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LIFE

WINTER 2025
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Interview w/

**Julie
Golob**



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IMAGE/ILLUSTRATION:
JAKE MILLER/ANTHONY WASHINGTON ART

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MIKE HUMPHRIES

WE'RE PROUD TO PRESENT the Winter 2025 issue of *The Armory Life* print magazine. This issue is packed with great content, from our cover story interview with renowned professional shooter and firearm expert Julie Golob to detailed product reviews and much more.

Julie Golob, now a brand ambassador for Springfield Armory, is a multi-time world and national shooting champion. She brings an invaluable perspective as a respected competitive shooter, published author, U.S. Army veteran, wife and mother. Turn to page 16 to learn more about her.

When the Hellcat first launched in late 2019, it set a new standard for micro 9mm pistols designed for EDC. Starting on page 10, Jeremy Trepn wrings out the newest addition to the Hellcat family — the Hellcat .380. Is this light-

kicking, easy-to-carry Hellcat the right one for you? Check out the article to decide for yourself.

In addition to full feature reviews of other Springfield Armory firearms — such as the Echelon 4.0C Comp and the newly refreshed SAINT Victor line — this issue also covers some exciting accessory and ammo options. Check out pieces covering the Dead Air Sandman X suppressor, the Surefire X300 Turbo, Hornady's Backcountry Defense 10mm and more.

Our history piece for the issue is about the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle, a gun

I desperately wanted as a young teenager back in the 1980's. While I wasn't able to get one then, I recently had one "rebuilt" on an M1A Scout Squad — and our article on that project has a uniquely retro-style look. So, step into our time machine and check it all out, starting on page 87.

As always, I'm very interested in hearing your thoughts about *The Armory Life*. Feel free to reach out to support@thearmorylife.com, and let me know what you think about the magazine and website.

So, welcome to the Winter 2025 issue of *The Armory Life* quarterly magazine. Flip through its pages, read some articles, scan some QR codes, visit the website and enjoy. And be sure to keep an eye out for future issues as well! 🍷



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IMAGE: U.S. NAVY

KAMIKAZES

THE ARMORY LIFE PRESENTS:

EDC EVERYDAY CARRY

VOLUME #18 2025

ECHELON 4.0C

TOP 10 GEAR PICKS

- 1911 DS PRODIGY COMPACTS
- STAN CHEN CUSTOM EMP
- I SURVIVED A CARJACKING!
- DON'T RUN A RED DOT?
- SPOTTING AN AMBUSH
- UNDER-FIRE RELOADS

EDC E-MAG



"DEAD EYES" DANGERS

KUNA'S SECRET

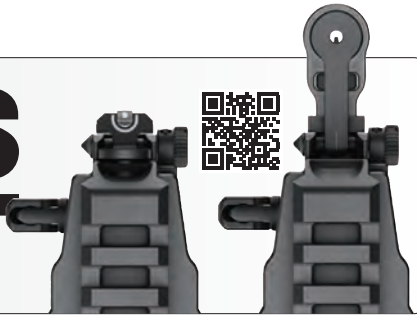


IMAGE: AWAKEN OUTDOORS

DON'T MAKE THIS MISTAKE



IMAGE: TOM LAEMLEIN

ARMORED JEEPS



BEST URBAN DEFENSE 9MM?

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

HELLCAT



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

The Hellcat OSP .380 packs in 11+1 firepower in a compact package. Shown with a Shield OMSsc red dot with translucent roof.

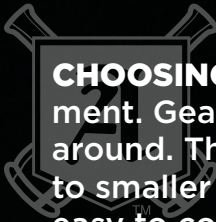
WATCH THE VIDEO:
TESTING THE HELLCAT IN .380




HELLCAT .380

THIS NEW ADDITION TO THE HELLCAT FAMILY OFFERS AN OPTIC-READY EDC THAT IS TRULY A PLEASURE TO CARRY — AND SHOOT.

JEREMY TREMP



CHOOSING TO CARRY EVERY DAY is a commitment. Gear has to fit your life, not the other way around. That is why a lot of folks keep circling back to smaller pistols that are simple to conceal and easy to control. Enter the new Springfield Armory Hellcat OSP in .380. Here's the short version: Same Hellcat DNA, but in a softer-shooting chambering.



I have carried a lot of micro pistols over the years. In fact, my very first CCW was actually a .380 pistol as the round has much to offer. While you give up a little on raw horsepower compared to 9mm, you have a cartridge that still offers capable power as well as controllability — that latter point being particularly true if

used in the right platform.

The .380 round itself has been around for a long time. Effectively a short 9mm (think .38 Spl. versus .357 Mag.), the .380 offers you a chambering that is easy to carry yet doesn't have to punish you.

Because the recoil is lighter, it's a lot easier to stay on your sights and get that follow-up shot right where you want it. You're not wrestling the gun like you sometimes do with a micro 9mm. Inside the distances where defensive pistols are employed, that extra control is a real advantage.

THE DETAILS

The Hellcat .380 sticks to the same carry-first formula that made the Hellcat family so

famous. It features a 3" barrel, a double-column flush-fit 11-rounder and an extended 13-rounder magazine, and a slim slide and frame that tucks under light clothing. The result is a pistol that doesn't print when you're moving around.

The dimensions sit right at the 1"-width mark, which is the sweet spot for true micro pistols. Weight is low at around 16 oz.

Springfield brought over the key features from the 9mm Hellcat we've come to expect. The frame has the same Adaptive Grip Texture, which locks into your hand when you grip hard but stays comfortable against the skin when it's riding in the holster. The slide is cut with serrations at the front, top and rear, so you can rack the pistol however you like and still get traction, even with sweaty hands. The U-Dot sight system is standard, pairing a large and bright tritium/luminescent front dot with a simple rear "U-notch" iron sight that makes for quick target acquisition.

Out of the box, the Hellcat .380 ships with two magazines. One is an 11-round flush-fit unit that is shorter and wears a pinky extension, which keeps the footprint small but gives you a little more to hold onto. The other 13-round mag is extended for a full-hand grip as well as a bump in capacity.

I like this flexibility. Most of the time I'll carry the short mag in the pistol for concealment, and drop the longer mag in a pocket or sling bag as a spare.

to stay comfortable even when sitting or driving. For appendix carry, a small wedge can help angle the muzzle and keep the pistol tight to the body. This is one of those guns you can put on in the morning and “forget about it” until you take it off at night.

A CLEAR VIEW

This Hellcat is offered in an

an ounce. Combine that with its extremely compact dimensions (1.60"x0.74"x0.84"), and you have an optic that offers both small dimensions and a large, unobstructed view. The translucent roof on that optic lets in extra light and keeps the window wide open for such a small footprint.

I still appreciate irons on a carry gun, but on pistols this size a red dot can be a real advantage for quick shots and for shooters whose eyes aren't what they used to be.

However, if you want to keep it simple, the .380's included slide cover plate fills the milled optic-mounting slot to give you a handy, iron-



The frame also includes a section of accessory rail, and Springfield kept it non-proprietary. That means you can fit common micro lights or lasers if you want. It's a nice option, though keep in mind you'll need a holster cut for it. Personally, I'll probably keep this one slick and light for maximum concealability.

This is the kind of pistol that simply disappears when you carry it. At the 3:30 position in a slim inside-the-waistband (IWB) holster, the short grip doesn't push out against clothing, and the slide length is short enough

OSP (Optical Sight Pistol) configuration, which means the slide is milled for direct-mounting optics with the Shield RMS/SMS footprint. The direct-mount system allows the sights to co-witness through most if not all of these optics.

I had the opportunity to try out the new pistol with a new optic from Shield Sights. That optic is the OMSc, which stands for “Open Mini Sight Sub Compact.” Described as the world's first “panoramic roof” optic, the aluminum-bodied optic employs a translucent acrylic roof and weighs in at just .51 of

sighted EDC. However, for me, having an optic that can co-witness with the irons is the best of both worlds.

RANGE TIME

For me, the main reason to choose the .380 version of the

The Hellcat OSP .380 combines impressive firepower with a compact package that is easy to EDC all day — yet be ready at a moment's notice.

Hellcat is the way it shoots. Micro 9mms can be snappy and, while they're impressive for their size, they can wear you out in a long training session.

The .380 softens that up noticeably. With the .380, the sights just seem to settle back quicker. Follow-up shots don't take as much effort, and shooting one-handed feels more manageable.

Is .380 as powerful as 9mm? No, and it's not supposed to be. What it offers instead is a balance: a caliber that is manageable, shootable and confidence-inspiring. That's a combination that makes sense for a lot of everyday carriers.

A pistol chambered in .380 is all about balancing control with enough ballistic performance for defensive use. That's why ammo choice is critical.

For my testing, I ran the Hellcat with a mix of common defensive loads to get a feel for how it performs across the board.

On the range I was able to test five flavors of ammunition: Black Hills 60-gr. HoneyBadger, Black Hills 90-gr. Jacketed Hollow

Point (JHP), Federal Punch 85-gr. JHP, Federal 99-gr. Hydra-Shok, and Fiocchi CovertX 95-gr. JHP. During my multiple range sessions, all the defensive ammo ran



HELLCAT OSP .380

CHAMBERING	.380 ACP
BARREL LENGTH	3"
WEIGHT	16.1 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	6"
SIGHTS	Tritium U-Dot
GRIPS	Integral, polymer
ACTION	Striker-fired
FINISH	Melonite
CAPACITY	11+1/13+1 (one of each included)
MSRP	\$653

with perfect reliability, smooth feeding and steady cycling.

It was an interesting experience shooting the Hellcat in .380, as I have been used to shooting 9mm Hellcat's for the past five years. I

know exactly what to expect when I pull that trigger. Shooting the .380 was quite enjoyable and a nice change of pace. The pistol is incredibly tame and easy to shoot, especially with some of the heavier-grain ammunition such as the 95- and 99-gr. loads. With these, muzzle rise was nearly non-existent.

On my second range day with the pistol, I did some basic accuracy and velocity testing from 15 yards. Accuracy results were quite good, with it averaging just over 1" at that distance. Average velocity results in feet per second (fps) were as follows:

- Black Hills 60-gr.: 1,202 fps
- Federal 85-gr.: 985 fps
- Federal 99-gr.: 919 fps
- Fiocchi 95-gr.: 1,020 fps

I ran out of time and did not get to accuracy and velocity test the Black Hills 90-gr. JHP load.

I found that the slide on this Hellcat is surprisingly easy to rack for a micro pistol, which is a big plus for newer shooters.

The magazine release is sized right; it's easy to hit on reloads, but not oversized to the point of causing snags. The slide stop sits where it needs to be without getting stopped up by your support hand.

HELLCAT OSP .380



Springfield also carried over the stand-off surface at the front end of the guide rod, which is designed to keep the pistol in battery if it's pressed against a surface. It's a detail you hope to never need, but I'm glad it's there.

CONCLUSION

The way I see it, the Hellcat .380 is a strong option for a few different groups of shooters. For people who are newer to carrying, the softer recoil makes it easier to train with, which means you'll shoot more and build confidence faster.


For anyone who struggles with the snap of micro 9mms, whether that's due to grip strength or just personal preference, this .380 is a welcome alternative.

Or, you might be an experienced shooter who just wants a Hellcat

that is easy to carry and even easier to shoot well.

The new Hellcat OSP in .380 fills a real need in the concealed carry world. It's small, easy to carry and very comfortable to shoot. That might sound basic, but those qualities are what decide whether a pistol stays in the safe or actually goes on your belt every day. Springfield kept all the things that made the Hellcat popular in the first place, and paired it with a softer-shooting chambering.

This is a pistol built for real-world carry needs. It's not about chasing

maximum power. It's about giving people a pistol they can shoot well, carry without compromise, and trust. For many of us, that's exactly the combination for which we're looking. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

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IMAGE: JAKE MILLER/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

Easily one of the most respected competitive shooters in the world, Julie Golob brings a wealth of experience to her new role with Springfield Armory.

JULIE GOLOB

BY MIKE HUMPHRIES



ANYONE even remotely familiar with the competitive shooting community has likely heard the name Julie Golob. In addition to having earned countless world and national shooting championship titles, this U.S. Army veteran is also a highly respected firearms expert and shooting instructor, as well as an avowed outdoor enthusiast.

She is also a respected author, with books that share her unique perspective as an accomplished competitive shooter as well as a wife and mother. Combine these with a voluminous number of published articles covering topics ranging from shooting tips, firearm safety, gun rights and the latest in guns and gear, to lifestyle posts on food, fashion and fitness, and you have a remarkable voice of authority in the shooting community.

Recently, Golob joined Springfield Armory as a professional shooter and brand ambassador, bringing her considerable

experience and knowledge to this important new role. We'd like to thank her for taking the time to do this exclusive interview with us.

THE ARMORY LIFE (TAL): Could you tell us a little bit about yourself, and what has brought you here to this new role?

JULIE GOLOB (JG): Born and raised in upstate New York, I'm a daddy's girl. My father was an avid outdoorsman and competitive shooter. We fished the Finger Lakes for Lake Trout and ventured out into the woods and fields for deer season. In the summers, we hit the range. My dad loved to shoot, and when he started competing in practical shooting matches, I joined him, helping pick up brass and pasting targets. Eventually, I became

a certified range officer.

As a young girl, I loved the range. Sure, it was loud and dirty, but it was the one place where I wasn't just another kid. Adults treated me differently, listening to what I had to say and respecting me as a person. Our range friends became an extended family, and when I decided to start competing when I was 14 years old, I had so many people cheering me on.

With my shooter family in my corner and our local range hosting one of the premier matches of the season, the Miller Invitational, I learned quickly. As a result, I earned a slot and competed in the United States Practical Shooting Association's (USPSA) Nationals as a junior competitor. It led to an opportunity to serve with the U.S. Army in the U.S. Army Marksmanship Unit (USAMU), and later work in the firearms industry.

When I look back on a career that spans three decades of competing and more than 20 years in the industry, I feel so grateful. I love that I get to share shooting sports and this lifestyle with my family and so many others.

TAL: Clearly, you have a passion for firearms. Can you tell us a little about how you first got into them, and how that led to where you are today?

JG: Firearms have always been a part of my life. My father's success in the field filled the freezer, and I learned firearm safety at a young age. Later, shooting sports became a special dad/daughter hobby. I've always been competitive in nature and dreamed of being the best at something. That something ended up being competitive shooting.

My father was a school teacher, which meant that as soon as school was out, we hit the match circuit. We traveled to competitions in a cramped camper in the bed of a Ford Ranger, volunteering to work events for free entry fees.

Working major matches provided a front row view to watch shooters of all ability levels and

their gear. I saw how competition firearms evolved from stock pistols to handguns with compensators and red dots. All that time watching, learning and eventually competing built a foundation and respect for the tools of the trade.

TAL: Speaking of your time as a range officer (RO) in those early days, we heard that you actually got to meet a very special shooter, and one you are now working alongside at Springfield Armory.

JG: Absolutely! All those years volunteering gave me the opportunity to meet the people I looked up to. As a teenager, instead of musicians and actors, my heroes were shooters. As much as many would deny it, all the RO's couldn't help but be star-struck seeing the pros, the sponsored shooters all decked out in company colors and logos from head-to-toe.

Which brings us to Rob Leatham. Rob isn't just an incredible shooter, he has an aura about him. As

an RO, with a timer in my hand, I felt I had arrived. Getting to tell Rob Leatham to, "load and make ready" was such a thrill.

Later, when I became a member of the Army Action

Shooting

Team at the USAMU, Rob came out to train with us. Rob isn't the kind of person who is stingy with knowledge, and he has a wealth of it. He saw me struggling and took the time to help me make little changes to my grip and stance. It made all the difference, and after that I was able to claim my first national title.

Year after year of traveling to all the same competitions, we became friends. When we were both chasing national titles in the same division, Rob let me use one of his guns so that I could be competitive. He knows more about shooting than anyone I know, and I've benefited a great deal from his knowledge and friendship.

To be his teammate at Spring-



IMAGE: AUTHOR

Competing for the U.S. Army Shooting Team, Golob was part of the Women's Super Squad at the 1998 USPSA Open National Championships.

field Armory? It's icing on a really amazing cake.

ROB LEATHAM: Julie is not only a great shot and wonderful person, but also a good friend of mine for many years. Over these years, we have developed a great friendship based on mutual respect and knowing what it takes to excel.

From that little kid who RO'd me many years ago to now, I have had the pleasure of watching her develop into a fantastic shooter. And while I'd love to lay claim to helping her

along the way, she didn't need much. Great hand/eye coordination and a drive to win are the keys to her success.

Over my many decades of teaching and competing, I have seen boatloads of shooters with promise and talent who never quite made the grade. To do so, you must have that "little something extra." Whatever that is — a will to win, or maybe just icy nerves that keep you from failing when that's the easy path — Julie has always shown me that "something."

It's a pleasure to call her my friend and now have her be part

of the Springfield family. Julie, welcome to your new home!

TAL: In these early days of you getting involved in competitive shooting and developing your skills, you would soon find yourself recruited to be part of the famed USAMU. Can you tell us

While Golob cut her teeth with the 1911, she also has a deep appreciation for striker-fired pistols such as this Springfield Armory Echelon 4.5F Comp (shown with a Trijicon SRO optic).

about how this opportunity came about for you?

JG: That first national championship I attended as a teenager, the one I mentioned earlier, was

a catalyst moment. I traveled to the event with fellow competitors from our local club, and it was the first time I competed without my dad. I shot well enough that the coach of the Army Action Shooting Team took notice.

By the end of the

week, I had a letter of acceptance to shoot for the U.S. Army. It was a one-year guarantee for a tryout, and I would be the first female member of the Action Pistol Team.

I can still remember the look on my parents' faces after coming home after a week away to tell them I was joining the U.S. Army. That October, with my letter in hand, I walked into the recruiting office, took the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), and signed

up for the Delayed Entry Program as Military Police (MP). The seven-month wait to start Basic Training began.

TAL: Can you tell us more about your time in the U.S. Army, and how it shaped who you are today?

JG: I left home the summer of 1995 for Fort McClellan, Alabama, for Basic Training and MP school. Upon graduation, I reported to Fort Benning, Georgia. The tryout to meet certain competition benchmarks and earn my Black Hat began.

It was a



Julie's drive to succeed has earned her a raft of world and national titles, and makes her a terrific addition as a brand ambassador for Springfield Armory.

difficult adjustment going from a caring, supportive family and extended shooter family to life in the military, but I put my head down and worked. I shot more rounds in my first year than all my years of shooting as a civilian combined. That much time behind the gun is a foundation I rely on even today.

Thanks to my time in the US-AMU, I achieved everything I hoped to and more. I also learned what it means to be a good leader. It's an honor to have been able to serve my country in such a way.

