GUN TESTS®

THE CONSUMER RESOURCE FOR THE SERIOUS SHOOTER

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PRICIER 1911 HANDGUNS: WE TEST FIVE

Tested: Guncrafter Commander, Nighthawk Custom Falcon, Springfield Loaded Operator PX9105LL, Dan Wesson 1911 Heritage RZ-45, and a Devil Dog Arms 4.25 Standard. Winners on... ● Page 6



350 LEGEND RIFLES

Is this new straightwall deer cartridge a flash in the pan or part of the future? To find out, we shot it in three new rifles from Ruger, Savage, and Winchester and learned that it isn't all that accurate. ● Page 18

Value Guide: Bolt-Action Rifles — page 27





GALCO'S FASTRAX PAC

Your body may need a break from having a gun rubbing on it, and this bag offers a way to still carry concealed. Also, we take a look at Galco's Switchback ambidextrous holster.
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DOWNRANGE

HARD TO ARGUE



Todd Woodard

The Second Amendment Foundation (SAF) said recently that if state agencies and officials around the country who are responsible for issuing concealed-carry licenses or permits are not taking new applications because of the COVID-19 outbreak, they should not arrest people for carrying without a license/permit in the state.

"We've received reports that some agencies are using the coronavirus outbreak as an excuse for suspending the concealed-carry application process," said SAF founder and Executive Vice President Alan M. Gottlieb. "The Constitution shouldn't be put on hold because of the coronavirus." At GUN TESTS, we heartily agree.

SAF has been involved in several legal actions across the country stemming from the coronavirus pandemic. Two of those cases, which have been favorably resolved, involved gun-permit applications.

"The right to bear arms," Gottlieb said, "translates to the right to carry, and like other rights protected by the Constitution, that right is not limited to the confines of one's home. Ever since the SAF victory in *McDonald v. City of Chicago* 10 years ago, the Second Amendment has been incorporated to the states via the 14th Amendment. A lot of people apparently have forgotten that, but we haven't. You cannot suspend a constitutionally guaranteed fundamental right, especially in times of emergency.

"The past few months have seen a significant increase in the number of new gun owners," he noted. "Many, if not most, of those new owners bought firearms for personal protection, and not just in the home. Where state law requires a license or permit to carry concealed in public, issuing agencies cannot be allowed to arbitrarily stop that process, using the coronavirus outbreak as the reason.

"If a sheriff's or police department is not accepting carry license applications," Gottlieb said, "they should not arrest someone for carrying without a license."

Also, while it's disappointing that the U.S. Supreme Court has mooted the New York State Rifle & Pistol Association's challenge of a now-defunct handgun law in the City of New York, there is a possibility for an important Second Amendment ruling coming from one of four cases now pending before the high court, SAF says.

The four SAF cases already submitted to the high court are *Rodriguez v. City of San Jose*; *Pena v. Cid*, *Culp v. Madigan* and *Mance v. Barr*. Let's hope one advances to the high court sooner rather than later and hardens the effects of *Heller* and *McDonald*. Obviously, further rulings are necessary to stop infringements of our rights. **GT**

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A Second on What Women Want

In a carry handgun, that is. Also, Reader Don wonders about the value of hand strength as it pertains to better shooting, and how much strength is enough? And, the glories of the Garand for defense.

Re "Firing Line," June 2020

I second the letter on women over 50 looking for a good carry weapon! As I read the letter, I was like, check, check, check! I'm 51. I've had a permit for more than 20 years. I've owned a CZ 75 P01 9mm for many years, and it's an excellent weapon, but I'm looking to downsize. I've carried IWB at small of my back, and carried in various places around my body using a Gun Goddess Hip Hugger Holster [illustrated below]. I'm



interested in staying in a 9mm, single stack, like the CZ, but want to go smaller and lighter. My top interests include ease of slide operation and a balance between weight and recoil. I appreciate you including retraction effort in your reviews. I do not have great hand strength.

I read with great interest the October 2019 write-up of small 9s, and I liked the looks of the Beretta APX Carry, plus it's made locally, one county away from where I live. I would like to see a test of a similar-sized guns from Springfield and SIG. I rented an M&P Shield last year, but I didn't really care for it, and it was still a little too big.

I am also trying to decide if I want a safety or not? The CZ does not have a safety, but it has a rather strong decocker with an exposed hammer, and I've always felt safe carrying it that way. I'm unfamiliar with the Beretta set up (striker



block safety? trigger safety? Never had those). I really need help deciding — COVID interrupted my shopping! I'm hoping to see some pistols soon get restocked in my local gun stores.

Thanks for considering this point of view in testing some additional carry pistols in the near future. I can't wait to see what you find. I really appreciate the work you all put into testing. **— Ann**

Hey Ann: Thanks for your comments. I'll see what we can get going with some small 9mms, including offerings from Springfield and SIG if they match up. — Todd Woodard

Read the post by Vincent on "Women of a Certain Age Carry." I've been an RSO and instructor to "The Well Armed Women" chapter in my town since they started five or six years ago. I would venture to say that a large percentage of the ladies are over that magic number of 50. Like all new shooters, everybody needs help and training

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.

in safe use of a weapon. I think our chapter has helped them find the correct handgun by letting them try ones that the chapter president and husbands have, along with the RSOs. We show them techniques for racking a weapon if it is too much for them, but prefer they select models that are more easily racked. With our "try before you buy" of our personal collections, they usually wind up happy. We also have classes on cleaning and maintenance and give them lessons on the types of weapons and various types of ammo. I've even held classes where I had most handgun rounds and rifle rounds in component state (shell, brass, powder) where they could get some idea on what makes them go boom.

We have women firing everything from 22 LR up to 45s and wheelguns in 38 Special/357 Magnum. Really wouldn't want to tick off the majority of these ladies upset. I am guilty of trying to ween the better shooters off their inexpensive 380 ACPs and 9mms that kick a tad by letting them try my SIG P238 and P938, which have less recoil and are more accurate. **— Dr. Fred**

This sounds like an awesome program. Congrats to you and the other local gun owners who help female shooters get lined up with the right guns for them. You've hit on the only effective way to choose a personal firearm, and that is to handle and shoot it. — tw

Re "Shooting Garand-Based M1 And M1A Rifles Head to Head," June 2020

Congrats on finding and testing a Federal Ordnance "Tanker" Garand. In early 1992, the "assault weapon" ban was looming (it passed in 1994.) I saw the Garand as the next premier self-defense rifle. It had none of the Evil Three features: a detachable magazine, a pistol grip, or a threaded muzzle. Plus it's reliable, powerful, and common, meaning there's lots of spare and aftermarket parts as well as expertise on how to outfit them. So I ordered one in 308 Win. from the LSG in early 1992 and never regretted it. Having shot an M1 Garand in High Power competition, it was a natural and a candidate for the perfect truck gun. In Ohio, it's illegal to have a rifle and loaded magazines in your vehicle. But the Garand's en bloc clips are okay.



Unable to find a Bell and Carlson synthetic stock, I replaced the wood with a Ramline unit. After years of use, I've had no problems and no issues with dents, etc. I added an Olangapo Outfitters stock-mounted clip pouch to carry two loaded en bloc clips, securing it on the QD sling mount. Plus, the "tanker" responded to all the standard accurizing procedures as match Garands. Installing my match-tuned trigger group gave me a beautiful, crisp 4.5-pound trigger. (The Garand was retired from competition when the AR-15 became a viable platform.)

However, test-firing the "tanker" at dusk revealed a large fireball with both M80 ball and soft-point reloads. A buddy's in 30-06 (USGI surplus) was a bit more intense. Replacing the gas cylinder lock with a Smith Enterprise Garand muzzle brake eliminated the low-light muzzle fireball. OK, it made the gun about 2 inches longer, but I find the extra length unnoticeable and the brake does not affect handling. I was lucky — my SE muzzle brake hand-tightened to about 5:30 and needed just a light tap to snug it properly at the 6 o'clock position. (The SE muzzle brake may require fitting.) A quick check revealed the muzzle brake and barrel were aligned correctly. Done.

I did not need to open up the peep sight. The shorter length of pull put my eye closer to the peep, thus making the hole appear larger. For truly fast work, I would open it a bit. But for everyday or hunting use, it's fine as is.

However, I intended to make this a Tanker Scout. Unfortunately, neither the Amega nor Ultimak mounts would fit without extensive machine work. The 308 barrels (at least the early ones) Federal Ordnance installed were very thick under the rear handguard. Not sure about the 30-06.

Bottom line: A "tanker" Garand gives up little to today's MSRs and, at least for some of us, is the perfect truck and/or house gun. Remember, time has been kind to us, but the next MSR ban is just an election away. **— Tony**

There's a lot to recommend folks buying and shooting M1As. The platform continues to improve, even though its military service life concluded decades ago. — tw

Dear Mr. Woodard

I am behind on reading GUN TESTS. I have had to read 22 books so far this year for various reasons, besides my normal work as an editor. So these comments are way slow coming to you. I just have to say your articles this year are superb. The history on the 308 rifles in April, the history on the 1911 in May, they are just interesting and useful to me. All of that info is so good and well presented. And I am just starting the 1911 article this morning. I hope to catch up to June by the end of the week or so. The article on shoulder holsters is so useful, and I am not even interested in buying one. But the helpful info on hitting the gun on tables, the gun sagging forward when you lean over, all of that and all the rest helps me understand all carrying problems better and helps me think of ways to solve

IWB problems that I do have. It also helps me answer questions much more fully when my kids or friends ask me what I think of the options. And I always tell people where so much of what I have learned came from — GUN TESTS.

One of my sons just took out a subscription before he made purchases. He wanted to see all the back tests after I started telling him about your tests, that you fail guns, that we needed to check the reviews. He couldn't wait for me to get done with work to look in the archive, so he subscribed. I hope others have subscribed as well. You are running a very good ship, and I make serious efforts to spread word-of-mouth advertising for you.

One article suggestion, and this may take some serious effort and expense. Could you compare accuracy shooting trainings from the different schools of thought, and tell us what you think of each? I have been to Front Sight in Nevada twice for their handgun defensive course. I cannot tell you how much that improved my shooting, to look at the front sight, and I think the isometric tension idea works, but if you have to shoot one-handed, you can't really do the tension. I have read articles about stance that say different things. I would love to see a comparison article of stances, grips, posture, sighting, and pulling the trigger. I would like this comparison on rifles and shotguns too, so maybe this is a three-article suggestion.

For example, on the grip. I heard about a pro pistol shooter here in Utah, not a champion but top 10, who had 90 pounds of grip strength. I know another shooter who was a college champion rifle shooter who was so strong he would kill a deer, clean it, then take the front legs in one hand, the back legs in the other, and just pick up the deer, set it on his shoulders, and carry it out that way, no matter how far. He backpacked with 60 to 90 pounds on long deep hikes into the Uintas and Windrivers. I shook hands with Billy Casper once, a pro golfer here in Utah, a champion and very successful. I thought he could squeeze blood out of the end of my fingers if he wanted to. Do all champions need grip like that?

When I met Casper, I could do 10 chin-ups easily; 10 pushups on my fingers (I was 6 foot, 200 pounds); hauled hay all day by hand, probably 500 tons a year, lifted it onto the trailer, then onto the stack, and then onto the sleigh to feed in winter; pounded all nails with hammers; shoveled all manure, grain, and snow with a shovel, not a loader; and split all wood and cut most posts with an ax, a few with a hand saw. We did everything by hand on our farm in Idaho. We even bored most holes in wood with a brace and bit, not a power drill. But I had only a 60-pound grip, and I could not have squeezed anything as hard as Casper. Does grip strength matter for champions? Is strength more important than isometric tension? How much?

I hope this makes sense. But I again especially want to compliment you on the content: simply superb stuff. **— Don**

Thank you for the kind words. Offhand, I can't think of a sport, with or without firearms, that can't be improved with specific "strength" factors, even smallbore rifle prone or air pistol. We'll discuss the articles. — tw

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Pricier 1911 Handguns: We Test Five from $1.1K to $3.6K

45 ACP semi-autos tested: Guncrafter Commander, Nighthawk Custom Falcon, Springfield Loaded Operator PX9105LL, Dan Wesson 1911 Heritage RZ-45, and a Devil Dog Arms 4.25 Standard.

