GUN TESTS®

THE CONSUMER RESOURCE FOR THE SERIOUS SHOOTER

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LIGHTWEIGHT 1911 9MMS

Tested: Springfield Armory 1911 Range Officer LW Compact, Ruger's SR1911 LW Commander Stainless, Colt's Lightweight Commander, and the Taurus 1911 Commander. Surprise finding: The company that created the concept falls way behind. ● Page 6

COMPACT 357 MAGS

Tested: Colt King Cobra, Rossi 971, and Rock Island Armory's AL3.0 import. Can the budget guns knock off the pricey snake? Only rounds downrange can tell... ● Page 17



KYDEX AND LEATHER HOLSTERS

We closely examine products from Tulster, Werkz, Galco, Alien Gear, Blade Tech, JM Custom, Nelson, Jeffrey Custom Leather, DM Bullard, and Lobo Gun Leather to find the right carry fit. ● Page 26



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DOWNRANGE

DEAR GUN TESTS READERS



Todd Woodard

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to spread, there is no doubt we are in uncertain times. We at GUN TESTS want to provide an update to our loyal readers about plans for the coming weeks and months as it relates to our ongoing gun-testing coverage.

As a leading provider of reader-focused gun-testing content, we are committed to serving our readers despite these challenging times. We understand how important our periodicals, books, and digital media are to our gun-buying audience, and we will continue to deliver our products to you.

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We know these are troubling times, but our commitment to you is to continue bringing you accurate and helpful gun-buying information.

Why Are So Many Folks Buying Guns?

As regular readers of this magazine, you're likely way ahead of the crowd in terms of what you have locked up in your safe right now. Probably have enough ammunition, too, if there's ever "enough." But as gun owners, we have to understand why people are panic buying. Simply said, they want protection if S*&^ Hits The Fan and they are forced to defend themselves. Their fears have bases. Burglaries are up. Prisoners (supposedly non violent, but really?) are being released from jails. Law-enforcement officers are exposed to people with the virus and are being put in quarantine, or in hospitals, so they're stretched thin. Firearms safety and security begins with you. It's time to help your neighbors be safe and secure, too. **GT**

GUN TESTS CREDO

REMEMBER: FIREARMS SAFETY AND SECURITY BEGINS WITH YOU

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BACK ISSUES:
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How to Get an Old Issue of GT

Reader Aaron wants to get an 13-year-old copy of the magazine. It's doable, within limits. Also, how does the search function work on Gun-Tests.com? Reader Ronald remembers an older Featherweight.



How to Get an Old Issue?

I am curious as to the availability of past issues. I happened to be on the cover of the October 1997 issue, and I am looking to find an original issue (or good copy). I had a copy at some point but can only find a rough copy. If this is available, please let me know. Thanks in advance for your efforts. — **Aaron**

Hey Aaron: We do have very limited samples of back issues we will sell, but it's month to month. You can contact customer service (information is on page 5) and ask what's available. Many digital issues are also available. However, you'll need the correct month and year. Based on the cover above, it doesn't appear to be October 1997. — Todd Woodard

Searching On Gun-Tests.com

I like the fresh new format of the redone Gun-Tests.com website, but I am frustrated in trying to find reviews of specific guns. For instance, I tried to search "Ruger American Ranch" and got:

— a Master Index
— an updated index
— a letter to the editor
— a "rifles update"
— an article about new Ruger products that doesn't include the American Ranch
— a comparison of 44 Magnum rifles, etc., and not one review of a Ruger American Ranch rifle of any caliber. I know the reviews exist because I have referenced them in the past. How do I find them now? Am I just slow? Is there a way to go straight to a review? 95% of what I use GUN TESTS for is to research the reviews. Please let me know if I'm doing something wrong.

— **Frustrated**



Well, first some general information. We have transferred material from the old website into a new container, and we're working on a variety of data transfers to get some old functionality back on the current Gun-Tests.com. The easiest way to narrow your search results is to use a single keyword, the more nearly unique, the better. For instance, if you search for just "ranch," you'll get this title as your fifth listing: "Threaded-Barrel Bolt Guns In 300 Blackout and 308 Win." The Ruger Ranch 06968 is reviewed there (May 2018). That's the only review of the line we've done. We have done other reviews of "Ranch" rifles, but they've been rimfires or Mini-14s. We've also reviewed the Ruger American Rifle Standard 6903 and Ruger American Standard

GUN TESTS REPORT CARD GRADING

Gun Tests Grade: A
A gun with this rating functions perfectly, shoots accurately, and exhibits comfortable, easy use for its owner. We may prefer one gun over others based on its unusual accuracy, superior performance, unusual features, or nice cosmetics. We recognize such a gun for these traits without regard to its cost.

Gun Tests Grade: B
We give this ranking to a gun that functions appropriately for its category, but which might not do as well in major areas as an **A**-ranked gun.

Gun Tests Grade: C
We may have reservations about some aspect of a gun's performance or pricing. We express those reservations so the reader can balance our concerns with his or her needs.

Gun Tests Grade: D
Some aspect of a gun's performance — in particular, safety, function, or accuracy — doesn't meet our standards and isn't easily resolved.

Gun Tests Grade: F
Some aspect of a gun's performance is dangerous, inappropriate for the category, or is likely to fail.

6904. I appreciate the question because updating the website is a work in progress and can be frustrating. Also, you've pointed out how little we've covered that Ranch Rifle, and we probably need to get something going on it. Got a chambering you're particularly interested in? — tw

Re "Shoulder Holsters Compared," April 2020

Dear Editor: I enjoyed your review of shoulder holsters. I thought I would pass along a tip I received many years ago. Quickly reaching across your body to draw from a shoulder holster can tend to make your torso rotate, so you can find yourself "chasing" the gun as your body turns. For a right hander, grasping the cover garment with the left hand at the same level as the gun and pulling the garment the opposite direction (i.e., to the right for a right hander) and outward from the body will reduce or eliminate the rotation and help keep the holstered gun in position for the draw, plus it gets the cover garment out of the way of the draw. **— John**

Great tip. Thanks for sharing that, John. — tw

Re "Red-Dot EDC Pistols from SIG, S&W, Walther, and Springfield," March 2020

I appreciate the time you guys took to review the Red Dot EDC Pistols in the March 2020 edition, but I had some issues with the review. At first, the review seemed genuine, but there seemed to be some subjectivity between the Walther PPS M2 and the SIG Sauer P365XL. You mentioned in paragraph two (half of the paragraph) of the Walther review that the slide rails on the Walther are different than the other polymer-framed pistols, which is true. But you didn't mention any of this for the P365XL, which based on the pictures has the same type of slide rails (even more so as there is no cut out, it runs the length of both sides). I know this as being a certified P365/P365XL armorer, it enhances accuracy.

Another thing not widely known to note, as it isn't designed this way by SIG, the P365XL and P365 have interchangeable grip frames (similar to the P320, the fire-control unit is the serialized item). With a quick use of a punch, the rear pin can be removed and the entire fire-control unit can be removed. This is not only a benefit for modularity of grip frames, but also for cleaning. I do stress to not attempt any further disassembly or replacement of parts. The process is very complex and should be only completed by SIG Certified Armorers. This modularity changes the game with the P365XL versus the others as one could have both the P365 and P365XL and swap slides or grip modules (or purchase them separately) and change their carry preferences, even more so if you add the P365 SAS.

You also mentioned in the P365XL review the proprietary rail "limits" its use of accessories. This is true, but mention in the Walther review there is no rail, but "probably isn't that big a deal on a pistol truly designed for concealment." Which is it, an issue or not? If there is anything, be it proprietary or not, is better than nothing — especially if the big-name laser/light companies, such as Streamlight, are designing the TLR-6 light/laser for it. Personally, I'd take the P365 or Hellcat over the Walther due to ammunition quantity, but being a LEO makes that a factor for me.

Please keep up the good reviews. I'd love to see the Hellcat/Hellcat OSP and the P365/P365XL/P365 SAS go head to head in a review, and I am sure based on the various forums and YouTube video, the CCW reader would as well. Please include holster options in the reviews as well, if at all possible.

By the way, I do agree with Paul and Ed that your comparing apples to oranges when comparing the P365 to the Ruger Security-9



Compact (M&P Compact9 seems more in line), the Stoeger STR-9, and Arex Rex Delta. **— KJZ**

And we appreciate your thoughts on the hot-selling P365XL, shown above with an extended magazine. I would point out that it earned an A grade in the review. — tw

Re "A Blueprint To Take Your Guns," April 2020

First, allow me to thank you and your team for all the information you compile. Some I agree with and some I don't, but it has lead me to rethink some of my opinions on other weapons I have shot, purchased, and sold over the years. Since subscribing to your magazine, I really like to start with your editorial. I look back on my 20+ years in the service (Marines), and I really wonder if the time I spent was worth all the head pain. Then, I read the magazine and relax on my front porch, watching my deer as they walk around the yard, and I conclude that the time in service was worth it, at least that's what my wife says. As for your latest comments in the Downrange column, you're dead on, and most people act like they're not interested due to the fact they believe it will never happen, that they could lose their gun rights. My wife and I talk a lot about the topic, and she believes that until the people lose their rights, they'll have no idea what is going on until it's too late. Well, I will wrap this up and leave you with a few thoughts:

1. Back in the late 70s, early 80s, the politicians tried the same thing, taking away our guns.

2. With the coronavirus today and more people purchasing handguns for protection, a politician made the remark, "What people are thinking today is, 'This country was founded by intelligent men, and is now being run by idiots."

Mr. Woodard, please let me know if there is anything I can do for you and your team, and again I thank you. **— DJ**

DJ, thanks are due to you for your service. Two decades in the Marines is a big commitment, and we appreciate it. Your wife seems like a super-smart lady. I fear she's right. In fact, the suspensions of gun rights in several states and cities due to the Chinese coronavirus pandemic have shown a lot of very dangerous people how to short-circuit 2nd Amendment rights. Scary. — tw

How About a Rec on a 10mm Auto 1911 Pistol?

My Dad is a retired sheriff's deputy of 30 years and is in search of a 1911-style 10mm. He is interested in your opinion of the most durable and reliable in the $1300-or-less price range. **— Will**

Hey Will: We've reviewed a few 10mms, some them 1911-style builds. In the March 2019 issue, we recommended the Springfield 1911 RO Elite Operator, $1145. In the November 2017 issue, we liked the Colt Delta Elite O2020XE 10mm Auto, $1099 at the time. The EAA Tanfoglio Witness, $665, was the most affordable gun recently reviewed (May 2017), but it's not a strict 1911 set up. The Kimber Custom TLE II 3200347 was in your budget window at $1028 in May 2017. Possibly the purtyest gun we've reviewed was the now-discontinued Dan Wesson Bruin Bronze 1881, $2194, also reviewed in the May 2017 issue. That should get him started. — tw

Re "308 Bolt-Action Rifles: We Compare Four Head to Head," April 2020



As a long-time subscriber, I read with interest about the Winchester 70 Featherweight rifle. I bought mine in 2015 (blued not stainless). Before taking it shooting, I cleaned the barrel well of any grease/oil from the factory. I had a Winchester 70 XTR Sporter that I bought back in 1992, that I have put more than 5,500 rounds through it. Even with the 22-inch barrel versus the 24-inch barrel of the Sporter, I got higher velocities with the 22.

Anyway, my Featherweight's barrel was free floated, except it was hard against the left side of the barrel channel. I carefully pulled the barrel/receiver from the stock and with dowel and 60-grit paper, proceeded to sand away the left side to where I could get four $1 bills through and reshot it.

