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EDITORIAL

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Mike Humphries

EDITOR

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Antonio Acitelli

ART DIRECTOR

Michael Ulrich

STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Michael Anschuetz

COPY EDITOR

Lisa Baumgardner

CONTRIBUTORS

Dan Abraham, Sam Averett,
Mike Boyle, Paul Carlson, Dylan Casey,
Scott Conditt, Rob Garrett,
Carson McDaniel, Jake Miller,
Doug Naes, Peter Suci, Yamil Sued,
Wayne van Zwooll

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

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INTEGRATED MEDIA

PRESIDENT &

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PRODUCTION

Connie Mendoza

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PUBLISHING TECHNOLOGY

Kyle Morgan

SENIOR

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Tim Neher

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

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MIKE HUMPHRIES

WE'RE PROUD to bring to you the Summer 2024 issue of *The Armory Life* print magazine. This issue is packed with great content, from our cover story interview article to in-depth product reviews and much more.

Gracing our cover is renowned 1911 expert and gunsmithing guru Hilton Yam, of 10-8 Performance. With an FBI career spanning more than two decades, most of those on SWAT, Yam gained a great deal of hands-on, practical experience with the Springfield Armory Professional Model. It was this hard-earned knowledge of the 1911 used in a duty role that led to his founding of 10-8 Performance. Check out the whole story starting on page 18.

While Hilton Yam no longer builds custom 1911 pistols, he agreed to create a special one-of-

a-kind Garrison 1911 pistol for this issue. The ultra-rare pistol features his handiwork as well as a curated selection of 10-8 Performance parts. Check out our full review of this amazing 1911 starting on page 88.

Speaking of high-performance gear, be sure to check out this issue's reviews of some very impressive Springfield Armory firearms. From a review of the newly refreshed and expanded line of .45 ACP TRP pistols to a piece on the SAINT Victor SBR 5.56mm as reviewed by a police officer who uses it as his patrol rifle, we have you covered.

In addition to the gun reviews, we also have articles on some top gear and accessories. From reviews of the Shield SMSc micro-red-dot optic to the Viridian RFX45 closed emitter green-dot optic, there's plenty of content here for you. Round that out with a fascinating piece on the World War I-era Chauchat light machine gun, and you have another must-read issue.

As always, I'm very interested in hearing your thoughts. 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 Summer 2024 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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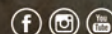
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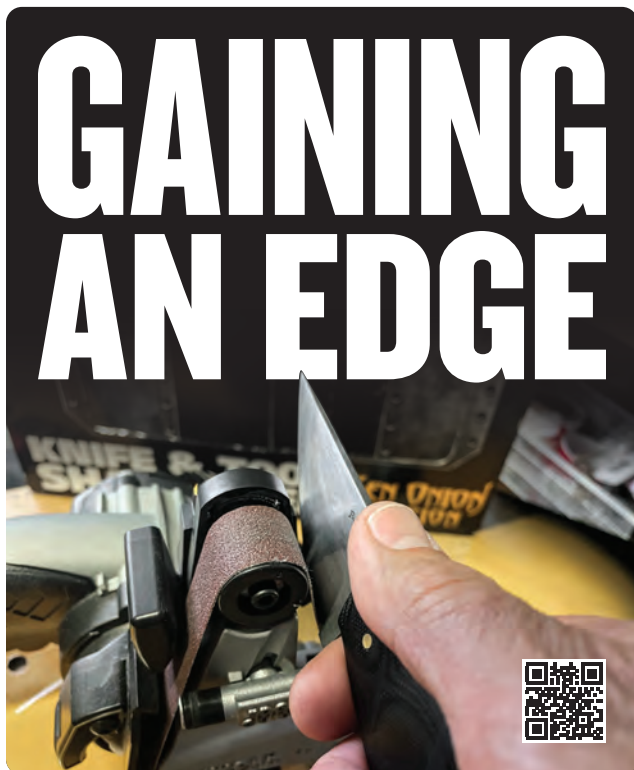


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1911 VS. 1911A1



ARE YOU READY TO REACT?



WOMEN'S TOP CCW OPTIONS

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

A FAILURE- PROOF MAG?



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

AN ICON

JEREMY TREMP



REBORN

SPRINGFIELD OFFERS A NEW TAKE ON THE REVERED TRP SERIES OF PISTOLS

IF YOU'VE BEEN AROUND 1911s LONG ENOUGH, the Springfield Armory TRP needs no introduction. In my experience, it's regarded as one of the best production-quality 1911's on the market. For those of you who might not be fully versed in its history, let's touch on the details here for a moment.

The respected TRP line has been updated with several new variants in .45 ACP, including this Carry Contour (CC) model featuring a lightweight frame and a 4.25" barrel.



WATCH THE VIDEO
FIRST LOOK: THE NEW TRP PISTOLS



The new models offered include (from top) the TRP Classic, the TRP CC 4.25" (in Black or Coyote Brown), the TRP Classic 4.25", and the TRP Rail (in Black or Coyote Brown).



The TRP was inspired by the custom Professional 1911 pistol developed by Springfield Armory for the FBI back in the 1990s. FBI regional SWAT teams wanted a 1911 that was accurate, rugged and reliable, and the Professional was produced to meet their demands. In addition, the pistol was also used by the FBI's elite and highly respected Hostage Rescue Team (HRT).

Competition among 1911 builders for the FBI contract was fierce, with numerous 1911 producers competing for it. The FBI's request for proposal (RFP) for the pistol specified a .45-caliber, semi-automatic, single-action pistol, preferably made of steel, with a grip safety and an ambidextrous frame-mounted manual thumb safety. Additionally, it could only accept a single-column magazine.

The test was extremely demanding and made up of several parts. First came an inspection for compliance to the specifications, followed by a safety check, abuse test, firing test, field suitability test, accuracy test, endurance test and, finally, a second accuracy test. The pistols were required to reliably feed hollowpoint ammunition like Remington Golden Sabers, which, at the time, was the FBI's duty load. Springfield Armory came away the winner, with guns that surpassed all the contract requirements.

THE SIBLINGS

With the success and popularity of the Professional 1911 pistol, Springfield developed

TRP CLASSIC



CHAMBERING	.45 ACP
BARREL	5"
WEIGHT	39.2 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	8.6"
SIGHTS	Tactical Rack, three-dot tritium
GRIPS	VZ Grips Hydra G-10
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Black Cerakote
CAPACITY	8+1 (three magazines included)
MSRP	\$1,899



the TRP to bridge the gap between the custom-grade Professional and the commercial market, creating an incredible 1911 that had many of the features of the custom gun at a price more attainable for the average consumer.

Since then, the TRP, which stands for "Tactical Response Pistol," has been a staple in the Springfield Armory line-up. Today adds another historic marker on the TRP timeline — a 2024 refresh of the TRP to offer an entirely new lineup of pistols. You can now expect four new variants of the TRP in .45 ACP — with two of them offered in Black or Coyote Brown, for a total of six models — ranging from the two Classic models to the Rail model to the "Carry Contour" CC model. Let's dive into the pistols and what you can expect for features and options.

Firstly, all pistols come with

forged frames and slides for strength and durability. Also, each pair is hand-selected for slide-to-frame fit and each component part is numbered to marry them together throughout the build process. In addition, all pistols feature Hydra G-10 grips from VZ Grips, as well as the 20-line per inch (lpi) checkering on the frontstrap for which TRPs are known. Also, all the pistols feature finely cut sighting plane serrations along the top of the slide matched up with Tactical Rack three-dot tritium sights. And lastly, except for the CC models, all the TRPs feature two-piece extended magwells.

For me, the most exciting addition is the Carry Contour TRP. This interesting new pistol not only features a shorter 4.25" barrel length for concealability, but also a "carry contour" cut to the lightweight alloy grip frame with a Picatinny rail section. The beauty of this design is that the bobbed portion of the aluminum frame minimizes potential printing while it is being worn in the waistband, but still offers a full and comfortable grip. You can expect Black and Coyote Cerakote finishes for this interesting new CCW pistol.

The next family is the full-size 5" railed variants of the TRP. The all-steel, full-size TRP utilizes a two-piece National Match full-length guide rod for reliable operation as well as a strip of Picatinny rail for lights and lasers. This duty-ready pistol with a two-piece magwell comes in Black or Coyote Cerakote finishes.



TRP RAIL

CHAMBERING	.45 ACP
BARREL	5"
WEIGHT	39.2 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	8.6"
SIGHTS	Tactical Rack, three-dot tritium
GRIPS	VZ Grips Hydra G-10
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Black or Coyote Brown Cerakote
CAPACITY	8+1 (three magazines included)
MSRP	\$1,999

Finally, we have the Classic versions of the TRP, which are offered in non-railed 5" and 4.25" versions. The Classic is the most reminiscent of the original TRP, but with some new additions and features. The all-steel pistols feature a full-size grip frame and two-piece magwells and come with a Black Cerakote finish with green/black VZ Hydra G-10 grips.

For me, what really makes the new Classic line so interesting — apart from the numerous enhancements — is the addition of the 4.25" version. With this, you get a gun with all the benefits of the TRP, but in an easier-to-carry and conceal package. Add to that the 5" model that channels everything that made the original so great, and you have two winners here.

THE DETAILS

If you need further convincing that the TRP is the right 1911 for you, you will be pleased to know that these pistols all receive hand finishing from the legendary craftsmen and craftswomen at Springfield Armory. The significance of this cannot be overstated as this kind of attention is generally reserved for custom 1911 pistols. With the Springfield Armory TRP, you can get a production gun that feels and performs like a pistol much higher in price.

The TRP line includes hammer-forged stainless steel match-grade barrels that provide the shooter with exceptional accuracy and reliability. Aiding in the handling and manipulation of the pistol, the TRP offers an ambi safety that is easily manipulated for strong- or weak-

hand shooting. Being that the TRP is a 1911, you would expect a world-class trigger and you won't be disappointed. The pistols' Gen 2 Speed Trigger, with serrations on the front and a skeletonized body, performs as good as it looks.

One of my favorite visual aspects of the new TRP is the Hydra-pattern grips by VZ Grips. They are made from G-10 material



The TRP Classic models (5" at left, 4.25" at right) are the most reminiscent of the original TRP, but with some notable enhancements and upgrades.

and create the perfect lock-up in your hand while shooting. Keeping with the visual theme, the skeletonized hammer creates an aggressive look while giving you exceptional performance with reduced weight and faster lock times. The TRP is designed with forward and rear slide serrations for enhanced manual operation of the slide under all conditions.

The TRP pistols' front sights contain a single tritium vial, while the rear sights contain two and is serrated to reduced glare. These sights are built rock solid and provide the shooter with an easy-to-find solution, day or night.

Finally, the 20-lpi checkering provides the shooter with an unmatched grip on the pistol in any condition imaginable. Combine the 20-lpi checkering with the VZ Grips, and you have top-notch control of the pistols.

As noted, I think my favorite vari-

ant of the new lineup is the Carry Contour TRP. In particular, I really like the Coyote version. This pistol just looks and feels "right" in my hands. I am an FDE fanatic, and the combo of the VZ Grips and Cerakote finish with the black barrel and controls is a masterpiece. The G-10 grips with the 20-lpi checkering in the frame give you an

TRP CLASSIC 4.25"



CHAMBERING	.45 ACP
BARREL	4.25"
WEIGHT	35.5 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.9"
SIGHTS	Tactical Rack, three-dot tritium
GRIPS	VZ Grips Hydra G-10
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Black Cerakote
CAPACITY	8+1 (three magazines included)
MSRP	\$1,899



iron-fisted grip on the pistol to easily control the powerful .45 ACP cartridge.

Additionally, the forged aluminum alloy frame offers strength as well as light weight.

I've also got to give kudos to Springfield for the new Classic version of the TRP. There is something magical about an elegant and classic-looking 1911. It's a faithful nod to the original look and design of John Moses Browning's



All but the CC model TRP pistols feature a two-piece mag-well. All variants feature Hydra G-10 grips from VZ Grips.

TRP CC 4.25"



CHAMBERING	.45 ACP
BARREL	4.25"
WEIGHT	27.3 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.9"
SIGHTS	Tactical Rack, three-dot tritium
GRIPS	VZ Grips Hydra G-10
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Black or Coyote Brown Cerakote
CAPACITY	7+1 (three magazines included)
MSRP	\$1,999



most accomplished design, but with a modern twist. The Classic version also

has the unique VZ Hydra grips that offer a beautifully unique blend of deep green and black.

RANGE TIME

On the range, the TRP line ran like you would expect — flawlessly. The magazines fed with ease, the recoil was manageable, and the pistols ate whatever I threw at them. This ranged from 185- to 230-gr. loads, from ball to defensive ammo. Speaking of ammo, a

quick shout-out to Nosler ammo for sending out some of their ASP ammo for this review. The reliability and accuracy of the ASP ammo is of the utmost quality.

You can truly feel the difference between shooting a TRP and other production-grade 1911s. The fit and function just doesn't quite measure up to Springfield Armory's offerings. The company's decades of experience really shine in this pistol, from its looks to its feel to its performance. The TRP is smooth, tight, accurate, and most of all, reliable.

This pistol stands on the shoulders of giants and, in my opinion,



The author ran the TRP pistols on the range and found them to be extremely accurate and reliable.

offers you the best in design, production and craftsmanship from the best in the business. It's not just one of these features that I have mentioned that makes this gun a one-of-a-kind, it's all of them combined and crafted by professionals with the right experience in the business. That is what makes the Tactical Response Pistol one of the longest-reigning champs in the 1911 market, and why Springfield Armory continues to support the TRP lineup to this day.

The CC model of the TRP, shown here in Coyote Brown, makes for an excellent EDC option.



CONCLUSION

If you demand the toughest, most reliable and accurate production 1911, and one with custom-grade features, then look no further than the Springfield Armory TRP lineup of pistols. Whatever your needs, the TRP has your back with the Springfield Armory namesake and its legendary history. MSRP for the Classic models is \$1,899, while the Rail and CC versions are priced at \$1,999. 

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Hilton Yam and his company, 10-8 Performance, have earned an enviable reputation for excellence in the 1911 community. He is shown here working on a custom Garrison 1911 project.



IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

THE ARMORY LIFE INTERVIEWS:

HILTON YAM

ROB GARRETT



WITH A CAREER SPANNING both decades and disciplines, Hilton Yam has earned an enviable reputation for excellence. After more than two decades with the FBI, and significant time behind the Springfield Armory Professional Model 1911 pistol, he channeled that experience and expertise with the 1911 into the company known as 10-8 Performance.

Mr. Yam was kind enough to sit down with us for an in-depth interview, telling us about his journey from an FBI SWAT team member to a highly respected gunsmith in the 1911 world. We would like to thank him for taking the time to do this Q&A session with *The Armory Life*.

The Armory Life (TAL): For those of our readers who might not be familiar with your background, can you give us a brief overview?

From your childhood to the FBI, leading up to where you find yourself today?

Hilton Yam (HY): Certainly. Growing up, I was always interested in action movies, firearms, the military and law enforcement. I got my first air rifle at around age 11, later shot on my high school's competitive small-bore rifle team, back when you could do that kind of thing, and then got heavily into IPSC with my first 1911. My inter-

ests eventually got me talking to someone who was in the FBI, and his insights and guidance encouraged me to apply.

TAL: Continuing this theme, could you give us a brief overview of your career with the FBI? Where were you posted, and what assignments did you have?

HY: I started at the FBI Academy in 1997, and then was subsequently assigned to the Miami Division. It was there that I worked for my entire career of just over 21 years. I was assigned to a Violent Crimes/Fugitive Task Force right out of the academy. I also worked Bank Robbery and later became the Principal Firearms Instructor for the division, running the entire firearms program for Miami. I was also on our SWAT team for 19 years, and served as a team leader and principal instructor for firearms/CQB/tactics, as well as instructing in defensive tactics, active shooter, and rappelling.

TAL: The Springfield Professional pistol is a legend in the 1911 world and has a highly devoted following. Can you tell us about its adoption by the FBI, and who was issued and/or authorized to carry it?

HY: The FBI held trials for a 1911-style pistol for its SWAT program in the 1990's, and Springfield Armory was ultimately selected to provide what became known as the Professional Model. The pistol began fielding in the late 90's, and SWAT agents were required to pass a grueling five-day transition school where they learned the manual of arms, care and maintenance of it. They were also required to shoot a challenging tactical pistol course qualification. These agents assigned to

the regional SWAT teams — each of the FBI field offices has its own team — were authorized to use the Springfield, and only after passing the transition course.

TAL: When did you transition to the Springfield Professional



Model as part of your duties as a member of an FBI SWAT Team? Also, what gear did you use; holsters, ammo, etc.?

HY: I got on our team in 2000, and was able to get to a transition school in 2001. We were issued Safariland 6004 holsters for tactical use, and a variety of concealment holsters were issued. These latter included thumb-break models from Don Hume and Alessi. I was issued and used an Alessi DOJ Thumb Break model. Our service ammunition was Remington Golden Saber 230-gr. brass jacketed hollow point.

TAL: Can you tell us about the service and maintenance process the Bureau employed to support the Professionals?

HY: The transition schools were supported by armorers, including famous custom 1911 gunsmith Steve Nastoff and AMU legend John Miller. These armorers

would make repairs and adjustments to the guns during the five-day transition school, as the students typically shot between 2,500-3,000 rounds. The guns in the field were then supported by either our weapons management facility at Quantico, or the Springfield factory.

TAL: When and why did you start your deep dive into the world of gunsmithing? Were you authorized to maintain the Bureau's 1911s?

HY: I had been around 1911 gunsmiths from day one of my IPSC shooting in the 80's. Our club had Austin Behlert building guns for all the shooters. After being issued a 1911, I realized that I wanted a deeper understanding of the gun's inner workings and started studying the gunsmithing of the 1911 in earnest. I got to see and learn an incredible amount from being around the Springfield pistols at work.

