number of aftermarket substitutes.



The bolt carrier group of the LAR-15LH (above, right) is distinctive for its opposing lugs, extractor and ejector.

impingement, gas operated, rotating bolt and magazine fed. The difference is in the upper receiver, which features a left-hand ejection port, forward assist and brass deflector. Inside, the LEF-T bolt carrier group (BCG) is reversed in design, aside from the firing pin, retaining pins, bolt cam, and gas key. Additionally, Rock River has chromed the BCG for increased wear resistance.

Accuracy Barrels that are short and stiff tend to be accurate. With handguns, it's really more a matter of position and sighting equipment that create limitations. When shooting groups for score, I did everything possible to allow the pistol to shoot its best: I used the big VX-6 2-12X scope (of proven accuracy), and I fired from a steady bench over a Caldwell Lead Sled. I also took my time and allowed the barrel to cool between groups and frequent cleaning.

Rock River's literature states "one MOA" accuracy. This pistol met that criteria with some individual groups, however, as the chart indicates, the averages weren't there. Honestly, I didn't expect them to be. That would be asking a lot.

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Accuracy was beyond adequate for this firearm's purposes out to 100 yards. Any perceived shortfalls in accuracy should be attributed to ammunition pairing, both in bullet weights for its twist and the use of rifle-spec loads.

Bullet Weight The LAR-15LH has a chrome-moly barrel with a 1:9-inch twist rate. That's a versatile twist that is able to stabilize a range of bullet weights. In my experience, it's just a tad slow for the heaviest .224-inch bullets such as 69 grains and above. My Rock River rifle with the same twist is deadly accurate with bullets up to 62 grains, but accuracy falls apart with heavier bullets. Adding to the complexity of this test, shooting for this article was done during pandemic shortages. Initially, I started with one 69-grain load and two different 70-grain loads. Of these, Black Hills' 70-grain GMX load shot the best at 100 yards with a 2¾-inch average.

I set the other two heavy bullet loads aside and dropped down to Hornady's 55-grain V-Max bullet — and the pistol



Benchrest groups were fired from 100 yards using a Caldwell Lead Sled. The scope is a Leupold VX-6 2-12x42mm. Extended, the arm brace allowed for steady, conventional shoulder-fire.

came to life! This load produced groups that met Rock River's one-MOA criterion, averaging 1.497 inches.

I wish I could have tested it with a 60- or 62-grain load, but I didn't have enough cartridges of any load in this weight range, and I wasn't able to obtain more.

I did have Hornady's Superformance 53-grain load. Performance was better than with the heavy bullets, but I think it pointed to another characteristic of AR

pistols and ammunition used in them.

Understanding Loads The challenge is that most 5.56mm and .223 Remington loads are designed for use in rifle-length barrels, so they're loaded with propellants that will burn completely to provide consistent velocity in barrels of at least 16 inches. There are 5.56mm loads intended for optimum performance in AR pistols and SBRs, but availability is limited. I suspect most of us who own AR pistols will, as I did, use the ammo we have and accept its range limitations.

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Mind you, the three loads I chronographed and fired for groups are proven. But the extreme spreads (ES) in velocity were large: 30 feet per second (fps) for the Black Hills’ 70-grain GMX (amazing), but 140 fps for the 55-grain V-Max and 169 fps for the 53-grain Superformance. This actually follows, because the Superformance load is rated at a screaming 3,465 fps in a rifle barrel. It struggles to burn the full powder charge in a 10½-inch pistol barrel.

Velocity In my experience, there is no definitive rule for velocity loss per inch of barrel. It depends on the cartridge, case design and propellant. Regardless of bullet and load, your .556mm or .223-caliber pistol has neither the range, trajectory, nor energy of the same bullet and load in a rifle-length barrel. Factory-specified velocities of the three loads I chronographed in rifle barrels were: 70-grain GMX, 2,800 fps; 55-grain V-MAX, 3,240 fps; 53-grain V-Max, 3,465 fps. With these loads, velocity losses with the pistol were, respectively: 213 fps, 592 fps and 687 fps. This suggests that the faster the load, the greater the loss. This may not always hold true, but Hornady’s Superformance

PERFORMANCE

LOAD	VEL. (FPS)	ES	SD	BEST GROUP (IN.)	AVG. GROUP (IN.)
Hornady Custom 55-gr. V-Max	2,648	140	71	.99	1.5
Hornady SPF Varmint 53-gr. V-Max	2,778	169	91	1.38	1.83
Black Hills 70-gr. GMX	2,587	30	21	2.1	2.74

Notes: Accuracy is average of five, five-shot groups at 100 yards. Velocity is the average of five shots measured by an Oehler Model 35P chronograph set 10 feet in front of the muzzle.

load is a varmint load, wringing max velocity from the .223 case. It stands to reason it will lose the most velocity from a short barrel — and it does.

Handling Weighing 6.3 pounds unloaded without sights, the AR pistol can be a handful. As a plus, with this weight, recoil is very manageable — but beware the muzzle blast from the short barrel! Some AR pistols are supplied with a padded buffer tube for a more comfortable chin weld, but the arm brace offers support for one-hand shooting. The brace offers a variety of options for two-hand positions, too. Rock River supplies SB Tactical’s SBA3 arm brace, which is sturdy and simple to use. Tightened on the forearm, the arm brace is surprisingly effective. Most of us, me included, will find the AR pistol heavy for one-hand shooting with any degree of accuracy. Two-hand shooting makes the LAR-15 pistol more accurate and controllable. Use of the arm brace in its extended position for conventional shoulder-firing is steady, however, and does not change its legal definition. The LAR-15 pistol is still a handgun! In use, the new LAR-15LH was reliable, accurate, and a lot of fun to shoot, just like an AR — except a lot shorter. **G&A**

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HARDLINE & BRUSHLINE

IT'S WORTH MEETING **CRIMSON TRACE'S** NEW OPTICS.

BY TOM BECKSTRAND | PHOTOS MARK FINGAR

CRIMSON TRACE has been in the variable-powered optics business for about 3 years, and its new Hardline, Hardline Pro, Brushline and Brushline Pro series reflect its growing ability to tailor its products for the American market. The Hardline models favor the competitive and tactical shooting crowd, for example, while the Brushline models target the hunting market. The differences in features between these four lines are found in the reticles, focal planes and turrets. Not surprisingly, the Pro models are more feature-heavy.

Asia's Optics Manufacturing It's actually rare for any rifle-scope brand to build its own scopes. The most common business model is that the company, Crimson Trace in this case, sets the scope's specifications and testing protocols. Then they look at the optic-manufacturing plants in Asia to build the product. Crimson Trace's role is extensive. They designed the reticles, determined the engineering guidelines for each

product, and quality standards that each scope had to maintain. Crimson Trace also does quality control testing in-house, a step that many optic-importing companies who operate using this business model do not.

The major optics manufacturing centers in Asia are located in China, Japan and the Philippines. One look at the retail pricing for Crimson Trace's scopes, and I was happy to see that production is handled in the Philippines. The best Asian scopes come from Japan, but they cost more than \$1,000. Once the price and (more importantly) the features driving the retail drop below \$1,000, Japanese taxes and labor rates are no longer worth the effort, from a consumer perspective. Japan has a robust optical manufacturing capability and they can insert some amazing features in any scope. But if a company like Crimson Trace





HARDLINE PRO

HARDLINE PRO



The magnification adjusts by means of an aggressively-textured power ring. The reticle's sharpness can be adjusted by the ring at the rear of the ocular housing.