TAL: While in the USAMU, you won USPSA Ladies National Titles in Open and Limited Division, a Ladies World Title at the Steel Challenge and were named Army Athlete of the Year. After your time in the military, you began to rack up more championship titles. (*Ed. Note: Please see list in accompanying table.*) Can you tell us a bit about what it took for you to earn all these titles? What got you to this point?

JG: When I first started competing, there was only one division. As the shooting sports grew and equipment evolved, we began to add divisions based on firearm and gear modifications. Though my competition journey began with stock firearms, it wasn't long before I focused on shooting highly customized pistols to shoot fast and as accurately as possible.

Because I started with a low-capacity iron-sight pistol and moved on to highly customized race guns and everything in between, I have an appreciation for

different types of firearms and the specific skills and challenges with them. If it has a trigger, I enjoy learning how to use and succeed with it.

TAL: In your first USPSA competition, we understand that you used a 1911 and a P.35-pattern pistol. Clearly, Springfield Armory has

time, single-stack capacity was another challenge in a sport that rewarded more rounds in a mag.

That's when I switched to competing with a P.35-style pistol. It was a Goldilocks fit with the combination of light recoil, trigger reach, and increased mag capacity. It allowed me to learn how to shoot, and I had fun — another

key component. I was able to improve, and it served as a springboard for me.

Later, I learned to appreciate these firearms beyond my own trigger time. The history and longevity of these designs are incredible.

TAL: While you clearly love these wood and steel handguns, you've also worked with polymer-framed/striker-fired designs. In particular, we see you are now running a Springfield Armory Echelon. Can you tell us what you like about

these types of guns in general, and the Echelon in particular?

JG: Yes, I do love the classics. At the same time, I greatly appreciate polymer striker-fired pistols. They are workhorses and just run and run. What makes the Echelon stand out for me is in the details. It's not just another polymer-framed pistol. It's obvious it's designed by and for shooters. From the Adaptive Grip Texture in how it feels and where texture and serrations are placed on the pistol to the ergonomics for ideal grip and recoil control, it shoots great as an iron sight pistol. Adding a red dot with the Variable Interface System just takes it to the next level in how low you can mount a variety of optics. I'm very excited to see what I can accomplish with it.



a strong foundation with these types of firearms with its 1911 and SA-35 pistols. Can you tell us what drew you to these designs?

JG: One of the major challenges my dad and I encountered when I first started to learn how to shoot was firearm fit. With my small hands, it was important to learn on a pistol that I could reach the trigger and controls. As a teacher, my father understood the value of starting with a firearm I could handle more easily. Enter the 1911.

Long before 9mm 1911s were so common, my father spent time working up a super soft load in .45 ACP. That ammo barely met the power factor minimum, but it allowed me to control the recoil. I could reach the magazine release and trigger easily. At the same



Golob is shown here with Springfield Armory's Rob Leatham and Kyle Schmidt, representing the United States as members of the National Team at the 2012 World Action Pistol Championships. It was held in Germany that year.

TAL: Beyond the Echelon, are there any other Springfield Armory guns with which you've been working?

JG: Though I am a competition shooter by trade, I also greatly value firearms to defend myself, my home and my family. The first guns on my wish list from Springfield Armory were the Hellcat and Hellcat Pro for EDC. I appreciate the Hellcat's smaller size for certain clothing choices, and the Hellcat Pro strikes that ideal balance in a fine-shooting carry gun, packed with features that you can always depend on.

The rifle selection is also exciting. Between hunting rifles like the Model 2020 Boundary options, the

extensive selection of ARs, and another amazing classic, the M1A, I have so many options. I'm very excited to set up my deer rifle for the season and take an M1A to the range, with either an SA-35 or 1911 on my hip to complete the vibe.

TAL: In addition to being a world-renowned shooter, you also note that you are a wife and mother. How have these two related roles affected your professional work — and your perspective?

JG: Becoming a wife and mother changed everything for me. My time in the military and the years after, I was completely focused on shooting as a competitor. Starting a family made me start to seriously consider concealed carry and firearm safety in ways that I didn't really relate to before. It's one thing to have an appreciation for concealed carry as a shooter and industry rep. As a mother, it's a whole new level. It wasn't about

just me anymore.

As a mom, I took time off from competing to be present for my daughters the way I wanted to be, but I also stayed engaged in shooting through writing. It resulted in my first book, "SHOOT: Your Guide to Shooting and Competition". I found I wanted to create more resources for shooters, like an eBook on "Shooting While Pregnant" and "Toys, Tools, Guns and Rules: A Children's Book About Gun Safety". My writing represents the different phases of my life, especially as a woman gun owner.

My time in the industry has at times felt like an exploration. Being

the first female action shooter for the USAMU as well as proving my worth in a male-dominated sport hasn't always been easy. When I first started working in the industry, there were few females, especially as pro shooters. Without examples to follow, at times it felt like I was venturing into the unknown.

So much has changed over these past decades. I hope that what I've been able to accomplish has shown other women that it can be a wonderful and rewarding sport, and for those who aspire to it, a career.

TAL: Thank you again for taking the time to do this interview with us.

JG: It's my pleasure. I'm so excited for this new chapter. 🇺🇸

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TOTALE



The newly enhanced line of SAINT Victor rifles and pistols in 5.56mm and 7.62mm offers a firearm for practically any application. The 14" Pinned & Welded 5.56mm variant is shown at top.



IMAGE: OFFENSIVE MARKETING GROUP

VICTOR...



**BUILDING ON A FOUNDATION OF OFFERING
PROFESSIONAL-GRADE CAPABILITIES, THE
NEW SAINT VICTORS CONTINUE THE TRADITION WITH
ENHANCED FEATURES AND IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCE.**

SEAN UTLEY



I'VE BEEN WATCHING Springfield Armory from afar for quite some time and have seen it continue to grow. I'm not referring to simply revenue and spreadsheets, but instead growth in product breadth and capabilities. In my opinion, they've been doing it right for many years now. No fluff or smoke here — Springfield continues to raise the bar.

The SAINT line of ARs first launched about a decade ago, and it caught many by surprise. Yes, this was an admittedly saturated market, and the company was more known for its traditional M1A-style rifles. So, how do you make your mark when jumping into manufacturing such a widely produced platform?

Easy. You push your engineering and design teams. You make sure they push the envelope to give users the best possible product.

The SAINT line would then expand over the years, including the launch of the SAINT Victor series in 2019.

SUM OF ITS PARTS

That familiar phrase, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts," comes to mind while looking over this newest iteration of the SAINT Victor.

Built on a foundation designed to provide users with a platform capable of professional-grade capabilities, the SAINT Victor quickly made a name for itself by offering premium features and impressive performance. However, Springfield Armory decided it was time to give the design a close look. The result is the "new for 2025" series of offerings of SAINT Victors we are considering here today.

I also want to point out

of its parts" approach. Rather than any particular new feature outshining all the others, there is instead a consistent progression in individual components that are designed, added or enhanced.

First, let's lay out what new models there are on offer. Chambered in 5.56mm NATO or 7.62mm NATO, there are 16 total new SAINT Victor models. These include 16" models as well as an 11.5" barreled pistol (and an SBR) in 5.56, as well as a really interesting new 14" pinned and welded version. In 7.62, there are both 16" and 20" models.

Mid-length gas systems are featured on the 14" and 16" 5.56mm guns, while the pistol and SBR have carbine-length systems. The 16" 7.62mm has an intermediate-length system between mid- and rifle-length, and the 20" 7.62mm has a rifle-length gas system.

Add in lo-cap, California-compliant, and color variants (Cerakote Coyote Brown and Tungsten Gray), and you have a lot of choices here. MSRPs range from \$1,249 up to \$1,688.

Looking them over, you get an immediate sense of what Springfield is trying to accomplish — manufacturing a competent, capable AR platform with top-tier components at an affordable price.

If the company's goal was to create an AR that is affordable and reliable, and with enough features to satisfy even the pickiest buyer, I think it has accomplished that mission.

THE DETAILS

Let's dive into what exactly sets these new Victors apart from their predecessors. While the



The new Victors feature low-key receiver markings. The Tungsten Gray Victor 5.56mm 16" rifle is shown here.

that we are not looking at a major redesign here. With the solid foundation of the originals, this revamp focused more on a "sum

new Victors feature forged 7075 T6 upper and lower receivers just like the originals, they now feature “government-style” low-profile markings that are simple and attractive. I personally noted the attractive markings for the fire controls. As a visual artist, my eyes are immediately drawn to certain details — even the most subtle ones — and these pictograms add that little touch.

Below the safe/fire engravings is an ambidextrous safety selector — an absolute must for any serious AR. The ability to effectively run the rifle with either hand is paramount. My right-handed/left-eye dominance has made this of notable importance over my shooting career.

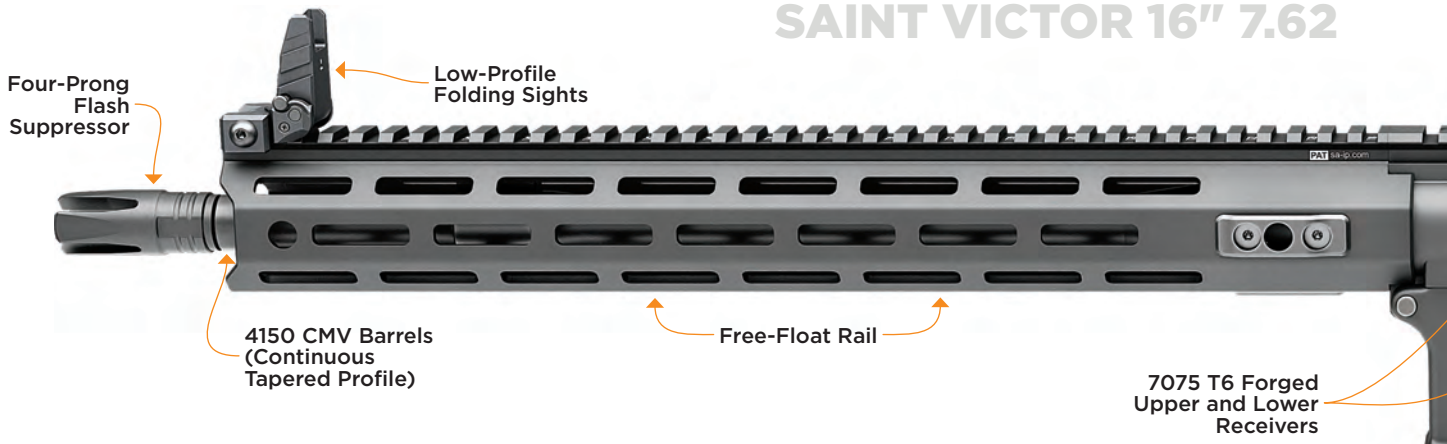
While the earlier Victors also had ambis, this new one is a 45-degree model with a short-throw lever on the right side. In the upper receiver, there is a Radian Raptor LT charging handle, designed to offer users full ambidextrous usage there as well. A 7075 T6 buffer tube rounds out the package.

Out front, the Victors feature 4150 chrome moly vanadium (CMV) barrels with a continuous tapered profile. This design offers optimal heat distribution and maximum rigidity. The barrels feature a durable nitride finish for wear- and corrosion-resistance, and a taper-pinned/low-profile gas block completes the feature set on offer.

Topping off the muzzles of all the Victors (apart from the California-legal versions) is an eye-catching four prong flash hider. The rate of twist on the 5.56 guns is 1:7”, and the 7.62 rifles are 1:10”.

The SAINT Victor 5.56mm 16” in Coyote Brown is equally at home out in the wild as it is on the range.

SAINT VICTOR 16" 7.62



SAINT VICTORS



CHAMBERING	5.56mm/7.62mm
BARREL	11.5", 14", 16", 20"
WEIGHT	5 lbs., 9 oz.-8 lbs., 1 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	27.5"-43"
SIGHTS	Low-profile folding
STOCK/BRACE	B5 Systems Enhanced SOPMOD, Magpul Fixed, SB Tactical SBA3
ACTION	Semi-Auto
FINISH	Black, Coyote Brown, Tungsten Gray
CAPACITY	10, 20, 30 (one magazine included)
MSRP	\$1,249-\$1,688



IMAGE: AUTHOR

Speaking of barrels, in addition to the 11.5" barrels for the pistol and SBR, and the 16" and 20" options for rifles, there's a unique one situated in the middle — the 14" Pinned & Welded model. This 5.56mm employs a 14" barrel with a pinned and welded flash hider that is long enough to bring total length of the carbine up to the legal 16" requirement.

Surrounding those barrels is a new free-float rail. This aluminum handguard features a full-length top Picatinny rail with T-slot markings as well as ample M-Lok coverage for fitting out the gun with a lot of accessories if so desired.

The handguard is attached to the Victor's upper receivers by a

robust, patented mounting system with integrated QD cups.

Atop the rifle is a newly designed set of low-profile manual sights that sit much lower than the original units.

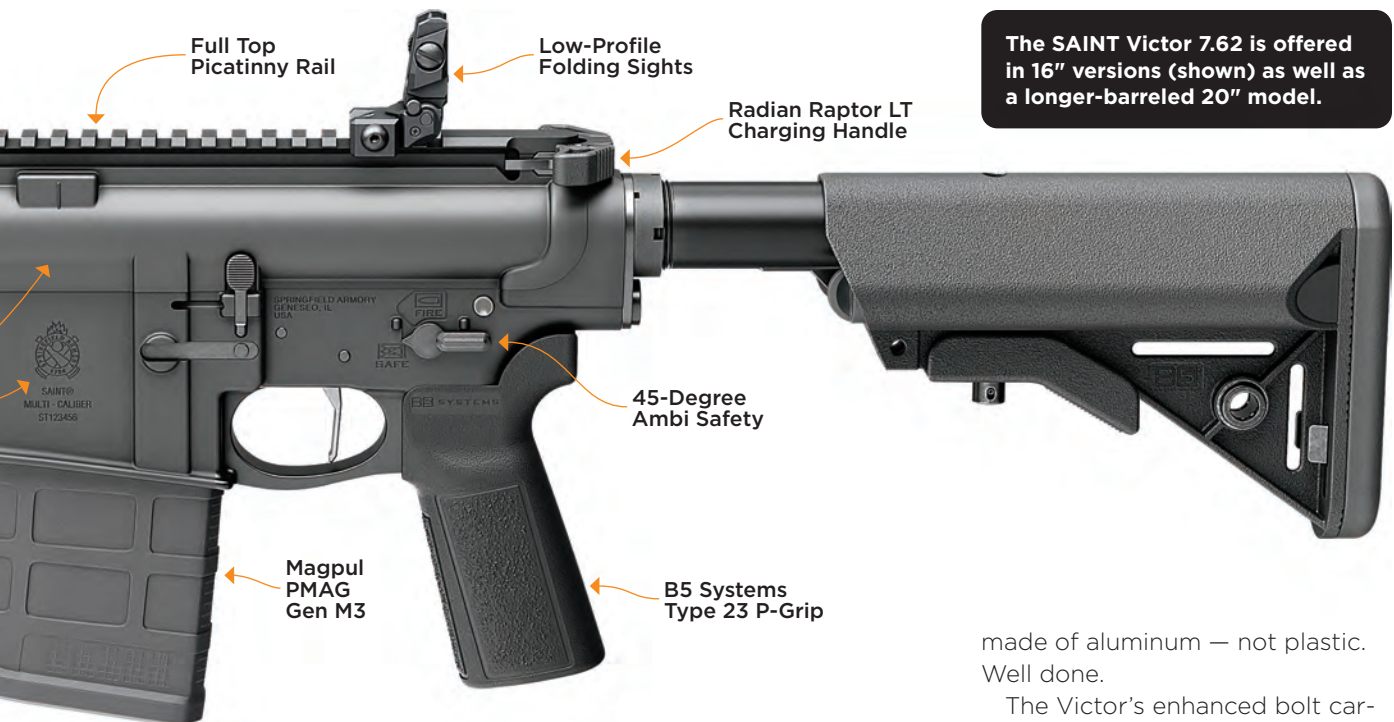
However, much of what made the originals so appealing still remains. The mag release and bolt catch mechanism are standard fare, single-sided and right where you expect them.

The lowers of all models except the Cali-legal and pistol versions are fitted out exclusively with

The author tested out the 11.5" 5.56mm pistol along with the 14" Pinned & Welded 5.56mm rifle (shown) with impressive results.

B5 Systems stocks, pistol grips and triggerguards. The pistol has an SB Tactical SBA3 brace, and the California guns have a Strike Industries California-compliant pistol grip along with a Magpul fixed stock.

I'm a big fan of the B5 Systems Type 23 P-Grip, which is nearly vertical with a 13-degree grip an-



The SAINT Victor 7.62 is offered in 16" versions (shown) as well as a longer-barreled 20" model.

gle that makes intuitive sense to the hand. It also has a beavertail and well-executed grip texturing to keep retention levels high without shredding you to pieces. The collapsible B5 Systems Enhanced SOPMOD stock is also quite good.

The Victors feature a trigger coated in nickel boron, employing a straight and flat blade that affords the operator great contact and feel. It's called a "G.I." trigger, which basically means it's a duty type, as opposed to a lighter, race gun-type trigger.

HANDS-ON

I personally got the chance to try out two of the new 5.56mm Victors for this review — a 14" Pinned & Welded carbine and an 11.5" pistol. So, I set about inspecting them and getting them ready for the range.

Trigger weight was tested at 4.5 lbs. to 5 lbs. on my test guns, with a predictable breaking point. They exhibited a bit of creep when pressed extremely slowly, but

under normal presses none of this is noticeable.

All in all, it works well and will hold up in harsh conditions. This is the type of trigger you want for hard use.

The upper gets a couple of bonus points in my book for the inclusion of the ambidextrous charging handle as well as the set of back-up/flip-up sights. I can't tell you how much it pains me that people think iron sights are unnecessary or useless. The rear sight is windage adjustable, and they are

made of aluminum — not plastic. Well done.

The Victor's enhanced bolt carrier group (BCG) features an M16-pattern carrier, with a bolt crafted from 9310 carpenter steel. It is HP/MPI tested and nitride finished, and a hard-chromed firing pin extends service life by reducing wear. The gas key and castle nuts are properly staked.

Per the usual, I like to start out on the flat range to get rounds through the barrel before doing any accuracy testing. I have no set protocol on this other than getting as many rounds down-range as possible.