Among the most enduring handguns is the 1911 designed by John Browning and built by Colt in its original form. The 1911 was subjected to service tests that no handgun of the time could have endured and continued to function. After the initial production, the 1911 has been subjected to incremental improvements in material, features, and performance. It has also been copied cheaply in poor material, but that isn't what we are looking at today. The original improved 1911A1 became the template for later gains, and between the world wars, Camp Perry and the National Matches demanded further refinement in the 1911. For generations, the Colt was upgraded by custom gunsmiths, with better accuracy being the primary goal. During the 1960s, largely led by Colonel Jeff Cooper, folks began to customize the 1911 into a superior defensive handgun. Features such as high-visibility sights and the speed safety we take for granted today were developed during this time. Many of these handguns were the basis for factory production guns that came later. Sights, such as the early King's Hardballer versions, were replaced by Heinie and Novak designs.

Companies began collecting good features on newer 1911s, and Kimber rocked the 1911 world by introducing a factory handgun with many pluses that customers wanted. Springfield followed with the Loaded Model. These handguns were similar to what custom gunsmiths offered as package guns. To expedite custom orders, gunsmiths offered several levels of upgrades in packages, including sights, a trigger job, a custom safety, and perhaps frontstrap checkering. Other upgrades, such as ball cuts and forward cocking serrations, were more expensive and were included in the high-end packages. Any deviation or extra work resulted in more charges. These package orders resulted in less wait time and less expense.

Then came factory high-grade customs such as







From the least expensive to the most expensive pistol tested here, there is a span of some $2245. But the gap in performance was not so wide. Top: We feel that the Springfield Loaded Operator PX9105LL, $1162, is comparable in performance to handguns costing twice as much, and it's a Best Buy. Middle: The Devil Dog Arms 4.25 Standard, $1150, is an excellent choice for concealed carry. Bottom: The Dan Wesson 1911 Heritage RZ-45, $1227, is a good pistol, if not our favorite.





Left: The Guncrafter Commander, $3285, and Nighthawk Custom Falcon, $3699, right, have unimpeachable quality. These small-scale makers have taken the chore of making the kind of handgun a few are willing to pay for and then setting the price. They do well, and many of the handgunners who purchase these handguns trust them for personal defense, carrying them on a daily basis. We don't see how they could be made appreciably less expensive and maintain the same features and quality. If you are flush with funds, the Guncrafter Commander is Our Pick, but it was a close call. The Nighthawk will please the most discerning 1911 fan as well.

the Wilson Combat handgun. This is a custom-grade piece but it is also a production pistol, making it more affordable. Les Baer is another. The pistols feature high-end sights and controls and excellent trigger jobs, as well as superior fitting. When a handgun is held to tight tolerances, the pistol will be accurate, and it will also exhibit less eccentric wear in the long run. No slop, no room for error, and less wear. While there has been a race to the cheapest 1911 handgun, there has also been a race to make the best 1911 handgun. The trend toward plastic and MIM parts, as well as castings, has not been met well by those demanding the finest handguns. A pistol made of forged bar stock is going to be expensive.

In this evaluation, the custom guns tested are intended for an accomplished shooter who understands the difference in quality and who will be able to get the Nth degree of performance from his 1911. Those who pay through the nose for this type of handgun may be kin to those who appreciate the finest stereos and vehicle performance or who build a '40 Ford with all-new suspension and running gear. As one rater noted, he has been on thousand-mile trips in a Jeep, a Corvette, and a Hyundai. All of the vehicles got him to the destination, but the experience was quite different. When you ask for something out of the ordinary, the price is usually high.

We picked a quintet of 45 ACPs with price points varying by as much as $2000 and evaluated them as concealed-carry choices. For this use, shooters will have definite preferences as to what they like, with chambering and form factor being two of the biggest restrictions. So our test guns are all 45 ACPs, and we had three full-size (5-inch barrel, ~8.6-inch OAL) 1911s and two Commander-length handguns (4.25-inch barrel, ~7.75-inch OAL). Our full-size handguns were the *Dan Wesson 1911 Heritage RZ-45 01981, $1227;* the *Nighthawk Custom Falcon, $3699;* and *Springfield Armory's Loaded Operator PX9105LL, $1162.* The two Commander-size firearms were the *Guncrafter Commander, $3285,* and *Devil Dog Arms's 4.25 Standard, $1150.*

How We Tested

For this test we expended more ammunition than usual, firing 320 cartridges in each gun during the combat firing stage before setting down to the 25-yard accuracy testing. As we closed on the top performer, we sometimes came back and fired again, so the total round count was even larger for the top handguns. During the combat firing phase, we used primarily the Black Hills Ammunition 200-grain LSWC. This isn't a light target-grade load, but neither is it quite full power, making it a very accurate loading. Two hundred of these were expended in each handgun. We also fired 60 rounds of the Black Hills Ammunition 135-grain Honey Badger in each handgun, and finally 40 rounds of the Hornady Custom 230-grain XTP +P. We also fired 20 rounds of Gorilla Ammunition 230-grain JHPs to test feed reliability of a blunt-nose all-copper JHP in a final wrap-up. This made for a good mix of target, personal defense, and +P loads to check practical accuracy and function. We shot rapid-fire drills at 7, 10, and 15 yards, and fired from a solid braced benchrest at 25 yards and 50 yards, firing one magazine in each pistol at this extended range. During the benchrest firing, we used three loads for accuracy. These were the Fiocchi 200-grain XTP, the Hornady 230-grain XTP +P, and the Speer 230-grain Gold Dot. We used the magazines issued by the maker with the handgun and added four eight-round Mec-Gar, four Wilson Combat eight-round magazines,

DAN WESSON 1911 HERITAGE RZ-45 01981 45 ACP, $1227

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The Dan Wesson Heritage offers good fit and finish and outstanding accuracy. We rated it down for a couple of break-in malfunctions. While understandable, the other 1911 handguns tested did not have break-in problems. The Heritage is a good example of a 1911, priced right for the quality.



Action Type.....Short recoil-operated locked breech, single action
Overall Length.....8.6 in.
Overall Height.....5.5 in.
Maximum Width.....1.25 in.
Weight Unloaded.....39.0 oz.
Weight Loaded.....44.0 oz.

Slide Material.....Forged Steel
Slide Retraction Effort.....18.0 lbs.
Receiver Material.....Steel
Finish.....Stainless
Front Strap Height.....2.6 in.
Back Strap Height.....3.2 in.
Barrel Length.....5.0 in.
Grip Thickness Max.....1.25 in.
Grip Circumference.....5.2 in.
Magazines.....Two 8 round
Rear Sight.....Fixed drift-adjustable Novak type
Front Sight.....Dovetailed post with tritium insert
Sight Radius.....6.4 in.
Trigger Pull Weight.....5.5 lbs.
Trigger Span.....2.8 in.
Safeties.....Slide lock, grip
Warranty.....Five years
Telephone.....(607) 336-1174
Website.....DanWessonFirearms.com
Made In.....USA

NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM FALCON 45 ACP, $3699

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

An excellent production/custom grade handgun. The Nighthawk is very smooth, the finish is excellent, and the combat ability was judged the best of the test. The pistol's accuracy cannot be faulted. It takes a very good shot to make the most of this handgun.



Action Type.....Short recoil-operated locked breech, single action
Overall Length.....8.6 in.
Overall Height.....5.5 in.
Max. Width.....1.25 in.
Weight Unloaded.....38.8 oz.
Weight Loaded.....43.8 oz.

Slide Material.....Forged Steel
Slide Retraction Effort.....19.0 lbs.
Receiver.....Steel
Finish.....Black Nitride
Front Strap Height.....2.6 in.
Back Strap Height.....3.2 in.
Barrel Length.....5.0 in.
Grip Thickness Max.....1.25 in.
Grip Circumference.....5.2 in.
Magazines.....Two 8 round
Rear Sight.....Heinie Straight Eight Ledge
Front Sight.....Tritium Insert
Sight Radius.....6.51 in.
Trigger Pull Weight.....4.2 lbs.
Trigger Span.....2.8 in.
Safety.....Slide lock safety/grip safety
Warranty.....None written
Telephone.....(870) 423-4867
Website.....NighthawkCustom.com
Made In.....USA

SPRINGFIELD LOADED OPERATOR PX9105LL 45 ACP, $1162

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (BEST BUY)

The Operator designation identifies a pistol as a handgun with a light rail. There are several Operators, some more expensive. This Springfield Operator provided a reliable platform with excellent practical accuracy. If you need a personal-defense handgun rather than a show piece, this is the trick. It will take years of training and practice to get all the performance it offers.



Action Type.....Short recoil-operated locked breech, single action
Overall Length.....8.5 in.
Overall Height.....5.5 in.
Max. Width.....1.25 in.
Weight Unloaded.....40.0 oz.
Weight Loaded.....45.0 oz.
Slide Material.....Forged steel
Slide Retraction Effort.....20.5 lbs.
Receiver Material.....Casting
Finish.....Stainless steel
Front Strap Height.....2.6 in.
Back Strap Height.....3.2 in.
Barrel Length.....5.0 in.
Grip Thickness Max.....1.25 in.
Grip Circumference.....5.2 in.
Magazines.....Two 8 round
Rear Sight.....Drift-adj. Novak w/tritium two-dot inserts
Front Sight.....Dovetailed post with tritium insert
Sight Radius.....6.4 in.
Trigger Pull Weight.....4.9 lbs.
Trigger Span.....2.8 in.
Safety.....Slide lock, grip
Warranty.....Limited lifetime
Telephone.....(309) 944-5631
Website.....Springfield-Armory.com
Made In.....USA

and several Colt eight-round magazines to see if the different mags had any effects on function.

Dan Wesson 1911 Heritage RZ-45 01981 45 ACP, $1227

This was a recent price at BudsGunShop.com, but the SKU is showing out of stock as we went to press. The company website shows it was discontinued in 2019. The Dan Wesson Heritage is a stainless steel Government-Model-size handgun. The pistol is well made of good material, and it's free from the billboard-size markings on the slide some of us do not care for. The slide features a raised rib with serrations. The pistol features excellent Novak-style sights. The front post contains a tritium dot; the rear sight is simply black. The pistol's speed safety is well designed and seemed to be the largest and therefore easiest to operate quickly. The beavertail grip safety properly releases its hold on the trigger about halfway into compression. A word on the beavertail safety: Some folks have no problem hitting the grip safety quickly, but some who use the popular thumbs-forward grip may find the palm forms a pocket that allows the grip safety to rise and deactivate the trigger. A beavertail grip safety with a memory bump cures this problem and funnels the grip properly, raising the hand and lowering the bore axis. We liked the Dan Wesson design. All of the pistols were equal as regards grip-safety design, with no clear preference. All controls featured a positive detent. Trigger compression is a crisp 5.5 pounds with the Heritage 1911. The trigger cannot be faulted, but it is also the heaviest of the test, according to the Lyman electronic trigger-pull gauge. The pistol does not have frontstrap checkering. The grips are austere for this type of handgun, a simple rubberized Hogue product. The Heritage is supplied with two eight-round magazines.

During the initial firing stage, the Heritage suffered a single failure to extract and a single short cycle in the first 50 rounds with the 200-grain LSWC loading. After these problems, there were no further malfunctions. Notably, these were the only malfunctions of any type during the test program in any of the handguns, save for a failure to lock open on the last shot with the Devil Dog handgun. The Dan Wesson pistol handled well. Recoil was not pronounced even with the +P loadings. Steel-frame 1911 45s are not a problem with standard loads. The controls were crisp and magazine changes were easily carried out. After the combat test, each handgun was carefully cleaned, lubricated, and checked for eccentric wear before firing for accuracy. The Heritage 1911 was none the worse for wear. The Dan Wesson Heritage turned in several 2.0-inch groups.

Our Team Said: The pistol is a good choice for most shooters, and while Dan Wesson terms it an entry-level handgun, it is as

DEVIL DOG ARMS 4.25 STANDARD DDA-425-B045 45 ACP, $1150

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The Devil Dog 4.25 Standard features a distinctive look and credible performance. The Devil Dog is big on features, such as forward cocking serrations and a pleasing 22-lpi frontstrap treatment. Of this set of five, this gun makes the most sense for real-world concealed carry.



