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Proudly, we bring you our third annual Ballistic's Best awards issue. Our mission: Be the go-to source for those on a quest to build their firearms collection with superior hardware by showcasing an unprecedented number of best-in-class guns.

There's no better time to kick the tumultuous year of 2020 out of commission with a huge bang. In fact, 12,700 bangs. That's the estimated number of total rounds our gun-test/evaluation teams let loose in order to determine the best firearm in the following eight categories:

- Full-size semi-automatic handguns (non-1911)—nine contenders, 1,650 rounds;
- Compact semi-automatic handguns (non-1911)—nine contenders, 1,650 rounds;
- Model 1911—10 contenders, 2,000 rounds;
- AR-15 pistols (5.56mm)—nine contenders, 2,800 rounds;
- Revolvers (DA/SA .357 Magnum)—five contenders, 800 rounds;
- Tactical pump-action shotguns—nine contenders, 1,000 rounds;
- AR-15/AR-10 rifles—eight contenders, 1,800 rounds;
- Bolt-action rifles (6.5 Creedmoor)—10 contenders, 1,000 rounds.

In the most legitimate, unbiased way, category rankings and winners were determined by the testing teams based on a nine-point criteria system that included aesthetics, ergonomics, sights, trigger control, recoil control, reloading ease, accuracy, reliability and value/price. Only the final tallies of the score sheets were used to crown the winners. Period. Our editorial staff didn't have any "discussions" to determine our winners in the aforementioned categories.



However, we did believe it was our duty to award several specific products and gear-related companies *Ballistic* Editors' Select awards based upon both superlative aspects (ie: Most Diverse Manufacturer) as well as new guns and gear we've shot and covered within our unmatched number of print magazine titles that we published during 2020.

Our team pledges full honesty and transparency in our scoring process and editorial practices. There's no pay-to-play funny business in this awards issue or any magazine issue we produce. We have full separation between church (editorial) and state (advertising). In fact, many of the new products evaluated here come from manufacturers that don't ever advertise in Athlon Outdoors publications. We owe this to you, our readers and faithful *Ballistic* magazine subscribers, as you are the lifeblood of our existence. Without your trust, we'd be just another gun rag or internet commando spewing biases to grease the money chain.

A final note with regards to our cover images. Depending on where you purchased the magazine, you're either getting our "handguns" cover featuring a revolver, a 1911 and a compact CCW pistol, or our "long guns" cover, which features the following companies from L to R: Mossberg, Rock River Arms, Springfield Armory, Falkor, Primary Weapons Systems, Sig Sauer, Sabatti, TR Imports, Masterpiece Arms, Zev Technologies, FN America, Daniel Defense and KelTec.

When you're done with the issue, please be sure to hit us with your feedback—good, bad or ugly—by emailing us at editdesk@athlonoutdoors.com, and visit ballisticmag.com for companion content. —Nino Bosaz



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PARDON THE GUN...EDITORS: In the Savage Renegade story blurb on page 54 of the O/N 2020 issue, we inadvertently referred to the gun as being inertia-driven. It's a gas-driven gun, as you can read about in the story's body copy.

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EDITORIAL DIRECTOR	Nino Bosaz
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF	Linas Cernauskas
SENIOR EDITOR	Mark Chesnut*
ART DIRECTOR/COVER DESIGN	Rory Slifkin
PREMEDIA	Mike Gregory
DIGITAL MANAGER	Matthew Hogan
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT	Richard Ortega
CIRCULATION CONSULTANT	Scott Hill/ProCirc
COVER PHOTO	Alex Landeen*/Courtesy Mfgs.

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 EDITORIAL INQUIRIES editdesk@athlonoutdoors.com

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VP/GROUP PUBLISHER & CONTENT DIRECTOR Nicholas S. Selfert

ADVERTISING SALES

National Office
 212-478-1910; sales@athlonoutdoors.com

INDEPENDENT ACCOUNT REPRESENTATIVES

NORTHEAST REGION	Scott Buchmayr; 978-462-6335
SOUTHEAST/UPPER MIDWEST	Amos Crowley; 216-378-9811
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ATHLON MEDIA GROUP

CORPORATE OFFICERS

PRESIDENT, CEO Chuck Allen
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CORPORATE ADDRESSES

NEW YORK:

60 E. 42nd St., Suite 820, NY, NY 10165; 212-478-1910

NASHVILLE:

2451 Atrium Way, Suite 320
 Nashville, TN 37214; 800-284-5668

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BY BALLISTIC STAFF



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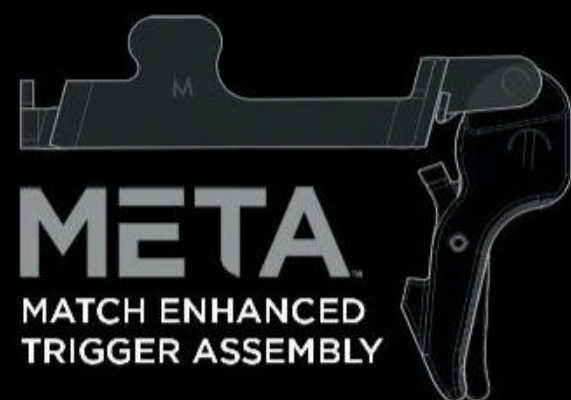
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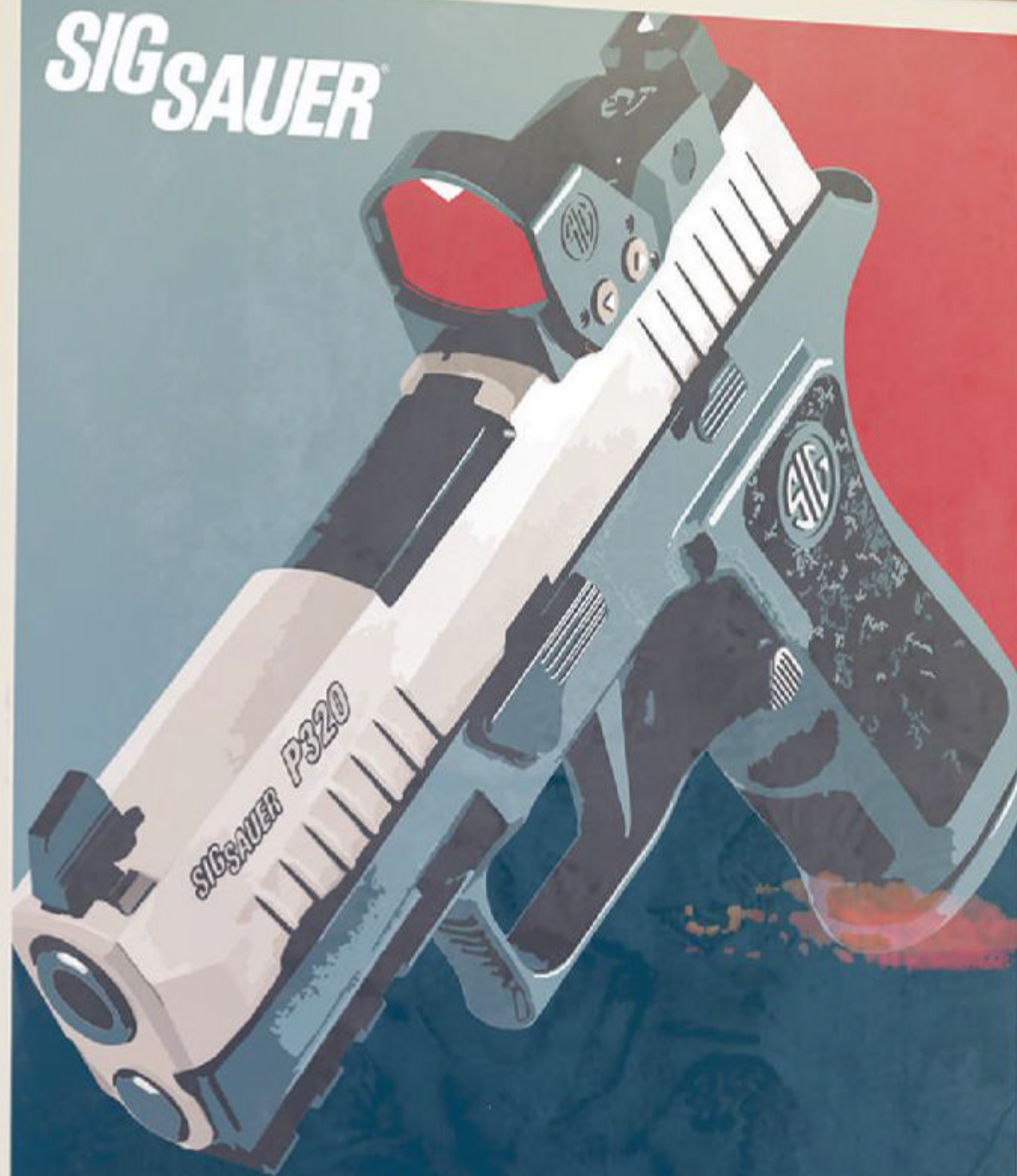


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HANDGUNS: FULL-SIZE SEMI-AUTOS



ABOVE: With its low recoil and high capacity, the Ruger-57 was described as the most fun pistol to shoot during the trial. **TOP RIGHT:** Unlike standard 92-series pistols, the 92X Performance has a frame-mounted safety for 1911-style, cocked-and-locked carry. **RIGHT:** The XD-M Elite 5.25 got high praise for its ergos and its excellent META trigger.

BALLISTIC'S BEST 2020



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One of the great things about living in today's world is the outstanding variety of products we have available to us as consumers in the firearms industry.

Whether you're looking for a race gun, an exotic caliber, something more customized or a tactically tricked out piece for home defense, the U.S. market has it all. Even when it comes to value-oriented firearms, today's manufacturing techniques, along with computer-aided design, help ensure even budget-friendly firearms are reliable and can be counted on when it matters most.

That fantastic variety and quality is definitely represented in this year's roundup of full-size, semi-automatic pistols for our Ballistic's Best 2020 edition. Despite the recent clamor for compact, concealed-carry pistols, there are still areas where full-size pistols excel and offer features that just aren't possible with smaller pistols.

In our bid to assist readers with finding the right full-size pistol for their needs, I and a few acquaintances stole off to the range to shoot nine different pistols and score them on nine specific criteria. Since pricing, types

and features were so varied, the tricky part was to rank each pistol on its own merits and let the chips fall where they may. Scores for each criteria were from 1 to 5 in quarter-point increments, with 5 being the best. The nine different scores were then averaged to determine this year's winner.

BUDGET-FRIENDLY DEFENDERS

Of the nine contenders, two pistols—the SAR USA SAR9X Platinum and the IWI Masada—had an MSRP under \$500. Aside from being easy on the wallet, both packages offered strong value as well. The Masada's standout features included excellent ergonomics, full ambidextrous controls for the slide stop and magazine release, and three interchangeable backstraps for a tailored fit. Like the Sig P320, the Masada integrates a serialized trigger chassis that can be removed from the frame. To sweeten the pot, IWI also includes an optics-ready slide along with four adapter plates to fit the most popular red-dot sights on the market.

Similar in form and purpose, the SAR9X Platinum, like the Masada, was built for rugged military use with its hammer-forged barrel and recessed crown. The polymer frame also

comes with three inserts to change the grip size, and the slide is drilled and prepared for mounting an optic. The SAR9X Platinum also came with the most complete kit including a magazine carrier, holster, magazine loader and a weapon light, in addition to the interchangeable inserts.

MID-RANGE AMERICANA

The next step up the price ladder included products from American companies and are among the best sellers on the market. The pistols in this segment were the Smith & Wesson M&P 9 2.0 Pro Series C.O.R.E. (Competition Optics Ready) and the Springfield Armory Elite XD-M 5.25 Precision, and despite their slightly higher MSRPs, both pistols offered excellent value in their own right.

The M&P 9 2.0 Pro Series C.O.R.E. is a step above a standard M&P pistol with its PC-tuned action, larger slide stop, suppressor-height sights and its overtravel stop. Packing 15+1 rounds, the M&P 9 C.O.R.E.'s best features include superb texturing, four interchangeable grip inserts, a reversible mag release and an extended, rigid steel chassis to reduce torque and flex. In keeping with its

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C.O.R.E. name, the pistol also includes an optics-ready slide for the installation of popular red-dot sights on the market.

While not boasting an optics-ready slide, the Springfield Armory Elite XD-M 5.25 Precision is also intended for competition. Its claim to fame, at least for this article, is the highest-capacity native magazines of our test group at 22 rounds. The Elite series is a step up in features over the standard XD-M lineup. Elite features include Springfield's new META trigger with overtravel stop, a removable flared magazine well, more aggressive slide serrations and fully ambidextrous controls including the mag release and slide stop. The Precision model features a fiber-optic front sight with a fully adjustable rear sight, and it includes a 5.25-inch hammer-forged barrel and a lightening cut slide.

EXOTIC FLAIR

A little further up the price chain we encountered a few "exotics." These are pistols that don't really fit into just one category and offer something a little extra that you don't just find every day.

With its sexy, two-tone appeal, the Beretta 92X Performance features a steel frame and slide for increased weight to reduce recoil.



ABOVE: Based on the 75B, the CZ Shadow 2 offers excellent ergos and a high grip for superb handling and control.

TOP RIGHT: The SAR9X hosts a set of low-profile three dot sights that yield a solid sight picture in daylight.

RIGHT: The Zev Z320 XCarry Octane adds additional custom mods to the Sig P320 XCarry.



The new Shadow 2 Optics Ready updates the original Shadow 2 with a milled slide to accept various red-dot sights.



First up was the only pistol in this review not chambered in 9mm. The Ruger-57 was designed as an alternative to the FN Five-seveN which fires the 5.7x28mm round. Ruger's offering is a fairly sizeable package, though it comes in around half the price of FN's pistol. Hosting 20-round magazines, the Ruger-57 uses an internal hammer and it includes an external thumb safety for an extra level of protection. Accessories can be mounted to the Picatinny rail, and the slide is drilled and tapped for the addition of optics. A fiber-optic front sight rounds out the package in combination with a fully adjustable rear sight.

Swinging back to the world of 9mm pistols, the first pistol above the \$1,000 mark is Zev Technologies' Z320 XCarry Octane. Taking the P320 to the next level, the Z320 XCarry Octane features a beautifully machined slide with an RMR cut and a Titanium Gray finish. The Z320 features Zev's Diamond-pattern laser stippling on the grip as well as a dimpled Zev Pro barrel with a black DLC finish. Rounding out the enhanced features is a set of Zev's combat sights complete with a fiber-optic pipe up front. The Z320 XCarry maintains Sig's



IWI's Masada is a full-size combat pistol designed for use by militaries in all types of harsh environments.





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The controls on the Ruger-57 are generously sized and are also snappy and responsive to the user.



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"THERE ARE STILL AREAS WHERE FULL-SIZE PISTOLS EXCEL AND OFFER FEATURES THAT JUST AREN'T POSSIBLE WITH SMALLER PISTOLS."



With its platinum Cerakote finish and matching frame, the SAR9X is an attractive pistol that looks like it stepped out of a Buck Rogers episode.



SAR
sarusa.com

flat-faced trigger and other ergonomics, and it ships with two 17-round magazines.

Included in the full-size category as much for its weight as its size was the Walther Q4 SF. Only in a world filled with polymer pistols would I consider a steel-framed carry pistol an exotic, but that's the world we live in now. Though, with its world-class trigger and ergonomics, it fits the bill as well. The Q4 SF is a reimagining of Walther's Q5 competition pistol for both duty and concealed carry. The sublime shooter offers a reversible mag release, an ambidextrous slide stop and rubber, wrap-around grip for outstanding control. Large, three-dot phosphorus sights get you on target fast, and the slide is intricately machined for phenomenal balance in the hand.

OFF TO THE RACES

The last two contestants in our review are competition-ready race guns that take two time- and battle-proven platforms to the zenith of their potential. The Beretta 92X Performance and the CZ Shadow 2 Optics Ready are both DA/SA steel-framed pistols with the extra weight assisting with the recoil mitigation that's needed for fast follow-up shots during competition. While the Shadow 2 has long been able to be carried cocked and locked like a 1911, this capability is not pro forma for the Beretta 92 series of pistols.

The Beretta 92X Performance swapped out a slide-mounted safety for a frame-mounted safety, making cocked-and-locked carry an option. Other enhancements made to the platform include an extended beavertail, a Vertec frame, an oversized magazine release and a generously sized ambidextrous thumb safety. Sawtooth serrations adorn the slide for easy manipulation, and aggressive checkering on the front and backstraps facilitate excellent control during recoil.

The 92X also includes one of the better fiber-optic front sights that I've seen and used, and it hosts a fully adjustable rear sight as well. Beretta went the extra mile by improving trigger operation with its Extreme-S system that yields a better pull and a much shorter reset. With its Nistan finish on the slide and frame, and its two-tone appearance, the 92X Performance was, in my opinion, the best looking pistol of the

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Springfield's new XD-M Elite pistols feature a host of upgrades over their standard line of XD-M pistols.



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bunch. And with its Picatinny rail, all of the features that make it such a great competition pistol lend themselves to making the 92X Performance an excellent choice for defensive use as well.

The same is true of the Shadow 2 Optics Ready. Sporting 19-round magazines and an optics-ready slide, the Shadow 2 is just as ready for serious tactical work as it is for competition day. Borrowing from the superb ergonomics of the CZ-75 platform, the Shadow 2 OR allows for a very high grip, resulting in reduced muzzle flip and solid control. To enhance that control, the Shadow 2 incorporates aggressive checkering on the grip panels and the grip frame as well.

A fully adjustable rear sight and a fiber-optic front sight get the shooter on target when a red-dot is not in play. Also, to improve shooter performance, the reversible magazine release is adjustable to three different heights and an improved trigger system offers one of the best double-action pulls you will ever try. The trigger reset is darn near exquisite, as is the pistol's accuracy. There's little more one could possibly want or need in a pistol built for speed.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

When I got the fellows out on the range, there was a lot of excited buzzing and whispering going on. It sounded more like a sewing circle than range day. After comparing one piece to the other and after a good amount of shooting, each one obviously had his favorite. And like me, they struggled with ranking pistols of such a wide variety of styles and price points. Although they were all full-sized, some were for different purposes and there were different operating



ABOVE: The Walther Q4 SF's steel frame does an excellent job of soaking up felt recoil.

RIGHT: Top comments on the Masada praised its accuracy, comfort, trigger and its ergos with full ambi controls.

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systems as well. How do you compare a striker-fired trigger on a defensive pistol to a double-action trigger on a race gun? You just do the best you can.

In general, the performance was excellent at all levels and price points. The only malfunction we experienced was a failure to extract with the Beretta 92X Performance. I hesitate to mention it because there were no other issues with it and it could have been anything that resulted in the one-off occurrence.

To be honest, the “oohhs” and “aahhs” generally came with the more expensive pistols. For example, when I asked John his thoughts after shooting the Walther Q4 SF, he said, “That was f---ing awesome.” His comments centered around the minimal muzzle flip, the grip contours and the Walther’s excellent trigger. Addison had a similar reaction after shooting the Beretta 92X Performance, and he said it would be his choice as his preferred, do-it-all defensive pistol. This was in large part due to its stellar sights and the pistol’s incredible accuracy.

In all fairness, the more expensive pistols have extra latitude with the materials that can

The Pro Series M&P 9 2.0 C.O.R.E. features a host of upgrades above a standard production model.

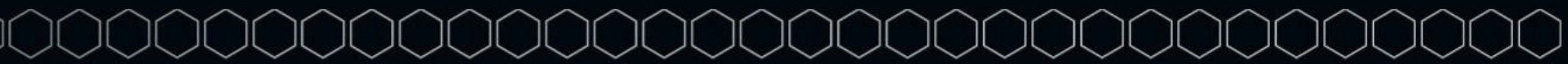


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SPECS

	BERETTA 92X PERFORMANCE	CZ SHADOW 2 OPTICS READY	IWI MASADA	SAR9X PLATINUM	RUGER 57	SMITH & WESSON M&P 9 2.0 PRO SERIES CORE	SPRINGFIELD ARMORY ELITE XD-M 5.25
CALIBER:	9mm	9mm	9mm	9mm	5.7 x 28mm	9mm	9mm
BARREL:	4.9 inches	4.89 inches	4.1 inches	4.4 inches	4.94 inches	5 inches	5.25 inches
OA LENGTH:	8.7 inches	8.53 inches	7.4 inches	7.6 inches	8.65 inches	8.5 inches	8.3 inches
WEIGHT:	47.6 ounces (empty)	46.5 ounces (empty)	23.5 ounces (empty)	27.5 ounces (empty)	24.5 ounces (empty)	29.4 ounces (empty)	30 ounces (empty)
GRIP:	Vertec	Checkered aluminum	Polymer	Polymer	Polymer	Polymer	Polymer
SIGHTS:	Fiber-optic front, adj. serrated rear	Fiber-optic front, adj. HAJO rear	White-dot	White-dot	Fiber-optic, adj. rear	Suppressor-height	Fiber-optic front, adj. target rear
ACTION:	DA/SA	DA/SA	Striker	Striker	Hammer	Striker	Striker
FINISH:	Nistan	Nitride	QPQ (Nitrocarb.)	Cerakote	Blued	Armornite	Melonite
CAPACITY:	15+1	19+1	17+1	17+1/19+1	20+1/10+1	15+1	22+1
MSRP:	\$1,399	\$1,549	\$480	\$555	\$799	\$700	\$653



WALTHER
waltherarms.com

Walther's new Q4 SF marries the best of striker-fired and steel-frame pistols.

be used and the extra touches that can be applied. There was still a lot of respect given to the less pricey options. I caught Lincoln taking a couple of extra turns with the Springfield Elite XD-M 5.25 Precision, and he was a fan of its accuracy, ergonomics and its very nice META trigger. Brad was impressed with the IWI Masada's accuracy, high hold and its very comfortable grip. He was also impressed with the optics-ready slide considering the pistol's MSRP.

The Ruger-57 was easily the most fun to shoot that day. Everyone liked seeing big fireballs with almost no recoil. Plus the 20-round magazines were fast and easy to load for quick turnarounds on the line, though the 5.7x28mm ammo isn't the cheapest on the market. The fiber-optic sight was very easy to acquire and the accuracy was like shooting a laser. In fact, when asked which gun they would choose to do everything from concealed carry to home defense, Lincoln chose the Ruger-57 for its light weight and capacity.

The Zev Z320 XCarry Octane got a lot of murmurs with its looks and feel as well, especially for its attractive and intricately machined slide. A couple of people felt the sights were a little small, but it's worth noting that a standard Sig P320 X series, with its factory-milled slide, loses



WALTHER Q4 SF	ZEV TECH Z320 XCARRY OCTANE
9mm	9mm
4 inches	3.9 inches
7.4 inches	7.4 inches
39.7 ounces (empty)	22.3 ounces (empty)
Rubber wraparound	Polymer
Phosphorus dot	Fiber-optic front, blacked out rear
Striker	Striker
Tenifer	Titanium Nitride
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zevtechnologies.com

The Z320 XCarry Octane's beautifully milled slide includes cocking serrations along its entire length.





the rear sights when an optic is installed. However, everyone agreed the diamond-pattern stippling definitely improved the feel of the Z320's grip over a standard P320.

When it comes to a comfortable grip and excellent texturing, the SAR9X Platinum was no slouch either. Like the Masada, the grip was rounded nicely and included subtle finger grooves (similar to HK VP9) for control. Addison mentioned that for the money, the SAR9X would be a great budget starter pistol, especially considering all the extras that came in the kit. The trigger was a little gritty, but it had a fairly crisp break, and the pistol was as reliable as anything else we shot. Accuracy was good, and the SAR9X shot relatively flat as well.

PHOTO FINISH

When the scoring was done, I can't say it was a real surprise. The base CZ Shadow 2 came in second place last year, just barely a few tenths of a point behind the Walther Q5 SF. CZ's new Optics Ready Shadow 2 flipped the script this time around by pulling ahead of the Q5's little brother, the Q4 SF, and finishing in front by a nose.

With aesthetics, accuracy, reliability, recoil control and its trigger as its highest scoring criteria, the CZ Shadow 2 OR had it all when it came to the most important aspects of a top-tier shooter. Throw in other relevant factors like the phenomenal ergonomics, extremely low bore axis, the 19-round magazines and an optics-ready slide, and there's no question

you've got a world-class pistol on your hands. There's little wonder why it dominates on the competitive circuit these days.

The biggest takeaway from our testing process was the excellent variety and the fantastic quality available at all price points. Whether you're looking for something with a lighter weight for all-day carry, a high-end race

gun or an accurate and reliable home defender that won't break the bank, there's a quality tool available for everyone. But when it comes to the very best execution of function and design at a specific moment in time, it's kind of like that movie, *Highlander*. There can be only one. And for the year 2020, that one is the CZ Shadow 2 Optics Ready. ●



FINAL SCORES

	AESTHETICS	ERGONOMICS	SIGHTS	TRIGGER CONTROL	RECOIL CONTROL	RELOADING EASE	ACCURACY	RELIABILITY	VALUE/ PRICE	TOTAL
CZ SHADOW 2 OR	5.00	4.50	4.60	4.85	4.95	4.50	5.00	5.00	4.20	42.60
WALTHER Q4 SF	4.80	5.00	4.10	4.90	4.90	4.45	4.80	5.00	4.25	42.20
BERETTA 92X PERFORMANCE	4.80	3.80	4.65	4.45	4.70	4.10	4.65	4.30	4.05	39.50
RUGER 57	3.50	3.55	4.40	3.50	5.00	4.80	5.00	4.60	4.50	38.85
SPRINGFIELD ARMORY ELITE XD-M 5.25	3.40	3.90	3.85	4.00	4.50	4.50	4.40	5.00	4.25	37.80
SMITH & WESSON M&P 9 2.0 PRO SERIES CORE	3.40	4.10	3.60	3.70	4.30	3.90	4.20	5.00	3.45	35.65
IWI MASADA	3.20	3.30	3.25	3.40	3.60	3.60	3.80	5.00	4.50	33.65
ZEV TECH Z320 XCARRY OCTANE	4.00	3.40	3.55	3.60	3.60	3.60	4.30	4.40	2.60	33.05
SAR9X PLATINUM	3.00	3.30	3.05	2.90	3.40	3.40	3.50	5.00	3.80	31.35

NOTE: Each category worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. Entries reflect averages from five shooters.



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HANDGUNS: COMPACT SEMI-AUTOS

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CPX-2

The CPX series is a DAO line of pistols chambered in either 9mm or .380 Auto. All CPX models are available in a wide variety of colors and with optional factory installed CTS-1500 Red Dot sight.

SCCY CPX-2

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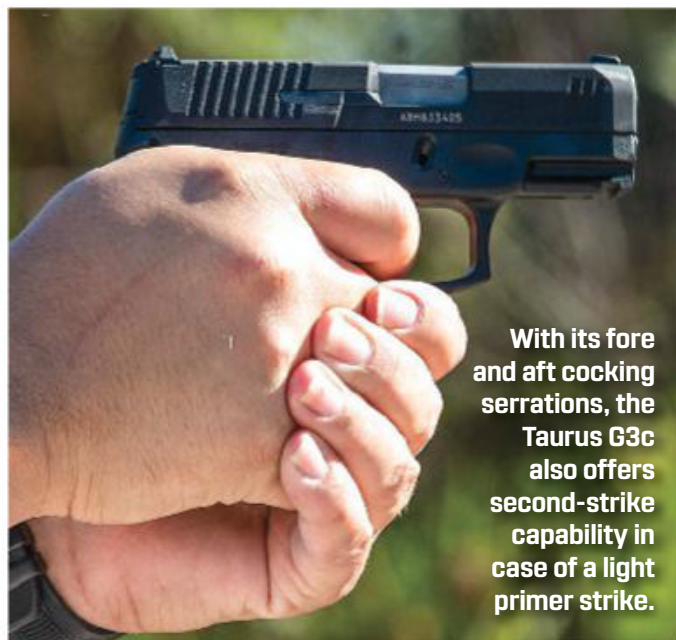
HANDGUNS: COMPACT SEMI-AUTOS



The addition of a CT 1500 red-dot to the M&P 9 2.0 Compact significantly improved Addison's accuracy at speed.



The FN 503 felt a little awkward in the hand with its longer grip frame but was still manageable during recoil.



With its fore and aft cocking serrations, the Taurus G3c also offers second-strike capability in case of a light primer strike.



The Canik TP9 Elite SC was a crowd favorite with its good ergos and its fantastic trigger.