I shot it at 200 yards and knocked an inch off my group size with match ammunition, getting two ¾-inch five-shot groups with Hornady and Federal factory 168- and Federal factory 175-grain match bullets. Also, I was surprised to see the stock had a solid glass bedding, as opposed to my old Sporter XTR, which had only light bedding.

— Ronald

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There are two ways to find guns we've reviewed. The Compare Guns feature (top left corner of the page under the logo) allows you to input several descriptors and narrow the search results. Or you can use the Search function. If you search for a common item, such as "22 LR," you'll get tons of references. Basically, the search function finds every instance of the searched-for topic and lists the accompanying articles the topic appeared in. The more specific and unique the reference, the better the search. We do our best to list the catalog numbers for guns we've tested, so that's usually a good place to start. There's also an "Advanced Search" area to help you narrow the results.

We welcome mail from our readers. To send us comments or questions about previous articles in the magazine, email us at: **GunTestsEditor@icloud.com.** *If you'll include the month and year of the article you're writing about, it's a big help. Also, please include your name, address, and phone number. We won't publish your personal information other than your first name, but we may need to contact you about material in your letter.* **GT**

Lightweight 1911 9mms: We Test Ruger, Colt, Taurus, SA

The players: A Taurus 1911 Commander, a Colt Lightweight Commander, the Ruger SR1911 LW Commander Stainless, and the Springfield Armory 1911 Range Officer LW Compact P19125L.

The U.S. Army adopted the Colt Model 1892 New Revolver chambered in 38 Long Colt in – drum roll please – 1892. This chambering, which is roughly equivalent to a mild 148-grain wadcutter loading in 38 Special worked well until it had to be used in combat. The Spanish-American War brought American troops to the Philippines where native tribesmen took exception to their presence and tried to make them leave. We have read many stories about how the Moro tribesmen, whether on drugs or just pure adrenalin, were able to soak up multiple hits from the 38 Colt and still injure or even kill our troopers. The Army decided that something needed to be done about this and a search for a new service pistol began.



There's a lot of innovation in these packable pistols. Top, muzzle right, is the Springfield Armory 1911 Range Officer LW Compact P19125L, $730. Top, muzzle left, is Ruger's SR1911 LW Commander Stainless 06722, $775. Middle, muzzle left, is where the pistol concept started, Colt's Lightweight Commander 04842XE, $895. Bottom, muzzle right, is the Taurus 1911 Commander 1-191101COM-9MM, $470. Three of the frames were full length, and the RO had a shorter "Officer's Model" length grip.

The first solution was to beef up the Model 1892, allowing it to handle a modified 45 Colt cartridge (the case rim had been enlarged to make for more positive extraction). This was also the dawn of the semi-auto pistol, so the Model 1909 in 45 Colt turned out to be a stopgap measure and the search continued. Enter the brilliant firearms designer John Moses Browning with his solution to the problem. Initial prototypes were produced and tested in 1905 with a much-revised model being presented in 1910 and adopted by the Army in April of 1911, hence the current name of a Model 1911. This pistol was originally chambered for the then-new 45 ACP (Automatic Colt Pistol) cartridge, the ballistics of which, with a 230-grain bullet at 830 feet per second, closely resembled the big bullet, going slow formula that had worked for the U.S. military for 50 years. Today, using newly engineered bullets at a similar or faster velocity, the 45 ACP is still one of the best fight stoppers in the handgun world.

In 1949, in an effort to standardize U.S.-service sidearms to match NATO Allies, the Army issued a request for a lighter-weight, semi-auto pistol chambered in 9mm. Firearms submitted for test included several Hi-Power variants, the Smith & Wesson Model 39, as well as a Colt 1911 version with a shorter slide and barrel mated to an aluminum frame. The Army decided to stand pat with their sidearms, but the Colt Lightweight Commander had been born and Colt began offering this to the public in 1950.

When defensive-style pistol competition really came into its own in the 1970s, Colt was a primary

player in the 1911 market. The Government Model pistols became the firearms of choice for several reasons: power, ergonomics, and the trigger. The 1911-style trigger, which is pressed straight to rear in compression, rather than a hinged piece describing an arc, is still today one of the easiest triggers to learn to shoot well. Well-built 1911s can frequently be found whose triggers only require 4 to 5 pounds of pressure to compress. Take up is minimal, overtravel can be tuned to where it is almost non-existent, and reset is fast.

The problem with pistols designed for the military is that they are sometimes engineered with extra tolerance in the parts to allow these firearms to function in almost any situation. This slop, if you will, is great for reliability but the absolute enemy of accuracy. When one of the testers for GUN TESTS began shooting USPSA (United States Practical Shooting Association) matches in 1984, common practice was to buy a Colt Government Model 1911, save the slide and frame, toss most of the other parts, and then take the remaining parts along with all the new ones to a gunsmith. Another $1,000 later (in 1984 dollars) and you had a shooter.

The year of 2020 is a different world for those who desire a great 1911. Industry knowledge of the platform has matured greatly, along with the understanding of what works and what doesn't. CNC machines now let gunmakers do quickly and precisely, via machine, what used to require many hours of highly-skilled hand labor. Accordingly, when we set out to review some of the latest generation of 9mm 1911s, we found completed pistols, containing many of the



Our test ammos included, left, Remington's green box 124-grain FMJs, which we used for break in and function testing. Then we shot several hundred rounds of Black Hills 100-grain HoneyBadger, Hornady 115-grain Critical Defense, and Speer 124-grain Gold Dot +P to see how these 1911s worked with defensive ammunition.

modifications we used to pay big bucks for, already included on the base pistols, all for less money than we used to pay for just the parts. Because of its shorter cartridge length and several other reasons, the 9mm version was always one of the trickier calibers to make work in a 1911. But, because there are several real advantages using this cartridge in this platform (recoil, magazine capacity, spring weights, etc.), we tested four different 9mm 1911 pistols for you. Which ones worked? Which worked quickly? Were they accurate? Let's find out.

Our 9mm 1911s came in slightly different configurations: the Taurus 1911 Commander (1-191101COM-9MM, $470), a Colt Lightweight Commander (04842XE,

9MM LUGER RANGE DATA

Black Hills 9mm 100-gr. HoneyBadger	**Taurus 1911 CDR**	**Colt LW CDR**	**Ruger SR1911**	**Springfield Range Officer**
Average Velocity	1191 fps	1226 fps	1174 fps	1209 fps
Muzzle Energy	315 ft.-lbs.	334 ft.-lbs.	306 ft.-lbs.	325 ft.-lbs.
Average Group	5.97 in.	1.98 in.	1.39 in.	1.90 in.
Hornady 115-gr. Critical Def	**Taurus 1911 CDR**	**Colt LW CDR**	**Ruger SR1911**	**Springfield Range Officer**
Average Velocity	1109 fps	1117 fps	1079 fps	1112 fps
Muzzle Energy	314 ft.-lbs.	319 ft.-lbs.	298 ft.-lbs.	316 ft.-lbs.
Average Group	2.51 in.	2.17 in.	1.87 in.	2.48 in.
Speer 124-gr. Gold Dot +P	**Taurus 1911 CDR**	**Colt LW CDR**	**Ruger SR1911**	**Springfield Range Officer**
Average Velocity	1221 fps	1207 fps	1197 fps	1201 fps
Muzzle Energy	410 ft.-lbs.	401 ft.-lbs.	395 ft.-lbs.	397 ft.-lbs.
Average Group	2.83 in.	2.59 in.	1.97 in.	2.40 in.

All shooting was done at American Shooting Centers in west Houston (AmShootCenters.com). We chronographed each load with a LabRadar device and shot each for groups at 15 yards from a well-sandbagged Caldwell Pistol Rest.

$895), the Ruger SR1911 LW Commander Stainless (06722, $775), and the Springfield Armory 1911 Range Officer LW Compact (P19125L, $730). All used barrels 4 to 4.25 inches long and some type of steel slide. Three of the pistols used alloy frames and one had a steel frame. Three of those frames were full length and one had a shorter "Officer's Model" length grip. We had two different types of feed ramps and three different geometries on the barrels. And only one favorite.

The original Colt 1911, as designed by John Moses Browning, was a superb handgun, well suited for self-defense in almost any environment. It served our armed forces well for 73 years as our official sidearm and is still carried by many Special Forces operators, though in a more than slightly different configuration. When Practical Shooting competitions were forming in the 1970s, theoretically equal emphasis was placed on accuracy, speed, and power. With the rules so defined, 1911s became the pistol to use. But they were never designed to run reliably at the speeds required by competition, so the modifications began. Shooters would take their Colts or Springfield Armory 1911s with a bag of parts to their gunsmith and say "Fix it, please."

Requested modifications often included:

- Lowered ejection port, with the rear relieved a bit to aid in ejection and protect empty brass.
- Higher-visibility sights, whether of the fixed variety or, even more commonly, a quality adjustable set.
- A solid bushing fitted to the barrel.
- A barrel and link fitted to the slide and frame for function and accuracy.
- High-ride beavertail grip safety to allow the hand to ride up higher on the grip safety, thus protecting the hand and lowering felt recoil.
- Rounded, Commander-style hammer.
- Skeletonized trigger with over-travel screw to allow for lighter trigger compression and less overall movement.
- Beveled or flared mag well for faster magazine changes.
- Checkered mainspring housing and/or frontstrap.
- Oversized thumb safety.
- Polished feed ramp and throat on the barrels.

The 1980s cost could easily be into the four-figure range, plus the pistol. Today's Taurus 1911 Commander 9mm comes from the factory with all of the above and does it at a street price we have seen at less than $500!

How We Tested

All shooting was done at American Shooting Centers in west Houston (AmShootCenters.com). We chronographed each load with a LabRadar device and shot each for groups at 15 yards from a well-sandbagged Caldwell Pistol Rest, using multiple types of practice and defensive ammunition. We used a SIG Tacops Government Model (5-inch barrel), as well as a SIG Ultra Compact (3-inch barrel) both in 45 ACP to give us comparison energy figures. We did speed and accuracy drills at targets ranging from 5 to 30 yards distant. We used Remington green box 124-grain FMJ for break in and function testing. Then we shot several hundred rounds of Black Hills 100-grain Honey Badger, Hornady 115-grain Critical Defense, and Speer 124-grain Gold Dot +P to see how these four 1911s worked with defensive ammunition. Here's what we found:

Taurus 1911 Commander 1-191101COM-9MM 9mm Luger, $470

The Taurus 1911 Commander is finished in a simple, matte black with contrasting controls. The hammer, grip safety, thumb safety, slide release and magazine catch are all a polished black. Grips are of a checkered diamond pattern, made of polymer and attached with hex head screws. The barrel seems to be well fitted to the slide with no movement evident when the barrel hood is depressed. Both the front strap and mainspring housing are fine checkered in a pattern that is well executed though not particularly sharp. The magazine well is slightly beveled to aid in insertion. Both front and rear sights are black with white dots, mounted in dovetails and anchored by set screws. Wide, angled cocking serrations are present at the front and rear of the slide. The barrel is thicker than some we have seen, and the pistol uses a full-length recoil spring guide rod.

Takedown is via normal procedure: Verify that the pistol is unloaded, check it again, use a bushing wrench to rotate the bushing clockwise, remove the recoil spring, rotate the bushing back all the way counter-clockwise and remove the bushing, line the slots up on the side of the slide and remove the slide release from right side to left, take off the slide and push out the barrel. The Commander is packed in a substantial case with two 9-round Mec-Gar magazines. Ten-rounders are readily available as aftermarket parts.

