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LIFE

FALL 2023
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DUTY READY
ECHELON

P. 14



The Hellion™ from Springfield Armory answers the call for superior ballistic performance in a short, adaptable platform. This fully ambidextrous bullpup rifle can be quickly configured for left or right side ejection and features an overall length of just 28.25-inches while still possessing a 16" barrel. Chambered in 5.56 and designed to accept AR pattern magazines the Hellion combines portability with potent performance.

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

HELLION





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SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

OWNER & CEO
Dennis Reese

PRESIDENT
Stephen McKelvain

**CHIEF
FINANCIAL OFFICER**
Ken Bowen

MARKETING

VP, MARKETING
Stephen Kramer

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**MEDIA RELATIONS
MANAGER**
Mike Humphries

**DIGITAL BRAND
MANAGER**
Chad Kimmer

**PRINT & GRAPHICS
MANAGER**
Jeremy Noder

Customer Service contact:
CS@Springfield-Armory.com,
(800) 680-6866

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EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER
Dennis Reese

VP, SHOOTING GROUP PUBLISHER
Chris Agnes

EDITORIAL

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Mike Humphries

EDITOR
Joe Kurtenbach

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Antonio Acitelli

ART DIRECTOR
Michael Ulrich

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Michael Anschuetz

COPY EDITOR
Lisa Baumgardner

CONTRIBUTORS

Massad Ayoob, Scott Conditt,
Dr. Will Dabbs, Capt. Dale Dye,
Richard Johnson, John McKenzie,
Jake Miller, Mike Mills, Yamil R. Sued,
Chad Thompson, Jeremy Tremp,
Randall Wilson

ENDEMIC AD SALES

VP, ENDEMIC SALES
Michael Savino
mike.savino@outdoorsg.com

NATIONAL ENDEMIC SALES
Jim McConville (440) 791-7017

WESTERN REGION
Hutch Looney hutch@hlooney.com

EASTERN REGION
Pat Bentzel (717) 695-8095

MIDWESTERN REGION
Mark Thiffault (720) 630-9863

NATIONAL AD SALES

**ACCOUNT DIRECTOR
DETROIT OFFICE**
Kevin Donley (248) 798-4458

**NATIONAL ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE
CHICAGO OFFICE**
Carl Benson (312) 955-0496

**DIRECT RESPONSE
ADVERTISING/NON-ENDEMIC**
Anthony Smyth (914) 409-4202

OUTDOOR SPORTSMAN GROUP® INTEGRATED MEDIA

**CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,
PUBLISHING & BRANDED MEDIA**
Mike Carney

**EXECUTIVE VP,
GROUP PUBLISHER & OPERATIONS**
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PRODUCTION**
Connie Mendoza

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PUBLISHING TECHNOLOGY**
Kyle Morgan

**SENIOR
CREATIVE DIRECTOR**
Tim Neher

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IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

EDITOR'S NOTE

MIKE HUMPHRIES

WE ARE PROUD to bring to you the Fall 2023 issue of *The Armory Life* print magazine. There's a lot of great content in this issue, from our cover story on an exciting new pistol offering to in-depth product reviews and much more.

You might have noticed that the pistol on the cover looks a bit different than any other Springfield polymer-framed pistol you've seen before. This pistol is the Echelon, and it represents the cutting-edge in modern striker-fired pistol design. From its modular chassis system to its revolutionary optics-mounting interface, the Echelon is truly unparalleled. Check out the full review starting on page 14.

Speaking of innovation, would you like to go behind the scenes on how Springfield Armory's amazing firearms are developed? Then check out our interview with

Dave Williams, head of Springfield's Research & Development department. With more than three decades with the company — and the honor of being named the 2006 American Pistolsmiths Guild "Pistolsmith of the Year" — Williams has a fascinating story to tell. It all starts on page 22.

Rounding out the issue are in-depth reviews of the Threaded Hellcat Pro, 1911 Operator in 9mm, Springfield Armory Limited Edition Custom Clip Point Field Knife and many more. In addition, articles on how to suppress the short and powerful SOCOM 16 .308, a cus-

tom Midwest Industries build on a SAINT 5.56mm, Hornady Critical Defense 9mm performance from the Hellcat 3" and more make this yet another must-read issue of *The Armory Life*.

As always, I'd like to hear your thoughts about *The Armory Life*. Please feel free to reach out to me at support@thearmorylife.com, and let me know what you think about both the magazine as well as the website.

So, welcome to the Fall 2023 issue of *The Armory Life* quarterly magazine. Flip through its pages, read some articles, scan some QR codes, visit the website and enjoy. And be sure to keep an eye out for future issues as well! 🇺🇸



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Length: 18 Inches
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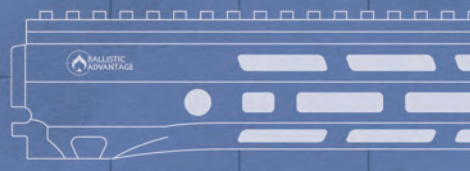
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WHAT IS THE ARMORY LIFE?

IN ADDITION to the print magazine you're reading here, there's also another means of consuming *The Armory Life* content — and it's just a few clicks away. TheArmoryLife.com website delivers free, daily content from some of today's top content creators and writers.

For those of you not familiar with the site, it covers a broad range of topics divided up into the following categories: EDC, Gear, Guns, Hunting, Skills, Survival and History. To visit them, simply go to the website, scroll up to the top of the page and click the "COLLECTIONS" button.

DIVING IN

This print magazine, in addition to providing you with beautifully

illustrated content, is designed to also act as a portal for readers to the website. This is accomplished through the use of QR codes on select pages. Scan these with your smartphone, and you will be taken directly to expanded article content and videos to complement the content within these pages. Additionally, these codes can also give you access to additional information on Springfield Armory products reviewed.

In case you're not familiar with how QR codes work, simply open up the camera app on your smartphone and point it at the QR code.


With most modern smartphones, your camera will automatically read the QR code and give you a link to click to visit the featured content. If your phone's operating system does not offer this feature in your camera app, please visit your app store and download a QR code scanner. Use the QR code located at the lower right-hand side of this page to take you to the site.

AN ENGAGING OPTION

While you are on the site, don't forget to sign up for *The Armory Life* Debrief. Doing this will ensure you receive our weekly Debrief email, featuring the editorial team's top content selections for the past seven days. Signing up will also enter you in *The Armory Life* Monthly Giveaway for a chance to win top Springfield Armory firearms. When you sign up for the Debrief, you'll automatically be entered for the current giveaway as well as all future monthly giveaways.

There are several ways to sign up for the Debrief email — by visiting TheArmoryLife.com/Debrief, through the dedicated tile located on the front page, at the sign-up section inset within daily articles, or in the "pop-up" that will appear when you visit the site. If you'd like to sign up right now, simply scan the QR code located at the lower left corner of this page and fill out the form.

CONCLUSION

Visit TheArmoryLife.com to sign up for *The Armory Life* Debrief and enter to win a free gun, check out all the free daily content, and much more! 



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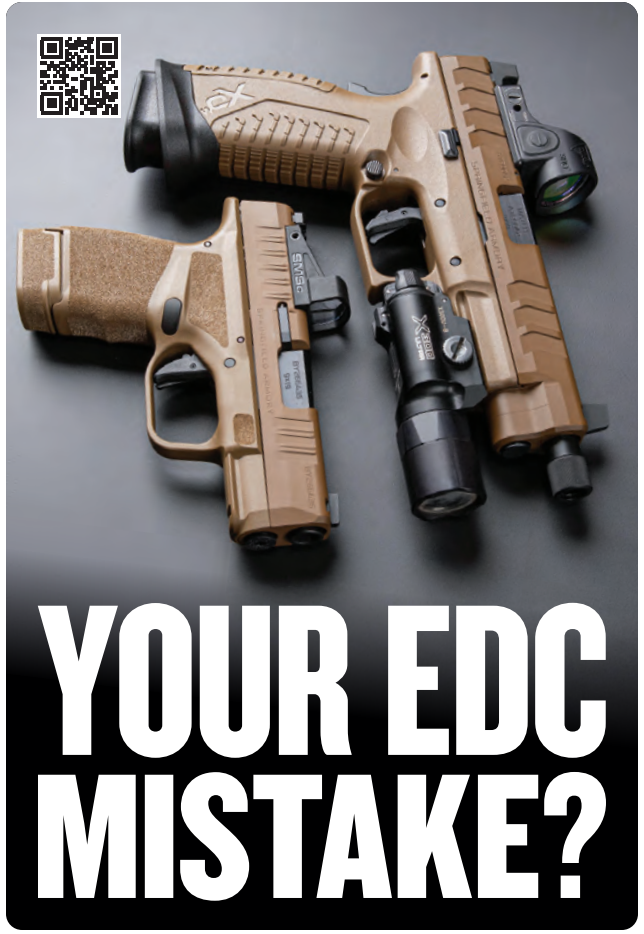
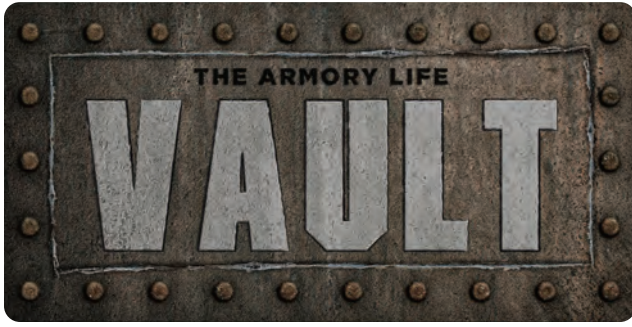


IMAGE: U.S. ARMY, SIGNAL CORPS PHOTO; 161-43-4081, SCHUMAN

IMAGE: JOHN MCKENZIE/DOWN RANGE PHOTOGRAPHY

THE M1'S FATAL FLAW?

YOUR EDC MISTAKE?



IMAGE: U.S. ARMY/BENJAMIN WILSON

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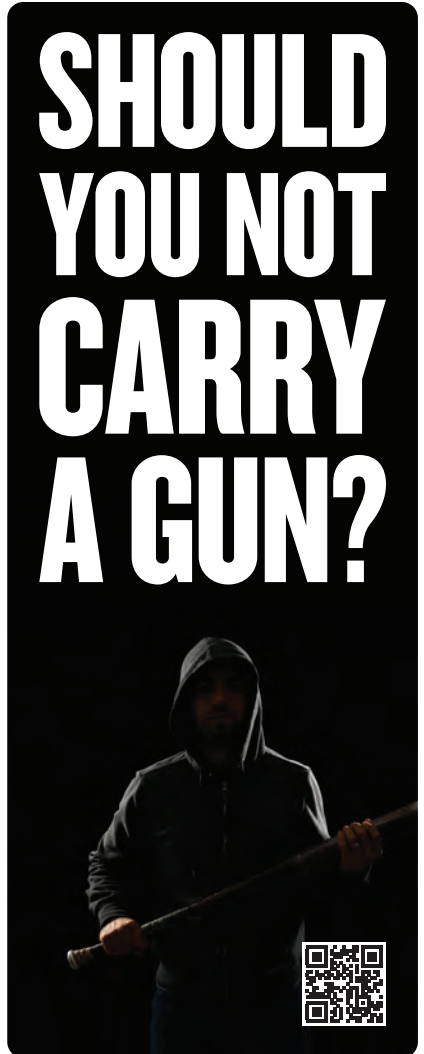
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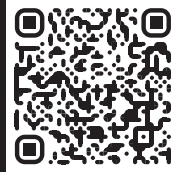
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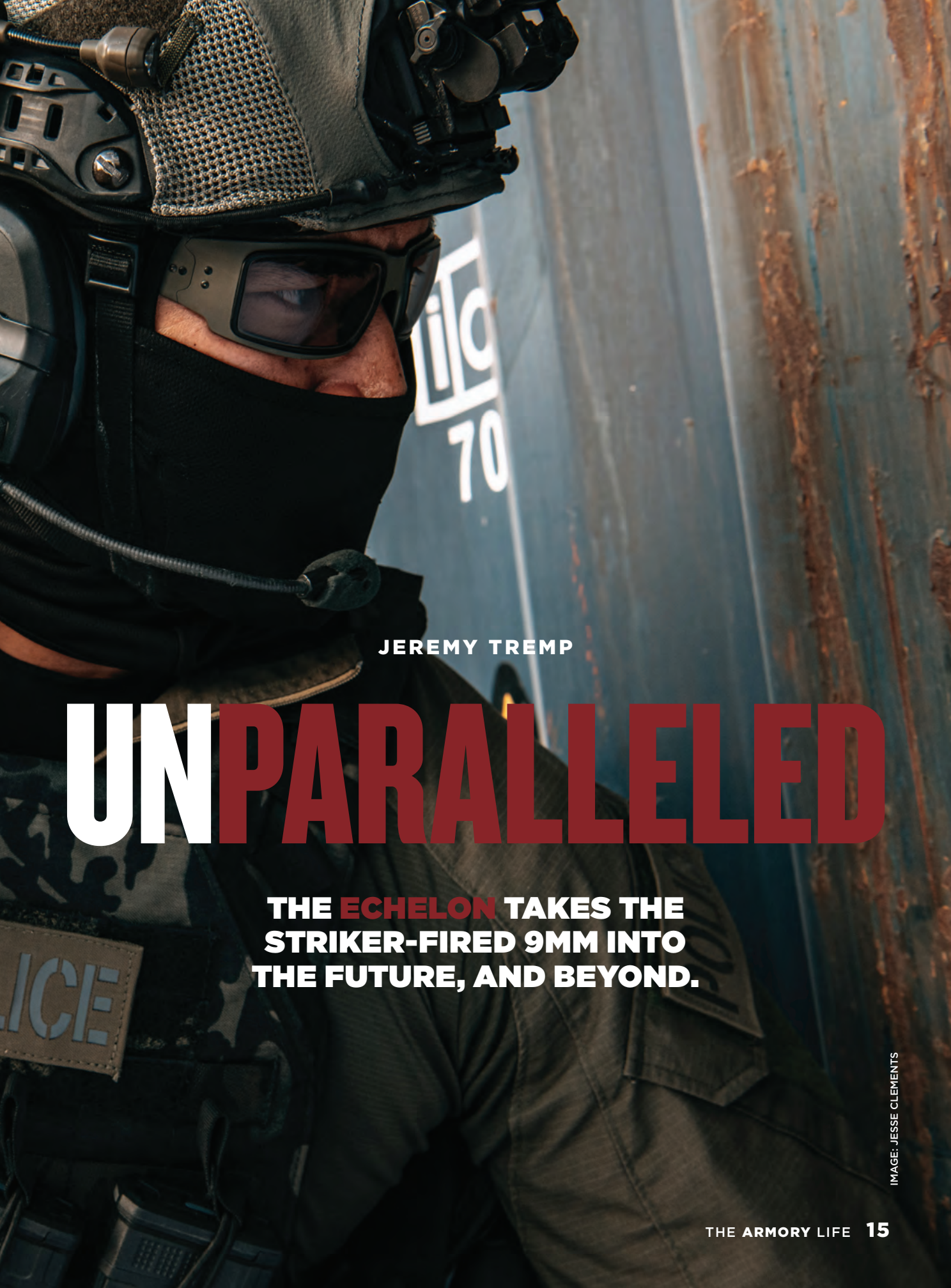
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JEREMY TREMP

UNPARALLELED

THE **ECHELON** TAKES THE
STRIKER-FIRED 9MM INTO
THE FUTURE, AND BEYOND.

IMAGE: JESSE CLEMENTS



IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

IF I WERE TO RATE my favorite Springfield Armory releases over the last several years, today's tops the charts. Springfield Armory has now officially launched the Echelon, a duty-style 9mm pistol that brings a host of innovative and exciting features to the market in a way that only Springfield Armory can.

To be frank, releasing a striker-fired pistol these days rarely elicits the term "exciting." Competent? Yes. Capable? Often-so. But exciting?

In this case, I believe the term is quite justified. But with striker-fired pistols having been around now for decades and seemingly refined to the point of diminishing returns, what makes the Echelon so special? In my opinion, not just one singular thing, but a host of things.

Springfield arrived at the approach underpinning the new Echelon by taking a long view. Coming to the market in 2023 with a fresh offering allowed Springfield

to take stock of what the market has seen, and what it might want (or even what it might not yet realize it could have).