Action Type.....Short recoil-operated locked breech, single action
Overall Length.....7.75 in.
Overall Height.....5.5 in.
Max. Width.....1.25 in.
Weight Unloaded.....35.0 oz.
Weight Loaded.....39.4 oz.
Slide Material.....Forged steel, domestic 4140 barstock
Slide Retraction Effort.....19.0 lbs.
Receiver Material.....Cast steel
Finish.....Black oxide
Front Strap Height.....2.6 in.
Back Strap Height.....3.2 in.
Barrel Length.....4.25 in., 1:16 LH twist
Grip Thickness Max......1.25 in.
Grip Circumference.....5.37 in.
Magazines.....Two 8 round
Rear Sight.....Fixed drift-adjustable Kensight
Front Sight.....Dovetailed post
Sight Radius.....5.7 in.
Trigger Pull Weight.....4.75 lbs.
Trigger Span.....2.8 in.
Safeties.....Slide lock, grip
Warranty.....Limited lifetime
Telephone.....(855) 433-2767
Website.....DevilDogArms.com
Made In.....USA

GUNCRAFTER COMMANDER GCI-COMM-RAIL-45-FCB-FCSS-AMBI 45 ACP, $3285

GUN TESTS GRADE: A (OUR PICK)

The monolithic slide and light rail frame of Guncrafter's "gun with no name" make it a uniquely crafted 1911. The fitting is excellent, the sights are ideal for combat, and the trigger is superb.



Action Type.....Short recoil-operated locked breech, single action
Overall Length.....7.75 in.
Overall Height.....5.6 in.
Maximum Width.....1.4 in.
Weight Unloaded.....36 oz.
Weight Loaded.....40.4 oz.
Slide Material.....Forged steel
Slide Retraction Effort.....17.0 lbs.
Receiver Material.....Steel
Finish.....Matte blue
Front Strap Height.....2.6 in.
Back Strap Height.....3.2 in.
Barrel Length.....4.25 in.
Grip Thickness Maximum.....1.3 in.
Grip Circumference.....5.4 in.
Magazines.....Two 8 round
Rear Sight.....Fixed Heinie-type tritium dot
Front Sight.....Dovetailed post with tritium dot
Sight Radius.....5.8 in.
Trigger Pull Weight.....3.5 lbs.
Trigger Span.....2.7 in.
Safety.....Slide lock, grip
Warranty.....Lifetime
Telephone.....(224) 321-5044
Website.....GuncrafterIndustries.com
Made In.....USA

45 ACP RANGE DATA

Fiocchi XTPHP 200-grain 45XTPB25	Dan Wesson 1911 Heritage	Springfield Armory Loaded Operator	Nighthawk Falcon	Devil Dog 4.25 Standard	Guncrafter Commander
Average Velocity	970 fps	954 fps	951 fps	899 fps	922 fps
Muzzle Energy	418 ft.-lbs.	404 ft.-lbs.	402 ft.-lbs.	359 ft.-lbs.	377 ft.-lbs.
Small Group	1.8 in.	2.0 in.	1.5 in.	2.2 in.	1.4 in.
Average Group	2.4 in.	2.5 in.	2.0 in.	2.7 in.	1.8 in.
Hornady Custom 230-grain XTP +P 9096	**Dan Wesson 1911 Heritage**	**Springfield Armory Loaded Operator**	**Nighthawk Falcon**	**Devil Dog 4.25 Standard**	**Guncrafter Commander**
Average Velocity	919 fps	907 fps	903 fps	867 fps	880 fps
Muzzle Energy	431 ft.-lbs.	420 ft.-lbs.	416 ft.-lbs.	384 ft.-lbs.	395 ft.-lbs.
Small Group	2.0 in.	2.2 in.	1.7 in.	2.4 in.	1.6 in.
Average Group	2.4 in.	2.6 in.	2.1 in.	3.0 in.	2.0 in.
Speer Gold Dot Short Barrel 230-grain GDHP 23975GD	**Dan Wesson 1911 Heritage**	**Springfield Armory Loaded Operator**	**Nighthawk Falcon**	**Devil Dog 4.25 Standard**	**Guncrafter Commander**
Average Velocity	855 fps	839 fps	828 fps	810 fps	780 fps
Muzzle Energy	373 ft.-lbs.	359 ft lbs.	350 ft.-lbs.	335 ft.-lbs.	311 ft.-lbs.
Small Group	1.9 in.	1.8 in.	1.6 in.	2.6 in.	1.7 in.
Average Group	2.4 in.	2.4 in.	2.1 in.	3.3 in.	2.0 in.

All groups were fired at 25 yards from a benchrest position using a Bullshooters pistol rest. The chronograph was 10 feet from the muzzle of the firearm. We used a Competition Electronics Pro Chrony to measure velocity.

nice a handgun as most shooters would wish to own. We rated it down a half grade based on the early failures to cycle and extract some test ammo.

Nighthawk Custom Falcon 45 ACP, $3699

This was a recent ordering price direct from NighthawkCustom.com. The Falcon is a 5-inch-barrel Government Model-type 1911 without a frame rail. Among the Nighthawk's features is a mainspring housing and magazine well custom built from tool steel and de-horned to prevent sharp edges. The forward portion of the slide has what Nighthawk calls High Power-type slide cuts. There are three ball-cut grooves in the top of the slide. The sights are Heinie Ledge types with the Straight Eight (stacked dots) tritium night-sight inserts, same as the Guncrafter. The grips are G10 and give the user plenty of adhesion and abrasion and are slightly thinner than some of the other grips tested. Most of the raters liked this design better than some of the thicker grips. The mainspring is checkered at 25 lines per inch (lpi), while the rear of the slide is checkered at 40 lpi to match the rear sight serrations. The barrel crown and smooth recoil spring plug present interesting architecture. The pistol is de-horned for carry use. After all, no matter how expensive these handguns are, each was designed as a personal-defense handgun. The front strap is nicely checkered and features a high cut that lowers the bore axis. The slide stop is nubbed and the frame beveled in the same manner as the Guncrafter. The match-grade barrel features chamber flutes, which may make cleaning easier and are eye catching. The stainless barrel bushing is finger tight. and disassembly isn't difficult. The trigger is very crisp, with a small take up before meeting 4.2 pounds of compression. The Nighthawk is supplied with two Act Mag magazines.



During accuracy testing, we had no trouble with the three loads chosen for benchrest firing.

During the firing test, the Nighthawk never failed to feed, chamber, fire, or eject. Operation was flawless. We really like the sight design the Nighthawk shares with the Guncrafter. The High Power cut in the slide allows racking the slide as you would with forward cocking serrations. Perhaps not as sure, and perhaps that is not the intent, but some of us do not like the looks of forward cocking serrations. The Nighthawk Falcon's performance on the combat firing line was the best of any of the handguns. The Nighthawk simply rained bullets into a tight group. We fired









Top row: Most of the draws with the Dan Wesson Heritage and Springfield Operator were done from a Galco N3 inside-the-waistband holster. Bottom left: In much of the testing with the Nighthawk, we used the Privateer Nomad holster, whose speed is excellent (PrivateerLeather.com). Bottom right: The Guncrafter Commander rides in the Bitterroot IWB holster, which is among the best we have tested.

from standing, firing quickly at close range, and also from a braced barricade at longer ranges. Per our estimation, the Nighthawk Falcon was the most accurate in combat terms in firing off hand. The Guncrafter Industries 45 and the Springfield Loaded Operator were very close in this contest, but the Nighthawk pulled away from them to a larger degree as the target got smaller and the range was further.

Our Team Said: In the Nighthawk we found an exceptional handgun, without compromise, and without fault. The Nighthawk is worth the money, even better if you find one at a lower price.

Springfield Armory Loaded Operator PX9105LL 45 ACP, $1162

This was a recent price at TombstoneTactical.com. When ordering this handgun, a letter makes a difference. The ML pistol is supplied with Pachmayr grips, as an example. That's fine if that is preferred, but our rater ordering the Loaded Operator with G10 grips, or LL. There are several Operators, some more expensive, including the TRP Operator with adjustable sights, the Marine Corps Operator, and the Long Beach (LB) Operator. The Operator designation identifies a pistol as a handgun with a light rail. The Springfield pistol features a nicely applied black Armory Kote finish. It has an ambidextrous slide lock safety, beavertail safety, and the usual Springfield lightweight firing pin and heavy-duty firing-pin spring for drop safety. The slide is tightly fitted. The slide racks more like a TRP than a Loaded Model. The Springfield features Novak sights with three-dot tritium inserts. The pistol is supplied with a magazine well that aids in rapid magazine changes. When the handgun was dissembled, the Armory Kote finish proved to be evenly applied to the inside of the slide and frame.

The pistol features forward cocking serrations. We noted that the transition from the slide to the dust cover features what appears to be a ball end cut rivaling the work on the Nighthawk handgun. The controls are tight and crisp and easily manipulated, with a positive detent. The G10 grips are molded in slightly different patterns forward and to the rear. This makes for good adhesion but also allows easily adjusting the grip. Both adhesion and abrasion are good. Trigger compression was pleasant, with the



The Nighthawk Falcon, left, and the Guncrafter Commander, right, share Heinie-type sights.





The "entry-level" Dan Wesson Heritage has a basic rear blade paired with a single tritium front bead, far right. The rear sight offers a broad notch for good accuracy.



The Springfield Loaded Operator is a businesslike handgun with good features. A combination of features, including Novak sights with tritium inserts, and a well-designed Swenson type ambidextrous safety make for excellent handling.



Of the pistols tested, the Devil Dog is the best suited for concealed carry, in the opinion of most of the raters. The sights, the beavertail grip safety, and the oversize speed safety are good touches for a personal-defense handgun.

trigger breaking at a clean 4.9 pounds. At 40 ounces, this is the heaviest pistol tested, but it also seemed to handle recoil the best. The effort to rack the slide was the greatest. This is a trade off because the recoil spring does a good job with all loads, including +P ammunition, and the pistol locks up tight.

During the firing test, we really liked the sight set-up. The serrated front sight provided an excellent sight picture. Combat accuracy was at least as good as any of the pistols tested for the most part, with the Nighthawk shading the Springfield by a margin. This is impressive considering the price difference. Firing off hand for head shots (often called hostage rescue) was limited to 15 yards, but that is a long shot if you are hitting the cranio-ocular area. The Loaded Operator was very consistent, with good results in trained hands. The pistol did not equal the Nighthawk or the Guncrafter in absolute accuracy, but it was close in practical terms. While none of the pistols tested were dogs, and all were actually very accurate, the Springfield Loaded Operator was the least accurate of the 5-inch-barrel guns in absolute accuracy, it you can criticize a pistol that fired a 1.75-inch group on one occasion!

Our Team Said: After appraising the performance of the Springfield Loaded Operator, we gave it an A rating. Based on the light rail, tactical finish, night sights and good reliability, we also named this pistol a Best Buy.

Guncrafter Industries Commander GCI-COMM-RAIL-45-FCB-FCSS-AMBI 45 ACP, $3285

This is sometimes called the Gun With No Name, as there are no slide markings. We really like the smooth slide treatment. The serrated dished out slide rib is well done. We had elected to test three full-size 1911 handguns, one of them with a rail, and two Commander types, and felt that one should have a rail for comparison. While this isn't an exact comparison, we also wanted to understand what the reader will get for his money. It just happened the Operator series is a good value and has the rail, it also just happened we were able to find a Guncrafter for sale without a long wait. The Guncrafter is a Commander-length handgun delivered with a rail and other custom-grade features. The Guncrafter is a genuinely individual pistol without a clear resemblance to other 1911 handguns save in a general way. Every piece, including the sights and safety levers, are cut from bar-stock steel; there are no cast, MIM, or plastic parts in the Guncrafter.