The Taurus is an all-steel firearm, in contrast to the other three pistols in this test, each of which has an alloy frame mated to a steel slide. That makes the Taurus heavier than our other samples, which should, theoretically, result in lighter felt recoil. We did not feel that was the case and wonder if the recoil-spring weight could have been a factor. The Taurus had the heaviest slide retraction effort and was noticeably harder to cycle the slide by hand. Recoil springs are required to operate the pistol and must be of at least a minimum weight or the pistol does not cycle. Heavier recoil springs help ensure function of a pistol to a point. Past that point, reliability can suffer and felt recoil increases because of the slide's mass moving back and forth under increased spring pressure. The

TAURUS 1911 COMMANDER 1-191101COM-9MM 9MM LUGER, $470

GUN TESTS GRADE: B-

This pistol comes with a truly impressive list of features, especially for the price. Our concern, and the grade, comes from poorer-than-expected accuracy.



Action Type..... Semi auto, hammer fired, single action only
Overall Length.....7.8 in.
Overall Height.....5.5 in.
Maximum Width.....1.4 in.
Weight Unloaded.....35.8 oz.
Weight Loaded.....42.6 oz. w/10 rounds 124-gr. Hornady JHP
Slide Material.....Carbon steel
Slide Retraction Effort.....18.9 oz.
Receiver Material.....Carbon steel
Finish.....Monochromatic black
Front Strap Height.....2.3 in.
Back Strap Height.....3.2 in.
Barrel Length.....4.25 in.
Grip Thickness (Maximum).....1.2 in.
Grip Circumference.....5.4 in.
Magazine.....Two 9-round
Rear Sight.....Novak 2-dot in dovetail, windage adjustable, set screw
Front Sight.....1-dot in dovetail, set screw
Sight Radius.....5.6 in.
Trigger Pull Weight.....7.2 lbs.
Trigger Span.....2.6 in.
Safety.....Firing pin drop, manual thumb safety, grip safety
Warranty.....Limited lifetime
Telephone.....(305) 624-1115
Website.....TaurusUSA.com
Made In.....Brazil



Left: The forward cocking serrations (arrow) are just one of many extra features on the Taurus.



Left: The Taurus barrel seems to be well fitted to the slide. We didn't notice any movement when we pressed down on the barrel hood. Takedown requires a bushing wrench to rotate the bushing (arrow) clockwise. Then, remove the recoil spring, rotate the bushing counter-clockwise and remove it.



Right: Both front and rear sights are black with white dots, mounted in dovetails and anchored by set screws. This is a standard sight setup most shooters would find familiar. Night sights would be nice for dim-light shooting.



Left: The polished controls on the Taurus create a nice contrast to the matte-black finish on the pistol.



Above: Both the front strap and mainspring housing (shown) are finely checkered in a pattern that is well executed, though not particularly sharp. Arrow: The Taurus has the needed memory bump on the beavertail safety, but we felt that it was hard to disengage, requiring extra fore and aft pressure to be applied in our grip. That may have affected accuracy.

SPRINGFIELD ARMORY RANGE OFFICER LW COMPACT PI9125L 9MM LUGER, $730

GUN TESTS GRADE: B+ (BEST BUY)

Good accuracy along with the most concealable profile in this test group. Sights are very visible but poorly calibrated, shooting consistently high and left. That is easily remedied, but it knocked the Springfield down a half grade.



Action Type ..... Semi auto, hammer fired, single action only
Overall Length ..... 7.6 in.
Overall Height ..... 5.1 in.
Maximum Width ..... 1.3 in.
Weight Unloaded ..... 27.8 oz.
Weight Loaded ..... 34.2 oz. w/9 rounds Hornady 124-gr. JHPs
Slide Material ..... Forged carbon steel
Slide Retraction Effort ..... 15.4 oz.
Receiver Material ..... Forged aluminum alloy
Finish ..... Parkerized
Front Strap Height ..... 2.25 in.
Back Strap Height ..... 2.75 in.
Barrel Length ..... 4.0 in.
Grip Thickness (Maximum) ..... 1.15 in.
Grip Circumference ..... 5.25 in.
Magazine ..... Two 8 round
Rear Sight ..... Novak 2-dot in dovetail with set screw, windage adjustable
Front Sight ..... Fiber-optic blade
Sight Radius ..... 5.5 in.
Trigger Pull Weight ..... 5.75 lbs.
Trigger Span ..... 2.5 in.
Safety ..... Firing pin drop, manual thumb safety, grip safety
Warranty ..... Limited lifetime for original owner
Telephone ..... (800) 680-6866
Website ..... SpringfieldArmory.com
Made In ..... Brazil

Controls on the Springfield Armory were positive and easy to use. The Springfield Armory Range Officer LW Compact mates a 4-inch Commander-length slide to a shorter frame. The result is a slightly muzzle heavy, concealable pistol.





Above: The magwell is properly beveled and was easy to reload into. The mainspring housing is checkered, but the front strap is smooth. The grip panels are slightly thinner than normally slim 1911 grips.



Above: The Springfield Armory used an alternative technique of fitting the barrel directly to the slide using a bull barrel. The barrel is built up at the muzzle and is fitted straight to the slide. It requires a reverse spring plug and a takedown pin (below right).



Left: The heavier barrel of the Springfield Armory is very obvious from the muzzle view. We liked the muzzle-heavy feel when we started doing the speed trials. The front sight is a very visible fiber optic.

DRILL #1 DATA

Pistol	Time to First Shot (seconds)	Split Average (seconds)	Total Time (seconds)	Process: First five shots from low ready, USPSA target, 7 yards.
Taurus 1911 Commander	1.14	.208	1.97	
Springfield RO Compact	.97	.223	1.86	
Ruger SR1911	.73	.193	1.50	
Colt LW Commander	.95	.22	1.76	

DRILL #2 DATA (5X5X5)

Pistol	Time to First Shot (seconds)	Split Average (seconds)	Total Time (seconds)	Process: Draw from a concealment holster. Fire 5 shots into a 5-inch circle at 5 yards.
Taurus 1911 Commander	.93	.253	1.95	
Springfield RO Compact	.91	.285	2.05	
Ruger SR1911	.99	.200	1.79	
Colt LW Commander	.88	.208	1.71	

DRILL #3 DATA

Pistol	Time to First Shot (seconds)	Split Average (seconds)	Total Time (seconds)	Process: Failure to stop drill. Two shots to lower A zone; one shot to upper A zone. From low ready, 7 yards.
Taurus 1911 Commander	.97	.315	1.60	
Springfield RO Compact	.81	.320	1.45	
Ruger SR1911	.87	.345	1.56	
Colt LW Commander	.80	.275	1.35	

ejection pattern put the empty brass just to our right side and slightly forward — another indication of a heavy recoil spring. Recoil springs are also cheap, available almost everywhere and, perhaps, the easiest thing on a 1911 to replace.

The basic 1911 design presents a superb fighting or target pistol that is slim for concealment's sake, shoots an adequate to excellent cartridge for a pistol, and does so with the most "shootable" trigger on the market. Trigger compression can be light, crisp, and in a line straight to the rear. This same outstanding trigger can also create a couple of potential issues for the 1911 owner. First, the light, short movement aspect of the trigger virtually mandates a manual safety. This is provided on all 1911's as a hinged lever, immediately forward of the hammer in a position easily activated by the right thumb. Ambidextrous models (with levers on both sides) are commonly available. Proper technique for the 1911 requires that the strong side thumb "live" on the safety whenever the pistol is on the hand. The only time the thumb is removed from the safety is to raise the lever into the safe position or manipulate the pistol, for example, to perform a reload or clear a malfunction. Second is the grip safety, which is a lever that has to be compressed on the back of the grip. If both safeties are not depressed simultaneously, a correctly functioning 1911 does not fire. This can be an issue for those with smaller or less-than-beefy hands. With the hand positioned high enough to properly disengage the thumb safety, the palm may not be able to correctly depress the grip safety and the pistol will not fire.

The most commonly used cure for this has been to use a grip safety with a "memory pad" or extra-thick bump on the bottom of the grip safety. The palm engages this safety earlier in the gripping process, pushes the grip safety farther forward allowing the tab on the grip safety to raise earlier and the gun to fire when needed. The Taurus has the needed memory bump, but we felt that it was hard to disengage, requiring extra fore and aft pressure to be applied in our grip and, possibly, contributing to some of the large groups we witnessed from this pistol. Once again, this is an easy fix, but it is one that should be done by a competent gunsmith.

Our Team Said: The list of features is impressive, especially for a pistol in this price range. The somewhat poor accuracy surprised us.

Springfield Armory Range Officer LW Compact PI9125L 9mm Luger, $730

Besides Colt, the 1911 competition market has been well supported and well served by Springfield Armory. The company offers an array of 1911s running the gamut from absolute basic mil-spec to full-blown race guns, so we just had to have one of Springfield's 9mms for our test. We chose the lightweight Range Officer Compact, which comes in a very desirable configuration. Namely, a 4-inch Commander-length slide mated to a shorter (think Colt Officer's Model) frame. The result is a slightly muzzle heavy, yet very concealable pistol.

The RO Compact has almost everything you could ask for. The alloy frame, steel slide, and all the controls

RUGER SR1911 LW COMMANDER STAINLESS 06722 9MM LUGER, $775

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (OUR PICK)

Relative newcomers to the 1911 world, Ruger has learned its craft in a hurry.



Action Type ..... Semi auto, hammer fired, single action only
Overall Length ..... 7.9 in.
Overall Height ..... 5.4 in.
Maximum Width ..... 1.3 in.
Weight Unloaded ..... 27.0 oz.
Weight Loaded ..... 33.9 oz. w/10 rounds 124-gr. Hornady JHP
Slide Material ..... Stainless steel
Slide Retraction Effort ..... 15.2 oz.
Receiver Material ..... Anodized aluminum
Finish ..... Gun metal grey tone
Front Strap Height ..... 2.6 in.
Back Strap Height ..... 3.25 in.
Barrel Length ..... 4.25 in.
Grip Thickness (Maximum) ..... 1.2 in.
Grip Circumference ..... 5.25 in.
Magazine ..... Two 9 round
Rear Sight ..... Novak 2-dot in dovetail, drift adjustable, set screw
Front Sight ..... 1-dot blade in dovetail
Sight Radius ..... 5.8 in.
Trigger Pull Weight ..... 4.1 lbs.
Trigger Span ..... 2.5 in.
Safety ..... Firing pin drop, manual thumb safety, grip safety
Warranty ..... None provided
Telephone ..... (336) 949-5200
Website ..... Ruger.com
Made In ..... USA



Above: Contrasting colors make for a great three-tone look on the Ruger. Grip panels are black and rubberized.





Left, Below: The Ruger demonstrated outstanding accuracy and speed in our tests.



Above: The ejection port has been properly lowered and slightly relieved at the rear (bottom arrow). The barrel hood is notched at the rear (top arrow), allowing a small viewport to check for a loaded chamber.



Left: Barrel lock up in the slide is rock solid. The bushing is pleasingly easy to rotate. We could disassemble the pistol without a bushing wrench. The sights are genuine Novak and are set in drift-adjustable dovetails. The Ruger won the accuracy component for each type of ammo fired, then won or placed highly in every speed drill.