As noted, all maintenance and repair work on the Springfields was performed by our shop at Quantico or the Springfield factory. However, I directly oversaw our team's fleet of pistols and also got to see them fired when I conducted our team training. All of that time in and around the guns gave me some incredible insight. Those guns saw use and round counts that far exceeded anything I'd seen in my years of competition, and I realized that a 1911 used in a duty setting lived a very different life.

TAL: As we understand it, this experience with and growing interest in the 1911 led you to create your company, 10-8 Performance. Could you explain the name and tell us about the history of the company, its products, and what you are doing today?

Yam has a long history with the Springfield Professional Model 1911, going back to his time on the FBI's Miami Division SWAT team.



Yam is shown here deployed to New Orleans for Hurricane Katrina relief efforts in 2005. Note the 1911 magazines on his belt.

HY: The company is named after the common radio code “10-8,” which means “on duty,” “in service,” or is LEO slang for “good to go.”

I founded the company in 2006 for the development of the various 1911 components I had begun to design. My first product was a ledge-profiled U-notch sight with a serrated rear face, which remains one of my flagship products.

TAL: We understand that these days you do not offer custom 1911 pistols and instead focus on developing and offering gun parts. But, can you tell us a bit about the guns you have built? How did you make them and how many have you built?

HY: I started building custom 1911 pistols around 2000, back before I had created 10-8 Performance. I was always configuring the guns in a manner that I felt was suitable for duty use. The more I built, the more I found that I wanted certain

parts that didn’t exist in the market, so I designed my own.

I eventually started a series of guns simply named after the phonetic radio alphabet — Alpha, Bravo, Charlie etc. These guns combined and codified my gunsmithing and design ideas into a complete package that I felt was ideal as a duty-use 1911. Due to the time constraints of my law enforcement career, I only built 64 complete guns before I had to

shift the focus of my efforts.

As the company grew and became more successful, I focused on product development and retired from building custom 1911’s. The current catalog of items includes sights, magazine base pads and components for the 1911, as well as parts for several other popular pistol designs.

TAL: You clearly have had a lot of experience with Springfield Armory 1911 pistols. What current production Springfield 1911s do you like?

HY: I’ve always liked building on Springfield Armory base guns. Of all the models I’ve used, I think I’ve built the most on Operator models. It’s a very solid platform with a great feature set. In addition, I think the Ronin and Garrison are really good values.

TAL: Can you tell us about your 10-8 Performance Patreon page

Yam’s personally owned, agency-approved Springfield Professional. He explained he carried it at work for many years and that it has the finish wear to show for it.





IMAGE: HILTON YAM

where you assist 1911 owners in building their own custom 1911 pistol, based on the Springfield Garrison 1911?

HY: In 2022, my Patreon students and I went through a monthly livestream class where I took them through the steps to build up a Springfield Garrison into a full-house custom gun. I'm very proud of the work that my students are doing, and even more so of the level of deep understanding that they have developed on the 1911. We've put together a great little community on Patreon, and I enjoy sharing the knowledge.

TAL: We know this is a loaded question, but do you think the .45 ACP is "dead"?

HY: I feel that "dead" might be a little harsh, but for law enforcement use the current technology of 9mm bonded JHP (jacketed hollow point) has absolutely

leveled the playing field in ammunition. There's no reason to have more recoil and lower capacity when the terminal results are indistinguishable between typical service handgun calibers. That said, I still prefer for my single-stack 1911 pistols to be .45 because I like the larger selection of parts and magazines as well as the proven format.

TAL: What Springfield model would you recommend for the person who is buying their first 1911?

HY: I think that a new 1911 user would be well served with a 5" traditional bushing barrel gun in .45 ACP such as the Operator, Garrison or Ronin. I recommend this size and caliber because there are the greatest number of options for magazines, support gear and parts. It's also an extremely reliable platform.

TAL: Can you tell us a little bit

Over the course of his more than two-decade career, Yam has learned the nuances of building and maintaining duty-grade 1911 pistols intended for hard use.

about what the future holds for you and 10-8 Performance?

HY: I look forward to continuing to bring together my experience in performance shooting, tactical operations, product design, and gunsmithing to offer the best possible products and online training.

TAL: We would like to thank you for your time and for giving us this insight into your background as well as that of 10-8 Performance.

HY: Of course. Thank you. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

10-8PERFORMANCE.COM
PATREON.COM/108PERFORMANCE
SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM

PAUL CARLSON

WHEN



IN ADDITION TO MY WORK as a writer in the firearms industry, I also work as a full-time deputy assigned to patrol duty in a sheriff's office in northeast Ohio. At the start of every shift, I load my cruiser with a seeming truckload of important gear. Some of that gear, like my breaching tools, rarely sees use on patrol. Other items, like my duty rifle, see regular use. I think that this gives me a helpful perspective on what makes for a solid and reliable rifle.

IT
DOES THE SAINT VICTOR
SBR 5.56 HAVE WHAT
IT TAKES?

COUNTS

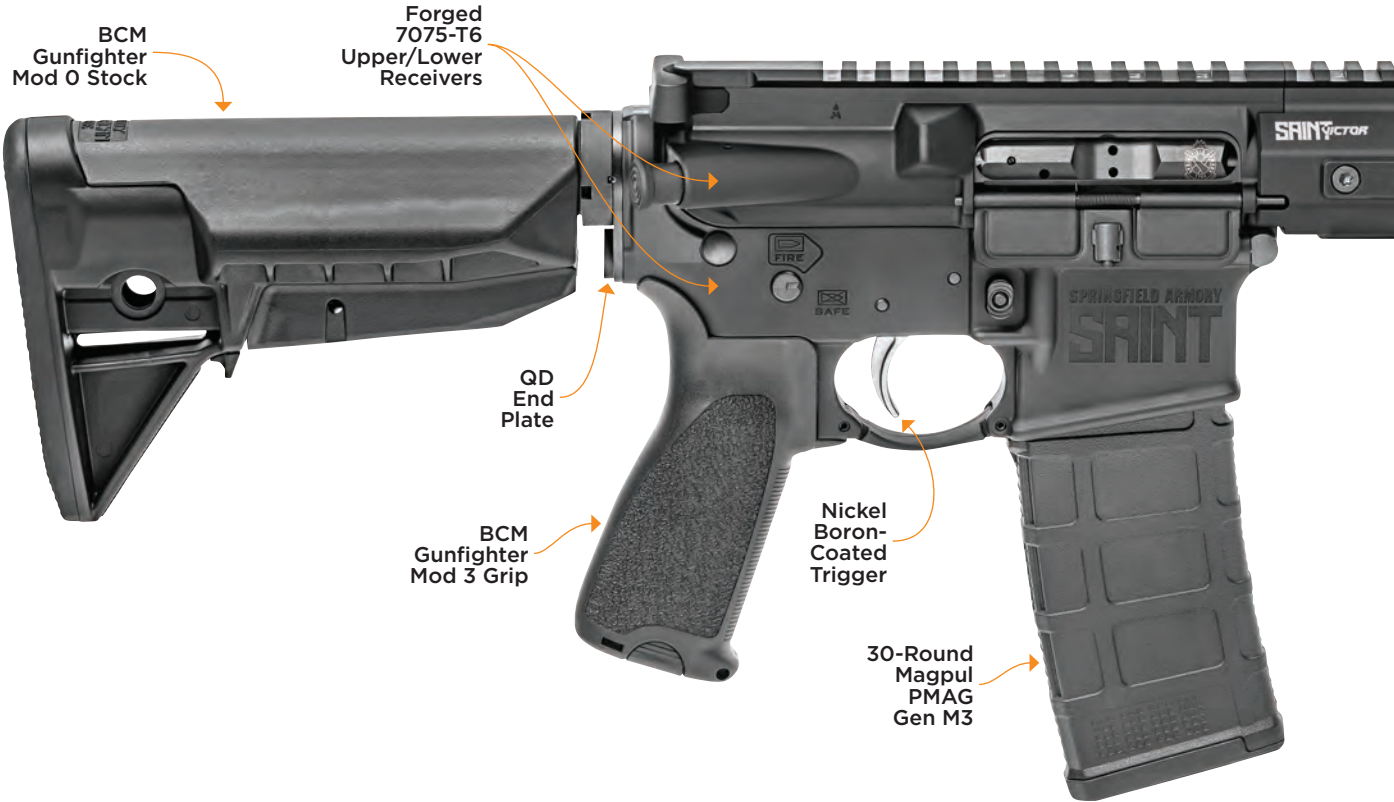
The SAINT Victor SBR makes for a great patrol rifle. Shown equipped with a Trijicon MRO optic, Surefire weaponlight and suppressor, and M-Lok slot covers.



WATCH THE VIDEO
IS THE VICTOR SBR READY FOR DUTY?

IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

SAINT VICTOR SBR 5.56MM



Frankly, my SAINT Victor SBR (short-barreled rifle) 5.56mm is paramount to the work I do. I would say that on approximately 10 percent of the shifts I work, I deploy my rifle. Of the gear I'm not wearing on my person, my 5.56mm gets the most attention. It's made "ready" at the beginning of every shift in a precise and methodical manner so that if I need to press it into use, I know it's good to go. Lives may count on it.

Most of the reviews I write tend to center around firearms for either home or self-defense. When looking at a gun for these purposes, reliability is king. While other attributes like fit and the availability of aftermarket accessories can be important, reliability is far and away the most important consideration.

For my duty rifle, I hold it to a different standard. Don't get me wrong, reliability is still an extremely important aspect of a duty rifle. But when it comes to

SAINT VICTOR SBR 5.56MM

CHAMBERING	5.56mm/.223	
BARREL	11.5"	
WEIGHT	5 lbs., 9 oz.	
OVERALL LENGTH	27.5"-30.75"	
SIGHTS	None	
STOCK	BCM Gunfighter Mod 0	
ACTION	Semi-auto	
FINISH	Black	
CAPACITY	30 (one magazine included)	
MSRP	\$1,150	

duty use, there are other factors I feel are just as important.

WHAT'S NEEDED

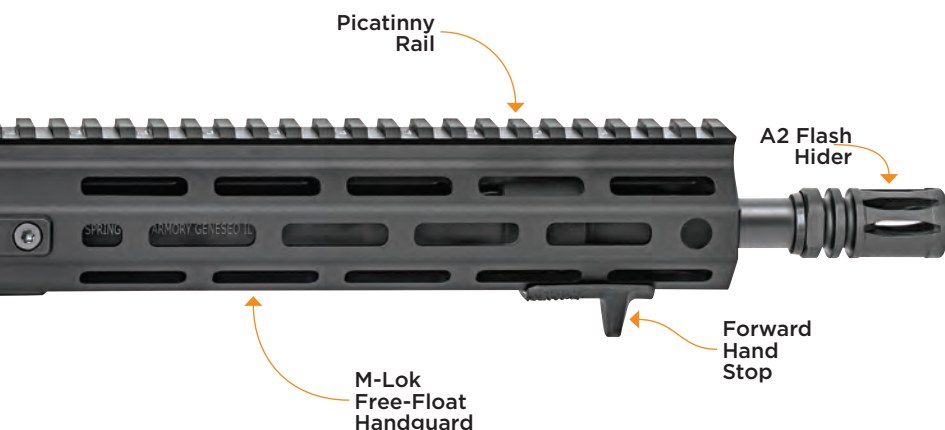
When it comes to selecting a gun for duty such as this, not just any firearm will do. The increased likelihood of this firearm being pressed into use as a life-saving tool and the conditions the rifle is

placed in on every shift demand a special combination of reliability, durability and customization.

When it comes to reliability, a rifle such as this needs to go "bang" every time the trigger is pressed. My SAINT Victor SBR has done that. It has run reliably for me in difficult circumstances in training over the past two years. It doesn't matter what ammo I'm running — even cheap range ammunition — the gun just runs. Again, this is a paramount quality in my duty rifle.

The durability requirement for my SAINT Victor SBR is just a slight notch below the reliability requirement in importance. Remember that stat I threw out earlier? In 10% of my shifts, my rifle is in use. That means it is out, in my hands or slung on my person many, many times.

And the stresses it faces do not just come from conventionally



employing it. Having my SBR on my back while I'm breaching an exterior door means my gun is exposed to an environment with significant stress, wear and tear. And while the finish of my gun shows that wear, the rifle keeps on going.

Also, I stow my rifle in a padded case in the back of my Tahoe. Each shift exposes my rifle to 250-350 miles of vibration, bumps and bangs that can take their toll on any piece of equipment.

FITTING IT OUT

And what about customization? These days, an AR-15 duty rifle without a selection of must-have accessories simply comes up short.

For starters, a rifle without a sling is a liability. The SAINT Victor SBR has QD sling mount points on both sides of the BCM Gunfighter Mod 0 stock as well as the free-floated, M-Lok compatible handguard. In addition,

The handguard is free-floated around the barrel on the SBR. Shown equipped with Sure-fire suppressor adapter rather than the standard A2 flash hider.



the back of the receiver sports another QD socket for those of you who like to sling your rifle at the midpoint. I personally rock a Defense Mechanisms Rifle Sling with QD mounts locked into the right side of the buttstock and the left front of the handguard.

The SAINT SBR's

flat-top upper receiver and handguard provide a Picatinny rail along the entire top length of the gun for the mounting of optics, back-up sights, lasers and anything else you might need (or are required) to attach. My personal rifle has a Trijicon MRO optic on it. Also, the rail holds the switch for my weaponlight. Finally, the M-Lok compatible handguard allows the mounting of just about anything else you could need.

As you can see, my SAINT Victor SBR provides reliability and durability, as well as the ability to customize it as I need it.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There was obvious thought that went into the layout of the SAINT Victor SBR. I'm not going to call out all the details, but the particulars are listed in this article's specification chart, including the MSRP of \$1,150. Instead, I'm going to share the details that I feel are important from my perspective.

First, the size. The Victor SBR is small. With the stock fully collapsed, the 11.5"-barreled SBR is just 27.5" in length. With the stock fully extended, the length comes in at a short 30.75". In my opinion, the length is an advantage in two situations.

The first is if your job has you regularly working inside a vehicle while wearing your rifle. The short length of the SBR is a decided advantage here. The second situation is my personal situation. I use my rifle almost exclusively outside of the vehicle. As a result, I don't need the short length of the SAINT Victor SBR. So, why did I select an SBR? Because it's the perfect host for a can, and I do run my gun suppressed.

Next is the single-sided safety. I



know ambidextrous selector levers are cool and a boon for southpaw shooters, but having a single-sided safety means you can sling your rifle with the selector lever away from your body.

And lastly, there is the bolt carrier group (BCG). The heart of an AR is its BCG, and Springfield selected an enhanced M16 bolt carrier with a 9310-steel bolt for strength and durability. In addition, it is Melonite-coated and is both high-pressure tested and magnetic particle inspected (HPT/MPI).

HANDS-ON

As I've already mentioned, I've spent more than two years putting this short-barrel AR-15 rifle to the test and it hasn't disappointed. I've pushed it very hard, and it has kept running. And in my time with it, I have come to really respect and trust the rifle.

As I mentioned, I have run this SBR very hard with a wide variety



IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The SBR's Accu-Tite system allows you to adjust the tension between the receivers through a green nylon-tipped screw. Rifle shown fitted with a non-standard ambi safety.

In training and in the field, the author's SAINT Victor SBR has stood up to all he threw at it, including taking part in breaching operations and training.

of ammunition over the past two years. Some of it was high-quality ammo; others, not so much. It all ran. However, we all know a duty or defensive rifle needs to be paired with the right ammunition. For the purposes of this article, I reached out to Black Hills Ammunition for some of the best 5.56 rounds in the business.

Black Hills was happy to help out and, in the process, I found one round in particular that paired with the Victor SAINT SBR extremely well. But that being said, all of it was impressive.

To see what the SBR could do with the ammunition, I tested for accuracy from a bench on a rest at 50 yards without the benefit of a magnified optic. I ran 62-gr. Dual

Purpose and TSX loads, as well as a 77-gr. Open Tip Match load.

All of the ammo performed well without a hiccup, but the real standout was the 62-gr. Dual Purpose round. Needless to say, with a group of just over .60" at 50 yards I was extremely impressed with this load. Black Hills certainly deserves a look if you care about the quality of your ammo. Check out the accompanying chart for the full results.

During my time with the SAINT Victor SBR over the past two years, I have learned a lot about it and its use. For example, the M-Lok slots have diagonal ends that can sometimes make mounting M-Lok accessories between two adjacent rails require a little extra effort. Not a big deal, just be aware.

I also experienced one instance of my adjustable gas block adjustment screw moving a bit. To address this, I added a monthly check



The author was able to shoot this tight .635" group at 50 yards with the Black Hills 62-gr. Dual Performance 5.56mm load. Shooting was with a non-magnified red dot sight.

PERFORMANCE (50 YDS.) SAINT VICTOR SBR 5.56MM

LOAD	GROUP SIZE	VELOCITY
BLACK HILLS 62-GR. DUAL PERFORMANCE	0.6"	2,664 fps
BLACK HILLS 62-GR. BARNES TSX	1.9"	2,666 fps
BLACK HILLS 77-GR. OPEN TIP MATCH	1.6"	2,422 fps

Group size is measured in inches and is best of three-shot groups and fired from a bench at 50 yards. Velocity in feet per second and is the average of five rounds at 10 ft. fired across a LabRadar chronograph. Abbreviations fps (feet per second), gr. (grain), TSX (Triple-Shock X).

of the screw to my maintenance schedule for the rifle and have not had any issues. Road vibrations are real for rifles that live in vehicles. If

you carry a rifle in your car, on duty or not, make sure to check everything with threads, regularly.