Pro models feature an illuminated reticle. The brightness can be adjusted by dialing the left turret. This is also the housing for the CR2032 battery.



Removing the turret caps exposes the turrets. They adjust in either .1-mil or .25 MOA increments, depending on the model you choose.



Exposed elevation and windage turrets appear most often in the Hardline models. The Hardline Pro has a left-side turret with side-focus and illumination dials.



A locking ring functions as a zero stop on some scope models. Screwing the locking ring down to the base of the turret once the scope is zeroed is all that's required.



The model designation, class of features and turret adjustment units, i.e., MOA or mil, are clearly labeled on the side of the objective housing.

isn't setting specifications on a fully-featured flagship model, then Japan is no longer my top pick for Asia's optic manufacturing.

In the sub-\$1,000 Asia-production category, the Philippines reigns supreme as a source for quality optics. Philippine manufacturers hold tight tolerances and turn out a good product when directed to do so and when managed correctly. The beauty of Philippine production is that Crimson Trace's scopes track well and include reticles with little-to-no cant, all while remaining budget friendly.

China produces the least expensive scopes. For anything other than casual range use, Chinese scopes lack the precision required for accurate fire at ranges past 300 yards. Chinese optic companies will only guarantee plus-or-minus 5 percent accuracy on turrets when dialed. If a shooter dials 10 mils on a turret and the internals only moved 9.5 mils, the result is a miss. This much error in the turret system also means it will be impossible to true the rifle to any ballistic calculator because that 5 percent error means it will only be correct at the specific truing distance. Most shooters will be tempted to blame the ballistic software for inaccuracies, but I've found that Chinese turrets lack the repeatability required for dialing targets at any distance. The smaller the target and the longer the range, the more this deficiency affects your shots.

CRIMSON TRACE HARDLINE PRO 4-16x50mm	
POWER	4X-16X
OBJECTIVE	50mm
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ELEVATION ADJUSTMENT	.1 mil per click
WINDAGE ADJUSTMENT	.1 mil per click
RETICLE	MR1-Mil
LENGTH	14.8 in.
WEIGHT	1 lb., 8 oz.
EYE RELIEF	3.6 in.
MSRP	\$859
MANUFACTURER	Crimson Trace, 800-442-2406, crimsontrace.com

Crimson Trace Performance The quickest way to determine how precise a riflescope is made is to run a tracking test and a reticle cant test. Tracking tests assess the accuracy of the turrets by measuring how far the reticle moves when the turret spins. A lot of folks will test this by putting the scope in an immobile jig and then measure by viewing through the scope how far the reticle moves on the target as they dial. I don't like this method because if there's any mirage it becomes close to impossible to get an accurate measurement.

I took a 6-24x50mm Hardline Pro to the range and put it atop my rifle dedicated to scope tracking. I shoot this

test at 50 yards to minimize the effects wind has on the bullet's flight. I shoot one round at a small dot near the bottom of a 24-inch by 36-inch target sheet, dial as much elevation as the scope will allow, 13 mils in this case (I didn't release the zero stop), and then fire again. I then dial back to my zero and shoot again, then dial up 13 mils and shoot again. I repeat this process until I have two, three-shot groups that are 13 mils apart.

Thirteen mils at 50 yards is 23.4 inches apart. In reality, my two groups were 23.68 inches apart, for a measured error of 1.2 percent. To put that in perspective, 13 mils of elevation travel takes my competition rifle chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor out to 1,357 yards when the temperature is 72

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BRUSHLINE PRO

degrees and there is 65 percent humidity in the air. A shift in muzzle velocity of 11 feet per second (fps) yields the same 1.2-percent amount of elevation error. Considering that even the best handloads can't consistently keep velocity extreme spreads (ES) less than 11 fps, this amount of elevation error is irrelevant. The fact that there is only 1.2-percent elevation error is fantastic, as this is about as much error as I usually find on scopes costing two or three times as much. If all I can find is about 1 percent error, my measured results could just as easily be operator error versus turret error.

Measuring reticle cant occurs by measuring the distance of each group from the plumb vertical line. My two groups impacted almost directly over one another with only .1-inch lateral difference between the two. I set the elevation distance traveled (23.4 inches) as the maximum amount of lateral error possible due to the circular shape of the internal erector assembly. A .1-inch shift at 23.4 inches of travel gives this scope .04 percent error for reticle cant. To give this some quantifiable meaning, a guy would have to be able to call wind within .5 miles per hour at 1,357 yards before that much ret-

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BRUSHLINE PRO



Each Crimson Trace scope is delivered with a bikini cover that protects the objective and ocular lenses when not in use.

icle became an issue. No human being can call wind that well. It's unusual for reticles to be perfectly mounted in a scope, and it's not uncommon to see several tenths of an inch in lateral shift across 13 mils or more of travel. To see so little shift for a scope that retails for \$859 is, again, fantastic performance from this scope.

I was shocked at how well this Hardline Pro model performed. It ties for the best Philippine-production scope I've ever tested, and would beat many of the



Crimson Trace scopes come with a fast-focus diopter that makes it easy to focus the reticle to an individual shooter's eye. Large lugs make it easy to manipulate the ring.



Capped-turret models are more common among the Brushline series. Brushline Pro models include wider magnification ranges and illuminated reticles.



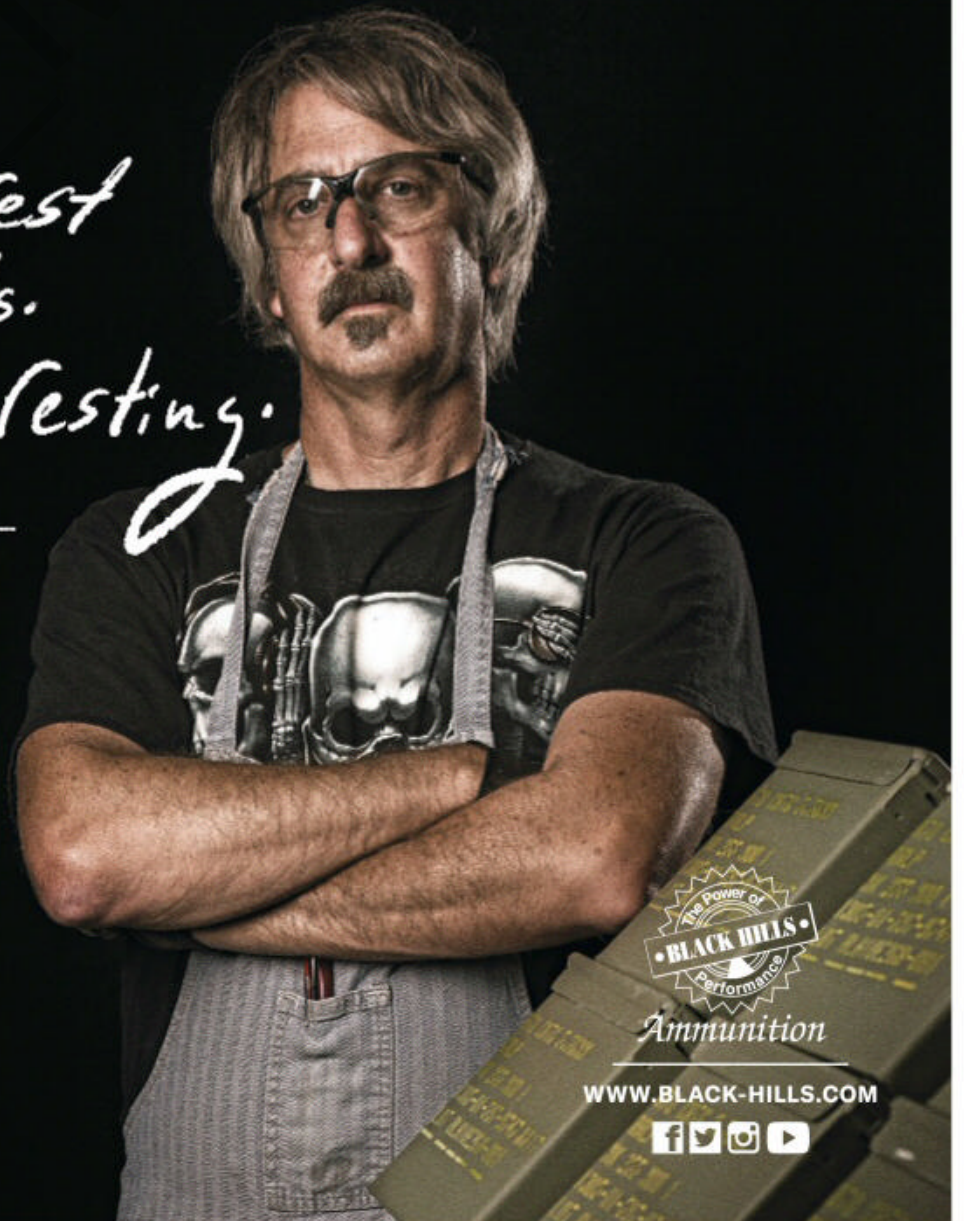
more expensive Japanese-production models. The only Philippine-produced scope that did this well for me was the Zeiss Conquest V4 (\$950, zeiss.com). Crimson Trace's full-featured and most expensive model is still a hundred dollars more affordable than the base V4.