A NEW DIRECTION

The Echelon is a completely new 9mm duty grade pistol built from the ground up with serious users in mind. Utilizing years of knowledge and product development of its other popular pistols, Springfield Armory was able to determine not only what would make for a great striker-fired design, but also harness the advantages of cutting-edge manufacturing capabilities to deliver what I think is the

The 9mm Echelon takes striker-fired pistol design to the next level. Shown equipped with a Trijicon RMR red dot and Surefire X300 weaponlight.

best-executed 9mm pistol design in years.

At the heart of the Echelon's innovative approach is its "COG", or Central Operating Group. The COG is the self-contained serialized part of the pistol that hosts the trigger system and ambidextrous slide lock lever. With this design, the COG can easily be moved between grip modules in seconds (more on that grip module in a moment). Precision built from stainless steel, the chassis provides a robust housing for the operating system of the Echelon.

The advantages of this system are numerous, not the least of which is the modularity as well as the strength of housing these

critical parts inside a rigid steel chassis rather than a polymer frame only. The result is a reliable and repeatable trigger, and I can say that the trigger on the Echelon is excellent. The critical components of the COG are machined from tool steel and highly polished, giving you a smooth and clean take up and crisp break.

SETTING YOUR SIGHTS

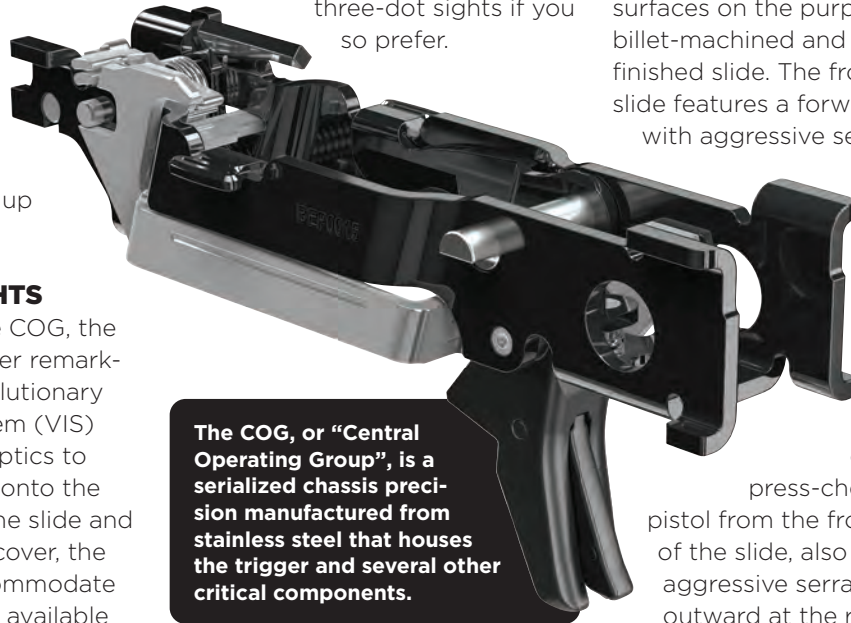
Beyond the remarkable COG, the Echelon also has another remarkable feature — the revolutionary Variable Interface System (VIS) for mounting red dot optics to the Echelon. Machined onto the upper rear portion of the slide and featuring a removable cover, the VIS is designed to accommodate more than 30 currently available red dot optics.

Even more significant than the breadth of the adaptability of the VIS is that it is also designed to mount these optics directly to the slide without an adapter plate. Yes, you read that right. By utilizing specific self-locking movable pins and various mounting holes drilled into the slide, the Echelon allows you to direct mount a stunningly wide range of popular red dot optics.

The advantages of this are obvious. Not only are you mounting the optic low to allow in many cases the ability to still see the iron sights, you are also removing failure points and extra attachment points by skipping the whole plate system. It's almost like you have been given a universal key to the seemingly bewildering world of handgun optics.

And although you have the means to put on the optic of your choice, Springfield still makes sure the irons you get are highly capable. The Echelon is offered with the U-Dot sights we know and

love from the Hellcat family, made up of a Tactical Rack U-notch unit and a tritium/luminescent front. The Echelon is also offered with more traditional tritium three-dot sights if you so prefer.



The COG, or “Central Operating Group”, is a serialized chassis precision manufactured from stainless steel that houses the trigger and several other critical components.

ENGAGING DESIGN

When creating a duty-style pistol like this, performance in all conditions is paramount to its success. A large part of a pistol's performance — beyond the core elements of reliable function — is determined by the handling and

manipulation capabilities of the design. Springfield took this mindset and turned it up to 11.

The Echelon provides the user with four distinct engagement surfaces on the purpose-built billet-machined and Melonite-finished slide. The front of the slide features a forward “trench” with aggressive serrations as well as a “shelf” located just forward of the ejection port. These are all designed to aid in charging or press-checking the pistol from the front. The rear of the slide, also featuring aggressive serrations, is flared outward at the rear with “wings”. This offers the user multiple means of charging the slide in all conditions.

Aiding in the comfort and personalization of the Echelon is the

All controls of the Echelon are fully ambidextrous, from the slide lock lever to the pistol's magazine release.





In addition to the standard 4.5" model, the Echelon is also offered with an extended 5.28" threaded barrel.

inclusion of three interchangeable backstraps in small, medium and large. Each backstrap includes an integrated armorer's tool for aiding in the takedown of the pistol. It's worth noting that the Echelon ships from the factory with the medium backstrap installed.

In addition, the Echelon is fully ambidextrous. This includes not only the slide lock levers integrated into the COG, but also the magazine releases. And the mag release is not reversible, it is fully ambi with buttons on both sides.

Remember that grip module I mentioned? Due to the modular (and serialized) nature of the Echelon's COG, the pistol can be easily reconfigured with differing grip modules. While the pistol ships with a medium-size grip module, there will be small and large

offerings as well. In addition, the interchangeable backstraps are designed to fit all three sizes of the module.

If you've held a Hellcat or a 1911 DS Prodigy, you're familiar with Springfield's popular Adaptive Grip Texture. The Echelon takes advantage of this pattern as well, providing the user with a superior grip that is as effective in your hands as it is comfortable during concealed carry.

The grip module's triggerguard is undercut for a comfortable grip and is also oversized for use with gloves. The Echelon also adds the Adaptive Grip Texture to common indexing points on the frame,

including the takedown lever, giving you an extra firm grip on the pistol.

THE DETAILS

All Echelon pistols feature hammer-forged barrels for strength, accuracy and longevity. They also are Melonite-finished for durability. The standard Echelon barrel length is 4.5", while the pistol is also offered in a suppressor-ready configuration with an extended 5.28" threaded barrel with a 1/2x28 thread pitch. That variant features an included thread protector as well as tritium three-dot sights.

Capacity of the Echelon is also quite impressive. Despite what struck me as a surprisingly slim grip, the pistol features a 17+1 capacity with a flush-fitting magazine, and an impressive 20+1 capacity with an extended floorplate installed. The pistol comes packed with two magazines. Also of note is the fact the proprietary magazines feature a black coating over their stainless steel bodies.

Also of note is the fact that the Echelon was designed to not only meet SAAMI drop test parameters, but exceed them. The Echelon's COG features a unique secondary sear design to help prevent

unintentional discharge should the firearm be dropped. Additionally, field stripping the Echelon is toolless and doesn't require a press of the trigger.



The Variable Interface System (VIS) of the Echelon allows for the direct mounting of more than 30 optics through a movable self-locking pin system.



ECHELON



CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4.5" (5.28" threaded)
WEIGHT	23.9 oz (24.5 oz. threaded)
OVERALL LENGTH	8" (8.8" threaded)
SIGHTS	U-Dot or tritium three-dot
GRIPS	Modular Grip Module
ACTION	Striker-fired, chassis
FINISH	Black
CAPACITY	17+1 flush, 20+1 extended (two magazines included)
MSRP	\$679-\$739

HANDS-ON

I can honestly say, the Springfield Armory Echelon exceeded all my expectations for a duty pistol. The grip, texture, angle, low bore axis, trigger and smooth operation left me with a lingering feeling that this was the pistol for which I've always been searching.

Let me start off by saying I own just about every single major striker-fired pistol on the mar-

ket. Until now, I've always been left wanting from each one that I have put through the paces. The Echelon and how Springfield approached the design gave them the opportunity to take the striker-fired gun to the next level, and I think they accomplished that goal.

From the "big" things like handling and performance, down to

the tiny details, the Echelon just feels "right." Also, I think a chassis design for the operating group is the way of the future for pistols. I am so glad that Springfield chose that design for the COG. Owning one pistol with unlimited configuration possibilities is pretty appealing to me. The COG's design also ensures superior operation of the critical components of the trigger.

Shooting the Echelon feels great. The low bore axis and the ease of fitting the pistol to your hand ensures you keep a solid grip. The recoil is smooth and has a great return to zero for fast follow-up shots, and manipulating the slide is practically impossible to mess up. From the forward trench and flared rear slide to the aggressive serrations, you'll get a grip anywhere on the slide in any condition if you do your part. The pistol swallowed up all the ammo I ran in it without a hiccup, and accuracy was impressive.

For my testing, I utilized the Trijicon RMR Type 2. Installation was extremely easy with the new VIS mounting system, and the optic was rock solid the entire time. It never lost its zero thanks to the VIS' remarkably solid interface. The slide doesn't just host multiple mounting



The author ran the Echelon on the range and was impressed with not only its ergonomics, but its rock-solid reliability.

holes for various optics, it also includes self-locking pins that create a superior lock-up, keeping the red dot firmly in place. I also greatly appreciated the low mount of the

optic to the slide, which allowed me to see the iron sights.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE SCENES



WITH A PISTOL like the Echelon, Springfield knew it needed a product video as advanced as the gun itself. One of the ways the company was able to achieve this was through the use of a high-speed Colossus robot arm as well as high-speed cameras.

The robot arm was chosen because it gave the video team the ability

to do things that would be physically impossible for a human operator, such as repeating the same move over and over with exact precision. In addition, the two cameras employed were integral to the results. One of them shoots 4K video at 1,000 frames a second. The other, set at its maximum resolution, shoots a stunning 76K

frames a second and can capture a bullet exiting the barrel of the pistol.

As explained to me by the team, the goal was to produce a video that would be as impressive as the Echelon. After having seen both myself, I'd say they achieved it. Check out the video for yourself with the QR code above.

—Mike Humphries

CONCLUSION

If you could not tell, I'm very taken with the new Echelon pistol. Springfield has been releasing some amazing offerings these past few years, like the Hellcat Pro that is my current CCW gun. And with the new Echelon, it's proven it's staying on the cutting-edge of firearms design.

I can't wait to take some classes and put this pistol through even more rigorous testing. So far, I feel like I have finally found a pistol that checks every box for me, even ones I didn't know I had. I would encourage you to head to your local gun store and see if you can get your hands on the Echelon. It just might be that pistol you've always wanted, but didn't know existed. 🎯

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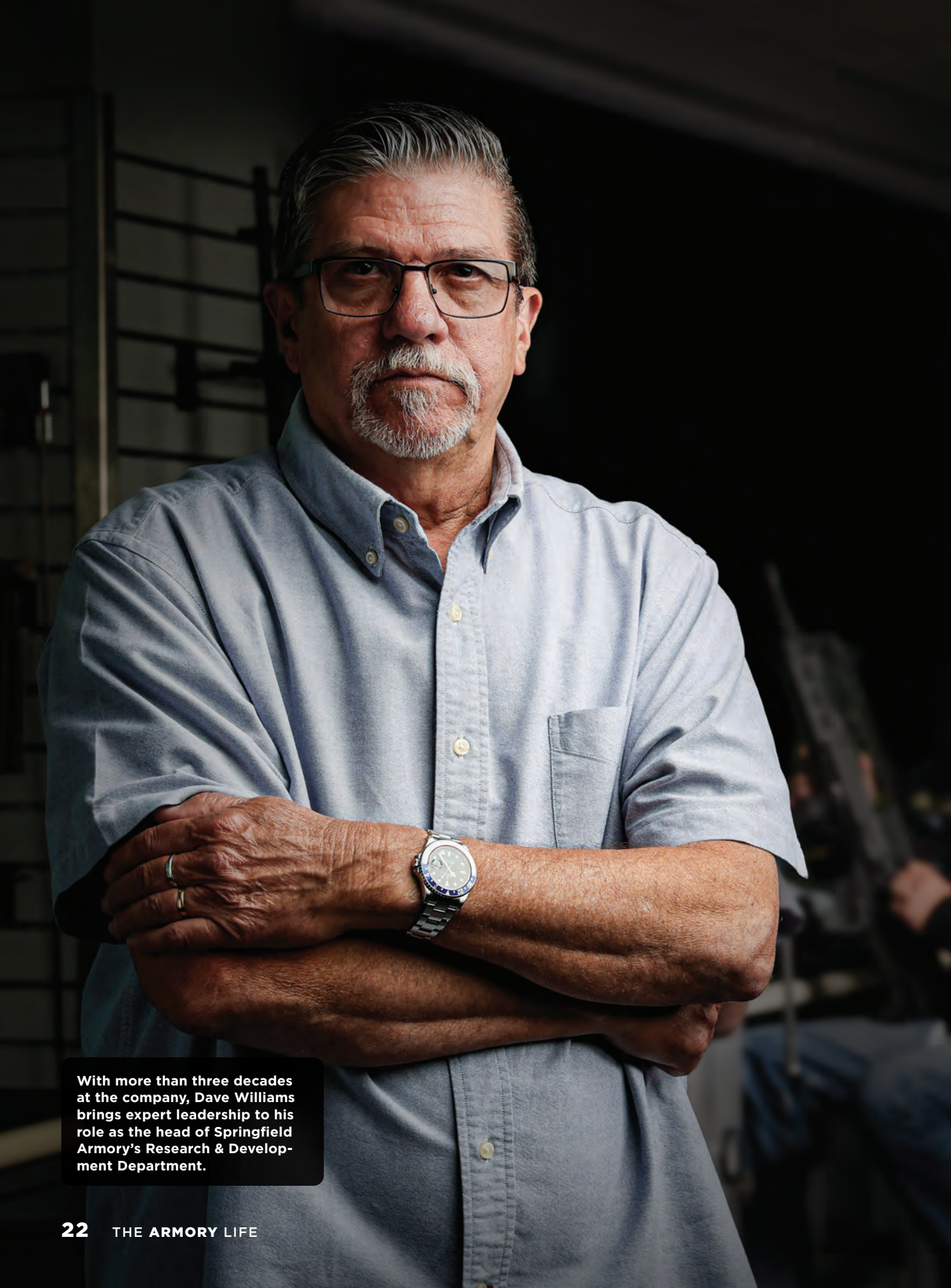
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With more than three decades at the company, Dave Williams brings expert leadership to his role as the head of Springfield Armory's Research & Development Department.

THE ARMORY LIFE INTERVIEWS:

DAVE WILLIAMS



WE RECENTLY HAD AN OPPORTUNITY to sit down with Dave Williams, head of Research & Development at Springfield Armory, for an exclusive interview. Not only is he one of the company's longest-serving employees, Williams is also a highly respected 1911 artisan and all-around firearms expert.

The depth of knowledge that Williams brings to the development of new Springfield Armory firearms, combined with his impressive tenure with the company, gives him a unique perspective on not only the history of the company, but also its future.

We'd like to thank Mr. Williams for taking the time to do this Q&A session with *The Armory Life*.

The Armory Life (TAL): Please tell us a bit about yourself, for those of our readers who might not be familiar with you and your background.

Dave Williams (DW): I've been a firearms enthusiast from a very young age. At 8, I took part in my

first deer hunt. At 9, I harvested my first — and best — whitetail deer, a 24-point South Texas monster. My interest in the mechanical aspects of firearms started when I was around age 10 or 11.

One of my first big projects was to refinish the stock on a rifle I owned. Around age 13, I took on the task of restocking my dad's sporterized 1891 Argentine Mauser. From there, I "fixed" several more of his guns. This helped improve my skills, but was not the best for my dad's collection!

While still in high school, I worked at a local high-end sporting goods business called "The Sportster" in my hometown of Tyler, Texas, in the "Armory" department. Two years later, I was

promoted to the Armory manager in their new store that opened in Longview, Texas. My experience at The Sportster is where I first developed my interest in competitive shooting as well as honed my gunsmithing/repair skills.

After a few years there, I relocated back to Tyler to work in the family construction business. All the while, though, I maintained my interests in competitive shooting and building custom 1911's for myself and friends. Soon, this pistolsmithing adventure became more of an actual job and less of a hobby.

TAL: How long have you been with Springfield Armory, and how did you get started there?