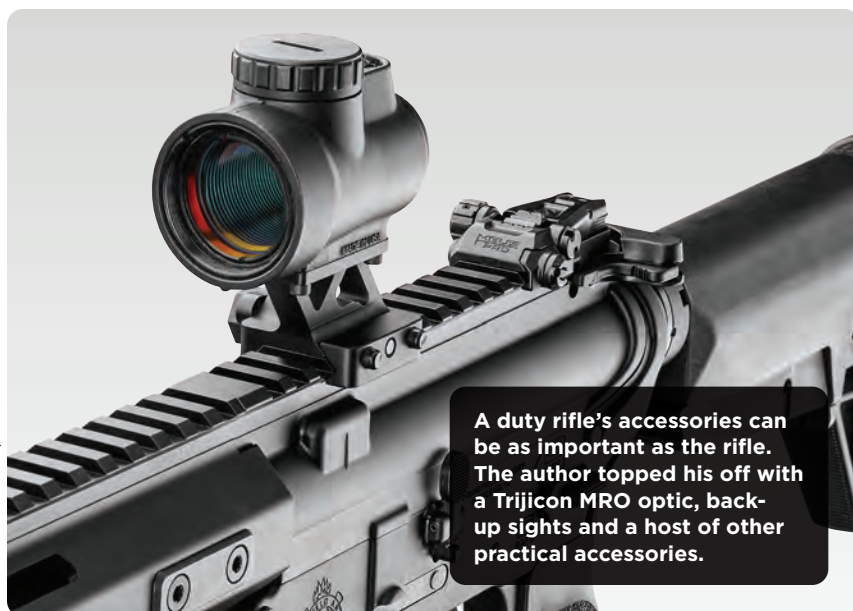
CONCLUSION

If acquiring an SBR is a possibility for you, the SAINT Victor SBR 5.56mm definitely deserves your attention. Considering its reasonable price, you can pick up a Springfield SBR and a suppressor for a total price around what you might pay for some other rifles.

I can honestly say the SAINT Victor SBR AR-15 rifle has performed extremely well for me over an extended period of time of some very hard use, and I expect it has a lot of life left in it. I never worry if my rifle is going to be ready. I know that if I do my part, it will have my back. And that means a lot to me. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM
BLACK-HILLS.COM
SUREFIRE.COM
TRIJICON.COM



A duty rifle's accessories can be as important as the rifle. The author topped his off with a Trijicon MRO optic, backup sights and a host of other practical accessories.

IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



OUT THE BOX

The innovative design of the SnapSafe Modular Safe series makes locating them practically anywhere in your house easy.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

**SNAPSAFE'S MODULAR
SAFE SERIES IS HELPING
RESHAPE HOW WE VIEW
GUN STORAGE.**

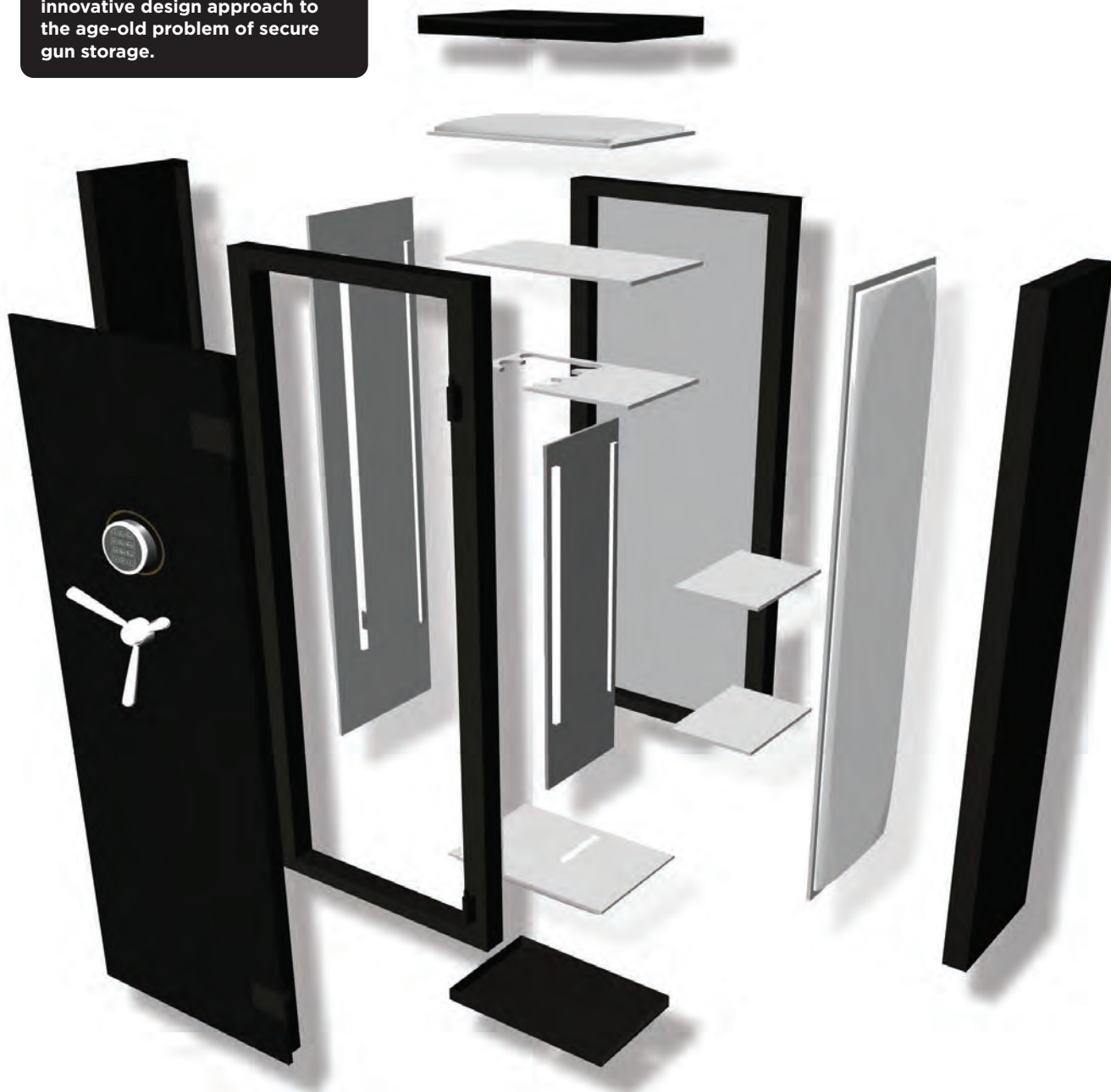
MIKE BOYLE

BEST KNOWN for its innovative bullet designs and high-quality ammunition, Hornady is also disrupting the safe industry's status quo with the SnapSafe brand that it acquired in 2015. While big steel boxes admittedly may not sound terribly compelling at first, SnapSafe is delivering some fascinating designs that are gaining a great deal of attention.

The SnapSafe line is made up four primary categories: its modular safes, vault doors, spe-

cialty safes (for home office or vehicle), lock boxes and an extensive line of accessories.

SnapSafe Modular Safes offer an innovative design approach to the age-old problem of secure gun storage.



While all of these offerings have their merits, it's the interesting modular safes we will be considering in this article.

Made up of three primary models — the Titan, Super Titan and the Super Titan Double Door — this line of safes offers a unique level of modularity and design that could completely change how you store your firearms.

SECURITY NEEDS

As responsible gun owners, we must ensure that our firearms are secure in the home environment in which we live. Secure storage can take many forms, but for many of us, a safe is the best option. Smaller lock-box-style safes are fine if our collection consists of a handgun or two, but that option is off the table if long guns

or multiple handguns are part of the picture.

A full-size, stand-up metal safe affords a number of advantages. First and foremost, it keeps your firearms out of the hands of unauthorized persons. Also, firearms are a prime target in residential burglaries, and a good safe will certainly frustrate the efforts of an individual who would other-

IMAGE: SNAPSAFE



A SnapSafe Modular Safe is delivered direct to your home disassembled. Shown is the largest Super Titan XXL Double Door variant, as delivered.

wise take your valuable property.

In addition to your firearms, other valuables such as jewelry can be stored there, and most of the higher quality safes will afford some protection from fire.

WEIGHTY CONCERNS

One of the obstacles relative to a safe in the house has long been their size and weight. Quality safes are large and heavy, and getting them delivered and moved to their final destination in your home is never a simple or easy process. Negotiating narrow hallways, doorways and stairs with something that stands five feet or taller and weighs about as much as an old VW Beetle is not a task that can be taken lightly. But thanks to the innovative thinkers at SnapSafe, there is an alternative for you.

Unlike traditional safes that are welded together, SnapSafe offers designs that are modular in nature. Basically, you receive the safe broken down into individual parts that can be moved to the desired location for your

safe much more easily, and then assembled in that spot.

Compare this to the freight delivery of a traditional safe. With these products, the driver typically drops it at the curb and you have to figure it out from there. For a safe that might weigh 600, 800 or even 1,000 lbs., you can see how this could be problematic for many people.

SnapSafe modular safes are tough and durable. Their modular design doesn't mean they are

fragile, as a safe door alone might weigh nearly 100 lbs. But compare that to the size and bulk of an entire welded safe. A married couple could maneuver a part weighing under 100 lbs. through a house with relative ease. Compared to a traditional safe, the individual components of a SnapSafe are quite manageable and easy to move.

SOME ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

I confess to being all thumbs when it comes to assembling the new propane grill or the kid's bicycle. Consequently, one of my concerns about any large product like this is how it might all ultimately come together.

As it turns out, assembling a SnapSafe is easier than many of you might imagine. Assembly requires just a single tool — a single socket wrench — that is provided with the safe along with

The primary components of even the largest of the SnapSafe Modular Safes are easily movable by two people. Super Titan XXL Double Door parts shown.





The only tool you need to assemble the safe is a socket wrench, which is included with the safe in a plastic case along with all the parts needed for assembly.



Assembling a SnapSafe modular safe is quick and easy, with the primary components going together with little trouble.

all the parts and pieces you need to assemble it. In fact, it comes in a handy sealed plastic case. To guide your assembly process, SnapSafe has a detailed instruction video on its website to make the whole thing trouble-free. Also, the carpeted interiors feature modular/adaptable shelving designs for you to configure to your needs.

With the SnapSafe modular assembly system, the walls lock together from the inside. In theory, this provides a safe that is every bit as secure as a traditional welded unit. Should you have to move it to another location in your home — or, for that matter, move to another home — it comes apart just as easily.

OTHER FEATURES

Even though the modular SnapSafe is bolted together rather than welded, it indeed appears to be every bit as strong compared to a traditional welded cabinet. Featuring a lifetime warranty, the safes have a powder-coated exterior. The solid steel

door is 3/16" thick steel and is described as being both sledge-hammer- and pry bar-resistant. In addition, 9-gauge two-ply steel exterior walls add further strength to the design.

The SnapSafe Modular Safes series is made up of three primary offerings: the Titan, the Super Titan and the Super Titan Double Door. Of that latter version of the design, there are two variants — the XL and the XXL.

TITAN (MODEL 75010)

EXTERIOR SIZE	59" (H) x 22" (W) x 17.5" (D)
EXTERIOR WALLS	9 gauge steel
WEIGHT	400 lbs.
LOCKING BOLTS	8
CAPACITY	12+ long guns
LOCK	SecuRAM digital with mechanical back-up
MSRP	\$1,969

SUPER TITAN (MODEL 75011)

EXTERIOR SIZE	59" (H) x 38" (W) x 17.5" (D)
EXTERIOR WALLS	9 gauge steel
WEIGHT	550 lbs.
LOCKING BOLTS	8
CAPACITY	24+ long guns
LOCK	SecuRAM digital with mechanical back-up
MSRP	\$2,509

The Titan model is the smallest in the line and is priced at an MSRP of \$1,969 (as a note, the MSRP of all the Modular Safes include shipping charges). It measures 59" in height, 22" in width and 17.5" in depth (add 3" for the handle). Designed with a 12-plus long gun capacity, it weighs 400 lbs. The door contains eight 1" steel live locking bolts, and a SecuRAM UL-listed digital lock with an EMP-proof mechanical key back-up rounds out the package.

Next up is the Super Titan, with an MSRP of \$2,509. Featuring a single door, it bumps up the size from the Titan to 59" in height, 38" in width and 17.5" deep (again, add 3" for the handle). This safe features a 24-plus long gun capacity and weighs in at 550 lbs. Like the Titan, it features eight 1" steel live locking bolts and a SecuRAM digital lock.

Last up is the Super Titan Double Door model, offered in both XL and XXL variants. As noted by the name, this large safe features double doors that sport 14 1" steel live locking bolts and a SecuRAM digital lock. The XL model has



The safes all come with reconfigurable shelving and carpeted interiors. Super Titan XL Double Door model shown.

an MSRP of \$3,269 and features a 59" height, 38" width and 24" depth (as always, add 3" for the handle). The weight of this model is 660 lbs., and it can hold 36-plus long guns.

The XXL model of the Super Titan Double Door takes it one step further in size and capacity as the largest model offered. Priced at an MSRP of \$3,819, it is 59" in height, 46" in width and 30" in depth (with an added 3" for the handle). The weight of the safe is 900 lbs. and is rated to hold 56-plus long guns.

SnapSafe's SecuRAM digital lock is a UL-listed electronic lock that operates on a single 9-volt

battery. The SecuRAM contains non-volatile memory, meaning it will remember your combination, even if you remove the battery. A secondary mechanical key lock allows you entry to the contents in the event of a primary lock failure or even an EMP attack. If that doesn't inspire confidence, I am not sure what would!

Fire protection is also factored into the designs of these safes. Heat-activated fire seals in the door expand when fire is present. Fire blankets sandwiched between the exterior walls and inner panels will help protect the contents of the safe from a 2300°F fire for one hour.

This is an important feature to keep in mind when safe shopping as some companies might use high temperature ratings, but it might be for a very short period of time.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

As one who has sweated, wrestled and cursed his way through moving a gun safe into his own home, the innovative modular design approach from SnapSafe brings an appealing new dimension to the table. All too often, a gun safe is placed in the garage of a home because that is as far as its owner can take it. But in all fairness, I guess that beats making it the centerpiece of the living room.

The new modular SnapSafe not only gives you peace of mind from theft or fire, but it allows you to store your firearms pretty much any place you choose, including in tight spots or locations accessed only by stairs. If you're on the hunt for a quality gun safe, these unique modular units from SnapSafe warrant some serious consideration. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
SNAPSAFE.COM

SUPER TITAN XL DOUBLE DOOR (MODEL 75014)

EXTERIOR SIZE	59" (H) x 38" (W) x 24" (D)
EXTERIOR WALLS	9 gauge, 2-ply steel
WEIGHT	660 lbs.
LOCKING BOLTS	14
CAPACITY	36+ long guns
LOCK	SecuRAM digital with mechanical back-up
MSRP	\$3,269

SUPER TITAN XXL DOUBLE DOOR (MODEL 75013)

EXTERIOR SIZE	59" (H) x 46" (W) x 30" (D)
EXTERIOR WALLS	9 gauge, two-ply steel
WEIGHT	900 lbs.
LOCKING BOLTS	14
CAPACITY	56+ long guns
LOCK	SecuRAM digital with mechanical back-up
MSRP	\$3,819

DAN ABRAHAM

THEN



The Shield SMSc from the Springfield Armory Webstore, paired with the Hellcat OSP 9mm, makes for an ideal EDC set-up.

NEW NORM

THE **COMPACT SHIELD SMSC** PROVIDES AN IDEAL RED DOT FOR YOUR EDC.



NOT THAT LONG AGO, the use of reflex/red dot optics on handguns was limited to the realm of competitive and custom guns — and practically none were CCW-ready firearms. These were large handguns and, usually, large optics. So, the fact that red dots on EDC-ready firearms is the norm now is quite remarkable — and in my opinion, due in large part to the launch of the Springfield Armory Hellcat micro 9mm in 2019.

With its compact size, impressive capacity, and the option of an OSP (Optical Sight Pistol) cut slide ready to accept a direct-mounted optic, the Hellcat helped make the use of a red dot on a small, easy-to-carry pistol the new norm. To ensure the best — and lowest — fit possible, the Hellcat's slide was cut with a foot-print designed to accept the popular Shield RMSc/SMSc red dot.

The benefits to this system were not only a precise and consistent fit, but also the ability to direct mount the optic without a plate adapter system. This allows for the very small optic to sit low enough to allow the Hellcat's U-Dot sights — made up of a large tritium/luminescent

front dot and a U-notch "Tactical Rack" rear — to co-witness.

MY CHOICE

I recently decided to upgrade the reflex optic on my personal Hellcat OSP. As the Hellcat OSP is a high-performance carry pistol, I wanted to give it (and myself) every advantage possible.

For obvious reasons, I prefer a small and durable optic that will enhance the capabilities of the Hellcat OSP. I went to the Springfield Armory Webstore to see what reflex optics were available, and found that they offered the Shield SMSc with the 4 MOA red dot option.

For those not familiar with the SMSc, which stands for "Shield Mini Sight Compact", it is a 1X lightweight and compact reflex/red dot optic. Featuring a lightweight nylon glass-filled polymer body, it shares the same overall



WATCH THE VIDEO:
TESTING THE SHIELD SMSC





IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

size and footprint as the company's aluminum-bodied RMSc.

The optic weighs just 0.57 oz. and is powered by a single CR2032 battery that fits on the underside of the optic. As noted, it is a direct fit for the Hellcat OSP's slide, and measures in at 1.7" long, 1" wide and 0.9" tall. The system runs with an auto-adjust brightness system that ensures it is "always on" and adjusts automatically to the brightness of its surroundings.

THE DETAILS

Shield Sight's was one of the earliest optic manufacturers to produce popular reflex optics for pistols, and they have a full line of reflex optics for many pistol applications. Whether it's for competitive shooting or concealed carry, Shield Sight's has it covered.

They developed the larger RMS/RMS footprint that has become very popular as an industry standard that many optic manufactur-

SHIELD SMSc	
OPTIC TYPE	Reflex
RETICLE	4 MOA, red
MAGNIFICATION	1X
WEIGHT	0.57 oz. (w/ battery)
DIMENSIONS	1.7" (L), 1.0" (W), 0.9" (H)
MOUNT	Shield SMSc/RMSc footprint
BODY	Nylon glass-filled polymer
OPERATION	Auto-adjusting
BATTERY/LIFE	Single CR2032 battery, up to three years of life
MSRP	\$299.99

ers follow. And the development of the compact RMSc/SMSc footprint only enhanced their prominence in this market.