Time flies...usually. The year 2020 has been an odd one, but it's about to be put in the rearview mirror for better or worse. The days have cooled, the leaves are starting to turn and a hint of wood smoke now lingers in the evening air. These annual occurrences are how many of us mark the transition from one year to the next. Another way, for us at *Ballistic*, is by highlighting the hottest new firearms of the past year in our annual Ballistic's Best edition.

Having been asked to cover the compact pistol category once again, I reached out to a few folks in my area to assist with evaluating nine different pistols. They included a couple of my regular shooting buddies, Lincoln and John. I also got Brad and Addison from my local gun shop, Stevens Firearm in Ashland, Kentucky, to help with the testing. They help me throughout the year with getting review pistols transferred and I thought it would be fun for them to go hands-on for this annual pageant of arms.

It was a gorgeous, sunny day in September, with a temperature of about 68 degrees when we got together to test and rank the nine compact pistols. They were graded on various criteria including aesthetics, ergonomics, accuracy, reliability and so forth. Our ranking system for each criteria was from 1 to 5, with 5 being the best. We allowed quarter-point increments to differentiate subtle differences in the pistols, and with our process and guidelines in place, we began the work of selecting the best of the best.

MEET THE CONTESTANTS

Henry Ford once said you could have his Model-T Ford in any color as long as it was black. That was pretty much the same variety we had with the compact pistols. Only one—Canik's TP9 Elite SC—was a different color and it had a dark-gray, tungsten Cerakote finish. So much for comparing aesthetics. Of the nine pistols, eight of them were striker-fired models. SCCY's CPX-2RD was the only hammer-fired option with its double-action only trigger. So, for the most part, you can have any kind of new compact pistol you want as long as it's black, polymer-framed, striker-fired, or all three at once.

A few of the pistols were variants of earlier releases. For instance, Sig's P365 XL was just a slightly longer and taller version of the P365.



Beretta's APX Carry is the company's subcompact, striker-fired pistol that offers excellent features and value for the price.



Mossberg's MC2c was also a larger version of its MCsc. Conversely, the new Taurus G3c was a smaller iteration of its popular G3. It was the same with Canik's TP9 Elite SC, with it being a compact version of the TP9 Elite. Smith & Wesson and SCCY's new offerings for the year were red-dot models of previous releases with the M&P Compact Optics Ready and the CPX-2RD, respectively.

There were only three brand-new, hitherto unseen pistol designs in the mix. Those included the FN 503 and the Beretta APX Carry, which were very similar in style, capacity and form factor. The third was Springfield Armory's high-capacity, micro-compact Hellcat, which caused a good bit of buzz with its release.

To my dismay, every single pistol was chambered in 9mm. Don't get me wrong; it's a good round and will usually get the job done. However, I'm starting to wonder if we're getting too much soy in our diets with the lack of .45 ACP





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HANDGUNS: COMPACT SEMI-AUTOS



The Canik TP9 SC has become one of the author's favorite carry pistols during the past year.



or 10mm compact offerings in the mix. Heck, for that matter, I'd even get excited over .40 S&W or .357 SIG at this point in the game.

The upside with all of the contenders we had spread out on the table at the range was that the prices, in my opinion, were all quite reasonable. On the high end was Smith & Wesson's M&P Compact 9 2.0 Optics Ready with an MSRP of \$616. At the more budget-friendly end was SCCY's CPX-2RD at \$339. Oddly enough, the pistols at both price extremes were the red-dot models, each with a Crimson Trace CT1500 installed. So, no matter which features are most important to the buyer, the type and style of pistol they're looking for is more than likely economically accessible to them.

SHOOTERS READY

The guys were chomping at the bit to start shooting and after briefly scanning the table, each grabbed the pistol he wanted to try first. For the general plinking, we went to work on a steel plate rack, and for checking sights and accuracy, we went to town on a couple of dueling trees with their smaller steel targets.

Despite the ammo shortage, we still had a more than ample supply of Federal American



“OF THE NINE PISTOLS, EIGHT OF THEM WERE STRIKER-FIRED MODELS.”

Eagle and Sig Sauer Elite Ball ammunition on hand, with weights varying from 124 to 147 grains. In between bites of pizza, a great time was had by all. Of all the compacts tested, there wasn't a single malfunction attributable to any of the pistols. Brad had occasions where slides didn't lock back on a couple of pistols. However, he has good-sized hands and we traced it to him inadvertently engaging the slide stops.

Aside from what they would put on their score sheets, I tried to pay attention to each shooter's reaction after he got done with a particular pistol. In between playing host, caterer, range officer and photographer, I'd listen to their comments to each other and I'd solicit their feedback on each pistol. Most of the comments were extremely positive, but of course, some were not. There was definitely a wide range of tastes and preferences represented by each of them, but it was interesting to note how often they agreed about specific pistols or features.

Because of limited article space, I can't go into the history and details of each pistol here. I thought it was more important to write up the actual impressions and observations made by the guys after they finished with each pistol, and I included my thoughts in the mix as well.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

After the dust settled and the smoke cleared, everyone gathered around the table to get their last look at all of the pistols and then started the scoring process. While everyone tried to be as objective as possible, I'm sure some biases came through. After the scoring was done, I asked everyone, “If you had to choose one compact to do it all—concealed carry, home defense, car carry, etc.—which would you choose?”

The responses were interesting and didn't line up 100 percent with the more objective



The Mossberg MC2c is the company's second pistol offering in a century and ships with a 13-round and a 15-round magazine.





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HANDGUNS: COMPACT SEMI-AUTOS



Sig's Xray-3 sights include tritium inserts at the front and rear for fine tuning your sight picture in low light.



SIG SAUER
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ranking results. John and Addison both said they would pick the Canik TP9 Elite SC, while Brad and Lincoln both chose the Springfield Hellcat. The TP9 Elite SC was, in fact, ranked the highest, on average, of all the compact pistols by evaluators. However, the Smith & Wesson M&P 9 Compact Optics Ready was ranked second—not the Springfield Hellcat. Their answer to my question could have been an inclination toward bias or simply a conscious choice relating to size and weight when factoring in concealed carry.

Another interesting aspect of the scoring results was that the most expensive pistol did not win. There were five pistols priced higher than the Canik TP9 Elite SC, but it was the Canik that scored the best. There were several key criteria that put it over the top including the excellent trigger, which easily equals the highly regarded triggers found on Walther's striker-fired pistols. Another key point was the TP9 Elite's stellar accuracy, and the great trigger could have played a role here as well. I can shoot one-hole groups at 7 to 10 yards with it easier than any other pistol I've tried. This



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could be because of the trigger, the sights, the ergonomics or a combination of all those.

Another attribute that took the day for the TP9 Elite SC was its value rating. At its MSRP of \$439, it packs quite a punch when it comes to features. Performance aspects aside (like the trigger and accuracy), the Canik offers a milled slide for a micro red-dot sight, a Picatinny rail, a 12-round and an extended 15-round magazine, and a reversible magazine release. On top of all of that, the kit comes with two additional, interchangeable backstraps to tailor the pistol's fit, along with a toolbox and a holster.

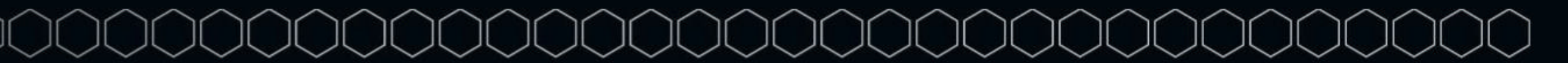
Though, that's not to say the Canik was the only strong value proposition in the mix. The Taurus G3c was the least expensive offering that we evaluated, yet it offered up a full suite of features like a Picatinny rail, great texturing, a nice trigger pull, restrike capability, thumb shelves for increased control, and fore and aft cocking serrations. Even better, it ships with three magazines, so your double mag carrier will be fully stocked when you leave the house. With an MSRP of \$306, it can be had for around \$250 on the street, and that's definitely a sweet deal.



Addison and Brad load up the compacts and get them ready for the trials.

SPECS

	BERETTA APX CARRY	CANIK TP9 ELITE SC	FN 503	MOSSBERG MC2C	SCCY CPX-2RD	SIG SAUER P365 XL	SMITH & WESSON M&P 9 2.0 COMPACT OR
CALIBER:	9mm	9mm	9mm	9mm	9mm	9mm	9mm
BARREL:	3 inches	3.6 inches	3.1 inches	3.9 inches	3.1 inches	3.7 inches	4 inches
OA LENGTH:	5.63 inches	6.7 inches	5.9 inches	7.1 inches	6.01 inches	6.6 inches	7.3 inches
WEIGHT:	19.8 ounces (empty)	24.8 ounces (empty)	21 ounces (empty)	21 ounces (empty)	17.5 ounces (empty)	20.7 ounces (empty)	25.8 ounces (empty)
GRIP:	Polymer	Polymer	Polymer	Polymer	Polymer	Polymer	Polymer
SIGHTS:	White-dot	Phosphorous dot front, Blacked out rear	White-dot	Truglo Tritium Pro	White-dot	X-Ray 3 day/night	Suppressor-height
ACTION:	Striker	Striker	Striker	Striker	DAO	Striker	Striker
FINISH:	Nitrocarburized	Cerakote	FNC	DLC	Nitride	Nitron	Armornite
CAPACITY:	6/8	12/15	6/8	13/15	10	10/12	15
MSRP:	\$349	\$440	\$549	\$490	\$339	\$680	\$569



S&W's latest poly pistol is the M&P9 2.0 Compact with an Optics Ready cut and adapter plates for various red-dot sights.

Next up the price ladder was the SCCY CPX-2RD. For the money, the testers felt like it offered good quality and excellent reliability. While the trigger pull was heavier than those on striker-fired models, and not exactly loved, a couple of us, myself included, felt like it was quite good for a double-action trigger. One person questioned the logic of installing a red-dot on a value-proposition pistol but admitted that it helped with overall accuracy. The magazine springs were rather stiff and a little difficult to load, but the overall ergonomics, including the finger grooves, were quite nice and offered solid control during fire.

Although it might have gotten overlooked when I asked the question, the M&P 9 Compact 2.0 Optics Ready's features and performance weren't overlooked during the range trial. Two of the fellows mentioned the excellent suppressor-height sights for co-witnessing, and three of them commented on how the trigger felt improved over the original M&P. I'm a sucker for the pistol's superb texturing and everyone thought it was a great all-around gun without any real drawbacks, which is why it came in a close second place.



SPRINGFIELD ARMORY HELLCAT	TAURUS G3C
9mm	9mm
3 inches	3.2 inches
6 inches	6.3 inches
18.3 ounces (empty)	22 ounces (empty)
Polymer	Polymer
Tritium front, U-dot rear	White-dot front, black out rear
Striker	Striker
Melonite	Tennifer
11/13	12
\$569	\$306



Possibly one of the best values on the market, the Taurus G3c offers all the great features of its bigger brother.



Right behind it, the Springfield Hellcat received a lot of praise as well. Positive comments like “Awesome value,” “Great capacity for size,” “Love the flat trigger,” and “Nice controls” were the norm—also with no real complaints. Addison said he preferred a fiber-optic sight but I like the high-visibility yellow sight with the tritium insert that was installed on our review pistol. It’s a subjective preference, but you can get either option on the Hellcat as well as the OSP model for a micro red-dot sight.

The most expensive pistol in the test was the Sig P365 XL (\$680 MSRP), and value was where it took its hardest ding in the scoring. Other than that, the reviews were quite positive overall. Two shooters really liked the XRay-3 tritium sights, and John mentioned how he liked the radiused edges. He pointed out that the P365 XL seemed to be dehorned better than the Hellcat. While the controls like the slide stop were a little undersized, everyone was impressed with the pistol’s accuracy and how easy it was to quickly address the steel plates during more accelerated shooting.

The Beretta APX Carry and the FN 503 were the only single-stack pistols in the compact category. They were also quite similar in design and style, and both ship with a six-round and an eight-round magazine. Both pistols offer excellent grip texturing and reversible mag releases, and neither incorporated an accessory rail. Because of the similarities,



they both received quite similar feedback in key areas. It was the consensus of the group that the grips on both pistols felt a little odd or awkward in the hand because of the distance between the frontstrap and the backstrap and the single-stack form factor.

The FN 503 felt robust and more solidly built than the APX Carry and the 503’s trigger was significantly better with a lighter and crisper pull. The trigger pull on the APX Carry was long and heavy, a little mushy, and it exhibited a good amount of rubbing. Offsetting the 503’s advan-

FINAL SCORES		AESTHETICS	ERGONOMICS	SIGHTS	TRIGGER CONTROL	RECOIL CONTROL	RELOADING EASE	ACCURACY	RELIABILITY	VALUE/ PRICE	TOTAL
CANIK TP9 ELITE SC		4.55	4.85	4.00	4.80	4.60	4.60	5.00	5.00	4.90	42.30
SMITH & WESSON M&P 9 2.0 COMPACT OR		4.35	4.55	4.30	3.90	4.60	4.70	4.80	5.00	3.90	40.10
SPRINGFIELD ARMORY HELLCAT		4.00	4.45	4.70	4.50	4.15	3.60	4.30	5.00	4.20	38.90
SIG SAUER P365 XL		4.30	4.40	4.30	4.20	3.60	4.05	4.40	5.00	3.45	37.70
MOSSBERG MC2C		3.10	4.05	3.50	3.50	4.00	3.80	3.60	5.00	3.30	33.85
TAURUS G3C		2.70	4.10	2.30	3.30	3.55	3.60	3.35	5.00	4.55	32.45
BERETTA APX CARRY		2.40	2.40	2.90	2.40	3.20	3.60	3.40	5.00	3.55	28.85
FN 503		2.30	1.90	3.10	2.90	3.20	3.50	3.50	5.00	2.10	27.50
SCCY CPX-2RD		1.70	2.10	2.20	2.00	2.60	2.20	2.70	5.00	3.30	23.80

NOTE: Each category worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. Entries reflect averages from five shooters.



Brad takes a few moments to write down his category scores for each pistol.

tage, however, was the APX Carry's excellent forward slide serrations and its \$349 MSRP, more than \$200 less than its FN counterpart.

Rounding out the pack was Mossberg's MC2c, which won over a couple of Glock fans in our midst. This is significant since the G48 is probably the Mossberg's closest market competitor. The MC2c's slightly smaller footprint (with flush-fit magazines), yet higher capacity (13 rounds) than a Glock 48 was a strong point in its favor. Also, a couple of guys liked the flat-faced trigger and the actual trigger pull was better than a standard Glock.

The Mossberg's ergos got the nod from a couple of guys, and Addison noted that he preferred the Tritium Pro night sights on our review pistol. At an MSRP of \$595, and even with night sights, the MC2c took a small hit in the value area. But, overall, the pistol offered

solid performance and excellent reliability during the evaluation.

HARD WORK

I would say that it was hard work doing this article, but that would be a lie. It's tough to find a better way to spend a Saturday with friends than shooting guns, eating pizza and talking about our favorite subject. It didn't hurt to have such an array of fine firearms that performed so well and that promised such good service as a defensive pistol.

Despite the tumult of this last year, we are living in exciting times. The firearms industry is turning out more products than ever and we are the beneficiaries of the most advanced features ever found on compact, defensive carry pistols. With products like the Canik TP9 Elite SC and the rest of the contenders in this review, it's good to know that quality and value still drive the narrative and that even better things are yet to come. ●

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MODEL



MATCH

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While most of the shooting community waits with bated breath for the newest high-capacity polymer defensive handgun to be released, there is a certain percentage of our group that could care less. They've already found what works for them and, like their first loves, remain loyal to the one they could always count on in hard times. Generally, you'll find more gray in their hair and a quiet wisdom gained through years of hard knocks. If you're lucky enough, and can manage to keep your mouth shut, you just might learn a thing or two from the guy with the well-worn 1911.

MATCH PREP

For 2020 we collected 1911s from 10 different manufacturers. Each gun was field stripped prior to shooting. I scrubbed both the frame rails and slide rails and also brushed out the bore. I also placed a few drops of oil on the rails, and worked the slide and frame to distribute it before reassembling the gun.

Securing ammo for this year's test, mostly due to COVID-19, was a chore. But we must give thanks to Aguila, Hornady, Doubletap Ammunition, Black Hills and Federal. We also used some of my own handloads to test this year's contenders.

All of the accuracy testing was performed using a portable DOA Tactical shooting bench.

My protocol for accuracy testing of any semi-auto handgun is to load six rounds into the magazine, chamber a round and fire the first shot into the backstop. I then fire the next five shots for a group. This prevents the manually chambered round from ruining the group.

To top it off, Ken Campbell, Gunsite's CEO, was kind enough to provide us with a range to accommodate the accuracy testing, reactive steel targets and also allowed access to one of Gunsite's shoot houses. Without further ado, let's meet the contenders.

KIMBER RAPIDE BLACK ICE

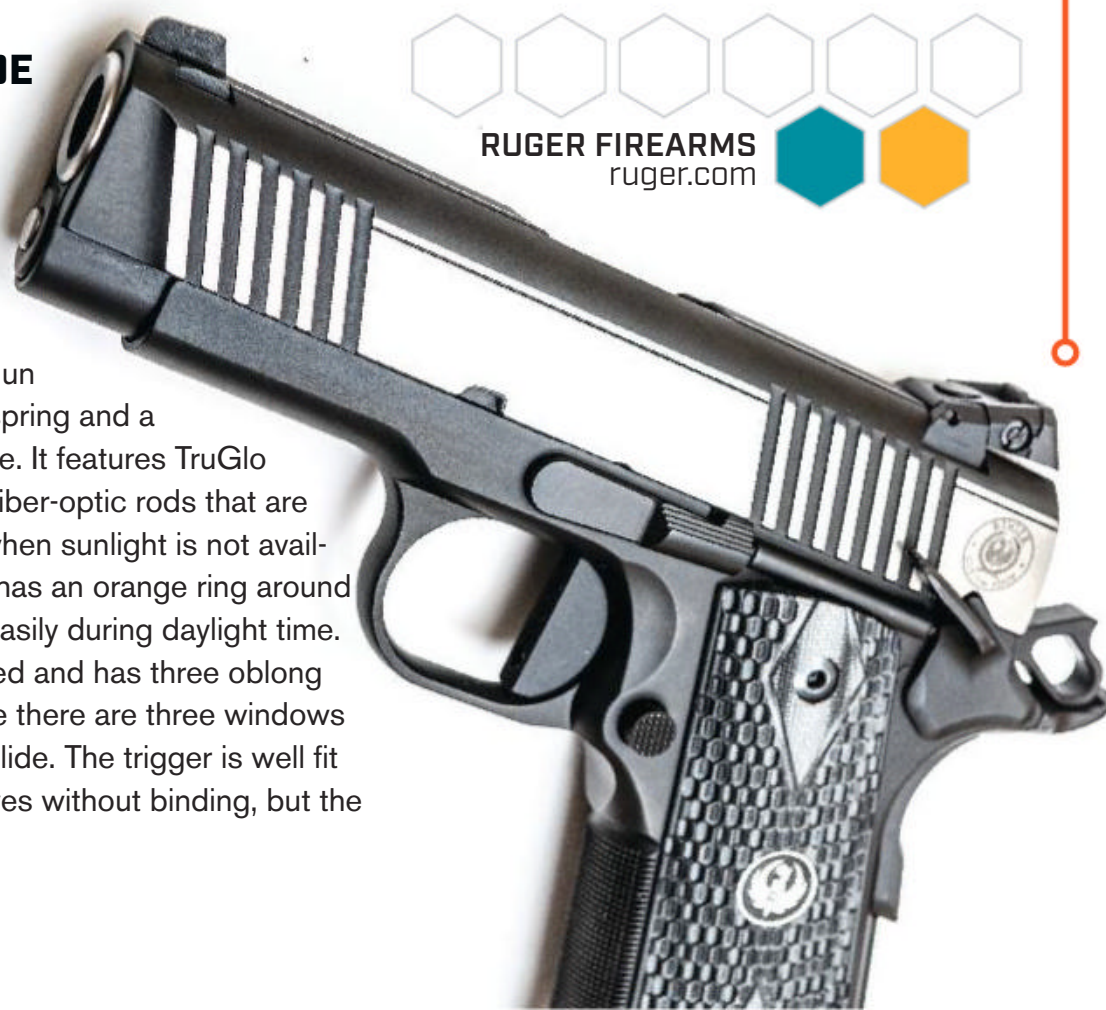
The Rapide Black Ice, a stunning gun with its two-tone finish that is actually KimPro II finish over stainless steel. The gun uses a single recoil spring and a standard spring guide. It features TruGlo sights that possess fiber-optic rods that are powered by tritium when sunlight is not available. The front sight has an orange ring around it so it can be seen easily during daylight time. The slide is flat topped and has three oblong ports cut into it, while there are three windows on each side of the slide. The trigger is well fit in the frame and moves without binding, but the

trigger pull on my sample was just too heavy at 5.5 pounds. I like the golf ball frontstrap treatment, and the mainspring housing is flat with three oblong ports machined into it. Grips are sculpted G10, and there's a relief cut for easy access to the magazine release. The cocking serrations are wide, front and back, and the relief cuts give the gun a racy look! There's a detachable magazine well funnel that is screwed into the mainspring housing, so the gun is ready for both USPSA and IDPA competitions. The gun has a high-cut frame for the shooter to obtain a higher hold on the gun, and the high sweep beavertail helps also. The gun looks great and feels great in my hand.

I shot the Rapide Black Ice at 25 yards for accuracy and found the only thing I didn't like about it was its trigger. Even though the gun does not have a firing pin safety and has a Series 70-style frame, its trigger pull is just too heavy for target or defense work, in my opinion. Despite this, the gun functioned perfectly and never let us down.

COLT COMPETITION PLUS

The Colt Competition Plus model and I did not get off to the greatest of starts during the pre-shooting inspection when I disassembled the gun for inspection and lubrication. After scrubbing and lubricating the slide and frame rails, I reinstalled the slide onto the frame to hand cycle the slide a few times to better distribute the lube. There's a tight spot that inhib-



its the slide's movement. It's not so tight that it wouldn't work, but tight enough to possibly impede the slide's velocity, and that can cause a number of cycling maladies.

Colt uses a Series 70 stainless steel lower on this gun. It is outfit with a strong-side-only extended thumb safety, a high sweep beaver-tail grip safety and the frame is undercut at the juncture of the triggerguard and frontstrap. It has well-executed 30-lpi checkering on its frontstrap and mainspring housing. The carbon steel, blued slide has a lowered and flared ejection port and a fluorescent front sight. The rear sight is low profile and can be drifted in its dovetail for windage. This particular sight is also adjustable for elevation, which is a handy feature for competitors that might use a handload for practice and jacketed ammo for a big match.

What I found when firing the Colt Competition Plus was some failures for the slide to go into battery on the first three magazines. After that, the gun loosened up and I was able to fire another couple hundred rounds without any sort of failures. Accuracy was better than average, and I did like the sights on the gun. The fluorescent front sight was absolutely brilliant in the bright Arizona sun! Trigger pull was manageable at 4.25 pounds. The upshot is that the Competition Plus does possess most of the features that competitors and concealed carriers look for in a 1911.

RUGER SR1911

Ruger's Custom Shop provided us with a beautiful two-tone Officer's Style SR1911. The gun has a stainless steel slide and frame coated with black nitride. The slide's flats are then polished for a pleasing two-tone finish. The Custom Shop flat tops the slide and serrates it. The low-profile rear sight is adjustable for both windage and elevation, and the front sight has a Tritium dot for low-light fighting. It uses an internal style or traditional extractor and an extended ejector. Our test sample is chambered for .45 ACP, and the gun comes with two seven-round stainless steel magazines. The stainless steel, match-quality barrel is bushingless in design and has a supported chamber. The trigger is flat faced, which feels surprisingly good and is adjustable for overtravel. It tracks effortlessly

in its raceway, there is no horizontal or vertical play, and it breaks with 3.25 pounds of pressure. The gun features an abbreviated grip frame, and the frontstrap is checkered at 30 lpi. It also has a high sweep beavertail with a memory bump and a beveled magazine well. Ruger undercuts the frame where it meets the triggerguard so shooters can get a higher grip on the gun. The gun also features ambidextrous extended thumb safeties and a finely checkered magazine housing that is rounded to prevent clothes from hanging up on it when worn concealed. Despite its abbreviated size, the Custom Shop gun feels surprisingly good in the hand.

I tested the SR1911 Officers at 15 yards because of its shorter barrel length. Its trigger made it an easy chore to shoot small groups, and the three-group aggregate was just 1.02 inches. There were no malfunctions or stoppages of any sort. Ruger's Custom shop builds fine pistols, and the SR1911 is just one example of the extraordinary work they do!

SPRINGFIELD 1911 VICKERS TACTICAL MASTER CLASS

Springfield Armory sent me a sample of their relatively new 1911 Vickers Tactical Master Class pistol. In a collaboration with retired U.S. Army 1st SFOD-Delta operator and combat veteran Larry Vickers, the gun combines Springfield Armory's extensive 1911 manufacturing experience with his knowledge of features that a fighting handgun should possess. There are no extraneous appendages or features that might entice a "1911 newbie" or the occasional match shooter to buy this gun. It possesses everything needed to win a deadly encounter and nothing that is not. This is an expert's gun built for the man who takes this business seriously, and it is a rock-solid workhorse.

Springfield only uses forged frames and slides because they provide the strength needed to stand up to thousands of rounds of practice. The match-grade barrel is manufactured from a stainless steel forging,





and a stainless steel bushing is used with it. Springfield designed the gun to use a single, standard recoil spring and guide. The gun is fitted with a solid, medium-length aluminum trigger and a Wilson Combat stainless steel Commander hammer, and the trigger breaks crisply with 4.5 pounds of pressure.

Just because this gun was designed for serious work doesn't mean that Springfield Armory couldn't make it look nice. Starting at the front of the gun you'll notice the slide is given ball cuts—something 1911 aficionados seem to always enjoy. The frontstrap, cocking serrations and mainspring housing have what Springfield calls Woven Checkering. It is an amazing piece of machining that gives all the purchase of fine checkering without sharp edges to cut the skin, holster or clothing. It is effective, and I like it! The frame, slide and appendages are coated with a Black T finish for corrosion resistance, lubricity and to give the gun a matte, non-reflective finish. Custom scalloped G10 grips complete the package.

The gun's sights are worth mentioning also. Its rear sight is a stout, one-piece affair with two screws that lock it in its dovetail. It can be drifted for windage correction, but my test gun shot perfectly to point of aim. It features a deep "U" notch and is serrated. The front sight has a Tritium dot for night fighting, and it is surrounded by a florescent orange ring so it can be easily picked up on presentation during daylight. It's fast and accurate, and making a sight picture is as easy as putting a ball in the bucket.

Of all the guns tested, this particular gun would be my choice for a "go-to-war" gun. It is a well-executed 1911 that gives the shooter everything needed to be successful.

TISAS 1911 DUTY B45R

I first saw the Tisas 1911s at the 2020 SHOT Show. I stopped by SDS Imports, their importer, and looked at the samples on display. I remember remarking to a colleague that if the 1911s delivered looked as good as the display guns, they were going to be a big hit with the American market. Made in Turkey, the Tisas 1911s feature forged frames and slides and a Series 70-style frame. SDS imports several different Tisas 1911 models

and I received a copy of the 1911 Duty B45R. The gun features deep, wide cocking serrations fore and aft, as well as ambidextrous extended thumb safeties. It also has a high-sweep beavertail grip safety, and the frame is undercut at the junction of the triggerguard and frontstrap. Together those features help the shooter in obtaining the highest grip possible to control muzzle rise.

The B45R's dust cover is railed for the addition of a light/laser, and both the frame and slide are given a matte black Cerakote finish. Tisas throats the stainless steel barrel and polishes the feed ramp to aid in feeding all ammo. During our testing, the gun never choked and displayed better than expected accuracy for a budget-priced 1911. Average group size for the three loads tested measured under 1 inch. I understand that not everyone can own a custom 1911 gun

worth thousands of dollars, and the Tisas Duty B45R is a viable alternative for a shooter on a tight budget. I'm favorably impressed with the quality of the Turkish import and found it to represent the best value for the money of any of the guns tested. Visit sdsimports.com to see which Tisas fits your needs the best!

REMINGTON R1 ULTRALIGHT EXECUTIVE

Remington Arms sent me a sample of their R1 Ultralight Executive—a 1911 built for concealment. Featuring a 3.5-inch supported barrel and built on a lightweight alloy frame with a rounded heel, the gun also features low-profile G10 grips, 40-lpi frontstrap checkering and an extended safety and high sweep beavertail. For carry comfort, Remington smiths remove all of the sharp edges. The entire gun is blacked out for a serious, no-nonsense look.



