

TWO 'ALTERNATIVE' CARRY GUNS

Everyone's search for the perfect carry gun is both personal and ongoing. I've gone through several phases of interest, including having a lightweight Commander custom-built to chamber 357 SIG ammunition. But such eccentricities usually carry big price tags, so they're out of the reach of most people.

However, custom guns interest us, and we presume they interest our readers, too, even if they aren't financially viable alternatives for most of us. So we recently test-drove two custom pistols that would provoke great interest at the range, and we pass along our impressions of them below.

—Roger Eckstine

Cylinder & Slide First 500 1911, \$5000

Bill Laughridge at Cylinder & Slide celebrated the 100th anniversary of the M1911 Government pistol by building the First 500 M1911 — which is not a showpiece or artifact. As its name suggests, the 500 M1911 is patterned after the pistol that was developed by John M Browning to answer the call for a reliable “automatic” pistol replacement for the Cavalryman's revolver. Browning competed with other designs in trials that took up the better part of seven years from 1904 to 1911). The official designation for Browning's pistol, of which 31,344 were ordered, was “Pistol, Calibre 45, Model of 1911.”

The Cylinder & Slide First 500 1911 is a working pistol that is an exact reproduction of the first 500 M1911 pistols as they were produced and delivered to the United States Army. Whereas subsequent runs of the pistol included numerous small changes, it took painstaking research to ensure that the components of the 100th Anniversary Edition were true to the initial production. This includes proper contours of the firing pin, disconnect, and grip safety. The firing-pin springs have the correct number of coils, and the grip screws display the proper head thickness and screwdriver slot width. Also, the recoil-spring plug lacks a tab punch, to name just a few of the staggering number of accurate parts renditions.

At the range we thought the minimal sights would limit



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the C&S pistol to collecting accuracy data at 15 yards. But after landing five-shot groups of Winchester's 230-grain FMJ rounds that averaged about 1.7 inches across, we decided to try 25-yard targets as well. In fact, all four choices of ammunition produced 15-yard groups measuring less than 2.0 inches across. This included 230-grain MC rounds from Mag Tech, 230-grain JHP rounds from Black Hills Ammunition, and Federal's 165-grain Hydra-Shok JHP loads. Didn't matter, the M1911 shot them all. In fact, we even managed an average-sized group measuring about 1.6 inches center to center firing the Black Hills ammunition. The Winchester ammunition was just a tick behind, and the remaining rounds resulted in groups that averaged about 2.3 inches across.

Our Team Said: Because the sight picture was not nearly as clear as those found in our modern pistols, we might credit the unexpected accuracy to the precision fitting of quality parts.

Carter Custom Caspian Commander Titanium 357 SIG, ~\$3250

Sig Sauer developed this round to deliver the stopping power of the 357 Magnum revolver from a high-capacity platform. I immediately recognized there was a weight savings simply from the standpoint of ammunition. The most common 45 ACP rounds are topped with 230-grain rounds weighing about 0.7 ounces apiece. The typical 124-grain 357 SIG round weighs about 0.25-ounce less.

After carrying some of the earliest Sigarms (now Sig Sauer) 357 SIG pistols, I was very impressed with the performance of this caliber. Though it was exceedingly loud compared to other calibers, its recoil was uncomplicated by excess torque, and I noticed that my little Sigarms P239 was driving what were ostensibly 9mm bullets fast enough to make IPSC “major” out of its 3.5-inch barrel. But with the availability of a titanium frame from Caspian Arms, I thought combining the lighter

but faster payload with a lightweight structure would produce a lighter, more powerful 1911-style carry gun.

Building the gun was just a matter of acquiring the components and convincing a custom gunsmith to put them together. I picked a 4.25-inch 9mm Schumann bull barrel and had it chambered for the 357 SIG's shouldered case. I purchased a Caspian bar-stock slide, Heinie Slant 8 sights and internal components such as hammers, sears, and firing pin from Cylinder & Slide. One key component was magazines. Because the 357 SIG cartridge begins as a necked-down 40 S&W case, all that was needed was 40 S&W single-stack magazines. Ross Carter of Harrison, Arkansas, was the gunsmith who was talented enough and downright curious enough to take on the project.

The resulting pistol was tested with two defense loads from Hornady and a special load from Black Hills Ammunition that was topped with a 100-grain frangible bullet. The Hornady rounds were 124-grain and 147-grain JHP XTP hollow points. The frangible loads were flat top solids that are perfect for practice on steel targets or steel target competition. From the 15-yard bench we produced a combined-average five-shot group measuring 1.2 inches center to center for all shots fired, all choices of ammunition. The Black Hills frangibles produced an overall best 0.5-inch group, and the 124-grain Hornady JHP XTP rounds a best 0.8-inch group. The 124-grain Hornady ammunition also produced a whopping 510 foot-pounds of muzzle energy.

The gun proved to be a wunderkind of precise, hard-hitting power. Its recoil, though abrupt, was over quickly. Aided by superior grip checkering, the sights were never really moved far off target. The 4.0-pound trigger and sharply defined sight picture added up to a snap-and-shoot scenario for each shot. The magazine well attracts reloads like flypaper. But reliability suffered if the 9-round 40 S&W magazines were loaded with more than 8 rounds. So, in terms of capacity, no real advantage was gained over a standard 1911. The gun weighed in at 39.7 ounces loaded with 8+1 rounds of 124-grain ammunition, which is heavier than the shorter-barreled Springfield Armory Champion Operator loaded to the same capacity with 45-caliber ammunition. So, we didn't achieve our goal of saving weight, either.

Our Team Said: If we were to build another 357 SIG 1911, we think a ramped barrel with standard rather than bull profile might save some weight. Then again, a 5-inch-barreled model with alloy frame may also make the gun more reliable and enable us to use the full capacity of the 9-round 40 S&W magazines. My 357 SIG Commander may have won in terms of shootability and power, but the battle of weight vs. capacity still goes to polymer-framed guns like the Caracals.



Loaded, the Carter Custom 1911-357SIG was heavier than the loaded Springfield Armory Champion Operator.