In my opinion, the Shield SMSc is an ideal reflex optic for concealed carry. Carriers who select optics on their EDC pistols prefer a compact design that is lightweight. It makes no sense to add any more bulk or weight than necessary to a carry pistol.

As noted, the Shield SMSc

features a matte black glass-filled nylon polymer body that is lightweight, yet durable. The 1X quartz lens features an anti-reflective, low-parallax, non-color coating.

WEIGHTY CONCERNS

As I mentioned, the SMSc is an incredibly light reflex optic. Shield Sight's said the SMSc optic weighs just 0.57 oz. with the battery. On my scale, the SMSc weighed in at just 0.50 oz., with that including the optic, the CR2032 battery and the two smaller screws I used to directly mount the optic on the Hellcat OSP. Yes, one half of one ounce.

It's not only light, but also very compact. As noted, the overall length of the housing is 1.7", and the width and the height are both right around 1". The height is the perfect compact balance between being low enough for carry, but large enough to offer a good-sized window for quick eye-to-red dot target acquisition.

BACKING-UP

Sight alignment is very important with reflex red dot optics. In my opinion, shooters need the comfort of knowing that their pistol's iron sights are always accessible. Let's face it — anything that is electronic has the potential of failure. Whether it is a dead battery or an optic malfunction, the shooter needs to be able to acquire the pistol's sights as a back-up plan.

Certain reflex optics do not offer a direct co-witness with the pistol's iron sights. I could just imagine a defensive scenario going wrong because the defensive shooter did not have an accurate sight picture. As concealed carriers, we must plan and prepare for any situation that could arise.

Thanks to the small size of the SMSc, the low direct-mount capability of the Hellcat OSP and the pistol's U-Dot sights, co-witnessing the Hellcat's irons with the SMSc is easy to do. Also, the SMSc has a channel cut into the body of the optic that helps facilitate this feature. If for some reason the red dot does not appear, the Hellcat's iron sights are accessible and ready for action.

WHAT'S IN THE CASE?

Shield Sights offers everything the user needs in the package to directly mount the SMSc reflex sight to the Springfield Hell-

cat OSP. The optic comes with a protective rubber cover for storage when the gun/optic is not in use. The optic also comes with two hex wrenches. One is for mounting the optic to the pistol and the other is for adjusting the red dot.

It has an adjustment mini dial for sighting in, two sets of screws for a range of mounting optics, and a single CR2032 battery. The package also includes an optional mounting plate and rubber shims that I did not need due to the direct-mount capability of the Hellcat OSP. Shield Sights also includes a warranty card with a QR code and a couple stickers with the Shield Sights logo.

HANDS-ON

I was immediately impressed by the SMSc. Its red dot is incredibly clear and crisp. It has an automatic brightness adjustment, therefore there are no buttons or levers on the housing frame. The auto brightness does all of

the work, which simplifies the process for the concealed carrier.

The red dot is very bright in sunny, daylight conditions and is appropriately dim in low-light conditions. Its lowest setting is night vision compatible. Basically, the auto brightness feature takes the guesswork out of the hands of the user. The advantage with auto brightness is the red dot brightness will suit any environment setting.

The Shield SMSc is powered by a single CR2032 battery that installs underneath the housing. The average battery life is between two to three years. At its lowest setting (dark conditions), the battery life is rated at a longer four years or more.

INSTALLATION

The Shield Sights SMSc mounts directly on the Springfield Armory Hellcat OSP with no need for the included plate. I used the shorter mounting screws included in the case that protrude below the optic base approximately $\frac{1}{8}$ of an inch. It was a perfect fit for the Hellcat OSP.

A special note here: I feel it's important to add blue Loctite on the mounting screws. Just a couple drops on the mounting screws will keep them tight and in place, even under heavy usage. I used the mounting hex wrench provided in the case to install the Shield SMSc tightly on the Hellcat OSP. All in all, this was a quick and easy process.



The Hellcat OSP's slide features a removable slide cover plate for easy installation of an optic.



IMAGE: AUTHOR

The author found the SMSc and the Hellcat to be a very viable EDC combo for his needs.

RANGE TIME

The Shield Sights SMSc out of the case was not too far off target at approximately 20 yards away. The first few shots grouped a couple inches low, and windage was just a little off to the left. I used the Shield Sights adjustment wrench to make the corrections. With a total of 10 shots fired, the Shield SMSc was sighted in.

It was then time to hit the steel targets. Stationary shooting is fine for confidence building; however, I prefer to transition between targets to get a true feel of a pistol and an optic's performance. After a couple magazines of shooting, I was transitioning and ringing the 8" steel target rack consistently from 12 yards.

During this range time, I was also able to experience the Shield

Sights auto brightness function in action. The range day began with bright sunshine, and then it turned into an overcast and cloudy day.

The red dot slightly dimmed with the lower light environment. The auto brightness suited the changing environment perfectly.

The SMSc is direct mounted to the slide, allowing for co-witnessing with the U-Dot iron sights.



CONCLUSION

Shield Sights produces quality reflex red dot optics for pistols. Their reflex optics have a fine reputation for reliability and ease of use. My goal was to enhance the Springfield Armory Hellcat OSP with a high-quality reflex optic.

My goal was met with the SMSc. I feel the pistol/optic combination was exactly what I was looking to accomplish. In my opinion, the Shield SMSc offers the precise balance of compact form and reliable function. In my estimation, a pistol/optic combination like this is definitely the new EDC norm. 

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TAKIN



The author had the specialists at Smith Enterprise convert his M1A rifle into a civilian-legal version of the Mk 14 EBR Mod 0 SEI.

WATCH THE VIDEO
AN M1A GETS THE EBR TREATMENT



ING STOCK

**SMITH ENTERPRISE TURNS THE
AUTHOR'S M1A INTO HIS DREAM
MK 14 EBR MOD 0 SEI RIFLE.**

JEREMY TREMP



AS I BEGAN A CAREER in the industry and had the opportunity to learn more about a wide range of firearms, my love for the M14 and its variants only grew. I have been a fan of this design since childhood, and it has not diminished any over the years.

Then, in 2020, I had the opportunity to write my first article for *The Armory Life*. Naturally, I chose the Springfield Armory M1A Loaded Precision to write about. Since that article, I have written 10 articles involving M1A rifles, several of which featured the work of the legendary team of Ron Smith and Andy Horton over at Smith Enterprise, Inc. (SEI).

To say that getting the chance to meet the guys at Smith Enterprises was an honor is an understatement. Over the course of those pieces, I had them build out an M21A5 Crazy Horse as well as a really cool SOCOM 16 variant. Throughout the process, I was blown away by their commitment to craftsmanship as well as all the history behind the shop.

Based on my experiences with those earlier projects, I decided to hand over my beloved M1A SOCOM with a Sage International EBR chassis stock to them. My goal was to have them turn that rifle into an Mk 14 EBR Mod 0 SEI, similar to the platform they delivered to the U.S. Navy SEALs.

The history of that rifle is quite interesting, to say the least. In the 2000's, the United States Special Operations Command requested a more compact version of the M14 that could be used for close-quarters combat as well as longer-range engagements. This new version required a telescoping stock, adjustable cheek comb, pistol grip, Picatinny rails on the handguard, and a Picatinny rail for a magnified optic.

Following the tragic attacks on 9/11, the U.S. Military began to realize the majority of their engagements in the Middle East were 500 yards

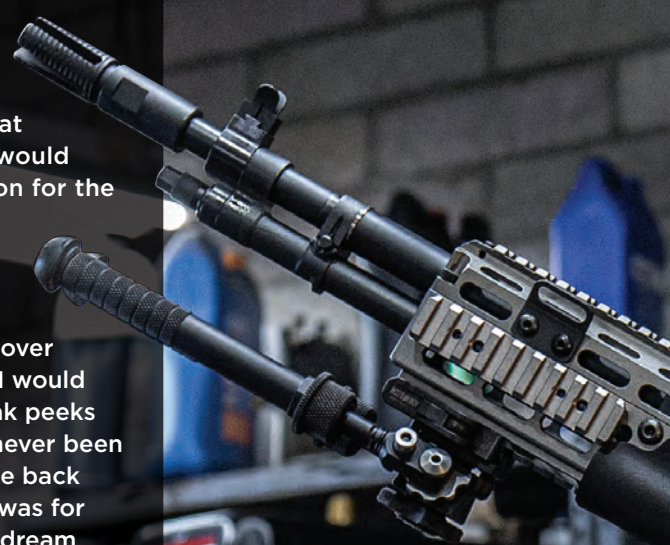
and beyond. The 5.56mm's weren't as effective at those distances, so the pressure was on to deliver firepower at those distances. The timing was perfect for the Mk 14 EBR to shine. Around that same time, Smith Enterprise created its own version of the Mk 14 EBR that used a medium-weight 18" barrel and their Vortex flash hider. That was the version that would serve as the inspiration for the build with my rifle.

THE PROJECT

Ron and Andy got to work on my M1A and, over the next few months, I would get updates with sneak peeks on the progress. I've never been so excited to get a rifle back from a craftsman as I was for this one. This was my dream build coming to life.

I provided Smith Enterprise with an M1A SOCOM, Sage EBR Chassis, EOTech Vudu 3.5-18x50mm and an Atlas Bipod for the project. Below is a list of the work that I had done on the rifle via Smith Enterprise, Inc.

- Medium weight 18" SEI barrel (salt bath nitride): **\$450**
- Vortex Flash Hider: **\$90**
- Warfighter Gas System (with enhanced piston): **\$220**
- Gas lock with dovetail: **\$80**
- SEI Extended Bolt Stop: **\$55**
- SEI trigger job: **\$125**
- Polished and salt bath nitride op rod: **\$120**
- Tactical Sniper Mount M14: **\$320**
- Bolt engraved with M14 Mod 0: **\$110**



A full-page photograph of an older man with grey hair, Ron Smith, standing in a workshop. He is wearing a black t-shirt and blue jeans. He is holding a black Mk 14 EBR Mod 0 SEI rifle with both hands. The rifle is equipped with a large Eotech scope and a Vudu sight. The background shows a workshop with a brick wall and various tools and equipment.

Ron Smith is shown here in his shop showcasing the completed Mk 14 EBR Mod 0 SEI rifle.



Using Remington's 168-gr. Premier Match load, the author tested his modified M1A rifle for reliability and accuracy.

Andy and Ron pored over every detail of my rifle until everything was perfectly dialed in. A few weeks ago, I got a text with a grouping from the range showing off the sub-MOA capability of the rifle. I was down at their shop the next sunrise to pick up my rifle, and boy was it worth the wait. Bucket list rifle number one was now complete.

RANGE TIME

The very next day, I took my newly built Mk 14 EBR Mod 0 clone out to the range to send some lead downrange. This build is an absolute beast, weighing around 14 lbs. when fully loaded and set up. When you pick up this rifle, you feel like you are holding a lasting and capable tool.

Shooting the EBR always brings a broad smile to my face. You can

just feel the power of the .308 rifle cartridge thumping out of this beauty. There's also nothing like the sound of the mechanicals in the M1A as it cycles a round—it's just so satisfying. There are a lot of amazing modern rifles that are hard to compete with, but when you shoot an M1A it just sounds and feels special.

A range day without accuracy testing this venerable legend would be a crime, so I set up the rifle for a five-shot group to see what she was capable of.

I have heard people inaccurately state that the M1A is a 2 MOA rifle, and I am here to prove them wrong. Yes, I know mine has been accurized, but I've shot a .5" group with the M1A Loaded Precision and some hunting loads in the past. These rifles can shoot.

The ammo I used for those precise groups was 168-gr. Remington Premiere Match .308. I've had fantastic results with this ammo before, so I wanted to see if this M1A would like it.

Setting up for the cold bore shots on a new rifle always gets my nerves going. I tend to overthink every little thing that I am doing, and I put a lot of undue pressure on myself by expecting perfection. I pulled the very first shot, and I felt it immediately. Mulligan! Settling back in and getting a better feel for the trigger, I restarted the group.

Five shots later and I was sitting at about .75" MOA, with a few shots going through the same holes. Call me very impressed. This is exactly the kind of results I was hoping to get out of this newly refreshed M1A from Smith Enterprise. Ron and Andy do not disappoint.

THE RESULT

For the purists out there, you will likely call out the lack of foregrip and my choice of bipod and optic on this build. For me, I appreciate having this platform with my personal spin on it. This isn't a safe pony, but rather a usable, viable

platform worthy of training and usage. Firearms represent pieces of each of our personalities, and my EBR represents my love of history, technology and impressive craftsmanship.

I chose the EOTech Vudu 3.5-18x50mm as my optic because of its extreme clarity and rugged durability. The reticle is intuitive and crisp, easily discerning small targets at full magnification. Personally, the medium range 3-18X style scopes represent my favored shooting configuration. You retain a large field of usability, from close range to medium ranges.

I utilized the BT Industries Atlas Bipod over the traditional Harris Bipod because I've used these for years and have the utmost trust in their design and reliability. This is my go-to bipod for all my precision rifle work.

The Smith Tactical Sniper Mount was used with an EOTech scope. Note the "UNITED STATES PROPERTY" markings.



In my opinion, the Sage EBR stock is the ultimate option for an M1A build. It's hard to imagine a more iconic design and look for the rifle than this chassis system. Frankly, most firearms enthusiasts will recognize this configuration of the M14-pattern rifle immediately upon sight.

Is it heavy? Absolutely. Is it accurate? Most definitely. Is it necessary? I'll let you be the judge of



Note the Smith Enterprise pronged Vortex Flash Hider and Warfighter Gas System.

that; but for me, it's the cherry on top. The modularity and rugged nature of the EBR chassis turns the M1A into an absolute machine. This rifle will be in my collection for as long as I am around, and then be handed down to my kids for safe-keeping.

I feel incredibly blessed to be able to have friends such as the team at Smith Enterprise to work with creating iconic rifles like this, and then telling those stories through *The Armory Life* to readers like yourself.

If you own a Springfield Armory M1A rifle, give Smith Enterprise a close look. You can order parts from their website ala carte, or you can send your rifle in for the full treatment by them. Either way, you can breathe new life into your venerable rifle that continues to show its strength and stands the test of time. 

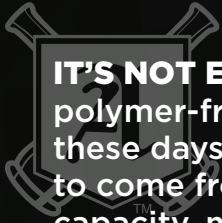
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THE SILENT

THE ECHELON THREADED MODEL ADDS A NEW LAYER OF CAPABILITY TO THIS DUTY-READY 9MM.

JOE KURTENBACH



IT'S NOT EASY to stand out in the market for polymer-frame, full-size semi-automatic handguns these days. In 2019, the industry got a taste of things to come from Springfield Armory with the high-capacity, micro-compact Hellcat. Despite its diminutive size, the Hellcat offered 11+1 magazine capacity and was available at launch with a direct-mount Optical Sight Pistol (OSP) system.



TREATMENT



The Echelon Threaded 9mm takes a proven, duty-ready platform and adds the ability to easily mount the muzzle device of your choice.

IMAGE: DOUG NAES



IMAGE: DOUG NAES

But what does a pint-size pistol like the Hellcat have to do with full-size service sidearms? The Hellcat was the first striker-fired pistol that Springfield Armory designed, from the start, to both take advantage of slide-mounted optics as well as enhanced-capacity magazines. The full-size Echelon was the second.

ENHANCED DUTY PISTOL

Ideal for professional use, home defense and even concealed carry, polymer-framed, striker-fired designs dominate the category of duty pistols thanks to their simple operation, reliability and durable construction. It doesn't hurt that they are generally more affordable than all-metal guns, either.

Now, though, many of the best-known competitors in the duty-pistol category are getting long in the tooth and have struggled to adapt to the demand for slide-mounted optics. That's why when I'm asked about the Echelon and how it stacks up against the

ECHELON THREADED



CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL	5.28" Threaded (1/2x28)
WEIGHT	24.5 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	8.8"
SIGHTS	Three-dot tritium
GRIPS	Integral, polymer
ACTION	Striker-fired
FINISH	Black
CAPACITY	17+1, 20+1 (one magazine of each type included)
MSRP	\$739

field, I immediately point to the Variable Interface System, Springfield's innovative and adaptable approach to slide-mounted optics. Mark my words: The Echelon has effectively freed us from optic-mounting plates.

Do plate systems work? Sure. But the ideal solution for keeping an optic in place during the violent action of recoil is a direct mount between the sight and the slide using deep-seated screws and recoil lugs for added security

The Echelon Threaded model is a sound platform for the optic, weaponlight and suppressor of your choice. Rugged Suppressors Obsidian shown.

— no extra parts or intermediate barriers. The Echelon's innovative system offers just that. Its modular lug design and multiple attachment points allow the system to accommodate more than 30 popular optics and ensure guns equipped with this system are virtually future-proof.

In addition to solving the optic-mounting equation, the Echelon easily keeps pace in terms of capacity. Packing 17 rounds of 9mm has long been considered the standard payload for full-size, double-stack pistols. The Echelon matches that, and also offers a 20-round magazine that increases both capacity and gripping surface, thanks to its textured, extended basepad.

Custom fitment comes standard with the Echelon thanks to the se-

rialized Central Operating Group and the bevy of frame adjustment options. Being that this part is the “firearm,” Springfield can offer three interchangeable grip modules. In addition, three sizes of backstraps are included with the Echelon to further refine the fit, and the backstraps will fit any of the frames.

Overall, the Echelon is a thoroughly modern pistol that offers an innovative take on optic mounting, has capable ammunition capacity, and even addresses fit and feel concerns for the increasingly diverse American handgun market. Now, the pistol takes on another growing trend. Enter the Echelon Threaded, a pistol prepared to offer more bite with less bark.

SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

As the name implies, the Echelon Threaded is distinct for its 5.28” barrel, compared to the standard 4.5” Echelon barrel. The added length extends beyond the slide and provides room for 1/2x28-pitch threading. The thread pat-

The fully ambidextrous Echelon features an ambi slide lock lever and ambi magazine release.



