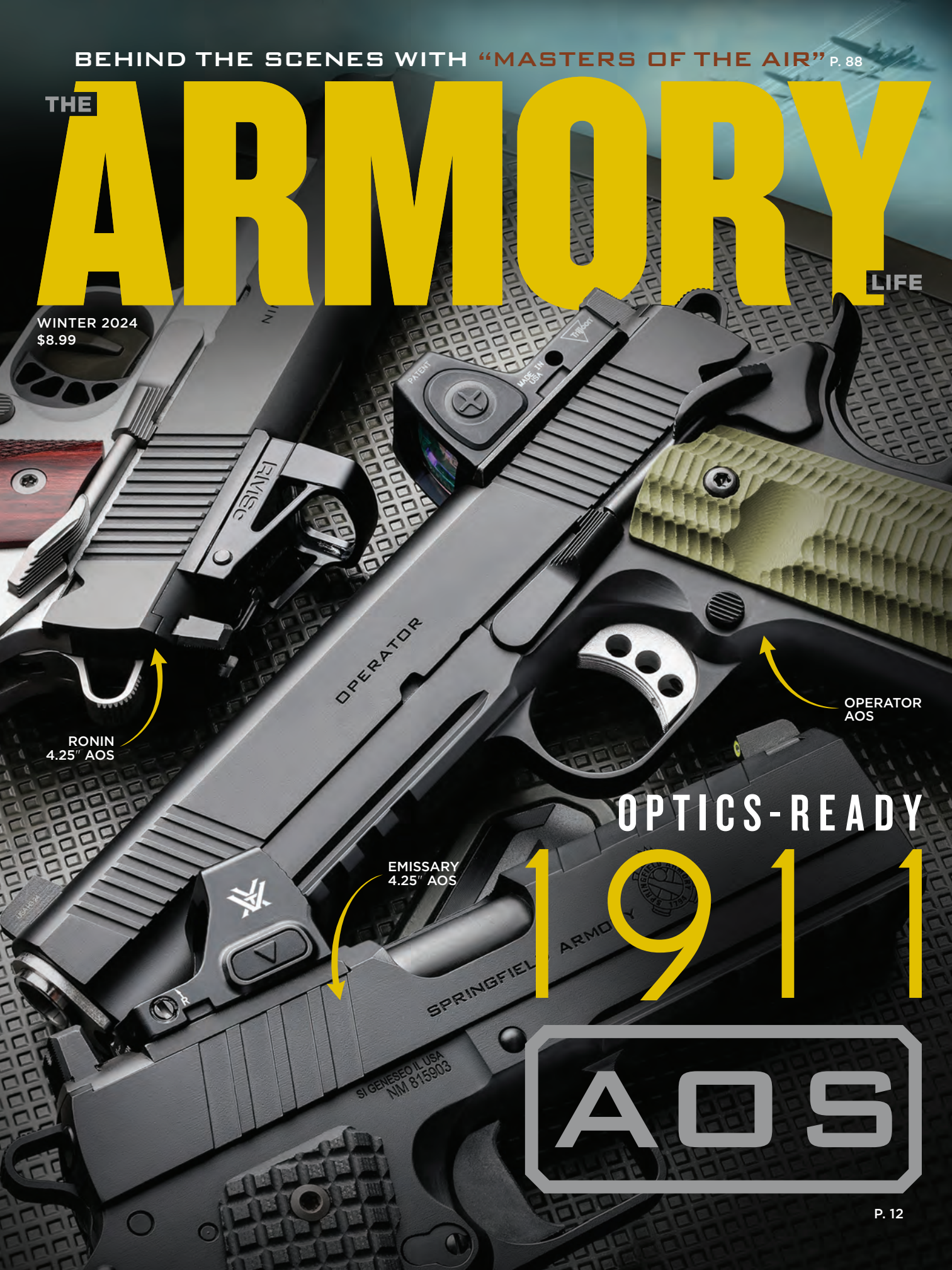
BEHIND THE SCENES WITH "MASTERS OF THE AIR" P. 88

THE ARMORY LIFE

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OPTICS-READY 1911

AOS

P. 12


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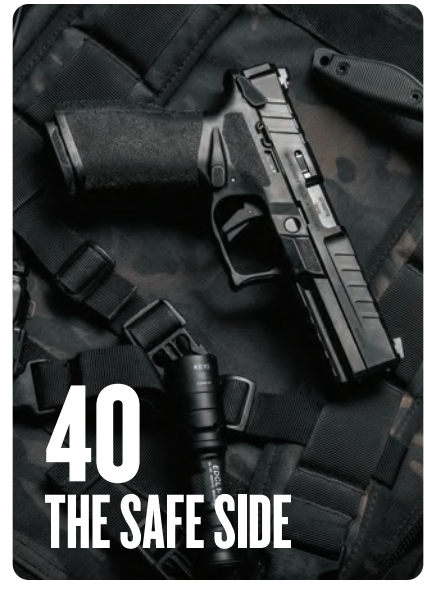














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IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MIKE HUMPHRIES

WE'RE PROUD TO PRESENT to you the Winter 2024 issue of *The Armory Life* print magazine. This issue is packed with great content, from our cover story on the new 1911 AOS line of optics-ready 1911 pistols to in-depth product reviews and much more.

Starting on page 12, we have Jeremy Tremp give us the inside scoop on Springfield Armory's new line of optics-ready 1911 pistols. Featuring the Agency Optic System (AOS), these pistols take the classic 1911 design into the 21st century with the ability to accept today's most popular handgun optics.

Immediately following the cover story, Dr. Will Dabbs interviews CEO and founder of Silencer Central, Brandon Maddox. Detailing not only the story of the company but also the man behind it, this piece gives us an inside look at how it — under his guidance — has revolutionized the sound suppressor market. Check out the story, starting on page 18.

In addition, we have famed actor and technical advisor Capt. Dale Dye, USMC (Ret.) take us behind the scenes of the Apple TV+ nine-part miniseries "Masters of the Air." Serving as the show's senior military advisor, Capt. Dye gives us unprecedented access to the show and how it was made. Turn to page 88 to learn more.

Want to know about the latest and greatest Springfield Armory firearms, as well as some of today's top gear and accessories? Then check out our reviews of the integrally compensated 1911 DS Prodigy Comp, the Model 2020 Boundary bolt-action rifle, the Echelon 4.5F with manual safety, the XD Mod.3, and much more.

As always, I'm very interested in hearing your thoughts about *The Armory Life*. Reach out to me at support@thearmorylife.com, and let me know what you think about the content you are seeing in the magazine and on the website.

So, welcome to the Winter 2024 issue of *The Armory Life* quarterly magazine. Flip through its pages, read some articles, scan some QR codes, visit the website and enjoy. Be sure to keep an eye out for future issues as well!

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IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

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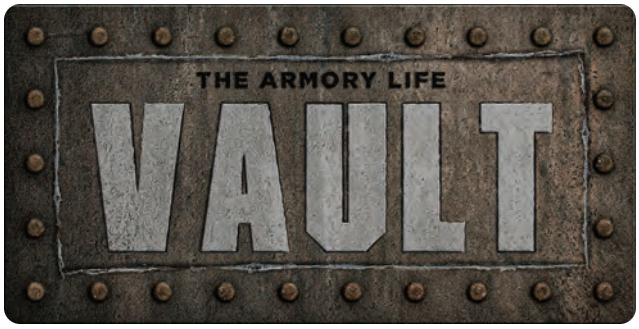
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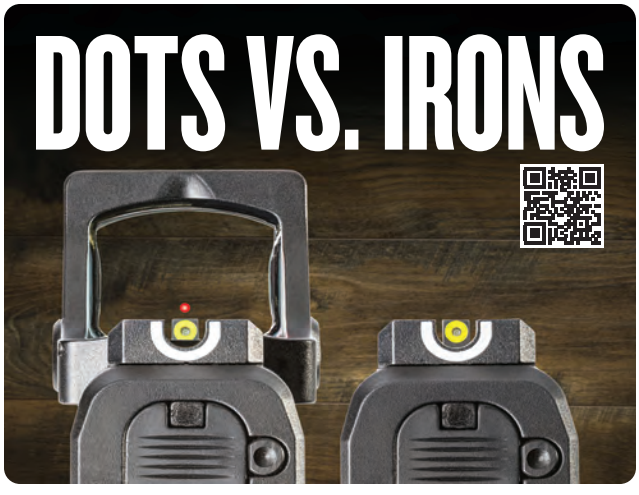
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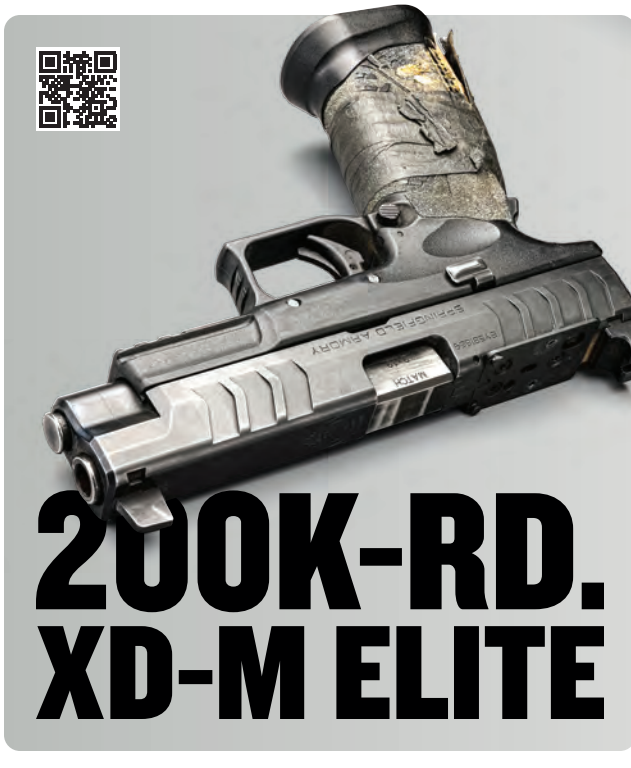
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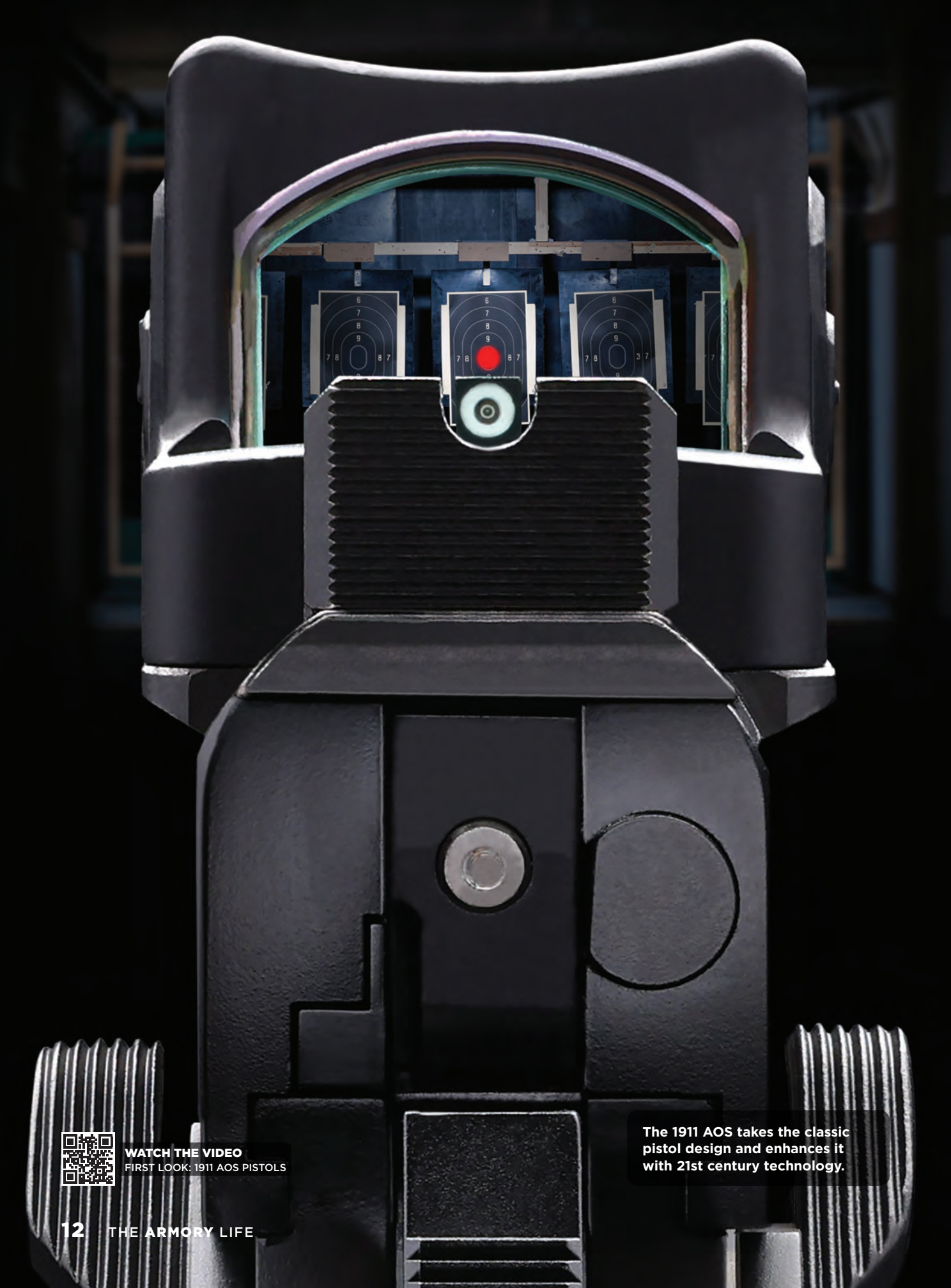



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FIRST LOOK: 1911 AOS PISTOLS

The 1911 AOS takes the classic pistol design and enhances it with 21st century technology.

FUTURE-PROOF

THE OPTICS-READY 1911 AOS LINE OF PISTOLS MODERNIZES A CLASSIC PLATFORM.

JEREMY TREMP

THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY the 1911 is from a bygone era and is outpaced by the "plastic fantastic" 9mm pistols that have proliferated on the market. To that I say, the 1911 pistol is as relevant as ever and continues to improve with time. But what are some areas where there's room for improvement?

In the past few years, we've come to expect our pistols to feature — from the factory — native optics capability. The widespread adoption of micro red dot sights for handguns has revolutionized the market and improved the experience for shooters worldwide.

While this feature is now common on polymer-framed pistols, the 1911 has been a design that has taken some time to adapt to this new world.

That is no longer the case in the Springfield Armory line with the launch of the new 1911 AOS (Agency Optic System) pistols.

Currently made up of 1911 Ronin, Operator and Emissary offerings in 9mm and .45 as well as 5" and 4.25" barrel lengths, these pistols feature the same optics-mounting system as the 1911 DS Prodigy.

ALL THE DETAILS

Developed in collaboration with Agency Arms, AOS allows modern optics integration direct from the factory. AOS is a plate-based system that allows for the mounting of today's most popular optics. The 1911 AOS pistols will ship with the iron sight configuration, which features a cover plate with an integral rear sight and a contour that preserves the classic lines of the 1911's slide.

If you remove this plate, you'll notice a flat surface with mounting holes machined into the slide. This is where the AOS plates come into play. Based on the optic you will be using, you simply purchase the proper plate from the Springfield Armory Store and attach that plate to the pistol. Then, you mount your optic to the plate. The only thing left to do is to hit the range and enjoy the new ease of

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

Note the AOS cut to the slide of this 1911 Operator 4.25" AOS pistol, as well as the cover plate (right), AOS mounting plate (center) and Trijicon RMR optic (left).

target acquisition and accuracy.

I think one of my favorite aspects of AOS is the rear back-up sight that is integrated into each plate to ensure a proper co-witness with your front sight with most optics. When adding optics to modern pistols, it can be a guessing game if you will still retain the ability to co-witness through the red dot. For me, this is a mandatory requirement as a back-up sighting system is a must in case the optic breaks, runs out of battery power or simply loses its zero. It's also a great way to always ensure your pistol is properly zeroed by lining up the dot with your irons.

There are six plates offered as part of the AOS system, allowing for a wide range of optics to be mounted to the pistol. Each plate retails for $129 and, as noted, includes a rear iron sight that will co-witness with most modern red dot optics. The built-in rear sight is all black and serrated to reduce glare, which is a nice touch.

Each optic plate is machined from billet steel for a durable and perfect lock-up with your pistol, ensuring proper zero is maintained.

Also of note is the fact that every purchaser of a 1911 AOS pistol will receive access to one discounted AOS optic plate of their choice for just $49.

Now that we have discussed AOS, let's dive into each pistol that is currently in the 1911 AOS family and consider what you can expect from each variant.

THE OPTIONS

First is the 1911 Ronin. To my eye, the Springfield Ronin AOS is a beautiful, classic and elegant 1911, with variants in 9mm and .45 ACP, and 5" or 4.25" barrel lengths.

The Ronin features crossed cannon wood laminate grips and a two-tone finish. The forged carbon steel slide is hot salt blued, which contrasts beautifully with the forged stainless-steel frame on the 5" guns or the Cerakoted satin sil-



ver forged aluminum frames of the 4.25" guns. The Ronin is outfitted with a Gen2 Speed Trigger, which is streamlined and skeletonized for performance. MSRP for all variants is $967.

Moving on to the Springfield 1911 Operator, we've got a sleek-looking defensive-grade pistol. The Operator is meant for hard use and sports duty-grade features such as a tritium front sight, forward cocking serrations, G10 grips and an ambi safety. The Operator is also equipped with an accessory rail for the mounting of a pistol light or laser. The Operator is made with a high-quality forged frame and slide for incredible durability and strength. The Operator is offered in 9mm and .45 ACP with 5" and 4.25" options. The 4.25" AOS model, newly offered as part of the 1911 AOS launch, features a lightweight aluminum frame. MSRP for all variants is $1,184.

Finally, we come to the 1911 Emissary. The Emissary was designed to bridge the gap between defensive-grade and custom-level pistols. Built on a foundation of a forged stainless steel barrel, slide and frame, the all-steel Emissary is durable and formidable. The Emissary AOS is an all-black Cerakote design with squared-off triggerguard and a Tri-Top cut slide. The Emissary is equipped with a bull barrel and "grenade"-pattern textured grips and frame checkering. This, combined with the all-black coating, makes this one of the coolest-looking 1911s offered by Springfield in my opinion. MSRP for all variants is $1,378.



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

The 1911 AOS Ronin features an attractive two-tone finish and classic wood laminate grips.

HANDS-ON

I was able to test a 9mm 4.25" Ronin, 9mm 4.25" Operator and a .45 ACP 5" Emissary with a range of optics, including the Vortex Defender-CCW micro red dot. It was refreshing to shoot such a solid platform as the 1911 with the benefit of a modern sighting system.

The process to attach the plate is very simple and nearly foolproof. You simply remove the existing cover plate by loosening the two attaching screws. Once removed, you attach your selected AOS plate to the pistol, fitting it snuggly to the slide and tightening down the screws that come with the cover plate. Just as an FYI, I use a bit of Loctite to ensure a secure lock-up.