At this point, I pay particular

PERFORMANCE (100 YDS.) SAINT VICTOR 14" 5.56MM PINNED & WELDED

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
FEDERAL GOLD MEDAL 77-GR. SMK	2,399 fps	1.32"	1.45"
FIocchi 77-GR. SMK	2,412 fps	.85"	1.24"
HORNADY BLACK 75-GR. BTHP	2,492 fps	.91"	1.54"

SAINT VICTOR 5.56MM PISTOL

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
FEDERAL GOLD MEDAL 77-GR. SMK	2,279 fps	1.8"	1.98"
FIocchi HYPERFORMANCE 77-GR. SBR ENHANCED	2,268 fps	.87"	.97"
HORNADY BLACK 75-GR. BTHP	2,410 fps	1.18"	1.41"

Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 100 yards, rested. Velocity is the average of 15 shots measured in feet per second (fps) by an Athlon Optics Rangecraft chronograph. Abbreviations: BTHP (boat-tailed hollow point), gr. (grain), SMK (Sierra MatchKing).



The SAINT Victor 5.56mm Pistol features an SB Tactical SBA3 brace as well as an 11.5" barrel to combine compact size with capable ballistic performance.



attention to the firearm's mannerisms — pointability, recoil, trigger feel, and the gun's ability to invoke confidence in the operator. This is a very real measurement. If the

The Victors feature high-quality, low-profile aluminum flip-up iron sights the author appreciated.



gun doesn't feel right, you likely won't shoot right. I don't make the rules, I just live by them.

Follow-up shots were easy on both guns. No malfunctions were encountered, save for one short stroke on the pistol.

I chalked it up to the box of random 5.56/.223 ammo I grabbed on my way out the door. I have no idea what brands were

mixed together. Once I transitioned to like-brands and lots of ammo, no other issues were encountered during the test.

For accuracy testing, I shot both guns at 100 yards. I was able to nab a few sub-MOA groups on this outing. The carbine man-

aged a best 0.85" group, as well as another tight 0.91".

The SBR Enhanced ammo from Fiocchi lived up to its name by delivering the best groups in the pistol. The tightest group was .87", but more impressively it averaged .97" across four separate groups. Per the testing protocols, I shot three, five-shot groups with each ammo for the test.

However, I shot an extra with the Fiocchi because it was shooting so consistently well. I'm not sure what's in the Fiocchi, but hats off to them for the performance of this loading.

CONCLUSION

AR's are a plentiful option in our wonderful American 2A marketplace. Finding one is not hard, but finding a good one can be. Corners can be cut, and many issues aren't discovered until round-counts rack up and the make-up has worn off.

While I'm still in the early stages with these guns, I can honestly say that how they're configured and what I've experienced with them here in-hand leads me to believe that all the right components are blended together in the right way. The result is not only attractive, but appropriate in design and composition.

So, be sure to check out these new Victors. With so many choices, there should be one there perfect for your needs! 🎯

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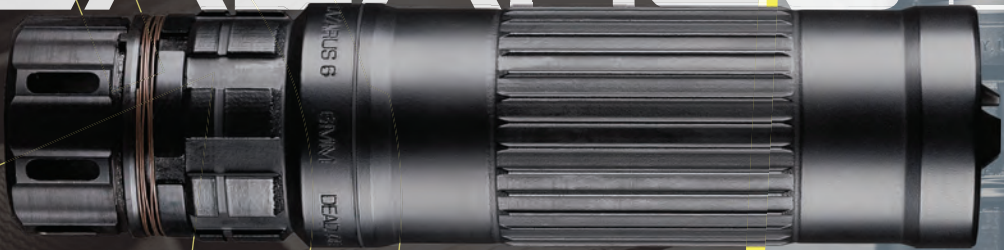


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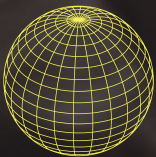
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IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The Echelon 4.0C Comp offers shooters a compact and concealable version of the highly capable Echelon, equipped with an integral compensator.

WATCH THE VIDEO:
TESTING THE ECHELON 4.0C COMP



PROMISE



IS THE **ECHELON 4.0C COMP 9MM** SPRINGFIELD ARMORY'S MOST VERSATILE EDC PISTOL YET?

JEREMY TREMP

THANKS TO TODAY'S CUTTING-EDGE TECH, we're shooting flatter, faster and more controlled — and all in a compact and concealable package. I'm, of course, speaking of the Echelon 4.0C Comp 9mm. This pistol follows in the footsteps of its big brother, the Echelon 4.5F Comp, and is based on the 4"-barreled 4.0C compact 9mm Echelon. Engineered with precision for reliability, accuracy and control, the Echelon 4.0C Comp carries over all the R&D from the full-size Echelon Comp and brings it to you in a more compact form factor.



The 9mm Echelon 4.0C Comp integral compensator, machined directly into the slide and the barrel, is located forward of the pistol's tritium/luminescent front sight assembly.

SIZED RIGHT

I've been a big fan of the Echelon 4.0C since its release in late 2024. The full-size Echelon 4.5F, my go-to sidearm for training, has proven itself to be a reliable and accurate platform with which I would trust my life.

The Echelon 4.0C brings the same level of performance and

capability, but in a more concealable package. With the Echelon 4.0C Comp 9mm pistol, you now have the capable Echelon platform in a concealable size with an integral compensator designed to deliver enhanced control.

We are certainly spoiled with options these days when it comes to firearms. For every carry position, hand size or situation, we have a great solution from which to choose.

In the past, if you wanted a compensator on your carry pistol, you needed an aftermarket threaded barrel as well as a compensator

to attach. You then had to determine if your ammunition would still reliably cycle the pistol, or you needed to mess with your springs to ensure reliability.

With Springfield offering factory-compensated pistols, it's a huge win for those of us looking for every advantage on the range or in defensive situations. And rather than employing an attachment hanging off of an extended threaded barrel, you have an integral compensator cut

directly into the slide and barrel, and made up of a single port located behind the front tritium/luminescent dot sight.

THE SWEET SPOT

At the heart of all Echelon pistols is the Central Operating Group, a self-contained stainless steel serialized chassis. This system allows you to easily swap the chassis — the “firearm” due to it being the serialized part — in and out of polymer grip modules with ease.

The Echelon 4.0C Comp comes with a “small” grip module with three interchangeable back-



straps, but medium and large modules are offered on the Springfield Armory Store.

The slide is billet-machined, comes with a black Melonite finish and is topped off with the integral compensator cleanly cut into the nose. The Melonite hammer-forged 4” barrel mirrors the slide cut with a single port cut to precisely vent gases up and out of the top of the pistol, enabling faster follow-up shots with less muzzle rise.

The 4.0C Comp ships with two magazines right out of the box: a 15-round flush fit for discreet carry, and an 18-round extended mag for when concealment takes a back seat to capacity.

The 4” hammer-forged barrel is built for accuracy and durability, and the tritium/luminescent front sight pairs with a U-notch rear to make target acquisition intuitive in a wide range of lighting conditions.

With an overall length of 7.25”, a height of 5.125” and weighing in at 24 oz., the Echelon 4.0C Comp hits a sweet spot. This isn’t just a compact version of a bigger gun; it’s a fully capable, red-dot-ready, compensated workhorse built to carry each and every day.

When you look at the compensator built into the Echelon pistols, you can immediately see the precision and thought that went into the design.

The machining of the slide and barrel match up perfectly, ensuring the compensator works as efficiently and reliably as possible. The opening in the slide is not just cut into the top, but also extends to the left and right down the sides of the slide. You will also notice that the front of the vent is shaped like a ramp going forward toward the muzzle.

These subtle design choices with the pistol ensure the high-pressure gases are pushed up and out, counteracting the inherent muzzle rise when a pistol

recoils after being fired.

As the slide of the Echelon 4.0C Comp moves rearward, the pistol wants to flip up and back in your hands. By venting

the gas out of the top of the pistol’s slide, this helps keep the pistol’s muzzle level.

As you can imagine, this makes shooting multiple, accurate shots in succession much easier.

HANDS-ON

I was immediately impressed with the Echelon 4.0C Comp on the range. In

general, the smaller a pistol gets the more difficult it is to control. Adding the compensator to the Echelon 4.0C helped bring the shooting experience closer to what I get from my full-size Echelon 4.5F.

Don’t expect it to totally delete recoil, but rather to take some of the edge off, enabling you to feel more confident on placing accurate follow-up shots.

The beautiful thing about a factory compensator is that Springfield did all the hard work figuring out how to make this pistol as reliable as possible. I’ve run 115-gr., 124-gr. and 147-gr. loads through it with no reliability issues.

I think Springfield hit a sweet spot with the size of the Echelon 4.0C. I have average-sized hands, and I think the pistol fits perfectly for a compact.

For those with larger hands, the Echelon ships with an extended 18-round magazine that carries over the Adaptive Grip Texture, giving you extra grip surface. Also, there are the aforementioned larg-



ECHELON 4.0C COMP 9MM

CHAMBERING	9mm
BARREL LENGTH	4"
WEIGHT	24 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.25"
SIGHTS	U-Dot
GRIPS	Grip module
ACTION	Chassis, striker-fired
FINISH	Black Melonite
CAPACITY	15+1 (one magazine), 18+1 (one magazine)
MSRP	\$765



IMAGE: AUTHOR

The author found the Echelon 4.0C Comp to be not only an impressively controllable 9mm, but also utterly reliable.

er grip modules as well.

The Echelon 4.0C is only slightly larger than my Hellcat Pro, making it a fantastic option for an everyday concealed carry pistol that is based on the Echelon platform. I find the Echelon 4.0C Comp more controllable than my Hellcat, which is designed to be as compact as possible. They all have specific purposes in my rotation depending on my wardrobe, but I really appreciate what the Echelon 4.0C Comp brings to the table in terms of control.

Beyond control and handling, the Echelon pistols employ the Variable Interface System, which enables you to mount just about any pistol red dot optic on the market directly to the slide

without any adapter plates.

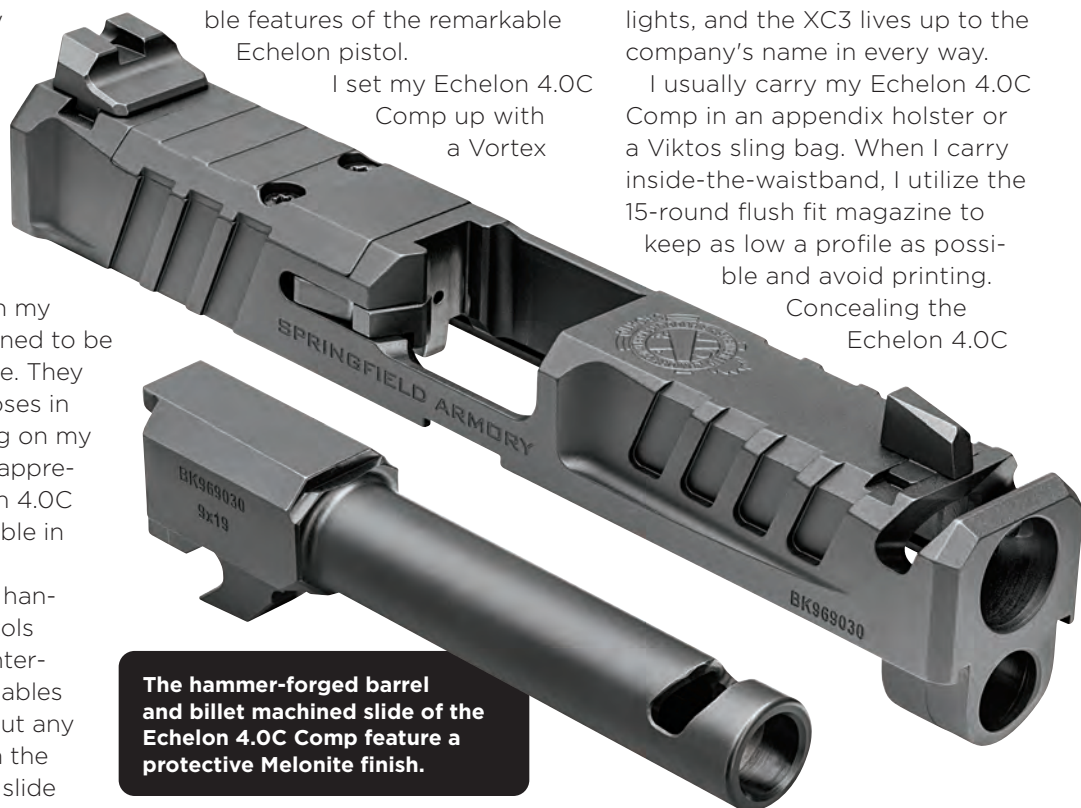
What's more, the vast majority of optics will also co-witness with the factory U-dot sights. This gives you the best of both worlds in terms of tech and redundancy. It really is one of the most notable features of the remarkable Echelon pistol.

I set my Echelon 4.0C Comp up with a Vortex

Defender-CCW red dot and am very happy with the combination. I've also tested the Echelon 4.0C Comp with a Surefire XC3, which fits and operates flawlessly. Surefire is a company I've grown to trust implicitly with their weapon-lights, and the XC3 lives up to the company's name in every way.

I usually carry my Echelon 4.0C Comp in an appendix holster or a Viktos sling bag. When I carry inside-the-waistband, I utilize the 15-round flush fit magazine to keep as low a profile as possible and avoid printing.

Concealing the Echelon 4.0C



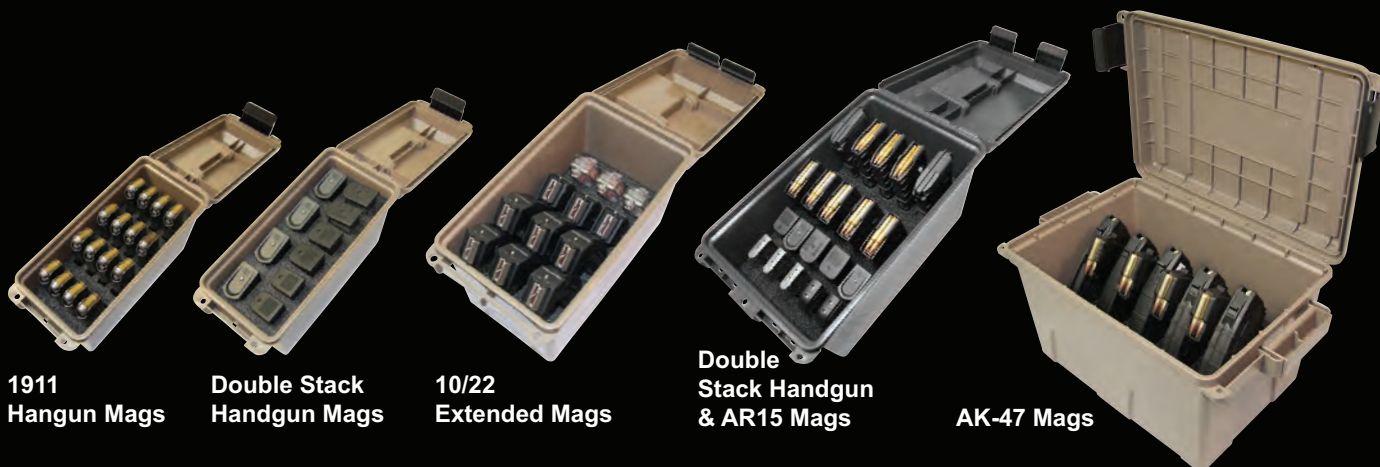
The hammer-forged barrel and billet machined slide of the Echelon 4.0C Comp feature a protective Melonite finish.

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ECHELON 4.0C COMP 9MM



is quite easy, and it's comfortable to carry all day. It really hits that sweet spot between capability and concealability.

Drawing from concealment with it is very intuitive. The Adaptive Grip Texture treatment provides excellent traction without tearing up your skin, and the natural grip angle makes acquiring a solid master grip easy under pressure or on a timer. The presentation is smooth and direct, with the red dot consistently landing in my line of sight.

When I press the trigger, the recoil feels linear and controlled. Instead of a snappy jump, the slide tracks back with authority. The comp clearly helps keep the muzzle down.

It's the kind of performance that builds confidence over time, especially when you start pushing your speed at the range.

CONCLUSION

The Echelon 4.0C Comp strikes a rare balance. It's not simply a compact version of a full-size — it's a fully realized system built for real-world use. It's configurable, durable, optic-ready and engineered with intention.

From the modular core to the integrated compensator, it reflects Springfield Armory's forward-thinking approach, while still staying rooted in reliability. Add in that integral compensator, and you have a seriously capable EDC pistol.

In the ever-expanding sea of carry pistols, the Echelon 4.0C Comp has carved out a unique place for itself. It's a firearm that

doesn't ask you to compromise. Whether you're looking for an everyday carry solution, a range performer or a defensive tool ready right out of the box, this pistol delivers.

And if you ask me, it might just be Springfield's most versatile pistol to date. 🏆

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THE WILD



FEATURING THE HIGHLY CAPABLE DANGEROUS GAME HANDGUN BULLET, BACKCOUNTRY DEFENSE BY HORNADY DELIVERS HEAVY-HITTING FIREPOWER FOR THE HINTERLANDS.

WAYNE VAN ZWOLL

BRINGING STOCK from the hills before snow was a routine ride for Two Pony. Under pregnant skies, he and his partner spun out the day gathering. Strays remained when the cowboys pulled their saddles at a line camp. Snow came that night. At dawn's colorless blush, they followed tracks to a cow. She was dead.

The soft, deep snow muted the bear's rush. Two Pony turned late, pulled his .38-40 Colt and fired twice. Then he died. Struck down by a great paw, his friend lunged for the revolver. He would remember claws shredding his face, tasting his own blood, the powerful stench — but not the hollow pop that drove a bullet up through the beast's chin into its brain.

On that lonely mountain before the Depression, grizzlies were an occupational hazard for cowhands, who shot them as chance allowed. With rifles. Only by chance would a handgun stop a

bear attack. The .38-40's 180-gr. .401 bullets had less punch than beefier missiles from the .44-40 and .45 Colt, albeit it passed as a heavy hitter in its day.

Unregulated shooting had so reduced grizzly numbers that fewer than 800 were thought to remain in the lower 48 states when the Endangered Species Act passed in 1973. Two years later, the grizzly was "listed" and hunting banned there. In much of its range, the bear's numbers have since doubled. Human activity West-wide, from hunters and hikers as well as stockmen, keeps bear attacks in the news.