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SMITH & WESSON SW1911 E SERIES

Smith & Wesson sent me a sample of their SW1911 E Series pistol. Constructed chiefly of stainless steel, the E Series gun possesses a high degree of fit and finish as well the reliability and accuracy we've become accustomed to with Smith & Wesson products.

It's a handsome pistol, sporting fish scale-style cocking serrations fore and aft. Smith & Wesson polishes the slide flats to a bright polish, while the rest of the gun remains a subdued satin silver. Appendages like the external extractor, magazine release, slide release, thumb safety, mainspring housing and beaver-tail grip safety are left blued to provide contrast to the stainless finish. The 20-lpi checkering is machine cut into the gun's frontstrap, and the mainspring housing has matching checkering to give the shooter a secure firing grip. Smith also flat tops the E Series slide top and serrates it to reduce glare. This custom feature is something I always add to my custom 1911s.

Frame-to-slide fit of the E-Series gun is perfection, as are the fit of things like the thumb safety and beavertail. Smith outfits this gun with a long, aluminum trigger, which is adjustable for overtravel. Combined with

Remington ships the pistol with two seven-round magazines. The R1 also uses a Series 80-style firing pin safety and extended ejector. It also features a strong-side, extended thumb safety. Despite the short barrel length, the gun uses a single, flat recoil spring and a full-length recoil spring guide rod. The bull barrel does not use a bushing. Sights feature a big-dot tritium sight with a rear sight with a deep "U" notch. Together they combine to make a very nice sight picture.

I fired the R1 Ultralight Executive for accuracy at 15 yards. It has one of the nicest triggers of the 10 guns I tested with a crisp 3-pound trigger pull, and this made it possible to concentrate on sight alignment while adding the pressure necessary to break the shot. Its reset is also very firm.

I think if I were to spec out a 1911 for concealed carry it would look much like this gun. Remington got a lot right with the R1 Ultralight Executive!

SPECS

	COLT COMPETITION PLUS	KIMBER RAPIDE BLACK ICE	NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM TRS COMP IOS	REMINGTON ULTRALIGHT EXECUTIVE	RUGER SR 1911 CUSTOM SHOP
CALIBER:	.45 ACP	.45 ACP	9mm	.45 ACP	.45 ACP
BARREL:	5 inches	5 inches	5 inches	3.5 inches	3.6 inches
OA LENGTH:	8.5 inches	8.7 inches	8.47 inches	7 inches	7.25 inches
WEIGHT:	36 ounces (empty)	38 ounces (empty)	39.6 ounces (empty)	28 ounces (empty)	33 ounces (empty)
GRIPS:	G10	Sculpted G10	Black synthetic	G10	G10
SIGHTS:	Novak rear, fiber-optic front	Tru-Glo TFX day/night	Adj. rear, fiber-optic front	Three-dot tritium night sights	Tritium front, adj. rear
ACTION:	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA
FINISH:	Stainless frame, blue slide	Silver/Gray Kim Pro II	Blackened stainless	Alloy frame, black slide	Stainless, black nitride
CAPACITY:	8+1	8+1	17+1	7+1	7+1
MSRP:	\$1,199	\$1,490	\$4,599	\$1,250	\$1,899

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the elongated, skeletonized hammer, the trigger breaks at a serviceable 4.75 pounds. No firing pin safety is included on this particular 1911. Low-profile, Novak-style sights are used on this gun and aided me in shooting some very nice groups.

WILSON COMBAT X9S

Wilson Combat added to its EDC line this year with the X9S Subcompact pistol. Designed for deep cover and concealed carry, the alloy-framed gun is based on the 1911 pistol with some of Bill Wilson's own refinements.

Chambered in 9mm, the EDC X9S has a capacity of 10+1 and weighs just 30 ounces fully loaded. Wilson Combat machines the X9S's frame from 7065-T6 aluminum. To keep the gun's dimensions as trim as possible, WC machines its trademark X-Tac traction texture into the gun's frontstrap and backstraps and also the sides of the frame where grips would normally go. Though the gun is built without a grip safety, WC does incorporate a beavertail

into the frame to prevent hammer bite. The frame also features a cut at the junction of the triggerguard and frontstrap to allow the shooter to get a higher hold, and the dust cover is designed to accept a compact light/laser.

WC machines the X9S's slide from stainless steel. It is a tri-top design and the slide flat between the sights is serrated at 30 lpi. The ejection port is lowered and an external extractor is used.

Every Wilson Combat pistol I have ever fired has produced head-turning accuracy and the X9S is no different. Our three-group average measured under 0.75 inches at 15 yards. This type of accuracy doesn't happen by accident, and Wilson Combat offers a 1.5-inch accuracy guarantee at 25 yards!

The X9S uses a stainless steel, match-grade barrel with a coned muzzle and supported chamber. There is no bushing used on this gun, and the barrel tube and chamber exterior are fluted, giving dirt and firing residue a place to go instead of tying up the gun. Because of the gun's petite dimensions and short barrel, WC uses a dual recoil spring system to give the little gun the needed spring mass to cycle properly.



SPECS

	SIG SAUER EMPEROR SCORPION	SMITH & WESSON SW1911 E SERIES	SPRINGFIELD ARMORY LARRY VICKERS	TISAS B45R	WILSON COMBAT EDC X9S
CALIBER:	.45 ACP	.45 ACP	.45 ACP	.45 ACP	9mm
BARREL:	5 inches	5 inches	5 inches	5 inches	3.25 inches
OA LENGTH:	8.7 inches	8.7 inches	8.6 inches	8.5 inches	6.75 inches
WEIGHT:	41.6 ounces (empty)	39.6 ounces (empty)	41.5 ounces (empty)	40 ounces (empty)	25.2 ounces (empty)
GRIPS:	Black G10	Wood laminate	G10	Black plastic	Integral to alloy frame
SIGHTS:	Siglite night sights	Low-profile three-dot	Tritium front, Vickers Elite rear	Novak-style three-dot combat	Low-profile, fiber-optic front
ACTION:	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA
FINISH:	PVD over stainless	Satin stainless steel	Black T	Black cerakote	Black DSC slide, Armor Tuff
CAPACITY:	8+1	8+1	8+1	8+1	10+1/15+1
MSRP:	\$1,080	\$979	\$1,495	\$479	\$2,695

Sights also aided in shooting this little gun well and Wilson Combat uses a florescent green front sight and a Battlesight rear with a deep notch "U." Not only could I shoot tiny groups with them, but I found them to be very fast during shooting exercises. The gun's trigger was also very helpful in shooting accurately and broke crisply with 4 pounds of pressure.

Because of its intended use, WC outfits the X9S with a strong-side-only thumb safety of standard dimensions. The X9S ships with one 10-round magazine that fits flush with the bottom of the frame. WC machined pulls on each side of the grip for the user to rip out a stuck magazine if needed. A 15-round magazine is also shipped with the gun and it has a machined aluminum base pad that acts as a grip extension and gives the shooter as much room on the frontstrap as any standard size 1911. Those who favor the 1911 operating system but need a smaller footprint for concealed carry should give the Wilson Combat EDC X9S a strong look!

NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM TRS COMP

Nighthawk Custom sent me a sample of its brand new TRS Comp gun for this Ballistic's Best evaluation. The gun possesses standard 1911 dimensions yet has a 17+1 capacity. Nighthawk machines the grip frame from 7075 alloy, anodizes it and then Cerakotes it to perfectly match the black Nitrided stainless steel slide.

My test gun had the Interchangeable Optics System, which allows shooters to put a red-dot on their 1911. It also allows them to go back to iron sights whenever they desire. It is a well thought-out system that gives the gun a great deal of versatility.

Nighthawk Custom machines circular dimples into the grip frame and mainspring housing just deep enough for the shooter's hand to press flesh into. It provides a very secure grip even with wet hands. Matching dimple cocking serrations are machined into the rear of the slide. Our test gun featured a single strong-side thumb safety, fit to perfection, and it engages and disengages crisply. Southpaws and competition shooters can spec their guns out to have an ambidextrous thumb safety, if desired.

The TRS Comp's trigger glides back and forth effortlessly in its raceway yet has no horizontal or vertical play. The hammer falls with

just 3.75 pounds of pressure, the overtravel is set to perfection and it also has a firm reset.

The TRS Comp gun uses a single port compensator screwed to the end of the supported, match-grade, stainless steel barrel. Nighthawk's craftsmen did a splendid job of mating the comp to the slide—so much so that when the slide was in battery, I dragged a fingernail over the seam between comp and slide, with my eyes closed, and I was unable to feel it. The barrel unlocks easily and without hesitation when the slide reciprocates, and the fit between slide and frame is perfect.

I tested the TRS Comp at 25 yards for accuracy and used the supplied red-dot to fire all of my groups. It is an easy matter to center the red dot in the black bullseye of my Shoot N C target while adding pressure to the trigger. It's amazing just how little muzzle disruption there is. Immediately after firing the shot, the sights settle right back on target. I won't go as far as to say it was like shooting a .22, but the gun's weight and compensator

effectively mitigated most of the recoil and muzzle flip.

Nighthawk Custom's new Tactical Ready Series Comp gun is a wonderful blend of superior engineering, articulate machining and old-world craftsmanship. While this might not be the gun aficionados dream of, it will appeal to those who want more capacity and lighter recoil in the same 1911 footprint.

SIG SAUER EMPEROR SCORPION

Last but not least is the Sig Emperor Scorpion, which uses stainless steel forgings for both the frame and slide and both parts are coated with a Flat Dark Earth PVD finish. The frame is a Series 80 style with a firing pin safety that prevents the firing pin from moving unless purposeful pressure is placed on the trigger. The frame has a rail on its dust cover, and its front-strap is checkered at 30 lpi. Sig undercuts the frame at the junction of the triggerguard and frontstrap for a high hold grip. The stocks are sculpted Hogue G10 magazine well grips that



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NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM
nighthawkcustom.com





possesses an unmatched capacity, has a great trigger and produced outstanding accuracy. All that comes at a cost, however. Our test gun's price starts at \$4,600 and goes up depending on which upgrades or features you select for your build. It's not a gun built for traditionalists, but I can tell you Nighthawk Custom has a waiting list for these guns. So, if you want one, place your order now to get your spot in line.

The Springfield Vickers Tactical came in at a solid second place. The Wilson Combat EDC X9S and the Ruger Custom Shop tied for the third spot overall. If I were to separate the compact guns, which were all tested at 15 yards, the Wilson Combat and Ruger offerings would be tied for first place with the Remington Ultralight Executive coming in third place.

Springfield Armory's Vickers Tactical pistol is right in the middle of the pack with a retail price of \$1,495, yet it was a close second-place finisher to a gun that costs three times more. The Turkish-made Tisas B45R is priced \$500 cheaper than its closest competitor, price wise, yet finished in ninth place, produced a three-group average of less than 1 inch at 25 yards and was completely reliable.

Speaking of reliability, the Colt Competition Plus was the only gun that stuttered during the evaluation and that issue seemed to work itself after a few magazines. All of the other guns worked flawlessly. So much for detractors who say the 1911 is unreliable. ●

add about 0.25 inches to the frame's length but provide a very efficient magazine well for quick and certain reloads.

The gun uses an external extractor—a departure from John Browning's original design—but they have racked up several years of flawless service and I have yet to find a downside to this design departure. Sig gives the slide edge a heavy bevel and also removes other sharp edges to make the Emperor Scorpion carry friendly.

The gun functioned fine and I didn't have any reliability issues with it. It also shot very accurately with a three-group average of 1.10 inches at 25 yards. But I did feel the trigger

could have been much better. It broke at 5.75 pounds, and I could actually feel the Series 80 linkage as I concentrated on my trigger press while doing the accuracy tests. Fortunately, this would be an easy fix for any 1911 specialist. Sig builds nice 1911s with their own distinctive style and I have fired enough of them to know the trigger on this particular sample is not the norm.

WRAPPING UP

Nighthawk Custom's TRS Comp gun is the winner of this year's Ballistic's Best roundup! It really is one helluva gun. It is well built and well finished, and I absolutely loved shooting it. It

FINAL SCORES		AESTHETICS	ERGONOMICS	SIGHTS	TRIGGER CONTROL	RECOIL CONTROL	RELOADING EASE	ACCURACY	RELIABILITY	VALUE/ PRICE	TOTAL
NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM TRS COMP IOS		4.75	4.38	4.63	4.50	4.63	4.75	4.75	5.00	3.63	41.00
SPRINGFIELD ARMORY LARRY VICKERS		4.63	4.50	4.63	4.38	4.00	4.50	4.63	5.00	4.25	40.50
WILSON COMBAT EDC X9S		4.38	3.50	4.38	4.38	4.13	4.25	4.63	5.00	3.88	38.90
RUGER SR 1911 CUSTOM SHOP		4.25	4.50	4.38	4.13	3.88	4.00	4.63	5.00	3.75	38.50
SMITH & WESSON SW1911 E SERIES		4.00	4.25	3.88	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.38	5.00	4.38	37.88
KIMBER RAPIDE BLACK ICE		4.13	4.38	4.38	3.63	4.50	3.88	3.75	5.00	3.63	37.25
SIG SAUER EMPEROR SCORPION		4.13	4.50	4.38	3.25	3.50	4.25	4.25	5.00	3.63	36.88
REMINGTON ULTRALIGHT EXECUTIVE		3.00	3.63	4.25	4.38	3.88	3.00	3.88	5.00	4.25	35.25
TISAS B45R		3.38	3.38	3.38	3.38	3.50	3.13	3.63	5.00	5.00	33.75
COLT COMPETITION PLUS		3.63	3.50	4.13	3.38	3.50	3.00	3.13	2.75	3.13	30.13

NOTE: Each category worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. Entries reflect averages from two shooters.





With near perfect fit and outstanding accuracy, the Nighthawk Custom TRS Comp climbed to the top of the 1911 ratings chart in very fine fashion.

★ **WINNER** ★



1911

**NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM
TRS COMP**

5.56MM

77 Gr. MK 262 MOD 1-C

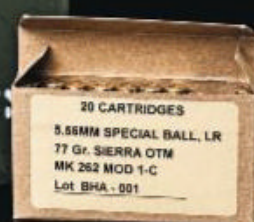
Group averages of 2" or less at 300 yards

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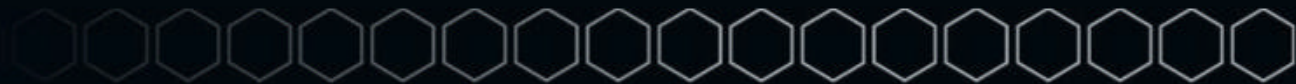
BY ANDY GROSSMAN





ballistic's best

HANDGUNS: AR-15 PISTOLS



CMMG
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America's favorite rifle has definitely evolved over the years. That evolution has brought us better, smaller, lighter and nicer looking guns in the past few years. Because of the evolution of the AR platform, pistols are becoming the new normal. The AR pistol has shown up from nearly every manufacturer, and I personally love them. In fact, I don't just love them, I am kind of obsessed with them—the look, the feel and the fireballs. Simply put, they are just awesome. When the *Ballistic* crew told me they wanted to create an AR pistol category in Ballistic's Best of 2020, I was ecstatic to take on the task.

One of the toughest parts of this project was limiting myself to nine guns. I honestly did hours of research to pick a very diverse list of AR pistols that I felt you, the reader, would truly be interested in seeing go head to head. I hand-picked four of the best AR shooters I know and we headed out to the range. Nine brand new AR pistols were loaded in the truck, along with about 3,000 rounds of ammo and a bunch of awesome shooting glasses for the other shooters that



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HANDGUNS: AR-15 PISTOLS

“ONE OF THE TOUGHEST PARTS OF THIS PROJECT WAS LIMITING MYSELF TO NINE GUNS.”

The Daniel Defense DDM4V7 provides plenty of great features at a decent price. It also came with Daniel Defense's 32-round magazine.

Magpul so kindly sent us to use during testing. There is something about driving around with nine AR pistols in the backseat of your truck that just gets the juices flowing. I knew it would be a tough day, but someone had to do it. We used a 0 to 5 rating scale, with 0 being the worst and 5 being the best. We used this scale to rate each gun individually on its own merit and allow the winner to be crowned from the average of the five shooters' scores. We rated the guns on aesthetics, ergonomics, sights, trigger, recoil, ease of reloads, accuracy, reliability and overall value.

Many of the guns unfortunately didn't ship with any kind of sights from the factory, which is why we used a 0-5 scale instead of 1-5. The guns that had no sights received a 0 for the sight category from all shooters. I was a bit concerned with safety and being able to reliably test accuracy of the barrels so I reached out to Magpul. I was able to put Magpul MBUS flip-up sights on all the guns that didn't have sights except the Sig Tread Pistol because it doesn't have a front rail on the handguard. I also

decided to get every gun chambered in 5.56mm to keep everything even across the board.

BUDGET BALLISTICS

One of the best things about ARs in general is that pretty much any budget has options. Out of the nine guns, three came in fairly budget friendly at under \$1,400 MSRP—the Sig Sauer Tread Pistol, the CMMG Banshee 200 MK4 and the Rock River Arms RUK-15 4.5 pistol. The Tread is the least expensive out of all tested, coming in at \$951. It has a decent M-Lok handguard on it with a Picatinny rail on the upper, making it easy to mount your favorite optic and M-Lok accessories. Sig also includes a Blade brace, which is a bit lower profile than most braces on the market.

The second most budget-friendly pistol was the Rock River Arms RUK-15 4.5. This tiny little AR pistol with a 4.5-inch barrel has an MSRP of only \$1,065. The RUK-15 has a very attractive look and would slip into most backpacks. Rock River includes a set of its own flip-up sights, a nice little hand stop up front and the SB Tactical SBA3 brace.



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HANDGUNS: AR-15 PISTOLS

CMMG is known for its budget-friendly Banshee in a number of odd calibers. We grabbed the Storm Trooper White 200 series Banshee for testing since we were doing everything in 5.56. This model has the longest barrel of the entire group at 12.5 inches and definitely stood out with that beautiful bright white finish. CMMG adds its own brace on the Banshee called the Rip Brace. The Rip Brace allows the shooter to go from fully collapsed to fully extended by just giving the brace a little tug. The Banshee stays fairly kind to the budget with an MSRP of \$1,149.95.

MIDDLE OF THE ROAD

Four out of the nine guns are marked at what I consider average pricing for AR pistols, between \$1,500 and \$1,800 MSRP. Out of those came the Bravo Company BCM RECCE-11 MCMR, Daniel Defense DDM4V7, ZEV Core Elite and the Springfield Saint Edge PDW. The lowest priced of these mid-range guns was the Bravo BCM. The BCM MCMR came with a set of decent flip-up sights, the



A fine AR pistol in its own right, the third-place Rock River Arms RUK-15 only missed out on the top spot by 0.4 points—a very close competition indeed.



ROCK RIVER ARMS
rockriverarms.com

upgraded BCM PNT trigger and incredible internals all made by Bravo Company. This gun has an MSRP of only \$1,500 and functioned flawlessly during testing.

The Daniel Defense, Springfield and ZEV are really a toss up when it comes to value. It

really boils down to personal preference and the features you might be looking for. Daniel Defense's DDM4V7 and the ZEV Core Elite pistols are very similar. Both have a 10.5-inch barrel, weigh in at right around 6 pounds and utilize the same SB Tactical SBA3 pistol



SPECS

	BCM RECCE-11 MCMR	CMMG BANSHEE MK4	DANIEL DEFENSE DDM4 V7	FALKOR PHANTOM 556	ROCK RIVER ARMS RUK-15
CALIBER:	5.56mm	5.56mm	5.56mm	5.56mm	5.56mm
BARREL:	11.5 inches	12.5 inches	10.3 inches	10.5 inches	4.5 inches
OA LENGTH:	27.5 inches	29 inches	26 inches	26.75 inches	22.25 inches
WEIGHT:	5.6 pounds (empty)	5.15 pounds (empty)	5.34 pounds (empty)	6.15 pounds (empty)	6 pounds (empty)
BRACE:	SB Tactical SBA3	CMMG Rip Brace	SB Tactical SBA3	SB Tactical SBA3	SB Tactical SBA3
SIGHTS:	BCM flip-up	None	Daniel Defense fixed	None	RRA NSP flip-ups
ACTION:	Semi-Auto	Semi-Auto	Semi-Auto	Semi-Auto	Semi-Auto
FINISH:	Hardcoat anodized	Cerakote (white)	Mil-Spec (brown)	Cerakote (FDE)	Hardcoat anodized
CAPACITY:	30+1	30+1	32+1	30+1	30+1
MSRP:	\$1,500	\$1,150	\$1,729	\$2,519	\$1,065

brace. Both are very easy on the eyes, as well. Daniel Defense includes one of its awesome 32-round magazines with the gun, while ZEV ups the ante with a very sweet, eye-catching bronze PVD-coated barrel.

The gun that really stood out in this price range was the Springfield Saint Edge PDW. I have been a huge fan of this gun since I first laid eyes on it at SHOT Show. Springfield really got innovative and stepped outside the box with this thing. The PDW was the only gun tested that utilized the Maxim Defense SCW brace, which collapses down so far that the gun is only 18.75 inches long when collapsed. Even extended, this pistol is shorter than most on the market when they are collapsed at under 24 inches in total length. The Reptilia CQG grip along with the 20-round Magpul PMag keeps the height of the gun down also. However, with these unique features comes a shorter BCG and recoil assembly.



TOP-DOLLAR POWERHOUSES

The last two guns that were tested—the Wilson Combat Protector and the Falkor Defense Phantom 5.56—are definitely at the higher end

of the budget scale, but with some very unique parts and features the pricing kind of makes sense. The Wilson Combat Protector features a unique Gear Head Works Tailhook Mod2



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pistol brace, Wilson Combat's Tactical Trigger Unit and an 11.3-inch match-grade barrel. This gun has an MSRP close to \$2,000 and like many others does not include a set of sights. The handguard has a nice low-profile design that looks very nice.

Last but not least is the Falkor Defense Phantom 5.56. Let's start with the price tag because it is the steepest out of the nine. With an MSRP of \$2,519 many would definitely cringe. However, after handling this gun, I can justify the cost. Everything about it is different, and every tester fought over shooting it first. The Phantom 5.56 has completely ambidextrous controls, a precision matched billet aluminum upper and lower, and a 3.5-pound Velocity trigger. Falkor also added its aluminum skeletonized pistol grip and matching hand stop on the handguard.

CROWNING THE KING

As you can imagine, it wasn't too hard convincing four gun guys to come out and run

rounds through nine different AR pistols and evaluate each of them. We all gathered our stuff and met at my good friend's house where he has his own outdoor range that was perfect for this type of testing. Dustin Lehto, Jason Wasylyshyn, Linas Cernauskas, Chris Vargo and myself were definitely ready to crown one of these guns Ballistic's Best of 2020. I was able to gather some ammo from Hornady, Focchi, Wilson Combat and HSM, which is **no easy task during an ammo crisis—especially** when I was seeking the caliber over half the country is also looking for. Thanks to these awesome companies we were able to complete the testing and even have a bit more fun at the end of it all.

It was such a beautiful, quiet day when we arrived at the range. That is, until I unloaded all these guns on my Diamondback bed cover and we started loading magazines. The sounds of birds chirping quickly was taken over by the beautiful symphony of 5.56 and .223 cartridges being popped into 30-round mag-



Not surprising for a gun from the good folks at Wilson Combat, the Protector tied for first place in the accuracy scores, proving itself a worthy AR pistol.



SPECS

	SIG SAUER TREAD	SPRINGFIELD ARMORY SAINT EDGE PDW	WILSON COMBAT PROTECTOR	ZEV TECHNOLOGIES CORE ELITE
CALIBER:	5.56mm	5.56mm	5.56mm	5.56mm
BARREL:	11.5 inches	5.5 inches	11.3 inches	10.5 inches
OA LENGTH:	27 inches	18.75 inches	27.25 inches	27.5 inches
WEIGHT:	6 pounds (empty)	5.5 pounds (empty)	6 pounds (empty)	6.14 pounds (empty)
BRACE:	Blade 2.0	Maxim Defense SCW	Gear Head Tailhook	SB Tactical SBA3
SIGHTS:	None	None	None	None
ACTION:	Semi-Auto	Semi-Auto	Semi-Auto	Semi-Auto
FINISH:	Hardcoat anodized	Hardcoat anodized	Hardcoat anodized	Hardcoat anodized
CAPACITY:	30+1	20+1	20+1	30+1
MSRP:	\$951	\$1,777	\$2,000	\$1,775

azines. Then that transitioned to the sounds of at least two AR pistols at a time firing rounds down range. I am sure it sounded like a war zone, and it was fantastic. After a few thousand rounds were spent and the smoke cleared, we started discussing everyone's evaluation sheets and tallying up the totals.

There were many features the testers liked and a few people didn't like. Pretty much every tester gave top rating for reliability to all the guns since we only experienced two malfunctions total between all of us. As expected, the more expensive guns had better parts such as triggers, charging handles and materials used. However, many of the more expensive models lacked any kind of stock sight system. I understand that most people purchase these guns and throw an optic of some sort on them, so I do get why manufacturers leave off the sights. To me, however, I would really like to see a set of simple flip-ups or even fixed removable sights on the guns from the factory.



If I just spent upwards of \$2,500 on a gun, I would really hope to be able to head right to the range and shoot it.

With that being said, the Bravo Company, Daniel Defense and the Rock River all were able to gain a few extra points with the simple addition of sights. A few other features that stood out and helped a few companies with

their scores were the trigger systems on the Falkor Defense Phantom, ZEV Core Elite and Wilson Combat Protector. Falkor uses that Velocity trigger, which I love. However, ZEV has an ATC 2.5-pound flat-face trigger that did not disappoint. Wilson Combat utilizes its own trigger setup that also felt fantastic to everyone shooting it.



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The CMMG Banshee stuck out for its incredible looks in Storm Trooper White and that awesome Rip Brace. Springfield's Saint Edge PDW is just a totally different animal in this category that shoots as well as it looks, and Sig really delivered a budget-friendly option with the Tread pistol.

KING OF THE PISTOLS

Once the smoke cleared and the scoring was all done, I took the average of all the scores for each gun to crown the overall winner. With very surprising results, we found that the Daniel Defense DDM4V7 narrowly took the crown as this year's Ballistic's Best of 2020 in the AR pistol category. The Daniel Defense beat the Bravo Company BCM MCMR by only 0.2 points, with the Rock River RUK-15 coming in a very close third, only losing the first-place position by 0.4 points—a very impressive, extremely close finish for the top three. The main thing that set the Daniel Defense DDM4V7 above the rest was it is moderately priced, has a great look, shot extremely well,

has a basic but great set of fixed sights mounted on top and is very lightweight. All the guns tested were very nice and would make

great choices for anyone's AR pistol. However, The DDM4V7 from Daniel Defense is the only gun that gets the honor of being crowned Ballistic's Best of 2020. ●



FINAL SCORES		AESTHETICS	ERGONOMICS	SIGHTS	TRIGGER CONTROL	RECOIL CONTROL	RELOADING EASE	ACCURACY	RELIABILITY	VALUE/ PRICE	TOTAL
DANIEL DEFENSE DDM4 V7		4.60	4.60	3.80	3.00	3.60	4.00	4.40	4.80	3.40	36.20
BCM RECCE-11 MCMR		3.60	4.00	4.20	4.00	3.80	4.00	4.00	4.60	3.80	36.00
ROCK RIVER ARMS RUK-15		3.60	3.80	4.40	3.60	3.60	4.00	4.00	4.20	4.60	35.80
FALKOR PHANTOM 556		4.80	4.40	0.00	4.80	4.40	4.00	4.60	4.40	2.60	34.00
ZEV TECHNOLOGIES CORE ELITE		4.60	4.20	0.00	4.40	4.20	4.00	4.40	5.00	2.60	33.40
SPRINGFIELD ARMORY SAINT EDGE PDW		4.20	3.80	0.00	3.80	4.20	4.00	4.00	4.80	3.40	32.20
CMMG BANSHEE MK4		4.40	3.80	0.00	3.40	3.80	4.00	4.20	4.40	4.00	32.00
WILSON COMBAT PROTECTOR		3.80	3.00	0.00	3.80	2.80	4.00	4.60	4.60	2.40	29.00
SIG SAUER TREAD		2.40	3.00	0.00	3.00	3.20	4.00	1.40	3.80	4.00	24.00

NOTE: Each category worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. Entries reflect averages from five shooters.

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HANDGUNS: REVOLVERS



As we close out 2020, I think readers will agree that it was a year unlike any other. Manufacturers struggled to keep up with demand, new products were put on hold and ammo shelves were empty. As a result, this year's candidates are a mix of something old and something new. However, we have never had a more equally balanced group of revolvers to test.