IMAGE: DOUG NAEIS

tern is pretty standard for 9mm firearms, so it should be compatible with most suppressors and other muzzle devices. A knurled thread protector is also included.

After receiving a review sample of the Echelon Threaded, the first order of business was to set the pistol up for use. I have average-size hands, so the standard medium-size grip module works perfectly for me. When it came to backstrap selection, I tested all

three options. Swapping between them is very simple and just requires the internal release tab, accessed through the magazine well, to be depressed. I found that the largest backstrap provided the most engagement with my natural firing grip.

With the grip frame sized and sorted, it was time to add an optic. I opted to use a Leupold Delta-Point Pro (DPP) with a 2.5 MOA red-dot reticle. Two reasons I like Leupold’s DPP: First, it’s a proven design. It’s durable, it has a small reticle for precise shooting, and the external battery access makes maintenance a breeze. Second, considering the Echelon Threaded has the capability to accept a suppressor, I wanted to choose a red-dot sight with a slightly taller deck height. Normally, I favor ultra-low-profile optics to keep the entire firearm package as trim as possible. However, knowing I would be mounting a suppressor, I recognized that a slightly taller optic like



IMAGE: DOUG NAEIS

The Echelon’s serialized Central Operating Group chassis makes swapping out grip modules extremely easy.

ECHELON THREADED



directly to the gun's threaded barrel. I also opted to use the long — 8.6", 11 oz. — configuration for maximum sound suppression.

AT THE RANGE

Ready for the range, I wanted to thoroughly test the Echelon Threaded. That meant everything from running defensive drills to bench-rested accuracy. I also wanted to know how performance would change when a suppressor was added. But before I could begin, I fired a few rounds to zero the Leupold DPP. Typically, I get a rough zero before the first shot by simply "lollipop-ing" the dot reticle over the front iron sight, then refine with feedback from three-shot groups. There is a lot of debate about what distance you should zero your red-dot at — more than enough for its own article. Since I would be conducting accuracy testing at 15 yards, per *The Armory Life* protocol, I set my zero at that distance.

As expected, the Echelon is a beast for defensive work. Coming from the low ready or out of the holster, the gun points very naturally thanks to its ergonomic design and customizable fit. Also, the gun runs fast. I shoot so many micro pistols these days that I sometimes forget how easy it is

the DPP would ensure that I could see and aim over a can.

Following the instructions and diagrams in Springfield's on-line Operation & Safety Manual, mounting the optic was easy. For the Leupold DPP, I used the included pin set 2 and screw set 2A. Just be sure you consult with the optic's instruction manual for

recommended torque values.

Finally, it wouldn't be much of a test if I didn't include a suppressor. I opted to use Silencer Central's Banish 45, a modular .45-caliber can. Well-suited for pistol and rimfire cartridges, the Banish 45 can be run in a long 12-baffle configuration or a shorter eight-baffle setup. It is also adaptable for many firearm platforms thanks to its ability to accept a wide range of mounts and pistons. For the Echelon Threaded, I added the 1/2x28 piston, which would mount



The pistol's Variable Interface System allows for the direct mounting of more than 30 popular optics. The author selected the Leupold DeltaPoint Pro.

to shoot bigger guns, and shoot them well. For the familiarization portion of my test, I rely on a can of mixed 9mm ammo with varied bullet weights and profiles. It's the remnants from 14 years of hand-gun testing, and it does an excellent job of sussing out if a pistol is picky. The Echelon Threaded is not. Not at all.

For accuracy testing, I chose three loads: Hornady American Gunner 124-grain XTP; Remington UMC 124-gr. full-metal jacket (FMJ); and Winchester Defend 147-gr. jacketed hollow point (JHP). The testing standard called for three, five-shot groups from each, fired from a rest at 15 yards.

Across the board, the Echelon Threaded performed admirably, and all of the loads turned in very good accuracy results. In fact, the average of all the groups combined was right at 1.5". In my experience, 2" groups or better at 15 yards is a good expectation for a personal defense firearm with a red-dot sight, so the Echelon and

DeltaPoint Pro combo beat that mark by a fair margin. Full results are tabulated nearby; note that less than two-tenths of an inch separated the individual averages.

During the testing, I really came to appreciate the Echelon's trigger. One of the benefits of a striker-fired gun is the consistency of the trigger pull. It's not that they are short and crisp with a

glass-like break, the way a good 1911 trigger can be, but they tend to be predictable and repeatable in a well-made pistol. The Echelon Threaded was that, and also very smooth, with no detectable grit or hang-ups. A total of 10 pulls with a Lyman Digital Trigger Gauge yielded an average weight of 5 lbs., 5 oz. With the clean travel it felt even lighter and was definitely an aid to accurate shooting.

RUNNING QUIET

With accuracy testing complete, I really wanted to see if there were any performance shifts when a suppressor is added. Three measures I was really watching for were impact shift, velocity changes and effects on reliability.

The first two characteristics are related, but not necessarily the same. Changes in velocity can affect the point of impact. Most commonly, we see vertical string-

The grip module comes with three interchangeable backstraps for customizing the grip to fit perfectly.



ing when velocities increase or decrease. However, when adding a suppressor with internal baffle structures and more than 8" of extra tube, I'm also concerned that the bore alignment and directional qualities of propellant gases may be affected.

I should not have worried. Using the Winchester Defend ammo, I fired several new three-shot groups from the bench without the suppressor and numbered the impacts "1". I then attached the Banish 45 and fired another round of groups at the same targets and labeled the impacts "2". The groups match up nearly perfectly. Only my numbering allowed me to discern suppressed and unsuppressed shots. At 15 yards, there was no noticeable shift. Data from the chronograph further confirmed my findings. The average velocity for 10 rounds with the Banish 45 attached was 1,059 fps, only a 6-fps increase. Negligible.

For reliability testing, it was back to the can of mixed ammo. For those unfamiliar, the concern with adding a suppressor to a handgun is that the added weight of the can, even just a few ounces, will play havoc with the operation of moving parts in a semi-automatic firearm. More so for a tilt-barrel design. That's why pistons have become so prevalent on pistol-caliber suppressors. The spring-loaded adapters help mitigate the adverse effects of muzzle-mounted devices. Regardless of the ammunition used, the Echelon Threaded/Banish 45 combo worked flawlessly. Functionality was 100 percent, with energetic



PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.) ECHELON THREADED

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
HORNADY AMERICAN GUNNER 124-GR. XTP	1,186 fps	1.17"	1.42"
REMINGTON UMC 124-GR. FMJ	1,142 fps	1.50"	1.57"
WINCHESTER DEFEND 147-GR. JHP	1,053 fps	1.10"	1.51"

Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured in feet per second (fps) by a Garmin Xero C1 Chronograph. Abbreviations: FMJ (full metal jacket), gr. (grain), JHP (jacketed hollow point), XTP (eXtreme Terminal Performance).

ejection and no failures to feed.

So, how did it sound? Silencer Central advertises 36 decibels of sound reduction when firing 9mm ammunition through the Banish 45. While I can't confirm the company's measurements, I can attest that the report was reduced to hearing-safe levels. Shooting is still loud, not like you see in the movies, but the noise is dampened and shifted forward away from the ear. I would still highly recommend wearing ear protection when shooting suppressed, but there is no doubt suppressors make any shooting experience more enjoyable.

THE FINAL SCORE

Without question, the Echelon from Springfield Armory is among the most modern handgun

The author ran the Echelon Threaded with a Silencer Central Banish 45 suppressor. It and the pistol performed flawlessly.

designs extant, and it sets a new standard for optics-compatibility with the Variable Interface System. Among full-size duty-rated handguns Springfield is entering a very crowded market, but in the Echelon, I think the company has the right tool for the job.

Already an extremely capable pistol, the Echelon Threaded adds adaptability for muzzle-mounted devices such as suppressors and compensators, further future-proofing the design. If you haven't invested in an Echelon yet, the Threaded model is your do-everything option. Alternatively, threaded barrels for standard Echelons are available in Springfield Armory's online store. There's no excuse not to enjoy a little peace and quiet. 

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Shown here on a Springfield SAINT Edge 5.56mm, the Viridian RFX45 green dot closed-emitter reflex delivers durability and performance in a reasonably priced package.

WATCH THE VIDEO
RUNNING THE RFX45



CLOSING THE DEAL

RUNNING VIRIDIAN'S RFX45 RUGGED AND RELIABLE CLOSED EMITTER GREEN DOT.

SCOTT CONDITT

BACK IN 2006, Viridian Weapon Technologies disrupted the red dot status quo when it brought a green dot to market. Since its introduction, many shooters have favored this color over the more traditional red when it comes to their dots and reticles for their optic.

Why? Simply put, the percentage of people who see a vibrant bright green “better” than other colors on the spectrum is greater. Viridian has built its brand around that science when producing quality green dot optics and other firearms accessories

such as lasers (it does offer red laser options as well).

One of the more recent of their green dot offerings is the RFX45 Closed Emitter Green Dot Reflex Sight in their RFX line of electro optics. Green is one of my absolute favorite

colors when it comes to dots, so I was extremely happy when I received one of the RFX45 units to test out at the range on both my Springfield Prodigy pistol and SAINT Edge 5.56mm.

IN THE BOX

I’m a sucker for high-quality, thoughtfully designed packaging. While engineers and designers can put a ton of time into developing the optics and products we buy, poor packaging can really undermine the experience.

Viridian does a really nice job when it comes to how they present their products to the consumer, and I am not just talking about their spiffy boxes. They give you good value when it comes to the quality and amount of accessories, mounts, tools, and instructions they provide in the box.



Employing an ACRO footprint, the RFX45 can be used on pistols such as this Springfield 1911 DS Prodigy 9mm.

The RFX45 housing is precision machined from 6061 aircraft-grade aluminum, which is both light-weight and durable. Dimensions are 1.9" by 1.1" by 1.1". The fully enclosed green LED emitter within the housing is shielded from dust, debris and possible occlusion from the elements, while also touting an IPX6 water-resistance rating.

The footprint is the widely popular ACRO footprint (adapter plates for footprints such as Docter, RMR and more are available), and the battery life is advertised to provide up to an impressive 50,000+ hours of life from a single CR2032 battery.

The highly visible green dot reticle provides a 5 MOA point of aim,

VIRIDIAN RFX45

OPTIC TYPE	Closed emitter reflex
RETICLE	5 MOA, green
MAGNIFICATION	1X
WEIGHT	1.73 oz.
DIMENSIONS	1.9" (L), 1.1" (W), 1.1" (H)
MOUNT	ACRO footprint
BODY	6061 aluminum, IPX6 waterproof rated
OPERATION	Instant on, 10 brightness settings (eight visible, two NV-compatible)
BATTERY/LIFE	Single CR2032, up 50K hours
MSRP	\$459

and the unit affords "instant-on" immediate and automatic wake-up when movement is sensed. It also features auto-off after two minutes of no movement.

The "up" and "down" brightness controls are featured on the side of the unit, which I prefer to rear

housing-mounted controls, and they offer eight daytime and two night vision brightness settings for use in any lighting condition. The glass is 24x15.5mm in dimension, and is clean and clear due to the fully multi-coated glass providing a distortion-free window.

RANGE TIME

I mounted the RFX45 on my 1911 DS Prodigy pistol first and, although I have always favored as small a footprint as possible when it comes to pistol-mounted optics, I was excited to test out the RFX45. The benefits of a closed emitter for certain "messy" situations and circumstances are clear, and the durability and longevity of the design pose some very valuable benefits for certain conditions.

Running it casually for training at the range, I was curious



how the larger enclosed housing design would impact my overall shooting experience on the Prodigy. Mounting with an ACRO plate on the pistol's AOS optics system was a breeze using the included mounting screws.

One thing I immediately liked about the RFX45 sitting atop the Prodigy was that the window within the housing sat low enough to co-witness my irons. A lot of enclosed optics have a large, high-set body that doesn't allow for a co-witness, so this was a definite plus. I expected it to weigh more than it did sitting atop the pistol, but it was not really that much of a difference from other reflex optics I have run in the past.

Loading up with Remington 9mm range ammo, I sighted in down-range and found the large window to be extremely clear with no visible glass distortion. The brightness and visibility of the green dot against the harshly lit Arizona desert in mid-day sun on a 105-degree day was exceptional. I dialed my brightness to the mid-range of the

available latitude, and it was more than adequately bright.

Pressing off a few rounds at approximately 15 yards out, I made a few swift adjustments to my windage and elevation using the flush-set adjustment points on the top and right side of the unit and was quickly able to confirm my zero. After running about four magazines through the Prodigy, the zero had held just fine and I

was happy with the performance of the RFX45 on the pistol.

It was comfortable, unobtrusive, provided co-witness capability with the irons, and was clean to view through.

It was now time to transition the unit over to my carbine, the SAINT Edge, to see how it performed on a different platform.

Viridian provides a handy tool that makes adjusting the point of aim/impact with the RFX45 extremely easy.



REACHING OUT

The SAINT Edge is always a treat to run, and it's genuinely one of my all-time favorite carbines. I have used just about every available configuration of optic atop the Edge at this point, from LPVO's, holo-sights, dots, and various irons at both traditional and offset angle orientations. I was able to mount the RFX45 easily with the optional riser mount and found affixing it to the Picatinny rail to be a breeze.

I practiced a few drills with the SAINT Edge at approximately 50 yards out from my Infinity Defense self-healing target after confirming my zero. Going from low-ready to rapidly sighting down on target and performing the tried-and-true failure drills, the ample size of the glass really made getting a rapid sight picture and reacquiring the dot for follow-up shots a very efficient and intuitive process.

The vibrant green quality of the dot that Viridian is synonymous with really can't be understated. Visually, it genuinely is a very easy-to-obtain dot, presents no

The author ran the RFX45 unit on both the Prodigy (shown) and a SAINT Edge 5.56mm carbine on the range. Performance was impressive.



With the optional high mount for a 1/3rd co-witness, the RFX45 can be easily attached to the Picatinny rail of a carbine.

flicker or aberrations, and I really enjoyed running this optic atop the Edge for its small form factor, crystal-clear glass, and ease of use when it came to dialing for zero and tactile brightness controls.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

As for my personal takeaway from this testing with the RFX45, I really enjoyed the unit and will continue to work with it. Personally, I really enjoyed it atop the SAINT Edge and could see running this unit more often atop it. I also would like to do some heavy durability testing with it in the future to see what kind of abuse the housing can take.

Based on my testing, I do think it's a really quality optic for general range use and was very reliable in terms of accuracy and holding zero for target shooting.

I enjoyed running this optic on the Prodigy pistol and SAINT Edge carbine, but if I had to choose a platform to primarily keep it on, I would lean towards the rifle. I could definitely see how a good deal of pistol shooters would find this enclosed design a very positive benefit, particularly for those operating in adverse environmental conditions. In those instances, especially, I believe it would be well-suited for their needs.

In either case, the fact remains that the RFX45 presents usability and versatility between both pistol and rifle platforms, and for all of these reasons I highly recommend you check it out for yourself. And with an MSRP starting at \$459, it's a great deal. 🏆

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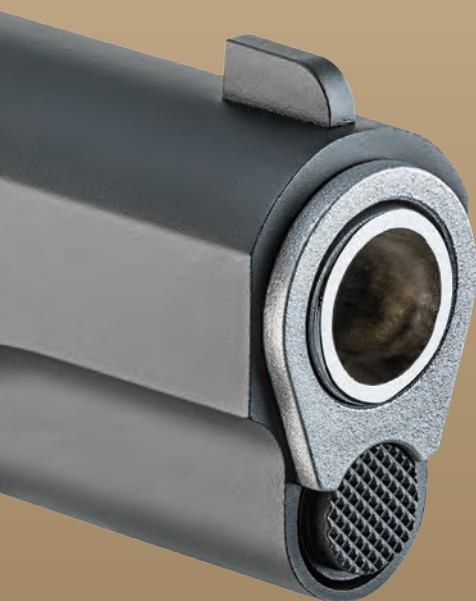


The all-metal 1911 Mil-Spec CO₂ Blowback .177 BB Air Pistol from Springfield Armory offers a quiet and affordable-to-shoot pistol for 1911 fans.

THAN AIR

THE 1911 MIL-SPEC CO₂ BLOWBACK DELIVERS FULL-METAL .177-CALIBER FUN!

DYLAN CASEY



LET'S BE HONEST — firearms can be a lot of fun. When used safely, guns can be a source of endless entertainment. But what about those new shooters who might be hesitant to try it out due to the noise and recoil? For them, a great option is an “air gun” of some sort that offers minimal noise and extremely light recoil.

In addition to being a great “starter” gun for a new shooter, replica air guns can also be excellent training tools for the shooting sports if you can acquire one that replicates the size and weight as well as the function and operation of the real thing. The result is something you can shoot easily and cheaply and don't necessarily have to head out to a traditional range to run — all the while having a great deal of fun!

A CLASSIC'S SIBLING?

The reason I mention all this is I recently had the opportunity to test the Springfield Armory 1911 Mil-Spec CO₂ Blowback .177 BB Air Pistol available from the Springfield Armory Webstore. As the name implies, this air gun is chambered for cheap and plenti-

ful .177-caliber BB's.

I actually have a centerfire Springfield .45 ACP Mil-Spec pistol in my collection, so I thought it would be helpful to compare them for this article. Let me start by stating that the 1911 air pistol version is practically identical to the centerfire pistol in nearly every way.

What you will notice as soon as you pick up the 1911 air pistol is its heft. Weighing in at 32 oz., the all-metal air pistol feels and looks like the real Mil-Spec. In fact, I was surprised at how very much it seemed like my .45 ACP pistol. Also of note is the fact the air gun is the same size as the centerfire pistol and features matching, functional controls.

However, there are a few aesthetic differences. The most



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL

The author had a .45 ACP Mil-Spec on hand (above) to compare against the .177-cal. air pistol.

noticeable is the white text on the outside of the pistol itself, from the “warning” markings on the frame to the “S” and “F” markings on the manual safety. A close inspection also revealed other minor details, like the fact the hammer of the air pistol has a different texture pattern than its centerfire sibling.