Here are the four pistols broken down. Top left: The Colt Lightweight Commander 04842XE is the aluminum-framed version that also comes with a beavertail with memory bump, rounded hammer, and better thumb safety. While not the highly polished slides of 50 years ago, the flats of the slides were smooth and the lines were sharp, with no visible tool marks on the pistol. Top right: The Ruger SR1911 LW Commander Stainless has a 4.25-inch fully ramped barrel in a stainless-steel slide mounted to a gray anodized-aluminum frame. The grip safety works when engaged then disengages easily. The mainspring housing is checkered and the front strap is smooth. Bottom left: The Taurus barrel is thicker than some we have seen, and the pistol uses a full-length recoil spring guide rod. The magazine well is slightly beveled to aid in insertion. Bottom right: The Springfield Armory Range Officer LW Compact's alloy frame, steel slide, and all the controls except the trigger are matte black. The trigger is brushed aluminum which, along with the polished barrel, make for nice contrasts. The thumb safety was substantially larger than mil-spec, but not large enough to be obnoxious.

except the trigger are a matte black. The trigger is brushed aluminum which, along with the polished barrel, make for nice contrasts to the black. The barrel is different in another way — it is a bull barrel (larger diameter) that uses a bushingless lockup. The barrel is built up at the muzzle and is fitted straight to the slide. It requires a reverse spring plug and a takedown pin, which is provided with the pistol. Movement of the barrel hood within the slide is virtually nil and speaks well for the craftsmanship in the pistol.

The grip panels are slightly thinner than the normally slim 1911 grips and would project just that much less when concealed. The grip safety had the needed memory bump, though it wanted to release just a little bit later than we prefer. The mainspring housing is checkered, but the front strap is smooth. The magwell is properly beveled and was easy to reload into. The thumb safety was substantially larger than mil-spec but not large enough to be obnoxious. The required trigger compression was smooth and consistent. This pistol performed and shot well through all tests. We really liked the muzzle-heavy feel when we started doing the speed trials. The front sight is a very visible fiber optic, and the rear is a Novak style with two white dots. Both are set in dovetails. A replacement fiber-optic tube is included in the case along with the takedown pin.

About the only problems we had came from the sights. Everything shot high and left. A couple of inches too high doesn't concern us, but the RO Compact was shooting some ammo as much as 6 inches too high. And this was across the board, using several different brands and weights of ammunition. We weren't having the same problems with other pistols that day, so it doesn't appear to be just the testers. We think Springfield Armory should verify the height needed for this sight. We also remind our readers to test fire every firearm they purchase — especially for self-defense — and to ascertain the gun's point of impact with whatever ammunition they choose.

Our Team Said: The RO is a smooth-shooting pistol, full of features at a reasonable price. Our only knock was the front sight.

Ruger SR1911 LW Commander Stainless 06722 9mm Luger, $775

Ruger introduced the SR 1911 in 2011 and has since added many calibers and variants to that product line. We wanted the Light Weight stainless-steel Commander version for our tests. It boasts a 4.25-inch fully ramped barrel in a stainless-steel slide mounted to a gray anodized-aluminum frame. Grip panels are black and rubberized. They, along with the matte-black controls, provide a nice three-tone look to the pistol.

The thumb safety is oversized but has been rounded

COLT LIGHTWEIGHT COMMANDER 04842XE 9MM LUGER, $895

GUN TESTS GRADE: C

The most expensive pistol in our test, the Colt LW Commander disappointed us with poor performance and malfunctions.



Action Type ..... Semi auto, hammer fired, single action only
Overall Length ..... 7.75 in.
Overall Height ..... 5.4 in.
Maximum Width ..... 1.4 in. including thumb safety
Weight Unloaded ..... 27.7 oz.
Weight Loaded ..... 34.7 oz. w/10 rounds 124-gr. Hornady JHP

Slide Material ..... Blued carbon steel
Slide Retraction Effort ..... 15.1 oz.
Receiver Material ..... Aluminum alloy
Finish ..... Blued
Front Strap Height ..... 2.75 in.
Back Strap Height ..... 3.25 in.
Barrel Length ..... 4.25 in.
Grip Thickness (Maximum) ..... 1.25 in.
Grip Circumference ..... 5.25 in.
Magazine ..... Two 9-round
Rear Sight ..... Novak 2-dot in dovetail, windage adjustable
Front Sight ..... 1-dot blade
Sight Radius ..... 5.6 in.
Trigger Pull Weight ..... 4.75 lbs.
Trigger Span ..... 2.5 in.
Safety ..... Firing pin drop, manual thumb safety, grip safety
Warranty ..... Limited lifetime
Telephone ..... (800) 962-2652
Website ..... Colt.com
Made In ..... USA



Above: Controls on the Colt were the right size, not too sharp and easy and positive to operate. The pistol comes with G10 grip panels with the Colt logo.



Above: An extractor problem led to FTE failures. We were able to solve those. Below: Colt's narrow feed ramp did not want to feed the HoneyBadger ammo. Recontouring and polishing the ramp is a job for a gunsmith.

Right: Our sample has the flat mainspring housing with vertical serrations, as does the frontstrap.







Above left: This standard Colt 9mm 1911 feed ramp was the source of several of our problems, in particular failures to feed. Most modern 1911 barrels are ramped and polished all along the lower radius of the barrel mouth. This aids in feeding ammunition other than standard full metal jacket. The Colt 1911 was not polished at all and showed a very narrow ramp. It needs a ramp and throat job, which widens and polishes the feed ramp, performed by a competent gunsmith. Also, note the Colt does not have a steel feed ramp that is part of the barrel. The other two alloy pistols in this test, Ruger (center) and Springfield (right) use this system. Even the steel-framed Taurus uses this system.

off so there are no sharp edges. The grip safety has a good memory bump and, more important, works when engaged then disengages easily. No death grip is required to shoot this pistol. Barrel lock up in the slide is rock solid. The bushing is pleasingly easy to rotate (we could disassemble the pistol without a bushing wrench) for what turned out to be a very accurate pistol. The mainspring housing is checkered and the front strap is smooth. The ejection port has been properly lowered and slightly relieved at the rear. The SR1911 also uses a "70 Series" firing-pin setup. This eschews the use of a firing pin safety (thus removing the requirement for more moving parts and a slightly heavier trigger), utilizing instead a titanium firing pin and a different firing-pin spring. Fewer moving parts and a better trigger pull while maintaining safety is a good thing. The barrel hood is notched at the rear, allowing a small view port to check for a loaded chamber. There are cocking serrations on the rear of the slide only. The magazine well has been properly beveled. The 3-dot sights are genuine Novak and set in drift-adjustable dovetails.

The current batch of polymer pistols bring many advantages over some of the old-style pistols. They can also bring their own issues. One of those can start with mainsprings. Many new-model pistols use a single spring to create pressure against the trigger and the striker. The 1911s employ a separate mainspring to power the hammer, a leaf spring to return the trigger and a third spring to return the slide to battery. This allows those with smaller hands or diminished grips to set those springs one at a time. The shooter can cock the hammer and then rack the slide, separately using less effort. The Ruger SR1911 uses an approach to springs opposite of that of the Taurus, in that the recoil spring is lighter than the others tested though it still functioned perfectly. This makes the slide easier to rack while also being a prime factor in making the Ruger feel like it had lighter recoil.

Our Team Said: The Ruger won the accuracy component for each type of ammo fired, then won or placed highly in every speed drill. It had the best trigger and the lightest perceived recoil in this test group. We were impressed.

Colt Lightweight Commander 9mm 04842XE 9mm Luger, $895

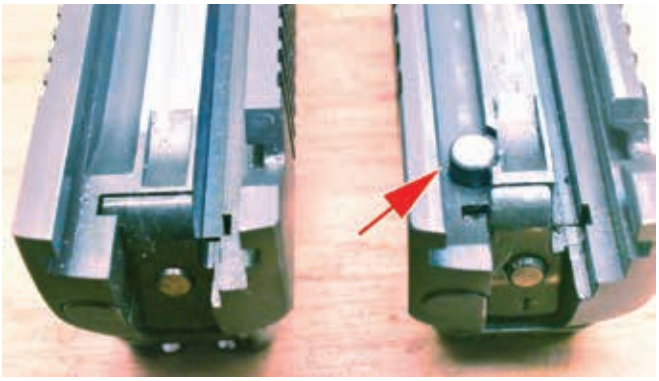
The Colt 1911 pistol has a very storied past and the history on this particular model is no different. In 1951 various solutions were proposed when the Army requested a replacement for the 1911 chambered in 45 ACP. Since all NATO members were using 9mm for their pistols, our military wanted to comply as well. Requirements also included limiting length to no more than 7 inches and weight to no more than 25 ounces. Accordingly, Colt submitted a 1911 pistol chambered in 9mm with a 4.25-inch barrel and an aluminum frame. Eventually, the Army decided to stick with the small arms they had, but Colt thought they had a winner

on their hands and introduced the new pistol to the public. Colt introduced the all-steel commander in 1970, requiring a difference in nomenclature. The all-steel version has since been known as the "Combat Commander" and the aluminum-framed version became the "Lightweight Commander." Both have indeed been major successes for Colt over the years.

We have documented upgrades being made to many 1911s over the course of this article. Our Colt LW Commander also sports the better sights, beavertail with memory bump, rounded hammer, better trigger, better thumb safety, etc. Our sample has the flat mainspring housing with vertical serrations, as does the frontstrap. The magazine well has the least improvement on it of any we tested here, showing just a light bevel on some of the well. We felt the pistol balanced the best of the four pistols tested. The trigger was excellent and the sights more than sufficient. While not the highly polished slides of 50 years ago, the flats of the slides were smooth and the lines were sharp, with no visible tool marks on the pistol. Colt has learned a few things about making this pistol. Except three things that really disappointed us.

First was the barrel. One of the tests for potential accuracy in a 1911 is to push down on the hood of the barrel. Movement is a bad thing. It means the barrel has not been fitted all that tightly to the slide and frame. The hood on our sample moves a good bit. The barrel and its setup were causes of additional concern. Most modern 1911 barrels are ramped and polished all along the lower radius of the barrel mouth. This aids in feeding ammunition other than standard full metal jacket. The Colt 1911 was not polished at all and showed a very narrow ramp, which proved problematic in some of the ammunition we used for testing. This pistol almost refused to feed Black Hills Honey Badger ammo, which has worked fine in every other pistol tested. A ramp and throat job, which widens and polishes the feed ramp, can easily be done by a competent gunsmith. Do not try it with your Dremel tool. The angles and surfaces are critical in proper feeding.

Next, problems may develop (note we said *may*, not *will*) on alloy-framed semi-automatic pistols where the feed ramp to the barrel is also alloy. The metal in the bullets can be harder than the alloy ramp and may damage the ramp over time. Many manufacturers have solved this problem via a simple solution: use a barrel with a steel feed ramp that is part of the barrel and then mill the frame to allow the differently shaped barrel to sit where it needs to go. Then every bullet being pushed forward out of the magazine impacts into the steel ramp instead of a softer alloy ramp. The other two alloy pistols in this test (Ruger and Springfield) use this system. Even the steel-framed Taurus uses this system. The Colt does not.



The Ruger slide, left, shows a 70-Series design that uses fewer parts and allows for a slightly better trigger pull versus an 80-Series trigger. The arrow points out the 80-Series firing-pin-block safety plunger, one part that adds complications. The 70-Series is perfectly safe.

Last is the extractor. This is the hook that pulls a cartridge (loaded or fired) from the chamber, back into the ejector (projection on the other side of the frame), which then pushes the cartridge or case out of the ejection port. Signs of an improperly tuned extractor include empty cases being left in the chamber after firing. While the other three pistols worked flawlessly, our Colt started leaving empties in the chamber, causing a double-feed. This virtually new pistol belonged to a somewhat chagrined member of our test team, so we felt a bit freer to experiment with his gun. We checked the extractor only to find that we could wiggle the extractor hook as it protrudes from the breech face. That is a bad sign. We removed the extractor and put some tension on it then reinstalled. It worked perfectly from that point on.