Features & Testing Features and magnification levels are what delineate Hardline from Hardline Pro, and Brushline from Brushline Pro. The "Pro" models come with all the bells and

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whistles. They have higher magnification, and are slightly more expensive for those features.

All Hardline and Hardline Pro scopes with exposed turrets come with a zero stop that is simple but effective. Removing the turret cap exposed a lock ring that wraps around the turret screw. If you run out of travel with the elevation turret, loosening the lock ring will likely free up more travel. Once the scope is zeroed, screw the lock ring down until it sits tight against the turret housing and then tighten the set screw. Replace the turret cap and the scope is good to go. The Brushline turrets are capped and have a spring-loaded inner


cap that lifts and rotates to zero without the need for tools.

The Hardline and Hardline Pro reticles are first focal plane (FFP) mil- and minute-of-angle (MOA)-based with sub-tension in .2 mil or 1 MOA increments. Anyone using a ballistic calculator, dialing for elevation, or holding for wind will want these reticles. The Brushline and Brushline Pro reticles are second focal plane (SFP) with ballistic drop compensating (BDC) reticles featuring three or four diamond-shaped windows in each reticle. Each diamond offers three aiming points — top, middle, bottom — and gives most hunters plenty of aiming points for hold-over use. An interesting note, Crimson

Trace's most popular scope features a BDC reticle developed just for the .350 Legend.

While I was thoroughly impressed with the mechanical performance of the Hardline scopes I tested, I was equally impressed with the stringent quality control and durability testing Crimson Trace requires across all product lines. I was pleased to learn that Crimson Trace conducts impact testing in six directions: front, back, both sides, and on two diagonal axes. Each direction sees 1,400 g-forces, which is a lot of energy. All 50 of Crimson Trace's scopes have to pass these tests.

I asked Crimson Trace about the warranty. These come with a lifetime warranty, and there are no warranty cards or proof of ownership required. The warranty includes both the optic and the electronics within. When talking to them about the warranty, Crimson Trace emphasized that the quality of their product mattered more than the warranty. A killer warranty is poor consolation if a failed scope ruins your match or a hunting trip. Crimson Trace is designing scopes to last, not cheap scopes they expect to have to replace. From a consumer standpoint, I can appreciate this approach.

Known for innovating laser-aiming devices since 1994, Crimson Trace is a newer name in the optics world. Still, it has a great strategy and business plan in place. They picked the right place to build scopes for this price bracket, and the factory is producing quality scopes with all the features that many of our budgets will allow. Crimson Trace reticles make sense, too, and you'll find that their features are abundant. I expect all four scope lines will grow and increase in popularity. 

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BY GARRY JAMES | PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL SCHREIER

The Standard Arms Model G was an attractive arm, especially the deluxe, top-of-the-line "Rocky Mountain" version seen here. It had good lines, balanced well and, when working properly, was a handy rifle. This rifle also has a fancy pistol grip and checkered Circassian walnut stock. The Rocky Mountain Grade sold for \$200 in 1911, some \$162.50 more than a Standard Grade.



TODAY, SEMIAUTO RIFLES and handguns of modern manufacture seem nowhere near as special as those made at the dawn of the 20th century. They still evoke a sense of mystery and awe. To contemporary shooters used to manually-operated firearms, guns that performed loading and ejecting functions on their own were simply magical.

Actually, the premise of a self-loader, even by 1900, was nothing new. Some number of years earlier, inventors were attempting to harness the power of a firearm's discharge to assist in loading and firing. However, the fouling caused by blackpowder almost universally thwarted their efforts.

Not until the acceptance of relatively clean-burning smokeless powder around the 1880s did the concept of a recoil, blowback, or gas-operated arm become truly feasible. In short order, successful semi- and full-auto longarms and pistols by such pioneers as Ferdinand Mannlicher, Hiram Maxim, Hugo Borchardt, John Browning and Manuel Mondragón popularized the concept of self-loaders with the military and general public.

It didn't take long for semiautos to hit the sporting market. Technically, the first sporter was the German 7.65mm Parabellum 1902 Luger Carbine, most likely, though it was really just an adaption of a handgun. There was also the *Kavallerie-Karabiner* version of the 7.63mm Mauser-caliber C.96 "Broomhandle" Mauser pistol, produced in small num-



The full-coverage engraving on this particular Model G is of high quality. The rifle was obviously intended to go to someone special, however, its history prior to 1940 has been lost.

bers, which pre-dated the 1902. Though sold commercially, the intent by Mauser was to interest the military in the piece, an endeavor that came to no avail. As far as centerfire purpose-built hunting autoloaders go, the premier examples appear to have originated in the United States.

Winchester introduced its centerfire Model 1905 blowback in .32 and .35 Winchester. Its success later spawned a Model 1907 chambered for the more powerful .351 Win. round, and the Model 1910, which handled a stout .401 Win. loading.

Not to be outdone, in 1906 Remington came out with its superlative Model 8 recoil-operated repeater offered in a quar-



tet of calibers: .25 Remington, .30 Rem., .32 Rem. and .35 Rem.

As well, early pump-action sport-ers were offered by various makers including Colt, Remington, Savage and Winchester. While a large number were .22 rimfires, there was also a reasonable selection of centerfires catalogued. Like autoloaders, they were viable alternatives for those shooters not particularly enamored of bolt actions or lever guns.