Under Williams' guidance, the R&D department configures, builds, tests and prototypes new and future firearm designs for the company.

DW: I began my career here at Springfield Armory in the fall of 1991. I answered a national advertisement in *American Handgunner* magazine for a pistolsmith position at Springfield Armory's Custom Shop, and a few days after submitting my resume I received a call from the leadership inviting me up for an interview. I was offered a position as a custom pistolsmith, and I relocated to Geneseo from my hometown of Tyler. The rest is, as they say, history.

TAL: Can you tell us a little bit about your early days with the Springfield Custom Shop?

DW: The early '90s was a great time in the world of competitive shooting. Action shooting was all the rage, and its popularity was growing exponentially. Our custom

shop was a leader in technology, innovation and design for products such as state-of-the-art compensators, sights and red dot mounting systems.

We designed a proprietary 1911 frame specifically for mounting red dot optics that was becoming, and to this day is, a must-have in IPSC/USPSA and bullseye competition. Springfield Armory-built pistols have been used to earn countless national and world shooting championship titles.

And Springfield had a huge part in those sports, with us sponsoring the best of the best in all shooting disciplines. We had the likes of Allen Fulford, one of the only civilians to achieve a Nation Championship shooting bullseye; and other greats such as John Farley; Roger Willis; Jim "Fleetwood" Fulwood; and Ricardo Rodriguez

to name just a few of our bullseye team members.

On the action side of shooting we had Brian Enos, Chip McCormick, Doug Koenig, Kippi Leatham, Jerry Barnhart, Jack Barns amongst many others, and — last but not least — the greatest pistolero to cast his shadow on this planet, my friend Rob Leatham. It has been an honor to build equipment for many of these legends in the sport!

Around 1994, I was given the opportunity to become the director of the Springfield Armory Custom Shop, a title I proudly held for more than 20 years.

TAL: And now you are head of Springfield's Research & Development (R&D) department, correct? Can you tell us about how long you have had this role, what you do, and a bit about your team?

DW: I was given the honor of being named the director of R&D in 2016. This was something of a natural progression for my career considering all the cutting-edge firearms development/enhancement we had been doing in the Custom Shop.

In R&D, we configure, build, test and designate design parameters, as well as prototype new and future platforms and models of products for the company. With new models and platforms, extremely thorough testing and evaluation is required. We do extensive endurance, reliability and function testing as part of this. It's not uncommon to fire 30,000 to 40,000 rounds of ammunition through a prototype test pistol.

Building conceptual prototypes is really rewarding. Taking a design from paper to steel is extremely fulfilling and something I really enjoy.

I have a great team. These guys are gunsmiths, machinists, innovators and — seemingly, from what they can achieve — alchemists. Most of the R&D team have been with Springfield for many years, in several cases even for decades.

TAL: Clearly, the company has experienced a great deal of growth in your decades with the company. And now you're located in the new Springfield Armory manufacturing facility in Geneseo. Can you tell us a bit about the changes you have seen over the years?

DW: It's been quite a ride! We might have started from humble beginnings, but the company has grown exponentially over the years. The company was started



Williams has the honor of having been named the 2006 American Pistolsmiths Guild "Pistolsmith of the Year."

in 1974 by the Reese family, with patriarch Bob Reese and his three sons making up the entire production team building M1A rifles in those early days.

A few years later, the company expanded into the 1911 market. In those days, I believe they were making 500 or so 1911 pistols in a year. That's just a drop in the bucket compared to what we are doing today.

And part of that growth is our brand new 200,000 sq.-ft., state-of-the-art manufacturing facility here in Geneseo. We employ the latest, most sophisticated machining and manufacturing processes in the industry. We have grown from four employees in the beginning to many hundreds of them today.

TAL: What are some highlights from your time with Springfield Armory? I believe you were involved in the development of the Professional pistol for the FBI contract, correct?

DW: Over the years, there have been many great people and

projects I've been involved with as part of my work with Springfield. One thing that I'm particularly proud of is the fact that we have built scores and scores of 1911 pistols for elite groups within the law enforcement and military communities.

That being said, the project I am most proud of was the "FBI contract pistol." In 1996, the FBI issued RFP (Request For Proposal) #6990 for a precision pistol for their elite regional SWAT teams and HRT. This was a competitive bid with an extensive testing protocol that eight manufacturers and custom pistol shops competed for.

After exhaustive testing, Springfield Armory came out on top and was awarded this prestigious contract. A 1911 pistol wasn't specified, but the required specifications for accuracy, reliability and durability demanded a custom-built, hand-fitted, precision platform. That certainly sounds like a 1911 to me!



The Springfield Armory R&D team (from left to right): James Winfree, Jason Chambless, Dave Williams, Jacob Rahn and Jeramiah Fuller.

That pistol quickly became the “most wanted” custom 1911 pistol available! Not only did we provide thousands of pistols for the government, but also produced the exact same pistol for civilian purchase, known the world over as the “Professional.” All pistols were built to the same spec; in fact, when building these pistols, we didn’t know if they were going to consumers or the FBI.

TAL: Clearly, you have an extensive background in custom work, particularly on pistols like the 1911. Did I see a plaque in your office stating you were the 2006 Pistolsmith of the Year with the American Pistolsmiths Guild?

DW: Yes. In 2006, I was honored to be selected as the American Pistolsmiths Guild “Pistolsmith of the Year.” Previous recipients of this prestigious award nomi-

nate individuals they believe are deserving of this recognition, and then the full membership votes for their preferred candidate.

It was a huge honor to be included in the fraternity of some of the greatest pistolsmiths in the world, such as Bill Wilson; Richard Heinie; Jim Clark, Sr.; Ron Power; Mike Curtis; J.D. Jones; and many others too numerous to mention. Also, we here at Springfield are privileged to have five guild members on our staff.

TAL: What is your favorite Springfield Armory firearm that you have been a part of developing? Or, alternatively, what’s your favorite Springfield?

DW: That’s a tough question. I’ve gotten to build guns for people like Tom Selleck, a strong Second Amendment defender and all-around great guy. I also have to

say the Professional is definitely a favorite of mine. And because we knew not everyone could swing the cost of the full custom Professional pistol, we developed the TRP line of pistols, directly inspired by the Professional. The TRP was configured with the same general configuration, but at a more manageable price point. That’s another one I really like.

The EMP pistol was another notable project. It’s a 1911, but scaled down around the 9mm cartridge. This gives it a much smaller grip circumference, and a smaller overall size. I was actually granted one of my first patents with the EMP, so that’s another reason it’s so special to me. Currently I have 13

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patents, and a few more pending.

As the company has grown, we've added numerous new platforms such as the SAINT AR family, the SA-35, the 1911 DS Prodigy, the Model 2020 Waypoint bolt-action rifle, the Hellion bullpup, and much more. And this all complements our ever-expanding lines of 1911 pistols and M1A rifles.

TAL: On the flip side, what is one gun you wish Springfield would make? We're talking wish list here.

DW: Boy, that's another tough one. I'd love to see a precision model version of the Model 2020 platform suitable for some of the long-range rifle competitions. Personally, I'm a smallbore competitor and would love to offer both rifles and pistols for the discipline. We've got numerous new projects on the drawing board, but unfortunately, I can't get into those. We're currently evaluating some new cartridge designs for both rifle and pistol that are really exciting. Be sure to stay tuned!

TAL: What is your fondest memory (or memories) of having worked at Springfield Armory over these past three decades?

DW: Springfield Armory started out as, and still is, a family-owned business. And I can honestly say we truly are a family, here. This is apparent through the many "legacy" employees we have at the company. There are a dozen or so of them that have more tenure than I do, and dozens of others that have more than 20 years of service here.

I think this really speaks to the sound leadership we have at the company, and how great a place it is to work. I've had so many great experiences and opportunities over the years here. It's really fantastic — and a rare thing — for your passion to become your



Williams also played an integral role in the design and development of the revered Professional Model 1911 pistol.

occupation! I have had the opportunity to travel the world and work with some great individuals, and love what I do.

Speaking of family, this is particularly true for me. I met my beautiful wife of nearly 30 years here at Springfield Armory. She started at Springfield Armory in 1981 and recently retired, beginning as a receptionist and working her way through the ranks to finish her long career in the advertising and marketing department.

One of her duties was getting requested firearms to writers for articles and for the entertainment industry. She had a great rapport with them and, as a matter of fact, one of "her" writers is also a fiction novelist who named a leading character "Deb Williams" in one of his novels after her!

TAL: We think that with your long history with the company, you probably have a very unique perspective on what the future of Springfield Armory might be. Considering the changes you've seen so far, what do you see in its future?

DW: I believe the sky's the limit for Springfield. We have literally scores of new projects on the books, and there are some really exciting newly designed platforms you'll start seeing soon. In fact, one of them — the Echelon — is featured on the cover of this issue.

I've seen huge growth over the years, but in many ways we've still remained the same family-owned company we always have been. Sure, we've gotten much larger and more sophisticated, but we're still a family here in our beautiful hamlet of Geneseo.

TAL: Thank you, Dave, for taking the time to sit down with *The Armory Life* for this interview. We truly appreciate it.

DW: Thank you. 🍷

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MIKE HUMPHRIES

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JEREMY TREMP

SUPP



The SOCOM 16, shown here in a Sage International EBR chassis, is a remarkable firearm. But how practical is it to suppress?

RESSING



THE

SOCOM 16

**CAN THE ORION X SUPPRESSOR'S
QUANTUM FLO TECHNOLOGY
TAME THIS .308 POWERHOUSE?**

WATCH THE VIDEO
ORION X AND THE SOCOM 16





The author used his SOCOM 16 fitted out with the EBR chassis to test out the Orion X suppressor.

IF YOU FOLLOW THE SUPPRESSOR WORLD, you may have noticed a push towards protecting the shooters from toxic gas blowback when operating a suppressed rifle. To paint a picture, when you fire a rifle without a suppressor, all those gasses from the gunpowder igniting leave the barrel and very little gas escapes the ejection port.

Conversely, when you attach a suppressor to a rifle, the gasses are dramatically slowed down once entering the suppressor, creating back-pressure and causing some of the gas to rush back, out of the ejection port and near your face. As you can imagine, firing thousands of suppressed rounds can make this a serious consideration.

So, I was very interested to learn about the Orion X suppressor from X2 Dev Group, which the company claims to be a zero back-pressure design. It sounded like a tall order, and I was eager to learn more.

But before we dive into the details of the Orion X, let's establish what exactly a suppressor is, what it does, and how it works.

BAFFLING REALITIES

The most traditional way of creating a sound suppression

device for a firearm is to use baffles in a stack. Think of cones with holes in them that a bullet passes through. Stack six or seven of them inside of a tube that attaches to your firearm, and you've got a suppressor. Imagine how, as a bullet travels through the bore, each cone fills with gas and the gasses travel to the next cone, and so on and so forth. The cones slow the escaping gas down as it travels through the suppressor, which in turn helps reduce the sound signature of the round being discharged.

The downside of this design is that, because of the pressure inside of said suppressor, you get a fair amount more backflow out of the ejection port or wherever gas can escape — such as the charging handle area of an AR. It can also makes your firearm filthy

in short order as those dirty gasses mix back into your chamber and the rest of the gun.

Lowering that back-pressure while keeping a reduced sound signature is no mean feat. A suppressor dramatically reduces the sound signature of a firearm by slowing down the air and, subsequently, the gasses leaving the barrel. A few companies out there are creating different technologies to slow down the gasses while also letting them flow through the suppressor, which helps reduce the blowback you experience.

THE HURDLES?

One of my favorite rifles to test suppressors on is my custom 16" M1A EBR, built on an M1A SOCOM 16 with a Sage International chassis system. The M1A has an open-top design and a very large ejection port, so you really notice how well the suppressor is pushing those gasses out of the muzzle or, conversely, coming back at the shooter.

But before we dive into this, let's address the elephant in the room regarding suppressing the M1A. First off, let's consider how the rifle operates. The M1A was never intended to be suppressed. The gas system is fixed and non-adjustable, and the muzzle does not have standard 5/8x24 threads, which is what is needed for most .30-caliber muzzle devices.

The M1A vents gas out of a port near the muzzle that faces downwards, bleeding off excess gas as the bullet leaves the barrel. The M1A was tuned specifically for reliability and accuracy, not adjustability. This is problematic for suppressors as they create a lot of back-pressure. Rightly so, as they are slowing down the gasses leaving the barrel, which in turn suppresses the report of the round being fired.

Now that we know our hurdles, we can talk about the items I used to get this beast purring. The task of attaching the actual suppressor to the M1A was made quite simple by the fantastic people over at Delta P Design. They have created an extremely high-quality muzzle adapter for the family of M1A rifles.

Their M1A SOCOM muzzle thread adapter uses two separate components and registers directly onto the barrel threads and thread shoulder, thus ensuring proper alignment. Once installed and aligned, a set screw positively retains the adapter. They are made in the United States from hard-

ened billet material and are the real deal in my opinion.

SURPASSING SUPPRESSING

So, now that we have established everything involved with suppressing a gun, and specifically the M1A, let's get back to that extremely intriguing Orion X suppressor from X2 Dev Group.

When I first heard of it, I immediately knew I wanted to test it out. The Orion X, using its Quantum Flo Technology, has a unique free-flowing design that acts as a gas mixing chamber with a larger volume than other suppressors. The Orion X uses a modular user-serviceable core that allows the flow dynamics and characteristics to be adjusted in order to create the optimal shooting experience.

By using chambers of different sizes and shapes, the Orion X is designed to direct gasses through a series of passageways in the suppressor, which allows the firearm to operate as intended while also giving the gasses time to

properly flow through the suppressor. This reduces the sound signature, muzzle flash and gas blowback. The way the suppressor is designed with a larger surface area also helps it cool much faster than other, more traditional baffle designs.

The Orion X I selected was the .30-caliber variant, which means it can be used with 5.56, 6.5mm and 7.62mm. However, the suppressor is also offered in dedicated .223 and 6.5 variants. MSRP is \$1,395.

RANGE TIME

I set out to the range to do my testing, hoping that this would be the perfect suppressor for my M1A EBR build. It's such a fun rifle to shoot, especially suppressed, but it can be a bit rough to shoot a lot if the suppressor has a notable amount of blowback.

The Orion X is a direct thread mount using their Concentric Core

Alignment System, which was nice since I didn't have to worry about misalignment that could induce an internal round strike and destroy the suppressor. The Concentric Core Alignment System also ensures you do not lose accuracy when using the suppressor.

I attached the Orion X to the M1A and got behind the rifle to shoot at



The Orion X has a unique free-flowing design that acts as a gas mixing chamber with a larger volume than other suppressors.

the berm so I could hear the report of the shot. I braced, waiting for the blast of blowback gas in my face. Pop. I waited and, to my relief, I didn't receive any sharp, stinging gasses from the ejection port. The report of the shot was also hearing safe. So far, so good!

I continued firing the M1A, this time on paper, to see if there was any major point of impact shift, which is common with suppressors. But with the beefy, short barrel on the M1A SOCOM 16 and the Remington UMC ammo I was using, there was no major shift, and the rifle was good to go punching holes in paper.

In addition to my M1A, I was also able to test the Orion X on my Springfield Model 2020 Waypoint chambered in 6.5 Creedmoor. The signature reduction was on par with all my other suppressed bolt guns, and the muzzle flash reduction was better than a lot of my other suppressors. The Orion X seems to be equally at home on gas guns and bolt-action rifles.

Some further specs on the Orion X suppressor: The length is 6.25", which is much shorter than other

In addition to his SOCOM 16, the author also tested the Orion X on a Model 2020 Waypoint rifle in 6.5 Creedmoor.



The Orion X is shorter than more traditional suppressors, with a larger diameter to allow for the free-flow chamber design.

suppressors with the same level of sound suppression. The diameter is 1.98", which gives a larger chamber for the free-flow design. It weighs in at 17.3 oz., which is about on par for its size. The materials used in the design are 17-4 PH stainless, 6AL-4V titanium, Inconel and 7075-T6 aluminum. The suppressor comes in black or FDE, featuring a tough Cerakote finish.

CONCLUSION

I believe that free-flowing suppressors are a must-have for any firearm upon which you cannot easily regulate the gas. They allow the firearms to function properly and prevent an unpleasant shooting experience for the user.

The Orion X delivers on those promises. Not only does it look fantastic on my M1A EBR, but it enhances the overall experience when shooting the rifle. A lot of the newer free-flow suppressor designs are 3D printed and cannot be disassembled. A great feature on the Orion X is that it is user serviceable. You can easily disassemble the contents of the suppressor for cleaning after a few range sessions to remove carbon build-up.