Interestingly, there are a few features of the air pistol that make it more like an original 1911-A1 than the .45 ACP Mil-Spec from Springfield, which has some modern tweaks and upgrades. For example, while the ejection port of the centerfire pistol is relieved for maximum clearance for ejecting cases, the air pistol Mil-Spec has the higher side wall on its ejection port like the 1911-A1. Another example is the vertical slide serrations on the air pistol, compared to the more modern angled slide serrations of the centerfire pistol. Both pistols feature modern three-dot sights atop their slides.

The standard blued pistol is

priced at a very reasonable MSRP of \$119.99 (and discounted to \$109.99 at the time of this writing), and a limited-edition stainless steel model is offered for an MSRP of \$129.99 (and also discounted \$10 at the time of this writing to a price of \$119.99). Both are available on the Springfield Armory Webstore.

THE DETAILS

At the heart of the air pistol is a CO₂-powered system of operation. You may have noticed the “blow-back” in the name of the gun, and that is one of its most interesting features. In addition to its heft, size and convincing feel, the air pistol is also designed to have the slide cycle like the real thing with every shot — powered by the CO₂ cartridge that is also driving the BB’s down the smooth bore at more than 300 feet per second.

The CO₂ cartridge is housed inside a removable metal magazine, that also holds 18 BB’s. The magazine accepts one 12-gram CO₂ car-

tridge that will last for roughly 65 total shots in my experience. That means you will get to use the same magazine several times before needing to swap out the CO₂ cartridge. On the last shot fired from a magazine, the slide will lock back, readying itself for a reload just like a normal semi-automatic pistol. Press the mag release button to drop the magazine. The safety also works just like you’d expect.

This air pistol is dimensionally very close to the 1911 Mil-Spec, meaning that all your holsters should fit. Also, the grip angle, texture, iron sights and controls are all the same. That means this is the perfect tool to practice with, but doesn’t cost nearly as much to shoot. Also, the familiar controls and reciprocating slide make it a great training tool.

However, this does not have to be

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viewed simply as a training tool for the centerfire pistol. It's perfect for just having fun, too! There doesn't need to be a training agenda behind every choice — this can be an easy way just to have some fun on the range that doesn't cost an arm and a leg. There is quite a broad selection of air gun targets available at the Springfield Armory Webstore that are also inexpensive and fun.

HANDS-ON

As I mentioned, the pistol feels great in the hands. Frankly, it feels like a real gun, and the blowback operation of the slide gives it a realistic feel like you're shooting a traditional pistol. Tracking your sights as you spit out BB rounds while the slide cycles back and forth is a very fun experience. The recoil from the slide reciprocating helps make it feel like a real pistol, but it's still light, smooth and quiet.

Due to their all-metal construction and the fact it also houses the CO₂ cartridge, the magazines have a good amount of weight to them. Simply ease the cartridge into place and then tighten it in using an Allen key to properly seat it. To load the magazines with BB's, simply pull the spring down with the

textured tab located on the forward face of the magazine and then load it up. After that, you will be ready to feed the magazine into the pistol and get to shooting. The pistol comes with one magazine, but



In addition to being offered in a blued-steel configuration, the .177-cal. air pistol is also offered in a limited-edition stainless steel finish version.

spares are available on the Springfield Armory Webstore for \$34.99.

During our time on the range I shot a variety of targets, both paper and steel. I was able to shoot some fairly tight groups on the paper targets at 10 yards. During testing, I found that my groups were tighter when I had a fully charged CO₂ cartridge, which makes sense. As that cartridge started to lose some of the pressure, our groups tended to open up a bit.

The air pistol had impressive enough accuracy that I was consistently shooting a steel silhouette target set at 40 yards, and I could hear the impacts on the steel. This was one of my favorite parts of shooting it because, at the distance of 40 yards you could watch the BB fly through the air all the way to the target.

So how does it compare to shooting the real 1911 Mil-Spec from Springfield Armory? Well, the recoil from the air pistol is, as you'd expect, not as aggressive as that of the .45 ACP. It's also not at all loud. However, the blowback of the slide on the air pistol is still enough to force the user to practice tracking the sights during recoil. So, it's both fun and practical — from a training standpoint — to shoot.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As you can probably tell, I had a lot of fun shooting this air pistol. It's a great way to get outdoors, have fun, and practice with your pistol without it costing an arm and a leg. This air pistol is also a great place to start for those new to guns, largely due to the operation being almost precisely the same as the .45 pistol, but with reduced noise and recoil. This inexpensive investment can be a valuable training tool, or simply just a way to have a lot of fun! 🎯



The slide reciprocates and locks back on the air pistol just like it would on a centerfire 1911 pistol.

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If you need an EDC system that can offer a wide range of holster configurations, the Blackhawk Stache deserves a look. Shown with Springfield Hellcat Pro 9mm.

EP-COVER DEFENSE



THE **BLACKHAWK STACHE** PREMIUM HOLSTER KIT DELIVERS WELL-ROUNDED EDC OPTIONS.

APART FROM A HIGH-QUALITY FIREARM, one of the most important accessories for all of us who live the EDC (Every Day Carry) lifestyle is a safe, effective and reliable holster. To be honest, there is a seemingly bewildering array of choices out there in holsters today because there are so many carry styles and materials options.

While there is much to be said for outside-the-waistband (OWB) carry, when you need to be as discreet and low-profile as possible, nothing beats an inside-the-waistband (IWB) rig. But it's not as simple as just choosing an IWB holster these days.

There are a plethora of optional carry positions, ranging from "3 o'clock" that is 90 degrees to

the strong side and variations such as "4 o'clock", "5 o'clock" and more that position it farther back toward the centerline of the body. There are also more obscure carry positions such as small of the back (SOB) that positions the holster in the center of the back, and crossdraw that positions the holster on the weak side of the shooter.



The Stache IWB Premium Holster Kit as tested offers you a holster rig set up with practically everything you need, and additional accessories are also available.

By far, today's most popular way to carry IWB would be appendix carry. This carry method positions the pistol on the strong side of the shooter, right up front. In fact, it has become so popular that several holster makers have developed holsters specifically designed for this mode of carry. But what about those of us that might want to carry in different positions depending on the day, weather and wardrobe? This is where Blackhawk comes in with its new Stache IWB holster.

CARRY OPTIONS?

While Blackhawk does offer the polymer Stache in a basic holster configuration for a wide range of popular pistol models for an MSRP starting at just \$33.95, I chose to try out their Stache IWB Premium Holster Kit. With a starting MSRP of \$64.95, this kit comes with not only the holster, but also a magazine carrier and

their "Concealment Claw."

For those not familiar with the adjustable passive retention Stache holster, it is basically a holster ecosystem that allows the shooter to position the firearm and magazine in a very wide range of configurations. The Premium Holster Kit consists of a polymer holster shell, magazine carrier shell and a selection of clips, adapters and hardware to allow the shooter to customize and create the best holster set-up to suit their EDC needs.

In addition to the kit, I also noted that Blackhawk offers some interesting optional products associated with the Stache holster. One of these is the Stache N.A.C.H.O. (Non-conventional Adaptive Carry Holster Option) Belly Band, which helps the shooter carry in situations where their wardrobe makes it harder to carry a holster. This could be times like

when you're jogging or hiking, or just don't have a belt on to secure your holster.

Another unique optional Stache accessory is the R.A.H.C. (Rapid Access Holster Carrier). In short, the R.A.H.C. is a versatile pack that allows the user to carry their firearm as a fanny pack or slung across their chest, giving them rapid access to their firearm.

There is one more option available I want to note. The Stache IWB 1.75" Tuckable Belt Clips replace the center single clip in the middle of the holster with two offset clips. This is not included with the premium kit, but is something that I might want to try in the future.

SETTING UP

For my test of the Stache, I wanted to create a holster for a very compact pistol, but I also wanted capacity, proven reliability and

accuracy. My choice was simple; I went with a Springfield Armory Hellcat Pro 9mm in Desert FDE, topped off with a Shield SMSc micro red dot.

There were several options to order the Stache, but as noted I wanted to test several carry options so I selected the premium kit. Before testing this holster system, I wanted to set parameters for my testing. I determined that the only way to do this would be to use the system for at least one day per configuration, or more if I found it comfortable.

I have found that holster selection is something you must try and use before finding the set-up that works best for you. I have found holsters that feel great for a minute or two, but after a few hours you can't wait to take it off. This is where I think the Stache system excels, as you have several different options in one bag.

Due to the design of the Stache, you have an IWB holster designed for handguns with or without optics that can work as either a right- or left-handed carry rig and can be adjusted for cant as well as carry height. In addition, it can easily be adjusted from a tradi-

tional behind-the-hip position to appendix carry.

One very important part of the Stache system is the optional "Concealment Claw," that is included in the premium kit. This "claw" is an adapter that is located beside the triggerguard area of the holster that is designed to push the holster against your belt. This subsequently pushes the grip of the pistol against your body,

minimizing the risk of "printing" through your clothing.

The kit comes with two claws; one for right-hand configuration and one for left-hand configuration. The kit also includes two different pads for the claw, so the user can choose how much pressure is applied against their belt.

HANDS-ON

One thing that some people forget when setting up their IWB holsters for the first time is the room needed. You should consider your wardrobe before you start using an IWB, as there should be enough room in your waistband for you, your pistol/holster and your magazine carrier. Be sure to factor this in.

The Stache IWB Premium Holster Kit comes completely disassembled, allowing the user to customize their holster to their needs. The first configuration I tried was appendix position, with the holster and magazine carrier attached together employing the included magazine carrier adapter. While I am not necessarily a fan of appendix carry, I did want to give it a fair shake.



The Stache is designed to accept pistols like the Hellcat Pro, either with or without an optic installed — like the Shield SMSc shown.



The holster is designed for right- or left-hand use, as the belt clips and position of magazine carrier can be reconfigured easily.

I configured my Stache for the right-hand configuration with the smaller pad on the claw. Even though the holster and magazine carrier joined together has so many advantages and I found it very comfortable to carry, I'm not trained with this mode of carry. Despite the benefits, I found it hard to adjust to it as I'm not used to doing my holster presentations from the appendix position.

For the second configuration, I separated the holster and the magazine carrier, but still tested carrying both in the appendix position. I found this configuration easier to use, but still was not 100% in my comfort zone.

In the third configuration, I moved the magazine carrier to my 9 o'clock on my left side and left the holster in the appendix position. With this set-up, I found having the magazine carrier on my left side much more comfortable. As you might suspect, there was a fourth configuration I tried and yes, you guessed it, it is the holster in 3 o'clock configuration. This option was much more comfortable for me.

The variable nature of the Stache design was really showing its value as I tried all these different configurations. The nice part of this belt clip is that I can easily move the holster forward and back depending on what I'm doing — standing, sitting, walking, driving or just spending some time at the range. I found that the 3 and 9 o'clock positions for the holster and magazine carrier are the best choices for me, but again, that is my personal choice.

Now for the elephant in the room. Retention. Both the holster shell and the magazine carrier shell have two retention adjustment screws that allow the user to select how much retention you want on the pistol and the magazine, independently. This feature is something that requires a lot



of testing at the range. You want both the pistol and magazine to have enough retention to keep the pistol and magazine in place while carrying, but you don't want the retention to make it difficult for you to do your pistol presentation or do a magazine change if necessary.

Another consideration of retention is reholstering. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't pay too much attention to this topic, but it's very important. To quote Ken Campbell, CEO of Gunsite and my first instructor there, when reholstering, do it "slowly and reluctantly". Setting up your holster and magazine carrier for pistol presentations, reloads and proper reholstering is imperative.

CONCLUSION

Upon finishing a couple of days of testing and carrying the Stache holster system, I'm very pleased with the system. I like the

options that the system provides. I tested several variations, and I found the one that fit me and my needs the best.

Is this holster worth my time and money? Absolutely. This offers four or five holster options in one package with a good range of options and accessories and is a great choice for EDC. This is true whether you prefer appendix, 3 o'clock or some other variation. This holster is well-suited to addressing a wide range of carry needs.

For me, this holster system does it all and does it all very well — and all without breaking the bank. When looking for a sturdy and reliable IWB holster system to enhance your EDC lifestyle, the Blackhawk Stache holster system should be on your short list. 

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REACHING OUT

APPRECIATING THE NUANCES — AND IMPORTANCE — OF BALLISTIC COEFFICIENT.



WHEN I FIRST FIRED A RIFLE, B.C. was a distant time predating gunpowder. Now, in shooter chat, it's a number assigned to a bullet. It has nothing to do with the cartridge case or the powder charge — except that a bullet's velocity can affect its BC.

As slumber is easily induced by reading about BC, I'll be brief. But a rough grasp of it matters if you wish to hit small targets beyond the range at which you can kill deer offhand with iron sights.

THE BASICS

Stripped bare, BC is a comparative measure of how well a bullet pierces air, or fights the drag set up by its own velocity. For bullets commonly used in small arms, BC is a three-digit number following a decimal. The higher that number, the better a bullet fares battling air resistance.

Before dismissing air as a nothingburger, stick your arm out the window of an automobile rolling down the highway at 60 miles per hour. You're traveling at just 88 feet per second (fps). But your muscles are taxed holding your

arm straight. The car's movement causes still air to feel like strong wind. But its pace is glacial compared to that of a bullet. A 180-gr. softpoint leaving the muzzle of a .30-06 at a standard 2,700 fps is moving more than 30 times faster than your sedan! Were you riding that bullet, your hair would be flat indeed, your eyes watering.

Every bullet decelerates as soon as it escapes the thrust of powder gas — that is, as soon as it exits the barrel. Air resistance and friction, plus turbulence set up in flight, act as brakes. All the while, gravity pulls the bullet toward earth at the accelerating rate of 32 fps, per second. Energy measured in foot-pounds is a function of bullet weight and the square of bullet velocity. So, as the bullet slows, it also loses some of its authority.



If you are committed to getting the most out of your long-range shooting, understanding what BC is might be well worth your time.

IMAGE: SAM AVERETT

Measuring the speed of bullets and tracing their path challenged early shooters. Then, in 1537 a bright Italian gentleman named Trataglia suggested in a book that bullets traveled in arcs, a radical idea when many people assumed they flew straight until spent, then fell abruptly to earth. Trataglia's experiments showed the launch angle that gave bullets their greatest range was near 45 degrees. This in reality is much steeper than the angle that gives a .30-06 bullet its longest reach. Still, Trataglia's conclusion was valid for his day. At the low speeds of early balls from black-powder muzzle-loaders, gravity

had a greater effect than drag on the projectile's flight. Modern high-speed bullets, in contrast, are influenced more by drag.

A century later, studying trajectory for the Venice arsenal, Galileo dropped cannon balls from the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Accepting gravity's tug as constant, he determined bullet paths must be parabolic, and affirmed 45 degrees as the launch angle for maximum range. But as Trataglia, he ignored drag in his calculations. Compared to the acceleration of gravity, drag on a cannonball dropped from a window was essentially zero!

Another century on, Englishman Benjamin Robins devised a bal-

listic pendulum. Firing a bullet of known mass into a heavy wooden bob, also weighed, he calculated the bullet's velocity by measuring the pendulum's swing. In the 1740s, few of his colleagues could imagine musket balls streaking away at 1,400 fps! Equally incredible: low readings from longer range suggesting that drag on the balls was 85 times as strong as the pull of gravity! Decades later, drag measurement would bear out Robins' results.

Isaac Newton conducted pendulum experiments, too. One of his findings was the universal law of gravitation, which declares that the force of gravity varies with

altitude. Sir Isaac's fundamental laws of mechanics, and his work on calculus (concurrently with Leibnitz), were crucial to the study of ballistics. Newton showed that drag increases with air density and with the cross-sectional area of the bullet. He also demonstrated a relationship between drag and the square of a projectile's speed. With no way to measure the speed of musket balls, he couldn't know that drag spikes as they near the speed of sound (1,120 fps).

Invention of the electro-ballistic chronograph in 1864 would absolve mathematicians from using calculus to predict bullet trajectories and open new investigations into bullet flight.

Use of a ballistic coefficient became practical late in the 19th

High-BC bullets face constraints imposed by magazine and throat lengths, case capacity and rifling twist.



IMAGE: HORNADY

Hornady's 143-gr. 6.5mm ELD-X bullet registers a G1 of .620, a G7 of .311, and has natural potential as a long-range performer.

century, with the adoption of "standard" bullets. Fashioned after artillery rounds of that era, they had specific shape, weight and dimensions. Early to the party was Germany's Krupp bullet. Krupp data prompted a Russian colonel,

Mayevski, to develop a mathematical model showing its drag deceleration. In 1881, the Gavre Commission in France came up with a similar bullet one pound in weight and an inch in diameter. It was 3.28" long, with a 1.96" shank

and a 1.32" nose with

2-caliber ogive. Tables by U.S. Army Colonel James Ingalls, published in 1893 and revised in 1917, used this Gavre Type 1 bullet, now known as G1.

CALCULATING BC

Any bullet's BC is essentially a mathematical comparison of its form and sectional density with those of the standard bullet. Computing BC – formally "C" with a "ballistic" subscript – is a tedious task.

Of various formulas, the simplest is: $C = SD/i$, where "SD" is the bullet's sectional density, or the ratio of its weight in pounds to the square of its diameter in inches, and "i" is the form factor.

Getting to "i" is no fun mathematically unless you're a numbers nerd. Think "streamlined." The higher its form factor, the easier a bullet cleaves air. Bullets with a long ogive (the nose, from shank to tip) and tapered heel brook less resistance and decelerate less readily than bullets the shape of a soup can.

MOVING (BULLETS) FORWARD

In my youth, pointed or "spitzer" bullets with G1 BCs of around .400 were considered racy. Many hunt-



IMAGE: SAM AVERETT

Most game is taken within the reach of standard softpoint loads. Only at very long range does a projectile's BC truly matter.

ers carried .30-30 lever rifles with 170-gr. bullets whose flat noses trimmed BCs to half that. The .360 BCs of the pointed 180s in my .303 SMLE seemed high to me. They're modest by current measure.