One of our raters is not only a gunsmith, he has taught at the university level. He felt that the Guncrafter was "out of his weight class" because of its build quality. The fit is tight, very tight. He called the assembly a "grease fit," which the other knowledgeable raters had not heard before. This refers to the fit of the slide to the frame. When the slide is racked, there are no hitches, and you really do not feel the locking lugs locking or unlocking in any significant way. The pistol features a heavy recoil spring. This did not impede function. The slide features an absolute straight line to the muzzle. The cocking serrations are angled properly for a good



Combat accuracy with the Dan Wesson is excellent. Right: Note the nice holes from the semi-wadcutter bullets in the bottom group. Fired offhand, the Dan Wesson was controllable.





The DW's function is reliable, and speed loads are 1911 fast. This is the cleanest design tested, if that matters. There is nothing on the pistol that isn't needed.



Here the youngest rater fires the Devil Dog as a spent case flies overhead. The Devil Dog was among the most popular handguns tested. It is pleasant to fire and use. Right: The shooter, not the gun, is responsible for a bullet outside the excellent rapid-fire group at 7 yards.







Far left: The Guncrafter Commander is a controllable piece in rapid fire due to its steel frame and excellent grip design. Near left: This is a three-round sighting-in group with the Guncrafter at 25 yards.

handfit. The light rail fit properly in the Galco N3 and Stryker holsters on hand for testing. Attention had to be paid to the draw angle with the N3, however. The barrel features a well-done target crown. Though tight, the pistol could be field stripped without a bushing wrench. The ambidextrous safety features a good, crisp fit. The grip safety is a well designed beavertail. We noticed it is more upswept than the others, but all were good designs.

The sights are Heinie types cut from bar stock. The rear design features a pronounced barrier for racking the rear sight on a belt or boot heel if desired. During the test, we used this feature several times. One of our raters noted that it is pretty difficult to rack any handgun with a rear sight, but if you have only one hand available, once you get the magazine loaded, it is easy enough to release the slide by using this sight, racking it on the belt to release the slide. Racking the slide to load the chamber using the rear sight for leverage is much more difficult. The rear face of each sight is nicely serrated. The sights feature a single dot in the front and a single tritium dot in the rear sight. This scheme, sometimes called the 8 ball or Straight Eight, works well. The Nighthawk Falcon is supplied with the same Ledge sights. The front strap checkering is very well done. The mainspring



Above: The Nighthawk Custom Falcon is a brilliantly fast-handling handgun. Note the spent case by the muzzle and one target loosened from the target backer by rapid fire 45 ACP impact.







Top: This rater is a nationally ranked champion. He gave the Springfield Operator a high rating. Middle: We fired fast at short range and also conducted bench-accuracy testing. Bottom: Even those with small hands find the 1911 manageable. The Springfield Loaded Operator is the Best Buy and the most practical workaday handgun, we believe.





Left: The rubber Dan Wesson's Hogue grip panels are okay, but they seemed out of place at this price range. Also, the frontstrap lacked checkering. Right: We liked the Devil Dog's grips. They are fairly thin, which is good for concealed carry, and they leave nothing to be desired for adhesion and abrasion. Its frontstrap checkering is well done and adds to the pistol's combat ability.







Above, left: On the Nighthawk Falcon, a combination of checkering and good grip design make for good adhesion and abrasion for the shooter's hands. Above, right: The Guncrafter's Shredder grips are among the best, perhaps the best, grip designs we have encountered for adhesion and abrasion. Bottom right: The Loaded Operator's black G10 synthetic grips are functionally unbreakable and provide enhanced gun retention and control.

housing is a nicely checkered magazine well. This unit funnels the magazine into the magazine well and makes for excellent speed. We really like the grips.

Notably, four of the five handguns tested feature excellent grip designs — the Dan Wesson rubberized grips are the only exception. The G10 grips are wavy



The DW Heritage is all stainless, so cleaning should be easier. We didn't have to use a bushing wrench to take the gun apart.



We liked the Devil Dog's barrel bushing fit. It is tight but not too tight. The Devil Dog and the Springfield shared forward cocking serrations.



The Nighthawk is expensive, but it exhibits many desirable features. It is well fitted and finished. The Nighthawk wedge-type slide design is a nice touch. The slide ball cuts are well done. A tritium front sight adds to the pistol's utility.



The Guncrafter Commander is well made of bar stock. The slide to barrel fit is excellent. Note the recessed barrel crown.



On the Springfield, we noted that the transition from the slide to the dust cover features what appears to be a ball-end cut, rivaling the work on the Nighthawk handgun.

at the front and feature a scalloped-out portion to address the magazine release. The rear of the grips feature larger raised portions. These Shredder grips are excellent designs. There is no uneven checkering or lines that wander. The uninterrupted pattern of the slide serrations are nicely done. The frame and mainspring housing lines are parallel — there's no slippage and no slop.

The slide-stop-pin treatment is very interesting. Our gunsmith has used a ball end mill to work out the frame then measuring the bevel and filing the slide stop down. The counter-sunk look is appealing. The rationale is that if the finger contacts the slide stop during firing, it may cause a malfunction. If you have attended shooting matches, yes, it happens, but we have never had a malfunction of this manner in testing many 1911 handguns. Just this same, this is a hallmark of a high-end custom handgun. Another hallmark of a high-end 1911 is the trigger action. The Guncrafter pistol has a bit of take-up before the trigger gets tight and then breaks at 3.5 pounds. The slight movement is a good choice for a handgun that may be carried for personal defense. The trigger is arguably the best of the test. The pistol was fired in the combat firing test with good results. The Heinie Ledge sights provide an excellent sight picture. The trigger is excellent as well, and the weight offers balance. Despite the shorter sight radius the Guncrafter was at least comparable to the 5-inch guns during the combat firing tests, besting the others and rivaling the excellent results of the Nighthawk Falcon. In absolute accuracy, the Guncrafter Gun With No Name was the most accurate handgun tested. The most accurate results were a 1.4-inch group with the Fiocchi 200-grain XTPs. While Guncrafter was the most accurate handgun tested from the benchrest, it was not the most accurate in combat firing, by a slight margin.

During the testing, we obtained a new design IWB holster from Bitterroot Gun Leather ($155 at BitterrootGunLeather.com.) This holster is a perfect fit for the Guncrafter rail. The draw is sharp. The holster also features a nice foot that keeps the weight of the handgun off the sciatic nerve.

Our Team Said: After firing the pistol and looking over the results, the Guncrafter 1911 earned a solid A rating.

Devil Dog Arms 4.25 Standard DDA-425-BO45 45 ACP, $1149

This is a recent price at DevilDogArms.com. The Devil Dog Commander 45 is a distinctive handgun. The pistol is manufactured with forward cocking serrations and a flattop slide. The frame is cast, while the slide is forged steel. The flattop slide is attractive in a manner formerly reserved for much more expensive handguns. The pistol is supplied with Kensight sights, which are similar to the Novak in profile. The pistol seems well made. This is the only handgun tested without night sights, which helps it be



We used a good number of magazines during the test with excellent results. Shooters should always check magazines for function before deploying them in self defense.



The TruGlo Tru Brite combat light gave good results on the Springfield. Only the Loaded Operator and the Guncrafter were fitted with rails to accept combat lights and other accessories.



All the guns in this group were capable of exceptional accuracy. Even at 15 yards, we'd be okay with trying a shot in a small window.

the least expensive. The slide-lock safety is well fitted. The beavertail grip safety releases its hold on the trigger about midway into compression, as it should. The trigger is smooth with a clean break at 4.75 pounds. This weight remained constant throughout the test, as we re-checked the trigger-pull weight on our Lyman scale at the end of the test. The Devil Dog pistol is supplied with two Mec-Gar eight-round magazines with base pads.

The front strap is nicely finished with 22-lpi checkering. This checkering, combined with the G10 grips, makes for excellent adhesion and abrasion. Some of the raters thought perhaps the 1911 front-strap angle or bevel had been changed by Devil Dog, but it had not. It simply feels different due to the checkering design. This is a competent treatment we recommend for duty use. A Commander-length handgun is traditionally a 4.25-inch-barrel pistol with a standard barrel bushing. Like the other 1911s, the DD's barrel bushing is tight, but not so tight it demands a tool for field stripping. The Devil Dog pistol is finished in a black-oxide coating.

The testing was begun with the same loads used in the other pistols, and the same regimen. While the Commander kicks more than a Government Model due to its lighter weight, we did not find the pistol uncomfortable to fire during the test. The sights are not up to the Heinie Ledge/Straight Eight standard, but they proved useful even at 100 yards. During the firing stage, we had one inexplicable failure to lock open on the last shot. We are calling this shooter error because we believe the shooter rode the slide lock with a thumb. The pistol gave good results without a single failure to feed, chamber, fire, or eject. The Devil Dog Commander handles well, and there were no complaints with the controls, sights, or trigger.

This is a service-grade handgun costing one third the price of the high-end pistols, and we did not expect match-grade accuracy. As one of the raters noted, the Devil Dog is considerably more accurate than the Colt Series 70 Commander he carries on a daily basis. The Devil Dog was accurate for a Commander 1911 pistol. As an example, the Devil Dog is more accurate than three out of four 45 ACP Commanders we tested in a previous report, but not as accurate as the Desert Eagle 1911 45 tested. We cannot say we struggled with either recoil or accuracy with this handgun. It is the lightest handgun tested; the Guncrafter Industries Commander pistol with its bar-stock parts and light rail and mag well was heavier. In this test, the Devil Dog is the equal of any 1911 Commander we have tested, with flawless reliability. The handling is good. As a carry gun, the Devil Dog is probably the preferred pistol of the test. In combat accuracy and speed to an accurate first shot, the Devil Dog may have led the way out to 7 yards, but after this, the longer-barrel handguns pulled away by a margin, and the superior trigger and sights of the Guncrafter also gave it an advantage.

Our Team Said: In absolute accuracy, the Devil Dog trailed the pack, but it isn't an inaccurate handgun. With groups of 2.4 to 3.25 inches at 75 feet, the pistol is clearly more than accurate enough for personal defense. After three months of testing, we noticed the finish was worn in some areas. This isn't a handgun meant to be a safe queen, but the finish of the other handguns has not worn similarly. We rated the pistol down a half grade on finish wear, but we would buy this handgun.

Written and photographed by Gun Tests *Staff, using evaluations from* Gun Tests *team testers.* **GT**

350 Legend Bolt-Actions from Winchester, Savage, and Ruger

Is this new straightwall deer-hunting cartridge a flash in the pan or part of the future? To find out, we shot it in three new rifles and learned that it isn't particularly accurate, but it is soft shooting.

A relatively new cartridge called the 350 Legend is purported to solve a cartridge problem for some hunters. A number of Midwestern states have long held that, given their high population density, modern, bottle-necked rifle cartridges have too much effective range and are a potential danger to their citizens. For a long time, the only firearms that hunters were allowed to use on deer were shotguns (slugs) and muzzleloaders, neither of which is known for match-quality accuracy. That all began to change in 2014 with new rules for the lower peninsula of Michigan. The new deer-hunting laws allowed straight-wall cartridges between 1.16 inch and 1.80 inch in length when topped with 35-caliber-or-larger bullets. Suddenly, 357 and 44 magnums were legal for hunting, along with the likes of Smith & Wesson 460 and 500 Magnums. The 45-70 also surged in popularity and, with the help of Marlin lever actions, the 444 Marlin came back from near death. More states, such as Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Iowa, and others, joined the party.

These large, straight-walled cartridges may bring extra power, range and accuracy, but they do so at the cost of some fairly stout recoil, not that shotgun slugs are any slouch in that area. Then in 2019, Winchester introduced the 350 Legend cartridge, similar to a 223 that has had the taper of the case blown out and trimmed to a slightly shorter length. But note the case body of the 350 Legend is larger than the 223, according to SAAMI (Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturer's Institute) specs. SAAMI drawings show the maximum width of the 350 Legend at the case head, immediately in front of the extractor grove, to be 0.390 inch. We measured Winchester 145-grain FMJ ammunition, which showed a max diameter of .3865 inch at the same location. Even though the 350 Legend does not have the same body diameter of the 223 Remington, the 350 Legend has a rebated rim that measured 0.374 inch — exactly the same as the





Right, top: We received the Ruger American Ranch Rifle in 350 Legend, inspected it, mounted the Nikon scope and took it to American Shooting Centers and started our test protocol. After firing round 19, we lifted the handle to cycle the bolt, and as we did so, the bolt disassembled itself, and the firing-pin assembly (on the bench) was ejected from the bolt body, which stayed in the action (top arrow). As we examined the bolt, it appeared to us that the cocking piece over-rotated, allowing the bolt to disassemble. The bottom image shows the bolt components together, but not assembled.