If you're interested in this unique, forward-thinking company, be sure to check out X2 Dev Group. For those suppressor junkies out there like myself, you won't be disappointed by the Orion X. The free-flow design allows you to use this suppressor on all types of firearms, especially those that don't have the ability to adjust the flow of gas.

At the end of the day, the old adage still rings true: Silence truly is golden. 🤫

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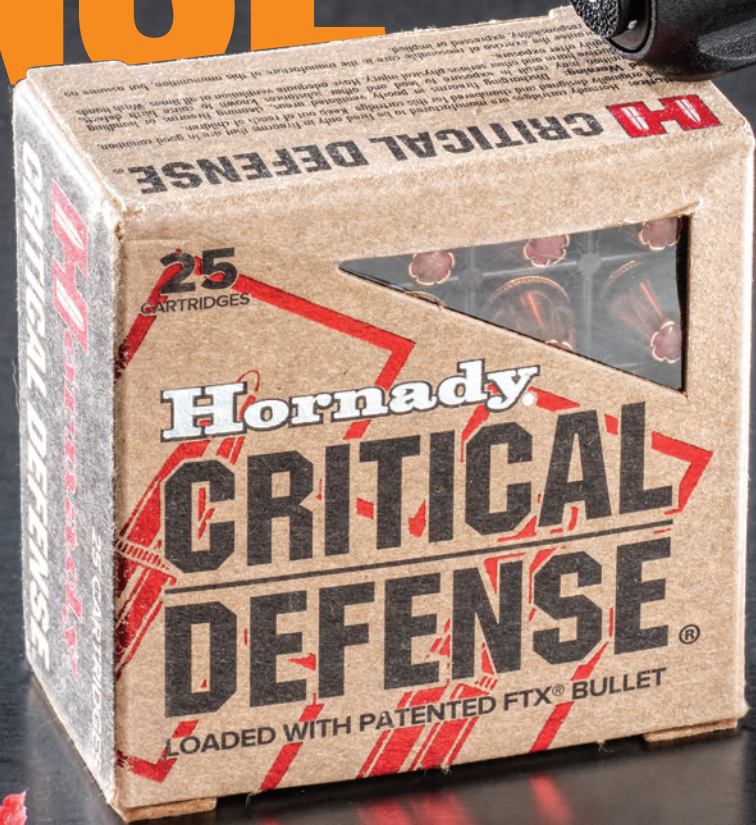
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TESTING HORNADY'S CRITICAL DEFENSE 9MM



The Hellcat with SMC red dot makes for a great CCW option. But how does Hornady's Critical Defense 9mm ammo perform out of its compact 3" barrel?



THE CONCEALED CARRY WORLD has changed dramatically in the past few years. It seems like we are always reading about another state now offering constitutional carry as an option for law-abiding citizens. But the laws are not the only things changing and evolving in the world of every day carry (EDC); hardware has evolved substantially, too.



IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The Hornady FTX projectile features a synthetic “Flex Tip” that is designed to prevent clogging for improved performance.

Pistols have gotten smaller, and ammunition capacity has increased. Red dots are now not only considered an option, but a necessity by many. There is a seemingly endless array of holsters for just about any carry mode you can imagine. As a result, a lot of new users can get lost in the details of selecting the right gun, and then the right holster. But they might easily overlook an equally important choice — your carry gun ammunition.

There is no bigger mistake you can make than selecting a high-quality firearm and a high-end holster, and the loading it with the cheapest range ammo you can find. Ammunition is something that many new users are grossly misinformed about, especially high-end premium ammunition.

I have always been very curious about premium ammunition and have learned they are not

all made the same. Often, some premium ammunition performs much better in one firearm versus another; this is why testing your ammunition with your desired EDC pistol is so important.

With micro-compact pistols, you should look for consistent velocity, accuracy and penetration performance. With their shorter barrels, wringing out the most performance from your ammo is a must. There's a broad selection of great premium ammunition from which to choose, but we should be very careful to look to the companies with a long history of producing quality ammunition with the utmost performance, accuracy and reliability.

SELECTING THE HOST

My first choice was to pick the right pistol for this test. To be honest, I was torn between two of my favorite CCW pistols, the Springfield Armory Hellcat and the

Hellcat Pro. Both are great performers, the only difference being the slightly larger size of the Pro.

The Hellcat has a 3" barrel and a capacity of 11 rounds in a flush fit magazine, or 13 rounds with the included extended magazine. There is also the option of an extended 15-round magazine. The Hellcat Pro has a 3.7" barrel with a longer grip that holds a flush-fitting 15 round magazine. Both pistols are offered with OSP (optical sight pistol) cut slides for accepting micro-sized red dots — but you can get a Hellcat without the cut if you prefer.

It was a tough choice, but I ultimately decided on the original Hellcat with the optional Shield SMSc red dot sight to accompany





The author's gelatin testing of the 115-gr. Critical Defense load showed consistent and impressive penetration and expansion.

the factory U-Dot sights. I wanted to see how well premium ammunition would perform in a pistol with a shorter barrel like this.

FUEL FOR THE FIRE

Like previously stated, picking the right premium ammunition for self-defense is just as important as choosing the right pistol. After some research on the top performance ammo manufacturers, I decided I wanted to test out Hornady Critical Defense 9mm 115-gr. ammunition featuring their FTX projectile.

For those not familiar with FTX, it employs a patented “flex tip” in the nose of the bullet that helps prevent the clogging and inconsistency you can get with a traditional open-mouthed hollow-point bullet. It has a well-documented history of good accuracy, reliability and outstanding overall performance. My testing goal was to find out how it performed in my pistol, and if it lived up to the hype.

Another aspect of this test that I felt was important was related

to the velocity of the load. While most ammunition manufacturers publish the stated velocities of their loadings, these ratings are rarely done with very short barrels as you would find on a CCW pistol.

In addition, when it comes to velocity, there are so many variables with which you have to contend. First, not all chronographs get the same results. Other variables that can affect chronograph ratings are temperature, elevation, barometric pressure, humidity and lighting conditions. All those can affect the results in either a positive or negative manner.

THE TEST

I wanted a testing environment with controlled conditions, so I chose to do this test in an indoor shooting facility. My choice was C2 Tactical in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Once there, I chose to shoot this test from the steadiest platform I have ever tested — a Ransom International Multi Cal Steady Rest. This is a solid aluminum rest with both great stability and adjustability.

I have always been a huge fan of standard chronographs. You know, the ones with the sky screen sensors you shoot through in order to get your result. But shooting indoors complicated things a bit. This time, I went with something even more reliable and accurate, selecting the Labrador doppler chronograph. It works in any lighting condition, making it ideal for use on an indoor range. I must warn you that the only downside with this chronograph is the price tag, which is higher than the more traditional sky screen units.

In order to test the reliability and penetration, I used Clear Ballistics Gel. Clear Ballistics is a clear synthetic media that resembles the

The author found that the addition of the Shield SMSc red dot to the Hellcat OSP improved his accuracy with the micro 9mm.



standard organic ordnance gel and has comparable results generally rated at about 98%. One of primary benefits of it is that it's reusable, does not have to be refrigerated and will not decay over time.

My first test was for bullet penetration. This test is done at 10 feet from the muzzle. I placed two 16" pieces of the gel back-to-back, just in case. After firing three shots through the gel, all three projectiles penetrated from between 10.75" to 11", and every projectile expanded perfectly. I could not have asked for any better performance from a 115-gr. bullet fired from a short 3" barrel. The permanent wound channels in the gel were also very impressive.

My second test was for bullet velocity with the Labrador. I fired five rounds and got an average velocity of 1,096 feet per second (fps), which is slightly lower than the advertised 1,135 fps printed on the box. But, like I mentioned previously, this is often the case as they



IMAGE: HORNADY

The author's gel testing garnered results right on track with what Hornady shows here in its own testing of the 115-gr. FTX round.

PERFORMANCE (10 YDS.) HELLCAT OSP 9MM

LOAD	GROUP SIZE	VELOCITY
HORNADY CRITICAL DEFENSE 115-GR. FTX	1"	1,096

Group size is best of those fired at 10 yards. Velocity, in feet per second, is the average of five rounds fired across a Labrador chronograph. Abbreviation: FTC (Flex Tip).

almost never test their ammunition with shorter barrels.

My final test with this combination was for accuracy at 10 yards. My first group, after doing the initial sighting in of the Hellcat with the Shield SMSc red dot, was

approximately 1.6". I kept shooting and by the time I was out of ammo my groups had gotten better and better. My best group of the day was right around 1", maybe just a bit less. I would not normally think I could do this with a micro compact pistol, but the Hellcat and the Hornady ammo certainly came through.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I have been carrying the standard Hellcat since it first came out, and I was impressed by the ergonomics and ease of shooting. Once I got the Hellcat with the Shield SMSc, it became a game changer. With a pistol-mounted optic, I was able to achieve groups I couldn't achieve with simple iron sights.

Now, for the ammo/pistol combination. The Hornady Critical Defense is accurate, reliable and consistent. It's also certainly not too shabby in the penetration department either, as the projectiles penetrated within 0.25" of depth of each other. The penetration was impressive for a 3" barrel, and expansion was outstanding. In my opinion, this combination is a must for anyone looking for an optimal concealed carry system. Add in a good holster, and you're ready to go! 🇺🇸



Packed 25 rounds to a box, Hornady's Critical Defense 9mm 115-gr. FTX is a highly respected and capable defensive round.

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A NEW



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

METRIC

**A MODERN TAKE ON A
CLASSIC DESIGN, NOW
AVAILABLE IN 9MM.**

MIKE MILLS



WATCH THE VIDEO
TESTING THE 9MM OPERATOR





IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

IT'S BEEN SAID the 1911 is the most perfectly designed pistol ever made. If you might question that, just consider the fact that today in the year 2023 people still talk about the legendary trigger, ergonomics and feel of a 1911 pistol. By my quick count, that's more than 110 years. With that in mind, it's almost crazy how popular they still are. Looks like John Moses Browning, creator of the 1911, knew what he was doing.

But the design hasn't remained static and unchanging for the hundred-plus years. While you can still get a basic, bone-stock 1911 that's more in line with the old classic 1911, many of today's versions have subtle but important enhancements and upgrades compared to the original.

I think one of the biggest differences right up front we can all understand is the benefit of

modern metallurgy and machinery. Think about today's CNC machines and forging processes as compared to the processes of the early 20th century. And the best 1911 pistols take advantage of these new benefits, like Springfield Armory's expansive line of offerings. In fact, we are considering one of the newer additions to the family here, the 1911 Operator pistol in 9mm.

The 1911 Operator 9mm pistol brings several modern tweaks to the classic design, such as a Picatinny rail for lights like this Surefire X300 Ultra.

THE ULTIMATE INTERFACE

To start, we should talk about what has made the 1911 so popular for so long — the way it feels in the hand, from grip angle to trigger to its heft. The first thing most people notice about a 1911 is the weight. There is no feeling of “tactical tupperware” in your hand when you grip the Springfield 1911 Operator. The forged steel pistol has a solid feel, and this weight soaks up recoil.

Well-designed angles on the 1911 are also a huge help with target acquisition and fast follow-up shots. A standard 1911 will have a roughly 18-degree angle at



The author tested out the 1911 Operator with Hornady's excellent Critical Defense 115-gr. FTX 9mm ammunition.

The pistol's silver-colored skeletonized trigger gives just a hint of a custom appearance while providing that crisp 4.5-lb. break you want. It also features an adjustable overtravel stop. An ambidextrous safety, skeletonized hammer, front and rear slide serrations, Tactical Rack sights made up of a tritium front dot and white rear dots, and an integral strip of Picatinny rail on the dustcover of the frame round out the package.

The match-grade barrel of the pistol is forged stainless steel for strength and rust-resistance, and helps ensure accurate groups. In addition, the barrel is ramped and fully supported, and features a 1:16" rate of twist. The ramped barrel also helps ensure the pistol can run a wide range of bullet types/shapes.

Besides the materials and features, I found the machine work on the 9mm 1911 Operator to be quite good. When you look at the fine

the grip, as compared to other designs with more aggressive angles. This grip angle is natural for most shooters and provides the ability to very easily present the pistol on target, with the sights naturally aligning.

Also, the single-action trigger design of the 1911 has a lot of benefits. With linear, straight-to-the-rear operation, in my experience the 1911 trigger is unmatched in both its precision and its crisp feel. In addition, the break of the 1911 trigger has often been compared to that of a glass rod breaking.

THE DETAILS

Now that we've established the strengths of the 1911 design, let's consider the specific features of the 9mm 1911 Operator. At its core, this is a 5"-barreled, full-size steel 1911. A good foundation, right?

When you first see the Operator, you will likely notice the deep rich black Cerakote on the forged

carbon steel frame and slide. This coating is very durable, and it has a deep matte finish with little to no glare reflection. In contrast to the black finish on the metal is an attractive set of scalloped G10 VZ Grip in OD green. They have an aggressive, non-slip texturing that is matched by similar texturing on the flat mainspring housing.

The traditional bushing system of the 1911 Operator makes fieldstripping the pistol both familiar and easy.





details of the frame, you'll begin to see some impressive attention to detail. For instance, I noted how the lines of the backstrap were chamfered off very smoothly from side to side.

Also, around the triggerguard you'll see perfectly machined bevels that will help guide your finger onto the trigger. When you look at the accessory rail, you'll notice the way it's cut into the frame and gradually terminates into the midpoint of the frame while rising to meet the flat side of the main frame body. In addition, gliding your fingers over the front

and rear slide serrations will reveal they've been de-burred and have no sharp surface edges.

HANDS-ON

While I was obviously impressed with the appearance and fit and finish of the pistol, I wouldn't get the true measure of it until I got it out on the range. For testing, I used a mix of 115-gr. ball ammo, 124-gr. ball ammo and some of my favorite self-defense ammo — Hornady Critical Defense. All of the ammunition cycled perfectly and exhibited very little difference in felt recoil. You will feel a slight

bit more push back with the self-defense ammo in most cases, but it's very minimal.

The textured mainspring housing combined with the VZ Grips gave all the traction I needed to keep the pistol on target and quickly get solid follow-up shots. When you solidly grip the pistol, you feel the backstrap fit tightly into the web of your hand, giving a firm and stable hold. As you come up on target and disengage the safety, you'll immediately notice both smooth operation and a very positive snap as it disengages.

The trigger is everything you'd



The author found that self-defense ammunition ran with utter reliability in the 9mm Operator pistol — a must for any defensive-style handgun.

expect out of a duty-grade 1911, and a bit more. The Operator’s trigger consistently pulled right at 4.5 lbs., which is right where you want a duty/carry trigger to be. While some might like extremely light triggers on their 1911, my experience as a law enforcement officer has shown me that most agencies and law enforcement departments allow a minimum pull weight on the trigger — usually right at 4.5 to 5 lbs. I think this is a smart move on a pistol like this, and is a pull weight that was right in my comfort zone.

The trigger pull was, of course, smooth with an almost immediate wall followed by a clean break and short reset once the slide had cycled. The tactile interface with the trigger is very positive, with its slightly curved design and the linear serrations on the trigger face. I find that even if I am slightly off on my trigger finger placement, as the 1911 trigger moves straight back in operation it’s more forgiving than a hinged design.

1911 OPERATOR



CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL	5"
WEIGHT	42 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	8.6"
SIGHTS	Tritium front, Tactical Rack rear
GRIPS	VZ Grips G10
ACTION	Semi-auto
FINISH	Black Cerakote
CAPACITY	9+1 (two magazines included)
MSRP	\$1,184



The 9mm 1911 Operator comes with two steel nine-round magazines, both of which have extended basepads. I have no doubt these will provide years of service. Aligning the sights is made easy by way of the three-dot design, with the front dot featuring tritium. If there’s ever a time you move into lower-light conditions, the front night sight will be easy to pick up and get on target. The rear sight is a “Tactical Rack” design, meaning you can use it to cycle

the slide one-handed against a hard surface.

The cycle of operation of the pistol is smooth and predictable, and it inspired confidence for me whether I was using basic range ammo or high-pressure, self-defense loads. The action of the pistol was quite smooth, with the slide cycling as if it were floating on the frame rails.


I did not have any malfunctions, slow cycles or failures to go fully into battery on any of the loads I tested. With just over 500 rounds through the 9mm 1911 Operator, it has proven to be just as reliable as my .45 1911 Operator — which has been a staple in my collection since it came out in late 2021. And since every mechanical device smooths out with use, I’m sure after a few hundred more rounds and a good cleaning and lubrication the action will get even more smooth.