While G1 values are still commonly applied to hunting and target bullets, the G1 standard bullet was faulted shortly after its debut for its rapid deceleration, which changed its ballistic properties. Sleeker shapes evolved. Here with a summary:

- G1 – Gavre, Ingalls; flat base, blunt 2-caliber ogive
- G2 – Aberdeen Proving Grounds; “J” projectile
- G5 – Short 7.5-degree tapered heel; long 6.19-caliber tangent ogive
- G6 – Flat base; long 6-caliber secant ogive
- G7 – Long 7.5-degree tapered heel; long 10-caliber secant ogive

- G8 – Flat base; long 10-caliber secant ogive
- GL – Blunt lead nose

The G7 standard is used increasingly now. It best represents the “VLD”, or “very-low-drag” bullets favored by long-range shooters, and ever more often by hunters. It's surely closer to the shape of modern sporting bullets than is the French Navy's G1 of 140 years ago! It is 4.230 long, with a .600 tapered heel (boat-tail) and a 1.450" shank. The 2.180" nose has a 10-caliber ogive. Many manufacturers now show G1 and G7 values for their sleekest bullets.

G1 numbers are the highest. For example, Nosler's 140-gr. 6.5mm RDF (Reduced Drag Factor) bullet has a G1 BC of .658, a G7 of .330; Hornady's 143-gr. 6.5 ELD-X bullet registers a G1 of .620, a G7 of .311. The G1 and G7 numbers are equally valid. Think of measures in miles and kilometers. Remember too,

the G7 shape is the more demanding standard.

With higher BCs, you get lower deceleration rates, so higher downrange velocities, better energy retention and flatter arcs far away. So why don't all bullets have Pinocchio noses and long tapered heels? Well, long tapers rob bullets of weight that contributes to sectional density and penetration in tough game. Long bullets must also be seated deep to clear the fronts of magazines. Deep seating intrudes on powder space in cartridge cases.

Also, rifling twist designed to best stabilize bullets of “ordinary” weight and length can prove too slow to afford matching accuracy with long bullets. That's why

fast-twist rifling is commonly recommended for heavy VLD's and cartridges designed for them.

Changes in drag, which most directly affects bullet drop, do not correspond linearly to changes in BC. A bullet with a .600 BC, launched at 3,000 fps, falls about 58" at 500 yards. A bullet with a BC of .400 sags 65". Not much more, given the 33-percent change in BC! Energy retention more nearly reflects point of impact change than it does differences in BC. The longer the shot, the greater the benefit of high BC. Any advantage of a speedier start from a lighter bullet is soon lost to faster deceleration.

A couple of things to keep in mind: Change in BC has a larger downrange effect at high starting velocities than at low ones because as you add speed, drag increases as a percentage of the forces braking the bullet. Secondly, actual BC isn't always the same

as the calculated number. "We often see differences of 10 percent between our chart figures and those determined by our firing tests," say technical experts at Sierra Bullets. "And ballistic coefficient

While a rifle like the M1A Loaded Precision is tuned for long-range performance, proper ammo to feed it is a must.

The author found that match bullets heavy for the bore, with long, pointed ogives, excel at long range.

can change markedly near the speed of sound."

CLOSING THOUGHTS

While BCs grab a lot of gab around campfire and wood stove, they're not the definitive measure of a game bullet. Bullet weight, construction (upset and penetration) and accuracy figure more heavily on most hunts. BC matters only at ranges beyond those at which animals are usually taken. Most important? Your ability to hold the rifle on the right spot and crush the trigger without disturbing your aim! 

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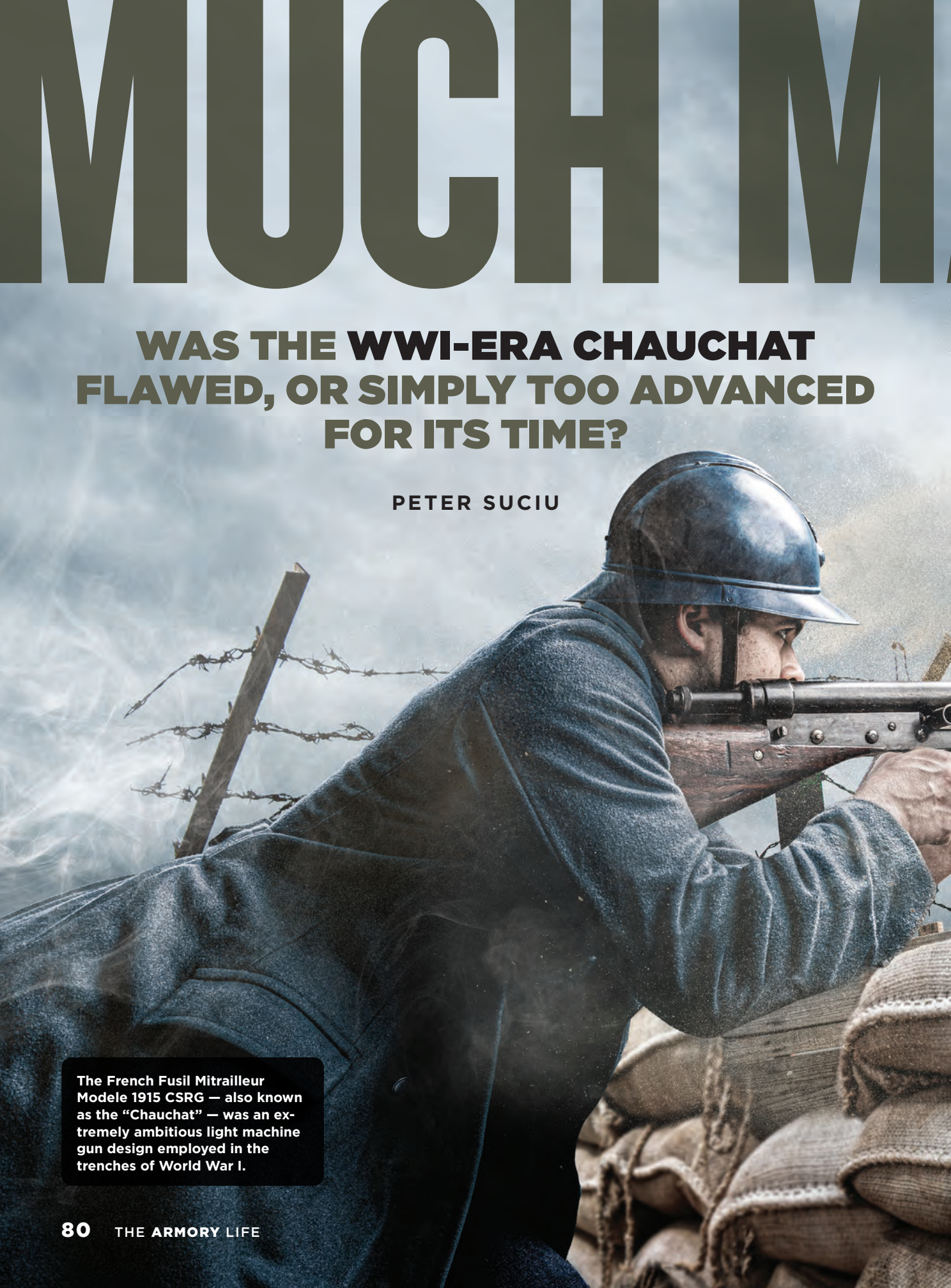
IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



MUCH M

WAS THE WWI-ERA CHAUCHAT FLAWED, OR SIMPLY TOO ADVANCED FOR ITS TIME?

PETER SUCIU

A full-page photograph of a soldier in a blue uniform and helmet aiming a Chauchat light machine gun from a trench. The soldier is positioned in the foreground, looking through the sights of the weapon. The background shows a trench with barbed wire and a cloudy sky.

The French Fusil Mitrailleur
Modele 1915 CSRG — also known
as the “Chauchat” — was an ex-
tremely ambitious light machine
gun design employed in the
trenches of World War I.

ALIGNED



THE 2001 made-for-television World War I movie "The Lost Battalion" has a brief segment where two veteran U.S. soldiers offer insight to a group of newly arrived "Doughboys" on the French Chauchat machine gun, and it is summed up as "it is a piece of garbage."

IMAGES: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



The Chauchat, shown with optional anti-aircraft sights, was a leap forward in concept — if not execution. Note the reproduction French M15 Adrian helmet, available from World War Supply.

Those sentiments are shared by many firearms enthusiasts today.

Ask the question, “What is the worst machine gun ever produced?”, and the answer will invariably be the “Chauchat.” Ask the follow-up question, “What made it the worst?”, and the answers may vary. Typically, this will range from “it had an open magazine that jammed,” to the more contentious “it got a lot of American Doughboys killed.”

In fairness, and with absolute respect for those American soldiers who were killed in World War I, German bullets and artillery as well as the Spanish Flu were

far more deadly than the potential inadequacies of a uniquely French firearm.

ORIGINS OF THE CHAUCHAT

What is often overlooked about the Chauchat is that it was remarkably innovative for its time. The nations of Europe were largely adopting Maxim-style heavy machine guns that were water-cooled, belt-fed and — at the time — mounted on heavy tripods. These machine guns were excellent for static defense and are a major contributing factor as to why the armies of Europe had “dug in” during the fall of 1914, creating the hellish trenches that became almost synonymous with the First World War.

Yet, more than a decade before the war broke out, a French arms designer named Louis Chauchat saw the potential for a light ma-

chine gun (or “automatic rifle”) that could be carried by a single “Poilu” (French infantryman). He envisioned a weapon that could provide what we would later describe as “walking fire,” allowing a soldier to advance with the firepower that was unavailable from the bolt-action rifles of the era.

It should be noted that the French military’s then-new Berthier Fusil Mle 1907/15 bolt-action rifle held just three rounds, so the idea of giving soldiers an automatic weapon that could hold 20 rounds was quite revolutionary. It was also apparently too forward-thinking for the French government, which truly did everything by committee. Much of that explains why the French Army marched off to war in the late summer and early fall of 1914 looking little different than they had during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.



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As the casualties mounted, it became apparent that something more than bolt-action rifles was needed to help break through the German lines. As a result, in early 1915 there was renewed interest in what would become the Fusil Mitrailleur Modele 1915 CSRG – otherwise known as the Chauchat. The 8mm Lebel weapon was rushed into production, and because of the wartime economy it was manufactured at two reconverted civilian plants: “Gladiator” and “Sidarme.”

I believe it’s fair to say that the weapon that resulted was crude, the materials were not to the highest standards, and it was not what could be described as an “attractive weapon.” However, when it comes to a wartime weapon, there is an argument for form to follow function.

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

In my opinion, critics of the Chauchat — notwithstanding the

The Chauchat was a select-fire design featuring “safe”, “semi-”, and “full-auto” settings. Note the vertical primary grip as well as vertical foregrip.



Another feature well ahead of its time was the “in-line” design of the buttstock, similar to that of the much later M16 rifle as well as the German StG44.

viability of their criticisms —almost always disregard the design’s merits. Unlike the Maxim-style machine guns, which were primarily defensive weapons, the Chauchat was designed from the ground up as one of the first truly offensive automatic weapons.

Moreover, while the Imperial German army adapted its MG08 Maxim for offensive use by

adding a bipod, pistol grip and side-mounted drum magazine to hold a belt of 100 rounds, it still wasn’t exactly mobile. The resulting MG08/15 still weighed around 60 lbs. By contrast, the 20-lb. Chauchat was a weapon that a single Poilu could carry and operate.

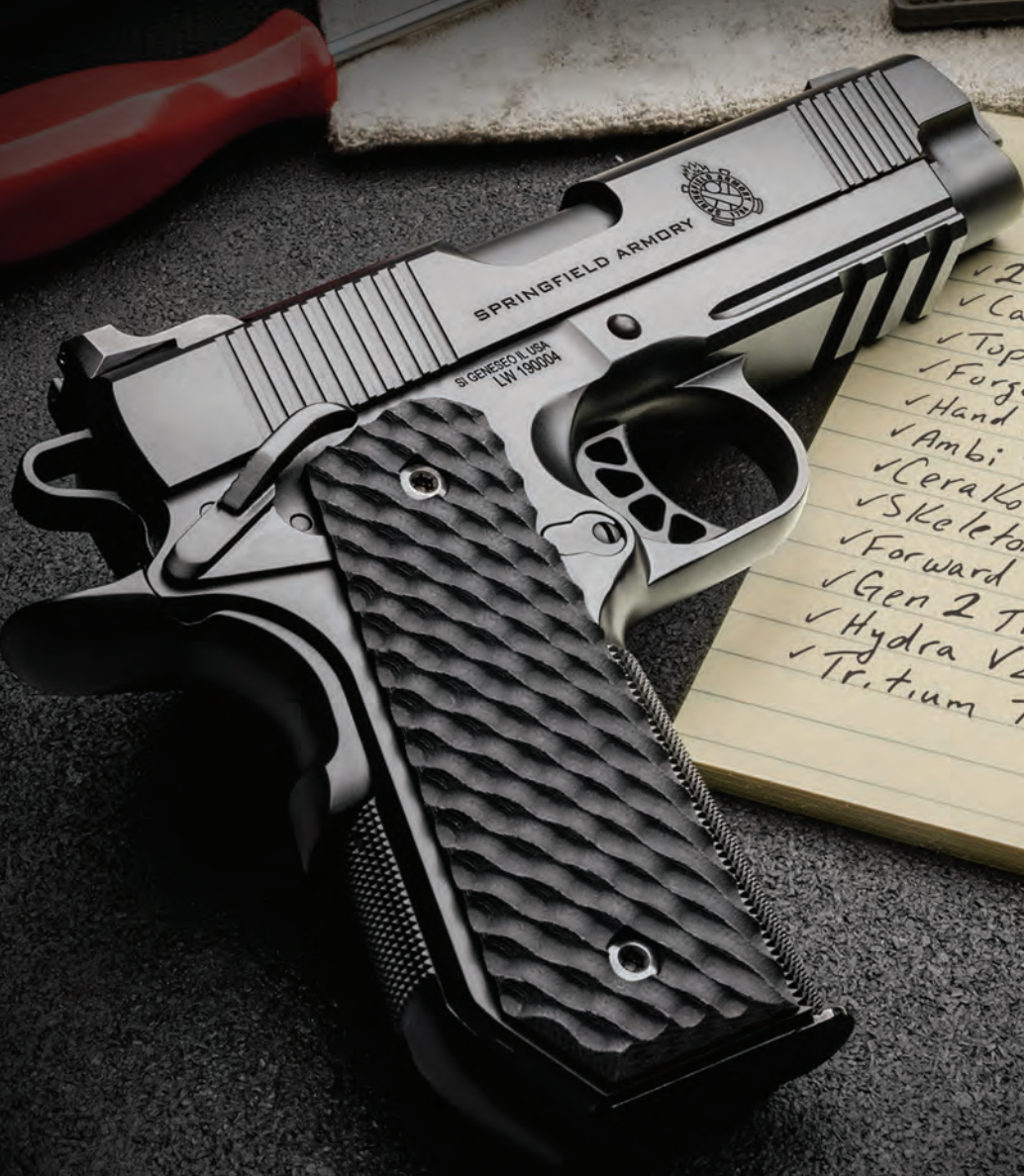
Unlike almost every other weapon of the era, The Chauchat was selective fire and offered both automatic and semi-automatic modes. It employed a unique system of operation of firing from an open bolt, with the barrel recoiling rearward within a barrel sleeve/shroud, cycling the action.

While the Chauchat featured an attached bipod, which did allow it to be used in a defensive capacity, it was designed as an offensive weapon for movement. Also well ahead of its time was the fact it featured a vertical pistol grip and an “inline” stock quite reminiscent of what you would

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The source of much controversy with the Chauchat was the open-sided, detachable curved magazine that could allow dirt into the mechanism.

later see on the German StG44 or the even later M16 rifle.

Further adding to the Chauchat's radically advanced design was the use of a vertical foregrip located just forward of the firing grip, as well as a unique detachable curved 20-round magazine that did not protrude a great deal from the bottom of the rifle.

UNDERSTANDING THE FLAWS

Given all of the above points, we come back to the fact that it has still earned the most dubious distinction of being the worst machine gun of all time. And if you start up a conversation with a gun enthusiast on this topic, they are very likely to mention the fact it featured an open-sided magazine that let in dirt and grime.

While this did offer the advantage of allowing visual access to the number of rounds

left in the magazine when firing, it undoubtedly did let in dirt that could cause serious functioning problems. But, I would argue the Chauchat had some other things stacked against it.

The bigger issue is that the American soldiers simply didn't like it — and with good reason.



While admittedly ungainly looking, the Chauchat had some remarkably advanced design features for its time.

First, there was the fact the first Fusil Mitrailleur Modele 1915 CSRGs issued to the arriving Doughboys had likely been in heavy service for at least a year or two. Those guns had been used and abused in one of the most hellish environments you could imagine.

In total, more than 15,000 Chauchats were issued to American troops that were chambered for the rimmed French 8mm Lebel round, but the U.S. military wanted to standardize its ammunition. In response, the French accommodated by producing another nearly 20,000 Chauchats chambered for the American .30-06 round used in the Springfield 1903 rifles.

This latter group of rifles is likely also a source of much of the weapon's bad reputation with American troops. Tests over the years, including some that were conducted as recently as 1994, did show that the weapon had an extraction problem with the American cartridge — likely caused by incorrect

chamber measurements and sub-standard manufacturing.

HOMEFIELD ADVANTAGES?

Then, there's the issue of politics.

While the Doughboys were ready and able to step up and fight the Germans, they probably didn't like using foreign equipment. This was notable in the case of small arms as there were two firearms that were viable alternatives to the Chauchat.

One was the Lewis Gun, which was designed by U.S. Army Colonel Isaac Newton Lewis. He had serious "differences" with General William Crozier, chief of the Ordnance Department, and after being frustrated to the point that he was "slapped by rejections from ignorant hacks," Colonel Lewis resigned his commission and took his design to Europe. The British adopted the Lewis Gun, and it was widely employed to great success.