Our Team Said: We got average accuracy from this pistol, we think, because of the somewhat poorly fitted barrel. We worry about the long-time viability for a heavily used 1911 with a non-ramped frame. We fixed the extractor quickly. We feel that we should not have had to. Colt makes an outstanding firearm. They have also had 70 years to work the kinks out of this one. The other three firearms we tested in this group already employ the new production methods eliminating the three problems. We are disappointed Colt has not yet decided to do so.

Finally, we must ask whether we blaspheme by the mere suggestion that one of JMB's most incredible creations could function properly while chambered in a "minor" caliber. We think we are still pious. Will a 9mm ever equal a 45 ACP shot to shot? No. But the energy figures for a fast 9mm come very close to some of those big, slow 45s. Sometimes they exceed them. And how could having a greater number of an effective, less expensive, lighter-recoiling cartridge in the outstanding 1911 platform be a bad idea? If it were us, we'd buy a Ruger Light Weight Commander and see if we liked it for self- or home-defense.

Written and photographed by Joe Woolley, using evaluations from GUN TESTS *team testers.* **GT**

Compact 357s from Rossi, Rock Island Armory, and Colt

We match up three six-shot compact 357 Magnums, and we'd carry the Colt King Cobra if cost were not a factor. The Rossi 971 and RIA's AL3.0 are good low- and mid-budget options, respectively.

A reader recently asked if we could run a test of compact 357 Magnum revolvers to see if there was any significant difference in performance and handling with different barrel lengths. We procured three suitable compact revolvers for testing which included a new Colt King Cobra with a 3-inch barrel, a used Rossi Model 971 VRC with a 2.6-inch barrel, and a new Rock Island Armory (RIA) Model AL3.0 with a 2-inch barrel. These compact revolvers also run the budget spectrum starting with the Rossi at about $295, the RIA at $504, and the Colt at $838. Common factors between these three revolvers are double-action/single-action triggers, six-shot capacity, and steel frames. The net-net is there is a slight edge with a longer barrel in regard to velocity and energy. We can also say there are some pros and cons for both snubbies and slightly longer barrel variants. With the ammo we tested, our data shows the 3-inch barrel of the Colt had a range of 11 to 17 percent increase in velocity and energy. We're sure we will get similar



The new Colt King Cobra (left) with a 3-inch barrel has an edge in velocity and energy over the Rossi 971 VRC (middle) with a 2.6-inch barrel and the Rock Island Armory AL3.0 (right) with a 2-inch barrel. These are not pocket-size revolvers but require a holster for conceal carry. We used an Uncle Mike's Inside-the-Pant holster to tote these revolvers around.

results with other ammunition brands, too.

In our opinion, these three revolvers are very traditional, meaning there really is nothing innovative about the design. If anything, the use of MIM parts in the Colt and RIA, such as the trigger and hammer, keep manufacturing costs down. The Rossi does not have any MIM parts.

With features like a short sight radius, compact grips, and triggers in DA mode that required a heavy pull, these revolvers are made for up-close work. We carried the Colt, Rossi, and RIA revolvers in a nylon Uncle Mike's Inside the Pant holster. Before going hot at the range, we dry-fired these revolvers in DA trigger mode, doing our best Jerry Miculek impression, and some of us found we were short-stroking the trigger on the Colt and RIA. This meant they were not allowing the trigger to go fully forward and reset prior to pressing the trigger again for the next shot. This meant the trigger jammed and we needed to release the trigger to reset, then press it for the next shot. This is not a fault of the design, rather the user's familiarity with the revolvers. No team members experienced short stroking with the Rossi. This was a reminder to our team that proper training and familiarity with your revolver is very important, if you plan to use it for self defense.

How We Tested

On the range we tested for accuracy using a rest in single-action trigger mode with targets set at 15 yards. The 357 Magnum revolver is very practical and versatile because it can fire both 38 Special and 357 Magnum cartridges. Starting at the mild end, we ran 38 Special Hornady Critical Defense loaded with a 110-grain FTX bullet. For 38 Special +P ammo, we used SIG Sauer V-Crown loaded with a 125-grain JHPs. For 357 Magnum ammo, we used Armscor brand cartridges loaded with a 158-grain FMJ bullets. We felt this was a good range of bullet weights and velocities. For speed shooting, we kept the target at 15 yards and fired in DA mode as fast as we could while still being accurate. We pushed ourselves to that edge where too much speed with the trigger can have a negative impact on accuracy. We did not experience any short stroking during this phase of testing. We did see groups enlarge dramatically, but we were capable of keeping shots in an 8- to 10-inch circle. We also used Tuff Products 6-round QuickStrip speed loaders ($9.45 for two strips at TuffProducts.com). These are made of a black flexible urethane material that allows you load two rounds at a time. Here's what else we found when we took the guns to the range.

Rossi Model 971 VRC 357 Magnum, $295

The Model 971 VRC (Vent Rib Compensated) is a used revolver that is fairly common to find on GunBroker.com and GunsAmerica.com auction websites. This model was manufactured from 1996 through 1998 and imported by Interarms. The 971's size and

RANGE DATA

Armscor 357 Magnum 158-gr. FMJ	**Colt King Cobra**	**Rossi 972 VRC**	**RIA AL3.0**
Average Velocity	1075 fps	966 fps	961 fps
Muzzle Energy	405 ft.-lbs.	327 ft.-lbs.	324 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.5 in.	1.3 in.	0.9 in.
Average Group	1.8 in.	1.4 in.	1.0 in.
SIG Sauer 38 Special +P 125-gr. JHP	**Colt King Cobra**	**Rossi 972 VRC**	**RIA AL3.0**
Average Velocity	990 fps	846 fps	827 fps
Muzzle Energy	272 ft.-lbs.	199 ft.-lbs.	190 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.2 in.	2.0 in.	1.5 in.
Average Group	1.6 in.	2.5 in.	1.8 in.
Hornady Critical Defense 38 Sp. 110-gr. FTX	**Colt King Cobra**	**Rossi 972 VRC**	**RIA AL3.0**
Average Velocity	950 fps	851 fps	839 fps
Muzzle Energy	220 ft.-lbs.	177 ft.-lbs.	172 ft.-lbs.
Smallest Group	1.8 in.	1.7 in.	1.3 in.
Average Group	1.9 in.	2.2 in.	1.5 in.

To collect accuracy data, we fired five-shot groups from a bench using a rest. Distance: 15 yards with open sights. We recorded velocities using a ProChrono digital chronograph set 15 feet from the muzzle.

ROSSI MODEL 971 VRC 357 MAGNUM, $295

GUN TESTS GRADE: B

Though the 971 VRC had a great trigger and the porting helped keep us on target, the accuracy was less than stellar. The weight helps with recoil, but it also makes it less convenient for concealed carry.



Action Type	Revolver, DA/SA
Overall Length	8.00 in.
Barrel Length	2.60 in.
Sight Radius	3.85 in.
Overall Height	5.25 in.
Maximum Width	1.45 in.
Weight Unloaded	33.8 oz.
Weight Loaded	34.70 oz.
Cylinder Gap	0.003 in.
Capacity	6
Frame Finish	Bright stainless
Barrel/Cylinder Finish	Bright stainless
Frame Front Strap Height	2.30 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.30 in.
Grip	Rubber, checkered, finger grooves
Grip Thickness (max)	1.15 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	5.12 in.
Front Sight	Serrated ramp, red insert, removable
Rear Sight	Adj. white outline, serrated
Trigger Pull Weight (DA)	11.03 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight (SA)	3.80 lbs.
Trigger Span (DA)	3.10 in.
Trigger Span (SA)	2.62 in.
Safety	Internal hammer block, security lock
Warranty	Limited warranty
Telephone	(305) 474-0401
Website	RossiUSA.com
Made In	Brazil



The Rossi cylinder locked in both the rear and end of the ejector rod. Note how the Rossi uses milled swirls cut into the ejector star (arrow).



We liked that we could easily see filled chambers.

There are a total of eight ports, four on each side of the Rossi's barrel at the 1 and 11 o'clock positions. The ports did a good job.





The rear sight is fully adjustable and serrated to kill glare.

function is similar to a Smith & Wesson K-frame but with a J-frame sized grip. Our sample was made from stainless steel and wore a bright finish. The grip is checkered rubber with finger grooves and slight palm swell similar to a Pachmayr Gripper grip. We liked the heft and feel of the Rossi. It was also the heaviest revolver, weighing 33.8 ounces unloaded.

The barrel has a similar design as the Tracker series of revolvers by Taurus, with a ported chamber about 0.8 inches deep at the muzzle. This chamber is counterbored, so it is not rifled. There are eight ports that spew gases and help keep the revolver from flipping when fired. Four ports are located at the 1 and 11 o'clock positions. We thought the ports did a good job of helping us get back on target when shooting for speed. The barrel also has a full lug, which helps give the Rossi some heft. This weight makes firing with hot 357 Magnum loads more tolerable.

The front sight is a pinned, serrated ramp with a red insert similar to what S&W equipped its revolvers with a decade or so ago. The rear sight is a white-outlined notch that is adjustable for windage and elevation, and the rear face of the sight is serrated to reduce glare. Whoever owned this revolver before us must have had eye-dominance issues because this revolver grouped beautifully, but 4 inches to the left of point of aim. We easily adjusted the sights even though there were no indication for up/down and left/right. Between the sights is a wide rib that is serrated. On longer-barreled 971 variants, this is a ventilated rib. We noticed the there was a sharp corner on the frame where the barrel screws into the frame. This is due to a chamfer milled into the rib but not on the topstrap. We also found some sharp edges on the muzzle edge of the under lug that made reholstering a bit more difficult. We checked gap and bore to chamber alignment prior to shooting and found it in spec.

The cylinder latch is full size and is pressed forward to swing out the cylinder. The cylinder locks in place at the rear and in the front via a pin that protrudes into the ejector rod. The end of the ejector rod was knurled. Frame-to-crane fit was good, as was the side plate fitted on the right side of the revolver. There was only a slight wiggle in the cylinder. Lock up was tight. The trigger was wide and smooth. The hammer spur was large, with plenty of toothy checkering for a sure grip. The firing pin is housed in the hammer like old-school revolvers, and the Rossi uses a hammer-stop internal safety. The trigger needs to be fully to the rear to allow the hammer and firing pin to fire a round.

Going hot, we found the trigger in DA mode required 11 pounds of finger pressure to work back and then fall. The pull weight, however, seemed less, due to the fact the trigger pull was smooth with nearly no stacking. In accuracy testing, the best five-shot group measured 1.3 inches with the Armscor 357 Magnum loaded with a 158-grain FMJ bullet. The average accuracy was 2 to 2.5 inches and is fine for self-defense situations. In the speed-shooting phase of the test, the Rossi showed less muzzle rise than



The crane of the Colt (left) and Rossi (middle) mate with the frame, while the crane of the RIA (right) mates inside the cylinder window similar to a Ruger LCR/LCRx.



The Uncle Mike's Inside-The-Pant holster worked fine with all three revolvers. It offers fast attachment, though you need two hands to reholster since the thin nylon mouth of the holster closes when the revolver is drawn.



We tested with an assortment of 357 Mag, 38 Special +P and 38 Special ammo. We also like the Tuff Products QuickStrip speed loaders, which allow you to load two rounds at a time. The strips also lay flat in a pocket.