223 both at the rim and the case head. That means that it should be very easy to convert your Modern Sporting Rifle to 350 Legend. Perhaps as simple as a barrel and magazine change.

The Winchester website devotes several pages specifically to the 350 Legend cartridge. The site claims the 350 Legend has more energy remaining at 200 yards than the 30-30 Winchester, the 300 Blackout and the 223 Remington using similar, Winchester-produced ammunition for all the tests. Please note that the chart specifies the use of a 16-inch barrel with the 300 Blackout versus a 20-inch barrel for all the rest. It also claims significantly reduced recoil versus the other similar calibers, to the tune of 11% less than a .30-30, 18% less than a .243, and 63% less than a 450 Bushmaster. The possibility of an effective caliber with reduced recoil interests us. In our experience as professional instructors, we have frequently noted the degradation of a shooter's results, whether they be inexperienced or an old salt, as recoil energy increases even in small amounts. In fact, we discussed recoil energy and its effect on young shooters at some length in our December 2019 article on 22-250 rifles. We will model the ballistic numbers on these rifles to determine some of the same energy figures for this piece.

To see which bolt action offers the best performance with this new round, we tested a trio of competitors. The first was a *Winchester XPR Hunter True Timber Strata 535741296*. Our test rifle shipped as a unit with a Vortex 3-9x40 Crossfire II. Bud's Gun Shop (BudsGunShop.com) showed the package price to be selling at $635, with the base rifle going for about $435 at press time. Our second rifle was the *Ruger American Ranch Rifle 26985, $442*. The third rifle tested was *Savage's Model 110 Hog Hunter 57534, $487*.



Ruger American Ranch Rifle 26985, $442



Winchester XPR Hunter True Timber Strata 535741296, $635



Savage Model 110 Hog Hunter 57534, $487

How We Tested

To give you some context about where the ballistic performance of the 350 Legend cartridge falls, we compared the Savage Model 110 with an 18-inch barrel and a Winchester 1894 with an 18-inch barrel, chambered in 30-30 Winchester. We used ballistic

350 LEGEND RANGE DATA

Winchester 145-grain FMJ	**Ruger American Ranch Rifle**	**Winchester XPR**	**Savage 110 Hog Hunter**
Average Velocity	2193 fps	2234 fps	2155 fps
Muzzle Energy	1548 ft.-lbs.	1608 ft.-lbs.	1496 ft.-lbs.
Best Group	2.09 in.	0.95 in.	1.83 in.
Average Group	2.39 in.	2.10 in.	2.03 in.

Winchester 150-grain XP	**Ruger American Ranch Rifle**	**Winchester XPR**	**Savage 110 Hog Hunter**
Average Velocity	2251 fps	2308 fps	2223 fps
Muzzle Energy	1688 ft.-lbs.	1775 ft.-lbs.	1646 ft.-lbs.
Best Group	2.19 in.	1.54 in.	1.01 in.
Average Group	2.42 in.	1.77 in.	1.33 in.

Hornady 170-grain Soft Point	**Ruger American Ranch Rifle**	**Winchester XPR**	**Savage 110 Hog Hunter**
Average Velocity	2211 fps	2250 fps	2212 fps
Muzzle Energy	1847 ft.-lbs.	1911 ft.-lbs.	1847 ft.-lbs.
Best Group	1.98 in.	2.35 in.	0.99 in.
Average Group	2.71 in.	2.57 in.	1.52 in.

All groups were shot at 100 yards from a solid bench using a Caldwell TackDriver front rest ($44 at MidwayUSA.com) and a T.A.B. Gear large rear bag ($30 at TABGear.com) with the heavy fill. Muzzle velocity was determined using a LabRadar chronograph ($559 at BuyMyLabradar.com). Location: American Shooter Centers (AMShootCenters.com) in Houston.

coefficient values from the Hornady website for the company's 170-grain soft-point bullet in 350 Legend, and from the Federal Ammunition site for their 170-grain soft-point round-nosed 30-30 load and plugged the data into the Applied Ballistics Mobile app ($30 on Apple's App Store) and calculated trajectories, assuming a 100-yard zero. At 150 yards, the 350 Legend would drop -2.5 inches compared to the 30-30 Win.'s -2.8-inch drop. At 200 yards, the 350 would fall -8.2 inches compared to the 30-30's -8.7-inch drop. The 350 Legend continued to narrowly outperform the 30-30 at 250 yards (-17.5 inches and -18.1 inches respectively) and 300 yards (-31.1 inches and -31.6 inches respectively).

Obviously, there aren't any great differences in trajectory between the two cartridges, though the 350 Legend does show a slight advantage. Add to that slightly less recoil, plus somewhat greater energy, and the 350 Legend may well turn out to be a cartridge worth considering. Also keep in mind that the 350 Legend is a cartridge easily adapted to a Modern Sporting Rifle platform.

All shooting was done at American Shooting Centers on the west side of Houston. All shots were fired from a well-sandbagged position using a Caldwell TackDriver rear bag and a T.A.B. Gear large/heavy rear bag. Muzzle velocities were measured via LabRadar. We shot multiple five-shot groups using three different types of ammunition from all three rifles. Group size, muzzle velocity, and standard deviation for those velocities, as well as muzzle energy and recoil energy, were tabulated and are found in the accompanying Range Data table.

We used both the Vortex Crossfire II scope provided by Winchester and a Nikon Black Force 100 1-6x24. The Vortex had an obvious magnification advantage over the Nikon, so we limited the magnification used in our shooting to 6x to keep things even. The reticles were also a factor. The Vortex scope mounted on the Winchester had a good set of crosshairs, while the Nikon used a 2-minute-of-angle dot. With the dot and a true 1x minimum power setting, the Nikon would quite likely be the quicker of the two scopes to find a target, while the Vortex should allow slightly more precise aiming. We tried very hard to use the 12 o'clock edge of the Nikon's dot in order to aim as precisely as possible. Both scopes were attached to the rifles using Picatinny rails and Warne rings. Overall, our team thought that any of the three rifles would make great hog guns as well as great deer rifles anywhere you need a straight-wall cartridge to hunt or where you are working in close quarters. Here's what we found in more detail:

Ruger American Ranch Rifle 26985 350 Legend, $442

We hear all kinds of stories about the torture tests to which gun writers purportedly subject their

RUGER AMERICAN RANCH RIFLE 26985 350 LEGEND, $442

GUN TESTS GRADE: F/B+

Our first sample failed when the bolt disassembled itself. The replacement rifle worked great, but wasn't as accurate as we would have hoped.



Action	Bolt
Overall Length	36.5 in.
Barrel	16.5 in. long, 1:16 twist
Overall Height w/o Scope Mount	6.0 in.
Weight Unloaded	6.0 lbs.
Weight Loaded (145 grain, 5+1 rounds)	6.5 lbs.
Sight Radius	N/A
Action Finish	Matte blue
Barrel Finish	Matte blue
Magazine Capacity	5
Magazine Type	Detachable box
Stock	Synthetic
Drop at Comb	0.62 in.
Drop at Heel	0.62 in.
Bedding	Power bedding
Buttplate	Soft rubber recoil pad
Length of Pull	13.8 in.
Receiver Scope-Base Pattern	Ruger
Trigger Pull Weight	4.3 lbs.
Safety	2-position tang
Warranty	None given
Telephone	(336) 949-5200
Website	Ruger.com
Made In	USA, North Carolina

WINCHESTER XPR HUNTER TRUE TIMBER STRATA 535741296 350 LEGEND, $635

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

The Winchester XPR is a full-length rifle that looked great and handled well; we dropped off half a grade for its just-average accuracy.



Action	Bolt
Overall Length	42.25 in.
Barrel	22 in. long, 1:16 twist
Overall Height w/o Scope Mount	6.3 in.
Weight Unloaded	6.75 lbs.
Weight Loaded (145 grain, 4+1 rounds)	7.0 lbs.
Sight Radius	N/A
Action Finish	Permacote flat dark earth
Barrel Finish	Permacote flat dark earth
Magazine Capacity	4
Magazine Type	Detachable box
Stock	Synthetic, True Timber Strata finish
Drop at Comb	0.5 in.
Drop at Heel	0.75 in.
Bedding	None
Buttplate	Inflex 1 recoil pad, small
Length of Pull	13.25 in.
Receiver Scope-Base Pattern	Short action Winchester
Trigger Pull Weight	3.3 lbs.
Safety	2-position sliding safety with bolt release
Warranty	None
Telephone	(800) 333-3288
Website	WinchesterGuns.com
Made In	Portugal

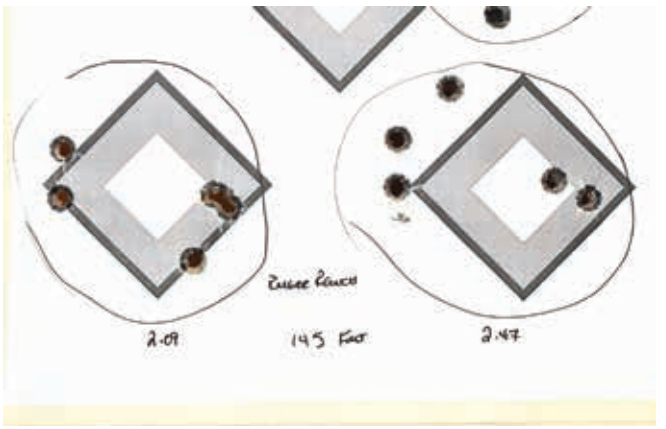
SAVAGE MODEL 110 HOG HUNTER 57534 350 LEGEND, $487

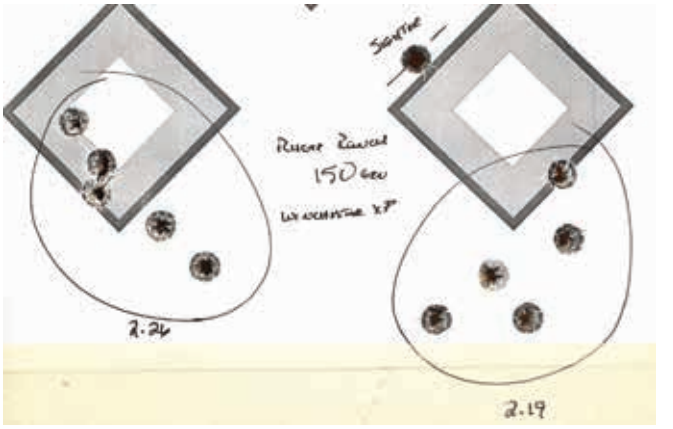
GUN TESTS GRADE: A (OUR PICK)

This rifle has a compact size with a short, stiff, accurate barrel and a great trigger. Its affordable price makes it a good value for the hunter who needs a straight-wall chambering.