Once the AOS plate is installed, you can now install your chosen optic by placing it atop the plate and securing the screws that come with your optic. Again, I personally use some Loctite for a solid fit. You are now ready to hit the range.

I am thrilled that Springfield is offering this. I've come to expect optics capability on all my pistols as it is a much more natural way of target shooting. Simply place the red dot on the target and manipulate the trigger without interrupting your sight picture. Don't get

The 1911 AOS system allows for you to fit out your pistol with a broad range of today's most popular red-dot optics.





The AOS plate system features an integrated rear sight unit designed to co-witness with most red-dot optics.

me wrong, iron sights are great and it's important to understand them and train using them, but having a red dot just feels like cheating sometimes.

If you've shot irons enough, you've heard many ways of "focusing your eyes" past the sight and somewhere in between your target and your front sight. With a red dot, you are always target-focused, making shooting much easier and intuitive.

On the range, the Vortex Defender mounted easily atop each pistol and made the session very enjoyable. The Vortex Defender-CCW is a rugged, incredibly well-built optic with a crystal-clear lens and a very intuitive design. The battery is top-loaded, making replacement easy. There is no distortion in the lens and no off-color coating adding a blue or pink tint to the image.

The 1911 Emissary AOS in all-black features stainless-steel construction with a black Cerakote finish.



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

The Defender has simple "up" and "down" buttons for changing brightness. The optic is also motion-activated, which for me is a must with a red dot. No need to turn the optic on or off; it's simply ready when you need it.

Lastly, the Defender-CCW features extremely rugged construction, including "Fast-Rack" texturing on the front of the optic. This allows you to rack the pistol against a hard surface with little fear of damage.

CONCLUSION

The beautiful thing about the new 1911 AOS pistols is that you don't even have to use a red dot if you don't want to as the cover plate system and rear sight makes it look and function just like a standard 1911. If one day you want to try it out with an optic, you will have the capability.

Equipping a modern red-dot optic on your 1911 will surely breathe new life into your experience and greatly improve your ability to quickly acquire your target and place rounds accurately with ease.

I also cannot overstate the value of a good plate-based system as you aren't locked into just one optic footprint. You get the freedom to choose the optic of your choice and even change your mind down the road to utilize a completely different optic. The AOS system makes your 1911 future-proof and ready to perform. Welcome to the 21st century.

Check out the Ronin, Emissary and Operator pistols with the AOS system. Be careful though. Once you experience the red-dot future with the 1911, you might not look at your iron-sighted pistols the same again.

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Brandon Maddox is the founder and CEO of Silencer Central, as well as the driving force behind its remarkable success.

IMAGES: SILENCER CENTRAL

THE ARMORY LIFE INTERVIEWS

BRANDON MADDOX

WILL DABBS, MD

AMERICANS LOVE AN UNDERDOG. Whether it's "The Little Engine That Could," Elon Musk firing his sports car into space or the American Revolution, we all admire a success story. Looking for another great example? Under the deft direction of CEO and founder Brandon Maddox, Silencer Central has seen breathtaking success revolutionizing the process of purchasing sound suppressors in America.

The company recently passed 100,000 eForms sound suppressor approvals. Thanks to their user-friendly business model, countless American gun owners have availed themselves of these remarkable shooting accessories.

The story behind Silencer Central and Brandon Maddox, the human dynamo who inspired the company, is fascinating.

We recently had the opportunity to interview Mr. Maddox about the effect Silencer Central has had on America's shooting culture.

***The Armory Life* (TAL):** The beginning always seems the best place to start. Who is Brandon Maddox and where do you come from?

Brandon Maddox (BM): I was born in Alabama, as were both my parents and all four of my grandparents. Raised in Atlanta, I attended high school and college in North Carolina. I did UNC Chapel Hill for undergraduate and Pharmacy School. I earned my MBA at Duke University on a full scholarship. I am also the founder and CEO of Silencer Central.

TAL: What's your source code?

BM: I'm aggressive, assertive, passionate and hardworking. I have an unparalleled drive to win. I'm not scared to outwork anyone and everyone to accomplish my goals.

TAL: Were you born a shooter, or is this something you got into later in life?

BM: I grew up in a gun-free home. My parents were not against them, they just had minimal familiarity with firearms. However, firearms were definitely in my DNA.

My uncle is a gun guy as was my maternal grandfather who died when I was young. As a teenager, I purchased a .22 rifle from a local hardware store where I worked, and there was no looking back for me from there.

TAL: How did you get into suppressors?

BM: I bought my first silencer once I moved to South Dakota and started varmint hunting in the South Dakota grasslands. I became obsessed with shooting prairie dogs and wanted to see if silencers could improve my shooting. That suppressor took my prairie dog hunting to a whole new level.

TAL: What exactly is Silencer Central? What's your elevator pitch for it?

BM: We offer the simplest and easiest way to buy a silencer in America. Silencer Central manages all the BATF paperwork and, once approved, we mail the silencer directly to your front door. We've been in business since 2005 and are the largest suppressor dealer in the country.

TAL: What's the origin story for this glorious enterprise?

BM: The business started as a way for me personally to avoid the inefficient process I found at the local gun dealer. While that local dealer was great at helping me select a gun, undertake a background check and leave with my firearm, communication back and forth for purchasing a silencer was more difficult.

Eventually, I acquired the licenses necessary to purchase and acquire silencers myself. However, I decided I needed some revenue to offset the expense of these licenses. I started working gun shows and grew from a single Federal Firearms License in South Dakota to now maintaining a licensed presence all 42 states where silencers are lawful.

TAL: Did the mail-order pharmacy industry influence the creation of Silencer Central?

BM: I am a registered pharmacist by education and trade. I maintain my pharmacy licensure in North Carolina, Florida and South Dakota. My wife is from South Dakota and is also a pharmacist. My first job in South Dakota was as the Pharmacist in Charge at CIGNA Tel-Drug mail-order pharmacy. This line of work requires an understanding of and compliance with a myriad of local, state and federal laws. I had to pass state and federal law exams prior to getting licensed as a pharmacist. At CIGNA, we had to have our South Dakota pharmacy location licensed in each state into which we mailed products. We also had to have a pharmacist licensed in those states. We shipped over 50,000 prescriptions each day and were required to comply with local, state and federal laws on each and every one.

Silencer Central's business model is analogous to that of CIGNA Tel-Drug. We maintain employees at each FFL location in those 42 states. We comply with both federal law and each individual state law when we process orders for silencers. Our compliance with local, state and federal laws defines a very unique business model. It also allows a one-stop-shop so a customer can order a silencer online.

Having the silencer shipped directly to their front door is a huge customer win, especially in rural areas or for busy patrons with limited time off from work. Research shows the #1 reason people do not buy a silencer is because of the process. We have significantly simplified this process and scaled it using technology to create a single point of contact to acquire a silencer.



TAL: In your opinion, what sets Silencer Central apart in the marketplace for customers?

BM: As noted, being able to purchase from your couch and have your can shipped directly to your front door is a big win for the customer. We also offer an interest-free, pay-while-you-wait, eZ-Pay payment system. We also offer a free NFA Gun Trust. This allows you to share your silencer and streamline who inherits it at your death. In addition, we provide expert advice on selecting a silencer. Our team has an average of three years' experience working solely in silencers.

TAL: Interacting with so much government paperwork probably intimidates many prospective suppressor owners. Silencer Central has excised much of that frustration from the NFA (National Firearms Act) world. Can you give us a quick overview of Silencer Central's unique process?

BM: Silencer Central has a director-level position that reports directly to the CEO that focuses solely on ensuring the customer is the center of everything we do. As part of this effort, Silencer Central manages the entire process for the customer. We take ownership to ensure everything is executed in a timely and correct fashion.

Our operations sit on top of Oracle NetSuite, and our technology can process over 1,000 BATF eForms per hour. Silencer Central has worked closely with our federal regulators, the BATF, to obtain variances so we can operate our business in a 100% digital environment. We send reminders to customers via SMS, email and phone to ensure everything submitted to BATF is both accurate and timely.

TAL: How can Silencer Central ship a suppressor right to a customer's door?

BM: We leverage our physical FFL's in all 42 states with technology to make this happen. Federal statutes allow for mailing a silencer because no background check is required at the point of receipt. The FBI completes the background check as part of the Form 4 approval process. As your dealer, we can therefore ship the can straight to you.

While Maddox may have started the company as a part-time project, Silencer Central has grown into a juggernaut in the industry.





Silencer Central stocks not only a broad selection of suppressors, but also offers its own Banish line of silencers.

TAL: Obtaining fingerprints seems to always be one of the biggest impediments to NFA ownership. How does Silencer Central manage the customer fingerprinting process?

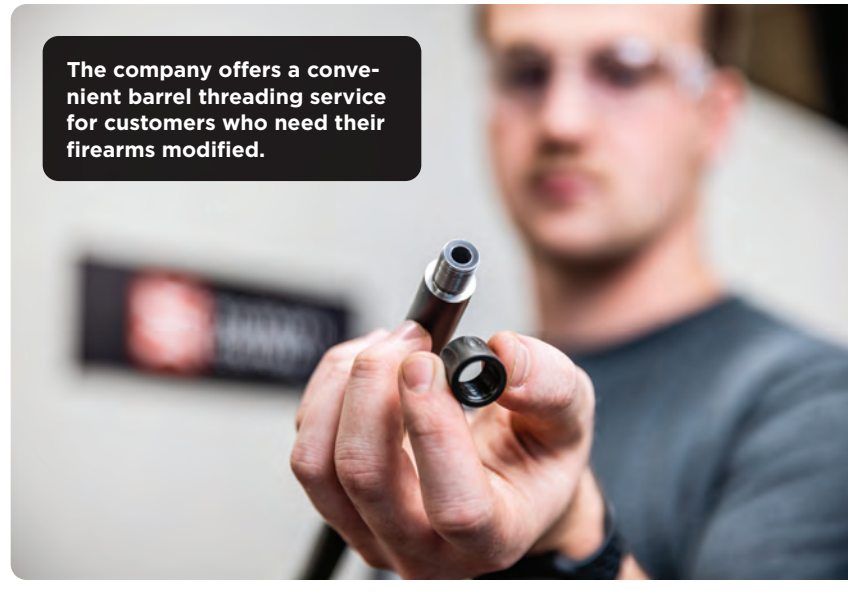
BM: We mail the customer ink and FBI cards to do their own prints. Additionally, we have created an instructional video on how to do your own fingerprints at home. We provide a self-addressed, postage-paid envelope for the customer to return the prints to us. We make that process easy and simple.

TAL: Can you tell us a bit more about the benefit of your free NFA Gun Trust program?

BM: Silencer Central has never charged for the NFA Gun Trust. A trust really is the best way to buy a silencer, so we have always included this in our buying process at no charge.

TAL: Your interest-free payment plan starts the process for just 25% down on a purchase. Has that been a popular addition to your business model?

BM: Yes, very popular. Customers struggle with the idea of paying 100% upfront while being unsure when they will eventually be approved. Allowing customers to pay



The company offers a convenient barrel threading service for customers who need their firearms modified.


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while they wait is a way to show our customers we are in the boat alongside them. This is a partnership to work through the BATF approval process together.

TAL: You also offer barrel threading services for customers needing to modify their firearms to accept your sound suppressors. How does that work?

BM: Threading barrels is a common obstacle to acquiring a silencer. We have a team of gunsmiths and machinists on staff at our headquarters, and we ship the customer an empty rifle case along with a pre-paid FedEx Ground mailing label. Normally, within a week we thread the rifle with our high-end CNC lathes and mail it back.

TAL: In addition to selling other company's products, Silencer Central now offers its own line of custom sound suppressors. Can you tell us a bit about those?

The multi-caliber titanium Banish 46 is a user-serviceable suppressor that can be easily disassembled for configuration changes and cleaning.





Maddox has a passion for hunting, particularly with suppressors. He is shown here with a roan antelope he took.

BM: Since we started, it has always been difficult to source and keep silencers in inventory. Currently, BATF is approving silencer transfers with unprecedented speed, often within days. This has created unprecedented demand. We are pleased to have partnered with a manufacturing team years ago to make the highest quality titanium silencers at the best possible price. Our Banish line is the #1 selling titanium silencer on the market. It is known for its light weight and quiet operation.

TAL: We know you are an avid shooter. Are there any Springfield Armory guns that are your particular favorites?

BM: I personally shoot the Model 2020 Redline in .308 for hunting. I love a lightweight suppressed rifle!

TAL: If you went back in time to the beginning of this business, could you ever have imagined that Silencer Central might become what is today?

BM: This was always the goal and the dream. It's indeed hard to have imagined where we are now considering I started part-time and just worked gun shows on the weekends.

TAL: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview with us, and for giving us this insight into Silencer Central and its story. We truly appreciate it.

BM: It was my pleasure.

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FULCRUM

THE INTEGRALLY COMPENSATED PRODIGY COMP 9MM ENSURES YOU STAY ON TARGET — SHOT AFTER SHOT.

JOE KURTENBACH

THE HANDGUN RENAISSANCE continues at Springfield Armory with the introduction of the integrally compensated 1911 DS Prodigy Comp AOS 9mm pistol in both 5″ and 4.25″ configurations. Even for a professional gun scribe, it can be hard to keep pace with the new models and innovations from the company. Hellcats, and Echelons, and 1911s, oh my! This time around it's the double-stack 1911-style Prodigy that has garnered engineering's attention, and the result is a trendy and tangible upgrade.

Springfield Armory's 1911 DS Prodigy is a single-action, hammer-fired, semi-automatic pistol. As its designation suggests, the Prodigy shares many features and traits with traditional 1911s, but it eschews the slim frame and single-column magazine for a more voluminous double-stack (DS) design.

Chambered for 9mm, Prodigy pistols come with two magazines boasting 17- and 20-round capacities. Although these are the standard payloads for the 1911 DS Prodigy platform, 26-round extended magazines are also available. Additionally, restricted-locale 10-round variants are available.

PRODIGIOUSLY PORTED

At writing, the pistol's family tree follows two primary forks, each with several smaller branches. The first differentiator is barrel length, as it is offered with either a 5″ barrel — and appropriately sized slide — in the standard model, or configured for a 4.25″ barrel and shortened slide. Regardless of length, additional options include optics-installed configurations, reduced-capacity models, and now, guns with integrally compensated barrels and slides.

M BUSTER



The integrally compensated 1911 DS Prodigy Comp AOS features a port cut into both the barrel and the slide. Note the rearward-positioned front sight.



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

The 1911 DS Prodigy Comp AOS 9mm is offered in both 5" (left) and 4.25" models (right).

The primary purpose for adding a compensator to a pistol is recoil mitigation. Compensators, like muzzle brakes, harness the pressurized gases produced by cartridge ignition, and vector it in a useful direction. On a handgun, that direction is typically straight up, and the result is downward pressure that combats muzzle rise during recoil.

Muzzle rise occurs as the result of energized gas being vented forward and the momentum of the slide's rearward travel. Those forces combine to lever the pistol over the shooter's hands, which act like a fulcrum. A compensator, acting like a booster at the front of the gun, helps stabilize the pistol during recoil. Ideally, they reduce disruption to the sight picture, facilitating greater target awareness and fast follow-on shots.

To achieve these benefits, a separate compensator component is often affixed to a lengthened barrel, as Springfield did with its Hellcat RDP pistols. These arrangements work well, but they also change the gun's external dimensions, meaning essential products such as holsters may be harder to source.

With the Prodigy, the company opted for a more straightforward approach, machining 0.43"x0.33" ports through both the slide and barrel. It's the same technique Springfield Armory utilized on the recently introduced Hellcat Pro Comp, and it's brilliant in its simplicity. Compensation is achieved without adding parts or changing the gun's external specs.

One other change distinguishes the Prodigy Comp configurations, and it's also located near the business-end of the barrel. Whereas the standard sighting configuration for the Prodigy pairs a fiber optic front sight with a black, serrated, U-notch rear, the Prodigy Comp comes with a white-outlined, tritium-powered front night sight.

Experience tells me that the heat-sensitive fiber-optic rod wouldn't reliably hold up to hot gas being vented up from the port, so Springfield wisely chose this component that also happily offers improved low-light performance.

AGENCY OPTIC SYSTEM

If handgun compensators are a trendy upgrade these days, accommodations for slide-mounted optics are downright mandatory. In some cases, though, adding sophisticated features is easier said

than done, and mounting micro-red-dot optics to 1911-style pistols has remained a challenge for many makers. The 1911's typically narrow, round-top slide doesn't lend itself to having a red-dot parking lot machined into it the way a wider, flatter upper assembly might.

Springfield cracked the code with the Prodigy, though. When the gun was originally launched, one of the headlining features was the Agency Optic System (AOS), a collaborative sight-mounting effort done by Springfield Armory with the custom metal cutters at Agency Arms.

The AOS makes use of high-quality metal plates machined from billet steel. The plates incorporate both a sight-specific mounting footprint and an integrated rear sight. Rather than opting for a one-size-fits-most iron sight solution, AOS rear sights are sized according to the intended optic, ensuring the co-witness through the red dot's window.

The way it works is quick and intuitive. Two screws hold an included cover plate with rear sight in position on top of the Prodigy's slide. Removing the plate reveals a shallow shelf with screw ports and a tongue-like lug that helps align the cover or mounting plates during installation. The optic mounting plates are affixed to the slide, and the optics, in turn, are secured to the mounting plates. It's a simple system that is future-proof, since new plates can be designed and manufactured for new optics.

Every Prodigy also ships with one AOS plate, designated "A 13B", and purpose-built for attaching the HEX Dragonfly red dot and similar optics. Additional plates for popular optics are available from the online Springfield Armory Store.

VORTEX DEFENDER-ST

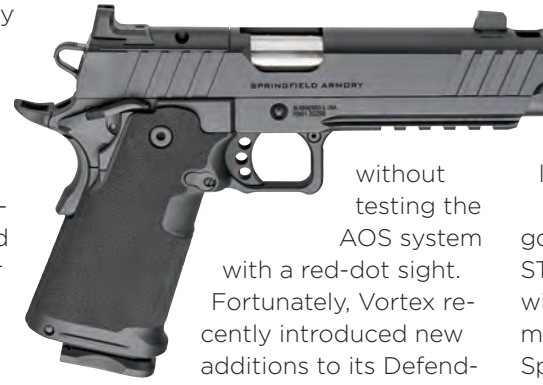
An initial evaluation of the Prodigy Comp would not be complete without testing the AOS system with a red-dot sight. Fortunately, Vortex recently introduced new additions to its Defender line of slide-mounted optics, including the mid-size Defender-ST. The ST model joins the compact Defender-CCW and upsized Defender-XL, and serves as a versatile, multipurpose middle ground.

The mounting footprint for the Defender-ST matches the Leupold DeltaPoint Pro pattern, so the "A15B" AOS plate was a perfect fit. Notable features of the Vortex include the top-load CR2032 battery tray; easy-to-use dual-button controls; durable aluminum housing with full coverage for the large glass lens; 10 reticle brightness settings, including two night-vision-compatible levels; and a motion-activation system that ensures your dot is visible when needed, but saves battery by shutting down after 10 minutes of inactivity. Two size options are available for the Defender-ST's red-dot reticle, 3 MOA or 6 MOA. Personally, I prefer the finer aiming point, especially for precision firearms like the Prodigy.