Philadelphian Morris F. Smith was no John Browning, but unquestionably he had a considerable mechanical bent. While much of his history is somewhat vague, records show a number of firearms patents, some of which were rolled into the 1906 patent number 314,242 for a unique “auto-matic gas-operated” rifle.

The salient words here are “gas-operated.” Though also semiautos, the above-mentioned Remington and Winchesters relied on blowback and recoil to work their actions. At this time, gas guns, while not common, were hardly unique, as witnessed by the 1908 Mondragón rifle and Browning’s Model 1896 Colt “Potato-Digger” machine gun. It appears, though,



The Lyman receiver sight (above, left) is adjustable for windage and elevation with a dual, flip-down aperture arrangement. This sight was atypical for the Model G. Most sight upgrades were tang types. The standard notch rear sight (above, right), with slide adjustment, was a more common sporting style of the period.



The front sight was a windage-adjustable post given an ivory tip from Lyman. The plate at the rear of the front sight, when removed, allowed access to the gas inlet screw for disassembly.

Smith’s contrivance was the first application of gas operation to a dedicated sporting rifle.

After spending some time in further development, in 1909 Smith’s Standard Arms Company, sited in Wilmington, Delaware, introduced its “Model H” rifle, a svelte, well-balanced double-duty semiauto/pump combination repeater.

“H” was possibly for “hammerless” as that feature was touted in the firm’s catalog. Almost immediately, the moniker of the rifle was changed to “Model G,” the “G” ostensibly standing for “gas.” Standard Arms also sold a companion pump-only version of the rifle, the “Model M,” “M” meaning “manual.” This allowed the company to provide the



Model G barrel markings included the Standard Arms address, caliber, and inventor Morris Smith's patent details.

shooter with action options while at the same time cutting costs by being able to use many of the same parts in both guns.

Wisely, Standard Arms did not develop proprietary cartridges for the G and M, but chambered them for the readily available, proven Remington .25, .30, .32 and .35 rounds originally developed for the Model 8. Very quickly the .32 was dropped, most likely because its performance was not much greater than that of the .30 Rem., and that if a shooter wanted more *oomph*, he could opt for the .35.

In operation the Model G was not unlike many later gas guns, providing the requisite power by tapping off pressure when the rifle was fired by way of a small hole near the muzzle. The force operated a piston which, through connecting rods, unlocked the bolt to eject and chamber a round. Ammunition — five rounds for .25 and .30 and four rounds for .35 — were dropped into a magazine incorporated within the receiver. Thus, the rifle did not have a projecting or removable mag. Access to the magazine was provided by means of a swinging cover, which was released by a small button at its front. An internal spring-loaded cartridge tray and carrier was hinged at the forward part of the mag opening.

Likely, the most interesting feature of the gun was its manner of chambering the first round. The rifle was equipped with a slide that was released by a button on the slide handle. Drawing it to the rear against spring pressure cocked the



The action handle on the deluxe rifle is of checkered walnut (above, top). Most were cast bronze with elaborate designs (above, bottom). The button at the front of the handle releases it for cocking and operating the action.



Turning the gas valve one-half turn allowed the rifle to be switched from semiauto to pump action. This was accomplished with the supplied takedown tool (right).



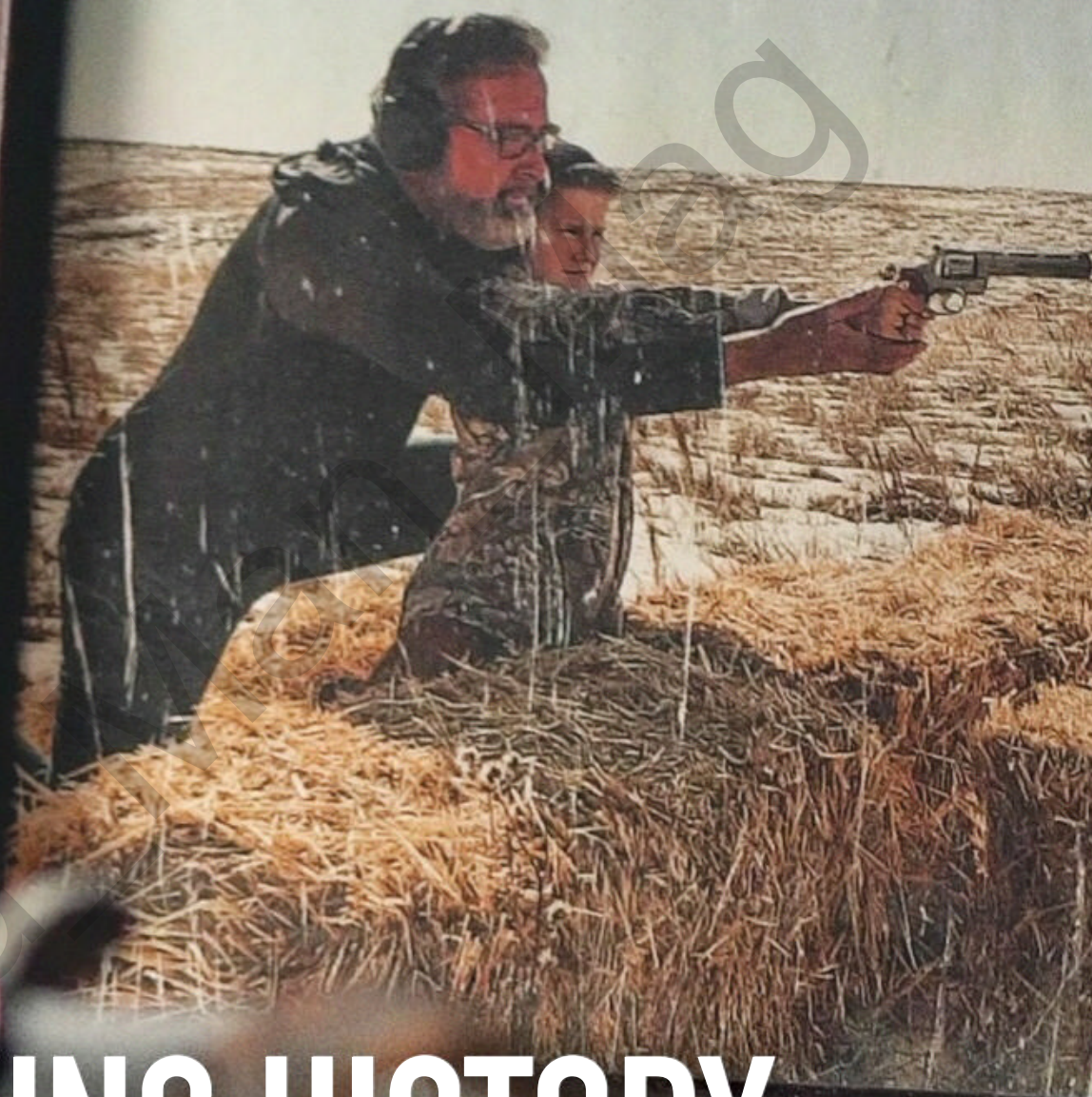
firing pin and prepared a round for chambering, which was accomplished when the slide was allowed to move forward. After firing the first shot, the rifle then operated semiautomatically.

Additionally, by turning a small valve on the front of the gas inlet a few inches behind the muzzle with a combination tool — supplied with the gun in a “little

vest-pocket cloth case” along with cleaning brush — it was possible to deactivate the gas system. This would allow the rifle to be fired by, as the company termed it, “hand-action.”