COLT KING COBRA KCOBRA-SB3BB 357 MAGNUM, $838

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

The King Cobra shares a lot with the new Cobra except this is a 357 Magnum powerhouse. The revolver offers good performance with the 3-inch barrel and is well made. Concealed carrying this revolver takes a bit of effort since it is longer and bit heavier.



Action Type ..... Revolver, DA/SA
Overall Length ..... 8.0 in.
Barrel Length ..... 3.0 in.
Sight Radius ..... 4.35 in.
Overall Height ..... 5.0 in.
Maximum Width ..... 1.4 in.
Weight Unloaded ..... 28 oz.
Weight Loaded ..... 28.9 oz.

Cylinder Gap ..... 0.003 in.
Capacity 6
Frame Finish ..... Matte stainless
Barrel/Cylinder Finish ..... Matte stainless
Frame Front Strap Height ..... 2.0 in.
Frame Back Strap Height ..... 3.1 in.
Grip ..... Hogue Overmolded, textured finger grooves, rubber
Grip Thickness (max) ..... 1.2 in.
Grip Circumference (max) ..... 5.1 in.
Front Sight ..... Brass bead post, removable
Rear Sight ..... Fixed notch
Trigger Pull Weight (DA) ..... 8.6 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight (SA) ..... 3.5 lbs.
Trigger Span (DA) ..... 3.2 in.
Trigger Span (SA) ..... 2.7 in.
Safety ..... Transfer bar
Warranty ..... None written
Telephone ..... (800) 962-2658
Website ..... Colt.com
Made In ..... USA



Lock up with the crane and frame was tight. We would have like the trigger to be slightly wider, but it sufficed.



The recoil shield allows the user to easily determine if a chamber is loaded or has an empty shell. We like being able to see the rear of the cartridge as it allows the user to easily align a chamber with the firing pin.



The rear sight groove was adequate, but we would have preferred a slight cut out at the rear to reduce glare.



The Colt had a deep crown at the muzzle. Note the front sight can be replaced. We liked the rounded edge of the under lug since it made holstering easier.

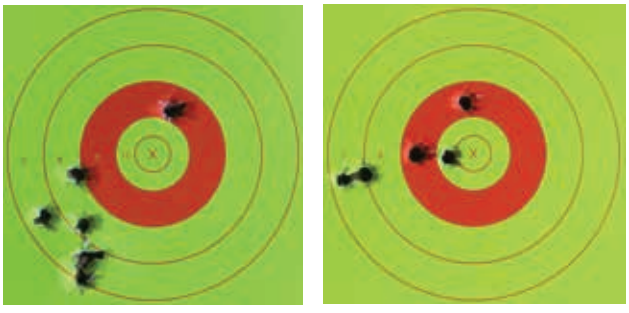
ROCK ISLAND ARMORY AL3.0 357 MAGNUM, $504

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

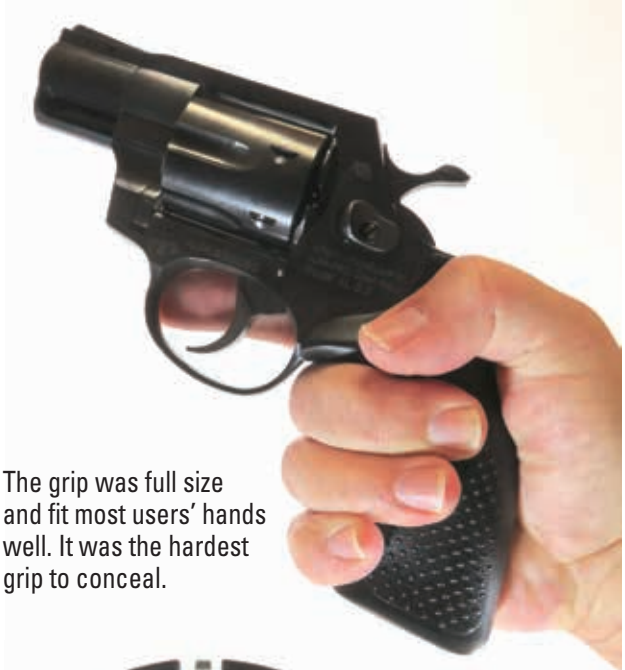
There was a lot to like with the AL3.0—price, accuracy, shooting comfort. Not a beautiful revolver for sure, but it did provide performance. It took some effort to carry it concealed.



Action Type	Revolver, DA/SA
Overall Length	6.75 in.
Barrel Length	2.0 in.
Sight Radius	3.90 in.
Overall Height	4.09 in.
Maximum Width	1.50 in.
Weight Unloaded	32.1 oz.
Weight Loaded	35.6 oz.
Cylinder Gap	0.004 in.
Capacity	6
Frame Finish	Blued
Barrel/Cylinder Finish	Blued
Frame Front Strap Height	2.3 in.
Frame Back Strap Height	3.3 in.
Grip	Rubber, textured finger grooves rubber
Grip Thickness (max)	1.25 in.
Grip Circumference (max)	5.12 in.
Front Sight	Serrated ramp, removable
Rear Sight	Fixed notch
Trigger Pull Weight (DA)	11.56 lbs.
Trigger Pull Weight (SA)	4.03 lbs.
Trigger Span (DA)	3.30 in.
Trigger Span (SA)	2.92 in.
Safety	Transfer bar
Warranty	Limited lifetime
Telephone	(775) 537-1444
Website	Armscor.com
Made In	Czech Republic (imported by RIA)



Left: This group from the AL3.0 is with Armscor 357 Magnum ammo loaded with a 158-grain FMJs. Right: This group from the AL3.0 is with Armscor 357 Magnum ammo loaded with a 158-grain FMJs.



The grip was full size and fit most users' hands well. It was the hardest grip to conceal.



The rear-sight groove was adequate, but we would have preferred a slight cut out at the rear to reduce glare.



From the operator's view, the RIA provided a good sight picture.

the other revolvers. The weight of the Rossi helps with felt recoil. With 38 Special ammo, the Rossi is a pussycat to shoot; with hotter 357 Magnums, it is very tolerable, making the Rossi the most comfortable revolver to shoot with hot loads. We did note in the data that the velocity and energy were less than the Colt with the longer barrel. The Rossi's numbers were a bit higher than the RIA's numbers. Empties were easily ejected and with no issues.

The 971 VRC was carried in a nylon Uncle Mike's Inside the Pant holster. This revolver does make its presence known compared to light-weight aluminum-framed 357 revolvers. That's part of the trade off with these heavier revolvers: more comfortable to shoot, less comfortable to carry.

Our Team Said: The 971 VRC is a low-cost alternative to a more expensive and new 357 Magnum. Though accuracy was not stellar, it was good enough for self defense. We liked the ported barrel's ability to help keep us on target and the great trigger. If you find one in good condition, this could make a good self-defense revolver.

Colt King Cobra KCOBRA-SB3BB 357 Magnum, $838

The new King Cobra is different from the original King Cobra models made from 1986 through 1992. Unlike the original King Cobras, which were closer in size and proportion to a Smith & Wesson L-frame, the new model is lighter and more concealable. It also has fixed sights; original King Cobra revolvers had an adjustable rear sight. Our sample wore a semi-bright stainless finish, which we thought was well executed. The trigger guard is flat on the bottom edge and gives the revolver a distinct look.

The King Cobra shares many parts with the new Cobra, including its internal lockwork, grip and sights. It uses a leaf mainspring design, which is better than the coil-spring arrangement found on vintage King Cobras. The DA trigger exhibited no stacking effect and was very smooth and consistent. Pull weight was just over 8 pounds, which we liked. The trigger was narrow and smooth. We would have preferred



From the rear you can see difference in grip size. The RIA (left) is the largest, the Rossi (middle) the smallest, and the Colt (right) in between.

the trigger to be a bit wider. The hammer spur was narrow and as wide as the hammer. The serrations on the spur worked well. The King's hammer was easy to cock, with no slippage. The firing pin is captive in the frame. The internal safety is a transfer-bar system, so the trigger needs to be fully rearward to allow the hammer to hit the transfer bar, which then hits the firing pin.

The barrel is one-piece, machined from stainless steel, with a deeply recessed crown at the muzzle. The top side of the barrel is milled flat. It features



We concealed-carry all three revolvers appendix style and found them comfortable to wear. We needed a bulky cover garment to hide the large grips. From left are the Colt, the RIA, and the Rossi.

a full lug that adds weight, which is a check in the pro column when it comes to recoil, but also a check in con column because it adds weight. The front of the barrel and lug were rounded to aid reholstering, and the barrel was nicely mated to the frame with all smooth edges. The front-sight post is pinned in place and wears a brass bead. The rear sight is a groove milled in the topstrap. The top side is also bead blasted for a matte finish. We felt these sights were well suited for the intended purpose of self defense. The sights were large as well as smooth and snag free, which is also appropriate in a concealed-carry weapon.

The grip is a one-piece Hogue Overmolded model with finger grooves, a pebbled texture and round butt. In our opinion, this grip was good for concealed carry and helped with recoil. All of our fingers had space on the grip and didn't leave our pinky finger dangling.

The cylinder latch is pulled back to swing out the cylinder, the opposite of an S&W-style revolver. Also note that the cylinder rotates clockwise, or into the frame. A S&W and the Rossi and RIA rotate counter clockwise. This is important to remember when trying to line up a specific chamber with the firing pin. The Colt's cylinder locked only in the rear. The ejector rod was knurled. The crane was tightly mated to the frame, and there was only slight wiggle in the cylinder. We did note the recoil plate allowed the user to see if a chamber was loaded or had an empty case. We like this feature, especially when you want to align a certain chamber.

In our opinion, the Hogue grip with finger grooves and crisp SA trigger allowed us to shoot the King Cobra accurately. Our best five-shot group measured 1.2 inches and was fired with SIG 38 Special +P ammo loaded with a 125-grain JHP. The grip also helped to dissipate recoil in the palm of the hand. With 38 Special and 357 Magnum ammunition, our average groups measured 1.9 and 1.8 inches, respectively. As mentioned, we saw an 11- to 17-percent increase in velocity and energy with the King's longer 3-inch barrel. We also found carrying the King took more effort, and it wasn't as easily concealable due to length. In DA mode and using a two-hand grip, we found the revolver was easy to control, even with a bit of flip and recoil with magnum loads. We had no issues shucking empty brass.

Our Team Said: The King Cobra performed well and would be our choice of these revolvers tested if price were not an issue. We liked the sights and trigger, which helped us shoot the King Cobra well. The King Cobra offers better ballistic performance due to the longer barrel, but that is at the cost of a larger package that is less easy to carry concealed.

Rock Island Armory AL3.0 357 Magnum, $504

RIA imports the AL3.0 from Alpha Proj in the Czech Republic. We tested a target variant of one these revolvers years ago and it failed miserably.







Top: The flat spring is the secret to the smooth, consistent and non-stacking trigger pull on the Colt. The Rossi (middle) and RIA (bottom) both use a coil spring, which causes a bit of stacking — increasing resistance — in DA trigger mode.

Our expectations were not high, but we test with an open mind. The finish on the RIA was suspect. The frame wore a blue/black color, but when the light hit it just right, it looked like a plum color. The crane specifically had a plum color. Not the best finish, in our opinion.

The rubber grip is full size with finger grooves and a pebble finish and a palm swell. We liked these grips because it made the RIA more comfortable to shoot. It also made the revolver more difficult to conceal.