Two years ago, a Montana hunter trailing a wounded deer lost part of his face to a grizzly. Not far away, another hunter was mauled and his guide killed by a grizzly as they field-dressed an elk. I've ridden pack trails in Wyoming where grizzlies were so plentiful their tracks covered the horse and mule prints. A hunting guide from our camp may have saved himself and clients by firing his .357 into the earth in front of a sow grizzly that sprinted towards them, half-grown cub in tow. The bears turned at the last moment, dashing past the hunters on either side.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



Most bears don't want trouble. For decades, Wyoming outfitter Ron Dube guided hunters where grizzlies abound. He never had to shoot a bear. "I stayed alert. When a bear surprised me, I stayed calm and didn't show fear." When a grizzly visited his campfire as he was frying fish, Ron waved his arms and shouted at it to leave. It did. But not all bears are so compliant. Like people, they have moods. Once, Dube and a client came upon a big grizzly boar on a carcass. "Unaware of us, he paced, growling and bristling. A dangerous bear. We backed away quickly."

Continent-wide, black bear attacks are less common than those by grizzlies. They get less media at-

tention too, partly because of the grizzly's fearsome reputation and its protected status. But black bears pose a different threat. While grizzly attacks typically follow perceived danger to cubs or intrusion on a carcass, black bears sometimes view people as prey. A study of bear attacks in Canada between 1929 and 1979 showed black bears accounted for 72 of 152 bear attacks, 12 of 26 human fatalities. In Alaska, only 19 of 170-odd maulings since 1900 were attributed to black

bears. The disparity in data is understandable. Canada has four

times as many black bears as Alaska, but roughly an equal number of grizzlies.

MODERN OPTIONS

Handguns have saved hunters from bears since blackpowder days. But not reliably. Indeed, after the Corps of Discovery found grizzly bears to be both surly and fearless, Meriwether Lewis discouraged his hunters from engaging them with *rifles* unless the men were in pairs. A couple of generations later, a detachment of U.S. Cavalry pestered a lone grizzly. After it shrugged off a volley of .36-caliber balls from 1851 Colt Navys, the shooters put spurs to their steeds.

In 1956, the .44 Magnum upstaged the .357 Magnum and hot loads in .44-40, .44 Special and .45 Colt. Despite its fearsome recoil, the big .44 didn't impress all bears.

"I once trailed a wounded brown bear into a thicket,



The 10mm Hornady Backcountry Defense load — shown here with a Springfield Armory XD-M Elite 10mm — is designed to drive straight and deep into a target rather than expand.

thinking it dead,” an Alaskan guide told me. “It wasn’t. And it paid no attention to the six .44 Magnum bullets I sent into his ribs as it ran me over getting away.”

Stopping a big, adrenaline-charged beast with a pistol bullet differs from killing the same animal with a shot to the ribs. An outfitter leading two anglers along an Alaskan stream turned to see them drop into tall grass as a bear appeared from the side — near enough to seem a threat. The outfitter fired his 9mm repeatedly into the bear’s chest, from both sides as it turned. The animal expired.

This veteran Alaskan dismisses much of the blather about “bear insurance.” He insists that to be useful, a handgun must be small enough and light enough that it’s always with you. “Like my 9mm. My .44 hits a lot harder, but if it isn’t with me, it’s no bear gun at all.” He adds that his little pistol is easy to point with one hand, in case the other is occupied or disabled. It holds more rounds than a revolver, and as recoil is light, they can be fired in quick repetition to correct aim. Another guide says hollowpoint bullets don’t drive deep enough through a bear’s thick bones and chest



IMAGE: AUTHOR

The ammo ran perfectly in the Ronin, and produced some very tight groups (with a few called “flyers”).

muscles from the front. “Don’t count on hitting the brain unless mid-step over a log you can turn and pulp tomatoes thrown at you at 35 mph.”

Heavy hard-cast, flat-nose bullets from the likes of Grizzly Cartridge and Garrett are scarce in loads from major ammo makers. Federal’s CastCore line was dropped and has only recently been replaced by the Solid Core. Recently, Hornady has helped fill the bear-stopping void with its Backcountry Defense ammunition. It’s not just for

revolvers, but includes loads for 9mm and 10mm autos, with DGH (Dangerous Game Handgun) bullets shaped for reliable feeding. It was the latter of those two autopistol loadings I would be testing for myself.

WHERE IT COUNTS

Hornady engineer Joe Theilen says the DGH bullet is designed for straight, deep



penetration, not to expand. "It's of protected-point design. The jacket is folded into the nose cavity, thus locking core to jacket there. A bear coming toward you presents a barrier of thick hide, big bones and dense tissue. Our Backcountry Defense bullets and loads were developed to breach that barrier."

When I asked how the bullet is made, Seth Swerczek confirmed, "it's a standard cup-and-core product, but with a heavy jacket that's long

enough to fold over the nose cavity's rim. You get an ogive that ensures reliable feeding in autoloaders, a bullet that isn't easily deformed or shoved off its intended course."

While there are examples of the 9mm being effective against something like a bear, I personally would lean toward something

heavier. That's why the 10mm loading in the Backcountry Defense line caught my eye. The ammunition itself has some impressive numbers, featuring a 200-gr. DGH projectile with a rated muzzle velocity of 1,160 feet per second (fps).

With its larger diameter projectile and greater cartridge capacity for powder — all in a round designed for aut pistols — the 10mm has a lot going for it. Combine that with the fact that you can get it in some highly capable guns, such as the Springfield 1911 Ronin and the company's XD-M Elite with its double-column



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The Backcountry Defense 10mm is designed to function well in autoloaders, like this Springfield Armory 1911 Ronin 10mm.

magazine, and you have a potent means of handgun defense.

For my range session with Hornady Backcountry Defense ammunition, I fired the 10mm load in a Springfield Armory 1911 Ronin pistol, a fetching 40 oz. pistol with a forged stainless frame. Its forged-steel slide, with a contrasting hot-salt blue, houses a 5" hammer-forged barrel. The "tactical rack" rear sight of the pistol has a ledge to assist with one-hand slide operation in an emergency.

Its two-dot square notch pairs up with a red fiber optic front sight. My big hand likes the extended grip safety. The bump at its base assures contact with the hollow of my palm. The 5-lb. trigger pull is exceptionally crisp. Springfield supplies an eight-shot magazine with a basepad.

The Backcountry Defense ammunition functioned without fault in the Ronin during my testing. Velocities over my Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph averaged 1,121 fps, just slightly lower than the advertised 1,160 fps. Standard deviation: 10.5. The extreme spread for 20 shots was 43 fps — though dismissing the top reading (1,147 fps) as an outlier cuts ES to 34 fps, and without the next-highest reading (1,138 fps), ES becomes a much cheerier 23 fps. At factory-listed speed, each 200-gr. 10mm DGH bullet carries about 600 ft-lbs out the muzzle and brings nearly 460 ft-lbs to 100 yards.

The checkered wood grip panels on the single-stack 1911 Ronin fit my hands nicely, and over sandbags, its sights settle naturally on the target.



The author found the 10mm Backcountry Defense loads comfortable to fire in the Ronin — frisky, but not brutal.

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.) 1911 RONIN 10MM

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
HORNADY BACKCOUNTRY DEFENSE 200-GR. DGH	1,121 fps	1.0"	1.3"

Accuracy results for three, five-shot groups measured in inches at 15 yards from a sandbag rest. Velocity is the average of 10 shots measured in feet per second (fps) by a Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph. Abbreviations: fps (feet per second), DGH (Dangerous Game Handgun).

My pulse made them shudder enough to land shots off-center, though, as did trigger pressure moving the pistol. No matter how minor, an errant bump or a nudge at the wrong time can instantly scuttle a promising five-shot group! Bottom line: Pistol and ammunition no doubt shoot better than even my results indicate.

Corralling three bullets in a tight knot at 15 yards — even in a single ragged hole — proved easier than keeping all inside a 1.5" span. Rogue last shots reminded me that accuracy with a pistol begs mental discipline!

Still, I drilled some very good groups with the 1911 pistol. This is clearly a handgun with a great deal of accuracy potential — along with a very powerful and capable chambering.

CONCLUSION

Understanding what your specific needs warrant is key to choos-

ing the most effective round for your selected defensive handgun. Hollowpoint hunting and self-defense bullets make modern factory loads much more impressive in gelatin than their lead-bullet forebears. There's a reason this type of ammunition is so common.

On the other hand, heavy-bullet handgun ammo designed to punch through the chests and scapulas of sturdily built beasts — and function in woods-worthy autoloaders like Springfield 1911's and polymer-framed pistols — is much less common.

With its new Backcountry Defense offerings, Hornady is giving hunters and wilderness travelers an option should they find themselves where bears share the trails. 🐻

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

HORNADY.COM
SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM

TURBO



The Surefire X300 Turbo is a perfect fit on the Springfield Echelon. It is shown with a Leupold DeltaPoint Pro red dot sight and a Kore Essentials buffalo leather belt with X6 gunmetal buckle.

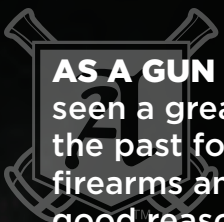
CHARGED

SUREFIRE'S 650-LUMEN X300T WEAPONLIGHT DELIVERS CONCENTRATED, ON-TARGET POWER AT BOTH CLOSE-QUARTERS AND EXTREME DISTANCES.

RICHARD JOHNSON



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



AS A GUN WRITER and former police officer, I've seen a great deal of innovation in flashlights during the past four decades. Surefire is well known in the firearms and law enforcement industries — and for good reason. The company built a solid reputation by delivering high-quality illumination tools that can take a beating.

I've tested and used more flashlights and weaponlights than I could possibly remember. Most were mediocre, performing at acceptable levels but not offering anything that made them stand out. More than a few were real dogs that failed to live up to their marketing hype.

However, a few companies repeatedly proved they could deliver products that equaled, and often surpassed, the marketing. Surefire is one of those elite few companies.

Today, I'm taking a look at the Surefire X300 Turbo, available on the Springfield Armory Store. Also known as the X300T, this product is a weapon-mounted light (WML) intended for use on handguns. I had high expectations for this WML and was determined to discover if it was ready for hard use in high-stakes situations.

THE DETAILS

The Surefire X300T is an extension of the company's X300 line of weapon-mounted lights. The "T" designates this as a "Turbo" model, suggesting more intense light output than prior variants. This is where I need to explain some terminology to ensure we are on the same page.

So, what are lumens? A lumen is a unit of measure for the total light output of an illumination source. The more lumens you measure, the greater the source's total light output. It does not consider the light's focus, however.

Consider that a bare

light bulb can have the same lumen measurement as a tactical flashlight, but each light source is modified so that the usefulness of the light is entirely different from each source.

The bare bulb, for example, might provide good illumination for reading a book in your bedroom. However, it would prove to be utterly inadequate for seeing an animal getting into your garbage from across the front yard. Conversely, a flashlight that focuses the same amount of light can help you see the raccoon in your trash can, but would likely prove to be too intense for reading a paperback.

Total light output — or lumens — is an important metric, but it is not the only thing you should consider when looking for a tactical light.

How about candelas? A candela is a unit of measurement that quantifies peak beam intensity. I liken this to the focus of the light. The higher the focus at a given light output, the higher the candela measurement.

Candelas and lumens measure different things, so there is no conversion from one to the other. Frankly, I think you need

both measurements to have a reasonable understanding of a tactical light's usefulness for a given task.

Let's consider the bare bulb and flashlight from the prior example. Let's assume they both have the same total light output. Since the bare bulb gives off equal amounts of light in all directions, it therefore has a low peak beam intensity (low candelas measurement).

However, the flashlight focuses its light output in a single direction. Therefore, it will have a higher peak beam intensity than the bare bulb.

REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS

The X300T is not brighter than Surefire's existing X300U weapon lights in the way you might think. But, it *is* brighter. Let me explain.

The X300T outputs less total light (lumens) than the X300U lights. However, the X300T is highly focused to provide a peak beam intensity that is more than 5X greater. For example, the

X300T has 650 lumens while the X300U has 1,000. Also, the X300T has 66,000 candelas, while the X300 U has 11,300.

Clearly, the two lights vary significantly on both measurements. But what does this mean in practice? What role is the X300T intended for?

A higher peak beam intensity suggests the light output is highly focused to give you greater reach. This is reflected in the beam distance measurements

of 514 meters for the X300T and

213 meters for the X300U.

For situations in which you anticipate needing to identify a target at a longer range, the Turbo model is the clear winner. If you think you will only use the light inside normally sized rooms in your house, the X300U might be the better choice as it gives you a broader light spill.

The bottom line here is that neither light is better than the other. Both lights are quite

bright. The two differ only in how tight of a light beam you want.

UNDER CONTROL

The Surefire X300 Turbo has a number of beneficial features that should be considered. First off, the light has instant activation via an intuitive switching mechanism. The switch is ambidextrous, meaning you can easily turn the light on from either side of the gun without breaking your grip.

You can also use both momentary and constant-on functions. I found the pressure pads on the rear of the switch allowed me to momentarily activate the light with my support hand



Surefire is known for building high-quality flashlights and weapon lights. The X300 Turbo proved worthy of its heritage.

Mounting the Surefire X300 Turbo on the Echelon is easy as Springfield Armory uses a standard accessory rail. The X300 Turbo can be adapted to non-standard rails as well.



thumb. Pressing down on the Surefire's switch kicked it into constant-on mode.

I appreciated the compatibility of the light with existing X300U holsters. It fit well into my Safariland 636ORDS duty holster (available on the Springfield Armory Store) with no modifications needed. For anyone considering adding a light to your gun, you know you have a multitude of options available for your consideration.

For a law enforcement agency considering a swap to this light, you will not have to budget the costs of a new duty holster to go with the light.

READY FOR DUTY

Surefire products are broadly used by the U.S. Military as well as law enforcement officers around the country. Mix in all of the hunters and other citizens who rely on the company's gear, and you wind up with a large

user base that can let you know if there are flaws in the product design or manufacturing.

My personal experience with them has given me nothing but confidence in the Surefire brand.

Having used Surefire lights since the 90's, I've had exceptionally good experiences with its handheld flashlights and weapon-mounted lights. In my Surefire G2X review on *The Armory Life* website, for example, I detailed the years of use and abuse I've put that light through, and it is still as strong today as the day I purchased it.

Although I've only had the X300T for about two months as of this writing, it seems to be built with the same ruggedness as the company's other products that I have owned or been issued.

This durability stems from the extremely competent design and manufacture of the weaponlight. The X300T's aluminum body has a mil-spec hard anodized finish to thoroughly protect it against impacts and corrosion, and it is very ruggedly built.

I also want to point out the fact the Surefire is water-resistant. The battery compart-

ment has a very tight seal with a rubber-like gasket. This is part of the reason the WML has a water-resistance rating of IPX7, which means it is waterproof to one meter for up to 30 minutes.

I tested this by tossing mine in my pool's deep end (roughly 1.5 meters deep) for an hour. As expected, the X300T had no visible water intrusion and worked precisely as it should.

In addition, it seems to be very tough. Although Surefire does not publish a specific impact resistance for the tactical light, I conducted drop testing to ensure it is as tough as it looks. If you imagine the light as a cube, I dropped it once on each side for a total of six drops. Drops were made onto a cured concrete sidewalk from a consistent height of one meter.

After the drop testing, the light

had a few minor blemishes to the finish. However, it functioned as if it had just rolled off the assembly line. There was no damage to the glass, batteries or switch, and the light worked normally.

HANDS-ON

I headed off to the range to test how easily the X300T on the Echelon operated when shooting and ensure its reliability was unassailable.

After all, a light that won't work

when you need it is useless, no matter how bright it might claim to be.

Since the Echelon is designed as a duty pistol, I figured it would be the perfect test platform for the X300

Turbo light. I mounted the Surefire light to the Echelon for this testing, which is topped off with a Leupold DeltaPoint Pro.

I can't say enough good things about the Echelon pistol. For those not familiar with the design, it's a striker-fired, semi-automatic pistol chambered for the 9mm cartridge. I love the feel and reliability of mine.

I ran a mix of ammo through the gun. About half were FMJ rounds, which many of us prefer for practice and target shooting.

The balance was a sampling of duty loads with bullet weights ranging from 115 to 147 grains.

The light just worked. Through the range testing, I alternatively engaged the momentary-on pressure pads and the lever switch to get a good feel for the light while mounted to the Echelon. I found the system was easy to use without much of a learning curve.

Attaching the light to the pistol was dead simple. On either side of the X300T are serrated tabs. You pull down on both of them and then slide the light onto the pistol's accessory rail. Once it is in position, simply let go of the tabs. The light will lock into place.

The tabs are about a third of the length of the X300T body, which gives you plenty of room to get your fingers on them. They are small enough, however, that they do not get hung up on anything or cause any issues.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Like other Surefire products, the X300 Turbo is a solid tactical light. During my testing, I could find no flaws in it, and I am comfortable carrying this on my duty or self-defense gun.

Beyond that, we come back to our initial question — for whom is the 300 Turbo the right choice? The primary consideration for me would be the difference in the beam pattern between this and the X300U.

If you are a law enforcement officer working in an area where the majority of your calls are in an urban location where you

Everything you need is included with the Surefire X300 Turbo. And yes, that includes the CR-123A batteries.




spend more time clearing rooms than

chasing poachers through the woods, I think the X300U may better serve you. I think most homeowners would likely fall right into this category as well.

On the other hand, if you do work a more rural area or live where you have a fair amount of land, the X300T is an excellent choice. The weaponlight's tighter beam pattern allows you to reach much longer distances and properly identify threats you might have trouble lighting with a Surefire X300U.

I've lived and worked in both types of environments, and I appreciate that Surefire is offering excellent weapon-mounted lights suited for either role.

When it comes down to it, you simply can't go wrong with either if you need a high-quality weaponlight that will deliver when you need it. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

SUREFIRE.COM
STORE.SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM
LEUPOLD.COM



THE RE



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

The Model 2020 Waypoint in 7mm PRC offers hunters a proven bolt-action rifle with a capable chambering. Is it up to the task of handling your specific needs?

ELLIANT



IS THE MODEL 2020 WAYPOINT IN 7MM PRC THE “ONE GUN TO RELY ON” FOR ALL YOUR NORTH AMERICAN HUNTING NEEDS?

JOE KURTENBACH

WORKING IN THE FIREARMS INDUSTRY and reviewing shooting gear offers a front-row seat to the cutting edge of gun-related tech and trends. And while some categories, such as optics, chronographs and suppressors seem to advance in leaps and bounds, other products progress through an unassuming procession of modest refinement. New materials, enhanced ergonomics, and original combinations of pre-existing features and components denote new generations of long-trusted designs.

For proof of my supposition, look no further than the ubiquitous bolt-action rifle.

The modern bolt-action rifle can trace its roots back nearly 200 years, to 1841 and Prussian arms maker

Nicolaus von Dreyse. His military long arm, popularly dubbed the "needle gun" for its lengthy firing pin, was the first bolt-action rifle to feed and fire self-contained metallic cartridges.