The lineup for this year includes the Colt Python, Chiappa Rhino, Kimber K6 Combat, Korth Silver Mongoose and the Smith & Wesson Model 19 Classic. All five are double-action/single-action revolvers, they share the same caliber (.357 Magnum) and with the exception of the Rhino, all have a 4-inch (or so) barrel. The Python and Model 19 are reissues of classics, while the Kimber K6, Korth Mongoose and Chiappa Rhino are newer designs, or at least new renditions, of the wheelgun. As the final scores reflect, this was one of the closest scoring roundups ever.

RANGE TIME

The range time and testing protocol for this year were somewhat limited by several factors. First, the shortage of ammunition reduced the round count for the evaluators. Second, production and supply issues resulted in delays for getting pistols for review. This reduced the range time and number of reviewers. That being said, the evaluators worked to provide the readers with their impressions and feedback. To accurately rate a pistol on recoil control, trigger, sights, reloading and accuracy requires sending rounds down range. Since all five revolvers were chambered in .357 Magnum, magnum loads were shot to evaluate ergonomics and recoil control. To get the most out of the revolvers and the shooters, we used .38 Special loads to judge accuracy. The accuracy test measured the shooter's ability to shoot a 10-round bullseye course of fire and does not represent the accuracy potential of the individual revolver. We had no reliability or reloading issues with any of the pistols.

CHIAPPA RHINO

The Rhino was originally introduced in 2010 and it turned heads. The unconventional appearance is

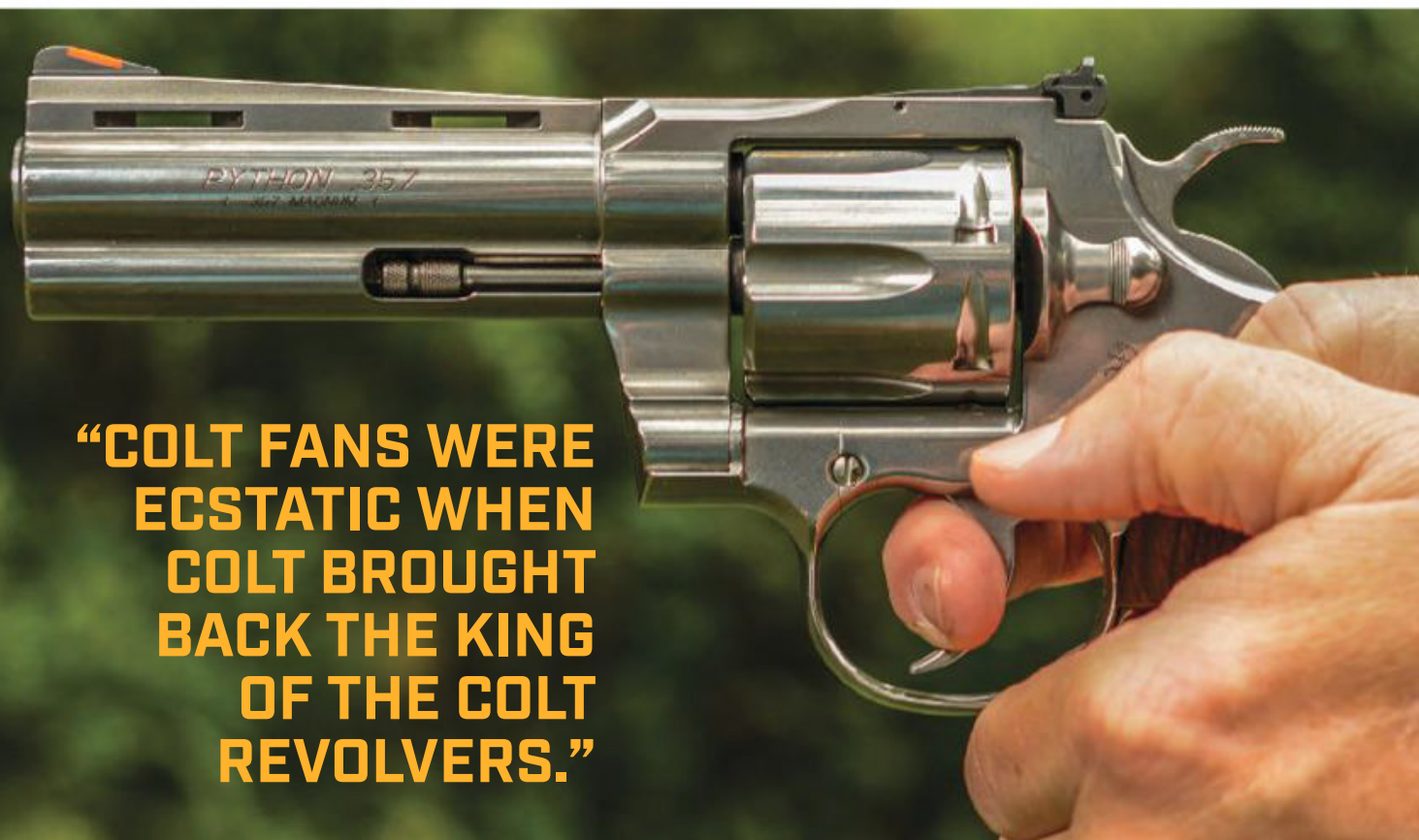
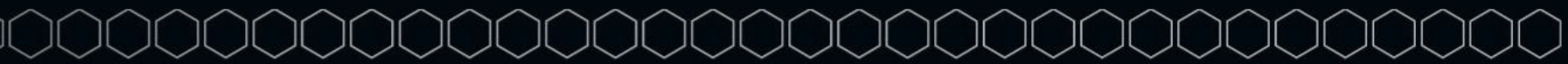


matched by the unconventional design. The barrel is mounted in the bottom of the frame, and the round is fired from the six o'clock position. The purpose of the design is to reduce felt recoil and muzzle rise. The Rhino does exactly that. We received the new stainless 30DS Rhino with a 3-inch barrel. The Rhino is so unconventional in appearance that one person remarked it looked like something Deckard would carry in *Blade Runner*. Needless to say, initial impressions, and aesthetics scores, prove that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Yet, form follows

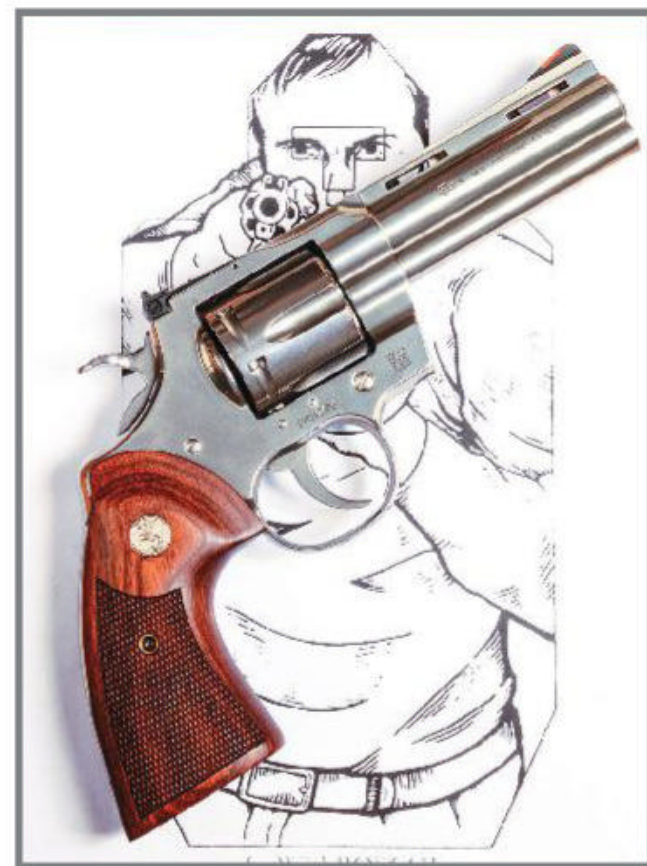


CHIAPPA
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“COLT FANS WERE ECSTATIC WHEN COLT BROUGHT BACK THE KING OF THE COLT REVOLVERS.”



function and when handled and shot, the Rhino scored very well in ergonomics. The rear sight is fully adjustable with green fiber-optic inserts. The front sight is a blued blade that is pinned to the stainless ramp and has a red fiber-optic insert. The sights received good scores, but everyone remarked that the rear blade needed to be deeper.

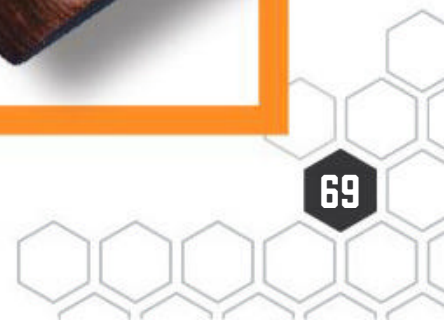
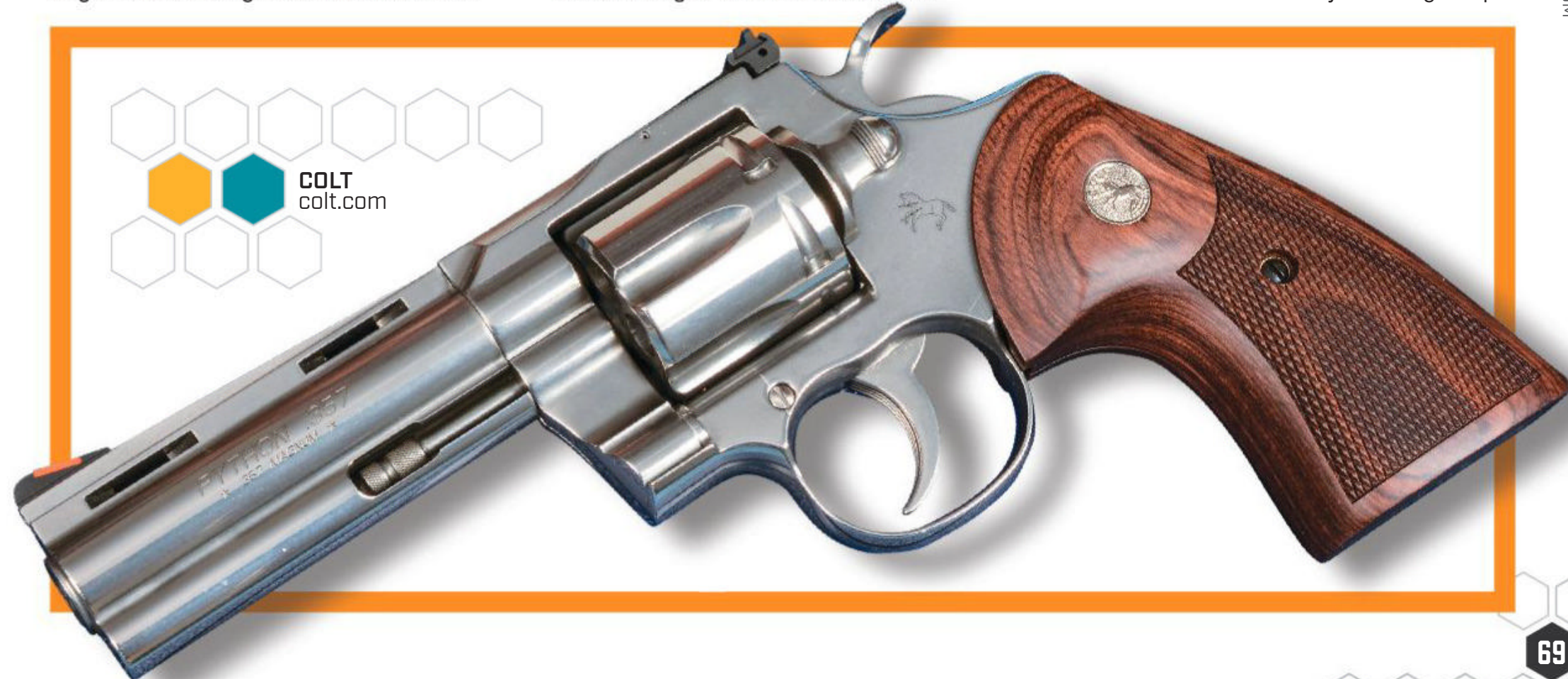
The double-action trigger pull was very good, in part due to the wide, smooth trigger. During double-action use, a red indicator, located in front of the rear sight, rises and falls. The exposed “hammer” is not a hammer but a single-action cocking lever. It does not move

during double-action fire and returns to the forward position after cocking the action. The red cocking indicator remains in view when the Rhino is in single-action mode. A thumb lever, mounted high on the left side of the frame, acts as a cylinder release. Recoil, even with the hottest magnum loads, was tame. With an MSRP of \$1,499, the Rhino scored 3.75 on value and price point, with consideration given to the innovative design and engineering.

COLT PYTHON

Colt fans were ecstatic when Colt brought back the king of the Colt revolvers. We

obtained the new 4.25-inch barrel version of the snake. In appearance, the new Python is a faithful rendition of the original. To be completely objective, we had to score the new Python on its own merit and not compare it to the snakes of old! Colt has simplified the operating system and made it more reliable and easier to manufacture. There are also subtle changes in the frame to make the new snake stronger than the original. Having never owned a Python, I was excited to have it included in the roundup. The new guns are all stainless steel and during manufacturing have been tumbled to remove any offending sharp





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HANDGUNS: REVOLVERS

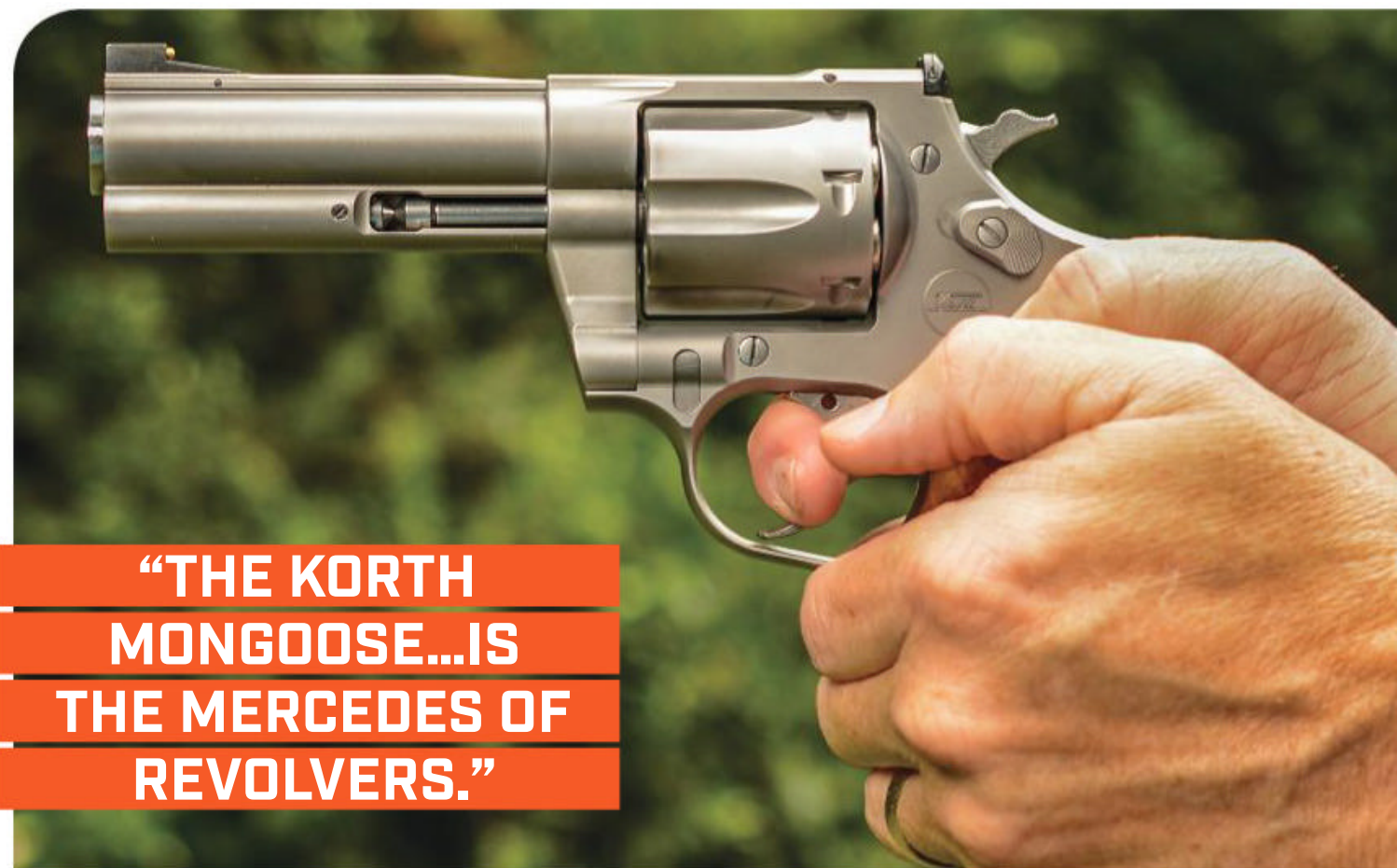
edges, and then polished. The new Python is smooth in the hand, something that is very welcome. The adjustable rear sight and red ramp front sight provided a clear sight picture. It was noted that the front sight blade can be changed out by the user.

The double-action trigger pull was very smooth and classic Colt, but with less stacking than the original pistol. We did notice that the single-action pull had some creep making it slightly mushy, but not objectionable. However, the scores for recoil control suffered due to the design of the grips and a sharp edge at the top of the backstrap. This is easily fixed and, overall, the Python drew very positive reviews with the positives far outweighing the negatives. The Python received excellent scores in aesthetics, ergonomics, sights and accuracy. It will be interesting to see how Colt expands the Python product line. We can hope for a 2.5-inch version or maybe a blued version. The Python's MSRP is \$1,499 and evaluators gave it an average of 3.67 in value and price point.

KIMBER K6 DASA COMBAT

In 2018, the Kimber K6 DAO 3-inch model won the "Ballistic's Best" category for revolvers. In 2019, the company introduced the DASA model with a 3-inch barrel. For 2020, it expanded the DASA line with the Combat model that features a 4-inch barrel. The K6 series is based on a medium frame with a six-shot capacity, and the K6 was the smallest and lightest of the test guns. The cylinder flutes have been replaced with flat bevels that add strength to the design and give the K6 the smallest diameter cylinder of any six-shot .357 Magnum on the market. It is an all stainless steel revolver with a soft satin finish and no sharp edges. The action is smooth, the trigger is rounded and polished, and the cylinder lock-up is positive. The scalloped recoil shield, along with beveled edges, gives the K6 a very modern appearance.

The sights on the K6 are similar to Novak 3-Dots found on a semi-auto pistol. Kimber equips the K6 with an attractive set of checkered "wood-like" grips that extend approximately 1 inch below the butt of the frame. The grips are attractive, fill the space behind the triggerguard and are ideal for concealed carry. However, the small grip, combined with a weight of only 27 ounces, made the K6



**"THE KORTH
MONGOOSE...IS
THE MERCEDES OF
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punishing with magnum loads. As other small revolvers chambered in .357 Magnum, the K6 is better suited to .38 Special +P. The Kimber also scored well in the ergonomics, sights, trigger control and accuracy tests. The shooters appreciated the high-visibility sights and the smooth action. The Kimber is a solid revolver that continues to surprise those who shoot it. MSRP on the K6 Combat is listed at \$989. Evaluators

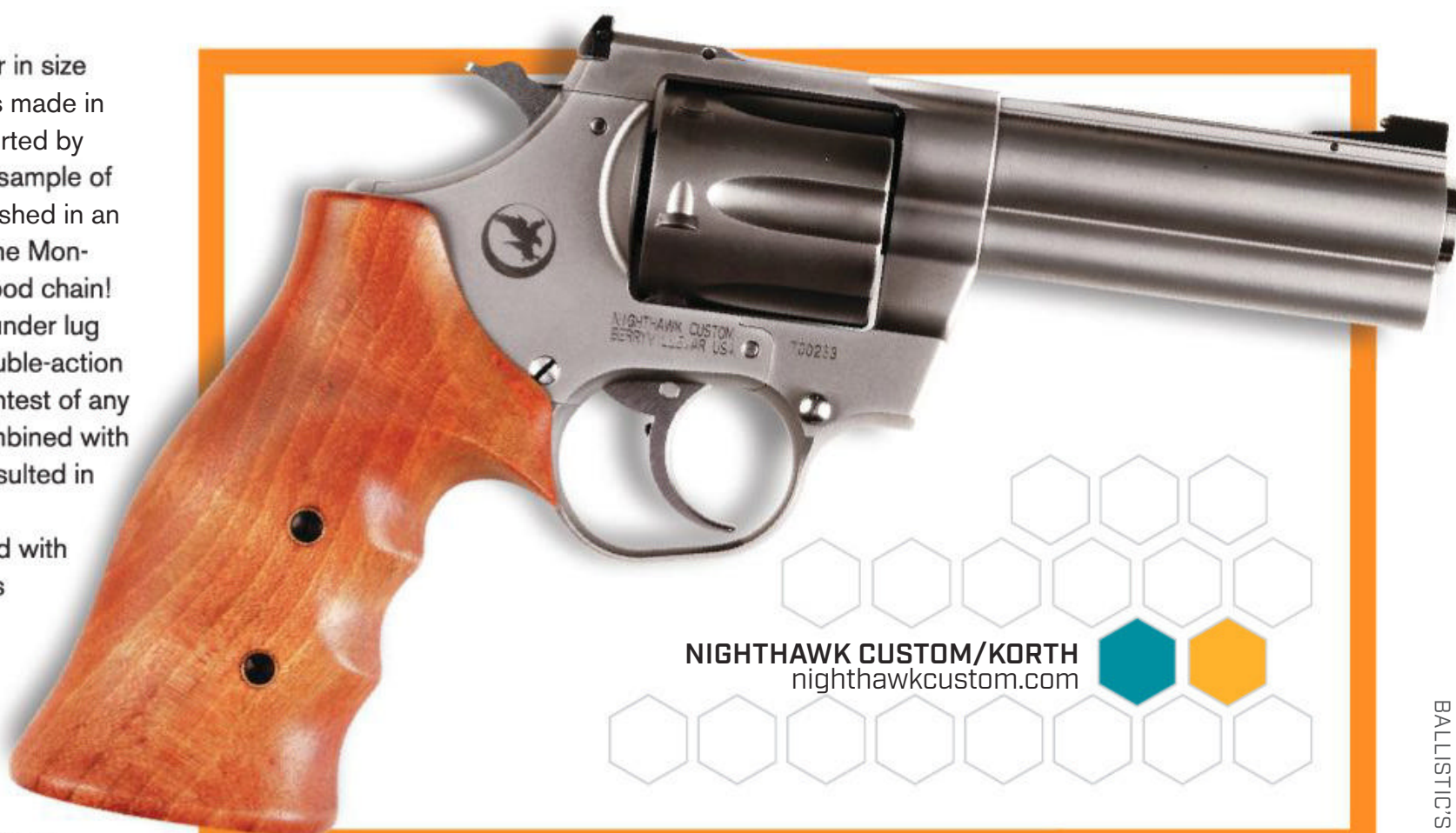
thought that, overall, this was a fair value with an average score of 4.25.

NIGHTHAWK CUSTOM KORTH SILVER MONGOOSE

Perhaps no other revolver generated more interest and curiosity than the Korth Mongoose. After all, how many folks have shot a revolver with an MSRP of \$5,000? The Mongoose is a

medium-frame revolver that is similar in size to the Smith & Wesson K-frame. It is made in Germany by Korth Waffen and imported by Nighthawk Custom. We received a sample of the new Mongoose Silver that is finished in an attractive and durable silver DLC. The Mongoose is at the top of the revolver food chain! The 4.25-inch barrel features a full under lug that is similar to the Python. The double-action trigger pull is the smoothest and lightest of any revolver in the group, and when combined with an excellent single-action trigger, resulted in an astounding score of 4.75.

The adjustable rear sight is paired with a gold bead front sight and provides an excellent sight picture. However, unlike a traditional adjustable rear sight, windage adjustments are made by tightening one screw and reversing an opposing screw with no tactile clicks. One of the unique features of the Mongoose is the ability to



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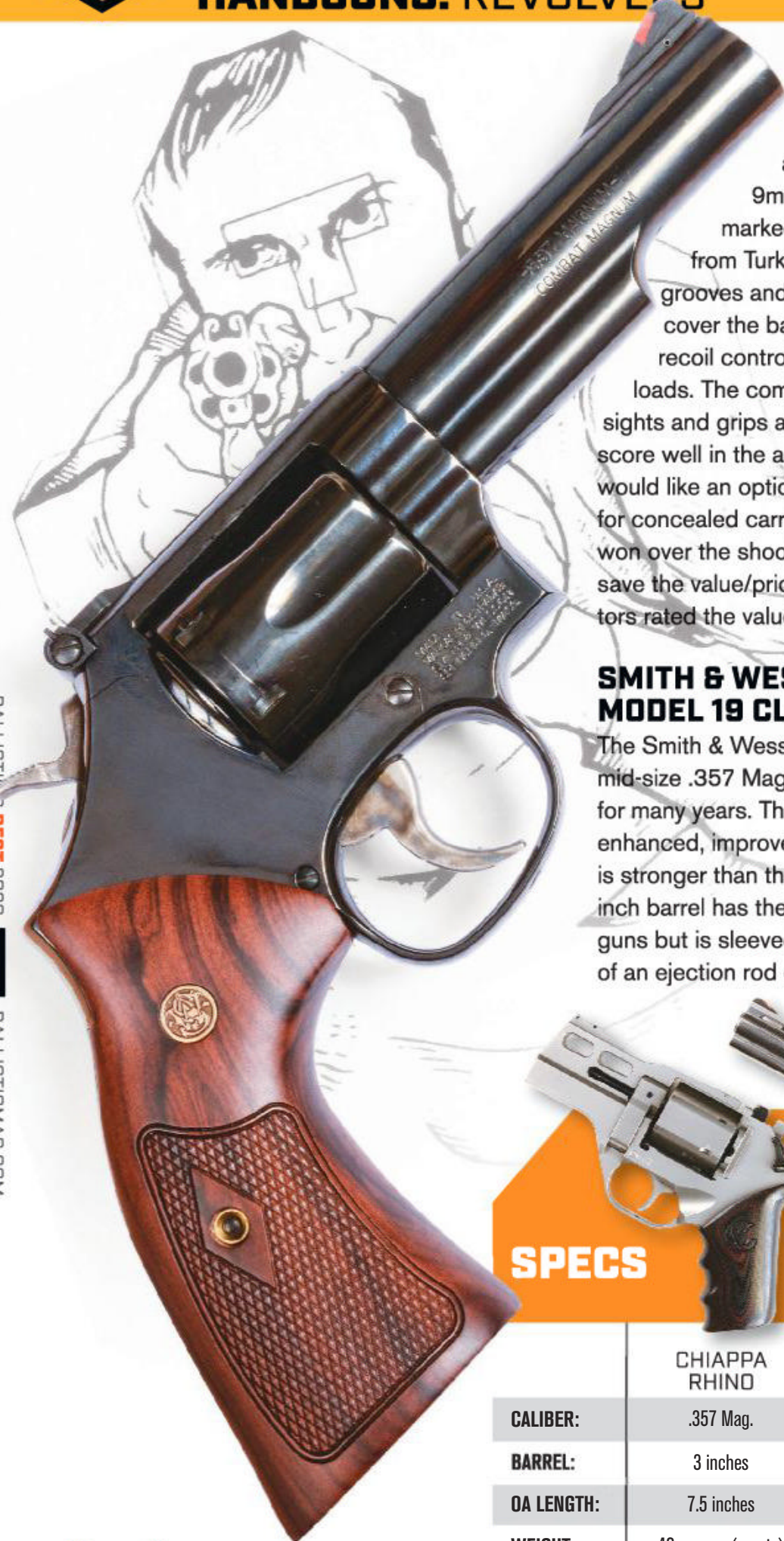
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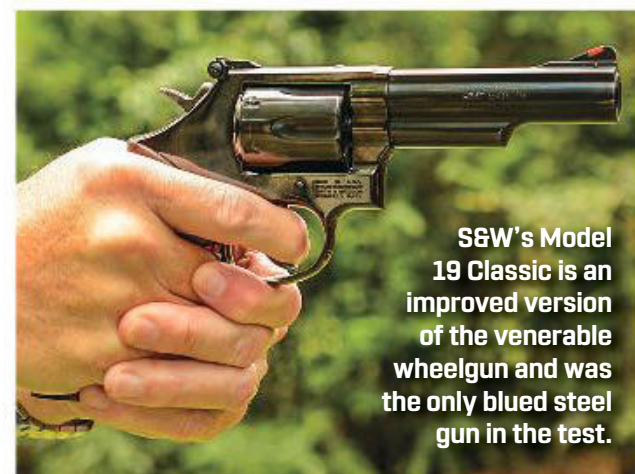
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easily change between the .357 Magnum cylinder and one chambered in 9mm. The oversize wood grips, marked "Jim Wilson," are made from Turkish walnut and feature finger grooves and palm swells. The grips also cover the backstrap and provide good recoil control when shooting magnum loads. The combination of the action, sights and grips also allowed shooters to score well in the accuracy category, though I would like an option of a more compact shape for concealed carry. Overall, the Mongoose won over the shooters in all of the categories save the value/price point. At \$4,999, evaluators rated the value at 2.83.