While this was my first time going hands-on with the Defender-ST, I have been seriously impressed with the Defender-CCW, which is mounted on my every-day-carry Springfield Armory Hellcat Pro. Besides subjecting it to the wear and tear of daily carry, I've trained extensively and taken defensive

PRODIGY COMP AOS

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL	4.25"/5"
WEIGHT	32.5 oz./33 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.8"/8.5"
SIGHTS	Tritium front, black serrated rear; AOS
GRIPS	Polymer grip module
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Black Cerakote
CAPACITY	17+1 (one magazine), 20+1 (one magazine)
MSRP	$1,599



While the Prodigy would be quite at home on the range for competitive shooting, variants such as this 4.25" model of the Prodigy Comp are also well-suited for personal defense.



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



The Prodigy Comp employs the Agency Optic System (AOS). It's a plate system, machined from billet steel, that integrates a rear sight into the unit.

shooting classes with that rig. The optic is righteous, and I expect no less from the Defender-ST. Plus, I love that Vortex includes a wide variety of common mounting screws in clearly labeled baggies with every optic — that is a serious quality-of-life upgrade.

COMP'D & COMPACT

For the range portion of my evaluation, I opted to test the shorter 1911 DS Prodigy Comp 4.25". In my previous experience with Prodigy pistols, I really came to appreciate the weight and balance of the smaller gun.

Too, the rhythmic cycling in the Prodigy 4.25" just felt "right" and helped me increase the pace of my shooting without sacrificing accuracy. I hoped that the Prodigy Comp 4.25" would offer the same or better, and I certainly wasn't disappointed.

For starters, the weight of the shortened Prodigy is still on-par with an all-steel 1911, despite its polymer frame. True, unloaded, the Prodigy Comp 4.25" tips the scales at around 32 ounces, but add an optic and loaded 17-round magazine, and you quickly catch up to the heft of a full-size .45.

Once you get shooting, though, that weight is a benefit, easily

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soaking up the mild recoil of the 9mm cartridge.

The excellent shooting experience is further enhanced by the new Prodigy's integral comp. On the range, the pistol shot flat. The usual push or snap of recoil was nigh imperceptible. The compensator helped keep the muzzle down, allowing the slide to cycle smoothly on a near-horizontal plane. When shooting multi-shot strings, I was able to keep the optic within my line of sight, quickly confirm alignment of the reticle on the target, and press out another shot. Firing more than 500 rounds in total, the Prodigy Comp 4.25" functioned flawlessly and shot accurately, as the nearby chart will attest.



The author tested the pistol for accuracy at 15 yards with a Ransom Rest Multi-Cal. Steady Rest, with very good results.

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.)
PRODIGY COMP 4.25" AOS

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
ARMSCOR 124-GR. FMJ	1,092 fps	1.21"	1.38"
HORNADY CRITICAL DEFENSE 115-GR. FTX	1,148 fps	0.75"	0.76"
WILSON COMBAT 147-GR. GDHP	1,064 fps	0.64"	0.73"

Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a Ransom Rest Multi-Cal. Steady 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), FTX (Flex Tip), gr. (grain), GDHP (Gold Dot hollow point).

In addition to its stellar performance, I want to point out that the Prodigy is a gun that's easy to run. First of all, being a 1911-inspired pistol, the Prodigy is safe, featuring both a rear grip safety and a bilateral manual thumb safety. The thumb safety levers are serrated across their faces for purchase, and snick securely in and out of the downward "fire" position.

When it's time to fire, the curved three-hole trigger delivers a clean break. My test sample's trigger pull weight measured consistently 4 lbs., 10 oz. with a Lyman digital gauge, which is perfect for a defensive firearm.

Wide forward and rear cocking serrations also make slide manipulations a breeze, whether running an optic or irons. The forged steel frame, to which the polymer grip module of the pistol is attached, incorporates an accessory mounting rail for adding a light or laser sight. And, finally, the molded polymer grip module offers an aggressive, but not abrasive, texture to facilitate a sure grip, and the magazine well is slightly flared and beveled for quick magazine changes.

If the Prodigy family has one eccentricity, it is already well-known to seasoned Springfield shooters, and that's the full-length two-piece guide rod. Nothing to be afraid of here, but be aware that disassembly requires the use of an included 5⁄32 hex wrench.

Read the manual for full instructions and you'll get the hang of it in no time, but I think it's prudent to keep that wrench in the range bag, along with tools for mounting and zeroing your optic, and a spare battery. Better to have them and not need them, right?

CONCLUSION

In all, the Prodigy Comp proved to be a worthy addition to the Springfield 1911 DS lineup, and the Vortex Defender-ST was a perfect pairing. The gun ran reliably and shot flat enough that I never needed to search for the dot.

In its 4.25" configuration, the Prodigy was already one of my favorite handguns for range use and defensive carry. Now, the pistol gets another boost thanks to the new integral comp.

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RAISING THE BAR

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NEW BOLT RIFLES ARE LEGION. FEW IMPRESS DISCRIMINATING HUNTERS. SPRINGFIELD'S LATEST SHOULD.

WAYNE VAN ZWOLL



IMAGE: MAX JACOBSEN/@PNW_PEW



The Model 2020 Boundary has the profile and handling characteristics of a traditional hunting rifle, but features cutting-edge materials and design.

IF I WERE TO BE GRANTED A WISH, I might mention something like my youth back, or maybe a Porsche. But, if I really had a little time to think about it, I might just simply say a good hunting rifle. You know, one with traditional lines and classic styling, but with something "new" to offer.

Well, I recently had that wish come true when a long box turned up at my local gun-shop. Inside was a heavy, black soft case, the kind in which Springfield Armory ships their rifles. However, its "2020" tag threw me. My wish was for a new rifle.

Indeed, it was.

The Model 2020 Boundary is the newest sibling of Springfield's first bolt-action rifle, the Model 2020 Waypoint, introduced in … well, of course. I'd been impressed enough with a Waypoint in 6.5 Creedmoor to report on it, then to snare two more in .308 Win. and 6mm Creedmoor.

The Boundary has the same bones as the Waypoint — a good thing, because they're good bones. The Springfield-built action — offered in both short- and long-action variants — shares the Remington 700's footprint, so it fits stocks and accepts triggers designed for the 700. (Not that you'll wish upgrades.)

Like the Waypoint, the Boundary features a hand-laid, pillar-bedded, carbon-fiber stock. The stainless receiver has an integral recoil lug. A TriggerTech trigger adjusts externally down to 2½ lbs. if you so desire. A lock time of just 1.9 milliseconds helps you hit where you're looking as the trigger breaks. The two-detent side safety permits cycling when it's "on."

As in the Waypoint, a twin-lug bolt, spiral-fluted and nitrided, slides piston-smooth through the Boundary's EDM-cut raceways. Dual cocking cams help with bolt lift. The bolt disassembles easily without tools. Like the receiver, it is machined after heat-treating to ensure finished dimensions match specs. The receiver, bottom metal, barrel shank and brake are Cerakoted. A 6″ Picatinny rail accommodates scopes.

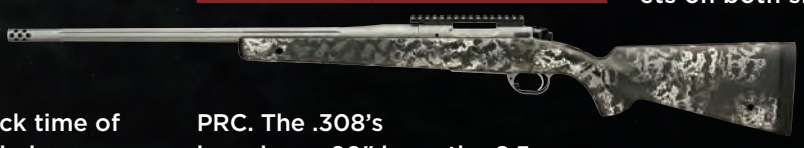
Springfield lists both BSF carbon-fiber and fluted stainless barrels for all seven of the Boundary's chamberings — .308, 6.5 CM, 6.5 PRC, 7mm Rem. Mag., 7mm PRC, .300 Win. Mag. and .300 PRC. The .308's barrels are 20″ long, the 6.5 CM's 22. Springfield settled on 24″ for all the others. The radial brakes, on 5/8-24 threads, are removable. Rifling twists stabilize long, ballistically efficient bullets.

Each carbon fiber-barrel has a stainless core "in a roll-wrapped carbon-fiber sleeve loaded under tension." Almost the entire length of the sleeve is free of the core, with the gap conducting heat away. Fluting under the sleeve trims the weight and speeds cooling.

Springfield's accuracy guarantee for the Boundary is the same as for the Waypoint: .75 MOA with match-grade factory loads for a three-shot group with a skilled shooter.

MODEL 2020 BOUNDARY

CHAMBERINGS	.308, 6.5 CM, 6.5 PRC, .300 PRC, .300 Win. Mag., 7mm Rem. Mag., 7mm PRC
BARREL	20″, 22″, 24″ (stainless steel or carbon fiber)
WEIGHT	6 lbs., 10 oz. to 7 lbs., 2 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	41″ to 46″
SIGHTS	N/A, Picatinny rail
STOCK	Carbon fiber
ACTION	Bolt-action
FINISH	Cerakote
CAPACITY	3-4
MSRP	$2,173-$2,599



DIVERGING POINT?

There are differences between these 2020s.

First: Magazines and stocks. The Boundary has an internal magazine, with a hinged floorplate that is secured by a guard-bow latch. For hunting, I personally much prefer it to the Model 2020 Waypoint's detachable single-stack box that protrudes 1¾″. With the Model 2020 Boundary, I can more easily carry the rifle with one hand at its balance point.

The Boundary has a trimmer buttstock, smoothly ovoid in cross-section (the Waypoint's has six angles). The straight comb is more slender, though well-rounded and supportive. It has no cheekpiece. It naturally aligns my eye with scopes in low and medium rings. There's no comb nose cut-out to allow for bolt removal, as the bolt clears the nose easily.

Instead of sling swivel pockets on both sides and in front of the toe, the Boundary has one pocket on the left side. The buttstock's bottom-line rises at a pleasing angle from the 1″ black Pachmayr recoil pad to a traditional "sporter" grip. (The Waypoint stock is much deeper behind a thick, near-vertical grip, whose trailing edge drops very low from the tang.)

IMAGE: MAX JACOBSEN/@PNW_PEW



The Boundary's fore-stock is trimmer and less angular in cross-section, also 2" shorter than the Waypoint's. It has two 1¼" M-Lok slots up front instead of three, and a single left-side sling swivel pocket instead of one on either side. The Boundary's stock is finished in what's described as Rogue camo. It's attractive, but so are the other finishes on Waypoint stocks.

Other disparities: The boundary's detachable bolt knob is smoothly pear-shaped and a tad shorter. The triggerguard is rounded, not square and, praise be, was thoughtfully profiled to follow the curve of the trigger.

These changes may seem a bit small; to my eye they're cosmetic improvements. For me, blocky is good if you're building a guardhouse; not so shaping a guard bow. If unnecessary angles were beautiful, Porsche roadsters would undoubtedly have had them by now.

I like the Boundary's dimensions and balance. It points naturally and absorbs the shock of firing well. The trigger arrived with a clean break just shy of 4 lbs. — exactly the same as on my Waypoint in 6mm CM. Adjustment, should I want it, is easy.

Springfield has a winner in the 2020's push-feed action. After four rifles and loads now totaling in the dozens, I've had no failures to cycle, not even a hiccup. Bolt travel is piston-slick, with almost no rattle. There's negligible end play at full retraction. From both the Waypoint's AICS magazine and the Boundary's internal box, cartridges slide seamlessly up and in. While the ejection port isn't huge, top-loading with single cartridges is easy.

The bolt-face extractor is stronger than the Mauser faithful might assume. Inserted through a slot in the center of the right-hand (lower) locking lug, it's secured by its own beefy shoulders. The claw is a generous 6mm wide across most of its face, 5mm at its leading edge, and is designed to prevail over case-sticking handloads. The face angle makes for easy push-feed engagement. A peppy plunger ejector boots from 4 o'clock.

The rifle features a patent-pending, one-piece hinged floorplate/integral box magazine system that offers exceptional fit and rattle-free operation.


IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

RANGE TIME

How does the Boundary shoot? The sample I received was a short action in .308 Win., and I'm pleased to report it went from good to great. Early groups were capable for a hunting rifle firing



my assortment of factory loads, most intended for big game — but I wanted even better. To ensure it got a fair chance to shine, I enlisted a sharp-shooting friend, Sam Shaw, to share time on the rifle and my Oehler Model 35P chronograph. Evidently, the barrel likes to send bullets, as groups tightened during our range session. The prelude ate enough cartridges to limit some multiples of groups, but enabled us to tap the Boundary's inner self.

The rifle was delightfully unfussy about the loads it gobbled, with us trying a broad range of 16 loadings ranging from 110 grains up to 185 grains. During the course of our shooting, the rifle punched near-minute five-shot groups at either end of the 110- to 185-gr. bullet-weight spectrum.

All told, we ended up with three of the best loads hovering at half an inch, with three-shot groups well under the .75 MOA accuracy guarantee. This is excellent accuracy for a 6½-lb. sporter fed a variety of commercial loads!

PERFORMANCE (100 YDS.)
MODEL 2020 BOUNDARY .308 WIN.

LOAD	VELOCITY	BEST GROUP
FIOCCHI 150-GR. SWIFT SCIROCCO	2,788 fps	0.6"
HORNADY 110-GR. TAP	3,198 fps	0.6"
PMC 165-GR. XHP	2,540 fps	0.5"

Group size is measured in inches and is made up of three-shot groups and fired at 100 yards. Velocity in feet per second and is the average of three rounds at 10 ft. fired across an Oehler 35 chronograph.

CONCLUSION

I'm certainly pleased with the Boundary. Surely other hunters will give it high ratings in regards to function, accuracy, balance and pointing qualities. Its profile makes it more trail-worthy than the Waypoint, which isn't as easy to cradle. Its light weight suits it to long treks in steep places, weighing from 6 lbs., 10 oz. at the lightest up to just 7 lbs., 2 oz. at the heaviest.

With its four powerful 7mm and .30-caliber chamberings that are on offer, it has enough reach and power for any game anywhere, save Africa's thick-skinned brutes. And with the .308 and 6.5 chamberings, you have even more options.

Springfield has done itself proud with this new hunting rifle. And with an MSRP ranging from $2,173 to $2,599, it's a lot of rifle for the money. Magazine capacity is four in rifles bored to .308 and 6.5 CM, while it is three in all the other offerings.

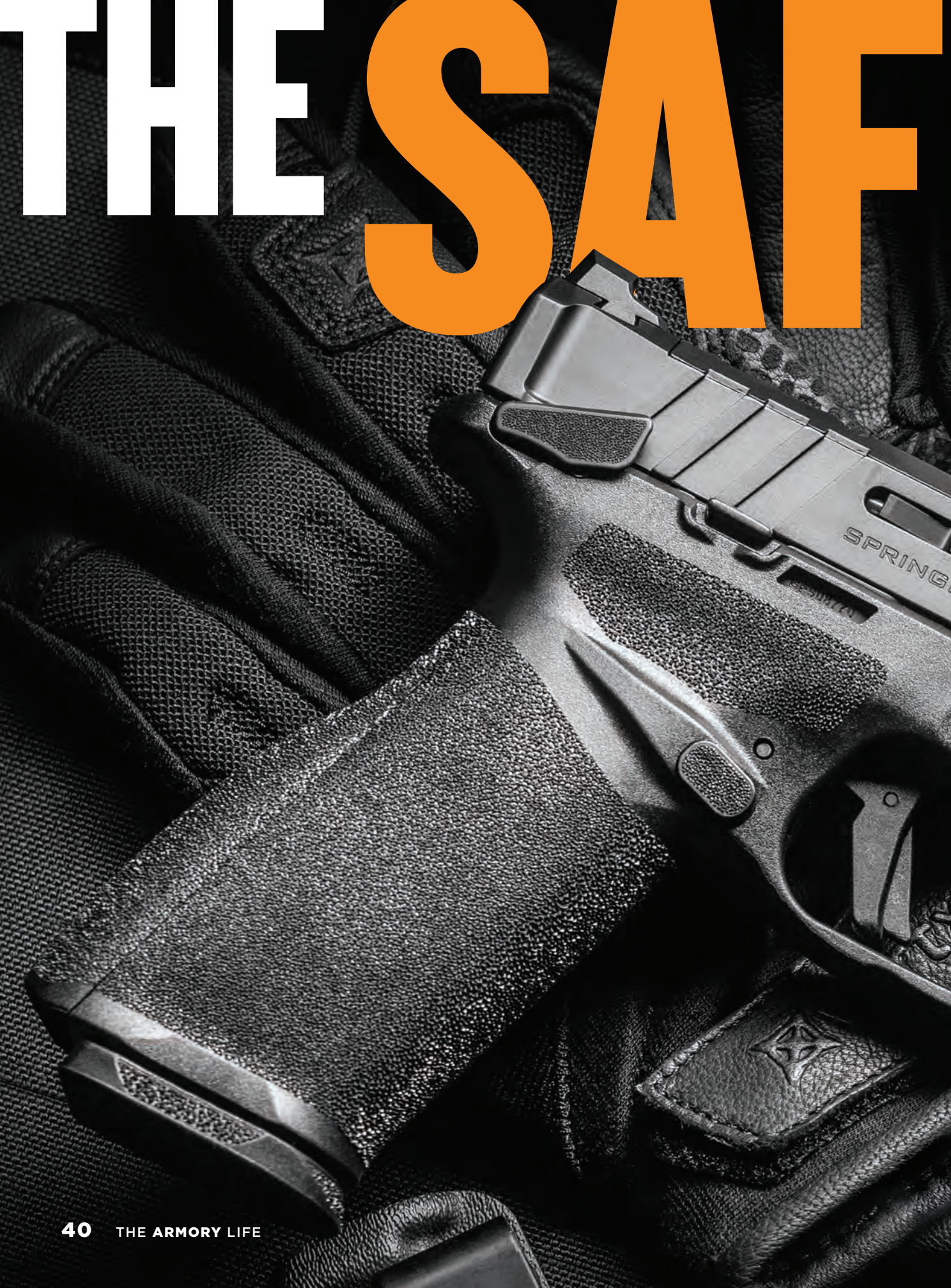
Failings? None. If I really thought about it, I'd possibly move the comb nose a half-inch back and flute it generously, straighten the top-line of the grip slightly and round the forend belly a tad, but I might just be nit-picking here. I guess I should have mentioned these things in my first wish.

The Boundary's comb aligned Wayne's eye quickly, and would work well with scopes in low or medium rings.