CONCLUSION

In my experience, even people who regularly carry striker-fired, polymer-framed pistols love the feel of a good 1911 once they get it in their hands and onto the range. And why not?

They’re great shooters that will last a lifetime if well-made and cared for. And this new 9mm 1911 Operator certainly fits that description.

With its exceptional quality and impressive performance, this 1911 would make for a great addition to any shooter’s collection — 1911 enthusiast or not.

So, be sure to check this one out and give it a shot. I have no doubt you’ll like it just as much as I do. 

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AND SLIDE* 

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The Aimpoint Duty RDS red dot is designed to offer law enforcement officers as well as civilians a rock-solid optic from a renowned maker at an affordable price.

RE



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DELIVERS TOP-TIER PERFORMANCE
AT AN EVERYMAN'S PRICE POINT.**

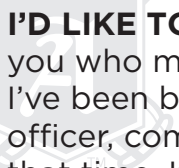
READY TO SERVE

CHAD THOMPSON

Sampson County Sheriff's Office. In addition, I also continue to teach firearms classes for law enforcement and armed citizens alike. I have also stayed in the competitive shooting world as a sponsored Grand Master pistol competitor in USPSA competitions, with me shooting for Deep River Customs.

The reason I mention all this is that I wanted to explain why my friend and editor-in-chief of *The Armory Life* asked me to do the review you are reading right now. I received a call from him, and he explained that he was looking for someone to review an optic from Aimpoint designed with law enforcement officers — as well as civilian shooters — in mind. "I think your perspective as not only a sworn officer but also a competitive shooter makes you a great fit for this piece," he told me.

Needless to say, I jumped at the chance. He explained that the optic was the Aimpoint Duty RDS red-dot sight, and he'd like to get me out a SAINT Victor rifle to test it on. I simply could not wait to get the chance to try the SAINT rifle — in my case a 5.56mm variant — and the Aimpoint RDS out on the job to really see if they were compatible with law enforcement and street work. I will spend the next bit of time expounding on this combination for you.



I'D LIKE TO BEGIN by introducing myself to those of you who might not be familiar with my background. I've been blessed with a career as a law enforcement officer, competitive shooter and gun writer. During that time, I've served as a law enforcement officer at the federal, state, local and international levels and have thoroughly enjoyed my time doing it.

Enter the next chapter of this wild ride. I recently retired from the North Carolina Justice Academy as the Senior Firearms Instructor and School Director of the Specialized Firearms Instructor Training Program. During my time in that role, I was the final word on firearms

training for the State of North Carolina. If someone in this state wanted to be a firearms trainer, they had to take a class from me. That included law enforcement officers, armed security officers and concealed carry handgun instructors. This was a lot of responsibility, and I was honored to have been entrusted with the role.

Although I had retired, I decided I wasn't quite through serving and accepted a position with the



The author, a law enforcement officer and trainer, put the Duty RDS and a 5.56mm SAINT Victor rifle through their paces at the range and on patrol.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

When I received the optic, I gave it a thorough inspection to familiarize myself with its design and features. The Duty RDS is a red-dot sight with a rugged and simplistic design you've come to expect from Aimpoint. The housing of the optic is a pressure-forged aluminum body that is hard-anodized and is submersible to 25 meters. The optic comes with a one-piece torsion nut mount and spacer for mounting on a Picatinny rail, and the weight of the optic alone is a light 3.8 oz.

The Duty RDS features a 2 MOA dot size with one "Off" setting, as well as six daylight and four night-vision-compatible settings. The dot is powered by a single CR2032 battery, and is rated for 30,000 hours (or more than three years) of usage.

Controls are made up of "digital intensity buttons" on the left side

of the optic for adjusting brightness, and are designed and sized for ease of use — even while wearing gloves. On the right side of the optic are flush-mount windage/elevation adjustment dials as well as a quick-access battery compartment. A solid front/transparent rear set of flip-up lens covers are also included.

Reading through the literature included with the optic, I learned that the point of the Duty RDS is to give shooters a good, well-made red dot with the quality one expects from an Aimpoint, but at a price point that's lower than you might expect. In fact, the MSRP of the optic is a mere \$499 — a deal for an Aimpoint. So, next I needed to determine if the sight would live up to that claim.

SETTING IT UP

The first step for me was to get the optic mounted with the pro-

vided equipment and tools on the SAINT Victor rifle. Imagine my surprise once I had the sight mounted on the Picatinny rail of the rifle and looked through it to find that the dot was almost perfectly co-witnessed to the provided flip-up iron sights on the rifle! Mounting was easy as pie, with one screw holding the RDS onto the rifle.

As I intended to use this SAINT as a patrol rifle on the job in largely rural North Carolina, I went to the 100-yard line to sight in the RDS on the SAINT. Upon firing the very first three-shot group, I found that the dot appearing to be near-zeroed was not an optical illusion. I only applied three clicks to the right to be perfectly sighted in at 100 yards!

Even more surprising to me was the fact I was able to remove the RDS and re-mount it on the rifle to see if it would return to the original zero, which it did. Now, I know some readers have seen that feature advertised on other scopes or electronic optics, but trust me when I say that's not always the case. Aimpoint has definitely designed their mount right in order for it to be that precise.

The Duty RDS came with a specific Torx T10-type star wrench for windage and elevation adjustments, and each audible click moves the point of aim around 0.3 at 100 yards. All told, I only moved the dot around one inch of windage total and no elevation adjustments at all. After shooting a few more rounds to make sure it was where I wanted it, I checked all mounting screws to ensure everything was still snug and then ran the combo through its paces on some drills using a PACT shot timer. Admittedly, I am still "old-school," as the vernacular goes, and use open sights on my pistols and shotguns. However, that is possibly going to change after getting my feet wet with this combo here!

RANGE TIME

In less than two boxes of ammo (or 40 rounds) through the Victor, I was hitting faster and more accurately with this rifle/sight combo than I hit on a regular basis with my usual patrol rifle set-up. Thinking it may have just been beginner's luck, I ran the series of drills again only to find that I was even faster the second time. Imagine what was going through my head when I realized I have

quite possibly been putting off the inevitable for far longer than I should have, simply because of my "old-dude" bias for iron sights.

I love the "heads-up" abilities of the Duty RDS and that I am able to leave both eyes open when shooting, even at extended distances. I am much more situationally aware of what else is happening around me with this set-up than I am able to be with traditional open sights on a rifle.

AIMPOINT DUTY RDS

OPTIC TYPE	Red dot
RETICLE	2 MOA
MAGNIFICATION	1X
WEIGHT	3.8 oz.
DIMENSIONS	2.7" (L), 1.5" (W), 1.7" (H)
MOUNT	One-piece torsion, Picatinny
BODY	Pressure-forged aluminum
OPERATION	Six daylight/four NV settings
BATTERY/LIFE	One CR2032, 30,000 hours
MSRP	\$499

Add to that my immediate love of the Duty RDS when I transitioned to support-side shooting during the drills I shot.

I am a right-handed shooter and am right-eye dominant; however, that had no discernible impact whatsoever once I shifted the rifle to my left side. Leaving both eyes open, I instantly saw the dot on the target with my left eye, and I still had my dominant eye open to enable me to observe much more directly what was downrange and on either side of me.

Target transitions were smooth and easy as well. I could actually see the next target coming into view way before the dot got to it. Therefore, I had the trigger prepped and never had one time that I overshot the target, forcing me to do a follow-up shot. The thing that truly impressed me is

Built with a rugged aluminum housing, the Duty RDS is ready for extreme service. Shown on a SAINT Victor 9mm Carbine.



that this dot and this system allows the red dot to stay in my field of view during recoil.

The Duty RDS employs Aimpoint's ACET (Advanced Circuit Efficiency Technology) diode circuitry to manage battery consumption, giving the optic the rated 30,000 hours of daylight usage on the #7 setting. I really liked the dot intensity on this setting for all-around use, and only brought it down to a lower setting when the sun went down.

I went to the range and qualified with this rifle and Duty RDS combo in order to carry it on the job and test it out for full-duty use. The other firearms instructors on the range also shot it some and loved the combo as I had it set up. In my home state, sworn officers are required to first qualify with any firearm they intend to carry for both duty or off-duty use.

I had no issues at all qualifying on a day and night course with a clean 100-percent score while using the SAINT and Duty RDS combo. I also used the opportunity to get in some accuracy testing since I had other instructors on the range with me and had a little assistance getting things set up.

This rifle/RDS combo had no issue at all holding intensely tight shot groups at 100 yards, even though most readers understand that this system is not designed for precision-type duty, but for overall patrol work. I, along with some other shooters, fired a few three- and five-shot groups that could be covered with a coin from your pocket. The best five-shot group I fired measured in at $\frac{3}{4}$ " and was with the 64-gr. Winchester PowerPoint. I then mounted the rifle in the patrol car and off we went.



Note the quick-access battery compartment, windage/elevation adjustment knob and included flip-up lens covers.

ON PATROL

For any readers who aren't aware of this, law enforcement work is never the same day-to-day. The only constant in this profession is constant change. Someone once said law enforcement was 90 percent boredom interrupted by 10 percent of sheer terror or adrenaline. In my experience, they are correct. As a result of this, the tools used in law enforcement are often knocked around and exposed to all kinds of elements and rough treatment. That is the reason that I carried this rifle and RDS combo on the job to see how it would hold up overall.

In short, the rifle and the Duty

RDS held up extremely well, even exposed to some extreme weather (relatively speaking) that we had in North Carolina during the testing. I did not handle either the rifle or the RDS with kid gloves, and treated them both the way my usual carry gear is treated.

Through it all, both proved to be quite fit for the job. Taking the rifle and Duty RDS out of the trunk from a car mount or out of a transport case, I never experienced unintentional changes — zero and brightness settings held true. Each time I tried it, the shots were right where they should be, and that is pure peace of mind.

CONCLUSION

I can say without any reservations that I would continue to carry this combination of rifle and RDS with absolute confidence if I were issued this set-up. I also am impressed with it from my perspective as a competitive shooter and all-around "gun guy." I also want to note that I think Aimpoint nailed it with the price point, as both officers who have to purchase their own gear and departments as a whole are often operating on very tight equipment budgets.

Give this Aimpoint a try if you are in the market for a high-quality red-dot system at a great price. I think you'll be pleased that you did. I am personally impressed to the point that I have no issue confessing I will be buying one of these Duty RDS optics for my current duty rifle in the very near future. 🙌

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

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IMAGE: AIMPOINT

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SILENCE

THE ROAR



JEREMY TREMP

**THE NEW HELLCAT
PRO OSP THREADED
MAKES SUPPRESSING
THE HIGHLY CAPABLE
CCW 9MM A BREEZE.**



WATCH THE VIDEO
FIRST LOOK: HELLCAT PRO OSP THREADED





The 4.4" barrel features 1/2x28 threads to accept a wide range of suppressors and muzzle devices.

A JK Armament JK 105LT CCX 9mm compact suppressor and Streamlight TLR-7 Subcompact flashlight pair well with the Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded.

I HAVE BEEN A FAN of the Hellcat 9mm series since its launch in 2019. And when the Hellcat Pro OSP 9mm was released with its increased capacity as well as longer grip and barrel, I picked one up as soon as I could. Just when I thought the Hellcat line-up of pistols couldn't get any better, Springfield Armory introduces another exciting variant of the Hellcat Pro.

Now available is the Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded. This gun offers you the ability to add a sound suppressor or muzzle device of your choice — something new for the Pro line. Let's take a look at the pistol and see what Springfield has cooked up.

THREAD THE NEEDLE

The pistol employs a hammer-forged barrel 4.4" barrel, compared to the 3.7" barrel of the

standard Hellcat Pro. The threaded barrel, which extends from the end of the Hellcat Pro slide, sports a 1:10" twist with 1/2x28 threads at the muzzle. With the 1/2x28 threads, this pistol will be able to accept a broad range of suppressors.

The barrel has a Melonite finish for the exceptional durability that you've come to expect from the Hellcat family of pistols. In fact, that durability was proven by a 20,000-round test of a Hellcat

by Paul Carlson done here at *The Armory Life* back in 2020, so you know these guns will run.

While adding a suppressor is likely the most popular way to accessorize the new pistol, a compensator is also a possibility. A comp can help moderate felt recoil and muzzle rise by redirecting hot gasses. It does nothing to protect your hearing, but it can work extremely well to keep you on target and decrease your time between shots.

When not in use, the threads are protected by an included screw-on cap. I've never damaged the threads on a barrel, but I can imagine the experience would be a painful one. Using the thread protector prevents me from having to find out.

A PRO'S PLATFORM

The Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded is all-black and, frankly, just looks professional. My experience with them suggests they can play the part well. Just like the barrel, the Hellcat Pro's slide has a Melonite finish that is a deep black. Melonite is a proprietary process that produces a hardened, corrosion-resistant surface that tends to be much tougher than traditional processes like bluing. While it is great in all environments, it excels in salt air and humid climates.

On my gun, it matches the color of the black polymer frame extremely well. The grip uses the company's Adaptive Grip Texture — a surface treatment well-known for providing excellent traction in the hand. While the texture really locks the gun into the hands, it's not unduly abrasive against both skin or clothing. It's a fascinating surface that under a microscope looks a bit like staggered pyramids.

The sights on this handgun are Springfield's U-Dot arrangement. If you are unfamiliar with the design, they consist of a high-contrast tritium and luminescent front dot sight paired with a Tactical Rack U-notch rear. This set-up is incredibly intuitive and useful in multiple lighting conditions. Think of setting the dot right inside the U-notch, and you've got a perfect sight picture. Sight acquisition and re-acquiring a sight picture have never been easier or faster.

Taking the sighting system to the next level, this Hellcat Pro also incorporates the easy-to-use OSP, or "Optical Sight Pistol" system. The OSP slide is cut to accept optics and features a cover plate. Remove that cover plate, and you



Like all Hellcats, the Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded features a hammer-forged barrel with a Melonite finish.

HELLCAT PRO OSP THREADED



CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4.4"
WEIGHT	22 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.2"
SIGHTS	U-notch rear, tritium/luminescent front
GRIPS	Polymer, integral
ACTION	Semi-auto
FINISH	Black
CAPACITY	15+1 (two magazines included)
MSRP	\$667

can use micro red dot pistol sights such as the Shield RMSc/SMSc family of optics. The beauty of the OSP system is that it allows you to direct-mount the optic to the slide, which situates it low enough for you to be able to see the irons through the optic's window. You get the best of both worlds — digital and analog sighting.

The pistol's trigger offers a comfortable, safe and predictable pull weight of 5 to 6 lbs. For a

pistol meant for concealed carry, you can trust this trigger to only release the striker once you have pressed the trigger fully rearward, which also depresses the safety lever located in the central face of the trigger. In my experience, the trigger pull is consistent, and the break is satisfying and predictable. The trigger reset is quick, allowing you to employ follow-up shots rapidly with ease.

INTERFACING OPTIONS

Springfield Armory did a great job designing the controls on this pistol. The Hellcat Pro features a reversible magazine safety that is designed for comfort as well as ease of use. The rear part of the magazine release is smooth and contours into the pistol frame, while the forward section is serrated for maximum grip.

The slide lock lever is serrated and surrounded by a lip built into the frame. This allows the lever to be easily manipulated while also keeping it out of the way of unintended slide locks while shooting. Additionally, the takedown lever is



easy to use, with generous serrations on the top and bottom, allowing for simple and efficient disassembly of the pistol.

Some additional quality-of-life features on the Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded are the slide serrations on the front and rear of the pistol's slide. These serrations aid in manipulating the pistol in a range of conditions. They provide just enough grip without being too aggressive for a CCW pistol.

The Hellcat Pro also features a loaded chamber indicator on the top of the slide. This is a simple yet effective way to quickly, at a glance, see if your pistol is loaded with the most important round — the one in the chamber. After all, knowing the condition of your firearm is one of the most important pistol safety rules you can practice. Finally, the pistol features a Picatinny accessory rail on the frame for mounting

weaponlights or lasers.

The Hellcat Pro ships with two 15+1 capacity, flush-fitting magazines, providing you with best-in-class capacity and concealability. Speaking of CCW, the Hellcat Pro Threaded measures in at 4.8" tall, 7.2" long and only 1" wide. When carrying this gun, you'll be surprised at how comfortable and concealable this formidable pistol is.