SMITH & WESSON MODEL 19 CLASSIC

The Smith & Wesson Model 19 is the classic, mid-size .357 Magnum that set the standard for many years. The new 19 is based on an enhanced, improved round-butt K-frame that is stronger than the original design. The 4.25-inch barrel has the same profile as the old guns but is sleeved with a steel barrel. Instead of an ejection rod detent, the new gun has



S&W's Model 19 Classic is an improved version of the venerable wheelgun and was the only blued steel gun in the test.

a frame-mounted detent for positive lock-up. The hammer, trigger and specific internal parts are manufactured using metal injection molding (MIM) but retain that classic look and feel. Unlike the older guns, the Classic model features a frame-mounted firing pin. The action on the Classic 19 is pure Smith & Wesson that is smooth with no grit or stacking. Smith has reproduced the original "Micro" style, adjustable rear sight and the red ramp insert in the front sight. All of the shooters noticed how shallow the rear sight notch was. This resulted in low scores in that category.

Grips are similar to the old Coke-bottle grips but are thinner. It was also nice to see a blued steel gun at a time when most manufacturers

SPECS

	CHIAPPA RHINO	COLT PYTHON	KIMBER K6 COMBAT	KORTH MONGOOSE	SMITH & WESSON MODEL 19
CALIBER:	.357 Mag.	.357 Mag.	.357 Mag.	.357 Mag.	.357 Mag.
BARREL:	3 inches	4.25 inches	4 inches	4.25 inches	4.25 inches
OA LENGTH:	7.5 inches	9.75 inches	8.62 inches	9.5 inches	9.9 inches
WEIGHT:	40 ounces (empty)	42 ounces (empty)	25.5 ounces (empty)	38.5 ounces (empty)	37.2 ounces (empty)
GRIPS:	G-20	Walnut target	Custom wood composite	Wood target	Composite wood
SIGHTS:	Adjustable rear, fiber-optic front	Adjustable	Fixed 3-dot	Adjustable rear, gold bead front	Adjustable
ACTION:	DA/SA	DA/SA	DA/SA	DA/SA	DA/SA
FINISH:	Stainless	Stainless	Brushed stainless	Silver DLC	Blued steel
CAPACITY:	6	6	6	6	6
MSRP:	\$1,539	\$1,499	\$989	\$5,199	\$843

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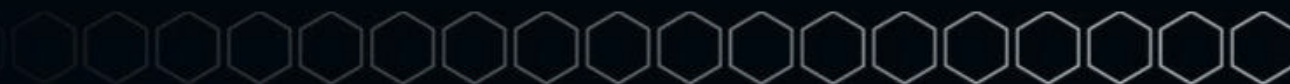
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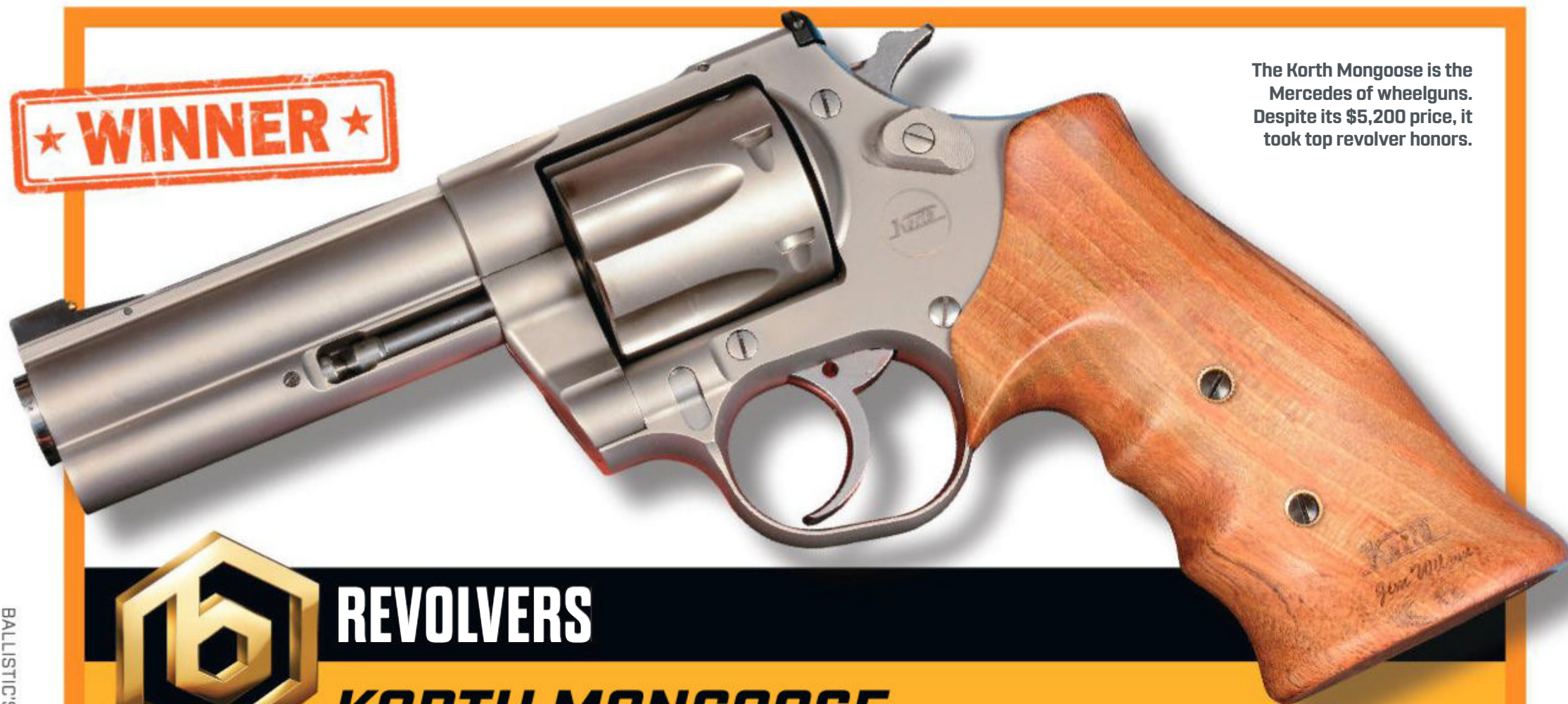
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HANDGUNS: REVOLVERS



★ **WINNER** ★

The Korth Mongoose is the Mercedes of wheelguns. Despite its \$5,200 price, it took top revolver honors.



REVOLVERS

KORTH MONGOOSE

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are just doing stainless steel. The Model 19 scored high in aesthetics, ergonomics, trigger control and accuracy. As with the Colt, the grips felt too thin, especially at the top of the grip, which affected comfort and recoil control with magnum loads. There was also a sharp edge at the top of the left grip. This, and the lighter weight, resulted in lower scores in recoil control. Still, the shooters felt that Smith did an exceptional job on the 19 Classic, rating it high in aesthetics, ergonomics and trigger control. Shooters also felt that, with an MSRP of \$843, the Smith rated a 4.25 in the value/price point category.


WRAP UP

The Korth Mongoose won handily, with an overall score of 40.48. It is the Mercedes of revolvers. The next three contenders scored within a few tenths of a point. The Python was a favorite and came in second with a score of 38.95. Clearly the new snake is a contender. The Rhino surprised everyone coming in third, with a score of 38.82. The venerable Model 19 Classic placed fourth, just under the Rhino, with a score of 38.15. Finally, the Kimber K6 Combat placed fifth with a very respectable score of 38.05. The scores were extremely close and the order could have easily been

changed by a mere tenth of a point. This is the closest point spread that I have seen during a roundup article.

I would like to express my appreciation for all of the industry partners that made this project possible. The revolver market remains strong, as indicated by these contenders. It is extremely difficult, almost impossible, to give a fair representation of these fine wheelguns in a mere 300 words. The next time you are at your favorite gun shop, bypass the black rifles and polymer wonder nines and take a look at the venerable wheelgun. You might find something that surprises you. ●

FINAL SCORES

	AESTHETICS	ERGONOMICS	SIGHTS	TRIGGER CONTROL	RECOIL CONTROL	RELOADING EASE	ACCURACY	RELIABILITY	VALUE/ PRICE	TOTAL
 KORTH MONGOOSE	4.52	4.58	4.72	4.75	4.25	5.00	4.83	5.00	2.83	40.48
COLT PYTHON	4.43	4.00	4.42	3.93	3.50	5.00	5.00	5.00	3.67	38.95
CHIAPPA RHINO	2.83	4.33	4.33	4.00	4.83	5.00	4.73	5.00	3.75	38.83
SMITH & WESSON MODEL 19	4.50	4.17	2.92	4.17	3.25	5.00	4.90	5.00	4.25	38.15
KIMBER K6 COMBAT	3.67	4.08	4.68	4.17	2.50	5.00	4.70	5.00	4.25	38.05

NOTE: Each category worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. Entries reflect averages from three shooters.

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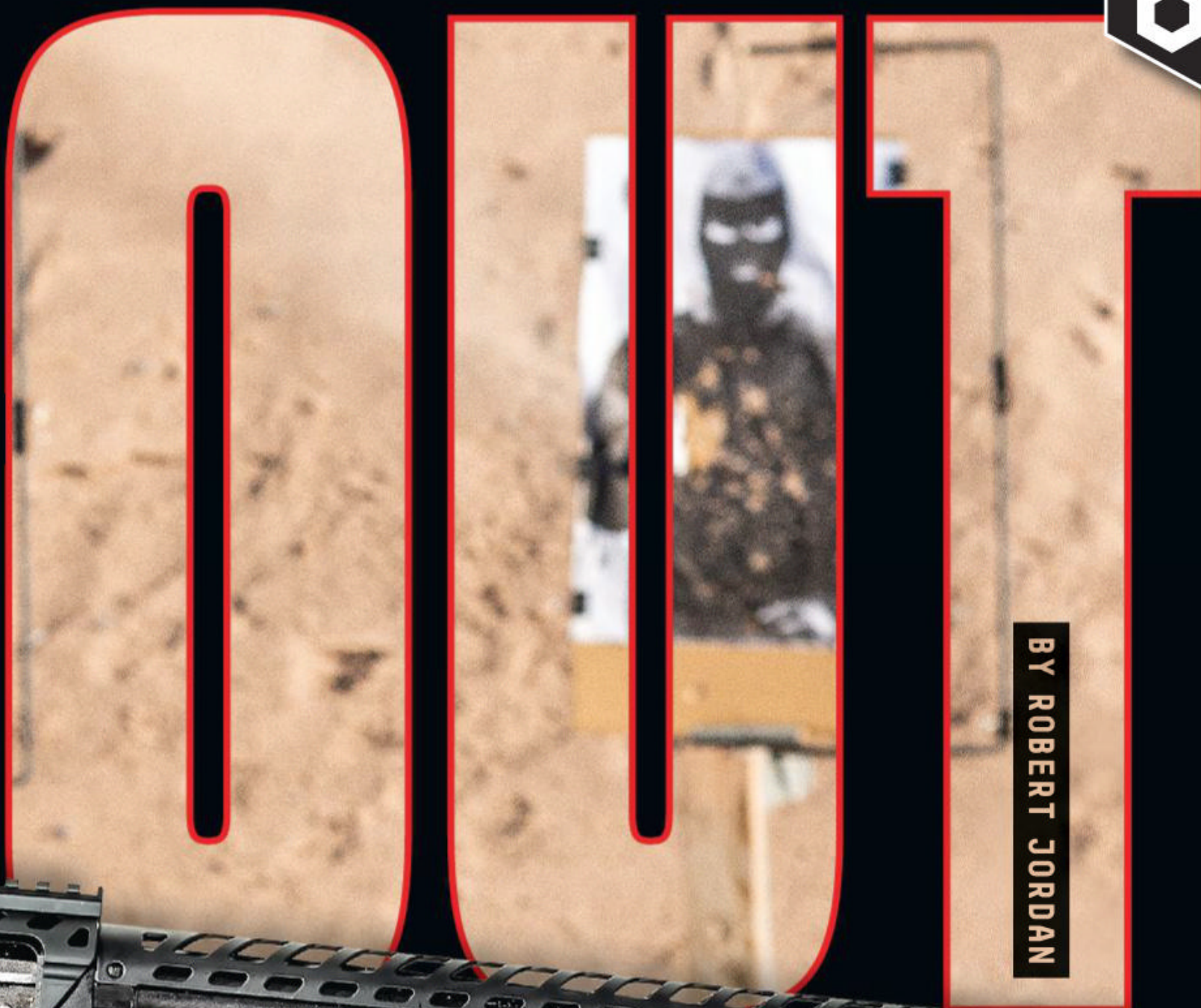
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SHOTGUNS: PUMP-ACTIONS



BY ROBERT JORDAN



ALEX LANDEEN PHOTOS





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SHOTGUNS: PUMP-ACTIONS



TESTING PARAMETERS

This year we conducted our testing over two separate days at the police shooting range of one of the largest police departments in Arizona. All tests were conducted by three full-time, sworn law enforcement officers, and all of us are firearm instructors for our respective agencies. We have more than 70 years of law enforcement experience between us and we are all self-proclaimed “shotgun guys.”

First was simply accuracy. All rounds were identical slugs, fired from a benched bag at 50 yards. The next time we hit the range it was to run drills with movement, use of cover and reloads. Shells varied, but the parameters were exactly the same for each gun. After the drills, each of the three evaluators scored and wrote comments.

Ammunition this year was provided primarily by Federal, with Fiocchi providing boxes of birdshot that were used for loading drills at the shorter distances. All rounds from Federal were from their Federal Premium Law Enforcement line and all were frangible. Their 00 Buckshot holds 9 pellets, and the rifled slugs weigh 325 grains. Slugs and buckshot are made of BallistiClean, so they are lead free and non-toxic. For us instructors who

are exposed to a lot of lead, this is a nice safety feature as lead exposure is cumulative and there is no “safe” level of exposure. As expected, all ammunition performed flawlessly.

5.11 provided all the judges and our fearless photographer, Alex Landeen, with different models of their new A.T.L.A.S. shoes. We all liked the extra stability, and the cool mesh uppers were very appreciated on the hot Arizona ranges. We all wore them for range and work days over six weeks prior to the final test day with great success. I’m sure we could have done the testing with any shoes, but these were perfect even when wearing 45 pounds of gear and running between shooting positions.

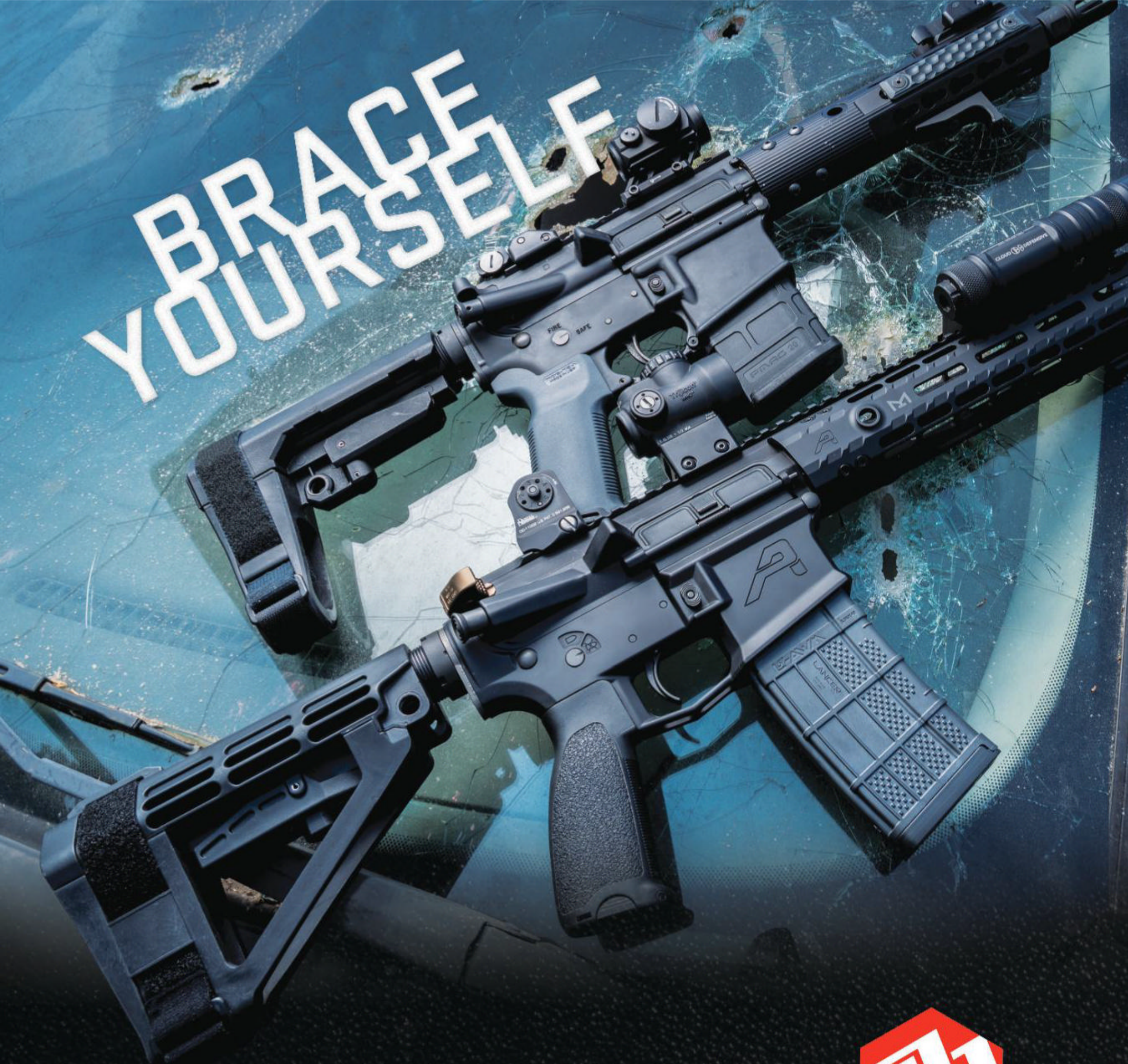
ARMSCOR/ROCK ISLAND ARMORY AG PUMP DEFENSE

The AG Pump Defense is a real crowd pleaser. Economically priced, it felt solid and performed well. The triangular safety button sits at the rear of the triggerguard and the action bar release sits on the left side near the front of the triggerguard. It only has a bead sight, but we all found it pointed easily. The main reason we all liked this shotgun was the furniture. The stock looks similar to Magpul’s shotgun stock, plus it has an adjustable cheek rest. The forend is slim and has sling attachment points at both ends. I probably would never attach a sling to the “pump” on a shotgun, but my pinky rested on the raised edge at the back and made racking the shotgun easy.




Last year’s roundup for Ballistic’s Best tactical shotguns included all semi-automatics since we wanted an apples to apples comparison. This year, the choice was obvious: pump-action only. The 12-gauge pump shotgun has been the backbone of law enforcement and home defense long arms since before Stoner invented the M16. It has been adapted to breach doors, fire less-lethal projectiles, deploy CS gas, tazers, birdshot, buckshot and slugs. The 12-gauge pump remains, hands down, the most versatile long arm deployed by military, cops and civilians alike. And still it is maligned by new shooters who are afraid of recoil or unsure how to operate it. I hear AR shooters talk about how they need 30 rounds for a gunfight, but according to the FBI, the average number of rounds fired by an officer who was attacked by a bad guy is only 3.3. If you are only going to get off a few rounds, shouldn’t they be the most fight-stopping projectiles possible?

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SHOTGUNS: PUMP-ACTIONS

It comes with three chokes (Full, Modified and Improved Cylinder) and a choke wrench. The length of pull can be shortened by removing a spacer, which we did. Two of us are vertically challenged so we outvoted the tall guy. We would have preferred some kind of rear sight to make it easier to shoot slugs at a distance, but at the price point, we can afford to have the receiver tapped and a Picatinny rail added for a red-dot if we really thought that was an issue.

BENELLI M3

Last year's winner of Ballistic's Best Tactical Shotguns returned with the Benelli M3. But the M3 isn't your run-of-the-mill pump gun. It is capable of being fired as a pump or as a semi-automatic, inertia-driven shotgun. For the test, we only ran it as a pump, but when we were done, we all tried it out as a semi-auto, too. We found the gun to be less natural to run because, instead of simply racking the forearm forward to close it after you run dry, you have to hit the bolt release button like you do on any semi-auto shotgun. While this wasn't what we were used to, it actually has a real benefit. When I run dry with a normal pump shotgun, it closes on an empty chamber and I hear the loudest sound in a gunfight: a "click" when I expected to hear a "bang." With the M3, the bolt locks to the rear and the forearm won't go forward. This tells me the gun is empty imme-



diately and because the action is open, I can tactically load one shell through the ejection port to get it back in the fight quickly.

Overall, I would say the M3 is an incredible, well-made shotgun, and if I practiced only running that gun, I believe I would get very good very fast. But switching to it from a normal pump caused us all some delays in operating. It is definitely set up as a tactical gun: It has no chokes to work loose, can accept a mag-tube extension, has an excellent ghost ring sight, and is drilled and tapped for the addition of a Picatinny rail on the receiver. I found the length of pull to be a little long for me, especially when wearing a tactical vest. One of the judges said he would prefer it if it was only a

pump or only a semi-auto, and did not have the ability to switch back and forth.

CHARLES DALY 301 PUMP TACTICAL

The 301 Pump Tactical was another economically priced shotgun that came packed with features. It has a folding, telescoping stock with adjustable cheek piece, a Picatinny rail with a groove down the center to act as a rear sight, a fiber-optic front sight and a Picatinny rail molded into the front of the forearm so you can mount a laser or light. The main downside was the magazine only holds four shells. It will almost take five but not quite, and I wish the gun had a magazine-tube extension to hold



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SHOTGUNS: PUMP-ACTIONS



“THE 12-GAUGE PUMP REMAINS, HANDS DOWN, THE MOST VERSATILE LONG ARM DEPLOYED BY MILITARY, COPS AND CIVILIANS ALIKE.”

a couple more shells. The barrel is threaded for Beretta/Benelli Mobil Choke tubes and comes with Improved Cylinder, Modified and a breaching tube that has teeth to dig into a door and ports to let gasses escape out the sides.

Our tall judge said he hit his nose on the hinge of the folding stock, but he might have had the stock collapsed down too far. The trigger was a little hard, but it loaded very easily and shot tight groups. The action was a little tight and sticky at first, but it broke in quickly and got smoother the longer we shot it. Again, simply due to price point and features, this was another crowd pleaser.

KELTEC KS7

KelTec enjoys a cult following and the KS7 has the iconic KelTec look. Most of us have seen the KSG with its dual magazines and bullpup design. A couple of years ago KelTec decided to keep the bullpup design but go with a more traditional single magazine tube for its KS7,

making it far lighter and quicker to maneuver. The company also put a retro carry handle on it that also serves as a channel to protect the triangular, green fiber-optic front sight. There is no rear sight, but a foot-long Picatinny rail kit can be purchased separately to replace the carry handle and allow you to mount a red-dot sight. There are also a number of M-Lok compatible mounting points on the forearm and the carry handle. The bullpup design makes it nice and maneuverable, and despite being only a little more than 2 feet long, it still holds six shells in the magazine tube. The ambidextrous action release sits at the front of the triggerguard and is activated by the trigger finger. The cross bolt safety is at the top of the pistol grip.

Again, this was a shotgun that took some getting used to. The controls were not intuitive, and we each would have preferred if the cross bolt safety was reversed. The lightness of the gun definitely made the recoil more noticeable, but if you want this for a backpacking or emer-



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gency truck gun, you want it to be light and compact. We also all struggled with reloads through the ejection port. If you practiced with only this shotgun, a lot of these problems would solve themselves as you became accustomed to the controls and running the gun.

MOSSBERG 500 ATI TACTICAL

Mossberg’s staple pump 12-gauge shotgun, the model 500, has been riding in police cruisers and serving as a home-defense gun for more than 50 years. The ATI (American Tactical Incorporated) model provides some new furniture to increase the functionality of this tried and true classic. The six-position telescoping stock is ATI’s TactLite and it is fitted with the company’s Scorpion butt pad. Length of pull can be adjusted from 10.75 inches to 14.62 inches. ATI’s Halo side saddle is bolted to the top of the receiver and provides nine mounting points for shell holders. Nine removable shell holders are also included. The ATI Halo Heatshield provides a blade front sight, and a notch in the receiver-mounted Picatinny acts as a rear sight. At the front of



SPECS			
	ARMSCOR AG PUMP DEFENSE	BENELLI M3	CHARLES DALY 301 PUMP TACTICAL
GAUGE:	12	12	12
BARREL:	18.5 inches	19.75 inches	18.5 inches
OA LENGTH:	40 inches	41 inches	35.5 inches
WEIGHT:	8.82 pounds (empty)	7.2 pounds (empty)	6 pounds (empty)
STOCK:	Black polymer	Pistol grip	Adjustable w/ pistol grip
SIGHTS:	Bead	Ghost ring	Fiber-optic with Picatinny
ACTION:	Pump	Pump/Semi-Auto	Pump
FINISH:	Parkerized	Black anodized	Black parkerized
CAPACITY:	5+1	5+1	4+1
MSRP:	\$299	\$1,599	\$279

the heat shield are two 2.5-inch Picatinny rails for lights or lasers.

Shooting the ATI Tactical was easy and comfortable. The Mossberg was possibly the lightest recoiling gun all day, it is easy to load and the controls are easy to use and locate. One complaint from all of the judges was the pistol grip makes it impossible to reach the ambidextrous safety mounted on the back of the receiver without taking your hand off of the grip. Another suggestion was to add a more traditional rear sight.

STANDARD MANUFACTURING DP12

The most expensive and most unusual shotgun we tested was the Standard Manufacturing DP12. It has dual magazine tubes and dual barrels. Each time you pump, it ejects two hulls and loads two new shells. The trigger has to be pulled twice, firing each barrel in turn, then the action repeats. If you only fire one shell, the action stays locked up and



"IF YOU WANT A GOOD PUMP SHOTGUN FOR HOME DEFENSE, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF EXCELLENT ONES TO CHOOSE FROM."

you cannot pump it (unless you engage the action bar release) until you fire the second shell. There are a number of M-Lok compatible mounting points on the rear receiver, and a 13.5-inch Picatinny rail is mounted on top. It does not come with sights, so we put a set of Magpul folding backup iron sights on it and they worked great. The action bar release is ambidextrous and sits at the front of the triggerguard so it can be manipulated with the trigger finger. The safety is AR-style and is also ambidextrous. Because this gun loads and ejects through the bottom, there is zero disadvantage to shooting this left- or right-handed. Holes are cut in the magazine tubes so you can easily see when you are getting to the last few shells, but with a total magazine capacity of 14 plus two in the chamber, it takes a while before you run dry.

Our first thought was it seemed pretty gimmicky. However, as we began shooting it we were all amazed. The gun is really well-made and designed: It loads super easy, and recoil is very light. We figured out it is easiest to load with your dominant hand by rolling the gun inboard and thumbing the shells in. Two shells could be fired as fast as you can pull the trigger. The whole thing is only 29.5 inches long and for a vehicle gun, a home-defense gun or even for law enforcement, this would make a reliable, well-built shotgun. But honestly, I think the "cool" factor of having 2 barrels trumps everything else.