Fast forward to today. We live in a time of super materials such as metal alloys and carbon fibers that are lighter, stronger and more heat-resistant than traditional walnut and steel. Too, our ammunition and cartridge ignition systems have come a long way from match cord, mercury fulminate caps, and, yes, "needles."

But upon careful inspection, we can also find many similarities between modern bolt-action rifles

and Dreyse's original military arm.

Bolt-action rifles remain the most popular style of sporting gun in the world. They have proven to be accurate, ro-

in a world of so many choices, what features am I looking for, and what model would I choose?

NON-NEGOTIABLES & NICE-TO-HAVES

We all build biases and preferences based on experience, as well as requirements derived from the intended quarry and terrain. In a one gun for North America scenario, I'm setting

bust, dependable and powerful. They are also eminently configurable for specific pursuits through the selection of appropriate chamberings, optics and other features.

I'm sure you can guess that if I could only have one firearm for North American hunting, it would indeed be a bolt-action rifle. But

my sights on big game ranging all the way from whitetail deer to elk and moose. I also need it to be capable of taking a grizz, in a pinch.

That game consideration eliminates, in my mind, almost all non-magnum cartridges, as well as those that tend to use bullets weighing less than 150 or 160 grains. I love my 6.5 Creedmoors, but I want more power and energy potential. The beloved .308 Winchester is also out. Sure, it's capable of carrying a heavier payload, but its default loadings are a little light for my taste, and



The 7mm PRC cartridge is a highly capable cartridge that can easily be effective on game out to 500 yards.



the cartridge's case capacity restricts its potential. Ultimately, I'm looking for a cartridge that is both powerful and versatile.

Other requirements include a means for easily mounting optics, and swapping scopes if needed. In my mind this is Picatinny rail, as opposed to a make- or model-specific mount and ring combination. An excellent trigger is also a must. It doesn't need to be featherlight, but it should be smooth and reliable.

Finally, this rifle could see terrain ranging from dense woodland to the West's wide-open plains. It may be carried from the truck to the tree stand, or many miles up and down mountains. Therefore, it should present a trim, portable package, and its construction should

MODEL 2020 WAYPOINT 7MM PRC



CHAMBERING	7mm PRC (tested)
BARREL	24"
WEIGHT	7 lbs., 5 oz. (rifle only)
OVERALL LENGTH	46"
SIGHTS	Picatinny rail
STOCK	Carbon fiber
ACTION	Model 2020
FINISH	Cerakote
CAPACITY	3 (one magazine)
MSRP	\$2,295



evolved to improve stability and accuracy, and I'm here for it.

MODEL 2020 WAYPOINT

One rifle that ticks all the boxes is the Springfield Armory Model 2020 Waypoint chambered for 7mm PRC. I love a speedy 7 mil, and the PRC's continuing rise in popularity and availability have cemented its place as my go-to North American (and beyond) hunting cartridge. I've used it with great success on deer, elk and moose, and it'd

be tough for anyone to argue against the hunting efficacy of a designed-for-precision cartridge launching 175-gr. bullets at nearly 2,900 feet per second (fps). It's a cartridge that is as viable at 500 yards as it is at 50, and the recoil is significantly less than comparable .30-cal. magnums.

Featuring a Model 700 pattern, the Model 2020 receiver is drilled and tapped for Remington-pattern scope rings and bases and comes standard with a Picatinny optics rail installed. For its trigger, Springfield includes a TriggerTech Field model in its Waypoints. User adjustable for a pull weight between 2.5 and 5 lbs. and featuring a wide trigger shoe, TriggerTechs are acclaimed for their clean travel, crisp break and overall durability. My rifle's trigger came set at 4 lbs., 4 oz., according to my Lyman digital gauge, and offered an enviable shooting experience. Still, following TriggerTech's instructions, I was able to reduce that by a pound with just a couple rotations of an Allen wrench.

Springfield's Model 2020 Waypoint line-up offers a variety of configurations, and customers need to make some selections to home in on their

be robust and weatherproof.

While not required, there are additional features I would prefer to see. The first is a detachable magazine, preferably with standardized dimensions. In my experience, this set-up makes ammunition management easier than with internal magazines, and it's

a good idea to have at least a couple spares stashed away in case of loss or damage.

I also prefer a threaded barrel that can easily mount a suppressor. I've been hunting suppressed for years and greatly prefer it. Not only is a suppressed shot far safer for my hearing, but it is much easier to hear a hit when your ears aren't plugged — or ringing.

And, lastly, I like a stock that offers enhanced ergonomics and ample sling and support mounting options compared to traditional American sporters. Nothing beats the aesthetic of classic walnut and a sleek, straight comb, but shooting tools and techniques have



The Model 2020 Waypoint is shown here with a Leupold VX-5HD 3-15x44mm riflescope with illuminated Firedot Duplex reticle.



preferred model. First, the barrel. Two options are available for most chamberings — either a fluted stainless-steel barrel or a carbon fiber barrel that features a stainless-steel inner liner supported and tensioned by a carbon fiber outer wrap. Both are threaded 5/8x24 — meeting my requirement for suppressor compatibility —

and come standard with Springfield's radial muzzle brake. I opted for the carbon fiber barrel to save several ounces of overall weight. In 7mm PRC, it's a 24" barrel with a 1:8 rifling twist rate.

Stock configuration and finish is another selection that must be made. All the Waypoint stocks are constructed from carbon fiber by AG Composites. They offer a modernized profile and include advancements derived from competition circuits such as the Precision Rifle Series (PRS) and NRL Hunter

matches. Evolutions include raised combs, vertical pistol grips, flat-bottomed forends, and plenty of places to attach bipods, slings and other accessories.

Springfield Armory offers Model 2020s with or without an adjustable comb, and in two custom-painted camouflage patterns: Ridgeline, with brown, tan, and gray splotches; or the green, tan, and gray Evergreen finish. I personally prefer Ridgeline, though both patterns look great. I selected the non-adjustable stock, which saves some overall weight.

The exact model I selected for my one gun to rely on is cataloged as "Model 2020 Waypoint 7mm PRC Rifle w/ Carbon Fiber Barrel – Ridgeline." Before adding a scope, it tips the scale at 7 lbs., 5 oz., and measures 46" from tip to tail. To me, this is a sweet spot as it's not too light for shooting — and especially practicing with — the powerful 7mm cartridge, but it's also not too heavy for backcountry excursions.

And, yes, it feeds from metal AICS-pattern detachable box magazines. My Model 2020 included Accurate-Mag's .300 Win. Mag. magazine unit, 3.850" cartridge overall length, which holds and feeds three rounds of 7mm PRC without issue.

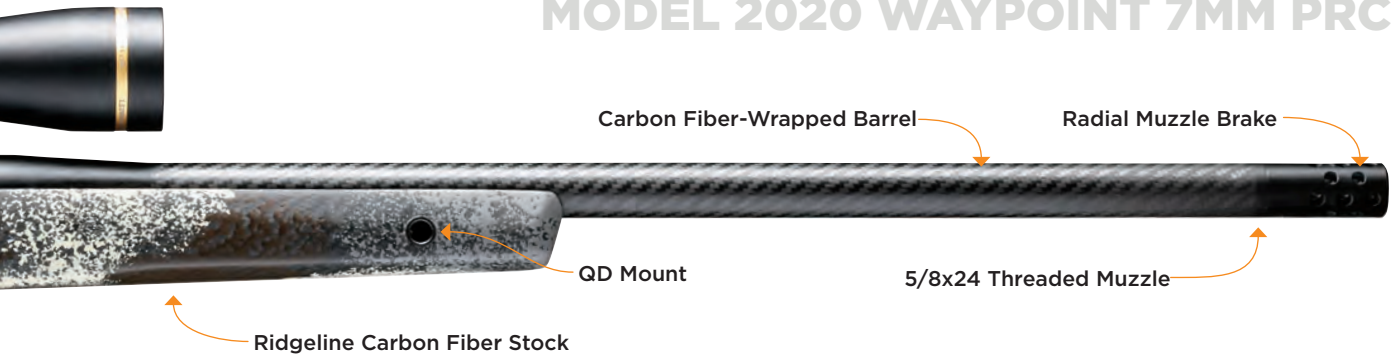
Federal's 175-gr. Fusion loading took top accuracy honors with a tightest group of .58", and an average of .65".



IMAGE: AUTHOR

MODEL 2020 WAYPOINT 7MM PRC

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



RANGE & FIELD READY

One additional consideration with any modern bolt-action is the selection of an appropriate rifle scope. In these deliberations, I weigh both the cartridge's capability and the intended pursuit. So, while an argument could be made that 7mm PRC is a 1,000-yard-plus cartridge and I ought to throw as much glass on top as possible, the agenda for this build is a North American game getter, and ethically killing an animal requires a different mentality than ringing steel on the far horizon.

I've come to prefer Leupold's VX-5HD 3-15x44mm rifle scope with the illuminated Firedot Duplex reticle. It offers plenty of magnification for extended shots in the hunting field but can also be dialed down for opportunities in close cover. The illuminated reticle isn't a must-have for me, but I find it to be a significant advantage when pursuing dark-furred game.

For the price of around \$1,300, it offers premium glass, Leupold's refined controls including side-focus adjustments and zero-stop capability, and the option to take advantage of the company's custom dial system. In my opinion, it's one of the best values on the market, and adds less than a pound-and-a-half, rings included, to my rifle's overall weight.

On the range, I tested the Model 2020 Waypoint with three 7mm PRC hunting loads: Federal Fusion Tipped 175-gr. PTB, Hornady

Outfitter 160-gr. CX, and Hornady Precision Hunter 175-gr. ELD-X. Not surprisingly, the rifle loved the heavier loads, and both easily outshot Springfield's .75 MOA accuracy guarantee. In a best-of-three-groups shootout, the Federal load just edged out Hornady's Precision Hunter, though I doubt any hunter or game animal could have discerned the difference.

Hornady's Outfitter load, with

remain intact and retain their weight after impact, making them excellent penetrators. Too, as some locales restrict the use of lead-based bullets, copper alloy offerings may be a requirement.

CONCLUSION

I'm exceptionally confident in the 7mm PRC cartridge, and I've successfully hunted Montana elk and British Columbia moose with

PERFORMANCE (100 YDS.) MODEL 2020 WAYPOINT 7MM PRC


LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
FEDERAL FUSION TIPPED 175-GR. PTB	2,880 fps	0.58"	0.65"
HORNADY OUTFITTER 160-GR. CX	2,939 fps	0.94"	1.07"
HORNADY PRECISION HUNTER 175-GR. ELD-X	2,803 fps	0.61"	0.70"

Group size is measured in inches and is best of three, three-shot groups fired from a Caldwell Lead Sled at 100 yards. Velocity is in feet per second and is the average of 10 rounds measured by a Garmin Xero C1 chronograph offset 6" from the muzzle. Abbreviations: CX (Copper alloy eXpanding); ELD-X (Extremely Low Drag eXpanding); PTB (Polymer-Tipped Bonded).

its lighter Copper alloy eXpanding (CX) bullet also posted very respectable groups. I should note, though, I did not follow any strict maintenance regimes, as some would suggest, to prepare for the non-lead projectiles. For tests like this, I prefer to put all the ammunition on an even footing, fouling the barrel with some familiarization fire and while zeroing the optic, and proceeding through testing with only a quick bore check between loads.

Still, I am a fan of having a copper-based option in my ammo box. Bullets like the CX tend to

Hornady's Precision Hunter and Outfitter loads, respectively.

Pairing that performance with the Springfield Armory Model 2020 Waypoint bolt-action rifle and Leupold's VX-5HD scope yields a premium package I would confidently rely on to hunt anything in North America. Looks like I have my "one gun to rely on." Could it be yours? 

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

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SANDI



**DOES THIS DEAD AIR SUPPRESSOR
DELIVER ON ITS CLAIM OF PROVIDING
THE PINNACLE OF PERFORMANCE?**

WILL DABBS, MD

W A N X



Featuring cutting-edge design and construction, the Sandman X is designed to offer the latest in suppressor technology.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

READING THE LITERATURE from the company on the Dead Air Sandman X, it represents the state-of-the-art when it comes to centerfire rifle suppressor technology. According to Dead Air, its design is the end result of a decade of aggressive mechanical evolution — hence the new “X” designation.

In my experience, Dead Air is one of the most innovative and agile suppressor manufacturers in the industry. So, if the Sandman X is the pinnacle of their rarefied suppressor line, I certainly was interested in trying it out.

aspect of modern sound suppressors, what is just as important is actually what you make it out of.

The diaphanous aluminum sort weigh about nothing, but you have to be careful with them. Titanium versions are markedly tougher for a minimal weight penalty. However, titanium, in addition to being costly, is notoriously

Haynes International develops exotic, high-performance alloys that are custom-designed for use in high-temperature applications where resistance to corrosion is a consideration. The company proudly states on its website that “HAYNES’ 282” alloy (UNS N07208) is a wrought, gamma-prime strengthened superalloy developed for high temperature structural applications, especially those in aero and industrial gas turbine

The Sandman X is shown here mounted on a Springfield Armory Hellion in OD Green. The 5.56mm bullpup is topped off with an Aimpoint PRO red dot and 3X magnifier.

From its cutting-edge design to its Information Age materials science, everything about the Sandman X is pushed to the very edge of the performance envelope. Sound suppressors for tactical firearms are expected to thrive at temperatures and pressures not typically found outside the space program. The Sandman X appears to be as capable as it gets.

FOUNDATIONS

I was a mechanical engineer the first of my five careers. Forgive me, but I find this stuff fascinating. While design is a critical

difficult to weld and work.

When you want a hard-use can that is full-auto

rated and capable of handling chamberings up to .300 RUM like the Sandman X, you need to think beyond convention. The mad geniuses at Dead Air suppressors settled on a wonder-material called Haynes 282.

engines. It possesses a unique combination of creep strength, thermal stability, weldability, and fabricability not found in currently available commercial alloys.”

Translating all of that into normal people-speak, Haynes 282 is a nickel-based superalloy comprised of 57% nickel, 19.5% chromium, 10% cobalt, 8.5% molybdenum,

2.1% titanium and 1.5% aluminum. It also contains small amounts of iron, manganese, silicon, carbon and boron. Each component is carefully chosen to provide specific attributes to the whole.

Haynes 282 maintains its strength up to around 1,600°F, making it ideal for hard-use sound suppressors. Get anything hot enough, and it gets soft. By contrast, Haynes 282 exhibits exceptional creep strength. That means it resists deformation even under conditions of high temperature and high stress.

Haynes 282 is also highly resistant to thermal cycling.

Repeated heating and cooling cycles will reliably destroy lesser materials. Haynes 282 is built to thrive in that space.

Haynes 282 is also relatively easy to weld and cut. Addi-

tionally, despite its high-tech parentage, Haynes 282 is not insanely expensive. That ultimately allows Dead Air to keep the price of the Sandman X within reach of the working man.

Lastly, while Haynes 282 offers myriad benefits over more traditional materials when in solid form, it also can be had in a powder. That makes this science fiction-grade material amenable to additive manu-

facturing/3D printing. As a result, Haynes 282 can be used to create incredibly complex shapes.

THE CAN

Sound suppressors are designed for lots of different applications. Tiny little rimfire cans are intended for low-volume utility work on relatively anemic firearms. Pistol cans are generally crafted to minimize weight and accept a Nielson Device for reliable functioning. On the other hand, the .30-cal. Sandman X is right at home on anything from your preferred bolt-action as well as your favorite semi-auto rifle. This is the hard-use, general-purpose suppressor that you don't have to be terribly careful with.

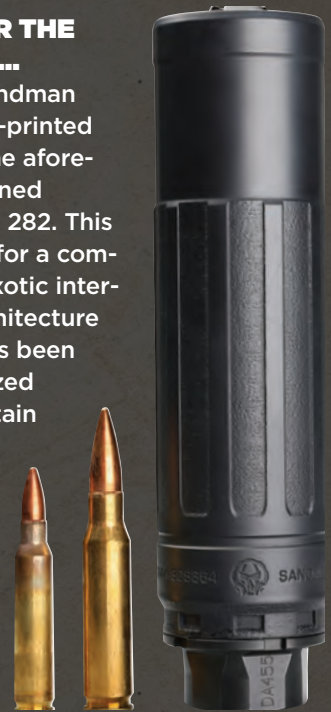
The Sandman X is available in either black or FDE Cerakote. It is also offered with two different mounting systems. The Xeno version weighs 14.5 oz., while the Keymo variant tips the scales at 16.8 oz. Both appear to be essentially unkillable. The overall length is either 6.4" or 6.9" depending upon the mount. The can is 1.65" in diameter. That's exceptionally compact given

this suppressor's rarefied performance.

Though this is a .30-cal. can, you can run it on most anything that will fit down the bore. While the can is rated up to .300 RUM, .308, 5.56 and 300 BLK are also on the menu. The end-result is a sound suppressor that is tougher than many a host firearm, and extremely adaptable.

UNDER THE HOOD...

The Sandman X is 3D-printed from the aforementioned Haynes 282. This allows for a complex, exotic internal architecture that has been optimized for certain specific tasks. Nestled within this



The Sandman X is shown here next to 5.56mm (far left) and 7.62 NATO (center) rounds.

high-tech shell are three fairly conventional cone baffles as well as a pair of patent-pending triskelion baffles. The cumulative result defines the proprietary Triskelion Gas Management System.

The Triskelion Gas Management System offers superlative acoustic performance. Keeping the gun quiet is, after all, the point of the exercise. In addition, this design also greatly mitigates

muzzle flash while effectively

dissipating superfluous heat. More importantly, the Triskelion system ameliorates back-pressure. This is particularly important in traditional Stoner-inspired direct gas impingement firearms.



PRACTICALITIES

Let's be frank. Standing in one spot in an enclosed space and emptying a magazine from a suppressed conventional AR rifle can seemingly asphyxiate you. That pungent ammonia smell will end up in your clothes, your hair and your nose. I can only imagine what that foul stuff does to our lungs. As a result, running a can that has been specifically designed to channel all that noxious effluvium forward and out not only makes the experience safer, it is also much more comfortable. The Sandman X is custom-designed to keep that nasty stuff off of you.

Even if you're running this can on a piston-driven gun like the Springfield Armory M1A or the Hellion bullpup like I did, venting excess gas forward makes the gun run cleaner. It also doesn't artificially accelerate the gun's moving parts. The synergistic result is a gun that will last longer and is easier to maintain.

THE GOOD HOST

I wanted to run this beast on both 5.56x45mm and 7.62x51mm firearms. That meant the Springfield

Armory Hellion bullpup and the SOCOM 16 CQB. Swapping the can between platforms is driven solely by the specific flash hider mount you use. Dead Air will naturally hook you up with anything you might need.