For those shooters who preferred a simpler (and more affordable) version of the gun, in the Model M it was possible to purchase one sans the gas arrangement that operated solely as a pump.

No screws were used in the action, pins and catches serving to hold the rifle together. Standard Arms claimed because of this the rifle could be “readily disassembled,” though anyone essaying the daunting task (including the author) might want to disagree with Standard Arms on this point.



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Loading a Standard Arms rifle is fairly simple. One merely pushes back on the magazine-cover button and lowers the cover, which also frees the spring-loaded carrier assembly, and then drops rounds into the magazine.

On the other hand, for simple maintenance takedown was slick. One simply pushed in on a recessed catch at the rear of the triggerguard using the combination tool or other pointed implement, pulled the lower frame slightly rearward and separated it from the receiver.

As inferred previously, the Model G (for that is what we will direct most of our attention on from here on in) was a sleek, handsome piece, reflecting some of the style of the period of its inception, but also looking a bit towards the future. It was extremely well balanced, much more so than the Winchester blowbacks that had a tendency to be butt heavy, and the Remington Model 8 that, as good a rifle as it was, always seemed to be a bit weighty in the muzzle. For the record, the Models G and M (Standard) weighed 7½ and 7 pounds, had 22¾-inch barrels, 13¼-inch buttstocks and measured 42 inches overall.

The receiver's long, slim lines were broken only by a hump about midpoint to accommodate a space for the bolt to lock into. The Standard model was blued and had a plain Circasian walnut buttstock. The rifle's most rococo features were



To take the rifle down for cleaning or servicing, one merely pushes down on a spring-loaded detent at the rear of the triggerguard with a pointed tool. (Here the tool is a pin punch.) Originally, a special takedown tool would have been used to release the takedown lock. The lower frame may now be removed from the upper portion of the receiver.

its buttplate and slide handle that were fashioned out of intricately cast bronze. Both were originally given a japanned finish, which quickly wore off. The plate incorporated the intertwined initials "SAC" for "Standard Arms Company" within an elaborate floral bouquet, and the handle, vignettes of lion and moose heads intertwined with sinuous tree branches.

The sights were like those of most other rival longarms, consisting of a simple V-notch rear leaf with central elevation slide, and a Lyman ivory-tip front blade, drift adjustable for windage. Lyman tang peeps were offered as extras.

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It is interesting to follow the fortunes of the Standard Arms Company through its catalogs, which are fortunately available in reprint from Cornell Publications (cornellpubs.com). The 1909 version is a relatively Spartan affair consisting of 12 pages, reasonably well-illustrated, and offering a simple description of the establishment's wares along with modest declarations of the firearms' advantages and a listing of features and extras.

These embellishments included special stocks and sights as well as "Engraving or Etching, \$6.00 and up." The Model H, as it was then called, sold for \$35 in the basic form, with prices rising to \$100 through three "special" models.

A year later, with the fortunes of the company obviously on the rise, the catalog evolved into an elaborate affair abounding with grandiloquent hyperbole about the Model G and extolling the virtues of gas operation over those of recoil or blowback. It increased in page count to 24, and was chock full of specially commissioned hunting scenes and photo-



The mainspring/firing pin assembly is contained within the bolt. It may be easily oiled and cleaned in position, however, repair or replacement can be time-consuming. The two small springs at the back of the bolt are buffers to keep the bolt from slamming to the rear, inside of the receiver.

graphs of various aspects and details of the Models G and M.

In 1911, a flyer sent to dealers announced some additions to the extras available for the line, describing them as "Standard Art Engraved Rifles." As well as the \$35 and \$30, respectively, Standard Grade G and M, depending upon the degree of decoration and style of wood the buyer desired, it was possible to purchase an "Adirondack" for

\$50, a "Sierra" at \$75, the "Selkirk" for \$100 and the top-of-the-line "Rocky Mountain" at a whopping \$200. (The average annual wage in the U.S. in 1911 was \$520). The Rocky Mountain, an example of which may be seen on these pages, exhibited full-coverage, top-quality engraving consisting of scrolls and game scenes as well as a finely checkered walnut pistol-grip buttstock and checkered walnut slide handle. Clearly the company was expecting big things.

When the gun worked, it was a pleasure to shoot as will be seen anon. Recoil was light, accuracy was good and the

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Initially, the Model G was described as being chambered in (left to right) .25, .30, .32 or .35 Remington. Early on, the .32 was apparently dropped from the lineup.



hybrid mechanism not all that difficult to manage once one got the hang of it. Unfortunately, as clever, attractive, and well-constructed as the Model G was, it incorporated fatal flaws. First, the mechanism was overly complicated with fiddly little parts that were destined to go wrong at some point or other. One of the main problems was that the pin that connected the piston to the bolt extensions was not up to its task. It had a tendency to shear under repeated use. When the gas system fouled, operation was sporadic or ceased altogether. It was then necessary to undertake a laborious and time-consuming disassembly, a task that was too complicated for the average shooter.

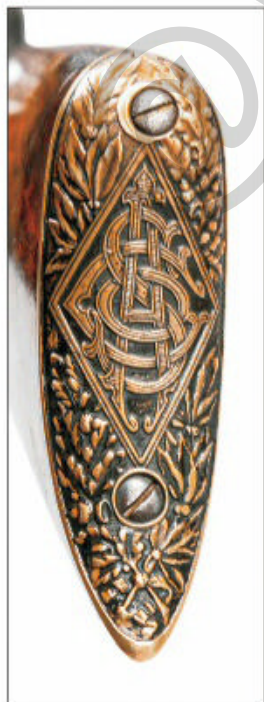
Standard Arms was careful in recommending that the Model G be cleaned and regularly oiled with sewing machine oil and gasoline. The piston and cylinder were singled out for regular lubrication, a trio of holes being drilled into the gas tube as oiling ports.

At one point, around 1910, the Model G was tested by the military and found unsuitable. Its evaluation was terminated. Some 7 years later, the U.S. Army would adopt a far more robust and reliable gas-operated shoulder arm: The Browning Automatic Rifle, or "BAR."

Early brisk sales slowed to a trickle once word got out that the Model G was not living up to expectations. In 1912, Standard Arms declared bankruptcy and ceased operation. A good number of parts were on hand and construction of the arms resumed until 1914 under the name Standard Arms Manufacturing Company (SAMC). Finally, SAMC sold its remaining stock to New York surplus arms dealer Francis Bannerman and others. Today, a wide selection of spare Standard Arms rifle parts are still available from Numrich Arms Corporation (gunpartscorp.com, 866-686-7424).

For a shooting evaluation, I was fortunate enough to obtain a wonderful-condition .35 Rem. Model G with "Rocky Mountain" embellishments, the execution of which would have well

Standard Arms rifles were universally fitted with intricately designed bronze buttplates including the company's initials.



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The Standard Arms Model G's main competitors were the blowback-operated Winchester Model 1907 (above) and the recoil-operated Remington Model 8 (below). (Photos courtesy of Morphy Auctions.)

The Standard-grade Model G was devoid of all engraving, though special-order sights and woodwork was available on request. This example has a special buttstock, which would have cost an extra \$10.

served the finest contemporary Marlin, Savage or Winchester. The bore was perfect. Interestingly, the rifle was fitted with a Lyman receiver sight rather than the tang arrangement.