The 2-inch two-piece barrel features a full lug and enclosed the ejector rod. The edges on the lug are sharp, and we'd prefer more rounded edges for ease when holstering. The edge in the cut out for the ejector rod was sharp, too. The barrel assembly uses a barrel and steel barrel sleeve, similar to how S&W builds some of its revolvers. There is a slight crown on the muzzle. The front ramp sight is serrated and pinned in place. The rear sight is a groove milled in the top strap. The serrations on the ramp front sight really cut sun glare.

The cylinder latch is similar to an S&W. Push is forward to swing out the cylinder. The latch itself was serrated yet smoothn with a lip that provided leverage when pushing it forward. There are, however, big differences between the RIA and the Rossi and other S&W-like revolvers. What is different about the RIA is the way the crane mates with the frame. The RIA's crane mates to the front side of the cylinder window, similar to a Ruger LCR or LCRx. It does not mate to the side of the frame like the Rossi, Colt, or an S&W. The cylinder only locks in the rear via a pin. The ejector rod is smooth. Also different is the ejector. It uses six nubs or peg-like protrusions for cylinder rotation. As the hand comes up during SA cocking or DA trigger pull, the hand connects under the nub to rotate the cylinder. Typical revolvers use a flat spiral type of protrusion. No doubt these design features cost less to manufacture the revolver. The cylinder rotates counter clockwise. The chambers are countersunk. The recoil plate is nearly to the outer edge of the cylinder, so it is difficult see if a chamber has a case in it or if it is loaded.

The trigger was wide and finely serrated. The hammer spur was wide and offered grippy serrations for cocking back the hammer. The internal safety system is a transfer bar, which means the trigger must be fully rearward for the hammer to hit the transfer bar and then the firing pin. The firing pin is mounted in the frame.

Going hot, we were surprised at the accuracy of the AL3.0. It shot circles around the Rossi and Colt. Our best five-shot group measured 0.9 inches with the hot Armscor 357 Mag ammo loaded with a 158-grain FMJs. With the 38 Special Hornady load and the 38 Special +P SIG load, the average five-shot groups measured 1.5 and 1.8 inches, respectively. In hand, the AL3.0 is hefty. At 35.6 ounces loaded, this revolver's weight helps reduce felt recoil. Between the full grip and heavy weight, it made the AL3.0 comfortable to shoot even with hot magnum loads. For speed shooting, the RIA allowed us to stay on target and manage recoil.



The QuickStrike speed loaders allow the user to load two rounds at a time. Just insert the rounds in the chamber and peel the strip from the cartridges.



The RIA used six pegs in the ejector star, which is different than most other revolvers. This no doubt cuts manufacturing costs.

We did encounter a slight bit of stacking with the RIA, and, overall, the trigger pull was fairly smooth and consistent. Stacking occurs when firing a revolver in DA mode. The user can feel extra resistance as the trigger is pulled through a full DA stroke. This is caused by the coiled mainspring compressing. The DA pull took over 11 pounds, and it felt like it. We would have preferred a lighter DA pull. SA pull required only 4 pounds, and that was more acceptable for accurate shooting.

The ejector-rod stroke on the AL3.0 is not long enough to fully eject empties, so remember to use a gravity assist. We had no issues discharging brass.

Our Team Said: The AL3.0 had really good accuracy. We appreciated the weight and full grip when shooting invigorating magnum loads. The weight and full grip make it harder to conceal carry, but in our opinion, this could make a good mid-priced wheelgun for home defense. We dinged it half a grade due to the inconsistent finish.

Special thanks to Eastern Outfitters (EasternOutfitter.com) of Hampstead, NC, for their assistance.

Written and photographed by Robert Sadowski, using evaluations from GUN TESTS *team testers.* GT

Kydex and Leather Holsters

We closely examine products from Tulster, Werkz, Galco, Alien Gear, Blade Tech, JM Custom, Nelson, Jeffrey Custom Leather, DM Bullard, and Lobo Gun Leather to find the right carry fit.

Recently, a reader suggested a realistic test of holsters. A holster test that met GUN TESTS criteria would have to be extensive. While we have worn holsters extensively, drawn from concealed carry, and subjected holsters to sweat, oil and solvents, the reader suggested we go further. He felt that a test should include extensive drawing from concealed carry and checking the respective handguns for finish wear. This meant a number of both leather and Kydex holsters should be tested. These holsters would be custom-grade tightly molded holsters with a good balance of speed and access. The holsters would be worn by the raters for weeks at a minimum, and the holsters would be subject to 500 total draws.

This isn't a harsh standard. Most martial artists feel that a minimum of 500 repetitions is necessary for any movement to build confidence and speed without fumbling. One of our raters has written for *Black Belt* magazine and has a lifelong pursuit of martial arts under his belt. He felt that this is a rigorous but reasonable standard before deployment of a concealed-carry-holster-and-handgun combination. We suspect very few shooters would follow this regimen. The raters found that 50 draws could be tiring with any of the holsters, and the maximum effort seemed to be 70 draws in one outing.



While most holsters will release the handgun if shaken, the Alien Gear design is reasonably secure. There is little to hang onto with the Bond Arms pistol.

When a new shooter or trainee begins discussing concealed carry, we offer the best qualified advice we are able. One piece of advice is that you really need two guns, a large and a small handgun, if you live in a true four-season climate. Even in warm Florida, you probably need to have a smaller gun for under the shirt or in the trousers. Another piece of advice is that a holster is a great modifier of handgun size if properly designed. A larger handgun may be carried concealed in a good holster with the proper geometry. The holster must keep the handgun secure and angled properly for a sharp presentation from concealed carry. The holsters chosen must pass this criteria.

We chose seven leather and seven Kydex holsters for the test, although two of the holsters are actually hybrids, a blending of leather and Kydex. While the difference between leather and Kydex is of prime importance in this evaluation, we also rated the handgun holsters based on speed and security. The regimen included raters wearing the holsters concealed and drawing from each holster 500 times. We also rated the holsters based on speed access and retention. While weapons wear is a concern if the piece is too valuable to allow it to wear, leave it in the safe. Working handguns are tools, not safe queens.

After the test, the raters had a good discussion concerning



This Taurus 1911 Commander picked up Kydex shavings from a tightly molded holster. The forward cocking serrations are sharp. The concealed-carry shooter should note this issue as part of his or her evaluation of the scabbard. With enough presentations, of course, the pistol will shape the holster.

Kydex and leather. There are strong adherents to either. In the end, the leather holsters were more comfortable when worn long term against the body. On the other hand, Kydex holsters offer a sharp draw and good retention and are not likely to lose their shape. There are things that may be done with Kydex that would be difficult or impossible with leather. These include adding the appendix-style foot to the Werkz holster, and also adding a removeable magazine pouch to a holster. On the other hand, the DM Bullard Bodyguard–type holster crafted for the heavy single-action revolver would not come out well at all in Kydex, we feel. For concealed-carry purposes, the hybrid type with a Kydex shell and leather backing seems to be the best of both worlds, with a strong Kydex component married to a leather backing for comfort.

As for handgun wear, we feel neutral on this subject. The raters have long-serving handguns that exhibit some muzzle wear from use, but for the most part these are blued guns. We feel that modern finishes will exhibit little wear

in the long term, particularly stainless-steel finishes. Either type should serve well. We do feel that appendix holsters, based on our tests, should be Kydex. A strong-side IWB worn close to the kidney over the right pocket should be leather or have a leather backing. One of our raters actually had light bruising after wearing Kydex for a month over the hip. This did not occur in the appendix position. Appendix carry demands a rigid holster without rollout, hence the Kydex recommendation. Here's how each holster performed in more detail.

Tulster AIWB, $60

Available from Tulster.com, we also tested the Tulster ECHO magazine carrier $35. The Tulster holster is made of Kydex, a thermoplastic resin that allows the holster to keep its shape indefinitely with excellent resistance to oil, water, and solvents. The holster delivered was molded for the Glock 17 9mm. The belt clip was angled in an ideal cant for appendix carry. One of the raters has experienced back problems and was very interested in exploring appendix carry, so he did the majority of testing with the appendix-style holster and draw. The belt clip was sturdy and took a good bite of the belt. The retention screw was adjustable for a good, tight ride or a little less tension for a easier draw. The draw was sharp. The holster rode comfortably. When the handgun was holstered, there was an audible *snick* as the muzzle was secured. The handgun was tugged free in a clean draw. The balance of speed and retention in this holster was good to excellent.



The Tulster Appendix holster and magazine carrier are good choices for concealed carry. The Tulster holster is well molded, with a good fit to the firearm.

We also tested the Tulster magazine carrier and found it to be tactically sound and secure on the belt. This unique carrier allowed tension adjustment on the magazine. The carrier was properly designed for use in conjunction with an Appendix Draw holster. During the rest program we deployed a well-used Glock 17 9mm. There was slight muzzle wear on the piece toward the top of the beveled end of the muzzle from years of use. After 500 draws and some six weeks of wear, the Glock demonstrated no further wear. We had guessed that the Glock, already worn a bit, would show considerably more wear after this test. It did not.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (HOLSTER)
GUN TESTS GRADE: A (CARRIER)

Werkz M6 AIWB, $50

Available from Werkz.com, the Werkz IWB offers good features, including a special foot that prevents rollout in appendix carry. Rollout is a typical problem that results in the gun handle rolling out away from the body. If this foot is unscrewed and removed, the holster is well suited to typical IWB carry. The holster fit the Glock 45 9mm. One rater experimented with the AIWB carry, but he carried the holster primarily as a standard IWB holster, over the right hip. The Tulster with its angle was better suited to AIWB as tested, while the Werkz was better suited to IWB for the individual raters. The Werkz was useful for either carry. The Werkz holster offers good retention



The Werkz holster is an excellent, well molded choice for all-round concealed carry. Note the attached and removeable foot (arrow) for stabilizing the holster in appendix carry.

adjustment and an excellent draw. The holster's design offers a trim package well suited to concealed carry. There was no discernible wear on the new-condition Glock 45 after it had ridden in the Werkz during the test program.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Werkz Bisect, $95

The Bisect is the most expensive Kydex holster tested. As such, it should have good features. It did. The Bisect as delivered features a belt bumper that serves as an anti-rollout device, the same as the foot on other holsters. This one is located neatly under the belt attachment. For behind-the-hip carry as a standard IWB, the bumper may be removed. The holster is supplied with a magazine pouch. When used in the AIWB position, the addition of a magazine carrier makes good tactical sense. Magazine deployment is easier than carrying the magazine carrier on the non-dominant-hand side. The belt attachments feature liberal adjustment range for AIWB or IWB carry at different cants. There was also adjustment for the ride above

The Werkz Bisect is a credible choice for concealed carry.



Below, note the magazine carrier (arrow). We liked the option of having a magazine carrier attached to the holster.



Below, the Bisect features a stabilizing foot (arrow) for concealed carry built into the belt loop.



or below the belt. We liked this holster a great deal after extensive use. It was well designed and a good fit for the Taurus 1911 45 Commander used during the test. While a closed bottom is a sign of quality with a leather holster, Kydex gear should be open at the bottom to make cleaning easier. (Concealed-carry leather holsters are short when the bottom is open as well.) Material in the holster may grind into the handgun's finish, so Kydex should be cleaned occasionally. You simply wash the holster out with soap and water and allow it to dry. As for wear, after 500 presentations from concealed carry, the Taurus showed some wear on the muzzle area, which seems to be the primary contact point for this holster. The Taurus uses an inexpensive matte finish, and mileage on the finish may vary according to the firearm. During the initial 100 draws, the pistol was covered around the forward cocking serrations area by shavings as a result of the cocking serrations digging into the Kydex. This also happens with leather holsters. There really is little to be done, but there is a chance the material could invade the handgun and cause a hang-up. This was cleaned off from time to time and disappeared after perhaps 125 presentations.