The SOCOM 16 CQB comes with a neat little stubby combination flash suppressor/muzzle brake. However, the thread pitch for this thing is not compatible with the standard 5/8x24 .30-caliber suppressor mount. I scored an inexpensive adaptor online that has held me in good stead for well over a decade. If you can change the batteries in your TV remote, you are overqualified to install this device.

Dead Air flash suppressor mounts are compact and effective. When using the Keymo mount, you slide the suppressor in place and then turn it to get the can fully seated. The Xeno version simply threads in place. However, the Xeno mounting system uses left-hand threads. That ensures that removing the can is actually tightening the flash suppressor mount. Once you get the flash suppressor mounts sorted on your two host firearms, swapping back and forth is absolutely stupid-proof.

Helpfully, the front cap on the Sandman X includes a built-in flash suppressor.

Dead Air recommends you clean the can every 4,000 rounds. Failure to do so isn't the end of the world. However, it can result in a degradation in acoustic performance and an increase in back pressure.

TRIGGER TIME

We cranked up our range time together with the Springfield Armory Hellion. This 5.56mm bullpup blockbuster is the civilian-legal semi-automatic version of the HS Produkt VHS-2 rifle currently in service with the Croatian armed forces. Springfield

The cleverly designed Sandman X features an endcap that incorporates its own flash suppressor.

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Armory engineers helped adapt the design specifically for the U.S. market with additions like a replaceable AR-pattern pistol grip, M-Lok slots and more. The Hellion is a thoroughly modern defensive tool with all the bells and whistles you could want. The chassis is indestructible, and the ergonomics superb. The short-stroke piston-driven action runs clean and is ultra-reliable.

Anything worth shooting is worth shooting twice, and the suppressed Hellion was born to deliver smooth double taps. Recoil is negligible, and follow-up shots flow forth like Rachmaninoff. No kidding, with the Sandman X in place, the Hellion shoots about like a .22 rimfire. What would be ear-splitting without the can is now hugely more civilized.

Next, we indexed to the big boy. The SOCOM 16 CQB is a thoroughly modernized version of the classic M14 rifle. This handy 7.62mm features an abbreviated 16" barrel and a high-tech polymer collapsible stock from Archangel. The gun is as reliable as a mother's love and as mean as a cornered cottonmouth.

Anything that shoots faster than 1,125 fps — the speed of sound in dry air — is going to create a nasty sonic crack no matter what you hang onto the end of the gun. However, the Sandman X gets rid of most of the gun noise with both platforms. Firing a round out over an open space emphasizes the crack. Shooting it into a nearby berm or indoors sounds more like a nail gun.

You can really tell how effective this can is by running a few subsonic 7.62 rounds through it. I load these myself to just barely squeak under the sound barrier.

They won't cycle an autoloading action, but they are, legit, movie-grade quiet through the Sandman X. Through the Sandman X, my subsonic .308 loads project enough horsepower to drop a whitetail while remaining sufficiently quiet as to make a humble pellet gun seem down-



With the appropriate mounts, the Sandman X can be used on a wide range of platforms.

right obnoxious by comparison.

Both guns shot beautifully straight and ran reliably with every factory load I fed them. The addition of the Sandman X makes both of these great guns that much greater. Once you've exercised these two superlative rifles with the Sandman X suppressor in place, you will never go back.

RUMINATIONS

To say suppressors are popular would be an understatement. There are currently millions of

them here in the United States. The quality of those cans ranges from superlative to garbage, with everything in between along for the ride.

In my estimation, the Sandman X from Dead Air rests firmly and majestically on the good end of this scale. This remarkable thing has more refined engineering than the Mars rover and is tougher than woodpecker lips.

It ran without complaint on the Hellion in 5.56mm and the SOCOM 16 CQB in 7.62 NATO during my testing, and performed admirably. What more could you want from your suppressor?

If you find yourself in the market for a hard-use can that you don't have to coddle, this is your snuffer. The MSRP is \$999 or \$1,059 depending upon the mount. Be sure to check it out.

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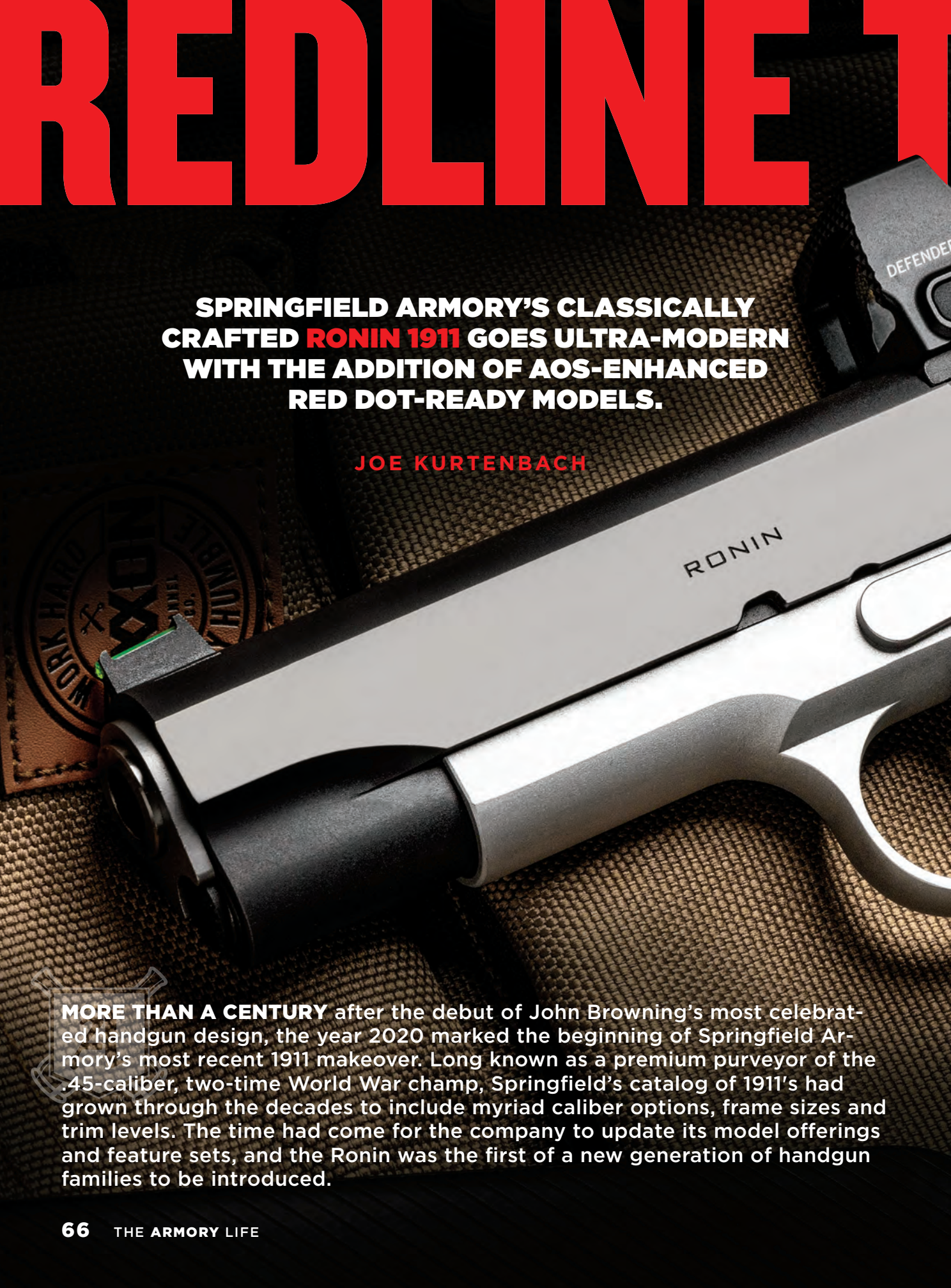
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REDLINE

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY'S CLASSICALLY CRAFTED RONIN 1911 GOES ULTRA-MODERN WITH THE ADDITION OF AOS-ENHANCED RED DOT-READY MODELS.

JOE KURTENBACH




MORE THAN A CENTURY after the debut of John Browning's most celebrated handgun design, the year 2020 marked the beginning of Springfield Armory's most recent 1911 makeover. Long known as a premium purveyor of the .45-caliber, two-time World War champ, Springfield's catalog of 1911's had grown through the decades to include myriad caliber options, frame sizes and trim levels. The time had come for the company to update its model offerings and feature sets, and the Ronin was the first of a new generation of handgun families to be introduced.

THE RONIN



IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

The 1911 Ronin AOS, offered in .45 or 9mm and 4.25" or 5" versions, combines the classic style and charm of the 1911 with modern optics compatibility.



The 4.25" variant of the 1911 Ronin AOS features a more compact slide and barrel as well as a light-weight forged aluminum frame.

IMAGE: JEREMY TREMP

Striking for its retro styling, the two-tone Ronin line was widely acclaimed for its blued-over-stainless aesthetics. Polished flats and checkered wood stocks solidified its timeless custom-inspired appearance, while sub-\$1,000 price tags ensured the pistol platform would be accessible for all. Ultimately offered in .45 ACP, 10mm and 9mm, as well as 5" full-size, 4.25" compact and 9mm-only EMP configurations, the Ronin family of 1911's quickly became a cornerstone of Springfield Armory's handgun catalog.

AGENCY OPTIC SYSTEM

Within a couple of years of the Ronin's introduction, Springfield unveiled the 1911 DS (Double Stack) Prodigy. Not only did the Prodigy provide the company

entrée to the growing double-stack 1911 market, it represented Springfield's first effort at mounting red-dot optics to single-action pistols. It was a masterstroke.

Although pistol-mounted optics have become standard fare, legacy firearm designs — particularly those with narrow slides — continue to represent a challenge. Limited surface area restricts options for milling and drilling. Too, the traditional location of mechanical necessities in the design, such as sear and firing pin assemblies, don't offer much depth for adding lugs or sinking mounting screws. While slide assemblies and internal parts on newer handgun models like Springfield Armory's Echelon are designed with optic mounting in mind, adding modern tech to

century-old machines requires creative solutions.

Despite commanding considerable engineering resources in its own right, Springfield Armory wisely collaborated with the slide-milling and optic-mounting experts of Agency Arms to develop and implement the Agency Optic System (AOS) on the Prodigy pistols.

An intuitive yet sophisticated plate system, the AOS meets the challenge of securely affixing a mounting plate to the firearm's slide while also ensuring the optic will mount equally securely to the plate. The sight-specific AOS mounting plates accommodate true micro optics such as the Shield RMSc, as well as larger red dots like the Aimpoint ACRO, Leupold DeltaPoint Pro and Trijicon

RMR — plus other popular optics that utilize those footprints.

Also, the AOS plates incorporate an appropriately sized rear sight to facilitate use of irons through most optics' lenses, should the electronics fail for any reason. It's not a universal solution as some red dots have taller deck heights than others, but the mid-height front sight offers a one-size-fits-most solution. Overall, the inclusion of serviceable back-up iron sights is a thoughtful addition to the well-engineered mounting system.

Prior to their public release, I was able to review the 1911 DS Prodigy pistols for *Guns & Ammo*, and I remember asking company representatives if we could expect the AOS optic system to proliferate through Springfield Armory's single-stack 1911

optic system to proliferate through Springfield Armory's single-stack 1911

offerings.

The catalog's overhaul that began with Ronin had grown to include several purpose- and aesthetic-inspired trims by that time. I assumed the answer was yes, though I recall a reasonably expected non-committal response. However, confirmation came in 2024 when Springfield unveiled AOS-equipped Emissary, Operator and Ronin 1911 pistols.

1911 RONIN AOS

It is the Ronin AOS pistols we are considering here today. The Ronin offerings are made up of

four models in two chamberings. They are .45 and 9mm versions in either 5" all-steel models or 4.25" lightweight models with forged aluminum frames.

Apart from the cover plate with integral rear sight, you would be hard-pressed to tell them apart from the original non-AOS Ronin offerings.

My evaluation pistol for this article was the full-size 5" 1911 Ronin AOS chambered for 9mm. Without writing an entire article about my affinity for this configuration, suffice it to say that shooting

a full-size 9mm 1911 is an experience without fault or flaw. For me, it's as fun as shooting suppressed .22s, with the added benefit of being a practical option for personal defense. The smaller-sized 4.25" 1911s in 9mm are not far behind in terms of shootability, and can be even more discreet for concealed carry applications. In short, without disrespect to the venerable .45 ACP, I am a fervent ambassador for the utility of 9mm 1911's.

Feeding from the included nine-round magazine, or commonly available 10-round units, the Ronin's stainless-steel, match-grade barrel helps ensure maximum accuracy and performance.

In terms of construction, the AOS models follow the Ronin blueprint. The frame of the 5" is forged stainless steel and retains a satin-like stainless finish. The slide is forged carbon steel with a hot salt blued finish. Both major

components are polished on the right- and left-side flats, giving the gun an upscale appearance that belies its price tag. Checkered laminate wood stocks tie the

whole ensemble together.

In terms of controls, classically styled cocking serrations front and rear come standard on full-size models, though the front serrations are deleted on the shorter slides of the 4.25" guns. A skeletonized black trigger pairs with a memory-pad-and-beavertail grip safety and a left-side-

only thumb safety. The Ronin AOS is a traditional 1911 in that it utilizes a barrel bushing and can be disassembled without tools in the same manner as John Browning's original.

The only change from non-AOS models is the addition of the optic mounting system and tweaks to the iron sights necessitated by the AOS upgrade. Keen-eyed observers will notice that both sights are slightly taller than their counterparts on non-AOS Ronins. This is to enable co-witnessing of the irons through the lens of a slide-mounted optic. Too, the front sight of AOS variants comes standard with a green fiber optic pipe, rather than the line-up's usual red front sight. This seemingly insignificant change is quite useful, as it should keep shooters from being confused by dueling red dots in their sight picture.



1911 RONIN AOS	
CHAMBERING	.45/9mm
BARREL LENGTH	5" or 4.25"
WEIGHT	29.5-41 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	7.9"-8.6"
SIGHTS	Fiber optic front, serrated black rear
GRIPS	Wood laminate
ACTION	Single-action
FINISH	Blued/stainless
CAPACITY	8+1/9+1 (one magazine included)
MSRP	\$977

UNDENIABLE RESULTS

For testing, I used a Vortex Defender-ST micro red dot with a 3 MOA reticle. Over the course of two range sessions and several hundred rounds, I put the Ronin AOS through its paces for accuracy and some defensive-style drills.

During my initial break-in run with the gun, I experienced a failure to return to battery issue. The remedy was simply a thorough cleaning and lubrication. In my experience, all-metal guns like the 1911 can exhibit behavior like this early on as the metal parts “wear in.” After giving the gun a once-over, it ran without issue for the duration of the test. In fact, everything from the slide to the trigger



IMAGE: AUTHOR

The pistol shot well with all loads tested, showing a preference for the Nosler Match Grade 124-gr. JHP load. The smallest group was a tight .87”.

continued to smooth out and lighten up as testing continued.

The Ronin AOS posted neat, round groups both from the bench and from the holster. The Vortex optic contributed greatly to this effort, but it’s really a combined effect that includes the 1911’s exceptional ergonomics, as well as its single-action trigger. The test gun’s trigger averaged 4 lbs., 8

oz., with a Lyman digital gauge and exhibited a discernible and predictable wall, and then a crisp break.

Full results are included, but the Ronin performed admirably with both range and defensive ammunition. Formal testing, measuring three five-shot groups at 15 yards, included Federal Gold Medal Action Pistol 147-gr. FMJ, Hornady American Gunner 115-gr. XTP, and Nosler Match Grade Handgun 124-gr. JHP (now discontinued). The Nosler load really stood out, posting the best group of the test, 0.69”, and the best three-group average, 0.87”.

CONCLUSION

I would like to make a point about the AOS system and holster selection. It’s true that holster options for optic-equipped 1911s are rapidly increasing, but it’s worth noting that the mounting systems being used by manufacturers are



The author put the 5” 9mm variant of the pistol, topped off with a Vortex Defender-ST, through its paces at the range.

IMAGE: AUTHOR

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1911 RONIN AOS 9MM




hardly standardized. For example, some 1911 makers are restricting optics compatibility to the smallest of micro red dots — only those that will fit within the dimensions of the pistol's narrow slide.

Other mounting systems, like Springfield's AOS, accommodate a wider range of optics, but utilize plates that may overhang the edges of the slide. Such pistols require larger openings or relief cuts to accept plate-equipped slide assemblies. The bottom line is that despite many 1911-pattern holsters being compatible and interchangeable with pistols from numerous manufacturers, holsters for optics-equipped 1911's may be

specific to makes and models.

Finally, I must return to one of my favorite refrains, which is to encourage shooters to consider 1911's, and especially 9mm 1911's. There is a reason the pistol design has endured, and it's not just about nostalgia. The handguns are proven, the ergonomics are superior, and the triggers are just about the best in the handgun world. The reduced recoil and increased capacity of 9mm 1911 variants also offer an inviting segue to

shooters who aren't ready to give up the practicality of their polymer wonderguns, but who are curious about one of the most dominant handgun design of the 20th and, now, 21st centuries.

Along those lines, the Ronins offer exceptional value thanks to their quality materials, careful construction and attractive appearance. Regardless of size or caliber, the Ronin AOS models are all priced to move at \$977. Be sure to check them out. 

PERFORMANCE (15 YDS.) 1911 RONIN AOS 9MM

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
FEDERAL GOLD MEDAL 147-GR. FMJ	873 fps	0.73"	1.00"
HORNADY AMERICAN GUNNER 115-GR. XTP	1,185 fps	0.99"	1.26"
NOSLER MATCH GRADE 124-GR. JHP	1,122 fps	0.69"	0.87"

Accuracy is best of three, five-shot groups measured in inches and fired from a Ransom Multi Cal Steady Rest at 15 yards. Velocity in feet per second and is the average of 10 rounds measured by a Garmin Xero C1 chronograph 6" below the muzzle. Abbreviations: FMJ (full metal jacket); JHP (jacketed hollow point); XTP (eXtreme Terminal Performance).

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MASTERED

Lehigh Defense's Tipped Controlled Chaos (TCC) load is designed to not expand or fragment in a barrier, but rather in fluid. Shown with Model 2020 Waypoint rifle in .308 Win.




WATCH THE VIDEO:
RANGE-TESTING LEHIGH DEFENSE .308



MAYHEM

DOES LEHIGH DEFENSE'S .308 WIN. 155-GR. TIPPED CONTROLLED CHAOS DELIVER THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS?