STOEGER P3000

We all agreed this felt like the lightest shotgun that we tested. Perhaps due to the lightness, it also felt like the hardest recoiling. There is definitely something to be said for light shotguns when you have to carry them a lot but you rarely have to shoot them. For a tactical gun, if and when you do have to shoot it, your life is probably on the line and you won't



SPECS

	KELTEC KS7	MOSSBERG ATI TACTICAL	STANDARD DP-12
GAUGE:	12	12	12
BARREL:	18.5 inches	18.5 inches	18.88 inches
OA LENGTH:	26.1 inches	36.37 inches	29.5 inches
WEIGHT:	5.9 pounds (empty)	6.75 pounds (empty)	9.75 pounds (empty)
STOCK:	Pistol grip (bullpup)	6-position adj.	Non-slip pistol grip
SIGHTS:	Fiber-optic bead	Winged post and bead	None; Picatinny
ACTION:	Pump	Pump	Pump
FINISH:	Black or green polymer	Matte blued	Thermal coated receiver
CAPACITY:	7+1	5+1	14+2
MSRP:	\$539	\$624	\$1,495


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

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SPECS

	STOEGER P3000	TR IMPORTS SILVER EAGLE RZ17	WINCHESTER SXP SHADOW DEFENDER
GAUGE:	12	12	12
BARREL:	18.5 inches	18.5 inches	18 inches
OA LENGTH:	40.5 inches	39 inches	38.5 inches
WEIGHT:	6.3 pounds (empty)	7 pounds (empty)	7.5 pounds (empty)
STOCK:	Black synthetic	Black polymer pistol grip	Pistol grip
SIGHTS:	Blade front	Peep sight	Brass bead front w/ fiber-optic clip-on
ACTION:	Pump	Pump	Pump
FINISH:	Black	Matte black	Matte black
CAPACITY:	7+1	4+1	5+1
MSRP:	\$339	\$251	\$450

notice the recoil. Also, if you push the gun forward with your support hand, the recoil is far less noticeable.

The P3000 is a pretty simple shotgun. It has a blade front sight, but no rear sight. The safety is at the back of the triggerguard, and the action bar release is at the front on the right side. Everything about the guns feels solid: It has a good trigger and the furniture is comfortable to hold. It shot good groups, though one of the judges caught his thumb in the notch of the lifter while loading. Besides that, comments amounted to it being a good price point for a simple, reliable tactical shotgun.

TR IMPORTS SILVER EAGLE RZ17 TACTICAL

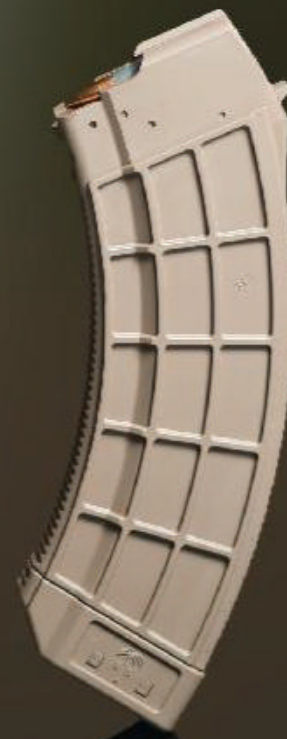
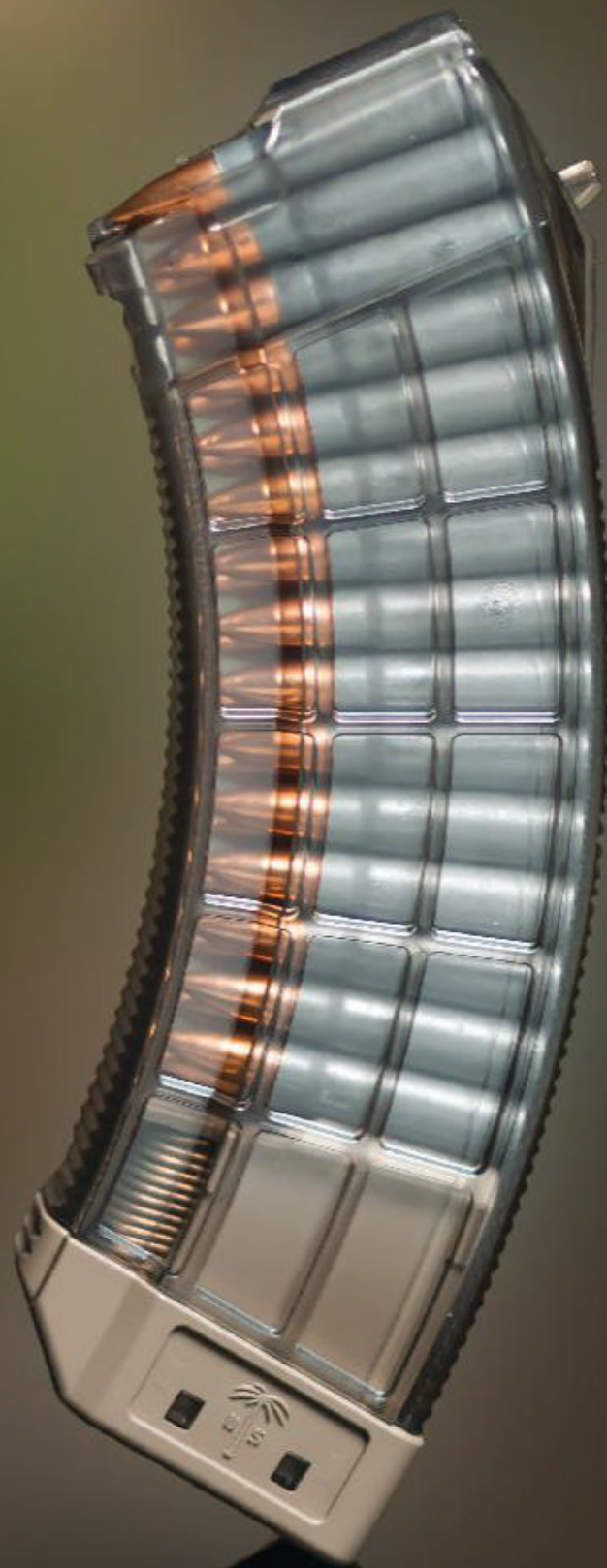
The Silver Eagle RZ17 Tactical is as exotic looking as its name. With a raised carry handle, full-length barrel shroud and five-position collapsible stock with adjustable cheek rest, it definitely catches your eye. A screw-on barrel extension makes the whole package look more

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like an M16 rifle than a shotgun. A 6.5-inch Picatinny rail is molded into the bottom of the forearm to mount a light or laser. As unusual as this shotgun looks, it brings a few nice features to the table. The fiber-optic front sight and adjustable rear sight proved excellent. It shot good groups and had a good trigger, and the price point is excellent. Our main dislike was the forward-assist spring on the forearm: You simply let go and it springs

forward. We all train to load a shell through the ejection port when a shotgun goes dry, and this design closes the bolt for you so you don't have this option. We didn't try it, but I was told there is a very simple solution to this problem: When you disassemble the shotgun to clean it, you can remove the forward-assist spring so that it will operate like any other 12-gauge pump. On the other hand, if you don't train to load through the ejection port, the forward

assist helps put the shotgun back into battery. This can be important for shooters who are older or have less upper-body strength.

WINCHESTER SXP SHADOW DEFENDER
The SXP Shadow Defender proved a nice middle of the road tactical shotgun. First, the safety is at the front of the triggerguard, where I prefer it, allowing you to keep your trigger

FINAL SCORES		AESTHETICS	ERGONOMICS	SIGHTS	TRIGGER CONTROL	RECOIL CONTROL	RELOADING EASE	ACCURACY	RELIABILITY	VALUE/ PRICE	TOTAL
MOSSBERT ATI TACTICAL		4.67	4.00	3.00	4.00	4.33	5.00	4.50	5.00	3.67	38.17
ARMSCOR AG PUMP DEFENSE		4.00	3.33	3.00	4.33	3.33	4.33	5.00	4.67	4.67	36.67
BENELLI M3		4.67	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	4.33	3.00	36.00
WINCHESTER SXP SHADOW DEFENDER		4.00	4.00	2.67	3.33	3.67	4.33	4.50	4.67	3.67	34.83
STANDARD DP-12		4.00	4.00	3.33	3.67	5.00	3.67	3.50	4.33	2.67	34.17
CHARLES DALY 301 PUMP TACTICAL		4.33	3.67	3.17	3.33	3.33	4.67	4.50	2.00	4.33	33.33
STOEGER P3000		4.00	3.67	1.67	4.33	1.67	2.67	3.00	4.67	4.33	30.00
TR IMPORTS SILVER EAGLE RZ17		3.00	1.67	4.00	3.67	3.00	2.33	3.50	3.00	4.33	28.50
KELTEC KS7		2.67	2.67	2.00	3.67	1.67	1.67	3.50	3.00	2.67	22.83

NOTE: Each category worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. Entries reflect averages from three shooters.

★ **WINNER** ★



SHOTGUNS: PUMP-ACTION

MOSSBERG 500 ATI TACTICAL

finger extended in a relaxed position until you need to click it off. The action bar release is at the back of the triggerguard on the left side. The stock is simple and comfortable with a very solid adjustable cheek rest. I would prefer a little shorter length of pull, but again, I am vertically challenged. An ingenious slide-on system put two Picatinny rails at the end of the magazine tube, and tightening the magazine tube cap locks them up solid. The front sight is a green fiber-optic that snaps onto the barrel and is held in place by the normal front sight bead with no rear sight. Fortunately, the receiver is drilled and tapped so an aftermarket Picatinny rail can be added for a red-dot sight. We all agreed that the gun was easy to load and run, and shot well with good accuracy. The trigger was a little harder than I prefer, but overall, it is a very nice tactical shotgun at a good price point.

THE WRAP & THE WINNER

This year's test showed there is no shortage of 12-gauge tactical pump shotguns with very reasonable prices. Several other companies wanted to contribute their shotguns to the competition, but they were simply sold out and waiting for more to be made at the factory. In the end when the scores were all tallied, the Mossberg ATI Tactical came out as the undisputed winner. That's no surprise, as Mossberg certainly knows a thing or two about making dependable tactical shotguns.

The next question was which shotgun was the Best Bang for the Buck? This was a lot trickier, and we ended up each picking a different gun: The Armscor RIA AG Pump Defense, the Charles Daly 301 Pump Tactical and the Winchester SXP Shadow Defender. While proving that taste varies, our indecision also proves that if you want a good 12-gauge pump shotgun for home defense, there are many excellent options. Decide which features are most important to you, and take your pick. ●

The ATI Tactical brings new life and features to Mossberg's ultra-dependable 500 series pump shotgun.



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The AR rifle evaluations were completed by a team representing a broad spectrum of shooters with extensive backgrounds in law enforcement, military, competition and hunting.



This has been a banner year for firearm sales, and the AR remains one of the best-selling rifle platforms. Politics, unrest and an overall need for home and personal protection have driven much of the demand, but not all. Turbulent times aside, unmatched ergonomics, simple operation, multiple calibers and infinite customization will keep the AR platform at the top for years to come.

Having been in the industry for nearly 25 years, nothing has approached today's level of interest in firearms, and the AR in particular. Clients are looking to purchase their "first" AR three-to-one over pistols and other rifles. Collectors and enthusiasts are clearly part of it, but new shooters make up the bulk of interest, and the results of this year's testing are an indication. *Ballistic's* staff picked a wide variety of .223 and .308 Win. ARs for this year's contest, and as always, it was very close. But simple, accurate and reliable rifles won the day. With availability scarce, demand high and defense the goal, value for cost was the winner.

THE TEAM

The team consists of me and three incredibly experienced shooters with varying backgrounds. Troy is currently a federal investigator with 15-plus years as a police officer, with 10-plus years as a SWAT team sniper and another several years guarding nukes in the Air Force. An avid hunter, he has taken game throughout the country, including Alaska. Methodical in detail, Troy just sees things that others miss. Ryan is my business partner, friend and colleague. Hunting since soon after he could walk, he is also a local 3-Gun and pistol competitor. Ryan has built dozens of ARs with and for me and has ran through thousands of rounds while testing in the field. Scott is a firearms industry icon who currently works for SCCY Firearms and has worked for many other manufacturers over the years. He is a



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world-class 3-Gun competitor, avid hunter and one of the best shooters I have ever seen. As a team, there is well over 100 years of experience between us in every aspect of the shooting and firearms industry.

TESTING

Accuracy testing was from 100 yards using either a bipod or bag. Ammunition was supplied by Hornady and Federal. Hornady American Gunner 155-grain BTHP and Federal Gold Medal Match with Sierra’s 168-grain BTHP were used for the .308 rifles. Frontier 55-grain FMJ was used for .223, and we used Federal Gold Medal Match with Sierra 69-grain BTHPs for our 5.56mm load.

Bushnell provided a 1-6.5x Elite Tactical PRO, Spuhr provided the mount and a 3.5-35x Elite Tactical XRS in a ZRODelta mount. We also used the Leupold Mark 6 on multiple rifles with either a Horus T2 or T3 reticle. Most testing was at 100 yards or closer, long-range steel out to 1,200 yards was available and there were no time limits or constraints.

Scoring consisted of Aesthetics, Ergonomics, Sights, Trigger Control, Recoil, Reloading Ease, Accuracy, Reliability and Value/Price Point. Three was the mean, so if it worked it was a three, if it scored higher or lower it either had an issue or excelled. Given the lack of iron sights these days, if none were provided it scored a zero, three if provided and only one company, FN, provided iron sights. Accuracy standard was 1.5 inches at 100 yards, scores were higher as groups tightened up. Value is “what you get for the money” based on list

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price. Results were as close as 0.25 points, making for a tight race in the middle. We scored in two categories this year—one for .223/5.56 and the other for .308.

WINNERS!

Primary Weapons Systems' MK-1 Pro took top honor in the .223 category and outscored

every other rifle tested. It was a close contest this year, but all testers were in complete agreement on the superiority of the MK-1 Pro. The rifle boasts excellent accuracy, flawless reliability, smooth operation and great value for your money. Its long-stroke piston allows for operation in harsh conditions with less recoil than most and is reminiscent of a modified AK

operating system. The trigger is clean, crisp and capable, contributing to groups around 1 inch at 100 yards, and it's a solid value. Our evaluators were all impressed by how much you get in the MK-1 Pro for its \$996 MSRP, and exceptional value for your money was a recurring theme throughout testing, the exact opposite of last year.

SPECS

	FAXON ION ULTRALIGHT	FN SRP TACTICAL	IWI ZION 15	PATRIOT ORDNANCE FACTORY ROGUE	PRIMARY WEAPONS SYSTEMS MK1 PRO
CALIBER:	.223 Wylde	5.56 NATO	5.56 NATO	.308 Win.	.223 Wylde
BARREL:	16 inches	16 inches	16 inches	16.5 inches	16 inches
OA LENGTH:	30 inches	33 inches	33 inches	34 inches	31 inches
WEIGHT:	4.95 pounds (empty)	6 pounds (empty)	6.5 pounds (empty)	5.9 pounds (empty)	6.7 pounds (empty)
STOCKS:	Magpul/MFT	A2 stock and grip	B5 Systems	Mission First Tactical	BCM
SIGHTS:	None	None	None	None	None
ACTION:	Direct Impingement	Direct Impingement	Direct Impingement	Direct Impingement	Long Stroke Piston
FINISH:	Black anodized	Hard anodized	Black anodized	Cerakote	Black anodized
CAPACITY:	30+1	30+1	30+1	20+1	30+1
MSRP:	\$1,425	\$1,199	\$900	\$1,828	\$996



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Every rifle did well, ending in results that were quite close. Winners were simpler and more effective, rather than having all the unnecessary bells and whistles.

Top honor in the .308 category went to the Rock River Arms BT3 Select Target rifle. It produced the best accuracy overall and had the highest-rated trigger, the Rock River Two Stage. Heavier than the other two .308 competitors, it was softer to shoot and controllable. Fit and finish was excellent with a nice look, and one evaluator called it “sharp looking without the bling.” As AR-10s go, the BT3 Select Target is also a solid value at \$1,840. It costs less than the roundup’s most costly AR-15, quite a bit less than many of its competitors, and is even half the price of our winning AR-10 two years ago. Again, you just get more for your money.

CLOSE CONTEST

In the .223 category, 0.5 points separated the Primary Weapons Systems Mk-1 Pro from its closest competitor, the Faxon Firearms Ion Ultralight. Unique in the AR world, the Faxon has a three-port muzzle brake that is machined into the barrel, allowing a true 16-inch barrel. Pencil thin, it is incredibly light and maintained

its accuracy throughout testing. At under 5 pounds, it was the lightest rifle by far, very accurate and just cleared the table of shooters when tested.

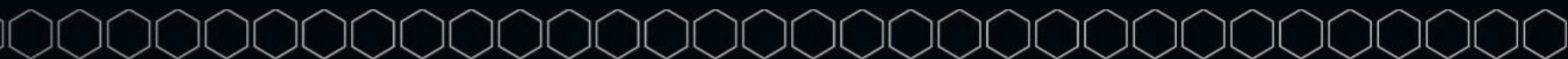
Separated by a single point, the third- and fourth-place offerings were basic rifles, the IWI Zion 15 and FN-15, respectively. Every evaluator commented on the value the IWI offers with solid accuracy, nice features like an upgraded grip and stock, and a predictable duty-capable trigger. Priced at \$900 it is about perfect for a duty rifle or that prized new-shooter market today. The FN-15 SRP Tactical has a great barrel and solid accuracy, but uses an A2 stock and true mil-spec trigger. Priced at \$1,199, it was just not quite the value for feature set. Savage’s MSR 15 Recon 2.0 was a mere 0.25 points behind with a strong feature set for value, making for a very tight contest.

When it came to the .308s, they were all excellent rifles. The POF Rogue came in second and was an evaluator favorite for its light weight and lack of recoil, thanks to an effective muzzle brake. Accuracy was solid, right behind

SPECS

	ROCK RIVER ARMS BT-3 SELECT TARGET	SAVAGE MSR 15 RECON 2.0	SIG SAUER 716I TREAD
CALIBER:	.308 Win.	5.56 NATO	.308 Win.
BARREL:	20 inches	16 inches	16 inches
OA LENGTH:	42 inches	33.5 inches	37 inches
WEIGHT:	8.6 pounds (empty)	7.3 pounds (empty)	6.5 pounds (empty)
STOCKS:	Magpul PRS 3	Magpul	BCM
SIGHTS:	None	None	None
ACTION:	Direct Impingement	Direct Impingement	Direct Impingement
FINISH:	Anodized black	Hard anodized	Hard anodized
CAPACITY:	20+1	30+1	20+1
MSRP:	\$1,840	\$999	\$1,599

SIG SAUER
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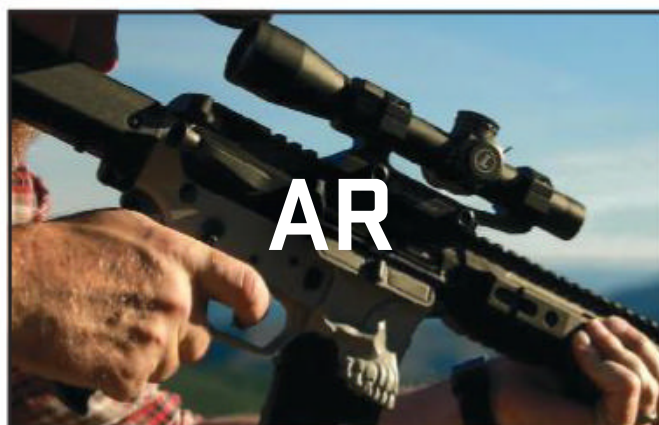
the Rock River Arms BT3 Select Target, and the trigger was excellent. Only 0.75 points behind, the Sig Sauer Tread lived up to its name as a good value, and for \$1,399 you get a great AR-10 with a nice trigger, an ambidextrous safety, and upgraded grip and stock. Reliable and accurate, it was for the most part a dead heat. You simply cannot go wrong with any of these rifles.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

My testing occurs outside the group to keep it fair and logistically easier. I set everything up for the team, step back, watch, listen and take photos. It was interesting to see how critical value became this year, as in their experience that's what most consumers are looking for. Bells and whistles are fine, but getting the most for your dollar seemed to be the theme.

All of us are selling, competing and training both law enforcement officers and consumers. Each pointed out their current clients are less enamored with artwork and want simple rifles that work and will survive a carbine class. It's a far cry from what many would think and fantastic to see.

All the guns evaluated were solid rifles falling along a broad spectrum. Rifles remain user-driven, as they should be, as what's required for one is of no interest to another, and not everyone uses them outside a range. Weight is always a recurring theme, but that can present other issues like increased recoil, requiring punishing muzzle brakes and thin handguards that fail under hard use. Teaching at both Gunsite Academy and Follow Through Consulting, I've learned that the most "tricked out" rifles are often the first to fail, many not making it through the first hour or the first barricade. Light is great when you are carrying up and down mountainsides, but it's all for nothing if it will not work.



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The rifles most likely to fail a Gunsite .223 or 5.56 have the most “work” done. Talk to most instructors running classes and you get the same answer: It’s the simple, well-built rifle using proven quality parts and accessories that takes the day, or survives it. Fancy is fine—it’s a big part of the industry—but if your life depends on it you should get the best value in a proven design that works under hard use.

BOTTOM LINE

Each year, this roundup provides a ton of information about where the industry is headed, and this year was the most promising for me. My career has been focused on rifles used to protect, with a bit of time putting food on the table. Dabbling in competition, I see the draw and the need for specialized equipment, and it is also a huge test

of what works, but not everything crosses over. As new shooters enter the community and seek training, they are finding it’s not how much you spend, but what you get for that money. And it looks like the industry is listening, offering rifles you can bet your life on at a fair price. Given the times, I am just not sure it gets any better. ●

FINAL SCORES	AESTHETICS	ERGONOMICS	SIGHTS	TRIGGER CONTROL	RECOIL CONTROL	RELOADING EASE	ACCURACY	RELIABILITY	VALUE/ PRICE	TOTAL	
	.223/5.56 AR-15 RIFLE										
	PRIMARY WEAPONS SYSTEMS MK1 PRO	4.75	4.25	0.00	4.25	4.75	3.75	4.25	5.00	4.75	35.75
	FAXON ION ULTRALIGHT	4.50	4.75	0.00	4.25	5.00	3.75	3.75	4.75	4.50	35.25
	IWI ZION 15	4.00	3.75	0.00	3.75	3.50	3.50	4.25	5.00	4.50	32.25
	FN SRP TACTICAL	3.25	3.00	3.00	2.75	3.25	3.75	4.25	5.00	3.00	31.25
	SAVAGE MSR 15 RECON 2.0	4.50	3.75	0.00	4.00	3.25	3.25	3.75	4.50	4.00	31.00
	.308 AR-10 RIFLE										
	ROCK RIVER ARMS BT-3 SELECT TARGET	4.25	4.25	0.00	5.00	4.00	3.50	4.25	5.00	4.50	34.75
	PATRIOT ORDNANCE FACTORY ROGUE	4.25	4.50	0.00	4.50	4.00	4.00	3.75	5.00	3.75	33.75
SIG SAUER 716I TREAD	4.00	4.00	0.00	3.25	3.75	4.00	4.75	5.00	4.25	33.00	

NOTE: Each category worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. Entries reflect averages from four shooters.

PRIMARY WEAPONS SYSTEMS

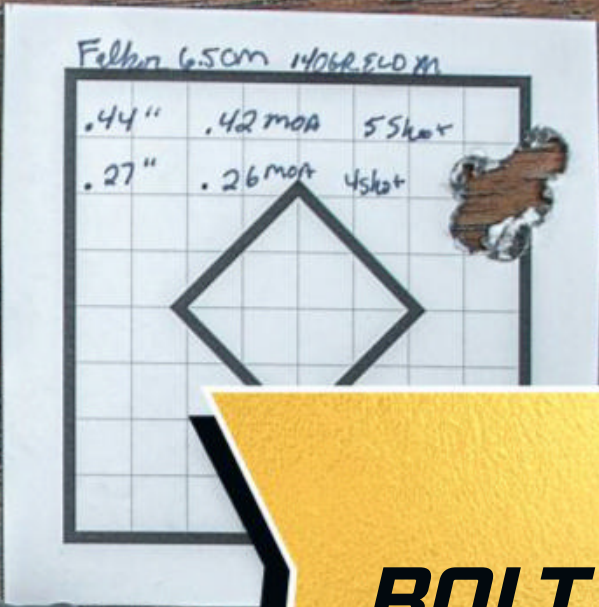
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**RIFLES:
BOLT ACTIONS**



BOLT

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ballistic's best

RIFLES: BOLT ACTIONS



With testers of various levels of expertise putting the rifles through their paces, the results ended up being close thanks to overall quality.



BALLISTIC'S BEST 2020



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2020 has been the year of firsts in many ways and that sentiment carries over into this year's Ballistic's Best bolt-action rifle segment. While we have some returning names to the category, we have four brands that are completely new to the bolt-action scene and they took no shortcuts on their efforts to drop products that would grab the attention of prospective shooters. These four companies have played solidly in other areas with no venture into the manually operated rifle space. Two of the brands are known for furnishing us with AR platforms, while the other two make semi-auto pistols and rifles.

Our review team is different this year. With only three reviewers, there is enough overlap in experience to cover a good portion of the likely

customers, with one being a serious rifleman and competitor in PRS style competition as well as hunting and one being more focused on pistol and AR platforms. This individual represents our "new" shooter, since she had no experience with bolt-action rifles until now. She represents the shooter who is eyeballing the growth of the bolt-action world and contemplating a move toward dabbling in it. I round out the group with a more general approach to bolt actions due to my profession. I like bolt actions for everything from hunting to PRS-style shooting, ELR and just general, long-range fun.

SPRINGFIELD 2020 WAYPOINT

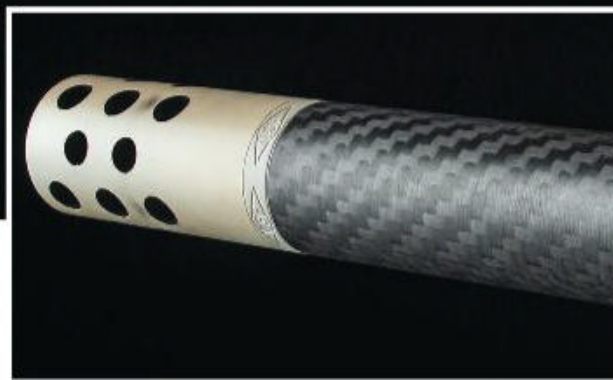
Our first of firsts comes from Springfield Armory. That's right, the maker of the M1A, 1911 and popular XD line of pistols. Heck it

wasn't long ago that they started their first AR platform and now they are taking on bolt-action rifles. We must say that the Waypoint is phenomenal right out of the gate. Springfield did their homework for sure, working some three years on the Waypoint before its release. They took their time and it shows in a rifle with fit and finish that you'd expect to see on rifles three times the cost of the \$2,200 Waypoint.

Carbon-fiber-jacketed barrel, a true carbon-fiber stock, steel receiver featuring a EDM cut raceway, integral recoil lug and recoil pins on the top rail are components for the serious rifle and shooter. The Waypoint is a hunting rifle by true definition, but that's no mark against it. The action is exact and smooth, if not a little tight. There is no slop, and it feels like quality throughout.



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RIFLES: BOLT ACTIONS

Two of us loved the camo pattern, while our resident pistol/AR shooter didn't initially dig it. It shot great, delivering a 0.6-inch group with Hornady 108-grain ELD M, although we tried true hunting loads in it. Recoil was tamed by the radial brake, and if there was a consistent gripe that was it. That radial brake spit dirt and debris in every shooter's face and arms, and all over our shooting mats. It'll be fine up off the ground, but shooting close to the dirt is asking for it. Yes, you could change out the brake, but in Ballistic's Best we are taking the products on their released merit and this was really the only thing we could come up with on the Waypoint that was a negative. The TriggerTech trigger is set a little heavy, too.

Although the Waypoint came as a package deal with a Leupold VX-6HD 3-18x44 optic, we changed it out for a finer reticle found in the Tract Toric HD 4-20x50mm with PRS reticle. This allowed us to coax out the best groups, further revealing that the Springfield is

a real shooter and likely a consistent sub-half-MOA rifle with more time to get used to it.

All in all, it's a solid performer and in no way reveals itself as a new kid on the block.

TIKKA T3X UPR

Two years ago, Tikka placed high in Ballistic's Best with their T3x Tac A1. This rifle has the same action but lacks the chassis and higher Picatinny rail of its more tactical sibling. Instead, it has a much lighter and minimal stock as well as lighter barrel profile. This is all fine and dandy, but UPR stands for Ultimate Precision Rifle and in our minds we feel things need to be a bit more substantial for that moniker. We simply thought it was a hunting rig.

While desolate, the stock did have a height adjustable comb, and that's about it. The website claims the grip area is modular, but ours wasn't, although we looked high and low online for proof. It also has two sling swivels for a Harris type bipod, which struggles in this crowd of M-Lok-cloaked forends that are able

to accept Pic rail and even RRS Standard Dovetail/Arca rail attachments.