Apparently, this gun had last been fired some 80 years earlier, so it was necessary to take it down and clean the mechanism and lubricate the parts as much as was possible. After considerable labor, the rifle was again apparently in operating condition. I took it to the range and, given the Model G's spotty reputation, kept my fingers securely crossed.

Four rounds of 150-grain Remington soft-points were dropped into the magazine, the cover closed, and the rifle brought up to the shoulder. As the gun's recoil spring is a bit on the stout side, it was necessary to get feel for it before I could get a round properly chambered. Once this was accomplished, no further problems — for the moment.

With trepidation, I pulled the trigger. Everything functioned flawlessly. Recoil was very light (affirming one of Standard Arms' claims) and the trigger pull was later measured at 5 pounds, crisp and sure. The first offhand shot, fired at 25 yards, struck at 11:00 in the 3-ring. The remaining three clustered around it and spread the group to 4 inches. All appeared well, but to be prudent I limited further shooting to a couple more magazines full. The rifle was then retired for the day, taken home and checked over. The following week, having confidence that the Model G was up to the task, we

returned to the firing line for a more thorough run-through. This time, employing a rest, the range was increased to 50 yards. Using the same ammunition, groups struck slightly higher than previously, though they tightened up considerably and now measured in the 2- to 3-inch range.

After about four, four-shot strings, disaster struck. The rifle failed to cycle and a pull on the slide merely intensified the problem. The magazine was emptied, and the rifle checked to make sure there was not a round in the chamber. Once the frame was removed from the receiver, the problem became immediately evident. A small pin that held a cap, which retained the mainspring and firing pin within the block, had dis-



The author found the Model G in .35 Remington to be very well-balanced, accurate and pleasant to fire. Unfortunately, basic design flaws kept it from being a serious contender in the sporting autoloader market.

integrated under the force of the mainspring jamming the cap between the rear of the inside of the frame and the block. The mainspring itself was badly mangled. A later forensic analysis showed the offending pin had crystalized. After examining the numerous small, jagged pieces, my shooting companions and I were amazed it held on as long as it did. To be fair, this was not a difficulty that seemed to crop up in any of my research, but was probably just a manifestation of old age. However, improper heat treating cannot be entirely ruled out.

Recoil springs were not available from Numrich but at least the pins were, and one was duly ordered. The spring, it was decided, if not obtainable from other sources, could be fabricated. Unfortunately, in order to replace the pin, it

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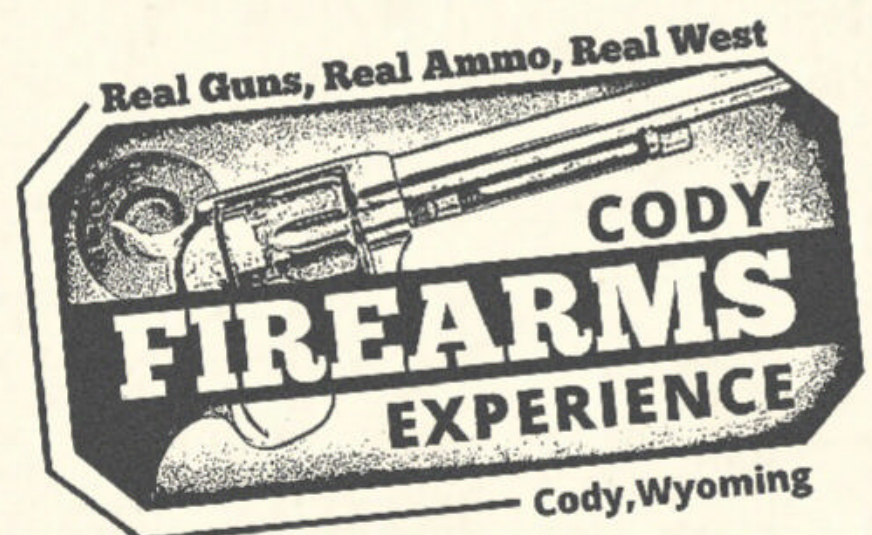
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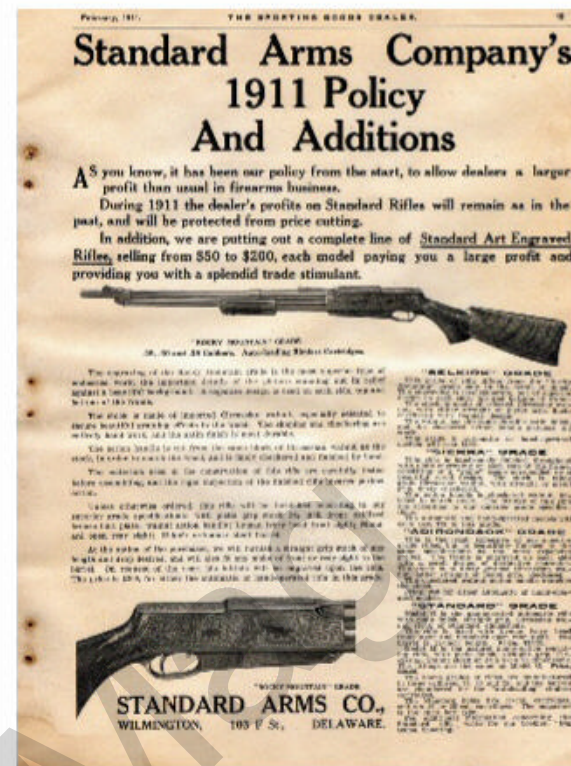
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For a fledgling company, Standard Arms offered a good selection of grades and options. This 1911 dealer's announcement lists the various grades, which ranged from \$37.50 for the Standard to a \$200 for the Rocky Mountain. (Courtesy of Larry Hare.)

was necessary to virtually disassemble the entire rifle — an onerous task, which, because of other obligations, I am loath to undertake at the present time. An inspection of another Model G revealed a different method of retaining the firing pin/spring that does not rely on a pin. The rifle has a lower serial number than the one we fired, so if the component was indeed intended to be an improvement, I suppose there's a possibility it could have been retrofitted later in the gun's history.

The abbreviated shooting experience I had with the Model G was revealing and, until it broke, extremely pleasant. It was also easy to see how problems could arise, and when they did could be difficult to immediately attend to; certainly a fatal flaw if in the field.

At least, to a degree, the Model G showed the efficacy of gas operation, a system that would eventually be taken up by many other firearms with far greater success. 

The author would like to thank Larry Hare, Bob Dillard, Gary Hartzell, Mark Keefe IV, and Phil Schreier for their assistance in the preparation of this article.



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THE EVERYMAN RIFLE

ATAC DEFENSE isn't a company most riflemen know about, but they should. ATAC Defense makes the ubiquitous AR-15 rifle, but, unlike most of the smaller businesses based around this platform, ATAC Defense-made rifles include material improvements normally found only on the most expensive AR brands.

ATAC Defense has been in the manufacturing business since 1993 and started making parts for AR-15s in 2014. They've been turning AR-15 forgings into finished receivers for years, as well as making many of the small parts needed in the

rifle. What makes ATAC Defense different from everyone else is the level of materials research and development it has done on the AR-15, and how it incorporates those findings into the rifles now offered.

Chris Johnson is the owner of the company and told Guns & Ammo, "We will be here even after the market settles down and things normalize. We have no debt and we're passionate about firearms. We also have no interest in private equity companies." With those words, ATAC Defense has our attention.