RANGE TIME

During my testing at the range, the pistol ran exactly as I expected, which means it was exceptionally accurate and reliable. I have a Hellcat Pro in Desert FDE I have shot extensively, so I knew what to expect. Since this new version has a threaded barrel, I decided to shoot the gun both with and without a suppressor during my testing.

For suppressor duties, I chose something I think is a great match for a CCW pistol like this: the JK Armament JK 105LT CCX 9mm suppressor. The modular CCX is a superb companion to this Hellcat Pro as it weighs a mere 2.5 ounces and is 4.6" long in its longest form, and can go as small as 1.2 ounces and 1.9" in its smallest form.

The CCX is unique as it doesn't require a booster. Most pistol-caliber suppressors that attach to tilt-barreled firearms (which is the majority of pistol designs these days) require a small spring inside that allows the suppressor to move back and forth when the barrel unlocks. The CCX is so small that it can directly thread onto the barrel without affecting the performance or reliability of the



Remove the cover plate, and the OSP-cut slide allows for direct-mounting of compact red dot optics like the Shield SMSc.



The controls of the Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded are well-designed and positioned, and the magazine release is reversible.

pistol. Simply fantastic.

Shooting the Hellcat Pro Threaded suppressed was as fun as you would expect it to be. Full disclosure here: I absolutely love shooting my firearms suppressed. It's easier on the ears, you can discern your hits with ease, and it's just plain cool.

Threading on the suppressor was a breeze, and once it's attached and tight, you're ready to rock. I love the look of the Hellcat with a suppressor, especially when adding a weaponlight like the Streamlight TLR-7 Sub I had on

hand. Talk about a sweet set-up.

The ammo for this review was provided by Remington, specifically their 9mm Subsonic ammunition. The ammo ran with the JK Armament CCX suppressor and the pistol without any issues. I'm looking forward to testing out a few other suppressors on this set-up, but I think it will be hard to beat the CCX in terms of size and weight.

FINAL THOUGHTS

One of my favorite aspects of Springfield Armory is its never-ending quest to provide its cus-

The author ran the pistol hard at the range with no issues or malfunctions.

tomers with best-in-class products and options. We all like to have a variety of features, sizes, colors, etc., and Springfield understands this. As a result, it's constantly enhancing its product line as well as offering new variants.

The newest Hellcat Pro with the threaded barrel really piques my interest as I am a tinkerer and tester at heart. I love to see how far I can take something, what I can attach and test on it, and where it might shine or fall short. The threaded barrel option checks all the boxes for me and allows me to spice up my range sessions with my favorite CCW pistol platform, one that has had a home on my hip for the last three years.

If you've ever been interested in shooting your Hellcat Pro suppressed or with a muzzle device attached, look no further than the Hellcat Pro OSP Threaded. You won't be disappointed. Check it out and be sure to call your local gun store to get your hands on one. 🎯

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A REBORN

**SPRINGFIELD ARMORY'S
CUSTOM CLIP POINT FIELD KNIFE
REPRESENTS A MODERN TAKE
ON A BATTLE-PROVEN CLASSIC.**

RANDALL WILSON



WARRIOR





The author thoroughly tested the Springfield Armory Field Knife in harsh conditions in a wide range of environments.

FROM GUADALCANAL TO OKINAWA, America's World War II Pacific island-hopping campaign against the Japanese was a nightmare of volcanic ash beaches, fetid jungles and labyrinthine caves. The ferocity of both the enemy and the elements proved especially harsh on the U.S. Marines and their equipment. It was respect for these brave fighters that led to the development of the Springfield Armory Limited Edition Custom Clip Point Field Knife, which is clearly inspired by the storied U.S.M.C. 1219C2 pattern knife.

The 1219C2, later known as the U.S.M.C. Mark 2 Combat Knife or just "Knife, Fighting Utility", was a modification of the Navy Mark 1 Utility Knife, conceived with input from U.S.M.C. Colonel John M. Davis and Major Howard E. America in late 1942. In all, more than one million Mark 2 knives were made.

A NEW APPROACH

Springfield Armory's Accessory Product Manager Allen Remley, who was involved with the custom knife's development, stated that the knife had to be both U.S.-

made and over-engineered. To do this, Springfield Armory turned to TOPS Knives of Ucon, Idaho. Remley conferred with TOPS on the specifications for the Field Knife. TOPS made the excellent Model 2020 Knife as a companion to the Springfield Model 2020 Waypoint rifle, so Springfield Armory was assured there would be a successful collaboration for its limited run of just 300 knives.

Springfield Armory wanted the Field Knife to closely spec to the original 1219C2. Both blades are constructed from 1095 high

carbon steel, but there are departures. The Field Knife is of full tang construction and not the stick tang with stacked leather washers and a welded pommel of the 1219C2. Additionally, the Field Knife has very durable Micarta scales bolted to the tang. This gives the modern version a handle as tough as a coral head.

The Field Knife's steel is 0.19" thick. This compares to the 0.16" width of the original. Again, Springfield Armory wanted their knife to be overbuilt. Finally, the Field Knife is differentially heat-treated, unlike its predecessor. The spine is left slightly softer than the blade's edge, equating to more malleability when used as a digging or prying tool, while still retaining its sharp edge.

While original diagrams for the 1219C2 show a blade length of 7",



The U.S. Marine Corps equipped its men with the capable U.S.M.C. Mark 2 Combat Knife, shown in this photo on the hip of a Marine at Iwo Jima.

the Field Knife stretches the tape to 6.88". Its clip point follows the WWII blade's contours, with the profile of the tip ever-so-slightly upswept. The distinctive fuller grooves are present on either side of the Black Traction powder-coated blade. Original 1219C2's came with blued or phosphate-coated blades.

THE DETAILS

Let's talk fuller grooves for a moment. A fuller is a knifemaker's tool that leaves depressions on the sides of a sword or knife blade. The fuller is used for pushing hot material aside and leaving an I-beam effect in the steel during forging. These depressions are called fuller grooves. They allow the blade to retain strength while lightening it.

Yes, I know, they are also referred to as "blood grooves" by some because it is thought that they assist with exsanguination by allowing blood to flow through the grooves and out of a torso that is

pierced by said blade. In my experience, that's just so much hokum because penetrating wounds of this type tend to self-seal — especially in shallow grooves such as these. That theory also must presuppose that you intend to leave your knife in the opponent for a length of time.

However, there may be validity to the assertion that "blood grooves" allow a blade to be withdrawn more easily. I con-

ferred with *The Armory Life's* resident medical expert and Emergency Department physician, Dr. Will Dabbs. He stated, "I was shocked at how hard it was to withdraw a deeply embedded blade. A couple of times it just seemed like the object was fastened onto something in there. I am assuming that is a function of the way the elasticity of human flesh causes it to seal tightly around the offending steel. The addition of fuller grooves might actually help break that suction."

GRIPPING SELECTION

Moving on, the handle of the Field Knife has textured and channeled tan canvas Micarta scales to provide tactile traction even when wet. Curiously, TOPS added red liners under the scales. Is this a nod to the Union Cutlery's first production red spacer knives? Those early-war knives featured a red leather spacer beneath the guard and red and black spacers at the pommel. But TOPS has been using red liners on some of its offerings since 1998. Hmmm.

Micarta was a solid choice for the Field Knife since stacked leather washers tend to degrade over time. Actually, they disintegrated in the unforgiving 1940's South Pacific. As a remedy, servicemen of that era made what are now called WWII Theater Knives, where they took their issued knives or personal hunting blades and replaced the eroded leather handles with whatever materials they had on island or shipboard. Many beautiful handmade examples had new spacers layered from combinations of acrylic, phenolic, aluminum,

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY FIELD KNIFE



BLADE LENGTH	6.88"
OVERALL LENGTH	12"
BLADE THICKNESS	0.19"
BLADE STEEL	1095 RC 56-58
BLADE FINISH	Black Traction powder coating
HANDLE MATERIAL	Tan canvas Micarta
KNIFE WEIGHT	13.9 oz
WEIGHT WITH SHEATH	19.6 oz

- Includes leather belt sheath with Springfield Armory logo.
- Limited Edition: Only 300 manufactured, with a custom serial number on each knife.
- Aluminum bolster to prevent hand slipping onto the blade.
- Two lanyard holes for lanyard attachment.
- Differential heat treatment.
- Lifetime warranty.
- Made in the U.S.A.



brass and steel.

The Field Knife's guard is another interesting feature. The original knives had thin, stamped steel guards to keep the user's hand from advancing onto the sharp parts. Springfield Armory decided to give the Field Knife a more robust powder-coated guard and imbued it with a more forgiving shape. The improved oval version is built from aluminum for safety and weight-savings, and it's press-fit to the blade tang.

Something the 1219C2 did not have were lanyard holes. The Springfield Armory Field Knife has two at the butt, made of brass, for those who choose an additional method of retention for secure chopping, hacking or lashing. I like having options, especially ones that enhance utility.

PACKING IT IN

The Springfield Armory Field Knife carries courtesy an included black leather belt sheath with a heavy welt to prevent the blade's edge from cutting the very even double stitching. The construction of the



While the knife is clearly suitable for a range of outdoor uses, it can obviously be used for survival purposes: defense, food prepping, shelter building and more.

sheath mirrors the fine quality of the Model 2020 Knife's version. The embossed crossed cannon logo of Springfield Armory is a nice accompaniment.

As expected, the Springfield Amory Limited Edition Custom Clip Point Field Knife gunned down hardwood boughs, cardboard and rope while taking no

prisoners. I even attacked a pressure treated 2x6 for giggles. How about an old ammo can? Hell, the knife laughed off being hammered into it, suffering only very minor scuffing of the blade's powder coating. With the thin clip point of this knife, no fool should do this. Yeah, that's me. After enough cutting to tucker me out, the Field Knife's edge bounced back after a few passes on the sharpener.

The knife features attractive tan canvas Micarta scales that provide a comfortable, non-slip grip. Twin brass lanyard holes allow for additional retention options.



CONCLUSION

The 1219C2 was used in the Pacific Theater not only as a combat device, but also for grunt tasks in opening cans and crates, digging, hammering and cutting. While a large blade can be reassuring on the hip of a warrior, in everyday use, the Springfield Armory Custom Clip Point Field Knife also provides yeoman's service as a camp, hunting or utility knife. With only 299 SA Field Knives available (minus the #22-014 I tested) at a per-unit-price of just \$249.99, we say, "Pipe this one aboard!" 🗡️

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POWER TO BEAR

RICHARD JOHNSON

SPRINGFIELD'S DESERT FDE XD-M ELITE OSP IN 10MM DELIVERS THE FORCE TO STOP BOTH TWO- AND FOUR-LEGGED THREATS.





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IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

FEW THINGS ARE AS PERSONAL as finding the right handgun for your needs. Whether for personal defense, hunting, or protection in the wild outdoors, finding the perfect pistol is a deeply individual pursuit. Let me introduce you to one of the newest options on the market that I think is very worthy of your consideration.

The Springfield Armory XD-M Elite 4.5" OSP 10mm FDE is an advanced, high-performance firearm designed for the modern shooter who demands precision and unfailing reliability. Engineered to deliver superior shooting performance, the new pistol offers a range of features, is chambered in 10mm and is finished in a distinctive Desert Flat Dark Earth (FDE) color.

During my testing, this gun performed exceptionally well. Based on this, I trust the gun

and recommend you take a look for yourself to see if it offers the features you are seeking.

OVERVIEW

In my opinion, the new gun is a premier pistol in Springfield Armory's XD-M Elite line. It has many of the advanced features common to this pistol family, while adding a subdued finish and one of the more powerful handgun cartridges available in a semi-auto.

For those of you not familiar with the XD-M Elite family, it

The XD-M Elite 10mm in Desert FDE offers impressive capacity, a powerful cartridge, red dot-readiness and utter reliability.

takes the solid foundation of the XD-M and adds numerous enhancements and upgrades. These include qualities such as fully ambidextrous controls, enhanced slide serrations, the META "match enhanced trigger assembly", and more. Also, the 10mm handgun's OSP (Optical Sight Pistol) configuration allows for easy optics attachment. All these features combine to make this an exceedingly capable handgun.

Let's take a closer look at some of this gun's defining features.

HARNESSING BRUTE FORCE

The 10mm cartridge is well-known for its power, being suitable for ev-



Springfield Armory uses match-grade barrels in its XD-M Elite line. This pistol is fitted with a 4.5" barrel with a Melonite finish.



XD-M ELITE 4.5" OSP 10MM FDE



CHAMBERING	10mm
BARREL	4.5"
WEIGHT	31 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.6"
SIGHTS	Fiber optic front, Tactical Rack U-Dot rear
GRIPS	Integral, polymer
ACTION	Striker-fired
FINISH	Desert FDE/Melonite
CAPACITY	16+1 (two magazines included)
MSRP	\$695

A wide range of pistol optics are compatible with the XD-M Elite. Springfield Armory offers a variety of mounting plates that fit a large number of red dots.

everything from defense to hunting. Nevertheless, I have always found it to be relatively easy to control in a well-built pistol like this one.

The power of the 10mm makes it a versatile round, capable of being loaded to levels offering performance well beyond the more commonly seen .45 ACP and 9mm. It's ideal for maximizing stopping power out of a handgun. While many people think of this in terms of personal or home defense, the same power is useful for humane harvesting of deer and other game animals — as well as a last-ditch defense against predators such as bear.

The barrel of the pistol is a match-grade variant made of hammer-forged steel and featuring a Melonite finish. At 4.5", the barrel makes for an overall length of pistol in a size that can still be concealed, yet long enough for the rounds to achieve velocities that maximize performance.

SETTING YOUR SIGHTS

When it comes to sighting options, you have two choices with this pistol: factory sights or a red-dot sight with the OSP optics-mounting system. For my money, the sights Springfield Armory

includes on the gun are some of the best factory sights available. The front sight is a red fiber optic rod that is very visible, matching up with a U-notch rear unit.

When the sights are aligned, the front fiber optic drops neatly into the wide U-notch rear sight. Called the Tactical Rack U-Dot, the rear sight allows the eye to quickly pick out the front sight for rapid, accurate shot placement. The rear sight can also be used to rack the slide against a hard surface for one-handed operation.

Thanks to the OSP system, a range of different optics will



work on the XD-M Elite with available adapter plates. I tested the gun with the HEX Dragonfly red dot, and with the mounting plate it took just a couple of minutes to install.

HANDLING THE FORCE

Springfield did an excellent job with the XD-M Elite's frame. The grip fills my hand well with the standard backstrap. Three backstraps are included to optimize the gun-to-hand fit, and come in small, medium and large sizes.

Along both sides of the pistol are recessed cuts for the trigger finger. These cuts help place my finger pad perfectly on the META trigger. I've found this improves my consistency with accuracy from the draw. I also have found the META trigger to be extremely clean and crisp.

Aggressive block-type checkering on the frame works well to give my hands good purchase on the gun. I live in Florida where even the winters can be warm and humid. Hands sweat easily,



The META trigger is one of the best available on a striker-fired pistol. It is light, crisp and consistent in its pull and break.

especially when you are out on the range running some training drills. That grenade-like grip pattern helps me keep a firm hold on the gun.

The XD-M Elite also features a really impressive removable magwell. As it ships, this gun is fitted with a “short” magwell that helps funnel a magazine into the gun during a reload. If you’ve never been under severe stress while shooting, you may not realize how much your fine motor skills will be degraded. The simple act of sliding a magazine home can be tough when your

body has adrenaline coursing through it. A flared magwell like this helps ensure you maximize reload efficiency. Matching up with the extended magwell is an extended-capacity 16-round stainless steel magazine. Two are included with the pistol.

Also, with the XD-M Elite, it doesn’t matter which half of your brain is dominant — all of the controls are ambidextrous. Not “swappable,” but truly ambidextrous. The slide stop and the magazine release work on both sides right out of the box. The grip safety is also ambidextrous

and features an extended “memory bump” for consistent and reliable engagement.

A BEAR OF A QUESTION

Brown and black bear threats are real for many hunters and outdoorsmen — especially in remote areas of Alaska and the Northwest. I’ve spent a lot of time outside, and I’ve always known



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the importance of being prepared for the unexpected. That includes threats from large predators.

A bear attack can happen in the blink of an eye, and you need a reliable firearm that can stop a charging bear in its tracks. You also need a proven caliber that can deliver enough thump to hit with authority. I believe that this pistol offers both.

The 10mm can be an adequate defensive round against bears. I say “adequate” as all handgun cartridges are suboptimal against North America’s largest predators when compared to rifle loads. But with the gun’s excellent reliability, you have fast access to 16+1 rounds of bear repellent.