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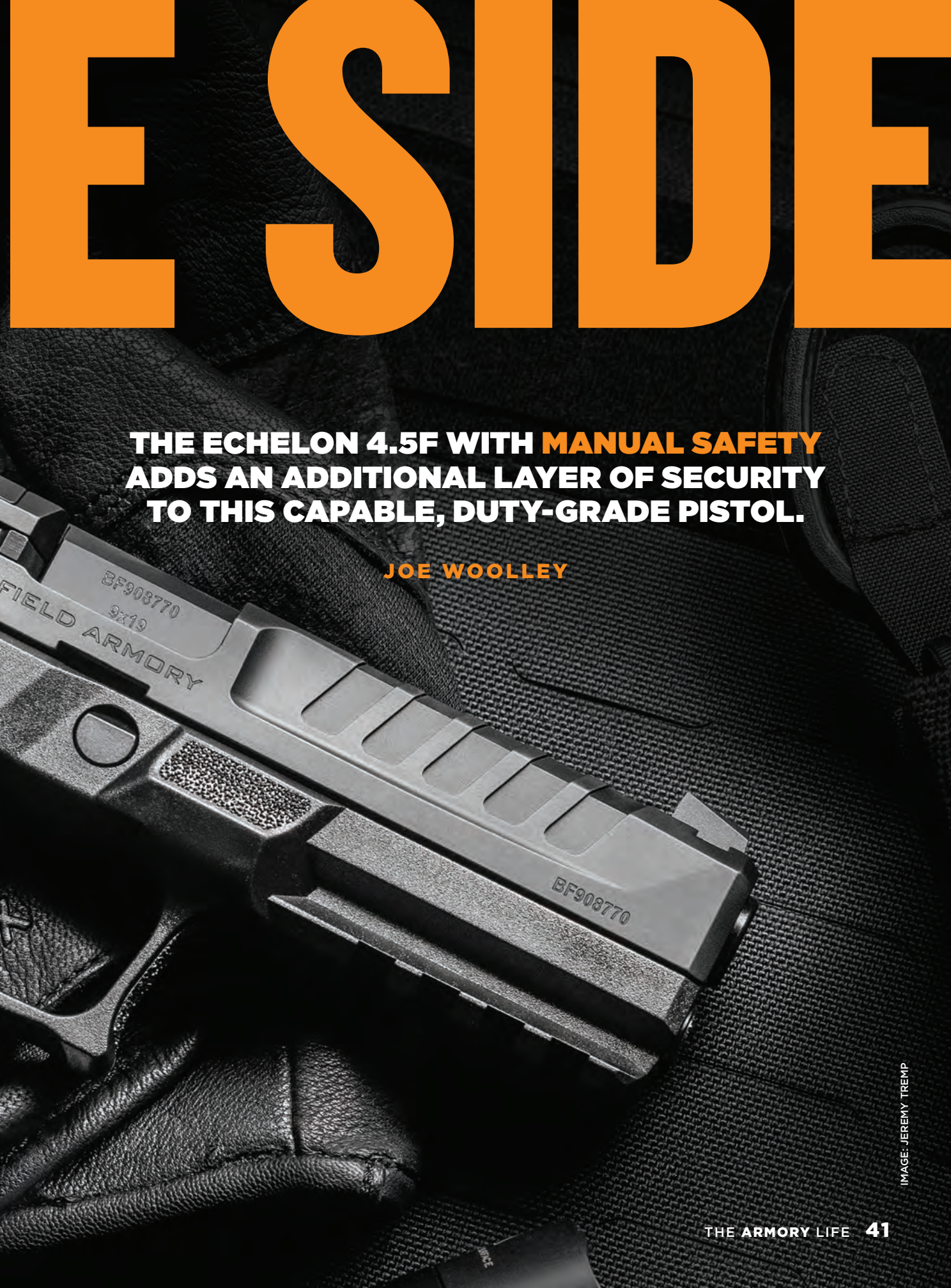


IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

INTRODUCED IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2023, the Springfield Armory Echelon 4.5F pistol has already had a darn good run. First, *Guns & Ammo* named it the "2023 Handgun of the Year". Then the National Association of Sporting Goods Wholesalers ranked it as the "Best New Handgun" for 2023. This year saw it win a "Gold" ranking in the Member Tested and Recommended program of the National Tactical Officer's Association (NTOA).

Springfield announced in late May of this year that they would be offering OD Green- and Desert FDE-color versions for those so inclined. Now, they have a new version mounting a feature I think the NTOA and self-defense-minded citizens need to know about — an ambidextrous frame-mounted manual safety.

A PROPER FOOTING

First, the basics. The Echelon is a full-sized, polymer-frame, striker-fired 9mm semi-automatic pistol. Overall height (without a red-dot sight) is 5.5". Adding a Trijicon RMR brought the overall height to just more than 6", and this minimal increase in height was achieved through the fact you can direct-mount the optic to the slide (more on that in a bit).

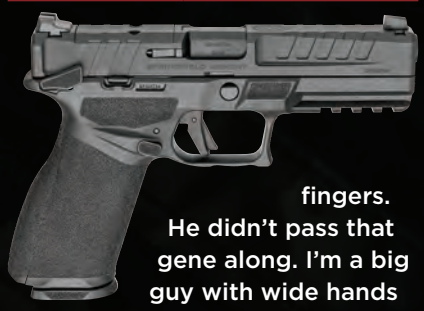
Overall length of the pistol is 8". The slide is made of billet machined steel with a tough Melonite finish. The barrel is 4.5" long (unless you get the 5.28" threaded barrel Echelon). Both are hammer-forged for accuracy and durability. The pistol comes with two magazines, one flush-fit that holds 17 rounds, and one extended that holds 20. Reduced capacity 15-round and 10-round models are also available for restricted locales.

Modularity seems to be the current theme for handguns, and I understand why. Handguns that don't fit your hand correctly are much more difficult to shoot well. Grips that are too large or too small don't index well on the target for anyone. To address this, the Echelon features a "grip module" that can be adapted to fit a wide range of hand sizes.

My dad had long piano-player fingers. He didn't pass that gene along. I'm a big guy with wide hands and short fingers. Handgun fit can be problematic for me. Not so with the Echelon. Had it not been small enough (or large enough) for my hands, Springfield Armory includes additional backstraps that can easily be changed out to fit your hand. It comes with ones in small, medium and large sizes, and each features an integrated armorer's tool. The medium size it shipped with worked great for me.

ECHELON 4.5F MANUAL SAFETY

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4.5"
WEIGHT	24 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	8"
SIGHTS	U-Dot
GRIPS	Modular grip module
ACTION	Striker-fired
FINISH	Melonite
CAPACITY	15+1 (one magazine), 17+1 (one magazine)
MSRP	$679



The grip module had several more features I liked. Just about every part of it I needed to touch was covered with what Springfield terms "Adaptive Grip Texture." This is the same texture you will find on the ever-popular Hellcat 9mm. If you are not familiar with it, think of it as having two layers of fine bumps. The first layer features flattened tops that provide a good grip when held lightly. The second/deeper layer has "sharpened" points that come into play when I use my "death grip." I don't intend for handguns to move in my hands, and I squeeze them accordingly.

The design of the Echelon made it easy to control under recoil. The texture was present on the magazine release, the bottom and forward surface of the triggerguard, the takedown lever, and the two index points on the sides of the frame. The triggerguard has been nicely relieved, allowing the middle finger of the shooting hand to ride as high as possible.

The slide is also designed to help the shooter. I am a big fan of press checks where I move the slide to the rear about ½" to verify whether the chamber is loaded. I don't like grabbing the rear of the slide where my hand covers the ejection port and hides everything I need to see. I'm also more than slightly paranoid about letting my hand come near the muzzle through this process.

The Echelon features forward grooves ending with a "trench"



The duty-grade 9mm Echelon 4.5F pistol with manual safety features a frame-mounted ambidextrous safety.

just forward of the ejection port to give me plenty of room and purchase. There are three more grooves at the rear of the slide that help accomplish the same goals if you prefer the "slingshot method" of operating a slide. The "wings" at the very back of the slide can also come in handy when manipulating a slide with a red dot attached.

The sighting system is another place where Springfield Armory shows some serious ingenuity. The iron sights are excellent. The rear sight offers a sharp ledge to allow one-handed manipulation as necessary. The notch is a deep "U" shape that mates up well with circular insert in the front sight. That has a tritium insert for low-light capabilities along with a luminescent circle that makes it easy to pick up in the light. While not overly tall, both sights are of sufficient height to allow the shooter to co-witness them through the Trijicon RMR I installed.

UNIQUE FEATURES

Remember I mentioned direct-mounting a Trijicon RMR? You might think this means the Echelon has an optics footprint cut exclusively for that optic, and you would be wrong. Frankly, the optics mounting system for the Echelon is simply magic.

It seems that everyone is determined to develop their own unique footprint for their sight and leave the mounting thereof to the gun companies.

To address this, Springfield Armory has produced an amazing solution with the Echelon to allow their products to easily mount most reflex optics. They call it the Variable Interface System, and the idea was to create an optics area that was already drilled and tapped for mounting screws and featuring movable pins to accept as many footprints as possible.

Screws are great, but red dots really need a recoil lug to stabilize the whole arrangement. The Echelon's system also provides a couple of posts that fit in mortises on the top of the slide. These posts have tabs inboard of the recoil stud that impinge on the base of the optical sight. The tabs are built in such a way that the mounted sight pushes down on

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



the tab, camming them and the recoil stud into a very tight fit with the slide and the sight. My experience has shown the system to be rock solid thus far. And it does all this without adapter plates for the vast majority of popular red dot optics out there. Like I said, it's truly magical.

In addition to the innovative Variable Interface System, the Echelon also features — within its polymer grip module — a standalone fire control unit Springfield calls the Central Operating Group. This is the serialized part that BATF considers to be the actual firearm. It also contains many slightly important working parts for the pistol — like the trigger and the sear. Or should I say, sears? More on that in a moment. Also, this system allows you to easily swap out grip modules in different colors and sizes.

According to Springfield, the Echelon is designed and tested to exceed SAAMI drop test parameters. To achieve this, the Echelon's Central Operating Group features a unique second sear design to help prevent unintentional discharge should the firearm be dropped.

The trigger proper within the Central Operating Group is a flat-faced unit that is designed to break at right around 90 degrees. It's wide with curved edges, making it comfortable to manipulate. It contains a blade safety that must be depressed before the trigger can be moved to the rear.

They also designed the striker so that it is fully tensioned when cocked. Simply rack the slide of the pistol and everything is good to go. The trigger stroke doesn't require any additional muscle to cock the striker, thus allowing that task to be accomplished with reduced effort.

On my sample, required trigger compression averaged a smooth 4.7 lbs. Since Springfield also seems to be about as paranoid as I am about safety, they also added that secondary sear that would stop the striker from contacting the primer in the very unlikely event the primary sear fails. No, I've never heard of that happening.

THE NEXT STEP

Now that we have laid out the details of the pistol itself, let's dive

into the identifying feature of this newest model. This latest version of the Echelon adds yet another safety feature in the guise of a frame-mounted, ambidextrous manual safety. It's located at the rear of the frame, similar in position to that of a 1911.

Springfield's take on this useful little gadget is different than most I've seen. Textured tabs are mounted on both sides of the frame at the rear. By the way, the Echelon should be great for southpaws — all the controls except the takedown lever are ambidextrous.

While relatively unobtrusive, the location and feel of these thumb safeties should make them easy to operate for anyone comfortable with a 1911-style pistol. Flipping up the safety locks the trigger, though not the slide. The Echelon can still be loaded, unloaded or chamber-checked with the safety engaged. The safety can even be engaged when the striker is at rest.

The lever is thick enough to be activated easily with a very positive "click" when done. It is also small enough that the shooting thumb can ride on the outside of the lever. Everyone has their own idea of what a perfect safety is. For some, a flat, wide paddle-type safety that requires the thumb to stay high in the grip can be uncomfortable. If that's you, you need to try the Echelon.

The manual safety on the new Echelon provides extra back-up in the event of a critical incident. I love a good 1911 and the manual safety thereon when adrenalin is ramped up. All my experience has been in the competition world. I can't imagine what it must be like when the threat is real. I like that safety there in case I forget Rule #3: Keep your finger off the trigger until it is on the target and you have decided to shoot.



The author found the gun's texture was aggressive enough to be effective without being excessive or uncomfortable.

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.)
SPRINGFIELD ECHELON 4.5F WITH MANUAL SAFETY

LOAD	VELOCITY	BEST GROUP
FIOCCHI 147-GR. FMJ	966 fps	1.13"
G9 DEFENSE 80-GR. MONOMETAL	1,536 fps	1.18"
REMINGTON 115-GR. FMJ	1,171 fps	1.12"

Accuracy results are the best of three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a bench rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured in feet per second (fps) by a LabRadar Chronograph. Abbreviations: FMJ (full metal jacket), gr. (grain), in. (inch), fps (feet per second), ft. lbs. (foot pounds of energy).

SHOOTING RESULTS

I tested three different kinds and weights of ammo. The first is the new 80-gr. screamer from G9 Defense. These pint-size little pills averaged 1,536 fps, which generated 419 ft lbs. of energy and grouped just under 2" — and 1.18" in my best group. Next, we selected the tried-and-true Remington 115-gr. FMJ "Green Box". These mid-weight loads chrono'd at 1,171 fps with 350 ft lbs. of energy and averaged 1.41" groups. My best group was 1.12".

Lastly, we wanted to see what some heavier bullets would do in this Echelon and picked up some 147-gr. FMJ's from Fiocchi. Looking like a great subsonic option, the Fiocchi's chronographed 966 fps with 305 ft lbs. of energy and 1.49" groups. My best group was 1.13". Average group size across all three types was just over 1.6". Of course, this Echelon functioned perfectly — and we gave it plenty of chances to fail.

CONCLUSION

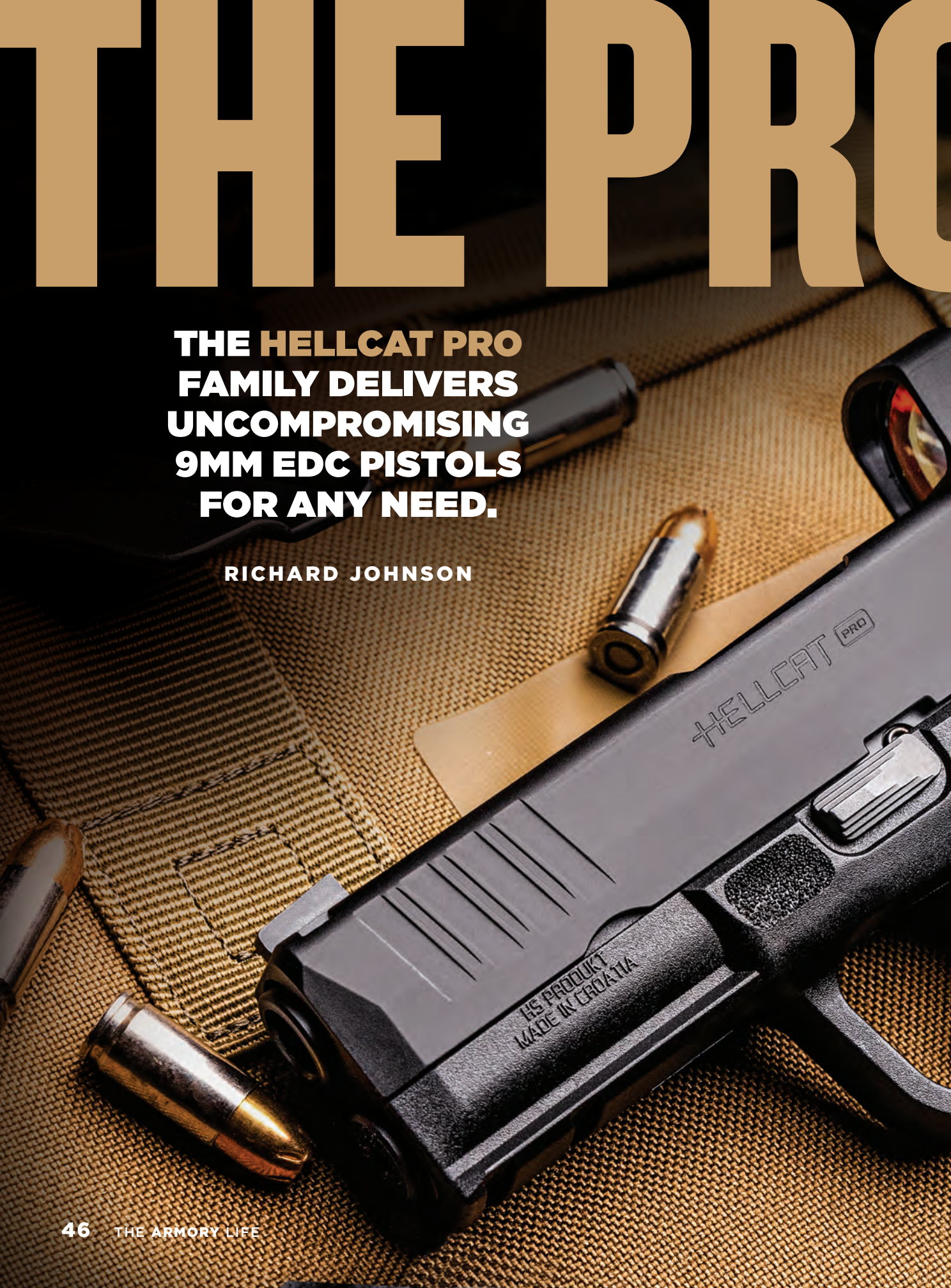
So there you have it. Springfield Armory has taken an already great 9mm duty-style pistol and added an appealing new feature to the platform. If you are the type of shooter who wants a reliable and accurate 9mm pistol with advanced features like its optics-mounting system and modular grip module, and also prefers a manual safety, this is the one for you. The list price for the standard capacity as well as restricted locale-capacity guns is just $679.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
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THE PRO

THE HELLCAT PRO FAMILY DELIVERS UNCOMPROMISING 9MM EDC PISTOLS FOR ANY NEED.

RICHARD JOHNSON



D PICKS



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



The Hellcat Pro Comp takes everything that makes the standard model great and adds an integral compensator system for enhanced performance.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

WHEN IT FIRST HIT THE SCENE, I knew the Hellcat Pro 9mm would be my ideal CCW pistol. It retained the thinness of the original micro 9mm Hellcat while adding a bit more grip and barrel to make it an even more effective defensive pistol. Adding 15- to 17-rounds of 9mm and a 3.7" barrel to the features and feel of its subcompact brother, I figured the Pro was ideal for my needs.

I was right. It seems the Hellcat Pro was right for a lot of other people as well. In response, Springfield Armory expanded the line to more than a dozen models — so far — with something for just about everyone. Let's go over the Hellcat Pro line-up and see what's currently offered and which might be the best fit for you.

THE ORIGINAL

While there are many variations of the Hellcat Pro, the original is still an amazing pistol that offers incredible performance in a personal protection pistol. Many people say the heart of a performance gun is in the barrel. Springfield Armory uses a 3.7" hammer-forged unit in the Hellcat Pro. While it is not labeled as a "match grade" barrel, I've found that my gun is extremely accurate. For increased durability and corrosion resistance, the barrel has a Melonite finish.

The frame of the gun is a durable black polymer. The grip fills my average-sized hands perfectly without having a pinky hanging off of the bottom. Springfield Armory developed Adaptive Grip Texture for the frame of the Hellcat and Hellcat Pro to help to positively lock the pistol in your hand without making it sharp or abrasive. It lends itself well to long shooting sessions in all kinds of weather. Forward of the triggerguard, Springfield includes an integral accessory rail, allowing you to add any light or laser to the pistol easily.

On top of the frame rides a billet steel slide with excellent gripping serrations machined forward and aft of the ejection port. The slide is Melonite-finished to ensure a lifetime of use.

Springfield Armory machines an optics mounting platform into the slide of the Hellcat Pro called OSP (for "Optical Sight Pistol"). It is designed to directly mount any reflex-style sight using the Springfield Micro footprint, which is the same as that of the Shield RMSc/SMSc.