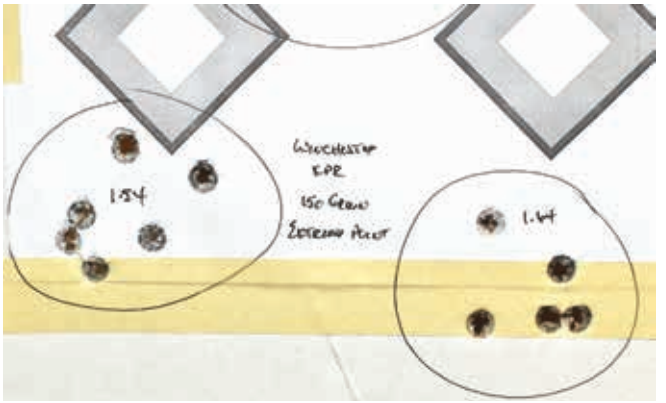


Action	Bolt
Overall Length	38.1 in.
Barrel	18 in. long; 1:16 twist
Overall Height w/o Scope Mount	5.8 in.
Weight Unloaded	7.1 lbs.
Weight Loaded (145 grain, 4+1 rounds)	7.3 lbs.
Sight Radius	10.7 in.
Action Finish	Matte black
Barrel Finish	Matte black
Magazine Capacity	4
Magazine Type	Detachable box
Stock	Synthetic
Drop at Comb	0.5 in.
Drop at Heel	0.62 in.
Bedding	None
Buttplate	Recoil pad
Length of Pull	13.75 in.
Receiver Scope-Base Pattern	Savage Model 10 short action
Trigger Pull Weight	2.7 lbs.
Safety	3-position tang
Warranty	1 year for original owner
Telephone	(800) 370-0708
Website	SavageArms.com
Made In	USA, Massachusetts



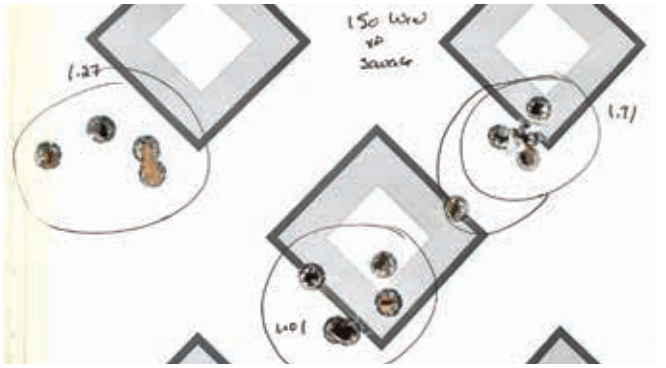


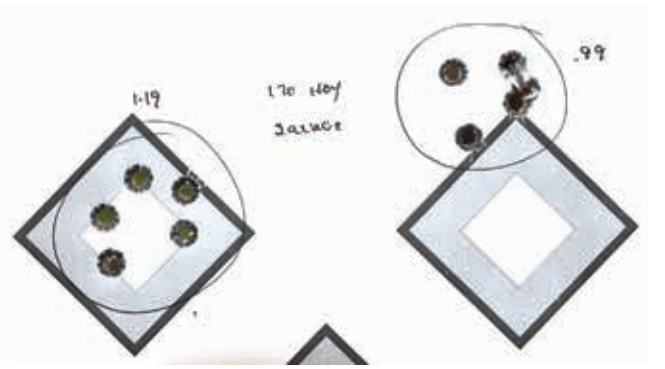
Here are some representative groups the replacement Ruger rifle shot with the Winchester 145-grain FMJs, left, and the Winchester 150-grain XPs, right. Average group size for the 145s is 2.39 inches and 2.42 inches for the 150s. The Hornady 170-grains were worse at 2.71 inches. This accuracy knocked the gun's grade down a notch.



Left: The XPR preferred the Winchester 150-grain XPs. Below left to right are the Winchester 145-grain FMJs, the Winchester polymer-tip XPs, and the Hornady 170-grain soft points.







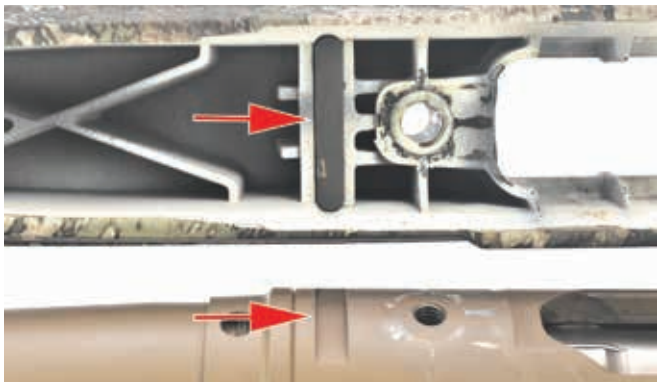
Above left: The Savage 110 Hog Hunter did okay with the Winchester 150-grain XPs, shooting a best group of 1.01 inches (bottom group). The average group size for the ammunition was 1.33 inches. Above right, the Hornady 170-grains were best in the Savage at an average of 1.52 inches. These were two pretty-good efforts in achieving that best-of-test average, with a 1.19 on the left and a 0.99-inch group on the right.

test samples. We don't. We inspect them when they first arrive for fit, form and function, lubricate them properly, take photos as needed and head to the range. We also need to know if they are going to function properly. That means, while not trying to cause malfunctions, we give them every opportunity to do so.

We received the Ruger Ranch Rifle in 350 Legend, inspected it, mounted the Nikon scope and took it to American Shooting Centers. Using Winchester 350 Legend 145-grain full-metal-jacket target ammo, we sighted it in at 100 yards and started our test protocol. Recoil was very mild. Bolt throw was a little rough in the beginning, but that is not that uncommon. Accuracy was only fair, which surprised us a bit. After firing round 19, we lifted the handle to cycle the bolt, eject the spent round, and chamber another. As we did so, the bolt disassembled itself, and the firing-pin assembly was ejected from the bolt body. Spring pressure was minimal, so there was never any

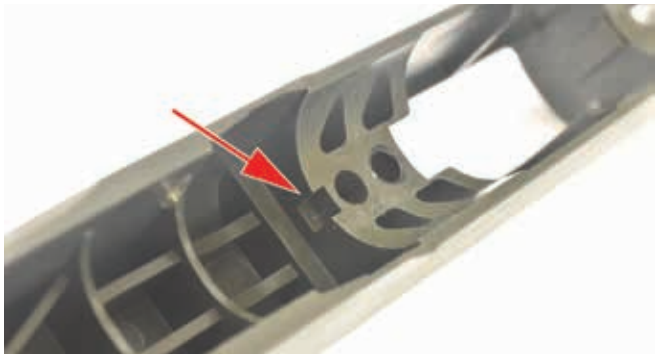


Above: The Ruger's bedding blocks are steel V-shaped inserts (top arrows) designed to draw the action tightly to the stock and aid accuracy. The stock blocks fit into corresponding slots in the action (bottom arrows).



Above: In the Winchester, a steel recoil lug (top arrow) has been inserted into the polymer stock and mates nicely with a mortise (bottom arrow) on the bottom of the action, just in front of the forward action screw.





Above: The Savage uses a collar (arrow) to attach the barrel to the round receiver. Right: We were surprised to find that the recoil lug did not abut against anything more substantial than a plastic shelf in the stock.

danger there. As we examined the bolt, it appeared to us that the cocking piece over rotated, allowing the bolt to disassemble. We stopped what we were doing, took photos and contacted Ruger. This is the same-pattern bolt that Ruger uses in many of its rifles and which we have tested many times. None of those tests have had any issues. To their credit, Ruger responded immediately with a new Ranch Rifle, and we proceeded with the tests. Still, as we have noted before, things can happen, and the firearms manufacturers want you to be very satisfied with your purchases. Call them first when something happens and let them take care of it for you.

Our second rifle arrived just a few days after we contacted Ruger. It looked just like the first rifle, which we thought was a good thing. The bolt handle has an almost polished-blue look, but the rest of the metal parts are definitely matte black. It would appear that flat dark earth is the new black, so the Ranch Rifle's polymer stock is appropriately FDE. The stock is reasonably rigid. Our testers could easily compress the fore-end to the point where it touched the barrel, but that didn't happen under the normal weight of the rifle, so you don't have to worry about those pesky barrel harmonics. The fore-end is also textured and indented right where the fingertips should go. The grip area is textured as well, with some raised molding to help the shooter create a solid hold on the rifle.

Many of Ruger's rifles have a similar type stock with an internal box magazine. For this model, Ruger removes the area where the internal magazine would normally reside and replaces it with an adapter that allows for a detachable AR-style magazine. The Ranch Rifle ships with a single five-round magazine marked "Duramag by C Products Defense." We have had considerable experience with C Products magazines used with 6.8 SPC ARs and were well satisfied with their quality. Larger-quantity mags are available from Cheaper Than Dirt and others. The supplied magazine also worked well, and the rifle fed rounds perfectly, whether from the magazine or just dropped on top in the action. The magazine release even somewhat mimics the AR release, being located just forward of the trigger on the right side of the stock.

Two action screws can be removed, allowing the magazine adapter to be withdrawn and the stock to be separated from the action. It is easy to see the reinforcement in the fore-end of the stock that creates the rigidity. Also visible are two patented V-shaped blocks, known as power bedding, that mate with mortises in the action. When the action screws are inserted and tightened, the bedding system positively locates the action and free floats the barrel, both of which substantially aid accuracy. Removing the stock allows the Ruger Marksman Adjustable trigger to be accessed and tweaked if desired. Average trigger weight on our sample was a bit over 4 pounds but







Magazines for the rifles varied quite a lot. Top left, the Ranch Rifle ships with a single five-round Duramag magazine by C Products Defense. Top right, the Winchester magazine has a polymer body. We had no feed issues with it. Left, the Savage magazine is an interesting design. Most of the working parts are plastic, but the shell is metal. The magazine catch (arrow) is part of the magazine. The base of the magazine allows a short double-stack of cartridges, but then narrows to feed lips one shell wide.

was easily adjusted down to approximately 3 pounds. Two sling swivels and a soft, functional recoil pad are mounted on the stock as well.

The barreled action is short and stiff — another possible aid to accuracy. The barrel is 16.38 inches in length and utilizes a 1:16-inch twist rate. It is cold-hammer forged for accuracy and threaded ½x28 for a suppressor or muzzle brake — not that you need a brake on a rifle chambered in 350 Legend. A thread protector is supplied as standard equipment. The rifle comes with a 14-slot 0-minute-of-angle-elevation Picatinny rail sturdily attached with four screws. There is plenty of room on which to mount a scope. The bolt release is on the left side of the receiver at the rear. One pushes on the protruding part of the lever to allow the bolt to be removed. On our samples, that end of the lever did not protrude very much and made us work at it a bit to get the bolt to release. Maybe the problem is that we all have old, fat fingers? The bolt is a full-diameter one-piece three lug design with a 70-degree throw. Bolt throw on our second sample was much smoother than the first, so there may have simply been something wrong with the bolt. With the short throw, there was ample clearance for optics and dual cocking cams made working the bolt easier. The bolt utilizes a plunger ejector along with a pivoting extractor. The rifle sports a two-position tang safety, easily visible and operated by either hand. There is a cocking indicator that protrudes from the bottom of the bolt shroud. Like it or not, the bolt stays open after the last round in the magazine is fired and the bolt is drawn to the rear.

The Ruger Ranch Rifle only had a 16.38-inch barrel compared to the 22-inch tube found on the Winchester. We wondered if the shortened barrel would provide a handy, compact rifle at the expense of some performance. It would appear that is not the case. Using the same ammo from the same lots in both rifles, the Ranch Rifle, with a barrel more than 5 inches shorter than the Winchester, only lost about 2% in velocity. Five-shot groups averaged about 2.5 inch for the Ruger, with the smallest coming in at just under 2 inches and the largest at more than 3.5 inches. Somewhat disappointing perhaps, but if the true comparison of this rifle is to an iron-sighted 30-30, the Ruger 350 Legend did just fine. We saw information posted on the web stating as much as a 20% reduction in recoil for the 350 Legend versus a nice Model 94 Winchester in 30-30. Our calculations were not quite that optimistic, coming in with just a 4% reduction in recoil energy. That being said, a reduction is a reduction and that was accomplished, by our computations, with a 6% to 10% increase in energy.

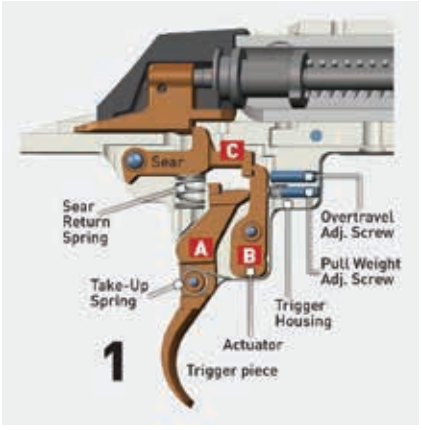
Our Team Said: With a 16.38-inch barrel and a short 12.5-inch length of pull, this would be an outstanding starter rifle and a great brush gun.