RANGE TIME

When I finally got the Springfield Armory XD-M Elite 4.5” OSP 10mm Desert FDE in my hands, I was eager to take it out for some range testing. I packed up some Blazer Brass as well as two Nosler defensive rounds and headed out to the range. Here are three things I learned during this process:

First, the gun is reliable. With more than 500 rounds downrange, I experienced no malfunctions with any of the loads. That included 100 rounds of self-defense hollow points. Secondly, accuracy was impressive. While the XD-M Elite pistols often deliver great accuracy, this pistol proved exceptional. At all ranges — from 3 to 25 yards — the accuracy and precision were great. With all ammo, 1” groupings were common.

Lastly, the recoil and muzzle flip were completely controllable. For me, the 10mm is strong, but not overwhelming. It feels on par with a .45 ACP, not the “90mm Magnum” that some internet trolls would have you believe.

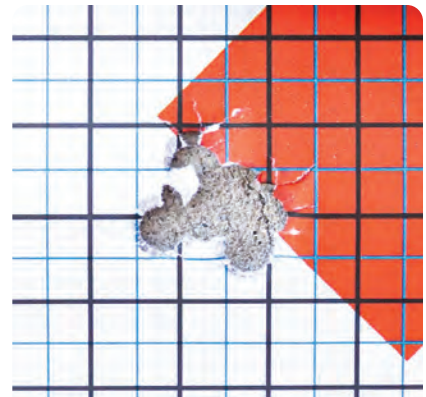


The author tested this gun on the range using a HEX Dragonfly red dot and Nosler premium ammunition. The gun performed admirably.

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.) XD-M ELITE 4.5” OSP 10MM FDE

LOAD	GROUP SIZE	VELOCITY
BLAZER BRASS 180-GR. FMJ	1.0”	1,201 fps
NOSLER 180-GR. JHP ASP	.70”	1,155 fps
NOSLER 200-GR. JHP DEFENSE	.50”	1,012 fps

Group size is measured in inches and is best of three-shot groups fired from a bag rest at 15 yards. Velocity is shown in feet per second and is the average of five rounds at 10 ft. fired across a Competition Electronics ProChrono chronograph. Abbreviations: ASP (Assured Stopping Power), FMJ (full metal jacket), JHP (jacketed hollow point).



With a Nosler 200-grain JHP load, the author managed a five-shot group a little over 0.5”. The best three-round group was even smaller than that.

The bottom line is that it offers dependable performance. Based on my testing of this and other XD-M Elite pistols, this handgun is one of the best values in defensive sidearms available today. And when it came time for me to put down the pistol after testing it, I knew that, if need be, I could count on it for any reasonable defensive use I might have.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Springfield Armory XD-M Elite 4.5” OSP 10mm Desert FDE Pistol is an impressive handgun that lived up to all my expectations. In terms of performance, the accuracy was exceptional. Additionally, I found the trigger was crisp and smooth. Reliability was bulletproof.

Overall, my impression of the Springfield Armory XD-M Elite 4.5”

OSP 10mm Desert FDE Pistol is favorable; from construction quality to handling characteristics, this gun really excels in all areas. With such solid performance and customizability at an affordable price point, it’s easy to see why so many people have chosen this pistol as their go-to choice for home defense or concealed carry purposes. 🇺🇸

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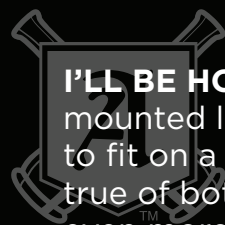
Packing in 500-lumen power and a high-visibility green laser, the Streamlight TLR-8 G Sub is ideal for an EDC pistol like the Hellcat Pro 9mm.

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STREAMLIGHT'S TLR-8 G SUB MAXIMIZES YOUR COMPACT EDC'S CAPABILITIES.



I'LL BE HONEST WITH YOU, the earliest weapon-mounted lights and laser sights were far too bulky to fit on a discreetly concealed handgun. This was true of both dedicated light and laser units, and even more so with systems that combined the two. But that reality is no longer the case. Consider the Streamlight TLR-8 G Sub, which incorporates both features into a very small package.

IMAGE: JOHN MCKENZIE/DOWN RANGE PHOTOGRAPHY



IMAGE: JOHN MCKENZIE/DOWN RANGE PHOTOGRAPHY

Machined from light yet rugged aluminum, the compact housing of the Streamlight TLR-8 G Sub is also rated IPX4 water-resistant.

I recently received one of these to test out, and Springfield Armory was kind enough to furnish a 9mm Hellcat Pro with a Shield SMSc red dot optic as well as fixed night sights as the vehicle for the test. The TLR-8 unit was marked “HCAT,” indicating it was specific for the Hellcat pistol — both the smaller 3” gun and the 3.7” Hellcat Pro I had.

The “G Sub” designation stands for the green color of the laser sighting beam, and the subcompact size of the unit. Extremely compact at about 2½” long, it also weighs less than 3 oz.

With a stated rating of 500 lumens, this unit is much brighter (and much smaller) than my older generation Streamlight TLR-2. It has a stated run time of 1.5 hours of light with its single

CR123A battery, as well as 11 hours for the green laser.

HANDS-ON

Operation of the TLR-8 G Sub takes a little practice to master, but gives you a lot of options. A quick tap on the activating lever locks on the light beam and the laser, while maintaining pressure on that lever creates a “dead man’s switch” effect that turns off both when thumb pressure ceases. In addition, you can select to run just the light, just the laser, or both together. Streamlight also gives you a strobe option for the light, accessed by tapping on either switch rapidly nine times, and then holding down on the 10th until the light turns off.

The ambidextrous lever system is positioned so that it extends

back and around the front of the triggerguard, making activation very intuitive once you get it down. The unit also comes with both “high” and “low” paddle switches giving you some flexibility on their position, and Streamlight included the tool needed to swap it out. The levers can be activated with either a forward push or downward press. Again, once you get it down, it gives you a lot of flexibility.

On my test sample, I found that the lever was small enough that if the thumb was riding the lever trying to hold it down, it would occasionally slip off during rapid-fire recoil, interrupting the light beam

and the aiming laser. However, this didn't happen if I activated the "on only when applying pressure" feature by pushing it forward with the support hand thumb, instead of down. For reference, with one hand only, a quick press of the ambidextrous lever with the tip of the trigger finger activates the "stay on by itself" mode.

IN THE DARK ...

On two consecutive dark nights, I took the Hellcat Pro and TLR-8 combo to the range. In both cases, the testing was done from a Caldwell Matrix rest on a concrete bench, from 25 yards, on cloudy and moonless nights with the excellent beam of the TLR-8 as the only source of illumination. In ambient light, such as it was, I literally wouldn't have been able to see the target, which was a IPSC silhouette with a Birchwood-Casey Shoot-N-C target stuck on.

Using Magtech 115-gr. 9mm

Ambidextrous paddles located on the rear of the TLR-8 G Sub make operating the unit simple and intuitive.

full metal jacket, I fired five-shot groups with each of the three sighting systems: the iron sights, the red dot optic and the green laser beam of the TLR-8. It was mid-December on the range in north Florida, and more than a lit-

The capable 500-lumen Streamlight unit is powered by a single CR123A battery.

tle windy for the first two groups.

After some initial practice groups with the iron sights, I used the Hellcat Pro's red dot as the aiming index and was able to achieve a 3.50" group (I measure to the nearest 0.05") for all five shots, with a 2.55" "best three" cluster. However, while these groups were quite good, I halted the test because the test unit sent its beam low and left of the point of impact, and we couldn't adjust it.

I reached out to Streamlight and found out that my unit was a very early sample that got out of the factory with improper adjustment screws. In less than a week, I had a completely new TLR-8 G Sub unit back in hand, and that was the one I used for the laser beam element of the testing. I have to say I was very impressed with how quickly and effectively Streamlight's customer service department handled this.



IMAGE: JOHN MCKENZIE/DOWN RANGE PHOTOGRAPHY



IMAGE: JOHN MCKENZIE/DOWN RANGE PHOTOGRAPHY



The author found the integral green laser worked well along with the white light of the Streamlight TLR-8.



From 25 yards, the TLR-8 provided the sole illumination in otherwise total darkness. As shown, the target and surrounding area were plainly visible.

TLR-8 G SUB

TYPE	LED light/laser combo
OUTPUT	500 lumen, green laser
LENGTH	2.51" length
WEIGHT	2.77 oz.
CONSTRUCTION	Machined aluminum, IPX4 water-resistant
BATTERY/LIFE	One (1) CR123A/1.5 hours, light; 11 hours, laser
MSRP	\$477

I got to bench the Hellcat Pro/TLR-8 combo for the laser aiming element of the test on Christmas night during a cold snap that got us down to an unusual 32 degrees. No one was more surprised than I was when, aiming with the green laser dot projected by the TLR-8, I achieved the best group of the test that cold night from the same rest with the same ammunition. This group measured 3.35" for all five shots, with the best three in a pleasing 1.20".

I can absolutely assure you that from 25 yards away in otherwise total darkness, this old man wouldn't have come anywhere close to any of that without the TLR-8 G Sub on the pistol.

ADDRESSING THE IMPACT

The owner's manual for this device reads, "For a laser mounted below or to the side of the bore, there is only one distance where the bullet path will coincide with the laser sight line. This point is the 'zero range.' Laser adjustment and the muzzle velocity of the bullet determine where this point occurs.

The user must decide how high above or below the sight line the bullet can be allowed to strike and adjust the sight accordingly. At distances less than the zero range the bullet will be above the sight line. Beyond the zero range, the bullet will be below the sight line. If mounted to the side, the bullet will also deviate to the side of the laser line, as well as up and down. In practice, a TLR on a handgun can be adjusted to keep the bullet strike within about 2" high and 2" low out to about 100 feet."

Personally, I've found it easier to simply sight the laser parallel to the line of the bore. In this case, the laser emitter is a little more than 2" under the centerline of the bore. With a 6 o'clock hold — that is, the laser aimed a couple of inches below the intended point of impact — at reasonable distances you know the shot is

going to hit about that much above the green dot.

CONCLUSION

While my test model was the green version, there is also a red version available. The "G" green laser configuration is, in my opinion, absolutely worth its cost over the red beam of the also-available standard TLR-8 Sub. Its green dot seems to show up well, daylight or dark, at greater distances than the red.

MSRP of the TLR-8 G Sub is \$477, and I have found that they are generally retailing in the \$300 range. Yes, the TLR-8 G Sub ain't cheap, but for all the features it brings to the table, I think it's well worth the money. Where else can you get this much capability in something small enough to fit on a compact CCW pistol like the Hellcat or Hellcat Pro? 🤖

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A PERFECT PAIRING

KITTING OUT A SAINT 5.56MM WITH MIDWEST INDUSTRIES' EXCEPTIONAL AR GEAR.

SCOTT CONDITT

I'VE SHOT EVERY SAINT RIFLE AVAILABLE. I've had the pleasure of running each of the SAINT, SAINT Victor and — my personal favorite — the SAINT Edge rifles, putting thousands of rounds downrange with them. And what have I learned from all this? Each runs exceptionally well, and each comes nicely equipped from the factory in relation to their respective price points.

It's no secret that if you're seeking a fantastic AR right out of the box, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better value than any one of the rifles in the SAINT line. But what if you're a tinkerer like me? What if you like changing out parts, trying new configurations, etc.? Then, the SAINT — the lowest-cost rifle

in the line-up — makes for a great option. You get a solid foundation, and have some money left over in your pocket for adding on some new parts or gear.

Let's be frank, that's one of the greatest appeals and benefits of the AR platform — the modularity and limitless customization poten-



The author used a SAINT 5.56mm as the foundation for his custom AR build with the Midwest parts.

tial that the rifle's design and interchangeable components present to users. I've built (and torn back down) more than my share of AR-15's over the years, so I was thrilled when Mike Humphries, editor-in-chief of *The Armory Life*, reached out to me with an opportunity.

"Would you be interested in taking a SAINT 5.56mm and kitting it out with a selection of Midwest Industries, Inc. gear?" he asked. Needless to say, I jumped at the chance as I'm a big fan of the products from both companies.

SOURCING IN ...

Per the company's website, "Midwest Industries (MI) was founded in 2003 by two partners in the precision machining industry, united by a lifelong belief in American-made products, American values, and the Second Amendment."

While their product line has evolved to include components

and accessories for a number of platforms and for a wide array of brands, they got their start with AR parts. And it was in that section I was looking. My goal was to utilize the strengths of the core SAINT platform, but also try out some interesting enhancements for it from Midwest.

After a good amount of research on their site (and a great deal of fun doing it), I selected the following parts for this project:

- Drop-In 3.5-lb. Single-Stage Flat Trigger
- Enhanced Black Nitride Bolt Carrier Group
- Combat Rifle Sight Set
- Combat Rail One-Piece Free-Float M-Lok Handguard
- Low-Profile Gas Block
- Two-Chamber Muzzle Brake

Now, before we go any further, I want to point out that the SAINT comes equipped and ready to go out of the box with practically

every feature you need. In fact, I highly recommend the SAINT line to my friends and family, having personally gifted a few rifles to some of the people closest to me.

I've personally entrusted the SAINT line and Springfield Armory as a brand for home defense, for competitions like the Tactical Games, and for training throughout the years. So, the bottom line is the gun doesn't really need any of these changes. But, I'm a tinkerer, and it's not always about what we need, is it?

So, what informed my choices? I selected some components, like the Midwest Industries handguard and the flat-faced drop-in trigger, out of personal and stylistic preferences. For example, whereas I really do like the appearance of



The SAINT 5.56mm rifle proved to be easy to break down and prep for the build with the new Midwest parts.

the B5 Systems SAINT's standard M-Lok handguard, I prefer M-Lok across as much surface area on an AR's handguard as I can get for accessories. There were also some other tweaks I wanted to make.

The specific model of SAINT I was working with for this build came from the factory with the A2-style front sight/gas block system. Again, I'm a fan of the iconic and classic look of the A2-style sight, but in practice at the range or for a home defense platform, it wouldn't be my usual preference when equipping an AR today.

As I would be including the Midwest Industries' Combat Rifle Sight Set in this build, I chose to swap out this factory-installed system for the Midwest Low-Profile Gas Block, which also accommodates the Midwest Combat

SAINT M-LOK B5



CHAMBERING	5.56mm
BARREL	16"
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 4oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	33"-36.25"
SIGHTS	Flip-up
STOCK	B5 Systems Bravo
ACTION	Semi-auto
FINISH	Black
CAPACITY	30 (one mag included)
MSRP	\$1,023



Rail One-Piece Free-Float M-Lok Handguard I had selected.