Of course, you may not even want to add an optic after you see the sights. For factory sights, Springfield Armory uses what I consider to be the best factory sights on the market — the U-Dot system. The front sight is a large post with a tritium insert. Surrounding that is a large photoluminescent ring that is highly visible, making for a front sight that is fast to find in a wide range of lighting conditions.

In the rear, Springfield Armory uses a large U-notch rear sight. The wide notch has a white outline that allows you to quickly align the front sight for accurate shooting. Dubbed a Tactical Rack rear sight, the leading edge of the sight has a hard edge designed for one-handed slide manipulation in an emergency.

Springfield Armory includes two magazines with the Hellcat Pro. The first is a flush-fitting 15-round magazine, while the second is an extended magazine that holds 17 rounds. The company also includes a soft storage case for the pistol. The suggested retail price is $649.

CAT OF ANOTHER COLOR

If you are like me, you have an appreciation for pistols that are available in a variety of colors. Desert FDE is one of the more popular colors on the market, and this version — the Desert FDE Hellcat Pro — looks great.

The polymer frame has a Flat Dark Earth color that matches the Desert FDE color of the Cerakote finish on the slide. If you are unfamiliar with the Cerakote process, it is a ceramic-based process that coats the metal in a thin but incredibly durable finish that looks amazing.

Functionally, this pistol is the same as the original Hellcat Pro pistol, with its intuitive sighting system, Adaptive Grip Texture and optics cut. The MSRP on this gun is $692.

HELLCAT PRO

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL	3.7"-4.4"
WEIGHT	21-22 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	6.6"-7.3"
SIGHTS	U-Dot
GRIPS	Integral, polymer
ACTION	Striker-fired
FINISH	Black, Desert FDE, Platinum Gray, Robin's Egg Blue
CAPACITY	10+1, 15+1, 17+1 (each pistol comes with two magazines)
MSRP	$649-$1,050



IF LESS IS MORE?

Springfield Armory recognizes that there are American citizens who live in states with restrictive gun laws. To that end, the company offers several models intended to meet requisite state compliance standards. The company believes everyone should have the right to legal self-defense and produces variants to help these customers acquire a Springfield Armory firearm.

If you live in a region where you are restricted to pistols with 15-round magazines, Springfield Armory manufactures two variants of the standard Hellcat Pro for you — a black variant and a Desert FDE variant. Both of these guns are the same as the analogous models mentioned earlier except for shipping with two flush-fitting 15-round magazines. Suggested retail pricing is the same as the standard guns.



The Desert FDE Hellcat Pro adds this popular and attractive color option to the platform.

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

The Hellcat Pro with SMSc adds in a proven and reliable 4 MOA red-dot optic that direct mounts to the slide.

For those living in the most restrictive states, Springfield also offers a low-capacity version of the original Hellcat Pro. This gun ships with a pair of 10-round magazines. The magazines are flush-fitting and work perfectly in all Hellcat Pro pistols. Although Springfield Armory has to make these magazines special for state compliance, the gun's price remains the same: $649.

Also of note is the fact that Springfield has also added a California-compliant version of the Hellcat Pro. Apart from the 10-round magazine, magazine disconnect safety and tactile/visible loaded chamber indicator, this pistol has everything you know and love about the Hellcat Pro. MSRP is also $649.

IN YOUR SIGHTS

Although it is an easy process to add a red-dot sight to your Hellcat Pro, many people prefer to get one from the factory. If this describes you, Springfield Armory offers a Hellcat Pro packaged with the Shield SMSc red dot optic.

The optic is a lightweight micro-sized optic with a bright 4 MOA aiming dot and an auto-adjusting brightness system. The result is an optic that adds practically no weight, yet allows you to get on target fast with quick follow-up shots.

The Hellcat Pro with Shield SMSc has all of the same features as the original Hellcat Pro, including the ability to remove the optic or to install a different model should your needs change. With the Shield SMSc sight, the gun carries an MSRP of $859.

A NEW BALANCE

While you could argue the Hellcat Pro is the pinnacle of EDC design, the Hellcat Pro Comp gives the EDC powerhouse an interesting new feature. Featuring an integral compensator, the Pro Comp reduces muzzle flip and perceived recoil by allowing escaping gas to flow upward out of the port to counteract muzzle flip.

Rather than a port (or ports) located behind the front sight, the Pro Comp has the front sight move back a short distance to be positioned behind the compensator port. Looking at the profile, you could almost miss that this is a new variant of the Hellcat Pro as it looks very similar to a stock Pro. When you shoot it, you will definitely notice the difference. MSRP of the pistol is just $699.

THREADING THE NEEDLE

Suppressors are becoming more and more popular as people understand how they work to protect your hearing and that they aren't as difficult to legally own as you might believe. It's only natural then for Springfield to offer the Hellcat Pro Threaded.

While this Hellcat Pro is nearly identical to the original, it is fitted with a 4.4" barrel with ½"x28 threads. Threading is standard for 9mm pistols, meaning you can fit practically any appropriately sized suppressor or muzzle device to the gun. For shooting that is safer for your hearing, this is the gun you want to run. Springfield Armory includes a thread protec-

tor with the gun for use without a comp or silencer.

For a completely outfitted pistol, you can add a white light or laser on the accessory rail and a reflex sight on the optics-cut slide. With the excellent U-Dot sights and Adaptive Grip texture, this gun is a shooter. It has all of the features of a full-sized duty pistol, but retains a size that is perfect for concealed carry. It's a real bargain at an MSRP of $667. There is also a Desert FDE Hellcat Pro Threaded priced at an MSRP of $710. Additionally, there are state-compliant versions of both the black and the Desert FDE pistols with 10-round magazines and matching MSRPs.



The manual safety version of the Hellcat Pro adds an ambidextrous safety at the rear of the frame, similar in position to that of the 1911.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

While thumb safeties are not generally typical on striker-fired pistols, many shooters do like to have the option. If this applies to you, Springfield Armory offers several Hellcat Pro models to pique your interest.

With the Hellcat Pro with Manual Safety, Springfield added a thumb-manipulated ambidextrous manual safety to the frame of the Hellcat Pro that is positioned similarly to that of the proven 1911. In other words, down for "fire" and up for "safe".

This Hellcat Pro retains all of the normal features you associate with the original gun, including its compact size, thin grip, optics-ready slide, tritium/luminescent front sight, Tactical Rack U-notch rear sight, Adaptive Grip Texture and accessory rail. The gun includes a pair of magazines: a flush-fitting magazine holding 15 rounds of 9mm and an extended mag that wrangles 17 rounds. The manufacturer's suggested retail price is $649.

The Hellcat Pro Threaded model extends the barrel out to 4.4" and features ½"x28 threads for mounting the suppressor or muzzle device of your choice.



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

Want a Hellcat Pro pistol with a manual safety that packs in an red dot optic? Then the Hellcat Pro with Manual Safety and Shield SMSc is the one that's right for you. From the factory, it comes with a Shield SMSc red dot sight. The SMSc has a robust polymer body to keep weight down, while offering excellent ruggedness. MSRP is $859.

If you live in restricted locales, there are versions of the manual safety pistol for you as well. One is the Hellcat Pro with Manual Safety and 15-round magazine, which comes with a pair of flush-fitting 15-round magazines. MSRP is $649. There is also the Low Capacity Hellcat Pro with Manual

Safety that comes with a pair of 10-round magazines, and also has an MSRP of $649.

SPECIAL EDITIONS

Even with the company offering so many different options, there are still opportunities for special versions of the Hellcat Pro. For people seeking something a bit different, here are several exclusive models that may fit your needs.

Firearms distributor Sports South teamed up with Springfield Armory to create a Platinum Gray Hellcat Pro. This model offers all of the important features of the original pistol, and then adds a Cerakoted Platinum Gray slide for a subtle two-tone look. The slide is cut for a red dot optic with the same Springfield Micro footprint of the other pistols in this line. The MSRP on this pistol is $670.

Probably the brightest gun in the series, this Davidson's exclusive Robin's Egg Blue Hellcat Pro features a frame in this eye-catching color paired with a stainless steel slide. The two-tone look jumps out at you and is a real conversation starter at the range. MSRP is $692.



These two distributor-exclusive Hellcat Pro pistols — the Platinum Gray (rear) and Robin's Egg Blue (front) variants — offer shooters eye-catching style.

In addition, firearms distributor Sportsman's Warehouse worked with Springfield Armory and Viridian to offer the Hellcat Pro Threaded with Viridian RFX11 & CTL model. These all-black pistols come packed with Viridian's RFX11 micro-sized green dot optic and the small yet powerful Viridian CTL pistol-mounted light. It comes with one 15-round and one 17-round extended magazine, and has an MSRP of $1,050. There is also a 15-round-only version with two magazines for restricted locales, as well as a low-capacity version with two 10-round magazines. MSRP for both of these versions is also $1,050.

The Sportsman's Warehouse exclusive Hellcat Pro Threaded with Viridian RFX11 & CTL model comes packed with a green dot optic and powerful light.



FINAL THOUGHTS

I believe that the Springfield Armory Hellcat Pro 9mm series offers a reliable and versatile CCW option for practically any need. With its wide range of offerings, including state-compliant and manual safety versions, the Hellcat Pro caters to very diverse needs while maintaining Springfield's high standards. That makes the Hellcat Pro a standout choice in the CCW market.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
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JOE KURTENBACH

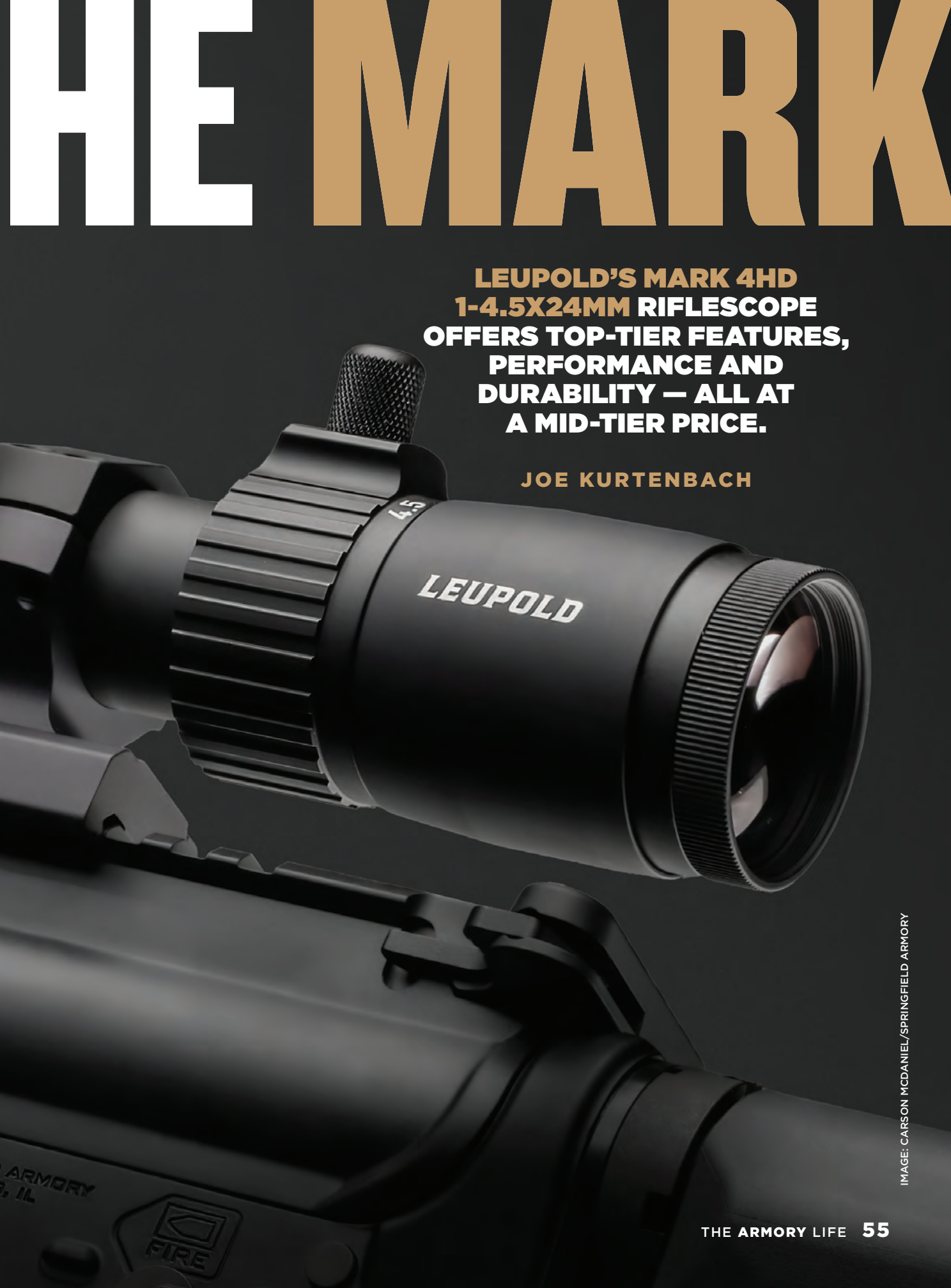


IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

LEUPOLD has earned its position atop the sporting optic industry. The company does it all. Among U.S.-based riflescope manufacturers, Leupold's catalog is impressive for its length and breadth. Seemingly offering a tailor-made optic for every ballistic pursuit, the company is renowned for the consistent quality, performance and durability of its products.

One of the latest feathers in the company's cap is the Mark 4HD 1-4.5x24mm riflescope, the smallest member of the recently updated Mark 4 series. In Leupold's lexicon, the "Mark" moniker denotes optics designed to meet the requirements of military and law enforcement users. Durable aluminum construction, robust controls and reliable precision have helped these tactical riflescopes earn an enviable reputation among armed professionals.

As proof of Leupold's esteem, when U.S. Special Operations Command had specific requirements for hard-use glass, they worked with Leupold to develop the Mark 6 and Mark 8 riflescopes. Since then, the company applied its expertise in battle-proven precision to launch the Mark 5HD series of scopes, which introduced Leupold's Professional-Grade Optical System for improved light transmission and clarity. The products also featured a wide range of windage and elevation adjustment, improved controls, and a selection of purpose-driven first-focal-plane (FFP) and second-focal-plane (SFP) reticles.

New for 2024 is the Mark 4HD series, including the 1-4.5x24. These scopes are distinct for their 4X magnification ratio, but still carry over the best features of the Mark 5HD line at a more accessible price point.



Employing a 30mm tube and — as tested — an illuminated Fire-Dot TMR reticle, the Mark 4HD 1-4.5x24mm is shown here on a SAINT Victor in Leupold's Mark AR 30mm one-piece mount.

THE SERIES

At writing, the Mark 4HD family includes five primary scope configurations and a total of 17 models differentiated by size, magnification and reticle design. The big boys in the family are built on 34mm main tubes and come in 8-32x56mm, 6-24x52mm and 4.5-18x52mm configurations. At the smaller end of the spectrum, Leupold also included 2.5-10x42mm and 1-4.5x24mm options in the series, built on 30mm main tubes.

Not everyone reading this will be hip to sporting-optic vernacular, so let me break down these designations using the 1-4.5x24mm scope as the example. The first component, 1-4.5X, is the magnification range. The lowest power setting on the riflescope is 1X magnification — or no optical zoom — and it can be dialed up to 4.5X. The next number, 24mm, is the size of the front or objective lens. For this scope, the objective lens is quite small, eschewing the typical bell shape of larger optics. Generally, the size of the objective increases along with high-end magnification ratings because a larger forward-facing lens is needed to effectively allow light to pass through and take in the view at longer ranges. Finally, a 30mm main tube describes the diameter of the scope's body, and this number is important for selecting the correct mounts and rings.

LEUPOLD MARK 4HD 1-4.5X24

POWER/LENS DIAMETER	1-4.5X/24mm
RETICLE	SFP Illuminated FireDot TMR
TUBE DIAMETER	30mm
ADJUSTMENT RANGE	48 mil, windage and elevation
WEIGHT	18 oz.
LENGTH	10.7"
MSRP	$999.99

Within each of the scope configurations, Leupold also offers reticle options. These include first-focal-plane (FFP) and second-focal-plane (SFP) reticles, as well as a selection of both mil- and MOA-based reticles and adjustments. Both of those topics are subjects for standalone articles, but suffice it to say that Leupold is providing a thoughtful variety of options within the series.

LPVO FTW

There are a lot of great options within the Mark 4HD line, and it is a comprehensive new series. One of the most appealing to me is the 1-4.5x24mm because it is the perfect pairing for a defensive carbine chambered in .223 Rem./5.56 NATO. The 1-4.5X Mark 4HD falls into a class of riflescopes often called low-power variable optics, or "LPVO" for short.

The best of these optics offer shooters dual utility as both a 1X reflex-style sight and a more powerful magnified optic capable of precision at greater distances. As well, the scopes in this category are generally light and trim, pairing well with the svelte dimensions of an AR-15-style carbine, and their magnification ranges are an ideal match to the ballistic capabilities of the 5.56 NATO cartridge. The 1-4.5X Mark 4HD exemplifies these characteristics and ups the ante by offering Leupold's renowned durability and function.

In terms of size, the scope is 10.7" long, and utilizes a 30mm main tube and 24mm objective lens. Overall, it's a sleek, low-profile design. Weight is fairly trim, too, at 18 oz., especially given the features Leupold packed into the little scope. The Mark 4HD is a true 1X optic, meaning no magnification at the lowest setting, so it can be used as a reflex sight when dialed to 1X without any distortion that could disrupt both-eyes-open shooting.

Dialed to 4.5X, the riflescope has plenty of magnification to match the performance of standard .223 Rem. and 5.56 NATO cartridges. Sure, these chamberings can be pushed to extended ranges, but most would agree they offer the greatest utility at 300 yards and in.

The Mark 4HD's magnification range also offers some familiarity for vets like me. For most of my time in uniform, my issued M4 was topped by a 4X fixed-power optic. I had no issues during qualification hitting E-type silhouette targets from 25 to 300 meters with this set-up. It was ideal for close-in environments because



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



Removing the zero-stop cap exposes the "naked" turret to allow for adjustments. Note the zero-stop button on the lower portion of the cap.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

of its illuminated reticle and low-power magnification, which offered a greater degree of precision but could still be utilized with both eyes open. I'm confident the Leupold would have performed with even greater alacrity given its enhanced and fully adjustable magnification.

Unlike the rest of the line, the 1-4.5X Mark 4HD is only available in SFP configurations. First-focal-plane systems tend to command a premium and provide the most benefit in precision shooting at extended ranges, and when used as range-estimation tools. These tasks are not the primary domain of the LPVO. Fast shooting at close- and moderate-range targets are where LPVOs excel, and SFP reticles work perfectly in that role, while also keeping the overall price down.

Three reticle options are offered for the 1-4.5x24mm scopes: FireDot TMR, FireDot BDC and HPR-1. Both FireDot reticles use a CR2032 battery to power a red illuminated central dot, and include a side-mounted push button to toggle between eight brightness settings. The Tactical Milling Reticle (TMR) is mil-based, and features hash marks on the horizontal and vertical stadia, both above and below the dot. A TMR-equipped scope also includes an exposed tactical/target-style elevation turret with zero-stop for dialing .1-mil-per-click adjustments. On the other hand, the FireDot BDC is an MOA-based scope, features capped turrets with quarter-MOA-per-click adjustments, and a conservative holdover reticle. Lastly, the HPR-1 uses a reflex-style circle-dot reticle design. It is not illuminated, but the scope does include an exposed zero-stop elevation turret for dialing quarter-MOA adjustments.