ATAC DEFENSE ADER

TYPE	Direct impingement, gas operated, semiautomatic
CARTRIDGE	5.56 NATO (tested) or .300 BLK
CAPACITY	30 rds.
BARREL	16 in. , 1:7-in. twist, 4150 CrMoV
OVERALL LENGTH	33 in. (collapsed); 36 in. (extended)
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 8 oz.
STOCK	MFT Battlelink Minimalist Milspec
GRIPS	MFT Engage
LENGTH OF PULL	11 in. (collapsed), 14 in. (extended)
FINISH	Hardcoat anodized and Cerakote (aluminum); Burnt Bronze (tested)
TRIGGER	Two stage; 3 lbs., 8 oz. (tested)
SAFETY	Two-position selector
MSRP	\$1,369
MANUFACTURER	ATAC Defense, 601-963-0300, atacdefense.com

ATAC Defense installs an ambidextrous magazine release on the ADER, as well as a unique, oversized bolt catch/release. These controls are easy to find.



The buffer tube assembly contains a 3-ounce weighted buffer and mil-spec spring for reliable cycling of the bolt carrier group. Worth noting, the castle nut was properly torqued and staked.



The MFT Minimalist stock is lightweight and adjustable for six positions. It works well for shooting offhand, but is difficult to support with a rear bag when shooting from the prone or on a bench.





The bolt carrier group features a 4340 heat-treated cam pin, and an 8640 heat-treated firing pin. The extractor is precision ground 4340 and the ejector is made of S7 tool steel; both are heat treated, also.



The ADER's mid-length gas system and barrel are shrouded by ATAC's proprietary handguard that features M-Lok slots to attach rail sections and accessories. The barrel is complete with a muzzlebrake.

The AR-15 is a rifle with few surprises. It has aluminum upper and lower receivers, and a direct-impingement (DI) gas system that cycles the bolt carrier group (BCG). ATAC Defense's line of rifles fit that description as well. The ATAC Defense Enhanced Rifle (ADER) model was sent to Guns & Ammo for review. They also offer a model known as the ATAC Defense Basic Rifle (ADBR) and the ATAC Defense Basic Plus Rifle wearing different Cerakote colors and chambered in either 5.56 NATO or .300 Blackout. G&A's test sample was delivered in 5.56 NATO.

The receivers are well-made and typical of those machined from 7075 aluminum. The ADER features a standard 7075 six-position lower receiver extension (i.e., "buffer tube") and some common but popular polymer pieces from Mission First Tactical (MFT, missionfirsttactical.com), namely the Battlelink adjustable stock and Engage grip.

Where this rifle deviates from other AR-15s is with the handguard, the barrel, BCG and the trigger.

The Sum of its Parts The ADER features ATAC Defense's own free-float handguard. It's machined in-house from 6061 aluminum, then tumbled and deburred. These rifles are only available with the M-Lok attachment system, which accepts direct-mount accessories and rail sections. The handguard's top rail integrates well with the upper receiver's optic rail for a full length of usable space. Here, you could add a night vision device, lights or an array of visible and IR laser devices.

The barrel is another special component of this rifle. ATAC Defense gets their barrels from a large defense contractor that otherwise only makes barrels for military contracts. Personal relationships that go back many years have allowed ATAC Defense to access the premium parts. Each barrel starts out as a mil-spec Mil-B-1159E bar of 4150 chrome-moly vanadium (CrMoV) steel that gets bored, button-rifled, and chambered by the contractor. The barrels have a 1:7-inch twist rate with a 5.56mm NATO chamber. The barrel is



The bolt catch/release lever may be oversized, but it work with a standard lower receiver. Behind it is ATAC's optional dual-stage trigger featuring a 1½-pound first stage and 2-pound second stage.

also coated and quenched, which gives it a lasting and durable matte finish. They'll shoot reliably even when conditions and ammunition aren't the best. The muzzle is threaded ½x28 and complete with a three-port muzzlebrake.

All barrels have the M4 contour and come with either a carbine-length or mid-length gas system. Where ATAC Defense deviates from military specifications on the barrel is the replacement of the chrome-lining process with nitride. Nitride is a better and more durable finish, especially for corrosion protection. The testing protocol for these barrels is way beyond anything used elsewhere in the commercial AR-15 community. Barrels are proofed with a 5.56mm cartridge loaded with pistol powder that generates twice the chamber pressure encountered by a SAAMI cartridge. They have to use pistol powder because it's not possible to put enough rifle powder in the case to double standard pressure.

The bolt in an AR-15 is the component most likely to fail under hard use. It's a small part that takes a beating every

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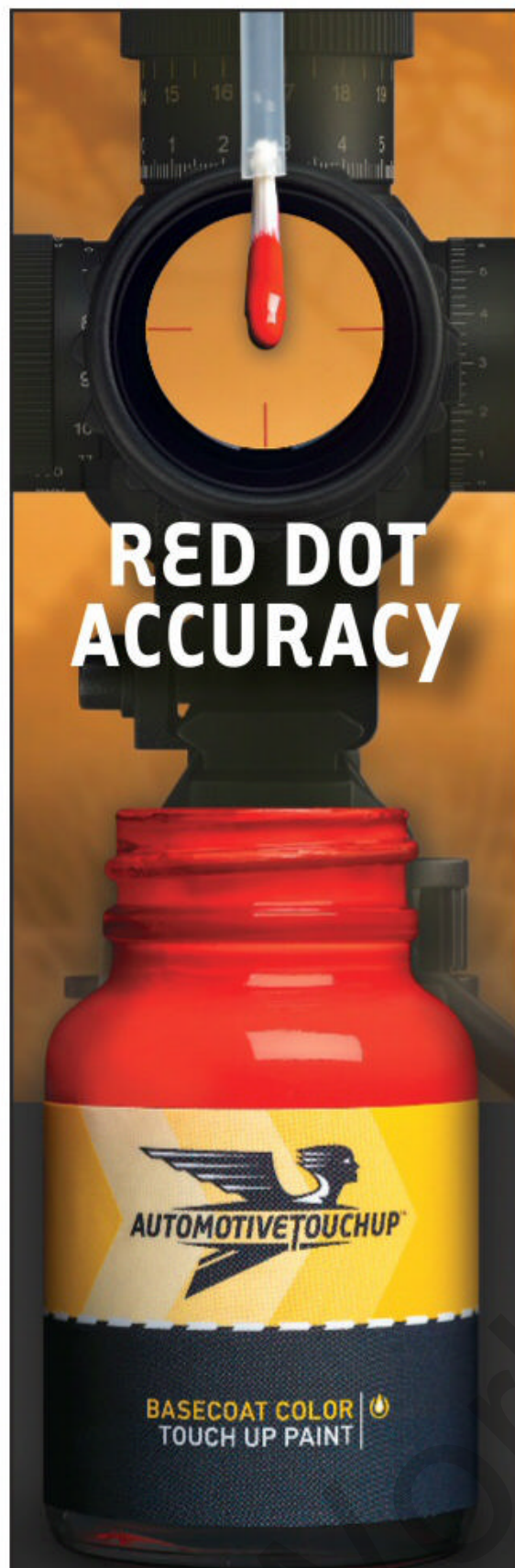
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Each ADER sports MFT furniture including the Engage grip, Version 2. This grip features a 15-degree angle to improve comfort, and the texture offers positive control. Note the tab that covers the receiver gap that usually causes discomfort during prolonged usage.