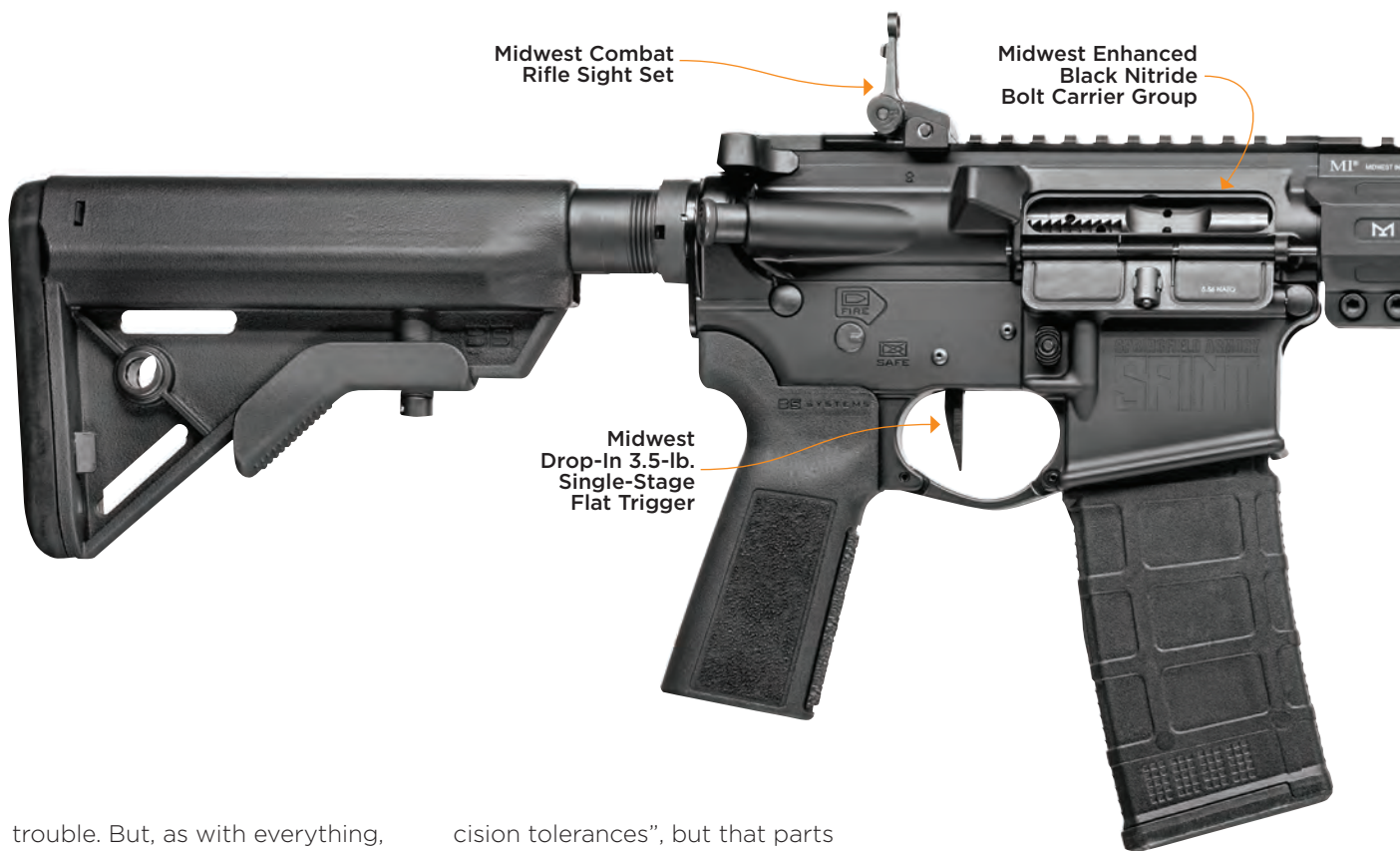
As for the trigger, I was very curious to try out Midwest Industries Drop-In 3.5-lb. Single-Stage Flat Trigger with included anti-walk pins, as I prefer a flat trigger these days. Don't get me wrong, the standard SAINT's factory-installed nickel boron-coated curved trig-

ger is a solid system, but remember, we are tinkering here. Also, I absolutely love the Modular Match Trigger that is in my SAINT Edge, and I wanted to feel how the Midwest drop-in trigger compared.

I was also curious to see how much the sizable Midwest Two-Chamber Muzzle Brake would help temper down muzzle rise compared to the conventional A2 flash suppressor on the SAINT. And lastly, I selected the Midwest Enhanced Black Nitride Bolt Carrier Group. This one was more of an "apples to apples" comparison, but I was curious how it would perform.

THE BUILD

For those who have built AR's from a variety of aftermarket components, you probably know that in theory everything should fit together without too much



trouble. But, as with everything, it's always good to be careful and cautious. I am sure many of you have learned during the course of building AR's that "Mil-Spec" doesn't always translate to "pre-

cision tolerances", but that parts are produced within an accepted range of tolerances.

One of the major benefits of selecting the majority of components from a single manufacturer, particularly a highly reputable and high-quality manufacturer that precision machines and quality checks their components like Midwest Industries, is that you have a much greater chance of complet-

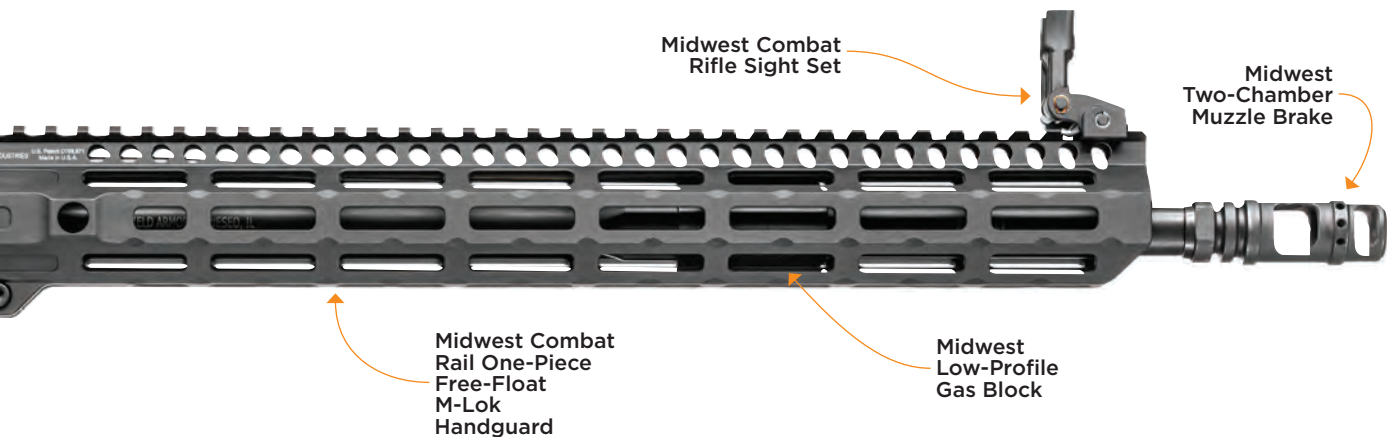
ing a successful build without any issues. And doing the same with the base rifle — selecting a reputable manufacturer like Springfield — is also a sound move.

Hitting the gun bench, the build was honestly one of the smoothest I've ever undertaken. This was in part because of the aforementioned precision-machined components from Midwest Industries simply fitting and pairing beautifully with the SAINT's quality components. My efforts were also greatly aided throughout the process by having a suite of Real Avid's exceptional gunsmithing tools at the bench with which to work.

After visually and physically inspecting and safety checking the chamber to ensure there was no ammo in the rifle, I broke down the SAINT and removed the complete upper assembly from the lower. Starting my work on the upper, I removed the clamshell-style M-Lok handguard, which was relatively easy.

The author ran the custom rifle on the range and was impressed with both the performance of the base gun as well as the new Midwest parts.





The Real Avid Accu-Punch Master Set came in handy when punching the pins out of the A2 pinned gas block/sight system. The Real Avid Master Gun Vise with the articulating jaw and Master-Fit Crowfoot Wrench Set was a blessing to have on hand to then remove the Delta Ring so I could gain access to the exposed barrel.

Installing the new Midwest Low-Profile Gas Block in alignment with the gas port in the 12 o'clock position on the barrel went smoothly. Fitting the included barrel nut over the barrel and mating it with the upper presented no challenge, and then sliding the Midwest "Combat Rail" over the barrel and in alignment with the SAINT's upper was a very smooth operation.

From there, I dropped the Midwest Enhanced Black Nitride Bolt Carrier Group into the upper with ease and, after verifying headspace, ensured I was good to go. The last touches for the upper modifications included threading on the Midwest Two-Chamber Muzzle Brake and installing the sturdy and easy to manipulate Combat Rifle Sight Set, which was as simple as putting them into the proper position on the top rail and turning the screws. These phosphated low-profile steel sights were quite impressive and well-made.

With my efforts on the upper completed, I turned my attention to the installation of the Midwest

Drop-In 3.5-Lb. Single-Stage Flat Trigger. When removing a trigger in an AR, always wear eye protection and keep a magnetic dish for small parts on hand when working with parts under tension.

Installing the drop-in trigger was very easy. As the name implies, it drops into place. After the trigger and housing were dropped in, I reinstalled the safety and then installed the included "anti-walk" pins using the two included Allen keys that allow you to torque down the pins on each side simultaneously. I added a bit of included orange thread locker for additional security.

COMPLETE PACKAGE


Connecting the newly revamped upper and lower gave me a rifle that looked familiar and sleek, and also appeared as a hybrid that fit somewhere between the SAINT Victor and Edge rifles, with the Midwest Industries components bringing it together in a new feel all of its own. The rifle looked fantastic, but it was time to put it to the only test that truly matters: Does it run?

I loaded up the truck and took off to the range. Loading up mags with Remington UMC ammo, I stepped up to the firing line, confident that my gas port alignment was true, my torque settings were applied properly, and that no "jiggle" or "wiggle" would be felt during firing.

Taking aim, flipping off the safety and pressing the newly installed Midwest Industries drop-in trigger, I was delighted that the gun ran — and ran extremely well. Building on the strengths of the SAINT rifle, this new custom gun was highly responsive and exhibited rock-solid build characteristics.

I ran half a dozen mags through it and enjoyed it thoroughly. The brake absolutely crushed the perceived recoil and diminished muzzle rise, the trigger was great, and most importantly to me — if only for my own insecurity as an amateur gunsmith — it had no issues or malfunctions whatsoever.

CONCLUSION

I'm happy to report that with the Midwest Industries components I selected, I received exactly what I was hoping for during this build with the SAINT rifle. I can wholeheartedly say that after this build I trust the quality and capability of Midwest Industries components in equal measure to the SAINT rifle, and would recommend this company to anyone seeking exceptional components for an upgrade or complete build themselves. 

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**A FIRSTHAND
ACCOUNT OF
AMERICAN
ARMOR DURING
THE VIETNAM
WAR.**

JUNGLE

CAPT. DALE DYE, USMC (RET.)



A flamethrower-equipped tank is shown here in Vietnam engaging the enemy with a staggering amount of firepower.

IMAGE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES (127-N-A373662_36-29666M).



IMAGE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES (127-N-A371493_36-2959M)

BACK IN THE SUMMER OF '67, I was having a brutal macho slugfest with my bunkmate in Staging Battalion at Camp Pendleton. I maintained that my buddy, who was a tanker, was a no-load weenie who would never see real combat. As I was headed for an infantry assignment, my buddy thought I was a bull-goose looney who didn't pack the gear to specialize in something less potentially lethal. We were both headed for Vietnam, so those things were important to us. We might both get blown away, but status while doing so was a greater concern.

U.S. Marines hitch a ride atop this American tank during a road sweep for the enemy.

My arguments were based on the kind of pre-deployment training we were getting that emphasized guerrilla warfare, avoiding booby traps, and winking out Viet Cong guerrillas in dense jungles. What good would big tanks and other armored vehicles be in that kind of fight?

Six months later during Tet '68 in the Battle of Hue City, I ran across my buddy scrunched into the turret of a Zippo, an M67 flame tank. At this point, I drastically revised my arguments about tankers and close combat. While those of us

more directly exposed to rounds, rockets and ricochets on the mean streets of Hue were taking serious casualties, my buddy and his fellow tankers were also getting banged around seriously by North Vietnamese Army (NVA) rocket gunners who played whack-a-mole with the tanks.

It occurred to me, watching his Zippo hose down enemy strongpoints with napalm, that fighting in an RPG-rich environment while perched on top of a 300-gallon tank of napalm might qualify as dangerous duty.

And that was the beginning of my interest in armor as used by U.S. Army and Marine outfits during the war in Vietnam. As I was mostly around Marine Corps tankers and armor crewmen, what I have to say here will have a distinctly Leatherneck bias.

AT THE FRONT

Because the Marine Corps fights as a self-contained combat outfit with all organic supporting arms and logistics under the same command umbrella, I had the opportunity to observe tanks and tankers in combat quite a bit from 1967 to 1970.

Marine tanks I observed during my time were all variants of the Patton design designated M48A3. They carried a 90mm main armament firing a variety of ammo from High-Explosive Anti-Tank (Heat) to High-Explosive (HE) and the grunt's favorite Anti-Personnel-Tracer (APERS-T), com-



This M50 Ontos and its crew are shown here moving forward in support of troops.

monly known as a Beehive Round.

Tanks assigned to infantry-support roles in the two tank battalions of the First and Third Marine Divisions, operating in I Corps (the farthest northern AO adjacent to the DMZ), also sported a .30-cal. co-axially mounted machine gun that was sighted and triggered by the gunner using main-gun fire control sights, and a .50-cal. heavy machine gun either in a cupola atop the turret or hard-mounted pintle on the turret roof.

They were 50-tons of bush-bashing beast, but the verdant jungles that severely restricted speed, constant mine threats and low visibility in many areas kept them a bit restricted. They had shock-effect and firepower, but mobility was a drawback in heavily jungled areas. However, as regular formations of the North Vietnamese Army appeared on various battlefields in Vietnam, tanks came to be much more of a valuable asset.

Tanks, armored personnel carriers and related heavy vehicles

proved their worth in fights where improved roads allowed them to exploit their mobility and bring heavy firepower to bear on enemy formations battling to control interior lines of communications throughout the country.

An early and powerful example of this came when my unit was based at Con Thien overlooking the Ben Hai River and the DMZ. We ran regular patrols on adjacent roads to keep supply lines open,

and one of our biggest assets was the soldiers from 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery, running M42A1 "Dusters" for us in the road sweeps.

These relatively light tracked vehicles based on the M41 tank chassis, sported a pair of 40mm Bofors automatic weapons that raised hell all over the DMZ and surrounding countryside. It got to the point where Marine units wouldn't consider running a road sweep without a couple of Dusters rolling along in support.

And then came Tet '68 and the bloody battle in Hue City.

THE THICK OF IT

In conversation with survivors after the fight in Hue, I learned that Marines were initially reluctant to send tanks into the city. It was basically counter to doctrine that said armor was too often forced into fire-traps on city streets, vulnerable to overhead attacks where their armor was thinnest, and limited turret traverse in narrow confines.

None of those concerns held up when the defecation hit the oscillation in Hue. And Marine tanks were often the deciding factor in

U.S. Marines are shown here riding on top of an M48 tank.



IMAGE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES (127-N-A186810_36-2923M)



IMAGE: NATIONAL ARCHIVES (127-N-A186721_36-2922M)

The flamethrower adaptation for American tanks could provide troops with highly valuable support in the field.

street fights that demanded sufficient firepower to blast a stubborn enemy from buildings and concrete strongpoints. A couple of 90mm AP rounds followed by a stream of burning fuel from a Zippo usually turned the tables against NVA defenders.

One of the most haunting images I retain from the Hue City fight is an NVA corpse standing upright and pinned to a tree by a swarm of flechettes. It might have been a tank round, or one from an Ontos 106mm recoilless rifle — they were all firing Beehive rounds — but the effect was gruesome. The NVA trooper hung like a scarecrow that had been dive-bombed to death by swarms of lethal wasps.

Hue was also my first opportunity to see the M50 Ontos in action. Most Marines were familiar at a distance with the weird-looking vehicles from seeing them parked in static perimeter defense positions around major firebases. And most had heard the stories about how the U.S. Army tried the Ontos out in the late 1950s and promptly decided it was too thin-skinned and otherwise unsuitable for a variety of reasons, notably the

need for some poor crew-dog to dismount under fire in order to reload the six 106mm recoilless rifles affixed to the hull.

But the Ontos — meaning “Thing” in Greek — went bang with a six-barreled vengeance, and that was an attractive feature for Marines who had enough suicidal PFCs to sustain the vehicle’s three-man crews. The Marine Corps adopted the Army cast-off Ontos and sent it to Vietnam hoping to use it as a mobile fire-support element for infantry.

Despite initial casualties, mostly from AT mines and RPG’s that devastated the light vehicles, Marines stuck by the Ontos, using its brace of 106mm recoilless rifles to good effect when terrain allowed it to follow close behind advancing grunts. But the Ontos was mainly relegated to perimeter defense or convoy escorts duties until things went weird in Hue City and the Ontos came into its own.

The small, lightweight and fully tracked Ontos was a regular and welcome sight among infantry Marines bulling and blasting their way through enemy defenses in Hue. The crews were nimble and canny

in roaring up to a hardpoint and cranking away with rec-rifles fired in pairs or broadsides. No warning was given about the horrendous backblast — and none was needed. When an Ontos was about to open fire — or even looked like it might — we knew to be elsewhere until the smoke and debris cleared.

CONCLUSION

For the most part, the NVA didn’t employ much armor during the fight in Vietnam. The occasional sighting of armored vehicles on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the attack by a platoon of PT-76s on the SF camp at Lang Vei in Feb. ’68, were exceptions.

In fact, until the massive NVA offensives toward the end of the American involvement (Easter Offensive in ’72 and the final push to end it all in 1975), enemy armor was not much of a worry for allied troops on the ground in Vietnam. But our armor undoubtedly worried them — and for good reason.

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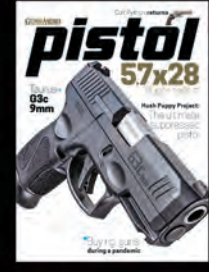
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