FIELD TEST

For my evaluation, I used a Mark 4HD 1-4.5x24mm FireDot TMR scope mounted on a Springfield Armory SAINT Victor AR-15 Rifle in 5.56 NATO. The integral Picatinny rail on top of the rifle's receiver provides the perfect attachment surface for Leupold's Mark AR 30mm one-piece mount. The mount uses five cross-slot tightening bolts to secure the scope to the rail; when torqued to spec, the set-up is nearly bombproof.

Mounting the scope, I needed to remove the SAINT's flip-up rear sight. I'm a belt-and-suspenders kind of guy when it comes to defensive firearms, so I like to have back-up irons if possible. In this situation, I ensured my iron sights were zeroed and marked the mounting locations before I removed them. I kept the dismounted sights with me in a small tool kit.

Zeroing the scope and rifle at 100 yards was simple, but I have two important takeaways for setting up Leupold optics with zero-stop elevation turrets. First, if your groups are printing high, don't be surprised if the elevation turret bottoms out after just a few clicks. Don't worry, simply remove the zero-stop cap and make your adjustments using the "naked" turret. The Mark 4HD 1-4.5x24mm offers 48 mils of both windage and elevation adjustment, so it's unlikely to run out of room.

That brings me to the second takeaway: Use the zero-stop! Once the rifle and scope are zeroed, loosen and rotate (or re-install) the turret cap so that the number "0" is aligned with the zero-index line, and seat the cap downward until the zero-stop button engag-


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es. Done correctly, the system ensures easy return to zero by simply spinning the turret back until it stops. The zero-stop functionality also does a good job preventing inadvertent adjustments since the button needs to be depressed to leave zero.

For testing, I wanted to validate the consistency and repeatability of the scope's windage and elevation adjustments. To do this, I conducted a test often described as "shooting the square." I've seen a few approaches, but my preferred method is to fire a total of 12 shots, adjusting between each shot. It looks like this: Fire — Dial Up — Fire — Dial Right — Fire — Dial Down — Fire — Dial Left; repeat the circuit three times. The key is to always keep the same point of aim and to use the same adjustment value between each shot. The end result should be four, three-shot groups spaced equally like the corners of a square.

To shoot my square, I set the target at 50 yards and opted to make 2.5-mil (25 clicks) adjustments between each shot — enough adjustment for clear results without sending shots off paper. For reference, one mil of adjustment is equivalent 10 cm, or about 3.6" at 100 yards, or 5 cm/1.8" at 50 yards. So, I was looking for about 12.5 cm/4.9 inches of separation between the square's corners.

To eliminate some of the variance inherent to range-grade ammunition, I shot this exercise with Federal Premium Gold Metal Match ammo loaded with a 77-gr. Sierra MatchKing bullet. I knew from previous tests that this ammunition was capable of sub-MOA groups in the SAINT Victor rifle. After three circuits around the square, the average separation between my groups was 4.8", and my average group size was 0.67". Given the human operator, sandbag rest and 300 total clicks of adjustment, those numbers are pretty impressive!



The scope and rifle easily passed the "shooting the square" test with Federal Premium Gold Metal Match ammo loaded with a 77-gr. Sierra MatchKing bullets.

Having certified the performance of the scope, I wanted to test its utility as an LPVO by wringing it out on silhouette targets at various distances. I made up courses of fire on the fly to work transitions and provide opportunities to dial magnification up and back. I was impressed with how smoothly the zoom adjustment ring functioned. Speed was enhanced, even in gloved hands, by the ring's grasping grooves and quick-turn lug, as well as the removable, low-profile knurled throw lever.

Finally, I highly recommend going with an illuminated reticle like the FireDot when possible. At 1X, the optic functions just like a red-dot reflex sight. At higher magnifications, the central illuminated dot provides a clear aiming point, even against dark-colored targets where a black crosshair alone may be hard to see.

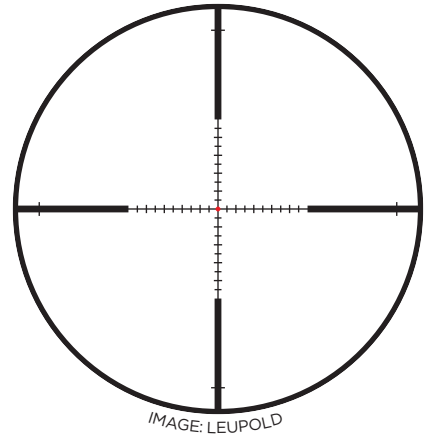


IMAGE: LEUPOLD

The author appreciated the FireDot TMR illuminated reticle because at 1X it made the optic function like a red-dot reflex sight for close-in targets.

CONCLUSION

The SAINT Victor in 5.56 NATO paired with the Leupold Mark 4HD 1-4.5x24mm is a handy and capable defensive option. The scope offers Leupold's Professional Grade optical system, proven durability, precision adjustments, and duty-ready features and construction. With an MSRP of $999.99, the value is unmatched.

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HYPERFORMANCE MATCH

Fiocchi's Hyperformance Match cartridges are designed from case head to bullet tip with one mission only—synchronize point-of-aim with point-of-impact at extreme distances...shot after shot. With bullets featuring ± 0.0003 concentricity, weight tolerance to ±0.3 grains, and a profile ensuring a high ballistic coefficient, Hyperformance Match is the new go-to for precision factory target ammunition that stands neck-and-neck with custom handloads.

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LEGENDS I



According to the author, the M3 Tanker (shown) and M1916 holsters from 1791 Gunleather are impressive reproductions that are even nicer than the originals. Shown with Springfield Armory Mil-Spec 1911.

N LEATHER

1791 GUNLEATHER OFFERS TODAY'S SHOOTERS A CHANCE TO OWN THEIR OWN VERSIONS OF SOME CLASSIC AMERICAN COMBAT HOLSTERS.

WILL DABBS, MD

NOWADAYS, most holsters are made from weird Information Age thermoplastics that embody more raw technology than the Space Shuttle. This amazing stuff won't stain, break, fade or warp. It could likely survive a nearby nuclear blast. However, it's also fairly antiseptic. For me at least, it's tough to develop a visceral attachment to a piece of Kydex.

By contrast, there remain leather-working artisans who craft classic carry rigs the way our forebears did. For example, 1791 Gunleather combines old-world craftsmanship with cutting-edge design to produce some of the most bespoke firearm carry solutions in the world. Their team spans four generations, and they use only premium American steer-hide in their leather goods. While 1791 Gunleather can also hook you up with some of that Information Age synthetic gear as well, I think they create their most serious art out of natural leather. More on that in a moment.

A WAR STORY

My wife's grandfather died several years ago at the ripe old age of 96. If you passed him in Walmart or Olive Garden, you'd think he was just some everyday old guy. And there you'd be wrong.

This man dropped out of school in the 9th grade, because that's what it took to keep his family from starving during the Great Depression. Eventually, he was homeless, riding the rails looking for work. In 1940, he enlisted in the U.S. Army because it was a reliable source of food. He ultimately fought in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. He started out as an infantry private and ended the war a master sergeant, because every single person he worked for was killed.

Just prior to his deployment overseas, he met a girl. They dated for about three weeks and were married. They lived together for maybe three months, and then he shipped out overseas. During that brief time, his young wife became pregnant. This man did not meet the little girl who eventually grew up to become my mother-in-law until she was nearly three. That sacrifice ensured that his daughter's world would be free from Nazi death

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The M1916-style G.I. Hip Holster uses high-quality tan leather and can attach to a G.I. web belt or a standard belt.

camps and Aryan "supermen."

He took a snapshot of his gorgeous young wife off to war as a memento. At one point he came across a crashed German Fieseler Fi-156 Storch observation plane. Using his combat knife, he cut a piece of Plexiglas out of the windscreen and crafted a transparent grip for his M1911A1 pistol. That hallowed item is my most prized possession today.

One day he was passing through a field hospital and came across a pile of discarded gear removed from wounded G.I.s. He retrieved a leather M3 Tanker holster from the pile and used it to carry his handgun for the rest of the war. He said it was special to him to have that picture of his wife so close to his heart in combat. They were ultimately married for 72 years. He was a great man from a generation of great men.

CLASSIC G.I. RIGS

John Moses Browning's M1911 pistol reflected the ethos of the nation that birthed it. Big, heavy, powerful and loud, the classic 1911 legend was inseparable from the heroes who wielded it. Where the Germans were satisfied to build a 9mm combat pistol pushing a 115-gr. FMJ bullet, John Browning simply doubled that weight. Springfield Armory's Mil-Spec GI 1911 .45 is a faithful rendition of those timeless classic combat pistols, slightly upgraded to maximize its performance.

There were basically two ways to carry the standard M1911 pistol during World War II. A shoulder holster or a hip holster. There were two different shoulder holsters issued to U.S. troops during WWII. The M3 Tanker served until 1944, when it was replaced by the M7. The M7 remains in limited issue today. WWII-vintage shoulder rigs were russet brown. The color changed to black in 1956.

The M3 hangs vertically via a single shoulder strap. The M7 was adjustable for a variety of carry angles, and included a chest strap. Both rigs included a short leather belt loop and a retention strap equipped with a standard "Lift the Dot" fastener.

The hip holster option was the M1916. This same basic heavy-duty leather carry rig served from World War I into the 1980's, when the 1911 was supplanted by the M9 pistol. The M1916 was an evolutionary development of the previous M1912.

The M1912 was a low-ride rig sporting a full leather flap that hung from a pivoting hanger. Troops of the era referred to the M1912 as the "Pershing-style" holster after Gen. "Black Jack" Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Forces during WWI. Four years later, the M1912 was simplified into the M1916 holster.

There were 16 manufacturers of the M1916 holster during WWII. Originals sport maker's marks stamped into the back. The M1916 is a familiar full-flap leather holster that attaches directly to the pistol belt via a heavy wire hanger.

The flap is held in place via a brass stud, and the rig comes with a length of leather thong to be used as a leg tie-down if desired. Many G.I.'s wrapped the thong around the bottom of the holster and secured it in place. Part of that was to keep it handy if needed. It also just looked really cool.

The color swapped from brown to black in the 1950's. I first donned the uniform in the waning days of the M1911A1 pistol and was issued leather holsters like these myself. Once broken in they were things of beauty.

REBORN WARRIORS

1791 Gunleather offers reproductions of both the M1916 G.I. issue Hip Holster and M3 Tanker G.I. carry rigs, newly made out of premium components. Both of these are available on the Springfield Armory Store, and I had a chance recently to try both of them out.

I was immediately impressed by the holsters. The stitching

During World War II, the grandfather of the author's wife fashioned this 1911 grip panel from a piece of Luftwaffe Plexiglas to display a picture of his wife.



IMAGE: AUTHOR



IMAGES: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The G.I. Hip Holster will attach to a pistol belt by the wire hanger, or to a thinner conventional belt through the slots.

and leather on these two holsters eclipses anything Uncle Sam ever issued in my experience. They both feature beautiful, thick, beefy leather, heavy hard-use stitching, the iconic "US" embossed on the front, and a 1791 maker's mark on the back.

Both are designed to accept standard full-size 5" 1911 pistols without rails, and are available in right-hand configuration. The M1916 in particular is quite tight at the beginning, but loosens up nicely over time. Just leave your gun in it for a while, and the leather trains itself accordingly. Once broken in, these two premium carry solutions are both functional and attractive in comparable measure.



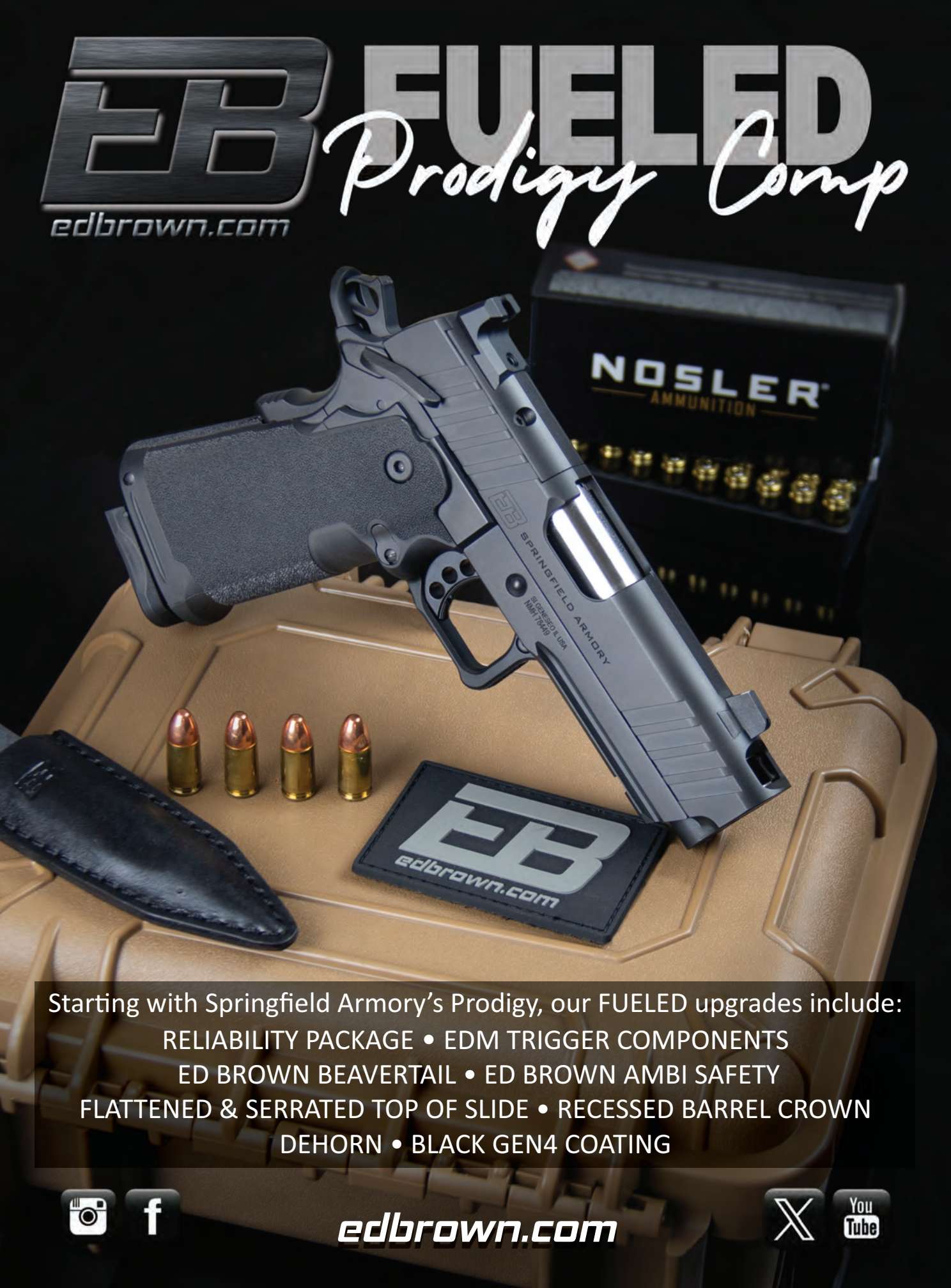
The M3 Tanker Holster uses a sturdy leather strap to carry a 1911 across the body. It has the iconic "US" embossed marking.

CONCLUSION

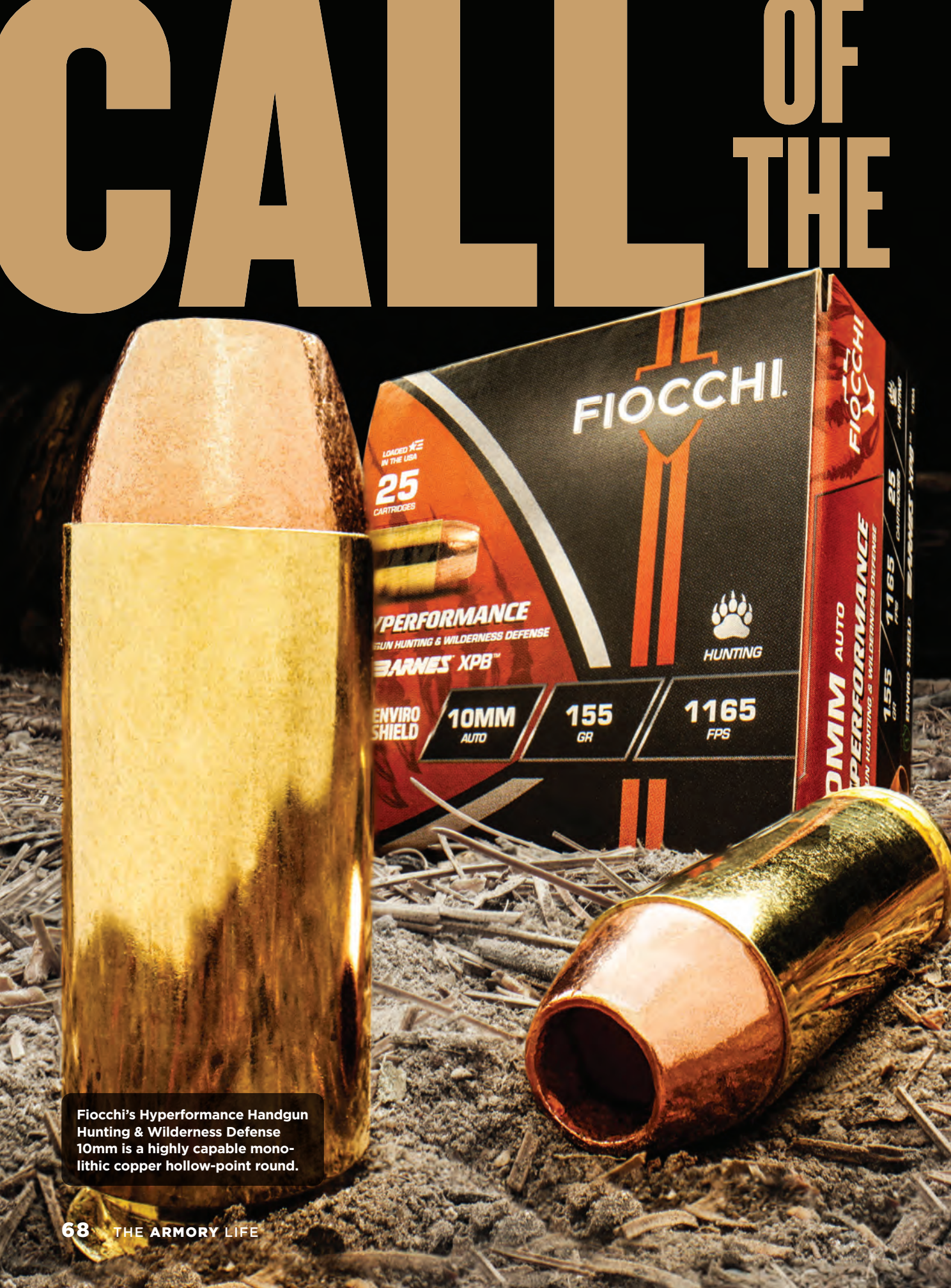
If you fancy the classic M1911 pistol and you hearken back to the good old days when our nation was populated by true heroes, then the M1916 G.I. Issue Hip Holster and M3 Tanker Holster by 1791 Gunleather will definitely scratch that itch. They are the perfect companions to Springfield Armory's expansive line of M1911 handguns.