YAMIL SUED



WHILE I AM an avowed firearms enthusiast and handgunner, I'll be the first to admit that I am fascinated by those who have mastered the deep skills required with rifle shooting. You know, those shooters that can gauge the wind and deliver a perfect shot through any weather condition imaginable. While I know my way around a rifle and can hold my own, it's still something about which I'm learning — and happily so.

Recently, I was offered the opportunity to test the Lehigh Defense Tipped Controlled Chaos (TCC) .308 Win. ammunition. I was interested as I viewed it as not only a chance to try out some exciting ammo I'd heard a lot of good things about, but also a chance to expand my own learning on the subject.

FUEL SOURCE

Before I started my test, I had to choose a caliber and bullet weight. Upon carefully reviewing Lehigh Defense's extensive selection of options, I chose .308 Winchester. In particular, I selected the 155-gr. TCC round with the listed velocity of 2,800 feet per second (fps) — tested

through a 20" barrel.

For those who are not familiar with this brand or this loading, Lehigh's TCC projectiles are designed to offer a higher ballistic coefficient. Due to its design, when the projectile impacts fluid it sheds the front portion of the bullet into multiple curled petals. These petals then radiate outward away from the bullet's initial trajectory path.

So, that's the chaos. What about the control? In addition to the aforementioned qualities, the TCC bullet is designed to not expand or fragment when it impacts dry mediums such as wood, drywall, bone or sheet metal. As noted earlier, it's only when it impacts fluid that it expands, doing its intended job.

The author tested the Lehigh Defense .308 load in the Waypoint with a Ransom Diamond Series Rifle Rest for maximum stability and the best possible accuracy.



THE PLATFORM

With my caliber and bullet weight choice made, I needed a good foundation to perform these tests. After careful consideration, I chose the Springfield Armory Model 2020 Waypoint rifle in .308 Win. with a carbon fiber-sleeved 20" 1:10" twist barrel and finished in Ridgeline camo.

This is a lightweight rifle, weighing in at a modest 6 lbs., lbs 9 oz., yet still comes with a three-shot .75 MOA accuracy guarantee (with a skilled shooter and match grade ammunition).

While my initial thought was to test this load in an AR-pattern rifle, I ultimately landed on the Model 2020 Waypoint for a few reasons. Firstly, with its .75 MOA guarantee, I know it would wring the best possible accuracy out of the round. Also, its 20" barrel exactly matched the test barrel length Lehigh used, making for a good "apples to apples" comparison of velocity. And lastly, I suspect the TCC round would serve

just as well in a hunting role as it could in a self-defense role.

Now that the rifle was selected, I needed to get a good optic. I've had very good luck with Riton Optics in the past, so I decided to check out their website.

After a bit of research and picking the brains of some very

experienced rifle shooters I know, I landed on the 5 Conquer 5-25×56. Due to my relative lack of experience with long-range shooting and how I planned to test the ammo, I selected the MOA version.

Finally, I needed a sturdy rest to wring out the best accuracy performance of the ammo. So, I reached out to Ransom Rest

first trip to the range with it.

As I would be testing the ammo at the distance of 100 yards, my best choice for that task was the Ben Avery Shooting Facility in Phoenix, Arizona.

After sighting it in at 100 yards using the Ransom Diamond Series Rest, I started the formal test of three, three-shot groups with the Lehigh ammo. After firing the

three groups, I retrieved my target and proceeded to measure them right there at the range.

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

LOAD	VELOCITY	GROUP (BEST)	GROUP (AVG.)
LEHIGH DEFENSE 155-GR. TCC	2,866 fps	0.64"	0.68"

Accuracy results for three, three-shot groups measured in inches at 100 yards from a Ransom Diamond Series Rifle Rest. Velocity is measured in feet per second (fps) by a Garmin Xero C1 Pro Chronograph. Abbreviations: TCC (Tipped Controlled Chaos), fps (feet per second), gr. (grain).

Boy, was I impressed with this ammo/rifle/scope combination. My groups measured .700", .695" and .640", for an average of .678". These were some very solid results, and well within the Model 2020's accuracy guarantee threshold.

Next up was testing for velocity. Over the years, I have chronographed hundreds of rounds of ammunition and, for the most part, the velocities listed on the ammunition packaging rarely come close to the actual velocities measured. So, I was curious how the Lehigh load would do.

For my chrono test, I used the Garmin Xero C1 Pro chronograph. After firing five rounds through the Garmin, I got an average velocity of 2865.8 fps, with a kinetic energy of 2826.1 ft-lb. Remember that Lehigh lists 2,800 fps out of a 20" barrel. This is just about the first time I have encountered

ammo that matches or even surpasses the velocity listed on the ammo packaging.


After I performed the accuracy and chronographing, I decided to test Lehigh's claim that the TCC bullet could penetrate a barrier and expand only when it impacted fluid. The best way to do this was to use ballistic gel.

The FBI Standard for ballistic gel is 6"x6"x16". I used the Clear Ballistic Gel 8"x8"x18" block of gel as I wanted a larger medium. This could allow me to capture the petals that were supposed to radiate out of the permanent cavity in the gel.

I placed the gel 10 feet from the muzzle of the rifle and I placed a 16"x16" piece of 1/2" drywall in front of the block. After calculating my offset, I fired one round into it. After the dust settled, literally, I inspected the block of gel and was stunned. The permanent cavity was extremely impressive, and the bullet fragmented into nine or 10 small fragments — with two of the petals going as deep as 16½".

CONCLUSION

I can say that, after performance testing this ammo, I believe it clearly is as good as it claims to be. The Springfield Armory Model 2020 Waypoint .308 rifle, combined with the Riton Optics 5 Conquer 5-25×56 scope and the Lehigh Defense 155-gr. TCC ammo, makes for an exceptional trio.

Whether you're hunting large game or looking for an effective tactical round, Lehigh Defense ammo — with this TCC load priced at \$68.95 for a 20-round box — is an option that can't be beat. 

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

LEHIGHDEFENSE.COM
SPRINGFIELD-ARMORY.COM
GARMIN.COM
RANSOMREST.COM
RITONOPTICS.COM

about a new series they call the Diamond Series Rifle Rest. I asked to try out the front and rear rest systems for the project.

THE TEST

To make sure I set up everything for this project correctly, I reached out to my friend Marty Enloe, from Enloe Custom Guns. He kindly helped me set my rifle up for the

PACES



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

LETTER

**DUSTY HOUSEL OF HS CUSTOM, LLC,
APPLIES HIS SKILL AND VISION TO A
CUSTOM STAINLESS STEEL 9MM
4.25" GARRISON PROJECT.**

ROY HUNTINGTON



The stainless steel 4.25" Garrison 9mm makes for a solid foundation for a custom build project, like this one by HS Custom, LLC.

I SHOT MY FIRST Springfield Armory 1911 for a feature in *Guns Magazine* about 35 years ago. At the time, Springfield was noted for accurate, reliable and affordable firearms of all sorts. It's interesting to note things haven't really changed much in the intervening years.

As a matter of fact, they've gotten even better. Over the decades, I've had dozens of Springfields come across my desk, and all of them have made me smile consistently when shooting them. I have written again and again about how I feel Springfield 1911's are the best value for the money from any company, anywhere, period.

When a reader asks me what "custom" 1911 they should buy, they usually offer a list of makers they are looking at. I most often simply tell them to go to Springfield's website and shop until they find a gun offering the features they need or want, then buy that one. No fuss, no muss, and it comes with a guarantee, excellent accuracy, outstanding build quality and a family-owned company history. The best part is you get all that for about half the cost of a full custom gun, without any

compromises in performance.

Strong words? You bet. I've only been shooting for 60 years and have been in the industry for 43 years, so I've seen a thing or two. A few things stick out and can be surprisingly rare. Quality, reliability, affordability, engineering excellence and customer service often escape the

realm of what's possible for too many companies. Springfield Armory gets it, though.

THE GAMEPLAN

However, while you can get everything you need from a stock 1911 from Springfield, it's always fun to see what a custom maker can do with one.

So, when Mike Humphries, editor-in-chief of *The Armory Life*, reached out to me about writing up a piece on a custom gun for the magazine, I happily agreed. Once we settled on a stainless steel 4.25" Garrison 9mm as the host gun for the project, I knew exactly to whom we should speak.

That person was Dusty Housel of HS-Custom, LLC, near me here in Joplin, Missouri. HS Custom is



The Garrison exhibited a great deal of attention to detail, from the finely cut checkering to the meticulously fitted components.

owned and run by Dusty, a full-time Kansas National Guard Sergeant and veteran of two tours in the “sandbox,” as it were. Dusty, who has a passion for building custom 1911’s, has a well-equipped shop and spends a great deal of time there — when he’s not fishing or shooting with his three boys! In fact, he explained that HS stands for “Housel & Sons” in case they want to work with him when they get a little older.

So, I got together with Dusty, and we worked up a plan for the pistol. Our question was, if someone wanted to make some changes to their Garrison (or any 1911 they had), what might they be, and why?

In my experience, a stock Garrison can shoot 1.5” at 25 yards reliably and has all the bells and whistles — like good sights, match-grade barrel, classic bushing-style barrel fit, great sights, forged frame and slide, and more. What on earth would you need to improve? Well, nothing, actually.

But what might you want to change? That’s the real question. A Springfield 1911 always makes a

great base gun for a build. As Dusty told me, “I build more guns on ‘Springers’ than any other. I enjoy doing it because the specs are always spot-on with no surprises. Aftermarket parts are easy to fit, and I usually never need to change the basic



IMAGE: AUTHOR

Dusty Housel of HS Custom is shown here cutting the frontstrap checkering on the pistol.

action parts, barrel or other components. It all depends on what the customer is looking for.”

So, I got with Dusty and asked him what he would do to a personal Garrison if he were to add some custom touches.

“It honestly doesn’t need anything changed; it’s already a solid pistol,” he told me. “But, if I were having some fun and just because I like to do the work, I might do a white ball inset front sight, Stan

Chen rear, a double arrow slide top pattern, Evolution Gun Works (EGW) gunsmith-fit bushing and extended smooth recoil spring plug to start things off.

“I’d flush cut the stock barrel and crown it since they are top-notch barrels already. I’d also do a de-horn package and blend the stock grip safety a tad, adding a machine bevel to the bottom edge of the slide, too. I’d add some more Chen parts since he already works with Spring-

field, so a Chen magwell, safety and mag release would be nice.

“I love the way a flush-cut slide stop pin looks, with 40 line-per-inch (LPI) checkering, so that’d be a go. Some 25 LPI frontstrap checkering would go on, and just some light trigger and action work on the stock parts as there’s no need to change them out at all. A final oxide bead blast and polished slide flats would do it. How’s that for off the top of my head?”

I was sold, and then set him loose on the project.

MAKE IT SO

Dusty dropped everything he was working on and concentrated on the Garrison. I shot it before the work using my Ransom Master Rest and found it to be a very reliable 1” to 1.5” gun with the right ammo. In this case, Black Hills FMJ wins as it does in most cases.

The gun ran fine, the sights were clear, the safety worked fine, and I had no complaints.



BUILD SHEET:

WHITE BALL FRONT SIGHT FROM BLANK	\$75
STAN CHEN REAR SIGHT (W/ LABOR)	\$80
DOUBLE-ARROW SLIDE TOP PATTERN	\$150
EGW CARRY BEVEL GUNSMITH FIT BARREL BUSHING (W/ LABOR)	\$60
EGW EXTENDED SMOOTH RECOIL SPRING PLUG	\$15
FLUSH CUT AND CROWN BARREL	\$50
CUSTOM LIGHT CARRY DE-HORN PACKAGE	\$175
MACHINE BEVEL BOTTOM OF SLIDE	\$50
STAN CHEN SHOOTER INSTALLED MAGWELL	\$150
NEW STAN CHEN THUMB SAFETY	\$80
STAN CHEN MAGAZINE RELEASE	\$50
FLUSH CUT/COUNTERSINK SLIDE STOP W/40 LPI CHECKERING	\$75
25 LPI FRONTSTRAP CHECKERING W/UNDERCUT	\$225
LIGHT TRIGGER WORK/STONING	\$60
OXIDE BEAD BLAST WITH POLISHED SLIDE FLAT	\$75
VZ GRIPS	\$65

Frankly, I would have put it to work just the way it came out of the box. But to make a gun more personal always tugs at the heartstrings. I was curious to see what Dusty's ideas would look like in the flesh and how it might change the way the Garrison handles.

After detail-stripping and conducting a careful measurement of all the parts involved, Dusty told me not only was everything well within spec, but he wouldn't need to touch the slide-to-frame fit as it was exceptional. He also noted that the same was true of the barrel and action parts. After gathering the aftermarket custom parts, Dusty went to work.

In addition to installing new sights, Housel cut "double arrow" rows along the top of the slide.

The front sight was made from a blank, and Dusty made and installed the white ball insert. The insert itself is made from white polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) rod. It's surprising how a small modification like this can make a big difference. The Chen sight rear is bold and easy to adjust for windage if needed.

One bit of work that always astounds me is when Dusty cuts the "Double Arrow" decorative lines on the slide top. He's all about careful mill work, and the detail and accuracy never cease to amaze me. The word "talent" comes to mind easily.

The EGW Carry Bevel bushing went in after careful fitting to the stock barrel and slide, along with the EGW smooth recoil spring plug. The latter offers a clean look and matches the bushing neatly. The stock barrel was then flush-cut and crowned, and Dusty spent a little time doing a "de-horn" of the pistol. He also cut that practical and attractive machine bevel along the bottom edge of the slide. Slow and steady is how he likes to do it.

The Chen magwell slipped in neatly, along with Chen's popular thumb safety. The curve nestles nicely under the thumb, secure and with a slightly different "feel" than the stock one. The Chen mag release has a slightly more aggressive pattern and comes to the thumb easily.

Dusty likes to do an elegant flush-cut and counter-sink to the right-side end of the slide release. On this job, he also added a very unique 40 LPI bit of checkering. It's both attractive and practical, offering a secure spot for a thumb when pressing out the slide release. The 25 LPI front-strap checkering always seems to be a good idea and goes well on the Garrison. Some opt for less

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aggressive checkering, but I've found this to be a good blend of both comfort and control.

Dusty also stressed he often uses the stock action parts on Springfield guns simply because they are robust and spec-out perfectly. To that end, he gave the 4-lb. trigger some minor stoning.

Since the gun is stainless, he did a soft oxide bead blast, then polished the slide flats for a bit of eye candy. I'm guessing it's about a 320-grit hand polish, and it looks just right to my eye.

Dusty told me the total cost for the work on this pistol would come out to around \$1,400, give or take. Add to that the reasonable \$927 MSRP of the base pistol, and you have a screaming deal if you ask me. And since it's all custom work, ideas could change for you — sights might be different, cosmetic touches different, or just about anything else you can dream up. Even basic sight, bushing and action work can sometimes make a big difference in shootability for some shooters, so keep in mind it's all up to you.

SHOOTING

All of this is fine, but does it improve the accuracy, reliability and handling? It'd be hard to improve on the reliability since past experience shows these to be virtually 100% pistols. Our sample here consumed about 300 rounds prior to the build to settle things in, and it ran just fine.

I dug out the Ransom Master Rest and we put things to a real-world test. Once the customized Garrison settled into the rest, our first 15-yard group was literally one ragged hold. Thank you, Dusty and Black Hills ammo.

We pushed it out to 25 yards, and things opened up just a tad. After several groups with the Black Hills ball ammo, we deter-



Houseil fitted out the pistol with a Stan Chen Shooter Installed Magwell and VZ Grips.

IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

mined this gun is able to shoot a pretty solid .75" from the Ransom, sometimes even a bit less. Keep in mind, that's with the stock factory barrel, stock slide-to-frame fit, and stock action (just smoothed a tad). As Dusty said, he enjoys using Springfields as base guns for all those reasons.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As I've said before, I honestly don't see any "need" to make changes to stock Springfield Ar-

mory guns. But if you're like most shooters, it's always fun to seek some custom touches to make a good gun a more personal one. Whatever your dream might be, a Springfield is always a great gun to use to build on that dream — and HS Custom, LLC is a great gunsmith to help you do it. 🎯

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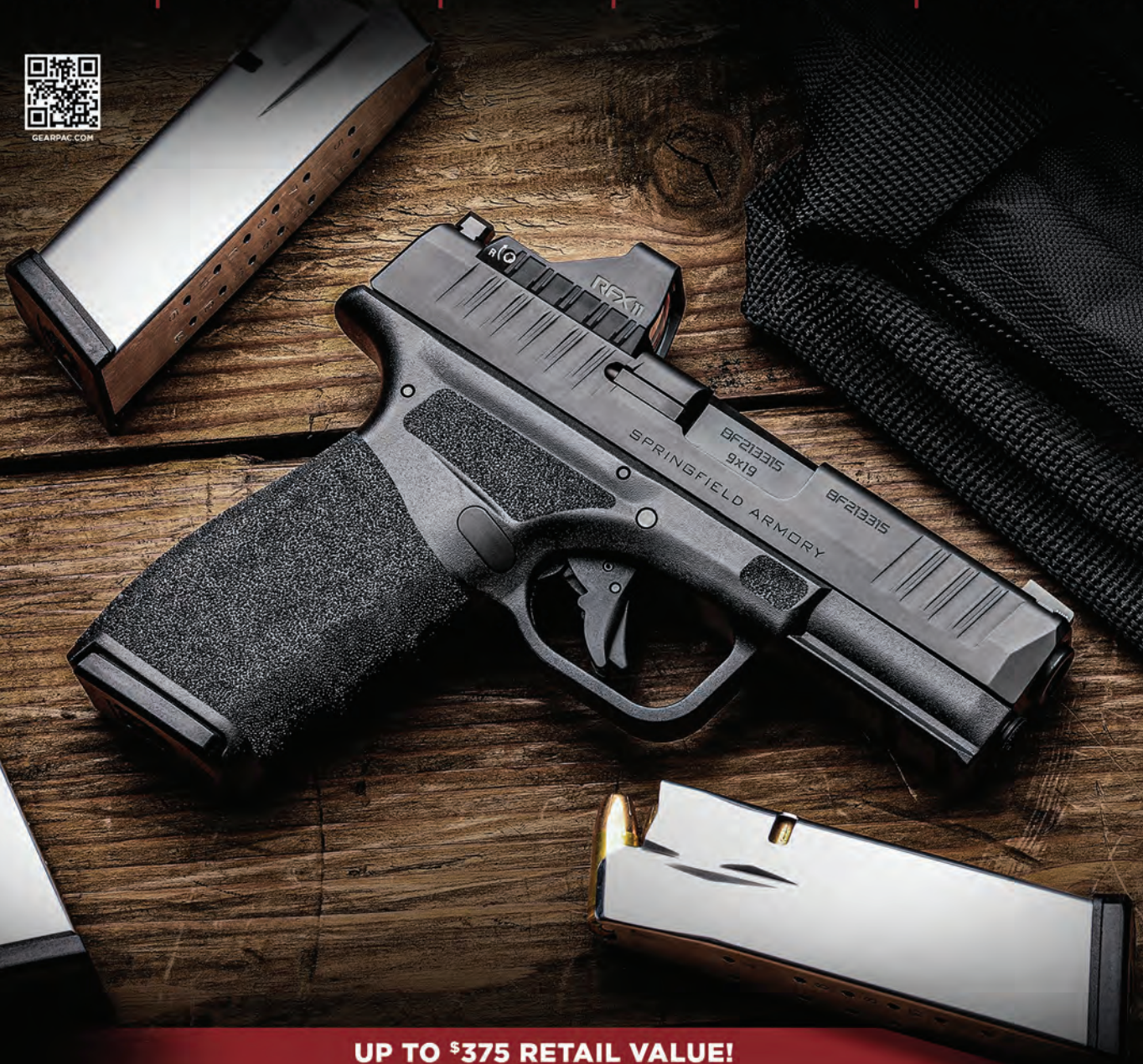
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M1A-A1 **BUSH** **RIFLE**