It might appear that Tikka really skimped on this rifle but one area they for sure didn't skimp on was accuracy. This was one of the best shooters of the lot, even with the thin barrel. I went on to shoot a 0.5-inch group with the Tikka, using Hornady ELD-M, coming off the rifle twice to retrieve rounds from the back of the vehicle so that I could finish the group. That's impressive to say the least. No muzzle brake was included, so it moved quite a bit. And as remembered, the action was silky, fast and easy to run—an equally impressive feat.

But is accuracy and an excellent action enough to win Ballistic's Best bolt-action rifle category? It remains to be seen.

SABATTI

The Sabatti made the trip from Italy to compete with some fine rifles. Italians are known for some amazing styling and refinement, but





that didn't seem to make it into the Sabatti. While Kendl loved the styling (she's an AR person), Tom and I just couldn't come to complete grips with it. To be fair, the styling queues weren't bad but the machining was pretty rough.

The action was as rough as the machining, although it had a very short bolt lift. It was also difficult to get comfortable on this rifle, although it had adjustability in the comb and in

the stock with adjustment plates. Those aren't easy to use so we didn't bother.

Tom and I agreed that the Sabatti let the shooter know he or she was shooting 6.5 Creedmoor, while other rifles soaked it up better. The rifle has a muzzle brake too, and while it was off center by several degrees, it did little to help tame the recoil. That said, the Sabatti printed one of the best groups in the hands of T-Mac. It measured 0.48 inches while

I struggled every step of the way with it. We both noted a heavy and mystical trigger. You just didn't know when it was going to go off.

Kendl found it to be enjoyable, giving it high marks in every aspect. That's the beauty of having differing levels of bolt gun experience at the same table—you won't get the cookie-cutter responses.

The Sabatti has potential and at \$1,400 is a bargain for someone looking to get into precision on the cheap. But it can be better.

WINCHESTER XPR

Winchester gives off an appreciable "old school" vibe with a beefy stock produced by Grayboe stocks. It looks beefy and stout, a match for the fluted bolt, but it's betrayed by the thin-ish profile barrel on this Renegade Long Range SR model.

We confused it with a more hunting-focused platform based on the barrel profile, but in reality it's supposed to be a more precision-shooting-focused rifle. There are

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RIFLES: BOLT ACTIONS

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no additional features to the XPR. The comb doesn't adjust, it has sling swivels out front so bipod choices are limited and it doesn't even come with a Picatinny rail on the receiver. Outside of that, it has a proprietary magazine and catch. Something precision focused should take AICS-pattern magazines at minimum.

Things didn't get better for the Winchester in the accuracy department. It took everything in us to get it close to 1-MOA accuracy and I don't believe we truly broke that barrier. It's too bad, because the XPR gives off the vibe that it's much better than it is.

FALKOR 7EVEN

When you hear Falkor, it's difficult to envision anything other than ultra-cool gas guns and an ultra-cool vibe. Well, it's time to shed that image and think of high-order precision and actions that will make you sing, because the Falkor action is one of the finest you can buy, and all evaluators agreed.

There is some magic tucked away in the 7even action. It feels like every input is assisted and pneumatic, like it's almost doing everything for you. It has two lugs and 90 degrees of throw. Extraction is excellent with ejection that is worry free. I think it's fair to say we'd put the action against any other manufacturer out there.

The chassis, unfortunately, isn't as good as the action. It's not that the chassis is bad, it's more eclipsed by the action. The forend has plenty of space to attach goodies, thanks to

M-Lok comparability. But the fun ends where the forend and action meet, as you can't put a long Arca rail on. The skeletonized pistol grip is nice looking but out of place in an otherwise serious precision package. That said, it's comfortable at the buttstock, even if the bottom is too thin, causing it to sink really low into the Gamechanger bag we like to use for shooting groups. It does have a little monopod, although we didn't use it.

The Dracos barrel was a hammer and got better as rounds were put through it. It's a sub-half-MOA gun, with two of us shooting under this default standard. The barrel heated up slowly and cooled quickly. All in all, we felt that the Falkor was super solid and the good parts eclipsed things we didn't love as much.

SIG SAUER CROSS

Also a brand new offering, the Sig Cross finally graces us with its presence. We've been waiting well over a year for the Cross production rifle since we first tested early prototypes. The Cross represents a fresher approach to the bolt-action rifle, bringing new design and processes like a one piece AR-like receiver, while being mindful to keep tried-and-true elements like a three-lug bolt that's more than adequate with an oversized bolt knob.

The Cross is minimalist, if you will, and while touted as a hunting rifle, in this early production version I see it more as an everyday, working rifle, meant to be with you whenever

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possible. Keep it in the truck, on the UTV or backpack, and handle what you need to when you need to.

Now, just because it's a working rifle doesn't mean it's not fun, because it is. Compactness in components, layout and overall size make it a rifle you want to have a reason to interact with. It folds down to 24 inches, with the 18-inch barrel we had on board making it the smallest of the group, if not the lightest, as well. Our resident 3-gunner found the AR safety to be odd, which I thought was strange, but she also found it to be a great thumb rest when shooting now that she's adopted the proper way to shoot a rifle.

While reloading is one of our factors, it takes something different to raise any attention and the inside-the-triggerguard

mag release didn't get any love from Kendl. "Personally I do not like the release inside the triggerguard for newer shooters," she said. "It could be a safety hazard."

The Cross was fairly accurate, but five-shot groups eluded the 0.5-MOA space, even if we could put three or four rounds under that. We swapped out the Sig Sauer BDX optic, which is part of the complete rifle kit (Kilo range rangefinder too), so that we could aim better with one from Riton.

I personally liked the action a lot. It's short,

robust and fast, and makes shooting lefty a far better experience than the others when manipulating the bolt. I still want a left-handed version, though. The Cross is going to be a very appealing rifle to many shooters, and for good reason.

DANIEL DEFENSE

A couple of years ago, DD released the Delta 5 and it was more or less what the Cross is out of the gate—hunting focused and "general" in use. But since the Delta 5 came out, I and



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many others wondered when they'd release a more target-focused and target-friendly version. Well here it is. The Delta 5 Pro has the same three-lug action tucked into a new heavy-duty chassis and it has precision rifle competition written all over it.

The chassis is mondo beefy with good adjustability in the comb and length of pull departments. It also features a forend with a full-length RRS Standard/Arca rail built into it. It looks like they got some help from Area 419 since the badging appears on the forend and the rifle comes with one of their brakes, giving it high scores in the recoil control department.

The Daniel Defense wanted to shoot great



groups early, and we'd shoot five rounds with a random flier somewhere in the mix. It wasn't always round number five that was off—it varied. We knew what it wanted to do, but we found that the barrel nut had worked its way loose after all testing concluded. As a comparison, we had a second unit on hand



briefly that shot 0.5-MOA from jump. No doubt it's capable.

The Timney Elite Hunter trigger was excellent and broke cleanly. Although set a bit heavy, it still managed to surprise us if we weren't paying attention. For whatever reason, it just seems like the Timney Triggers in the group

SPECS



	ACCURACY INTERNATIONAL AXSR	DANIEL DEFENSE DELTA 5	FALKOR DEFENSE 7EVEN	MASTERPIECE ARMS MPA	ROCK RIVER ARMS RBG
CALIBER:	.300 Norma Mag.	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Creedmoor
BARREL:	27 inches	24 inches	26 inches	26 inches	24 inches
OA LENGTH:	49 inches	40 inches	38.5 inches	49 inches	43.5 inches
WEIGHT:	16 pounds (empty)	11.4 pounds (empty)	10.5 pounds (empty)	13 pounds (empty)	10.5 pounds (empty)
STOCK:	AI Chassis	Adjustable carbon fiber	Chassis	MA BA Hybrid Chassis	Chassis
SIGHTS:	None	None	None	None	None
ACTION:	Bolt	Bolt	Bolt	Bolt	Bolt
FINISH:	Cerakote (FDE)	Black anodized	Cerakote (FDE)	Cerakote (black/blue)	Satin
CAPACITY:	10+1	10+1	10+1	10+1	10+1
MSRP:	\$9,000	\$2,499	\$4,250	\$3,425	\$4,235



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RIFLES: BOLT ACTIONS



gave better “breaking” feedback than the TriggerTech versions. That’s just a side note.

Where we all complained on the DD was the action. While it’s light and can be fast, it binds a lot. It’s hard to get a read on why, though. “Super stiff, have to utilize my entire shooting arm to engage,” noted our newest bolt gunner. It might need more break-in, but as soon as you’re feeling invincible with the Delta 5 Pro, an unwarranted bobble erases any perceived momentary greatness. I’d like to shoot one that has a few thousand rounds on it.

Now, the DD is priced at \$2,500 and that is a serious bargain on a rifle that we think will

last you a long time and break in and do great things for you. If you learn to run the action right, it’s ready to compete locally right out of the gate.

ROCK RIVER ARMS

Daniel Defense is not the only AR-centered company that can make a bolt gun. Rock River Arms entered the fray with their RRBG. This is one nice rig featuring a bright SS barrel mated to a “proprietary action” and tucked into an incredible KRG Bravo Chassis. I’ll go out on a limb and say the action is a Big Horn (aka Zermatt Arms) version. My competition rifle

and trainer both have Big Horn actions so I know them when I feel them. It’s a mystery why RRA doesn’t want anyone to know, as they are great actions. But I digress.

A TriggerTech trigger makes it go boom, and if you know how to run the action I challenge you to find one faster and slicker. That said, it wasn’t Tom’s cup of tea. “Takes some getting used to,” he said. The barrel has a fairly heavy profile, but we don’t know who makes the barrel.

While the RRA looks good, we struggled with accuracy. It just wouldn’t shoot. We tried 140’s and 130’s from several manufacturers

SPECS



	SABATTI STR OVERWATCH	SIG SAUER CROSS	SPRINGFIELD ARMORY WAYPOINT	TIKKA T3X UPR	WINCHESTER XPR RENEGADE LONG RANGE
CALIBER:	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Creedmoor	6.5 Creedmoor
BARREL:	26 inches	18 inches	18 inches	24 inches	22 inches
OA LENGTH:	41.5 inches	38.5 inches	41.5 inches	44 inches	42 inches
WEIGHT:	13.6 pounds (empty)	6.8 pounds (empty)	7.6 pounds (empty)	8.3 pounds (empty)	8.5 pounds (empty)
STOCK:	Chassis	Sig Precision Stock	Carbon fiber	Carbon fiber	Graboe Renegade Long Range
SIGHTS:	None	None	None	None	None
ACTION:	Bolt	Bolt	Bolt	Bolt	Bolt
FINISH:	Black anodized	Black anodized	Camo and Cerakote	Black matte	Black matte
CAPACITY:	10+1	5+1	5+1	10+1	4+1
MSRP:	\$1,480	\$1,779	\$2,275	\$1,400	\$1,070



but there was never a great group. The best was 0.8 inches with maybe a couple of rounds touching. This miffed us, causing us to shake our heads while looking at it. It has so many great components, but it just didn't work well in this particular sample. Tom stated, "It had moments of brilliance, otherwise it won't group." And, with a price tag over \$4,000, we honestly expect more.

ACCURACY INTERNATIONAL

AIAX won the first Ballistic's Best back in 2018. But does it have what it takes to win in 2020? In a word. Yes. This model is the solicitation-driven AXSR, a long-action, multi-caliber rifle based on the version submitted for military procurement.

It's different in almost every aspect from the AIAX MC we tested a couple of years ago, but nothing was lost in the performance arena. In fact, it's only improved. It features an M-LOK forend, two-stage adjustable trigger that is simply awesome and a two-position safety that has been relocated. On a technical note, the receiver is no longer bonded to the chassis, but it's still as accurate as before (if not more).

This version can shoot .300 Norma, .338 Norma, .308 Win., 6.5 Creedmoor and others with the proper barrels and bolt heads. Built in RRS dovetail mounting makes things really awesome, too.

The action, with six lugs, is brilliant but, of

course, long. But it makes you wonder how AI does what they do. Our version was chambered in .300 Norma Magnum. Yes, that's what I said. However, the recoil was excellent for such a big cartridge, showing even more AI's superiority in design.

On a reloading note, the massive magazines made cramming rounds into them so easy you'd find yourself pulling them back out just to do it again. The mag is a double-stack one with a light pressure and positive and satisfying "click" with each inserted round. It's almost as if you could throw the rounds into the magazine.

Initially, Kendl wasn't as impressed with the AI as Tom and I were, and that's why a new shooter is necessary to add to this. She brings an open and untainted mind to the evaluation, while for some, present company included, the name AI alone is nearly enough to grant it victory. And before you get any ideas, the AI didn't win. Price point is a factor, and the term "cost-prohibitive" came up frequently. The AXSR is \$8,974 of lusciousness that most of us can only experience through pictures, video and the occasional video game. "It's killer accurate with 215-grain Berger OTM," according to Tom. Kendl wrote, "Very expensive. Makes sense but not an

easily attainable rifle for the average shooter price wise." The price hurt it across the board, although

it shot one of the best groups of all the rifles, even in .300 Norma trim.

MASTERPIECE ARMS

Masterpiece Arms is a staple if not a big chunk of the foundation of modern precision rifle shooting and competition. Their chassis took the space by storm, and they never stopped improving and bringing new products to market. Now they produce rifles, using their excellent chassis and other quality components like actions from other manufacturers.

We were fortunate enough to receive a Matrix rifle featuring Masterpiece's own 27-inch MTU profile barrel mated to a Curtis Custom Axiom action, nestled inside their Matrix chassis in that eye-penetrating NRA blue. This is what a serious competition rifle looks like, but one that is also right at home as a pill-sender and general target rifle. Oh, and this one showed up in left-handed trim.

While the short throw of the action is excellent, the Masterpiece came out of the box spitting 0.5-MOA groups like they were free to all. No warm up was necessary, no rounds down the tube, just accuracy out of the gate. Any blown opportunities were the shooter's fault without a doubt. "...shot great right out of the gate," Kendl noted. This is what you want your rifle to do—put you in your place or lift you to the heavens.

The Axiom action is really good, but it didn't feel overly stellar compared to others in this



MASTERPIECE ARMS
masterpiecearms.com



group, which is a testament to all the players in this comparison. Kendl noted it was easier than expected to shoot as a right-hander. Tom had to mention it was wrong-handed, but no worries we don't look at that as a factor.

The chassis is highly adjustable and weights can be added to help balance it or soak up more recoil forces. But with the excellent muzzle brake, the additional weight isn't needed. Linear impulses abounded.

Tom liked the chassis overall, and even though he is a frequent competitor he had not piloted a Matrix before this comparison, although he has an older MPA chassis. He didn't love the thumbhole portion or the rear of the chassis because it doesn't make sense to him. I don't look at it as a thumbhole as much as a hole cut to lighten the chassis somewhat.

Regardless, the Matrix is super accurate and immediately hurtles you to superstar status as a shooter—and does so with absolute ease.

THE WINNER

Ballistic's Best is always a true crap shoot and anything can happen in the bolt-action section. The evaluators are chosen because of their honesty and real-world approach to the process. I never have to worry about them sugar-coating anything, and choices and opinions are never obvious with them.

The winner is the Falkor Defense 7even rifle. While its looks are debatable and some features questionable, the incredible action, performance and feel made it the clear win-



ner with all evaluators combined. That's not to say it blew the competition away, because the second-place MPA Matrix was only 0.66 points behind it and the AI just 0.17 behind that. We split the hairs of the hairs, and the Falkor Defense action truly shines and makes up for a lot.

The takeaway is that we have another group of solid-performing rifles. Each has its gives and takes and further underlines the

difficulty you might encounter when you venture out for your next rifle purchase. I'm glad I don't have to do that. We are splitting hairs, which is time consuming and tedious, and outside of a few obvious models that weren't truly up to snuff, you really can't go wrong with any of these rifles. You will just find yourself wanting "another" one to fill a different role. And, sometimes that's what being a gun owner is all about. ●

FINAL SCORES		AESTHETICS	ERGONOMICS	ACTION	TRIGGER CONTROL	RECOIL CONTROL	RELOADING EASE	ACCURACY	RELIABILITY	VALUE/ PRICE	TOTAL
FALKOR DEFENSE 7EVEN		4.17	3.50	5.00	4.67	4.67	4.67	5.00	4.67	4.50	40.83
MASTERPIECE ARMS MPA		4.50	4.00	4.33	4.50	4.67	4.33	4.83	4.33	4.67	40.17
ACCURACY INTERNATIONAL AXSR		4.50	4.33	4.50	4.17	4.67	4.67	4.67	5.00	3.50	40.00
SPRINGFIELD ARMORY 2020 WAYPOINT		4.33	3.50	4.50	3.50	3.83	4.00	4.67	5.00	4.17	37.50
SIG SAUER CROSS		4.00	4.17	3.84	4.33	3.50	3.33	4.33	4.33	3.67	35.50
DANIEL DEFENSE DELTA 5		3.83	4.33	2.67	3.50	4.67	4.67	4.33	4.00	3.17	35.17
ROCK RIVER ARMS RBG		4.00	4.33	4.33	4.00	3.67	4.33	3.50	4.17	2.67	35.00
TIKKA T3X UPR		3.50	3.67	4.67	3.33	2.67	3.83	4.33	4.00	3.50	33.50
WINCHESTER XPR RENEGADE LONG RANGE		3.00	2.67	3.17	3.33	3.00	2.00	2.83	4.67	3.08	27.75
SABATTI STR OVERWATCH		3.33	2.50	2.67	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	2.83	3.33	27.67

NOTE: Each category worth 5 points for a total of 45 points. Entries reflect averages from three shooters.



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\$556
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Striker

Capacity
17 Rounds
19 Rounds

Includes
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Weapon Light
Magazine Loader

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EDITORS' SELECTS

MORE GUNS AND GEAR DESERVING SOME EXTRA RESPECT



Not all *Ballistic* magazine readers know that the editors of this publication also produce other shooting and hunting-related titles including *Tactical Life*, *Combat Handguns*, *PDW* (Personal Defense World), *PDW Concealed Carry Handguns*, *Guns Of The Old West*, *American Frontiersman* and a pair of *Gun Buyer's Guides*. To say we're well-versed on all of the latest and greatest guns, weapons and related gear is an understatement. No, we're not bragging. What we're saying is the following Editors' Selects winners are based on a lot of actual hands-on testing by the editors and dozens of our expert content creators. Without further ado, the pages that follow contain our editorial hat-tip to some of the "Best In Class" companies and products that weren't covered in the gun tests earlier in this *Ballistic's Best* edition.

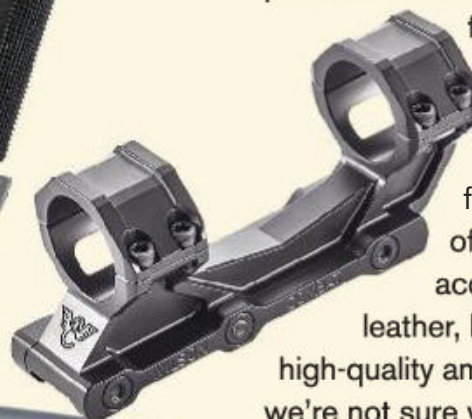


MOST DIVERSE MANUFACTURER *WILSON COMBAT*



MOST HEAR WILSON COMBAT

and their minds immediately key on the 1911 platform. Bill Wilson and his team—hands down—produce one of the finest custom 1911s. But don't ever sell WC short. Wilson Combat has a ton more in store, including high-end AR-platform rifles and pistols chambered in the hottest of calibers. In fact, in 2020, SAAMI approved Wilson's very own 300 HAM'R. Additionally, shop Wilson's site and you'll also see categories for custom scatterguns, all manner of aftermarket handgun and rifle accessories, suppressors, custom leather, knives, steel targets and even very high-quality ammunition. If that's not diversity, we're not sure what is. (wilsoncombat.com)





RIFLE STOCKS MAGPUL



MANY WOULD SAY the trigger is the heart of the rifle, some say the bolt, but for us it's the stock. It's usually the first thing you touch, and if it doesn't fit and feel right, it can completely ruin your shooting experience. Magpul, manufacturer of firearms accessories, apparel and gear, make some of the finest stocks out there. You can tell Magpul puts a lot of thought into their

stocks, especially with the attention to detail. They offer stocks for AR-style rifles, AKs, Remington 700s, Ruger 10/22s, Savage 110s, FALs, HK 91/G3s, Remington 870s and Mossberg 500/590/590A1 shotguns. If you're in need of a solid stock, there's no question that Magpul has a solution for nearly every possible long-gun platform. (magpul.com)



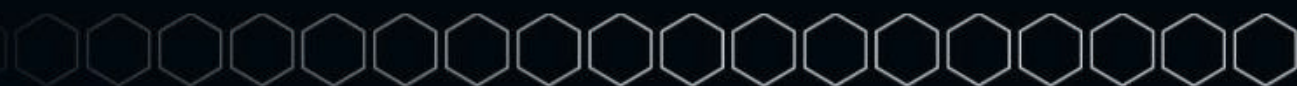
BEST-KEPT SECRET CENTURY ARMS AP5



THIS "SECRET" NEW FIREARM

first appeared on *Tactical Life's* December 2020 cover. Our team first got their mitts on the HK MP5 clone at our editorial Rendezvous event in Driggs, Idaho, this past September. Content creator Mitch Hardin put it best: "The Gun Gods have surely smiled down upon us, and given us one of the coolest firearms ever invented." Century's new AP5 ("5" left on to pay homage to HK) should be available for purchase early in quarter one of 2021. A little birdie told us that the MSRP ought to be about \$1,000 less than similar HK models. (centuryarms.com)





BEST NEW DIRECTION



SPRINGFIELD ARMORY 2020 WAYPOINT

SPRINGFIELD, a company known to think outside of the box, surprised us in late 2020 when they jumped feet first into the hunting market. The Springfield Model 2020 Waypoint is a premium bolt-action hunting rifle. There are currently 32 variants available, all featuring a carbon-fiber stock and the option of a steel or carbon-fiber barrel with a 0.75-MOA accuracy guarantee. Currently, they are only available in short action, but long-action versions are on the horizon. This is Springfield's first bolt-action in nearly a century, and we believe that it was totally worth the wait. (springfield-armory.com)

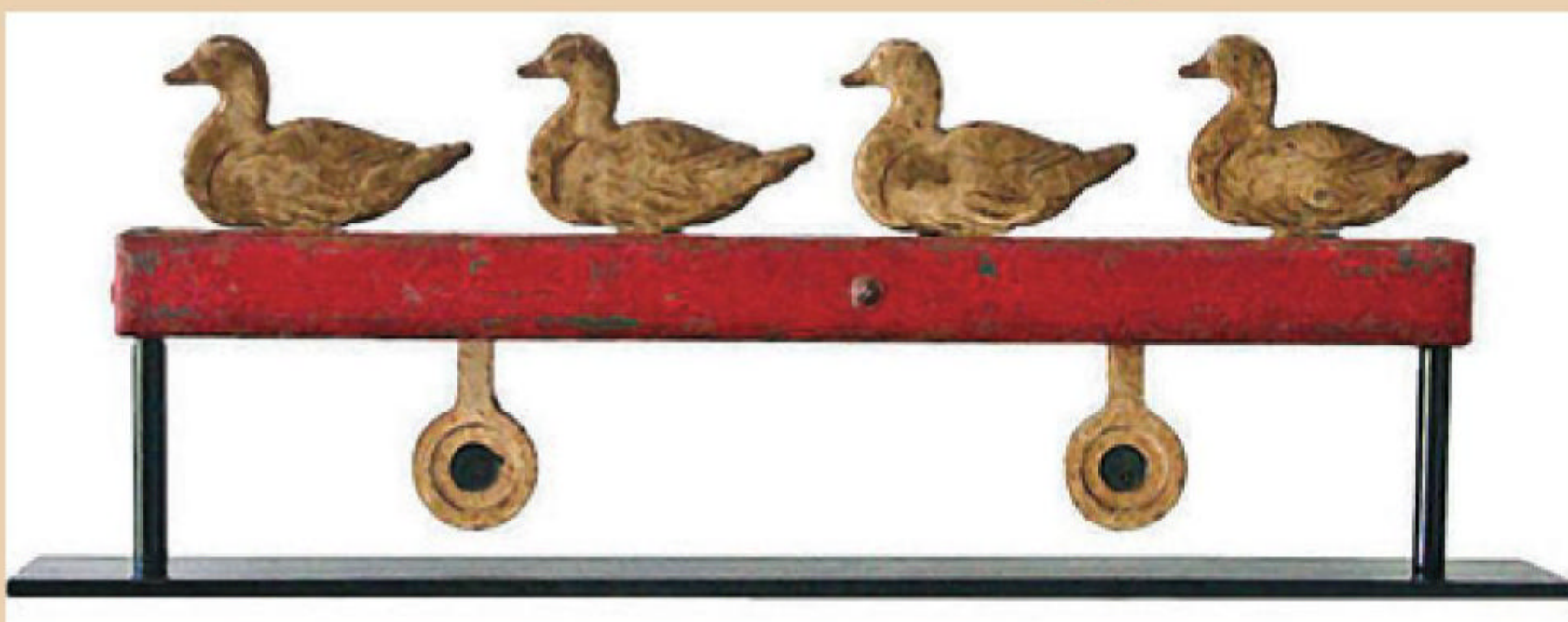


NEW CALIBER HORNADY 6MM ARC

THE EDITOR of *Tactical Life's The Complete Book Of Reloading* annual got the first taste of Hornady's groundbreaking new 6mm ARC on the coyote-hunting proving grounds of Wyoming. Some backstory: The 6mm ARC was born when a secretive Department of Defense (DoD) "entity" (as Hornady puts it) came to them asking for a cartridge that would defeat barriers better than 5.56mm NATO rounds, have the long-range performance of a 7.62mm NATO and be capable of fitting in an AR-15 platform rifle to cut weapon and ammo loadout weight. As of midsummer 2020, 22 different rifle manufacturers had signed on to build 6mm ARC rifles. Even though Hornady offers three loads for the 6mm ARC—105-grain boat-tail hollow-point, 103-grain ELD-X and 108-grain ELD Match—they also see the wisdom of offering reloading tools and components to feed shooters taking on the new cartridge. There's no question that the 6mm ARC is here to stay! (hornady.com)



You're a sitting duck



in a gun-free zone

Public safety is a critical part of the education campaigns of the Second Amendment Foundation, and with good reason. Without a self-defense option, we are all at greater risk.

The facts support our concerns about gun-free zones. The Crime Prevention Research Center (CPRC) recently finished updating a list of mass public shootings worldwide.

FACT: Over the course of 18 years, 1998 to 2015, the CPRC found 2,354 attacks and at least 4,880 shooters outside the U.S. and 53 attacks and 57 shooters within this country. The study found the U.S. makes up 1.49 percent of the murders worldwide, 2.20 percent of the attacks, and less than 1.15 percent of the mass public shooters.

FACT: Most gunmen are smart enough to know that they can kill more people if they attack places where victims can't defend themselves; 98 percent of mass public shootings since 1950 have occurred in places where citizens are banned from having guns. In Europe, every mass public shooting in history has occurred in a gun-free zone. And Europe is no stranger to mass public shootings. In the past eight years, it has experienced a per-capita casualty rate 50 percent higher than that of the U.S.

FACT: The U.S. is a relatively safe place from these shooting attacks precisely because so many attacks are thwarted by legally armed good Samaritans.

FACT: The evidence shows that gun-free zones are not the answer. Truth is, they are an added danger because they prevent legally armed citizens from defending themselves and their neighbors. It's time to get rid of gun-free zones. The U.S. has tried them for more than 20 years and evidence shows that gun-free zones actually increase the danger. Nobody wants to be a sitting duck in a maniac's shooting gallery.



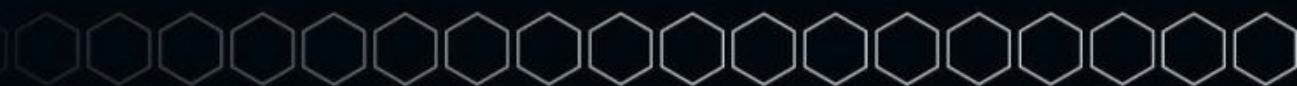
The Second Amendment Foundation

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www.saf.org



ballistic's best



BEST NEW PLINKER

UMAREX ORIGIN .22 PCP AIR RIFLE

IT'S TRUE THAT BIG-BORES and personal-defense handguns often take center stage in many of our gun publications. But hey, we're into plinking and popping vermin, too. And our go-to manufacturer for all-things air-support related is Umarex USA. Their newest Origin .22 PCP Air Rifle—with high-pressure air hand pump included—is a powerful, rugged and value-priced gun. Here's the kicker, the Origin's patented pre-pressurized tank is pressurized for a full-power shot with just 13 pumps from the included 4,500 PSI hand pump. About 100 pumps will make the system fully charged. Shooters can mount their favorite optic on the combo-optic rail that accepts 11mm or Picatinny rings. The package includes two easy-to-load 10-shot rotary mags. (umarexusa.com)



BALLISTIC'S BEST 2020



BALLISTICMAG.COM



PISTOL-CALIBER CARBINE

CMMG BANSHEE 300 5.7x28

THE YEAR 2020 can very well be the comeback year of the 5.7x28mm. Several pistols and rifles were introduced in the hard-hitting 5.7 caliber. CMMG was one of those companies. Available as an SBR or pistol, the heart of the Banshee is CMMG's Radial Delay Blowback system to help minimize felt recoil. We can personally attest that this is one of the most enjoyable and flattest shooting AR pistols. Everyone who shot it instantly had a huge grin after the first shot. Finding ammo might be a bit of a chore, but there's no doubt you'll want to give this new Banshee a hard look. Maybe pair it with an old FN Five-seveN or a new Ruger-57? (cmmginc.com)



Men's Virility Restored in Clinical Trial; 275% More Blood Flow in 5 Minutes

A newly improved version of America's best-selling male performance enhancer gives 70-year-old men the bedroom performance they enjoyed in their 30's.