The MSRP is $99.99 for each, and they are both available now on the Springfield Armory Store. That's a whole lot of holster for the money.

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CALL OF THE



Fiocchi's Hyperformance Handgun Hunting & Wilderness Defense 10mm is a highly capable monolithic copper hollow-point round.

WILD

FIOCCHI'S HYPERFORMANCE HANDGUN HUNTING & WILDERNESS DEFENSE IN 10MM DELIVERS FAIL-SAFE POWER.

ROY HUNTINGTON

SOMETHING NEARLY MAGICAL has occurred over the past few years. The resurgence of interest in the 10mm has spawned a deluge of new loads, guns and handloading options. This seems to be driven by a newfound and significant interest in the caliber for hunting and defense.

I think the 10mm was an underdog for much too long. An undeserved reputation for being "too potent," and early guns wearing out quickly often stole the spotlight on this versatile, powerful, accurate and easy-to-load cartridge.

Today, there are dozens of high-quality factory loadings for the 10mm, offering shooters a wide cross-section of options. Among them is classic ammunition manufacturer Fiocchi's latest. Its "Hyperformance" load showcases what innovation and technology can do for a cartridge, and opens the door to helping modernize the 10mm even more.

First, let's put a few rumors and nay-sayer comments to bed. No, the 10mm is not the same as a .41 Magnum. Hot 10mm loads can sort of "chase" lower-end .41 loads, but if you need a .41 Magnum, you should buy one.

The other item I'd like to put to rest is the "fearsome" recoil of the 10mm. Sorry folks, it's just not like that at all. Sure, a hot 180-gr. load can be snappy, but if you can shoot a lightweight .45 ACP 1911, then a 10mm is just as easy. Grip, squeeze, lock your wrist, get a firm stance, roll your shoulders forward, and blast away. Don't, as my young daughter used to say, "Be afeard of it." Quick, can you think of anyone who has ever been "injured" from that fearsome recoil? Me neither.

A BRIEF HISTORY

I firmly believe the history of a company is at least as important as the products it creates. Fiocchi was founded in 1876 in Lecco, Italy, and has been making ammunition ever since. That's a long time in-grade, I'd say.

In the 1950s, Fiocchi began importing ammo into the U.S. and it was met very positively. I recall seeing Fiocchi in gun stores in the middle '70s when I was starting in the early days of action pistol shooting. It quickly gained a reputation for quality, consistency and good value. Through the years, I've often used Fiocchi ammo for hunting, competition, test ammo for articles, and casual

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



The author tested out the Fiocchi 10mm round with an XD-M Elite 3.8" Compact OSP pistol, as well as a Diamond D Guide's Choice Chest Rig holster.

shooting and training.

Not surprisingly, in typical Italian style, Fiocchi pays close attention to the art, mechanical accuracy and even the look of their ammo. It values quality and design, and even applies that famous Italian sense of design to the look of the boxes.

In 1983, it founded a manufacturing facility here in the U.S., in Ozark, Missouri. It recently added yet another facility, this time near Little Rock, Arkansas. Fiocchi currently employs nearly 200 U.S. workers, and I discovered about 80% of the Fiocchi-branded products sold in the U.S. are loaded here in the states.

With this bit of history under your belt, I hope you see it is not only invested in quality and performance, but it is invested right here in our own backyard, too.

HYPERFORMANCE

The concept for Fiocchi's new 10mm load is to support the handgun hunter and/or the person who wants a reliable cartridge for, as they say, "Wilderness Defense." Both of these jobs require a cartridge and bullet combo promising to be fail-safe when called upon.

Fiocchi focuses careful attention toward their precision-formed brass cases, uses only clean-burn powders and loads all of the components with precision and care. Their U.S. facility is modern in every respect, and it shows in the repeatable quality of their loaded ammo.

The Hyperformance line uses the proven Barnes XPB bullet, matched to the right load, to give the best terminal performance possible. Barnes is famous for their monolithic copper hollow point bullets, which have proven themselves around the world on big, dangerous game and in defensive situations. Fiocchi has expanded on the Hyperformance line-up, rounding out the original .357 Magnum, .44 Magnum and .45 Colt loads to include this new 10mm offering.

Factory specs for the 10mm load show a 155-gr. Barnes XPB HP bullet at 1,165 fps. The box label did not specify the barrel length the cartridge was tested in, but I suspect it was about a 5" pressure barrel.

I had a new XDM-Elite 3.8" Compact OSP 10mm on hand to test how the round shoots, and used another semi-auto pistol I had with a 4.5" barrel to see if there were any velocity differences.

SHOOTING

I've long been a fan of the 10mm, both in autos and revolvers. However, I've never been a fan of trying to turn it into a magnum. As I said, if you need magnum performance, buy a magnum.

I set up my Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph and went to work. The Xero is truly a delight to use; no fuss, fast to set up and turn on, and it works like a charm.

I put three, five-round strings over the chrono out of the XDM-Elite with the 3.8" barrel. I was frankly amazed at the consistency of the velocities. One five-round string showed (in feet per second): 1,070; 1,073; 1,079; 1,071; and 1,074. That, my friends, is stunning consistency and helps explain why this is such a reliable and accurate load for the 10mm.

To balance the shorter barrel, I used a 1911-style auto in 10mm with a 4.5" barrel. The numbers were just as consistent but higher: 1,124; 1,117; 1,120; 1,119; and 1,116. This sort of extreme spread of just a few feet per second means the bullets are flying extremely consistently, with virtually no vertical stringing.

I have some steel plates in my backyard range here. The XDM-Elite with a backstrap selected to fit my smallish hands was a breeze to shoot. Multiple fast shots on a torso plate showed that with a tight grip, locked wrist and firm stance, it was easy to keep things well-centered. The fact the load is a 155-gr. bullet and not a 180 means recoil is certainly lighter. Having said that, a 155 Barnes at almost 1,100 fps from a 3.8" barrel is nothing to sneer at. Fiocchi's moniker of "Hunting & Wilderness Defense" rings true here.

Shooting from the 4.5" test gun was even easier, and while I don't think the added velocity is critical, the controllability of the slightly longer slide is noticeable. I think if it were me and I carried one of these in the hunting field, I'd opt for the longer slide. It's just as easy to carry as the shorter one, especially in the Diamond D Guide's Choice chest rig shown (available from the Springfield Armory Store). Suffice it to say, fast, accurate and controllable shots were easy to manage with either gun.

TARGETING

For the final test, I ran three, five-shot groups at 20 yards with the load, using the XD-M Elite as the testing platform. I found the excellent trigger and bold sights really enhanced

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

my ability to be consistent. I used a Ransom Multi-Caliber Steady Rest rather than a wrist-rest on a sandbag. I've found it to be an extremely reliable way to chase the best accuracy out of any gun/load combination.

The bottom line here is the fact the 10mm Fiocchi Hyperformance load delivered astonishing accuracy. The "worst" group of the three measured about 1.4" total, while the other groups were a bit less. I have learned over the years when using a good rest like the Ransom Steady Rest, if you take the outer two hits out and just measure what remains, it pretty much duplicates the results you'd get from a full Ransom mechanical rest. In this case, removing the two outer shots would leave a .95" 20-yard group from a duty-style pistol and hunting ammunition. Simply amazing.



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The round's hollowpoint assures expansion, while the solid copper construction of the Barnes XPB delivers effective penetration.

During the tests, I'd shoot one round, then put the gun down and walk away. Then return, regain the sight picture, shoot, etc. I think it's a real acid test because in the field that first shot is always a cold shot and this shows just what five "cold" shots added up to in the real world.

The author found the Fiocchi ammo to be powerful and reliable. It was also accurate, as attested by this 20-yard group fired from a rest.



CONCLUSION

A good 10mm load truly fills a void between the .38 Super, .45 ACP and big-bore revolver loads. With the right load, it has already proven itself in defense against big bears, 300-lb. wild boars and has even taken African plains game.

A 135-gr. bullet designed for use in a cop's gun is something very different than what we have here. One is for thin-skinned miscreants, while the other is for thick-skinned critters intent on killing you.

Choose wisely. This one certainly seems like a good choice to me.

PERFORMANCE (20 YDS.)
XD-M ELITE 3.8" COMPACT OSP

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
FIOCCHI HYPERFORMANCE 155-GR. BARNES XPB	1,073 FPS	1.1"	1.35"

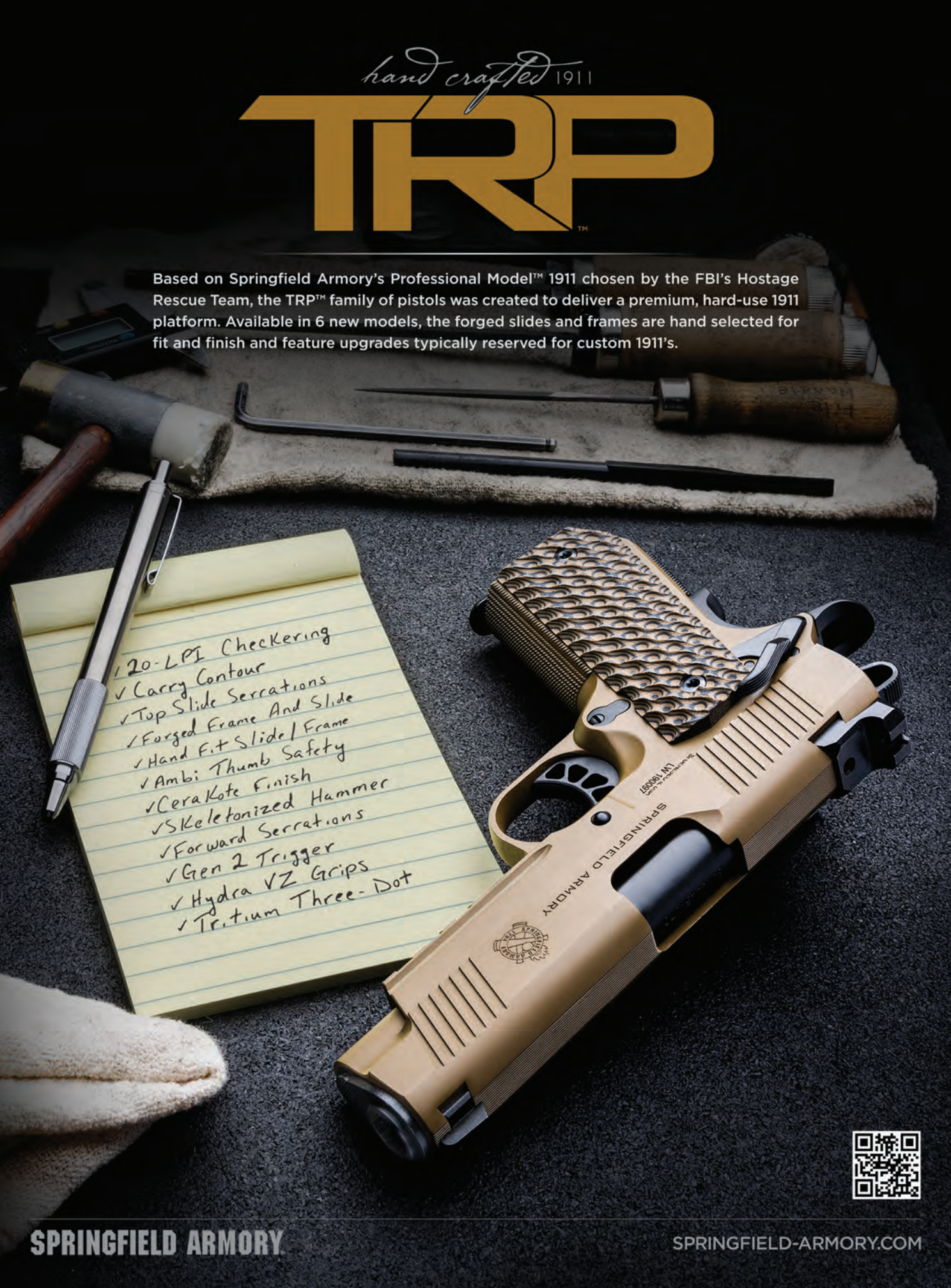
Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 20 yards from a Ransom Multi-Caliber Steady Rest. Velocity is the average of three five-round strings measured in feet per second (fps) by a Garmin Xero C1 Chronograph. Abbreviations: fps (feet per second), gr. (grain), XPB (eXpanding Pistol Bullet).

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Based on Springfield Armory's Professional Model™ 1911 chosen by the FBI's Hostage Rescue Team, the TRP™ family of pistols was created to deliver a premium, hard-use 1911 platform. Available in 6 new models, the forged slides and frames are hand selected for fit and finish and feature upgrades typically reserved for custom 1911's.



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DOUBL



These color variants of the Model 2020 Rimfire Target add a new dimension to the popular line of .22 LR bolt-action rifles.

E-TAKE

SPRINGFIELD OFFERS SHOOTERS A NEW LOOK FOR THE CAPABLE MODEL 2020 RIMFIRE TARGET.

JEREMY TREMP



WATCH THE VIDEO:
COLOR VARIANT TARGET RIMFIRES



The OD Green (left) and Coyote (right) color options for the Model 2020 Rimfire give shooters two exciting options in the bolt-action .22 LR line.

I GET IT. Centerfire rifles are cool. Being able to take down large game on the hunt or reaching out to truly long distances with your rifle has obvious appeal. But what about simply shooting for fun? Or, getting some range time in without having to spend a ton of money on ammunition?

It's here that the .22 LR rimfire rifle shines. With very affordable ammo and low recoil, a rimfire rifle is just about ideal for this role. Affordable shooting does not mean you have to have a "cheap" rifle. In fact, in 2023 Springfield Armory launched a great solution for those looking for a high-quality rimfire rifle family with its Model 2020 Rimfire.

At launch, the Model 2020 Rimfire family was made up of six options, ranging from two synthetic-stocked Target models to Classic models with beautiful wooden stocks offered in a range of four different grades.

The two Target models offered at the debut featured either an all-black stock or a sage with black webbing stock.

I had the opportunity to try out the new rimfire models at their launch, and I can honestly say they both performed and looked amazing. Now, Springfield has offered us two new variants of the Target model to add to the list. Let's take a look at them.

STANDING OUT

The two new Model 2020 Rimfire Target rifle color options are Coyote with black webbing or OD Green with black webbing. Both of these, featuring an MSRP of $499, are the same high-quality, well-made .22-cal. rifles you've come to love.

Anyone who has followed my writing here at *The Armory Life* knows I am going to lean toward the tan option. I just can't get enough of this color. Having spent 32 years of my life in the American Southwest, I guess it's just ingrained in me to love this color.

In my opinion, the new Coyote and OD Green colors bring a bit more personality to the Rimfire line-up. Whether you're setting this rifle up for hunting or range-time recreation, you will likely find a color here suitable for most any terrain you might encounter.

Within both colors, you will find attractive "flecks" and "bands" of black webbing, much like you will find on the original sage Target model released at the launch of the Model 2020 Rimfire line.

Bolt-action rifles hold a special place in my heart. The manual cycling of the action, the extreme potential for precision accuracy and the ability to wring out the most performance add up to create a thrilling experience at the range. The feeling of shooting an incredibly tight group is simultaneously exhilarating, affirming and confidence-inspiring.

That's where I think the Model 2020 Rimfire Target fits best for me. As we all know, ammunition can be extremely expensive when it comes to precision match-grade rounds. Sadly, this can keep us from the doing the training we should. Unless, of course, we have a precision-style rifle that we can practice with for a fraction of the cost. With this .22 rimfire, you can dial in your form, breath control, trigger press, positional shooting, etc.

MODEL 2020 RIMFIRE TARGET

CHAMBERING	.22 LR
BARREL	20"
WEIGHT	7 lbs., 7 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	38"
SIGHTS	N/A, Picatinny rail
STOCK	OD Green or Coyote w/ black webbing, polymer
ACTION	Bolt-action
FINISH	Black
CAPACITY	10 (one magazine included)
MSRP	$499



THE DETAILS

The Model 2020 Rimfire Target features a 20" heavy barrel with a straight-taper contour as well as a ½x28 threaded muzzle with an included thread protector cap. The barrel is matte blued and features a 1:16" twist. The full length of the barrel is free-floated to ensure maximum accuracy.

The action features dual cocking cams for fast and smooth cycling of the chromed 4140-steel bolt. The 60-degree bolt throw ensures quick and easy operation for any shooter. Additionally, the bolt handle knob is threaded for easy removal and replacement with another of your preference should you so choose. For mounting optics, the Model 2020 Rimfire includes an interrupted Picatinny rail.

Each Model 2020 Rimfire ships with a .22-cal. rotary magazine crafted from a durable polymer material. The magazine holds 10 rounds and is easy to load. The magazine is cross-compatible with commonly available Ruger® 10/22-pattern magazines of the same capacity. Also, the Rimfire Target features an extended magazine release.

For comfort, the Model 2020



Rimfire features a rubber recoil pad. While recoil is virtually nonexistent on these rifles, the pad still allows for enhanced comfort while shooting. The length of pull on the stock is 13.45".

One of my favorite aspects of the Model 2020 Rimfire is the Model 700-pattern trigger. This trigger is optimized for the .22-cal. action and is factory set at 4.5 lbs. However, the trigger is adjustable, allowing you to tune it to your preference. For me, the 4.5-lb. stock tune is a bit too heavy for precision shooting, but as an all-around rifle that may see use by a new shooter, I think it's a great place to have it set right out of the box. Also, since it's in the Model 700 pattern, you can swap out the trigger for one of your preference if you so choose.



The Model 2020 Target Rimfire feeds from a 10-round rotary-style magazine. Also, the bolt knob is removable for easy customization.

HANDS-ON

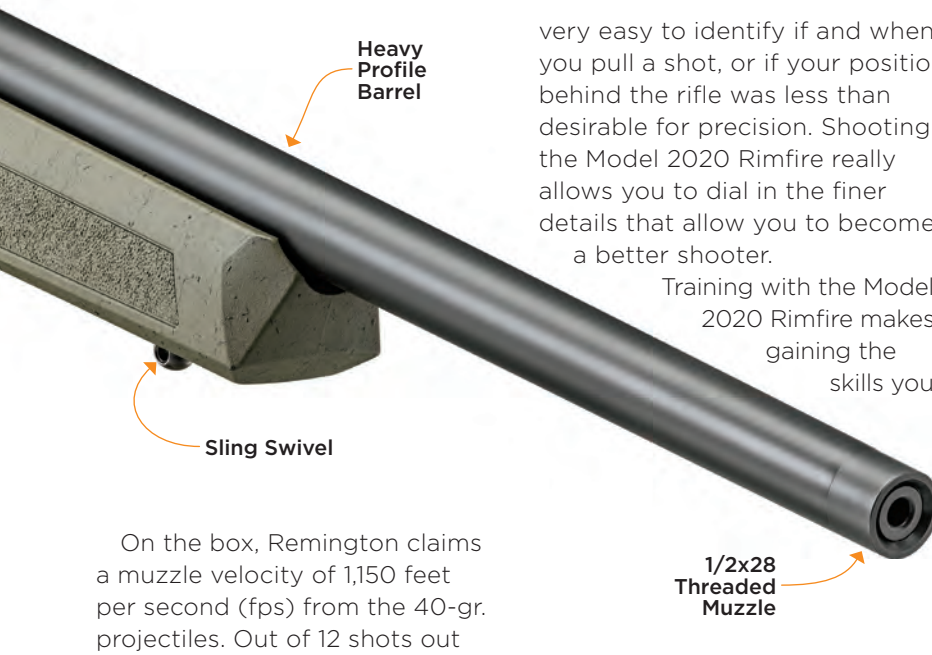
The Model 2020 Rimfire Target in my experience is exceptionally accurate and easy to use right out of the box, especially for a sub-$500 dollar rifle. For the coyote variant I tested, I utilized a Magpul MOE bipod attached to the swing swivel mount and mounted a Leupold VX-Freedom 3-9x40mm Rimfire scope on the Picatinny rail.