Winchester XPR Hunter True Timber Strata 535741296 350 Legend, $635

The Winchester XPR Hunter showed up ready to work. The Vortex Crossfire II 3-9x40 scope was already mounted and bore-sighted on our sample. This was a nice, trim scope with crosshairs thick enough to see and thin enough not to obscure your point of aim. The reticle includes "tick" marks to help with hold off on both elevation and windage. Glass was clear and crisp.

The stock is molded in "Strata" camouflage pattern,







Left: You have to pull the stock to access the Ruger Marksman Adjustable Trigger and tweak if desired. Average trigger-pull weight on our sample was a bit over 4 pounds, but we easily adjusted it down to about 3 pounds. Center: The Winchester XPR's M.O.A. trigger is likewise user adjustable with the stock off. Ours was fine at 3.3 pounds. Right: The Savage AccuTrigger is user adjustable, but we left it at the factory setting of 2.7 pounds.

Sight-attachment options, and sights, varied between the rifles. Top near right, the Ruger came with a factory-installed Picatinny rail mounted on the receiver. Bottom near right, the Winchester package rifle included a Vortex scope that came from the factory installed and bore sighted. Deduct $200 if you want the gun without the scope. Far right, the Savage comes with excellent iron sights. To mount a scope, get bases for a Savage Model 10 short action or install a Pic rail of our own, as we did .











which makes good use of multiple hues of brown, green, and tan. The synthetic material has a nice pebble grain sculpted into the fore-end and the grip. The bottom of the fore-end is flat to help with shooting off the bag. The butt of the stock has a soft recoil pad that again, is not a primary concern with this caliber. We actually had one of the testers' 12-year-old granddaughters shooting this particular rifle. She is a pretty seasoned shooter but had never fired anything larger than a 6.5 Creedmoor before this trip to the range. When asked if she thought there was too much recoil, she nonchalantly said, "Not so much."

Both the Ruger and Savage rifles utilize short, handy barrels. The Winchester has the look of the more traditional hunter rifle with its longer tube. The XPR's button-rifled barrel is not threaded at the muzzle, though it is nicely recessed to protect the rifling from abuse. Theoretically, the barrel is free-floated. That may be the case regarding contact in the bottom of the fore-end channel, but on our sample, the sides of the fore-end did indeed gently touch the barrel. A steel recoil lug has been inserted into the polymer stock and mates nicely with a mortise on the bottom of the action, just in front of the forward action screw. Once again, the bottom "metal" is a polymer as well as the magazine and even the trigger. The magazine latch is at the forward end of the mag and is recessed sufficiently to prevent most chances of inadvertent release. The spec sheet from Winchester says these are three-round magazines, but we got four in ours without any problem. We saw no spring pressure or feeding problems. The magazine cannot be top loaded while inserted in the rifle. It must be removed to be topped off. The barreled action has been finished in FDE Permacote, which matches nicely with the camo pattern on the stock.

The bolt is a one-piece design that was smooth to operate, even from the shoulder, and was easily removed via the bolt stop located on the left rear of the action. The bolt face sports a plunger-type ejector and a pivoting extractor. A groove runs down the left side of the bolt, into which the head of the







From top left are the buttstocks of the Ruger Ranch Rifle, the Winchester XPR, and the Savage Model 110. If camo's your deal, the Strata pattern can help you lose your rifle if you put it down. The Savage has an edge over the others for its adjustable LOP system. All three buttpads offered a soft shooting experience behind the rifles, even though the 350 Legend probably doesn't require such cushiness. Still, it's appreciated.

bolt release fits and prevents the bolt from binding. The three-lug bolt lifts with a short 70-degree throw, keeping the bolt handle well away from any optics. The bolt is removed via an easily accessed release on the left rear of the action. The safety is a two-position rocker switch on the receiver just aft of the bolt handle. Forward is Fire and to the rear is Safe. Both the bolt and the trigger lock while in the safe position, so the Winchester XPR provides a bolt-release button immediately forward of the safety that can be depressed to rotate the bolt, even while on Safe. A visual and tactile cocking indicator protrudes from the bottom of the bolt shroud when the firing pin is set. The trigger may be plastic, but required compression was a very consistent 3.3 pounds with almost no perceptible creep or overtravel.

The average five-shot group from this rifle averaged 2.15 inches when compiled for all three types of ammo used. The XPR's favorite was the Winchester 150-grain Xtreme Point, with groups as small as 1.54 inch. It would be interesting to see what results some tailored handloads could produce in this platform. All rounds fed perfectly whether from the magazine or just dropped into the receiver with the mag in place.

Our Team said: The Winchester XPR looks great and worked perfectly. This package includes a Vortex Crossfire II Scope at around $650, which makes it a good value.

Savage Model 110 Hog Hunter 57534 350 Legend, $487

According to a national feral-hog-control organization, "The solution to the feral hog problem has not been readily apparent. The ultimate answer as to how to control these animals has not been found to date. In many ways, feral hogs are America's most successful large invasive species. All of which means that feral hogs are a veritable nightmare for land and resource managers trying to keep the numbers of these animals and the damage that they do under control." Scientists may not have discovered the ultimate solution to this problem, but various firearms manufacturers are trying to help. Savage is a great example with its Hog Hunter series. The company is now offering a variant of the Model 110 in three different calibers (223 Rem., 308 Win., and 350 Legend) in a configuration they believe would appeal to hog hunters. Our sample, of course, was in 350 Legend.

So, what does a hunter need to go after hogs? A decent cartridge? Check. A short, handy barrel? Check. Provision for a suppressor? Check. Good trigger? Check. Those requirements don't differ substantially for shooters who hunt deer in the Midwestern woods.

The 223 and 308 versions of the Hog Hunter come with 20-inch barrels. The 350 Legend model ships with an 18-inch barrel installed. As with the Ruger Ranch Rifle, the shorter barrel did not seem to affect energy downrange too much, losing only about 3% to the longer Winchester. It is a thick barrel, measuring 0.75 inch slightly to the rear of the muzzle. The muzzle proper is threaded for a muzzle brake or suppressor and comes with a metal, knurled thread protector. Unlike the other two rifles in this test, the Hog Hunter is factory equipped with sights. These are not just emergency sights, but are instead tools fit for hunting. The rear sight is mounted about one-quarter of the way forward on the barrel from the receiver. The whole unit is metal. The blade sight sits in a dovetail that is mounted on a track and can be lowered or elevated as needed, giving the shooter plenty of movement to adjust for windage or elevation. The front sight is tall

VALUE GUIDE: BOLT-ACTION RIFLE SCORES			
GUN NAME	**ISSUE**	**GRADE**	**COMMENTS**
Winchester Model 70 F'wt Stainless 308 Win., $951	April 2020	A	Our Pick: Smooth handling, very good accuracy and classical styling.
Remington Model 7 CDL 26423 308 Win., $798	April 2020	A	A nice piece of wood, a good trigger and a compact 20-inch barrel on a rifle that could really shoot.
Tikka T3x Lite Stainless JRTXB316 308 Win., $748	April 2020	A-	Best Buy. Functional polymer stock, the smoothest bolt in the group, and the best out-of-the-box trigger.
Ruger Hawkeye Compact 37139 308 Win. $691	April 2020	B+	Short length of pull and a 16.5-inch barrel; could be a great truck gun or suitable for a smaller shooter.
Savage 110 Scout 57139 450 Bushmaster, $829	July 2019	A-	Best Buy. The Savage Axis proved accurate, reliable, and fast handling. Adjustable LOP.
Ruger Scout Rifle 6830 7.62 NATO, $1139	July 2019	B+	The Ruger Scout comes closest to the original Scout rifle concept, but it falls short due to weight.
Mossberg MVP Scout Combo 7.62 NATO, $780	July 2019	B	Not a true interpretation of the Scout Rifle concept. Accurate, well-handling short rifle at a good price.
Ruger 77/44 Model 7401 44 Remington Mag., $754	May 2019	A-	The 77/44 offers accuracy and power in a lightweight rifle. We disliked the magazine.
Ruger American Rifle 6903 Standard 308 Win. $382	Dec. 2018	A	Light enough, accurate enough, and inexpensive enough for us to want to keep it.
Savage Axis II XP 57095 308 Win. $411	Dec. 2018	A-	Best Buy. It works well, is accurate enough for hunting, and it is affordable.
Savage Model 12FV 18393 308 Win., $420	Dec. 2018	A-	Most accurate rifle tested. Modest recoil. The rifle never failed to impress us.
Mossberg Trophy Hunter 308 Win., $240	Dec. 2018	C	Overall, the rifle was worth the modest price, but there are better choices.
Ruger American Rifle Ranch 06968 300 Blackout, $420	May 2018	A-	Shot well both suppressed and unsuppressed. Short length would make it handy.
Remington Model 700 SPS-T 84205 300 Blackout, $680	May 2018	A-	Shot well in 300 BLK supersonic and subsonic.
Savage Arms 10PT-SR 22356 308 Win., $550	May 2018	B+	Good build. It did shoot sub-MOA with one round. We loved the handle and AccuTrigger.
Remington M700 SPS 85538 308 Win., $600	Oct. 2017	B+	This short rifle isn't the most accurate, but the overall handling is superb.
Remington Model 700 SPS 84218 308 Win., $606	Oct. 2017	B+	Hard to find a production rifle that is capable of greater practical accuracy.
Savage Axis 19223 308 Win, $240	Oct. 2017	C	Accuracy wasn't the best. The rifle was dogged by a heavy trigger that we fixed.
Remington 783 85847 308 Win., $340	March 2017	A	Best Buy. This was the most accurate rifle tested, and there were no demerits.
Remington 700 SPS 85538 308 Win. $655	March 2017	A-	There are few rifles that are as handy as this one.





Left: The Highland Tactical "Winchester" model bag really helps us organize things for trips to the range. Lots of pockets and lots of room. On the gun, a 1-6x24 Nikon Black Force 100 scope provides quality glass along with a fast, usable reticle. Above, when asked if she thought the 350 Legend had excessive recoil, a 12-year-old female tester said, "Not so much."

and actually has a brass bead on it. Both bases are mounted directly to the barrel and feel very sturdy to us. The receiver uses four screws to mount scope bases. We used a Warne Zero MOA one-piece Picatinny base along with Warne low 30mm rings. We tried the Model 110 bases only to find that this model requires short-action Model 10 bases. Make sure that you buy a base for the modern round-type receiver. Once we got the right parts, everything locked down solidly.

The receiver is the round type that you would expect on a Savage. The Savage system uses a collar to secure the barrel to the receiver that allows the precise setting of head space. A solid recoil lug is sandwiched between the receiver and the barrel, as usual. We were a bit surprised to find that the recoil lug did not abut against anything more substantial than a plastic shelf in the stock. But we were pleased to find the action screws insert through metal pillars molded into the stock, allowing those screws to be torqued properly without overstressing the stock.

The Savage Model 110 uses a smaller-diameter bolt than the Ruger or the Winchester we tested. It has a floating bolt head that is designed to allow more precise alignment with the chamber, thus aiding in accuracy. The bolt uses a pivoting extractor and a plunger-type ejector. It is a push-feed design just like our other two rifles in this project. It is removed by simultaneously pressing on the trigger and a button on the front of the trigger guard. Remember that last button. There are three screws that must be loosened to remove the action from the stock. Two of the screws are visible in the expected locations at the front and rear of the bottom material. The button in front of the trigger must be depressed to expose the third screw.

The safety is a three-position type located on the tang just to the rear of the bolt shroud. The bolt handle is oversized and easy to manipulate in a hurry. With a 70-degree throw, it also stayed well clear of the Nikon Black Force 100 1-6x24 scope we used. Optical clarity was very good on the Nikon, and its controls were easy to access. This model has an illuminated reticle with a 3-MOA dot at the center. The overall length of the Nikon, along with the magnification range, seemed to be sized appropriately for the shorter Ruger and Savage rifles.

The Hog Hunter comes with the Savage user-adjustable AccuTrigger. The unit on our test rifle broke cleanly at a consistent 2.7 pounds, and we wouldn't change a thing. The magazine was an interesting design. Most of the working parts are plastic, but the rigid shell is metal. The magazine catch is actually part of the magazine. The base of the magazine is wide enough to allow a short double-stack of cartridges, but then narrows to feed lips one shell wide, which presents rounds from a central position. The manual says this is a four-round magazine. We were able to load five, as long as we didn't want to close the bolt. We decided this was an easy way to load 4+1 shells, with the requirement that we start from an open bolt. We have used extended magazines made for the Savage 110 by Snyder Mags (SnyderMags.com) and have been very pleased with their performance thus far. We understand that an extended 10-round version for the Model 110 Hog Hunter should be available soon.