If you delete the magazine carrier, the holster costs $30 less. Because you need a spare magazine carrier, this gets the Bisect into a much better value when all is considered. We rated the holster down a half grade based on its fit with the forward cocking serrations.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

Galco King Tuk Classic, $37

We ordered this product from MidwayUSA.com, but we saw a range of prices for this holster, ranging from the least expensive, as noted above, to shops asking $76 for the King Tut Classic. The weighted average of a dozen sites was $48. So shop around. This holster was ordered for the Springfield XDs 3.3-inch 40 Smith & Wesson. The holster showed good fit and retention. The Kydex holster component is only part of the holster's construction, however, with the backing of supple black-finished steer hide. We liked the hybrid-style holster for its comfort. However, the foot print is larger in width than competing styles such as the Galco Triton. Just the same the primary advantage is comfort. The steerhide holster against the body is definitely a plus. Retention was good. While we do not like to count on body compression as a part of retention, the soft steerhide component allows body mass to press against the handgun. This makes for good retention. The King Tuk is a tuckable and may be completely concealed beneath a tucked-in shirt, given reasonable care. One of the raters visited hot and humid Louisiana while wearing the King Tuk Classic/Springfield combination and found it to work well. The treated steerhide did not turn dark and discolor in what the rater described as June summer seat and profuse perspiration. He also made 500 draws, but not from the tuckable position. They were done in a standard IWB-type carry to let the test proceed at a more reasonable rate. After the draws, the pistol showed some wear on



Galco's tuckable King Tuk Classic holster features a hard Kydex component attached to steerhide. Galco's steerhide backing on a Kydex holsters makes for comfortable carry.

Below, Alien Gear offers a well-designed holster for a hard-to-holster handgun, the Bond Arms Bullpup, which has a short slide. Bottom, note simple adjustments of the Alien Gear holster.





the top of the slide near the front sight, reasonable for this type of testing. We find the King Tuk to be a good design well worth its price.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Alien Gear Cloak Tuk IWB, $39

This holster was ordered from AlienGearHolsters.com for the Boberg 9mm pistol. which is the primogenitor of the Bond Arms Bullpup 9mm we were using. Our concerns were not as much for the holster as for the pistol itself. The Bond Arms pistol features a trigger guard well ahead of the usual position and a relatively short muzzle area. We wondered if a holster of conventional design could offer sufficient retention. As it turns out — it certainly does. Retention isn't a problem. The holster holds the pistol in a good angle for a draw, and while the belt attachments are adjustable, we did not have to adjust the loops during the test program but instead concentrated on the pistol's retention and draw speed.

This is a tuckable, and it works nicely with the shirt tucked in. Just the same, we did not draw more than a time or two from the tucked position. Ripping the shirt up and out and then drawing is slower and also adds much more time when you are executing a 500-draw regimen. The Alien Gear holster featured a synthetic backing that was comfortable and should repel perspiration well. The holster was easy to draw from and did not lose its rigidity.

The Bond Arms stainless slide showed no wear marks. When the pistol and holster were turned upside down, the pistol did not slide from the holster, but it could be shaken free with some effort. There simply isn't much to hang onto in the case of the short-slide Bullpup. We rated the combination down a half grade based on this.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

DM Bullard Bodyguard Standard, $295

Available from DMBullard.com, the Bodyguard holster offers an alternative to the IWB for those who cannot tolerate inside-the-waistband carry, and who may wear a holster under a pulled-out sport shirt. A straight cant belt holster would present a tall holster, while the Bodyguard angles the handgun across the belt. The draw is at a severe angle, but not nearly as severe as the small-of-the-back holster, as an example. The Bodyguard as tested was ordered in hippo hide, a legal material and very difficult to obtain at times. Thus its high price. Regular leather designs run $85. This tester's normal wear is a single-action Ruger in 44 Magnum or 45 Colt, although he may use a 45 Auto at times. The Bodyguard does an excellent job of carrying the big guns comfortably, with the weight well distributed across the belt line rather than hanging in one place and dragging down. The draw isn't as fast as the Combat holsters offered by the same maker, or an Avenger type, but the holster succeeds at canting the handgun to an extent that a larger handgun is concealable. There really isn't a Kydex alternative we have been able to find that equals the Bodyguard.

The angle is such that 20 draws were the limit for real speed before the tester tired. We found the draw passable, especially when the holster was worn under a heavy but unbuttoned jacket, and the primary advantage of this holster is better comfort with a heavy handgun compared to almost any other holster, in our experience. After the test was completed, there was no finish wear at all on the Ruger Bisley blue steel Vaquero. The inside of the holster was slightly polished, but no wear was apparent.



This DM Bullard hippo-hide Bodyguard model was the most expensive holster tested, but we would expect similar performance from DM Bullard's standard leather holster. The back of the DM Bullard hippo-hide holster is thick saddle leather. This is a surprisingly comfortable rig, even when carrying a heavy handgun.



We would probably recommend the standard-grade holster at $85 rather than the custom piece, but the hippo is nice if you are flush. It seems impervious to wear.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Blade Tech Classic OWB, $80

Ordered from BladeTech.com, the Classic OWB is primarily a competition-suitable holster. As such, it is designed with a speed cut out (which also neatly accommodates a pistol with optics) and a natural draw angle. The holster is very fast. Retention was good to excellent. The holster offered a rigid lock on the belt by means of a supplied Tek Lok device. The Classic was filled with a well-used Glock 9mm. Of the holsters tested, the Classic OWB offered the speediest draw and was the least tiring to execute draw after draw. However, the offset of the holster from the body isn't designed for concealed carry. Just the same, this holster has many applications in practical range use and competition. There was no discernible wear on the handgun and no shaving of material from the holster.







Top: The Blade Tech holster tested is designed primarily for competition use. Middle: Note Blade Tech's Tek Lok belt attachment. Bottom: Blade Tech's speed cut and Tek Lok are good features for easy use.





The Jeffrey Custom Leather Body Guard Avenger-type holster cinches the belt tightly to the holster, making the holster ride close to the body.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Jeffrey Custom Leather Body Guard, $119

Available from the company website JeffreyCustomLeather.com, the Body Guard is referred to as an Avenger-type holster, or improved Avenger. This appears to be a simpler holster than the Professional, but it also requires considerable handwork and stitching. The Body Guard is tightly molded with a holstering welt to prevent the holster mouth from collapsing, and it has a sweat guard to protect the shooter's body from being gouged by the sharp edges of the handgun, and also to protect the handgun from corrosive perspiration. While the holster is molded on both sides of the body, the rear tunnel loop cinches the holster tight against the body for a tight ride. In executing 500 draws from this holster with a Taurus 1911 Commander, we noticed some finish wear after, and while no bare metal showed through, the finish was definitely different in appearance.

The Body Guard is a good holster with a good balance of speed and retention. We liked the Professional (reviewed below) better by vote. The Avenger is more compact, and it is more about individual choice. The Taurus Commander also shaved leather off the interior of this holster, resulting in a half-grade demerit for the combination, but it wasn't as severe as the Kydex holster.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-





The Jeffrey Custom Leather Professional features excellent fit and finish and superb stitching. Molding, blocking, and stitching are executed properly as well. The rear of the holster is compact to allow good concealment.

Jeffrey Custom Leather Professional, $119

The Professional features a tightly molded body that is double stitched for rigidity. There is no backing; the Professional is molded from a single piece of leather. The back is flat, and the molding is all on the front. This is what the maker calls a Roman arch effect, in which the strength of the holster eliminates the holster collapsing, despite the fact that there is no holstering welt. A retention screw near the trigger guard controls tension. The belt loops are angled for a forward cant. There is a sweat guard, a requisite, in our opinion, for close-body carry. The holster

was delivered to fit the Government Model 1911. The first 20 or so draws from leather were very tight, and the holster exhibited a good balance of speed and retention after 100 draws. Simply wearing the holster is also part of the break in. There was no discernible finish wear on the slide of the pistol involved in the testing. We find the Jeffrey Custom Leather Professional and excellent all around concealed carry holster.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Nelson Holsters Stealth, $120

Found at Nelsonholsters.com, the Stealth is a fairly complex holster with several layers of design. The holster body is stitched onto a leather backing. The backing then features neoprene that rides against the body for comfort. The neoprene backing isn't glued on to the holster, but is rather stitched on. The result is a holster with plenty of rigidity and one which offers a good, sharp draw from concealed carry. The dual belt loops help to spread the weight of a handgun about the body. A reinforced welt on the holster body keeps the holster mouth from collapsing. This holster isn't lined but is waxed on the inside surface. This holster, molded for the Glock 19, was also a good fit for the Glock 45 9mm. Wear on the long bearing surfaces of the handgun tested was minimal to nonexistent. Despite being tested with a new model handgun with forward cocking serrations, there were no instances of material shaved from the holster despite our torquing the handgun from side to side.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

JM Custom Kydex IWB3, $55

We wanted to test at least one Kydex holster molded for a revolver, here a 4-inch-barrel Ruger GP100. This is a big handgun to carry, and its weight and bulk would be a good test for the type. We think that many shooters regard the Kydex holster as a modern design for polymer-frame handguns. The Kydex type, if properly designed, has advantages for the revolver. As an example, the revolver IWB needs to keep the cylinder bulge above the belt line or the holster may fold on itself and make the draw difficult. The IWB3 features a rigid and very well molded body that will not collapse. It offers a non-collapsible pocket for the revolver cylinder. While the revolver bulge is a problem and it will never conceal as neatly as a





The Nelson Holsters IWB is among the most comfortable and well crafted holsters we have tested. Neoprene backing is a trademark of the brand.





The JM Custom Kydex holster does a good job of concealing and carrying a heavy revolver. It is well molded for the individual handgun without excess material. Note how JM Custom Kydex handles the dual belt loops and cylinder bulge.

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flat autopistol, the revolver handle offers a fast, sharp draw. The IWB3 features dual belt loops set far back enough to aid in concealment and offer retention. It even offers a sweat guard, an unusual feature on revolver holsters.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Lobo Gun Leather Offset Belt Clip IWB, $70

This inside-the-waistband holster, available at LoboGunLeather.com, is of conventional construction in some ways, with excellent molding, a good fit, and a reinforced holster mouth. The offset belt clip is an aid in moving the belt clip from the area of the revolver cylinder. The rear clip is also larger than most, heavily sewn onto the holster body, and manufactured of strong spring steel. We used a nickel-plated Smith & Wesson Model 13 357 Magnum. The Offset Belt Clip holster was tight to begin with and, like many quality leather

Lobo Gun Leather Offset Belt Clip IWB



holsters, demands a break-in period. After 50 presentations, the draw was quite sharp. Retention is excellent. While nickel finish is often considered more durable than bluing, nickel will crack and peel and sometimes shows brush marks and discoloration with wear. There was no wear after 500 draws with this combination. This holster is possibly the best IWB/Revolver holster we have tested.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Written and photographed by Gun Tests *staff.* **GT**

COMING UP IN GUN TESTS

- Bargain Hunter: Used scatterguns for home defense. Tested were the Winchester 1200 Defender, $225; Winchester SXP Marine Defender , $255; Iver Johnson Champion, $50; and the Remington 870 Magnum, $275.

- Single-Action Rimfire Revolver Shoot-out: Tested are the Chiappa 1873, Heritage Rough Rider, Ruger Wrangler, and Traditions Rawhide Rancher.

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