These additions make this a very versatile rifle capable of great accuracy, easy handling, and hours of fun and training on the range or in the backcountry.

During my range session shooting Remington 40-gr. Target ammo, I wanted to see what this rifle and ammo were shooting as far as muzzle velocity was concerned. I set up my Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph and got to work.



The author fitted the rifle with a Leupold VX-Freedom 3-9x40mm Rimfire scope and fired Remington 40-gr. Target ammo.



On the box, Remington claims a muzzle velocity of 1,150 feet per second (fps) from the 40-gr. projectiles. Out of 12 shots out of the 20" barrel, my average fps was 1106.3.

For accuracy, Springfield guarantees 1" or less at 50 yards with their Model 2020 Rimfire rifles and match-grade ammo. During the testing of this rifle at that distance, I achieved a best three-shot group of 0.8". The Magpul MOE bipod, Leupold optic and rear bag made shooting the rimfire accurately a breeze.

With a near total lack of perceived recoil, you can keep your optic on the target and identify your shots immediately. It's also very easy to identify if and when you pull a shot, or if your position behind the rifle was less than desirable for precision. Shooting the Model 2020 Rimfire really allows you to dial in the finer details that allow you to become a better shooter.

Training with the Model 2020 Rimfire makes gaining the skills you need so much easier. Getting access to a 50-yd. range is generally easier than 100 yards and beyond. Also, the ammo is far cheaper and your optic doesn't need to have a wide range to see the target with ease. The Leupold 3-9x40mm featured more than enough zoom range to quickly determine where I was impacting the target.

CONCLUSION

Shooting the Model 2020 Rimfire will feel quite familiar to shooting its larger brother, the Model 2020 Waypoint series. However, it will be with a shorter bolt throw, shorter travel and, obviously, much less recoil.

This platform excels at training new shooters since it's a bolt-action. Additionally, it's a fantastic trainer for seasoned or newer precision shooters, but for a fraction of the cost. If you own a .22-cal. suppressor, the experience is that much greater.

The new OD Green or Coyote color options are rich and beautiful, complementing the black action and barrel. You won't be looking to swap out these stocks anytime soon, I suspect.

In the .22-cal. rifle market, I believe the Model 2020 Rimfire is a solid option for reliability, accuracy and style. I know I'm going to be adding the Coyote model to my collection!

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A NEW

THE XD MOD.3 REPRESENTS A MODERN TAKE ON A PROVEN CLASSIC.

RICHARD JOHNSON



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP



The XD Mod.3 takes everything great about the original design and adds numerous upgrades and enhancements.

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE, but the Springfield Armory XD is approaching 25 years of service. The guns made a big splash when they first entered the market in 2001 and continue to be quite popular. Just because they remain great shooting pistols doesn't mean the design cannot be refined and updated, though. A lot has happened in modern handgun design over the past two decades or more, and that's where we find ourselves today.

XD MOD.3

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4"
WEIGHT	27 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.3"
SIGHTS	Fiber optic front, white dot rear
GRIPS	Integral, polymer
ACTION	Striker-fired
FINISH	Melonite
CAPACITY	16+1 (one magazine)
MSRP	$325



Sitting next to my keyboard as I type this is the newest addition to the XD line: The Springfield Armory XD Mod.3. Spoiler alert: I think Springfield is really going to make waves with this gun.

I don't want to bury the lede here: This gun is a fantastic pistol and has an unbelievable suggested retail price of just $325. Why do I think it surpasses the original and is — hands-down — the best value in 9mm pistols on the market today?

BUILDING BLOCKS

At its core, the XD Mod.3 is a sort of reimagining of the company's popular striker-fired pistol. You might be wondering about the Mod.3 designation. Obviously, the original XD was the "Mod.1", while there was also a Mod.2 variant offered for several years with some aesthetic and feature modifications to the original platform.

However, the new XD Mod.3 represents a truly new and modern take on the XD platform, keeping everything that was good about the original and updating and modernizing it where needed.

The XD Mod.3 is a full-size, striker-fired pistol chambered for the 9mm cartridge. While it shares many features with the original pistol — such as compatibility with original full-size XD9 magazines — the XD Mod.3 has some truly notable upgrades.

TOPPING IT OFF

First and foremost, the XD Mod.3 is optics-ready direct from the factory. As red dots are now becoming the norm for handguns, this modification makes a lot of sense. The slide is cut to accept Springfield's popular OSP plate system to fit a wide range of professional red-dot sights.

The plates come in Trijicon RMR, Leupold DeltaPoint Pro and NOBLEX (Docter) footprints. Compatibility with these footprints means you can also use sights from HEX, Burris, Vortex, Shield, Crimson Trace, Redfield and Holosun. In addition, they are readily available from the Springfield Armory Store and are very affordable. The slide comes with a flush-mounting cover to keep things tidy if you choose not to run a red dot sight.

Speaking of sights, the XD Mod.3 also features a set of highly durable and rugged steel sights. The high-visibility front sight features a bright red fiber-optic rod, and the rear sight has two easy-to-see white dots.

While we are on the topic of the top half of the pistol, let's discuss the slide serrations located at the rear and forward ends of the slide. Wider and deeper than on the original, they offer a lot of gripping surface that works well with both bare and gloved hands. Good serrations improve your ability to run the slide under pressure, and I think those on the Springfield Mod.3's slide are excellent.

GRIPPING CHANGES

The polymer grip frame of the Mod.3 also has some notable features. The undercut triggerguard and extended beavertail allow you to get a very high grip on the pistol. Also, more aggressive texturing on the leading and trailing edges of the grip is a noticeable change over the original XD.

In addition, the frame has reshaped thumb rests on both sides of the pistol to offer a more natural angle when using a solid grip. Finally, the forward edge of the triggerguard is rounded, while remaining large enough to easily accept a gloved finger.

At the forward end of the frame on the dustcover, the Mod.3 carries over the accessory rail design of the original. However, it adds in an additional slot for more precise fitting of accessories such as pistol-mounted lights. This can make a significant difference in how easy it is to activate a light due to its position.

While all of the pistols in the Springfield Armory XD line employ a passive grip safety that is disengaged when you achieve a proper shooting grip, the Mod.3 enhances the design by adding a "memory bump" at the lower end. This ensures that the safety will be fully disengaged when gripped without decreasing its effectiveness.

The trigger design has also received some attention in the Mod.3. While the original XD had a traditional-style curved trigger, the new variant features the popular flat-style trigger. Similar in shape and contour to that of the XD-M's "META" trigger, the Mod.3's flat trigger helps ensure a consistent feel throughout the pull. The rear of the trigger has a stop to prevent overtravel.

FOUNDATIONAL CHOICES

While the XD Mod.3 has a notable number of enhancements, it also carries over many sound features from the original design. These include a loaded chamber indicator, striker status indicator at the rear of the slide and an ambidextrous magazine release.

In my opinion, one of the best carryovers is the 16-round magazine. Older Springfield Armory full-size 9mm XD mags are 100% compatible with the new XD Mod.3 pistol. If you are like me, you have more than a few magazines for the original line, and these will work without problems in the new guns.

If you have run an original XD, you will feel right at home with the XD Mod.3. It features a hammer-



The sights of the Mod.3 are made of steel and feature white dots on the rear and a high visibility fiber-optic front.



forged 4" barrel with a Melonite finish, housed within the forged steel slide that features a matching black Melonite finish. Weight of the pistol is 27 oz. Overall length is 7.3".

Currently, there are two versions of the Springfield Armory XD Mod.3 offered: a standard model and a low-capacity model with a 10-round magazine. Both come packed with a single magazine.

RANGE TIME

I had decided to set up the XD Mod.3 with a Crimson Trace CTS-1500 red dot from an XD-S Mod.2 9mm pistol I had on hand. Mounting it with the appropriate plate proved easy.

Starting with full metal jacket (FMJ) target loads, my son and I began some presentation and rapid-fire drills to get a feel for the gun. Both of us liked the feel of the pistol and were quite comfortable while handling it.

Ammunition cycled smoothly through the system as we made hole after hole in the paper targets. After several hundred rounds of flawless operation, we set up a sandbag rest to test the pistol's accuracy at 15 yards.

All loads shot well and within what I would consider more than acceptable accuracy. All five loads I tested delivered best five-shot groups in the 1.5" range or so at 15 yards. The stark reality is that the shooter — me — is the weakest link in this accuracy chain. I suspect both the gun and ammo have even greater accuracy potential than I do with my aging eyes and increasingly arthritic hands.

Out of the box, the XD Mod.3 is a nearly perfect fit for my hands. The grip

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.)
XD MOD.3

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)
BLAZER BRASS 115-GR. FMJ	1,117 fps	1.37"
FEDERAL HST 124-GR. JHP +P	1,188 fps	1.31"
LIBERTY AMMUNITION CIVIL DEFENSE 50-GR. JHP +P	2,041 fps	1.44"
REMINGTON UMC 115-GR. FMJ	1,102 fps	1.89"
SPEER GOLD DOT 124-GR. JHP	1,109 fps	1.45"

Accuracy results are best of three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity results are an average of five shots measured in feet per second with a Competition Electronics ProChrono Digital Chronograph at an approximate distance of 5" from the muzzle. Abbreviations: +P (plus pressure), FMJ (full metal jacket), fps (feet per second), gr. (grain), JHP (jacketed hollow point).







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shape and the undercut trigger-guard allow me to get my hand way up on the gun to minimize muzzle rise. Also, the grip texture does an excellent job of keeping the gun anchored in my hand.

The trigger has a similar feel to my original XD9, with a moderate amount of take-up and short travel to a clean break. There is no perceptible overtravel thanks to a built-in stop at the rear of the trigger. Reset requires a moderate amount of travel and has a distinct click.

The slide is cut to accept readily available OSP plates for mounting a wide range of optics.



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

CLOSING THOUGHTS

With an MSRP of just $325, it's hard not to mention the word "value" when reviewing the XD Mod.3. With its combination of proven performance and modern upgrades, it offers a lot of gun for the money. But if you ask me, I think the XD Mod.3 stands alone as being a good option at any price point you might expect for a pistol of this type.

Frankly, I simply don't know of a better deal on a polymer-framed 9mm pistol like this anywhere on the market.

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OF THE AIR



A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT THE WEAPONS TRAINING BY THE AUTHOR FOR THIS HARD-HITTING WORLD WAR II MINISERIES.

CAPT. DALE DYE, USMC (RET.)

IMAGE: APPLE TV+

"MASTERS OF THE AIR" stands as a landmark in telling the American World War II story in popular media. The expansive and expensive nine-part miniseries — which aired in 2024 on Apple TV+ — was designed as the third part of a trilogy that included the massively successful "Band of Brothers," followed by "The Pacific." They were long and difficult productions, and I was honored to serve as senior military advisor on all three.

We did mountains of research on the 8th Air Force in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) generally, and specifically the activities of the 100th Heavy Bombardment Group (The Bloody Hundredth), which was selected as representative of the air war in Europe for the series.

Maybe it was my background as a former enlisted man or just my instincts to cheer for the underdog, but I was concerned from the start of our training period and throughout the production in the UK that there be an accurate depiction of the air gunners who flew on all B-17 missions.

Usually in a dramatic, character-driven production, the emphasis tends to be on the officers up front — the pilots, navigators and bombardiers. However, I wanted to make damn sure the unsung and under-appreciated air gunners got the attention they deserved.

During training and prior to committing anything to cameras, we used a crawl, walk, run approach.

World War II flight crews were trained as soldiers before they went on to mission-specific bomber crew duties, so we began with the basic soldier stuff including proper wear of the uniform, PT, close-order drill, and United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) organization to include customs and courtesies. Then it was time to get specific with a special emphasis on the performers who would portray air gunners.



WHERE TO BEGIN

We started training them on the real .50-cal. Browning M2HB, with four blank-adapted guns on a firing line at our training site. They got a taste of taming that beast by loading and firing in short bursts from a flex-mount. While they wrestled with the bolt handle, feed chutes and stiff recoil springs, we reminded them that they would be simulating all that at high altitude wearing oxygen masks and heated suits in sub-zero temperatures.

Touching the gun's metal parts without thick gloves would lead instantly to frost-bitten and useless hands. Ammo was fed to each gun through a series of metallic chutes, and trying to link extra belts into a gun while airborne at altitude was a trick that every B-17 air gunner had to master given the AN/M2's ammo-eating rate of fire.

The "Ma Deuce" can be a bear to handle under any condition, but we wanted to ensure they understood — and accurately portrayed — the problems with taming a .50-cal. machine gun in a vibrating aircraft at extreme altitudes.

THE REAL EXPERIENCE

To hammer the point home, toward the end of the training period, we dressed all our actor aircrew out in everything the men they were portraying would have worn on a real-world mission then. This included a basic uniform shirt and trousers, a set of blue long johns, and the leather electrically heated trousers and fur-lined jackets.

Added to their misery were extra sweaters, scarves and fur-lined boots, plus helmets, goggles and period-correct earphones and throat mics. They waddled to the gimbal-mounted B-17 mock-ups and got some serious experience in



Capt. Dye served as the senior military advisor for the "Masters of the Air" miniseries on Apple TV+ and trained the B-17 air gunners.

IMAGE: APPLE TV+



IMAGE: APPLE TV+

Capt. Dye ensured the actors in the show understood the perils and difficulties the men they were portraying faced.

moving around a bouncing, bucking airplane while dressed like the Pillsbury Doughboy.

We were rotating gunners through various aircraft positions one day when I noticed we had a man missing at muster. He was a big guy who had been cast to portray a tail gunner, which meant he spent hours crammed into a narrow tunnel, straddling a little bicycle-type seat at the end of the B-17.

When we finally found him — beet-red, sweating and nearly passed out in the tail position — we had to shoehorn him out into the open air. Between the mouthfuls of water I forced him to chug, he squinted up at me and said, "You mean those guys stayed in there like that for eight or 10 hours?"

They did. And so did he when we were shooting long, continuous scenes of an aircraft in flight. Training like this brings understanding, and understanding pays dividends on camera.

WORKING TOGETHER

A B-17 Flying Fortress crew of 10 men could be conceptually divided like a modern football team into groups of offensive and defensive players.



IMAGE: APPLE TV+

On offense were the two pilots, bombardier, navigator and radio operator (RO). It's not an exact analogy, as there were variations in B-17 models. In some, the RO was equipped with an AN/M2 .50-cal. machine gun, and the bombardier and navigator up in the nose bubble also had a pair of .50's in flexible cheek mounts. But, manning those weapons was secondary to their primary missions.

On defense — a crucial element in surviving relentless German Luftwaffe attacks on bomber formations — were the air gunners: Tail gunner with a pair of .50's, ball-turret gunner and top turret gunner (who also served as flight engineer) with paired .50's in turret mounts, and the two back-to-back waist gunners firing single guns in flex-mounts.

Identifying and calling out enemy fighters was another challenge. We spent hours studying and

identifying German aircraft types and working the high-low clock references that would quickly alert the crew to inbound threats. That was particularly difficult for tail gunners who had to remember they were flying backwards, so their clock was reversed.

We had good mock-ups provided by brilliant technical designers and engineers, so training while stuffed into a cramped turret was effective for top turret and ball turret gunners. They spent hours whirling and spinning in these torture devices, and that gave them a feel for what it was like in a turret trying to fend off fighter attacks.

When we got to the mock-up ball turret for training, I had four young actors who were not at all anxious to cram themselves into that underslung goldfish bowl in which gunners laid on their backs with their feet up in the air at about shoulder level.

Asked how it went after their first experience, one of my guys just shrugged and massaged his sore back. "OK, I guess. Good practice if you're having a baby or getting a prostate exam."



IMAGE: NARA

This 8th Air Force ball turret gunner is seen maintaining his 50-cal. weapon during June 1944.

MAKING IT COUNT

Machine gun marksmanship and aiming was another training challenge, especially for the right- and left-oriented waist gunners. They were only slightly offset from direct back-to-back positions in the middle of the aircraft and were firing from open ports that made wind a factor in controlling their weapons.

In addition, you can't use the old duck-hunter "lead" in firing from an aircraft that is moving in one direction while your target is moving in any one of several others. Also, with other B-17 bombers flying next to you in tight formation, you can't just pray and spray lead everywhere. With engagement ranges of airborne targets beginning at about 600 yards and these powerful .50-cal. guns, that's a recipe for fratricide.

The machine guns we used in actual filming were gutted, pneumatically operated versions of the World War II-era AN/M2. While they were balky at first, they eventually ran like Swiss watches. We wound up with mounds of .50-cal. casings to sweep out of fuselage sections at the end of every shooting day.

Importantly, the waist gunners got a feel for the tripping hazards big piles of shell casings presented as they swiveled along

Waist gunners demonstrate their nearly back-to-back positions aboard a B-17 Flying Fortress.



IMAGE: NARA



IMAGE: APPLE TV+

"Masters of the Air" put the viewer in the middle of the harrowing air war above Europe during World War II.

with computer-generated targets projected on all-surround screens in front of them.

FOG OF WAR

Some stats regarding enemy aircraft destroyed by heavy bomber air gunners may come as a surprise. From November 1943 to April 1944, over the course of a thousand recorded engagements in which enemy aircraft were confirmed as destroyed, 5.1% fell to ball turret gunners, 15.6% were nailed by waist gunners (each side), 17.2% went down under fire from top turret gunners, and 30.5% fell to tail gunners.

World War II air gunners bitched loudly about such stats, but it was hard in those days — in a chaotic sky filled with heavy bombers and blazing machine guns — to keep accurate track. An enemy aircraft destroyed (versus damaged) was often claimed by multiple gunners in multiple aircraft. Additionally, a crash or bail-out by an enemy fighter pilot had to be verified by a second observer. Confirmation was often arguable and hard to come by in over-heated post-mission briefings.

Capt. Dye has a long and storied history as a military advisor as well as an actor in countless films and shows.



IMAGE: APPLE TV+

CONCLUSION

While "Masters of the Air" as a series was mostly snubbed during Emmy considerations, the reward for those of us involved was watching the young actors we'd trained mount up in those B-17 mock-ups every day looking as if they were born to it.

They moved smoothly and confidently and knew all the hazards and short-cuts by first-hand experience, just as the real air gunners and other crewmen did during the real war.

That's the sort of thing that counts for filmmakers of the genre, and it adds up to a long-overdue salute for the men who took up these dangerous and deadly missions.

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