The stock design on the Savage had several features we liked. The dark olive-green polymer had a combination of checkering and grooves molded into the fore-end and the wrist. The overall effect was a very secure grip without being uncomfortable. There are spacers included with the rifle that allow length of pull to be adjusted. Remove two screws accessible through the very soft recoil pad, take off the current spacer and replace with your size, then remount the recoil pad with the screws — simple. Three different-sized spacers and appropriate screws are included in the package with the rifle.

Our Team Said: Accuracy of the Hog Hunter was the best of the three rifles tested, with an average five-shot group of 1.63 inches. Several of those groups were right at or just below the magic 1-inch number. This is a good-shooting rifle with an adjustable trigger for less than $500. That sounds like a bargain, and the Hog Hunter would be Our Pick of these three new chamberings.

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

Hands-On: Galco's FasTrax PAC Reinvents the Fanny Pack

Your body may need a break from having a gun rub on it, and this bag offers a way to still carry concealed. Also, we take a look at Galco's interesting Switchback ambidextrous holster.

Concealed carry via a waistpack or "fanny pack" could be defined as a method of transporting a handgun in a compartment suspended from a belt separate from any belt or other means worn to suspend a pair of pants or a skirt. At once we are reminded of the typical Old West gunfighter's belt strapped across the hips, describing a diagonal line weighed down by one's choice of shooting iron. Indeed, the shortcomings of a fanny pack or waistpack carry begin with an obvious "tell," wherein the presence of something heavy and incongruous has been added to one's waistline. Galco Gunleather's $99 FasTrax PAC takes on the challenge of making the fanny pack less conspicuous while offering multiple ways to put the firearm into play.

The FasTrax PAC consisted of a main compartment measuring 8.7 inches long by 5.2 inches high; width unloaded is a mere 1.5 inches wide. The main compartment was revealed via a two-way zipper that lies open approximately the upper half of its rectangular shape. There was also a zippered compartment on the outer face ideal for ID cards or a thin radio or iPod. A pass-through device for headphone wires was in place. The support belt offered a maximum length of 50 inches plus 7 inches of stretch. The belt could, however, be cinched down to as little as 20 inches in circumference, making it possible to be attached to a pole, the bars of an ATV, or other stationary object. But that would be missing the point. The space-age material that allows the FasTrax PAC to hug the body without drooping and move with the operator is a key advantage over other designs. We also found that the unit did not cause us to sweat behind the back panel of the main compartment or along the belt line.

We're not sure if Galco revisited fanny-pack carry because new materials made it more viable or the company was intrigued with producing a quick-draw holster that rotates the gun into the hand with the pull of "string." We think the FasTrax holster certainly makes it more fun, if not a lot faster. The holster itself enveloped all but the grip and included a hard lower frame that is adjustable to several specific models of handgun. This includes any number of small-frame revolvers, such as the Smith & Wesson J-frames to the Ruger LCR series, the Taurus 85/605 and the Charter Bulldog revolvers, plus a variety of small semi-automatic pistols. More than 26 firearms are listed in the owners manual. The holster stabilizes the gun via an adjustable welt "sandwiched between the walls of the holster and positioned to cradle the trigger guard." Four different positions are clearly illustrated in the owner's manual to accommodate different handguns. The welt was positioned by two "Chicago" screws, one fore and one aft. The forward screw holes were designated letters A through C. The rearward screw holes were numbered 1 through 4. For example, to accommodate our 9mm Smith &



The FasTrax PAC, $99 from GalcoGunleather.com, adds a slick ripcord feature that hastens access by rotating the gun into the hand. The internal holster leaves only the grip uncovered, so there is little chance of the trigger finger prematurely entering the trigger guard.



The FasTrax PAC was designed to accommodate more than 26 different guns, including pistols and revolvers. Retention was achieved by a "welt" or brace that captures and supports the gun at the trigger guard. The fit of specific guns were listed in the owner's manual by the number and letter screw holes designated to secure the welt. Our Smith & Wesson Shield shown here was listed as "3B."

Wesson Shield 2.0, we mounted the welt using the combination 3B.

The procedure of opening the main compartment by pulling on the zipper tab to open the top of the pack, then tugging the activation cord to rotate the gun into the hand, was not as complicated or as time-consuming as it may sound. To test, we used an unloaded Smith & Wesson Shield and an unloaded Ruger LCP drawn in a series of 10 dry-fire sequences against a shrinking maximum time limit (PAR time). The timer provided both an audible start and an audible stop signal. Start position was with the strong (gun) hand on the top zipper and the support hand holding the ripcord tucked innocently inside the belt. The sequence ended when the trigger was pulled. In this facsimile of an emergency draw, results showed that our team members were able to draw, push the gun forward, and snap the trigger within a time period of 1.5 to 2.0 seconds.

As contrived as the start position in our action test might sound, one's intention could conceivably be masked by a nonchalant, hands-on-belt posture. Bear in mind that there are also many more situations in everyday life that do not demand a quick draw. For example, when walking to one's car in a darkened parking lot after a late night at the office, it's not unusual for someone to place his hand on his firearm while it is still in concealment, such as a hand inside the pocket or inside a bag. The FasTrax PAC excels at this level of readiness because the holster safely retains the gun even when the main zipper is completely open. In addition, the gun can be drawn without pulling the cord, leaving the support hand free to attend to other chores such as open a door, push an innocent out of the way, or fend off an attacker. Digging the hand inside the main compartment was safe because the trigger guard remained covered until the gun was completely free of the pack.



Left: Galco's FasTrax PAC doesn't scream "gun!" Muted colors add discretion, and the outer pocket provides a pass through for a headphone wires. Right: The rear face of the Galco FasTrax PAC consisted of Galco's Comfort Cloth, a soft and breathable mesh designed to circulate air and prevent chafing or sweating. Combined with the flexible belt, the pack moves with the shooter. We found the FasTrax comfortable to wear.

Our Team Said: We sometimes forgot we were wearing the FasTrax PAC because it didn't sag and moved instinctively with the wearer. We were split on using the activation cord to bring the gun into action. Some of us thought it was a gimmick, albeit one that actually worked. But we all agreed that the rotating holster was an excellent feature that provided security as well as speed. Men and women on our team agreed they should have a Galco FasTrax PAC in their arsenal.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A

Switchback Ambi Holster

From time to time, GUN TESTS writers require armed security from natural agents, such as snakes awoken by spring rains, or feral hogs and coyotes, which are a year-round problem that sometimes inhabit the same lands as both the private and public shooting ranges where we conduct our tests. The question becomes how best to carry a big-bore revolver filled with snake shot, or at least a backup speed loader of same. The current crop of holsters that strap on and ride across the chest are fine for hunting, but what if a shooter needs to test-fire from a cramped bench or from prone position? In such instances, the better method of carry might be an alternate position such as cross draw. The holster should also be resistant, if not impervious, to weather and provide a sure locking device that is not complicated. We found these attributes in the $49 Switchback Strongside/Crossdraw Belt Holster by Galco.

The Switchback holster consists of a body of closed-cell foam covered with ballistic nylon. The foam core allows the holster to take on shapes without being permanently impressed. The nylon shell seals the



Right: We bought the Switchback holster to carry a backup range gun loaded with snake shot to take care of nuisance game our testers sometimes see at the range. The Switchback proved to be lightweight, comfortable, and easy to clean. Perhaps our biggest surprise was how well it worked for concealed carry.



The $49 Switchback Holster From Galco Gunleather is a versatile budget holster right for rugged outdoor use and concealed carry. Construction is based on closed cell foam covered with ballistic nylon. The foam allows it to take shape and spring back. The interior was lined with a pack cloth to avoid "polishing" the gun. The cross strap was reversible to go with the 1.5 inch belt loops on each side for ambidextrous or cross draw carry. There's also a detent screw. Retention without using the strap was surprisingly strong.

core from moisture. The interior of the holster was lined with 420-denier pack cloth to protect the gun from the type of abrasion that results in holster wear on the gun. Primary retention and to some degree seating depth is adjustable via a detent screw located to pinch the trigger guard. There was also a leather cross strap with a slot designed to capture the hammer spur of guns so equipped. The strap was affixed with heavy snaps at each end so it could be reversed along with one's choice of right-handed, left-handed, or crossdraw carry. The end of the strap to be released was elongated to create a release tab. Slots designed for 1.5-inch-wide belts were supplied by a leather panel that surrounded the front of the holster as well as both sides. The purpose of this design, described by Galco as an "exoskeleton," was to add strength and lend continuity to the appearance of the holster. Specific fits for the Switchback holster are available for a long list of handguns, including semi-automatic pistols as well as revolvers. Just about the only sidearm ineligible for Switchback carry are those featuring a grip safety.

We began wearing the Switchback in January 2020 filled with a variety of revolvers, including a 3-inch-barreled Smith & Wesson K-frame and 7-shot S&W L-frames with 2.5-inch, 3-inch, and 4-inch-long full-lug barrels. Our 44 Magnum of choice was the five-shot ported Taurus Tracker. All five guns fit equally well with the hammer spur dead center in the cross strap. The foam core seemed to hug the gun without favoring one barrel length or barrel contour over another, with little or no tweaking necessary to the detent screw. Usually we rely on a detent screw to take up slack when a used holster stretches out, but after two months, any adjustment has been a result of personal taste rather than need. The holster was also worn for concealed carry, as well as on range and for hiking trips. A first impression of the surface-mounted belt loops was that the gun would hang awkwardly off the body, relegating the Switchback to outback wear only. But the gun and holster tucked in to the body surprisingly well.

Our Team Said: The first thing we think of when we see a nylon holster is poor retention. But the Switchback didn't really need help from the cross strap for the everyday carry. We credit the foam core and tight fit. Then again, when it comes to hiking or bouncing around on our ATV, the strap made retention worry free. The belt-loop grid was stylish enough to disappear on the unused side, and we were surprised to see how well the Switchback worked for concealed carry. At $49 MSRP, the Switchback goes well beyond what we'd ask for in a budget utility holster.

GUN TESTS GRADE: A-

Written and photographed by Roger Eckstine, using evaluations from GUN TESTS *team testers.* **GT**

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COMING UP IN GUN TESTS

● Big-Bore Striker-Fire Pistols: We looked at some pistols chambered in calibers larger than 40 S&W and with barrels about four inches in length that would serve as concealed-carry pieces. We also wanted to see how pistol-grip girth varies when chambering polymer-frame pistols in larger calibers. Tested: a new Lone Wolf Distributors (LWD) full size frame Timberwolf in 45 Auto, a new LWD compact-size frame Timberwolf chambered in 10mm, a used Glock model 37 in 45 GAP, and a new S&W M&P M2.0 in 45 Auto.

● Tactical Shotgun Shoot Out: We test four modern self-loading shotguns: the Rock Island Armory VR 80, Beretta 1201 FP, Benelli MK4 H20, and Remington V3.

● A Bolt-Action Handy Rifle: Savage 110 Hog Hunter 223 Remington. We tested a Savage Arms 110 Hog Hunter in the new 350 Winchester Legend cartridge, and we've also shot one chambered for 223 Remington. Shooters who don't need a straight-wall cartridge might appreciate it.

● 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.

● More Single-Action Rimfires: Tested are the Chiappa 1873, Heritage Rough Rider, and Traditions Rawhide Rancher.

● The "Modern" 45-70: We tested the Marlin 1895G Guide Gun 70462, $633; the brand-new Henry X Lever 010X, $817; and a used Browning Model 1885 High Wall.

● Barrel-Length and Performance Testing for the 9mm Luger: A reader wondered if we would be willing to conduct an extensive test of 9mm Luger ammunition in subcompact, compact, service-length barrel handguns and a carbine. So we fired more than 2,000 cartridges over a period of 14 months to find a decent all-around load that performed acceptably in all of the firearms in the battery.

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