ATAC Defense's oversized charging handle is ambidextrous and machined from 6061 T6 aluminum. This charging handle is easy to use, even with optics mounted above it.

time the rifle cycles. If it breaks, the rifle is immediately inoperable. Ways for a manufacturer to mitigate premature bolt failure include using heat-treated Carpenter 158 steel for the material, which ATAC Defense does. Unlike most AR-15 manufacturers, ATAC Defense sources bolts in the raw and then coordinates the heat treat and finishing. This allows them control not common in the AR industry.

Not content to just focus on the bolt, Monte Johnson, ATAC Defense's lead engineer and no relation to its owner, conducted a detailed analysis of each bolt component to ensure that it had the best material for the job. He ended up using 4340 steel for both the extractor and cam pin, too. "4340 can handle a lot of abuse and shows little wear for it" Johnson said. Most companies will use less expensive steel for the cam pin and the extractor, but ATAC Defense wanted maximum performance for a reasonable price, so 4340 was it.

A more exotic material, S7 tool steel, sees use as the bolt's ejector. Johnson said, "Once S7 has been shot-peened and stress relieved, it'll last almost forever in this application." ATAC Defense has a lifetime warranty on their rifles, so even if the guy who puts 30,000 rounds down the barrel and eventually wears the barrel out can rest assured that ATAC Defense will replace it. The same goes for worn extractors and worn ejectors. The warranty is one of the reasons they invested so much time into materials research and testing.

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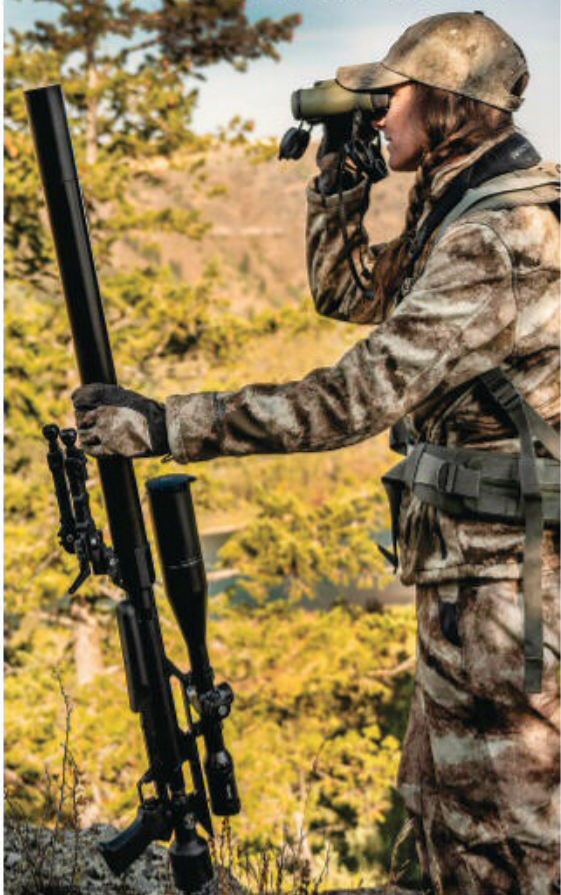
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Winchester Match 69-gr. BTHP	2,530	32	13.2	.89	1.04
Federal GMM 69-gr. BTHP	2,592	26	11.3	1.07	1.19

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

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was within financial reach,” Johnson said. “He knows it will work if he ever needs it to defend himself or his family.”

Perhaps most surprising upgrade is the two-stage trigger that ATAC Defense installs for certain models. Each two-stage trigger is machined from billet tool steel, so the trigger pull it has when it comes out of the box will improve with use, but never worsen. Most triggers we find in AR-15s are made from metal-injection-molding (MIM) and, when done correctly, rarely pose an issue. However, MIM triggers will never offer the durability and service life of a quality billet trigger. MIM is an inexpensive way to make a good trigger quickly whereas tool steel is more expensive, but yields a product that endures.

At The Range Testing revealed accuracy slightly better than most AR-15s. Across three loads, the rifle averaged right around 1 MOA, which for anything with a 5.56 NATO chamber is excellent. Getting tighter groups out of any barrel would require the .223 Wylde chamber, which ATAC Defense can do on request.

The two-stage trigger was exceptional. Each stage was easily discernable and the trigger had crisp let-off. This trigger would require no replacement, even for snobs.

ATAC Defense offers a product that delivers far more than the price required to purchase it. After speaking with the company’s owner and lead engineer, we have no doubts they make and sell exactly what they claim: A high-quality AR-15 for the average working American. 

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KEITH WOOD

Visiting “The Home of Marksmanship.”

CMP TALLADEGA

MOST READERS ARE FAMILIAR with the Civilian Marksmanship Program (CMP), but some only know it for its competitive shooting programs or the sales of surplus firearms and ammunition. What you might not know is that CMP operates one of the nation’s premiere ranges: The CMP Talladega Marksmanship Park.

Situated near Talladega, Alabama, construction of the CMP Talladega Marksmanship Park was completed in 2015. It was built on a 500-acre campus and cost \$30 million. Today, the range is open to the public with reasonable fees and no membership required.

No matter the discipline, the Park has something for any shooter. Handgunners have access to 15 action-pistol bays and a 50-yard pistol range. There’s a trap field, a skeet field and a 15-station Sporting Clays course. However, many would consider the expansive rifle ranges to be the Park’s main attraction. Known-distance positions are available from 50 to 600 yards, and an impressive unknown-distance area allows everything from close-range rimfire targets to shots on steel targets placed out to the horizon.

Flanked by towering Alabama-pine forests, the rifle ranges stretch toward a mountain backdrop beyond. These ranges are absolutely picturesque and cleverly ornamented with giant steel statues that aim downrange and stand watch. These were made entirely from unrestorable surplus M1 Garands that were welded together into artforms.


Unlike the ranges some would remember from qualifying in the military, there is no pit duty, and no reason to go downrange to change targets. Permanent Kongsberg Target Systems (kongsbergtargets.com) automatically score hits downrange and provide detailed data for shooters on

the bench-top displays. The Park is the only civilian range in the U.S. with this target system, which was imported from Norway. This advanced system keeps a match moving quickly and safely.

Before firing can commence, a range safety brief is mandatory, and shooters are required to qualify at shorter ranges before they can progress further. Safety is, of course, paramount at the Park. There are multiple full-time professional range officers on staff at each range who can assist shooters as needed. I found them to be courteous and knowledgeable during my recent visit.

Not only are the shooting grounds impressive, the 13,000-square-foot clubhouse is like no other. The clean and open floorplan features multiple lounge areas and two multimedia classrooms. The facility is also open to hosting corporate events (it has even hosted a wedding), and the pro shop is a must-see.

Yes, CMP firearm sales are available onsite. A variety of rifles are for sale daily, which are pulled from the nearby Anniston Army Depot in Bynum. This is where all CMP guns for sale are inspected and serviced. Be advised: There is always a long line of buyers waiting at the gate to purchase CMP firearms. On the day of my visit, the racks carried a selection of M1 Garands, M1917 Enfields and a few Krag-Jorgensens at reasonable prices. The CMP had ammunition in stock, too.

CMP Talladega is less than a 2-hour drive from Atlanta. Whether it is to compete in one of the Park’s matches, to test your skills or to tour the facility, a visit to CMP is a worthwhile trip. I’d recommend it to any serious shooter. Visit thecmp.org to learn more. 



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