**BLAST FROM
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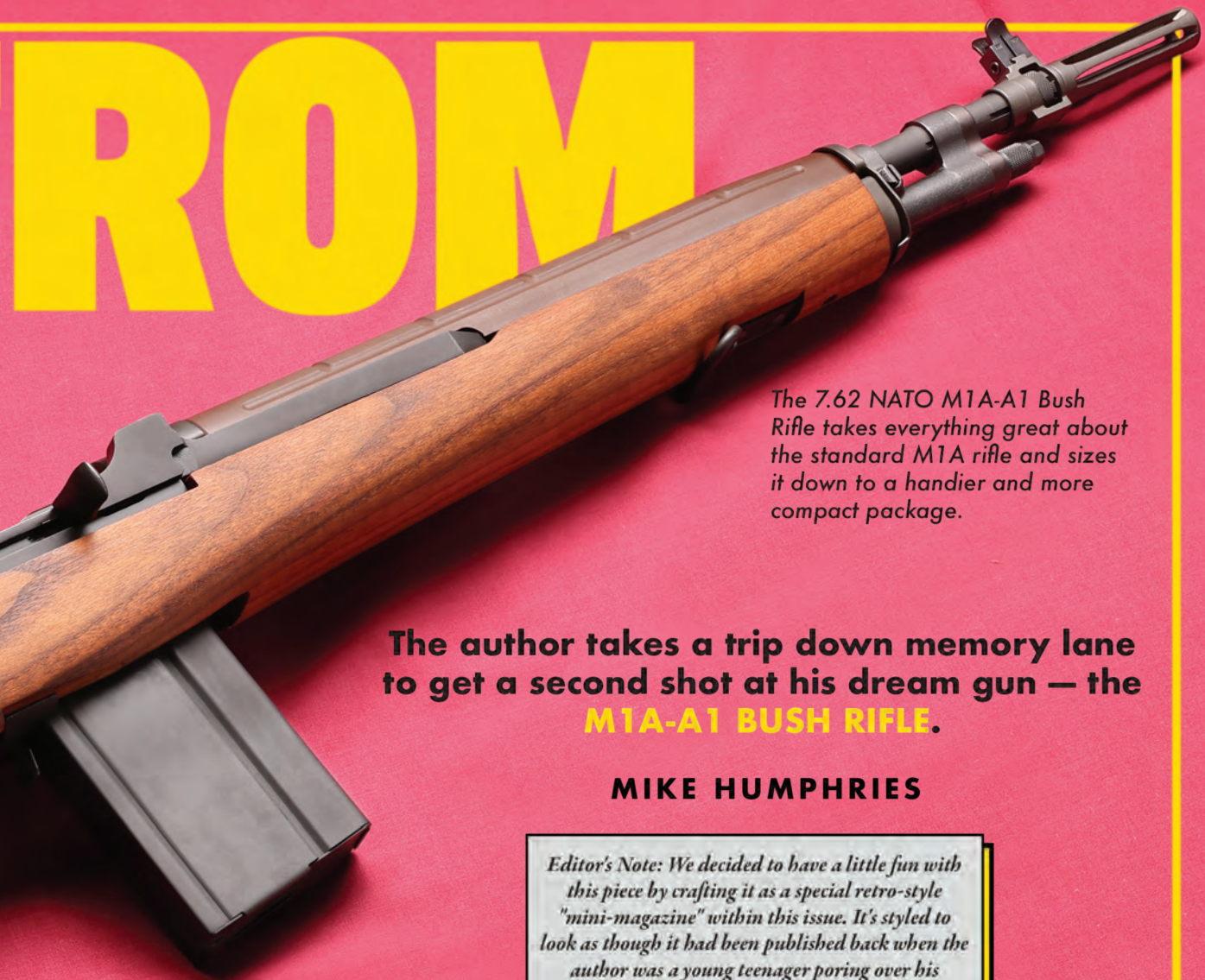
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BLAST F THE PAST



IMAGE: CARSON MCDANIEL / SPRINGFIELD ARMORY

ROM



The 7.62 NATO M1A-A1 Bush Rifle takes everything great about the standard M1A rifle and sizes it down to a handier and more compact package.

The author takes a trip down memory lane to get a second shot at his dream gun — the **M1A-A1 BUSH RIFLE.**

MIKE HUMPHRIES

Editor's Note: We decided to have a little fun with this piece by crafting it as a special retro-style "mini-magazine" within this issue. It's styled to look as though it had been published back when the author was a young teenager poring over his collection of Springfield Armory catalogs.

I've been a "gun nut" as long as I can remember. As a young teenager in the 1980's, I subscribed to all the gun magazines and would voraciously read them from cover to cover. While I liked practically all firearm types, my true area of interest was surplus guns and civilian-legal versions of military firearms. I love history and I love guns, so these were right up my alley.

Needless to say, the 1980's was a great decade for these types of firearms — unless you were a teenager with no money to spend. I would regularly go to the local

gun shop and look at the rifles up on the racks as well as all the pistols under the glass. I would also round up as many catalogs as I could to take home and read over and over.

TAILOR-MADE

Hands down, my favorite guns at the shop were made by Springfield Armory. Springfield Armory was a brand that seemed as though it had been specifically created to make guns I loved. Springfield's line had "exotic" offerings like the FAL-based SAR-48 and the G3-based SAR-3 rifles,

as well as classics like the M1 Garand and the 1911. Heck, if you wanted something truly unique, the company also offered semi-auto versions of the BM-59 — an Italian re-engineering of the M1 Garand that fed from detachable box magazines.

However, the one Springfield on the rack that would always draw my eye was the M1A. Based on the U.S. Military's M14 rifle, the semi-auto M1A rifle combined the best of all worlds for me. It was retro and classic in that it was made of wood and steel, but modern enough with

its detachable box magazine that it could compete with the FAL's and G3's of the world. It was an appealingly American design that combined the charm of the Garand with the capabilities of the most modern rifles of the era.

While all the Springfields in the shop were very reasonably priced, they were also well out of my price

"Springfield Armory was a brand that seemed as though it had been specifically created to make guns I loved."

any collection – there was another variant I could remember eying back during my days at the gun shop. That was the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle, a shortened version of the standard M1A with a handy 18" barrel, offered in both fixed and folding-stock variants.

While the 22"-barreled standard model is undeniably a wonderfully

IMAGES: CARSON MCDANIEL/SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



The M1A-A1 Bush Rifle with walnut stock combines classic lines with compact firepower.

range as a young teen. Combine that with the fact I was also too young to buy one, and I would leave empty-handed every time – short of the armful of catalogs I'd take home.

THE LONG PATH

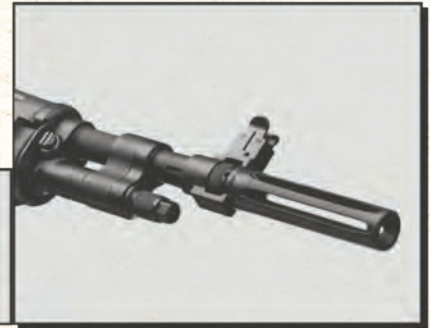
For Christmas that year, my father was kind enough to buy me a surplus M1 Garand and a case of corrosive .30-06 ammo. That rifle had a rough exterior and an even rougher bore, but it gave me countless hours of range time and fun. I tore that gun down and learned every little detail about it I could. That time with the Garand made me want an M1A even more.

Fast-forward several years to when I was graduating from graduate school. My father stepped up again and purchased a standard wood-stocked M1A rifle as a graduation gift for me. To say I was overwhelmed would be an understatement. I finally owned one of these classic rifles for myself. Sitting next to that beaten-up, old Garand in the rack, the M1A was truly a beauty.

However, as much as I loved that M1A – and having a standard issue-style rifle is an absolute must for



The stock features the original military steel flip-up buttplate that covers an inner steel buttplate with hinged access door.



The short 18" barrel of the Bush Rifle features a long, slotted flash suppressor.



If you've ever fired an M1 Garand, the receiver design and rear sight assembly of the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle is very familiar.

balanced, beautiful rifle, there was just something about the dimensions and look of that shorter "Bush Rifle" that drew me in. It had always caught my eye, and I thought it would make a great companion for the standard rifle. But at that point, it had been taken out of the Springfield Armory line. I kept an eye out for a used one, but could never seem to find one when I had the money to spend on it. So, I just put it on the backburner.

However, I don't want you to think that Springfield abandoned this type of platform for its customers. As the Bush Rifle phased out, the comparable M1A Scout Squad phased in. Anyone who remembers the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle will recognize the familial connections between it and the Scout Squad.

Featuring the same 18" barrel, the Scout Squad takes the Bush Rifle platform and adds a highly advanced muzzle brake as well as a forward "scout-style" Picatinny rail through a slotted handguard. It's technically an upgrade over the Bush Rifle in several ways.

I had an opportunity to shoot one several years ago, and I learned that its brake does an amazing job taming recoil. Also, the rail makes mounting an optic on the rifle much easier. However, the draw of the original Bush Rifle always stuck with me.

JUST A STEP OR TWO ...

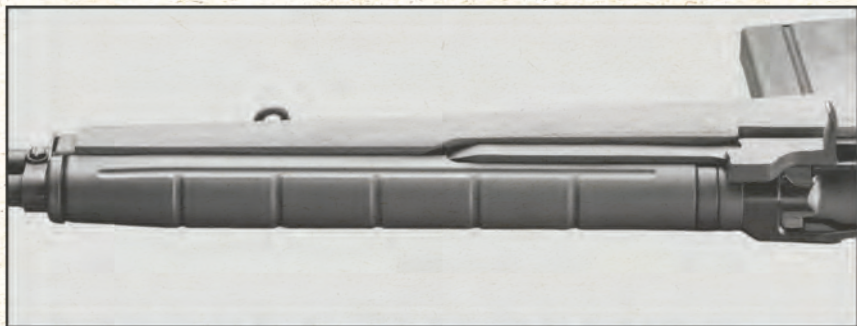
Last year, my father started paring down his gun collection a bit and passed along his own M1A rifle to me (he told me he had liked the one he bought me so much he eventually went back and got a rifle for himself). That rifle also just happened to be an M1A Scout Squad with the short 18" barrel.

I took that rifle to the Springfield office and asked Randy Nichols, resident gun expert and a man with nearly four decades under his belt at Springfield Armory, if he could give the rifle a quick once-over.

Randy is another guy who loves guns and loves history, and I've learned we have a lot of interests in common. In fact, when speaking



The author found the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle to be extremely well-balanced, powerful and accurate on the range.



Unlike the M1A Scout Squad, the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle features a standard handguard with no optic mount slot cut into it.

to him I off-handedly mentioned I had called in to Springfield Armory more than 20 years earlier for some technical help on a used SAR-3 I had managed to add to my collection (I had searched for years for that one!). We determined I had actually spoken to him then. It's a very, very small world ...

"It was an appealingly American design that combined the charm of the Garand with the capabilities of the most modern rifles of the era."

During our conversation about my father's rifle, I noted how I wished it had been an M1A-A1 Bush Rifle. "I miss those, too," he told me. "To be honest, it'd be pretty easy to turn this rifle into one of those for you."

Randy explained he would need to see if he could locate a spare flash suppressor for the project as well as a standard handguard from a stock rifle. Otherwise, everything needed was right there.

Randy let me know the rifle would need to use an M1A flash suppressor sans bayonet lug, as a lug would complicate disassembling the M1A's gas assembly. This would be due to its farther rearward position on the shorter barrel.



BUILDING BLOCKS

As a result of my father clearing out his gun safe a bit as well as an off-handed conversation with another historical gun enthusiast, I now had an opportunity to turn back the clock to the 1980's and get my hands on the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle I had always wanted. I also decided it would make for a great basis for the article you're reading now.

So, I set about doing some research to learn as much about the Bush Rifle as I could. I reached out to Dennis Reese, CEO and owner of Springfield Armory, to see if I could get a little backstory on the development of the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle.

Mr. Reese has been there since the earliest days of the M1A in Geneseo, Illinois, from its launch in 1974 through all the varied models offered today – now made with the latest manufacturing technology available, I might add. Since he was there in the early days, hand-building them with the rest of the Reese family, he knows a thing or two about the line.

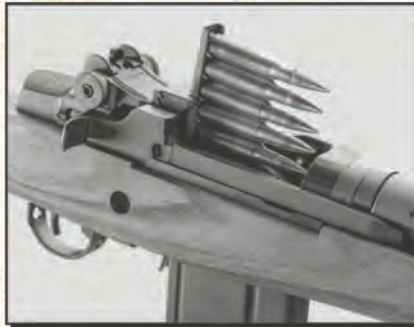
"I remember thinking to myself in those early years that we could try to modify the M1A full-size rifle configuration in a way to make it more compact and more utilitarian, like a 'ranch rifle,'" he explained. "My father was concerned barrel harmonics would be seriously impacted and that it would really affect the accuracy, so we needed to test it out to see.

"We built up a rifle and tested it for accuracy and velocity, and we got some very surprising results. Velocity drop was quite minimal, and accuracy was comparable to the full-size rifle out to 600 yards. We built four more samples to verify, and got the same great results. So, the M1A-A1 Bush Rifle was born," he told me.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

It turned out that Randy was able to locate the needed spare parts, and I found myself a few days later holding an M1A-A1 Bush Rifle. It was the spitting image of those ones I used to see at the gun shop in my

The optional 20-round magazine from Springfield delivers impressive firepower.



It doesn't get more old school than topping off a mag with a five-round stripper clip – with "ball" ammo, of course!



Springfield Armory CEO and owner, Dennis Reese, is shown here inspecting M1A rifles during the early days of the series.

hometown back when I was in my early teens.

Everything I remembered about the old Bush Rifle held true with this one. The overall look was beautiful, and to my eye very "balanced." That perception carried over to the handling as well. That shorter 18" barrel really does change the balance and feel of the M1A. It points and swings very naturally and is very well-balanced.

At the range, I loaded it up with some "white box" 149-gr. 7.62x51mm NATO ammo (naturally) and put the rifle through its paces.

The M1A is designed to fire both .308 Win. and 7.62 NATO safely, so no problems there. The rifle ran like a champ and, keeping with the theme, I even went old-school and topped off a mag or two with some stripper clips I had in my collection.

At the end of the day, I found exactly what Mr. Reese learned during the original testing – accuracy and performance was quite comparable to the full-size rifle. You get a smaller and more compact M1A, and with few if any downsides.

It was truly a pleasure to be out on the range with this rifle, and I could



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IMAGE: JAKE MILLER / SPRINGFIELD ARMORY



The M1A-A1 Bush Rifle project gave the author the opportunity to acquire a unique version of the M1A that he has wanted since the 1980's.

M1A-A1 BUSH RIFLE

CHAMBERING	7.62 NATO
BARREL LENGTH	18"
WEIGHT	8 lbs., 12 oz.
OVERALL LENGTH	40.5"
SIGHTS	Aperture Rear
STOCK	Walnut
ACTION	Semi-Auto
FINISH	Black
CAPACITY	20
MSRP	N/A

just imagine myself back in the late-1980's as the proud owner of one of these. I put a lot of rounds downrange with that old "beater" Garand I had, and I have no doubt I would have done the same with this rifle.

CONCLUSION

It's no exaggeration to say I'm thrilled to have been able to add

"At the range, I loaded it up with some 'white box' 149-gr. 7.62x51mm NATO ammo (naturally) and put the rifle through its paces."

this new/old rifle to my collection. It feels like I have come full circle with this one, owning a rifle that I remember eying back at the old gun store in my hometown and that hasn't been around for two decades or more.

The fact it's built off my father's personal M1A rifle makes it even more special to me. Looks like my dad managed to get me that M1A-A1 Bush Rifle after all!

To be honest, while it was a very unique combination of circumstances that brought this rifle to me, it would be relatively easy for anyone to build up one of these for themselves. If you own a Scout Squad, all you would need would be a flash suppressor sans bayonet lug, a set of castle nut pliers and a standard handguard, and you'd have everything you need for your own Bush Rifle project.

Now all I have to do is convince Springfield Armory to reintroduce the old folding stocks from back in the old days, and my new/old Bush Rifle will be complete!

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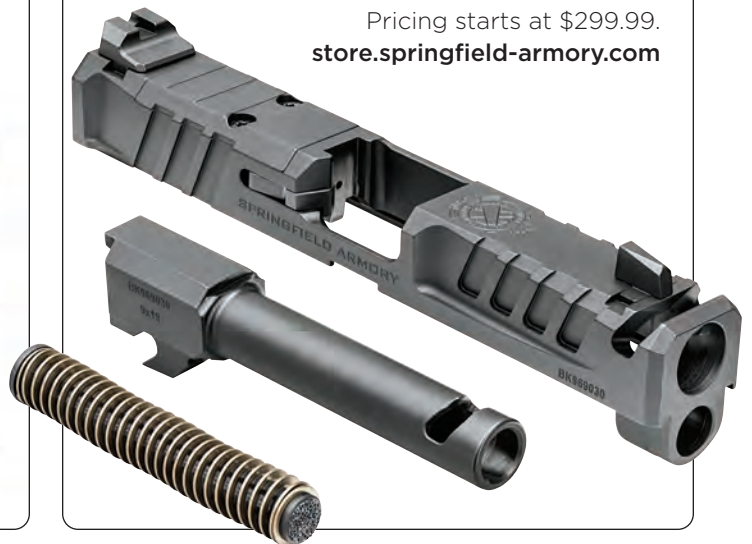
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