America's best-selling sexual performance enhancer just got a lot better.

It's the latest breakthrough for nitric oxide – the molecule that makes erections possible by increasing blood flow to your penis.

Nitric oxide won the Nobel Prize in 1998. It's why "the little blue pill" works. More than 200,000 studies confirm it's the key to superior sexual performance.

And this new discovery increases nitric oxide availability resulting in even quicker, stronger and longer-lasting erections.

One double-blind, placebo-controlled study (the "gold-standard" of research) involved a group of 70-year-old-men.

They didn't exercise. They didn't eat healthy. And researchers reported their "nitric oxide availability was almost totally compromised," resulting in blood flow less than HALF of a man in peak sexual health.

But only five minutes after the first dose their blood flow increased 275%, back to levels of a perfectly healthy 31-year-old man! "It's amazing," remarks nitric oxide expert Dr. Al Sears. "That's like giving 70-year-old men the sexual power of 30-year-olds."

WHY SO MUCH EXCITEMENT?

Despite the billions men spend annually on older nitric oxide therapies, there's one well-known problem with them.

They don't always work.

A very distinguished and awarded doctor practicing at a prestigious Massachusetts hospital who has studied Nitric Oxide for over 43 years states a "deficiency of bioactive nitric oxide... leads to impaired endothelium-dependent vasorelaxation."

In plain English, these older products may increase levels of nitric oxide. But that's only half the battle. If it's not bioactively available then your body can't absorb it to produce an erection.

Experts simply call it the nitric oxide "glitch." And until now, there's never been a solution.

NEXT GENERATION NITRIC OXIDE FORMULA FLYING OFF SHELVES

Upon further research, America's No. 1 men's health expert Dr. Al Sears discovered certain nutrients fix this "glitch" resulting in 275% better blood flow.

He's combined those nutrients with proven nitric oxide boosters in a new formula called *Primal Max Red*. In clinical trials, 5,000 mg

is required for satisfying sexual performance. *Primal Max Red* contains a bigger, 9,000 mg per serving dose. It's become so popular, he's having trouble keeping it in stock.

Dr. Sears is the author of more than 500 scientific papers. Thousands of people listened to him speak at the recent Palm Beach Health & Wellness Festival featuring Dr. Oz. NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Namath recently visited his clinic, the **Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine**.

Primal Max Red has only been available for a few months — but everyone who takes it reports a big difference. "I have the energy to have sex three times in one day, WOW! That has not happened in years. Oh, by the way I am 62," says Jonathan K. from Birmingham, AL.

HOW IT WORKS

Loss of erection power starts with your blood vessels. Specifically, the inside layer called the endothelium where nitric oxide is made.

The problem is various factors THICKEN your blood vessels as you age. This blocks availability causing the nitric oxide "glitch." The result is difficulty in getting and sustaining a healthy erection.

How bad is the problem?

Researcher shows the typical 40-year-old man absorbs 50% less nitric oxide. At 50, that drops to 25%. And once you pass 60 just a measly 15% gets through.

To make matters worse, nitric oxide levels start declining in your 30's. And by 70, nitric oxide production is down an alarming 75%.

Primal Max Red is the first formula to tackle both problems. Combining powerful nitric oxide boosters and a proven delivery mechanism that defeats the nitric oxide "glitch" resulting in 275% better blood flow and stronger erections. There's not enough space here to fully explain how it works, so Dr. Sears will send anyone who orders *Primal Max Red* a free special report that explains everything.

MORE CLINICAL RESULTS

Nutrients in *Primal Max Red* have logged impressive results.

In a *Journal of Applied Physiology* study, one resulted in a 30 times MORE nitric oxide. And these increased levels lasted up to 12 hours.

"I measured my nitric oxide levels, you can buy a test kit from Amazon," reports 48-year-old Jeff O. "Monday night I showed depleted."

Then he used ingredients in *Primal Max Red* and, "The results were off the charts. I first woke



A new discovery that increases nitric oxide availability was recently proven in a clinical trial to boost blood flow 275% resulting in even quicker, stronger and longer-lasting erections.

around 3 a.m. on Tuesday with a throbbing boner. My nitric oxide levels measured at the top end of the range."

FREE BONUS TESTOSTERONE BOOSTER

Every order also gets Dr. Sears testosterone boosting formula *Primal Max Black* for free.

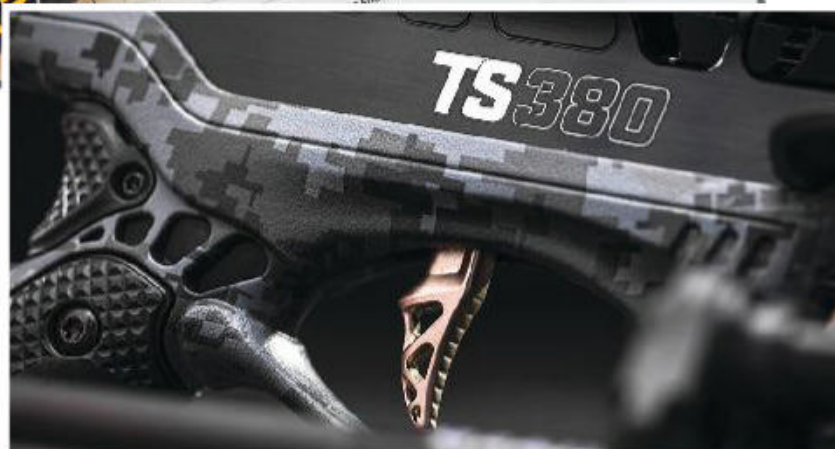
"If you want passionate 'rip your clothes off' sex you had in your younger days, you need nitric oxide to get your erection going. And testosterone for energy and drive," says Dr. Sears. "You get both with *Primal Max Red* and *Primal Max Black*."

HOW TO GET PRIMAL MAX

To secure free bottles of *Primal Max Black* and get the hot, new *Primal Max Red* formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at 1-800-236-3161 within the next 48 hours. "It's not available in drug stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about *Primal Max*, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back," he says.

The Hotline will be open for the next 48 hours. After that, the phone number will be shut down to allow them to restock. Call 1-800-236-3161 to secure your limited supply of *Primal Max Red* and free bottles of *Primal Max Black*. You don't need a prescription, and those who call in the first 24 hours qualify for a significant discount. Use Promo Code BALL1220PMAX when you call in. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered.



DROP-IN TRIGGERS TRIGGERTECH

THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN INTEREST in everyday gun owners looking to upgrade their stock guns. And never before has there been so many aftermarket drop-in trigger manufacturers. This year, over the course of publishing 30-plus gun magazines, we found that the folks at TriggerTech are really making waves. TriggerTech triggers can be found on many of today's gas guns and bolt-action rifles including those from Christensen Arms, Weatherby, Bergara, even crossbows like Barnett's TS380 we featured in the *Tactical Life* October/November 2020 issue. (triggertech.com)



BEST VALUE CCW SCCY FIREARMS

WANT A GREAT STEAL ON EVERYDAY CARRY HANDGUNS? Then look to SCCY! Our staff has had many opportunities to run SCCY pistols and after every range session, our jaws hit the floor when we hear the MSRP. From SCCY's newest DVG-1 series, which graced the cover of *Ballistic's* February/March 2020 issue, to its complete line of CPX guns, some in .380 ACP and others in 9mm, SCCY has become the hands-down winner in the CCW value category. SCCY builds reliability, comfort and affordability into every gun it produces. Its newest CPX-4 RD can run with the best of today's red-dot-equipped guns, and for half the price of most. (sccy.com)





MOST INNOVATIVE SUPPRESSOR COMPANY **SILENCERCO**

SILENCERCO IS DEFINITELY A COMPANY TO KEEP AN EYE ON. They have brought us the Maxim 9 (integrally suppressed pistol), Salvo 12 (shotgun suppressor), the Omega family and so much more. The company's innovative and forward-thinking approach has given the firearm industry what many said was impossible. We were treated to a hands-on with its products out at our 2020 editorial Rendezvous, which left many editors and content creators talking about the great products. We can't wait to see what SilencerCo will come out with next. (silencerco.com)



HOLSTER COMPANY OF THE YEAR **BLACKPOINT TACTICAL**

THIS CATEGORY WAS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT for us to nail down because there are so many great holster makers today. After the cursing and yelling calmed down, we were in agreement that BlackPoint Tactical—manufacturer of custom, handcrafted holsters built around the ideals of comfort and concealment—should be awarded. BlackPoint Tactical holsters will fit just about any lifestyle and desired carry style. BlackPoint is a company that seeks to fill in the voids in otherwise unfulfilled markets. Plus, these holsters are 100-percent made in the USA handcrafted products, and the company's customer service is second to none. (blackpointtactical.com)



BEST NEW TACTICAL APPAREL LINE

BERETTA TACTICAL TRAINING GEAR



WHEN YOU TRAIN OR GO SHOOTING, it's always advisable to wear clothing (unless you train in a nudist colony). Beretta, known for its upscale hunting apparel, has fully jumped into the tactical apparel market. Its collection starts with performance shirts, BDU pants, and waterproof and softshell jackets. We can tell you with confidence that the clothes are well made, super comfortable and, best of all, priced right. The Defense Training Gear collection has a retail price range of \$12-\$189. (beretta.com)

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OPTICS



CQB OPTIC

PRIMARY ARMS GLX 2X PRISM

NOT EVERYONE'S BUDGET

allows for dropping \$1,000-plus for gun glass. There's also a misconception that if the optic isn't expensive, then it isn't good. Well, that can't be further from the truth. The folks at Primary Arms have steadily sent us affordable optics that work great and come out on top during torture testing. We recently got to run their new GLx 2X Prism with Primary's popular ACSS CQB-M5 5.56/.308/5.45 Reticle at our fourth annual editorial Rendezvous. The GLx scope didn't disappoint. This

fixed-power optic provides just enough magnification to enhance target ID, yet allows for seamless both-eyes-open, red dot-style shooting at close-range targets. Its body is 5.3 inches long and it weighs in at just 11 ounces. A comfy 3.5 inches of eye relief and a large 12mm exit pupil make for a very forgiving eye box. Top it off with daylight bright illumination, a 20,000-hour battery life, Autolive motion activation and a price of \$370, and you'll see why we've selected the GLx 2X best CQB optic of 2020. (primaryarms.com)





BEST NEW SCOPE LINE

RITON X5 TACTIX

RITON'S TACTIX LINE launched in early 2020. The X5 came out in March. After shooting it this fall, we've come to realize that other scopes in this class might run you an additional \$1,000 or more. Riton's new X5 Tactix 1-6x24 carries a street price of around \$800. The X5 is proving to be a great all-around option for tactical shooters and hunters alike. It features Riton HD glass, daylight bright illumination and capped, zero-resettable turrets. Its first-focal-plane (FFP) reticle allows for quick and accurate ranging as well as the ability to utilize Bullet Drop Compensation for most AR-platform guns. Riton is a relatively new company in the tactical shooting space, but there's no question that the company is making great strides and growing—big time. (ritonoptics.com)



BEST NEW THERMAL OPTIC

STEINER CQT



WE HAD A CHANCE to get some hands-on experience with a prototype of the Steiner CQT back in 2018 at our Rendezvous event. Hands down, everyone in the room was blown away. It's finally here and available, and we like it so much that it'll be on the cover of our *Tactical Life Stealth* issue. What makes this thermal special is it is a see-through thermal sight with Clear View Thermal technology that overlays onto a direct view of the real world. Basically, it's thermal to identify and red-dot to target. I wish I could explain better how jaw-dropping awesome this thermal actually is. (steiner-optics.com)



REFLEX SIGHT

TRIJICON'S RMRCC

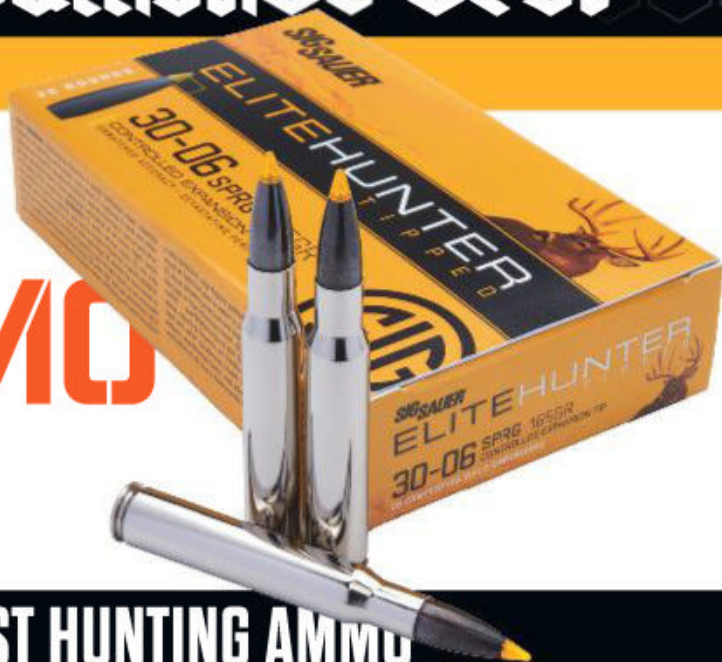
OUT OF THE BLUE, Trijicon drops the RMRcc in September 2020. Born from the legendary RMR, the thinner, lower profile RMRcc provides fast, both-eyes-open target acquisition, accurate aiming and proven reliability for concealed carry pistols. A 2032 battery powers it for up to four years of use. There are currently various mounts available for popular pistols. Since it's thinner, it's ideal to mount on popular single-stack and subcompact pistols. "Trijicon is proud to offer pistol owners an optic designed around their needs and built to Trijicon's standards for durability," said Chuck Wahr, Trijicon's global vice president of sales and marketing. "Users can have confidence in carrying a pistol equipped with the RMRcc." We fully agree with that assessment. (trijicon.com)





ballistic's best

AMMO



BEST HUNTING AMMO

SIG SAUER ELITE HUNTER TIPPED

IN LAST YEAR'S BALLISTIC'S BEST EDITORS' SELECTS, Sig Sauer won the "Most Diverse Manufacturer" title, partly because of its successful ammunition line. This year, Sig Sauer gets the nod for Best Hunting Ammo with its launch of Elite Hunter Tipped. This new line seems a perfect fit for Sig's new Cross bolt-action rifle platform. We've yet to drop game with it, but we have shot it at the Athlon Outdoors Rendezvous event. It's accurate as advertised. Built for accuracy and

top terminal ballistics, the rounds feature a translucent yellow tip designed to increase BC, improve terminal performance and aid in reliable chambering. The lead-core bullet provides double-diameter expansion you can count on every shot. In fact, earlier this year, *Ballistic* magazine content creator Richard Mann was able to put down African animals up to the size of kudu using Elite Hunter Tipped 6.5 Creedmoor. Keep on killing it, Sig! (sigsauer.com)



SHOTGUN

FEDERAL FORCE X2



WE HEARD WHISPERS OF THE FEDERAL FORCE X2 at our 2019 Rendezvous event. We all were intrigued by the concept and couldn't wait to go hands-on with it. It arrived just in time for 2020. The Force X2 is a 12-gauge, 2¾-inch, nine-pellet segmenting buckshot. Its nine copper-plated 00 FX2 buckshot pellets are engineered to split into two equally sized pieces

upon impact. This creates up to 18 wound channels, improves the transfer of energy from the payload to the target and minimizes the potential for overpenetration, reducing the risk to bystanders. Force X2 is also loaded for more manageable recoil, allowing the shooter to stay on target for quicker follow-ups and better accuracy in self-defense situations. (federalpremium.com)



HANDGUN

FEDERAL PRACTICE & DEFEND PACKS

PRACTICE AMMO AND DEFENSIVE AMMO have always been considered two distinct categories, and for the longest time, that meant two different shooting experiences—especially with handguns. Even if you tried to match the bullet weights, you'd still notice more recoil with the self-defense rounds, for example, or variations in velocity or point of impact. Trying to find training rounds that would match, or come as close as possible, to your defensive rounds was always a nightmare. We know, as we've spent a ton of time and money on this particular quest. Thankfully, Federal Premium has an answer.

Federal's new Practice & Defend ammo packs (available in 9mm, .40 S&W and .45 ACP) take all of the guesswork out of matching your training and defensive rounds. Each pack includes 50 personal-defense HST rounds and 50 Syntech Training Match rounds. Both loads are designed to produce identical velocities, trajectories and points of impact. So take the guesswork out of your life and try Federal's Practice & Defend ammo packs for your favorite carry gun. They're quite affordable, too. (federalpremium.com)





ballistic's best
GEAR UP!

RENDEZVOUS STOCKPILE



**HOT NEW STUFF
SHOWCASED AT
ATHLON OUTDOORS'
LATEST EVENT IN IDAHO**

This past September saw Athlon Outdoors host its fourth annual Rendezvous in Driggs, Idaho, near the Grand Tetons. For three days, dozens of gun manufacturers unveiled their latest and greatest wares—many still under wraps—to Athlon editors and content creators, giving us plenty of trigger time to create more content for our various print magazines and websites in the coming months. But this amazing event wouldn't have been possible without several key sponsors donating goods for every participant. Here we'd like to show our support and fill you in on the great gear that made for another awesome Rendezvous. —The Editors



1 5.11 TACTICAL RUSH LBD MIKE 56 L

What kind of shooting-range Rendezvous would be complete without a bag for toting clothes and gear? Embroidered with our Athlon Outdoors logo, 5.11's Rush LBD (Load Bearing Duffels) MIKE 56L is built to haul heavy loads like armor and equipment, and is made from 1050D nylon, with webbing and heavy-duty bartacking reinforcements throughout. Featuring interior mesh pockets, lashing straps, compression straps and grab handles, the duffels can be shouldered or worn as a backpack. RUSH LBD Duffels are MOLLE-compatible. (511tactical.com)

2 5.11 TACTICAL COMFORT MASK

The 5.11 Comfort Mask is built with three layers for comfort and easy wear—an outer lightweight polyester fabric, a middle SMS filtering layer and a moisture-wicking inner lining with antibacterial properties. Soft and stretchy ear loops and a thin nose wire provide a comfortable fit. Ours were branded with the *Ballistic* magazine logo. (511tactical.com)



ballistic's best GEAR UP!

3 5.11 TACTICAL CAP: Team 5.11 also provided Rendezvous participants with co-branded *Tactical Life* magazine caps that sported 5.11's ABR Diamond patch. It features a soft crown, 100-percent cotton six-panel design and a moisture-wicking jersey sweatband with adjustable hook and loop sizing. (511tactical.com)

4 BERETTA BOLO ALPHA JACKET: When the range temperatures started to dip, Beretta's BOLO Alpha got called on for duty. The BOLO is made of resistant nylon with protection inserts and is designed to maintain optimal body temperature. Its Alpha active insulation is engineered for consistent thermic regulation, while still allowing breathability during running and gunning missions on the range. It features YKK zip closure, chest pocket and large front pockets with YKK zippers, drawstring regulation at the bottom, elastic wrist and embroidered Beretta logo. Works great as a base-layer, too! (berettausa.com)

5 CALDWELL E-MAX SHADOWS: Putting on your eyes and ears is job number one when the range goes hot. The E-Max Shadows are Bluetooth, rechargeable electronic ear plugs designed to go where you go, play all your music and keep your ears protected. High-quality stereo sound is Bluetooth compatible with your mobile device and comes with a 23dB noise reduction rating. Dual microphones provide directional clarity and come equipped with easy-to-use touch volume controls. The charging case comes with an integrated lithium battery. (caldwellshooting.com)

6 DOA SHOOTING BENCHES Looking for a rock-solid, go-anywhere bench? Every firing station at the Rendezvous had three DOA Shooting Benches. Super-stable and rugged, yet easy to adjust, these benches feature quality steel tripods and seat supports as well as tabletops that are made from either 14-ply birch or maple for an unbeatable feel. The seat can be moved vertically and laterally, and the entire setup can support more than 500 pounds. (doashootingbench.com)

7 DGX STEEL TARGETS Nothing beats the pleasant ping of hitting a steel target several hundred yards away. To help us out, Dixie Gun Worx (DGX) provided dozens of durable AR500 steel targets that survived three full days of shooting, even from large-caliber rounds. (dixiegunworx.com)

8 HOWARD LEIGHT IMPACT SPORT BOLT EARMUFFS Everyone at the Rendezvous used a set of Howard Leight Impact Sport Bolt earmuffs for hearing protection. Building on over 30 years of continuous technological innovation, these electronic earmuffs combine 5x sound amplification, a 22-decibel noise reduction rating and



a lightning-fast, 0.5-millisecond attack time with a slim, comfortable and ergonomic design that uses one control knob. In short, these earmuffs make it easier for you to hear range commands while canceling out the sound of gunfire. They're powered by two included AAA batteries. (howardleight.com)

9 HOWARD LEIGHT UVEX GENESIS EYEWEAR

Few things are more frustrating than having shooting glasses fog up while lining up sights on a target or swinging a scattergun over a flushing pheasant. Thankfully, Howard Leight has developed a new UVEX Hydroshield coating for its eye protection that helps keep lenses fog free up to 90 times longer than many other popular anti-fogging products. It's also scratch resistant and blocks harmful UVA and UVB ultraviolet radiation. At the Rendezvous, shooters got a chance to test this coating out on

Howard Leight's ballistic-rated UVEX Genesis glasses. (howardleight.com)

10 MAGPUL DAKA VOLUME POUCH

The DAKA Volume Pouch was specifically designed to maximize usable storage space while maintaining a compact footprint. Its intuitive design allows the Volume Pouch to stand vertically on its own and expand up to 3 liters in size when in use. The wide mouth and water-resistant zippered opening allows the user to insert and remove items with one hand without having to hold it open with the other. The large, translucent window makes organizing and locating gear even easier, and a single large carabiner attachment point doubles as a lashing point and carrying handle so your stored gear will always be at hand when needed. (magpul.com)

10



11 MAGPUL DAKA BIFOLD WALLETS

The DAKA Bifold Wallet was designed with the same slim styling of Magpul's original wallets, but with extra room added for things like credit cards and cash. It's made from a polymer-infused material that will stand up to hard use without slipping in your pocket. The seams are RF welded for extra durability. (magpul.com)

11



12 SILENCERCO TRUCKER HAT

Keep on trucking and keep on shooting with a slick Trucker Hat. Our hats were co-branded with the Athlon Outdoors logo. Yes, Silencerco is known for its suppressors, firearms and related accessories, but the company also has a slick selection of soft goods including hats, patches, T-shirts and more. (silencerco.com)

12



13 SONIC BOOM REACTIVE TARGETS

Pounding steel targets is awesome. There's no denying that great feeling you get when you hear that resounding ping and your spotter calls out a hit. But when things go boom, the thrill factor ticks up several notches. Sonic Boom donated cases of its 2-pound exploding rifle targets for this year's event. Sonic Boom's full array of products are easy to use and see at great distances. (sonicboomtargets.com)

13



14 TANNERITE REACTIVE TARGETS

To keep things loud and fun, Tannerite provided several cases of its awesome reactive targets. Simply mix the powders provided into a canister, shake it up, set it a safe distance away and shoot it with a high-velocity round. The resulting blast will have everyone smiling. (tannerite.com)

14



15 UNDER ARMOUR MEN'S AND WOMEN'S UA TACTICAL TECH SHORT SLEEVE T-SHIRTS

Staying cool and comfortable was easy with UA's lightweight training T-shirt. Our shirts wore the Athlon Outdoors logo on the sleeve. The Tech series is made with ultra-soft fabric that wicks sweat and dries rapidly. Anti-odor technology prevents the growth of odor-causing microbes. It sports smooth, chafe-free flatlock seam construction. (underarmour.com)

15



16 UNDER ARMOUR MEN'S AND WOMEN'S UA TACTICAL COTTON T-SHIRTS

These super-soft, cotton-blend fabric T-shirts provide all-day comfort. The lightweight fabric allows for quicker drying than regular cotton. UA's Tactical Ts are designed specifically for first responders, without big logos, so they can be worn with uniforms. (underarmour.com)

17 UNDER ARMOUR STORM EVOLUTION DAYTONA VEST

This is the one layer you don't have to keep taking off and putting on all day. That's because it actually adapts to the temperature, keeping you warm when it's cool, but letting out extra heat as the day gets going. UA Storm technology repels water without sacrificing breathability. Features: Breathable insulation through back and side with lightweight spacer fabric, woven overlay on front for wind protection and dropped, shaped hem for enhanced coverage. (underarmour.com)

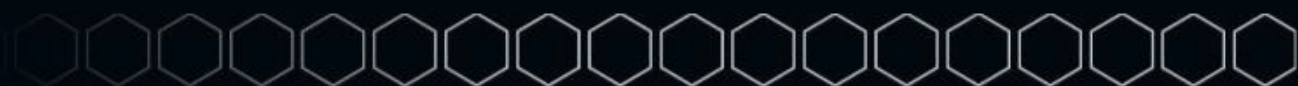
16



17



18



18



18 UNDER ARMOUR SPORTSMASK

When health officials said healthy people should wear facemasks, UA started building prototypes until it made the perfect one for athletes. UA's Sportsmask has the airflow you need, a cool feel, and the best fit for running, training and shooting on the range. (underarmour.com)

19 UNDER ARMOUR WOMEN'S BORA JACKET

Several women on the Athlon Team sported UA's Women's Bora Jacket. Its UA Storm technology repels water without sacrificing breathability. Windproof construction shields you from the elements, and its 100-percent waterproof and breathable 2.5-layer construction sports fully taped seams. (underarmour.com)



20

20 US PALM AK 30R MAGAZINE

No goodie bag is complete sans a magazine for running your favorite AK-platform firearm. US Palm's dependable AK30 mag features a sealed, one-piece design built with a proprietary polymer for endurance. A low-friction, self-cleaning polymer follower keeps performing while the stainless steel latch cage ensures positive loading that won't give way when you need it most. The unique waffle and tread design that distinguishes the magazine provides a solid grip for the shooter during loading and unloading while providing rigid reinforcement. (uspalm.com)

19



21

21 TETON VALLEY LODGE

We owe a special thanks to the Teton Valley Lodge in Driggs, Idaho, which hosted us throughout the week with excellent cabins, five-star meals and the most kind and helpful staff you'll ever meet. Seriously. Everyone enjoyed their stay, and we couldn't recommend the scenic lodge more for fly fishing or whatever outdoor pursuits you're looking for. (tetonvalleylodge.com) ●

AMMO MANUFACTURERS

Cases upon cases of ammunition ranging from .22 LR all the way up to .338 Lapua Magnum were needed to feed the hundreds of firearms that were tested at this year's Rendezvous. Coming up big this year with ammo donations were:

BERGER BULLETS
bergerbullets.com

BLACK HILLS AMMUNITION
black-hills.com

HORNADY AMMUNITION
hornady.com

SIG SAUER
sigsauer.com



SPECIAL SPONSORSHIPS

There are many behind-the-scenes costs incurred with massive events of this magnitude—from meals and lodging to signage and more. The following companies helped immensely with time and other donations. Team Athlon Outdoors would like to thank the following companies for their contributions.

ANDERSON MFG
andersonmanufacturing.com

CENTURY ARMS
centuryarms.com

FN AMERICA
fnamerica.com

PRIMARY ARMS
primaryarms.com

SCCY FIREARMS
sccy.com

WEATHERBY
weatherby.com



PRIMARY ARMS





THE PERFORMANCE LEADER.



NEW
Q4 STEEL FRAME

Walther continues their tradition of superiority with a handgun designed specifically for those who only buy the best and nothing less. This is the ultimate representation of high-class performance in a concealed carry package that just can't be found anywhere else.

WaltherArms.com

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