American units that had used it, including the members of the United States Marines Corps that headed to the Argonne Forest, had to turn in their Lewis Guns — the weapon they had been trained on — in favor of this French weapon that few had seen before.

The second weapon that was relegated to the side in favor of the Chauchat was the M1918 Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). While it did not arrive until 1918, it has been reported that General John Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), had been holding back widespread adoption of it until victory seemed cer-

tain. This was reportedly done out of fear the BAR would be copied by the Germans.

IN POPULAR CULTURE

The Chauchat hasn't been seen in all that many movies, and most American viewers may only know it from the 2001 A&E TV movie "The Lost Battalion."

The firearm wasn't even seen in a movie until it appeared in the 1937 Soviet-made film "Za Sovetskuyu Rodinu" ("For the Soviet Motherland"), which was released under the American title, "Ski Battalion." It depicts the now largely forgotten Soviet-Finnish conflict of 1921-22, and the guns used in the film were likely actual Chauchats provided to the Russian Imperial Army, which were then captured/obtained by the Red Army and likely saw service in the Second World War!

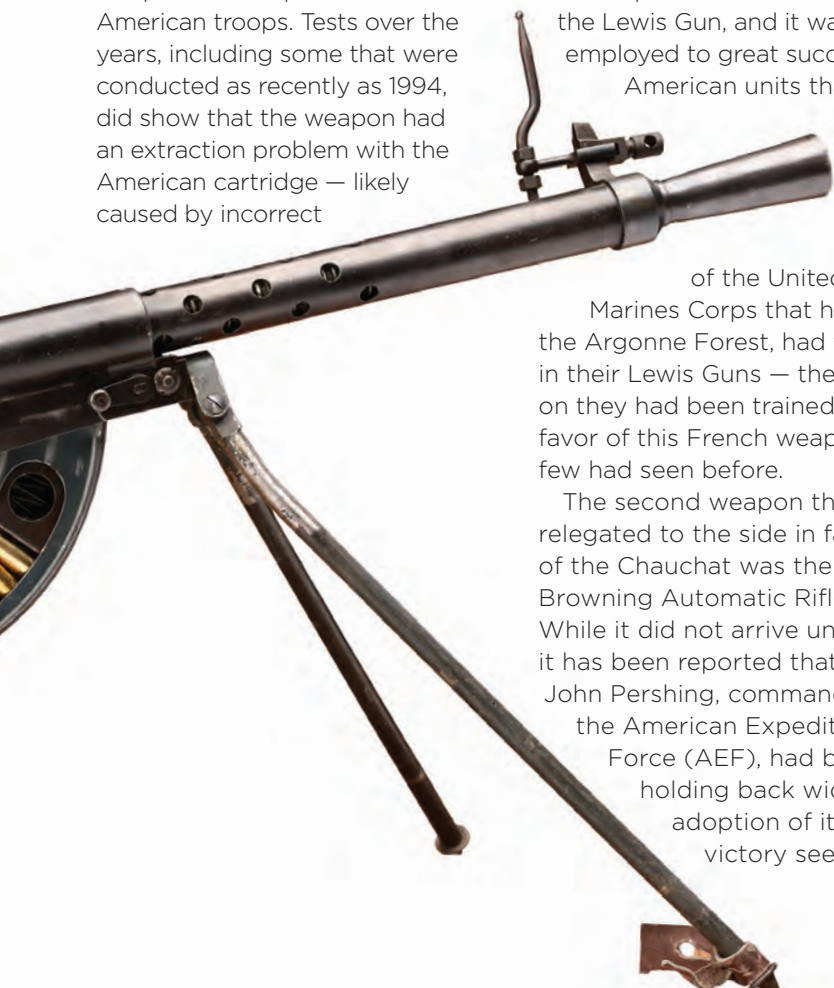
It wasn't until the 1991 French-made World War I film "Capitaine Conan" that the machine gun was seen in a truly Western-produced film. More recently, it could be seen in the film "A Very Long Engagement," the 2004 French love story set during the First World War. It can also be seen in the direct-to-Amazon film "The Great War."

CONCLUSION

Again, bringing up the topic of the Chauchat light machine gun is likely to start up a spirited debate among historical firearms enthusiasts and military history buffs. While most will likely dismiss it as the "piece of junk" it has been often called, the Chauchat might just deserve another look.

Given the influence the design clearly had on many later successful military firearms, it could be far more fair to describe it as one that was ahead of its time, but not without its share of problems. 

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**THIS CUSTOM GARRISON
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A F

ROB GARRETT



This ultra-rare custom Garrison pistol by 10-8 Performance features gunsmith Hilton Yam's personal selection of parts and enhancements for the project.

CERTIFIED

IT'S SAFE TO SAY readers of *The Armory Life* don't need to be reminded the 1911 is a design that's alive and well. Despite the wide range of capable polymer-frame pistols available today, in my opinion, the 1911 is still a very sound choice for beginners and experienced shooters, alike.

1911



IMAGES: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



Hilton Yam brought a wealth of experience with the 1911 to the project, crafting a truly unique version of the Garrison 1911.

It's not by accident that Springfield Armory offers numerous lines of 1911 pistols, each populated by a wide range of configurations and chamberings. No sir, the 1911 reigns in Geneseo.

WHERE IT STARTED

My relationship with Springfield Armory started back around 25 years ago when I was a young, aspiring writer for *Combat Handguns* magazine. In 2000, I purchased a Professional Model that was my primary off-duty carry gun for many years.

For those unfamiliar, the Professional is a custom pistol developed by Springfield Armory for the FBI back in the 1990's. The gun is almost mythical in the 1911 realm, and it always attracted a lot of attention when I was at the range or attending a class with it.

Fast forward to 2010. I had the pleasure of meeting 10-8 Performance's Hilton Yam when I was assigned to review one of his custom-built 1911 pistols for *Combat Handguns*. We stayed in touch, and I have continued to follow his social media content.

Hilton has a very impressive pedigree. In addition to being the founder of 10-8 Performance and a renowned gunsmith as well as a competitive shooter, he spent 19 years on an FBI SWAT team where his primary pistol was a Springfield Armory Professional. That experience gave Hilton a unique insight into what it took to maintain a 1911 in a hard-use, high-round-count environment.

Now retired from the FBI, Hilton and 10-8 Performance are running wide open. While Hilton no longer builds custom guns, he

offers a wide array of parts for the 1911, from his excellent sights to his great-looking stocks. About the only thing you can't get from

BUILD SHEET

10-8 Performance flat trigger
10-8 Performance magazine catch
10-8 Performance signature inlay grips
10-8 Performance GI-spec slotted grips screws with standard height grip screw bushings
10-8 Performance spring plug and spring guide with 17-lb. Wolff spring
10-8 Performance rear sight with .350" tall blade and .140" U notch
10-8 Performance fiber optic front sight with .175" tall x .115" wide blade
10-8 Performance hammer with EGW strut and sear, 4-lb. trigger job
10-8 Performance thumb safety
Wolff extra power firing pin spring and 19-lb. main spring
Two (2) CMC Power Mags with 10-8 Performance base pads
Full reliability and function tuning
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Satin glass bead blast finish
100-round function test

10-8 is a frame, slide and barrel. Other than that, 10-8 has you covered. Additionally, Hilton offers a line of parts for the EMP and the 1911 DS Prodigy from Springfield.

A SOLID SOURCE

As you can tell, Hilton has a strong connection with many Springfield products. This likely played no small part in a very special project we are talking about here today — a semi-custom 1911 based off of the Springfield Armory 1911 Garrison pistol. This build project was developed to not only showcase 10-8 Performance's excellent parts, but also promote the Garrison as a solid foundation for a custom build like this.

When the editor-in-chief of this magazine asked me if I'd like to

review this custom gun for this issue, I didn't hesitate. It was a great opportunity to connect again with Hilton, as well as get to review a fascinating gun. I remembered that gun of his I reviewed back in 2010, and couldn't wait to see this new project.

As part of my research for this article, I asked Hilton his opinion on the current Springfield 1911 guns, and specifically the Garrison. To quote him, "Regarding the single-stack guns, everything they (Springfield Armory) have been doing, in terms of refining the production process, is noticeable. The slide and frame fit has been exceptional on every gun!"

I should note that these are guns that Hilton purchases for research and for his online classes he offers. I should also note that he is a custom gunsmith with a reputation for very high standards. So, this is some very high praise.

Speaking of Springfield's guns, as mentioned the foundation for this project is a Garrison 5". Available in blued or stainless steel in .45 ACP or 9mm, it is a feature-rich 1911 at a very reasonable price. Factory features include a forged frame and slide, a forged match-grade barrel, and low-profile three-dot sights. A beavertail grip safety and rowel-type hammer are also standard. For a retail price of \$868 for blued or \$917 for stainless, the Garrison is a great deal. It's also a great base gun for Hilton to work his magic.

THE PROCESS

The variant selected for the 10-8 build was a stainless Garrison in .45 ACP. When Hilton received the gun, he completely disassembled and inspected it. Not surprisingly, he found his sample to be a solid pistol with no issues.

As mentioned, Hilton no longer does custom builds like this.



Yam gave the Garrison a full teardown and inspection before starting the custom build project.

However, he did agree to it for this special project. The build planned was a relatively simple and straightforward one, designed to highlight the selected 10-8 Performance parts without overshadowing the base gun.

In fact, I think it's important to note how many components Hilton retained during the build. This is a credit to the quality and consistency of the Springfield line of pistols. But first, let's dig into the parts that Hilton has designed and made part of this custom build. You can see a listing of parts included and work he did in the accompanying "Build Sheet."

Starting with the slide, the factory sights were replaced with the 10-8 low mount rear sight with a "U" notch. This sight is CNC machined from 4140 bar stock and finished in black oxide. After years of shooting, Hilton is a big fan of a "U" rear notch. The rear face is serrated 40 lines-per-inch (lpi) to reduce glare while the leading edge is a ledge profiled for single-hand manipulation. Interest-

ingly, 10-8 offers the four different heights that are matched with particular brands and models. The rear sight was paired with a bar stock, dovetailed front sight that is set up with a fiber optic rod.

I have always found Springfield Armory barrels to be exceptional, and Hilton saw no need to replace the one that came in the Garrison. He also retained the factory barrel bushing and barrel link.

The factory recoil spring plug was replaced by Hilton with a 10-8 Performance plug, and the recoil spring was replaced with a Wolff 17-lb. spring.

For the frame, the most noticeable addition is the 10-8 Performance aluminum flat-faced trigger. Let me say, if you haven't shot a flat-face trigger, you are missing out! More on that later. Hilton also installed his 10-8 Performance thumb safety. His design is a wide paddle that is serrated with

beveled edges. When disengaged, the forward edge of the paddle is contoured to allow the thumb to lie flat alongside the slide.

Little details can make a huge difference. This is the case with the 10-8 slide stop. Hilton has designed a slide stop that is approximately 0.50" wider than the original G.I. part. This, along with the sloped shelf and serrations, provides an enhanced surface for positive manipulations. Hilton also reshaped the angle of the lobe for easier re-assembly without scratching the frame. His design also improves the pressure of the detent spring to minimize the chance of premature slide lock. It's these little things that reflect Hilton's deep knowledge and experience with the 1911.

Hilton installed and fitted his bobbed spur hammer. To my eye, this gives the Garrison a great retro appearance. The hook geometry is designed to fit with the drop-in EGW sear, with no stoning. Internally, an EGW hammer strut and sear were installed, giving the Garrison a clean trigger break that averaged 4 lbs.

As with his other 10-8 parts, the design of the magazine catch has been enhanced. The 10-8 catch is machined from bar stock to Hilton's specifications. The length of the 10-8 catch is approximately 0.45" longer than the stock part and features a serrated beveled face. The catch ledge has been raised by 0.10" to enhance magazine retention and positioning.

As is the case with the other parts, the 10-8 stocks on the pistol are designed with the end user in mind. The stocks are manufactured from G-10, and have a diamond texture. The left panel has a prominent magazine catch scoop. Both panels have the 10-8 logo in a stock insert. The base of the stocks is cut flat for use with, or without, a magazine well, and there is a cutout for access to the mainspring housing pin.

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The final touch was to give the pistol a full external dehorning treatment and then finish it with a soft, satin appearance. This was accomplished with the careful application of glass bead media in a blasting cabinet. To get a consistent finish like this on an entire pistol takes patience and skill. Hilton pulled this off in typical 10-8 fashion, giving us an absolutely gorgeous pistol. The finish reminds me of the old Armaloy finish of the 1970's. As a nice additional touch, Hilton added the 10-8 logo at the forward portion of the dustcover on the frame's right side.

Two CMC, eight-round Power Mags with 10-8 base pads round out the package. Finally, Hilton completed a thorough 100-round testing protocol.

WHERE IT COUNTS

When Hilton finished with the Garrison, it was sent to *The Armory Life* team for photography, and then entrusted to me. Needless to say, I was honored to have the opportunity to test a pistol as rare as this. Being familiar with Hilton's

The custom Garrison features 10-8 Performance's bar stock low mount U-notch rear sight and fiber optic front sight unit.



work, I expected something very impressive. It did not disappoint.

For testing, I ran 230-gr. FMJ for familiarization and three types of defensive loads. For those interested in the numbers, Federal 230-gr. HST averaged 918 fps, Federal Syntech Defense 205-gr. hollow point averaged 917 fps, and Speer 230-gr. Gold Dot averaged 830 fps. The Garrison ran flawlessly and shot exceptionally.

In conclusion, this is a very special Garrison that retains all

Yam fitted the pistol with a set of his signature inlay grip panels, crafted from G10 material.

the great features and quality of the original Springfield Armory pistol, but has been sprinkled with a touch of 10-8 fairy dust. It is one of a kind and, while there may be other collaborations, there will only be one stainless 10-8 Performance Garrison. I asked Hilton how much this one would have cost me if I had been able to buy it, and he told me that the total price for the project, including the \$917 MSRP for the Garrison pistol, would have been \$2,395.

It was truly a pleasure having the opportunity to review this very special — and rare — pistol. All the parts used in the build (and more) are available from 10-8, and you can learn more about 1911s and how to tune them for duty by visiting Hilton's Patreon page. 

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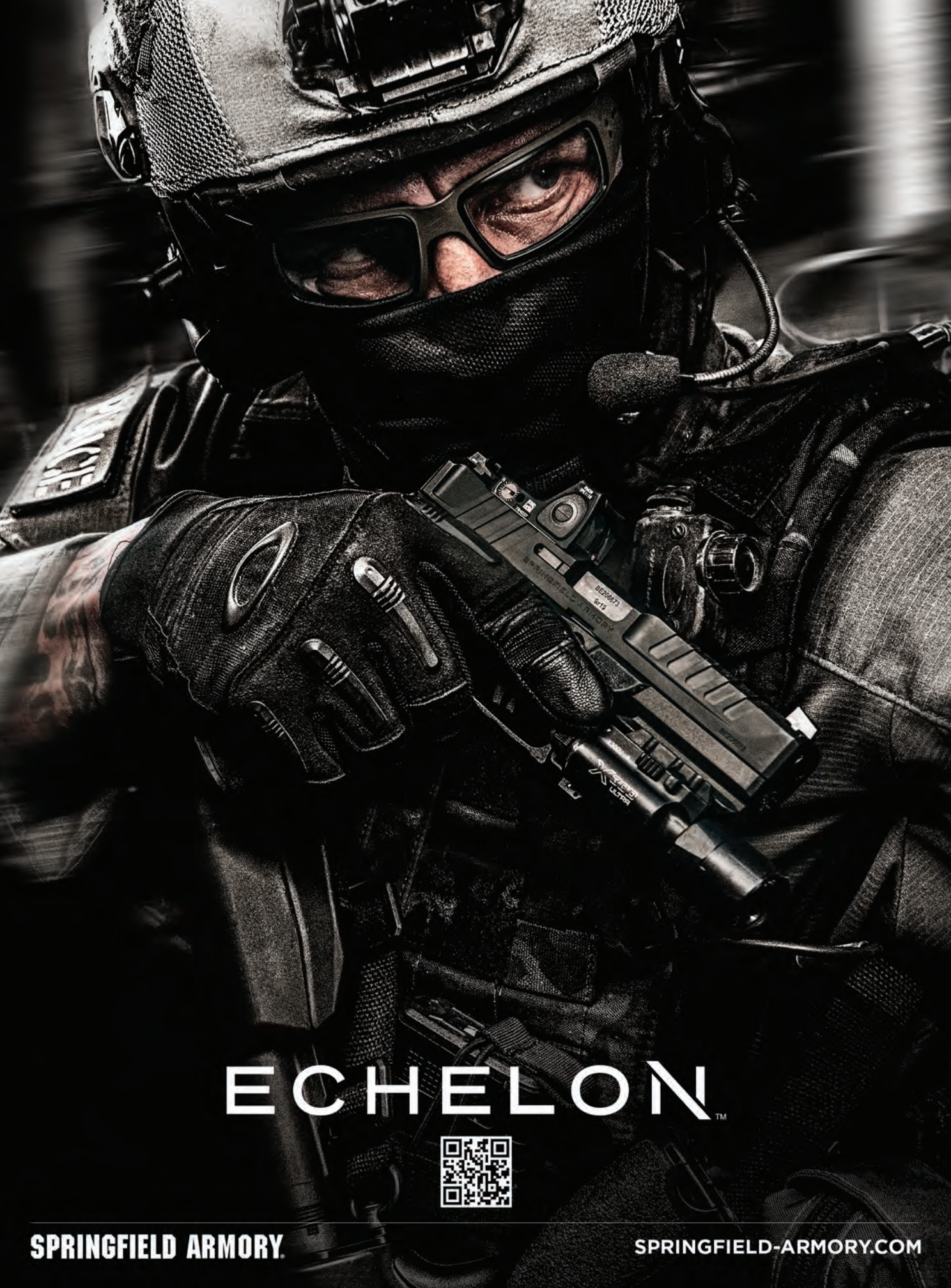
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